"SO MANY KINDS OF VOICES"

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THE Gospel according to St. Matthew reports a conversation between Jesus and his disciples concerning his use of the parable as a teaching method. "This is why I speak to them in figures," He said, "because though they do not hear or understand" (Goodspeed, 13:13). Every preacher and teacher must, on many occasions, after he had tried in every way he knew, to make what seemed to him a simple idea clear, have discovered that most of those to whom he was speaking failed to get the point. There are, as the Apostle wrote, "so many kinds of voices" speaking. And it is so difficult to understand what they are saying.

The year that Gene Tunney won the championship by defeating Jack Dempsey, I had a troop of Boy Scouts camping on the shore of a lake in eastern Massachusetts. The boys were all agog to know the outcome of the fight. It was before radios were available. The only way in which we could get the news was to send a deputation of boys around the lake and over to the nearest town two or three miles away. Before the boys set out it was agreed that when they got back to the shore of the lake directly opposite from the camp they would "wig wag" the news, using flash-lights and signalling according to the "semaphore" system. The boys who remained in camp waited for the the report in great excitement. When the deputation got back to the opposite shore of the lake we could see them frantically waving the flash-lights back and forth. But they were so excited with the news and the boys who were waiting their report were so impatient to know what it was that nobody could make out what they were trying to tell us. We had to wait until they had tramped around the lake and gotten within shouting distance before we could learn who had won the fight.

I have often thought, when I was in the midst of a sermon, that I was doing very much the same thing that the deputation of Scouts were trying to do, whom we sent to gets the news of the outcome of the fight. Down before me, sitting in sedate decorum, and with the outward manifestation of every varying degree of interest, were the congregation. And there was I, standing in the pulpit, and frantically "wig-wagging" at them. They apeared to be listening attentively. They appeared to be following what I was saying. But were they really getting the idea? Was the experience which my speaking stimulated in their consciousness in any wise comparable to the experience that prompted me to speak? Out of our joint efforts to make that preaching occasion mutually profitable, were we making any progress toward establishing a stronger bond of "community" in which we were all linked together in one corporate whole? I could never feel very confident about it.

The "Blockages" of Communications

In the Spring (1945) number of THE ILIFF REVIEW Dr. Elwood Murray discussed some of the "blockages" that interfere with our communications—especially our attempts at communication in religion. He singles out four for consideration. There is, first of all, the difficulty of understanding our interpretations or evaluations of first-hand experience. There is, second, the tendency to which we are all prone to yield, to think of life in static, rather than in dynamic terms. Growing out of these two is the tendency to consider a "word map," that is the particular formulae of language in which our in-

terpretations are phrased as possessing independent validity. We fail to remember that words are only symbols, or pointers, indicating a substantial body of fact or experience which constitutes the true reality with which we should be dealing. And there is, finally, the tendency of our thinking to complete its divorce from reality through a process of inversion, or "self-reflexion" by which we focus our attention upon a discussion of the form of statement rather than of the fact or experience which the terms we use are designed to represent.

The Character of "Truth" and "Fact"

Dr. Murray has put his finger upon a vital matter. But his discussion falls a long way short of reckoning with the real difficulties in our problem of communication. There are at least two points at which we need to enter a demurrer to the argument presented in the article. In the first place Prof. Murray speaks of "the first order of facts or 'truth'" as though it represented a substantial core of indisputable reality by reference to which all of our statements may be corrected. He points to "the almost universal confusing of the word with the 'facts'" as one of the primary sources of confusion in our thinking. He pleads for a more nearly universal use of "the new available general scientific methods habitually (to) check words and symbols to the facts they cover," as the way of escape from this confusion, as though these "facts" were readily available, easily identified, and dependably stable criteria.

