

A CHRISTIAN MINORITY
THE COPTS IN EGYPT

by

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(BAT YE'OR)

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A Christian Minority: The Copts in Egypt

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The clashes which broke out in 1972 between Christian Copts and Muslims in Egypt prompted the Egyptian government to set up a parliamentary commission of enquiry to investigate the causes of these disturbances which had begun in 1971.

According to the official report, they "were the result of tensions aroused by a strong religious undercurrent, tinged by fanaticism."¹ According to the same report, one of the causes of the unrest was a law, passed in 1934, which permitted churches to be built only if ten conditions were fulfilled, one of which was the absence of any mosque in the vicinity. In practice, however, no sooner was any plot of land set aside for the building of a church than a mosque was immediately erected nearby, thereby dashing the hopes of the Christian community.

The Coptic population numbers about six million today out of a total Egyptian population of approximately forty million.

I. THE PAST

The Copts descend from the early Egyptian Christians. Before the Arab invasion, Egypt was a province of the Byzantine Empire. Egypt's inhabitants were primarily Christians and the land was covered with numerous churches and monasteries.

At the end of the second century, the famous Catechetical School of theology and exegesis of early Christianity was founded in Alexandria, then the centre of Hellenistic culture. It was renowned due to the writings and teachings of Pantaeus, Clement of Alexandria and

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Origen who opposed Hellenistic paganism. After Alexandria became the spiritual capital of Christianity, cœnobitic life extended into the desert along the valley of the Nile and deep into the oases. Communities of anchorites and monks were founded under the leadership of Paul, Anthony and Pachomius. The latter (292–346) established the monastic rules and vows that were to serve as a model for the religious orders of Europe in the Middle-Ages. In 323 Constantin the Great declared Christianity the state religion of the Byzantine Empire. Religious strife broke out throughout the Empire between pagans, Christians and heretics. The national struggle of Egypt against the Byzantine yoke took a religious form. The Church of Alexandria, orthodox at first, later adopted the monophysite heresy (one nature of Christ) and fought against the Byzantine orthodox church. At the time of the Arab conquest, Egypt was the scene of bloody religious battles between the Melchites, followers of Byzantium, and the more numerous Jacobites, adherents of the monophysite doctrine.

In 640, the Egyptians welcomed the Arab conquerors as liberators come to deliver them from Greek tyranny. The Arab army of occupation made no changes in the administration of the conquered territories and the Copts retained their posts. But this tolerance was due to the particular circumstances of the conquest – the necessity for the Arab army to control a large Christian population – and was short-lived. In fact, the relations between the Arab army and the subjected indigenous population changed as the Arab domination grew firmer and became an irreversible phenomenon of history as a result of the elaboration of a system of colonisation: the *dhimma*.

Originally, the *dhimma* was the treaty concluded between Muhammed and those he subdued. The tolerant character of these pacts, defining the obligations and duties which bound the indigenous populations to the conquering Arab Muslims, determined the sedentary populations of the towns and villages to capitulate before the advancing Bedouin armies. In theory, the lives and property – as well as religious liberty – were guaranteed to those who accepted this pact, on the condition that they did not transgress any of its stipulations; but very soon the interpretation and the application of its conditions transformed the *dhimma* into a codified system of legal tyranny, spiritual in theory, but which in practice often led to physical genocide and was at the base of the arabization and islamization of the Christian Orient. Its evolution, in the course of centuries, was governed throughout by the irrefutable belief in the superiority of Islam and in its universal su-

premacny. The following words are attributed to the Caliph Mu'Awia:

I found that the people of Egypt were of three sorts, one-third men, one-third like men, and one-third not men, i.e. Arabs, converted foreigners, and those who pretend to be Muslims, the Copts.²

II. THE PACT OF 'UMAR

The *Pact of 'Umar*, generally attributed to 'Umar II (717-740), regulated the discriminatory status imposed upon the *dhimmis*, i.e. the non-Muslim native population living under the domination of Islam. They had to pay the *jizya*, a poll tax, symbolizing their subjection to Islam and also higher commercial taxes than were paid by the Muslims. The ownership of their land passed to the Muslim community and in order to have the right to cultivate it they had to pay a special land tax, the *kharāj*. Very often, whole communities were burdened with arbitrary impositions. At the beginning of the conquest, the Muslim occupants paid no taxes and therefore the Arab State and army were subsidized by the non-Muslim peasants and town dwellers.

The construction of new churches or the restoration of old ones, as well as the use of bells, banners, sacred books, crosses on churches or borne in procession, and any other non-Muslim cult-object were prohibited. So as not to disturb Muslims, the *dhimmis* had to hold their services in silence and abstain from lamentation at funerals. The social discrimination of the *dhimmis* and their exigency for security compelled them to live in separate areas. Their inferior and humble dwellings and tombs had to differ from those of the Muslims in size and decay. Marriage, sexual intercourse with a Muslim woman, blasphemy against Islam, were punishable by death. Relations between *dhimmis* and Muslims were forbidden, but as this proved impracticable, relations were strongly discouraged. The *dhimmis* were not allowed to exercise any authority over a Muslim and could not testify in a legal tribunal against him. Their movements were restricted and they had to go unarmed.

As the *dhimmis* were inferior to the Muslim, so they had to differ from him in their outward appearance – for instance in early Islam Christians had to shave their brows. They were denied the use of certain colours – e.g. green, which was the colour of the Prophet – and were forbidden to wear the clothes, belts, shoes and turbans worn by Muslims. Numerous decrees regulated in detail the colours, shape of

clothes, ill-fitting and ridiculous head-dress, belts and shoes that the dhimmis and their slaves were obliged to wear so as to be easily recognized and humiliated in the streets. A little bell around the neck, or a similar distinctive sign, made them recognizable at the public baths. Noble mounts such as horses and camels were reserved for Muslims, the dhimmis being only allowed to ride donkeys and use pack-saddles. In some periods they were forbidden to ride their donkeys within the towns, in other periods the Christians were humiliated by being forced to ride their donkeys facing the tail.

Other vexatory measures also governed their every-day life, such as the obligation to stand up and remain standing in the presence of Muslims, to address them in low and humble tones and give them right of way on the pavement by walking along the narrowest section of the street, on their left side – the impure side for a Muslim. The dhimmis could not relieve themselves naturally in the streets, nor assemble in groups to converse. For a more detailed study of the life of the dhimmi (Jews and Christians in Muslim lands the reader should consult the authoritative monographs on this subject.³

The jizya was paid in the course of a ceremony during which the dhimmi was publicly humiliated by receiving a slap in the face or a blow on the back of the neck. The dhimmi was then issued with a receipt which allowed him to travel; however, should he lose it, he could be put to death. When a census was taken of monks in Egypt (715–717) they were obliged to wear a metal bracelet bearing their name and the date and name of their monastery. Any monk found without his bracelet was liable to have his hand cut off or be executed.

The kharāj, the tax on non-Muslim land, reduced the Copts to destitution: they abandoned their fields and mass conversions occurred, but they were forcibly brought back by the army and obliged to pay the taxes (694–714). To prevent the Copts from abandoning their villages, the Arab army conducted a census and branded them on the hand and brow (705–717). No Christian could travel without a passport. Boats on the Nile which carried a Christian without a passport were set on fire. In 724, 24,000 Copts converted to Islam to escape ruinous taxes. The conversions impoverished the State and to discourage them, the jizya was also imposed on new converts. Furthermore, they were forbidden to sell their lands to Muslims, as these lands would then have been exempt from the kharāj; later a fixed sum was levied on the Coptic community which covered any lost revenues from new converts. At the beginning of the 8th century, Usame Ben Zaid,

Governor of Egypt, wrote to Caliph Abdel Malik (715-717): "I draw milk; if it stops, I draw blood; if it clots, I press the skin." The same caliph used to say: "Draw milk until it ceases to flow, draw blood until it is exhausted."

In Tinnis, taxes reduced the Copts to such destitution that they abandoned their children in slavery to the Arabs.⁴ Those who did not pay were thrown into jail or tortured. Under the Abbasids, the dhimmis who could not pay their taxes were put into cages with wild animals. The church leaders were often held responsible for the sums levied on the community. Unable to pay, they were thrown into jail and tortured. Around 718, Abdel Malik ben Rifa'a, Governor of Egypt, had the Patriarch Michael thrown into a windowless cell dug into the rock, a block of wood attached to his feet and a heavy collar put around his neck. He remained in this position for 31 days until the required sum was paid. The exorbitant taxes and the tortures used to extort them provoked numerous revolts which were brutally crushed. Thousands of Copts were killed, women and children enslaved, their property expropriated by the Arabs who thus became more numerous in towns and villages.⁵

As the Pact of 'Umar forbade the dhimmis to exert any authority over a Muslim, they could not become civil servants nor join the army. In every period, numerous decrees resulted in the dismissal of Christians from the posts they held unless they converted to Islam. However, the Copts were indispensable as all the Egyptian bureaucracy was in their hands. The Muslims accused them of purposely trying to complicate the administration in order to retain their posts. These deviations from the dhimma provoked riots: the mob would then plunder the Christian quarter, massacre the Copts and destroy their churches.

