

## 134 Mainstream and Extreme

Things are hotting up. The spread of militant Islam in different parts of the world is facing politicians with a host of urgent, complex questions. One response being considered in Britain is the bringing-in of "EDOs" - Extremism Disruption Orders. These would give the authorities further powers to put a stop to anything they branded as "extreme". Such Orders are clearly targetted at home-grown, home-based British jihadists, but the Orders could also be a net with too small a mesh, scooping up anyone whom the authorities felt was being "extreme".

That is where the problems come in! For any belief to be labelled "extreme" tells us nothing at all about the belief itself - whether it is good or bad, right or wrong, true or false. It simply tells us that this belief is held by a minority compared with the mainstream beliefs of the majority, which in a democratic society are given the authority to "carry the day".

But since when has majority, mainstream opinion been unquestionably true, right and good (that ultimate KURT) - the course to be followed without further discussion? The answer is - Never! The Bible overflows with wonderful characters whose activities were branded "extreme" by the "mainstream majority". Moses clung to his "extremist" belief that they were in God's hands and were to remain faithful to Him. Young David was dangerously extreme concerning Goliath (I Samuel 17. 23-26, 32) and surely deserved having an EDO slapped on him! Each member of "the goodly fellowship of the prophets" fearlessly spoke the words of the Lord, so often being dubbed wild extremists for their trouble. John the Baptist, the Lord Jesus Himself, the heroes of the Early Church - all continued in the great tradition of "extremism", when their beliefs and statements are contrasted with the prevailing mainstream views of their times.

We see from such examples that any biblically-based faith and life is always at risk of the "extremist" label, even though in terms of truth and righteousness it is nothing of the sort. "To obey the Word of the Lord is to ensure being in a minority in whatever age or dispensation men may live" (A E Ware, "World in Liquidation", page 111).

The British Government's dilemma is how to make the mesh of their proposed EDO net the right size: fine enough to catch the real targets, who are few in number but murderous in their intent; yet large enough for the far more numerous Bible-believing "extremists", whose "offence" against the mainstream is simply to proclaim God's truth and seek His goodness for all - to escape being scooped up in a great, clumsy, free-speech-squashing, net.

For there is nothing "extreme" about Christian truth as far as the British constitution is concerned. At its heart is the monarch's Coronation Oath, which binds her, and her government, and all who exercise authority on their behalf, to "maintain the Laws of God, the true Profession of the Gospel, and the Protestant Reformed Religion established by law". There we have it! Yet governments of all persuasions frequently act in blatant defiance of these legal requirements - and get clean away with it.

So we as Christian pilgrims today do not try to be extremists, but to follow, obey and proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord. If and when we are labelled "extreme" (perhaps with its terrifying companions, "bigots, prejudiced, intolerant, old-fashioned, medieval" and the like), there need be no great surprise. The devil will throw what he can at us, using the state, the law, the media, social media, and perhaps even the established church, all lined up to shout, "Ooooooh, how TERRIBLE!".

We fear not, and take our minor place in that noble throng of "extremists", declaring with Peter, when forced by God-denying "mainstreamism" to choose - "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5.29).

And we can sing - loudly! - Bunyan's great old hymn - "Since, Lord, Thou dost defend / us with Thy Spirit // We know we at the end / shall life inherit // Then fancies flee away! / I'll fear not what men say // I'll labour night and day / to be a pilgrim"! We thank the Lord for great saints such as our brother and fellow "extremist" John Bunyan, who trod so faithfully himself the path now stretching before us.

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