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## CHRISTIAN MINORITIES IN KUWAIT

### Introduction

Religious and ethnic minorities have largely influenced political, economic, cultural and ideological developments in the Arab world in the last two centuries. Although the relations that these minorities have had with the governments and populations in the concerned countries have passed through phases of quick and major changes in some cases, yet some of these minorities integrated well and gradually with their burgeoning communities, away from violence and confrontation.

As for the Arabian Gulf region and Kuwait in particular, there might be difficulties in dealing with the history of the most important non-Muslim minorities found on its territory, namely the Christian Kuwaitis. How Christianity came to this tiny emirate and the status of Christian Kuwaitis may be equally difficult issues to discuss. In any case, this is not a religious research into sectarian, political or even ethnic confrontation among minorities in the emirate of Kuwait<sup>1</sup>.

In today's Kuwait, one of the countries in the Arabian Peninsula, and after more than 1400 years of the advent of Islam, and in the heart of the capital near the National Assembly (Parliament of Kuwait), we find this huge church building considered one of the oldest on Kuwaiti territory in the modern era. This is the National Evangelical Church<sup>2</sup>, built in the early thirties of the previous century, specifically in 1931, and is one of eight church buildings in the emirate. What is strange about this church building is not its proximity to the highest legislative institution in the country; rather it is in the huge cross showing on the church façade, considered unacceptable in a country where 99% of the populations are Muslims<sup>3</sup>.

Moreover, Kuwait had the oldest Christian cleric in the Gulf region who conducted services in traditional national dress (Ghutra and Egal). The Rev. Jacob Abraham Shammass, who sang hymns and recited prayers in the local Kuwaiti dialect, was the first Kuwaiti cleric to earn the title of Sheikh in the

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1. To be fair, Christianity remains one of the most important heavenly faiths to emerge in the Middle East, and then spread to most continents of the ancient world. Nevertheless, it does not hold a firm presence in the Arabian Peninsula, especially after the advent of Islam.

2. Previously known as Christ Church.

3. Close to the National Evangelical Church, in fact a few meters away from it, is the Church of the Holy Family, which is one of the oldest churches to provide service to a large portion of Christians in Kuwait. Essay on 'Christians in Kuwait after Islamists won the election', First words site (Christian), [www.calam1.org/a](http://www.calam1.org/a) retrieved on February 7, 2012.

Arab Evangelical Church in 1964. He was succeeded by Solomon Simon Shammas, and both passed away in 1980 and 1984, respectively. The current Kuwaiti pastor is Emanuel Benjamin Gharib, patron of the National Evangelical Church in Kuwait<sup>4</sup>. In this study, the researcher has tried to answer several questions, including:

Who are the Christian Kuwaitis?

When and how did they come to settle in Kuwait?

How many are they, their denominations and churches?

How do they practice their religious rituals?

Do they face discrimination or intolerance?

How are they accepted by their fellow Kuwaiti Muslims?

Therefore, this paper explores and reviews the different Kuwaiti Christian minorities using a historical approach aiming as a historian at providing such a study.

There is no doubt that Christianity is generally considered the second religion in Kuwait after Islam, as Christians of various nationalities and countries come to work but do not hold Kuwaiti citizenship and are not considered Kuwaiti citizens.

Paradoxically, many Muslim Kuwaiti citizens are ignorant of the fact that there are Christian Kuwaiti nationals who hold the Kuwaiti citizenship, enjoy full rights of citizenship, and practice their faith freely and safely.

In fact, we had difficulty meeting one of the Christian Kuwaiti families, who total 256 members according to the latest statistics issued by the General Authority for Civil Information, in a country of 1, 226, 747<sup>5</sup> Kuwaiti Muslims and a society of more than three millions<sup>6</sup>.

However, it is clear that Christian Kuwaitis enjoy their full rights, practice their rituals freely, and are respected by their fellow Muslim Kuwaiti citizens, who speak of them with pride, cherish their presence in Kuwait as indicative of religious tolerance and freedom of faith enjoyed by all citizens living on its territory.

As far as I know, there has never been any detailed or comprehensive research done on the topic of the history of minorities and their presence in Kuwait<sup>7</sup>, especially as researchers often confront difficulties in tackling such

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4. The researcher conducted a number of interviews with Father Emanuel Gharieb, between March and May 2014, in his office at the National Evangelical Church, close to the Kuwaiti People's Assembly.

5. The General Authority for Civil Information, "Population according to religion, ethnic groups, and gender", June 2013, (<http://stat.paci.gov.kw>.)

6. They were also estimated at around 150-200 individuals in The International Religious Freedom Report for 2012, United States Department of State – Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. *International Religious Freedom Report for 2012, United States Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor.*

7. In this respect, see "Apostasy Law in the Age of Universal Human Rights and Citizenship: Some Legal and Political Implications", a research by Anh Nga Longva, University

a topic due to the lack or scarcity of sources. Hence, the researcher had to resort to newspapers and magazine archives, some articles, and verbal account by the local priest. The latter was the result of an interview with the Kuwaiti Father Emanuel Gharib and some other priests at the Holy Family Cathedral. The interviews were conducted to fill in some gaps and answer questions raised.

The research was divided into three main points of focus:

1. Kuwait as a land that had attracted many immigrants from adjacent territories.
2. Kuwait's relation to Christianity; through preaching or the services provided by the American missionary.
3. Churches in Kuwait, Christian families and their contribution to Kuwaiti community.

### **Kuwait, a land of immigrants**

The State of Kuwait is located in the Northwest tip of the Arabian Gulf, between latitudes 28° and 30° north, and latitudes 46° and 48° east<sup>8</sup>. It extends between the southern Iraq and to the north of Al-Ihasa governate in Saudi Arabia. Historical evidence<sup>9</sup> suggests that Kuwaiti society was a society of immigrants since the beginning of its history as an independent state.

Modern archeological excavations reveal that Kuwait was a center of civilization during its more ancient times. Monuments dating back to 2200 B.C. were found at sites in Failaka island<sup>10</sup> (originally Ikarus), Al-Sibya, Kazhmeh, and others. These finding suggest that Portuguese sailors were among the earliest Christian visitors of Kuwait at a time when it was just beginning to become an attractive place for immigrants. They are believed to have established a citadel in Qurain<sup>11</sup>. In addition to this, Carmelites Christians continued to visit Kuwait as individuals rather than organized groups after the British moved the headquarters of the Indian Eastern Company to the country in 1795<sup>12</sup>.

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of Bergen. The fourth Nordic conference on Middle Eastern Studies: The Middle East in globalizing world Oslo, 13-16 August 1998-(<http://www.org.uib.no/smi/pao/longva.html>).

