

**Tom Wolfe's New Book *The Kingdom of Speech* and Walter J. Ong's Thought**

**Thomas J. Farrell**

**Professor Emeritus in Writing Studies**

**University of Minnesota Duluth**

[tfarrell@d.umn.edu](mailto:tfarrell@d.umn.edu)

[www.d.umn.edu/~tfarrell](http://www.d.umn.edu/~tfarrell)

They say that forewarned is forearmed. So stand forewarned: The following essay is a bit all over the place, as is the book I am here commenting on. Basically, in the present essay, I proceed by associative links of thought.

Tom Wolfe (born in 1931; Ph.D. in American Studies, Yale University, 1957) is a fashionable prose stylist and satirist. In his new book *The Kingdom of Speech*, he gently spoofs Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory and Noam Chomsky's linguistics theory. For his irreverent spoofs, Tom Wolfe may be banished – or worse! -- by the political-correctness police, because they do not like to have their secular sacred cows spoofed – especially by one of their fellow atheists.

But what could the political-correctness police say or do to Tom Wolfe that would be worse than banishing him from the ranks of respectable secular intellectuals? Perhaps they could say that Tom Wolfe is really a closet conservative. In fact, that charge would be sufficient to banish him. But he is a southerner (born and raised in Richmond, Virginia). And he studied English at Yale University at a time when the southerner Cleanth Brooks, who distinguished himself as a Faulkner scholar, was a big shot in English at Yale. So perhaps Tom Wolfe is culturally a conservative southern agrarian, not a Yankee industrialist, eh?

Years ago now, the Canadian Catholic convert Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980; Ph.D. in English, Cambridge University, 1943), aligned himself in spirit with the southern agrarians in his article "The Southern Quality," which is reprinted in the book *The Interior Landscape: The Literary Criticism of Marshall McLuhan 1943-1962* (McGraw-Hill, 1969, pages 185-209). In addition, he irreverently spoofed Yankee industrial culture in his short-essay-commentaries on various artifacts in his copiously illustrated book *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man* (Viking Press, 1951).

Years ago now, after McLuhan had published his controversial books *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (University of Toronto Press, 1962) and *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (McGraw-Hill, 1964), Tom Wolfe helped propel him to extraordinary fame by publishing his article "What If He [Marshall McLuhan] Is Right?" which is reprinted in Tom Wolfe's book *The Pump House Gang* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1968, pages 133-170).

By way of digression, I should point out here that McLuhan's book title *Understanding Media* honored the title of Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren's widely used textbook *Understanding Poetry* (Holt, 1938). McLuhan and Brooks were good friends, as Mark Royden Winchell details in his book *Cleanth Brooks and the Rise of Modern Criticism* (University Press of Virginia, 1996, pages 114, 204, 205, 295, and 391).

Of course the political-correctness crowd today does not think that Marshall McLuhan is right. For them, he represents one road not taken. But what if Tom Wolfe today is still convinced that Marshall McLuhan is right? Wouldn't this help explain why Tom Wolfe today is spoofing certain sacred cows of the political-correctness crowd in his new book? Wouldn't this conviction be sufficient reason for him to risk the wrath of the political-correctness crowd?

Now, Tom Wolfe is not the only person today who is offending against the spirit of political correctness. The developer Donald J. Trump of New York, the Republican Party's 2016 presidential candidate, has garnered an enormous amount of free media coverage of various things he has deliberately said to offend the spirit of political correctness. And he has a fervent base of white middle-class male supporters cheering him on in his assault on the spirit of political correctness. But Trump's fervent supporters do not strike me as likely to read Tom Wolfe's new book, even though he gently spoofs certain secular sacred cows.

Perhaps we should note here that Trump's fervent white middle-class male supporters see the secular intellectuals in the political-correctness crowd as engaging in top-down social and political change – to the detriment of their economic and social standing.

Historically in American culture, intellectuals have played a big role. So perhaps top-down political and social change is part of our American heritage, eh?

Now, in Tom Wolfe's estimate, Jesus is one of the six most influential people in world history (page 165). Charles Darwin is another one of the six, but, alas, Noam Chomsky is not.

Tom Wolfe even paraphrases certain points from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, which he characterizes as "the most radical social and political doctrine ever promulgated (page 166). No doubt many Christian believers today would agree with his assessment.

