

**SCHOOL OF MISSION AND THEOLOGY**

**CONFLICTS BETWEEN CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS IN EGYPT  
SINCE 1980**

**CHRISTIAN PRESPECTIVS ON BEING A MINORITY IN EGYPT**

**BY**

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## **DEDICATION**

I would like to dedicate this piece of work to my family for their moral support through out this hard journey.

I also dedicate this piece of work to Professor Jan Opsal, who poured out his heart to guide me, not only in academic and supervisory capacities but also as a parent. I am truly thankful to him.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Background to the Study

#### 1.1.0. First recent turning point in relation between Muslims and Christians.

There are two recent turning points in relation between Muslims and Christians. The first turning point had been considered in 1982, when a conflict had happened between some Christians and some Muslims in a quarter called el-zawia el-hamra<sup>1</sup>(the red nook). Basically, that conflict took place when a Christian guy started to construct house on a piece of land possessing by his. Some Muslims thought that he was not constructing his won house but a church. Those Muslims were trying to stop what the Christian man doing was because according to Muslims and due to much restrictions issued by the regime regarding churches construction is not allowed to Christians to construct a church in Islamic land. Otherwise, they must get an official permission from the regime after fulfilling a prerequisite regulation. The Christian man had refused to stop while some other Christian joined him to help him against Muslims. As result, that conflict had extended to the whole district. Many people were killed and others injured. In addition, several Christians houses had been burned by Muslims

Based on that dramatic and violent conflict the relation between Muslims and Christian has getting sick and weak. Unfortunately, Anwar el-Sadat the president of the state at that time, had contributed to that sickness and weakness of the relation between Muslims and Christians. At his first speech responding to such event, Anwar el-Sadat criticized the church leaders, especially Pope Shenouda III, the head of Coptic Orthodox church. In addition, he did criticize the way of teaching at Sunday school. He claimed that teachings given to youth and children by religious leaders at Sunday school are shaping their minds to be on the side of Intolerance and hating others whom are different in faith. In fact, Christians had refused

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<sup>1</sup>[http://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%A9\\_%D8](http://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%A9_%D8)

Accessed in February 20<sup>th</sup> 2011

el-zawia el-hamra one of Cairo districts locating to the north. Founded by Anwar el-Sadat for peoples who were living in slums around the Capital.

that claims with much anxiety. That anxiety has reflected among Christians after that given speech especially when Anwar el-Sadat stated at the same speech that he is a Muslim ruler ruling Muslim State. That statement had been received among Christian as a direct threat to them coming from the state. Moreover, Christians became more anxious after El-Sadat enforce Pope Shenouda III, to leave his headquarter and his responsibilities as a head of Coptic orthodox church to another religious leader who was one of Archbishops of Orthodox Church. The tension between Muslims and Christian had reached its top after Pope Shenouda III, left his headquarter and went to stay at his preferable monastery i.e Wadi el- Natron<sup>2</sup> where he used to go form time to time to rest and being just with himself. Enforcing the Pope to leave and being under house arrest had left Christian with convention that they are treating by the state like strangers not citizens .Moreover, some Christians were viewing what had happened in el- zawia el- hamra as a beginning of a new era of persecution . Others consider it as bad sign of shaking the stability of Egyptian society. That shaking might be a result of political system failing to mange the conflict between Christian and Muslims. In fact, the conflict between Muslims and Christians had colored the Egyptian society by Religious intolerance. By other words intolerant environment had been created by that conflict. That intolerant environment had given opportunity to fundamentalists from both sides to showing up. Those fundamentalists were feeding intolerance environment by which the relation between Muslim and Christians impacted and conflict between them getting increased. Muslims brotherhood and Christian fundamentalists are taking the responsibility of feeding conflict and creating that intolerant environment. In fact, Fundamentalists from both sides were very active especially among universities students where many conflict and violent action had occurred between Muslims and Christians students. At that time, some students all over the country stop attending their classes and waiting for exams to avoid that conflict or violent actions might take place. Fanaticism is getting increase in our society influence the relation between Muslims and Christians.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.anbawissa.org/vb/showthread.php?t=25802> Accessed in March 12<sup>th</sup> 2011  
Wadi el-Natron one of the Egyptian monastery locating 15 k.m to North West Cairo.

### **1.1.1. Second recent turning point in relation between Muslims and Christians.**

The Second recent turning point in relation between Muslims and Christians had been considered in 1990 when Some Muslim fundamentalists belonging to Gamaat El- jihad<sup>3</sup> (Jehad group) commit certain acts of violence against Government installations and tourists as well as some political leaders. They assassinated the Chairman of the Egyptian Parliament at this time (Refaat El- Mahjoob). Therefore, the state started seriously to fight and stand against terrorists. Actually, it took many years and many efforts done by security forces to put those terrorists under control. By controlling them a feeling of relief had taken place in our society especially among Christian. That feeling of relief had broken down when some Muslims opened fire at Christmas night last year while people celebrating the event at the orthodox church locating in Nageh Hammadi (550 k.m. to the south Cairo). As a result, seven people were killed and many were injured. In fact, that event had affected many Christian all over the country and some of them start calling up for revenge. Indeed, that incident had brought back that feeling of unsecure among Christian community which they experienced in 1980s. Again feeling of unsecure associated with anger is reflecting among Christians. That anger had been expressed loudly this time. By other words, Christians way of expressing their anger had been changed. It becomes loud and no longer peaceful. Accordingly, several demonstrations inside and outside Egypt took place to condemn the event and asking for justice and revenge for Christians victims. In fact, some other tensions between Muslims and Christians had occurred based on what had happened in Nageh Hammadi. No doubt, that Nageh Hammady incident had impacted negatively the relation between Muslims and Christians. It left Christians with much fear and Sense of disaffiliation to the country. Accordingly many Christians especially the young ones like to immigrate to the United States or Europe where they might restore their feeling of secure and have a better life. Many of them apply every year to a green Card program issued by United States of America hopefully to get a chance to immigration. No doubt, that Nageh Hammadi incident as well as some other violent actions had happened against Christians by extremist had made emigration and flee the country among the basic dreams of Christian's youth. Unfortunately, frustration is dominating their view of life. According to that view, life without feeling

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<sup>3</sup> A radical group using violence as a part of its religious identity.



secure it has no meaning and Valueless. So, seeking better life and better security is their right. Indeed Nageh Hammadi incident had left them sick by the dream of immigration as well as their relation with Muslims has got health setback. It was sick by fragility for a long time and what happened in Nageh Hammadi revealed to what extent that fragility infected the relationship between both sides.

The Impacts of such violent action over the relation between Muslims and Christians had motivated many specialists and scholars from different fields to put that type of relation under investigation. They assume that relation between Muslims and Christian in Egypt has dramatically changed thought the last three decades. It changes from co-existence to conflict associated with violence. In addition, they almost agreed that religion is the corner stone of building up or break down that relationship. Religion might be function as source of conflict or a source of peace. Whether, we agree or not about viewing the role of religion that way, we might not deny its role in reproducing and constructing the value system especially in Egyptian society, therefore, life in Egypt seems very religiously. So, some sociologist claim, that religion's role is inseparable with social circumstances to very extent by means; the more individuals have social problems the more they become religious. That inseparability might be reflecting obviously among poor and middle class members. In fact, the roots of that inseparable relationship have stretch back to ancient times, where people are used to face their problems and life challenges by myth. At antiquity, most of religious beliefs are shaped through myth. It was dominating People's life, the way of viewing and understanding reality, and social relationships as well. That shows us, how wide the role of myth was. Indeed, religion takes over that role especially, in Egyptian daily life. Being religious is one of the best options capturing Egyptians mind especially the middle class members. In a study by Dr. Saad Eldeen Wahba about social characteristics of one radical religious group has an act of aggression against a high school in 1974. He found that most of its members belonging to the middle class and not highly educated as well<sup>4</sup>. That observation leads to an acclimation that religion could be used as means of poor peoples to facing life problems and pressures .In fact, that acclimation is disapproved by most Muslims

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<sup>4</sup> Galal Ameen, *Whatever happened to the Egyptians? Changes in Egyptian society from 1950 to the present* (The American University in Cairo Press, Cairo / New York, 2000), 90.

Saad Eldeen wahba is one of oppositionists to the Egyptian government and the founder of Ibn Khaldown center for human rights locating in Cairo.

and Christian religious leaders. According to them, word means should not associated with religion. Religion should be a goal in itself not a mean and people who are using religion as a mean for any purpose except worship their religiosity is not true. In fact, the acclimation made by Dr. Saad came back to the spot light with much evidence after arresting the attacking group who committed the violent action in Nageh Hammadi. That group has three members all of them are not highly educated and belonging to the middle class. Unfortunately the majority of Egyptians are including in that middle class where tensions and conflicts are reproducing. So, it was not surprise to find the attacking group of Nageh Hammadi belonging to that middle class. Regardless, to what class those people are belonging to their crime affected whole society and put the relation between Muslims and Christians in a turning point. It affects the society in general and Christians in particular .Frankly, I am among those Christians affected by what had happened in Nageh Hammadi. That incident motivated me to ask why the relation between Muslims and Christians in Egypt characterized by conflict and violence? The study will go deeply into details to analyze to find out an answer to that question.

## **1.2 Statement of the problem**

Conflicts and tensions between Muslims and Christian exposed in many different areas in Egypt, and in most cases, associated with violence. It might be a direct threat to co-existence and peaceful living in our society. The study, will try to find out the sources of that conflict from Christian perspective.

## **1.3 Objectives**

### **1.3.1 Main Objectives**

1. The main objective of the study will be to analyze the Christian understanding of violent expressions conflict between Muslims and Christians in Egypt from 1980-2011 with regards to the processes and causes of those violent events and proposed suggestions for improvements .

### **1.3.2 Specific Objectives**

1. To analyze the process of conflicts in different parts in Egypt in Egypt.
2. To find out how much knowledge people have about the real causes of the conflict.
3. To figure out some ideas and elements that can be put in place to reduce conflict and restore the co-existence.

### **1.4 Scope of the Study**

The study will focus on the current situation concerning the relation between Muslim and Christian especially in some parts affected by conflict and violence to find out what could be done to help and improve the relation between Muslims and Christians and restore their peaceful living.

### **1.5 Research Questions:**

The data in the study will be collected with the help of the following questions;

How do Christian religious leaders perceive conflict?

How do Christian religious leaders explain the relation between social changes and conflict?

What do Christian religious leaders see as the causes of conflict?

How do Christian religious leaders see the possibilities to restore peace and co-existence?

How do Christian religious leaders think that forgiveness and reconciliation can take place?

What do Christian religious leaders do or advice to restore co-existence?

The Significance of the Study:

The study may Non-governmental organizations and policy makers to have alternative approaches to conflict management and restoring co-existence.

The data in the study will be significant for Egyptians to figure out the causes and consequences of conflict over the Egyptians society.

## **1.6 Challenges of the Study**

The information may not be easily got from the people especially Muslims and may people have some fear to reveal more information, since the researcher belonging to Christianity and coming from a different part of the country.

Finding key persons helping me to have accurate and good information might not be easy and can take a quit long time.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE EGYPTIAN CONTEXT

The history influenced the present, so a historical account is needed. In this Chapter, I will try to identify some problems contributing to conflicts between Muslims and Christians since the coming of Islam to Egypt up to the regime of Anwar El-Sadat with special regard to the marginalizing of Christians in the society.

#### **2.1 Egypt encounters Islam**

##### **2.1.1 Taxes**

When Islam incoming to Egypt (639 - 640)<sup>5</sup>. Egyptians welcomed Muslims with expectation that Muslims might save them from the Byzantine regime.<sup>6</sup> At that time, Egyptians were very oppressed and exhausted by taxes that Byzantines enforced them to pay. It was a heavy burden on their shoulders. So, Egyptians were hoping to get rid of Byzantine governance.

Taxes were determining the relationship between folk and regimes. People might feel satisfied with a regime when taxes are light and dissatisfied when taxes are heavy. So, taxes were used a tool of oppression in the Byzantine era. Of course, the question of taxation was a key element in order to understand why many Egyptian Christians welcomed Muslims to Egypt.

##### **2.1.2 Jizyah as a main fund resource**

Muslims commander (Amr Ibn al-' Aas) declared that Egyptian Christians had three options as follows:

- i. Embracing Islam and being exempt from paying Jyzia<sup>7</sup>.
- ii. Paying *Jizyah*.

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<sup>5</sup> Abd El- Aziz Gmal El- Dien , *Tarikh Maser* "Egypt History"( Madbouly press, Cairo, 2006) , 659-660.

<sup>6</sup> Zachary Lockman , *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism* (Cambridge University press, 2005) , 22.

<sup>7</sup> Regular tax should be paid by non-Muslims living in a Muslim state.

iii. Fighting against Muslims.<sup>8</sup>

Many Christians has chosen to embrace Islam in order to be exempted from paying *Jizyah*<sup>9</sup>. Embracing Islam increased the number of Muslims on one hand and decreased the national income on the other hand. So, a militant Muslim leaders Mawya was thinking to stop Christians coming into Islam to keep the sources of income in balance<sup>10</sup>

### 2.1.3 Roots of discrimination

When things settled down, Amr Ibn al-' Aas started managing and organizing the country. He started collecting taxes from Christians to meet the needs of the Muslim military forces. As the process of collecting started, Christian's fears of Muslim Invaders began to re-emerge. Those fears had sharply view after a document had been issued by the Caliph Umar, articulating some regulations which discriminated Christians in the Islamic state.

It is unknown why Caliph Amar had issued that document, by which Christians were instructed to:

Pay *Jizyah*

Hosting Muslims submitting to referees.

Riding donkeys, mules as means of transportations and not horses like Muslims.

Not override Muslim homes.

Not dressing in the same clothes of Muslims in terms of color or design.

Not perform restoration of a church.

Those conditions were used as a primary reference to many Egyptian rulers, guiding them in their ways of treating Christians. Obviously, that document was primarily concerned with duties of Christian's living in the Islamic state rather than their rights. It says nothing about rights of Christians as citizens.

This document might be considered as a document legitimizing discrimination and segregation of Christians. According to that document, Christians were responsible for financing the Muslims government by paying *Jizyah*. In fact, Jyzia, and other taxes imposed by Muslim leaders afterwards have burdened Christians very much and caused some of them

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<sup>8</sup> Jack Tager, *Aqbat wa Muslomuon "Copts and Muslims": from Islam to 1922* (The Egyptian General Egyptian Book, Cairo, 2010), 65.

<sup>9</sup> Gmal El- Dien, *Tarikh Maser*, 21.

<sup>10</sup> Tager, *Aqbat wa Muslomuon*, 51.

to flee from a place to another escaping and avoiding paying taxes<sup>11</sup>. It was not only the *Jizyah*, it caused oppression of Christians but the rest of conditions mentioned above had the same effect. Those conditions overwhelmed Christians since then and are still problematic so far. For example, one of these conditions prevents renovation of churches or places of worship which was devastated by the invasion. Moreover, Christians should not construct a new church or a new place for worship especially in the towns constructed by Muslims. According to the Muslim view, building a church in an Islamic land or in an Islamic state was not allowed.

Some Muslim leaders failed to adhere to that condition and allowed Christians to renovate some places of worship particularly, those places Muslims devastated when they came into Egypt.

In fact, the construction or refurbishment of churches was an issue of contention between Muslim rulers<sup>12</sup>. Some were applying the conditions of Caliph Umar straightly were considering preventing of renovation or construction of churches among their duties in order to preserve the Islamic identity of the State. Others permitted some churches to be renovated or constructed and viewed that as symbols of tolerance and not against the Islamic identity of the state. For example, in 785 the prince of Egypt, Ali Ibn Soliman, decided to devastate Christian churches especially the new constructed ones, while Mosa Ibn Issa, the following prince in 787 called Christians to reconstruct the churches and got some money from them in return. In 1013 Al- Hakem be-Amer Allah<sup>13</sup> (ruling according God's order) gave his order to destroy all the churches and monasteries all over the country and take out all of it's properties. At that time, it was said, thirty thousand churches and monasteries were destroyed completely<sup>14</sup>. This political confusion about church building or renovation has created an atmosphere full of misunderstandings between the two sides and weak capacity to communicate<sup>15</sup>. Moreover, preventing church building or refurbishment had created feelings of alienation among Christians. It impacts their sense of belonging to their country.

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<sup>11</sup> Gmal El- Dien, *Tarikh Maser* , 21-22.

<sup>12</sup>Tager, *Aqbat wa Muslomuon* , 85.

<sup>13</sup> One of the Fatimid governors he ruled Egypt from 966 up to 1020.

<sup>14</sup> Tager, *Aqbat wa Muslomuon* , 45.

<sup>15</sup> Tager, *Aqbat wa Muslomuon* , 85-86.

#### **2.1.4 Culture boundaries problem**

The conditions issued by Caliph Umar have created many boundaries between Muslims and Christians in Egypt. According to those conditions, Christians were not allowed to dress like Muslims. Their clothes should be different in color and design from the clothes of Muslims. Moreover, in 1011 al-Hakem be-Amer Allah commanded Christians to hang a big wooden cross in their necks to make it easy to identify them. Enforcing Christians wearing clothes of a different color and design has created culture barriers by which the distinction between Christians and Muslims reflects and characterizes their social life.

In addition, Christians had been enforced to ride their donkeys the most common transportation at that time, the same way women do. It has prevailed as insulting and dehumanization because women were less valuable than men at that time. By other words, enforcing a man to act like a woman was seen as dehumanizing the man.

#### **2.1.5 Employment problem**

By that time, another condition had been added. It was about recruiting Christians as employees. According to that condition, Muslims might replace Christians employees and no longer recruiting them. Indeed, that condition was seen as an implementation of what was mentioned in Qur'an according to Surah Al-ma'idah (5 v.51).

“O you who believe! Take not the Jews and the Christians as *Auliya'* (friends, protectors, helpers, etc.), they are but *Auliya'* to one another. And if any amongst you takes them as *Auliya'*, then surely he is one of them. Verily, Allah guides not those people who are the *Zalimun* (polytheists and wrong-doers and unjust)”

Christians had unique experience in managing funds and accounts. Therefore, some Muslims rulers ignored that condition and left Christians employees in charge of accounts due to their good experience in the field. Others insisted to replace them by Muslims regardless their experience and qualification to take over those jobs.

In fact, the way that Muslims rulers dealt with that issue of Christian's employment in Islamic state, created fears and anxiety among Christians. It had negative repercussions on their social life and standards of living as well. They were forced to leave their jobs and no other option was available to them except working as daily workers as agricultural labor to get some money for daily expenses. Some of those went to Monasteries, to live and avoid



paying taxes because; people living there were not under taxes. It was temporary privilege given to such places and people living there.

### **2.1.5.1 Employment and language issue**

When Arabic was decided to be the official language of the country instead of Coptic and Greek, many Christians, accelerated to learn Arabic, especially, those who were eager to keep their jobs because of their proficiency and lack of alternative. They rushed to learn Arabic with much fear of losing their jobs. It was a challenge to Christian employees pressuring them to do much effort for keeping their life going.

### **2.1.6 Lack of economic resources and violence**

In fact, many rulers had been challenged by lack of economic resources and growing needs of Egyptian society. They used to impose more taxes to increase economic recourses and face the growing needs of their society.

Imposing many taxes had created a significant gap between the rulers and the people. Taxes were among the main reasons of tension and conflict at that time. It had led to El-Bashmorein revolution in 831, when a Christian group protested and refused to pay taxes.<sup>16</sup> Their revolution was the first and most powerful conflict arose between Christians and the State. Many violent actions had taken place as many of El-Bashmorein killed and the rest enslaved. They were treated like animals and used to grind grains instead of the animals.<sup>17</sup>

Generally, the previous conditions issued by the Caliph Omar had laid down by the time. It might be possible that Omar himself did not intend to create that discrimination between Christians and Muslims but to preserve Arab identity by implementing those conditions to social life in Egypt.

Subsequently, those conditions became the basis of the distinction between Muslims and Christians. It was a powerful weapon in the ruler's hand, helping to validate and justify pressures and discrimination against Christians. Moreover, it slows cultural interaction between Muslims and Christians.

