



Chavasse Lecture No.2

The question of Who Jesus is remains central to the debates in the Anglican Communion. On December 14. the Blog An Exercise in the Fundamentals of Orthodoxy posted a satirical Christmas Carol supposedly being sung by leaders of the Episcopal Church, entitled "O come let us ignore him".

Bishop Michael Nazir Ali addressed this central issue in his second Chavasse Lecture at Wycliffe Hall: Who is Jesus? The Unique and Universal Christ.

Is Jesus simply an agent of God (however exalted) or is he the presence of God among his people?

The theological relevance of Jesus cannot be separated from the historical task of discovering his agenda, and what others thought of him and what he thought of himself. Did Jesus think of himself as unique in his person and work, and did he see that there were universal implications in his vocation?

The mission of Jesus was focussed on the renewal of Israel, the fuller working out of the implications of the return from exile in Babylon and the restoration of an acknowledgement of God's sovereignty. The imminence of God's kingdom is extremely important – the God of Israel is the God who is amongst his people healing and restoring and preparing through those whom he has sent and in his own person.

Nazir Ali debated the muslim view of Jesus as presented by Omar Rageeh in his TV Series The Miracles of Jesus who believed that Jesus exorcisms are sign of his divine authority and of God's victory over evil. Nazir Ali asserted contrary to Rageeh that the Quran does affirm that Jesus' miracles occurred by God's leave. For the Quran Jesus is a prophet, apostle, the Word and spirit of God, and it even mentions his death in 19.33 and 3.55. He hoped that Rageeh could address in a future series what he has learnt from Christian tradition about Jesus and what his Muslim background has taught him.

To the Jewish community Nazir Ali posed the question how far can the Jews within the integrity of their own faith see the marks of the coming messianic age in the figure of Jesus? He affirmed that to understand Jesus and his movement, we have to look at the Jewish people for information and inspiration.

Hindus and Hinduism itself has been changed in surprising and important ways by the encounter with Jesus. The criticism of caste, the emancipation and education of women and the tendency to ethical monotheism took place under explicitly acknowledged Christian influence. But the key question in Hinduism has to do with the uniqueness of Jesus as the Word made flesh whose death enabled human beings to have open intimacy with the God who is the source of their being.

Jesus own presentation of himself as divine wisdom in the search of the excluded, disreputable and the lost. The female form of Wisdom affects our understanding of women as in God's image sharing in a common mission with different approaches. Redemption in Christ does away with distinctions, oppression and subordination which result from the Fall and human sinfulness.

In presenting himself as the Son of Man, Jesus identified himself with the figure in Daniel 7 who represents God's people, and is given divine authority and rule, but only through suffering. This suffering, of God's servant, was expiatory of sin and restorative in dealing with the consequences of sin, including weakness and disease.