

THE ETHICS OF PERSUASIVE PREACHING

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Preaching generally has been considered a noble task. Looking at the past one sees such glittering descriptions of preachers as the "Heralds of God,"¹ or the "Royalty of the Pulpit."² In a similar vein proclamation of the gospel has been described as "the Divine Art of Preaching,"³ "the Integrity of Preaching,"⁴ and "the Romance of Preaching."⁵

This does not mean that preaching has been without its critics. In ancient times enraged auditors stoned the prophets (Matt. 23:27); turned deaf ears to the words of Christ (Matt. 13:57, 58); and persecuted the apostles (Acts 4:6, 7; II Cor. 21-28; Rev. 1:9). In modern times preaching has been charged with lack of effectiveness. Critics urge that it be supplanted by, or at least supplemented with dialogue.⁶

But the effectiveness of preaching, focus of the above-mentioned criticisms, is only a part of the problem. In recent years, communication scholars have become concerned with the ethics of persuasion—preaching included.⁷ For example, existentialist theologians in general and Søren Kierkegaard in particular object to persuasion because it reveals disrespect for human personality.⁸ And Helmut Thielicke asks, "Does the preacher himself drink what he hands out in the pulpit?"⁹

These criticisms point up several vital questions for the conscien-

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1. James S. Stewart, *Heralds of God* (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1946).
2. Edgar DeWitt Jones, *The Royalty of the Pulpit* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1951).
3. Arthur T. Pierson, *The Divine Art of Preaching* (New York: The Baker and Taylor Company, 1892).
4. John Knox, *The Integrity of Preaching* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957).
5. Charles Silvester Horne, *The Romance of Preaching* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1914).
6. See such works as Clyde Reid, *The Empty Pulpit* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967); Reuel L. Howe, *The Miracle of Dialogue* (Greenwich, Conn.: Seabury Press, 1963), and *Partners in Preaching: Clergy and Laity in Dialogue* (New York: Seabury Press, 1967); and Peter L. Berger, *The Noise of Solemn Assemblies* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1961).
7. For a survey of secular thinking on this subject see Richard L. Johannesen, *Ethics and Persuasion: Selected Readings* (New York: Random House, 1967).
8. See Raymond E. Anderson, "Kierkegaard's Theory of Communication," *Speech Monographs*, XXX (March, 1963), p. 5.
9. Helmut Thielicke, *The Trouble with the Church*, ed. and trans. John W. Doberstein (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), pp. 2-3.

to preach at his best? Should one man try to persuade another? How tious Christian preacher. Does the minister have an ethical responsibility does a Christian preacher know that his views are right and that the other man's views may be wrong? Is the average man capable of deciding and determining his own future? What are the standards and methods of ethical persuasive preaching?

Obviously a paper of the limited dimensions of this one cannot develop a full-blown philosophy of Christian ethics.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the above-listed questions must be faced and thought through by the Christian preacher. Our approach will be from the practical demands made repeatedly upon the ministry.

THE ETHICAL SITUATION

The Christian preacher interested in the ethics of his persuasive task ought to acquaint himself with what ancient and modern men think about it. Although not all sacred and secular thinkers address themselves directly to the issue at hand, many deal with it either explicitly or implicitly. We ought, therefore, briefly to consider the ancient Hebrew-Christian, the classical rhetorical, and the contemporary rhetoricians' attitudes toward the ethics of persuasive communication.

THE HEBREW-CHRISTIAN VIEW

The ethics of persuasive proclamation receives little formal treatment in the Bible. However, good prophets are extolled and false prophets are criticized. Human wisdom and rhetoric, though used, were viewed suspiciously, while preaching in the power and demonstration of the Spirit was encouraged.

