

" SUNDAY IN EGYPT "

I. On the 18th February, 1957, the well-known daily paper "Al Ahrām" appeared with the following title on the front page "Commercial, Industrial & Educational Establishments to Close on Friday".

The paper thereunder said that a "Draft Law" had been prepared in this connection and would be discussed on the same day by the "Government Committee for Legislation" presided by El Said Abdel Latif El Boghdady, Minister of Municipal Affairs & Planning. The paper went on saying that by the said law all the Commercial, Industrial and Educational Establishments would be bound to close on Friday under penal sanctions in case of infringement.

II. Such a Law is looked upon as non-constitutional for the following reasons:

- A - It contradicts one of the essential liberties, "The Freedom of Work" that everyone since he is owning and running his own enterprise, has got the full right to choose his holiday, both for himself and for those working in or benefiting from the said enterprise.
- B - It is against the principle of "Equality of Opportunities", guaranteed by the Egyptian Constitution of the 16th January, 1956, because a Christian Egyptian who may have his holiday on Sunday for religious considerations, will be forced to close down on Friday, thus finding himself in a position less advantageous and non-equal to the position of a Moslem Egyptian.
- C - It is indirectly affecting the freedom of religion for Christian Egyptians, since they shall be forced, in order to avoid the penal sanctions laid down by law, to close on Fridays and to open on Sundays. They shall, therefore, be prevented from enjoying their religious rites on the "Lord's Day".

./..

D - It is unprecedented in the history of Egypt even since the beginning of Moslem Rule of the Country.

III. On the evening of the same day of the 18th February, 1957, assembled in the Coptic Orthodox Patriarcate of Alexandria many priests, pastors and clergymen of the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Coptic Catholic Church and the Protestant Churches of Alexandria, constituting what was called "The Christian Church Council of Alexandria".

They decided unanimously to submit their strong protest against the said "Draft Law" to the President of the Republic.

On the 19th February, 1957, copies of the original minutes of their meeting were handed to the Acting Governor of Alexandria and the Army Commander of Alexandria Zone.

The newspaper "La Réforme" of Alexandria of the 20th February, 1957, referred in french to the said meeting (p.2) but all the other Arabic papers were strictly censured about the subject.

IV. The General "Maglis Milli" of the Orthodox Copts of Egypt assembled on the 19th February, 1957, upon receiving complaints and protests against the said "Draft Law" and cabled a very strong protest to the President of the Republic.

V. On the 22nd February, 1957, the paper "Al Akhbar" confirmed in big letters that what had been said about the said "Draft Law" was completely unfounded.

This confirmation, however, was worded in such a manner to look quite ambiguous and clearly limited to "Merchants", thus dropping the Industrial, and more important, the Educational Establishments already referred to very specifically in the "Ahram" of the 18th February, 1957.

VI. Strangely enough, the Government paper "Al Goumhouriah" of the 23rd February, 1957, published (p.6) that the Union of Chambers of Commerce had approached the Ministry of Commerce and the Ministry of Social Affairs to issue a law for the Compulsory Friday Holiday and that the former Ministry had

therefore proposed to form a committee for that purpose.

Moreover, another daily paper "Al Shaab" of the 24th February, 1957, published that the previous "Draft Law" will come before the Government Committee of Legislation on Sunday 3rd March.

VII. In these circumstances, and in the absence of any official Communiqué to the contrary, the Church Council of Alexandria had another meeting on the 27th February, 1957. It cabled Amba Athanasios the Acting Patriarch of the Orthodox Coptic Church, Amba Marcus Khoussam, Patriarch of the Catholic Church and Rev. Dr. Ibrahim Said, Chairman of the Protestant Synod of Egypt, requesting them together to see at once the President of the Republic to withdraw the said "Draft Law" which will cause, if issued, very serious consequences.

Many Christian Egyptians were determined, in the worst alternative, to close down on Sundays, whatsoever the expense might be. Certain regretted incidents happening in Souhag, Cairo and Tanta have already been reported.

"Al Ahram" throughout February 1957, had been publishing various appeals from Christian merchants of Upper Egypt requesting the Government to avoid the issue of any law for the Compulsory Friday Holiday.

It has been arranged, also, that all churches in Alexandria will have as their sermon on Sunday, the 3rd March, 1957, one subject, namely "The Lord's Day" and pamphlets in thousands were distributed among Christians in All Egypt, containing the decisions and protests above-mentioned.

VIII. On the 28th February, 1957, Amba Athanasios, on interviewing some members of the Church Council in Cairo, declared that he had received on the same morning, two envoys from the Government who assured him that there was no intention to issue the "Friday Law".

./..

IX. Cables to the newspaper "Al Akhbar" announcing those good news to be published, never saw light in that paper which had already made her first announcement on 22nd February, 1957.

X. In the circumstances it looks to be more likely that the "Draft Law" of Compulsory Friday Holiday has been suspended but has never been definitely or officially dropped.

Christians in Egypt, however, are quite sure through their non-wavering faith that their Almighty God shall preserve and safeguard forever His "Glorious Day".

-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-