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Are Christian Enclaves the Solution?

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Middle East Quarterly
Winter 2001

Since the seventh century, the goals pursued by Middle East Christians have varied from era to era and from area to area, but one generalization holds: Most churches have seen their prime goal as freedom of conscience; if sites of worship are safe and access is insured, ecclesiastic hierarchies are usually satisfied. The laity, in contrast, has put a priority on human rights and safety from physical persecution. Lay Christian representatives and organizations in Iran, Iraq, Syria, Egypt, and Israel-Palestine want their communities protected from the abuse of governments, organizations, and individuals, even if they are underrepresented, misrepresented, or marginalized from political life.

Some Christian groups in the Middle East have set their sights higher still and have attempted to establish autonomy for their communities. Using the rhetoric of self-determination and national liberation, at least three ethnic communities have attempted to establish geographical enclaves: the Christians of Lebanon, the Assyrians of northern Iraq, and the black Africans of southern Sudan and the Nuba Mountains. A fourth group, the nationalist Copts of Egypt, have raised this possibility only to be discouraged by geography and demography.

In other words, alongside the main history of Christian subordination in the Middle East lies a minor tradition of Christian enclaves. Thus, if most Copts of Egypt, Melkites and Jacobites of Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Palestine, and lower Lebanon lived under the *dhimmi* status,¹ Maronites of Lebanon and Assyrians of the Fertile Crescent's highlands, as well as the Nubians of the valley of the Nile escaped it by retreating into enclaves. These minorities who retreated to the remoteness of the highlands were rewarded by being left alone; more effective in the deserts and plains, the Arab armies generally avoided costly and long campaigns against mountaineers.²

Maronites of Lebanon

The first attempt to establish a Christian enclave in the Arab-Muslim Middle East was certainly in Lebanon. In contrast to Christians in the rest of the region, the Maronites never accepted the *dhimmi* status granted by the Muslim caliphs to Jews and Christians living under Islamic rule. Indeed, many Maronite historians allege that the first homeland of Middle East Christianity was established as early as 676 C.E. in Mount Lebanon. This safe haven enabled a warrior group known as the Mardaites—whose faith was Maronite and whose language was Aramaic—to form a highlander state that challenged the Umayyad, Abbasid, and Mamluk dynasties until 1305.

Under the Ottomans, the Maronites and a Muslim minority group, the Druze, co-ruled an autonomous principality in Mount Lebanon. Then, under the French mandate of the 1920s, the Christians were given increasing power over the newly formed state. Abandoning the idea of autonomy and an ethnic enclave, the Maronites dreamed of dominance over a larger Lebanon, to the frustration of many Muslims. In 1975, the Lebanese republic split into two super-

enclaves, with the center defended by Christians and the rest controlled by a Muslim-PLO-Syrian coalition. Only a few years into the conflict, many Christians reverted to the older idea of safe haven or ethnic enclave.

In 1976, the (Christian) Lebanese Front of East Beirut chose to promote the federal system as a way to demand autonomy, and for fifteen years, a central enclave of Christian sectors was formed north of the capital. The main architects of the enclave were the Lebanese militia forces and the political parties backing them. Defended by a sophisticated militia as well as by the main brigades and command infrastructures of the Lebanese regular army held by Christians, this mini-Lebanon was able to mobilize about 20,000 well-equipped soldiers, more than enough to resist the onslaught of 35,000 Syrian troops and their allied Islamist militias until 1990.³

Christian ethnic power reached its apex between 1980 and 1983, during which time the enclave was able to maintain most state institutions and sustain a viable economy in its "free areas." In this period, which both preceded and followed the Israeli invasion of June 1982, the entity maintained by the Christians was a solid nucleus for a mini-state, a "Petit Liban," covering East Beirut, most of Mount Lebanon, areas in the Beka'a, and a southern enclave linked by sea.

In sum, after being attacked by an alliance of PLO, Islamist, and Syrians, the Christians of Lebanon shrank to a smaller "country" and were successful in retaining military and economic power. However, the price of that autonomy was very high. Between 1975 and 1982, dozens of Christian villages and towns outside the central enclave were attacked, razed, and ethnically cleansed. During the same period, massive Syrian bombardments of the Christian areas left thousands of casualties.

