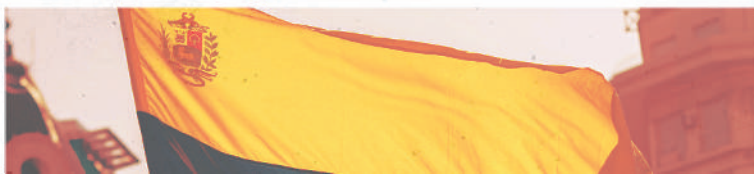


DE MOC RA



Magnífica humanitas:

A First Reading.

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for Ibero-America*

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TI ZA TION



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Magnifica humanitas: **A First Reading**

1

The first encyclical of Pope Leo XIV, *Magnifica humanitas*, is a lengthy document (245 numbered sections), rich and complex in content, which we must endeavor to receive.

It contains principles, reflections, experiences, and guidance for action. Indeed, the richness of its content calls for multiple readings and shared reflection.

Under no circumstances should we impose our own interpretive frameworks upon it (as it sometimes happens). For that reason, the opportunity provided by this first colloquium is especially welcome.

2

The Holy Father's first encyclical is a social encyclical, and this cannot fail to attract our attention, because it is not the usual practice.

3

Moreover, he has invoked Leo XIII and *Rerum novarum* as a precedent that serves as his inspiration. Indeed, this is why he adopted the name Leo upon his election.

Rerum novarum, however, was certainly not the first of Leo XIII's many encyclicals.

What, then, does it mean that the Holy Father begins with a social encyclical?

- i) The (external) reference to *Rerum novarum* offers us a clue: a technological transformation is taking place that has a decisive impact on the lives of individuals and societies.
- ii) This confronts us with the need to provide special protection for the human person in this new era of human history.
- iii) This alone would already seem to be sufficient reason: "Each generation," he tells us, "inherits the task of shaping its own time."¹

What he adds next, however, suggests a broader perspective –or, if you will, a deeper reason. That task consists in "guiding history to become a place where the dignity of every person is safeguarded, justice is promoted and fraternity is made possible."²

The Holy Father makes us see –as will become very clear throughout the document– that our Christian life is interwoven with the circumstances of time and place. It is not directed toward

1 Leo XIV, Encyclical Letter *Magnifica Humanitas*, 1, <https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/es/encyclicals/documents/20260515-magnifica-humanitas.html>

2 Idem.

an inward-looking spirituality. Rather, it is —and must be— an interior life that does not abdicate its responsibility to make the world more humane.

Thus, quoting the words of John Paul II —which he cites in no. 50— he places us before the reality that “the human person always remains the «way for the Church».”³

“Founded on Christ,” he adds, “the living stone, we experience the powerful and mysterious action of the Holy Spirit, and we believe that every authentic human effort to cooperate with him for the good will be blessed by our heavenly Father, in whom we place our hope.”⁴

3

With this human and faith-filled vision, we cannot ignore that “today... we find ourselves facing a new situation

- i) in which the power and prevalence of emerging technologies are interwoven into the fabric of daily life,
- ii) shaping decision-making processes,
- iii) and deeply affecting the collective imagination.”⁵

He then echoes Pope Francis: “Never has humanity had such power over itself,”⁶ which —as we know all too well— immediately entails the power of some human beings over others, of a few over the vast majority.

3 John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis*, 14.

4 Leo XIV, Encyclical Letter *Magnifica Humanitas*, 2.

5 Ibidem, 4.

6 Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato si*, 104.

The question, therefore, is: “Where are we going? Toward what goal do we wish to orient ourselves? What direction should we choose as a people and as a human community?”⁷

4

For this reason —and hence the recourse to Catholic Social Teaching— it will be necessary to discern “how to navigate responsibly the era of AI”⁸, how to safeguard the human person.

Ultimately, the question is which paths to follow in living out our responsibility as Christians, as men and women of faith who seek, in all things, to fulfill the Will of God.

I say “Christians” because, although the encyclical’s heading does not specify its intended audience, throughout the text the Pope exhorts and addresses Catholics, lay faithful, Christians, and men and women of good will.

5

We have noted that this is a social encyclical.

Even so, it is striking that the Holy Father devotes the first two chapters —more than 70 sections— to the history of Catholic Social Teaching —“how the Social Doctrine of the Church has taken shape (...) in order to demonstrate its dynamic character”—⁹ and then proceeds to present its “foundations and principles.”

7 Leo XIV, Encyclical Letter *Magnifica Humanitas*, 6.

8 Ibidem, 7.

9 Ibidem, 17.

Why pause over a task that, in a certain sense, had already been accomplished?

Besides the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church (2004), which the Pope cites, there is a document issued by the Congregation for Catholic Education on December 30, 1988, entitled Guidelines for the study and teaching of the Church's Social Doctrine in the formation of Priests, which offers a treatment of the subject similar to the one found in the encyclical.

Why, then, return to the subject in this way?

I would venture to suggest two reasons. First, the Holy Father wishes to make clear the foundation on which he bases his discernment of the present situation and of the guidance he offers for our mission. Second —in continuity with the first— he wishes to bring this doctrine to all men and women of good will.

Not only because, as one might suppose, it is not widely known among the general public, but above all because he sees the need to apply it in concrete circumstances: “My hope is (...) to help the lay faithful and people of goodwill rediscover their duty of implementing the above-mentioned principles in their daily lives, family relationships, work and involvement in society. Thus, they will let themselves be inspired by the aim of embodying God's love in the concrete events of life.”¹⁰

He also extends an invitation: “to encourage academic institutions and universities to give fresh impetus to these principles, and to apply them in a way that will be relevant and effective in addressing the digital revolution.”¹¹

¹⁰ Ibidem, 47.

¹¹ Ibidem, 47.

Accordingly, we must recognize that “the Social Doctrine of the Church is a living reality, in dialogue with history, cultures and sciences. At the same time, it enshrines a core set of unchanging truths. For this reason, it can be considered a form of wisdom that is capable of guiding the personal and societal lives of believers even today.”¹²

6

The foundation, as we know, is the human person, created in the image of God,¹³ whose dignity is inalienable and prior to any determination by the State. It is equal in every person,¹⁴ and in the modern age its primacy has found expression in the formulation of human rights.¹⁵

By nature, the human person is open to relationship and love and (as we see from the very act of creation) stands in need of others “It is not good that the man should be alone”¹⁶; and of social life.

Gaudium et spes summarizes this well: “Man’s social nature makes it evident that the progress of the human person and the advance of society itself hinge on one another. For the beginning, the subject and the goal of all social institutions is and must be the human person which for its part and by its very nature stands completely in need of social life.”¹⁷

12 Ibidem, 46.

13 Ibidem, 48-50.

14 Ibidem, 51.

15 Ibidem, 54-58.

16 *Gén* 2, 18.

17 Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 25.

Having established this foundation, the Pope then proceeds through the following principles, detailing some of their contemporary applications: the common good, the universal destination of goods, subsidiarity, solidarity, and social justice.

All of this leads to the concept of the integral development of society.

7

In the third chapter, he turns directly to the issue of Artificial Intelligence in relation to individuals and societies.

He draws on two contrasting biblical images —the building of the Tower of Babel and Nehemiah’s rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem— to ask us, without delay: What are we building?¹⁸

“We believers must and can choose which projects to work on and in what manner, so as to safeguard and value the grandeur of humanity that has been given to us as a gift.” He thus affirms the personal responsibility of each individual in the building of a more humane and fraternal society.¹⁹

Amid a technocratic paradigm —as Pope Francis called it— when technology becomes the criterion for decision-making and is taken as the measure of actions and projects, and in the face of the concentration of power in the digital world,²⁰ he seeks to recall “a few essential elements for a moral and social discernment that safeguards the primacy of the human person, in order to ensure that it will always be human intelligence, with its conscience

18 Leo XIV, Encyclical Letter *Magnifica Humanitas*, 90.

19 Cfr. Ibidem, 91.

20 Ibidem, 96.

and freedom, that guides technical innovations and responsibly determines their use and limits”.²¹

He then proposes several important cautions in approaching the subject: first, that any statement about AI runs the risk of becoming obsolete in a very short time; and second, that all of us –including those who design these systems– know very little about how they actually function.²²

He then goes on²³ to offer a brief comparison with human intelligence, in which we might especially note the distinction expressed in the subtitle of Josef Weizenbaum’s seminal book (*Computer Power and Human Reason*): From Judgment to Calculation, the reduction of judgment (a uniquely human prerogative) to calculation (something machines do well).

Then, the use of AI “is never a purely technical matter” (like replacing an abacus with a calculator), because it profoundly affects human life; nor can it be regarded as “morally neutral”,²⁴ since –by collecting and processing information– it inevitably reflects the assumptions and preferences of those who originally designed it.

Particularly grave is the development of AI-related weapons: weapons systems with operational autonomy that make war more feasible and less subject to human control.

21 Ibidem, 97.

22 Ibidem, 98.

23 Ibidem, 99.

24 Ibidem, 99.

“For this reason, the development and use of AI in warfare must be subject to the most rigorous ethical constraints.”²⁵

“Moral judgment cannot be reduced to calculation, for it involves conscience, personal responsibility and the recognition of the other as a person.”²⁶

He then sets forth three specific criteria for discernment:

- The first such criterion concerns personal responsibility. When a decision to strike becomes automated or opaque, the risk of abdicating responsibility increases.
- The second criterion pertains to the moral timeframe for making judgments. While AI tends to expedite the decision-making processes, speed and efficiency should never be the supreme motivating force for the irreversible decisions made in the context of war.
- The third criterion is the identification and protection of civilians. Any technology that facilitates attacks without seeing the face of human beings lowers the moral threshold of conflict.²⁷

For this reason, the Pope has called for the “disarmament” of AI: “Disarming AI means freeing it from the mentality of “armed” competition, which today is not limited simply to the military context, but is also an economic and cognitive phenomenon. This entails a race for ever more powerful algorithms and larger datasets, driven by the desire to secure geopolitical or commercial dominance. To disarm means discrediting the assumption that

25 Ibidem, 197.

26 Ibidem, 198.

27 Cfr. Ibidem, 199.

technical power automatically confers the right to govern. To disarm does not mean rejecting technology, but preventing it from dominating humanity.”²⁸

At the end of this chapter, he refers to the “underlying narratives” of transhumanism and posthumanism, in which the human being is ultimately treated as mere matter, while at the same time expressing –albeit imperfectly– a desire for transcendence. There is, indeed, a “more-than-human” reality that is found in the grace of God, in the supernatural elevation of the human person. “The Christian tradition has maintained that human beings are not confined by the boundaries of their own nature; rather, they are called to self-transcendence, not through an escape from reality or a contempt for their limitations, but through their fulfillment in love.”²⁹

And in that section on “the limit, the heart and the grandeur of the human person,” he makes a particularly important affirmation –especially in the face of the fatalism of our age: “history does not appear solely as a record of human violence, but also as evidence that humanity is capable of creating institutions that protect our shared life”;³⁰ “history can also change when individuals truly take the dignity of everyone seriously”.³¹

8

The question of history becomes even more prominent in the reflections of the fourth chapter, on safeguarding what is human amid social transformation.

28 Ibidem, 110.

29 Ibidem, 127.

30 Ibidem, 123.

31 Ibidem, 124.

He gives particular attention to three lines of reflection, each concerning what is most properly human: truth, work, and freedom.

Considering truth as a common good touches upon the human person's essential openness, the capacity to know reality. Consequently, it also concerns the capacity to relate to others as truly other. The impact of digital technologies on communication deserves serious consideration: it affects our very interpretation of life —the narratives that shape the social imaginary— and has a profound impact on democracy as a way of life. The field of education requires particular care.

The impact of AI and new technologies, which are “rapidly transforming the very structure of work”, makes it especially important to protect the dignity of work, “a fundamental dimension of the human experience”.³²

Freedom —which makes the person, as the subject of his or her own actions (*causa sui*, according to the classical expression), capable of love and of self-giving, in which personal fulfillment is attained— is being profoundly affected by the digital revolution. We must break the chains of these new forms of slavery. This struggle is a “decisive test for the ethical discernment of AI and digital transformation.”³³

It then becomes necessary to recall “the urgent need for reflection and action that keep the inalienable dignity of every human being and the common good, as both the focus and goal of society, as well as the guiding criteria for every personal, social and political choice. Without this ethical and humanizing

³² Ibidem, 154.

