

22nd October 2021

Innovations

**“As the birth of living creatures at first are ill-shapen,
so are all innovations, which are the births of time.”**

Francis Bacon, Essays: 'Of Innovations' (1625)

In a church where I was once minister, there were some who were against change, choosing to focus on what was familiar and “safe”, while being suspicious of anything new. It was a struggle, for example, to introduce new hymns, to include “responses” in the worship, to dispense with the sermon in favour of times of reflection. Not everyone felt that way of course. But innovations were frowned upon by many.

In one Good Friday meditation, I was determined to move away from the “hymn sandwich”, to give people time to think and “feel” through the issues raised by the Crucifixion narrative. I placed a large candle on the Communion Table and lit it during the first hymn. When we came to the part of the service where we remembered the death of our Lord, I’d arranged for the church lights to be switched off during some music, leaving the single candle burning. During the silence after the music, I snuffed out the candle, leaving the church entirely in darkness.

It was a metaphor that needed no explaining. But I got “pelters” for that service from some church folk. “It looks like candles are in vogue,” said one snidely. “Very papish,” said another. “Not what we’re used to here,” said a third. Clearly, this innovation was too “ill-shapen” for them.

When Marmaduke Hussey was Chairman of the BBC, he got “pelters” for innovations too. In an interview with the *Independent on Sunday* in 1991 he said that he clung to a quotation from the 16th century Florentine politician and philosopher, Niccolò Machiavelli who wrote in 1532:

There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, nor perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than the introduction of a new order of things, because the innovator has for enemies all those who have done well under the old conditions, and lukewarm defenders in those who may do well under the new.

Innovation may well be ill-shapen at the start. But without those who look to a “new order of things”, how is any enterprise – including the Church – to remain relevant to its present age and circumstances?

Innovators all, wherever you are, I salute you today!

A prayer for today

Lord, what can I innovate in my service to others today?

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