



Churches at risk, people protesting about lack of protection, and fear of what will happen next, leaves Coptic Christians in Egypt in a state of unrest and their families abroad fearing for the lives of loved ones still residing in the Coptic motherland. Coptic Christians, including infants, children, and women, have been murdered; churches bombed and burned; and needless to say Christians suddenly without employment and income. It is a continuing occurrence, not a isolated incident.

A very unsettling, unsafe environment for a minority population. When there is no precipitating or provoking reason for the persecution, it becomes clear there is no emerging forthcoming solution either.

As with all things, dialogue is essential for community and solidarity within a country that exists with a newly developing sense of self government, instead of the constant radicalism that is currently predominating and overshadowing any sense of democratic platform once idealized. The tone of the political affairs in the Middle East, in general, is disconcerting. Tragically, it is displayed as violent in taking the lives of all of its citizens without

regard for geographic region, social class, or faith. When violence overtakes any country everyone loses something.

Radical violence without question ruins economies and displays to the world protest rather than tolerance. Egypt is a country which famed scholars admire its historical wonders of the world and its archeological treasures, is within textbooks worldwide in children and college classrooms, contains the ancient Nile River which has been the center of the greatest of scholarly study, tops the tourist lists of desirable places to visit, and is the cultural epicenter of the Middle East. Thus it is non-advantageous to absolutely no one for the country of Egypt to be on a list of unsafe countries to place economic development or travel to.

It is to everyone's benefit, economically, politically, and socially, to have the respect of those looking at the various Middle East leaders whom have been removed to find that Egypt is peacefully planning a governmental change that will encompass productivity and that each and every citizen can contribute to making Egypt a country known for its political reform and value of human life. Egypt must regain a self of itself, in its respect for the many diverse populations that call Egypt their homeland

and their various places of worship that have existed for hundreds of years.

While it is fervently prayed that the military leaders in Egypt will be more vigilant in protecting the Coptic Christians in Egypt, this is not known with certainty. What can either the families living in Egypt or their loved ones living abroad do to ease the suffering of a minority Coptic faith in a land attempting political change?

Realistic options must be addressed, while not allowing ourselves or our hearts and minds to be defiled and preoccupied in the process with desiring retribution. We must look toward the fullness of time for resolution, not disbelief, that man provoked must intervene for God. God is not weak.

1) Assessing Realistic Options

With a government in transition one cannot force the heavily armed military to meet the safety needs of the Coptic Christians, cannot take justice into their own hands without potentially causing an increase in repercussion, and cannot voice their concerns to an established, accountable government until one is formulated.

So what true options are available to the plight of our Coptic Christians in Egypt? First, we must learn to accept that every human suffers. This is not easy and

with the ongoing constant persecution from a few, it is acknowledged increasingly more difficult. As Christians, we must look to the suffering as something we must endure, as well as the pain that it causes and learn to benefit from it. We should not become a casualty of it. We do not renounce the Christianity we have proclaimed for two thousand years by giving way to anger, rock throwing, insulting those who oppose us, or cursing them. This is neither the nature nor the personality of the One we follow, our Lord Jesus Christ. Are we following a sect or our Lord?

Rather, in every cup of suffering tasted--we learn that God has a plan for us, and it is obvious through glancing back at history that survival has been born out of Coptic suffering. Our very heritage is famous for the number of martyrs and saints derived out of persecutions. This day and time in history will be no different.

The Lord Jesus Christ said, "*A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house.*" (Matthew 13:57). The Lord Jesus Christ in the midst of His own country, Nazareth, was rejected. The Nazarenes did not accept Him nor tolerate His beliefs.

They demeaned the Lord and declared His holy family to be unimportant and insignificant although they could find no fault in them. Prejudice was rampant. Although the Lord Jesus Christ was rejected at Nazareth, He did not retaliate and throw stones. Rather He moved from His home and fed the five thousand hungry. The Lord replaced conflict with an act of kindness, one of compassion.

The Coptic motherland, with its rich heritage of Coptic art, ancient monasteries, and churches which not only have historical value but many with miracles associated within them, must withstand any attempts to desecrate them through spiritual defense of their holiness. If God desires them to stand, they will and if God desires them to spread the Holy Gospel in another manner, it is God's will, not our own.

