

The Black Friar and the Catechism: A question of words and meaning

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At the time of the Reformation the catechism began to assume a new importance. The rapid diffusion of printed works coincided with the spread of new reforming ideas. Luther had a catechism printed in 1529. This was followed by a Catholic catechism published at Augsburg in 1530. Most of the leading reformers produced similar manuals and Peter Canisius and John of Avila were in the field before the Catechism of the Council of Trent. But catechisms can tell us more than the way in which Protestant differed from Catholic. Not all correlative religionists agreed about the relative importance of doctrines nor indeed about method. We are reminded of this by the appearance of a new edition of the 'Commentaries on the Christian Catechism' by Archbishop Carranza. This work was first published in Antwerp in 1558, put on the Spanish Index of Prohibited Books in 1559 and officially condemned by Pope Gregory XIII in 1576. Four hundred years later in 1972, a new critical edition, with the Imprimatur of the Bishop of Salamanca, was published to commemorate the International Year of the Book.¹

I

Bartholomé Carranza, born 1503, was a Dominican of the Province of Castille. He was a consultor to the Inquisition at Valladolid and also censor of books, he attended the first two stages of Trent as one of Charles V's theologians. At Trent he was a powerful advocate of episcopal residence and his experience at the council gave him first hand contact with religious controversy and the political situation outside Spain. When Philip married Mary Tudor in 1554, Carranza was chosen to accompany the Prince and remain in England as ecclesiastical adviser.² At the Council of Trent, Carranza had become friendly with Pole and together they now worked for the restoration of Catholicism in England under Philip and Mary. As resistance to Mary grew, Carranza advocated a hard line and earned the name of 'The Black Friar'. There were even attempts to assassinate him. He took part in the national synod of 1555-6. With Pole he was instrumental in drafting a plan for clergy training preceding the Tridentine decree. He was asked by the synod to draw up a catechism for the guidance of Catholics so that they might

¹Bartolomé Carranza de Miranda. *Comentarios sobre el Catechismo Cristiano*. Edición crítica y estudio histórico por José Tellechea Idigoras. B.A.C. Madrid 1972 (2 vols.). The account given in the first part of this article is largely drawn from Tellechea's historical introduction which also contains a full bibliography.

²The only account, as far as I know of Carranza's stay in England is J. I. Tellechea Idigoras. *Bartholomé Carranza y la restauración católica inglesa, 1554-1558*. *Anthologia Annuæ* 12 (1964), pp. 159-282.

know what was acceptable teaching. It was Carranza who assumed responsibility for the execution of Cranmer. He ordered the burning of heretical books and vernacular bibles. He was appointed visitator to the Universities and at the request of the University of Cambridge, the bones of Bucer, the Protestant and ex-Dominican friar were disinterred and burnt. In 1557 Philip, who had now succeeded Charles to the throne of Spain, left England for the last time and took Carranza with him to Flanders. These three years made a lasting impression on him. He was struck not only by the fortitude of Catholics under persecution (he was a great admirer of Sir Thomas More and Bishop Fisher) but he saw that an almost insuperable obstacle to any restoration was posed by the need for church property to be taken out of the hands of those who had acquired it in the previous reigns. Himself a friar, he was able to appreciate the great handicap that the Church was under, in its need to possess wealth. So he was appreciative of the impossible situation of those who had benefited from the Henrican and Edwardian Reformation.³ For much of his stay in England he lived at Westminster. His letters home with their strange spelling of place names, Vyt Aal (Whitehall), Atoncurt (Hampton Court), Granuche (Greenwich) give an outsider's view of Tudor England that has been strangely neglected by social historians. Back in the Low Countries he became nostalgic for England and its people. He considered the quality of Catholicism better there than at home. He wanted to send friars from Spain to work in England, especially in the Universities.

