

Exegetical study of John 16:25–33 and the Church in persecution in Nigeria

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Currently, there is a high rate of persecution unleashed on Christians worldwide with a special reference to Nigeria. Globally, Nigeria accounts for more than 70% of Christians being killed because of their identification with the Christian faith. This makes Nigeria one of the most dangerous countries for Christians. Employing the redaction method of doing biblical exegesis, this study explores and interprets the context of John 16:25–33 and applies its theological findings to the similar reality of Nigerian Christians being confronted with severe persecutions. This study argues that the lessons drawn from John 16:25–33 can equip Nigerian Christians to have the peace Jesus promised consolidated in their hearts as they are being persecuted because of their faith in him.

Contribution: This study addressed the issue of the high rate of persecution being unleashed on the Church in Nigeria from the theological stance of John 16:25–33. The study recommends that the lessons drawn from John 16:25–33 can equip the persecuted Church in Nigeria to enjoy the peace Jesus promised the Church.

Keywords: Gospel of John; church; persecution; tribulation; peace; Christians; Islam; Nigeria.

Introduction

The Church in the interim of the *Parousia*, in every era, passes through diverse forms of tribulations. There are daily, horrifying proofs of the reality of the tribulations Christians are suffering all over the world. Consequently, McAlister (2014) notes that 'From Northern Iraq to Nigeria, from China to India, the cries of Christian suffering pierces the heavens'. There is a high rate of persecution unleashed on Christians in the world with special reference to Nigeria. Nigeria, being a deadly country for Christians, accounts for more than 70% of Christians killed globally (Buwalda & Ogebe 2021:1). Christians are subjected to great difficulties and afflictions. These include various forms of political and social harassments, destruction of their properties, destruction of church buildings, violent deaths and near-extinctions. The series of crises reported daily on local, national and international media on uncountable number of killings of Christians and destruction of properties that worth millions of naira have been alarming (Awotune 2016:38). Many of these oppressions and killings are not reported or the perpetrators are not prosecuted. These pogroms and killings are unleashed on Christians either to make them deny their faith or to punish them for their faith in Jesus. Christians suffer persecutions because they have chosen to believe in the person of and witness to Jesus Christ. The peace and faith of Christians are challenged in persecution. Although Jesus foretold his disciples about the persecution they would face for 'being in him', he was also concerned about their need for peace. Because of the severity of persecutions and their accompanying crises, Odoeme (2013:72) opines that 'Christ's concern for justice and peace could be looked upon as the pseudo-political aspect of his ministry'. Would the yearning for peace by the Church in the face of tribulations be considered an illusion? In the face of severe persecution, how would Christians experience the presence of the peace that Jesus promised his followers?

John 16:25–33 presents the conclusion of the series of the discourses Jesus had with his disciples in the upper room, preceding the passion narrative. This micro-narrative in John's gospel is the concluding part of the extended farewell discourse (Jn 13–17), in which Jesus revealed to his disciples about his departure from the earth and that because they believed in him, the world would hate them and would therefore persecute them because they are ignorant of the Father. However, even in the midst of the tribulations that would be unleashed on them, Jesus charged them to be assured of peace in him. The aim of this study is to exegetically explore John 16:25–33 and show how the lessons drawn from the exegesis can equip the Nigerian Christians to have the peace Jesus promised consolidated in their hearts as they are being persecuted for their identification and faith in him. To achieve the above research aim, the redaction criticism method

of doing biblical criticism was used to give the interpretative and theological motif of the author of the texts being examined.

Reading John 16:25–33

The introduction of this narrative with the phrase ταῦτα λελάληκα ὑμῖν [these things I have spoken to you] underlines an allusion to the various previous discourses, teachings and allegories, communicated 'in parables' ἐν παροιμίαις. Jesus, being prophetic and proactive, showed knowledge of the precarious situation the disciple would be going through, and their would-be effects on their lives, after he as their master, would have departed from this world. Nevertheless, he wants his disciples to have confidence in him and imitate him on how he overcame the world despite the world's hostility to him. By the implication of παροιμίαις, Jesus implies that he has been speaking to his disciples in parables or in proverbs. Jesus was not speaking to them plainly about the mystery of 'being in him' because he was still with them. The disciples would not understand the significance of what Jesus said and did until he is glorified (Guthrie 1981:111), in death and resurrection and ascension and until his Spirit is given to them. This explains the reason why his disciples then had not come to the full knowledge and understanding of the mystery of the Kingdom of God, which is founded upon the suffering of the cross and resurrection. By using the Greek words 'ἐν παροιμίαις', it could mean that Jesus was making reference to the discourses of the immediate past or he spoke of the parabolic method that he employed as a whole (Elis 1986:1257).

