

*Sermon: Jesus said, Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost...*

Michael Nazir Ali, Bishop of Rochester, has criticised the church for its reluctance to preach the Gospel to people of other faiths. The issue is to be debated next month at the General Synod. As you would expect, the so-called “liberals” among the modern bishops and in the Synod have expressed their strongest disapproval of a bishop for suggesting that we should follow Our Lord’s command to preach the Gospel to all nations. What, take the word of the Lord seriously? Not likely: this is the new and enlightened Church of England and the Bible is out of date, Our Lord was only a man of his time and so on.

The former Bishop of Hulme – now Bishop of Urban Life – but how long before we have a Bishop of Clubbing, Glue-sniffing and Fornication... perhaps there is one already? This go-ahead Bishop of Urban Life says that Bishop Michael’s approach, *...shows no sensitivity to the need for good interfaith relations. Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs are learning to respect one another’s paths to God and to live in harmony. The demand for the evangelisation of people of other faiths contributes nothing to our communities.*

So much for baptising all nations in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. You got it badly wrong there Jesus. Notice what this Bishop of Urban Life – and so many like him on the bench of bishops – really is: he is not a Christian evangelist carrying out the command of Christ; he is a secularist who thinks contemporary sociological definitions of *communities* far more important. But it is the idea of communities – multiculturalism – which has produced so much of the unease and tension in Britain today.

The communities-mongers, multiculturalists, really recommended cultural and religious segregation in Britain. These were the same people who, when they saw this practised in South Africa, condemned it as Apartheid. Now even Sir Trevor Phillips, former head of The Commission for Racial Equality, says that multiculturalism was a mistake. To have large minorities in a nation who refuse to integrate into the life and culture of the nation produces racial ghettos and the breakdown of the social order.

The Bishop of Urban Life speaks of *paths to God* as if the different faiths all believe in the same God. This is not even theological ignorance: it is syntactical ignorance, ignorance of the plain meaning of English words. The various religions have different paths because they lead to different gods. Perhaps mainstream Islam is an authentic Abrahamic faith (as they say). But what about that strain of Islam which is once again resurgent on four continents? Militant Islamism, Jihadism, preaches conversion to the Muslim faith or death. This is a long way from the Bishop of Rochester’s suggestion that we should gently invite and persuade people to become Christians.

Jihadism is the currently dominant strain of Islam whose adherents shout at us that *Islam is a religion of peace and love – and if you don’t accept that, we’ll come round and kill you.* In any case even moderate Islam is a long way from Christianity. Muslims deny the resurrection of Christ and they deny the Trinity. As Chesterton said, *What is Islam anyhow, except Unitarianism seven hundred years too early?*

The Bishop of Urban Life also mentions Hinduism as one of the different paths to God. But if you take a different path, you must not be surprised when you arrive in a different place. Hinduism is polytheistic of which we were reminded only last week in the public exhibition of images of the god Rama going forth with his army of monkeys to do battle with the demon king.

There is a real difference between truth and error as the Collect for the Third Sunday after Easter reminded us: *God, who shewest to them that be in error the light of thy truth*. And, as I tried to show in my sermon for Trinity Sunday, what precisely you believe has consequences for the whole of your life, even for your science, your politics and the sort of music you compose. Judaism is a special case because Jews and Christians share so much of the same book, and the Founder of Christianity was himself a Jew who declared he had not come to abolish the Law but to fulfil it.

What is called into question by the controversy about converting people of different faiths is the issue of truth and authority. The last forty years have seen the gradual and then the headlong abandonment of the church's truth and the church's authority by the very men – bishops and the like – who at their ordination promised to uphold these things. Instead of resisting the aggressive secularisation – which masquerades as the doctrine of universal human rights – the church has conspired with this secularisation with the result that the church almost no longer exists.

As T.E. Hulme said, *An institution is beaten only when it has lost faith in itself, when it has been penetrated by the ideas that are working against it*. The Church of England has accepted the whole secular agenda: the new sexual ethics by which what was once a mortal sin is now only a lifestyle choice; mass abortion; embryo research; the abolition of Sunday, and with it all public acknowledgement of the sacred.

The church hierarchy has also adopted the Marxist agenda which declares that crime is produced by economic forces. So the General Synod's report *Faith in the City* preached that the excluded underclass can be improved by massive inflows of cash. I hesitate to quote Chesterton twice in one morning but, as he said, *If the poor can be made better by becoming richer, why aren't the rich better already?* But the modern church has abolished the doctrine of sin and the notion of personal responsibility and replaced these things with abstract social forces. And the claim that poverty is the cause of crime is a slander and an insult upon the great majority of the poor who remain honest and upright.

But it's worse than that – a lot worse. For at the root of the church's failure of nerve is the surrender of theological and spiritual truth. Like the sexual and social revolution, this began in the 1960s when, some of you may remember, Bishop John Robinson said *Our image of God must go* and when senior clergymen lined up to quote Professor Rudolf Bultmann: *You can't believe the miracle stories in the Gospel and the resurrection in an age of electric light and the wireless*. To show just how complete was the surrender of the church to the forces of secularism, one of the best-sellers in church bookshops at the time was called *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel*

The church authorities have simply caved in. The Church of England has effectively resigned. We have been penetrated by the ideas that are working against us. Does this matter? Marcello Pera, former President of the Italian Senate, says: *Christianity is so*

*consubstantial with Europe that if Christianity goes, everything good in European civilisation goes with it.* Well, we notice that there is deliberately no reference to God in the European Constitution. Professor Pera says:

*A foul wind is blowing through Europe. This same wind blew through Munich in 1938. While the wind might sound like a sigh of relief, it is really a shortness of breath. It could turn out to be the death rattle of a continent that no longer understands what principles to believe and consequently mixes everything together in a rhetorical hodgepodge.*

He asks

*Will the Church, the clergy and the faithful be able to and want to be purified of the relativism that has almost erased their identity and weakened their message and witness?*

Not if The Bishop of Urban Life and his colleagues in the church hierarchy have anything to do with it. They have surrendered to the new regime of democracy, universal rights, diversity, and the moral relativism which can no longer distinguish between right and wrong. Libertarianism will not do. We are not at liberty to do as we please. We have Commandments from God which are few in number but very specific. The new regime we now live under advertises itself as tolerant and liberal. It is not. It is a juggernaut, secular, totalitarian. It is not too much to say that the church which should preach Christ has become Antichrist.

But God has promised he will always leave himself a faithful remnant. Michael Nazir Ali is a leader of this remnant. We are part of this remnant here. And I am thrilled to be able to tell you that Bishop Michael has agreed to come and preach at The New Year City Service next year. Meanwhile, brethren, fight your corner and pray without ceasing.