

Speech Training for the Minister

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Speech is one of the oldest of academic disciplines. It was twenty-five hundred years ago when Aristotle wrote his *Rhetoric* as a speech textbook. But even twenty-five centuries before Aristotle there were Egyptian documents of the twelfth dynasty recording the philosophies of Ptah Hotep, dating from the fifth dynasty. He had set down for his sons precepts which gave instructions in speech, and which became a textbook for centuries.

Throughout history, speech has been a decisive factor in social adjustment and personal influence, but because the gift of speech has been perverted for selfish purposes by some men, loud voices of protest have been heard intermittently. For example, although Plato seemed to recognize there *could* be "honourable" speaking, yet he had Socrates glumly observe to Callicles: "But you have never yet seen this kind!"

If the average man speaks twenty-five thousand words a day, then women and ministers do not lag far behind. If the average man utters nearly ten million words a year, then speech training must certainly have its place. Obviously, the minister depends upon speech and communication in all areas of his work.

The minister in training is on a quest for knowledge and skills. His speech training concerns both. The speech discipline has a body of knowledge concerning the speaker, his hearers, and his message. His speech skill should bless with a new radiance, a new effectiveness, all areas of knowledge in the seminary curriculum--whether theological, philosophical, Biblical, spiritual, or practical.

Speech training for the minister has four major sources: Hebrew prophecy, the Christian Gospel, ancient secular oratory, and more recent speech research. Our concern in this formal academic occasion will be to give a brief sketch of the historic trends which have shaped these four sources into our present speech heritage.

Careful study of Hebrew prophetic speech shows that Old Testament preachers actually used principles and practices

which were recommended later by speech experts. Moses especially showed great skill in his speeches, despite his own lack of confidence in himself and his ability. The oral skills of later prophets are also being recognized today.

The flaming tongue has been the symbol of Christianity since the Day of Pentecost. Speakers with an earnest, holy boldness have carried the message wherever Christianity has gone. Jesus and the Apostles sent out spokesmen with the Christian message and witness. Paul, a highly trained voice for the early Church, used his logic, his understanding of audiences, and his rhetorical skill in his ministry. Seeking to train young men for effective ministry, Paul also gave sage advice concerning their ethos or personal force, concerning their hearers, and the content of their message.

The speech theories of the classical Greek period which were recognized and codified by Corax and Tisias, by Aristotle, and by the famous Attic Orators, had degenerated into Asianism or the "mere rhetoric of style" by the first century of the Christian era. This decline of speech theory and practice in time corrupted even the more vigorous Roman rhetoric. Even Cicero's and Quintilian's works were unable to raise their contemporaries above the flood of popular rhetoric, tailored as it was to the purpose of display.

In the Roman educational system *imitatio* came to be the chief means of speech instruction. This imitation was based upon *progymnasmata* or stock collections of exercises and model speeches. Choice paragraphs of famous speeches were collected, to be memorized and rearranged in eclectic fashion.

This practice of imitation and the prevalence of idolatry made Roman rhetorical training especially obnoxious to some of the early church fathers and gave rise to the great debate of the fourth century, "Should Christians use pagan learning or not?" Ambrose and Jerome, converted rhetoric teachers, condemned the rhetorical excesses of their fellow preachers. Ambrose saw the need for training preachers and cried out, not against rhetoric itself, but against its sophistic excesses and abuses. Both Ambrose and Jerome gave place to rhetoric in primary training, while Augustine recommended speech training throughout ministerial preparation.

Augustine rejected the "empty eloquence" of the sophists of his day and described his fellow preachers as "dull and cold."

For them *forma* only was significant--for Plato only *materia* had been important. Augustine urged the union of both form and matter in Christian teaching. The Scriptures themselves were examples of style in the textbook which he wrote for ministers. Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana* has been called the first manual of Christian rhetoric.

