Reformation patterns of speech, as we find them in sixteenth-century literature, reflect the interplay between rhetoric and theology. The kind of language Reformation leaders used to communicate what they believed to be true appealed to those who became followers, gathered in various communities (organized institutions or free associations), and tried to put common ideas and ideals into practice. The Reformers' words had also a profound effect on persons who either chose to stay outside of confessional boundaries or held opposite views. Moreover, Reformation speech provided later generations with the vocabulary to construct their respective views of reality—even if the inherited frame of reference increasingly failed to relate to actual experiences and therefore lost relevance.

Of course, socio-cultural experiences in changed times have shaped our modern speech and its post-modern deconstruction. Still, it appears useful to examine the ways in which major figures of the Reformation, like Erasmus and Luther, put words together to frame, defend, and advance their respective theological views. That much at least Luther and Erasmus had in common: They took language not simply as a means for effective communication (as we usually do), but they believed that the form of speech is important because it is an expression of its content and author.

Erasmus, above all, regarded the way one speaks or writes as alluding to who one is, what one believes, and what one does. The form of speech

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2"Speech is the mirror of the mind" (Lingua CWE 29:326); "Qualis est sermo nostrer, talis est spiritus nostrer" (cf ASD V-4:40, line 117-42, line 14); "Quaecunque est cor hominis, talis est oratio" (ASD V-4:42, line 161; cf 460, lines 271-72); see references to oratio certissimus animi
mirrors the author's belief system and behavior pattern. One comes closest to understanding who others are and what they mean by words if one looks at how they frame their speech. It is not absolutely necessary to see others in person in order to form an impression of their character. It is enough, even preferable, to read their writings.

God's speaking in Scripture allows us to understand the divine mind as incarnate in words. Therefore, God's word-revelation in Scripture could provide, so Erasmus assumed, a common ground for a discussion with Luther. Indeed, both shared the belief that Christ had become word in Scripture. Both interpreted biblical passages from a Christ-centered focus. But their divergent theological presuppositions (including their respective teachings on Christ and salvation) and their different hermeneutical principles led to dissimilar views of God's relation to human beings. Nonetheless, for the sake of peace Erasmus attempted in his De libero arbitrio to come up with similarities between Luther and the Catholics. Erasmus' own intention, i.e., his rhetorical theology aiming at a mediating position between two extremes, impelled him to find a solution that could reconcile Luther and the Catholic Church.

Rhetorical analysis offers an appropriate method for uncovering an author's ideas and values (inventio), their construction in words (dispositio), and their intended impact on an audience (elocutio). A closer, admittedly limited, look at how Erasmus communicated with Luther, then, should allow us

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