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The Independent Copt

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Editor's Note



The Independent Copt Magazine is published monthly by The Free Copts. The Free Copts is a nonprofit web-based Coptic organization that is focused on Coptic rights and human rights in general.

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FREE COPTS

Dear Reader,

We at The Free Copts are pleased to bring you the premier issue of The Independent Copt magazine. An independent Copt is a free thinker, unfettered by geographical location and the political pressures of their environment. They are, as are we, the idealists and passionate opponents of inequality and oppression wherever it may be.

We are Independent in freedom of speech, thought and religion; but as you will see, we are Egyptians to the core and proud of our heritage.

We invite you, regardless of religion or nationality, to learn about Egypt, Egyptians and Copts. We hope you will find our dedication to expressing the truth, based on fact, to be as refreshing to your eyes as we have found it.

If you find you are inspired to act, please join us on the website, in our multilingual discussion forums.

<http://freecopts.net/forum>

We look forward to seeing you there.

Peace,

The Free Copts

The Independent Copt

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The Coptic Flag, Meanings and Colors

Lanternix, The Free Copts



The Coptic Flag, as designed by The Free Copts

Not long ago, a number of Coptic activists from both Egypt and the Diaspora have adopted the design of a Coptic flag that underlines the Egyptian and Christian identities of the Copts. Yet, before certain people embark on accusing us of causing sectarian tensions, or of being the mouthpieces of Zionism, Imperialism, Crusaders, and all these meaningless accusations, we have decided to make our dear readers aware of the meaning of this flag and of the motive behind it.

Flags and Emblems

It is well known that any group has the right to create an emblem or a flag that represents it and which would be its window on the world. Examples of such in the Middle East include the emblem of the Muslim Brotherhood (two swords surrounding the Koran), and the flag of the Lebanese phalanges (a red circle surrounding a green cedar tree).

Furthermore, there is the flag of the Lebanese Hezbollah or the flag of the Assyrian minority, which flies side by side with the Iraqi flag at the Assyrian churches. It is thus noteworthy that flags do not call for isolation from their surrounding enti-

ties, but rather represent certain components of these surroundings.

Therefore, in view of the above examples, the suspicion of national betrayal or sectarian isolation that some might raise as we talk about the Coptic flag would be groundless, particularly in light of the fact that the number of Copts worldwide (more than ten millions) surpasses that of entire countries.

It is indubitable that Copts have taken too long to voice their opposition to many aspects of the Egyptian political life.

The Motive behind the Coptic Flag

One of the things that bother Copts the most is the actual Egyptian flag, and that in turn is due to many reasons. First are its colors that closely resemble those of other Arabic-speaking countries, then there is this odd insistence to add the word Arab next to Egypt's name, as if to distinguish between an Arab Egypt and one that is not. In this respect, taking into consideration that Copts are Egyptians and not Arabs, the current Egyptian flag represents an alienation of the Egyptian Christian

minority in its homeland.

Nevertheless, in view of the Copts' nationalism and their attachment to their country, and from the standpoint of respecting the opinion of the majority of the Egyptians who might consider Egypt to be an Arab country, we as Copts are called upon to respect the current flag of Egypt as a representation of our Land, in spite of our disagreement with what it represents.

Therefore, we found that the best solution for this dilemma is designing a Coptic flag that represents us and highlights our non-Arab identity. This flag would be used by the Copts alongside the official Egyptian flag. In that way we would have reconciled our pride of our Coptic identity, our allegiance to our beloved Egypt, and our respect for the opinion of the majority of our Egyptian Muslim brothers.

The Coptic Flag

The Coptic Flag consists of two main components: a blue cross and a colorful coat of arms.

The cross represents Christianity, the religion of the Copts. The blue color of the cross stems from the blueness of the Egyptian sky and water. It also reminds the Copts of their persecution, when the Arab rulers and tyrants forced their ancestors to wear heavy crosses around their necks until their neck bones became blue.

2. The top of the coat of arms is decorated with some crosses, which refer to the Christianity of the Copts, intertwined with lotus flowers, which refer to their Egyptian identity. The three main crosses are Coptic crosses, for they are made of four arms equal in length, each of which is crossed by a shorter arm. Those crosses are different in that respect from the more conventional crosses that possess three short arms on top of one longer arm.

The lotus flower, also known as the Egyptian White Water Lily *Nymphaea lotus*, is one of Ancient Egypt's most famous flowers. It used to represent creation and resurrection, for it closes during the night and disappears under water, then resurfaces and opens at dawn. A creation myth from Ancient Egypt states that the first thing to have been born from the watery chaos of the beginning of time was a giant lotus flower, which, on the first day of creation, gave birth to the sun.

The black background behind the ornaments is a symbol of Kimi or Kemet, the Egyptian name of Egypt, which means the black land. Ancient Egyptians gave their country this name since the waters of the Nile used to bring black African soil dur-



The Coptic Coat of Arms

ing the inundation season and deposit it on the banks of the Nile, thus fertilizing them.

The contrast between the yellow and the black is a symbol of the Copts'

Christian faith and Egyptian identity that still shine amid the darkness of the persecutions they have been suffering over the centuries.

Beneath these ornaments is a green line in the Middle of the coat of arms, which represents the Nile Valley. Around it are two yellow lines that symbolize the Eastern and Western Deserts of Egypt. These two lines are in turn flanked by two blue lines that represent the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea that surround Egypt. Finally, these lines are separated by red lines symbolizing the Coptic blood, which has been shed all over Egypt since Egyptians adopted Christianity and until today.

□

Highlights from Freecopts.net

Address to the Conference on Middle East Democracy and the Future of Christians in Egypt

Father Keith Roderick addressed the attendees of the Fourth International Coptic Conference and Coptic Christians at large concerning creating a renewal of the Coptic voice against oppression.



Statement from the Coptic Papal Residence in Cairo

A statement from the Papal Residence concerning the health of H.H. Pope Shenouda III and his plans for treatment, including a visit to a Cleveland hospital.

Complacency is a CRIME

An article by writer Sally Bishai prodding Copts both inside and outside of Egypt to shed their complacency, in spite of the danger that they may be subject to and to overcome their fear and stop accepting the status quo. She calls Copts to act to drive reform regarding the position of Copts in Egypt.



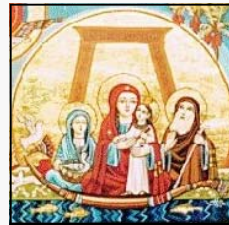
Tragedy of a Coptic family

Left: The daughter of Medhat Aziz Ibrahim, from Kafr Selim, Behira Governorate in Egypt. Medhat, who is a Copt, has been arrested by the state security services, at the time of the writing of this article, his family

had no contact with him since his detention. They were told that he is not allowed any visits, and they are not allowed to know his whereabouts.

The Book of Isaiah under the sands of Egypt

The archaeological mystery has been solved! The latest research shows that the manuscript found by Polish archaeologists in the village of Gournia (Sheikh abd el-Gournia) near Luxor in Upper Egypt contains the entire biblical book of Isaiah in the Coptic translation. "This is the first complete translation of this book in Coptic" – says Prof. Ewa Wipszycka-Bravo of the Institute of Archaeology at Warsaw University.



The Holy Family in Egypt

On the 24th day of the Coptic month of Bashans, which corresponds to the 1st of June, Copts celebrate the entry of the Holy Family into the land of Egypt. On that day, churches throughout the land that gave the Holy Family shelter resound with the words of the Doxology.

Christians in the Middle East face persecution, pushed to the periphery

Christianity has a rich cultural seam in the Middle East. On the first Pentecost, when the disciples were blessed with tongues to tell the good news, one of the languages spoken was Arabic. So successful was the spread of Christianity across a region that now includes parts of Iraq, Syria, Palestine and Egypt that by the sixth century it had 15 million followers.

These and many more articles, ranging from News and Opinion, Selected Articles and Press Releases, can be found on [The Free Copts](http://TheFreeCopts.com) website.

Who Are the Copts Anyway?

Sally Bishai

With the recent unrest in Egypt—nothing new, really—a great many Westerners and non-Arabs have been more than supportive, showing the very understandable feelings of outrage, sadness, and horror.

Many of these same people, however, have no idea on earth who the Copts are, apart from the fact that we're Egypt's Christians.

Others might know how the Coptic community in Egypt is persecuted on a professional, and sometimes personal, level. But I think it's time people knew more about our community's beginnings.

Copts are native Egyptians, the largest group of Christians in the Arab world, the most undiluted descendants of the pharaonic people. Unfortunately, most of us don't have the luxury of speaking Coptic (Qibti is the Arabic word for it) in everyday life—in fact, relatively few Copts can even read and write the language, and even fewer can speak it, though there has been an underground resurgence (of late) dedicated to bringing the language back,

complete with newsgroups, mailing lists and websites.

Rather, those of us who are Coptic Orthodox (or attend the Coptic Orthodox mass, anyway) get to hear this beautiful language in the liturgy.

Another thing that I mentioned a few minutes back is that modern-day Copts are the most undiluted descendants of the pharaonic people, who were the original Copts. This refers to the fact that the Arab invaders who brought Islam to Egypt were obviously non-Egyptian and non-Coptic, and furthermore, to the fact that the subsequent intermarriage with their converts, and the settling of these interracial families into Egypt, made for increasingly thinned ties to Coptic forefathers as generations passed.

The first time I heard this, I theorized that there had to have been some further intermarriage between the purer still-Copts and those who had converted to Islam, but a friend set me straight: "If that were the case, the family would automatically

have had to become Moslem. Hence, those who remain Copts to this day refused to convert and thus have no Moslem ancestry or blood." Dr. Edwin Wakin, author of *A Lonely Minority: the Modern Story of Egypt's Copts*, concurs, estimating that up to 80 percent of the current Moslem population in Egypt carry the Coptic lineage in the beginnings of their family trees. In terms of the Coptic Orthodox faith, it came into being as a result of St. Mark and his extensive teachings of Christianity in Egypt. Dr. Wakin further enlightens us about the ancient Egyptians, telling us how "Christianity... appealed to them with its clear-cut morality and assurance of life after death, with which Egyptians have always been preoccupied... The Coptic religion [Orthodoxy] has been diluted by heavy doses of superstition... the content of Coptic life has become part Pharaonic, part Christian, part oriental, part petit bourgeois."

In terms of the origin of the word "Copt," Christian Cannuyer, in the English translation of his *Coptic Egypt—The Christians of the Nile*, has this to say about the Coptic name, among other things:

"The Copts are the Christians of Egypt. Theirs is among the most ancient forms of Christianity, born in the time of Jesus. The name derives from the Arabic Qibt, an abbreviation of the Greek name Aigyptios (Egyptian); this in turn is a derivation of Hikuptah, House of the En-ergy of Ptah, the religious name for Memphis, the capital city of ancient Egypt. Coptic Christianity mingles remnants of pharaonic practices, elements of Hellenistic and Byzantine Egyptian culture, and the dynamism of Arab civilization."

Perhaps he should have said "Coptic Orthodoxy" rather than Christianity, since there are now branches of Catholicism and Protestantism in



Pharaoh Akhenaten and the royal family

Egypt.

Nevertheless, as in Cannuyer's words above, the term "Coptic" is, more often than not, misused to denote those Egyptians of the Orthodox faith, though the most accurate modern usage of the word would be "Egyptian Christians." The aforementioned Dr. Wakin takes it a step further, stating that "in the Coptic language, "Copts" means "people of Egypt" and the Copts use the term literally, referring to themselves as the "true Egyptians."

Perhaps it's this fact that has made the Copts so persecuted, or maybe it's their tenacity in clinging to Christianity. Either way, the Copts are one of the most put-upon people of the Middle East. In yet another gem by the very perceptive and articulate Dr. Wakin, we see that in "any minority, its symbol is a badge in times of prosperity, a brand in times of trouble." This may refer to the ever-present symbol of the cross, as in those that they imprint into the walls of their houses, as in the pendants that they always wear, the icons that they hang, the tattoos that they wear at their wrists, even the sign of the cross that they make when worried, scared or grateful.

