

# The Trying of your faith worketh patience

I occasionally get sent unpleasant reading material through the post. This, for instance. It's from *The Barnabas Fund*, a charity set up to help persecuted Christians. Perhaps you think all that sort of thing died out when Caesar stopped feeding Christians to the lions. But it didn't. Here we learn of girls as young as nine from Christian families in Pakistan being abducted, gang-raped and left half dead by, as *Barnabas* delicately put it, *youths from the majority faith*. We read of churches burnt to the ground, not once but time and again. Even of Christians crucified in Sudan. And all this alongside the routine persecution and banning of books and crucifixes in many Middle Eastern countries. Try celebrating Mass in Riyadh and see what happens to you at the hands of, shall we say, *representatives of the majority faith*. You see how circumspect your Rector has become. But if there were a Regent's Park in Saudi, you could not expect *representatives of the majority faith* to let you build a church in it.

*The trying of your faith worketh patience*. In England Christians don't suffer physical persecution and deprivation – not yet at least. But we are a church under persecution nonetheless and the Christian faith is traduced, ridiculed and blasphemed all over the place. The sacred names *God* and *Christ* are used only as curses – often tied to the most foul expletives. Scurrilous novels and films pour out alleging that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene or – and – having a homosexual relationship with the Apostle John. The pornographic trash *Jerry Springer the Opera* is broadcast on BBC2 – the channel that began life as a repository for the discerning. On *Jerry Springer* the name of Christ was uttered blasphemously 3000 times and the Controller of BBC2 – who like Cherie Blair calls himself a Catholic – declares there was no blasphemy in it.

But *Jerry Springer* is only a foul emblem of the reality – that society and culture in England today is deeply hostile towards the Christian faith. Imagine the outcry there would be if some of the blasphemies shouted against God and his Christ were uttered against those who are elsewhere described as belonging to *the majority faith*.

But Christianity in England is not only mocked and scorned by the usual suspects – the louts and the rappers of the sordid popular culture and the iconoclastic arty-farty *avant garde*. Christianity is persecuted and denied by deliberate acts of public policy. Let me give a few examples...

It is no longer permissible to teach the Christian faith in schools. This would be racist, sectarian indoctrination. So teachers are allowed only to teach *about* Christianity – as they are commanded to teach *about* Islam, Hinduism, Shinto and the rest. It sounds nice and liberal, but look at what it means. To be in a position to teach *about* Christianity - and indeed all these other faiths - means that the teacher must inhabit some neutral position from which he is able to evaluate and judge all these other faiths. That means the teacher is expected to be secular and what he is commanded to regard as basic are the presuppositions and prejudices of agnosticism or atheism.

We are suffering a hangover from an experiment in social policy which began in the 1960s. I was a university student in those days and I vigorously argued in favour of reform: reform of the divorce law, the Homosexual Reform Bill and the Abortion Act.

I believed the argument which said that divorce was a social stigma that should be removed. We were assured that this would not lead to the destruction of marriage – by people serially nipping in and out of Holy Wedlock as if it were a revolving door. As we were assured that the Abortion Act would end life-threatening backstreet abortions – not that it would result in 190,000 abortions every year; abortion on demand; abortion used as a form of contraception; children ripped untimely from the womb merely because their existence is not *convenient* and might disrupt people's *lifestyle*.

I voted for the Homosexual Reform Bill because I was convinced that this would stop men being blackmailed and criminalized for their private relationships. I read the words in which this Reform Act was framed: *between consenting adults in private*. Where *between* meant two. *Adults* meant twenty-one. And *in private* meant behind locked doors. Now look what we have: the love that once dared not speak its name screams at us in high camp lewd processions along the high street and a militant slob such as Peter Tatchell invades the Easter pulpit of the Archbishop of Canterbury to accuse him of *discrimination*.

There has been a complete inversion of moral values in England over these last thirty years. And Christianity is all but abolished in everything but name. Let me give you an illustration by the use of one honourable English word which describes perfectly the catastrophe which has overtaken us. This is the word *tolerance*. This is one of the great liberal slogans, the old Whig mantra, the benign progressive philosophy of the sainted John Stewart Mill and Mr Gladstone. *Tolerance* for good Whigs, for open-minded liberals was almost a sacred word. You were asked to tolerate those things of which you disapproved. And we all did.

But now look what has happened. *Tolerance* has become a dirty word. The Marxist Herbert Marcuse speaks of *oppressive tolerance*. Why? Simple: if you say that you will tolerate something, you will be condemned for *discrimination*. Your tolerance will be taken to represent a judgement. And this is exactly what is no longer allowed. The eleventh commandment is *Thou shalt not be judgemental*. And we see at once – or perhaps rather belatedly – that this means we are not allowed to say that anything is better or worse than anything else. In other words the distinction between good and evil has been abolished. Satan's Trojan horse has been wheeled into the secular city wearing the benign painted smile of Lord Shaftesbury or Charles Dickens. Of course the horse is full of high explosive.

*The blood dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.*

This is not a matter *merely* of the persecution of the Christian church. Don't think for a minute that secular society will provide a refuge for your conscience, let alone social stability. As long ago as 1930, T.S. Eliot said,

*Do you need to be told that even such modest attainments  
As you can boast in the way of polite society  
Will hardly survive the Faith to which they owe their significance?*

Bluntly: if Christianity goes, the lot goes with it. So what can you do? It's no use joining the Band of Hope or writing to your MP or going to self-improvement classes. That would be just to play into the hands of the satanic forces that brought this catastrophe upon us. *For we fight against principalities and powers, against the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.*

So what can you do? There is only one thing to do. Stop regarding our Christian faith as an agreeable hobby and start regarding it for what it is – a matter of life and death. If the gates of hell are not to prevail then we must fight with our bare hands. There are things you can do. And these are only what the church has always done in times of persecution.

Say your prayers as if your life depended on it. It does. And the lives of your friends and your children and grandchildren.

Read and study the ways of God in the Bible. And learn how all this has happened before and what the remedy was then.

Become devout and passionate in your love for Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. Take this and be strengthened in the power of God.

Love this St Michael's where it has pleased God to place you this morning. And give yourself to it. Take strength from the fellowship here. And be a tower of strength to this fellowship, this church.

And above all give thanks and rejoice. *For so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.*