

LETTER |

From Professor Alister McGrath

An editorial in the previous edition of *Churchman* is severely critical of the council of Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, on account of its alleged decision 'to ban meetings of the local student branch' of Reform at the Hall. In view of the hostile and seriously factually inaccurate account of matters which is contained in this editorial, I am writing to set out the true state of affairs. I would have been most happy to have explained these to the author of the editorial, had he chosen to check his facts before publishing.

Wycliffe Hall welcomes debate and discussion between all strands of Evangelicalism, and has not 'banned', and does not intend to 'ban', any discussions within its student body. The college regularly invites speakers from Reform and other evangelical bodies to speak to its students, and encourages its students to invite speakers from these bodies to address student meetings within the college. We regard such discussions as essential, if evangelical unity is to be preserved. The strongly judgmental tone and factually inaccurate character of the editorial attributed to Gerald Bray would seem to do little to advance such unity.

For the record, the college council passed the following motion at its meeting in February 2000:

We welcome members of Reform to Wycliffe Hall. We are concerned for the unity of the college community. In the light of last year's difficulties, which caused distress, we believe that, although the organisers were not responsible, it would be right to defer until next academic year, an opportunity for members of Reform to hold a public meeting in the Hall. The council intends at its June meeting to formulate a policy to cover all such events.

The background to this is that a public meeting organized by Reform students at the college in 1999 caused intense distress to some students, both men and women. In the light of this, the council felt it right not to agree to a request for a similar public meeting in 2000, but to ensure that a policy was put in place to allow Reform and other bodies to hold meetings at the Hall for our students

in future under conditions acceptable to all. In the event, a busy council agenda in June meant that the matter will now be discussed in November.

Wycliffe Hall intends to ensure that all standpoints within Evangelicalism are represented in the Hall's programmes, and to encourage the accurate, courteous, gracious and loving discussion of the issues they rightly raise. This strident intemperate and misinformed editorial does little to encourage such a dialogue, and simply reinforces the negative stereotypes of Evangelicalism which many of us are working to counter. Let us pray for a spirit of humility, graciousness and unity within our movement, as we seek to speak the truth in love to our church and nation.

ALISTER McGRATH, Principal, Wycliffe Hall

Reply to Alister McGrath's letter of 1 September 2000

We are very grateful to the principal of Wycliffe Hall for his clarification of the situation there and wish to assure both him and everyone connected with Wycliffe that we at *Churchman* fully appreciate the college's efforts to include everyone in the right way. It is most unfortunate that the editorial in the last issue singled out Wycliffe Hall and its recent actions (as described by the principal in his letter) in a way which was never intended, and we apologize unreservedly for the false impression which this is bound to create in some quarters. The problem which that editorial raised is much broader than any single action or series of actions, and we deeply regret the way in which offence has been caused to a single institution with reference to one particular occasion. It is never easy to achieve tolerance for different viewpoints, and we concur fully in Dr McGrath's prayer for a spirit of humility, graciousness and unity as we seek to speak the truth in love. We wish Wycliffe well in its efforts to find an equitable solution to the issues which have been raised, and hope that others, including ourselves, will be able to draw inspiration from their example in this respect.

GERALD BRAY