

The Saint Martyr

PHILIAS

Bishop of Tummy Emdeed

**"LES SAINTS D'EGYPTE"
by R.P. Paul Cheneau**

**Translated by
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As everybody knows, the persecution at the time of Diocletien was intensely severe in Egypt. The saints whose biography will be read, are well-known among the countless victims of the crowned monster.

One of them was a bishop, another was a magistrate; many others were associated with their sufferings, or it is better to say, with their triumph.

Philius was born in Tummyl Emdeed, the metropolis of the province of Mendes (whose ruins are situated between Mansourah and Cherbin). There was the cult of Pan, with the repelling face of a ram. It was one of the richest and most beautiful cities of ancient Egypt.

Philius had good looks, and was very familiar with literature and philosophy. He was so rich that he could alone provide for the whole province. He had long ago relinquished paganism whose coarse dogmas shocked his enlightened mind, and whose unclean practices were loathsome to the integrity of his morals. The roman authority had requested his good will. He responded with his great heart by his precious cooperation; and within a short time he arrived at the greatest position in the civic administration. It was there that his fellow citizens went to seek him in order to place him upon the episcopal see of their city. He was their pride, and during a long time, in the catastrophic days of the persecution, he was a quietening agent, because of his past brilliant position and his influential relations among the authoritative world.

He witnessed dreadful things with a sickened heart, recognising to be unable to describe them. He mentioned them in a letter which arrived to us, and which we faithfully summarise hereafter:

Following the example of their Master, who obeyed until death, and the death of the Cross, the extremely happy martyrs suffered torture over torture rather than wounding in anyway the integrity of their faith. Their steadfastness was unflinching, and their perfect magnanimity desisted any feeling of fright in them. If anyone would only make a sketch of their performances' account, these would seem unbelievable; only those who witnessed them with their eyes would believe them.

The martyrs of this era were placed in such a way that any passenger who would like to molest them, could reach them. If a curious person had in mind a new torture, he could immediately try it out. Everywhere they were excessively beaten with rods with knotty sticks, lashed with leather straps, and scourged with cords and whips. It was a competition among the crowds, who would find a new torment for these glorious confessors? The hands of the latter were tied with ropes which were swiftly stretched

by pulleys, until their members were completely disjoined. They were left there during the whole day long in order to see if the duration of the torment would bring their constancy to an end.

The nails of iron seemed to be a light torture. When the tyrants applied them to those dauntless heroes, they were not satisfied by tearing the loins of the sufferers, as they do with murderers and highwaymen, but they stripped their skin off from their abdomen, their legs, their arms, their cheeks, and their forehead itself. Then, and in order more to refine their sufferings, these quivering bodies were publicly exposed, as in an exhibition, not only without any clothes, but also with the skin completely peeled out.

Some were seen hanging by a single hand to the porches, until all the articulations were dislocated and outspread. Nothing could be equal to the sharpness of such pain. The martyrs were tied to pillars, without their feet touching the ground, so that the bonds would become tighter and tighter by the weight of the body, till they penetrated in the flesh to the bones.

At the end of the day, all these disfigured and unrecognisable beings, covered with their blood and saturated with outrages, were brought again to their jail, on foot, where they were casted upon sharp fragments of broken pots, as a bed to rest upon; or they were placed inside wooden shackles with their legs discarded in a way that no movement could be permitted and that no relief from their sufferings could be left out. Philias wrote this realistic description a few days after his arrival to Alexandria.

The historian Eusebius of Caesarea wrote what follows, in the tenth chapter of the eighth book of his "History of the Church" which was translated into Arabic by the Rev. Fr. Marcos Daoud and published by "Dar El Karnak" for publishing, printing, and distribution, Cairo:

The writings of the martyr Philias about the description of the events at Alexandria.

(1) So long as we had mentioned that Philias was very famous for his knowledge of worldly sciences, let himself testify in the following expressions which are extracted from his writings, where he uncovers to us his personality, and at the same time, describes with more accuracy than ourselves, the martyrdoms which happened in Alexandria during his time.

(2) The blessed martyrs who were with us, having before them all these examples and blessed specimens which were given to us in the Holy Scriptures, absolutely did not hesitate, but rather they sincerely fixed the eyes of their minds toward God on highest; and having concentrated their thoughts in death for the sake of christianity, they persisted in their calling with a firm will; because they had known that Our Lord Jesus Christ made Himself human for our sake in order to cut off every sin, and to provide us with the means of entering eternal life "who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2: 6-8).

