

WORLD DOMINION

The World Dominion Movement advocates Informed Continuous Co-ordinated Evangelism to reach everyone at home and abroad. Its basis is belief in the Deity and Atoning Death of the Lord Jesus Christ, the World's Only Saviour, and in the Final Authority of Holy Scripture.

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Vol. XVII., No. 1 CONTENTS JANUARY, 1939

EDITORIAL :	3
THE UNSHAKEN THRONE. <i>T. Wilkinson Riddle</i>	5
EVANGELICAL CHURCH IN POLAND	10
EUROPE FACES A NEW TRAGEDY. <i>Alexander McLeish</i>	11
AN INTERESTING EXPERIMENT	19
EVANGELICAL RUSSIANS. <i>Joachim Müller</i>	20
INTERNATIONAL ATHEISM	29
THE BIBLE IN THE WORLD. <i>R. Kilgour</i>	30
RELIGION IN JAPAN	35
THE PRINTED PAGE AS PIONEER. <i>John Savage</i>	36
THE BIBLE AT WORK	40
AN APOSTLE OF LIBERTY. <i>Santiago Canclini</i>	41
A HAPPY HOME FOR MILLIONS ?	44
POSITION OF THE CHURCH IN EGYPT. ' <i>Onlooker</i> '	45
FORTY YEARS IN THE SUDAN. <i>Gilbert Dawson</i>	53
WEST INDIANS FEAR THE 'EVIL EYE'	61
NEW VISION FOR LEPROSY WORK. <i>Robert Cochrane</i>	62
THE NEW DAY IN ARABIA. <i>J. J. Cooksey</i>	67
SKY-SCRAPERS IN ARABIA	72
PHILIPPINES—ACHIEVEMENT AND CHALLENGE.		
	<i>E. K. Higdon</i>	73
1938	80
CLOSED LAND OF NEPAL. <i>Katherine Harbord</i>	81
CHRISTIAN CONFERENCE IN JAPAN	85
'OUT WITH THE PACK.' <i>W. W. Harrison</i>	86

The Editor does not accept responsibility for views expressed by the writers. Communications may be sent to WORLD DOMINION PRESS, FOUNDER'S LODGE, MILDMAY CONFERENCE CENTRE, LONDON, N. 1, and 156, FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK. Published Quarterly. Annual Subscription, 4/6, post paid; Single Copies, 1/2, post paid. The next number of the magazine will be published on the 23rd March, 1939.

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The Position of the Church in Egypt

' ONLOOKER.'

EGYPT'S somewhat nebulous and equivocal position as a nominally independent sovereign State has at last been clarified, first by the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936 and then by the Montreux Convention of 1937. The uncertainty which enshrouded the respective functions of the British Residency (as it then was), the royal palace and the ultra-democratic Parliament has now largely passed. Egypt's complete independence has been given international recognition, the Capitulations have been abolished, and, with the 1923 Constitution restored, Egypt stands as a democratic State, ruled by a popular, if strong-willed monarch, King Farouk I. For the first time for many years the country's leaders are free to devote their attention to the solution of the many pressing social and economic problems rather than to the adjustment of its relations with foreign powers, especially Great Britain.

For the work of the Christian Church in Egypt these changes are fraught with consequences of no little significance. It is noteworthy that while the protection of minorities formed one of the four reserved points for which Great Britain in 1923 retained special responsibility, in the abortive Treaty negotiations of 1929 it was stated that the question of minorities was the exclusive concern of the Egyptian Government, and in the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936 no reference was made to the minorities at all. The hope was entertained in responsible circles that at Egypt's admission to the League of Nations in May 1937, a statement would be made by the Egyptian Delegation confirming the safeguards already contained in the Egyptian Constitution, but no undertaking was given. Presumably the articles of the Constitution were considered adequate, though this opinion is not shared by many of the Egyptian Christians themselves.

At the Montreux Convention, which sanctioned the abolition of the Capitulations, written assurances were furnished by the Egyptian delegation for the protection

WORLD DOMINION

of missionary work. They promised that during the transition period of the next twelve years and, indeed, until a further agreement should be reached, missionary institutions in existence at the time of the Montreux Convention would be allowed to continue their activities under the Mixed Tribunals, but also subject to such Egyptian legislation as applies to similar Egyptian institutions, and on condition that none of these activities contravened public law or morals. Freedom of public worship was guaranteed in accordance with the customs and usages in Egypt concerning non-Moslem religions. These guarantees met with searching and bitter criticism from some of the more extreme organs of the Moslem Press, but they still stand and are being faithfully honoured.

In estimating the present position of the Christian community in Egypt account must, however, be taken not only of the actual legal guarantees which have been given, or not given, in the last few months, but also of the general policy of the Egyptian Government, the administrative decisions of the various departments, and the attitude of Moslem public opinion. In some ways, these are almost of greater importance than the legal guarantees themselves, as they determine the spirit in which all such guarantees are interpreted and applied.