Thus, in Old Testament times the people of Israel were forbidden to follow the abominable practices of pagan nations. They were not to listen to soothsayers, augurs, sorcerers, charmers, mediums, diviners, wizards, or necromancers (Deut. 18:9-14). God promised to raise up prophets like Moses in whose mouths He would put His words, and Israel was to heed these divinely inspired prophets. They did not need to fear false prophets. The test for discerning between true and false prophets was the fulfillment test (Deut. 18:17-22).¹¹

In the New Testament Jesus warned of the danger of false prophets

10. The reader interested in a more thorough study of general Christian ethics should study such works as Carl F. H. Henry, *Christian Personal Ethics* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1957); Paul Ramsay, *Basic Christian Ethics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), and *Deeds and Rules in Christian Ethics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967); E. M. Blaiklock, *The Christian in Pagan Society* (London: Tyndale Press, 1951); C. S. Lewis, *Christian Behaviour* (London: The Centenary Press, 1943); and their suggested bibliographical references.
11. On the prophetic situation see such works as Edward J. Young, *My Servants the Prophets* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1952); Alexander F. Kirkpatrick, *The Doctrine of the Prophets* (London: The Macmillan Co., 1907); and George Adam Smith, *The Book of the Twelve Prophets* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1929), 2 vols.

and explained that they would be known by their fruits (Matt. 7:15-20). Paul reminded the Corinthians, "My speech and my message were not in plausible [persuasive] words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the spirit and power" (I Cor. 2:4).¹² However, in spite of this disclaimer of persuasion, Paul revealed his use of it in Corinth and elsewhere. His beautiful passage in I Corinthians 13, and his sermon on Mars Hill (Acts 17:22-34) are examples of his rhetoric (persuasion). And his claim in II Corinthians 5:11, viz., "Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade [*peitho*] men," indicates that he did use persuasion. From the Mars Hill sermon (Acts 17:22-34), Lane Cooper, translator of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, cites Paul's use of such classical rhetorical instruments as enthymeme, sign, and appeal to witness.¹³ Cooper also cites from I Corinthians 13 Paul's use of negative expressions in his praise of charity in the passage—that is, what love is not, etc.¹⁴

THE CLASSICAL RHETORICAL VIEW

The ancient rhetoricians began to clarify, in at least some embryonic form, the various philosophies of communication. These philosophies were not so much stated as implied. Nevertheless, through trial and error, observation and practice, study and criticism, they were gradually evolved. They reveal how the ancient classical rhetoricians felt about communication. They are as follows:

1. The philosophy of *results*. This philosophy was emphasized by the Sophists of ancient Greece. Because the Sophists taught that rhetoric was the art of persuasion which sought response from listeners, a speaker's effectiveness was gauged in terms of his results. Unfortunately, a speaker's methods might be shoddy as long as he attained the results he wanted.

2. The philosophy of *truth*. This philosophy developed around Plato, who insisted on the importance of truth in discourse. Plato's *truth* philosophy of communication was not only the outward application of his broader philosophy, it was his reaction against the sophistic rhetoricians of his day whom he considered unethical.

3. The philosophy of *methods*. This philosophy developed around Aristotle. His *Rhetoric* is probably the most influential book on public speaking to the present time. Deeply influenced by Plato, yet recognizing value in some of the techniques of the Sophists, Aristotle included both points of view in his system. His *methods* philosophy is seen in his oft-quoted definition of rhetoric as being "the faculty of discovering in the particular case what are the available means of persuasion."¹⁵ It is not too much to say that if one's methods of speaking are sound, one's

12. All Scripture quotations are taken from the RSV.

13. Lane Cooper, trans., *The Rhetoric of Aristotle* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1932), pp. xxvii-xxix.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 197.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

results will be sound. And by the same token, if one's methods are unsound, one's results likely will be unsound.

4. The philosophy of *the good man speaking well*. This philosophy was presented by Quintilian, the Roman teacher of rhetoric (A.D. 35-95), and is developed in his *Institutes of Oratory*.¹⁶ Quintilian stressed two basic imperatives for the ideal speaker: (1) moral character and, (2) speech skill. The rest of his system is developed from these two characteristics.

Each of the above philosophies of communication—results, truth, methods, and good man speaking well has found expression in Christian preaching. At times they have been stressed in an unbalanced way to the harm of the church. At other times, and in more responsible hands, they have been applied in sound balance to the edification of Christendom.

CONTEMPORARY ATTITUDES

Modern views of the ethics of persuasion are more direct, specific, and organized than in ancient times. They may be seen in current writings on persuasion as well as in contemporary political oratory, news-casting, advertising, publications, preaching, and such. Some view persuasion as inherently bad. Others consider it inherently good even though it is used unethically at times. Still others see persuasion as neutral, amoral, neither good nor bad, but potentially good or bad depending on how it is used.

