The Teaching Ministry:
Four Styles of Language

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THE TASK of theological education assigned by the Church to its seminaries is in the fullest sense the function of providing an education in religion which is in itself a theological experience. Therefore, the principles, values, and philosophy which provide the foundation for a concentration in Christian Education should in large measure be identical to those which undergird the entire theological enterprise. This is true in part because it is assumed that a program in Christion Education will include an education for Christians, and also in part because the task of the teaching ministry is to provide within the context of the local church an education in religion for every member of the community of faith which is in itself a theological experience.

The teaching ministry is rooted in the history of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Since the Exile Judaism has included instruction as a major element in the functions of a congregation; the role of Rabbi for over two thousand years has been that of teacher rather than priest. The record of the early church informs us that after the experience of Pentecost, "they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." (Acts 2:42 RSV) Since the time of the New Testament, the teaching ministry has been responsible for the training of the catecumens, the building of universities and colleges, the development of a program of child and youth instruction in religion, the

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formulation of philosophies of religious education, and the perfecting of the faith of those within the church. We are being asked in our own day to reemphasize this ministry in such a way that the minister might be the teacher of the faithful who in turn teach others.

The teaching ministry of the Church involves a complex program inclusive of all age levels, a variety of assisting disciplinary concerns, and a basic theological focus involving biblical, historical, and philosophical understandings. Therefore, one might propose a host of problems, some pragmatic, some institutional or programmatic, some experimental or scientific, some theoretical or philosophical. We shall focus on one problem in the remainder of this paper, that of language. During the Enlightenment period, scholars were concerned about the origins of language and thus produced a variety of theories about the "ursprache" or original speech. Linguists have analyzed language systems in terms of "families" of languages and have described the phonetic and morphic qualities of varying language systems. Grammarians have organized language into "proper" and "colloquial" usages. And General Semanticists and Linguistic Analysts built philosophies of language. Each of these areas could be considered as relevant to our teaching tasks within the church. However, we shall consider the problem of types or "styles" of language which are appropriate to the several tasks which comprise the teaching ministry.

It is normal to study language in terms of four basic factors: Grammar, Rhetoric, Criticism, and Symbolism. It is no accident that the four major theo-

logical tasks of the teaching ministry correspond to these four factors. We shall therefore consider briefly: The Grammar of Faith—A Catechetic Language; The Rhetoric of Faith—An Apologetic Language; The Criticism of Faith—A Hermeneutic Language; and The Symbolism of Faith—A Mythopoetic Language.

I. The Grammar of Faith— A Catechetic Language:

The grammatical understanding of a language provides both a content perspective and a method perspective. Grammar is concerned with the "parts-of-speech," the names of things, persons and actions, and their modifiers. But it is also concerned with the manner in which these parts of speech are related, their ordering, and the rules for their use.

We would suggest that there is a "Grammar of Faith" which might be viewed in a very similar manner. The content of the teaching ministry is disclosed by those experiences, both immediate and historical, which provide a Christian self-understanding. These experiences might occur in every culture and be defined in every religious movement. However, the "Christian" possibility for each of these experiences would be determined by the data of the Christian history. Thus the factual data concerning the Bible, the history of the Church, the history of Christian thought and the application of these ideas to life experience in a variety of settings all form the statements of faith which compose the language of the man of faith. However, the grammar of faith also controls his use of these data, the method by which he appropriates or communicates the data. The method appropriate to the teaching ministry is informed by, though not determined by or limited to, the skills and understandings supplied by a number of secular disciplines.

The teacher turns to sociology for a description of the function of religious behavior, the nature of social institu-