But now his fortunes lay elsewhere. In the Low Countries he again set out to reform the clergy. He uncovered a network smuggling heretical books out of Germany, through Holland, with Spain as their destination. He took all the repressive measures he could and on the more positive side he published his Catechism in 1558. It was written in Spanish and he intended to bring out a Latin version to give it a wider circulation. His efforts did not go unrewarded. On the death of the Archbishop of Toledo in 1558 he was asked to succeed and after initial resistance he was prevailed upon and was consecrated in Brussels. Toledo was by far the most important diocese in Spain, and the firm upholder at Trent of episcopal residence insisted on taking up his appointment immediately. But 1558 was a troubled year. Protestant groups had been discovered at Valladolid and Seville. The religious unity of the country was threatened. There were mass arrests of professional people and of friars on suspicion of lutheranism and illuminism. After a five week journey Carranza was triumphantly received at Valladolid the royal city. The great heresy hunter was home from his triumphs in the north. He signed orders for the prohibition of certain books in Spain. But all the time, Valdés the Inquisitor General had in his possession a copy of the Catechism. But this anti-heretical work of Carranza was in his hands because it had been delated to him as suspect of heresy and Melchior Cano, a colleague of Carranza, was in the process of examining it. To Valdés and others, although they did not yet disclose it publicly, Carranza appeared

³Tellechea. *l.c.* Anth. Ann 12 (1964), esp. pp. 192-195, 'El problema de los bienes de la Iglesia'.

as a sort of Spanish Cranmer, one who was trying to use his great authority and prestige to introduce error into Spain. His sermon on 21 August at Valladolid did nothing to better matters. He referred openly to the unfortunate occurrence of heresy in Spain. He appealed to the people not to panic but to trust the King and the Inquisition to castigate the heretics and at the same time to work for pardon and reconciliation. Such talk was pleasing enough to Francis Borgia, who was in the congregation, but was deeply suspect to others. Pardon? Reconciliation? Two Franciscans denounced him to the Inquisition. It soon became public knowledge that his Catechism was to be condemned. He exchanged letters with the Inquisition, asked for a fair hearing and showed willingness to correct any careless or erroneous phrases. He continued to visit his people as a simple friar rather than a lordly archbishop and was received tumultuously. Yet permission was obtained from Philip to arrest and try Carranza, the Primate of Spain, for heresy. In the early hours of 22 August 1559, he was awoken while on a visit to Torrelaguna and put under arrest.

The next seventeen years of his life were spent in detention, first in Spain, and then in Rome. He was unable to exercise his office as Primate. He was unable to attend any further sessions of the Council of Trent. The case dragged on; at times it became vital for some of the interested parties, that no decision should be reached. Eventually in 1576 he was cleared of formal heresy but his way of speaking was suspect so he was declared 'vehementer suspectus de heresi' and his catechism was banned. He abjured 16 propositions on which the suspicions were founded and he was set free. He left the Castel S Angelo broken in health and eighteen days after his release he died in Rome. Yet Gregory XIII, the Pope who condemned the Catechism, personally intervened to write a generous epitaph in which he praised his teaching and his virtues and noted the coincidence of his day of death with the Feast of St Athanasius.⁴

II

There are several reasons why this was a complex case. There were intrigues within the Dominican order including a long standing rivalry between Cano and Carranza; there was jealousy among those who had hopes of the Archbishopric of Toledo (and among the disappointed candidates one has to mention Valdés the Inquisitor); diplomatic relations between Spain and the Papacy were at a delicate point; and perhaps above all there was Phillip's need for political and religious unity, a unity that was seen to be threatened by the Archbishop of Toledo in the fateful year 1559. The case of Dr Cazalla reminds us that Carranza was not the only favourite Philip deserted for the sake of political unity and harmony. The case of Archbishop Carranza is a good example of the way in which political and religious motives are often entwined in the Iberian Peninsula. For an understanding of what happened one has

⁴The epitaph reads: D. O. M. Bartholomaeo Carranza, Navarro, Dominico, Archiepiscopo Toletano, Hispaniarum Primati, Viro Doctrina, Contione atque Elemosynis Claro, Magnis Muneribus a Carolo V et a Philippo II Rege Catholico Sibi Commissis Egregie Functo, Animo In Prosperis Modesto et In Adversis Aequo, Obiit Anno 1576 Die Secundo Maii, Athanasio et Antonino Sacro, Aetatis Suae 73.

to remember that the accusations were initially made in Spain and although with the accession of Pius V, a Dominican, Carranza went to Rome, even there the case continued to be a question of orthodoxy or not according to Spanish standards. Throughout the controversy Rome found itself involved in Spanish politics and Spanish theology and at times would have been glad to have the whole thing finished one way or the other. As von Pastor remarks⁵ the Imperial agent, Cusano, was of the opinion that the wearisome trial was one of the causes that led to the death of Pius V.

