

Markan material in the Gospel of Mark appears to be more natural; in this respect, Baum supports 'Markan priority' (252). The differences among the three Synoptic Gospels go well with Baum's idea that the Synoptics partly included the same materials handed down orally. Mark preserved more names; these were not eliminated by Mt and Lk during the process of copying but simply forgotten either by Mt and Lk themselves or by their traditors.

Sometimes, Luke's prologue is wrongly used as an argument to prove that Lk is based on written sources; it is true that Luke mentions predecessors, but as his sources he specifies the tradition of eye witnesses (83f.).

The tradition hypothesis becomes plausible because Baum takes into consideration all relevant analogies (387), i.e. he includes our knowledge of memorising information and of oral traditions such as oral poetry and analogies from Antiquity. He relates the differences between the Synoptics to the verified characteristics of oral tradition; and these characteristics even offer valid explanations for phenomena which represent 'anomalies' from the perspective of the Two Source Theory.

At the end of each chapter Baum summarises the results, which helps the reader to get the broad picture. He carefully weighs his arguments examining to which extent a certain fact can also be reconciled with a theory of literary dependence (e.g. 209). Therefore, one is able to follow in detail Baum's presentation of data and his conclusions.

In particular because of his comments on quantity, Baum's interdisciplinary approach is a very labour-intensive enterprise. The effort was worthwhile because, thanks to his bringing together separate domains of scholarship, the oral tradition hypothesis becomes very convincing.

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The Unique and Universal Christ. Jesus in a plural world

Michael Nazir-Ali

Milton Keynes/Colorado Springs/Hyderabad: Paternoster, 2008;

xii + 158 pp; p/b, £9.99, ISBN: 978-1-84227-551-1

SUMMARY

The former Bishop of Rochester argues forcefully that the fundamental values and virtues that are needed today for human flourishing arise from a Christian vision that is centred on the person and work of Jesus Christ. Accordingly, he deals with the doctrine of Christ, points out the need for a new start with God and ourselves if there is to be any personal and social transformation, lays out different ways of relating Christ to culture, e.g. affirming God-given aspects as well as refusing those that have to do with our fallenness, discusses the relationship of the gospel to people of other

faiths as well as these faiths themselves, and explores the consequences for mission and Church arising from such a Jesus-focused vision.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Der frühere Bischof von Rochester, Dr. Michael Nazir-Ali, hielt 2007 die Chavasse Lectures in Wycliffe Hall, Oxford. Dieses Buch ist die gedruckte Version, in der der Bischof nachdrücklich argumentiert, dass die grundlegenden Werte und Tugenden, die heute für das Aufblühen des Menschen benötigt werden, von einer christlichen Vision herrühren, die auf die Person und das Werk Jesu Christi zentriert ist. Von daher behandelt er die Lehre von Christus, betont die Notwendigkeit eines Neubeginns mit Gott und mit uns selbst für jegliche echte persönliche und soziale Veränderung, skizziert verschiedene Wege, Christus mit der Kultur in Beziehung zu bringen, z. B. das Bestätigen gottgegebener Aspekte und das Zurückweisen von Aspekten, die mit unserem gefallenem Zustand zutun haben, diskutiert die Beziehung des Evangeliums zu Menschen anderer Glaubensrichtungen ebenso wie diese Glaubensrichtungen als solche und untersucht die Konsequenzen für die Mission und die Kirche, die so eine auf Jesus zentrierte Vision hervorruft.

RÉSUMÉ

L'ancien évêque de Rochester, Michael Nazir-Ali, a été invité comme orateur en 2007 pour les conférences Chavasse du Wycliffe Hall à Oxford. Ses exposés sont repris ici. L'évêque affirme avec force que les valeurs et les vertus fondamentales qui sont aujourd'hui nécessaires à l'épanouissement humain sont celles qui découlent d'une pensée chrétienne centrée sur la personne et l'œuvre de Jésus-Christ. Il traite donc de la doctrine de Christ, souligne la nécessité d'un nouveau départ avec Dieu et soi-même pour toute transformation personnelle et sociale, et indique différentes manières de mettre Christ en rapport avec la culture. Il s'agit par exemple d'affirmer ce qui provient de Dieu et de rejeter ce qui résulte du péché. L'auteur traite encore de la relation entre l'Évangile et les adeptes d'autres religions, entre l'Évangile et ces autres religions elles-mêmes. Il explore les conséquences de cette vision christocentrique pour la mission et l'Église.

