

OCTOBER 1966

SOME called it his Rubicon. But he finally crossed it—and that publicly—on the night of October 18th 1966 at the National Assembly of Evangelicals convened by the Evangelical Alliance at Westminster Central Hall.

A now defunct religious weekly, *The Christian*, described it at the time as 'an exciting meeting, with two rows on the platform occupied by leaders of evangelical thought in Britain today, all listening intently to Dr. Lloyd-Jones, small in stature, insignificant in figure, and yet mighty in eloquence, with a great command of the Scriptures and the ability to hold the largest congregation spell-bound.'

He was attempting to get evangelicals to face up to the doctrine of the Church—something, he said, that he had never been able to get people to hold a discussion on during the 30 years in which he had been

associated with evangelical work in London. They were always afraid that someone would be offended and that divisions would be caused. Often, so he argued, 'evangelicals . . . seem more concerned to maintain the integrity of their denominations than anyone else in the denominations.'

He argued that the existence of the ecumenical movement should force us to reconsider this position, and he drew attention to the various moves that were afoot (some subsequently completed) towards denominational mergers and also to the alarming new attitude that some were showing towards Rome.

There were two major questions, he said, that evangelicals must address themselves to at once. The first was, Were evangelicals content to go on with being nothing but an evangelical wing to the Church? The second—even more basic—was, What was the Christian Church?

Evangelicals rightly put doctrine before fellowship, which was the exact opposite of the ecumenicals. Could we be content, he asked, with a 'paper Church'? 'The Church, surely, is not a paper definition. It does not consist in Articles or a confession of faith. It consists of living people. Sometimes we are told that the Church is a place in which a man can fish, but surely the Church does not consist of unconverted people. It consists of saints.'

He then turned to the question of the sin of schism. 'It is not schism to divide over basic points of doctrine,' he argued. Thus to divide from Rome was quite right. But he went on to accuse evangelicals of being the only people who were guilty of schism. They who were agreed on the essentials of the gospel were divided from one another and were actually fighting for the denominations that most of them were in because they had been born into them.

'I make an appeal to you evangelical people this evening. What reasons have we for not coming together? Why is it that we are so anxious to hold to our inherited positions? Some say we would miss evangelistic opportunities if we left the denominations, but I say, "Where is the Holy Spirit?" Surely, He will





honour the truth if we hold together. Evangelicals spend their time criticizing their own leaders, but these men are still your leaders. You cannot justify your decision to remain in your denomination by saying that you maintain your independence. You cannot dissociate yourself from the church to which you belong. That is a contradictory position, and one that the man in the street must find very hard to understand.

'We believe the Bible and we take it authoritatively,' he continued, 'and we are the only people doing this . . . We are the modern representatives and successors of the men who fought this fight centuries ago. We are standing in the position of the Protestant Reformers. God is calling upon us to maintain this ancient witness not occasionally but always. The need has never been greater. There is a need of conviction of sin, of new life, of turning to God, of becoming God's people. This is the work of the Holy Spirit, but have we the right to ask Him to do this, when we spend our time arguing in the churches? If we would only stand constantly together, I believe we would then have the right to expect the Spirit of God to come down in a mighty revival.'

'I am well aware that there would be great and grievous difficulties. There would be family and financial problems if we acted on these principles, but has the day come when we are afraid of principles? The early Christians had great problems, but they were not daunted. Was Luther not confronted with problems? We are living in tremendous times, in one of the great turning-points of history. We may be small in number, but since when has the doctrine of

the remnant become unpopular among evangelicals? We are not interested in numbers but in the truth. Go home and read the story of Gideon again, and see how God has acted through one man. If we stand for God's truth we can be sure God will honour and bless us.

'Therefore, fellow evangelical Christians, rise to the occasion and listen to the call of God. If we have one objective only, namely, the glory of the Lord, we shall be led by the Spirit to the true answer to these problems.'

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The argument was biblical, the reasoning sound and the delivery moving. But, as the Doctor had always feared, so far as the majority of evangelicals were concerned, it fell on deaf ears. The Evangelical Alliance had sponsored the meeting and had invited Dr. Lloyd-Jones to speak to this subject and to repeat in public the arguments he had previously put in private to their Commission on Church Unity. In the light of this, the congregation were amazed when the chairman—Anglican John R. W. Stott—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.

This was very much the shape of things to come, in that many evangelical leaders, especially in the Church of England, seemed to be falling over themselves in



their haste to dissociate themselves publicly from the Doctor's call.

The following week *The Christian* carried an incredible letter from the then secretary of the EA, Mr. A. Morgan Derham. The report of the Assembly in the previous week's issue had included a photograph of the platform party—David Winter, Godfrey Robinson, J. Hywel Davies, Dr. Lloyd-Jones, John Stott and A. Morgan Derham—under the headline 'Leave your denominations'. The EA Secretary wrote to complain about this: '... the men who appear in the photograph under the bold headline "Leave your denominations" are, with one exception, opposed to such a policy, and feel that this conjunction of startling heading with the photograph can cause them serious embarrassment in their own denominational situations.'

This in turn drew an appropriate response in the form of another letter one week later from Rev. Iain Murray: 'Anyone who took the trouble to read [the account] would see that the address was far from being given on behalf of the platform party. What then is the "serious embarrassment" liable to be caused to the other ministers who were on the platform "in their own denominational situations"? ... Did anyone ever hear of an evangelical minister feeling it necessary to protest to a denominational paper because his picture or name was reported in conjunction with some denominational colleague who does not hold to the Faith? It seems that Mr. Derham's letter goes far to underline one of the points in Dr. Lloyd-Jones' address, namely, that too often we allow denominational considerations to override more basic biblical truths.'

A watershed

The evening was a watershed so far as evangelicalism was concerned, particularly in England but also in the British Isles in general. Its effects are with us still. One prominent evangelical Anglican spokesman recently accounted for those who heeded the Doctor's call in terms of the fact that they were 'lacking in a sense of humour'! A continually growing number of men and churches have seceded from their denominations in the years following that call, not to come together in some new evangelical denomination—such a thought had never been in Dr. Lloyd-Jones' mind—but to attempt to stand together in fellowship on the distinctiveness of the gospel over against all that would contradict or undermine it.

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Just over twelve months later at the British Evangelical Council's annual conference, a packed Westminster Chapel heard Dr. Lloyd-Jones make a further impassioned and reasoned plea for evangelicals in the denominations to leave them and to join in

fellowship in the BEC in a true expression of biblical unity. The occasion was the 450th anniversary of Martin Luther's nailing of the 95 Theses to the church door in Wittenberg. After giving a fascinating account of Luther's development and of the momentous step taken by him in 1517, Dr. Lloyd-Jones proceeded to relate the principles of the Protestant Reformation to the present-day situation. It meant, so he argued, asking the real questions. Not, 'How can we find a formula that will satisfy men of diametrically opposed views?' but 'What is a Christian? Is he only a man who objects to atomic bombs and apartheid? Luther is thundering down the centuries and asking us this question. Then, *How does one become a Christian?* How do I get forgiveness of sins? And, *What is a Church?* Is it an organization or a gathering of believers?' He described the idea being put forward by the 'in-it-to-win-it' school of evangelicals of infiltrating and reforming the denominations from within as 'midsummer madness'. Revelation 18:4 was the relevant text: 'Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins . . .' Come out—but come together in the fellowship of the BEC.

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The passing of the years has seen the continuation of the trends which the Doctor in his perceptive way outlined on those evenings. His stirring call has lost none of its biblical authority and relevance.

'He being dead yet speaketh.'



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