

Anselm Tormeeda, Priest and Christian Scholar, Spain



Great numbers of Christians embraced Islam during and soon after the Islamic conquests after the prophet's death. They were never compelled, rather it was a recognition of what they were already expecting. Anselm Tormeeda^[1], a priest and Christian scholar, was one such person whose history is worth relating. He wrote a famous book called "The Gift to the Intelligent for Refuting the Arguments of the Christians"^[2]. In the introduction^[3] to this work he relates his history:

"Let it be known to all of you that my origin is from the city of Majorca, which is a great city on the sea between two mountains and divided by a small valley. It is a commercial city, with two wonderful harbors. Big merchant ships come and anchor in the harbor with different goods. The city is on the island which has the same name - Majorca, and most of its land is populated with fig and olive trees. My father was a well respected man in the city. I was his only son.

When I was six, he sent me to a priest who taught me to read the Gospel and logic, which I finished in six years. After that I left Majorca and traveled to the city of Larda, in the region of Castillion, which was the center of learning for Christians in that region. A thousand to a thousand and a half Christian students gathered there. All were under the administration of the priest who taught them. I studied the Gospel and its language for another four years. After that I left for Bologne in the region of Anbardia. Bologne is a very large city, it being the centre of learning for all the people of that region. Every year, more than two thousand students gather together from different places. They cover themselves with rough cloth which they call the "Hue of God." All of them, whether the son of a workman or the son of a ruler, wear this wrap, in order to make the students distinct from the others.

Only the priest teaches, controls and directs them. I lived in the church with an aged priest. He was greatly respected by the people because of his knowledge and religiousness and asceticism, which distinguished him from the other Christian priests. Questions and requests for advice came from everywhere, from Kings and rulers, along with presents and gifts. They hoped that he would accept their presents and grant them his blessings. This priest

taught me the principles of Christianity and its rulings. I became very close to him by serving and assisting him with his duties until I became one of his most trusted assistants, so that he trusted me with the keys of his domicile in the church and of the food and the drink stores. He kept for himself only the key of a small room where he used to sleep. I think, and God knows best, that he kept his treasure chest in there. I was a student and servant for a period of ten years, then he fell ill and failed to attend the meetings of his fellow priests.

During his absence, the priests discussed some religious matters, until they came to what was said by the Almighty God through his prophet Jesus in the Gospel: "After him will come a Prophet called Paraclete." They argued a great deal about this Prophet and as to who he was among the Prophets. Everyone gave his opinion according to his knowledge and understanding; and they ended without achieving any benefit in that issue. I went to my priest, and as usual he asked about what was discussed in the meeting that day. I mentioned to him the different opinions of priests about the name Paraclete, and how they finished the meeting without clarifying its meaning. He asked me: "What was your answer?" I gave my opinion which was taken from interpretation of a well known exegesis. He said that I was nearly correct like some priests, and the other priests were wrong. "But the truth is different from all of that. This is because the interpretation of that noble name is known only to a small number of well versed scholars. And we possess only a little knowledge." I fell down and kissed his feet, saying: "Sir, you know that I traveled and came to you from a far distant country, I have served you now for more than ten years; and have attained knowledge beyond estimation, so please favor me and tell me the truth about this name." The priest then wept and said: "My son, by God, you are very much dear to me for serving me and devoting yourself to my care. Know the truth about this name, and there is a great benefit, but there is also a great danger. And I fear that when you know this truth, and the Christians discover that, you will be killed immediately." I said: "By God, by the Gospel and He who was sent with it, I shall never speak any word about what you will tell me, I shall keep it in my heart." He said: "My son, when you came here from your country, I asked you if it is near to the Muslims, and whether they made raids against you and if you made raids against them. This was to test your hatred for Islam. Know, my son, that Paraclete is the name of their Prophet Muhammad, to whom was revealed the fourth book as mentioned by Daniel. His way is the clear way which is mentioned in the Gospel." I said: "Then sir, what do you say about the religion of these Christians?" He said: "My son, if these Christians remained on the original religion of Jesus, then they would have been on God's religion, because the religion of Jesus and all the other Prophets is the true religion of God. But they changed it and became unbelievers." I asked him: "Then, sir, what is the salvation from this?" He said "Oh my son, embracing Islam." I asked him: "Will the one who embraces Islam be saved?" He answered: "Yes, in this world and the next." I said: "The prudent chooses for himself; if you know, sir the merit of Islam, then what keeps you from it?" He answered: "My son, the Almighty God did not expose me to the truth of Islam and the Prophet of Islam until after I have become old