It could also refer to the fact that Copts are forced to state their religious affiliation on all official documents—not unlike the Star of David during the Holocaust, or the Mark of the Beast/Seals of the Righteous in the book of Revelations. But despite the killing of 144,000 Copts (some purport that the figure's actually well over 800,000) between 303 and 311—killing that was sanctioned by then-emperor Diocletian (interesting to note that the beginning of the Coptic Orthodox's Year of the Martyrs falls on September 11th)—despite the 1320 razing of every

Coptic church in Egypt by Moslem fanatics, despite the more recent and gratuitous rash of murders (1200 Copts in Egypt have fallen since 1992, and now, four in Jersey City), despite persecution in the streets, in the workplace (Copts can almost never make it to the highest level of any job), by the government (the president himself must issue a decree before a church can be built or even repaired) and all of the other travesties and tragedies that I don't have the space to recount, the Copts live on—upwards of 10 million



Tattoo of a Coptic cross on the wrist of an Egyptian Man

strong!—both ethnically and religiously.

It should be noted, by the way, that despite the escalating tension in the Middle East, not everyone is quick to point the finger of blame at Moslems; some of us are still praying (fervently) for peace. The actions of a few people do not an entire race (or religion) condemn (the religion—whatever it may be, however, SHOULD always be examined for its own internal and external validity).

Should non-Moslems hate the entire

Islamic population because of the actions of Mohammed Atta and his crew? No. Just as we shouldn't hate all blondes/Americans/"McVeighs" for the Oklahoma City bombings (I know! I always pull this example out, but I happen to like it.)

After all, with love in our hearts, there's always the tiniest hope for growth and change, but with no love there's no change and no hope for change. We love God not because He's deserving of it (although He is—even when we're not), but because He first loved us. How would we have known about Him, otherwise? So, too, then, must we first love "the Other" if we expect the slightest chance of reciprocity.

In Arabic, we have a phrase that says "Enta el Kebeer" ("you're the old/big/mature one"), which many wise friends use to counsel chums who are in a tiff with others.

The Wise Guy: "Are you and J. STILL in that argument?"

The Dolt: "Yeah... he refuses to go see the KISS reunion concert with me, and I've already gotten tickets!"

The Wise Guy: "Akh! Go and make up with him. After all, you could die in a plane crash this week and then it would be on your hands!"

The Dolt: "Good point, but I don't plan on traveling anywhere this week, and anyway, he started it!"

The Wise Guy: "I can't believe I'm hearing this. A helicopter could fall out of the sky and take you to the hereafter, and you're being childish. He started it, but you finish it. Inta el kebeer!"

The Dolt: "Oh... well, when you put it like that, I guess..."

(Enter J., The Wise Guy moves downstage to give them "privacy," and then J. and the Dolt make up. Cut to the pair at the KISS reunion concert.)

Anyway, now that I've finished the sermon and the Arabic lesson for the day, let's get back to the Copts. In a final snippet by the informative and illustrious Dr. Wakin, we find a

(Continued on page 26)



Sally Bishai

Sally Bishai is a writer and journalist with a Bachelor of Science in psychology, and a Master's and Ph.D. candidate in Speech and Intercultural Communication. She teaches various classes at the university level, lectures (off-campus) about her books, culture, and other controversial topics. Her latest project deals with the persecution of Egypt's Copts.

Reader's Comments

9th June 2006, 06:35 PM

A post was started on The Free Copts forum site by a user by the username Kiristine. Apparently she was struck by a [post written in Arabic](#) that started her thinking...



Shame on us? Yes!

Kiristine

Since I am unable to read arabic I was intrigued by the subject of [Nada's post](#). What could Nada have been talking about? To whom was she addressing her message? Shame on us as Egyptians? As Copts? As Americans living free and easy in the United States, Europe or other English speaking countries?

Every time I visited the forum since she posted her message seeing it just made me more and more curious. I started to think about what we should be shamed over. What event triggered Nada's message? World events? Something in her own life?

I am sure someone will tell me now that her message was nothing more than a Sayeedi joke or something to that effect, but I am well beyond that point now.

Over the last two days it occurred to me - why I should be ashamed.

I should be ashamed because when you look at this forum, there are over 1200 threads and 10,000 posts in arabic, and only a handful in this forum, and I have not done anything to help build this community.

I should be ashamed because there are hundreds of Copts, Muslims and others debating, learning and educating each other. And what have I done?

I log onto the freecocepts website or onto these forums and I read the articles, and I GET MAD! I get so infuriated that these things are happening and that no one is doing anything! I jump down to the bottom of the article, ready to post a comment, and then I come to the same realization that I do every time, and I stop.

The thoughts that run through my head are these... What am I about to write? Am I just going to complain that these are atrocities that should be stopped? That it is unfair and it should be corrected? No, that would just be unfruitful whining... Whatever I post has to

mean something... I should be calling people to do something... To do what?... I don't know... I don't know how to begin.

So I get frustrated and I don't post anything at all. I come to these forums and the same thing happens all over again.

I should be ashamed.

Where will it start if it doesn't start with me?

Where will the momentum for change come from?

They have that momentum in the arabic forums. So I ask YOU - YES, YOU! - what have they got that we haven't got? What can we do to help? What can we do to debate and educate and get momentum going?

I want to be part of the solution, and I know you do too. Post your ideas.

I know there are people here on this forum who are just waiting to help.

I know that there are people like me who want to do something but don't know where to start.

I know that we can do this.

With God's love,
Kiristine

9th June 2006, 10:19 PM



fanous

Kristine;

Thank you! You have raised some very good point about our involvement, as Copts, in the global Coptic issue.

There obstacles, no one can deny that, one of which is the lack of Coptic enthusiasm. Copts have a long way to go before becoming a cohesive block with concrete aims and goals.

The question is, where to begin?

People like ourselves have started many forums online to talk about the issue. Clearly talking will solve very little, but maybe talking will at least define the goals we should struggle for.

So, to begin and to take the discussion to the next level, let's come up with a concrete list of aims towards which we should all work.

Ougai, Andrew

10th June 2006, 04:00 AM

Mena0064

You guys are raising very good points and I think we agree on nearly everything but that's easy because we are all in the same category of attitude towards the Coptic cause.

Like kiristine said we need to widen that circle and her suggestions and logical and brilliant. This process will probably take a long time to reach any concrete milestones but I do think the pace of deterioration of the conditions for the Copts in Egypt will be a catalyst for Coptic activism. We just have to make sure that the right channels are set up for the inevitable flood of energy and even if we can't reach things now it'll still be a great benefit to have our arms stretched in the right direction because others will bridge the gaps.

I know it maybe frustrating that we can't do much now other than talk and try, I know that we are met with sarcasm, criticism and disregard but that's because we are able to detect what may not be so obvious to others, unfortunately the Copts only believe what they see with their own pair of eyes and I think many are in denial in spite of all the signs. Unfortunately, I am certain that disasters are in the making and all eyes will look towards us immediately when that happens so we must be ready to lead and that'll take a lot of mental preparation, education and confidence. Places like this website are a perfect ground for us to do all that in collaboration with others, that's why I never think writing here is a waste.

I hope we keep the English forum going, I know there are only few who contribute here now but it's a start. I believe that foreign language speaking Copts have additional duties on their shoulders because they are the vital link to advance the cause globally and the face of the Coptic cause internationally and I hope more of them will join us here on this forum.

Many posts have followed this one. Go to <http://freecocepts.net/forum/showthread.php?t=1382> to add your own comments to the thread.

□



Journey to the Afterlife

The Tomb of Tutankhamen

King Tutankhamen is undoubtedly one of the most famous and best known Egyptian Pharaohs. He is sometimes referred to as the boy king, as he ruled and died when he was but a teenage boy. The fame of King Tutankhamen is largely due to the discovery of his amazing tomb and the fascinating treasures found within.

Tutankhamen was Pharaoh of the Eighteenth dynasty of Egypt (ruled 1334 BC to 1325 BC), during the period of Egyptian history known as the New Kingdom. He is thought to be a son of King Akhenaton's. He married his half sister, also the daughter of King Akhenaton's from his wife Queen Nefertiti.

His original name, Tutankhaten, meant "Living Image of Aten", while Tutankhamen meant "Living Image of Amun". Under Ikhnaten the god Amun had been replaced by Aten, and the reaction in favor of Aten ended under Tutankhamen; thus, the king who had been known as Tutankhaten, changed his name. He also abandoned Ikhnaten's new capital, Akhetaten (Tell el Amarna), to return to Thebes, sacred to Amun; he restored the name of Amun, deleted from the monuments by Ikhnaten.

His Controversial Death

Tutankhamen died in the year 1325 BC, after only nine years of rule. The cause of the young King's death has been at the center of much speculation over the years since the discovery of his tomb. The design and size of the tomb were closer to those used to bury common people not members of the royal families. This is possibly an indication that he died suddenly before arrangements could be made for a proper royal burial chamber.

X-rays taken in 1968 seemed to indicate that he may have been killed by a blow to his head. The suggestion caused a controversy among Egyptologists and scientists.

If he were murdered, who did it? Was it Aye, Tutankhamen's vizier who ascended to the throne after his death and married his wife? Or was it Horemhab, the army officer who became king after Aye's short four-year rule? Some archaeologists suggested that Aye and Horemhab might have shared the guilt, working in cahoots to kill the boy.

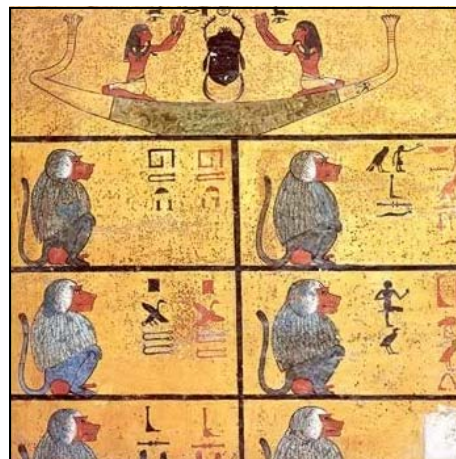
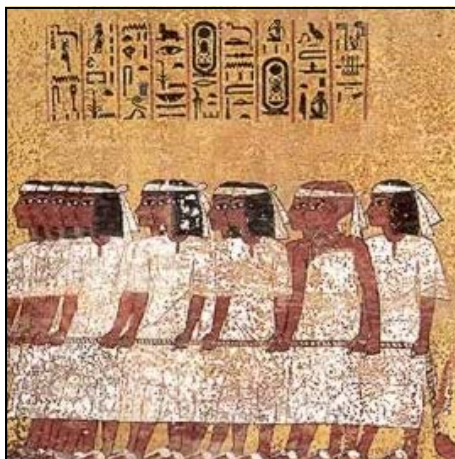
However, on March 8, 2005, Egyptian archaeologist Zahi Hawass revealed the results of a CT scan performed on the pharaoh's mummy. The scan uncovered no evidence for a blow to the back of the head as well as no evidence suggesting foul play.

Other observations from the CT scan included a hole in the head, but it appeared to have been drilled, presumably by embalmers. A fracture to Tutankhamen's left thighbone was interpreted as evidence that suggests the pharaoh badly broke his leg before he died, and his leg became infected; however, members of the Egyptian-led research team concluded that the fracture may have been caused by the embalmers. The controversy continues today.

The Tomb

The tomb of Tutankhamen was found (1922) almost intact by Howard Carter and the earl of Carnarvon in the Valley of the Kings near Luxor, between the tombs of King Ramses II and Ramses IV. Its great wealth of objects afforded a new store of knowledge on Egyptian sculpture and life of the eighteenth dynasty.

Small and relatively unimpressive compared to tombs of other Pharaohs, the tomb of King Tut is remarkable in that it remained almost untouched since the death of the boy king. King Tutankhamen is also the only Pharaoh in the Valley of the Kings to have his mummy still in its



original position since the burial.

Tutankhamen's tomb consists of an entrance leading to a single corridor, followed by several annexes for funerary equipment. At a 90 degree right angle is the small burial chamber, with another annex attached leading back in the direction of the entrance.

Of the whole tomb, only the burial chamber received decorations. Here, all of the walls have the same golden background. On the west wall we find scenes depicting the ceremony of the "Opening of the Mouth" to give life to the deceased, the solar bark on which one travels to the afterworld, and Tutankhamun's ka in the presence of Osiris.

The most magnificent item in the tomb is thought to be a gilded canopic shrine. Earl Carter says of the discovery of this shrine:

Facing the doorway, on the farther side, stood the most beautiful monument that I have ever seen - so lovely that it made one gasp with wonder and admiration.

