

## **Tawney Lecture**

### **Annual General Meeting of the Christian Socialist Movement, 25<sup>th</sup> March 2000**

If you walk, as I have on a couple of occasions, from Cambridge north along the banks of the River Cam to Ely, it's a distance of about 15 miles. But you can see Ely Cathedral within a mile or two of starting out, rising up from the flatness which spans the horizon in every direction. It stands on the only high ground for miles, and you would be able to see it even without a cathedral on top of it. But, with the vast cathedral tower, it is an awe inspiring sight. In making that journey you spend the entire day, one footstep after another, drawing closer to this extraordinary building, until finally you climb up from the river, up the hill through some orchard fields, and enter at last the huge cathedral doorway. That cathedral, now, along with every cathedral in the land, in good shape thanks to the efforts of English Heritage, occupied the skills of innumerable craftsmen and has been a place of worship for countless believers throughout most of the past millennium.

But about half way along what is in one sense a rather dreary journey through the Fens, with just that cathedral to draw you on, you come across - just alongside the river, apparently in the middle of nowhere - another, more recent place built for worship. It is an abandoned Methodist chapel. Once in that place, a group of ordinary farm labourers - perhaps following a visit by John Wesley himself - these labourers had set out to follow Christ and had decided they wanted to build a chapel where they could meet and worship and express their new found faith together. The building - not used now - is a reminder of the change in the lives of that little group of people. A change which had come about when they came to believe.

And I used to wonder which of those two buildings for worship was the more impressive. In one sense, the answer is obvious. And yet that little chapel has a good claim to the accolade too, absorbing as it did the faith and commitment of people who had never done anything out of the ordinary before. It testifies to the change which occurred in their lives, a chapel built as it was not by royal decree and with the resources of the mediaeval church but through the determination of a little group of ordinary people.

George Eliot put it like this in the finale to Middlemarch:

*For the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life and rest in unvisited tombs.*

Certainly, as far as the history of our party is concerned over the past century, the movement represented by the people who met in that chapel, and in chapels like it all over the country, has had much the greater impact. Ordinary people in their communities came together in the chapels and discovered that they could succeed in positions of leadership which they had never aspired to before. They discovered from reading the Bible that those who had always claimed to be their betters were not in fact superior at all - as far as God was concerned, everybody was in the same boat.

They learned that Paul had written to the Christians at Corinth and reminded them in 1 Corinthians Chapter 1:

"Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many of you were influential; not many of you were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.

Their lowly status was no obstacle as far as God was concerned. Their experience of faith changed their lives. Among the results were the labour movement and, after a few generations, just 100 years ago, the Labour Party. Of the 30 Labour MPs elected in the mould breaking General Election of 1906, 18 described themselves as non conformists, and right through the party's early decades, it was the chapel influence which provided the inspiration for very many of those who were involved.

I want to argue today that we are going to see something rather similar happening in the Labour movement again - that people's experience in churches and the changes brought about in their lives when they start to follow Jesus Christ will again be a major influence in the development of our party. That may seem a hopelessly naïve claim to make at a time when gleeful reports appear in the papers every few months that church attendance has plummeted again. But I believe it is going to be the case and I want to explain today why I believe it. Whatever is happening to official attendance figures, it is clear that church commitment and engagement in social action, church financial giving - all of these are sharply on the rise.

Take the remarkable impact of the Jubilee 2000 campaign over the past three years. It is extraordinary to see how that campaign has been taken up right across the spectrum of the churches. From the black churches in my part of London to the noticeboards of churches in some of the most affluent parts of the country - alongside the posters for Spring Harvest and the Alpha Group - Jubilee 2000 has been there. Something pretty remarkable has happened.

At the age of 18 I had been for a couple of years a member of a gospel hall in my home town. A charming retired accountant who was one of the elders told me that the right path for Christians was to train for a profession and to vote Conservative. He was not unusual. Thankfully, his view is much less common today.

