Loaded Words

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When Words Fail

EDWARD HADAS

Olivier-Thomas Venard, *A Poetic Christ: Thomist Reflections on Scripture, Language and Reality* (T and T Clark, 2020).

It is easy to think that Olivier-Thomas Venard is too wide-ranging for all but an elite handful of readers. Certainly, *A Poetic Christ: Thomist Reflections on Scripture, Language and Reality*—a mere 449-page selection from the French Dominican's gigantic trilogy *Thomas Aquinas Poet Theologian*—is nothing if not ambitious.

A very partial list of topics from the English book includes the prose and poetic stylistics of Saint Thomas Aquinas, the modified atheism of Ernest Renan, Jacques Derrida's inadequate understanding of language, the ambiguous narrator of the prologue to John's gospel, the different linguistic theories implicit in Augustine and Aquinas, the limits of neo-scholastic Thomism, the stunted literary theory of Roland Barthes; not to mention the relationship between Arthur Rimbaud's homosexuality and the anti-theology of his poetry. All of this, and quite a bit more, presented with what would appear to be scholarly attention to each topic (although no single reviewer could possibly be expert enough to judge).

While Venard comes over as audacious in his aims, there is nonetheless a fundamental humility about his project. He presents it as a self-consciously inadequate effort to show how all human experiences, especially the use of language and any claims of its truth, are built around the words of God, the Word of God and the wonder of God's word in the book of creation. Venard takes seriously the statement in the gospel of John that "the world itself could not contain the books that would be written" (Jn 21:25) if we wished to write down all that that Jesus did or made (Venard brings out the richness of the Greek idea of *poiesis*). His aim is to sketch out a few volumes from the transcendental library of the Incarnation.

Words finally failed Aquinas, the great master of theological language and Venard's own great master. After a mystical experience, Thomas decided that he could not finish his discussion of the Eucharist in the *Summa Theologica*. Venard is basically pre-announcing a similar happy failure. He never abandons his confidence that humanity would have no words unless speech were used to say something about God: but neither does he think that any collection of words could capture the fullness of Revelation. It is hardly an accident that *Poetic Christ* ends with a reminder of "the importance of a liturgical anchoring for theological speech....In its multiplication of genuinely gratuitous acts which resist the technical reduction of the world and the spirit, the liturgy rips the net which imprisons us and enables up to soar into the heights".

In this volume, Venard is primarily concerned with one particularly modern and post-modern snare: the emptying of language of its connection with reality. Human words, said the moderns, could somehow correspond to the world in which humans live—if only we XXX. The X's have varied over the

past four centuries or so. Venard does not linger on nominalism, Kant, or Hegel, although he is deeply aware of all of their attempts to make words true. He is, though, fascinated by the claims of some 19th century French poets that somehow the beauty of words might make them meaningful. Venard focusses on Rimbaud's strange and magnificent "A Season in Hell", in which the poet recounts his quasi-religious recovery from the despair of verbal meaninglessness. In a modern mirroring of Saint Thomas, Rimbaud gave up poetry shortly after writing "A Season". He seems to have accepted Christianity, and perhaps the ultimately Christian meaning of all words, on his deathbed.

For Venard, the failure of a Godless world to find words for anything more than its despair is inevitable, because language is ultimately theological. God creates through speech. "And God said, let there be...and it was so" (Gen 1, *passim*). The gift of something like divine speech in the second creation story of Genesis is the beginning of Revelation because it reveals the divine desire to enter into a communion of speech with humanity. In direct and purposeful contrast, the post-modern effort to show "the arbitrariness of meaning" is an attempt to take the Word, the divine Logos, out of human words. The result, says Venard, is a "haunting absence" of meaning, but a discourse that is actually shaped by the meaning that is denied. These writings are imbued with the wordless presence of the "Word of God embodied in Holy Scripture [and...] incarnated in Jesus Christ".

The unity of this Word, the second person of the Trinity, with the human words found in experience and Revelation is a central theme of *Poetic Christ*. In the tradition of Thomas, Venard sees no accident in the description of the Messiah, in the prologue to the Gospel of John, as Logos: the expansive Greek philosophical term for word, thought, and the rationality that orders all things. The divine Word fulfils the Old Testament's word of creation. Venard develops the philosophical fruitfulness of the theological debate about how the Father can utter a Word that is distinct from Himself but also and equally God. Just as the discussion of Jesus the God-man was crucial for the development of the idea of the person, the discussion of the co-eternal Father and Son-Word is crucial for any acceptable theory of language.

The incarnate Word ensures that language cannot be reduced to what Venard describes as an inadequate allegory of reality, whether mathematical or nominal. Rather, language is a participative representation in and of reality (as in the Greek *symbolon*). In Venard's somewhat dense way of writing, faith in the Incarnation "cements the intersected foundation of the Word and words, of the oral and the written, of grace and freedom, of nature and revelation, of being and beings; here the infinite regression of the truth in linguistics, ethics, noetics or metaphysics is arrested" .

Each of those pairings receives some attention in *Poetic Christ*, but readers without much background in both theology and philosophy might struggle with some of the arguments. Readers unfamiliar with French literature could find themselves skimming over some of the chapter entitled "I am no writer". Even readers who are more comfortable with English and German contemporary theology might find it difficult to digest the ideas of the many French thinkers whom Venard follows closely or critically in various discussions. All of this notwithstanding, while the challenges of this ambitious project are great, the rewards for the humble and determined reader are greater. Venard has much to teach contemporary Christians, whilst also offering a profound, sophisticated and compelling challenge to a certain blasé assumption of modern atheism.

The elegant richness of Venard's approach can be seen in his explication of what might appear to be a specialised topic: the poetic sensibility of St Thomas Aquinas. A full chapter is dedicated to the eucharistic hymn "Adoro te". In compact and elegant verse, Thomas moves from the need to trust the words of Truth in order to recognise Christ veiled from the senses, to the hope that, purified by the taste of the eucharistic body, the hymn's author will see the face of Jesus in heaven, where human words will

no longer be necessary. The poem, says Venard, is something like a compact summary of Thomas's approach to theology. Far from the philosophical and doctrinal answer-machine portrayed by many doctrinaire Thomists, the genuine Thomas gives us a deeply poetic, even mystical, understanding of the fullness of revelation.

Venard is not merely arguing against other Catholic interpreters of Thomas. He also wishes to counter an overly easy and thorough Christian acceptance of modern thinking. Like such thinkers as Henri de Lubac, Hans Urs von Balthasar and John Milbank, all of whom he cites, Venard sees a widespread forgetfulness of the ultimate Christian claim: that love, beauty and life only make sense when they are seen in the Cross that unites death with life and earth with heaven.

Venard explains how modern non-Christian claims that there is no meaningful way to talk about God ignore the words of God found in the two divine books, the Holy Scriptures on the one hand, and on the other, the creation that Scripture itself describes as 'very good'. He rejects with equal fervour limited Christian rationalism. The claim that the truth of revelation can be fully expressed in human words is ultimately blasphemous, because it denies that "encountering God will always mean a surprise for humanity". With his typical scholarly flair and almost mischievous appreciation of pre-modern wisdom, Venard even suggests there was something to arguments presented at the Council of Trent against translating the bible into vernacular languages: "There is…much wisdom in surrounding the proclamation of Scripture with the richness of the symbolics and aesthetics of the whole liturgical universe".

As befits the Deputy Director of the École Biblique et Archéologique in Jerusalem, Venard engages fruitfully with modern techniques and ideas, for example in his discussion of Jesus's use of irony in John's gospel to the insights of semiology. However, Venard rejects the fundamental modern claim that anything can truly make sense—words, actions, people, beings, the world, death—without reference to the Word and Reason of God, through whom all things were created; and in particular to the Christian "logic of the Cross" (1 Cor 1:17).

Aquinas might have been surprised by some of Venard's arguments, but he certainly accepted that everything is fundamentally Christian, including the air we breathe and all the words we speak. Pagans and secularists may not accept the Christian nature of reality, but the replacement of paganism with Christianity and the inability of supposedly post-Christian philosophers and poets to find a source of meaning testify to the completeness of the Christian revelation.

Contemporary Christian apologetics are too often too accommodating of the modern separation of God from nature and society. They are certainly right to argue that you, reader or listener, should personally accept Jesus as your Saviour. However, Venard's arguments make clear that these apologists are deeply wrong if they accept that religion offers a separate Magisterium to the authorities of governments, science and individual passions and judgements. They have lost the battle for Truth if they accept the potential rationality of a godless world. In that case, all they can offer is basically a God-of-the-gaps, whether the gaps are epistemological, scientific, emotional, or logical. Venard's humble audacity is a reminder that Christians have the words and the Word of eternal life.

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Christianity and the Weight of Words

JOHN LARACY

In the din of today's technological society—fueled by the abstract "languages" of political ideology, mass media, and consumerism—it is especially tempting to reject language altogether, to escape into silence and stop listening to others, when their words seem too often a means of manipulation. However, in his monograph on the theme of "Word and Silence" in Balthasar's thought, Raymond Gawronski shows that the temptation to escape from the noise of our shared life, into solitary silence, is a perennial temptation of *homo religiosus*. To fallen man, the way of radical self-renunciation and negation ("self-flight"), found in the mystical and ascetic strands of most religions, appears to be the sole means of fully transcending the clatter of "self-seeking" human desires. Remaining sympathetic to this religious urge for silent repose, Gawronski elucidates, by contrast, Balthasar's fundamentally positive Christian theology of language. For him language is essentially a function of our dialogical nature, which images the truth of God's triune love. Holy silence, accordingly, is an active mode of receptivity toward the super-eminent, eternal "dialogue" between the divine persons, revealed to us in Christ the Word (*logos*).

Elegantly illuminating this thesis through an impressive command of Balthasar's German-language oeuvre, *Word and Silence* has rightly become a "classic" in the secondary literature since its initial publication in 1995. However, early reviews of it by heavyweight theologians Edward Oakes and Paul Griffiths both claim it does not make good on its subtitle: "the Spiritual Encounter between East and West." Specifically, one does not find there a dialogue between Balthasar's Catholicism and the major Eastern religions, each speaking from its own perspective. Rather, Balthasar's (admittedly inexpert) perceptions of the world religions serve as a foil for a distinctly Christian understanding of "Word and Silence." As "the religion of silence *par excellence*." Zen Buddhism, in particular, serves as a cipher for human attempts to lose oneself in the silent "non-word (*Unwort*)" beyond all words, that is to say, in the hidden ground beyond multiplicity, change, passion, and finitude. Gawronski highlights this tendency, *mutatis mutandis*, in Neo-Platonism, Gnosticism, Jewish mysticism, Islamic mysticism, Hindu mysticism, German Idealism, and even supposedly Christian mystics like Gregory Palamas and Meister Eckhart. So long as one bears in mind the inadequacy of this approach for understanding these distinct forms as such, this comparison remains useful as a means to elaborate the distinctiveness of Catholic Christianity.

According to the latter, God is the infinite mystery of self-giving love, in which the divine persons always "speak" and receptively "listen" to the others in perfect accord. Balthasar's analogical language attempts to convey how all perfections hold together in the infinite mystery of triune love. To describe God as the archetype of language itself, one may speak of the Trinity as an eternal "dialogue" between the Father and the Son—in the Holy Spirit. God the Father expresses his most basic love by giving away all of himself, indeed all of his infinite being, to his beloved Son. In gratitude for this total gift, the Son

offers all of himself in return and expresses his readiness to speak their love to creatures in the form of Jesus Christ. The Son is thus *the* Word (*logos*), by which the Creator Spirit draws creatures into his eternally triune "dialogue."

Lest this notion of a personal "dialogue" with the ever-actual Creator seem too anthropomorphic, Gawronski emphasizes that, for Balthasar, "God's Word to man remains far above, and other than, human dialogue." In Chapter V on his theology of prayer, a highlight of the book, Gawronski describes the appropriate posture of the creature as one of contemplative listening and watchful waiting for signs and "words" of God's ever-greater grace. "Dialogue" remains a meaningful analogy here, because God's glorious Word descends in the incarnation to encounter humans where we are—in concrete history—to elicit lives of prayer. While all words take on an objective meaning beyond the speaker, our words of repentance, praise, thanks, and fidelity, spoken in response to Christ, generate forms of life in the Church that draw us into the glory of his triune love. Christian speech is a humble, but radically creative, "echo" of the Word who descends to us from above, saving us from death and sin by dying with us, in order to raise us into his everlasting communion. The word "echo" here does not convey mere repetition, since by praying, the creature freely receives and offers *himself* to the Father, together with Christ. "Echoing" God's Word to us in Christ, our own creaturely words return to the Father by sharing in the Son's total and eternal self-communication to him.

Gawronski thus illuminates the essential difference between Christian language and both ancient mythology and non-Christian negative theology. For Balthasar, he explains, mythology is closer to the truth insofar as it intuitively grasps the *personal* nature of being; yet it does not grasp the difference between the absolute Giver and his free gift of creation. On the other hand, radical negative theology involves the progressive mastery of those techniques by which the "mystic" (*myesthai*: initiation) rises beyond finitude, and indeed personhood, into the silent One. Contrary to this sophisticated approach, reserved for elites, Christianity claims that Jesus died on the cross for "the non-mystical, the non-gifted, the simplest and most foolish." The crucified and risen Word speaks to each of us, through the actual events of our lives, beckoning us, not to renounce them for a putatively better existence, but to freely hand them over to his transformative glory. Thus, Christian belief in the events of Creation and Resurrection "coincides with the intuition of the child and the primitive, that the world actually is." In Balthasar's philosophical anthropology, accordingly, the childlike "cry of praise" in response to the gift of being takes primacy over sophisticated discursive speech.

At the theological level, Mary stands as the archetypal "hearer of the word," who empties herself in humility to be filled with the mystery of God's revelation. Proclaiming her "yes" to the Father's offer to impregnate her with his Word in the Annunciation, she thus fulfills the Old Testament type of Israel as the Bride of Yahweh and becomes the personal form of the Church. Gawronski here plays with the German "*Jawort*," which literally mean "yes-word," but more specifically invokes the "I do" of matrimony. Mary's *Jawort* to God is similar to a supreme marriage vow since it creates an indissoluble and intrinsically fruitful covenant between them. Indeed, this "I do" immediately gives rise to the supreme fruit of the Christ-child. Bearing within it unbounded gratitude, praise, faithfulness, and motherly affection, her simple response is an eminently creative human word. Mary's obedient listening to God's perpetually creative Word, acting in history, gives rise to a spontaneous Echo that lasts forever.

Gawronski's consistent emphasis on Balthasar's preference for humble receptivity over an imposed *via negativa* offers an illuminating rejoinder to the common criticism of him in academic theology today, namely, that he oversteps human limits by saying too much about the inner life of the Trinity. In truth,

Balthasar merely "echoes"—albeit in the way of a genius—the ever-greater truth of the divine Word, who gathers together all the countless words of creation, as he comes from and returns to the Father. Far from denying human limits, Balthasar affirms them precisely as the created foundation for our personal response to God's self-revelation. His vivid analogies for the Trinity aim to ground our own lives in the Creator's infinitely greater, all-encompassing "personal" life. By contrast, academic theologians who rigidly hold fast to the dominance of the apophatic method tacitly undermine the everlasting significance of finite humanity and humble discipleship in Christ. If God himself were not super-personal, our individual lives would fade after death into his sheer silence, finally representing only so much noise. It seems that the chaotic din of modern technology and the empty mystery of "God" in much of academic theology are two sides of the same dialectical coin, so to speak.

Still, for a monograph on another theologian, *Word and Silence* could itself benefit from greater conceptual precision. Gawronski's rich integration of key leitmotivs (the Christian as perennial child; Mary as consenting Bride-Church; technique vs. listening; etc.) fails to directly articulate the conception of language it implies all along: words, at bottom, are revelatory events of truth whereby distinct persons—foremost the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—enact the super-intelligible meaning of being as love. This deeply contemplative book nevertheless succeeds in recapitulating the theology of Christian language it so beautifully describes.

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Making Dystopia: Modernist Architecture Refuted

JAMES C. MCCRERY II

Language: A body of words and methods of combining words used and understood by a considerable community.

—Webster's International Dictionary of the English Language, 2nd ed., unabridged (1949)

Architecture: A body of building forms and methods of combining building forms used and understood by a considerable community.

—A paraphrase of the definition of the word "Language"

Architecture—the arts of designing and building conjoined—has been with us created human beings since the fall of man. Implicit in the need for God to fashion clothing for Adam and Eve was the need for the couple to fashion a dwelling for themselves. Since then, mankind has been at great pains making buildings for human use.

For millennia, we got it mostly right and that is no small feat, for the design of buildings is as difficult as their construction is laborious. Great architecture, like any example of excellence, is and always has been fairly rare. That said, it used to occur with greater frequency than it does now.

The built record of our cities, towns, villages and hamlets, our churches, capitals, train stations, and houses provides ample demonstration of the fact that beauty and nobility in architecture used to be much more common. The same record also shows that when it comes to our buildings and cities, for some set of reasons in the early twentieth century, things started to go sideways, quickly, and with lasting effect.

The onset of the twentieth century was welcomed by a coterie of central European and Russian thinkers as the opportunity to supplant the benefit of humanity with "progress" as the true end of all human endeavor. Unfortunately for the arts and architecture, much progress was made advancing that false notion. Houses were no longer homes but "machines," and as machines they required a machine aesthetic. Architects were no longer to look to excellent examples of previous architecture for inspiration, but to current and futuristic examples of manufacture and transportation. Materials used to build buildings would need to be the same materials used in manufacture and transportation: steel, glass and concrete. Applied also to city planning, these ideas have rendered great damage to once-

beautiful cities the world over.

While there are currently signs of a coming reorientation, architecture's center of gravity, attracted by the dictates and fashions of Modernism and Postmodernism, has shifted so far away from society's that the profession is a regular source of popular derision and even contempt. Yet the architecture profession and, even more critically, most schools of architecture, remain obstinate in their waywardness. In view of a growing societal discontent with architects, and perhaps in reaction to it, there has been in recent years a "doubling down" by the architecture and planning establishment on the irrefutable errors of Modernism and the undeniable havoc it has wreaked on our buildings, towns, cities, and landscapes.

Into this arena of Modernism's over-confident self-denial strode James Stevens Curl, a British architect and architectural historian, an accomplished scholar whose love of language is evidenced by his authorship of two dictionaries and one encyclopedia on architecture. Here is a man committed to the truth. He carried into the arena his most recent book *Making Dystopia: The Strange Rise and Survival of Architectural Barbarism*. In this remarkable work he sets the historical record straight by demythologizing architectural Modernism, its progenitors and heroes. He removes the century of filth swept beneath its rug by the same individuals, points his straightened finger at the ongoing non-sense, and advises for better approaches that eschew the manifest errors of Modernism and lead to better architecture and better places for human beings to live.

Curl has been carefully choosing words for nearly a half-century. In his title, he pulls out two heavyweights, "Dystopia" and "Barbarism," utilizing them to indict Modernist architecture and planning that has left the most fortunate places badly pock-marked while destroying the skylines, streetscapes, and especially the habitability of entire cities worldwide. These words both carry meanings relative to a *good*. "Dystopia" is an antonym of sorts to Saint Thomas More's neologism, his imaginary *Utopia*; and "Barbarism" denotes an activity outside the pale, beyond the boundary of civilization and therefore unacceptable to it. Curl uses "Dystopia" in response to the "Utopia" that Modernists both profess to draw inspiration from and promise to supply to civilization. "Barbarism" is what Modernists actually produced and the ways and means by which they operated and continue to operate.

To no small degree, this is also where Modernism has carried us: to a very real state of self-evident ugliness, placed well outside what any civilization could rationally recognize as its own. Curl uses the bare facts to show that yes, what Modernism has wrought was and remains, truly, that bad.

He is clear in the book's preface that his work is not "an attack" on the Modern movement and that his purpose is simply "to explain, expose and outline the complex factors that have managed to create so many Dystopias in which, arguably, an 'architecture' devoid of any coherent language or meaning has been foisted on the world by cliques convinced they knew or know all the answers, yet demonstrated or demonstrate an incompetence with buildings that fail as architecture at almost every level and by almost every criterion." A Modernist will undoubtedly feel "attacked" by the book's contents, but Curl's success is in allowing the facts to do the heavy lifting. The situation really was, and remains, that bad.

Curl's scholarship must be lauded here. This is a book that needed to be written and that was extremely difficult to write, for the task presents the scholar a daunting challenge in defenestrating the Modernist movement. Clearly, he rose to the challenge, surpassing it with his superb writing and meticulous research. Both are evidenced by his:

18-page preface necessitated by the fact that what follows is too unbelievable to be started in

upon without sufficiently developing the absurdities that make the body of text so necessary;

27-page epilogue containing warnings and advice, because we are still in the Modernist mess;

60 pages of notes required because, after more than a century, Modernists still ignore and deny their works' manifestly horrible origins and legacies;

a helpful 16-page partly illustrated glossary needed to clarify architectural terms in general and modernist jargon in particular;

a 43-page bibliography that demonstrates the author's labors and negates any credible charge of partisanship against him from the Modernist establishment. And because after 140 years of modernist hegemonic management of the myths of its own origins, narratives, histories and results, documentation is necessary in setting forth the truthful contrary;

111 plates and figures illustrating things that simply cannot be described in writing;

a 41-page index that assists in making the book the indispensable reference for other scholars. The body of the book sets forth the nineteenth-century "Origins of the Catastrophe." It negates Modernists' assumptions of their movement's virtuous motivations and conduct. It further describes architectural Modernism's early growth, its internal struggles, and strong affinities to atheists, Bolsheviks, National Socialists, and Italian Fascists. It describes Modernism's spread in Europe between the World Wars, as well as its "surprising" global metastasis and "Universal Acceptance" after 1945. Following is a description of Modernist architecture's inevitable "Descent into Deformity."

Curl closes the body of *Making Dystopia* with a brief chapter called "Dangerous Signals" in which he reveals the unhappy truth that, to this day, civilization remains obligated to bear the burden of the buildings and towns that architects continue to "design" and "build" for us. As he asserts in his preface, "[t]his is not a history of Modernism in architectural or urban design." Indeed, it cannot be a history for we are still in it. Rather, Curl uses history to show where we are now amidst Modernism's "deformities" and to present civilization with a remarkable lens through which to recognize its current predicament. There is not yet any aftermath of Modernism, though reading this book makes one long for it.

That societies worldwide are gripped in Modernism's quagmire is why the remainder of the book is necessary. In his final chapter "Some Further Reflections" and in his epilogue, Curl has reserved for us his very best. Here he addresses those non-architectural matters that are profoundly impacted by architecture and urban design, and which matter most to society. In a section titled "Measurable & Unmeasurable Aspects," he contradicts the central Modernist notion that buildings are "machines for living" and that cities are collections of mere "function."

Buildings and cities, very much like language, are the highest and best manifestations of culture. They both arise from and give substance to that culture in ever more sophisticated, beautiful, and meaningful ways. They draw on the best of what has come before so as to point to what can come to be. Thus, architecture and urbanism are *necessarily* aspirational, transcendental, and *not* Utopian. What Curl shows us is that "Modernist dogma . . . foreseen by many, seems to be an ever more hideous Dystopia, leveling always downwards."

Making Dystopia is a tremendously well-written and vitally important book that places history and truth at the service of civilization while calling for architects and urbanists to place themselves anew in that same service. Modernists and those they purport to serve should have ears to hear and eyes to see.

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"Biology": How Words Shape Our View of Nature

LESLEY RICE

In a thoughtful blog post about the coronavirus epidemic this spring, Canadian intellectual David Cayley pointed out a surprising convergence in the thought of feminist philosopher of science Donna Haraway and Catholic philosopher and social critic Ivan Illich concerning contemporary perceptions of the human body. In view of her studies of science and technology, Haraway pronounced in her 1991 book *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Women* that "we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism" and that "no objects, spaces or bodies are sacred in themselves; . . . components can be interfaced with any other if the proper standard, the proper code, can be constructed for processing signals in a common language." Embracing this "cyborg ontology," Haraway regarded the effacement of the distinction between body and mechanical construct as a path to liberation, and she issued an "argument for *pleasure* in the confusion of boundaries and *responsibility* in their construction."

By contrast, the growing hold of this scientific revision of the body on the collective imagination awakened consternation in Illich, as he grappled to understand profound changes in the practice of medicine and their consequences for our self-understanding. In the mid-twentieth century, medicine as an art began giving way to medicine as a science; several generations into this trend, it is difficult for us to appreciate our extensive menu of curative treatments as the watershed it is. We have learned to see and treat the body as a system to be repaired, and to repair that system relying on biomedical experimentation that abstracts from the body and statistical analyses that abstract from the particular person within a population. This approach to medicine has issued in cures—but also in a new sense of illness as a technical failure and health as an achievable entitlement. Where suffering and death become equated with failures of the organismic "system," the medical system, or both, the inescapable human task of facing finitude, as represented in the body's vulnerability and mortality, is displaced and reconfigured.

