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Vander Lei, Elizabeth, Thomas Amorose, Beth Daniell, and Anne Ruggles Gere, eds. *Renovating Rhetoric in Christian Tradition*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2014. 232 pages.

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Few things evoke suspicion in higher education more than the topic of religion, and as a scholar who studies the intersection of sexuality, gender identity, and Christianity, I can understand why. In and outside of the classroom, Christian mores (or secularized versions thereof) operate as a socially dominant narrative, one which is often deployed as a prophylactic against considering minoritized perspectives. An abundance of scholarship in our field attests to this frustrating phenomenon. And yet, no matter how frustrating this phenomenon may be, academics from a range of subfields within rhetoric and composition--myself included--implore their colleagues to consider the important ways that Christianity continues to shape public life, even (and especially) when we don't recognize its immediate influence. Elizabeth Vander Lei, Thomas Amorose, Beth Daniell, and Anne Ruggles Gere's *Renovating Rhetoric in Christian Tradition* continues this work.

Beginning with a modest grant from the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities, the editors of this collection accomplish more than an interesting manuscript. Early in the writing process, their genuine passion for exploring the multiple meanings of concepts like "religion" and "Christianity" resulted in the creation of a special interest group (SIG) at the Conference on College Composition and Communication. Drawing from this robust academic conversation, Vander Lei, Amorose, Daniell, and Ruggles Gere offer readers a series of essays that illuminate a dynamic, rather than rigid, relationship between rhetoric and Christianity--essays that challenge readers to rethink their aversion to religious rhetorics. Like similar collections, the editors claim that our field's favoring of secular discourse communities over religious ones comes at the cost of losing out on a trove of resources for rethinking the rhetorical tradition.

Turning readers' attention toward these resources, the editors have cleverly organized their book around a central theme of rhetorical "renovation." Throughout its chapters, authors illustrate how rhetors--across times of historical and contemporary rupture--have worked within and against Christian tradition to articulate themselves as social agents and effect change within their discourse communities (ix). *Renovating Rhetoric* includes four sections, each reviewing a different point of tension within Christian tradition.

Section One, "The Rise of Christian Sects" examines how religious outsiders--Mormons and Seventh Day Adventists, respectively--challenged socially dominant perspectives about the validity of their religious beliefs and their place within the United States. Anne Ruggles Gere's "Constructing Devout Feminists" illustrates how Mormon women, at the turn of the nineteenth century, renovated the literacy practices of women's literary clubs in order to successfully combat prevailing misperceptions about their (lack of) feminist agency (4-13). In the process, Gere argues, these women were able to accomplish the daunting task of articulating Mormonism as thoroughly American, during a crucial time when Utah made its bid for statehood (14). Highlighting a different struggle against dominant forms of Christianity in the U.S., Elizabeth Rand's "A Rhetoric of Opposition" provides a compelling history of the origins of Sunday worship and the ways in which Seventh-Day Adventists (SDAs) were demonized for flouting this mandate (18-20). Bucking the assumption that SDAs are merely oppositional, Rand draws from theorist John Schilb to demonstrate how these types of "rhetorical refusals . . . serve to illuminate the dynamics of power" (27). Taken together, these essays shed light not only on the rhetorical moves employed by religious minorities but, more importantly, on how normative Christian groups have often colluded with the state to enshrine a white heteropatriarchy as divinely ordained. Moreover, these essays invite us to explore that which is "queer" within minority religious discourse communities, urging us to reconsider dominant conceptions of what is normal, healthy, and good.

While the contribution of women rhetors cuts across the previous section, this takes center stage in Section Two, "The Rise of Female Rhetors." Here, authors illustrate how women have "sometimes respect[ed] and sometimes challenge[d] the orthodox practices and beliefs of their discourse communities" in order to carve out a space for women's leadership--something that is no small feat in male-dominated Christian traditions (xi). The first essay, "Preaching from the Pulpit Steps," by Vicki Tolar Burton, examines Mary Bosanquet as a case study of how blending spiritual discourses gained Methodist women rhetorical leverage, which in turn slowly challenged their community's prohibition against female preachers. In "With the Tongue of [Wo]men and Angels," Aesha Adams-Roberts, Rosalyn Collings Evers, and Liz Rohan present a comparative analysis of how three female rhetors--across racial, class, and sectarian lines--employ apostolic rhetoric to garner authority within their religious communities. The authors close their essay by imploring feminist rhetoricians to "centralize matters of faith and spirituality" so that they will have a more complete sense of the women's available means of persuasion (58). The third and final essay of this collection, Karen Seat's "Rhetorical Strategies in Protestant Women's Missions," demonstrates how Protestant women

renovated discourses of domesticity and abolitionism to justify their work in “foreign” ministries, a move the author argues ultimately liberalized mainline Protestant communities. While these narratives certainly highlight the need to examine the female rhetorician in all of her (spiritual and religious) specificity, they also highlight religious women rhetors as simultaneously poised against and complicit in various forms of oppression--thus offering readers a nuanced model for thinking about the consequences of articulating rhetorical agency.

