A MINORITY WITHIN A MINORITY: A HISTORY OF WOMEN IN THE EGYPTIAN COPTIC ORTHODOX AND EVANGELICAL CHURCHES (1854-PRESENT)

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences of Georgetown University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Arab Studies

By

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Washington, DC April 27, 2011
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ABSTRACT

From 1854 to the present, Egyptian Evangelical and Coptic Orthodox women have gained a variety of new leadership roles within their respective churches. The reason for the expansion of their roles within their minority communities can be traced to several factors: innovations in female education and employment in the Evangelical Church by foreign missionaries and a subsequent counter-reformation movement in the Orthodox Church; the improvement of female education and vocational opportunities in the public sphere and the gradual permission of the Churches to grant women responsibilities commensurate with their qualifications; and the desire among the Christian population to create a minority social sphere parallel to that of the mainstream Egyptian society. In general, whenever the Evangelical or Orthodox Church expanded its activities and the scope of its services, women were able to take advantage of this expansion to secure new roles and responsibilities for themselves. Certain restrictions on women’s leadership remain in both the Evangelical and Coptic Orthodox Churches. Despite these restrictions, however, Christian women have become increasingly visible and influential leaders within their Churches over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries.
The idea for this paper began in the living room of Um Hani, in a nondescript cinderblock building on the outskirts of Cairo. Her family is socially conservative, like many of their Christian and Muslim neighbors. As such, her 17 year-old daughter, Sara, is rarely allowed outside the house unless going to or from her high school and private tutoring sessions, and the family discourages her from even visiting her girlfriends nearby. Yet Sara has an active social life in the tiny Evangelical Church she attends in their neighborhood. Sara participates in women’s prayer meetings and gatherings for teenage girls. She attends Christian conferences in Alexandria with other young Christian girls, and is mentored by adult women in her church. Her closest girlfriends are at her church, so she prefers to spend her free time there. At the same time, Sara’s older sister Gigi is unimpressed with the Evangelical Church for its disregard of the saints and liturgical traditions. Gigi attends a Coptic Orthodox Church, where she also attends midweek women’s meetings. She attended a few years of primary school at the church, and later volunteered as a Sunday school teacher there. The leader of her women’s group meets with her periodically to provide mentoring and counsel. On her free days, she enjoys visiting the church’s courtyard, where she can buy snacks and play with her daughter.

These parallel social spheres that Sara and Gigi created for themselves in their churches prompted me to begin thinking about the church as a physical space where recreation is sanctioned and social networks formed, especially for women who are sometimes culturally prohibited from socializing outside of their homes. As I began to
research further, I discovered that Coptic Orthodox and Evangelical Churches alike offer a vast array of social, recreational, vocational, and educational services and activities. The churches sometimes appear to function as small cities, rather than mere houses of worship. Two primary questions emerged from my initial observations. First, how and why did Egypt’s churches expand to become the primary loci of the minority Christian communities, offering far more than religious services? Second, how have Egyptian women like Sara and Gigi capitalized on this parallel Christian social sphere in order to gain opportunities for community leadership and recreation that might not otherwise be available to them? The best way to answer these questions, I decided, was to trace the historical development women’s roles in the Coptic Orthodox and Evangelical Churches in the 19th and 20th centuries.

This project was made possible through the support of my colleagues, advisors, and loved ones. I am greatly appreciative of my advisors, Dr. John Voll and Dr. Sara Scalenghe, who encouraged my research over the past two years and helped me see this project through to its completion. I am thankful for all the faculty and staff at the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies for challenging my thinking and encouraging my best efforts, and to my colleagues at the Center for their encouragement and feedback over the course of this project. Amy Beisel, Casey Rath, and Stephanie Hamilton provided invaluable help with editing.

Dozens of individuals helped support my fieldwork in Egypt, each of whom deserve special recognition for their efforts and patience in assisting me. Thanks to Anne-Laure Malauzat and Sam Tadros for providing many of my initial contacts in Cairo, to
Heather Keaney for sharing her experiences and letting me tag along to her church, and to Andrew Cornetta and Safy Jacob for providing key introductions within the Egyptian Evangelical community. Thanks to Pastor Sameh Maurice, Nader Naim, Sally Samir, and Youssef Gamil of Kasr el-Dobara Church for making time for me; special thanks to Youssef for his tireless work in arranging meetings. My appreciation also extends to the entire AWEMA staff, who let me visit on two different occasions and join their morning prayer meeting. I am also grateful for the help of Tharwat Wahba, Emile Zaki, Venice Nicola, and Mourad Adel at the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo for sharing the wealth of their historical records with me. Thanks to Mina Rezkalla for the great lengths he went to in order to arrange meetings for me within the Coptic Orthodox community in Shobra and for the hassles he endured for it. I am also very appreciative of Ramy Rezkalla for our many conversations both before and during my trip. Special thanks to Mourad Sinot and Awad Basseet for alerting me to the great variety of perspectives within the Coptic Orthodox community.

I remain especially indebted to ever-gracious hospitality of Um Hani and her family, who are my “home away from home” in Egypt. Without them, this project and my research would not have been possible. Finally, I share my thanks and appreciation with my family, who provided tremendous support and encouragement throughout this project.
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Introduction

Leila Ahmed writes in *Women and Gender in Islam* that social and political changes brought on by colonialism in the 19th and 20th centuries fundamentally changed the status of women in the Middle East. This process of change gradually allowed women to leave behind the seclusion of their houses and, in different times and places, even the veil. Muslim women in particular found themselves thrust in the center of national debates about the status of women in Islam, the modern state, and the family.¹

While in agreement with the conclusions made above, I argue that Christian women in Egypt experienced the same social changes and gender debates as their Muslim counterparts in addition to undergoing a re-negotiation of their status within their minority Christian communities. This latter process was unique to the Christian women alone, though it was inextricably bound to the broader trends in female education, political activity, employment and domestic behavior affecting all Egyptian women generally.

It could also be argued that the status of Coptic women in Egyptian society was more precarious than that of Muslim women, and as such, securing a protected role within their minority communities was all the more important. Both Coptic and Muslim women could be marginalized for their gender within the mainstream society and also within their own religious communities, but Coptic women could be additionally discriminated against in Egyptian society for being members of a religious minority. Christian Egyptian women are thus a minority within a minority, and the history of their

participation in both governmental and Church-sponsored institutions helps us understand the way that they negotiated their status within their own minority groups as well as in the society at large.

When speaking of the Christian population in Egypt, there are a number of sub-communities to consider. The Christian population was once homogenously Orthodox, under the aegis of the Coptic Orthodox Church and its pope. The Orthodox Church lost its monopoly over the Christians with the arrival of foreign missionaries. Most significant among these were the American Presbyterian missionaries who arrived in Egypt in 1854. Their missionary work created unprecedented ripple effects through the Egyptian Christian population and resulted in the formation of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Egypt out of the missionaries’ converts. The modern period also saw groups of Copts who rejected the leadership of the Orthodox Church in communal affairs and viewed themselves in secular, nationalistic terms. The result is that, today, we can speak about four sub-groups within the Christian minority, each of which developed its own rhetoric around the proper role of women in their community: the Coptic Orthodox Church, Protestant missionaries (with American Presbyterians dominant among them), the local Egyptian Evangelical Church, and secular Coptic elites. Over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries, each of these sub-groups began new communal debates about the role of women in their communities, resulting in varying opportunities, policies, and restrictions for the women in their ranks. The following chapters will detail some of the differences of the experiences of Christian women in mediating their position within these various sub-groups.
Social and Political Context

In the 19th and 20th centuries, Christian women in Egypt participated in a series of social movements and theological shifts. First, Christian women were affected by nationalism in the 19th century. It must be stated, of course, that Christian Egyptian women have never lived exclusively in isolated minority enclaves, but have always functioned as members of a larger national society. During the nationalist movement, however, Christian women had the opportunity to increasingly identify as Egyptians—an inclusive identity that downplayed divisions by religion or sect. Thus we also find that Christian women have not always functioned in society as Christians, but have lived among other Egyptian men and women and have typically followed demographic trends common to the whole country.

Second, Christian women also participated in the feminist movement that achieved notoriety in the early 20th century. The Egyptian feminist movement took pains to diminish the distinction between Christian and Muslim. As we will examine in a later section, elite Christian and Muslim women worked together in party politics, feminist activism, and philanthropic works. Their participation in the feminist movement also helped influence their status within their religious minority communities.

Third, Christian women experienced the effects of imperialism through the activities of foreign missionaries and other foreign influences. A key focus of this paper will be on the lasting impact of missionary activities on the status and role of Christian women in Egypt. However, we cannot assume that all Christian women participating in institutions of the Egyptian Churches were doing so for reasons of faith—the large
numbers of Muslim, Jewish and Orthodox students who attended Protestant missionary schools in the 19th century attest to the fact that women and their families chose which public, private, or religious institutions to access based on a complicated array of reasons, only one of which was religious affiliation. Yet in examining the role of Christian women in various Church institutions, it becomes clear that whatever their motive for participating in the structures of their church, the very fact of their participation served as leverage by which to negotiate their position in their religious community. Thus girls who attended missionary schools and even outwardly embraced Evangelical teachings could go on to serve as teachers, social workers, and nurses within Evangelical programs, enhancing their visibility and public role within their community. In examining the participation of Christian women in various Church institutions, we can begin to understand how their participation affected their role and status within their religious community.

My research benefits from the previous studies of Muslim Egyptian women in the 19th and 20th centuries. Leila Ahmed argues in *Women and Gender in Islam* that both nationalist and imperialist actors placed Middle Eastern women at the center of national debates over the proper role of Muslim women in newly modernized societies. These debates produced contradictory impulses to educate and “liberate” Muslim women, while also ensuring that they were good wives and mothers. Beth Baron and Heather Sharkey both examine the influence of missionaries and imperialism on female education and employment within the Muslim and Christian religious communities, as well as in public society. Their research brings to light the key role Christian missionaries played in
popularizing female schools, clubs, and orphanages within various segments of Egyptian society in order that Muslims and secularists might keep their children from being converted to Christianity. The new availability of private schools and orphanages for Muslim girls sparked a debate over the purpose of female education and the changing role of Muslim women within society and their families as a result of modernization and colonialism in the 20th century.

At the same time, a budding feminist movement accompanied the nationalist movement in Egypt, and many Muslim, Christian and Jewish Egyptian women felt that an improvement to their social, economic, and political standing would come through secular institutions, rather than through religious institutions. Margot Badran draws attention to secular feminists in Egypt in Feminists, Islam and Nation. Lisa Pollard’s Nurturing the Nation and Beth Baron’s Egypt as a Woman examine the use of female imagery in the Egyptian nationalist movement, analyzing the way that the symbol of “woman” was prominent during the nationalist movement, even as Egyptian women themselves were politically and socially marginalized. These studies have made a great contribution toward helping us understand some of the reasons why women’s rights and social status became important issues for Egyptians and imperial powers alike in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Building on these previous studies, this paper leaves behind the questions of why and how the women’s movement arose to look instead at the way that women in a religious minority group navigated the political, social and economic developments of the 19th and 20th century. The overlapping and sometimes conflicting roles played by Christian women as simultaneous members of the Christian minority and as members of Egyptian society as a whole is a subject that has not yet been addressed in detail.

In this study, I argue that the experience of Christian women is closely parallel to that of Muslim women over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries. For example, 19th-century Muslim and Christian women alike suffered from seclusion, especially among the upper classes, and low literacy rates, especially among the lower classes. Likewise in the 20th century, both Muslim and Christian women generally enjoyed greater opportunities for education, political activity and leadership in the public sphere than they had in previous centuries. One can indeed argue that these broad national trends in female education and employment have played a greater role in affecting Christian women’s status than any actions or policies by the leading institutions in their religious communities.

While participating in larger national trends of female education and employment over the last two centuries, Christian women have also experienced a unique and separate trajectory of development within their minority groups. Whereas gender debates in Muslim circles centered on whether women should wear headscarves or if men should be allowed to have multiple wives, Christians argued over the permissibility of female leadership in Church activities. These debates focused on when and where female
participation and service is appropriate; when and where men and women should be allowed to mix in religious settings, whether women could lead religious services, and so forth.

Furthermore, a related debate has occurred within the Coptic Orthodox and Evangelical communities over the social function of the Church and its role in providing educational and vocational opportunities for women. Prior to 1952, the American missionaries and Egyptian Evangelicals sought to create many state-like structures within their religious community, including a vast network of schools, hospitals, medical clinics, and vocational training centers. During this period, Evangelical women’s participation in these institutions gave them the leverage and visibility to improve their status within their religious community. In contrast, the Evangelical Church largely ceded responsibility for education and health to the state in the second half of the 20th century. Thus Evangelical women (along with most all Egyptian women) study in government schools and visit public hospitals as any Egyptian would, and their participation in these institutions does not significantly impact their status within their Christian community. Evangelical women have therefore developed new avenues for participation and leadership within the Church, in venues like Sunday school and weekly worship meetings, where they can better influence their role and status. The increase of Islamism in the public sphere may also have played a role in encouraging Evangelical women to seek greater roles and leadership positions inside the Church rather than in the public sphere.

The Coptic Orthodox Church had an inverse trajectory: until the 1950s, the Coptic Orthodox Church refrained from building many schools or clinics. For most of the 19th
and 20th centuries, Coptic Orthodox women attended missionary or government schools and clinics along with other Egyptian women, lacking institutions particular to their own sect. The lack of new institutions, programs or activities for Coptic Orthodox women in the 19th and early 20th centuries greatly reduced their chances to change their role or status within their religious community. This changed in the second half of the 20th century when the Coptic Orthodox Church began to dramatically expand the number of schools, medical clinics and vocational training centers it operated. Many of these services are parallel to government services, and indeed are meant to replace them for Coptic families preferring the familiarity of their Church community to the anonymity of the bureaucratic processes surrounding the acquisition of social services in Egypt. Thus there are increased opportunities for Coptic Orthodox girls and women to study in primary schools, visit medical clinics, and train in vocational centers run by the Coptic Orthodox Church. In so doing, they participate in the institutions of their minority religious community, rather than the society at large, which gives them certain leverage over how, and by whom, the Church’s services are provided.

Methodology, Terminology, and Transliteration

This study relies on a variety of primary and secondary sources in order to reconstruct and assess the history of Christian women in Egypt in the 19th and 20th centuries. Primary sources include the memoirs, diaries, and records of the American Presbyterian missionaries. Among these records, Andrew Watson’s American Mission in Egypt is particularly useful for the information it includes on missionary projects for Egyptian women. Statistics on female education in the 19th and 20th century are drawn
primarily from Amir Boktor and the data compiled by J. Heyworth-Dunne and Judith Cochrane.

In researching the contemporary period, I spent two weeks in Cairo, Egypt, in December 2010 and conducted over 25 interviews with leaders and parishioners in Coptic Orthodox and Egyptian Evangelical churches and organizations. Though these interviews could not provide exhaustive information about the activities of the Coptic and Evangelical churches, they offered indications of broad trends in female participation in different religious communities and details about specific programs by and for Christian women. During this trip I was also able to acquire a number of pamphlets, magazines and records by both Churches. I am especially indebted to the gracious assistance of Tharwat Wahba, Emile Zaki, and Venice Nicola at the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo, who provided me with access to their research notes and publications drawn from the archives of the American Presbyterian mission and the Synod of the Nile.

In conducting fieldwork on the contemporary Egyptian Evangelical Church, I focused heavily on the activities and structures of Kasr el-Dobara Church in Tahrir Square, Cairo. Kasr el-Dobara is described as the largest Evangelical church in Egypt, and is known for having more activities, programs, and social services than most other Evangelical churches. Though not all other Evangelical subjects interviewed cared for the perceived size or wealth of Kasr el-Dobara church, all interviewees described the church as being extremely influential on the activities and ministries of other Evangelical

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3 According to Pastor Sameh Maurice of Kasr el-Dobara Church, they have 7,000 members. The next biggest Evangelical church in Egypt has only 1,500 members. Source: Interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 15, 2010.
churches in the country. Their influence is spread through satellite broadcasts of their weekly worship services, interdenominational events held at their large conference center on the outskirts of Cairo, and a wide array of sports camps sponsored by the church every summer. Discussions in this paper on the role of women within Kasr el-Dobara church are not meant to necessarily be representative of the status of women in all Evangelical Churches throughout Egypt, but simply to point to trends, patterns, and precedents set by this influential congregation.

In aspiring only to touch on broad trends of female participation in Christian minority communities, I will be selective in the groups and organizations discussed in this paper. Though this study will touch on the work of British Anglican missionaries, it will focus heavily on the role of the American Presbyterian missionaries in Egypt. There are two reasons for this narrow focus. First, the American Presbyterians were among one of the most influential missionary groups in 19th and 20th century Egypt through the number of schools, clinics and other institutions they built. This emphasis overlooks the substantial contributions made to female education through private French, Italian, British, and German schools. For example, private French schools enrolled 16,095 female students in some of their 279 schools operating in Egypt in 1927. That same year, American schools enrolled only 4,122 female students in the 78 schools they were operating in Egypt.4

Yet the American Presbyterians warrant focus in our study because they alone formed an indigenous Church in the wake of their evangelism and educational outreach.\(^5\) Though small pockets of Coptic-Catholic, Episcopalian and other Christian sects exist today in Egypt, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Egypt that formed as an outgrowth of the American Presbyterians’ work is by far the largest.\(^6\)

Additionally, a note must be made to disambiguate between Presbyterian missionaries and Egyptian Evangelical converts. The Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Egypt (known officially as the Coptic Evangelical Church until 2004, and referred to in this paper as the Egyptian Evangelical Church) can be studied as a group somewhat separate from the American Presbyterians themselves. Beginning in 1870, the Egyptian Evangelical Church formed as a separate entity distinct from the American mission, though it took a gradual process over the next 100 years for the local church to achieve total institutional and financial independence from the missionaries. From the earliest days of the Egyptian Evangelical Church, however, we can see a difference in perspective and priorities among the Egyptian Evangelicals, as opposed to that of the foreign missionaries. In order to distinguish between these two overlapping but distinct groups, I will refer to the American missionaries as “Presbyterians” and the local Egyptian Evangelical Church as “Evangelicals.”

\(^5\) Some may argue that there is also a new, indigenous “Coptic Catholic Church” in Egypt as the result of Catholic Pope Pius IX’s efforts to unite eastern Orthodox Churches with the Roman Catholic Church. Based on personal interviews with Coptic Catholics and on the research of Heather Sharkey in *American Evangelicals in Egypt*, it is my understanding that Coptic Catholic Churches feel and function very much like Coptic Orthodox Churches. The same Coptic Orthodox liturgy is used in both Churches, and few serious structural changes were made to the Coptic Catholic churches to differentiate them from the Orthodox churches in Egypt.

