

**EGYPT'S ALLIANCE OF HOPE:  
THE PATH TO ENLIGHTENMENT**

**BY**

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**“Every Kingdom Divided Against Itself will be ruined, and Every City Or Household Divided Against Itself will not stand”**

**MATTHEW 12:25**

**“Be Not Like Those Who Became Divided Amongst Themselves and Have Fallen Into Disagreement After Clear Proofs Had Come To Them; a Terrible Punishment Awaits Them”**

**QUR'AN 3:105**

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# **I: Introduction: A Coptic-Muslim Talks Again**

This Talk is a follow up of a talk I gave last May in Cairo, at the invitation of the Rotary Club. It was the first talk I gave in Arabic for a long time.

It was also the first time I had the courage to reveal a secret I kept hidden until then. That is to recite, in public, two poems which I wrote in reaction to a very sad event: the one when some innocent Coptic brothers were attacked as they were leaving the Church after attending the Easter Ceremony.

The Arabic title of my Talk was: Anna Qibti-Moslem; i.e. in English” I am A Coptic-Moslem”. I, then, proceeded to describe the reasons behind this most unusual title, particularly from a practicing Moslem. Two main motives were identified: One was Nationalistic, while the other was a Religious one.

The Nationalistic one related to my deep ever-lasting love of my unique and unmatched country, Egypt. In this context, one should note that, without going into great detail, the word” Copt” is an English word taken from the Arabic word ”Gibt or Gypt”, which literally means Egyptian. That, in turn, can be traced back to an ancient Egyptian word: “Ha-Ka-Ptah”. (34)

As to the Religious one, it is based on my deep faith, based fundamentally on my pride of belonging to the “People of the Book”, with unreserved belief in All the Holy Books and All God’s Prophets and Messengers.

## **II: The Path, the Vehicle, the Co-Pilots, and the final Destination.**

My Talk today takes this Two Pillars for my “Coptic-Muslim” title further. I seek your permission to ask that you join me in a “Journey”, along a Route or a Path leading to an ultimate Destination. Both the Path and the Destination are Quasi-Sacred. (See map of the Journey next page)

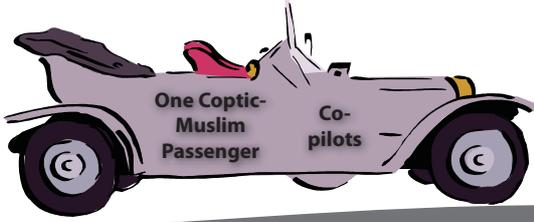
Symbolically, let me call the Route or the Path: “The 1919 Cross-and Crescent Route”. The final destination will be an address at the end of such a Route. It is a house, newly refurbished to suit the mission, though with very old foundations. It is also to be renamed as “Egypt’s House of Hope”. The intended occupants will be a “Core” representing an “Alliance”, to be named the “Alliance of Hope”.

In Navigating through the Route, an environmentally –friendly Vehicle will be used, which, for analytical purposes, will be called the “Enlightenment Vehicle”.

This Vehicle will be Co-Piloted by highly dedicated people, who are primarily committed to an Egyptian tailor-made “Enlightenment” mission. The Co-Pilots will have, preferably but not necessarily, some theological background. Team spirit should be their “motto” and they should solemnly swear to honour all commitments they make and to practice what they preach.

# Egypt's Alliance of Hope Enlightenment Journey

Enlightenment Vehicle



**1919 Cross-Crescent Route**

DEPARTURE

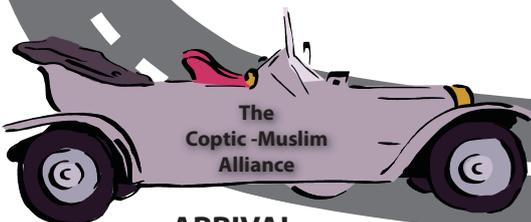


The Journey

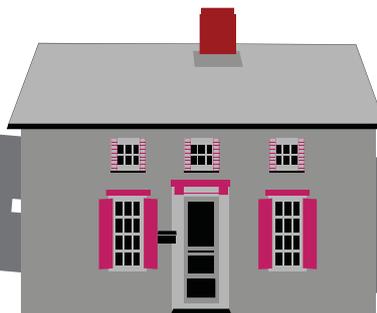
Wisdom Traditions

Engine Recharge

Egypt's House of Hope  
Signature of The Charter of Hope



ARRIVAL  
Final Destination



"Table" "Light"

**2nd October 2010  
Alliance of Hope  
Route....**

### **III: Preparation for the “Enlightenment” Journey: A GPS, the first “Coptic- Moslem Passenger and the “Alliance of Hope”**

With all the details of the “journey” known, and given the horrendous traffic in Cairo, so-to-speak, one needs a GPS to navigate, which fortunately is allowed now in Egypt.

As you all know there are now many types of GPS which are, by far, superior to any Compass, no matter how precise this Compass may be. Also the GPS is chosen to be unique, through the “1919 Cross-Crescent Route”. The Holy Bible - Old and New Testaments - and the Holy Qur’an will form the core of the chosen GPS.

In addition, a wealth of knowledge, with emphasis on philosophies going as far back as the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, would be relied upon. However, it would not be adopted automatically, but would be adapted to be suitable for Egypt’s circumstances, bearing in mind that those trained in such a knowledge will ultimately form a happy “family” to reside in “Egypt’s House of Hope”.

The “Enlightenment Vehicle” will be guaranteed at least “One Passenger”, the “Coptic-Moslem” standing before you this evening. He will be delighted to welcome any other volunteers who will be willing to join such a pioneering mission, (and he knows of many)!!!

This first passenger, being an economist by education and with business experience, is convinced that in no time the “Vehicle of Enlightenment” will resemble Egypt’s buses; full of passengers to the brim, sitting, standing, inside, outside and on top.

One reason for such optimism is that the mission of Enlightenment is long awaited for in Egypt, has been building up over the years, and cannot be delayed any longer.