Some form of the last two views, i.e., that persuasion either is inherently good, or at least neutral, is probably the soundest view. Arguing about the degree of superiority of one of these views over the other seems a bit irrelevant. We know that persuasion, whether good or neutral, is too often used by unethical communicators.

Of more concern to us is the question: How does one determine the ethics of persuasion? From what has been said thus far, as well as what has been provided in persuasion literature, it appears that the ethics of persuasion is usually measured by two criteria: the ends of persuasion and the means of persuasion. To this question we now turn our attention.

MEASURING THE ETHICS OF PERSUASIVE PREACHING BY THE ENDS SOUGHT

Most writers speak of both specific and general goals. Specific goals would be speaking to inform, to stimulate, to convince, to actuate. In the case of secular speaking, entertainment may be the object.¹⁷ These may be broken down into even more specific purposes.

16. H. E. Butler, trans., *The Institutio Oratoria of Quintilian* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1953), I, 9.

17. The specific ends or purposes of speaking may be studied in such books as Alan H. Monroe, *Principles and Types of Speech*, 5th ed. (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1962), Part 4, and Lew Sarett, William Trufant Foster, and Alma Sarett, *Basic Principles of Speech*. 3rd ed., (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1958).

There are certain larger ends of communication, however, by which men measure the ethics of persuasion and under which the specific purposes operate. These ends are briefly described as follows:

Classical rhetorical ends. Although these ends have already been mentioned, it is wise to restate them because in one way or another all communication flows from one or more of the classical rhetorical philosophies. Thus some of the ancient Sophists were preoccupied with *results* as the end of speaking. The means or methods of arriving at their desired results were sometimes unethical. But many Sophists loved the plaudits of the crowd, the admiration of the auditors, the stamping of the feet, and the cheering of the spectators, regardless of the means used to attain them.¹⁸ Plato insisted on *truth* as the object of public speaking. Dialogue and defense of the speaker's ideas, therefore, were paramount in his philosophy of communication.¹⁹ Aristotle set forth a *methods* philosophy of rhetoric, defining it as the "faculty of discovering in the particular case what are the available means of persuasion."²⁰ To him ethical methods produced ethical results while unethical methods produced unethical results. Quintilian aimed at developing *the good man speaking well*, and thus made character and skill the ends of speaking. Character made the orator seek noble ends. Skill helped him attain them.²¹

Scientific and rational ends. Some men measure the ethics of persuasion by scientific and rational ends. Thus Leonard Doob, a social psychologist, maintained that ends are right if, at a given time, they are scientific and of value to society. He felt that ends are wrong which are unscientific and of doubtful value to society.²²

The general semanticists hold that language forms which do not correspond to their empirical "fact territories" are misleading and potentially dangerous. Language forms which correspond to their "fact territories" are reliable and helpful.²³

Rational ends of speaking were stressed by Aristotle in his *Rhetoric*,²⁴ *The Organon*, *The Prior Analytics*, and *The Posterior Analytics*.²⁵ Plato's

18. For a description of the traveling Sophists, see Edwin Hatch, *The Influence of Greek Ideas on Christianity* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1957), Lecture IV, "Greek and Christian Rhetoric."

19. For this view see the Dialogues of Plato, the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedrus*, plus Richard M. Weaver, *The Ethics of Rhetoric* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1953), Chap. I, "The Phaedrus and the Nature of Rhetoric."

20. Cooper, *The Rhetoric of Aristotle*, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

21. H. E. Butler, trans., *The Institutio Oratoria of Quintilian*, *op. cit.*

22. Leonard Doob, *Public Opinion and Propaganda* (New York: Henry Holt, 1968), p. 240.

23. Alfred Korzybski, *Science and Sanity: An Introduction to Non-Aristotelian Systems and General Semantics*, 2nd ed. (Lancaster, Pa.: The International Non-Aristotelian Library Publishing Co., 1941), p. 59. See this notion expanded in this same work, Chap. IV, "On Structure." See also the writings of Stuart Chase, S. I. Hayakawa, Wendell Johnson, Irving J. Lee, and others who followed Korzybski in the discipline of General Semantics.

