

An early Christian who puts us to shame

When I was part of the usual church system I was just like all the other brethren who piously said (or was it a boast?) we would be willing to die for Christ. As I grew older, and experienced persecution and physical attacks, I tempered my claim with a more sober hope that I would indeed not fail God if I came to the very brink of death at the hands of evil men. An instant death might be conceivable... but what of a slow, long punishment that was enough to cause pain and suffering but not enough to kill?

I believe the case of an early bishop, Thomas of Marash (now in Turkey), should present what I mean. He was a man we can easily offer immense sympathy to... but can we actually identify with him in his Christian suffering?

We find this bishop listed as an attendee at the Council of Nicaea and you can find his story in a number of sources. The remarkable thing is that he was able to attend at all, given the horrific injuries he received from enemies. Most of the bishops at that Council meeting had been tortured at some time, and left with marks in their wrists and feet, given to them in hatred by people who hated Christ. Some had their eyes gouged out, their ears cut off, or teeth dug out by knives. But, Thomas was above them all in what he endured...

Thomas was acknowledged to be a most fearsome sight, because of horrific attacks on his person. He was imprisoned for 22 years by the Armanites (Armenians). In order to make Thomas accept their evils, they mutilated parts of his body, or cut something off, every year of his incarceration... but, he refused to acknowledge the validity of their religious demands and so suffered incredibly.

He had to be taken to the Council in special vehicles... throughout the years he had his ears cut off, his nose, and his eyes. His teeth had been hacked out one by one. Both his arms and legs had been cut off, but, before that, he had all his nails pulled out from feet and hands. Yet, he refused to recant.

When the Emperor Constantine saw him, he fell on his knees before him, saying *"I worship thee, O thou martyr of Christ, who art adorned with many crowns."*

Thomas was the worst example of hatred against Christians at that time, but all but a small

Thomas, Bishop of Marash

Written by K B Napier

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number of bishops at that convocation had similarly been mauled, but not to that degree. (Recorded by Marutha of Maipqat and discovered, 2007, in a collection of Syriac documents, now in Yale University). Though numbers of attendees differ in the various other accounts, it seems about 318 bishops were able to attend the Council. Of those only 11 did not have horrible marks and mutilations. Would

you

be a bishop at that time?

The sole purpose of this paper is to recognise a true believer who suffered greatly for his faith, and for refusing to accept heresy or wicked beliefs. When he attended the Council of Nicaea, he was but a body without arms and legs, and with a horribly mutilated face. Bits of him were hacked off every year... how many years could you or I continue like this, knowing that the next year something else would be hacked off? Try your soul (as I do) and ask the question!

Do not be blasé about your faith, and never boast that whatever happens you would keep your faith and be a true witness to Christ. We can all hope; we can all pray; we can all genuinely stand firm before the event... but when the time comes, would we be like Thomas, or run, or recant?

Thomas and the other bishops (pastors) were at the very start of growing Catholicism, but before Rome had ruined the doctrine of God with many falsities. So, we cannot dismiss Thomas for that reason. He suffered more than many men, and did not have the luxury of dying from his injuries (because his enemies wanted to keep him alive for their own wicked pleasures of torture). I have no reason to doubt his salvation, but every reason to commend his faith and resolve.

We are now in an age when persecution is rife, not just of Christians but of anyone who lives by their religion. This is because the world is quickly becoming Satan's domain, just as scripture prophesied. The hatred for all religions is like a white-hot fire burning all before it. Of course, God is not interested in those whose religion is ungodly. But, we should be very aware of the possibilities before us in our own lifetime, especially as Islam is gaining prominence, with all its hatred for Christians displayed for all to see. In this, a false religion is using brute force to subdue men and women of the one true faith. Christians are already dying because of this and many have been murdered. Some have also been mutilated.

So, pray that if you are attacked for your faith, that you will respond in godly manner. It is what I

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pray for myself. Though I have known persecution and even physical attacks, none of it comes anywhere close to what happened to the bishop of Marash. Let us thank the Lord for our relative ease today, but let us prepare ourselves spiritually for what might be to come.

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