

The Copts of Egypt

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**Ibn Khaldoun Center
for Development Studies**

BY SAAD EDDIN IBRAHIM et al



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Egypt
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The Copts of Egypt

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MINORITY RIGHTS GROUP

Minority Rights Group works to secure rights and justice for ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities. It is dedicated to the cause of cooperation and understanding between communities.

Founded in the 1960s, Minority Rights Group is a small international non-governmental organization that informs and warns governments, the international community, non-governmental organizations and the wider public about the situation of minorities around the world. This work is based on the publication of well-researched reports, books and papers; direct advocacy on behalf of minority rights in international fora; the development of a global network of like-minded organizations and minority communities to collaborate on these issues; and **the challenging of prejudice and promotion of public understanding** through information and education projects.

Minority Rights Group believes that the best hope for a peaceful world lies in **identifying and monitoring conflict** between communities, **advocating preventive measures** to avoid the escalation of conflict and **encouraging positive action** to build trust between majority and minority communities.

Minority Rights Group has consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council and has a worldwide network of partners. Its international headquarters are in London. Legally it is registered both as a charity and as a limited company under the United Kingdom Law with an International Governing Council.

THE PROCESS

As part of its methodology, MRG conducts regional research, identifies issues and commissions reports based on its findings. Each author is carefully chosen and all scripts are read by no less than eight independent experts who are knowledgeable about the subject matter. These experts are drawn from the minorities about whom the reports are written, and from journalists, academics, researchers and other human rights agencies. Authors are asked to incorporate comments made by these parties. In this way, MRG aims to publish accurate, authoritative, well-balanced reports.

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Declaration on the Rights of Persons belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities

(Adopted by the UN General Assembly; Resolution 47/135 of 18 December 1992)

Article 1

1. States shall protect the existence and the national or ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identity of minorities within their respective territories, and shall encourage conditions for the promotion of that identity.
2. States shall adopt appropriate legislative and other measures to achieve those ends.

Article 2

1. Persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities (hereinafter referred to as persons belonging to minorities) have the right to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, and to use their own language, in private and in public, freely and without interference or any form of discrimination.
2. Persons belonging to minorities have the right to participate effectively in cultural, religious, social, economic and public life.
3. Persons belonging to minorities have the right to participate effectively in decisions on the national and, where appropriate, regional level concerning the minority to which they belong or the regions in which they live, in a manner not incompatible with national legislation.
4. Persons belonging to minorities have the right to establish and maintain their own associations.
5. Persons belonging to minorities have the right to establish and maintain, without any discrimination, free and peaceful contacts with other members of their group, with persons belonging to other minorities, as well as contacts across frontiers with citizens of other States to whom they are related by national or ethnic, religious or linguistic ties.

Article 3

1. Persons belonging to minorities may exercise their rights including those as set forth in this Declaration individually as well as in community with other members of their group, without any discrimination.
2. No disadvantage shall result for any person belonging to a minority as the consequence of the exercise or non-exercise of the rights as set forth in this Declaration.

Article 4

1. States shall take measures where required to ensure that persons belonging to minorities may exercise fully and effectively all their human rights and fundamental freedoms without any discrimination and in full equality before the law.
2. States shall take measures to create favourable conditions to enable persons belonging to minorities to express their characteristics and to develop their culture, language, religion, traditions and customs, except where specific practices are in violation of national law and contrary to international standards.
3. States should take appropriate measures so that, wherever possible, persons belonging to minorities have adequate opportunities to learn their mother tongue or to have instruction in their mother tongue.
4. States should, where appropriate, take measures in the field of education, in order to encourage knowledge of the history, traditions, language and culture of the minorities existing within their territory. Persons belonging to minorities should have adequate opportunities to gain knowledge of the society as a whole.
5. States should consider appropriate measures so that persons belonging to minorities may participate fully in the economic progress and development in their country.

Article 5

1. National policies and programmes shall be planned and implemented with due regard for the legitimate interests of persons belonging to minorities.
2. Programmes of cooperation and assistance among States should be planned and implemented with due regard for the legitimate interests of persons belonging to minorities.

Article 6

States should cooperate on questions relating to persons belonging to minorities, inter alia, exchanging information and experiences, in order to promote mutual understanding and confidence.

Article 7

States should cooperate in order to promote respect for the rights as set forth in the present Declaration.

Article 8

1. Nothing in this Declaration shall prevent the fulfilment of international

obligations of States in relation to persons belonging to minorities. In particular, States shall fulfil in good faith the obligations and commitments they have assumed under international treaties and agreements to which they are parties.

2. The exercise of the rights as set forth in the present Declaration shall not prejudice the enjoyment by all persons of universally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms.
3. Measures taken by States in order to ensure the effective enjoyment of the rights as set forth in the present Declaration shall not prima facie be considered contrary to the principle of equality contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
4. Nothing in the present Declaration may be construed as permitting any activity contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations, including sovereign equality, territorial integrity and political independence of States.

Article 9

The specialized agencies and other organizations of the United Nations system shall contribute to the full realization of the rights and principles as set forth in the present Declaration, within their respective fields of competence.

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (of 16 December 1966. Entered into force on 23 March 1976).

Article 27

In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, or to use their own language.

Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief (Adopted by the UN General Assembly; Resolution 36/55 of 25 November 1981)

Article 1

1. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have a religion or whatever belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.
2. No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have a religion or belief of his choice.
3. Freedom to manifest one's religion or belief may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.

Article 2

1. No one shall be subject to discrimination by any State, institution, group of persons, or person on the grounds of religion or other belief.
2. For the purposes of the present Declaration, the expression 'intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief' means any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on religion or belief and having as its purpose or as its effect nullification or impairment of the recognition, enjoyment or exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis.

Article 4

1. All States shall take effective measures to prevent and eliminate discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief in the recognition, exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms in all fields of civil, economic, political, social and cultural life.
2. All States shall make all efforts to enact or rescind legislation where necessary to prohibit any such discrimination, and to take all appropriate measures to combat intolerance on the grounds of religion or other beliefs in this matter.

Article 7

The rights and freedoms set forth in the present Declaration shall be accorded in national legislation in such a manner that everyone shall be able to avail himself of such rights and freedoms in practice.

The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (Adopted by the eighteenth Conference of Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity in June 1981. Entered into force on 21 October 1986)

Article 8

Freedom of conscience, the profession and free practice of religion shall be guaranteed. No one may, subject to law and order, be submitted to measures restricting the exercise of these freedoms.

Preface

For centuries, the Copts in Egypt have been socially, economically and culturally integrated. A foreign observer would hardly be able to detect any difference between the Coptic minority and the Muslim majority in looks, manners or values. Nevertheless, the political integration of the Copts is less than a century old; and has at times deteriorated to tokenism.

Despite the Copts share of wealth, education, and professional prestige, they have found that when Egypt experiences social tensions, they pay a disproportionate price. The rise of Islamic militant groups in the 1970s and 1980s, itself a reaction to mounting social tensions, has made Egyptian Copts more of a scapegoat than ever. In recent years, 1992 stands out as having been particularly violent with 22 Copts murdered and 285 injured. In a country of 60 million, these figures may not seem high, particularly when compared to sectarian strife elsewhere in the world, but for Egypt, these figures are unprecedented in modern history.

The Egyptian Copts are the largest and one of the oldest Christian communities in the Middle East, dating their origin to 42 A.D. with the formation of the first church in Alexandria by Saint Mark the Evangelist. Their number is currently estimated to be 5 million, almost 10 per cent of the Egyptian population. Before the Arab conquest of Egypt in 640 A.D., all Egyptians were known as Copts and early Arabs called Egypt the Land of the Copts. After the conquest, Copts gradually converted to Islam and the Muslims became the majority population of Egypt.

This report which has been written by Saad Eddin Ibrahim, Director of the Ibn Khaldoun Center for Development Studies in Cairo, carefully examines the historical role played by the Copts and the tensions to which they are vulnerable. The report aims to promote constructive responses. The recommendations reflect this approach and stress the importance of freedom of worship; equal access to employment opportunities; an education which recognizes the Coptic contribution to Egyptian history; the importance of preventing stereotypical and defamatory remarks about Copts in the Egyptian media, and the need to end discrimination against women.

It has been the experience of the Ibn Khaldoun Center and Minority Rights Group that treating the Egyptian Copts as a minority is a controversial assertion in Egypt. The Conference on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Minorities and Peoples in the Arab World and the Middle East was held jointly by the two organizations in May 1994. It was a controversial event in the region and initiated a national debate over the inclusion of the Copts as a minority. Some Coptic opposition to the Minorities Conference was based on

the desire not to be seen as having a lesser status, because they felt this could be implied from the term 'minority', and therefore perceived as being nationally divisive. However, the decision to include the Copts was because because religion is one of the accepted categories for minorities under the United Nations Declaration on Minorities and the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights. However, the Ibn Khaldoun Center decided that suitable phraseology could include the terms 'sects', 'ethnicity' and 'groups' in future.

Some states refuse to acknowledge the existence of minorities. However the experience of other countries shows that a strong national identity can be forged whilst acknowledging and respecting differences. As this report concludes, the fate of the Copts is inseparable from that of Egypt. A stable, prosperous and democratic Egypt holds the greatest promise for the Copts, while discrimination and marginalization could lead to serious inter-communal conflict.

Alan Phillips

Director

December 1995

Introduction

Egyptian Copts are the largest Christian community in the Arab world. The Coptic community is currently some 5 million-strong in Egypt, representing 10 per cent of the population. They constitute four times the number of Christians in Lebanon, and more than twice the number of Christians in Sudan.

Most Copts gradually converted to Islam following the Arab Islamic conquest of Egypt (640 A.D.). By the end of the tenth century and the start of the eleventh, Muslims had become the majority population in Egypt. Despite the general Islamic spirit of cooperation and compassion, Copts were not treated equally. Discrimination against Copts has happened throughout history, however it has been particularly prevalent during times of economic recession and political despotism.

Before the Arab conquest, all Egyptians were known as Copts, and the early Arabs called Egypt the 'land of the Copts'. Since Christianity was the religion of the Egyptians, Arabs used the terms 'Coptic' and 'Nazarene' to indicate the original population of the country.

Opinions differ as to the origin of the word 'Copt'. Most people agree however that it is a derivation of the Greek term 'Aegyptos', with which the Greeks named Egypt and the Nile. In its current usage, the term 'Copt' indicates the original Christians of the country who kept their faith after most of the population converted to Islam.¹

Socio-demographic characteristics

In Egypt, the term 'Christian' in official statistics refers to the total number of both Copts and other Christians native to Egypt. The official figures for 1976 show that the number of Christians in Egypt was 2.3 million constituting 6 per cent of the total population, which was, at that time, 38.6 million.² Certain Coptic circles dispute this percentage. Some sources, based on Church statistics, estimate the number of Christians in Egypt in 1975 to be 6.8 million, or 18 per cent of the total population.³ However, verification of those estimates is virtually impossible, as is the case with all minorities in the Arab world, therefore estimates are the only available data. Some estimate that the percentage of Christians in Egypt, including Copts, has been stable for the period 1907-76, amounting to between 6.3 and 8.3 per cent of the population. After the exodus of foreign residents from Egypt in the 1950s and 1960s, Copts have retained their share of the population without

any discernible changes. Therefore the current population estimate of 5 million remains.⁴

Copts constitute 10.8 per cent of the total population of Upper Egypt. However, in Lower Egypt areas they represent less than 2.3 per cent (1976 estimate). Coptic migration from rural to urban areas has been part of a wider phenomenon that includes both Muslims and Christians, but it was particularly emphasized during the 1920s, when official statistics revealed that Copts preferred living in urban areas. This is perhaps due to the fact that minorities tend to live near governmental centres where they may feel protected from violence, and where improved employment opportunities and social promotion prospects exist.⁵

Coptic social demography is influenced by several variables, including: the higher Muslim birth-rate; conversions to Islam; and Coptic migration to countries such as the USA, Australia and Canada.⁶

Copts are represented in all classes in Egypt. There are a large number in the middle and upper classes because they have long been known for their interest in education. This helped them get on in the public sphere and in business. However, like their Muslim counterparts, the poorer classes constitute the majority of Copts in Egypt.