Now, I was about to say, "as a matter of fact," this very manner of defining the problem is itself an illustration of the very confusion we seek to dispel. This use of the term "fact" very well serves to illustrate the inadequacy of the picture of the situation drawn by Prof. Murray. "Truth", if the word has any table and dependable meaning at all, is very far from being an assembly of scientifically attested data. It involves interpretations and meanings. It includes a vast complex of associations and correlations which reflect not the coldly objective reporting of impersonal "finders" but the product of the organizing function of intelligence shot through and through with emotional warmth and color. The inherent convincingness of any purported statement of "truth" depends, not so much upon any intrinsic correspondence between the "word map" and the external territory defined, as it does upon the degree of coherence and consistency which it represents, and the extent to which it "gears in" to the total body of interpreted experience which we share with our neighbors.

This does not mean to say that we must resolve ourselves into a kind of social solipsism, in which we conclude that the only objective reality we can know is limited to the agreement or consensus of judgment among intelligent persons concerning what they will believe about the world. All our knowledge—in fact, the very possibility of our knowing anything at all—rests back upon the assumption that all human intelligence is essentially kindred in structure and process. That is to say, we must assume that given the same sequence of events any two individuals will interpret those events in essentially the same fashion. Out of our common life together languages emerge because the essentially kindred processes of intelligence tend to use the same word symbols as counters possessing substantially the same values. Our knowledge rests back, further, upon the the assumption that the structure and process of human intelligence corresponds in essential particulars with the structure and process of reality. This means that man is part of nature. It further means that the mental life of men, the total product

of their intelligence, is not a "sport" or an excresence, but is integral in the structure and process of reality.

"Truth" represents, however, something inherently different from the stark and naked "fact" which Dr. Murray's discussion appears to assume. The very term "fact" itself never represents any brute inert datum existent totally apart from the experience of men. Take, by way of illustration, Sir Isaac Newton's apple falling from the apple tree, or Benjamin Franklin's nerve shock when he touched the key to his kite string, or the rock which Galileo dropped from the leaning tower of Pisa, or the chemical reaction which any research chemist notes down in cryptic symbols in his notebook. Here are naked "facts" if we ever can come at them. And yet in every instance it only requires a moment's reflection to make clear how much more than bald, bare, naked "fact" they involve. You have to reckon not only with the apple, but also with Isaac Newton. And the bald, bare fact of the falling apple did not become significant until he had related it, in his thinking, to something universal in the experience of other men; and, further, until he had put his interpretation in terms that would enable a substantial number of his neighbors to share, to some limited extent at least, in the experience through which he came to his conception of the nature of the physical universe. In similar fashion you have to reckon Benjamin Franklin himself in as an integral component element in the "fact" of the first record of a man's fully intelligent awareness of electricity. You have to consider that, in a sense, Galileo dropped all the way with the rock he pushed over the edge of the tower. The chemist must be counted in as an even more significant element than any of the elements represented by symbols in the chemical equations in his notebook.

It might be a more accurate way of looking at the whole problem if, instead of the term "facts" we should make use of a term like "event". Prof. Murray has pointed out, as one of the primary "blockages" in our communications, "the static orientation and outlook upon facts and reality". He would insist that "the world in which we live, the real world of facts to which we must adjust, appears to modern science as completely and universally in-process". This observation is enough, in itself, to make clear the inadequacy of the notion of "fact" to which we are taking exception. Every such "fact" datum amounts, in effect, to an attempt at a cross-section of the on-going process of reality. It is a necessary cross-section, it is true. But, when we make it we ought not to forget what we have done. And we ought to attempt to make allowance for a certain inevitable distortion of perspective which it involves. Every "fact" is like a sudden sharp and abrupt stopping of a motion picture film. In the interest of securing a longer period of observation of the detail of the process we "freeze" all action for an instant while we attempt to gather up a more nearly complete impression of the infinite complexity of the situation, much of which we ordinarily miss. But, in the very attempt to seize and hold this fleeting glimpse and transform it into an extended view, we, to a certain extent, destroy the thing that we would observe. For life does not stop. The play goes on.

