

## FAITH AND WORDS

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‘**W**E haue on the one side auoided the scrupulositie of the Puritanes . . . ; as also on the other side we haue shunned the obscuritie of the Papists, in their *Azimes, Tunike, Rational, Holocausts, Praepuce, Pasche*, and a number of such like.’

‘. . . [Catholic] correspondence of a singular freshness, authentic eighteenth-century, and authentic English, mere English, indeed, and utterly free from the stereotyped half-foreign jargon that later generations were to experience.’

‘The fruits of the bloody sacrifice are superabundantly applied by the unbloody sacrifice.’

‘I saw Pfuff’s “Interrelated Harmony” described in the catalogue as a neo-amorphist experiment in intra-abstractionism. It is also an embodiment of universal mode-concepts, and the absence of stress emphasizes the integral tranquillity. Whirlpools of space would be a more accurate description of these non-emotional facets of dynamic passivity.’

The first of these quotations is from the address to the reader of the translators of the Authorized Version of the Bible; the second is from a review in *The Times Literary Supplement*; the third is a contemporary theologian quoting from cap. 2 of session xxii of the Council of Trent; the fourth is from a satirical jape of ‘Beachcomber’. They are part of the harvest of a little desultory reading, and serve well enough as an indication of what I want to talk—or rather, muse—about: words.

Everything, however small, that can be a hindrance to faith is of importance; and as an experienced missionary has said, ‘language can in fact be a pretty effective hindrance’. Even among those who fall over themselves in their concern to translate exactly (*incruentus* means ‘unbloody’), there is sometimes a tendency to dismiss matters of English terminology and vocabulary as not mattering.<sup>1</sup> Well, words can effect what they signify: ‘I, John,

<sup>1</sup> I may remind readers that the public was recently informed on the authority of a moral theologian that there are times when a Christian is allowed to be brutal. That means to emulate the brute beasts, and it is not an esoteric meaning. The harm done by such carelessness with words can hardly be exaggerated.

take you, Joan, for my wedded wife . . .', or, 'Brown, you will go to prison for six months'. But I am not concerned with things at that level. What interests me is the accumulated effect of the current terminology and vocabulary of Catholics in England in 'putting off' those who have no faith, or the content of whose faith we believe to be insufficient, in discouraging them in their inquiries into or approach towards the faith of the Catholic Church. Furthermore, there is the fact that much of this vocabulary is a discomfort and hindrance to some new converts, at the very time when their faith needs nourishing and to be made 'natural' to them. And not only new converts: not all who are so troubled get used to it; for some, the discomfort increases with the years, and is found to be a real and serious difficulty when it comes to trying to commend the Church's faith to those who have it not. And this, of course, is not confined to converts. Perhaps people 'ought' not to be affected by such considerations: but in fact they are.

Better than by writing at large, by amateur philosophizing and chatter about semantics, I can perhaps make my point clear by taking a number of examples, almost at random; and, to emphasize that I am making notes and not writing a thesis, I will take them in alphabetical order. But I will start with an exception, for I have just used the word *convert*.

'A convert is one who turns to God after living far from him; or even one who already serves God faithfully but aims at greater perfection': the words are Bishop Besson's. But for many the word 'convert' inevitably connotes, say, the heathen of darkest Africa. I have myself heard a 'new Catholic' say: 'God's grace has touched me and I am reconciled with his Church. But I was truly baptized as a baby, and I have always tried to serve him—I am not a convert.' I am not trying to get rid of the word in this connexion—that would be a waste of time; but I do suggest we should be more careful in our use of it. 'Making converts.' On our left hand we emphasize to the prospective Catholic that faith is a free gift of God; and on our right we tell our neighbour, 'I have made a convert'. An accepted colloquialism, no doubt, but an unfortunate one. And it is tied up with the irritation (or amusement) of so many non-Catholics who feel that Catholics are always 'getting at' them.

*Apparition*, a word inseparably associated with spooks in

common speech. An inquirer who is bothered about Fatima, or even Lourdes, is not helped if we refer to visions or appearances of our Lady as 'apparitions'.

*Cenacle.* Every serious English Protestant knows that the Last Supper and the gathering at Pentecost took place in an upper room—but what is this? If it be insisted that *caenaculum* means a dining-room etymologically, well then, let us say so: that is at least intelligible, which the French word is not. And with apparitions and cenacles we should be well rid of many other single words: from obscurities and unrealities such as benignity, longanimity, dolours, spouse, immoral and unlawful (for sinful or wicked), mediatrix (for mediatrix) and so on, to such strangers as Josue, Osee and Noe of the ark. We cannot even call a shop a shop: it becomes a 'repository'.