But don't Noam Charisma and the political-correctness crowd fancy themselves as promulgating "the most radical social and political doctrine" in contemporary American culture? You bet, they do. In addition, they tend to see themselves as pitted against Christian and other religious believers. Their secular spirit could be summed up in the rallying cry, "Atheists of the world, unite!"

Unfortunately for the atheists, religionists in American culture still outnumber them by a wide margin, and American religionists tend to be organized at the grassroots level into activist cells known as churches and synagogues and mosques and the like – some of which tend to be more conservative in terms of social and political doctrine, while others tend to be more liberal and progressive.

However, in terms of contemporary American culture, it is hard to imagine the rallying cry, "Religionists of the world, unite!" Of course in terms of contemporary world culture, it is also hard to imagine the rallying cry, "Religionists of the world, unite!"

But not so long ago, the official anti-religion position of communism did evoke widespread anti-communism in American culture and world culture. Fortunately for contemporary American culture, our idealistic atheist intellectuals/activists under the influence of Noam Charisma and other charismatic leaders have not yet managed to evoke a widespread response as strong as anti-communism hysteria once was in American culture. Nevertheless, the secularists are working on it.

Perhaps we should recall that the British novelist George Orwell (1903-1950) was an atheist socialist who, like Tom Wolfe at a later time, like to write satirical spoofs. Surprise, surprise! Anti-communists in postwar American culture co-opted the British atheist's novels *Animal Farm* (1946) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1948) to help advance anti-communist hysteria in the United States after World War II. So couldn't enterprising American conservatives today co-opt the American atheist's new book *The Kingdom of Speech* to help advance the conservative critique of the spirit of political correctness? In theory, perhaps conservatives could do this. However, I do not think it is likely that conservatives are going to do this.

Now, the charismatic Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont, who is Jewish, has at times described himself as a socialist. However, in his presidential primary campaign for the Democratic Party's nomination, he did not go out of his way to identify himself as a secularist out to advance an anti-religion agenda. On the contrary, Senator Sanders publicly praised Pope Francis for his spirited strafing of capitalism.

In addition, in his presidential primary campaign here in Minnesota, where I live, Senator Sanders shrewdly declined former Governor Jesse Ventura's offer to endorse him publicly. When former Governor Ventura was in office, he often mocked Christians for their tendency to turn the other cheek – something a big tough guy like Ventura would never do.

In Hillary Rodham Clinton's presidential primary campaign against Senator Sanders, she managed to advertise her Methodist faith. Even though I do not understand fully how certain persons may seem to others, or at least to some others, as charismatic, it strikes me as fair to say that Hillary is not a charismatic speaker (but neither am I).

There are far too many American voters who identify themselves as religious believers of one kind or another for any hopeful presidential candidate to espouse an explicitly anti-religion position.

For this reason and others, I do not think that Noam Charisma or other secular intellectuals would be viable presidential candidates.

Arguably Noam Charisma and other secular intellectual today can be understood as secular embodiments of the spirit of ancient Hebrew prophets such as Amos who called for economic justice (also known today as social justice). In this respect, Noam Charisma and other secular intellectuals today can be contextualized in the American Protestant tradition of the American jeremiad. See the Jewish scholar Sacvan Bercovitch's book *The American Jeremiad*, 2nd ed. (University of Wisconsin Press, 2012).

Now, under the leadership of the prophet Moses, God's chosen people set out from Egypt for the "promised land." But the "promised land" means that they were to become agrarians – you know, like those more recent southern agrarians mentioned above.

Nevertheless, to purify them for their eventual religious destiny in the "promised land," they wandered around in the desert for forty years. They needed to be purified spiritually of their cultural conditioning in Egypt.

For more than forty years now, the political-correctness crowd has been wandering in the secular intellectual desert, following their various secular intellectual prophets. Arguably McLuhan was one alternative prophet that intellectuals could have followed, but he was a Roman Catholic.

Disclosure: I would characterize myself as a theistic humanist, as distinct from a secular humanist. In our contemporary culture wars, I tend NOT to endorse the anti-religion position of certain secular

humanists. In general, I tend to see economic libertarians such as the Koch brothers as a far greater threat to the common good than religionists of various kinds. However, certain secular intellectuals tend to see religionists as a far greater threat than the economic libertarians.

