

Abstract

Conversions in Egypt: Social Tensions, Legal Provisions and Biased Reporting

There is no area as sensitive in the relations of Muslims and Christians in Egypt as conversions of Muslims to Christianity and conversions of Christians to Islam. The act of conversion practically always leads to accusations of malpractice by adherents of the converting religion, and can even result in physical violence and arrests. But allegations may not always be true.

Muslims, Christians and Jews have their affiliation noted on their identity card. Converting from Christianity and Judaism to Islam is legally possible, and involves changing one's religious identity on their identity card. However, converting from Islam to Christianity is legally impossible but has been challenged by lawyers for Christians who converted to Islam, and later wanted to return to their Christian faith. Converts from Islam in Egypt risk being arrested if they make statements about Islam that Muslims perceive as offensive.

One hears of large numbers of secret Christian believers among Muslims without providing any evidence (Skinner, 2015). "Missionary Says Christianity On Rise In Middle East." Times-Herald.com, September 24, 2015]. Christians making such claims hardly realize the effect they have on Muslims, who often believe those claims to be true and see this as a threat. Therefore, it is perceived as a call to increase their efforts to defend Islam and increase the awareness of Christians with the message of Islam.

Conversions are sensitive in Egypt but the public discourse about this tends to be strongly influenced by ideological/religious motivations, which in turn aggravates the tensions around conversions.

The paper will use a descriptive methodology and qualitative framework of analysis of the discourse about conversions in Egypt based on 20 years of research on inter-communal relations in Egypt.

Biography

Cornelis Hulsman, B. 1955. M.A. in Development Sociology Leiden State University, 1984, with specialty Islam and Middle Eastern Christianity. Correspondent with different (Christian) media in Egypt since 1994. Founder and editor-in-chief of the electronic magazine Arab-West Report since 1997. Affiliate-Assistant Professor of Mass Communication at the American University in Cairo, 2000-2001, Secretary-General of the Cairo Foreign Press Association, 2003-2009. Published several books and reports and a substantial number of articles about Christianity, Muslim-Christian relations and media in Egypt.

2. In what way does your paper make an original contribution to the chosen field of study?

3. Does your paper show the following features:

- Clarity and logic of argument;
- Originality and concreteness of content;
- Level of engagement with relevant scholarship;
- Accuracy of form, expression, and language inclusiveness