

12th June 2023

Sexism

**"Whenever I hear a man talking of the advantages of our ill-used sex,
I look upon it as the prelude to some new act of authority."**

Letitia Elizabeth Landon, *Romance and Reality*, Volume 1

I'm not guilty of sexism – or at least I don't *think* I am. But I've had to learn that even if I don't *mean* to be sexist, sometimes my words can convey a different and more uncomfortable meaning than I intend. I've learned this from some caring and challenging people, and I'm the better for it. "You have to remember that what comes out of your mouth might land on my ears in a way you never considered," a young lady in my congregation once said. And she was right.

I took myself to task recently when I used a sexist word in a conversation. The people I was talking to were from the west of Scotland. They'd been married for sixty-two years, having met in a dancehall in Glasgow in the late 1950s. As we shared memories of Glasgow and "courting couples" in dancehalls, I said, "I remember that kind of winching very well." Oops! As part of the Glasgow slang, I'd used the word "winching" to endear myself to people who would understand. But "winching"? Goodness! *That* made me think.

"Winching" is courtship, "walking-out". Its etymology, according to my Scots Dictionary, is from "wench", a somewhat demeaning word for a young girl. But "winching" also carries the connotation of "lifting". And *both* are sexist. *Both* imply a man on the lookout for a suitable mate. *Both* point to the male of the species "on the pull", in modern parlance – perhaps "a prelude to some new act of authority", as Letitia Elizabeth Landon remarks. Some will tell me I'm being over-sensitive, that "winching" is simply a vernacular term describing a natural activity and that it has no sexist implications. But is that true? And anyway, if I've become oversensitive, is that not a good thing, so that I'm more aware that what I say without malice might land differently on other ears?

Sexism isn't just what we say. It's about how we think, the culture we create, and sensitivity to the feelings of others. I'm not guilty of sexism – or at least I don't *think* I am. But I have to keep listening to that voice in my head that suggests I still have lots to learn ...

A prayer for today

Lord, help me always measure my words against your unconditional love for all. Amen