

# THE RESPONSE OF THE CHURCH TO PERSECUTION IN NIGERIA

DELIVERED BY

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(ANGLICAN COMMUNION)

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Jesus Christ said “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. *If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they keep my word, they will also keep yours*”(John 15:18-20).

## **Protocol:**

Greetings,

- We welcome scholars and faculty members of the Oxford Centre for Religion and Public Life from Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas who are hosting this lecture.
- Scholars and faculty members from the Oxford Centre for Religion and Public Life from around the world,
- Members of the Anglican Communion from around the Globe
- Members of the International Organisation for Peace Building and Social Justice, from the Nigerian diaspora
- All Participants, Members of the media, Ladies and Gentlemen

## **Lecture Introduction:**

Our OCRPL faculty member Dr Anna Belele from Ukraine will introduce the LECTURE.

PREAMBLE: We Appreciate the Vision and courage of those God used to establish the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, Samuel Vayney, Canon Sugden, Dr. Anna and others. Thank you for inviting me to this Lecture, as you may know, I am a Pastor and will speak from the Pastoral perspective and not presenting an exhaustive Academic Paper. As an Inquiry it is “Faith Seeking Understanding”(Anslem). It a sharing borne out of what we have and continued to experience as Christians in Nigeria and especially in Northern Nigeria.

## **TOPIC: THE RESPONSE OF THE CHURCH TO PERSECUTION IN NIGERIA:**

### **Introduction:**

**Africa has been a Bleeding and Tearful Continent, and she has suffered generational degradation and violence but has remained resilient and thriving. Her offsprings have been enslaved by the Arabs through the Trans-Sahahran Trade for many centuries and Islamic has been forced on her; again her children have been enslaved by the Europeans through the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade for centuries. Do we dare speak of the lives that were wasted. When the Berlin Conference was held in 1884 and 1885, Africa was portioned among European countries and that sealed the fate of Africa. Colonization and Neo-colonialism and the scramble for the Rich Resoures of Africa are still with us. Religious Imperialism is on the rise and Persecution of Christians in Nigeria is part of it. Those who have persecuted Christianity have seen it with a political lense as a colonial expression even when it is manifestly Islamic and Arabic imperialism.**

The Church of God in Nigeria has faced various forms of persecution, primarily in the context of religious conflicts in the country. Nigeria is a culturally and religiously diverse nation, with significant populations of both Christians and Muslims. This diversity sometimes leads to tension and conflict, particularly in regions where the religious demographics are sharply divided. There is the tendency to think of Nigeria as Muslim North and Christian South. This is not true because there is a large population of Christians in the North and a large population of Muslims in the South West of Nigeria. The fact is that the Muslims have political, economic and social dominance in the North while Christians have similar dominance in the South. Some of these factors have played into Christian-Muslim Relationships in Nigeria.

### **What is Persecution:**

The etymological origin of the word persecution is the Latin equivalent *persequi*, meaning to “pursue”. Put simply, religious persecution refers to any unjust action of any form and level of hostility directed at individuals or groups regarded as the religious other, essentially for faith-related reasons, resulting in any kind or level of harm to the victims. What distinguishes religious persecution is the primacy of religion as the leading factor for the persecution.

The Biblical History shows that the chosen people of God, Israel, have been subjected to suffering and persecution by the Heathen Nations around them all through history. Bondage and suffering were at the heart of the making of God’s people; the deliverance

wrought by God in the midst of their suffering has been the bedrock of their faith in the Living God. Jesus did not mince words in what Christians should expect and about the Cost of Discipleship cf John 15: 18-21. Be it in the Early Church, Totalitarian or Revisionist Regimes or the Rise and Dominance of Fundamentalist Islam suffering for Christ is an integral part of the Christian calling. You cannot follow the Crucified Lord and Saviour and not expect persecution, especially when you walk the narrow path of the truth of God's Word.

Therefore, persecution of the Christian Church is as old as the history of the Church itself. However, there is a profound difference between the attitudes of the early Church towards persecution and that of the Church today.