The central portion of it consisted of a large shrine-shaped chest, completely overlaid with gold, and surmounted by a cornice of sacred cobras. Surrounding this, free-standing, were statues of the four tutelary goddesses of the dead - gracious figures with outstretched protective arms, so natural and lifelike in their pose, so pitiful and compassionate the expression on their faces, that one felt it almost sacrilege to look at them.

Howard Carter,
The Discovery of the Tomb of Tutankhamen

The Treasure Chamber in the tomb of Tutankhamun contained twenty-two black-painted wooden caskets, each of which contained one or more wooden statues portraying the pharaoh or a number of deities from the Egyptian pantheon. All of the figures contained in the black tabernacles are fixed to a rectangular base and at the moment of their discovery were wrapped in a linen cloth datable to the third year of the reign of Akhenaten.

A gold chest held four canopic jars containing the dead pharaoh's vis-

cera (internal organs -- lungs, stomach, intestines and liver). Four goddesses protected the shrine -- [Neith](#) to the north, [Selkis](#) to the south, [Isis](#) to the west and [Nephthys](#) to the east. Also found in this room were thirty-five model boats and a statue of [Anubis](#), a god represented as having the head of a jackal. For conservation purposes, all these treasures have been removed to the [Egyptian Museum](#) in Cairo.

Two life size statues were found in the burial chamber standing guard facing each other. They are striking in their dimensions and the black finish of their skin, bearing testimony to the skill of the artist who made them. Rather than being designed to frighten eventual intruders, the black skin tone was a reference to the earth and thus, given that these are ka images of the sovereign, emphasizes indestructibility of the creative nature of the king,

evoking the aspects of rebirth and cyclical resurrection of Osiris.

Thirty-four wooden statues were found in the tomb of Tutankhamun, seven portraying the pharaoh and the other twenty-seven depicting various divinities from the Egyptian pantheon. The majority of the statues had been placed in the treasure chamber inside black wooden cabinets mounted on sleds and set along the south wall. Two of these pieces, placed together in the same cabinet, are identical and depict the pharaoh stepping on the back of a panther.

This throne was produced in the early years of the reign of Tutankhamun, prior to the religious counter reformation that marked the definitive end of the Amarna Period.

The grace of the forms combines well with the richness of the decoration and the luminosity of the colors, giving rise to a composition of ex-

quisite craftsmanship.

The tomb is filled with many other awe inspiring artifacts, jewels and treasures. Although smaller and less impressive in layout and design than other royal tombs in the Valley of the Kings, it has proven invaluable as a tool to understand a vital ritual of the great civilization that flourished alongside the river Nile. If nothing else, it afforded us a glimpse into the life of a young boy who became a king, then died suddenly whilst still a young boy!

Ironically we learn about the lives of the great Pharaohs through their final resting place: their burial chambers which are designed to send them off to the afterlife...to immortality. Perhaps they were not so wrong about their immortality after all.

<http://www.crystalinks.com/tutstomb.html>
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tutankhamun>



Two life size statues were found in the burial chamber standing guard facing each other. They are striking in their dimensions and the black finish of their skin, bearing testimony to the skill of the artist who made them. Rather than being designed to frighten eventual intruders, the black skin tone was a reference to the earth and thus, given that these are ka images of the sovereign, emphasizes indestructibility of the creative nature of the king, evoking the aspects of rebirth and cyclical resurrection of Osiris.

Thirty-four wooden statues were found in the tomb of Tutankhamun, seven portraying the pharaoh and the other twenty-seven depicting various divinities from the Egyptian pantheon. The majority of the statues had been placed in the treasure chamber inside black wooden cabinets mounted on sleds and set along the south wall. Two of these pieces, placed together in the same cabinet, are identical and depict the pharaoh stepping on the back of a panther.

This throne was produced in the early years of the reign of Tutankhamun, prior to the religious counter reformation that marked the definitive end of the Amarna Period. The grace of the forms combines well with the richness of the decoration and the luminosity of the colors, giving rise to a composition of exquisite craftsmanship.

The Village of Qus

A Window to Discrimination and Persecution of Christians in Egypt

Bishop Marvin

Through the past several years, I have visited non-Muslims peoples who reside within regions of the cultural, political, and religious authority of Islam. The purpose of my visits was to examine, to learn, and to understand the state and condition of minorities who live with Islam but refuse to join Islam.

After witnessing the affects of oppressive violence against non-Muslim victims in northern Nigeria and Sudan, I appreciated the idea of visiting Egypt, not only as a respite from what I had observed as brutal acts of religious prejudice, but also in anticipation of a fresh view of what I had hoped would be a more humane, mature Islam. Not long after my arrival in Cairo, my expectations were crushed.

When I was asked to provide this report, I accepted, with the pledge to protect the anonymity of victims who shared with me their day-by-day experiences. I still vividly picture their faces, some of tears, some of fears, some of infirmities, and others of courage and confidence.

If there was any single experience that really provides a window into the state of religious oppression in Egypt, it is the series of public humiliations, fraudulent indictments, and extreme tortures by government officials against the Christians in the village of Qus between August 1998 and December 2,000 (nearly 30 months). With permission, I share the following information addressed to me in a private audience by his Grace, Bishop Wissa of El Balyana, and the Holy Father, Priest Gabriel of Qus.

As I traveled to that interview, I discovered that Egyptian intelligence officials had listened in on my telephone conversations with the Bishop. In fact, in the seats directly behind me on the train, they used

listening-devices to eavesdrop on my personal conversations to an associate. At points, intelligence officers chased me from train to train, and taxi to taxi. On one occasion of confrontation, they nearly caused a riot. As I fled the scene, they pursued me in my private car at speeds in excess of 120 kilometers per hour on a 1 & 1/2 lane road traveled by pedestrians and donkey carts. As a legitimate visa-bearing guest of Egypt to visit non-Muslim peoples, Egyptian intelligence recklessly invaded my privacy and risked my life. However, as I listened to the two ordained clergy of the Orthodox Copts, I learned that my maltreatment was nothing to compare to the living conditions of the non-Muslim minorities of Qus.

According to Father Gabriel, on August 14, 1998, two young Christian men of Qus, Samir Oweida Hakim and Karam Tamer Arsal were murdered. The Christian community regarded five young Muslim men as possible culprits, but did not view the murders as a religious crime. However, the police immediately said to Father Gabriel that a Christian was responsible for the mur-

ders. "They soon began to round up Christians."

Bishop Wissa said, "They started taking our people to the police station, twenty to forty of them, torturing them with unbearable tortures. They did not distinguish whether it was a man or a woman, children or elderly. It made no difference. The reason for the torturing was to get them to testify against a certain Christian, to prove him the killer. That person's name was Buktor, a Coptic name for 'Victor' in English."

Troubled by the behavior of local police and local intelligence, the Bishop appealed to a top Intelligence Officer. He told him, "If they are looking for a killer that is your business, but you are torturing my people. What have the children and the elderly to do with this? If the killer is a priest by all means take him, but do not torture my people."

In response, the local Director of Intelligence in Qus became angry with the Bishop for consulting a higher authority. He told Wissa, "as for the torture of Christians in Qus, you have seen nothing yet; there is plenty more to come." His threat



The village of Qus

was clear and public. He went on to mock the idea of justice. He said, "I know for a fact that Buktor and his family committed the crime." But then, out of the other side of his mouth, he offered to look the other way, if the Christians were ready to offer a scapegoat in place of Buktor.

Imprisonment and torture continued!

Two weeks later one of the priests serving in Qus died and the Bishop went to pay his final respects. While there, he asked to see the daughter of Buktor, the accused man, because the rumor had been manufactured that the murder victims, Samir and Karam, had raped her. As an act of revenge, her father, Buktor, killed them.

The police defended their whole case on the basis of that rumor. When the daughter agreed to accompany the Bishop in order to visit a medical doctor, the Bishop took her to the village of El Balyana outside of Qus, across the Nile. The doctor certified that the daughter was still a virgin, proving the rumor untrue. Nothing changed.

On Thursday, September 17, 1998, the Bishop again visited an Intelligence authority of higher rank. When he was asked, "why me?" The Bishop answered, "I will not discuss the issue with a person who threatens me, and my people, with more torture and greater violence." He requested the officer to please visit Qus in person because words could never explain what was happening there.

So, he came and visited the victims one by one. He saw how the son and daughter of Buktor had been tortured. How they had tortured the girl with electrical wires. In his review, she began weeping and found herself unable to finish her story. The Intelligence Officer asked that the case against Buktor be closed. Since Buktor's arrest, thirty-three days had passed.

Amazingly this was not

the end of the case.

On the same day, a Christian man by the name of Shibub, formerly tortured to testify against Buktor, was now charged with the crime of murder. "Soon they started torturing Buktor to testify against Shibub." At that time, they also took two Christian military interns and tortured them along with a third person that refused to testify against Shibub. One of the interns collapsed and testified against Shibub. Then the police announced that Shibub was the killer.

Later, the father of the intern that testified against Shibub came to Bishop Wissa and told him that his son was mentally unstable and that he felt guilty because he falsely testified in the case of Shibub. So, Bishop Wissa sent one of the Fathers to El Minya, which is the area where the two men were being trained, to ask for a leave so that he could come to restate his testimony. They arrived back in Qus October 6, 1998. The next day they testified at the Intelligence Department where the whole incident started. On October 7, the case against Shibub was closed.

The unbelievable is committed.

On October 8, actually October 7 according to the Bishop, the Intelligence Department began investigating why the interns left their unit? Even though, the two testified that they had never seen or met Wissa, the Intelligence Department decided to put the two in jail. On October 19, the Bishop was asked to appear at the Intelligence Department. They told Wissa that the interns had admitted that Wissa instructed them to change their testimony.

The investigation was closed as follows.

1. Five charges of terrorism were filed against his Grace, Bishop Wissa. The punishment for those charges ranges between 10 – 15 years of imprisonment. Wissa told me, "These charges are still filed



Bishop Wissa

against me until this minute." His lawyer described it as "putting a sword to his neck as an option for the future," an effort to intimidate Wissa to stop trying to protect his people.

2. They sentenced Shibub to 15 years imprisonment. Shibub remains in prison today.

The Fulfillment of the threat!

The Director of Intelligence in Qus had threatened Wissa, "As for the torture of Christians in Qus, you have seen nothing yet. There is plenty more to come." That threat became reality beginning on December 31, 1999 with a fight between a Christian merchant and a Muslim customer. The merchant went to the police station to report the incident. By the time he returned, a Muslim gathering had destroyed his whole store.

The situation was volatile. The police asked the priests to instruct their people to stay at home. They did, but Christians' stores were pillaged and burned. On Sunday Christians went to worship. That is when the full attack exploded. By twelve o'clock, Father Gabriel was in El Balyana, the seat of the bishopric, to visit Bishop Wissa. Telephone calls

were also coming in from Qus. The sounds of guns and bullets could be heard from the telephone all-the-way across the room. Father Paul drove Wissa and Gabriel back to Qus ... a one-hour drive. Qus was in flames.

The Department of Intelligence requested Pope Shenouda III to send a bishop to Qus to calm down the Christians. "Imagine," said Wissa, "we are being assaulted and they request a bishop so that we be calmed." When the designated Bishops arrived, the Governor told them it was a normal situation where only five people were killed. No major deal.

The Bishops asked to see for themselves. They found twenty victims. Eight were killed out on the farms and twelve were killed in the residential area. A young Christian boy was also shot to death on the spot while riding his bicycle. The killers threatened the family, so the father agreed to testify that a car struck his son. So the boy was not recorded among the other dead. Of the eight found in the field, one was alive long enough to identify the killers. This was on Sunday, January 2.

Religious Executions

On Tuesday, January 4, seventeen corpses were brought into the church, two corpses had already been buried, another person was so totally burned away that only one small bone remained, and the boy on the bicycle was excluded. All were buried as martyrs. When I inquired why burial as martyrs, I was told that in each case before the killings, executions, "the Christian victim was asked to convert to Islam. When the offer was rejected, the victim was executed." (Collaborated by Freedom House)

The Government tried to explain the executions as a conflict in which twenty Christians were killed and one Muslim. Wissa added, "That was not true of course. There were twenty-one Christians. A Muslim was killed, but that was twelve kilometers away, in another incident,

an accidental shooting.

How did this really begin?

We know there was a threat, but was there a prior meeting? Was there a prior discussion of such violent behavior?

Bishop Wissa then explained that prior to the killings, deliberations began on a Saturday evening during the Ramadan Feast for Muslims. After they broke their fast at sunset, Muslim elders, the Deputy Director and the Director of Intelligence was asking them, "why are you fearful of Christians?" The Deputy said, "I have sent one person to kill eleven Christians, he was only in prison one hour. What's stopping you from taking action?"

