MY NEW YEAR'S WISH FOR THE CHURCH IN THE UK

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Category: Church: UK

You know what? I'd love to see the church in the UK hitting the headlines because it is talking about Jesus too much, this year.

All to often, it seems to me, the church is in the news because it is talking about itself, very often in ways that are indistinguishable from the wider culture. It seems as though the church is fascinated by status; arguing over who can and can't hold authority and do certain jobs (with a good dash of sex and sexuality added to the mix). Then there are the stories ofÂ British Christians being persecuted, which pander to a romantic view of Britain as an old-fashioned Christian nation.

The problem with these narratives is that they distort the reality of the church. When synods and church councils become the main story, the faithful work of churches in streets and parishes across the country is ignored. When we obsess about the right of Christians in the UK to wear a cross to work, we turn our eyes away from the real, life and death, persecution of Christians in Nigeria, the Middle East and elsewhere.

More importantly, when the church becomes the story, we are no longer pointing people to Jesus and to his Kingdom. Ours is a life changing message about the life, death and resurrectionÂ of Jesus, about his Spirit's power to transform individuals and society, about forgiveness of sin andÂ reconciliationÂ with God and mankind.

Yes, I know that the politics (especially the gender politics) of some branches of the church in the UK are complex. I know, too, that it is becoming difficult to express Christian faith in some contexts in the UK.

However, we mustn't let the world squeeze us into its own mould of status seeking and victimhood. We have to challenge the world with the awkward, feisty and counter-cultural message of a God who suffered on our behalf and who calls us to full allegiance to him.

Easier said than done, perhaps. Especially with a media who are ever eager for a sniff of conflict or controversy. But wouldn't it be wonderful if at the end of 2013, the papers were complaining that Christians were spending too much time talking about Jesus?