\(^6\) Heather Sharkey estimates that today there are 200,000 Coptic Catholics, whereas there are an estimated half million Evangelical Presbyterian Egyptians. See Heather Sharkey, *American Evangelicals in Egypt*, 32, 227.
This choice in terminology reflects the institutional names historically associated with each group, but also points to the fact that American Presbyterians have undergone theological shifts over the past 200 years. Thus, while the American Presbyterian missionaries in the 19th century considered themselves “Evangelical,” and emphasized a typically Evangelical belief that “lives could be changed through conversion, individual Bible study, and reflection on Christ and his sacrifice,” American Presbyterians shifted in the early 20th century to “mainline Protestantism.” Mainline Protestantism typically places social services and international development as higher goals than traditional conversion and evangelism—and indeed, the American Presbyterian missionaries began to shift their activities in Egypt in the 20th century to reflect this philosophic and theological change back home. It is therefore not accurate to refer to the American Presbyterians as “Evangelicals” at all points of their work in Egypt, so I will reserve this term for the Egyptian Evangelical Church alone, which has maintained an Evangelical theological outlook throughout its history.

In transliterating Arabic words, I am adhering to the guidelines of the International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES) transliteration guide. Per IJMES protocol, I will not transliterate those names or institutions that have established their own preferred transliteration in English. For example, I will refer to Kasr el-Dobara Church, rather than Qaṣr al-Dūbāra, as IJMES transliteration would ordinarily stipulate. This will enable readers to more easily locate the websites and publications of

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7 Heather Sharkey, American Evangelicals in Egypt, 25.
contemporary Christian institutions and authors who have standardized their own transliterated name.

Finally, I have selected only two broad categories of activities through which to analyze the public participation of Egyptian Christian women in their religious communities. First, I examine Christian women’s participation in educational activities provided through their churches. This refers to formal educational facilities, such as boarding schools, primary and secondary schools, as well as religious education in Sunday school programs. In this category I also address the participation of Christian girls in orphanages, which provided formal and informal academic, religious and vocational training. Second, I examine female labor in their religious communities. “Labor” here comprises work such as Sunday school teaching, social service work, staffing Church medical centers, and taking leadership roles within the worship service itself. Labor also refers to formal vocations: Coptic nuns, wage-earning evangelists and female preachers on television. As part of this latter category, I often speak broadly of female “participation” and attendance in Church events. This low-profile form of female activity is arguably one of the most important for raising the profile of women in church congregations and creating demand for programs and activities specific to women. There are perhaps other categories of female activity within the church that merit investigation and analysis. However, education and labor are the two most visible forms of female participation in Church institutions, and are therefore a suitable starting place from which to analyze female activity in Christian communities.
The structure of this paper reflects the key role of the American Presbyterian missionaries in setting off dramatic transformations within the Egyptian Christian community that continue to impact Christian women in Egypt to this day. Chapter One addresses the entire tenure of the American Presbyterian mission in Egypt from 1854-1952, examining their impact on Evangelical, Coptic Orthodox, and secular elite Coptic women. Chapter One is divided into three sections. First, I will focus on the new educational and vocational opportunities for Egyptian women afforded by American Presbyterian missionaries. Second, I will examine the reaction of Coptic Orthodox clergy to the educational and vocational innovations started by the missionaries. Third, I will point to the national trends in education and employment across Egypt to show the influence that these broad social changes had on the status of Evangelical and Coptic Orthodox women during this time period.

In Chapter Two, I will examine the status of Evangelical women within their sub-community from 1952 to the present. In this period, the Egyptian Evangelical Church largely retreated from providing educational and medical services and began to invest heavily on expanding the opportunities for female leadership and participation within the Church itself. Women have benefited from a number of new opportunities for educational and vocational participation and leadership within the Church, which takes place in front of co-ed audiences and in mixed settings. At the same time, the Evangelical Church has placed certain restrictions on female leadership, especially for ordained ministry.
In Chapter Three, I will examine the status of Coptic Orthodox women within their community from 1952 to the present. By the 1960s, a faction of reformist clergy gained sufficient influence within the Church hierarchy to begin expanding the Church’s social services and ministry opportunities for youth, women, and laity generally. Since the 1960s, Coptic Orthodox women have worked in the Church as volunteers, social service providers, and nuns. Unlike the Evangelicals, the Coptic Orthodox women have a long history of being ordained for certain types of religious work, though the Coptic Church has maintained limitations on the kinds of religious work they are allowed to do.

In both the Evangelical and Coptic Churches, the status of women in their minority communities is constantly being negotiated, just as the role of women in the larger Egyptian society is also. Christian women simultaneously exist as minorities in three different spheres: as women in Egypt, as Christians in Egypt, and as women in their Christian communities. These roles often overlap and intersect, and the fortunes of women or Christians in Egypt generally parallel the fortune of women within their Christian minority communities. For example, Christian women have generally followed national trends in female literacy, employment, and political activity. However, Christian women have also participated in a second process of mediating their role and status within their religious communities. The participation (or lack of participation) by Christian women in the structures and institutions of their Churches over the 19th and 20th centuries has provided them with a new means of leverage in negotiating their roles and statuses within their minority groups.
Chapter One

New Roles and Opportunities for Egyptian Christian Women, 1854-1952

Prior to the 19th century, few Egyptian girls seem to have been educated formally or extensively. According to surveys of the history of education in Egypt, Muslim girls had the opportunity to learn passages of the Qur’an and perhaps basic literacy in a kuttāb or in a local mosque, or sometimes received private lessons. Christian girls had similar access to informal and community-based education. Prior to the 20th century, some Coptic communities maintained small primary schools, in which girls were sometimes allowed to attend alongside boys. Anecdotal evidence by Protestant missionaries in the 19th century also points to the presence of teachers in the Coptic Orthodox Church—usually elderly, blind men—who would teach boys and girls basic literacy and Bible stories. This education was insufficient, however. Surveys of literacy rates by the Egyptian government at the end of the 19th century indicate only 11 of every 1,000 Egyptian women were literate (compared to 124 of every 1,000 Egyptian men, indicating that illiteracy in general was widespread, regardless of gender).

Women also had limited opportunities for wage labor. Judith Tucker’s study on female employment in the 19th century indicate that some lower class women worked as agricultural workers, merchants, and entertainers, often as a matter of financial necessity.

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for their families.\textsuperscript{11} Some urban women participated in the economy as petty merchants in local vegetable markets. Lower class women could also make a living selling products to the secluded elite women of Cairo or Alexandria.\textsuperscript{12} Overall, female participation in wage labor was still very low, however, hindered by cultural barriers and low literacy rates among women.\textsuperscript{13}

Within the 19\textsuperscript{th}-century Coptic Orthodox Church, there were also few vocational avenues for Christian women to pursue. One officially recognized vocation was to be a nun in a convent, whereby the women devoted their lives to prayer, domestic responsibilities for the resident bishop, and small income-generating projects to support their communities. Women also donated their services to the church in informal ways, such as in embroidering priests’ robes and providing social, material and spiritual support and counsel for other women in the church. Since women were banned from serving as priests or deacons, from reading from the Bible in church or other official roles, there were not many vocational alternatives within the Orthodox Church.\textsuperscript{14}

Beginning in the mid-19\textsuperscript{th} century, the number of opportunities for formal education and Church service for women expanded significantly. This expansion was due in part to the influence and activities of foreign missionaries, especially the American Presbyterians. The establishment of missionary-run projects, such as hospitals, clinics, Sunday schools, and door-to-door evangelism provided Egyptian Evangelical converts

\textsuperscript{12} Tucker, \textit{Women in Nineteenth-Century Egypt}, 82.
\textsuperscript{13} Tucker, \textit{Women in nineteenth-century Egypt}, 90-91.
\textsuperscript{14} Pieternella van Doorn-Harder, \textit{Contemporary Coptic Nuns} (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), 37.
with opportunities to use their newfound literacy to take leadership positions within the growing Evangelical community.

Of course, Evangelical converts were not the only population who utilized the missionary-run institutions—according to missionaries’ records, they consistently had numbers of Orthodox Christians, Muslims and Jews within their schools, orphanages and clinics. Yet the participation of Orthodox Christian women in missionary institutions had a minimal and mixed impact on their status within their own religious community. On the one hand, various Orthodox popes and clergy attempted to punish families who attended missionary or Evangelical Bible studies, schools or clinics.\(^{15}\) The negative reaction of Orthodox Church officials to the missionaries’ activities appears to have played a significant role in delaying the expansion of educational and social services within the Coptic Church, with a negative impact on the prospect for Orthodox women to involve themselves in their churches. At the same time, it is also clear that some Coptic Orthodox churches did begin to offer Bible studies, prayer meetings, and schools for girls and boys, even if they did not always have official permission from Orthodox Church officials to do so.\(^{16}\) Thus for Evangelical women especially, the activities of the missionaries provided new avenues for direct involvement and leadership in their communities. For Orthodox women, the activities of the missionaries provided a small amount of leverage with which they could push their churches into providing more services and opportunities for women, though they were not always successful in extracting large concessions.


American Presbyterian missionaries arrived in Egypt in 1854, originally hoping to convert Muslims to Christianity. When social and legal barriers to this kind of evangelism quickly frustrated their efforts, they focused instead on infusing the local Christian population with their Evangelical values and theological viewpoints, believing that Coptic Orthodox beliefs and rituals were erroneous and even un-Christian. In one passage typifying the sentiments of his colleagues, American missionary Andrew Watson compared the Orthodox Church unfavorably to a mummified relic and decried the priests as “despotic” and drunkards. His colleague Gulian Lansing likewise complained about the prevalence of drinking and gambling among Coptic Orthodox priests. He also berated clergy for conducting mass in the ancient Coptic language instead of Arabic, as the Coptic language was no longer spoken or understood by most Egyptians. The missionaries therefore believed that the Copts could be considered nominal Christians at best, and set out to ‘convert’ them to an Evangelical understanding of the Christian faith.

The American Presbyterian missionaries placed Egyptian women at the heart of their evangelism efforts. Like elite Egyptian reformers and British imperial modernizers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the American missionaries believed that women were the most important segment of society upon which to concentrate literacy campaigns and modernizing efforts. According to this perspective, Egyptian women—both Muslim and Christian—were suffering from the misogynistic influence of Islam on

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the Egyptian culture. Female seclusion, illiteracy, veiling and polygamy were all symptoms of this Islamic influence, from which Christian and Muslim women suffered to varying degrees.\(^{20}\) As Andrew Watson wrote, “The native Egyptian Christians…seem to have adopted in their homes many of the social habits of the Muhammadans, and become thoroughly filled with Muhammadan ideas of women’s inferiority and women’s special depravity.”\(^{21}\) For the missionaries, this perceived negative influence of Islam over Christian women was especially deplorable, and they sought to rapidly eradicate female seclusion and illiteracy from the Christian community.

American missionaries were concerned with female illiteracy for theological reasons, too. Protestants have historically placed a strong emphasis on individual spiritual experiences and education, requiring literacy in order to study the Bible on one’s own.\(^{22}\) The missionaries feared that clergy could become corrupted and too powerful if they alone knew the contents of the Bible and were permitted to teach on it—and indeed, the missionaries sharply criticized Coptic clergy on this point.\(^{23}\) The key to their evangelism efforts was teaching literacy and distributing Arabic translations of the Bible for the personal consumption of Egyptian Christians. For these two reasons, American missionaries especially targeted Christian women for their educational programs.

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\(^{23}\) For example, American missionary Gulian Lansing wrote, “I cannot help feeling that it would be a blessing if [Coptic clergy], all with their priests and deacons, and monks, and all the seven orders of them, could be instantaneously prepared for heaven, and then earth open and swallow them, like Korah and his company. The poor, oppressed, priest-ridden people could then receive the Gospel and live.” Lansing, *Egypt’s Princes*, 184.
**Female Education**

One of the primary goals of the American missionaries was to improve female literacy rates—and, by extension, the ability for Egyptian women to read the Bible and better understand Christian teachings. In addition to widespread illiteracy that plagued Egyptians at that time—both male and female—an additional problem remained for Christian education, in that the Orthodox mass was still conducted in the ancient Coptic language that was no longer spoken or widely understood by most Egyptians. This liturgical language barrier made the missionaries despair that Egyptian Christian women would be unable to understand essential Christian doctrines without rigorous education. Even when listening to church sermons in Arabic, Andrew Watson wrote that Egyptian women’s “vocabulary of words is not sufficiently extensive to enable them to understand, and they had never been trained to listen to connected discourses, such as the women of the West can comprehend.”\(^\text{24}\) The missionaries therefore viewed literacy and education as essential steps in spiritual development.

To meet this need, the American Presbyterian missionaries established a policy of opening a girls’ school alongside boys’ schools in each town they visited.\(^\text{25}\) They were responding to a real lack of educational opportunities available to girls and women; at the same time, they were also clearly hoping to gain influence in shaping their students’ characters and culture, if not converting them to an Evangelical understanding of Christianity.\(^\text{26}\)

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The first girls’ school run by the American missionaries was established in Alexandria in 1856, in partnership with a Scottish missionary organization. A second girls’ school was opened in Cairo in 1860, and another in Azbakiya in 1861, signaling the beginning of a trend towards rapid school building that would not cease until the Egyptian government began to nationalize missionary schools in the mid-20th century. Between 1885 and 1895, for example, the missionaries doubled the number of their schools, from 59 to 119, with a total of 7,975 students attending by the end of the 19th century. The missionaries’ documents do not consistently record how many of the total students were male or female. However, there is some indication of how emphatically the missionaries stressed female education: in 1875, there were a total of 826 female students enrolled in Protestant missionary schools, in contrast to only 350 male students.

The missionaries took a significant step forward in their female education project in 1864, when they opened their school in Cairo to girl boarders. They followed in 1868 with another girls’ boarding school in Asyut. By 1924, there were at least four girls’ boarding schools, each of which provided the missionaries with greater cultural and doctrinal influence over their students. The opportunity to board also increased the opportunities for female education, as many families appear to have preferred this

27 Watson, American Mission in Egypt, 95.
29 Watson, American Mission in Egypt, 371, 386.
30 Watson, American Mission in Egypt, 279.
31 Watson, American Mission in Egypt, 175.
arrangement, rather than have their daughters travel publicly to and from school each day.\textsuperscript{33}

Education remained a cornerstone of the American mission in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, even as government and private Muslim schools began expanding. In the height of Egyptian nationalist fervor in the 1920s, fully one-third of all Egyptian students were enrolled in private Christian schools.\textsuperscript{34} The percentage was even higher among Egyptian girls: in 1913-1914, fully one-half of all female Egyptian students were enrolled in foreign schools, many of which were run by missionaries.\textsuperscript{35} Within the American schools themselves, Egyptian females made up 60 percent of all their students.\textsuperscript{36} At the same time, women were underserved by both governmental and private schools: out of a total of 111,935 students recorded in the 1921-1922 governmental census, only 17,661 were girls.\textsuperscript{37} This made the presence of mission-run girls’ schools in the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century especially significant in the context of low female education rates across Egypt.

The American mission also expanded the opportunities for higher education for elite females, with the opening of the American College for Girls in Cairo in the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century. The American College for Girls was a point of pride for the mission, and hailed as the only girls’ college in all of North Africa. It gained so many accolades in the international community that former American President Teddy Roosevelt came to

\textsuperscript{33} Watson, \textit{American Mission in Egypt} 446.
\textsuperscript{34} Joseph Andrew Fowler, “Christian Schools in Muslim Lands: a Survey by Representative Examples of Christian Schools in Turkey, the United Arab Republic (Egypt), Pakistan, the Federation of Malaysia, Indonesia, the Republic of the Sudan and Northern Nigeria.” (M.A. diss., Southern Methodist University, 1963), 45.
\textsuperscript{36} Boktor, \textit{Development and Expansion of Education in U.A.R.}, 78.
\textsuperscript{37} Fowler, “Christian Schools in Muslim Lands,” 45.
dedicate the school’s property in 1910.\textsuperscript{38} The school was successful in promoting higher education for the girls studying there, who numbered 400 by 1927. The girls received a liberal arts education, with instruction in home economics, music, Arabic, French, English, Christianity, and physical education. Despite the absence of math or science in the curriculum, graduates had some success in attaining higher levels of education. By 1927, four graduates of the American College for Girls were studying in the national Egyptian University, and one had already received her M.A. in Egypt and went on to receive her Ph.D. from the Sorbonne.\textsuperscript{39} The American Evangelicals also established the American University in Cairo in 1919, and admitted female students beginning in 1928.\textsuperscript{40}

These schools were intended to serve the upper classes of Egyptian society, but the mission opened a number of girls’ schools to serve a broader spectrum of female students. By 1924, there were multiple female mission schools in Cairo, Alexander, Asyut, Tanta, Bani Swayf, Fayyum, Zagazig, Azbakiya, Luxor, Banha, Sinuris, Nukhayla, al-Matya, al-Badari, Tahta, and Mansura.\textsuperscript{41} Four of these were boarding schools, and the school in Mansura specialized in training female teachers, who went on to work in other girls’ schools operated by the mission.\textsuperscript{42} In order to compete with the growing system of government schools, the mission also placed a renewed emphasis on quality control, forming a central curriculum committee and holding annual examinations

\textsuperscript{38} Finney, \textit{Tomorrow’s Egypt} (Pittsburgh: Women’s General Missionary Society, 1939), 141; Elder, \textit{Vindicating a Vision}, 132.
\textsuperscript{39} Finney, \textit{Tomorrow’s Egypt}, 144.
\textsuperscript{40} American University in Cairo website, http://www.aucegypt.edu/about/History/Pages/history.aspx. Accessed March 7, 2011.
\textsuperscript{41} Elder, \textit{Vindicating a Vision}, 185, 263; Heyworth-Dunne, \textit{An Introduction to the History of Modern Education in Egypt}, 410-411.
\textsuperscript{42} Elder, \textit{Vindicating a Vision}, 185, 263.
for female students beginning in 1921.\textsuperscript{43} By 1933, the girls’ missionary schools adopted the government curriculum, adding in their own courses on Christianity, English and home economics.\textsuperscript{44}

The growth in missionary schools also increased opportunities for women to be hired as teachers. In 1860, the American missionaries opened their second girls’ school, this one in Cairo. A female missionary headed the school, and soon hired a Coptic woman as an assistant—marking the first record of an Egyptian Christian woman working in the missionary schools.\textsuperscript{45} After this point, it appears to have been common practice to employ at least some Egyptian teachers and aides to work alongside the foreign missionary women, and the percentage of Egyptian staff grew with the expansion of the school system.\textsuperscript{46} For example, by 1895, the American Presbyterians were operating 119 schools with 195 teachers, but had only 39 full-time American missionaries—only a portion of whom worked as teachers or school principals. Thus nearly 200 Egyptian teachers were employed in missionary schools by the turn of the century, all of who were sure to be Evangelicals, since the missionaries were keen to use their schools as a way to spread their theological views. Following the norms in practice at the time of primarily employing female teachers to work with female students,\textsuperscript{47} we can reasonably conclude that a significant percentage of the teachers in missionary-run schools were Evangelical Christian women.