*Favours,* God's favours. I invite the reader to recollect the ordinary use and connotation of 'favour' in English, and then to consider whether it be a suitable word to designate the graces and goodness of Almighty God, even his uncovenanted mercies. No wonder people think we think of God as an earthly father writ large—and with 'favouritism' just round the corner: favouritism, a pernicious fault in any father of a family.

*Intolerance, tolerance.* Crucial words. Time and again Catholics speak of tolerance as meaning toleration of error or other evil, and we hear about 'the duty of intolerance' in this sense. But that is not the sense of the word in ordinary speech. In day-to-day use tolerance means 'respect for the other man's conscience': already two hundred years ago intolerant was given the subsidiary meaning of 'disposed to persecute those who differ' (S.O.E.D.), and that undertone it still has. We appear to be convicted of bigotry and desire to persecute out of our own mouths; it is folly to expect people to appreciate a distinction expressed in a meaning that is unfamiliar to their lifetime habits of thought and speech.

*Justice.* Many people are confused by reading and hearing familiar texts with the key-word, 'righteousness', etc., altered to one which they associate with courts of law and political oratory. Recent translations of the Bible are showing us a better way (as in plenty of other examples); but those translations are not yet part of our minds, and the inquirer continues to get a wrong or inadequate idea from our speech.

'*Outside the Church there is no salvation.*' It should not be necessary to refer to this expression, but it stands for a whole category and it still goes gaily on, doing all the harm that a 'misleading truth' can do. Quite simply, in the mouth of a theologian it does not mean what it conveys to the ears of a non-Catholic. Nobody wants to deprive the theologian of his technical ways of expressing himself in his text-books and lecture-rooms; but we others look to him to respect the ordinary significance of simple words in our mother-tongue. This is but one glaring example among many; ordinary people cannot be expected to understand or master the esoteric language of theology any more than that of other sciences. This is a case where the meaning of the Latin should be rendered, not the words. Far from all Catholics understand this expression themselves. In our own day there was a priest in Boston, Massachusetts—but my readers know the rest of that sad story.

(*Modern*) *Pagans*. I feel like Canute's courtiers after he got his feet wet. In Christian usage a pagan was by definition a religious man; a 'modern pagan' is by definition an unreligious or godless man. Aristotle, Plato, Virgil, Seneca were pagans. Ought we to use the word as a mere term of abuse? Are people encouraged to consider Christianity by being called by what is meant to be a rude name? I have made my protest, and pass on.<sup>2</sup>

*Patronage*. 'We fly to thy patronage . . .'. This word has three principal connotations in current speech: (1) the support which some artists and writers seem to expect as of right from the state or from rich men; (2) the personal distinction or monetary subscription entitling one to be listed among the patrons of some enterprise; (3) 'patronizing airs'. No one of these is relevant to the Mother of God. What is the matter with 'protection'? By association, *patronus - cliens*: 'client of St Aliquis'. In English the word at once suggests a business relationship with a professional man. It has been remarked that some people would be better described as the customers of a saint. But seriously, such words are nothing but a hindrance.

*Practising the virtues*. English people attach meaning and importance to being good, to being charitable, being honest, being chaste. But to speak of 'practising' these virtues is foreign

<sup>2</sup> Moment of light relief: The celebrated Anglican evangelist Father Ignatius in the pulpit described Plato as 'a dirty old pagan', and abused Jowett for translating him.

to us, and to many repulsive. It seems to suggest cold calculation, surface piety ('exteriority'!), lack of depth and reality. Or even an unseemly literalizing of the metaphor in I Corinthians 9: 24-27, with all the emphasis on the training rather than the crown, the means rather than the end, doing rather than being. A very damaging phrase.

And what about *religious exercises*? 'On the hands, down! One! Two!'

*Secret*. 'Yesterday the Pope delivered an allocution (gave an address?) at a secret consistory', and similar usages. Cardinals padding about in noiseless slippers, Jesuits listening behind curtains, Dominicans stoking the fires—oh dear, oh dear! *Secretus*, *segreto* here only means 'private'.<sup>3</sup>

*Supernatural*. This one is as difficult as it is important. The word is inevitably tainted by its everyday association with apparitions, ghosts and the like; and has it not got a certain artificial flavour in English? A necessary word cannot be avoided just because it has some misleading associations; but we could use 'supernatural' less and 'spiritual' more.