In every period, monasteries and churches were despoiled, burned and destroyed. The Caliph Al Hakim (996-1020) renewed the clauses of the Pact of 'Umar. All the churches and synagogues in his Empire (Egypt, Syria, Palestine) were then looted and demolished - or converted into Mosques. The mob pillaged the Christian and Jewish quarters and the caliph forced the dhimmis to convert or leave his dominions. At the end of his reign, he allowed them to return to their religion and to rebuild their places of worship. In 1058, all churches were closed, the patriarch and the bishops thrown into jail and the Copts ransomed for 70,000 dirams. The slightest incident could provoke a massacre. In 1377, the mob was incensed at the sight of a Christian maltreating a Muslim and immediately clamoured for the

dismissal of Christian and Jewish public servants in the service of the Emirs and then for their conversion or death. The Christians went into hiding, but the mob ransacked their quarter, massacred them and forced the women into slavery. Some Christians were grouped in a horse-market; a pit was dug into which they were to be thrown and it was set alight: all converted to Islam.⁶ A Christian was riding by the Al-Azhar Mosque, his spurs and handsome saddle angered the Muslims who pursued him with the intention of killing him. Riots broke out, forcing the Sultan to summon the leaders of the Jewish and Christian communities and remind them that they were subject to the shame and humiliation of the dhimma. When they left the Sultan, they were attacked by the mob which tore their clothes and beat them until they agreed to apostasy. Stakes were set alight for the Jews and for the Christians. The churches and the houses of dhimmis that rose higher than those of the Muslims were destroyed. The dhimmis even feared to go out into the streets. In 1343, Christians were accused of starting fires in Cairo; in spite of the Sultan's efforts to protect them, they were seized in the street, burned or slaughtered by the mob as it left the mosques. Anti-Christian violence raged in the main towns. To enable the Christians to go out into the streets, Jews would sometimes lend them their distinctive yellow turban.

The history of the Copts is a lengthy tale of persecutions, massacres, forced conversions, of devastated and burned churches. Thousands of Copts fled to Abyssinia, but the greater part found refuge by accepting Islam.

III. THE PRESENT

The founder of modern Egypt, Muhammed Ali (1801-1846), undertook the cultural and industrial revolution of his country with the help of a team of French scientists. Tolerant and politically-minded, he tried to mitigate religious discrimination in the face of the opposition of a traditionalist population. The Copts made use of that period to build schools and acquire modern skills and when the British occupied the country (1882) the Christians were prepared to act as civil servants in a modern administration. The British occupation brought stability and economic development to Egypt. Schools were founded and new opportunities were created in the developing commerce, industry and agriculture. The Copts perfected their skills and distinguished themselves in the liberal professions and in government service.

In spite of the liberal, albeit limited, trend which favoured the secularisation of the State and the equality of its citizens, the rise of the erstwhile dhimmis did not occur without shocking, even traumatising, Muslim susceptibilities – as their former abject status had been the basis of Islam's superiority and domination. To make matters worse, the abolition of the discriminatory laws against non-Muslims in 1856 did not stem from an evolution *sui generis* in the Arab mentality, but was imposed by the West.⁷ In retaliation, thousands of Christians were slaughtered in the Syrian provinces in 1860. This massacre prompted France's brief intervention – in agreement with the other European powers – and the establishment of an autonomous Christian region in Lebanon, which remained nonetheless under Ottoman suzerainty.

Having thus been emancipated by Europe, the Christians – remnants of pre-Islamic cultures – in a cynical paradox of history, were automatically associated with imperialism. Their hard-won equality was considered by the Arabs as an additional humiliation imposed on them by the Western powers. This was the reason why the struggle for national independence, with its rejection of the West and its return to Islam, has also manifested itself in the persecution of minorities. In fact, justified as it may have been, the anti-colonial struggle was never conceived of as a national war in the European sense. It was a *djihad* – a holy war of Islam against Christianity. Inevitably then, religious fanaticism linked Eastern Christians to the West, which had not only liberated them, but, furthermore, by protecting them, had delivered them from a traditional humiliation, thus violating the tenets of Islam established since the 8th century.

