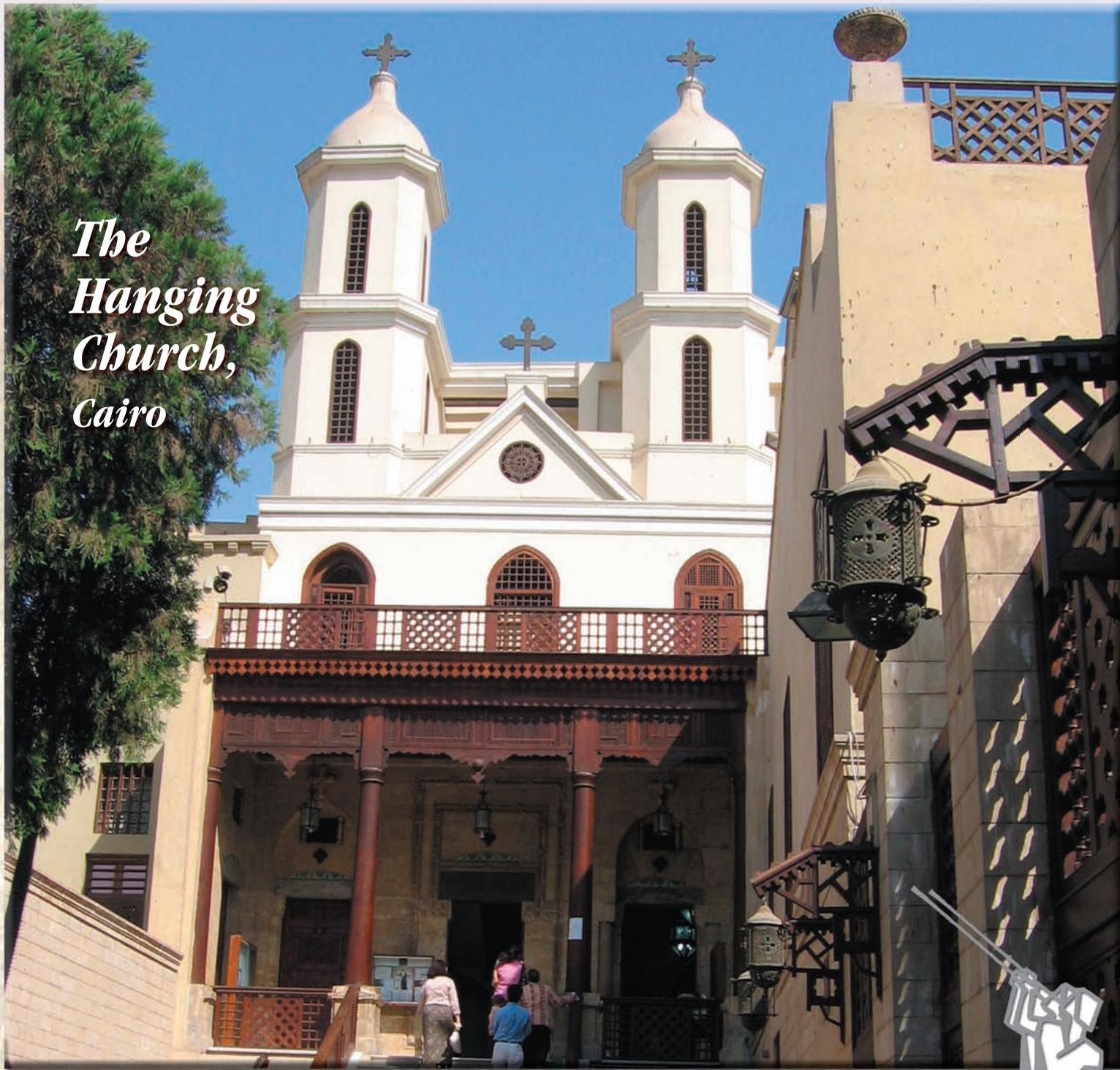


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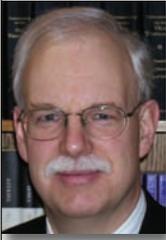
*The
Hanging
Church,
Cairo*



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- What Kind of Soil Are You?
- Family Worship





E. Kampen

Bible Study

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The men who spoke are not to be seen as zombies but as men fully engaged in their task

In his second letter to Timothy, Paul wrote that "all Scripture is God breathed" (2 Tim 3:16). The older translations spoke of Scripture being inspired. Peter wrote in his second letter, "For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet 1:21). These passages point to the fact the Scriptures have their origin with God and therefore they have an authoritative role in our lives as Christians. At the start of another season of Bible study, we do well to reflect on this process of inspiration and how this will affect our study.

The human factor

As for the process, it needs to be stressed that pointing to the ultimate divine origin of Scripture does not exclude the role of human authors. In this respect, the Christian view of inspiration is quite different than the Muslim view. The Muslims believe that Mohammed was totally passive in receiving the Koran. He supposedly was in a trance when he received it. His function therefore was like that of a secretary writing down a letter dictated by an employer. The Christian view, however, wants to do full justice to the human factor, all the time realizing that the Spirit was behind their work. The men who spoke are not to be seen as zombies but as men fully engaged in their task.

A most vivid example of this is found in the opening verses of the gospel according to Luke. We know that he was not one of the apostles. How was he able to write about the life of our Lord? He tells us how he did it in his opening verses of his account. We read, "Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated

everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account. . ." (Luke 1:3). When you read this, you realize that Luke approached his work in the same manner as a student who has received an assignment from a teacher. The first thing he did was to research the topic. Once he had his information, he organized it in an orderly way. From the opening verses in the book of Acts, we know that Luke can be said to have written a series. The first dealt with the ministry of our Lord on earth. The second dealt with the ministry of the Lord from heaven through his apostles.