The phrase ἔρχεται ὥρα ὅτε οὐκέτι ἐν παροιμίαις λαλήσω ὑμῖν', which also relates to Jesus' saying in verse 32, could be a reference to the post-Pentecost times. Christ had promised them great illumination by his Spirit. Jesus would no more be bodily present in the world teaching them about God and the mystery of his kingdom, but he would continue speaking to them clearly through his Holy Spirit. Whatsoever they would be encountering, the Holy Spirit would be clearly teaching them and guiding them to know more about God the Father.

By the implication of 'αἰτήσεσθε' in verse 26, Jesus declares that 'you shall ask' to assure his disciples that when he would depart from them, to be with his Father in heaven, and that when they pray in his name, that their prayers would be answered. By the theological implication of 'and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you', Jesus also gives them the assurance of praying to the Father directly and that their prayers would be answered. The disciples can go to the Father directly in the name of Jesus.

In John 16:27, Jesus used the Greek words, αὐτὸς γὰρ ὁ πατὴρ φιλεῖ ὑμᾶς, to make his disciples know that God loves them. By the implication of φιλεῖ being used in its verb indicative of being perfectly active, it connotes that God's love for his disciples will ever be presently active. Furthermore, in this expression ὅτι ὑμεῖς ἐμὲ πεφιλήκατε καὶ πεπιστεύκατε ὅτι ἐγὼ παρὰ θεοῦ ἐξῆλθον, Jesus explains why the disciples could go

to the Father directly to make request. They can go to him because they loved (πεφιλήκατε) Jesus and also for the reason that they have a consistent firm believe (πεπιστεύκατε) that Jesus is One with God, he came from the Father to the world. Also, because they have loved Jesus and believed that he came from the Father, this established the reason that the Father loves them.

In John 16:28, Jesus claims deity when he expressed these Greek words, ἐξῆλθον παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς (Dickson 2011:1300). John wants his readers to accept that Jesus is One with God, for Jesus came from the Father into the world – καὶ ἐλήλυθα εἰς τὸν κόσμον as the Messiah sent from God. John, in consolidating the 'sending motif' in his gospel, wants his readers to be cognisant of the theological truth that God is the loving sender and that Jesus is the divinely 'sent One' (Painter 2019:1). As the 'sent One', Jesus was perfectly pictured as the missionary sent by God in a unique way from heaven to transform and redeem the world through agape-love (3:16). After finishing the work for which Jesus in form of a man came to the world, he was then set to go back to his Father.

The disciples in John 16:29 admitted that Jesus has at this point spoken to them in the simplest way in which they would understand him. The disciples were happy that he spoke to them plainly and that gave them the leverage to understand what he said to them. In John 16:30, the Johannine Jesus achieved his purpose of coming from the Father as the missionary divinely sent to the world. The essence of Jesus' coming was to persuade the world inhabitants to believe in him for their eternal salvation (3:16). Showing that this purpose was achieved within the confine of his disciples, the disciples not only categorically declared that they now believe in Jesus as having come from the Father, but they also gave the reason for which they believe in him. Jesus has in this discourse spoken to them plainly that he came from the Father, and they had begun to receive revelation about his divine nature. That he knows all things made them to not only understand but believe that he came from heaven. In believing in him as having come from God, consequently their faith began to develop, it grew till the point they came to believe that he was not just an ordinary man but God also. The disciples saying 'νῦν οἶδαμεν' [now we know] express their acknowledgment of Jesus as God. At this point in their discourse, the matter of their faith is that they have come to believe that Jesus came from God and the motive of their faith consolidated on Jesus' omniscience.

In John 16:31, Jesus responded to his disciples by asking them a rhetoric question – Ἄρτι πιστεύετε; – ['Do you now believe?']. In this rhetoric question, John captures the centrality of the purpose for which he wrote this gospel as summarised in John 20:30–31 (Mears 2002:419). In John, all that Jesus said or did were by way of redaction used to bring the disciples to the point in which they would come to believe in Jesus as being divine. The words and stories about Jesus in John were constructed with the purpose of deepening Christians' faith

and keeping the disciples 'from stumbling' (Jn 16:1) in the face of opposition against their faith in Jesus.

