

## The Blood of Christians is Seed: The 5<sup>th</sup> Gospel and the Growth of the Church

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### Abstract

*The belief that persecution of Christians contributes to the numerical growth and the spiritual reinvigoration of the Church is as old as the Church itself. The first church growth movement is chronicled in the Book of Acts because the early Christians in Jerusalem were targeted for their faith. The Roman Empire persecutions have also proven that the blood of Christians is indeed seed. Pagan onlookers followed Jesus after witnessing the heroic way the Christians faced the unjust persecution. The fastest growing churches today are in Iran and Afghanistan, two Muslim countries under the rule of Sharia Law. The church in Somalia has also proven many pundits wrong because of its resilience. Somali Muslims are regularly coming to the Lord despite the painful persecution awaiting them once they become disciples of Christ. Church historians and missiologists agree with Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus, popularly known as Tertullian, (155 –240) that persecution is the lifeline of the Church. The North African author and apologist popularized the belief that the blood of the martyr is the seed of the church. Not all persecuted Christians are martyred. In fact, most persecuted Christians walk away bruised and bloodied. Persecutors often target the leadership of the community of faith and Christian materials including the Scriptures. The idea that the sheep will scatter when the shepherd is struck is a first century persecution strategy. This paper illustrates the direct relationship between the persecution of Christians and the growth of the Church. The Church describes persecution and martyrdom as the Fifth-Gospel. This Fifth Gospel is without a doubt a blessing in disguise.*

*Key Words: Persecution, Martyrdom, Fifth-Gospel, Church-Growth*

## An Overview

The Church terms martyrdom of Christians as the Fifth-Gospel according to Catholic News Agency.<sup>1</sup> The biblical record in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles shows the earliest form of persecution and the impact it had on the nascent Church. The first three centuries after the formation of the Church shows that the Roman Empire inflicted sporadic persecution on the Church. The Roman government accused Christians of antisocial behavior since they kept to themselves and refused to worship pagan gods promoted by the Empire and its sympathizers. As a result, they were considered antisocial outcasts and enemies of the state.<sup>2</sup> Christians were also accused of cannibalism, and incest; this is because of their terminologies of eating the body of Christ and drinking his blood at the Lord's Table, as well as the holy kiss that they practiced.<sup>3</sup>

Christians were misinterpreted and were thus considered dangerous to social harmony and a threat to the Empire.<sup>4</sup> While the persecution of Christians in the Acts of the Apostles resulted in church growth, contemporary persecutions have also resulted in a similar church growth in the Islamic Republic of Iran, which has the fastest growing church in the world, according to Christianity Today.<sup>5</sup> An article by the Voice of the Martyrs, "Iran: Persecution Causes Church Growth," chronicles how the church in this conservative Muslim country is proliferating despite its severe maltreatment by the Islamic regime.<sup>6</sup> In 2016, Operation World reported Iran to have 19.6% growth annually in its Christian population, far more than any other country as confirmed by Mission Network News.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Operation World has recently described the Somali Church as the 7<sup>th</sup> fastest growing evangelical church in the world.<sup>8</sup> This reported growth is a divine achievement for the little known Somali Church.

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<sup>1</sup> Courtney Grogan, (2009, March 19). For families of 21 Copts Killed by ISIS, Martyrdom is 'Fifth Gospel.'" Catholic News Agency. Rome: Italy. <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/for-families-of-21-copts-killed-by-isis-martyrdom-is-fifth-gospel-56908> (accessed 27 February 2020).

<sup>2</sup> Earle E. Cairns, (1996). *Christianity Through the Centuries: A History of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan, 86

<sup>3</sup> F.F. Bruce, (1973). *The Spreading Flame: The Rise and Progress of Christianity from its First Beginnings to the Conversion of the English*, (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans,), 169.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Carey Lodge, (2016, September 20). Which Country Has the Fastest-growing Church in the World?" Christian

Today <https://www.christiantoday.com/article/which.country.has.the.fastest.growing.church.in.the.world/95924.htm>, (accessed 27 March 2020).

<sup>6</sup> Voice of the Martyrs. (2017, May 24). Iran: Persecution Causes Church Growth. <https://vom.com.au/iran-persecution-causing-church-growth/> (accessed 19 February 2020).

<sup>7</sup> Jason Mandryk, (2010). *Operation World 7th Edition* (Biblical Publishing.), 916.