2) Guarding Our Hearts Against Defilement

An angry mob incites more destruction. Healing does not come from anger but from discernment and right actions against injustice. Wisdom will not incite additional burning and bombing of churches until the appropriate time for government accountability for restoration. This will take a leader whom acknowledges that Egypt's Christian citizens deserve protection, safety where they live and worship, and preservation of its culture and history.

Just as the pyramids still stand acknowledging a belief no longer to be the belief of the majority of Egypt's population so must our churches be allowed to stand without threat.

The Lord Jesus Christ walked on water without difficulty in the midst of an angry, swelling sea on waves tossing about uncontrollably. St. Peter could not. He was not as strong nor in control of what was happening around him as the Lord, and cried out "*Lord, save me!*" (Matthew 14:29) when he thought he could walk upon the water in the same manner as the Lord. It became evident to St. Peter very quickly that his pride and faith without God could not make him feel safe.

Contemplation, meditation, silence when there are no answers, and prayer make up the spiritual persistence needed for a country with unrest and political government change. "*Every kingdom divided against it is brought to desolation and every city or house divided against it will not stand.*" (Matthew 12:25). We are called to be united in our actions, not be retaliatory, and listen to the call of the church--His Holiness Pope Shenouda as our leader. We must support the leadership of the Coptic Church and not take matters into individual hands led by emotions of anger, accusation, and destruction. This is the underlying attempt of those

who seek to do us harm--to divide us into smaller groups and have us labeled as "protestors", "unruly", and "emotionally charged" rather than calm, spiritual, strong, and reverent followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

3) Believing In the Fullness of God's Time

Do we fight for a cause with zeal and lose all honors to God? Does a country come before God? If so, then where does He rank? Do our own desires and interests take precedent over those of what the church teaches? It is human nature to want justice, right wrongs, and demand restoration. Actually it is the means by which people orderly and peacefully exist. This will come with wisdom "in God's time" not with hostility and demand from those temporarily in power with no vested interests in a country's political future but simply maintaining stability in the easiest manner possible.

From the earliest of time, the church fathers who knew persecution as a way of life wrote about the way to benefit from it and bear fruit from it.

Lactantius (c. 304-314) teaches, "It is a virtue to restrain anger, to control personal desire, and to curb lust. For this is to flee from vice. For almost all things that are done unjustly and dishonestly arise from these affections...Also if desire is restrained, no

one will use violence by land or by sea. Nor will anyone lead an army to carry off and lay waste the property of others...It is not virtue, either, to be the "enemy of bad" or "the defender of good"...When the agreement of men is taken away, virtue has no existence at all. For what are the interests of our country, but the hardships of another state or nation? To extend the boundaries that are violently taken from others, to increase the power of the state, to improve the revenues—all of these things are not virtues, but the overthrowing of virtues."

Clement of Alexandria, c.195 wrote, "When again, He says, 'When they persecute you in this city, flee to another,' He does not advise flight as if persecution were an evil thing, nor does He command them to avoid death by flight—as if in the dread of death. Rather, He wishes us to be neither the authors nor abettors of any evil to anyone—either to ourselves or to the persecutor and murderer."

"O blessed ones, count whatever is hard in this lot of yours as a discipline of your powers of mind and body. You are about to pass through a noble struggle, in which the living God acts the part of superintendent in which the Holy Spirit is your trainer, and in which the prize is an eternal crown of angelic essence—citizenship in the heavens, glory everlasting" (Tertullian c.197).

What do we know from the fullness of time? Coptic Christianity not only has survived but flourished from two thousand years of persecution and martyrdom. Today, we have examples of those who walked before us as how to conduct ourselves and we should follow in their footsteps.

Suffering is difficult and uncomfortable but realizing that our response to it is how God and the world will judge us. Let us not be found with lacking virtuous suffering for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. Instead let us follow in His ever example of understanding the wisdom of God behind the suffering—giving rise to the birth and spread of Christianity.

May the Lord be glorified in us and with us,

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