

What Happened in Mārīnāb Village?: An Investigative Report

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I. INTRODUCTION

On September 30, late afternoon, we were informed about “Muslims having burned a church.” A Christian from Cairo called us with the message that this incident was worse than that of the Two Saints Church in Alexandria on January 1, 2011, when a bomb attack had taken the lives of 20 Christians. This was a gross exaggeration, but the demonstrations and killings on October 9, 2011, leaving 24 Christians dead, exacerbated the situation.

We were visiting Father Yu’annis, a long time friend of Cornelis, in Maghāghah. We turned on Egyptian TV and satellite channels, but found nothing. On the Internet we came across films of a burning church, angry mobs, and fearful Christians. We thus decided to travel immediately to Idfū on the first train available. We arrived early Saturday morning at 7:00 AM, long before any journalists or others had descended on the village.

The purpose of our visit was to meet as many people as possible in order to write an investigative report that we hope will help all parties to understand the reality of the situation. Based on this report, we hope Egyptians will be able to negotiate an arrangement that will bring justice and peace back to the area and to greater Egypt, which is now plagued by the demonstrations of the uninformed.

The October 9th clashes in Maspero have made the details of this report that much more significant and it is our hope that the truths in this research will contribute to a better understanding of Muslim-Christian relations in Egypt.

II. INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING TO BUILD PEACE AND HARMONY

Arab West Report (AWR) believes that knowing every detail is requisite of finding solutions. People in the area, demonstrators, and the media now talk about events without having a complete background on the facts. AWR does not need to find the solutions, but we should at least provide others with details that we hope will help them to achieve these ends.

In investigative reporting one collects as much raw data as possible. This includes:

- Interviews: Opinions of involved people. Whether the stories they tell are true or not, they express sentiments in a particular area.
- Mentioning the most important people involved: Describing each person we met, checking in the database of AWR to determine if there is any existing information about the involved people.
- Documents people have provided, or that exist, but still need to be found in further research.
- Photos and videos.
- Media and Internet reporting: Distinction needs to be made between Egyptian and foreign media reporting, Coptic and Muslim (since this is relevant in this case).

- A description of the area visited.
- Checking with the database of AWR to determine if previous incidents were reported about a particular area.
- Interviews with experts (people who are not directly involved but who through their knowledge can provide important context for the details found on a location).
- Mentioning which information we tried to obtain, but were not able to obtain.

The visit to Mārīnāb and Idfū was naturally followed by phone calls with the people involved to clarify things that were not clear from the information gathered in the area.

III. FIRST IMPRESSIONS

I fell in love with this small, charming village on the Nile. It was clean and organized and the villagers there are attractive with very fine Egyptian features. Both Muslims and Christians reported that their village was peaceful and quiet before the tensions erupted over a church building. How different is life here from the crowds, noise, and pollution that we find in Cairo.

In the early morning on October 1st, Cornelis and I went to the village where we noticed a few security vehicles on the main road to the village. No one tried to stop us or to check who we were as would have happened in the days prior to the Egyptian Revolution. We tried our best to build contacts with people from both sides and pacify their initial suspicions about us. These suspicions toward any outsider are a natural product of a conflict.

Our first visit was to a coffee house on the road where we met a local sheikh who spoke derogatively about Christians as *kuffār*, or infidels. We received tea and directions as to where to go next.

A local Christian dressmaker joined the local Muslims. He lived in peace, he said, explaining that he attended church in Khūr al-Zag in Radīsīyah (a neighboring village 4 km from Mārīnāb).

We entered the village and were brought to a place for a gathering. Here, local Muslims and Christians had met the evening before for a reconciliation meeting. The tensions were all over, they remarked. The issue was, in their view, closed; however, after tea and introductions, a picture emerged that showed that this flare-up had been brewing for some time and that the issue is, in fact, unresolved.

IV. TENSIONS HAD BEEN BREWING FOR SOME TIME

It is evident from only a few lines of a September 24th article in *Al-Shurūq Al-Jadīd* newspaper that the situation in Mārīnāb was on the verge of explosion. The title read: "Copts Extinguished Possible Sectarian Violence by Stopping Construction of a Church in Idfū."

This sectarian violence referred to Mārīnāb village in the district of Idfū where Christians had demolished an old building—a meetinghouse that was used for prayer, to replace it with a church. The structure consisted of a dirt floor, four stone walls, and a roof made of palm beams and leaves.

A problem started with the initiative of some Copts to erect a formal church structure in place of the meetinghouse. Things went sour when a dome and church bell were incorporated. When Muslims saw this they stopped the workers and protested the continuation of the construction process, claiming that it is an illegal building for which they did not have permission to construct. Copts tried to negotiate with Muslims to convince them that the church would not have a dome and bell, but all the negotiations were in vain.

V. LOCAL MUSLIM VIEWS

Upon my arrival, Cornelis and I met a group of Muslims who welcomed us in the hall of occasions and told us their story, citing their documents.

Abdallah, who identified himself as a farmer and employee in the Youth and Sports Ministry, explained, “We have never seen or witnessed a church in Mārīnāb, nor have we any records of any church having been here in the time of our ancestors. There was no problem at all in our village ‘til August 30, 2011, the first day of Bairam, or the feast of Muslims, when the church started constructing domes. We then protested peacefully to let the Copts know that what is built on illegitimacy is illegal. We went with leaders of the governorate to meet the governor, General Mustafá 'Alī, but they did not respond. We kept our protests peaceful.”

Shaykh Habīb Mansūr, an imām appointed in the village by the Ministry of Awqāf, made inflammatory remarks about the Governor of Aswan. The article from September 24, 2011 titled, “Copts Stop Possible Sectarian Violence by Freezing Church Construction in Idfū,” accuses the Governor of being involved in giving Copts permission to continue the church’s construction. He claimed that this move was intended to placate the Copts after a Coptic girl named Christina from



Local Muslims with *Shaykh* Habīb, seated to my right to prove he is not a Salafist.

the village of Sibā'īyah (50 km away from Mārīnāb) who converted to Islam to marry a Muslim youth.

As we talked, the number of Muslims grew to a group of perhaps 15 people, all firm in their rejection to the church's construction. They believed the numbers of Christians in the village to be no more than 30 people, while the Muslims, they said, measured about 50,000. They also argued that Copts had no permission for the structure they were building.

The villagers showed us a copy of an official decree from a government institution to demolish the current building and meetingore it to its former purpose as a house. This decree, signed by Hamādah Ba'zaq, would help to extinguish the fire of sectarian tensions.