Evelyn Fox Keller's 1995 volume *Refiguring Life: Metaphors of Twentieth-Century Biology* sheds light on the point of agreement between Haraway and Illich—that our sciences are reshaping our view of ourselves—by offering an historical overview of the biological discourse of the foregoing century. Keller's purpose is not to join these other thinkers in evaluating the broader cultural influence of the sciences; instead, her delineation of some of the entanglements of language, culture, and history *within* the sciences offers a valuable prologue to such work. A theoretical physicist turned historian and philosopher of biology, Keller is in a good position to navigate the intertwining developments of genetics, embryology, thermodynamics, and cybernetics that comprise her story. Her central claim is that the ideas enshrined in words, metaphors, and images, set the boundaries of imagination and

thought in every discipline. Speech and acts are not to be rigidly distinguished; the words we choose dispose us and our interlocutors to particular interpretations and indeed to particular pursuits. Thus the language used in describing the objects of scientific study, Keller says, "are not simply determined by empirical evidence but rather actively influence the kind of evidence we seek (and hence are more likely to find)." And this language does not arise in a vacuum.

To illustrate, Keller considers the shift in language used to describe the union of egg and sperm in sexual reproduction. A generation before the publication of *Refiguring Life*, fertilization could "effectively and acceptably be described in terms evocative of the Sleeping Beauty myth (for example, penetration, vanquishing, or awakening of the egg by the sperm), precisely because of the consonance of that image with prevailing sexual stereotypes." On this side of the sexual revolution, however, she observes it is "equal opportunity" imagery that prevails: fertilization becomes "the process by which egg and sperm find each other and fuse." The shift is interesting, but is it significant? Keller offers evidence that it is, bound up with her complicated exposition of another image, the one that dominates her slim volume: "gene action."

The history of the gene is a complicated one, spanning numerous decades, disciplines, and protagonists, and Keller only scratches the surface in the three lectures that form *Refiguring Life*. A key part of the story she tells is the growing antagonism in the early twentieth century between embryology and the alluring new field of genetics, which initially sought an increasingly fine-grained particulate explanation of heredity, growth, and development, with genes as the star of the show. But the burgeoning new discipline also revised and co-opted its elder brother's main question. The query "how does an egg develop into a complex many-celled organism?" now reduces to "how do genes produce their effects?" Embryology is reduced to genetics.

The idea of the genome as the agent or producer of life found vivid expression in physicist Erwin Schrödinger's oft-quoted 1944 characterization of chromosomes as "law-code and executive power—or to use another simile, they are architect's plan and builder's craft—in one." This attribution of intelligence and will to the genome *preceded* key research breakthroughs that specified what genes actually, physically are and how they work, but it presaged the perception of their centrality and power that in fact would both guide a highly successful research program and also capture the public imagination.

The roots of this perception are many and tangled, but Keller draws attention to a particularly deep one that was struck in the wake of Watson and Crick's 1953 discovery of DNA's double helical structure. Building on other recent breakthroughs, they offered a new description of gene action as the orderly transfer of "information" according to a genetic "code." Keller recounts the reception of their thesis in the biological world:

> Geneticists and molecular biologists were euphoric: there, surely, must be the answer! DNA carries the "genetical information" (or program), and genes "produce their effects" by providing the "instructions" for protein synthesis. DNA makes RNA, RNA makes proteins, and proteins make us. It was, without doubt, one of the greatest milestones in the history of science. But still, one might ask (although few people did at the time), what kind of answer is this? What, in fact, do *information, program, instruction*, or even the verb *makes* actually mean?

The metaphors multiplied. Genes were agents, bearers of information, the repository of a program, the locus of the instructions that dictate the structure and function of the whole body. But there were several problems with these images. A metaphor always makes an evocative comparison between unlike things. Though it is arguably impossible to communicate without them, this does not mean that

every such comparison holds water. Casting genes as actors within cells propelled the field of genetics to the center of the biological stage, but this choice rests on, and perpetuates, a distortion of what genes actually are and do. Keller cites geneticist Richard Lewontin's wry 1992 critique of the attribution of quasi-spiritual directive capacities to a biochemical:

> DNA is a dead molecule, among the most nonreactive, chemically inert molecules in the world. . . . [I]t has no power to reproduce itself. Rather it is produced out of elementary materials by a complex cellular machinery of proteins. While it is often said that DNA produces proteins, in fact proteins (enzymes) produce DNA. The newly manufactured DNA is certainly a *copy* of the old, . . . but we do not describe the Eastman Kodak factory as a place of self-reproduction [of photographs].

Despite the inadequacy of the metaphor, the discourse of gene action set the course of mainstream biology for decades and remains influential: it "framed the questions [scientists] could or could not meaningfully ask, the organisms they would choose to study, experiments that did or did not make sense to do, the explanations that were or were not acceptable."

On the assumption that life is constituted by gene-agents producing their effects, the "other" constituent of a new organism—the cytoplasm and other structures donated by the female gamete—was reduced to a stage on which the hero of the developmental drama, the gene, could perform its feats. Keller reads the genome-cytoplasm opposition as symbolizing the practice of twentieth-century biology on multiple levels, including that of sexual stereotypes. The male gamete consists almost entirely of nuclear material (chromosomes), and thus is readily associated with the genome and genetics. Although the female gamete contributes an equal number of chromosomes, its *distinctive* contribution is the cytoplasm, which easily becomes the symbol of the feminine contribution to new life, notable for being non-genetic, hence of marginal interest. Mediated by the discourse of gene action, the difference between the gametes becomes a new spin on the male-active, female-passive trope of generation that reaches back to Aristotle. And Keller suggests that the genes-as-agents metaphor induced a kind of tunnel vision that, among other things, neutralized motivation among for studying topics like maternal inheritance because pursuing the action of the genome was the only real game in town, at least in the U.S.

Keller's charge of metaphorical slippage between disciplines also comes to light as systems theory began to take possession of—and to "refigure"—the concept of organism. She cites the "Progress Report of the Air Defense Systems (ADS) Engineering Committee" of 1950 as not only the first modern technical definition of the term "system" but also a foreshadowing of the term "cyborg" (cybernetic organism). An organism, the report said, was a thing with "sensory components, communication facilities, data analyzing devices, centers of judgment, directors of action, and effectors, or executing agencies." This notion of organism was versatile, applicable to animals, men, groups of animals and men—but also to "partly animate organisms" like the ADS, a system involving men and machines, and to "inanimate organisms" like vending machines. The equivocation is a harbinger of Haraway's call to cultural revolution just a few decades later.

Keller's three essays are whirlwind accounts of a complex history that require, but also repay, study. Her attention to the linguistic, disciplinary, and historical-cultural influences of biology shed light on the way in which all of these forces impinge on our self-understanding by way of their construal of the body. Keller's conclusion, perceiving the new fungibility of the body in consequence of the linguistic and cultural shifts she has recorded, should give us pause:

> The body of modern biology, like the DNA molecule—and also like the modern corporate or political body—has become just another part of an informational network, now machine, now message,

always ready for exchange, each for the other.

But her work is also an invitation to become better acquainted with the intriguing contingency of the sciences. As Karol Wojtyła warned in *Love and Responsibility*, we should not confuse the biological order with the order of nature. Biology is a construct, a "work of the human mind separating some elements of this order from what really exists," with "man for its immediate author." Studies such as Keller's offer the beginnings of an antidote to rampant appeals to scientific authority as though it were the sole remaining absolute. By exposing unquestioned suppositions borne in our habits of speech and thought, Keller's work offers a pathmark along the way of reclaiming a more adequate vision of our bodies and ourselves.

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The Glorious Form of the Liturgy

ANDREW SHIVONE

> **Martin Mosebach,** *The Heresy of Formlessness: The Roman Liturgy and Its Enemy* (Angelico Press, 2018).
>
> **Martin Mosebach,** *Subversive Catholicism: The Papacy, the Liturgy, and the Church* (Angelico Press, 2019).

Angelico Press has recently published two books of essays from the German novelist Martin Mosebach. The first, *The Heresy of Formlessness: The Roman Liturgy and Its Enemy*, was originally published in English by Ignatius Press in 2006 but has been recently expanded for the second edition with six new essays. The second, *Subversive Catholicism: The Papacy, the Liturgy, and the Church*, is a collection of essays published in German in 2012 (while Pope Benedict still reigned) and just recently published in English in 2019. This review will deal with the theme of liturgy in both books.

Since the publication of *The Heresy of Formlessness* in 2006, Mosebach has been known in America for his lectures and essays on the traditional Mass. In Germany, however, Mosebach is known principally as a popular novelist. As Robert Spaemann points out in his introduction, Mosebach's status as a "secular" novelist puts him in a unique position to be an advocate for the traditional liturgy in Europe. Thus, the essays of this volume are principally written to a Catholic audience who think of the "old Mass" as simply an outdated and bygone relic. Mosebach wants to reintroduce the ancient form of the Mass to Catholics who have simply never known their own tradition. In some ways, the audience for these essays does not exist in America in the same way as it does in Germany which, even if it is more secular than America, still publicly supports the Catholic Church with taxes and possesses some recollection of being a Catholic country. Most Americans, on the other hand, who read these essays will be already convinced traditionalists.

Given its purpose, many of the essays here on the liturgy repeat arguments that those familiar with the traditionalist movement will know well already. The new form of the Roman Rite, according to Mosebach, was a radical break with tradition and so disconnected generations of Catholics from their rightful heritage; Catholics do not know their faith because the liturgy fails to "incarnate" the meaning in its forms; *Sacrosanctum concilium* did not intend a massive revolution but a minor reform of the liturgy; the "reformers" of the Mass were pursuing an ideological goal and used whatever arguments available to them to foist their ideology on unsuspecting Catholics; the Church cannot be reformed until the liturgy is returned to its ancient form—or, as the American blogosphere puts it, "save the liturgy, save the world." Mosebach makes these arguments quite convincingly, and he is adept at giving the best possible presentation of them. These arguments, however, are not unique to these books and are not where Mosebach is at his most evocative and convincing. The most valuable parts of both books, and those where his novelistic skill is most evident, are those where Mosebach contemplates the mysterious relationship between the interior reality of the Mass and its external expression; the integrity of the one thing necessary in the Mass—the Eucharistic sacrifice—and the ceremonies, postures, words, and music which surround it.

The mechanical and technological worldview from which modern man almost instinctively operates renders it nearly impossible for us to grasp the logic behind liturgy and ritual. For us, reality is split between the infinite variations of atomic arrangements and the mind which attempts to impose some meaning on this seemingly chaotic state. The consequence of such thinking is that it is requires great effort for us to conceive of the body as possessing an intrinsic relationship to the spirit. For us, the body and its gestures are inherently meaningless. Against this modern tendency, Mosebach wants to recover the close relationship between what something is and the way it appears, between the physical and the spiritual. He is, he writes, simply a "stone age materialist" who is "one of those naïve folk who look at the surface, the external appearance of things, in order the judge their inner nature, their truth, or their spuriousness." Mosebach looks at things as if they mean something, as if the exterior said something about the interior (how could a novelist operate without such a belief?), as if "all matter is so full of spirit and life that they simply pour from it."

It is from this perspective that Mosebach views the liturgy. For Mosebach, no matter where one looks in the ancient liturgy, whether from a distance perceiving the whole action, or up close in contemplation of certain prayers and actions, everything points to and reverberates with Christ's redeeming action. While only the Eucharist is strictly necessary, each part has, to use Balthasar's term, an "aesthetic necessity" which can only be understood by grasping the whole form. As Mosebach writes, the liturgy is "a rich image with a welter of tiny details, greater than the sum of its parts; thus it must be contemplated and can never be entirely understood."

This deep integration of parts to the whole, the essence and the accidents, is precisely what, for Mosebach, makes the Extraordinary Form of the Mass a spiritual treasure for the Church. Like a work of great art, there is nothing "superfluous or unnecessary" in the Extraordinary Form but every part communicates something necessary and worthy of contemplation. Mosebach draws attention, for example, to the various signs of the cross that the priest makes and how even these simple gestures—seemingly incidental and overly repetitive—can draw us into a contemplation of the whole act. This is true even when there are parts which seem out of place. Like in a great work of art, if we contemplate the liturgy conscientiously and "ponder the detail, especially the apparently superfluous detail, we find that the offending element comes unexpectedly to life; in the end it sometimes happens that we come to see it as a special quality to the work."