Here is then the challenge: take a literary approach to the study of the Bible

The human factor is also very evident in the epistles. They are not abstract theological treatises dealing with various topics. Rather, they were written in response to concrete questions sent to the apostles or to deal with issues in the congregations that had come to their attention. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, for example, sees Paul systematically working through a number of issues and questions that had come to his attention.

While we are not always able to determine the authors of the Old Testament books, the human factor is still very evident. We see this in the different writing styles among the prophets. Human authorship



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is very evident in the Book of Psalms. These were definitely human compositions, reflecting very concrete experiences. Human authorship is also evident in a book like Proverbs.

While only a little reflection reminds us of the real involvement of human authors, in practice we easily lose sight of this. What I mean is that we tend to use the Bible in a piecemeal fashion. For example, we have the good practice of reading Scripture at meal time, but due to time factors and attention spans, the tendency is there to read bite-sized pieces. As it takes weeks to get through a book, we easily lose sight of the flow of the book. The same applies to Bible studies where a week or two may pass between sessions. Further, in the weekly preaching, texts may come from different Bible books. Even when a minister preaches a series, a whole week passes between sermons. Further, it may not be possible to hear every sermon in a series due to babysitting or health issues. Finally, when we deal with a certain topic, there is a tendency to mine the Scriptures for handy references. All that seems to matter is that a verse has the appearance of relevance. All these have their place, but it does not do full justice to the fact that the Spirit did not just guide authors to write certain words, paragraphs, or chapters, but He guided them to write whole books. In this respect, it is good to remind ourselves that originally Scripture was not divided into verses and chapters. This was only introduced in the late middle ages. A proper understanding of Scripture therefore requires that we honour the Spirit by paying attention to the books as a whole and from there work towards the details.

Literary approach

What does this mean practically? It means that in essence we have to approach the books of the Bible with the same tools that we use when we read any book. In other words, you have to approach the books as literature. At this point one can see the value of skills learned in English class where a teacher will have shown how to analyze a book to understand the author's intent. In some cases, this will be stated

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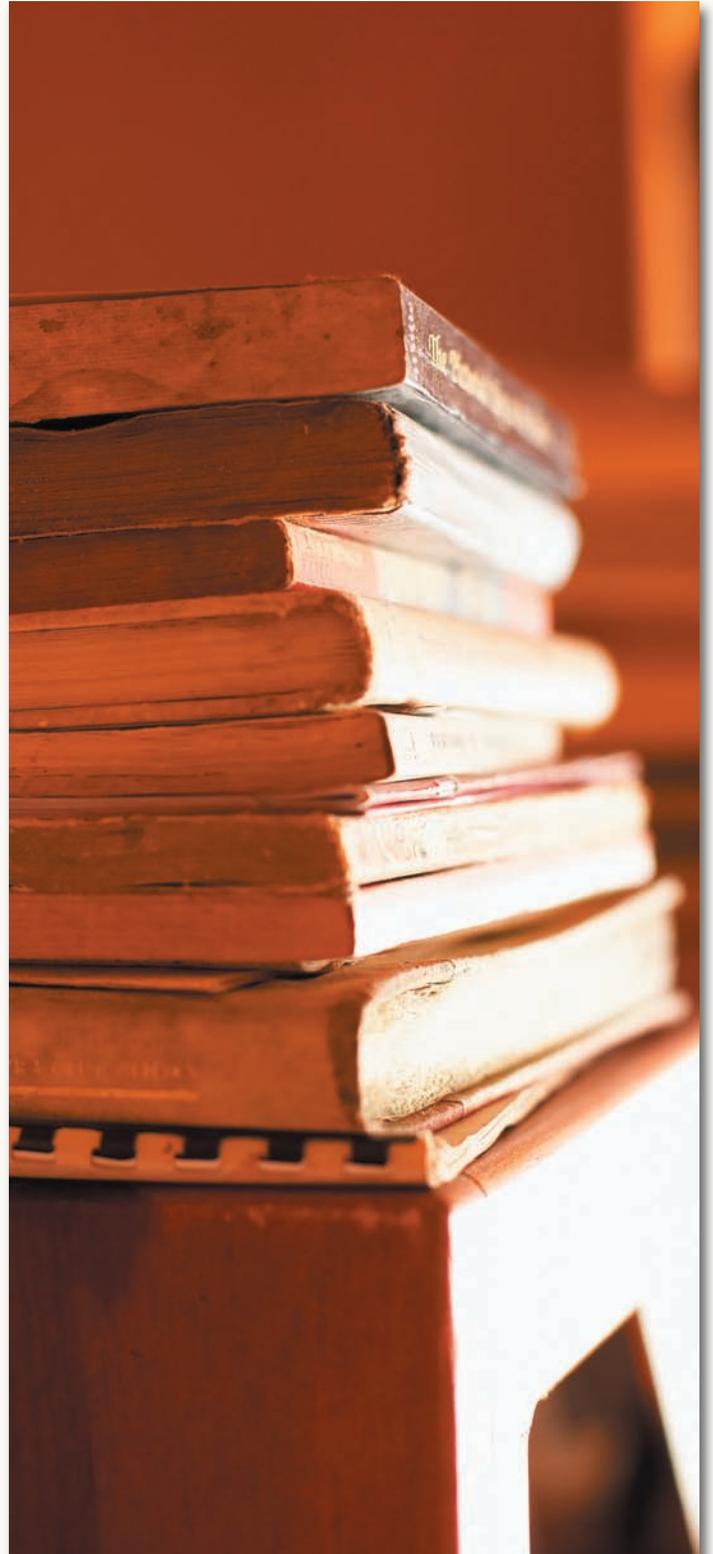
explicitly in the opening chapter. We can think again of Luke's opening words. At other times it will not be stated till the end. We can think here of the gospel of John (John 20:31). Sometimes it is never explicitly stated but you will be able to figure it out as you read the book.