"Later, we went to the military governor who came to Mārīnāb on September 1, 2011 and asked how many Copts were in the village. The Copts replied that they number around 30 people. He also asked how many Muslims there are and we replied around 50,000 Muslims in Mārīnāb and its surrounding villages (18,000 in Mārīnāb alone). We then came together for negotiations in Kom Ombo, but it was in vain," Abdallah explained.

The military leader asked: "Whose interest is it now to provoke any side of people in this critical moment of Egypt, especially when security is absent?"

"The military officer then showed me many documents—all photocopies, that prove that the building was a house or hall for occasions and not a church, that was sold by Mu'wad Yūsuf Mu'wad to Bishop Hidra on May 15, 2011. The contract states that it was a house with two floors constructed with green bricks with definitive limits and a well-defined surface," Abdallah continued.

"So, at what point did it become a church? The contract is dated May 1, 1987. And, if it was a church, is the church able to be sold and purchased? The officer also showed me photocopies of documents of water and electricity bills that show registration as a house owned by Mu'awad Yūsuf Mu'awad."

"The most interesting evidence is the request offered to the general governor, who is, by the way, the only one who was not replaced after the Revolution and was a member of the NDP, the ruling party of ousted President Mubārak. He was the only governor who gave the oath before ex-President Mubārak face-to-face. The request was to restore the ceiling of the church in Mārīnāb, while in the letter we read that it was a request for a restoration of a church called Khūr al-Zag in al-Radīsīyah, which is in another village a few kilometers away from Mārīnāb."

Later, this group of Muslims gave us a C.D. of a discussion in a high school in Mārīnāb on December 16, 2010, prior to the Revolution. On this C.D., Muslim Shaykhs and Father Salīb are speaking about Christian-Muslim relations.

Abdallah claimed that Father Salīb stated that rumors had been circulating about the building of a church in Mārīnāb. He also claimed that Father Salīb said that it would

be a hall where you can share sad and happy moments. “And if you find it to be a church then you demolish it.”

In May of 2011, the church received a decree from the city council to demolish the illegal elements of the building. The decree gave them 15 days to execute this themselves, but none of the officials did. Then Muslims then protested again on Friday morning (September 30th) in one of the streets close to the building. They saw one of the Christians burning a tire from an abandoned house, and they had to put out the fire. I was told that an old woman was about to choke from the smoke, but the Muslim young men carried her to an ambulance. We waited for promises of a solution from the governor, but it was in vain.

“I question whose interest it is now to create sectarian violence. Father Salīb is the head of the churches in the district of Idfū and Bishop Hidra is the metropolitan of Aswan,” Abdallah responded.

“Why do you do this in such a critical time for Egypt after the Revolution?” I asked him.

“They abuse the absence of security to serve their personal interests. The Christians demolished part of the domes by themselves, but two domes were left and we noticed that they were tearing them down very slowly.”

Abdallah claimed that Mārīnāb never had a church. He said that the governor said this as well.

VI. LOCAL CHRISTIAN VIEWS

At first, Cornelis and I were not allowed to talk with the Christian side. Some Muslim villagers told us that there were instructions from the governor, but after some negotiations we went to meet with the Christian villagers.

I saw a group of small houses, mostly built with mud bricks, grouped in the form of a square. We noticed Copts trapped in their houses in panic. I was told that security surrounded them and locked them inside. I went in one of the houses where an old lady received me. The house had two floors and was in very poor condition.



Cornelis and I with local Christians.

Some of the security generals were standing at the door and told me to wait until the committee of investigation came. The old lady told me to talk with her in private in her bedroom while Cornelis was left with other men in a small hall. There they called Yūsuf Mu'awad to come and talk to me as he knew the story better than anyone else in Mārīnāb.

“The demolition decree was to reduce the height of the wall from 12 to 9 meters. The decree also stated the domes and the vault had to be eliminated,” he explained.



The church domes before they were destroyed.

“They were given 15 days to fulfill the demolition decree, but on the first day of the Feast after Ramadan we found Sa’īd Bashīr, a school director, leading a protest against the church’s construction. Yesterday, around 1 or 2 PM, we saw a mob of between two and three hundred people who destroyed the church until sunset. They burned down a storehouse near the church filled with wheels and the belongings of a tradesman named 'Abās.”

Mu'awad said the building had always been used as a church. A security car used to be parked outside the door during feasts and prayers, which was a sign that it was officially recognized as a church and not as a meetinghouse.

“Father Makarius,” he said, “had obtained a permission signed by the governor to erect a new church. Since 1949, the building was used as a church where prayers were held under the protection of security during feasts.”

“Father Makarius got permission for demolition from the governor to erect a new ‘Church of Mother Mary’. The decree of replacement and renewal was released six months later, after the Bairam feast following Ramadan. It took [the Christians] almost a year to replace [the church].”

A meeting in Kum Umbū was held to negotiate with leaders of Muslim governorates, where we, Father Salīb, and



A dome demolished by Christians.

Father Makarius were told that no cross and no bell should be placed in the church. Then, on September 1, 2011, they changed this to ‘no microphone, no bell, no cross, and no domes’.

“We received a decree from the engineering administration ordered us to remove the high walls and the domes. We removed the domes with our hands and shortened the walls from 9 to 8.40 meters. Workers were doing their best, but it was difficult to remove it quickly without causing the ceiling to collapse,” Father Makarius explained.

There were around 55 families—so, around 250 people in Mārīnāb. The church is also serving four other villages: Mārīnāb, Jandalah, Ghunaymīyah and Balālīs. The nearest church in Khūr al-Zag is 7 km from us.”



The looted supermarket.

Other Copts told me that Christian stores around the church were looted and burned and that “the smoke was so intense that we could not see each other”. One person told me that around 50,000 EGP was stolen from one of the houses around the church. A secured house close to the church, which served as a warehouse for carpets, icons, and many other objects was burned. A supermarket was also stripped of all of its items.

In a modest bedroom I was surrounded by around 15 men and two women. People were disturbed and panicked because of the situation. A woman downstairs had just given birth to a baby and her health was deteriorating. Another woman came to tell us that the woman who gave birth was bleeding again. At that point I was too disturbed to help her or continue the story with the first woman.

I spoke with Ashraf 'Ayād, the owner of the house we visited. He told me that on Friday morning, September 30th, a neighbor came calm with his hands crossed behind his back saying, “May God give rest to the soul of Islam. Islam is buried in this village. If we let this church be erected, Islam is ended in this village.” Ashraf explained that he then gathered a big group of people who came to destroy the church. The cement pillars were destroyed so that they would not be able to build it again and the fire set in the church was so strong that the iron strings combusted in the heat, Ashraf recalled.

