

Multi-faith worship

In the 1990s the Church of England produced a report entitled “Multi-Faith Worship”. It contains some good material. It gives an illuminating history of the churches' attitude to interfaith worship, and practical hints on how not to offend people of other faiths. It is clear on the legal position over worship in the Church of England.

More important, the report rules out the more extreme forms of multi-faith worship. 'In their participation in such services, Christians should avoid giving the impression that Jesus Christ is merely one of many saviours. *Christian contributors need not be embarrassed by mentioning the name of Christ.*

'Services in which Christians participate, but in which Christ is not mentioned at all, understandably give offence to many Christians.' (The italics are mine: how amazing that such a statement is felt necessary!) I personally believe that, *at best*, all multi-faith services give the impression that Jesus is merely one of many saviours. But, more specifically, this statement rules out the multi-faith Service of Welcome to Pilgrims in Canterbury Cathedral in September 1989 and the similar service in Newcastle Cathedral in 1984, both of which excluded the name of Jesus. But he is hardly mentioned in the Commonwealth Day Observance either.

Then the report states: The alteration of hymns in order to remove references to Christ, against the original intention of the authors, is not acceptable.' One year's Commonwealth Day Observance – in Westminster Abbey - did exactly that to *All Creatures of our God and King*.

The report continues: 'It is neither appropriate nor lawful for words and actions which are contrary to the Christian faith to be performed in an Anglican Church'. This should rule out the multi-faith service in Bristol Cathedral Chapter House in 1988. There, the Bahais affirmed all religion was one and the Buddhists affirmed salvation by good works. At each Commonwealth Day Observance the Buddhists proclaim attaining Nibbana (or Nirvana) by works, and one year the Hindus affirmed salvation by works.

Good, you may think. But unfortunately on three occasions the report also praises the Commonwealth Day Observance and the splendour of (this) traditional' event. It is the theological chapter that causes me most concern. This takes 13 pages to argue that the Bible supports multi-faith worship (mainly indirectly). Some of the texts referred to are irrelevant. For example, it claims that in the Old Testament, Yahweh (the accurate form of Jehovah) was worshipped by people who were consciously worshipping other gods.

It also claims the Old Testament, unlike the New Testament, doesn't always call for *complete* conversion from other gods. And, says the report, this should modify our view of the Gospel call to complete conversion. But the Bible never commends people who are half converted. And even where the texts quoted aren't irrelevant, they will not support the weighty inferences the report draws from them.

Sadly, the report ignores fundamental questions like: 'Are we all worshipping the same God?' Or: 'Doesn't multi-faith worship involve Christians in encouraging other people to come to God ignoring Christ?' And this report could give those churchmen with only a superficial knowledge of Scripture - alas, they exist - the totally false impression that the Bible supports multi-faith worship. True, it rules out extremes of multi-faith worship but, once the door is officially opened a little, it will swing wide and all sorts of unbiblical and anti-Christian events will follow.

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