Copts follow three different denominations: the Orthodox, Anglican (Protestant), and Catholic. The majority, however, follow the Orthodox Church, which is also known as the Church of Alexandria, or simply the Egyptian Church. It is the oldest church in Egypt. Coptic Orthodox traditions claim that the Orthodox Church was established by Saint Mark, who is said to have arrived in Egypt between the years 48 and 64 A.D.⁷ Despite the fact that Franciscan monks, according to some researchers, began their activities in Egypt in 1219, the organization of the Catholic Church in Egypt officially only began in 1895,⁸ and the Egyptian Protestant community founded the first Anglican Church in 1860.

An historical overview

Copts before Islam

Alexander the Great of Macedonia landed in Egypt in the year 332 B.C. Three centuries later, the Romans took over in the year 31 B.C., thus Egypt entered into 10 centuries known as the Greco-Roman era. Under Roman rule, Egypt was part of the Byzantine Empire. This led researchers of Egyptology to speak of a Greco-Roman era in Egypt, and of a Coptic era and a Coptic civilization. This latter period is characterized by the conversion of Egyptians to Christianity, their fight for their cultural identity, and their desire to throw off Byzantine rule.

Foreign rulers exercised different forms of oppression and abuse against the people. They refused to acknowledge the right of Egyptians to citizenship, which resulted in their racial, religious, economic and political downgrading. The Greeks built special cities for themselves, separate from the majority of Egyptian peasants. In addition, they sought to impose their culture and to dissolve the Egyptian language into their own. Egyptians were required to pay taxes per head, yet were considered slaves for their ruling masters. Occasionally Egyptians rebelled against their foreign rulers, yet these uprisings were repeatedly crushed.

Christianity quickly spread in Egypt from the middle of the first century A.D. However, many Egyptians shaped Christianity to their own needs and beliefs.⁹ It may even be said that the more that Roman rule oppressed them, the more they were bent towards creating a new ideological concept linking religion with a national consciousness. Perhaps that is why Egyptians decided to begin the Coptic dating system with the rule of Diocletian on 29 August 284 A.D., because his reign was considered the most bloody and oppressive against Christians, and was known as the Age of Martyrs (303-11 A.D.).¹⁰

When Roman Emperors realized their failure to impede the spread of Christianity, the first Christian Emperor of Rome, Constantine the Great, issued the Milan Decree of 312 A.D., announcing Christianity as the official religion of the state.¹¹ This only reduced Coptic resistance for a very short period of time.

In the third century, Egypt was invaded by several countries. Zenobia, Queen of Palmyra, destroyed an army of 70,000, while other African tribes attacked Upper Egypt. This, and the heavy burden of taxation, threatened the very social and economic system which had been stable for thousands of years. Poor peasants fled, while those who stayed behind amounted to a mere one eighth of their original number. Middle class landowners gave their land

to upper class landowners in exchange for protection.¹²

Matters worsened in the fourth century; peasants fled their villages to the desert, while skilled labourers abandoned their crafts. The fifth century witnessed an age where landowners tried to gain independence from Constantinople. Reformation decrees failed to control corruption in local administrations, because landowners were themselves the responsible employees. During the fifth and sixth centuries, the Church of Alexandria owned large areas of land, and whole regions were under the authority of the Church and monasteries. Bishops had private armies and police, in addition to their own special courts. The clergy began forming their own class distinction.

When Justinian the Byzantine Emperor died in 627, the Coptic Church rejected the official Church religion, for its belief in the concept of the 'two natures of Christ'. The Coptic Church, together with the Egyptian people, fought for their own doctrine, which is the concept of the 'one nature of Christ'. The Church of Alexandria became a leader of Christian philosophical and theological thought, throughout the entire Christian world at that time. Several researchers claim that the schism that divided the Church around those controversies was due more to Egyptian nationalism than to genuine theological factors.¹³

The most important contribution of the Church of Alexandria was the Didascalia, the famous theological school which set the foundation of the philosophies that govern Christianity in general and Eastern Christianity in particular. In addition, the Church of Alexandria contributed Monasticism to the world.¹⁴

The movement towards independence from Byzantine rule failed to achieve its objectives. There were several economic, social and cultural factors that explain the failure of people's movements against Byzantine rule. The uprisings and rebellions were primarily carried out by peasants, most of whom did not have a clear understanding of how to overcome nor change existing economic and social systems, and the leadership was confined to the few educated individuals of the villages and the clergy. The Coptic Pope, with his spiritual, religious and national position, refused to succumb to the authority of the Emperors, but he was forced to make peace with them.

During the period 620-30, Emperor Hercules (610-41) decided to create a reformation movement to protect his kingdom. He decided to initiate a new religion for the state which encompassed all the conflicting Christian doctrines throughout the Empire. Hercules presented his denomination known as the 'Monophilic', and tried to enforce this over the Egyptian Church in Alexandria and Antioch, but to no avail. He began to use violent methods and Egypt entered into a new phase, now known as the phase of the

Great Tribulations.¹⁵ During that time Benjamin, the Coptic Pope (623-62), was forced to abandon his seat and flee to the desert for almost a decade, while priests and bishops dispersed. Many citizens, including the clergy, were compelled to deny their faith. Meanwhile Egyptian citizens were already suffering due to economic and social problems; village stability was shaken to the core, and trade deteriorated. All these factors contributed to the welcoming of the Arab Muslim conquest, in the hope of finding a better life under their rule.

There were, however, at least six rebellions against the new rulers between 725 A.D. and 773 A.D., after which Copts acquiesced to their new rulers and many of them converted to Islam.¹⁶

The Arabization of Egypt

Three major factors contributed to the Arabization of Egypt:

- Arab migration,
- The spread of Islam,
- The introduction of Arabic.

Arab migration

Arabs were well known to Christian Egypt. In 610 B.C., an entire population was living in Alexandria. After the Arab conquest, however, Egypt witnessed a new era of Arab tribal migration activities, whose origins came from the Arabian Peninsula. Migration waves began in the seventh century and continued until the thirteenth. Migration continued to increase due to several factors:¹⁷

- There was a high birth-rate among the Arab migrants.
- Egyptian rulers were appointed by the Caliphs, and arrived in Egypt with a large number of their tribespeople in order to strengthen themselves.

Arab tribes continued to be attached to the agricultural land, mingling with the local population leading to their full integration with the original landowners. Furthermore, intermarriages increased.

The spread of Islam

Egyptians converted to Islam for several reasons:

- Large groups of Egyptians embraced the new religion voluntarily and in genuine conviction.
- Many Copts converted to Islam after suffering under Arab rule, especially during times of heavy taxation.
- Others converted to Islam wanting to become equal partners with Muslims on political and social levels.

Arabs had given the original landowners several promises to protect their lives and properties, and secure their freedom of belief in return for taxes. Some researchers claim that Omar Ibn Al Khattab placed several restrictions on the freedom of Christians to build churches, and made

them dress differently to distinguish them from their Muslim counterparts, as written in the Omar Charter.¹⁸

The introduction of Arabic

When Arabs arrived in Egypt, the Coptic language was the language used by Egyptians. However, it began to slowly die out with the introduction of Arabic. The Copts' take-up of Arabic was a very gradual process, especially when compared to Arabic's spread in countries like Iraq and countries of the Levant.¹⁹ However, the Coptic language withdrew to the monasteries, while the Coptic Church continued (and still continues to this day) to use it in its liturgy accompanied with the Arabic language.

Yet, Copts who worked in governmental positions had a role in the spread of Arabization because:

- Following the decree that stipulated the Arabization of all government diwans, (government departments), Coptic clerks hastily sought to study Arabic. Since they were the elite in Coptic society, who relied upon the state for their positions, they were anxious to learn Arabic.
- Due to the Pharaonic tradition of 'inheriting' a job, those clerks taught their children and relatives Arabic, in order to secure a better future for them.
- Since bureaucratic institutions are the daily link between the authorities and all sectors of society, the employees of the diwans spread Arabic from the state to the people, and from the people to the state.
- Successive governments, characterized by tolerance towards Christians, helped and encouraged Copts to integrate socially. Copts welcomed this change, and Coptic senior employees during the Fatimid era began using Arabic names and titles.
- There was a real upsurge in the use of Arabic when Pope Gabriel II (1131-45) issued a Papal Decree, for the first time in the history of the Coptic Church, calling for the use of Arabic in Church services alongside the Coptic language. The Pope issued this decree because he realized that most church-goers were no longer able to understand the sermons and participate in the liturgy in the old Coptic language.²⁰

Copts during the Memeluke era

During the rule of the Memelukes (1250-1517), their sultans stopped the Tartars from invading Egypt, and demolished the last Crusaders camps. Under the Memelukes, Cairo became an influential place and flourished both economically and culturally. However, during their second dynasty (1382-1517), the administration became so weak it was incapable of carrying out its duties or caring for the agricultural land. Worse still, the Portuguese discovered the Cape of Good Hope, leading to a commercial recession, the further weakening of the state, and its fall into the hands of the Ottoman Empire.

The Memelukes paid attention to trade, yet agriculture

was abandoned. Desertification of agricultural land ensued, skilled labour decreased, and peasants were oppressed further. The Memelukes carried out important changes in land ownership which led to the Memeluke country becoming the biggest serfdom in the region. The legal status of peasants changed; freedom seemed an impossibility and many therefore chose to escape. A large number died of starvation. Concurrently there were great floods, plagues and a grave recession. Furthermore, language, race and culture suffered, and ethnic barriers were aggravated as the Memelukes acted as sole rulers, applying *sharia* law.

During that time, Copts existed in all sectors of society, whether as traders, priests and bishops, peasants, service workers or skilled labourers. While most Copts belonged to the peasant sectors and the middle and poorer sectors of the community, there were also Copts in the *diwans* who played an important role in the financial administration of the country.

The number of Coptic clerks and service workers increased because of their traditional experience in this field. This caused sharp contradictions in Memeluke society. The duty of Coptic employees was confined to increasing the wealth of the sultan, and there was no barrier between the wealth of the sultan and that of his ministers. There were Copts who amassed huge fortunes, owning servants and slaves, and some of their buildings were grander than those of Muslims or their mosques. Copts were even given the same titles as those usually only given to Caliphs.²¹ Out of jealousy and because of their wealth and powers, some Copts were subjected to various forms of harassment.

There was a conflict between Coptic bureaucracy and Muslim intellectuals, including *ulemas* (learned religious men), the Muslim clergy, students at Al Azhar University, and religious schools. These groups had grown steadily with the flourishing of Islamic cities, and the increase in the number of schools teaching the Sunni denomination. From the middle classes came increasing numbers of educated writers and poets, all of whom aspired towards power and service in the state. Coptic bureaucracy in its different forms began to intervene on the political and social levels. In addition, the Memeluke sultans sought to create a balance between the different denominations, and in their search for securing their power, they preferred to ignore Egyptian Muslim and Arab employees, especially in administering some of the *diwans*.

The Memeluke era had its fair share of mutual violence between Muslims and Copts and Al Makreezi's writings include what we now call investigative reporting about sectarian strife during the times of Sultan Mohammed Bin Kalawoon.

