

The Subject of Persecution (2)

Persecution Today: Different Means to the Same End

The form and means of persecution might change with time, but its content and goal remain invariably constant; and will only end with the end of time. This is so because behind persecution there is only one master mind, Satan, the ruler of this world (John 16:11), our restless ceaseless opponent who roams around us like a lion looking for whom to devour (1 Peter 5:8). He is also our day-and-night accuser before our God (Revelation 12:10). He is the one who in each epoch and generation assumes a different picture, puts on a different mask using a different style with each believer. Sometimes, he also uses his old tools after renovating and consolidating them to fit the period at hand.

1. The first and nearest opposing force is the self, the 'old man', and old wrong experiences that Satan stirs up and which worry the individual.
2. Oppositions could become a source of persecution from the nearest family members in the form of defaming, depreciating, ridiculing, hindering service and putting stumbling blocks before one's calling. Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself suffered from His nearest people "*But when His own people heard about this, they went out to lay hold of Him, for they said, 'He is out of His mind.'*" (Mark 3: 21). He Himself said "*and 'a man's enemies will be those of his own household.'*" (Matthew 10:36).
3. Today, persecution takes the form of modern technology beautifying and presenting sin (especially sexual sins) no longer as nakedly abhorrent as it used to be, but in the most beautiful form wrapped in the most spectacular masks. Today the world dedicates all the talents of the human brain and modern capacities for the service of sin rendering it not just appealingly acceptable but stunningly floundering as found in a book, a story, a magazine, a film, a colored picture, across the satellites (i.e. on the international television stations and the internet) now available in all homes. Add to all that, the use of music, songs, and public fun places (all of this under the name of recreation and acculturation). In addition the different unruly movements manifest in the different clothing (under the name of fashion) and the lawless forms of enticing dances (under the name of fun, activity and mussel exercise). We cannot ignore the sexual promiscuousness that exists in the west and which is sweeping towards us by all means- under the name of freedom, practical education, globalism and even human rights! Generally speaking, premarital relations is no longer deemed disgracefully wrongful; but on the contrary a natural precursor to engagement or for future marriage. Even homosexuality which in the

past brought about repugnance and dejection has nowadays its name reformed from being a self revealing nomenclature as 'going against nature' to same 'sex marriage'; and has become in some countries in the West, a human right protected by law, consolidated publicly by riots and demonstrations and punitive to those who condemn it. On the other hand, purity is considered some kind of a fall behind modernization, going against nature and an expression of intricate psychological condition. Thus, all the instincts placed in us by God for our good have become dissipated for the sake of lust at the expense of the concept of sacred love; and Christian family and freedom became a chance for carnality and a cover for evil (Galatians 5:13; 1 Peter 2:16). The recession of sexual sins in the early centuries due to the spread of the Christian faith is nowadays regressing; and the flourishing age of science has become the time of moral decline and the unashamedly wayward spread of sin. "...and whose glory is in their shame" (Philippians 3:19). Not only that, but sin has become the ultimate truth and the life of purity and sanctity thought of as a sick perversion, cultural regression and abnormality. Believers adhering to their purity walk as if on heated coal in the midst of such a sex polluted, drug infected and alcohol infested environment, exposed to derision, vulnerable to segregation like patients suffering from psychological ailments supported by no one except their faith in their liberating Savior and His ultimate final victory.

4. The predominant worship of money running rampant these days is another weapon with which believers are persecuted. Thus, their faith becomes obscured, replaced with fear and concern. The feeling of having been undermined creeps in enhancing the desire for a more luxurious, lavish life. When such feelings establish themselves and if need be, believers exchange and replace their morals and principals, losing focus to eternal life.
5. Love of the world creeps into the Christian family causing cracks and divisions in its foundation because of worldly issues (such as money) igniting greed and selfishness in hearts or termination of covenants for the sake of lustful feelings. Once enticed by such feelings the result is broken homes and many victims of all ages.
6. While some people consider science advancements a source of glorification to God as the inspirer of all research fields extending from space outreach, to various medicinal developments with their prospective problem solving utilizing a lot of different kinds of research such as genetic engineering, agricultural and animal productivity; others use scientific findings as an occasion for deluding the simple minded people into thinking that science is the challenger of faith; thus resulting in loss of faith in God as being the power and controller of everything. It is true that there was a time when the Western church exceeded limits entering into a simulated opposition with science and scientists going so far as charging some with fiercely false charges. However, that age is gone; and in a brave, open apology the church restored to Galileo his dignity and regressed from supporting the evolution theory. Throughout the years, so much literature has appeared establishing reconciliation between religion and science asserting that both of them lead ultimately to the glorification of God: religion through faith and science through

knowledge and research. Each side moved within their circle boundaries without antagonizing or impinging on the other. True science in essence is not against God but at the disposal and service of God and humanity. It is not a tool for feeding lust but the product of mercy, love of the poor, the sick, the needy, and the desire to facilitate life for people. A true believer does not fear modern technology nor shun away from it but use it as a tool for acquiring knowledge, work, and for communication with God and people.

