

Opera Omnia

Volume IX Mystery and Hermeneutics

Part Two

Faith, Hermeneutics, and Word

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ORBIS  BOOKS
Maryknoll, New York 10545

INTRODUCTION

While the first part of Volume IX, *Mystery and Hermeneutics*, dealt with myth, symbol, and cult—three forms by which the human being opens up to the mystery of reality—this second book is dedicated to faith, hermeneutics, and the word, terms that describe this opening up.

Faith

Faith is understood as that dimension in Man that corresponds to myth. Man is open to an ever-widening horizon of awareness, a horizon that is present in myth. Faith is taken to be the vehicle by which human consciousness passes from *mythos* to *logos*, in that all faith is expressed in beliefs. Faith manifests the myth in which we believe, without “believing” that we believe in it. To believe is not to hold a belief as one holds an object of knowledge; it is simply the act of believing. Human reflection on faith may have to do with the fact that we believe, but also with the contents of our belief. The first case makes discourse about belief possible and gives us an awareness of the results of believing. The second one either self-destructs as rational reflection, because it does not understand its contents, or if it does, destroys faith by converting it into knowledge. This is what the Latin Middle Ages called the incompatibility between the *cognitum* and the *creditum*—between what is known and what is believed. We know *that* we believe (the first case) but we do not know *what* we believe (the second case), which is why we believe and do not know. In other words, faith that expresses itself in belief has no object, it is not an *objectum* of our mind. Thomas Aquinas, in the second part of his *Summa Theologiae*, formulating a common Christian conviction, said: *Actus autem credentis non terminatur ad enuntiabilem sed ad rem* (The act of the believer does not end at the formulation, but in the thing itself)—in reality itself. Reality here is the ever-inexhaustible Mystery, beyond the reach of objective knowledge.

“I believe in God,” for example, is a cognitive statement when it stands for the expression of the act of believing (the first case) and is real faith only when I do not know *what* God is—that is, when I do not *know* God as the object of my belief (the second case). If I am asked whether I believe in God I cannot properly respond, as I do not know what is meant by “God” and so cannot answer whether I believe in this “God.” Any question about God either self-destructs because it does not know *what* it is asking or dissolves the God we are asking about into something that is no longer God, but a mere idol. The God of faith is a symbol, not a concept.

Hermeneutics

The fact that the believed is not the known does not subordinate the one to the other, but it relates knowledge and belief as different forms of consciousness without allowing the reduction of awareness to mere knowing (of objects) or to mere believing (in myths). From this fact there emerges an image of Man that cannot be limited only to *logos* or to *mythos*.

And yet there are many things that need interpretation. Man does not live by symbols alone—hence, the second part of this book. Hermeneutics is the art and science of interpretation, of providing sense, of making meaning, of restoring symbols to life and in the end letting new symbols emerge. Hermeneutics is the method of overcoming the distance between a knowing subject and an object to be known, once the two have been separated. Hermes is the messenger of the Gods but only outside Olympus.

Now we can distinguish a threefold hermeneutics, or rather three kairological moments in the hermeneutical enterprise, three intertwined ways of overcoming the epistemological distance and thus human isolation.

Morphological hermeneutics entails the explanation or clarification done by, say, parents, teachers, elders, or wiser people for the benefit of those who have not yet had full access to the valuable meaning of a particular culture. It is the reading of the text. Morphological hermeneutics is the homogeneous unveiling of implicit or de facto unknown elements. Here the great method is logic. It starts with what is implicit (which is present in the “wise”) and moves toward the present. It proceeds by way of comparison—and all the other rules of correct reasoning.

Diachronical hermeneutics refers to the knowledge of the context necessary in order to understand a text, because the temporal gap between the understander and what is to be understood has obscured or even changed the meaning of the original datum. Diachronical hermeneutics also deals with the problems of ideology and time. It takes the temporal factor as an intrinsic element in the process of understanding. Its method is fundamentally historical. Action and involvement are its basic constituents. This means moving away from our own “position” in order to enter into another worldview. This is the proper place for dialectics: the movement here is from present to past so as to incorporate it, include it in a wider category, or cancel it. Diachronical hermeneutics is not the youngster learning about the past from contemporaries. It is the adult firmly rooted in his present degree of awareness, trying to enrich himself by understanding the past.

