

# BLESSED PERSECUTED

Mt 5:10

## I. PERSECUTED DESCRIBED οἱ δεδιωγμένοι

- A. Harassed, hunted—wild beasts pursued, enemies attacked
- B. Suffered losses of various sorts (property; reputation; relationships; friends & relatives)

## II. PERSECUTED LAUDED

- A. A postulate: “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church” (Tertullian)
- B. A history of persecutions.
  - 1. Early Church (much recorded in Eusebius’s *Church History*)
    - a. James in Jerusalem; Peter & Paul in Rome; only John died a natural death
    - b. Ignatius of Antioch, ca. 110 A.D.
    - c. Justin Martyr, c. 150 A.D.
    - d. Polycarp of Smyrna, ca. 160 A.D.
  - 2. Islamic conquests & persecution: Bat Ye’or, an Egyptian-born scholar recounts what Christians suffered under Muslim rule in *The Decline of Eastern Christianity Under Islam: From Jihad to Dhimmitude*.
    - a. *Jihad* is Islam’s normal path to expansion through wars of conquest with goal of ruling world
    - b. *Dhimmitude* is the status of non-Muslims in Islamic lands, leading to “agricultural decline . . . the gradual desertification of provinces” and cultural decay; 1915 Armenian genocide a recent illustration
    - c. In short, Bat Ye’or says, “irrefutable historical and archaeological sources confirm” that the “process of Islamization” in conquered lands, “was perhaps the greatest plundering enterprise in history.”
  - 3. Reformation persecutions evident in 16th century England
    - a. Henry VIII executes Thomas More, John Fisher, and many more Catholics
    - b. Bloody Mary executes Thomas Cranmer and leading Protestants
  - 4. 20th century bloodbaths
    - a. Bolsheviks—cf. Solzhenitsyn’s *Gulag Archipelago*
    - b. Nazis—e.g. Maximilian Kolbe; Dietrich Bonhoeffer
    - c. Maoists—multiplied millions
    - d. Fidel Castro & Che Gueverra kill, suppress Christians
    - e. Muslims in Nigeria today
  - 5. Current intimidation, suppression in America as “culture wars” intensify
    - a. Schools—battle over curricula, pronounced in Virginia
      - 1. Influence of Marcuse, Angela Davis & New Left.
      - 2. Influence of Paolo Freire & *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*
    - b. Courts—struggle to uphold 1st Amendment—Alliance for Freedom & CO cases

## III. FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS’ SAKE (ἕνεκεν δικαιοσύνης)

- A. Setting aside the fact that some suffering is due to obtuseness, foolishness, etc.
- B. Suffering due to righteousness includes:
  - 1. Speaking the truth:
    - a. Doctrinal (trinitarian God, Incarnate Christ)—Peter in Jerusalem on Pentecost; Athanasius “*contra mundum*,” Luther’s “Here I Stand,” John Wesley’s field preaching
    - b. Ethical (lawful behavior)—Ambrose vs. Emperor; monk Telemachus in Roman Coliseum ends gladiatorial games, 404 A.D.; English Parliamentarian William Wilberforce ends slave trade; pro-life movement architects (Bernard Nathanson)
  - 2. Living rightly (“live not by lies”)—C.S. Lewis said the greatest failure of ordinary folks is the refusal to acknowledge the truth
    - a. Caring for dying (Mother Teresa)
    - b. Establishing schools (Benedictines in past & church schools today)
    - c. Defending life (scores of pro-life organizations, endeavors)
    - d. Defending community (police), nation (military)

## IV. THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN