



From Experience to Expression: A Phenomenological Pathway to Liturgical Creation and Understanding

Roberta Raymond-Nolan

University of Limerick, IRE, Ireland

Abstract

This paper examines the semantic displacement of the term 'exigence', historically rooted in Catholic exegetical practice yet recently redefined within secular rhetorical discourse. Its appropriation into the Advanced Placement English curriculum and composition studies illustrates a broader cultural tendency to flatten concepts once embedded in theological tradition. Employing Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics, the study argues that such usage obscures the doctrinal and sacramental resonance of exigence, reducing it to a utilitarian category within the rhetorical situation. The inquiry adopts a threefold methodology: critical analysis, to evaluate the theological and philosophical significance of exigence; scoping, to trace its development from biblical exegesis to modern pedagogy; and meta-analysis, to synthesise scholarship on Catholic hermeneutics, the historical-critical method, and Ricoeur's philosophy of tradition. Drawing on Origen, Vatican II, and Benedict XVI, alongside Husserl's phenomenology and Ricoeur's theory of symbols, the paper argues that Catholic liturgy and magisterial authority safeguard continuity where secular discourse tends toward rupture and relativism. Re-situating exigence within the organic unity of Scripture, liturgy, and tradition restores its theological depth and preserves the epistemological integrity of interpretation.

Keywords: exigence; exegesis; magisterium; tradition; continuity

1. Introduction

The impulse for writing this paper arises from my dual vocation as both an Advanced Placement (AP) English teacher in the United States and a university professor of literature and philosophy. Since 2010, I have taught AP English Language and Composition, a course designed by the College Board to provide high school students with rigorous training in rhetorical analysis, argumentation, and writing. For over fifteen years, I have also taught courses at the university level—such as Philosophical Issues in Literature—which draw upon a broader tradition of hermeneutic and philosophical inquiry. This combined experience has continually forced me to think across pedagogical registers, bridging the pragmatics of secondary education with the more theoretically inflected practices of higher learning.

It was within this professional context that, in 2021, I noticed a subtle yet telling shift while reviewing the AP curriculum: the word exigence had been introduced as a named component of the “rhetorical situation” (AP® English Language and Composition Course and Exam Description: V1, p. 18). At first glance, the change may appear minor, another curricular adjustment in the evolving landscape of writing instruction. Yet for me, trained in hermeneutics and attuned to the theological and philosophical genealogy of the term exegesis, the moment was striking. Having completed a PhD in 2005 that employed Paul Ricoeur’s hermeneutics as a critically evaluative methodology of textual analysis, and carrying with me a genealogical awareness of the Catholic tradition’s engagement with Scripture, I was startled to encounter exigence in such a dehistoricised, secularised form.

In its new curricular role, exigence seemed detached from the weight of its theological lineage, emptied of its original doctrinal and intellectual content, and repurposed as a mere pedagogical tool. The word appeared to function more like a consumer product, stripped of heritage and reframed for utility, something as casually appropriated as a Coke can or reproduced in the manner of Warhol’s Marilyn Diptych. John Edlund, writing under the pseudonym Guitarsophist in a 2019 blog post, notes the increasing prominence of exigence in composition studies, tracing its adoption in contexts such as the ERWC 3.0 curriculum and the influential volume *Writing Across Contexts* by Kathleen Yancey, Liane Robertson, and Kara Taczak (Edlund, 2019). While Edlund recognises the term’s novelty in pedagogical discourse, his account does not grapple with its deeper exegetical roots in theological hermeneutics, a silence that exemplifies the very process of semantic displacement that this paper seeks to interrogate.

Traditionally, exegesis, from which exigence etymologically and conceptually derives, has been rooted in Catholic hermeneutics, serving as a methodological approach to the interpretation of Scripture. Far from a neutral category, exegesis functioned as an instrument of doctrinal continuity, grounded in magisterial authority, theological inquiry, and philosophical reflection. To appropriate such a term without acknowledgement of this lineage risks flattening its epistemological density. The secularisation of exigence thus exemplifies a broader cultural tendency to efface the historical depth and interpretive complexity of inherited concepts, transforming them into adaptable but shallow signifiers.