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<sup>16</sup> Tager, *Aqbat wa Muslomuon* , 112-113.

<sup>17</sup> Tager, *Aqbat wa Muslomuon* , 114.

## **2.2 Some sort of tolerance**

### **2.2.1 The Tulunids regime**

The Altolonet and Fatimid were the most tolerant years for Christians. Curiously, in those periods Governors and Sultans were treating Christians well and were eased many taxes especially at Ibn Tulun regime. At that regime, the relation between the government and Christian grassroots was improving to good but it was not the same with the Christian Patriarch. The relationship between the Patriarch and Ahmad Ibn Tulun was very tense because the Patriarch was not supporting the legitimacy of Ibn Tulun regime. So, Ibn Tulun decided to put the Patriarch at single jail where he spent a full year. After one year a Christian man who was having a good relation with Ibn Tulun appealed to him to release the Patriarch after paying a sum of money determined by the Governor. Unfortunately, the Patriarch was unable to pay that money which was about 20,000 dinars. So, he had been returned back to the jail and remained there up to death of Ibn Tulun. This way of treating the Patriarch had left Christians with anger and feeling bad towards the regime although that regime demonstrated some sort of tolerance towards them.

### **2.2.2 The Fatimids**

The Fatimid regime, was characterized by tolerance towards the Christians since the beginning of that regime up to El-hakim be- Amer Allah period who oppressed the Christians very much. They were persecuted and suffered from discrimination on all levels.

In 1012 some were killed and many embraced Islam to avoid that persecution. In addition, Christian's immigrants to Romans land had been manifested.<sup>18</sup> Christians became seriously marginalized minority.

In addition, it could be mentioned about that period was the theological differences in Christological issues between the Christians coming from the East (Jacobites or non-Chalcedonians) and the Christians coming from the West (Melkites or Chalcedonians ). This Egyptian controversy motivated Christians in Egypt to assist Salah El-Dinm, who have some

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<sup>18</sup> Tager, *Aqbat wa Muslomuon* , 145-149.

attempt to revive Muslim sea power, to invading Egypt and expel crusaders.<sup>19</sup> Christians were viewing crusaders as dishonest in fulfilling their promises they made before coming to Egypt. Those promises were including respecting and honoring all Christian groups. Crusaders were not respecting their promises.

They viewed Egyptian Christians as Atheist and prevented them to visit Jerusalem. Christians in Egypt were characterized as atheists due to their theological perspectives regarding the nature of Jesus Christ, which was different from views of the crusades. In fact, dogmatically differences and arguments between Egyptian Christians and crusaders might be standing behind the fact that Christians supported Salah El-Dine to defeat the crusaders. Although, that Christians welcomed Salah El-Dine many Muslims were thinking that Christian were supporting the crusades against Muslims which led Muslims to have more pressure on them. They viewed the Christians as their enemies due to their convictions that Christians had given the crusaders some help. That claim has no historical evidence supporting it unfortunately; it has been devolved to a stereotype impacting the relation between Christianity and Islam in general and the relation between Christian and Muslims in Egypt in particular<sup>20</sup>

### **2.2.3 Mamluk regime**

In the Mamluk era, Christians did not experience much difference or changes. Most of them were poor and totally neglected people. Long term marginalization had led them to be accustomed to humiliation and living simple lives.

However, in the Mamluk era some Christians were appointed for the financial and administrative jobs for their competence. It was an opportunity for those to set a good relation with authorities and earn some money. They gave some help to churches and monasteries which had reached a very bad condition and needed financial support. Among those Christian who was very unique in financial administration and very famous by his wisdom, was Ibrahim El- Gohary who died in the year 1797.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Alan G. Jamieson, *Faith and Sword: a Short History of Christian–Muslim Conflict* (Reaktion books Ltd, London, U.K ,2006) ,66.

<sup>20</sup> Tager, *Aqbat wa Muslomuon* , 181.

<sup>21</sup> Tager, *Aqbat wa Muslomuon* , 215-216.

#### 2.2.4 French Campaign

The French Campaign in (1798-1801) by Napoleon Bonaparte who had lifted some restrictions on Christian rituals and festivals and gave Christians more freedom to practice their religion. He had shown some passion towards Christian for a short time<sup>22</sup>. Afterwards, Christians and Muslims as well were oppressed by the French campaign leaders. Christian daily life had no changes worthy to be mentioned except the freedom of worship which had been given to them and to Muslims as well. In spite of Christians having no especial advantages, Muslims were viewing them as traitors who cooperated with their French enemies. That claim was controlling Muslims' minds towards Christians even after the French left Egypt. That claim had impact the relation between Muslims and Christians deeply for a long time and let the gap between them getting wider<sup>23</sup>

#### 2.2.5 Muhammad Ali era

When Mohamed Ali<sup>24</sup> came to power in Egypt (1805-1848), he worked very hard to establish justice and tolerance in Egyptian society as well as rebuilding a modern State. In fact, Mohamed Ali's era was the most significant time in terms of tolerance and justice in Egyptian community. He had a strong belief in equality as basic foundation of building a modern state. So, believing in equality colored his way of organizing and administrating the country. He was determined to establish peace and co-existence between Christians and Muslims by overcoming the hostility which had been left behind by the French Campaign and impacted the relation between Muslims and Christians. His spirit of tolerance motivated him to confront discrimination between Christians and Muslims on the basis of clothing and way of dressing which goes back to the time of invasion of Egypt by Muslims. In addition,

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<sup>22</sup> Tager, *Aqbat wa Muslomuon* , 223.

<sup>23</sup> Tager, *Aqbat wa Muslomuon* , 235.

<sup>24</sup> According to Wikipedia, he was an Ottoman of Albanian origin, who became an Ottoman Wāli, and self-declared Khedive of Egypt and Sudan. Though not a modern nationalist, he is regarded as the founder of modern Egypt because of the dramatic reforms in the military, economic and cultural spheres that he instituted. He also ruled Levantine territories outside Egypt. The dynasty that he established would ruled Egypt and Sudan until the Egyptian Revolution of 1952

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muhammad\\_Ali\\_of\\_Egypt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muhammad_Ali_of_Egypt) . Accessed in February 15th 2011.

more freedom was given to Christians to practice their worship and he never rejected any claim regarding construction or renovation of their churches.<sup>25</sup>

Also, some of his descendants coming after him followed his policy towards Christians like Wali Saeed Pasha and Khedive Ismail. Both of them asserted that the Christians are not strangers or foreigners but Egyptians. In order to confirm this, Saeed Pasha issued an order in December 1855 to set Christians free from *Jizyah* a decision which was considered as conclusive evidence confirming the principle of equality. Of course, setting Christians free from *Jizyah* had left them with a deep satisfaction and relief.

### **2.2.6 Khedive Ismail legitimizing tolerance and equality**

Tolerance and equality was further confirmed by Khedive Ismail when declared officially that Christians and Muslims are alike in all levels<sup>26</sup>. Moreover, he opened the door to the Christian to nominate and being among the candidates of the Consultative Council. This was a further step for supporting and asserting equality between Muslims and Christians which did not exist before. So, the relation between Christians and Muslims was some what improved through that equality.

### **2.2.7 British colonization enrich mistrust**

Unfortunately, the improvements that Khedive Ismail gave to the relation between Muslims and Christians were not to last for long time. The relation was back to worse by the time of British colonization.

When the British colonized Egypt, Christians were accused by Muslims of supporting the British troops and affirming their mission of colonizing Egypt. That accusation had impacted the relation between Muslims and Christians negatively. Their relation was colored by mistrust and they became more skeptical towards each other.

Muslims and Christians weren't happy with that unstable relation. So, Christians had supported very much Ahmed Orabi<sup>27</sup> when he was standing against khedive Tawfeek and the

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<sup>25</sup> Tager, *Aqbat wa Muslomuon*, 242.

<sup>26</sup> Tager, *Aqbat wa Muslomuon*, 249.

<sup>27</sup> According to Wikipedia he was an Egyptian military commander and leader, had led revaluation against khedive Tewfik which was the first national revolution in the history of modern Egypt.

British colonization. Through that affirmation they were able to approve and declare their opposition to British colonization. They were trying to restore their relation with Muslims as it was before colonization. Ahmed Orabi helped both Muslims and Christians to overcome their mistrust and reunite on the basis of their citizenship rather than religion. Egyptian citizenship became their common ground.

### **2.2.8 Unique model of co-operation**

The common ground created as a result of Orabi revolution, resulted in another revolution against British colonization led by Saad Zaghlol in 1919. Muslims and Christians were standing together supporting each other as much as possible against the British colonization. The success of that revolution was based on the unity between Christians and Muslims<sup>28</sup> that type of unity expressed in 1919 was very unique. It gave Christians an opportunity to affirm their Egyptian citizenship. They were no longer strangers or foreigners. The former accusation that Christians were supporting colonizing Egypt by British had completely been demolished and no longer existed. Therefore, after independence was declared in 1922, Egyptian political and some civil leaders worked very hard to establish the first Egyptian constitution which was issued in 1923<sup>29</sup> focusing on equality of all Egyptian citizens regardless their religion or faith as well as the full freedom in practicing the religious rituals and worships. In addition, it became possible for Christians to have jobs in the government administration<sup>30</sup>

### **2.2.9 Muslims Brotherhood contribute to discrimination**

Discrimination between Muslims and Christians had reflected back just after Saad Zaghlol cabinet stepped down. Again discrimination developed to marginalize Christians in the society.

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It mentioned in Wikipedia that he had born in 1 Apr, 1841, in the Village of Haret Rozana East County. He had been sent by his father, who was Mayor of the village to religious education to Learning Quran. In 1849, and then joined the military school to be among the military leaders afterwards  
<http://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki> Accessed in Feb.17<sup>th</sup> 2011.

<sup>28</sup>William Solyman Glada, *Al-masehia wa al-eslam ala ard Maser* “Christianity and Islam on Egypt land” (Dar el-Horia press, Cairo, 1986), 250.

<sup>29</sup> Tareek El-Beshery, *Muslimoon wa -al aqbat Fi el- Gamah el-Watanya* “Muslims and Copts within national group” (Dar el-shrouk, Cairo, 1988), 163.

<sup>30</sup> Tager, *Aqbat wa Muslomuon* , 263.

Marginalizing Christians had been accepted and now it got the full supporting of the religious Muslim leaders especially those who were belonging to radical Muslims movements like the Muslims Brotherhood<sup>31</sup>.

Muslims brotherhood founder Hassan El-Banna, had played an essential role to mobilizing and convincing the public that marginalizing Christians is a religious duty. According to Hassan El-Banna, marginalizing and oppressing Christians are not against Islam.

Moreover, the Muslims Brotherhood is viewing Christians as infidels and considering them enemies of God as well as of Islam.

Animosity towards Christians had grown up and became stronger especially after finding one American evangelist (who was having a permission issued by Ministry of endowment in Egypt, allowing him as a foreigner to visit Mosques and Muslims sites) distributing Christian pamphlets inside El-Azhar calling Muslims to embrace Christianity. In fact, that incident had influenced the relation between Muslims and Christians very much.<sup>32</sup> It became like a crisis devastating the relation, not just between the religious leaders from both sides but between Muslims and Christians in general. At that time, Christian's institutions like hospitals and schools founded by missionaries were accused by having an evangelism agenda covered by educational or medical mission, targeting Muslims in order to convert them to Christianity. That claim had been expressed by the Muslims Brotherhood. They were warning Muslims against having relationships with infidels like Christians or Jews which according to them are against Islam.

Indeed, missionaries activities in Egypt at that time, had fed unintentionally strengthened the Muslim radical groups. For example, Muslims brotherhood had appointed themselves to guarding and preserving the genuine Islam from Christian evangelism activities. They were

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<sup>31</sup> According to Wikipedia, the Brotherhood is an Islamic movement and the largest political opposition organization in Egypt. It was founded in 1928 in Egypt by the Islamic scholar and schoolteacher Hassan al-Banna. The Brotherhood's stated goal is to instill the Qur'an and Sunnah as the sole reference point for ordering the life of the Muslim family, individual, community and state. Since its inception in 1928 the movement has officially opposed violent means to achieve its goals. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muslim\\_Brotherhood](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muslim_Brotherhood) Accessed in Mar. 3<sup>rd</sup> 2011.

<sup>32</sup> Tareek El-Beshery, *Muslimoon wa -al aqbat Fi el- Gamah el-Watanya*, 467.

in competition with Christian missionaries, attacking each other<sup>33</sup>. That tension created a very radical trend towards Christians as a minority.

### **2.2.10 Calling for implementing Islamic law**

At that time, many Muslims leaders and intellectuals were asking for the implementation of the Islamic law (Sharia). Hassan El-Banna was one calling and focusing on the necessity of implementing the Islamic law in Egypt as the majority were Muslims.

In addition, some other voices were calling for re- implementing *Jizyah* and argued that Christians should pay it back retrospectively. In fact, advocating the necessity of applying Sharia and re-implementing *Jizyah* really frightened the Christians who had suffered a long time by paying *Jizyah* which impacted their economic and social life as well.

Christians were expecting that implementing Sharia would made it possible to accuse many of them of blasphemy, heresy and insulting Islam which deserve death penalty according to Sharia they viewed Sharia implementation as a new threat of persecution and oppression.

The Muslims Brotherhood was working hard to accomplish Hassan El-Banna's call for Sharia Implementation. They organized a large media campaign against the Egyptian Constitution through some Islamic newspapers and magazines, stressing that the Constitution in force which is focusing on equality of all citizens regardless their religion or faith, is in fact against the Islamic law<sup>34</sup>. But this campaign did not find sufficient support among Egyptians. Their experience with the Constitution was good and they did not see the values of freedom, justice and equality as values against Islam, but rather as values supported by Islam and Muslims since the first ages of Islam.

Despite the failure of the campaign press, they still asked for Sharia implementation. It's an essential goal motivating them to stand against that constitution. They have hope that one day

Sharia implementation will achieve. That hope of the Muslims Brotherhood cause Christian fears of persecution and oppression to grow deeper. Fears of persecution and oppression are dominating Christian minds and leading them to be passive more than active in the public arena. They were not able to express their fears or their problems, challenges and needs

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<sup>34</sup> Tareek El-Beshery, *Muslimoon wa -al aqbat Fi el- Gamah el-Watanya*, 484-486.



loudly. From a Christian point of view, expressing fears or needs loudly might not help Christians to solve their problems but may create more of them. In addition, they used to defend or justify their passivity and lack of participation especially in the political life.

According to some sociologists, passivity of Christians had given Muslims radical groups more confidence to work to establishing an Islamic state and implementing Sharia. Passivity of Christians had made them weak and left them with no power to resist what Muslim radical groups want to do.

The Muslim Brotherhood was among those groups who were viewing Christians as a minority having no rights except to live according to the Sharia law if they wanted to stay in Egypt.

Moreover, the passivity of Christians affected their own life. They preferred to separate themselves from Muslims, for example, most of the Christian parents especially who are living in cities and urban areas like to send their children to Christian schools.

In addition many churches had founded a small clubs attached to the church building to attract Christian youth and stop them going to public clubs where Muslims youth are attending. That attitude of separation is growing and being justified by Christians after every violent action being performed against them by Muslims radical groups.

### **2.2.11 Gamal Abd El-Nasser regime**

In fact, radical groups, especially the Muslims Brotherhood and Jihad movement<sup>35</sup> had grown very rapidly in numbers since Gamal Abd El-Nasser's regime. That growth had left Christians with more fear and anxiety.

After that Christians got some relief when the regime took action against those radical groups. It happened in 1954 after Gamal Abd El-Nasser had disagreed with the Muslim Brotherhood implementing Sharia and using violence against non-Muslims. As result, Gamal

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<sup>35</sup> According to Wikipedia, the Egyptian Islamic Jihad an Islamist group active since the late 1970s. It is under worldwide embargo by the United Nations as an affiliate of al-Qaeda. It is also banned by several individual governments including that of the Russian Federation. Since 1991 it has been led by Ayman al-Zawahiri the second man of al-Qaeda. The primary goal of Jihad was to found an Islamic state in Egypt. Violence is characterizing jihad movement.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egyptian\\_Islamic\\_Jihad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egyptian_Islamic_Jihad). Accessed in March, 3<sup>rd</sup> 2011.

Abd El-Nasser decided to disunite the Muslims Brotherhood,<sup>36</sup> after which they were not allowed to participate in Egyptian political life and activities. Regardless, that decision of disunity led to that they continued working and growing underground up to Anwar Al- Sadat regime

### **2.2.12 Anwar Al- Sadat regime**

At the beginning of his regime, Anwar Al- Sadat, did his best to improve the relation between the Muslims Brotherhood and the state. He brought them back to the light and encouraged them to do their religious mission. That was proclaiming and provoking people to live and behave according to genuine Islam which they were possessing according to them. In fact, Muslims radical groups in the era of Anwar Al- Sadat era had got more strength especially, after he announced that he is Muslim ruling a Muslim state in one of his famous and tough speeches. That speech was completely against Christians and Christianity. It was like legitimating violence towards Christians. Many conflicts in different places have happened between Muslims and Christians due to that speech. Moreover, many violent actions took place against Christian's leaders as well as churches and institutions. That speech had left Christian with more fears and anxieties. As result, some of them had left the country to live in the United States or in Europe. In other words, the number of Christians emigrants from Egypt had been increased to some extent not only because violent actions but also because of discrimination which was everywhere all over the country. For example, universities were the most remarkable places where discrimination and prejudice devolved among students. Due to that discrimination, many conflicts had happened between Muslim students and Christians student in different universities and different places. Those conflicts had affected Christians and most of them had stopped attending their classes to avoid conflict with Muslims.

Moreover, during the era of Anwar Al- Sadat era, Christians had felt very bad when the Egyptian national T.V. had allowed El- Sharaway one of the most famous Muslims leaders, to have a weekly T.V. program to explain Quran. He often offended and attacked Christianity and Christian thinking. Christians felt very hurt and badly treated. They also

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<sup>36</sup> Terborg, Meerten B. & Willem Van Henten, Jan. (eds, *Powers: Religion as social and spiritual force*. (Fordham University Press, U.S.A 2010), 65.

view that as another faze of legalizing violence and prejudice as well as discrimination against Christians. In fact, the relation between Muslims and Christians had become more fragile in the era of Anwar Al-Sadat era because of that kind of T.V. programs coming through media devoted to spread hatred and prejudice among Muslims and Christians. That fragile relation between Muslims and Christians was full of mistrust and misunderstanding by which conflict was feeding and enriching. Defeating mistrust and misunderstandings might take a long time to be achieved. Muslims and Christian leaders, religious institutions and the state should find out some ways to cooperate to overcome that mistrust which is fuelling most tensions and conflict between them.

### **2.3 Conclusion**

When Christians encountered Islam, they were expecting that Muslims might be different from the Byzantines who oppressed Christians very much. But these expectations about Muslims have failed. Muslims have oppressed Christians in Egypt since their first encounter up till now. Christians are suffering a lot and facing many challenges for a long tem. Those challenges had started with the document that the Caliph Umar issued and are still up till now. Discrimination, intolerance and violence against Christians are always there.

Muslims rulers who tried to establish a tolerance model like Mohamed Ali and some of his followers failed. The tolerance culture of their regimes lasted only short term. It failed to function for a long time because Muslim radical groups were standing against that tolerance culture. Unfortunately, those radical groups are nowadays mobilizing and attracting many Egyptians. They are able to mobilize people towards intolerance and led them to more prejudice. That trend had grown and got more strength under Gamal Abd El-Nasser as well as under Anwar Al- Sadat. As a result, a tolerance culture in Egypt does not exist on the ground. Christians are struggling to have sufficient freedom to reconstruct their church, to have a good job and to experience social justice.

The long term of oppressing Christians might lead Christians to violence to have their rights back as citizens. In that case, Egypt will be having more troubles and facing more difficulties to provide stability and peaceful life for all the citizens of the country.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THEORY AND METHOD

#### 3.1 Theory

##### 3.1.1 Religious conflicts and power

Conflicts integrating religion tend to become heated conflicts, indicating that religion plays a main role in power games. People might use religion to justify conflicts and violence as they play the game of power. In other words, religion is about power but power is not necessarily about religion. Religion might be a tool of power; people use to legitimize conflict and violence. The link between violence and the sacred is an ancient one that grows out of the roots of human cultures (see Girard1997).<sup>37</sup> Associating violence with the sacred might be use as a mean of justification of conflicts and power game.