The aesthetic necessity of the Extraordinary Form stands in contrast to the Ordinary Form which allows for so many possible variations that every part is, by definition, not integral to the whole action. Since nearly everything is optional and unnecessary, the Ordinary Form, for Mosebach, perpetually communicates the disunity of spiritual intent and external gesture. The plethora of options for both laity and priests in the liturgy contributes to the sense that physical gestures and symbols are merely sentimental adornments to real internal worship. While one could celebrate it quite reverently with the proper chants, reciting the Roman Canon, and in Latin, the very fact that all these forms are optional suggests that they are unnecessary aesthetic accoutrements for elitist retrogrades rather than integral parts of a whole.

For Mosebach, the reformers fundamentally misunderstood the nature of language and communication, thinking that what was "simple" and "clear" was more comprehensible. Mosebach is at pains to show that by making the Mass more "accessible" and "visible," the reformers concealed its real nature. What they failed to see was that the veiling and concealing is not intended to impart a sort-of mystical air to the liturgy but is instead the mode of God's revelation of Himself to the world. In one of the more striking essays, he writes:

Veiling, in the liturgy, is not intended to withdraw some object from view, to make a mystery out of it, or to conceal its appearance. The appearance of the veiled thing is common knowledge anyway. But their outward appearance tells us nothing about their real nature. It is the veil that indicates this. If one draws the veil aside, and the veils that lie behind it, like peeling an onion, and penetrates to the core of the mystery, one is still confronted with a veil: the Host itself is a veil.

Given his earlier declaration of loyalty to the sheer appearance of things, this passage indicates the great irony of the sacraments. It is the most humble of human artifacts—bread—which both veils and reveals the greatest reality of all. The layers of veiling present in the ancient liturgy were intended not to hide this great mystery, but to reveal it in all its splendor.

It is unfortunate that Mosebach declines to consider whether anything at all of value might be derived from the liturgical documents of the Second Vatican Council or the implemented reforms. This view ignores, I think, real benefits that have been derived from the Council's teaching on the liturgy. Take, for example, the often misunderstood and maligned increase of actual lay participation during the Mass. The 1970 reforms made lay participation an integral part of the public Mass rather than an option as it had been in the 1962 Missal. Though we might decry the abuses of "active participation," it seems that a strong argument (on theological and historical grounds) can be made for the integration of the laity into the bodily act of ritual through the recitation of certain prayers (the Confiteor, the Credo, the Psalms) and the enactment of certain gestures (kneeling for the Eucharistic prayer). This need not be banal "activism," nor must it involve a confusion of the priesthood and laity. Participation by the laity through gestures and words is an integral part of the spiritual participation in the eucharistic sacrifice and the Council and the subsequent Magisterium all rightly emphasized this element of liturgical worship. Real fruit has been produced from this emphasis.

Indeed, the emphasis of the Council on increased attentiveness and actual participation of the laity in the Mass is certainly one of the causes of the traditional Mass movement itself. Mosebach himself recognizes that the great treasure of the Mass had become mostly invisible to mid-century Catholics and that the laity considered the Mass principally a matter for clerics. In his own family, for example, his mother waited until the bells rang out after the Gospel before she began walking from their home to the village church. That way, they could arrive in time for the consecration without having to listen to the homily (a misguided if sometimes understandable approach). Mosebach acknowledges that this sort of legalism was the norm for his parents' generation. It is, of course, this regrettable state of affairs that gave rise to the reform of the liturgy and the Council's emphasis on the need for actual participation in the liturgy. We can rightly criticize some of the implemented reforms (which must be separated from the actual Council) while also recognizing the benefit of the emphasis of the Second Vatican Council on the role of the laity in the common prayer of the Church. This teaching has born great fruit in those who have taken its words seriously and in faith. The irony here is that those who now attend the Extraordinary Form do so with a level of interior and exterior participation and understanding that was vanishingly rare before the Council.

Amongst the abundance of books about the liturgy that have been published over the past decade, Mosebach's work stands out as exemplary. Writing about the liturgy suffers the same problems and temptations as writing about art: focus on meaning comes at the cost of perceiving individual beauty while focus on the particular comes at the cost of meaning. In either case, the spirit and power of the actual work of art is lost. Mosebach's great skill lies in perceiving and describing the right detail, the right gesture or word, which reveals the meaning of the whole at once.

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On Translation

LAWRENCE P. HERRERA S.J.

O Tosco che per la città del foco

vivo ten vai così parlando onesto

piaciati di restare in questo loco.

La tua loquela ti fa manifesto

di quella nobil patria natio

alla qual forse fui troppo molesto.

—*Divina Commedia Inferno, Canto* X, 22⎕28

"O Tuscan, who through the City of Fire, *alive*, goes speaking so modestly, may it please you to stop in this place. Your speech reveals you as from that noble fatherland-nation [Florence] to which I was, perhaps, too much of a bother."

Thus speaks Farinata, still perhaps a bit defensive even in hell, to Dante: he is speaking of the death and destruction he caused from the faction opposite Dante's. But imagine for a moment the faint glimmer of hope of one so isolated and tormented in the fires of the City of Dis, who yet hears the precise melody of his native dialect coming from someone passing through while still *alive, in the flesh*. "O Tosco!" is used only twice in the *Commedia* and reminds us of the Gospel, when Peter is identified by his Galilean accent as, literally, one "who *must* be one of Jesus' followers."

The scene is poignant because it prompts us all to remember the most tender tones of the language, the accent, we first heard on our mother's knee before we could even respond. We know scientifically that, for a long time, babies, rather like foreigners, can understand a lot more passively than they can express actively. That language is so very close to us; it seems to project who we are and how we are in the world. Translating texts into a new language is a daunting enterprise, if for no other reason than the impossible task of approaching that homespun linguistic space; and then having to face the painful truth that our efforts will inevitably result in an approximation.

But still, we can help each other. Rather than a full blown theory of translation, let me present a couple of pointers. There are principles that can help keep us on guard when we are reading a translation.

My first example comes from the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola. Since it was written in the sixteenth century it presents a few challenges, as does any other text of ages past. Two important points relate to, first, the *goal* of the Exercises; and second, the role and nature of creation as we find ourselves in it.

In Loyola's Autograph, the heading, which defines the role of the Exercises, actually looks like *this:*

[21] EJERCICIOS ESPIRITUALES PARA VENCER A

SI MISMO Y ORDENAR SU VIDA

SIN DETERMINARSE POR AFECCION

ALGUNA QUE DESORDENADA SEA

[Upper Case, bold added by St. Ignatius]

This could be translated thus:

Spiritual Exercises for conquering

Yourself and ordering your life

Without being determined by *any* affection/affect characterized by passionate attachment

Which might be disordered.

Rhetorically, it is a strophe with the choice of conquering the self and ordering life versus being conquered by disordered affections. Our modern problem is the tendency to think of affection as a passing fancy, somewhat attenuated. However, in Spanish the word is a doublet with the same Latin root as *aficíon.* In Spain, an *aficionado* is a fan, such as a sports fan. In order to understand the intensity of an *aficionado,* think of the violence displayed at some soccer matches! This structure represents the simplicity of the Exercises of Ignatius: the simple choice for or against Christ. The Exercises are about that choice.

On the other hand, the Louis Puhl S.J. translation commonly used in the U.S. renders the heading thus:

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

Which have as their purpose the conquest of self

And the regulation of one's life in such a way that

No decision is made under the influence of any

Inordinate attachment. [emphasis mine]

Every journey of a thousand miles begins with that first step. So too a journey to conversion. The difficulty with the Puhl translation is that it introduces a metaphor that is not extant in the original, that is, of *regulating* something. Paul Ricoeur, in *The Rule of Metaphor*, recovers the importance of metaphor as a vehicle of truth and knowledge, not just a minor literary trope, as in modern usage. Aristotle understood in his *Rhetoric* that a metaphor could be used also to lie, exaggerate or propagandize. But metaphors are powerful, formative, and we do not have ultimate power over the language we inherit. Most metaphors come from some semantic field. Ironically, the term semantic field is itself a metaphor, being agricultural. Metaphors are multivalent, giving literature its evocative power for this very reason. I like to teach at a table with students, rather than have them sit in child-sized chairs in a classroom. But if that table is a metaphor for the classroom, then there are many different kinds of "table": kitchen for casual, frank discussion, formal dining for presentations, or operating tables for textual surgery, analysis and synthesis. Each metaphor comes with a different feel

and flexibility.

Regulating something suggests setting parameters for it, accepting and modifying it on the basis of "more or less," a lot like temperature. This is coupled with the unfortunate phrase, "inordinate attachment." Most will immediately recognize "inordinate" as "excessive." Even Wiktionary defines inordinate as, "excessive, unreasonable or inappropriate in magnitude, extreme."

However, this is not what Ignatius is doing at all. If we respect the rhetorical construction, then we can see a contrast between an ordered life, ordered according to God's plan for us, and disordered affections, which are all too familiar. Ignatius is concerned about the ability of a possible exercitant to *choose,* otherwise he is not apt for the Exercises *at this time* (cf. Deuteronomy 30:15-20, or Psalm 1). There is no "third way" in the Exercises, where one fails to be presented throughout with the choice to "choose *life* in Christ. To simply coast comfortably with my vices, as long as they are not *too* excessive, is not a choice here. Happily, the recent *Ratio Fundamentalis* or fundamental rationale for the formation of priests by the Roman Catholic Church appropriately paraphrases this section saying: "In this ongoing path of discernment, the priest will…. "free himself from all disordered affects and, having removed them, to seek out and find the will of God in the ordering of his life with a view to the salvation of the soul" (ch. 3, no. 43, emphasis mine). We can readily see the difference as applicable to any Christian!

A second critical issue for the Exercises arises in the so-called "first principle and foundation," as follows:

[23] PRINCIPIO Y FUNDAMENTO.

El hombre es criado para alabar, hacer reverencia y servir a Dios nuestro Señor y, mediante esto, salvar su ánima; y las otras cosas sobre la haz de la tierra son criadas para el hombre, y para que le ayuden en la prosecución del fin para que es criado…

Structurally, this is a virtual *inclusio*, beginning with humans as created, and finishing with the end for which we are created.

The first important point is the translation of the title itself. In this instance, *Principio* in Spanish evokes more profoundly the biblical phrase "in the beginning." It has much more to do with starting from the beginning, the origin of things, than an intellectual "principle" *a priori*. It may be translated thus: "Man is created (*criado*) to praise, reverence and serve God our Lord and, by means of this, to save his soul; and the other things upon the face of the earth are created (*criadas*) for man, and so that they might help him in following through on the end for which he is created (*criado*)."

Ignatius used the vocabulary available to express this concept. In his day the verb create (*crear*) existed in very limited form, as in the Pope "creating" Cardinals. This expression is actually still used in English today. Instead, Spanish used *Criar* in a much more biblical and Catholic sense, viz., that God nurtures and *orders* the world, creating it over time, caring for it, bringing it to fruition: ultimately coming back to him WHO is our *fin*, our end. In Spanish, a *criada* is a maid, someone who comes in and cleans, puts everything back in order. Still today, a baby is a *criatura*, one who is to be nurtured and fed, loved and cared for over time. Consequently, Creation is *Criada*, nurtured by a provident God for our salvation. The almost universal, even unavoidable, English translation as "Creation" or "Created" certainly runs the risk of buying into the scientific mentality of the "Big Bang" or creation *ex nihilo*, which is simply not what is at stake in this text.

Too many people in the West, following Bacon, seem to feel the need to constrain nature, squeeze its secrets out, conquer it, bend it to our will, instead of conquering ourselves! Perhaps these essentially spiritual misconceptions are at the root of militant or extreme environmentalism. It is as if beauty itself, the human and the rest, is misunderstood or threatening to spirituality, virtue or chastity. If the foundational ideas of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius are mistranslated then an unfortunate spin is inherited by those seeking to profit from them spiritually. That would be quite a few people. Spiritual texts may seem inspired, but it is up to us who inherit them to use them wisely whilst paying it forward.

A good wordsmith chooses words carefully. Our first principle of translation then has to be that of respecting an author's choices by respecting the semantic field and history of the author's chosen words. However, it is important to avoid interjecting a metaphor where none exists, or removing one that does exist; all of which may drive a reader down a rabbit hole of unrecognized assumptions from which no escape is possible, precisely because the reader does not know he or she needs to escape!

So much for what not to do. What should we, as translators, *actually do*?

