



01/03/2021 New and Ancient Word
Jeremiah 31:7-14; Psalm 147:12-20; Ephesians 1:3-14; John 1:1-18
Reverend Giuseppe Mattei

There used to be a time when a person's word meant something.¹ A person's trust record, based on her consistent credibility, honesty, and dependability, was all that was needed to close personal deals.²

We can be creative with words and use them to uplift people's spirits with an inspiring message, a poem, a captivating novel, a well plotted movie script. We can also use words to tear each other a part and declare war, unfortunately.

Words can be powerful, and it is frustrating when we are not able to communicate well what we have on our mind. It must be rather devastating for those who lose their ability to speak due to a stroke or Alzheimer. It must be equally disempowering for those who may not have the ability to articulate their needs clearly and convincingly. Politicians, lawyers, orators, poets, writers, and even pastors are among the many who appreciate and benefit from the power of words.

But words can also be misleading and become a weapon with corrupt intent. I did a quick Google search for "conspiracy theories" and got back more than 85,000,000 results to explore. Conspiracy theories used to be confined to rumors and small groups of ardent believers. The social media platforms have given conspiracy theories a feeling of credibility and a highly effective way to broadcast their beliefs to a larger audience. Thankfully, the internet also provides easy access to fact checking sites such as Politifact, Snopes.com and FactCheck.org.³

When individuals are wrapped up in a conspiracy theory, the word of an expert in a field or the facts presented by science become irrelevant. In fact, the believer in conspiracy is ready to dismiss and find an explanation for anything: logical contradictions, evidence showing the opposite, even the complete absence of proof have no bearing whatsoever.⁴ Sadly, conspiracy theories create division, alienation, and conflict in the office space, at church, and especially in homes. In a world filled with conspiracy theories, it can be difficult at times to know what to trust and believe.

To hear someone say, "You have my word." is not enough anymore. We need to know whom we are dealing with, how trustworthy one is, and how well we know the character of that person.

The gospel of John does not give us Jesus' infancy narratives. Instead, John wants to connect the act of God giving us the Light of the world with God's primordial action of creating the lights of the firmament by just speaking the Word. John could just as well have started his gospel by having God saying to us: "I give you my Word." From the birth of Jesus onward, light, truth, and

¹ Numbers 30:2

² [Your word is your bond history and origins: From Matthew to hip-hop. \(slate.com\)](https://www.slate.com/articles/health_and_wellness/mental_health/2017/07/your_word_is_your_bond_history_and_origins_from_matthew_to_hip-hop.html)

³ [The 6 Best Political Fact-Checking Sites on the Internet \(dailydot.com\)](https://www.dailydot.com/news/best-political-fact-checking-sites/) or <https://mediabiasfactcheck.com/2020/04/12/the-10-best-fact-checking-websites-for-2020/>

⁴ [How to spot a conspiracy theory when you see one \(theconversation.com\)](https://www.theconversation.com/how-to-spot-a-conspiracy-theory-when-you-see-one)



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grace have a human face and God's truest and most trustworthy character is evident for all to enjoy and to follow.

The poetic words of the Book of Wisdom refer eloquently to the night in which God's word of hope and compassion was spoken to a hurting world and a new creation came about: "When peaceful silence lay over all, and night had run the half of her swift course, down from the heavens, from the royal throne, leapt your all-powerful Word; Into the heart of a doomed land the stern warrior leapt." (Wis. 18.14-16)

This poetry tells us how wonderful things often happen in the silence and in the dark as a way to make us rethink our stereotypes and negative thoughts around silence, quietness, and darkness. In stillness we find God⁵ and yet, how confused might we be when we think we need to surround ourselves with words and noise. God's silent Word can be very loud and creative for those who learn how to listen and to follow.

Theologian Matthew Fox reports that the German mystic Meister Eckhart recognizes that God's Word speaks marvelous things to those who listen in silence. Eckhart invites us to sit humbly before the Word in "pure ignorance, unknowing knowledge that is unencumbered and bare," along with "pure nothingness." This exercise offers ways into "darkness, emptiness, solitude and a desert" where we are to remain "still" for what God has prepared for us. "There is where the Father gives birth to the Son in the soul and there is where the soul is addressed."

Rather than an angelic event with shepherds witnessing a birth in a stable, John's nativity story is more like a cosmic explosion delivering its main element to the earth. God speaks that Word straight to our face and we cannot ignore it. Christmas is a break from business as usual; it is God's purposeful invasion of our space and time; it is God's decisive and determined action to become flesh and live among us and in a way telling us: "I am not ignoring you; I am right here with you. And you can't ignore Me anymore." John moves us beyond the baby to the Creator of all! The evangelist zeroes in on what this birth means for all of us, all year around. God became human for us and gives us power to become the children of God.

Obviously, there are those who claim that the way the Word of God is relayed by those who identify as God's spokespersons is confusing if not even scandalous. We need to admit that in many cases they are correct, unfortunately. On the other hand, we Christians cannot attest to God's existence with a 100% irrefutable scientific proof. It is all in the realm of faith and often our faith is mixed up with our inconsistencies, misinterpretations, unfaithfulness, hypocrisy, and misplaced loyalties. Considering all the abuses and violence made in the name of God, the world is not totally wrong in looking at religions with a critical mind. Often, we need to associate ourselves with the world in discerning whether what we hear preached from a pulpit is truly in

⁵ Psalm 46:10



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accordance with Jesus' Way and is not corrupted by an unchecked infiltration of selfishness, nationalism, and/or cultural prejudices.

God's Word is definitely and clearly spoken to those who approach it with humility and simplicity. To us Christians, does the Word come first or do our assumptions and prejudices take priority? John calls us to become part of a trinitarian event where God the Speaker (the Father) speaks the Word (the Son) to us, which is in turn received by God the Listener (the Spirit) in us for the purpose of birthing the Son of God in us.

It is through the faith, the obedience, and the listening skills of Jesus in us that we are empowered to follow that Word and give birth to Jesus, become more like Jesus, and offer Jesus to the world. Impeding the Spirit in us to receive the spoken Word and cutting ourselves off that dynamism causes us to commit the gravest sin which offends God.⁶

In this time of covid, when we are so separated from loved ones and from our church family, what does it mean to listen to the Word that summons us to new birth and a new resting place in God? Regathering the church once the physical distancing recommendation is over is not going to be an easy task unless we all acknowledge to be spoken to by the One who keeps all things into his hands. Some of us are suffering more than others because of covid. Some are still in much physical pain and at graver health risk. To all of us God still speaks words of consolation and encouragement, and God's radiant Light gives direction and peace. By the grace of God we shall rebuild our community, we shall strengthen our outreach, we shall witness to God's glory, and we shall sing anew God's praises.

Let us pray:

O God, you have been present with us since the beginning, We give thanks that your Word gives us Light and empowers us to bring your love, grace, and truth to all people. Help us to know that in our good days and in our bad days, in our doubts and in our questions, in our sorrows and in our joys, your love for us and your presence with us will never end. Amen.

⁶ Matthew 12:31-32