##### 3.1.2 Heresy and power

Heresy might be a product of the relation between violence and the sacred, so heresy is important to our understanding of religious conflict.

In his book, *Gods in the global village*, Lester R. Kurtz perceives heresy as tool of both explaining as well as creating conflict. He emphasizes that through out church history many conflicts have been related to heresies. So, heresies are intermingled with religious conflicts. They are leading people to stand against each other and expose harming claims.

Heresies represent a religious dimension in conflicts, related to devotees seeking power and trying to dominate a society. In other words, heresies are related to seeking power, justifying conflict and violence. Power is the main target of heresies and the main cause of different types of conflict as well. It's a universal cause of conflict hiding behind social activities and interactions.

Moreover, power is a divisive tool. It divides people, often into two different groups, i.e. dominant and weak. Both dominant and weak groups might use religion for keeping or restoring power. So, religion and power are functioning together in process of "Othering"

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<sup>37</sup> Lester R. Kurtz, *Gods in the global village: the world's religions in sociological perspective* (Pine Forge Press, Thousand Oaks, California, U.S.A, 2007), 247.

especially, in Arab world, where religion is used to legitimize and disguise the arbitrary exercise of power, indicating that a break between religion and power never ever occurred<sup>38</sup> So, Othering is a natural fruit of the relation between religion and power. It's the fruit of their union and the common ground by which both keeping close.

Both religion and power are concerned with Othering. When it comes to issue of heresy defining truth is the common tool of creating an Othering process. It intermingled with power. Editor Alexander Michel Foucault, focus on the inseparable relation between Truth and Power. The way he defines Truth is indicting that type of relation.

“Truth” is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulations, distribution, circulation and operation of statements. “Truth” is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produces and sustains it, and to effect of power which it induces and which extend it”<sup>39</sup>

That inseparable relation of power and Truth is central in of creating heresies. Usually, truth is the main subject of heresies. Power seekers have the same claim of power holders that is: Truth is possessed by them and the others are out of its track. So, truth in an Othering process is about “We” and “Others”, not about truth itself. The “We” and the “Others” are usually in conflict on the stage of truth, accusing each other of heresy. So heresy is an accusation functioning as a divisive tool motivating both to be in conflict for confirming or keeping power.

### **3.1.3 Heresies and rumors**

Indeed, an Othering process is a social process in which religion; culture; social circumstances and political challenges are being used for keeping the process active for the sake of power. Not only heresies attached to religion are keeping the process active, but also heresies attached to social structures, circumstances and challenges. We will argue that also rumors are functioning the same way in an Othering process. May roumer be defined in a simple way like this: “a story or statement in general circulation without confirmation or certainty as to facts or usually a mixture of truth and untruth passed around by word of

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<sup>38</sup> Christoph Reuter, *My Life is a Weapon: a Modern History of suicide bombing* (Princeton, New Jersey, 2004), 33.

<sup>39</sup>Michel Foucault, “Truth and Power” in “*Orientalism: a Reader*” (ed. Alexander Lyon Macfie, New York University Press, New York, U.S.A, 2000), 43.

mouth”<sup>40</sup> Both heresies and rumors have the same function, dynamic, and purpose which is Othering. The main difference between is that, those heresies are intrareligious dynamic but rumors in the Egyptian context are interreligious. The dynamic of rumors might be manifested and reactivated easily in the absence of culture pluralism. In other word, lack of pluralism culture afford to rumors more public space to reflect and impact social life. Rumors may use that public space to make what was supposed to be private to public<sup>41</sup> constructing the process of Othering. So, rumors are tools of Othering on the power stage. Usually, it creates negative stereotypes of the other to produce an alternative vision as a part of an Othering process. Moreover, it might be a mode of communication as it spread rapidly from person to person and from group to another especially, if attaches to humor or funny jokes like it often happens in Egypt. Due to that dynamic of easy spreading, it might be seen as the most effective divisive tools effecting social relationships. In addition, rumors produce hostility leading to social division and conflict, like Ahlback points out :

“Rumors are concrete representations which are preserved by the members of a group. They crystallize the perceptions that members of each group have of the group towards which they feel hostile. Rumors are often an indicator of hostility. They are reflecting intergroup hostility provide morality tales, each complete with a plot, characters, a message and sometimes even a call for action. Rumors confirm that prevailing ideas are true by seeming to demonstrate that they are rooted in reality. Paranoid fantasies and infamous stories play the main in part in rumors speed, before, during and after attacks manifesting group conflicts.....rumors is the breeding ground for moral panic.”<sup>42</sup>

The hostility and moral panic that rumors might leave a group with, demonstrate the similarity between rumors and heresies in terms of function. Both are ways of Othering for the sake of power by which hostility, moral panic and conflicts take place.

Lester R. Kurtz articulated five statements characterizing the link between heresies and religious conflict. These five statements on heresies way be translated into the Egyptian context to shed light on the function of rumors. The word heresy is indentified by Kurtz as:

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<sup>40</sup> <http://www.definitions.net/definition/rumor> Accessed in April 20th 2011.

<sup>41</sup> Marianne Bjelland Kartzow, *Gossip and Gender: Othering of Speech in the Pastoral Epistles*( Ait e-dit AS,Oslo, 2007), 33.

<sup>42</sup> Tore Ahlback, *Exercising power: the role of religions in concord and conflict* (The Donner Institute for Research in Religious and culture History, Abo, Finland, 2006), 112-119.

“a sin of one who, having been baptized and retaining the name of Christian, pertinaciously denies or doubts any of the truths that one is under obligation of divine and Catholic faith to believe”<sup>43</sup>

This definition of heresy way also helps us to understand the role of rumors in Egypt. In addition, heresy has a Christian meaning and Christian background, so it might be better to use the word rumor to understand the conflict between Muslims and Christian in Egypt. It explains more precisely what is going in Egyptian communities.

“Heresy is simultaneously near and remote. That is, heretics are within the relevant social group and therefore close enough to be a threat, but distant enough to be considered in error. A heretic is thus a “deviant insider” and is considered a danger to the institution and its leadership. Heresies are internal, but they represent pollution from external sources—an inevitability in the global village, where traditions collide.”<sup>44</sup>

When traditions collide in Egypt, rumors about conflicts between Christians and Muslims are of produced. They function as cause and effect of conflicts. In other words, conflicts are based on rumors and rumors are reproducing and escalating by conflicts. Relation between conflicts and rumors is reversal. Through that relation rumors might turn into a stereotype creates and dominates conflict for a long time.

Indeed, rumors and stereotypes are founded within the relevant social group.<sup>45</sup> They are internal representing pollution from external sources. Among those external sources feeding rumors are prejudice and injustice prevailing in a society. The more injustice and prejudice the more rumors are getting strong and long life time inside the relevant social group. They are the main material of rumors by which conflict is feeding. So, establishing social justice and considering pluralism might be the best option for conflict management and leaving less room for rumors. Social justice may help individuals to think creatively and critically and let them deal with rumors as rumors not as facts.

### **3.1.4 Rumors authority and identity**

“Heresy is socially constructed in the midst of social conflict as people fighting with one another, their interest become associated either with the heresy or with its

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<sup>43</sup> Kurtz, *Gods in the global village*, 245.

<sup>44</sup> Kurtz, *Gods in the global village*, 245-246

<sup>45</sup> Kurtz, *Gods in the global village*, 264.

refutation. Consequently, the problem of heresy is primarily a problem of authority, that of beliefs and structures.”<sup>46</sup>

Rumors are also socially constructed because social institutions and individuals are contributing to reproducing rumors in order to define their authority. Contributors know exactly the weakness of their local communities. They are usually using them to form and create the main theme of the rumors. For example, the relation between Muslims and Christians in Egypt is the weakest point in the local community structure. So, most of rumors are being created around that relation enriching mistrust and misunderstanding.

Rumors function as fuel of conflict. They provoke people to defend their religious or cultural identity leading them to think that their identity under threat. So, their mission is to fight for protecting that identity which is a key word in creating rumors and conflict as well.

In Egypt, people are very sensitive about their religious identity more than the cultural one. They are doing many efforts and scarifies to protecting their religious identity. Both Muslims and Christians think that protecting their religious identity is a mission directed by holy God. They must do their best to achieve it. Nothing deserves the sacrifice of their own life, except their religious identity. Indeed, that attitude has led both Muslims and Christians to be in conflict. Muslims are thinking that Christian activities are against their identity. Christians also, perceive that Muslim activities and actions threat their Christian identity. Both sides are thinking that the others are threats to their identity. Unfortunately, what they claim about each other effects their way of interaction and encounter. So, conflict and violence characterize their relation. Standing against each other might be the main trend influencing them. Both always claim that they are seeking to achieve their holy mission that is protecting their religious identity. Under the umbrella of protecting religious identity many rumors constructed to create or justify conflicts between both sides.

In fact, protecting religious identity might not the only cause of conflict between Muslims and Christians in Egypt, but the question of power and authority also contribute to that conflict. They are fighting for power motivated by their own dream to convert Egypt to Islam or Christianity.

Some Christian leaders have that hope to see Egypt become a Christian country. They are trying to persuade Christians that one day Egypt will be a Christian country and Muslims

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<sup>46</sup> Kurtz, *Gods in the global village*, 264.



will no longer exist. Most of those leaders are belonging to the charismatic movement. They view Muslims as a source of evil.

Also, some Muslims leaders have the same hope to establish a Muslim state implementing Islamic law. They view Christians as a source of evil and they might standing against them or at least, marginalize them. They are not concern about their rights as citizens. They view them as strangers belonging to a western culture more than to an Egyptian culture. Therefore, marginalizing Christians is their strategy to maintain power and the Islamic identity of the state.

Marginalized Christians have been left with a feeling of alienation and loss of sense of belonging to Egyptian society. Those feelings could explain why Christians are so passive in terms of contributing in public life activities, especially in the political field.

Currently, marginalization challenges the Christian community. They have some sort of motivation to fight to leave the margined edge and Muslims are fight to keep them there. Therefore, the Egyptian social structure is not stable as the marginalized group is trying to come out of the marginalization and others want them not to leave their current position or place. They are fighting for authority. Christians want to approve that they have some power to come out of the margin .Muslims are fight to prove their power and authority and to keep Christians calm and marginalized.

Indeed, that conflict has led to many rumors. Many rumors have also enriched and reproduced by that conflict. For example, a rumor was created around Contraceptives which came largely as donations from abroad, particularly from United States. The rumor says that those means are given to Muslim Ladies by Christian doctors to contributing to infertility which reduce the number of Muslims. It was seen as a Christian method to access power. In addition, that rumor goes on to claim that United States is supporting Christians to achieve their goal. Of course, that type of rumor is contributing much to mistrust between both sides leading them to conflict and creating barriers, preventing them from cooperation.

Rumors are not only creating barriers in terms of relationship between Muslims and Christians in Egypt, but they also affect the structure of each group. For example, rumors provoke many Muslim groups to be more united and more radical against Christians and the same happened to some Christian groups. Both sides are becoming more organized as well as more radical standing against each other. In other word, the unity of each group has been

empowered by rumors. Unfortunately, that solidarity empowered by rumors has contributed to fundamentalist movements.

Fundamental groups from both sides have found rumors effective tools to justify their radical and violent actions towards each other. So, rumors have a double function, those are contributing to the solidarity of a certain group and being a means of justifying radical actions or violent against another groups. In other words, rumors might create conflict and justify it at the same time.

### **3.1.5 Social impacts of rumors**

Kurtz is concerned with the social implications of heresy:

“Heresy has social consequences as well as social origins. It is a double –edged sword, sometimes disruptive (the conventional view) but often is used for the creation of group solidarity and for purposes of social control. By labeling a group of people as heretics, elites rally support for their own positions but may inadvertently stimulate a rebellion.”<sup>47</sup>

Indeed, also rumors have social impacts on the relations between Muslims and Christians. Those impacts are represented in mistrust, misunderstanding and lack of cooperation. Muslims and Christians are not trusting each other, particularly Christians who in most cases, fear Muslims and not giving them much trust. They claim that Muslims thoughts and deeds are contradicted. So, Muslims are not worthy to trust. In addition, Christians claim that Muslims have a very narrow mind. They are seeking to live life as it was at the prophet Mohamed time. Christian’s viewing that as retarded culture model.

Muslims also, claim that Christians thoughts are not like their like deeds or behaviors. In addition, Muslims are considering Christians as unclean because they are drinking wine and eating pork. So, they are not worthy fellowship and trust. They are not trusting each other and using the former claims to justify mistrust.

Unfortunately, Rumors producers are using that mistrust and misunderstanding to form the main theme of their production. They consider mistrust a fertile soil in which to produce rumors. It is the soil and main source of feeding rumors. Mistrust might be used to create rumors and rumors are enriching mistrust. Rumors and mistrust are in reversal relation, they

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<sup>47</sup> Kurtz, *Gods in the global village*, 264.

are inseparable. That inseparability of rumors and mistrust make the relation between Muslims and Christians very tense and always stimulates to conflict.

Moreover, rumors are challenging the dialogue between Muslims and Christians if it at all happens. It leads both to highly concern defending their beliefs and allegations that are reflected by rumors. They are often not talking to each other. Every side is talking to himself about himself. In dialogue, often listening, discussing of crucial issues effecting their relation and objectivity are absent .So, dialogue between them is too often some sort of fighting, not talking or discussing their concerns.

Both are concerned to show and approve the genuine nature of their religion. It is the ultimate goal of each. Unfortunately, that attitude has disappointed some of intellectual leaders participating in dialogue between Muslims and Christians. Those leaders have done many efforts through dialogue to help both sides to change their way of thinking. They were trying to lead both sides to create a common ground, helping them to have better dialogue and leading them to stop thinking only about in defending their religion. In addition, they were trying to encourage Muslims and Christians to talk and discuss the matter of their relation as citizens belonging to the same country and the same community. It didn't work because of rumors that influenced their talks. Therefore, dialogue has not led significance impacts over the relationship between Muslims and Christians worthy of being mentioned.

### **3.1.6 Doctrinal impacts of rumors**

A Campaign against a heresy be could described as a rumor campaigns. Therefore Kurtz helps us to see the relevance of this:

“Campaigns against heresies have doctrinal consequences as well as social ones. In the heat of escalating conflicts, groups often clarify just what they believe about particular issue”<sup>48</sup>

Doctrinal consequences of rumors are represented when Muslims and Christians are provoked to defend their religious doctrines by harming each other. For example, Christians have defended the trinity doctrine against Muslims saying that Christians have three Gods. So, they are infidels believing in polytheism according to this Muslim point of view.

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<sup>48</sup> Kurtz, *Gods in the global village*, 264.

Christians are doing their best to defend the doctrine of trinity. Many published books in Arabic discussing the issue and explaining the Christian perspective of trinity. Moreover, that issue of trinity was among the main themes of many forums and conferences organized by the church to provide information and teach Christians how to defend their beliefs in trinity when Muslims criticize them and call them infidels.

Muslims also, have the same problem and same concern. They are doing their best to defend some of doctrinal issues that have been criticized by Christians. Like wise, they defend the Muslim perspective of woman's role and position in Islam and why men having superiority over women. Indeed, that competition between Muslims and Christian to defend some debatable doctrine obviously reflect through the internet and media. Both sides are using the internet and media as tools of defining and also offending other religion. Defending and offending are related, and many people are not able to differentiate between defending their own religion and offending the other religion. Moreover, both are using the internet and media for providing false information about others or creating rumors by which conflict might be created and take place. Indeed, conflict based on doctrinal differences is developing and enriching by many rumors provoking both sides to continue having that type of conflict.

### **3.1.7 Rumors as ritual**

According to Kurtz heresies may be dealt within a social ritual:

“The process of defining and denouncing heresy is a *ritual* that helps to relieve social and psychological tensions and deal with institutional and religious crisis”<sup>49</sup>

The ways that Egyptian using to denounce rumors have negatively effect the relations between Muslims and Christians. Egyptians have used to face rumors by joking which is some sort of ritual or custom of denouncing. Joking means, they are not taking the matter seriously. Unfortunately, this have caused some serious rumors to become widespread. For example, a rumor about Christians was saying that Christians are practicing sex at the church while they are celebrating New Year. Christians had created many jokes about that rumor to denounce it. Those jokes caused the rumors to be wildly spread instead of being denounced.

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<sup>49</sup>Kurtz, *Gods in the global village*, 264.

In addition, Egyptians had used to face rumors by creating more rumors, which means the Muslims and Christians are competing with each other in creating rumors as away of denouncing. For example, the rumor mentioned above about Christians having sex at the church on New Year celebration had provoked Christians to claim that Muslims engage in sex during Hajj while they are semi-naked in the midst of hustle. As a result, the society is full of rumors that feed conflict between both. Moreover, rumors became an attempt to smear and defame ritual and worship which offend both sides and affect their relations badly. Indeed, they are going in a wrong way using the wrong tools for facing and denouncing rumors. Fighting against rumors by creating more of them is a bad way. It creates more conflicts and tensions and denounces nothing. That wrong way of facing rumors by rumors had created professional groups in reproducing and creating such rumors. Those have a good experience in reproducing rumors. The way of facing rumors by creating more of then stands behind that experience those people have. They know how to organize their stories and how that stories harm the most sensitive ears effecting the relation between Muslims and Christians. Also they know how to use some incidents to create their rumors and give them the gols of facts.

### **3.2 Method and sources**

Originally, I planned to make a case study of Muslim-Christian relation in Nag Hammady and Marsa Matroh. Both places had experienced violent conflict between Christians and Muslims .However, people in Nag Hammady and Marsa Matroh did not like to speak with an unknown researcher about sensitive issues in their local community. Therefore, I had to refocus my project. The new focus became the general relations between Muslims and Christians in Egypt. The informations I got through interviews which I did from Cairo and El-minya,<sup>50</sup> are integrated in my thesis with some written sources and open information. . Letters C1.C2.C3..... would be used as a referring to Christian informants and M1.M2.to Muslim informants, all of them were interviewed in seen structured interviews. Being an Egyptian myself, I have also been a participant observer of this topic during the last thirty years.

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<sup>50</sup> El-minya is one of the governorates of Upper Egypt 250 k.m south of Cairo.

I have been implementing what Lester R. Kurtz stated about heresies to rumors to Muslims – Christian's relation in Egypt to find out how rumors effect that relation and their contribution to conflict and violence. Some rumors will be select as examples whether created by Muslims or Christians by which their social life affected and colored by conflict.

### **3.3 The sensitivity issue**

Indeed, both Christians and Muslims informants do not like to talk about their relation. They are considering that such issues are very sensitive and should not be under discussion. I was wondering why is discussing the relation between Muslims and Christians colored by that sensitivity?

The sensitivity that people have towards such issues was one of the main difficulties preventing many people to express their opinions freely or giving much information. Of course, not all Christian or Muslims in Egypt are afraid to express their opinion or present their perspectives. Some of them are very courageous to do that. They believe in discussion and dialogue to solve a problem. That conviction has helped those individuals to express their opinions and represent their own perspective without coloring the issue of the relation between Muslims and Christians by sensitivity which standing as a big challenge to discussion.

In addition, that sensitivity has led many Muslim and Christian religious leaders to give half truths or incomplete information concerning the relation between Muslims and Christians. They have used to affirm that nothing is bad about Muslims- Christian relation. Moreover, some of those leaders have some sort of link to the Egyptian government, which always used to present false information about the relation between Muslims and Christians in Egypt. They usually neglect and ignore tensions and conflict or justify them to impose a message that the relation between both sides is still strong and stable.

It was a big challenge to find informants giving true and complete information about relation between Muslims and Christians in Egypt. Therefore, using open information is supplement as well as some literature regarding the relation between Muslims and Christians in Egypt.

### **3.4 Open sources**

The advantage of using Internet and Egyptian press as open resources is to provide update information concerning conflicts between Christians and Muslims in Egypt. In addition, it gives a wide range of information helping me to understand what is going on the ground between Christian and Muslims in my country.