(a) The attitude of Paul IV, the great hater of Spain, is interesting. Paul already had trouble in Italy. He was bitterly opposed to the humanistic 'spiritual' circle to which Pole belonged and to the way they spoke of the importance of Scripture and the role of faith in justification. These suspicions were increased by the defection of Peter Vermigli to the Protestants, Paul's initial sympathies were with Carranza's accusers. Yet towards the end of his life he became increasingly favourable to the Archbishop of Toledo perhaps because he saw the way in which Madrid was interpreting his concession for the trial to take place in Spain as permission to take the whole affair out of papal hands.

(b) Under Pius IV when Trent reassembled without one of its distinguished theologians, a commission was set up to examine the Catechism. The result was approval of Carranza, although this was regarded more as a symbolic gesture than a considered theological judgment. The Fathers of Trent were by no means unanimous in their support. But in any case this decision was completely rejected by the Spanish Inquisition on the grounds that the Council had no powers to pronounce on the case since Paul IV had entrusted the whole matter to Spain to decide. One can understand why it was that Borromeo complained that there was no way of helping the Archbishop unless one was prepared to come to a complete break with Spain.

(c) Pius V was much more favourable to Carranza and it was during his pontificate that Carranza went to Rome. But when he arrived, he was made to wait a year for his Catechism to be translated from Spanish and when Pius did eventually set up a new tribunal it had to include members of the Spanish Inquisition. In fact Philip realised that the authority of the Inquisition would suffer if the trial were to be removed from its jurisdiction and he could not afford to offend the Inquisition as he needed its support for his continued governing of Spain.

(d) Under Gregory XIII a decision was made. But the condemnation was fairly mild and it appeared a matter of days before the Archbishop's death and any idea that Rome was against him was dispelled by the epitaph dictated by the Pope. This left the whole issue blurred as far as the attitude of Rome was concerned.

One of the reasons for Rome's frustration was the ambivalence of Spain towards the papacy. This was a characteristic of Spanish

⁵L. von. Pastor. *The History of the Popes*. Eng. trans. R. F. Kerr, vol. 17, p. 365. For the attitude of the Papacy to the Carranza trial useful information can be found in vol. 14, p. 315; vol. 16, pp. 327-335 and vol. 17, pp. 344-364.

Catholicism which enabled it to give full support to the spiritual claims of the Papacy and at the same time so to criticise the exercise of the primacy as to seem to deny it altogether. There are not wanting instances of this in more recent history.

III

In the first period of the trial the outstanding figure was Melchior Cano. Although he died in 1560 it was he who first accused Carranza of Illuminism and Lutheranism, and his whole approach to the case deserves special consideration. Cano was far from a papalist. Although he numbers the papacy among the sources of theology he himself was reprimanded in 1556 for preaching against the Pope, and later on his writings were to become one of the authorities for those Catholics who adopted a regalist position extolling the rights of Catholic kings against the Pope. But Cano's reputation rests on his treatise *De Locis Theologicis*. This work, published posthumously, was composed at the same time as the trial was progressing and it was intended not simply as a treatise for the professional theologian but as a handbook for inquisitors to guide them in their task of discerning true teaching from heresy.⁶ Cano is often credited with directing the attention of theology away from nominalism and an interest in verbal subtleties towards a positive consideration of Christian sources,⁷ as a representative of 'the best type of reformed Catholic theology'.⁸ This may be so, but at the same time there is a consistency between what is said in the *De Locis* and the *Censures on the Catechism*. There is a strain of anti-intellectualism in Cano which should be a warning that positive theology has its dangers too. His chief objections to the *Catechism*⁹ were that it contained heretical notions, savouring of Illuminism and Lutheranism, that it was written in the vernacular and so introduced deep theological matters to the simple faithful. What may be suitable for priests is not suitable to the laity who have to be fed on milk and not solid food. It is especially dangerous to use the vernacular in Spain because of the troubled times. Moreover the ceremonies and the rites of the sacraments should not be completely exposed to the vulgar gaze. By attempting to explain them Carranza was doing a disservice to religion by destroying the sense of mystery.

