

PERSECUTION AS AN EFFECTIVE CATALYST FOR THE PROPAGATION
OF CHRISTIANITY.

NBTS
M.Div
F83-P

SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF
THE NIGERIAN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY,
OGBOMOSO, NIGERIA.

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE,
MASTER OF DIVINITY

BY
PASTOR DAVID OLADELE KOLADE

JUNE, 2001.

06 — 1087

A. Conclusion

Christian persecution is indeed a painful scenario. Being flagged off from the days of the martyrs of Stephen (Acts 7:54-60), the Church had experienced great hardship and unrest (Acts 8:1b). According to O'Donovan, "persecution is a painful discipline..."¹

During those period, Christians and clerics were subjected to varying degrees of humiliation and death. The manner of their death varied. While some were drawn, others were simply burnt to death.²

The intensity of hostilities in some cases went beyond death. In order to ensure the dis-continuity of Christianity among future generations, it was not uncommon that Christians were denied statutory rights to monas-tries and land even when they were bonafide qualified to such facilities.³ This led to decline in Christian education and by extension discipleship.

¹W. O'Donovan, Biblical Christianity in African Perspective, (N.S.: Peter Master Press, 1996), p. 526.

²J. L. Gonzalez, The History of Christianity (US: Harper and Row Publishing Co., 1984), p. 56.

³J. H. Nicholas, History of Christianity (1650-1950) (New York: The Ronald Press, p. 20).

Most Christian literary works were endangered. Christian scriptures and other holy books were either confiscated or burnt.⁴ The dearth of Christian literature had been readily linked to such barbaric "acts" in their effort to exterminate Christianity.

However, the enemies were proved wrong. Rather than being burnt, Christianity grew through persecutions. A glaring attestation to this fact was that Saul went to Damascus to persecute the Church but he returned a Christian.⁵

The ripple effects that resulted from the conversion of Saul were further aided by persecutions. This was appropriately observed by Keeley.

This evangelistic calling helped by persecucion which drove the movement both eastward and eventually into Southward Russia and westward to the New world.⁶

That was the beginning of foreign Missionary works which began in 1783 until today. These foreign Missionaries were responsible for the spread of Christianities many African countries including Nigeria.⁷

⁴R. C. Petry, A History of Christianity, (New Jersey: Prentice Hall,), p. 55

⁵P. Alexander et al, The Lion Handbook to the Bible, Lion Publishing Plc., (1975), p. 228.

⁶R. Keeley, Christian in today's World (U.S.: WM.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965), p. 68.

⁷D. Reeves, Jesus and the Church, (Ibadan, Nigeria: Scripture Union, 1965), p. 50.

In conclusion, therefore, it is absolutely correct to assert that persecution is not an end but transitory. The case study of the persecuted Christians attested to this. They, "did not make persecution an end in itself."⁸

Rather than being discouraged, persecuted Christians regarded themselves as being on the errands of Jesus Christ. According to Chamber,

"...when we were on Jesus Christ's errands no time is to be taken in standing up for ourselves. Personal insult will be on occasion an the saint for revealing the incredible sweetness of the Lord Jesus."⁹

This is no doubt in line with the assertion of Paul that anyone who intend to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted by the unregenerated (2 Tim. 3:12).

Finally, it is hoped that necessary information has been given in this project as to encourage future research works on related and allied subjects. Prominent among such areas are the proliferation of churches and the attendant doctrine of prosperity all over major cities and towns in Nigeria today.

⁸J. P. Kealy, The Early Church and Africa, (Nairobi: Oxford University Press,), p. 204.

⁹O. Chamber, Studies in the Sermon on the Mount, (Worcester: Oswald Chamber Pub., 1997), p. 46.

B. Evaluation

- (1) The impact of persecutions on Christians had been both bitter and unfortunate but rewarding. It was bitter and tragedy in the sense that lives and properties were lost in the process. In Nigerian context, it had been stories of woes and pains for the Christians. They had been at the receiving ends from their Islamic brothers.
- (2) It has been rewarding in the sense that persecution had greatly helped Christianity to spread to Nigeria.

C. Recommendations

As effective antidotes towards further persecutions of Christians, the following recommendations are put forward. These are spiritual and governmental.

- (1) Spiritual approach should be adopted. Here, Christians should pray for the intervention of God who is able to control all hearts including the unbelievers' for peaceful co-existence.
- (2) Co-existence of Christians should be promoted and encouraged. The National Youth Service Corps Scheme is already promoting inter-religious

harmony among the members of the scheme through de-religious strategies.

- (3) Government should be neutral on all matters of religion. Rather than support a religion as against others, every religion should be allowed to strive on equal terrain.

Religious disharmony is undesirable. It should be discouraged. Christianity should be allowed to flourish unhindered any longer.

- (4) In Nigeria here, persecutions had always been from the Muslims against the Christians. The reverse case has been very rare if at all it happened. The Christians were dispersed in the process and evangelism tempo rises.

This attracts more persecutions. The vicious - circle so created is a potential subject for further research.