Moreover, this first, economist passenger, with long experience in forecasting, can predict an unmatched rate of return, even under prevailing gloomy market conditions. The uniqueness of the predicted return is, mainly, to be attributed to the uniqueness of the

GPS chosen, with its core being the HOLY BIBLE and the HOLY QUR'AN.

Starting with at least one passenger, with many more joining throughout the journey, what is hoped for is that the “masses of believers” will be ready to form “An Alliance of Hope”. This would be possible with the passengers being guided by a quasi-sacred GPS to the journey's ultimate destination, Egypt's House of Hope. Once such an Alliance is in place they will be ready to start an ambitious “Peaceful Campaign” aiming to fulfill Egypt's horizon of well-deserved greatness.

However, before the Journey starts, a very important qualification must be made at the outset. Although no journey in Egypt, in general, can escape the debate on domestic politics, it is the intention to deliberately avoid getting immersed in that quagmire, so-to-speak.

Apart from the obvious reasons known to all of you, and to whom it may not be wise to repeat, avoiding the indulgence in domestic politics is based on an assessment of its lack of immediate relevance or usefulness, rightly or wrongly. For example, one can quote Josef Stalin on Democracy, saying:

“Those who cast the votes decide nothing. Those who count the votes decide everything”. (21)

But more fundamentally, it is vehemently believed that what is needed in Egypt now goes far beyond and much deeper than changing the “Political System”, no matter how radical the change might be. Unless and until the “societal” foundations and underpinnings are overhauled, no “Political Change” alone will fulfill Egypt's hopes and aspirations.

While bearing in mind the exclusion of domestic politics per se, this does not mean that it will not be taken into consideration in the analysis. More precisely, and speaking mathematically, with “Egypt's Hope” being the endogenous variable, the equation will include, other things being equal, domestic politics as exogenous variable(s).

## **IV: Charging the “Enlightenment Vehicle”**

Before the “Enlightenment Journey” begins, the “Enlightenment Vehicle” must be prepared. Given that it is environmentally friendly, the “Hybrid Engine” needs to be charged first. The source of charging consists of thoughts and ideas which is, in a sense, a sort of “Renewable Energy”. In the context of this talk these thoughts, philosophies and ideas go as far back as the 17-18th Centuries, but are subject to the proviso of being suitable to Egypt’s circumstances.

The Charger contains “an intellectual movement of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries”; namely the “Philosophy of the Enlightenment”. It is marked by the celebration of the powers of human reason, a keen interest in science, the promotion of religious toleration, and a desire to construct governments free of tyranny.

According to this philosophy “man has essential autonomy, is responsible to himself, to his own rational interests, to his self-development, and, by an inescapable extension to the welfare of his fellow man”. Man was not a sinner, at least not by human nature, and is by origin good, or at least neutral. “Despite the undeniable power of man’s antisocial passions, therefore, the individual may hope for improvement through his own efforts—through education, participation in politics, and activity on behalf of reform”. (36, 37, 42, 43)

In summary, Enlightenment as a philosophical movement is characterized by belief in the power of human reason and by innovations in political, religious, and educational doctrine.

Despite the fact that Enlightenment goes back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century and has been attacked and criticized from many angles, in many ways “The Enlightenment has never been more alive. The notion of human rights it developed are powerfully attractive to oppressed people everywhere, who appeal to the same notion of natural law that so inspired Voltaire and Jefferson.

Wherever religious conflicts erupt, mutual religious tolerance is accepted as a solution. Rousseau’s notions of self-rule are ideals so universal that the worst tyrant has to disguise his tyrannies by claiming to be acting on their behalf. European these ideas may be,

but they have also become global ideals by which modern states are judged”.

Last, but not least, two important observations need to be emphasized on the subject of Enlightenment. One is to warn against regarding the philosophy on Enlightenment as a European heart/brain transplant in recent times into an Egyptian body for political or other reasons. This is far from the truth.

Many scholars, for example, consider Rifa'a At-Tahtawi as the father of Enlightenment in modern Egypt. At-Tahtawi was the first to call for keeping the heritage without bigotry and taking from the West without dependency, thus he became the first thinker who established a relationship between heritage and modernity. (41)

Another example is Muhammad 'Abduh (1848-1905), who restored the primacy of reason, and wrote “that in the case of conflict between reason and tradition, it is reason that has the right to decide”. He, and his disciples, decided to adopt the principles of Enlightenment and to “lead in its name political activity against both local despotism and the colonial aims of Europe”. (40)

Finally, Taha Hussein (1889-1973) “would intrude on the period between the two wars with his Western, positivist message, genealogically linked with the Enlightenment”.(40)

The second observation is, again, to emphasize that the form of the Enlightenment philosophy adopted in this talk is one that recognizes the importance of religion. It is one that “advocates every individual's freedom to pursue whatever non-coercive religion he sees fit”.

As to Islam, as stated by Dr Zakzouk, Minister of Al-Awqaf, “Enlightenment, as seen by the Europeans, was not strange to Islamic thought. The word, in Arabic, is derived from “Nur”(light), which is the opposite of darkness and ignorance, the latter being a form of darkness. (39)

But, in Islam, it is not confined to the mind alone. Islam coupled religion with the mind, and showed that the enlightenment of religion means absence of complexity and vagueness in belief and legislation, and enlightenment of mind means infallibility of

conscience, realization of facts, and distinguishing between different matters”.

The Coptic Church shares this view to a great extent. In a recent article, when referring to Dogmas and Knowledge, it states, “one of the very important characteristics of the Church of Alexandria was her broad-mindedness and openness of heart towards philosophers. While leaders of the Church in other countries looked at philosophy as an enemy of faith (like St Justin and Tertullian), our fathers embraced philosophers with love, treated them as children in need of the church to help them grow through faith into manhood”. (35)

“So the Alexandrians saw faith not as opposite to the mind and knowledge, but as a satisfaction of mind and an elevation of thoughts through which one could enjoy divine knowledge. It concludes by stating “God grants faith to men who are rational creatures, and He would not destroy the minds which He created”.