<sup>8</sup> Evangelical Growth, Operation World, 2021 <https://www.operationworld.org/hidden/evangelical-growth> (accessed 29 March 2021).

## Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to examine the relationship between the persecution of Christians and church growth. The Acts of the Apostles documents the first methodical attack on the Church and the church growth that followed it. However, the Roman Empire persecution of Christians inspired the advent of systematic theology of persecution that is still expressed both in prose and poetry; these compositions all attest to the fact that the Church continued growing during the persecution. The persecution of Christians elicited widespread support in the Roman Empire.<sup>9</sup> Though such persecutions were often localized and sporadic, *ad hoc* basis. There was no Empire-wide persecution until AD 249.<sup>10</sup> Church historian, Philip Schaff, comments, “[T]heir Jewish origin, their indifference to politics and public affairs, and their abhorrence of heathen customs, were construed into an *odium generis humani*,” hatred of the human race.<sup>11</sup>

Tertullian in AD 197 observes in his book, *The Apology*, addressing the Roman governor of his North African province, “[t]he oftener we are mown down by you, the more in number we grow; the blood of Christians is seed.”<sup>12</sup> In another apologetic work Tertullian wrote earlier in AD 196, he ridiculed the absurd accusations used to justify the persecution of Christians:

The Christians are to blame for every public disaster and every misfortune that befalls the people. If the Tiber rises to the walls, if the Nile fails to rise and flood the fields, if the sky withholds its rain, if there is earthquake or famine or plague, straightway the cry arises: “The Christians to the lions!”<sup>13</sup>

Philip Schaff’s description of the persecution is noteworthy:

It was in this hate and fear-filled atmosphere that saw the bloodbath of persecution. Multitudes of Christians were crucified; some dressed in fresh animal skins, were thrown to hungry beasts, and some were lit up on poles to be used as torches.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Philip Schaff, (1882). History of the Christian Church, Volume I: Apostolic Christianity. A.D. 1-100. CCEL Publisher, 381.

<sup>10</sup> Everett Ferguson, (1990). Did You Know? Christian History, Issue 27 (Vol. XI, No. 3), 20, 1, inside cover

<sup>11</sup> Schaff, (1882). History of the Christian Church, Volume I, 325.

<sup>12</sup> Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. (Editors). (1997). Tertullian’s Apology, in The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 3, Oregon, Books for the Ages, 182 (OR 1-2).  
[http://media.sabda.org/alkitab-8/LIBRARY/ECF\\_0\\_03.PDF](http://media.sabda.org/alkitab-8/LIBRARY/ECF_0_03.PDF) (Accessed 22 March 2020).

<sup>13</sup> F.F. Bruce (1973). The Spreading Flame: The Rise and Progress of Christianity from its First Beginnings to the Conversion of the English, (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans), 169 (OR 165).

<sup>14</sup> Schaff, (1882). History of the Christian Church, Volume I, 381.

From the Acts of the Apostles to the Roman Empire and even this modern era, persecution of Christians has always purified the Church; it has also generally contributed to the numerical growth of the Church. Rick Wade, examining the early persecution of Christians and its contribution to the health of the Church, writes:

However, history has shown that persecution ultimately strengthens the Church. It removes the nominal Christians, and it emboldens others to both stand firm when persecuted and become more aggressive in the proclamation. If persecution comes to us, the Church will remain, although church membership rolls will probably become shorter.<sup>15</sup>

Christian advocacy groups, such as the Voice of the Martyrs, have been reporting for years many instances in which the Church was displaying a numerical growth during persecutions. The belief that persecution stimulates church growth finds a basis in the Acts of the Apostles where the Church grew after the intense persecution in Jerusalem, a growth that started with Peter's preaching at Pentecost in the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. Jesus has also made it clear in the Gospel of John (12:24) that martyrdom and church growth are related using the example of the grain of wheat that falls to the ground and dies to produce much fruit.

Persecution of Christians may not always end up in martyrdom. Sometimes, it may mean Christians who suffer community or state-sponsored persecution. Persecution of Christians may mean all or any of the following: beating, jailing, denial of proper medical care, job discrimination, community ostracization, death or denial of common basic needs on the virtue of being a Christian. In this paper, persecution of Christians includes all the above atrocities.

