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**Title: Polemics discussion paper**

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**Thanks to the staff of the Center for Arab-West Understanding for translating *Ukht Yahoudha* (Sister of Judas), and *Samā' min Turāb* (Heaven of Dust) by Robert al-Fāris, the eight Muslim polemical books on Christianity, and *Al-Katība al-Tībīya* (The Theban Legion), and to Janique Blattmann, also of the center, for the presentation of a study on the religious identity of Egyptian children and the interview with Robert al-Fāris. *Arab-West Report* is extremely grateful to Dr. Jan Slomp, scholar, author and expert on the Gospel of Barnabas and Dr. Hasan Wajīh, expert in the linguistics of negotiation and cross-cultural communication at the Azhar University.**

Polemics is an aggressive attack on or refutation of the opinions or principles of another (Merriam-Webster online dictionary).

Any discussion of polemics, and particularly religious polemics, is bound to be highly sensitive. Polemics are often linked to missionary activity and conversion, which causes fear and anger amongst the group any convert is leaving. Fear is related to a strong sense of community in Egypt, for conversion means leaving one's community, usually resulting in the cutting of ties with family and friends for life. In Egypt, there is also a fairly widespread perception, primarily amongst Muslims, that outside forces are exploiting sectarian tensions to intervene in the country's internal affairs. When such a climate of mistrust prevails, attack on the community a convert joins is often seen as the best form of defense.

Polemics also depend very much on the cultural context. What is considered polemical by an Egyptian, is not necessarily considered polemical by Westerners. Furthermore, depending on the formulation used, statements of the genuine differences between religions may be considered polemical by one religious group, but not by another.

This report does not argue about faith, and is intended only to criticize the formulations used to express differences. The Center for Arab-West Understanding and *Arab-West Report* aim to create understanding, and to reduce tensions within Egypt. **As such, this report is a discussion paper, and responses are welcomed.**

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## Introduction

In recent months, with the publication of Danish cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad, Arab-West, and Muslim-Christian understanding has come under the full focus of the international spotlight. The Center for Arab-West Understanding aims to promote intercultural and interreligious dialogue and to provide independent, credible, accurate documentation in context. For over ten years, the center has published an electronic, English language review of the Egyptian media, *Arab-West Report*, intended at using information to combat misunderstandings.

The subsequent debate over freedom of speech is of vital importance to Arab-West understanding. While freedom of speech is a value that must be defended from all attacks, words are powerful weapons that can drive communities apart, prompt radical and extreme behavior, aggravate injustice and undermine efforts to build tolerance and peace. The irresponsible exercise of freedom of speech can have destructive consequences, as Egypt knows only too well.

The purpose of this report is to demonstrate that polemics, that is the use of negative claims that are not backed up with evidence, help neither Muslims, Christians nor people of other faiths, contrary to what polemicists would like their readers to believe.

This report first presents two recent examples of the effects of what many people perceive as being polemics; the massive demonstrations across the Islamic world following the publication of Danish cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad, and the sectarian clashes in Alexandria in October 2005, which were prompted by the distribution of a CD of a play, performed in a church, which many Muslims found highly offensive.

Nevertheless, many Europeans, and Christians would deny that the cartoons or the play in Alexandria respectively were intended to be polemical. Therefore, this report examines Hugh Goddard's criteria for understanding what constitutes polemics. Goddard argues that there are three categories of literature, 'eirenical literature', which seeks common elements and understanding between different religions, 'intermediate literature', which is neither explicitly positive nor explicitly negative, and 'polemical literature', which is antagonistic and which implies a black and white division between 'them' and 'us'.

Polemics, of one form or another, has, of course, existed for more than a millennium. Two historical examples, are provided; *Mīzān al-Haqq*, Christian polemics on Islam, written by a European missionary, and the Gospel of Barnabas, a 17<sup>th</sup> century book which has formed the basis of much of the Muslim polemics against Christianity. Yet it is in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the increasing contact between Western Christianity and the Islamic world, that polemics has begun affecting the general public on a more consistent basis.

Over the years that *Arab-West Report* has been working in Egypt, we have, unfortunately, managed to collect far too many examples of what is perceived by either Muslims or Christians in Egypt as being polemical. This report presents the television program of 'Father' Zakarīyā Butrus on *al-Hayāt* television channel, eight Muslim polemical books about Christianity, two books by Robert al-Fāris, *Ukht Yahoudha* (Sister of Judas), and *Samā' min Turāb* (Heaven of Dust), which warn Christians of the dangers of conversion to Islam, and which imply that forced conversion is fairly widespread, and finally, *al-Katība al-Tībīya* (The Theban Legion), a publication focusing on alleged Muslim 'persecution' of Christians.

This report then proceeds to examine some of the reasons for polemics, both anti-Muslim and anti-Christian, bringing in to the discussion a thesis on the religious identity of Egyptian children. It is argued that polemics are not an inevitable result of the differences between faiths, but are normally the result of a deliberate attempt to antagonize 'the other' or to gain support, often from outside people, organizations or powers, for one's own group.

As such, it is important that polemicists realize the 'boomerang' nature of their work, whereby Muslim anti-Christian polemics result in Christian anti-Muslim polemics and vice versa. This report argues that polemics are reciprocal, whereby each polemical work sparks another in retaliation. Polemics are used in the belief that they strengthen the polemicist's own faith, acting as an extreme form of apologetics, by attacking the beliefs of 'the other', and sometimes, but not always, by encouraging conversion. Yet very few people are actually convinced to leave their religion by polemics, nor do polemics strengthen religions. Ultimately, polemics cause sectarian tension, place a strain on national unity, and in some cases, lead to violence. Polemicists should be aware of the highly damaging consequences their work has on Egyptian society. An extreme case study, that of the Armenian genocide, should act as a warning to those who under-estimate the danger of polemics.

In conclusion, this report argues that freedom of speech needs to be exercised responsibly, that there should be one standard for all, Muslim and Christian, East and West, and that prominent and influential figures should take a stand against polemics. Then perhaps, polemicists may find themselves without an audience.

### Examples of the consequences of ‘polemics’: Cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad and the Alexandria riots

On September 30, 2005, Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* published 12 cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad, accompanied by an article on freedom of expression. In Islam, any depiction of the Prophet Muhammad, or any other prophet, is considered *harām*, [forbidden], but obviously non-Muslims can not be held to such a prohibition, nor is this considered polemic in a Western cultural context. Nevertheless, at least one of *Jyllands-Posten*'s cartoons caused particular offense by depicting the prophet with a bomb as a turban, suggesting the widespread notion in the West that the religion of Islam is to be associated with violence.

The newspaper's cultural editor, Flemming Rose, stated that the cartoons were commissioned in order to highlight the difficulty faced by Danish author Kare Bluitgen in finding an illustrator for his children's book on the Prophet Muhammad. Three illustrators had refused to work on the book, fearing violent responses from Muslims, and citing the murder of the Dutch director Theo Van Gogh, whose film 'Submission' showed beaten Muslim women with verses of the *Qur'ān* written on their bodies, and the attack on a lecturer at the University of Copenhagen, Denmark, in October 2004, for reading the *Qur'ān* aloud to non-Muslims, which was reported in the Danish media.

Regardless of whether or not these cartoons were intended to be polemical, many Muslims considered the cartoons an attack on Islam. Initially though, response among Muslims was peaceful. Some of the cartoons were published in *al-Fajr* [See AWR 2005, 42, art. 24] and in Denmark, ambassadors of Muslim countries protested. By February 2006 though, as the crisis escalated, other European media republished the cartoons, initiating a debate across Europe about freedom of speech and Islam. Concurrently, it appears that anti-Western groups were exploiting the issue, encouraging a boycott of Danish products, and initiating violent protests against Danish, Norwegian and European Union interests in Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Libya and Iran, where a newspaper retaliated by announcing a competition seeking cartoons of the Holocaust [See AWR 2006, 7, art. 2]. Even in Europe, reactions were angry, and in Great Britain, where protestors, some dressed as suicide bombers, brandished banners calling for killing those responsible, some Muslims complained that extremist groups were hijacking the issue [See <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4676524.stm>].

Similarly, in Alexandria in October 2005, violent demonstrations erupted over a play, performed in a church, which depicted a young man's conversion to Islam from Christianity, and his gradual realization that his conversion had been a mistake. The play had been performed for a very short time several years earlier without protests, but during fierce competition between a Coptic and a Muslim Brotherhood candidate during the Egyptian parliamentary elections, a CD of the play was distributed, and the issue found its way to the national press [See AWR 2005, 41, art. 28]. In the subsequent demonstrations, one church was seriously damaged and several Muslims were killed in clashes with Egyptian security forces.

Both these issues illustrate the nature and possible consequences of polemics, derived from the Greek *polemikos* (warlike), and meaning "an aggressive attack on or refutation of the opinions or principles of another". The Denmark cartoons may not have been originally intended to antagonize Muslims, but, it was claimed, to defend the principle of freedom of speech, while the play in Alexandria was intended to warn Christians against conversion. Nevertheless, Muslims found both the cartoons and the play deeply offensive, and extremists exploited these feelings of outrage to incite violence and increasing antagonism between the different parties involved.

## Categories of literature on religion

The issue of the Danish cartoons illustrates an important point about the different views on what can be considered polemical. While many Europeans consider extremely harsh critique or even denial of religious beliefs acceptable, most Egyptians, both Muslim and Christian, consider the sanctity of religious beliefs absolute. Obviously though, not everything written about religious belief is polemical.

Dr. Hugh Goddard's book *Muslim Perceptions of Christianity*, Grey Seal, London, 1996, distinguishes three types of Muslim literature about Christians and the Christian faith: Eirenic, intermediate, and polemical. This is, of course, also true in the case of Christian literature regarding Muslims and Islam.

**Eirenic literature** seeks common elements and understanding. It does not attack believers of other faiths. Goddard gives some insightful examples of Muslim Eirenic literature such as the 10<sup>th</sup> century *Shī'a* thinkers known as the *Ikhwān al-Safā* (Brethren of Purity), Muhammad Kāmil Husayn, who received the 1957 Egyptian State Prize for *Qarya Zālīma* (City of Wrong), and 'Abbas Mahmūd al-'Aqqād's book *'Abqariyat al-Masīh* (The Genius of Christ).

**Intermediate literature** (also referred to as moderate) is, in Goddard's words, "not explicitly positive nor deliberately negative" (p.141). Authors are primarily concerned with their own faith and sometimes delineate differences without using explicitly denigrating language. Some statements in the *Qur'ān* are diametrically opposed to those in the Bible, for example questions of whether Jesus was crucified and resurrected or not, or show the superiority of Islam over other faiths. Some Christians may interpret this as denigrating and, thus, polemic. However, Goddard does not do this because this is inherent in the text of the *Qur'ān* and believers should refrain from criticizing the holy books of other religions. Thus, when a Muslim or Christian simply explains his faith on the basis of the *Qur'ān* or the Bible, without explicitly highlighting differences or denigrating the other, this belongs to the category of intermediate literature. Goddard considers the work of Egyptian scholar Hasan Hanafī an example of this category. Hanafī repeatedly asserts the superiority of Islam over Christianity, but does so without explicitly denigrating the Christian faith. The belief in the superiority of one's own religion is not endemic to Islam, but to Christianity as well.

**Polemical literature** is antagonistic and implies a lack of willingness to understand the other. Goddard writes that studies about 'comparative religion are viewed as a way of evaluating another religious tradition, often in a simplified way. Simultaneously, the writer makes a forceful assertion of the superiority of his religion, and of the correctness of its claim to supplant the religious tradition about which he is writing. Goddard comments that the aim of comparative religion should be to study religions for the purpose of comparison only, "and not for the purpose of a blatant assertion of the superiority of one tradition over all the others" (p.83). This attitude is common to both Muslim and Christian writers. Polemical literature is generally perceived by the believers of one religion as 'a strong defense' and by others 'as an attack on their faith.' Sometimes, polemical writers attempt to instill fear by adding conspiratorial elements to their work, such as the depiction of an innocent victim and a malicious aggressor (p.92-93).

## Pre-20<sup>th</sup> century Muslim-Christian polemics

### *Mīzān al-Haqq*

There have, no doubt, been Muslim-Christian polemics in one form or another since the early days of Islam in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, given the history of political conflicts between the Islamic and Christian worlds, for example the Islamic conquests, the Crusades etc. Yet in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, European colonialism also brought an unprecedented number of European missionaries to the Muslim world. Though many focused on providing Western-style education, some others brought Islam and Christianity increasingly into conflict. “When European missionaries, especially Protestant ones, began to be active in the Muslim world, they did not hesitate to indulge in quite violent polemics against Islam” (Goddard, 1996, p.39) One of these polemical books was K.G. Pfander’s *Mīzān al-Haqq* (The Balance of Truth), written in 1829 to convince Muslims, through a comparison of the Bible and the *Qur’ān*, Christian faith and Islam, that Christianity is the only truth.

*Mīzān al-Haqq* consists of three parts:

- 1) Proof that the Old and New Testaments are the word of God, and that they have neither been corrupted nor abrogated, as is fairly widespread Muslim belief.
- 2) The principal doctrines of the Bible, showing that its teaching is in conformity with the criteria of the true revelation.
- 3) An inquiry into the Muslim claim that Islam is God’s final revelation.

Parts one and two are, from a Christian point of view, apologetics, a legitimate defense of Christianity, but part three is an outright attack on Islam and is therefore should be considered polemical. As Jan Slomp states, “Sometimes it is not easy to draw a sharp line distinguishing polemics from Christian apologetics. Both Christian theology and Muslim kalam found their origin in defending the Christian faith or the Islamic faith.... However, apologetics may easily turn into polemics by disparaging remarks, by personal attacks or misrepresenting historical facts.” (Slomp letter, April 4, 2006)

The book was written for missionary purposes to win Muslims for the Christian faith but, writes Goddard, part three “contained outright attacks on the *Qur’ān*, Muhammed and Islam. And thus, if modern Muslim thinking about Christianity reflects these phenomena of politicized religion, modernist religion and polemicized religion, it is to some extent at least only reproducing and mirroring certain aspects of European attitudes towards the Islamic world” (p.40).

Muslims naturally responded to *Mīzān al-Haqq*. Pfander’s work, and that of other 19<sup>th</sup> century Christian missionaries, was vehemently opposed by Rahmat Allāh al-Hindī who used Western Bible criticism and propaganda to critique Pfander in *Izhār al-Haqq* (Demonstration of truth). Goddard calls this “a turning point in the Muslim reaction to the influence of the Christian missionaries” (p.50). Christian missionaries’ use of polemics had backfired.

### **The Gospel of Barnabas**

At around the same time, Rashīd Ridā (1865-1935), a prominent Syrian Muslim thinker, discovered a 1908 Arabic translation of the Gospel of Barnabas, which, from then on, became the basis of many Muslim polemical texts against Christianity. The Gospel of Barnabas, is supposedly a lost gospel which claims that Jesus is only a prophet, and not the son of God and predicts the coming of a prophet from the descendants of Ishmael, a reference to the Prophet Muhammad. In fact though, the Gospel of Barnabas is widely recognized, even by prominent Muslim scholars, such as ʿAbbās Mahmūd al-ʿAqqād, to be a 17<sup>th</sup> century fake [See appendix 1].

The use of the Gospel of Barnabas also demonstrates the ‘boomeranging’ nature of polemics; polemics resulting from the extreme behavior of one religious community against another, and polemics spawning more polemics in return, since the gospel was probably written in response to Catholic Spain’s persecution of Muslims following the reconquista of Granada.



### **Polemics today - television and literature in Egypt**

There are, unfortunately, many more recent examples of work considered by either Egyptian Muslims or Christians to be polemical. ‘Father’ Zakarīyā Butrus’s television program on Islam uses snippets of academic debate, taken out of context and massively simplified, to try to show the inconsistencies in Islamic doctrine. Just as the Gospel of Barnabas was most likely written in response to the Spanish reconquista, Catholics pushing Muslims out of Spain, Zakarīyā Butrus’s television program seems to have prompted, to some extent, the [re]publication of polemical books on Christianity, eight of which are reviewed in this report. These books attempt to show the errors of Christian doctrine, at times by relying on the 17<sup>th</sup> century Gospel of Barnabas. There are also polemical books against Islam, such as Robert al-Fāris’ *Ukht Yahoudha* (Sister of Judas), and *Samā’ min Turāb* (Heaven of Dust) collections of fictional stories often showing innocent Christian girls lured or forced into Islam by devilish creatures, and a Christian publication, *Al-Katība al-Tībīya* (The Theban Legion), which presents Christians as a persecuted minority under violent attack from Muslims.