8. Muḥammad Râshid Al-Feel, *Soḵan al-ḵuwâit* (Inhabitants of Kuwait), Beirut, All Prints Distribution and Publishers, 1969, 17-18.

9. For more information, see Journal of the Islamic Fiqh Academy, *Organization of the Islamic Conference, Jeddah, by Abdullah Osman*, November 2012, pp. 70-71. Greek coins dating back to the year 212 BC were also found on the island Failkah. (<http://www.mojtamai.com/book/almaktabah/book19/home>)

10. 212 BC.

11. Andrew Thompson, *The Christian Church in Kuwait: Religious Freedom in the Gulf*, Kuwait City: Saeed & Sameer Bookstore Co. Ltd. 2010, p. 6.

12. Ahmad Al-Hussain, *ḵha'tar al-ta'bsheer al-sa'lepy fe al-ḵuwâit* (*Danger of Christian Missionary Activities in Kuwait*), Kuwait City, 1st ed, Al-Hasin, 1996, p. 68.

We have no evidence of Christians living in Kuwait before the arrival of the Utbah settlers, a diverse group that included Al Sabah, Aljalahima, and Al Khalif. Historical sources unanimously agree that after the arrival of these settlers, they began to establish the city and had to choose a ruler. As mentioned by the first Kuwaiti historian *Abdul-Aziz Al-Rashid*<sup>13</sup>, the Sabah family was the first to build stone houses, and Sabah Bin Jaber was the first ruler of Kuwait<sup>14</sup>. Kuwaiti territory continued to expand and became a destination to many immigrants from neighboring countries in search of security and better life<sup>15</sup>. Furthermore, in a report by the Dutch

Eastern Company (Knphausen and Jan Fanehaulest) in 1756 mentioned that Bani Utbah numbered around 4000<sup>16</sup> and owned 300 ships. The German explorer Carsten Niebuhr<sup>17</sup>, who visited the region in 1765, mentioned that 'Kuwait is a country of 10,000 inhabitants who own 800 ships and live on trading, fishing and diving'<sup>18</sup>.

As the country slowly moved towards becoming an emirate, it came as no surprise that it also hosted many immigrants who quickly joined the society of this burgeoning city-state, previously known as *Alkout*<sup>19</sup> or *Alqurain*. The demographic structure of Kuwait and continued immigration lacked reliable censuses until 1965, the year when Kuwait began performing regular censuses<sup>20</sup>. In the last census, the number of Christian Kuwaitis holding Kuwaiti nationality increased to 256 compared to 1,226,747 Kuwaiti Muslims, as mentioned earlier.

## Historical Roots of Christian Presence in Kuwait

As in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Egypt, the study of minorities in Kuwait holds special significance, as minorities in any country often constitute a multi-faceted problem, which involves religious, social, cultural and political

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13. Hussein Khaz'al, *Tāreekh al- kuwāit ṣeaiṣi* (Political History of Kuwait), Part I, 1st ed, Beirut, Dār Al-Hilal, 1962, 43. See also Ahmad Al-R āshidi, *āl kuwāit men ālemārāh elā āl-dāwlā* (From Emirate to State: A Study in the Emergence of the State of Kuwait and its Legal Development), Kuwait, 1st ed., Dār Souad Al-Sabah, 1993, p33; Maimounah Al-Sabah, *āl kuwāit Tāreekh wa hādārā* (History and Civilization of Kuwait), Part I, 4th ED, Kuwait, 2003, p. 108.

14. Known for his righteousness, strength and justice.

15. 'Abd al-'Aziz Al-Rāshīd, *Tāreekh al-kwāit* (History of Kuwait): Kuwait, Revised ed 3st : Dār Qurtas, Kuwait's history, p. 76.

16. "To the General Regional Director", Khaled Soud Al-Zeid, Kuwait in the Gulf Guide *āl kuwāit fe dālel al -khāleej*, Kuwait, 1st , Dār Rubaiaan, 1981, 23.

17. Carsten Niebuhr, a German discoverer, mathematician and cartographer, who worked with the kingdom of Denmark. He gained information about Kuwait through a Dutch employee working in Al-Kharj. His book was published in 1772.

18. *The Eastern Indian Company in the Island of Al-Kharj*, Knaphausen (and his assistant) Jan Fane Houlest, 1756, translated into Arabic.

19. "Koot" is a small fortress, hence the name "Koot", and was also called Al-Qurein.

20. Every five years.

factors. Kuwait may have a problem with residents living on its territory without nationalities, conflict between urban and Bedouin citizens, and between Sunni and Shia citizens, and other societal issues, but the Christian minority constitutes a different facet in the historical realities of this emirate. For our purposes, a minority may be defined as a small group of individuals bound together by national, ethnic, religious or linguistic ties that differ from those of the majority of population in that country. However, history confirms that The Christian minority in Kuwait has never been the subject of any persecution, or provocations throughout their presence on the land of the emirate.

This does not mean that Christian Kuwaitis represent a heterogeneous or special societal reality in the country, or receive special treatment. The Christian minority simply represents a segment of society that has a relatively small population, who has never been utilized in any conflict that would put pressure on the emirate or Kuwait's rulers for whatever reason, as is often the case in other region in neighboring countries such as Iraq, Bahrain and Iran.

Historical sources investigated by the researcher indicate that Christian Kuwaitis were not among the original founders of the emirate of Kuwait, nor were they among its early immigrants. However, we cannot deny them a thoroughbred oriental origin.

Excavations by the French-Kuwaiti archeological mission have unearthed relics of Christian churches in the Islands of Akaz<sup>21</sup> (Shuweikh) and Failaka dating back to sometime between the fourth and the seventh century AD. The two islands represent two civilization centers where the Christian Nestorian families<sup>22</sup> had settled. The ruins of a church built with local stone bricks were discovered in Shuweikh, and it was found to have had three prayer halls and a cross made of plaster inside it. They also discovered a tomb which may have belonged to a monk, and as the Kuwaiti-French excavation team working at the site<sup>23</sup> reported, two adjacent churches were also unearthed in Failaka, with the smaller of the two churches having had one prayer hall, an altar, and a stone floor. The church had a gate facing West, along with five steps leading up to it. Excavations also revealed another 30 square meter church with three main prayer halls, which had three side en-

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21. Andrew Thompson, 1993, *The Christian Church In Kuwait Religious Freedom in the Gulf*, p. 33.

22. The expedition discovered crosses belonging to Nestorian Faith of Nestorius, who claimed that we should not call Virgin Mary 'Mother of God' (Theotokos) as she was a human being-For more information, see: Thompson, op., p. 9, cited from: Muhammad Abdel Fattah Soliman, *ālmāsryōñ wā āl-māsehyā tārekh wā sāqāfet āl-serāā* ( Egyptians and Christianity: History and the Culture of Conflict), Kuwait City: Afaq Printing Company, 20131st , p. 333.

