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THE PERSECUTION OF STEPHEN AS A CATALYST TO  
THE EARLY CHURCH GROWTH..

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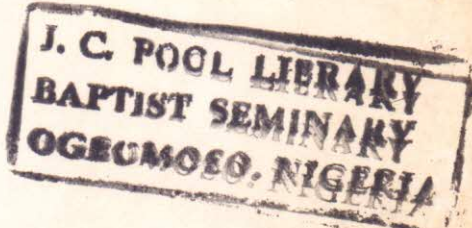
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## CONCLUSION AND REMARKS

Reading through the writings of Luke in the book of Acts and also getting familiar with the experiences of Christians of the early centuries, one cannot but agree that persecution is a catalyst that enhances church growth and an instrument used by God to wake up the church to the great commission "Go ye and make disciples of all nations"<sup>1</sup>.

From the story of Stephen the writer concludes that what believers could not do of their own free will was achieved through persecution. The numerous disciples at Jerusalem were fighting over daily distribution of material needs, neglecting the task that was committed to them until the Lord scattered them through great persecution that arose after Stephen's death.

Without serious persecution, Christians would be complacent. They would compromise and would just sit down in the church building to enjoy the blessings of God without reaching out to the lost to fulfill the Lord's assignment of soul-winning. They would have hidden the light under the bushel contrary to the Lord's injunction that the church should be a light in the dark world.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 28:19 RSV.

When persecution comes it refines the church and purges it of all vices and makes believers more zealous for evangelism. No matter what happens, persecution cannot destroy the church. It can only hasten its growth. As far as the church still remains in the world, it cannot avoid persecution because the path of the church is a path of persecution. The way of life of the church is quite distinct from the way of the world and therefore there is bound to be conflict between the two unless the church compromises.

From the persecution of Stephen, the following lessons can be drawn about persecution:

1. Persecution brings unity among Christians communities.
2. It enables Christians to be more committed and fervent in spreading the gospel.
3. It makes Christians to have a common identity and goal.
4. It may lead to the conversion of persecutors. The case of Paul was an example.
5. It reveals the heart of the believers and helps us to know who's who in the faith.
6. It leads to church growth both internally and externally.

In his farewell message to the Christians at Lystra Paul said "We must through many tribulations enter the Kingdom of God"<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup>

Acts 14:22 (NKJV).

The road to heavenly bliss is not easy. It is by the grace of God. We must struggle to see that we make it on the long run.

We should look to Jesus Christ during the time of persecution, for he himself had experienced such before.

"Looking to Jesus the author and the finisher of our faith who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God"<sup>3</sup>.

If Jesus was seriously persecuted so also will all his followers be.