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Youth For Christ Essay

Isolationism and the Modern Coptic Adolescent

In 21st century America, Coptic youth are blessed with all the freedoms and rights endowed to the country's citizens, and encouraged to embrace the opportunities thereby presented. One such right is the one granted by the First Amendment in the Bill of Rights of the Constitution: the right to practice one's religion of choice without the fear of persecution. Unfortunately, our brothers and sisters in Egypt do not enjoy this luxury, a disquieting reality overlooked by many not in the immediate line of fire. Such youth behaviors and attitudes are primarily caused by the current circumstances and mindset of the youth.

Living in America, youth are raised thousands of miles from religious persecution. Physical distance causes mental distance, and youth don't see the problem as immediate or pressing since it is so far away. We are fortunate enough to live in a free country that respects our rights, so many don't realize that not all have this luxury, as all the people they see also enjoy the same respect. The syncretic Coptic- American culture our youth have become a part of further separates them mentally from the tragedies in Egypt. Growing up here, they naturally feel a stronger attachment to America as their homeland, making sympathy for those in Egypt more difficult. Facts and figures about the dilemma are impersonal; the stories we are told are so difficult to relate to since they are so different from our own experiences. And since most of us have never experienced the situation

firsthand, the events that transpire an ocean and then some away are perceived as more myth-like than a reality people just like us have to live through every day.

The mindset of the youth plays a far more significant role in their lack of mercy and compassion. As tragic as it sounds, teenagers are become increasingly self-centered and unable to pull the focus away from themselves, maybe due to America's individualist society rather than Egypt's collectivist society. As Abraham's servant praises God in Genesis 24:27, he says, "Blessed be the Lord God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken His mercy and His truth toward my master. As for me, being on the way, the Lord led me to the house of my master's brethren." He praises God's mercy towards those in need, and as Christians, it is our duty to emulate our Lord, who also said in Matthew 5:7, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." The lack of discipline in modern teenagers also influences Coptic youth through less social rigidity. Many new immigrants from Egypt have children who's parents are struggling to make a living in the new country, and the youth have less time with their parents to solidify our Christian values of love, mercy, and compassion. It is easy to "follow the crowd" of other teens and get wrapped up in your own life, but as the Lord says in Luke 12:33, "Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys." The material possessions we amass for ourselves now bring us no merit in the next life. Selling our possessions and giving to the poor, however, amasses for us goods and riches in the eternal kingdom. An emphasis on compassion and mercy from leaders the youth look up to, such as parents and Sunday School teachers, could be instilled in our youth through trips to Egypt. As St. Augustine said, "The World is a book, and those who do not travel read only a page."

My own father suffered persecution during his 38 years in Egypt. As a medical

student, many examinations were graded subjectively, and he had to work twice as hard as other students just to get the same grade, though he deserved higher scores in actuality. As a Christian, he was denied several jobs based on his religious beliefs and was unable to open up his own practice due to the bureaucratic hoops he would have been forced to jump through, only to be the target of even more discrimination if he ever was able to get the practice set up. Realizing how closely impacted I have been by persecution, I am more likely to aid my family and other Copts in Egypt in any way I can. I was lucky enough to be born in a free country. Many others were not.

In retrospect, many teens seem to lack concern for the persecution of our brothers and sisters in Egypt, mainly due to their mindset and their circumstances. By making more friendships with Copts in Egypt, going on service trips, and realizing how easily we could have been in their situation, we can significantly impact the lives of our brethren for the better. Our Lord died to save even people who were persecuting him; surely we can make small sacrifices for our own brethren.