It is worth noting how close the houses are to each other so that if a fire is set in one house, it can easily and quickly spread to other houses.

Ashraf told me that he was the one who called the fire truck. Conversely, one of the Muslims told me that it was they who called the fire trucks.

Ashraf 'Ayād and Yūsuf Mu'awad told me that fire truck was prevented by security and Muslims to go down the street to put out the fire. I contended that streets are too tight for a car and he said they could use hoses, but the security and Muslims stopped it.

I asked Ashraf how relations were between he and the Muslims. “What should I tell you?” he lamented. “We were one house and one family. I used to enter their houses without even knocking on the door and I used to sit in their private bedrooms like the those where you stay now”.

Ashraf explained to me in detail how the fire spread:

A small house owned by Rif'at 'Ayād Girgis caught fire next to a six-story storehouse in the northern part of the village. I noticed that all of the ceilings were made of wooden beams and the storehouse owned by Yūsuf Mu'awad and one other owned by Subhī 'Azīz and Majdī 'Azīz were full of electronic apparati. The fire spread all over for more than 3 hours. Neither the security nor government were able to let the fire truck in.

I took some photos of the church from the second floor of the house where we stayed. I could see the church from here, but I was not allowed to enter the church



Remaining dome and vault.

myself to take photos of the burned walls and ceiling. I gave my camera to a man who hid it in his *gallabiya* to take photos.

When I asked the old lady who had set fire to the church, she declared: “Arabs have set fire to the church and houses”. I asked her if she knows them, or if they are from the village.

“Yes,” she replied. “Some are our next-door neighbors”.

Then they showed me a list of around 70 names of people who were seen burning or demolishing the church and houses nearby. I posed many questions about whether the police or the army were there. Yūsuf replied that there were two officers and around 20 soldiers who arrived there before a huge group of youths. Around 1 or 2 PM on Friday more security had arrived, he recalled, “but they were watching them while drinking tea. One of them even told the guys: ‘Enough for now kids. Continue tomorrow’.”

I got back to Cornelis' room who was surrounded by a group of men. One of them had told Cornelis of the destruction of a plantation of 1,200 mango trees. Someone else told him of the looting of his shop. Cornelis had also asked them to take his camera and take photos of the damage inflicted on the area. Because he is Dutch, they asked him about immigration, but Cornelis had to tell them that it is not easy to get visas from Western countries. Also, he noticed a great fear among the Christians. All was well with Muslims, they said, before the tensions about the renewal of the church had started.



Young mango plantation with not as many trees as claimed, but damage had been done.

We sat for a while waiting for my camera, then I went down the stairs, which were awkwardly shaped and I was scared that I would fall. Then we exited the house to meet the security forces.

VII. THE SECURITY OFFICERS

Before we entered the Christian houses, the security officers had asked to meet us, which we readily accepted. In our effort to understand the full story we also needed to hear from the security officers. They were perched on simple wooden benches outside the block of Christian houses close to a wall that Muslim youth had broken before entering the church.

The head of the security was General Muhammad Badrān. He spoke with us while the other officers listened. Some Copts had followed us because they were naturally curious to hear what the security officers would tell us. General Badrān did not like this and shouted at Copts to close the doors of their houses and remain inside. A small group of kids were outside trying to watch or to listen to what the officers were telling us. He roared at them as well, startling me.

General Badrān changed his tone with us and was polite. He introduced himself as the Deputy Head of Security in Aswan and told us, "I just shouted at them because roaming kids raise the dust in the air."

He claimed that some documents had been falsified.

"It was a simple meetinghouse where they were praying, but recently Copts wanted to give it the ecclessical form of a church from the outside. Their effort to change the outward appearance created the problems."

"A decree of demolition had come out and Copts started to remove some of the illegally built elements by hand, but they were removing them slowly, which provoked

the young Muslims here who thought that the Christians did not want to remove the remaining illegal elements.”

“On Friday (September 30th), about 1,000 Muslim youth had gathered at the building to demolish it, closing the street. They all had their own simple hammers and instruments that could not break the walls. Also, they are not workers, so one of them set a fire inside the building to ensure the demolition of the cement building,” the General explained. “Near the building a storehouse where the stuff of the old church was stored like carpets, blankets, and wheels of cars was set on fire as well. So this is how the fire spread out all over here.”

“Why did the security or army not try to intervene to stop them?” I questioned.

“There were well over 1,000 people and all were very excited,” he responded.

“When did you arrive to Mārīnāb, or here to the building location?”

“We have been here since 1:00 PM through sunset. We have been here since the early morning as well,” the General replied.

I asked him if we could go the building to take some photos. He refused saying: “No, it is not allowed for anyone to take photos there, we should wait until the committee of investigation comes. They should be coming in an hour.”

Cornelis asked for the number of Christians living in the village and the General told him that they numbered no more than 75 people.

Cornelis and I arrived around 11:00 AM to the Christian side after having spent time with the Muslims. We had been told earlier that the committee would come soon. Sitting in front of a Christian house with the building to our right, we were surrounded by some soldiers holding weapons.

“It was a simple meetinghouse like the one here on the left side, it was built with mud bricks,” General Badrān informed us.

He mentioned that an old Coptic lady was about to be choked by the intense smoke, but young, Muslim men carried her outside and called her an ambulance.

“The Christians here are very few and if Muslims wanted to really hurt them then they could have finished them all. They just wanted to remove the building,” he asserted.

I asked him if I could go inside to take photos of the meetinghouse to show the church before and after the changes were made. “Ok,” he said, “but keep the door closed while taking your photos.”

Cornelis and I entered and found some soldiers inside who came out and closed the door behind us as the General had asked. I took some photos of this meetinghouse with my camera. Some Copts were sitting on a bench outside their homes watching us vigilantly. We came out to meet the General again.

“We have been here a long time,” the General informed us.

“May God help you,” I said.

Obviously he was not happy, having been summoned by his superiors to come to this village. He shook his head and replied: “Yes, that is what we need to hear.”

At this moment some other people of high positions in security or in the government arrived and sat down facing us on the bank. One of them, an older man in dark civilian clothes, repeated some of the same arguments that security officers had made about the illegal changes to the building. This man was obviously a high-ranking security official. The whole atmosphere was tense, and I felt uncomfortable getting any more information from any of the officers.

When Cornelis and I were about to leave, he explained that we might need around a week’s time to complete this report and would like all parties, including security, to see this. We asked General Badrān how we could send him the report.