Extrapolating from our first principle, it is important to note a controversy at war for a century after Saussure wrote his *Cours de linguistique générale,* wherein he created an opposition between the change of meaning in a word's history, which is diachronic; versus the meaning it has contemporaneously, right now, in all of its possible current meanings, which is synchronic. We all know words change their meanings over time. But we have to avoid the genetic or etymological fallacy of assuming that words can *only* have their meaning from history, based on their root. On the other hand, if we assume that words *only* have their contemporary meaning, we risk jettisoning art itself. An artist knows words have extensive history and baggage. That is what provides depth, shade, pointed ambiguity, even humor and plays on words, pace Joyce or Eliot.

Let us look at a positive example: an authentic and authoritative text from the Roman Catholic Mass, which showcases how word choice matters. The exact way in which the original Greek liturgy used in the West gently flowed into a Latin translation is difficult to pinpoint. However, after the Offertory, the priest says:

Oráte, fratres, ut meum ac vestrum sacrifícium acceptábile fiat apud Deum Patrem omnipoténtem.

Pray, brethren, that my and your sacrifice might become acceptable to God the almighty Father.

The people respond:

Suscípiat Dóminus sacrifícium de mánibus tuis ad laudem et glóriam nóminis sui, ad utilitátem quoque nostram totiúsque Ecclesiæ suæ sanctæ.

As commonly translated: "May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands for the praise and glory of his name, for our good and the good of all his holy Church."

The point of concern here is the verb *suscipio* in Latin. The verb form in the Liturgy is a present subjunctive, i.e., *may* the Lord accept etc. Of course, the real question is what the verb signifies. Suddenly, it makes sense to look at not only what the verb meant at the time of the drafting of the text, but what it means historically and holistically. Here, Ricoeur is helpful because he argues for what may be called panchronicity, to resolve the issues between the warriors of *syn-* and *dia*chronicity. To understand the full meaning of this chosen word, and not another word, one takes into account not only the contemporary meaning, but its historical meaning as well. And here the depth of meaning

bequeathed to us becomes apparent. As it stands at the heart of our Liturgy, it is important.

Certainly, the root and etymological meaning of *suscipere* is to grasp, to catch something from underneath it and bear it up. Of course, this something could be some kind of a *munus*, a duty, or an office, a burden of some kind, honorific or otherwise. Thus, it means to pick something up and support it, put it on your shoulders and carry it, if you will. To "undertake" may be a perfect literal translation, but something of a distraction in our modern period!

The word *suscipere* is the perfect translation for the action in the Mass at precisely the correct moment. Pure genius, because it carries with it not only the rather bland meaning of "accept" or "receive" but rather the cultural meaning of a primary experience in Roman culture. The very founding of the Roman world relies on the myth of Romulus and Remus who were, notably, *exposed,* not killed. That is to say, they were left to the greater powers of Fate and Fortune; but not actively *aborted.* In the Roman world the Domina, or mistress of the household, having given birth, would beg the father of the child, the Paterfamilias, to "accept" the child, boy or girl. During the Republic, he had the right to reject the child for any reason, i.e., due to deformity, gender, or suspicion that adultery had taken place. Needless to say, the moment in which a swaddled child was presented to the Paterfamilias, depending on the family dynamics, could have been quite harrowing. The Domina of the house would petition the Paterfamilias: *Suscipe Domine!* Take up, Lord, this child and make it your own. If he did so, it would be legally his, recognized fully as his child.

If we return to the *Suscipiat Dominus* with a new set of eyes, we see something truly profound: because the people come with bread and wine, gifts that are to become the body and blood of their anointed one, the Christ, the Son. But he is fully and truly one of us. He is flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone. He is the Incarnation which makes him truly *ours*. He is really one of us, he is ours. As human beings, He is truly our child. In union with the *pater,* the priest, who holds him up, who receives the gifts, we beg the Paterfamilias of heaven: *Suscipe Domine!* We know that the Father is free. If we are wise, we enter into this moment realizing its action, its freedom, even if practice suggests there is no doubt in the outcome. It is nothing less than a moment that is thrilling! Yes, too often it goes unnoticed in practice. But now we know. Yes, the translation matters, and it is inescapably inculturated, for good or for ill: in this case for the good.

So, let us return to the beginning. But this time, not just to the *loquela,* the distinct way of speaking, but rather to that space of meaning and feeling so close to us, before we can even respond to it. There is an interesting phenomenon that people seem to experience when they are multi-lingual, as many Europeans are. You watch a movie, have a conversation, and years later all you remember is the meaning and the feeling. You can't seem to remember where you were or the language you heard it in! This reminds me of the advice once given by a Trappist, that when you pray with Scripture you have to go past the words to the Word, who is closer to us than our own language. Thankfully, this Word doesn't need any translation at all.

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Unspeakable Loneliness: Cancel Culture and Education

APOLONIO LATAR III

Today's society is infected with the disease of "cancel culture." Looking around, it is difficult not to see Raskolnikov's dream in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* as eerily prophetic, describing as it does "a terrible new strange plague" that endows men with "intelligence and will," but which causes every man to attack another, believing himself "so intellectual" and "so completely in possession of the truth" that it is "wretched" to look upon or listen to anyone else. This is our present situation.

Newspaper editors retract stories and opinions simply because of backlash, people lose jobs over what they tweet, colleges silence speakers as students threaten boycotts and violence, and certain scientific research is forbidden before it even starts should it reach conclusions offensive to a particular interest group. For a culture that stresses dialogue, it now seems impossible to discuss any of the things that matter most in life. The unmistakable conclusion is that the modern person is unable to engage in *true* dialogue, especially in this digital age where words are cheap and where it is easy to be selective of what one hears. It is not unsurprising that violence is the result.

So why is it that we fail to communicate with one another? And how should educators, in particular, confront this phenomenon in the classroom? To fulfill their vocation, educators have an obligation to propose an alternative openness to dialogue based on a renewed understanding of the human person, in contrast with the modern failure to truly engage with one another.

The Emptiness of Modern Conversations
In the book *The Coddling of the American Mind*, authors Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt note that the word "safety" underwent a transformation of meaning at the beginning of the 21st century. They observe how in the past, the term primarily referred to physical security and to the protection of bodies from potential danger, risk, or harm. But since then, the meaning of the word has expanded to include emotional safety, so that to care about the safety of students, for example, now means to avoid doing harm to their feelings. The authors also note how the same became true of words such as "harm" and "trauma" and that what we see in this transformation is a "shift to a subjective standard." Emotional comfort is now the criterion of whether one is safe or not. The authors therefore conclude that one of the biggest challenges facing society today is "safetyism," or the idea that safety (which now caters to emotional comfort) is the primary and sacred value of society. The result, according to Lukianoff and Haidt, is decreased tolerance for anything one finds offensive. Consequently, people cancel content that they think is a "danger to their lives" or a "threat to their existence."

But there is a deeper issue at stake here and it lies at the root of why the shift of the meaning of words to a subjective standard is possible and why modern conversations are always doomed to failure. Assumed in this shift to a subjective standard is the Enlightenment philosophy of the self being disengaged from the world. Ever since Descartes' "turn to the subject," the human self has become detached, worried about building a bridge from one's inner states, thoughts, and feelings, to the external world. The only thing certain for such a person is their own existence, ideas, and feelings,

while they remain skeptical of everything in the world around them. The material world is thought to lack any intelligibility of meaning or inherent purpose and is seen as a neutral domain filled with a mechanism of efficient causes through which one can impose one's own purposes and ideas. The result is a completely new understanding of human language.

The premodern self, by contrast, saw the world filled with inherent meaning and purpose that was capable of being known. The world "spoke" to the person and she was able to listen, to receive what the world was "telling" her. In other words, a person could truly grasp the world and therefore was able to speak *of* the world. The mind's grasp of things was called "concepts," but these were not thought to be something wholly internal. Concepts were that through which a person knew the world, a sort of union between the person and external reality.

However, when one understands language from the perspective of a disengaged self, words merely come to signify internal states. Since the world does not have inherent meaning or purpose, because the world does not "speak" to the person, what the person understands are things inside the mind. As John O'Callaghan summarizes Locke's philosophy of language, "The suggestion is that the goal of language is not to communicate directly about extramental things, but to communicate our internal ideas about extramental things."[1]

An implication of this "turn to the subject," and the consequent assumption that there is no objective meaning and purpose in the external world, is the tendency to see words as merely signifying the ideas that a person *imposes* on the world. Since a disengaged self is only certain of ideas, feelings, and other internal states of the mind, words no longer express a knowable world, but simply affirm oneself and one's personal ideas. Words become instruments of power. It is little wonder, then, why "safetyism" comes about. It emerges from the modern understanding of the "I" as first mover and *summum bonum* of humanity. Meanwhile, safetyism's byproduct, "cancel culture," is the reaction against anything that threatens the idea of this "I" being the sole source of meaning in the universe.

Contemporary educators, whether conscious of it or not, are "infected" with this modern understanding of the human person in which "conversations" are reduced to mere self-affirmations. Yet, as every educator knows, a student's ideas or feelings, even of themselves, should never be the ultimate standard of truth or the student's well-being. It is simply not true that every kind of speech that provokes emotional discomfort to the hearer is necessarily bad. Truth is often offensive and an appropriate source of emotional discomfort. Should not a racist hear that all human beings, no matter what race, have equal dignity and should be treated with justice? Should not the fundamentalist Christian hear that Genesis 1 should not be interpreted literally and that the world was not created 6,000 years ago? Should not students who constantly feel badly about themselves be reminded that life is good and beautiful? If anything, students should be told that they are part of something greater and that their uncomfortable feelings do not diminish the value and beauty of their being.

Besides these apparent reasons, the deepest problem of the modern anthropology of the disengaged self is that it sees relationships (to the world, things, people, and God) as products of the human will. Their success or weakness depends on the strength of the efforts put into them. Here we see why modern "conversations" always fail and why political and economic power, not truth, always wins out. Since there is no objective ground besides the will that unites one person to the other, it is always easier to separate from the other whenever circumstances become difficult. Having no profound reason why a person should belong to the other, and particularly when the other is no longer found interesting or agreeable, the other becomes seen as a threat to one's own ideas and feelings of self-worth. Just as the Cartesian project fails to build a bridge between the mind and the external world, so too do modern

conversations fail to bridge the gap between persons. The misunderstanding that a disengaged self generates is the idea of the human person as being somehow lost in a cosmos of their own making. The result is rampant loneliness on an immeasurable scale. And the lonely person is one who is without affection—a violent person, both to oneself and to others.

The Common Ground

The first thing an educator must do to confront this sad state of affairs is to offer a richer metaphysics of the human person. Made in the image of God who is a communion of Divine Persons, the human person is always already related to God, to others, and to the world. He does not need to build a bridge between himself and others because there is already a unity that exists that does not depend on his own thoughts, will, or actions, and there is nothing that he can do or say that will take away this communion in which he already exists.

Christianity proposes that everything is created through and for the eternal "*Logos*" and that therefore each and every created thing has a "*logos*" and is united to all the other "*logoi*" in this eternal source. Every human person has a *logos*, a meaning-word, that only she can say and carry. Each person is also related to the *Logos* and can express the *Logos* in her own unique way, but the *Logos* will always be greater than each particular *logos*; the *logoi* never exhaust the *Logos*. In other words, no person can claim the whole truth, the whole *Logos*, even as they partially express it. This limit is not a defect of the person but brings about the necessity of every person to understand the fullness of truth. This opens the person to a common life since each word or *logos* is necessary to understanding the meaning or *Logos* of existence. If this is indeed true, then each person's attitude towards another should always be that of affection. Dialogue will mean striving to understand the particular word each person carries in relation to *the* Word. Especially in conflicts and deep disagreements, the person will comprehend that there is a greater and deeper communion that exists with the other. True dialogue is not simply affirming that one's own views are correct while others are wrong, but rather uplifting the other in his or her unique relation to the *Logos*, the truth, by affirming and even helping let emerge what the other has to say. In uplifting the other, a person sees how their own self is also uplifted; the other's *logos* has enriched one's own.

This idea of communion-within-difference must be experienced to be understood. One of the privileged places where one experiences this is in education. The school is a place where different persons belong to each other and share a unity of vision and mission. This is why it is important that the faculty and staff be united. Indeed, for students coming from broken families, the school may be the first place where they experience an integration of themselves because of the shared and common life lived out in the classroom. This responsibility falls especially on teachers because it is often they who have a more direct relationship with students.