7. Is it not cumbersome for any believer to see waves of atheism and doubt sweep whole nations who, previously were worshippers of Jesus Christ? and million others worshipping strange gods up till now?
8. The world persecutes believers by trying to crawl into the church and strike it internally through worldly enticements such as love for fame, leadership, money, involvement with politics, or social work that is void of the spirit of salvation of souls. Consequently, the church dissolves in the world losing the source of her power degenerating in her testimonial role. In addition, the world, with its loud horns, might take advantage of the faults of some clergy spoiling their reputation by throwing shadows of doubt in the upright hearts of the majority of believers thus making sinners feel comfortable in their sinful zones.
9. Is it not painful for the believer to see that just for the sake of retaining the first seat, the world unite against the church, the body of Christ, dividing her into different churches and denominations, contenting her in that state of division and opposing all efforts for reunion ?
10. In the field of service, the world entices servants with the ‘first seat’ temptation, and enhancing absolution from the law of “*becoming like children*” (Matthew 18:3) and the rule of “*the washing of feet*” (John 13:14) which the Lord has commanded His disciples to adhere to. Or service turns into from without spiritually meaningful work that leads to repentance.
11. With regard to believers in general, the world presses on them hard to pull them away from salvation, repentance, worship and knowledge of scripture making them satisfied with just the form but not the meaningful effectiveness of worship and content with the picture but not the power of piety. Also, believers could slide down into a false attempt of living a dual life of serving two masters; or release themselves from commitment to faith and the knowledge of Jesus Christ in order to avoid the animosity of non Christians.
12. The list is long. However, it is essential to refer to social and psychological persecution and the various types of discrimination and their ramifications especially in environments where believers form a minority in the midst of an opposing majority.

Articles on the Christian History - The Fourth Century

The Fifteenth Article

The Roman Empire Acknowledgment of Christianity- the Edict of Milan

Before the end of the year 312 AD, in Milan, Emperor Constantine issued a declaration, thereafter known as the Edict of Milan or the declaration of Religion Reconciliation – which asserted the freedom of religion for all. That was the first official acknowledgment of Christianity by the Roman Empire. In addition, the Emperor issued an act declaring the restoration of all usurped properties and the release of Christian prisoners jailed just for being Christians. Later on, the church named “Confessors” those who suffered for the name of Christ without martyrdom. Concerning what Emperor Constantine did, Eusebius **the** Caesarian writes, “Also, the emperor called all the servants of God and showed them all respect, hospitality and kindness in words and deeds as people consecrated to the service of their God. Accordingly, despite their poverty of attire and simplicity of shape he allowed them to sit at his table because he did not see them with his naked human eye but saw God in them believing that the One whom they worshipped was going to support him. In addition, out of his own resources he gave lavish gifts and donations to the churches of God in order to be improved and the alters to be decorated (book 1:42).

“He has shown amazing generosity towards the poor Christians and non Christians. Constantine used to go out of his empire very early at dawn and shine with heavenly light glowing with the light of his gifts to all those who approached him.” He would sit with bishops and common people and participate in their discussions like any common person keeping his guards at a distance as he believed he was under God’s protection (book 1:43).

Out of admiration of him, some people wanted to erect a statue for him in one of the squares in Rome, but he refused but asked that a long cross-shaped spear be put up in the most famous place in Rome with the following Latin words inscribed on it: “By this blessed emblem, the sign of real power, your city has been liberated from the yoke of attack. It also liberated the Roman appointed parliament and people returning them back to their previous glory and fame.”

During that time, Emperor Constantine became ruler over the Western Roman Empire. Emperor Licinius, the pagan ruler of Eastern Roman Empire, Christians. Constantine, trying hard to win his friendship gave his sister in marriage to Licinius. But the latter persecuted the church and to weaken Christianity furthermore, he issued several rules in his empire such as forbidding the bishops to meet together and forcing the believers to meet in open places which was impossible. After discussions and negotiations with him have reached a dead end, emperor Constantine launched war against him to save the Christians of the Eastern empire and defeated him around the year 323 AD. Disguised as a poor slave, Licinius fled. Rumors has it that God allowed great

tribulations to befall him that almost erased his features and slimmed his body. Finally, he realized his great mistake, repented and got baptized. Since that time, he became the sole ruler over the whole Roman Empire -east and west.

Queen Helena's Discovery of the Cross

After all these victories, Emperor Constantine's mother appeared on the stage of events. Accompanied by a lot of soldiers, she traveled searching for the blessed honored cross. (Read the Coptic Synaxarium on the 17th of Thout.) Where she found the cross, she erected a big church (basilica) keeping in it a big portion of the cross she had found. The church was consecrated by a number of bishops during the papacy of Pope Makarios, (bishop of Jerusalem at the time). Queen Helena took the cross and the nails and returned to her son who kept the cross in a golden box decorated with precious stones and kept it for the people to be blessed by it in a church named after the apostles.

After all these incidents, during the papacy of Pope Alexandros, the Arian heresy had already started to spread becoming a threat to the peace of the Roman Empire. So, in the year 325 AD, Emperor Constantine issued a decree calling all the bishops around the world to meet at Nicea. By the measures of that time, it was exceptional for 318 bishops to meet at the same place and time to discuss Arius' heresy.

Presiding over the first session only, Constantine asked all the bishops to put an end to that heresy. During that meeting the Decree of Faith, with its first and second parts, was written down expressing the church's faith in the second hypostasis – God the Logos.

In 335 AD, a few years after the meeting at Nicea, Emperor Constantine chose Bezant, a small fishing village to become the capital of the new empire and called it Constantinople. Because of his love for the church and saints, he brought to Constantinople a lot of the saints' relics. Thus Constantinople became famous for its majestic churches.