## **V: The “Volunteer Advocates” Agree Guidelines.**

The Co-Pilots are both Coptic: one is a Coptic Moslem, and the other is a Coptic Christian. Having checked that the “Enlightenment Vehicle” is fully charged with all the necessary enlightenment material, they started planning the Journey.

Joined by the “one passenger”, they decided to regard themselves as “**Volunteer Advocates**” for the Enlightenment mission. They have a great deal in common. They are, in the first instance, All Copts, with a level of Egyptian patriotism at its peak. They All belong to the “People of the Book”, whom the Holy Qur’an confirmed should have “no fear, nor shall they grieve” (Qur’an 2:62). They are people who are determined:

**“Not to hate one another and not to be jealous of one another, and not to boycott one another, and be servants of God as**

**brethren” (Hadith of Bukhari 78:57), at the same time observing:**

**“He who is least among all, he is the greatest” (Luke 9:48)**

Guided by their very unique GPS, as based on the Holy Bible and the Holy Qur’an, the “Volunteer Advocates” decided to agree the guidelines for the Journey, to list them in writing, and to abide by them in their advocacy role, as follows:

- The ultimate destination is to reach" Egypt's House of Hope" safely.
- “To speak up for the people who cannot speak for themselves. To protect the rights of all who are helpless. Speak for them and be a righteous judge. Protect the rights of the poor and needy”.  
Proverbs 31:8-9
- “O ye who believe! Avoid suspicion as much (as possible): for suspicion in some cases is a sin: And spy not on each other, nor speak ill of each other behind their backs. Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? Nay, you would abhor it... but fear Allah: For Allah is oft-returning, most merciful”  
Qur’an 49: 12
- “Stop judging by mere appearance”.  
John 7:24
- “Call on your God humbly, and in Secret”.  
Qur’an 7:55
- “Take nothing for the Journey- no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra tunic”.  
Luke 9:3.
- “Provide for the journey, but the best provision is piety”.  
Qur’an 2:197
- “Do not judge and you will not be judged”. Luke 6:37,

- “Wrong not, and you will not be wronged”.  
Qur’an 2:279
- “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God”.  
Matthew 5:9
- ”Make peace between your brothers, and fear God, so you will obtain mercy”.  
Qur’an 49:10.
- “Simply let your “Yes” be “Yes” and your “No”, be “No”. Matthew 5:37,
- “Do not mix truth with Falsehood, and do not conceal the truth when you know it”. Qur’an 2:42
- “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”  
Matthew 5:10
- “The most excellent Jihad is the uttering of truth in the presence of an unjust ruler”. Hadith: Mishkat: Tirmidhi 17.
- “Be merciful, just as your father is merciful”.  
Luke 6:16,
- “On those who show compassion, God is the most compassionate”.  
Qur’an 12:64

## **VI: The “Volunteer Advocates” Agree a Priority Agenda for a” Charter of Hope”**

As it must have become apparent when the concept of Enlightenment was discussed, it would take, without exaggeration, volumes to adequately cover it. Listing the general topics alone would produce a very long agenda. Then, focusing the case on, say, a specific country would most likely produce a lengthier extended agenda.

This might suggest that no meaningful analysis can be made without addressing, more or less, all the issues encompassed in the concept. This view seems to be advocated, implicitly, by some of the Enlightenment philosophers. Take, for example, the view expressed by Nikos Kazantzaks that:

“The real meaning of Enlightenment is to gaze with undimmed eyes on all darkness”. (42)

Realistically, it is virtually impossible to follow such a view given the time and space limitations. Under these circumstances one has no option but to be selective, focusing on what we might call “Priority Agenda”, relating the word “priority” specifically to Egypt. Again, some Enlightenment thinkers advocate, implicitly, a priority-related approach. Here, Idreis Shah wrote:

“Enlightenment must come little by little, otherwise it would overwhelm”. (42)

How to decide what the Priority is, thus including it in the Agenda, and what is to be deferred to a later occasion or context was not an easy task, for fear of facing a charge of being biased.

Out of respect for this distinguished audience, and in silent obedience to the quasi Holy status of some of the topics covered in this talk, I endeavoured to my fullest ability to ensure that nothing is said, or included, but for a purpose. Above all else, this purpose is Egypt’s vital interests, and in so selecting a Priority Agenda I seek the truth, and nothing but the truth. In this respect I apologize, in advance, for choosing a very brief Agenda, on behalf of the “Volunteer Advocates”, out of kindness to them, to say the least.

Thus, choosing the name for the “1919 Cross-Crescent Route” was not coincidental, despite the sad fact that such a street or route does not exist in reality, to the best of my knowledge, in Egypt.

This is, indeed, very surprising: for 1919 is a very important date in Egypt’s recent history, while the Cross and Crescent, usually known as a slogan, are of critical significance and relevance to present Egypt and to its peaceful future.

Interpreted in a broader sense to include the core subject of this talk, one is bound to place on the table for discussion at least, two vital

issues which will represent the core of the Priority Agenda relating to Enlightenment and hope in Egypt. These are:

- **“Egyptian Nationalism and the current state of Patriotism”,**
- and**
- **“Religious Harmony and the current state of Tolerance”.**

### **VI.1: Priority Agenda: Egyptian Nationalism**

Regarding the first item, there can be no doubt that Egyptian Nationalism- as distinct from its de facto substitute Arab Nationalism- has witnessed gradual erosion since the middle fifties. The year 1958 marked the culmination of a process of paving the way for the replacement of Egyptian Nationality.

**In an atmosphere of euphoria and highly charged emotion, a name well established and deeply rooted in ancient history and specifically mentioned in the Holy Books, was dropped, namely “Egypt”. It was replaced with a name, the United Arab Republic, that bore no relationship whatsoever to Egypt and its long and ancient history. (29)**

Pursuance of quasi-Marxist policies, following the break-up of the unity with Syria, added a complicating dimension to Nationalism, as perceived by the Egyptians. The “Internationalist” Marxist ideology in a class-related manner marked the start of an era of dilution and erosion of Egyptian Nationalism. This affected, adversely, in a significant way the Egyptians’ confidence in themselves, culminating in the 1967 defeat.