23. Thompson,op, p. 21.

trances and an elevated hall. All the floors and inner walls had been coated with plaster. The church was considered a center to the village, surrounded by some residential homes<sup>24</sup>. The director of Monuments and Museums in Kuwait points out that the discovery of these churches opened the door for archeological excavations belonging to this period. He also suggested that the historical sources point to a Christian presence in the Arabian Gulf islands dating from the fourth century AD until the seventh century AD – on Kuwaiti territory and the Gulf region, and then confined within the Christian monasteries with the spread of Islam in the region<sup>41</sup>, to emerge later as small Christian minorities in largely Muslim communities.

### **The Emirate of Kuwait receives its early Christians**

Ancient societies with ethnic and religious minorities include Egyptian Cops, Iraqi Kurds, Assyrians, and Shiites, Palestinian Jews, Lebanese Shiites and Druze, Syrian Alawites, and scattered smaller Christian minorities in most of the region, including the Gulf region. Other smaller minorities emerged over the centuries either through immigration from another adjacent region or from distant places.

The recent interest in the rights of minorities, especially in Kuwait, may be due to the rising ethnic and sectarian tensions many countries in the region have begun to experience. The term ‘minority’ simply refers to a small group of citizens in any state that represents a small number of individuals characterized by special ethnic, national, religious, cultural or linguistic features. They often have negligible power to affect positively their political and social status within that society<sup>45</sup>. Apparently, as a community of immigrants, Kuwait had never had a religious minority believing in a religion other than Islam. This was emphasized by Medhat Pasha (a former governor of Baghdad 46) in his report on the political situation of Kuwait he presented to Ottoman authorities following his visit in 1871. He had written that the population had no Jewish or Christian minorities<sup>45</sup>, which meant that all its inhabitants were Muslim.

Ultimately, the report does not hold ground against evidence of Jewish presence in Kuwait, mainly families that came from Iraq and worked in commerce. They were estimated in the thirties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to be around a hundred families<sup>25</sup>, a number that was supported by Louis Pelly’s<sup>26</sup>

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24. The expedition started work in 1989, and committee was formed in 2007. Location is the Hellenistic Citadel, The Palacesarea, Island of Failaka. Work duration from 11/11/2007 to 7/12/2007. The agreement was signed on 5/9/2007.

25 They numbered 100 families in the thirties, who were mostly traders and had a famous market in Kuwait known as ‘Market of the Jews’. They traded in Gold and cloth, and even had their own cemetery, which is still standing and surrounded with a fence behind the Khalijia Complex facing the Sharq industrial area. Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah ordered their eviction from Kuwait in 1947.

report. Pelly had visited the region in 1865 and mentioned in his report that "The inhabitants, including Jews, enjoyed freedom of religious practice", proving that a Jewish minority had existed in Kuwait<sup>27</sup> for many years. Similarly, in 1890, Vital Kine, a French census, mentioned that the Kuwaiti population numbered 20,000 with 5,000 Jews and there was no mention of Christians<sup>28</sup> in Kuwait.

It may have been the fact that Kuwait was a society largely made up of tradesmen that made it so appealing to the Jewish minority that eventually settled in Kuwait. Reports always spoke of a Jewish presence, never mentioning the Christian presence. It was likely that the latter had found better refuge in Iraq and Persia, where their families had settled and prospered.

Christianity had initially been introduced to Kuwait through Christian missionaries<sup>29</sup>. Samuel Zwemer<sup>30</sup> was one of the most distinguished missionaries to visit the Gulf region in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. He visited Kuwait during the year of 1896 to investigate the situation, while familiarizing himself with the city and how willing its inhabitants were to accept Christianity<sup>31</sup>. At the beginning, his presence was no cause for concern to the inhabitants as he wrote, "since the early days of my stay, I never felt any resentment as a Christian living beside Muslim families".

A man called Salome<sup>32</sup> and his family accompanied Zwemer. Salome family was perhaps the first Christian family to live on a Kuwaiti territory. It

26 Some have added the family of Samuel to Jewish families, but there has been no verification of this information, especially as they have been recognized as a Christian family.

This was mentioned by Yousūf Aly Al Mūtāiri, among others in his book *Jews in the Gulf Alyahood fe khāleej*, 1st Dubai: Dār Madarek Publishing Company, 2012, p. 58.

27 Al Mūtāiri, op., p55, cited in Sir Lewis Pelly, *Report on a Journey to Riyadh in Central Arabia* (Cambridge: The Oleander Press, 1865), p. 10.

28 Tālāl Al-Rūmaīdhi, *al-kwāit wā āl- khāleej āl ārabī* (Kuwait and the Arabian Gulf in the Ottomān Annals), Kuwait Without Publishing House, 2009) without ed., p. 9.

29 Mark 16:15, 'Go to all nations and preach the word of God'. See also: George Leonard Carey, *Challenges Facing Relations between Major Religions*, (Archbishop of Canterbury, head of the Evangelical Church in Britain in his lecture delivered at the University of Al-Azhar in the early (October, 1995 AD, quoting Christianization, its concept and its objectives and methods And ways to confront Ali bin Ibrahim Al-Hamad Ant, edition of 3.2003, a publishing house King Fahd National Library); Omar Farroukh, *Orientalism in Science and Politics*, in *Orientalists and Islam*, (Jeddah: Dār Al Ma'refah 1985)1<sup>st</sup>, pp. 125-143.

30 Samuel Zwemer, 1852-1867, is one of the most important American missionaries to arrive in the Gulf region in late 19th century and early 20th century. He published extensively including *Arabia the Cradle of Islam* (1900) and *The Moslem Christ* (1911). Among his most famous statements "Christ has the right to regain the Arabian Gulf. There's evidence from the past fifty years that Christianity was widely spread in these countries in the past. There is archeological evidence of the presence of the Christian Church here. Hence, our duty is to bring this region back to Christianity".

31 Zubaida Ashkinani, *men nāfezā āl-ālmīreḳāny* (From the American Window), Kuwait City: Dār Qurtas, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed. ,1995, p. 4.

32. *Al-Qabas Daily*, March 12, 2007(<http://www.alqabas.com.kw>)

is strange that there was no mention of this person's name in translation, except in connection with Zwemer's name, as mentioned in the book *From Here Began Kuwait*<sup>33</sup>. "In 1903 Zwemer and Salome and his family arrived and rented a shop for the distribution of the Bible", in the same year, 1903, James Mwardaak (an active missionary) opened a bookshop in the capital's market<sup>34</sup> and appointed a Christian<sup>35</sup> to sell Bibles<sup>36</sup>. Perhaps, Salome and this Bible vender were the two Christians that father Anastas Carmelite<sup>37</sup> mentioned in 1904 in his article on Kuwait, where he estimated Kuwaiti population in 1904 to be 20075 inhabitants, mostly Muslims, sixty Jews and only two Christians<sup>38</sup>.