These polemical works do not simply examine the differences between Islam and Christianity, but deliberately exploit Muslims’ and Christians’ fears, feeding the masses supposedly ‘irrefutable’ ammunition with which to attack each other. Due to the misrepresentation of faith, polemical texts result in anger, hatred and polarization in society. Polemics therefore become part of a never-ending cycle, in which Muslim polemicists attack Christianity, Christian polemicists respond by attacking Islam and so on and so forth.

Ultimately, though polemics may create doubt among those whose faith is weak, they do not convince firm believers, and the use of such inflammatory language simply strengthens radicals on both sides, leading to sectarian tensions, and in some cases, even violence.

### Zakarīyā Butrus on *al-Hayāt* television channel

Father Zakarīyā Butrus presents a television program on Islam, *As'ilah 'an al-Imān* (Questions about Belief) on *al-Hayāt* satellite channel, broadcast in large parts of the Islamic world, including Egypt. Though reports say that Zakarīyā Butrus has been defrocked [See AWR 2004, 22, art. 24], he still wears his priestly outfit and is referred to as 'Father', suggesting to viewers that he is an official representative of the church. Zakarīyā Butrus uses Muslim books, some of which are considered unreliable by Muslims, against Islam, arguing that the sources contradict each other. He does the same with respect to the *Qur'ān* by pointing out similarities with pre-Islamic texts in an attempt to show that the *Qur'ān* is not a revelation from God, but the creation of the Prophet Muhammad.

Weeks before the *hajj* in 2005, the Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca, Zakarīyā Butrus presented several programs about the *hajj*, quoting from books, including *Myth and Tradition*, by Dr. Sayyid al-Qimnī, stating that the *hajj* was originally a pagan ritual, with sexual connotations.

Zakarīyā Butrus challenges Muslim scholars to respond to him, and claims to receive numerous letters from Muslims, including converts from Islam to Christianity. His programs are certainly widely watched. To date, he has made approximately 60 weekly episodes about Islam, each with a running time of 30 minutes, with each episode broadcast at least three times per day for a week. The series finished around February 1, 2005. Despite the angry reaction of Muslims who argue that the program is aggressively anti-Islamic [See AWR 2004, 16, art. 11], *al-Hayāt* channel has continued to broadcast the programs, and now is showing a new series entitled *Hiwar al-Haqq* by Zakarīyā Butrus.

*Al-Hayāt* channel also broadcasts sermons from several Evangelical churches in Egypt, providing the channel with credibility among many Evangelical Christians. As a result, there are tens of thousands of Egyptian Christians, probably many more, who have watched Zakarīyā's programs, either on television or on video. Many middle and lower class Egyptian Christians defend Zakarīyā's bold attack on Islam because they argue that he quotes from Muslim books themselves, including Islamic authoritative sources as the *Sahīh* of Muslim [One of the seven most respected collections of *hadith* traditions], the Islamic Encyclopedia of the *Azhar*, etc. However, such viewers are unaware that Zakarīyā Butrus takes parts of academic works out of context, and then uses them for very different purposes.

Zakarīyā Butrus has raised arguments about comparative religion that Dr. Hasan Wajīh, expert of linguistics of negotiation and cross-cultural communication, Faculty of Languages, *Azhar* University, argues, in an interview with AWR, should be limited to scholars who know their sources and arguments, instead of being brought to a larger public that has no way to check sources and depends on the credibility of those who inform them. The average Egyptian Christian will trust Zakarīyā Butrus because the manner in which he quotes from Muslim books appears convincing and substantiates anti-Muslim preconceptions. The average Muslim will reject his claims because he is not a Muslim scholar and presents thoughts in violation with Islamic beliefs. Such widely differing responses to one and the same program, within the context of religion, are dangerous. It drives a wedge between Muslims and Christians, results in mutual anger, and could possibly lead to conflict.

Zakarīyā Butrus' approach is extremely counter-productive, since it fosters / promotes arguments against the Christian faith that only strengthen anti-Christian feelings, and push moderate Muslims towards polemics. Nevertheless, there are Christians who are aware that it is in response to the polemics of Zakarīyā Butrus and others that several polemical books on Christianity have been

published. They argue that Zakarīyā Butrus does not actually reside in Egypt, and therefore he has the freedom to say anything he likes, whatever the consequences in Egypt. They fear that Zakarīyā Butrus' polemical programs will have a 'boomerang' effect, whereby some Muslims will mix authoritative Christian sources with Western liberal sources, some of which may be considered unreliable by many Christians, to show discrepancies in Christian texts, including the Bible.

### Examples of Muslim-Christian polarization: Review of books considered polemical by Christians

*Arab-West Report* reviewed eight new books on Christianity published by *al-Nāfidha* publishing house, Giza, Egypt, between 2003 and January 2005. The publishing house has an extensive circulation and publishes many Islamic and Christian publications at a low price [between EGP 8 and EGP 40, for books between 110 and 410 pages]. The books are distributed through *Rose al-Yousuf*, one of the biggest and most reputable press establishments in Egypt, which has 14 bookshops and stalls in Cairo and Alexandria, seven of which are situated in the most crowded train and metro stations in Cairo.

All but one of the books has an official registration number, meaning that they have been approved by the competent authorities, but all the books criticized the Christian faith, generally trying to convince a laymen readership that the Bible is distorted, Jesus Christ is neither God nor the son of God, Islam is the only right religion and that Christians are polytheists. Some of the comments in these books are statements of genuine religious beliefs, such as the Muslim belief that Jesus did not redeem mankind by his death [Goddard's intermediate category], but such statements are sometimes formulated in a polemical way. For example, *Al-Injīl wa al-Salīb* (The Bible and the Cross) by °Abd al-Ahad Dāoud al-Ashourī al-°Irāqī states "It became quite obvious and convincing that Jesus Christ would not redeem anybody by his life. He would not even offer the world a piece of his fingernails... He would not even give away one pound of the carpentry work placed in front of his carpentry shop" (p.99) [See appendix 2 for summaries and excerpts from each of the eight books].

The books are obviously efforts to defend Islam against some Christian missionary approaches which attempt to show the weaknesses of the *Qur'ān* or Islam in an effort to underline Christian teachings. Many of the books use the Gospel of Barnabas to dispute Christian doctrine; in *Al-Masīh: Insān am Ilah?* (Is Christ a Human or a God?) by Justice Dr. Muhammad Majdī Murjān, the author states that the truth is that it was not Jesus, but his traitorous disciple Judas, who was crucified. Though the arguments in the books are not excessively shocking for a European public that is used to Bible critiques, Christians and Muslims in Egypt, however, are generally very religious, are not used to critique of religion, tend to respond in a very defensive way, and make efforts to protect what they believe is holy. That cultural context gives rise to much sharper responses and thus risks drawing a deeper line between religious communities in Egyptian society, hindering the government's attempts to promote national unity.

Some Egyptian Christians linked the publication of these books to the aggressively anti-Muslim television program of Zakarīyā Butrus. These books do the same as Father Zakarīyā Butrus, but providing, as often happens in polemical literature, a reversal of values [See *AWR* 2004, 48, art. 24]. These books are therefore, in effect, the boomerang effect of polemical Christian preaching, whereby polemics on one side usually trigger polemics from the other side [See *AWR* 2005, 45, art. 28].

***Ukht Yahoudha (Sister of Judas), and Samā' min Turāb (Heaven of Dust) - Polemical Christian books on Islam***

'Polemical' cartoons, plays, texts, and even television programs attacking the doctrines of another's religion have been shown to be harmful enough, initiating a vicious circle of polemics, suspicion and fear. Robert al-Fāris, an Egyptian Christian journalist, editor and author of *Ukht Yahoudha* (Sister of Judas), and *Samā' min Turāb* (Heaven of Dust) does not address Islamic doctrine, but he criticizes Muslim behavior in an aggressive way.

Al-Fāris' two books include 25 short stories on Christians, mostly young women, who convert to Islam for various reasons, including sexual attraction, poverty, love, financial hardship or greed, family break-up, kidnap and rape, desire to have several wives, desire for divorce, fame, religious ignorance or drug addiction. According to al-Fāris all the stories have a true content but are shaped in a literary style, and though al-Fāris never uses the words Islam or Muslims, he admitted, in a meeting with *AWR*, that he was explicitly referring to Muslims in all the 25 stories. The language used in the books is extremely inflammatory, describing how 'devils' and 'animals' seduce innocent victims, encouraging or forcing them to convert [See appendix 3 for summaries and excerpts from the stories].

Al-Fāris himself states that his books "are directed to Copts to raise awareness among them, as well as exposing their shortcomings and mistakes. They also aim at showing the mistakes of the church, which led Christians to betray Christ... The books also warn Copts against naïve behavior that may invite other people [Muslims] to make use of them... We can not deny that there is a conspiracy against Copts." Al-Fāris sees his approach as a legitimate defense of the Christian community against conversions, and it seems that many other Christians in Egypt support that view. *AWR* has no reliable figures for the number of copies of these books sold, but al-Fāris claimed that the books were bestsellers in both the Coptic Orthodox and the Evangelical churches in Egypt.

One of the short stories from *Samā' min Turāb* is particularly dangerous due to its close link to a heinous rumor that spread almost all over Egypt in 2004, the same year as the publication of the book. The rumor was about two famous chains of shops run by Muslims; *Awlād Rajab* and *al-Tawhīd wa al-Nour* and claimed that Muslim workers at the shops were selecting Christian girls, telling them that they won a competition and asking them to sign receipts to receive their prizes. Later, the girls supposedly discovered that they had signed a proclamation of conversion to Islam. Other rumors added that Christian girls were raped in the shops before being forced to convert to Islam [See *AWR* 2004, 18, art. 15]. Both Bishop Mousa [See *AWR* 2004, 12, art. 15] and Pope Shenouda [See *AWR* 2004, 14, art. 15] denied that there was any truth to these rumors, but by this time, the damage to Muslim-Christian relations in Egypt had already been done. It is not clear whether *Samā' min Turāb* created the rumor, or whether the book simply gave the rumor credibility.

### *Al-Katība al-Tībīya* - The Theban Legion

*Al-Katība al-Tībīya* (The Theban Legion) is a Christian publication which is also polemical, but again, rather than attacking the Muslim faith itself, it presents Christians as a persecuted minority, targeted by Muslims [See appendix 4 for more information and for excerpts]. Egyptian Christians may feel, rightly or wrongly, that they are under attack, but *AWR* argues that the method of defense adopted by *Al-Katība al-Tībīya*, which often engages in conspiracy thinking, is counter-productive.

For example, in an article in February 2005, entitled: “Who slaughtered the Armānīyus family?” it was claimed that a Coptic family in New Jersey, U.S.A. were murdered due to the father’s activities preaching Christianity to Muslims and helping many Muslims to convert. It was also claimed that an *imām* in Jersey City declared the family’s blood “*halāl*,” [i.e. licit to shed], because of their proselytizing activities among Muslims. This claim was later found to be untrue, and in fact two non-Muslim, non-Egyptian, convicted drug dealers were charged with murdering the family after the daughter recognized one of them as they were robbing the family’s property.

*Al-Katība al-Tībīya* is effective because it is widespread in many, but not all churches, giving it credibility amongst many Copts and because it plays on existing fears and stories that are similar to those presented by U.S. Coptic activists. This possible link to U.S. activists angers many Muslims who resent what they perceive as the Copts’ attempt to involve outside powers in Egyptian domestic problems.

## Explanations for polemical texts

### Muslim polemics about Christianity

It is clear from the many articles that AWR has translated from different Arabic media that there are strong feelings of fear and anger over increased anti-Muslim sentiments, or at least perceptions of anti-Muslim sentiments in the West. The difference between the two is not always clear or well-distinguished, and often disregards sentiments in favor of dialogue and co-existence with Muslims among Christians in the West. Such feelings are often associated with the U.S.-led war and occupation of Iraq; the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the increase in Western missionary activities, including in Iraq after the defeat of Saddām Husayn, anti-Muslim internet sites, and Christian polemics against Islam, such as Zakariyā Butrus' programs etc.

Muhammad <sup>°</sup>Alī Salāma, from the post-graduate studies section of the Department of *Shari'ah* [Islamic law], *Dār al-<sup>°</sup>Uloum* [Faculty for Teaching the Arabic Language], Cairo University, explains in the introduction of the book *Al-Injīl wa al-Salīb* (The Bible and the Cross) (pp.9–12) the reason for publishing such books. Below are some excerpts from his introduction

“...We find these days a lot of books and articles, published by Christians, attacking the creed, the Book [*Qur'ān*], and the prophet of Islam. The Internet and publishing houses are full of Christian books and articles that are falsely, untruly, and intentionally criticizing Islam...”

“They wrote articles on the Internet claiming that a Muslim scholar converted to Christianity. This is very funny because everybody, non-Muslims and Muslims, knows that it is unimaginable for any Muslim, who has experienced the light and the greatness of Islam, which is the religion of *Allāh*, to convert to any other religion.”

“With regard to the news that we hear about the conversion of common Muslims to Christianity, most of such Muslims, or rather all of them, are ignorant of Islam and not close to *Allāh*. They are looking to satisfy their pleasures and desires at any price. The Christians go to such people and lure them with money, pleasures and women...” [The author generalizes about Muslims and Christians, claiming, as do some Christians, that those who convert cannot have been good Muslims or Christians respectively].

“For these reasons, we decided to stand against this false attack and take part in defending the religion of *Allāh*. We will achieve this by resorting to fairness and not to falsehoods and untruthfulness. We will publish a series of books written by a number of Christian scholars and intellectuals who converted to Islam. In these books, they will clarify the distortions and the contradictions in some Christian books. They will also clarify the prophecies concerning Muhammad, the prophet of *Allāh*, which are mentioned in their holy books. These prophecies are the reasons for their conversion to Islam. They believe in the one and only God, and in the last of the prophets, Muhammad. They will demonstrate how the Christian books announced / foretold the good news of the coming of Prophet Muhammad and ordered all people to believe in him.”

### Christian polemics about Islam

Likewise many Egyptian Christians are concerned and afraid about what some Christian leaders estimate to be thousands of conversions to Islam every year, and feel that they are under threat. As a

result, they misguidedly believe that by attacking and criticizing Islam, they will decrease the number of conversions; the play in Alexandria and Robert al-Fāris' books specifically warn Christians of the danger of conversion to Islam. Nevertheless, the wisdom of this response should be strongly questioned. Christians make up between six and eight percent of the Egyptian population, many are fairly poorly-educated, and not very well versed in Christian doctrine. As Muslim polemicists respond to Christian polemics with fierce attacks on the Christian faith, the conversion to Islam of nominal or weak Christians is bound to increase, the opposite effect of what Zakarīyā Butrus, Robert al-Fāris and others would like to achieve.

### **Religious identity of Egyptian children**

Rachel Allison Royle's Bachelor's dissertation in Psychology at the University of Surrey, U.K. investigated religious identity in Christian and Muslim Egyptian children, based on interviews with Egyptian orphans. One of the findings of Royle's study was that Christian children had more negative perceptions of Muslims, than Muslim children did of Christians. Indeed 48 percent of the Christian children interviewed described Muslims as 'not nice', compared to only 7.5 percent of Muslims describing Christians in the same way. Royle links this to social identity theory, in which a minority who feels that its identity is challenged has to build its in-group identity through black-white comparison with the out-group. As a result, Christian children demonstrate in-group (Christian) favoritism and out-group (Muslim) devaluation [See appendix 5].

Royle's dissertation, though not without weaknesses, does seem to indicate that Christian polemics against Islam are related to Christians' feelings that, as a minority, they are under attack from, or at least challenged by the dominant religion in Egypt, Islam.