The role of external influences on the relationship between Copts and Muslims

During the reign of the Tulunids (868-905), the Ikshids (935-60) and the Fatimids (969-1171), Copts were treated with tolerance and respect.²² They were represented in all government posts and *diwans*

and suffered no discrimination, except for one instance of persecution when Al Hakim (1012-15) destroyed monasteries and churches and expelled Copts from their positions in addition to forcing many to convert to Islam. His successor, Al Zahir, reversed these policies and allowed those who had converted forcefully to return to their faith.²³

This tolerance was destroyed by the Crusader wars during the Ayyubid and Memeluke periods. The Crusader wars primarily targeted Egypt, since the French believed that in order to retake the Holy Lands, they needed to eliminate the Memeluke rule in Egypt. The Crusader ambitions included two aspects: that Europe should control Egypt from the North, and the desire to separate the Ethiopian from the Egyptian Church, in preparation for uniting it with the Catholic Church. This separation would have paved the way for the support of Ethiopia in controlling Egypt from the South.²⁴

These plans and ambitions eventually failed because the kings of Ethiopia favoured good relationships with the sultans of Egypt especially as they were closely linked culturally and religiously. In addition there were close commercial ties between the two countries which the Ethiopians did not wish to jeopardize. It was not easy for Ethiopians to abandon these relationships without destabilizing the internal affairs of their own country, both socially and religiously.²⁵

A close study of the external influences on the status of Copts reveals the following:

- The intensity of the Crusader attacks awakened the dormant spirit of *jihad* (holy struggle) in Muslims, and fanaticism and bigotry against both Eastern and Western Christians flourished. Consequently, Islamic intolerance towards Copts also increased.²⁶
- The Crusaders treated Eastern Christians exactly the same as they treated the *Khawareg*, (outsiders), depriving them of the local rights that they enjoyed during Islamic rule.²⁷
- The Coptic Church suffered severely from the Crusader endeavours to tempt Ethiopian rulers to unite with them in order to control the Egyptian Sultan. The Portuguese, after the discovery of the Cape of Good Hope, sought to convince Ethiopians to change the Nile route away from Egypt. The Egyptian Church found itself in an impasse which threatened national security. The strained political Egyptian-Ethiopian relationships imposed an immense amount of pressure on the Coptic Church.²⁸
- Regarding the relationship between the kings of Nubia and the Memeluke sultans, the Christian rulers of Nubia agreed to pay taxes to the Arabs in the year 651-52. These were known then as 'Coptic taxes'. The relationship between the two peoples, ranged from periods of silent anger to outright instability and unrest. Since Nubians followed the Egyptian Church, Nubian kings would occasionally raid Egyptian land whenever they heard that the Egyptian Patriarch was being mistreated, or was being forced to pay a large fine.²⁹

When the Nubians resisted paying the annual taxes to the sultans, Sultan Bibars (1260-77) and his successor Sultan Kalawoon, raided the Nubians and defeated them. Those defeats, combined with internal instabilities in Nubia, quickly led to the fall of the Christian kingdom. Islam began to spread from the beginning of the thirteenth century, and since then, the Egyptian Church has failed to have any influence on the Christians of Nubia.³⁰

Copts in Ottoman Egypt

Following the invasion of Sultan Selim I in 1517, Egypt was transformed from a country governed by the Memeluke sultans to a state appended to the Ottoman Empire. A ruling class was formed, controlling the Egyptian administration and military, followed by wealthy traders, and the influential *ulemas*. In the early Ottoman period, Copts had no influence in the higher administrations. There were only two *divans* and these were restricted against Copts.

Gradually, in the second half of the seventeenth century, their positions in the administration started to improve. With the turn of the eighteenth century, several Coptic leaders began to emerge as wealthy traders and administrative employees in the *divans*. The peasants and agricultural labourers, Coptic and Muslim, continued to live together in poverty and oppression.

The second century of Ottoman rule witnessed the disintegration and fragmentation of the Empire, mainly for internal reasons. However, there were also external factors due to a European infiltration of the Ottoman Empire, especially after 1683. Countries like France, Austria and Russia demanded and sought the reformation of certain ethnic and denominational characteristics, for the benefit of European world expansion, and an alliance was formed between the European traders and the missionaries. Ottoman markets were invaded in the name of religion. France cooperated with the Vatican to push the Catholic denominations (Arab or otherwise) into the arms of the Roman Church.³¹

In 1684 the Franciscans, with the approval of the Ottoman rulers, sent a Catholic missionary to Upper Egypt, and the Jesuits sent another missionary to Cairo. These attempts halted in the 1740s. After the fall of Ali Bei the Great, the Vatican sought to win the approval of the Coptic Pope and his acknowledgement of the sovereignty of the Roman Pope in exchange for the protection of the Copts (this would have exempted Copts from paying taxes). But this also failed.

As the Ottoman Empire continued to decline, several political and social changes that had a long term impact on Egyptian society began to take shape. An extremely wealthy Egyptian bourgeoisie class, appeared. Memeluke princes and traders sought to become independent from the Ottomans, and were encouraged by wealthy Christian traders who came from the Levant and lived permanently in Egypt. French interests had developed and increased in Egypt, and the weakness of the Empire led Napoleon Bonaparte to invade the country in 1798. In light of the political difficulties that permeated Egypt, the wealthy and the middle classes sought a different rule which would bring about stability.

Copts from 1800-1982

The nineteenth century

Egyptian society witnessed many economic, political and social changes in the nineteenth century, leading to the destruction of several inherited institutions, and their reorganization based on a class structure. Three factors contributed to that change:

- Mohammed Ali built an independent, contemporary state.
- The British colonization of Egypt in 1882, which spread its own economic, political and social policies, leading to an exploitative form of 'development' which linked the state to Britain.
- The rise of national consciousness, and the development of a national democratic movement opposing foreign control and tyrannical rule.

Mohammed Ali was from 1811 the absolute ruler of Egypt. His strategy was founded on the creation of a strong and contemporary modern military power, the reconstruction of the administration, the modernization of industry, and the creation of a modern education system. He used foreign experts in that process, but was also careful to cultivate local expertise from both Copts and Muslims. He made use of Copts particularly in financial and accounting matters, and many were appointed rulers in a number of local governorates.³²

Mohammed Ali ruled with absolute power. He was aided by a High Council which excluded Copts. (Copts were present in other institutions after the rule of Khedive Ismail [1863-79]). In the second half of the nineteenth century there was support for the concept of equality between Muslims and non-Muslims. In the year 1855 Copts were exempted from taxes, and in 1856 there was a decree enlisting Copts in the military (the Hamayouni Decree).

The Hamayouni Decree

The Hamayouni Decree sought to achieve equality between Muslims and Copts, to help support the modern state. The most important articles in the decree include:

- The re-establishment of all previous laws concerning Copts, especially the independent personal status laws.
- The formation of Lay Councils consisting of the clergy and secularists to administer the financial matters of the Church and to discuss personal status affairs.

- Requests for church-building to be presented by the pope to the sultan and a licence to be issued.
- No one is to be punished nor prevented from exercising his (sic) rites and no one should be forced to abandon his religion.
- Equality between Muslims and Christians in employment.
- Military training and participation is a duty for all males, regardless of religion.
- All terminology that discriminates between people on the basis of religion should be abolished from the *divans*, and offending people on a religious basis is forbidden.

This law, contrary to what many people believe, is an advanced law that sought to remove discrimination between citizens on the basis of ethnicity, race or religion. For example, the article regarding licences was formulated after complaints from Copts that they were not allowed to build their churches. The new law was to ensure that they acquired that right, and this law existed for 78 years. In February 1934, however, Al Ezabi Pasha, Minister of the Interior, issued a Ministerial Decree, adding 10 conditions for building churches. Those conditions were:

1. Is the land on which the church is to be built empty or agricultural land, and does it belong to the person presenting the request?
2. What is the distance between the proposed church and surrounding mosques?
3. If the land is vacant, is it near to Christian or Muslim settlements?
4. If it is close to Muslims, do they have any objection to it?
5. Is there another church belonging to this denomination in the same town or village?
6. What is the distance between the nearest church belonging to this denomination and the town in which the requested church is to be built?
7. What is the number of Christians in the area?
8. If the land on which the church is to be built is close to the Nile, or bridges or public utilities belonging to the Ministry of Irrigation, an approval should be sought from the Ministry itself. Also, if it is near to railway lines, the railway authorities should also give their approval.
9. An official report should be made on all of the above points, and it should indicate the surrounding buildings to the requested spot on which the church is to be built, including the

nearest shops, and the distances between these shops and the church.

10. The person making the request should have all these papers signed by the head of the denomination, and the engineer who is to be responsible for that area, in addition to the aforementioned approvals, and present all the requested papers.

The 1919 Revolution

In the early twentieth century, two Copts became prime minister, Boutros Ghali Pasha (1908-10) and Youssef Wahba Pasha (1919-20).

Coptic participation in political life increased, as Copts became active in various political parties. A wealthy Copt, Dr Akhnoukh Fanous, founded the Egyptian Party on sectarian principles, advocating cooperation with the British colonialists. It did not last long. Copts did not join it, staunchly believing that their fate was indivisible from the fate of all Egyptians.

Towards the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, Copts owned large numbers of magazines and newspapers, and some social clubs and organizations which were mostly for charitable purposes. The intellectual trends that influenced the formation of culture, especially among the Coptic elite, were fundamentally the French age of enlightenment and English liberal trends. New concepts of equality and nationalism began to take shape, and were adopted by Coptic and Muslim intellectuals. These became deeply rooted in Egyptian culture.

The Orabi Revolution arose under the slogan 'Egypt is for Egyptians', and during that period the British sensed the threat of a national revolution against them. They resorted to different mechanisms for quashing this movement, most notably by separating Copts and Muslims. This mechanism coincided with the interests of other foreign nations, who came to the Arab world under different religious pretences: France's guise was the protection of Catholicism, Russia's banner was the Orthodox League, and the USA promoted Evangelical Protestantism.

Meanwhile, Britain sought to carry out its plans of segregation in the following manner: first, to deal with Copts on an ethnic basis; second, to isolate Copts from the national movement that fought against them; and third, to break up local Coptic religious institutions.

Such policies had a strong impact on the relationship between Copts and Muslims. They helped to create a category of people that opposed Arab solidarity and, for the first time in its history, Egypt began recognizing and endorsing planned and systematic methods for inciting sectarian strife, using them as basic mechanisms to weaken the movement against imperialism and colonialism.

Sectarian strife had begun in 1906 in the wake of an aggravated economic crisis, and the upsurge of nationalism against foreign invaders. In 1908 segregation intensified, and the country was on the verge of a massacre. In 1911, a number of wealthy Copts called for the organization of a general assembly of Copts, to be known as the Coptic Conference. This assembly was organized under

the slogan 'Looking into Coptic demands'. Their agenda had five demands, one of which was establishing Sunday as a public holiday alongside Friday. They also demanded that Copts had the right to be represented in councils and in the legal system. In April of the same year a Muslim conference was organized and was given the significant name of the 'Egyptian Conference'. It discussed Coptic demands and rejected them altogether. Both conferences could have had grave consequences, exacerbating strife between Muslims and Copts. However, this provocation failed to accomplish its objectives.

On an ideological level, both the Coptic and the Muslim elite adopted the concept of one nation and one people, uniting all Egyptians. This allowed Egyptians to have diversity in their religious beliefs, but avoided segregation. The majority of Copts therefore vehemently opposed the embodiment of the rights of religious minorities in the 1923 constitution.

Copts between 1919-51

Coptic participation in the 1919 Revolution has established their role in building the civil national state. Copts from all sectors of society and from all social classes were involved.

Britain's attempts at inciting sectarian strife

Britain secured the support of the allies in the Peace Conference and Egypt was considered a British protectorate. Sensing the threat to its position, and as a continuation of its policy which aimed at portraying Egypt's population as being diverse and irreconcilable, the declaration of 28 February 1922 was issued, recognizing Egypt's independence but with four provisos, including the protection of foreign interests and the protection of 'minorities'.

A Constitution Committee was formed on 3 April 1922, to draw up a constitution on the basis of the 1922 declaration. As soon as the declaration was announced, both Copts and the liberal Wafd Party vehemently opposed it, saying the British had no right to assume protection of minorities and that this was considered an unacceptable intervention.³³

For the first time, Saad Zaghloul, appointed two Coptic ministers in his popular ministry of 1924. The Wafd government adopted the same policy until 1944. Saad Zaghloul was also the first to appoint Coptic headteachers in state schools. When parliament, headed by the Wafd, appointed the Copt Weesa Wassef as speaker, his opening speech discussed national unity.

Missionaries and the rise of religious movements

In 1928 several important incidents had a strong impact on Egyptian political life in general, and on the relationship between Muslims and Copts in particular.

In April 1928 a missionaries conference was organized in Jerusalem, Palestine. Rumours spread about the conference's secret sessions and their inclusion of attacks

against Islam. There was an upsurge of angry reactions, and Palestinian Muslims sent telegrams to Egypt, stirring public opinion against the conference. This incident coincided with a highly provocative event in Egypt itself. Father Zoimer, the most prominent American Protestant missionary to Egypt, Syria and Palestine, and editor of *Islamic World* magazine, entered the Al Azhar on the morning of 17 April 1928 and began proselytizing and distributing papers. This provoked the 3,000 Azharite students who were present at the Al Azhar (the biggest Islamic gathering in the world).³⁴

Following this incident, a delegation from Al Azhar met with Prime Minister Mostafa Al Nahhas, expressing their anger at missionary work, and the government immediately withdrew its permit from Zoimer prohibiting him from entering the Azhar premises. This issue was also discussed in parliament, and several members asked the government what action it would take. Zoimer apologized, commending the Azharites for their wisdom and rationality.³⁵

Several similar incidents occurred, until the Mentro Convention of 1937, when Egypt gained full sovereignty over its lands.