In the classroom, a teacher must not be neutral to the truth. The gift and task of the educator is to interpret the world and tell the story the world tells. Students learn by seeing the world through the eyes of their teachers and they learn the language of the world in the story their teachers embody and tell through their words, way of listening, gestures, classroom activities, and even grading. What students need to learn is to follow what the teacher is saying, while it is the teacher's role to help students know what it means to follow another. Following what the other is saying means knowing what is said, how it is said, why it is said, why it is relevant to one's life, and what it has to do with the whole world. The purpose of the educator, then, is to let created being speak its *logos*. This means not only disavowing any notion that the world does not have inherent meaning and that one can be neutral towards it, but also disavowing the idea that teachers can be neutral towards their students. Each student has his or her own unique way of understanding the truth. Being a master of their subject

matter (math, literature, psychology, history, etc.), therefore, means being able to articulate what the world has revealed in a way that can be grasped by students so that they too can articulate what they have received in their own way. Educators do not impose their will, but let reality speak.

There is an important lesson that an educator can learn from those who defend free speech against so-called "cancel culture." Defenders of free speech say there is value in hearing speech that is false, even if it provokes discomfort. Giving voice to such false ideas has value because it is important to know what people believe. For example, it is important that a newspaper publishes a given politician's perspective, even if it is false and unpopular, because it allows voters to come to know their views and, consequently, decide how to vote. It is important to know what people believe, why they believe it, and how many people believe it, even if the belief in question is false.

Educators should therefore let students voice false ideas even if this causes emotional distress. Here we see why student assessment is important. Teachers needs to understand whether their students have been following them. They need to know what their students are thinking, even if these thoughts are wrong. This understanding allows the educator to approach each student in their own unique way, maybe reformulating questions or rethinking lectures so that each student receives the help they need. However, the aim is always for the whole class to come to the truth together. Free speech is free only if it is ordered to the truth. In fact, only if it *is* true.

The classroom is something quite other than supposedly neutral platforms like social media or the media in general. The classroom is a place where students are always encouraged to bring their deepest questions so that they may receive help to face them and benefit from the gift of others. This happens when students experience being seen by the teacher as a gift. When one is seen as a gift, it allows one to see the other as a gift as well. Naturally, this does not mean there never will be deep disagreements, especially when important things in life are at stake. What deep disagreements reveal is the love of truth each person has. And what a classroom has that social media platforms do not is a unified point of reference, the teacher, who affirms the good that each person carries so that they too can affirm the good of others. To start seeing the other as a good is a path towards reconciliation. The classroom is a place of affection.

What this shows is that there can be no communion without authority. Someone with authority (*auctoritas*) is not someone who has more power than the others, but someone who has the vision of the whole and who can help guide others to grow (*augere*) in the truth. Someone who has authority does not have to be infallible. What is needed is a reference point of unity so that dialogue always begins in a fruitful manner. A mother, for example, is the guide to reconciliation between two quarrelling children. She usually knows more than her children and can understand each child's point of view. When conflicts arise, what keeps the children from separating is their relationship to their mother and therefore the understanding that they belong to each other. It is in *her* that they find themselves again and begin to discover each other in a new way.

The teacher accompanies parents by embodying this authority outside the home. When students experience that they are essential and a gift to the other (God, the teacher, and their classmates), then they begin to see that the other is essential. The classroom is not necessarily emotionally comfortable (think of the hardest math problem that needs to be solved!), but it is the place where even discomfort can find place and meaning. It is the place where a student can experience the reality that the other is not a threat, but a gift—and consequently, where she dares to take risks because the end is always the same: moving together towards the truth.

Finally, it is important that the inexhaustibility of the *Logos* be emphasized. There is nothing a student

or even the brightest teacher can say that can exhaust the whole meaning the cosmos carries. Even when truth is heard, it is always part of something inexhaustible. And this allows a glimpse into the nature of language: language is always embodied in a shared life and always expresses something more of the world. That is the great truth that is learned from philosophers who speak of language as making "infinite use of finite means" (von Humboldt). There is always the possibility of telling more about the world and there is no sentence or group of sentences or even a book that can totally capture the richness and depth of truth. And yet, this possibility of speaking about the world could not come about without being part of a community that already knows how to speak of the inexhaustible world. What this profound power and limit of language reveal is the *time* necessary to understand the richness of the other and to express what one wants to say and what story the world is telling.

This is why there can never be a "last word" to any discussion. There is a never-ending, always-more to saying and hearing. Hope, therefore, is built into language. One can always look forward to what another person can learn and express it in a new way. Especially when there is deep disagreement, seeing the other person as always ordered to the *Logos* allows one to approach the other with hope. Deep in the other person is a unique word, *logos*, that one can help uplift and let emerge. The classroom can be the place where one is always looking forward to seeing and speaking to each other, where one has the opportunity to affirm the other. The response to cancel culture is an experience of common life where hope radiates.

[1] John O'Callaghan, "The Problem of Language and Mental Representation in Aristotle and St. Thomas," in *The Review of Metaphysics* 50.3 (March, 1997): 512□13.

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Social Media *Is* Hate Speech: A Platonic Reflection on Contemporary Misology

D. C. SCHINDLER

We are experiencing today, in our "social media" culture, a rather paradoxical phenomenon regarding language. On the one hand, we appear to trivialize speech in a manner that would have astonished earlier ages: not only do we broadcast every thought without discretion, but we do so with a patent disregard for form. On the other hand, we appear to absolutize speech in an equally astonishing way, extracting a person's words or phrases in complete ignorance of concrete and historical context and loading them with a weight that exceeds their evident carrying capacity. Do we take words too seriously, or not seriously enough? To attempt an answer to this question, it is helpful to go back to one of the first thinkers in the Western tradition to reflect on the nature of language and its place in human existence.

In the middle of the *Phaedo*, the dialogue depicting the final hours of the life of Socrates, Plato interrupts the discussion of the immortality of the soul in order to have his mentor present a reflection on the nature of philosophical argument, which began with the diagnosis and aetiology of what he called the "greatest evil that a human being can suffer," namely, "misology," literally, the hatred of logos (*Phaedo*, 89d). Plato describes misology as the worst possible evil without explanation, but it is not difficult to divine the reason behind his judgment. For the classical philosophical tradition of which Plato was a part (and, in some sense, the father), *logos*—"reason" or "speech"—is not just one of the many capacities of the human being, but the power that properly characterizes man, that makes man human. As Aristotle effectively put it, man is most precisely defined as the *zoon logon echōn*, the animal possessing logos (*Nichomachean Ethics*, 1098a3￿5, and *Politics* 1253a9). In this case, to show contempt, *misein*, for logos is to show contempt for human nature, and thus for man simply. Misology would thus represent a kind of suicide, a destruction of one's own nature. Although he argues that a philosopher ought to look forward to death without fear, Socrates sharply distinguishes this cheerful willingness to die from suicide, which is an act of the highest impiety (*Phaedo*, 61-c-62c). Drawing on G. K. Chesterton, we might say that martyrdom and suicide, however similar they might seem on the surface, are diametrically opposed to each other: martyrdom occurs in the recognition of a goodness that is greater than the self, a goodness that is at the source of all things, so that one gives up one's self in the ecstasy of affirmation; suicide is the absolute negation of all things through the negation of the self: "A martyr is a man who cares so much for something outside him, that he forgets his own personal life. A suicide is a man who cares so little for anything outside him, that he wants to see the last of everything. One wants something to begin: the other wants everything to end."[1] There is a twofold connection between Socrates' denunciation of suicide and his denunciation of misology: On the one hand, contempt for logos is a putting to death of one's humanity; on the other hand, the retreat from all good things outside the self coincides with the retreat from logos. This retreat is a taking refuge inside the self *against* the world, a detaching of one's "word" from reality. These denunciations are made especially poignant by the fact that, in making them, Socrates is peacefully awaiting his own death in hope (*elpis*) and spending that time engaged in a leisurely reasoned debate—*dia-logos*—about the goodness and the meaning of life.

In perfect contrast to the misologist, Plato is known to be a "philologist" in the full range of meanings of the Greek etymology: he is a lover of reason, to be sure, but he is also one who demonstrates an exquisite *care* for *words*. This care becomes an explicit theme for Plato in another dialogue, *The Phaedrus*, which is essentially a discussion of the nature of words, or more specifically the relation between eros and logos: it is a loving speech about speeches about love and love for speeches. In the course of his discussion on the nature of "rhetoric," Plato presents what would eventually be recognized as the first serious critique of technology. In this case, the technology was that strange, new invention called "writing." Plato lived in the latter days of what was principally an "oral" culture, in which the literary tradition was passed on through singing, philosophical education occurred through conversation, and the community was governed in a basic way through actual public deliberation. In the volatile time around the Peloponnesian war, a new "culture of writing" was beginning to establish itself, trafficked especially by the itinerant teachers known as "sophists." Plato recognized that this new "technology" was not just an additional tool to add to the general store in pursuit of the various ends of human existence, but in fact was profoundly revolutionary in the sense that it introduced a new *culture*, a medium through which *all* the various ends of human existence were perceived and understood. Human nature, as we have said, is defined by its relation to logos; a change in the way we understand the nature of words and relate to them will have a profound impact on our interpretation of human nature, and therefore on how we live *tout court*. What are we to make of writing on this score?

At its best, Plato says, writing is a "reminder to those that know" (*Phaedrus*, 278a). What he means by this is that writing has its proper place as a kind of extension of a more original relationship between the soul and reality. To know is to have a kind of intimacy with being, something that is real in one way or another; language is an outward expression of that intimacy, and writing is, so to speak, a kind of detachable, reified token of it. Just as we relate to a person properly if we look, not *at his body* as a separate thing in the world, but *at him* in and through his body, so too do we properly relate to words when we "read into" and "see through" them as expressions of an actual judgment, a grasp of something true, and therefore real. This is in some sense easy to do when we are faced with a speaker "in the flesh," as it were. We hear the words coming from him as things that *he* is saying, and indeed saying at this particular moment, in these concrete circumstances, addressed specifically to me, or to us, for some actual reason. We are able to take in not only the particular content of the words, but a whole world of surrounding things that give that content significant context: from the tone of voice and particular glint of the eyes and subtle gestures of the body, to the concrete circumstances of the thing said, circumstances in which I, too, am right now present as the listener. I take all of these things in as a whole *in* the words to which I am listening. Language discloses reality, and reality is always concrete: the complex, meaning-laden context in which the speaking takes place contributes to the disclosure and so belongs in an intrinsic way to the language.

When Plato says that writing is a "reminder to those that know," what he means is that writing has a derivative reality: it is an "image" of the *real* word, which is the "living, breathing discourse of the man who knows" (*Phaedrus*, 276a). When I speak about something I actually know, something that I have experienced myself, not just superficially witnessed but actually suffered through in depth, my speaking will carry with it a kind of authority and authenticity that we all recognize: the words will be "living and breathing," literally "filled with the soul" (*empsychos*) of the speaker. By contrast, the words of one who speaks merely in imitation of one who knows will tend to ring hollow. Something similar can be said, by extension, about writing. Charles Péguy contrasts those who write with ink and those who write with blood. Writing "in blood" is writing that points so to speak beyond itself to what we might call the original event of disclosure, re-presenting that actual knowing in the sense of allowing the reader to enter again into its presence, its happening ("There is no frigate like a book / To take us

worlds away . . .”). If writing is not received as a “reminder to those who know,” that is, as a recollection of the reality it images, the only alternative is for it to be taken as an independent thing in itself, a reality of its own. In this case, it ceases to point beyond itself, to be relative to what is actually real, and to have its roots in a genuine, living soul. A word arises *from* a human soul, or more specifically from a soul in its encounter with reality, and it is destined to arrive by being received by another human soul, which is thus enabled to enter into relation with that reality in community with the first, the word’s “author” or, as Plato puts it here, its “father.”

In articulating a critique of writing, Plato means to raise a cautionary flag regarding the kind of relationship to reality that this new “technology” will tend to foster. While the inventor, in Plato’s myth of its origin, praised writing as a “tool for remembering,” Plato called it instead a “tool for forgetting” (*Phaedrus*, 275a). For Plato, forgetting is a loss of knowledge, an ignorance, and ignorance is the absence of a living relationship with reality. If the relationship with reality is not most basic, we will lose a capacity to differentiate between being and appearance, and this incapacity will become manifest in praxis. Socrates says to the inventor of writing,

> you provide your students with the appearance of wisdom, not with its reality. Your invention will enable them to hear many things without being properly taught, and they will imagine that they have come to know much while for the most part they will know nothing. And they will be difficult to get along with, since they will merely appear to be wise instead of really being so. (*Phaedrus*, 275a-b)

The point of Plato’s critique, then, is to warn against the sorts of practices that would cultivate a kind of indifference in the soul to being in its most basic sense.