### **Are polemics inevitable?**

The anger in Muslim-Christian polemics is directly related to incompatible criteria of what the truth is. If a Christian holds Biblical revelations and the witnesses of the Apostles of Jesus' teachings as the truth, according to which all other beliefs, including Islam, are measured, then the Christian's belief is bound to offend Muslims. Similarly, if a Muslim holds the revelation of the Prophet Muhammad as the truth, as any true Muslim believer would, and uses this as the criteria by which to measure the degree of truth in other faiths, then that Muslim is bound to offend others who hold different beliefs. Polemicists on both sides realize this, but since they believe that such a clash is unavoidable, they make no attempt to avoid it, and accept that polarization between adherents of different religions is inevitable.

Christians and Muslims who compare their religions with such an attitude in mind, are bound to accentuate differences. Nevertheless, it is possible to accept that one's religion is the absolute truth, without making unfavorable comparisons with other religions. One need not give up one's own faith to see the similarities and the positive aspects in other religions. Such work would fall under Goddard's category of 'Eirenical' literature, which seeks common elements and understanding, or 'Intermediate' literature, which is neither explicitly positive nor deliberately negative, and which allows a Muslim or Christian to explain his faith, and even its superiority, on the basis of the *Qur'ān* or the Bible, without explicitly highlighting differences or denigrating the other.



## Polemics, sectarian tension and its possible consequences

Polemics, as demonstrated in the television programs, books and media above, reflects a deep anger about people believed to have caused harm to their faith or community, and an apparent desire to take revenge for what the other has done, or is believed to have done. Polemical texts incite and inflame sentiments against people of other faiths, increasing anger among those accused of misgivings. Both Muslim and Christian advocates of polemics try to increase the circle of distribution as widely as possible, increasing the negative atmosphere, and drawing more people into discussions in which they were not previously involved.

Polemics therefore leads to increasing sectarian tensions and polarization within society, which is then exploited by extremists who wish to incite violent clashes. There are, unfortunately, all too many examples of such clashes: October 2005, thousands of Muslims in Alexandria demonstrated over the issue of an anti-Islamic play and damaged Christian property, February 2006, mass demonstrations, some violent, around the Islamic world following the publication of Danish cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad, January 2000, 21 killed during the Kushh incidents in Egypt following a small business conflict in an already polluted atmosphere [See *AWR* 2000, 3, arts. 11–63]. In certain extreme cases, and under certain conditions, polemics can even create the suitable climate for genocide, as happened in Armenia in 1915-1917.

## The Armenian genocide

The Armenian genocide, which took place during the 1<sup>st</sup> World War, is believed to have resulted in the deaths of between one and one and a half million Armenians through outright murder, starvation or disease, caused by the mass deportations of Armenians from Armenia and Anatolia. Many Western publications focused on the atrocities committed during the 1<sup>st</sup> World War, but more important is to study developments in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that explain how, through Western interference in the Ottoman Empire and incitement by Armenian and Turkish nationalists, ultimately a climate was created which made a genocide possible [See appendix 6 for more on the Armenian genocide].

### **Similarities between the current tensions in Egypt and the polarization between Armenians, Turks and Kurds in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman Empire**

- 1) European powers, appealing to their religious constituencies at home, forced the Ottoman Empire to introduce reforms favoring religious minorities. These reforms were, or at least were perceived as strengthening Western interests at the expense of the empire. Likewise, the U.S. Freedom from Religious Persecution Act in 1998, and U.S. interference in the Islamic world, appealing to a religious Christian constituency back home, are seen as bolstering American policies in the region at the expense of Islam.
- 2) The most radical nationalist Armenians were found outside the Ottoman Empire, for example in Paris, and made great efforts to incite Armenians living inside the Ottoman Empire. Today the most radical Copts are living outside Egypt and make great efforts to incite demonstrations amongst Copts living in Egypt, through Arabic websites, through support for some Coptic lawyers in Egypt and possibly through support of *Al-Katība al-Tībīya*.
- 3) Many expatriate Armenian activists in the 19<sup>th</sup> century hoped for external intervention on their behalf. Many Coptic activists in the West would like to see U.S. intervention in Egypt.

- 4) The 19<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman state was no longer a match for the European powers of its day, just as Egypt is no match at all for the U.S. As a result, the Ottoman, and now the Egyptian state was put under great external pressure, leading to great resentment of the people who were seen as bringing about those pressures.

**Differences:**

- 1) Egypt is much more ethnically homogeneous than the 19<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman Empire. Copts have, until recently, not seen themselves as ethnically different. Today there are a number of Copts advocating that they are the only true Egyptians, a dangerous development that will, no doubt, result in tensions with Muslim Egyptians.
- 2) There are practically no Copts who advocate an autonomous region or even a separate state. The wish to obtain autonomy or independence was, however, widespread among Armenians.
- 3) There is no hostile state neighboring Egypt housing a substantial number of Copts as was the case with Russian occupied Armenia, which bordered areas of the Ottoman Empire.
- 4) There is no major war, which tends to provide the circumstances making genocide possible.

Despite these major differences, the first four similarities with the case of the Armenians are serious enough. They show polemical influences can result in a deterioration of Muslim-Christian relations at the expense of the weakest group in society; in Egypt, the Christians.

## Conclusion

This report was prompted by the realization that an increasing number of anti-Christian and anti-Muslim texts were being published in Egypt, probably in response to one another, with comparison with, and attack on, other religions being seen by some as the best form of defense against the perceived threat from ‘the other’. Mr. Volkhard Windfuhr, a major Western journalist and political analyst who has spent a very long time in Egypt suggests that one can hardly call this an expression of freedom and democracy anymore. Has the freedom to be offensive been forced upon Egypt or are there elements in Egypt who would not mind a conflict between Muslims and Christians?

Certainly it appears that extremist groups are exploiting the greater freedom of expression to stir up sectarian strife. This is reflected in the October 2005 Alexandria riots, which were caused by the news that a play, offensive to Islam, had been performed in a church, even though the performance had actually been several years earlier. Other extremists, particularly some Coptic activists, mainly living outside Egypt, seem to believe, possibly genuinely, that crimes such as the robbery and murder of the Armāniyus family in New Jersey, U.S., [See appendix 4] are religiously motivated, arguing that this necessitates foreign interference on behalf of the Copts in Egypt.

Such resorts to foreign powers tends to make Muslim-Christian relations worse [See *AWR* 2005, 52, art. 46]. The U.S. can force particular laws on Egypt, but they are not able to force a change in the perceptions of Muslims towards Christians in Egypt. Outside interference therefore further escalates sectarian tensions and indeed, *AWR* has previously published articles by Egyptian Copts urging expatriate Copts to stop interfering in Egypt, since it is not they who have to suffer the consequences [For example, see *AWR* 2005, 49, art. 23].

Religious polemics [Dog-fight discourse], therefore, are of no benefit to anyone. Though polemicists, such as Zakarīyā Butrus, claim that numerous people have changed religion as a result of their work, there is no proof for these claims, and it is likely that only a few people, who already have doubts about their faith, are influenced by polemical publications and television programs. Polemics exploit people’s deep set fears and beliefs to bring radicalization and polarization, tensions, insecurity, weakened development opportunities, disintegration of national unity and in some cases, violence and death. Egyptians, both Muslim and Christian can only lose from this.

This report, though, does not subscribe to the idea that opposing polemics inevitably requires limiting freedom of speech. Rather it argues that freedom of speech must be exercised with responsibility, or polemicists must be prepared to be critiqued. This critique is most effective when it comes from the polemicists own circle. Furthermore, *AWR* argues that there must be one standard for all; Arab or Western, Muslim or Christian. As such, one should not complain about polemics, if one then engages in polemics oneself.

This report has argued that polemics are not inevitable and that even comparison of religions is possible without being antagonistic. There will always be those who choose to take snippets of academic debates out of context as a justification for polemics. In many cases, there is little that academics can do to prevent this, except to respond with clarifications. However, it is possible for Egyptians to boycott, or to publicly condemn publications or programs they find polemical. *Arab-West Report* uses a systematic media watch to critique all articles translated and summarized, both from the Arab and Western press believing that justified critique can help to prevent such articles being republished in the future by making authors more careful about reporting sensitive issues. We were

pleased to see in *Arab-West Report* that Egyptian journalist Usāma Salāma condemned the work of *Al-Katība al-Tībīya* [AWR 2005, 51, art. 30], stating that most of its articles are full of “extremism and sectarianism”. Yet were the pope and other prominent members of the clergy, whose articles are republished in *al-Katība al-Tībīya*, to state that such polemics harm Egypt’s national unity, this criticism would be much more credible. Likewise, were prominent Islamic figures to state the same about books that contain polemics against Christianity, the number of readers would no doubt decrease.

Muslims and Christians have the right to defend their religions, but, as Jan Slomp argues, “It is important, in my view, to convince both Christian and Muslim polemicists that their cause in the long run is better served by a positive attitude, which sometimes may tend to praising one’s opponent” (Slomp letter, April 4, 2006), for example recognizing Muhammad as a seeker of God and an important historical figure. Indeed, when asked what was positive in Islam, the late Metropolitan Athanasius responded to Cornelis Hulsman that he wished Christians too would pray five times a day, and likewise, Dr. °Abd al-Mu°tī Bayyomī wrote an authoritative and highly positive article on the Muslim view of Christianity [AWR 2003, 12, art. 17] in response to an attack on Christianity by Zaynab °Abd al-Azīz [AWR 2003, 5, art 9].

Polemics are profoundly dangerous for Egyptian society. They damage relationships, create distrust and poison the atmosphere. As Dr. Yunan Labīb Rizq, a widely respected Egyptian Christian professor of history at °Ayn Shams University, has said, anything can happen if the evil spirit of fanaticism prevails, adding that this way of thought has spread in recent years in Egypt [AWR 2005, 49, art. 24]. AWR applauds such a stand against polemics, and welcomes all responses to this discussion paper.

There are opportunities for cooperation between Muslims and Christians in Egypt. Many Muslims and Christians live and work alongside each other, and consider themselves Egyptians first and foremost, but a few strategically timed polemical articles can cause major sectarian tensions. It is therefore vital that Egyptians of all religions act to prevent the irresponsible actions of polemicists undermining Egyptian society.

## List of Appendices

### Appendix 1

#### **The Gospel of Barnabas**

**Author: Drs. Cornelis Hulsman**

Muslims who use the Gospel of Barnabas believe it confirms their faith. From the beginning of the 20th century, prominent Muslims, including Rashīd Ridā, began using the Gospel of Barnabas as a useful weapon against Christian missionaries and apologetics. Since then, the gospel has become a standard work in polemical Muslim writings about Christianity. Many Muslims believe the Gospel of Barnabas to be true because it seems to fit so well with general Islamic teachings.

The gospel affirms the unity of God, Jesus' claim to be only a prophet, not the son of God, the coming of a prophet from the descendants of Ishmael [a reference to the Prophet Muhammad], the crucifixion of Judas Iscariot instead of Jesus, and Jesus' observance of Jewish laws. The Gospel of Barnabas thus follows much, but not all, of mainstream Islamic teaching. The website <http://www.barnabas.net/> claims the text was accepted as a canonical gospel in the churches of Alexandria until 325 C.E., the date of the Council of Nicea which, they claim, "ordered that all original Gospels in Hebrew script should be destroyed. An Edict was issued that any one in possession of these Gospels would be put to death. In 383 C.E., the Pope secured a copy of the Gospel of Barnabas and kept it in his private library," which ultimately ensured that the gospel was not lost forever. There is, however, no evidence for this theory and no single reference to the Gospel of Barnabas prior to the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

There are some Muslims who consider the Gospel of Barnabas to be an original gospel. In 1942, Muhammad Abu Zahra published a book called '*Muhādarāt fi al-Nasrānīya*' (Lectures on Christianity) that according to Prof. Dr. Ahmad Ghalwash, head of the *da'wa* department of the Azhar, became "the basis for every other book on the subject published since" (Goddard, interview 1979, p.60). Abu Zahra argues both that there is an original gospel, the Gospel of Barnabas, that, according to him preceded other gospels (Goddard, pp.59-67), but also that the chain of transmission for the gospels accepted by Christians was broken between the time of Jesus and the Council of Nicea, making all Christian sources unreliable. As such, he therefore states that investigators must have recourse to the *Qur'ān*.

For most Western scholars, and even some Muslim scholars, there is no question that the Gospel of Barnabas is a late medieval forgery, dated to the 17<sup>th</sup> century [For arguments see Jean Slomp, 'The Gospel of Barnabas in Recent Research', *Islamochristiana*, 1997, 23 and <http://www.cs.rutgers.edu/pub/soc.religion.christian/faq/gospel-barnabas.>] °Abbās Mahmoud al-°Aqqād, prominent Egyptian writer, 1889 – 1964, wrote on the Gospel of Barnabas in *al-Akhhār* newspaper on October 26, 1959, mentioning four main points:

1. It is noticeable that many phrases in the Gospel of Barnabas are written in a linguistic style that was not known before the spread of the Arabic language in Andalusia.
2. The description of hell in this gospel is based on information that was not known to the Jews and Christians who lived at the time of Jesus Christ.
3. Some of the gospel's phrases reached Europe through Arab sources; for example, the claim that Christ announced his message before thousands of people in the name of "Muhammad the Prophet of *Allāh*."
4. Some mistakes are repeated several times in this gospel.

The 17<sup>th</sup> century was the period following the completion of the Spanish reconquista. Granada, the last Muslim stronghold on the Spanish peninsula was taken in 1492 A.D. Everywhere in sixteenth-century Europe, it was assumed that religious unity was necessary for political unity, but the sense of urgency was larger in Spain than elsewhere since Spain's population contained significant non-Christian communities, some of whom were believed to be of dubious loyalty. Granadan Muslims, known as Moriscos, were given the choice of voluntary exile or conversion to Christianity, and many did convert, albeit nominally. But exile and conversion were not believed to be sufficient and over the next hundred years, efforts were made to reduce the influence of the Moriscos as much as possible.

It seems likely this was the context in which the Gospel of Barnabas was written, possibly first in Spanish (there are some Spanish fragments left) and later translated in Italian. The Italian manuscript, the text we know today, is written in a language that resembles that of 17<sup>th</sup> century Italy. It contains anachronisms, which can date only from the Middle Ages and not before.

Many scholars believe the text appears to be written by a Christian convert to Islam. Others, however, believe it could be a Morisco, but the author of the text seems to have a greater knowledge of Christian texts than of Muslim texts. It is, for example, not likely a Muslim would have called Muhammad the Messiah, as the Gospel of Barnabas does, and thus the author is more likely to be a Christian who turned to Islam. If the dating to the 17<sup>th</sup> century is correct, he must have known of, and most likely been upset by, the forced conversions of Muslims to Christianity by the Spanish Catholic state.

The Gospel of Barnabas was published in 1907 by Lonsdale and Laura Marie Ragg with a critical introduction. Their English translation became the basis of a 1908 Arabic translation which ignored their introduction and which was reprinted many times. The Gospel of Barnabas was later translated in other languages, either for apologetical purposes in discussions with Christians or for the propagation of Islam. Translations with Muslim prefaces also exist in German, Spanish, Dutch, Turkish, Indonesian, Urdu, Persian, and purely academic translations of the gospel exist in French and Italian.

The Muslim publishing houses or authors apparently using the Gospel of Barnabas for apologetical reasons rarely refer to the critical introduction of the Raggs and have replaced this with introductions that are similar to those of Barnabas.net. They rarely, if ever, respond to the arguments of scholars who believe this gospel is a late medieval forgery. They just state that arguments claiming this text is a forgery are false, without really providing arguments why.

This is a general problem with many arguments that are supposed to support one's religious views. For example, some Coptic Orthodox Christians claim that medieval texts about the Holy Family tradition provide the historical truth about events that happened in the first century. Dr. Mahmoud <sup>c</sup>Umar claims that the well he discovered in Tall Bastā (near Zaqāzīq in the Egyptian Delta) must have been the well the Holy Family created because this was mentioned in medieval manuscripts [AWR, 2004, 47, art. 8]. For Western scholars that position is unacceptable since, except for the Gospel of Matthew, no first century documents exist about the route that the Holy Family supposedly followed.

There are many medieval manuscripts which make claims about something that happened centuries earlier, but this does not make such claims true. Medieval manuscripts say something about the period they were written in, but nothing about the period they write about. As such, documents about the well at Tall Bastā only show that during medieval times, it was *believed* that this was the place created by the Holy Family. It does not prove that the well was *actually* created by the Holy Family.