Eighteen Muslims stood up in opposition. They argued, "The end is not pleasant. We want to be excluded." They were called, "hypocrites of Islam."

The result was the assault.

The Bishop said, "I had access to this information for some time, but did not release it for the sake of those who withdrew. But now an independent magazine has documented all of the details.

After the assault, the Director of Intelligence interrogated Father Gabriel for ten hours, 9 pm until the next day. Thirteen charges were filed against him. Six Muslims charged that Father Gabriel shot at them while they were crossing a bridge to the Islamic Institute in Qus.

When they were asked to explain why they were all crossing the bridge at that time that day, each one said that he had come to pick up family members from the Institute. However, they lied. They forgot that the day they claimed Father Gabriel shot at them was a holiday weekend, Sela, and there was no school that day. Father Gabriel made the point. "There is an old Arabic saying, 'Lying has no legs'." At that point of our visit everyone laughed heartily.

Finally:

After all the false charges with increasing international disgrace with growing interests of human rights organizations

The Intelligence Department issued a degree charging 96 persons, out of which 38 were Christians and 58 were Muslims. When I asked the question, "How many Muslim properties were destroyed?" They answered emphatically, "none, not one." And I asked again, "How many Muslims were killed?" Again they responded "None, not one." So, Christians were charged for burning and looting their own properties and killing their own people.

This prosecution continued into December 2000.

Then the judge ordered all the defendants into the court and addressed them. "We are close to the Christmas Holidays and Ramadan Feast. I propose a peace agreement." He picked out a Christian and a Muslim in court and had them shake hands and all 96 defendants were released.

The only person held and charged was the Muslim who had accidentally shot and killed another Muslim. All the others were let go. Even the criminals, who had burned, assaulted and murdered, were set free. No convictions. No imprisonment. No sentences for the crimes against the Christians of Qus were ever issued. Just like the Director of Intelligence had suggested.

1. The witnesses who had seen the actual murders, the actual shootings, their testimonies were denied. The forensic evidence was changed stating that all the killings were committed with sharp weapons, knives, machetes, and swords. No one was shot by a gun. So how can we believe these witnesses?

2. Two Christians testified in court against the person they saw commit the killings. "They said the name exactly. They knew. The name is in the file." But the Intelligence Officers placed information in the file that

the accused person was a patient in the hospital at that time and therefore could not have been responsible for the killings.

Conclusion

Twenty-one Christians were killed and no one was held accountable. The Egyptian Government, the Egyptian President had detailed knowledge of the crimes of murdering, pillaging, torturing, and making false indictments against the Christians of Qus.

Why the public humiliations, the fraudulent indictments, the extreme tortures? They were all used to protect what? Religious Executions!

Qus: A Window for the World

A window to Qus makes clear to the world that there was no justice for the Copts of Qus, no justice from the Qus Officials! No justice from Cairo Officials. No Egyptian authority was courageous enough to offer justice to the Copts of Qus! Egyptian Officials sanctioned, by silence, by inaction, by nodding of the head, a culture of discrimination, persecution, and execution of Christians.

The failure of justice in Qus is not about fundamentalists. The failure of justice in Qus is not about radicals. The failure of justice in Qus is not about fanatics. The failure of justice in Qus is the failure of Egypt. It is the failure of the Egyptian Government. It is the failure of the Egyptian Religion, Islam. It signifies the impotency of an Islamic nation to produce righteousness.

There is no freedom of religion in Egypt. There is no freedom from Islam in Egypt. Little Christian chil-

dren are forced to memorize the Koran in the public schools, even segments of the Koran that deprecate and humiliate their parents, their families and their churches. Muslim teachers frighten Christian children with threats from the Koran that they will burn in hell.

Others are forced into ceremonial washings and recitation of Islamic prayers, and the wearing of the headscarves. Even on the streets, Muslim adults call out to Christian children. "I hate you." That is reality. That is the status of Christian children in Egypt.

Christian women cannot ride public transport without risking insults from adult Muslim males calling them, "whores," and then whacking them with their hands in the back of their heads. Christian churches are closed without explanation. New churches are forbidden. Church improvements, toilets with running water instead of outdoor latrines, are not allowed.

Advertisements for job opportunities in public newspapers clarify, "Christians need not apply." These behaviors are not exceptions, but are increasingly the rule for Egypt. In my investigations, the religious discrimination and oppression of Christians in Egypt resembles nearly identical oppressive behaviors taking place in Sudan, northern Nigeria, and Zamboanga, the Philippines. The similarities of these abusive behaviors are no accident, but are reflections of the common culture.

We need to ask ourselves: what are the sources that feed this culture of discrimination and persecution?

Let me make several suggestions for our consideration. First, we must

acknowledge that this oppressive culture comes from "the biographical models" of Muhammad and the Koran. Thinking of only a few of Muhammad's models for violence, the deportation of the tribe of Nad-eer, the beheadings of the tribe of Quraysah, the terror attack against Khaybar, and the subjugation of Tabuk.



The Koran endorses and instructs that oppressive behavior.

"Fight those who believe not in God nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden by God and his Apostle, nor acknowledge the Religion of Truth, (even if they are People of the Book), until they pay the jizya with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued" Koran IX (29). (A. Yusuf Ali)

Second, we must acknowledge that this oppressive culture feeds at the trough of "Super Religion." Egypt adopted Islam as its state religion by Article 36 of the Constitution in the year, 1984. Consequently, the teachings of Islam are supported and practiced by the state.

Third, we must acknowledge that this sociopath culture feeds on the Egyptian Identification Card. The Card identifies each Christian, and thereby facilitates the isolation and marginalization of Christians (e.g. education and employment) by officials of the Egyptian state and by officials of the Egyptian religion. Fourth, we must acknowledge that

(Continued on page 25)



Bishop Marvin

Bishop Marvin was born and raised in a rural community in mid western America. His youthful interests in farming and marketing continue to influence his understanding of life today. He earned several academic degrees, a BA. from Calvin College, an M. Div. from Calvin Theological School, and a D. Min. from San Francisco Theological School. He was ordained in 1969 as a bishop in the Christian Reformed Church of North America.

The Coptic Language

The Background

The word Copt refers to the native Christian minority of Egypt. The word itself is derived from the Greek word Aiguptious which simply means Egyptian. However in modern times the word Coptic is used as a reference not only to Christian Egyptians, but also to their distinctive art and language.

The Coptic language, now extinct, was the form of the ancient Egyptian language spoken in early Christian times. By the 12th century it was superseded by Arabic. It represents the last phase of ancient Egyptian language, and is the direct descendant of the ancient language written in Egyptian hieroglyphic, hieratic, and demotic scripts. The Coptic alphabet is a slightly modified form of the Greek alphabet, with some letters (which vary from dialect to dialect) deriving from demotic.

As a living language of daily conversation, Coptic flourished from ca. 200 to 1100. The last record of its being spoken was during the 17th century. Coptic survives today as the liturgical language of the Coptic Orthodox Church. Egyptian Arabic is the spoken and national language of Egypt today. It is a member of the Afro-Asiatic language family and the Egyptian language sub-family.

Geographic Distribution

Coptic Egyptian was spoken only in Egypt, and historically has had little influence outside of Egypt proper, with the exception of monasteries



The Coptic Alphabet

Development and Changes of the Ancient Egyptian Language

Timeline	Phase	Written as
---- - 2600 BC	Archaic Egyptian	----
2600 BC - 2000 BC	Old Egyptian	Hieroglyphs
2000 BC - 1300BC	Middle Egyptian	Hieroglyphs
1300 BC - 700 BC	Late Egyptian	Hieroglyphs
700 BC - 500 B	Demotic	Script derived from Hieratic
4 th Century BC – 14 th Century AD	Coptic	Coptic alphabet

located in Nubia. Coptic's most noticeable impact has been on the various dialects of Egyptian Arabic, where an immense amount of words from the Coptic lexicon has been preserved as well as many morphological, syntactical, and phonological correspondences. There are also a handful of words of Coptic origin that have been borrowed more generally into Standard Arabic. These include:

timsâh تمساح "crocodile"

Coptic tamsah "the crocodile"

tûbah طوبة "brick"

Sahidic to'bæ; Bohairic to:bi; this subsequently entered Spanish (via Andalusian Arabic as adobe, whence it was borrowed by American English

wāhah واحة "oasis"

Sahidic wahə, Bohairic wehi

A few words of Coptic origin are found in Greek, some of which were ultimately borrowed into various languages of Europe (e.g. barge from Coptic bari "small boat").

It should be noted, however, that most words of Egyptian origin that entered into Greek, and subsequently other European languages, come directly from ancient Egyptian (often demotic), and not Coptic. An example of this is Greek ὄασις oasis, which comes directly from Egyptian WH3T or demotic WHĭ and not Coptic wahə.

Interestingly, Coptic re-borrowed

some words of ancient Egyptian origin back into its lexicon via Greek. For example, both Sahidic and Bohairic use the word ebenos, which was taken directly from Greek ἔβεος "ebony", originally from Egyptian HBNY. Finally, Old Nubian (and modern Nubian languages) borrowed many words of Coptic origin.

Official Status

As an extinct language, Coptic does not have any official status. The mediaeval Bohairic dialect is, however, presently used as a liturgical language of the Coptic Orthodox and Coptic Catholic churches (along with Arabic and Greek).

Vocabulary

The core lexicon of Coptic is derived from the ancient Egyptian language, being most closely related to the demotic phase of the language. Approximately one-third of Coptic vocabulary is drawn from Greek, though borrowings are not always fully adapted to the Coptic phonological system and may have semantic differences as well.

There are instances of Coptic texts having passages that are almost entirely composed from Greek lexical roots. However, it must be remembered that the majority of Coptic texts are direct translations of Greek works.

□

Towards the Restoration of Full Citizenship Rights to Copts

Adel Guindy

A great deal has been said over the past several years concerning the Copts, and the harsh situation they are facing in Egypt. But one must be careful on how to diagnose the issue.

Their problem cannot be categorized as one of 'terrorism': Even if Copts paid a heavy price and had a disproportionate share of victims, they were not the only ones to face the acts of extremist groups. Besides, and this is more important, some of the atrocities that befell them (such as in El-Kosheh) were actually perpetrated by 'normal' people, sometimes neighbors, who had acted despicably because of incitement and other reasons linked to a prevailing culture of hate.

Nor could the problem be seen, in Human Rights terms, as one of a population group seeking the right of self-determination. The Copts have always maintained that they stand for a united Egypt where all citizens live side by side in peace, harmony and equality. They are, as is often said, part of Egypt's 'national fabric', but they do expect to be treated on an equal par with their fellow-citizens.

Theirs is a case of a religious minority looking for full recognition and integration, enjoying all rights and duties, in their country, while preserving their cultural heritage. (This, incidentally, is an ancestral heritage to all modern-day Egyptians, and hence is not simply the prerogative of Copts).

In other words, the prognosis of the Copts' situation should, in fact, be summed-up under one heading: being deprived of full citizenship rights in their homeland. In 'medical' terms this could be restated as Rights of Citizenship Deficiency Syndrome (RCDS)!

Some would say that Egypt is facing a myriad of problems: the 'Coptic

issue' being only one of them, but not regarded (by the government or the society at large) among the most important at that; as Egypt eventually embraces modernity and develops economically and politically, the problem of Copts would be resolved.

There may be some truth in such claims, but one must quickly emphasize three points. First, is to reject the fallacy that the Coptic issue could automatically (or magically!) be cured, at some undefined point in the future, without specifically addressing its roots now! Second, is that progress could, and should, occur on multiple fronts, with a continuous feedback process positively supporting the other fronts. (For example, progress on human rights standards in general, on women's empowerment and on the Coptic issue, would certainly be mutually supportive). Third, is that tangible progress in resolving the Coptic issue would, in itself, be an indication that Egypt is successfully embracing modernity. The reverse is also true: Egypt cannot pretend to be progressing nor embracing modernity, without fundamentally curing itself from that 'RCDS'!

Based on the above-stated 'prognosis', we can proceed to propose a 'prescription'. To be specific as much as possible, we offer here a number of remedial actionable points to help cure the problem. Promoting them as objectives, will inherently promote the general good of Egypt, as they will help make it a modern (i.e. pluralistic, secular, democratic) and prosperous nation, well worthy of its seven millennia history.

