

T H E R E A R E N O S Y N O N Y M S *)

The first man to write on synonyms a special book in the Western World of our era, was the abbe Girard. In 1718 he published his book and already did he have to write on the wide spread opinion that for one idea a great variety of words could be used. Girard protested. His title itself is a protest: "La Justesse de la Langue Francaise ou les differentes significations des mots qui passent pour synonymes"; and in the text, he says: I do not think that there is a true synonyme in any language (Je ne crois pas qu' il y ait de mot synonyme dans aucune langue, P. XXX).

Indeed there are no synonyms. Every name was an attempt of man to accompany the course of events with a worthy response to the gifts of time. The energy flowing through time materialized in communal forms whenever he found the right names in which his fellow men could join, in a common outcry of faith. In naming, Goethe has said, humankind proceeded as though the world was still to be created by them together.¹ To name a part of reality, means to testify to man's power of common realization. We cannot realize anything in this world without fellowship of others. Naming always is a public act which the community must recognize. A name is not a word. A name is not a thought. A name is never arbitrary. When a

* From the Word of Mankind, Volume I.

1. "Geist-Epochen", Werke 39 p. 3.

man gives his name to a woman, a public and political act is enacted. In our generation, for example, one of the few names which have the quality of a recognizable name, is "science." Money is given and spent in the name of science, in huge amounts. You could not canvass the same funds in the name of superstition; not even in the name of religion. In other words, science, is a true name; as we invoke it, the action throws a communal mantle around many men's shoulders. Under the cover of this name, one body is formed, many sins are committed, much good is achieved. Under the name and in the name of Science, a body is constituted behaving like any body, but behaving that is to say having life.

A man's religion is in the names which make him act in common with others. There is no other religion. These names may be passing, but in their time they are more incisive and more public and more history-making than all private relations to a pretty face or a blood relation, or to the air and the sky and the sun and the land. For the names decide whether we respect the sister in the woman or seduce her as a female. They decide whether we report to Washington for duty, or retire to the back hills when the draft is enacted. It is true, that all the protestations of modern man are to the contrary. He insists that words have no power, that words have lost their meaning, that this is all verbiage or propaganda.

Yet will he be judged for his genuine religion. And this religion is his relation to the life and death and resurrection of the spirit as expressed in those names which make him behave.

For this reason the belief in synonyms is a heresy. It is the central heresy of our time.

If any one word may take the place of another, language has become an-onymous. Without the necessity for idiomatic speech, we live in an abstract and indifferent frame of arithmetics. By listing synonyms for each term, modern man has returned into the limbo of mere suggestions, inferences, stimuli, hints, instincts. We are in limbo today, the limbo out of which the risen Christ had taken the people of our era, in the power of his name. Our language has become pre-nominal, "nameless," again. And the reader may remember that the pre-historical herd, of the animal kingdom, although endowed with speech, had no power to give names. How could the man who believes in synonyms still create the future. The future comes about only when we believe in the one thing that is necessary for all of us, now. And in the name of World War II, we have cooperated for now five years. If we had sliced up this One Name into synonyms, like "Spread of the World Revolution," "rebellion of Asia," "suicide of Europe," "emancipation of the colored," "self-defense of the White Man," "self-destruction of the Western Nations," "the end of nationalism," "War of Survival," etc., etc., we would have split our energies. Only by naming this war World War II, could we stay united, repair the damage done by Wilson's defeat at home, suppress the jealousies between the capitalistic and communistic Allies, and stake out some frame of reference for the world after this War. Also, by the term, we could envisage the danger of World

War III. There was no synonym for World War II, except by those whom we fought and whom we had to destroy because they did call this fight with a different name. Because the Japs fought for co-prosperity and the yellow races, they were our enemies. The names they used, proved it to us.

But the common man who always has known that his names are his religion, is teased today by the intelligentsia for his "superstitions." The reality of the names "Science," and "World War," is denied by our intellectuals. The whole academic world is superior to names. In fact, the whole ambition of the academic world seems to center on the attempt to strip the world from its names. For, the ambition of the academic world is to reduce the world to its state without names. And as we have been told that science reduces everything to its "real" elements, we actually have come to acquiesce with its claim that all names are interchangeable and arbitrary. It is the constant toothache of my existence as a college teacher that I have to read in every second or third paper some expression of our modern heresy. The favorite expression is: 'The term "religion," or "liberty," has been arbitrarily attached to this or that. 'Or, "I shall call this arbitrarily, Love."