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In this book of six chapters Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali sets off by suggesting that dignity, liberty, equality and safety are recognized values all over the world. These values, however, can hardly be understood or sustained unless we recognize that they are rooted in the Judaeo-Christian view, moral vision and virtues. This does not rule out freedom, space and recognition for others in an increasingly pluralist society. In acknowledging differences lies the key to understanding and defining areas of mutual cooperation.

Nazir-Ali next examines who this Jesus is – the unique and universal Christ. The basic source remains the New Testament, but he draws on contributions from Muslim,

Jewish and even Hindu scholars, suggesting that e.g. 'Divine Wisdom', 'the Son of Man' and 'Servant of God' are key terms. What can be seen from these titles taken together with other NT material accumulates to a fuller picture, 'rules of faith' and finally the creeds as we know them. The various Gnostic 'gospels' seem far removed from the biblical world view, thought forms and *Sitz im Leben* of the canonical Gospels.

Now to 'the unique and universal work of Christ'. Alienation and disruption is widely observed, and various religious traditions aim to restore universal harmony. Worship and sacrifice in Israel, however, was markedly different. In OT it becomes clear that the sacrificial victim is a human whose obedience leads to communal deliverance. Jesus' teaching and work is focused on his suffering, death and resurrection. Jesus dying on the cross is the most significant event ever, the culmination and climax of 'at-one-ing'. He healed the disruption and opened the way to God the Father. Christ's work was substitutionary, representational and victorious – and truly universal, bringing in reconciliation, healing and justice.

The relation between Christ, culture and context was addressed by Paul, as did Clement of Alexandria and Justin Martyr. The latter's idea of *logos spermatikos* meant that philosophers were able to criticise and refute popular religious notions, not to establish positive truth. Niebuhr's well-known five-point schema of Christ against / in harmony with / above / in paradoxical tension with / transforming culture is used with numerous examples. Christ transforms personal lives, cultures and even impacts Islamic Sufism. The homogenous-unit-principle is also visited positively, appreciating the role of house churches in the New Testament. As an Anglican bishop the author has seen various aspects of both ethnic and national churches.

Nazir-Ali is at pains to point out that the world religions of today have a responsibility for upholding world order, promotion of fundamental freedoms and enlightened citizenship, and, in particular, world peace. If so, they must have the spiritual, intellectual and moral

capacity to do so. Christian faith does have these capacities in general, and salvation history relates to God's universal purposes. The Bible has both a *centripetal* as well as a *centrifugal* model, held together in tension. Nazir-Ali claims that receiving all that God has revealed and done in Christ is the adequate response to the challenges presented – but he stops short of evaluating possible merits of other religions.

The final chapter deals with the Church, whose object is to establish effective Christian witness and service in each city, town or village. This 'incarnational' model of e.g. national churches must be evaluated as people are increasingly relying on professional, social and recreational networks. Secondly, in dealing with leaders who depart from the teaching of Scripture the Church cannot capitulate to culture. It must remain prophetic, challenging – and, if necessary, suffer. In 'transformational mission', in 'life dialogue', without coercion, we gently witness to all that Christ means, has done and what he longs to do. In evangelism the Church evangelizes herself as well, reaching individuals, groups and traditions. Is it possible to live as a Christian within the old cultural and religious framework? This is an ongoing discussion, but believers will have to live with integrity and loyalty and cannot deny their experience nor forsake their Lord.

Nazir-Ali's series of lectures paints a broad picture. The bishop comes across as a church leader with an integrated global vision, argued ably and forcefully. His Oriental origins and varied experience allows him to bring together East and West, North and South, and Early as well as the Emerging Church. It is somewhat disappointing, however, that Nazir-Ali does not speak more directly to the claims that Christ is *not* unique, i.e. the issues raised in modern theology of religion. The book title could suggest that to be the issue being addressed. Even so, the book is a very helpful and encouraging read – highly recommended. It has a bibliography and helpful index.

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