tions, and a description of cultural values; to the psychologist for an understanding of the effect of religious experience on personality, the developmental tasks and needs of emerging persons, theory of personality and interpersonal relationships, and learning theory. The teacher of religion appropriates from the educator philosophies of education, teaching skills, communication arts, creative activities and principles of curriculum development. From the Social Group Worker he learns of the nature of social group process, how individuals react within groups, leadership potential in the process of concensus formation, the principles of community organization, the recruiting, training and supervision of volunteers, and the procedures in administration and program building. These constitute the rules of grammar for the teaching ministry to a very great extent. The field of Christian Education cannot forsake the methods thus supplied by these assisting disciplines. However, the movement of religious education from Dewey, through the work of Bower, Coe, Vieth, and a host of others, for a period of over forty years presumed that a certain arrangement of these appropriations, ordered by a particular philosophy of liberal education, would supply the very content of religious education. Thus a method, guided by a progresive understanding of man, became the data, the grammar, of the teaching ministry. When one in an English course teaches rules of grammar without naming parts-of-speech, one's teaching becomes incoherent, dislocated, and eventually irrelevant. This has been the state of religious education in many departments in this country and therefore in many churches within Methodism.

Thus we find the risk of a dichotomy between content and method. The two must always be held together. The content of the Christian Faith, i.e., the immediate and historic religious experiences which provide a Christian self-understanding, informs the methods

employed in the Teaching Ministry. And the methods employed must be consistent with the individual minister's interpretation of the content of the Christian Faith. Thus there is a reciprocity between content and method which becomes a process of Christian Education. It is the task of the Department of Christian Education to clarify this process for the various forms of the teaching ministry. The process cannot be appropriated in terms of a specific set of skills and tools for the social engineering which dominates so much of our present congregational experience. What is demanded for an effective teaching ministry is a vocational self-understanding which allows the minister to appropriate the process as a personal style of professional relationships.

The first step in this development of a personal style for the professional teaching ministry is to discover a style of language which might be helpful in communicating the grammar of faith. This style we have termed a catechetic language. By this is meant that type of language which will enable children and youth to mature into men of faith, a language style which will serve the catalytic function of allowing a decision-making process to mature in relation to a Christian self-understanding. This was the style of language used by the apostles after Pentecost, that used by St. Ambrose as he tutored St. Augustine in the Christian Faith, that developed by Horace Bushnell for the process of Christian Nurture. For each teacher it will differ, with each learner it will be altered, in each sub-culture it will have differing characteristics, but it will witness to and communicate the faith.

II. The Rhetoric of Faith— An Apologetic Language

If one takes the task of developing a teaching ministry and an appropriate language seriously, he will find that a catechetic language is not available until another style is first developed.

Those with whom he would communicate are outside the Church in large measure. And even when within the Church a great maority are so informed by alien understandings, secular self-definitions, pagan orientations, and religious primitivism that the grammar of faith is incomprehensible. Thus we are in need of a style of language which might relate two differing self-understandings, two world-views, two life orientations.

In the history of language, there is one term which arose in just such a condition. It is the notion of rhetorics. Now since Plato, Rhetorics has been without content; it has been a method, or skill, or manner of speaking, or of understanding speech. But prior to Plato, the Sophists understood Rhetorics as a symbolic action which carried meaning at a time when two symbol systems were clashing. Already by the period of the Sophists, the myth of the polis, the Greek city-state notion of cultural identity, had broken down. The Sophistic reaction was to develop a cultural Paideira, a form of ancient liberal education. These two notions of the informing principle of the culture were in conflict and the Sophists invented the science of rhetorics as a mode of speech action which could carry the full weight of the necessary symbolic action to a new community formation under the new rubric of Paideira. Plato rejected such a notion, reinstituted the polis myth, or at least attempted to do so nomothetically under the dictatorship of the philosophers, and, in order to prohibit symbolic action from succeeding in its task of forming a new cultural understanding, removed all content from rhetorics. We would thus suggest that there might be value in exploring a return to the time of the pre-socratics, to a possibility of a rhetoric of faith in which the Christian Myth and that of the contemporary world view might meet.

Fortunately there is an appropriate language style for this possibility of a Rhetoric of Faith. It would be drawn

from the theological method known as Apologetics. The simplest meaning of Apologetic theology is "a defense of the faith." This is actually the **purpose** of apologetics, as carried out by the so-called Apologists among the Ante-Nicene Fathers, rather than its **nature.** It could better be described as a way of doing theology. If this definition is allowed, then a variety of apologetic attempts and principles might be examined, in order to determine a style for the task at hand.

