

Remember, remember 31st October

On

31 October 445 BC (according to Jewish tradition), Ezra gathered the people together in Jerusalem, read to them from the Book of the Law, and called them to national repentance. Israel had sinned grievously against God. She had forsaken the God of her fathers and so God had sent judgment.

On 31 October 1517, Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to a church door in Wittenberg. His first point called the Christians to repentance: "When our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, said 'repent', he called for the entire life of believers to be one of penitence." Luther faced two major challenges: firstly, a Church that had become morally corrupt, spiritually deficient and financially grasping, and, secondly, the real possibility of a Turkish Muslim invasion via central Europe. In the face of these challenges he recognised the importance of the Book of the Law - the Bible - and the need for national repentance.

Luther found himself isolated. There were those on all fronts who disagreed with him. Some German pastors even suggested welcoming Islam, seeing it as less oppressive than their situation under the Church, with its Catholic army under Habsburg rule.

On 31 October 2017, when the 500th anniversary of the Reformation will be celebrated, the Church, particularly in the West, is faced with the same challenges that faced Martin Luther. Sadly, the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ is morally complacent, more concerned with social ethics than with the commands of Scripture, spiritually weak to the point of insipidity, and so consumed by materialism that she has lost the reason for her existence. At the same time, Islam now poses a new challenge to the Church. Theologically coherent, community-centred, with a dynamic spirituality, socially and politically aware, Islam has made considerable progress in re-shaping the West through the presence of its own communities and through the influence of Islamic states with massive finance and energy reserves.

But a third challenge has arisen, one which Martin Luther did not have to face. This can be termed the new civic religion – the secular humanism that is reshaping society and has eroded, if not destroyed, the Judaeo-Christian foundations of society, so that the book of the law is despised and Christianity increasingly abhorred.

Western secular governments, concerned for community cohesion and for national security, are increasingly introducing hate speech legislation, which is gradually eroding religious liberty and fundamental freedoms. Christians, both in the West and in the non-Western world, are faced with growing marginalisation, discrimination and sometimes outright persecution.

The call of Scripture is to stand up in the midst of all this and proudly proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord; to affirm that we will not be ashamed of the centrality of our faith, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, His word, His message and His life; that we will not be ashamed of His people, whom we will embrace; and that we will look for that judgment day when we will all have to stand before Him, when He will not be ashamed of us and we will hear His words, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

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Rising from the ashes in Nepal

I AM NOT ASHAMED
Suffering Church Action Week 2017

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Information and resource guide

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