After Constantine, when early Christian eloquence was blooming, nearly all distinguished preachers attended the great centers of *secular* instruction to get the most thorough general education their day could provide. While some church men, like Jerome, had peculiar notions which led them to despise and neglect the classics, others, including Basil, Chrysostom, and Augustine, advocated not so much loving these secular writers less, but loving the Scriptures more. However, the Greek and Latin fathers tended to imitate the overwrought style of their day. Even Chrysostom showed this tendency toward ornateness, despite the fact that he shared, along with Augustine, the highest reputation for early Christian preaching. Some, like Bernard of Clairvaux in a later day, professed to despise speech training and human learning, but they wisely waited to voice their sentiments until they had acquired such training. When the fourth century emperor, Julian, issued an edict forbidding the study of rhetoric and grammar, a number of distinguished Christian Rhetoric teachers gave up their positions and terminated their teaching careers. About this time there was a fifteen-year period in the life of the scholarly Ambrose in which he made no reference to any of the classics.¹

In the course of history, speech or rhetoric came to be identified primarily with its aspects of dialectic and logic. Scholasticism and syllogistic reasoning almost smothered preaching for several centuries. The people in the pew began to pray: "Deliver us from rhetoric," when they heard the excesses of stylistic rhetoric with its schemes and tropes on the one hand, and detailed, dull syllogistic reasoning on the other.

The enthusiasms of early reformers rescued preaching temporarily and inspired new interest in the spoken word. For example, the Dominican monastic order was founded in the beginning of the thirteenth century for the express purpose of

¹John A. Broadus, *The History of Preaching* (New York: A. C. Armstrong & Son, 1889), pp. 100, 101.

preaching, after the church officials had seen the popularity and power of "reformation" preaching by Peter Waldo and others. The eloquent Dominic led his order of preachers to establish four hundred seventy monasteries, which trained probably twenty thousand traveling preachers or evangelists who covered Europe and spread over into Asia.² Unfortunately, these mendicant preachers often contributed to the further neglect of preaching because negligent local priests let the traveling men do all the speaking in their churches.

While a revival of preaching had come with the Reformation, during the early eighteenth century again there was much criticism of pulpit speaking on both sides of the English Channel. Bourdaloue, Bossuet, and Massillon were popular French Catholic exceptions to the drab, dull pattern in the pulpit. Outstanding reformers commonly sought to provide some measure of speech training for their followers. In their days, Luther, Melancthon, Calvin, Fenelon, Wesley, Spurgeon, and others have added to the bulky speech tradition.

Wesley's Methodist preachers developed reputations as speakers when ministerial speaking in general was at low tide. In 1749 John Wesley wrote *Directions Concerning Pronunciation and Gesture* for the training of his men. Voice was considered the most important part of delivery by Wesley. While he was not the bombastic type of preacher who fell exhausted at the end of a sermon as did Whitefield, yet Wesley was once heard distinctly from a distance of one hundred and forty yards. His book advised: "Never scream . . . it is offering God murder for sacrifice." Another notable quotation reads: "Strong lungs and enthusiasm are not sufficient for these things."³

Later, Spurgeon lectured to young ministers. Of particular note are his talks on "Voice" and "Attention." He referred to the preacher, who

Leaves his hearers perplex'd--
Twixt the two to determine:

² *Ibid.*, p. 114.

³ Joseph Dawson, *John Wesley on Preaching* (London: Grant Richards, 1904), p. 162.

'Watch and pray,' says the text,
'Go to sleep,' says the sermon.⁴

Spurgeon lamented that "Scarcely one man in a dozen in the pulpit talks like a man." Then, to show that affectation and artificiality were not confined to the Protestant pulpit, he quoted from Abbe Mullois: "A man who has not a natural and true delivery, should not be allowed to occupy the pulpit. . . . the instant you abandon the natural and true, you forego the right to be believed, as well as the right of being listened to."⁵ Spurgeon observed, "By far the larger majority of our preachers have a holy tone for Sundays, . . ." "They might almost boast with the Pharisee, that they were not as other men are, although it would be blasphemy to thank God for it."⁶

Spurgeon continued, "I tell you most seriously, that the thing called 'effect' is hateful, because it is untrue, artificial, tricky, and therefore despicable. Never do anything for effect, but scorn the strategems of little minds. . . ." Stressing the point that thunder is not lightning and that the most noisy gun does not always shoot the greatest distance, Spurgeon said he could, as Macauley had said of William Pitt, whisper in such a way that he could be heard in the remotest corner of a building, or it is possible to "shout so that nobody could understand." With tongue in cheek, Spurgeon concluded: ". . . perhaps an example is needless, as I fear some of you perform the business with remarkable success."⁷ He warned his students: "But, gentlemen, never degenerate in this business into pulpit fops, who think gesture and voice to be everything."⁸

Obviously, theological education in America really had its roots in European education. Some young men came to the frontier from the Fatherland already equipped, while others returned across the ocean to prepare for the ministry. Since the colonial minister was the teacher of the community, his education was a necessity.