It is true that a number of positive changes have taken place since 1967 and, in particular, the 1973 October War. The courage of the Egyptian soldiers succeeded, to some extent, in restoring some confidence and raising the national spirit. But, this proved to be only temporary, was converted into an Arabic victory, and ultimately not

credited to the Egyptian people. But, as was the custom especially at that time, it was attributed to the concept of “the leader, the great, the saviour etc” which was first introduced in the 1960’s.

**With this historical background, any Enlightenment campaign must aim to achieve a marked revival of Egyptian Nationalism as the highest priority. Egypt needs so desperately to return to the “Golden Age”; a return to the fever and zeal of Egypt’s 1919 revolution, which was nationalistic in every single detail.**

This can only be achieved by direct appeal to the people, to their acquisitive and patriotic instincts. This must be pursued democratically, calmly, logically and, most importantly, peacefully.

In this connection, one cannot avoid wondering:

**Why the name Egypt is not sufficient?<sup>1</sup>**

**Why we do not hear of, say, the European Republic of France, or the European Republic of Germany, or the Anglo-Saxon Republic of the United States of America and many others?**

**Why then the Arab Republic of Egypt???** Is the name “Egypt”, as it has always been, not sufficient?

**Certainly, the return to the original historical name “Egypt” could be the first signal of a process of ‘returning home’ to Egyptian Nationalism, and restoration of confidence, self-reliance, and pride?**

**Who best to pursue this ambitious and highly significant priority than an” Alliance” of all sincere, committed, and deeply proud Egyptians?**

However, before the second item in the Priority Agenda is addressed, one cannot ignore the relationship between energizing Egyptian nationalistic feelings and some geopolitical concerns relating to Egypt, as defined by some political theorists as a “Pivotal” state.

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<sup>1</sup> A new phenomenon is becoming very noticeable recently in Egypt. Pregnant ladies travel to give birth abroad, for the newly born to be entitled to a foreign passport, as if an Egyptian passport alone is not preferable!!!!

As such it is well placed to play a number of “regional roles” with “critical interests in demography, land, and water use and the environment, many of which can best be promoted in a regional or international context”. (30)

Egypt has played this pivotal role, both regionally and internationally, stretching back to approximately 1804-1805, and continued to play such a role ever since. But the benefits to Egypt were not always as hoped for, and most certainly are due for a fresh review as a start.

### **Some important changes are needed to boost Egypt’s position in regional and in international affairs: (30)**

- Egypt should open up strategically and proactively to its entire geopolitical surrounding world.
- One needs to remember Mohamed Ali’s foreign policies in the 1800’s and, in particular, opening up to Europe, which enabled strong Egypt to become a significant power, stretching its domain of influence to Central Asia, southern Europe and through to the Arabian peninsula.
- As to the relationship with the US, Egypt must self-recognize its critical strategic importance to the vital interests of the US. Accordingly, Egypt must play a “hard-to-get” friend of the US.
- A strong dignified Egypt cannot accept Israel’s monopoly of nuclear arms capability and its refusal to sign the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty since 1995. And,
- Last, but not least, it is about time that the Camp David Accord is renegotiated. Circumstances have changed since it was signed and at least some provisions relating to Egypt’s sovereign rights over Sinai are no longer acceptable. One should bear in mind that an “Accord” is not real peace. Permanent lasting peace is one between equals, not between one that has unilateral power of causing total nuclear destruction and one that does not have anything similar!!

## **VI.2: Priority Agenda: Religious Harmony**

In discussing this proposed item in the Priority Agenda, there is no intention to deal with the topic of religious harmony in its conceptual or general contents. One aims to be specific by focusing on the inter-relationship between the Egyptian Orthodox Christians and the Egyptian Moslems. In this subject matter alone, and for the sake of brevity, Egyptian Orthodox Christians will be referred to as the "Copts". (33&34)

The history of Christianity in Egypt can be regarded as having begun with the visit of the Holy family. The Copts attribute the blessings of Christianity on their country to the days when Jesus was a young boy. The Holy family, consisting of the baby Jesus, Mary and Joseph travelled to Egypt and lived there for some time.

However, historically it was St. Mark during the first century AD, who is considered to actually be the founder of the Church. He preached and suffered martyrdom in Alexandria around the time Nero ruled Rome. The early Christians of Egypt suffered considerably at the hands of the early Roman pagans, as did others prior to the Rule of the Roman emperor Constantine, who not only legalized their faith, but also encouraged it by being a Christian himself.

However, following the split of the Church in 451 AD, the persecution against the Coptic Christians of Egypt began. After having survived the persecution of the Roman pagans, they were "once again besieged now by other Christians. Hence, when the Arabs invaded Egypt in the mid-seventh century AD, they met little resistance from the native Christian population".

Following the Arab Muslims invasion around the middle of the seventh century AD, the Coptic Church suffered a short period of decline. However, for the four centuries that followed the Arab conquest, the Coptic community and the Coptic Church generally flourished and Egypt remained mainly Christian. This can, to a large extent, be attributed to the fortunate position that the Copts enjoyed, for Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) had an Egyptian Coptic wife. She preached a special kindness to the Copts, reportedly saying:

**“When you conquer Egypt, be kind to the Copts for they are your protégés and kith and kin”. (34)**

Copts, accordingly, were allowed considerable autonomy and an unrestricted freedom to practice their religion; though they had to pay a special tax “Gizya” qualifying them as “Ahl Zemma” protégé (protected).

But the Christian face of Egypt began to change by the beginning of the second millennium A.D. In addition to the Gizya, Copts were subjected to some unfair stipulations, some of which interfered with their freedom of worship and were, thus, serious. Restrictions were imposed on refurbishment or the building of new churches. Other restrictions dealt with aspects of individual freedom, such as on testifying in court, on public behaviour, on adoption, on inheritance, on public religious activities, and even on dress codes. By the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the face of Egypt changed from being predominantly Christian to a predominantly Muslim country. At the time, and for a period, the Coptic community found themselves in an inferior position and anticipated some Muslim hostility, which occasionally flared into violence.