Implement Political and Constitutional Reform

Modify Egypt's Constitution to emphasize the secular nature of the State, the absolute equality of rights

and duties and political participation of all citizens irrespective of belief, or any other distinctive traits.

The Copts have always maintained that they stand for a united Egypt where all citizens live side by side in peace, harmony and equality

The constitutional change making Islamic Jurisprudence (Shari'a) the principal source of legislation, which was introduced in 1981 against national opposition from Copt and Muslim liberal intellectuals alike, has opened the door to relentless political violence endangering the stability of the country, harming its national unity, dangerously mixing religion and politics and rendering the Copts to a position akin to the historical Dhimmi status. In fact Egypt, Yemen and Qatar (!!) are the only three Arab countries that make such a stipulation. (Saudi Arabia has no constitution other than the Quran). Consequently, this makes Egypt the ONLY country in the world which imposes the religious code of the majority on its considerable religious minority.

Imposing Shari'a-inspired laws is at the same time discriminatory and goes counter to the established universal human rights values.

Explicitly state in the constitution that Universal Human Rights Declarations take precedence over any other constitutional or legal texts. Enshrine values of guaranteed liber-

ties, to ensure that democracy would mean, in practical terms, the participation of all social groups (especially those marginalized) as key bases for the socio-political reforms that Egypt needs; and not simply a 'ballot-box' exercise in demagoguery eventually leading merely to the legalization of a (theocratic) dictatorship.

Abolish all laws, regulations or procedures that restrict the right to freedom of conscience, or those applied only to non-Muslims limiting their right to freely practise their faith. The "Hamayoni decree" (which dates back to 1856, during the Ottoman era), and all related humiliating conditions, on the building of places of worship, is a prime example.

Replace the current policies of treating 'matters related to Copts' as a 'security issue', with a transparent organism under the direct authority and responsibility of the President, who should be a president of 'all Egyptians' and the guardian of the national unity. Such national unity must not mean the 'tyranny of the (religious) majority'.

Lay down legal rules and measures to eliminate all forms of discrimination based on religion, in matters related to legal or administrative procedures, education, culture, employment and promotion.

The State should strictly respect its secular nature, and consequently pull out from, and avoid meddling in, all activities of religious nature or related to promoting a particular religion. The nature and role of institutions such as the syndicates and professional societies must be kept strictly in the civil domain.

Change the Climate of Intolerance

Ensure that all school curricula are free of denigrating references to non-Muslims and to their religions; and encourage the acceptance and respect of the 'different other'. Mandatory courses in human rights and should be taught in all public schools.

It must not be the role of the State's public education system, as is the case currently, to teach (indeed preach!) a religion from a (biased) theological point of view; but rather in reference to a cultural and societal context, and with an aim to imbibe tolerance, respect of other beliefs and a genuine sense of human equality rather than the self-claimed 'superiority' of a particular faith.

Criminalize hate campaigns and propaganda, whatever their source, whether it is media or religious organizations and figures. Frequently published literature labeling non-Muslims as "Kafirs" (infidels) - in addition to treating them as inferiors - amounts to nothing but an open incitement of various forms of violent acts against them.

Reverse the Exclusion and Marginalization of Copts

It is essential that the government of Egypt issue an accurate census reflecting the true number of Copts. The latest official census (in 1996) puts the number of Copts at 3.6 million (which is about the same level as reported in the 1950s, whereas the general population almost tripled during the same period!) Such figures grossly underestimate all independent and most reliable estimates.

Copts must be fully and adequately represented in all elected and appointed legislative and administrative institutions. The current situation, where Copts are hardly present, or are severely under-represented, is unacceptable.

While we do not favor a system permanently based on proportionality, we believe that such an approach is needed at the present time, as an interim measure. Applying the principle of affirmative action, would correct past injustice and guarantee the participation of Copts in the running of the affairs of their country alongside their Muslim compatriots. Allocating about 15% of all Assembly and Council seats to Copts is considered a necessity to re-establish

needed political and psychological equilibrium.

Revise the educational curricula to cover the Coptic era in Egypt's history, and emphasize the Coptic culture as a key tributary to the culture that all Egyptians share today.

Use similar standards of space- and programming time- allocation across national media which are financed by all tax-payers, and consequently augment the abysmal portion now allotted to cover Copts-related issues.

Emphasize that the Egyptian national identity should be founded on genuine Egyptian traits, based on patriotic and national cohesion, rather than religious identification. Openness toward modern universal values and religious tolerance and understanding should become part of those Egyptian qualities.

Eliminate Discriminatory Practices

Dissolve tangible distinction among citizens by eliminating any requirement to state one's religion on official documents such as ID cards, application forms; with the exception of the birth certificate.

Fully abide by the principle of freedom of conscience, and apply similar rules to freedom of belief and conversions to all citizens. Abide by the specific religious creeds of non-Muslims with regard to their family status issues, rather than revert to Shari'a rules.

Ensure that all job appointments are based only on merit and adequate representation. This is especially important in cases of 'highly visible' posts, from which Copts are currently excluded, such as senior Cabinet positions, governors, city executives, university and faculty deans, and high-ranking positions in the media, military and police (including State Security). The same applies to enrollment into military academies, or to teaching positions appointments at universities, or for judiciary and diplomatic corps¹, where upper ceilings on Copts

(typically 1-2%) are currently imposed.

Eliminate religion-based discriminatory attitudes, such as those practised by some individuals in influential positions in the government, and the public or private sectors; and explicitly outlaw and punish perpetrators of such behaviors.

Abolish the religion-based duality in the educational system. The current situation of a 'Muslims-only' parallel educational system has grown 300 times in the past three decades, to currently encompass over 1.5 million students. There must be one national education system open to all citizens. Specialized schools, preparing personnel for religious institutions must be kept only for that specific purpose, and related curricula need to be supervised to ensure that they abide by the spirit and letter of Human Rights standards.

Respect all religious and charitable endowments in equal and lawful manner, and return all seized assets and estates to the original proprietors.

Respect the fact that expatriate Egyptians, with dual citizenship, are loyal Egyptians and have under International Law the right to enjoy their political rights and freedoms as citizens of both their birthplace country and their adopted one².

Halt the Harassment of the Copts

Apprehend and punish, according to the law, those who attack or persecute Copts, and adequately compensate the victims. The local authorities, who are usually capable of taking decisive measures when government officials or tourists are targeted, should not become lax (if not complacent) when it comes to Copts.

Eliminate reported bias by the police and other local authorities in cases of forced conversions to Is-

lam. Documented evidence indicates the systematic use by certain fanatic individuals and groups of various means of coercion and undue pressure, especially on weaker members of society such as young girls and the poor. In that respect,

Copts must assume their responsibility in effecting the needed change through full participation in building a better Egypt and rid themselves of their passiveness

modify the current law allowing the conversion (to Islam) of minors: Youngsters who require parental approval to marry if they are below twenty-one, can now convert as of the age of sixteen; an anomaly used by fanatics in their proselytizing zealotry.

Ensure that the conversion of any individual should, under NO circumstances, lead to coercing any other family member against their free will, nor forcing minors to follow the new faith of a converted parent.

End the practices seen in numerous Egyptian villages (often with the knowledge of local authorities) whereby "Jizyah" is imposed on Copts by fanatic groups, mixed with bandits. If they fail to pay, or if they complain, their lives and properties become jeopardized. In despair, many Copts have had to abandon their homes and flee to live in the slums of larger cities.

Objectively investigate incidents of abuse, humiliation, persecution and violations of the rights of Copts as humans, and punish those responsible for such incidents.

Outlook

The above-stated objectives are non-sectarian and relate only to the most basic human and citizenship rights and, hence, should be acceptable to most reasonably-minded people. They are believed to be quite actionable, yet will require tremendous efforts by a great number of good-willed people in order to become realities on the ground; for the hurdles are by no means minor. Some of these are:

The higher authorities in Egypt have yet to admit in public the fact that the Copts are facing any particular problems. When confronted, they keep repeating, instead, that the Copts are treated as they should (!!) In fact, it has been reported that the president personally holds such views³ and sees no need for any broad-based actions or policy changes!⁴

The holding grip of Islamic and Islamist extremism on society and on the governmental apparatuses is, if anything, on the rise in Egypt. Counter-actions by the ruling clique remain largely a matter of power struggle, rather than being based on a different progressive vision.

With rare exceptions, the media in Egypt are usually quick to brand any caller to resolve the Coptic issue as 'sectarian' at best, if not 'working with the enemies to harm the national unity', or outright 'traitor'.

As the various political parties come-up with projects on political reform in the country, it is astounding (and quite saddening) to notice that little, if any, mention is devoted to the critical issues of building a secular state and resolving the Coptic issue.

Copts are pacifists and would not contemplate using violence in any form to attain their objectives. In-

(Continued on page 26)

Adel Guindy

Adel Guindy is a political writer on Middle-Eastern affairs and civil rights advocate based in France. He is a frequent contributor to Watani.

Copts Throughout History

Father Matthew the Poor—A Coptic National Treasure (1919 - 2006)

William A. Hanna

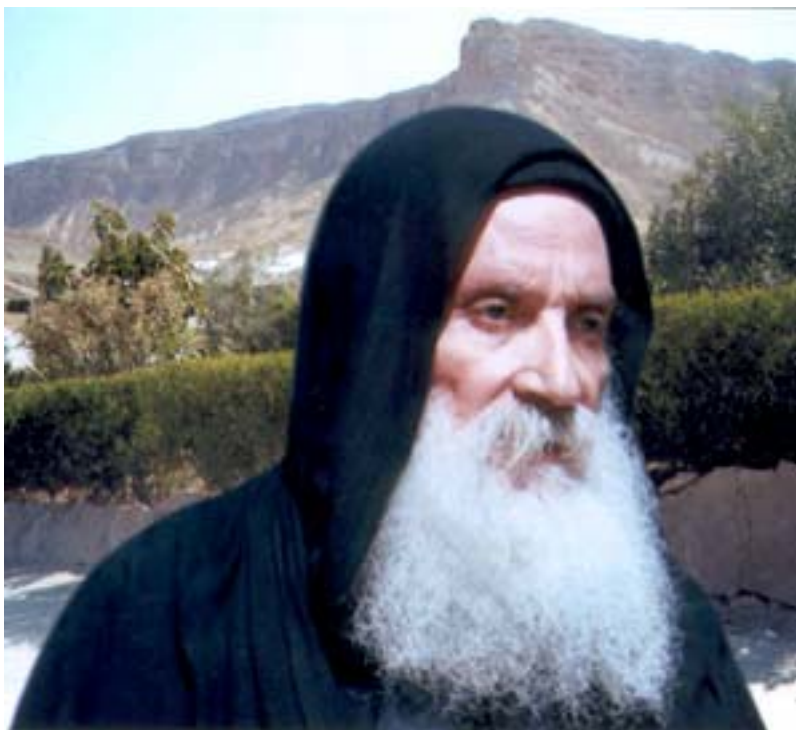
Fr. Matthew the Poor (Abouna Matta El-Maskeen) was a young Coptic Orthodox Christian in 1943 who graduated from Cairo University, College of Pharmacy. He was very bright, handsome, and industrious. A good Christian Egyptian who cared about citizenship as much as any good citizen with a pure heart did.

He opened a Pharmacy in Damam-hoor Egypt, and in 4 years he prospered to own 2 pharmacies, 2 villas and 2 cars. He made it habit to refuse to accept payment from the poor and paid for them out of his own pocket. This was the beginning of his caring for the poor.

He was from a good Christian family, he attended Church, gave to the poor and fulfilled all the commandments. This could have been sufficient. Normal human behavior (and nothing wrong with it) is to maintain the business and become more prosperous. He easily could have married and had a family, but he had a greater fire in his belly. This was the desire to dedicate his life to Christ, the longing for monastic life, living as a celibate dedicated to the service of God.

Instead, Youssef Eskander from Benha, Egypt chose to live the life of a poor monastic. He sold everything he owned and gave the proceeds to the poor. He kept only the price of a one way ticket to a forgotten and extremely poverty stricken monastery, namely, the monastery of St. Samuel the Confessor, in the Qul-lamoun Mountains near Menya. This is the same historic monastery that was returned to use 10 years earlier by one of his spiritual fathers, then Fr. Mena the Hermit "Al Mow-tawahed," who later became the saintly Pope Kyrillos VI, a contemporary saint.

He stayed in this monastery from



Father Matthew the Poor (Abouna Matta El-Maskeen)
Departed on Thursday, 8 June 2006

1948 to 1950 when he was assigned by then Pope Youssab (Joseph) II to the monastery of St. Mary, known as El Syrian in the prairies of Esecete (Wadi Al Natrun) between Cairo and Alexandria in the Western desert. At El Syrian monastery, he was ordained priest by the late Bishop Theophulus.

Bishop Theophulus was known for running that monastery and ordaining many of that generation's monks, including departed Bishop Samuel, and the present Pope, HH Pope Shenouda III. The newly ordained Father Matta was named El-Meskeen (the Poor) not only to differentiate him from another monk by the name Matta at the monastery but also because it reflected his early deeds. The remainder of his life resembled that of Pope Matta El-Maskeen.

Four years later Father Matta was elevated to a hegumen ('qummos') and was made a deputy to the Pope for the region of Alexandria. His efforts there were a nucleus for a

revival of the then 40 churches in Alexandria in 1954-55. After two years he resigned the job and returned to the monastery of El Syrian.

In 1956, he moved to a cave 40 km east of the edge of Fayoum in the desert known as Wadi Al Ryaan. He was followed by others who liked his example of solitude. They each dug a cave in the desert hills to live in. Although it was very harsh living in the desert, without building or shelter, the numbers of those who followed his example reached 12.

While living in a cave in Wadi Al Ryaan in the early 1960's, he began the renewal of the life of dedication by starting Beet El Takreese in Helwan. Beet el-takreese, or House of the Dedicated to the Service of God, was an old villa with a garden in the about 10 minutes walking distance from the train station.

There was a falling out between Pope Kyrillos VI and Beet El Takreese in 1963 when the Coptic Church endorsed a World Council

of Churches document circulated by the Catholic Church. The document was labeled the "Innocence of the Jews from the Blood of Christ." Many Coptic intellectuals opposed the document. Beet Al Takreese opposed it also and issued a pamphlet against it.

Although I was only 15 years old at the time, I remember those events and recall that I was in favor of Beet Al Takreese's stand as a courageous one. HH Pope Kyrillos VI considered Abouna Matta disobedient at the time, but there was no formal action against him since he was living in the desert of Wadi Al Ryaan at the time.

However, 6 years later, in 1969, he was given a formal assignment by then Pope Kyrillos VI to renew the monastic life of the Monastery of St. Macarius in the Escete (half way between Cairo and Alexandria in the Western desert). At that time there were 5 elderly monks in this monastery that lived in the ancient historic building ('Hessn'). The monastery dates back to the time of Queen Helena, the mother of Constantine, circa 330 A.D.

The buildings, after 1500 years of neglect, were dilapidated and parts of it were buried in the sand. As part of the project to renew the monastic life at St. Macarius monastery an old church was repaired and renovated and greatly expanded in order to house hundreds of monks and to receive thousands of visitors. This church stands to this day. Father Matta stayed at Deir Abu Machar until his departure.

The number of monks at the monastery of St. Macarius increased from a half dozen in 1969 to over 130 today. They have a large farm, several fully equipped clinics, shelters for domesticated animals, workshops of different kinds for wood working, printing, and car and tractor maintenance.

Abouna Matta El Maskeen lived the life of solitude both outside the monastery in caves and inside it in Qualya with limited to no contact

with others in the monastery. The monks of Abu Machar learned to live like their spiritual father.

When we visited in 1994, we were surprised to find that the quantity of crops produced at the monastery not only covered their own needs but those of the community and still has enough excess for them to be sold outside of the community. The watermelon and other fruit produced by Abu Machar are considered premium products and are served in 5-star hotels throughout Egypt.

Abu Machar was the first to begin cultivating sugar beets as an alternative to the Egyptian reliance on sugar-cane for sugar production. The monks management of agriculture and dairy production in the desert far exceeds the abilities of many universities. This fact even attracted the attention of the late President Sadat to Abu Machar and the Abbot (Father of Monks) of Abu Machaar; Fr. Matta El Maskeen.

Printing of the voluminous theological works of the departed Father Matta alone was enough of a strain for the monastery to maintain a modern printing press. Father Matta wrote more than 280 highly valued theological and spiritual books in Arabic. The monastery prints a monthly magazine (St. Mark) that is distributed world wide. Almost all their publications are translated multiple languages by monks at the monastery who specialize in translation. The languages include: English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Polish, Dutch, and Russian.

Abouna Matta was a tireless leader of tireless fathers. His scholarly publications have left their mark throughout the world. They are deep in Christology, spirituality, theology, and philosophy and continue to be applicable to today's thinking, culture, and Christian living.

He also was an active citizen of Egypt who loved his country and spoke his mind concerning the political system and the life of its citizens. In the 1950's and 60's he wrote

about religion and politics (Al Seyasah Wel Deen), citing socialism as a good system that serves the needs of the poor and less able. He also wrote about Israel and Zionism as a Western injustice against the Palestinians and the people of the Middle East. I consider his political writings as his rights of citizenship and should be considered completely separately from his theological and liturgical writings.

Abouna Matta was nominated for the patriarchate twice: in 1958 after the departure of Pope Joseph II and in 1971 after the departure of Pope Kyrillos VI.

The events that transpired in the final four years of former president Sadat (from Camp David, 1977 to his assassination on 5 October 1981) created some conflict between Father Matta and the Church. Sadat was impressed by the success of Abouna Matta and his monastic family (Deir Abu Machar). It is rumored that President Sadat wanted to remove Pope Shenouda III and make Abouna Matta the Pope.

It is also rumored that Abouna Matta told Sadat that Sadat could never do this and would be ill advised to remove Pope Shenouda III. He explained to the then president of Egypt that all Coptic Popes are chosen by the will of God and not the will of men. Unfortunately, Abouna Matta was misquoted in a most infamous TIME (USA) article in 1981 and this became a source of friction that afflicted both sides.

HH Pope Shenouda III was informed concerning the meetings with Sadat. In 1981 HH was put under house arrest in the monastery of Anba Bishoy from September 1981 to December 1984 (40 months). In 1996, HH visited the monastery for the first time in 17 years. He was received by Fr. Matta and the monks at the door and Fr. Matta prostrated himself in front of the Pope of Alexandria and the Patriarch of the See of St. Mark, as is common after a long time of not seeing HH the Pope.

Fr. Matta spoke of the significance and blessings of the visit of the Pope to his children the monks. Hereafter HH resumed his weekly visits fervently, traveling from Cairo to the monastery to Alexandria and back again.

HH spoke of the importance of the life of prayer for the Church. He stated that the praying monk is more valuable for the well being of the Church than any other monastic service. HH gave Abouna Matta and his spiritual children credit for being a good example for the life of prayer in the [Church](#).

I never met him, but we met in the spirit every time I heard a story about his high spiritual statute and every month when I read St. Mark Magazine (Megalat Morcos). As a teenager in the 1960s I used to purchase the magazine for 5 piasters (lots of money for a kid then) and now I receive the magazine by mail (\$2/month = ~1000 piasters).

I can see not only the wealth of knowledge, but the beautiful printing of valuable Christian art from many cultures, countries and Orthodox traditions on the cover, front and back. This is sophistication that is rare in people with this high level of spirituality and self sacrifice. Vladimir Theological Institute in Boston considers Abouna Matta one of the greatest Orthodox theologians that ever lived.

I was fortunate to acquire many of Father Matta's books in Arabic and English: Most valuable of 280 books are: Life of Orthodox Prayer, the series "with Christ", the Holy Spirit (3 parts), Life of St. Paul the Apostle, Life of St. Athanasius the Apostolic, Life of Isaiah, and his commentary on the Holy Bible. For over 50 years:

1960s - 2006 Father Matta wrote the opening article of the monthly Magazine. He also usually wrote one or two articles every month. That is more than 2000 articles or one article for every year since our Lord was glorified in 33 A.D.

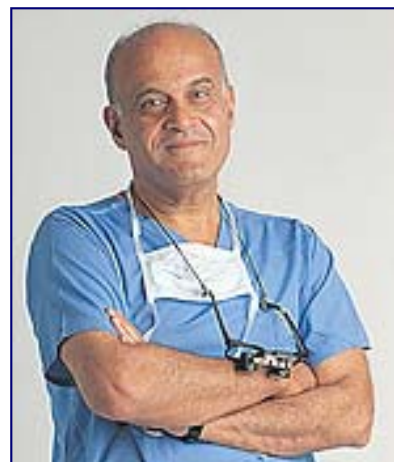
A most rich life for a man that chose poverty as a way of life on earth. Blessed are you our departed Father Matthew the Poor, Abouna Matta El Maskeen. You are now discussing philosophy, theology and the riches of Christ our Lord with the saints Paul, Athanasius, and Cyril the Great in Heaven. I also know that you did not neglect singing the praises, a very important part of the life of a monastic, but explained them to us in books and on tapes. Some were even recorded by the Ministry of Information and Culture of Egypt as treasures of Coptic History and Culture.

Father Matta El Maskeen is considered a great Orthodox Theologian by the Eastern Orthodox Churches. St. Vladimir Monastery and Higher Learning Institute publishes and comments favorably on all his theological writings.

What can we say, but to quote St. Paul the Apostle: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing." (2 Timothy 4:7-9).

Axiox, Axios, Axios (worthy, worthy, worthy) Ava Matta ni monachos (the monk). Glory be to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. One God. Amen.

Profiles of Great Copts



Sir Magdi Habib Yacoub

Sir Magdi Yacoub, (born November 16, 1935), is a heart surgeon. He was born in Aswan, Egypt to a Coptic Orthodox family hailing from the Southern town of Assiut. He studied at Cairo University and taught at Chicago. He moved to Britain in 1962 where he became a consultant cardiothoracic surgeon at Harefield Hospital (1969-2001) and director of medical research and education (from 1992).

He was appointed professor at the National Heart and Lung Institute in 1986 and was involved in the development of the techniques of heart and heart-lung transplantation.

In 1980 he performed a transplant operation on Derrick Morris, who until his death in July 2005, was Europe's longest surviving heart transplant patient.

In 2002 he was selected to spearhead a government recruitment drive for overseas doctors.

Dr. Yacoub led a [breakthrough heart surgery](#) in 2006, reattaching a young girls own heart to replace the failing donor.

He was knighted in 1992 by HM Queen Elizabeth II.



William A. Hanna; Ph.D.

Born in 1947, in Cairo, Egypt. Graduated from Cairo University with a B.Sc. degree in Electrical Engineering in 1967 and a B.Sc. in Mathematics in 1969. After moving to the United States in 1969, he received a M.Sc. and Ph.D. in 1971 and 1974 respectively. Dr. Hanna has been with the Boeing Company since 1981. He is a Technical Fellow in Advanced Avionics and is an Adjunct Professor of Computer Engineering at the University of Missouri in St. Louis where he currently resides. He has contributed articles to Watani.

The Ongoing Conflict Between Political Islam and the West

Magdi Khalil

While there is no issue with Islam as a religious belief, political Islam – as much as any political body – was bound to make mistakes.

The Muslim Caliphate was the manifestation of that concept in past ages; and it can be identified nowadays in the upsurge of "Global Islamism".

The offensive cartoon that triggered a violent outburst in the Muslim World, and particularly in the Arab part of that world, raises the question about the true nature of the current happenings: are we dealing with a contrived cultural confrontation or with a dispute that is gradually shaping into another round of the ongoing conflict between the West and Islam?

I personally lean towards the second option, and there are precedents in history to support that opinion. Political Islam and the West are at extreme odds, waves of mutual hostility and animosity can be tracked throughout history, and, we may indeed be witnessing the fifth round in that long, historical conflict.

The First Round: initiated by political Islam via the first Islamic invasions, or what is known in Islam as the "Islamic conquests". The early Islamic conquests reached the West, threatened Europe and left an obvious mark on Al-Andalus.

The Second Round: Europe set off this round with the crusades; those were launched under religious banners in the same fashion as the first Islamic round, and left the Muslims of the East with extremely bitter memories.

The Third Round: initiated by political Islam through the Ottoman Caliphate that was accompanied by a huge, widespread violent wave, posing a menace to the survival of Europe, and leaving a clear impact spanning from Asia Minor to the Balkans.

The Fourth Round: Europe initiated this one with the European colonization of most of the Muslim World – some countries remained under occupation until the sixties of last century.