But I digress. Back to Tom Wolfe's new book.

Throughout his book Tom Wolfe refers to the Word (his capitalization), meaning speech, language. However, he does not happen to advert explicitly to the famous prologue of the Gospel According to John, which begins, "In the beginning was the Word" (Greek, "Logos"; Latin, "Verbum") – a play on the opening words of one account of creation in the book of Genesis. As to the reference to the Word, the anonymous author of the prologue was likely familiar with a similar usage by Philo the Jew of Alexandria.

Nor does Tom Wolfe happen to advert explicitly to the Christian custom of referring to the supposed Second Person of the supposed divine trinity as the Word (also known as the supposed Son and as the supposed Christ, or Messiah).

Now, in the book *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (Yale University Press, 1967), the expanded version of his 1964 Terry Lectures at Yale University, the American Jesuit cultural historian and theorist Walter J. Ong (1912-2003; Ph.D. in English, Harvard University, 1955) discusses the Word (capitalized) as this term is used in the Christian tradition of thought and the word (lower-case).

It is in the realm of the possible that Tom Wolfe is familiar with Ong's 1967 book *The Presence of the Word*. In any event, Tom Wolfe's book *The Kingdom of Speech* is not incompatible Ong's book *The Presence of the Word*. But Ong's book is deeper and more profound than Tom Wolfe's new book is.

Now, Tom Wolfe describes speech, language as a human artifact. But is it an artifact?

However, in Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophy in which Ong as a Jesuit was trained, human beings have a distinctively human nature (or essence) that sets them apart from all infra-human animals. In that framework of thought, speech, language is an aspect of distinctively human nature. Distinctively human nature is also referred to as the distinctively human soul (the translation of the Greek term transliterated as "psyche" or "psuche").

Because it is also fashionable in certain academic circles today to reject so-called "essentialism," see the Aristotelian philosopher Martha C. Nussbaum's article "Human Functioning and Social Justice: In Defense of Aristotelian Essentialism" in the journal *Political Theory*, volume 20, number 2 (May 1992): pages 202-246.

But human beings are known as rational animals, which distinguishing them, on the one hand, from infra-human animals and, on the other hand, from disembodied spirits such as angels and God. However, as rational animals, human beings also have an animal soul. Therefore, the key question is, "How do we know the moment of ensoulment with the distinctively human soul?"

In my estimate, the U.S. Supreme Court's 1973 ruling in *Roe v. Wade* established a reasonable guide-line when it legalized abortion in the first trimester. But of course certain religious zealots do not agree with that ruling.

For an informed discussion of the distinctively human soul (also known in short as the intellect, or mind), see the Aristotelian philosopher Mortimer J. Adler's accessible short book *Intellect: Mind over Matter* (Macmillan, 1990). Adler was not a secularist. As far as I know, he had no appreciable impact on the prestige culture in American culture.

For a carefully reasoned position regarding legalized abortion in the first trimester, based on deontological moral theory (derived from Kant), see James H. Fetzer's book *Render unto Darwin: Philosophical Aspects of the Christian Right's Crusade against Science* (Open Court, 2007, pages 95-120).

Now, in the book *In the Human Grain: Further Explorations of Contemporary Culture* (Macmillan, 1967), which young Hillary Rodham (born in 1947) read in the summer of 1967 and was impressed with, Ong comments explicitly on the problematic that Tom Wolfe discusses in connection with Darwinian evolutionary theory:

"At a point where living organisms approximating the present human body were appearing [in our evolutionary history] the first [distinctively] human soul is created by God, infused within a body in the material universe. This is, of course, a special act of God, for the creation of the [distinctively] human soul in its spirituality transcends the merely material" (page 78).

Elsewhere, Ong says, "Each [distinctively] human soul, it is true, is created by a direct act of God" (page 76).

For the information about young Hillary Rodham reading Ong in the summer of 1967, see Gail Sheehy's book *Hillary's Choice* (Random House, 1999, pages 48-49).

Of course Ong's claims are anathema to atheists who hold a materialist philosophical position. Nevertheless, Tom Wolfe's argument about speech, language is open to being used to support Ong's claim about the distinctively human soul. In the larger framework of thought that Ong works with, Tom Wolfe's argument about speech, language actually supports that claim that speech, language is an expression and manifestation of the distinctively human soul.