It seems that Kuwaitis' apprehension of these missionary activities forced the authorities to deal harshly with them. They decided to stop these activities, close down the bookshop, and asked the mission to leave<sup>39</sup>. In 1905, some missionaries were banned from entering Kuwait<sup>40</sup>. Probably, opening the bookshop and selling Bibles were direct cause of people's apprehension of spreading Christianity in Kuwait. Kuwaitis were aware of what happened in Bahrain where missionaries started by providing medical services then moved to missionary activities<sup>41</sup>.

Missionary activities resumed after Kuwait's ruler, Mubarak Al-Sabah, asked Dr. Bennet, a member of the American Mission who was treating his daughter during his visit to his friend Sheikh Khaz'al ruler of Mahmara<sup>42</sup>, to come to Kuwait and work there. This may have encouraged Mr. Bennet to

33. Abdallah Al-Hatem, *men honā bādāt āl-ḳwāit* (From Here Started Kuwait), 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Lebanon, Modern Press, 2004

34. Abdel-Malek Al-Tamimi, *Al-tā sheer fe mantekat Al-ḳhāleej Al -ārābī* (Missionaries in the Arabian Gulf Region 1st Kuwait without Ed 1982 , p. 59.

35. It closed down again at the end of the fifties, see Abdel-Malek Al-Tamimi ,op., p. 218.

36 - This bookshop closed down in 1904, reopened in 1910 with beginning of Christianization in Kuwait,

37. Butros Gobraeil Yousuf Awad, known among researchers as Anistaz Marie Karamelli, was born in Baghdad in 1846 to a Lebanese family. Got his early education at the Keremelkli Fathers School, then at the Jesuit Fathers School in Beirut, before becoming a monk in Belgium. He studied Liturgy in France and became a priest in 1893, thereafter becoming father Anistaz Marie. See his article on Kuwait in the magazine *The Orient*, (in two parts) beginning with issue No 10, 7th year, May 15, 1904 (<http://kenanaonline.com/>).

38. *The Orient* magazine, year 7, 1904 (<http://kenanaonline.com/>).

39. Al-Tamimi, op., p. 59.

40. They were delegates from the American Mission, *Al-Qabas Daily*, March 15, 2007. (<https://deedat.wordpress.com>)

41. Kuwaiti citizens in return opened a Muslim association and brought a Turkish Pharmacist to run it.

42 -Sheikh Mubarak, while on a visit to to Khaz'al, Amir of Mahmara, asked Dr. Binit, a leading missionary, to treat his sick daughter, and when the latter succeeded, he asked him to come to Kuwait and practice medicine



request the establishment of a hospital, which was later approved<sup>43</sup>. They bought the land and constructed the hospital buildings<sup>44</sup>, which started to serve many patients, who started to receive treatment<sup>45</sup>. A school was established within the hospital premises, which later moved to a separate building and started with only twelve pupils learning English and Arabic languages.

### **Missionaries failed to attract Kuwaitis**

Arnold Wilson “once explained the significance of preaching in Kuwait” by saying, that the strategic and commercial advantages of Kuwait’s location make it a place of special interest for missionaries, as Zwemer wrote “missionaries in Muslim countries have a constructive and destructive advantages”<sup>46</sup>. In any way, and despite efforts exerted by missionaries in Kuwait, no sources point to their success in convincing individuals or groups to accept Christianity<sup>47</sup>. However, there is a single reference to one Kuwaiti who converted to Christianity, but whose parents are unknown. That person was a patient at the hospital where he was treated and later died and buried inside its premises, and nothing is known about him<sup>48</sup>. He may be the same person referred to by a Kuwait researcher, Professor Abdel-Malek Al-Tamimi, who mentioned that there was a non-Kuwaiti individual from Al-Ihsa governate with the name Eissa Al-Dawi, who converted to Christianity and was a patient at the hospital in 1925<sup>49</sup>. A journalistic report published in June 2007 refers to the Evangelical church of Kuwait’s endeavour to restore a tomb inside the church building, and according to pastor of the church Father Emanuel Gharieb, contained the remains of Isa bin Ibrahim, who converted to Christianity in the forties of the past century<sup>50</sup>.

Anh Nga Longva, of the University of Bergen, points out in her study “The apostasy law in the age of universal human rights and citizenship:

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43. The committee was composed of jon van esse and arthur binitt. see Mohammad al-rumeihi, *al -ḵwāiṭ Qabl al- Neft* (Kuwait before the Oil, Stanley Mallory’s Memoirs), Translated by Mohammad Al-Rumeihi, Dār Qurtas Publishers, 2nd edition, Kuwait, 1997, p.54.

44. Stanley Mallory was responsible for it. Nour Al-Habashy, *KeṣYt Al-Mostashfā Al-Amrecāni Fe Al- Kūwāiṭ* (The Story of the American Hospital in Kuwait), 1<sup>st</sup> ed 2006, p. 23.

45. *al -ḵwāiṭ Qabl al- Neft*, 1907-1947 (Kuwait before the Oil, 1907-1947), translated by Mohammad Al-Rumeihi, 3<sup>st</sup> Dār Modrek ,2006 ,1907-1947, p. 73

46. *Al-Manar* Magazine, August 2, 1911 (15/259) Protestant missionaries proselytizing,([www.ibrahimragab.com/abooks](http://www.ibrahimragab.com/abooks))

47. Strong religious opposition from the citizens made them suspend some of their activities such as the school.

48. For more, see the press interview with Fawzia Al-Sabah (Lawyer), National network.

49. Died in 1950 and was buried behind the Protestant Church, See Abdel-Malek Al-Tamimi, *A Socio-political History of Kuwait*, op., 1982, Kazimah Publishing & 1<sup>st</sup> edition, p. 233.

50. A Church in Kuwait restores the tomb of the first Kuwaiti convert to Christianity, ([www.Alarabiya.net/articles/4/6/2007](http://www.Alarabiya.net/articles/4/6/2007)).

Some legal and political implications”<sup>51</sup> that there was a Muslim convert to Christianity, a Kuwaiti named Hussein Ali Qambar, a Shi’a Kuwaiti businessman, who converted and became a member of the Evangelical Church in late 1955. However, we believe that the case the researcher referred to was handled legally, more than just being an unusual occurrence in the modern Kuwaiti society. That same individual later returned back to Islam<sup>52</sup> in an unprecedented legal case in Kuwait<sup>53</sup>. The State never interfered in the case and just left it to litigation. Moreover, the court granted him the right to see his children as a Christian. A Bahraini newspaper<sup>54</sup>, quoting a Kuwaiti newspaper<sup>55</sup>, mentioned that a military personnel requested to change his religion from Muslim to Christian. The incident indicates freedom of faith, and a legal and constitutional system that applies to all without discrimination<sup>56</sup>.

