



Associated Press

## Today's Martyrs

### Bishoy Armiya Boulous

Bishoy Armiya Boulous was probably the second most famous Christian alive in Egypt, after Pope Tawardos II. Everyone in the country knows who he was and what he had done. He may have been the greatest symbol of courage in the country. He had been consigned to a twilight existence in prison for the crime of converting to Christianity and his relentless demand that the country officially

acknowledge it.

He was born Mohammed Hegazy in 1982. At age 18 he decided to be baptized as a Christian. As he put it, "the major issue for me was love. Islam wasn't promoting love as Christianity did". He took the name Bishoy Armiya Boulous. His wife later converted and took the name Christine. They have a daughter named Miriam. In 2007 Bishoy did something no one had ever done in Egypt: he sued the government to force it to change his religion on his identification card from 'Islam' to 'Christianity'. Without this change Miriam would technically remain Muslim and would be breaking the law by attending Christian religious education or by marrying in the church.

The Egyptian constitution states that Islamic law - the sharia – is the fundamental source of law, but the sharia requirement that apostates must be put to death had never been codified in Egypt. Insulting Islam, however, is a crime. The government considered Bishoy's request to officially change his religion as an insult to Islam. He was arrested and tortured, then released after three days. The charge of 'insulting Islam' was never dismissed. The court case regarding his official religion was dismissed in February 2008; Bishoy had always said that he planned to reopen the case someday.

The Muslim Brotherhood, which comprises about 10% of the electorate, took power in 2012. Muhammed Morsi was elected president in an election marred with widespread fraud. Christians found their names missing from voter rolls, and Muslim Brotherhood members turned away Christian women from voting because they were unveiled (as they did unveiled Muslim women). Following the election Morsi's administration turned a blind eye to extremism. It allowed the opening of terrorist camps in the Sinai. The abduction of young Christian girls with police complicity accelerated to the point that one disappeared every three days. The economy tottered as the government began to favor their Brotherhood cronies. Morsi violated the constitution when he announced that his decisions would have the force of law and not be subject to judicial review. Finally on June 30, 2013, nearly 40% of Egyptian citizens took to the streets and demanded Morsi's resignation. The army then stepped in and forced him from office.

The Brotherhood soon exacted its revenge against their favorite scapegoats, Egypt's Christians. In a calculated and premeditated move, violence erupted in nearly every major Egyptian city and town on August 14, 2013. For eight days and nights levels of violence not seen in centuries consumed over 150 Christian churches, schools, businesses, and

residences, many of major historical importance. Nearly three dozen people, mostly Christians, were killed, many by gruesome means. This event has been dubbed “The Egyptian Kristallnacht” by knowledgeable observers.

In the weeks following this violence police detained a cable television crew which had been documenting it and charged them with "inciting sedition by communicating to a US-based channel unfounded information on Christian persecution in Egypt". Bishoy Armiya Boulous was a member of this crew. By April 2014 he had told his attorney that he was being beaten and tortured with electric shocks.

Bishoy’s trial on the sedition charge was held on June 18, 2014. He was convicted, fined US\$70, and sentenced to 5 years’ imprisonment, then released on bail pending appeal. The next day he was arrested on the old but never-dismissed insulting Islam charge. In August 2014 he was denied food and clothing in prison. Besides the continuous beatings and tortures inflicted by both guards and compliant prisoners, he has been forced [in early December 2014] to sleep on the floor of an execution chamber.

The Egyptian government apparently had no intention of releasing Bishoy. He had completed enough time in prison to cover the insulting Islam charge, and since he was technically still on bail on the sedition charge he should have been released at the beginning of 2015. Instead he was shuttled from prison to prison just ahead of his attorney’s visits. Prison officials refused to deliver Bishoy to court hearings, and the judges would then dismiss his attorney’s motions with a wink because he had failed to appear. In a further attempt to isolate him, his attorney was told on July 20, 2015 that his visits with Bishoy would be restricted to one per month.

After almost a year in which nothing was heard about Bishoy Armiya in the Christian media, he suddenly appeared on July 29, 2016 in a video in which he announced his return to Islam, and he was released from prison. He is now, once again, Mohammed Hegazy. He apparently broke when told that he would be released into the custody of his parents, who had many times sworn to kill him for his apostasy. Christians cannot help but feel a great sense of loss at this news, and we should ask the question, Did we do enough for him? Did we fail him? Given the almost year-long absence of his story from the Christian media, it is hard to escape the feeling that we all did. Perhaps we need to examine ourselves and ask if we can be better prepared for the next such case. Also, please remember to pray for him and his family: his video statement was stilted and obviously scripted, and only God knows what is truly in his heart.

### **Today’s Martyrs**

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