Rats! Banishment from the ranks of respectable secular intellectuals would be too light a punishment for Tom Wolfe. Perhaps secular intellectuals should torture him by water-boarding him – or by burning him at the stake. Secular intellectuals don't want to hear Adler's or Nussbaum's Aristotelian argument about human essence. American pragmatic philosophy is the de facto materialist philosophy of most secular intellectuals – not Aristotelian philosophy – or Ong's Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophy.

For Ong, Darwinian evolutionary theory is broadly acceptable as a way to account for the emergence and slow development of all that is material in the cosmos. But the spirituality of the distinctively human soul "transcends the merely material." And Tom Wolfe's so-called "kingdom of speech" is the central feature of the distinctively human soul.

In short, Ong's position regarding the distinctively human soul, as distinct from the infra-human animal soul that human animals have from the moment of conception as a viable life-form, can be described as a kind of creationist position. Nevertheless, his creationist position is not typical of what is known in the United States as "creationism."

Ong valued the evolutionary orientation of the French Jesuit paleontologist and spirituality writer Pierre Teilhard de Chardin so strongly that he never tired of referring to Teilhard's thought. Teilhard's most widely known book about spirituality is *The Divine Milieu* (French ed., 1957).

Ong highlights his Jesuit spirituality in his article "A.M.D.G. [*Ad majorem Dei gloriam*]: Dedication or Directive?" in the now defunct journal (but available online) *Review for Religious*, volume 11 (1952) pages 257-264. He reprises this article in his book *Hopkins, the Self, and God* (University of Toronto Press, 1986, pages 78-81 and 87), the published version of Ong's 1981 Alexander Lectures at the University of Toronto.

McLuhan expressed his interest in spirituality in his article "G. K. Chesterton: A Practical Mystic" in the *Dalhousie Review*, volume 15 (1936): pages 455-464. Gilbert Keith Chesterton (1874-1936) was a well-known British convert to Roman Catholicism, and in the spring semester of 1937, McLuhan himself became a convert to Roman Catholicism. (In my estimate, Chesterton's biographies of St. Francis of Assisi and St. Thomas Aquinas are still worth reading today.)

In connection with the spirituality of the distinctively human soul that Ong works with, I would call attention to what Matthew Fox refers to as creation spirituality. See, for example, his 550-page book *Sheer Joy: Conversations with Thomas Aquinas on Creation Spirituality* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1992).

Arguably the culminating exercise known as the Contemplation to Attain Love (standardized numbered paragraphs 230-237) in the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556), the founder of the Jesuit order, is oriented toward the spirit of creation spirituality as Matthew Fox describes it.

Concerning the spirit of guided imagistic meditation on scripture in the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius Loyola, see the Canadian Jesuit biblical scholar David M. Stanley's essay "A Suggested Approach to *Lectio Divina*" in his book "*I Encountered God!*": *The Spiritual Exercises with the Gospel of Saint John* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1986, pages 311-327).

But doesn't the spirit of imagistic meditation expressed in the Christian practice of *Lectio Divina* follow the Hebrew Bible's injunction "Hear, O Israel"?

Concerning the spirit of imagistic meditation involving icons, see the German art historian Hans Belting's book *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, translated by Edmund Jephcott (University of Chicago Press, 1994).

Concerning the spirit of imagistic thinking in the Homeric epics, see the classicist Eric A. Havelock's book *Preface to Plato* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1963). Ong never tired of referring to this book.

Havelock differentiates the imagistic thinking in the Homeric epics from the kind of abstract philosophical thinking exemplified in Plato and Aristotle. The German Thomistic philosopher Josef Pieper calls attention to the distinction that Thomas Aquinas makes between two ways of knowing: (1) properly theoretical, conceptual philosophical knowledge, knowledge *per cognitionem*, in the Western tradition of philosophy, and (2) knowledge based upon existential affinity, knowledge *per connaturalitas*. Pieper says, "The first form gives one knowledge of something foreign, [but] in the second form one knows what belongs to one."

In effect, the British classicist G. E. R. Lloyd discusses the two kinds of knowledge in his book *Polarity and Analogy* (Cambridge University Press, 1966). Polarity tends to inculcate either-or thinking. By contrast, analogy tends to inculcate both-and thinking.

