

# Egyptian muslims and christians religion essay



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

In the Middle East, along with many Muslim communities there exist many Non-Muslim communities: the Coptic Christian community is one of the largest Non-Muslim communities in the Middle-East. The Coptic Christian community is situated in Egypt and a brief history about this community: the Coptic Christians believe that Christianity was brought to Egypt by “ the Apostle Mark” in 64 CE and those who accepted his message of Christianity were the ancient race of the pharaohs (Henderson). The word “ Copt” is derived from the Greek word “ Aiguptos” meaning Egyptian, furthermore the word “ Copt” is also linked to the ancient Egyptian name for the city of Memphis. In the seventh Century Islam spread throughout Middle-East and Africa, Egypt was conquered by early Muslims in the year 641, during the time of the invasion 80 percent of population in Egypt consisted of Coptic Christians (Henderson).

As Muslims came to control in Egypt they charged the Coptic Christians “ Jizya” for two important purposes: the first purpose was to convince the Christians to convert to Islam so that they could avoid taxation and the second purpose was to collect money to fund the nation’s army. The “ formal system and designation” for Non-Muslims (Coptic Christians) came to be known as “ Dhimmia” (Henderson). During the 1970s and 1980s Anwar Sadat became president, under his rule there was much conflict between Muslims and Coptic Christians, the Muslims argued that the population of Christians has stopped Egypt from becoming a strong Islamic Country. The Coptic Community gained support from the U. S and formed an “ anti-Islam” campaign, eventually after much turmoil the increased tensions decreased as Sadat lost his support to the Islamic fundamentalists (Henderson).

Today Coptic Christians make up only five to fifteen percent of the total population in Egypt the rest of which are Muslims, because of their low population the Christians often face social pressure to convert to Islam (Vliet). Furthermore, Coptic Christians argue that they face discrimination, underrepresentation and also face difficulties when building or restoring their churches. In the viewpoint of Muslims the Coptic Christians are an embarrassment, a few years ago some students of " Tafsir" in Al-Azhar University were asked what distinguishes a Coptic Christian from a Muslim, and the students answered that a Muslim believes in Islam and that he is of Arabic origin (Vliet). Since Coptic Christians are also Egyptian meant that they also would have had an Arabic background but they did not follow Islam creating a problem.

Recently there have been many problems among Coptic Christians and Egyptian Muslims. There is a constant struggle between Egyptian Muslims and Coptic Christians to develop their identity in Egypt, both the sects pursue the government to support them. According to " The Times" several Coptic Christians were killed in the southern Egyptian towns as they left a midnight Mass celebrating the Coptic Christmas, witnesses reported that three gunmen in a vehicle opened fire to a group of Coptic Christians who had just left the Church leaving about nine people wounded and killing seven people (Times). One of the witnesses Bishop Kirolos of the local diocese said that he had received threats warning of a possible attack on the Coptic Christians to exact " revenge for the rape of a 12-year old Muslim girl by a Coptic youth" (Times). Bishop Kirolos also said to the press that, " It is all religious now. This is a religious war about how they can finish off the

Christians in Egypt,” he said (Times). The tension between Coptic Christians and Muslims has been on the rise in the recent years whether the conflict is about land or women. The Coptic Christians “complain of widespread discrimination, including severe restrictions on religious building sites” (Times).

Coptic Christians were the majority of the population before and during the invasion of Egypt in 641, however in recent years Muslims are the majority of the population. As the population of Muslims keeps growing in Egypt, the Coptic Christians not only face the pressure to convert to Islam but also feel a loss of identity. The Christians want “...acceptation and integration as opposed to refusal and exclusion” within the society (Vliet). As the Muslim population keeps on growing in Egypt the Coptic Christians face continued discrimination, government restrictions on the building of Churches and underrepresentation.

According to BBC News Coptic Christians often get tattooed with a cross which determines their identity and community because they are not given the proper Identification Cards. Amyan Raafat Zaki has been a member of the St. Michael’s Church for nine years and has the tattoo of the cross to represent that he is Coptic Christian; however the state has denied that he is Christian because his mom was a Christian but his father had converted to Islam (BBC News - Fraser). Since in Islam the father determines the religion of their children, Amyan was refused to be given a proper Identification Card that determines his religion and identity, from the age of sixteen Amyan has lived an anonymous life and doesn’t exist in the eyes of the state (BBC News - Fraser).

<https://assignbuster.com/egyptian-muslims-and-christians-religion-essay/>

Another story is that of Nahla, Nahla lived with her sister who had converted to Islam in order to marry a Muslim man; Nahla was forced by her brother-in-law to convert to Islam as he had found her a Muslim husband. When Nahla refused to marry, she was taken to a police station where she was beaten, eventually she married the Muslim Man but later on ran away to marry a Christian (BBC News). Nahla's children are Christian and she attends the Church on a regular basis but yet she is refused to be given a proper Identification Card by the state which says that she is Christian. Lawyer Peter Ramses Al Nagar currently is handling the case of 3, 200 Christians forced to accept a Muslim Identity, " The law says when a person becomes 16 years old, when they must get an identity card, he or she has the right to take papers from the church to prove they are Christian", however when these paper are brought in front of Interior Ministry they are given only two choices. The first choice is to take a Muslim Identity Card and the second choice is to live without an Identification Card which can cause great problems (BBC News).

Samuel Huntington in his argument regarding " Clash of Civilizations" has outlined six reasons as to why civilizations will clash: " how they deal with fundamental social/political relations, globalization, identity crises brought about by modernity, responses to Western domination, the stability and power of identity, and the role of culture in promoting economic regionalism" (Ayesha). In some ways Samuel Huntington is correct as Coptic Christians and Muslims fight over identity, Coptic Christians face identity crisis as they face discrimination, and underrepresentation by the Muslims. Muslims feel

that as Coptic Christians fight for their voice that it will cause them (the Muslims) to lose power and stability of their own identity.

Samuel Huntington also says that conflict at the " Micro-level" between two civilizations is often upon the control of territory which is correct as one of the reasons Muslims and Coptic Christians have had violent clashes is to gain land. Furthermore Samuel Huntington mentions that conflict at the " Macro-level" between two civilizations is often for Military and Economic control as well as promoting religious and political values (Ayesha), this is also true as Coptic Christians were constantly under pressure by the Muslims to convert to Islam and were also politically persuaded to accept Islam by not giving them proper Identification Cards. One flaw in Samuel Huntington's argument is that he describes the nature of conflict between civilizations but fails to mention as to why " why principalities, nation-states, ideological-states, and civilizations clash" (Ayesha).

In terms of identity there are major differences between Coptic Christians and Egyptian Muslims. Both the groups follow different religions, Muslims follow Islam while the Christians follow Christianity. Coptic Christians were the majority of the population in Egypt before the invasion in 641, however today they make up only ten to fifteen percent of the total population; they have lost their identity as they continue to face discrimination and underrepresentation: not being given proper jobs, education, Identification Cards, and even the right to construct or repair their Churches.

The Christians also face the pressure to convert to Islam when they are taxed " Jizya" and are forced to accept a Muslim Identification Card. In the

view-point of the Muslims, the Coptic Christians are also a problem as they do not follow Islam and are of Arabic descent (because they are Egyptians). The Muslims also feel that as the Coptic Christians fight for their right and land that they (Muslims) would lose their identity. The tensions between Muslims and Coptic Christians has grown within the recent years, as both the groups resort to violence to gain power (Land) and for their voice to heard by the government, an example, that was mentioned was the shootout by the Muslims on the Coptic Christians as they were leaving their Church after a Christmas celebration.