

WE COULD USE SOME MORE DOGMATISTS

"The dogmatist believes that, theologically speaking, men are not going to get to know on earth anything of crucial importance that we do not know already."

I underwrite this statement. Truth is not a brew you can concoct. Truth is revealed. Evangelical Christians believe that the Scripture teaches that man is fallen, alienated from God and in rebellion against His laws. In these days of togetherness when all men should be brothers regardless of creed, when we hear so much about dialogue with the Buddhist and the Mohammedan, it is hard to write, even for a Christian, about the message of the Scriptures. There is plenty of good news in the Bible, but there is never any flattery or back-scratching.

The Bible does not have an attractive message. It condemns all men as sinners and holds out punishment for them. First the realization must come that man is a sinner before he can hope for mercy. The Bible has a message of man lost without God, with the Lord Jesus Christ as the only way of salvation for this world. What happened to this message? The coming of Christ into this world has been so sentimentalized that it has lost its Biblical moorings. Soft human pity has been substituted for God's mercy in the sight of millions. Christ has been romanticized, and the Christian faith is supposed to make nice people nicer. In this secular world of pious sentiment and cruel action all religions are considered as equal and anyone who insists that Christ is the only Savior, the only way, the only truth, and the only life, is treated as a bigot and a dogmatist, and not quite up-to-date.

Of course, it is far easier and more attractive to align oneself with the world's wisdom and its values than to believe in the authority of the Bible. So many in the name of Christian theology say: "We are on the way to the truth. Our modern age must be reckoned with. The old beliefs must be put on the shelf or at best be re-evaluated so as to make them acceptable to man come of age." So we discuss religion on television and in the press as a kind of game, much as we discuss art, politics, education and philosophy, accepting as one of the ground rules of the game that there is no final test of truth. In this way we have the "thus says the Lord" by common consent and truth by majority vote.

That the Christian religion may be very precious to some is admitted, that it is nice that people still go to church is generally acknowledged. But we should not hurt anyone's feelings. In our discussions we should never show any intolerance lest we offend. But we should never forget that the great advocates of tolerance are invariably the most intolerant of everyone who speaks about God with certainty. We are not allowed to be sure. Christians are facing the tyranny of the "Zeitgeist" (the Spirit of the Age).

I am writing in defence of dogmatism. At least, the dogmatist accepts the limitations of the human intellect before the mystery and the profundity of the almighty and holy God. The desire to please everybody is commendable enough under certain circumstances.

But when a Christian starts to please men rather than God in order to be popular he is on the wrong track.

To be right with God has often meant to be in trouble with men. This is a common truth but appears to have been overlooked by a majority of Christians today. We are so afraid to lose popularity! But as soon as we try to make the gospel acceptable and pleasing to everybody, there won't be an appeal left. There is a notion abroad that to win a man you must agree with him. You must put water into the gospel wine. Actually the opposite is true.

The prophets and the apostles have never won popularity contests. They were often like men crying in the wilderness. They were misunderstood and stood alone with their message. In *Letters to Malcolm chiefly on Prayer*, C. S. Lewis asks: "By the way, did you ever meet, or hear of, anyone who was converted from scepticism to a 'liberal' or 'de-mythologized' Christianity? I think that when unbelievers come in at all, they come in a good deal further." Let Christians dare to speak even when their message goes against the grain of modern thought!

Someone must stand up and say, "Look, we are going the wrong way. It is time to change!" The Christian will not disagree merely to be different, but wherever the moral standards and religious directives differ from the teaching of the Bible – he will disagree flatly. He must, in order to be true to his Lord. We cannot bow before public opinion but only before God's Word. Dogmatists are never timid. When men believe in the God of the Scriptures they speak with boldness. They fear their God and not men. When men doubt, they do confer. When they are sure, they proclaim!

The great Christian leaders of the past have been dogmatists. Martin Luther was not timid. He braved the anger of an emperor for truth's sake. John Calvin met the greatest minds of his day. But he found common ground only when they met in Scripture. He was not afraid to lay bare what he considered to be error. G. K. Chesterton remarked that each generation has had to be converted by a man who contradicted it most.

We could do with less conferences and religious dialogues. We could use some dogmatists who dare to speak the truth in love.

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