

Getting Lost in Translation

Translator's Foreword

I have not the slightest doubt about the central message of Roberto Pla's *Man, Temple of the Living God*, and that is why I was willing to take up the challenge of translating it into English. The task was humbling. It proved to be far more demanding than any work I have ever undertaken.

Even for one well-versed in the subject matter, Pla's text calls for slow, careful analytical reading and thorough understanding of each sentence, each passage, before going on to the next. The translator should come up to the exacting standards of a scholarly reader; yet the only advantage I could offer was that of ignorance—a fresh perception, largely untainted by common prejudices or ecclesiastical accretions. Consequently, I would from time to time find myself facing what seemed to be an impassable obstacle. Without Javier Lantero's learning and his patient counsel, without the long hours we devoted to the study of a difficult text (like the commentary on Logion 15), without his skillful editing, the job would have been impossible. He is in effect my co-translator.

We kept coming up against the same problem: even after long struggles to understand an obscure passage, even after gaining some understanding, how to express what had been understood? It is plain that Pla faced the same intrinsic difficulty and was well aware of it. Here, we are often touching on the limits of language. The ineffable.

A further difficulty: the book is Pla's crowning glory, written in old age. Yet it is plain that he wrote alone, without the help of an editor. Hence the need to check all references and clarify some passages. Time-consuming labor, worthy of so ambitious a work.

This may go some way to explaining certain peculiarities in Pla's style, but not, I think, the strangest one of all, when he mixes metaphors, stuffing the imagery from three, four, even five parables into a single sentence. While this may simply confuse the reader, that very confusion can on occasion have an unexpected effect, when mental friction sparks off insight into the deeper meaning behind the parables! Baroque koans...

Here, the writer shows his mastery of the art of paradox, that of a musician skilled in harmony and counterpoint, that of a scholar deeply versed in Sanskrit and the Advaita (non-dual) philosophy of Sankara, likewise in the livening and omnipresent employment of paradox by Jewish and early Christian scribes, before this river of life ran into the sands of univocal church dogma and the Deity transcendent came to upstage and eclipse the immanent Presence.

Pla's purpose is to provide the reader with the keys he discovered and he uses these directly, throwing open doors and shuttered windows to air, light and the revelation of Gospel prospects long hidden.

It would have been possible for me to speak of all this in dry, impersonal terms. Possible, but inappropriate. The content is too essential, it is too intimate. Yet, I don't have it in me to let myself be carried away on a flood of words like Pla. My expression's earthbound, I can only dream of effortless soaring... and turn the poetry of Saint John of the Cross...

Reader, please be patient, then, when my version fails to convey the full meaning of the original text, making it harder for you to access the depths of Pla's exposition¹.

What I cannot stress enough is the paramount value of the book's hard-to-chew message, for me, for Christians, for all men.

Christ is no mere exemplar; he shows us, not what we should be or aspire to be, but the perfection we intrinsically are.

PeterBurnett
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¹ Readers are invited to bring any errors to our attention (see e-mail addresses on p.4). In particular, we have been unable to trace a few of the author's citations.