*Tradition*. The way we toss this word about to the confusion of inquirers is appalling. The Assumption, Latin at Mass, the St Christopher story, and pancakes on Shrove Tuesday: each is, we say, traditional (unqualified). Yet, 'by tradition I mean that body of revealed truth . . .'. It would help people if at least we always distinguished in so many words between *the* tradition of the Church and *a* tradition in the Church, or among Catholics.

There, then, are a dozen words and phrases, varied and of unequal weight, which in form or content are unfamiliar to all, and discouraging in their cumulative effect to many, non-Catholic English-speakers. The list could be easily extended, and so could the whole subject, which would eventually involve the business of religious metaphor, and other prickly matters. But I think I have said enough to air the problem, which in any case has been aired before. Years ago that stalwart fighter in the Midlands (or as some would have it, warrior of the Mercian fyrd), Father F. H. Drinkwater, declared that 'The ordinary Englishman undoubtedly finds us [Catholics] . . . too fond of

<sup>3</sup>Not so long ago papal encyclicals were translated in such a way as to provoke the exasperated comment that the translator seemed to be trying to conceal the Pope's meaning. The remedying of this was a really valuable work. But what about the current translation of the Marian year prayer? No easy job, I know, but . . .

technical language . . .'. Something has been done since then, but not nearly enough; and there are still far too many other things in Catholicity as presented that do not 'click with reality' for our neighbours<sup>4</sup>. In this matter of vocabulary (as in that of a thoroughgoing reform of public worship) it is sometimes objected that serious changes would 'scandalize and disturb the simple faithful'. It is not my business here to examine the implications of that surprising objection. But perhaps I may point out that whatever there might be of that sort would all be over in one generation.

Such misuses or unfamiliar uses of language as I have instanced not only have their own proper importance: they are also one element, and a considerable one, in that 'foreign look' of Catholicity in this country that is such a stumbling-block to our fellow-countrymen. Catholicity in England today is not English in the sense that our Catholicity was English in 1350, or even in 1750, or in the sense that there is today a German Catholicity, a French Catholicity and so on. That foreignness has come from both east and west of us: it is a result of our particular ecclesiastical history, and past history cannot be gainsaid. But future history can be influenced, and if the Catholic faith is to be commended to the English people in general we have got to think and feel as Englishmen—and talk English.

Catholicity is a fellowship, a unity in variety, not a supra-human—and therefore inhuman—totalitarian system. When a man becomes a Catholic he still remains the same man, with his qualities of temperament and culture; he is not (or should not be) confronted with the task of acquiring a new culture, but of 'catholicizing' what he has (so far as that may be necessary). When an Englishman is reconciled with the Catholic Church he does not (or should not) 'cease to be an Englishman'. Nor does he receive all and give nothing. Quite apart from the spiritual contribution that God's grace may enable him to make towards the good estate of the whole Body, he can make a contribution of culture, of *ethos*, of ways of thinking and doing, the chap at the garage as well as the don or man of affairs. One need not be an absurd chauvinist to think that one of the things that today

<sup>4</sup> Recently, at a Blackfriars conference, Mrs Renée Tickell and Father Gerald Vann had something to say about 'Roman Catholic English'. They did not forget what is to be found in the *Manual of Prayers*. Cf. BLACKFRIARS, September 1954, pp. 357 ff.

could benefit the Universal Church on her human side, at the least for the commending of her to our fellow-countrymen, is a bigger element of what English people can give, precisely as English. Have those of us who are English (few enough, I know) all done all we might to make our own contribution as English men and women? If we had—even in a relatively subordinate matter like vocabulary—perhaps our neighbours would find the approaches to faith somewhat less hard, discouraging and frightening than they do.

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## VAUGHAN WILLIAMS AND THE ENGLISH TRADITION

ERIC TAYLOR

IT is curious how the leadership of the musical world has passed from one country to another. This is not always merely the result of fashion or of social causes: it really does appear that the muses are migratory. The commanding influence exerted by any country at one time has tended to swamp or, to change the metaphor, at least obscure the native art of others. One has only to think of the tremendous impact of Italian, and later of German, music in this country to realize this. So complete and far-reaching has the predominance been on occasion that an appearance of a truly international musical style has been given. This was never more clearly true than in the eighteenth century, when the process was aided by a social and aristocratic internationalism. Nevertheless, every nation has a characteristic musical tradition of its own, even though the tradition may sometimes only be traced with difficulty, being continued by a host of minor, forgotten composers. Thus, even in eighteenth-century England, which is popularly regarded as a *locus classicus* of a trough in a musical tradition, there were composers such as Boyce who spoke in unmistakably English accents.

What it is that causes and perpetuates national characteristics is a matter for conjecture. Rousseau attributed it to the influence, *via* song, of language; but, though there may be some truth in this,