

[A Shocking Proposal for Arab Christians: Leave Your Homelands](#)

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By Jacob Thomas

Recently, my article “**Why Don’t Arab Christians Learn from the Jewish Experience?**” was posted on the FFI website. It was prompted by an op-ed column that had appeared on 26 October, 2007, on the Arabic-language elaph.com website. A few days later (30 October,) a Levantine Christian responded with an op-ed article “**Re: Calling on Christians to Learn from the Jewish Experience.**” Here are excerpts from this rejoinder that give a fuller description of the tragic and shocking experiences of how Christians are beings persecuted in their homelands

The author of the article began with these words:

*“I have read many articles about Arab Christians, some well-written and optimistic; while others would cause one both to laugh and weep at the same time. This was the case with the article that was posted on Elaph, on 26 October, 2007, under the title, “**Why Don’t Arab Christians Learn from the Jewish Experience?**”*

*“Its author reiterated what he had previously written, by asking: ‘**Why don’t Christians learn from the experience of the Jews who lived in the Arab world? The Jews lived patiently under religious persecution and racial discrimination, with no realistic hope for the amelioration in their political situation, or the rise of a spirit of tolerance and coexistence. The Jews paid a heavy price for their patience: they were persecuted, oppressed, lost their properties and their citizenship in the Arab countries.**’*

“The style of the article was sarcastic. Having admitted the existence and persistence of the persecution of Middle Eastern Christians, he advised them to be patient as the Jews were, with the hope that some day, Muslims might grant them their rights, and a little more religious freedom. I appreciated the fact that he did acknowledge the difficulties surrounding the lives of Arab Christians; but I reject his advice to the Christians to be patient; and eventually, leave their homelands in a mass migration to the West.”

Having rejected the main thesis of the “**Shocking Proposal,**” the writer of the rejoinder went on to give specific examples of the inequities imposed upon Arab Christians, who after all, are the original inhabitants of Egypt, the Levant, and Mesopotamia (known nowadays as Iraq.)

“Let’s begin with Egypt. Coptic Christians form ten percent of the population; however, they don’t even have one representative in the Legislative Assembly! Recently, when some Christians tried to enlarge their church building in Al Minya Province, they faced a violent reaction from their Muslim neighbors, who upon leaving their mosque after the

Friday morning prayer, beat up and wounded many Christians and forced them to stop their work on the church!

“In Gaza, a Christian was abducted and murdered early in October, 2007. He had done nothing wrong, except that he happened to be of the Christian faith, and was in charge of the Bible Society bookstore!

“In Iraq, two priests were abducted; one was 35, and the other 65 years old. Those who abducted them demanded one million dollars for a ransom. Many Christians were forced to leave their homes; daily they face discrimination based on their religious commitment.

“As for Lebanon, they’re having extreme difficulty to elect a Maronite (Christian) president, due to a series of assassinations that were directed mainly against Christian men.

“And let’s not forget the forced marriages that take place in Jordan, and in other Arab countries. A Christian girl is forced to change her religion, upon “marrying” a Muslim. Quite often, when such marriages end in divorce, these young women are not allowed to return to their previous faith. On their official ID cards, they are listed as “bila deen” i.e. without religion!

“Notwithstanding these cases that point to acts of discrimination against the Christian population of Arab countries, we are met with an absolute silence from the side of Arab rulers. Compare that attitude with those Arab writers who recently pounced on the words of a Catholic cardinal in the Vatican. He had remarked that dialogue between Muslims and Christians was difficult due to the theological differences in their respective views of their Holy Books. Muslims claim that their Qur’an was a product of a Divine message that “descended” both its words and its message (inzal ilahi lil-Kitab, harfan wa-ruhan.) Christians say that their Holy Bible was written due to Divine inspiration, but with human words (al-Kitab al-Muqaddas kutiba bi-ilham Ilahi, wa bi-ahruf bashariyyat.)

“Uproar ensued upon the words of the cardinal, as if any dialogue implied and required that one side should hold exactly to the same views and concepts of the other side, with whom one is dialoguing! But what’s wrong with telling the other party, ‘I hold to a different view than yours?!’ Was stating that there were difficulties in “dialoguing” with Muslims required that the Azhar University authorities in Cairo should stop all contacts with the Vatican?!

*“When we take into consideration all that is going on in Christian communities throughout the Arab world, it is rather shocking to hear the advice of an Arab writer telling us, ‘**You Christians better leave your homelands and go to the West.**’ We certainly don’t need such proposals. As Arab Christians, we have never murmured about bearing the cross, even if it were a heavy one. We’re no different than our forefathers who lived during the early years of Christianity. They were fed to the lions during the Roman persecutions. Later on, we Eastern Christians underwent severe persecutions. We were required to wear special clothing, to distinguish us from the Muslim population. We*

were forced also to pay the Jizya tax, or be killed. As a result, our demographic presence in the East changed; we became a minority, and were regarded as aliens, and not as the original inhabitants of the Middle East. We have been patient; our example was neither the Jews, nor any other people. Our example has been the Savior, who bore His cross, and went to Golgotha, as a way that preceded His resurrection and victory.

*“We, Arab Christians don’t need the suggestions of those Arab columnists who advise us to leave our homelands. And should all doors close before us, we will resort to our Holy Book, where we find these words of our Master and Teacher: **‘Be not afraid of those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul; but fear the One who is able to kill both body and soul in hell.’**”*

“We would love to experience periods of tranquility that would allow us to go to our churches and places of worship. We should implore our Lord to influence the minds of our twenty-first century persecutors, asking Him to forgive them, and to keep us from returning to those dark days when we were severely oppressed, and were paying the jizya!”

It was quite moving to read the rejoinder of the Levantine who was horrified at an Arab Muslim’s advice to Christians to leave their homelands. I hardly need to add any further comments. At a time when Muslim nations are very sensitive about any discussion of the plight of non-Muslims living within their lands, it is very refreshing to read articles that deal realistically and objectively with the plight of the large minorities that have survived in *Dar al-Islam* for the last 1400 years. In this age of globalism, large numbers of Muslims have settled in Europe and the Americas, where they enjoy complete freedoms of worship, expression, and propagandizing. On the other hand, in the Muslim world, there is an absolute lack of a *quid pro quo* with respect to the status of non-Muslims, who remain marginalized, and very often persecuted. The state of affairs must not go on, *ad infinitum!*