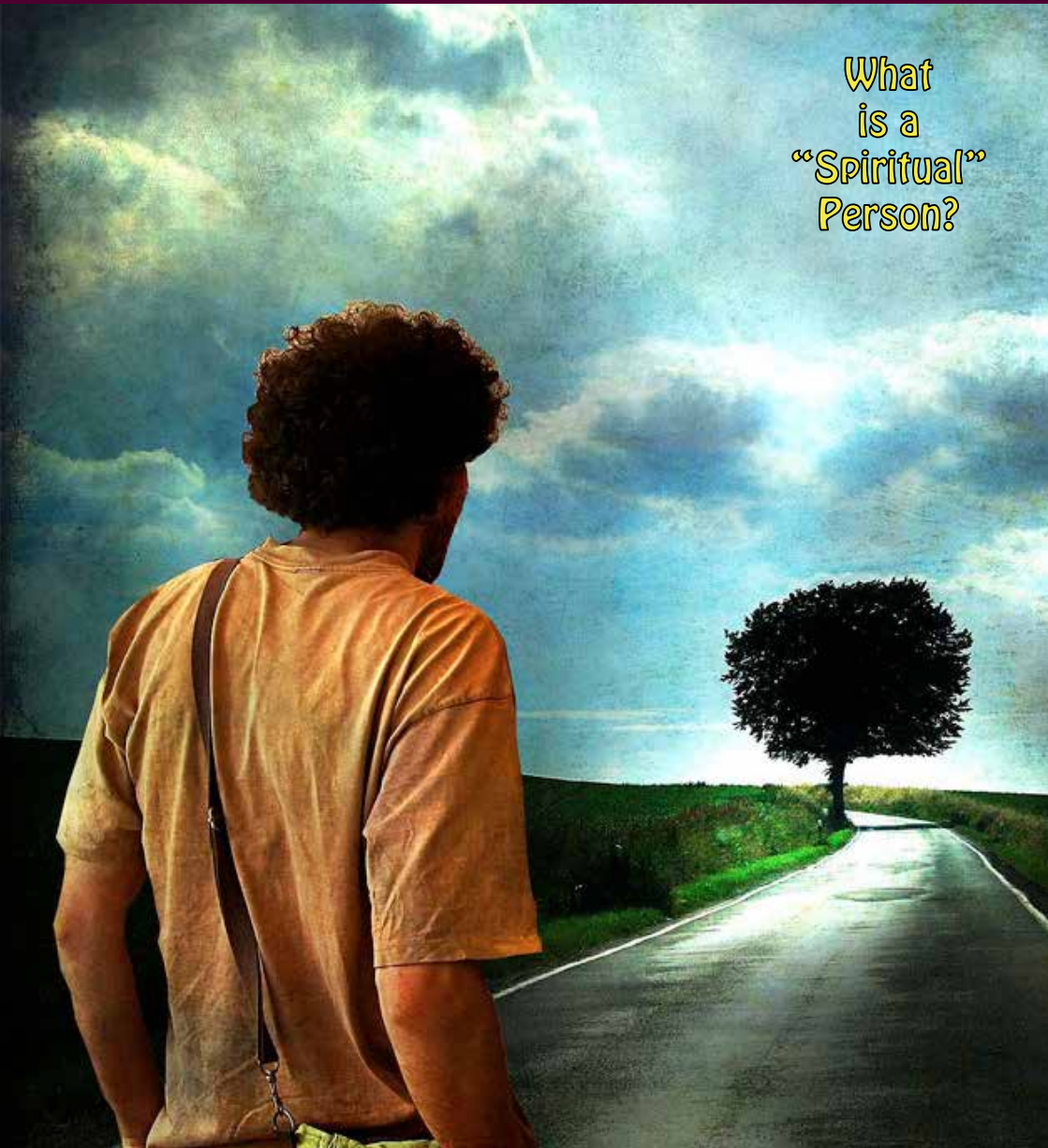


The Contender

The magazine of Edmonton Baptist Chapel

What
is a
“Spiritual”
Person?



“Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us:
we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God.” 2 Corinthians 5:20

“I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.” Jude verse 3



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The Contender is produced by the church at Edmonton Baptist Chapel. We are an independent Baptist church who hold to the historic evangelical Christian faith.

WHAT IS A 'SPIRITUAL' PERSON?

IT IS difficult to resist the spirit of the age in which we live. In the West we find ourselves living, for the most part, in a materialistic world, permeated by materialistic values, and continually persuaded that the present life is all that we will ever enjoy. We are saturated with the message of the advertising industry that consumer goods and earthly possessions are an unfailing source of happiness, and that anyone who does not pursue these is doomed to disappointment. Our inborn desire for gain and earthly security is exploited by those who wish to build their fortunes on the back of human greed, and who do all in their power to make us believe we cannot exist without their latest products. They wish to rob us of any sense of contentment with our present circumstances, and to develop in us a restless hunger for more and more as we struggle to walk the treadmill of 'success'. Their intention is that we should be ever dissatisfied with our present lot, lest we stop purchasing, stop consuming, stop bowing down to the god of mammon. We have forgotten Christ's words that 'a man's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses'.



More than the material?

It is therefore refreshing at first to come across those who still believe in something beyond what can be seen and heard, touched and tasted, beyond the physical realm and mere bodily existence in the present life. Don't we feel a sense of relief that there are still some who think in terms of a soul and a purpose to life that is more than simply the registering of sensation? Such people try to resist the tendency to reduce everything to the material, to find a physical explanation for all human experience. They insist that there is also a mysterious dimension to life so that human relationships are as important as brute facts,

and the mind has separate existence and is not simply the result of the brain's electrical activity. Some even point to a creator or higher power who superintends the universe, though most prefer to speak of 'the God within'. In contrast to the strident atheists of our time, these seem to offer us a more meaningful and hopeful view of the world.

However not all claims to spirituality carry equal weight. We need to ask, what authority does a person have for believing what they believe? And what exactly is it that they believe? Is it something of significance, something which can be clearly defined and which they can communicate in simple logical propositions? Do they have any answers to the great issues of life: what is the origin of the universe? Is there a God to whom we are accountable, and, if so, what is his character? What is the nature of man? Is there a purpose to human existence? Why is death in the world, and is there life after death? True spirituality should be able to explain things such as the human capacity for good and evil, the existence of the conscience, our sense of the dignity of man.



Spiritual but not religious

Somebody may say, 'I am a spiritual person but I am not interested in organized religion'. Not wishing to appear an out-and-out-materialist, he would nevertheless rather follow a spirituality of his own than accept any of the historic faiths. He is averse to dogma which is negatively perceived as the imposition of other people's ideas, and to an authority which he regards as controlling the mind and taking away the freedom to believe what he likes. Now of course we could sympathise with this attitude if we were considering only man-made religions, for it is indeed an outrage for one man to have to submit to another man in this comprehensive way. No doubt religious authority has been abused countless times throughout history so that not only have entirely false religions been invented, but the true faith revealed by God in the Bible has been hijacked by those who see it only as a means of promoting their own oppressive influence. But

the Christianity of the Bible is not like this. Christ taught his disciples, 'You are not to be called "Rabbi," for you have only one Master and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth "father," for you have one Father, and he is in heaven.' The Apostle Paul assured the Corinthians, 'Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy.'