Politically, the leaders of that community were not as astute as their Muslim counterparts. In 1983, a split leadership failed to rally the Druze and sign a peace agreement with Israel. This led to anti-Christian massacres in the mountain. In 1988, militia and Lebanese Army leaders missed an opportunity to form a united legal government, leading to a disorganized war against the Syrians in 1989 and, worse, to a fatal civil war among the Christians in 1990.

In October 1990, a Syrian invasion of the central enclave ended fifteen years of Christian autonomy in Lebanon. The constitutional government headed by General Michel Aoun was replaced by a Syrian-controlled regime, and in 1991 Damascus imposed a heavy-handed occupation of the country. The former enclave was subjected to a campaign of Syrianization. During the 1990s, the main Christian political forces fell under systematic Syrian and pro-Syrian persecution. In 1994, the former Christian militia-turned-political party was disbanded; its chief, Samir Geagea, was jailed. Journalists, students, and activists were constantly arrested, many tortured, and some transferred to Syrian jails. Syrian intelligence infiltrated the government, the armed forces, and civil society.

While all Muslims who had been driven out of the enclave returned, most of the Christian refugees from various ethnic-cleansing campaigns were not permitted to regain their homes. School curricula were systematically Arabized, and the three elected legislative assemblies produced a pro-Syrian parliament.

In May 2000, Israel withdrew from the security zone in the south of Lebanon. Hizbullah entered the area as a victor, and the Christian-dominated South Lebanon Army (SLA) was disbanded;

more than 7,000 SLA members and their families went into exile in Israel. With the fall of this last enclave, the Christians of Lebanon lost all territorial bases for resistance.

Since then, Christian resistance has re-emerged in different forms, notably as human-rights organizations. In addition, a growing student movement has emboldened the Christian opposition to Syria, resulting in demonstrations against the regime that have attracted media attention. In the diaspora, especially in the United States and Europe, active Lebanese groups have been lobbying legislatures to expose the Syrian occupation of Lebanon. Lastly, and most recently, the Maronite church under its patriarch, Nasrallah Sfeir, has become vocal in raising the issue of Syrian withdrawal, thereby re-establishing the popular legitimacy of the Christian resistance, particularly once the Council of Maronite Bishops issued several declarations calling for a Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon.

Thus, the Christians in Lebanon, the most formidable force within Middle East Christianity, have been defeated in geopolitical terms. But politically, they are still capable of mounting an opposition force. The question today is: Would they be able to re-establish an autonomous ethnic enclave following Syrian withdrawal, or would they again be defeated by Islamist forces in Lebanon?

Assyrians of Iraq

Christians of Mesopotamia have not been able to establish full geopolitical autonomy in their areas as the Maronites were able to do in Lebanon. But because of the special status quo achieved at the end of the Kuwait war, there is today in northern Iraq an Assyro-Chaldean polity within the Kurdish autonomous zone. Although this Christian autonomous sub-region has for the moment escaped the wrath of Saddam Husayn, it does not have enough strength to claim its own areas.

The Assyro-Chaldean community in Iraq, one million strong throughout the whole country, descends from the various Mesopotamian kingdoms that once ruled the area and formed powerful empires in the Fertile Crescent. But since the fall of the Assyrian kingdom to Persian power in the seventh century B.C.E., no sovereign Aramaic-speaking state has reemerged in Mesopotamia. Converting to Christianity as early as the second century C.E., the Assyrians were subjected first to Persian, then to Arab domination, and finally (in the fifteenth century) Ottoman control.

Under Muslim rule, Christians of Mesopotamia came under the *dhimmi* status. Unlike their co-religionists of Mount Lebanon, the Assyro-Chaldeans did not have the opportunity for a political and military autonomy under Muslim rule, a fact that dispersed them and shrank their numbers. With the liberation of the region from the Ottomans by the British during World War I, many minorities—including the Christians—attempted to carve out ethnic enclaves as prelude to a national homeland. Between 1919 and early 1920, Assyrian nationalists under the leadership of their Patriarch Sham'un fought fiercely to defend their ethnic areas in what later became modern Turkey, shah-ruled Iran, and British-ruled Iraq. As a result of ethnic cleansing by Iranian, Turkish, and Arab-Iraqi forces in the 1920s and 1930s, the Assyrians lost thousands of people and regrouped in the mountainous regions north of Baghdad.