Taking a somewhat jarring contemporary turn, Section Three, “The Rise of Concern about American Christian Fundamentalism” offers strategies for helping students “make sense of the relationship between their religious identity and their academic work” through rhetorics of renovation (xv). Priscilla Perkins’s “Attentive, Intelligent, Reasonable, and Responsible,” for example, offers a sympathetic case study of Tina, whose anxiety about her Evangelical Christian identity prevented her from demonstrating self-reflexive writing practices. Throughout, Perkins shares with readers a refreshing way of thinking about rhetoric beyond mere persuasion to considering how one’s arguments might affect others. In “Ain’t We Got Fun?” Elizabeth Vander Lei reflects on her interactions with her student Marty, a Christian Fundamentalist, in order to consider how teachers can be more hospitable to students whose ideas they find “disagreeable” (90). Cautioning teachers from painting all religious students with a broad brush, she advocates instead creating opportunities that help students locate their religious narratives as part of a larger discourse community (97). Perhaps the crowning piece of this section is Beth Daniell’s “A Question of Truth.” Through historicizing biblical canonization, reading practices, and conceptions of truth, Daniell presents strategies for responding to religious students in such a way that they don’t have to choose between their faith and their education. All told, these essays offer teachers valuable theoretical and practical tips for engaging in difficult dialogues.

Finally, Section Four, “Rhetoric in Christian Tradition,” examines what the collection’s editors describe as “the troubled relationship of rhetoric and the Christian tradition” (xv). But because the editors have presented us with such a great metaphor like “renovation,” I’d risk describing this final section as an acknowledgement of the cracks in the foundation of Christian discourse. For instance, in “The Jewish Context of Paul’s Rhetoric,” Bruce Herzberg notes that while his Greco-Roman rhetorical training may be acknowledged, Paul’s rabbinic training in rhetoric is denied by New Testament scholars and Christian rhetorologists alike--a silence Herzberg rightly notes as “suspect” (132). As a corrective, he calls on scholars to acknowledge Jewish rhetoric’s contributions to the Christian rhetorical tradition. The collection closes with Thomas Amorose’s essay, “Resistance to Rhetoric in the Christian Tradition.” Herein, Amorose examines three ways in which Christian discourse communities stifle

the free exercise of rhetoric: denying agency to the rhetor, limiting hermeneutic freedoms, and upholding the status quo. He argues that Christianity's reticence toward rhetoric results in a stale discourse community and a stagnation of faith (145). In contrast, Amarose argues that embracing rhetoric's full potential can help Christian discourse communities remain meaningful in contemporary times. Together, these essays direct readers' attention to the future--what remains to be said in the field of Christian rhetorics.

On the whole, this collection inspires with the possibilities of renovating both Christian rhetorical tradition and the rhetorical tradition in general. A strength of this collection is that it welcomes other scholars into the conversation, regardless of whether or not their primary research interests include Christian rhetorics. For instance, those who consider themselves feminist rhetoricians might find the first two sections of this collection quite useful, particularly those with an interest in excavating new means of persuasion from feminist archives. Moreover, those who study deliberative rhetoric, along with those who'd like to brush up on negotiating difficult dialogues, would certainly benefit from the latter half of the collection. And, of course, it goes without saying that *Renovating Rhetoric* is a must-read for those interested in religious rhetorics--especially those interested in pulpit rhetorics and the literacy practices of Christian students.

Renovation is *such* a smart metaphor for the collection, precisely because it has the potential for encouraging us to think about the worlds we build through discourse. It can also give us an opportunity to consider everything from the leaky roofs to the cracks in our discursive foundations. While there are places where I see the collection attempt to seize these opportunities, I do wish the authors had tempered their enthusiasm for Christian rhetorical agency by acknowledging that Christianity also happens to be a dominant social discourse that has, at times, been responsible for denying the agency of others. Taking into consideration how difficult it is for editors to make any collection cohere, I was also left wanting more renovating voices that might knock down discursive walls to make room for a more socially just vision of Christianity. All that said, perhaps a hallmark of a well-thought collection is that it "fires the curiosity of . . . readers" and reminds them of the work yet to be done (xvi).

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## About the Author

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