Perhaps the reason why many reject the religion of the Bible is that they instinctively know that it demands repentance and obedience to God, and they have certain cherished sins which they know would have to go. In fact their 'spirituality' may be nothing more than an attempt to justify their sin and to invent their own standard of righteousness, which allows them to define themselves as good people without having to change. Conscience often forces self-righteousness upon those who will not accept God's standards.

However there is also pride at work in this rejection of the Bible, a pride that will not even submit to the Lord himself. Can I be happy submitting to God? Doesn't submission mean loss of freedom? What happens if I submit to God's word, the Bible, and am then told to do something I don't like? Only *my* ideas are really safe, and any restriction on what I want to do is tyranny. Has it ever occurred to us that the choices we make may themselves be harmful, and that God may understand us

better than we understand ourselves, and that certain restrictions on our actions and even our thoughts are good for us? If even other human beings must have authority over us for the proper cohesion of society, how foolish we are if we contest God's right to rule over us. It is in the strength of our reaction to his rule that we see how deep-seated is our rebellion against him. Like the Prodigal Son we wish to set out on our own, but hopefully in God's mercy we may come to see our own spirituality as bankrupt and return to our heavenly Father for mercy. Christ invited men and women to come to him with such gracious words: 'Come to me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.' Pride begets pride, but it is easy to submit to the embodiment of humility.

"Don't question my spirituality"

Some insist that a claim to spirituality cannot, and indeed should not be tested. We may hear it said of someone, 'He [or she] is a very spiritual person', and this description could be given for a number of reasons. It may be that the subject of this complement has an interest in art or music, or has some other creative side to their being. They may have an appreciation of the beauty of nature

that moves them deeply, or an ability to empathise deeply with others. They may be adherents to any number of the more free-wheeling, new-age type beliefs – to yoga, meditation, astrology, or some form of mysticism. But the observation that they are spiritual people is somehow expected to discourage us from probing too far into their credentials and to place them beyond scrutiny. Who am I to say that another person's understanding of the meaning of life, of human personality, good and evil, the afterlife, or truth and reality is wrong? Each of us is entitled to hold his or her own views on these matters and, as long as they are sincerely expressed, no one has the

right to criticise, for no one has an exclusive hold on the truth, says the modern outlook.

After all, no one is suggesting that the spiritual person claims to have found the *only* truth, objective truth, truth that is the same for everyone at all times and in all places. That, according to current thinking, is beyond our reach or does not even exist – on no account should we suggest that it is possible to be certain about spiritual things. As a result, all opinions are valid and no

view may be discounted. I can still believe what I like since there is room in the world for any number of different subjective views of reality. We are willing to concede that a person has spirituality, because nothing much is being affirmed by this remark. Such spirituality is just about tolerated in a materialistic world as long as it does not commit the cardinal sin of claiming to be true in any absolute sense.

What is truth?

But what is the value of a

“Truth must be capable of being defined in clear terms which we can hear and understand and choose to accept or reject”

spirituality that comes to us with so little authority? What use is truth which is only true for the speaker and not for anyone else? Truth must be capable of being believed

by more than one person. In fact if something is true, it demands the belief of all rational people: to refuse to believe it is not an option. Truth must be capable of being defined in clear terms which we can hear and understand and choose to accept or reject. And truth does not change; it is true all of the time and does not need to be modified or updated, because ultimate reality itself does not change. Truth is more than simply a local perspective on the situation; otherwise it would

be only partial truth. Truth is the perspective of one who knows all things and puts all together in one coherent whole. The trouble with so much spirituality today is that it is so vague as to be worth almost nothing. But what else do we expect from fallible men?

Long ago the Lord Jesus Christ made a staggering claim. He said, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through me.' In this momentous statement he did not claim to be just the local or partial or temporary truth, but to be the ultimate truth, truth from the perspective of one who understands all mysteries and holds all knowledge unified in himself. No mere human being could ever in all honesty make such a claim, because all human knowledge is limited and constantly needs to be corrected. Scientists frequently remind themselves that what they know today will have to be revised tomorrow. Christ claimed for his words a permanence that surpasses anything that human beings are capable of, and which means that what he said will never need to be corrected or updated.

At his trial the Saviour of the world told Pontius Pilate, 'For this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.' Pilate could not take this in and responded with the sceptical question, 'What

is truth?' He was trapped in the cynicism of his day which could not believe in the existence of absolute truth, and therefore could not recognise the incarnation of truth standing before him.

On another occasion Jesus Christ declared, 'Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will by no means pass away'. His words are more enduring than even the physical universe itself, and after the heavens with all their countless stars and galaxies have come to an end, the words that came from his mouth will still hold true. No wonder he tells us to take these words seriously. What 'prophets' of our times would dare to make such a statement? They know perfectly well that they cannot give us truth of this quality, and they dare not expose

**“For this cause I have
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witness to the truth.”**

themselves to ridicule by being too precise and risk being debunked after a few years. They have learnt by experience how difficult it is in a changing world to deliver truth that is stable and timeless. Yet the words of Jesus Christ have never been broken and never will be.

When he describes human nature, he speaks as one who understands it perfectly and sees the fatal flaw at the heart of every man and woman. When he sets before his disciples the moral standard by which they are to live, his commandments are clear, unambiguous, defining right and wrong in universal terms which all can understand. When he presents the only way in which we can be reconciled to God, he explains that way which will never change and can never be improved on, which will remain our only hope to the very last hour of this world. He laid down his life on the cross in order to take the punishment of all those who come to him in repentance and faith, and he allowed God the Father to punish him with

the punishment that we deserve to bear for all eternity in hell. He did this so that God can forgive us freely and still be true to his own justice.

When Jesus Christ predicts future events, he predicts both near and far events with perfect confidence, describing how our world will end with his return at the last day, when he comes to judge all who have ever lived. And how could it be any other way if, as the Bible teaches, he was not simply a man but the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, possessing all the attributes of God equally with the Father? As the Son of God he has infallible knowledge of all things and knows the future with absolute certainty.

Such truths are clearly defined, set out in terms which all can



understand and which have vast implications for every one of us. They are not vague or subjective notions, but clear propositions and trustworthy promises on which we can build our lives. Whether we agree or disagree, we know what Christ is saying.

The truly spiritual person

The word 'spiritual' is of course used in the Bible but in a very different sense to that of modern usage. According to modern usage the spiritual man is to be contrasted with the material man. The spiritual man rises above the level of the material and sees some purpose in life beyond the fulfilment of biological needs, but the term need not imply any more than this. In the Bible the spiritual man is not contrasted with the material man, but with the carnal man. Both have a body and a soul but the carnal man is dominated by his bodily appetites and lives to satisfy these. He is spiritually dead because he has never searched for God, never seen that he is lost, never repented of his sin and come to Christ for forgiveness and for the gift of eternal life. The spiritual man, on the other hand, has had life created within him by God. Because he is spiritually alive he instinctively relates to God as a child and prays to his heavenly Father. He takes for granted the existence of the soul but he recognises that the soul can either be spiritually

dead or spiritually alive. Above all the spiritual man has the Spirit of God, the third person of the Trinity, dwelling within him, moulding him. The Spirit uses the Scriptures to reveal Christ to him, to teach him doctrines which form the framework of his faith, to reprove him when he sins bringing him to repentance, to correct wrong understanding, and to train him in righteousness.

