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EGYPT



CHRISTIAN ARABIC SERVICES: The Best-Kept Secret in the Restoration Movement?

A CHRISTIAN STANDARD INTERVIEW WITH SAFAA FAHMI

by John Caldwell

Christian Arabic Services of Cairo, Egypt, is strategically located in the Islamic world, at the crossroads of Africa and Asia and next to the world's only Jewish state. Safaa and Mona Fahmi lead the CAS ministry, which targets the 420 million Arabic-speaking people concentrated in northern Africa and the Middle East. The Fahmis and their dedicated team of associates have trained leaders who have helped to reopen at least 200 Egyptian village churches from Aswan to Alexandria.

Through its efforts, several hundred denominational churches have embraced New Testament Christianity, as well. Each year, Safaa Fahmi and his associates train nearly 3,000 Christian leaders from a number of Arab countries. The training takes place through leadership seminars and correspondence courses, as well as formal Bible college and seminary programs, with degrees granted by Hope International University.

I recently interviewed Fahmi to learn more of his story and the ever-expanding work of CAS.

Pyramids of Giza, Sphinx, and Nile River



CS How did you come to Christ?

SF I am from a Coptic Orthodox family where I never heard anything about salvation, becoming a new creation, or being born again. At age 17 I had a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. For a few weeks I tried to understand what was going on within me, until I met a Protestant minister who was known all over Egypt as the best Bible teacher. He encouraged me to start studying the Scriptures. A year later, 1968, I enrolled in what was then the only Protestant Bible college in the country. I graduated in 1973 and started my ministerial life as youth minister in Assiut at the second-largest evangelical church in Egypt. A year later, the senior minister died and I was chosen as his successor. Mona and I married in 1978.

CS What was your first exposure to the Restoration Movement, as it is known in America?

SF My first connection was in 1980 when I met Dr. Lewis and Betty Foster in Egypt, where they had come to examine the scrolls of Nag Hammadi. We hosted the Fosters for three weeks while they visited various ancient sites. The day before they left, we had a discussion about Christian baptism. I told him, "What we practice in our church is clearly not biblical." [Dr. Foster] would later baptize me, and I would later baptize Mona. Dr. Foster invited me to continue my studies at Cincinnati Bible Seminary where he sponsored me in completing three masters' degrees. I studied under

great professors like [Lewis] Foster, [Ken] Goble, [Jack] Cottrell, [Willard W.] Winter, [LaVerne] Morse, [Reuben] Bullard, [Sherwood] Smith, and [R. J.] Kidwell. They poured their rich knowledge into our hearts and minds. I returned to Egypt well equipped to teach and preach based on the Bible alone.

CS Tell us about the church you served in Assiut.

SF When I began as youth minister, the church had 300 members. At the time I left as senior minister, we had 1,260 members.

CS How did Christian Arabic Services come into existence?

SF Around 1986 there were efforts by the professors I mentioned—as well as men like Dan Pence, John Caldwell, David Roadcup, Joe Putting, Mike Nakoff, Jim Cook, and Sam Stone—which brought CAS into existence and made it an effective reality in the Arab world. Biblical teaching influenced 41 congregations near Assiut between 1988 and 2003. More than 420 churches from several denominations have since been impacted by CAS in Egypt along with many other churches in the Sudan and the greater Arab world.

CS What are some ways CAS ministers in the Arabic-speaking world?

SF Our evangelism strategy is based on the example of Jesus . . . his teaching and preaching,





but also his actions. Thus CAS is involved with feeding the hungry, offering medical attention to the sick and infirmed, and educating the illiterate. We distribute hundreds of Bibles free of charge and provide trays and cups to churches for the weekly practice of the Lord's Supper. We also have provided Bible correspondence courses for thousands of seekers in 21 Arabic-speaking nations.

CS What is the relationship between CAS and Hope International University?

SF HIU-Egypt is a branch of Hope International University in Fullerton, California. Since 2006, the Egyptian branch, part of the CAS ministry, has been the higher education, theological arm of our ministry, offering a biblical diploma, a bachelor of arts degree, a master of arts in ministry, and now a master of divinity as well.

Hope and CAS are well-known all over Egypt, the Middle East, North Africa, and both North and South Sudan, as a nondenominational, biblically conservative college with an emphasis on preparing ministers and evangelists for the churches. Students come from 11 denominations. And while we respect everyone, we respect his Word more than anything else.

CS Tell us about the Arabic-language, Bible commentary project.

SF CAS is producing the very first Bible commentary in the Arabic language. Thus far we have

completed 28 books of the Old Testament and 25 books of the New Testament. We expect to complete at least 90 percent of the Bible and have these hardback-bound books in the hands of Christian students and leaders by the end of 2019. Financial help is still needed in completing this important project. The cost of printing the commentaries has tripled since 2017.

CS How can the readers of *Christian Standard* pray for the church in Egypt and the greater Arabic-speaking world?

SF The challenges of preaching Christ in an Islamic-dominated society are obvious. So pray for wisdom, for effectiveness, safety, and for the financial needs to be met. The work of CAS has expanded 20 times over since its inception, thus there is the continued struggle with limited resources. We invite Christians from America to come and see. Send your missions committees to see how big the work is and how essential and urgent is your partnership in prayer. ■

John Caldwell served as senior pastor of Kingsway Christian Church in Indianapolis from 1974 to 2010. He remains involved in ministry as a guest speaker and interim minister, and he serves with three mission boards as well as a part-time field representative for Christian Arabic Services.

More to the Story: Kid's Carnivals, a Heresy Trial, Ministry Funding ...

Christian Arabic Services is the leading distributor of Sunday school and VBS material among churches in Egypt. Recently more than 6,000 children from 41 congregations participated in "Kids Carnivals" (VBS) where they were taught the basics of Christianity. As many as 500,000 children have participated in that program since its inception.

There is far more to CAS's story than can be told in this one article. Furthermore, wisdom and security concerns preclude telling much of the story in such a public forum.

A most interesting aspect of Safaa Fahmi's ministry is he was tried and found guilty of heresy by a denominational body for practicing New Testament Christianity. This occurred after a video surfaced of him immersing a number of that denomination's ministers. He was removed from leadership of the church in Assiut, after having led that church in tremendous growth, because he insisted on believer's baptism by immersion and weekly observance of the Lord's Supper.

That congregation suffered greatly because of his removal. That led to another trial in which the "guilty verdict" was rescinded and he was asked to return to the pulpit in Assiut. In the intervening time, however, the CAS ministry had expanded so much he believed he could accomplish far more for the kingdom through his ongoing leadership of it than by returning to that congregation.

Additional funding to complete the Bible commentary project is greatly needed. Perhaps your church would consider sponsoring one of the remaining books. The CAS donor base is quite small relative to the expansive nature of the ministry and its vast potential impact. Consider that the entire ministry is led and carried out with indigenous workers, with only occasional visiting preachers and teachers from the United States. But as the ministry continues to expand, congregations multiply, and more and more leaders come to CAS for training, "There is still a great need for Christian teachers and preachers to come from America and help us," Fahmi said. "God's kingdom keeps expanding in the Arab world in spite of the continued growth of Islamic opposition."

Dr. Lewis Foster called Fahmi "the Alexander Campbell of Egypt." But CAS may be the best kept secret in the Restoration Movement. If you would like to know more, get involved, or simply arrange a presentation to your church and/or missions team, contact me at johncaldwellministries@yahoo.com.

—J.C.