By the early 19<sup>th</sup> century the position of the Copts began to improve. In the opinion of many scholars, this improvement can be attributed, to a very great extent, to the “stability and tolerance” of Muhammad Ali’s dynasty. The Coptic Community ceased to be regarded by the state as an “an administrative unit” and, by 1855 A.D., the main mark of Copts’ inferiority, the “Gizya” tax, was lifted, and shortly thereafter Copts started to serve in the Egyptian Army”.

**“The 1919 A.D. revolution in Egypt, the first grassroots display of Egyptian identity in centuries, stands as a witness to homogeneity of Egypt’s modern society with both its Muslim and Coptic sects.”**

**One can even go further and say that:**

**“Today, this homogeneity is what keeps the Egyptian society united against the religious intolerance of extremist groups, who occasionally subjected the Copts to persecution and terror”.**

The word “Today” in the above quotation might raise an “eye-brow”, to say the least? An honest answer is to say, “it depends” on what one is referring to?

When the reference is to “**homogeneity**” amongst the two sects of the Egyptian population, “**today**” clearly, categorically and unreservedly **means not only today 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2010, but up to this very minute.** Amongst the two communities absolute loyalty to Egypt remains as solid as it has ever been. Their dedication and love to Egypt and to each other is deep and unshaken. Quoting one of Rumi’s poems here may be appropriate: (19)

**Be certain  
In the religion of Love  
There are no  
Believers or unbelievers  
Love embraces all**

When the reference is to “**harmony and tolerance**”, the answer to “**today**” is also the “**same as above**”, but requires some **qualification.** One cannot deny that: recent acts of extreme violence against innocent people, just because they are Copts, attacks against places of worship, publications which advocate hatred and incites retaliation, charging infidels, being judgmental, plus recent novel discriminatory behaviour, and the like, all these have adversely affected, and in some cases dealt a blow, to religious harmony.

**But the undeniable fact is that all such deplorable acts have been contained in many ways, amongst which applying the law to all citizens irrespective of their faith, race or else. Most importantly, it was, and is, the intrinsic peaceful loving nature of the Egyptian people, which ensured the “continuity of tolerance”.**

Despite this relatively optimistic assessment, one cannot undermine the dangers facing “religious harmony and tolerance” in Egypt. Yes, most serious threats have been contained, but this would not ensure continuity in the future of relative success. One needs to go deeply through the underlying causes that led to the recent recurrence of such sad events. In this respect it is worth referring, for example, to two issues of domestic nature which require urgent attention:

- Some of the practices, which started in the fifties, such as the de facto allocation of some ministries only to the Copts, must be changed. It was not acceptable that an Egyptian made it to the highest diplomatic position in the world, Secretary General of The United Nation, but could not make it as a Minister of Foreign Affairs in his own country!!!, but only a State Minister, despite promises given during the Camp David negotiations. Was the reason that he was a Copt, as Copts have been allocated since the fifties the Ministry of Supply only responsible for Sugar, Wheat and Rice? However, the allocation has now been promoted to deal with the hated subjects of "Taxation and Expenditure". One cannot help asking the question: Why cannot Egypt have a Copt Prime Minister or even a President? Is there not anybody amongst the Coptic community qualified enough or experienced enough to hold these positions? Why do we not learn from the recent US election of a President who belongs to a race which was hated until recently and who only came to America in his youth?
- There is no doubt that a change in the Education Strategy, in its entirety, in Egypt is urgently needed, based on the recognition that human capital is the most valuable asset amongst all other resources. However, this is likely to require a long time and effort before it can come to fruition. But, there is a critically urgent matter relating to religious tolerance and harmony that cannot wait. History and religious books used in Egyptian schools and institutes of education need to be urgently revised. Over the years, the former were subjected to changes that served certain political objectives, while the latter witnessed inclusion of extremist material, mostly imported, invisibly, to Egypt.
- While Freedom of Speech and Freedom of the Press and Media must be preserved, a New Code of Conduct, legally binding, must be developed and agreed by all parties concerned. This should prevent publications which threaten religious harmony from being published or broadcast such as the ones recently broadcast- making

allegations of treason and arms-stocking in places of worship or casting doubts on Holy Books, being the Qur'an or the Bible!!!!

Of course, one cannot ignore the indirect impact of some macro factors, which history tells us have had significant impact on religious tolerance. Respect for human rights forms an integral part of human tolerance. Fear, lack of confidence, a feeling of injustice, limitation on freedom and the like make people less tolerant with each other. Extreme poverty, loss of hope in economic improvement, and worsening of income and wealth equality lead to violence, in general, and envy and intolerance in particular. Erosion in the traditional moral and ethical heritage, and, in particular, the adoption of materialism, and weakening of spiritualism, contribute to intolerance, and even violence. Last, but not least, the "fractioning" of the family, as the nucleus of social cohesion, is a matter which needs urgent attention.

**Certainly, the return to the historical Cross-and crescent slogan of the 1919 is urgently needed, and who best can pursue this ambitious and highly significant priority than an "Alliance" of all sincere, committed, and deeply proud Egyptians?**

As the "Volunteer Advocates" move to the next stage, they decided to adopt an optimistic approach, in relation to yesterday and today, before they could move the "Enlightenment Vehicle" in the direction of the "1919 Cross-Crescent Route".

Looking to the future when the Priority Agenda should result in a "Charter of Hope", they borrowed another poem from Rumi, again, which says: (19)

**It is good to leave each day behind,  
Like flowing water, free of sadness  
Yesterday is gone and its tale told  
Today new seeds are growing.**

## **VII: The “Volunteer Advocates” Spread The Word & the birth of the”Coptic Muslim Alliance of Hope “**

In discussing the Priority Agenda I deliberately avoided numbering the two main items. Not only as they are regarded as being equally important, equal in urgency, but because they are fundamentally inter-related. The degree and strength of religious harmony affects, positively and negatively, the degree and strength of Egyptian nationalistic status, and the latter, in turn, affects Egypt’s domestic front and its influence regionally and internationally.

