

Martyn Lloyd-Jones and Theological Education

As chairman of its Sponsoring Committee, Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones, in the latter years of his life, gave the inaugural address at the opening of the London Theological Seminary in October 1977. In his preliminary remarks he made this comment: ‘I have a suspicion that many of you feel that the phenomenon by which you are confronted is that of a poacher turned gamekeeper!’¹ Such an opening statement could give the impression that Lloyd-Jones had entertained doubts concerning the necessity of theological education for those preparing to be preachers and pastors.² As we shall argue it was not so much the need that he had questioned as the kind of education that was on offer.

He himself had been ordained into the Presbyterian Church of Wales (The Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Church) ministry without any formal theological education. The denomination had arisen out of the evangelical awakening of the 18th century with the ministries of such giants as Daniel Rowland, Howell Harris, William Williams Pantycelyn and blessed with second generation men of the calibre of Thomas Charles and John Elias. Most of the early Calvinistic Methodist exhorters and preachers had no theological college training but were self-taught, being steeped in the Scriptures, widely read and full of the Holy Spirit. During the 19th century the denomination set up its own theological training programme with colleges in North and South Wales. Though he was interviewed as a prospective student by the principal of the Aberystwyth theological college, Lloyd-Jones was convinced that such training was not the right way forward for him.³ He studied Greek on his own and received some pastoral help from respected senior ministers while at his first charge in Sandfields, Port Talbot, South Wales. Already well conversant with the Scriptures and theological subjects, his reading of book reviews in Christian periodicals put him in touch with the latest thinking and introduced him to important works of the past. He read such tomes as Barth and Brunner but it was the writings of Jonathan Edwards and Benjamin Warfield that were particularly helpful in the development of his thinking.

Though he had made up his mind that formal theological education was not for him the fact that he entertained a call to become principal of the Calvinistic Methodist theological college at Bala indicated that he was not averse to the idea of such training for those entering the

¹ Dr D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Training for the ministry today*, LTS, 1983, p.1.

² Iain Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith 1939-1981*, Banner of Truth Trust, 1990, p.712.

³ Iain Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The First Forty Years 1899-1939*, Banner of Truth Trust, 1982, pp.84-85.

Christian ministry. That he did not in the end take up the position was the decision of the denomination rather than any doubts in his own mind concerning the need.⁴

In the early 1940s he was very involved in the establishment of the London Bible College (LBC) or London School of Theology as it is now called, being Vice-Chairman of the College Council in 1943. Although he declined an invitation to become its principal, he supported the college in its early years and introduced the committee to Ernest Kevin who became its first principal.⁵

It was the college's policy of preparing students for the London University divinity degree that concerned Lloyd-Jones and led to his negative attitude toward the theological education on offer.⁶ On the occasion of the opening of the LBC's new premises in May 1958, Lloyd-Jones urged staff and students to keep to the revealed truth and seek to know God better. 'You may have more BDs than any college in the country but only if the result is that your people know God better!'⁷ E. J. Young of Westminster Theological Seminary was present and found the preaching a memorable experience but the college faculty received the sermon coolly and refused to have it published for they were very aware of the implications of what he was saying. Despite the fact that he had little to do with the college in any formal way after this, in an indirect way he continued to influence for good a generation of LBC students preparing for the gospel ministry through his Friday night and Sunday ministry at Westminster Chapel.

His own disillusionment at the way men were being prepared for what he considered to be the highest calling of God, was shared in the mid 1970s by other evangelical gospel ministers in England and Wales.⁸ He listened to their concerns and the result was the opening of the London Theological Seminary (LTS). His inaugural address reveals the kind of education Lloyd-Jones felt was necessary for those preparing for the preaching, pastoral ministry and that LTS was to exemplify. It presents his mature reflections, giving voice to ideas and views that had occupied his mind for many years.

⁴ *Ibid* pp.346-352.

⁵ Murray, *The Fight of Faith*, pp.91-94,163-164.

⁶ Cf. Oliver Barclay, *Evangelicalism in Britain 1935-1995* (Leicester, 1997), p.129: 'When London Bible College started preparing its students for the London University external BD, Martyn Lloyd-Jones sounded an alarm and lost interest in the college that he had helped to create.'

⁷ *Fight of Faith*, p.311.

