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Editorial

Readers of *Churchman* may not be aware how much new and exciting writing there has been of late on the subjects of the English Reformation and Civil War. For some time there has been a tendency among 'revisionist' historians to play down the religious issues involved in these events and concentrate instead on social, political and economic factors. Not a few scholars have been ready to suggest that it was these which shaped the nature of the religious debate, and that theology did little more than provide the vocabulary which was needed to express essentially secular ideas. One or two extremists have even suggested that there never was a Reformation at all—that the whole thing was a political manoeuvre with little or no practical effect at grassroots level.

Views of that kind were certain to provoke a reaction sooner or later, and a flood of new books has brought theological factors very much back into the forefront of discussion. Pride of place in this must go to Professor A.G. Dickens's revision of his immensely influential *The English Reformation* (London, 1989). Readers of the first edition will need to acquire the second one as well, so extensive have the revisions been. In this second incarnation, Professor Dickens takes the Revisionists to task and demonstrates as well as he can just how broad and deep the Protestant penetration of England actually was. After 1559 there could certainly not have been any going back to the earlier order of things, but Professor Dickens points out that this was probably true even in the last years of Henry VIII, when Protestant ideas were flooding in from the Continent. No doubt political considerations played their part, but Henry's Reformation would probably have occurred somehow or other even if there had been no formal political cause.

Equally significant, though in a very different way, has been Nicholas Tyacke's book *Anti-Calvinists* (Oxford, 1990 rev. ed.). He charts the rise of Arminianism in the hierarchy of the Church of England from the 1590s to the collapse of the Church in 1640 and demonstrates clearly that this was the work of a small group dedicated to its own vision of episcopal authority and ecclesiastical prestige. It had little if anything to do with the feelings of the great majority of the people, whose desire for a definite, if moderate, Protestantism was thwarted by what amounts to a priestly clique.

That this group was subsequently able to hijack the term 'Anglican' and drive its opponents out of the Establishment amounted to a denial of the Church's Reformed character, which ever since has had to struggle for a place in the sun. The supreme irony of this must be that Archbishop Laud's 'Catholicism' was extremely parochial and xenophobic, whereas it was the Puritan element which sought most consistently to Europeanize the Church. In 1992, when the need to be open to Europe seems to imply a

need to move Romewards, it is worth remembering that there is still an international Reformed tradition to which the Church of England more naturally belongs.

Lastly, there is a most interesting new book by Kenneth Fincham, entitled *Prelate as Pastor: The Episcopate of James I* (Oxford, 1990). In spite of the fact that this began life as a doctoral thesis, it is an extremely readable account of the bishops who exercised office under James I. For the first and only time in English Church history, a largely Calvinist episcopal bench was given the support it needed to pursue the Reformation of the Church at grassroots level. Dr. Fincham demonstrates that they possessed a vision of their office securely grounded in the New Testament's concept of the pastor, and that their main concern was to further the work of the Gospel in the parishes. Most remarkable of all was the Archbishop of York from 1606 to 1628, Tobias Matthew. He kept a diary of his journeys, and lamented on paper the illnesses and misfortunes which kept him from preaching. How many bishops have we known who would regard failure to preach three or four times a week as a dereliction of their duty? And of course by preaching, Matthew meant the full-blown Calvinist Gospel, not the friendly episcopal chat we have grown accustomed to nowadays.

Evangelicals today need to recapture the kind of vision for the Church which these men represented. It may seem a great deal to expect the average clergyman to enjoy a book like Dr. Fincham's, but the discerning reader will soon discover in his pages a model for ministry which could not only put life into the Decade of Evangelism, but also stem the outflow into house churches and other similar bodies. For not the least of Dr. Fincham's points is that had the Church of England continued along these lines, instead of being torn apart by the priggish ecclesiasticism of Archbishop Laud and the divine right theories of Charles I, Puritan dissent would almost certainly have been contained within the bosom of a united Church of England. We should never forget that today's splits, like those of the seventeenth century, are rooted in a dissatisfaction with the national Church which is all too often justified. If Dr. Fincham helps us to understand this more clearly, and shows us models of episcopal behaviour which might, if practised with any fidelity, extract us from this situation, then so much the better.

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