
18th October 1966:

I was there...

Stan Guest, then of the Congregational Evangelical Revival Fellowship

By 1966 I had been a member for some 12 years of the Westminster Fellowship. We met monthly under Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones and shared thoughts on many different subjects. From a letter I wrote to him on 2nd February, 1966, it is clear that, at the January meeting, he had spoken about "coming out" of the denominations. In my letter I said I was ready to do so but not yet persuaded that the time was "now". I recalled his earlier advice that we should stay in as long as we can. I was preparing a statement for the Annual Assembly of the Congregational Union in May.

I was present at meetings of the National Assembly of Evangelicals 1966 and was aware of the deep sadness and confusion felt by so many. This resulted in the Doctor closing the Westminster Fellowship for a time. My own personal position, however, had been greatly helped by the Doctor's stand and this, no doubt, encouraged me to accept, in 1967, the position of Secretary to An Evangelical Fellowship of Congregational Churches.

Evangelicals in congregationalism had a situation to face in 1966 that was different from their brethren in other denominations. The Congregational Union of England and Wales was changing its form in very significant ways. After several years of discussion it invited churches to covenant together as *the Congregational Church of England and Wales*. This commenced in 1966 and it was a clear move towards the further step of uniting with the Presbyterian Church of England to form the United Reformed Church. This took place in 1972. It was hailed as an important move towards ecumenical oneness. Though it is difficult to see it as such when one realises that over 200 *more* congregational churches stayed out of the URC than the number of Presbyterian churches that went in.

Not all the churches that remained congregational did so on evangelical grounds. Many saw that the URC was, in fact, really a Presbyterian body. They compared, for example, the Congregational Union declaration of 1833 with the URC constitution. The former stated that in no way was the Union to assume authority or become a court of appeal. The latter had as its closing statement: "The decision of the General Assembly on any matter which has come before it on reference or appeal shall be final and binding".

Evangelicals recognised these changes of church policy, of course, but they believed they had even stronger grounds for separation. For decades the CUEW had been drifting away from the final authority of Scripture and the true declaration of the Gospel. This had already led, in 1947, to the forming of a Congregational Evangelical Revival Fellowship, drawing together individual members of churches. The call to covenant as the CCEW required an affirmation of oneness in doctrine with those who were fully liberal in their teachings. There were churches who could not do this and, in 1967, there was formed an Evangelical Fellowship of Congregational Churches.

One question that had to be faced was whether or not simply to join the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches. Some churches did, in fact, take up joint membership. It was recognised, however, that churches would be more easily encouraged to take a stand if they could see they were continuing in a congregational denomination. One important consequence of this has been that, because an EFCC was legally recognised as a continuing

congregational body, it has received substantial funds from the former national and county Congregational Unions, thus preserving their benefit for evangelical purposes.

The call for wider evangelical unity was not ignored, however. The first EFCC constitution booklet stated: "In no way is it the intention to set up a permanent body as a separate continuing denomination. We see ourselves as a 'bridging Fellowship' until such time as the Lord may prepare the way for a wider grouping of Bible-believing Christians from all denominational backgrounds". Its first statement of purpose reads: "To seek the welfare and express the faith and the true unity of the whole Church of Jesus-Christ".

Basil Howlett, then at Hesters Way BC, Cheltenham

The scene is indelibly etched on my mind. The occasion was the opening night of the Second National Assembly of Evangelicals arranged by the Evangelical Alliance which followed hard on the heels of a Commission to "study radically the various attitudes of Evangelicals to the Ecumenical Movement, denominationalism and a possible future United Church". Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones had been asked by the leaders of the Evangelical Alliance to "say in public, what he had said in private" when speaking to them. The Central Hall, Westminster was full, the platform was occupied by evangelical leaders of various persuasions – two rows of them. At first, as far as physical stature went, Dr Lloyd-Jones was dwarfed by them, but as the meeting went on he seemed to become a giant!

I felt sorry for Derek Prime that night! He gave the introductory Bible Study on Philippians 2, and it was very good, but what followed was so electrifying that nobody had a hope of remembering what he said! The Rev. A Morgan Derham's remarks, which had eulogised the Doctor with feint praise brought forth the following response when he arose to speak: "It would be churlish of me not to thank Mr Morgan Derham for the remarks he has made, but I wish he had not done so; he has robbed me of my valuable time!"