⁸ The LTS Sponsoring Committee comprised those who were opposed to the ecumenical movement and included the General Secretary of the Evangelical Movement of Wales, the General Secretary of the British Evangelical Council, the Director of the European Missionary Fellowship, and a representative from each of the following: the Strict Baptists, the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches and the Evangelical Fellowship of Congregational Churches. At that time the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of England and Wales had not been established.

1. He encouraged theological education

Lloyd-Jones considered it a fallacy that any educational institution could produce a preacher. He believed that preachers and pastors were born but that did not mean they needed no helps. In order to become effective preachers and pastors he saw the importance of a place where those gifts could be developed.⁹

It must not be forgotten that Lloyd-Jones, before he entered the Christian ministry, was Chief Clinical Assistant to the King's physician with rooms in Harley Street, a Member of the Royal College of Physicians and possessed a London University research degree, all by the early age of twenty-five. He was therefore not opposed to people receiving the best education available. While he deplored theological education that was tied to the university system, this did not mean that he was taking an obscurantist attitude toward all knowledge and learning. He was supportive of a well-trained mind and believed it was 'an error' to think that college training was not needed. Speaking at a private conference for the revival of evangelical theology in 1941 Lloyd-Jones highlighted the pietistic strands that had led to the weak state of evangelical scholarship.¹⁰

2. He broke with tradition

Though the LTS marked a complete break with the long-standing tradition of theological education in Britain, it was actually seeking to return to the kind of training that the apostles received. Lloyd-Jones demonstrated how quickly the Early Church had moved away from the emphasis of the New Testament, how they had sought to defend the gospel with philosophical argument and how in the Middle Ages the gospel was obscured by a mixture of philosophy and biblical teaching. Although at the time of the Reformation gospel teaching and preaching were reintroduced and the errors of Rome exposed, he criticised the Reformers for perpetuating the kind of preparation for the Christian ministry that was already in existence. While the Reformers 'corrected the doctrine' they 'did not deal in a fundamental manner with this further matter of training men for the ministry.' Even the Puritans did not 'break free' from the old methods that had been in vogue for many centuries.

What is Lloyd-Jones saying? It was when he came to the Evangelical Awakening of the 18th century that we begin to detect what he is seeking to make clear. There were preachers raised up by God at that time who had no university training and yet some of them were exceptionally powerful preachers. But they were called exhorters or lay-preachers rather than simply preachers or gospel ministers because 'they had not received the customary training'

⁹ *Training for the ministry today*, p.10.

¹⁰ *The Fight of Faith*, pp.70-74.

and thus they were not allowed to be ordained. Due to their Anglican background, both the Calvinistic Methodists of Wales as well as the English Wesleyan Methodists were very insistent on this at the beginning.

Lloyd-Jones was emphasising that scholarship does not make a preacher and he indicates how the theological training that had been on offer either hid the gospel or had been a complete waste of time. He gives the example of how the learning of classical Greek became to some extent a hindrance to those studying the Koine Greek of the New Testament and how the assured results of biblical criticism in one generation become out of date and useless with the advance of knowledge. What he is criticising is the emphasis on this kind of scholarship for interpreting and appreciating the Word of God.¹¹

a) academic agenda

Allowing a place of learning like the University of London to set the courses and determine the syllabus that evangelical ministerial students were to follow Lloyd-Jones considered to be entirely inappropriate. While the various Bible Colleges that had come into existence since the Second World War had been established to preserve the biblical teaching, the method of training had never been thought through. They had made the ‘fatal mistake of allowing the curriculum to be determined by the liberal outlook’ even though they had made every effort to guarantee that the teaching would be in the hands of evangelicals. They had repeated the defects and weaknesses of the denominational theological colleges that arose in the 19th century. Referring to his involvement in the establishment of LBC he indicated that while such Bible Colleges were eager to safeguard the teaching they never considered the method of training.¹²

b) academic mentality

Lloyd-Jones dissented most strongly from Gresham Machen’s position in an address he gave at the opening of the Westminster Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, USA in 1929. Machen had spoken of a theological seminary as ‘an institution of higher learning whose standards should not be inferior to the highest academic standards that anywhere prevail.’¹³ For Lloyd-Jones this was an entirely wrong approach. He was adamant that a seminary for training preachers and pastors should in no way be compared to an institution of higher learning. He considered that it was ‘in an entirely different realm’. That is why degrees and

¹¹ *Training for the ministry today*, pp.3-5.