This suggests that one word is as good as another, that their choice is more or less futile because arbitrary, and worst of all, that a man who speaks or writes, is free to define his terms as he pleases. All this is untrue.

He who believes in synonyms and arbitrary definitions, desecrates speech. Now, as with the town's garbage dump, and

the septic tank, desecration of dead words is a necessary service rendered by the undertakers of the mental world, the critics. Faeces are faeces. And certain words are due to die, in the rotation of crops which we call speech and languages. It is not wicked to desecrate words by looking for a synonym if you know what you are doing. You are then passing the death sentence on one word, and try to call another word into being. But if you imagine, as most classroom-fed brains do, that you always are in a position in which you are the superior of the sacred names, then you are as funny as the boy who would treat the whole of life as a garbage heap and the city dump, and a car cemetery. Arbitrary definitions belong into the scholastic exercises of mere minds. Heart, soul, and body of men, live on the right word at the right time.

We stay alive by being grateful to the right words spoken at the right time. They go to prove that we are immersed in an ocean of speech, formerly called the spirit, and now denied by the murderers of consecrated speech, the people who carry the desecrating business of the critics, of the people in charge of our sewer system, into the front door life of the community.

Any part of language is as real as a daisy or a violet or a pansy or a weed. You may have to weed your garden of words. But that does not prove that words are unreal. Weeds, are, alas, most real; they cannot be treated as indifferent or nonexistent; neither are the roses in our garden of words man-made. To weed the ragweed and to cut off the roses, are responsible actions and not at all arbitrary. They are political actions

of our government of the world.

Neither the weeds nor the roses of human language are to be arbitrarily defined or cleverly suggested. All language is the precipitation of the intensified respiration which we experience as members of the community, and which is called the spirit. "As all higher life has the duty to dominate all lesser life, as the horse dominates the parasites living on or in him, so the common inhalation and exhalation of the group which puts words into our mouth and makes us sing and speak and criticize, towers over our own particular respiration and commands the priority of our allegiance. The inspirations of our community demand our allegiance as long as we are not inspired by a new initiative and by a greater spirit than the one already permeating our community. The non-inspired speaker who calls words arbitrary and who defines his terms, stands lower than the most humble partner in the existing spirit of the community. A member of the Baptist Church in the South, has a more correct attitude towards speech than the college student who acts on the assumption that he is free to define his terms outside the classroom, and who overlooks the fact that a classroom is sterile, without bed or food or anvil or well or orchard. In all situations then, in which people are attracted to each other, children are begotten, things created, fruits grown, thirst assuaged, names are the moving powers which give us peace and collaboration and hope and love, which gives us a future. Because the sophisticated people have criticized all names, the common man has taken refuge to mere letters for

his community religion. V-E Day, V-J Day, CIO, GI, are our best names today. Our souls hide their true faith behind these ugly but genuine names and that goes to prove that names are indispensable.

The precipitated spirits which we call words when they have crystallized, cannot be eliminated by decree or indifference. The only way of superseding an inspiration which has gone stale, is to re-liquify it in the fire and glow of a new and better inspiration. By the act of reliquifying, then, the new speaker will testify that he too is smitten by the power of the word, by the sacredness of this word at the right time. He may know that all words at times fall dead to the ground. But to admit the death of a name, does not mean to admit that words have no life. Mechanical things never live. Words because they are alive can die as much as a living being. Man is alive today and dead tomorrow because he was so much alive today. This is true of the right word, too.

There are no synonyms. But does not everybody say, teach so, print so? Ernest Renan, who ran the most elegant mental salon of the nineteenth century, has written a book on the origin of language. Like a jeweller, he speaks of the treasures of words, that the Arabs have 5744 words which deal with the camel.¹ The nineteenth century adored wealth. In Noah Webster's dictionary, the synonyms are made an institution. All the children in school are encouraged to enrich their vocabulary. It is like injecting artificially the vitamins into

1. E. Renan, L'Origine du Langage, 1889, p. 142.

our bread after having sterilized it first and ground it to an empty dust lest it not look pure white.