The role of Habib Guirguis and the beginning of the Sunday School Movement

Pope Cyril IV sought to reform the Church and to oppose external influences, especially those brought about by Protestant and Catholic missionaries. However, the Pope sought to reform methods rather than ideologies or concepts, and he began building schools, to counter the missionary schools. He also started to administer the Church's *wakfs* (endowments) and financial records. The following Pope, Cyril V, continued in the same vein, but also gave attention to the education of the clergy. This renewal and revitalization of methods, however, was not accompanied by a renewal in conservative religious thinking. This led to a gap between the newly educated clergy and population and the Church's conservative leadership.³⁶

This conservatism began to gradually change with the involvement of Archdeacon Habib Guirguis (1876-1951), who had worked as a personal aid to Pope Cyril V. The Church was already beginning its outward reform, therefore the road was somewhat paved for Guirguis to encourage further changes. Guirguis is acknowledged for the initiation of a new generation of clergy who are more educated, cultured and enlightened, while adhering to the Church's conservative ideologies and basic thoughts.

Guirguis began by changing the preaching methods, and reforming clerical schools. More importantly he attempted to appoint only priests from the graduates of the clerical college, in order to ensure at least a minimal standard of education for the clergy to suit the new reformation and modernization. He encouraged the translation of books into Arabic, which helped to gradually bring in unorthodox thoughts and concepts. He further encouraged the writing of books, as well as giving special attention to the press. He reformed the religious education given in state schools, and founded several Coptic organizations. He encouraged young people to participate in sports activities and entertainment in addition to charity work. Most importantly, he founded the Sunday School

Movement which was based on the above ideas.

Although he was a conservative in thought, Guirguis was also a mediator between the Lay Council and the Church's leadership. He was almost the only person who could understand the lay members' demands, being a lay person himself and a reformist, while at the same time supporting the conservatism of the Church's leadership. Hence, while Pope Cyril IV presented a reformation of the religious aspect of the Church, Guirguis presented the reformation of its more social aspects, and the ability of the Church to influence the public. He therefore played a complementary role.

Following Guirguis, the Sunday School Movement could be divided into three major stages:³⁷

- From 1918 it had a religious, revivalist role in confrontation with foreign missionaries;
- From 1940 it had a social, philanthropic role;
- From 1950 it had a political role.

The Muslim Brotherhood

The Muslim Brotherhood, led by Sheikh Hassan Al Banna, came into existence in the same year as the Zoimer incident. The rise of this group at this time was no coincidence. Hassan Al Banna was influenced by a Sufi group named Al Hasafeya, which resisted missionary, evangelical groups. In the Brotherhood's first five years of activity, it succeeded in founding 15 branches throughout Egypt, most of which existed in places where missionaries were active. From May 1933, they published a newspaper, prompting and inciting people to fight and resist the missionaries. The Brotherhood's attack on missionaries continued until the British capitulation in 1937.³⁸

Catholicism

The presence of Catholics in Egypt may be traced back to the fifth century; however, until the thirteenth century they were regarded as a marginal minority. Some researchers take the beginning of the Catholic movement in Egypt to be the year 129 A.D., which is the date of the arrival of Francis Assisi, the Catholic monk, to Egypt.³⁹

At this time, there was a minority of Copts who had converted to Catholicism, and a group of mostly foreign residents who followed Catholicism. Catholic monks began social and religious activities directed primarily towards those foreign residents, and extended it to include the Catholic Coptic minority.

Francis Assisi was interested in promoting peoples' spiritual lives, and he therefore established a monkhood that was solely directed towards spirituality rather than social work, the latter becoming an indelible mark of Catholicism in Egypt from the eighteenth century onwards.

There was no apparent conflict between the Orthodox and the Catholic Church during that initial stage, nor between them and Islam. Catholics were closer in their rituals, liturgy and prayers to the Orthodox Church than the Protestant religion. The latter brought new forms of prayers yet almost no rituals. This perhaps explains why there was no notable confrontation between Catholicism and Orthodoxy, as well as the slower speed with which

people converted to Catholicism as opposed to Protestantism. In Catholicism, Copts found similar rituals, and there was no need to convert, whereas Protestantism gave a totally new presentation of religion, which was much simpler and easier for people to understand, hence their faster conversion to Protestantism.

Catholics focused on education as a means of propagating their beliefs. The Franciscans built many schools, and by the nineteenth century these were widely spread throughout Egypt. The schools were not confined to Catholics, but extended throughout society, especially as they were generally the best schools providing superior education.⁴⁰

The Evangelical movement

When Pope Cyril V began his reforms, both Catholic and Protestant missionaries were active, the former from the start and the latter from the middle of the nineteenth century. The Coptic Church considered them rivals, and hence the Pope sought to increase the number of schools for the education of Copts.

The Evangelicals who arrived in Egypt were non-political in essence, and puritanical in trend. Soon, however, politics began to infiltrate. Evangelicals were convinced that Muslims should understand the Bible, but they believed their primary mission was to evangelize Coptic Orthodoxy which they felt was not related to Christianity in any way. This drove them to try to convert the Orthodox community, which revealed a clear discrepancy between Western and Eastern Christianity, the latter having been influenced by Islam and Eastern traditions.⁴¹

Language was also an obstacle in preaching, and the Evangelicals decided to publish the Bible in Arabic. They also sought to publish and distribute books in Arabic that explained the Protestant concepts, and began carrying out Church rituals in Arabic.

Presbyterianism became popular in the poorer areas and in Assiut. Because it was puritanical and revivalist, it also found many followers among the most conservative. It should be noted that many Copts were educated in the missionary schools.

With the advent of the twentieth century the seeds for the nationalization of the Evangelical Church were sown. In 1871 Father Tadros Youssef was appointed priest to the Egyptian Council of the Presbyterian Church. He began writing the minutes of the Council in Arabic, which paved the way for the rise of the Egyptian Coptic Evangelism.

The Church gained independence from the American Church in 1908, and its finance and administration was finally severed in 1926. However, it continued to be a member of the General American Presbyterian Council. In 1958 this relation was also severed, and the Anglican Synod replaced it. The foreign movement was then fully replaced by a national movement. The schools that had been appended to the Americans and the missionaries, came under the control of the Egyptian Synod.

The rise of sectarian strife

In the mid-1930s, there was an intense political crisis, and an economic recession in Egypt. In addition there was the traditional conflict that began in 1919, between the

Wafd Party, as the party of the majority, and the remaining parties who sought protection from the invaders and the King, in order to come to power without elections. The rise of the Brotherhood and Misr Al Fatah also indicated the beginning of the loss of Wafd popularity.

The minority parties resorted to accusing the Wafd Party (the majority party at that time) of Coptic fanaticism and bias, while in the meantime, calling the King and his army, the 'Protectors of Islam'. They claimed that since the Wafd Party was controlled by Copts, they were planning to isolate Muslims. The campaign against the Wafd continued, with sermons, lectures and articles stressing that Muslims should not be ruled by Copts.⁴²

The founding of the Lay Council

The Lay Council was originally founded in 1872, with the Khedive assuming responsibility for it two years later, following the election of its members. Boutros Ghali was chosen deputy to the Council, while the presidency was retained for the Pope. Pope Cyril V felt the Council to be an incumbence on his powers and he dissolved it in 1875, although it was this very Council that had just elected him Pope. Boutros Ghali sought state intervention, and a Royal Decree was issued on 13 March 1883 and the Council was re-established. Boutros Ghali was re-elected on 14 May 1883.

The Council's by-laws and regulations stipulated that its duties included the supervision of Coptic internal affairs; Church properties, monasteries, schools, and accounts; and inspecting resources and expenditures. It also stated that it should administer schools and help the poor, as well as keeping records of churches, priests, monasteries, monks, and properties. Further, it stated that the Coptic Personal Status Court was responsible for looking into matters of marriage and divorce, etc.

All Bishops vehemently opposed this. They issued statements saying that the Council was against divine ordinance and all Biblical interpretations. Pope Cyril V announced his opposition and rejection of the by-laws. When the Council attempted to re-elect its members in 1891 the Pope asked the Governor of Cairo to stop the meeting. The Council however carried out its meeting as scheduled, whereby Cyril V wrote to the government in 20 July 1891 accusing the Council of anti-governmental activities. Boutros Ghali called for a meeting and requested government intervention to revoke the Pope's interference in the Council.

After repeated mutual accusations, the Pope and the Council reached an agreement whereby the properties of the monasteries would remain under the Pope's supervision, and the monasteries would keep the resources and revenues from its own lands. They announced that the chairing of the Council, in the event of the Pope's absence, should be carried out by a member of clergy and that the Pope had the right to appoint one third of the Council without elections.

Although the agreement was in the Pope's favour, he reneged on the initial agreement, and the Council asked the government to banish or dismiss the Pope. The Pope was banished to Abu Moas monastery in Natroun Valley where he remained in exile for just over a year. With his

return on 4 February 1893, his popularity increased despite being even more conservative than before. He decided to work under the 1883 by-laws, on condition that he had a Lay Committee working with him, instead of the elected Council. By achieving this, the Pope managed to totally destroy the sense of the by-laws. This situation continued for approximately 12 years.

After the 1919 Revolution, the national movement was able to embrace the reformation and enlightenment aspects. In the first parliamentary rounds of the Wafd, Dr Sorail Gerguis, a Coptic Member of Parliament (MP) presented a draft law to amend the Lay Council's by-laws. The draft cancelled the two amendments which Cyril V made in 1908 and 1912, and returned to the by-laws of 1883. Consequently, law no. 19 in 1927 was issued after making amendments concerning Church-owned properties, as requested by the Pope. The clergy opposed it and refused to apply the law. This led to a Council meeting in November 1928, based on a decree issued by Prime Minister Mohammed Mahmoud Pasha, stipulating that the Pope reserved the right to appoint heads of monasteries and to form a committee regarding monastic properties. This committee would consist of the Pope, his deputy, six members of clergy, and four members of the Council. The Pope held out against this until there was a fire at the Al Moharrak monastery which underlined the Church's poor management of its affairs. The Council intervened without consulting the new Pope John XIX.

The conflict with the clergy continued to intensify, particularly regarding the Council's by-laws. In addition, a new problem arose, which concerned the modernization of the Church and the rules for papal elections. This was especially prominent in the period following the death of Pope Cyril V in 1927 to the death of Pope Joseph II in 1956. The main points in the conflict between 'the modernizers' and the clergy are:

- The clergy believed in the necessity of chastity, while the modernizers called for this condition to be revoked. Chastity was invalidated during the Pope John XIX's elections conflict but was restored during the Macarius period and persists to this day.
- The formation of the electorate council.
- Bishops nominating themselves for the position of Pope.

All three Popes, Macarius III, John XIX and Joseph II, approved, on the eve of their elections, the by-laws of 1883 or law no. 19 of 1927, and then immediately rejected them following their elections.⁴³

The election of Joseph II

The most infamous of the popes was Pope Joseph II whose election process began during the government of Nokrashi Pasha. The newly nominated Pope promised Dr Minyawi, the deputy of the Lay Council that he would grant the Council all its powers in accordance with law no. 19, and promised Bishop Ibrahim Luka, deputy of the Patriarchy, to fire Malak Girgis, one of his own followers known for corruption.⁴⁴ The Royal Decree was issued appointing Joseph as Pope on 14 May 1946 during the

government of Ismail Sidki Pasha. However, Joseph II refused to fulfil his promises and all efforts at building bridges between the Pope and the Bishop failed.

Malak Girgis was an 'uncrowned Pope', who coerced churches and monasteries to pay him money in return for protection, and interfered in the appointment of Bishops. His wealth in 1950 reached a quarter of a million pounds. People were enraged because the Pope ignored Girgis's corruption. It is perhaps noteworthy that, according to police records, on 10 February 1950, the Pope, Girgis and others, forcefully entered the room where the electorate committee of the Lay Council was meeting and attacked several committee members. This led Dr Minyawi to resign in 1951. He was replaced by Yussef Saleh who tried to improve relations with the Pope, but to no avail.

In 1955, a group of youths kidnapped the Pope and took him to a monastery where they forced him to sign a letter of resignation. However, the entire plot was discovered, and the Pope was returned. One year later another youth managed to enter the Papal headquarters and attempted to assassinate the Pope. He was arrested and after investigations he accused a priest of aiding him.⁴⁵

In September 1955 the Holy See held a meeting in which they decided to remove the Pope and banish him from the papal headquarters. In his place, they established a three-person committee to administer the Church's affairs. The See notified the Lay Council of its decision, who were in agreement, and the Pope was banished to the Al Moharrak monastery in September 1956.