⁴Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *Lectures to my Students*, First Series (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1876), p. 127.

⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 118, 119.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 119.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 125.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 132.

All of the early American colleges and universities were established in order to insure a worthy ministry. On September 23, 1642, at the first American college commencement, Harvard honored the first nine graduates. The ministerial training of these men had included the theories of Peter Ramus, but the Ramistic view of speech involved only style and delivery. Their earlier training had included the use of dictionaries of phrases and proverbs, maxims and words of wisdom, memorized paragraphs in the sublime style, and purple patches of oratory from near and far. For many years commencement exercises included oral examinations in public, including disputations and declamations.

The only training in public speaking which colleges offered until 1760 was in translating the ancient rhetoricians and orators, and in declaiming in Latin or Greek. From the very origin of American institutions of higher learning in 1636 until a few years after the Civil War--over two hundred years later--it was the regular and accepted practice to translate Demosthenes, Quintilian, and Cicero, but such instruction in classical rhetoric was merely incidental to the early American trivium--Latin, Greek and mathematics.

Francis Bacon's *Advancement of Learning* was only thirty-seven years old at the time of Harvard's first commencement, but it was having profound effect upon seventeenth century thought. One of the three diseases of learning Bacon called "delicate learning"--when men study words and not matter. Bacon mercifully helped to restore to rhetoric the task of reaching and persuading men, along with reviving concern for audience reactions.

The first official educational interest in speaking as such appears to have been a resolution voted by the Harvard Board of Overseers in 1754, which called for more training in oratory. When several young men presented a program the Board voted, either because of despair for the quality of the work done, or out of pleasure for commendable speaking, to encourage extra-curricular emphasis upon speech.

By the time of the American Revolution both academies and colleges were giving instruction in rhetoric and were encouraging extra-curricular speech activities, which were supervised by all faculty members, usually on Wednesday afternoons. Literary or debating societies sprang up in every school and town, considering at first urgent issues of the young

republic, but later debating such questions as that debated in Brown University in 1803: "Ought those who are bachelors from choice, to support those who are Old Maids from necessity."

The latter part of the eighteenth century saw profound changes in American university education. The system of class tutors was replaced by one in which each tutor specialized in an academic field. Instead of being a peripheral concern of all faculty members, speech now became the sole responsibility of the professor in that area.

John Quincy Adams, sixth president of the United States, was inducted in 1806 as the first Boylston Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory at Harvard. He gave his students a gifted re-valuation of the speech teachings of Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian, and added Pulpit Oratory to Aristotle's classical types of speech.

Speech theory and practice tended to develop locally along the lines of professorial interest. Remarkable balance and scope marked such rhetoric teachers as Ebenezer Porter at Andover, President John Witherspoon at Princeton, and Chauncy Goodrich at Yale. The primary English rhetoric texts used were those of Archbishop Whately, George Campbell, and The Reverend Hugh Blair's. Along with many others of his day, Edward T. Channing, who was installed in 1819 at Harvard, led his students in the direction of *belles-lettres*.

During the first half of the nineteenth century the general study of rhetoric, both in England and America, was increasingly identified with the study of literature and literary criticism. Traditionally concerned with the arts of discourse as an established part of the study course from medieval times, rhetoric now was largely replaced by courses in English language. Literature was narrowed to the scope of undergraduate theme writing, while studies in oratory were replaced by poetry.

Accompanying this drastic shift toward literary criticism had been another long-range trend. Since 1750, criticisms of the delivery of English speakers had been especially severe; special training in "elocution" or delivery had become widely popular on both sides of the Atlantic. The five canons of rhetoric for centuries had included invention or sources of material, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery. Now this ancient discipline came to mean only the *form* of speech--

style or literary criticism on one hand, and elocutionary delivery on the other.

Elocutionists were divided into two schools, each calling itself "natural." The "naturalistic" school emphasized, "Be natural," "Think the thought," while the "mechanistic" theory offered elaborate systems of rules for acquiring naturalness. Both schools of elocutionists tended to emphasize speech as the fine art of imitative delivery, or too often taught students how to say nothing in a nice way.