³³ Ibidem, 174.

reflection, the growing power of digital systems could lead us toward new atrocities that are no less shameful than those of the past that we now deplore, while we continue to present ourselves as “advanced” and “civilized” societies.”³⁴

9

In the fifth chapter, the reflection developed thus far culminates in a broad examination of the confrontation between the culture of power and the civilization of love.

These are two opposing logics, already represented by the biblical images of Babel and the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem, and rooted in St. Augustine’s doctrine of the two cities.

A culture of power is becoming entrenched —one that normalizes war in the name of a supposed political realism and promotes the unchecked expansion of power.

Underlying this is a distorted view of the human person and, above all, an understanding of history as an ultimately impersonal arena, in which responsibility is abdicated in the name of the logic of power.

In response, the Holy Father returns to St. Paul VI’s expression, the civilization of love, which “consists in translating charity into structures of justice, giving institutional form to fraternity and regarding others —whether individuals or peoples— as allies necessary for building the common good.”³⁵

34 Ibidem, 174.

35 Ibidem, 186.

In the international sphere, “the project for a civilization of love, therefore, must undertake the task of transforming this imposed interdependence into a willed and chosen solidarity.”³⁶

The civilization of love —a vision that we must recover today with renewed conviction— “is no naïve utopia, but a demanding project.”³⁷ We might even say, with Jacques Maritain, that it is a concrete historical ideal.³⁸ Yet we must overcome the temptation to think “the problems are too big and we are too small (...) We all have our own areas for action, and it is precisely there —and nowhere else— that we must choose whether to fuel the mentality of force (even if only through indifference, cynicism, lies or hatred), or to preserve the mindset of peace (with truth, moderation, closeness and care).”³⁹

He then introduces the quotation from *The Lord of the Rings* that has attracted so much attention. Faced with the prospect of Gondor’s defeat and of giving his life in battle, Gandalf says: “It is not our part to master all the tides of the world, but to do what is in us for the succour of those years wherein we are set, uprooting the evil in the fields that we know, so that those who live after may have clean earth to till.”⁴⁰

Ultimately, we view history in the light of the crucified and risen Lord, to whom the Father has given “all authority in heaven

36 Ibidem, 187.

37 Ibidem, 186.

38 See Jacques Maritain, *Humanisme intégral*, ch. IV, I. Aubier-Montagne, 1968, p. 135.

39 Leo XIV, Encyclical Letter *Magnifica Humanitas*, 212.

40 Ibidem, 213.

and on earth (*Mt 28, 18*)".⁴¹ This brings us to the conclusion of the document.

We can see clearly that the Holy Father's approach, grounded in the Church's Social Doctrine and, as such, coming from moral theology,⁴² advances to bring forth a theology of history.

10

"We have reflected on the world we are building, and we asked ourselves what it means to safeguard the human person in the era of artificial intelligence. At the end of this reflection, I would like to propose a sober yet demanding program of Christian life with which we can navigate this epochal change in the light of the Gospel."

He then explains: "This avenue emerges through contemplating God's plan, living ecclesial unity by partaking of the Eucharist, building a world centered on the common good and praying in union with the Blessed Virgin Mary."⁴³

"At the heart of everything is the mystery of the Incarnation, the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us."⁴⁴ "For this reason, as a believer among believers, I invite everyone to contemplate, in the face of the Son of God, the grandeur of humanity that shines a light also on the era of AI."⁴⁵

41 Ibidem, 210.

42 Cfr. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 41.

43 Leo XIV, Encyclical Letter *Magnifica Humanitas*, 229.

44 Ibidem, 231.

45 Ibidem, 232.

“This human face is the fullness toward which history is moving. It is the mystery of «recapitulation»: the certainty that the Father has decreed to bring all things, those in heaven and those on earth, back to Christ, the one Head.⁴⁶ In this plan, nothing will be lost that is authentically human. Indeed, everything will be purified and reunited in the One, who gathers every fragment of life, every tear and every authentically human achievement, rescuing them from nothingness and delivering them, redeemed, to the Father.”⁴⁷

“The spirituality I wish to commend,” he tells us, “is that of the «wise architect» who, driven by hope for the Kingdom of God, is committed to building the world for the common good.”⁴⁸

“The task of building in our time must place our relationship with God at its center. Our rule must be the acceptance of human limitations as a natural and positive reality, and should be characterized by shared responsibility and a language characterized by the Gospel.”

“In this task, we are called to assume an active role, without taking refuge in spiritual sentimentality or retreating into our own little worlds. We must be faithful to the truth, invest in education, cultivate relationships and love justice and peace.”⁴⁹

Let us conclude, then, with the summary offered by the Pope himself: “the fourth pillar of this program for Christian life —after the faith that contemplates the Father’s plan of love, the charity that unites us in one ecclesial body, and the hope that sustains

46 Cfr. *Ef* 1, 10.

47 Idem.

48 Cfr. *I Cor* 3, 10.

49 Leo XIV, Encyclical Letter *Magnifica Humanitas*, 236.

our action in the world— is prayer. Mary's song accompanies our commitment."⁵⁰

"With the same faith as Mary, let us become "weavers of hope" in our world, sharing who we are and what we have, so that the presence of Jesus may grow among us and his Kingdom take shape (...) The Lord continues to make all things new and offers every era the possibility of becoming part of salvation history in the light of the Incarnation."⁵¹

At the ITER, June 10, 2026

50 Ibidem, 236.

51 Ibidem, 245.

Julio Borges Junyent

El Césped es Verde:¹ A Common-Sense Revolt for Ibero-America

In 1926, G. K. Chesterton wrote a line that seems as though it were written for our own time: “We shall soon be in a world —he said— in which a man may be howled down for saying that two and two make four, in which furious party cries will be raised against anybody who says that cows have horns, in which people will persecute the heresy of calling a triangle a three-sided figure, and hang a man for maddening mob with the news that **grass is green.**”

Chesterton was not merely making a characteristically English joke. He was articulating a cultural prophecy. With his customary irony, he warned us that a civilization can descend into such confusion that the most elementary truths come to be regarded as scandalous. An age in which stating the obvious is no longer a trivial gesture, but an act of resistance.

That time has arrived.

We live surrounded by worn-out words. We speak of freedom while emotional, political, and technological dependence

1 El Césped es Verde is a Spanish-language media outlet. Its name translates as “The Grass Is Green.”

continues to grow. We speak of truth while celebrating post-truth as a mark of sophistication. We speak of human rights while excusing dictatorships when they belong to the “right” side. We speak of democracy while hollowing out the democratic culture that sustains it. We speak of love while fragile, disposable relationships devoid of lasting commitment multiply. We speak of identity while the human person dissolves into labels, brands, algorithms, and tribes.

El Césped es Verde was born from this intuition: there are simple truths that must once again be defended. Not because they are new, but because they have been forgotten. Not because they are complex, but because our age has become too sophisticated to accept them without embarrassment.

Common Sense in Intensive Care

Our publication was created to rescue something that is in intensive care: common sense.

But we do not understand common sense as simplicity, mediocrity, or a lack of thought. On the contrary, common sense is the most basic —and the most profound— form of contact with reality. It is the ability to distinguish truth from falsehood, good from evil, beauty from ugliness, justice from injustice, democracy from totalitarianism, excellence from mediocrity.

These distinctions may seem obvious. But they no longer are.

Today we are told that truth depends on the narrative. That good is a social construct. That beauty is a form of cultural imposition. That freedom means doing whatever one wants. That all authority is oppressive. That every tradition is inherently

suspect. That every inherited identity is a prison. That every limit is a form of violence.

In response, we want to look at reality again without asking permission.

To say that the grass is green is to affirm that reality exists prior to our desires. That the world does not begin with our opinions. That there is something outside ourselves that we can know, love, care for, and cultivate. That freedom does not consist in inventing everything from scratch, but in responding with intelligence and responsibility to a truth that precedes us.

A university student today lives amid an avalanche of stimuli, ideologies, and competing narratives. They are constantly receiving information, yet too often they are not receiving education. They have access to all the data, but not always to sound judgment. They can have an opinion on everything, but have not necessarily learned how to think. They may be connected to thousands, yet still feel alone. They may champion many causes, yet possess little sense of purpose.

It is to that young person that we wish to speak. Not from above. Not with sermons. Not with nostalgia. We want to speak with respect and with a challenge —as one might say: You are not condemned to repeat slogans. You can think. You can disagree. You can seek the truth. You can find your own voice.

An Ibero-American Project

El Césped es Verde is an Ibero-American publication. That description matters. We do not want to be a project confined to a single country, a particular political moment, or a local battle. We want to build a cultural network stretching from Spain to

Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean, Colombia, Venezuela, Peru, Chile, and Argentina —a broad conversation across the seas, among peoples who share a language, a history, wounds, challenges, and possibilities.

Ibero-America embodies a paradox. It is a young, vibrant, religious, and creative region, endowed with an extraordinary reservoir of cultural and human wealth. Yet it is also marked by populism, authoritarianism, polarization, corruption, poverty, exile, violence, and disillusionment. It has youth, but too often lacks a common project. It has memory, yet is sometimes manipulated by competing narratives. It has faith, yet does not always succeed in translating that faith into culture. It has democracy, but often without the moral habits that make democracy sustainable.

For that reason, we believe the cultural battle is not a luxury. It is an urgent necessity.

This is not about repeating the labels of Left or Right. Nor is it about constructing an ideological refuge. We seek to bring together people with different perspectives and different voices around a shared foundation: human dignity, responsible freedom, truth, beauty, justice, democracy, family, community, transcendence, and culture as a space for human flourishing.

The publication seeks to bring together established intellectuals, university professors, journalists, writers, and young students. We want interviews with leading thinkers to appear alongside essays by young people who are just beginning to find their voice. We want a professor to explain Hegel, a young woman to discover a Kipling short story, a philosopher to write about beauty, a critic to reflect on a television series, a student to write about the hope of returning to Venezuela, and someone to explain

Chesterton or Ratzinger without turning them into museum pieces.

That combination is part of the project's identity.

Short, Clear, and Profound Essays

In our style guide, we emphasize one central idea: writing for **El Céspedes Verde** is not about impressing readers —it is about enlightening them.

We ask for concise essays, typically between 600 and 900 words. They should be clear, focused, centered on a single idea, enriched with examples, and written with a strong sense of rhythm. We are not looking for academic papers disguised as articles. Nor are we interested in hastily formed opinions without substance. We are aiming for something more difficult: serious thought expressed in accessible language.

Simplicity is not superficiality. It is a form of intellectual charity.

An essay published on our platform should be something a university student can read during a break in the day and come away with a question that lingers. It should unsettle the reader a little. It should help them see more clearly. It should open a window.

That is why we have published and developed essays on the **Overton Window**, explaining how the unthinkable gradually becomes acceptable; on Zygmunt Bauman's concept of **liquid society**, to understand why human relationships have become increasingly fragile; on the many "**post-**" eras —postmodernity, post-truth, post-Christianity, and posthumanism— to ask why

an entire civilization now seems to define itself by what it has left behind; on **George Orwell**, to reflect on surveillance that no longer watches us from the wall but from our own pockets; on **A Clockwork Orange** and **The Wave**, using film as a moral diagnosis of our age; on beauty, to remind us that a society without **beauty** becomes sadder and more aggressive; and on **Paideia**, to recover the idea of education as the formation of the soul rather than merely vocational training.

We have also published interviews with thinkers such as Peter Kreeft, Fernando Savater, Montserrat Herrero, Elena Álvarez, Rafael Gómez Pérez, and Víctor Hugo Pérez Gallo. In each case, our goal is the same: to take profound ideas and turn them into living conversation —to allow philosophy, politics, faith, culture, and everyday life to speak to one another once again.