IV

More important than the charges themselves, was the way in which Cano argued his case. From an examination of the text of the *Catechism* it could be shown that Carranza used words, phrases, expressions that in the strict objective sense 'in rigore ut iacent' could be nothing

⁶A. Huerga O.P. *In M. Cani De locis theologicis opus, scholia historiam spiritualitatis spectantia*. Angelicum, 1961, p. 20-55.

⁷E. Gonzales. *Teología y tradición en la doctrina de Melchor Cano*. Salmanticenses 10 (1963), 135-160.

⁸O. Chadwick. *From Bossuet to Newman* (Birbeck Lectures, 1955-56), p. 197 n.

⁹F. Caballero. *Vida de Melchor Cano* (Vol. ii of *Conquenses ilustres*), Madrid, 1871, p. 536s gives the Spanish version of the censures. J. Sanz y Sanz. *Melchor Cano Cuestiones Fundamentales de crítica histórica sobre su vida y sus escritos*, Madrid, 1959, gives the Latin version.

else but heretical. Words (thus argued Cano) are to be understood not by appealing to the intention of the writer, but in themselves. It is verbal purity that is required. To understand Cano's position it is helpful to refer to Menendez y Pelayo in his chapter of the Trial of Carranza in the *Historia de los Heterodoxos de España* Book III. Menendez y Pelayo maintains that the fact that Carranza was a good religious, generous towards the poor, zealous in visiting his flock, tells us nothing about his orthodoxy. There are stronger arguments in his favour from the way in which he behaved in England and Flanders, the heretics he converted, the universities he reformed, the truly Catholic views he voiced at Trent. But even this does not prove that he himself could not have changed his opinions as a result of his contact with heretics. When one turns to the Catechism one doesn't need to be a theologian to know that 'Faith without works is sufficient for salvation' or 'Christ our Saviour satisfied for our sins so effectively and fully that there is required no other satisfaction from ourselves'—these and like phrases are not orthodox statements. It was not lawful for anyone to write like the Archbishop did about Justification after the Tridentine Decree. No wonder, thinks Menendez y Pelayo, that not only prelates who were envious of Carranza and opponents like Cano, but others should all maintain that Carranza was not a good christian.

The dispute between the two friars Cano and Carranza was not a case of the institutional church against freedom, it was about the meaning of words and about truth. Carranza pleaded that neither Arius nor Mahomet had had their words interpreted in this way. If Cano's 'In rigore ut iacent' were to be applied to Chrysostom, Augustine, John the Evangelist, they too would be guilty of heresy. One cannot, according to Carranza neglect figures of speech, metaphor, usage. For twenty-five years in the Inquisition, he, Carranza, had always followed this method viz. trying to see things in their context, as a means of judging whether a work was to be condemned. But for Cano words have a fixed meaning. They are coinage, tokens that must not be debased. Words like 'security', 'confidence', 'trust' were used by Protestants and so they are a vocabulary that cannot be used by Catholics in a Catholic sense. A somewhat different line is taken by Fray Juan de la Pena who suggests that Lutherans have no legal right to use these words in their sense, since they are already Catholic and to be understood in a Catholic sense.¹⁰

Tactically Cano's argument is unassailable. When Carranza exalts 'Faith' Cano deduces he must be denying 'Works'. When Carranza speaks of the need to have trust in God, Cano reads into this a denial of the need for the fear of God. Now, this standpoint gives the whole discussion an air of objectivity. It is not the personal animus of one friar against another. (And to anyone who knows the history of these two in the Dominican order of the day, there is an irony here.) Cano, like Menendez y Palayo three centuries later, excludes from his condemnation any judgment as to the intentions or personal views of Carranza.