After the cancellation of the emergency laws, some clergy tried to bring the Pope back to Cairo, but the Lay Council convinced the government that his return would induce instability. The papal headquarters were closed and the police took measures to prevent the Pope from reaching it. On his return, the Pope went straight to the Coptic hospital where he remained for some time. As he became increasingly ill, he was carried to the papal headquarters where he died on 13 November 1956, ending the most scandalous papal affair in Egypt.⁴⁶

Copts between 1952-70

After the 1952 Revolution, a coup involving Lt-Col Gamal Abdel Nasser vastly changed the social and economic characteristics of Egyptian society, and Copts, like other members of the community, were influenced by the new ideologies. The Revolution ousted the King on 26 July 1952, and a Republic was announced in 1953. Parties were dissolved in 1954, a law of agricultural reform was issued on 9 September 1952 and nationalization laws in 1961.

Just like other Egyptian citizens, Copts welcomed the 1952 Revolution, but as time went by, they became suspicious because the military movement did not include any Copts, and the Free Generals Organization which led the Revolution had only one Coptic member. Furthermore, the Coptic elite was gradually removed due to agricultural reform and nationalization.

The economic and social changes that followed the revolution incited two contradictory feelings among Copts. The first was a feeling of equality with the majority in education and employment, where there was free education

for all and the immediate appointment of graduates in the workforce. Although this could have strengthened national and civil ties, the opposite happened. In the conflict between Nasser and the Muslim Brotherhood, which Copts usually accepted with quiet approval,⁴⁷ Nasser issued two decrees:

- In 1957, he enforced religion as a basic subject in the school curricula. Whereas previously, as established by the Wafd in 1937, religion was a complementary subject in schools, to increase religious consciousness.
- He reformed the Al Azhar University to meet contemporary demands, but confined it to Muslim students. If religion separated students of the same class in school, the Al Azhar University deepened that separation, because it provided Muslim students with excellent opportunities, yet excluded Copts completely.

The second feeling was of equality on the economic level. The nationalization in July 1961 did not differentiate between Muslims and Copts. The nationalization process however affected Copts more than Muslims, because it abolished many of the skilled jobs which Copts excelled in. In general, Copts lost 75 per cent of their work and property.

In the executive and in parliament, Copts represented less than one per cent. The ministries which Copts headed from 1952-70 were marginal, and no Copts were given important ministries throughout that period. Generally, both Coptic and Muslim ministers were chosen on the basis of the approval of state security reports, and non-political involvement.

After the disintegration of political parties in January 1953, Copts were no longer able to nominate themselves in general elections, especially after the dissolution of the Wafd Party. Just one Copt won in the elections of the Nation's Council in 1957. Nasser therefore picked 10 carefully chosen districts in which only Copts were allowed to nominate themselves, and hence were left to Coptic competition. This process failed, and Nasser implemented a new constitutional principle, that of appointing individuals, and added it to the temporary constitution in 1956, allowing the President to appoint 10 members to Parliament. This led to a negligible number of Copts winning electorally, yet most of the appointees were Copts.

Table showing Coptic political participation between 1964-71

Parliament	Elections	Appointment	Total
1964-68	1	8	9
1969-71	2	7	9
3	3	15	18

(Source: The authors)

Coptic migration

Following the 1952 Revolution, the role of Copts lessened in the community. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, particularly after the dissolution of political parties (and especially the Wafd Party), Copts lacked channels for self-expression, and there was the first wave of Coptic migration. It is estimated that the number of Egyptians who migrated to Canada between 1962-75 was 5,427, among them 4,399 Copts and 506 Muslims. During that same period, the number of Copts who migrated to Australia and the USA were 4,789 and 3,314 respectively. By the year 1977 the numbers reached 85,000 in Canada and the USA.⁴⁸

At the start of the 1950s the Coptic Nation group was formed, but was immediately dissolved. This group was a dissenting branch of the Sunday School Movement but was considered illegal in existence and in its demands. It attacked the clergy and demanded that the Coptic language be taught to all Copts instead of Arabic. It was a sectarian based movement, and was behind the kidnapping of Pope Joseph II.

Migration abroad began during that time. It undoubtedly denoted Coptic unrest and anxiety. Those who migrated did not sever their relationship or emotional contact with the homeland, but were still seen as rebellious and as rejecting the status quo. However, in their newly-found communities, Copts met with a different set of problems which were no less threatening to their identity, and they had to learn to deal with them. It is noticeable that Copts in the diaspora, tended to gather together in communities and the Coptic Orthodox Church built Orthodox churches in those communities.⁴⁹

During the 1970s and 1980s, some Coptic migrants took active political roles, albeit from afar, demanding Coptic rights and decrying Coptic persecution in Egypt. President Anwar El Sadat's policy of mixing religion with the political discourse, gave rise to an opposite and equal Coptic religious discourse, which found vent in the diaspora where there is an ability and a means for free self-expression. Although it could not be denied that Copts were suffering during that period, (along with their Muslim counterparts), the diaspora in general did more harm than good by its intervention.

Some Copts began forming a sort of government in exile while others sought to criticize the government's treatment of Copts through the international media. Most of those so-called rebellious communities are separated from the authority of the Church in Egypt, which continuously seeks to pacify them and bring them under its control.

Several organizations have been formed in the diaspora, including the American Coptic Organization which issues a publication called *The Copts*. This organization not only calls for Coptic rights, but also stresses Coptic identity in the sense of being the 'owners' of the country, and rejects the Egyptian political system.

Although most Copts in the diaspora are closely linked to the Church in Egypt, there are many opposition groups whose characteristics can be summarized as follows:

- Some of the opposition groups are political rather than religious movements, trying to influence state policy and exert pressure on the government.

- Some of the opposition have a sectarian basis, emphasizing ethnic roots and the historical background of the Copts.
- Parts of the opposition are inclined towards modernization in religious matters, being influenced by the Western environment.
- Others seek genuine, internal reformation of the Church.

The July Revolution and the Lay Council

A law was issued in 1957 which replaced all the Church's *wakf* with government stocks. Copts complained and this led the government to issue another law, limiting Church and monastic properties to 200 acres. Then a general body was founded to supervise the Coptic *wakf*, leaving the Lay Council without a role. The conflict about the by-laws continued for 84 years.

The election of Cyril VI

There was a sudden Presidential Decree stipulating new by-laws for papal elections, which included all the clergy's demands. The Lay Council objected and presented a petition stating that the people should have the right to choose the pope. The petition objected to a condition, which prevents the more educated younger generations from becoming popes. Another complaint concerned the fact that there would be a casting of lots among the three finalists inside the temple. They declared the process anti-democratic.

It should be noted that there were three suggested candidates in 1956, including the current Pope Shenouda. But as people were worried about the candidates' youthfulness and unorthodoxy, a new by-law was introduced regarding candidacy for the papal seat, which included a minimum age and a minimum number of years spent in the monkhood. The petition met with no response, and elections proceeded as scheduled with the new by-laws. Bishop Cyril VI won the least number of votes, but by casting lots at the temple, he was chosen as Pope. However, he remained supportive of this group of youths, and appointed many of them to important positions in the Church. Of those, the most notable are Bishop Samuel, Bishop of Public Relations and Social Services; Bishop Shenouda, bishop of the Clerical School and Church Education; and Bishop Gregorious, Bishop of Scientific Research and Higher Education. This new generation was an extension of Guirguis's school, and they sought to make some enlightened reforms.

Immediately following the Pope's election, there was a confrontation with the Lay Council. For the first time in the history of the Church, the Pope was criticized because he prayed too much at the expense of Church work. It was unfamiliar to find a pope going to prayers every day and evening. Other popes used to leave prayers to the clergy and carry out their own papal duties and tend to other Church concerns. Pope Cyril VI, did not concern himself with these complaints and continued with his prayers.

Angrily, the Lay Council declared that it did not have the money to pay for the expenses of the papal headquar-

ters nor the Church in general, and claimed that they had to borrow from the Coptic Tewfik Organization to pay the salaries of priests and employees. They suddenly stopped paying the salaries. The Pope immediately resorted to President Nasser, who ordered the dissolution of the Lay Council, and made a state donation to the Church. He also formed a committee to administer the Church's *wakf*, and the Church managed to overcome its debts and its finances continued to increase. The Council remained dissolved until Pope Shenouda III ordered its reformation immediately after his election on 31 October 1971, following the death of Pope Cyril VI.

Copts between 1971-81

Egypt underwent serious economic, political and social changes from 1971-81. In the 1973 war, Egypt was victorious over Israel for the first time in the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict. On the economic front, law no. 43 in 1974 declared an open-door policy, which started the dissolution of economic centralization. Politically, three platforms were formed in 1976, left, centre and right, in preparation for the announcement of the formation of political parties in December of that year. On 18-19 January 1977 there followed the Revolution of the Hungry, as Egyptians now call it, which rose in rebellion against the economic policies of the ruling regime. It was considered the first of a series of class protests that continued until 1976. However, sectarian strife increased as well, due to economic and social frustrations. Such incidents continued to occur leading to outright conflict between President Sadat and Pope Shenouda in 1980-81.

The rise of religious groups

From the outset, Sadat called himself the 'believer president'. He began giving his speeches on the day of the birth of the Prophet Mohammed instead of the traditional Revolution Day speech, hence emphasizing religious identity, calling his era the age of 'science and religion'. In 1972 there was a new upsurge of Islamic group activity. Some of Sadat's consultants had suggested the founding of an organizing movement for the Islamic groups in universities to counter the leftist movements therein. This was the plan which Sadat carried out. As we have seen above, the road leading to sectarian strife was clearly paved.

At the end of 1972, a report was circulated which some claimed was written by official security sources, declaring that Pope Shenouda had organized a meeting in Alexandria. The report was written in such a way so as to appear to be an official document. It claimed that the Pope made announcements that affected state security, and also outlined a conspiracy. He was supposed to have advocated an increase in the Coptic population, in order to equal the number of Muslims, so that Egypt would return to the Copts once again. This report was used to provoke and incite people against the Copts.⁵⁰

When the permanent constitution was being formulated after the movement of May 1971, there was a clear

trend towards considering the Islamic *sharia* the sole source of legislation, in contradiction to Coptic demands of freedom of belief, and the requests to cancel the 10 conditions for building churches. In protest against the proposed constitution, Coptic clergy organized a conference in Alexandria on 17-18 July 1972, after which they sent telegrams to the People's Assembly, concerning the protection of their rights and of their Christian faith. They also stated that they would rather die as martyrs than live a life of oppression.

Sadat realized that society was starting to polarize, so he called for a conference to discuss national unity on 24 July 1972. He then asked for an emergency meeting with the National Assembly in August of the same year and passed the law of national unity which stipulated for the freedom of belief and the respect of freedoms.

Despite that law, there were consecutive attacks on Orthodox churches and organizations such as the Nahda Organization in Sanhoor, Beheira, on 8 September 1972, and the Bible Organization which the Copts of Khanka used as a church - this was burnt down on 6 November 1972. On 12 November, a large number of priests along with some 400 citizens went to this church to pray. In the evening, Muslim youths gathered in the mosque of Sultan Ashraf close by, and went on a provocative demonstration to the police station saying 'Allah Akbar' (God is great). Officials asked them to disperse and leave, which they did. But as they passed a shop owned by a Copt, the Copt was said to have shot at them and they burned down his shop, along with a number of houses and other shops owned by Copts in the area. Three individuals were slightly hurt, and many were arrested for theft, destruction and rioting.

Following this incident, a parliamentary committee was formed, which included renowned Coptic and Muslim figures. The committee worked day and night and wrote an important report identifying the exact source of the conflict. They said that the reasons included the building of unlicensed churches, the Hamayouni Decree, and the media with its role in provoking sectarian strife. The committee presented its findings and recommendations to Sadat and the People's Assembly.⁵¹

Sadat resorted to a temporary solution for the crisis. He visited Al Azhar and the papal headquarters, announcing during his visit to the Pope, that he would allow him to build 50 churches each year. This promise, however, was never fulfilled.

The 1973 October War and after

After the victory of 1973, there was relative calm in Egypt for a year. But Sadat began to form closer ties with the USA, and the USA's Foreign Minister, Henry Kissinger, started visiting Egypt with the aim of bettering relationships with Israel. The outcome was an agreement to end the conflict between Egypt and Israel without consulting other Arab nations, including Syria, Sadat's partner in the October War.