### **3.5 Being an observer**

As an Egyptian, I live with the conflicts between Christians and Muslims for an extensive period of time, so I have had the opportunity to find out in much more details what those conflicts are all about. In addition, observing those conflicts in their natural environment helps me to have relevant information<sup>51</sup> as well as perceiving what is going on the ground influencing the relation between Christians and Muslims and leading them to conflict and violence.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

The five statements that Lester R. Kurtz, articulated on heresy have been used to show to what extent rumors can affect social life and relationships. Those statements are helping us to see rumors as social processes having many social consequences. Rumors have consequences that are impacting ways of thinking and acting.

Rumors are socially constructed, growing inside a group and being used outside as social pollution. Social construction of rumors and social pollution are in combination to make rumors seen as facts .Indeed, viewing rumors as facts is often creating conflicts and tensions especially among Muslims and Christians in Egypt where rumors are plying central roles in creating conflicts between both sides.

Egyptians are usually provoked by rumors to denounce them. They often denounce rumors by creating more of them or inventing jokes about them. Both ways of denouncing are counter productive. Fighting against rumors with rumors or jokes contributes to more conflicts between Muslims and Christians in Egypt. Rumors are social challenges. People

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<sup>51</sup> Kenneth D.Bailey, *Methods of Social Research* (The free press, a division of Macmillan, New York, 1987), 240-241.

should know how to investigate them to differentiate between them and actual facts by which they can denounce rumors and handle their conflicts in more constructive ways.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### 4.1 CHRISTIAN'S PERSPECTIVES OF THE RELATION WITH MUSLIMS

Christian in Egypt is a minority living among Muslims majority. They are living together since a long time. Their relation had many changes and challenges affecting their social life and way of viewing each other. My main concern is to articulate and analyze the Christian perspective focusing in how Christian viewing their relation with Muslims using the information I got from my informants who most of them were Christians coming from different places as well two Muslim leaders.

I will focus on some crucial issues impacting the relation between both sides and controlling their perspectives since 1980 to present integrate some perspectives from the distant and recent past which are relevant to understanding the last three decades and the way Muslims and Christians use media and internet facilities against each other.

#### 4.1.2 Tribal thinking and Muslims - Christian's relation

Muslims came to Egypt; with an idea controlling their mind i.e. Christians are heating them because they are different in faith and beliefs.<sup>52</sup> That idea had controlled Muslims thinking and relation with Christians for a long time.

Such idea might have roots attach to the tribal social life, which Muslims were used to live in Arabia desert.<sup>53</sup> The tribal life was full conflict between different tribes due to some difference or a daily problem between them. So, it might be possible that *umma* meaning and conception extended to that tribal life, bounding Muslims together by a common faith rather than kingship relations<sup>54</sup> or geographical ponders. It indicates that, the Muslim bears a religious legal responsibility (*wajib shari*) towards his brother in faith, irrespective of his geographical location.<sup>55</sup> *Umma* usually being used as means of distinct Muslims nations

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<sup>52</sup> Tager, *Aqbat wa Muslomuon*, 43.

<sup>53</sup> Hugh Goddard, *Christians and Muslims From double standards to mutual understanding* (Curzon Press Quadrant, Richmond, 1995), 34.

<sup>54</sup> Harold Coward and Gordon S. Smith, *Religion and peace building* (State University of New York press, Albany, 2004), 131.

<sup>55</sup> Amal Saad-Ghorayeb, *Hizbu'llah: Politics and Religion* (Pluto Press, London, 2002), 75.

from other nations. It is the borderless community of all Muslim,<sup>56</sup> a way of Othering by which tribal way of thinking reflects.<sup>57</sup> In other words, the concept of *Umma* can change the socio-tribal structure but not the tribal way of thinking.

The tribal way of thinking, might be poor in tolerance and accepting differences. So, people who have grown up in a tribal community find it difficult to be tolerant with others who are different culturally or religiously.<sup>58</sup> They are thinking that those who are different from them might hate them. Tribal background of Muslims had made their relation with Christian unstable and mostly run in tension. It has also led them to perceive tolerance as sacrificing their own identity.

#### **4.1.3 Implications of identity protection**

Muslims are used to link their identity to religion. They are thinking that people who are different in religion or faith might threaten their identity<sup>59</sup>. So, oppressing the adherent of other faith is their mission to preserving and protecting their own identity. Preserving their identity is an ultimate goal. They might fight against non-Muslims and sacrifice their own life to achieve it. Actually, such an attitude is standing behind many conflicts and violence actions taking place between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Keeping and protecting their identity is a permanent concern of Muslims and a key element by which their relation and interacting with other people around them is influenced. They used to attach their identity with culture materials, like ways of dressing, eating and drinking, not only to express their identity but also as means of Othering.<sup>60</sup> That way of Othering was reflecting in Egyptian life since Islam came and Caliph Omar conditions was issued, creating barriers between Muslims and Christians indicating that permanent concern of Muslims to protect their identity.

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<sup>56</sup> Marc Gerech Reuel, *The Islamic paradox: Shiite clerics, Sunni fundamentalists, and the coming of Arab democracy* (American Enterprise Institute press, Washington, D.C, 2004), 35.

<sup>57</sup> El-Morshedy Mohamed Ibrahim, *O`robat Maser Wa Agbatha "Arabs Egyptians and Coptic"* ( El-Shark El-A`wsat publishing house, Cairo, 1993) ,.5-7.

<sup>58</sup> Heather J. Sharkey, *American Evangelicals in Egypt: Missionary encounters in an age of empire* (Princeton University Press, 2008), 101.

<sup>59</sup> Tager, *Aqbat wa Muslomuon*, 43.

<sup>60</sup> Derk Ton and Roymans Nico, *Ethnic Constructs in Antiquity* (Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam, 2009), 146.

In fact, identity protection is not something bad in itself. But it might be bad when standing as an obstacle against social communication and interaction. It might also be bad when leads to conflict and violence.

Seeking identity protection had created many tensions and conflict between Muslims and Christians. Most of those conflicts and tensions rose up for minor cause like, a Muslim criticizing a Christian why he or she has a symbol of cross printed on a hand<sup>61</sup> or a Christian criticizing a Muslim asking why prophet Mohamed had many wives and among them one who was under age.

In fact, conflict over minor causes in recent years was reflecting first, among secondary schools students and by the time, affected the whole society. Egyptian intellectuals were crying out to let secondary school students stop criticizing each other or arguing about religion in their schools. Intellectuals, raised up that issue especially after the increasing of published materials focusing on criticizing the other religion associated with some sort of offending. Those materials were being used a lot by secondary school students helping them to attack each other. It creates some kind of competition between them to strengthen their own religion.

#### **4.1.4 Religious leaders leading the competition**

Some religious leaders from both sides, who might be described as extremist leaders, used to enrich that type of competition. They were organizing meetings and classes for those young people giving them some lessons in how to criticize the other religion adherents. They taught them some ways of criticizing and motivating them to focusing on some critical issues, like doctoring of trinity in Christianity or abrogation ( El- Nasekh wa –al mansokh) in Islam which are not easy to be presented or answered precisely. That competition of criticizing each other created many tensions instead of being a good way of communication or encounter. Criticizing religion as means of interaction is unacceptable by both Muslim and Christian. They are viewing it, as a directed threat of religious identity.

That competition of criticizing each other religion start to reflecting publically in latest 1980's up to now, it never stopped. National Egyptian T.V. had contributed to bring the issue

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<sup>61</sup> Most of Christians in Egypt had that printed symbol of cross on their right hand. It's reflecting their identity as Christians and helping them to communicate and identify each other as a minority.

to the public arena. Some Muslims leaders like Sheik El Shaarawy <sup>62</sup> used to criticize Christian doctrines through a weekly TV program. Also, he used to identify Muslims with the 'Us' versus the Christians as 'Others' by means of this Othering he caused division. <sup>63</sup> Christians were upset and got angry, because they have no access to the national T.V. to defend their doctrines and answering those critical questions coming through that program. Therefore, they worked hard to publish some books explaining the Christian doctrines to Muslims. Unfortunately, published materials, information and ideas coming through that type of T.V. programs were being used by the public raising conflict and tension between them.

“what is involved here is the recurring tendency in both communities to compare the *ideals* of their own faith with the *realities* of the other. Christians, in other words, are adept at comparing the wonderful ideals of the Christian faith with the painful realities of Islamic societies, and Muslims are equally expert at highlighting the obvious problems in societies influenced by the Christian faith while pointing to never-implemented Islamic ideals as the solution to these problems”<sup>64</sup>

Day after day, disputations and arguments about religion (Islam and Christianity) were growing more radical especially, among those who are not highly educated. Those ones had used to receive what their religious leaders presenting without a single comment or question. They were accepting what those leaders saying as if, from God directly. They became fully dominated by their religious leaders.

According to several informants, those leaders like to dominate their followers by creating many conventions controlling their minds in order to achieve that goal. They persuaded their followers that they have better knowledge than them and advanced experiences, not only in religion but in life's issues, complications and problems. Moreover, some of those leaders were able to persuade their followers that their thoughts, words and ideas are being received directly from God.

As a result, followers whoever Muslims or Christians, had fully dominated by those leaders seeking their advice and consultation in every details of their own life. Many are no longer

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<sup>62</sup>It is mentioned in Wikipedia that, El-Shaarawy was born in Dakadous village, Mit Ghamr, Ad Daqahliyah, Egypt on April 15, 1911. He had very widespread popularity that he earned the title of "The preacher of the century" [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muhammad\\_Metwally\\_Al\\_Shaarawy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muhammad_Metwally_Al_Shaarawy) Accessed in April 23 rd 2011

<sup>63</sup> Derk and Roymans, *Ethnic Constructs in Antiquity*, 146.

<sup>64</sup> Goddard, *Christians and Muslims From double standards to mutual understanding*, 18.

able to make any decision concerning their life before asking their religious leader's advice. For example, a friend of mine refused to take medicine when he was sick because his religious leader told him to stop taking medicine and to wait for God's healing. Unfortunately, stopping taking medicine caused him to die. Although, advices given by those leaders are costing people a lot and lead them even to sacrifice their lives but they still do not stop seeking them. Moreover, those who had been following those leaders were highly convinced that those leaders were more spiritual and possessed very special kinds of spirituality. Leaders also, have the same conviction and are using it for dominating followers.<sup>65</sup>

#### **4.1.5 Religious Leaders way of thinking and conflict**

Often Religious leaders are used to viewing life only from their own side. They like to color social life in Egypt, by their own single preferred color. By other word, pluralism is unacceptable to them. They used to be standing against religious pluralism based on their convention that, there is only one true religion which the whole world should embrace. Indeed both Muslims and Christians who are thinking that way have the same attitude that one religion must dominate the whole world. As a result, Muslims are viewing Christians as followers of a false religion and the reverse is also a fact.

Therefore, the issue of which religion is genuine came into the spot creating more problems and conflicts not only among secondary schools students as mentioned above but among the general public as well.

My informants see that grassroots were affected by their religious leaders and by some other religious movements they encounter in a way or another. Muslims had been impacted by the Wahhabi movement especially those were working in Saudi Arabia or in other Gulf countries. Christians were affected by charismatic movements which Koreans and Americans missionaries apply to Egyptian churches, particularly the reformed churches.

Such movements are encouraging the single minded way of thinking. Religious pluralism is non-preferred and mostly unaccepted. People who are influenced by those movements become more prejudiced towards others who are belonging to a different religion. The

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<sup>65</sup> Kieran Flanagan and Peter C. Jupp, *A sociology of spirituality* ( Ashgate Publishing Limited, England, 2007),111.

prejudice can be understood as means of identity protection, and is especially the ordinary people.

Unfortunately, many ordinary Muslims and Christians have ended up with the conviction that pluralism is against their religious identity as modernity challenge their spirituality.<sup>66</sup> So, standing against pluralism and fighting modernity is among their goals and missions. That trend had effected not only the relation between Muslims and Christians, but also the relationships within Muslims and Christians communities. For example, standing against pluralism had affected the relation between the majority Muslims Sunni and the minority Muslims Shi`ites. The same with Christians the relation between different denominations especially between Protestant and Orthodox had been affected. As result, many tensions had been reflected between the Protestant and the Orthodox Church. For example, one of Orthodox leaders had used to organize an annual retreat for Orthodox youth all over the country, where he with some other Orthodox leaders were presenting and discussing with highly critical perspectives the doctrines of other churches and denominations especially the Protestant. Most of those leaders who used to contribute to that annual retreat are very convinced that religious pluralism is against the genuine Christianity and the ultimate truth that the Orthodox Church possessing.

In one of those retreats the leader had declared that other denomination which are not belonging to Orthodox tradition are exclude salvation. They must be punished by hill at the end. That declaration had raised many problems and tensions and it was totally against pluralism.

Muslims and Christians who are viewing pluralism as something against religion they have hope that religious pluralism one day might be demolished and no longer exist and their belonging religion will be the only one controlling the whole world not only Egypt.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Ronald Lukens- Bull, *A Peaceful Jihad: Negotiating Identity and Modernity in Muslim* ( Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2005),120-127.

<sup>67</sup> Coward and. Smith, *Religion and peace building*,135.

#### **4.1.6 Muslims and Christians on the wrong way**

Muslims and Christians have the same mistakes concerning the way they protect and preserve their own religious identity. Both are misconnecting identity protection with their social apart or isolation from each other.

Muslims are used to isolate and marginalize Christians to keep the Islamic identity of the state. In addition, Christians are used to set themselves aside and stick to the church by which they might protect their religious identity<sup>68</sup>. By other words, both Muslims and Christians are viewing miscommunication between them as the best way of protecting the religious identity of each.

Actually, that attitude is being observed through the tendency of both Muslims and Christians to send their children to private schools colored by religion. Therefore, many private schools have been founded and built up since 1952 when the regime declared that education is available to all Egyptians.

Indeed, that separation between Muslims and Christians students is quiet obvious in urban areas where most of those private schools are located. In addition to that, some Christians and Muslims who live in rural eras and villages are used to send their children to cities for receiving their education in private schools. Regardless, the extra money and long distance transportation they need to pay.

A friend of mine decided to send his two children to a city where a private school belonging to the Catholic Church is located. It costs him more than what he earns as salary every month. It was a financial challenge to him and his family to send their children to a Christian private school. They have to fight economically to provide it. As result, they decide to sell some of their own property. They sold a piece of land to cover the education expenses of their children. Social segregation between Muslims and Christians is not only a social challenge but also financial. People are suffering a lot to keep themselves away from others for the sake of protecting their religious identity and avoid conflict.

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<sup>68</sup> C 4

<http://www.shorouknews.com/ShoroukPDF.aspx>, issue 634,27 Oct.2010,p.16 Accessed in Feb.5<sup>th</sup> 2011

#### **4.1.7 Social segregation getting wide**

According to several informants, social segregation as a way of protection had been developed especially among Christians after some violent actions took place against them since the regime of Anwar El-Sadat, and up to the 1990's. Those violent actions had left Christians with much panic and anxiety. They have much concern about their life and identity, and try to find some ways to protect themselves and avoid conflict. So, from Christian perspective, isolation was obligatory to avoid conflict. That trend constitutes a major obstacle in building confidence and bridges between Muslims and Christians. It makes the gap between both sides getting wider, day by day.

#### **4.1.8 Challenges of mixing national identity with religious identity**

When Anwar El-Sadat in 1980 declared that he is a Muslim ruling a Muslim country, it was understood not only as legitimizing violence and discrimination in Egyptian society, but as affirming the Islamic nationality of the state. That affirmation had many impacts in Egyptian daily life. Among those impacts was viewing Christians as strangers living in Islamic country. They were no longer red and full citizens because they are not Muslims.

It was obvious that what Anwar El-Sadat declares; strengthen the misconception that national identity and religious identity are two aspects of the same identity<sup>69</sup>. That misconception had challenged Christian on all levels, socially, economically and sociologically. They are facing many challenges in their daily life, for example, if a Christian wants to rent an apartment which is owned by a Muslim, it might not be given to him because he is a Christian; otherwise, the rent cost might be doubled for the same reason. Moreover, some Muslims who have business concisely refuse to give a job to Christians; they prefer Muslims even if the Muslims are less qualified. In addition, some of them even declared that Christians are not allowed to apply for a job in their business. Some Christian businessmen, who are a few, have done the same and declared that Muslims are not allowed to have a job in their business.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> By means if you are not Muslim you are not Egyptian citizen.

<sup>70</sup> C 4



This identification of religious identity with national identity challenges Christians very much. It challenges them to struggle for confirming their citizenship which is not easy to be achieved. It was difficult for Christians to confirm their citizenship and national identity due to that misconception. It might be the only way of Christians to confirm their nationality to be Muslims which the vast Christian majority rejects. Christians are trying to cope with the problem of identifying national identity with religious identity which characterizes many Muslims communities so far<sup>71</sup>

More obstacles and difficulties are created by some international political events challenge Christians in Egypt to confirm their national identity. For example, when Iraq was invaded by the U.S.A. the whole Egyptian community was upset and angry including Christians. But many Muslims did not believe that Christians were angry. Due to that identification of national identity with religious identity, Muslims were viewing Egyptian Christians as Americans, standing and supporting what Americans are doing in Iraq. The vast majority of Muslims were very convinced that Christians are supporting the United States of America. That convention was not approved by Muslims but still dominate their mind towards Christian

Several informants see that, the mixing of religious identity with national identity was behind that accusation and viewing Christians as stranger having a different nationality. This legitimized oppression and marginalization. In other words, defining the national identity is also about power. Who might be in charge? Power is integrated in the issue of identity creating tensions and conflicts not only between Christians and Muslims but also within Muslims and Christians communities<sup>72</sup>. So, the issue of identity might be a cover, where as power is the real issue.

It is very stressful that Christians living in their country as stranger while they have nothing to do to confirm their nationality. It is difficult to be treated as strangers while you are citizen because misconception religious identity with national ones. Indeed, Anwar El- Sadat regime, is taking the full responsibility of that misconception.

Christians wish to appreciate their nationality and recalling what happened in 1919 revolution, when Muslims and Christians had united together against the colonial regime,

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<sup>71</sup> Christopher Catherwood, *A Brief History of the Middle East* (Carroll Graf Publishers, New York, 2006), 131.

<sup>72</sup> Goddard, *Christians and Muslims From double standards to mutual understanding*, 55.

appreciating that they all are citizens, have the same citizenship. It might take a long time to be achieved and to have their nationality confirmed.<sup>73</sup>

Christians like to confirm their nationality at least to release themselves from that stress of being treated as strangers and in order to being fully accepted as citizens. One of my informants<sup>74</sup> said that he was struggling to confirm to his fellows at a school where he is working to persuade them that he is an Egyptian like them and not American or Jew. As a way of confirming his nationality, he participated with some other Christians working at the same school in demonstration organized by Muslims against the American invasion of Iraq as well as participating in other demonstration against some cartoons by which prophet Mohamed had been insulted. He was trying to find any way to confirm his national identity by sharing Muslims their anger concerning what was happening in Iraq. It didn't work well for him due to that mixing of religious identity with national identity by which Muslims viewing Christians as strangers.

Viewing Christians as strangers had motivated an Archbishop one of the Coptic Orthodox leaders, who considered as second man after Pope Shenouda III, of Orthodox Church in Egypt, to declare at an annual retreat, that Christians are not strangers but Muslims are.<sup>75</sup> They invaded our country and can not deny that they are invaders. According to Hugh Goddard, understanding between Muslims and Christians is low.

“The level of mutual understanding between these two communities, however, is often very low; indeed it could be said that mutual ignorance is far more widespread than mutual understanding”<sup>76</sup>

Indeed, that speech given by that man let Muslims being more upset and angry towards Christians and some radical Muslims were seeking to kill that man. The Pope himself motivated him to apologize to the Egyptian community announcing that, all of us have the same origin, the same father and mother that are Adam and Eve; all are worshipping the same God and drink the same water of the Nile. The Pope was trying to reduce Muslim bad feeling and reactions towards Christian due to that speech given by the Archbishop and protect him.

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<sup>73</sup> C 4

<sup>74</sup> C 3

<sup>75</sup>. Peter E Makari, *Conflict and Cooperation: Christian-Muslim Relations in Contemporary Egypt* (Syracuse University Press, New York, U.S.A, 2007),195. (the name of the Archbishop not mentioned for security reason)

<sup>76</sup> Goddard, *Christians and Muslims From double standards to mutual understanding*, 11.

