

# KINGTON BAPTIST CHURCH ONLINE NOTICE BOARD – 53

*Thought for the Day*, the one on BBC Radio 4, at around 7.45 am each week day, is worth hearing. I'm able to listen in on Monday to Wednesday as I drive to work.

With speakers drawn from different world religions *Thought for the Day* is a sort of a religious 'Allsorts', a 'Pick and Mix' of 'faiths'. In view of this it's remarkable that almost all the speakers make the same point. I've noticed that this message is repeated whether the speaker is Jewish, Moslem, Buddhist, Hindu, Sheikh, Christian or humanist. It's this agreement that makes it seem that in the end all of the world's religions are the same; each person has his own and each is as good as the next.

More often than not the speakers remind us of how we should behave towards each other – we're reminded to be kind, caring, compassionate, patient, gentle, serving and loving.

These qualities are those Paul calls 'the fruit of the Spirit'. It's a remarkable fact that almost all the world's religions stress the importance of the same values: love, joy, peace, patience, meekness, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control.

We could say that while there's a lot of agreement on the 'Fruit' there's no agreement on the 'Root'.

The question I'd like to put to each contributor is the question Jesus put to the Pharisees: *What do you think of the Christ? Whose son is he?* (Matthew 22.42) If ever a question was calculated to divide opinions this is it!

The Pharisees answered that Jesus is '*the son of David*'. This is the answer everyone gives to that question, except Christians. That answer sees Jesus as one among many others. '*The Son of David*', no more than a human king among other human kings; '*a prophet*' among all other prophets; a teacher; a healer; a good man; an example – one among others. But Jesus rejected all those answers. He insisted that he must be confessed as the Lord ('*how is it then that David, inspired by the Spirit, calls him **Lord**?*' [verse 43]); *seated at the right hand of God the Father, who confers on him universal sovereignty over all creation* (verse 44).

This is the most profound and penetrating question the world must face. Our Lord formed his question to prevent shallow attempts to understand his identity in terms of *what* he said or *what* he did, side-stepping the real issue of **who** he is. This question, *who* he is, points to a *relation* – '*Whose **son** is he?*' His question forces us to see that the truth about Jesus goes way beyond saying he's 'a prophet'; it even goes beyond confessing that he is divine. It forces us to confess or deny a *relation*. The only answer acceptable to Jesus was to say that Jesus is *Lord*, the Son of God. That his *relation* is

as Son to his heavenly Father. Our Lord's question demands the confession of the Holy Trinity.

This is the question that makes clear the unique character of the Christian faith, a faith unlike any other 'faith' in its confession of God as three Persons in the unity of the Holy Trinity. In a time of confusion and assimilation this is a confession we must faithfully maintain and boldly confess.

C. S. Lewis considered this question – '*who do you say I am?*' – and came up with the idea that there are only three possible answers: that Jesus was bad, mad, or God. I think he was right. It's impossible to be neutral or indifferent about Jesus. It is impossible to be neutral about him because of the claims he made for himself – summed-up in the two most extraordinary words Jesus used of himself: '**I AM**'. '*I tell you in solemn truth,*' replied Jesus, '*before there was an Abraham, I AM!*' (John 8.58. J B Philips)<sup>1</sup>

Some of the most intellectually gifted speakers on Thought for the Day would tell us they consider Jesus to be a *prophet*. But that is the one thing you *cannot* say about Jesus – without also saying if you believe him to be a *true prophet* or a *false prophet!* There is no 'half-way' house. If you believe Jesus to be a true prophet then you cannot refuse to confess him to be God, for that is who he claims to be. If you consider him to be a false prophet then he was no prophet at all, but was either mad or bad.

The late, highly regarded, Chief Rabbi, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, spoke of Jesus as a *prophet*. On a very recent Thought for the Day the Bishop of Liverpool spoke of a conversation with the Chief Rabbi, in which the Chief Rabbi said that 'the three most extraordinary words of Jesus were "*But I say*". (I don't think he's right about that, but that's another matter.) The point is that the Chief Rabbi said these words were the words of a prophet, that Jesus was a *prophet*. But to say that and to say no more is to miss the meaning of these words when used by Jesus. When Jesus says '*But I say...*' he's not speaking as a prophet, he's speaking as the *Lord God!* No Old Testament prophet ever began his prophesy with these words. The true Old Testament prophet began his prophecy by saying '*Thus says the Lord...*'. Jesus nowhere says that – because he **is** the Lord!

As the Lord we're told *it pleased the Father that in Christ **all fullness** should dwell* (Colossians 2.9). Then everything and everyone else is empty!

He is *the true light, who gives light to every man that comes into the world* (John 1.9). *For our benefit God made Christ to be wisdom itself. He is the one who made us acceptable to God. He made us pure and holy, and he gave himself to purchase our freedom* (1 Corinthians 1.30).

These statements about the Lord Jesus explain the remarkable agreement among the world's religions we often hear on Thought for the Day. Jesus *radiates* the light of truth – because he is the Light. He doesn't borrow it –

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<sup>1</sup> Of course there are those who claim that Jesus never said this at all but his followers who wrote the Gospels put these words in his mouth. Which is simply to say that we know nothing at all about Jesus as a prophet or as anything else, and that his followers, who claimed to live for the truth and who died for the truth, were themselves both mad and bad!

he is it! He *alone* radiates the light of truth – *I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man comes to the Father but by me* (John 14.6).

Wherever else these same truths are found, from whoever else we hear them, they are *reflected* light – as light is reflected from a mirror. They shine with borrowed light, borrow from the One who is *the Light of the World*.

In the darkness of night I'm pleased to have the reflected light of the moon. But in the day the radiated light of the sun overwhelms the light of the moon. Why would I be satisfied with the light of the moon when I have the light of the Son! *This Light goes on shining in the dark and the dark will not put it out!* (John 1.5)

Jesus alone IS; the rest IS NOT.  
(Therese of Lisieux)

Less could not satisfy, more could not be desired.

The Lord Jesus is the fullness which fills all in all. Creation is too small a frame in which to hang his likeness. Human thought is too contracted, human speech too feeble, to set him forth to the full. He is inconceivably above our conceptions, unutterably above our utterances.

(C. H. Spurgeon)