



## COFFEE AND CONTROVERSY IN THE GARDEN

A quiet friendly discussion in a garden between two famous men of God, D. M. Lloyd-Jones and T. T. Shields, reveals the sad misunderstanding existing among God's people over the serious question of Christian protestation.

The year was 1932, the garden was in Canada, and my information comes from the first volume of Iain Murray's biography of D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones entitled *The First Forty Years*.<sup>1</sup> Somewhat romantic as Christian biographies tend to be, those of us who knew the great man were looking forward to its long-awaited publication. We were not disappointed, for more reasons than one as the following will reveal!

Dr Lloyd-Jones [1899–1981] was on a preaching tour of Canada when Dr Shields [1873–1955], the well-known minister of Toronto's Jarvis Street Baptist church, phoned him suggesting they meet at his home for lunch the following day. After the meal, they sat in the garden drinking coffee and amicably discussed their differences.

It proved to be a very significant meeting, for although the two men were united over the fundamentals of the faith, they nevertheless spearheaded two opposing viewpoints regarding the nature of Christian protestation. Today, decades later, the ideas expressed by these godly brethren are still being debated, and their example followed even in areas where the names of Lloyd-Jones and Shields may not be known.

### THE OPENING SHOT

Put simply, the fifty-nine year old Shields was a vocal Protestant, a “vigorous denouncer of all denominational apostasy” the biography informs us.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, the thirty-three year old Lloyd-Jones considered the older man

“sometimes too controversial, too denunciatory and too censorious”<sup>3</sup> [ibid]. Indeed, states a very sympathetic biographer, “he was often to pass on the same warning to other ministers exposed to the same temptation”.<sup>4</sup> Rather, his subject suggested that Shields should “drop all this, preach the gospel to people positively, and win them!”<sup>5</sup>

Let me say at the outset, that the personalities and ministries of these godly and outstanding men are not at issue. I am only concerned with the viewpoint they represented, and to seek to understand how almighty God would have his people obey the apostolic injunction to “earnestly contend for the faith” (Jude 3).

### A QUESTION OF BALANCE

To begin with, the two men were not polarized in their thinking on this topic all the time. They must often have entered each other's position. For instance, had Shields never preached the gospel but only contended, fellowship between them would have been impossible. Indeed, his salvation would have been called into question! On the other hand, many of us knew Lloyd-Jones to be very vehement in opposition to theological error, and woe betide those who wielded a mere cudgel to his rapier! The argument, therefore, is not about extremes but rather the possibility of imbalance.

I have only the passage from the book in which to rest my case, but my assessment of it draws me to the conclusion that Dr Lloyd-Jones was as unbalanced in this issue as he claimed Dr Shields was!

The passage under review, a lengthy and unedited quotation from Lloyd-Jones himself, sets out to present a favourable picture of his views about Christian protest. However, the passage also blatantly endeavours to encourage the reader to think less of Shields and the vocal Protestant approach to the Christian faith. In short, it is a less-than-fair appraisal of the issues.

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<sup>1</sup> Iain H. Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The First Forty Years, 1899–1939* (Edinburgh and Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1982).

<sup>2</sup> Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones*, 271.

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<sup>3</sup> Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones*, 271.

<sup>4</sup> Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones*, 274.

<sup>5</sup> Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones*, 273.



For example, the image of Dr Shields painted by his coffee companion is of one who appeared to love controversy for its own sake. According to Lloyd-Jones, it was Shields who began the discussion: “he suddenly turned to me”. Then, we are informed, Shields steered his guest into the controversy by expressing shock upon hearing that Lloyd-Jones received no blessing from the writings of Dr Joseph Parker [“Man! What’s the matter with you?”], and implies that Shields’ sole interest was in Parker’s attack upon the liberal theologians: “Surely, you are helped by the way he makes mincemeat of the liberals?”<sup>6</sup>

I would in no way question Dr Lloyd-Jones’ integrity, but the picture presented is very lopsided. Just from reading this passage, the impression received of Dr Shields’ character is that he was decidedly bellicose, as if to support Dr Lloyd-Jones’ case that Dr Shields was “controversial”, “denunciatory” and “censorious”?

One might find it hard to credit, that in the peace of the garden Shields made no comment of a spiritual nature; after all, whatever else he might be accused of, he was an experienced man of God. However, if spiritual matters were discussed, and surely they were, it is not mentioned by Lloyd-Jones. Perhaps, the point of the exercise is to show that vocal Protestants have no appetite for Christ and eternal issues, but if that is so, it is a picture that has no basis in fact, yet one continually promulgated today in Christian circles.