It all too often happens, however, that both oriental Muslims and Christians believe they can use certain material, medieval stories, oral traditions etc., to support their faith. Once doubt is cast by others on their theories, they cling to their theories even more strongly, receiving the support of those who share their faith, but failing to convince those who do not share their faith.

## Appendix 2

### **Examples of Muslim-Christian polarization: Review of Muslim polemical books on Christianity Translated and reviewed by CAWU staff**

These books were selected because they are considered, by many Egyptian Christians, to be polemical. To others though, including Muslims and many, though not all Westerners, arguments denying, for example, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, are not polemical but a matter of belief. For many of these people though, it is the way that Christian beliefs are denied that they find polemical. The books are not representative of all the books published by *al-Nāfidha* publishing house, and other publishing houses may have published similar books.

The books tend to mix traditional Islamic beliefs, Western bible critiques and unsubstantiated claims and conspiracies with formulations that are un-necessarily negative. In most cases, it is these negative formulations and comparisons between Islam and Christianity, intended to support the authors' common belief that Islam is better than Christianity, that are polemical.

#### **Titles of the books used in this review:**

1. The Bible and the Cross
2. Is Christ a Human or a God?
3. Is God One or a Trinity?
4. An Answer to the Doctrines of Christians
5. The Unitarians, between Islam and Christianity
6. The Secret of Mary between the Bible and the *Qur'ān*
7. Criticism of the Torah
8. The Masterpiece of the Brilliant One in Answering the People of the Cross

#### **An overview of each of the eight books**

##### **Book one**

Name of the book:	<i>Al-Injīl wa al-Salīb</i> (The Bible and the Cross)
Author:	°Abd al-Ahad Dāoud al-Ashourī al-°Irāqī The biography of the author (p.13-14) gives the following information: He was born in 1868 in Persia. He was a Christian and was ordained as a priest in 1895. He converted to Islam after he had conducted profound research and investigations into the story of the killing, crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ. The results of his research convinced him that the story was a myth.
Edition:	First
Date of publication:	2004
Date of publication of earlier edition(s):	Not mentioned
Number of pages:	230
Price:	EGP 20.00



### The main ideas of the book

- The author states that the Bible is the word of God, but that it was deliberately distorted by early church leaders during the Council of Nicaea (325 AD) in order to hide the numerous prophecies about the Prophet Muhammad mentioned in an original version of the Bible.
- The author provides translation theories claiming that the names Ahmad, Muhammad, and all the words based around the letters s-l-m, the root of the word 'Islam' are frequently mentioned in the Old and the New Testaments. He claims that these names have been intentionally mistranslated in the Bible translations. For example, he says that the verse in Luke 2:14 should be "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace and to people Ahmad." In other words, the angels wanted to say, "The religion of Islam will be established on earth." Throughout the book, the author quotes many Biblical verses, which, according to him, indicate how the meanings of the word Islam are repeatedly mentioned in the Old Testament, for example: Isaiah 44:26–28, Isaiah 12:38, Proverbs 7:16, Joshua 10:1-4.
- This means that the real message of the Bible, especially the message given by Christ, is an announcement of the arrival of a prophet called Muhammad. Since Christians do not believe that Muhammad is the prophet of God, but believe in a trinity, they are considered polytheists. The author suggests that Christians have forgotten the true Christ, who was certainly not crucified, and have instead substituted Christ with an imaginary person called Jesus who made himself God and died on a cross.
- The author believes that Jews and Muslims have many things in common regarding their beliefs; both are monotheists and descendants of Abraham. For this reason, Jews and Muslims can unite and combine the *Qur'ān* to the Torah [the five books of Moses; sometimes Egyptian authors use the name Torah instead of Old Testament, thus not distinguishing between the Torah and the Old Testament]. By doing this, he says that the Jews can take refuge in Islam from the Christian enemy, which wants to annihilate them.
- The author justifies the use of force for the purpose of establishing a religion or a state.
- The author claims that he has successfully proved that the true Kingdom of God, mentioned in the Bible, is the religion of Islam and that the true word of God is the *Qur'ān*.
- Muhammad °Alī Salāma wrote in the introduction: "This book is a call, by fair means, to Jewish and Christian scholars to convert to Islam, which is the religion of *Allāh* and follow the Prophet of *Allāh*... Listen, Christians and Jews, here is one of your own scholars who obeyed the truth, listened to the voice of *Allāh*, accepted the gift of *Allāh*, and entered the kingdom that is announced in your Holy Books. Why do you deprive yourselves from this honor and light, and imprison yourselves in the darkness of doubt and suspicion?" (p.10–11).
- Muhammad °Alī Salāma added on page 16 the following footnote: "I would like to refer to a very important point, and it is a message for all Muslims. What the priest said means that his need for money to meet daily expenses was the reason that stopped him from immediately converting to the religion of *Allāh*, which is Islam, is true to a great extent because the priests who converted to the religion of *Allāh* said that the reason for not publicly announcing their

conversion to Islam was their good living conditions. The church spends a lot of money on priests, which enables them to live in luxury. When a priest converts to Islam, he will lose his luxurious lifestyle. Therefore, the priests who want to convert to Islam usually say, “In order not to lose our income, we will keep our image as Christians before people and we will worship *Allāh* secretly.” ... “My message for all Muslims is to try and find an organization or an establishment that would financially take care of those who convert to Islam and provide them with the same standard of living they used to have before their conversion. Believe me my brothers, I swear to God that if we did so, we would see a big part of non-Muslims, especially the scholars, proclaiming their conversion to Islam and preaching Islam” (p.16).

- “The priests ... made up and created the books of the Revelation and the Gospel of John...” (p.30).
- 
- “The epistles that carry the names of the disciples... are some writings about an imaginary man called Jesus Christ...” (p.39).
- “Since the books of the Old Testament are abrogated, then faithful Christians have no other indubitable book that can lead them to the right path except for the book of Muslims” (p.41).
- The description of the servant of God in Isaiah 42 can only apply to the Prophet Muhammad and not to Christ (p.58 – 59, footnote by the Iraqi translator of the Turkish original text that was translated into Arabic).
- “Christ, explicitly and repeatedly, said that he did not come to bring peace, but a sword and fire. He said that he came to cause disagreements and to separate people. There is no chance for peace with Christ or with Christianity...” (p.65). [Compare Matthew 10, 34: “Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.” Christ said this to make his followers aware of the conflicts with their family they would encounter as a consequence of believing in him. The word sword is not to be understood literally [See *AWR* 2003, 5, art. 9].
- “I say to the millions of Christians who are not Israelites: Look, your Christ did not know you at all, he did not say a word about you. He called the non-Israelites dogs, so who do you think you are?” (p.98).
- “It became quite obvious and convincing that Jesus Christ would not redeem anybody by his life. He would not even offer the world a piece of his fingernails... He would not even give away one pound of the carpentry work placed in front of his carpentry shop” (p.99).
- “The Muslims are the only people who love Christ. This is because the Jews rejected him and the Christians have forgotten the true Christ and substituted him by an imaginary person called Jesus who made himself God” (p.100).
- The author believes that Christ meant by the real water of life the following: “...the drink of the Kingdom [of God] is a new drink... it is the knowledge of the magnificent *Ahmadīya* law [the law according to Muhammad]... the water of life that springs from the verses of the Munificent Qur’an...” (p.117). [This is the author’s interpretation of John 4:14]

- “The church was teaching me: ‘... you may be as generous and close to the poor as Abraham, as patient as Job, as meek as Moses... and as straight and steadfast as Muhammad, ...’” (p.140).
- “During the era of the orthodox caliphs... all the monotheist Christians who were living in Asia and Africa converted to Islam. Only a minority of those who believed in the Trinity have not believed in Islam until this day” (p.151).
- To Jews: “your worst enemy is not Islam but Christianity...” (p.158).
- “I am very aware of how much the church hates Islam. The church believes that whatever is being done to Muslims is permissible and appropriate. Why? Because it wants the cross to win and the crescent [the symbol of Islam] to be destroyed and eradicated. Then, the hearts of all those who had been baptized will be filled with happiness and laughs...” (p.159).
- “In the vision of Daniel, which is certainly true but distorted, the son of man is not anyone but Prophet Muhammad...” (p.194).
- “Christianity is associating partners with God; it believes in three entities. Therefore, it is out of God’s kingdom, it does not believe in God and it does not worship Him” (p.213).
- “Oh, poor Muslims! How can you escape the anger of the lamb who sits in the throne of heaven? ... We must believe that there is no one who sits on the throne of heaven except for *Allāh*, we must not worship anyone except for Him and we must not see there any lamb or sheep...” (p.219).
- “The churches are making Jesus Christ a slaughtered lamb, an interceding priest, a son of God and then they make him - God forbid - (God). They also make him (the Word of God)... and a shepherd too! Have you ever heard something funnier than these words? This laughing stock is whom the Christian worship. A lamb and a shepherd at the same time, how strange! If the shepherd is a lamb, how happy foxes and thieves would be. There is no place in the Kingdom of God for such nonsense and for such provocative creeds that teach unbelief [*kufur*] (p.221–222).

#### Observations:

It is not likely that the author was a Christian priest and Biblical scholar as he claims, because he seems not be aware of the very basic ministerial ranks of the church. He wrote, “I say to the monks of the Protestant Church...” (p.65) and “The daughter of the archbishop of the Protestants” (p.127). There are no monks in protestant churches and with the exception of Anglicans and Lutherans, there are also no bishops. There are three Anglican archbishops in the U.K.; Canterbury, York and Wales, two in Ireland, three in Canada and three in Australia, and a Lutheran archbishop in Sweden, but one would then not write about “the archbishop of the Protestants.

**Book two**

Name of the book:	<i>Al-Mas̄h: Insān am Ilah?</i> (Is Christ a Human or a God?)
Author:	Justice Dr. Muhammad Majdī Murjān
	The back cover of the book provides the following information: “ He was born in a devout Christian family and was a church deacon. After his conversion to Islam, he wrote four books to reveal the truth:
	1- Is God One or a Trinity?
	2- Is Christ a Human or a God?
	3- Muhammad the Prophet of Love
	4- Why did I Convert to Islam?
	The author currently occupies the post of the president of the Criminal Court and the Supreme Court of Appeal. He is also the head of Afro-Asian Writers Organization.
Edition:	Second
Date of publication:	2004
Date of publication of earlier edition(s):	1972
Number of pages:	183
Price:	EGP 9.00

The main ideas of the book

Most of the view expressed in the two books by Justice Dr. Muhammad Majdī Murjān, such as the belief that Jesus is not the son of God and the denial of the resurrection, are part of fairly mainstream Islamic belief. This book would seem to fit Goddard’s “intermediate” category of literature, but for many Egyptian Christians, such ideas are considered polemical.

- The word Christ means “the anointed one.” There have been many anointed ones in Jewish history from Aaron to Jesus. The Jews’ idea of the identity of the Christ has changed throughout time from someone who is anointed as a priest, king or prophet to someone who will be sent by Yahweh to deliver his people and subdue all the nations. This idea expresses the hope of an oppressed nation awaiting the coming of a savior.
- Although Mary was a virgin when she gave birth to Jesus, in accordance with the text of the *Qur’ān*, Jesus was not a descendent of David. This is one of the many claims made up by the authors of the gospels.
- The picture that the Christians have about Jesus is totally different from how the true Jesus was. The true Jesus was a normal man who had many friendships with women, especially prostitutes, but without having sex with any of them. If Jesus had lived longer, he would have married one or more women. He also was a cheerful man who loved to have fun, enjoyed lavish banquets, delicious food, and drinking wine... etc [The author based this on his interpretation of certain episodes of the gospels. The belief that Jesus would have married if he had lived longer is quite common among Muslims].
- Many people believe that Jesus was a disciple of John the Baptist.

- Jesus personally declared that he is not God (p.59).
- Jesus used the miracles he performed to prove that his message was from God so that people would believe in his message. On the contrary, the Prophet Muhammad never made any connection between his miracles and his message in order not to force people to believe in his message.
- The message of Jesus was limited to the Israelites; therefore, no other nation but them has “the right to believe in his message.”
- The message of Jesus is extremely racist and it will lead the world to hatred and violence. On the other hand, the message of Islam and the Prophet Muhammad is extremely tolerant and it will lead the world to peace and fraternity.
- The gospel writers gave contradictory / differing accounts about the crucifixion of Jesus. The story of crucifying Jesus, whether it was true or not, is of minor importance because it would not add anything to his message. [For Christians, the crucifixion is the whole point.]
- The truth is that Jesus was not crucified, but his traitor disciple Judas was crucified instead of him. [This fairly widespread belief was given a new emphasis from the Gospel of Barnabas. See appendix 1].

### Important excerpts

“I was born to worship Christ, to exalt him above all gods. But when I grew up I had doubts about this. I searched for the truth until I found it. Christ called me and said, “You who are a worshipper of God, I am a human like you, do not associate partners with God and worship a created one. Follow me and worship Him with me. Let us pray together, ‘Our Father and our God, Praise and Glory be to You Lord of the Worlds. You alone we worship and You alone we ask for help.’ You who are a worshipper of God, you and I and all people are worshippers of the Beneficent.” “At that time I believed in *Allāh*, trusted in Christ, and disbelieved in the gods made by men” (p.1). [This is the personal conversion story of the author, but all conversions are seen as offensive by those whose community the convert has left].

- “The Torah speaks about the wars that were waged upon the orders of the cruel and proud Lord Yahweh to annihilate the neighboring peoples, and plunder their possessions...” (pp.5–6).
- “... except for Mathew and Luke, no one else referred to the virgin birth of Jesus,... even Paul, the Apostle of Christianity, or John, who Jesus loved, did not mention anything about that birth. It seems as if it was something they were afraid to discuss or talk about, as if they were afraid of being mocked or they were had doubts and suspicions...” (p.22–23).
- “...the authors of the gospels raced to quote verses from the Old Testament, and falsely made its prophets say things that they actually did not say. They also altered the words and stories that prophesized the coming of Christ in order to make it applicable to Jesus...” (p.24).

- “It is true that Jesus did not get married, but on the other hand he did not hate women or isolate himself from them. He had relationships and friendships with many of them... he was satisfied with having innocent friendships and being in the company of women... if he had lived longer and had seen the success of his message... he would have married one or more women so that no one would doubt his manhood or falsely accuse him of being homosexual” (p.36–37).
- “To whom did Jesus attribute the miracles he performed? He attributed them to their performer, to God who sent him, to his creator, to the “finger of God,” to the spirit of God, and to the power of God. Jesus himself had nothing to do with these miracles... Jesus declared his total incapability before the power of God. This is the truth; Jesus was but a tool and a means used by God to achieve His purposes... so that people would believe he was a messenger of God...” (p.59).
- “The Israelites interpolated falsified texts in their Torah and Holy Books and then attributed it to God. They claimed that God ordered them to rob the Egyptians, who had treated them well, and loot their fortunes and money...” (p.99).
- “The authors of Christianity said things that contradict every right and truth, every mind and logic, and even what is written in their Holy Books...” (p.122).

### Book three

Name of the book:	<i>Hal Allāh Wāhid am Thalouth</i> (Is God One or a Trinity?)
Author:	Justice Dr. Muhammad Majdī Murjān (for details of the author, see book two)
Edition:	Second
Date of publication:	2004
Date of publication of earlier edition(s):	1972
Number of pages:	140
Price:	EGP 8.00

#### The main ideas of the book

- The author reviewed a number of explanations for the meaning of the Trinity given by Christian clergymen and scholars. He concluded that such explanations are anthropomorphic, attributing human qualities to God, and eventually lead to unbelief and straying from the right path. The author wonders whether this would be the substance of associating partners with God? [Editor: *Shirk*, a cardinal sin in Islam]
- The idea that God is divided into three separate divine persons (*aqānīm*) means that there is no unity between these divine persons. Consequently, they may disagree, contradict, and conflict with each other.
- Christian denominations have never agreed on one explanation of the Trinity. This is because they are not convinced of it. No one, including philosophers and scholars, could ever understand the idea of the trinity. This is simply because it contradicts any kind of logic.