Worse: the situation of the minorities became more complicated by the fact that in any litigation between Muslims and non-Muslims, Islamic law was applicable, and then, as neither the testimony nor the oath of a non-Muslim was admissible due to the infidel's congenital depravity, the Muslim was automatically acquitted. In order to protect their lives and property, the minorities tried to obtain consular protection or a foreign citizenship, thus benefiting from the system of Capitulations. If by this device, they could escape from the discriminatory Islamic courts, on the other hand this link with the West compromised them even more. Thus, in the short or long run, no matter what they did, the political situation of the religious minorities was foredoomed.

Under the British protectorate, the fact that a few Copts and Jews became high government officials created the illusion of a liberalisation, despite a violently xenophobic pan-Islamic current which was the

manifestation of the revolt of Islam against the political and cultural supremacy of the West. Professor W. C. Smith has written:

Most Westerners have simply no inkling of how deep and fierce is the hate, especially of the West, that has gripped the modernizing Arab.⁸

This same hatred has accused the minorities of collusion with Western imperialism.

C. Issawi⁹ attributes these anti-Coptic feelings to the high intellectual level of the Copts, but primarily to Islamizing tendencies, which resulted in economic discrimination against the Christians in the early thirties. During this period the Egyptian monarchy led an active pan-Islamic campaign in the Arab countries. The progressive Islamization of national life inspired the rector of Al Azhar, the renowned Islamic University of Cairo, to declare in 1928 that nationality is religion.¹⁰

Already in 1927, Muslim political and religious associations proliferated, such as the Society of Young Muslims, the Society for the Benevolence of Islamic Morals, the Good Islamic Way, the Society for the preaching of Islamic virtues, the Society for the revival of religious law, the Salfiya Society, the Muslim Brotherhood and Young Egypt. Cairo became the centre of a religious nationalism from which missionaries went forth to the Sudan, Japan and India.¹¹ This proselytism carried with it a current of xenophobia, which manifested itself also against European orientalists, accused of undermining the faith of Islam. In March and April 1928, the activities of Christian missionaries were violently criticised. They were accused of utilising dangerous drugs and hypnosis to make new converts.¹² In 1933, in Kafr el Zayat, the Franciscan Sisters of Mercy were forced by a menacing crowd to release the pupils in their care.¹³ The nationalist element in this religious current is best illustrated by the words of the Christian author, Salama Moussa, who stated in 1930: "Islam is the religion of my country, my duty is to defend it."¹⁴

In 1936, Makram Ebeid, the Coptic Finance Minister, declared: "I am a Christian, it is true, by religion, but through my country I am a Muslim."¹⁵ From which it follows that to be an Egyptian it was necessary to act as a Muslim.

In 1937, Farouk with the help of his former tutor, Mustapha el Maraghi, rector of Al Azhar, attempted to abolish the constitutional government and transform Egypt into a theocratic State. The Wafd, the nationalist party which was very popular, became the main obstacle to the royal ambition. In order to discredit the Wafd, Maraghi

resorted to religious xenophobia, accusing the Wafd of being controlled by the Copts, whom he described as "foxes" in a radio broadcast in February 1938. Friendship between Copts and Muslims is contrary to divine law, he declared.¹⁶ In pursuit of his anti-Copt campaign, the rector of Al Azhar stated that Egyptian policy must only draw its inspiration from Islamic principles, which, as far as the relations with Christians were concerned, meant the re-introduction of the dhimma. Anti-Coptic and anti-missionary feelings were aroused and the reputation of the Wafd was ruined.

At the same time, the Muslim Brotherhood considerably increased the number of its members as well as its hold on the economic and political sectors of the country. The Brotherhood attempted to turn Egypt into an essentially religious State, governed according to the strictest interpretations of Islamic law. It condemned democratic parliamentarism, which, in its eyes, was a corrupt institution imported from the West. Divided into cells, the Brotherhood owned printing presses, clinics, schools, book-shops, recreation-centres as well as possessing its own secret terrorist organisation and para-military "army."

