

The Death of the Church in England?

In London, England, in the 1370s, John Wycliffe suffered intensive persecution for daring to protest for biblical truth. In 1415 John Hus was burnt at the stake in Prague, Bohemia, for doing the same. On 31 October 1517 a German monk named Martin Luther risked martyrdom and worse - the Inquisition - when he launched his protest for biblical truth: salvation by grace through faith, not merited by works. He sought reform but got division, and the Protestant Church was born.

Protestant societies were not only forgetting God and the truths that gave liberty to their positive energies and made them great, but 'in pride and arrogance of heart' (Isaiah 9:9b) were rejecting God and his word as irrelevant.

British MP William Wilberforce (1759-1833), was passionate about Britain's need for spiritual reformation as it was in a state of advanced decay. Not only had the nation largely forgotten God but its church had mostly returned to a works-based theology, believing that people merited salvation because they were 'good' - not that people were good because they were saved by grace through faith. The awakening and spiritual reform that Wilberforce launched turned the tide in the UK. But today nearly 500 years on from Luther and some 250 years on from Wilberforce, the UK is in trouble again and is desperately in need of a fresh awakening. Moreover religious liberty is fading fast.

All Nations Church in Kennington, South London, was recently ordered not to use its sound system for its sermons or music so as to avoid offending its Muslim neighbours. A Christian nurse from Exeter was recently threatened with disciplinary action after she refused to remove the cross from her necklace that she had worn without a complaint throughout 30 years of nursing.

A Deputy Registrar with Islington Borough Council, was demoted because she refused to preside over same-sex civil partnership ceremonies. A Christian community nurse and professional foster mother was recently struck off the register for failing to prevent a 16-year-old Muslim girl converting to Christianity. A Christian homelessness prevention officer with 18 years experience was sacked by Wandsworth Council for sharing his faith with a client who had lost hope. These cases are just the tip of the iceberg.

While Christians are being silenced, Islamisation is advancing, with Islamic fundamentalists appeased at every turn by short-sighted politicians who lack political courage and hanker after political gain. While Christians are fined, sacked and sued for expressing their faith. If the Equality Bill that is now making its way through the UK parliament passes (as expected), then persecution of Christians may increase dramatically. (Based on various sources). Next week we begin a series on First Thessalonians, a church experiencing hostile persecution.