

## **“Why Do the Copts of Egypt Fear Fridays?”**

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On 17 May, 2007, while glancing at the website of the online daily, *Elaph*, I noticed a very intriguing title of an article on the plight of the Christian community in Egypt: **“Why Do the Copts of Egypt Fear Fridays?”** The writer, himself an Egyptian now living in France, gave a realistic explanation that should stir our thoughts, and make us fully aware of the suffering of this brave minority. I share with the readers of FFI excerpts from the article, and follow with my analysis and comments.

*“Islamists have taken upon themselves the responsibility to stoke the fires of religious discord and civil strife whenever they had been extinguished. The result is that Egypt becomes the victim, and both Muslims and Christians end up being the losers. It is quite evident that Islamists don’t want the attacks against the Copts to stop.*

*“The last attack on the Copts took place on Friday, 11 April, 2007, in the village of Behma, of the El-‘Ayat Township, in El-Giza Province. Rumors had spread that Christians were about to make an addition to their church building. Five hundred Islamists gathered, and attacked Christians in their homes and places of business. They shouted **Allahu Akbar**, as they embarked on their new **ghazwa** (conquest), resulting in the torching of 27 homes and places of business. They proceeded to loot the contents of the shops, taking all they could find of precious metals and jewelry. After all, why not engage in the plunder, having been assured by the Islamists’ fatwas that the Christians’ possessions were legitimate war booty?! Thankfully, they stopped at that point, and did not take Christian women captives as a prize of their ugly **ghazwa**; however, many Christians in that village were injured.*

### **Why Afraid of Fridays?**

*“When I was in Zurich, Switzerland, attending the **“Conference on the Plight of Women and Minorities in the Middle East and North Africa,”**\* an Egyptian Coptic correspondent told me, **‘We Copts, worry about our own safety and possessions on Fridays, can you tell me why?’** I answered her, **‘Certainly, you must know that the Islamist virus has been spreading in Egypt, in our media, in our educational institutions, and in the Friday sermons at the mosques.** Islamists have altered the very nature of the Friday sermons, changing them from messages on religious and moral issues that are meant to ennoble human beings by elevating their souls toward their Creator, and enabling them to become tolerant in their relations with their fellow human beings. On the contrary, **the Friday sermons have become lessons in hatred and envy of the ‘Other’ declaring him to be a Kafir, and calling for war against the ‘children of apes and pigs,’ i.e. Christians and Jews. Thus when a Muslim leaves the mosque he has become like a time-bomb, ready to explode on any Christian he encounters on his way. This is why the Friday sermon has become a very dangerous matter.***

*“I don’t know why we have never seen a Christian, who leaves his church on Sundays, goes ahead and sets fire to a Muslim house, or assaults a Muslim and kills him! I cannot understand why anyone who kills a Copt and burns his possessions nowadays is regarded as mentally ill! Actually, Islamists have succeeded in employing religion for their political goals. In my discussion with a historian of contemporary Egyptian history, he told me, **‘The Muslim Brothers (al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun) regard Copts as an easy prey; so whenever the government arrests one of their members, they attack a church, or the Christian population. These acts come to the attention of the world public opinion, causing the Egyptian government to stop persecuting the Ikhwan. In other words, Islamists use the Copts as a means to get their members released from prison!’**”*

*“Whenever attacks on Christians take place, the Egyptian police seem to be absent! And when they finally appear at the scene, it is too late. By then the Islamists would have attacked Christians, beaten them, and robbed them of their goods. I remember when I was in Muharram Beik, Alexandria, a Muslim told me, not realizing that I was a writer, that a policeman who guarded a church building told the attackers, **‘go ahead and attack the church, but only from its back door; then, I won’t interfere with your act!’**”*

*“**The Islamist International\*\***, under the leadership of **Yousef al-Qaradawi, Rashed Al-Ghanoushi, and Fahmi Houweidi**, issued fatwas allowing for the murder of women, children, and the unborn, in Israel. But they have been silent about the killing of civilian Muslims in Morocco and Algeria, and equally silent about attacks on our Coptic brothers. These attacks receive the silent assent of the Islamist fuqaha who approve the killing of innocent Muslims and peaceful Christians, as long as the murderers are Islamists like themselves!*

## **Analysis**

The writer of the article draws the attention of the wide readership of Elaph to this unbelievable state of affairs in Egypt, where Copts fear the advent of every Friday. This sixth day of the week has become the occasion for attacks on their persons, homes and property; almost immediately after the worshippers leave the mosques!

## **Comments**

Many readers may find it difficult to see a connection between worship at a mosque and the destructive acts that follow. Actually, this has become a regular experience of many Christians in Egypt. This is why Copts have come to dread Fridays.

I must confess that I was rather surprised to read these words from the article: *“Islamists have altered the very nature of the Friday sermons, changing them from messages on religious and moral issues that are meant to ennoble human beings by elevating their souls toward their Creator, and enabling them to become tolerant in their relations with their fellow human beings.”*

The writer manifests an extremely idealistic picture of what a Friday *khutba* (sermon) should be. I have listened to many sermons broadcast over the airways from Cairo, Riyadh, Rabat, and Damascus. The moral and spiritual elements within a typical Friday *khutba* are quite often, minimal. Rather, what the *khateeb* (preacher) proclaims is a list of the past glories of Islam, the ills that have befallen the Islamic world since the beginning of the 20th century, and a call for rallying the forces of Islam to regain their glorious past. Added to that, are the usual imprecations that are hurled against the enemies of Islam with a ferocious intensity!

Should we then be surprised that Muslim worshippers, whether in Cairo, Alexandria, or Karachi, after having listened to a fiery preacher denounce the enemies of Islam, **‘leave the mosque as a time-bomb, ready to explode on any Christian they may encounter on the road?’**

\*For information about some of the lectures delivered at the Zurich Conference, please consult the following articles posted on the FFI site: **“Leaving the Muslim Brotherhood”** posted on 14 April, 2007; and **“A New Minority in North Africa”** posted on 18 May, 2007.

\*\****The Islamist International*** is a new term, reminiscent of a by-gone organization, **“The Comintern,”** i.e. (The Third International that was formed in Moscow in 1919); which sought to spread Communism all over the globe. Events in the Islamic world, point to the rise of an ***Islamist International***, grouping jihadist organizations, working together for a global jihad, and the resumption of the *futuh* of early Islam.