

Missing the Point – Badly

On 18th October, 1966, D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones was the opening speaker at the conference on ‘Christian Unity’ called by the Evangelical Alliance at the Central Hall, London. The subsequent controversy over his now famous discourse – or, some would say, infamous discourse – still rages.

I have no interest in re-hashing that controversy. My purpose is altogether different, altogether more fundamental. My title says it all: ‘Missing the Point – Badly’.

Let me explain. Nearly everything I have read about that discourse and the ensuing debate wastes ink on an absolutely futile issue. I choose my words deliberately. I see a parallel with the scholastic debate that used to occupy so many minds in the medieval Church: How many angels can be got onto the head of a pin?¹ Actually, it is worse than that!

To make my point as clearly – and as briefly – as I can, I refer to Iain H.Murray’s analysis of the affair in his response to the many critics of Lloyd-Jones; namely, the chapter “‘The Lost Leader’ or ‘A Prophetic Voice’?” in his book *Lloyd-Jones – Messenger of Grace*, published by The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 2008. The question which occupies so many is this: Did Lloyd-Jones call for evangelicals – evangelical Anglicans, in particular – to separate from their mixed denominations? And, as a corollary, if he did, was he right to issue that call?

All parties are deeply concerned about such issues as ‘denominations’, ‘visible churches’, ‘associations’ and so on. All parties, it seems to me, accept such terms and principles without question. Moreover, concepts such as ‘separation’ and

¹ Whether or not this debate actually took place as prominently as is commonly thought is itself debated. The fact is, however, in 1270, Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologica* raised the issue by asking: ‘Can several angels be in the same place?’

‘sectarianism’ are, by most parties, thought of as theological swear words.

But all this is to think and speak on the basis of Christendom. If we stick to Scripture, there is no debate about any of these things; the issue is cut and dried, settled once and for all. Indeed, from a scriptural point of view, there is no issue in the first place! Notions such as ‘denominations’, ‘visible churches’, ‘associations’ are entirely of Christendom’s making, and constitute Christendom-speak. And Christendom is probably the greatest curse Satan ever inflicted on the people of God!²

² As for Lloyd-Jones, himself, alas, there can be no doubt that, over many years, he made it clear that he was confused, ambiguous and self-contradictory over church life, denominationalism and the like (For full documentation, see my *Battle for the Church:1517-1644* and *Infant Baptism Tested*). So much so, I think it is impossible to make a consistent case for Lloyd-Jones’ position on any of it. How muddled can one get? Take this from Murray: ‘The BEC [that is, the British Evangelical Council] was not a denomination, but an association of denominations. In 1967 Lloyd-Jones encouraged Westminster Chapel to move from its Congregational Union to the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches [that is, the FIEC]. Although he had long since ceased to be involved in the denominational affairs of the Presbyterian Church of Wales, his ministerial status formally remained with that denomination’ (Murray p177). The FIEC was a subset of the BEC (see John Brencher: *Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981) and Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism*, Paternoster, Carlisle, 2002, p116). While, at the start, the FIEC was anti-denominationalism (see Brencher p83), its recent development, to my mind at least, has the appearance of the FIEC itself moving towards becoming a denomination. Westminster Chapel’s move to the FIEC was not an easy passage. It was the BEC that gave Lloyd-Jones his best ‘platform’ (see Brencher pp123-125,199-200). Murray: ‘Lloyd-Jones’... call [in 1966] was not separation from denominations as such; it was for separation from error and unbelief’ (Murray p187). In 1974, Lloyd-Jones told Pentecostalists: ‘Don’t stand in denominationalism. Belong to a denomination but don’t stand fast in it’ (Brencher p84). Murray admits Lloyd-Jones’ support for *historical* separatism (Murray p187. For abundant confirmation, see D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones: *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors*, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, reprinted 1991).

As for separatism, far from being a term of abuse, it speaks of a principle that is entirely biblical – entirely biblical, I say again; it is written right across the Bible. In the old covenant, Israel had to be separate from all other nations – that is, pagans – and in the new covenant – which concerns us as believers today – the principle of separationism is patently scriptural. Christ spelled it out for his people:

If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you (John 15:19).³

As he said to his Father in his great intercessory prayer just before his crucifixion:

I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world (John 17:6).⁴

Paul was unequivocal about the issue, uncompromising in his assertions and commands:

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said: 'I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty' (2 Cor. 6:14-18).

³ Has not Christ told us in the bluntest of terms that just as the world had hated him and his words, they will hate us and our words (John 15:18-27; 16:2-4,33; 17:14-18)?

⁴ Do not miss the unbreakable and indispensable link between God's word and separation (the root meaning of 'sanctification') in Christ's prayer (John 17:17-19). The two stand or fall together; any weakening of separation can only involve a corresponding weakening of our hold on, and obedience to, God's word.

We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things (1 Cor. 4:13).

If [since] with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations...? (Col. 2:20).

James could not have made the position any clearer:

You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God (Jas. 4:4).

John was explicit:

You are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error (1 John 4:4-6).

Indeed, the very word chosen by the Spirit to describe the local church and its gatherings – *ekklēsia*, ‘the called-out ones’ – shouts ‘separationism’ from the housetops.

If it is objected that the ‘separation’ in question is separation from the world – as in the scriptures just quoted – then the answer is self-evident. Yes, separation is separation from the world, of course, but the passages definitely encompass denominationalism and the like:

First, since denominationalism is totally unknown in Scripture – it being, as I say, an invention of Christendom – it can be no surprise that Scripture does not directly address the subject.

Secondly, what are the denominations which the participants in the debate are concerned with? All are agreed that they are mixed bodies – some members being regenerate and others not, some members and their churches standing on the gospel and others not. If association with – union with – such bodies is not covered by the scriptures quoted, what is?

Let me deal with the old chestnut: ‘You are calling for a perfect church!’ While I am not daft enough to think that any local church can be perfect, every believer and every church must strive to be as perfect as possible; that is, to be as scriptural as possible. In other words, believers and their churches are forbidden to have fellowship with all forms of darkness. If the above-quoted scriptures do not teach this, what do they teach?

Let me illustrate how the debate badly misses the point. Murray objected to the allegation that in his 1966 address Lloyd-Jones had made:

...a forceful appeal in the words of Revelation – ‘Come out of Babylon’.

Murray responded:

I have seen the original copy of the address, taken down from the tape recording, and no such words were spoken.⁵

But the call is entirely biblical:

Come out of her [that is, Babylon], my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues (Rev. 18:4).

The fact that some accuse – and criticise – Lloyd-Jones for saying such a thing (if he did!), and others have to deny (out of embarrassment, it seems) that he did say it, speaks volumes, and makes my point!

In short? Let us drop Christendom-speak now! Even more, let us give up Christendom principles forthwith! Let us get our churches into the biblical separation so clearly set out in Scripture, and let us obey the unequivocal command for us to be separate from all manner of darkness.⁶

⁵ Murray p171.

⁶ For more of my work on this topic, see, for instance, my *Relationship Evangelism Exposed: A Blight on the Churches and the Ungodly; Battle; Infant; Deceit in Death: Christendom in the Raw: ‘Christian’ Last Rites for Unbelievers.*