New Testament apologetic method is most readily seen in Paul's use of typology as a method of contact based on a kerygnatic principle. All apologetic attempts appear to contain three factors. First, the speaker finds a point of contact with the person, group, or subculture to whom the witness is being made; second, the speaker presents a critical analysis. This might be in the form of a correction of misinformation about the Christian faith, an attack on the heresy that is being exposed, as in the anti-gnostic writings of many early fathers, or an analysis of some shared condition common to both the speaker and hearer; third, there is a constructive theological statement, either in the form of illustrating how the Christian Faith fulfills the meanings of the alien group, or a structuring of Christian statements in the language or categories of the alien or heretical group.

From the time of Justin Martyr, through Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Augustine, the principle was a philosophical defense of the faith, even though the apologetic methods differed widely, from dramatic in Iraneas, didactic in Clement, allegorical in Origen, to rhetorical in Augustine. St. Thomas used an analogical method for a constructive purpose, thus not primarily defensive, however he still used a philosophical principle moving from the neo-platonism of the earlier men to a base in Aristotelianism. Luther and Calvin are the first since St. Paul and Anselm to use the

kerygmatic principle. They each reject a philosophical principle as being too defensive in favor of a style which will serve the proclamation of the word. In Schleiermacher, the defensive principle re-enters with his "Radin" against the cultured despisers of religion. Ritschl and Harnack then led the liberal movement of the 19th Century toward a use of the historical-critical method with a basic rationalistic principle. Karl Barth ended that program with a proclamation in "Der Römerbrief" that only a kerygmatic principle could be used as the basis for the doing of Christian theology. However, Barth discarded all apologetic attempts as inadequate. He has demanded a dogmatic method, which allows him to speak only to the Church. Paul Tillich openly chooses the apologetic style but returns to a philosophical principle which many recognize as a return to the neo-platonic modes of the early apologists. Bultmann agrees with Barth that the underlying principle of all doing of theology must be kerygmatic. However, he has borrowed a point of contact in man's existential situation, and a critical analysis of **dasein** from Martin Heidegger. Thus, although he denies any apologetic attempt, his method is clearly in that style.

From this hasty and grossly inadequate charting of theological method, certain suggestions become clearly possible. It would appear that whenever one chooses a philosophical principle as the basis for the doing of theology one runs the risk of becoming either primarily defensive of the faith and thus speaking only to the Church or of so distorting the faith as to fail to speak the Gospel. Also when one insists on a dogmatic method rather than apologetic, one speaks only to the Church. Therefore, if one is to meet the alien or hostile symbol system or world view which is set over against the Christian myth, one might do well to choose a kerygmatic principle with an apologetic method in order to speak to one's

audience with any degree of communication or comprehension. The apologetic style of language provides language with a thrust rather than a stance. It is therefore the proper style for evangelistic endeavor, for speaking to those outside the Church, or for speaking with those who are within the Church but stand outside the Faith.

It is this apologetic style which might enable an effective teacher to use the insights and skills learned from the social sciences in entering into the life situation of the learner. It is this style that might allow for the personal relationship indicated by Wilhelm Dilthey's "erlebnis" or "lived through experience." It is this style that would make it possible for a Christian teacher to enter into the symbol system of another perspective in order to understand and communicate with those who are motivated by that alien symbol system.

There is a sense in which the "risk of faith" must be redefined, for the great risk is not in taking a psychological "leap" into the unknown and nonscientific area of a faith stance; it is actually a greater risk to move out of the Christian faith stance into another faith stance in order to "meet" those who live under the alien symbol. The identification might become so effective that the alien symbol converts the teacher while he is in the process of witnessing. Two problems thus arise: the apologetic style is not a security system—thus only those of genuine faith dare risk its use; also there is no guarantee that the teacher will discover a point of contact with the learner or hearer. Social sciences and philosophical investigations will aid only to a certain extent. We must search for another style of speaking that will enable the apologetic style to be operative.

III. The Criticism of Faith— A Hermeneutic Language:

The first requirement in all communication is the interpretation of meaning. Whether our intention is to preach the Word, administer the sacrament, teach the faith, instruct in ethical and moral alternatives, or simply to be present to a particular person, group, or situation, at some point we will be required to interpret the meaning of our statements or actions. As in the apologetic method, the second factor is a critical analysis, perhaps the theological factor that will provide a possible understanding of the process of interpretation would be a critical theological analysis.