This gathering must be seen against the background of the increasing liberalism and mounting ecumenical pressures of those days. Two dreadful books which undermined Gospel truth had but recently been published. *Honest to God* by John Robinson (the Bishop of Woolwich) closely followed by *Down to Earth* written by Howard Williams (then President of the Baptist Union). In most of the doctrinally mixed denominations, Evangelicals were, at best, marginalised and ignored, but often mocked and discriminated against. Many young, evangelical ministers were fighting for survival, and would often find that a denominational official was working in league with disaffected members, to get them out of their churches. Numerous good, evangelical, theological students, looking for a church, were passed over. The Ecumenical Movement was marching forward to conquer, with strident voice and big steps, but with little sympathy for those who stood in the way. Evangelical churches had little hope of getting sites for church planting; Ecumenical Centres were the talk of the day.

Against that backcloth, Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones stood to make his impassioned plea for Evangelicals, who were divided up among the denominations, to come together "as a fellowship or association of evangelical churches", and to stand together for the Gospel. In actual fact, the words "separate" and "secede" were not mentioned. It was a positive appeal for Evangelicals to stand together, not just occasionally, but always. I went to the Central Hall, that night, disillusioned with the Baptist Union, desiring closer unity with Evangelicals, but scared about the way forward. How do you leave a major denomination and its security when you have a young family? Suppose the denomination evicts your church from its premises and throws you out of the manse! Yet as the message drew to a close I was convinced, along with others, that to be true to Scripture and conscience I had no alternative

but to ask God to give me the strength to do what was right, no matter what the cost. The preacher knew there would be a cost for many and sympathised:

There are great and grievous difficulties: I am well aware of them. I know there are men, ministers and clergy in this congregation at the moment, who, if they did what I am exhorting them to do, would have a tremendous problem before them, even a financial, an economic and a family problem. I do not want to minimize this. My heart goes out to such men. There are great problems confronting us if we act on these principles. But has the day come when we, as Evangelicals, are afraid of problems? The true Christian has always had problems. The early Christians had grievous problems, ostracized from their families and the threat of death ever facing them. They were not daunted: they went on, they believed, they knew, they would rather die than not stand for the truth.

Five years before, almost to the day, I had sat in the Free Trade Hall, Manchester, trembling and gripping the seat, as I heard the Doctor preach for the first time, and was rescued from the emptiness of liberal theology. Now I was gripping the chair again! Oh that we had more preachers today who could make us tremble.

The chairman, John Stott, sensed that many men were being stirred to action and feared that some Anglican clergy might leave their church. Although he had already been given a ten minute slot earlier in the meeting to state his own views, he rose, at the end of the Doctor's address not to close the meeting, but to counter what had been said. Being a young, impetuous non-conformist at the time, I secretly hoped that Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones would get to his feet again and make mincemeat of the Anglican leader, but he was wiser and more gracious than I shall ever be...

In spite of the interjection, many of us left the Central Hall feeling that we were on the verge of something new and exciting. We honestly believed that if we left our mixed denominations it would not be a matter of going out into the wilderness, but into this new grouping of churches. We also felt, quite justifiably, that just as men were willing to make sacrifices to come out of mixed denominations, so evangelical bodies like the FIEC and the Strict Baptists, etc, would be prepared to make changes in pursuit of this greater evangelical unity. Sadly, it has not happened. Our failure to heed the appeal, in my view, is one of the greatest tragedies and disappointments of the past 30 years. I sometimes wonder whether the increased confusion and contention within evangelicalism, not to mention the comedy, is a judgement of God upon us because of our failure to take evangelical unity seriously.

Is it too late now? New factors, besides liberalism and ecumenism, have come into the religious scene, ranging from the ridiculous to the rigid. The difficulties will be enormous but should that prevent us from attempting what is right? After all, trying to live a holy life can be difficult. Am I wrong to dream that one day there might be a closeknit Fellowship or Association of Bible Churches with English, Welsh and Scottish branches, to include all who have a serious view of the Bible and a commitment to a robust evangelicalism? Dr Lloyd-Jones ended his appeal with the prayer "May God speed the day".

I thank God for the privilege of being at the Central Hall that night and of being allowed to live through those exciting, if scaring, times. Just one small, almost trivial incident indicates how traumatic the Central Hall meeting was. Two days later, as the EA assembly continued, newspaper vendors were selling their wares outside the Central Hall. The paper they were selling was *The Christian*, and their sales cry was not "Late Final" or "Latest Football Results", but "Lloyd-Jones in *The Christian*!", "Lloyd-Jones in *The Christian*!"