Given such a strong link between the two topics, one can anticipate that when the priority agenda is discussed the two topics will be dealt with together, almost as one topic, regardless of how the discussion formally begins. This expectation is likely to go further than the starting task of discussion, and to go beyond it to form a program of joint action, involving, more or less the same core actors.

Thus, when the “Volunteer Advocates” commence their program of spreading the word, so to speak, they are likely to perceive, action wise, the two Priority items of the Agenda as one item, whose constituents are intrinsically inter-related. Such an approach is unavoidable, particularly as they would rely on the same source of Enlightenment wealth, stored in the Enlightenment vehicle, in addition to the agreed guidelines based on the Holy Books.

The question of which of the two items will be used to commence the program of interrelated action relating to the interrelated items proved to be much easier in this case, to what is normally the case in most other interrelated matters. A quote from Rumi again proved to be of great help. Referring to the “hand of God”, Rumi’s poem says:  
(19)

**Today is such a happy day  
There is no room for sadness  
Today we drink the wine of trust  
From the cup of knowledge.  
We can’t live on bread and water alone.  
Let us eat a little from the hand of God.**

Starting from the religious aspect, one has to admit that there are differences between Islam and Christianity in general; also, there are differences within Islam and within Christianity. These differences are bound to cause differences amongst the respective believers. Adding other worldly aspects, these differences could reach such levels as to lead to flare-ups, or even result in violence.

In themselves differences are neither bad nor good and should not necessarily lead to conflict. Even when they cannot be reconciled, each party's position should be respected, if it cannot be accepted, and should, under no circumstances, result in animosity or hostility. What matters is not the existence or otherwise of differences, but in how one deals with such differences. This question does not apply to matters of religion only, but applies to many other matters, related or unrelated to religion. In fact, they apply within the single person's thoughts and emotions.

The 'how' question has one, and only one, answer, in my considered opinion, that is "dialogue" between the relevant parties, with a view to improving harmony, and preventing differences from escalating to the level of undesirable action. In this respect, one should have faith in the positive nature of human potential, and, hence, genuine harmony is achievable through constructive dialogue.

In a recent book, "Towards the True Kinship of Faith", by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, he addressed the general question of "How the World's religions can come together". The prescription provided in chapter 8, "A Program For Inter-Religious Understanding", applies within the one country as it applies on a world level. In fact, on page 143, in what His Holiness (humbly, as usual) called "my own limited aspirations", he strongly recommended application of his prescription to the "national level", and not to confine to the World's level only. Logically, one can deduce from this position an assumption of application at a national level as a prerequisite to moving to the next level, which could be, say, the regional level, leading ultimately to the international level. (10)

His Holiness presented a program for the promotion of inter-religious harmony and understanding based on dialogue, which included four key elements, as follows:

(1) “Dialogue between scholars of religion on the academic level regarding the convergences and divergences of their respective faith traditions and - more important - the purpose of these different approaches”.

When applied to the case of Egypt, the purpose should not be too ambitious as to focus on “theological” aspects, but rather on the ramification on consolidating inter-religious harmony amongst the Coptic and Muslim communities.

(2) “Sharing of deep religious experiences between genuine practitioners.” In this connection, he adds “when genuine practitioners from two different traditions meet, they are able to recognize the qualities present in each other as the very same qualities they seek to cultivate in their own faith traditions, in the fashion of seeing one’s own face in a mirror”.

Again, when applied to the case of Egypt, this can be adopted at many levels, both top-down and bottom-up, but must be in a carefully thought out way, and to be so programmed in such a way as to ensure constructive outcome of furthering understanding.

(3) “High-profile meetings of the religious leaders to speak and pray from one platform”. His Holiness quotes the example of His Holiness John Paul II when he convened “the Inter-Religious Meeting of Prayers for Peace in Assisi, Italy, in 1986”. At this Meeting, attended by many of the World’s religious leaders, they ”prayed from a single platform and for a single goal-namely world peace in a united voice.” He added, “Not only was this historic, it was also deeply touching”.

In Egypt, attending each other’s religious festivals and important events by leaders of the Coptic Church and their corresponding Muslim leaders have been the case for a long time, which included prayers appropriate for the occasion. When they do, they do not simply do it as a formality, but in a well-meant and in a very cordial, brotherly, way. When applied to Egypt, the question that presents itself here, in view of the Dalai Lama’s proposal, is how joint prayers can be organized, at what level or levels, and which platform or platforms, how regularly, and, most importantly, what wordings can be used on the basis of their respective Holy Books? It may help, in this connection, to quote Delia Smith, in her book “A Journey into God”, which says:

**“A prayer into its simplest form is a one-word description of a whole lifetime’s journey into God, a single word encompassing all that is central to human life”.**

(4) “Joint Pilgrimages to the World’s Holy places”. In applying such propositions, one might face some difficulties, if not adapted selectively to ensure strict compliance with “Pilgrimage Rules and Regulations”. In this respect one must refer specifically to the restrictions and requirements associated with Pilgrimage to Mecca, which is a (conditional) pillar of Islam, permitted only to Muslims.

These elements of the program put forward by His Holiness the Dalai Lama could form an important part of the Enlightenment mission of the Volunteer Advocates, to which they could devote time and energy, as the Vehicle of Enlightenment navigates through the 1919 Cross and Crescent Route, towards their final destination of Egypt’s House of Hope.

However, the above primarily religious based elements of the program were not meant to be advocated per se, separate from the nationalistic dimension of the Priority Agenda, but to initiate an integrated discussion. While, by and large, agreeing with His Holiness’ proposals, possibly adapted to suit Egypt’s circumstances, the Volunteer Advocates must consider other complimentary initiatives. These can be numerous, hence some examples are suffice for the purpose of this paper, such as (continuing with the numerical sequence):

(5) The establishment of a” **Supreme Joint Coptic -Muslim Advisory Council**” could provide pertinent advice , not only in relation to religious matters, but it could go further in providing inputs to decisions relating to Egypt’s national interests. Currently advice is sought, and provided, from the highest authorities of the Coptic Church and the Islam Mufti. This is bound to miss some aspects of interaction, inter-relationship, and, most significantly, empowers the political establishment to be selective. Although it is advocated strongly the establishment of such a supreme joint advisory council, this does not, and should not, entitle such council to become part of the political decision-making process, or to regard it,

in any way, as a license to interfere in what are predominantly political issues or matters.

