

Advice On Reading Dr Lloyd-Jones

By Iain H. Murray

As there must be not less than fifty books by Dr Lloyd-Jones currently in print, there is some danger that the most vital among them may be missed. But how is any differentiation possible? Would any selection of those works thought to warrant first attention simply be the result of a subjective impression? Can any dependable guidance be given on the subject? We think it can.

First, let it be remembered that virtually all his books pre-existed in shorthand transcripts or recordings of sermons and of these there was a large store before the conclusion of his ministry at Westminster Chapel in 1968. How did Lloyd-Jones himself go about the selection in his lifetime? The answer to that question reveals what, in his own judgment, was of chief usefulness. In arriving at that judgment he was slow and deliberate.

We believe his judgment has been proved correct, and that the Lloyd-Jones titles that should be put first are those that he placed there in determining the priority for publication.

All his books published before 1990 are listed in an appendix to the second volume of his biography, *The Fight of Faith*. From that listing it can quickly be seen what was published in his lifetime at his direction. After the small (and still valuable) paperbacks put out by Inter-Varsity, the first major title was the two-volume *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, 1958-60 (IVF and Eerdmans). Now in one volume, it ought still to hold first place and we heartily agree with what others say on the subject elsewhere in this issue.

Little else major appeared in the 1960s, apart from *Faith on Trial*, 1965 (IVF and Eerdmans, later re-issued, with another title, as *Faith Tried and Triumphant*), and *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Cure*, 1965 (Pickering and Inglis). It was only in the 1970s, when no longer in a pastoral charge, that Dr Lloyd-Jones could give close attention to publishing, and in that respect it was the most important decade in his life. His first decision had to do with books that would show, in his view, how whole books of Scripture may be handled for the edification of congregations. At that date Christians only had commentaries to turn to for the understanding of longer sections of Scripture; he believed that books of Scripture could be preached effectively and that in so doing people may be shown 'the grandeur, glory and majesty of the Scriptures and their message'. By the 1970s he had much material of this kind to choose from a series on 2 Peter in 1946-7, Philippians in 1947, I John in 1948-9 - but instead of these he determined to prepare his maturest expository work, namely, what was to be 14 volumes on *Romans*, the first appearing in 1970 (*Atonement and Justification*, Banner of Truth).

The following year he published the one book especially intended for preachers and students for the ministry, *Preachers and Preaching* (Hodder and Stoughton, and Zondervan). To the *Romans* series there was now added the series which in some ways he regarded most highly of all. While the *Romans* were for Friday nights and had a touch of the lecture about them, the series on *Ephesians* consisted of sermons in his purest sense of the term, and it was this series which claimed slightly more of his time in their preparation in the 1970s. Six volumes of *Romans* appeared before his death in 1981, and seven of *Ephesians*, leaving only one volume to complete the latter series (Banner of Truth).

These two series constituted his greatest work, and it is a thrilling fact that all 14 volumes of *Romans* are now translated into Korean and Portuguese. If there is one slight

regret to be attached to these series it is that some preachers did not notice what he wrote on p.197 of *Preaching and Preachers* in regard to preaching an expository series. The whole page is important and there is autobiography in his words

What one man can do another cannot, and it is dangerous for him to attempt to do so. It not only depends on the particular person of the preacher, it also depends upon his stage of development. A preacher should be always growing and advancing and developing, so that what he cannot do in his younger days he should be able to do in middle age and old age.

Since the death of Dr Lloyd-Jones many more of his sermons have appeared in print. We would not be without any of them, but if they should displace the titles listed above it would be a serious mistake. Those first published before 1981 should always come first! If there is an exception to that principle, it would have to do with material that was published in his life time and yet not in book form until after his death. In that category are *Knowing the Times: Addresses Delivered on Various Occasions 1942-1977* and *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors*, both magnificent books for all readers (Banner of Truth, 1989 and 1987 respectively).

There is one other standard that can be applied to Dr Lloyd-Jones's books, and again it is one in which he personally believed. Let the reader go first for a book in hardback! He believed that if something is worth printing it is worth printing to last, and to be handed on to later generations. With regard to his own writings, this test probably reflects more on the sense of the publisher than on the content within the covers, yet no one today can buy all the Lloyd-Jones titles and we think his rule of going for hardbacks remains relevant.

It is good that the two paperbacks, *Joy Unspeakable* and *Prove All Things* have now appeared in hardback (*The Baptism and Gifts of the Spirit*, Baker, 1996), and with the sermons restored to their original chronological order. The same publisher has done in hardback, *Love So Amazing: Expositions of Colossians 1* (1996). Banner of Truth may be forgiven for taking a little pride in having so many of his titles in hardback, including *2 Peter* and *Authentic Christianity* (a series on Acts, currently numbering five volumes).

From the above it can be seen that it would be helpful if all publishers of Lloyd-Jones titles included the date when the material was originally preached, and an additional help to readers would be to know whether the sermons were preached on Sunday mornings (principally to believers) or evenings (invariably evangelistic in intent). We conclude by mentioning an outstanding volume in the latter category, *Old Testament Evangelistic Sermons* (Banner of Truth, 1995).

The last thing that this preacher wanted was applause. Let us thank God for so enabling his servant that we have these life changing books today!

[From the *Banner of Truth*, March 2006, Issue 510.