

Philobus, Egyptian Coptic Priest and Missionary (part 1 of 2)

Description: A priest who at one time actively spread misconceptions about Islam accepts Islam (part 1).

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Al-Haj Ibrahim Khalil Ahmad, formerly Ibrahim Khalil Philobus, was an Egyptian Coptic priest who studied theology and obtained a high degree from Princeton University. He studied Islam to find gaps to attack it; instead he embraced Islam with his four children, one of whom is now a brilliant professor in Sorbonne University, Paris France. In an interesting way, he reveals himself saying:

"I was born in Alexandria on the 13th of January 1919 and was sent to the American Mission schools until I got my secondary education certificate there. In 1942 I got my diploma from Asiut University and then I specialized in religious studies as a prelude to join the Faculty of Theology. It was no easy task to join the faculty, as no candidate could join it unless he got a special recommendation from the church, and also, after he should pass a number of difficult exams. I got a recommendation from Al-Attareen Church in Alexandria and another from the Church Assembly of Lower Egypt after passing many tests to know my qualifications to become a man of religion. Then I got a third recommendation from Snodus Church Assembly which included priests from Sudan and Egypt.

The Snodus sanctioned my entrance into the Faculty of Theology in 1944 as a boarding student. There I studied at the hands of American and Egyptian teachers until my graduation in 1948.

I was supposed, he continued, to be appointed in Jerusalem, had it not been for the war that broke out in Palestine that same year, so I was sent to Asna in Upper Egypt. That same year I registered for a thesis at the American University in Cairo. It was about the missionary activities among Muslims. My acquaintance with Islam started in the Faculty of Theology where I studied Islam and all the methods through which we could shake the faith of Muslims and raise misconceptions in their understanding of their own religion.

In 1952 I got my M.A. from Princeton University in U.S.A. and was appointed as a teacher in the Faculty of Theology in Asiut. I used to teach Islam in the faculty as well as the faulty misconceptions spread by its enemies and the missionaries against it. During that period, I decided to enlarge my study of Islam so that I should not read the missionaries books on it only. I had so much faith in myself that I was confirmed to read the other point of view. Thus I began to read books written by Muslim authors. I also decided to read the Quran and understand its meanings. This was implied by my love of knowledge and moved by my desire to add more proofs against Islam. The result was,

however, exactly the reverse. My position began to shake and I started to feel an internal strong struggle, and I discovered the falsehood of everything I had studied and preached to the people. But I could not face myself bravely and tried instead to overcome this internal crisis and continue my work.

In 1954, Mr. Khalil added, I was sent to Aswan as secretary general of the German Swiss Mission. That was only my apparent position, for my real mission was to preach against Islam in Upper Egypt especially among Muslims. A missionary conference was held at that time at Cataract Hotel in Aswan, and I was given the floor to speak. That day I spoke too much, reiterating all the repeated misconceptions against Islam; and at the end of my speech, the internal crisis came to me again and I started to revise my position.

Continuing his talk about the said crisis, Mr. Khalil said, "I began to ask myself: Why should I say and do all these things which I know for sure I am a liar, as this is not the truth? I took my leave before the end of the conference and went out alone to my house. I was completely shaken. As I walked through Firyal public garden, I heard a verse of the Quran on the radio. It said:

"Say: It has been revealed to me that a company of Jinns listened (to the Quran). They said: We have really heard a wonderful recital! It gives guidance to the Right, and we have believed therein: We shall not join (in worship) any gods with our Lord." (Quran 72:1-2)

"And as for us, since we have listened to the Guidance, we have accepted it: and any one who believes in His Lord, has no fear of either a short (account) or of any injustice." (Quran 72:13)

I felt a deep comfort that night, and when I returned home I spent the whole night all by myself in my library reading the Quran. My wife inquired from me about the reason of my sitting up all night and I pleaded from her to leave me alone. I stopped for a long time thinking and meditating on the verse:

"Had We sent down this Quran on a mountain, verily thou wouldst have seen it humble itself and cleave asunder for fear of God..." (Quran 59:21)

And the verse:

"Strongest among men in enmity to the believers wilt thou find the Jews and the Pagans, and nearest among them in love to the believers wilt thou find those who say, 'We are Christians': Because amongst these are men devoted to learning. And men who have renounced the world, and they are not arrogant. And when they listen to the revelation received by the Messenger, thou wilt see their eyes overflowing with tears, for they recognize the truth: They pray: 'Our Lord! We believe, write us down among the witnesses. What cause can we have not to believe in God and the truth which has come to us, seeing that we long for our Lord to admit us to the

company of the righteous?" (Quran 5:82-84)

Mr. Khalil then quoted a third quotation from the Holy Quran which says:

"Those who follow the Messenger, the unlettered prophet, whom they find mentioned in their own (Scriptures), in the Taurat and in the Gospel; for he commands them what is just and forbids them what is evil; he allows them as lawful what is good (and pure) and prohibits them what is bad (and impure): He releases them from their heavy burdens and from the yokes that are upon them. So it is those who believe in him, honor him, help him and follow the light which is sent down with him, it is they who will prosper. Say: O men! I am sent unto you all, as the Messenger of God, to Whom belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth: there is no god but He: It is He that giveth both life and death. So believe in God and His Messenger. The unlettered Prophet, who believeth in God and His Words: follow Him that (so) you may be guided." (Quran 7:157-158)

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