Under the various Iraqi governments, particularly those following the British withdrawal in 1945, Christians in Iraq were politically suppressed. Although substantial numbers of their intellectuals chose to join the Ba'th regime and identify themselves as Arab Christians, the bulk of the Assyrian nationalist movement asserted its ethnic distinctiveness and sought the

establishment of an Assyrian national homeland, called Beit Nahrain. This enclave-to-be comprised regions stretching from western Iran to northern Syria and southern Turkey, with northern Iraq being the basis of the "Assyrian home."⁴

With Saddam's invasion of Kuwait and his subsequent defeat, large parts of Iraqi Kurdistan became de facto autonomous under a no-fly zone enforced by the West. Under Kurdish control, dozens of Assyrian small towns and villages have armed themselves and established local militias. Under the auspices of the Assyrian Democratic Movement, and, in some areas, the Beit Nahrain Party, a Christian sub-entity within the Kurdish autonomous areas has integrated into the Kurdish institutions. Since 1992, five members of the locally elected legislative assembly of Kurdistan have been Assyrians.

Nonetheless, Assyrian leaders and human rights activists around the world have been protesting Kurdish mistreatment of the Christian minority, and several abuses have been documented since the mid-1990s.⁵ Meanwhile, Assyrian attempts to reinforce their own cultural autonomy under Kurdish autonomous rule have not been successful. The current equation—Assyrian participation in Kurdish local autonomy—basically arises from the Kurdish need to integrate the minorities in their territory and use their resources in the confrontation with Saddam's regime.

South Sudanese

Although southern Sudanese consider themselves Africans, and many of their intellectuals would not feel comfortable with the label "Middle Easterners," their struggle is part of the Christian saga in a region dominated by Arab-Islamic regimes. The emergence of a southern-based rebellion since the 1950s and its extensions in the following decades has, for practical purposes, led to the formation of another mostly Christian enclave in the Middle East, one that was fiercely opposed by the Arab world.

The struggle of the Nilotic tribes such as the Nubians and Nuers against an Arab advance into sub-Saharan Africa goes back to the seventh and eighth centuries. The northern Nubian Christian kingdoms fell first. Centuries later, under the Ottomans, further southward incursions pushed Christianity into the sub-equatorial jungles. Under British colonialism, Western Christian missionaries converted large numbers of southern Sudanese, particularly members of the Dinka tribe. The mostly Christian Africans wished to obtain an independent southern state, or at least a province within a federation. But as soon as the British handed over power to the Arabs of the North, federation was replaced by Arabization, triggering the longest civil war in the Middle East, one going on intermittently since 1954. As of 1954–56, the Anya Nya rebels were able to liberate pockets in the southern areas, and these were the first Christian enclaves within the Arab part of black Africa.⁶

The renewal of the civil war in 1983 came about as a result of an Islamization process launched by the northern government in Khartoum, and the war re-established a number of southern enclaves. At different times, those areas liberated by the Sudan's People's Liberation Army (SPLA) under John Garang's leadership stretched as far as the vicinity of the southern district capital of Juba and then shrank to the international borders.⁷ Moreover, these mostly Christian enclaves were not always linked and on many occasions were controlled by rival factions with different political goals. The SPLA of Garang sets its goal as the liberation of all of Sudan, while Garang's main opponents, such as Riek Machar, Lam Akol, and others, advocated separatism in their agendas. Thus, even when the Christian-dominated area was

territorially significant, it lacked a centralized government, socioeconomic infrastructure, and even a fixed locality. For in contrast with the Maronite enclave in Lebanon, the southern Sudanese Christians must move their center of gravity as the conflict with Khartoum shifts.

Still, the factions' military activities have had a unified impact, as the southern guerillas were able to absorb most of the Northern military offensives. And in this way Southern Sudan's Christian enclave has over the decades established a strategic status quo with the North. At all times, a zone of control has existed somewhere in the subtropical areas of the South.