By contrast, those who design their own spirituality want to be subject to no one else. They want to create something which is the product of their own skill, which they can take the credit for. They want to be original, owing nothing to those who have gone before them, and to be free from the constraints of any system of religious doctrine. By nature we are all like this, wanting something we can be proud of, something which marks us out as special and different. In these days of rampant individualism, there are even fewer inhibitions than in the past about searching for some respect in which we can outshine our fellows. These things are very powerful motivators and have profound effects upon us, for what makes life worth living for so many is the praise they hope to receive from other human beings.

The truth and nothing but the truth

So then, although God has revealed his truth to the human race

and given us all we need to escape from death, hell and condemnation, until he humbles our pride we would rather do anything than come to him for life. Although we are created by him and his power preserves us in existence moment by moment, we want to live as if he was not there. In place of the pure worship of the living God we substitute the worship of invented gods and human ideas which do not begin to compare with what he has revealed for consistency, relevance, and wisdom.

But God will judge all false human ideas. We like to imagine

the flattery of the enemy of souls, the devil, who is quick to portray us as sophisticated and original: 'No one else has ever come up with observations like yours!'

It is at this point that we are most sensitive: any curbing of our behaviour is resented, but none more so than the curbing of our ideas. Here then is the test of true humility: will we make our thoughts subject to God's thoughts? If we will do so, then we begin a never-ending voyage of discovery into the truth of the everlasting God. We will find that like Abraham, God is our

exceedingly great reward. But if we insist on inventing truth for ourselves, then God will say of us as he said of the Israelites of old, '(They) have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, And

that our subjective experience, our emotions, our insights, our secret motives are private and personal and should not be scrutinized by any. But God who made our bodies also made our minds and we can have no secrets from him. When we develop ideas and theories of our own, he sees the self-obsession which puts us centre stage and the unsightliness of our self-confidence. He sees how vulnerable we are to

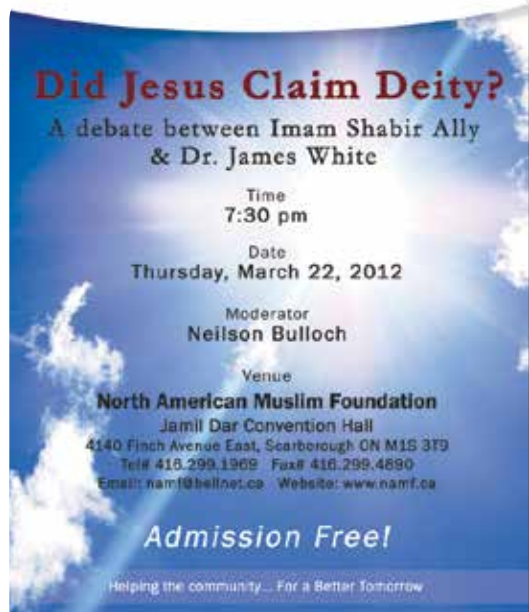
hewn themselves cisterns -- broken cisterns that can hold no water.' Let us therefore abandon all false spirituality of our own and humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, and he will open to us truths far more glorious than any we could invent for ourselves. Repent of your sins, trust in the Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world, and you will receive the forgiveness of God and his gift of eternal life.



WHY DO CHRISTIANS CALL JESUS CHRIST THE SON OF GOD?

PEOPLE everywhere have their own ideas about who the Lord Jesus is. The Bible tells us that He is the 'Son of God'. But for some, this identity is a blasphemy. For others, this is a real stumbling block. And for others still, the Lord Jesus was a mysterious and eloquent man, an enlightened man, a mystic, a great prophet and teacher, an idealist, a man of another time. The list goes on and on. Is Jesus Christ the Son of God? This question has been examined under the microscope by critics everywhere – discussed, debated and even fought over. Man-made theories abound, but they all collapse like a house of cards when confronted with the testimony of the Bible: Jesus Christ is none other than the Son of God.

Putting aside all the theories, we can see from the Bible that the doctrine of the divine 'sonship' of Christ is not the fruit of human imagination, nor is it the result of some Church council but it is clearly taught from the very beginning of the Bible (Genesis 1:1, 26). The



A number of debates have taken place on the subject of
Jesus being the eternal Son of God

Bible tells us that the Lord Jesus did not 'become' the Son of God, but He has always been so from eternity; an eternal 'Father-Son' relationship has always existed in the Godhead. The title 'Son of God' provokes deep thought. It refers to a spiritual 'sonship', not a physical or biological one. No true Christian has ever, or would ever hold to such an idea. To say or think so would be an appalling

blasphemy to us too. No Christian believes that God fathered a son through a woman called Mary. What an enormous misunderstanding! God forbid that we ever reduce Him to our human level!

It is a matter of authority. We believe that the Bible is the inspired and unchanging Word of the only living and true God. Since God is eternal, all wise and unchangeable, so must His Word also be unchangeable.

Son

In His eternal Word, God Himself chose to refer to the Saviour of the world as 'My Son', for this term is understood and accessible to human experience and all human beings can identify with it. The Jews at the time of the Lord Jesus time understood

very well that whoever makes such a claim, effectively makes himself equal with God. It is not surprising therefore, that they demanded that He should be crucified (John 5:18).

So Christians have not invented the title 'Son of God'. They are simply the interpreters of what the Bible plainly testifies.

Among the Hebrews, the term 'son' refers to someone who shares

the qualities, the character and characteristics of his father, for he is his father's 'carbon copy'. In other words, the son is the image of his father; he knows him best and he is able to discern his will. It is often said 'like father, like son'. The idea behind 'son of' in these instances is to convey likeness, similarity. Arabic speakers tell us that there is a fine distinction between 'ibn' and 'walad', both of which mean 'son of'. These expressions (The Qur'an, Surah 112) are never used to refer to the Lord Jesus' descent from God as His physical son. Something more profound is meant in the Bible. Two of the Lord Jesus' disciples are referred to as 'sons of thunder' (hot tempered fellows). Nobody would interpret this literally. One finds a similar expression used to

refer to a fellow-citizen as a 'son of the country', a traveller as a 'son of the road', a student as a 'son of the school', etc.

The Qur'an endorses the miraculous birth of Jesus

(Surah 3 and 19). He is described as the son of Mary and not of Joseph. Yet in both cultures (Jewish and Arabic), 'sonship' always goes through the father's line. Save for a few exceptions, a man is never

“Yet... sonship always goes through the father's line. Save for a few exceptions, a man is never designated with the name of a woman.”



Dr James White and Dr Shabir Ally at a recent debate

seven hundred years before Christ came, the Lord Jesus will be a sign (Isaiah 7:14). Amazingly, the Qur'an, compiled five centuries after the New Testament, confirms this (Surah 19:17-21 and 21:91)!

The question is, can God – if He wills – enter into human flesh and personality and remain God at the same time? The answer to this question is affirmative in the Bible. Islam strongly denies it, though Moslems

designated with the name of a woman. But in the Qur'an, to one's astonishment, readers have never questioned that! So whose son is the Lord Jesus? The answer – His virgin birth is linked with His divinity. This is the only plausible explanation. Isn't God great!

