

George Lovell's wider legacy.

In 2006 George was awarded the Lambeth degree of Doctor of Divinity by the Archbishop of Canterbury. He called this his "crowning honour." And he expressed his delight that Molly had lived long enough to share his joy on that momentous occasion. I'd add that he was equally delighted when the Archbishop later conferred the Cross of Saint Augustine on Catherine Widdicombe. Each occasion became the pretext for the jolliest of jolly lunches which enlivened the House of Lords no end.

It was the exercise of gathering letters of support for that award that made me aware of the range of institutions and organisations with which he'd developed a working relationship and among whose members he'd earned great respect. Roman Catholic religious communities, groups of bishops from the Church of England and the Roman Catholic church, the Senior Command of the Salvation Army, academic communities in Oxford and Sheffield, parishes, dioceses, national churches in several parts of the world, and individuals galore. His work with church workers at times of transition in their lives, the theoretical and practical work he did with those who were focussing on Mission and Evangelism, his understanding of the secular disciplines associated with community development – all these testify to the breadth of his interests and the attraction of his methods to people from across the theological, denominational and social spectrums, from infra-red to ultra-violet.

Within his beloved Methodism he was often misunderstood but the steady support of Ted Rogers, Albert Mosley, Charles New, Howard Mellor and others gave him constant encouragement to continue his journey. I attended one of his 10-day courses in 1980 on my return from Haiti and in readiness for a suburban circuit ministry in Loughton, Essex. I found it deeply challenging. I've been endowed with unusual attributes and I've always known that someone like me can either be a blessing or a flopping nuisance according to the way they employ their gifts. The church has had too many prima donnas in its history. George Lovell, who'd known me since my teenage years, helped me to see that the key emphases of his methodology – based fundamentally on the art of listening to one another, identifying aims and objectives together, prioritising tasks and working with others to achieve goals – did not require of anyone that, in the name of collaboration, they should suppress their gifts or hide them. His methodology sought to release the gifts of practitioners of all kinds and to make them available for the work being undertaken. I'm sorry if this sounds a little self-serving; indeed, I hope it may ring bells with others here

today. That course led to the renewal of my friendship with George who became my “work consultant” for the next 30 years. I’ll never be able to calculate his contribution to my life and ministry.

Nor will I ever forget the three consultations in West Africa where I was privileged to a member of George’s team. In Sierra Leone, the Methodist Church was preparing for its first indigenous Chair of District; in Ghana, we looked at the way the British and Ghanaian churches might move on from a mother-daughter relationship to become sister churches. And in Nigeria, the most radical agenda of them all, we faced the challenge of re-uniting a Methodist church which had been separated by the Biafra war of the 1960s. I remember the tears of joy that flowed at the end of that particular event. It was to Nigerian Methodism what the Good Friday Agreement was to be to the communities of Northern Ireland.

The family has passed over to me a box file full of documents, most of which I have yet to study in detail; - all of them a record of our long friendship. I’ve been startled to find dozens of letters written from my days in Llanelli, Cardiff, Lampeter, Cambridge and Haiti – from 1958 to 1980 and the beginning of that 10-day course. I simply must draw these remarks to a close by quoting from one of them. I was approaching the end of my time as an undergraduate. I had only recently given my life to Christ. This is how I explained things to George:

My preaching appointments have helped to build me up in readiness for the great challenge of God in my post-university life. Oh I want to do so much for Him, and with His help I know that I shall never cease from doing His work. It is all I want to live for. I remember always how you handled that timid, unsure youngster from Burry Port, how you coaxed him, and encouraged him and helped him and taught him. How you introduced him to the only worthwhile way of life. And now there is no other for him. And that young man wants now to thank you with all his heart.

What more can I say? I am a living testimony to, the very embodiment of, the legacy of George Lovell. I know others could add their own stories to mine.