But in Havelock's terminology, the properly theoretical, conceptual philosophical knowledge exemplified in Plato and Aristotle involves the separation of the knower from the known (in effect, Lloyd's polarity). But why might the separation of the knower from the known be desirable?

The German scholar Max Weber (1864-1920) helped popularize the expression "the disenchantment of the world" – which presupposes a preceding enchantment of the world.

No doubt knowledge based upon existential affinity (and Lloyd's analogy) produces the sense of life that is expressed in the enchantment of the world.

In the book *Varieties of Transcendental Experience: A Study of Constructive Postmodernism* (Michael Glazier Book/Liturgical Press, 2000), the American Jesuit philosopher and theologian Donald L. Gelpi regularly contrasts what he refers to as the American Protestant dialectical imagination (involving Lloyd's polarity) with what he refers to as the Roman Catholic analogical imagination. Evidently, Gelpi was not familiar with Ong's work on Ramist dialectic.

(Peter Ramus [1515-1572] was a French logician and educational reformer and Protestant martyr whose work in dialectic was central to the curriculum at Harvard College, founded in 1636, and at Cambridge University when the poet John Milton was a student there.)

As Gelpi repeatedly notes, the dialectical imagination tends to inculcate either-or thinking. But according to him, the analogical imagination tends to inculcate both-and thinking. (As I will explain momentarily, Ong often uses the either-or thinking of dialectical contrasts to work out well-articulated comparison-and-contrast essays. But this is not what Gelpi means by either-or thinking. By either-or thinking, Gelpi means pro- and anti- polarities. By both-and thinking, Gelpi means inclusive thinking, which is what Ong's either-or contrasts also involve. In other words, Ong's either-or contrasts do not involve pro- and anti- polarities.)

Now, the Roman Catholic monk and satirist Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466-1536), author of *The Praise of Folly* (1511), actually aligned the theologian Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) with the much earlier church fathers, not with the more recent Roman Catholic scholastic dialecticians (logicians) known collectively as the schoolmen. Dialecticians tend to emphasize what Lloyd characterizes as polarity.

Both Ong and McLuhan studied the history of the verbal arts (grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic, or logic) focusing on certain sixteenth-century figures.

But McLuhan emerged from his study with a pronounced aversion to the spirit of the medieval scholastic dialecticians that Erasmus disliked. For a recent study of the background of McLuhan's thought, see Eric McLuhan's book *The Sensus Communis, Synthesia, and the Soul: An Odyssey* (Bastian Publishing, 2015).

In general, Marshall McLuhan tends to favor what Lloyd refers to as analogy. For example, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the birth of the Victorian Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889), McLuhan published his essay "The Analogical Mirrors," which is reprinted in the book *The Interior*

*Landscape: The Literary Criticism of Marshall McLuhan 1943-1962*, edited by Eugene McNamara (McGraw-Hill, 1969, pages 63-73). (Hopkins was a convert to Roman Catholicism.)

In contrast, Ong tends to work with polarities – dialectical contrasts, which he tends to compare and contrast. (In a dialectical contrast, the two terms in the dialectical polarity are operationally defined so that term A cannot be term B in the same way and at the same time – they are operationally defined as mutually exclusive.)

Nevertheless, despite Ong's pronounced tendency to work with dialectical contrasts, I should point out that in effect he works with a kind of analogy between the capitalized "Word" of Christian theology and the lower-case "word" of ordinary human experience in his book *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History*, mentioned above.

In any event, Ong liked to say that to understand something, we need both closeness, or proximity (e.g., what belongs to one), on the one hand, and, on the other, distance (e.g., something foreign).

Long ago, the medieval scholastic dialecticians that Erasmus didn't like have disappeared from influence in the Roman Catholic tradition of thought, even though the terms "scholasticism" and "schoolmen" persisted long after the demise of their influence in the Roman Catholic tradition of thought. Nevertheless, you could argue that the spirit of the medieval scholastic dialecticians, and the proverbial "clunched fist of logic," lived on in the strongly polemical theological disputations and the issuing of anathemas.

But the pastoral spirit of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) in the Roman Catholic Church advanced a more irenic tone and attitude, which in turn helped spark post-Vatican II renewal of interest in spirituality. This renewal coincided with mainstream Americans discovering American Indian spirituality, as the religious-studies scholar Philip Jenkins details in his book *Dream Catchers: How Mainstream America Discovered Native Spirituality* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

For a handy guide to Roman Catholic thought about spirituality, see the 1,100-page *New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality* (Michael Glazer Book/Liturgical Press, 1993).