An Oasis Amid the Algorithm

We live in the age of the algorithm. And the algorithm has no soul. It measures clicks, engagement, reactions, and consumption. It rewards whatever provokes outrage, arouses emotion, deepens division, or oversimplifies reality. It was not designed to lead us toward the truth, but to keep us inside the feed.

That is why we need spaces where we can write, read, and think.

El Césped es Verde aspires to be a small oasis —a place where not everything is designed to provoke outrage. A place where readers can pause. Where a song, a film, a parable, an essay, an interview, or even a single fact can become an occasion for reflection.

We are not naïve. We know we must be present on social media. We know we must communicate well. We know that young people live on digital platforms. But we do not want the algorithm to define the soul of this project. We want to use the tools of our age without bowing to their logic.

Our question is not simply, How do we reach more people? Our question is, How do we cultivate better readers, better citizens, and better human beings?

Visibility without community quickly fades. Community without truth becomes a tribe. Truth without accessible language remains locked away. That is why we need all three: reach, community, and depth.

Creative Minorities

Joseph Ratzinger spoke on several occasions about **creative minorities**: small groups capable of preserving and renewing a culture when the majority is swept along by inertia. He was not referring to arrogant elites or insular communities closed in on themselves. He was speaking of people and communities with sufficient interior life, moral clarity, and cultural creativity to safeguard what is essential and make it fruitful once again.

That idea lies at the heart of **El Césped es Verde**.

We want to be part of a network of Ibero-American creative minorities: young people, professors, writers, journalists, organizations, universities, media outlets, and readers who refuse to surrender to nihilism. People who reject the notion that everything can be reduced to fashion, power, narrative, or consumption. People who believe that civilization is sustained by things that seem small: an honest conversation, a family that endures, a

professor who teaches well, an essay that sheds light, a community that cares, a word that is given and kept, a thoughtful question.

In his poem *The Just*, Jorge Luis Borges speaks of those who save the world without knowing it: the one who tends a garden, the one who gives thanks for a piece of music, the one who prefers that others be right, the one who gently strokes a sleeping animal. That intuition is profoundly true. Civilizations are not saved only in parliaments or at international summits. They are also saved in classrooms, homes, libraries, conversations, journals, digital publications, circles of friends, and small communities that continue doing good even when the world seems determined to forget it.

Structure and Themes

The publication is organized around several thematic areas.

The first is **living philosophy**: essays that explain authors, ideas, and enduring questions without unnecessary jargon. We want to write about Plato, Aristotle, Saint Augustine, Hegel, Tocqueville, Chesterton, Lewis, Ratzinger, Bauman, and Byung-Chul Han as thinkers who still have something to teach us about how to live.

The second is **culture and literature**: analyses of short stories, novels, poems, songs, films, and television series. Literature is not an escape from reality; a form of moral knowledge. That is why an H. G. Wells short story can help us think about persuasion; Kipling can reveal the invisible boundaries of power; a film such as *The Wave* can expose the allure of extremism; and a song can speak of wounds, the mud, and hope.

The third is **politics with a soul**: democracy, authoritarianism, populism, human rights, the state, power, and freedom. But we do not want merely to analyze elections. We want to explore the cultural roots of politics. What kind of person does a democracy require? What habits sustain it? What happens when freedom is separated from truth? Why do political extremes resemble one another more than they realize?

The fourth is **everyday life**: family, friendship, love, work, technology, attention, fatigue, social media, children, loneliness. For this is where the cultural battle is also fought —not only in great speeches, but in how we look at our phones, how we argue, how we love, how we care for our elders, how we raise our children, and how we practice silence.

The fifth is **the interview** as an encounter. We want to engage in conversation with people who think differently, with those who have something to teach, and with those who have devoted their lives to seeking truth. The interview makes possible something that is increasingly rare today: listening.

Alliances and Network

An Ibero-American project cannot stand alone. That is why we are seeking partnerships with websites, universities, organizations, and publications that share some of this concern for democracy, culture, and the education of young people.

We have explored opportunities for cooperation with platforms such as *Diálogo Político*, a platform of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation for democratic dialogue in Latin America, built around values such as freedom, solidarity, and justice.²

2 <https://dialogopolitico.org/>

We are also interested in collaborating with media outlets and websites such as **El Montonero** in Peru, **La Patilla** in Venezuela, **El Herald** in Mexico, **The European Conservative**, which publishes on philosophy, politics, art, and contemporary affairs from a European perspective,³ and with institutions such as **CEU CEFAS** in Spain, dedicated to education and social analysis based on the principles of the Church's Social Doctrine.⁴

Together with organizations from the *Red por la Verdad y la Libertad* (Network for Truth and Freedom) and other civic and cultural initiatives throughout Ibero-America, we want to build an ecosystem. Not an isolated brand. A space for collaboration, the circulation of ideas, cultural translation, and education.

Our ambition is modest and enormous at the same time: to help more young people think better.

An Invitation

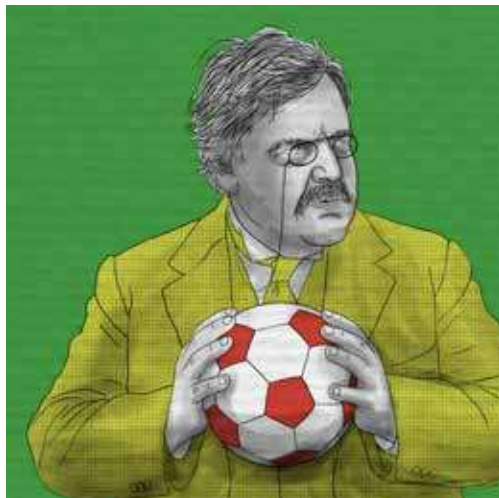
El Césped es Verde does not claim to have all the answers. It wants to ask better questions. It wants to be a place where truth is not a relic, but an adventure. Where freedom is not whim, but responsibility. Where beauty is not decoration, but nourishment. Where democracy is not an empty procedure, but a moral culture. Where young people are not treated as a market, but as a promise.

We invite those who read this article to come in, read, discuss, write, propose, and disagree. We need contributors from every Ibero-American country. Young people who want to tell what they see. Professors who want to translate their knowledge into accessible language. Writers who want to open up new worlds.

3 <https://europeanconservative.com>

4 <https://cefes.ceu.es>

Journalists who want to think beyond the immediate political moment. Readers who want to stop being spectators.



Chesterton gave us the opening image: a time will come when we will have to defend the fact that grass is green.

We believe that time is now.

And so, with joy and a sense of responsibility, we have decided to draw that little sword of common sense. Not to wound, but to clear a path. Not to impose, but to remind. Not to shout, but to calmly affirm something that remains true:

that reality exists, that truth matters, that beauty saves, that the good makes demands of us, that justice is worth defending, that democracy needs a soul, and that a generation of young people can once again look at the world with free eyes.

That is the purpose of **El Césped es Verde**.

And that is our invitation.

Juan Miguel Matheus

Post-Truth and the Crisis of Justice: From Pilatean Law to Orwellian Law

“Pilate said to him,
«What is truth?»
After he had said this,
he went back outside to the Jews
and told them,
«I find no guilt in him.»”
John, 18:38.

“The Party told you to reject
the evidence of your eyes and ears.
It was their final, most essential
command.”
1984, George Orwell.

On Thursday, September 22, 2011, His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI took his place at the speaker’s lectern in the upper house of the German Parliament. A place marked by the scars of history, and a German Pope. The Vicar of Christ on earth –the universal shepherd of the Catholic Church– was present in the temple of popular sovereignty in his native land. The symbols of God and Caesar were brought together within the same civic chamber.

Christianophobic Europe, which for decades had been in freefall toward secularism and nihilism, was consumed with anticipation over the outcome of that parliamentary session. As expected, the former professor of theology did not disappoint. He spoke without preamble and for only a few minutes. With the simplicity born of a desire to convey truth humbly, the Pope prompted an examination of conscience for all humanity: a reflection on law and the foundations of law amid a relativistic, positivist, and postmodern civilization. And although it is impossible to plumb the full depth of his words in just a few lines, I want to quote him at length in order to clearly delineate the moral coordinates that animate this article. He said:

“Allow me to begin my reflections on the foundations of law (*Recht*) with a brief story from sacred Scripture. In the First Book of the Kings, it is recounted that God invited the young King Solomon, on his accession to the throne, to make a request. What will the young ruler ask for at this important moment? Success, wealth, long life, destruction of his enemies? He chooses none of these things. Instead, he asks for a listening heart so that he may govern God’s people, and discern between good and evil (cf. 1 Kg 3:9). Through this story, the Bible wants to tell us what should ultimately matter for a politician. His fundamental criterion and the motivation for his work as a politician must not be success, and certainly not material gain. Politics must be a striving for justice, and hence it has to establish the fundamental preconditions for peace. Naturally a politician will seek success, without which he would have no opportunity for effective political action at all. Yet success is subordinated to the criterion of justice, to the will to do what is right, and to the understanding of what is right. Success can also be seductive and thus can open up the path towards the falsification of what is right, towards the destruction of justice. “Without justice —what else is

the State but a great band of robbers?“, as Saint Augustine once said. We Germans know from our own experience that these words are no empty spectre. We have seen how power became divorced from right, how power opposed right and crushed it, so that the State became an instrument for destroying right, a highly organized band of robbers, capable of threatening the whole world and driving it to the edge of the abyss. To serve right and to fight against the dominion of wrong is and remains the fundamental task of the politician. At a moment in history when man has acquired previously inconceivable power, this task takes on a particular urgency. Man can destroy the world. He can manipulate himself. He can, so to speak, make human beings and he can deny them their humanity. How do we recognize what is right? How can we discern between good and evil, between what is truly right and what may appear right? Even now, Solomon’s request remains the decisive issue facing politicians and politics today.”¹

Serving the law and combating the rule of injustice is and remains the fundamental duty of the politician, and it is necessary to prevent the state from becoming a great band of robbers... But why the question of the foundations of law? Because the crisis of democracy, which affects professional politicians and citizens alike, cannot be fully understood without examining the crisis of law. The latter has been the framework that –naturally– has given political power its structure, legitimacy, and limits.² In this

1 Benedicto XVI, Address of his Holiness Benedict XVI, Reichstag Building, Berlin 2011, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/es/speeches/2011/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20110922_reichstag-berlin.html.

2 This subject has been extensively studied by various scholars. However, I believe it is important to highlight the contribution of André Hauriou, for whom the purpose of Constitutional Law is “the legal framework

article, I intend to examine how the law of the Western tradition –originally grounded without hesitation in philosophical anthropology and metaphysics– has undergone a process of degradation. In particular, I will coin and develop two concepts to examine some concrete forms of its decomposition: Pilatean law, which evades truth under the “dogma” of moral neutrality, and Orwellian law, which turns the law into an instrument of ideological manipulation and totalitarian domination. Mi objetivo es desentrañar las causas y consecuencias de estas crisis que se retroalimentan, mostrando cómo la pérdida de cimentación en la verdad y en la justicia ha llevado al vaciamiento del derecho y al debilitamiento del orden democrático. Para ello, el artículo se dividirá en tres partes. Primero, abordaré la crisis espiritual de la democracia y su relación con la crisis del derecho. Luego, definiré qué entiendo por *derecho pilático* y por *derecho orwelliano*, examinando sus características principales. Y a continuación, explicaré cómo se ha producido esta degradación espiritual del derecho, sus efectos en las sociedades y los riesgos que conlleva para la democracia. No plantearé conclusiones porque los problemas aquí tratados permanecerán como cuestiones abiertas a los desafíos éticos de nuestro tiempo.

My aim is to unravel the causes and consequences of these mutually reinforcing crises, showing how the loss of a foundation in truth and justice has led to the hollowing out of the law and the weakening of the democratic order. To this end, the article will be divided into three parts. First, I will address the spiritual crisis of democracy and its relationship to the crisis of law. I will then define what I mean by Pilatean law and Orwellian law, examining their main characteristics. Finally, I will explain how this spiritual

of political phenomena.” Cfr. André Hauriou, *Derecho constitucional e instituciones políticas*, trad. José Antonio González Casanova, Ariel, Barcelona, 1971, 17.

degradation of the law has occurred, its effects on societies, and the risks it poses to democracy. I will not offer any conclusions, because the issues addressed here will remain open questions in the face of the ethical challenges of our time.

