

Church - Christian Unity

Is the church the place to debate the fundamentals?

By Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Martyn Lloyd-Jones answered thus: "There is to be no discussion about 'the foundation'... If men do not accept that, they are not brethren and we can have no dialogue with them. We are to preach to such and to evangelize them. Discussion takes place only among brethren who share the same life and subscribe to the same essential truth."

In our current series of questions and answers we are discussing critical aspects of the issue of Christian unity — how to achieve and maintain it, and just as importantly, how *not* to do it. We are using Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones' landmark 1962 speech to a British ministerial fellowship as our outline.

"Sheer Confusion and Muddled Thinking"

Thus far, we have seen that unity is not the church's first concern; unity is not to be found in the visible church; unity is only to be found in regeneration by the Holy Spirit and unwavering belief in the fundamentals of the faith; and, it is sinful to attempt to forge "unity" on any other basis. Dr. Lloyd-Jones next turned to the question of whether the church should be used as a forum for hashing out fundamental doctrines:

7. To regard a church, or a council of churches, as a forum in which fundamental matters can be debated and discussed, or as an opportunity for witness-bearing, is sheer confusion and muddled thinking. There is to be no discussion about "the foundation," as we have seen. If men do not accept that, they are not brethren and we can have no dialogue with them. We are to preach to such

and to evangelize them. Discussion takes place only among brethren who share the same life and subscribe to the same essential truth. It is right and good that brethren should discuss together matters which are not essential to salvation and about which there is, and always has been, and probably always will be, legitimate difference of opinion. We can do no better at that point than quote the old adage, "In things essential unity, in things indifferent liberty, in all things charity."

Before there can be any real discussion and dialogue and exchange there must be agreement concerning primary and fundamental matters. Without the acceptance of certain axioms and propositions in geometry, for example, it is idle to attempt to solve any problem. If certain people refuse to accept the axioms, and are constantly querying and disputing them, clearly there is no point of contact between them and those who do accept them. It is precisely the same in the realm of the church. Those who question and query, let alone deny, the great cardinal truths that have been accepted throughout the centuries do not belong to the church, and to regard them as brethren is to betray the truth. As we have already reminded ourselves, the apostle Paul tells us clearly what our attitude to them should be: "A man that is a heretic after the first and second admonition reject" (Titus 3:10). They are to be regarded as unbelievers who need to be called to repentance and acceptance of the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. To give the impression that they are Christians with whom other Christians disagree about certain matters is to confuse the genuine seeker and enquirer who is outside [and also, we would add, to confuse those within the church]. But such is the position prevailing today. It is based upon a failure to understand the nature of the New Testament church which is "the pillar and ground of the truth" (I Timothy 3:15). In the same way it is a sheer

waste of time to discuss or debate the implications of Christianity with people who are not agreed as to what Christianity is. Failure to realize this constitutes the very essence of the modern confusion.¹

No Place for "A Generous Orthodoxy"

Today, leaders of the Emerging Church movement like Brian McLaren advocate what he refers to as *A Generous Orthodoxy*, the title of one of his books. In the subtitle, McLaren says that he is "a Missional, Evangelical, Post-Protestant, Liberal/Conservative, Mystical/Poetic, Biblical, Charismatic/Contemplative, Fundamentalist/Calvinist, Anabaptist/Anglican, Methodist, Catholic, Green, Incarnational, Depressed-yet-Hopeful, Emergent, Unfinished Christian."²

But the content of *A Generous Orthodoxy*, and McLaren's public statements elsewhere, tell us that he is no Christian at all.

He rejects descriptions of the Bible as authoritative, inerrant, and infallible as "unnecessary and distracting." In a February 2005 interview for *Time* magazine, McLaren referred to insistence on adherence to fundamental doctrines as "weapons of mass distraction." He rejects the claim that there is no salvation outside of Jesus Christ. Elsewhere he gives his approach to evangelism: "I don't believe making disciples must equal making adherents to the Christian religion. It may be advisable in many circumstances to help people become followers of Jesus and remain within their Buddhist, Hindu, or Jewish contexts." He says he is uncertain that anyone will be in Hell for eternity.

On the question of whether or not homosexual "marriage" is sinful, McLaren refused to give an answer. "The thing that breaks my heart is that there's no way I can answer it without hurting someone on either side."

Scripture-driven Christians must beware of the Emergent Church movement, or anything or anyone else proposing unity based on the theological equivalent of "two plus two doesn't necessarily equal four." Such people and movements are echoing the words of the serpent in the Garden: "Has God indeed said...?"

As Martyn Lloyd-Jones so well put it, there is no room within the true church of Jesus Christ for such "sheer confusion and muddled thinking. There is to be no discussion about "the foundation"... If men do not accept that, they are not brethren and we can have no dialogue with them. We are to preach to such and to evangelize them. Discussion takes place only among brethren who share the same life and subscribe to the same essential truth."

The Deception of Numbers

One of the biggest deceptions regarding the issue of true Christian unity is the tendency to focus on numbers — to assume that if the church draws a crowd, that it automatically means we are doing something right. Martyn Lloyd-Jones deal with this deception next in his 1962 speech, as we shall see in the [next article](#) in this series.

References:

1. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, "The Basis of Christian Unity," in *Knowing the Times: Addresses Delivered on Various Occasions 1942-1977* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1989), 162-163.
2. Brian D. McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy: Why I Am a Missional, Evangelical, Post/Protestant, Liberal/Conservative, Mystical/Poetic, Biblical, Charismatic/Contemplative, Fundamentalist/Calvinist, Anabaptist/Anglican, Methodist, Catholic, Green, Incarnational, Depressed-yet-Hopeful, Emergent, Unfinished CHRISTIAN* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2004).

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