Recall that language, logos, is not one of many human capacities, but the one that defines man, the basic place wherein he encounters all other things, including himself. It is in and through language that man does all that he does, and so a change in the way man communicates will have a profound effect on being, both his own and the being of the world to which he relates. Keeping this in mind helps us avoid the mistake in a common objection to Plato’s critique of writing in the *Phaedrus*: Plato made this critique *in writing*. In response to this objection (which is not in fact an argument, but what is known in logic as a *tu quoque* fallacy), we can point out that Plato did not in fact reject writing *in toto*. Instead, he cautioned against giving writing a central importance and ignoring its form as something deferential to the more primary relationship between speaker and reality. This separation between speaker and reality we could call a form of misology, for the separation realizes a kind of casting out, and casting off, that bears the logic of contempt, regardless of the writer’s particular feelings or intentions, however much he may be in love with his own words and arguments. If misology is a retreat from reason through a taking refuge in one’s immediate impressions, then to privilege the trafficking of abstractions in a medium that is indifferent to truth and to the reality of time and place is to succumb to the logic of misology. The logic can be redeemed, we might say, if the text is given its proper place, subordinated to a real relation to reality and thus revealed as an image expressive *of* that relation. In this case, what transcends the words of the text becomes manifest, and so present, *in* it. But if no significant difference is recognized between writing and speaking and recollected in the writing and speaking, which is to say, if a kind of indifference is taken for granted at bottom, then misology becomes the governing paradigm. Logos, the speaking of and listening to that defines the very essence of human being, is in this case “orphaned” and cut adrift. It thus becomes a thing that can confuse as much as communicate, and whether it does one or the other is, ontologically speaking, a matter of indifference. When the technological means of communicating is made primary, the word tends to lose its “place,” as the “between” that unites the speaker and listener with reality, and therefore with each other.

What Plato says about the intrinsic ambiguity of writing is especially illuminating with respect to our contemporary experience of the "hyper-writing" of social media:

> Writing shares a strange feature with painting. The offsprings of painting stand there as if they are alive, but if anyone asks them anything, they remain most solemnly silent. The same is true of written words. You'd think they were speaking as if they had some understanding, but if you question anything that has been said because you want to learn more, it continues to signify just that very same thing forever. When it has once been written down, every discourse rolls about everywhere, reaching indiscriminately those with understanding no less than those who have no business with it, and it doesn't know to whom it should speak and to whom it should not. And when it is faulted and attacked unfairly, it always needs its father's support; alone, it can neither defend itself nor come to its own support. (*Phaedrus*, 275d-e)

Abstracted from their original source, written words are naturally "opaque," and so vulnerable to manipulation. At the same time, the cause of confusion arises from the production end as well: because the author of written words is essentially absent from what he writes, there is a spontaneous temptation in the use of a "faceless" medium to "vent" and be thoughtless in one's writing, to express things "off the cuff," which is to say one's most immediate feelings or thoughts. It is not possible to "pour oneself" into an essentially flat, "surface" medium that has no place for the depths of a real, human self.

Our unrestrained readiness to take every (electronic) utterance as a definitive pronouncement, which does not require a patient attentiveness to its origin, to the nature and history of the person speaking, to the circumstances that bore it, and so forth, in order to grasp what is being said, is a sign that we take the indifference of words to reality as their native and normal condition. It would take us beyond the limits of this essay to explore the notion, but it is worth pointing out that this spirit of abstraction finds expression in other aspects of modern culture: from the peculiar "fetishizing" of commodities that detaches entirely from sources of production, to the exclusive focus on *parts* outside of *real wholes* in our approach to science and medicine, to the outsized financial market dwarfing the market of real goods in economics. Arguably at the root of all of these cultural phenomena is the false separation of the logos from its father.

In response to the question posed at the outset, whether we take words too seriously, or not seriously enough, the answer is clearly "yes." The particular form of exhibiting thoughts and feelings that the various social media not only presuppose but also cultivate relativizes what is absolute, and absolutizes what is relative. This is the essence of disorder. In their perfect abstraction from the concrete context of a real speaker, a reality spoken about, and a real listener, these pseudo-intelligible bits are on the one hand cheap, empty, and without bearing, constraining purpose, and accountability. On the other hand, the very thing that cheapens them, namely, their isolation from context, absolutizes them. The word "absolute," in fact, means, "separated from context." Bits of text, or in some cases images, whether from the present or dug up from the past, are now taken in an immediate way as definitive deeds, and the judgment pronounced on them is by its very nature totalizing and irrevocable. The immediacy is the crucial point: the bits are not interpreted, which is to say they are not received as expressions of something beyond themselves, which require an understanding of that reality in order to be proper bearers of intelligibility. This sort of reception requires an entry of the recipient, not only into the complexity of the particular existential conditions of the original speaker, but in some cases even into what may be a radically different culture in a radically different historical period. One cannot really *read* casually, and "on the fly." Reading *costs* something, and so one simply cannot be available to read just anything, at any time, in any circumstances.

In perfect contrast to this distortion of language, Plato insists that words can be properly articulated and received only in a generous expanse of time, according to organic rhythms (*Phaedrus*, 276b). He recommends that we *not* give ultimate weight to written words in that particular form, and *only thus* take them very seriously: when we affirm such words in freedom as nothing but images, and so as pointing to a reality greater than themselves, when we in other words receive them as relative to something more fundamental than they are meant to convey, they acquire by that token an extraordinary depth and fullness. Paradoxically, by being less than reality, the turn out to possess more reality themselves than they would as separable things in themselves.

The evident chaos of the contemporary "cancel culture"—which is coming to resemble something like a cyber version of The Terror in late 18th-century France during which the revolutionaries began cutting off even their own heads—is certainly due to an abuse of language. But in responding to this it is important that we go to the roots of the problem: the abuse that is occurring here is not most basically the occasional instance of hate speech, however increasingly frequent it may have become, or the wildly indiscriminate denunciation of hate speech that both reacts to it and provokes it even more. The deepest abuse of language is the general contempt for logos that is being institutionalized in the social media culture that surrounds us, not just in its content, but already in its form. In other words, there is a misology already in the form of social media, to the extent that it is used, not just for an occasional passing on of information when other means are lacking, but as a basic "place" of social interaction, a fundamental point of reference in communal life. There is a profound sort of cultural suicide occurring in this phenomenon. A proper response requires a recovery of our capacity to read and write, which itself depends on the capacity to speak—and, above all, genuinely *to listen*. It is in some sense a very easy thing to recover, since this is just who we are, but in another sense it is quite difficult, because the denial of this reality is becoming increasingly normalized. But the energy for resistance can be found when we consider what is at stake. If man is the animal with logos, a hatred of logos is a hatred of man.

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[1]G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (Nashville, Tenn.: Sam Torode Book Arts, 2009), 68☐69. Chesterton thus provides the profound response to Nietzsche, who claimed that the spirit of ultimate life-denial entered into the West through Socrates: *Twilight of the Idols*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin, 1982), 473☐79.

The Internet: How Words Can Unite or Divide Us

SOPHIE CALDECOTT

The power of words on the internet to make or break a career, and a life, has long been on my mind. As a journalist-in-training back in 2010, my peers and I were taught about the perils of reading and engaging with the comments section on websites, where trolls were rife and connection was rare. A decade later, as someone who earns her living working in online media, I'm constantly thinking about the potential of what I write, whether it's a thoughtfully-researched article, or a quickly thrown-together social media post, to deepen connection or sow division. I'm also painfully aware of the potential dangers the words I share online could pose to my own career and life.

In his book, *So You've Been Publicly Shamed*, journalist Jon Ronson traces the frightening development of modern public shaming on the internet, and the way that one thoughtless joke or throw-away comment shared on Twitter can destroy someone's life and livelihood. He argues that internet shaming is a much more vicious reincarnation of the public shamings of times gone by: "When shamings are delivered like remotely administered drone strikes, nobody needs to think about how ferocious our collective power might be," he writes. "The snowflake never needs to feel responsible for the avalanche."

It's all too easy to use words online to dehumanise people. Empathetic dislocation can easily occur in the context of the internet: precisely because of the disembodied access to one another's worlds and thoughts that it provides. Writing in the comments section of an article or social media post, we become lazy and easily forget the humanity of the person we're engaging with. It's easier to serve someone harsh criticism when we're not physically present to one another. Whilst we often say things we regret in the heat of the moment in person, it's easier to read someone's mood and tone when we can hear their voice, see their face, and watch their body language. Vivek Murthy, in his book *Together*, puts it this way: "The way in which we use technology can not only distract from in-person interactions, but it can also create distance between us and others. Not having to look people in the face when we're commenting on social media shields us from having to deal with their reaction or the pain that our words may cause."

Online, our interactions are stripped back and limited purely to the words (and images) that we choose to share. As embodied beings, inhabiting the same physical space can help us to be more acutely aware of the complex inner life of the person in front of us; being physically present with each other not only provides a kind of closeness and connection as we look into each others' eyes and communication moves beyond the realm of language, but it also makes us aware of our essential separateness and the individuality of the other. When interacting with others on the internet, especially when we're in a hurry and are reading something on our phones in the middle of doing something else, the odds are against connection; when we're not actually in the same physical space as the person we're communicating with, the alienation that can exist between two people who don't understand each other, don't share similar life experiences and perspectives, is deepened. It's easier to reduce people down to ideological boxes, and to forget the common humanity we share behind our screens. This is

why interactions online can often feel so dehumanising for everyone involved.

So yes, the negative power of language stripped of this essential physical presence on the internet is well documented, and many of us are well aware of this from personal experience. But what's perhaps a little less widely discussed is the power of language on the internet to unite us and bring about *good.* For the most part, this has been my own personal experience as an online writer. From the husband who got in touch to thank me for an article that helped him understand his wife better, to the woman with Covid-19 who couldn't go to her dear friend's wedding and needed inspiration to write her a letter to read on the eve of her wedding day, I've felt connected to readers around the world through the words I share online. In 2014, when my father was told he had roughly 5 weeks left to live, a blog post and some tweets that I shared resonated so deeply with people that they were shared thousands of times by friends and strangers all around the world, enabling me to organise a wonderful surprise for my comic book-loving father through a campaign we called #CapForStrat. And then, during a lonely few years of nomadic life and several transatlantic moves, sharing words online helped me to deepen existing relationships, as well as forge new ones.

My work these days involves a lot of research into the kinds of things people type into Google, and the startling intimacy and urgency of the language people use in that little search box never ceases to astonish me. This kind of research can feel a little like snooping on people's private thoughts, hopes, dreams, and fears (though of course I just see the search queries, and not any details about who typed each phrase into Google). It's estimated, for example, that thousands of people type the phrase "pregnant and alone" into Google each month. What kind of consoling and helpful words are these people hoping to find? We can only guess, but it breaks my heart and motivates me to keep writing and sharing words that can potentially help—or at the very least make someone feel a little less alone—online. During lockdown, I watched a spike in searches for gardening tips, bread recipes, how to thread a sewing machine, and online music lessons. I was moved to see a significant uptick in the number of searches for the phrases "how to help the elderly," and "positive news."

Obviously, I'm focusing on the positive here, rather than on the dark side of the way people use words on the internet. Blogs have radicalised mentally unstable people, terrorist attacks have been organised on social media. Pornography, human trafficking, and abuse of every kind is able to flourish under the cover of anonymity that the internet can provide. Online bullying has ruined lives and led young people to suicide; trolls and stalkers regularly use the internet to turn someone's life into a living nightmare.

On a smaller scale, there's the mental health repercussions that social media addiction can cause, along with the temptation to compare our lives to someone else's, and information overload certainly has a negative impact on our attention spans and relationships, as Vivek Murthy points out. "Modern progress has brought unprecedented advances that make it easier for us technically to connect, but often these advances create unforeseen challenges that make us feel more alone and disconnected," he writes. "Thanks to advances in technology, we can enjoy all the conveniences of community without directly interacting with other people."

Certainly, my personal experience of using the internet in an intentional way demonstrates that what we read on the internet can give us a window into someone else's perspective, and that can be a very powerful tool for connection. But the flipside is that it can also leave us feeling discontented and disconnected from our own life and the people physically present right in front of us. Vivek Murthy points out that "the constant presence of our phones and other communication technology has been shown to reduce the emotional quality of our conversations. As Andrew Przybylski and Netta

Weinstein found in their experiments, the mere sight of phones during conversation negatively impacted 'the extent to which individuals felt empathy and understanding from their partners.'"

When I think about the deepest friendships I've forged online, one common thread is that each of those relationships moved from online to offline as soon as possible. We might have got to know one another by reading each others' social media posts, articles and blog posts, but then we moved to sending emails and private messages, having video and telephone calls, writing each other letters, and then meeting up in person when the opportunity arose. It takes time and care to see and respond to someone's words in a thoughtful way online, and we can't do it in a rush or in large quantities.