24. Cooper, *The Rhetoric of Aristotle*, *op. cit.*

25. For these see such works as Richard McKeon, ed., *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (New York: Random House, 1941), and others.

dialogues are examples of ancient logical argument. In modern times Franklyn S. Haiman condemns as unethical any persuasive method which aims at circumventing man's reasoning process in order to elicit "non-reflective, semiconscious or unconscious responses."²⁶

It should be kept in mind that the scientific and rational ends views are held in connection with their effects on people, and not as ends in themselves. As such, they also relate to the following category.

Social effects ends. Virtually all rhetoricians except certain unethical Sophists used as their ultimate purpose, end, or object the general good of individuals in particular and society in general. The ethics of rhetorical methods and techniques, they contend, should be measured in terms of whether they help or hurt people.

Holders of this view include Albert Schweitzer and his reverence for life teaching;²⁷ Soren Kierkegaard and his dignity of humanity belief;²⁸ Everett Lee Hunt who defined rhetoric as "the study of men persuading men to make free choices";²⁹ and others.³⁰

Theological ends. It should not be surprising that the Christian persuader should approve and use all of the above described ends of persuasion, assuming moderation and balance. But in addition to these, the Christian persuader has an even higher responsibility. He represents another. He follows in the tradition of the ancient *herald* who spoke in behalf of his master, a message not his own.³¹ The Christian herald is sent to preach by divine commission: "And how can men preach unless they are sent?" (Rom. 10:15).

With a divine commission and a prescribed message Paul and his fellow workers preached the gospel fearlessly, always toward the end of pleasing God, not men. He clearly wrote to the Galatians: "Am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still pleasing men, I should not be a servant of Christ" (Gal. 1:10). And in a similar vein he wrote to the Thessalonians: "But just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we

26. Franklyn S. Haiman, "Democratic Ethics and the Hidden Persuaders," *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*, XLIV, (December, 1958), pp. 385-392.

27. Albert Schweitzer, *The Teaching of Reverence for Life*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1956); and "Schweitzer's Words: Light in the Jungle," *The New York Times Magazine*, January 9, 1955, p. 73.

28. Raymond E. Anderson, "Kierkegaard's Theory of Communication," *op. cit.*, p. 13.

29. Everett Lee Hunt, "Rhetoric as a Humane Study," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, XLI (April, 1955), p. 114.

30. See Robert T. Oliver, *The Psychology of Persuasive Speech*, 2nd ed. (New York: David McKay Co., Inc., 1957), pp. 24ff; Winston L. Brembeck and William S. Howell, *Persuasion: A Means of Social Control* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1952), p. 455; Donald K. Smith, *Man Speaking: A Rhetoric of Public Speech* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1969), pp. 238ff.; and Karl R. Wallace, "An Ethical Basis of Communication," *The Speech Teacher*, IV (January, 1955), pp. 1-9.

31. Robert H. Mounce, *The Essential Nature of New Testament Preaching* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1960), p. 13.

“speak, not to please men, but to please God who tests our hearts” (I Thess. 2:4).

These statements are not to be construed to mean that Paul did not care for people and thus did not make them an end for his preaching. Of his own Jewish brethren he cried, “. . . I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen by race” (Rom. 9:2, 3). And of others he wrote, “Knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men” (II Cor. 5:11).

Subsequent Christian preachers follow in this train. Their purposes in preaching are to please God and to reconcile men. In the words of Paul to the Corinthians they testify, “So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (II Cor. 5:20).

Ends of persuasion as a measure of its ethics. Other than the goal of sheer selfish results of the Sophists, it would be difficult to brand any of the above purposes or ends of persuasion as unethical. Although difference of opinion exists as to the relative importance of these goals, most rhetoricians would accept them as valid and valuable. But does this mean that the adoption of any or all of these goals makes a persuader ethical? Regardless of the nobility of one's purposes, may he use any method, process, or technique to attain them? This brings us to a consideration of the other half of the measure of persuasion—its means.

MEASURING THE ETHICS OF PERSUASIVE PREACHING BY THE MEANS USED

Methods of persuasive speaking and preaching are almost as voluminous as the words a communicator uses. And most of these methods have been criticized at one time or another. Although all of these methods cannot be treated here, we will refer to those which have come under most frequent attack.