Besides looking for an obvious statement of intent, you also have to look at the way the author put the book together. In the book of Genesis, for example, you find that, after the introductory chapter, there are ten sections each beginning with the phrase, "This is the account of. . ." (e.g. 2:4; 5:1, etc.). You also start looking for key words and phrases, which will tip you off to a theme in the book as a whole or to a subsection in the book. When we keep in mind that the Holy Spirit is the ultimate author, paying attention to words, phrases, and ideas in one book will also show connections with other books of the Bible.

This literary approach to the books of the Bible may seem somewhat overwhelming. It need not be. There are helpful tools. For example, there are good "Study Bibles" or books with surveys of the Bible.¹ These will have an introduction to each book in which they spell out things like main theme, sub-themes, and structure. At the same time, while there are helps available, one should not hesitate to sit down to figure these things out for oneself. Most books of the Bible are not that long. They can be read through in a couple of hours. One will be amazed what stands out when a book is read in one sitting, with pen in hand to make notes on basic questions like theme, structure, key words, and phrases.

At the start of another season of Bible study, here is then the challenge: take a literary approach to the study of the Bible. This in no way diminishes the fact the Bible is inspired and therefore authoritative. Rather, it is honouring the way the Spirit has worked, using his servants, the prophets, and apostles. It will require some work, but the reward will be insight and discussions that move beyond the superficial, discovering treasures old and new.

¹ For example, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* and *How to Read the Bible Book by Book* by Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, published by Zondervan.



J. DeGelder



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What Kind of Soil Are You?



MATTHEW 13:52

"Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed."
Mark 4:3

It's the time of year when people get together for a new season of Bible study. We respect the authority of the Word of God as the rule for faith and life. But why do we have the impression sometimes that the Word of God does not yield as much fruit in our lives as it should?

With the Parable of the Sower, Jesus wants us to look into our hearts and lives. What are we doing with the Word that we have heard? This is important, for either the seed of the Word will take root in our life, or we will lose it completely.

"A farmer went out to sow...": Jesus explains that God the Sower sows his Word (v. 14). Some of this seed fell along the path and was eaten by the birds. What will happen if you hear God's Word but you don't do anything with it? Never forget that Satan is right there when you hear the Word! And he will constantly try to prevent it from working in your heart.

You may hear the Word when it is read, but you don't listen. Your heart is hard, like the path besides the farmer's field. You may even go to church faithfully, but the message goes in one ear and out the other. The devil can use anything to prevent God's Word from bearing fruit! Sleeping in church is one way. Or attending church only to please your parents, or your boyfriend or girlfriend. Perhaps your heart is filled with bitterness, anger, and unwillingness to forgive. Or you

don't want to give up a sinful life. Don't give Satan the opportunity to take the Word out of your life altogether!

Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it didn't have much soil. Not everyone refuses to receive God's Word. Rather, some hear it and are excited about it. This news is wonderful: "In Jesus I have found the response to all my questions!"

But be careful. If your faith is not much more than emotional enthusiasm, if the Word of God is not deeply rooted, it'll be tough to preserve it in times of trouble. If you think that God's Word guarantees you a successful and problem-free life, you're in for a rude awakening. You may encounter persecution or other hardships. And you may say: "Does my faith do me any good? Is it worth the trouble?" Great excitement can easily turn into deep disappointment.

Ask yourself: Is my heart "soil" of enough depth so that God's Word can take root, and develop, and bear real fruit, even in times of distress? Jesus urges you to receive God's Word with firm trust in his faithfulness, so that you won't give up and fall away when your faith requires sacrifice.

Other seed fell among the thorns. This seed started to grow, but it didn't get enough room to develop, so the grain died, choked by the thorns. This is the person who says, "I am willing to believe

the message of Christ, and I know it is important. But there are so many other interesting things to be busy with. I really don't have much time to be busy with the Word of God."

The question is: where is the love of your heart? You can be busy with many different things. But if you think that you are too busy to read, listen to, study, and meditate on God's Word, one day you will find out that this Word is completely overgrown. It was "choked" by all those other things!

God's Holy Word requires the undivided love of your heart. Let it rule your life and all the things you do. Love the Word of God and rejoice in what it produces. For Jesus says that there is also good soil in which the Sower's seed can grow and produce fruit. If you receive the Word of God in faith, and if you praise God and love his Word, you will see tremendous results.

So if you wonder why you don't see many fruits of faith in your life, receive God's Word with a believing heart. Give it the central place in your heart. Believe it as God's own message for you and praise Him for it. Take care that you grow in love for this wonderful Word of life and that you get to know it better and better. If you do so, God's Word will grow, increase, and produce an abundant harvest of love and compassion, thankfulness, and joy!



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Family Worship (Part 2 of 3)

In our first instalment, we noted that family worship is somewhat of a given in the Bible. Nevertheless, the Old Testament portrays believing families as places where instruction and praise are given to God. Children are to receive that instruction and fathers have the primary responsibility to give that instruction. The entire family is together to praise the God of salvation.

The New Testament on family worship

Turning now to the New Testament, we find that what we learned from the Old Testament is reinforced. In Ephesians 6:4 we read, "Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord." Notice first of all that Paul puts this responsibility on the fathers. Fathers are to bring up their children in the training and instruction of the Lord. Fathers are not to exasperate their children, or more literally, to provoke their children to wrath.