In John 16:32, Jesus, being all-knowing, as the disciples had already observed, presaged about what would start happening in few hours later. The disciples would in the coming hours witness the Jews' climactic hostile treatment of Jesus that would eventually lead to his death and would result them to respond by scattering away from him (Dickson 2011:1300). Their faith in Jesus was not strong enough to overcome the fear that was about to come upon them. Jesus being God had the foreknowledge of what would happen and hence predicted their fall as they would scatter away from him. Few hours from that very moment, during the night hours, when Jesus was arrested, the prophecy of Jesus was fulfilled. Jesus knowing that suffering is part of what he came to the world to undertake for human sake, passed through the peril of the trials and crucifixion with his Father alone. Jesus was physically alone because his disciples ran away from him for their safety, but Jesus was not alone for his Father was with him throughout the peril.

By using these Greek words ταῦτα λελάληκα ὑμῖν in verse 33, Jesus made reference to all he has said to his disciples about the things that would befall them for 'remaining in him' when he would have departed from this world. Having spoken to the disciples about all 'these things', he was not only concerned to prevent their distress when they see the tragic events, but the whole paschal discourse has been specifically designed to calm these timorous disciples in the face of provocation (Ellis 1986:1260).

Jesus promised εἰρήνη [peace] to those who would be put through diverse forms of tribulation for 'being in him'. In the world, it is natural to have a crisis of peace because of the problem of sin. Peace was promised because it is one of the virtues that are continually lacked in the world and which the world, by all means, would want the followers of Jesus to be deprived of. The world cannot offer perfect peace to anyone; perfect peace can only be found in Jesus (Dickson 2011:1300). Those who are following Jesus could have peace in him (ἐν ἐμοὶ εἰρήνην ἔχητε) and not stumble in the face of tribulations if they are assured of the presence of God with them in any situation that confronts them. The peace Jesus promised is essential to Christianity because it encapsulates living in intimate fellowship with God (Roberts 2010:1). The εἰρήνη Jesus promised his disciples is not the absence of problems, but the presence of God in the midst of the problems, acknowledged by the persecuted (14:27).

Tribulation (θλίψιν) in this context refers to the varying degrees of afflictions, oppressions and distresses, which the world would be exacting on the disciples of Jesus because they believe and have identified with Jesus in the interim between Jesus' departure and his Parousia. By using the Greek words, ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ θλίψιν ἔχετε, Jesus puts it to them clearly that for 'being in him', they would be experiencing

afflictions and suffering of diverse kinds and degrees in the world. In John, there is no link between the believers and the world, one is either of the world, or an authentic believer in Jesus' ontological and functional natures. In John, there is a strong antithesis between the 'believer' and the world (qua 'the Jews') because of the distinction between their modes of existence (Smith 1990:76), belief and identification with the person and the mission of Jesus. The world antagonises the mode of the existence of anyone who believes and identifies with Jesus and his mission. Therefore, the system of the world exposes the followers of Jesus to trials and persecutions. Consequently, Jesus tells his disciples that trials would threaten and challenge their faith in him and would tend to make them run away from him or deny their faith in him. Jesus in John having expressed these words 'ἀλλὰ θαρσεῖτε, ἐγὼ νενίκηκα τὸν Κόσμον' equips his disciples to be courageous as they would be persecuted because they believe in him, for he, whom they believed in, conquered the world.

The context of the persecution of Christians in Nigeria

Nigeria is one of the West African countries in which its citizens are known to be notoriously religious. While the United Nations on 14 July 2021 projected the population of Nigeria to be 211, 588, 116 (World Population Review 2021:1), a US source reports the population of Nigeria to be about 214 million (USA Government Report 2020:1). Nigeria, with its 2.60 growth rate, is ranked as the most populous country in Africa and the seventh-most densely inhabited country in the globe. Nigeria as a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country has a constitution that may or may not be adjudicated to have provided the secularity of the state (Ogbu 2014:135). However, the Nigerian Constitution 'bars the Federal and state Governments of Nigeria from adopting a state religion, prohibits religious discrimination, and provides for individuals' freedom to choose, practice, propagate or change their religion ...' (USA Government Report 2020:1). Because the constitution of Nigeria allows freedom of religion, different kinds of religion flourish in Nigeria. While traditional religions, Islam and Christianity, are the major religions in Nigeria, the majority of the Nigerian populace are divided into Muslims and Christians.