- The idea of the Trinity is a stage between idolatry and monotheism. The disciples and apostles had to include some idolatrous beliefs, such as having a trinity, because they believed that was the only way to convert pagans [in reference to the Romans of those days] to Christianity. According to a prominent Christian bishop called Boulus Ilyās al-Yasou<sup>c</sup>ī [a Jesuit], Christianity of nowadays is a mixture of the true Christianity with idolatrous beliefs, traditions, and rituals (p.73).
- Jesus was just an ordinary human being created by God. He is one of God's great messengers. The Holy Spirit is neither God, nor a divine person, nor a part or element of God, but it is a power created by God.
- Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, as well as all other messengers, were sent by God to lead people to the one true religion, to the religion that does not associate any partners with God. They all came, including Jesus, to preach Islam.
- The author illustrated a number of his points with quotations from the Gospel of Barnabas [See appendix 1].

#### Important excerpts

- "...the Father (God) may also desire to have a daughter to give her his love and kindness and to be a tender sister for the son [Jesus]. The Father may love the daughter more than the son... Maybe with time the Father becomes a grandfather, the son becomes a father and the daughter becomes a mother... the divine love and kindness will be restricted only to the divine family. As regards to human beings, the worshipers of God, there will be no love nor kindness left for them... This is how the number of gods increases in the minds of those who are fantasizing about things in their minds" (p.17).
- "According to this division in the divine functions and characters, the gods will cooperate together and every god will help his co-god so that none of them will get tired..." (p.25).
- "When we look at God through these divine persons of which He is comprised and through the three faces he wears... we will find Him divided into three gods each of them on his own is weak and incomplete..." (p.26)
- "These substantial differences between those who believe in the Trinity clearly indicate how vague the idea of the Trinity is. It also shows that those who believe in it are not convinced because it contradicts the logic of their minds..." (p.42)
- "... If philosophers and scientists failed to understand what the Trinity is, then who can understand it? ...Do those who believe in the Trinity want us to give up our minds and believe in it too? The belief in the Trinity contradicts the simplest rules of logic and calculation and it is too far from being realistic... Many Christians said to me that they cannot understand what the Trinity is and that they are living in a struggle between their minds and their religious traditions... some priests said to me that a Christian must have a blind faith in the Trinity..."

- “The disciples of Jesus had to include some idolatrous rituals, customs and traditions in Christianity... They believed that this would be the only way to help pagan nations understand Christianity... They thought that with the passing of time, Christianity would be purified of these rituals... The sad reality is that, what happened was exactly the opposite of what the disciples had thought. The idolatrous rituals have overcome the great heavenly message of Christ and completely wiped it out...” (p.70).
- “The followers of Moses who believed in the true Torah are not *Musawiyin* [followers of Moses] but Muslims. The followers of Jesus Christ who believed in the true Bible are not Christians but Muslims. The followers of Muhammad who believed in the Munificent *Qur’ān* are not Mohammedans but Muslims...” (p.128).
- “...The Muslim Prophet Jesus Christ did not bring a new message to people and did not ask them to deify or worship him... Jesus preached of the only one religion of God, which is Islam” (p.133).
- “...He is an unbeliever (*kāfir*) he who believes in Christ and denies Muhammad...” (p.137).  
[This statement is controversial. Many Muslims would consider someone born a Muslim who later denies Muhammad as a *kāfir*, or unbeliever, but Muslim scholars have differing opinions as to whether those not born Muslim and who do not accept the Prophet Muhammad are *kāfirs*.

#### Book four

Name of the book:	<i>Al-Radd ʿala Asnāf al-Nasāra</i> (An Answer to the Doctrines of Christians)
Subtitle:	A Rare Manuscript Published for the First Time
Author:	ʿAlī Bin Rabban al-Tabarī According to the introduction: The author lived between 162 A.H. and 237 A.H. [9 <sup>th</sup> century A. D.]. He was a physicist, a specialist in Biblical studies, arts, and medicine. He converted to Islam when he was 70 years old.
Edition:	First
Date of publication:	2005
Date of publication of earlier edition(s):	Not mentioned
Number of pages:	110
Price:	EGP 10.00

#### The main ideas of the book

- The book contains a long introduction (pp.9–41) written by Khālid Muhammad ʿAbduh. ʿAbduh began by giving thanks to *Allāh* for the blessing of Islam, and adding that he who strays from it will perish.
- The main points of the introduction are:



Praise for the great contributions made by a group of writers who have converted to Islam from Judaism and Christianity, from the dawn of Islam until the modern age, in exposing the defects of other religions. ‘Abduh calls them “the blessed group.”

A biography of the author of the book.

A historical background of the era of the author.

The scientific value of the book.

The methodology of research used by the author.

- The author wrote this book to renounce Christianity and to be a guide for all Christians to leave their faith.
- The author made an effort to prove, through his personal interpretations of the Bible, that the beliefs of Christians are contradictory to many Biblical verses.
- The author surveyed the main beliefs of the Christian creeds of Jacobianism [Jacob Baradaeus, 6<sup>th</sup> century bishop who is greatly revered in the Syrian Orthodox Church] and Nestorianism and said that these beliefs are contradictory to Biblical texts [Coptic Orthodox Metropolitan Bīshouy supports the claim that Nestorian beliefs are contradictory to Biblical texts in a recent book he published about the Nestorians].
- The author refuted the Apostles’ Creed proving that it is full of contradictions with Biblical texts.

#### Important excerpts

- “...All those who made a comparison between their religions and Islam discovered the weak proofs and feeble arguments of their religions, the defectiveness of their creeds, and the difficulties and contradictions of their Holy Books... In addition to all this, they also discovered the falsifications and distortions of facts in their religion...” (p.11)
- “Any Muslim that read my book would become prouder of Islam. On the other hand, any Christian that reads my book will find himself in a dilemma of either renouncing his religion or living in doubt for the rest of his life...” (p.45)

#### **Book five**

Name of the book:	<i>‘Aqā’id al-Nasāra al-Muwahhidīn bayn al-Islām wa al-Masīhīya</i> (The Beliefs of the Unitarians between Islam and Christianity)
Author:	Husnī Yousuf al-Atyar
Edition:	Third
Date of publication:	2004
Date of publication of earlier edition(s):	Not mentioned
Number of pages:	200
Price:	EGP 15.00

### The main ideas of the book

- The author gives an historical background of the most famous Unitarians [Heterodox sect of the second and third centuries] throughout Christian history, proving the authenticity of their teachings, as opposed to the distorted and contradictory teachings given by the authors of today's distorted Bible.
- The author claims that he gave new unprecedented evidence proving that the original gospels of Matthew and Luke did not include the story of Jesus' birth, which was only added a few centuries later. He also made a comparison between several Biblical verses, from old and recent translations, to show the contradictions between them and to argue that there are intentional distortions in the Bible.
- Saul from Tarsus conspired with the Jews and made up a story claiming that he believed in Jesus Christ, after he had appeared to him. The reason for this conspiracy was to infiltrate the Christian community and to act as an apostle, adding idolatrous' teachings to Christianity in order to wipe out the original teachings of Jesus. The conspiracy succeeded, and many teachings that Christians today attribute to Jesus are actually pagan teachings [After Saul became Christian he was arrested, flogged, shipped to Rome and killed. It seems then that he genuinely believed in Christianity, so the argument that he was part of a conspiracy to infiltrate Christianity is doubtful].

### Important excerpts

- “The Christians spent three centuries, until the Council of Nicaea, without knowing where their religion came from, on what bases it was founded or whether the founder of this religion was a man, a god or a devil...” (p.20).
- “They [the Christians] did not hesitate to make changes in the main message of the Bible. They altered its original texts and changed the word of Christ according to their whims... The authentic original versions of the Bible were wiped out and destroyed in the first century...” (p.131).
- “It becomes obvious that the Bible was written more than once and its phrases were altered several times for historical and moral reasons. The authors of the Bible intentionally added new parts to it... They deliberately put words into Jesus' mouth that he did not say” (p.138).
- “The true reason for deifying Jesus was to attract idolaters to Christianity...” (p.180).
- “The Unitarians agree with Muslims in the bases of belief, although their ways are different, therefore, they were Muslims before the appearance of Islam” (p.191).

**Book six**

Name of the book:	<i>Sirr Maryam: Bayn al-Injīl wa al-Qur'ān</i> (The Secret of Mary between the Bible and the <i>Qur'ān</i> )
Author:	Husnī Yousuf al-Atyar
Edition:	Second
Date of publication:	2003
Date of publication of earlier edition(s):	Not mentioned
Number of pages:	204
Price:	EGP 15.00

The main ideas of the book

- Making a comparison between the lavish praise on Mary in the *Qur'ān* and the fainter praise on her in the Bible.
- Highlighting the clear contradictions between the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Luke concerning the story of Jesus' birth. Calling these stories an act of "holy falsification." Suggesting that the church must choose one of these two stories and delete the other.
- Making a comparison between the Gospel of Matthew and the *Qur'ān* proving that the story of Jesus' birth does not match in both books and the story in the Gospel of Matthew is most likely based on the imagination of whoever wrote this Gospel.
- Quoting texts from the Bible, the Torah, traditional Christian and Jewish books, and the Apocrypha confirming the authenticity of the *Qur'ānic* account of the birth of Jesus and the life of Mary.
- Assuring that Jesus lived all his life with accusations of the Jews that his mother was not a decent woman and that he was an illegitimate child.
- Suggesting that the gospels have to be reassessed to reveal all the defects of the Christian belief, lighting the way for Christians to follow a better path.

Important excerpts

- "The authors of the Bible did not want to praise her [Mary]. They did not pay any attention either to her conduct or to her life. On the other hand, they praised some prostitutes and madwomen who perfumed or showed affection to the Christ of Nazareth" (p.18).
- "Jesus suffered from his parents' bad reputation... He got very angry and nervous whenever he heard the words 'father' or 'mother'... This is because there was a deep bleeding wound inside him that he could neither ignore nor surpass" (p.71-73).

- “We aimed through this research to unveil one thing that Christians avoid, because they know how dangerous it is when people find out that they have lived for centuries blinded from seeing the true facts about their Christ” (p.191).

### Book seven

Name of the book:	<i>Naqd al-Tawrāh</i> (Criticism of the Torah)
Author:	Dr. Ahmad Hijāzī al-Saqqā Professor of Comparative Religion at the <i>Azhar</i> University
Edition:	First
Date of publication:	2005
Date of publication of earlier edition(s):	Not mentioned
Number of pages:	410
Price:	EGP 40.00

### The main ideas of the book

- There is a Jewish conspiracy to rob Muslims of their right to the covenant of God. Moses explicitly stated that a prophet will come after him [Deuteronomy 18:15–22]. This prophet is Muhammad but Jewish scholars deliberately distorted this statement to make it impossible for Muslims to say that God’s covenant applies to them. There are many clear indications from the Torah that the prophet Moses referred to, will be a descendent of Ishmael, and thus the Prophet Muhammad.
- Analyzing texts from the Old and New Testaments and providing historical facts to prove that the Torah and the Bible have been deliberately distorted to hide the fact that Muhammad is God’s prophet to both Jews and Gentiles.
- Confirming that all followers of the major three Christian denominations [Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant] are deemed unbelievers [*kafara*]. This is because the Orthodox believe that Christ is God, and the Catholics and Protestants believe that God is comprised of three divine persons.
- Providing Biblical evidence that Jesus Christ was neither killed nor crucified and that the prophecies of the books of Psalms apply only to the Prophet Muhammad.

### Important excerpts

- “Whoever reads the Torah will find things that no one should ever read. It contains texts that would make anyone feel very embarrassed if his sons and daughters read it. Not to mention what would happen to his wife if she read it. She would immediately start looking for a handsome man with whom to commit adultery. If she was a decent woman, she would let her husband read such texts so he would understand that she wanted to have sex with him. Is this a religion that anyone would devote himself to? ...” (p.5).

- “The Jews infiltrated the faithful followers of Christ and deliberately distorted the teachings of the Bible as they had deliberately distorted the Torah before. They misled the Christians and made them worship Christ instead of God...” (p.25).
- “We cannot compare the books of Christianity to the Torah and the *Qur’ān* because the laws of Christianity are not the laws that Christ brought from heaven, but they are positive laws made by Paul...” (p.303).
- “Christ – Peace be upon him – has neither power nor authority...” (p.306).
- “Jews and Christians can join the army in some Islamic countries on the pretext of fraternity, and equality between their religions and that of Islam, so as to escape the humiliation of paying *jizya* [tax on non-Muslims under a Muslim government]. Muslims must prevent Jews and Christians from serving in the military with them and prohibit them from fighting their enemy [Muslims’ enemy]. Muslims must abide by the *Qur’ānic* rule, whenever they can, in judging Jews and Christians” (p.309).

### **Book eight**

Name of the book:	<i>Tuhfa al-Arīb fi al-Radd ʿala ‘Ahl al-Salīb</i> (The Masterpiece of the Brilliant One in Answering the People of the Cross)
Author:	Priest Anselm Turmeda, also known as ʿAbd Allāh al-Turjumān al-Andalusī
Edition:	Fourth
Date of publication:	2005
Date of publication of earlier edition(s):	1992 [First edition]
Number of pages:	148
Price:	EGP 10.00

[The book is presented by Dr. Mahmoud ʿAlī Himāya, professor and head of Comparative Religion Department at the Faculty of *Usoul al-Dīn* [The School of Islamic Theology], *Azhar* University, Assiut branch. Jan Slomp writes that “the *Tuhfa* is an old Morisco text by a renegade from Majorca in 1423, see Louis Massignon, *Examen du ‘Présent de l’homme lettré’* par Adbdallah ibn al-Torjoman, Rome, PISAI, 1992. There is also a (better) Spanish edition by Mikel de Epalza in Alicante” (Slomp letter, April 4, 2006)].

### **The main ideas of the book**

- Dr. Mustafa Muhammad al-Hadidī al-Tayr from the Islamic Research Institute confirmed the authenticity of the book and approved its contents.
- A biography of the author explaining why he converted to Islam.
- Claims that the authors of the four gospels are liars.

- Arguments that Jesus Christ was an ordinary man, while all the prophesies in the book of Psalms and the Torah refer only to the Prophet Muhammad.

### Important excerpts

- “The people of the book [the Christians] arrogantly refuse to admit that the *Qur’ān* is the word of truth. They distorted and altered their [Holy] Books according to their whims and according to the devil...” [Introduction by Sālih Sharaf, member of the Islamic Research Institute and professor of postgraduate studies at the Philosophy and Creed Department] (p.12).
- “The first chapter is about the authors of the four gospels and it will expose their lies, God’s curse upon them” (p.63).
- “To the Christians: “You – may God have mercy on you – must know that the authors of the four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, distorted the religion of Jesus. They added, deleted, and altered the word of the Almighty God...” (p.66).
- “This is their disgusted faith and their wicked religion as it was prepared by their early devils...” (p.89).

### Observations

The author of the book said that he was once a Christian priest and says:

- “John was Jesus’ cousin. The Christians claim that Jesus attended John’s wedding and he changed the water into wine at this wedding. This was the first miracle performed by Jesus. When John saw this miracle he abandoned his wife and followed the religion of Jesus. The Christians say that Jesus asked his cousin, the above-mentioned John, to take care of his mother Mary...” (p.70).

[Clergy sometimes add local traditions to Biblical texts but such traditions are not supposed to be in violation with established teaching in one’s church. The Bible does not mention that the disciple John was Jesus’ cousin or he was the bridegroom in the wedding when Jesus performed his first miracle but perhaps this is a local tradition?]

- The author of the book wrote on page 79:  
The religion of the Christians has five sacraments, they are:
  - Immersion [baptism]
  - Belief in the Trinity
  - Belief in the cohesion of the person of the son in Mary’s abdomen [womb]
  - Belief in the Eucharist
  - Confession of all sins to a priest
- [If the author was a priest in a church in Spain (probably a Catholic church), how could he write that the Church has five sacraments when there are seven sacraments in the Catholic, and Orthodox, Church.]