Meanwhile, Sadat's government had interpreted all class protests made by the poorer sectors as either a leftist/communist, or Nasserite, conspiracy. The government strengthened itself with Islam. The tone of the religious discourse began to intensify and violence started to

spread. Islamic groups began important political uprisings, especially after the attack on the Military Academy led by Saleh Sereya in 1974, which ended in their defeat. Some Christian groups became active as well, and Christians were drawn together around their own religious organizations and structures.

The Al Azhar presented a draft law to parliament, calling for the execution of apostates and enforcing the *huddud* (Islamic penal) system. This proposal had a strong impact on Coptic feelings of instability, nervousness and anxiety. The Coptic Church felt it was being directly targeted, and the Church called for a Christian religious conference, the second in the history of Egypt. The conference took place on 17 January 1977, and a statement was issued. Although officials prevented the statement's publication and circulation, the impact of the conference was distinctly visible, and Copts circulated the document among themselves.⁵²

The document discussed several aspects: freedom of belief and of rites, the protection of the family and Christian marriages, equality and equal opportunities, the representation of Christians in local councils, and warnings of extremist trends. The statement also demanded that officials dismiss the draft law and stop thinking of applying laws taken from the *sharia* to non-Muslims. It also demanded the cancellation of the Ottoman laws that restricted the building of churches, an end to discrimination in high state positions, and the freedom to publish the Christian history and heritage. The conference showed its resolution by declaring 31 January to 2 February 1977, a period of uninterrupted fasting. More importantly, it declared that the conference would remain assembled until officials accepted its recommendations.

On the day following the conference, the Revolution of the Hungry took place. The focus on the conference slowly withdrew, Coptic demands remained unanswered and the situation unchanged. Those Copts living in the USA, Canada and Australia, began organizing their own conferences and issued similar statements to those of the Alexandria conference. Their letters poured into the presidential offices and to the People's Assembly.

Because those letters were very similar in content to the local conference demands, officials assumed that there was a conspiracy. They believed that there was one single person or hand behind the whole issue. They also felt that there were some foreign powers behind the whole matter, especially as these Copts were living abroad. This was the first Coptic protest from the diaspora, although the local Coptic protest was much stronger.⁵³

In July of that same year, there was a general conference of the Islamic institutions and groups under the auspices of Sheikh Al Azhar Dr Abdel Halim Mahmoud. Their statements were published in *Al Ahram* newspaper the following day where they declared that the state Council referred the draft law of the *huddud* and apostasy to the Ministry of Justice, in preparation for referring it to the Minister's Council, and eventually the People's Assembly. The Council accepted the draft law regarding stealing, and defined an apostate as every Muslim, male or female, who was 18 years or older, who deliberately leaves the Islamic religion. They decided an apostate should be punished by hanging. To fulfil the punishment, the apos-

tate must be given the chance to repent for a period of 30 days, after which, should they insist on their apostasy, they would be hanged. Furthermore, an apostate had no right to handle or administer their own money, and the court would appoint a custodian over their property.

Pope Shenouda and the Holy See assembled several times following that announcement and they declared a period of fasting from 5-9 September 1977.

In March 1978, there were confrontations once again between Muslims and Copts in Upper Egypt, especially in Menya and Assiut. Several churches were burned, priests were attacked and one priest murdered in Samaloot, Menya. The church of Abu Zabal was also burnt in Cairo. The reaction was immediate and 90 priests led a protest demonstration. During the years 1978-79, as friction continued to increase, several officials and writers began calling for the immediate implementation of the apostasy law.

On 26 March 1980, Pope Shenouda issued a statement objecting to the fact that *sharia* was the basis on which laws were formed in Egypt for non-Muslims. He expressed anxiety about the replacement of nationalism by religion, and announced that the Resurrection Day prayers that year would not take place, as a form of silent protest over Coptic demands. Instead of attending the Good Friday prayers, the Pope decided to go with his bishops to one of the monasteries in the desert, announcing that he would pray to God to free them from the pressures they were under. He also gave orders to all his clergy to refuse the traditional congratulations or greetings on the occasion of the Resurrection feast from any official delegation or individual representing the government.

For the first time, a direct confrontation between political officials of the state, and the Coptic Church began. On 15 May 1980, in a speech to parliament, Sadat announced that he had received information about certain political, papal ambitions, where the Pope was accused of wanting to become a political rather than a religious leader of the Copts. Sadat also added that the reports he had received indicated that the Pope was planning to establish a Coptic state in Upper Egypt, whose capital was proposed to be Assiut. Sadat went on to criticize the building of unlicensed churches, and pointed to the role of the Pope in 1972, accusing him of ingratitude.

The Church, however, was not the only challenge to the regime; the Islamic groups, who were confident and well organized, were a much more serious threat. They used every opportunity for a show of force and power. For example, on Feast Day in 1980 they were refused permission to erect a camp in the Cairo University campus, whereby they seized the Salah Al Din Mosque on the other bank of the Nile. They placed microphones on its walls and made speeches attacking governmental corruption of the regime and the peace with Israel.

In June 1981 Egypt witnessed the worst incidents of sectarian strife. A personal dispute between two people in Al Zawya Al Hamra district, near Cairo, turned into an armed conflict and served to fuel sectarian hostilities. Sadat visited the USA in August of that same year and his visit caused an uproar. Pope Shenouda sent a delegation of Copts headed by Bishop Samuel, to welcome the President during his visit. But Coptic organizations in the USA published a half-page advertisement, in both the

Washington Post and *The New York Times*, expressing their anger at the treatment of Copts in Egypt. They organized anti-Sadat demonstrations in front of the White House, during Sadat's meeting with President Reagan, and another demonstration in front of the Metropolitan Museum where Sadat was inaugurating a new section of Egyptian artefacts. Furthermore, the Public Prosecutor announced the death of three individuals and the wounding of 59 in a bomb explosion near the Masarra Church of Shubra. This led to both Muslims and Copts deliberately trying to embarrass Sadat during his visit.

In an unprecedented move, on 4 September 1981, security officials arrested 1,536 individuals from different political and religious groups which government perceived to be a threat. Among those arrested were 22 priests and bishops. The following day, Sadat announced the cancellation of the Presidential Decree of 1971 which appointed Pope Shenouda, and replaced him with a committee to carry out papal duties. The Pope received the news in his monastery in Natroun Valley where he was placed under house arrest. The Church, which considered the Pope as 'elected by God' and not a mere presidential appointment, believed that he could not be banished. Therefore, all Coptic rites and rituals continued to take place in the Pope's name, despite his arrest.

Sadat announced that a referendum would take place in accordance with article 74 regarding the dissolution of all religious organizations, the closure of their newspapers and journals, and licensing of church buildings.

The Lay Council, with which the Pope did not initially have any conflict, took a strong position in support of Sadat. The Holy See (with the exception of some members of the papal committee) and the clergy, as well as the secular officers of the Church, were totally against Sadat's decision, and all churches continued to pray in the Pope's name.

The Lay Council called for a special meeting to which the papal committee was invited. After the announcements of the results of the 'referendum' of 10 September 1981, approving Sadat's infamous decisions, the Lay Council issued a statement on 23 September fully supporting, endorsing and accepting not just the decisions regarding the Pope, but also all of Sadat's decisions, including the arrest of hundreds of Egyptian intellectuals.

Copts from 1982-93

Sadat was assassinated on 6 October 1981 leaving behind a divided nation. Corruption was rife because of the constant attacks on the values that had previously governed Egypt during the liberal and Nasserite periods. Some mistakes were corrected: prisoners were released, laws were changed and corruption was checked, but the basic economic, political and social instabilities remained.

Mohammed Hosni Mubarak, Sadat's successor, was a military man, and his legitimacy emanated from being a leader of the military forces in the 1973 October victory. The President began his rule in December 1981, trying to pacify and improve relations between the nation's divided people. He started by freeing all political detainees.

The years 1981-85

This new presidential era made Pope Shenouda hesitate before taking his case of banishment to court. When the Pope heard that Mubarak was visiting the USA for the first time after his election, he also heard that Copts in the USA were organizing demonstrations on his behalf, calling for his reinstatement. The Pope immediately sent a delegation to assuage the Copts, carrying the message from the Pope that they should welcome the new President in love and submission, and that they should also pray for him.

The Pope remained under house arrest for four years, while Mubarak's government gave sustenance to several institutions including the Muslim Brotherhood. However there were indications of unrest and widespread strikes.

After the Jihad group attacked a police station in Assiut in 1981, killing a number of officers, the then deputy Prime Minister, Dr Fouad Mohi Al Din gave instructions that the escapees should be captured alive, which established the belief that the state was not seeking revenge. In addition, the government announced that security was taking full priority and that fighting the terrorism which hid behind religion had to be accomplished not only through security, but also through political and intellectual means. The government also announced that it was pursuing people for criminal rather than political or ideological reasons.

In the case of the Islamic groups, in September 1984, 190 defendants were declared innocent, among whom was Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman; 17 were sentenced to life imprisonment with hard labour, with 2-15 years for the rest; although the prosecutor had demanded the execution of 299 defendants and life sentences for three. This again emphasized the government's and the judiciary's objectivity. Not only that, but the case also discussed the torture which the defendants were subjected to.

The government began differentiating between the Muslim Brotherhood and other religious groups, accepting the legitimacy of the Brotherhood because they were non-violent in reaching their aims. The participation of the Brotherhood in parliament gave additional legitimacy to the entire institutional system in Egypt. The Brotherhood members presented several requests for the application of the *sharia*. Copts were very anxious about this, especially since the matter of the Pope's house arrest had not yet been resolved. Many Muslim writers began demanding the Pope's return.

Copts and the 1984 elections

The government of Dr Fouad Mohi Al Din was preparing for its first legislative elections during the Mubarak era. Law no. 13 in 1983 was issued to organize parliamentary elections, and was approved by the People's Assembly on 30 July 1983. The law stipulated that the elections of the MPs would be according to party lists, and for the first time, the law stipulated that any party which did not win at least 8 per cent of the total votes in all districts would not be represented. Opposition parties attacked the law, while Coptic circles welcomed it because it would increase their chances of representation. The elections resulted in the success of four Coptic members, which was a vast improvement on the elections of 1976-79 (when no Copts were elected). In addition, on 2 January 1984, the High Administrative Court unanimously voted for the return of the New Wafd Party which had dissolved itself in 1987, in protest at Sadat's oppressive policies.

Copts, more than any other group in Egypt, welcomed the return of the Wafd Party to political life, especially with its traditional Coptic involvement, and its commitment to national unity. The New Wafd elected Ibrahim Farag as Secretary General. However Coptic happiness was short lived, since the Wafd announced the end of its conflict with its old enemy the Muslim Brotherhood, and allowed them to enter under their umbrella in parliamentary elections. This led some secularists to withdraw from the Wafd.

The game of 'Coptic votes' intensified. There were two main players in this:

- The ruling party began spreading rumours that it would free the Pope immediately before the elections in order to win Coptic votes.
- The New Wafd, published a book about its Secretary General, including his political memoirs and the relationship between the New Wafd and the Pope, insinuating that Copts had joined the Wafd Party.

Using Copts in such a manner had grave, long-term political and social consequences. There was likely to be retaliation and a search for 'Islamic votes', representing a return to the methods used by the British when they were in Egypt. Second, this manner of dealing with Copts as a sectarian group with their own demands and independent problems, was extremely dangerous. It was likely that there would be a reaction to this from Muslims.

The return of the Pope

The Pope was to be tried in front of the Court of Values which was initiated by Sadat's government, accused of:⁵⁴

- Endangering national unity and peace, inciting sectarian strife and repeating that Egypt was a Coptic state which the Muslims invaded and controlled.
- Provoking people to hate the current regime.
- Giving the papal seat political overtones, and using religion to achieve political aims and objectives.
- Inciting conflict and instability by organizing a meeting in Alexandria and asking the priests to coerce the government to succumb to their demands.

