

**ST GEORGE'S WINDSOR**  
**Trinity 19: 22 October 2017**

**Jesus said to them, 'Whose head is this, and whose title?' They answered, 'The emperor's.' Then he said to them, 'Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's.'** These are words from today's reading from St Matthew's Gospel. I shall return to them shortly.

Quite by accident yesterday, I discovered that a hymn that I remember people singing with considerable gusto in years gone by – one that had been included in the original 'English Hymnal' (as well as in 'Hymns Ancient and Modern Revised' and no doubt other collections too) – was not to be found in the hymn book that we use here at St George's, 'The Revised English Hymnal'. By the time that hymnal was published in 1986 (just a little more than thirty years ago) that hymn had, I suppose, become unfashionable, thought to be of inferior and somewhat sentimental verse, and often accompanied by a not very sophisticated tune. I don't know! I do however judge that its omission from the book is a shame.

The words of the hymn were composed by a 19<sup>th</sup> century vicar's daughter named Frances R Havergal. When her father was vicar of St Nicholas, Worcester, and when she was in her early teens, she seems to have experienced quite a powerful awakening of Christian faith; a 'conversion' you might say. Soon afterwards she wrote: 'I committed my soul to the Saviour, and earth and heaven seemed brighter from that moment.' At the age of seventeen, in 1853, she was confirmed in Worcester Cathedral.

Though she was to become something of a scholar and linguist, speaking several modern languages, and knowing Greek and Hebrew, Frances, who died at the age of forty-three in 1879, was never to be considered very much of a poet, though her poems are acknowledged to be marked often by attractive sincerity. One of those poems constitutes the words of the hymn that I find missing from 'The New English Hymnal'. You might well know it, and you might frequently have sung it.

The hymn's opening two lines are:

Take my life, and let it be  
Consecrated, Lord, to thee;

And the hymn continues:

Take my moments and my days,  
Let them flow with ceaseless praise.

Take my hands, and let them move  
At the impulse of thy love.  
Take my feet, and let them be  
Swift and beautiful for thee.

The words speak of commitment, dedication and total abandonment. 'Take my life, and let it be / Consecrated, Lord, to thee.' They seem to me to be fitting words to have at the back of our minds as I return to the passage from St Matthew's Gospel with which I began this sermon.

**Jesus said to them, 'Whose head is this, and whose title?' They answered, 'The emperor's.' Then he said to them, 'Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's.'**

The disciples of the Pharisees and the Herodians had clearly set out to trap Jesus with their question: 'Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?' Jesus asked them to produce a coin. He asked them to identify the head of the emperor on the coin. He then spoke quite simply: **'Then give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's.'**

Quite neatly, Jesus avoids being accused of siding with the revolutionary, anti-Roman Zealots while, at the same time, claiming some sort of independence in religious observation. It is the sort of compromise that has pleased good British citizens on many an occasion: a nice separation between matters of the state and matters of religion. It seems that you can 'have your cake and eat it'.

But things, of course, are not always what they seem. For those with eyes to see (indeed for those with eyes with which to 'read') Jesus's solution might not be so clear-cut after all. Perhaps there is a touch of irony here.

According to our version of the New Testament, Jesus asked his would-be 'trappers', whose 'head' was on the coin. Because the coin was marked with Caesar's 'head', it should clearly be paid to the emperor. But, the word in the generally acknowledged version of the Greek New Testament is best translated, not 'head' but 'image'. It is because the coin bears Caesar's 'image' that it must be paid to him.

If the bearing of the 'image' is the criterion by which it is decided to whom things are due, how do we decide what should be paid to God? By now, the answer should be clear. According to the Book of Genesis, when God made humankind, he made them in his 'image'. (In the Greek version of the Old Testament, the same word is used as is used in our passage from St Matthew.) Human beings bear

God's 'image'; are 'stamped' you might say, with God's 'image'. Our *whole* life must be offered to God.

Take my life, and let it be  
Consecrated, Lord, to thee.

If you look just a little bit beneath the surface of Jesus's words, he seems to be saying that our primary obligation must always be to God, all other lesser obligations being judged in the light of what we understand to be God's will. There can be no separation of the secular and the religious, and no being 'let off the hook' by our assuming that there can be. Our *whole* life is to be offered to God.

Of course, we struggle to discern God's will in any given situation and, even when we think we know it, we find it impossible to do it. In this dilemma, maybe we can learn something from Frances Havergal. Notice that, from the start, she recognises her need of God's grace. She does not promise to consecrate her life to her Lord. She simply prays that her Lord will work in her to bring about such consecration.

Take my life, and let it be  
Consecrated, Lord, to thee.

She recognises that, at every step along the way, she needs God's guidance and inspiration. In our hoping to be instruments of God's will, humility and prayer are of the essence.

In the final lines of her hymn, Frances Havergal writes:

Take my will, and make it thine:  
It shall be no longer mine.  
Take my heart; it is thine own:  
It shall be thy royal throne.  
Take my love; my Lord, I pour  
At thy feet its treasure-store.  
Take myself, and I will be  
Ever, only, all for thee.

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