¹² *Ibid.* pp.5

¹³ *Ibid.* p10. The quotation comes from J. Gresham Machen, ‘Westminster Theological Seminary: Its Purpose and Plan’ in *Studying the New Testament Today* Vol.1 of *The New Testament Student*, ed. John H. Skilton, Presbyterian & Reformed, 1974, p.163.

diplomas and the whole examination system did not belong to such training. He compared the training of preachers and pastors to the training of general practitioners in the medical world. For too long the medical schools had been training specialists instead of general practitioners. Only recently had they recognised the need to prepare medical doctors for day to day ailments that are dealt with in the surgery. Likewise, ministerial training, he argued, should be geared toward 'general practitioners' of the Word, who preach Sunday by Sunday to congregations of ordinary people. If men wanted to go on and specialise they were to feel free to do so but a seminary for preachers was not in the business of catering for that.¹⁴ In this he was reiterating a warning he gave in 1941 at a private conference of evangelical scholars. He feared that in their enthusiasm to raise up evangelical specialists in biblical studies there was the danger of losing the whole picture with over specialisation. What the church needed was 'general practitioners'.¹⁵

He would have agreed with C. H. Spurgeon's aim in setting up his Pastors' College: 'to train preachers and pastors rather than scholars and masters of arts. Let them be scholars if they can, but preachers first of all, and scholars only in order to become preachers. The universities are the fit places for producing classical scholars, let them do it; our work is to open up the Scriptures, and help men to impress their fellows' hearts.'¹⁶ Lloyd-Jones saw that 'the supreme need is that of preachers, not mere teachers, still less lecturers'. By preaching Lloyd-Jones meant 'proclamation...the powerful presentation of the great message of the Bible.' The business of the preacher, he argued, was not simply to give the people knowledge and information but 'to bring the Bible alive to them...to move people'; to produce 'live living witnesses...to produce saints'.¹⁷ Thus the whole course at LTS from start to finish was to have this one aim in mind of preparing men for the gospel ministry. All the subjects covered were to be taught with an eye to the gospel ministry.

3. His philosophy of education

The subject of education in general is one to which Lloyd-Jones had given much thought. At the age of twenty-one he gave an address on the subject of 'Modern Education' to the Literary and Debating Society at his local church in London. The contents of this address are lost to us but from other addresses he gave in subsequent years of which manuscripts do survive, we can appreciate the way he was thinking. In an address on 'The Signs of the

¹⁴ *Training for the ministry today*, pp.10-11.

¹⁵ *The Fight of Faith*, p.75.

¹⁶ C. H. Spurgeon, 'The ministry needed by the churches and measures for providing it' in *Sword & Trowel* (1871), p.226.

¹⁷ *Training for the ministry today*, pp.5-6.

Times' in March 1924 one of the illustrations he gave for the moral chaos of the times was the craze for degrees and diplomas.¹⁸ He expanded on this when he again spoke to the Literary and Debating Society in 1925 on 'The Tragedy of Modern Wales'. This was the address that brought his name to public attention in the land of his birth. The first principal sign of his country's degeneration, as he saw it, was the 'tendency to judge a man by his degrees and diplomas rather than by his character'. He found it pathetic that the nation that had produced such men as Howell Harris and John Elias was now found 'worshipping at the altar of degrees'. Education had replaced real Christianity. 'The true business of education is to give culture and the only culture that is worth considering is the culture possessed by Christian men and women...We worship today any man who knows many facts and we despise the man who knows the only thing that is really worth knowing.' He concluded his speech by calling for 'real men' not 'educated snobs' but 'men with vision and the faculty divine'.¹⁹

Some years later, when Lloyd-Jones had begun his ministry in South Wales, he was invited to speak at his old secondary school in Tregaron on the occasion of their annual Prize Giving in 1927. He addressed the governors, staff and pupils on the theme of true education, warning them of 'the tyranny of knowledge', and of the dangers of thinking that 'people who read a lot were great thinkers.' A degree in science did not mean that a person was a scientist. He considered there 'was no real value in education unless it helped to build character...It was not what one knew of geometry, history, mathematics, and chemistry that mattered, but what one knew of life and men'. The cultured person was the one who thought and the most cultured people he had found were the ones who had not gone to university.