The part played by the Brotherhood is still a determining factor in Egypt. Remarkably well organised, it became the most powerful party in the country. Thanks to the support of the King and army, it had ramifications throughout the country – as well as in the Sudan, in Yemen and particularly in Palestine, where from 1948 to 1956 it provided the fedayeen with arms and money. After World War II, the Brotherhood became the most powerful party in Egypt and was at the zenith of its glory. Its fanaticism, the wave of murders and bloody riots instigated by its terrorist organisations, maintained xenophobia at fever pitch and created an atmosphere of terror and discrimination against non-Muslims. Possessing arms and training grounds, it set up military organisations and units of shock troops, which applied unbearable pressure on the Egyptian government and plunged the country, with the King's consent, into the 1948 war against Israel. After the defeat of the Arab forces, it started a regime of terror in Egyptian cities. The government, not having the means to control them, could only re-establish a comparative stability by imposing martial law. Nasser needed the help of the Brotherhood to seize power and Sadat collaborated with Hassah El Banna, the Brotherhood's Supreme Guide.¹⁷ Yasir Arafat, born in Cairo in 1929, learnt from members of the Brotherhood how to make bombs and other explosives.¹⁸ When the party was outlawed by Nasser, thousands of its members were im-

prisoned, others found refuge in Syria and especially in Jordan, where they joined the ranks of the Palestinian fedayeen organisations.

Though it never had a definite programme for social reform, the activity of the Muslim Brotherhood was varied and affected every sphere of life, whether social, economic, political, educational or cultural. In its pursuit to create an essentially Muslim society governed by the most rigorous precepts of Koranic law, it established, within the framework of the State, its own banks, industries, schools and army. If it can be said that the Muslim Brotherhood introduced reforms for the protection of wage-earners, it is no less true to say that, by religious intransigence, it contributed to the spread of a destructive hatred of the West, the foreigner and the non-believer, using, for this end, numerous publications and inflammatory sermons pronounced from mosques.

To understand Islamic pan-arabism, which in Western disguise ("Secular and Democratic Palestine," "Progressive-Muslim Lebanon") stirs the Arab world today, it is necessary to trace the steps of its evolution.

After the 1860 Syrian massacres, the Christians had tried to promote an Arab nationalism based on cultural identity. But this Arab nationalism, inspired by European conceptions, irritated the Muslims who looked upon it as an attempt by the West to divide and weaken them. The majority therefore rallied to the pan-islamic movement which advocated a return to traditional Islam. Thanks to the theologians of Al Azhar, the two movements, antagonistic at first, fused into Islamic pan-arabism. Today it is clear that Islam and Arabism are inseparable terms and that, in fact, pan-arabism is synonymous with the cultural, social and political rebirth of Islam. To be more precise, it is possible to be a Muslim and not an Arab, but the reverse is impossible: a true Arab must be a Muslim. As long as modern Egypt will proclaim itself to be "essentially an Arab and Muslim land," uncertainty will continue to weigh on the Copts, the only remaining native religious minority after the forced departure of eighty thousand Jews.

When Nasser came to power, Egypt resolutely turned its face towards Arabism and became its staunchest champion. Cairo proclaimed Islamic unity and pursued an active policy of pan-arabism which identified Islam with Arabism.

The precarious situation of the minorities became even more acute. Was it possible to be a Christian and an Arab? The problem was obsessively debated in literature and in the press and the solution was

invariable: since Muhammed was an Arab and the sacred Koran was revealed in Arabic, only a Muslim could identify fully with Arabism.

In addition, Islam gave the Arab civilisation strength and grandeur. These beliefs were formulated by the Christian founder of the Ba'ath party, Michel Aflak, who urged his co-religionists to convert, for as he maintained: "Islam is Arab nationalism."¹⁹

It was quite clear that in the context of this essentially religious nationalism, no religious minority could ever participate in the political life of the country. The islamization of the country led inevitably to discrimination against the Copts at all levels. Edward Watkin's book on this subject is particularly enlightening.²⁰ A recent article published by the late Georges Henein, a Coptic writer, gave valuable information on the economic discrimination imposed on the Copts during Nasser's rule.²¹

In August 1957, the Copts protested against persecutions which revived, in modern Egypt, a familiar thirteen-centuries-old tradition: restrictions in building churches, new laws affecting the personal status of Christians, discrimination against Christians in public office, in the distribution of land, in housing and for posts in the mass media.²² These recent events must be examined in the context of the dhimma – churches destroyed by villagers, houses and shops burned down, bishops and Coptic congregants stoned.²³ The campaign of intimidation, inspired by the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* as described by G. Henein in the above-mentioned article is not unlike that instigated against the Jews in the fifties which resulted in their total expulsion. Is the rebirth of religious fervour in Egypt a consequence of the islamization of governmental institutions, with President Sadat's tacit approval, or is it the work of the resurgent Muslim Brotherhood, organised into semi-clandestine cells?

