

# Keough, G. Arthur

## (1909–1989)

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### SVEN HAGEN JENSEN

Sven Hagen Jensen, M.Div. (Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, USA) has worked for the church for over 50 years as a pastor, editor, departmental director, and church administrator in Denmark, Nigeria and the Middle East. Jensen enjoys reading, writing, nature and gardening. He is married to Ingelis and has two adult children and four grandchildren.

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George Arthur Keough was an educator, administrator, editor, and missionary who served the Seventh-day Adventist Church for 57 years on four continents. He founded Middle East College and later served as its president. He was the author of four books, several adult Sabbath School quarterlies, and numerous articles.<sup>1</sup>



G. Arthur Keough

Photo courtesy of Farid Khoury.

## Early Years

Arthur Keough was born in Cairo, the capital of Egypt, on February 19, 1909, to Pastor George D. and Mrs. Mary Ann (Alderson) Keough, Seventh-day Adventist pioneer missionaries to the Middle East. He grew up speaking Arabic with the locals and was one of the few Englishmen in the world who had mastered that difficult language. At 17 years of age, Keough returned to his native England, where he received the training that qualified him to later return to the region of his birth.

Keough graduated from Stanborough College (now Newbold College) with ministerial training, and then followed up with a two-year teaching degree at Borough Road College, also known as the oldest teachers training college in the Commonwealth.<sup>2</sup> He later earned graduate degrees from the University of London in advanced studies in Arabic and Islamics and an M.A. from the Theological Seminary at Andrews University.<sup>3</sup>

Keough met his wife, Dora Joan Whiting (born June 20, 1910), while teaching English at Stanborough College. They married in Plymouth in December 1936,<sup>4</sup> then spent their first two years of married life at Stanborough School in Watford, Hertfordshire. He assumed the role of headmaster or principal for this boarding school that primarily catered to overseas missionary children.<sup>5</sup> It was during this time their first child was born, but she

never took her first breath. They buried her and called her Moira because of this bitter experience.<sup>6</sup>

In 1938, a call from the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists came for the Keoughs to go to Lebanon as missionaries. Keough's first assignment was to open a college that prepared young people for Church work in the Middle East. In 1939, he founded the Adventist College of Beirut (ACB), which later became Middle East College (MEC). He became its first president,<sup>7</sup> a position he held from 1939 to 1944 and again from 1961 to 1965. <sup>8</sup> He was ordained to the gospel ministry in 1946. From 1952 to 1956, he taught social sciences and at the same time was director of the Extension Division of the College until 1954. From 1955 to 1956, he taught speech at MEC, and in 1956 also served as its librarian.<sup>9</sup>

## His Life

All together, he gave 27 years of service to the Middle East. In addition to the responsibilities at the College, he was also the Education director for the Arabic Union Mission from 1941 to 1944, had a study furlough in the USA from 1945 to 1947, and continued as Education director in the Middle East Union (1947-1952), in the East Mediterranean Union Mission (1952-1956), and the Middle East Division (1956-1961). In addition, he took on the roles of Sabbath School and Youth director in the Middle East Union (1947-1950) and director for the department of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty (PARL) in the Middle East Division (1958-1961).<sup>10</sup>

Keough's background and skills contributed to the many activities and developments that occurred during the period of time he was an Education director at the various levels as well as during his connection with MEC. In 1948, he became the first editor of the *Middle East Messenger*, a Union-wide newsletter. Reports of his visits to the many initiatives and projects from the fields across the Union to the happenings at MEC were shared as a means of encouragement for workers and members. In 1948, he visited the Fayoum Training School in Egypt and was invited to lead out in the Week of Prayer, all in Arabic.