¹⁰J. I. Tellechea Idigoras. *Censura de Fray Juan de la Pena sobre Propositiones de Carranza* (1559). *Anthologia Annu* (10), 1962, p. 406.

He is only concerned with the material signification of words. It is an objective judgment of heresy. What Carranza really thought, whether he believed what Luther or Calvin believed, or whether he was just bad at expressing himself is incidental and entirely irrelevant. You cannot use words in this way and remain orthodox. The concern is about material rather than formal heresy. It may be a legalistic or canonical point of view but an important figure like the Archbishop of Toledo has to use words carefully and exactly. I think it is worth observing that this test of orthodoxy is often used in the political sphere today. There are certain words, certain slogans that have to be avoided and others that have to be used. Provided one conforms to the accepted usage, one will be left alone. Some find it extremely difficult and distasteful to do this. As academics and scholars they want to distinguish meanings. For these, life can be a misery. Others who are less intelligent or less scrupulous play the rules of the game and survive. The whole matter is connected with education and sensitivity to words. The preoccupation with verbal purity at the trial is a much more serious issue than might appear at first sight. Unless there is agreement about language, communication will break down and society will be split. Rome, in the person of Pius V was later to understand things much more in Carranza's way. 'Heresy lies in the intellect and in obstinacy and not in words or letters on a page' the Pope is reported to have said to the Spanish Ambassador. And when the authority of Cano was quoted he was dismissed as an 'eccentric person'.¹¹ The real issue becomes formal heresy. One must not forget that the case of Michel de Baye (Baius) coincides with the last years of the Carranza trial and Spanish theologians were concerned with that case too.¹² The Bull *Ex omnibus afflictionibus* appeared in 1567. In the well known global condemnation that follows the 79 propositions¹³ it is allowed that some of the propositions are open to an orthodox interpretation, but 'in rigore et proprio verborum sensu' such as the authors intended, they are not acceptable. However you punctuate the sentence (and one must recall the controversy about the Comma Pianum) it seems as though the 'in rigore et proprio sensu' has to be taken in conjunction with 'ab assertatoribus intento'. However, as the history of Baianism and Jansenism prove, this does not put an end to the argument but leads into deeper waters. The author can always claim that he is being misinterpreted. The distinction between the intention of the author and what the words actually say, was to be developed further by Nicole in his distinction of 'question de fait' and 'question de droit'. In the end authority is forced into the position of having to say 'I can tell you what you meant'.

¹¹ von Pastor, *History of the Popes*, vol. 17, p. 346-7 and 355.

¹² J. I. Tellechea Idigoras, *Espanoles en Lovaina en 1551-8. Primeras noticias sobre el baiatismo*. Revista Espanola de Teologia, vol. xxiii, 1963, p. 21-33.

Miguel Roca, *El problema de los orìgenes y evolucion del pensamiento teologica de Miguel Bayo*. Anthologia Annua (5), 1957, p. 417-492.

Miguel Roca, *Las censuras de las universidades de Alcalà y Salamanca a las proposiciones de Miguel Bayo y su influencia en la bula 'ex omnibus afflictionibus'*. Anthologia Annua (3), 1955, p. 711-813.

¹³ 'Quas quidem sententias stricto coram nobis examine ponderatas quanquam nonnullae aliquo pacto sustineri possent in rigore et proprio verborum sensu ab assertoribus intento haereticas erroneas suspectas temerarias scandalosas et in pias aures offensionem immittentes . . . damnamus'.