Derek Prime, then at Lansdowne EFC, Norwood

My memory of the evening of Tuesday, October 18th, 1966, at the Central Hall, Westminster, is not as clear as I would wish it to be. I do not think that any person taking part imagined that it would prove to be so significant. Had we appreciated the consequences that were to follow, I for one would probably have taken greater note of the feelings and convictions I then possessed.

I have clear recollections, however, of our time in the vestry beforehand. I imagine that I had been asked to take part because I was in the middle of my year as president of the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches. The atmosphere was warm and friendly. After prayer together, John Stott, the chairman, suggested that we make our way to the platform, and Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones asked John Stott, where he wanted him to sit. "Sit at my side", John Stott requested, to which the Doctor quickly responded, with a twinkle in his eye, "Which side? You have *two* sides, John!"

I had been asked to read the Scriptures early on in the meeting, together with some brief comment. Since the stated theme was Christian unity, I read the first half of Philippians 2, and commented on the passage in the light of the subject.

The address Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones gave is well documented, and what he said probably surprised few of us, but what took everyone by surprise, I believe, was the action of the chairman, John Stott, when, after the Doctor's address, he proceeded to repudiate what he had said. I sensed that this was unpremeditated and certainly not on the programme for the meeting. John Stott was clearly alarmed at the action some might be prompted to take. The lesson I clearly remember from that meeting, which has remained with me, is that a chairman should not be a principal contributor to a meeting, especially if the subject is one where strong feelings are held. The sympathy of many went out to the Doctor who had no opportunity of reply, and especially the sympathy of those who already identified with the Doctor's position or who were feeling the particular pressures of a false ecumenism in their church situations. I wonder if things would have been different – and the outcome better – if the meeting had been chaired by someone whose task had only been to chair, and not to represent a position or point of view?

It was a sad occasion because of my personal debt to and affection for both men. As a teenager, my school was adjacent to Westminster Chapel, and I was early introduced to the Friday Evening Discussion Meeting. Then as a young pastor, before moving to Edinburgh, I attended for twelve years the Westminster Fellowship. As a student, I was Mission Secretary for the first mission John Stott took for the Christian Union at Cambridge, a mission which was outstandingly fruitful as he preached the series of sermons from which came *Basic Christianity*. No two men, with their contrasting styles of effective expository preaching, more greatly influenced me with regard to my own understanding of preaching. I owe a great debt to God for their example.

There were many repercussions from the meeting, which others have written about. The Evangelical Alliance lost from its council godly men such as Theodore Bendor-Samuel and John Caiger, and the British Evangelical Council was seen as a preferred alternative for expressing evangelical Church unity. My personal regret was that I lost fellowship with many whose friendship I had appreciated and gained from since student days in the then IVF, particularly with evangelical Anglicans. Evangelical Anglicans and evangelical non-conformists expressed their identity and common concerns in many ways in the early years of my ministry, but that more or less ceased, and both went very much their own ways. It

has perhaps only been in recent years, principally through the Proclamation Trust's activity, that the divide has been bridged and fellowship re-established.

Leith Samuel, then at Above Bar Church, Southampton

Rev. Morgan Derham was the General Secretary of the Evangelical Alliance (EA) when it undertook the task of enquiring whether or not there was a widespread demand for a united evangelical Church in Britain. An Assembly open to all Evangelicals registered with or recognised by the EA was arranged to meet in the Church House, Westminster, with two evening rallies in the Central Hall. John Stott chaired the first evening rally at which the speaker was Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who had discussed with the Council everything he was going to say. A rumour has circulated since that the message he gave took the Council of EA completely by surprise. Not so! They knew, and if they wished to, could have requested him not to say what he came out with. Revelation 18:4 was the Scripture on which the Doctor based his appeal. "Everything is in the melting-pot" is freely admitted all round. "For too long we have been content to go along as the evangelical wings of doctrinally-mixed denominations. Is this not the time to come together?" He did not advocate a new denomination, but "a loose federation of evangelical churches". When he finished, John Stott got up and, contrary to the generally understood role of a chairman, flatly contradicted the Doctor's thesis by saying: "The Doctor has Scripture and Church History against him", with no reference to any Scripture or incident in Church History. My host for the night, Tim Buckley of the London Bible College, said on the way home to Tooting: "Rugby and Cambridge. I can't understand it!", a reference to the chairman's behaviour.