The purpose of this paper is therefore twofold. First, it aims to examine the semantic displacement of the term exigence through the lens of Ricoeurian hermeneutics, arguing that its contemporary deployment in rhetorical pedagogy exemplifies not only a secular flattening of meaning but also a forgetfulness of tradition. Second, it gestures toward a hermeneutic reclamation: a recognition that terms such as exigence cannot be fully understood apart from their theological and exegetical genealogy. While the immediate methodology will rest on critical analysis, a future phase of this project will incorporate autoethnographic reflection, engaging through narratives and journals with both lay readers and apostolic representatives. Such dialogue, I contend, may preserve the magisterial rule of interpretation while recovering the depth of exigence as a term embedded in theological inquiry.

In grounding this argument, I turn to early Christian theology. In his foundational treatise *De principiis*, Origen, writing in the early third century, articulated a hermeneutical principle crucial to Christian understandings of divine revelation: “And not only did the Spirit supervise the writings that were previous to the coming of Christ, but because he is the same Spirit and proceeds from the one God, he has dealt in like manner with the gospels and the writings of the apostles” (Origen, c. 220/1936, IV.2, p. 287). This affirmation of continuity between Old and New Testament texts under the guidance of the Spirit underscores the interpretive seriousness of exegesis as a practice. As C. G. Bateman (2010) has argued, Origen’s recognition of the New Testament as divinely inspired was pivotal for its eventual canonical

authority. To recall such theological depth alongside contemporary appropriations of exigence is to insist that the modern use of the term is neither innocent nor trivial but historically and theologically freighted.

This inquiry thus situates itself at the intersection of pedagogy, hermeneutics, and theology, advancing the claim that recovering the doctrinal and interpretive depth of terms like exigence is essential not only for intellectual honesty but also for resisting the broader cultural trend of conceptual dispossession.

2. Methodology & Argument

This paper argues that the modern secular appropriation of exigence exemplifies a broader cultural trend of conceptual flattening, wherein terms with profound theological and hermeneutical histories are reduced to pedagogical jargon. Through a Ricoeurian hermeneutic lens, I will demonstrate how this displacement obscures the depth of tradition, undermines continuity, and risks transforming theological symbols into cultural commodities. My method will focus on textual and conceptual analysis, with future work incorporating autoethnographic perspectives. The aim is not merely critique but reclamation: to re-anchor exigence within the Catholic interpretive tradition while remaining in dialogue with contemporary rhetorical theory.

This paper aims to examine the semantic displacement of the term exigence through a Ricoeurian hermeneutic lens, arguing that its contemporary usage in secular rhetorical discourse obscures the term's theological and exegetical lineage and exemplifies a broader cultural tendency to efface the historical depth and interpretive complexity of inherited concepts. The immediate methodology rests on critical analysis, but a future study incorporating autoethnography—through narration and journal—will seek to integrate the voices of lay individuals into a dialogic engagement with apostolic representatives, thereby preserving the magisterial rule of interpretation while recovering the depth of exigence as a term embedded in a tradition of theological inquiry. In doing so, this inquiry not only critiques the secular flattening of a historically rich concept but also gestures toward a hermeneutic reclamation that honours both the doctrinal origins and interpretive plurality that such terms deserve.

3. Exegetical Tradition and Early Authority

The Catholic theological tradition has long grounded its interpretive practice in exegesis, the critical interpretation of Scripture. Origen, one of the earliest systematic theologians of the Church (c.185–254), argued in *De principiis* that divine inspiration extended equally to the Old Testament, the Gospels, and the apostolic writings: “And not only did the Spirit supervise the writings which were previous to the coming of Christ, but because he is the same Spirit and proceeds from the one God, he has dealt in like manner with the gospels and the writings of the apostles” (Origen, c.220, 4.2, p. 287). This assertion emphasised theological continuity across the canon and shaped the Church's recognition of both Testaments as divinely inspired.

As C.G. Bateman notes, early Catholic liturgical practice reflected this hermeneutic development. Old Testament texts were introduced with the phrase “it is written”, while the Gospels and apostolic writings increasingly appeared with the authoritative preface “our Lord said” (Bateman, 2010, p. 11). The difference in formula signalled more than provenance; it reflected an emerging liturgical hermeneutic that gave the apostolic texts unique revelatory weight. By distinguishing yet unifying these sources, the early Church established interpretive principles that integrated history, worship, and theology into a coherent whole.