“I don’t use any mail or internet,” he conveyed, “but you may check the site of the security department and send me the report there. Then they will hand it to me.”

We stood up and shook hands with the many important officials from the security force, and while we were leaving Copts were again watching us carefully. We shook hands with several of them as we left. I saw Ashraf Mu’awad and I gave him a look indicating that we should stay in contact by mobile. I tried to calm the tense atmosphere and told security officers: “Please take it easy on them (Copts), they feel panicked.” I reassured the Copts that everything would be ok.

“You should not be afraid that way,” I offered. “It is our security and our army that runs the country nowadays.” They shook their hands as sign of agreement.

VIII. RETURNING TO THE MUSLIM SIDE

After the Copts gave us their own proof, we came out with our driver 'Alī, who was waiting impatiently for us. We had to get back to the Muslim side to get their documents about the issue which they had promised us earlier. Cornelis and I returned to the hall where 'Abd Allāh and others had first received us and found some other new faces had come to talk with us. They were full of suspicion and doubt, so we had to introduce ourselves repeatedly. Tea and cakes were served as the Muslims began to tell us the same story that we had heard before: “Christians are our brothers and neighbors; we share their grief and joy”.

A tall man with dark skin and a short beard entered and introduced himself as Shaykh Habīb. He told us about Christina’s story. Shaykh Habīb accused the governor of making an unclean deal with Father Salīb to get permission for the church’s construction so that the story of Christina would be closed forever.

“So you were protesting because of the illegal papers and the permission given for the construction of a church. What would you have done if Father Salīb would have come to you with legal permission for church-building?” I inquired.

“He wants to create sectarian violence, because their numbers are very few and they have another church a few kilometers from us. Why would they have another one if they are not more than 30 people?” he retorted.

The issue of numbers is continuously coming back. Christians estimated their numbers to be around 250. Muslims estimate their number to be around 30 people. General Badrān estimates the number to be between 50 and 75.

I recognized Shaykh Habīb from the video 'Abd Allāh had shown us earlier that morning. Shaykh Habīb was sitting close to Father Salīb in discussion on December 16, 2010 in the local high school. He explained that his father had named him after a Christian friend “Habīb”. He also said he does not hate Copts, mentioning the same story of an old Coptic lady who was carried on the shoulders of Muslim young men in front of the security to save her.

Shaykh Habīb told me that the destruction of the church dates back several months. He said that Governor General Mustafá Al-Sayīd is deeply involved in the story, as he gave the Copts illegal permission to close the file of Christina, who had converted to Islam in Sibā'yīah village. Habīb believes the governor must leave and that the whole government apparatus still mainly consists of the National Democratic Party. He also believes that the governor is incapable of solving any problems that Aswan has been through in recently.

“The governor was in Alexandria for more than 10 days while Nubians were protesting before the government and burned part of it. He did not return to solve any problems. Why is he the only governor who stayed in the chair after the revolution?” he asked.

Another old man with dark skin interjected. He introduced himself as Hāmid Badawī Mustafá, a contractor working in construction. Hamed explained that he had built Yūsuf Mu'awad's house and that it was a house or a meetinghouse, but not a church.

I turned again to Shaykh Habīb, who seemed to be really involved in the story from the very beginning. He showed me a small article in *Al-Shurūq* newspaper and accused the governor of mishandling the issue. He also said that the Christian leader, Father Salīb, is originally from Minya and not from Aswan. Shaykh Habīb claimed that Father Salīb, Father Makarius and Yūsuf Mu'awad are primarily responsible for this sectarian tension.

“They are not allowed to enter the village or their religious address after what they did. They say on their internet sites that Salafis in the village attacked and burned the building, but there are no Salafis in our village.”

I told him that I saw a propaganda poster in Idfū of Al-Nūr (Light) Party, which is a Salafi fundamentalist political party. This means that there are in fact Salafis in this area.

“No, there are no Salafis here in our village,” he insisted. “There are a few in Idfū and they care only for their personal interests.”

“So the Muslim Brotherhood have a good chance to enter parliament?” I wondered.

He laughed and said, “No they can’t, they have only a few supporters here. It is most likely that independents and former NDP representatives will win seats [...]”

Meanwhile, Cornelis was having a side chat with a bearded old man between 50 and 60 years old. Cornelis informed me that he is a Sufi. I was happy to meet a Sufi there because of my personal interest in Sufism. I wanted to know what kind of Sufi order, or *tarīqah*, could be found in this part of Egypt. Also, Sufis are known for their tolerance with People of the Book (Christians and Jews) and non-Muslims in general.

“To which Sufi order do you belong?” I inquired.

“I am Naqshabandī, from Bahā' al-Dīn Naqshabandī *tarīqah*.”

I wondered how it was possible that there were Naqshabandīs in Upper Egypt, as Bahā' al-Dīn Naqshabandī was from central Asia, and this *tarīqah* is spread more in Turkey and central Asia than in Africa.

I asked about other Sufi orders in Aswan and in Idfū.

“Sure, there are Rifā'yīyah, Shāzīyah, and Burhānīyah, who originally came from Sudan,” the man replied.

I was curious to know Shaykh Habīb's *tarīqah*, but he did not want to tell me.

“You want to know everything at once,” he mocked. “When you come here again, we will talk more.”

Then Shaykh Hāmid, the contractor, tried to confuse me.

“If a Sufi is working at a Christian house during the daytime in Ramadān, is it ok for him to eat in their houses when sunset comes?”

I thought and it took me a while to interpret his question and I replied, “A Sufi doesn't have a problem with that. Sure he can eat in their houses.”

“When I work in their houses they respect me, they don't eat or even smoke a cigarette when I am working. I live here and I can eat at home or in any restaurant. but I prefer to eat with them,” Hāmid commented.

Shaykh Habīb added: “We can’t hurt them—they are the origin of Egypt and it is we who came to them. Go and ask them if any one of them has just been simply hurt [physically].”

I asked Shaykh Habīb about his vision for how his relationship with Christians can be rebuilt again. He said that the problem is almost over.

“The culprits behind this sectarian violence, Father Salīb, Father Makarius, and Yūsuf Mu'awad, should be kept away from us. They can’t impose their own view and opinion on us, the majority. Still, 10 percent of the problem is what is written on the Internet and in the media. There are two Copts living in Idfū, Thābit Kāmil Mu'awad, and Fawzī Kāmil Mu'awad who are spreading rumors about me and that there are Salafis in the village, which is untrue.”

“I felt 50 percent sure when you told me that you are Sufi,” he said.

“When can you feel 100 percent sure about me?” I asked.

“When I read what you have reported.”