Demographically, a study estimates that 53.5% of the populace of Nigeria are Muslims, 45.9% are Christians and 0.6% are other indigenous religious people (Varrella 2021); another study estimated that 49.3% are Christians, 48.8% are Muslims and 1.9% are other indigenous or non-affiliated groups (Pewforum 2012:1). However, another research report evenly divided the 98% of the populace between Muslims and Christians, leaving approximately 2% to belong to the indigenous religious and other non-religious groups (USA Government Report 2020:1). In sub-Saharan Africa, African Traditional Religion began diminishing from 76% in 1900 to 13% in 2010; the growth of Islam rising from 14% in 1900 to 29% in 2010, while the growth of Christianity was increased from 14% in 1900 to 57% in 2010 (Pewforum 2010:1).

Since the advent of Christianity in Nigeria (Taiye 2021:1), it has been thriving at the high rate of the proliferations of Christians and churches in Nigeria. Nigerian church founders, church overseers and lay Christians are voluble, enthusiastic and deeply passionate about their Christian faith for diverse motivations. Nevertheless, it has been globally observed and confirmed that Nigeria is 'a killing zone for Christians, statistically perhaps the single most dangerous place on the planet to be a Christian' (Allen 2021:1), despite the clear provision of freedom of worship in the Constitution of Nigeria (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999:n.p.). Nigeria is among the top 10 nations of the world where it has been increasingly difficult to follow Jesus (Christianity Today News 2021:1). It is evident to the world that Christians in Nigeria are experiencing diverse forms of persecutions. The profile of persecution shows that violence against Christians is rated to be 14.1 over 16.7 (Open Doors USA 2021:1). The Church in Nigeria has been established in her unified form as 'a church under persecution, in quest for peace' (Amunadi 2012:309). Being a Christian in Nigeria is not possible without one form of persecution or the other. The primary source of extreme Christian persecution in Nigeria is the Islamic extremists' oppression (Open Doors USA 2021:1) that is consolidating due to Islamic Jihad resurgence. Agenzia declares that 'what is happening to Christians are not mere accidents, but is the result of the work of Boko-Haram Jihadists and Fulani Jihadists' (Fides-News 2013:1). Consequently, Nigeria is currently 'Africa's leading hotbed of Islamic Jihad and religious intolerance' (Genocide-Watch 2021:n.p.); hence, there is an occurrence of incessant religious crisis in Nigeria (Ogbuehi 2016:158). Islamic oppression is the persecution of Christians because Muslim Jihadists and elites in Nigerian politics selectively focus their attacks on Christian properties, people and churches while leaving the neighbouring Muslim buildings and mosques untouched. These selective attacks and oppressive treatments clearly indicate that there is a clear religious dimension and a clear plan to attack Christian communities in the North, middle belt (Djadi 2021:1) and elsewhere in Nigeria. Islamic Jihadists and elites directly or indirectly have 'publicly declared war on Christians and stated their aim to Islamize the whole of Nigeria' (Release International 2021:1). In this resurgence of Islamic Jihad, it is observed that there is the covet role of Muslim elites in the Nigerian government to consolidate, protect and enforce Islamisation of Nigeria (Open Doors USA 2021:1). In the African context, contents and opportunities, forms of persecutions that are meted out on Christians in Nigeria are enormous (Kukah 2012:1). Islamisation of Nigeria is obviously taking effect directly or indirectly because of the implementation of Sharia in civil matters as seen in the whole of Nigeria (Kendal 2006:1). The ways Nigerian Christians are persecuted for their faith in Jesus include denial of freedom to embrace Christianity, the imposition of the Sharia Law which is enforced by the 12 Northern states' Hisbah commission, which has caused and is still causing the death of thousands of persons who are mostly Christians