Clearly, the two parties have exchanged "blows" throughout history, each side initiating an equal number of rounds, but with different outcomes. Political Islam left behind Muslim entities in the former USSR and in some European states, by forcing the indigenous populations to convert to Islam. The West was – and still is – engaged in helping the Jews realize their historical dream to resurrect their ancient kingdom in the land of Palestine.

It is worth mentioning that there is a difference between Islam as a religious practice, i.e. spiritual rituals, worship, and faith in God and the five pillars – and political Islam, where Islam serves as an ideology with a vision to create a viable political Muslim entity. The Muslim Caliphate was the manifestation of that concept in past ages, and it can be identified nowadays in the upsurge of the concept of "Global Islamism".

The Islamization of all aspects of life is at the heart of this comprehensive concept, and terrorism – the military side of this concept – serves as a reinforcing brutal arm. In other words, in reference to the common argument that Islam is both *din wa dawla* (religion and state), we need to differentiate between the two aspects; the issue has nothing to do with Islam as a religious belief, and the right of belief is a granted personal right. However the notion of Islam as "a state" addresses the political aspect, and, political Islam – as much as any political body – is bound to make mistakes.

The exclusive religious nature of Islam only lasted for a few years after its emergence; before long, Islam had fused religion and politics,

giving birth to what is known as political Islam—a concept that is still in effect in our times. Political Islam, by definition (whether scientific or functional) is an old phenomenon, as ancient as Islam itself, only the labels have changed throughout history.

Some in the West have estimated those extremists to represent around 10-15% of the total population of the Muslim world, which roughly equals 130-200 million

It is also worth noting that from a western perspective, the conflict with political Islam is basically of a political nature, even though it has taken on a religious angle in one particular round. On the other hand, from an Islamic perspective, it is a political / religious conflict, given that Islam has fused both aspects since its early beginnings, as mentioned earlier.

This theory is supported by the fact that Eastern Christianity has suffered as a result of foreign attacks in the course of the long historical conflict with political Islam. The crusaders have played a role in weakening Eastern Christianity, and what the crusades did in Constantinople is proof enough. Furthermore, the Eastern Christians have paid – and are still paying – a heavy price, given the intense religious tone of the conflict. As perceived by political Islam, there was no way for Eastern Christians to escape unscathed,

and they have become convenient targets of the hostility and rage permeating their world.

The Fifth Round: Political Islam took a turn in initiating another round, and the events of 9/11 marked the beginning of a deliberately planned round of assaults. The only difference this time around is that rather than a "Muslim Caliphate" state to carry out the assault, "Global Islamism" took that job. As mentioned earlier, "Global Islamism" is a comprehensive concept, and terrorism – planned or unplanned – represents the aggressive wing of this wide-ranging scheme. In the days of the Muslim Caliphate, there was a central state in charge of the military aspects of political Islam, and nowadays, in the absence of that state, terrorism has taken on the military role (of course, the concept of Global Islamism extends far beyond mere terrorism).

There are no designated leadership quarters for Global Islamism, but there are several quarters for the purposes of recruitment and spreading the word, and Saudi Arabia comes on top of those, followed by Egypt and Pakistan. Around the globe, millions of Muslims are sitting on the sidelines, watching the unfolding events from a distance, as this round of assaults was initiated by extremists only and not by all Muslims.

Some in the West have estimated those extremists to represent around 10-15% of the total population of the Muslim world, which roughly equals 130-200 million fanatics. Islamic extremism is unfortunately gaining more ground as days go by, a fact that does not bode well for the future, hinting at the possibility of an extensive confrontation and of a shift from a cold war status to an all-out battle.

Magdi Khalil

Magdi Khalil is a political analyst, researcher, author and executive editor of the Egyptian weekly *Watani International*. He is also a columnist for *Asharq Al-Awsat* newspaper, London, a free-lance writer for several Arabic language newspapers, and a frequent contributor to Middle East broadcast news TV. Mr. Khalil has also published three books and written numerous research papers on citizenship rights, civil society, and the situation of minorities in the Middle East.

Conspicuously, the cycles of violence instigated by political Islam – whether through the Muslim Caliphate, the Ottoman Caliphate or international terrorism – are of a global nature, hitting East and West, sparing no one, while the western attacks mostly tend to target the East and the countries of the Third World.

So, which of the Muslim states can stake a claim for the leadership of the Muslim world?

There are three types of leadership:

First, political and military leadership: it is obvious that none of the Muslim states qualify for this type of leadership, for many reasons. It is also a given that the West would not allow such a state to emerge and bring back the Muslim Caliphate; the West has no wish to revisit that period, or to be haunted once more by the phantoms of the Islamic invasions that have threatened Europe more than once.

Second: an intellectual leadership capable of offering a compelling extremist ideology that would draw and mobilize fanatics. Several states are walking that path, whether intentionally or unintentionally, and Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iran and Pakistan are at the top of that list.

Third: The model of Islamic reform: simply put, this implies following the example of Judaism and Christianity in making a complete separation between religion and state. So far, not a single state has dared to put this model forth, as the great majority firmly believes in an Islam that fuses "religion and state". The Turkish model is an exceptional case, that can neither be generalized nor copied, not to mention that it has been gradually losing ground,

and showing clear signs of instability and turmoil.

Possible Future Scenarios

The First Scenario: suggested by Bernard Lewis – a historian and prominent expert on the Ottoman Caliphate – in a book that was written prior to the events of 9/11, and published afterwards. In the book entitled *What Went Wrong?* he mentioned that the Muslim civilization has declined, and the Muslim world was crumbling under the weight of ignorance, poverty and regression. "Islam cannot ("cannot" is one word) flourish without conquests", he clearly stated, which means that a substantial Muslim political structure cannot exist in the absence of Muslim Caliphate.

The Second Scenario: A resurgence of a Muslim Caliphate, in a different form, the dream that Osama bin Laden and Ayman Al-Zawahiri have long harbored, and thought to accomplish through terrorism, and by taking control over a state that will serve as a launching point for the new Muslim Caliphate.

They were hoping to start with Afghanistan, then move on to Saudi Arabia, overthrow the regime, and establish a base for the Caliphate, but their dream faded after Afghanistan was hit. Prior to that, Hassan Al-Turabi, who was based in Sudan, tried and failed to revive the Islamic Nationalism "al-Umamiyah al-Islamiya". Others took a step-by-step approach to revive the Muslim Caliphate, resorting first to political means, and planning to shift into a military mode once they are in power.

The Muslim Brotherhood movement in Egypt stands out as passionate advocates of that approach, as confirmed by a statement of the late supreme guide of the movement – Mr. Mustafa Mashour "we will not give up (the goal) of restoring the Muslim Caliphate". (*Asharq Al-Awsat*, 9 Aug. 2002). I personally think that these attempts are destined to fail.

The Third Scenario: suggested by

Samuel Huntington in "The Clash of Civilizations", where he wrote "in the end, Mohammed will triumph" – meaning that the Prophet of Islam will have his victory owing to the Muslim world's rapid population growth, and the way Islam is spreading and the Muslim cells are multiplying, threatening to enfold the world within their clasp.

The Fourth Scenario: it was suggested in the aftermath of the events of 9/11 that this is the final round of the battle between political Islam and the West, which will result in "the collapse of the Muslim World." This scenario suggests that political Islam will be entirely defeated in a matter of a few decades, because terrorism will have taken the lead in this round, at a time when the Muslim world was at its weakest. That might explain why some people have commented that the Muslim world is actually facing the most dangerous crisis in its long history. □

The Village of Qus

(Continued from page 15)

this oppressive culture feeds on the monolithic bread of enforcement authorities. Only the followers of Islam are employed as Intelligence Officers in Egypt. Thereby guaranteeing a unanimously solidified prosecution against Christians.

A fifth contributing factor, although it may not be considered a cause, for the failure of justice for Christians in Qus – is that the Copts are the indigenous people of Egypt. Since the armies of Islam subjugated them in 641, the Copts' history tells us they have been oppressed and persecuted. Roman Catholics are oppressed but they have the Vatican. Anglicans are oppressed but they have the Queen. Presbyterians are oppressed but they have Westminster. The Egyptian Copts have no foreign recourse because they are truly Egyptian. As Father Gabriel

said, "There is no way to fight back. There is not way to get justice." Here we have fifteen million Christians trapped in the Guantanamo Bay of Egypt without the sound of a whimper from the world.

What can we do about this culture of oppression?

First, Egypt must excise from its state religion the teachings to fight Christians and Jews (non-Muslim peoples) into submission and humiliation, Koran IX (29), as well as all the other messages of the Koran that feed a culture of dehumanization and bigoted violence. Second, Egypt must desist from printing a person's religion on his/her Identification Card.

Let them begin to honor human equality and the freedom of religion. Third, Egypt must desist from forcing its state religion on non-Muslim students in its public educational system. Fourth, Egypt must allow the construction of worship facilities and the right to improve and repair older facilities. Fifth, Egypt must impose and enforce a quota that requires 20% of the Christian population to hold 20% of all government employment nationwide.

Let us relentlessly pursue human equality and freedom of religion in Egypt. Let us courageously stand together with all of God's children across the world. Let us pray, shout, and march with them and for them until the windows of heaven break forth with the justice of God. □

To My fellow Muslim citizens

We've been told countless times that Islam is a religion of peace and that it is the radical fundamentalists who are twisting the words of the Koran to suit their needs. Yet, this message is being addressed to the wrong audience.

Muslim organizations and institutions need to address this message with mosque Imams who preach hatred and intolerance towards Jews and Christians. To this very day, Christians living in Islamic countries have to endure daily insults and intimidation through loud speakers in mosques, particularly during Friday prayers.

We'll not be convinced that Islam is a religion of peace if moderate Muslims stand idly by when Bin Ladin quotes the Koran and the Hadith (Sayings of Muhammad) in every single statement he makes to prove that is relying on the genuine Islam and not the type of Islam that, as he claims, "the stooges of the West" are following. It has always been my desire to see Muslim leaders and Imams respond to the radicals with references from the Koran and the Hadith and to give examples from Muhammad's life that what the radicals are doing is wrong, but I have been disappointed. If you visit any radical Islamic website, you will see nothing but messages promoting hate against non-Muslims and calling for holy war against them for the sake of Allah, quoting tens of Koranic verses that support this conviction.

Bin Ladin, Zawahri and Zarqawi take the prophet of Islam and his companions as role models in waging war against the infidels and driving them out of Muslim land. One of Zarqawi's favorite quotes was that of Islam's prophet; "I had desired to raid the infidels and get killed, then raid the infidels and get killed, then raid the infidels and get killed." Passages like this one only stressing the importance of fighting what they consider infidels.

Mere sweet talk by uttering "Islam is a religion of peace" will not solve the problem, you need to address the core, the Koranic passages and the violent Hadith that condone hostility against others.

A Free Copt

Towards the Restoration of Full Citizenship Rights to Copts...

(Continued from page 19)

stead of being appreciated for such noble attitudes they, in a world where only violence seems to be effective, tend to be ignored as a negligible minority, of little weight.

Many Copts have, after centuries of relentless oppression, resigned themselves to the dhimmi status. Some have even become dhimmis by choice, and admirably excel at the role of denying or even justifying flagrant discriminatory policies! The government usually rewards those by appointment to the posts it wants to 'grant' to Copts.

Attempts by some Copts to engage in dialogue with Egypt's officials have so far been largely unsuccessful. Initiatives have been simply ignored, or used to pacify those behind it with little real progress.

But despite such hurdles, and others, one should still retain certain optimism and strive for actions to be initiated today, even if the fruits may take a generation (or more!) before they come about. The following points should be taken into account:

It is obviously the duty of ALL Egyptians, in full partnership of various sectors and groups of society, as well as other interested advocates of human rights the world over, to work towards achieving the above-stated objectives.

It is also obvious that Copts must assume their responsibility in effecting the needed change through full participation in building a better Egypt and rid themselves of their (true or perceived) passiveness. Rights, no matter how fair and obvious, are usually never granted; but extracted.

A just and prompt solution to the Copts' concerns and grievances in Egypt, within the country, by the relevant authorities is naturally preferable. But one must also emphasize that in today's world the issues of human rights, minorities' and peoples' rights are no longer a mere lo-

cal or internal affair. They are global concerns and occupy a prime position in international affairs. Moreover; according to national and international laws, it is fully the right of Copts to seek foreign support, known as 'influential mediation'⁵ (which is not foreign intervention' in the traditional sense) by the international community.

