

Editorial

Not long ago a student at one of the country's leading Evangelical theological colleges said to me that the one thing he had learned in the course of his training was that he was not Reformed in his theology. At first I did not take this too seriously, since Reformed, like Catholic and Evangelical, is a word which can mean different things to different people. There is a school of thought in the Church of England which regards everything which might be labelled 'Calvinist' as automatically bad, and it must be said that this school transcends the normal party divisions within the Church. Whatever the history books may say, one must never assume that the modern 'Evangelical' wears the theological mantle of George Whitefield or of Bishop Jewel.

However, deeper probing revealed that what was bothering this student was not so much the doctrine which the word Reformed might be presumed to represent. What worried him was the attitude and cast of mind of those (mainly his fellow students) who labelled themselves in this way. To be Reformed, in his opinion, was to be uncharitably dogmatic, narrow-minded, uninterested in anything except lengthy theological debate on matters of highly uncommon interest, and totally unattractive to anyone not sharing the same views and mental outlook.

Of course there are fanatics in every movement, especially if it has a religious character. The extreme Anglo-Catholic is just as repulsive, even to many of his fellows, as the extreme Reformed Evangelical. For those of us who deplore the laxity and unprincipled liberalism which governs so much of church life, it would be quite hypocritical to encourage people with strong convictions to abandon them in the name of 'love' or respectability. We must be very careful, when expressing distaste for the opinions and attitudes of others, to make sure that we are not trying to justify something equally unpleasant and unacceptable in ourselves.

Having said that, however, observation and common sense seem to demonstrate that there is a kind of 'Reformed' person about who is not doing his professed cause any good. Such a person may be confrontational by temperament, and he is certainly likely to believe that he, and he alone, is in full possession of the Truth. This conviction makes him rather unwilling to waste time studying 'error', since that has no rights—the ancient position of the Holy Inquisition is alive and well in some of the descendants of those who died to be free of its controlling power.

As Anglican Evangelicals, we ought to be deeply grateful for our Reformed heritage, and of the links which this gives us with

Christians around the world. We ought to be ashamed of the way in which this heritage has often been slighted, and even denied, in official church circles since the rise of the Oxford Movement. We ought to be conscious of our roots, and determined to express the traditional faith of the Scriptures in our own time. Above all, we ought to be on the lookout for false and superficial interpretations of men like Calvin, which turn one of the greatest spiritual geniuses of all time into a renegade from true religion.

Additionally, we ought to be on our guard against two besetting sins which so easily afflict us. The first of these is lifeless traditionalism. To posture in the pulpit as if one were a seventeenth-century divine is both absurd and impractical in the late twentieth century. Ours is a living faith, and it is one of the great tragedies of our time that flexibility and innovation have become the preserve of liberals, whilst the orthodox defend the ancient bastions in the ancient way. If our Reformers were alive today they would deplore the way in which we so often try to ape them, and talk as if the world has scarcely moved on since 1662 (or whenever). Being up-to-date *and* faithful to the tradition is never easy, but it is the challenge which we must face. The truly Reformed person should be contemporary as well as orthodox, using the truth of the latter to inform the approach of the former.

The second besetting sin is lack of love. It is extraordinary how many 'Reformed' people seem to be incapable of learning from anyone else, or of being charitable to their opponents. It is also remarkable how ready some of them are to regard almost everyone else as an enemy—real or potential. The Gospel quickly gets lost in pseudo-theological nit-picking, which disgusts those who are not in on the game and leaves the world outside largely indifferent. To be truly Reformed is to be changed—to be born again, fashioned anew in the light and in the love of Christ. Are we so insecure in our beliefs that we cannot love others who do not share them? Is there nothing in our faith which cannot attract the open-minded of other persuasions? Why are we not seen to be men and women of God, frightening to others purely because of that? When we read the biographies of the great Evangelical saints, is it not this quality which so often strikes us, how they loved God and one another with a love which the world could not comprehend?

Today we cannot afford to be untrue to the principles for which we stand and contend. The world is not only an increasingly dangerous place, it is also increasingly exposed. If we try to hide our light under a bushel, there are plenty of prying eyes who will want a peek inside, and who may secretly expect to find that the candle has gone out while nobody was looking. Let us proclaim our beliefs boldly and openly, but let us also live lives of charity and openness to one another, that the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ may truly

shine in us, and that we might be in time to come what our ancestors in the faith were in time past—lights to the perishing world.

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