Unlike in the Early Church, where Christians gladly endured persecution, sought and willingly embraced martyrdom, the reverse seems to be the case in our days. This is not to say that martyrdom in Northern Nigeria is sought for or informed by an individualistic and romanticized pietistic desire to die and be with Christ! Martyrdom is meted out against Christians by the virtue of being the Disciples of Christ in a predominantly Muslim population. After the riot, burning and killing of Christians in 1987, the Rt. Rev Titus Enyolorunfunmi Ogbonyomi convened a One Day Synod which he titled "Baptism of Fire". And both Prophet Isaiah and Apostle Paul acknowledge "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it written: 'For Your sake we are killed all day long, We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter'"(Romans 8:35-36).

The history of religious persecution in Nigeria dates back to the colonial era and has not abated; rather it is occurring increasingly at a more complex level.

The persecution faced by the Church in Nigeria includes violence and attacks, Government policies and legal connivance, Displacement of Communities, Sociopolitical and Economic Pressure. There have been numerous incidents of violence against Christians, attacks on churches, clergy, and congregations. These attacks are often perpetrated by Extremist Groups such as Boko Haram in the Northeast, and Armed Fulani Herdsmen, that have Inflicted much pain on peasant farmers in Northcentral, Eastern and Southern parts of the Country.

Many Christians have been displaced from their homes due to the ongoing violence. This has created a humanitarian crisis, with displaced persons often lacking access to necessities. There are concerns about government actions or inaction that exacerbate the situation for Christians. This includes allegations of bias in the enforcement of laws and protection of citizens, as well as issues related to religious freedom and discrimination. Christians in some areas face sociopolitical and economic pressures, including discrimination in employment, denial of political office appointments, relegation of Christians who are community leaders as second-class and outright imposition of community leaders, and discriminatory access to education and to

services. These pressures can make it difficult for Christians to practice their faith openly and without fear.

Despite these challenges, the Church in Nigeria remains a significant and resilient religious institution. It continues to provide spiritual, social, and humanitarian support to its members and the wider community, advocating for peace, justice, and reconciliation in a divided society.

## FAR REACHING PERSECUTION

“Open Doors International”, a non-governmental organization established in 1955 to act for and on behalf of persecuted Christians all over the world, in its publication of January 18, 2023 reported that,

“Nigeria accounts for 89% of Christians martyred worldwide.” Out of the total of 5,621 Christians killed for their faith during the reporting period, Nigeria recorded 5,014, marking the country as one of the most dangerous places to follow Jesus. The report tracked the period from October 1, 2021 to September 30, 2022.”

## CASE STUDY OF NORTHERN NIGERIA:

Two types of discernible persecution are experienced by Christians in Nigeria, particularly in Northern Nigeria. These are;

### **1. *Insidious Persecution;***

“This type of persecution is prevalent and endemic in the Northern states of the federation and typified by the daily experiences of many Christian minorities in the Northern region. Some examples of this type of persecution include:

Discrimination in employment. Often, we see what happens in these states each time employment opportunities present themselves. Muslim applicants are often preferred over and above those of the Christian fold even when they possess superior qualifications and expertise. Qualifications and merit take backstage while religion and ethnicity are preferred. Kaduna, Kano, Niger, Bauchi, Sokoto, etc are notorious for these nepotistic practices.

The other example is the denial of Church building permits. It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of the needle than to have building permits granted by many Northern states to erect Churches and worship centers.

Other examples of insidious persecution include but are not limited to stagnation in promotion in public service; suppression of ministries; preventing Christian pupils from receiving Christian Religious Education; denying Christians the opportunity to reach elective and appointed positions; imposing the veil on Christian female students; denying Christian students a place of worship on campuses (whereas mosques are

built in virtually every block); discrimination in admission to tertiary institutions (professional courses are an exclusive preserve of Muslim students while those of other faiths are admitted for nonprofessional courses).

Others include, forcing and abduction of young Christian girls into marriage against their parents' wishes (while forbidding their daughters from having any relationships with Christian boys). Denial of land for building of Churches – in some states it's like they vow never to allow the building of Churches in some major cities, Zaria city in Zaria is a typical example. Denial of access to state media, where only 30 minutes slot is given to CAN to do their Christian programme on a State television for the whole week in some cases.