The Archbishop had been advised to leave his parish and hide himself at unknown place for his own safety. In fact, that situation shows to what extent misconception of religious identity and national identity can create problems and contribute to raising conflicts. It might lead both Muslims and Christians to treat each others as strangers or as invaders by which their relation and their own life views might be affected.

#### **4.1.9 Rumors about Christian identity and conflict**

Long term treatment of Christians as strangers has impacted their sense of belonging to their country. In other words, they were treating as stranger and feel like strangers because of that. Lack of sense of belonging became more serious especially after some Muslims radical youth burned up a Coptic church located in al-Khanka district<sup>77</sup> in November 1972,<sup>78</sup> on the basis of a rumor saying that two Muslims youth had been converted to Christianity. Many Muslims were upset and angry because of that. The rumor and church burning had impacted the relation between Muslims and Christians very much and raised tension to the highest level.

At that time, many Muslim leaders called out for stopping the Christian activities targeting Muslims youth. They assumed that Christians has a hidden agenda to convert Muslims. Unfortunately, that assumption has escalated and extended to all over the country creating conflict between Muslims and Christians confirming that individuals who create rumors are an unusual insider and are considered a danger to the institution and its leadership.<sup>79</sup>

As result of that assumption, a Muslim radical violent group called al-Jama`a al-Islamiyya<sup>80</sup> was founded. It was born as a reaction of believing that Christians had an agenda to convert Muslim youths to Christianity. That group had founded 1972, the same year as the burning

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<sup>77</sup> One of Kaliobia cities in the north of Cairo, it is one of the biggest industrial district

<sup>78</sup> Sohirin Mohammad Solihin, *Copts and Muslims in Egypt: a study on harmony and hostility* (The Islamic foundation Markfield Dawah Center, United Kingdom, 1991), 82-83.

<sup>79</sup> See 3.1.1

<sup>80</sup> According to wikipedia al-Jama`a al-Islamiyya is an Egyptian Islamist movement, and is considered a terrorist organization by the United States, European Union and Egyptian governments. The group is (or was) dedicated to the overthrow of the Egyptian government and replacing it with an Islamic state. The now imprisoned cleric Omar Abdel-Rahman was a spiritual leader of the movement. The group is reported to be responsible for the killing of hundreds of Egyptian policemen and soldiers, civilians, and dozens of tourists in a violent campaign in the 1990s. While the assassination of the Egyptian president Anwar Sadat in 1981. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Gama%27a\\_al-Islamiyya](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Gama%27a_al-Islamiyya) Accessed in March 3<sup>rd</sup> 2011

al-Khanka church. Their first encounter with Egyptian society was in Assuit<sup>81</sup> where the Christian American mission center was located, and many local inhabitants were Christians. They started their mission among Muslims youth to raise their awareness and warning them against Christian activities. In fact, their mission had contributed a lot to circulate prejudice and discrimination had been developed to conflict especially between Muslim youth and Christian youth.

In conflict, rumors might be easily created and developed<sup>82</sup>. At that time, many rumors about Christians had been created. For example, in 1989 a rumor circulate that Christians were organizing themselves all over the country to form a political party expressing the Christian identity as well as defending Christian's rights. They appeal to form that party under a name "social peaceful party for national unity". That rumor provokes both Muslim and Christian leaders to respond to that rumor. Among those leaders Gammal Assad was a parliament member, he said that:

"The Orthodox Church does not intervene in politics, in conformity with the Christian position on total separation of religion and politics, and that the Political interests of Egyptian Copts must be accommodated through existing political parties"<sup>83</sup>

The Pope Shenouda III also responded critically to that rumor. He said that:

"Such a party would be totally isolated and politically it would gain nothing. Ironically he added: those who wished to form such a party political platform had no contact with the church"<sup>84</sup>

This was not the only rumor impacting the relation between the Muslims and Christians and between the church and the state. There were others which played a basic role in keeping good relations between both sides. For example, there were two other rumors functioning together at the same time. One of them was about Christians wishing to form an independent Christian state<sup>85</sup> in Assuit where the majority of inhabitants were Christians. The other was that Christians in Egypt were half of population in the country. So, according to this rumor,

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<sup>81</sup> A big city 360 k.m western Cairo.

<sup>82</sup> See 3.1.1

<sup>83</sup> Solihin, *Copts and Muslims in Egypt*, 87.

<sup>84</sup> Solihin, *Copts and Muslims in Egypt*, 87-88.

<sup>85</sup> Solihin, *Copts and Muslims in Egypt*, 82.

Christians were going to regain the country from the Muslims conquerors, as it happened in Spain after eight centuries under Muslims rule<sup>86</sup>. These two rumors confirm that the problem of rumors is primarily a problem of power.<sup>87</sup>

No doubt, that type of rumors had impacted the relation between Muslims and Christians in general and between the church and state in particular. It provoked Muslims radical groups to be more violent against Christians and left them with deep panic and unsecure feeling.<sup>88</sup>

That deep panic and unsecure feeling had created a false dream and hope among Christians to get some help from United States or European countries. That dream still dominates the mind of many Christians.

#### **4.1.10 Conclusion**

The convention that pluralism is against religious identity is standing as a main cause of creating conflict. It leads religious leaders to stand against pluralism, viewing others who are different in faith or views as enemies. It gives religious identity priority over national identity and confuses both together. Christians are trying to have their nationality appreciated even if they differ in faith from the Muslim majority. Indeed, the issue of identity might be seen as an issue of power. Identity protection usually, is about power and who might be in charge. Identity might be seen as a tool of keeping or restoring power. For that purpose, rumors are taking a place on power stage. Many rumors are created around the relation between Muslims and Christians for the sake of power rather than religion or religious identity. Rumors have devastated the relation between Muslims and Christians and created more violent action. They have given more strength to radicalism and radical groups. Muslims developed convection that marginalizing Christians is the only way for preserving the Muslim religious identity of the state and keeping power in the lands of Muslims.

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<sup>86</sup> Solihin, *Copts and Muslims in Egypt*, 84.

<sup>87</sup> See 3.1.2

<sup>88</sup> Ahlback, *Exercising power*, 112.

## 4.2 ANWAR EL-SADAT REGIME CONTRUBUITE TO SOCIAL CONFLICT

### 4.2.1 Anwar El- Sadat turning a rumor to fact

The Christian strategy to found an independent state in the Assuit district was not a rumor, according a speech given by President Anwar El- Sadat in May 14<sup>th</sup>1980<sup>89</sup>. It was true strategy backed by the West against the Nasser regime since 1960 Anwar El- Sadat said. That claim implicated Pope Shenouda III, who represents the Coptic Orthodox Church, which the majority of Christians belong to. Anwar El- Sadat accused him for trying to cooperate with other Christian denominations in Egypt to establish a state inside the state. Unfortunately, what Anwar El- Sadat claimed escalated very fast among the public. It mobilized and provoked them against the Church. Anwar El- Sadat claim was never confirmed, but it became stereotype has social consequences as well as social origins.<sup>90</sup> The stereotype provoked Muslims and led them to conflict with Christians. Also, it provoked Christian to think how to defend themselves against what Anwar El- Sadat claimed.

At that time, Christians had been deeply affected and felt angry. Their anger was mixed with a deep fear and lack of security due to the conflict created between them, society and state. They felt deeply unsecure when Anwar El- Sadat decided to force Pope Shenouda III, to leave his office and stay at one of Egyptian monastery only for worship purpose. Of course, Anwar El- Sadat was having the upper hand over the church as the head of the state.

Christians were very upset because of that action taken by Anwar El- Sadat. They perceived it as a direct threat to the church coming from the state. It led the Muslims majority to view the church as an opposition institution standing against the regime. In addition, it forced the Pope to leave his office and stay at monastery. This was perceived by Christians as an indication of the beginning a new era of persecution.

Expecting persecution had motivated Christians to attend worship asking God to protect them. They were being under psychological pressure of that expectation. That pressure had reflected in Christian religious leader's speech. They started to speak about persecution of Christians in the Roman's regime and how that persecution was very devastating but

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<sup>89</sup> Mohamed Hassanein Heikal, Kharif El-ghadab: keset bdayet wa nhayet aser Anwar El- Sadat "Autumn of Fury: The Assassination of Sadat"( Arabic edition, Cairo, 2006), 371

<sup>90</sup> See 3.1.3

Churches still standing and most Christians were still alive. Of course, those leaders were trying to encourage their congregations alive and support them to feel protected and safe by God. Christian religious leaders clarify what they believe about persecution.<sup>91</sup>

Indeed, Anwar El- Sadat's claim had affected Christians socially too. It pushed the Church and Christians to be more introvert and isolate themselves from the society. They took a step back from sharing in social public activities as. For example, The Christian youth stopped to go to the public clubs where they can do some physical practice and fun. They preferred some small clubs attached to some churches. Avoiding Muslims and separate themselves from the rest of the society was a reflected in daily life activities. By other words, the daily life of Christian had been colored by avoiding Muslims in the community. One of my informants said that:

“My church, which is locating in a village Upper Egypt, was financially struggling to buy a bus for taking Christian girls to their schools in the city, because parents and girls themselves are afraid to use the same means of transportation that Muslim students are using. They like to avoid them”.<sup>92</sup>

That comment shows to what extent Christians were trying to separate themselves from the rest of Egyptian community. In fact, growing and developing that trend had impacted Christian relations with whole society. It led the society to see the church as an institution no longer belonging to Egyptian society, and those Muslims radical groups got a kind of unwritten permission to harm the churches as well as Christians. Indeed, many Christian were being hurt by Muslims as well as being more isolated. Christians perceive isolation as a means of protection. They were trying to protect themselves through isolation and avoiding Muslims in the community.

#### **4.2.2 Christian's big mistake**

According to several informants, it was a big mistake of Christian to understand isolation and avoidance as means of protection. In fact, avoidance and separation of Christians had encourager Muslims to put them under more pressure. Muslims had understood that isolation and avoidance as an indication of weakness, by which Muslims were motivated to put

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<sup>91</sup> See 3.1.4

<sup>92</sup> C 3

Christians under more pressure. In other words, more isolation means more pressure. Isolation will not give Christians the feeling of safety which they are seeking.

In addition, what Anwar El- Sadat claimed, was devastating the image of the church and its role as a religious institution. Anwar El- Sadat has led the Egyptians to view the church as a political institution rather than a religious one.

He changed the church's role in Egyptian's eyes. They were viewing the church not as a place of worship but as center for political activities.<sup>93</sup>

Some Egyptian intellectuals indicate that what Anwar El- Sadat claimed about Christians, was probably some sort of revenge, due to what happened to him, when he was in United States to hold some talks with American leaders<sup>94</sup>. Some Christians who were living in United States demonstrated against Anwar El- Sadat's regime and were insulting him. After returning back to Cairo, he gave that speech calming that the church had a plan to form an independent state. Others view the claim as a way of giving some satisfaction to the Muslims radical groups, who were angry with him because of the peace agreement Anwar El- Sadat made with Israel. Most of the Islamist groups disagree with this agreement.

Those radical groups had considered what Anwar El- Sadat claimed as a new trend against Christians, with which those radicals were content. They view Christians as their enemies as well as infidels not worshiping the true God as them. So, they were happy that Anwar El- Sadat as the president stood against the Christians and the church<sup>95</sup>. Moreover, that claim had strengthened the solidarity of radical groups and motivated them to do more violent action against Christians.<sup>96</sup>

#### **4.2.3 Radical Muslims express hatred**

At that time, some leaders of those radical groups wanted to chase the Christian out of the country. They used to attack Christians through their teaching and preaching, considering them as the main source of evil in Egyptian society. Christians should leave the country because they are not following Islamic ethics. They are eating pork, drinking wine, and having sex in their Churches. That type of speech was trying to add more ugly drawings and

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<sup>93</sup> C 4

<sup>94</sup> [http://www.coptichistory.org/new\\_page\\_428.htm](http://www.coptichistory.org/new_page_428.htm) Accessed in May 13th 2011

<sup>95</sup> C 4

<sup>96</sup> See 3.1.3



colors to the church's image, describing it not only as political organization as Anwar El-Sadat had claimed, but also, a place for sin and committing idolatry.

Unfortunately, that radical religious speech had affected Muslims and many of them are convinced that Christians are bad people and having bad ethics. A new stereotype was created about the Christians as a main source of evil in Egyptian society. It was way of Othering Christians and justifies discrimination and violence against them which was perceived by those radical groups as a way of fighting against evil.

Those radical are used to telling many lies about Christians and Christian life to justify the stereotype they have created. For example, they used to tell many lies about Christians students accusing them that they used to do bad things together as boys and girls.

Three of my informants<sup>97</sup> were students at that time at El-Minia university when al-Jama`at al-Islamiyya were warning and asking Christians students not to move along together as boys and girls<sup>98</sup>. If Christian students did not follow that, they would hurt them.

At that time many confrontations and conflicts escalated among the students because al-Jama`at al-Islamiyya were trying to dominate the students community, by applying that role as well as some other additional roles, like, enforcing Christian girls to dress like Muslims or at least cover their heads or avoiding wearing short clothes. Accordingly, many Christian students, both boys and girls, stopped attending their classes and were reading and studying at home.<sup>99</sup>

In addition, the stereotype created by the regime affected the whole society not only the student community. Many conflicts arose and many Christian religious leaders received threats to be killed. Threats were very serious and some were really killed. They were killed related to accusations that they were working to convert Muslims to Christianity.

The regime also, used to legitimize violence against Christians by not realizing this as a real problem in Egyptian society. For example, describing those who are taking violent actions against Christians as abnormal or accusing outsiders of committing that violent action. In other words, the regime was doing whatever possible to legitimize violent against Christians.

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<sup>97</sup> C 1,C5,C6

<sup>98</sup> That trend back to reflect see <http://www.coptreal.com/WShowSubject.aspx?SID=46511> Accessed in May 13<sup>th</sup> 2011.

<sup>99</sup> C 1

#### 4.2.4 The regime and church's construction issue

During the regime of At Anwar El- Sadat, Christians had felt being victim's injustice. They were wondering why the regime creating lies about Christian? Why was the regime insisting to view the church as a political organization working against the stability of the state? Why the regime was always legitimizes violent actions against Christians?

They had left with many questions without answers and affected very much by what was happening to them. As result, their sense of belonging to Egyptian community was getting weak.<sup>100</sup> Muslims were viewing them as strangers and they were viewing themselves as stranger too and no longer feeling the same belonging to that community where they were facing hearted and violence.

Creating negative stereotypes functioning against the Church was not the only contribution of the political system to the conflict between Christians and Muslims in Egypt. There are others coming through the regime. Among those contributions is the way that the regime is dealing with churches renovation or building. Since a long time, the regimes were Rough and tough regarding Church building or renovation. It goes back to the time Islam invaded Egypt. Most of the Muslims rulers governing Egypt were rough and tough regarding the issue.

The regime of Anwar El- Sadat, was applying a law issues by theTurks in 1856 called Hamayuni decree by which the president of the state is the only person who have the right of issuing permissions for constructing Churches.<sup>101</sup> Applying that very old law, had put all the establishments of constructing or renovating a church on one hand i.e. the president hand. In addition, Anwar El- Sadat applied some other regulations issued by a previous Under-Secretary of the Interior minister called El-Korbi Basha. In 1934 that person regulated ten conditions regarding construction of Churches. Those ten conditions are very difficult to fulfill. Accordingly, constructing or renovating a church might be impossible<sup>102</sup>.

Building or renovating a Church is being used by the regime, as tool of oppressing Christians. So, changing conditions and regulations make the construction or the renovation of Churches more difficult.

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<sup>100</sup> C 3

<sup>101</sup> [http://www.coptichistory.org/new\\_page\\_237.htm](http://www.coptichistory.org/new_page_237.htm) Accessed March 5<sup>th</sup> 2011.

<sup>102</sup> [http://www.coptichistory.org/new\\_page\\_237.htm](http://www.coptichistory.org/new_page_237.htm) Accessed March 5<sup>th</sup> 2011.

Unfortunately, the way the regime was dealing with the issue of construction of Churches has affected the whole society. By means, Muslims majority in Egypt, think that Christians has no right to construct new churches in an Islamic land. They have the right only, to keep what they already have for worship and not for anything else. By other words, the toughness of the state towards renewing or constructing a Church had transmitted to the public. That toughness was increasing and growing deeply within Egyptian society, day after another. It is stressing the prejudice and discrimination growing against Christians.<sup>103</sup> The more the prejudice grows the more that toughness reflects. It becomes like a social movement standing against constructions or renewing of churches.

The restrictions that the regime introduced along with social protesting and opposition to reconstructing or renewing churches, has provoked Christians all over the country. They were thinking to find alternatives as most of churches are old. Christians were trying to do some needed renovations in hidden ways.<sup>104</sup> They usually tried to avoid the security forces who are watching over the churches as well as the Muslim local communities do.

If Christians were doing major to their churches, they were not easily done behind closed doors. If they were reported to the police, the leaders of those churches could be detained and conflicts might take place between Muslims and Christians.

In fact, the restrictions and regulations that the regime was setting for constructing or renewing a church had mad that issue among the main sources of conflict between Muslims and Christians.

Christians used to compare between constructing a Mosque which can take a very short time to be achieved without any problem and constructing a church or doing minor changes as renovation which might take several years.<sup>105</sup>

One of my informants was a pastor. He spent more that ten years asking for an official permission form the government allowing him to renovate two walls of his Church. Even after he got that permission, the chief police officer forced him to sing an agreement to renovate the two mentioned wall within four days only and not to do any extra renovation needed except those two walls mentioned by the permission. In case, if he doesn't stick to

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<sup>103</sup> C 4

<sup>104</sup> C 4

<sup>105</sup> C1

that agreement they will stop the renovation of those two walls and arrest him, the officer said.<sup>106</sup>

This example shows how the official authorities are dealing with the issues of constructing or doing minor changes to a church building as a renovation. Unfortunately, comparison between regulations of building a Mosque and those of renovate a church usually lead Christians to feeling injustice.

The policy of the regime regarding this issue has impacted the relation between Muslims and Christians. The issue of construction and renovation churches becomes very stressful and challenging for Christians as it is representing injustice and inequality.

As the problem had been created by the regime and its bad way of dealing with this issue, it is quiet ironic that the regime are condemning the conflicts between Muslims and Christians on this background.

When the regime condemned the conflict, it used to blame Christians, indicating that, Christians used to provoke and hurt Muslims community by disrespecting the official regulations of renewing or constructing churches.<sup>107</sup> Of course, condemnation and blaming Christians that way strengthened their feeling of injustice. In addition, it provokes Muslims to do more resisting and standing against the desire of Christians to renovate or construct a church.

Moreover, the regime often declared that, there was nothing against constructing or renovating Churches in Egypt if Christians only stick to official regulations concerning the issue. According the regime, Christians are creating conflicts and challenges by disrespecting of those regulations which must be fulfilled for construing a Church. Official authorities are saying that while they know exactly that those regulations are very difficult to fulfill.

According to several informans, the way that the regime of Anwar El- Sadat was addressing and dealing with these issues had created gapes between Muslims and Christians in terms of social relationships. It also led Christians to be more alienated and lose their sense of belonging to Egyptian community. It motivated Christians to do what they are not like. In other words, Christians hate to live like strangers, but they isolate themselves to be strangers. Lack of their sense of belonging reflect since that regime and still function

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<sup>106</sup> C1

<sup>107</sup> C 4

Although, the Mubarak regime made some changes to the regulations and conditions of constructing or renovating church to lighten them, it still takes a long time to fulfill the demands of the government<sup>108</sup>. Moreover, there still is the same conflict reflects in this field Muslim communities still have the same attitudes and are often standing against church construction or renovation as it happened before.

#### **4.2.5 Conclusion**

There is no doubt, that rumors can impact social life and relations, especially, when leaders as well as grassroots, receive rumors as fact, like Anwar al-Sadat did. It's an effective tool of Othering leading to a lot of social pressure and pushing the oppressed to alienate and avoid the oppressors who might exercise more power over them. The issue regulations concerning of church renovation or construction is an example of how leaders and authorities are using their power and authority over minorities like Christians in Egypt, and how those leaders contribute to conflict, lack of social justice and generating hatred within their societies. Creating rumors for justifying prejudice, discrimination and Othering threatens the social stability and produce conflict.