\textsuperscript{43} Elder, \textit{Vindicating a Vision}, 188.
\textsuperscript{44} Elder, \textit{Vindicating a Vision}, 260.
\textsuperscript{45} Watson, \textit{American Mission in Egypt}, 117-118.
\textsuperscript{46} Watson, \textit{American Mission in Egypt}, 162.
\textsuperscript{47} Tucker, \textit{Women in Nineteenth-Century Egypt}, 128.
The hiring of Egyptian women to work as teachers in the schools represented a new formal professional opportunity for Christian women in Egypt. As mentioned above, there were few teachers (and few schools) for Christian girls prior to the arrival of the missionaries. Those who did teach informal lessons for children in the Orthodox Church were usually elderly men in the community. The missionaries’ teacher training represented a novel opportunity for newly-literate women to work as leaders in their communities, receive wages, and contribute to the education of a new generation of women below them. Yet the achievement of new respect and leadership within the Evangelical community was not easy or automatic. For example, even for those Egyptian women who were hired to work for the American missionaries, the end result was not always an improvement of their community status. Differences in nationality, class, language and educational level sometimes led to Egyptian staff women being treated as subordinates to the foreign missionaries. The first Christian woman hired for the missionaries’ girls’ school in Cairo in 1860 was described as “ignorant, inefficient and inexperienced” and a “burden” on the female missionary in charge.48 It was only when a whole class of female graduates emerged from the missionaries’ schools that a sufficient number of Egyptian women were qualified to teach and run the Christian schools, and the popularity of the schools in their care testifies to their growing competency and professional qualifications.

48 A. Watson, American Mission in Egypt, 118.
Sunday Schools

American missionaries also emphasized female education within the context of the Church, which manifested itself in the rapid multiplication of Sunday school meetings. Sunday school meetings took place inside the church, in the homes of missionaries, or in the homes of Egyptian members of the congregation, and were divided according to age and gender. As with their commitment to building equal numbers of academic institutions for boys and girls, the missionaries were also careful to establish Sunday school meetings for girls and boys, as well as for women and men. The first female Sunday school began in 1861.\(^{49}\) By 1870, there were over 100 Sunday school students—female and male—in 4 different locations. After that, the number of students increased dramatically: 733 Sunday school students in 1875; 1,575 in 1880; 4,427 in 1890, and onwards on an upward trajectory.\(^{50}\) While Andrew Watson did not record the percentage of girls and boys attending Sunday school, Heather Sharkey notes that women outnumbered men by 15 to 9 in church services during this same period, and that thousands of women and girls were attending Sunday and mid-week services held by Presbyterian missionaries.\(^{51}\) We can therefore reasonably assume that women probably represented at least half of all Sunday school students, if not more so.

In the mid-1870s, the missionaries began expanding the types of women’s meetings that they offered within their churches. For example, in 1874 Andrew Watson

\(^{49}\) Watson, American Mission in Egypt, 434.

\(^{50}\) Watson, American Mission in Egypt, 279, 367, 386.

\(^{51}\) Sharkey, American Evangelicals in Egypt, 39, 89-90. Heather Sharkey writes that by 1904, 3,302 of the 7,324 official members of the Evangelical Church in Egypt were women. Each Sunday, 5,879 women attended the weekly service; 1,313 women attended mid-week programs, and 3,366 attended prayer meetings specifically for women. (Source: American Evangelicals in Egypt, 90).
began to hold special women’s meetings after the sermons to ensure that they understood the teaching for that day. He would review the subject matter of the sermon in simple Arabic so that the uneducated women would be sure to understand any concepts they might have missed. Some churches also began to hold weekly prayer meetings for women. These meetings were held in the daytime, when women were less encumbered by their domestic obligations for their families and when travel in public was more culturally acceptable.

Educational programs within the church also increased over the course of the 20th century. Women’s meetings were frequently held on Sundays, in addition to normal Sunday school classes. Though these classes often focused on religious themes, they also presented opportunities to discuss female literacy, women’s health, and family hygiene. These classes were part of a broader initiative by American missionaries to do “women’s work for women”: that is, for female American missionaries to address family health, domestic concerns and literacy among Egyptian women in order to modernize Egyptian families in accordance with western ideals.

Orphanages

In the 20th century, Evangelical missionaries began constructing orphanages as an outgrowth of their strategy of advocating social development along with traditional evangelism. Catering both to children without parents and those whose families could no

longer support them, round-the-clock care and supervision provided missionaries with unlimited opportunities to instill Evangelical values in the children they cared for.

Lillian Hunt Trasher, an American Pentecostal missionary, founded a large Christian orphanage in Asyut in 1910. The Trasher orphanage served parentless children along with the mothers and children of impoverished female-headed households. With the support of the local community, Egyptian elites, and other missionary organizations, the orphanage swelled into a massive complex that held up to 1400 children and widows at any given time. It had schools, athletic facilities, expansive dormitories, health clinics, and centers for vocational training. Girls in the orphanage also received financial and social support for marriage. By 1960, the Trasher orphanage had served over 8,000 children. In addition, Presbyterian missionaries founded the Fowler orphanage in Cairo, which provided room, board and education for girls between the ages of three and twelve. The Fowler orphanage had the capacity for 40-60 girls at a time.

Through these orphanages, missionaries had the opportunity to teach Evangelical doctrine to children from Coptic Orthodox, Muslim, and Jewish backgrounds. In many instances, they were successful in bringing these girls into the Evangelical Church. A 1937 report from the Presbyterian’s Fowler orphanages shows that dozens of girls from the home went on to be teachers in Christian schools, female evangelists, and nurses in mission-run hospitals and clinics. Many of the children from the Trasher orphanage also went on to be employed by institutions of foreign missionaries and the Egyptian

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57 Baron, “Orphans and Abandoned Children,” 27.
Evangelical Church. Orphanages therefore provided an opportunity to raise up a new generation of women leaders in the Evangelical community.

The Trasher orphanage also provided employment for widows and divorced mothers, both Muslim and Christian, many of whom had children receiving care in the orphanage as well. These socially marginalized and financially vulnerable women worked in the orphanage doing “laundry, cooking, baking and cleaning” as the “main labor force” for the complex, according to research by Beth Baron. The employment of widows and divorced mothers in the orphanage had a mixed impact on their role and status within the Christian community. On the one hand, employment—however menial—provided financial stability and a measure of social standing for this marginalized and vulnerable population of single mothers. On the other hand, the critical view of the foreign orphanage staff towards these Egyptian women is evident in their policy of requiring the legal custody of all children in their facility, even those with living parents, in order to ensure that they alone would be able to influence the child’s religious, moral and cultural education. This policy extended to the widows and divorcees working on staff, who were banned from caring for their own children. Thus it seems that within the orphanages, the girls in their custody had better opportunities for future leadership and prominence in the community than their mothers did. The girls could go on to become teachers, nurses, and evangelists—and indeed, many did. Their mothers, on

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60 Baron, “Nile Mother,” 252.
61 Baron, “Nile Mother,” 251.
62 Baron, “Nile Mother,” 252.
the other hand, were protected and provided for by the orphanage, but kept in a marginal social position as domestic workers.

*Health Clinics*

Hospitals and medical clinics provided new avenues of employment for Evangelical women. In the 19th century, missionary hospitals appear hired a number of Egyptian women to work with female patients. In one example, when American medical missionary Dr. V.M. Henry took over the Christian Asyut hospital in 1891, he hired an American female nurse to provide care for female patients. At the same time, he also hired a blind, elderly Egyptian Evangelical woman named Shamsa to work in the female ward primarily as an evangelist. It is not clear if she received theological training previous to her tenure at the Asyut hospital, but once there, she acted as a religious teacher and authority. Shamsa evidently took on interested female patients as students, who she tutored in Evangelical theology and pedagogy. These women evidently returned to their hometowns to work as evangelists.\(^\text{63}\)

In the mid-20th century, two nursing schools for Egyptian women were established in Tanta and Asyut to provide formal medical training and increase the number of Egyptian staff.\(^\text{64}\) Both of these cities were already the sites of American-run missionary hospitals, and the hope was that Egyptian nurses trained near these facilities would serve in hospitals after completing their training. This establishment of the nurses’ training schools as “feeders” into missionary hospitals (in which religious services and

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\(^{63}\) Anna Augusta Milligan and Frank C. McClanahan, *Dr. Henry of Assiut, Pioneer Medical Missionary in Egypt*, 91-92.

\(^{64}\) Skellie, *One Hundred Years*, 16 and Lorimer, *The Presbyterian Experience in Egypt*, 20-25.
evangelism for patients was a fixture of the health care provided), mean we can readily assume that these nurses were all Evangelical Christians. In 1945, only sixteen Egyptian women were enrolled in the nurses’ training program, with eight graduates working at the Asyut hospital.\textsuperscript{65} The missionaries also operated a nurses’ training program near their hospital in Tanta. This program was more successful, with an average of twenty nurses enrolled in each graduating class.\textsuperscript{66} These training programs provided a unique form of vocational training within the Church, enabling women to receive professional medical licenses at a time when few governmental nurse-training programs were available. These women became essential, professional medical providers within the Evangelical community. For example, when the government nationalized the missionary’s hospitals and clinics in the mid-20\textsuperscript{th} century, Egyptian Evangelical nurses were able to stay on staff to ensure the continuance of medical services.\textsuperscript{67}

Despite the gains these women made in acquiring a medical education and professional licensing as nurses, the nurses-training programs were successful for only a short period of time. The American mission and the Egyptian Evangelical Church were not always able to sustain its opportunities for female education and employment, and the nurses’ training program was discontinued in 1964. The nurses’ training program had always been small, and it suffered from increased governmental competition by the mid-20\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{68} In the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, the Egyptian government had been offering a three-year certificate program for nurses, providing Egyptian women with access to

\textsuperscript{65} Anna Augusta Milligan and Frank C. McClanahan, \textit{Dr. Henry of Assiut} (Philadelphia: United Presbyterian Board of Missions, 1945), 150.
\textsuperscript{67} Lorimer, \textit{The Presbyterian Experience in Egypt}, 21.
\textsuperscript{68} Judith Tucker, \textit{Women in Nineteenth-Century Egypt}, 129.
employment in clinics, hospitals and as midwives. The American and Egyptian Evangelicals in Asyut hoped that nurses from their training program would stay to work at their hospital, but lacked the funds to provide their nurses with a competitive salary. Many left shortly after completing their training to seek more lucrative employment. The Asyut mission hospital itself was also suffering from competition with inexpensive government hospitals, and closed in 1964. The nurses’ training program in Tanta was similarly unsuccessful, as the government refused to license its graduates. 

Though the nurse-training programs were ultimately unsuccessful under the management of the American mission, the Egyptian nurses themselves still managed to gain a number of benefits from their participation. First, while the programs were still operational, a number of women did receive medical training and licensing. Though the government did not recognize the certificates of the nurses from the Tanta program, the mission hospital was still able to hire them, and graduates from the Asyut program could be employed anywhere. The ambitious implementation of nurse-training programs by the missionaries signaled their commitment to expanding opportunities for female employment, and in that regard, the training programs were somewhat successful. As we will see in the following chapter, the failure of the missionaries to compete with government educational programs and state medical services pushed the Evangelicals to focus their energies on expanding the professional opportunities for women within the Evangelical Church. In some ways, this internal focus did more to increase the visibility

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of women leaders in the Evangelical Church than did their work in schools and clinics away from members of their church congregations.

**Social Clubs for Girls**

The American mission introduced a variety of clubs for women and youth in the 1920s as well, and their popularity increased steadily throughout the first half of the 20th century. For example, girls’ clubs for illiterate children were held in public community centers and attracted a wide range of children who might not otherwise be allowed or willing to participate in mission-run activities. By the middle of the 20th century, there were 16 girls clubs meeting in Cairo alone, and they had become institutionalized to the point of requiring an eight-month leadership-training course for the Egyptian women supervising the meetings. Missionary Anna Thompson also helped to start an Egyptian women’s temperance society to combat drinking within the Coptic community. The formation of these social clubs by the Protestant church was part of a rising trend in early 20th century Egyptian society, where nationalist and religious groups sought to involve youth in their movements through providing a public meeting space for recreational and educational activities.

Evangelical women organized in more formal ways, too. In 1953, a Young Women’s Union formed through a coalition of 18 pre-existing Evangelical women’s groups. Members of the organization were encouraged to undertake a two-year leadership-training course with the Egyptian Evangelical Church, which included

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certificates of completion. The Union’s leaders were formed entirely of Egyptian women, and included a teenage representative as well.76 At the same time, Egyptian Evangelical women pushed to be formal members of the Synod of the Nile, and gained this right in 1950.77 The Evangelical Church also selected one woman from every presbytery to serve alongside Egyptian delegates to the missionary meetings.78

These activities were supported by a proliferation in women’s newsletters and conferences. Conferences for Bible Women and Sunday school teachers began as early as 1911, and beginning in 1944, were held biennially.79 Girls’ youth conferences were held for the first time in 1948, and were held biennially beginning in 1952.80 A monthly women’s newsletter began in the Egyptian Evangelical Church in 1947. These conferences and newsletters helped to create a circuit of communication and support among Egyptian Evangelical women who might otherwise be separated from one another through distance and difficulties in travel.

*Bible Women*

Beginning in the late 19th century, American missionaries were aware that some women were unwilling, unable or uninterested to leave their homes to participate in Church activities or women’s meetings. Therefore, the missionaries began to train groups of American and Egyptian women to undertake evangelistic house visits. These women were eventually known as “Bible women,” and beginning in 1885, they received formal

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77 Wahba Tharwat, “Practicing Mission in Egypt” (Ph.D. diss., Brunel University, Supervised at London School of Theology, 2008), 69; Elder, *Vindicating a Vision*, 286.
78 Tharwat, “Practicing Mission in Egypt,” 69.
79 Elder, *Vindicating a Vision*, 287.
80 Elder, *Vindicating a Vision*, 297-298.
assistance and training from the missionary board to go from house to house, reading from the Bible and engaging in conversations about Christian teachings. The precise figures of Egyptian women who worked as Bible women are lacking, though the program appears to have begun sometime in the 1870s. In one rare entry, we learn that there were thirty Egyptian women working as evangelists in 1874. Several decades later, this number increased to 51. An American female missionary started a training school for Bible women in 1928, instituting a nine-month training course to help women learn how to run “street Sabbath schools” and be effective in home visits. The training school also held monthly conferences to bring together Bible Women from across Egypt for ongoing training sessions. The American mission estimated that by the mid-1920s, 171 women and 165 children were reached by the Egyptian female evangelists each week.

However, the Egyptian Evangelical Church was unable or unwilling to continue the Bible Women program after achieving institutional independence from the American missionaries in 1958. American Presbyterian missionaries had continued to fund and train Egyptian women as full-time evangelists from the 1870s through the mid-20th century. However, the Bible women program was cancelled in 1963, not long after the total transfer of missionary properties and projects to the Egyptian Evangelical Church in 1958. The Egyptian Evangelical church complained that it did not have the funds to

83 A. Watson, American Mission in Egypt, 440.
84 Finney, Tomorrow’s Egypt, 123.
85 Finney, Tomorrow’s Egypt, 135.
86 Finney, Tomorrow’s Egypt, 152.
continue in that work, as the missionaries had previously paid their salaries, and the local church was overwhelmed with its new responsibilities in managing all of the mission’s other projects, properties and institutions. Women were allowed to continue volunteering and serving within their own church congregations, but would only receive pay if their churches agreed to it. According to research by Rev. Emile Zaki of the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo, the cost of supporting full-time female evangelists was increased by President Gamal Abdel Nasser’s requirement that all full-time employees receive a pension. This requirement extended to clergy and all full-time ministers, though volunteers were exempted. Unable or unwilling to pay the Bible women’s salary, support for their public ministry stopped.

The training of Egyptians to work as Bible women represented the first type of public ministry and church employment that Evangelical women were able to participate in. To do, it is the closest the Evangelical Church has ever come to ordaining women for public ministry. Heretofore, devout Coptic women were only given the opportunities to express their faith as wives and mothers, or as cloistered nuns in convents. Though only a small number of Egyptian women ever worked as Bible Women, this house-to-house evangelism represented a new kind of religious vocation for Christian women in Egypt, and one of the first opportunities for women to earn wages for explicitly religious work within the Church. Though the program has been discontinued, the following chapter will

88 Emile Zaki (Evangelical pastor and former General Secretary of the Synod of the Nile, Researcher at the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo), in discussion with the author, Cairo, Egypt, December 22, 2010.
show the various ways in which Evangelical women have continued to find public roles for themselves in the ministries of the Church.

*Part Two: Responses of the Coptic Orthodox Community*

The participation of Coptic Orthodox women in Evangelical and missionary institutions had a mixed impact on their standing within their own Orthodox community. Some Coptic women saw their status enhanced within their own Orthodox community by using their participation in missionary or Egyptian Evangelical programs and institutions as leverage for pressuring the Coptic Orthodox church into providing similar opportunities and services. In one example, the Coptic Orthodox Church opened a girls’ school in 1869 in the same town where the missionaries had recently opened one. The result was that the Orthodox girls and female teachers transferred to the Coptic Church’s new school.\(^{89}\) Though the motive of the Coptic Orthodox Church appears to have been to compete with the missionary school for influence, this competition helped the Orthodox women and girls of that community secure education and employment for themselves, along with an implicit recognition from the Church of the importance of female education.

Other Orthodox women were threatened or punished for participating in missionary-run institutions. According to missionary records, priests in the 19\(^{th}\) century would threaten to withhold matchmaking services or marriage rites for girls who attended missionary schools or Egyptian Evangelical churches and prayer meetings.\(^{90}\)

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churches. For those girls unable, unwilling or uninterested in attending a mission school, the Coptic Church in the 19th and early 20th century provided few alternatives for education. There were only two Coptic girls’ schools by 1878, and few followed that.91

_Coptic Clergy_

In reviewing the changing policies of Coptic popes towards female education and employment in their community, we gain a more complete picture of the context in which Orthodox women had to work in order to obtain a secure and positive status for themselves in their community. Overall, in the 19th and early 20th centuries, the Coptic Orthodox Church resisted implementing many reforms for the benefit of Orthodox women in the 19th and 20th centuries, which caused Orthodox women to seek educational and vocational opportunities in the Evangelical community, as well as with the Egyptian government.

Prior to the 1850s, there were few educational or vocational opportunities within the Coptic Orthodox Church for either men or women. This changed to a small degree when Kyrillos IV (r.1854-1861) ascended the papal throne. He opened an institute for Coptic studies at the papal cathedral, established weekly Bible studies at the patriarchate and opened the first private printing press in Egypt.92 He made a number of structural changes in the Church meant to improve education among Copts and weed out corruption in the Church, earning him the title “the Father of Reform” by observers as early as 1892.93 As significant as these reforms were in beginning to address complaints about the

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91 Heyworth-Dunne, _An Introduction to the History of Education in Egypt_, Appendix B, 450.
management of church finances and the education of clergy, few of these reforms addressed the role of women in the Church.

