

Abstract (249w) for IAMS Study group Rel. Freedom, Persecution and Mission, Seoul 2016:

Conversions and Transformations despite Persecution: John Bunyan and John Wesley as Missional Key Figures of 17th and 18th Century England and Beyond

John Bunyan and John Wesley can be regarded as England's most influential religious figures of their respective centuries. While Bunyan represents the Puritan-Nonconformist struggle for freedom of religion and worship prior to the Glorious Revolution of 1688, Wesley embodies the Pietist-Methodist movement and its mission to "spread scriptural holiness throughout the land" during the 18th century Evangelical Revival. A comparative study of these figures in their respective interreligious and social contexts can avoid denominational biases and demonstrate striking similarities. Both had a paradigmatic conversion experience and understood conversion as a process, which is quite different from contemporary evangelical recruiting practices in the West. Bunyan's works *Grace Abounding* and *The Pilgrim's Progress* are classic examples of this concept of conversion as well as the corresponding pattern of Christian pilgrimage.

Both preachers were willing to stand persecution for following their divine call. Bunyan's twelve years in prison for unlicensed preaching gave him an even greater platform for his message. From there he preached with the pen and reached millions of readers. Although Wesley lived through a century of significantly more religious freedom and despite his privileges as Anglican priest and Oxford Don, he also suffered considerable persecution for his aggressive and comprehensive itinerant evangelism which disregarded parish boundaries. Consequently, both men's ministries have resulted in numerous conversions worldwide and also in the transformation of large segments of English society.