This early hermeneutic framework matters for two reasons. First, it reveals how exegesis was never a neutral, secular act, but one situated within a community of faith and worship. Second, it demonstrates that interpretive authority was relational, resting not merely on textual analysis but on ecclesial practice and continuity. In this respect, Origen's recognition of parallel inspiration prefigured later magisterial authority, ensuring that the interpretation of Scripture remained bound to apostolic succession and the liturgical life of the Church.

Marie Anne Mayeski emphasises this continuity when she recalls Michael Cahill's vision of a dialogue between those who privilege the historical-critical method of analysis and those who emphasise the theological history of exegesis (Mayeski, 2001, p. 140). The historical-critical method, often praised for objectivity, is not devoid of presuppositions. As the University of Chicago notes, it is inevitably shaped by "a moral and political standpoint in the present, on a reasoned dissatisfaction with life as it is currently lived" (Goswami et al., 2014). The risk here is not overt moralising but subtle subjectivity, in which dissatisfaction with present conditions frames interpretation of the past.

From a Catholic perspective, this is a double-edged tool. On one hand, critical historicism illuminates historical complexity and can correct naïve readings. On the other, it risks detaching exegesis from its theological and liturgical roots, flattening sacred texts into artefacts of cultural history. Catholic hermeneutics, by contrast, insists on continuity, anchoring interpretation in tradition, magisterial authority, and the Christocentric unity of Scripture (CCC §112). Without such anchoring, terms like exegesis, and by extension exigence, risk semantic drift, losing their theological moorings in favour of secular redefinitions.

4. Ricoeur: Continuity, Identity, and the Whole of Scripture

Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics provides a crucial lens for understanding how tradition maintains continuity without collapsing into rigidity. In *Time and Narrative*, he argues that traditions evolve through a tension of identity and difference, where continuity is not static repetition but narrative refiguration sustained across generations (Ricoeur, 1985, p. 20). He describes tradition as sedimented history, layered interpretations that together constitute the style of a community. For Catholics, this means that doctrinal and liturgical forms are not frozen relics but evolving expressions of a stable theological identity. At the same time, the evolving nature of tradition requires vigilance: without grounding in authoritative interpretation, inherited concepts are vulnerable to distortion or relativisation.

Ricoeur emphasises that identity within a tradition is never achronic or logically fixed. Rather, identity develops as stories and interpretations accumulate, forming what he calls the "schematism of narrative understanding" (Ricoeur, 1985, p. 20). In Catholic thought, this resonates with the Second Vatican Council's claim that "the study of the sacred page is the soul of theology" and must be renewed by each age (Dei Verbum, p. 24). Continuity is thus neither rupture nor repetition but a narrative process whereby the faithful reinterpret the Word while remaining tethered to apostolic succession and the magisterial tradition.

This narrative conception of tradition becomes especially relevant when examining language. Ricoeur notes that linguistic systems are organic, meaning that the whole has priority over the parts (Ricoeur, 1985, p. 31). Applied to Scripture, this suggests that meaning cannot be isolated within fragments but arises from the unity of the canon. Catholic exegesis mirrors this principle in its Christocentric hermeneutic: the Old and New Testaments form an organic whole, unified in Christ. Without this organic understanding, language risks fragmentation, and inherited terms become subject to arbitrary reinterpretation.

The Catholic emphasis on Christocentric exegesis stands in stark contrast to secular appropriations of religious vocabulary. When “exigence” is introduced into rhetorical theory without acknowledgment of its exegetical roots, the word becomes detached from the organic unity that once gave it meaning. Detached from the Christological whole, exigence becomes mere occasion, a situational trigger in rhetoric, rather than a deeply theological concept embedded in tradition. This reduction is precisely the kind of semantic flattening that Ricoeur warns against, where narrative identity is supplanted by utilitarian categorisation.