What I've come to realise over the past decade of my life is that it's all about how we choose to use the platforms and the words at our disposal. If we can be more intentional about how long we spend online, and then unplug and be fully present to those around us, virtual connection can still play a role in bringing about closer connection and building meaningful community. If we can hold the truth in our hearts that each person we encounter, both online and offline, is beloved by our Creator, and choose our words with care, we'll most likely find ourselves consuming a lot less content and being a lot slower to tear someone down when we disagree with them. Online, even more than in person, you just never know what might be going on under the surface.

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A Keyhole for Unbelievers? The Public Character of *Cultus* and the Broadcasting of the Mass on TV

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The broadcasting of Mass on television, which is already taking place regularly in several countries, has—by contrast with those countries—led to a lively and fundamental discussion in West Germany. Here, the weight of arguments and Catholic public opinion has been in favor of a categorical refusal of such TV broadcasts of the Mass; this is in part because it constitutes, as a matter of principle, a profanation and is contrary to the public character of the Christian *cultus*, and in part because the alleged spiritual usefulness of this practice is questioned and it is instead feared that it will do greater damage in the long run. "The desire to be modern," writes Fr. Karl Rahner, "may very soon turn out to be highly unmodern. Once the TV set has become part of the ordinary furniture of the average person, and once he is used to being the spectator of just about anything between heaven and earth on which an indiscriminately curious camera preys, then it will be an unbelievably exciting thing for the philistine of the twenty-first century that there still are things which one cannot view while sitting in a recliner and chewing on a burger."

By contrast, the advocates of the new practice seem to have ended up on the defensive. There does not seem to be a clear answer to the question, why it is better to do it rather than not. Certainly, there are the sick and elderly to whom one hopes to be charitable. And one assumes without further argument that staring at the small screen—being totally different from the presence in the actual space of worship—would be suitable to intensify spiritual participation in the mysteries. Yet it is likely that a prayer book fulfills that purpose much better. Experiencing a lack is always more fruitful than having some surrogate.

There is also talk of the need to penetrate all areas of the world with Christianity; but there are no precise reflections—based on a sociology of these technologies—that would demonstrate why this must lead, of all things, to a TV broadcast of the Mass. After all, evangelization as an initiation into the mystery loses its point, if the mystery itself is used as a means for evangelization.

Given the weight of the arguments that are raised against this controversial practice the discussion apparently now focuses on the question of whether there are any conclusive reasons to say that this practice is indeed contrary to the nature of the Christian cultus in any strict sense. In order to deny this and so as to contend that it is possible in principle to broadcast Mass on TV, one now often proposes an argument that to my knowledge has not yet been subjected to a more thorough critique, even though it really cries out for such a response. It is the argument concerning the "Public" (*Öffentlichkeit*). Mass, so it is argued, is not primarily an act of private devotion (though that certainly also needs to be part of it). It is essentially a "*cultus publicus*," a public cultic act. The encyclical *Mediator Dei* of Pius XII has also re-

empathized this public social character. Just as the sacrifice on the Cross itself, so Mass is offered in the name of the whole of humanity. Even where it is celebrated in a tiny chapel, it is not the celebration of an esoteric mystery, but a public act in the strict sense. And while we would strongly disapprove of TV broadcasts of acts like birth, begetting, or death, nevertheless, the broadcasting of Mass—so the argument goes—can in no way be regarded as similar in character.

The premise of this argument is indeed indisputable: the character of the Mass as a *cultus publicus*. But it is amazing how unabashed one takes advantage of the ambiguity of the notion of the "Public," how one takes it to be self-evident that this involves the same kind of "publicness" that we encounter in soccer games, movie theaters, or those who are "public nuisances." I, for one, believe that it must quite definitely be denied that TV, as we know it today, can be counted as a "public sphere" in the sense that is here under discussion. We are far from a proper understanding of what "public" meant in that ancient sense, which is the basis of the Latin notion of the "*res publica*" or even today of the Code of Canon Law. "Publicness" is, after all, first and foremost a term of law, but in the sense in which law must be understood as the expression of an ontological structure. Public in this sense is, for example, an official decree, even if it is only "publicized" or "made public" in the Federal Gazette. *Not* public, but only private, are communications of a manufacturer of stockings, even if they are plastered on billboards. For in this latter case there is nothing else at play but the subjective will of individuals to manipulate other individuals. Such a will, as loudly as it may announce itself, cannot constitute "publicness." Public is not that which just *happens* to be actually known by all members of a society, but rather that which in a particular case *ought* to be known by all, even if this "public knowledge" can perhaps only be known with great effort (e.g., by visiting a library, looking up the code of civil law, or seeking the counsel of a lawyer). The sentence "ignorance does not protect from punishment" (*ignorantia legis non excusat*) depends entirely on this sense of "publicness."

Certain legal acts, sales contracts, etc., that are publicly sanctioned, are not characterized by being enacted at a random place in the streets, but rather in the chancery of public notary as a representative of the Public. The shrinking of the forms of representation and the all-encompassing domination by merely economical—i.e., not public—forms of social interaction, have led to a loss of a living notion of the Public. Mere bureaucracy is not an appropriate representation of the "*res publica.*" Entering a birth into the registers of the registry office is a very abstract, formal act. But if we read that the French queen had to give birth to her child in the presence of the entire assembled court, then we become aware of this age's, perhaps exaggerated, degree of intensity in its sense of the Public. In more recent times, this degree of intensity often becomes apparent only in the limit case of war: in the "public" death of the soldier (which has misled some to consider the public nature of the political sphere as consisting only in its relation to war). These two cases have something in common that makes them instructive for our topic at hand. They are characterized by the fact that, in them, the Public demands from a human being the most personal, most subjective, and most intense acts.

And here it needs to be said that in all these cases it is indispensable that the "spectator" is also a "witness," i.e., that he, too, must step out of his private space and into the specifically circumscribed public sphere. The borderline of the indecent and perverse is transgressed precisely by the one who peeps through the keyhole, i.e., the one who wants to enjoy the event without the seriousness of being part of it, without public attendance, without being a "witness." The death of the soldier is public, it occurs on the open battlefield. The one who sees it is usually a comrade-in-arms. But even a reporter must enter at least the zone of danger and thereby somehow still participate in this qualified form of the Public. But it is villainy to show such pictures to people in the movie theater or on TV for the satisfaction of their private curiosity. And likewise with executions. In former times they were public. Had Hitler been present personally—face to face—at the execution of the men on July 20, 1944, then we

might still call him cruel or vengeful; but by having the executions privately screened in film for himself, he lowered himself below any humanly characterizable standard. By contrast with theater, film is—with a word of Cocteau (who indeed ought to know)—the "art of the keyholes." The movie theater is the place where one can see without being seen, where one can enjoy without the seriousness of participating. And in TV broadcasting this situation reaches its apex, because the rest of the audience is absent as well.

Justly, therefore, an advocate of TV broadcasting of the Mass has coined the phrase: "a keyhole for the unbelievers." But the "*cultus publicus*" of the Mass cannot tolerate this keyhole-situation. And first of all, what does the notion of the Public mean with regard to the Church and her liturgy? We might say that an absolute concept of the Public can, after all, be realized only in the theological sphere. All empirical-political organizations of human associations are characterized by an element of arbitrariness or randomness. The transition from private to public is fluid and any sphere of the public is by its particularity not itself entirely public. Even in the age of economic globalization there is not yet a political "global Public." The Bible, on the other hand, does have a notion of a global Public, whose actualization, however, is of an eschatological nature: the assembly of all nations before the Son of Man appearing as their judge. Even the character of Abraham cannot be understood apart from his relation to the one "in whom all nations of the earth will be blessed." Precisely in the sacrifice of his son does Abraham enter into the position of a somehow officially recognized "public person"—just as the people of Israel as a whole will later. Only in this way can it become intelligible that the Church prays in the Easter Vigil that "the whole world might enter into the sonship of Abraham and the dignity of Israel." The Church understands herself to be the legitimate place where the unity of humanity is realized under the rule of God—not as the tower of Babel, but as the Body of Christ. Recognition of the Church as a legally public corporation is therefore not the cause and condition of its theologically-grounded public character, but merely its political expression.

Now it is from this perspective that the notion of a *cultus publicus* must be understood. This *cultus publicus* is first of all the sacrifice of reconciliation on the Cross; it is furthermore the abiding representation of humanity before God in Jesus the High Priest, of which the Letter to the Hebrews speaks; it is, finally, the cultic representation of the redeeming sacrifice in the celebration of the Eucharist, with the surrounding wreath of the liturgy of the Church. It is noteworthy that Pius XII in his encyclical "*Mediator Dei*" distinguishes the celebration of the Mass and the liturgy of the Church from the private sphere as "the public prayer of the eminent bride of Christ." It is not an external element that characterizes the Christian cult as public, but rather the fact that, in it, the Church as Church, as the "Bride of Christ," as humanity reconciled in Christ, acts through someone who is specifically delegated for that purpose. Absolution in the confessional is likewise a public act (as the historical explanations of Poschmann again have shown) and not a "private confession," as with a psychoanalyst. And yet this is not a reason to relocate it out of the secrecy of the confessional.

So what follows from this more precise conception of the notion of the Public for the question of whether the Christian cult, especially the Mass, may be broadcasted on TV? This question has already largely been answered by the aforementioned analogies. The analogy is first and foremost that Christian worship is not just any public ritual, but that it is prayer, public prayer. If someone were really to read the encyclical, which defenders of broadcasting the Mass on TV like so much to quote, then he would discover that the pope is concerned—against extreme positions in the Liturgical Movement—to prevent the tearing apart of "objective" liturgy from subjective piety. Liturgy fulfills its purpose only to the extent that the subjectivity of the participants is involved therein. And so, here, too, we have the case of this highest measure of intensity of the Public, in which (as in public childbirth and public death) the vital intimacy of the person is claimed to the highest degree.

This constitutes the difference from public rituals such as coronations of kings and popes, whose purpose is fulfilled with its "objective" performance. Such ceremonies can be "*tele*-vised" indeed. In the case of the Mass, however, it remains unintelligible from which principle one could possibly justify the keyhole-situation, the justification of being a spectator without the seriousness of being really there. The Mass is public—this means, firstly, that it is offered in the name of the whole church as the "Bride of Christ;" and it means, secondly, that all men are, in principle, invited to participate, to be really there. They are asked to step out of their private isolation and enter into the Public of the Corpus Christi. This invitation is issued to the individual, i.e., it is in a sense delivered privately, just like the invitation of the royal paterfamilias, including on the radio and on TV. There may even be words of edification communicated to the individual Christians. If the Church here is approaching also individuals outside of the Church, then she does so in competition with other social groups, other forces and intentions. In this context, she appears in a sense as one private company amongst others, as a "limited liability company." In doing so, the Church takes into account the reality of her situation in the contemporary world. Yet this situation does not represent the self-understanding of the Church. This self-understanding is represented first and foremost in the celebration of the Eucharist. Here the Church does not turn as a private institution to private individuals, but rather, those who leave their individual isolation and enter into the public sphere of the Mystical Body of Christ turn towards God.

TV broadcasting makes this public occurrence into a private spectacle for individuals in their personal rooms, who see without being seen. This is, first of all, a violation of the intimacy of prayer, which, according to the exhortations of the pope, must not be removed from the Mass. It is the typical situation of the indiscretion of a seeing without being a "witness." Even the unbeliever who is present at divine worship is still a witness; even he must at least externally conform to the rules of the Public of the believing participants—just like the reporter who enters the zone of military danger. He does not need to do this in front of the TV set—and it is in this situation of the keyhole that profanation consists.

Profanation is also a "re-privatization" of that which is essentially a *cultus publicus*. The strictly public character of the Mass is concealed, if it is lumped together with the other elements in the pseudo-public sphere of sensationalism. (In the best case scenario, the public cult becomes a mere means—and not at all the best means—to instigate personal piety, but without the ability to let it emerge into the public space of the "*sacrum commercium*." But this is a reversal of the natural order of things.)

Empirically, the Church today is one society among others, one element in society. She must make her voice be heard; she is in the situation of the messenger at the hedges and fences. But in her self-understanding, she is the public sphere per se, the representative of all humanity before God and of God before humanity, the Corpus Christi. She is inevitably forced to obscure her public, universal character, if she dumps the center of her life, the celebration of the mystery, into the bankruptcy estate of all the other private items of publication.

Robert Spaemann (1927␣2018) was a preeminent German philosopher.