Various forms of spirituality (secular, polytheistic, monotheistic) are aimed at attuning the practitioners to what the Swiss psychiatrist and psychological theorist C. G. Jung, M.D., refers to as the Self, capitalized here to distinguish it from ordinary ego-consciousness (the lower-case self as it were).

For all practical purposes, the Christian terminology, mentioned above, of the Christ (also known as the Messiah) and the Second Person (of the divine trinity) and the Son (as distinct from the Father and the Holy Spirit in the divine trinity) and the Word (with a nod to the assimilating spirit of Philo the Jew of Alexandria) can be understood as invoking what Jung and his followers refer to as the Self, as distinct from ego-consciousness.

Because Orwell was decidedly anti-Catholic, we should note here that if we are all God's children, the Son could be referred to as Big Brother. Of course the Roman Catholic Church is also known for theological-thought-crimes and thought-police. (Their secular counterparts today are the political-correctness police that Tom Wolfe spoofs in his new book.)

Oftentimes, Roman Catholic theology strikes me as exuberant intellectual gymnastics. However, within Roman Catholic theology, there is one doctrine that strikes me as the catch-22 of catch-22s: the doctrine



of baptism by desire. Whoever formulated the doctrine of baptism by desire had an extraordinary theological imagination. According to the doctrine of baptism of desire, certain morally upright American Indians and other so-called “pagans” could have experienced baptism of desire.

This brings me to another extraordinary idea developed in the Roman Catholic theological imagination recently: the idea of anonymous Christians. In the 1,300-page book *Catholicism: Study Edition* (Winston Press, 1981), the American theologian Richard P. McBrien of Notre Dame explains three positions taken by different Roman Catholic theologians about anonymous Christians (pages 269-270). Despite certain differences, the theologians agree in essentials. The idea of anonymous Christians is important for pastoral reasons.

In *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (1888), which pre-dates Darwin’s *Origins of Species* by over a decade, John Henry Newman (1801-1890), a famous convert to Roman Catholicism (in 1845), wrote about the theory of the development of Christian doctrine.

Ong published the article “Newman’s *Essay on Development* in Its Intellectual Milieu” in the Jesuit-sponsored journal *Theological Studies*, volume 7, number 1 (March 1946): pages 3-45. Later on, Ong wrote further about Newman in his 1986 book *Hopkins, the Self, and God*, mentioned above.

Oftentimes today, Roman Catholic theologians see themselves as the research and development wing of the church. However, in the hierarchical governance structure of the Roman Catholic Church, the bishops, including of course the pope, are officially in charge of arbitrating and ruling on what is official church teaching. Oftentimes today, the bishops, who tend to be doctrinally conservative, see theologians as the apologetics wing of the church, not as the research and development wing. In the bishops’ view, the theologians’ job is to cultivate what oft was thought but ne’er so well expressed in Roman Catholic thought – to paraphrase Alexander Pope’s characterization of poets (in what Ong refers to as basically oral tradition).

To be sure, certain Roman Catholic theologians do write books that can be categorized as straightforward works of apologetics.

For an account of Roman Catholic theologians who recently ran into trouble from the doctrinal conservative Vatican officials, see Matthew Fox’s book *The Pope’s War: Why Ratzinger’s Secret Crusade Has Imperiled the Church and How It Can Be Saved* (Sterling Ethos, 2011). (Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger became Pope Benedict XVI. In the long reign of Pope John-Paul II, Cardinal Ratzinger served as the head of the Vatican’s thought police in charge of snuffing out real or imagined theological-thought crimes.)

Of course at an earlier time, doctrinally conservative Vatican officials prevented Teilhard from publishing his work. However, in Pope Francis’ widely publicized 2015 eco-encyclical, he refers to Fr. Teilhard de Chardin without advertent explicitly to his earlier run-in with Vatican officials (see the pope’s endnote 53). So perhaps Teilhard can be rehabilitated within the church. (In contrast to Teilhard, neither Ong nor McLuhan ran afoul of Vatican officials.)

Now, according to Tom Wolfe, “by now, the early twenty-first century, the vast majority of people who thought of themselves as intellectuals were atheists. Believers were regarded as something worse than hapless fools” (page 128).