Pope Kyrillos IV also seems to have made some progress towards establishing Coptic schools, including some girls’ schools. The exact number of schools opened by the Coptic Church in the 19th century is unclear, though. A Presbyterian missionary claimed that by 1858, the Copts had opened a dozen primary schools “as a means of preventing intercourse with the missionaires…and avoiding the necessity for sending the children of Copts to American Schools.”94 Kyrillos IV opened two girls’ schools in 1853, in Azbakiya and Harat al-Saqqā’in, purportedly to provide Coptic girls with an alternative to Protestant education.95 In 1865, American missionaries also confirmed that one Coptic Church in Upper Egypt had a co-educational school with 300 total students, but it is not clear how many other Orthodox schools were providing female education.96

Under Pope Demetrius II (r. 1862-1870) it is clear that any significant efforts by Pope Kyrillos IV to establish Orthodox schools lost their momentum. Pope Demetrius II was largely uninterested in education, so only a small number of primary schools were maintained or built during his tenure, and even these were poorly funded.97 Professor Samir Seikaly claims that by 1873, the Coptic Church was only maintaining three primary schools—two for boys, and one for girls—with a total of 290 students between them, though J. Heyworth-Dunne counted two Coptic schools for girls in 1875, with 172

94 A. Watson, American Mission in Egypt, 110.
96 Lansing, Egypt’s Princes, 286.
97 Seikaly, “Coptic Communal Reform,” 262.
female students. 98 With a population of several million Copts and such low enrollment, these schools were significant only on a symbolic level.

The next pope, Kyrillos V (r.1875-1927) gradually began to support and improve educational initiatives within formal institutions of the Coptic Church. He opened a number of schools for the education of clergy and monks, established programs for studying the Coptic language, and re-opened the seminary first started by the British Anglican missionaries in 1842 that had closed during the reign of Pope Boutros VII in 1848. 99 While significant for re-focusing the energies of the Coptic Orthodox Church on expanding its educational system, few of his educational initiatives targeted Orthodox girls. As we have seen, the overall number of Coptic primary schools established by the turn of the 20th century was also exceedingly low, especially when compared to the number of Protestant and government schools at the time. For example, in 1907 the Coptic Church was maintaining approximately 46 primary schools, only a small portion of which would have been girls’ schools. 100 In contrast, the American missionaries reported having 119 primary schools already by the turn of the century, with girls comprising more than 60 percent of their total student body. 101 Thus we see that, after the reign of the “Father of Reform” Kyrillos IV in 1862 until the end of World War I in 1918, Coptic Church leaders did little to increase the educational opportunities for Orthodox girls. Most of the impetus for establishing any Coptic educational programs

100 Seikaly, “Coptic Communal Reform,” 267.
101 A. Watson, American Mission in Egypt, 386.
appears to have come from a defensive point of view, in an effort to oppose missionary activity and prevent further inroads into their community. Any advancements for Orthodox women prior to 1952 came from the efforts and activities of laypeople in the Coptic Orthodox community.

Coptic Elites

By the early twentieth century, a generation of elite Christian women emerged who had benefitted from the expansion of educational programs available to them, particularly through missionary-run schools in the 19th and 20th centuries. These women were proficient in one or more foreign languages, often had family connections to Egyptian or European ruling elites, and some had traveled abroad. Accustomed to having opportunities for education and communal leadership, a number of elite Coptic women were frustrated at the lack of such opportunities within the Coptic Orthodox Church itself. These women thus joined forces with a growing elite lay movement that rejected the Coptic Church as the sole leader of the minority community. These women a secular communal sphere in which to assert their leadership.

Majlis al-Milla

In the early 20th century, a growing disjuncture took place between the modernist, Europeanized Egyptian elites and the Coptic Orthodox clergy, who were perceived as uneducated, irresponsible with Church finances, and resistant to reform. This perception that the Coptic Orthodox Church was backwards and corrupt caused some elite lay Copts to seek a non-religious communal identity apart from the Orthodox Church. In an effort to simultaneously reform the Church while distancing themselves from its association, a
small group of wealthy, educated Copts formed a communal lay council, the *Majlis al-Milla*. The goal of this lay council was to create “another legitimate voice representing Copts, thereby undermining the hegemony of the Coptic Orthodox Church as the sole mediator and Coptic representative,” according to Mariz Tadros.¹⁰²

The precise details of the conflicted relationship between this lay council and the Coptic popes of the late 19ᵗʰ and early 20ᵗʰ century have been detailed by S.S. Hasan, Mariz Tadros, Samir Seikaly and others and need not be repeated in its entirety here. Yet significantly, the emergence of a new, non-religious kind of Coptic identity had significant implications for Coptic women. Coptic Orthodox women could now choose between two different minority communities for their allegiance and participation. In the end, however, the impact of the Majlis al-Milla on Coptic women was short-lived. On the one hand, Coptic elite women helped to establish a number of charitable institutions separate from the Church that provided schools and clinics for poor Coptic women. The number of secular Coptic charities remained small, however, and did not reach a wide audience within the Coptic community. The impact of the Majlis al-Milla on Coptic women was further limited by the fact that no women served on the council, thus limiting their voice and influence. Finally, the constant battles and disruptions of the council as a result of their contested relationships with Coptic popes curtailed their activities, and the council was ultimately shut down by President Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1957.

Yet Christian elites had one other significant avenue through which to exert their influence apart from the Coptic Orthodox Church: the Wafd party. As professor Fiona McCallum asserts, the political fortunes of Egyptian Copts in the national society rose (and fell) with the popularity of the Wafd party throughout the early 20th century. In the early part of the century, the Wafd was on the ascendency, as were the Copts associated with them. In 1923, 44 percent of the Wafd executive committee were Copts. Sixteen Copts were elected to the national parliament in 1924, which was actually equated to a proportional overrepresentation of Christians in the legislative body. Even more Copts were elected in 1936.

Most of the elite Copts who participated in the activities of the Wafd were men. However, a small handful of elite Christian women were able to avail themselves of new political opportunities presented by the nationalist and feminist movements, and through the Wafd party most especially. The most prominent example is that of Esther Fahmy Wissa (1895-1990). Esther contributed visibly to both the feminist and nationalist movements, making her greatest contributions to the Wafd party. Though an Evangelical, we consider her here as an example of an elite, wealthy, educated Christian woman who sought to gain social and political opportunities for herself apart from any structures of a church.

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When Huda Sh‘arawi famously removed her headscarf at the Cairo train station after attending an international conference on women’s suffrage, Esther gave speeches from the train platform.\(^{106}\) Esther took part in the 1919 nationalist demonstrations, and later received recognition for her political activism from President Gamal Abdel Nasser.\(^{107}\) In 1920, she helped to found the Central Wafdist Committee for Women, and served as vice-president to Huda Sh‘arawi. At Esther’s direction, the first Women’s Wafdist meeting was held at St. Mark’s Coptic Orthodox Cathedral in Cairo.\(^{108}\) In 1923, Esther became the president and spokeswoman of this group, representing Wafdist women’s interests nationally and at international conferences.\(^{109}\) She was also selected to address more than 20,000 Wafdist during a meeting in 1935, of which all but 400 attendees were men.\(^{110}\) Though Esther’s political role in the Wafdist party was not typical of all elite Christian women, her career indicates the extent to which Egyptian society had changed in the 20\(^{th}\) century to allow women greater civic leadership. Though the Wafd party did not endure in popularity past the 1940s or remain an open door for a large number of female political activists, in Esther’s life we see a brief moment in which Christian women were able to assert communal leadership outside the context of the Church.

*Social Reform*

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\(^{110}\) Baron, *Egypt as a Woman*, 177.
Like modernists and imperialist critics from the same time period, elite lay Copts saw a number of social ills relating to the status of women that required their attention. For this they formed the “Coptic Committee for the Suppression of Evil Habits” to combat the seclusion and veiling of women and the practice of early marriage.\footnote{Seikaly, “Coptic Communal Reform,” 266-267.} Elite Coptic women also supported charitable institutions throughout the 19th and 20th century. Egyptian notables contributed to the work of the Lady Cromer Dispensary for mothers and children, and Lillian Trasher bequeathed her large orphanage complex as a waqf holding to the Coptic elite of Asyut.\footnote{Renate Lunde, “Building Bonny Babies: Missionary Welfare Work in Cairo, 1920-1950” in Interpreting Welfare and Relief in the Middle East, ed. Nefissa Naguib and Inger Marie Okkenhaug, 83-107 (Boston: Brill, 2008), 88; Beth Baron, “Nile Mother: Lillian Trasher and the Orphans of Egypt,” 249-250.} Esther Wissa founded a charitable society called “Work for Egypt,” which began in 1924 and remained until it was nationalized under President Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1962.\footnote{Wissa, Assiout: the Saga of an Egyptian Family, 254.}

Prior to 1952, Coptic Orthodox women had few opportunities within the Church to seek new educational or professional opportunities. Coptic popes during this time period opened only a token number of girls’ schools, which were poorly maintained and attended. There were as yet no new Sunday school programs, hospitals, or social services provided by the Coptic Orthodox Church in which Orthodox women might work. For Orthodox women seeking new educational opportunities or avenues for leadership, they had to turn to the Evangelical Church, to government schools, or to the secular civic sphere. New opportunities for female participation in the Coptic Orthodox Church would not begin until the 1960s, when a new generation of reformist clergy rose to prominent positions within the Church hierarchy.
Part Three: The National Context

It must be emphatically stated that the American missionaries, Coptic Orthodox Church and the Coptic elites were not the sole or even primary actors affecting the educational and vocational opportunities for Christian women in the 19th and 20th centuries. Though the American Presbyterians deserve credit for helping to popularize female education, particularly within the Christian population of Egypt, Christian women had an increasing number of opportunities to attend governmental and foreign private schools throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. This is particularly true for upper class Egyptian Christians who could afford private tuitions. There were also other means through which Christian women gained employment opportunities or community leadership. For elite Christian women, philanthropy has always been an important avenue towards improving their social status. In the early 20th century, the Wafd party and the feminist movement also provided some Christian women with new avenues for public participation and leadership. These national trends had their own impact on the status of Christian women within their communities.

Twenty-five years before the arrival of American missionaries, a small number of British Anglican missionaries arrived in Egypt in 1825, looking to assist, strengthen and reform the Coptic Church and its clergy from its perceived problems of corruption and illiteracy. Most prominent among this small group was John Lieder, who took it upon himself to establish a number of British-style schools that would emphasize the Protestant
values of “industry, discipline and order” in order to bring about a revival in the Coptic Church. A boys’ school was established in 1828, followed by a girls’ boarding school in 1829. The girls’ school followed the same rigorous methods of instruction as the boys’, along with many of the same academic subjects: Arabic, English, math, Christian doctrine, and the Bible. In addition, girls also spent their afternoons learning domestic skills, such as sewing. The Anglican missionaries viewed female education as one of their top priorities, believing that the reform and enlightenment of Egyptian women would lead to the revival of the entire Coptic community. It was the women, they believed, who were most susceptible to believing the “oriental” and “superstitious” teachings of the Coptic clergy, so only the education of women would remove these erroneous beliefs and practices from Coptic community. These schools were notable for providing female education at a time when hardly any other governmental or religious institution was. Yet the British Anglican mission was poorly funded and staffed, and temporarily suspended its mission to Egypt in 1865. The British Anglicans re-started their Egyptian mission in 1882, but never established the same number of schools, clinics or other outreach institutions as the American missionaries.

The Egyptian government also played a significant role in expanding female education, though progress was initially very slow. When Muhammad Ali (r.1805-1848) became governor of Egypt, he began a sweeping program of modernization, including social and economic reform. Most notably for our purposes, he began investing heavily in

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Egypt’s educational system beginning in the 1820s. According to Judith Tucker, this educational initiative extended to women only insofar as Muhammad Ali opened a midwifery institute for women attached to his new medical school. This institute opened in 1832 and included basic literacy and math classes in addition to health skills, but never succeeded in attracting many students.\textsuperscript{118} No new significant gestures towards improving female education came until the reign of Ismail Pasha (r. 1863-1879), who aimed to expand and modernize the government school system for the benefit of both boys and girls.\textsuperscript{119} As part of this initiative, he opened a government primary school for girls in 1873, and a girls’ secondary school in 1874, though J. Heyworth-Dunne asserts that these schools were largely attended by Muslim girls who had been unwilling to avail themselves of missionary-run schools in operation during this same time period.\textsuperscript{120} Progress towards expanding the educational sector stalled when Ismail declared bankruptcy and was forced to abdicate.\textsuperscript{121} By the time of his abdication in 1879, nearly 900 Egyptian girls were enrolled in government schools.

The British stopped this new momentum towards female education by deliberately stunting the growth of Egypt’s educational sector in an effort to balance Egypt’s budget and maintain imperial control.\textsuperscript{122} When the British began direct control over Egypt in 1882, British officials repeatedly decried the illiteracy and seclusion of

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  \item Ahmed, \textit{Women and Gender in Islam}, 136.
  \item Heyworth-Dunne, \textit{An Introduction to Education in Modern Egypt}, 374-375.
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Egyptian women, and pledged rhetorical support for improving female education. In truth, however, the British government deliberately decreased government investment in the educational sector and curtailed the enrollment of students in government schools by raising tuition prices. The only efforts by the British towards expanding female education in Egypt was for elite women and for those who could work as governesses for British children. Despite their claims to promote female education, British policies undid even the minimal progress of 19th century Egyptian rulers toward improving female literacy and vocational training. Judith Tucker notes that after decades of British rule, female literacy was only two percent in 1917.

Female education did not become widespread in Egypt until the Egyptian government began to make serious improvements to the public education system in the early 20th century, including the construction of girls’ schools. At the exact same time, a confluence of factors led to a decline of the American missionary school system, which helped to establish the government as the clear provider of Egyptian education for girls and boys by the 1950s.

In the 1930s, the American mission was forced to downsize for a number of reasons, including budget cuts, anti-foreigner and anti-missionary backlash within the Egyptian population, and nationalization policies by the Egyptian government. Financially, the Great Depression led to a sharp decrease in funding. Heather Sharkey documents a 34 percent budget cut in foreign missions that contributed to a dramatic

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decline in the number of full-time missionaries supported by the Presbyterian Church in the United States - from 217 missionaries in 1924 to 174 in 1939, and only 66 in 1944. In 1941, a prominent mission-run girls’ school in Alexandria closed for lack of funds.

Competition from free government schools was the major cause of the decline in overall enrollment, which dipped from 13,706 students in 1925 to only 5,304 students in 1944. Put another way, in the 1920s, fully one-third of all Egyptian students were enrolled in private Christian schools. By the late 1940s, the number of overall enrollment in governmental schools had skyrocketed: 374,292 girls alone were enrolled in public schools. In contrast, only 8,000 girls were enrolled in private Protestant schools in the same period. The government rapidly replaced missionaries as the primary provider of education for girls and boys alike. Thus Egyptian Christian girls benefited from increased opportunities in education throughout the 20th century, but no longer needed the Church to provide these opportunities for them.

At this time, the government passed a series of ordinances that restricted the operation of Christian schools in response to the nationalist and Islamist movements. In 1934, Law 40 made it illegal for schools to teach students a religion other than their own, and required all schools to provide separate facilities for boys and girls. The first part of the law irked the missionaries, though they tried to find various ways around it.

The second restriction put a considerable financial strain on missionary-run village

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126 Sharkey, American Evangelicals, 97, 146.
127 Sharkey, American Evangelicals, 145-146.
128 Fowler, “Christian Schools in Muslim Lands,” 45.
129 Sharkey, American Evangelicals in Egypt, 146.
130 Sharkey, American Evangelicals in Egypt, 6; Baron, “Christian Missionaries and the Rise of the Muslim Brotherhood.”
131 Sharkey, American Evangelicals in Egypt, 131-132.
schools, and made the expansion of missionary schools a more expensive enterprise generally. In 1948, another law was passed to re-iterate that students had to be instructed about their own religion, and were additionally required to be taught Arabic and Egyptian history. Some reluctantly complied, while others expelled their Muslim and Jewish students rather than teach Islam as an academic subject.

After the Free Officers came to power in 1952, they passed a series of laws in rapid succession that point to the urgency the government felt in finally pushing missionaries out of the educational system altogether. In 1955, a law was passed to confirm that all Muslim students must be taught Islam, regardless of the wishes of their parents. By 1957, schools were not allowed to discriminate against Muslim students by refusing their enrollment or expelling them from the institution. In 1958, Law 160 subjected foreign schools to certain quotas that required a certain number of nationals to be brought onto the staff and required school directors to be Egyptian. As a result of these laws, the American mission formally transferred its schools to the local Egyptian Evangelical church. The Egyptian Evangelical church was ill-prepared to assume responsibility for these schools, both in terms of finances and human resources.

The overall quality of private Christian schools began to suffer, but the overall number of Christians receiving an education had increased. According to a study by Judith Cochran, girls made up 12 percent of the student body in government schools by 1930, mostly represented in primary schools. Though the overall percentages were low,

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132 Fowler, “Christian Schools in Muslim Lands,” 46; Sharkey, American Evangelicals in Egypt, 183.
133 Sharkey, American Evangelicals in Egypt, 182.
134 Sharkey, American Evangelicals in Egypt, 6.
135 Fowler, “Christian Schools in Muslim Lands,” 48; Sharkey, American Evangelicals in Egypt, 206.
136 Sharkey, American Evangelicals in Egypt, 206.
this level of female education in Egypt was unprecedented. By 1956, female students represented one-third of the total enrolled in public schools, with 541,361 girls enrolled in the government’s 5,399 primary schools. In contrast, there were only 1,967 private schools operating at that time, only a tiny fraction of which would have been Christian-affiliated in any meaningful way. Though Christian girls were no longer educated in Christian schools in large numbers after the 1950s, the overall rise in the level of female education led to an expansion and expectation of female employment in the Coptic and Evangelical churches.

Conclusion

In the 19th century, the idea of female education and the expansion of women’s vocational opportunities became an aspiration and a widely debated topic for the first time in Egypt’s modern history. Several voices joined in the growing calls for improved female literacy rates in Egypt, including Egyptian elites and rulers, British colonial officials, and foreign missionaries. Of all these actors, it was the American missionaries who made the most concerted initial efforts towards providing and expanding the educational institutions available to all classes of Egyptian girls. Their vision also extended to the Church itself, where they instituted new service opportunities, especially for newly-literate Egyptian women. The expansion of Sunday school programs encouraged the spread of literacy and Church participation, including among Egyptian girls. The Bible women program created new and innovative forms of public ministry.

hitherto unavailable to Egyptian women. Sunday schools, orphanages and day schools employed a large number of Egyptian women as well.

At the same time, Coptic clergy were highly resistant to change, and reacted strongly to the perceived inroads of the American missionaries into the Coptic community. As thousands of Copts converted to Protestantism, the Coptic Church viewed Protestant-initiated programs with disdain. As a result, the Church put only minimal effort into creating and maintaining private schools that would have increased the educational opportunities for girls. They also rejected Sunday school programs, and at various points, even threatened excommunication against those who would attend Protestant educational programs and schools. By taking a defensive, resistant position against the activities and rhetoric of the Protestant missionaries, the Coptic clergy failed to develop their own narrative about the role and service of women in their community.