I. Introduction: The Spiritual Crisis of Democracy and Its Reflection in the Spiritual Crisis of Law.

1. The Spiritual Crisis of Democracy

Liberal democracy has been the dominant political model in the West since the Enlightenment. Its fundamental promise is that of a system based on individual freedom, respect for human dignity, and the pursuit of the common good through institutions legitimized by popular consent and the intrinsic justice of laws.

However, today this model is facing a profound crisis that cannot be explained solely in political or institutional terms. It is a spiritual crisis insofar as it affects the ethical and philosophical foundations upon which democracy was built. Perhaps for this reason, anticipating such a situation, John Paul II pointed out that the Church does not canonize democracy, but rather values it as a form in which justice is historically realized.³

When I speak of a spiritual crisis, I am referring to the loss of purpose in political life, the relativization of human values, and the breakdown of the idea of the common good. I am not referring to accidental difficulties in technical, economic, or governance matters. It is a crisis of “meaning” that entails doubts about

3 “In any case, Catholic social ethics supports the democratic solution in principle, because it better reflects the rational and social nature of the human person, as I have already noted. But it is far from —this should be made clear— «canonizing” this system.» Juan Pablo II, *Memoria e Identidad*, La esfera de los libros, Madrid, 2005, 95.

the reasons why democracy should exist, as well as collective blindness about what must be done to create and maintain a just political order.⁴

One of the clearest signs of this crisis is the erosion of the notion of truth in the public sphere. Over time, democratic debate has revolved around rational deliberation and the effort to reach consensus based on objective criteria for approximating social reality. But today, relativism has displaced this model, giving rise to a moral climate in which truth is regarded as a subjective and manipulable construct. It is the “weak democracy”,⁵ of weak thought; all of this has generated a sea of uncertainty and weakened societies’ ability to resolve conflicts peacefully of weak thought; all of this has generated a sea of uncertainty and weakened societies’ ability to resolve conflicts peacefully.⁶ Democracy has fallen into a “morass of relativism,” as Eric Voegelin would put it.⁷ Or, to frame it in *Straussian* terms, it has become mired in the tragedy of guiding the historical action of a people by mere opinions—even when they are those of the majority —rather than by truth.⁸

4 Walter F. Murphy, *Constitutional Democracy: Creating and Maintaining a Just Political Order*, Johns Hopkins University Press, United States, 2008.

5 Julio Borges Junyet y Javier Ormazabal Echeverría, *La posmodernidad en jaque: un debate entre C.S. Lewis y Gianni Vattimo*, Libros Libres, Madrid, 2023, 299.

6 “In this regard, it should be noted that if there is no ultimate truth to guide and direct political action, then human ideas and convictions can easily be instrumentalized for the pursuit of power. A democracy without values can readily become an overt or covert form of totalitarianism, as history demonstrates.” Juan Pablo II, *Centesimus Annus*, n. 46.

7 Eric Voegelin, *Introduction to the New Science of Politics*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1952, 14.

8 Leo Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1959, 343.

Another fundamental aspect of this crisis is the transformation of the concept of freedom. Whereas in the classical and liberal tradition, freedom was linked to responsibility and to the citizen's obligation to participate in the pursuit of the common good, today it has been turned into a subjective notion that is often understood as a license to act without restrictions or reference to objective standards of justice. This is a distortion of freedom—left-wing and/or right-wing license—that has contributed to the individualistic atomization of societies, the retreat from public life, and a profound loss of civic identity that should be something Western democratic citizens can share with one another.

The third expression of this crisis to which I wish to refer is the denaturalization of justice. Here it is enough to say that, in the democracy of our times, justice is—as Thrasymachus would shamelessly put it in Book I of Plato's *Republic*—"nothing but the advantage of the stronger," that is, to the ruler (power), who is never wrong in his will to dominate.⁹

And, as is evident, a democracy in which truth, freedom, and justice have become blurred is condemned to spiritual sickness...

2. The Spiritual Crisis of Law

The spiritual crisis of democracy is not an isolated phenomenon. It is directly linked to—and gives life to—the spiritual crisis of law. As I have noted above, law has been, is, and will continue to be the normative and institutional framework that has enabled democracies to function with legal rationality,

9 The quote is: "Justice is nothing but the advantage of the stronger." Platón, *La República*, trad. José Ortega y Gasset, Editorial Gredos, Madrid, 1954, 147.

in a predictable manner,¹⁰ while providing moral protection to the weakest. It has not been merely a set of rules or written texts, but rather a system of practical-prudential guidelines designed to make justice, civic stability, and the protection of human rights possible.

However, law has gradually been emptied of its substance. A relativistic democracy requires, as its instrumental cause, a relativistic law. For this reason, law has been turned into a formal instrument, used to justify any political decision under the pretexts of the proper application of positivist procedures and the necessary prevalence of majorities. All of this has deprived law—or, to put it more bluntly, castrated it—of its sources of substantive and natural legitimacy.

For this reason, in this context, it is essential to examine how law has evolved from its classical conceptions to its current state of crisis. Doing so will provide a better understanding of the causes of the degradation of law and allow us to explore possible solutions for restoring its role as the backbone of a spiritually healthy, non-relativistic democracy.

II. Pilatean Law and Orwellian Law: Definitions and Characteristics

1. Pilatean Law: Evasion of Truth and Moral Neutrality

By coining the term *Pilatean law*, I am referring to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea who, when faced with his own question about what truth is, chose to wash his hands and leave

10 Tom Ginsburg and Aziz Z. Huq, *How to Save a Constitutional Democracy*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2018.

it to the crowd to decide whether Barabbas or Jesus of Nazareth should die.

In legal terms, this model of law is characterized by an attitude of indifference toward truth and ethics, to say nothing of metaphysics... It is based on the idea that law should not commit itself to any objective conception of truth or the good, but should limit itself to regulating the procedures through which political decisions are made and the supreme will of the majority emerges. It claims to be neutral on matters of values and has been defended to the utmost by thinkers in the legal positivist tradition.

In this regard, it is well known that more than ninety years ago, in the distant year of 1934, Hans Kelsen's book *The Essence and Value of Democracy* was published. The book brings together a pair of essays that represent the summum of Kelsenian thought on democracy and on the philosophy that, in his view, should animate every democratic and constitutional system. He writes:

(...) if it is stated that truth and absolute values are inaccessible to human cognition, at least not only one's own opinion but also the opinion of others, and even a contrary one, must be considered possible. Therefore, the philosophical view presupposed by democracy is relativism.¹¹

And he continues:

In the eighteenth chapter of the Gospel of Saint John, an episode from the life of Jesus is described. The narrative –simple, yet lapidary in its naivety– belongs to the most sublime creations of world literature, and, without intending

11 Hans Kelsen, *Esencia y valor de la democracia*, Editorial Labor, Barcelona y Buenos Aires, 1934, 156 (Own translation)...

to, it dramatically symbolizes relativism and democracy. It is during the season of Passover when Jesus, accused of calling himself the Son of God and King of the Jews, appears before Pilate, the Roman governor. Pilate ironically asks him who, in the eyes of a Roman, could only be a poor madman: “Are you then the King of the Jews?” And Jesus answers, with deep conviction and illuminated by his divine mission: “You say that I am. I am a king, born and come into the world to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” Then Pilate, that man of an old, exhausted, and therefore skeptical culture, asks in turn: “What is truth?” And since he does not know what truth is, and as a Roman is accustomed to thinking democratically, he turns to the people and holds a plebiscite. He went out to the Jews and said to them: “I find no guilt in him. But you have a custom that I should release someone to you at the Passover. Do you want me then to release to you the King of the Jews?” The plebiscite went against Jesus. They all cried out in response: “Not this man, but Barabbas!” The chronicler adds: “Now Barabbas was a robber.” Perhaps the partisans of autocracy will object that this very example speaks more against than in favor of democracy. This objection is worthy of respect, albeit on one condition: that they, for their part, are as convinced of their political truth —and prepared, if necessary, to seal it with their blood— as the Son of God was of his.¹²

However, this supposed neutrality is itself a position. By avoiding taking a position on fundamental questions of justice, *Pilatean law* leaves the way open for political power to impose its own worldview without any limitation whatsoever. In other

12 Hans Kelsen, *Esencia y valor de la democracia*, 158-159 (Own translation)..

words, law becomes an instrument of injustice at the service of those who wield power.

But it is also well known that, more than sixty years after Kelsen's assertions, another German-speaking thinker, Joseph Ratzinger, critically addressed this issue in order to illustrate the tragedy of a constitutional democracy hollowed out of values:

The Austrian jurist (Kelsen), father of political positivism and champion of the relativist position, sets forth his view when commenting on a Gospel passage: the passage from the Gospel of Saint John in which Pilate asks Jesus, "What is truth?" (*John* 18:38). Pilate's question is a question only in appearance. In reality, it is a categorical answer that could be formulated as follows: truth is unattainable. The proof lies in the fact that he does not wait for an answer, but instead turns to the crowd so that they may decide a difficult question by vote. Through this maneuver, Pilate expresses the necessary skepticism of the politician, who must be distrustful, incredulous, indifferent, disinterested, and cold. His creed is to believe in nothing: neither truth nor goodness nor justice. By proceeding as he does, Pilate behaves as a perfect democrat. The perfect democrat must shrug his shoulders—or wash his hands—in the face of moral dilemmas and pass them on to the majority, which is the source, origin, principle, and root of value. An exemplary figure of relativistic and hollow democracy: that is Pilate. As such, he disdains relying on truth or the good. His only support is procedure. Kelsen does not seem troubled by the fact that the democrat Pilate, acting with impeccable democratic propriety and without moral scruples, brings about the death of an innocent man. Since there is no truth or good beyond that of the majority, there is no point in asking whether its decisions are just or legitimate. To send a righteous man to his death, all that is

needed is the majority's approval —in other words, sufficient support. Kelsen went so far as to defend the need to impose relativist certainty, with blood and tears if necessary. One must firmly believe in the necessity of believing in nothing. Therein lies the superficial democratic imperative.¹³

The contrast between the quotations reproduced above is overwhelming. It brings two ethical visions of human life and political coexistence into confrontation. For now, it is enough to say that both account for the spiritual crisis of democracy and of law, including law in its *Pilatean* form. Kelsen does so pathologically, just before the most devastating consequences of moral relativism in Europe came to pass: National Socialist and Communist totalitarianism. Ratzinger does so from practical experience —with the historical weight of the wounds inflicted by totalitarian regimes— and with a therapeutic outlook and an ethical prescription for the future of humanity.

2. Orwellian Law: Ideological Manipulation of Law.

Orwellian law represents an extreme degree of corruption of law: law is transformed into an instrument for the ideological control of the human person. By this term, I am referring to George Orwell's 1984, in which language and reality are manipulated to consolidate the power of a totalitarian regime¹⁴. In this context, Orwellian law distorts legal reasoning and, moreover, imposes a single worldview, suppressing any dissent and legitimizing the restriction of fundamental freedoms —in a Gnostic manner, as Francisco Plaza would put it in his profound work *The Silence of*

13 Joseph Ratzinger, *Verdad, valores, poder. Piedras de toque de la sociedad pluralista*, Ediciones Rialp, Madrid, 1995, 28-29.

14 George Orwell, *1984*, trad. Rafael Vázquez Zamora, Ediciones Destino, Barcelona, 2003.

*Democracy*¹⁵— in the name of the “human good,” the “common good,” or “democracy.” Orwellian law is the law of Hitler, Stalin, and totalitarian systems.

Unlike *Pilatean law*, which evades truth and takes shelter behind moral neutrality, *Orwellian law* goes a step further: it constructs a “new” legal truth, reinterpreting essential concepts such as “justice,” “human rights,” and “freedom” to fit a given ideological agenda. In this process, law becomes a means of social engineering designed to shape society according to a pre-established worldview. It is the death of metaphysics in social life.