The same Qur'an describes the Lord Jesus as "Ayatou-Allah" (Miracle of God), "Ruah-Allah" (Spirit of God), "Kalimatu-Allah" (Word of God). The Bible, the Word of God, affirms that "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us..." (John 1:14). If the Lord Jesus is both the 'breath' and the Word of God, it follows that God, His Word and His Spirit are one with Him. Can one dissociate a person from his word or his spirit? As the prophet Isaiah said

believe that God can do anything.

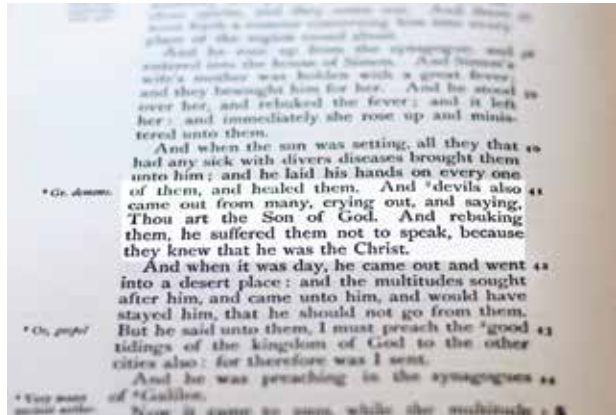
There was a good reason for His coming into this world. Because of His love to the human race, God was manifested in flesh in the person of Christ (John 1:1, 14, 18). Whoever wants to know God, or how He looks, must look unto Christ. He is the express image (character or print) of God.

How is the Lord Jesus (whose name means 'God saves') distinctive and why would He be given such a name? Here are some reasons, chosen from many.

His birth

The Lord Jesus was conceived miraculously and born from the womb of a virgin. Christians call this the Incarnation – God taking human nature.

Adam and Eve were directly created by the mighty power of God – whereas the Lord Jesus has always existed. They are the beginning of the human race, and obviously therefore did not have biological parents. Since then, all humans have been born to a mother and a father. God suspended, as it were, the normal process of procreation to assume human flesh and live amongst us. The Lord Jesus' conception was a miracle; born of a woman without the intervention of a man. All the books of the Old Testament and all the true prophets of God spoke concerning Him and His coming into the world. The details of His birth, place of birth and other details regarding His atoning death for sinners, who will trust in Him, were prophesied by the prophets of old. The first promise of His coming and His virgin birth as the Saviour in human flesh and nature is clearly predicted in Genesis 3:15 in response to the sin of Adam and Eve, by which every man is now a sinner by nature as well as by choice. As the Old Testament proceeds, it develops and amplifies this prediction (Isaiah 7:14; 9:6; 53; Micah 5:2, etc.).



His identity

The Lord Jesus never hid His true nature. He openly stated that He was the Son of God. He often used the expression “My Father” to refer to God. At the age of twelve years, Jesus said to his earthly parents that he must be about the business of his Father. Conversely, God the Father testified publicly on several occasions that the Lord Jesus was His Son (Matthew 3:17; 17:5). In other words, it is not just the case that the Lord Jesus spoke of God as His Father, but God also spoke of Him as His Son. At His temptation, the Devil (Satan) also testified that He was indeed the Son of God, and the Lord Jesus did not deny this fact (Matthew 4:3-6). Curiously, the demons were among the first ones to recognise His identity (Luke 4:41), though naturally without believing in Him. They confessed that He could spare them from eternal punishment (Matthew 8:28-29). They called Him ‘Son of God Most

High' (Luke 8:28). But as with many, they know about Him but they do not believe in Him. There is a world of difference between believing about Him and believing in Him. The disciples also collectively confessed Him as the Son of God and since then, this has been the keystone confession of the Church.

Those who claim that Jesus never said He is the 'Son of God' should think again and consider the accusations brought against him (Matthew 27:43; Mark 14:61). In John 10:36, He stated in the most explicit manner that He is the Son of God, sent to the world by the Father. He who has seen Him has seen the Father (John 14:8-9). "I and my Father are one" (John 10:30), He solemnly asserted.

Some think that the Jewish mind was not familiar with the idea of the Son of God and from the teaching of their Scripture they never expected that God should visit them in this way. But this is simply not true because every pious Jew was in expectation of the coming of a Saviour with supernatural quality. For example Nathanael as soon as he realised who He was, exclaimed: "Rabbi, you are the Son of God" (John 1:49). Later on, Peter made the same confession on behalf of all the disciples. (Matthew 16:16).

His words

With divine authority, He spoke like no other man did and taught in

such a way that the common people heard Him gladly, in contrast to the merely religious men of His time. His parables and sayings continue to amaze and stand to this very day. His 'Sermon on the Mount' is unrivalled. His great 'I am' statements (all found in the Gospel of John) are His perfect response as the Redeemer and the Saviour to all man's problems. Christ has the words of eternal life to satisfy the soul's spiritual hunger and to quench all spiritual thirst. So let His words feed your soul. Come to Him humbly, repent of your sins, believe in His precious blood shed on the Cross of Calvary and be saved. Read also His incomparable words of revelation and invitation in Matthew 11:25-30.

His nature

He is simultaneously the pre-existing and eternal Son, the Incarnate Son and the exalted Son. He is both the Revelation and the Revealer; both the Message and the Messenger; both the Way and the "Signpost". No human prophet would be sufficient to present all of God's saving revelations to this fallen world. We need more than a prophet, we need a Saviour. As Hebrews 1:2 says, God "hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son". The Lord Jesus is the embodiment in human flesh of the eternal Word of God, Himself being that eternal Word. He is the "visible" God, of the same nature

and essence as the invisible God (Colossians 1:15). He who has seen Him has seen God, and he who believes in Him believes in God. No one comes to the Father except by Him (John 14:6).

The Lord Jesus is a member of the glorious and holy Trinity. 'The Second Person of the Trinity' is a term used to refer to Him in the Godhead. He is certainly not inferior to the First Person (the Father). They are one in their eternal existence and essence, in each attribute and capacity, in nature, substance and power. It is true that the Son, on account of the incarnation and for our redemption, assumed a place as God-man on earth in submission to the First Person, and He took pleasure in working in the power of the Third Person (the Holy Spirit). He voluntarily subordinated Himself to the Father in order to take our place by becoming a man. He had no other way of redeeming us from our sins. Incidentally, we are talking about "Tri-unity", not "tritheism". We believe and confess One God alone, unique and Trinitarian (Father, Son and Holy Spirit). It does not mean we worship three gods.

Instead of reacting negatively, the term 'Son of God' should motivate us to melt in respectful awe, mingled with admiration before the God of love. He Himself descended from Heaven, He became one of

us (though He did not have our sinful nature). All the prophets, great as they were, need to be forgiven of their sins, but the Lord Jesus was without sin (Hebrews 7:26; 2 Corinthians 5:21). "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" was His challenge to the religious leaders of his time, and none could in conscience accuse Him. The Lord Jesus never committed a single sin and never asked for the forgiveness of God, as the other



A leper, one among many living in a designated colony

prophets did. He is both God and man. These are two natures in a single person (one divine and one human). It was necessary for Him to become a man in order to fulfil God's holy moral law and save us, even if this is beyond our human understanding. However, God can reveal Himself to us if we seek Him with a sincere and earnest heart.