### Kuwaiti Christians

The importance of civil society and the maturity of its institutions grow with its role in organizing and activating the participation of people in controlling their destiny to face the policies that affect their livelihoods or increase their impoverishment. Moreover, civil society has a role in spreading the culture of creating self-initiative, building institutions, upholding citizens, and emphasizing the will of citizens in historical activism. This will lure citizens into contributing effectively to the achievement of the great transformations of their community, rather than leaving all to the monopoly of the ruling elites<sup>57</sup>. The truth is that Kuwait, despite some intricacies and conflicts between the government and civil society, which never spiraled out of control, is a civil society. It elevates the value of the individual without being individualistic. On the contrary, it is a collaborative society that oper-

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51. Anh Nga Longva University of Bergen “The fourth Nordic conference on Middle Eastern Studies: The Middle East in globalizing world”, Oslo, 13-16 August 1998 ([www.org.uib.no/smi/pao/longva.htm](http://www.org.uib.no/smi/pao/longva.htm))

52. ([najeibalwagayan.com](http://najeibalwagayan.com))

53. A site claims that Qambar returned to Islam, and that his conversion to Christianity was because of a financial crisis, Father Emanuel Gharieb’s interview ( [www.q8baqer.com/ArticleInfo.aspx](http://www.q8baqer.com/ArticleInfo.aspx))

54. *Al-Wasat* Daily, Bahrain, No 2954, Friday, October 8, 2010 ([www.mbahrain.net./www.alwasatnews.com](http://www.mbahrain.net./www.alwasatnews.com))

55. *Al Jaridah* Daily, Kuwait, October 7, 2010. ([www.alwasatnews.com](http://www.alwasatnews.com)).

56. In a priest’s legal dispute who was sentenced by a court for his role in a dispute between two conflicting parties to gain control of the Anglican Church, January 1999. The priest appealed against the sentence and was acquitted. [enjeely.com](http://enjeely.com) Anglican Church Forum. ( [www.ebnmaryam.com/vb/t179142-3.html](http://www.ebnmaryam.com/vb/t179142-3.html))

57. Ahmad Thabet, *Al- Demokrātya Al- Māsreyā* (Egyptian Democracy at the Outset of Next Century), Kitab Al Mahrousa, Al Mahrousa Center for Research, Training and Publishing, Cairo, 1st edition, January 1999, p. 2.

ates through a large net of institutions<sup>58</sup>. In 1959 the Amiri Decree No. 15 was issued, to identify Kuwaitis as citizens normally living in Kuwait before 1920. These were considered founders of the State of Kuwait, while others were granted Kuwaiti nationality (naturalized) as per Articles (2), (5) and (7) of the nationality law. Granting Kuwaiti nationality created a slice of society enjoying all the advantages of Kuwaiti citizenship and becoming Kuwaiti citizens rather than being just immigrants from other regions. Granting Kuwaiti citizenship to those people, who were not originally Kuwaitis with deep roots in the society, made of them what we may call 'goodwill' citizens, and distanced them from nationalist, ethnic, chauvinistic or sectarian tendencies. Consequently, they also distanced themselves from engaging in organizations or parties with ideological or nationalistic orientation. After issuance of this law, all those who met the conditions for naturalization applied for Kuwaiti nationality, including some Christians who became the core of Christian minority in Kuwait<sup>59</sup>. Those included the following individuals:

- Khalil Yousuf Sheheiber<sup>60</sup>
- Gabra Eissa Sheheiber<sup>61</sup>
- Sami Selim Bishara<sup>62</sup>.
- Yousuf Danial Rawi<sup>63</sup>.
- Benyamin Yaqoub Gharib<sup>64</sup>.
- Soliman Dawood Nu'man<sup>65</sup>.
- Ya'qoub Shammās Ibrahim<sup>66</sup>.
- Sabri Samaan Shammās<sup>67</sup>.

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58. Habib Al-Jinhani, *Al-Moğtāmā al-Mādāni Bāyn Al- Nāzāryā Wā Al- Tātbiq* (Civil Society Between Theory and Practice), *Aalam Al-Fikr* Magazine, National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters, State of Kuwait, Issue No 3, Volume 27, January-March 1999, p. 36.

59. For more information, see, op., Andrew Thompson, *Christian Churches in Kuwait: Religious Freedom in the Arabian Gulf*, 2010.

60. A British Army officer in Gaza who was called upon to come to Kuwait in 1948 to work in Kuwaiti Police Force when it was under construction. He reached the rank of General which was equal to Deputy Minister.

61. Born in 1930 in Gaza, and was also working for the Gaza police force under British rule and was called to come to Kuwait in the same year as Khalil Yousuf Sheheiber. He contributed to the formation of the Amiri Guards and Public Security. He later moved to the Army and largely developed its administrative affairs.

62. His family has its origins in Palestine.

63. We could not trace his origin.

64. Gharib's family came to Kuwait in 1945 and at first worked in nursing.

65. We could not trace his family.

66. The Shammās family was initially connected to missionary activities in Kuwait since the beginning in 1911. He was in charge of the Mubarakiya Bookshop, which was one of the first missionary bookshops in Kuwait.

67. From South-East Turkey. Their father previously worked with the American Missionary in Bahrain.

- Soliman Samaan Shammās<sup>68</sup>.
- Kamil Shaheen Alyyes<sup>69</sup>.
- Edward Yaqoub Shammās<sup>70</sup>.
- Henry Dawood Nu'man<sup>71</sup>.
- Ghanim Gerges Soliman<sup>72</sup>.
- Subeih Yaqoub Mansour<sup>73</sup>.
- Subeih Dawood Almousa<sup>74</sup>.
- Kamel Dawood Nu'man<sup>75</sup>.
- Malaka Alghouri, Albert Ibrahim Tannos, Anisa Anton Matta. (All three were listed in this order in the parliamentary questioning presented by an MP in 1981<sup>76</sup>).
- Mathew Shako and his two sons<sup>77</sup>.
- Barakat Gerges Soliman<sup>78</sup>.