In 1955, Keough conducted two Division workshops at MEC: the Arabic Bible Textbook Workshop and the Arabic Hymnal Workshop. In 1957, he visited Iran in the interest of the Iran Training School. In 1959, he addressed the religious liberty challenges in the Middle East and recognized the many privileges the Adventist Church enjoyed in running its hospitals, schools, etc. He encouraged the members "to always live up to one's ideals and principles" and "ought as Christians to live as good citizens." In 1962, he was listed as one of the delegates to the 1962 General Conference session. In 1965, he resigned as president of MEC, and a new chapter in his life began.<sup>11</sup>

Neal C. Wilson, former missionary colleague in the Middle East, now president of the Columbia Union Conference, extended an invitation for him to join the Religion Department of Columbia Union College (CUC).<sup>12</sup> When he was still in transit, Elder Bothe of the Canadian Union called him with a request to serve as president of Canadian Union College. He had to make a choice. Keough's son, Alger Keough, explained how he made his choice:

After years of serving the church in whatever capacity they asked him to do, for the first time he had a choice and felt free to do what he loved to do - teach. His classroom was where he was most comfortable. Prestige was ok, but doing what brought joy was best. His commitment to the church balanced with his own desires.<sup>13</sup>

In the summer of 1965, Arthur, Dora, and their two younger children, Norma and Alger, made the move from Lebanon to the United States.<sup>14</sup> Keough joined the Religion Department of CUC where he taught the subjects of Greek, Daniel and Revelation, Hebrew Prophets, and "just about everything else" for many years. For a time, he was chairman of the Religion Department. He was also a member of the American Academy of Religion,<sup>15</sup> and in 1981, he received the "Citation of Excellence" from the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to teaching, he wrote a number of Sabbath School Lessons for the Church as well as books, among them, *Infinitely Happy* (1978), *Our Church Today, What It is and Can Be* (1980), *Let Daniel Speak* (1986), and *Growing Spiritually with the Psalmist* (published posthumously in 1990).<sup>17</sup> "He was a Sabbath School teacher in much demand at Sligo," said Betty Howard.<sup>18</sup> He also graded lessons for the Home Study Institute and was asked in 1975 to assume leadership of over 40 regular elders to help with the smooth functioning of the 3,300-member Sligo SDA congregation.<sup>19</sup>

After "retiring" in 1974, he was named professor emeritus, and CUC asked him to return to teach classes and even serve as acting chairman of the department. He served on many committees, including the General Conference committee overseeing the Church's work in the Middle East.<sup>20</sup> The library in Middle East University, Beirut, Lebanon, has been named after him as the *Keough Library*.<sup>21</sup>

Before Keough came to CUC, he donated his entire personal library to MEC. However, after he arrived in the United States and priced books there, he realized that he could not replace his personal library. So, he decided to buy old books and paperbacks and bind them himself. The grandfather of his son-in-law, Richard Osborn, was a bookbinder. When he heard of Keough's interest, he spent a week teaching him the vanishing art of bookbinding. Binding old bibles became one of Keough's special hobbies.<sup>22</sup>

Arthur and Dora Keough had four more children: Gillian Ann, Graham Arthur, Norma Sue, and Alger Lynn. Two of their children were born in the Middle East, and two in their mother's hometown, Plymouth, when home on furlough. His "Middle East family" extended further, when three of his four children married the children of missionaries they met in Beirut. Gillian married Larry Geraty (son of Thomas Geraty, president of Middle East University); Norma married Richard Osborn (son of Robert Osborn, Middle East Division treasurer); and Alger Keough married Martha Leshner (daughter of Richard Leshner, missionary to Egypt and Lebanon).

Pastor Arthur Keough passed away peacefully on December 10, 1989.

The final lines from G. Arthur Keough's traditional Thanksgiving poem written for the family in 1988:

God bless us all, both you and me.

God grant us grace to faithful be  
Until we hear the Trumpet Call  
And rise to praise Him one and all.<sup>23</sup>

## Legacy

G. Arthur Keough worked for his Church as teacher, principal, union and division education secretary, college president, academic dean, professor, and department chairman. His influence in the educational area of the Middle East especially was legendary. His spiritual emphasis was paramount. For him, Christian education was the preparation for life. One of his favorite quotes was: "It prepares the student for the joy of service in this world and for the higher joy of wider service in the world to come" (Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 13).<sup>24</sup>

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### NOTES

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3. Harrison W. John, "Scholar with a sparkle," *Sligoscope* 5, no. 7, September 1975, 3.
4. Lawrence T. Geraty to Sven H. Jensen, August 18, 2023, "Memorial Service Life Sketch of Dora Joan Whiting Keough," April 13, 2013, unpublished paper kept with Geraty.
5. Ibid.; Rob Pohle, "Keough Dies After 25 Years Of Service," *The Colombia Journal* 2, no. 5 (Tuesday, December 12, 1989): 1.
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8. Ibid.
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