His deeds and His work

The Lord Jesus is the One through whom God the Father created the Heavens and the Earth (Colossians 1:16). He accompanied His words with miracles to authenticate who He is. Who else except Him walked on water, calmed the sea with just a word, healed the sick, cleansed the lepers, restored the sight of the blind, fed thousands of people with five loaves and two fishes or raised the dead? He forgave sins, the absolute prerogative of God alone – “Who can forgive sins but God only?” – said His shocked enemies; and then to prove it He also healed the paralysed man whom He had forgiven (Mark 2:1-12). The Lord Jesus was certainly not a magician. All his miracles are pictures. They show us that what He accomplishes in the physical realm is a parallel of what He does in the soul of those who trust in Him. On the cross of Calvary, He suffered the punishment that we should have suffered for our sins. The Lord indicated that all the work has been done to save the sinner who repents and gives his life to Him, when he cried with a loud voice from the Cross, “It is finished!” Christ fully paid the price of salvation.

When the apostle Peter confessed Him as the Son of God, the Lord Jesus described him as being blessed. Thomas worshipped him and said, “My Lord and my God” (John 20:28).

He never reproved anyone for having worshipped Him. He, who taught others to worship God alone, accepted worship from men, because HE IS GOD. There is a blessedness for whosoever believes that Christ is the Son of God (Matthew 16:16).

His worshippers

The true prophets of centuries past like Abraham and Moses placed all their faith and hope in Jesus Christ, even before He was born. They knew and predicted that He would come, and He came. Amongst others, Abraham, ‘the friend of God’, saw His day and was glad (John 8:56). Moses spoke of Him as the promised prophet greater than him, to whom all must listen. David, the man after God’s own heart, called him ‘Lord’. As one reads the New Testament (Injil), he soon discovers that Jesus Christ is indeed the last and final prophet. By His coming, His death and resurrection, He is God’s final revelation (Hebrews 1:1-13). No one else is to come and no one else is to be expected.

The New Testament is full of accounts of men and women who worshipped Christ as the ‘Son of God’. A high-ranking Ethiopian official testified of his faith in Christ as the ‘Son of God’ and was baptised. Immediately after his conversion Paul, the merciless persecutor, became an indefatigable preacher and started straightway to preach in the synagogues that Jesus

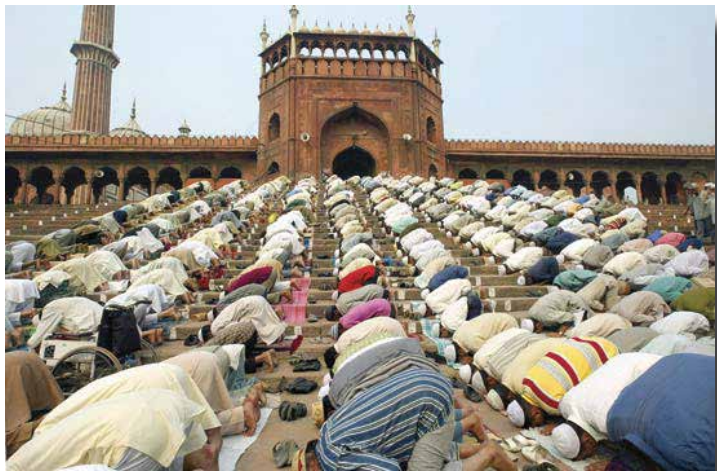
is the Son of God (Acts 9:20).

In short, God the Father, the angel Gabriel, the apostle Paul, the disciples, the Roman centurion, the impure spirits, and even the Devil (in spite of his duplicity) recognised Him as being the Son of God. Since then, millions have bowed the knee before His Majesty and lived for Him. Moreover, the Lord Jesus was called in anticipation the 'Desire of all nations' by the prophet Haggai (Haggai 2:7). The Lord Jesus, the Son of God, is given to be the Saviour of all nations, of all people who put their trust in Him. He shall be called, "Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of peace" (Isaiah 9:6).

"But whom saye that I am?"

This is a question of the utmost importance, since the eternal salvation and eternity of every person depend upon it. Do you really want to know who the Lord Jesus is in spite of all your preconceived ideas and misconceptions? "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of

God" (John 7:17). A godly life with God is not possible except by faith in the Son of God. There is no doubt that the Lord Jesus is who He says He is. He is unparalleled in all history. The doctrine of His divinity is not based on what we think, nor is it an adulatory title. It is infallibly corroborated by His birth, His character, His names, His attributes (that only God possesses), His works (that only God can accomplish), His words (that only God can speak), and the worship that is rendered to Him (which should be rendered only to God).



God spoke to create the Heavens and the Earth, but to redeem His creatures from sin, God Himself had to enter his own creation as the Word manifested in the flesh. He suffered on the cross of Calvary the suffering that those who repent and believe in His saving work would

otherwise bear. The punishment that we all deserve, He took in our place.

What shall we say? Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift! Let us put aside all arguments and all doubts for a moment. Let us give particular consideration to the reason for His coming: SIN. Do you take sin seriously? Or maybe you regard it as something trivial, nothing of serious importance, just a 'mistake', taking the view that 'to err is human'? Sin separates us from God and is against the holiness of God. We all fall so short of God's demands and commands. But Jesus Christ is the only one who lived a perfect life. To save sinners, God became like us in every respect, except for our sinful nature. This is the divine eruption into humanity. In His person, it is God Himself who entered the physical realm, whilst maintaining His divine power, so that the sins of men can be forgiven and the works of the Devil can be destroyed.

Are you aware of the immense ugliness of your sins? Since God is absolutely holy and just and cannot let the sin go unpunished, in His great love He came into the world to take upon Himself the punishment of those who will believe in Him. Are you aware of the immense ugliness of your sins? Think of the immense price that the Lord Jesus paid to redeem those who have repented of their sins and trusted in His saving work. Think of the

great love that God displayed in that He "spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all..." (Romans 8:32). God can do the impossible – Jesus Christ took on our humanity without losing His divinity. He became a man, without ceasing to be God. With all these divine claims, if the Lord Jesus is not God, He is not good. That's makes neutrality about Him impossible. At the very moment a person believes in the message of gospel, he will be declared righteous in the sight of God and all the angels in Heaven will rejoice! All who believe on Him are forgiven and have full assurance that they will definitely go to Heaven to be with Him forever. There won't be any punishment or divine judgement for him. Saved and free from the wrath of God forever and ever. His message is unique but simple: "repent and believe in *me*". He is the only Saviour, the only Way and the only Name given under heaven among men, whereby we must be saved (John 14:6; 1 Timothy 2:5; 1 John 2:2-3; Acts 4:12).

"But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name" (John 20:31).

FACING THE REALITY OF GETTING OLD

“**W**HAT IS your life? It is even a vapour, that appears for a little time, and then vanishes away.” *James 4:14*. That is God’s summation of the transitory nature of our brief existence here on earth. It’s no mere cliché to assert that from the day we are born we are all in the process of dying. Not only so, but our decline is so often marked with failing health or mental instability, and while we are blessed in this country, despite the many criticisms, with a health service that is superior far to many other countries, still to face the uncertainty of just how we will cope with the twilight of our existence is a cause of concern to the majority of people.

“And Moses was an hundred and 20 years old when he died: his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated.” *Deuteronomy 34:7*.