Ricoeur’s insight into tradition also highlights the danger of assuming that inherited language retains its meaning unchanged across shifting contexts. Derrida’s notion of *différance* underscores this instability: meaning is constantly deferred and displaced. Without ecclesial structures to safeguard interpretation, theological terms can be emptied of their doctrinal content while retaining the veneer of continuity. Thus, when educational institutions deploy exigence as rhetorical jargon, they unwittingly participate in a process that masks discontinuity as if it were faithful transmission.

The biblical concept of “the Word” (Logos) illustrates Ricoeur’s hermeneutic concerns. John’s Gospel declares: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). Within Catholic tradition, this affirms not merely linguistic order but the Christological centre of reality. Logos is divine reason, incarnate in Christ, the unifying principle of creation and revelation. Yet the Logos gains identity only within the system of Scripture and the Church, which provide its interpretive framework. As Ricoeur suggests, style and meaning emerge only in relation to the whole.

In secularised discourse, however, language is often reduced to instrumentality. The Logos as a theological reality is supplanted by logos as rational discourse, or worse, by language as a functional tool of persuasion. Here, Ricoeur’s caution is indispensable: the danger lies not simply in redefinition but in misrecognition. When the Word is stripped of its theological content, it risks being commodified as a rhetorical object, its transcendent depth flattened into immanent utility.

5. Magisterium and the Shift from Confession to Reconciliation

Catholic hermeneutics is not only theoretical but embodied in sacramental practice. The sacrament of penance, traditionally understood as “confession,” illustrates how interpretation shapes theology. St. Alphonsus de Liguori described the confessor as father, physician, teacher, and judge, emphasising that the priest mediates divine mercy rather than condemnation (Aramonte, 2020, p. 2). Yet Vatican II reoriented this understanding by foregrounding reconciliation. The priest, acting in *persona Christi*, was no longer primarily a juridical figure presiding over a tribunal of consciences but a pastoral father called to welcome and guide penitents in their search for truth (Aramonte, 2020, p. 3).

This interpretive shift reveals how exegesis functions liturgically: biblical passages such as John 20:22–23, where Christ empowers the apostles to forgive sins, are read not as relics of a bygone past but as living mandates shaping pastoral practice. By emphasising mercy and accompaniment, Vatican II employed a hermeneutic of renewal that remained continuous with apostolic authority. Exegesis, here, is neither purely historical nor abstractly theological; it is liturgical, embodied in the Church’s sacramental economy.

6. Relativism and the Hermeneutic of Rupture

Yet the renewal inaugurated by Vatican II was not without controversy. Some interpreted the Council as a radical break from tradition, adopting what Benedict XVI later criticised as a

“hermeneutic of rupture”. Such readings treat the Council as a revolution rather than a reform, detaching Catholic identity from its historical and doctrinal continuity. Benedict countered with a “hermeneutic of reform in continuity”, insisting that change in expression must always converge with fidelity to the faith’s substance (Ratzinger in Twomey, 2022, p. 25).

The dangers of rupture are compounded by the rise of relativism. As Ratzinger noted, the horrors of the twentieth century undermined Europe’s confidence in its Christian heritage, leading to scepticism toward claims of absolute truth (Twomey, 2022, p. 18). Cultural relativism, as anthropologists such as Melville Herskovits argued, treats human experience as entirely conditioned by enculturation (Kanarek, 2013, p. 2). While this approach fosters tolerance, it also risks moral paralysis. If all truths are culturally relative, then violence and oppression can be justified within their own frameworks, leaving no transcendent criterion for critique (Kanarek, 2013, p. 10).

When applied to theology, relativism corrodes magisterial authority. The danger is not only theoretical but practical: Catholic language can be co-opted by secular ideologies, emptied of doctrinal content, and repurposed for cultural or political agendas. Terms such as “gospel” illustrate this semantic drift. Originally *euangelion*, was the proclamation of salvation through Christ; the word is now often reduced to a cultural marker (“gospel music”) or sectarian identity (“gospel-centered churches”). Detached from its Christological and ecclesial meaning, “gospel” risks becoming a brand rather than a message.