We need to go back one step further in the process of analyzing the sources of our difficulties in communications. We need to begin, not with "evaluating the facts to be communicated" but with the so-called "facts" themselves. We need to recognize that what we are dealing with is not an initial bare, brute "fact," but a brief segment of the experience of a living person. The "facts" to which Prof. Murray would

appeal with such confidence as the substantial ground of reality which ultimately provides us with firm footing are themselves abstractions. They are, in sober truth, among the most thoroughly "abstract" factors in our experience.

This leads us to a second objection which we would raise to the argument in "Science, Communications, and Religion". When one confidently pleads that "When religion takes unto itself the disciplines of the general scientific methods now available it will be enabled immediately to remedy its own frustrations and ineptitudes" he is overlooking the extent to which every alleged "fact" represents an abstraction from the full, rich content of actual experience. Every scientific datum represents an abstraction of those aspects of reality that lend themselves to measurement by the methods developed by the physical sciences. It represents that, and nothing more. And out of this fact that we have overlooked, or deliberately ignored the extent of this abstraction, has come the enormous distortion of perspective that has tended to throw our whole modern culture severely off center. The resultant radical dislocation of vital elements in the on-going processes of living are threatening to shake our boasted modern culture into fragments.

We are not questioning the value, even the necessity, of this abstraction. But we are insisting that we should realize what we are about and make proper allowances when we engage in it. It is possible, for illustration, to reduce Beethoven's "Fifth Symphony" to a collection of mathematical equations. We can resolve the most complicated piece of musical composition into a series of measurable intervals. Or we can analyze Da Vinci's "Last Supper" into a rather complex combination of geometrical patterns. Each of these attempts to get at the substantial "fact" behind the work of art will be "true", in terms of the severely limited universe of meanings in the vocabulary of which we are seeking to make that particular experience articulate. And yet, how vast an area of meanings we leave totally "blacked out" in our process of abstraction! These very illustrations we have just used are likely, themselves, to lead us off the trail. They are the product of a highly sophisticated process of analysis; whereas the thing we are attempting to illustrate is one of the most immediate elements in our experience. They have been deliberately selected just to emphasize the character of the problem with which we are dealing. The bare "fact" to which we would make our appeal, and the "scientific method" by which we would validate the fact, and through which we would discipline ourselves toward clarity of our mutual understanding, may become themselves a primary source of our confusion.

The Irrepressible Evaluation

One of the major sources of confusion arising out of our attempts to apply scientific method to the analysis of religion, and, for that matter, to that whole range of experience that we have rather clumsily and superficially baptized with the family name of "social sciences", is our deliberate attempt to abstract the "objective fact" from "evaluations". We need to realize that, in actual living experience, we never divorce ourselves from evaluations. Even in our attempts to be severely and impersonally "objective" we are still steeped to the point of saturation in the processes of evaluation. The very urge to attempt to become objective represents, in itself, a highly concentrated form of evaluation. It is in the interests of setting in sharp relief certain segments or severely limited aspects of experience that we attempt to become objective. We have come to reckon this impersonal, mathematically

commensurable, aspect of experience as one of the highest values within the reach of modern man. Out of our relative success in attaining this highly abstract view of reality we have developed such processes as standardized patterns and mass production that have so radically revolutionized the total environment of human living in our time. We have become so impressed by the enormous increment of power which this practice has made available to us, and by the sheer novelty of the comforts and excitements which it has placed at our disposal, that we have come to fancy that at last we have come to grips with naked reality.

It is a clear indication of how sadly we are deluding ourselves that we find ourselves completely baffled by such a figure as Mr. Ghandi in India. His whole proposal just doesn't make sense to the western mind. We cannot make him out. We have not known what to do with him. If we were as confidently sure of our ground as we are accustomed to boast, we would rather summarily have brushed him aside. It is so patently absurd that any one in his right mind would think that you could turn back the hands of the clock and revert to the economic level of the spinning wheel. It ought to be enough to demonstrate conclusively this absurdity just to observe how swiftly the process of the industrialization of Indian society is going forward. And yet we cannot escape the haunting suspicion that we may have missed the whole point of Mr. Ghandi's protest against western culture. Perhaps we are the ones who are absurd, if we could get a proper perspective.