In 1985, Mubarak issued a Presidential Decree allowing the return of the Pope.⁵⁵

Copts between 1986-90

The President, throughout the first four years of his rule, had full support from the people, and there were no notable protests or violent incidents. By the middle of the fourth year, early signs of instability began to loom on the horizon. At the start of the summer of 1985, Sheikh Salama Hafez tried to lead some religious groups in what he called the 'Green Demonstration'. There were also some labourers' unrest and demonstrations in factories in Helwan and Alexandria, among others. In autumn 1985, Egypt witnessed a series of strikes, riots, students' and people's demonstrations. A series of violent incidents continued in 1986, followed by media campaigns which became increasingly bitter between the government and the opposition.⁵⁶

Religious and sectarian violence between 1988-89

Violence against Copts and religious violence in general continued to rise. In March 1987, there was a sectarian conflict after Islamic groups accused Christian citizens of burning the Kotb Mosque in Sohag, and they incited citizens to burn the Church of the Virgin Mary which was nearby. In September 1987, there was a violent confrontation in Assiut between Islamic groups and the security forces leading to the destruction of some shops owned by Copts. In Menya there was trouble between Islamic groups and Copts because of Islamic attacks on a

celebration organized by a wealthy Copt, followed by explosions in the Church of the Virgin Mary in Menya. In September 1988, a church was burnt in Rode Al Farag, and in November of the same year, a bomb was thrown at the Virgin Mary Church in Masara during a wedding ceremony. In January 1989, Islamic groups attacked Coptic citizens in Menya and seized control of the Abu Hilal district, south of Menya. In September and December 1989, there was violence by Islamic groups against Copts and security forces, particularly in Assiut.

In March 1990, the conflict continued in Abu Kerkas, Menya, with the burning of 48 shops owned by Copts, as well as the churches of the Virgin Mary and Saint Gregory. This led to the transfer of the head of security in Menya together with 14 officers, followed by the dismissal of the governor of Menya himself. In April 1990 a bomb was hurled at the Virgin Mary Church in Ein Shams, Cairo.

Sectarian conflict between 1991-93

On 5 February 1991, the trouble was renewed in Beni Suef. Three pharmacies and two shops owned by Copts were burnt down. On 5 April 1991, violence flared up again between Islamic groups and Copts in Menya. A shop belonging to a Copt was burnt and a Coptic student attacked. Furthermore, there were robberies on jewellery shops owned by Copts in Ein Shams, Zeitoun and Shubra. The most violent year was 1992 with 22 murdered. This represented 28 per cent of all victims of violence, and twice the number of Muslims murdered.

In the same year, there were 37 attacks throughout Upper Egypt, Cairo and Alexandria including damage to three churches, and 14 shops. The most violent attack of those was in Sanabo, Assiut.

Current controversies and the opposition

It should be noted that the current Coptic community in Egypt is neither unanimous nor harmonious in its support of the Church and the Pope. Despite the fact that their supporters remain the overwhelming majority since conservative religion plays a pivotal, albeit sentimental, role in the lives of Egyptians, there are several opposition groups both internally and abroad, and there are broad concepts around which almost all opposition groups tend to agree:⁵⁷

- That the Lay Council has been deliberately weakened.
- Concern over the Pope's control over the elections and decisions of the Council.
- The banishment and disrobing of many priests and bishops without proper and just clerical procedures.
- The Pope's direct involvement in politics.

Table to show religious violence and attacks on Copts 1953-93

Year	Religious violence	Violence against Copts
1953	4	
1954	2	
1964	2	
1972	3	3
1973		
1974	1	
1975		
1976	4	4
1977	8	6
1978	6	6
1979	4	4
1980	12	12
1981	14	4
1982	2	
1983	2	
1984	1	1
1985	2	
1986	14	2
1987	10	2
1988	22	1
1989	10	
1990	17	3
1991	11	14
1992	91	33
1993	174	25
30 years	412	111

(Source: The authors)

- The Pope's assuming leadership over the lives of lay Coptic leaders, seeking to take them under his umbrella, and presenting himself as the sole spokesperson for Copts.
- The Pope's rejection of all forms of criticism, immediately ostracizing such clergy or lay members.
- The Pope's rejection of opening discussions with other Coptic denominations as well as with the opposition.

The opposition may be divided into two three main groups: clergy, lay members, and Copts in exile. In addition to those, there are individuals who are not part of any group, although these are small in numbers. Clearly the sanctified concept of 'obedience' to the Church lessens the numbers who do voice their opposition.

The clergy groups

These are mainly priests or monks in opposition to the Pope, who have numerous followers:

- Father Matta Al Meskin (Makkar monastery): he differs with the Pope regarding the Church's methodology, calling for the return of its spirituality and its pioneer spiritual role, objecting to its intervention in civil or political affairs - which was basically the methodology of the previous Pope Cyril VI.

- The late Bishop Samuel: called for greater prominence for secularists and lay members of the Church, and the decentralization of power in the hands of the clergy.
- Father Gregorius: who calls for popes to be like 'parents' who gather the flock in love and not people who seek to divide. He also calls for confronting the opposition instead of oppressing them.
- Various clergy members who call themselves the Clergy Group, and they seek internal reforms in the Church both spiritually and administratively.
- Father Aghathon: who has been asked to remain in retirement until further notice for his role in the renovation of the Church of Helwan without prior permission from the Pope.
- There are other individual priests who have been defrocked and banished from the Church for diverse reasons, regardless of the justification for their disrobement, some of whom voice their opposition to the Church's administration and leadership.

The lay groups

The primary group is the Sunday School Movement that opposes the Pope in his methods on both spiritual and secular matters. They basically seek to give prominence to the role of secularists in the Church and gain control of administrative and financial matters. This had previously been the role of the Lay Council in its conflict with consecutive popes, but as the Lay Council is currently elected by lists, one of which is the Pope's list which always wins, this role has been taken over by the Sunday School Movement. The Pope had issued a decision to banish all members of that group and prevent them from serving in the Church and called for a boycott of their magazine. However, a group of them dissented and requested forgiveness, publishing their request in the Coptic newspaper *Watani*. The Pope, however, continues to reject them. The remaining group are headed by Kamal Zakher Moussa, who remains in opposition to the Pope.

The Coptic groups in exile

These are spread over the USA, Australia, Canada, France and the UK. They all have their own magazines through which they publicize and voice their opposition. However in the USA there are perhaps the most famous groups, the most prominent being: the The Shawki Karras Group which basically attacks the Egyptian government in addition to attacking the Church, and the Rudolf and Raef Morcos Group which seeks cultural reform and to educate and raise Coptic awareness of their societies and their religion.

Copts today

Despite cases of discrimination against Copts, there are some positive aspects in Egypt. Here we will look at rights regarding education, employment, property, political participation, and women's rights.

Education

Educational opportunities, according to the constitution, are provided on a basis of equal opportunity. Both Muslims and Copts have access to free primary education as well as to free university education.

More recently, with the growth of religious extremist thought in the education system and ministries, school curricula have tended to be more inclined towards increasing the schism between Muslim and Christian schoolchildren. In some areas in Upper Egypt, especially those that are out of direct reach of the government, female students, both Muslim and Christian, have been coerced into wearing the veil.

Muslims have an additional advantage in education. The state-funded Al Azhar University covers all branches of education (medicine, pharmacology, literature, etc.). Yet, Copts are excluded from them. By contrast, Coptic religious institutions are not supported by the state. There are additional complaints about discrimination in joining some schools and institutions, as well as scholarships abroad. As for the national culture, there are no Coptic studies or Coptic-related studies of art, literature, architecture, etc. in universities nor in the school curriculum. Copts are also discriminated against in the scientific and teaching faculties. This has been noticeable in their under employment in these faculties.

Employment

The number of Copts in associations such as the lawyers association, the pharmacists, the medical, the journalists, and the veterinarians, etc., amounts to 25 per cent of the total membership.

There are no mayors, governors or university deans who are Copts, neither are there any Coptic school headteachers of state schools. In addition, there are hardly any high-ranking Copts in the military, the police force or the judiciary. Moreover, Copts are excluded from the intelligence service and the presidential staff on security grounds. Of the approximately 360 heads of state-owned companies, only 10 are Copts. Of 127 ambassadors, there is just one Copt, stationed in a minor country. Copts in the

Ministry of Foreign Affairs account for only 2.5 per cent of the employees. In the field of education, there are no Coptic deputy ministers, regional directors of education, or university presidents; and there are currently no Copts out of 166 faculty deans.

Property

The nationalization of 1961 did not discriminate between Muslims and Copts. However, Copts owned the following: 75 per cent of transport, 44 per cent of industry, 51 per cent of banks, 34 per cent of agricultural land (this constituted 15 per cent of total national wealth). After the issuance of law no. 47 in 1974 regarding the economic open-door policy, the traditional capitalist system partially returned. Currently Copts own 22.5 per cent of all the private investment companies that were founded between 1974 and 1993.

According to the restrictive rules of the Hamayouni Decree, churches may not be built or renovated, except by Presidential Decree or with prior permission from the state. Permission to build churches tends to take some 10-30 years for approval. According to the report of the Institute for Religious Minorities in the Islamic World for 1993, between January 1981 and December 1990 the Orthodox Church received only 10 permits to build new churches and 26 permits for repair. Some churches have been closed down by the government for 'failing to comply with building regulations', including St John's Church in Menya and the Coptic Orthodox Church in Khanka. Other denominations received 44 building and repair permits.

Political participation

In general, the relationship between status, wealth and participation may be categorized according to the following periods:

1924-50 - The 1919 Revolution solved a problem concerning the Copts status and their wealth in relation to their political participation. Copts sometimes had a higher degree of political representation than their corresponding numbers in society, such as in the parliaments of 1929 and 1942. The Wafd succeeded in all seven elections that took place following the 1923 constitution with Copts representing between 3 and 9.8 per cent of the MPs.

1952-71 - Copts wealth and participation decreased, and the issue of participation was resolved only in so far as appointments were made to parliaments.

1971-90 - Copts wealth and social status increased but participation remained problematic. The maximum number of Copts elected was six (1.3 per cent), in 1964, while in 1990 only one Copt was elected (0.22 per cent).

It has been increasingly difficult for Copts to succeed in elections, and most appointed members in parliament are so-called minority groups, either Copts or women. In the 1991 elections, out of 480 MPs, only five appointees were Copts.

Boutros Boutros Ghali, current Secretary-General of the United Nations, comes from a wealthy and politically renowned family in Egypt. He was appointed as a consultant on foreign affairs but was never promoted to Minister of Foreign Affairs, despite being the most qualified for the position. In the different ministries, there are only two Copts: the Minister of Scientific Research who was appointed as a woman and a Copt, and the Minister of International Cooperation. In addition, a ministry was formed under Sadat, namely the Ministry of Immigration, to which two Coptic ministers were consecutively appointed, specifically to attract Coptic investment from abroad.

Ever since the 1952 Revolution, Copts have been increasingly appointed to minor ministries that do not have a strong impact on policy-making.

Women's and girls' rights

The first demonstrations for women's rights took place along with the 1919 Revolution. A feminist movement began to form and women gained universal suffrage in 1956, long before other women in the region. Egyptian women have a long history of fighting against gender discrimination in schools, universities and employment.

With the rise of religious extremism in the 1970s, the discourse concerning women in Egypt became stereotypical, depicting women as home-makers whose primary and sole duty is the family and the rearing of children. It is a discourse that has been strengthened over the past two decades with calls for women to go back to the home, forfeiting their gains, and acquiescing to their 'customary' roles of housekeepers. This has been especially enforced with the economic recession. This discourse has been, and still is, emphasized and endorsed by both Christian and Islamic religious institutions. In addition to being enforced by the law, the inferior status of women is also supported by conservative traditions and customs that govern Egyptian society.

From a legal perspective

Although not all laws are responsible for gender discrimination, there are many laws that condone it. Among them are the personal status laws that stand out as an exemplar of discrimination. The first article of the civil personal status law stipulates that women may not leave their homes without prior permission from their husbands even if they are going out to work. Thus where the constitution stipulates for equality between the sexes, some laws contradict it under the guise of being contrary to *sharia*,

which is not always the case. Women are not allowed to have passports issued or travel without prior written permission from their spouses. Neither are they allowed to travel with their children without the spouse's approval.

Men may divorce their wives at will, whereas women have to go to court. A woman can get a divorce if she can prove that she has been 'harmed' by her husband. Polygamy in such matters is not considered 'harm' and the wife has to prove that her husband's second marriage has caused her substantial personal harm, a fact difficult to prove.

Other discriminatory laws are the nationality laws, where a woman may not give her nationality to her children if she marries a foreigner, because children are considered to be under their father's 'custody'.