For most of the 19th century, the only Christian opportunities for female education and service took place in the Evangelical church.

In the 20th century the Egyptian government began to nationalize missionary institutions and curtail their activities in response to a growing sense of Egyptian nationalism, anti-imperialism, and Muslim backlash against Christian missionary activities. The missionaries themselves were unable to sustain many of their ambitious projects in the face of a global financial depression. As a result, the Egyptian government began to take over and replicate many of the social programs, schools and clinics started by the missionaries. For Egyptian women who had once sought educational, medical and social services through the Protestant Church, they now had the opportunity to find these
same opportunities (and sometimes at a cheaper price) through the government.

Effectively shut out of the educational sphere, the American mission and the Egyptian Evangelical Church began to focus on expanding the quantity and quality of religious programs within the church, rather than compete with the government in the public sphere. As we will see, from the 1960s onward this led to an expansion of the Sunday school program, youth conferences, Christian student clubs, Christian media and church-based recreation. All of these new activities affected the role of Christian women in the Church. For Coptic Orthodox women, the normalization of female education and employment in the public sphere by the mid-20th century helped to kick start a new phase of opportunities for female participation in the Orthodox Church.

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139 Fowler, “Christian Schools in Muslim Lands,” 58-59; Sharkey, American Evangelicals in Egypt, 6, 185.
Chapter Two
The Role of Women in the Evangelical Church, 1952-Present

From 1952 onward, the Egyptian Evangelical Church began to focus predominantly on developing religious and social programs within the Church, rather than for the general public. The initial cause for this shift was the nationalization policies enacted by the Egyptian government on foreign missionaries in the 1930s and 1940s. By the 1970s, the increased influence and activities of Islamists in Egyptian society further encouraged the Evangelical Church to create a robust, parallel social sphere in which Evangelicals could worship and socialize amongst themselves. The result is that the physical setting of the Church has become the primary communal gathering site for Evangelicals. For women, this means that their participation in Church activities is more visible by all members of the congregation than it was in previous times, when female participation primarily occurred in mission-run primary schools away from male members of their church congregations. As elders, worship leaders, conference organizers, and social service providers, women are increasingly visible in a site that is the focal point for the minority Evangelical population.

The expansion of Church-related activities gave women more opportunities to participate in their Evangelical communities, opening new avenues for female leadership at conferences, worship services, and through media outlets. The Evangelical Theological Seminary also began admitting women into academic programs for lay leaders. However, despite the overall increase and visibility of women as leaders in the Evangelical Church,
the question of female leadership remains controversial in the Egyptian Evangelical Community. This is most evident in recent efforts to ordain female ministers within the Evangelical leadership structure, which has met with institutional and popular resistance among the Evangelical churches. Even though the Synod of the Nile recently approved women to serve as elders in Egyptian Evangelical Churches, there are ongoing debates about the theological and cultural propriety of women serving in such roles, and the possibility of Egyptian women working as head pastors seems remote at the moment.

Trends in the broader national society also affected the role and status of Evangelical women within their minority religious community. First, the academic and professional achievements of Egyptian women in the public sphere helped legitimize their increased prominence and leadership in the Evangelical Church. For example, today there is a female doctor serving as president of a church hospital with a multi-million dollar annual budget, whereas the mission hospitals of the late 19th century only allowed Egyptian women to serve in subordinate positions to both the American mission’s foreign staff. Starting in the 1970s, women began to participate in Church activities in such high numbers, and brought such high academic and professional qualifications to their Church responsibilities, that women’s Church participation has since become normalized in a variety of spheres and activities. Though women have not achieved equality of service or access to all levels of leadership within their minority community, they have established themselves as a substantial force in the Church.

140 Sameh Maurice (Pastor of Kasr el-Dobara Church), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 15, 2010.
Below, I will briefly describe the national context in which the Egyptian Evangelical Church has functioned in the late 20th-century, focusing on the relationship between the Egyptian Church and the American missionaries and the changing educational and professional status of Egyptian women in the public sphere. Following that, I will examine the participation of women in four key areas of the Church from 1952 to the present: church education, conferences and Evangelical non-governmental organizations (NGOs), social services, and pastoral leadership.

National Context

Egyptian women have experienced an overall increase in female education and employment in the 20th century, especially in urban areas. Scholars are quick to note that women’s achievements in education and employment still lag behind that of men, and that due to periodic shifts in the economy and culture, the trajectory of female development has not been linear or uniformly progressive. ¹⁴¹ That being said, today Egyptian women work as doctors, engineers, parliamentarians and professors, whereas roughly 60 years ago, they did not. As Evangelical women have contributed their skills, talents, and training to the ministries of the Church, their roles and prestige in the Evangelical community have been enhanced.

The Free Officers’ government initiated free, compulsory primary school for men and women in 1953. ¹⁴² By 1959, there were 927,863 girls attending public or private schools, and 23,639 female teachers. ¹⁴³ Female representation in secondary schools and

¹⁴² Boktor, Development and Expansion of Education in the United Arab Republic, 27.
universities was still relatively low, though historically unprecedented: 28,748 girls attended secondary school in 1960 (as compared to 103,413 males).\textsuperscript{144} In institutions of higher learning, over 10,000 women in 1960 were studying to become teachers in special training colleges.\textsuperscript{145} Women were allowed to study in any university faculty, and a total of 15,014 females were enrolled in universities in 1961.\textsuperscript{146} By 1979, the percentage of female students in primary school increased to 40 percent of all enrolled students, with 1,697,492 girls enrolled.\textsuperscript{147}

Female employment also increased over the course of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. From 1971 to 1981, the percentage of women working in the formal labor force more than doubled, from seven percent to 18 percent (excluding the agricultural sector).\textsuperscript{148} In the 1960s, women began to take jobs in the expanding state bureaucracy, in addition to more traditional clerical and teaching jobs.\textsuperscript{149} By the mid-1970s, women began to break into traditionally male-dominated fields, such as medicine and engineering.\textsuperscript{150} These new opportunities for education and employment provided women with practical skills and social prestige. Christian women brought their expertise and vocational training with them into the Church setting, where they began to apply their skills in the ministries and activities of the Church. Gradually, the Evangelical Church began to accommodate these

\textsuperscript{144} Boktor, \textit{Development and Expansion of Education in the United Arab Republic}, 57.
\textsuperscript{145} Boktor, \textit{Development and Expansion of Education in the United Arab Republic}, 57.
\textsuperscript{146} Boktor, \textit{Development and Expansion of Education in the United Arab Republic}, 146.
\textsuperscript{147} Judith Cochran, \textit{Education in Egypt}, 48.
qualified women in new leadership positions commiserate with their professional and educational training.

*Education: The Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo*

The Egyptian government had achieved a near monopoly on primary and advanced education by the mid-20th century. For Christian women interested in studying their faith, however, there were no public or private institutions that admitted female students for advanced Christian theological training. Evangelical women thus achieved a significant step when they were admitted for the first time to the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo in 1967. The seminary was originally established in 1863 to train and ordain pastors and evangelists. As the Egyptian Evangelical Church has never ordained women, the institution did not offer any programs for women for most of its history. The enrollment of women was first allowed when the seminary began an evening program in the late 1960s for non-ordained lay members to take classes on the Bible and Christian theology, along with leadership training. The first woman graduate, Victoria Fahim Aziz, received a degree in religious studies in 1970.\(^\text{151}\) Since the introduction of graduate degrees in 1999, women have received master’s degrees in Biblical studies from the seminary.\(^\text{152}\) The Women’s Union of the Synod also runs an eight-week leadership-training course for laywomen through the seminary.\(^\text{153}\) A few women work as professors at the seminary including Dr. Nadia Haleem and Dr. Viola Morris, both Egyptian women.

\(^{151}\) Lorimer, *The Presbyterian Experience in Egypt*, 32.
\(^{152}\) Lorimer, *The Presbyterian Experience in Egypt*, 43.
\(^{153}\) Lorimer, *The Presbyterian Experience in Egypt*, 45.
with Ph.D. degrees. Interestingly, some professors have been ordained female pastors from Protestant denominations in the United States or Europe, such as the American Presbyterian Rev. Elisabeth Kennedy. On at least a few occasions, foreign female pastors have officiated communion for students at the seminary, despite the fact that the Evangelical Egyptian church does not recognize female ordination. According to professors and students interviewed at the seminary, this is indicative of the ambivalent view of female ordination within the Egyptian evangelical community, where some clearly support the practice and others believe it runs contrary to Biblical teachings and Egyptian cultural norms.

*Sunday School, Discipleship Groups, and Youth Services*

Social and religious programs in Evangelical churches have helped promote female participation in local church communities, as well as foster mentoring relationships between women leaders and young girls. Nearly every church sponsors youth groups and Bible study groups often known as “discipleship groups.” Though sometimes synonymous with Sunday School classes, many discipleship groups meet mid-week and in addition to Sunday School classes, and provide social support, peer companionship, and mentoring along with religious lessons and Bible study. In practice, these small groups are usually single-sex until college age, though some churches

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156 Lorimer, *The Presbyterian Experience in Egypt*, 44.
157 Mourad Adel (Student at the Evangelical Theological Seminary), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 15, 2010; Tharwat Wahba (Professor at the Evangelical Theological Seminary), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 20, 2010; Emile Zaki, interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 22, 2010; Youssef Gamil (Member of Kasr el-Dobara Church), interview with the author, Cairo, Egypt, December 15, 2010; Sameh Maurice, interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 15, 2010.
continue to separate young men and women in their discipleship groups until they reach their mid-20s.\textsuperscript{158}

As in the Sunday School programs, women are typically required to teach and lead other girls and young women, which means that the expansion of discipleship programs has led to an increase in opportunities for female mentorship and leadership within their congregations.\textsuperscript{159} In interviews with women discipleship group leaders and participants, female mentorship appears to be one of the primary draws to participating in these groups, and has clearly helped raise up new generations of women leaders in the Evangelical Church. For Sally Samir, a young discipleship group leader at Kasr el-Dobara, her childhood discipleship group leaders were some of her closest friends and confidants. Along with a group of ten other teenage girls, she received counseling, companionship, and spiritual instruction. By the time she and her cohort grew too old to remain as participants in the discipleship group, four of them decided to undergo training to become leaders. Sally now leads a group of seven girls between the ages of 18 and 21, and she expects that one or two of these girls will graduate to become leaders themselves.\textsuperscript{160}

In another example, Nevine\textsuperscript{161} joined a discipleship group at Kasr el-Dobara over 20 years ago. She became a discipleship leader in 1989, at a time when there were only three or four women leading discipleship groups in the entire church. The growth in popularity of these discipleship groups over the past 20 years has created a demand for

\textsuperscript{158} Yousef Gamil, interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 11, 2010.  
\textsuperscript{159} Sally Samir (Kasr al-Dobara discipleship group leader), interview with author. December 17, 2010.  
\textsuperscript{160} Sally Samir, interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 17, 2010.  
\textsuperscript{161} Last name withheld out of consideration for her role with AWEMA and its socially and politically sensitive work of supporting Christian evangelism in the Arab world.
new women to become group leaders; there are now nearly two dozen women serving as discipleship group leaders. After working as a discipleship group leader for a number of years, Nevine went on to become a shepherd, helping to oversee the female discipleship groups throughout the entire church. There were only two female shepherds in the church at the time of her appointment. Nevine’s experience in the discipleship groups and her professional credentials as a pediatrician helped her to win the respect of her male colleagues and acceptance as a woman leader in one of the top echelons of the church. The acceptability of women serving in these positions has also increased over time, due to the effectiveness of female mentoring in identifying qualified new women leaders. There are currently six women serving as shepherds at Kasr el-Dobara, which is the highest position that women are allowed to hold in that church.162

Youth worship services are another avenue through which young women are able to participate in their church community and receive leadership training as worship leaders. Many Evangelical churches have large youth meetings or worship services that occur mid-week or in the evenings after the main worship service. Kasr el-Dobara’s youth meetings take place on Friday afternoons, and at one point, became so popular that it had larger attendance than the official weekly service.163 These meetings are one of the few times during the week when young women and men can socialize together at church.

162 Nevine (Head of women’s ministries at AWEMA and leader at Kasr el-Dobara Church), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 19, 2010.  
Young women have the opportunity during these services to mingle with young men, seek romantic partners, and practice leadership skills in a co-ed environment.  

These youth groups for girls and boys are outgrowths of the social clubs and Sunday school classes started by the American Presbyterian missionaries in the 19th century. Just as those early groups and classes provided a means for Christian girls and women to leave their homes in order to socialize in their community and participate publicly in a religious setting, these contemporary discipleship groups fill a variety of spiritual and social needs. The multiplication of discipleship, Sunday school, and youth groups throughout Evangelical Churches in Egypt has helped to normalize female participation and attendance throughout the week at the church building and create a sanctioned public sphere in which even conservative families frequently feel comfortable sending their daughters.  

Conferences  

Religious conferences have provided a new avenue for female leadership. Since the mid-1950s, evangelical women have regularly met together in conferences for women, by women, gaining valuable experience in planning and leading large-scale events in the process. This leadership also provided the opportunity for women to gain prominence as leaders and organizers for the mixed-gender youth conferences that

164 Author’s visit to Kasr el-Dobara Church Friday, December 17, 2010; Yousef Gamil, interview with author, December 11, 2010.  
165 Sara Tal’at (Member of Evangelical Church in the M‘asara neighborhood on the outskirts of Cairo, Egypt), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 17, 2010; Gigi Tal’at (Member of al-Adhra Coptic Orthodox Church in M’aadi, Cairo and former member of an Evangelical Church in the M‘asara neighborhood on the outskirts of Cairo, Egypt), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 12, 2010; Dina (Administrative assistant at AWEMA, member of Evangelical church in Heliopolis, Egypt), interview with author, December 13, 2010. Dina’s last name withheld out of consideration for her socially and politically sensitive work with AWEMA.
became popular after the 1960s.\footnote{Sameh Maurice, interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 15, 2010.} Women attend and staff these conferences in large numbers, using these church-sponsored events to socialize and build networks with other Christian women.

Youth conferences, which now comprise a key element of the social life of a church, have played an important role in increasing the participation of Christian girls in their religious communities. The youth conferences sponsored by Kasr el-Dobara church have gained special prominence due to their location at Kasr el-Dobara’s own recreation and retreat center at Bayt al-Wadi in the desert only an hour outside of Cairo. Thousands of Evangelical and Coptic Orthodox young Christian girls gather with young men for annual events which feature state-of-the-art sound and light equipment, worship teams with electric guitars and drum sets, and entertainers and speakers often invited from abroad (last year’s conference featured a high-ropes course, pro-wrestlers, and stunt-performing motorcycle exhibitionists). Christian girls hear motivational speakers, play sports and participate in activities with their peers, and meet members of the opposite sex in a sanctioned and supervised environment.

Individual churches also host small-scale workshops in order to address social problems in their congregations. During one visit to Kasr el-Dobara church, I witnessed a two-day marital counseling workshop. Several hundred couples gathered to participate in Christian worship and to receive religious and psycho-social counseling for marital problems. A special space was arranged for nursing mothers in the rear of the meeting space so that they could participate in the workshop while tending to their children’s
needs. Evangelists working with Evangelical churches in Upper Egypt, Bani Swayf, and Giza also reported that churches there regularly held conferences for prayer, worship, and leadership training. In each of these conferences and workshops, Egyptian girls and women are provided with opportunities to increase their social network within their religious communities, gain religious instruction, and sometimes serve in leadership roles through instruction, logistics, or worship.

*Non-Governmental Organizations and Parachurch Ministries*

A number of Christian ministry organizations sprang up in the 1970s and 1980s to reach Christian students and youth, supplementing the outreach occurring during the Church conferences discussed above. Campus Crusade for Christ International, Youth With A Mission, Operation Mobilisation, and Navigators all established a presence at this time, typically operating near or on university campuses and in connection with Egyptian social clubs and churches. These organizations originated in the United States and Europe, but Arab Christians from Lebanon primarily brought these organizations to Egypt from the Levant, where they had earlier established an institutional presence. Unlike in the United States and Europe, where these organizations typically aim to convert non-Christians, their role in Egypt is to encourage Christian youth to become more active in their religious communities. In this way these organizations are allowed to

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167 Author’s visit to Kasr el-Dobara Church, Cairo, Egypt, December 11, 2010, 11 a.m.
168 Ramzy (AWEMA, Department of Evangelism), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 13, 2010. Last name withheld out of consideration for his socially and politically sensitive work with AWEMA.
169 The term “parachurch” refers to ministries and Christian organizations that are not tied specifically to any particular church or denomination.
operate under current anti-evangelization laws in Egypt and avoid backlash from the Muslim population.\textsuperscript{171}

The impact of these organizations on the role of women in the Evangelical community is mixed. In the instance of Campus Crusade for Christ International in Egypt, there are almost 200 staff members who holding evangelistic events, discipleship training, and worship meetings in order to encourage the faith of nominal Christians. However, according to a former staff member of Campus Crusade, there are few women represented on the staff. Most of the single staff members are men, and the women represented on staff are typically married to other staff members.\textsuperscript{172} At Youth With a Mission, however, a number of courses are available for male and female Egyptian students to learn how to run orphanages and preschools, start new churches, and care for the urban poor.\textsuperscript{173} Though the number of Egyptian women directly affected by these NGOs and parachurches is relatively small, these organizations represent yet another novel avenue for female leadership and employment in the Evangelical Church. These also represent one of the few settings in which Evangelical women can earn wages for their Christian work.

\textit{Social Services}

In addition to expanding programs, conferences, and activities within the Church, Egyptian Evangelicals also maintained a certain commitment to the kinds of social and economic projects initiated by the American missionaries in the first half of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century.

\textsuperscript{171} Wahba, interview with the author, Cairo, Egypt, December 20, 2010.
\textsuperscript{172} Wahba, interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 20, 2010.
century. Their primary vehicle for such projects is through the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services (CEOSS). Started by American mission president Dr. Davida Finney as a joint venture with the Egyptian Evangelical Church, many Americans served in its leadership positions until the evacuation of foreign personnel in 1967.\(^{174}\) Since then, and per requirements of the Egyptian government for registered non-profit organizations, its leadership has been entirely Egyptian. Reverend Samuel Habib served as its first director with the assistance of Reverend Menis ‘Abd al-Nur, a former pastor of Kasr el-Dobara.\(^{175}\)

From the beginning of CEOSS, the program has specifically reached out to Egyptian women. Beginning in the late 1960s, CEOSS provided vocational training for women, including sewing and knitting classes, in what it called the “Happy Home” program.\(^{176}\) It also initiated a three-year home economics course that combined vocational training with family health and nutrition. CEOSS staff focused on providing these courses to women in rural areas, where they perceived women’s health and vocational needs to be greatest. At any given time, hundreds of women registered and attended classes five times per week.\(^{177}\) Presently, CEOSS combines its female vocational training and micro-loan enterprises with a strong emphasis on reproductive health. Since the 1970s, CEOSS has worked with women to encourage family planning and birth control, and as well as working against clitoridectomy.\(^{178}\) These programs also


\(^{176}\) Dye, *The CEOSS Story*, 19.