Since rhetoric had degenerated either to literary criticism or to "elocution," many schools dropped all required speaking in the latter 1800's and some were slow to replace this discipline with any courses in speech. In 1900 there were no departments of "speech," so-called.⁹ "The separate department of Elocution and Oratory, established at the University of Michigan in 1892 by Professor Trueblood, is the earliest department to maintain continuous autonomous organization for speech instruction in one of the great universities of the country."¹⁰ In the first decade of this century there were only seven Master's degrees offered in Speech.¹¹ The earliest Doctor of Philosophy degree in Speech was given in 1922.¹²

Speech has been called the broadest of all academic disciplines. In the intervening decades since 1920, speech training has mushroomed, divided, and sub-divided until it is possible to specialize in perhaps a score or more of speech areas. For example, classical scholars are especially amused or dismayed by the fact that it is possible in this day of specialization to obtain the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Radio and Television! Some of the other areas of speech training today are the speech sciences, including pathology, acoustics, audiology, and phonetics; forensics, including debate, logic, and argumentation; discussion, communications, group dynamics, listening, general seman-

⁹Donald K. Smith, "Origin and Development of Departments of Speech," in *A History of Speech Education in America*, by Karl Wallace and others (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1954), p. 447.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 461.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 466.

¹²*Ibid.*

tics, leadership, and parliamentary law; drama and theatre; composition and criticism; oral interpretation; pedagogy and the philosophy of speech; voice culture, articulation, and diction; public address, rhetoric, oratory, and the psychology of persuasion. Many of these areas can make significant contributions to the speech training of the minister.

In conclusion let it be said that all knowledge and all skills for the good minister are dedicated to one purpose--to bear witness to the truth. With Jesus he can affirm: "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth" (John 18:37). And the truth of the New Testament is both message and witness. Quintilian quoted Cato the Censor in defining good speech as a "good man speaking well."

For the minister, knowledge and skills must be co-ordinated with a right spirit--the spirit of John the Baptist declaring to his generation, I am a voice; I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord. His spirit must be that summarized by the words, I decrease--He must increase.

In Shakespeare's "Tempest" Prospero taught Caliban to speak, and he says: "Thou hast taught me to speak. For what profit? Now I can swear!" Speech is never an end in itself. Speech training for the minister is not to be viewed as fine arts. Speech is a plowhorse with work to do. The end of speech is not to be eloquence. The goal is to communicate, to carry a message, to be a witness!

There is an ironic parable told of a wealthy tourist who was impressed by the linguistic skill of a tropical bird which could talk in six languages. He thereupon purchased the rare fowl and had it shipped to his home for a pet. The family cook was surprised when the live bird was delivered, but without asking any questions he dressed the fowl and served it for dinner. "You didn't carve up my bird!" exclaimed the man of the house, "Do you know that bird could talk in six languages?" To this the poor cook replied, "Then why didn't he say something!"

If there are survivors of this century--called by Sir Winston Churchill "this terrible twentieth century"--they may well ask of our privileged generation: "Why didn't they say something?"

Speech education in American theological seminaries today was analyzed in a study, completed in August of 1960 as a re-

search project, for the Doctor of Philosophy in Speech at Purdue University. In this study of eighty of the eighty-two theological schools which are now accredited by the American Association of Theological Schools, W. K. Clark discovered that "voice training" was the usual meaning and content of seminary speech courses. Thirty-five per cent of the seminaries did not require speech for the degree of Bachelor of Divinity. Nineteen per cent (fifteen seminaries) did not even list courses in speech. Despite the usual lip-service given to speech in these seminaries, Clark came to this conclusion: "About the best thing that can be said for the 'status of speech education in the seminaries' is that it is not rejected. But its form or 'character,' is that of Nineteenth Century 'elocution' more often than it is that of the Twentieth Century audience-oriented 'speech.' It is being taught by teachers still holding to a school of psychology (i.e., the 'faculties' school) which was thoroughly discredited by psychologists over thirty years ago!"¹³

In view of these findings, Asbury Theological Seminary is to be commended. This Seminary accents the pastoral ministry, but still has retained a concern for the speech training of its preachers.

The Christian message must be declared persuasively in this hour. The task demands trained spokesmen whose sincerity and earnestness overshadow their speech skills. We are dedicated to developing "good men who speak well."

¹³Mimeographed letter from W. K. Clark.