(Kendal 2006:1), forcing Christian women to marry Muslim men (Open Doors USA 2021:1), destruction of church and school buildings (Nzwili 2017:1), denial of access to buy land for the building of churches (Open Doors USA 2021:1), denial of access to the state media (Kendal 2006:1), deprivation of political rights (InterSociety 2021:1), denial of access to state and federal employments (Kendal 2006:1), undue retirements (Odunsi 2019:1) and killing of Christians who are in the armed forces (CBN News 2021:1), denial of access to Christian religious education in schools in the Northern States (Svanidze 2020:1), attempts to stop the teaching of what is known in Nigerian schools as Christian religious knowledge (Maina 2021:1), kidnapping of Christian girls and raping them (CSW 2002:1), kidnapping of Christian students (Bulu 2021:1), kidnapping of Christian travellers (Christianity Today News 2021:1), kidnapping and killing ministers of God (Maina 2020:1), killing of Christian farmers (CBC News 2020:1), killing of Christians in their houses (Summer 2020:1), villages and churches (Brethren.org 2020:1) and the high rate of discriminations meted against Christians in Nigeria in relation to how the emergency relief palliatives provided by the Federal government were shared during the peak of the COVID-19 lockdown (Christianity Today News 2021:1).

Christians in Nigeria suffer persecution because they believe and have faith in Jesus as 'One with God'. The reality of the high rate of the persecution and the killing of Christians in Nigeria predispose Nigeria to be ranked the number one position among the nations of the world where Christians are martyred most because of their faith in Jesus (Open Doors USA 2021:1). Because Nigerian Christians are persecuted, it is recurrent that the perpetrators of these brutal attacks are not brought to justice.

In John, Jesus explained three main causes for which Christians of every generation would always be persecuted. The remote but theological causes of the persecution of Nigerian Christians that relate to the reasons for which the world hates the Church in every age include that the world is ignorant of God (Dickson 2011:1300), the Church no longer identifies with the world (Smith 1990:76) and the Church identifies with Christ (Kendal 2006:1). Following these, Jesus' saying 'you will be hated' is ever relevant. 'Miseo' was dominantly used in John by Jesus to tell the disciples how the world would dislike them. Also, these unveil part of the reasons behind the remote causes for which the Church in Nigeria is relentlessly severely oppressed. The Church in Nigeria is persecuted because like her Lord, she is hated and oppressed; therefore, the Church should not be surprised but rather with this knowledge be equipped. Apart from theological reasons, other immediate pivotal factors that fuel Christian persecution in Nigeria include Islamisation agenda of the Muslims (Maina 2021:1), political (Enwerem 1995:1) and economic reasons (Amaza 2019:1). These factors contribute to positioning Nigeria to number one country in Africa in which it is difficult to be a Christian (Allen 2021:1).

The theological causes and effects of Christian persecutions in Nigeria

Christians are directly and indirectly persecuted in Nigeria notwithstanding that the country officially recognises a secular constitution that guarantees freedom of religion and belief (Release International 2021:1). Through persecutions, Nigerian Christians are continually being deprived of their right to freedom of worship. In extreme cases, the effects of the attacks inherent in persecutions have caused so many to be killed, and so many have lost their loved ones. The effects of these attacks have left many Christians to be widowers, widows, childless, orphans; these attacks have caused destruction of property, displacements, family extinction and setbacks for the growth of Christianity in the country (Amunadi 2012:309). A research report has shown that the number of Christians killed in Nigeria in 2020 increased by 60%, mostly because of Islamic violence against Nigerian Christians (Obiezu 2021:1).

The foremost effect of persecution of the Christians in Nigeria is that they:

[T]ravel fearing they could be kidnapped or attacked. They go to bed fearing they will be kidnapped or attacked. They go to church fearing they will be kidnapped or attacked. (Djadi 2021:1)

They go to their farmlands scared of being rounded and killed, some have refrained from going to their farms and recently, this has directly or indirectly caused scarcity of agricultural products and a consequent increase in prices of food commodities in Nigeria (Olurounbi & Adamu 2020:1).

Christians' responses to persecutions in Nigeria are diversified. Because of fear that Muslim Jihadists and their attacks have consolidated in Nigeria, some succumb in the face of persecutions, some flee away from the states in which they are severely persecuted and some others stand to withstand the persecution and in the process, many would get wounded or killed. Hence, most Christians have responded to these attacks by fleeing their homes, and these people make up a growing percentage of the million-plus internally displaced persons in Nigeria alone (Egwu 2021:1).

The inference of the content of John 16:25–33 applies to the Christians' situation in Nigeria. There are too many factors functioning to encourage a crisis of peace for Christians in Nigeria. In the interim as the *Parousia* is being awaited, diverse forms of persecutions are being unleashed on those who have identified with Jesus. The convulsive effects of persecutions on Christians and the crisis of faith they consolidate persuade some Christians to question or doubt the presence of peace that Jesus promised those that would endure the tribulations that would be unleashed out on them because they identified with him. Amid these diverse forms of persecutions, Christians need peace; hence, they are questing to live in peace and embrace their Christian faith in peace in Nigeria.