7. Liturgy, Gospel, and the Homily as Hermeneutical Events

The Catholic liturgy embodies the Church’s hermeneutic principle that Scripture is not only read but proclaimed and interpreted within a community of faith. The Liturgy of the Word, in particular, is not a devotional exercise but a hermeneutical event, where Scripture is actualised in worship. The Gospel holds pride of place, proclaimed only by an ordained minister within apostolic succession. Its universality is reinforced by the lectionary: Catholics across the globe hear the same Gospel on the same day, underscoring the Church’s unity. This universality safeguards the text from subjective selection, ensuring that the “Good News” is received rather than invented.

The Greek term, *euangelion*, originally denoted the announcement of an emperor’s victory or birth. Early Christians adopted it to proclaim Christ’s life, death, and resurrection as the definitive Good News. In the liturgy, this proclamation is not merely historical reportage but a present reality. The Gospel becomes a sacramental word: Christ is encountered, not simply remembered. The act of proclamation thus resists reduction to a cultural marker or brand, for it is embedded in an interpretive community sustained by apostolic succession and magisterial oversight.

Alongside the Gospel, the homily functions as the Church’s authoritative interpretation. It is not an opinion piece but a catechetical and evangelising act that bridges the ancient text with the lived experience of the faithful. Rooted in tradition, the homily interprets Scripture in continuity with magisterial teaching, ensuring that personal experience does not override revealed truth. While the homily contextualises the Gospel for contemporary listeners, it does so within the boundaries of apostolic faith. Its aim is formative rather than expressive: to conform the faithful to the Word, not the Word to cultural trends.

The centrality of Gospel and homily reveals the risks posed by distortions in non-Catholic or secular contexts. When divorced from ecclesial authority, biblical language can be appropriated and redefined. The term “gospel,” once universally understood as the proclamation of salvation, has in many Protestant and secular contexts become a marker of identity or genre --

“gospel music,” “gospel coalition” -- rather than a proclamation of Christ. This shift exemplifies how relativism can masquerade as continuity. By presenting derivative meanings as natural extensions of the original, language is co-opted for cultural or political purposes.

Such distortions threaten what Ratzinger called the “epistemic chain” linking Scripture, Tradition, and Magisterium (Twomey, 2022, p. 25). When interpretation is severed from apostolic authority, theological terms risk becoming tools of propaganda or ideological identity. This is particularly evident in contemporary contexts where partisan politics, nationalism, or commercial interests co-opt religious language to legitimise agendas fundamentally at odds with Catholic teaching. In such cases, words like “gospel” and “exigence” are not merely redefined; they are dehistoricized, stripped of their liturgical and theological depth, and redeployed as rhetorical instruments.

In this light, perhaps the Catholic understanding of language demands an extended, even sacramental, sense, one in which language participates in revealing and shaping metaphysical truth. In our current technological era, however, language has undergone a profound shift. With machines now capable of producing words and mimicking discourse, the focus for interpretation must sharpen. The researcher can no longer rely on surface-level meaning but must attend more rigorously to rhetorical elements such as syntax, cadence, and word choice, which may carry deeper, or more destabilised, resonances. Language, in this context, becomes both more powerful and more precarious. This state of language in the modern world makes the role of magisterium, which, “...refers to the teaching authority which Christ has given to the Church. Here the term refers to the authority itself, not those who exercise it. Second, the term refers to those who exercise this teaching authority -- in other words, to the pope and the bishops teaching in union with him. Collectively, they are referred to as the “Magisterium” (Akin, 2019). At a time during which misinformation is sold to appear as a form of intellectualism and lying has become almost synonymous with speaking, it is important to utilise the limits of magisterium tradition to maintain the linear trajectory of Catholic discourse.

Against this backdrop, the Catholic liturgy offers a counterexample: by embedding Scripture within ritual, symbol, and sacrament, the Church safeguards interpretation from devolving into arbitrariness and anchors it within a living tradition. The Catholic liturgy offers a counterexample. The Church ensures that interpretation is not arbitrary but communal and Christocentric. The liturgy integrates continuity and renewal, embodying Ricoeur’s claim that tradition is both identity and difference, sedimented yet dynamic. The proclamation of the Gospel and the authoritative homily prevent theological language from drifting into semantic relativism, preserving its sacramental depth against secular flattening.