How might they do that? The Old Testament background of the word that's used there for "exasperate" is telling. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament that word is often used for provoking someone to anger with unrighteous behaviour. If a child sees a parent who says one thing, but blatantly and

unrepentantly does another, he will become angry at the hypocrisy that he witnesses. So, Paul is saying, "You fathers, strive to have your deeds match your words!" Otherwise, your children will become bitter and angry and may even leave the faith altogether.

Instead, Paul says, fathers are to bring up their children in the training and instruction or admonition of the Lord. "Bring them up" means to nourish and to nurture. It's the same word used in the previous chapter with regards to how husbands are to relate to their wives. Husbands nourish and nurture their wives and fathers nourish and nurture their children.

If a child sees a parent who says one thing, but blatantly and unrepentantly does another, he will become angry at the hypocrisy that he witnesses

This means that there is an intimate and direct relationship. Fathers are to be like shepherds for their children, leading their children to the pastures of God's Word where they can mature and

grow in grace and knowledge. Fathers are to be like pastors for their children, showing them Christ and the gospel of salvation.

This nurturing takes place through two means, according to Paul in Ephesians 6:4. The first is through training. This is disciplined and structured instruction. There is regularity and a set format, for instance, a planned means of going through the Bible or following the teachings of the Bible with a catechism. The kind of instruction commanded here is not all over the place, but focused and well thought-out. The Christian father takes care that his children are instructed properly in the faith, that they know their sinfulness from the law, and that they know their redemption through Christ in the gospel.

The second means is through instruction or admonition and warning. The devil, the world, and our own flesh don't stop attacking us, and the Christian father has to be diligent to warn his children about these enemies and their tactics. His primary tool in giving these warnings and admonitions is going to be the Word of God. The same word for "instruction" is also used in 1 Corinthians 10:11. Paul is writing there about the people of Israel in the Old Testament and their experiences in the desert. In verse 11 he writes, "These happened to them as examples



and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come.” In other words, we use the Bible to instruct and warn and admonish our children in the way of faith.

While fathers are to be the first line when it comes to the Christian nurture of families and children, we have to realize that this isn't always practical. In our day, we see broken families and this takes place even in the church. However, this is nothing new. In Paul's day too, there were families that didn't have Christian fathers or even that had no father at all. Take Timothy, for instance. We learn from 2 Timothy 1 that Timothy had a Christian mother and grandmother, Eunice and Lois, but we read nothing about a father or grandfather. In 2 Timothy 3, however, we find that Timothy was in fact raised in the Christian faith. Who did this? We can assume that it was his mother and

grandmother. That demonstrates that there can be flexibility in how our family spiritual leadership (including worship) is arranged, especially with exceptional circumstances. The norm is for a father to be the leader, but in abnormal or exceptional situations a mother may have to take the lead out of necessity.

Wise parents who really love their children will not neglect this practice

Since we're in the letters to Timothy, there's one more passage we should briefly consider and that's what Paul writes in 1 Timothy 5:8: "If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an

unbeliever." Now if we must provide for our family in material things that will someday pass away, how much more should we expect to provide for them in spiritual things that are eternal? We're called by God to provide food for our families, and that includes spiritual food. That calling also comes through in the Form for the Baptism of Infants. As parents, all of us promise to have our children instructed in the doctrine of the Bible, summarized in the confessions and taught in this church. One of the ways we keep that promise is by being committed to a time of regular family worship.

Now perhaps you find none of this convincing. Then let me try to persuade you from wisdom: is it wise to neglect the spiritual nurture of your children? To just let them find their own way? The book of Proverbs would tell us otherwise. Let me try to persuade you from love: do you love your children? Do you want them to grow to be godly Christian men and women? Do you want them to taste the sweetness of eternal communion with God through faith in Christ? Don't those things compel you to regular daily family worship? Wise parents who really love their children will not neglect this practice, but will find every way possible to engage in regular family worship.

In the last instalment, we'll consider some of the practical aspects of family worship.



A Visit to Cairo

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During the week of June 17-24 my wife and I were privileged to be the speakers at two conferences in Cairo, Egypt. These conferences were organized by the Middle East Reformed Fellowship (MERF) of Egypt. My wife spoke at a women's conference. I spoke at a pastors' conference. Since it does not happen too often that we get an opportunity to see something of what the Lord is doing in Egypt, I would like to share some of our experiences.

Egypt is a fascinating country. The signs of its cultural and political significance in the past can be seen everywhere in the form of pyramids, old forts, and ancient churches. Egypt is still an important country today. With its eighty million people it is the most populous country of the Middle East. When we visited Cairo, US president Barack Obama had just left and Russian president Dmitry Medvedev was just arriving. Clearly, world powers consider it important to have a good relationship with Egypt.

Cairo is no less fascinating as a city. With its twenty million inhabitants it is one of the most crowded places on earth. To travel on the streets and highways of Cairo is an experience in itself. Traffic is always mildly or severely congested. Whether there are rules for traffic is not clear, but if so, everyone is breaking them.

Amazingly, we saw almost no accidents during the whole week. (Perhaps I should say that accidents are not taken too seriously. Our driver got involved in a minor collision with another car but since the damage was not too serious the two drivers decided to settle for the exchange of some unpleasant words and simply continue the journey.)

Cairo offers an interesting blend of historical and modern cultures and religions. Just outside the city they have the famous Giza pyramids and the Great Sphinx, dating back to the early Pharaonic dynasties. In the modern city itself it is obvious that the Muslim faith is dominant. There are mosques everywhere and the majority of the women are dressed according to Muslim fashion. Yet, there is a significant Christian presence in the city as well. In the older part of the city there are some beautiful Coptic Orthodox churches, some of which are older than a thousand years. Christians may be second-class citizens in this country, but somehow the church has been able to co-exist with Islam for centuries.

