

What think ye of Christ? This is a question that for centuries was answered by looking at the way we organise our lives in community: the Church's Year. So the prophecies of his coming in Advent; Christmas kept as a religious occasion and not a mere consumer-fest; Lent, which some kept well and others badly or not at all; Good Friday, when the shops and factories closed and there were no newspapers; Easter; Whitsunday, before the government abolished that holiday; Ascensiontide and Trinity. We answered the question, *What think ye of Christ?* By pointing to the fact that we were a Christian country and our year was ordered following the sequence of events in the life of Our Lord. Most people were not very pious, but that didn't matter. The fact was that the consciousness of Christianity was deeply embedded in our way of life, the way we counted the days and in all our institutions.

This is no longer the case. Aggressive secularism, under the guises of *diversity*, *multiculturalism* and *political-correctness* has ensured that we are no longer a Christian country, that it's probably a crime even to claim that we

are, for fear of *offending* people of other faiths. As a matter of fact, these people of other faiths are rarely offended. The idea of such offence is only cited as an excuse to attack Christianity: the militant atheists and aggressive secularists, powerful groups who want to see Christianity done away with.

Eliot saw this coming long ago and explained:

Why should men love the Church? Why should they love her laws?

She tells them of Life and death, and of all that they would forget.

She is tender where they would be hard, and hard where they like to be soft.

*She tells them of evil and sin, and other unpleasant facts
They try constantly to escape from the darkness outside
and within...*

The secularists persecute us because we tell them uncomfortable truths about themselves. But really, you know, persecution is not bad for the church. There is something much worse and that is apostasy, unfaithfulness, intellectual, moral and spiritual cowardice

on the part of the church itself. *What think ye of Christ?* We should turn and ask what the contemporary church thinks of Christ. We find that the prevailing theological culture in the church, the Establishment, bishops, synods, those who rule the church have – with a very few honourable exceptions – acclimatised themselves to the ideas of the secularists who hate the church. This is the pseudo-ethical consensus of universal rights, foreign aid, adopting the management culture and multiplying a bullying bureaucracy resembling that of the former Soviets; abandoning traditional teaching on sexual morality, bishops telling us they can save Africa when they can't even save the local post office; the pagan fantasy of global warming by which saving the planet will cost the earth. Trusting not so much in Christ as in low energy light-bulbs – which gives a whole new meaning to the blind leading the blind.

The church is commanded by Christ to preach the gospel to all nations. Instead our modern leaders prefer cosyng up to other religions and turning the faith into a watered-down wider ecumenism, a multifaith stew, the lowest common denominator – which turns out to be just a pale

copy of the secular agenda. For example, the new Head of Religion at the BBC told me (at the Oval cricket ground) there is going to be a big row over *Thought for the Day* – because, apparently, there is a great clamour to have secular speakers, agnostics and atheists. I laughed and said, “But that’s what we’ve got already! Nearly all the contributors to *Thought for the Day*, whatever their professed religion, teach the secular, liberal consensus.”

The joke in all this is that all these demythologised, denatured, secularised church leaders who come on to speak really believe that they are being true prophets to the Establishment. What these clowns don’t understand is that *they are the Establishment* – the same gang of opinion that has given us human rights, foreign aid, multiculturalism, climate change as a dogma, anti-capitalism, and the quixotic charge around the world spreading the gospel of *democracy*.

What think ye of Christ? When we ask this question to the pathetic clique which now runs the church, we should not be surprised to find that they think Christ is

rather like themselves: they are convinced that, if Our Lord walked the earth today, he would believe in *democracy, diversity, multiculturalism*; that he would reserve his condemnation for the bankers and other nasty capitalists; that he wouldn't turn water into wine, but perhaps into Fair Trade coffee; and that he'd jump up on the global warming bandwagon before you could say *Baloney*. In other words, in their blasphemous parody of the gospel, they reduce Christ to a teacher of platitudes – which happen, of course, to be their own preferred platitudes – and for them Jesus becomes merely the democratic socialist candidate for Galilee South.

What think ye of Christ? For a satisfactory answer we must finally return to the original sources – to the gospel. And here we find a Christ who is the living antidote to the clap-trap taught by our contemporary church leaders. He does not go around teaching a bland universalism and an inoffensive tolerance of everybody and everything. The bland leading the bland, and both fall into the *Kitsch*.

What think ye of Christ? Let us be very daring and take this a stage further: what did Christ say about *himself*? The High Priest asked him, *Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?* And Jesus answered, *I am and ye shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power.* It's a long way from Fair Trade coffee and low energy light-bulbs. He also said, *I and the Father are one. He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.* He said, *Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.*

He said that he would *separate all nations from another as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats. And set the sheep on his right hand but the goats on the left...and to them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed into everlasting fire.* The same Jesus who told the parables of the Good Samaritan and the Lost Sheep also cursed the fig tree, sent the herd of swine plunging over the cliff, called the religious leaders of his day *whited sepulchres which indeed appear beautiful outward but are within full of dead men's bones and of all uncleanness.*

This is not a gospel you will hear on *Thought for the Day* or from many pulpits. There's nothing like it in *Church Times* or the debates in the Lambeth Conference or the General Synod. The teacher of platitudes won't suffice. The social democratic candidate for Galilee South is just too wet. As Alex Boot says in his brilliant new book about Tolstoy, *The teaching of Christ is not just by Christ; it is about Christ*. This means that you cannot separate the teachings from the man. And what Christ teaches about himself is supernatural. So you cannot separate the man Jesus from God. Therefore Christianity is a supernatural religion.

Remember his shocking words: that he is at one with the Father. Remember when he said, *Before Abraham was, I AM* – thus ascribing to himself the sacred name of God. The Christ of the gospels bears absolutely no resemblance to the platitudinous, pale Galilean of our contemporary teachers who, like Thomas Jefferson and Count Tolstoy, simply leave out all those parts of the gospel which they can't square with their own private agenda.

What think ye of Christ? My dear people, you have heard this morning how Christ speaks of himself. Now listen as he speaks directly to you:

Come, ye blessed children of my Father, receive the Kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world...