Of course, Jubilee 2000 has not been an exclusively church campaign. It has won very wide support, and that has been one of its glories. But the fact is that 80% of those who have participated in those human chains and sent in those Jubilee 2000 postcards with one pound coins sellotaped to the back of them - 80% of them were from the churches. It is from the churches that the campaign has derived its energy and its vigour. There has been nothing like it since the campaign against the slave trade.

I was taken aback one lunchtime, a couple of months after I had become a Treasury minister, to find our building completely encircled by people with church, trade union and Jubilee 2000 banners. I hurried on past, hoping they wouldn't work out I was a Treasury minister. They didn't - or, if they did, they were too polite to say.

The Chancellor was also rather taken aback one day to receive one of those postcards with a coin on the back from a minister's wife in Scotland, a Mrs Brown. It was his mother. And those coins incidentally were all applied to repaying Tanzania's debt to the UK - over £14,000 in total.

And, of course, the campaign has achieved its objective in Britain. Just before the end of last year, the Chancellor announced that all the debts owed to Britain by the world's poorest countries were to be cancelled, once they had poverty reduction plans in place to demonstrate that the money would be used to reduce poverty.

Will Hutton, in the Observer, reflected on all of this in an article last autumn:

"At the end of an increasingly secular century," he wrote, "it has been the biblical proof and moral imagination of religion that have torched the principles of the hitherto unassailable citadels of international finance - and opened the way to a radicalism about capitalism whose ramifications are not yet fully understood. ... There is the moral basis for a new social settlement. The Left of Centre should take note; it is no longer Morris, Keynes and Beveridge who inspire and change the world - it's Leviticus."

But its not only Jubilee 2000 which has shown how things are changing. The think tank Demos has maintained that "much of the best innovation in the provision of local health, homelessness, community regeneration and drug related services is now being shaped by people with strong religious beliefs". I think they are right.

I want to make three major points in this lecture, and then conclude with a fourth. The three points are:

- First, that there is in Britain today an important social movement - a new Christian activism which deserves to be taken seriously. This is the point on which I want to spend most time.
- Second, that this Government needs to work with this new Christian activism, in order to maximise the effectiveness of our work in tackling social exclusion.
- And third, that the churches equally can benefit from taking advantage of this Government's framework for work on social exclusion.

In tackling social exclusion, there is common ground between the Labour Party, this Government and the churches. There is scope for partnership between us. I want to see that potential realised. I believe it is in the interests of our churches, and of our party, and of our country and its people, that that potential should be realised.

And finally I want to suggest that what we have here is a basis for a new Christian Socialism which will have as profound an influence on our party in the new century as earlier Christian Socialism did in the old.

Let me begin, then, with this new Christian activism in our communities. I want to give a series of examples of what I mean. And in doing so I want to illustrate some of the features of this activism:

- First, that it is a grassroots movement. It doesn't have a centre or a cathedral, but it is making itself felt across the country. It is largely about unhistoric acts and hidden lives.
- Second, that it is locally focused. It is rooted in a committed mutual community - a church - which is socially and culturally mixed, able to enlist people to move across the boundaries of their comfort zone.
- Third, that it is rooted in worship. It does not consist of activists who happen to have had some background in Christianity. Rather it has right at

its centre the person of Jesus Christ, and the activity of worship. That conveys to it vitality, energy and commitment.

- Fourth, that it is interested in changing individuals. It plugs away, it doesn't abandon failures even if it looks foolish. It has a profound vision of what it means to be human, in faith that the ultimate destination of human history is in God's hands and that at that time, what is so plainly wrong today will be put right.

I want to illustrate all this by describing three projects which I have come across in my work since the General Election. There are many, many other projects I could have chosen and I make no special claims for those I am going to refer to, except that I have visited each of them and taken a look at their work. They are:

- Pecan, an employment project in south London
- Bethany Trust, a homelessness project in Edinburgh
- Victory Outreach, a drug misuse project in north London.