The remarks made by the orientalist W. C. Smith on the Muslim Brotherhood of the fifties could well apply to certain trends now prevalent in the Arab world:

The reaffirmation of Islam endeavours to counter the failure of modern life but may not succeed in transcending it. Unfortunately, for some of the members of the Ikhwan (Muslim Brotherhood) and even more for many of their sympathizers and fellow-travellers the reaffirmation is not a constructive programme based on cogent plans and known objectives, or even felt ideas; but is rather an outlet for emotion. It is the expression of the hatred, frustration, vanity, and destructive frenzy of a people who for long have been the prey of poverty, impotence, and fear. All the discontent of men who find the modern world too much for them can in movements such as the Ikhwan

find action and satisfaction. It is the Muslim Arab's aggressive reaction to the attack on his world which we have already found to be almost overwhelming — the reaction of those who, tired of being overwhelmed, have leapt with frantic sadistic joy to burn and kill. The burning of Cairo (26th January 1952), the assassination of Prime Ministers, the intimidating of Christians, the vehemence and hatred in their literature — all this is to be understood in terms of a people who have lost their way, whose heritage has proven unequal to modernity, whose leaders have been dishonest, whose ideals have failed. In this aspect, the new Islamic upsurge is a force not to solve problems but to intoxicate those who cannot longer abide the failure to solve them.²⁴

The lessons of the past and the present isolation of the Copts does not augur well for the future. When Nasser seized power and forbade all political parties, no one dared question or criticize the dictatorial government of the military oligarchy. This was particularly distressing in view of the fact that, at the beginning of the century, Egyptian intellectuals were the first from the Arab world to focus on the problems created by the clash with the modern Western world.

Although the present, more liberal, regime of President Sadat has loosened the totalitarian control in the political and intellectual spheres of the State's institutions, it has hardly diminished anti-Christian discrimination in the political, economic and educational fields.²⁵ The actual resurgence of Islam,²⁶ the massacre and flight of Lebanese Christians as a result of the union of Islamo-Palestinian forces, Syrian President Assad's military intervention in Lebanon, allegedly to protect Christians, can only favour a general traditional policy of Arab-Islamic domination.

As a confirmation of this tendency, at a recent manifestation of the Muslim Brotherhood in Cairo, some Egyptian members of parliament demanded that Koranic law should henceforth be the only source of the country's legislation.²⁷

The moment has come for Arab Muslim intellectuals to recognize, courageously, that if the Arabs can condemn Western imperialism, so have the Eastern Christian communities the right to demand equality of rights in the lands successfully colonized by Arab imperialism.

IV. ANNEX

Telegram (Summer 1972) addressed to President
Anwar el Sadat

by

The Assembly of Christian Churches in Egypt

The National Assembly of the heads of the Copt-Orthodox, Copt-Catholic, and Copt-Evangelical churches met at the Orthodox-Coptic Patriarchate in Alexandria. The delegates were shocked by recent provocations and the planned persecutions publicly announced by the Ministry of WAKFS (Muslim Ministry of Religion) and its various sections. These projects are intended to inflame the populace to hatred and to discrimination which can only lead to our annihilation. In spite of all this, no responsible department of the administration has done anything to stop these perfidious intrigues against national unity. Those intriguing knew very well that their action would lead to clashes between the two groups of the nation — the Muslims and the Copts — and this at a time when there is a great need to preserve our unity in order to create a united front against the enemy. All this has happened, even though on several occasions we have complained to those in authority.

We, members of this Assembly, subjected to considerable pressure engendered by all these injustices which are occurring throughout the country, conscious also that the Constitution guaranties liberty to all citizens, we request, Sir, that:

1) Sectarian and mischievous projects of the Ministry of WAKFS and other departments of this Ministry cease.