*Operation World* lists Afghanistan as having the second most significant church growth in the world, and that it is primarily the persecuted Iranian Christians reaching Afghans. It is indeed remarkable that Iranian Christians, who suffer state-sponsored persecution like beatings, jailing, and denial of proper medical care when in prison, are witnessing to Afghani Muslims who are coming to the Lord in great multitudes.<sup>16</sup> *Operation World* reports that Christianity in Afghanistan was growing at 16.7% annually, a significant feat in a highly repressive and anti-Christian country.<sup>17</sup>

Nigeria and Ethiopia have significant records of persecution of Christians. The church in Ethiopia faced intense persecution under the communist regime of 1974-1991.<sup>18</sup> Expatriate missionaries were expelled, church properties confiscated,

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<sup>15</sup> Rick Wade, "Persecution in the Early Church." Compass Crusade for Christ, Cru.org (April 2012). <https://www.cru.org/content/dam/cru/legacy/2012/04/wadepersécutionintheearlychurch.pdf> (accessed 22 September 2019).

<sup>16</sup> Joe Carter, (2015, October 20). 9 Things You Should Know About Global Persecution of Christians. *The Gospel Coalition* <https://www.theGospelcoalition.org/article/9-things-you-should-know-about-global-persecution-of-christians-2015-edition/> (accessed 25 March 2020).

<sup>17</sup> Jason Mandryk, (2010). *Operation World 7th Edition* (Biblical Publishing.), 916.

<sup>18</sup> Geoff Stamp, (2001). "Revival and Persecution in Ethiopia," *Charisma Magazine*

worship meetings prohibited, and Christ-likeness was considered a liability by the ruling military junta and their devotees.<sup>19</sup> Protestant Christians went underground and found ways to be the church without traditional buildings and conventional leadership structure. One young denomination was officially shut down in 1982 with 5,000 members and re-emerged with 34,000 members in 1991 when the communist regime was overthrown.<sup>20</sup> As of 2017, this denomination had a membership that exceeded over 500,000.<sup>21</sup>

### Persecution of Christians

Persecution of Christians started with the inception of the Church. Both the polytheistic Roman Empire officials and the monotheistic Jewish religious leaders saw the nascent Church as a threat to the status quo. The local Roman authorities were suspicious of Christians because of their rejection of the official cult of Emperor worship.<sup>22</sup> The Jewish religious leaders felt that Jesus and his disciples challenged their age-old traditions and the established religious system.<sup>23</sup> Jesus despised the human traditions which were enshrined in the oral and written laws of the Jews; he taught that this human religious system distorted the Torah, Mark 7:1-20. Jesus also criticized the legalistic and self-righteous religious leaders of the Jewish faith, rejecting their claim that they are the followers of Moses, David and other prophets. Jesus called these dominant Jewish figures the “servants of Satan” as seen in John 8:37-44. No wonder many Pharisees and other religious authorities wanted him dead.

The first severe and well-chronicled persecution by the Roman Empire started under Nero, AD 37-68, using the great fire of Rome as a pretext to target the Christians. The era of Constantine, AD 324, drastically reduced the persecution against the Church and the Edict of Milan, AD 313, paved the way for a new reprieve.<sup>24</sup>

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<https://www.charismamag.com/site-archives/189-features/africa/530-revival-and-persecution-in-ethiopia> (Accessed 21 March 2020).

<sup>19</sup> Jay Ross, (1981, November 17). “Ethiopia Seizes Headquarters Of Major Protestant Church. The Washington Post.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1981/11/17/ethiopia-seizes-headquarters-of-major-protestant-church/c2fd5ac0-c74d-4d9d-ad2e624ce89a7d82/?utmterm=.4f0daf5d146d> (Accessed 23 March 2020).

<sup>20</sup> Dave Rogalsky, (2012, October 10). Ethiopian Church Grows in Maturity: Meserete Kristos Church Follows the New Testament Pattern,” Canadian Mennonite.

<http://www.canadianmennonite.org/articles/ethiopian-church-grows-maturity> (Accessed 27 March 2020).

<sup>21</sup> Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopaedia Online (GAMEO). (1990). Meserete Kristos Church. 2017 Update. [https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Meserete\\_Kristos\\_Church](https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Meserete_Kristos_Church) (accessed 23 March 2020).