First, Pecan. After the election I became Parliamentary Private Secretary to Andrew Smith who was at that time the Employment Minister responsible for the New Deal. I came across Pecan quite early on, in Peckham in South London, which helps people into work. It has played a big part in the Government New Deal Programme in Southwark, and is working now on the new Employment Action Zone there.

PECAN is the Peckham Evangelical Churches Action Network. It started work ten years ago, to provide training for unemployed people. Most people in the area live in one very large council estate. Few of the residents were there from choice.

The Recruiters started knocking on every door on the estate to invite people on to Employment Preparation Courses. They have been doing so ever since, two or three times a year, taking the time and trouble to go out after people and to meet them and get to know them, not just waiting for them to come in to the office. That is, after all, the approach which Jesus took.

10 years later, thousands of people have been on PECAN's four week Employment Preparation Courses, and employment prospects in Peckham have been transformed. Of course, many other things have been going on alongside the work of Pecan. In particular, there has been an excellent local regeneration programme led by the local council. Crime has fallen by 60%, but the really remarkable thing I think is what has happened to unemployment. When Pecan started knocking on doors, the area was a high unemployment area, with a rate three times the Inner London average. Today, it no longer is. It is below the average. It has been that knocking on doors, year after year, going out to call on people and encouraging them to come in, often with volunteers from the local churches, that has been the key to the transformation.

In 1998, Pecan had 35 staff, last year there were 63, and this year that number will rise to 110, and Pecan is engaging in a growing range of Government programmes. Most staff are recruited from the local churches and so have a knowledge of the area and the specific challenges that it faces. All of the staff earn the same and there is a very strong sense of commitment to each other and to those they are working with.

Pecan's Board of Governors has two members from each of ten local churches which constitute the project. The churches meet four times a year to pray for the work. The staff meet together weekly, and, every six weeks, a leader from a local

church - not just from the ten but others as well in turn - addresses the staff group.

So Pecan is seen as part of the churches' work, and it is from the lives of those churches that Pecan draws its inspiration and its determination. The result has been impressive change, change of the kind this Government wants to see in many other places as well.

My second example is the Bethany Trust. To investigate it, I went just after Christmas to Edinburgh to meet Alan Berry, its Director. The Trust works with homeless people in the city. It has its headquarters in a very solid looking little old two storey chapel building in Jane Street in the Leith district of the city, which says over the door "Saint Andrews Place United Presbyterian Church Mission Hall". In fact its last use was by a congregation of Plymouth Brethren, which shut down but transferred the building to the trust on favourable terms. Its opposite Bob's Garage and the intriguingly named office block, Tarzan House.

Alan preached about God's concern for the poor as a minister in a nearby inner city Baptist church. After church each week, he and his congregation were confronted by Edinburgh's homelessness. A stream of homeless people came to knock on his door.

So he and three others set up Bethany Christian Trust and bought their first property, opposite the church, in 1983, as a hostel for homeless people. It now has accommodation for over 120, and about 80 full-time paid and volunteer staff.

They meet homeless people on the streets, offering food and emergency shelter. They offer medium and long term accommodation with specialist care, including addiction care if that is needed. There is help in furnishing homes, and employment training, not least through the trust's own network of charity shops. The vision is that a rough sleeper can come for shelter, progress to his own flat, to job training and to employment.

I met a worker called John at the emergency hostel. He told me that he came in from the streets in 1987. He says that while he was at the hostel he began to cave in from the inside. He was deeply impressed by the care shown to him by the staff and he went on to join a local church. Later he left the hostel and returned to drink, but in 1991 he came back. He is now the manager. When men come in beaten up, drunk and screaming he knows what it is all about. Bethany has a record of keeping in touch with people who have been through its hostels, even when they don't end up as employees. For a long time Mrs Berry remembered everyone's birthday, and many of those who have been through refer to the Berrys as Mum and Dad.