Until 1955, the Church had its own personal status laws and its own confessional courts while Muslims had *sharia* courts for matters of marriages and divorce. In 1955, however, laws were unified to civil courts, and any Christian or Muslim may now go to court to settle marital disputes (this was through issuance of law no. 461). However, although this applies to divorce cases, it does not apply to marriage itself, hence polygamy, which is acceptable by Egyptian law, is prohibited according to all Christian laws in Egypt, and is not acknowledged by Egyptian law for Christian families. In addition, civil courts abide by the original Coptic laws even in cases that at times contradict current civil laws. The exception is in cases where there is no clear solution such as divorce cases.

It is evident from the laws that govern the Church however that there are certain laws that are implemented under the influence of the Eastern culture and *sharia*, although in many cases current civil laws are much more advanced than the Church's. One such example is that according to the Orthodox Church, as in the *sharia*, a woman whose marriage has been annulled or whose husband dies may not marry until 10 months have passed to ensure that she is not pregnant (in *sharia* it is three months). However this may be shortened in some circumstances.⁵⁸

Another example concerns expenditure within the family, where the Orthodox Church's laws stipulate that it is the man's duty to house his wife and feed, clothe and shelter her, but, as in civil law, the wife is denied this once she leaves her husband's home without permission. The Anglican Church does not have such laws, and expenditures are considered a mutual responsibility between husband and wife, depending on their earnings.⁵⁹

Obedience is part of Orthodox law, and article 44 stipulates, 'the wife must obey her husband as he is entitled to rights of her', and article 45 states, 'the wife must live with her husband and follow him wherever he goes, to live with him in the suitable house he chooses for their residence, and the husband has to house his wife in his own home'. According to Catholic law, article 19 states 'the wife is considered disobedient if she leaves the marital home for no legal reason ... and in this case the husband will have access to bringing her home legally'.

Courts in divorce cases deal with the matter according to *sharia*. As such, it is easier for men to get divorced than it is for women. However, even in cases where a 'civil court' rules for divorce, and the couple are considered legally divorced, the Church continues its deliberations

about the divorce for as long as it needs, and the couple are forced to wait until the Church decides upon their case which can take over seven years. This is unless one of the partners converts to Protestantism, Catholicism or Islam, which automatically annuls the marriage.

The Church has its own rules for accepting divorce, some of which discriminate against women. Some of these include:

- If the wife is not a virgin or has a bad reputation which the husband was unaware of before the marriage.
- If the husband or wife suffer from mental illness.
- In case of adultery.

Divorce is virtually impossible in the Orthodox Church, and this accounts for numerous conversions from Orthodoxy into either Islam or Protestantism to escape failed marriages. There are thousands of cases pending in Church concerning divorce.

Recently, feminist organizations have initiated and endorsed a 'new marriage contract'. This contract proposes to make the bride and groom sign a pre-marital agreement, whereby, among other things, a wife may divorce herself if she so wishes, something which is endorsed by Islam. The document has been seriously attacked by religious leaders, who state that marriage is 'holy and based on love', and therefore needs no such contracts. Although feminist groups continue to fight for the implementation of the document, it has no effect on Christian marriage and divorce. Christian marriages are considered 'holy matrimony' where nothing may separate what God has put together. That is why the idea of a 'contract' is pointless to Christians, unless the marital institution itself in Egypt becomes a civil ceremony, with marriage at a church as an option.

Intermarriage between Christians and Muslims is socially unacceptable in Egypt despite the increase in such marriages over the past two decades. Statistics are hard to find concerning such matters. The Church tends to underestimate the numbers and Al Azhar tends to exaggerate them. However such marriages are discriminatory: a Muslim man may marry a Christian woman but the opposite is forbidden and they are considered adulterers if they do marry. The children are, as usual, in the father's custody and must be registered as Muslims in such cases. If a spouse converts to Islam, child custody is given to this spouse and the Christian spouse loses guardianship. If the husband converts to Islam while his wife remains a Christian, the law does not consider them separated unless the wife asks for divorce. However, if the wife is the one who converts, the judge asks the husband if he would like to convert as well to keep his wife. If he does not, the judge orders their divorce.

Concerning child custody, the Church considers that the period for ending the mother's custody is seven years old for boys and nine for girls, whereupon the child is given to the father or his guardian in case of the father's death. The Orthodox Church insists on keeping these rules, despite the fact that the slightly more advanced civil laws provide for nine years for a boy and 12 for a girl according to law no. 100, with the additional provision that the judge has the right to keep the children with their mother.

From a social perspective

From the beginning of the twentieth century in Egypt, women have had a strong and notable role in non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Many women from the upper and upper-middle classes were involved in voluntary charitable work, forming a whole history and movement. However, as the role of NGOs decreased after the 1952 Revolution, so did the role of women in general.

Women have been employed in different jobs, but their numbers remain limited in the higher, decision-making positions, including ambassadors and ministers. (There are currently only two female ministers: Social Affairs, which has remained a female position for the past three decades, and the Minister of Scientific Research to which a Coptic female Minister has only recently been appointed). Women are not allowed to be judges, district attorneys or hold military positions. This is due to tradition rather than specific laws, in direct contradiction with the constitution.

Women are represented in parliament, but, like Copts in general, tend to be appointed rather than elected. Although this is also the case for Muslim women, the situation is doubly aggravated because Coptic women are normally appointed as 'Copts and as women', rather than as MPs in their own right.

It should be noted that discrimination against women takes place not only in society, but also within the Church. Women are not allowed in key, decision-making positions within the Church and the Lay Council has no women members. Recently, however, Pope Shenouda has added two women to his elections list.

The Orthodox Church remains conservative in other matters concerning women as well. For example, men and women remain separated inside the Church during the liturgy. Furthermore, women are not allowed to become deacons or priests; they are confined solely to charity and service work within the Church. The subjugation and 'obedience' of women is constantly preached as the ideal duty and ultimate goal of a woman's life.

Early marriages are condoned by tradition despite the law that stipulates a minimum age of 16 for females and 18 for males. Religious institutions have a strong role in opposing early marriages, but find this difficult to enforce especially in rural areas where early marriage is strongly supported.

Girls in Egypt are subjected to female genital mutilation (FGM). This is especially prevalent among the lower and lower-middle classes. Statistics reveal that more than 70 per cent of Egyptian women have been subjected to this procedure. Although it has been commonly assumed that Islam is responsible for the performance of FGM on both Christians and Muslims, this is not the case. However, this myth has been prevalent for centuries, therefore it is difficult to campaign against it especially in rural areas where illiteracy levels are high.

FGM is performed on girls between the ages of 6-13. They are performed by either the *dayas* (rural midwives), or local barbers. The justifications given for performing FGM include:

- If left to grow, a female's genital organs would grow like a male's.

- If a girl does not undergo FGM, her sexual desire will be left uncurbed and she will bring shame on the family.
- Girls will not find husbands who will agree to marry them if they know that the girls have not undergone FGM.

Following the International Conference on Population and Development which took place in Cairo in 1994, the debate concerning FGM was brought sharply into focus as one of the major themes in the conference documents. This fuelled a debate concerning whether it was religiously-based or not, with NGOs demanding that the harmful custom be legally prohibited. This opinion was based on the fact that not all Muslim countries perform this procedure, and that it was not mentioned in the Koran. However, the more conservative religious powers in Egypt, led by the Sheikh of Al Azhar, have strictly condoned the procedure and oppose anyone who is against FGM. This led the Ministry of Health to acquiesce to his request and encourage the procedure in state hospitals, penalizing anyone who performs it outside such hospitals. Some feminists and human rights activists have initiated legal action against both the Minister and Sheikh Al Azhar. To date, the procedure continues to be performed on young Christian and Muslim girls.

The image of Copts in the media and the press

The official media

Although many of the press pioneers in Egypt were Copts or Christians from the Levant region, there are currently no Coptic editors-in-chief of any major newspaper, nor are there any Copts in key positions in the Ministry of Information to which television and radio broadcasting are subject.

During the 1970s and the 1980s, the media was strongly infiltrated by Muslim extremists. Far fewer Copts were employed in media positions, and there was an increase in religious programmes attacking Coptic doctrines and creeds. This has been silently condoned by the government despite Coptic protests. However, more recently, especially since 1994, such programmes have stopped, particularly after the government came to fully realize the impact of such religious extremism on its own powers and authority.

Private media

During the same period, the 1970s and 1980s, the market was saturated with books attacking Copts and the Christian creed and doctrines. In addition, there was a widespread circulation of tapes spreading a hatred of Copts and of Christianity. There have been several crackdowns on places selling such tapes and their confiscation, after their dangerous ideas and impact were felt by the government.

Several Coptic Churches have recently produced films that deal with the lives of saints. These films are acted, written and directed by renowned Coptic actors, writers and directors in the film industry in Egypt. This is considered an 'alternative' medium for expression. Such films do not discuss Copts today, they deal with the historical persecution of Egyptian saints. However, as recently as December 1995, a shop owner selling these films was arrested.

In addition, there are tapes of Coptic hymns that are available throughout the Orthodox and the Evangelical Churches. These are sold solely within the Church, and may not be bought elsewhere. Some critics tend to consider this a form of polarization, where Copts, due to governmental negligence in the media, resort to having their own media with their own subject matter.⁶⁰

Conclusion and recommendations

This report reveals several key points:

1. There has traditionally been a joint culture between Muslims and Copts in Egypt. Muslims and Copts have long fought side by side, and together they have forged the concept of the contemporary state since Mohammed Ali, through the 1919 Revolution, and up to independence from 1922-52. There was also a mutual stance against invaders and foreigners throughout the ages starting with the Crusades through to the conflicts with Israel.
2. There were social and psychological factors that rooted the concept of this joint culture, such as the Copts and Muslims sharing the same ethnic background, language, individual and group traditions, and other joint factors of an anthropological and ideological nature.
3. This report also shows that there was a cultural specificity to both Muslims and Copts which was not an ethno-cultural specificity but one which related to the religious cultures.
4. Despite the fact that those involved in sectarian conflict always tried to highlight the Coptic identity as being separate from the Muslim one, the two cultures remain bound in forming a genuine Egyptian culture.

Recommendations

Freedom to worship

Concerning the building of churches, the Ministerial Decree of 1936 and its 10 conditions should be abolished, and a new law issued that conforms to the contemporary situation, giving equality to all citizens in matters of building both churches and mosques in relation to the population statistics should be enacted.

Freedom of belief

Current unofficial statistics claim that in the period 1988-90, approximately 50,000 Coptic university graduates have converted to Islam for economic reasons.

Concerning missionary work and *Daaw'a*, Muslim and Christian missionaries who use coercion and threats to convert people should be punished. Concerning Christians who wish to convert to Islam, the regulations which allow that person to talk the matter over with a priest, should be respected. Furthermore, there should be protection for those who want to convert to Christianity.

The *Wakf* Ministry

The *Wakf* Ministry used to oversee Islamic properties only, not Coptic ones, but since 1968 it has begun seizing Coptic property. This needs to be looked at, as a matter of urgency.

Education

Education, especially in primary and secondary schools, should stress tolerance and anti-discriminatory concepts. The Coptic history in Egypt should not be overlooked in school curricula but should be included and studied by children together with the Pharaonic and Greco-Roman periods.

Some Copts demand that Coptic children should not be forced to study the Koran in school, and that if such studies are required, that Christian doctrines and creeds should be equally implemented in schools.

Employment

It was common for Copts not to be appointed to the higher positions of the Ministry of Interior, but this spread to other ministries as well, especially Education and Foreign Affairs. There should be fair representation of Copts in all governmental positions including the key decision-making posts. Those who persecute and or discriminate against Christians should be strictly dealt with, especially if they are government employees.

The media

Action to stop the attacks on Christianity in the media, has been successful. People who incite hatred and discrimination should be severely punished in accordance with the law.

Women

The unification of the personal status laws (ie, the state and the Christian ones) would improve women's position. The government should apply the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women without its reservations.

More women should be encouraged into leadership of the Church.

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References to Copts in the Coptic language are both Greek and Coptic in origin. The words *kuptaion* (Sahidic) and *kubti* (Bohairic) are attested, but are used in the surviving texts to refer to the language, rather than the people; these both derive from Greek ἱαίπυτοι *haiiptoi*, "Egyptian." The Coptic term for the word "Egyptian" is *rem en kame* (Sahidic). Medieval writers before the Mamluk period often used the words *Copts* (Arabic: قبط) and *Egyptians* (Arabic: مصريون) interchangeably to describe all the people of Egypt whether Christian or Muslim. After the bulk of the Egyptian population converted to Islam, the word *Copt* came to be associated with Egyptians who retained their Christianity.