(6) There is currently a process, at inception stage, aiming to form a **Movement of Thakafa't Al Mowatanaa (the culture of citizenship)**, with similar objectives and spirit to the ones advocated in this paper. Dr Ali Eldein Hillal, a highly respected and an original political thinker, who is, also, well experienced in Egyptian national policy affairs, is the principal promoter of this initiative. In principle, I am also interested in being involved in this said movement. At the top of its priorities comes religious harmony and tolerance, within the framework of deepening nationalist fever. Its initial charter envisages a wide-ranging program of diversified activities, targeting primarily the youth. This movement could be one worth supporting and promoted by the Volunteer Advocates.

(7) Any close observer of Egyptian celebratory occasions cannot miss the fact that they are numerous, covering many facets of life. In addition to the religious ones, there are many others, some of which are what we might call macro-nationalistic ones; such as celebrating the Victory of the October War and others relating to the 1952 revolution. But, in addition there are many, in fact hard to count precisely, which we might call, with due respect, micro-events or specific institutionally related ones.

In the context of this paper, the Volunteer Advocates might want to consider the promotion of a special annual event, reflecting the homogeneity and harmony of Egypt's population, and is used to revitalize national allegiance and faith in its future.

### **Why do we not establish a major national event worthy of celebrating; that is "A Festival of Hope"?**

This event could be dated in relation to a very important date in Egypt's history, perhaps a date selected from the 1919 revolution. It could involve diversified activities, from cultural, to sports, to entertainment, to novel and creative ideas, lasting more than one or two days, and cover the whole nation. There is nothing unusual about these festivals, as many countries in the world arrange similar events, and people look forward to enjoying them.

(8) The mission of the Volunteer Advocates should not end by simply fulfilling the objectives of their Enlightenment mission. It is true that their mission is not a simple or easy one. To the contrary, as stated by Jenkins and Munslow in their book "The Nature of History Reader", it involves many concepts and many tasks when it relates to the Volunteer Advocates:

**" Concepts such as citizenship, the state, civil society, public sphere, human rights, equality before the Law, the individual, distinction between public and private, the idea of the subject, democracy, popular sovereignty, social justice, scientific rationality, in addition, of course to religious harmony"**

To ensure continuity, they should aim to establish:

### **"A Muslim-Coptic Alliance of Hope"**

Such an Alliance - **Call it the MCAH-** should be **NON-Political**, but primarily a civil non-governmental (NGO) movement. It would be based on a **"Charter of Hope"**, based on the Enlightenment guidelines and the other Holy guidelines which bound the Volunteer Advocates, when they started their mission.

(9) The "Charter of Hope" should be drawn to serve primarily the twin objectives of enhancing Egyptian Nationalism and strengthening Religious Harmony. Its main slogan should be:

### **"Egypt First, Egypt First & Egypt Always"**

This should not be misinterpreted as an attempt for Egypt to disengage from its special relationship with both the Arab and Islamic world. However, special relationship is one thing and abandoning one's historical identity is another. Britain has had a special relationship with the United States, and still does, but did not feel obliged to adopt American Nationalism. Furthermore, Britain's joining the European Union did not automatically or necessarily lead to the adoption of European Nationalism, if such a thing exists. British nationalistic feelings and pride were revived during the Thatcher era, after a period of loss of self-confidence, and remained until now the most predominant factor in Britain's way of life.

This leads to a very controversial issue. Egypt's national anthem was changed to become a reflection of a single love to one country;

namely Egypt. This raises a related issue, which may prove to be highly controversial. Is it not time to consider Egypt's flag too, so that it reflects the intrinsic everlasting feature of Egypt, rather than being related to a specific event, even if many regard it as an important revolutionary event? If we are, for the sake of argument, to base it on an event, is the 1919 awakening of true unified Egyptian identity not a far more important event? If the answer is undoubtedly yes:

**“Perhaps, this slogan, signifying the unity of the Cross and Crescent, would be a better and more meaningful choice for a new Flag?”**

As one should not underestimate the resistance to this alternative flag for Egypt, in the interim, perhaps it should be chosen as:

**“The adopted Flag of the Muslim-Coptic Alliance of Hope.”**

## **VIII: Destination: Egypt's House of Hope**

The Vehicle of Enlightenment is now about to enter its final destination; namely Egypt's House of Hope. But the Vehicle which started with the Co-Pilots and one Coptic Muslim passenger is now a typical Cairo bus, full of passengers who are so convincingly keen to join the " Muslim-Coptic Alliance of Hope".

However, although Egypt's House of Hope has an address on a relevant and significant route, both the House and the Route are not physical, but "symbolic". On one hand, the Route symbolizes one of the most important events in Egypt's recent history. On the other hand, the House symbolizes all that the Charter of Hope covers, founded on the basis of Enlightenment and guided by the Holy Books of the Bible and the Qur'an.

Thus, this House, conceptually, exists in every corner of Egypt. Examining the attached map of Egypt of the Route followed by the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, one would notice a very important feature: **Jesus blessed almost All of Egypt**, after crossing the border he visited almost the whole of the Delta, then headed

south, following the route of the Nile, again, almost to the most southern borders of Egypt. In so doing, Isaiah's prophecy is fulfilled:

**"When the time comes, there will be an altar to the Lord in the Land of Egypt, and a stone pillar dedicated to him at the Egyptian border. They will be symbols of the Lord Almighty's presence in Egypt". (Isaiah 19:19)**

**"The Lord Almighty will bless them and say 'I will bless you: Egypt my people". (Isaiah 19:25).**

The conception of Egypt's House of Hope would include the most precious and valuable documents of Christianity and Islam, would have at its disposal all the important Libraries in Egypt, would make available halls for gatherings, rooms for lectures and events. Lectures, classes, festivals, enlightenment type of entertainment, tutorials, and coaching could be arranged. Above all, it will ensure that Egypt's Flag will always be rising up high, signifying the pride, and uniqueness of Egypt's pivotal status.