Again we turn to the field of language and speech for indicators or directions. Within language disciplines the function of interpretation is assigned in the present day to the literary critic. Kenneth Burke has suggested the motifs for the movement thus far, as his trilogy on the "Grammar, Rhetoric, and Symbolic of Motive" attempts a total interpretative schema in terms of the creativity of "motive." Critics such as Burke attempt to approach the text primarily with the categories of interpretation which they find within the text itself, thus claiming to bring justice in place of prejudice in the process of interpretation.

Within the theological disciplines, there is also a science of interpretation. That portion of biblical scholarship which comes after textual and exigetical study but prior to systematic, or homiletic treatment, has been termed hermeneutics. The Helenic messenger of the Gods, Hermes, has been the patron of literary interpretation since Homer. Therefore, in the current theological scene, the term has been broadened to include the entire program of interpretation of the documents of the faith. Also, it should be noted that the basic principles of interpretation of sacred texts agree with the "just" criticism mentioned above. That is, the text itself supplies the categories for its own interpretation. Beyond this, the inter-

preter while in the process of interpreting the text discovers that he is being interpreted to himself by the text. In other words, the text illuminates the interpreter's self-understanding at the very moment he is attempting to illuminate the meaning of the text. This movement from interpreter to text to interpreter is known as the hermeneutical circle.

It would be assumed that this style of hermeneutic language might be appropriated by the teacher who finds himself within the apologetic stance. The interpretive language would allow him both to explicate the documents of the faith properly and to stand forth as a man of faith with a firmer self-understanding in terms of the Christian experience.

One of the most disturbing discoveries of the Christian teacher in the present social situation will often be that the members of the culture whom he is addressing are themselves unaware of their own entanglement with a particular cultural or subcultural situation and therefore lack any self-understanding in terms of that cultural set of meanings. However, because of the restricting nature of the structures of society, their freedom is impinged upon without their conscious choice or even emotional acceptance. It is therefore imperative that the conscientious teacher will first move to the documents, as it were, of the culture. The same process of interpretation is now involved as the man of faith moves toward the cultural situation with a Christian self-understanding. This self-understanding becomes involved again in a hermeneutical circle so that a double hermeneutic stance is sought and the hermeneutical circle becomes an eliptical experience, for the culture interprets the man of faith to himself within the categories of the culture. Here lies the risk of faith again. If the double self-understandings are so contradictory as to force an alienation from

one for the other, the teacher must make a choice which is not necessarily made according to the ethics of the Christian faith. Existential decisions of this type are always **de novo.** However, if the teacher is able to decide again for his faith stance while also recognizing a self-understanding within the categories of the cultural situation, he is now in a position to perhaps speak meaningfully to the members of the culture who have not yet become a part of the community of faith.

One of the pitfalls of the apologetic method is that the amateur will attempt what appear to be innocuous gimmicks for the establishment of a point of contact, while they actually become when in use means of seduction or otherwise inauthentic patterns of exploitation. If the hermeneutic, eliptical movement is followed, the point of contact is no longer a particular jargon, or attitude toward the universe, or metaphysical system, or fascination with baseball or what-have-you. In this syle of address and comunication, the teacher himself becomes the point of contact, as the one who "mediates" between the faith and the culture in terms of his own set of self-understandings. This is at once the fearful dilemma of the man of faith and the actualization of the doctrine of Christian freedom.

Thus communication is now possible, but communication is without content unless experienced meaning is made flesh. That the point of contact is found in the flesh of the teacher, and that the meaining is apparent to his own experience, do not guarantee that the meaningfulness of such experience can be expressed. One further style of language would serve our need.

