

Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali - Future Mission Talk, Question & Answer At St. Nicholas Church, Sevenoaks on Tuesday 23rd June 2009

Rev. Angus MacLeay: You've given us four areas. I wonder if the best way to approach it is perhaps if we could do them in reverse, perhaps if I kick off with a question and then it will focus on those areas, so in turn if we focus on the Anglican Communion, then the situation in this country, then Islam and then ending with your plans, is that ok? So if we start and if we put the note on the PowerPoint for the FCA. We should have on our seats these flyers for the... (Sorry, have we got the PowerPoint? I think we should have that). It just gives details of the Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans' meeting which is coming up and which you're speaking at.

I mean the criticism is that this is a divisive move, but what is your (to go a little bit further), your justification for being part of the FCA, and what is your hope for the FCA in the sort of short-term? Would that be fair to ask that?

Bishop Michael: Yes, of course. I, as you know, I was unable to go to the Lambeth Conference. This would have been my third conference and I've had a prominent role in the first two but I could not go because about 50 Bishops were invited who had ordained a person who was divorced and in a same-sex relationship, to the Episcopate. The Anglican Communion had said that such people should not, until they repented of what they had done, be invited to representative Anglican gatherings. But they were invited and I did not feel as you all know by now, that I could be at the same gathering as they were.

I did go to GAFCON though only for a short while - I was a speaker there and I went, I was there for 3 days. Valerie was there for the whole time because she had a leadership role in the spouses' programme which arguably was, well at least as good as the main programme - in some ways, much more imaginative. But all I can say is that when I arrived at GAFCON, here were people from an Anglo-Catholic, Charismatic, Conservative and open-Evangelical backgrounds. So quite different, from all parts of the world.

When I arrived there I thought to myself, I prayed that God would make the Anglican Communion like that. There was a basic agreement about faith. There was a desire to worship and to praise God together. There was a considering together of many issues that face the Church and at a very impressive level that I could see. Now, I think anyone who wants the prospering of the Church in this Gospel sense will want this to continue - why should it just be for a week or in my case for 3 days? Why should we not benefit from this coming together?

The Anglican Church in North America - many other, what's the word - associations of Anglicans like the Global South have been doing this now for some years and we are really lagging behind here so I don't think FCA is divisive - anyone can come. But what it does say is that it is not true that Anglicans can believe anything and it is not true that Anglicans believe nothing. It is to affirm confidently the historic Anglican faith, which is nothing more than the faith (or should be nothing more) than the faith of the apostles. That's why I'm very happy to be associated with it. I hope you can be also. But it's not against anyone.

Angus: Well, these are on the seats and as we say, Bishop Michael is addressing I think, leading the communion at the end so people are very, very warmly welcomed to come along to this event on Monday 6th July. Staying on that theme of the Anglican Communion, do we have just one or two questions to the Bishop on that theme?

Questioner A: I thank you very much for the good work that you've done over the years - it's been a great inspiration to us by upholding the traditional faith of the Church but I do sometimes think, can I say with all honesty that the Church of England is a Christian Church? Because when you consider that Camilla Bowles and Prince Charles were given a blessing, both were adulterers and this is not a good example of marriage, and also of course we've got one parent families - the essence of marriage is being eroded and no one is standing up, no one is doing anything. I asked the PCC, could they discuss it - they don't want to know, you know and it worries me. I'd like your opinion please.

Bishop Michael: Of course the Church is surrounded by all sorts of dangers, that is why we are here tonight and we could simply give in to those dangers or we could say that we are going to combat them. I mean, as I've been saying, the question about the family is a very urgent one for the nation, let alone for the Church but the Church has to lead in this.

I was at a Citizen's Assembly last night with some MPs who had the Speaker on their minds I'm afraid - but never mind that - and some journalists and so on. And the people were saying again and again, why is the Church not giving a moral lead, as you have said sir? And I think partly that the reason is that the Church is too comfortable in its culture. This is always a danger for an established Church. I mean, there are good things about establishment, I've defended establishment before - it gives us an opportunity to speak where we would not otherwise have it, and it gives us access to people in all sorts of ways.