Projected Enclaves, Never Achieved

Apart from the three main enclaves—in Mount Lebanon, northern Iraq, and southern Sudan—other Christian groups in the Middle East have dreamed of similar safe havens in their respective native countries. Among these groups are the Copts of Egypt and the Syriac Aramaics of Syria. Both ethno-nationalist factions have devised projected enclaves but neither has ever seen the light of day. Yet given the changing nature of Middle Eastern geopolitics, even the two projected enclaves may be of interest.

Copts. The Christians of Egypt are the largest body of Christians in the Middle East. They have also, in recent decades, been among the most persecuted. But their demographic dispersion was and is their major handicap. Present in all of Egypt, the Copts have historically been unable to establish a geographic area of concentration where an enclave might be established.

After Arabs invaded Egypt in 640 C.E., the native Copts were subjected to centuries of Arabization and Islamization. In contrast to the Maronites of Lebanon (who had the opportunity of gathering with access to the Mediterranean) and in contrast to the Assyrians of northern Mesopotamia's highlands (who were able to retreat to a mountainous mini-homeland), the Copts of Egypt found themselves trapped between desert and Nile. When the British arrived in the country at the end of the nineteenth century, the Copts had been reduced to less than 300,000. Profiting from English rule, the Christians of Egypt re-integrated themselves into public life.

Nevertheless, a nationalist current, embodied in two Coptic congresses in 1905 and 1912, advanced plans for a Coptic state. The idea was to create a national enclave for the Coptic people in upper Egypt. In the early twentieth century, such a project may have been possible - had the nationalist Copts been as active and influential as, say, the Zionists. But two obstacles emerged. One was the refusal of most bourgeois Copts to embrace a plan that would cut them off from economic ties to the rest of Egypt. The other was a lack of serious lobbying in the West, particularly in Great Britain. While the Zionists were able to obtain the Balfour declaration from London, no such British promise was obtained by the Christians of Egypt.

With the exception of this small nationalist current, the Coptic elites preferred to be part of the national Egyptian establishment, rallying to the Wafd party and sending one of its own to the top executive office: Boutros Boutros-Ghali (the grandfather of the United Nations secretary-general). These Egyptianist Copts hoped the Muslim majority would adopt secularism and distance itself from other Arabic-speakers. But with the departure of the British and the establishment of a revolutionary republic under Gamal Abdel Nasser, the Christians faced a new and sour reality. Although secular in principle, the republic was devoted to Arabism and socialism. Hit by a wave of nationalization and political suppression, thousands of Copts emigrated to the West. The remaining nationalist Copts responded in 1954 with the formation

of an ethnic party, the Coptic Nation (*Umma Qubtiya*). In a few days, it attracted more than 90,000 members. But the regime hastily disbanded the group and arrested its founders.⁸

A fringe attempt to raise the issue of a Coptic enclave emerged in the wake of the 1967 war. Encouraged by Israel's stunning victory, a group of radical Coptic activists offered to help establish a Coptic state in the occupied Sinai Peninsula. This project would have required a massive resettlement of Christian Egyptians into the area between the Jewish state and the valley of the Nile. But there was no funding or institutional organization for a large-scale demographic operation, and Israel was uninterested in such a provocative plan.⁹

The signing of the Camp David agreement made it clear that neither Israel nor the West would weaken the Cairo regime by extending help to a Christian separatist movement in that country, and in 1981 a new era of persecution against the Copts began. Under Sadat, thousands of Copts were arrested and jailed, and Pope Shenouda was put under house arrest and accused of a "plot to divide Egypt." Responding to the oppression of the 1980s, Coptic activists attempted to form a militia-in-exile in East Beirut while Coptic associations in the West launched publicity campaigns against the Egyptian regime. Under President Mubarak, Islamist hostilities and massacres increased against the Christians in Egypt, triggering wider Coptic reactions in the diaspora, and in the 1990s a propaganda war raged between the exiled Coptic opposition and the Egyptian government.

Although a Coptic enclave seems to be unrealistic to most supporters of Egyptian Christians around the world, and in the United States in particular, nationalist Copts believe that without such a solution, they will face forced assimilation.¹⁰

Syriacs. Syriacs have likewise hoped to establish an ethnic enclave, this one in northern Syria. Known for claiming an Aramaic-rooted identity for the country and for its rejection of Arabization, the Athurayo movement looks to the northeastern part of Syria as a core-enclave and nucleus of a future Syriac state.