\(^{177}\) Dye, *The CEOSS Story*, 40-41.

provide opportunities for Egyptian women to assume leadership roles. In their literacy programs, especially, women who received CEOSS training often became literacy instructors, or used their skills to set up schools and childcare facilities.\(^{179}\) Through these programs, CEOSS has maintained the same emphasis on women’s education and employment as that of the American missionaries before them.

CE OSS’s emphasis on improving the living standards of Egyptian women generally has paralleled their focus on the status of women inside the Evangelical Church specifically. Since the 1960s, Samuel Habib made a point of addressing gender issues within the Evangelical community itself. He advocated an end to virginity tests for brides—a ritual that had heretofore been customary, and that is still practiced by many Egyptian Christian families. He also worked to remove gender partitions in Evangelical churches that had separated male and female congregants.\(^{180}\) In visits to Evangelical churches in Cairo, it is evident that gender segregation is still practiced by some congregations, though it seems to be in a minority of churches.\(^{181}\) CEOSS also hosts conferences that focus on the role of women in the Evangelical Church. For these, it recruits prominent women from rural villages to serve as speakers. In this way, rural Christian women have some of the same opportunities for conferences and social activities as do urban women.\(^{182}\)

Individual churches also operate various social, medical, and educational programs. Kasr el-Dobara church in downtown Cairo has the largest hub of programming

\(^{179}\) Lorimer, *The Presbyterian Experience in Egypt*, 70, 87-88.

\(^{180}\) Following common practice in the Coptic Orthodox Church, gender segregation in evangelical churches typically means that women sit on the right side of the church, while men sit on the left.

\(^{181}\) Author observation of Evangelical church in Masara, Egypt; February 2009.

\(^{182}\) Dye, *The CEOSS Story*, 46.
activity, as it boasts the largest Evangelical congregation in the entire Middle East and is well-funded from Egyptian and international donors. Of its ten social service programs, two are led by women. This includes a full service Amoun-CoMET hospital, directed by a Christian doctor named Lucy Sobhe Maasarani. Another woman, Eva Botrous (nicknamed “Colonel Eva” for her bold personality) oversees the Mercy Team ministry that serves underprivileged Muslim and Christian children. Kasr el-Dobara also has a large sports program that is meant to provide recreational activity and Christian mentorship for youth who might not otherwise be interested in church activities. Young men, however, primarily access these sports clubs rather than women.

Other Evangelical organizations also provide services to Egyptian women. The Arab World Evangelical Ministers Association (AWEMA), an international Evangelical ministry headquartered in Egypt, has had three full-time staff members devoted to providing programs for women and girls throughout the Middle East since 2003. In Egypt, they focus particularly on rural and urban single teenagers and young women. They have two reasons for this emphasis: first, many churches have discipleship groups and support networks for university students and mothers, but often provide very little programming for single adult women. Second, AWEMA staff members perceive that Egyptian women suffer generally from low self-esteem and from cultural norms that tie a woman’s value to her marital status. Their rural programs focus on social problems.

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183 Pastor Sameh, interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 15, 2010.
184 Mourad Sinot (Coptic-Catholic Christian and Coptic historian), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 12, 2010.
185 Nevine, interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 19, 2010.
believed to be more prevalent in Egyptian villages, including cliteridectomy, young marriage, incest, prostitution, and other forms of social and physical exploitation.\textsuperscript{186}

In order to address these perceived needs, AWEMA staff members hold an annual international and national conference, as well as multiple small conferences throughout the year.\textsuperscript{187} In these conferences, they provide leadership training and self-defense skills, along with curriculum support for Bible studies. One of the staff members, Therese, also regularly travels throughout villages and towns in Upper Egypt to provide lessons on female health and safety at churches and private and governmental schools. Therese also provides leadership and counseling courses for community members and school social workers in rural areas so that they can provide adequate health, psycho-social, and vocational support for teenage girls. She estimated that her trainings reach 20-30 community leaders and 150-200 girls per event, and she holds these trainings three times per year, per site.\textsuperscript{188}

\textit{Worship Leading}

Though not an ordained position within the Egyptian evangelical church, worship leading has become a relatively common and influential avenue for female leadership in Egyptian Evangelical churches. According to Pastor Sameh of Kasr el-Dobara church, women first gained the opportunity to lead worship during all-women’s conferences. As mentioned in the previous chapter, conferences became a common activity within

\textsuperscript{186} Violet (Wife of AWEMA president and active participant in AWEMA ministries), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 12, 2010; Therese (Women’s ministry staff member at AWEMA), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt December 19, 2010. Last names withheld out of consideration for the socially and politically sensitive work of AWEMA.\textsuperscript{187} Violet, interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 12, 2010.\textsuperscript{188} Therese, interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 19, 2010.
evangelical circles by the 1940s, and were regularly hosted by individual churches, cities, and on a national level. Conferences were either exclusively female- or family-oriented until 1963, when the first co-ed youth conference was held. Women who had established reputations as gifted worship leaders during all-women’s conferences were given the opportunity to lead the singing of religious songs during co-ed conferences from the mid-1960s onward. As Pastor Sameh at Kasr el-Dobara church stated, worship leading at co-ed conferences was extremely significant for women, “because it gave women the opportunity to meet, lead, speak and give their testimony in ways they wouldn’t be able to in a main service.” It became common for Christian conferences to be co-ed, and women who had gained experience singing religious songs and playing musical instruments at women’s conferences were gradually invited to contribute similarly during mixed gatherings. Many church congregations also regularly permit women to sing religious songs in front of the congregation, and sometimes to serve as the main worship leader for a group of singers and musicians.

Beginning in the 1980s, groups of Christian musicians began to form performance troops, which provided a means of public ministry for women. The most famous are al-Khabar al-Sār (the Good News team), al-İdāyāa al-Afğāl (the Better Life Team), Praise Team Egypt, and al-Farīq al-Risala (the Message Team). These groups perform at Egyptian churches and congregations, sometimes perform internationally, and often hold

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189 Sameh Maurice, interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 15, 2010.
190 Sameh Maurice, interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 15, 2010.
191 Yousef Gamil, interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 11, 2010.
192 Yousef Gamil, interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 11, 2010; Nader Naim (Discipleship group leader at Kasr el-Dobara Church), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 12, 2010; Dina, interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 12, 2010.
holiday concerts. Many of these groups now post videos on the YouTube website, and provide their music for purchase or free download online.\footnote{See \url{www.goodnews-team.com}, \url{www.betterlifeteam.com} and \url{www.praiseteamegypt.com}.} In the case of Manal Samir, her experience on the Better Life Team helped her to launch a modest career as a solo Christian vocalist, with international performances and albums for sale.\footnote{Dina, interview with author, Cairo, Egypt December 12, 2010.} Though Egyptian women have a long history of working as singers and performers, the development of traveling worship teams is the first time Christian women have had access to this vocation within a co-ed religious setting.

Though worship leaders are not ordained, and the participation of women in worship leading varies from congregation to congregation, the inclusion of women in this ministry is significant in the context of Egyptian Christianity. In the Coptic Church, women do not participate in leading chants or songs during mass, nor do they stand at the front of the church at any point during the service. Women worship leaders and musicians in the Evangelical churches thus have an unprecedented opportunity to be recognized as religious leaders before the entire congregation.

**Female Preaching**

Kasr el-Dobara has also taken unprecedented steps to provide women with pastoral responsibilities within its church. At the behest of Pastor Sameh, two women preach regularly during the church’s weekly worship services. Nora Edward preaches several times a month, often during the church’s most attended weekly services. Cassette tapes and online video clips of her preaching are circulated locally and internationally. The other female preacher at Kasr al-Dobara is Salwa Sahbi, who teaches less frequently.
than Nora but often leads worship during the church’s weekly services. Though these women are not permitted to assume any other leadership responsibilities of a pastor, they are able to participate in a pastor’s most public function—preaching.

The internet and satellite television channels have also provided Evangelical women with new and unprecedented leadership roles. There are a handful of Christian television channels that reach audiences in Egypt, including the public Coptic Orthodox channel, the Hayāa (“Life”) satellite channel, the al-Kālima (“The Word”) satellite channel, and the M’ujiza (“Miracle”) satellite channel. Kasr el-Dobara regularly broadcasts its worship services on the M’ujiza channel and posts videos of its services on the Internet. One of the most prominent Egyptian Christian women to take advantage of this new television technology is Nora Edward. Having been invited to preach regularly at Kasr el-Dobara church, her sermons are frequently broadcast as a part of the Kasr el-Dobara services shown on satellite TV and on the church’s website. At the same time, Nora Edward started her own television show called Rabinā Yaqdar (“God is Able”) on the M’ujiza channel, and recently started a new program called al-Rabb Sām’ānā (“God Heard Us”). This new platform for preaching allows her to circumvent the current restrictions on female ordination in place in the Egyptian Evangelical Church.

195 Sameh Maurice, interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 15, 2010.
Female Elders and Ordination

Despite the increasing visibility of female leadership within evangelical churches—as worship leaders, discipleship leaders, and conference leaders—the topic of female leadership remains controversial within the Egyptian evangelical church. The issue was first discussed in detail in 1970, after an evangelical pastor in Minya unilaterally ordained two women for ministry in his congregation. In the controversy and discussion that followed, the Synod of the Nile commissioned a study to be undertaken on the Biblical and historical precedent (or lack thereof) of female leadership in the Church. Rev. Emile Zaki, who went on to serve as the General Secretary for the Synod and authored part of the report, openly supported the right of women to serve as elders. In the end, the Synod decided to sidestep the controversy by neither accepting nor rejecting the women’s position.

The topic remained unresolved until 2002, when a pastor in Asyut ordained a woman as an elder in his church. The Synod discussed the matter until 2006, when it voted to approve the ordination of female elders. The decision allowed women to be appointed to key leadership and advisor roles within individual congregations and lent symbolic support to the notion of Christian female leadership generally. In practice, however, few churches have appointed female elders since the decision was passed. Though hard figures are lacking, church leaders interviewed thought that only a small handful of congregations out of the 311 evangelical churches had women serving in these roles.

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198 Tharwat Wahba, interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 20, 2010.
199 Emile Zaki, interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 22, 2010.
200 Emile Zaki, interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 22, 2010.
positions. Kasr el-Dobara has decided that it will not appoint female elders at this time, citing disagreement among current church leaders about female elders and a desire to avoid splitting the church over the controversy. Kasr el-Dobara does allow women to be “shepherds,” a rank that is specific to their individual church structure. Shepherds oversee discipleship group leaders and act as mentors to junior leaders beneath them. However, elders supervise these shepherds, and women are not permitted to be elders within Kasr al-Dobara church.

The Synod’s decision to allow female elders stopped conspicuously short of the approval the ordination of women as head pastors. The Egyptian evangelical church, with its historical ties to the United Presbyterian Church, has repeatedly asserted its disagreement with the American Presbyterians’ decision to ordain women, citing Biblical differences in interpretation and cultural barriers to female ordination in Egypt. From interviews with members of the Synod, church leaders, and professors at the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo, it is clear that a variety of opinions and positions exist on this subject, though female ordination does not receive widespread support from leaders or laity. Rev. Emile Zaki has recently supported an application by his daughter, Anne Zaki, to be ordained by the Synod of the Nile as a minister. The Synod is currently

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201 According to an interview with Emile Zaki on December 22, 2010, he thought that women were serving as elders in churches in Fayyum, Alexandria and Cairo, but could not recall the particular names of the churches.Sameh Maurice and Tharwat Wahba also confirmed that only a very small number of women had been ordained since the Synod allowed female elders in 2006.
202 Sameh Maurice, interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 15, 2010.
203 Sally Samir, interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 17, 2010.
204 Sameh Maurice, interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 15, 2010.
205 Emile Zaki, interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 22, 2010.
reviewing the application, though it seems unlikely that it will be approved at this time given the controversy that still surrounds women serving in the lesser position of elder.

Conclusion

One impact of the expansion of social, educational, and recreational activities by the evangelical church is that the physical space of the church has become a sanctioned public sphere for female participation. In an extreme example, since 2007 Kasr el-Dobara church has operated a room called the “House of Prayer,” inspired by a 24-hour prayer ministry based in Kansas City, USA. Kasr el-Dobara’s House of Prayer is usually open at least twelve hours a day, every day, and sometimes for a full 24-hour cycle. Women frequently participate and lead in the prayer and singing that takes place in the House of Prayer; any member is welcome to sign up to lead a “shift,” though much of the worship activities in the room are not necessarily led or directed by any particular individual. This fluid form of worship provides women in the congregation with ample opportunities to build confidence and experience in leadership within the context of a religious service.

The round-the-clock availability of the prayer room also underscores the extent to which the church building has become a central site of the Evangelical community and a place where women are increasingly visible.

This prayer meeting typifies the new environment in which evangelical Egyptian women work and participate in their religious communities: one in which women’s presence in ministries is expected, and even ordinary, where opportunities for female

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206 Author visit to Kasr el-Dobara Church, December 11, 2010; Yousef Gamil, interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 11, 2010; Mourad Sinot, interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 12, 2010.
208 Author visit to Kasr el-Dobara Church, December 11, 2010.
209 Yousef Gamil, interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 11, 2010.
leadership frequently present themselves without fuss or effort. At the same time, Evangelical Egyptians are aware of institutional barriers to further female advancement. This is especially true for women’s ordination as head pastors and, to a lesser extent, as heads of a ministry or as elders. Though the Egyptian evangelical church has recently officially allowed women to serve as elders, few women have yet to be appointed to this position. In Kasr el-Dobara, the largest and most influential Evangelical church in Egypt, they have decided not to appoint women to be elders, despite the decision by the larger body of evangelical churches. Thus the opportunities for female participation in leadership have expanded tremendously within the evangelical Church, but women have yet to gain access to all avenues of leadership.
Chapter Three

The Role of Women in the Coptic Orthodox Church, 1952-Present

In the second half of the 20th century, Coptic Orthodox Clergy dramatically reformed the structures and practices of the Church in order to address illiteracy, corruption, and the marginalization of laity, youth, and women within the Orthodox community. Through these reforms, there was a widespread increase in the number of women serving as volunteers, nuns, and service providers through Church institutions.

At the same time, the Coptic Orthodox Church became the focal point for the Orthodox community with the decline of the Coptic elites and the Majlis al-Milla in the 1940s and 1950s. By the late 1960s, Coptic clergy were both able and ready to resume sole leadership of the Coptic community and be the focal point of all of the Coptic community’s activities. Without a parallel secular Coptic movement through which to exercise communal leadership, Coptic women’s means for influencing their status and standing in the Orthodox community could only be found in the Church itself, lending greater significance to all opportunities and barriers to female participation there.

As the re-established leader of the Coptic Orthodox minority, the Church began to invest heavily in the internal structures of the church from the 1960s onward—paralleling the inward focus of the Evangelical Church during this same time period. This internal orientation had two causes. First, with government schools fully established and most missionary schools nationalized, the Coptic Church did not have to expend its energies and resources in establishing a costly system of private schools. They were therefore free
to focus on reforming the internal structures of the church: expanding Sunday Schools, providing social services to parishioners, revamping monasteries, and setting higher educational standards for priests, nuns, monks, and even lay volunteers. Second, the Coptic Church expanded its internal activities as the presence of Islamists expanded in the public sphere, thus increasing the social and recreational function of the Church and placing it increasingly in the center of the Orthodox community.\textsuperscript{210} As S.S. Hasan remarks in her history of the Coptic reform movement, the transformation of the Orthodox Church into an “all-embracing institution” that deals with “issues temporal as well as spiritual,” provided Coptic women with numerous service opportunities in the explosion of new activities within the Church.\textsuperscript{211}

This chapter will examine first the rise of the reform movement, commonly referred to as the “Sunday School Movement,” within the Coptic Church by the mid-20\textsuperscript{th} century. Next, we will examine the impact of Sunday school and social service programs on increasing the opportunities for female service among the laity as students, teachers, patients, and service providers. Third, we will look at opportunities for women to serve in religious capacities within the official Church hierarchy, and the limitations imposed on this service by Church officials. Finally, as with Evangelical women, the increase of educational and professional opportunities in the public sphere has positively influenced the standing of Coptic women within their communities. Thus Church officials have


\textsuperscript{211} Hasan, \textit{Christians Versus Muslims}, 87.
come to expect, and even demand, a certain level of education among Orthodox women lay volunteers and nuns.

_The Sunday School Movement in the 20th-Century Coptic Orthodox Church_

As detailed in Chapter One, Coptic clergy resisted most proposed reforms to the Coptic Orthodox Church throughout the 19th and early 20th century. It was this resistance that prompted the growth of a secular lay movement among the Coptic elites, though their movement was ultimately short-lived and without many lasting consequences. The influence of the Coptic laity declined along with the _Wafd_ party’s waning power throughout the 1940s. After 1952, Nasser’s land reform laws struck a serious blow to the influence of elite Coptic families who heretofore had accrued significant social power through large land holdings.212 Furthermore, the absence of any Copts in the 1952 Free Officers’ coup led to a marginalization of elite Coptic laity in Egyptian politics for the rest of the 20th century.213

Yet the need for reform was still great in the 1950s, even after the Majlis al-Milla was dissolved. The 1950s were a time of particularly rife corruption within the Coptic patriarchy, as when Pope Yusab II (r.1946-1956) allowed his assistants to use church holdings and wealth for personal enrichment and social leverage.214 The conflict between lay reformers and the Coptic pope grew so severe that President Gamal Abdel Nasser intervened to depose the pope in order to restore communal stability within the Coptic

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213 Seikaly, “Coptic Communal Reform,” 81-82.
214 Hasan, _Christians Versus Muslims_, 59.
minority. It was not until Kyrillos VI (r. 1959 – 1971) took the papal throne that reform-minded clergy were able to rise high enough in the Church hierarchy to institute substantive changes that increased opportunities for female participation and service in the Church.²¹⁵

Though the effect of the Coptic Church reformers was not felt until the 1960s, reformist ideals took root within a small faction of the clergy by the late 19th century. Habib Girgis, a deacon in the Coptic Church, is hailed as the founder of the Sunday School Movement. In 1893, he took advantage of the new opportunities for (male-only) higher education in the Coptic Church by enrolling in the first class of the Coptic Theological School.²¹⁶ Convinced that Coptic clergy and laity alike would benefit from increased educational opportunities, Habib implemented and contributed to a number of educational projects and programs. The most influential of all of these was his implementation of a Sunday school program that replicated, in some ways, the Sunday school programs introduced by the American Presbyterian missionaries in the late 19th century. In 1918, Habib established a central committee that would oversee the establishment of Sunday Schools, develop curriculum, and supervise instruction,²¹⁷ and through these efforts his influence and popularity spread. Engaging his students in an interactive “question and answer” format, he educated them on Coptic saints, the Coptic

²¹⁵ Patrick, *Traditional Egyptian Christianity*, 166.
²¹⁶ Patrick, *Traditional Egyptian Christianity*, 145.
language and history of the Church, along with Biblical teaching in an attempt to blunt the influence of foreign missionaries among the youth.\textsuperscript{218}

By the 1940s, there were an estimated 42,000 girls and boys participating in weekly Sunday schools under a standard curriculum.\textsuperscript{219} In 1948, Pope Yusab II officially recognized and institutionalized the Sunday school program, appointing Habib Girgis to lead the new High Committee for Sunday School Education.\textsuperscript{220} In the ensuing years, guidelines for curriculum were established and program oversight was centralized. The Sunday school program expanded dramatically to reach virtually every Orthodox Church, leading to a great need for female Sunday school teachers to teach the girls’ classes.

