

# Mantra Beware the Mantra Discourse Mantra Mantra

*Edgardo Moffatt, an editor for Kairós—a theological publisher in Buenos Aires, Argentina—talks to InterLit about the dangers of what he calls the “mantra discourse” in publishing.*



*“Listen to the church with a critical and prophetic attitude,” says Edgardo Moffatt.*

Last year, during the Letra Viva conference for Christian publishers in Latin America, you talked about the “mantra discourse.” What do you mean by this term?

In some Asian religions, a “mantra” is a brief verbal formula that must be repeated constantly to attain spiritual advancement. It is assigned by a master to a disciple and is supposed to work through literal and incessant repetition. A “discourse” is a formal expression of thought on a subject. So, by “mantra discourse” I mean theological publishing which merely repeats or reflects the ideas that people want to hear. When editors develop products to document and reflect the realities of the church, and just echo popular and sometimes questionable ideas common in the church, they create Christian mantras.

**How is this a “danger” to the church?**

It is dangerous in several ways.

First, it reinforces the tendency of the church to hear only what it wants to hear. Publishers who put out mantra discourse can say that “consumer preference” guides their editorial decisions, but their books really become mere tools for commercial success.

Second, mantra discourse is like a bulldozer smoothing over the differ-

ences and the voices of minorities. Less popular messages are silenced.

Third, through constant repetition, mantra discourse reinforces the ecclesiastical status quo. It canonizes certain ideas making them sound authoritative.

And last, when editors and publishers think they are just reflecting reality in their books but fail to see these mantra books shape public opinion, they package subjective material as objective material without realizing it. They offer undiscerning consumers mantra opinions as if they were something new.

**How do you suggest editors avoid the “mantra discourse?”**

Look beyond the profitability of a project in selecting themes to publish. Take advantage of market research to listen to the church, but also apply discernment, creativity and courage to publish what the church may not want to hear.

Remember the prophet Jeremiah’s warning. He said, “Do not trust in deceptive words and say, ‘This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD!’” (Jer. 7:4). We need the courage to break the formulas repeated by the ecclesiastical and social culture that surrounds them.

**How then can editors break away from the spell of the “mantra discourse?”**

We need to develop the capacity to question the authoritarianism, conservatism, and censorship that comes from just repeating accepted perspectives and recycling them in catalogs as “new” releases. We should listen to the church with a critical and prophetic attitude and publish the views of the minority so these can be considered and debated by the majority. We need to publish books to communicate the transforming power of the Gospel. In this way we can engage the Church in a healthy hermeneutical discourse rather than merely repeating the popular mantras of the day. We can foster “change discourse” rather than “mantra discourse.” ♦