This phenomenon manifests itself in contemporary democracies, in which law has been used, for example, to restrict freedom of expression, freedom of conscience, and freedom of association, under the pretext of combating “dangerous” or “anti-democratic” speech. Through this mechanism, the law ceases to serve as a guarantor of pluralism and becomes a weapon of exclusion and repression. Any position that does not conform to the official narrative is silenced, censored, or even criminalized on the grounds that it represents a threat to the democratic order and pluralism. And, of course, the full institutional and coercive power of the state is brought to bear in this direction, violating the conscience of the human person; this is a reality in many of today’s “constitutional powers.”

15 This subject has been broadly studied by Francisco Plaza, *El silencio de la democracia*, Los Libros de El Nacional, Caracas, 2011.

2.1. *The Manipulation of Legal Language and Its Impact on Society*

One of the fundamental characteristics of *Orwellian law* is the manipulation of legal language. In 1984, George Orwell describes the concept of *Newspeak*: a strategy of distorting people's perception of reality through which the ruling regime transforms the meaning of words in order to consolidate its power and alienate human consciousness altogether.

In the legal sphere, this translates into the redefinition of fundamental principles of the constitutional tradition. Terms such as "equality," "tolerance," "human rights," or "democracy" cease to have an objective meaning and are reinterpreted according to the dominant ideology. They become whatever serves those in power. For example, in many countries, the concept of fundamental rights has been redefined to include new categories of rights based not on human nature, but on ideological constructs. I will examine this in greater depth later.

Moreover, this manipulation of law affects the legal sphere but also extends to education, the media, and culture, creating a single "constitutionally protected and guaranteed" mode of thought. In this sense, *Orwellian law* seeks not merely to shape laws, but above all to seize control of consciences by establishing a model of the "ideal" citizen who must conform to official narratives. It is a distorted way of circumventing the old Aristotelian dilemma of how to attain the best form of government, in which the good man and the good citizen coincide in the same human being.¹⁶

16 Leo Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1959, 356.

2.2. Law as an Instrument of Social Control

Under *Orwellian law*, constitutions and statutes become instruments for legitimizing the expansion of the state into the private and social lives of citizens¹⁷. This can be seen in various public falsehoods that, under the guise of promoting rights or advancing official state agendas, impose restrictions on individual freedoms.

For example, in certain contemporary democracies, legislation has been enacted that limits freedom of expression, restricts public debate, and generates self-censorship, leading citizens to prefer remaining silent rather than risk punishment by the state's punitive machinery.

Another troubling aspect of *Orwellian law* is its impact on the educational system. Instead of fostering critical thinking and pluralism, many educational institutions have adopted teaching programs designed to inculcate a specific vision of society, excluding any alternative perspective—all without respecting, for example, the natural right of parents to determine the essential parameters of their children's education. In this way, education becomes indoctrination, never intellectual formation or liberation: it is the creation of a new human being¹⁸.

Finally, *Orwellian law* tends to concentrate power in supposedly independent bodies, such as constitutional courts

17 "To the extent that civil society, or the political body, has become more clearly differentiated from the spiritual realm of the Church—a process that is simply the development of the distinction between what belongs to Caesar and what belongs to God—," Jacques Maritain, *El hombre y el Estado*, trad. José Luis López, Ediciones Rialp, Madrid, 1951, 129.

18 Rafael Tomás Caldera, *La formación intelectual*, Editorial Monte Ávila, Caracas, 1977, 15–21.

or international organizations, which act —as one might call them— as ideological arbiters. They are employed so that groups of unelected “ideologues,” who impose their worldview without genuine popular support, can make key decisions concerning the social and political life of nations. I will return to this point later.

2.3. *The Ultimate Consequence of Orwellian Law: Democracy as a Legal Fiction*

The ultimate result of this Orwellian process is the transformation of democracy into a legal fiction. Citizens may vote, but their decisions have no bearing on the fate of nations. The formal structure of the democratic system —elections, parliaments, courts— remains in place, but political debate is reduced to a simulation in which all options are predetermined by the prevailing ideology and by what is deemed “politically correct.” Democracy becomes a façade concealing a system of one-track thinking, all the more monolithic the more power the Big Brother of the day —political, economic, cultural, or media— has accumulated.

Orwellian law is the endpoint of a long process of legal degradation. It begins with *Pilatean law*, which relativizes truth, and culminates in a system in which legal truth is constructed according to the needs of those in power, in order to control the conscience and conduct of citizens. And even to smuggle in the transition from a democratic regime to an autocratic one.

III. The Spiritual Degradation of Law

The transition from law in its classical conception to *Pilatean law*, and from the latter to *Orwellian law*, represents a degradation that is spiritual in nature because it entails the loss of the fundamental principles that give meaning to the political

and legal order, giving rise to various problems such as: (i) the hollowing out of law and the loss of its legitimacy, (ii) the erosion of the cultural identity of nations and social fragmentation, and (iii) the risk of authoritarianism.

1. The Hollowing Out of Law and the Loss of Its Legitimacy

One of the principal effects of this degradation is the hollowing out of law. As law becomes detached from justice, it becomes violence.¹⁹ It loses its ability to generate political legitimacy and guarantee social stability.

Law ceases to be a mechanism for protecting human dignity and becomes a means of imposing power, ideology, agendas, lies... And this, as one would expect, breeds distrust in institutions and weakens the rule of law: citizens cease to believe in the impartiality of the legal system.

In a society where law has been emptied of substance, a crisis of legitimacy arises that can lead to the radicalization of political conflicts and the collapse of the democratic order. Without an objective foundation of justice, law becomes a battleground in which different groups seek to impose their will without reference to universal principles or even common sense. The capacity to find common ground and reach consensus is lost.²⁰

19 "Human laws have the force of law insofar as they are derived from natural law. But if, at any point, a human law departs from natural law, it is no longer a law, but rather a corruption of law." Santo Tomás de Aquino, *Suma Teológica*, I-II, q. 96, a. 4, trad. Padres de la Provincia Dominicana Inglesa, Nueva York: Benziger Brothers, 1947.

20 "Only by defeating autocratic regimes do societies tend, through a kind of civic intuition, to organize human coexistence around the Constitution, concord, the center, and consensus," Juan Miguel Matheus, interview

2. The Erosion of Cultural Identity and Social Fragmentation

Another effect of the degradation of law is the erosion of the cultural identity of democratic societies. Naturally, law reflects the culture and values of a given political community. However, when law is used as an instrument of social domination, it becomes a means of destroying the traditions and values that have historically sustained societies.

Orwellian law, in particular, is characterized by the promotion of policies that seek to redefine the fundamental principles upon which the culture of a people has been built. This includes removing references to history and national identity from constitutional and legal texts and interpretations, or adding new, false, or artificial elements that are fictionally presented as part of that history.²¹

And this erosion of cultural identity generates social fragmentation because it destroys the bonds that unite citizens within a political community. Without a shared foundation of values and principles, society fragments into a multitude of groups with opposing worldviews, making democratic coexistence and

by Isabella Sanfuentes, "Political Change in Venezuela Points to Two Tasks in Parallel: Achieving Democracy and Rebuilding State Capacity," *Democratización*, Año 6, n.º 32, diciembre 2024, 8.

- 21 The replacement of portraits of Simón Bolívar with those of Hugo Chávez in some official spaces in Venezuela has been a subject of political debate and symbolism. This change took place during Chávez's administration as part of his Bolivarian Revolution project, seeking to emphasize his vision of historical continuity between Bolívar and his own leadership. Bolívar's portrait, traditionally displayed in public institutions, was in some cases replaced with images of Chávez. See: "Develan versión digital del rostro de Simón Bolívar," *BBC News Mundo*, July 24, 2012, accessed March 26, 2025, https://www.bbc.com/mundo/ultimas_noticias/2012/07/120724_ulntot_bolivar_rostro_mr.

dialogue more difficult. It is a loss of memory and identity, as John Paul II warned.²²

3. The Risk of Authoritarianism

Finally, the degradation of law leads to a crisis of democracy insofar as it weakens the principles that guarantee its stability. When law exists to serve power rather than the other way around, and when power takes precedence over truth and justice, the door is opened to authoritarianism²³.

Democratic systems can function only if objective limits exist on the exercise of power.²⁴ However, in a context of Pilatean or Orwellian law, these limits disappear, allowing regimes to become entrenched that, although they retain the appearance of democracies, in practice function as authoritarian systems; and, what is worse, some of them may be embraced by citizens and enjoy high levels of popularity.²⁵

22 John Paul II, *Memoria e Identidad*, La Esfera de los Libros, Madrid, 2005.

23 "Saint Thomas More is venerated as an enduring example of moral integrity. And even outside the Church, especially among those called to guide the destinies of nations, his figure is recognized as a source of inspiration for a form of politics whose supreme purpose is service to the human person." John Paul II, *E Sancti Thomae Mori*, Apostolic Letter issued *Motu Proprio* proclaiming Saint Thomas More the patron saint of statesmen and politicians, October 31, 2000, n. 1, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/es/motu_proprio/documents/hf_jp-ii_motu-proprio_20001031_thomas-more.html

24 "The State has the duty to oversee and direct the exercise of human rights in the economic sphere; however, it must not supplant individual initiative, but rather ensure that it develops within a framework of justice and solidarity." John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, no. 47.

25 "The success of totalitarianism depends on its ability to mobilize the masses, not as individuals with interests of their own, but as a homogeneous entity shaped by propaganda and terror." Hannah Arendt,

Under these circumstances, elections and institutions (parliament, the courts, etc.) become mechanisms for validating injustices that are manifestations of the existential and spiritual voids within democracy.

Los orígenes del totalitarismo, trad. Guillermo Solana, Alianza Editorial, Madrid, 2006, 57.

Francisco Del Campo

An Overview of the West

What does a nation need in order to thrive? More specifically, what do Western nations need today? More precisely still, what is it that our Hispanic American nations need?

At the beginning of this millennium, we find ourselves facing a West that has been battered: divided by wars, but above all shaken and disoriented in its very identity.¹ When we turn to the challenges confronting our nations in the Americas, we see, moreover, that we suffer not only from the afflictions of a culture that has been denigrated, but also from the hardships of structural poverty affecting millions of people.² In this context, there are many challenges that must be addressed if an American nation is to recover and move forward. Yet I would like to focus on one

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- 1 We also see a Europe that is less secular, though not more Christian; rather, it is becoming increasingly Islamized. This has given rise to cultural reactions that, at least for now, have not yet resulted in a genuine spiritual renewal of the Catholic faith.
 - 2 How is it possible that countries with Catholic majorities continue to experience so much injustice? What is this, if not the personal inconsistency of their leaders and citizens? This happens when faith is lived as nothing more than a Sunday adornment, rather than as the leaven of the heart that transforms every aspect of a person's life.

aspect that cuts across the whole of the West and that, I believe, is the root cause of all the others: its spiritual life.

Our countries are currently undergoing a cultural and political shift. We come from decades in which not only left-wing governments have predominated politically, but also a worldview marked by a collectivist tendency, in which the state has played a central role in the political and cultural life of these countries. The economic, social, and moral failures of the political left in the Americas eventually carried over into the political arena. The political outcomes of the past three years (in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, the unsuccessful cases of Ecuador, the possible results in Colombia, and so on) have reflected this shift toward the political right or center-right. And what can be said of the cultural sphere? Social media has given a voice to thinkers who had no place in the traditional media. This has made it possible for worldviews to gain wider exposure that have neutralized —and even countered— the dominance of the messages that state-backed media campaigns had previously been able to establish with relative ease through traditional media outlets.

That said, it is one thing to observe this cultural and political shift —which is fairly evident today— and quite another to consider its nature: Is it taking place in the best possible way? Is it unfolding in a sustainable manner? Is it happening in a way capable of rebuilding nations that have been deeply weakened —not only morally, but also socially, economically, and institutionally?