Cornelis and I suggested that Shaykh Habīb or one of the leaders come with us to sit down with the Christian side to try to build bridges.

“It is already over, but I can’t go there and none of the people sitting here can go to them. They insulted us yesterday and insulted our religion and our prophet. What would you do when the Prophet Muhammad is insulted?” the Shaykh questioned.

“So, how can this crack, or wound, be healed?” I asked.

He affirmed that he is still a friend of a Coptic lady who sells poultry and “we laugh a lot with each other.”

“Please try to understand their reaction. Imagine if a mosque were attacked?” I replied.

They were silent for a second and Habīb replied: “There was no church from the beginning.”

“They are simple people. And as I saw, they take it personally,” I contended. “How would you explain to them that the attack was against the building and not against them? They are afraid.”

“They pretend to be afraid and I tell you it is over,” he asserted. “It will take a week or so to let things calm down and relations will get back to normal. Our problem is with these religious leaders and not with them. Father Salīb tried to threaten us in the last meeting with the EU and Human Rights Watch. He is not national. If he wants dialogue with me he could have threatened me with the governor, police, or even our army.”

A boy came with our copy of the documents—the stack was visibly thinner than the original they had showed me. I asked why and they showed me that other documents were already faded and too weak to be copied one more time. I took the copies.

We chatted with Shaykh Habīb, to whom I said: “Copts here are very few. Please try to be easy with them.”

“I told you it is over and relations will be back to normal,” he insisted. “I guarantee you. I assure you that none of them will be touched.”

IX. FATHER SALĪB

We left the hall and drove with Ali, our 15 year-old driver, to a restaurant with a view on the Nile. Cornelis and I spoke for a while about the views and interpretations, then we took another car to drive us to Aswan where Father Yu’annis had told Cornelis Father Salīb would be.

Father Salīb was mentioned frequently. We followed the desert road, preparing the questions that would be posed to Father Salīb. I enjoyed very much the nature and I had a talk with the driver, who was 'Alī's uncle, about how Aswan can become a better place and how factories can be built.

“That tourist resources in Sharm al-Sheikh had pulled tourists from us, but we can do many things here in Aswan,” 'Alī's uncle explained.

We drove to Aswan's Cathedral, it was huge and resembled the St. Mark Cathedral in the Cairo district 'Abāsīyah. The Cathedral is perhaps 15 years old and located on a small hill in the center of town. I took photos of it from the outside and inside.

In the Cathedral we met with Father Bola, who received us well with many questions about who were we and what we were doing. He then told us that Father Salīb is in Idfū and not here in Aswan. We spoke about the church in Mārīnāb.

“Laws are still very hard for us to build a church,” Father Bola told me. “We should be in agreement with our Muslim neighbors. In Abū Simbil I had the same problem where we had a permit to build a church, then were asked to build in another part of Aswan, and then were asked to use less square meters as had initially been agreed upon. I did not mind building in another, less prominent place in Aswan, but we disagreed with authorities who suddenly wanted the church to be smaller. We did not want the space for the church alone, but for church services as well. There is approval and then there is trying to make changes—hassles for us.”

“I also want to tell you another story,” he continued. “Muslim neighbors wanted to inaugurate a new mosque. They asked me to get the lamp or the sheep that would be slaughtered at the door of the mosque and I do it with love, but I know that they won't react the same when a church is opened.”

“We know that the cross is a sign that chases or scares the devil away—so we don’t understand why Muslims are afraid or annoyed by the form of the cross”.

Father Bola cares for illegal Ethiopian and Eritrean immigrants in Aswan who are in dire need of medical care. We told him we would search for help from NGOs that we know. Then we returned to Idfū with a Coptic taxi driver of whom we inquired about Muslim-Christian relations. He was a simple man who had heard many stories of difficulties that had made him believe that Christians are persecuted.

We arrived at the church in Idfū, where we met Father Salīb Elias and Father Makarius. They insisted that they had all legal documents to turn the existing prayer room into a church. Of course we asked them for documentation and they provided us with the following:

1. Two C.D.s of presentations given by Shaykh Habīb and Father Salīb on October 16, 2011.
2. One C.D. that recorded the meeting of Kum Umbū when Muslim and Christian leaders met and Muslims dictated the conditions of not placing a cross on the building, placing a bell, or building a dome. ([Link to Transcript of Meeting](#))
3. One C.D. with photos and a copy of the documents of the old church with clips of the burning and harms that occurred at the buildings around.

Cornelis asked Father Makarius about the cutting of the 1,200 mango trees.

“I believe the man you spoke to exaggerated somewhat; perhaps there was a young plantation, but there were certainly not 1,200 trees,” he said.

Both Father Makarius and Father Salīb agreed that people had the tendency to inflate numbers. There was damage done, but this should not be exaggerated.

Father Makarius and Father Salīb were busy with a lawyer from Idfū who would contact government and security officials for a solution. So, where for Shaykh Habīb the story was finished, it was obviously not for the priests in Idfū.

We decided to leave the priests alone with the lawyer. We shook hands and left for our hotel.

On October 2, 2011, Cornelis and I left Idfū. I returned to Cairo and Cornelis to Minya. In the train station I bought *al-Misrī al-Yawm* newspaper and we found the news of Coptic protests in Cairo before the High Court. It was then that I realized that the tensions in Mārīnāb had become a media war, focused around the governor’s involvement in the story with his signature.

Later on, more demonstrations took place; the one in Maspiro on October 9th was described by Jayson Casper here: .

Cornelis returned a day later from Minya to Cairo. In Minya, one priest had told him that he had been struggling for twelve years to obtain a building permit in a village.

X. PHONECALLS FOR ADDITIONAL DETAILS

1. A phone call with a lawyer from the church, October 5, 2011

On Wednesday, October 5th, I called a Coptic lawyer named Osama, who is responsible for the file on the church in Mārīnāb. I asked him about one particular document that I received from the Muslim faction. The document is “a request of presentation” to the general governor of Aswan. On the left corner it states: “Concerning the observation of the church of the Archangel Mikhail in Radīsīyah Khūr al-Zag,” and then the topic: “Concerning the request offered by senior Priest Makarius Bulus Mijala' 'Ayād, Priest and Pastor of the church Saint George in Mārīnāb, Idfū (south), to get an approval for the replacement and renovation of the ceiling of the church in the ground floor with cement instead of the palm reeds, and renew three domes of red bricks in the upper floor of the church instead of mud, and mud-bricks, and to renovate the electric conjunctions [...]”. Then there was a detailed description for the church (The copy is very pale in lower part of the document).

