

FORTY YEARS ON...

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2006 marks the 25th anniversary of the home-call of Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. It is therefore fitting to remember another important anniversary in connection with his ministry, and this appears below – Ed.

On 18th October 2006 it was the fortieth anniversary of Dr. D.M. Lloyd-Jones' (MLJ) opening address at the Second National Assembly of Evangelicals in London.¹ This (what was to be) historic meeting was organised by the Evangelical Alliance and, as events turned out, this proved to be the last occasion on which MLJ spoke for this body. The first National Assembly of Evangelicals had set up a Commission "to study radically the various attitudes of evangelicals to the ecumenical movement, denominationalism and a possible future united church" (that is, a United Evangelical Church).

MLJ began his address by announcing his subject which was to be church unity and he made it clear that he was speaking at the request of the Commission. Having previously been called as a witness to this Commission and expressing his views, he was then asked by the same Commission to state his opinions in public. This is an important point given the repudiation of MLJ's case by the meeting's chairman, the Rev. John Stott. Although John Stott's intervention had not been planned by the Assembly, it opened up the whole issue for debate and this had not been MLJ's intention. In addition, it undermined all that he had already stated. The Christian press, understandably, made the division between MLJ and Stott a cause for considerable comment, yet perhaps the saddest outcome was the inevitable cleavage that took place in the Westminster Fellowship of ministers of which MLJ was chairman.

Another change was the different attitude adopted by Anglican Evangelicals the following year as, following the Keele Congress, they became more inclusive, identifying with liberals, Anglo-Catholics and even Roman Catholics. Indeed, they were prepared to regard them all as true Christians and renounced any view that said otherwise.

What had MLJ said in his address that brought about such polarisation? It is probably true to say he was not the cause of this, but rather his address proved a watershed: the occasion of tremendous change and upheaval in the Evangelical world of that time, and its repercussions are with us this day.

MLJ's Address

- His preliminary remarks over, MLJ pleaded for a right understanding of the nature of the Christian church and that such a body should enjoy spiritual and visible unity.
- After giving a brief history of the Evangelical Alliance and why it was formed, he then described the new situation that Evangelicals found themselves in because of the Ecumenical movement. Indeed, he felt that there had been no other such tremendous times since the Reformation and that great opportunities lay before the church if she would only grasp them. All the denominations were affected by ecumenism (as they are now) and they were prepared to reconsider their whole situation and throw everything into the melting-pot in order that a "new world church" could be the result. The Ecumenical movement wants one great world church, MLJ said, and a new attitude towards Rome. It was certainly true that in 1966, as he observed, "a change, a profound change, has taken place in the attitude of Protestants toward the Roman Catholic Church."

¹ The contents of this address appear in *Knowing The Times*, chapter 13, page 246 under the title: *Evangelical Unity: An Appeal*.

- The position of Evangelicals was then analysed and MLJ's conclusion was that it was pathetic and tragic. He also deplored the fact that there was no true interest in biblical church unity and Evangelicals were confused, divided and in disagreement amongst themselves and manifested a negative attitude towards church union. In addition, they did not speak with one voice but were scattered about in small groups throughout the denominations.
- A failure to discuss the doctrine of the church was also lamented by MLJ, because Evangelicals themselves acted within the terms of the Ecumenical movement. They were afraid to talk about such a truth in case they offended others and brought division. Consequently, teaching about the church was neglected. With that, he asked, are we content to be "an Evangelical wing of a church?" Content to stay where we are and try and change things in our denominations? Prepared to stay in churches that may have wrong views on the sacraments, the Bible, the very being of God etc? Content to stay in "a territorial church" that will eventually include the Roman Catholic Church? Happy with "a kind of paper church, with a formula that people interpret in their own way..." and remaining an Evangelical wing in this "comprehensive, national, territorial church"?
- That said, MLJ challenged his hearers to go back to the Bible and discover what a New Testament church is really meant to be like and to put doctrine before fellowship. Denying that a church is a place in which we can fish (i.e. use as place where fellow members can be evangelised) he contended that the New Testament idea was that the church is a fellowship of saints where we are working together for the same ends and objects. He was also careful to define the doctrines that declare us to be truly Evangelical and included the infallibility of Scripture, the deity of Christ, his "atoning, sacrificial, substitutionary death; His literal, physical resurrection," etc.
- With that, MLJ commented upon the sin of schism and declared that to leave a church that is apostate is not schism. "That is one's Christian duty and nothing else." With customary frankness he accused Evangelicals of this sin because they were divided from one another! "We spend most of our time apart from one another," he lamented, and being "joined to and united with people who deny and are opposed to these essential matters of salvation. We spend our time with them. We have our visible unity with them. Now, I say, that is sinful."
- Finally MLJ appealed to Evangelicals to leave their compromised denominations and come together. "You cannot dissociate yourself from the church to which you belong," he said, and for him there was no distinction to be drawn between a local congregation and the denomination. It was all one in his eyes. "Do we not feel the call to come together, not occasionally, but always?" he pressed. He was a believer in Evangelical ecumenicity and as such felt believers were called to the positive task of being the "guardians and custodians of the faith, the faith that has been given once and forever to the saints." We are called, he persisted, to maintain an ancient witness and stand in the position of the Protestant Reformers, the Puritans, Covenanters, early Methodists, etc. He made it clear that such a stand would present Evangelicals with many problems and difficulties, but that believers were living through tremendous times and are at one of the great turning points of history. Let them then come together in a fellowship, an association of Evangelical churches.

WHAT OF US FORTY YEARS ON?

1. Remember what MLJ had to say those many years ago and, whatever our views on churchmanship, consider again what the New Testament has to say about the nature of the true church of Christ.
2. Evangelicals should think seriously about remaining in apostate denominations. Things were bad enough in the days of MLJ but they are far worse now. We have great sympathy with aged and infirm saints who have few options left open to them, but what of others? What excuse can

they offer? They ought to consider the call to leave spiritually compromised denominations. MLJ issued this call forty years ago and it is as imperative now as it was then. Sadly, his words went largely unheeded as we fear they will be again. Tragically, Evangelicals are becoming more absorbed into the parent denomination and instead of changing the main body, it is changing them.

3. Further, let us learn from MLJ to beware of movements that are built upon spurious and unbiblical foundations. They are doomed to failure from the start. Unless God is in it, there will always be decline and spiritual decay, leading, possibly, to eventual apostasy. Our eyes should always be upon the Lord.

4. Whether or not we are in full agreement with MLJ, Evangelicals face serious problems and difficulties. May the Lord appear for us in our day.