

Rumor Has It...

Rumor is a great way to kill conscience, consciousness, presence and happiness.

It's easy to say hurtful, false things and then apologize later. But throughout time, the pernicious and, yes, viral, nature of rumor has been well known. And there's no public figure that doesn't comprehend the venal, moral turpitude of pretending they don't know what they said—or don't think it was "that bad." They know full well.



Stultitia – Incapacity to know good from evil



Inconstantia – lack of moral balance



Invidia – Envy – to look in a hostile manner

Giotto, Scrovegni Chapel, Padua — grisaille frescoes of three of the Seven Vices

Just last week, there was a bit of a kerfuffle over comments Meghan McCain (on the nationally televised show "The View") made in 2020 in which she said she didn't mind the (now) former US president's labeling of the COVID-19 virus in (obviously) anti-Asian rhetoric. Just this week, she made another oblique comment, concerned that "identity politics" would allow Asians to get jobs over Whites. Castigated by many, she then posted a rather manufactured, un-heartfelt statement that she doesn't support "the reprehensible violence and vitriol that has been targeted towards the Asian-American community."

Instead of being forced to make a sham apology, how about not saying something that displays your lack of conscience in the first place?

In this particular case, Rumor had a year to stew in the minds and hearts of too many. As with this current example, apologies are worthless and do not exonerate people for their words and deeds.

Virgil, writing around 25 BC, has a great passage about Rumor in the *Aeneid*. Although immaterial to the universal lesson, the particular rumor being spread concerns the romance between Dido, Queen of Carthage, and Aeneas, the hero of the story who will go on to found Rome:

“Suddenly, Rumor went through the great cities of Libya, Rumor than which there is no swifter evil. She thrives on movement and increases her power by her traveling; at first she is small through fear; soon she raises herself into the air, walks upon the ground, and hides her head among the clouds. The parent Earth, irritated by the wrath of the gods, produced her, they say, last of all, the sister of Coeus and Enceladus.* She is swift of foot and fleet of wing, a dreadful, huge monster, which for every feather on her body has just as many watchful eyes beneath—marvelous to tell—and just as many tongues and mouths sound, and she pricks up just as many ears. At night she flies screeching through the midst of the sky, nor does she close her eyes in sweet sleep. During the day, like a guard she sits either on the ridge of the highest roof or on lofty towers and terrifies great cities, as persistent a spreader of the false and depraved as of the true. Then gladly she kept filling the people with many different kinds of gossip and gave out fact and fiction in equal measure:...”

From Virgil's Aeneid, book iv, translated by Kevin Guinagh (Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1970)

One of the pathetic tragedies of today is that so few people realize the time-honored, ubiquitous banality of rumor, gossip, spite...and the nearly willful incapacity of so many people to discern the difference between good and evil (*Stultitia*). That dopey fog leads to a spineless imbalance (*Inconstantia*, literally, the lack of a stable seat—the picture above has a woman attempting to balance on a ball) that can instigate outbursts of wrath—with its sudden, mindlessly passionate delight in destruction.

The pictures above show three of the seven Vices that Giotto painted in the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua around 1300. The depiction of Envy (Rumor) is spectacular! It shows a venomous snake coming out from the mouth of a person, but the snake doesn't bite someone else: it turns on the “false prophet” and poisons them. So true! If only people realized that, in attempting to harm someone else with deceit and lies, you usually wind up harming yourself—your soul, if you still have one—more.

If you've never been to Italy, make a point of visiting Padua and the Scrovegni Chapel. It's one of the most extraordinary artistic treasures of our collective civilization.

*Two of the Titans: *Coeus* – “questioning, intelligence”; *Enceladus* – “sound the charge,” (i.e., the rumbling roar of an earthquake) giant defeated by Athena and buried under Mount Etna, Sicily