But the danger is of capitulating to culture and in many ways the Church has not stood out for the health of the family. In fact over the years as the family has been eroded by various pieces of legislation, it has actually been complicit to be quite honest and it is now up to us to reclaim what the Bible teaches and what the Church formally still believes and say, 'look this is not arbitrary, this is not unreasonable, this is not old fashioned. This is relevant and good and necessary for you now'.

In my own small way, as you all know I've tried to say this in what I've written in the papers or said on television or radio, but we need to keep doing it don't we? So let's do it together.

Angus: Thank you. Do we have another question, perhaps linking in with the Anglican Communion? There's a question, David...

Questioner B: I would like to know whether the clergy believe in the 39 Articles of the Church of England, and when the Reformation was on - can we keep to the, what we believe????? Because the Reformation made this country great, and how we kept to the Scriptures. And now the Anglican churches have gone away from this - the 39 Articles... with every Church like, doing their own thing these days, what could you Bishop do about it?

Angus: Thank you David.

Bishop Michael: Well, I think the first thing to say is that the classical Anglican position is that Anglicans have not believed and are not required to believe anything that the Church has not always believed from the very beginning. That's why I mentioned the teaching of the apostles. So this is not some kind of innovation, some kind of new invention. This is the apostolic teaching becoming, coming alive for us and that is what it should be about.

Now, at GAFCON, what we did was to reaffirm quite clearly what we call the Anglican formularies – that is to say the Book of Common Prayer, the 39 Articles of Religion and the Ordinal as the basis of our faith and life together and if you come on 6th July you will see that that is also what we will do then at, ironically, Methodist Central Hall. I don't know what the Methodists will think of it, but I'm sure they'll approve.

Angus: Thank you. Well let's move on and look more at your third heading Bishop, which was about reversing the historical amnesia in our own country. Again I mean one of the concerns that a number of folk have expressed is that you are one of the more prominent spokesmen voicing concerns and that there is a fear that if your voice is not being heard you know, what voice will be heard to say exactly the sort of things that you were sharing tonight? I wonder if you could just sort of help us on that as we seek to think - how can we reclaim that moral and spiritual framework within the nation?

Bishop Michael: Yes, I think the reason that a person's voice is heard is because it is acknowledged to have some integrity about it and I am very concerned for myself and for the Church generally, that that integrity should not be lost. Now, if that means that I lose the sort of status which gets me a hearing I'm quite aware of this, so be it. I mean this has happened to me before and I have found that if you give up something for the Lord's sake, he does not in any way let you down, let's put it like this.

So I hope that the voice will continue to be heard. It is very important for us to be discriminating about this. There are many sort of siren voices that are promoting British-ness. Well, let them. That is not what I've been about. There are some that even promote a sort of nostalgic sense of the place of the Christian faith in British life - that is also not what I'm about.

What I am saying is that the Christian faith has been the basis of fundamental institutions in this country and of the way in which the human person has been understood and therefore it is not simply an endorsement of whatever is going on in the culture but also an active principle of critique when that is needed. So if we are going to say something to our culture, what is our vantage point? I think that is what needs to continue.

Angus: Thank you Bishop. Well, as we think about our country, do we have any questions relating to that? There's a question...

Questioner C: Bishop, at the very beginning of your talk you spoke about being educated in what we believe and Islam and I think absolutely right because we need to know what they really believe so my question is, is there a good edition of the Koran that, in English, that we could read. It's many years ago since I read it, is there one now that Christians could read and is there a really good book you could recommend that would help Christians understand it correctly? Just be careful, don't get reported: 'Bishop recommends reading the Koran'.

Bishop Michael: Well, I always say read the Bible first. But yes, there is I mean there's a very good new translation by Professor Abdel Haleem of the Koran published by Cambridge University Press I think it is - easy to read. You can read some of my books of course if you wish to in that area or you can read Kenneth Cragg, *'The Call of the Minaret'* or *'The Mind of the Koran'* or *'The Event of the Koran'* - it's a very good basic Christian commentary on how a Christian has read the Koran.