I have had ample opportunities to prove the possibility that Moses’s experience may not just be confined to him personally. When the Scripture exhorts us to,



“Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.” *Ecclesiastes 12:1*.

The practical advantages of this are easily understood, for youth is a time of eager, vitality and ambition accompanied generally with the health to enjoy and pursue our dreams. But what of the declining years?

Has a man to so decline in the attributes of his youth, has to vegetate to some degenerative condition dependent upon the support of carers and loving family? Having passed into the realm of

four score years and more, I want to testify to the ability of God to implement the principles stated above and grant at least a measure of such a blessing to those who have been compliant with His commands, especially with regard to repentance and confession of sin and reception of the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. I was in my mid twenties when I first heard the Gospel presented with any degree of clarity. When I repented of my sin and asked Christ to come into my life and save my soul for all eternity, I had no idea of the implications of such an act, neither any concept of just what a blessing and comfort this experience would be all the way through my presently lengthy sojourn on this earth.

What, when this life is passed?

I don't believe that there are many ordinary folk who are totally immune from thinking at various times about what is going to happen to them at the end of their earthly lives. In our early years, our demise seems light years away, and we can easily banish any morbid thoughts of death to the back of our minds. But as the years quickly roll on and certain afflictions attach themselves to us, the reality that we are unable to do what we once did with ease slowly dawns upon us, but once again such negative thoughts are hastily despatched to forgetfulness. However, Old Father

Time he just keeps rolling along in the words of that well known song "Old Man River." In the twilight of our lives, time just doesn't seem to roll along but rather to race along. No strength or power of any man can keep us from the inevitability of the grave. We will live out the exact length of years that God has appointed and not a nano second more or less and where will we be able to derive any degree of real comfort from natural sources?

Self assessment is rarely right

With all the aches and pains that advancing years especially bring to the man who has never put his trust in his Maker, just where is he going to find any real solace or comfort in his declining years, and this is a gloomier prospect than many fail to appreciate. Reflections are tinged with regrets over past misdeeds, missed opportunities, foolish decisions, reckless actions which the sympathy of earthly friends can do little to assuage, and all of this accompanied with the darkness and foreboding of uncertainty. Most elderly folks cannot face the realities of their soon demise except by forms of self deception. For example; that they, and not their Creator, are the agents who have formed the proper estimation of what will be the outcome of their godless existence. Any transitory conversations with others of a similarly godless existence may bring a fleeting



temporary peace of mind, but the appointed time of our demise is not within our remit to order.

Visit the Care Homes of our nation, particularly where elderly residents gather in the common rooms, and there witness the assembly of the aged and be impressed with silvery locks that often adorn the furrowed brows. How benign and composed and worthy of respect the inhabitants appear, and this we might concede is just up to a point. But pause a moment and consider that here we have a microcosm of the Nation's senior citizens, and closer examination of their lives and attitudes confirms that for many decades most of them have lived godless lives devoid of the slightest concern or interest that Jesus Christ came into this world to save sinners! Externally many may look "saintly", but more rigorous examination often reveals that they have stubbornly, adamantly and defiantly opposed any reception of the Gospel of Christ all their lives. If we briefly compare this class of citizen to the minority who have, mostly from their youth, trusted in Christ so that confessing their sin and receiving

Him as their Saviour and Lord then the tremendous difference in attitude and contentment is quite apparent, primarily because the true believer has a hope that transcends the grave and is projected into eternity itself.

What does God say?

Of course in a democratic society each individual has the privilege to believe the Bible or reject it without coercion or censure. However the acceptance or rejection of God's Word does not in the slightest way alter the fact Scripture is totally unaffected by the opinions or philosophies men. God declares:

The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness. *Proverbs:16:31.*

Therefore it is incontrovertible that the corollary of this then has got to be that if the old grey head is not to be found in the way of righteousness, then it is not a crown of glory but rather an emblem of opprobrium in God's estimation, and certainly not a candidate for entry into heaven when earthly existence expires.

The Apostle Paul reminds us of the critical heart of the Gospel declaring:

This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. *1 Timothy 1:15.*

THE BIG SOCIETY

“WHEN THE CONSCIENCE CARES BUT HUMANISM HINDERS”



ON THE 18th May 2010 the Prime Minister David Cameron together with the Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg launched “The Big Society” initiative. It could be said sympathetically in this instance, that the conscience of man in government has motivated a policy initiative designed to encourage the voluntary support and care in the community.

Objectives of The Big Society

David Cameron describes his passion as being not only “Economic Recovery” but also “Social Recovery”. In his view The Big Society initiative in general terms sets out to encourage and motivate citizens to exercise voluntary care and support, and contribute to their respective communities to aid what he describes as a broken

society. His aim is to build a bigger, stronger society, that includes strong families, strong communities and strong relationships where our nation’s wellbeing is higher and everyone gets a chance to get on in life. He considers the essential quality of a good society is for citizens to take responsibility to do the right thing by themselves and



each other. His vision for The Big Society is liberalism, empowerment, freedom, responsibility and wherever possible putting power and money

in the hands of the people to choose what's best for them. The three main principles stated by the Government for The Big Society are i) Social Action; ii) Public Service Reform, and iii) Community Empowerment, these being galvanised by the use of three techniques - Decentralisation, Transparency, and Finance. Summarising these principles and techniques The Big Society philosophy envisages a new culture of voluntarism, philanthropy and social action wherein public services are opened up to charity providers, social enterprises, private companies and individuals, to provide diversity where neighbourhoods are in charge of their destiny. Power would be driven down from centralised government to local government, and further down to charities, co-ops and mutual societies. This would give communities, neighbourhoods and individuals greater freedom of information from government to assess needs, and access to capital to launch initiatives that provide a service to those communities. This is intended to be the people of Britain working out for themselves the big answer to the social problems.

Reaction to The Big Society

The reaction to this initiative has been understandably mixed. From a political perspective the leader

of the Labour party Ed Milliband describes it as a cynical attempt by the Conservative Party to dignify its cuts agenda by dressing up the withdrawal of support with the



Ed Milliband

language of re-invigorating society. The National Office of Unite, the union for the community and non-profit sector relevant to this issue, suggested that The Big Society is 'smoke and mirrors' for an avalanche

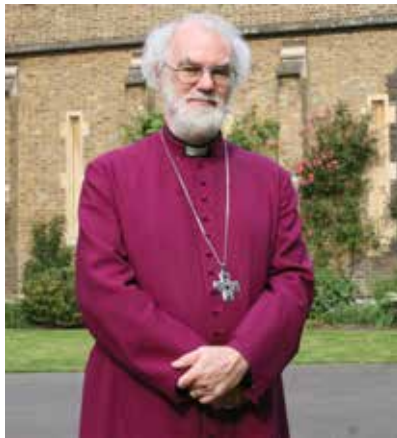
of privatisation under the Tories. While Dave Prentis, General Secretary of UNISON the largest Public Service Union, suggests the Government is simply washing its hands of providing decent public services and using volunteers as a cut price alternative. He says public services must be based on the certainty that they are there when you need them not when a volunteer can be found to help you. In the media The Daily Telegraph wrote on a positive note in March 2010: "We demand vision from our would-be Leaders, here is one which offers a big vision of a society rebuilt from the ground up." The Times writes: "an impressive attempt to reframe the role of Government

and unleash entrepreneurial spirit.” The Economist suggests that David Cameron gave a promising set of ideas a lousy name. However The Guardian summarised its response to The Big Society in a rather scathing manner by way of changing the Marxist slogan - ‘from each according to his ability to each according to his need’ to - ‘from each according to their vulnerability to each according to their greed.’ Such a response reflects their aversion to what they understand as capitalist ideology riding on the back of a perceived move to abdicate government responsibility to social needs.