Of course both Ong and McLuhan were believers, so I guess that today's secular intellectuals regard them -- and Teilhard and Fox -- "as something worse than hapless fools." But don't today's secular intellectuals engage in secularist spirituality?

For an example of secular spirituality, see Troels Engberg-Pedersen's book *Cosmology and Self in the Apostle Paul: The Material Spirit* (Oxford University Press, 2010).

For an informed account of the non-materialist philosophical position, see the Aristotelian philosopher Mortimer J. Adler's accessible short book *Intellect: Mind over Matter* (Macmillan, 1990).

Ong works with the non-materialist philosophic tradition of thought known as Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophy that he had studied as part of his Jesuit training – as did all Jesuits of his generation. In that tradition of philosophic thought, the human intellect (also known as the mind) is attributed to the distinctively human soul. But the concupiscible and irascible appetites (also known as tendencies) are attributed to the infra-human animal soul of the human animal.

Actually, the imagery in Plato's *Phaedrus* of the charioteer (Greek, "logos" representing the distinctively human soul) guiding two powerful horses (the irascible and concupiscible appetites, or tendencies) hitched to the chariot (the human body) nicely captures the human condition as set forth in Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophy.

In that philosophic tradition of thought, reason (or the mind) needs to cultivate the cardinal virtue of prudence in decision-making in order to cultivate the cardinal virtues of temperance (of the concupiscible appetites, or tendencies) and courage (the irascible appetites, or tendencies).

In the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition of philosophical thought, the struggle of reason to cultivate prudence in decision-making should involve cultivating temperance and courage and the cardinal virtue of justice in one's own personal decision-making (as distinct from legal justice and from social justice). The cardinal virtue of justice in one's own personal decision-making involves the will.

For an informed account of the will in Western thought, see Vernon J. Bourke's book *Will in Western Thought: An Historico-Critical Survey* (Sheed and Ward, 1964).

Now, in the massively researched book *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue: From the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason* (Harvard University Press, 1958), Ong works with the non-materialist philosophical position he had studied in Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophy as part of his Jesuit training. As a result, he aligns sensory data from the bodily senses (represented as the chariot in Plato's imagery mentioned above) with the infra-human animal soul of the human animal – not with the human mind (or intellect). Accordingly, Ong refers variously to the corpuscular epistemology, the corpuscular view of reality, and corpuscular psychology (see pages 65-66, 72, 146, 171, 196, 203, 210, and 286).

In effect, Ong discusses the irascible tendencies (or appetites) as agonistic tendencies in his book *Fighting for Life: Contest, Sexuality, and Consciousness* (Cornell University Press, 1981), the published version of his 1979 Messenger Lectures at Cornell University.

In the preface Ong indicates that he is working with a non-materialist philosophical position: "This book goes a bit farther than sociobiology ordinarily does. Indeed, if the term is properly understood, what it deals with might be called 'noobiology,' the study of the biological setting of mental activity (Greek, *noos*, *noos*, mind)" (page 11).

Subsequently, Ong says, “[W]e can style the present work . . . an essay in ‘noobiology’ (from the Greek *nous*, genitive *noos*, pronounced in two syllables, meaning ‘mind’). . . . [W]e can say that sociobiology is the study of the biological underpinning of social behavior, including human social behavior, so noobiology is the study of the biological underpinning of human mental or intellectual activity. The present essay in noobiology undertakes to examine some of the relationships between intellectual activity and biological activity which are found centered around contest. Contest has been a major factor in organic evolution and it turns out to have been a major, and indeed seemingly essential, factor in intellectual development” (pages 27-28).

The American neurosurgeon Paul D. MacLean, M.D., identifies the part of the human brain that he refers to as the reptilian brain as the biological base of what Ong refers to as agonistic (or contesting) tendencies, and of what Plato and Aristotle refer to as *thymos* (or *thumos*). Basically, the reptilian brain is the part of the human brain that is manifested in our fight/flight/freeze response.

For recent discussion of MacLean’s brain research, see Karen Armstrong’s book *Fields of Blood: Religion and the History of Violence* (Knopf, 2014), Gregory L. Fricchione’s book *Compassion and Healing in Medicine and Society: On the Nature and Use of Attachment Solutions to Separation Challenges* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), and Darcia Narvaez’s book *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality: Evolution, Culture, and Wisdom* (Norton, 2014).