In the light of these strongly held opinions, it is no surprise to hear him in his inaugural address so negative toward modern education and its emphasis on acquiring degrees. The object of theological education for those called to the gospel ministry, Lloyd-Jones argued, was to give a person 'a deeper understanding, to make him a more profound thinker'. He quoted Peter Brown in his biography of Augustine to make the point that it was not the business of a theological seminary to train a person 'for a task he will later accomplish' rather it is 'one of making him wider – of increasing his capacity, at least, to take in something of what he will never hope to grasp completely in this life.'

In summary, Lloyd-Jones maintained that the main function of a Seminary was to teach men to think and to go on thinking after they have left college and not simply to churn out the

¹⁸ *The Fight of Faith*, p.65.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* pp.76-72.

lecturers' notes. He felt strongly that the tragedy of so many men who had been to theological college was that they had never really thought after they had left college. College training should be only a beginning. In his lectures to the students at Westminster Theological Seminary, he makes much of the preacher's need to carry on reading in all the main areas covered in a theological seminary. For him the primary object of reading was not merely to gain information or get ideas for preaching but as a stimulus to make one think. 'The preacher is not meant to be a mere channel through which water flows; he is to be more like a well...Take all you read and masticate it thoroughly. Do not just repeat it as you have received it; deliver it in your own way, let it emerge as a part of yourself, with your stamp upon it. That is why I emphasise the general principle that that is the chief function of learning.'²⁰

In addition, he strongly felt that the business of a theological seminary was to give men 'a greater love of the Word than they have ever had, a greater desire to dig into its profundities...to read everything they can which will help them to that end, and then to go on doing this, to go on learning and increasing and developing in every respect until they are called home to their eternal reward'. He gave this challenge: 'If men's hearts are not warmer when they go out from this college than when they came in, then these tutors will have failed.'²¹ Similar words were uttered by him twenty years earlier in his address at the opening of the new premises of the London Bible College on Marylebone Road in 1958. 'Do they know God better than when they came in?...Have they a greater zeal for God? A greater love for the lost and perishing?...'²²

4. His approach to theological education

Lloyd-Jones considered training men for the gospel ministry to be quite unlike any other kind of training, precisely because the subject matter was of a different order and the prospective ministers of the gospel were not in the same position as those engaged in training for other types of work. With subjects like medicine students begin by knowing virtually nothing. This is not the case with theological education. Lloyd-Jones made it clear that there was a sense in which every Christian had the same knowledge as the preacher. It was merely a question of degree. There was a spiritual dimension that had been too often neglected in ministerial training programmes.

²⁰ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching & Preachers*, Hodder & Stoughton, 1971, pp.180-181.

²¹ *Training for the ministry today*, p.15.

²² *The Fight of Faith*, pp.310-311.

In preparing men for the Christian ministry the starting point must be the realisation ‘that here we are in a new realm, an entirely different realm; and the matter must not be considered in an academic or scientific manner. It must be considered always in a spiritual manner.’ He used the argument of Anselm that belief in the revealed truth of the Christian faith comes before analysing that truth. Reason is not the controlling factor. But having begun with belief we are not to stay there but seek to understand as far as humanly possible using ‘enlightened spiritual reason’.²³ He was therefore, not advocating an obscurantist point of view but emphasising the need to put first things first and to remember that educating men to be preachers and pastors was not to be considered in the way one would a university course.

Lloyd-Jones believed that theological education in preparation for the Christian ministry should not be concerned with the kind of scholarship that wearied students with the conflicting theories of the biblical critics while the important truths of the Christian faith were sidelined or forgotten. This had been the tragedy of the theological learning over the past century and he saw it as no surprise that some of these colleges had now ceased to exist. His view of degrees and diplomas has already been mentioned and it was his opinion that, in the context of the spiritual outlook that should characterise a theological seminary, the whole idea of examinations and academic awards was completely out of place. This was not only a radical departure from what had become customary but it was flying in the face of an increasing trend for more degrees and higher degrees and which is even more evident in today’s world. He went so far as to suggest that it was ‘almost blasphemous’ that there should be examinations in connection with the knowledge of God and the gospel truths.²⁴ The worldly attitude that he had observed in his own countrymen with their desire for degrees and diplomas to gain recognition and acclaim he abominated. He had observed its deadening effect on churches that looked for ministers with BAs and BDs rather than spiritual qualifications.

5. His theological curriculum

Theological education was to have the one practical aim of preparing a man to be a better preacher. To this end he urged that the tutors must be preachers themselves and have had pastoral experience. While they must know their subjects they are not academics primarily but men who have experience of church life, know how to handle people and can preach.

