

The True Meaning of Words

To defend ourselves from the confusion of ideas and information that seems to characterize our days, it is necessary for us to become aware of the importance of using words in their proper sense, of respecting their true meaning.



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Back in the fourth century, Plato expounded in his dialogue *Theaetetus*, in opposition to the Sophists, on the relationship between the true and the false, and consequently, on the need for man to recognize the relationship between the word and the reality it represents.

While also meditating on the confusion of tongues in Babel (cf. Gn 11:1-9), I became convinced of the need to analyse the confusion of ideas and information that seems to characterize our days. To this end, I believed it opportune to set forth some examples that can serve as a starting point for the consideration of this topic.

My goal is to promote a deeper awareness of the importance of using words in their proper sense, of respecting their meaning, and, as a result, the truth about things.

An ill-conceived liberty

In his work *What's Wrong with the World*, Chesterton astutely writes: "This is the huge modern heresy of altering the human soul to fit its conditions, instead of altering human conditions to fit the human soul."¹ And this is done in the name of an ill-conceived liberty that transforms us from

pilgrims on this earth, who know our way and our destination, into aimless beings.

Indeed, liberty is confused with the guarantee of always doing what one desires, and people strive, furthermore, to have this acknowledged as an authentic right. They thus fail to recognize that the possible is not always beneficial for man, and that those who act in this way end up as impoverished slaves (cf. 1 Cor 10:23; 2 Pt 2:19).

We are inebriated with a liberty limited to the concept of free will, to the point of losing an awareness of who we are! When man rejects his state as creature, he subjects himself to confusion, to isolation, and to living in a constant conflict with himself and his neighbour. If we do not accept the fact that our nature is God-given, together with everything that this objectively means, we condemn ourselves to being nothing more than poor vagabonds.

Truth imposes itself

I therefore invite you, dear reader, to reflect for yourself, beginning by confronting reality and seeking to find the truth therein. Thus, you will avoid becoming trapped in a kind of blind subjectivism that nourishes ster-

ile egocentricity and leads inexorably to lethal solitude.

St. Thomas warns: "truth is strong in itself and is overcome by no attack against it."² Therefore, it should never be imposed, for the simple reason that it imposes *per se*!

However, unfortunately, modern man very often defends himself against the truth, without realizing that truth is what defends him; instead of seeking to know it, he prefers to support the convictions or interests of his own group, if not his own gang.

Good and evil are objective realities

For example, let us analyse the terms *good* and *evil*. In everyday life they are clear to everyone, but only apparently so. Within the current climate of ethical subjectivism and consequent relativism, many are deeply convinced that there is no objective good or evil, but rather whatever the person *feels* is good or evil.

The word *feel* is used in a generic sense, often accompanied by an even more confused and distorted notion of *conscience*, according to which it is up to man to decide what, in the final analysis, is good and what is bad. Moreover, if we reread the Book of Genesis, we will see that there is noth-



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ing new under the sun, because the temptation of our first parents was precisely that of wanting to be equal to God (cf. Gn 3:1-6)!

However, whatever the temptation may be, it is important to recognize that good and evil are, above all, objective realities. To immediately confirm this it suffices to observe, even at a glance, our physical and moral life: health is a good, sickness is an evil; giving life is a good, taking it is an evil...

Nevertheless, I do not intend to dwell on this aspect, but on another one which, in my opinion, eloquently demonstrates how much that which is bad virtually prevails in our daily way of thinking and acting. I am referring to the fact that, in general, the negative impresses us more than the positive.

Physiology precedes pathologies

We often forget something undeniable: evil, both physical and moral, is always a deprivation, a deficiency. *Bonum ex integra causa, malum ex quocumque defectu*: the good demands the totality of its requirements; when there is a deficiency in one any of them, the whole is compromised.

Unfortunately, we often feel inclined to begin by collecting, high-

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lighting and emphasizing deficiencies – evil – neglecting that positive aspect – good – in the light of which it makes sense to speak of an evil. We allow ourselves to be absorbed with “pathologies” and we end up forgetting that they are preceded by “physiology”.

Hence the importance of *educating oneself* to look at the good in the first place, to know how to privilege and value what is positive. “Think positive,” the Americans like to say. Considering the outside world from this perspective will inevitably change our mentality, our way of understanding life and our life itself, as well as that of those with whom we come into contact.

Triumph over evil with good

The Word of God constantly invites, and almost challenges us to recover the beauty of an existence that is a divine gift and not man’s own creation. It can only be fully lived by having the belief that the Son of God “loved me and gave Himself for me” (Gal 2:20), by committing oneself to triumph over “evil with good” (Rom 12:21) and by filling our minds and hearts with that which is true, noble, just, pure, gracious and praiseworthy (cf. Phil 4:8).

One last observation, certainly not a minor one: doing good or evil is important and has its consequences before God: “The Son of man will send His Angels, and they will gather out of His Kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and throw them into the furnace of fire; there men will weep and gnash their teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear” (Mt 13:41-43). ✧

¹ CHESTERTON, Gilbert Keith. *What’s Wrong with the World*. 8.ed. London: Cassell, 1910, p.109.

² ST. THOMAS AQUINAS. *Summa Contra Gentiles*. L.IV, c.10, n.15.