For example, in New Testament exegesis, the priest who participates in the sacrament of reconciliation performs the archetypal role of “Father.” This reflects the authority given by Christ to the apostles, particularly in John 20:22-23, where Jesus empowers them to forgive sins. When the priest acts in persona Christi, he exercises this apostolic function and serves as a mediator of divine mercy and moral restoration. This understanding is more than a simple relational identity; it is a profound interpretation with a robust biblical-theological grounding and ecclesial authority. This understanding repositions the sacrament from a juridical act to a restorative encounter grounded in scriptural precedent.

The commentary above can be extended and concluded as follows: The transition from the pre-Vatican II conception of confession to the post-conciliar emphasis on reconciliation represents a substantive theological and pastoral reconfiguration that recontextualizes the role of the priest within the sacramental economy. Whereas the traditional model cast the priest primarily as a juridical figure—an agent of divine judgment administering penance within a framework centered on guilt and restitution—the post-Vatican II paradigm, informed by a hermeneutic of

mercy, foregrounds the priest as a spiritual father, healer, and ecclesial mediator of restorative grace. This interpretive shift, grounded in a renewed ecclesiology and scriptural exegesis, necessitates a dynamic and ongoing formation of the clergy, both theologically and spiritually. Scriptural exegesis, in this instance, alludes to the critical interpretation and explanation of biblical texts. In the context of Vatican II and the theology of reconciliation, it involves analyzing passages from scripture, such as the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15), to understand more deeply the nature of God's mercy and the role of the priest in mediating it.

Rather than reading these texts through a purely legalistic lens, postconciliar exegesis emphasises their relational, compassionate, and redemptive dimensions. This supports the reinterpretation of the priest not as a judge enforcing divine law, but as a pastoral figure who participates in God's reconciling mission. Priests are thus required to cultivate not only doctrinal proficiency but also pastoral discernment, emotional intelligence, and spiritual maturity, enabling them to accompany penitents in a dialogical and transformative encounter. In this context, hermeneutics functions as an indispensable tool for rearticulating the sacrament in light of contemporary anthropological and ecclesial insights, thereby rendering the priesthood a pedagogical vocation rooted not in juridical authority alone but in the witness of lived holiness and relational wisdom. The Liturgy of the Word, is not merely a devotional practice but a hermeneutical event. In it, Scripture is proclaimed and actualized within the life of the Church. Liturgy integrates Scripture with ritual, symbol, and sacrament, reflecting the Church's interpretive lens shaped by tradition and doctrine.

8. Phenomenology and Hermeneutics: Husserl and Ricoeur

While Ricoeur provides the hermeneutical framework for tradition and language, his method is deeply indebted to phenomenology, particularly the work of Edmund Husserl. Husserl's concept of intentionality, that consciousness is always directed toward something, reshaped modern philosophy by insisting that meaning is constituted in lived experience. Ricoeur adapted this principle to textual interpretation, arguing that exegesis requires distancing: stepping back from a text's original context to perceive its universal horizons (Moran, 2005, p. 46). In this way, phenomenology grounds hermeneutics by showing how interpretation arises not only from historical-critical inquiry but also from the structures of human consciousness.

Symbols, for Ricoeur, embody this duality of meaning. They are "bound to" their literal sense yet "bound by" a deeper symbolic resonance (Ricoeur, 1970, p. 32). This double structure resists reduction to mere surface meaning, demanding interpretation that uncovers the hidden depth of language. Applied to liturgy, this means that biblical symbols, water, bread, cross, are not exhausted by their physical or cultural meanings but disclose divine realities. The homily, in this light, becomes a phenomenological act: it allows the faithful to experience the symbolic power of Scripture as revelation, bridging ancient text and present life.

Husserl's method of "epoché" also illuminates liturgical exegesis. By bracketing presuppositions, one can encounter phenomena as they are given. Ricoeur translates this into a hermeneutic of faith and suspicion. Suspicion unmasks distortions, while faith reconstructs meaning through what he calls a "second naiveté" (Ricoeur, 1970, p. 28). For Catholics, this means that exegesis requires both critique, resisting relativist or ideological appropriations, and faith, which re-engages Scripture as living Word. Without this dialectic, interpretation risks collapsing either into uncritical repetition or sceptical reductionism.