If you take the line Cano seems to have advocated, and stop short at language, making orthodoxy's chief concern the use of words, you save yourself a lot of trouble. As a good Thomist, Cano would not dispute St Thomas's dictum (*Summa Theologica* IIa IIae Q1 a2 ad2) 'The act of the believer terminates at the reality not at the proposition' but the proposition has an importance as it is the only thing one has whereby to judge the intention. If the christian faith is something shared, if it has to do with living together and praying together then its expression in human terms is most important. Doctrinal formulations are necessary as language is necessary. Language can sometimes help to clarify thought itself and the same can be said of the articles of faith and credal statements. The sense of a christian community was very strong on all sides in sixteenth century Europe and the links between Church, State and Society symbolised in the Augsburg Declaration had their strengths as well as weaknesses. Although it may not have been permissible to explain the words within the context of the author's intention, it was necessary to understand words within the context of the particular time and place. This was one of the reasons why the Catchechism was attacked. Certain things might be allowed in other parts of christendom but were not able to be said in Spain without misunderstanding. Cano was making a judgment on how words would be understood within a particular community.

Censors of books, inquisitors and compilers of Indexes were often careful to distinguish between the book itself and the author. It was the written word that had to be condemned or absolved. In his preface to the Index of the Council of Trent (1964) Francis Forerius, O.P., indicates different classes of condemnation. In the first class are placed books and writers which are either heretical or suspect of heresy. But in the second class there are books, not authors, which because of their teaching are suspect. These books are condemned even though their authors may never have departed from the church.¹⁴

With the increasing use of the vernacular new problems arose. As long as there was a universal language of theology one could be sure of the usage and signification of certain terms. But the use of the vernacular brought a new flexibility and in such circumstances verbal purity became more difficult. Rather than face the new problems in an already complex situation there was the decision to confine theological discussion to the experts. It is hardly surprising that a man who set great store on words and language would be repelled by those who played down the importance of external ritual, ceremonial and vocal prayer. Cano's antagonism towards the Alumbrados is consistent with his behaviour at the Carranza trial and goes part of the way to explain his opposition to the Jesuits who did not adopt the practice of other religious orders of having vocal prayer in common.

V

In 1566 while the trial of Carranza was still in progress there ap-

¹⁴Joseph Mendham M.A. *An Account of the Indexes, both Prohibitory and Expurgatory of the Church of Rome*. London, 1826, is still the best introduction in English to the Indexes.

peared the first edition of the Roman Catechism, or Catechism of the Council of Trent. It was the work of a special commission, mostly Italians, set up by Pius IV. They realised that the crisis facing the Church could not be solved by anathemas and inquisitions, but only by an inner personal renewal and improved education. The Roman Catechism was designed for this end and it even bears the marks of some indebtedness to Carranza. But Spain is different and it was not the Roman Catechism of Trent that won universal acceptance. Indeed the Catechism met with difficulties from some Spanish theologians. Exception was taken to a certain section and it was thought best not to translate it into the vernacular.¹⁵ Instead it was the local products, the catechisms of Astete and Ripalda that gained approval. Jeronimo Ripalda, an otherwise obscure Jesuit (not to be confused with his illustrious namesake of the early seventeenth century) wrote a book that had the advantage of being brief, clear and easy to memorise. It was not like Carranza's work of 433 folios, but a slim volume of 46 folios in the form of question and answer. Between 1591 and 1900 it went through 471 editions. It was printed in Spain, in other parts of Europe, in America, in the Philipines. It could be learnt by heart, it still is learnt by heart and it has posed both the questions and the answers that are regarded as relevant to a Spaniard's Catholicism. It works on the principle of memorisation first and then explanation afterwards. And incidentally one should remember that Martin Luther set great store by the memorising of his catechism. The approach is quite different from Carranza's rather rambling discursive account of the Christian Faith. But there is nothing unorthodox in it¹⁶. It is a triumph for Melchior Cano and is well suited for those who expect definite questions with definite answers.

¹⁵von Pastor, *Lives of the Popes*, vol. 17, p. 193.

¹⁶It is only fair to mention that the 1848 edition of Ripalda was in fact prohibited by the Bishops of Almeria and Granada because it translated the commandment as 'no cometer adulterio' whereas it should be 'no fornicar' (cf. Carbonero y Sol. *Indice de los libros prohibidos*, Madrid, 1873, p. 158). It is interesting to note such a concern about the right use of words in nineteenth century Andalucia. No doubt it was prompted by a fear that a too narrow interpretation of 'ne moechaberis' would lead to laxity.