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**PERSECUTION IN THE HISTORY OF THE EARLY CHURCH
A.D. 30 – 200 AND ITS RELEVANCE TODAY**

IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Persecution started with our Lord Jesus Christ during his earthly ministry. He was persecuted by Jews of His days. This persecution continued even with the apostles after Jesus had ascended to heaven. In fact, it is causing a lot of problems to the Church.

.This work will examine persecution historically how the early Church suffered persecution in the past from A. D. 30 – 200. This will be examined in chapter two, while chapter three will look at persecution in Nigerian situation and then chapter four will deal with its impact on the church as well as Christendom.

There will be recommendations and suggestions in chapter five concerning what needs to be done during persecution in Nigeria and the world at large.

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RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

A. Recommendations to the Church in General

This chapter will basically deal with suggestions and recommendations to the Church in general. Since persecution has been causing problems right from the inception of the Church, the Church has not been free from violence and trials. Consider our Master Jesus Christ who suffered persecution during his earthly ministry. In fact, the Lord Jesus was persecuted right from his childhood. The hand of the enemy was against Him to destroy Him, and He had to be taken to Egypt for protection. Persecution of the Lord was prophesied. The Bible said that, He will be despised and rejected by men, acquainted with grief and sorrow.¹

Despite the persecution that our Master Jesus Christ went through, He was always occupied with His Father's business. If the church wants to grow in the image of the Master Jesus, she must learn to walk with the Master Jesus daily. Similarly Nehemiah was opposed in rebuilding the temple, yet, he did not give up. He served God faithfully despite persecution. This was another intimidating dimension of their trouble and persecution. People in both urban and rural contexts were paralysed with

¹Fomum, The Way of Suffering for Christ, p. 20.

fear when new threats came from their enemies, yet they did not give up.² So in the same way, the church of Christ should not give up because of trials and persecution.

1. The Church Should Put on the Whole Armour of God

Hornby defines armour as "defensive covering made of metal, steel, etc. for fighting, armour car, tank is to be equipped with tanks, vehicles, guns for protection."³ Hornby is explicit in his definition of armour. Hence, armour is used for defence and protection. The Bible admonishes the Church to put on the whole armour of God and to be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Thus:

Put on the whole armour of God that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil, for we are not fighting against flesh and blood but against the principalities, against powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places (Ephesians 6:10-13).

The Bible has shed enough light on what the church needs to do at this present dispensation. The church of God should equip herself with the whole armour of God since armour is used for defence and protection, the church of Christ should be prepared to defend herself. It is crucial to take into consideration the body of the ancient soldier was fairly well protected to ward off the offensive weapons wielded against him. One of the most effective defenses was the shield or buckler expressed by Hebrew words such as the round shaped shield as well as shield covering

²Raymond Brown, The Message of Nehemiah: God Servant in a Time of Change (Montford Street: InterVarsity Press, 1998), p. 79.

³Hornby, p. 41.

the whole body for protection or be used to raise a protective roof over the attackers for effectiveness in battle.⁴

The above passage is explicit on what the Church needs to do in this generation where persecution is rampant in Africa. The Church should be prepared to defend herself. The Church must fight both and nail with whosoever disrespects God. By the way, God did not condemn Elijah for slaughtering the 450 prophets by Baal. It is better for the Church to fight back and defend herself.⁵ Nehemiah 4:7-9, 13-17 explained that the people of God defended themselves when Tobia and Samballat arose to attack them when they were rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem because from that day, half of the servants worked on construction and half held the spears, shields, bows and arrows, each laboured with one hand and weapons on the other hand.

The above passage has elucidated clearly concerning what the Church should do. There is provision for the Church to defend herself from the attack of the enemies just as the people of Israel did while rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem. The Bible explained vividly that security agents were employed while those who were working on the rebuilding were well armed with weapons to defend themselves. The Bible has a provision for self defense. If possible, the Church should make provision for defensive weapons and store them in a hidden place for the sake of

⁴Merrill C. Tenney, The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible in Five Volumes, pp. 319-320.

⁵Sylvestewr Nwanjobi, "The Church and the Persecutors," Shining in the Darkness, Vol. 1.5, December, 2000, p. 3.

security and defense. The Church ;should not be brutal or rather the Church should be prepared to defend herself.

2. Preventive Measures Towards Persecution Through Prayers and Fasting

Taking preventive measures through prayer and fasting is far better than cure. Meanwhile, we shall consider what the Bible says about prayer in Philippians 4:5-6, "Let all men know your forbearance, the Lord is at hand. Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." The above passage has shed more light that the Church should let her requests known to God. God is able to deal decisively with her persecutors for the Lord is a Warrior. He is able to prevent them before their operation because He is a Man of war. The Church is called upon to pray and fast for her persecutors in Nigeria. Prayer and fasting is very important in moving the Church forward. Robinson said that prayer is talking to God for others. Just as Robinson has explained above, the Church should take preventive measures of crises and persecution through prayer and fasting, because with God all things are possible.

Instead of fighting the battle by one's effort, the Church should call for divine intervention in times of trials and persecution. Moses says to the people of Israel, "The Lord will fight for you and you have only to be still for the Egyptians you see today, you will never see them again for the rest of your life (Exodus 14:13-14). God is able to deal with the persecutors on behalf of the Church.

