

Church - Christian Unity

How was Martyn Lloyd-Jones' stand on the basis of church unity received?

By Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Some church leaders heartily agreed with him. But among the vast majority of Evangelicals, his message fell on deaf ears. And some, including his protégé John Stott, publicly rebuked him for taking a separated stand, and went into apostasy themselves.

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

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; it is sinful to attempt to forge "unity" on any other basis; unity does not come through dialogue or debate concerning the fundamentals; and, unity is not based on numerical strength.

As we conclude this series, we shall look at some of the contemporary responses to Martyn Lloyd-Jones stand for unity on the only proper basis, and separation from apostasy. We find that while some church leaders heartily agreed with him, among the vast majority of self-described Evangelicals his message fell on deaf ears — and with some, evoked reactions that showed their true colors.

Heresies Past and Future

Self-described Evangelical leader John Huxtable reacted thus to Lloyd-Jones' call for unity on the only sound basis:

Not the least of my difficulty with the Conservative Evangelicals is their characteristic insistence that, unless the Faith is expressed in their particular way, it is not truly expressed at all . . . that, unless we believe in the substitutionary theory of atonement, it is doubtful we believe in salvation at all . . .¹

Huxtable's words remind us that in heresy, there is nothing new under the sun. His words echoed the old atonement-denying heresy of the modernist Auburn Affirmation of the 1920s, and they also prefigured the new denials that would come in the late 20th and early 21st centuries in the form of Shepherdism, the New Perspective on Paul, and the Federal Vision movement.

Emerging Church Thinking Is Not New

As we look at the reactions to Dr. Lloyd-Jones' call for unity on the only Scriptural basis, we also find that the 21st-century Emerging Church movement's false flag of unity is not new. The very way of thinking expressed by Brian McLaren in his 2006 manifesto of the movement, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, was an underpinning of the negative responses to Martyn Lloyd-Jones' position in the 1960s. Dr. Douglas Jones of Durham University wrote this:

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones is trying to persuade us that there are precise doctrinal distinguishing marks of Christians, that we can distinguish him who believes from him who does not believe. . . In this respect he has learnt nothing from the greatest Evangelical theologian of modern times [by this he meant the heretic Karl Barth] . . . There is no greater scandal in this complex situation than the refusal of Christians to accept fellow Christians. . . *The Church is the emergence*

*within the body of mankind of the unity to which not only Christians but all men are called — more than that, in which they already exist in Jesus Christ. Christ is the head of every man . . . the Church is . . . never possible to define."*²

A Protégé Turns On His Mentor

Dr. Lloyd-Jones' well-known protégé John Stott also began turning on his mentor. Over the remaining years of Lloyd-Jones' life the divide between them would grow into a chasm. In October 1966, at another ministerial conference, Dr. Lloyd-Jones gave a similarly impassioned plea for unity on the proper basis coupled with separation from apostasy. Faithful ministers of the present day, he said, "are the representatives and the successors of the glorious men who fought this same fight, the good fight of faith in centuries past. We are standing in the position of the Protestant Reformers."³

According to an eyewitness press report, when Lloyd-Jones was finished speaking John Stott took the podium, and in an impromptu speech "took the surprising step of virtually rebuking the speaker and of declaring that history was against him in that others had tried unsuccessfully to do that very thing. He also affirmed that Scripture was against him, in that the remnant was within the Church and not outside it."⁴

Such revisionism about the Reformation would characterize John Stott's ministry from that time onward. Two years later, Stott would write this about Evangelicals: "We have acquired a reputation for narrow partisanship and obstructionism . . . We need to repent and change."⁵ The kind of "change" Stott had in mind was evident when he chaired a so-called "Evangelical" conference in 1967 to which Michael Ramsay, Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury, was invited as the principal speaker. Ramsay had by this time already publicly stated that he expected to see atheists in Heaven; had criticized Evangelicals as "heretical" and "sectarian"; and had expressed a sympathetic view of Protestant reunion with Rome. In his address to the conference chaired by Stott, Ramsay said that experience must take precedence over theology, and that

Evangelicals must not exclude postmodernists such as Rudolph Bultmann, who said the Bible must be "de-mythologized", from their fellowship.⁶ Following after such thinking, Stott himself would subsequently go to Venice, Italy to take part in the Evangelical-Roman Catholic Dialogue on Mission.⁷

Stott would also later deny the doctrine of eternal punishment in Hell:

Emotionally, I find the concept intolerable and do not understand how people can live with it without either cauterising their feelings or cracking under the strain. But our emotions are a fluctuating, unreliable guide to truth and must not be exalted to the place of supreme authority in determining it . . . my question must be — and is — not what does my heart tell me, but what does God's word say?⁸

But Stott would in fact place his emotions above Scripture by developing a doctrine of annihilationism that denied the Bible's clear statements on eternal punishment. Despite this and other errors, he continues to be a favorite of many self-described Evangelicals. A few years ago, he was invited to address the student body of Covenant Theological Seminary, the denominational seminary of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). Dr. Bryan Chappell, president of the seminary, defended Stott's appearance at Covenant by saying that despite his views Stott is still "within the pale of Evangelical truth" and has made "important contributions to the gospel." A few weeks after his Covenant Seminary appearance, Stott also spoke at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, the quasi-official seminary of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC).^{9, 10}

A little less than two years before Martyn Lloyd-Jones' death, John Stott requested a meeting with him that, according to Stott's own account, was an attempt at reconciliation with his former mentor. But Dr. Lloyd-Jones, while personally polite, made it clear that the divide between them was not one of personalities (as some in

the Evangelical world surmised), but of principles. Lloyd-Jones told his guest that if Stott would return to Biblical principles and the breach could thus be healed, "I would say like Simeon, 'Lord now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace.' " But it was not to be.¹¹

Scripture-Driven Christianity in Contrast

The Word of God calls Christians to a higher standard. There is only one basis for Christian unity.

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. Therefore He says: "Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you light." See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is." (Ephesians 5:8-17)

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. (Ephesians 6:10-13)

May God give us the grace to stand as Dr. Lloyd-Jones did, as "the representatives and the successors of the glorious men who fought this same fight, the good fight of faith in centuries past."

References:

1. John Huxtable in *Evangelicals and Unity* (1964), as quoted in Ian Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, The Fight of Faith, 1939-1981* (Edinburgh, Scotland and Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth Trust, 1990), 430.
2. Douglas Jones, *Instrument of Peace* (1965), as quoted in *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, The Fight of Faith, 1939-1981*, 430-431. Emphasis added.
3. *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, The Fight of Faith, 1939-1981*, 524.
4. "October 1966" in *The Evangelical Magazine of Wales*, Vol. 20, No. 2, April 1981, pages 40-42, reproduced at <http://www.mlj.org.uk>, as viewed on 3/31/2009.
5. *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, The Fight of Faith, 1939-1981*, 538.
6. *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, The Fight of Faith, 1939-1981*, 539.
7. *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, The Fight of Faith, 1939-1981*, 659.
8. John Stott, *Evangelical Essentials* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1988), 315-316.
9. As reported in "Controversy Dogs John Stott in America," *Presbyterian and Reformed News*, Vol. 5, No. 4, December 1999.
10. Although not officially connected with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia was described in the denomination's *Report of the Committee to Study the Views of Creation* (reproduced in the *Commissioners' Workbook for the 71st General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2004*, page 1607) as "the OPC's *de facto* denominational seminary."
11. *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, The Fight of Faith, 1939-1981*, 659.

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