

EDITORIAL

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CALENDAR

Sunday 30 April:

Third Sunday of Easter

Monday 1 May:

Easter Feria. St Joseph the Worker

Tuesday 2 May:

St Athanasius, Bishop and Doctor.

Wednesday 3 May:

SS Philip and James, Apostles

Thursday 4 May

The English Martyrs

Friday 5 May:

Easter Feria

Saturday 6 May:

Easter Feria

Sunday 7 May:

Fourth Sunday of Easter

Published weekly except Christmas. Periodicals
Postage Paid at Rahway, NJ, and at additional
mailing offices.

U.S. Postmaster: Send airspeed address

corrections to The Tablet, c/o Air Business Limited,

4 The Merlin Centre, Acrewood Way,

St Albans, Herts, AL4 0JY, UK.

Annual subscription rate US\$135.

© The Tablet Publishing Company Limited 2006

The Tablet is printed by WILTSHIRE (BRISTOL) LTD,

Bedminster, Bristol, for the proprietors

The Tablet Publishing Company Limited,

1 King Street Cloisters, Clifton Walk, London

W6 0QZ. 29 April 2006.



**CONSUMER
PRESS**

Independently audited certified average
circulation per issue of THE TABLET, for issues
distributed between 1 July and 31 December 2005,
was 23,071.

Volume 260 No. 8637 ISSN: 0039 8837



THE LANGUAGE GAME

To innovate is not to reform

JOHN MORRISH

WARS OVER the Government's various "reforms" are still raging, although one battle has now been lost, *pace* Edmund Burke, and that one concerns the word "reform" itself.

It is perfectly natural for the Government to say that its attacks on various institutions and groups constitute "reforms": that's its opinion, shared – on occasions – by its supporters. It is certainly keen on the word. It appeared 10 times in last year's 1,250-word Queen's Speech, and that was not exceptional.

It is quite a different matter, however, for reporters and commentators to use the word as if it were a neutral term for any kind of change. Or it may well imply that they have examined it and are in favour. The BBC is particularly guilty, but everyone is at it, even obvious opponents of the Government such as *The Daily Telegraph*.

The verb "to reform" has always meant not to change but to improve. Arriving in the fourteenth century from the French, it originally meant to "recreate" or "re-establish". Its first appearances were in Richard Rolle de Hampole's 1340 *Commentary on the Psalms*, where he tells us that Christ "reforms in us his image" and "wastes discord, reforms peace". He also used the word in a more modern sense, referring to the soul being "reformed" or restored to its original condition.

By the end of that century, however, it was being used to mean "to convert into a better form", often in an explicitly religious context. It subsequently became a common word for correcting or revising a text, for revising a judgement, and for changing any institution for the better. Most importantly of all, it meant, in the words of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "to bring, lead, or force (a person) to abandon a wrong or evil course of life, conduct, etc., and adopt a right one; to bring about a thorough amendment in (a person, his conduct, etc.)".

The noun "reform" is not recorded before the seventeenth century, at which point it was used to mean the amendment or improvement of things, particularly corrupt or oppressive political institutions. A "reformed" church, of course, was one "created by the reduction of another to stricter observances", in the *OED*'s economical definition. The Reformation, of course, is what Protestants called their rebellion against the Pope, even as it was happening. And then there were the great Reform Acts of the nineteenth century. Throughout, "reform" has been a word with a powerful moral component.

The use of the word "reform" as a term for a change is simply unrecognised in the most recent edition of the *OED*, published in 1989. The way the Government uses this word, and other loaded words, has recently been given a name. In his book of the same name, Steven Poole called it Unspeak, "an attempt to say something without saying it, without getting into an argument and so having to justify oneself". The resemblance to Orwell's Newspeak is no accident.

To me, though, these "reforms" are an expression of party politics rather than government, and if their proponents want to call them that, they have that right. What is dispiriting is journalists' willingness to let politicians – and the politicians of one party – set the terms of the discussion.

It is not as if there is any shortage of neutral terms for innovation: what's wrong with "schemes" or "plans", architectural metaphors dating from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries respectively? Or what about "proposals", "initiatives", "programmes", "projects" or even "ideas"? Does no one own a thesaurus any more? It's true that some of these have a touch of jargon about them. In which case, why not stick to "changes"?

Glimpses of Eden



Like any other self-respecting lake, Gormire is reputed to be bottomless. Disappointingly the guidebook told me that it was

only 28 feet at its heart. As we stood with our son and his eldest cousin on the bank, peering through the tattered sedge at the black, wind-whipped heart of the tarn, I was glad I'd never mentioned this rather more conservative estimate. Formed at the end of the last Ice Age when a landslip trapped a glacier's melt-water, Lake Gormire is the place of legends. The devil, having gambled away the world on a losing hand of cards, is supposed to have ridden in despair over the crags; the tarn forming where he fell

through the earth to hell. Alternatively, a vil-lage is said to lie under its bitter waters, flooded when it refused to embrace Protestantism.

Armed only with a bamboo pole lined by Grandad Jack with cotton thread and a bent pin, we were determined not to go home without catching one of the monster pikes so often half-glimpsed in the reeds. Searching for the perfect fishing spot we walked round the lake, our path fringed with wood sorrel; first showing at Easter, this white flower with its almost translucent leaves is known in Europe as the Alleluia flower. The hours passed chasing shad-ows in the dark waters and we came back with nothing except for a bucketful of memories.

Jonathan Tulloch