He encouraged preachers as he encouraged all Christians to read the Bible regularly every day and to read it in a systematic way so that the entire Bible was covered at least once a

²³ *Ibid.* pp.8-9.

²⁴ *Ibid.* p.9.

year.²⁵ The preacher's task, however, was to expound the message of the Bible to the people and therefore theological education must give the preacher a thorough grounding in the Scriptures. Knowledge of the Bible was top of his list of subjects to be taught but he was also concerned about what this entailed. He was emphatic that while Hebrew and Greek should be taught knowledge of the languages was not the key to understanding the Bible. Gresham Machen had claimed that 'you cannot read the Bible for yourself unless you know the languages in which it was written'. Lloyd-Jones dissented strongly from this position arguing that some of the greatest preachers of the Christian church were men who did not know the biblical languages while many scholars who knew the languages did not understand the message of the Bible. With 1 Corinthians 2 in mind, he maintained that understanding the Bible is a spiritual matter and depended on the activity of the Holy Spirit.²⁶ To become experts in the languages requires a lifetime of study. What was needed in a theological college was proficiency in the languages to enable the preachers to use their commentaries and the various translations of the text in an intelligent manner.

Training was needed in exegesis and particularly hermeneutics. Grasping the message was the all-important thing. When this was done the training should then help students to convey and apply the message to the people.

The teaching of theology was likewise to have the practical aim of enabling the person to preach theologically. It was not to be taught as 'an abstract, theoretical, academic subject'; rather, it must be seen to arise out of the Scriptures. Biblical theology was essential but not at the expense of systematics. There would be no true benefit, as he had made clear before, 'if the end result was that elements of Old and New Testament theology were not co-ordinated in the whole of truly systematic biblical theology'.²⁷ Doctrine is likened by Lloyd-Jones to scaffolding that is put up when a great building is to be erected. 'It must be there if you are to have good preaching' and to keep the preacher on the right lines', but it must never be turned into a straitjacket. The object of theology he insisted must bring a person to fall down in worship of the holy awesome God. It must never be discussed in some frivolous or matter of fact way. He saw no place for philosophy in a theological course only apologetics, but even this was not to be a major item in the curriculum. Refuting false arguments and exposing

²⁵ *Preaching & Preachers*, pp.171-174.

²⁶ *Training for the ministry today*, pp.11-12. In his copy of Machen's statement there are exclamations and underlining and when Machen a few paragraphs later refers to the Reformation doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture Lloyd-Jones notes in the margin how this contradicts his previous statement.

²⁷ *The Fight of Faith*, p.75.

error Lloyd-Jones saw as a necessary negative but the main purpose of theological education was to be positive.

History he saw as a vitally important subject for theological students. This included not only drawing attention to the great events of the past but the lives of great Christians, the history of the various denominations and most importantly historical theology. Finally, pastoral subjects he urged should be taught by men with long experience in the work but he was adamant that no provision was to be made for the teaching of psychology. The kind of psychology on offer was of a humanistic kind and he again emphasised that pastors are ‘called to deal with problems of a spiritual nature’ which can be done primarily from a knowledge of the Scriptures.²⁸

Conclusion

Lloyd-Jones was emphatic that ‘no college, or any other institution, could ever produce preachers and pastors’. To think that they could, he said, ‘has been another of the fallacies of the past hundred years’. What is needed is that future ministers are ‘helped in the development of the gifts they have in order that they may become effective preachers and pastors’.²⁹ That which characterised Lloyd-Jones’ ministry – careful preparation of sermons where the text was set in context and within the flow of redemptive revelation, interpreted in the light of the whole of Scripture and pressed upon the hearers as of vital importance to their lives – he was concerned to see encouraged by those responsible for preparing preachers. As he closed his inaugural address Lloyd-Jones saw theological education as helping to provide a kind of sacrificial offering so that the fire of God’s Holy Spirit might descend upon it. He considered it to be a means toward an end, an important means, but he did not want the students to put their trust in their training but in the living God. ‘You may be in the pulpit of Whitefield, you may have Whitefield’s knowledge, and even more than he had – for he was not a very learned man – but the secret of Whitefield was his God, and without Him we avail nothing.’³⁰

Philip H Eveson

Principal of The London Theological Seminary

²⁸ *Training for the ministry today*, pp.12-14.

²⁹ *Ibid.* p.10.

³⁰ *Ibid.* p.16.