### Appendix 3

#### **Robert al-Fāris' *Ukht Yahoudha* and *Samā' min Turāb* – Polemical books about Christians converting to Islam**

Translated and reviewed by CAWU staff

##### **Book one**

Title:	<i>Ukht Yahoudha</i> [Sister of Judas: Confessions from the File of Betraying Christ]
Author:	Robert al-Fāris
Presented by:	Archpriest Antonius Kamāl Halīm, Priest of Mār Jirjis Church, Shibīn al-Qanātir
Publisher:	Sons of St. John Chrysostomus [Nādir Samou'īl]
Editions:	Three [Until June 2005]. A fourth edition is currently being printed.
Registration number:	15125 \ 2003
Price:	EGP 2
Number of copies sold:	60.000 [Until June 2005]

##### **Book two**

Title:	<i>Samā' min Turāb</i> [Heaven of Dust: Sister of Judas, Part II - Confessions from the File of Betraying Christ]
Author:	Robert al-Fāris
Presented by:	Archpriest Marqus °Azīz Khalīl, Priest of al-Mu°allaqa Church [The Hanging Church]
Publisher:	Abu Sayfayn For Publishing and Distribution
Edition:	Two [Until June 2005]
Registration number:	10791 \ 2004
ISBN:	977 – 19 – 1513 – 5
Price:	Not mentioned
Number of copies sold:	10.000 [Until June 2005]

A third book, in which al-Fāris will discuss the reasons that make Christians convert to Islam [i.e. money, fame, sex, divorce...etc] and how to solve them, will be published soon.

##### **Who is Robert al-Fāris?**

He is a young Coptic journalist who holds the following posts:

- Supervisor of the “Panorama” section in *Watanī* newspaper
- Editor of *al-Qāhira* newspaper
- Deputy editor-in-chief of *The Coptic Life* magazine
- Editor-in-chief of *al-Mashriq* newspaper

He is the author of several books, novels and scenarios including:

- The Virgin. A novel in the literary series of Thoth [Egyptian god of Writing] (out of print)
- Israel and the Egyptian Church Fathers (out of print)
- Sister of Judas (short stories)
- Heaven of Dust (short stories)
- Mār Jirjis (novel)
- A Testimony to the History of the Jamā'a al-Umma al-Qibtiyya (Coptic Nation Society)
- Scenario of "Philotheos" (Coptic film)
- Scenario of "Ya'qoub al-Muqatta'" (Coptic film)

### **Aim of the books**

In the introduction of *Samā' min Turāb* al-Fāris wrote, "We assert that the main aim of these stories is [providing] awareness and protection, because protection is better than getting lost. The Bible says, "my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge" (p.9).

According to Archpriest Antonius Kamāl Halīm the aim of the book *Ukht Yahoudha* is to strengthen the faith of girls who do not find love in their homes and to warn them not to follow Judas and forsake Jesus to look for love, money, admiration ... etc (p.4).

In a meeting with Janique Blattmann of *AWR* on June 17, 2005, al-Fāris said, "The books are directed to Copts to raise awareness among them as well as exposing their shortcomings and mistakes. They also aim at showing the mistakes of the Church, which led Christians to betray Christ... The books also warn Copts against naïve behavior that may invite other people [Muslims] to make use of them. "We can not deny that there is a conspiracy against Copts," al-Fāris added.

### **General overview of the two books**

The two books include 25 short stories (*Ukht Yahoudha* 13 stories, *Samā' min Turāb* 12 stories) on Christians (mostly young women) who converted to Islam. According to al-Fāris all the stories have a true content but are shaped in a literary style.

Although al-Fāris never used the words Islam or Muslims but he admitted, in a meeting with him, that he was explicitly referring to Muslims in all the 25 stories. The language used in the books is inflammatory to the extent that several Christians we have consulted and who have read the books felt embarrassed that such work was being written by an Egyptian Christian. Almost in all the stories al-Fāris portrayed Christians as victims and described Muslims as devils and animals, yet he says that he does not believe that the books are offensive to Muslims.

Despite the insults hurled at Muslims in both books, two Coptic archpriests [Father Antonius Kamāl Halīm, Priest of Mār Jirjis Church, Shibīn al-Qanātir and Father Marqus 'Azīz Khalīl, Priest of The Hanging Church] highly praised the books. In the introduction of book two, Father Marqus 'Azīz Khalīl wrote: "*Samā' min Turāb* is a continuation of the wonderful book *Ukht Yahoudha*. It is the second part of this small comprehensive encyclopedia. The blessed son Robert al-Fāris is indeed a knight of the word of truth [The Arabic word "Fāris" means "knight" in English]... Although it is a small book, it is exhaustive and comprehensive and one can rarely find something similar. It is a



creative book whose words illuminate the way for all those are targeted to sell their Holy Christ... How great and how valuable this book is! It reports on a reality that happens around us with neither exaggeration or overstatement nor underestimation and indifference.... I wish this book every success and I hope that everyone who reads benefits from it and gives it to others..." (*Samā' min Turāb*, pp.5–6)

The covers of both books are very eye-catching. On the cover of "Sister of Judas" there is a girl with modern clothes holding a hammer in one hand and a nail in the other with which to crucify Jesus lying before her. The girl is sitting on flames of fire and in the background there are three crosses and a big tree where someone is being hanged. On the cover of *Samā' min Turāb* there are two pictures of Jesus; one while being whipped and the other while being crucified. Between the two pictures there is a third picture of a young man holding a glass with ice cubes. It seems that the young man does not care about Jesus being whipped and crucified but only cares about enjoying his life and having fun.

Al-Fāris gave several examples of how Christians are lured to sell their religion, in other words to convert to Islam. The examples he gave are as follows:

- Sexual attraction and involvement (*Ukht Yahoudha*, story 1 and *Samā' min Turāb*, story 11)
- Poverty, debt and love of money (*Ukht Yahoudha*, stories 2, 3, 4, 12 and *Samā' min Turāb*, story 2, 8, 12)
- Marriage and / or love with non-Christians (*Ukht Yahoudha*, stories 3, 6, 8, 9 11)
- Family break-up and divorce (*Ukht Yahoudha*, stories 3, 5 and *Samā' min Turāb*, story 3, 6)
- Search for fame (*Ukht Yahoudha*, story 7)
- Kidnap and rape (*Ukht Yahoudha*, story 10 and *Samā' min Turāb*, story 5)
- The desire to have children and get married to more than one wife (*Samā' min Turāb*, story 4)
- Religious ignorance (*Ukht Yahoudha*, story 3)
- Need for drugs (*Ukht Yahoudha*, story 3)

All these factors, except for kidnap and rape, have been seen in Egypt. However, in these stories, conversion to Islam is seen as part of a deliberate, planned attack on Christianity, and not a result of personal weaknesses on the part of those thinking of converting, and offers of help, followed by encouragement, from Muslims.

### Important excerpts

Note: Anything not written between quotation marks is added by the author of this report.

- A poor Christian girl describes a situation when she was in a desperate need of money to pay for her mother's medical operation. Her close Muslim friend led her to someone who paid her EGP 15,000 [\$ 2500. The average annual income in Egypt in 2004 was EGP 6843, which equals \$1140 - Source: <http://www.idsc.gov.eg/NDSSearch/NdsResults.asp>] in return for converting to Islam. The girl, according to the story, said, "My dear friend was one of them [a Muslim]... Satan was standing with his dark beard. He looked at my body and smiled. "Ten thousand," he maliciously said. "I will give five thousand more," he added... I signed on paper

and my name became unholy because it had been separated from Jesus” (*Ukht Yahoudha*, pp. 8- 11).

- A Muslim young man proposed to a Christian girl during a Nile cruise and she agreed. The girl said, “At that time I noticed someone with a pale face smiling and he raised his hand and made the sign of victory... On the next day I went to make the proclamation [procedures for conversion to Islam]... I noticed the man with the pale face giving him [her Muslim fiancé] a big envelope... days passed by and my fiancé did not call me. I looked for him, but I could not find him. I called one of our friends and he said to me, ‘All I know is that he [her Muslim fiancé] was simply in urgent need of money and he has got it’” [*Ukht Yahoudha*, pp.14-15].
- A Christian girl described how a Muslim man offered to pay her father EGP 3,000 [\$500] to save him from imprisonment and later she married him. The girl said, “...the officer announced to my [imprisoned] father that there was a good man who sought to do acts of charity and who wanted to visit him... ‘In order to conclude the deal you and your family must become one of us [Muslims]. I do not help the other [Christians]’, the good man said to my father ...My father got out of prison and we both entered another prison, from which we would never be able to exit. I married that man who was by no means a good man. He used to hit me with his shoe and on so many occasions he enjoyed hitting me mercilessly with a belt... He used to lock me in a closed room... and used to say: “How could I trust someone who sold her religion...” (*Ukht Yahoudha*, pp.16-17).
- A Christian girl who married a Muslim businessman described the motive of her husband for marrying her: “The businessman considered me as a new deal that he could use to get things that a regular bride could not do, things that require a beautiful bribe. Yes, I am just an appetizer for the clients.” The girl made a contrast between the immoral behavior of her husband and the good conduct of a Christian civil servant whom she described as, “pure, honest and decent” (*Ukht Yahoudha*, pp.20-21).
- A Christian widow described how she was lured into marrying the brother of her Muslim neighbor: “My husband died and left me three children... I suffered very cruel loneliness. I had a female neighbor who was not of us [i.e. Muslim]. She was very friendly to me and used to visit me a lot. She had control over my thoughts and convinced me that the Christian idealism is something imaginary that has no place in the reality... Once she came to visit me with her brother who very quickly showed affection to me and we became very close...” (*Ukht Yahoudha*, pp.24-25).
- An Egyptian actress, who converted to Islam in order to get more popularity and fame described Muslims as follows: “...they bear malice against Christians because of the grace Christians possess. They [Muslims] think of nothing but how to take away this grace from them.” The actress added, “All ways to fame were closed before me because of him [Jesus]. He was the only barrier for me. We are living in their society and they [Muslims] have priority in everything” (*Ukht Yahoudha*, p.28)
- A Christian woman, who converted to Islam, described what happened after her Muslim husband introduced her to his father, “When his father saw me for the first time he congratulated him for his skills in hunting me. His father has always been in constant

disagreement with his aged wife. I was pretty, so he took me for himself from his son... I fell into the pond of rotten humiliation and worked as a servant for everyone and my body was the desire of every evil eye..." (*Ukht Yahoudha*, p.36)

- A Christian woman, who converted to Islam, described a conversation with her Muslim husband at the time she wanted to tell him she was pregnant:

Husband: "I have put up with you many months and it is time to talk now."  
 Wife: "I want to tell you that I am..."  
 Husband: "Shut up and listen carefully to me. I despise you to such an extent that I feel sick of you. Since you have agreed on changing your religion you have become a dirty pile of betrayal and disloyalty. There should be no love above the love of religion and one who renounces her religion can do anything else."  
 Wife: "I did it for you."  
 Husband: "You would do more than this for someone else."  
 Wife: "No, I did it because I loved you."  
 Husband: "What is love?"  
 I did not know how to answer.  
 Husband: "It is sex."  
 Wife: "No, it is stability and security," I screamed.  
 Husband: "There is no stability, security or dignity without religion. Now I hate you. You either leave and I will divorce you, or serve [me] in return for me feeding you."  
 He left and slammed the door violently and I forgot to tell him that I was pregnant (*Ukht Yahoudha*, pp.44-45).

### Two other stories show:

- 1- How easily people believe and spread whatever they hear
- 2- How extremely dangerous rumors can be

### Story one

This story proves that many people have a strong tendency to accept anything they hear, as long as it supports what they wish to believe [i.e. Muslims are bad people, God severely punishes those who convert to Islam, ... etc.] Moreover, people spread the stories they hear without exerting the least effort to check whether they are true or not, and this method of story telling is particularly influential, given the lack of reading culture.

Below are excerpts from a short story from *Ukht Yahoudha* called 'Coffin in a Public Square'. The story written by al-Fāris is similar to a story that spread in the Coptic Orthodox communities in Egypt about six or seven years ago. Different people used to give different accounts of the story, yet everyone claims that what he says is true because it is based on eyewitness reports.

Thus far we have heard three versions of the same story [from several sources]. Although it is quite obvious for us that the true account of this story is lost, people whom we have questioned still cling to what they had heard and refuse to believe that there must be rumors involved.

### **Coffin in a Public Square (*Ukht Yahoudha*, pp.31-33)**

Excerpts from al-Fāris' account, followed by the two other versions:

The funeral procession was on its way to the church... [The deceased] was in the third year at the faculty of literature. She was young and pretty... She was run over by a careless driver on her way back from university... all her body was torn to small pieces...

Suddenly the coffin started to get very heavy... and suddenly a very beautiful white dove came out of the coffin and its wings were fully covered in oil. All those who were walking in the procession saw the white dove... Then a very dirty and rotten smell came out of the coffin... The coffin was then placed on the ground in the middle of the big square... and people tried to stay away from it as much as possible.

A handsome, young, kindhearted man appeared. He was one of the deceased's university colleagues and a leader of the church's group at the faculty. "I have the explanation," the young man screamed while tears flowed endlessly from his eyes, "... one of them promised to make her succeed [in her exams], get high grades and to marry her in return for her spitting on the cross and renouncing Christ in front of her friends. She irresponsibly did what he asked her to do and we all felt very sad for that. On the next day she was run over by a car. I believe this rotten smell is to stop us taking her [body] to the church because she is no longer a Christian." ... They left the coffin in the street... the others [Muslims] came very happily and took the coffin to one of their many cemeteries.

#### **Version two as recounted by several Copts**

This version agrees with the previous one on that the girl spat on the cross and renounced Christ before her friends and later she was run over by a car. However, when those who were carrying the coffin tried to enter the church, two angels appeared in front of everybody and took something from the coffin that appeared to be the chrism [The holy oil].

#### **Version three as recounted by several Copts**

In this version, people claim that the coffin was brought into the church and while the priest was praying, a big fire came out of his thuribel [A censer used in certain ecclesiastical ceremonies or liturgies]. The fire prevented the priest several times from praying, until he realized that there must be something wrong. When the priest asked if anyone had an explanation for what was going on, a young university colleague of the deceased told the story of her spitting on the cross and renouncing Christ. Then the priest refused to continue the religious ceremony.

#### **Story two**

The following excerpts are from a short story in *Samā' min Turāb* which is very similar to a heinous rumor that spread in Egypt in 2004 that Muslim workers at two chains of shops run by Muslims; *Awlād Rajab* and *al-Tawhīd wa al-Nour* were selecting Christian girls, telling them that they had won a prize and asking them to sign a receipt in exchange for their prize. The girls later discovered that they have signed a proclamation of conversion to Islam. Other rumors added that Christian girls were raped in the shops and forced to sign papers proclaiming that they converted to Islam. The rumor, for which

there was absolutely no proof, appeared in mid-2004, which is the same year *Samā' min Turāb* was published, indicating that either the book strengthened the rumor, or that the book actually caused the rumor.

### **Mall of horror (*Samā' min Turāb*, pp.24-27)**

She went to the “mall of horror”... she preferred to go alone so that the prizes would be a pleasant surprise for her family... At the door she found Satan wearing a Parisian suit of clothes and hiding his poisonous tail in jeans. He welcomed her with a smile... saying, “Welcome to the mall, sister. Whoever enters our mall must become like us. Welcome to the wonderful world of our competitions. You certainly will have your share of prizes...”

“Tell me about your competitions and its conditions...”

“Our competitions take place in the dark to guarantee the fairness and objectivity of the choice. You must close your mind, let your eyes be blindfolded and obey the one who leads you and holds your hand till you reach the door of your luck. Do you agree?”

“Yes I do.”

They walked together in a long corridor and when she reached the stairs she heard the screams of a woman shaking the walls of the mall... she tried to go back but he had a firm grip on her hand. She went up to the second floor and there was a girl that had been sexually assaulted [Literally: her chastity has been slaughtered] screaming in pain, “...they took my home telephone number and told me that I won. I came alone in the night to receive my prize but they took away my virginity.” Satan kicked that girl with his foot and comforted the [other] girl whose will he had stolen saying, “do not believe her, she is crazy.” They went up to the third floor...

Al-Fāris went on with the story describing more girls that had been sexually assaulted when they went to the mall to receive their prizes. He ended the story saying that the girl won the prize she wanted and did not return to her family.

