

JESUS IS SICK OF WORDS

Baptist Times 29 January 2004

In the musical 'My Fair Lady' Eliza Doolittle exclaims, 'Words, words, words, I'm sick of words! I get words all day through, first from him, then from you! Is that all you blighters can do?' I believe that Jesus too is sick of words, words, words – he is sick of pious professions of faith that do not issue in practice. Here is a challenge to many of us Baptist-Christians. We stand in tradition where words are important. It has been said that the first test of an evangelical church is the length of the sermon; and the second test is the presence of a meeting for Bible study and prayer. Much as I believe that listening to sermons and taking part in Bible study are vital to healthy Christian development, if our Christian faith revolves around such things alone, then there is something wrong about our faith. For at the heart of the Christian faith is the doctrine of the incarnation – the Word becoming flesh. Our words too need to be rooted in the business of living. Orthopraxis (right living) is as important as orthodoxy (right believing). Indeed, the latter without the former is a nonsense, for it is the former which tests out the reality of the latter. My mind goes to one of my former deacons, an extraordinarily eminent university professor who had been honoured with his own personal 'chair'; yet also an extraordinarily humble servant of the Lord Jesus, who without drawing any attention to himself used to wash the sheets of an incontinent member of our womens' meeting. If the truth be told, some felt his theology was a little suspect – he didn't dot the 'i's and the 't's in the way we thought was right; and yet the way he lived the faith put the more orthodox of us to shame. Yes, its actions which count – and actions too which often convert. No doubt this is what the Apostle Peter had in mind, when, instead of telling his readers to be ready to take the initiative in sharing their faith, he said: "Be ready at all times to answer anyone who asks you to explain the hope you have in you" (1 Pet 3.15). A little while ago I read a book with a wonderful title: *The Provocative Church*. There Graham Tomlin, the author, wrote: "Unless there is something about church, or Christians, or Christian faith, that intrigues, provokes or entices, then all the evangelism in the world will fall on deaf ears. If churches cannot convey a sense of 'reality' then all our 'truth' will count for nothing". Some years ago, I was doing my level best to win for Christ a high-flying businessmen-cum-academic, but getting absolutely nowhere. But then the breakthrough came – and it had nothing to do with me. My friend happened upon a biography of Mother Teresa – and in the reading of it became convinced of the truth of God's love. Its actions, not words, which count.