Then Shields, the editor at the time of an international paper called *The Gospel Witness*, is reported by his guest as concluding his argument with the words, “Do you know, every time I indulge in what you call one of these ‘dog-fights’ the sales of the GOSPEL WITNESS go right up. What about that?”<sup>7</sup>

There is no doubt that Shields uttered those words at some stage, for Lloyd-Jones was not a liar, but in what context? In any case, would an intelligent man “in defence of his attitude” really draw his argument to a close on such a flimsy and negative note? Some “defence” it would have proved to be!

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<sup>6</sup> Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones*, 272.

<sup>7</sup> Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones*, 272.

## CROSSED SWORDS, CROSSED WIRES

I suggest Dr Shields’ guest edited the discussion in the garden, in order to heighten the quality of his own position; it is an old debating ploy! The idea is to take hold of an opponent’s less worthy statement in order to use it as a rod with which to verbally beat him. For example, in the passage under observation one notices that Shields’ comment about ‘dog fights’ increasing sales, is used by Lloyd-Jones as a springboard from which to present his more “worthy” illustration. There is a trick to every trade!

Dr Shields was obviously joking; no editor of his standing would permit ‘dog fights’ to govern editorial policy, and Dr Lloyd-Jones would have known it. Still, if one wishes to create the impression that “dog fights” are the meat and drink of the vocal Protestant approach, the story is a good one. In truth, the appetite is for Christ, and the battles arise because he has been offended and his glorious message tampered with.

However, his story half completed, Lloyd-Jones rises to the occasion by adopting another ploy, a good psychological one. He obviously wished to make it clear to the reader, without actually stating the fact, that he was winning the argument. He always did! While he remained seated, the vocal Protestant is seen losing ground by leaving the “arena” [retreating!] to think matters over: “Shields got up, walked down the garden and then came back to re-open the conversation”.<sup>8</sup>

It was at this point though that both men got their wires crossed, as most do in any debate on the question of protestation. They failed to acknowledge, that an examination of the New Testament reveals two aspects to “the good fight of faith”; on the one hand, the battle *without* the true church against heresy and apostasy, and then again the occasional confrontations within the church when Christians require correcting (e.g. Acts 20:29, 30).

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<sup>8</sup> Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones*, 273.



Instead of recognizing the first of these approaches, Shields weakened his argument by ignoring it. He could have referred to Jesus' anger in driving the moneychangers from the temple, and on two separate occasions, even using a "scourge of small cords" to do so (Matt. 21:12; John 2:15). Equally, Shields could have reminded his guest of the use of language employed both by Jesus and John the Baptist.

Had he done so, perhaps Lloyd-Jones might have considered them "too controversial, too denunciatory, and too censorious", when calling the priests "serpents" and "a generation of vipers" (Matt. 23:33; Luke 3:7)! Or, maybe, he would have suggested Jesus and John should have shunned such condemnatory behaviour, and instead, preached the gospel to the priests "positively and win them". Yet, here was a classic example of battles being waged *outside* the true church against apostasy. Let it be noted, that the motive behind such holy indignation by Jesus, the prophets and the apostles was *not* to "win them", but *solely to challenge their apostasy* (e.g. Jer.19).

This is a legitimate aspect of vocal protestation, which is much misunderstood, whereby righteous indignation is audibly expressed in opposition to God's enemies, *not* in order to "win them", but because it is a duty to honour almighty God and uplift his Son and his Word when the enemies of truth are waging war. How superficial, and misguided, are those who criticise vocal Protestants and charge them with lacking love, when in truth not to contend for the faith is a sign of a lack of love towards the Lord of the faith.

That, I assume, is why Dr Shields had a reputation as "a vigorous denouncer of all denominational apostasy". Why not? Such a man loves the truth to which his Lord and Saviour bore witness (John 18:37). As that faithful warrior J. Gresham Machen, once said, "Far easier is it to curry favour with the world by abusing those whom the world abuses, *by speaking against controversy, by*

*taking a balcony view of the struggle* in which God's servants are engaged. *But God save you from such neutrality as that!*"<sup>9</sup>

The acceptable aspect of his argument having been overlooked, Dr Shields we are informed returned to the table, but as he continued with the discussion instead of referring to Jesus and the Baptist in the examples mentioned above, he crossed the wires by introducing the other element in the vocal Protestant witness; the stand for truth from *within* the church: "What about this? You remember Paul in Galatians 2? He had to withstand Peter to the face." Basing his case upon a faulty premise, Dr Shields walked straight into the brick wall of Dr Lloyd-Jones' reply: "The effect of what Paul did was to *win* Peter round to his position."<sup>10</sup>

What an eccentric situation these two highly intelligent men found themselves in, like opposing armies fighting each other on different battle fields! There is a vast difference between, shall we say, Simon Magus [Acts 8:18-24] and Simon Peter [Gal. 2:11-18]; between the condemning of one masquerading as a believer, and the rebuking of a genuine Christian, even if the dispute is about God's revealed truth. Yet, despite the fact Dr Shields and his guest were talking at crossed purposes, Dr Lloyd-Jones believed he had gained a great victory over his host!