### **Reactions to the books:**

The following information is based on a meeting with al-Fāris:

- Officers from the State Security Investigation (SSI) called Archpriest Antonius Kamāl Halīm, who wrote the introduction of *Ukht Yahoudha* and intimidated him. Later Archpriest Halīm denied that he wrote the introduction.
- The SSI called al-Fāris and asked him whether the stories mentioned in *Ukht Yahoudha* were true or fictional. Al-Fāris assured the SSI that all the stories were fictional.
- After publishing the *Ukht Yahoudha* al-Fāris received many angry phone calls insulting and threatening him. Some of those who called him claimed that they were from the SSI.
- Father Shenouda, a Coptic Orthodox priest in Heliopolis, called al-Fāris and blamed him for publishing *Ukht Yahoudha*, saying that the book has scandalized Copts and raised fear among youths. However, al-Fāris claims that many Coptic priests from all over Egypt have asked for a reduction in the price of *Ukht Yahoudha* so that it can be distributed during youth meetings.

- Al-Fāris has attended several seminars to discuss his books with Coptic youths. The first question they usually ask him is, “Do you want to tell us that you should not have Muslim friends?” Al-Fāris always replies to their question saying, “Of course not, but choose your Muslim friends very carefully and be very discreet not to tell them any secret about your personal life.”
- *Ukht Yahoudha* is not only the best seller in the Coptic Orthodox Church, but it also sold massively in the Coptic Catholic Church and was, according to al-Fāris, hailed by Reverend Dr. Safwat al-Bayādī, head of the Evangelical Church in Egypt [There is no proof for these claims by al-Fāris, and it seems unlikely that Rev. Dr. Safwat al-Bayādī praised the books].

## Appendix 4

### *Al-Katība al-Tībīya* - The Theban Legion

Translated and reviewed by CAWU staff

*Al-Katība al-Tībīya* [The Theban Legion] is a Christian publication that first appeared sometime around August 2004 and is published infrequently.

The name of the publication refers to a late third century Christian legion in the Roman army that was recruited in Thebes [the Thebaid] in Upper Egypt. Eucherius, bishop of Lyons from 434 to circa 449 AD, believed that some 6,000 Christians served in this legion. The Theban troops disobeyed imperial commands to worship heathen gods in the years 285-286 AD. The commander, Mauritius, stressed his loyalty to the emperor, but also stoutly proclaimed his belief in Christ. His superior, Maximian, became so enraged that he commanded all the Christian troops be killed. The number of those killed can be debated, but the story of the martyrdom certainly left its traces in Switzerland, Germany, France and Italy [See Samir F. Girgis, Theban Legion, in the Coptic Encyclopedia, vol. 7, MacMillan Publishing Company, New York, Toronto, Oxford, Singapore, Sydney, 1991, pp 2231-2234.]

The Theban martyrs remained, however, unknown to the Copts until they started migrating to Europe and discovered this tradition, quickly making it their own. Stories about martyrs of the Theban legion have spread widely in the Coptic Orthodox Church in the past decades. The name of the *Al-Katība al-Tībīya* is, therefore, highly relevant. It reminds Coptic readers of martyrdom, placing the commands of God over those of worldly rulers and defense of the Christian faith, in particular from conversion to Islam.

The paper is distributed in many Coptic Orthodox Churches and was sold on different stands at The Global Day of Prayer, May 15, 2005, [[www.globaldayofprayer.com](http://www.globaldayofprayer.com)] which was organized by all Christian denominations in Egypt and attracted several thousand people [according to eyewitnesses mostly Protestants] to the Coptic Orthodox Church at al-Muqattam, Cairo, the largest church in Egypt.

No such paper could be distributed for free or sold in Coptic Orthodox churches without the explicit permission of Pope Shenouda. Pope Shenouda has, for example, forbidden churches in Egypt to distribute the books of Father Matta al-Maskīn. He could have done so with this publication, but it seems he chose not to do so.

*Al-Katība al-Tībīya* is, however, not an official church publication and is therefore much freer in expressing opinions that may be widespread in the Coptic community, but which cannot be expressed, many Copts believe, in public by Pope Shenouda.

*Al-Katība al-Tībīya* is published under the supervision of:

- Father Matiyās Nasr Manqāryous, priest of the Virgin Mary and Pope Kyrillos Church in ʿIzba al-Nakhl, Cairo.
- Father Filopātīr Jamīl ʿAzīz, priest of the Virgin Mary and Mār Marqus Church in al-Tawābiq, Faysal, Giza.
- Father Fīnhās al-Nusrānī [the publication does not mention the name of his church]

On page two of the issues of April and May 2005, *Al-Katība al-Tībīya* describes its goals as:

### First

Rebuilding the Coptic-Egyptian entity through:

- 1- [Holding] several symposiums and meetings all over Egypt [subject not mentioned, but no doubt related to the points below].
- 2- Reprinting books and sources interested in the Egyptian identity and Egyptian history especially during the Coptic era.
- 3- Combating all things that are imposed on us [Egypt's Christians] under the pretext of Arabism. [The paper is opposed to Arabism, the stress on the Arab identity of Egypt.]
- 4- Paying attention to the Egyptian language in its latest form [the Coptic language and thus not Arabic, seen as the language of invaders].
- 5- Promoting Egyptian-Coptic arts and literature in order to develop a Coptic cultural awareness.
- 6- Uncovering attempts to falsify Egyptian history, which, [the paper believes,] are widespread in elementary and university education. Stating historical facts as they are, without any deceit or flattery. [This means, for example, opposition to describing the Islamic conquest of Egypt in 639-641 AD as 'the opening to Islam,' as is frequently done by Muslim authors. Muslim authors would stress how well Islam has treated Christians throughout the centuries. Christians opposed to that would stress the *dhimmi* status, periods of persecution, the perceived second rank status of Christians in Egyptian society throughout the centuries etc.]

### Second

Responding to [what the publication believes to be] the destructive media through:

- 1- Observing Egyptian mass media and taking notice of everything that may destroy the nation and combating it through available legal means.
- 2- Combating everything that compels Egyptians, especially children, to accept a belief different than their own [Egyptian Christians would read the expression 'a belief different than their own' as Islam.] through educational curricula, the treatment in the educational establishments and repeating the morning slogans which are against human rights [most probably these slogans refer to reciting *Qur'ānic* verses before going to classes, which is a common practice in governmental schools.]
- 3- Answering the biased and misleading press that cast doubts on the Christian doctrines. Combating programs that insult the Christian belief and our Holy Book. [In other words *Al-Katība al-Tībīya* is strongly opposed to books such as those presented in appendix 2]
- 4- Reporting news that the Egyptian mass media deliberately ignored [this is in reference to stories published, for example, by the U.S. Copts Association and others about persecution and discrimination in Egypt] and which link the members of the one body [the one body of Christ, i.e. the Church] with all citizens inside and outside the nation [The sentence is not clear in Arabic but it most likely refers to news that links emigrant Copts and Copts living in Egypt.]
- 5- Publishing the facts and investigations of different incidents in order to shed light on events, through eyewitnesses, with the aim of not falling prey to conspiracy theories [Those conspiracy theories are not explained]. Standing by the persecuted and oppressed [i.e. Christians] and propagating the spirit of Christianity through the right means of expression and the methods of non-violent struggle.



## General features of the paper

AWR became aware of *Al-Katība al-Tībīya* starting from its sixth issue, published in February 2005. The paper is currently sold for one Egyptian pound per issue, but some people claim that earlier editions were distributed for free. *Arab-West Report* has no independent figures on the circulation of the paper.

### Front-page inflammatory headlines:

#### February 2005

##### **“A mysterious [Jeep] Cherokee killed Thanā’ Mus<sup>c</sup>ad after she had returned to Christianity”**

It refers to an interview on pages 10-11 conducted with Father Filopātūr Jamīl <sup>c</sup>Azīz, priest of the Virgin Mary and Mār Marqus Church in al-Tawābiq, Faysal, Giza. Father <sup>c</sup>Azīz refuted the claims of an article published in *Sawt al-Umma* newspaper on January 3, 2005 [See AWR 2005, 1, art. 3] under the title, “A mysterious Cherokee killed Thanā’ Mus<sup>c</sup>ad and her daughter after she had proclaimed her belief in Islam.” Father <sup>c</sup>Azīz accused several Muslim officers with the State Security Police of colluding to force Thanā’ Mus<sup>c</sup>ad and her four daughters (aged 19, 16, 12 and 5 years old) to convert to Islam. He also accused the grand *imām* of the *Azhar*, *Shaykh* Muhammad Sayyid Tantāwī, of trying to convince them to believe in Islam. Father <sup>c</sup>Azīz says he based his accusations on talks with three of Thanā’ Mus<sup>c</sup>ad’s daughters.

##### **“Who slaughtered the Armāniyus family?”**

It refers to an article on page 14 reporting on the murder of a Coptic family in New Jersey, U.S.A. The author of the article, <sup>c</sup>Awad Basīt, claims that the family [Husām Armāniyus (47), his wife Āmal Jaras (37) and his two daughters Sylvia (16) and Monika (8)] were killed because of Husām’s activities in preaching Christianity to Muslims. Basīt added that the website [www.jihadwatch.org](http://www.jihadwatch.org) reported that a Muslim *imām* in New Jersey stated that shedding the blood of Husām Armāniyus and his family would be *halāl* [permissible.] [The text on [www.jihadwatch.org](http://www.jihadwatch.org) reads: “Law enforcement officials have received information from at least one Copt — a close friend of the Armanious family — indicating that the crime was indeed religiously motivated. This family friend has said that an *imām* in Jersey City declared this Christian family’s blood “*halāl*,” (i.e., licit to shed), because of their proselytizing activities among Muslims. He has named — by name — a suspect in this crime, whose motive was religious and who has fled the country.”

#### March 2005

##### **“When they [security men] throw stones at the Papal residence.”**

It refers to an article on page 11 about Islamic extremism in the Egyptian police apparatus and police violations against Christians in the last few years, including a recent incident of policemen throwing stones at the Pope Shenouda’s residence [reported during the demonstrations about Wafā’ Constantine, see AWR 2004, 51, art. 13].

##### **“According to the constitution and the law: Copts are a persecuted minority”**

It refers to an article on page 16 by Dr. Salīm Najīb, head of the Coptic Canadian Association. Dr. Najīb responded to an article published in *Al-<sup>c</sup>Arabī* newspaper on January 3, 2005 by Jamāl As<sup>c</sup>ad under the title, “The mistakes of Pope Shenouda’s Church.” [See AWR 2005, 1, art. 31] Dr. Salīm wrote that As<sup>c</sup>ad attacked Pope Shenouda and denied that the Copts are a persecuted minority. Dr.

Salīm refuted the claims of As<sup>c</sup>ad and ended his article saying, “Things that are happening to Copts such as aggression, deprivation, humiliation and the denial of full and equal rights between them and Muslims, are, according to international law and all international human rights declarations, blatant injustice and persecution in every sense of the word.” [Dr. Salīm Najīb is a prominent Coptic political activist in the West and teams up with other Coptic political activists. Could it be that *Al-Katība al-Tībīya* (The Theban Legion) is supported by Coptic activists in the West?]

## April 2005

### “The Administrative Judiciary confirms: The Christians are *kafara* [unbelievers]”

It refers to an article on page 9 by <sup>c</sup>Awad Basīt in which he gives three examples of people who wanted to live as Christians but were forced, by law, to become Muslims against their will. The first example is of a Christian man who converted to Islam in 1989. Later he wanted to return to Christianity, but a court ruling based on the Islamic *Sharī‘a* [Islamic law] denied him this right. The second and third examples are of two Christian men whose fathers converted to Islam when they were young. When these two men wanted to obtain identity cards, they were shocked to discover that they were legally considered Muslims, due to their fathers’ conversions.

Basīt said in his article, “This is the religious freedom in Egypt; anyone can convert to Islam but whoever renounces Islam will be a *kāfir* [unbeliever], apostate and killing him/her is *halāl* [permissible]. Stranger still is that someone [a Christian] can wake up one day and find himself a Muslim regardless of his own beliefs, simply because one of his/her parents had converted to Islam. May God help Egypt.”

### “Hundreds of converted Christians are asking: Where is religious freedom in Egypt?”

It refers to an article in page 3 by Father Fīnhās al-Nusrānī [No church mentioned] about what he described as “so-called religious freedom in Egypt.” Father al-Nusrānī complained about the fact that any Christian could officially convert to Islam in Egypt while it is absolutely impossible for Muslims to officially convert to Christianity. Father al-Nusrānī wondered, “Why religious freedom in Egypt is going only in one way. Everyone is free to renounce Christianity and embrace Islam, but if he/she tries to do the opposite then he/she is not free. Those who want to convert to Christianity face many obstacles preventing them from doing so, starting from the second article of the Egyptian constitution, which states that Islam is the religion of the state. What kind of freedom is it that you are praising?”

## May 2005

### “The phenomenon of Islamization is a violation of the religious freedom of Copts.”

It refers to an article on pages 8-9 by Father Fīnhās al-Nusrānī discussing the recent phenomenon of female Christians converting to Islam. He believes that girls and women are lured to convert to Islam by “dirty and criminal means.” He also believes that kidnapping, although it rarely happens, is one of the means used by Muslims to force Christian girls and women to convert to Islam. Father al-Nusrānī concluded his article saying that this phenomenon is a part of a plan in which the state and its institutions have a hand. [Editor: See the many reports in *AWR* about the alleged kidnapping of Christian girls, see also the comments of Rev. Munīs <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Nour about this in *AWR*, 2004, 36, art. 28]

### “In front of security men: Burning a church in al-Minoufiya”

It refers to an article in page 5 reporting on the burning of Mār Marqus Church in the village of Tilwāna, al-Minoufiya on Sunday April 3, 2005 and Muslims attacking Christians and priests in the same village on Friday April 8, 2005. The author of the article [not mentioned] claimed that during the attack of April 8, Muslims were shouting, “kill the *kafara* [unbelievers]...kill the *kafara*.” The author called the 83-year-old mayor of the village and the *imām* of the village’s mosque “devils.” The author strongly believes that the security forces colluded with the perpetrators of both incidents [This would simply further inflame tensions in the village].

## July 2005

### “Copts between the hammer of the National Party and the anvil of the Muslim Brotherhood”

It refers to an article in page 3 written by father Fīnhās al-Nusrānī accusing the Egyptian regime of marginalizing, suppressing and attacking the Copts. In the middle of the article there is a photo of President Husnī Mubārak next to the photo of the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood Hasan al-Bannā. The logo of the National Democratic Party (NDP) and the slogan of the Muslim Brotherhood, Islam is the solution, are placed above the photos. Father al-Nusrānī accuses the Egyptian police of attacking a number of churches or giving orders to Islamic fundamentalist groups to attack them and blames the regime for what he calls ‘the Islamization of society’ by pressurizing Copts to convert to Islam.

In July 2005, Father Fīnhās al-Nusrānī was suspended. Many people claimed that he was suspended because of this article, in which he dared, in an unprecedented way, to criticize President Husnī Mubārak.

## October 2005

### “Torturing a young man in ‘Ayn Shams police station”

It refers to an article on page 9 claiming that 25-year-old Coptic man Majdī Halīm Edward was unjustly imprisoned for five years and was tortured by officer ‘Abd Allāh al-Sayyid in ‘Ayn Shams police station.

[*Arab-West Report* has further, more recent copies of *al-Katība al-Tībīya* in its archives].

### Seemingly official support

The second page of all the issues of *al-Katība al-Tībīya* reviewed presents an article written by Pope Shenouda III. It is not clear whether the Pope’s article is written specifically for the publication or whether it is a reprint from some other publication. Nevertheless, the effect is that the average Christian sees that *al-Katība al-Tībīya* must have the blessing of Pope Shenouda.

Furthermore, each issue includes several articles written by Coptic Orthodox priests, including prominent priests such as Father Marqus ‘Azīz Khalīl and Father Makārī Younān or interviews with top leaders of the Coptic Orthodox Church such as Bishop Bīsantī. Some issues also reprint articles written by Muslim writers, such as Sayyid al-Qimnī, Rif‘at al-Sa‘īd, Faraj Fouda and ‘Abbās al-Tarābīlī, in another publications. These articles either criticize extremist Muslims or defend Coptic rights.

### Coptic persecution

The main stream of the paper tries to prove how Copts have been persecuted in Egypt since the Islamic conquest. In general, the language used in the majority of articles can be described as inflammatory and sometimes even aggressive, as demonstrated in the above-mentioned headlines.

