340 Word (*Sermo*)

According to the Philosopher, the first book of *Politics*,[[1]](#endnote-1)whereas some animals have a voice, man above the rest has a word. Wherefore also word morally is said to be the planting of the mind according to that of *Ethics*.[[2]](#endnote-2) And when a word (*sermo*) is said it is because between each of them it is planted (*seritur*). Wherefore Christ said to the Jews, John 8[:37]: “My word has no place in you.” So, a seed thrown on bad earth or upon a rock does not take root, nor does it produce. So neither does the word of God in evil men, Chrysostom, homily 8, *Super Mattheum*,[[3]](#endnote-3) the word of a man sounds in the ears, but the word of God since it is united works in the hearts, just as it is good earth and apt for receiving what Christ teaches, John 14[:23]: “If any one love me, he will keep my word.” Wherefore Bernard,[[4]](#endnote-4) he cannot catch the fire of eloquence because his breast is frozen. In the manner that one does not understand Greek who does not know Greek, so, the language of love is for him who does not love, mere barbarism. Therefore, Christ said, John 6[:3]: “Now you are clean by reason of the word, which I have spoken to you.”

¶ Again, sometimes it happens that ash before it becomes lye does not clean but defiles the more. However afterwards other things through it are cleansed. The cause of this is because those clothes are full of ashes which are put in, not because of cleanness, but because of filtering. So spiritually the word of Christ goes first to the ecclesiastical powers then to the laity. But sometimes the first are full of the dust of sins, where the laity are purged and washed. Therefore, Christ said, [John 13:10]: “You are clean, but not all.” Wherefore Jerome says,[[5]](#endnote-5) as lye washes flowing through ashes, however ashes are not washed from filth. Wherefore Augustine, *De decem chordis*,[[6]](#endnote-6) you should make peace with your adversary. While you are with him on the way, you should not come in discord with him before the judge. The word of God is your adversary. If you do what it says, you are at peace with him. If you do not do it, you quarrel with him, Matt. [5:25]: “Be at agreement with your adversary betimes: lest perhaps the adversary deliver you to the judge, and the judge deliver you to the officer” of the prison.

¶ Of such a kind however ought the word of the teacher, as Jerome teaches, according to *Sermo* 35,[[7]](#endnote-7) to be founded in the reading of the scriptures of the teacher. I do not wish that you be declamatory, nor garrulous. Neither be quick in speaking among the authorities to make yourself admired by the crowd. Seneca, *Epistula* 28,[[8]](#endnote-8)the conversation that breaks in little by little profits the most. The work is not in many words, but in efficacious ones. And Gregory in a *Homilia*,[[9]](#endnote-9) concerning the sufferings of the Lord, the food of the mind is the word of God. As if food received by the stomach is slowly rejected, when the word of God in the belly of God is not retained. But whoever does not retain food, one despairs of his regaining health.

¶ Concerning the respectful reception of the word of God, Augustine says,[[10]](#endnote-10) and it is put into Causa 1, [quest. 1], c. [94], *Interrogo*,[[11]](#endnote-11) you who seek what would excel the word of God, let it go because there is no less guilt for the one hearing the word of God carelessly, than the one who carelessly permits the body of Christ to fall upon the ground.

1. Aristotle, *Politics* 1.2 1253a8 (Barnes 2:1988): And whereas mere voice is but an indication of pleasure or pain, and is therefore found in other animals (for their nature attains to the perception of pleasure and pain and the intimation of them to one another, and no further), the power of speech is intended to set forth the expedient and inexpedient, and therefore likewise the just and the unjust. And it is a characteristic of man that he alone has any sense of good and evil, of just and unjust, and the like, and the association of living beings who have this sense makes a family and a state. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Aristotle, cf. *Melissus, Xenophanes, and Gorgias* 6 980a2-b9 (Barnes 2:1550): But even if they are knowable by us, how he asks, could any one indicate them to another? For how, he says, could any one communicated by word of mouth that which he has seen? ... he who speaks, speaks, but does not speak a color or a thing. When, therefore, one has not a thing in the mind, how will he get it there from another person by word or any other token of the thing except by seeing it, if it is a color, or hearing it, if it is a noise? For he who speaks does not speak a noise at all, or a color, but a word.... [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. (Pseudo-)Chrysostom, *Opus imperfectum in Mattheum* hom. 8 ex cap. 4 (PG 56:678): Si ergo sermo humanus tantam habet virtutem, auribus sonum praestans, putas quid agebat sermo dominicus, cum esset spiritus vivus, non tantum in auribus sonans, sed et in cordibus operans? [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Bernard, *In Cantica Canticorum* 79.1 (PL 183:1163): quoniam omnino non potest capere ignitum eloquium frigidum pectus. Quomodo enim [Col.1163C] Graece loquentem non intelligit qui Graecum non novit, nec Latine loquentem, qui Latinus non est, et ita de caeteris; sic lingua amoris ei qui non amat, barbara erit, eritque sicut aes sonans, aut cymbalum tinniens (I Cor. XIII, 1). [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Jerome, cf. Decretum, Dist. 83, c. 6, Gr. p.: Sicut enim Ieronimus ait: ut lixiuium per cinerem humidum fluens lauat, et non lauatur, ita bona doctrina per malum doctorem animas credentium lavat a sorde peccatorum. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Augustine, *De decem Chordis* 2.2 (PL 38:75-76): Tempus est concordandi cum adversario tuo cito. … Si autem tanquam quotidianus sperandus est incertus dies, componatur cum adversario, dum est tecum in via. Via enim vocatur haec vita, per quam omnes transeunt; et non recedit iste adversarius. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Jerome, *Epistola* 52.8 (PL 22:534): Lacrymae auditorum, laudes tuae sint. Sermo Presbyteri, Scripturarum lectione conditus sit. Nolo te declamatorem esse et rabulam garrulumque sine ratione, sed mysteriorum peritum, et sacramentorum Dei tui eruditissimum. Verba volvere, et celeritate dicendi apud imperitum vulgus admirationem sui facere. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Seneca, *Epistula* 38.1 (LCL 75:256-257): Plurimum proficit sermo, quia minutatim inrepit animo.

 But the greatest benefit is to be derived from conversation, because it creeps by degrees into the soul.  [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Gregory, *XL Homiliarum in Evangelia* 15.2 (PL 76:1132): Cibus enim mentis est sermo Dei. Et quasi acceptus cibus stomacho languente rejicitur, quando auditus sermo in ventre memoriae non tenetur. Sed quisquis alimenta non retinet, hujus profecto vita desperatur. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Augustine, *Sermones de diversis* 300.2 (PL 39:2319): Interrogo vos, fratres vel sorores, dicite mihi. Quid vobis plus esse videtur, verbum Dei, an corpus Christi? Si verum vultis respondere, hoc utique dicere debetis, quod non sit minus verbum Dei quam corpus Christi. Et ideo quanta sollicitudine observamus, quando nobis corpus Christi ministratur, ut nihil ex ipso de nostris manibus in terram cadat; tanta sollicitudine observemus, ne verbum Dei quod nobis erogatur, dum aliud aut cogitamus aut loquimur, de corde nostro depereat: quia non minus reus erit qui verbum Dei negligenter audierit, quam ille qui corpus Christi in terram cadere negligentia sua permiserit. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Decretum, Causa 1, quest. 1, c. 94, *Interrogo.* [↑](#endnote-ref-11)