Freedom

There is more religious freedom in Egypt than we had expected. Before we left for Egypt some well-meaning friends had warned my wife that she should take along a headscarf. In reality, we found

most Christian women do not cover their heads. It was also encouraging to see that Christians go to church freely on Sundays and we were amazed to hear that there are Christian schools and hospitals in this city.

This does not mean that there are no pressures. Christians can easily get into trouble, especially if they try and evangelize Muslim neighbours. Ministers should be careful with what they say from the pulpit because there may be a government spy in the audience. One minister told me how one day a man showed up at his office pretending to be interested to become a Christian. In reality, the man was trying to set the minister up so that the police would have a reason to harass him.

MERF

Our visit to Cairo gave us the opportunity to learn more about the work that the MERF is doing in Egypt. It is a small miracle in itself that the Egyptian authorities allow the MERF to have such a large operation in Cairo. Two sound engineers and several other people are involved in the production of Christian programs for the Middle East.

We were impressed with what happens at the MERF office. Every day a half hour radio program is produced and broadcast to various countries in the Middle East. It is

hard to measure the results, but judging by responses received it is clear that thousands of people are listening to the programs. The MERF office receives many emails from listeners everyday, in fact so many that MERF had to appoint an additional person to respond to all the mail. Our Egyptian brothers confirmed that the radio programs of MERF and other organizations are a huge blessing to many people in the Middle East. Under the circumstances it is the most effective means to proclaim the gospel.

MERF Egypt is involved in other activities as well. For example, in one of the rooms we met a volunteer who devotes his free hours to translating John F. MacArthur's *Charismatic Chaos* into Arabic. Another side-initiative is the organization of conferences for local churches. This brings me to say something about our participation in the recent conferences in Cairo.

Lectures

The conferences at which we spoke were aimed at leaders and members of the Presbyterian Evangelical Church in Egypt. The first conference was a pastors' conference, attended by some twenty ministers, mostly from the Cairo region. During the first day I did two presentations, one on the work of the Lord Jesus Christ after his ascension, the second on the work of the Holy Spirit. During discussion with the brothers I was impressed with the commitment of many of the brothers. I met some older pastors who have served the Lord in the Middle East for decades. During our discussion of



Dr. DeVisser teaching at pastors' conference (with translator)

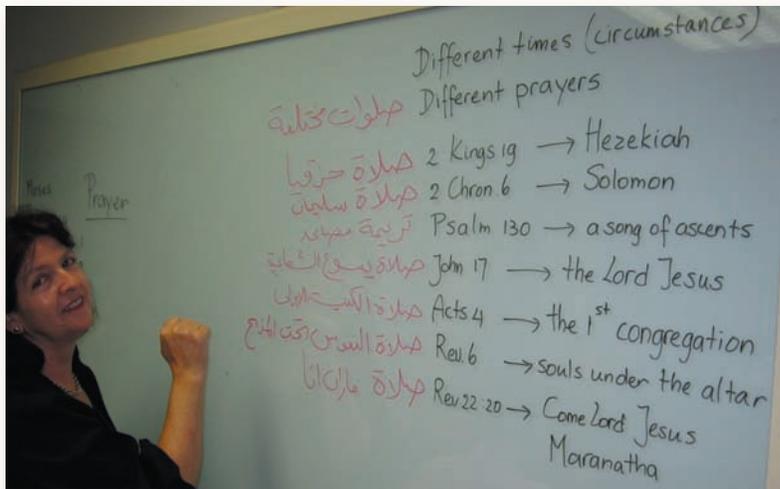
the work of the Holy Spirit it also became clear to me that the church in Egypt is challenged by the influence of the charismatic movement. One of the ministers defended speaking in tongues as a gift of the Spirit that should be used today.

During the second day I spoke about John Calvin's principles for the reformation of the church. I discussed some of Calvin's core views, such as the centrality of preaching, the importance of congregational singing, the important role of the elders in the church, and the need for robust Christian discipline. This led to a lively discussion. Some of the brothers argued that Calvin lived in another time and another culture and that his principles cannot automatically be applied to the situation in Egypt. Others said that the church in Egypt needs to apply Calvin's principles urgently because they are biblical.

Gradually it became clear to me that the Presbyterian Church in Egypt has a real problem: there are very few elders and the church is basically run by the ministers. Since eldership is almost non-existent, Christian discipline is very weak as well. It is hard for a minister to exercise Christian discipline if he has to do it alone!

Women's conference

My wife Inge spoke at a two-day women's conference. She had a very good time with the thirty-five sisters that attended the conference. The first day she focused on how to study the Bible, the second day on Christian prayer. The Egyptian sisters were surprised to learn that my wife is not a minister and not even an elder. They were even more surprised (most of them pleasantly) to find that she is opposed to the ordination of women.



Mrs. DeVisser marvelling at the Arabic translation of her notes

members were baptized. It is quite impressive to realize that Christianity has been around in this country since the days of the apostles.

At the same time it does not take long to see that the Coptic Church has fallen captive to ritualism and idolatry. Coptic churches are filled with relics and candles and pictures of all kinds of saints. During our visit to the famous "Hanging Church" in Cairo we witnessed how a family gathered in front of an ancient painting of Mary. We heard them pray to Mary and sing hymns in her honour. While it was moving to see the devotion of these believers, it was also distressing to realize that this devotion is misguided.

