

‘Defining Religious Diversity: The *Bureaucratization* of Religious Identity in Egypt’

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Abstract:

The issues of discrimination and religious freedom represent two of the main aspects related to the wider topic of the relation between religion and human rights. In both cases the core of the problem lies in the way in which religious identity is defined within a specific society. This is due to the fact that it may represent the element that determines rights and liberties that believers can enjoy, especially in those states that require citizens to declare their religious identity in official documents. This fact leads toward a *bureaucratization* of religious identity that poses a serious challenge to the implementation of religious rights. This problem becomes of particular relevance for those people who consider themselves as atheist, or for those religious groups whose faith is not recognized as a valid religion by their government. In this regard, the situation of Egypt is paradigmatic. In the Egyptian society the possession of a valid religious identity represents the *conditio sine qua non* to enjoy civil rights. Since only Islam, Christianity, and Judaism are recognized as valid religions, those citizens who do not belong to any of those three religions are prevented from obtaining rights and placed in a condition of social and bureaucratic marginalization. Through an analysis of the current treatment to which Baha’is and atheists are subjected in Egypt, the present paper aims to explore the negative implications of the bureaucratization of religious identity showing its effects on the implementation of civil rights and religious liberties in the Egyptian society.