

Mr Enoch Powell's belief that children born in England of black people also born in England are inevitably not so British as white people ('How can this be so?') makes him a racist in a fairly simple meaning of the term. His hedging on the question of whether black people are 'inferior' to whites makes him seem racist in a more sinister sense, and his speeches on the immigration of black people make him a thorough nuisance to everyone working in the field of race-relations. His clear statements of his views make him the spokesman for a lot of less articulate people with a similarly narrow outlook, and he expresses the hidden attitudes of an even larger number of his countrymen—some of whom evince great outrage when these feelings are made public.

Because of his racism he is sometimes mistaken for a fascist. But fascism is not necessarily racist (Italian fascism was not notably racist nor is the form of fascism that will politely take over in England unless socialists work a lot harder) and moreover Mr Powell is in any case an old-fashioned laissez-faire liberal. For this reason his political theories are not of very great interest.

Of much greater interest are his theological opinions, for here too he states clearly what a lot of less articulate people actually believe, and brings into the open latent feelings that would sometimes surprise their owners.

Holding, as of course I do, that heresy is a sin, I would naturally not accuse Mr Powell of being a heretic, but his views seem to amount to a fairly straightforward exposition of a form of the Albigensian heresy. 'It seems to me . . . that there are two completely different worlds, both present in myself which overlie one another or run parallel. . . . This seems to me to be one of the characteristics of Christianity, the absoluteness and exclusiveness of its claim and therefore—I'm taking a risk with the word—the deliberate impracticality of its claim'. The theme that runs right through the recent collection of sermons and addresses from which this quotation is taken<sup>1</sup> is this division between the world of material practicalities and the sphere with which Christians as such are engaged. Eg. ' . . . you have brought our conversation to the verge of a great divide: the divide between the world of Christ and Christianity and this world. The world of Christ and Christianity is a world, humanly speaking, of impossibilities. It is a world in which bread is flesh, and wine is blood. It is a world in which you are commanded to do the impossible'. Or: '(Christ) was denying in the most precise manner the relevance of his missions to politics, to economics'.

Denis de Rougemont has argued that the Albigensian heresy lies at the root of the 'courtly love' of the Troubadours with its perpetually

<sup>1</sup>*No Easy Answers* S.P.C.K. £1.95

and necessarily unsatisfied longing for the unattainable Lady. Mr Powell has just such a romantic version of the Christian life: 'I am aware, in relation to religion, of a sensation which is like that of being hungry. . . .' Anything that might satisfy this hunger would, by definition, not be of Christ. Apart from one uncharacteristic sermon concerning the Hospital Service, the notion that Christianity should or can intervene in the day-to-day political process is altogether repudiated.

Like the Albigensians and all gnostics, Mr Powell is also élitist: 'If success, life, salvation—use which term you will—depends on a content of the mind, then those incapable for any reason of the requisite mental activity, or of entertaining the essential propositions, must fail or die or be damned, according to the terminology chosen. Ignorance, incapacity, perversity, the sheer human propensity to error are sufficient to ensure a high failure rate'.

It is, of course, fun to watch him making hay of liberal Christianity with its bland assumption that the Gospel must be on the side of reform, improvement and middle-class values. Much more clearly than Malcolm Muggeridge or any of his other interlocutors, even Bishop Huddleston, Mr Powell seems to have grasped the essentially revolutionary character of the Gospel:

'Huddleston: . . . there is plenty of conflict between the Christian faith and the social order in which the Christian Church operates.

Powell: It seems to me it must be absolute conflict'.

What he is unable to believe is that revolution, the radical change of the existing order, is possible in this world. He has recognised the transcendence of the Kingdom but has no coherent theology of grace. He cannot recognise the transcendent operating in history. 'All the objects of your lives and mine, all the worthy aspirations and achievements which will deserve an honoured and comfortable old age, a knighthood or the Queen's reward for industry, a favourable mention in the history books . . . they are not just nothing, says the Church, they are less than nothing'. He seems just not to know that this pathetic list of prizes means considerably less than nothing to any average revolutionary socialist.

What makes Powell interesting and important is that just as his racism clearly expresses dangerous and half-recognised beliefs and attitudes that are very widespread, so his version of Christianity makes clear the implicit (and I believe heretical) theology of all those who say that the Gospels are politically neutral and that theologians and preachers should steer clear of political commitment. For them as for Powell, the revolutionary explosion of Christianity is safely isolated in outer space.

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