Dr. Frances J. Ranney, Department of English, lurks on public discussion boards following the destruction by lightning of a 60-foot statue of Jesus at the Solid Rock Church in Monroe, Ohio, to find that believer, agnostic, and atheist all hold one thing sacred—and it’s not styrofoam.

Amid jokes about the wrath of God (or Zeus) and predictions that the statue will return in three days, public discourse also poses serious aesthetic questions about the statue’s size and construction materials, as well as the inspiration for its creation and the presumably better uses to which the costs of construction may have been put. Questioning who constructed the statue, and why—and why of such inappropriate materials—the public discourse somewhat inadvertently draws on all four of Aristotle’s metaphysical causes as participants consider, whether in sorrow or in glee, why Jesus took a fatal hit.

Nevertheless, it is clear that form and matter are the two causes that most “matter” in this discussion. Drawing on Aristotle’s implicit discussion of the four causes in his Rhetoric, this talk considers why that is the case, and why styrofoam is excluded from a pantheon of material gods.

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