One of the keys to Bethany is the volunteers - a dozen full-timers, and 35 different church teams staffing by turns a Care Van, giving out soup, rolls and blankets on the streets every night of the year. Volunteers work in the night shelter and at the housing units, staff the charity shops and help in a befriending scheme. A team of 30 goes out to speak to groups about the trust's work. Four prayer letters a year and an annual report are sent out to 4500 people. The trust's work has become part of the lives of many individuals and churches - Protestant and Catholic - in the city and beyond.

Everyone Bethany works with knows it is a Christian project. There are daily prayers for anyone who wants them, and two weekly praise services. All the staff are Christians. They don't take the initiative in proselytising, but they are ready

to explain their faith if asked. From time to time, they are accused of brain washing by former residents. In response to one such accusation, the city's social work department mounted a major investigation ten years ago, and the conclusion was that there was no basis for that accusation. The city council acknowledges that the Trust is too big to ignore and that it is providing vital and high quality services.

My third example is Victory Outreach. Just before Christmas, a young Afro Caribbean woman came to my constituency surgery and asked if I knew about it. She told me that it was an effective church-based project helping people with drug problems, but that it couldn't secure funding. She showed me a glowing commendation from a recent edition of the Daily Mirror and asked me if I would be willing to pay a visit. I said that I hadn't heard of it but that I would be willing to go.

Victory Outreach started in 1967 with the conversion in New York of a drug addict and notorious gang member, Sonny Arguinzoni. It arrived in London ten years ago and started a Men's Special Services Home for ten people. A Women's Services Home started in London last year and there are also Victory Outreach Homes and Churches in Manchester and Dublin. Victory Outreach Church in North London grew out of the homes. I visited the home in Leyton in North East London.

The basis of the project's work is going out on to London streets most evenings of the week and offering help to people addicted to drugs or engaged in prostitution. Those who want it are offered immediate help. If they accept, the rules are explained and they have to decide if they want to sign up. If they do, they are in for a disciplined programme with a focus on prayer and Bible study and mandatory church attendance. If they don't, they are referred for help elsewhere. If they are not put off initially, they often lose interest pretty soon. Those who leave outnumber those who stay.

A direct evangelistic message is a part of the programme. Those who complete the programme have a formal graduation ceremony at the church at the end.

The homes aim to combine a structured, disciplined environment with a family atmosphere. All the staff are from backgrounds involving drugs, alcohol or crime.

I met a number residents at the home in Leyton. One man who used to live in my constituency told me that "Victory Outreach has done more for me in these first 4 days than all of the other drugs rehabilitation programmes that I've been on before." Another man who had been there longer told me "It's given me back a sense of dignity and my family have started to talk to me and ring me again".

Victory Outreach also is sometimes accused of brainwashing. An accusation on Carlton TV a couple of years ago caused a great deal of difficulty, though it led eventually to a public apology from Carlton. Other media coverage, like the article I was shown in the Mirror, has been more positive. It is easy to be cynical about the approach Victory Outreach takes, but a few minutes with people reassembling their lives there provides a pretty convincing antidote to cynicism.

The church itself is central to all this. It has a strong family atmosphere, creating a sense of belonging with most of the churchgoers going through or having been through the rehabilitation programme. Those who have been through the programme are encouraged to take an active part in church life, including preaching.

The work is self-supporting. The explicitly evangelistic thrust rules out public funding, except in housing benefit for the hostel residents. Charitable funding is not easy to come by either. Somehow the project scrapes by. Its approach resembles that of the Salvation Army in its early days, but in a highly modernised form.

Those are my three examples to support my first point about a new Christian activism which deserves to be taken seriously. I hope you can see from them what I mean when I say it is driven from the grassroots, locally focused, rooted in worship and committed to changing individuals.

