

## NOTES, DOCUMENTS, AND CRITICAL COMMENT

### SOME NOTES ON EQUIVOCATION

#### I

PROFESSOR HUNTLEY is right when he says (*PMLA*, LXXIX, Sept. 1964, 390–399) that the meaning of the term “equivocation,” as it appears in the Porter’s speech in *Macbeth*, has not been sufficiently documented. But for that reason it is essential that an article undertaking to supply the “background of Jesuitical equivocation” be fully accurate. May I therefore enter certain corrections?

1. The father of equivocation is indeed Martin Azpilcueta (Doctor Navarrus). The doctrine, however, dates not from the 1560’s, but from the publication at Rome in 1584 of a short treatise by Azpilcueta that is commonly cited as *in cap. Humanae aures*. It is misleading to speak of “Navarrus’ chapter *Humanae Aures*” or “his chapter *Humanae Aures*,” as though it were a section of a larger work. “*Humanae aures*” is the initial phrase of a canon (drawn from Gregory I’s *Moralia*) in question 5, cause 22, part 2, of Gratian’s *Decretum*. Azpilcueta wrote a commentary on that *caput* as a means of dealing with the subject of mental reservation and deception, and gave his work the following title: *Commentarius in cap. Humanae aures. XXII. q. V. De veritate responsi partim verbo, partim mente concepti; et de arte bona, et mala simulandi*.<sup>1</sup> The connection, further, between the doctrine and Valladolid is not that Azpilcueta was teaching there, but that the Jesuits at the College of Valladolid had sent a case for resolution to Azpilcueta, who had been living in Rome for a number of years and was serving as a consultant to the Penitentiary. Furthermore, Azpilcueta does not say “that he developed the doctrine from an incident in the life of St. Francis of Assisi”: the episode of St. Francis and the murderer is mentioned very briefly in Azpilcueta’s treatise, question 2, number 11; the grounds of the doctrine are set out in question 1, and have to do chiefly with the nature of human speech.

2. The statement that equivocation was “developed as a serious doctrine by the Society of Jesus” cannot be supported. Those commentators and controversialists of the period who treat the matter in detail agree that Azpilcueta, an Augustinian, originated the doctrine in the 1584 treatise cited above. It was not until 1609, when Suarez rejected Azpilcueta’s basic proof and supplied another, that a Jesuit made a significant contribution to the development of the doctrine.

And by that time equivocation was fully established in the literature of moral theology. In England equivocation came to be regarded as a Jesuit doctrine for a number of reasons: (1) because it seems to have been introduced to English Catholics by the Jesuits Henry Garnet and Robert Southwell, who returned from Rome in 1586; (2) because it was publicly defended by Southwell at his trial in February 1595; (3) because the Jesuits were taxed with a fondness for the doctrine in many of the pamphlets published during the Archpriest controversy; (4) because the doctrine had so prominent a place in the trial of Garnet in March 1606.

3. It is no longer true that nothing is known of the authorship of the *Treatise of Equivocation* that figured in Garnet’s trial. Dr. A. F. Allison, in an article in *Biographical Studies* (now *Recusant History*), 1, 1951, has established conclusively that the author is Garnet himself. Furthermore, it is not possible that Robert Southwell quoted parts of that treatise at his trial, since Garnet says in a letter of 22 April 1598<sup>2</sup> that he wrote the treatise to defend what Southwell had said at the trial. Nor is it possible that the *Treatise of Equivocation* was put together during the last ten years of Elizabeth’s reign from such continental sources as Suarez and Sanchez, since Suarez’ treatment of equivocation was first published in volume two of his *Opus de virtute et statu religionis* in 1609, and Sanchez’ treatment was first published in the posthumous *Opus morale in praecepta decalogi* in 1613. Garnet’s *Treatise of Equivocation* is basically Azpilcueta adapted for the English recusant.

4. The story of equivocation, on the continent and in England, is intricate, and the sequence of events often difficult to establish. But in some episodes the chronology is indisputable. (a) There is no record of a 1602 edition of Robert Persons’ *Treatise tending to mitigation* (Allison and Rogers, 641); there could scarcely be, since much of the work is a page-by-page refutation of Thomas Morton’s *Full satisfaction* (*STC*, 18185), published in 1606. (b) The speeches of

<sup>1</sup> I have taken the title from a Vatican Library copy of the 1584 edition. The work can be consulted in editions of the *Opera*—not so inaccessible as Professor Huntley reports. In the U. S. there are copies at Harvard and at the Catholic University in Washington, in Canada at the *Sedes Sapientiae* in Ottawa.

<sup>2</sup> An abstract of this letter appears in Christopher Grene’s *Collectanea P*, fol. 552, in the archives of Stonyhurst College in Lancashire.

Thomas Whitbread and his companions immediately before their deaths in 1679 could not have had any influence on Pope Innocent XI's condemnation of equivocation in the same year. The bull *Sanctissimus Dominus* was promulgated on the fourth of March, and the five Jesuits were executed in late June.

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## II

I respond to my critic's four points in this way: 1. Thanks to Professor Malloch for actually turning up the basic text on equivocation which I had correctly identified by author and title but mistakenly thought to be a chapter in a larger work. The Michigan catalogue mentions the University of Chicago copy of the *Opera* (1584); I wrote to the librarian there but he could not find (naturally) a "chapter" called *Humanae aures*. A further but fruitless enquiry of the microfilm library in St. Louis caused me to surrender too soon. My mistaken assertion that Navarrus got the idea for his theory from an incident in the life of St. Francis arose from my taking somebody else's word in the absence of the original document.

2. Instead of saying that equivocation was "developed as a serious doctrine by the Jesuits," I should have said "appropriated and used by the Jesuits." This, my intention, is supported by Professor Malloch, who might have added as a fifth reason why (in his words) "in England equivocation came to be regarded as a Jesuit doc-

trine" his (4a) and my citation of *A Treatise Tending to Mitigation* by Robert Persons (or Parsons), S. J., in 1607 (where did I find also a 1602 edition?). Incidentally, I would like to know whether there is a "Jesuit device" on the title pages of the *Opera* of Navarrus, and if so, how and why did it get there. Further, the world would like to know what Professor Malloch can tell us of the young John Donne's supposed relationship to Bishop Thomas Morton's book which brought forth Parsons' answer.

3. I yield (again) to Professor Malloch on the authorship of *A Treatise of Equivocation*. Though I possess in microfilm the Bodleian Library manuscript, I was unaware of Dr. Allison's article on Father Garnet.

4. The first sentence in Professor Malloch's fourth point comforts me: "The story of equivocation, on the continent and in England, is intricate, and the sequence of events often difficult to establish." Though I was in correspondence with scholars in two of our leading Jesuit universities, I was told, half jokingly, that I knew more about "Jesuitical equivocation" than the Jesuits did. I wish I had written to Professor Malloch.

*Summary:* Professor Malloch does not attack my thesis concerning *Macbeth*, nor the tone which I was careful to preserve in giving this "background" to it. Like an explorer who has drawn the first map and filled some empty spots with whales, I can only welcome the factual corrections of one who has obviously been in this strange territory before me.

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