(3) Those christophoros martyrs who also were enthusiastic for the best virtues, supported all the calamities and all kinds of plots and tormenting, not for once, but some of them twice. And in spite of the emulation of the guards among themselves, to threaten them in every way and by every kind of intimidation, not only by words, but also by deeds, they did not falter away from their resolution, because "perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18).

(4) What words can describe their courage and their bravery amidst every torture? Freedom having been given to all those who wanted to ill-treat them, some would beat them with sticks, others with rods, others with lashes, others with whips, and others with cords.

(5) As regards those who saw them, their excitement was varied in its degree, and all of them expressed violent disapproval. Some martyrs were pressed between two pieces of wood where there were some aperture and which were fastened to their limbs, having their hands bound behind them, each member being stretched with a special instrument. After that, the executioners were ordered to tear all their bodies with the instruments of torture, not only their flanks as it happens with the murderers, but also their abdomens, their knees, and their cheeks. Others were lifted up and suspended with one hand, and so they suffered terrible pains by the effect of pulling their members and their articulations. Others were bound to columns without their feet touching the ground, but the weight of their bodies was hanging on the bonds with which they were tied and which were very tightly fixed .

(6) They suffered all that, not only during the time when the governor was speaking to them, but all day long. Because while he passed by others, he used to leave them to the supervision of some employees who were at his command, in order to watch if any of them would have been vanquished through torture, and began to give up. Then he would

command to fasten them relentlessly with chains, and when they would arrive at the last breath, they were cast upon the ground and dragged out.

(7) Because he had ordered that no care should be given to us. Rather they thought and acted as if we were not existing. Thus our enemies invented this kind of tormenting, in addition to scourging.

(8) After these tumults, some were placed in a wooden instrument, and their feet were stretched inside four holes, so that they were compelled to lie down upon the instrument, unable to keep straight because of the new wounds that covered all their bodies as a result of scourging. Others were cast down on the ground and suffered the hardest kinds of torture, so that the spectators would see some more terrible manifestation of brutality, the marks of various torture which they had invented, being apparent in the bodies of the saints.

(9) While this happened, some would die under torture, bringing shame to the enemy by their marvelous perseverance. Others were cast down in jails, while they were at the point of parting away from life, and after they had tasted the bitterness of their sufferings, they died in a few days. As for the rest who had some care, they were healed and remained long in jail and gained confidence with time.

(10) When they were ordered to choose between being spared from the torments if they touch the unclean sacrifices and so to obtain a damned freedom from them, otherwise they would be condemned to death if they refused to sacrifice, ... they did not hesitate, but rather they joyfully hurried to death, because they knew what the Holy Scriptures had announced, because it was said: "He who sacrifices to any god, except to the Lord only, he shall be utterly destroyed" (Ex. 22:20), and it was also said: "You shall have no other gods before Me" (Ex. 20:3).

(11) These are the words of the true philosopher martyr, the lover of God, which he has addressed to the brothers in his diocese, while he was still in jail, and before the final judgement was pronounced against him. In them, he had shown his special circumstances, and at the same time he had incited them to be steadfast in the religion of Christ, even after he had seen death coming near him.

(12) But why should we lengthen our meditation in these matters, and continue to add new examples about the combat of the pure martyrs in all the world, especially when we know that they were not treated according to any law, but were assaulted as enemies.

The bishop's martyrdom

In fact, the persecution which seemed to have forgotten him, changed its mind when the new governor of all Egypt, the prefect

Culcianos, came to power. He had just come down from the region of Thebe, where he was distinguished by his zeal for the decrees of the emperors against Christianity. He owed to his hierarchical chiefs a testimony of gratitude for his beautiful promotion, or it is rather better say, his low servility. He looked around himself and in the surrounding regions, and was astonished about the immunity which the christian community had enjoyed under the rule of his predecessors. He resolved to put an end to this exceptional regime.

A small company, then, left Alexandria. The distressed Tomyel Emdeed saw them entering its walls, surround the home of the bishop, and go back soon, taking with them its most famous citizen, the indispensable administrator Philius, hands in chains, with his joyful face and a smile on his lips.