The exegesis of John 16:25–33 points to the truth of the prophecy of Jesus to his disciples, which is ever relevant – in the world, his followers will be persecuted. This is evident because even in this era, Christianity has been established to be the world's most severely persecuted religion (Open Doors USA 2021:1). Jesus, in both words and works, ministered to his disciples and prepared them in advance for any form of tribulations that they would be confronted with. Through the hostile treatments the Jews of the then world (Smith 1990:76) unleashed on Jesus, Jesus' proverbial teachings and sayings, he in advance made Christians of every generation know that abandoning the system of the world to be 'engrafted in him' would be consistent/habitual in attracting persecutions to them so that they will not be offended 'in him' (16:1). Accordingly, the persecutions Christians in Nigeria are passing through are not out of place. Therefore, Nigeria is one of the countries in Africa and in the world at large, where it is difficult to be a Christian. In Nigeria, religious persecution is real and growing as it is although in other parts of the world (Christianity Today News 2021:1).

In the persecution of Christians in Nigeria, the peace of the Christians is challenged. They live in fear. However, the Church in Nigeria has not been passive in the face of these persecutions. Individual Christians, churches, church leaders and Christian organisations have been taking some steps to consolidate the culture of freedom of worship and peace and safety in Nigeria. But there is no agreement by the Nigeria's Christian leaders on how best to respond to the persecutions against the Church in Nigeria. There appears to be a divide among Nigeria's Christian leaders on how best the Church should respond to the Muslim extremists' attacks on Christians. The mainline Christian leaders are often more likely to reach out to Muslim religious leaders and the government to develop strategies to stop Muslim extremists' attacks on Christians (Kukah 2012:1), whereas some other Christian leaders tend to demand government's action and call for Christians to defend themselves (Martins 2021:1). But generally, the actions that Christians in Nigeria have taken in order to curb or reduce the severity of persecution in Nigeria include the following: (1) praying, (2) speaking but not in one voice, (3) speaking inciting words that could ameliorate or even increase the severity of persecution, (4) protesting and calling on the international communities to help stop the unending attacks on Christians' properties, people and churches, (5) creation of awareness, (6) being security conscious and (7) by paying ransom or persuading government to pay ransom to rescue Christians who have been abducted.

The American government through its embassy and consulate general officials and some visiting high-level officials had in 2020 voiced concern about abuses and discrimination meted against people because of their religion. The US Ambassador and his team promote:

[R]eligious tolerance, interfaith relationship-building with a wide range of religious leaders and civil society organisations ..., importance of respect for religious freedom at large religious

gatherings, ... and as well as funded peace-building programs in conflict-prone states. (USA Government Report 2020:1)

Still in 2020, many more expanded activities were carried out by the US embassy to reduce or stop the escalation of religiously motivated violent conflicts and to consolidate social cohesion, religion freedom and to instill in the Nigerian leaders on how to mitigate communities' disputes peacefully without these incessant conflicts degenerating into ethnoreligious conflicts (USA Government Report 2020:1).

The mitigating roles that are still being played by the Federal and state governments who appear to be directly or indirectly participating in persecuting Christians and the government's and government-supported grassroots acclaimed efforts and roles to halt religiously motivated crises, and the responses of the Christian leaders and lay members and other international communities and organisations' efforts to deter or abate attacks on Christians and to promote sustainable peace have not consolidated lasting solutions to the increasing rate of the persecution of the Church in Nigeria. This conclusion is drawn because within just the first four months in 2021, many properties belonging to Christians have been destroyed, and many more Christians were injured, kidnapped or killed because of their faith in Jesus Christ. In relation to the persecution of Christians in Nigeria, John 16:25–33 is, therefore, the summary of Jesus' preparative words to Christians of every age, as well as Nigerian Christians, who were called out of the world to be the followers of Jesus in the world full of trials and persecutions, who are to be encouraged by the victory that Jesus has eternally wrought for the Church.