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<sup>108</sup> C 3

## 4.3 THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN CONFLICT

### 4.3.1 The issue of conversion and conflict

Conversion is a crucial issue that challenges Muslim and Christian relations in Egypt. It opens a door for many allegations and accusations against each other. Muslims are accusing Christians that they have an organized plan of converting Muslims to Christianity.<sup>109</sup> The same accusation is made by Christians who think that Muslims are exploiting the bad economic conditions of Christian poor ones to convert them. They give them some money for embracing Islam and leaving Christianity

According to several informants, those accusations are very common and widespread among the public. On their basis, a huge gap between Muslims and Christians was created, and many social consequences resulted from this. For example, Most of Muslims and Christians young people are not moving along together or having a good friendship with each other. They think that friendship with the other might be a strategy of converting the other.

Because of those accusations, most Muslim and Christian families are warning their young members against having a friendship with people from other side, asking them to avoid that kind of relationship.

Both Muslims and Christians are dominated by a deep fear leading them to view friendship between young people as a part of the conversion strategy of the other.<sup>110</sup> They are using some stories of conversion to affirm their accusations to each other as well as to persuade the young that friendship is a step to conversion and implementing the hidden agenda of the other.

In fact, many conflicts and tensions had been raised on basis of some conversion stories started with a social relation between different couples belonging to both traditions. Those stories had influenced the much contribution to creation of a stereotype about conversion controlling and affecting the minds of Muslims and Christians mind. That stereotype supports the idea that both Muslims and Christians have their own agenda of conversion. According to that stereotype, Muslims are getting support from rich Muslims countries like Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries to achieve their goal and fulfill their agenda. Christians

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<sup>109</sup> C 5

<sup>110</sup> C 5

as well, are getting much support from European countries and United States to implement their agenda of converting Muslims to Christianity. So, many Muslims are viewing Europeans and American as their enemies. Christians have the same view regarding Gulf countries and Saudi Arabia.<sup>111</sup>

Indeed, that stereotype attached to the issue of conversion is affecting the social and political relations within and outside Egyptian community. It stands as an obstacle against improving the relations between Muslims and Christians.

#### **4.3.2 Media promoting allegations and stereotype**

Media had created more difficulties in the relation between Muslims and Christians in Egypt, by mistreatment and misconception of some crucial issues, like conversion which is often misconceived.

Misconceptions in the national media regarding conversion as offending religion, is very common in Egyptian media.<sup>112</sup> It used to deal with conversion as a serious way offending religion. On the basis of that misconception, the media had promoted accusations and allegations especially against Christians. Christians have been accused that they have some secret places in some monasteries for hiding and protecting the converted ones<sup>113</sup>. Those who had been converted from Islam to Christianity are hiding in those places until finding a way to leave the country to United States or Europe where they can live in peace and security.

The media used to indicate that United States and European countries were supporting Christian activities and their agenda. This affected Christians very much. They had been affected socially to become more alienated. Othering Christians by linking them to Western countries is strengthening their alienation. The majority of Muslims think that Christian loyalty and affiliation to Western countries is non-questionable. As a result, many Muslims used to give Christians a nick name “Khawaja” or “Khawaja”, meaning “foreigners” or

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<sup>111</sup> C 3

<sup>112</sup> C 7

<sup>113</sup> <http://youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=410141> Accessed in May 14<sup>th</sup> 2011.

See more <http://youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=328031> Accessed in May 14<sup>th</sup> 2011.

<http://youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=261146> Accessed in May 14<sup>th</sup> 2011.

“strangers”.<sup>114</sup> Muslims are using those titles to indicate that Christians are foreigners or strangers which are not the original meaning of the word. That word is a Persian word meaning Lord or Master<sup>115</sup> but another meaning given is foreigner or stranger.

Khawaja is not just a nick name; it’s a type of segregation or Othering coming from outside to influence Christians. It might used and demonstrate for justification of discrimination and lack of social justice as well. Christians are not pleased with that title and many of them refuse to be called by that nick name Khawaja. They hate the title because of its bad contributions. That title attaches them to Western countries and Western culture which create many problems for them. The negative image Egyptian media drawing and presenting about Western culture and Western life has made Muslims hate Christians as they attach them to that culture.

The media had used to view the Western ethics and Western culture as standing against Islam.<sup>116</sup> In other words, associating Christians to Western culture means that Christians are against Islam and Muslims as well. Therefore, hatred between Muslims and Christians is developing, leading both to be in conflict with each other for any reason.

Christians were trying through Christian Satellite channels and internet to defend those accusations mentioned above, showing that they are not Western, but Egyptian and still Egyptian.

Before the availability of the internet and Satellite channels, Christians had no ways of accessing a wide audience through media. They were not able to express themselves affirming their affiliation to Egyptian community or prove that they are not having an agenda to convert Muslims to Christianity.<sup>117</sup> Nowadays, Christians are making counter efforts to the former allegations and showing that they are real Egyptian. But influencing Muslim conceptions about Christians are still active. It is still active due to, Egyptian media contributions to enrich and support that stereotype. Exaggeration and giving false information contribute much to enriching and empower that.

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<sup>114</sup> [http://www.copts-united.com/08\\_copts-united\\_08/wrrr.php/2008/08/29/10099.html](http://www.copts-united.com/08_copts-united_08/wrrr.php/2008/08/29/10099.html). Accessed in May 14<sup>th</sup> 2011.

<sup>115</sup> <http://aljazeeraatalk.net/forum/showthread.php?t=82299> Accessed in May 17<sup>th</sup> 2011.

<sup>116</sup> C 3

<sup>117</sup> C 4



Practicing exaggerations and giving false information by the media have impacted the relation between Muslims and Christians to a large extent. Their relation has deteriorated particularly in villages and rural areas, where the majority of inhabitants are not well educated or literal at all. They used to believe what the media presenting without any question. They were fully dominated by what they receive through the media.<sup>118</sup>

The media for them is the main source of information. They believe, trust and follow what the media present to them. Unfortunately, those uneducated people are not able to know if the media exaggerating or telling lies because they have no other information resource than T.V. They can't access other resources due to lack of education. So, they are taking whatever the T.V. presents for granted. Among those people the stereotype concerning the former allegations is still active and affecting the relation between Muslims and Christians very much.

In fact, Muslims and Christians are accusing each other, using the same accusations. The only difference between the two sides is that Muslims can speak out their accusations to Christians loudly, but Christians can not, they just talk about it within the Christian community. The long term oppression Christians face might explain why they prefer that way of expression.

Accusations coming from both sides, whether expressed loudly or quietly, are creating conflict and challenging relationships. Unfortunately, those accusations have been reproduced, escalated and extended by the media. It promotes and enriches them to be dominant stereotypes creating conflict and developing hatred between both sides.

Those stereotypes are creating conflicts and are strengthened by them. For example, if someone converted to Islam or Christianity conflict might rise and the stereotype about conversion agenda being strengthened by that conflict. So, the relation between conflict and stereotypes is a circle relation. In other words, stereotypes are creating conflicts and conflicts feeding are stereotypes.

Unfortunately, that type of relation between conflicts and stereotypes is a challenge, as it is giving conflicts good prospects for long life.

The media are contributing to that long life term of conflicts, by exaggerating and creating many rumors in dealing with conversion issue. For example, the media had used all means of

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<sup>118</sup> C 7

exaggeration and misuse of conversion story of a Christian woman to Islam. The woman was a wife of an Orthodox priest in Upper Egypt.<sup>119</sup> The media had made that story very problematic issue especially, after many rumors were created around it.

Among those rumors, one rumor says that some Christian leaders had kidnapped that woman and killed her. Based on that rumor, many Muslims have been upset and provoked to demonstrate against the church asking for revenge. Some of the demonstrators go so far calling for taking the Pope himself to the court, if the converted woman was truly killed. They were shouting and insulting Christian and Christianity describing Christian leaders by extremist.<sup>120</sup>

In addition to that, another rumor had reflected regarding the same story, saying that, Egyptian police had supported the Pope and helped him to arrest that woman and hiding her inside a Coptic monastery to enforce her to leave Islam and return back to Christianity.<sup>121</sup> So, many Muslims came out to the street demonstrating and calling for freedom of belief. They were asking as the Pope to release that woman.<sup>122</sup>

Unfortunately, escalating those rumors and mistreatment done by the media to such story has created some sort of war between Muslims and Christians.<sup>123</sup> Both were using satellite T.V. channels to insulting each other and offending the other religion. Among those channels which were used for criticizing and insulting other religion was the Islamic channel called el-Rahma and the Christian channel called el- Hayat. Of course, there are some others channels sending the same stuff and have the same attitude but those two are the most popular ones. Many people are following and watching them. Those channels are acting like a pulpit for insulting and offending the other religion. They are feeding conflict very much, especially among those who have no other means enabling them to access other information sources except these satellite channels.

Christians are considering el- Hayat channel as their powerful instrument against Muslims. Therefore, most of Christians, even the poor ones have a satellite dish to access and watch

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<sup>119</sup> <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2010/1014/eg8.htm> Accessed in May 17<sup>th</sup> 2011.

<sup>120</sup> <http://www.youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=273690&> Accessed in May 11<sup>th</sup> 2011.

<sup>121</sup> <http://www.almesryoon.com/news.aspx?id=37340> Accessed in May 11<sup>th</sup> 2011.

<sup>122</sup> <http://0soldiers0.wordpress.com/category/%d9%83%d8%a7%d9%85%d9%84%d9%8a%d8%a7> Accessed in May 11<sup>th</sup> 2011.

See also, <http://youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=402904&SecID=12> Accessed in May 11<sup>th</sup> 2011.

<sup>123</sup> <http://www.youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=274214&0&> Accessed in May 11<sup>th</sup> 2011.

that channel. Moreover, most of them prefer to watch that channel more than going to the church. They honor and appreciate the way Christian leaders are criticizing Islam through that channel. They feel much content to express themselves through the media and this way. They feel content to use such channel to attack Islam the same way as Muslims attack Christianity. It's a competition for exposing power rather than defending one's own religion. The media is the powerful weapon of both for metaphorically killing each other. It's a war created and enriched by the media.

Misuse of the media is manifested in presenting rumors as facts to create conflict and stereotypes as well. Both Muslims and Christians are receiving whatever the media present without inquiring or investigating what they receive. They are taking the information for granted. They had learned through the media to criticize each other but not to criticize themselves. In other words, both are using their critical mind to criticize each other. They are not using that critical mind to filtrate information imposed by their own media about the other religion. Their ability to criticize themselves seem to have been disabled.

Each of them trust their own media more that reality.<sup>124</sup> For example, some conflict rises between some Muslims and Christians and as a result, some are injured from both sides. Muslim media reporting on that conflict might say that many Muslims were killed and none of Christians even injured. Christian media might do the same. None of them are presenting the truth according to what actually happened on the ground, but people trust the media more than the reality. They are keeping their trust in the media even after realizing exaggerations and mistreatments that media are doing.<sup>125</sup> They use to follow the media with blind eyes. The media is dominating them in their thoughts and deeds. It forms their reactions towards each other as well as leading them to hurt and each other in the name of religion.

According to several informants, some of those who are trust and depend on the media as the only source of information used to report false information as their contribution to the media. In other words, they used to receive some false information and report other false information to the media. That way of exchanging the false information between people and the media are very challengeable in terms of finding out which true and which false. In fact, the media is misleading people and they do the same to the media. That double edge

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<sup>124</sup> Ahlback, *Exercising power*,112

<sup>125</sup> C 3

misleading is creating conflicts and stereotypes putting the relation between Muslims and Christians in Egypt always under tension.

### 4.3.3 Using internet in conflict

There is no doubt that the internet has many advantages. Those advantages are affecting social life and social relationships in worldwide. It provides a better and faster communication all over the world. Moreover, it is the cheapest communication tool given to the human kind by modern technology. It provides interaction on an unprecedented scale with different groups of other nationalities backgrounds, and it allows religious affiliations to communicate and exchange their ideas, dealing with their problems and discussing their own challenges.<sup>126</sup>

Therefore, discovering more common ground between different cultures become easier to identify and achieve through internet. In other words, communalities have been easier to see through the internet.

Exchanging and accessing information become more easy, fast and often nearly costless. Therefore the internet has become the most essential tool among different tools of communication. It's a blessing given to the humankind to achieve better communication, but can also lead to polemics and creating conflicts as users communicate<sup>127</sup>. That type of conflicts can be much on higher level and more aggressive. Tore Ahlback mentions that:

“It is a well-known element of internet communication that levels of aggression can be much higher than in face to face interaction, since angry responses can be sent off in a split second, and one rarely sees the reactions of those one has insulted”<sup>128</sup>

This is the case, regarding the way that some Muslims and Christian in Egypt using the internet. One of my informants said that, both are using internet facilities like, chatting rooms to attack and insult each other rather than for achieving better communication or better understanding.

Using the internet facilities for insulting and offending other religions had promoted and developed by the time. For example, some Muslims users used to insult Christ and claim that

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<sup>126</sup> Tore Ahlback, *Exercising power: the role of religions in concord and conflict* (Vmmalan Kirjapanio Oy, Finland, 2006), 93.

<sup>127</sup> Ahlback, *Exercising power: the role of religions in concord and conflict*, 93-94.

<sup>128</sup> Ahlback, *Exercising power: the role of religions in concord and conflict*, 101.

he was a homosexual. He was staying all the time with his disciples and was not married. They are inquiring by which way Jesus was fulfilling his sexual needs as a human being. Christians too doing the same, they used to insult the prophet Mohammed and claim that he was polygamous and a sexually abuser, because he married to many wives among them one was under age, not more than nine years old. Ignorance is a challenge affecting the relation between Muslims and Christians. Hugh Goddard mentioned that:

“Mutual ignorance, then, is one obstacle in the way of mutual understanding between Christians and Muslims”<sup>129</sup>

Moreover, both are using the internet for creating and promoting many rumors and false information which lead to conflict and violence<sup>130</sup>. Rumors are contributing much in creating misunderstandings between both sides. They develop barriers and hatred as well.

There are uncountable numbers of Muslim and Christian websites competing in creating rumors and escalating them as well. Religious leaders from both sides are supporting those who are using the internet facilities to do so. They are giving much time to answer and respond to issues and questions young people raise and ask. Most of those issues are controversial, like the issue of trinity in Christianity and the issue of abrogation in Islam. Religious leader are not only giving answers to such issues but they are also giving those young people more information and teaching them different ways of argument with others who are belonging to a different religion. In other words, they are teaching and encouraging those young to challenge each other, raising conflicts online which can transfer to conflict on the ground.

According to several informants, some of those leaders are giving wrong answers or false information about other religions by which more conflict might be created. In the Nageh Hamady, incident for example, a lot of information escalated and was presented through the internet; claiming that some Muslims had tried to assassinate the Archbishop of Nageh Hamady.<sup>131</sup> The Archbishop himself claimed that. On the basis of that claim, conflict in many places all over the country arose. Many Christians in different places were provoked and went out demonstrating against terrorists and asking for revenge.

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<sup>129</sup> Goddard, *Christians and Muslims From double standards to mutual understanding*, 12.

<sup>130</sup> <http://youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=403897> Accessed in May 11<sup>th</sup> 2011

<sup>131</sup> <http://www.masreat.com/%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%AB%> Accessed in May 11<sup>th</sup> 2011

The wrong information and claims are not coming only from Christian side. Some Muslims also, giving the young ones wrong information about Christianity and using those young to escalating and creating rumors through the internet.<sup>132</sup> For example, it had been mentioned online that the church leaders were torturing the priest's wife who converted to Islam and she might have been killed. Indeed, escalating that claim online had provoked many Muslims inside and out side the country. It led al-Qaida in Iraq to threat churches in Egypt by devastating them if the converted ones whom the church was keeping were not released.<sup>133</sup>

The story of that woman was no longer local story. Escalating it online made it an international issue which provoked many Muslims in many different Arab countries like Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine.

Indeed, the fast and easy exchange of information, news and ideas online has opened the door to outsiders to intervene and feed the conflict between Muslims and Christians in Egypt. Those who are living outside the country, whether Muslims or Christians, seem to think that their intervention might help.

According to several informants, the ways that outsiders react and respond to the conflict between Muslims and Christians have many negative impacts. For example, when the Nageh Hamady incident happened, many Christians living abroad got angry. They demonstrated asking for revenge, especially those who are living in United States. As result, some sort of pressure come over the regime from outside addressing some chronic issues and challenges that Christians face as a minority in Egypt. Muslim local communities and the regime were provoked and rejected that pressure coming from outside. Also, Church leaders in Egypt have the same attitude to reject outside intervention, stressing that Egyptian society is responsible for solving and dealing with Coptic problems not those who are living outside. Rejection of outside intervention was strong before and is still strong after that incident.<sup>134</sup>

The regime was having some kind of sympathy to Christians, just after the incident. That sympathy changed to anger because of that intervention of outsiders living abroad.<sup>135</sup> Mubarak had mentioned in one of his speeches after that incident that intervening of outsiders is unacceptable referring to an organization called aqbat al- Mahjar (Copts of the

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<sup>132</sup> C 4

<sup>133</sup> [http://arabic.cnn.com/2010/middle\\_east/11/1/church.iraq\\_cas/index.html](http://arabic.cnn.com/2010/middle_east/11/1/church.iraq_cas/index.html) Accessed in May 15<sup>th</sup> 2011

<sup>134</sup> . Makari, *Conflict and Cooperation: Christian-Muslim Relations in Contemporary Egypt*, 170-174.

<sup>135</sup> C 7

diaspora) originating in U.S.A. and advocating Christian's rights in Egypt.<sup>136</sup> They used to focus on some problems like the issue of building or renovating churches, the challenges Christians face to find a job and the lack of social justice.

One of my informants who has been living in United States for five years was a members of that organization, and he said that

“The organization had a lot of efforts in using the internet compelling the local incidents and events to the notional community. Unfortunately they used to exaggerate and not telling the truth. They also creating rumors by which many people might be provoked to act foolishly causing more damage to the relation between Muslims and Christians in Egypt”<sup>137</sup>.indeed, rumors are internal but they represent pollution from external sources in the global village.<sup>138</sup>

The first harmful contribution to the conflict between Muslims and Christians done by this organization was in 2000.They escalated some information and video clips online showing what had happened to some Christian in a village called al-kusheh in upper Egypt where twenty Christians were killed and some others injured <sup>139</sup>; in a conflict between Muslims and Christians in that village . That organization of aqbat al- Mahjar had used the incident to tell the international community that Muslims are going to devastate Christians all over the country. Moreover, they claimed that Christians are facing a real genocide<sup>140</sup> by which Christians might be totally devastated.

The regime got angry and accused them that they are trying to divide the Egyptian community as well as keeping Muslims and Christians in conflict. The way that organization dealt with this incident had provoked the regime to be against Christians in some way or another. Christian at that time felt that the regime was standing against them because of the interventions of outsiders. They felt that when the regime released 93 out of 96 Muslims who participate in committing that crime. Christians felt injustice and were very angry and upset

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<sup>136</sup> [http://nacopticas1.blogspot.com/2010/01/blog-post\\_5112.html](http://nacopticas1.blogspot.com/2010/01/blog-post_5112.html) Accessed in May 15<sup>th</sup> 2011

See also, [http://nacopticas1.blogspot.com/2010/01/blog-post\\_4123.html](http://nacopticas1.blogspot.com/2010/01/blog-post_4123.html) Accessed in May 15<sup>th</sup> 2011

[http://nacopticas1.blogspot.com/2010/01/blog-post\\_1416.html](http://nacopticas1.blogspot.com/2010/01/blog-post_1416.html) Accessed in May 15<sup>th</sup> 2011

[http://nacopticas1.blogspot.com/2010/01/blog-post\\_10.html](http://nacopticas1.blogspot.com/2010/01/blog-post_10.html) Accessed in May 15<sup>th</sup> 2011

<sup>137</sup> C 3

<sup>138</sup> See 3.1.1

<sup>139</sup> [http://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%AB%D8%A9\\_%D8%A7%D9%84%](http://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%AB%D8%A9_%D8%A7%D9%84%)

Accessed in May 15<sup>th</sup> 2011.