Angus: I mean perhaps also Patrick Sookhdeo's writings - very helpful. But, a question perhaps on our context within the UK. A question from, I think is it Margaret...

Questioner D: When I think that there are probably only about 7% of adults in church more than once a month, and that's all churches, are there areas where we can in a sense not stand on a kind of Christian viewpoint explicitly but argue with others about, because I was listening to the Reith lecture this morning. I don't know if you heard the Reith lecture this morning in which some, a Jewish American was actually saying things sort of very Christian in a sense about human beings and yet was saying it in a basis that would attract many secular people to agree with him and this is the same in a sense with marriage and the position of children in marriage. Should we try to in a way be emollient and irenic and not actually push a Christian viewpoint because we are such a small minority and yet we can take people with us? Or not, do you think?

Bishop Michael: Well we're not as small a minority as the apostles were. You know, I think you know, I'm used to being in a minority in my family, in my nation, in this nation, you know wherever. Sorry about the 20-20 by the way Ian Dobbie. He's taking me to Lord's so I'd better keep on his good side.

No, I don't believe so. I think that what we do need to say is why the Christian point of view is good for people - that it is not arbitrary, this is not something you know just because God says so. It was Father's Day the other day wasn't it? Father's quite often say to their children, 'because I tell you to or because I say so.' Well, that is not what God's commandments are like - they are intrinsically about our personal and social flourishing.

Now the churches have taken of course this emollient line for the last 50 years and it's not got them anywhere. It's actually the reason for the marginalising of the churches because people now don't know what they're for. They don't know what the church is for. In fact the church is there to bring them God's purpose for the ordering of their lives.

Take, let me take an ordinary example: again and again in legislation you have the question about the dignity of the human person that comes up and I have not found even the finest minds, certainly in Parliament (perhaps there are some fine minds outside Parliament as well) actually able to give an answer to why human beings have an inalienable dignity without invoking the Judeo-Christian teaching about being made in God's image and so on.

This is also true about equality. Last year I got the surprise of my life when I was invited to address the new Equality Commission and in fact I got my secretary to ring them up and ask if there'd been some mistake because I am not just you know, your typical person that they would invite. Anyway, they confirmed that they did want me. So I went and this whole bureaucracy, Equality Bureaucracy - it's quite astonishing to meet them.

I mean the only Christians there were The Christian Institute to give them credit and a few people from the black-led churches who are also working for the equality industry. Now I was very grateful for them being there. But what I found was you know all these very well disposed people who all believe in equality but they don't know why. Why should we believe that people are equal? On the face of it, we're not. You know, they're differently endowed - mentally, physically, they look different, they are of different races and backgrounds and cultures. Why should we believe that people are equal?

And of course the answer has to do with the Bible's teaching about the common origin of the human race. You know, this may seem obvious to us but one of the first things that was denied as a result of Darwin's publication '*Of the Origin of the Species*' was

the monogeny of the human race, and out of this teaching of polygeny came all sorts of racist theories that came to fruition both in national socialism as it arose and also in apartheid in South Africa.

So if you are not able to give a reason why the human race is one, and that reason can only be a Biblical reason, why should you believe human beings are equal? So I am a strong believer in saying yes, these values are important for us, this is where they've come from and if you separate values from the worldview from which they arise, sooner or later they will evaporate. Chris Smith doesn't believe so - you know, the former minister. He says, well he acknowledges that the values come from Christian faith but he says it's like a ladder, you know we've climbed up the ladder and now we can throw it away. Wonder what'll happen when he wants to get down again. I always think about that.

So being apologetic has not got us anywhere - I think, let's be clear: this is where it comes from - a flourishing of this worldview will lead to a flourishing of the values and the virtues that we want people to have.

Angus: Thank you very much. Well let's move on to our next area which is Islam and I wonder if I can... I mean one of the books we've got (we've got a tiny little bookstall at the back there) is the book '*Secret Believers*' and it's a great encouragement, just very realistic - it's all sorts of issues, but it does highlight the growth of the Gospel even amidst persecution. I mean, I just wonder if you could perhaps share some of the encouragements that are happening. I mean, we're aware of the recording - you won't be able to go into details but I wonder perhaps if that would also give us a slightly different angle on what is happening with the Church growing in those sorts of areas.