Measuring ethics of the ethos, or character of the speaker. Ever since the time of Aristotle, rhetoricians have considered *ethos*, or the character of the speaker, as a major source of proof or persuasion. Men differ, however, about what constitutes a speaker's *ethos*. Aristotle described it as being the persuader's sagacity (wisdom), high character, and good will.³² Cicero, the great Roman orator, claimed that morals, principles, conduct, and lives of forensic pleaders contributed greatly to their success in speaking.³³ And Quintilian, the Roman teacher of rhetoric, listed two characteristics of the ideal orator, namely, he ought to be a good man, and he ought to have speaking skill.³⁴ Through the years these characteristics have been expanded, but for our purposes

32. Cooper, *Rhetoric of Aristotle*, *op. cit.*, II, 1 ff.

33. *Cicero on Oratory and Orators*, trans., J. W. Watson (Philadelphia: David McKay Publisher, 1897), II, 43.

34. Butler, *The Institutio Cratoria of Quintilian*, *op. cit.*, I, 9.

we will treat *ethos* as being the speaker's wisdom, moral character, good will (toward self, subject, and audience), and speaking skill.

Soren Kierkegaard charges that the persuasive speaker seeks to build up his *ethos*, prestige, or image for the purpose of capitalizing on it. In contrast, he claims, the edifying speaker should minimize his *ethos*. Unlike the persuader, the edifying speaker should refrain from such techniques as suggestion,³⁵ gesticulation, wiping of sweat from the brow, strength of voice, and vigor of fist deliberately employed to put psychological pressure upon his auditors. These techniques, according to Kierkegaard, may succeed only in short-circuiting "the very process of valuation" the speaker hopes to elicit.³⁶

The Christian preacher can hardly challenge Kierkegaard's objection. Neither can the preacher forsake *ethos* as an integral part of his life. He must utilize all of his ethical powers—wisdom, moral character, good will, and speaking skill—in the preaching of the gospel. But he must never prostitute these qualities as cheap tools of persuasion.

Measuring the ethics of the logos of the speaker. The logical appeal (*logos*), or appeal to reason used by the speaker has been the focus both of praise and criticism. In the traditional form it involved two general categories, inartistic and artistic proof. Inartistic proof, or what we would call facts, is material which we do not furnish ourselves. According to Aristotle it included such things as witnesses, tortures, and contracts.³⁷ Today this kind of proof would include all matters falling under the definition of facts. Artistic proof is the process of reasoning. Although classical rhetoricians went into great detail expounding the laws of logic, it will suffice at present merely to say that the logical appeal was generally used either inductively or deductively.

Methods of logical appeal which are criticized. Some of the more controversial methods of logic which receive criticism are as follows:

1. *Distortion or falsification.* Brembeck and Howell sum up the views of many rhetoricians when they write, "The decision to lie is a weighty one, a burden not to be taken lightly by the persuader."³⁸

2. *Propaganda devices.* These included (1) the name-calling device, (2) the glittering generalities device, (3) the transfer device, (4) the testimonial device, (5) the plain-folks device, (6) the card-stacking device, and (7) the band-wagon device.³⁹ Although these devices are instruments with which the unprincipled propagandist may distort information, it would be erroneous to assume that they are invariably wrong.

35. Raymond E. Anderson, "Kierkegaard's Theory of Communication," *op. cit.*, p. 5.

36. *Ibid.*, pp. 5, 10.

37. Cooper, *Rhetoric of Aristotle*, *op. cit.*, I, 2.

38. Brembeck and Howell, *op. cit.*, p. 461.

39. C. R. Miller, *Propaganda Analysis* (Institute for Propaganda Analysis, I, 2, November, 1937), pp. 1-3.

In all fairness these devices may be used ethically or unethically depending upon the speaker.

3. *Communication barriers.* Other communication barriers may distort information. Allness or overgeneralization, in such forms as the thin entering wedge statement, or the building of small incidents into catastrophic events; the two-valued either/or statement which reduces many alternatives into one or two oversimplified choices; invalid cause and effect reasoning; lying with statistics; distorted definitions; false analogies; appeals to authority; begging the questions; *ad hominem* logic, or attacking a man instead of his arguments; guilt or innocence by association; and appeal to the crowd are some of the ways information can be twisted and thus deceive people.⁴⁰

4. *Confusion of facts with inferences.* In the realm of beliefs and values confusion of facts with inferences has led to all kinds of deception and distortion in business, politics, and even in religion. A conscientious and responsible preacher, therefore, will be careful about assigning the label "fact" to his unverified statements of inference. He recognizes the differences between experimental and non-experimental beliefs. Experimental beliefs cannot be reasonably challenged. Non-experimental or unverified beliefs have led to a multitude of controversies.