Christianity and The Big Society

A mixed response has been forthcoming from religious leaders and organisations. The recently retired archbishop, Rowan Williams, described The Big Society as being “aspirational waffle – designed to conceal a deeply damaging withdrawal of the state from its responsibilities to the most vulnerable.” The Bishop of York speaking earlier this year raises questions about the real motive of the initiative. “Was it simply a

sound-bite, a ruse that played well with focus groups but that was easily pushed aside when put under greater scrutiny? ... The cynic might suggest that it wasn’t so much a celebration of a thriving society where everyone looks out for their neighbour, but rather a ploy to get community groups to pick up the cost of local government cuts. However, I hope that it was in fact a genuine attempt to move society forward – aiming to unite communities in a common cause.” The Evangelical Alliance, representing churches of various denominations, has sought to positively engage with the Government in relation to The Big Society. In an article entitled “The Church and The Big Society”



Former Archbishop Rowan Williams

the Evangelical Alliance reports three specific initiatives that have been launched to take advantage of the Big Society concept.

Firstly: The Cinnamon Network. This is a relational network, involving nearly 100 leaders of denominations and chief executives of

Christian organisations developing responses to The Big Society.

Secondly: Serve. This is a new Evangelical Alliance coalition



this message and the God they represent. Then we may begin to realise the Big Society aspiration.”

Existing and Historic Christian Care in Society

The Evangelical Alliance makes a point in the article

of key members of the Christian voluntary sector in England. It comprises Tearfund, Care, Prospects, Street Pastors, The Lighthouse Group and HOPE.

Thirdly: Gather. This is an emerging national collaborative network of vibrant missional unity movements in towns and cities across the UK.

The Evangelical Alliance states: “The initiatives mentioned here, share a vision of God’s Kingdom or if you like, a Big Society, where division and individuality are transformed by a developing a culture of respect, forgiveness and unity. In this context, the role of the Church is to set the pace in partnership working, to prioritise those who are most vulnerable, to work against injustice and to encourage aspiration for a society that is healthier, happier and more peaceful. When people begin to see this happening in their localities, they may begin to recognise who the people are who live and speak

that refers to the work already being undertaken in the community by volunteers from a church-based ministry prior to The Big Society initiative! Market research by the Evangelical Alliance initiatives shows that local churches across the UK contribute more than 72 million hours of voluntary work a year to their communities through social initiatives. This effort, along with church funding, staff time and facilities, has been valued at over £1 billion a year. In fact when we consider this issue from an historic perspective much of the compassionate care for the wellbeing of society finds its roots in initiatives emanating from the Church or that of Christian organisations.

In relation to Christianity and The Big Society, Christopher Price in an article entitled ‘Pagans, Christians and Charity’ published under the Christian Colligation of Apologetics, Debate, Research and Evangelism, notes charitable care has been one of the hallmarks

of the Christian Church from its formation. "The idea in the West that individuals, organizations, and the state should offer help to those in need without an expectation that the favour will be returned – charity – is largely due to Christianity's influence. The Christian concept of charity was unique because it promoted the idea that charity was not just limited to one's own family or even one's own social or cultural group. From the founding of early Christianity to the modern age, Christians have carried with them a beneficial concept of charity that has had a substantial, positive impact on humanity." He continues in the context of the Early New Testament Church, "Christians devoted much time, energy, and resources to generous charitable efforts in a time of great need. Not only was there an abundance of human misery (in a broad range of forms), but the pagans did little or nothing to assist them! Yet, uniquely, the Christians did not limit their assistance to members of their own subculture, or as an exchange of favours. To cities filled with the homeless and the impoverished, Christianity offered charity as well as hope. This Christian creed of charity was widespread and embodied in the actions of individuals, families, and churches. In homes, whole families adopted a style of life modelled on that of the Apostles; some devoted themselves to missionary works,

others to charitable deeds among the outcasts of Roman society – lepers and others identified as 'unclean': vagabonds, prostitutes, the homeless and destitute. Churches everywhere took care of widows and orphans; tended the sick, the infirm, and the disabled; buried the dead, including indigents; cared for slaves; and furnished work for those who needed it. This broad approach to charity did not exist in Western culture until Christianity placed it there."

Humanistic Hindrance to The Big Society

The context and culture in which voluntary care from whatever organisation, religious or otherwise, is being exercised in the UK, is now predominately humanistic in its attitude and thinking. The Government initiative is also inseparably linked with humanistic ideals in its philosophy. If we consider some of David Cameron's statements in speeches outlining the principles of the initiative of The Big Society, we see evidence of this. "Social problems need social solutions." "A country of do-ers and go-getters, where people feel they are in control of their destiny, where they trust those around them, and where they have the power to transform their lives, where nothing will stop them from pursuing their dreams." Such a statement of individualism given

David Cameron revives 'big society' idea in his Christmas message

Prime minister says millions of people building the big society are living up to the teachings of Christ

Nicholas Watt, chief political correspondent
The Guardian, Tuesday 24 December 2013



David Cameron pictured meeting British soldiers at Camp Bastion in Afghanistan last week. Photograph: Leftens Pitarakis/PA

David Cameron, who once said that his Anglican faith "sort of comes and goes", has turned to Jesus to try to revive his signature theme of the 'big society', which bombed during the 2010 general election.

In his annual Christmas message, the prime minister says that millions of people building the big society are living up to the teachings of Christ.

Cameron says: "There are those millions who keep on strengthening our society too – being good neighbours, running clubs and voluntary associations, playing their part in countless small ways to help build what I call the big society.

"Many of these people are Christians who live out to the letter that verse in Acts, that 'it is more blessed to give than to receive'. These people put their faith into action and we can all be grateful for what they do."

right to claim Jesus founded The Big Society 2,000 years ago," joking: "I'm not saying we've invented some great new idea here." In some respects what the Prime Minister said here is right inasmuch as Jesus taught a lifestyle of compassionate care for one another. However the difficulty is when we promote one philosophy while actively promoting and legislating for another. The humanistic culture of today's rampant capitalism, greed, selfishness, idolatry, immorality and double standards is undoubtedly mitigating against a mission of compassionate care. For example the nation's energy

in the context of a call to social voluntarism, creates a confusion of objectives especially when compared with the Christian concept of sacrificial compassionate care.

An example of this is found in a statement David Cameron made to a group of church leaders at a reception in Downing Street in May 2011. They would be "absolutely

providers have increased their profits in one year by 75% and at the same time increased their annual charges by at least 8% thus forcing the elderly, the poor and the vulnerable to turn the heating down in the winter. The I newspaper of Wednesday November 27th reports that it is estimated that 30,000 deaths this winter could be

attributed to high fuel cost in homes.

