

Persecution – It Comes With The Territory

This is the month we remember our persecuted Christian brothers and sisters around the world and across the ages ever since our Lord Jesus said, *“I will build My Church.”* In keeping with Hebrews 13:3, many churches across America will observe International Day of Prayer (IDOP) to remember persecuted Christians. What does it all mean?

By the 8th Century so many Christians had been martyred for their faith the Church established All Hallows (All Saints) Day on November 1st to remember those who had died for Him. It was like a Christian “Memorial Day.” The night before All Saints Day became a Hallowed Eve – a night to prepare for the coming Holy Day.

During the Dark Ages in Europe, Ireland, Scotland and England, pagan Druids honored their dead on October 31st. Celtic settlers held festivals and ceremonies designed to drive off oppressive evil spirits. Autumn, the time of falling leaves and prelude to winter, symbolized the death of nature. Bonfires were lighted to fend off the coming winter spirits. Treats were given to appease their wicked tricks.

By the beginning of the 16th Century true Christianity was virtually unrecognizable. The Church had moved away from its original message of salvation by grace through faith as the gift of God. Almost any office or rank in the Catholic Church could be bought, and Church positions became dominated by corrupt and materialistic Humanists who ruthlessly persecuted genuine Believers. Meanwhile Muslim hordes with their sights on Europe had invaded Hungary and laid siege to Budapest.

Muslims had been fighting Christians for 900 years when the Protestant Reformation took place. Against the background of every great move of God, Islamic terrorists were creating havoc in the background. Islam is Satan’s thorn in the side of the LORD’s great work. Our Lord Jesus, Who promised to build His Church and not allow the gates of hell to prevail against it, raised up a succession of godly men to bring the ship of faith back onto God’s intended course.

In 1517 Johann Tetzel, an itinerate Dominican monk, toured Europe selling “indulgences” (which could only be cashed in Heaven – to which they claimed to hold the keys), to pay for the Pope’s excesses and to build the new cathedral in Rome. His visit to Saxony prompted Luther to protest the unethical fund-raising tactics of an apostate Church. Luther argued that only God could forgive sins – and it was better to help the poor than to buy indulgences.

On October 31, 1517 Dr. Martin Luther nailed his **“95 Theses against Indulgences”** to the door of the *Schloss Kirsche* (Castle Church) in the university city of Wittenberg, Germany. The hammer blows were felt all the way to Rome. The theological fire thus ignited spread across Europe and changed their culture and work ethic for generations to come.

Luther’s challenge was in Latin, but some enterprising printer translated it into German and began to print and sell copies of it. Soon the *95 Theses* were available in French, Spanish, Flemish, Dutch and Italian. Luther’s dramatic challenge against the unbiblical corruption of “indulgences” was being read in the marketplaces and palaces of Europe. Even the Pope was handed a copy to read.

In the 55 years of our missionary lifetime, my wife and I have worked in restricted-access countries where our work was vigorously opposed by Communists and Muslims. We must not lose track of the fact that our ultimate enemy is not a political or religious system, but Satan himself.

Last month right across America, the Garden Intruder distracted our attention on October 31 from Reformation to Halloween. Millions in the USA were preoccupied with costumes, candy, and “ghoulies and ghosties and long-legged beasties and things that go ‘bump’ in the night” rather than the seriousness of our Reformation heritage.

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In India, beginning in August this year, there was

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major civil unrest in the eastern state of Orissa, where a Hindu militant and four of his followers were gunned down by Maoists (communist) insurgents. (This Hindu leader had been heading up a campaign to systematically wipe out

Christian believers in Orissa.) The Maoists, in a bid to kill two enemies with one stone, blamed the Christians for his murder. The victim’s followers lashed out in murderous revenge against the Christians, with widespread killing and burning of homes and churches. Many fled for survival to the jungles. Response from the government, due in part to international pressure, was slow and inadequate.

This area has a long history of violence against Christians. In 1999 an Australian man and his two sons were burned to death in his car because of his work among the lepers. At Christmas last year others were killed and property destroyed in similar attacks.

As we go to press with this issue of ITM, reports are coming in of intense persecution of Christians in Mosul, Iraq – the last stronghold for Al Qaida – with Believers being shot on the doorstep of their homes and churches burned. More than half of the Christians have fled Mosul. Jesus said, *“The time is coming that whoever kills you will think he offers God a service.”* John 16:2

In Muslim lands that time is now.

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