This is where I believe the answer —and the path forward for our countries— cannot be merely political, cultural, or social. It must also be spiritual. I will approach this subject from observations I have made personally, while also drawing on the thought of someone I hold in particularly high regard: Emmanuel Mounier, the father of communitarian personalism, who was

one of the twentieth century's foremost advocates of personalist thought, above all through his tireless work and, especially, through the witness of his own life.

I would therefore like to offer a few reflections on the contribution of spirituality to today's public debate —something as unusual as it is necessary— by presenting several aspects of Mounier's thought that I believe are prophetic for our time, and by explaining why he remains so relevant to the challenges facing our nations.

Mounier and His Time

I propose that we take a closer look at the thought and life of Mounier. Most biographies of Mounier emphasize the witness of his life even more than his thought. Mounier was never concerned with constructing a closed philosophical system. He died young (1905–1950) and never had the opportunity to produce a comprehensive conceptual synthesis. Yet his witness proved —and continues to prove— inspiring to many.

He was born in Grenoble, a small town in France. He lived through the two World Wars, the Communist Revolution, and the Great Depression. He also experienced a secularized France amid the rise of both left-wing and right-wing totalitarianisms, in an environment dominated by a materialist and individualistic culture.

Within this complex context, he founded the journal *Esprit* in 1932, creating a center for reflection on and the dissemination of personalist ideas. He demonstrated a profound commitment to reflecting on the major events of his time, engaging in dialogue with intellectuals from widely differing worldviews: Catholics, Marxists, Jews, anarchists, and others. His aim was to reflect

upon and promote communitarian personalism, which expresses a vision of the human person as unique and irreplaceable, yet one who does not attain fulfillment in isolation, but in communion with others.

Mounier sought to build a community of thinkers who would place the human person at the center, above the collectivist logics that emphasized the role of the state and above the individualism reinforced by the logic of the market. For Mounier, neither the state nor the market, but rather the human person, must stand at the center of a society's reflection and action. To place the human person at the center —not alone, not in an isolated or individualistic way, but together with others. Together with others, yet not in the collectivist manner of the totalitarianisms of either the Left or the Right.

Here the reader may begin to see why a thinker such as Mounier can shed light on today's debates. We currently find ourselves engaged in a debate over the proper role of the state and the limits that should be placed on individual freedom. Public discourse, both in the media and on social media, has become polarized between the role the state ought to play and the degree of freedom the market requires. Depending on where we stand, we find ourselves choosing between an "active state" and a "ruthless market," or between "a market that demands freedom" and "a massive, overbearing state."

In response to the deification of the state advocated by the collectivisms of both the Left and the Right, in their various forms, and to the deification of the market by proponents of a more individualistic liberalism, Mounier proposed something that remains profoundly relevant today: placing the human person at the center —but not in isolation, rather in communion with others. In other words, neither persons nor society can truly

flourish where collectivist systems subordinate the person to an all-encompassing structure, causing the concrete individual to disappear and be sacrificed for the sake of a general and abstract idea. The dignity of the person, unique and unrepeatable, can never serve as a justification or pretext for a “greater good.” It is an end in itself.

At the same time, this uniqueness of the person should not lead us to conceive of the person in individualistic terms. The person does not attain fulfillment alone, but in communion with others. To be unique is not to be individualistic.

Now, this idea of “placing the person at the center” is not fundamentally an ideological or political debate. Rather, it is a spiritual revolution. It is not so much a political, cultural, or economic program (although it may take concrete form in those spheres). For Mounier, the problem of the West is, above all, a spiritual one. And it is from that level that change must come.

Therefore, if we want to heal society at its roots, we need to transform its structures —but not primarily by adopting one system or another. Above all, what is needed is a spiritual transformation. It is worth clarifying that this spiritual focus, this spiritual revolution that Mounier proposes, is not the naïve idealism of a few well-intentioned hippies. As we have already seen, his own life and witness show that this is neither an easy nor a simplistic path: during the Vichy regime, Mounier was imprisoned for ten months because he was regarded as one of the spiritual leaders of the Resistance.

Quoting Mounier: *There is no proportion between the totality of our work and its strictly political coordinates. Politics may be urgent, but it is subordinate. The goal toward which our broadest aspirations are directed is not the happiness, comfort, or prosperity of the city, but the*

*spiritual fulfillment of the human person. If we pursue the political good, it is not because we cherish the illusion that it will secure for us a life without risk, without suffering, and without thirst. Our political action is therefore the instrument of our spiritual action, and not the other way around.*³

And in another passage, even more explicit regarding the conversion of the heart, Mounier writes: *People want revolution to be a dazzling blaze of red flames. No. Revolution is a far deeper upheaval. Metanoείτε: change the heart of your heart – and, in the world, everything that it has contaminated.*⁴

The deepest revolution is not the one brought about by bombs and the overthrow of governments, but the one that takes place in the human heart. It is something truly revolutionary that, at the same time, restores trust to the fabric of society through a renewed way of seeing oneself and others. Is it not trust, after all, what drives markets? Is it not trust that builds political alliances? Spiritual change, then, offers profound answers to the concerns of those who defend either the State or the Market at all costs.

Contributions for the Present

Turning our attention back to the present, we too hear the sounds of war. We too are confronted with forms of totalitarianism –some political, but also cultural totalitarianisms, primarily of the Left, with transnational ambitions. Through transnational organizations, the cultural agenda of the Left has gained ground over the past several decades, not only in the cultural sphere but

3 Emmanuel Mounier, “Revolución personalista y comunitaria” in *El Personalismo. Antología esencial*, Sígueme, Salamanca, 2014; p. 35.

4 Ibidem, p. 42.

also in the political and legal spheres through various international treaties.

As noted earlier, in recent years this trend has been countered by the emergence of an incipient cultural right, which has been carrying forward what many of its leading voices describe as a “cultural battle.” This cultural battle has gained ground primarily through its liberal wing, increasingly permeating society by exposing the inconsistencies and failures of the Left over recent decades. These are voices that, as already mentioned, exist outside the traditional media but that, thanks to the anarchic nature of social media, have been able to gain a place in public debate—whether by opening many people’s eyes or by giving voice to what many were already thinking. Personally, I count myself among them, and I welcome this cultural counterbalance, above all— and regardless of one’s personal beliefs —because of the totalitarian aspirations that, in my view, the Left has increasingly displayed on the global stage through its various agendas.

However, I wish to point out that, valuable though this cultural battle may be, I do not believe it is sufficient. It is necessary to take the further step that Mounier proposes: the spiritual revolution. Indeed, if the cultural battle is not rooted in a spiritual foundation, it will become a missed opportunity.

What do I mean by this?

If we respond to the culture and ideology of the Left with a counterculture of the Right, we create a counterweight that remains on the same level. We answer left-wing arguments with right-wing counterarguments. It is a battle fought at the level of ideas—a worthwhile endeavor, I insist— but not a sufficient one. It is an attempt to confront one ideology with a counter-ideology.

Yet to counter a cultural Left with a cultural Right is to enter into the dialectical framework of Marxism, which understands progress and historical development as taking place through class struggle —ultimately a materialist form of Hegelian dialectics. To enter that struggle, that battle, is to enter the Marxist game. And to enter into the dialectical game, I believe, is to concede —at least in part— that Marxism is right. It is to play by someone else's rules, which means we have already lost before the game —or the battle— even begins.

The best way to confront Marxism is not to enter into its game, but to transcend its materialist foundations. It is to change the logic radically —not by engaging in a dialectical struggle that operates on the same level, but by changing the rules of the game altogether. That requires us to adopt different frameworks, ones that are not confined to the merely material plane.

Materialism cannot be overcome with another form of materialism, but rather —as Mounier said— through the primacy of the spiritual and a technique of spiritual means.⁵

But here a crucial question arises: What kind of spirituality? The limitation I see in this cultural battle is that it is being waged

5 Jean-Marie Domenach, *Mounier According to Mounier*, Laia, Barcelona, 1973; p. 109: *Esprit* sought a “technique of spiritual means” that would break with the petty stratagems of political tacticians: nonviolence, whenever possible; steadfast service to the truth; demystification; and education wherever men and women can be formed —in the press, the school, the family, the labor union, the Church, and so forth; planting within all the vital organs of a civilization now grown sclerotic the seeds and the leaven of a new civilization. This work of infiltration, education, and witness has one indispensable precondition: each person's genuine break with the established disorder, and the continual conversion of the whole person —words, actions, and principles— in the unity of a single commitment. To make the Revolution, one must begin by revolutionizing the revolutionaries.

primarily by the liberal wing of the Right. And society will not find in liberalism, by itself, sufficient means to counter Marxist materialism through a spiritual revolution.

Not long ago, I heard some of these right-wing thinkers say that liberalism, on its own, is not enough; that we need to rediscover our Christian roots in order to defend life, liberty, and property. That perspective is most welcome. It is encouraging that liberals, too, are beginning to recognize it.

Here we come to the second point that Mounier criticized in his own time: individualism. Together with materialism, this is the other of the two great evils afflicting contemporary society. Mounier's approach also shows us something about what this spiritual revolution must be like: it cannot be individualistic or solipsistic. It is not a New Age spirituality that deifies the individual, but a genuinely Christian spirituality that, when lived authentically, transcends the individual and opens itself to others. It is a spirituality that becomes active charity.⁶ Mounier's communitarian personalism does not conceive of the fulfillment of the person in isolation. For that reason, a person's spiritual life is not fulfilled simply by becoming somewhat more reflective or by meditating a little. When we say that the person is a being who finds fulfillment with others, we mean that he or she reaches fulfillment by giving of oneself.

6 Mounier sought that “*spiritual rigor in the face of the two errors so common among Catholics in their engagement with political life: on the one hand, the temptation to flee from concrete reality and, believing themselves to be «rising» to the spiritual plane, to settle for a kind of solemn, dogmatizing dogmatism; on the other hand, the temptation to identify the eternal values of Christianity with particular historical solutions.*” Carlos Díaz, *Emmanuel Mounier. Un testimonio luminoso*, Ediciones Palabra, 2000, p. 29.

This perspective draws the human person out of the prison of individualism. It also opens the way to answering the questions that every person asks, and that the liberal worldview ultimately fails to answer. For the human person is not merely a being who needs “certain guarantees” and the means to consume goods and services. These things are undoubtedly necessary, but they are not sufficient. And if this insufficiency goes unrecognized, it may undermine the cultural shift that this cultural battle seeks to bring about.

Human beings are not motivated solely by the material well-being that a free-market society may appear to offer. Material goods alone are not enough, just as they are not enough when they are obtained through coercion and redistribution. In the face of Marxism, the human person needs freedom and spirituality. In the face of liberalism, the human person needs justice and transcendence.

Is material well-being what truly moves society? Is struggle driven by economic conditions, such as gaining control of certain ports, markets, or rights?⁷ It is the soul alone that struggles, that

7 Chesterton remarks, with his characteristic irony, something similar regarding economic materialism as the driving force of history: “Nero could not hire a hundred Christians to be eaten by lions at a shilling an hour; for men will not be martyred for money. But the vision called up by real politik, or realistic politics, is beyond example crazy and incredible. Does anybody in the world believe that a soldier says, «My leg is nearly dropping off, but I shall go on till it drops; for after all I shall enjoy all the advantages of my government obtaining a warm-water port in the Gulf of Finland.» Can anybody suppose that a clerk turned conscript says, «If I am gassed I shall probably die in torments, but it is a comfort to reflect that should I ever decide to become a pearl-diver in the South Seas, that career is now open to me and my countrymen.» Materialist history is the most madly incredible of all histories, or even of all romances. Whatever starts wars, the thing that sustains wars is something in the soul; that is something akin to religion. It is what men feel about life and about death. A man near to death is dealing directly with an absolute; it is nonsense to say he is

seeks... it is the soul alone that will be satisfied. The answers will not be found in the dance of opposites. The soul is not satisfied either by a materialist and ideological conception of justice or by the mere freedom to buy and sell without taxes. We must guard ourselves against the collectivisms that alienate our societies, but also against the self-sufficient and world-weary individualisms that fail to satisfy the human heart.