Bishop Michael: Yes, this is a very difficult thing to talk about and I'd rather not talk about specific places but in a particular country as I think I was saying earlier, there is tremendous spiritual restlessness I think is the right word. But this restlessness is not amorphous - it takes particular forms and for many people it takes the form of some kind of experience of Jesus Christ.

Now, from our Christian point of view it's not complete, it's not taught. St. Nic's people would be horrified by what some of these people believe but it is real and the authorities of that country have made every effort to dampen this down and even to kill it and they have not succeeded praise God, but they have tried.

I mean, what can you do, what can the authorities do if for instance in a family if they try to prevent a family coming to church because they are Muslims and the father tells the security apparatus that they have no Christian background but they come to church because Jesus Christ has raised their daughter from her deathbed? I mean this is an actual situation. This is... I mean for the father and for the family this is totally real and in this case, the answer of the security people was, 'well in that case go to church but don't talk too much about it'. Well that is what the apostles were told weren't they? You remember when they were arrested as a result of their preaching.

I was talking to an elder from a church in another country - spontaneous movement among nomadic peoples - I mean, it looked spontaneous to me anyway and I was talking to him before breakfast and someone came a little later and said, 'Bishop your breakfast is ready' and I didn't want to know about it. You know I'm usually quite keen on breakfast but I suddenly realised what Jesus had meant when, you remember the apostles came to him and said, 'Master come and eat' and he said, 'I've food to eat of which you do not know'. And I suddenly, I realised in experience for the first time what that meant. Because what this man was saying to me - ill taught - I mean

he was certainly not formally theologically educated – but what he was saying was absolutely Gospel.

Now I'm hoping that we can help this group to develop some Bible teachers and so forth among them. It's that kind of thing that is going on all over the world praise God and we need to work with such people and strengthen them.

Angus: I wonder just in this second area of Islam and the Church, the persecuted church, whether there are particular questions... Jean on the front row.

Questioner E: You said that we should resist ideology when Islam... but shouldn't the Christian faith affect every area of life so, what's the difference between having a Christian worldview and an ideology that we should resist?

Bishop Michael: Thank you. I think the ideology is such that it leaves no room for human freedom. Let me tell you a story – a long time ago when I was working in a Muslim country, a Muslim friend said, 'we never know when Christians are fasting', so I said, 'well Jesus did say when you fast you shouldn't let anyone know', and it struck me then that this was a very major difference between Islam and Christianity – that we are not supposed to show our piety, whether it's prayer or fasting or whatever it may be whereas in Islam it is a social necessity. That if there is a fast, everyone should be seen to be fasting.

Now this spills over into, for example, law so that dissent from what is officially believed is not allowed. Now, whatever we say about the place of the Christian faith in public life, we are not saying that that should lead to any circumscribing of people's freedom. In fact I believe that a proper view of the way in which the Christian tradition has informed the institutions of state and of custom in this country, leads to recognising freedom and the recognition of freedom is a particular fruit of the Christian faith because of the way in which Jesus invited people to believe but never coerced them, did not seize power to enforce his worldview or anything like that.

So there is a great difference in affecting, in influencing public policy or whatever it may be, and having an ideology that regulates every area of life.

Angus: Thank you. Again on the front row...

Questioner F: Bishop Michael, there are many secret believers in Britain but they are afraid to come out and confess with their mouth that Jesus is Lord because of fear of persecution and afraid that they will lose everything – their social identity, their culture, family and friends and there are many who are born again through visions and dreams in Britain. Now I want to ask you, how as the body of Christ can we help these people?

Bishop Michael: Yes, and I am ashamed to say that the Church has quite often turned its back on such people. It is now waking up to its responsibility; I mean there's been some quite high profile exposure of what is happening to some of these people. I know some of them personally. And I think the media have got interested in the question from the point of view of people's freedom. I mean, so that has been a good thing and we must make sure first of all, in the nation that people are free to believe whatever they like and to change their belief if they so wish. We must not compromise that particular freedom.

