



Written by [James Heiser](#) on May 27, 2011

Muslim Mob Besieges Egyptian Church

St. Mary and St. Abraham Church in Ain Shams was closed by Egyptian State Security on November 22, 2008, when mob violence perpetrated by Muslims against the church reached the point where thousands of Muslims surrounded the building and pelted it with stones. As [reported on May 24](#) in an article for Assyrian International News Agency (AINA), the violent crowd was back on May 19 of this year, when Coptic priests reopened the church:



On the morning of May 19 two Coptic priests went to St. Mary and St. Abraham Church in Ain Shams and opened it together with some of the Coptic residents, but later in the day thousands of Muslims surrounded the church to protest its opening, hurled stones at the church building and the Copts, who responded by throwing stones. The army and the police stood there watching and did not intervene.

Unable to secure the church, the army and police closed it and arranged for a "reconciliation" meeting between the Coptic priest and the Salafi sheikhs. They also arrested eight Copts, one of them 13-years old, and three Muslims. They were all charged with rioting, violence and causing injury to citizens. Three Copts were also charged with having cartridges but no guns and one 15-year-old boy with possessing two knives. The 3 Muslims were charged with throwing stones at the army. Father Filopateer Gameel, one of the organizers of the Maspero sit-in, said that during a meeting with the Minister of Interior he was told he cannot choose the churches to be reopened because it was all "planned with the Salafis and the security authorities so that when we go, there will be no problems." He confirmed the minister had himself suggested the names of the three churches to be reopened.

The "reconciliation" session was held in a tent by the Islamist imam Kerdassi, the main opponent of the reopening of the church, who also recently built a mosque facing the church. Next to the tent was another one hosting Muslim Brotherhood and Salafi sheikhs, among them the renowned Salafi sheikh Hassan and over 3000 guests all chanting "Islamic, Islamic."

The move of arresting Coptic victims alongside the perpetrators of the violence is typical of encounters between Christians and Muslims in Egypt. Among other things, arresting the victims of the riot on charges of "rioting" allows the government to perpetuate the appearance of evenhandedness, and plays into media distortions of the situation in Egypt, [as reported previously for *The New American*](#). The pattern of anti-Christian violence has grown far worse since the bombing of a Coptic church at the



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beginning of this year. The Salafi and Muslim Brotherhood have taken advantage of the situation since the collapse of the Mubarak regime to persecute Christians with little fear of being held accountable for their actions.

The reason for the anti-Christian riot at St. Mary and St. Abraham Church is simple: The church is recognizably Christian on account of its dome and cross, and in keeping with the long-standing Muslim system of "[dhimmitude](#)," such a public display of the faith of a subjugated religious minority is deemed to be intolerable. In short, what the howling mobs in the street are demanding is that Christians would be "put in their place." As AINA reports,

The Muslims demanded that should the church be reopened, it should be without cross and dome. Coptic attorney Dr. Ihab Ramzy said the army and the police did not participate in the "reconciliation" meeting. "This shows the government is ignoring the problem. Am I there to get the Salafis' permission to open the church? If they say no, does this mean I should not open the church?"

"The joint statement linked the opening of the church with the consent of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces," said activist Mark Ebeid, "so the military council has to know that if the church is not opened, this means the dignity of the State has been lost in front of the Salafis. Everyone believes the government should have carried out its decision to open the church whatever the outcome. The big question now is will the government give us a written permission or not?"

The latest assault on a church is of a piece with the attack on two churches in Cairo earlier in the month. [As reported by the Associated Press on May 8,](#)

Mobs of ultraconservative Muslims attacked the St. Menas church in the Cairo slum of Imbaba late Saturday following rumors that a Christian woman married to a Muslim man had been abducted. Local residents said a separate mob of youths armed with knives and machetes attacked the Virgin Mary church several blocks away with firebombs.

"People were scared to come near them," said local resident Adel Mohammed, 29, who lives near the Virgin Mary Church. "They looked scary. They threw their firebombs at the church and set parts of it ablaze."

The Egyptian revolution so eagerly embraced by the Obama administration has thus far simply set loose the most dangerous elements of Egyptian society, allowing the Muslim Brotherhood to operate openly for the first time in over 50 years, and giving impetus to five socialist and communist parties to form a common front as they seek political power in the "new" Egypt.

As the churches of Egypt are bombed and burned, at least the Muslim Brotherhood has found the "hope and change" for which they have been waiting for so long.

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