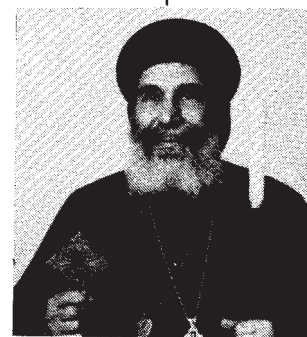




The Motives of Martyrdom in Christianity

ΜΙΛΩΙΣΙ ΜΑΡΤΥΡΙΑ Ν'ΧΡΙΣΤΙΑΝΟΣ

Written by the late Bishop Youannis
ΠΙΕΠΙΣΚΟΠΟΣ ΕΤΕΝΚΟΤ ΙΩΑΝΝΗΣ



Bishop Youannis

Humanity did not know in all its history, martyrs like the martyrs of Christianity, in their enthusiasm, courage, meekness, patience, endurance, and rejoicing with martyrdom! They embraced death and torture in joy and calmness, which amazed their persecutors who accused them with madness and foolishness. Some of the enemies of Christianity mocked the martyrs and interpreted their attitude as a type of escaping from life and kind of suicide.

We cannot fully comprehend martyrdom in Christianity, or estimate its sanctity, unless we know its motives that led those saints to death as if it were an enjoyable journey. Early Christians believed in steadfast spiritual principles which were capable of changing their outlook of life. We may mention some of them in the following:

1. This world is temporary compared with eternal life: There are many Divine sayings that encourage such a feeling: "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are Eternal." (II Corinthians 4:17, 18)..."But this I say, brethren, the time is short, so that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none, those who weep as though they did not weep, those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice, those who buy as though they did not possess, and those who use this world as not misusing it. For the form of this world is passing away." (I Corinthians 7: 29,30)..."And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the Will of God abides forever." (I John 2:17).

2. They are strangers

in the world: They were always remembering the inspired words of the holy Apostles, "Conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear." (I Peter 1: 17) "Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul." (II Peter 2:11) St. Paul after speaking about the heroes of faith in the Old Testament said, "These all died in faith, not having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." (Hebrew 11:13) "So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord...we are confident, yea, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord." (II Corinthians 5:6,8)

3. This world lies under the sway of the wicked one and this life is full of suffering, pain and tribulations:

"We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one." (I John 5:19) "Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice, and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy." (John 16:20) "Enter by the narrow gate." (Matthew 7:13) "In the world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have over-come the world." (John 16: 33)

By comparison with the other life, it is said, "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." (Revelation 21:4)

4. They believed that the end of the world's



tribulations lead to a great glory in Heaven:

“He who loves his life will lose it and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for Eternal Life.” (John 12:25)...”Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls onto the ground and dies, it remains alone, but if it dies, it produces much grain.” (John 12:24)...”I say to you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy. A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human has been born into the world.” (John 16:20-22)...”This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him we shall also live with Him, if we endure, we shall also reign with Him.” (II Timothy 11,12) “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed unto us.” (Romans 8;18)

For all these reasons:

I. They abandoned worldly and material things:

They followed the wisdom of Job as he said, “Naked I came from my mothers’ womb, and naked I shall return there.” (Job 1:21) It is the same meaning St. Paul confirmed in the Holy Book of I Timothy 6:7,8.



St. John and St. Luke. St. Menas Church. Fum Al’Khalig. Cairo.

II. They desired and longed for departure and being with the Lord Jesus Christ:

This strong desire was supported with the Lord’s promises, “Where I am, there you may be also.” (John 14:2,3); “He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for Eternal Life...if anyone serves Me, let him follow Me, and where I am, there My servant will be also.” (John 12:25,26). Therefore, all the martyrs shared Simeon’s song, “Lord, now You are letting your servant depart in peace, according to Your Word, for my eyes have seen Your salvation.”

(Luke 2:29) In the same meaning and feeling St. Paul expressed his inner strong desire, “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain...I am hard pressed between the two having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better...”(Philippians 1:21-23)

III. They did that out of fervent love: Saints and martyrs loved the Lord Jesus Christ and kept the first and greatest commandment from all their hearts, minds, souls, and strength. They applied His Words, “He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.”✝

The Ten Commandments are not multiple choice.