5. *Concealment of purpose, organization, or institution.* Persuaders, whether preachers, door-to-door salesmen or religious sect evangelists, are considered unethical when they try to hide the true purpose of their persuasion, or the organization they represent. Most rhetoricians insist that a persuader, regardless of what type of organization he may represent, "lay his cards on the table," so to speak, early in his communication. The responsible preacher will not conceal his purpose or organization for unethical reasons. This does not mean that speech purpose may not be approached indirectly for rhetorical purposes of surprise, but only that this shall be done within ethical bounds.

6. *Other methods receiving criticism.* Although criticism could be extended almost indefinitely to minor content details, the above instruments receive the brunt of objection. Adapting one's messages to the whims and preferences of the audience, advisability of complete and absolute honesty, the slipping of personal value judgments into objective descriptions, and the use of tact and sincerity, however laudable they may seem, may be used unethically and have at times been criticized.

Types of criticism levelled at the logical appeal. Even though appealing to the listener's reasoning powers seems unassailable, critics of the process have attacked it. Kierkegaard, as we have already mentioned, took a dim view of trying to elicit subjective ethical and religious response through logical demonstration. He claimed that logical proof could not

40. For a fuller treatment of these and other barriers, see Raymond W. McLaughlin, *Communication for the Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1968), Chap. 4, "Barriers to Communication."

be used to establish belief because belief is a product of volitional action, not assent. Values cannot be probed through empirical demonstration. Thus, he claims that beating the listener down through rigid empirical and logical demonstration results in preventing belief by removing the occasion of choice.⁴¹ The weakness of this attack is in its assumption that logic cannot even be used to argue for probabilities, let alone absolutes. The Christian persuader does not use logic as an absolute proof for the existence of God. He merely uses it to argue in favor of a high degree of probability that God exists.

A broader attack upon traditional Aristotelian reasoning is made by Alfred Korzybski and the general semanticists. Korzybski and his followers struck deeply at the roots of Aristotelian logic—the three “laws of thought.”

1. The law of identity—whatever is, is.
2. The law of contradiction—nothing can both be and not be.
3. The law of the excluded middle—everything must either be or not be.⁴²

Upon these three laws of thought Aristotle and Aristotelians erected their system of logic, so widely used by mankind. Korzybski's non-Aristotelian approach to life and language stressed what seems to be the opposite of these three laws. Thus he taught:

1. The law of non-identity—the word is not the reality.
2. The law of non-allness—the word is not all of reality.
3. The law of self-reflexiveness—the word can be used in statements about itself.

Some thinkers, however, charge that the general semanticists have misrepresented Aristotle, applying his laws to language representations when actually he meant them to apply to existing things and to thought.⁴³ Were he alive today, they argue, Aristotle would remain true to his three laws as they apply to objects and thinking but that he would doubtless agree with Alfred Korzybski that “the word is not the object,” that “the word does not tell all about the object,” and that language is self-reflexive. Aristotle's laws are distorted when made to mean that the word “table” is identical with the object table which the label is being used to represent. His law of the excluded middle is distorted from its meaning when

41. Anderson, “Kierkegaard's Theory of Communication,” *op. cit.*, pp. 4ff.

42. On this criticism see Alfred Korzybski, *Science and Sanity, op. cit.*, p. 404 and here and there throughout the book; Wendell Johnson, *People in Quandaries* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1946), pp. 7ff; Irving J. Lee, *Language Habits in Human Affairs* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1941), pp. 87-91, 100-109, *et passim*; Stuart Chase, *The Tyranny of Words* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1938), pp. 226ff, and other writers on General Semantics.

43. For criticism of the general semantics approach see such works as Barrows Dunham, *Man Against Myth* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1947), pp. 233-266, and Margaret Gorman, R.S.C.J., *General Semantics and Contemporary Thomism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1962).

used to shrink a many-valued set of alternatives into a two-valued, either/or set of alternatives. And Aristotle probably never believed that language was not self-reflexive, that is, that it could not be used in statements about itself.

Finally, some rhetoricians, though favorable to logical appeal, object to those who would insist that logical appeal be the only or predominant appeal in discourse. These critics maintain that even though strong logical appeals be structured into a speech, logic alone does not always persuade listeners. Man's prejudices, biases, social and emotional conduct do not always allow him to respond to discourse in a logical way. Man sometimes responds to emotion, social influences, suggestion, and other appeals when logic does not convince him. When this happens a speaker who refuses to use these appeals because he wants to perpetuate pure logic may be as unethical as a man who uses them.⁴⁴

More than that, Professor Donald K. Smith questions the possibility of separating logical from emotional discourse.⁴⁵ He argues that even the presentation of facts and logic elicits a degree of emotional response. Words in themselves are not emotional. They create emotional response because they get their meaning from their context.

Conclusions regarding criticism of logical appeal. Criticisms of logical reasoning and appeal have been helpful to the students of persuasion. The ethical obligation of the persuasive preacher, however, would seem obviously to be in favor of its use. Nevertheless, heavy dependence upon facts and reasoning should not exclude the use of other appeals such as emotion, social influence, and suggestion if used ethically and together with facts and logic. In fact, the Christian preacher needs to ponder the ethical implications of failure to use the kind of appeal that would move one type of audience even though such an appeal might fail to appeal to another type.

MEASURING THE ETHICS OF THE PATHOS OF THE SPEAKER

Even though attacks on the ethics of emotional appeal occur more frequently and vehemently than those on the ethical and logical appeals, the criticisms of *pathos* are not as thorough and detailed as the criticisms of the other two appeals. Most critics merely resent in a general way a speaker who bypasses the listener's reasoning process and seeks to get response solely through emotional appeals.

Kierkegaard objected to the persuading of an audience through the channeling of their existing desires. He felt that the preacher, or the edifying speaker, should confront the listener with the ultimate values which might require the renunciation of the listener's desires.⁴⁶ Franklyn

44. See Brembeck and Howell, *op. cit.*, pp. 449-50; and Minnick, *op. cit.*, pp. 284-85, as representative of this view.

45. Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 236-38.

46. Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

S. Haiman criticized the emotional appeal as often at odds with the conscious thought processes of the listener.⁴⁷ He does allow for the kind of emotional appeal which does not attempt to short circuit the hearer's thought process.⁴⁸

Professor Thomas R. Nilsen fears that with the advent of such highly developed communication techniques as mass advertising, motivation research, and professional public relations, persuasion runs the risk of violating democratic principles. These principles include the values of the intrinsic worth of the individual, his reasoning process, his privilege of self-determination and the fulfillment of his potentialities as a positive good.⁴⁹ These values, according to Nilsen, must control the procedures of communication rather than vice versa.

And in a similar vein, Professor Karl R. Wallace criticizes any persuasive methods which violate democratic ideals and values, regardless of the ends pursued by the speaker. The dignity and worth of individuals, equality of opportunity, and freedom to think and act must be protected. And no person's capability of understanding democracy: its goals, values, procedures, and processes, must be violated.⁵⁰

Although not exhaustive, the preceding criticisms of emotional appeals tend to be general, focused at the speaker who bypasses the listener's reasoning process in order to get response through emotion alone. When this happens, individual dignity, democratic values, and even spiritual ideals may be violated. When used responsibly and in connection with sound facts and reasoning, not only are emotional appeals ethical, but they may be the only way to get a favorable response from some audiences.

Means of persuasion as a measure of its ethics. Means or methods of persuasion lend themselves to abuse more often than the goals of persuasion. Thorough understanding of these methods and exceeding care in their use is, therefore, mandatory. A study of persuasive methods shows that some are obviously ethical. Others are obviously unethical. Some must be thought of as ethically neutral and can be used for good or bad. Persuasive methods, therefore, should be used accordingly.

SOME ETHICAL STANDARDS FOR PERSUASIVE PREACHING

The increasing concern for ethics in persuasion indicates that few rhetoricians question the validity of its study. The major problem is that of deciding on the standards by which to measure the ethics. There is little agreement on what the standards ought to be.