<sup>22</sup> Earle E. Cairns, (1996). Christianity Through the Centuries: A History of the Christian Church, 3rd ed. Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan, 86

<sup>23</sup> N. T. Wright, (1992). The New Testament and the People of God: Christian Origins And The Question Of God, Volume 1, (Fortress Press), 451.

<sup>24</sup> Religious Facts. (2005, March 17). Persecution in the Early Church. Last updated, November 19, 2016 <http://www.religionfacts.com/persecution-early-church>, (Accessed 22 March 2020).

The Islamic Umayyad Caliphate persecuted the Berber church in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries until many of the Christians were pressured to convert to Islam.<sup>25</sup> Muslim crowds looted and destroyed properties owned by Egyptian Coptic Christians from AD 832 to 837. This open season on Christian properties happened during the leadership of the seventh Abbasid caliph, Caliph al-Mamun. The Muslims looted churches and monasteries and martyred many Christians including monks.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, starting from the 14<sup>th</sup> century until 1517, violent subjugation, dispossession and discrimination under the Laws of Umar targeted the Egyptian Christians. Also known as Pact of Umar, Treaty of Umar and Covenant of Umar. These laws, for example, prohibited Christians from building new churches, monasteries or other places of worship; they also made it illegal to rebuild or renovate damaged churches and other Christian places of worship.

Many of these Coptic Christians were coerced to convert to Islam.<sup>27</sup> The Mamluk Sultanate in Cairo (1250–1517) demolished most of the church buildings and massacred over 300,000 Christian Copts throughout the 13<sup>th</sup> century; Maronite and Greek Christians also suffered a terrible fate in the hands of Mamluks including the destruction of their homes.<sup>28</sup>

Ottoman and Kurdish soldiers persecuted the Assyrian Christians of the Ottoman Empire from 1843 to 1847. More than 10,000 Assyrian Christians were massacred in the Hakkari region. Many more thousands were sold into slavery by the Muslim rulers.<sup>29</sup> Christians in India were historically persecuted by various Muslim rulers like Tipu Sultan.<sup>30</sup> Hindu nationalists spearhead modern-day persecution according to *Human Rights Watch*.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> C. J. Speel II, (1960). *The Disappearance of Christianity from North Africa in the Wake of the Rise of Islam: Church History*, Vol. 29, No. 4, (Cambridge University Press on behalf of the American Society of Church History), 379-397.

<sup>26</sup> Robert Morgan, (2016). *History of the Coptic Orthodox People and the Church of Egypt*, (FriesenPress), 203-205.

<sup>27</sup> Kristen Stilt, (2011) *Islamic Law in Action: Authority, Discretion, and Everyday Experiences in Mamluk Egypt*, (Oxford University Press), 120.

<sup>28</sup> Teule B. Herman G., (2013) Introduction: Constantinople and Granada, Christian-Muslim Interaction 1350-1516, in David Thomas and Alex Mallett, *Christian-Muslim Relations, A Bibliographical History*, Volume 5 (1350-1500), (Brill), 11.

<sup>29</sup> David Gaunt, 2006. *Massacres, resistance, protectors: Muslim-Christian relations in Eastern Anatolia during World War I*, (Piscataway, N.J. Gorgias Press), 32.

<sup>30</sup> James Scurry, (1980). *The captivity, sufferings, and escape of James Scurry, who was detained a prisoner during ten years, in the dominions of Hyder Ali and Tippoo Saib*, (London, H. Fisher, 1824), 103.

<sup>31</sup> Human Rights Watch. (1999, September 30). *Anti-Christian Violence on the Rise in India: New Report Details the Politics Behind Extremist Hindu Attacks*, <https://www.hrw.org/news/1999/09/30/anti-christian-violence-rise-india> (accessed 17 March 2019).