Synonyms are indeed the enrichment of a dead language. The language has been killed, and is mummified with the spices of synonyms. We marvel at the superstitions of the Egyptians who built a skyscraper of a pyramid for one glorious mummy of their ruler. We have simplified this process; we burn the dead. But we have erected the skyscrapers of our dictionaries and courses in English over the corpse of speech. In these pyramids whole civilizations are buried. The people are taught the art of putting spices and herbs and perfumes around this corpse of a language in which we once prayed to the living God, and heard the Gods of family, clan, country, congregation, genius, speak to us. We do not fuss about dead people. Our superstition is the elaborate burial of living speech, which we smother under synonyms.

Of the people of Tuscany, the people whom a pope once acclaimed as "The quintessence of cultured mankind," it has been said by a noble mind: "This people knows not of synonyms. This is their greatest superiority. For a man of Tuscany, there are no two words which mean the same thing. Each word is used in a precise, in a definite sense, and any other usage, to a Tuscan, unchains rebellion, the rebellion of the devils in hell." (R. Bianchi Bandinelli, in *Die Toscana*, by A. von Bersig, Wien 1939, p. 20)

There are no synonyms in Tuscany nor in any other land of the living. But a minister in the summer of the year 1945

after the incarnation of the Word, could say in church: "Political convictions, deals, God or whatever you choose to call it."

I knew of a man who grew to the age of 26 before he discovered his father's true affection for him. The father was one of those stoics who believed in personal example but abhorred words. He never failed in the great tests of character, as an independent citizen and as a husband. But he never declared his convictions on God or world explicitly. For this reason, he remained rather unknown and invisible to his children. They revered him. They saw him defy publicity, honors, titles of any types. They saw him care for their education, friends, interests, but they heard little or nothing of his own worries or problems.

When the first World War broke out, the railroad stations of Berlin naturally were jammed by ten thousands of people. The son arrived for a rapid stop-over, before joining his military outfit. An ocean of people waved back and forth on the platform. All of a sudden, he heard his name called out by a sonore voice, like a clarion call. And this one name towered over the sea of noises like an immense ball of clarity and light. It was his own name. This was not a town crier's voice. He was not paged as in the lobby of a hotel. Here was a voice disclosing all the affection, and all the exuberance which alone could justify that this voice ever broke its reticence, its restraint, its prison walls. What had happened?

The son did not trust his ears at first and then he was stupified and overcome by an incredible excitement which made him shaky for years to come whenever he remembered the moment.

The reticent father, the hater of publicity, had been overcome by his great longing for this only son who would go to war. He forgot the crowd, he forgot himself, and his aversion to all emotionalism. Here he was shouting his son's name on the top of his lungs as though there was nobody else in the world. And the son accepted the call as though there had been the greatest distinction and decoration bestowed on him. He was so proud of the fact that he, of all people, had been able to elicit this paean of a call, from this mouth. Do you now understand what a Presidential citation originally meant?

It was to the son the great revelation of his life. He now knew how immensely he was loved. For, to remove those mountains of inhibitions, an atomic bomb of love was required. His name had broken the ice, had reliquified his father's speech. His name had not been used arbitrarily. It had overpowered his father when he was in need of recognizing and of being recognized. "When the Morning Star shouted with joy," on the first day of creation, it had not been different. In every moment of history, one name has to be shouted with joy, with singleness of purpose and thereby it is inserted in the book of everlasting life, as a genuine name.

From a million of chaotic molecules speech singles out that being for which we long and which we are challenged to recognize. A whole book may represent such one name. It may

be a long letter. Rarely will it simply be as primeval as the calling by name on the railroad platform. But it will not differ from this act of recognition, as a virginal act of first love, of breaking of conventions, of forgetting oneself and the world around oneself, in an act of total application. Our hand, our mouth, our throat, are forced to do so, to our great surprise, by our heart. The pen races over the paper, whether a poem or a letter or a book or an invitation ensues, it is moved by a power bigger than oneself. ALL THE WORDS OF EVERY DAY ARE TRANSPORTED BACK TO THEIR TRUE DIGNITY AND precision as the appropriate names which we cannot help pronouncing.

There are no synonyms, in the speech of the living.