<sup>140</sup> [http://www.coptichistory.org/new\\_page\\_12.htm](http://www.coptichistory.org/new_page_12.htm) Accessed in May 15<sup>th</sup> 2011.

to the regime standing against them and not considering their rights. Unfortunately, feeling injustice may lead to enriching and feeding conflicts between Muslims and Christians.

Injustice led Christians to imagine that those who live outside the country can give help by mobilization their given countries to call for justice and equality that Christians are missing in Egypt. That hope of getting some help from outside had been used by Muslims leaders for confirming that Western countries are trying to intervene in Egyptians internal affairs, which was completely unacceptable to both the regime and the majority Muslims as well. In other words, Christians waiting and crying for help coming from outside the country let the Muslim community to put Christians under more pressure. Therefore, the more Christians are crying for help the more they are being oppressed.

The local community was not ready to hear the Christian voices expressing their suffering injustice and inequality. Christians should keep silent, that seem to be what the Muslim majority wants.

Indeed, keeping silent was the attitude of Christians until 10 years ago. Since 10 years ago Christians had left the strategy of silence. They have started to speak out using the freedom of speech available to them by using the internet.<sup>141</sup> That freedom of speech has restored some confidence in the Christian community and led them to feel that they are not weak and they can fight for their rights as citizens. Confidence has been restored through the freedom of speech and freedom of contact with many people around the world. Christians felt that they are no longer a forgotten minority .they have some sort of feeling secure because nothing wrong can put them under condemnation because of using the internet.

. In fact, using the internet as means of communication has set Christian free from their fears to speak out and expressing themselves. “They decided to leave silence and open their mouth which was closed for a long time” one of my informants said<sup>142</sup>.

It was strange and unacceptable to majority Muslims to hear Christian voices speaking loudly. It is one of the main recent challenges to the Egyptian community, which was not ready to accept that new situation. Therefore, more pressure comes up over Christians creating more challenges forcing them to go back to silence.

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<sup>141</sup>. Makari, *Conflict and Cooperation: Christian-Muslim Relations in Contemporary Egypt*, 180-181. See also, 177-186.

<sup>142</sup> C3



Indeed, Christian young generation does no longer prefer silence and view silence as a passive reaction led Christians to lose their rights as citizens and waste many opportunities to achieve justice and equality. They think that Christians should use all available means to restore their rights and achieve social justice and equality. Silence doesn't reflect tolerance or lead to tolerance as Christians thought before; this is how the new Christian generation sees silence. They view silence as a sin which Christians must leave. Their voice should be loud everywhere. So, the new generation has been eager to use internet to achieve that purpose and indicating that silence has no future among the Christian community in Egypt. As a result of that change of Christians attitude, many conflicts arose online affecting the relation between Muslims and Christians on the ground.

#### **4.3.4 Conclusion**

The media and internet has become a new arena where more conflicts and tensions between Muslims and Christians in Egypt reflect. The new arena is using for creating and enriching rumors as well as stereotypes, by which the social relations impacted. Unfortunately, people can not leave that new arena or stop using it or follow it. It's a part of their new life, which they like. It gives them more freedom to express themselves especially Christians. The young Christians generation sees internet and other facilities of communication as a blessing given to them to leave silence and defend their rights. Muslims are also using the given facilities to defend their religion and explore their Islamic views. They way both sides are using internet and media is indicating that conflict between them might take a long time and is not coming to an end any time soon.

## 4.4 NEW WAYS OF EXPRESSING ANGER AND LONG TERM CONFLICT

### 4.4.1 Silence is not spiritual

Christians in Egypt have experienced oppression since the Romans regime. This challenges Christians to find out some ways of expression to express their anger, pain, and their feeling of injustice.

They have stayed in silence for a long time, preferring isolation as means of protection. According to several informants, silence and isolation has affected them socially. Loosing their opportunities to speak out their problems was the result reflected. They became more introvert and lost their genuine desire to participate in life's activities, particularly political ones.

Moreover, their concern about what is happening around them in their local community was affected too. Unfortunately, the church had played a basic role supporting that trend of isolation and introversion.<sup>143</sup> Christians had been convinced by the church that they are not belonging to the current physical world, but only to the spiritual. Accordingly, they should not care about their present life. Their main concern is their spiritual future.

Church leaders have used some way of preaching convincing their congregation that suffering and persecution intended for testing their faith. God allows those difficulties to affect them as blessings that strengthen Christians and Christianity. Therefore, Christians should accept them without complains. Complaining or expressing anger indicates weakness of faith.

What the church was saying and teaching for a long time created and supported the attitude of alienation. In other words, the church had helped Christians to justify their alienation. It becomes like a stereotype dominating Christian minds, leading Christians to think that the more alienated the individual is the more is spiritual he or she. Alienation was seen as a parallel to spirituality and is often regarded as one of its synonyms.

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<sup>143</sup> C2 , C 5

Moreover, the church had mixed silence with tolerance which is among the central Christian values. This why most of the Christians were not worried about their silence and did not have any significant reactions against the long lasting oppression.

Also, keeping silence had affected Christian and led Muslims community to think that Christians are very weak. They are not able to react. So, Muslims oppress them more and more.

#### **4.4.2 New Generation on the arena**

The new generation of Christians is not like the former one. Youth do not have the same attitudes as the former generation, socially or spiritually. They do not give silence any spiritual value.<sup>144</sup> Changing the social image of Christians is their own goal and ways should be found to achieve it. So, they are using all available means to make their voice and needs recognized.

According to several informants, that new generation is not much controlled by the church. They are not following the church with blind eyes. They are more critical and like to argue expressing their opinions. For example, those young can argue with priests, pastors and leaders if their teaching is irrelevant and not easy to apply.

Those young Christians are not having much concern about tolerance.<sup>145</sup> Their main concern is to accomplish equality and social justice. Therefore, issues like expressing their anger, communicating their needs and addressing their challenges form their agenda. They do not fear to confront the Muslim community, asking for their rights as citizens.

Indeed what happened in el-Omrana <sup>146</sup> was an indication that the way Christians are expressing themselves is changing. It was the first time young Christians confronted the

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<sup>144</sup> C 2

<sup>145</sup> C 2

<sup>146</sup> The largest district of Giza governorate in Egypt, Up to about 50 square kilometers, occupying most of the suburbs and parts of the pyramid.

For more about the conflict based on that incident see

<http://youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=308729> Accessed in March 20<sup>th</sup> 2011.

<http://youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=308448> Accessed in March 20<sup>th</sup> 2011.

<http://youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=308786> Accessed in March 20<sup>th</sup> 2011.

<http://youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=308607> Accessed in March 20<sup>th</sup> 2011.

<http://youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=308634> Accessed in March 20<sup>th</sup> 2011.

<http://youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=308485> Accessed in March 20<sup>th</sup> 2011.

police forces who were trying to stop them to complete and finish the construction of their church g. As a result, conflicts between Christians and Muslims had taken place not only where the church is located but in other places too.

Christians are no longer passive as before.<sup>147</sup> They express themselves loudly. In other words, there is no difference between the way Christians are expressing their anger and the way Muslims do. Currently, both Christians and Muslims have the same way of expression, for example, demonstrations associated with violence. Both are using violence, damaging public sites and property creating some sort of chaos.

According to several informants, demonstrating and using violence are new ways that Christians were not using for a long time as means of expressing themselves. By choosing those new ways, Christians say that they are no longer calm or weak and Muslim perspectives might change, so Christians are perceived Christians in a different way. Many Egyptian intellectuals warn the regime as well as the rest of the community that Christians community are changing and Christians should be reconceived as full citizens and must be equal to Muslims in every level. Otherwise, conflict and violence between Muslims and Christians will not come to an end. It might be getting more harmful and widespread.

These intellectuals' responses to Christians regarding their new ways of expressing their anger have encouraged them to continue and they were pleased that some of Egyptian intellectuals supporting their rights to seeking equality and social justice.

However, those who are supporting Christian's rights and considering their needs are not many.<sup>148</sup> The majority of the Muslims are not happy to see the Christian community avoiding silence in order to be heard. Many Muslims do not want to change their views about Christians and recognize them as citizens. They always view them second-class citizen and treat them as strangers and who do not really belong to the Egyptian community.

Christians protesting and demonstrating for equality and social justice have provoked some Muslim radical groups to demonstrate against the church. They demonstrate against the church, asking for liberating individuals whom the churches are keeping under custody to prevent them from embracing Islam. In their demonstration they described church leaders as

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<sup>147</sup> C 2 , C 5

<sup>148</sup> C 3

terrorists using violence against and torturing those who converted to Islam. Recently, the Salafi<sup>149</sup> group issued a statement confirming its determination to rescue two converts to Islam from the grip of the Church and do all efforts even being willing to sacrifice their own life, in reference to using violence against the church if necessary. This can be seen as a reaction against the new way adopted by the Christian community to express their suffering. In addition, that statement is imposing a clear message to Christians to return back to calm and silence otherwise, the Salafis might take violent actions against them.

It seems that the Muslim community has been shocked by the new ways that Christians use to express their needs and challenges.<sup>150</sup> So, the community has two different responses to that. On one hand, some were very sympathetic with Christians indicating that the long term oppression, lack of equality and social justice justified those changes happens to Christian's community to demonstrate and using violence.

Those who have that sympathy with Christians warn the regime as well as the rest of the community not to continue neglecting and marginalize Christians. If so, the stability of Egyptian community might be in danger. They also indicate that the Christians will never go back to being calm and silent again. The Christian community has changed and the new generation is different from the former ones. The generation of the internet, as they call them, is characterized by freedom of speech and expression. Silence has no meaning and they are ready to sacrifice and do their best to restore rights back. Christian community is not as it was before.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> According to Wikipedia, **Salafi** (Arabic: سلفي) is a follower of an Islamic movement that takes the *Salaf* of the patristic period of early Islam, as exemplary models. The word *Salaf* is an Arabic noun which translates to "predecessor", or "forefather" and who are collectively referred to as the "*Salaf as-Saaleh*", or Pious Predecessors, namely the first three Muslim generations: the *Sahabah* ("Companions"), the *Tabi'un* ("Followers") and the *Tabi' al-Tabi'in* ("Those after the Followers"). These three generations and their understanding of the texts and tenets of Islam are looked upon by Salafis as the Islamic orthodoxy. Salafism has been usually used by Sunni theologians since the fifth Muslim generation or earlier to differentiate the creed of the first three generations from subsequent variations in creed and methodology. Salafi has become particularly associated with the small minority of Salafis that espouse violent Jihad as a legitimate expression of Islam, the so-called Salafi Jihadis. This association has negatively affected the large majority of Salafis that reject any valid religious basis for violence. Salafis have been subject to persecution, especially in areas dominated by Sufi forms of Islam. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salafi> Accessed in April 10<sup>th</sup> 2011.

<sup>150</sup> C 2

<sup>151</sup> M1

On the other hand, others are saying that the Christians have no right to demonstrate, expressing themselves that way. They are a minority living in Islamic state. So, they should keep quiet and not ask for equality with Muslims. These Muslims had also criticized the regime and asked why the regime allows the minority to demonstrate. They emphasized that Christians want to destroy the country by showing to the international community that they are living under pressure and being persecuted by Muslims. This could provoke the international community to take stand against Muslims. They also claim that rights of Christians as Egyptians are available to them and nothing is missing. Christians are protesting and demonstrating for nothing.<sup>152</sup>

The most radical response to the new Christian way of expression anger and need was imposed by the Muslims brotherhood movement. They mentioned that Christians had no rights expect what is given to them by Shari`a. Muslims in Egypt are very tolerant against Christians. They are not taking *Jizyah* from them, and giving them freedom to worship. They also not standing against their church and still keeping their promises since Omar iben El asera to keep them in safe<sup>153</sup>

Regardless, the different responses towards the new ways that Christians have as means of expressed their rights, are significant that Christians have got some encouragement to defeat their fears of expressing themselves loudly. That encouragement has reflected in developing ways of protesting and demonstrating. At the beginning, they used to demonstrate inside the St. Mark's Coptic Cathedral in Abbassia in Cairo. After that, they left the Cathedral as they used to demonstrate and they went out in the streets which were an indication that their way of expressing anger had developed. They are no longer afraid to demonstrate in the streets to express themselves publicly.

Before the Omrania incident, Christians were used to demonstrate peacefully but after that, demonstrating was often associated with violence. It was another step of developing their ways of protesting by which they have conflict with police forces as well as with Muslims.

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<sup>152</sup> M1

<sup>153</sup> <http://www.way2allah.com/modules.php?id=1&name=Khotab&op=AuthorVedio> Accessed in May 15<sup>th</sup> 2011

Christians are no longer peaceful people<sup>154</sup>.it is challenging to the whole community that Christians are doing violent actions as means of expression. It might produce more violence and conflict. Because violence is producing violence and conflict is feeding conflict<sup>155</sup>

#### **4.4.3 Contribution of current violent actions to conflict**

##### **4.4.3.1 Alexandria incident**

Indeed, there are many violent actions contributing to the conflict to between Muslims and Christians in Egypt. Most of those violent actions took place because one of three main reasons. Those three main reasons are church construction or renovation, romantic relations between Muslims and Christian's young people and conversion issue.

The most recent incidents against Christians occurred because of conversion or romantic relation between young people for example, bombing a church in Alexandria had happened on the back ground that the Coptic Church leaders are said to have detained some of the converted women who converted to Islam and are torturing them to return back to Christianity. According to one theory, some radical Muslims planned to bomb the church as revenge of torturing their sisters in Islam. Those radicals bombed the church by using an explosive device detonated in front of the Coptic Orthodox church of Saint Mark in the Sidi Bishr neighborhood in Alexandria.

Initial reports stated that it was a car explosion; however an Interior Ministry statement later declared that it was a suicide attack, through the Egyptian official news agency.

At the time, of the blast, several thousand Coptic Christians were attending midnight prayer service at the church at the occasion of the New Year. The explosion resulted in scattered body parts, destroyed cars and smashed windows. Twenty three Coptic Christians were killed as a result of the explosion, and about one hundred people, most of them Christians, were injured. The remains were covered with newspapers until they were brought inside the church.

Forensic testing confirmed that the explosive device used was home made and contained nails and ball-bearings. The Interior Ministry stated that the bomb was filled with small

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<sup>154</sup> M2

<sup>155</sup> M1

pieces of metal to cause maximum damage and that a foreign-backed suicide bomber may have been responsible.

Copts were deeply aggrieved by this attack, many believing that the Egyptian state security's failure to deal firmly with past attacks on Christians in Egypt, increased threats of further this attacks, while others went as far as to directly blame the State Security for the bombings. One member of the Coptic community declared, "The government is the reason this happened. They are the terrorists who attack us every day following the bombing."<sup>156</sup>

Based on that, several thousand Copts took to the streets in protest. Furious Christians clashed with Egyptian police and Egyptian security forces. Christians and Muslims pelted each other with rocks, and cars were torched after these overnight protests, more than 100 Christians protested the following morning near the church that was attacked, chanting "We sacrifice our souls and blood for the Holy Cross" and "O Mubarak, the heart of the Copts is on fire".

The Egyptian police reacted by firing rubber bullets and tear gas at the Christians. In Cairo, about 4,000 Christians and Muslims demonstrated against terrorism in the predominantly Christian neighborhood of Shubra. The demonstration lasted for six hours and was joined by both government and opposition members of the Egyptian parliament and a number of political figures, including a former minister and Tomorrow Party Leader Ayman Nor.

In the same neighborhood of Shubra, thousands of Coptic Christians clashed with riot police for three consecutive days, resulting in injuries to both Coptic civilians and riot police soldiers. Thousands of Copts demonstrated at the Monastery of Saint Simon the Tanner in el-Mouktam in Cairo. The demonstrators called for the resignation of the Egyptian government. They chanted, "With our souls and blood we redeem our Cross". They then clashed with the Egyptian security forces, resulting in injuries to twelve of the Coptic demonstrators.

In addition, thousands of Coptic Christians demonstrated outside the Egyptian ministry of foreign affairs and the state television buildings for two consecutive days. Pope Shenouda

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<sup>156</sup><http://youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=348194> accessed in May 15<sup>th</sup> 2011

See also, <http://youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=362166> accessed in May 15<sup>th</sup> 2011

<http://youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=352591> accessed in May 15<sup>th</sup> 2011



III, strongly condemned the criminal assault, bombing in Alexandria blaming it on forces that wish no good for Egypt.

The Pope also called upon the government to speedily arrest and prosecute the perpetrator of this criminal act His personal secretary said, the incident had severely grieved us, because it is very alien to the love and harmony in which the nation lives. The top cleric in Alexandria, the Patriarchal Vicar Hegumen Ruwies Marcos, said that, the Egyptian government and security forces wanted to blame the bombing on a suicide bomber instead of a car bomb in order to write off the crime as something carried out by a lone attacker. He also denounced the lack of protection in front of the church, stating that he was surprised to find only three soldiers and one officer guarding the church at such a sensitive time in spite of the recent numerous threats against Copts.

The Synod of priests in Alexandria unanimously criticized the lax attitude of the Egyptian authorities towards the public expression of hatred against Coptic Christians

In a statement issued by the Synod, the priests said, that the attack on the church, was the result of anti-Christian mobilization and the lies recently propagated against the Coptic Orthodox Church On the Sunday following the bombings, Coptic parishioners at the bombed church of Saint Mark and Pope Peter expressed anger, and protested discrimination that Christians in Egypt are facing.<sup>157</sup>

The priest of the church blamed Islamic fanaticism and Islamic extremism He called upon the Egyptian government to ensure the rights of the Christians in "life, prayer and work."<sup>158</sup>

#### **4.4.3.2 Helwan incident**

Two people died and a church was burned because of sectarian violence erupted near Helwan, south of Cairo. The two dead were a farmer and a merchant of fruit Muslims, who had an altercation with the exchange of gun shots, a Coptic Christian farmer's son because the latter had an affair with the daughter of Muslim farmer.

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<sup>157</sup> <http://youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=328769> accessed in May 15<sup>th</sup> 2011.

<sup>158</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2011\\_Alexandria\\_bombing#Background](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2011_Alexandria_bombing#Background) Accessed in February 12<sup>th</sup>

2011. Sees see more about violence between Christians and Muslims,  
<http://youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=412574> Accessed in May 15<sup>th</sup> 2011

<http://youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=412572&SecID=12> Accessed in May 15<sup>th</sup> 2011

The incident, took place in the village of Swul, near the centre of Atfih, in the governorate of Helwan. Within hours after the two dead were buried their relatives have marched to the Coptic church of the Virgin and destroyed it. The attackers first stormed the building of four floors, by throwing stones and incendiary bottles, and then stormed inside, seizing on the lower floors and forcing former tormentors to take refuge in the upper. The entrance of the building was set on fire, as well as numerous vehicles parked on the forecourt administrative offices and archives were devastated and the demonstrators destroyed everything that they could.

#### **4.4.3.3 Tensions flame**

More violence erupted when Coptic protesters blocked a highway in the Egyptian capital, protesting against the burning of the church in the province of Helwan.

The rally angered Muslims who wanted to pass through. Witnesses said both sides threw stones, and the army fired into the air to disperse the crowds.

The Grand Imam of al-Azhar, issued a statement on Tuesday 8 March 2011 condemning the attack on the Church in Atfih, Helwan governorate, as a distortion of Islam.<sup>159</sup>

Sheikh Ahmad al-Tayyib called on Muslim residents of the town to help start rebuilding the church and to refrain from sectarian violence, Egypt's official news agency, Mena, reported. As result, thousands of Coptic protesters continued their sit-in outside the state television building. They are calling for the rebuilding of the church, better protection for Christians, and a full investigation into the attack.<sup>160</sup>

#### **4.4.4 Conclusion**

Both Muslims and Christians have many challenges in terms of attitudes and relationships. They need to find some ways helping them to face rumors that influence their life and impact

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<sup>159</sup> <http://youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=365631> Accessed in May 15<sup>th</sup> 2011.