Currently, Sunday school provides opportunities for female students and teachers alike to receive formal religious instruction, participate in Church structures apart from the weekly mass, and receive counseling on various social and personal issues. Sunday schools classes are separated by age and gender, providing students with a structured peer group in which to receive instruction and socialization into the Church, along with Church-sanctioned recreation in a communal meeting place. Sunday school also provides a means for the Coptic Church to address social issues relevant to youth. For example, both male and female Sunday school classes frequently discuss sex and marriage.\textsuperscript{221} One former Sunday school teacher invited a doctor as a guest speaker during a Sunday School

\textsuperscript{218} Hasan, \textit{Christians Versus Muslims}, 74.
\textsuperscript{219} Hasan, \textit{Christians Versus Muslims}, 76.
\textsuperscript{220} Hasan, \textit{Christians Versus Muslims}, 76.
\textsuperscript{221} Ramy Rezkalla (Servant trainer and former Sunday School teacher at Mar Girgis Church on Haram Street in Cairo, Egypt), interview with author, December 21, 2010; Marian Mounir and Marco Elkomos Daoud (servants at St. George church in Shobra and former servants at St. Mary’s church in Shobra el-Khaima), interview with author, December 18, 2010.
session so that her female high school students could receive sex education and ask health questions to a professional in a protected, confidential environment.  

**Servants and Servant Training**

All the while, the need for female Sunday school teachers multiplied with the number of new Sunday school programs. Informally, Sunday school teachers were first trained by Habib Girgis. When he was still a student in the Coptic Theological Schools in 1896, he began publishing popular lessons in Coptic theology for the general public. These lessons later were incorporated into Coptic Sunday School curriculum and used for the training of Sunday school teachers.  

After Pope Yusab II institutionalized the Coptic Sunday School program in 1948, the Church instituted strict training requirements for all church volunteers, including Sunday school teachers. In the Coptic system, trained volunteers are called “servants” (singular in Arabic: *khādim*, plural: *khuddām*) while female volunteers are frequently called by the Coptic term for “my sister,” *tasuni*, or in Arabic as *khādima* or plural, *khādimāt*. The training of Church volunteers is known as *t‘alīm al-khuddām*.  

Coptic women have taken advantage of this training in large numbers. Many churches reported having hundreds of trained volunteers, with dozens more undergoing training each year. In some churches, women make up the majority of khuddām, and

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222 Heather Keaney (Coptic Orthodox Christian and history professor at the American University in Cairo), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 11, 2010.  
223 Hasan, *Christians Versus Muslims*, 75.  
224 Ramy Rezkalla, interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 11, 2010; Awad Basseet, (Coptic Orthodox Sunday school teacher, journalist at Copts United), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 11, 2010.  
225 Gigi Tal, interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 12, 2010.
most everywhere, women serve as khuddām trainers. The institutionalization of this volunteer service lent previously informal female labor in the Church legitimacy and recognition, along with titles, ranks, and certain privileges. Tasunis are thus greeted with titles of respect by members of the congregation, have the authority to teach classes and lead activities, and use meeting rooms in Church compounds for their programs.

Based on interviews with servant trainers in different congregations, training classes are co-ed, and usually include both male and female instructors teaching this mixed group. This is consistent with Church practice that segregates students by gender through high school, and then permits mixed learning environments beginning with college students. Trainees are typically expected to be at least college-aged to begin the program, though some interviewed said they began servant training while they were still in high school. All servants are required to complete a two-year training course, in which trainees meet at least once a week for a few hours. Curriculum materials vary from church to church, but standard subjects include church history and patristics, Orthodox theology and biblical study, the Coptic language, and teaching methods, along with discussions on leadership styles, psychology, and how to use one’s gifts and talents. Examinations on the training material are held regularly, and trainees who do

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226 Father Ifraim, St. Dimiana Church in Shobra al-Khaima, interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 18, 2010.
227 Maryam (Tasuni at al-Adhra Church in M aadi), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 13, 2010.
228 Sheri (servant trainer, Mar Girgis Church in Giza, Egypt), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 17, 2010; Ramy Rezkalla, interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 11, 2010.
229 Sheri, interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 17, 2010; Ramy Rezkalla, interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 11, 2010.
230 Awad Basseet, interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 11, 2010.
231 Sheri, interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 17, 2010.
not pass their examinations are dropped from the program. Trainers also reserve the right to deny certification to anyone deemed unfit by character or personality to serve the Church in this capacity.

The training program by itself has provided numerous opportunities for women leaders, in addition to the opportunities afforded to women volunteers once they graduate as servants. In the Saint Dimiana and Mar Girgis churches in Shobra al-Khaima, Giza, and downtown Cairo, priests technically oversaw the training program, but they delegated most of the responsibilities for teaching to qualified laity within their congregations, both men and women. At the Mar Girgis church located in a low-income neighborhood by the Giza pyramids, a young, single, female medical student, Sheri, is in charge of overseeing all first-year servant trainees, both young women and men. In her position, she not only teaches on her own area of expertise—the Coptic language—but she is also in charge of coordinating the various instructors who will teach eight different subjects during the first year of training. During one training meeting, Shari began her lesson by leading a lively discussion on the book of Joshua in the Bible. She took questions from both male and female trainees, and at times, openly disagreed with the Biblical interpretations of her male students.

Given that women are typically not allowed to teach men religious subjects in the Coptic Church, Shari’s position of authority in the training class indicates that female

\[\text{232} \text{ Marian Mounir and Marco Elkomos Daoud, interview with author, December 18, 2010.}\]
\[\text{233} \text{ Sheri, interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 17, 2010.}\]
\[\text{234} \text{ Author observation at St. Dimiana Church in Shobra al-Khaima, December 18, 2010 and at Mar Girgis Church in Giza, December 17, 2010; Ramy Rezkalla, interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 11, 2010.}\]
\[\text{235} \text{ Sheri, interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 17, 2010.}\]
religious leadership in the Coptic Church can sometimes be more accepted in practice than it is on paper.

Furthermore, the regulation of Church volunteers represents one of the many ways in which the Church has drawn laity into formal Church institutions. The official recognition of laypeople’s contributions to the Church is critical for Coptic women, who, until recently, have been excluded from any official capacity in the Church hierarchy except as contemplative nuns.

Social Services

Women servants work in a variety of different settings within the Church in addition to Sunday school. In the second half of the 20th century, Coptic clergy became more involved in providing social services through the institutions and structures of the Church. Pope Kyrillos VI appointed Bishop Samuel to the Bishopric of Social Services in 1959, in a continuation of the social work carried out by elite Coptic laypeople and reformist clergy since the 1940s.236 The Bishopric of Social Services has since expanded its reach to include social ills in urban settings, including services for the mentally ill and physically handicapped, clinics for drug addicts, and “homes of mercy” for the protection and care of unmarried mothers.237 In personal visits to churches in M’aadi, Giza, and Shobra al-Khaima, I observed a large number of social service centers on church grounds, including kindergartens, schools for children with mental illness, medical

236 Hasan, Christians Versus Muslims, 91.
237 Hasan, Christians Versus Muslims, 93.
clinics, computer labs, and vocational centers, with large numbers of women involved in running these various programs.\textsuperscript{238}

The expansion of social services on this scale has had a dramatic impact on the participation of Coptic women within the Church community. Women are key recipients of care and services, benefitting personally from vocational, literacy, and medical clinics. On the other hand, these services require an enormous work force. Women are highly represented in Church services as teachers, doctors, social workers, vocational trainers, and so forth, reflecting the expansion of women’s professional opportunities in the work force in the public sphere over the course of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. By providing these services through the religious community, the Orthodox Church has provided Coptic women with opportunities for leadership and visible public service in a way that would not be possible if such services were only accessible through the government.

\textit{Women’s Meetings}

In addition to Sunday school meetings for children and youth, churches offer a wide number of mid-week prayer meetings, Bible studies, and support groups. In interviews with priests and laity, all churches reported having meetings for teenage girls, adult women, and co-ed prayer meetings that many women attend.\textsuperscript{239}

The establishment of the Bishopric of Youth in the 1980s helped to focus the attention of the Church on the needs of young Coptic women. Bishop Musa, the head of this new Bishopric, has helped encourage individual congregations to provide not only


\textsuperscript{239} Gigi Tal at, interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 12, 2010; author participation in a women’s meeting at al-Adhra church, Cairo, Egypt, December 14, 2010.
Sunday school classes to high school students, but also recreational activities, trips to youth conferences, and the attractive use of media. Young Orthodox women have new opportunities to build social networks through the Coptic Church and engage in Church-sanctioned recreation, in addition to receiving spiritual instruction. The Church magazine Risālat al-Shabāb al-Kanāsī (“The Mission of the Church Youth”) addresses popular social and cultural problems Coptic youth face, including how Christian girls should dress and date. A webpage devoted to the Bishopric of Youth on the social media networking website Facebook helps Egyptian youth stay connected to events and online lecture series held by Bishop Musa. The establishment of an internet-based social sphere further expands the opportunities for Orthodox girls to build social networks within their religious community.

Women’s meetings are also popularly attended in many churches, and provide adult women with religious instruction and social camaraderie. In one women’s meeting I attended at the al-Adhra church in M’aadi, approximately two-dozen women of widely varying income and educational levels attended, two with their small children. The meeting was co-led by two tasunis. Each of these tasunis had completed the necessary two-year training course as many as 20 years prior, showing how the institutionalization of training courses has led to the emergence of generations of women leaders within the Orthodox Church. The meeting included the recitation of liturgical prayers from the Coptic prayer book, singing of religious songs, and a lengthy and participatory recounting

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242 Maryam, interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 13, 2010.
of the events surrounding Jesus’ birth. All of the women present were encouraged to participate, with the tasunis applauding correct answers and inviting multiple opinions and Biblical interpretations. At one point, one of the attendees disagreed with the tasuni, and the tasuni ultimately changed her mind about a Biblical passage in question. Snacks were shared, and a small gift was given at the end to encourage frequent attendance. Women in the room took turns minding the small children in the room, passing babies between rows and letting an older child play quietly in the corner.

The meeting focused primarily on religious knowledge and spiritual encouragement, and it ended with an open-ended discussion of how moral lessons from Bible passage under discussion might be applied to the women’s lives. The tasunis did not encourage women to share the details of their personal or family problems, but they made themselves available to meet with the group members individually throughout the week.

Active Nuns and Deaconesses

Tasunis undergo formal training, but they are otherwise loosely regulated volunteers who teach Sunday school or lead adult meetings according to their interest and availability. Another group of Coptic Orthodox women sought a formal structure to recognize, support, and regulate full-time public ministry in the Coptic community.

The first recognized attempt to create such an institution took place in 1958, when Church reformer Matta el-Meskeen established a group of consecrated, celibate male

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243 Author observation, women’s class, al-Adhra church, M aadi, Egypt, December 14, 2010.
244 Author observation, counseling session with Tasuni Maryam, al-Adhra Church, M aadi Egypt, December 13, 2010.
volunteers known as *mukarrasin* as part of his ongoing campaign to revive interest in monasticism. These men strove to live like monks but work outside the monastery walls in their communities. Like monks, they promised to live celibately, study the scriptures, and pray, but they devoted themselves to public service instead of to a life of cloistered contemplation. Because Matta el-Meskeen acted on his own accord in establishing this group without the permission of the pope, their vows were not recognized by the Church, nor were they officially initiated as monks.²⁴⁵

A few years later in Bani Swayf, two women approached the local bishop with a similar request to serve as “nuns in the world,” living a monastic lifestyle but dedicating themselves to full-time service of their Church and community. The late Bishop Athanasius of Bani Swayf agreed to support them and enrolled the women in a period of training and mentorship. In 1969 he gave them an unofficial rite of ordination as so-called “active nuns,” who would dedicate the rest of their lives to serving the poor, praying, and living celibately. Their numbers grew throughout the 1970s, until these *mukarrasat* formed a community they called *Binat Maryam* (“the daughters of Mary.”) Pope Kyrillos VI eventually offered a “blessing” of the service of the mukarrasat at Binat Maryam in 1971, but he stopped short of giving mukarrasat official recognition or incorporation into the Church structures.²⁴⁶

Despite the lack of official recognition, the work of the mukarrasat continued in Bani Swayf and beyond. These consecrated volunteers have undertaken a number of spiritual and development projects across Egypt, including medical clinics; schools; care

²⁴⁵ Hasan, *Christians Versus Muslims*, 89.
²⁴⁶ Van Doorn-Harder, *Contemporary Coptic Nuns*, 36, 37.
for the elderly; care for the mentally or physically disabled; care for converts, runaways, and unwed mothers; vocational training; after-school centers for youth; and spiritual education and care. In all of these projects, the active nuns work to train local staff to eventually take over the work for their own communities.  

The continuance of their work despite official recognition indicates some of the key developments of the Coptic Church in the second half of the 20th century. First, it shows how Coptic Orthodox Christians came to expect that the Church would provide charitable projects and social services for Coptic Christians throughout Egypt, to the extent that volunteers would provide these services even without the official support of the clergy. Second, their work indicates the increasing educational and professional achievements of Egyptian women generally. These mukarrasat were educated and qualified to run schools, medical clinics, and social services without the assistance of men. Coptic women’s education and work experience enabled them to take initiative in providing new services through the church and to create new leadership opportunities for themselves where none existed previously.

Outside of Bani Swayf, a few other dioceses began to accept celibate lay volunteers as mukarrasat to serve their religious communities and provide social services through the Church. The practice was never institutionalized or well regulated, leading to varying policies and practices between dioceses. The permissibility of serving as a mukarrasat was left up to the priests and bishop in the community. The divergent

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practices between areas meant that the vocation of “consecrated woman” remained a poorly-understood and seldom-used avenue to female participation in the Church until 1981, when they received official recognition from Pope Shenouda III.\textsuperscript{249} Even since, this does not seem to be a widely recognized or utilized avenue for female religious service.

Rather than permit the expansion of this informal model of female service, Pope Shenouda III decided in 1992 to institutionalize mukarrasat by reviving the office of deaconess (\textit{shammāsa}).\textsuperscript{250} The office of the \textit{shammāsa} is believed to have been practiced in the early days of the Coptic Church, but to have been defunct for several centuries.\textsuperscript{251} The mukarrasat were now viewed as novice shammasat, who were required to undergo additional training before achieving this new rank. In order to attain the level of “shammasa,” a woman must undergo several preparatory stages. In the first step, she spends a year of service under the title of \textit{ṭāliba takrīs} (“one who seeks consecration”). After this, she serves as an assistant to an already-consecrated woman (\textit{musa’ida mukarrasa}). Her next two years are spent as a “novice” (\textit{mubtadi’a}). At the end of these three years, she attains the title of “consecrated” (\textit{mukarrasa}). She must spend five more years in service in order to obtain the next title of “assistant deaconess” (\textit{musa’ida shammāsa}), and another five years until she obtains the full title of “deaconess” (\textit{shammāsa}). The whole process requires approximately 18 years, at the end of which the consecrated women undergoes an official rite of initiation and official recognition of the church.\textsuperscript{252}

\textsuperscript{249} Pieternella van Doorn-Harder, “Discovering New Roles,” in \textit{Between Desert and the City}, 83.
\textsuperscript{250} Gawdat Gabra, \textit{Historical Dictionary of the Coptic Church} (Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2008), 268.
\textsuperscript{251} El-Khawag, “The Laity at the Heart of the Coptic Clerical Reform,” 268.
\textsuperscript{252} El-Khawag, “The Laity at the Heart of the Coptic Clerical Reform,” 161.
As Dina el-Khawaga points out, there are advantages and disadvantages to such a model. On the one hand, it does legitimize and encouraged the contributions of uncloistered women in the service of the church. Though shammasat cannot perform any sacraments and are at the bottom of the clerical hierarchy, they are, nevertheless, included. On the other hand, “the various groups other than consecrated women no longer have any official legitimacy within the church,” which denies them access to church funds and honored status in the community.\textsuperscript{253}

In institutionalizing the office of shammasa, the Church has imposed a number of restrictions that simultaneously make the office more respectable, but limit the number of women eligible. For example, shammasat must be chaste and unmarried during their term of service, but they are permitted to be either virgins or widows.\textsuperscript{254} The marital status of female volunteers is indeed a point of interest for the leaders of the Coptic Church. Pope Shenouda III has encouraged virgin girls who were unable to join convents to fulfill their desire to live celibate lives by becoming consecrated deaconesses.\textsuperscript{255} Alternately, Father Matta El Meskeen writes that widows should not be allowed to remarry, but that they should instead devote their lives to the church. In fact, he refers to widowhood as a Church “office,” similar to that of a deaconess.\textsuperscript{256}

However, the requirements that mukarrasat and shammasat remain chaste and be unmarried during their years of service exclude the possibility of married women

\textsuperscript{253} El-Khawaga, “The Laity at the Heart of the Coptic Clerical Reform,” 161.
\textsuperscript{254} El-Khawaga, “The Laity at the Heart of the Coptic Clerical Reform,” 161.
receiving official recognition for their service to the church. By tying women’s sexual and marital status to church service—a requirement that is not in place for priests, who are typically married—the vast majority of Coptic women cannot hope to achieve such recognition. It also would seem that the number of years required to achieve the status of deaconess would preclude the possibility for some women to obtain it, even for those who began to work towards this goal.