When we come to study the policy of the Government and the attitude of the public we find that no very clear picture can be given. This is due, in large measure, to the constant tension that exists in the country between two conflicting viewpoints. One section of the community considers that the most important element in Egypt's internal and foreign policy should be the establishment of her position as the paramount Moslem State. Another section holds that religion should not be allowed to enter into political life lest it divide the Moslem citizens from the Coptic and prove a handicap to the country's political progress, but that Egypt should aim rather to take her place as a fully developed modern State amongst the great nations of the world.

Many examples might be given of the strength of both

THE POSITION OF THE CHURCH IN EGYPT

of these movements. By the introduction of some remarkable measures of reform, efforts are being made to re-establish the prestige of Al-Azhar University, and to give it a curriculum suitable to meet the needs of a modern generation. From many parts of the Moslem world student delegations are being sent to attend its courses, and subsidies for their support are being provided by the king or the University authorities. A new policy is being developed of commissioning Azhari graduates to go as preachers to scattered Moslem communities in foreign countries for their instruction in the faith and encouragement, while the Ministry for Waqfs has in recent months made grants towards the establishment of mosques in Budapest, Bucharest and Manchuria. Public subscriptions have also been opened for the erection of a mosque at Juba in Southern Sudan. Symptomatic of this attitude are such proposals (fortunately not yet adopted) as those for the abolition of a minimum age for marriage, for the re-establishment of the Sharia Law as the sole standard of jurisdiction, for the enforcement of prayers in the Government compulsory schools, and for the prohibition of the teaching of children of any religion save that of their parents and guardians. Account, too, must be taken of the revival of propaganda for the restoration of the Caliphate with King Farouk as the favoured candidate.

The more 'secularistic' party, on the other hand is, for obvious reasons, not nearly so vocal as the pro-Islamic party, but its influence on that ground must not be discounted. While not prepared to follow Turkey in the extreme measures she has taken for the separation of religion from the State, many of the younger generation consider that the power of the reactionary forces in Egypt must be broken, and a policy of secularization followed in politics, legislation, education and jurisdiction. The future alone will show which of these two parties will prove the stronger. At present the swing of the political pendulum gives the greater influence first to the one and then to the other. Both of these parties favour the cementing of closer relations between Egypt and her neighbours, but whereas

WORLD DOMINION

for the one group this is principally a matter of political and economic aims, for the other the primary purpose is religious and cultural. Thus the Treaty of Friendship with Turkey has been ratified, and Egypt's adherence to the Four Power Pact, which binds together Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan, is considered by some only a question of time. By the engagement of Princess Fawzia to the Crown Prince of Iran another link has been forged in the chain of friendship between the two countries.

One consequence of the present uncertain situation is that the attitude of the Government towards the Christian minorities and the work of missions fluctuates according to the viewpoints of those in office. Under one ministry it may be much more difficult for Christian congregations to obtain permits for the erection of new churches, than under another. One Minister of Education will show a conciliatory attitude towards the request for the recognition of Christian elementary schools, while another will raise apparently insuperable difficulties. Whereas under one Government Christian officials will receive fair treatment in the adjudication of posts and in such matters as promotion and increases in salary, under another they will be penalized and subjected to obvious discrimination.

Again, there is always the danger of missionary work being made a catspaw in the local game of politics. An instance of this occurred during the election campaign of 1938. In order to discredit the Wafdist party the statement was circulated that a Wafdist Government meant a 'missionary' Government, on the ground that Makram Obeid Pasha, the Wafdist leader, was a Christian, and that he used his influence when in power to undermine the religion of the State and to encourage missionary work. All the absurd and outrageous charges which the Arabic press levelled against missionary work in 1933 were revived, and at one time it looked as if public fanaticism might be roused to a dangerous pitch. Then the campaign was officially called off and the agitation died down as quickly as it had started.

THE POSITION OF THE CHURCH IN EGYPT

Confronted with such disabilities, and uncertain as to their future position, the Christians of Egypt are naturally prone to a spirit of uneasiness and apprehension. The temptations facing uneducated and unshepherded Copts to embrace Islam are increasing in force. Some are seeking release from an unhappy marriage, others want to marry Moslems, while still others are tempted by offers of work, or money, or of preferment in office. This leakage to Islam is likely to be augmented by the Government's present system of compulsory education whereby Christian children are virtually, though not nominally, obliged to attend the lessons in Islam in the Government village schools and no provision is made for their instruction in their own faith.

The more spiritually minded of the leaders of the Coptic Church, whether ordained or lay, have come to realize that the only ultimately satisfactory method of dealing with this and kindred problems is a deepening of the spiritual life of the whole Church, with special emphasis on the instruction of the young. In Cairo and district alone there have sprung up more than forty lay movements for the reform of the Coptic Church, all of them centering around some leader of dynamic personality, and seeking by meetings and personal work to bring new life and light to their members. In addition, there are many young Copts, students and employees, who are offering their services in an entirely voluntary capacity in connection with the twenty or more evangelistic meetings which the tiny Anglican Church is organizing for Copts and Moslems in Cairo and in the villages around. The ultimate objective of these meetings is the emergence of village congregations composed of converts from Islam who will gather, like the first century Christians, in the house of one of the members. All these meetings are being conducted by young men who are only too anxious to avail themselves of any training classes that may be arranged to assist them in methods of preaching and of evangelistic work.

