

Christians Emerge as Scapegoats After Egypt's Coup

On one hand, Egypt appeared calm as the interim prime minister assembled his cabinet over the weekend. He's trying to lead the country under an army-backed "road map" to restore civil rule after the military removed President Mohammed Morsi.

On the other hand, Egypt's Muslim extremists, enraged over the ouster, have apparently zeroed in on the nation's Christian minority, scapegoating them even though the Islamist leader was widely unpopular.

A Middle East expert, who must remain anonymous for safety reasons, says, "I talked to leaders up in Alexandria that have said it's an absolute mess up there. It is on the radar, not as much as Cairo and Tahrir Square, but there are some terrible things happening."

Despite the recent seeming unity among the 20-plus million on the streets calling for Morsi to step down, our anonymous source thinks this was not an unexpected reaction.

"The believers, as they were elated with the removal of Morsi, they also at the same time were bracing themselves for blowback. So they were telling us, 'Please pray for us.'"

More people packed the streets to call for Morsi to leave than elected him into office. Despite the fact that Christians could only make up a small percentage of the millions, Morsi's supporters seem to be targeting them for retribution, notes our source. This may be due to rumors that Christian leaders masterminded Morsi's removal.

"It's everything that they detest," he explains. "They can't really go after the military; they're not strong enough. The logical result is they're going to attack Christians, and

we're seeing it."

It didn't help matters when the face of Christianity in Egypt took a public stand.

"The Coptic pope came out and said some things in support of Morsi's removal, and then in support of the interim government," our source says. "You could just see this conflict had to be on the horizon."

Since then, kidnappings, assaults and worse have been reported. Many of the victims have been Christians, note reports from Fox News and Reuters. Historically, Egypt's Coptic community—roughly a tenth of the population—has faced severe marginalization and often has been imprisoned and tortured for their Christian faith.

Although there may be some protection from the military government, the future is all but clear. Will the remainder of this year bring more persecution and marginalization for Christians, or will it bring greater liberty to worship?

So far, the signs are not encouraging, says our source. In fact, the concern now is a chain reaction that could be sparked by what's happening in Egypt.

"We just want to pray for Egypt—all of North Africa, too, because as Egypt goes, so usually goes North Africa," he says. "Admittedly, there are many more Christians. There are more Christians in Egypt than in any other Middle East country, but yet the shock waves go out from Egypt."

It's no coincidence, remarks our source, that this is happening at this time of year. It's spiritual warfare, he says: "Here in the holiest month of Islam is when this conflict is happening; so we have put together a Facebook page: 8thirty8 to just give believers each day an opportunity to pray for believers in dangerous countries, that they'd be protected."

Is prayer effective against the wave of ire in Egypt? More than effective—it's catalytic. Our anonymous source explains, "We're praying for Muslims to come to faith in Christ. About 75 percent of the Muslims that we've interviewed [who are now following Jesus] say that something significant happened to them in their journey to Christ during Ramadan."

Pray that the Egyptian Christians would rely on God's wisdom, especially during their transition of leadership. As they are building their government, pray that they would make truth the foundation.

And finally, says source, "Pray for Muslims to have an opportunity to respond to Jesus' message of love."

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