My second point is that this Government needs to work with these church initiatives. What I want to say to my colleagues in Government is this. There is in the churches an exceptional degree of commitment, a willingness of people to share their lives with others, which our partnership initiatives on social exclusion need. Those qualities are apparent in a wide and growing range of church-based projects addressing the big issues which face us. They have people, energy, commitment, local knowledge, sometimes buildings. We need to be open in Government to working with those projects, not expecting them to abandon the faith which has inspired them, but being willing to accept it and to work alongside the initiatives they are developing.

The three projects take different approaches to different problems, and their relationship to Government is different too. But all of them are tackling intractable problems in a creative and imaginative way, deploying the commitment of people whose lives have been changed by following Jesus Christ to mount a serious assault on problems in their community. In Government we need to work with that commitment and take advantage of it because we want to address those problems too. We want those initiatives to succeed, because we share their objectives: ending social exclusion, regenerating local communities.

There is sometimes a tension for some of these projects with public funding requirements. A policy of employing only committed Christians, for example, can conflict with some public sector equal opportunity policies. I think we should ensure we don't inadvertently exclude in that way organisations which could otherwise make the most effective contributions to tackling social exclusion in their area.

Equally, some projects will offer employment, for example, only to Muslims, and, if the results serve their community in an effective way, in the public sector we should respect that too. Indeed, on these issues, there is a good deal of scope for projects drawn from different religions to draw support from each other and I hope we shall see more of that in the future.

Al Gore spelt out last May his support for faith-based organisations to provide basic welfare services, as long as there is a secular alternative and as long as no one is required to participate in religious observances. "They can do so", he said, "with public funds without having to alter the religious character that is so often the key to their effectiveness. We should extend this approach to drug treatment, homelessness and youth violence prevention". Gore was drawing on work of the Progressive Policy Institute in Washington which has looked at this too.

In his latest e-mail bulletin, Jim Wallis of the Sojourners community in Washington reflects from a recent visit that:

"a real story is emerging in North Carolina ... the churches are leading by example, inviting every other sector, including Government, to take up their rightful responsibilities, and preaching good news to the poor".

My three examples are addressing unemployment, homelessness and addiction. They are tapping into something new, and we need to recognise and honour that in Government. I could have referred to many others - the fair trade movement, counselling services, Saturday schools, family centres, credit unions, night shelters in church halls, refugee projects, work with people with HIV and AIDS, parenting classes, youth clubs and hospices.

Projects like these are doing good work. But for socialists, there needs to be more to it than that. Charity alone can be patronising rather than empowering. We want to see how engaging with these big issues of our age radicalises and politicises people, just as the early Methodists were politicised, bringing them face to face with the hard problems which so many people face every day, and with the need for political change in response - posing searching questions to those in power.

In their own right the projects are all developing civil society, expanding the social capital of their communities - the rich web of relationships and participation in community activity which enable a society to flourish. These are big and important contributions to our country's well being, helping to repair the damage of the past 20 years, and our party and our Government should encourage and celebrate them.

All my examples access public funding, even if, as in the case of Victory Outreach, it is just housing benefit. The Government's major programmes, like the New Deal, the New Deal for Communities and the Rough Sleepers' Initiative, are designed for partnership. The church projects I have described, and many others, are proving to be good partners, and more can be too.

The third point is that the churches can benefit from the framework this Government has provided. What I want to say to the churches is this. This Government is providing, through our range of programmes to tackle social exclusion, a framework in which churches can contribute and do so without having to leave their faith behind when they do. For the first time in 20 years, it is officially recognised that poverty is a problem. The Social Exclusion Unit reports directly to the Prime Minister, drawing together initiatives from across Government.

In this Government, we know that we can't solve these problems on our own. We need to be working in partnership with others. We need churches and church-based projects working with us. That is the message of our 'active communities' initiatives and of the regeneration funding guidance published by John Prescott's Department. Church based projects feature in the reports of the social exclusion unit. I hope this lecture will encourage more churches that they can take part without jeopardising their integrity or watering down what they believe.