All the issues we have seen contain eye-catching pictures and photographs that try to demonstrate the persecution of Christians:

- Two injured persons [one priest and one man] at the demonstration that took place at the Coptic cathedral on December 2004 (February, p.13).
- Angry demonstration at Fayyoun (March, p.1, p.6).
- Photo of *Shaykh* Muhammad Sayyid Tantāwī next to subtitle on the front page that reads: “A lawsuit against the grand *imām* for his involvement in forcing a girl to convert to Islam (April, front page).
- Picture of Jesus crucified next to two subtitles on the front page that read: “The Passions of the Christ and the Passions of the Church” and “The way to Calvary is everywhere” (May, front page).
- A picture of a cross being burnt (May, p.5).

### Examples of subjects tackled in *al-Katība al-Tībīya*

- Responses to articles previously published in other publications, primarily in *al-Ushbouʿ*, *Sawt al-Umma* and *al-Maydān*, that are critical of the Coptic Orthodox Church or Copts in general.
- Reporting individual and collective incidents of alleged discrimination or persecution against Copts in Egypt [i.e. luring or blackmailing Copts to convert to Islam, burning Coptic churches, police violations against Copts].
- Writing about the Islamic conquest of Egypt, the persecution of Copts during that era [since ʿUmar bin al-ʿĀss] and the perceived falsification of history in favor of Muslim conquerors. Writing short stories about Coptic martyrs during what the publication calls “the Islamic era.” [the examples given deal with Coptic martyrs between 864 A.D. and 1768 A.D].

List of priests, pastors and bishops listed as authors in the issues we have seen:

- Pope Shenouda III
- Bishop Baphnotius of Samālout
- Metropolitan Bīshouy of Dumyat [Secretary of the Holy Synod of the Coptic Orthodox Church]
- Archpriest Marqus ʿAzīz Khalīl of the Hanging Church in Old Cairo
- Archpriest Matyās Nasr Manqarius, priest of the Virgin Mary and Pope Kyrillos Church in ʿIzba al-Nakhl, Cairo
- Father Filopātīr Jamīl ʿAzīz, priest of the Virgin Mary and Mār Marqus Church in al-Tawābiq, Faysal, Giza
- Father Makārī Younān, St. Mark Church, Klotbey, Cairo
- Father Fīnhās al-Nusrānī, [No church mentioned]
- Father Bījoul Bāsīlī, [No church mentioned]

- Father Shenouda Jabra, [No church mentioned]
- Father Youtā, [No church mentioned]
- Father Īsh<sup>°</sup>yā' Lam<sup>°</sup>ī, [No church mentioned]
- Father Youhannā Sharqāwī, priest of the Virgin Mary and Ānbā Abrām Church in Faysal, Giza
- Father Istifānous Mīkhā'īl, [No church mentioned]
- Father <sup>°</sup>Abd al-Masīh Basīt, priest of the Virgin Mary Church in Musturud
- Father B.N.Ā, [No church mentioned]
- Pastor Rif<sup>°</sup>at Fikrī, pastor of the Evangelical Church, Ārd Sharīf, Shubrā

*Al-Katība al-Tībīya* has re-published an interview given to *Nahdat Misr* newspaper by Bishop Bīsantī, a well-known figure amongst many Copts [*Al-Katība al-Tībīya*, March 2005, pp.4–5]. Though Bishop Bīsantī does not say anything inflammatory in his interview, and even expresses his disagreement with the program of Zakarīyā Butrus on *al-Hayāt* Christian satellite channel, the publication of his views adds to the credibility of the publication.

### Conclusion

*Al-Katība al-Tībīya* does not attack Islam itself, but presents Christians as a persecuted minority, and is extremely confrontational, implying that Muslims themselves are bad people. The stories do not differ very much from many of those once promoted by Maurice Sadiq, a Coptic activist and lawyer, until he left Egypt in 2000, and stories placed in the U.S. Copts Association *Coptic Digest*. The major difference, however, is that Sadiq never had such a possibility to promote his extremist views openly in Egyptian churches since access to the *Coptic Digest* requires the Internet. *Al-Katība al-Tībīya* though is presented in Arabic, sold in churches for only one pound, and gives the impression that it is supported by Pope Shenouda and the Coptic Orthodox Church. As a result, it has far reaching consequences for Muslim-Christian relations in Egypt.

Indeed, it seems that *al-Katība al-Tībīya* may have fuelled anger leading to the Wafā' Costantine issue, in which the wife of a priest tried to convert to Islam, and led to demonstrations against conversions in Fayoum Oasis [March] and Ma'asara, south of Cairo [May] [See AWR 2004, 51, art. 13].

## Appendix 5

### **An Investigation of Religious Identity in Christian and Muslim Egyptian Children (Bachelor dissertation of Rachel Allison Royle in Psychology at the University of Surrey, UK)**

**Reviewer: Janique Blattmann**

In 1996, British psychologist Rachel Allison Royle came to Egypt to conduct interviews with Egyptian children, aged between 6 and 13 years, to investigate how they perceived their religious identity. *Arab-West Report* obtained a copy of her study and found its results relevant and insightful even ten years later and decided to present a summary of Royle's findings to its readers. The results of the study should be a warning signal that issues of relations between religious groups in Egypt have to be addressed in a proactive way.

#### **Aim and methodology**

The aim of Royle's study is to investigate Egyptian children's religious identity, focusing upon their knowledge of and responses to their own and another religious group. The study is built upon the framework provided by social identity theory (Tajfel) and social representation theory (Moscovici). Egyptian interviewers held structured interviews with 137 Muslim and Christian Egyptian orphans living in single-sex and single-religion orphanages and attending mixed public schools. The author admits that the result of the study should not be easily generalized, as the sample chosen includes only orphans. Children were first allowed to talk freely about their own religious beliefs. Then they had to sort 9 pairs of adjectives, e.g. "clean"/"unclean," "kind"/"unkind" to describe themselves, then their religious group, then the other religious group.

#### *Results*

To the question what they know about God, more Christians (89%) gave relevant answers than Muslims (71%). Christians for example mentioned crucifixion, God's love and miracles, whereas Muslim children stressed Muhammad as God's messenger, and the oneness of God. According to the author, there were "many suggestions by the Christian children that Muslims believe in the devil and not in God" (18). On the other hand, a Muslim child said "Christians are our brothers, we all live in Egypt."

More Muslim (9%) than Christian (4%) children mentioned the cross (tattooed on the wrist) when asked about distinctive dress of Christians.

Only 67.69% of Muslim children gave relevant answers to the question what Muslims believe about God, whereas 96% of the Christians were able to give relevant information about their own faith. Concerning the other faith, 86% of the Muslims gave relevant answers about Christian beliefs, but only 54.17% of the Christians could say something relevant about Muslim beliefs about God. [The lower percentage of relevant answers to the question about Muslim beliefs might be linked to the fact that this question was asked earlier in the interview when children felt less free and comfortable to speak.]

100% of the children felt God loved them. The question "Does God get angry with you?" was answered with "no" by 62.5% of the Christian children and 42% of the Muslim children, with a significant difference associated with the age group among Muslim children: Whereas 20.59% of the younger Muslims (6-9 years old) answered "Yes, God does get angry with me," the percentage of

affirmative answers was 64.52% for the older Muslim children (10-13 years). More Christian than Muslim children gave qualified answers like “sometimes” or “when I sin.”

The author interprets the difference between Christian and Muslim answers by pointing to the importance of God’s forgiveness in the Bible – a theme which she says is also present in the *Qur’ān*, but alongside the theme of God’s vengeance and anger.

To the question if Muslims believe that God exists, 100% of the Muslim children answered “yes,” but 39% of the Christian children answered “no”, suggesting that they are not convinced that Muslims believe in God. The question if Christians believe that God exists was answered with “yes” by all children, both Christian and Muslim.

To the question what they knew about Muslims, some Christian children reported instances of what they experienced as being harassed or beaten by Muslim children for being Christian.

In the presentation of the results of the sorting task with the opposite adjectives, I focus on the negative evaluations.

Christians were more likely to choose negative adjectives as being descriptive of Muslims. The following percentage of Christians evaluated Muslims as “dirty” (35%), “not nice” (48%), “unkind” (40%), “impolite” (49%), “naughty” (60%), “smells bad” (38%).

The Muslim affective response to Christians was somewhat more positive:

“dirty” (29%), “not nice” (7,5%), “unkind” (3%), impolite (3%), “naughty” (16%), “smells bad” (6%).

To the question whether members of the other religious group were nice or not, 30% of both Muslims and Christians answered “yes”. 62% of the Muslim children gave qualified answers concerning Christians such as “some are nice and some are not nice.” 43% of Christians said that they disliked Muslims either a little or a lot, whereas only 5% of Muslims said they disliked Christians. But 26% of Christians and 28% of Muslims said they loved the others a lot.

A self-evaluation concerning the importance of gender, religion and nationality showed that religion was more salient to Egyptian children than gender and nationality. (The author admits that this might be linked to the framework of the interview, which is questions about their religious identity.) Religion was ranked higher among young Muslims than among young Christians. The salience of nationality increased with age among the Christian children and was higher among Muslims in general. Gender was more salient to younger children in general.

### **Interpretation**

The author explains the findings of the study that Christian children were more capable of talking about faith than Muslim children with reference to the disparity in the amount of religious education given to the two groups: Egyptian Christian children go to Sunday school and church meetings much earlier and much more often than Muslim children attend lessons in mosques (44-45). [The author’s statement that “Christian children in Egypt attend church approximately four times a week for religious education, whereas the Muslim children do not generally have any formal religious education outside of school and the home until the age of 13” is questionable. It seems to be more differentiated than stated here. For Christian children, there are less religious activities during the school year than in summer, so four times per week seems to be too high. There is some *Qur’ān* teaching at mosques for

children starting at a very early age, although not in a highly formalized or institutionalized way. I could find no mention of the amount of religious education in the source she quoted: Patrick Johnstone, *Operation World*, which is a statistic reference book about Christian communities all over the world. Concerning population statistics, Johnstone (1993) says that the percentage of Christians is “14.2%, officially 6%. Some Christians claim 20%.” He doesn’t give the source for the figure of 14.2%. Cornelis Hulsman has been corresponding with the author about this figure and provided arguments based on academic research, his own investigative work in 1985 when he systematically asked Egyptian bishops for statistics in their diocese and Egyptian sources, that the percentage is more likely to be 6-8%.]

The study shows that the Muslim children interviewed were more able to differentiate in their self-evaluation and in the evaluation of others, saying for example “sometimes I’m naughty, sometimes I’m calm/well-mannered” or “some Christians are rich, some Christians are poor.” They demonstrated a more advanced cognitive development because they had a more realistic understanding of intra-group differentiation than the Christian children (39).

Royle explains that this phenomenon supports the predictions of social identity theory: A minority has a tendency to establish and safeguard its in-group identity through black-white comparison with the out-group. Therefore, Christian children demonstrate favoritism and out-group devaluation or denigration. On the other hand, Muslim children are less likely to engage in inter-group comparison in order to achieve positive self-esteem.

Royle mentions that other studies (Lambert, Klineberg, Allport) have shown that close contact with members of the other group and better knowledge of them would result in reduction of hostility and an increase in positive affective responses. But this is only true under a number of conditions: Contact should occur in a strong social network where integration, cooperation and tolerance are fostered and where the groups are perceived to be of equal status (Hewstone & Brown) and the identity of neither group is threatened (Tajfel). Royle questions if the Egyptian public schools attended by the interviewees can really provide such a supportive social environment.

It would be very interesting to study the same attitudes in children now, ten years after Royle’s study was conducted, examine if there has been a development and discern what the factors are which influence children’s attitudes towards members of the other religious group.

The findings of Royle’s study provide an important signal which should be taken seriously, but they do not offer final interpretations. In any case, they show how important it is to build positive relationships between the different religious groups in order to create an environment where different people can experience an equal sense of belonging to their society and actively participate for the sake of their country.

For another study of the same author – now called Rachel Takriti –, conducted among Christian and Muslim children in England, see <http://www.psy.surrey.ac.uk/staff/papers/mb-religion.pdf>.



## Appendix 6

### **The Armenian genocide**

**Author: Drs. Cornelis Hulsman**

Hulsman wrote his MA thesis (1984) on the period leading up to the Armenian genocide.

#### **Elements that contributed to tensions between Armenians and Turks**

Nineteenth century Europe had come under the influence of various nationalist movements that believed that the foremost characteristics of a nation or an ethnic group were its language and national history. National aspirations, however weak, were encouraged, causing great tensions in multi-national / multi-ethnic states such as Austria, Russia and the Ottoman Empire.

In competition with each other and with the Ottoman Empire, the 19<sup>th</sup> century European powers, Britain, France, Russia and Austria had encouraged various national aspirations and nationalist movements, assisting several Balkan nations to become independent from the Ottoman Empire. Part of Ottoman Armenia was conquered by Russia and its capital Yerevan became a major center of fierce Armenian nationalist movements, such as the Hunchak and Dashnak parties. Their radicalism only increased with the fierce Ottoman resistance to the break-up of the empire.

Another center of nationalist Armenian fervor was in Paris and other European cities, where many Armenian students became influenced by the growing nationalist fervor in Europe and took those thoughts back to the Armenian community in the Ottoman Empire.

Religiosity in Europe was then much stronger than today. The 19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the development and growth of Christian missionary movements who spread along with European power. Not all in government were very religious. Liberalism was strong in European upper classes but the religious sentiments of large segments of the European populations could not easily be neglected and thus they were used as tools to further the interests of European governments. Indeed widespread European, Christian and non-Christian, sentiments in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century were used to force the Ottomans to sign two edicts of reform strengthening the religious minorities in the Ottoman Empire, winning their sympathies and thus further weakening the empire, by then ‘the sick man of Europe.’

The cycle of radicalism increased. Armenian political parties would try to win sympathy from European powers in the hope they would intervene on their behalf. In order to achieve this they gave much attention to propaganda, particularly after the killings of large numbers of Armenians in the 1890s, winning the sympathy of European Christians for their persecuted brothers and sisters in the Ottoman empire. Nevertheless, European intervention in the Ottoman Empire only came later, when it suited the political agendas of those powers. Such intervention and interference in the internal affairs of the empire was bound to create forces of resistance, for example the Young Turks’ nationalist movement and the Islamist movements.

This then was the backdrop to the 1<sup>st</sup> World War, during which the Ottoman Empire sided with Germany and the Austrian Empire, hoping to reduce the interference of Britain, France and Russia in the Ottoman Empire. The Russians initially advanced into eastern Anatolia, which then housed a large Armenian population hoping to be liberated. Turkey saw the Armenian population as a threat, fearing that they would side with Russia, and removed them forcibly from their homelands, resulting in what has become known as the Armenian genocide of 1915.

## The situation in Egypt

In Egypt, the Copts had not been affected by 19<sup>th</sup> century nationalism. Unlike the Armenians, most Copts did not perceive themselves as being ethnically different from Muslim Egyptians, but the few that presented themselves as a religious minority, tolerated but not equal, formed the Coptic Congress in Assiut of 1908. During the 1st World War, Egypt's nationalist leader Sa'd Zaghloul was able to unite both Muslims and Copts in the nationalist movement against the British. Many prominent Copts were later rewarded with prominent positions in the *Wafd* Party and government.

In 1928, Hassan al-Bannā founded the Muslim Brotherhood which became the model for some radical Copts to form the *Umma al-Qibtīya* in the 1950s. The *Umma al-Qibtīya* presented views similar to those of 19<sup>th</sup> century Armenian nationalists. Using radical language, they presented Copts as a separate nation, the only pure Egyptians who were later conquered by Arab Muslim outsiders. The *Umma al-Qibtīya* was, however, short lived and was forbidden after the group abducted Pope Yousab II in 1954.

Egyptian migration to the West started slowly after the Nasserist nationalizations and grew in the 1960s and 1970s. Some Copts emigrated because they had lost possessions as a result of nationalization, and others because they had been politically active and had clashed with Nasser's regime. This emigration became fertile soil for the thoughts of the *Umma al-Qibtīya*, and even today, in discussions in, for example, the *Copts Digest* one finds individual Copts writing about Muslim Egyptians as Arab invaders, thus totally alienating themselves from Muslim Egyptians.

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