Dialogue is welcome, indeed necessary, with government officials and political leaders in Egypt as well as members of NGO's, intellectuals, public figures and all those who care to appreciate the very basic right, the right of equality, for which the Copts are calling.

Finally, we call upon Egypt to create in earnest a special 'Citizenship Rights Commission', reporting to the president directly and composed of an equal number of reputed Muslims and non-Muslims. Its mandate shall be to examine all laws, regulations, policies and practices currently in place with a view to recommend and oversee changes needed to establish complete and equal rights to all citizens.

Indeed; if the political will was there, the 'Coptic problem' would be solvable rather quickly and equitably.

Footnotes

1. A review was done by the author on the heads of Egyptian diplomatic missions abroad (ranks of 'ambassador' and 'consul general'), based on information available on the website of the Foreign Ministry: Out of 151 names listed, three are Copts and up to two others could (based on their names) be Copts as well. Hence, their ratio would be at best a meager 3.3%.

2. Refer to 'A Coptic Blueprint for a Modern and Democratic Egypt' by Nabil Malek.

3. Refer to 'En attendant la prochaine lune' by Boutros Boutros-Ghali (Bayard, Paris), page 201.

4. Two recent changes ought to be mentioned here: 1) the 'delegation of the authority of the president' to governors in issuing construction permits necessary to conduct repair in places of worship. In practice, this has reduced the embarrassment of having the president himself sign decrees authorising the repair of a broken window (or a toilet) in a church; but still left the entire matter up to the whims of local security authorities. 2) Establishing the Coptic Christmas day as a notional holiday. This was a good gesture, even if some people con-

Who Are the Copts Anyway?

(Continued from page 7)

commentary on—and tribute to—the strength of the people that the Pharaohs and their kingdoms would have been more than proud to call their descendants:

"Unlike the American Indians, the Copts have not practically disappeared under the sword of outsiders who conquered and settled; nor did they absorb and assimilate the invaders as did the Chinese. Unlike Armenians and Jews, the Copts have had little migration and no diaspora. It is both their burden and their fortune to have had only one home—the Nile Valley."

Footnotes

*For more information, check out my upcoming documentary, "Children of Kemet: The Copts, Culture, and Democracy of Egypt."

* This article is, in part, excerpted from Sally Bishai's 2004 "Mid-East Meets West: On Being and Becoming a Modern Arab American."

FREECOPTS.NET CROSSWORD

We've compiled hot terms, events and concepts from this month's articles to create this crossword puzzle.

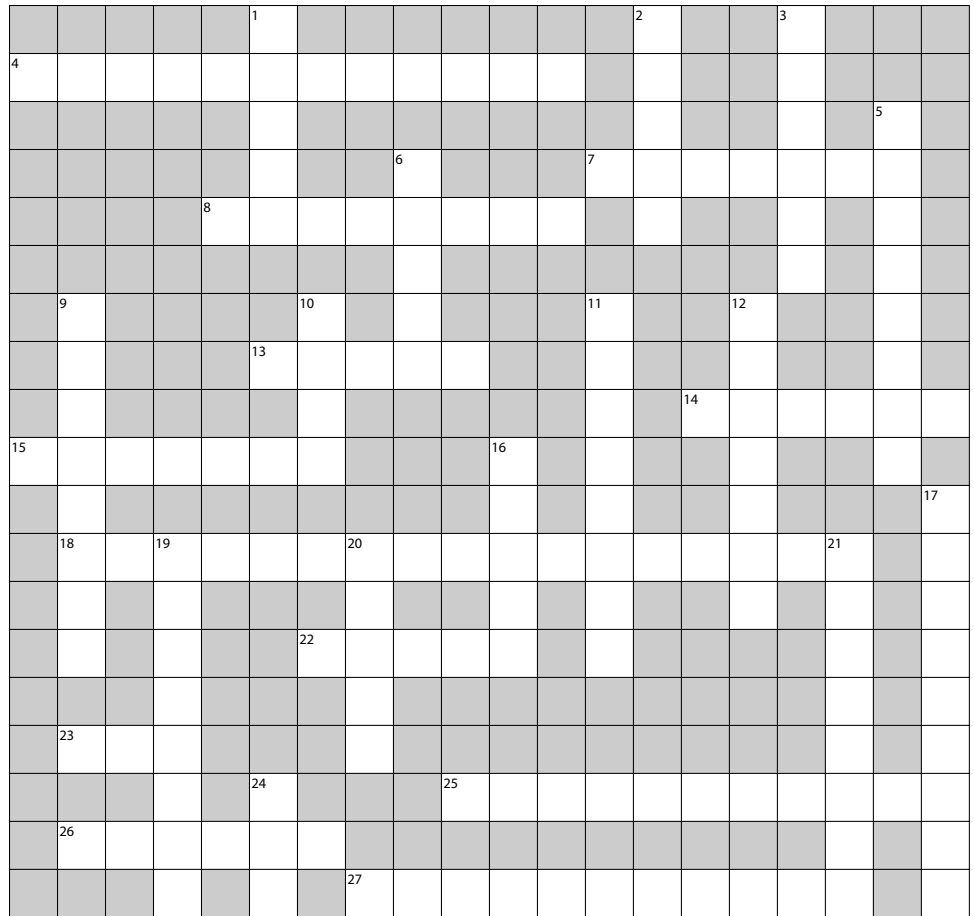
Solution on next page

Across

4. Egyptian national hero
7. Catholic group in 25 across
8. Construction guru
13. Offshoot of 18 across
14. Sharm Al Shaikh
15. Manal & Alaa's space
18. Egypt's future government?
22. Discovery at Deir Abu-Hennes
23. Government count of Copts
25. Banned in China
26. Land of Vertigo
27. Used for torture

Down

1. "The communist monk"
2. United Arab Republic
3. The initial crime in Qus
5. Coptic ex-patriots
6. Religious decree
9. Forbidden depicted
10. Freedom fighter
11. Latest target of Egyptian security
12. El-Maskeen
16. The Coptic Cedar Revolution
17. Number of martyrs in Qus
19. Where clergy go to school
20. Events on a Wednesday, May '05
21. Gloria Patri
24. Help from the U.S.

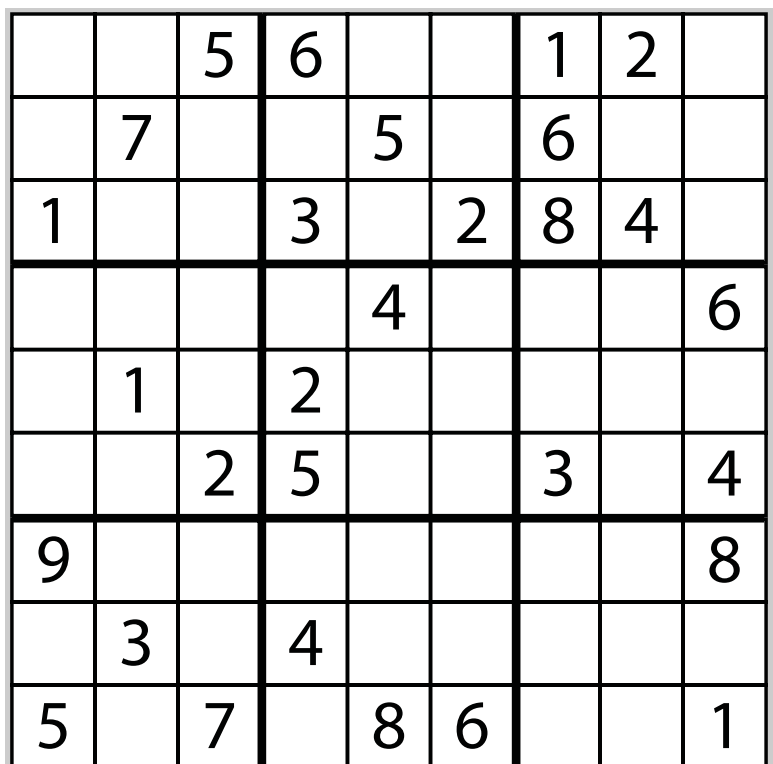


EDITORIAL CARTOON



Cartoon by Shafik Botros

SODOKU CHALLENGE



Solution on next page

Opinion

Hala, the Latest Victim of the Egyptian State Security Services

In a new episode of terrorizing human rights activists by the Egyptian government, Hala Al Masry - born Hala Helmy Boutros Makarios - was banned two weeks ago from leaving the country to attend the Fourth International Coptic Conference held in New Jersey. Al Masry, a Coptic woman in her forties and a blogger, is a prominent defender of minority and civil liberties in Egypt. Following the latest attacks against the country's native Coptic minority, Al Masry did a courageous job of being present amidst the events; reporting them and interviewing the families of the victims. By doing so, Al Masry knew she was provoking the Egyptian authorities and the country's official media outlets, which had previously concealed such events or denied them altogether.

About a month ago, Al Masry was arrested at her house in the Upper Egyptian city of Quena. It was alleged by the Egyptian State Security Services that her writings were broadcasting false information about sectarian tensions and the persecution of Copts in Egypt.

June 15: Hala was headed to the United States to cover the [Fourth International Coptic Conference](#). She was removed from the plane at Cairo airport and told that she was prohibited from leaving the country. She was asked to appear before the State Security Prosecution on June 25th.

June 22: At midnight State Security forces raided Hala's house in Quena, where her husband and children live, searching for Hala who happened to be in Cairo at the time. Her husband had to accompany the State Security forces to sign an affidavit stating that his wife would appear before the prosecution in Cairo on June 25th.

June 25th: Hala went to the State Security Prosecution accompanied by her attorneys, Mr. Mamdouh

Ramzy and Mr. Naguib Gobraeil. She was questioned for four hours concerning online articles and blogs attributed to her that expose the Egyptian government's negligence in protecting Christians in Luxor on January 19th, 2006 in the village of Udyssat near Luxor. During her interrogation, Al Masry was accused of broadcasting false information thus endangering the social peace between the country's Muslims and Christians. She was subsequently released on June 25th, 2006 on a 3000 LE (\$US 500) bail and asked to appear again for further interrogations the next day.

June 26: Following another round of intense interrogation over articles posted online attributed to Hala, an addition allegation was levied against her stating that she is "Destabilizing the country".

According to Mamdouh Ramzy, Hala's lawyer, "all the charges are groundless and insufficient for her conviction." Ramzy, [in a statement to The Free Copts](#) said, "The accusations were groundless and mere words without the slightest evidence, they were only based on inquiries and investigations and none were based on physical evidence."


The fabrication of charges against the human rights activist Hala Al Masry, and her prevention from leaving the country to cover the

The Events in Udyssat

After a rumor spread that Copts were about to repair their local church, a mob attacked local Christian homes and attacked and set fire to the church building. At least nine Copts were hospitalized and one died of his injuries.

[Hala wrote](#) of those events:

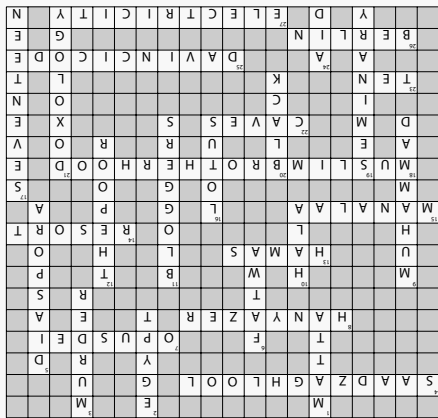
After exposing these scandals that we brought to your attention as examples of what faces the Copts in Egypt, we find ourselves unable to carry on writing, for what is happening is dazzling! The wounds of Christians of yet another village in Luxor, El Udaysat, are still healing after the January 19th 2006 massacre.



Hala Al Masry

Fourth International Coptic Conference, is indubitably a violation against freedom of expression. It is furthermore an act of intimidation aimed at civil rights advocates, and a menace that they will be detained and questioned for attempting to unearth and report infringements on human constitutional rights in Egypt.

Puzzle solutions



1	3	4	6	8	9	7	2	5
2	7	9	5	1	4	8	3	6
8	6	5	3	2	7	1	4	9
4	1	3	7	9	5	2	6	8
9	5	7	8	3	2	9	1	4
6	8	2	9	4	1	3	5	7
5	4	8	2	7	3	9	9	1
3	9	6	1	5	8	4	7	2
7	2	1	4	9	6	5	8	3

