

Presentation of the Publishing House *Parole et Silence*

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In this Easter season, we are witnesses to the hope that inspires the world. Independent of the fact that countries have eliminated Christianity through political pressure, or of the secularization which afflicts Western nations, there is a perceptible sense of renewal – and the charisma of the late Pope John Paul II was no small part of this. Religious publishing, like the entire religious world, felt the tremor and crisis of individualism and secularism. It was in this mass of polarized centers that the publishing house *Parole et Silence* was born, nearly ten years ago, with the intent of bringing enlightenment and prayer to the Christian community.

Perhaps you are aware that the landscape of French publishing has fundamentally changed over the course of the last fifty years. Book proposals have increased, but despite the modernization of publication technology, religious literature has not realized this development.

In the face of extreme secularization, large, international publishers are publishing texts of a religious character, in part to ensure their survival and further protection of their business interests. Traditional religious publishers, for their part, are aware of an organizational and publishing crisis: “organizational” because of a lack of evolution; and “publishing” because they are having difficulty identifying markets and actual expectations of their readership.

Parole et Silence made the choice to enhance the fulfillment and organization of spiritual life often disintegrated in a secular setting. Theology is not the mixing of ideas amidst

others, but rather a spiritual experience that achieves organization through wisdom.

Let us not forget that what influences the Christian publisher is the same thing that influences the individual Christian – the Christian who wants to live in accordance with the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is the search for true, everlasting joy and that eternal life that comes through knowing “You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:3). This true realization expresses itself in all aspects of our lives, but it can be developed according to three requirements. First, we must turn to Christ, to find the answer to what is right and what is wrong; second, we must enter into truth and remain there; and third we must acknowledge the hope that lies within us.

To follow the calling of Christ to “go forth and make disciples of all nations,” we must begin by knowing whose disciples we are. We have lost the symbols which by themselves may not cause immediate conversion, but by their very existence invite us to contemplation. The Angelus bells calling us to prayer to the Mother of God, a cross hanging on the wall in a hospital, a nun who arrives in a spirit of benevolence – such widespread symbolism was, for a long time, an opportunity for seekers of truth to ask themselves about the deeper meaning of these religious symbols. When they disappear, there are fewer occasions to pose questions regarding the true meaning of life. This is not nostalgia, but a statement of fact.

The publishing house *Parole et Silence* was created by laymen and Church intellectuals to promote works which enliven faith, uniting enlightenment and spiritual life. After we published the encyclopedia “Faith and Wisdom,” Msgr. Louis-Marie Billé, former president of the Bishops’ Council of France, stated that this text allows Christians to imagine “how their faith opens their wisdom for endless oceans of eternity.” This text should become a unifying text for all Christians.

As we said earlier, to realize the hope that exists within us, we need provisions, words to understand and deepen our faith in all its truth and fullness. The job of *Parole et Silence* is to support this organic connection between spiritual life and theo-

logy. A catalogue of publications was also created from this perspective.

We can take, as an illustration, a table of books which is supported by four legs. These four legs represent the four directions of our production. The first direction is the propagation of prominent authors, be they French-speaking or foreign, to a large group of readers. Foreign authors often comprise a large investment for publishers because in addition the standard costs of a book, there are the costs of buying rights and of translation for a large quantity of copies and all for a book which is not likely to be a best-seller. This is part of a publisher's job: to know authors who will be accepted by a majority of the readers of that publication.

From the early years, we published foreign authors who, in our minds, summarized the concern about the development and support of spiritual life. Among them, one who became particularly well-known is Joseph Ratzinger. *Parole et Silence* has published seven translations of his writings – originally written in German – and we are publishing new ones every year. There is one specific text in which he highlights the relationship between Judaism and Christianity, thus bearing witness to a people of one Testament. Thanks to close cooperation with the press, we were able to place an excerpt in the *Nouvel Observateur*, a daily international journal, which prints 500,000 copies. The work received recognition. Another excerpt came out one week later in a competitor journal *L'Express*. The book rose to the higher ranks of sales. Simply by appearing in *L'Express*, the book had exposure in supermarkets and newsstands and 30,000 copies were sold in one month, which makes it a bestseller among mainstream publications.

To this prestigious list of names we can add Cardinal Schönborn, archbishop of Vienna; Brother Enzo Bianchi, founder of the monastery of Bose; Father Raniero Cantalamessa, official preacher of the papal household; then-Father and now Bishop Bruno Forte, and others. There also exist texts regarding the decline of Christianity in a new edition of writings by Hans Urs von Balthasar.