The revival of the office of shammasa simultaneously created a place in the existing clerical hierarchy for full-time public female service to the Church while regulating and supervising the practices of consecrated women and setting requirements for their service. Though the work of mukarrasat and shammasat did not differ in any significant way from one another, the revival of the office of the deaconess confirmed that the majority of female volunteers in the Coptic Church would operate within (and at the bottom of) the clerical framework and hierarchy.\textsuperscript{257}

In addition, mukarrasat and shammasat are only permitted to work with children, the elderly, or other women—not with adult men.\textsuperscript{258} Of course, these women are not allowed to perform sacerdotal functions or perform sacraments, nor are they allowed to teach men or read sacred texts for public meetings.\textsuperscript{259} Pope Shenouda III has made this point explicitly clear, declaring that, “in the whole history of the Church, we may find some Deaconesses, not for the service of the altar, but for social service or educational service…but not for serving the altar, not for the Holy Eucharist, not to baptize….”\textsuperscript{260} Of

\textsuperscript{257} El-Khawaga, “The Laity at the Heart of the Coptic Clerical Reform,” 161.
\textsuperscript{258} Van Doorn-Harder, \textit{Contemporary Coptic Nuns}, 38.
\textsuperscript{259} Van Doorn-Harder, \textit{Contemporary Coptic Nuns}, 38.
\textsuperscript{260} Shenouda III, \textit{Homosexuality, Ordination of Women} (London: Coptic Orthodox Publishers
course, this holds true for all women in the Coptic Church, not just for shammasat. The Coptic Orthodox Church has historically restricted women from performing any sacerdotal functions, or even from receiving the Eucharist when they have their period. These restrictions are in place for all women, including for mukarrasat and shammasat.261

Though the symbolic significance of the revival of the office of deaconess is great, the practical impact of mukarrasat and shammasat in many communities is small. 180 women were recognized as mukarrasat in 1981 by Pope Shanudah III, and according to Pietermella van Doorn-Harder, at least 500 mukarrasat and shammasat were consecrated by 1997.262 In such a large Coptic population, however, these numbers lead to a small and dispersed impact, which is further limited by the fact that many Coptic Orthodox are unfamiliar with the office and have not yet accorded the vocation a high amount of prestige. According to Father Ifraim at the St. Dimiana Church in the predominantly Christian district of Shobra, Cairo, there were only three or four consecrated women working in the entire diocese, which has at least 22 churches and tens of thousands of Coptic families.263 In general, it does not seem to be an innovation that has led to widespread female participation in the Church. For now, the most popular and

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261 Pope Shenouda III has recently upheld the Church’s traditional hierarchy that places men as the “head” of women, both in church and in the home, appealing to the story of Adam and Eve as well as to other Biblical writings. He upholds St. Mary, mother of Jesus, as an example for all women to follow. According to his reasoning, St. Mary was the “most worthy” and most holy woman to have ever lived. If St. Mary was not a priest, than no other woman could possibly be worthy enough to be a priest, either. Thus in both the premodern and modern periods, St. Mary continues to maintain the standard model to which Coptic women are expected to adhere. In the ways that she upholds the models of virginity, motherhood, and monasticism, women are allowed to follow her example. However, since she did not model a priestly vocation for women, women are therefore excluded from the priesthood. (Source: Pope Shenouda III, So Many Years, Vol. 1: 41, 74.)
262 Doorn-Harder, “Discovering New Roles,” 84; Gabra, Historical Dictionary of the Coptic Church, 342.
263 Father Ifraim, interview with the author, Cairo, Egypt, December 18, 2010.
accessible form of female service in the church is as a trained servant. Despite the steps some Coptic women have taken to be officially recognized as dedicated, celibate, and lifelong workers of the Church, the office of the Deaconess and the vocation of mukarrasat remain fairly unpopular, obscure and marginal in the Coptic Church.

Contemplative Nuns

In contrast to the murky status of mukarrasat, the Coptic Orthodox Church has long supported communities of cloistered, contemplative nuns. It is the oldest and most established form of female participation in the Coptic Church, and it is highly respected. Furthermore, a renewed interest in monasticism in the 20th century has led to the expansion and improvement of female convents throughout Egypt and the desire to expand the number of opportunities for nuns.

The first documented evidence of Egyptian convents dates back to the 3rd century CE, but the near disappearance of references to convents throughout much of the premodern Islamic era and the disrepair or ruin of convents throughout Egypt suggests that very few women lived as nuns after the introduction of Islam. A renewed interest in monasticism for both men and women grew throughout the 19th and 20th centuries due to the educational reforms described above. Whereas there were estimated to be 55 nuns at the beginning of the 20th century, and 150 nuns by 1973, by 1997, there were approximately 450 contemplative nuns. One convent in Cairo reported receiving between 250 and 300 applicants in one year, though they only had space to initiate two

264 Patrick, Traditional Egyptian Christianity, 142; Van Doorn-Harder, “Discovering New Roles: Coptic Nuns and Church Revival,” 84.
new novices. There are six convents currently recognized by the Church: five in Cairo, and one in the northern Nile delta. This last convent is the newest, built in 1978 near the shrine of St. Dimiana. This convent not only houses a number of nuns, but it is also is the national center for consecrated women and deaconesses, serving as a meeting center and resource for them.

Though the period of monastic revival has been relatively brief, stretching back only a few decades, already female monastics have established their reputations for themselves as holy leaders. Mother ḤIrini, the Mother Superior for the Abu Saifain convent in Cairo, she was one such spiritual authority who is already referenced as a new model for today’s contemplative nun, and is considered a candidate for canonization. Prior to Mother ḤIrini’s tenure at Abu Saifain, Egyptian convents operated very similarly to Egyptian monasteries: nuns lived relatively independent lives, pursuing their own spiritual goals without much interaction with the other nuns in their community.

Mother ḤIrini broke from this model to implement a monastic rule first created by Saint Pachomius in the premodern era, which created a more communal system for convents. In this system, nuns meet together for meals and for common spiritual lessons taught by the Mother Superior. The spiritual development of the entire community is elevated over the specific needs of any given individual. As nuns learned from her system and went on to become abbesses and mothers superior in other convents, her communal

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265 Van Doorn-Harder, Contemporary Coptic Nuns, 72.
266 Van Doorn-Harder, Contemporary Coptic Nuns, 36.
system spread.\textsuperscript{267} Now most convents operate according to the \textsuperscript{3}Irini -Pachomius rule, distinguishing the feminine contemplative life from that of the monasteries.

Although Mother \textsuperscript{3}Irini has achieved unique recognition for her spiritual guidance and reforms of the convent system, all convents have an internal hierarchy that allows women to serve in various levels of authority over the other nuns. Each convent has a Mother Superior, who answers only to the pope himself; not even bishops have authority over her. She is responsible for the spiritual and physical needs of the entire community, as well as for the convent building itself. She oversees income-generating activities, acts as the ambassador for the convent to the outside world, and sets the spiritual agenda for all of the nuns under her care.\textsuperscript{268}

Increasingly, leaders in the convents have university degrees, following the general increase in education among all Egyptians over the past few generations. In fact, Pope Shenouda III has explicitly discouraged illiterate women from becoming nuns, though this was a normal practice up until forty years ago.\textsuperscript{269} Mother \textsuperscript{3}Irini’s reforms to monastic communal rules offer one example of the increasingly high level of authority and education of the nuns, and thus, of the convents. Such communities are now better equipped than their predecessors to accommodate changing social conditions and make significant changes to the liturgical life and entrance requirements of the cloistered community. The Church has been able to accommodate the increased educational and

\textsuperscript{267} Van Doorn-Harder, “Discovering New Roles,” 89.
\textsuperscript{268} Doorn-Harder, \textit{Contemporary Coptic Nuns}, 62.
\textsuperscript{269} Shenouda III, \textit{So Many Years}, 1: 74.
professional qualifications of its female members, expanding the authority of Mothers Superior to reflect their status and achievements.

**Conclusion**

For many Orthodox Christians, the physical grounds of Coptic churches have become the primary community space in which to gather. In both wealthy and impoverished Coptic churches, one frequently finds medical clinics and hospitals, charitable material support and donations, religious classes, vocational classes, sports teams, volunteer work, computer labs, bookstore, preschools and elementary schools. In Cairo and other urban areas, Coptic Christians from wealthy congregations often donate their time, services, and resources to poorer congregations in order to ensure that these services are provided. In many churches, parishioners seek social and medical services first in the church, and only access government services as a last resort. One professor at the American University in Cairo referred to this expansion from providing purely religious services to seeking to meet nearly all social needs as a shift to a “cathedral” model, in which the Church becomes a one-stop center for an entire community’s needs. The participation of women in these Church structures helps to raise their profile within the community, and over the course of the 20th century, their participation and leadership in various spheres has become normalized. The Church has also come to expect a certain educational and professional standing of the women in its congregations as a result of the increased opportunities for female education and employment in the public sphere in the mid- to late-20th century. At the same time, the Church has also placed certain limitations

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270 Father Ifraim, interview with the author, Cairo, Egypt, December 18, 2010.
and restrictions on female leadership and participation in the Church, particularly related
to sacerdotal functions and the narrow eligibility requirements for mukarrasat and
shammasat.
Conclusion

Christian women succeeded in expanding their roles within their minority communities over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries. As a result, their participation and leadership in a number of activities became normalized over time in both the Evangelical and Coptic Orthodox Churches. The initial impetus for these new roles for women in the Church was the arrival of foreign missionaries in the 19th century. Through the missionaries’ activities, women gained a number of new vocational opportunities. Prior to the arrival of the missionaries, the only religious vocation available to Christian women was to become nuns, and even this vocation declined after the introduction of Islam in the 7th century. In the Evangelical Church, women began to work as Sunday school teachers, school teachers, nurses, and door-to-door evangelists. Some of these roles represented the first time that Christian women received wages for work in a religious setting. Coptic Orthodox women were sometimes successful in pressuring the Orthodox Church to provide similar educational programs for them. For the most part, however, Coptic clergy resisted any reforms associated with the foreign Protestants. Orthodox women were left with few opportunities for social, vocational or educational activities within their own churches, and had to seek these opportunities in the Evangelical churches or in the growing number of government schools and social services.

In the modern era, the opportunities for women to participate and lead in Church activities have increased. This increase is due in large part to the growing educational and
professional achievements of Egyptian women generally. Evangelical women have
brought their skills and qualifications to the Church setting, and won the respect of their
community for their leadership capacity. Women’s leadership in the Evangelical Church
is apparent in a variety of spheres. For example, women lead worship services and
conferences in front of mixed audiences. Discipleship groups provide opportunities for
women to mentor new generations of female leaders within the Church. Satellite
television channels, internet broadcasts and social media websites give female worship
leaders, singers and musicians, and preachers increased influence and visibility.

Most of these opportunities for leadership occur within the Church itself, as the
Evangelicals have stopped running schools and orphanages to the degree that the
American missionaries did before them. In some ways, this inward focus may have
helped raise the profile of women within Evangelical churches. Whereas Evangelical
women in the 19th and early 20th centuries used to do outreach work with Muslims and
needy populations in schools, orphanages, and medical clinics, their work now takes
place largely within the walls of the church and in front of the men and women of their
own congregation. The visibility of their work may have helped to increase their prestige
in the community and normalize their leadership in Church affairs.

Coptic Orthodox women have likewise seen an expansion of their leadership
opportunities within their religious community. Like the Evangelical Church, the Coptic
Orthodox Church has focused its efforts inward. As a result, most of the new
opportunities for Orthodox women have emerged from an expansion of institutional
programs and innovations official Church hierarchy. Since the mid-20th century,
Orthodox women have been trained to work as “servants,” filling a number of instrumental roles within the Church as Sunday school teachers and providers of social services. As women began demanding new avenues for official Church service within their communities, Pope Shenouda III revived the office of the deaconess so that full-time, celibate volunteers could dedicate their lives to public service. The Coptic Orthodox Church has also encouraged women to become nuns and rehabilitated the convents throughout the country. Though the overall number of women serving as nuns or deaconesses is small, these offices are significant for establishing a place for women within the Church’s hierarchy. In contrast, Evangelical women have not yet won the right to be ordained in any capacity for ministry.

Christian women still experience a number of limitations in their religious subgroups, limitations predominantly tied to their ability to serve as prominent, public leaders within the Church. Evangelical women are barred from serving as head pastors, or even as ordained ministers at any level. Any evangelical women who work in leadership positions do so strictly as volunteers. Coptic Orthodox Women do not appear in front of the Church at any point during the mass: not for prayers, Bible reading, chanting, or teaching. Pope Shenouda III and other Coptic Church officials have written books and pamphlets against the ordination of women as ministers, citing Bible verses and Church precedent. Evangelical interrogators point to the same authorities, but mention an additional complicating factor: that Egyptian Muslim women do not serve in prominent religious roles during prayer at mosques. Evangelical church leaders and seminary professors stated their concerns that they would be criticized by the Muslim
community for allowing women to become ministers or that it would ruin their chances to evangelize the Muslim population.

The increase in opportunities and status of Christian women within their religious minority communities is due to a number of factors. First, changing social expectations and practices made female leadership and public participation more acceptable. As we saw, the Egyptian government began taking steps toward establishing institutions for female education as early as the 1830s, and renewed its efforts in the 1870s. Female education also became more acceptable among the Egyptian elites, and the number of private female schools—religious and secular—expanded dramatically by the end of the 19th century. The influence of foreign missionaries and imperial powers had a strong influence as well. While British observers strongly criticized Egyptians for keeping women in seclusion and rhetorically supported the idea of female education, it was primarily the foreign missionaries who helped to build schools and create vocational opportunities that would allow women to take a more public role in their communities.

The spread of missionary schools and clinics set off a kind of “arms race” between the Egyptian government and Muslim charitable and social organizations in order to break the missionaries’ monopoly over the educational system. By the 1930s, the Egyptian government began to assert itself as the primary provider of education, and by the 1950s, Nasser’s government assured women equal opportunities for education at all levels.

Vocational opportunities for women also increased over the course of the 20th century, and were linked, to an extent, to the expansion of schools and clinics in the public and private sector. The demand for female teachers and nurses grew with the
number of female students and patients. After the 1952 Free Officers’ coup, President Nasser’s socialist policies provided ample space for women to work in the state bureaucracy. Female access to higher education paved the way for women to enter specialized professions once reserved exclusively for men. Women brought these professional credentials into their religious communities, and their social and professional standing enhanced their status in the Churches. Now a number of prominent female leaders in the Evangelical church are licensed doctors, and the Coptic Orthodox Church has begun to require university degrees for its nuns to reflect the high educational achievements of its parishioners.

Future Research

Yet for having increased their visibility and leadership within the Orthodox and Evangelical Churches, it is not yet clear what influences are informing the leadership styles of Christian women. Researchers have yet to undertake a detailed study of the feminine role models within the Egyptian Orthodox or Evangelical Churches. A number of sources begin to point to this answer, which could serve as the basis for future projects. For example, Coptic Orthodox leaders have recently published a number of works about women, gender roles, and marriage. Pope Shenouda III took the opportunity to address the subjects of gender and sexuality in detail in his *Women and Homosexuality*. Matta el-Meskeen also devoted an entire book to the role of women in the Coptic Church. Father Tadros Y. Malaty of Alexandria, Egypt refuted what he termed “feminist theology” in his *Coptic Orthodox Church* and rejects the idea of women serving in the priesthood. Bishop Yusuf discussed gender roles within marriage in his book, *al-zawāj*, along with Church
prohibitions on divorce. Coptic Church publications in recent years have celebrated the lives and legacies of notable Egyptian nuns, such as Thiyubusta and Maryam at the Mar Girgis convent in Old Cairo. Ancient Church documents, such as compilations of the lives of saints and martyrs, could also be analyzed in light of the gender ideals they uphold.

In the Evangelical church, a similar study into gender ideals and role models remains to be done. In this instance, more work needs to be done to understand the relationship between the Egyptian Evangelical Church and the American missionaries, who often disagreed with one another and had conflicting ideas about how to conduct ministry. The American missionaries clearly brought with them their own ideas and values about gender roles that differed from the ideas of the local Egyptian Church. In the 20th century, the influence of the American Evangelical community remains pronounced, especially in affluent churches like Kasr el-Dobara. There are also other influences on the Egyptian Evangelical Church from Christians in Europe and other Arab countries. These cultural influences remain to be explored, and could provide new insights into the gender ideals promoted within the Egyptian Evangelical community.

Christian women underwent the same economic, political, and social changes as their Muslim counterparts, which required them to re-negotiate their status within their Christian minority community. In carving out protected spaces for themselves within their Churches, Egyptian Christian women have created educational and vocational opportunities, social services, and a social network that exists apart from the public.

sphere. By creating a parallel social sphere within the Church whereby they have roles and social statuses apart from their roles and statuses in the public sphere, they can protect themselves from their double marginalization in the public sphere as Christians and as women.


Fowler, Joseph Andrew. “Christian Schools in Muslim Lands: a Survey by Representative Examples of Christian Schools in Turkey, the United Arab Republic (Egypt), Pakistan, the Federation of Malaysia, Indonesia, the Republic of the Sudan and Northern Nigeria.” M.A. diss., Southern Methodist University, 1963.


Al-Rāhiba Thiyubusta: Basma wa Intilāq. al-Qahira: Silver House, 2006


Interviews
§ = Last name withheld per request of interviewee or out of consideration for the sensitive nature of their work.

Awad Basseet, (Coptic Orthodox Sunday school teacher, journalist at Copts United),
interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 11, 2010.

Dina § (Administrative Assistant at AWEMA, member of Evangelical church in Heliopolis, Egypt), interview with author, December 13, 2010.

Emile Zaki, (Evangelical pastor and former General Secretary of the Synod of the Nile, Researcher at the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo), interview with the author, Cairo, Egypt, December 22, 2010.

Gigi Tal’at (Member of al-Adhra Coptic Orthodox Church in M’aadi, Cairo and former member of an Evangelical Church in the M’asara neighborhood on the outskirts of Cairo, Egypt), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 12, 2010.

Heather Keaney (Coptic Orthodox Christian and history professor at the American University in Cairo), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 11, 2010.

Ifraim § (Coptic Orthodox priest at Saint Dimiana Church in Shobra al-Khaima), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 18, 2010.

Marco Elkomos Daoud (Servant at Mar Girgis church in Shobra and former servant at Saint Mary’s church in Shobra el-Khaima), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 18, 2010.

Marian Mounir (servant at Mar Girgis church in Shobra and former servant at Saint
Mary’s church in Shobra el-Khaima), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 18, 2010.

Maryam § (Servant al-Adhra Church in M‘aadi), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 13, 2010.

Mourad Adel (Student at the Evangelical Theological Seminary), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 15, 2010.

Mourad Sinot (Coptic-Catholic Christian and Coptic historian), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 12, 2010.

Nader Naim (Discipleship group leader at Kasr el-Dobara Church), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 12, 2010.

Nevine § (Head of women’s ministries at AWEMA and leader at Kasr el-Dobara Church), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 19, 2010.

Ramy Rezkalla (Servant trainer and former Sunday School teacher at Mar Girgis Church on Haram Street in Cairo, Egypt), interview with author, December 11 and 21, 2010.

Ramzy § (AWEMA, Department of Evangelism), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 13, 2010.

Sally Samir (Kasr el-Dobara discipleship group leader), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 17, 2010.

Sameh Maurice (Pastor of Kasr el-Dobara Church), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 15, 2010.

Sara Tal‘at (Member of Evangelical Church in the M‘asara neighborhood on the outskirts
of Cairo, Egypt), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 17, 2010.

Sheri § (Servant trainer, Mar Girgis Church in Giza, Egypt), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 17, 2010.

Tharwat Wahba (Professor at the Evangelical Theological Seminary), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 20, 2010.

Therese § (Women’s ministry staff member at AWEMA), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 19, 2010.

Violet § (Wife of AWEMA president and active participant in AWEMA ministries), interview with author, Cairo, Egypt, December 12, 2010.

Youssef Gamil (Member of Kasr el-Dobara Church), interview with the author, Cairo, Egypt, December 15, 2010.