MORE DOWNGRADE IN THE FIEC

Charles Soper

It gives us no pleasure to include this revealing article. It confirms our past contentions that the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches has left its biblical and separatist moorings. What would its founder, a previous editor of this magazine, E.J. Poole-Connor, make of this appalling downgrade? We thank Mr. Soper for supplying this evidence, and trust that something will be done to rectify this dreadful situation – Ed.

Since the *Bible League Quarterly's* disclosure of serious ecumenical compromise at the FIEC church of Above Bar in Southampton in 2001¹, readers may well have followed subsequent developments in the FIEC. It is with sadness that we report another egregious example of ecumenical compromise which has come to light. Carey Baptist Church in Reading has been supporting a missionary in Poland since the early 1980s. Malcolm Clegg, currently a lecturer at a theological seminary in Wroclaw², has repeatedly visited Reading, interacted with its past ministers and given presentations on his work there subsequent to his commissioning. Recently, 15 hours of his lectures were made available on the internet³.

These lectures indicate close ministerial cooperation with Roman Catholics in Poland. In Mr. Clegg's own words, translated here into English, "In the 1980s, I worked very much in Catholic circles, in those years we started Catholic fellowships." He disavows the intention to encourage people to leave Roman Catholicism: "It was never my intention to convince people to change their church." In a manner reminiscent of theological liberals and their neo-evangelical cousins, he disdains doctrinal categories and caricatures other missionary practice:

And one way of thinking is boundary thinking — when he jumps over a certain barrier, which I set up. And my barriers are God's barriers. And so for example he must become a Christian. He must stop being a Muslim. He must read the Bible. He must kneel before God and confess his sins. He must become a member of a Christian church, formally, in the place where he is. He must be baptised. He must go to a church service every Sunday. The question is, what barriers, what boundaries does he have to jump over, to exist in the chosen people, to belong to the chosen people? ... So now if I work, using again the illustration of Muslims, what is important for me is that a person is totally devoted to God. What is important for me is to get him moving towards Jesus, to teach him that Jesus should be at the centre, or that God should be at the centre of his life, that he should live theocentrically, in all aspects of his life. And at which moment he becomes a Christian or becomes a believer, or now belongs to the people of God, well I don't settle that, I don't even worry about it.⁴

Mr. Clegg also toys with the use of the crucifix in worship, "A second option: I will commemorate it by this — I'll have a cross on the wall. Every time I look at it, I'll remember Jesus. Is there something bad in that?," and again "I can't say to that guy, in my opinion, just because he is a Catholic, "You worship that guy on that cross."

The seminary in Wroclaw openly promotes ecumenical dialogue with Roman Catholics, and when featured in a television news report in 2007, the cheerful participation of senior Roman Catholic and Orthodox clergy was clearly evident⁵.

It is disconcerting to find overt ecumenical practice and neo-liberal doctrine not only unchecked, but actively supported by a well-known church within the FIEC. The claim on its website, that it upholds the principles of "Protestant non-conformists of the Particular or Calvinistic Baptist Denomination who hold and maintain the doctrines commonly known as Evangelical"⁶, would appear to require updating.

It is also disconcerting that such views apparently have the support of figures so close to the heart of Affinity and WEST. Thus far, repeated contacts with the parties involved have produced no intention

to dissociate from Mr. Clegg, or his activities. How is this remotely compatible with the 1996 FIEC council statement on ecumenism? In the context of Roman Catholic heresy, it professes, "The gospel of salvation by grace is so precious to us that we desire to stand together with all who believe and preach it. For the same reason, we are compelled to remain separate from those who deny it. By taking this position we are seeking to follow the commands of Scripture. (Galatians 1:8, Romans 16:17)."⁷

Most disconcerting of all are the reports coming from Poland about the long-term devastation Mr. Clegg's views are causing, as they filter down to local churches, whilst their eager request to our reformed and evangelical churches has been: "Come over and *help* us."

References:

- 1. BLQ July-September, 2001.
- 2. Seminary staff found at http://www.ewst.edu.pl/en/faculty,97.html. The seminary has now chosen to withdraw this page, a copy of a search engine cache is retained at http://www.strateias.org/faculty.htm
- 3. Originally published at http://www.berea.edu.pl/?metody-studiowania-biblii-cz.-1,235 , though since withdrawn (the original materials have been recorded and are available to the author). Transcripts in Polish and a professional translation into English are held at http://strateias.org/wroclaw.htm.
- 4. Further documents and links connected to these accounts and their background can be found at: http://www.strateias.org/wroclaw.htm.
- 5. Originally found at http://ww6.tvp.pl/6239,20070511496936.strona it has since been withdrawn, and is now found at http://strateias.org/est.asf, with kind permission of TV Poland.
- 6. Originally found at http://uk.geocities.com/modnar@btinternet.com/02.Page.htm. Since withdrawn and the current website merely claims the church is 'independent' and 'evangelical', http://www.careybaptistchurch.org.uk/who.
- 7. 1996 FIEC Council Statement on ecumenism (found at www.fiec.co.uk/Default.aspx?tabid=640). Let us hope this is also not shortly to be withdrawn.

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