That was in February 304. Diocletian had to resign from the empire two months later.

Culcianos restlessly waited for the bishop. He was going to have someone with whom to argue. The culprit was of a superior class; and he could show his beautiful qualities and his appreciation, and justify the emperor's trust. Briefly, a beautiful judicial case was about to be opened. He would retail all his resources, and make himself sometimes gracious, sometimes sarcastic, patronizing, sly; but always respectfully, and ready to come to a compromise with this old and honest servant of the empire, who kept away from business, and who was so much listened to, and surrounded by such warm sympathies.

Soon after the procession had entered the town, Culcianos, without losing time, summoned Philius to the assembly. The inquisition began immediately.

Here it is such as a contemporary kept it for us:

The bishop who is arrested, is placed upon a small platform before his judge.

The judge abruptly says: "Can you be moderate now?"

Philius: "I am always temperate, and I lead a life of frugality."

The judge: "Sacrifice to the gods."

Philius: "No."

The judge: "Why not?"

Philius: "Because one must not sacrifice except to the true God."

The judge: "Then immolate to the true God."

Philius: "No, because the true God does not want bloody victims."

The judge: "What then are the sacrifices which the true God demands?"

Philius: "God claims a pure heart, sincere feelings, and straightforward words."

The judge: "Sacrifice!"

Philius: "I do not know sacrificing to the false gods, but to the true God alone."

The judge: "Did not Paul sacrifice?"

Philius: "Certainly not."

The judge: "Did not Moses sacrifice?"

Philius: "Perfectly, because the Jews could do it; but only in Jerusalem."

The judge: "Enough shrewd distinctions, sacrifice!"

Philius: "I shall not stain my soul."

The judge: "Is it the right time to take care of your soul?!"

Philius: "Certainly yes, of my soul and of my body."

The judge: "Of what body?"

Philius: "Of mine."

The judge: "Perhaps you believe that your body will resuscitate if it is broken to pieces?"

Philius: "Yes, most surely."

The judge: "Did not Paul deny Christ?"

Philius: "A thousand times no."

The judge: "Swear about that."

Philius: "It is useless to swear, I assert, and that is enough."

The judge: "Was not Paul a persecutor of the Religion?"

Philius: "What a question?!"

The judge: "Was he not a Syrian? did he not argue in Syriac?"

Philius: "Paul was a Jew, he argued in Greek and possessed a rare wisdom."

The judge: "Perhaps you are going to pretend that the was superior to Plato?"

Philius: "Not only superior to Plato, but superior also to all the other philosophers. If you give me your permission, I shall make all his teachings known to you."

The judge: "I dispense you of that. Sacrifice!"

Philius: "No, no."

The judge: "Perhaps your conscience forbids you that?"

Philius: "You said it."

In his heart, Culcianos wanted to save the head of Philius; he had allowed the lawyers to assist this great personality, hoping to intercept a moment of weakness in him, and then to pronounce a judgement of pardon. The responses of Philius to his judge confounded the lawyers.

The lawyers: "Why do you oppose the prefect?"

Philius: "I just answer his questions."

These questions were in fact becoming more and more compressed.

The judge: "Come on! All these words are needless, sacrifice to the gods."

Philius: "No, I shall not sacrifice; the salvation of my soul comes before everything."

The judge: "Was Christ God?"

Philius: "Yes, He is God."

The judge: "How could you attain this certainty?"

Philius: "By His deeds. He gave sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, health to the lepers, life to the dead, He resuscitated Himself, and He accomplished many other wonders."

The judge: "Very well. But this God, your God, was He not tied to the disgraceful gallows of the Cross?"

Philius: "That is right. He willed that, in order to achieve our salvation."

The judge: "Philius, see what respect I have for you, appreciate well all the delicate procedures which I am using as regards you; I could have let you stand before the court of your own town, I could have handed you over to the low insults of the masses, but I have not done so."

Philius: "Thank you for your good intentions; however to stand before the court in my own town would cause me a very great joy, please do not bereave me of it."

The judge: "What are you saying? What is it you desire?"

Philius: "Execute the orders which you have received."

The judge: "So then, you want to die without reasons?"

Philius: "How without reasons? But for the sake of God and truth."

The judge: "Was Paul God?"

Philius: "Who said so?"