Those individuals with their families and children, who met the conditions for naturalization according to Articles of the 1959 Amiri Decree were therefore granted the Kuwaiti nationality. Consequently, the number of Christian citizens increased in 1981 to 91, according to the answer of the Kuwaiti Minister of Interior to a parliamentary question submitted him. In a press interview, a Christian Kuwaiti once said, "in general, we are forced to wed our daughters to Christian Arabs, Lebanese, Egyptians, Syrians and others, as most of our families are females". These later leave Kuwait with their husbands, and thereby lose their nationality. The truth in this individual's words explains, one way or the other the reason why their numbers has not reasonably increased since these families became Kuwaiti citizens. Similarly, some of them prefer to live in Western countries for either study or work. Moreover, in 1981, the Kuwaiti Parliament passed a law that prohibited the naturalization of non-Muslims, which also limited largely the number of Kuwaiti Christians.

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68. Worked as a pharmacist in the American missionary hospital in Kuwait.

69. Recruited to work as a doctor for a member of the ruling family in Kuwait.

70. Converted to Islam in 1981 and changed his name to Anwar Yaqoub Thomas Al-Khabbaz.

71. His family worked as mechanics for the family of Sheikh Fahad Al-Salem.

72. His family roots go back to Iraq.

73. Mansour's family was in charge of possessions belonging to Al-Sabah family in Iraq.

74. With Turkish origins.

75. His family roots go back to Iraq.

76. We could not trace origins of all three.

77. Of Indian origin who was granted the Kuwaiti nationality but later gave it up and returned to his homeland.

78. We could not trace his family origin.

## Churches in Kuwait

The church is the most important missionary institution. It is a place of prayer and preaching and meeting people. The Church also means the Christian community and not only the building. Establishing a church gave the missionary work a sense of permanency, which in the eyes of the missionaries consolidated missionary work. There are a few recognized churches in Kuwait, which vary among the three doctrines; Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox. Those churches serve large numbers of Christians of various nationalities, and are responsible for counseling, religious preaching and prayers, and the usual religious rituals<sup>79</sup> for followers. There are also a number of houses and places used for worshiping and religious rituals for Christians in Kuwait, but are not officially authorized by the government to do so. These are not formally, nor administratively true churches, and although authorities were aware of them, yet they let them practice their rituals without restrictions.

There is no doubt that Christian Kuwaitis practicing their worshiping and their religious rituals comfortably and securely in the various houses of worshiping (churches) in Kuwait. Maintaining the security and safety of these churches guarantees effective protection of basic rights and freedom of Kuwaitis and other Christians. The following is a list of operating churches in Kuwait:

- 1. National Evangelical Church:** The church was established in 1931 as a place of prayer<sup>80</sup> for Christians within the American missionary complex. It was initially called Christ Church, but the name was changed in 1966 to the National Evangelical Church<sup>81</sup> and the parish became member of the Middle East Church Council. The church is located in Al-Watiya (Qibla) and is frequented by a few thousand Protestants in Kuwait.
- 2. The Holy Family Cathedral:** (The Catholic Church) The foundation stone for this church was laid in 1957 when Sheikh Abdullah Al Salem donated the land for it<sup>82</sup>. The church is considered a complex for several churches grouped under Catholicism, and is located close to the National Evangelical Church in Al Watiya district (Al Qibla). The church

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79 - The USA annual *Foreign Report on Religious freedom around the world*, including Kuwait, gulfmedia.co 21/5/2013 (<http://www.alaan.cc/pagedetails.asp?nid>).

80 Al-Tamimi, op, p. 229.

81 Al-Husain, op, p. 90.

82. "Holy Family Cathedral", *Al Arabi Al Kuwaiti Journal*, no. 44 (1962) (<http://www.alarabimag.net/arabi/comm...ction/info.htm>)

serves the largest group of Catholic Christians in Kuwait and is frequented by huge numbers every week for mass<sup>83</sup>.

3. **Our Lady of Arabia Church:** Located in Al Ahmadi, the church was established in 1948 by the Kuwait Oil Company for the benefit of the Christian workers in the oil industry. It is affiliated with the Holy Family Cathedral in Al Qibla, frequented by Christian workers and their families.
4. **St. Paul's Church:** Also located in Al Ahmadi, this church was established in 1956<sup>84</sup> by the Kuwait Oil Company to provide services for workers in the oil industry, specifically the British Anglican Christians.
5. **St. Mark Church** for Egyptian Copts: This church was originally a rented house (owned by Al Hamad family) and became a church in 1960. The church has recently moved to Hawally, with the new church being a huge, luxurious building that provides services to Egyptian Christian Copts working in Kuwait.
6. **The Greek Orthodox Church:** Situated in the district<sup>85</sup> of Salwa, the church is located in a building where Greek Orthodox prayers, mass, and services are held for a population of about 3,500 individuals.
7. **The Greek Catholic Church:** Another building situated in the Salwa district, this church offers Greek Catholic services to about 2,000 individuals, as was mentioned by father Emmanuelle.
8. **The Armenian Orthodox Church:** This is a house situated in Salmiya, and offers its services to a population of about 4,000.
9. **St. Thomas Indian Orthodox Syrian Church:** It is located in Al-Ahmadi and we can trace its beginning back to 1934. It is a parish of Malankara Orthodox Church, which is founded by St. Thomas, the Apostle of Jesus Christ, in AD 52.

Many Christians in Kuwait frequent these churches weekly. Indian, Filipino and Egyptian Christians constitute the majority of population using these churches.

Through my research, I found that Cristian Kuwaitis come from different sectors of Christianity and they attend the services in the Churches of Kuwait based on their original ethnicity. The majority nevertheless follow the National Evangelical Church headed by Rev. Emanuel Gharieb, who is Kuwaiti. The National Evangelical Church is not exclusive for Kuwaiti Christians of course and they merge there with the other nationalities that share the same sector of Christianity with them. Others who follow the Orth-

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83. Father Adel Naser, Deputy Head of Church The Catholic Committee for General Affairs, pointed out that the Kuwaiti Government gave a donation of one million Dinars in 2011 as an Amiri grant.

84. Al-Tamimi, op, p. 230.

85. Mohammad Al-Wasmi Street. Father Emmanuelle estimates the number of Christians frequenting this church to be around 3500 individuals.

dox sector of Christianity attend the service at either The Greek Orthodox Church or The Armenian Orthodox Church such as the Sheheber Family. The rest of Christian Kuwaitis are divided between the rest of the churches based on each of the individuals' belief.

It seems that official channels between the state and the religious establishment of global Christianity took a diplomatic turn in the second half of the twentieth century also when a pontifical emissary visited Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem in 1950, to be followed in 1953, the establishment of the independent Apostolic Papal mission<sup>86</sup> Kuwait is one of the first Gulf States to establish official diplomatic relations with the Vatican in 1969, and in 1992 the first Vatican embassy in the region was opened. These churches do not receive any formal government support and are not under the umbrella of the Ministry of Islamic Waqf, the body responsible for religious matters in Kuwait. Hence, they do not receive financial aid provided by the State to mosques and other places of worshiping and Da'wa in Kuwait.