Such discrimination is very common in most of our Northern states and has become the new normal for Christians in Northern states. These common practices of persecution accentuate the domination-subordination relationship between Muslims and Christians in Northern Nigeria. In a nutshell, insidious persecution in the North is made possible oftentimes through the deployment of instruments of state to target and marginalize Christians. This type of persecution impinges on the dignity, development, and religious liberty of Christians.

## ***2. Elevated Persecution;***

The second type of persecution that Christians in Northern Nigeria are subjected to is known as elevated persecution. This form of persecution was before now intermittent, but in recent times has become more entrenched and is evolving. Elevated persecution is a more lethal form of persecution. It is employed by extremists such as Boko Haram, ISWAP, and Fulani herdsmen Terrorists against Christians in Northern Nigeria. Not satisfied with the outcomes of insidious persecution, Islamists began to adopt a more vicious strategy against Christians living in the region.

At first, it took the form of sporadic violence involving attacks against Christians, Churches and homes. Recall the attacks of Christians in Kaduna in 1982 where eight Churches were destroyed and 400 people ( the officially released figure) massacred. In 1984, a violent attack erupted in Jimeta Yola killing 700 people and thousands were rendered homeless. In 1987, Muslims in Kaduna, Zaria, Kano, and Katsina launched a half-week jihad where over a hundred churches were burnt and property destroyed including our seminary in Wusasa Zaria; several Christians were butchered and roasted to death. In 1991, on October 14th to be precise, Muslims went on a rampage in Kano to disrupt a mega crusade where the German Evangelist Reinhard Bonkie was to feature; they had planned to murder him. Many Christians, over 200, were killed as reported in the News Watch magazine and some were dumped in wells.

In December 1994, one Mr Gideon Akalaka was openly beheaded for allegedly defiling a portion of the Quran; his detached head was paraded in the city of Kano. A gruesome attack was unleashed on Christians in Sayawa in Tagawa Balewa in Bauchi in 1995 on July 1st and 7th; 77 churches were burnt but more painful was the massacre of 36

women and children taking refuge in a building in Gungu-Zango; some women especially the pregnant ones had their bellies ripped open.

In Maiduguri in 2006 in reaction to the Danish Cartoon of the Prophet Mohammed published in a Danish newspaper, scores of Christians were killed while places of worship were either burnt or destroyed. The protest at Nigeria's hosting of the Miss World beauty pageant in 2002 led to the killing of some Christian. Some of you may also remember the protest that erupted in Europe and cascaded into the Northern states of Nigeria because of Pope Benedict XVI's Regensburg lecture in September 2006.

Nigerian Christians are subjected to such episodic attacks at the slightest rumor of blasphemy or provocation, – a more recent one was the gruesome killing and setting ablaze of a young Christian girl Deborah in 2022 in Sokoto, for blasphemy as reported. Whether committed in Nigeria or abroad after such attacks occur, the usual reaction from state authorities and Islamic religious leaders is to dismiss the action as the activities of miscreants and hoodlums. The government hurries to carry out an investigation into the incident with a promise to bring the culprits to justice, but soon afterward, nothing is ever heard regarding that.

### **3. PERSECUTION AS TERRITORIAL CONTROL AND CONQUEST (CALIPHATE).**

There is shift or rather a drive to actualize the establishment of Emirates and a Caliphate which is strictly ruled with Islamic laws and Jurisprudence. It is a continuing Jihad and Jihadist movement. Elevated persecution has taken another pattern in the last 5 years. This has taken the form of invasions of isolated, geographically dispersed Christian villages by armed terrorists of Fulani extraction. Boko Haram use similar methods to capture Local Government areas and impose their control. By this method they capture and occupy territory. Christian Communities have been exterminated and occupied by Fulani Herdsmen. These attacks have become increasingly widespread, highly organized and sophisticated. Armed attackers take victims by surprise, usually arriving late at night or before dawn to wreak havoc on sleeping communities. States like Plateau, Benue, Taraba, Adamawa, Borno, Niger, Kaduna, etc. have all tasted the brutality of these assailants and persecutors.