Appreciation

Our short visit to Cairo gave us a deep appreciation for the work that the Lord is doing in Egypt. We saw something of the strengths and weaknesses of the church in this special country. Our expectations had to be corrected in many ways. There is more freedom and more Christianity in Egypt than we had thought: many congregations, pastors, and committed members. But there are also more challenges than we had thought: not just the pressure from the side of the surrounding Islamic society, but also the influence of unbiblical forms of Christianity (Coptic, liberal, Pentecostal), as well as the danger of deformation from within.

May the Lord continue to uphold and strengthen his church in Egypt and may He bless all efforts that aim to serve this goal.



Time for relaxation: camel ride to see the pyramids

During the discussions Inge had experiences that were similar to mine. She was impressed with the deep-rooted faith and commitment that these women showed. Their love of the Lord and their devotion to the well-being of his church was very encouraging. At the same time there are challenges. Some of the women were struggling with the idea that the God of the Old Testament is different from the God of the New Testament. Where does this idea come from? Liberal theology?

A topic that generated much discussion was the question how Christians should pray for someone who is seriously ill. Should we pray with the laying on of hands? Does illness have a demonic origin and should we cast out demons? Or does illness come from the Lord and should we pray

for healing while at the same time desiring that God's will be done? It was important to be able to share the biblical view of the relationship between suffering and growing in faith. At the same time, it is clear that the traditional Reformed understanding of the Scriptures is being challenged by charismatic and other influences.

Coptic Church

Speaking about the state of Christianity in Egypt, one cannot bypass the Coptic Orthodox Church, the largest Christian denomination in Egypt. We visited a few ancient Coptic churches in Cairo. These churches are so old that the visitor gets a sense of what worship must have been like in the early church. Some of these churches still have the original baptistry – the place where new



Welcoming the Versteegs

Once again the congregation of Toronto and supporting churches were blessed with a special Sunday. It was with great thankfulness that on June 14, 2009, Rev. Henderik Versteeg could be installed as missionary. It was only a month ago when we said farewell to Rev. 't Hart and his family as they left the mission field and we can only marvel at God's greatness and care as He could provide us with another missionary in such a timely manner. We are thankful that Rev. and Mrs. Versteeg will be able to join the Mission Team in Papua New Guinea to continue God's work there as our new missionary family.

A special Sunday

In the morning service, Rev. den Hollander chose as text John 20:21b which reads as follows: "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." Each of the gospel accounts ends with this commission given by our Lord. We heard that as the Lord Jesus was sent as representative of the Father, so the disciples are sent to proclaim the gospel. Jesus sends his disciples with the Father and the Son backing them up by sending his Holy Spirit to work in them. This is



how we are sending Rev. Versteeg to Papua New Guinea as well. After Pentecost the disciples went out into the world to testify to the truth and so became apostles. Today we are sending Rev. Versteeg to bear witness to this same truth.

In the afternoon service Rev. Versteeg preached his inaugural sermon as missionary for Bethel Canadian Reformed Church. He chose as text Matthew 28:20, which reads: "And teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Rev. Versteeg stressed that even though this is the second time he is being sent as a missionary by the congregation at Toronto, there is a difference between the first time

and this time. The first time he was sent to a people who had never heard the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ – it was a grass roots situation. This time it is not so primitive. The main emphasis this time is with the teaching (and preaching) to train men to be ministers of the Word and leaders in the Churches in Papua New Guinea. We are all disciples of Jesus Christ. It is through the working of the Holy Spirit that we must make Him known to the ends of the earth. Those of us who remain here in Canada must live a faithful lifestyle and so proclaim his Name to those around us and the Versteegs must proclaim this gospel to the people in Papua New Guinea. God assures us of his spiritual presence; He is always

with us and will make our ministry effective. It is with his blessing that this ministry will succeed to his honour and glory until He returns on his glorious day.

Welcome celebration

Following the service, Brother Gerald Boot welcomed everyone for a short "Welcome Celebration." Brother Boot began by giving a special welcome to Rev. and Mrs. Versteeg and their children and grandchildren who were in our midst as well. He made mention of the fact that the Versteegs were not



strangers to us, as this was the second time he was installed as a missionary in our congregation. We then were given a brief overview of the mission work that Toronto had been involved in for the past fifty years. We can be thankful to our

Heavenly Father for providing us with faithful servants in the past fifty years and can also rest in the confidence that He will continue to go with us in the future. Any delegates that were present were given the opportunity to say a few words of welcome and encouragement to the Versteegs.

After the formal part of the program was completed, everyone was invited to stay for a BBQ supper served once again by the Action Committee. During this time the members of the Bethel Congregation could reacquaint themselves with the Versteegs and their children with their families. Having completed dinner, we gathered once again in the auditorium to enjoy a hymn sing, focused on spreading God's Word to those around the world.

It is our prayer that God will bless to the preparations that are being made so that the Versteegs can go to Papua New Guinea, the Lord willing, in September.





Ray of Sunshine

By Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Patricia Gelms

As I awoke to the beginning of a brand new day,
It seemed like waves of trials kept coming my way.
Problem after problem was all I could see,
I cried out, "Lord, what is it you want from me?"

The answer that came from the One Most High,
Was nothing but a very simple reply,
It was one unexpected, but yet rang so true,
It's something He desires from me and from you.

He said, "*Everything*"

"I want you to know Me as your Saviour and Guide,
The One who will always be right there at your side.
I want you to serve Me through the good times and
bad,
To sing praises to My Name whether you're happy or
sad.

"I want your faith to grow stronger as each day goes
by,
To trust Me when there's no answers to your questions
of 'Why?'
To learn of My love and to feel My embrace,
When you're called to endure the hardships you face.

"I want no one or nothing to take My place in your
heart,
In whatever you should do, I want to take part.
Stand on My promises, let nothing cause you doubt,
In the end you will see that all things will work out.