We do not seem to know what to do with artists and poets anywhere. From the standpoint of the major premises upon which we have attempted to build our modern occidental philosophy, they are among the most readily "expendibles" in our excess baggage train. And yet, we cannot get along without them. We find ourselves, in spite of ourselves, constrained to call them in to reconstruct the hideous ugliness, which our highly abstract "objective" science has so often made of our world, in patterns of beauty and loveliness. We clamor for more than algebraic formulae and chemical equations. We want sonnets and lyric stanzas. This Man of Nazareth has been a problem ever since He first appeared. Many of his notions do not fit comfortably into the kind of world which we have tried to construct upon the basis of our abstract objectivity. The root of the trouble does not lie in any inherent incongruity between the ideas of Jesus and the bare, brute "facts" of reality, or the discipline of "scientific" procedures. The trouble is in the area of values. The values which we have surreptitiously sought to serve, through our attempted "objective" abstractions, run sharply counter to the values which the insight of Jesus discovered rooted in the structure and process of reality.

Here we come, again, face to face with our problem of communication. Our initial confusion is rooted in our overlooking or attempting to ignore that evaluation is inherent in the initial step of our attempt to make our experience meaningful. And it runs throughout the whole process of our struggle, through various forms of communication to achieve a vital and stable community. We need to realize that evaluation is not only inherent in the process of knowing and sharing experience; it constitutes the primary focus of interest. And we need, likewise, to recognize that value is determined, ultimately, in terms of the elemental drive toward the development of community. This is the point at which the disciplines of religion come to grips with the problem of living. It is with reference to the fundamental criterion of value that we need the corrective of religion to reconstruct the perspectives of objective science, fully as much as

we need the disciplines of the method of the physical sciences to clarify the interpretations of religion.

The Nature and Function of Words

It is one of the oddities of everyday experience to observe how any people stand in awe of the mystery of words. To see a statement set in cold type means more than the most solemn asseveration in a court of law. It must be so. We saw it in the paper. We read it in a book. We heard it said. Prof. Murray is correct in locating one of the primary blockages in communications in this confusing the "word-map" with the terrain itself. He has, also, paid passing tribute to the emotional association of words. But we need to go a good deal farther than he has gone in his discussion in recognizing that one of the primary functions of words is to serve as the trigger for the release of emotions. Our communications are involved in no end of confusion at this point.

For one thing, we altogether too readily take it for granted that a word is like a minted silver dollar. It should be accepted and pass as coin of the realm, with the same acknowledged value, anywhere. Of course, even dollars do not circulate in quite that simple and naive a fashion. Much less do words always carry precisely the same weight of meaning to everyone. No word ever means precisely the same thing to any two people. This roots back in the situation with which we were dealing near the beginning of this this discussion. "Facts" are not bare-brute entities. Facts are events. Involved in every observation even of the simplest and most commonplace phenomenon, are all the elements that have entered into the complete life history of the observer up to that moment. Take a doorknob, for illustration. There is a simple, elemental fact if ever there was one. I take hold of it and open the door. A thousand other people, in the course of the day, see the same doorknob, reach out and grasp it, and open the door. If we are content to abstract out only certain uniformities that hold true for all the thousand, it remains the same doorknob in the experience of every one of them. Yet, in the most important and significant fashion, it represents a thousand doorknobs.