Nigeria is a very diverse and complex nation. Prof. Yusufu Turaki therefore cautions that persecution cannot be viewed in isolation from other factors which include “politics and economics”, which “may trigger crises and conflicts are dominated by ethnic, land, religious or cultural matters.” One can say that these Jihadists carry out their heinous crime using Religion but having political, economic and other agendas. Nigeria is a dynamic and growing complex society. The attempt to forcefully create a community other than pure peaceful social rebuilding will create many problems

The historian Max Siollun is however more specific on the thin line of religious divide; “Nigeria is unique in terms of its religious composition. It is the only country in the world with its population split between Christians and Muslims. The changes that brought about this religious pattern occurred in the 19th and 20th centuries and were among the most rapid and remarkable mass religious conversions in the history of mankind.” While there was a preponderance of African traditional religions “in pre-colonial cosmology”, Siollun goes on to ask why should the Islamic groups think that they can create another Caliphate by exterminating Christians and moderate Muslims in spite of the present reality. Max Siollun offers some insight when he opined that:

“Africa was the first place in the world to practice Islam outside the Arabian Peninsula. Traders and migrants brought Islam to the Kanem-Borno Empire on Nigeria’s north-eastern frontier (in the modern-day Borno area) in the 11th and 12th centuries, and it arrived in Hausaland (to the west of Borno) in the 14th century. Portuguese traders introduced Christianity to the Benin area in the 15th century. However, it remained dormant and did not gain traction.”

The historical forces that have shaped colonial Nigeria and continue to shape the politics of contemporary Nigeria, especially its religious formation and religious struggles, are grounded in colonial structure, and promoted today by the global Islamic extremism and movement.

#### **4. PERSECUTION BY ENSLAVEMENT AND ECONOMIC**

**EXTORTION: Christian Communities and Leaders are targeted for kidnap for ransom at very exorbitant cost. Where such ransom is not paid victims are killed. In the bid to raise the money and goods Christians are further impoverished. This is Criminality that is at the service of Religion and economic interest of some people.**

#### ***Impact of Persecution***

The Insidious, elevated, territorial conquest and economic extortion and other forms of persecution have badly affected both Northern and Southern Christians and the generality of Nigerian people in different human endeavors, the family, the Church, socio-economically, health and psychologically.

1. Family and tearing the Fabric of the Society: It has resulted in having more widows, widowers, separated Homes, orphans, extinction of communities.
2. A Great set back to the Mission and growth of Christianity in Nigeria.
3. Socio-economic Impact: Most of the casualties of violent attacks are young people and women. The loss of productive life and resourceful young people has great economic impact. The economic effect of persecution is more obtrusive in the rural

and semi-rural areas, where people can no longer go to farm for fear of being attacked. The ripple effect in the city and urban is food shortage and high cost of food which they are suffering presently.

4. Health and Total Well-being of the people: Emotional and psychological torture is a more devastating impact of persecution. The experience of persecution lives with the victims and, like abuse, it can cause significant psychological disorders and permanent changes in social relationships. 5. Violation of the human right of freedom of association and worship.

6. Divided Communities with deep seated suspicion: There are parts of the country where Churches are not allowed to buy landed property or to build a place of worship. Many communities have continued to live in perpetual conflict with their Muslim counterparts living in envy and suspicion of one another.

### ***Positive Impact:***

***1. Extraordinary shows of Love, Kindness and Care, where Christians forgive and protect Muslim neighbours and where Muslims protect and stand for Christians.***

***2. Joint Christian/ Muslim Youth Groups are working together to build a better Community and resist Violence to the citizens.***

***3. Persecution has been like a Refining Fire that burn off the chaff of human lives and make people cherish the things that matter in life, producing endurance, character, resilience and team work in the Church and Community.***

***4. Extraordinary manifestation of the Living God, His Love, His Word, the power of Prayer and Divine Direction. Instead of destroying Christianity, we are experiencing Spiritual Growth and Genuine Christian Commitment.***

***5. Christian Strategic Engagement according to Matthew 10:16.***

## **5. THE RESPONSE OF THE CHURCH IN NIGERIA TO PERSECUTION**

One of the most enduring features in man is the propensity to react spontaneously to issues and actions that may threaten existence; the quest for survival will always be a major concern. Yet as Christians, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ did not leave us in doubt nor without a clear instruction in the face of persecution. Suffering and Persecution is almost a given when it comes to following Christ faithfully and living godly in this life. 2 Timothy 3:12 says, in fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.