IV. The Symbolism of Faith— A Mythopoetic Language:

Within the area of language studies, one cannot raise the question of the communication of meaining without beginning with the logical positivists, for this is a philosophy which inquires

into the logical meaning of words and statements. The positivists will not allow the ontological question as to the being of language to be raised, for all ontological, metaphysical, theological, poetical, and non-referential statements are attacked as non-sensical. Thus the problem of meaining becomes acute. One answer was offered by the early Wittgenstein as he closed the **Tractatus** with the statement, "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent!" This inherent mysticism was not acceptable to the movement and the later Wittgenstein made a radical departure from the positivist position in his "Philosophical Investigations." Even A. J. Ayer was forced to soften his linguistic fundamentalism in the later editions of "Language, Truth and Logic." The other answer to the problem of meaning was an inversion conversion experience of a group of British analysts, who asked with Ogden and Richards, "What is the meaning of meaning?" These men, including Flew, MacIntyre, John Wisdom, J. O. Urmson, I. T. Ramsey, and others have taken the positivists beyond a normative approach and arrived at a radical relativism in which language is little more than a series of games, or magic circles. If this be true, no communication is possible; teaching is an impossibility; and any ontology of language is mere jabberwocky.

However, if language can be demonstrated to have ontological value, then the magic circles are all broken and communication might occur. Here the later Heidegger suggests a program for the recovery of meaning in language, by means of the phenomenological method, whereby two questions are bracketted out—"What is it?" and "How do I feel toward it?"—in order that the Cartesian dichotomy between the subjective "feeling" and the objective "facticity" might be overcome. Heidegger, following Husserl's method, is able to ask one question—"What does it mean?"

A whole history of the philosophy of language might be written in terms of a phenomenology of meaning alone. Heraclitus gave a first clue in suggesting that man was involved in a "speaking existence." Plato added the "boulesis" or target of meaning, as the intention of a statement. Hamann, Herder, Kierkegaard and others have contributed. However, it is sufficient for this purpose to point to Martin Heidegger's contribution to the Consultation on Hermeneutics held at Drew University in the spring of 1964. Here he defined the result of an analysis of "non-objectifying thinking and speaking" as meaning that theology and ontology might each forsake the error of deriving their categories of thought from the sciences on loan, but rather "to think and speak with the subject matter out of faith for faith." The major question for Heidegger is to ask for the meaning of "the poem behind the poem, the poem in the table of contents." In other words, the statement of meaning, which is the key statement of any theologian is for the wanderer in the Black Forest the end of all the "Holzwege" or byways in the forest on which men loose themselves.

In raising the question of meaning, we have been led by an assumed atheistic existentialist to return to the theological question as to the proper language for communication of the meaning of the experience of the man of faith. He has suggested that we answer our own question in terms of the symbols of the faith. These symbols freight the meaning of human experience through a full history of man's relationship to God. And because they freight meaning they function for theology just as other forms of language function for ontology, as when spoken by the poets Rilke and Holderlin, that is, in each case the symbolic language used gives forth the "Anruf" the call of being, or the call into authentic existence. Thus, our proper style of language must be mythopoetic, that is myth making, symbol making, lan-

guage if it is to be both theologically and ontologically appropriate speaking or address.

As some may have noticed we have now come full circle, for we at first suggested that the proper theological language was catechetic language, or the language of faith, the statement of the religious symbols. It would appear that this grammar of faith style is the same as the use of mythopoetic language. And this is correct in the ideal sense. However, language like man suffers from a "fall from being," a loss of innocence. As soon as the symbols of faith are "catechized" or dogmatized there is a cessation of symbolic action. What have been depth symbols are reduced to dogmatic conceptualizations, or in the thought of Philip Wheelwright, into "steno-statements." These signs, as Freud would recognize them, demand a response to their stimulus directly, whereas the theological experience should produce a symbol, as Jung would recognize it, which stimulates a human organism to freely respond. That is, we are to answer a call of being, a call, or election if you will, into authentic existence, in that "Christ might dwell in our hearts through faith, that we, being rooted and grounded in love, may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth . . ." not measured by calipers and rules, or even by phonemes, sememes, and morphemes, but measured by the authenticity of our participation in the symbol that breaks all steno-signs and grammatical statements. This is the continuing resurrection of the symbol in the myth of the Christ as a recapitulation of meaning in the theological experience of the man of faith. But he must do theology in order to share the experience, and he must communicate in varying styles of language if he is to share the experience as his response to a call into the teaching ministry.