Lessons and recommendations

1. Christians in Nigeria should learn that because they have identified with Jesus, they should expect persecution and could be killed (16:2). Understanding and appreciating the advance warnings and teachings of Jesus concerning the persecution of Christians (16:4) should predispose Nigerian Christians not to become offended or feel depressed (16:6) because of the faith in Christ or lose faith in Jesus. They should, therefore, in the face of persecution, gather strength that if their Lord overcame, they would also overcome.
2. Nigerian Christians in persecution should not allow the severity of the persecutions that confront them to make them doubt, deny or betray Jesus. Christians should have firm belief and faith in the divinity of Jesus, for it is sin in John not to genuinely believe in the divinity of Jesus (16:9).
3. Nigerian Christians should learn that it is only when one loves Jesus and consolidates a firm belief 'in Jesus' and undergoes suffering for the name of Jesus, would one be said to be subjected to persecution as well as be entitled to have peace in the face of persecution that Jesus promised his followers. Any Nigerian who has no faith 'in Jesus' is with the world. Consequently, any suffering that person is suffering even in the name of Jesus is not to be seen as persecution. Being 'in Jesus' is proffered to Nigerian Christians, so that the 'peace' that Jesus promised those who have faith 'in him', who would suffer for his name's sake, would then be fulfilled.
4. Nigerian Christians should take advantage of the advance information and warnings Jesus had given in his parables or proverbs, categorical words and the words from the Holy Spirit to learn to be equipped to conquer the world as Jesus and his disciples modelled.
5. Nigerian Christians should always acknowledge that God is with them through the presence of the Holy Spirit (16:7, 13–15, 25). While facing persecution, Nigerian Christians submitting to the leadership of the Holy Spirit would enable them to access the perfect peace that can only come from God.
6. Nigerian Christians should understand that they are living in the era when it has been theologically established that the Church would be persecuted in the same manner the Lord of the Church was persecuted (17:14). Christians should learn from Jesus who understood the value of the sufferings meted on him and hence did not allow him to be deterred from carrying on his mission. Understanding the positive side of suffering in the life of a Christian helps in determining how a Christian responds to persecutions. Although Jesus is the Lord of the Church, he was also persecuted (Jn 5:16), but he lived out the liberating passion of God. Nigerian Christians should come to terms with the suffering implications of 'being in Christ'. Suffering diverse forms of persecution is synonymous to 'being in Christ'.
7. It is crucial that Nigerian Christians acknowledge and value the mediating role of Jesus between God and humankind in this era of the interim before the Parousia. Christians in Nigeria in persecution should be making requests to God through Jesus' name to meet all their needs that they would be having, so that their joy and peace in him do not get truncated or taken by anyone (16:22) but be full (16:24).
8. Nigerian Christians should always be conscious of the theological truth that Jesus conquered the world and his promised *Parousia* should consolidate peace and hope in them as they will be active in the mission mandate of the Church. The gift of his Spirit (20:22) and the promise of Jesus' second-coming (14:1–3; 21:22–23) should encourage Christians in persecution (16:22) not to lose their joy and peace in Jesus.
9. Nigerian Christians are to unite and not divide as they have been presaged by the Lord of the Church to be living in the era of persecution. Being united will persuade Christians to have one voice against those who are persecuting them. Just as Jesus prayed to his Father that he helps his followers to be united (17:11), and so, ever relevant remains the need for Christians in every age to be united in their firm belief in the person and mission of

Jesus to the world. This would also function to hinder the enemies of the Church from using division in the body of Christ in Nigeria to make Christians to be offended against themselves and hence leveraging some to fall out of faith in Jesus.

Conclusion

Christians in Nigeria are persecuted because of their identification with Jesus Christ. Because of the rate of persecution that Christians are suffering in Nigeria, the nation is enlisted among those countries in the world where it is very difficult to be a Christian. This is established because of the rate of both reported and unreported cases of persecution that have left many Christian's displaced, unemployed, traumatised, wounded or dead. There are also recurrent news of countable and unaccountable loss of properties. Churches and people's properties have been burnt. The recognisable efforts of the Federal and state governments of Nigeria, church leaders, lay Christians and international communities to reduce persecution in Nigeria are being foiled because once the Church is still in the world, she will continuously be persecuted. Nevertheless, if Christians in Nigeria continue to be firm in their faith in Jesus and by emulating how Jesus who is the founder and the Lord of the Church conquered the world, they would also have peace in him and also conquer the world as Jesus and his disciples did.

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Author's contributions

C.P.U is the sole author of this article.

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Data availability

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