The response of the Church in Nigeria has been both Biblical and unbiblical, Sporadic and Intentional and Corporate and individualistic.

### **UNBIBLICAL RESPONSE OF THE CHURCH TO PERSECUTION:**

These are responses that are not consistent with the Teachings of the Scriptures. It appears to be the unavoidable response in the face of fear of extermination.

#### ***1. Fight Back:***

Some people believe in reprisals and that the Church should retaliate, fight back wherever and whenever she is attacked or persecuted. Those who hold on to this believe the time is gone when the Church should continue “to turn the other cheek”; several reasons have been adduced to justify the retaliatory actions some Christians choose to adopt. Some quote Scriptures for the Just War and the historical antecedents of the Crusade that liberated the Holy Land and parts of Europe from the occupation by the Islamic Empire.

The persecution of the Church in Nigeria, especially in the Northern region, has elicited a myriad of responses from Christians. Christians are divided as to how to respond. In the wake of the brokenness and hopelessness brought about by the protracted persecution of the Church in Northern Nigeria, there are those who suggest that the church should engage in armed struggle to bring an end to the persecution. They argue that armed struggle has become a necessary evil if the church is to survive the current onslaught. Christians have hardly engaged in violent attacks.

Like the believers in the Early Church many Christian communities had to leave their towns and residences and relocate to other places that are safe especially when the persecution became intense. This obviously looks like one is running away but it is also evangelistic in a way as many in the attempt to escape have further helped to spread the Gospel, as we see it in the book of Acts of the Apostles chapter 8:4 , 11, “Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word.”

#### ***2. Self Defense***

Those who hold onto this believe the Church should not fight back but should be ready to defend herself where and when necessary. In this case the Church should use weapons or anything in her custody to defend herself whenever she is attacked. From my personal observation, this has always been the practice in many states in Nigeria, especially here in the north where the rate of persecution is very high.

### **3. Syncretism**

A lot of havoc has been done on the Church in the past and even in the recent times. Many times, the Church has had to suffer it alone while the Government just looks on or becomes insensitive to the killings and destruction of lives and property. This is disheartening and annoying to say the least. When Government and her agencies protect and collude with the perpetrators of violence against the innocent, such strengthens and makes it real persecution.

Due to the nonchalant attitude of Government and the incessant persecution, some people have resorted to the use of charms and fetish items to defend themselves. They still maintain they are Christians but had to use these alternatives as their fervent prayers seemed not to yield any meaningful result. This is very dangerous because it subtly turns believers to the idolatry they had once abandoned.

***4. Psuedo-Identity: In order to gain admission into Educational Institutions, be able to secure employment or be promoted and enjoy what by merit a citizen should have but which are denied to Christians because of their Faith, some have resorted to changing their names and identity to be like the Muslims. Others in quest for position and privileges have converted to Islam and few revert back to Christianity, eg Gwandum.***

### **THE CHURCH'S RIGHT / BIBLICAL RESPONSE TO PERSECUTION**

We believe the Response of the Church should be Biblical, Christo-centric and Missional. The Church's virtuous response to persecution often involves a combination of resilience, advocacy, and reliance on Faith. Here are some of the Christ honoring responses of the Church in Nigeria to Persecution:

1. **Faith and Prayers:** The first response of a Christian in the face of any challenge or persecution is to cry out to God joyfully trusting Him and His word, knowing that in His sovereignty He is not only aware but able to help His people. The account of Israel in Egypt and their cry to God in Exodus affirmed that God hears the cries of His people. (Exodus 2:23-25). The scriptures encourage us to call on God in such situations like persecution (Psalm 50:15, Acts 4:23-30, James 1:2-4; Philippians 4:6-7).
2. **Resilience and Forgiveness:** The Scriptures and the orthodox teaching of the Church throughout the ages emphasize resilience and the importance of forgiving our persecutors, drawing inspiration from the teachings and example of Jesus Christ.