In these impressive surroundings the "Muslim-Coptic Alliance of Hope", sat around the "Table", a very special Table, remembering that the Qur'an said in Surat Al-Maida:

**"Said Jesus, the son of Mary. "O Allah our Lord! Send us from heaven A Table. That there may be for us - For the first and the last of us- a solemn festival. And sign from thee; and provide for our sustenance. For Thou art the best sustainer (of our needs). Allah said: "I will send it down unto you. But if any of you After that resisteth faith I will punish him With a Chastisement such as I have not inflicted on any one among All the people" . (Qur'an 5:114-115)**

**The light for the "Table" is not just any light, but, quoting the Holy Bible:**

**"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father, which is in heaven"  
(Matthew 5:16)**

**The "Charter of Hope" is, then, duly signed, and a joint prayer is performed:**

**“Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For this is the Kingdom, the Power and the Glory for ever and ever, Amen”  
(Matthew 6:9-13)**

**“In the Name of Allah Most Gracious, Most Merciful. Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds, The Compassionate, the Merciful, King of the Day of Judgment. You alone do we worship and to You alone do we cry for help. Guide us on the straight path. The path of those you have blessed, not those with whom You are angry, nor who have gone astray, Amen”.  
(Qur’an 1:1-7).**

**After pleading for God’s blessings the Alliance of Hope decided to commence a New Journey, through a New Route. With deep commitment to the New mission, they are now gathering at the beginning of the New Route, named “ the 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2010 Alliance of Hope Route”. Their aim is a “ Harmonious Society for a Happy Egyptian Future”.**

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## **Attachment: Jesus in Egypt (25)**

# JESUS IN EGYPT

Discovering the Secrets of  
Christ's Childhood Years

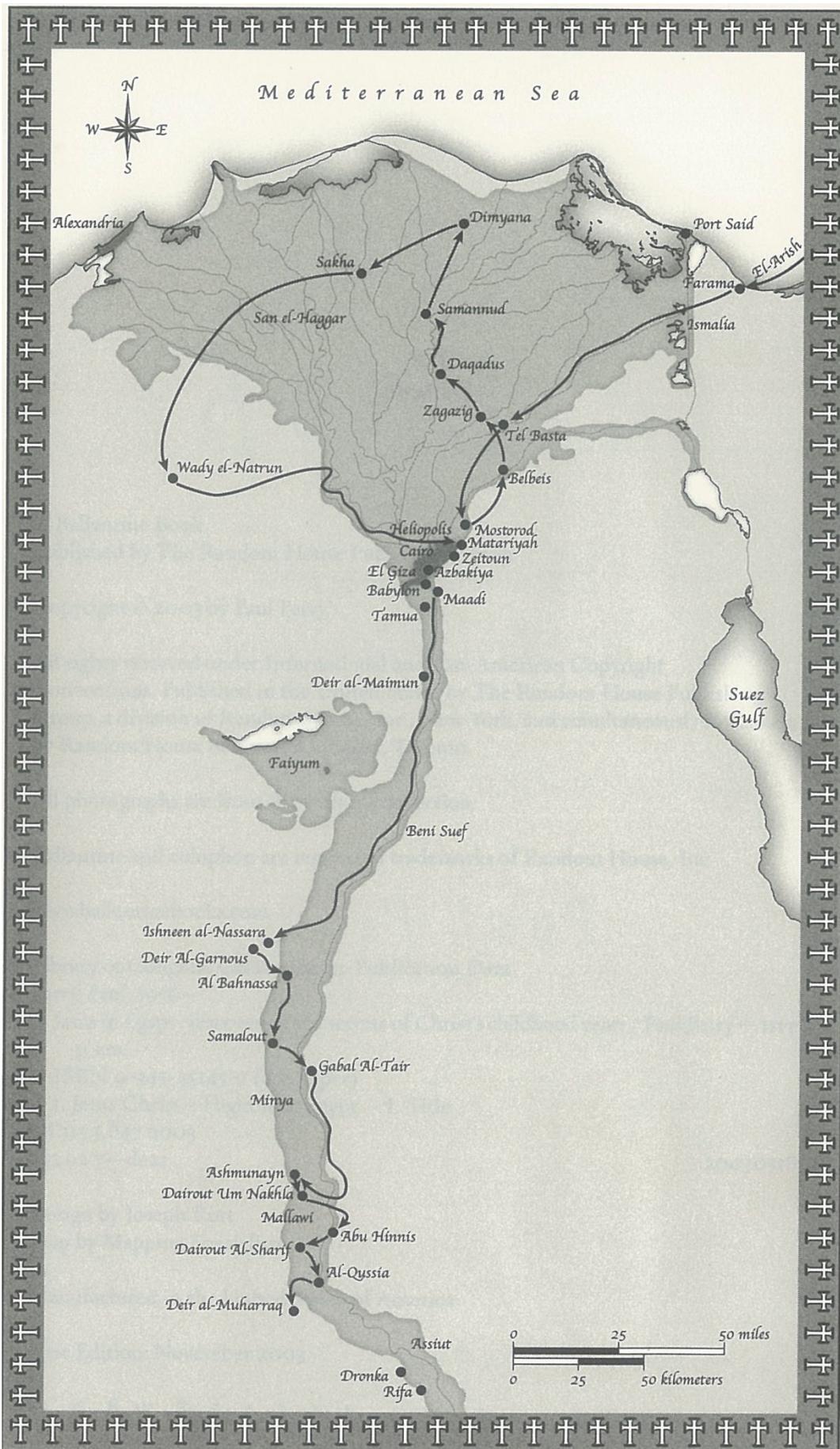


Paul Perry



Behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.

—Matthew 2:13



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