Undoubtedly, the State grants and administrative facilities that these churches receive, constitute a major part of the basic support they get from their followers, whether Kuwaiti Christians or Christian expats living in Kuwait. Moreover, they also receive financial support from churches and institutions abroad. Government support is often restricted to donations, such as free land, issuing of papers and allowing priests to come and stay in Kuwait. We see many of these priests from the Vatican, Egypt and Lebanon who come to provide services and consolidate followers' faith. The law prohibits the preaching of Christianity, hence, there are no missionaries in the old sense of the word. However, there might be individual attempts conducted outside the church. Furthermore, the authorities have allowed a private company<sup>87</sup> to import bibles and other publications for use inside these churches on condition that they have no offensive material to Islam. The 'Family Bookshop' in Salmiya<sup>88</sup>, and the 'Bible Bookshop' in the Mubarakia market (closed for a long time) are part of the cultural work of the Christian community in Kuwait.

The reaction that followed the statement by MP Osama Almonawer, calling for a strict prohibition of building houses of worshiping in Kuwait other than mosques, confirms that Kuwaitis understand minority rights to practice their faith freely and securely.<sup>89</sup> Abdullah Al-Saleh, a journalist in Al-Anbaa newspaper, claims that Muslims should be against founding new churches in Kuwait because there are enough of them already. He adds that

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86. Chaired by Father Stake, *The Danger of Missionary Activity*, op., p. 70.

87. The Book House Company.

88. Sells books, and generally has no missionary publications.

89. See *Alraie Daily*, February 28, 2012, Article entitled "150 Kuwaiti Christians only and the rest have immigrated". ([www.alraimedia.com/Articles.aspx](http://www.alraimedia.com/Articles.aspx))

the calls for building new churches are for political and empowering reasons. It is not easy to build a new church in Kuwait; the last one was built for the Egyptian Orthodox in Hawally. There are several interpretations for the second amendment in the Kuwaiti constitution of Kuwait being a Muslim country. These interpretations make it difficult to find a new church but it does not imply a discrimination against the Christians in particular.

The year 2009 witnessed the formation of the Christian Muslim Council. The aim is to foster closer friendships between Muslim and Christian leaders. The Council of Christian-Muslim Relations has a role to bring closer followers of different religions, cooperate for the good of all humanity, and bolster relations through charity, seminars and other activities. Mr. Mohammad Baqer Al-Mahry chairs this Council, as pointed by the Rev. Emanuel Gharieb, and has Muslim and Christian clerics as members. The Council reflects another step in the direction of communication and collaboration among religions<sup>90</sup>.

Christian clergy have expressed in some interviews that the number of churches in Kuwait is not enough, and Christians are in need of more churches. However, they also said that they also appreciate the government response to their demands<sup>91</sup>.

We cannot decide whether churches in Kuwait are able to provide adequate services to all Christians and as these expats have come to Kuwait for work and not to settle and are often unaccompanied by their families. However, we cannot deny that they make up a societal group with the same rights that others have (like Sunnis and Shiites, for example). Original Christian Kuwaitis do not exceed 300 individuals, and their relatively small number does not allow them, now or later, to be effective as a religious minority. In the short run, they cannot be classified as a population block with a different religion capable of affecting political, economic, cultural or ideological developments. Gradually, this minority adapted flexibly to its growing society without confrontation or strife.

### **Christian Minority in Kuwait: Reality and Participation**

The conservative Kuwaiti society, which is religious by nature, imposed total respect by government and State to all nationalities, minorities and religions living in Kuwait. By their nature and numbers, Sunnis and Shiites share a large portion of the administration in ministerial, parliamentary, legislative and sovereign sectors.

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90. A Church Pastor on the Seventh Day hoped for an unoffensive language of discussion between Muslims and Christians in an article entitled "Father Emanuel Gharieb: The American Priest Terry Jones who burned the Quran is out of his mind". ([alwatan.kuwait.tt/articledetails.aspx?id=198268](http://alwatan.kuwait.tt/articledetails.aspx?id=198268))

91. See Alraie Daily, February 28, 2012 op , Article entitled "150 Kuwaiti Christians only and the rest have immigrated". ( [www.alraimedia.com/Articles.aspx?id=315338](http://www.alraimedia.com/Articles.aspx?id=315338))



In this sense, and in the light of Christian Kuwaitis' unwillingness to compete for a presence on the political or societal map in Kuwait, even during the crisis of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 Christian Kuwaitis did not have a different role from the rest of the society in rejecting and resisting the aggression.

In any case, there is no evidence of any restrictive measurements or harm that Kuwaiti Christians have been subjected to throughout their presence on Kuwaiti territory, to suppress their ethnic identity and right to practice their faith freely and securely.

With the exception of their demand for more churches, they are free to practice their rituals, have the same rights and duties, and never fear a threat to their culture and customs.

Some Christian Kuwaitis have been appointed to high posts in the government. These include Dr. Sohail Shuhaiber, Kuwaiti ambassador to the Swiss Confederation, and Ambassador Said Shammass, who joined the current Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad, when the latter was foreign minister in 1963, to fly the Kuwaiti flag at the United Nations. There are also some Christians who have been appointed as deputy ministers<sup>92</sup> and police generals<sup>93</sup>.

Christians Kuwaitis joined their fellow citizens during the crisis of the invasion in resisting the Iraqi aggression, when they were involved in organizing committees and providing aid and other forms of resistance with fellow Muslims<sup>94</sup>.

Moreover, there is no distinction between Christian and Muslim Kuwaitis in access to health care, education and other services. For example, Christian Kuwaiti Students are allowed the same rights to education like Kuwaiti Muslim students' at all educational levels; elementary, middle and high school, and university without distinction<sup>95</sup>.

By their sheer numbers as a small voting bloc<sup>96</sup>, Kuwaiti Christians do not stand a chance to win seats in the National Assembly, and thus achieve full integration. In addition, their participation in political, social and economic activities, commensurate with their demographic strength, is marginal. Perhaps their most important demand now is the abolition of the Na-

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92. A Christian Kuwaiti is appointed Deputy Minister of the Interior. ( [www.q8ow.com/vb/showthread.php?p=247647](http://www.q8ow.com/vb/showthread.php?p=247647)) 14/2/2008.

93. Ambassador Dr. Suhail Sheheiber, who was Kuwait's ambassador to the Swiss Federation, and ambassador Said Shammass, who joined Sheikh Subah Al-Ahmad, the current Amir, when he was foreign minister in 1963, in raising the Kuwaiti flag at the UN.

