

## The Christmas message no one seems to want to hear – Littlebourne 24 Dec 2023 – Peter H

Materialism has replaced the spiritual content of Christmas. Commercialisation has made it a season to sell more things to consumers, most of which have nothing to do with the birth of Jesus in a stable.

Materialism originally was a philosophy of life without spirituality, but now it seems just to mean a preoccupation with spending on pleasures and possessions. Spiritual is also now a word used to refer to human qualities derived from material experience, like appreciation of beauty, appreciation of nature, appreciation of human activities deemed worthy of approval. It has lost its connection to the divine.

Today Christmas is a time to publicise the needs of others – the deprived, the homeless, the victims of whatever tragedy is in the news media. Jesus said, *“Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”* Matthew 25:40. This is a personal request to every man to love his neighbour as himself, not advice to outsource the good that you do to someone else so that you can avoid personal responsibility and still feel good that you have done something worthy of society’s approbation. Neither can this verse be used to demand that more must be done by charities and government – other people. To do so obscures the Christian message that Jesus speaks to individuals to change their beliefs first and that changes in behaviour flow from a changed heart.

In today’s world, good is done to others for its own sake – or rather because it is a demonstration of human values. It doesn’t require faith in God. It is no longer a spiritual enterprise, done against the grain of our inclination not to get involved with the misfortunes of others. In its secular form it has become a test of virtue, a means to signal of one’s apparent goodness and at the same time signal one’s outrage at the failures of the State to deal with matters still left to charities. Blaming others for the ills of society helps no one. Throwing money at problems is a sticking plaster on the festering sore that is man’s sinful heart. It can do some good, but it offers no route to heaven.

The Gospel message is about convicting people of their sinfulness, with a free offer of redemption. Jesus was not sent into the world to complain about the lack of welfare benefits, lack of medical facilities in Judea and how taxes could be spent more wisely. Most of the charities who use this time of year to raise funds aren’t much interested in the reason for Christmas, nor repentance, nor why mankind is sinful. They publicise issues that need funding and appeal for generosity. Jesus doesn’t normally feature in the publicity of most fund-raising charities, many of whom have airbrushed away their Christian roots for fear of offending the secularists. Religious belief is seen by many as controversial and practically a taboo subject. The tinsel, coloured lights, present giving and excessive eating and drinking remain necessities for the season to be jolly and festive, without Jesus. The charities and good causes try to expose the inadequacy of the government and the belief that more should be done to meet the needs of those more misfortunate than ourselves. People are asked to give whatever they can, so that others more professional and trained (and often paid) can handle those awkward matters that involve time they don’t have nor the inclination to get involved with because to do so will involve unwanted commitments.

The Christmas message most people do not want to hear is about man’s flawed state, man’s moral ambiguity, man’s lack of self-discipline and man’s pursuit of material security and personal welfare. The message of Christmas is that Jesus came into this world of suffering and loneliness to tell people of their real condition: we are all sinners in need of salvation. Jesus addressed sinners and offered them not the moral purity of campaigners for humanity becoming materially better off, but simple forgiveness.

The birth of a baby is a joyful occasion. This baby was the creator of the world and was born to bring life, life everlasting. Let’s praise the perfect gift, the most costly gift, the gift that gives more than we ever can possibly give ourselves. Praise Jesus with song and word, love and obedience, trust and faith.