But secondly, the Church needs to support those who are working with these people and the people themselves. The Barnabas Fund has been mentioned already, there

are a number of agencies who are quietly working and indeed some churches that are working with such people and we should discover who they are and support them.

Angus: Thank you very much indeed. I think we'll need to... time is pressing so we do need to move on because it would be lovely, I'm going to ask a few folk to pray in a minute but we come to the first of your sections which was OXTRAD. I think we'll put it on the screen just so that folk have got... the wording I was given from Chris Sugden was slightly different - we missed out Advocacy, we've got Development instead of Dialogue so I don't know if that's been a work in progress over the years, over the last few weeks. Can I just ask one or two practical questions: where are you likely to be based for this new ministry?

Bishop Michael: That's a very difficult one; I mean that's a dilemma for us. In some ways the easiest option for me would be to be based in Oxford because I'm a fellow of my college and I have facilities - I often say to Valerie if something happened to her I can at least get 3 meals a day at the College. Not that I'm saying something should happen. So there is that temptation you know, there's the libraries and everything but our 2 sons, Shammy and Ross work, in Kent - in Gravesend and in Gillingham and we feel we need to be around to support them so we have been looking on the, sort of the outskirts of Kent and a particular corridor which is good for their transport which is the Borough Green, Meopham, that kind of ... Istead Rise, Gravesend corridor to see if there was anything suitable that we could afford. It's quite sobering actually I mean I don't know if you are in this situation but after a lifetime of ministry you find you haven't got a house to live in and there is a serious possibility of homelessness if we don't find something. We had found a house and it did answer our needs to a great extent but somebody bid a higher price so we lost it.

Angus: I mean it does, it's difficult for you to say this but perhaps I can ask this with everybody listening. In terms of your funding for this new role, it's a new organisation. As far as I understand it, it doesn't come with any existing funding so I presume therefore it does need to be raised. Do you know where that is coming from at present?

Bishop Michael: Yes, well some of it... I mean we haven't raised the entire amount that we need which is a very modest amount but some Trusts have been very good to us - a particular Christian individual has been very generous but you know, like all of these ventures it is a venture of faith and we have not got any sort of spare resources certainly so you know, there is the need continually to raise money.

Angus: So, sort of accommodation which also needs to be a working base, presumably a sort of study base and then on top of the sort of ministry expenses and travel - all those sorts of things.

Bishop Michael: There is an office in Oxford, a small office which can be used but obviously if I live around these parts I'll need an office at home so we've been looking for a home that's got 4 bedrooms and a study but of course as you know in these parts, prices are not a joke.

Angus: I mean, one of the things we have done, on the screen, you might want to jot it down is the name of the organisation and it's if people do wish to give, we have taken the liberty of just putting our collection box at the back just with that notice on the back for a retiring collection if people do wish to give or indeed if churches wish to take things back to individuals or even PCCs.

As I understand it, because it's in the process of being set up and it's not got charitable status yet, gift aid can be done via Anglican Mainstream and indeed writing

to Anglican Mainstream who are also sponsoring this conference. There's an address on the back but marking any gift for OXTRAD would get there I presume?

Bishop Michael: Yes, I mean OXTRAD is a separate organisation and we have been registered as a company limited by guarantee but the application is in with the Charity Commission for charitable status but they've got a backlog - they did promise it by July, it may come through but in the meantime we are grateful to Anglican Mainstream for offering us some assistance with efficient giving. Well, thank you that's very, very kind.

Angus: Well, I'm sure that many perhaps will want to just register and as we come to pray, very much praying for you and for Valerie, for Shabby and Ross in this venture. In a moment I'm going to ask a few folk who I've sort of, some of whom I've primed beforehand just to lead us in prayer before a final hymn - I'm aware that the time is going on but Bishop I think we're just very, very grateful for the honesty with which you've spoken to us and just for the clarity of highlighting those 4 key areas and especially the way that they all sort of flow on from each other and have been inter-related, which has been certainly very striking as we've listened so I think we do want to express our enormous thanks to you for your leadership over 15 years but also your continuing contribution.

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