Finally, I want to close Tom Wolfe’s riff toward the end of his book: “[T]he kingdom of speech, inhabited solely by *Homo loquax*. Or is ‘kingdom too small a word for the eminence of speech [?] . . . Should it be Imperium loquax, making speech an empire[?] . . . Or Universum loquax, the Spoken Universe[?]” (page 168).

Got that – the Spoken Universe?

In the beginning God said . . . .

In the beginning was the Word . . . .

Hear, O Israel.

Listen up, Tom Wolfe may be on to something, eh?

But didn’t Max Weber help popularize the expression “the disenchantment of the world” as the way to characterize the secular world?

Doesn’t Tom Wolfe’s Spoken Universe represent the opposite spirit – the re-enchantment of the world, eh?

But isn’t this an assault on reason, eh?

Isn’t secular America under siege, eh?

Circle the wagons, secularists!

In the passage quoted above, I have used square brackets to insert question marks in places where I have deliberately tightened up Tom Wolfe’s copiously abundant expressions. Throughout his short book, he does not write in the tight style of Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address, but in the copious style of

a modern-day Cicero. If a word to the wise is sufficient, I guess that Cicero did not think he was talking with wise people – and I guess that Tom Wolfe doesn't think he is either.

Basically, early Christians deeply assimilated classical learning, including the verbal arts of grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic, or logic, mentioned above, and Cicero's ideal of eloquence. The early Jesuit educators appropriated the Cicero's ideal of eloquence as part of the plan of studies in their educational institutions (all conducted in Latin, the lingua franca of the day). The founder of the Jesuits, St. Ignatius Loyola, decided that Jesuit education would include teaching St. Thomas Aquinas.

In the parlance of the Roman Catholic Church, the assimilating spirit of early Catholics resulted in what is known as the Roman Catholic tradition of thought. For example, Roman Catholic theology, including moral theology, blends certain elements of ancient Greek and Roman philosophical thought together with Christian scripture.

For example, in the two volumes titled *Ambrose: De Officiis*, edited and translated by Ivor J. Davidson (Oxford University Press, 2001), we can readily see that Ambrose of Milan (c.339-397) modelled his influential Latin work on Cicero's work with the same title.

Moreover, in the book *Saint Cicero and the Jesuits: The Influence of the Liberal Arts on the Moral Probabilism* (Ashgate, 2008), Robert Aleksander Maryks shows that Cicero's influence on the Jesuits extended into the domain of moral theology – centuries after the death of Cicero.

So if the Roman Catholic tradition of thought could assimilate Cicero's thought, couldn't it assimilate Darwinian evolutionary theory? Teilhard and Ong think it could and should. After all, in Roman Catholic theology, it has long been customary to refer to God's transcendence. Surely God's transcendence makes God the God of evolution.

But in our American cultural history, white Anglo-Saxon Protestants (WASPs), and former Protestants, have been over-represented in the prestige culture. (Ong's father and his father's side of the family were WASPs.)

No doubt the prestige culture in American culture today is a wee bit more inclusive than the prestige culture was in, say, 1960. Nevertheless, because American Protestants in the past tended to be anti-Catholic, I want to call attention here to the religious-studies scholar Philip Jenkins book *The New Anti-Catholicism: The Last Acceptable Prejudice* (Oxford University Press, 2003) and the American Jesuit Mark S. Massa's book *Anti-Catholicism in America: The Last Acceptable Prejudice* (Crossroad, 2003).

Nevertheless, for a brief shining moment, the three Roman Catholic intellectuals Teilhard and Ong and McLuhan appeared to be making inroads in the prestige culture in American culture. In that brief shining moment, Tom Wolfe published his essay "What If He [Marshall McLuhan] Is Right?"

But then the counter-revolutionary forces pushed back forcefully against McLuhan and Teilhard and Ong, ushering in the political-correctness crowd spoofed by Tom Wolfe in his new book.

In his new book *The Kingdom of Speech*, Tom Wolfe has ably spoofed certain secular sacred cows in the prestige culture in American culture today. We'll have to see if he has the right stuff to impact the thinking of the political-correctness crowd and the gatekeepers of the prestige culture in American culture.