Conclusion

More than once I have heard those engaged in this cultural battle say that, historically, the Left was associated with the lower classes, whereas today it is more closely associated with the upper classes. And that is true. But what accounts for this “quasi-factual” —*quasi* because I do not have statistical evidence, only my own perception— observation? That question often goes unanswered.

Those who have benefited from greater access to goods and services find in liberalism a form of individualism that provides material goods but does not strengthen them spiritually. Yet the human heart longs for something more; the liberal offer is not enough. When people do not find sufficiently satisfying answers there, they readily turn to something that appears more “spiritual” and “transcendent”: a concept of justice. It may be ideological and mistaken —as in the version proposed by the Left— but it is nevertheless a search for justice. And that is why many have gravitated toward the cultural Left.

*concerned only with relative and remote complications that death in any case will end.” G. K. Chesterton, *El hombre eterno*; Club de Escritores, Buenos Aires, 1987, p. 166.*

We cannot attribute Gramsci's success solely to his strategy. That strategy could never have succeeded in a society that was spiritually strong.⁸

I believe that, amid these challenges, Mounier remains a guiding light for a West seeking to emerge from its cultural—and above all, spiritual—agony. The cultural battle, alongside debate and apologetics, must also be nourished by a deep spirituality. In Mounier's words: *It is the quality of our inner silence that enables our outward activity to shine; action must spring from the abundance of silence.*⁹

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- 8 Those transcendent values have not been fully conveyed by a Church that has itself, all too often, become ideologized. In any case, there are many facets to this issue, and much more could be said about it. But I will not pursue that discussion here.
- 9 Emmanuel Mounier, "Revolución personalista y comunitaria", in *El Personalismo. Antología esencial*, Sígueme, Salamanca, 2014; p. 46: *The human person needs a spirituality that does not isolate one from the temporal realities in which one is immersed, but instead grants the freedom to commit oneself wholeheartedly to them, without reducing one's person or one's life to any particular temporal action or cause.*

María Fernanda Villalobos

Changing to Remain

I perfectly remember the fear I felt when I asked my thesis advisor whether I was venturing into dangerous territory with my research. She told me I was, but that the only thing we had to be careful about was our choice of words, in order to reduce the risk as much as possible.

That was when I realized something a professor had told us during our first semester: studying Political Science in Venezuela means doing so in a breeding ground. Back in 2019, that phrase seemed to have meaning. But in 2025, I understood the signifier. That breeding ground could become your best resource or your worst nightmare. And that was the tightrope I decided to walk in my final year of college.

When I think about what motivated me to follow that path—a path I had to justify to myself, and to others, many times—the first thing that comes to mind is that I needed to graduate soon, and to graduate soon I needed to write a thesis (in a program where a thesis was not an official requirement). But when I think about it more carefully, that doesn't really answer the question: why did I choose to make my life more difficult by studying that particular subject?

Perhaps because I often felt that we were so busy analyzing what we, as the opposition, were doing wrong that we were neglecting attempts to understand what was actually sustaining Chavismo. Perhaps because I wanted to understand how a political project survives when everything seems to be pushing it toward decline. Or perhaps because, although I didn't know it yet, I sensed that political projects also speak through their symbols.

I chose to study Chavismo during one of the years of greatest political persecution. I chose to examine the transformations of revolutionary language in the same year I had to leave my home because it no longer seemed safe to stay there. And while people very dear to me told me how strong I was for doing it, the truth is that the last thing I felt was brave. I simply had to keep rowing. I had to keep swimming. I had to keep going.

My thesis —the first of its kind at the School of Political and Administrative Studies at the Central University of Venezuela— examined the transformations in Nicolás Maduro's revolutionary language between 2013 and 2023:¹ how his discourse became more radical as the crisis deepened; how his symbols changed; how his image changed; how he distanced himself from Chávez's ghost when he needed to forge an identity of his own, and how he returned to it when things got complicated. But above all, it examined something more important: language did not accompany politics. Language was politics.

1 María F Villalobos, "Lenguaje y crisis política: La transformación del discurso revolucionario durante el gobierno del presidente Nicolás Maduro, período 2013-2023" (Bachelor's Thesis, Universidad Central de Venezuela, 2025), https://www.academia.edu/164889218/LENGUAJE_Y_CRISIS_POL%C3%8DTICA_LA_TRANSFORMACI%C3%93N_DEL_DISCURSO_REVOLUCIONARIO_DURANTE_EL_GOBIERNO_DEL PRESIDENTE NICOL%C3%81S MADURO

Political projects speak even when they believe they are simply communicating. They speak through colors. They speak through symbols. They speak through those present and through those absent. They even speak through what they are trying to stop looking like.

That is why one of the first things I evaluated during my research —although it was not part of the study itself— was the transformation of *Somos Venezuela*.

In 2017, Nicolás Maduro announced the launch of the movement.² In January 2018, its legalization was announced,³ and in February, Delcy Rodríguez resigned her membership in the PSUV⁴ to take on the role of Secretary General of a different organization, one that was nevertheless politically aligned with the government's project. At the time, it might have seemed like just another reorganization within the Chavista ecosystem. A diversification, or an expansion.

But in retrospect, perhaps it was something else.

While the PSUV remained *rojo rojito* —deep, unmistakably red, the color forever-associated with the Chavista regime—

2 Ministerio del Poder Popular de Economía y Finanzas, "Pdte. Maduro lideró el lanzamiento del Movimiento Somos Venezuela," June 12, 2017, <https://www.mppef.gob.ve/pdte-maduro-lidero-el-lanzamiento-del-movimiento-somos-venezuela/>

3 María Victoria Fermín Kancev, "Maduro decide legalizar el «Movimiento Somos Venezuela» como partido político," *Efecto Cocuyo*, January 27, 2018, <https://efectococuyo.com/politica/maduro-decide-legalizar-el-movimiento-somos-venezuela-como-partido-politico/>

4 Agencia Anadolu, "Líder de la constituyente venezolana renunció al partido oficialista," February 7, 2018, <https://www.aa.com.tr/es/mundo/1%C3%ADder-de-la-constituyente-venezolana-renunci%C3%B3-al-partido-oficialista/1057299>

Somos Venezuela began speaking a different visual language. More colors. A more polished image. An aesthetic less closely associated with the original Chavismo. They did not completely abandon the founding narrative. They repackaged it.

And perhaps that is one of the hardest things to recognize when you are too close to a historical moment: not every change announces its importance out loud. Some appear as administrative decisions, tactical moves, small internal reorganizations. But over time, you begin to suspect that certain forms also function as laboratories.

Somos Venezuela was not merely a party card, a different color, or a short-term political maneuver. At least in retrospect, it was an exercise in political plasticity. A test of whether Chavismo could try to expand its boundaries without completely breaking with its core. It could keep invoking Chávez, but invoke him differently. It could continue to claim a revolutionary legacy, but present it with a different texture. It could preserve its core of power while experimenting with a different way of presenting itself.

Perhaps that was what interested me without my realizing it at the time: not change as rupture, but change as continuity. The ability of a power structure to alter its surface without abandoning what sustains it.

The signs were there. The red flags were there. But as often happens in the social sciences, we recognize patterns more clearly when we look back.

My thesis was not about the Rodríguez family. But it did leave me with a methodological certainty that seems relevant again today: symbolic changes are rarely superficial. And that brings us to the debate of these past few months. As Ricardo del

Búfalo told Paola Bautista de Alemán in an interview for *Revista Democratización*:⁵ **people aren't stupid.**

And that phrase, which may sound too colloquial for this piece, contains a truth more serious than it might seem. Societies learn to read power. They do so with imperfect tools, with intuition, with humor, with exhaustion, with anger, with memory. But they do it.

In Venezuela, that kind of reading has also become almost a form of survival. For years, we have learned to interpret the smallest gestures: who appears in a photograph, who stops appearing, which word is repeated, which slogan disappears, which color is abandoned, which tone is softened, which enemy is no longer named. In authoritarian contexts, politics is rarely understood solely through what is officially announced. More often, it is understood through what seeps through the cracks.

That is why political humor is not merely entertainment. It is also a form of collective intelligence. A way of processing what does not yet have a name. A mechanism for saying, before formal analysis catches up, that something is shifting.

Every meme exists because people are paying attention to behavior. Reading conversations. Finding patterns. There are social scientists studying political processes. There are teams tracking digital trends. There are taxi drivers saying things that end up becoming part of the national conversation. There is a citizenry that no longer consumes politics solely through press

5 Paola Bautista de Alemán, "Ricardo del Búfalo: «La cultura debe interpelar a la sociedad»,” *Democratización* (Red FORMA), March 18, 2022, 73, <https://red-forma.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Democratizacion-18-marzo-22.pdf>

conferences or headlines. Today, politics happens on TikTok. On WhatsApp. In an improvised livestream. In user-generated content. And when thousands of people start noticing the same things at the same time, it is probably worth paying attention, because Delcy Rodríguez does not change by accident.

What took Nicolás Maduro a decade to build —that gradual shift from a classic revolutionary narrative toward a more pragmatic, more flexible form of communication, less dependent on the original political liturgy— has taken Delcy Rodríguez only months.

The first thing I thought when I started noticing these changes was that maybe I was reading too much into them. After spending a year studying symbols, political language, and discursive construction, you start finding patterns where there are none. The political-science equivalent of Googling your symptoms and convincing yourself you have a terminal illness. But then more things kept appearing. And they kept appearing quickly. Too quickly.

A new aesthetic. New tones. New emphases. New words. New priorities. A discourse less anchored in permanent revolution and more oriented toward stability, governance, and normalcy. A political image less defined by ideological confrontation and closer to something that, not long ago, would have been difficult to imagine within Chavismo.

What we are seeing is not merely a change in communication. We are watching power shed its skin. And shedding its skin does not mean changing its nature.

In our case, it means precisely the opposite: shedding a form that no longer serves its purpose in order to better preserve what

it seeks to protect. Animals shed their skin to grow, to survive, to adapt to an environment that demands a different surface. Power, in its own way, does the same.

That is why the image is so unsettling. We are not witnessing a democratic conversion, a moral reckoning, or a renunciation of authoritarian impulses. We are witnessing something more ambiguous: a transformation in appearance to better manage a new stage. A skin that is less strident, less red, less epic, less revolutionary on the surface. But not necessarily any less authoritarian underneath.

What is truly dangerous about certain political mutations is not that they completely conceal what they are, but that they can make themselves familiar enough, palatable enough, normal enough that part of society begins to live alongside them without ever fully naming them.

My research examined how Nicolás Maduro had progressively transformed his political language as his political needs changed. How symbols appeared and disappeared. How his communication priorities shifted. How revolutionary discourse hardened or softened depending on the political moment.

But there was something more. Language was not merely a way of communicating political decisions. It was a tool for building legitimacy. For regaining control. For shaping public conversation. For ensuring that society received —consciously or unconsciously— what those in power needed it to receive. Because language does not merely describe reality. It also shapes it. It organizes it. It establishes a hierarchy, what matters and what does not, what constitutes a threat, what problem deserves attention, and what problem should disappear from the radar.

Sometimes it changes the words, sometimes the symbols, sometimes the aesthetics. And sometimes it changes all of them at once. That is why —and I say this at the risk of looking like the Charlie Day meme with the conspiracy board and red strings— I have always found it hard to believe in coincidences when it comes to power. Even less so when it comes to political systems that have demonstrated an enormous capacity to adapt —or, as Juan Miguel Matheus has called it, autocratic resilience—⁶ in order to survive.

What we are seeing today does not seem to be merely a transformation in communication. It looks like an attempt to produce a new reading of reality. Because when an autocracy needs to sustain itself through a new political stage, it also needs to construct new frameworks of legitimacy. It needs new languages. New symbols. New interlocutors. And new ways of explaining itself.

Perhaps that is why there is something about this stage that feels familiar. Not because we have seen it before in exactly the same form, but because there is a logic behind the mechanism. For years, Chavismo built political legitimacy through revolutionary epic, through Chávez, through confrontation, and through the constant construction of enemies.