Abdul Rahman, an Afghani Christian convert, was arrested in 2006 for abandoning Islam.<sup>32</sup> Influential Afghani Muslims, including government officials, lobbied for the death penalty in accordance with the Sharia Law according to the *Associated Press*.<sup>33</sup> Initially, the Kabul judge rejected calls to end the trial of the Christian convert.<sup>34</sup> Abdul Rahman was eventually released because of pressure from some Western governments according to the *Washington Post*.<sup>35</sup>

The persecution against Somali Christians has been on the rise since 1991 when Somalia's central government collapsed. Christians started facing what amounts to a religious genocide because of increased lawlessness and resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism.<sup>36</sup> Radical Islamists beheaded several Somali Christians and at least on one occasion, in 2008, videotaped the gruesome decapitation of a local evangelist and a humanitarian worker, Mansur Mohamed.<sup>37</sup>

### The Blood of Christians is Seed

The famed North African theologian, Tertullian, was a fervent believer that persecution of Christians helps the church to grow; he wrote in his 197 seminal book, *Apologeticus*, "the blood of the martyr is the seed of the church;" this is a poetic adaptation of what Tertullian has literally penned, "the oftener we are mown down by you, the more in number we grow; the blood of Christians is seed."<sup>38</sup> Tertullian never doubted that persecution strengthens the community of faith and contributes to church growth. Non-Christians embrace Christ when they witness Christians dying heroically for their faith, according to Tertullian and many of his contemporaries. In a letter by an anonymous 2nd-century Christian apologist addressed to "most excellent Diognetus", a well-connected pagan man, affirms:

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<sup>32</sup> BBC. (2006, March 20). Afghan on Trial for Christianity: Afghan Man is Being Tried in a Court in the Capital, Kabul, for Converting from Islam to Christianity. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/4823874.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/4823874.stm) (accessed 26 September 2019).

<sup>33</sup> Associated Press. (2006, March 25). Afghan Judge Resists Pressure In Convert Case. *Washington Post*.

[www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2006/03/24/AR2006032401914.html?noredirect=on](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2006/03/24/AR2006032401914.html?noredirect=on) (Accessed 27 February 2020).

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Associated Press. (2006, March 25). Afghan Judge Resists Pressure In Convert Case. *Washington Post*.

[www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2006/03/24/AR2006032401914.html?noredirect=on](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2006/03/24/AR2006032401914.html?noredirect=on) (Accessed 27 February 2020).

<sup>36</sup> The Angelical Planet. (2009, March 30). Almost Expunged: Somalia's Embattled Christians. <http://anglicanplanet.net/international-news/2009/11/30/almost-expunged-somalias-embattledchristians.html> (accessed 11 September 2019).

<sup>37</sup> Compass Direct News (CDN). (20102, February 9). Islamic Extremists Behead Another Convert in Somalia: Young Christian Man Murdered outside Mogadishu. *Christian Post*. <https://www.christianpost.com/news/islamic-extremists-behead-another-convert-in-somalia-69102/> (accessed 18 March 2020).

<sup>38</sup> W. M. Reeve, Translator & Annotator. (1709). *The Apology of Tertullian*. 50, s. 13, initially printed in London in 1709 and Reprinted in a second edition in 1716/1717. [http://www.tertullian.org/articles/reeve\\_apology.htm](http://www.tertullian.org/articles/reeve_apology.htm) (Accessed 03 March 2020).

Do you not see that [the Christians] thrown to the wild beasts - that they may recant the Lord - do not allow themselves to be beaten? Do you not see that the more they are punished, the more the others increase in numbers?<sup>39</sup>

This Epistle to Diognetus, as it is known, is another compelling testimony of the early church's conviction that persecution contributes to church growth. Also, Ippolito Romano, a contemporary of Tertullian, wrote during lethal persecution, "that large number of men, attracted to the faith by martyrs, also became God's martyrs."<sup>40</sup> Professor Antonio Miralles of Pontifical University of the Holy Cross writes:

The martyrs gain through losing their lives in bearing witness to Jesus – they gain eternal life. But this is also positive for the Church, that receives new believers, encouraged to convert thanks to the example set by the martyrs, and she also sees a renewal in existing believers.<sup>41</sup>

The second and third centuries persecutions have profoundly impacted the young faith that resulted in theology that venerates martyrs.<sup>42</sup> Contemporary scholars estimate that 54 of the Roman emperors who ruled from 30-311, about 30 of them have persistently targeted Christians.<sup>43</sup> Some scholars estimate that from first government-sanctioned persecution under Nero in 64 to the Edict of Milan in 313 that established a government-sanctioned Empire-wide religious toleration for Christianity, the church faced 129 years of severe persecution and 120 years of peace or toleration.<sup>44</sup>

While many Roman Empire persecutions against the Church were brutal, the persecutors often targeted the Scriptures, other Christian materials, clergy, church property and influential sympathisers of Christians. The non-prominent lay Christians often escaped direct persecution.<sup>45</sup> Some Church historians and missiologists estimate that more Christians were martyred for their faith in the last 50 years than in the Church's first 300 years combined.<sup>46</sup> Sometimes the religio-political climates change in world areas where Christianity was already established in different degrees having a negative effect on the Church; Chairman Mao's China and Islamic North Africa being a case in point.