The document thus refers to two different churches: one in Radīsīyah in Khūr al-Zag and one in Mārīnāb—two very different villages. Muslims, therefore, believe this document has been tampered with.

“It is a mistake made by the secretary who typed the document,” the lawyer explained.

A mistake of a secretary in the governor’s office? And the governor signed this?

I asked him about the document that the Muslims had shown me to prove that it was two-story house.

“It was a house, but the father of Yūsuf Mu'awad had granted it to the church long time ago to make this a church,” the lawyer explained.

“Why did not you try to change the documents to prove that it is registered as a church?” I asked.

“It is known in Coptic *waqf* (endowment) and it is the problem of the state and its laws.”

2. A Call with Shaykh Habīb, October 6, 2011:

Shaykh Habīb told me about a possible compromise proposed by a Shaykh from Aswan and a Christian religious leader. The proposed agreement concerned rebuilding the house according to its old form before the demolition. I called him back on October 7th to ask him if any progress was made at this meeting.

“No,” he said. “Christians insist on going to the media, escalating the issue.”

I then called Ashraf Mu'awad to ask him if there was any news from his faction.

“Everything is ok now,” he told me, “but there have been some intriguing announcements made against some of us. We were locked up, and after a while we were released after paying 200 EGP.”

3. A Call with Shaykh Habīb, October 8, 2011:

On October 8th, I received a phone call from Shaykh Habīb Mansūr who told me that a Salafi group called the “Coalition for the Support of New Muslims” had offered him a press conference in Cairo where he could show his documents and present his arguments. He asked my opinion about that. I explained that “this coalition was behind the violence directed against Kāmīliyah Shihātah and the sectarian violence in Imbābah and I don’t expect anything good from them. AWR would publish your documents as well as the documents of the Christian faction. He was convinced not to deal with them.

Cornelis Hulsman had met with Kāmīliyah Shihātah on April 8th. She was in hiding and not veiled as Salafis had presented her, which indicates this picture was Photoshopped. Kāmīliyah has had marriage problems with her husband, but has never converted to Islam nor made a police report for this as Wafā’ Costantine had done. I expressed my fear that they would use the Shaykhs documents for similar anti-Christian propaganda purposes, which could result in more demonstrations and violence.

XI. MEETINGS OF MUSLIM AND CHRISTIAN LEADERS

Shaykh Habīb Mansūr and Father Salīb were invited to a discussion about “the appurtenance to homeland supported by Christian and Muslim leaders.” I received a C.D. from the Christian faction about presentations given by “the heroes of the story” during this discussion.

The attendees consisted mainly of boys and girls of secondary-school age. At the head of the table were Shaykh Habīb, Father Salīb, Father Makarius, and two directors of the school. The meeting started with the director introducing Shaykh Habīb as “Imām and preacher of ‘Umar Ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz mosque and a member of the *Iftā’* committee in Idfū,” and Makarius Mijala’ as, “the priest of the Saint George church in Mārīnāb”. The aim of this discussion was to emphasize citizenship, nationality, and the protection of national property.

Father Salīb speaks very good classical Arabic, which is unusual among the Copts. He spoke about Shaykh Habīb as his beloved brother. Father Makarius was introduced as “the priest of Mārīnāb church who belongs to you, too”. He went on to criticize people who seek strength and support from without the church, asserting that true Copts should depend on God alone. He mentioned the situation concerning Pope Boutrus VII and his offer to protect minorities in Egypt in addition to the famous offer of the British colonizer to Patriarch Kyrillos V to protect the minorities, which the Coptic pope rejected. Father Salīb also recited some Qur’anic verses that illustrate that relations between Muslims and Christians are strong and that Christians are the most beloved people to Muslims.

Father Salīb then told an interesting story of 25 years ago when Muslims had heard a rumor that Christians would build a church.

“Your ancestors were wise and asked us, ‘will you build a church?’” Father Salīb began.

“No, it is a meetinghouse for weddings and funerals where you can come to celebrate occasions. And, to reassure you, we can write a stipulation stating that if you find a meetinghouse, then you are invited to come to our occasions and if you find it a church, it is already in your hands and you can demolish it. From that moment until now, it is still the meetinghouse near the house of Yūsuf Mu'awad,’ the Christians replied.”



The meetinghouse built in 1985.

Cornelis and I had a meeting with some Muslim and Christian leaders in Idfū to discuss the subject further.

Muslims and Christians in the past were wise enough to ask and write a condition to make it remain a meetinghouse, an Arabic language teacher noted. He then cited a prophetic Hadīth: “Don’t build your house’s wall so high that it blocks the breeze from your neighbors.”

Later he mentioned how taxing it has been for Father Makarius to go through offices within State Security to the Awqāf, or the Ministry of Endowments, and to the Ministry of Construction to obtain the documents for the restoration of the church in Mārīnāb. This has long been a hindrance for Father Makarius and other clergy in villages when efforts are made to obtain permits.

The following are the links to the video taken of the discussion between Shaykh Habīb and Father Salīb:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ffGRr-ZveUM>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dnRpYVfpOrs>

Comments on the Discussion (Lamīs):

Father Salīb and Shaykh Habīb seem to understand each other, despite the challenges that exist in their village. In most parts of Father Salīb’s speech, he speaks about building and restoring churches, providing examples from other places and even from prophetic Hadīths. It is thus obvious that there has been attention to rebuilding the church a long time ago and that Muslims were aware of it.

I called Ashraf 'Ayād to ask him where exactly Yūsuf Mu'awad's house is.

“To the left of the meetinghouse,” he said.

I went to this meetinghouse and took photos of it. It seemed relatively new—perhaps 25 years old. I asked Ashraf whether Yūsuf Mu'awad has another house.

“Yes,” he said, “Near the church.”

So now, I am confused as to which one was the church and which building was the meetinghouse since Yūsuf Mu'awad had two houses.

XII. DOCUMENTS FROM MUSLIMS AND CHRISTIANS

Muslims' Documents:

1. The document is a [“Request of Presentation”](#) to the Governor of Aswan. On the left corner it states: “Concerning the observation of a church of the Archangel Mikhail in Radīsīyah Khūr al-Zag,” followed by the topic: “Concerning the request offered from Senior Priest Makarius Bulus Mijala' 'Ayād, Priest of the church Saint George in Mārīnāb, Idfū (south), to get an approval for the replacement and renovation of the ceiling of the church on the ground floor with cement instead of the palm reeds, to refurbish three domes with red bricks in the upper floor of the church replacing the mud and mud bricks, and to renovate the electric connections. It also provided a detailed description of the church.