2) Restrictions imposed by the officials of the Administration concerning the construction of new churches be abolished. The argument used according to which this prohibition is based on an old Ottoman decree is invalid as this law was abrogated by the new Constitution.

3) Entrance to the Universities must be based solely on the final examination results at secondary school and not on a private interview. Furthermore, it should be forbidden for University courses to be held in mosques and Islamic Institutions.

4) Studies of our religion from a negative viewpoint, such as "Israel and Universal Zionism" and "Conference on Christianity," should not be published.

5) All discrimination regarding employment in certain departments of the Universities and the Institutes of Advanced Studies should be abolished, as well as the quota system applicable to Christian students in specialized schools and similar institutions.

6) It should be forbidden to publish books or articles attacking our faith and our Holy Scriptures, in particular the Old Testament.

7) It is essential to apply the (National) COVENANT and protect the Christian family against the dangers which menace it through the pretext of grant-

ing legal protection. Divorce must be made more difficult in that part of the law relating to the personal status of non-Muslims.

8) The projects which are aimed at preventing Christians from acceding to high (government) posts should be abolished.

Sir, we await your reply, as soon as possible, to our just requests. We do not accept to be humiliated in this country which is ours. The delegates have called a further assembly in Cairo for TUESDAY 29 AUGUST 1972. There is thus sufficient time for our just requests to be accepted. If this will not be the case, martyrdom is preferable to a life of servitude.

We are sure of your wisdom, as we are sure that you will overcome this dangerous situation. May God protect you and through your efforts grant victory to our nation.

(signed)

For the Copt-Orthodox Patriarchate: The Reverend MENA, Patriarchal Vicar

For the Copt-Catholic Church: The Reverend GIBRAEL GHATTAAS, Patriarchal Vicar

For the Copt-Evangelical Church: Pasteur LABIB QALDAS

NOTES

1. *Le Monde*, 2nd December 1972. See Annex.
2. A. S. Tritton: *The Caliphs and their non-Muslim Subjects*, London, 1970, p. 1.
3. A. S. Tritton, *op. cit.*; Antoine Fattal, *Le Statut légal des non-Musulmans en pays d'Islam*, Beyrouth, 1958; E. Strauss (Ashtor), *The social Isolation of Ahl-Adh Dhimma*, in P. Hirschler Memorial book, Budapest, 1949.
4. A. S. Tritton, *op. cit.*, p. 145.
5. A. S. Tritton, *op. cit.*, p. 144.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
7. Moshe Ma'oz: *Ottoman Reform in Syria and Palestine (1840-61)*, Oxford 1968, p. 27. By the *Hatt'i Hümayun* (1858) Europe forced the Ottoman Sultan, who was still the nominal suzerain of Egypt, to proclaim equality between Muslims, Christians and other minorities throughout his Empire.
8. W. C. Smith, *Islam in Modern History*, Princeton, 1957, p. 164.
9. C. Issawi, *Egypt, an economical and social analysis*, Oxford, University Press, 1947, pp. 161-62.
10. M. Colombe, *L'évolution de l'Égypte 1924-1950*, Paris 1951, p. 171.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 144.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 143.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 143.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 146.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 146.
16. Elie Kadourie, *The Chatham House Version*, London 1969, pp. 199-200. Maraghi no doubt alludes to the verses in the Koran (Sura 5, 51) and to the habits (acts and words attributed to Muhammed) that forbid or strongly discourage relations between Christians and Muslims. The segregation of the dhimmis was at the root of their social and political ostracism by the Islamic community (*Umma*).
17. Anouar Sadat, *Revolt on the Nile*, London 1957, p. 30.
18. Thomas Kiernan, *Yasir Arafat*, London 1976.

19. Silvia Haim, *Arab Nationalism*, University of California, 1962, p. 64.
20. Edward Watkin, *A Lonely Minority, The Modern History of Egypt's Copts*, New York, 1963.
21. *L'Express*, 20-26 November 1972.
22. P. Rondot, *Man, State and Society in the Contemporary Middle-East*, London, 1972, p. 276.
23. *Le Monde*, 16 novembre 1972.
24. W. C. Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 163-164.
25. Josette Alia, *Les Chrétiens d'Orient*, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, No. 581, 29 décembre 1975-4 janvier 1976.
26. Bernard Lewis, *The Return of Islam*. Commentary, Vol. 61, No. 1. January 1976.
27. *Le Monde*, 26 mars 1976.