"So you see, My dear child, I want to be your all in all,
To depend on My presence when you stand or when
you fall,
When you question just what is it that I want from
thee?
My answer is *Everything*, as you are *Everything* to Me."

May this poem encourage us in everything that we
do, to spur us on to the hope and love we have in
Christ. "Be joyful always; pray continually; give
thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for
you in Christ Jesus." 1Thessalonians 5:16-18

Birthdays in October:

- | | |
|------------------|---|
| October 3, 1990 | Janell DeBoer
6311 Silver Street, RR 2
St. Ann's, ON LOR 1YO |
| October 6, 1967 | Henry Vander Vliet
Anchor Home
361 Thirty Road
RR 2, Beamsville, ON LOR 1B2 |
| October 12, 1983 | Leona Barendregt
Box 2184
Smithers, BC VOJ 2N0 |
| October 13, 1956 | Nancy Schipper
653 Broad Street West
Dunnville, ON N1A 1T8 |
| October 17, 1966 | Alan Breukelman
225-19 th Street
Coaldale, AB T1M 1G4 |
| October 22, 1960 | Nelena Hofsink
Bethesda Clearbrook Home
32553 Willingdon Cr.
Clearbrook, BC V2T 1S2 |
| October 28, 1956 | Mary Ann De Wit
31126 Kingfisher Drive
Abbotsford, BC V2T 5K4 |

Congratulations to all of you celebrating a birthday
in October. We hope you truly have a wonderful day of
celebrations, together with family and friends.

*If you have somebody to add to our birthday list
or contact information needs to be changed,
please let us know.*

548 Kemp Road East, RR 2,
Beamsville, ON LOR 1B2
Phone: (905) 563-0380
Email: jcorgelms@porchlight.ca

Press Release of the meeting of the combined committees of the Canadian Reformed and United Reformed Churches to propose a common church order, held July 28-30, 2009 at the Dutton United Reformed Church, Dutton, MI

Present were: Dr. Nelson Kloosterman, Rev. William Pols, Rev. Ronald Scheuers, Rev. Raymond Sikkema, and Mr. Harry Van Gorp representing the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA) and Dr. Gijsbert Nederveen, Mr. Gerard J. Nordeman, Rev. John VanWoudenberg, and Dr. Art Witten of the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC).

Dr. Kloosterman opened the meeting with a brief meditation on Galatians 4:1-7 and prayer.

The minutes of the March 24-26, 2009 meeting were reviewed and approved, as were the agenda and timetable for the next three days.

As part of unfinished business from the previous meeting several matters were finalized. A proposed format and language was discussed and adopted for three ecclesiastical credentials: *Classical Credential* in which a consistory names the brothers delegated to a meeting of classis and authorizes them to deliberate and decide upon all matters that have been legitimately brought to this classis. And with the stipulation that they are to do this in total submission to the Word of God, in faithful adherence to the Confessions of the Church, and with loyal observance of the adopted Church Order. The Consistory with the Deacons, on their part, promise to abide by all decisions which have been taken in accordance with the above

conditions. A *Regional Synod Credential* and a *General Synod Credential* in which the delegating classis names the brothers delegated to these respective assemblies and authorizes them to deliberate and decide upon all matters that have been brought legitimately to these assemblies. These credentials also contain the same stipulation as in the credential for classis.

In the Appendices the opening paragraph for the Examinations for Ordained Ministers was rewritten in more concise language to cover three possible situations:

1. An ordained minister of a church with which we have ecclesiastical fellowship.
2. An ordained minister of a church federation with which we do not have ecclesiastical fellowship.
3. An ordained minister who together with his congregation wishes to join the federation.

Throughout the PJCO the term "council" was replaced with the words "consistory with the deacons," recognizing that council is not one of the assemblies recognized in the church order. The popular concept of the authority of the council as the governing body in the church is problematic. The notion that the council is an ecclesiastical body is not correct according to historic Reformed definition. The use of *council* in the Belgic Confession, Article 30 is not intended to identify the governing body of the church. The direct authority within the congregation lies with the consistory.

Most of the available time was used by the committee to deal with the letters received from the churches and the comments and feedback from the conferences. The Committee received thirty-three letters from Canadian Reformed churches and sixteen letters from

United Reformed churches as well as some correspondence from individuals. A number of these letters had come in after the deadline set by the committee. However, they were still perused for matters that needed further attention. The combined correspondence from the churches interacted with fifty-two out of the fifty-eight articles of the PJCO as well as with the Introduction and Appendices. While each member of the combined committee had been given copies of all correspondence, the CanRC brothers had prepared proposals for dealing with the input from the Canadian Reformed churches, and the URC brothers had prepared proposals for dealing with the input from the United Reformed churches. These proposals were discussed in detail by the combined committee and, as a result of the feedback received from the churches and the regional conferences, changes were made to forty-one of the fifty-eight articles proposed. It is not possible in this press release to provide all the details of these discussions and decisions. In many instances the changes proposed are minor and serve only to improve the language in order to clearly convey the intent of the article. In other cases the changes are more substantive. It should be noted that Article 55 Appeals and Procedures has been repositioned and is now Article 31 with the resulting renumbering of the subsequent articles. Also in response to feedback received a new article has been added dealing with Public Profession of Faith (Art. 40) namely:

Baptized members who have been instructed in the faith and who have come to the years of understanding shall be encouraged to make public profession of faith in Jesus

Christ. Those who wish to profess their faith shall be examined by the consistory concerning their motives, doctrine and life, and their public profession shall occur in a public worship service after adequate announcements to the congregation and with the use of the appropriate liturgical form. Thereby the baptized members become communicant members and not only shall they be obligated to persevere in the fellowship of the church and in hearing God's Word, but also in partaking of the Lord's Supper.