In addition to the foregoing, we also publish prominent French-speaking authors. Jean-Marie Cardinal Lustiger published his most important work, *Promise*, which interpreted Matthew's gospel. This was an opportunity to establish a link between the Old and New Testaments, Christ and the Commandments, reminding people that the gospel is the revelation of God's promise to the nations.

Other francophone authors published by us include Poupard and Jean Vanier, founder of L'Arche, which accepts disabled adults and supports them in everyday life in socialization, work, and emotional support. Also, three years ago, we published a work about Mgr. Daucourt and his unique journey from the Second Vatican Council in Rome to a parish in Nanterre, in the Parisian region, which was widely celebrated in the press. To the degree that the bishop publicizes *Word and Silence*, so we, for our part, would like to publicize him to the degree that we can, beyond the measures of his ministry.

Another example is the sermon during Lent which is held every year at the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris. These sermons have a long history. They were started in 1835 on the initiative of Frédéric Ozanam, founder of the fraternities of Saint Vincent de Paul, which support the weakest in society. He suggested to Archbishop Hyacinthe-Louis de Quélen of Paris that Father Lacordaire, a renowned Dominican preacher, be invited to preach at Notre Dame. Lacordaire's appearances had a striking effect and started a tradition that has lasted over a hundred years. Over the years, sermons during Lent at Notre Dame also became a meeting place for Christians who wished to find spiritual peace during Lent and also for those who sought God and had a desire to hear the message of the Church.

In 2005, Cardinal Lustiger decided to invite informed individuals in medicine, humanitarian studies, literature, philosophy, and theology, who spoke in agreement about human existence from the point of view of their persuasions, Christian or otherwise, and about their search for the truth. Archbishop André Vingt-Trois, who succeeded Lustiger in March 2005 as ordinary of Paris, led the dialogue, which was transmitted on the national radio station, France Culture. *Parole et Silence*

became a publishing center which provided the dissemination of this exchange. This dialogue between faith and contemporary thought plays an important role with such authors as Guy Coq, Emmanuel Mounier, and Pierre Emmanuel.

This dialogue is also the goal of our participation in the Book Salon in Paris. Every year this Salon gathers a large number of publishers of unusual variety. In a word, you can find anything – except there are very few religious or confessional publications. This prominent book fair has become a place where Christian participation can be in the spotlight throughout the world.

Returning to the illustration of the table, the second leg on which our production rests is the formation of the spiritual life. As Saint Paul knew, at some age we need to adapt to food and be weaned from milk to solids. In this way we need to find authors who have a deeply rooted spiritual life and language which can reach out to other believers. Thus, we have an ongoing release of twentieth century authors, including Charles Journet and Marie-Joseph Le Guillou, as well as theologians and advisors to the Second Vatican Council, who have been immortalized by many lay people. We also publish Hans Urs von Balthasar; Henri Caffare, founder of Shield of the Holy Mother, whose goal is to support spiritual and married life of Christian couples and also the founder of The Absent Course of Prayer; and Dom Augustin Guillerand, monk of the Carthusian order.

There is a noteworthy and unyielding interest in the spiritual nature of the Carthusian order. Not only is the life of the order attractive – these hermits who live secluded *solī Deo* (united for God and for one God) – but their spirituality, penetrated by the Word and life with God, brings a calm to many readers, who find great contentment in the simplicity of their words.

Along with these “elders,” if we can call them this, we publish more contemporary authors: Enzo Bianchi, founder of the ecumenical monastic community of Bose in Italy; Andrea Riccardi, founder of the community of Sant’ Edgido; the Cistercian spiritual writer André Louf who was the Abbot of Mont des Cats; Anselm Grün; and Joseph-Marie Verlinde,

founder of the Order of Saint Joseph, whose calling was to teach *lectio divina*. In sum, *Parole et Silence* provides for a variety of different spiritual orders (Carmelites, Carthusians, Dominicans, Jesuits) to exist in one place, each having its own character. Naturally, these joint efforts should help Christians to read, contemplate, and pray the Word of God.

The third fundamental direction in our work is education and dialogue with other religions. Bishops know that it is very difficult to prepare students to teach and research in the field of theology. Vocations to the priesthood are few and there is a need for new priests everywhere. It certainly requires a strong will for a seminarian or a priest to curtail their occupation as a pastor to dedicate themselves to academic studies. The question is no less serious for lay people who want to give their time to the Church: should they be immediately prepared to read the catechism, or require compulsory preparation for one or two years before giving them a mission? But we all know the degree to which these enlightened individuals are indispensable.