This group's ideology, prevalent among many Syriacs in northern Syria, has historical roots. At the time of the Arab-Islamic conquest of Syria after the battle of Yarmuk in 636 C.E., the native population of the region was basically Syriac speaking and following various Christian rites. While the majority of the indigenous Christians converted or were forced to convert to Islam and were Arabized, some retained their native culture and religion and accepted *dhimmi* status, as did most of the Christian minorities of the region. These Christians remained marginalized until the French mandate took over in the 1920s. Thereafter, while the Melkite Orthodox majority of the Christian community chose to join itself with Arab nationalists in their quest for Syrian independence, the Syriac minority felt sympathy with its sister community in Iraq and with the Maronite independence movement in Lebanon.

To Syriac nationalists, a preferred solution would have been to join their brethren in northern Iraq by uniting their regions in northern Syria and forming a Fertile Crescent enclave south of Turkey, as a first step towards an Assyro-Syriac Christian state.¹¹ But those visions were shattered by the Sykes-Picot agreement, which divided northern Mesopotamia between British-Iraq and French-Syria, thus separating the Aramaic population of northeastern Syria from its sibling in northwestern Iraq. The formation of two modern states, ruled from Damascus and Baghdad, isolated the Syriacs of the west in the Jazeera and al-Hassaka areas. Since independence in 1943–45, the agenda of the Syriac-speaking Christians in those areas has been largely confined to maintaining a cultural distinctiveness via the use of their own

language. But under the Ba'th regime, which made Arabization an aspect of state ideology, the propagation by an activist group, called Athuriya, of an ethno-nationalist political culture aiming ultimately at establishing an independent state for Syriac-speakers, had to go underground.

The followers of Athurism are found among the Christian population of the Hassaka, bordering southern Turkey and western Iraq. Many among them moved to Lebanon, and from there to exile in Scandinavia and Europe. Inside Syria, the Aramaic nationalists are repressed even though the Ba'th regime has absorbed a number of their dignitaries into the regime's institutions. As long as the Ba'th rule Syria and an Asad rules the Ba'th in Damascus, it is unlikely that any autonomy, even cultural autonomy, will be granted to the Syriacs or to any other ethnic minority in Syria.¹²

Sunni Arab Rejection

The ruling Sunni Muslim and Arabic-speaking regimes of the Middle East disagree on many things, but on one thing they all concur: non-Arabs and non-Sunnis in their midst must not have political power. Symbolic of this consensus, the Arab League has refused to recognize the right of any Christian minority to establish its autonomy, whether through military means or political dialogue. This rejection goes far to explain the vehemence that Christian communities meet when they attempt to establish independence in their own enclaves.

In the three principal cases—Lebanon, Iraq, and southern Sudan—the majority Sunni Arab reaction has been adamant: there must be no recognition and there must be a constant effort to gain control over those areas. The Lebanese Christians endured fifteen years of assault before their enclave finally fell in October 1990. In 1994, the main Christian resistance movement, the Lebanese Forces, was disbanded. The Iraqi regimes have all insisted on the forced Arabization of the Assyrian Christian minority; today's autonomous villages owe their freedom wholly to Kurdish autonomy, which itself results from the imposition of a Western no-fly zone. If Saddam's forces move northward, the Christian entity will be doomed. In southern Sudan, the various Khartoum governments, particularly including the current ruling National Islamic Front, have waged constant wars against southern autonomy.

Israel's Distancing

Israel has changed its attitude towards Christian enclaves of the region. Itself a Jewish enclave in a predominantly Muslim region, Israel at first encouraged the idea of a mosaic of mini-states that would undermine Arab hegemony over non-Arabs. Well before the establishment of the state, Jewish Agency representatives contacted Maronites, Kurds, and other minority groups in the Levant. During the first Sudan civil war, Israeli assistance was evident among the southern guerrilla forces. In northern Iraq, Israeli intelligence agents supported the Kurds. But it was in Lebanon that the Jewish state played the card of a Christian enclave to its fullest. In the 1950s, Prime Minister David Ben Gurion actively looked at the possibility of cooperation with a smaller Christian Lebanon, allied to Israel. As of 1975–77, Israeli assistance to the Christian militias of East Beirut and those of the southern border developed into full-fledged cooperation climaxing in 1982 with the Israeli invasion and the election of Bashir Gemayel as president of the republic.

