

While we take for granted our freedom to meet for worship each Sunday, Christians are enduring persecution worldwide. As I speak, the authorities in Libya are torturing four men for converting to the Christian faith. Before the Sri Lankan parliament there is a bill to make Christian conversion a criminal offence. Recently a seventy-five year old woman in Saudi Arabia was given forty lashes for socializing with her men friends. Christianity is illegal in Saudi – one of our most important middle-eastern allies with whom we do massive trade in weaponry. If you are caught in that country with a Bible, or with the Cross around your neck, you will be arrested by the religious police and thrown into prison.

In Pakistan, a thirteen year old girl was taunted for being a Christian by five Muslim youths who then raped her. The rapists were not charged. Churches are burned down every week in Pakistan. A man is on trial for his life in Egypt for converting to our faith. In China a house church pastor has been slung into prison for *utilising superstition to undermine the law*. There have been ancient and established Christian churches in the Middle East since the time of St Paul. Now these are breaking up as never before in 2000 years as hordes of Christians try to leave to escape persecution.

In the face of endemic violence from the radical Islamists, the archbishops and bishops have set up an everlasting talking shop to promote *Christian-Muslim dialogue* and they issue vacuous communiqués from time to time. The uselessness of this project arises from the fact that it is only “liberal” Christians engaging in polite chit-chat with “moderate” Muslims. All ignored by the militants, naturally. I have some experience here. I was once asked to help the Muslim, Professor Akbar Ahmed who told me, *I have more trouble with my own extremists in Bradford than with any number of Christians*

Ah but surely all the atrocities are taking place in far off countries of which we know little? Not at all. Let's come a bit nearer home:

In England a Muslim girl who converted to Christianity from Islam has been removed from the home of her carer after she chose to be baptised. She was placed in a foster home because her father beat her and threatened to send her to Pakistan for a forced marriage. Her carer, who has fostered more than eighty children, did nothing to encourage her to convert

In Sheffield, a primary school head teacher, described by her colleagues and pupils' parents as *marvellous*, has resigned after being accused of racism by parents of Muslim students. The accusation comes after she proposed that the school stop holding separate assemblies for Muslim children and replace them with assemblies which would include all pupils.

Also in England, three Coptic Christian children have been placed by social services with a Muslim foster family after their parents divorced. They were originally placed in the custody of the city mosque. The authority has refused to return the children to the custody of the Coptic Church.

And so on. The nurse who offered prayer to a patient, as part of her ministry to body and soul, is sacked. The airline worker who wears a discreet Cross is sacked also. A child was reprimanded for discussing God at junior school. Public libraries have been instructed to place Bibles on the highest shelf – as if they were some sort of pornography likely to deprave and corrupt.

In the face of all these terrible persecutions, it is easy to be seduced by the arguments of those who tell us there is a *clash of civilisations* between the Christian West and Islam. This is not true. Most practising Muslims desire only to say their prayers and go to the mosque and to have good relations with their neighbours of whatever faith or none. I have not come across many Muslims who object to Christmas decorations or the wearing of the Cross or the public exhibition of the Bible. The truth is more sinister. We are dominated by a secular elite which hates Islam every bit as much it hates Christianity. This elite of atheists and metro-political despisers is also a cowardly elite and dare not attack Islam for fear of getting its corporate throat slit. But it finds it useful to invoke an allegedly outraged Islamic sensitivity in order to persecute the Christian faith.

This secular elite – the Dawkins, Pullmans, Toynbees, Graylings and the BBC entire, targets Christianity because it sees Christianity as the embodiment of those historic and traditional values which, until the contemporary reversal, made this country a place worth living in. A few years ago there was an obscene theatrical show called *Jerry Springer: The Musical*. In this – broadcast incidentally by the BBC whose Director General claims to be a Roman Catholic – there were some 3500 blasphemies of God and Jesus Christ and many insults directed at The Virgin Mary. Jesus wore a nappy. A case was brought and the programme was judged to be inoffensive.

Now look here: I've written a few musicals in my time. How do you think I would get on if I were to submit my latest proposal to the BBC *Mohammed: The High School Years* – with Shi'ite nudity and a pulsating rock score?

The law of the land says we must not discriminate – except in favour of secularism. Did you know it is an offence to teach Christianity in schools as something that is true – though the 1944 *Butler Education Act* assumed it is true? Christianity now must be taught only as one among many religions. The only way this can be done is from the secular perspective. This is atheism by state decree.

Of course the secular Establishment has been massively helped by the very people who might have been reckoned to oppose it. The Bishops and Synod have sidelined *The Book of Common Prayer* and *The King James Bible* and introduced their mindless jogging for Jesus new liturgies and unreadable versions of Scripture. These people are virtually unbelieving in any sense that St Augustine would have understood. For them, Christian doctrine is a sort of long-running

metaphor for the social policies of the soft left. And their eschatology amounts only to a slavish acceptance of the pagan fantasy of global warming. The Bishops and the Synod have also accommodated the church to the secular social agenda which gnaws away at the fabric of the family and public life like the moth fretting a fine garment.

The plain fact is that Europe, and particularly our nation, was formed out of Christian values. The secular assumption nowadays is that you can remove Christianity and all the other good things will stay in place. They won't. If Christianity goes, the lot goes with it

T.S. Eliot saw the way things were going more than sixty years ago when he wrote:

*An individual European may not even believe that the Christian Faith is true, but what he says and makes and does will all spring out of this history of European culture and depend upon that culture for its meaning. Only a Christian culture could have produced a Nietzsche or a Voltaire. I do not believe that the culture of Europe could survive the complete disappearance of the Christian Faith. And I am convinced of that not merely because I am a Christian myself, but as a student of social biology. If Christianity goes, the whole of our culture goes. Then you must start painfully again, and you cannot put on a new culture ready-made. You must wait for the grass to grow to feed the sheep to give the wool out of which your new coat will be made. You must pass through many centuries of barbarism. We should not live to see the new culture, nor would our great-great-great grandchildren: and if we did, not one of us would be happy in it.*

The appalling truth is that our civilization has developed a culture of self-hatred, a death-wish of which the present assaults on Christian freedom are only to be expected. As in St Augustine's day, the repression of freedom is accompanied by the tawdriest and lowdest entertainments and public spectacles. What a falling off there has been. We inhabit the electronic, technological version of the bread and circuses of Augustine's time. The celebration of low life in mass entertainments such as *Big Brother*. The debauched worship of celeb-trash. But a serious civilization and culture can overcome any amount of aggression from external enemies. It cannot, of course, survive its own suicide

Christianity in Britain today is under severe persecution. And it will get much worse. I do not resent this persecution. I welcome it. For it will weed out the pseudo-Christians, the wimpish bishops and the caved-in Synod. By persecution we discover who our true friends actually are. Persecution? Bring it on, I say. We will stand for what is good and right as Christian men knowing whose subjects we are. And if there should come the day when we are murdered by the unholy alliance between the Islamist terrorist and the secular commissar, then so be it. For *the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church*.

What I am preaching this morning is no mere airing of my personal prejudices. I am only quoting what I have read. And this is what I have read:

*They shall deliver you up to be afflicted and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated for my name's sake...rejoice and be exceeding glad, for so persecuted they the prophets that were before you*