NOTE: Two separate churches are indicated here: Saint George and Radīsīyah Khūr al-Zag. Mārīnāb did not have a dome originally. It is clear that the document was not based on a survey of the structure. This is the key document that caused friction between the two parties. Christians believe this is a mistake of the government and, conversely, Muslims are saying that it is a falsification.

2. [A document from the electric company states](#): “On September 10, 2011, Bishop Hidra Milād 'Ādil had offered a request to be participant of number 66654. Additionally, the account ownership was transferred from Mu'awad Yūsuf Mu'awad to Bishop Hidra Milād 'Ādil in the assigned authentic contract dated August 6, 2009 in Mārīnāb. The sort of activity is: a flat/occasions house/account number 1580. Date: 10-09-2011 without any duty of the company.
3. [A document from the agricultural department in Idfū](#) stated that, on Monday, December 20, 2010, Father Makarius sent Mahmūd Ibrāhīm 'Abd al-Bāsīt, head of the department, to inspect the two-story house. He found illegal construction according to Law 116 from 1983.
4. Report of Attendance: [Ref.1](#) – [Ref. 2](#)

Christians' Documents:

1. "[Permission for Demolition](#)" numbered 2 (2010) requested by Father Makarius. According to this document, he is allowed to do the following:

"Demolish the ground floor with two façades 29.7 m long under the supervision of an engineer."

2. "A Decree of Permission" [Ref. 1](#) – [Ref. 2](#) written in accordance with Law 144 (2006):

"The requester owns a parcel of land with a church of the great martyr Saint George in Mārīnāb with two eastern and southern façades. It is constructed of green mud-bricks composed of an entrance and a court with pillars composed of red mud-bricks and cement. The ceiling is made of reeds and wooden bars. He wants to demolish the ground floor to the ground according to the geometrical design."

3. A "[Decree and Promise](#)," which states that "I, Makarius, am permitted to make the specific changes stated in the permit numbered 41 (2010) as I am doing so on behalf of his eminence, Bishop Hidra [...]."
4. [Instruction from Law 119](#) (2008) includes Articles 40, 43, 49, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, and 60 and Permit #42 (2010).



The meetinghouse.

XIII. MEDIA REPORTING

Al-Ahrām, October 2, 2011

Sāmih Lāshīn

“Coptic Open Sit-in if Demands Aren't Met Concerning Idfū Church Incident”

<http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2011/week-40/4-coptic-open-sit-if-demands-arent-met-concerning-idfu-church-incident>

Al-Miṣrī al-Yawm, October 2, 2011

Emad Khalil

“Thousands of Copts Protest Aswan Church Attack”

<http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2011/week-40/2-thousands-copts-protest-aswan-church-attack>

Al-Akhhbār, October 2, 2011

“Coptic March from Shubrā to Ramsīs Protesting Idfū Church Incidents”

<http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2011/week-40/3-coptic-march-shubra-ramsis-protesting-idfu-church-incidents>

Rose al-Yūsuf, October 2, 2011

Mikhael 'Ādil and Muhammad Sharīf

“Coptic Organizations Call on SCAF to Investigate Idfū Church Incident”

<http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2011/week-40/6-coptic-organizations-call-scaf-investigate-idfu-church-incident>

Al-Miṣrī al-Yawm, October 2, 2011

Sarah Carr

“Aswan Attack Part of 'Ethnic Cleansing' of Copts, says Lawyer”

<http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2011/week-40/13-aswan-attack-part-ethnic-cleansing-copts-says-lawyer>

Al-Miṣrī al-Yawm, October 3, 2011

“Copts in Aswan Demand Construction of Church”

<http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2011/week-40/28-copts-aswan-demand-construction-church>

Al-Ahrām, October 4, 2011

Nevine Naguib

“Conflicting Reports by Church, Governor on Aswan Fitnah”

<http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2011/week-40/32-conflicting-reports-church-governor-aswan-fitnah>

Waṭanī, October 2, 2011

Nādir Shukrī

“Idfū's Extremists Burn Church, Copts Houses”

<http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2011/week-40/34-idfus-extremists-burn-church-copts-houses>

Al-Miṣrī al-Yawm, October 5, 2011

Emad Khalil

“Military Police Forcibly Disperse Coptic Sit-in”

<http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2011/week-40/35-military-police-forcibly-disperse-coptic-sit>

Al-Miṣrī al-Yawm, October 4, 2011

“Coptic Christians Continue Sit-in, Demand Building Marinab Church”

<http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2011/week-40/38-coptic-christians-continue-sit-demand-building-marinab-church>

Al-Miṣrī al-Yawn, October 6, 2011

“Military Police Disperse Coptic Protesters by Force”

<http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2011/week-40/40-military-police-disperse-coptic-protesters-force>

Al-Ahrām, October 6, 2011

“8 Suspects in Aswan Church Attack Released”

<http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2011/week-40/43-8-suspects-aswan-church-attack-released>

Al-Ahrām, October 6, 2011

Muhammad 'Abd al-Khāliq

“Azhar Condemns Aswan Church Attack”

<http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2011/week-40/44-azhar-condemns-aswan-church-attack>

Arab-West Report, October 10, 2011

Diana Maher Ghali

“Statement from the Coptic Orthodox Church Holy Synod on Maspero's Incidents”

<http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2011/week-41/5-statement-coptic-orthodox-church-holy-synod-masperos-incidents>

Al-Ahrām, October 10, 2011

'Abd al-Mun'im Sa'īd

“The Marīnāb Church”

<http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2011/week-41/14-marinab-church>

Al-Shurūq al-Jadīd, September 24, 2011

Hamādah Ba'zaq

“Copts Pacify Fitnah by Holding Construction on Church in Idfū”

<http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2011/week-39/5-copts-pacify-fitnah-holding-construction-church-idfu>

Al-Miṣrī al-Yawm, September 30, 2011

“Muslims Burn Part of Aswan Governorate Church”

<http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2011/week-39/45-muslims-burn-part-aswan-governorate-church>

Waṭanī, September 26, 2011

Nādir Shukrī

“Cabinet Fact-finding Team to Investigate Muslims Objection to Church Domes in Aswan”

<http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2011/week-39/18-cabinet-fact-finding-team-investigate-muslims-objection-church-domes-aswan>

XIV. CONCLUSIONS:

Lamīs Yahyá

So many arguments appeared in this story. Copts, Muslims, and security all bear responsibility for the escalation, but I place huge blame on the security for not stopping Muslims from attacking the church. I have seen how officers treat Copts in a tough manner. I assume that Copts know how difficult it is to refurbish the church, let alone replacing it, so they used some illegal methods to get the permit. That is in line with the theory of Habīb Mansūr, which I mentioned at the beginning of this report. The governor may have also been deceived without any kind of underhanded deals.