94. Father Emanuel Gharieb stressed this in his interview.

95. Christian pupils attend classes of Islamic studies, or leave classrooms and go to the library, though primary school pupils must attend these classes, and may learn some verses from the Quran for the sake of knowledge.

96. As their participation indicates integration.

tionality Act of 1981, which prohibited the naturalization of non-Muslims. They also demand private schools for their children to study Christianity, and to stop voices calling for a restraint on establishing more churches or passing a legislation making Kuwaiti nationality available only to Muslims.

There are also hopes that one day there will be a Christian minister<sup>97</sup> in the cabinet, but as the Rev. Emanuel Gharieb said, Christians would like to see this happening but they did not request it<sup>98</sup>.

The State is not inclined to impose restrictions on Christians, nor do we see such calls in society. Nevertheless, the Christian minority in Kuwait would like to see State aid given to the church, something that the church itself is now doing. Nonetheless, the greatest challenge for Kuwaiti Christians is undoubtedly their constant need to establish links with churches outside Kuwait in Arab and foreign countries.

The Christian minority in Kuwait today, though a social group that is few in number, do not have a specific geographical location or a specific area to live in within the borders of the State. On the contrary, they enjoy full freedom of movement and religious practice, and have all the rights set forth in the Constitution of Kuwait. There is no record of an instance of compromise or violation of their rights throughout their history in the Emirate.

The Christian minority in Kuwait has never been forcibly discriminated against because of race, gender or culture. They live in harmony with Kuwaiti Muslims, especially in personal matters, and if needed, resort to the same civil court in total equality in rights and duties before the law with their fellow Muslims.

Moreover, the law and the Constitution of the State of Kuwait did not differentiate between the Kuwaiti Muslim and Kuwaiti non-Muslim as the two share the basic rights and public freedom. Article (30) of the Constitution states: "All people are equal in human dignity and in public rights and duties before the law, without distinction to race, origin, language, or religion. Personal liberty is guaranteed." The Constitution did not differentiate between Kuwaiti Muslim and Kuwaiti Christian. Justice, liberty and equality are the pillars of society, cooperation and mutual respect and bond citizens, Christians and Muslims, together<sup>99</sup>.

We believe that the Christian minority will continue in Kuwait to integrate and adapt at different speeds and in different degrees. Greater integration comes with a more open, liberal and democratic Kuwait. Christian clergy in Kuwait praises the degree of tolerance between Muslims<sup>100</sup> and

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97. [www.father-bassit.net/vb/showthread.php?t=26059](http://www.father-bassit.net/vb/showthread.php?t=26059).

98. Interview.

99. See also the *American Foreign Office Report* – op, 2013.

100 - Emad Misaak, a non-Kuwaiti Christian living in Kuwait once said, "I have been living with my family in Kuwait for six years, and I haven't felt discrimination in any way, not from the State, nor at work". Emad Misaak is the manager of a hotel in Kuwait. Also see

Christians in Kuwait is very high, and the Constitution guarantees freedom of religious practice.

The Rev. Youssef Fakhri<sup>101</sup>, the Maronite pastor in Kuwait, also confirms that Christians are living in freedom, especially Christian Arabs. Father Bigol Bishoy, the Orthodox Coptic priest at St. Mark Church, points out that the Kuwaiti government has historically shown great tolerance toward Christians<sup>102</sup>. The Rev. Adel Nasr, priest of the Holy Family Church, has stressed, "We feel that Kuwait accepts diversity"<sup>103</sup>.

At the current level, Kuwaiti Christians as a religious minority are not likely to pose any threat to the authority or the Kuwaiti society. In addition, this minority is not likely to engage in a confrontation with any of the greater majority of Sunnis and Shiites<sup>104</sup>, though some Christians have expressed concern against pressure by some Muslim societies and charity institutions that pressure them to convert to Islam<sup>105</sup>.

Despite fears and the unknown fate of religious minorities in adjacent countries, and despite the deadly attacks on churches and other religious burial sites in neighboring Iraq, we cannot say that Kuwaiti Christians face a vague future. A Christian Kuwaiti businessman, Sobhy Yaqoub Mansour, says "we are confident that with the current situation where Muslims generally win, we have no fear as long as the Sabah family is here to protect us"<sup>106</sup>.

Despite the changing global geo-political map, Kuwaiti Christians did not distance themselves from a societal unison. In a country where religion is a basic component of life, the issue of violence is just not there. The current Christian minority in Kuwait may be blamed for their inability to develop

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*Alraie* Daily, February 28 2012, "Only 150 Christian Kuwaitis, and the rest have immigrated". [www.alraimedia.com/Articles.aspx?id=315338](http://www.alraimedia.com/Articles.aspx?id=315338)

101. *Aljareeda* Daily, issue 50, Sunday 29/7/2012 [www.aljarida.com/news/index](http://www.aljarida.com/news/index)

102. *Alraie* Daily, 28/2/2007, "Only 150 ..." [www.aljarida.com/news/index](http://www.aljarida.com/news/index)

103. Father Adel Nasr is of Lebanese origin, Kafr Shima, once said, "As an Italian national, I came as a representative of Apostolic Church to help Bishop Camillo Palene with his duties and serve the community of Arab Christians in Kuwait". He added, "Christian Presence in Kuwait goes back to the beginnings of the previous century".

104. Some see the Shiites are more tolerant in dealing with Christians and accept them more than others. Some Muslim clerics denounce sharing Christian their religious celebrations, which a Shiite cleric allows congratulating Christians on their religious occasions. See the views of the Muslim cleric Sheikh Nazim Al-Misbah on his total ban of participating with Jewish and Christian festivities. However, Mr. Mohammad Baqer Al-Mahri has a different view, and stresses that congratulating Christians on Christmas Day is not a breach of Islam, and stresses the importance of being cordial and friendly with non-Muslims, *Alwatan Daily*, 25/12/2011 ([alwatan.kuwait.tt/article/details.aspx?id=410514](http://alwatan.kuwait.tt/article/details.aspx?id=410514))

105. *Aljareeda* Daily, Sunday, July 29, 2007. ([www.aljarida.com/news/index/174570](http://www.aljarida.com/news/index/174570))

106. Christians in Kuwait: Effective presence and political absence, Christian Forum ([www.ishtartv.com/viewarticle,40621.html](http://www.ishtartv.com/viewarticle,40621.html))

and enrich their culture in view of the threats that Middle Eastern Christian minority face nowadays. This may distance Christian Kuwaitis away from voting to Sunnis or Shiites in parliamentary elections. In addition, they are expected to be impartial and to avoid taking sides while becoming more and to accept greater changes and maintain good relations with all in such a way to secure neutrality and rights alike.

#### SUMMARY