9. Conclusion: Reclaiming Exigence

This paper has argued that the contemporary secular appropriation of exigence exemplifies a broader cultural trend of flattening theological concepts into utilitarian terms. Historically rooted in Catholic exegesis and hermeneutics, exigence once carried the weight of tradition and doctrinal authority. Detached from this lineage, the term has been reduced to a pedagogical category in rhetorical theory, stripped of its narrative and sacramental depth.

Drawing on Ricoeur and Husserl, I have shown that tradition must be understood as a dynamic interplay of continuity and difference, where meaning arises from the organic whole rather than fragmented parts. The liturgy, particularly the proclamation of the Gospel and the homily, exemplifies this hermeneutical principle by preserving continuity within renewal. Vatican II's shift from confession to reconciliation illustrates how interpretation evolves while remaining tethered to apostolic authority. Relativism and rupture threaten this continuity, risking the semantic drift of theological terms into secular slogans.

To reclaim exigence, and by extension other inherited concepts, requires a hermeneutic that unites suspicion and faith, critique and continuity. Suspicion unmasking distortions that flatten theological terms into cultural commodities. Faith, exercised through the magisterial tradition and liturgical life, restores their depth as symbols disclosing divine realities. Only within this dialectic can the Catholic Church resist semantic erosion and continue to proclaim the Word as living truth rather than rhetorical instrument.

In light of the Catholic tradition's emphasis on the communal nature of faith, especially as it is cultivated and expressed through the liturgy, it is necessary to consider the potential harm caused when contemporary partisan politics, often intertwined with nationalism and power, seek to appropriate the Word outside of its theological, liturgical, and historical context. Such efforts risk dislocating the Word from the organic structure of Catholic tradition, reducing it to a rhetorical device or ideological symbol. This act of commodification not only strips the Word of its sacramental and narrative depth but also positions it within a liminal space where repetition lacks rootedness, transforming sacred language into a vehicle for disinformation or propaganda. In doing so, the foundational integrity of the Catholic experience, as a tradition shaped by grace, narrative, and communal understanding, is undermined by interpretations that disregard its etymological, doctrinal, and ecclesial continuity.

Furthermore, while the Church must remain attentive to the historical and ethical implications of colonialism, corporatism, and imperial forces, that have often shaped the social and political orders in which it has operated, there is a growing concern when such calls for commentary arise not from a pursuit of truth or reconciliation, but as a strategy within contemporary political agendas. In these instances, political actors may seek to reposition the Church not as a moral witness or sacramental community, but as a legitimising force within the frameworks of power they themselves construct. This risks displacing the Church's theological vocation—rooted in grace, communion, and eschatological hope—and reinscribing it within a matrix of secular instrumentalism. When the language of grace is co-opted to serve the objectives of ideological power, the Catholic community is no longer seen as a pilgrim people oriented toward transcendence, but as a partisan entity conscripted into the antagonisms of the political present. Such a reconfiguration undermines the Church's capacity to speak prophetically and universally, threatening to fracture the unity of faith by embedding it within the very structures of violence and division it is called to transcend.

Ultimately, the responsibility lies with both scholars and the faithful. Theologians must engage critically with secular appropriations, while Catholics must immerse themselves in the liturgy, where Scripture is interpreted not as artefact but as sacrament. In an age when language is

easily commodified, the Church must embody Ricoeur's vision of tradition: not static preservation nor radical rupture, but a living narrative in which continuity and renewal converge. Only then can terms such as "exigence" and other theological terms regain their rightful place as vessels of depth, coherence, and truth within the Catholic intellectual and spiritual tradition.

Acknowledgement

This paper arises from my teaching in both secondary and university contexts and from my current research on the instrumentalisation of language in the Arts. I am indebted to the works of Paul Ricoeur, Joseph Ratzinger, and Origen for shaping its hermeneutic and theological framework, and to contemporary interlocutors such as John Edlund and C. G. Bateman for sharpening my awareness of how tradition is rearticulated in modern discourse.

I would also like to acknowledge my academic mentors, Drs. Sandra Joyce and Martin Cunneen, whose guidance and example have deeply influenced both the method and spirit of this inquiry.

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