But Israel's policies towards Christian efforts to establish enclaves then changed, primarily due to the surge of hopes that accompanied the peace process, as well as a wish to accommodate the U.S. government. In 1972, when the Shah suspended his support of Kurdish northern Iraq,

Israel followed suit and terminated its own. After the signing of the Camp David accords with Egypt, Israel did not respond either to Coptic requests for cooperation or to southern Sudan's requests for guerrilla support, for peace with Cairo was too valuable to undermine by supporting minority activities. Its involvement with the Maronites gradually ended between 1985 and 2000.

Western Distancing

The Muslim world supports its brethren in need around the world (e.g., Palestinians, Kosovars, Kashmiris, Chechens) for reasons of cultural and religious solidarity; one might expect Western states would do likewise and wish to rescue the endangered Christian communities of the Middle East. But Christian solidarity in the West during the second half of the twentieth century has almost disappeared.

First, the Christian world has developed a rationale for the principled rejection of any Christian-based international initiatives. Western chancelleries at times even rail against the religious nature of the claims of Coptic, Maronite, southern Sudanese, and Assyrian peoples, dismissing them as extremists. The cause of Middle East Christianity has been relegated to a low level of concern or even criticized by Western diplomats and intellectuals. An anti-Maronite and anti-minority ambiance prevails among "Arabists" in the State Department.¹³ John Esposito argues that Middle East Christians, particularly Maronites, have had excess power and do not need to be granted autonomy.¹⁴ Elaine Hagopian accuses Maronites of seeking "dominance in Lebanon."¹⁵ In the media, this trend produced a wide literature, symbolized best by Jonathan Randall's *Going All the Way: Christian Warlords, Israeli Adventurers, and the War in Lebanon*.¹⁶

Second, Western lack of concern for Christians results from a desire to gain favor with oil-producing regimes as well as a priority on Arab-Israeli diplomacy. This latter point deserves attention, for the Arab-Israeli conflict vastly overshadows the Middle East's Christians. World attention being focused on the fate of Palestinians and Israelis, little attention or energy is left over for Maronites, Assyrians, or the other minority peoples. For example, for the Christians of Aramaic background to obtain an enclave in Syria would require a restructuring of the whole country, a course not endorsed by Washington, whose main concern is to keep Syria united under a strong centralized power and committed to negotiating a peace agreement with Israel.

Ironically, while Washington, London, and Paris came actively to the rescue of Muslim enclaves in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Israel, they not only turned a deaf ear to Christian enclaves of the Mediterranean, but in many instances acted to undermine them. Christians in the Middle East have battled for these enclaves alone and often against the will of Western powers. While the Arab revolts of Algeria, Syria, Iraq, Sudan, and Palestine were seen as legitimate and granted recognition, the non-Arab movements within those countries were disqualified.

Even the Vatican's foreign policy is opposed to Christian autonomy in the region; instead, it strongly recommends moderation and integration to indigenous Catholics. While openly supportive of Arab Palestinian independence from the Jewish state and Kosovar Muslim separatism from Serbian Orthodox domination, Rome's Curia has withheld similar support from Lebanon's Christian resistance, southern Sudan's black rebellion, and northern Iraq's Aramaic claims. Similarly, the Vatican has been more supportive of Egypt's ruling establishment than of its beleaguered Coptic church.¹⁷

The same is found among Protestants, where the mainstream churches have focused almost entirely on the plight of the Palestinians, and hardly on the persecution of the region's Christians. Lutherans, Anglicans, and Episcopalians have advocated the causes of the people of Palestine and Iraq, while ignoring the causes of Christian people in Mesopotamia and Lebanon. Those attitudes were also expressed by the World Council of Churches, which is represented in the region by the (mostly Protestant-Orthodox) Middle East Council of Churches.

