

The exigencies of printing and the fact of Summer holidays have driven us with regret to return to the former *Blackfriars* custom of producing a single enlarged summer issue to cover both July and August.

For technical reasons (connected for example, with stapling) we cannot actually double the size, but we propose to compensate our readers by also producing an enlarged Winter issue in the month of December.

Editor

Comment

“Carruthers is the whitest man I know” says Ponsonby-Smith in the year 1900 thereby establishing himself as belonging to a rather dreadful clique of English snobs but not necessarily as personally a racist. The racism at that time was simply implicit in his language; it would be beside the point to upbraid him or to hope that some effort by him to alter his speech will have any serious effect on the racial climate. Racism was built into this English rather as *original sin* is built into the total structures of human living. Suppose we think of the individual as a kind of node in a network of relationships, beginning with the structure of his or her own body and moving out to the extensions of that bodily life into the structures of society, rather, perhaps, as we think of a subatomic particle as a confluence of the lines of a field of force. Then just as the network which is a particular language may be infected throughout by a distortion such as racism, so the networks that constitute human life are infected throughout by inhumanity. The structures essential to communication themselves impede it. We can speak and think to conceal ourselves from others and from ourselves – and not only that: the language itself tends to such concealment. Consciousness tends to false consciousness as the sparks fly upward.

Such is our situation of sin and our need not just to try to reform ourselves but to be redeemed. We need the transformation of the whole structural context within which and through which we live out our humanity, we need a new creation, a resurrection from the dead. It is a form of that perennial heresy, rather unfairly named after the British theologian Pelagius, to hold that simply by

individual effort we can overcome the contradictions inherent in our constitution. We can be entangled in a moral evil that will not go away simply because we recognise it as such.

The mistakes in such a situation are to suppose that we must either do everything or nothing. The sensible thing is to make what improvements we can while recognising that the distortion is going to remain anyway. Yes, original sin has been in principle, conquered; yes, we can lead better and more human lives, but the weakness and the temptations remain.

It seems to me that we need just such an attitude when we confront another structural defect in our language, one that is even more pervasive though a good deal less catastrophic than the racist one. Consider this sentence "This is the cup of my blood ... it will be shed for you and for all men so that sins may be forgiven." By any standards that is a curious translation of "pro vobis et pro multis effundetur". There was absolutely nothing to prevent ICEL from saying "shed for you and for all", where did these *men* come from? There is not even a latin *hominibus* to excuse it. (There are, by the way, scholarly reasons connected with the underlying aramaic for not rendering 'multis' by 'many' with its Jansenistic flavour.)

Once alerted by such an example you begin to find liturgical texts a bristling minefield of apparently sexist expressions. No doubt their authors were no more personally anti-feminist than Ponsonby-Smith was personally racist, and women's liberationists who see the Catholic Church as a sinister sexist institution are lacking in historical perspective, but that does not excuse our retaining these expressions. We cannot in this situation do everything; it looks as though we are stuck with a language with a built-in bias of gender; not much, beyond disconcerting people, is achieved by referring to God as 'She', but that does not mean we can do nothing. Far more damaging than the phrase 'God the Father' is the persistent assumption of our liturgy that the *human race* consists entirely of males. This is something that can be dealt with simply by being more careful, but there is an amazing amount of re-wording to be done. (Let us hope, however, that this will not involve scattering the pompous word 'person' all over the language; when we need a gender-free substitute for 'man', well, the Greeks used *soma*, some Latins used *corpus* and the English after all, not long ago used 'body', which we still preserve in combinations like 'everybody'; certainly the milkbody sounds a lot less formidable than the milkperson).

It is no doubt diversionary and irrelevant to complain when the Pope speaks of the 'dignity of man' but it is only common sense to want to deal with the truly scandalous state of our liturgical texts and to lay the liturgical Ponsonby-Smith finally in his white man's grave.

H.McC.