

Article reprinted from *Cross+Way* Issue Summer 2008 No. 109

(C)opyright Church Society; material may be used for non-profit purposes provided that the source is acknowledged and the text is not altered.

NO OTHER NAME – THE UNIQUENESS OF CHRIST FOR SALVATION

By David Phillips

The issue of the uniqueness of Christ for salvation has been bubbling up for some time and has shown every sign of erupting in the last few months. Many are now trying furiously to prevent any such eruption for fear of the consequences.

Paul Eddy, a layman from Winchester Diocese, tabled a Private Members' Motion to be debated at General Synod. By the end of the February Group of Sessions it appeared that his motion had enough signatories to make it top of the list of Private Members' Motions and a certainty for debate at the July Synod. But when the Business Committee of the Synod met in late May Paul's motion was declared to be in second place behind a motion which deals with Church Tourism. Paul has also said that a decision to take this Church Tourism motion with a related item of business was reversed in order to keep his motion off the agenda. The Committee said they could not find enough time to debate it, despite 8 hours being devoted to Women Bishops. It is still possible that the motion will slip in if other business gets through quickly but don't hold your breath.

The Daily Telegraph quotes Paul as suspecting foul play:

"I think they're censoring it on theological grounds and because of the timing. Ten days before Lambeth there would be lots of bishops who would not be comfortable voting on the uniqueness of Christ. Now that Synod has electronic voting, it would have been very easy to show how many of our bishops believed in the uniqueness of Christ as the only means of salvation, something which would have shown the division on orthodox views in the House."

The motion itself is quite tame, it merely asks the House of Bishops to produce a report on *"their understanding of the uniqueness of Christ in Britain's multi-faith society, and offer examples and commendations of good practice in sharing the gospel of salvation through Christ alone with people of other faiths and of none."* But Paul Eddy is surely right that such a debate and vote would potentially reveal just how far removed some of our Bishops are from the apostolic faith.

A survey conducted by Christian Research six years ago asked Clergy whether they believed without question that Jesus is the only way of salvation. Only 51% of the Clergy questioned could agree. Moreover, when the respondents were categorised by their churchmanship the figure fell to well below a fifth of those who identified themselves with bodies such as Affirming Catholicism (co-founder Rowan Williams). The House of Bishops consists of the 44 Diocesan Bishops and a handful of elected suffragans. They are dominated by liberal Catholics and there are no classical evangelicals amongst them, therefore there is good reason to think that less than a half of the Bishops believe that Christ is the only way of salvation.

It is also worth noting that the survey sought to identify churchmanship by identification with various organisations. Broadly speaking the answers suggested that amongst traditional middle of the road Anglicans and Anglo-Catholics just over a third do not believe that Jesus is the only way of salvation. Amongst those who self-identified as evangelical of a broader nature about one in six do not believe it, which suggests that on this issue as others many of those who self-identify as evangelicals have a remarkably elastic way of interpreting Scripture. They can claim to uphold the authority of Scripture and be gospel (evangel) focussed people without accepting a fundamental part of Biblical teaching and the gospel message.

The issue of the uniqueness of Christ had already surfaced in an exchange between Michael Nazir-

Ali (Bishop of Rochester) and Stephen Lowe (Bishop of Hulme). The former had supported calls for evangelisation of Muslims but the latter is reported as saying:

"Both the Bishop of Rochester's reported comments and the synod private members' motion show no sensitivity to the need for good inter-faith relations. Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs are learning to respect one another's paths to God and to live in harmony. This demand for the evangelisation of people of other faiths contributes nothing to our communities."

Notice those words 'respect one another's paths to God'. It is as if Jesus said 'Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations except the nations of the Jews, Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs'. As we will show in an accompanying article by the standards of the Church of England those who hold such a view are 'to be had accursed'. Paul Eddy is right that his motion would have flushed out other Bishops besides Hulme.

Moreover, those who say that we should not share the gospel with Jews, Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs are guilty of discrimination. This was asserted in one of the better motions passed by the General Synod in recent history. It was tabled by George Kavour, now Principal of Trinity College Bristol and a Chaplain to the Queen. The motion, which was passed with a large majority, by Synod began:

That this Synod, whilst valuing and affirming the importance of cultural and religious diversity, is convinced that the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ is for all and must be shared with all including people from other faiths or of no faith and that to do anything else would be to institutionalise discrimination.

Instead of debating a motion about Christ and His uniqueness the Synod will devote its time and energies to Church Tourism and a report entitled 'Sacred Britain'. The sad irony is that if Christians had not believed that Jesus is the only way of salvation there would be no Churches in England. Now it seems the Church of England is more interested in maintaining buildings for people to visit than bringing the light of Christ to people who sit in darkness.

David Phillips is General Secretary of Church Society.