The Paris diocese made its choice many years ago. In 1984, Cardinal Lustiger founded the Cathedral School, which was headed by Mgr. Pierre d'Ornellas, at that time an aide to the archbishop of Paris. This school has developed to the point where it now accepts approximately three thousand students, both lay people and priests. This school gave rise to the Faculty of Holy Mother, a new faculty of theology in Paris. It prepares well-respected emissaries of bishops and also young lecturers. The latter do not simply want to lecture: they also want to write, which is crucial in recording their research and making it available to the general public. The publisher *Parole et Silence* is a partner in this matter. These lessons led to the publication of *Notes of the Cathedral School*, which became a series of annual collected articles, published by the director of the collection who is also the director of the school. Studium, which exclusively prepares future priests, also has its own collection and annually publishes articles on specific topics presented by guest lecturers. This is the common goal uniting religious enlightenment and publishing.

In respect to other religions, particularly the dynamic relations between the Catholic Church and the Jewish community, we are publishing Claude Vigée, who appeared this year at Notre Dame during Lent, and Colette Kessler, recipient of the 2004 award for writers of faith for *Meeting with Lightning*. These two Jewish writers provide our readers with a better understanding of the ties which unite us. We are also preparing a publication of meetings between Jews and Christians which occur every two years under the auspices of the Jewish European Congress and the Bishops' Committee on Jewish-Christian Relations.

On the Orthodox Christian front, we just published a commentary by Vladimir Zielinsky, an Orthodox priest who lectures at the Catholic University of Brescia. And, as you undoubtedly know, we recently published the interview by Antoine Arjakovsky of Lubomyr Cardinal Husar, as well as Professor Arjakovsky's collection of articles on Bulgakov. We have long been attentive to ties with the Orthodox Church and, as I just indicated, since our inception, we have been publishing Father Marie Joseph Le Guillou. This Dominican, founder of the Eastern Church journal *Istina* and the Institute of Ecumenical Studies in Paris, worked very hard on the question of what unites East and West. In May, we also published a new edition of his work on the spirit of Greek and Russian Orthodoxy.

We have arrived at the fourth leg, so that our table can be completely stable. This is the presence of the Church in the world through witness and contemporary questions. Pope Paul VI said that people do not listen to teachers, but they listen to teachers who are witnesses. It is up to us as a religious publisher to shed light on the lives of witnesses who show Christians the way and lead them on the long road to sainthood. Some of these witnesses are more well-known. We have already referred to Jean Vanier. We can also mention Madeleine Delbrêl, who spent her life in Ivry, a "red," communist suburb of Paris, and who interrupted her professional life, never supporting Communism, to which even the faithful succumbed. They wanted to find in it a "last straw" for the disenfranchised and exploited people.

We can also mention Brother Gregory, whose life was recorded by Robert Masson in the book “That Was a Swindler.” Sentenced to decades in prison, Brother Gregory was accepted for a few days at a Cistercian Abbey, where he remained until his death. He was a spiritual leader to a great many people who knocked on his door at the monastery, happy to hear that the gospel is also for them and, possibly, primarily for them. Last fall, we published the letters of Geneviève de Gaulle-Anthonioz to a spiritual friend. The niece of Général de Gaulle, she actively patronized the organization ATD-Quart Monde, which worked in all directions to reduce poverty in France, even in the capital. While upholding these human ideals, Genevieve de Gaulle had a satisfying spiritual life, about which she never spoke and which became known through her “Letters to a Friend.” This is a contemporary example of the importance of an individual who, through her support in the course of world events, was a Christian emissary.

This brief overview of the publisher *Parole et Silence* I hope, gives a sense of a decade’s work in service of the Church and Christian people. This is thanks to our structure, which allows us to avoid the disappointments of publications that are rated in relation to sales. In religious literature we carry on a vast publishing project: seventy new publications per year and 450 works in our catalogue, with both prestigious authors and little-known writers, for whom it is important to find a place where they can express their thoughts and define their positions. It is our business to provide adequate doses and proportions of the necessary financial stability to continue this practice. We, as Christian publishers, should remember that the calling of our readers is holiness. All in all, we should give to those who believe in us what Christ promised: “you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (John 8:32).

