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Coptic Christianity - II

Lead: It was not easy, but in the years following the birth of Islam, Coptic Christianity was able to coexist in Egypt alongside its rival religion near the heart of Islamic culture.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: In the seventh century CE, not too many years after the hijira of Mohammed, Arabs invaded Egypt. For several centuries, Coptic Christians lived under various Muslim regimes, sometimes protected, sometimes persecuted,

sometimes under onerous conditions, but able to survive and conduct worship. There were taxes and restrictions and the inevitable pressure to convert to Islam, but Muslim scholars respected Coptic erudition and permitted a certain flowering and preservation of this brand of Christianity.

Conditions under the Ottoman Turks from the 16th to the late 18th century were easier for Coptic Christians than under the Arabs. There were restrictions on the building and restoration of churches, but that is not terribly different from the experience of Christians in Egypt in the modern era. With the opening of administrative and legal reforms

under the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century, Copts were fully integrated into Egyptian society.

Coptic Christianity in Egypt comprises approximately 7% of the population, although this government figure is somewhat smaller than the number claimed by the Coptic Church. Copts are encouraged to attend daily Mass and study the Bible as well as Coptic language and religion. Because of lingering affection and respect for monastic life, many Copts make brief pilgrimages out to the desert monasteries and are encouraged to consider joining the contemplative life as monks or nuns.

Reinforced by its experience with Islam, Coptic Christianity has always strongly advocated the separation of church and state, and has been active since the middle of the 20th century in efforts to reconcile Eastern and Western Christianity.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

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