“The negotiations led Muslims and Copts in a vicious circle but Copts obtained approval to demolish the domes.” I still cannot find any clear causes for the Muslim attack on the church on Friday, September 30th. Can this be related to the threats made by the meeting of the NDP to burn Upper Egypt if they are prevented from joining the upcoming parliamentary elections? How much of this can be by mere coincidence?

The argument that Muslims offer citing Coptic abuse of the power vacuum and security to build the church sounds reasonable as well, but why did the Copts not wait until elections are over and an elected settled power can run the country? By the same logic, Muslims have also abused the absence of power and security to demolish the church.

The question of fire still exists. Who set the fire? Each faction tries to blame it on the other.

Copts say that Muslims have set fire to the church and houses.

Muslims claim that according to Shaykh Habīb, a Copt named Ra'ūf Farīd had started the fire in wheels to stop us from approaching the church and the security generals saw that. I not understand why the security did not try to stop the fire.

General Mohammed Badrān explained that Muslims, while demolishing the church, used inadequate instruments to set fire to the church.

Where is the security force to stop such a catastrophe? Why did they not try to call extra reinforcement from Idfū to help them?

My comments will not please any faction. The movement to build churches to compete with the building of mosques has presented Egypt's urbanism in a pathetic

image, where ornate mosques and churches are built in poor or random places. The houses of Copts I entered were in miserable places, where a woman in labor suffers without medical care for her and the child. There is always enough money to build mosques and churches with huge minarets in both, but there is no money for schools, hospitals, or even libraries? Such things are not in the agendas of either faction.

Copts are more concerned with their outward appearances and competing with the towering minarets of mosques than treating diseases.

Marxists say that “religion is the opium of nations”. This turned out to be so true in Egypt 2011. Both have lost hope of having better life, so they run to religious life no matter what kind of religion is offered to them. They place themselves entirely in their religious leaders’ hands, who they believe will accompany them to the gates of paradise. Still, it seems that religious leaders liked the power that people have granted them. It is a conflict between religious leaders on both sides to show their power. Copts believe that the priest’s papers are legitimate. They love and follow him. Within the other faction, Muslims listened to the Shaykh, who, on Friday preached his wish to demolish the church.

Cornelis Hulsman

The story of Mārīnāb was about church building, apparent government and church manipulations, Muslim intolerance to a small church structure in their village, a poorly drafted law for building churches, lack of law enforcement, and Christians and Muslims trying to take things into their own hands. Of course the weakest party, the Christians, then loses.

The role of the Governor has not been good. His responses have been very inflammatory, claiming the Christians never had a church in Mārīnāb. What makes a place a church or a mosque? Prayer! Christians had been praying here for many years, to the knowledge of the entire Muslim community and government. The claim of the Governor that there had been no church was repeated by Muslims in the village, thus justifying their assault on the church. He instead should have said that this was a church that for years had been functioning without a building permit.

The story was also about outward appearances. Christians were indeed a small minority with a place to pray, which no Muslim objected to, but a number of them wanted the building to be larger and also from the outside clearly visible as church. Muslims rejected that. Since the government was largely inactive, this resulted in the unfortunate attack on the building that was to become a church in the village on September 30, 2011.

There are several elements in this story that reflect patterns in Egyptian society:

Many people, Christians and Muslims, complain about laws being selectively applied, difficulties for Christians to establish houses of worship and easy for Muslims to build mosques.

Clergy in Aswan, Minya, and Cairo provided several examples of difficulties in obtaining church building permits and if they are obtained Christians often would try to construct more than the permit they received allowed. I believe it not to be wise to construct more than what was allowed but Christians we meet argue that it is so difficult and thus they should try to grasp what they can get. I believe that such behavior only creates more suspicion of both authorities and local Muslims who see the violations as examples that they should exercise great caution in providing permits.

The difficulties in obtaining building permits are partly related to bribes that officials at times expect to get. This was mentioned by Christians in Minya and Cairo as a general feature but no one mentioned this in Mārīnāb or Idfū and thus this issue of bribes may frequently occur, but does not always happen.

It is known among both Muslims and Christians that Christians will try to circumvent the law in order to get what they want. It is at one hand understandable because of the difficulties they experience in getting permits but following such a route does not help to gain trust.

Christians also have been making use of moments of inattention by security and the local Muslim population to extend buildings or create new building, not only in Mārīnāb, but also in other parts of Egypt. The effort of the Monastery of Bishoy to extend their walls after the revolution was a case in point.

Christians were prepared for the onslaught. They had cameras to film all that happened. Others made lists of names of Muslims from the village they witnessed in the attack against their church. This, too, is a pattern of at least the past decade with the growing importance of the internet. But dramatic photos and videoclips only help to inflame tensions since they ignite the emotions of other Christians, create anger among Muslims, and do not help to provide the much needed context that helps in understanding why things are happening and how solutions can be found.

Media, generally, does not play a good role, neither in Egypt nor abroad. They present emotions, show the negative side, and tend to neglect the context or positive stories. Journalist Hosam al-Aidy, a friend of mine, told me on October 7, that he witnessed how a police officer protected a particular woman in a demonstration. He found the officer and wrote a story about him, only to be fiercely criticized by fellow journalists that he wrote something positive about a police officer. The media climate is poisoned and much more attention needs to be given to context and positive stories in order to show that not all is black but there are elements of light as well.

In the dramatization that took place Christians have been describing the Muslims in the village as Salafis which was not true. When I asked a priest later in Minya about this he answered that for him there was no difference between Muslim Brothers, Salafis or other Islamists. Such attitudes of course do not help in finding solutions.

Christian clergy are capable of moving their flock. They are able to mobilize their own people as are Muslims able to mobilize their own people. Christians give credibility to the stories told by their clergy and Muslims give credibility to their

leaders, which could include a popular shaykh, a head of family, or representative of a local political party.

Shaykh Habīb, and thus the people following him, lack a good understanding of the Christian community. They stated that they had no problems with the Christians in the vilage but did not want the priests Salīb and Makarius to enter the village but for Christians the attachment to their clergy is very deep and not allowing them to enter the village is thus no sign of peace.

Reconcilliation between Muslims and Christians is much needed, not only in Mārīnāb but in many other places of Egypt as well. We pray for a better future of Egypt in which Egypt will show the world that Christians and Muslims are brothers and sisters who together can work to build Egypt.