The judge: "What was he, then?"

Philius: "A man like us, but he was full of the Holy Spirit, and for this reason he operated miracles."

The judge: "Philius, I pity you greatly; I am going to spare you because of your brother and your family."

Philius: "No, no, do your duty."

The judge: "Listen, if you were a mere poor wretched commoner, I would not have shown this forbearance; but I am informed about your past life, I know your wealthy situation, and I do not ignore that you alone could provide for the food of a whole province; and that is why I want to spare your head: immolate to the gods."

Philius: "By refusing to immolate, I spare myself."

The lawyers who wanted to bring him out of his situation, with all their power and in spite of him, shouted:

The lawyers: "It is no use, lord prefect; he has already sacrificed inside the literary meeting."

Philius, interrupting with a powerful voice: "Have I sacrificed to the false gods? Never! But to the true God, yes, and very often."

The disappointed lawyers replied: "Illustrious prefect, our very honorable customer asks to reflect."

Culcien, pronouncing: "Yes, willingly; I grant him all the necessary time."

Philius: "Giving me time to consider! Shall I let you believe that I am hesitating for a single moment!? That will not be. There is a long time since my reflections have been made; my choice is no more to be made; I shall suffer and die for the sake of Christ."

Then there was a heart-rending scene. His relatives, his old friends, the high-ranked employees of the city of Alexandria, left their seats, surrounded the platform where he was standing, and beseeched him, and asked him with tears in their eyes, at least to make believe the obedience to the imperial decrees. They threw themselves at his feet amidst the general emotion of the attendance. But, as firm as some motionless rock when it is beaten by the waves of an angered sea, he challenged all their offers, thanked them for this explosion of sympathy, and protested that he would not like to hear anything except talking about heaven.

There was a magistrate among the high-ranked personalities who were present. He was delegated to Alexandria by the emperor himself, for the sake of the settlement of important matters. In order to raise up his mission, Diocletian had given him the title of magistrate. His name was Philorome. When he saw Philius who was bothered by his relatives, by the complaints of the official representatives, and by the questions of the prefect, he stood up, and said loudly with an authoritative voice:

This painful scene has been too long. Why do you test the steadfastness of this hero with such a hard trial? Why for the only sake of satisfying yourselves, do you want to bring up against God, a man who is faithful to Him? Do you not then see that his eyes do not perceive your tears, and his ears do not perceive your groaning. It is enough; let this man alone in peace."

Culcianos was skimming with anger before this challenge. The occasion had come and was too good for him, he would not let it escape. He would confuse with the same single decree, both the bishop of the Christians, and this burdening delegate who had come and nobody knew why, and who was allowing himself to intervene everywhere like this, and to inquire about people and things.

This incident of the attendance precipitated the end. Philius and Philorome were both condemned to have their head cut off. The same

judgement was applied to other victims who had been crowded since a long time inside the jails of the city.

The procession headed for the spot where the executions take place. On the way, one of the brothers of the bishop attempted a last effort. While the prefect was passing by, he said with a loud voice:

"Lord, my brother Philius is making an appeal."

Culcianos, running to the martyr: "Did you make an appeal, is that true?"

Philius, replying: "Not at all. God forbid! Do not give any attention to this voice. As for me, I am thanking the emperors and you, prefect, who are going to set me up as a heir to the kingdom of heaven."

When they arrived to the end of the road, the confessors stopped; the executioners took hold of their persons and arranged the materials for the execution. Philius was firstly called to place his head upon the block, and he asked for the favour of doing his last prayer. He stretched his arms in the form of the cross and said:

"O my dear children, my beloved brothers who worship the true God, watch well upon your hearts, because Satan seeks to take hold of them; rejoice, because at this hour, we are going to become the true disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom glory is due forever till the end of the ages."

When he ended his prayer, Philius and Philorome gave themselves up to the executioners. Both were beheaded at the same time. The bishop and the magistrate presented themselves together at the twinkling doors of paradise. The cross and the sword were brotherly united for ever in the eternal glory.

Authors to be consulted:

Father Gregoire, contemporary of these saint martyrs.

RUFIN, 1, VIII, chapter 9.

EUSEBE OF CAESAREA, "Ecclesiastic History", 1, VIII.

NICEPHORE CALLIXTE, 1, VII, chapter 9.