Let me give an illustration. Last November before the Pre-Budget Report the Government published the report of the Treasury's Policy Action Team on enterprise in disadvantaged areas and that looked particularly at social enterprise - organisations which are independent of the public sector and provide goods and services for a social purpose rather than for profit. Then, in the Pre-Budget Report, Gordon Brown announced a £30 million programme - the Phoenix Fund - to boost enterprise in disadvantaged areas and amongst disadvantaged groups.

Small businesses, community and voluntary enterprises across the country, often cannot raise the critical amounts of capital they need to start or grow towards achieving their potential. The Phoenix fund will go some way to addressing this, for example promoting Community Finance Initiatives which can act as a bridge between mainstream institutions and entrepreneurs in deprived communities.

The best known initiative of this kind is probably the Prince's Trust, and that has been fantastically successful in helping young people and now older people as well start up in business. But there are other very encouraging models around as well. A couple of months ago I went to Birmingham to launch a new fund for the Aston Reinvestment Trust. That has brought together private finance, charitable funds through the Charities Aid Foundation and other help to establish a fund which will lend to social enterprises on wholly commercial terms. The difference is that it will be accessible to small, social enterprises which banks or other commercial lenders just won't touch. The banks are happy to channel loans through the trust because it now has an established track record but there needs to be this intermediary between the bank and the enterprise. Those are the kinds of intermediaries we shall be using our fund to encourage and I hope we shall see more developments of that kind.

Churches are in a great position to take advantage of that sort of facility. They can draw on the expertise and commitment of church members to generate self supporting entrepreneurial activities to give the chance of a decent future to people who for a great variety of reasons have not had one in the past.

One of the first loans from the fund which I launched at Aston was to the Betel Trust. It's a Christian organisation which started in Spain and now has a base in Birmingham too and which works to restore homeless and substance dependent people to productive, independent lifestyles. It funds itself through work carried out by the participants, which also helps them in their recovery. It's a great example of an enterprising approach which churches are well placed to develop - an imaginative and hopeful way forward where old approaches have failed.

I am pleased to see that, under the umbrella of its Investors in Society initiative, the Charities Aid Foundation has launched the Inspire Fund specifically to provide social finance for church-based community projects. As the Director of that Fund puts it, "We see organisations born in the church or by Christians - often evangelists or missionaries - who look beyond the fabric of the church building to a sense of mission with those excluded or in suffering". The Church Urban Fund and many others have provided support of this nature too.

So that is an example - one of many - of how one of this Government's initiatives will help make it possible for church-based initiatives on social exclusion to start up and to flourish.

So those are my three points:

- First, that there is in Britain today an important social movement - a new Christian activism which deserves to be taken seriously.
- Second, that this Government needs to work with this new Christian activism, in order to maximise the effectiveness of our programmes on social exclusion.
- And third, that the churches equally can benefit from taking advantage of this Government's framework for tackling social exclusion.

But I think for us in the Christian Socialist Movement, entering our party's second century, there is something more we can say.

A little while ago, the Newham branch of the Christian Socialist Movement went on a prayer walk along the Barking Road through Newham. We started at Rathbone Market in Canning Town and the organiser told how many churches had been in the vicinity 60 years ago. Most had been bombed and nobody had ever bothered to rebuild them. Others had been sold and bulldozed after their congregations dwindled. Further along we knew there was a large Baptist chapel which had been converted in the 1940s into a warehouse with a shop on the front selling tea towels and pillow cases. It looked like a depressing picture of decline and for many years it was.

But as we walked along we saw that something new was happening. It was the shop names which showed it first - we came to the Amazing Grace Mini Mart, Signs and Wonders Hairstylists and Redeem Travels. Somebody claimed to have spotted Washed in the Blood Launderette but I think they were having us on! Then we came to that disused Baptist chapel - and we saw that now the tea towel shop had closed down and after over 50 years it has been converted back into a church again. It is the Glory Bible Church and it is bursting at the seams every Sunday. 200 yards away is another Baptist church - apparently one of the fastest growing in Europe.

And what's happened? Well many of the African people who have moved to Newham - in many cases fled from their home countries - are committed Christians. For others, the trauma of the move has revived their faith or caused them to consider the gospel seriously afresh. Now they want to celebrate and they are injecting a huge new surge of worship into the area. And it isn't just the newly arrived - the evidence is that the indigenous population is going to church much more than ten years ago as well. Older churches are providing night shelters for the homeless, Sunday meals for people living alone, English classes, counselling services, and many share their premises with other language congregations. In my constituency, the biggest congregation is Tamil speaking, with people who came from Sri Lanka for asylum.

So what we found was not a picture of decline, but of growth. We are going to have much more exposure to Christian activism in the future, I believe, than we have done in the recent past.

I visited the Glory Bible Church the other week. The two pastors, Albert Odulele and Jonathan Oloyede, both qualified as doctors in Nigeria before coming to Britain, and they founded the church in 1993. They explained to me what was happening. They have 500 to 600 people in the church every Sunday with separate children's and youth services. They told me that, in Nigeria, anyone standing on a box and reading the Bible in a market square will gather a crowd. In London, they have to work a good deal harder! They are becoming increasingly international and multicultural. They aim to be professional, with superb contemporary music in their services.

And they feel strongly that the church must relate to the local community. For the last two years, they have run a health and well being day at the church, in conjunction with the local health authority, the council and the Prince's Trust. The programme included access to various health screening activities, stalls run by the East London Black Women's Organisation, Cancer Black Care and St John's Ambulance, plus Gospel Aerobics. They want to turn part of the old warehouse into a healthy living centre. Next month, the first 12 long term unemployed lone

parents will start on a publicly funded employment training programme at the church, with church members acting as mentors as the participants move on in to jobs.

It is a very impressive set up. What is striking about is that the church sees no contradiction between describing itself as evangelical, charismatic, as part of a global apostolic move of God, on the one hand, and on the other developing services like healthy living, the provision of welfare rights services for families affected by HIV and AIDS, or working with the local authority social services department and health trusts. The large numbers of people committed to the life of that church and the full breadth of its activities mean that the potential for a big impact is huge too.

I recently went to help another black church launch a Saturday school in my constituency to address some of the disadvantage faced by Afro-Caribbean youngsters in our schools. More and more of these initiatives are springing up.

The people worshipping in churches like Glory Bible Church. The volunteers working in those projects in Peckham and Leyton and Edinburgh. All of them are people whose lives have been changed by believing in Christ, just as the hidden lives of those who built that little chapel in the fens were changed by the same experience 200 years ago. Like the Methodists, the more recent believers are having an impact on their communities, working to tackle the problems, wanting to bring some hope to people in the position they used to be in.

What is so important for our movement about this is that it is can be a new and vibrant source for Socialism. It is based on the Christian vision of a world where people would not be valued for what they owned or what they earned but for being human, each one made in the image of God. Let's embrace that vision as Socialists and point out to those who share it the political consequences of that Christian vision.

We can see here the contours of a new Christian Socialism - activist, local, committed to changed lives, rooted in worshipping communities and inspired by a Biblical vision. A new Christian Socialism which can bring a new wave of energy and vision into our party - just as Christian Socialism has in the past.

The vision which inspires this movement has had a profound impact on our party in its first hundred years. Sometimes that is forgotten. Part of our task is to make sure that it isn't.

But that influence is not just in the past. This new Christian Socialism will have just as big a role in inspiring our party in the future. This movement, meeting here today, is called to place Christian Socialism again at the heart of Labour's vision as our party faces the challenges of our second hundred years, just as it was at the commencement of the first.

In 100 years time, Ely cathedral will still be there to be cherished by our descendants. But it will have been the hidden lives and vision of Christians in far meaner halls who will have been the ones who shaped our party.

Thank you.