

Sir Frederick Catherwood

1925-2014

A Tribute by James Allcock

I only met Sir Fred twice. The last time was at the Faith in Business spring conference in 2006, when he, Sandy Landale (sadly also no longer with us) and I were asked to discuss why as young evangelical Christians we bucked the trend and pursued an alternative vocation in business. But Sir Fred's influence on me and many others of my generation was enormous.

Sir Fred was an Ulster Protestant. He was brought up in a Christian home and came to faith as a boy. After school at Shrewsbury, he read History and Law at Clare College Cambridge, where he began to make contacts which would last a lifetime. Following university he was articled to Price Waterhouse, where he qualified as a Chartered Accountant.

In London he was drawn to the expository preaching of Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones at Westminster Chapel and their relationship became much closer and lifelong when he married the Doctor's daughter Elizabeth in 1954. She was the love of his life for sixty years. They had two sons, Christopher and Jonathan, and a daughter Bethan.

His rise to prominence in industry was meteoric. At the age of 30 he was Managing Director of British Aluminium. With the creation of the Department of Economic Affairs by the new Labour government in 1964, he moved from industry to the edge of politics, first as Chief Industrial Advisor and then as Director-General of the National Economic Development Council. This was the Prime Minister's brainchild, which he hoped would regenerate British industry. Sir Fred emphasised the importance of management, that is, managers who manage.

With the return of a Conservative government in 1971 Sir Fred received a knighthood, and returned to industry as Chief Executive of John Laing & Sons. However, he also found time to be Chairman of the Institute of Management and Chairman of the Overseas Trade Board.

He was an enthusiastic pro-European and became MEP for Cambridgeshire and North Bedfordshire in 1979.

Space does not permit me to mention all his responsibilities, but suffice to record that he was Chairman of the Committee on External Economic Relations and a member of the delegation between the European Parliament and the US Senate. He constantly urged the Conservative government to remain pro-European. He wrote in the Christian magazine *Third Way* about this one issue: "This is the last moment to be faint hearted and abdicate our responsibilities in the European Community". If he were alive today, he would no doubt be running the "Yes" campaign in next year's referendum.

In addition to his business and political roles, he found time to support many evangelical organisations: he was President of the Fellowship of Independent Churches, the Evangelical Alliance, and the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students.

In later years his health deteriorated and he spent a lot of time at home in Balsham, Cambridgeshire, where many enjoyed the hospitality of Fred and Elizabeth. He was content so long as Elizabeth was with him, which



she was until he died on 30th November 2014.

His influence on generations of young Christians brought up on the doctrine that teaching and medicine were the only secular occupations fit for Christians to consider was enormous. The integration of his Christian faith with his economic and political work was communicated clearly in his two books *The Christian in Industrial Society* (1964) and *The Christian Citizen* (1969), which I can see on my bookshelf as I write this. He enabled others to recognise that to spend a life in industry, commerce or politics was intrinsically worthwhile; that despite the pressures it was possible to survive and indeed flourish in industrial society; and that the influence of Christians was badly needed in British industry and public life. But this was not just something he wrote about; this was the way he lived.

Sometimes when Christians became dispirited, bemoaning the fact that there were no Christians in senior positions in industry, even wondering whether or not the two things were incompatible, someone would pipe up and say - 'Oh yes, there is Fred Catherwood!'

He was a beacon of light for us. 



James Allcock OBE spent his career in the energy industry, culminating in his being Director of Gas Supplies at British Gas.