<sup>160</sup> <http://youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=36951> Accessed in May 15<sup>th</sup> 2011.

See more <http://youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=411828&SecID=190> Accessed in May 15<sup>th</sup> 2011

<http://youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=412574> Accessed in May 15<sup>th</sup> 2011

<http://youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=412572&SecID=12> Accessed in May 15<sup>th</sup> 2011

their relations. They might need to use their critical mind not only as they criticize each other but also to analyze and investigate rumors. They also should agree to stop believing in them or treating them as facts. Both need to work hard together with the other to establish and accept cultural and religious pluralism and leave their hope that their own religion might be the dominant. They should know that they can't avoid or deny pluralism, if so; they are staying on the conflict track for ever. They also need to know how to use the new available facilities for having better communication to reduce tensions and conflicts. They might learn to accept each other as citizens living together and having the same rights and duties. They need to talk to each other, not about each other. Dialogue is needed. That dialogue should not only be held between religious leaders from both sides but first and foremost between the ordinary people from both sides. It might be serve as a tool of defeating rumors, stereotypes and creating better understanding. Muslims and Christians in dialogue might find non-violent alternatives of expressing except violence. They might leave violence as a way of expressing or restoring power. Conflict creates conflict and violence reproduces violence and both are counter productive ways of constructing or restoring power.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### A DIALOGUE AS A CHALLENGE

#### 5.1 Introduction

My first participation in Muslim -Christian dialogue was in 2000, organized and sponsored by one of the largest civil society organizations (CEOSS)<sup>161</sup> in Egypt. That organization used to organize such meetings two or three times every year since 1995. I was eager to be one of participants.

The participants were religious leaders, some university professors, journalist and reporters. That meeting holds for three days. I spent those days to figure out what kind of dialogue that went on among those participants. Indeed, I was shocked when a well-known Christian leader, one of the participants, and attending such meetings since they started, told me: that dialogue is wasting time and money. It has no impact over the relation between Muslims and Christians. Lack of confidence and mistrust are showing up through the dialogue, he added. After he left me, I asked myself, why did he take part in the dialogue at all, with such with such a negative attitude?

In this chapter, I will try to discuss some challenges contributing to mistrust and facing the dialogue between Muslims and Christians in Egypt.

#### 5.2 What is dialogue?

Before going a further to discuss some challenges facing dialogue between Muslims and Christians, it is important to define dialogue.

Simply dialogue means, instead of talking about each other we should talk to each other<sup>162</sup>. In fact, human social life is characterized by dialogue. Therefore, dialogue is an essential tool creating the distinctiveness of human social life. Dialogue gives life its meaning, because the whole life is about dialogue, which means, that all different life's activities are about interacting with others, including eating, drinking, working, enjoying, and loving<sup>163</sup>. Life is

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<sup>161</sup> Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services.

See more in <http://www.ceoss.org.eg/> Accessed in May 16<sup>th</sup> 2011

<sup>162</sup> Ataulah Siddiqui, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue in the Twentieth Century* (Palgrave, Macmillan, 1997), 125.

<sup>163</sup> C 6

being life when it is colored by dialogue. The continuity of life might be preserved and guarded through the dialogue.

### **5.3 Some historical challenges**

#### **5.3.1 Stereotypes as challenge**

In fact, mistrust in dialogue between Muslims and Christians which I experienced as participant in the dialogue, is one of the biggest challenges facing the dialogue between both sides. That mistrust might be related to stereotypes controlling each side. Those stereotypes are dominating the way of perceiving the other. For example, Christians are likely to charge Islam with falsehood as well as Muslims judge Christianity and perceiving it as a heresy affirming polytheism.<sup>164</sup> Both sides had been dominated by such views, which led them to misunderstanding and mistrust. In addition, they judge the other religion on the basis of their own ideas<sup>165</sup> which are reflecting the lack of knowledge of each other. Unfortunately, the ways of judging the other religion are being inherited and transmitted from generation to generation by which the relation between Muslims and Christians has been hurt deeply by misunderstanding and mistrust<sup>166</sup>. Indeed, keeping that transmitting of mistrust might be undertaken of religious leaders who playing a main role in creating stereotypes and bring out that mistrust through their way of teaching and preaching.<sup>167</sup> In fact the religious speech of both Christian and Muslims is supporting that mistrust while mutual confidence is needed<sup>168</sup>.

#### **5.3.2 Using polemic as challenge**

Muslims view Christian believes in trinity advocating polytheism, while Islam is stressing monotheism which is seen as a sign of Islam's superiority over Christianity. Incarnation also, is blasphemy according to Muslim point of view. They reject that God can suffer or incarnate as a human being. Christ is nothing more than a prophet like other prophets.

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<sup>164</sup> Lamin sanneh, *The Crown and Turban. Muslims and west African pluralism* (West view press, Oxford, 1997), 137.

<sup>165</sup> Jacques Waardenburg, *Muslims and Other: Relations in context* (Walter de Gruyter Berlin / New York, 2003), 163.

<sup>166</sup> Waardenburg, *Muslims and Others*, 164.

<sup>167</sup> Waardenburg, *Muslims and Others*, 169

<sup>168</sup> Jutta Sperber *Christian and Muslims: The dialogue activities of the world council of the Churches and their theological foundation* (De Gruyter, Berlin/ New York, 2000), 100.

In fact, recalling polemic literature that way and using it for offending other religions has left the relation between Muslims and Christians very sick, infected by mistrust.

Christian leaders also used to raise some issues against Islam through criticizing Qur'an, the instrumentalization of religion, the patriarchal structures of Muslims community, the inferior position of woman and the religious legitimation of violence.<sup>169</sup> Indeed, using polemic approaches from both sides as means of offending the other religion is a big challenge to the relation between Muslims and Christians. It has led some leaders who are were participating and supporting dialogue to lose their interest. Their hope to break down the mistrust between Muslims and Christians has evaporated.

I still remember in one of the annual meetings between Muslims and Christian leaders in my country that a number of participants from both sides had left that meeting and decided not to attend again because the participates started attacking each other using polemic language for addressing controversial religious issues. They left that meeting with a disappointment and viewing dialogue between both sides as a matter of wasting time and money for nothing. Dialogue will not change reality according to their pessimistic view. Indeed, many Muslims and Christians have strong traditions of using polemic language approaches for defending their religion and stressing its superiority. They see it as their religious duty and responsibly to defend their religion and stressing its superiority.

In fact, feeling and addressing superiority of one religion to other religions might be among the challenges of dialogue, as it is creating obstacles and enriching mistrust.<sup>170</sup> Seeking to establish that superiority, Muslims are claiming that there is no other religion except Islam which existed before creation and has been given to prophets from Adam to Mohamed through out the history of mankind. Accordingly, they perceive the differences between humankind as culture difference related to the different ears of prophets not to the religion.<sup>171</sup> In fact, Christians also claim the superiority of their religion, based on viewing Christ as the only way of salvation, non-Christians are not included. They should convert to Christ and accept him as their redeemer to be saved.

No doubt that the way each side use to approve religion superiority of belonging religion challenge dialogue between them and creating more problems.

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<sup>169</sup> Waardenburg , *Muslims and Others*,191

<sup>170</sup> C 5

<sup>171</sup> Waardenburg , *Muslims and Others*, 164-165

## 5.4 Some contemporary challenges

### 5.4.1 Pluralism as a challenge

The contemporary challenges of dialogue between Muslims and Christians could have the same impacts over their relations that is feeding and reflecting mistrust. Of course, contemporary challenges are many but pluralism is the greatest one among them.<sup>172</sup> Pluralism is a challenge for Christians and Muslims as well as it is found on many different levels as the social, ethical, religious, economical and political levels. In all of those levels dialogue is needed. In other words, pluralism is affirming the necessity and essentiality of dialogue for keeping our human societies together in peace and cooperation while both Christian and Islam affirming the idea of single truth.<sup>173</sup> Believe in one single truth really against dialogue and peaceful co existence. The problem is not the truth claim but the willingness to force the other to accept my truth. Unfortunately, what is going on the ground between Muslims and Christians is affirming that religious pluralism is not yet accepted.<sup>174</sup>

### 5.4.2 Media as a challenge

Pluralism is not the only challenge facing the dialogue between Muslims and Christians in our modern age. Media also, represents a major challenge for Muslims-Christian dialogue. It often improves the way of communication but may also stand behind conflicts in different parts of the world.

Indeed, media has made our world very small and very tense as well in regarding to the relation and dialogue between Muslims and Christians. I still remember, what had happened in Egypt, when many Muslims destroyed some Christian properties as means of expressing their anger regarding to cartoons drawings portraying the prophet Mohamed which had been published by a Danish news paper. Similar violent actions had happened also some months ago, when a pastor in the United States had called for burning the Qur'an. That call for burning the Qur'an became an issue of public debate which led Muslims fundamentalists in Egypt to call for burning many churches if the Qur'an was burned in the United States.

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<sup>172</sup> Nancy T.Ammerman, *Everyday religion: Observing religious lives* (Oxford University press, 2007), 227.

<sup>173</sup> Ammerman, *Everyday religion*, 226.

<sup>174</sup> C 3

Unfortunately, such events coming through media is challenging the relations between Muslims and Christians all over the world as well as their interreligious dialogue and enriching mistrust, especially in Egypt.

### **5.5 Conclusion**

Obviously, the many challenges mentioned are feeding mistrust between Muslims and Christians. Both are in need of overcoming the stereotypes that are influencing their relation and dominating their dialogue. They should challenge themselves and get to know each other better and stop judging each other according to their own views. They should learn how to differentiate between defending and offending and stop mixing them up.

They should also need to learn together that believe in one single truth, might not associate with forcing the other to accept that truth. They should stop using all violence means in order to achieve that.

Indeed, if Muslims and Christian are still not able to do so, mistrust will continue to characterize their relation and impact their dialogue.

Both might change their views of pluralism as a threat to the social solidarity of their local communities. They might use all means of available for better communication, not for stimulating conflicts. They also need to invest in some cultural elements like, hospitality which is taking a remarkable place at many cultures especially in Egypt <sup>175</sup>as a common ground for establishing dialogue and building up their relation on a basis of trust.

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<sup>175</sup> C 6



## CHAPTER SIX

### FINDINGS

Conflicts and tensions between Muslims and Christian have been exposed the last three decades in many different areas in Egypt, and in most cases, associated with violence. It might be a direct threat to co-existence and peaceful living in our society. In my thesis I have discussed some causes of that conflict based on information and opinions gathered from my informants, literature and my personal experience as an Egyptian.

#### **6.1 Understanding the problem**

##### **6.1.1 Pluralism**

Based on my findings, Egyptian society is colored by conflicts, which indicate that religious pluralism is not yet accepted among Egyptians. Large segments of the society do not accept religious pluralism, and perceive it as a threat against social solidarity and stability. Those who do not accept religious pluralism want one religion to dominate the whole Egyptian society. According to them, one religion dominating the society is the only way of achieving social solidarity and stability.

I have found that accepting religious pluralism in Egyptian society is a big challenge as conflicts and acts of sectarian violence are getting wider, indicating that Egyptians are still far off infamous of accepting religious pluralism.

##### **6.1.2 Imposing truth by force**

I have found that the issue of which religion is genuine, is creating much conflict between Muslims and Christians, especially online. They are in competition to approve the genuineness of their own religion. Both are thinking that one religion is true and other is false. One religion possesses the ultimate truth and other possesses nothing. Adherents of one religion might hold power and others might be under their control. In other word, many Christians and Muslims have the same attitude of imposing truth by force. Many Egyptian religious leaders think that imposing truth by force is a holy mission they must fulfill

regardless any difficulties or challenges that might face them. Imposing truth by force is an attitude of legitimizing violence in our society.

### **6.1.3 Rumors**

Based on my findings, rumors are influencing relations between Christians and Muslims. They crystallize the perceptions that members of each group have of the group towards which they feel hostile. People used are to create rumors and treat them as facts. Unfortunately, creating rumors seems to be a familiar custom in the Egyptian community. In other words, many Egyptian are not feeling bad about creating lies and false stories about each other. They are perceiving lie as a kind of creative thinking. According to them, rumors and lies are creative products of creative thinking. Perceiving rumors that way has led the Egyptian community to appreciate those who are creating them. Moreover, creating rumors or communicating lies seems to be a social phenomenon in Egypt or a local tradition coloring social relations. That local tradition is functioning as a means of Othering for the sake of power.

Creating rumors as a means of Othering is a dominant factor impacting social structure and social relations. It is an important cause behind conflicts between Christians and Muslims in Egypt.

The relation between conflicts and rumors is a two-way relationship. They depend on each other and function together impacting social structures and social relationships. That two-way relationship of conflicts and rumors is a real social dilemma challenging Egyptian community. That dilemma became a hard one when rumors were used as a weapon to devastate those who are different in terms of culture or religion. Unfortunately, rumors are weapons being used by public, leaders and regime which is indicating the toughness of this dilemma. In addition to that, many peoples trust and believe in rumors more than they believe in reality. If a rumor contradicts reality, many people might be on rumor's side against reality. In other word, rumors are creating a reality which people follow and trust. Rumors create a suitable atmosphere for rising conflict between Muslims and Christians.

#### **6.1.4 Construction and renovation of churches**

Based on the findings, the issue of construction and renovation of churches is one of the main causes of conflict between Muslims and Christians. It represents inequality between the Christian minority and the Muslim majority. It's a part of power game between the minority and the majority identifying the dominating ones and dominated ones. In my own view, that power game between both sides might continue even if the problem of churches construction or renovation find a solution. Many other issues will be raised as a means of justifying that game of power.

#### **6.1.5 Romantic relations**

Romantic relations are a very sensitive issue causing conflicts between Muslims and Christians. Both perceive that type of relationship as means of implementing a conversion agenda that every side has. Moreover, both Muslims and Christians look at that type of relations as a sign of weakness. In other words, both perceive romantic relations as a sign of weakness in contradiction with power. Falling in love is seen as falling in weakness. So, conflicts and tensions between Muslims and Christians on the basis of romantic relations are not primarily about religion or anything else, but just and foremost about power.

### **6.2 Hopes for the future**

I have several hopes based on the findings that mentioned above. They are hopes and challenges as well which Egyptian community must deal with to restore social stability and peaceful co-existence between Christians and Muslims.

#### **6.2.1 Attacking barriers**

Egyptians should attack the barriers they made up as means of separation and in order to break them down. They should communicate frankly and sincerely talk together and discuss their common challenges instead of treating each other as strangers. They should strengthen and confess their common citizenship and overcome division of their society and all classifications of weak and strong, false and true, believers and infidels, second class citizens

and first class citizens. They have to work hard to defeat those types of classification which impact their relations and create conflicts.

### **6.2.2 Establishing a culture of tolerance**

They should work hard to establish a culture tolerance. It might take a long time and much effort to be achieved but it is really needed. Encouraging Muslim and Christian families to contribute in establishing a culture of tolerance is among those efforts. Also, the education system might participate in constructing that culture. People can learn how to be tolerant and how to accept pluralism. It's a matter of education. So, families and schools are in a key position to lead the process of constructing tolerance and helping people to be familiar with pluralism. In addition to that, the religious institutions belonging to both sides also have essential roles of constructing that culture of tolerance. Religious leaders must do their jobs and help congregations to appreciate tolerance and co-existence. They must stop creating rumors and break down stereotypes that provoke people and lead them to be in conflict with the other.

### **6.2.3 Social flexibility**

Egyptian society must give its young people more space to choose their own life. In other words, no more social restrictions should prevent the young from interacting and have romantic relations together, not on a religious basis but on a human basis. Such social relations should be appreciated and evaluated as normal relations not being linked with religion or the conversion issue. Giving the young the freedom to choose their own life and their religion can help overcoming the barriers that Muslims and Christians created for a long time as means of avoidance.

### **6.2.4 Changing the way of using media**

Young Muslims and Christians in Egypt might change their way of interaction with each other online. Online there is a good chance to develop better communication and better understanding. They have the ability to change the Egyptian society, if they change their attitudes towards each other as Muslims and Christians. They can establish good relations

between them and make use of online communication to create their new reality as they wish. Social and religious institutions should cooperate and help them not to stimulate conflict but to establish better communication and better understanding. Religious leaders might stop to direct young ones to conflict by giving them wrong information about the other or teach them how to insult and offend the other religion as they used to do.

### **6.2.5 Changing mentality**

Both Muslims and Christians are in need to change their mentality and think differently about their relations. They have to defeat their fears, suspicions and hatred to reconstruct their relation and restore their social stability.

Egyptians should stop all processes of Othering, starting with the way parents treat and teach their children about the other up to the judicial and political systems. They have a lot of work to do to change stereotypes, that are leading people to perceive that the other is a threat their identity and existence as well. It might take a long time to achieve this, but it is the most urgent task. Appreciating and accepting pluralism, establishing tolerance and breaking down Othering processes will help and contribute much to establish and achieve better understanding and restore peace and co-existence between Muslims and Christians in Egypt. They have to work together to let religion stay as source of ethics not politics and Othering.

## Appendix

### Interview guide

PROJECT:

RELATIONS BETWEEN MUSLIMS AND CHRISTIANS IN EGYPT WITH SPICAL REGARD TO SOCIAL CHANGES A CASE STUDY OF MUSLIM- CHRISTIAN RELATION IN NAG HAMMADY AND MARSA MATROH.

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(The interview guide basically will be in Arabic and I will translate it into English)

#### Information to informants, given orally:

The researcher is Rev. Ephraim Zakhary, a student in the master of theology program at school of mission and theology in Stavanger, Norway. The interview is a part of field work for Master thesis. All the responses given will be treated confidentially and all personal information will be anonymized. Any answer given will be useful to the researcher and after the submitting of the thesis; all the materials given will be destroyed, at the latest by June 25, 2011.

#### Information about informant:

Age:

Religion:

Education Level:

Position:

#### Section one: Christians-Muslim relations today

**1.1** According to your own view, what do good relations between Muslims and Christians mean?

**1.2** How do you see the relations between Muslims and Christians in Egypt today?

**1.3** As religious leader, are you satisfied with the relations between Muslims and Christians currently? Why or why not?

**1.4** Do you see the level of confidence between Muslims and Christians regarding their relationship?

**1.5** Do you think that the relations between Muslims and Christians are getting worse? If so, in which way?

**1.6** What affects the relations between Muslims and Christians the most in Egypt and local community?

**1.7** Do you think that they are in need to reconstruct their confidence towards each other? Why or why not?

**1.8** In your own view, when did the relation between them become more difficult?

**1.9** What do you think is the best aspect of the relation between Muslims and Christians?

### **Section two: Changes in Christians-Muslim relations**

**2.1** How do you see the changes you have experienced in Muslims and Christians relations in Egypt?

**2.2** How do see changes in relation between Muslims and Christians concerning your local community?

**2.3** As a religious leader, what kind of changes have you experienced in your time?

**2.4** What do you think are the causes behind the changes?

**2.5** How do you think religious speech, media, social and political circumstances have influenced those changes?

**2.6** How do you think it is possible to influence those changes positively to restore peace and co-existence between Muslims and Christians?

### **Section three: Roles of religious leaders in Christian-Muslim relations**

**3.1** Regarding the relation between Muslims and Christians, what do you think is the role of the religious leaders in general?

**3.2** How do you see your own role as a religious leader concerning the relation between Muslims and Christians?

**3.3** How do you see the role of other religious leaders in your local community?

**3.4** How do you teach your congregation about the other religious groups?

**3.5** How do see the role of your (Mosque or Church) with regard to improving the relation between Muslims and Christians?

**3.6** What types of difficulties and challenges are facing as religious leaders with regard to promoting peace and co-existence?

**3.7** What efforts do you think it will sacrifice in order to achieve your role?

**3.8** What's encouraging you the most to work for peace and co-existence?

**Section four: Future of Christian-Muslim relations**

**4.1** How do you see the future of the relation between Muslims and Christians?

**4.2** How do you see the potentials for developing peace and co-existence between Muslims and Christians?

**4.3** In your own view, as religious leader, what kind of initiative should be taken for restoring peace and co-existence between Muslims and Christians in your local community?

**4.4** What do you think the government should do to restore peace and co-existence between Muslims and Christians?



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