

Confessing Christ today

Standing up for unpopular truth



...in the Christian walk opposition is often a sign that we are doing a good job

If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the Word of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Him. Where the battle rages there the loyalty of the soldier is proved; and to be steady on all the battle front besides, is mere flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point. (Luther's Works. Weimar Edition. Briefwechsel [Correspondence], vol. 3, pp. 81f.)

As Christians we are fighting in a spiritual battle, but Martin Luther argued that not all God's truth is under attack at once. In any culture and generation there are certain truths which are more under attack than others. As Christian doctors in the 21st century we need to be aware of which truth is most under attack, and ensure that we are faithful in standing for that truth. It is 'mere flight and disgrace' only to stand for truth which is not being currently targeted.

Most people are very accepting of Christian doctors who mind their own business and just quietly minister to people's needs with niceness, tolerance, decency and compassion. But Scripture is very clear that persecution is part and parcel of the Christian life, and its absence should give us pause for thought about how faithful to God we are being in the truth that we stand for.¹

It is tempting to imagine that if we are being good and faithful Christians everyone will like us, but Jesus said exactly the opposite.² Often in the Christian walk opposition is a sign that we are doing a good job rather than a bad job.³ Many people hated Jesus simply because he spoke the truth – that is precisely why he was crucified. Likewise when we speak the truth some people will hate us.⁴ Persecution began for the early church when Peter, John and Stephen opened their mouths and started to speak unpalatable truth! We must of course speak the truth in love,⁵ but how often do we use 'sensitivity' simply as an excuse for cowardice, when our real underlying motive is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ?⁶

Several events over the last few months have led me to reflect on what truths are under attack in this generation. CMF came under attack for playing a role in the reversal of the BMA's neutral stance on euthanasia last June⁷ despite the fact that our influence was exaggerated in an attempt to sideline all opposition as religious.⁸ Dignity in Dying

(formerly the Voluntary Euthanasia Society (VES)) and critics like Liberal Democrat MP Evan Harris continue to blame CMF for the defeat in the Lords last May of Lord Joffe's *Assisted Dying for the Terminally Ill Bill*.⁹ Former VES chairman Michael Irwin suggested recently on the National Secular Society (NSS) website the setting up of a group affiliated to the NSS to challenge CMF and 'the religious lobby' on issues such as abortion, doctor-assisted suicide, stem-cell research, and voluntary euthanasia'. Perhaps, he hoped, a 'Secular Medical Fellowship' might emerge.¹⁰ In the same article Irwin ridicules CMF members for accepting 'the Bible as the supreme authority in matters of faith and conduct'.

The Times gave front page coverage in November to four UK universities where Christians currently face discrimination.¹¹ In Exeter, Edinburgh, Birmingham and Herriot Watt Universities Christians Unions have come under attack by Student Unions either for restricting their leadership to Bible believing Christians or for teaching a biblical view on sex to their members. Bank accounts have been frozen and access to university facilities has been denied. In Exeter the Christian Union had its name changed by the SU to the 'Evangelical Union' on the grounds that it was not 'inclusive' enough to be called Christian. In these cases the staunchest opposition has come from those who take exception to the exclusive claims of Christ or to the biblical view that sex between two people of the same sex, or indeed sex in any context outside marriage, is wrong. At the time of writing one Christian medical student group is attempting to regain access to a campus from which it has been excluded.

Christian doctors and medical students in this generation need to stand for the views that abortion and euthanasia are wrong, sex is for marriage, the Bible is God's Word and Jesus is the only way to God. These truths are under attack. These views will not make us popular – but if we shrink from standing for them – I would suggest that we are not confessing Christ.

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references

1. John 16:1-4; Matthew 24:9-14; Mark 13:9-13; Luke 21:12-17; 2 Timothy 3:12
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3. Matthew 5:10-12
4. John 7:7
5. Ephesians 4:15
6. Galatians 6:12
7. news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/5123974.stm
8. www.cmf.org.uk/press_release/?id=84
9. www.dignityindying.org.uk/news/news.asp?id=202
10. www.secularism.org.uk/72918.html?CPID=203709943d98ed5730d31aa77d0933c6
11. *The Times* 2006; 18 November