Certainly, if we are to believe the biographical passage, with great pride Lloyd-Jones exulted in what he believed was a personal triumph: "Shields was finished"<sup>11</sup>, a harsh and unpleasant phrase, hardly guaranteed to win his opponent to his viewpoint. It was the kind of comment St George might have made after the dragon had been slain! Still, thirty-three year olds tend to feel proud when they think they have humbled a much older man, even if the "victory" gained was as hollow as their argument had been.

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<sup>9</sup> David Otis Fuller, ed, *Valiant for the Truth*: (McGraw-Hill Book Company Inc., 1961), 454 (emphasis mine).

<sup>10</sup> Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones*, 273.

<sup>11</sup> Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones*, 273.



## A SAVAGE BLOW

It had though the required effect. Dr Shields, strangely believing he needed to melt in the heat of a superior argument, appeared to cower before the younger man. At least, that is the impression Lloyd-Jones evidently wanted the reader to gain. Then came the final thrust: “After we had stopped arguing, I made a Jones great appeal to him”<sup>12</sup>. Apparently, in the 1920s Dr Shields had anticipated a certain university appointment, but had been turned down as a result of behind-the-scenes pressure by theological liberals. From that moment, Dr Lloyd-Jones suggested to him, “you suddenly changed and became negative and denunciatory. *I feel it ruined your ministry* [emphasis mine]”.

What an extraordinary statement to make from a proud young man who had been in the Christian ministry a mere five years, to one who had faithfully served for about thirty! Even worse, it was cruel, because Shields’ wife had died just a few days earlier. The meeting was not proving to be an ideal pastoral visit!

However, the challenge did the trick, and with the recording of it Lloyd-Jones’ image is enhanced. We are informed tears welled up in Shields’ eyes—not surprising in the circumstance of having just lost his wife—and he confessed to his guest, “you have moved me very deeply”. He even went so far as to humbly promise his young guest that he would seek advice from his board, and endeavour to change his general approach. It was not to be the last time that vocal Protestants have been “advised” to cool down, although the “wise” never seem to feel they need to get more steamed up!

All that having been stated and seeking to create the balance lacking in the garden, one has to admit there is a particular pitfall to be avoided in the vocal Protestant approach. It has to be admitted that Dr Shields may have fallen into it, namely, to use the pulpit on occasions not so much for the exposition of God’s Word, as to venture beyond it in order to express deeply held views

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<sup>12</sup> Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones*, 273.

(albeit, correct ones) unrelated to the chosen text. As Iain Murray maintains in his book, “Rather than helping young Christians by the strength of his polemics against liberal Protestants and Roman Catholics, Lloyd-Jones believed that Shields was losing the opportunity to influence those whose first need was to be given positive teaching”<sup>13</sup>. True, that is a sad possibility.

That having been admitted though, those tempted in this way are also in possession of another problem. However much they seek in all honesty before the Lord to present a strictly balanced ministry, preaching the Gospel and “earnestly contending” for it, such is the opposition to vocal Protestantism they are always likely to be accused of being unbalanced and unloving. That is the influence of the viewpoint expressed in the garden by Dr Lloyd-Jones.

## IRONIC TWISTS

What became of the two men? According to the prejudiced account in Murray’s book, despite being moved to tears by Lloyd-Jones’ challenge, Shields failed to change his approach. As a result, “some of his warmest supporters” at Jarvis Street left and he “finished his ministry with a congregation much reduced in size”<sup>14</sup>. How sad, and I am sure that had Dr Lloyd-Jones occupied Toronto’s Jarvis Street pulpit employing a different approach it would not have happened.

Or would it? Perhaps had Dr Shields, being “a vigorous denouncer of all denominational apostasy”, been in Lloyd-Jones’ shoes he would have publicly denounced the “charismatic” influence that succeeded him at London’s Westminster Chapel; he would certainly not have suggested the man who followed him into the pulpit! Nowadays, one hears the congregation is “much reduced in size”. How equally sad!

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<sup>13</sup> Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones*, 271.

<sup>14</sup> Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones*, 273.