What Middle East Christians Can Do

But Western policies towards Christian enclaves in the Middle East are not irreversible. The possibility of Western sympathies is evidenced by the passage of legislation in the U.S. Congress to assist the persecuted religious minorities around the world and in the Middle East in particular. This resulted in good part from a surge in Christian solidarity that has been apparent worldwide, and especially among Evangelicals and conservative Catholics. Of late, Balkan and Russian Orthodox have also come to the support of Christian causes in the Middle East. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, veterans of Soviet watch groups shifted their energies to investigate the authoritarian regimes in the Middle East. As a result, the mistreatment of Christian and other minorities was increasingly noticed and reported by human rights organizations. In addition, the increase in Islamist strength, with its attendant anti-Christian activities, has triggered wide concern.

The Middle East Christian themselves can help this process by taking several steps:

- * Reunite their forces and work on a unified national agenda, which in turn requires working along democratic and pluralistic lines. From Mesopotamia to Nubia, Christian enclaves were defeated as a result of internal disunity. The main enclaves, particularly the Maronites and the southern Sudanese, have been plagued with internal civil wars that destroyed more infrastructures than their external foes.
- * Establish close ties among themselves and act together in the face of the international community. When one group is besieged, others must come to the rescue. Solidarity is a tactic that Middle East Christians have not learned yet from Muslims and Jews.
- * Address Western and U.S. publics more clearly and rationally. Today's international opinion is less interested in past histories and its abundant literatures than in tragic stories of underdog nations. Middle East Christians must have the humility to admit their status as persecuted nations.

Charles Malik, ex-president of the United Nations General Assembly, stated in 1982: "Today, I am very concerned to know if Christianity will be still present east of the Mediterranean in the year 2000." They did survive to 2000; but will they make it much beyond? Much depends on their adopting these activist policies.

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² Mordechai Nisan, *Minorities in the Middle East: A History of Self Expression*. London: McFarland, 1991.

³ Walid Phares, *At-Ta'addudiya fi Lubnan* (Junieh: Kasleek University Press, 1979), pp. 207-334.

⁴ Sargon Dedesho, *The Assyrian National Question* (Modesto: Beit Nahrain Publications, 1987); interview with Sargon Dadesho, *Mashreq International*, Feb. 1986, p. 29.

⁵ U.S. Department of State Iraq Report on Human Rights Practices for 1997 (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, Jan. 30, 1998) at http://www.state.gov/www/global/human_rights/1997_hrp_report/iraq.html.

⁶ Haim Shaked and Yehudit Ronen, "The Ethnic Factor in Sudanese Politics: South versus North," *Ethnicity, Pluralism and the State in the Middle East*, ed. Milton Esman, et al (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 258.

⁷ Francis Madig Deng, "The Identity Factor in the Sudanese Factor," *Conflict and Peace Making in Multiethnic Societies*, ed. Joseph Montville (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1990).

⁸ Da'ud Shanuda, "Hizb Al-Umma al-Qubtiya," *Al-Umma Qubtiya* (Beirut), May 1981.

⁹ Author's interview with Khalil Kallada, secretary general of the Coptic Nationalist Front, Beirut, May 1985.

¹⁰ Warren Cofsky, "Copts Bear the Brunt of Islamic Extremism," *Christianity Today*, Mar. 8, 1993; Youssef Ibrahim, "Copts under Siege," *The New York Times*, Apr. 3, 1993; Carlyle Murphy, "Copts Become targets of Militants," *The Washington Post*, May 19, 1993

¹¹ Author's interview with "Malik Athur," spokesperson of the Athurayo Movement International, Chicago, 1998.

¹² Athurayo (Stockholm), 1985-1990.

¹³ Robert Kaplan, *The Arabists* (New York: The Free Press. 1993), p. 306.

¹⁴ John Esposito, "Panel on Middle East Politics," Middle East Institute meeting, Washington, D.C., Oct. 1991.

¹⁵ "Maronite Hegemony To Maronite Militancy," *Third World Quarterly*, Oct. 1989.

¹⁶ New York: The Viking Press, 1983.

¹⁷ Libanius, "Vatican: La Comprehension de Jean Paul II, Le Reveil," (Beirut), May 14, 1984; S.J. Jean Aucagne, "Vatican: Changement de Cap," *Magazine*, (Beirut) May 19, 1984.