

# Message from the Editor

Michael Parker

([mike.parker@etsc.org](mailto:mike.parker@etsc.org))

Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo

This issue of the journal contains six articles on a variety of subjects ranging from ancient Syriac Christianity to the challenges faced by contemporary Christian seminaries. The first two concern history, the second two were addresses given at ETSC, and the final two are submissions by the editors.

The first article was written by Gerald Lauche, a German missionary who works in Aswan and Cairo and teaches as an adjunct professor at ETSC. His article is on the Sudan Pioneer Mission that works among the Nile Nubians of Upper Egypt. Gerald first presented his research at one of ETSC's Scholars' Seminars in the spring of 2019. Since his work was original and on a little-studied subject, we asked him to turn his lecture into an article, which he graciously did.

The second article concerns the history of Syriac Christianity in the Islamic era, from 600 to 1400. This is the second installment of Dr. Heleen Murre-van de Berg's six lectures, which she gave in the January 2019 term at ETSC. Her major interest in this article, originally presented as her second and third topics, is Syriac Christian literature, but she also discusses a number of other things, including the *millet* system of the Ottoman period and Syriac Christianity in India and China.

The next two articles were originally presented as speeches at ETSC. The first of these, given by Dr. George Sabra, was the chief address of the May 2019 commencement ceremonies at ETSC. Sabra, who is the president of the Near East School of Theology, Beirut, Lebanon, spoke of five great challenges faced by theological education in our time: adjusting to advancements in information technology, balancing spiritual formation with responsible social action, living into a commitment to ecumenical Christianity, promoting gender equality, and moving beyond "our obsession with survival" in the Middle East to a move active and effective witness to the Christian faith.

While Sabra's speech addressed broad issues that in many respects apply to theological seminaries all over the world, Dr. Kenneth Bailey presented an address that was a specific challenge to ETSC. Bailey, who died in 2016, spoke at the opening of ETSC's Center for Middle Eastern Christianity (CMEC) in June 2004. His words were personal and passionate. He spoke of the vision that God had given him that the Bible should be studied and interpreted by Middle Eastern Christians, and he made an eloquent plea for the CMEC to take up this challenge as its own. Though this speech is now sixteen years old, it is reprinted here so that it will not be lost in a forgotten file drawer or computer file, and so that the CMEC might be reminded of Bailey's inaugural dream.

Of the last two articles, my own modest contributions to this issue, the first introduces the Confession of Faith of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Egypt. This document was borrowed by the Egyptian church from its Presbyterian sister church in America in 1933. It is printed here because the English version of the text is

not easily obtainable and because it includes a preamble and supporting biblical citations that the Arabic version available in Egypt lacks. The introduction to the text provides a brief historical background to the Presbyterian Church that created this document and explains the controversial points of theology that were debated in the process of its adoption.

The final article is a review of N.T. Wright's newest offering, *Paul: A Biography* (2018). Wright has written a number of books about Paul, the most impressive being the fourth volume of his much-admired series, *Christian Origins*. This fourth volume, at 1,700 pages, is a massive scholarly treatment of Paul entitled *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (2013). Wright's latest book on Paul, at only 480 pages, is intended for a popular audience. It contains many of the same insights as his earlier works but attempts to answer questions uniquely suited to biography. It is reviewed here because of its own special merits but also to help raise awareness about the work of a great contemporary Christian scholar.