This again resulted in the renumbering of the articles that follow this new addition.

The need for and function of Regional Synods and Deputies Regional Synod was an issue that received considerable attention from the committee. After much deliberation it was agreed to maintain the provision for regional synods as one of the recognized assemblies in the church, together with the related functions that come with it. The committee's rationale for this decision is as follows:

Among the items being proposed in the joint Church Order, perhaps the one most discussed among URC respondents is the matter of regional synods.

The rationale for regional synods include the following considerations.

1. *Historical.* Although regional synods have not been used in some Reformed denominations in North America, traditional Reformed church polity around the world (including North America) has acknowledged and generally employed regional synods as part of church government. Throughout most of its history, the Christian Reformed Church in North

America made provision for regional synods in its Church Order, but never implemented those provisions. It is worth reflecting about the developments within the CRC in the decades after removing these provisions from its Church Order. In Europe, South Africa, and Canada, regional synods have functioned meaningfully.

2. *Juridical.* Perhaps the most important (though not the only) function of regional synods consists in adjudicating appeals and reviewing overtures in a timely manner. Usually the general synods meet once every three years, a time period that is not adequate for adjudicating appeals. The absence of regional synods virtually requires annual general synods if justice and pastoral care are to be administered properly in the church.

2.1 In this connection, the concern and warning that regional synods will increase hierarchy must be met with the observation that precisely the absence of regional synods invests general synods with such a degree of urgency and responsibility that the general synods tend to exhibit the features of hierarchy and domination. Moreover, the evil of hierarchy is not inherent in a system of broader assemblies, for hierarchy can be manifest within consistories as well.

2.2 The use of regional synods for adjudicating appeals and reviewing overtures helps to prevent these matters from escalating into federation-wide controversy, because they are reviewed and

addressed in their regional context rather than a national or international context.

2.3 The use of regional synods for reviewing overtures will ensure that the overtures that come to general synods have already been deliberated and enjoy the support of a larger number of consistories. Conversely, overtures that do not gain support would then come to general synod only by way of appeal, if necessary.

3. *Broader, not higher.* Today's pervasive need for historical awareness within the church can be met only when we seek to understand why our spiritual ancestors applied the Bible to the life of the church as they did. Fundamental to this application was the notion that beyond the local congregation, church assemblies are not higher but broader in character. As broader assemblies, they seek to ensure and safeguard the federation's shared interests, including the most frequent role of their deputies, which is to ensure the following of regularized procedures for entering and leaving the office of minister of the Word and sacraments. Particularly the minister's office, though exercised within local congregations (note the plural), is not restricted in its exercise to a single local congregation. For this reason, in order to protect both the minister and the congregations, because ministerial ordination authorizes a federation-wide exercise of office, the procedures and standards for entering and for leaving this office must be regularized. To

construe or represent this oversight as a form of hierarchy is seriously mistaken and erodes the continued unity and well-being of the federation.

The committee gratefully acknowledges the detailed and substantive feedback received from the churches and the considerable effort that was put in by many consistories and individuals.

On the last day of the meeting the committee discussed preparing the final reports to be submitted to the churches and to the respective general synods 2010 of the two federations. In addition

to the final draft of a Proposed Joint Church Order (2010) the committee will serve the churches and synods by providing a two-column report showing the PJCO 2007 and PJCO 2010 side by side for easy comparison.

Since this was the last meeting of the committee before the general synods of 2010, the committee members made use of the opportunity for closing remarks. The common thread again was the appreciation for the harmonious and brotherly atmosphere in which the committee could perform its task over the years. It is the prayer of the

committee that the Lord will be pleased to use these labours to the benefit of the churches, and, if it is his will, for a combined federation.

Following prayer of praise and thanksgiving to our heavenly Father, Dr. Kloosterman closed the meeting.

This press release, as well as copies of previous releases can be found at the following web sites:
<http://sites.google.com/site/churchorderpjco> and
<http://www.canrc.org/resources/press/index.html>

For the committee,
Gerard J. Nordeman



Letter to the Editor

Re: *Clarion* Volume 58 Number 14 July 3, 2009

Among the thirteen or so pages on John Calvin, who was God's gift to the churches of the Reformation, I noticed a colourful ad entitled "Return to Sender, ion." It stated that ion's new album "Return to Sender" is now available with a subheading "Positively Charged Christian Pop/Rock." Clicking on the website provided the browser is greeted with rock music and a picture of the band, a group of young men, who true to rock albums posed with the typical blank stares and dead pan look. The website further states "sonically ion's goal is to write emotionally driven pop/rock with focus on beautiful melodies and soaring choruses, in everything ion does, we strive to promote and praise our Saviour Jesus Christ!"

I am a bit confused; is this the same as addressing each other in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs? Or is it more evidence that we as church are no longer in step with the Spirit, as is evident in other adaptations of the world around us. I believe the readers of *Clarion* deserve an explanation.

Terry Veenendaal

Response

Dear Mr. Veenendaal:

As publisher we are responsible for the magazine.

The advertisement you reference concerns Christian pop/rock music about which there has been considerable debate in the past (also in this magazine) and it continues today. After some reflections about the appropriateness of the ad, we decided to accept it for publication. This particular acceptance does not encompass automatic insertion of all advertisements sent.

While we share some concerns about this genre of music, it would be good for you to engage the musicians directly with your viewpoint, for they are your brothers in Christ. This subject matter is certainly worth discussing, so that we may build up one another in what is pleasing to God.

For the publisher,
W. Gortemaker



*Letters to the Editor should be written in a brotherly fashion in order to be considered for publication.
Submissions need to be less than one page in length.*