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<sup>39</sup> Antonio Miralles, (2004, May 31). The blood of martyrs, the seed of Christians. Clerus <http://www.clerus.org/clerus/dati/2004-05/31-13/12MarIn.html>, (accessed 13 March 2020).

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Kenneth Scott Latourette, (2000). A History of Christianity, Volume I: Beginnings to 1500, rev. ed. Prince Press, 81

<sup>43</sup> Mark Galli, (1990). "The Persecuting Emperors." Christian History, Issue 27 (Vol. XI, No. 3), 20

<sup>44</sup> Maurice M. Hassatt, (1910). "Martyr." The Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. IX, Robert Appleton Company.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Everett Ferguson, (1990). Did You Know? Christian History, Issue 27 (Vol. XI, No. 3), 20, 1, inside cover.

## Conclusion

Since the 5<sup>th</sup> century, church tradition recognised ten major persecutions by the Roman Empire:<sup>47</sup>

The Nero persecution (c. 64-68) which resulted in the martyrdom of Peter and Paul. The Domitian persecution (reigned 81-96). The Trajan persecution (112-117); though Christianity was banned, there was no dragnet to hunt Christians who kept a low profile. The Marcus Aurelius persecution (reigned 161-180) in which Polycarp is the most high-profile martyr. The Septimus Severus persecution (202-210) in which Perpetua, a fearless and an overachieving young Christian, is among the most well-known martyrs. The Decius persecution (250-251) targeted Christians who refused to offer pagan sacrifices or buy certificates (*libelli*) instead of sacrificing. Bishops of Rome, Jerusalem and Antioch, are the most prominent martyrs. The Valerian persecution (257-59) in which its eminent martyrs include Cyprian of Carthage and Sixtus II of Rome. The Maximinus persecution (235-38). The Aurelian persecution (reigned 270–275). The Diocletian and Galerius severe persecutions (303-324). None of these persecutions slowed down the growth of the Church.

During the first meeting of the International Congress on World Evangelism in Lausanne, Switzerland, Billy Jang Hwan Kim stated, “[p]ersecution is a storm that is permitted to scatter the seed of the word, disperse the sower and reaper over many fields. It is God’s way of extending his Kingdom.”<sup>48</sup> The 1974 meeting, popularly known as Lausanne Movement, was about the global persecution of Christians. The conviction of the Korean born church leader that persecution results in church growth is widely shared by many Christians that include Pope Francis. The Pope declared in 2014 that “[t]he Church grows thanks to the blood of the martyrs. This is the beauty of martyrdom.”<sup>49</sup>

Michael Green highlights that persecution has the potential to stimulate church growth. He cites that Stephen’s martyrdom did not hinder church growth but ushered in a new era of emboldened disciples whose ministry led many to the Lord.<sup>50</sup> Green’s theory is that a besieged church is more likely to grow as the persecution will inspire the Christians and purify the Church. The growth of the primitive Church, despite the persecution and martyrdom it faced, is an example par excellence that the blood of Christians is seed. Modern-day examples of persecuted churches growing in Islamic countries like Afghanistan, Iran and Somalia, are further evidence of Tertullian’s

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<sup>47</sup> Religious Facts. (2005, March 17). Persecution in the Early Church. Last updated, November 19, 2016 <http://www.religionfacts.com/persecution-early-church>, (Accessed 22 March 2020).

<sup>48</sup> Billy Kim, (1975). “God at Work in Times of Persecution,” in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice: Official Reference Volume, Papers and Responses*, ed. James D. Douglas (Minneapolis, Minnesota: World Wide Publications), 57.

<sup>49</sup> Elise Harris, (2014, June 30). Pope Francis: Church grows from the blood of the martyrs. Catholic News Agency, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/pope-francis-church-grows-with-the-blood-of-the-martyrs-45498> (accessed on 12 March 2020).

<sup>50</sup> Michael Green, (1970). *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 172-173.

belief that the more the Christians are mown down, the more in number they grow because the blood of Christians is seed.

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## About the author

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