One or two of the Coptic Bishops have grasped the

WORLD DOMINION

importance of providing Christian education for Christian children in the villages, and the Coptic Bishop of Kena, for example, has been instrumental in opening a large number of Christian elementary schools within his diocese. A scheme has also been launched by the Anglican Church for the establishment of similar schools in co-operation with the local Coptic communities in some of the villages of the Giza and Menoufia Provinces. The hope is that ultimately these schools will become centres of spiritual enlightenment to all these residents in the neighbourhood.

Sooner or later the movements for education and reform are bound to bear fruit in the life of the Coptic Church, which still claims nearly one million members. At the same time, the younger Churches have responded in an encouraging way to the appeal for a Forward Move which was addressed to them, as well as to the missionary societies, by the Near East Christian Council in the spring of 1937. As part of the preparation for the Madras Conference, as well as of its follow-up afterwards, the various Churches were urged to consider what steps might be taken for the deepening of the spiritual life and experience of their members, and for the encouragement of each individual Christian to bear witness to his or her non-Christian neighbours. As in the Coptic Church, so in the younger Churches, there is an increasing body of young men and young women who are willing to engage voluntarily in Christian evangelism or social service. Some of these movements, like those of the Young Men's Christian Association, and of one or two evangelistic centres in Cairo, are not definitely attached to any particular Church, and many of them (as in the Coptic Church), have exclusively indigenous leadership.

While, for various reasons, these progressive movements tend still to follow denominational lines, there are indications of a closer understanding and of a greater readiness for co-operation between some of the Churches. Not a little of the credit for this more Christian attitude is due to the work of the 'Fellowship of Unity' which has laboured quietly and patiently for eighteen years to create

THE POSITION OF THE CHURCH IN EGYPT

a better spirit between the different Churches and organizations. A unique feature of the Fellowship in recent years has been the annual united service of worship and thanksgiving which has been held in turn in the Armenian, the Greek, the Coptic and the Anglican cathedrals, as well as in the Presbyterian Church at Ezbekiah, Cairo. The very pressure which outside circumstances bring to bear upon the Christian forces helps to make them realize their common problems and needs, and thus draws them closer to each other. The first steps have been taken for the consideration of a proposal for the establishment in Egypt of a National Christian Council, which will comprise representatives of the Churches, as well as delegates from the missions. This would signify a definite move forward beyond the stage reached by the Egypt Inter-Mission Council, whose membership at present is exclusively from missionary societies.

There are indications in Egypt, as in other parts of the Near East, of a growing consciousness amongst Christian nationals of their responsibility for the evangelization of the non-Christian population. This change in attitude may be due, in part, to the emphasis which has been placed by the Evangelistic Committee of the Near East Christian Council on the central place of Christian witness in the life of every Church and of each member of it. Through clubs, day-schools, and Sunday-schools, by personal conversation, the distribution of Christian literature and of Bible portions, by means of special courses of evangelistic meetings, and in numerous other ways, individual Christians, as well as Churches, are striving to reach their Moslem friends and neighbours. Thus, gradually, the fallacy is being dispelled that the primary duty of the national pastor is to shepherd his flock while evangelization is the sole concern of the foreign missionary organization and its employees.

To this evangelistic activity of the Churches must be added the patient, unremitting service rendered by missionary schools, hospitals, welfare centres and clubs, all of which are making their impact upon the mental and

WORLD DOMINION

spiritual life of the community. Perhaps at no period in their history have missionary institutions, educational or medical, been so crowded as they are to-day. The growing concern of the Egyptian Government for the welfare of the masses received no small impetus at the outset from the pioneer efforts of Christian missions, and the far-reaching social programme of the State is heartily welcomed, as it should be, by many Christian workers. Up to the present there is no ground for apprehension that the day of Christian educational and medical service has passed. On the contrary, the need for a comprehensive system of Christian education for the leaders and youth of the Christian Church, and of adequate social service, such as is expressed in welfare centres and clubs, for its various members, is probably more pressing to-day than ever before. At the same time, the Egyptian Christian community is beginning to realize the breadth as well as the depth of the range of evangelization, and an increasing proportion of its members are prepared to enter with enthusiasm into schemes of Christian witness and service along social lines.

In short, the uncertainties and dangers to which the Christian Church is exposed from its position as a minority group within an overwhelmingly Moslem community are driving the Church, not merely to strive for guarantees of religious freedom which may or may not be granted, nor merely to aim at educating public opinion concerning the values for the community itself of freedom of thought and conscience, but what is fundamentally of greater and more abiding importance, they are revealing to the Church the fact that its only permanent source of strength and growth is its whole-hearted dependence upon, and communion with, its Lord and Master, Jesus Christ.

In Japan, at a time when the cult of State Shinto, with its emphasis upon the divine quality of the Emperor and people is being pressed very hard indeed, a religion which unequivocally puts God above all created things, and links the believer in a fellowship with other Christians all over the world is not popular. Christianity is necessarily committed to both these positions.'—WILLIAM PATON, in *World Community*.