Coptic Christians

Background:

Coptic Christians have a very old tradition. They trace their origins to Jesus’ family’s stay in Egypt (when Jesus was a baby) and then to the preaching of the Apostle Mark. At first, the Copts (like other Christians) were persecuted by the Roman Empire because they refused to accept the emperor as a god. Later, they became involved in a controversy about the nature of Christ. The conquest of Egypt by Arab Muslims in the 7th century was at first a relief since Christians were not persecuted. However, as time went on, more and more people converted to Islam, and Arabic became the language spoken in Egypt by Muslims and Christians alike.

Today Copts are about 10% of Egypt’s population. Following the Arab Spring of 2011, in which Egyptians protested against – and eventually overthrew – the decades-long rule of President Hosni Mobarak, Egyptians have been trying to organize a government along democratic principles. Sometimes the political discussion has centered around Muslim leaders, thus causing problems for Egypt’s Christian minority. There have been acts of violence against Christians – and other occasions when Muslims have worked to protect Christians against violence.

The difficulties of being an Egyptian Christian today are reflected in “Excuse My French.” We see the discrimination against Christians (Hany’s classmates), coupled with official efforts to keep them satisfied (the principal’s attitude, which is so excessive in his effort to avoid offending them that it offends them!). We also see that many Coptic Christians are leaving Egypt for the West – Hany’s mother hopes to move the family to Canada.

The issue of religious diversity in the Middle East, particularly during an upswing in Muslim fundamentalism, will be a continuing issue in coming years.

To look for in the movie:

- the complexities about Muslims’ feelings toward Christians
- the official attitude toward Christians in Egypt (example: the principal’s reaction to the fights)
- the difference between rich and poor schools (how the educational system gives advantages to some and not to others)
- similarities and differences between Egyptian and U.S. schools

**A few accessible (short, clear, online) resources:**


**Lesson plan:**

“Use of Symbols in Egyptian Religion: Ancient, Coptic Christianity, and Islam” by Sharlyn Scott - [http://cmes.arizona.edu/outreach/lessons](http://cmes.arizona.edu/outreach/lessons) and scroll down to the links to the lesson (alphabetically by title).