

A Tribute to a Missionary Scholar — Dr. Harvey Staal

January 17/22 – February 21/ 99

By Shirley W. Madany

On August 7th, 1999 a large group of friends and family gathered at the Heritage Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan, to participate in a memorial to the late Dr. Harvey Staal. Three of their four sons, Tim, Steve and David, and their two daughters, Eileen and Judith, and their families were able to be present. Tom Staal, working in the Middle East, was ably represented by his wife Ann.

Memories were shared from a variety of times and places in the Staal's busy life of service. Harvey and Hilda spent seven years each in Basra, Iraq, Bahrain, Kuwait and Oman and 6 years in Beirut, Lebanon, as well as 1 year in Cyprus.

A classmate from college days shared, as well as someone who had made his acquaintance during the Beirut period. Gaylen Byker, now president of Calvin College, recalled the great hospitality they enjoyed in the home of the Staals in Beirut and the courage which Harvey displayed when they were being evacuated by helicopter during a particularly stressful time in that civil war. Harvey came down to the beach to see them off!

Another friend and missionary from early days, Bob Block, recalled Harvey's sense of humor. Looking at their two names Harvey had remarked that probably they wouldn't get much done because it would either be "blocked or stalled"! That was in Basra. Rev. Block remembered trying to load two boys bikes onto a car and feeling the heat extremely. Harvey exclaimed: "Heat! You haven't lived in Bahrain!"

Over and over the comment was made that this dear saint of the Lord had some outstanding characteristics. He was a faithful Christian ambassador, an intense scholar, and a great family man.

Tim Staal presided over the Remembrance part of the memorial service and did an excellent job. His brother Steve recalled a lasting impression of his father's physical strength. At Kodai School in India, a group of students planned a strenuous hike, which involved a descent of 5000 feet to the bottom of a nearby valley. To their amazement his father joined the group and even decided to walk back with the smaller group who planned to do that arduous climb up the mountain. Similar but different was their memory of their father's mental prowess when he actually won a TV Quiz show in Kuwait, competing in Arabic as the only foreigner among Arabs, on wide-ranging knowledge of the Arab world. As the program was widely shown and often repeated it gave Dr. Staal a certain claim to fame.

Rev. Bassam Madany, retired radio missionary, was asked to speak about the lasting value of Harvey Staal's literary work. He likened Dr. Staal to Samuel Zwemer and Cornelius Van Dyke; calling them three great missionary scholars.

A brief stay in Cyprus, for the Madanys, had coincided with the Staal's one year in that country. Harvey's books in English and Arabic, on Mt. Sinai Codex 151, had

been published by the Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium of Louvain, Belgium. Codex 151 consisted of all the New Testament Epistles plus the Book of Acts. What a thrill it was to receive the English and Arabic copies from him as a gift.

It wasn't until May of 1998 that Rev. Madany was able to introduce this valuable work to his students at the Jordan Evangelical Theological Seminary. As he had expected, they were overjoyed to discover the existence of this portion of Scripture; one thousand years older than the treasured Smith/Van Dyke version of 1860! At that time the branch office of the United Bible Society in Amman had sufficient copies for all 35 of them to purchase one. Not only was this an early translation from Syriac into Arabic, but it contained notes and comments written by the original Christian translator. Here was evidence of evangelical roots!

Back in America, and through our E-mail contacts and web page, we began to sense that there was renewed interest in Mt. Sinai Codex 151. What a disappointment then, to discover that the central office of the Bible Society in Beirut, Lebanon, had exhausted their supply. An Arabic language web page was eager to advertise the book. Reprinting was going to cost \$32,000.

Before the service was over there was a tangible interest in pursuing this idea as a memorial project for Harvey Staal. The project has been approved and contributions may be sent to the Reformed Church in America, P.O. Box 19381, Newark, NJ 07195-1938. Please indicate on the memo line of the check that this is for "Harvey Staal memorial book."

If you haven't read the article "[The Treasures at St. Catherine's Monastery](#)" we recommend that you look it up now under Shirley's articles. It will give you all the background you need.