6 Juan Miguel Matheus, entrevista por María F. Villalobos, 14 de junio de 2025, transcripción en: María F. Villalobos, “Lenguaje y crisis política: La transformación del discurso revolucionario durante el gobierno del presidente Nicolás Maduro, período 2013-2023” (tesis de pregrado, Universidad Central de Venezuela, 2023), Anexo D, https://www.academia.edu/164889218/LENGUAJE_Y_CRISIS_POL%C3%8DTICA_LA_TRANSFORMACI%C3%93N_DEL_DISCURSO_REVOLUCIONARIO_DURANTE_EL_GOBIERNO_DEL_PRESIDENTE_NICOL%C3%81S_MADURO

But political systems do not survive for decades without learning to adapt, and neither do authoritarian regimes. Systems of power change when their incentives change —when they need new forms of legitimacy, new allies, new audiences, new ways of producing stability. And perhaps that is the important question. It is not simply what is changing, but why it needs to change now.

When language changes rapidly, when symbols change, when forms change, and when communication priorities shift, we are often not seeing merely a change in narrative. We are seeing political adaptation.

And that is where the most difficult layer to confront emerges: autocracies do not adapt in the abstract. They adapt to concrete incentives.

Sometimes those incentives come from an exhausted society that no longer responds to the old codes of mobilization in the same way. Sometimes they come from an economy that needs to promise order even when it cannot offer justice. Sometimes they come from international actors willing to prioritize stability. And sometimes they come from all of these things at once.

That is why it is not enough to say that the narrative has changed. We have to ask what conditions made that change worthwhile. Which new audiences is it trying to appeal to? What costs is it trying to reduce? Which conversation is it trying to displace? Which part of reality does it need to make acceptable again?

Daniel Yabrudy

The Revolt of Those Who Think

Distraction as a Totalitarian Threat

Truth is under attack. Today, the enemies of democracy wield a subtle weapon: distraction and polarization, using them to blur the truth— to relativize it and strip it of its value.

The enemies of democracy want us overwhelmed by triviality. To achieve this, they exploit our craving for dopamine —that feeling of satisfaction we experience when we accomplish something worthwhile— but in this case they promote satisfaction without any real achievement. It is an illusion. This natural human mechanism is being corrupted and redirected toward distraction and, consequently, toward the weakening of a thinking and engaged citizenry. This addiction is fueled by novelty, by the fear of missing out (FOMO), and by low-quality entertainment. This culture of triviality is increasingly dominating the time and minds of today's society.

The enemies of democracy seek to dominate our emotions. Another tool they use to cloud our minds, creating people addicted to their screens, is polarizing narratives. These narratives capture our attention and drive us toward irrational conclusions

where unchecked emotions prevail. The strategy of polarization is based on relativizing facts by framing them in ways that trigger an “all-or-nothing” mindset. Through polarization, the truth becomes relativized, and our emotions become clouded. We no longer feel appropriately. Propaganda disguised as news manipulates compassion through false empathy and turns the thirst for justice into hatred. This strategy is not meant to inform but to dismantle society.

The enemies of democracy seek to take possession of our spaces of silence. Our capacity to develop a critical and reflective mind is under threat because we live in an environment that is fundamentally hostile to thought. The tyranny of noise has robbed our minds of spaces for reflection. Our surroundings are filled with stratagems designed to capture our attention through content that, ironically, leaves us empty.

Ultimately, the enemies of democracy seek to seize political power by weakening the power of citizens, relying on a distracted, irrational, and atomized people —a distracted society as the tyrant’s ideal instrument. In other words, the pursuit of democratic consensus is displaced by the relativization of truth and by conflict among groups that are deeply misinformed and incapable of reaching agreement. A society lulled into complacency by the distractions and radicalizing effects of the smartphone is easily manipulated.

“Your Truth” or “My Truth”?

Truth is objective. It is grounded in facts and realities that transcend personal opinion. Truth is coherent. However complex these objective facts may be, they do not contradict one another; rather, they give us the opportunity to understand the meaning of reality. In this sense, truth is demanding. The search for it is

anything but simplistic: it requires both intellectual and emotional effort. Humility, therefore, is an essential virtue for anyone who seeks the truth. Truth does not bend to our personal agendas; rather, wisdom lies in allowing the truth to shape our judgment and our character. Finally, truth lays the foundation for a lasting social covenant. A society that takes itself seriously —with a long-term vision and an aspiration to prosper— cannot be built on relativism but on the firm foundation that truth provides.

By contrast, relativism is subjective. In its pursuit of equality, the relativist maintains that two cultures with diametrically opposed values can both be equally right. If everyone has “their own truth,” then subjectivity becomes the norm. Relativism is also incoherent. If there are no universal truths that provide a unifying thread to human experience, then it is impossible to maintain that truth itself is relative. Finally, relativism is tyrannical, for it imposes its own vision in order to define reality rather than conforming its vision to reality. This tyranny naturally gives rise to a society devoid of social capital, incapable of debating ideas in pursuit of the common good. In the end, “your truth” and “my truth” amount to saying that there is no truth. Relativism, therefore, becomes a path toward meaninglessness, emptiness, and chaos.

The Revolt of Those Who Think

This is no trivial matter. Relativism threatens thoughtful society, free debate, and liberty itself. We must confront this tyranny of relativism with the revolt of those who think.

When attention is scarce and countless interests compete to capture our minds, the pursuit of truth declines dramatically. In a climate of polarization, being right becomes more important than discovering what is true. It becomes easier to surrender

one's conscience to relativism than to remain faithful to the truth, because the consequences of doing otherwise can be severe. Whoever seeks the truth inevitably challenges today's moral absolutism and, as a result, risks being canceled, isolated, or worse.

Yet this struggle is worth undertaking. Today, protecting our minds is an act of rebellion. Devoting ourselves to deep reflection and cultivating a state of intellectual and spiritual vigilance will make us citizens of greater discernment and greater civic strength.

There is something profoundly encouraging about this. The battle for the heart of our society and our nation does not require weapons but minds and souls strengthened against the totalitarian threat, together with the conviction that, united, we can build a great and sovereign nation. Citizens armed with courage, conviction, and hope can overcome the strategies of totalitarian relativism and forge a shared commitment to freedom and progress.

The Identity Crisis in the Age of Relativism

The most enduring and successful forms of consensus are those built upon the foundation of truth. Two hundred and fifty years ago, a nation was founded on an understanding of truth that has enabled it to become one of the world's longest-standing uninterrupted representative democracies. The founding document of the United States declares: *We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.* (Declaration of Independence of the United States, adopted July 4, 1776.)

This conviction has served as a pillar of the identity of an entire nation that has weathered —and continues to face— great challenges.

Today, however, the United States is experiencing an identity crisis in which relativism has played a critical role. Founded upon the idea of a Creator from whom unalienable rights are derived, the United States has, for decades, been grappling with the consequences of a postmodernism marked by a distinctly anti-Christian orientation (by its very nature, postmodernism stands in opposition to all metanarratives). The effort of various groups, including segments of academia, has been to dismantle the metanarrative that gave rise to a unifying idea of the nation.

What has been proposed to replace the United States' founding metanarrative? Relativism. The notion that truth can be neither absolute nor objective, and that it has merely served as an instrument of domination. Indeed, relativism and victim-centered narratives go hand in hand. More specifically, the relativist vision seeks to replace a national identity rooted in a history rich in shared values and convictions with identities based on oppression and the struggle between social or ethnic groups. In this way, each individual loses his or her sense of rootedness and becomes isolated within an echo chamber of polarization.

What Is a Woman?

One example is gender relativism. For centuries, the prevailing understanding has been that there are only two sexes —female and male— and that this is a self-evident truth grounded in empirical observation, scientific inquiry, and divine revelation acting in harmony. By contrast, relativists have sought to separate sex from gender. They argue that human beings are born with a biological sex determined by chance, but that this does not define

their gender. Rather, each person may —or perhaps should?— define their gender according to their own subjective *feelings*. In other words, the individual need not conform to empirical reality, much less to the civilizational metanarrative that has shaped the West, but instead must discover who he or she is solely by looking within. This is perhaps arrogance in its purest form, with deeply regrettable consequences. It is a tyrannical imposition in which each individual becomes his or her own god and ultimate source of truth.

The harm this ideology inflicts on society and culture lies in the extent to which it is detached from reality. For example, when a biological male who identifies as a woman competes in women's sports, conflict becomes inevitable because sex and gender cannot ultimately be separated. This issue, virtually unimaginable before the twentieth century, has now reached the Supreme Court of the United States, where on multiple occasions the traditional understanding has been reaffirmed: that human beings are either female or male, and that men may not compete in women's sports.

This is not merely a philosophical debate. Rather, it demonstrates the impact that ideas have on everyday life. Disagreeing with the relativist generally results in social or political condemnation, and when the relativist happens to hold political power, it may even result in persecution. Here we see how relativism, by abandoning rational and democratic debate, becomes a foundation for tyranny. It serves social tyrants who elevate group identity above individual critical thought, and it serves authoritarian rulers who justify political persecution under the banners of peace and the fight against hate. It can go so far as to relativize hatred itself. There is no longer an objective understanding of what it means to hate another person; there is no metanarrative to explain it, no conscience to validate it —only the ideological narrative according

to which anyone who disagrees with an idea is said to hate the person.

In the face of the anti-democratic threat posed by relativism, it is an urgent civic duty to devote ourselves to thinking —to thinking as both an intellectual and a spiritual discipline that strengthens our civic engagement. We must think not only as individuals but together, unafraid of disagreement, discussing and debating ideas while strengthening our democratic culture. We must do so face-to-face, not merely through pseudonyms and anonymity on social media. We also have a duty to strengthen our defenses against the distractions that seek to dull our minds and the false dichotomies that aim to polarize and isolate us. Today, it is the duty of every citizen to advance the Revolt of Those Who Think, enriching our society with democratic culture, thoughtful reflection, and a profound love of truth.

The Revolt Against the Epidemic of Distraction

The culture of relativism flourishes in the fertile soil of a society with fragmented attention. Such a society is incapable of carefully and rigorously examining the absurdities proclaimed from a smartphone or from the presidential podium.

The good news is that this revolt is armed with knowledge and spiritual strength. It is armed with a commitment to democracy, truth, freedom, and human dignity. While the distracted are swept along by the current of relativism and, in their arrogance, impose their own vision upon the truth, those who think seek out and test the rock on which they stand, and in humility they live according to the truth. The bad news is that, like every revolt, this one is under attack. To choose the path of keeping both mind and heart awake is to choose the more difficult path —but also the one that offers the deepest sense of purpose in a distracted world.

A distracted person lacks the inner strength needed to influence and support his or her community —the real community of flesh-and-blood people encountered every day, whose names may be less familiar than those of social media personalities. The distracted mind is perpetually dissatisfied, constantly chasing the next dopamine hit in order to feel “good.” Such a person is easily manipulated and rarely contributes anything of lasting value to the community. The influences that dominate this person’s attention encourage the squandering of life’s most valuable resource: time. Such is the irony of being influenced by “content creators” only to be left with an even deeper sense of emptiness.

In response, the thoughtful rebel must discipline both mind and heart. He or she must recognize the cunning of those who seek to undermine the capacity for critical thought and build the necessary defenses. There are countless strategies for overcoming addiction to distraction, and they are well worth considering. Yet a thousand strategies are of no use without a clear vision and a compelling sense of purpose. That is why the rebel is not merely a rebel, but also one who thinks.

We are not condemned to live in a tyrannical, polarized, and distracted society. This revolt begins in the home and moves into the public square with a willingness to discuss ideas openly and face-to-face, from the academy to the local parish council. It is a revolt against the meaninglessness of relativism and in favor of building worthwhile projects within every community while defending our society against totalitarian ambition. It is a revolt in which we demand of ourselves, as a society, that we be participants rather than mere spectators. It is a revolt in which we insist on being treated as thoughtful and responsible citizens, not merely as beneficiaries.

The pursuit of truth is the most powerful revolt against the emptiness and chaos of relativism, and it is the finest way to live both as individuals and as a society. It is the Revolt of Those Who Think.

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