I rang the Doctor at his home that night, and expressed my grief at the way he had been treated. I did not sleep much that night, because I had to introduce a proposition next morning in the Church House that a fund should be started to help ministers who felt their conscience, enlightened by Scripture, was telling them they ought to leave their doctrinally-mixed denominations. I mentioned in my introduction that the existence of the Church of England was an illustration from Church History of a withdrawal from an apostate Church.

Imagine my consternation when we received at the door of the Central Hall that night a copy of *The Christian*, containing David Winter's report of the meeting the previous evening with a heading across the front page saying: "The Doctor had called people out of their churches to form a new denomination". Rev. HF Stevenson was unwell on the previous night and had asked David Winter to double up for him, so the *Life of Faith* came out with a similarly startling heading the next day. In company with the Rev. Roland Lamb and a few others I submitted a letter to both papers asking the editors to correct the misleading impression of the previous week's issue. The small letter was duly printed by both journals on page 3, totally lacking the impact of the previous week's streaming headlines.

From personal conversations with the Doctor I gathered that he (and I!, let me hasten to add) were hoping that a banner would be raised at the Central Hall that we could all (true Evangelicals) in Britain come together under. I was informed by Dr Douglas Johnson, a close friend of the Doctor's, that John Stott apologised privately to the Doctor, but never made public that he was sorry for treating the leading Evangelical in the country in the way he had done.

The next year the Anglicans met at Keele and declared they were committing themselves to a future in the Anglican community. I wrote to John Stott asking him not to overlook his non-conformist brethren. He assured me this would not happen! But ten years later at

Nottingham they proceeded further in an Anglican direction: "This was not my scene" said the leading Anglican Evangelical to me straight after Nottingham!

On the non-conformist side, the BEC gathering in Westminster Chapel, October 3rd 1967, was a significant moment, 450 years after Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the door of the Church of Wittenberg, though the *impetus* of that great gathering was never maintained, alas!

Derek Swann, then at Ashford Congregational Church

I began my ministry at Ashford in January 1963. My predecessor, but one, the Rev. Gilbert Kirby had left to become General Secretary of the Evangelical Alliance in 1957. Consequently, the Church had strong links with the EA. It was natural, therefore, that I should be present at the October 1966 meeting at the Westminster Central Hall as a Church delegate, and at the various public meetings of the EA prior to that.

All that Dr Lloyd-Jones said that night in October is now well documented. To some, his message came like a thunderbolt, but to those of us who regularly attended the monthly meetings of the Westminster Fellowship of Ministers over which the Doctor presided, it was not. For many months the question of the Doctrine of the Church, unity and schism had been thoroughly discussed, so we were familiar with the Doctor's position.

As Congregationalists we were forced in the early 60s, in way others were not, to consider, and face up to, the subject of Church unity. The Congregational Union of England & Wales was actively working for the formation of the Congregational Church *in* England and Wales (this came into being in 1966), which was a spring-board for union with the Presbyterian Church of England, which would result in the formation of the United Reformed Church in 1972. The majority of Evangelical Congregationalists were clear about what action they should take, but the discussions under Dr Lloyd-Jones were both strengthening and encouraging. At Ashford, as in many of our churches, the main issue was the Doctrine of Scripture. How could we possibly work with ministers and churches who held the view that "the Bible is not wholly free from error, confusion and contradiction, it must be read with fully critical attention if the Church is to discern the truth which is binding, and not to be in bondage to what is not binding".¹

A colleague had lunch with one of the leading men in the CUEW at the time, and warned that if loose views of Scripture continued to be embraced then Evangelicals could have no part in the proposed EC in England and Wales. His reply was: "We're ready to lose you, for the sake of wider unity". Not surprisingly the bulk of Evangelical Congregational Churches did not enter the new body. I must point out, as a matter of fact, that we did not come out of a body, rather we refused to join one.

To go back to the October 1966 meeting. When the Doctor finished his reasoned and passionate address, the behaviour of the Chairman, the Rev. John Stott, came as a shock. That otherwise calm and reasonable Anglican seemed to be visibly shaken by what had been said, and perhaps, fearful lest there should be a flood of Anglican ministers prematurely leaving the Anglican Church, spoke briefly, but strongly that both Scripture and History were against the position the Doctor had outlined. The atmosphere was electric and one had the sense that from that night onwards a division in evangelicalism was highlighted that would dominate the scene for years to come.

References

¹ *A Declaration of Faith*, First provisional draft, May 1964