and my body weakened. Yes, there is no excuse for us in this, on the contrary, the proof of God has been established against us. If God had guided me to this when I was your age, I would have left everything and adopted the religion of truth. Love of this world is the essence of every sin, and look how I am esteemed, glorified and honored by the Christians, and how I am living in affluence and comfort! In my case, if I show a slight inclination towards Islam they would kill me immediately. Suppose that I was saved from them and succeeded in escaping to the Muslims, they would say, do not count your Islam as a favor upon us, rather you have benefited yourself only by entering the religion of truth, the religion that will save you from the punishment of God! So I would live among them as a poor old man of more than ninety years, without knowing their language, and would die among them starving. I am, and all praise is due to God, on the religion of Christ and on that which he came with, and God knows that from me.” So I asked him: “Do you advise me to go to the country of the Muslims and adopt their religion?” He said to me: “If you are wise and hope to save yourself, then race to that which will achieve this life and the hereafter. But my son, none is present with us concerning this matter; it is between you and me only. Exert yourself and keep it a secret. If it is disclosed and the people know about it they will kill you immediately. I will be of no benefit to you against them. Neither will it be of any use to you if you tell them what you heard from me concerning Islam, or that I encouraged you to be a Muslim, for I shall deny it. They trust my testimony against yours. So do not tell a word, whatever happens.” I promised him not to do so.

He was satisfied and content with my promise. I began to prepare for my journey and bid him farewell. He prayed for me and gave me fifty golden dinars^[4]. Then I took a ship to my city Majorca where I stayed with my parents for six months. Then I traveled to Sicily and remained there five months, waiting for a ship bound for the land of the Muslims. Finally a ship arrived bound for Tunis. We departed before sunset and reached the port of Tunis at noon on the second day. When I got off the ship, Christian scholars who heard of my arrival came to greet me and I stayed with them for four months in ease and comfort. After that, I asked them if there was a translator. The Sultan in those days was Abu al-Abbas Ahmed. They said there was a virtuous man, the Sultan’s physician, who was one of his closest advisors. His name was Yusuf al-Tabeeb. I was greatly pleased to here this, and asked where he lived. They took me there to meet him separately. I told him about my story and the reason of my coming there; which was to embrace Islam. He was immensely pleased because this matter would be completed by his help. We rode to the Sultan’s Palace. He met the Sultan and told him about my story and asked his permission for me to meet him.

The Sultan accepted, and I presented myself before him. The first question the Sultan asked was about my age. I told him that I was thirty-five years old. He then asked about my learning and the sciences which I had studied. After I told him he said. “Your arrival is the arrival of goodness. Be a Muslim with God’s blessings.” I then said to the doctor, “Tell the honorable

Sultan that it always happens that when anyone changes his religion his people defame him and speak evil of him. So, I wish if he kindly sends to bring the Christian priests and merchants of this city to ask them about me and hear what they have to say. Then by God's will, I shall accept Islam." He said to me through the translator, "You have asked what Abdullah bin Salaam asked from the Prophet when he – Abdullah came to announce his Islam." He then sent for the priests and some Christian merchants and let me sit in an adjoining room unseen by them. "What do you say about this new priest who arrived by ship?" he asked. They said: "He is a great scholar in our religion. Our bishops say he is the most learned and no one is superior to him in our religious knowledge." After hearing what the Christian said, the Sultan sent for me, and I presented myself before them. I declared the two testimonies that there is no one worthy of worship except God and that Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, is His Messenger, and when the Christians heard this they crossed themselves and said: "Nothing incited him to do that except his desire to marry, as priests in our religion can not marry." Then they left in distress and grief.

The Sultan appointed for me a quarter of a dinar every day from the treasury and let me marry the daughter of Al-Hajj Muhammed al-Saffar. When I decided to consummate the marriage, he gave me a hundred golden dinars and an excellent suit of clothes. I then consummated the marriage and God blessed me with a child to whom I gave the name Muhammed as a blessing from the name of the Prophet."^[5]

Footnotes:

^[1] After embracing Islam, he was known as Abu Muhammad bin Abdullah Al-Tarjuman. He was called Al-Tarjuman (The Translator), because in less than five months after his conversion, the Sultan appointed him general of the Marine Administration where he learned the Arabic language and became a skillful translator in discussions between Muslims and Christians. After only one year, he excelled in the Arabic language and was appointed as the head of Translation Affairs. He was well known among the common people, who gave him some pleasant nicknames; the most popular was Sidi Tohfah, which means "My Master Gift", referring to his famous book.

^[2] Tuhfat al-arib fi al-radd 'ala Ahl al-Salib in Arabic. The book was a powerful blow to the structure of Christian belief because it was written by one of the greatest Christian scholars of the age.

^[3] Following the introduction, he wrote about some events concerning the Hafsah State. He followed with nine chapters including one demonstrating that the four gospels were not written by the disciples of Jesus to whom they are usually attributed. He also discussed other topics including Baptism, Trinity, Original Sin, The Lord's Supper, The Indulgence, The Law of Faith. He refuted all of these doctrines based upon the texts of the Gospels and logical reasoning. He proved also the human nature of Christ and disproved his alleged Divine nature. He then exposed the contradictions in the interpolated texts of the Bible. He also discussed matters which Christians criticized the Muslims about, such as the permissibility of marriage for religious scholars and pious men, circumcision and physical enjoyment in

Paradise. He concluded his book by proving the truth of the Prophethood of Muhammad using texts from the Bible.

[4] Coins of currency

[5] Extracted from Material on the Authenticity of the Quran: Proofs that it is a Revelation from Almighty God by Abdur-Raheem Greene.