This is a problem with which we have to wrestle in every attempt at communication. The most nearly completely identical experiences that we can imagine remain utterly discrete and unique for every individual who participates in the fellowship of an attempted sharing of those experiences through communication. This is only a part of the liabilities involved. For words represent more than an index tab in the filing system of our memories. And each one of us, in our attempts to organize our past experience, has worked out our own individual pattern of meanings. In this pattern the various word symbols which we have picked up at the teller's window, of the counting house of ideas, have their peculiar connotations of meaning. To no two of us do the same symbols ever indicate precisely the same meanings. When we use a word we are linking up some current increment of experience with the accumulated store of understanding that we already have on deposit. We are attempting to add up a substantial increase in our balance of understanding. And no one has yet succeeded in working out a method for drawing up a completely adequate audit of meanings.

Words are more than indicators of meaning. They are triggers that release emotions. Every word that enters into a man's vocabulary carries with it a certain amount, and a particular quality of emotional over-charge. Whenever the word recurs in his thinking or in communications with others it tends to precipitate a resurgence of the same type of emotional reaction that

accompanied its first appropriation. In each instance the appearance of this word in the conscious experience of an individual gathers up additional emotional increments that modify, or intensify, the emotional reactions which the word stimulates. And, again, with every individual, the emotional overtones which are associated with any given word vary from those which that same word carries to every other individual.

Once again, words become bugle calls to action. It is probable that the inception of language should be traced to a desire for some kind of action. And words never become complete divested of this action-objective. We have suggested that the primary focus of our whole evaluational experience is the development of a stable and mutually satisfying community. This community finds expression through a sharing of experiences. This means a commonly recognized and accepted pattern of meanings more or less completely integrated in a coherent philosophy of living. This means a sharing of emotional experiences. And it means cooperative action toward socially approved and corporately shared objectives. The building up of our vocabularies is always accompanied by various patterns of action. The words which we appropriate and use carry with them all manner of associations with more or less specific action patterns. Some of these associations may be purely accidental. Some of them have been deliberately selected and planned. And, in each instance, with each several individuals involved, the same word carries its own unique and individual association of action patterns.

"That All May Learn"

The implications of all this discussion of the problem of communication for the teacher and preacher should not be far to seek. The Apostle Paul, in writing to the members of the Church of Corinth about the danger of overvaluing the experience of "speaking in tongues", pithily remarked: "If then I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be to him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh will be a barbarian unto me." Too many times a preacher fails to remember that it is never enough simply to have delivered himself of what he has judged to be an important idea. He has still failed to hit the mark unless at least one other soul has entered into some degree of vital fellowship in shared experience as a result of his speaking.

The object of our speaking is not even just "get the idea across". It is to establish a genuine community of experience in which those who participate in the communication are linked together in a living fellowship. This almost always involves a sharing of meanings. It inevitably includes a sharing in the emotional over-charge with which these meanings are freighted, and a reproduction in common of the emotional state that made the meanings dynamic in the experience of the speaker. It almost always looks toward some community of action.

One of the primary requisites of such intelligence and productive communication is the initial establishment of a high degree of mutual appreciation and **rapport** between those who participate. This is just one of the reasons that the Church needs to cultivate the practice of relatively long pastorates. How else can a preacher ever hope to enter into that intimate sharing of a common life that makes real communication possible? How else can he hope to win the attention and hold the interest of those to who he would speak?

It indicates, further, the importance of both the broadest practicable base of general culture for the preacher, and also the necessity of sharpening the razor edge of his technical preparation. A man who undertakes to teach or to

preach will need to possess in his own life a well-grounded familiarity with every significant area of interest and experience that he finds represented in his constituency. He needs, as the Apostle long ago observed, "to become all things to all men." He needs, equally, to submit himself to the most rigorous and exacting disciplines of critical thinking and self-expression. There is no more imperative subject for life-long study than this field which we have recently dignified by the rather formidable term, "Semantics". There is no more prolific source of confusion and misunderstanding current than an almost criminal carelessness in the use of words.

Anyone who undertakes to deal with words needs must devote himself to a life-long discipleship seeking the mastery of the meaning and function of words, and of the vital processes within human personality, and in the interactions of human society, of which words are the vehicle of self-expression.