*Matthew 5:10-12: "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for their's is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you,*

*persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”*

Romans 12:14: *“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.”*

**3. Interfaith Dialogue and Ecumenism:** The present situation in our nation of Nigeria has made the tension in the relationship between Christians and Muslims worsen, initiatives aimed at promoting inter-faith dialogue are fraught with political prejudice, and intentional efforts from the religious leaders are needed to sustain the impact of these efforts of the leadership of both religions. The Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) and its state and local government equivalents, and numerous inter-faith initiatives have continued to serve as important platforms for Christians and Muslims to seek ways of improving mutual understanding and tolerance.

**4. Security Consciousness:** As Christians and places of worship become increasingly vulnerable to attacks, a number of security measures that include education and security skills have been adopted by Nigerian Church. Security around Church buildings has been intensified. Churches are acquiring handheld metal detectors to screen people; in some churches, women are barred from entering with handbags; cars are parked in designated areas, and roadblocks are mounted in areas to restrict access.

**5. Advocacy, Awareness Support Networks:** The Christian communities often engage in advocacy efforts to raise awareness about persecution and to call for religious freedom. This can involve lobbying governments, engaging with international organizations, and partnering with other religious groups. Many Christian organizations within and outside Nigeria often provide support to persecuted individuals and communities through humanitarian aid, legal assistance, and other forms of practical help. Relief materials were distributed by the Church to the victims of attacks in several places. For example, the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) has established a national Relief Committee that has helped several victims, families, congregations and communities who were maimed and persecuted across the country. These efforts are based on the scriptural injunction like *Galatians 6:2: “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way, you will fulfill the law of Christ.”* And *1 John 3:17-18: “If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth. Proverbs 31:8-9: “Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy. Hebrews 13:3: “Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.”*

**6. Spiritual Activities:** Apart from physical security measures, the Church has embarked on spiritual activities like fasting, intense prayer and organization of solemn

assembly of interdenominational prayer rallies. At the level of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), days of fasting and prayers have been organized. In response to the killings, an estimated five million Nigerian Christians participated in a CAN-organized three days of Prayer and Fasting Rally at the end of January this year. Peaceful protests and prayer walks and calling on the authority were organized as a response to the persecution of the Christians in Nigeria. By Divine Direction (As the Bishop of Gombe), we organized Interdenominational prayer meetings across the Churches asking the Lord to frustrate the plans of Islamic militias and Boko Haram. By the grace of God, Gombe was spared from being run over in February 2014 by Boko Haram.

**7. Missional, Martyrdom and Expectancy of the Parousia:** The most important way to respond to attack is to attack, and as Christian the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, nor physical but spiritual. The greatest weapon of the Church is the Word of God, is the Gospel of Christ, and the expression of the Love of God. It is a sure way to win the battle against wickedness and the devil. The Church must rejoice at suffering for Christ and continue to engage the hostile communities with the gospel of Christ if it means via various missions' strategies as Christian professionals. We have a living hope in Christ, that He has gone to prepare a place for us; this world is not our home, we must daily live in expectancy of the second coming of the Lord. As Christians, we must be ready to die for this Gospel, A faith that is not worth dying for is not worth believing. We must not be afraid but be resolute in our faith. *Revelation 2:10: "Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor's crown."*

### **Conclusion**

The Early Church was characterized by harrowing experiences. As the church grew, the fire of persecution raged. It was determined to root out Christianity, before it had opportunity to gain a firm footing on the Roman soil. There is no doubt that Christians are still facing persecution in several parts of the world, including Nigeria. However, we have the examples of the early church and insights gained from the missionaries that brought Christianity to Africa who came with their coffins. The idea of martyrdom to many Christians is nauseating; it resonates with a feeling of abhorrence. Nevertheless, God uses persecution to refine His bride. The Church has grown in number and faith under the heat of persecution. The Church has become purer, prayerful and holding fast to the Word of God and more focused in her Hope and Mission. We stand with the Apostle Paul in this fact that : ***"For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hopethat in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always , so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or death. For to me, to live is Christ, qnd to die is gain."***

Thank you for listening.

**The Most Rev'd Dr. Henry C. Ndukuba MA, BD, MA(Ed), D.D**

Archbishop, Metropolitan and Primate of All Nigeria.

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