The Standards by Which Men Measure Ethics

Drawing up a list of ethical rules by which persuaders should func-

47. Haiman, *op. cit.*, p. 385.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 388.

49. Thomas R. Nilsen, "Free Speech, Persuasion, and the Democratic Process," *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*, XLIV, 3 (October, 1958), pp. 235-43.

50. Wallace, *op. cit.*, pp. 5-6.

tion runs headlong into the absolutist-relativist controversy. Most secular rhetoricians tend toward the relativist view that ethics are determined by the individual, the society, and the culture of a given period. This culture, society, and individual change and so do their ethics. Thus the secular persuader finds few if any absolute ethical principles by which he can always function. He must adapt to the current situation. The classical rhetorical, scientific and rational, and social effects ends or goals mentioned earlier fit easily into the relativist ethical system.

Although it would appear that the theological ends or goals view described earlier would fit better into the absolutist rather than the relativist ethical system, such is not necessarily the case. For the theologically oriented communicators represent virtually all the shades of opinion in the absolutist-relativist situation. Some theologically oriented homileticians and preachers would hold to an extreme absolutist biblical ethic with an attendant system of legalism. Others would hold to an extreme relativist position comparable to the situation ethics system of Joseph Fletcher and others. Still many other theologians would occupy a more mediating position by which they would utilize characteristics of both absolutist and relativist positions.

A Suggested Biblical Standard for Persuasive Preaching

The Christian persuader is committed to the Bible as his sole source of faith and practice. Some, of course, are absolutist in their orientation. They feel that every biblical law and precept must be binding at all times without exception. They are legalists. Others tend toward relativism and hold that love is the only law that is binding upon them. They believe that only the context of a given situation can dictate how one should operate in love.

For most Christian persuaders, however, an ethic of love which has some guidelines is necessary. Thus, they operate within a biblical and practical context with *agape*-love as the dominant motivation.

This author, therefore, suggests that the Christian persuader start his ethical system with what our Lord considered to be the great commandments of the law.⁵¹

You should love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You should love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets (Matt. 22:37-40).

In order to see how adequately Jesus' words fit the Christian persuader's ethical system note the following facts about the above commandments.

First, both love and law are part of this system of ethics. Christians need both love and law.

51. See on this Kyle Haselden, *Morality and the Mass Media* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1968), pp. 31ff.

Second, love is central, and law is peripheral. No matter how completely one lives by the law and the prophets, if he does not do so in love, he violates both commandments.

Third, the passage actually suggests three, rather than two commands.

Love God.

Love neighbor.

Love self (implied).

From the order of these commands we readily see that regardless of humanistic philosophy, God is the primary object of man's love, not men. Man is included but only as our secondary and maybe tertiary object of love.

Finally, from these verses we can settle upon our ethical ends or goals in life and persuasion. Moreover, the Christian persuader's ends or goals include those of many secular rhetoricians but go even higher. Thus our ethical goals would be as follows:

Love God—theological ends.

Love neighbor—Love self: social effects ends.

And it is not too far-fetched to imply from these ends those set forth in classical rhetoric, science, and logic. From the words of Jesus, then, the Christian seems to have a comprehensive and desirable ethical framework with which to begin.

From such a beginning, the Christian can proceed to expand and develop from the Bible an adequate and helpful ethical system within which he can operate, always dominated by *agape* love. Every rhetorical instrument he uses in his preaching must constantly be examined against the standard of his love for God, for his neighbor, and for himself.

Some of the rhetorical means or methods will obviously be right. Others will obviously be wrong. Still others will fall into a neutral category and their ethics will be determined by how they are used.⁵²

THE CHRISTIAN PERSUADER'S ETHICAL OBLIGATION

In spite of the criticisms levelled at persuasion, Christians are under obligation to persuade. Obviously their persuasive ends and means must be ethical. Knowing how crucial the gospel message and its proclamation is to the destinies of men, the Christian persuader should consider the ethical implications of failure to be at his persuasive best. Slovenly or careless preaching may actually be unethical. Therefore it behooves Christian preachers to use the best possible rhetorical goals and methods lest their ignorance blunt their effectiveness. Nothing less would be ethical.

No persuader will ever be perfectly effective. But each can work assiduously to narrow the gap between his ethical and effectual potential and his ethical and effectual performance.

"Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men" (II Cor. 5:11).

52. For an example of this type of categorization see Minnick, *op. cit.*, pp. 285-87.