

Certain Persecution Awaits Coptic Christians in Post Morsi Egypt

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Note from Pastor Kevin Lea: The title 'Coptic Christians' means Egyptian Christians who trace their spiritual roots back to when Mark (the Gospel writer) brought the gospel of Jesus to Egypt.



The continuing dramatic struggle for power and friction in Egypt continues between two groups: the Muslim Brotherhood and the supporters of Mohamed Morsi on one side, and the combination of forces, mainly secular but divided, opposed to radical Islam on the other.

Both Muslim extremists and the secular groups had, for differing reasons, celebrated the toppling of President Hosni Mubarak on February 11, 2011. Morsi had been freely elected with 51 percent of the vote as president on June 24, 2012. A gulf now exists in Egypt between those insisting on a political system enshrining sharia law and those favoring a secular order without religious controls. The latter are hoping for a government that is more competent and less corrupt than the norm in Egypt. The fate of Christians in Egypt will be determined by the outcome of the struggle between the two sides.

Western liberals appear indifferent to the reality that Christians are the victims of persecution in Arab Middle East countries and live in a climate of hate. Little attention has been paid to the unfair and unequal treatment of the Christians of the Coptic Church in Egypt by successive regimes. The mainstream media in the United States and Europe have largely ignored the unprovoked attacks and violence against those Christians.

Present-day Copts, descendants of one of the oldest Christian communities and now the largest Christian community in the Middle East, account for about 10 percent of the Egyptian population. Since the army's coup d'état in 1952, led by Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser, which overthrew King Farouk and set up a republic, the Copts have been adversely affected in a number of ways. As relatively prosperous citizens, they were hit economically by Nasser's nationalization policies.

While there are no restrictions on Muslims to build mosques, the necessary permits to construct churches are consistently delayed; minor repairs to churches can be undertaken only with official approval; and church land and properties were and are being confiscated. Conversions from Islam to Christianity are not officially recognized, and people who commit crimes against the Copts are rarely prosecuted.

Nasser's successors, Sadat and Mubarak, were as hostile to Copts as was Nasser. Sadat kept the Coptic pope under house arrest for a number of years, and Mubarak prevented the building of new churches. The Coptic community from 1980 on was harassed in Upper Egypt by hate crimes, and by attacks on and burning of churches and monasteries. Individual Copts were subjected to physical assaults, causing many to flee their homes.

While assaults on the Copts have continued for decades, three recent ones are particularly notorious. One was the event in the town of Marsa Matrouh, where a mob of 3,000 Muslims attacked the Copts in 2010 and destroyed 18 homes, 23 shops, and 16 cars. A second was the incident on January 1, 2011, when a car bomb exploded outside a Coptic Church in Alexandria, killing more than 20 and injuring more than 80 people. It was particularly poignant because the bomb went off a few minutes after midnight as the Copts were leaving a New Year's Eve church service.

A third event was the "Maspero massacre" in October 2011, when the army, using disproportionate force, killed at least 24 Christians. The army, riot police, and special forces using armored personnel carriers descended on Copts who were peacefully protesting the burning of a church in the town of Marinab.

Discrimination against the Copts increased after the Muslim Brotherhood came to power, when it gained 37 percent of the vote, and the extreme Islamist party Nour won 24 percent in elections held in December 2011. The second International Coptic Conference held in Washington in February 2012 reported that the state of the Copts has continued to deteriorate after 2004, when the first Coptic Convention was held in Zurich. Greater Islamic control meant more burning of churches, more attacks on Copts, forced migration, and an assault on the Coptic Church in Cairo. Church land was usurped by Muslims, cemeteries were destroyed, and riots against the Copts occurred in Alexandria in 2005. Very few Copts were allowed to be candidates for national legislative elections. Though Boutros Boutros Ghali, a Copt, became Egyptian foreign minister and later Secretary-General of the United Nations, Copts in general have been sparsely represented in official positions and law enforcement. Not only were Copts denied legal protection according to provisions of international law and treaties of human rights, but they also have been falsely accused of such actions as ...

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