There is, however, a third moment in any complete hermeneutical process, and the fact that it has often been neglected or overlooked has been a major cause of misunderstandings among the different cultures of the world. I call it *diatopical* hermeneutics because the gap to be bridged is not merely temporal, within one broad tradition, but is the distance between two human *topoi*, “places” of understanding and self-understanding—between two, or more, cultures that have not developed their patterns of intelligibility or their basic assumptions via a common historical tradition or through mutual influence. To cross the frontier of one’s own culture without realizing that another culture may have a radically different approach to reality is today no longer admissible. Diatopical hermeneutics starts from the thematic consideration that we need to understand the other without assuming that the other has the same basic self-understanding and understanding as we have. At stake here is the ultimate human horizon, and not just different contexts. The method in this third moment is a particular *dialogical dialogue*, the *dia-logos* piercing the *logos* in order to reach that dialogical, translogical realm of the heart (according to most traditions), allowing for the emergence of a myth in which we may be in communion, and which will ultimately lead to understanding—sharing the same horizon of intelligibility.

Diatopical hermeneutics aspires to know the *pretext* as well as the text and the context. It is not objectifiable, because it considers the other an equally original source of knowledge. In other words, man’s self-knowledge concerns not only what man thinks of himself, but also what man is. In order to understand what man is, we need a method fundamentally different from the “scientific” approach, because what man understands himself to be is also part of

his being. In fact, understanding the different forms of self-understanding among men is a central problem of diatopical hermeneutics. Here we shall use diatopical hermeneutics without a systematic study of its theory.

I have already mentioned the importance and also the limits of hermeneutics. Man does not live either by bread alone or by word alone. Myth and faith challenge hermeneutics, but without hermeneutics myth and faith would perish in the moment when the innocence of the ecstatic state ends. Yet it remains true not only that man alone can interpret but also that interpretation is inbuilt in Man's very nature. Not only does Man's self-interpretation belong to what Man is, but Man's interpretation of the World also belongs, in a way, to what the world is. This is why our search here is constitutively open, incomplete, unfinished, not finite and infinite.

Word

A language is more than a tool; it is a body, a part of oneself, a part that in a way stands for the whole, a *pars pro toto*. A language is a way of looking at, and indeed of being in, the world. This is exactly the characteristic feature of the word: to be the image, the *eikon*, the expression and manifestation of the totality, the firstborn of God, in accordance with Hindu, Christian, and other sacred Scriptures. But here the singular is fundamental. The many words do not substitute the word meant as incarnation of Spirit. We have to speak a language, and in a sense this language also has to be the regional dialect of the community to which we belong. Only a dialect is full of life, vivid, and able to express what no contrived idiom, however essential, can ever express. The poets know this. Nonetheless, our present-day forms of dialect can no longer afford to be the slang of a select group or the mere repetition of clichés. Our dialect must integrate in itself the experience of other worldviews. Yet we cannot pour all of human experience into a language, not because the poet lacks the skill, but because the enterprise is self-defeating.

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The first section is centered on faith and its nature. It seeks to challenge the monopolization of faith due to an overly narrow interpretation. Only the symbolic character of words and their use in a mythical sense can break the tendency of our reason to assume a monopoly on the meaning of words.

The second section of the book seeks to apply hermeneutics to some present-day problems in today's encounter between religions and in the confrontation of their various worldviews. The aim here is to integrate the interpretations, dictated by the contemporary situation of so-called fundamental theology. From this hermeneutical point of view, an example is examined from within the Christian religion. The last chapter analyzes an important aspect of each religion, which seems to be inexplicably neglected. Secularization and religion certainly find a meeting point in underlining the importance not only of liberation but of liberty.

The third section includes the book *The Spirit of the Word*, composed of four texts that take on the theme of the relationship among Man, Reality, and Word, each essay offering a different perspective. They were published at different times and in different cultural contexts from India to Catalonia. They analyze the issue in a stimulating and concise way from philosophical, religious, and scientific points of view, bringing together into a single spiritual and intellectual experience the insights of Western and Eastern thought, and in particular the thought of India as well as philosophy and Western Christianity. There then follow three articles on the philosophy of language.