

Egyptian Christian Finds Hope in the Midst of the Storm

The following article was written by Michael (not his real name). He is a Christian leader in Egypt, which is ranked No. 25 on the Open Doors 2013 World Watch List of the worst persecutors in the world.

This morning, as I was praying to start a new day with all its happenings and challenges, submitting it into the hands of the Lord, I was reminded of the shipwreck scene recorded in Acts 27. Explaining a hopeless situation, Paul wrote in verse 20, “When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, we finally gave up all hope of being saved” (NIV).

The verse obviously reflects a state of despair, tiredness and failure of human wisdom. Hope has left the scene, leaving anxious and worried men wondering if this was it—if they will ever make it back to the shore again.

The atmosphere around that scene portrayed by Paul and the heavy feelings felt on board that boat are so similar to the same feelings many Egyptian Christians experience today. We open our eyes in the morning every day, and here are the reports we hear or read:

- More taxes are being imposed for extra services in return.
- Food prices are going higher every day, and salaries are frozen (if not reduced in some cases). Limited-income families are struggling to manage their daily needs with their inadequate income.
- Daily electricity and water supply cuts now last for hours. (Just now, as I’m writing these words, the electricity went off.) It’s 102 degrees Fahrenheit

today; no fans, no air conditioning.

- News of increasing dominance of the Muslim Brotherhood party in various strategic positions. Nine new ministers were recently appointed; seven of them belong to the Muslim Brotherhood.
- A new movement called “Rebellion” was recently launched, aimed at collecting 15 million signatures of people who want to reject Dr. Mohammed Morsi’s leadership and are calling for early presidential elections. This sound like a promising movement. However, looking into the reactions and consequences of such a movement, I wonder how much violence will develop when supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood and Dr. Morsi will roll down to the streets and confront the “Rebellion” movement members on every street and every alley.
- Reports about the jihadi and criminal groups settled in Sinai, with the central government losing control over this special part of the country, bring deep pain to the heart of every sincere Egyptian. This pain, together with a deep sense of shame, has hit the hearts of Egyptians just yesterday, when a short YouTube video was circulated of a group of seven young soldiers kidnapped in North Sinai. They were blindfolded and begging Dr. Morsi, our president, to respond to the requests of the kidnappers so they can be set free. I felt that shame, together with much anger.

New tensions between Muslims and Christians erupt and escalate every other day. Any small conflict between a Christian man (by name, of course) and a Muslim can easily get out of control and turn into a religious fight, led by a mob of angry Muslims who think they are fighting a holy war for “Allah.” People get injured; houses, small shops and churches of Christians living in that particular village or town get burned down; and people even get killed.

It is enough for a small rumor to turn an entire village or

town upside down. Often it's a simple rumor about a Christian man (by name again) who falls in love with a young Muslim woman, and they both flee away. An incident like this is enough for angry Muslim villagers to bring their judgment down over the entire Christian community. This has created a strong sense of insecurity among Christians.

Egypt is certainly a country with many pains.

This is just what I read in Acts 27:20. This is the time that we Egyptian Christians can see neither sun nor stars appearing for many days, and the storm continues raging. This is a time when many of us have "finally given up all hope of being saved." Communications with heaven seem to be put on hold, and we cannot see God responding to the cries and worries of His people.

However, we are learning the lesson. It is in these very times when we have to stick to the Lord and His faithful promises. We must run to Him and cry out in His mighty name, as it is only then we will have glorious joy and peace of heart.

Although many Christians in Egypt are living through the "no hope of being saved" stage, many other Christians now see the mighty hand of God at work. One pastor recently said these encouraging words:

"Though many things are going wrong in Egypt with the economic crisis, political chaos and daily security challenges, yet the spiritual situation of the church and the numbers of people coming to the Lord and searching for the truth—from both Christian and non-Christian backgrounds—has never been as enormous. It's a time of real victory and joy for us, and we are honored to live today and see what God is going."

For Paul and his group, God sent an angel to stand beside him and encourage him, assuring them that they would survive. On a different boat and in a different storm, it was Jesus Himself who showed up on the scene to assure His disciples.

We Christians of today are not less fortunate and blessed, because we already have the Holy Spirit living, not just by our side, but even dwelling within us. That is the very reason of joy, victory and real hope for the followers of Jesus in Egypt!