Where there is no fixed point of reference used for morals and justice (such as taught in the Bible) an initiative such as The Big Society, activated in the context of a humanistic culture and agenda, finds itself in danger of being nothing more than an aspiration drowned in disillusion. For example the initiative, three years after its launch, still requires 5,000 Community Organisers and 80,000 volunteers are still required for its National Citizens Service!

Responding to The Big Society

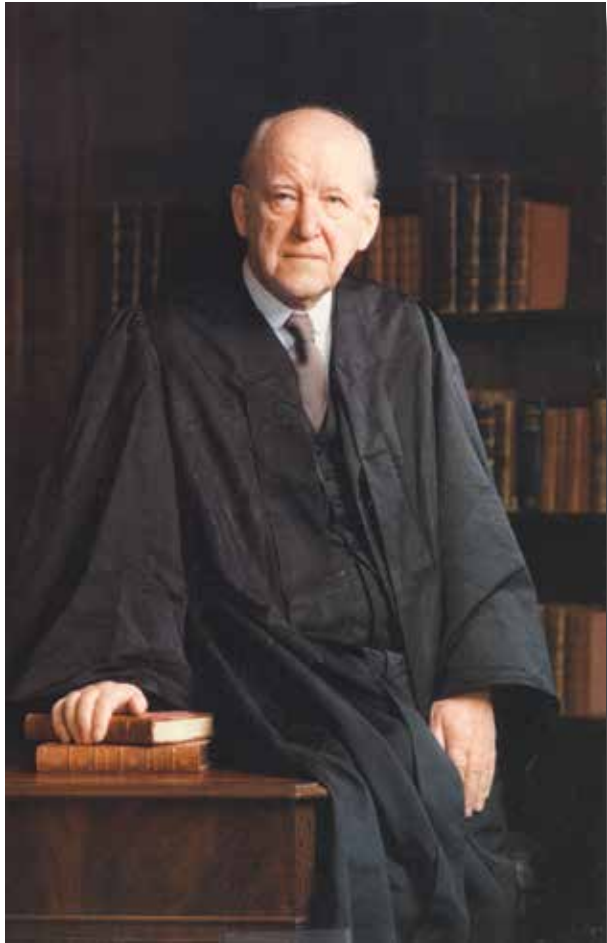
The Church remains a significant source of volunteering in the community in the UK and as such is provided with an open door of opportunity to preach the Gospel in word and deed. The Big Society initiative does serve as a public reminder to Christians, even a wake-up call to the fact that Care in the Community is not an option or added extra but a command of God. We are called first to love God and then our neighbour as ourselves. But the Lord goes even further when He commands us even to love our enemies, bless them, and pray for them! In the community Christians are exhorted under the example of the perfect ministry of Jesus Christ the Lord to be the salt and the light.

Now to do so effectively and for the wellbeing of man's whole being (body, mind and soul), the

Lord's people, His servants, must constantly remind themselves of the need to have as their chief focus in the ministry of care, the making known of the Saviour Jesus Christ. Whole-being care that includes the care of the soul provides the essential added ingredient whereby the Christian can be a true blessing in the community. This is the factor that sets Christian care as being a unique ministry in the world. Whereas many organisations provide excellent voluntary care for the body and the mind, only Christian care provides the added vital element of care spiritually for the soul. This is why any outreach into the community under the Christian banner, must of necessity have an unashamed link to the making known of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. When the Lord speaks of loving our neighbour He does so by clearly setting an example of linking physical and mental care with the Gospel. For example, when healing the paralytic man He links his healing with His power to forgive sin. Again, having healed the man possessed with a demon named Legion and being now in his right mind, the Lord commands him to go into the city and show the great things God had done for him.

However in our day and generation whole-being Christian care activated within a humanistic culture, finds restrictions being placed upon it owing to political pragmatism and

opposition against Christian belief. Limitations are placed upon the extent to which the spiritual part of Christian care can be exercised even in the ideals of The Big Society. Nevertheless Christian care must never lose its spiritual purpose within The Big Society philosophy, even if funding is withheld because of this stand. For a Christian cares not only socially but spiritually, and this spiritual element is the fundamental issue that ensures that God's name is glorified in Christian care. To lose this focus under the Christian banner of care, puts it within the confines of what the Lord describes as the salt losing its savour and proper purpose. True Christianity in action is about preserving what is good as the salt, and shining the light upon the truth that comes from God's Word the Bible. In effect this means that a person, who is truly a Christian in the Biblical meaning of the name, is seeking day by day to follow the example of



Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones

Christ and lead people to trust in Him as the way, the truth and the life. This is the call and essence of Christian Care in the Community.

Conclusion

The main issue that needs to be addressed for the good influence upon society is not Government legislation and initiatives entrapped

or hindered by humanistic philosophy, but rather the vital need to be right with God. For the blessed outcome of many being right with God will be a truly whole-being, caring influence on a broken society. One of the well-known ministers in London and the UK in the last century was Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones. He insisted that no amount of legislation or institutions or big government control however well-meaning could arrest the downgrade of society. He argued quite rightly that what people most needed was to hear and believe in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. One day a young boy came to visit him after an evening service in his Church and thanked him for helping his family. He testified that a great change had come in his father's life. Before this change he was a drunkard and a lot of his wages went on excessive alcohol. As a result there was often no food on the table to eat. But now everything was different: they had food on the table, warm clothes and hope for the future. The difference came about through the Gospel preaching ministry of Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones. Every Sunday evening he preached from the Bible and taught about the need of personal repentance from sin and to trust only in Jesus Christ the Saviour of the world and to follow Him as Lord. "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son that whoever believes in Him

should not perish but have eternal life"! Now this Gospel pointing to Jesus Christ had totally changed the father's life, for he repented of his sin and believed in Him as his Saviour and Lord. As a result he had become a true blessing to his family.

In one of his speeches David Cameron stated: "For too long we have lived in an upside down world." In a way without realising it the Prime Minister had put his finger on the heart of the problem, albeit he was referring to effort and reward. The real problem is that society is actually upside down in its relationship with God and therein lays the reason for its downward trend. Interestingly when the Apostle Paul preached the Gospel of God in Thessalonica he and those preaching with him were accused of turning the world upside down. As people were converted and came to trust in Jesus Christ there was a transformation in the life; their lives were turned upside down again in their thinking and attitude toward God. In effect they now become the right way up before God.

The greatest need in our land is for people to have their lives turned upside down by the transforming power of the Gospel and find purpose and hope, and know true love for God and its fruit of whole-being love for our neighbour – a love which is concerned for their physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing.

SUNDAY SERVICES

10:30 Gospel Service This service is particularly suitable for everyone, especially first time visitors. It is straightforward and concentrates on our greatest need and how we can seek and find the Lord God.

The very young children, attending with an adult, will have their own special time at Junior church in another room.

17:00 Teaching Service This service of worship concentrates on the systematic teaching of the Bible for those who have personally come to know the Lord.

BIBLE STUDY and PRAYER MEETING

19:30 Thursday Our Bible study will usually involve a series of studies, over a number of weeks, in one of the books of the Bible, or on a topic, applying it in a practical way to the life of the Christian.

SUNDAY SCHOOL & MEETINGS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Sunday & Monday Depending on their age there will be a meeting for them on either the Sunday afternoon (5-8 year olds) or Monday evening (9-11+ year olds). See our website for further details.

www.ebcuk.org

