



Arab Baptist Theological Seminary

كلية اللاهوت المعمدانية العربية

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The Restored Community

By Caleb Hutcherson, Lecturer in Historical Theology and Faculty Lead

It happens once every two years, during December and January. I get to team up with a group of our faculty to teach one of the most important modules we offer at ABTS. (Of course, I could say the same for every class ABTS offers...but it sounds more dramatic that way). In this module, the faculty team and our 2nd and 3rd year residential students explore the theme of *Church as a Restored and Restoring Community*. If you have watched the news at all, then you have seen the complicated and troubling contexts from which many ABTS students come, and into which they return for ministry. And the significance of this theme should be readily apparent. The church is not meant to simply stand by and watch.



ABTS's vision to see God glorified, people reconciled, and communities restored through the Church in the Arab world grows from a holistic understanding of salvation: a restored humanity, reconciled in every aspect of our brokenness. We understand that the saving work of God does more than provide an individualistic escape plan to get out of hell and into heaven. Rather, we recognize that God reconciles people to Himself in order to develop a community of reconciliation that becomes God's agent of peace in the world. In the community where Christ is acknowledged as Lord, reconciliation with God results in reconciliation with "each other" in the community and with "the other" outside.

The question we wrestle with in one way or another through this module is this: "How does the reconciling work of God restore people and communities into agents of God's peace? And what does that mean in a region so often characterized by... not peace?" While we recognize the "already/not yet" reality of God's reconciliation, we also press into how we are yet called to practice this restoration in the present. Students and faculty explore this question through four courses that focus on biblical-theological, historical-theological, socio-cultural, and ministerial approaches.

It is an intense time of focused study, punctuated by Christmas, when we celebrate the incarnation of the Word of God, Jesus Christ. Every time I get to take this journey with our students, I am struck with profound sadness at the depths of brokenness that characterize our existence. And I am overwhelmed at the profound hope with which we have been entrusted to proclaim and practice in the face of this brokenness. We are overcome by the grace of God who condescends to be with broken humanity, God with us. And my prayer for students at the end of the module is that they, that we, would continue to grow to be a people who both proclaim and practice this reconciliation and restoration in the world, in anticipation of the One who did, does, and will do so for us. ■

Faculty members share with us about their respective courses that they teach in the Restored Community module ...

*Hikmat Kashouh, Research Professor, shares about his course, **the Restored People of God in the Old Testament and the New Testament.*** “During this course of study, we will work to understand the religious perspectives of the worlds of two communities, Jewish and Christian, through the prevailing stories, symbols and practices that were adopted and practiced by each group, especially during the second Temple period until the destruction of the Temple in AD 70. This course intends to push students to a deeper understanding of the biblical and non-biblical texts in order to understand the Jewish people directly preceding the coming of the Messiah, and the Christian world and life of the restored/renewed Church directly after (his coming). The formation of a clear picture of the People of God in the Old and New contributes to the development of a precise theological understanding of the Christian community that each of us live in (today).”



*Bassem Melki, Dean of Students and Lecturer in Peace and Reconciliation Studies, shares about his course, **Conflict Resolution.*** “Conflict resolution is desperately needed today. There is a need for peacemakers who face struggles biblically and are spirit-driven. This course



highlights that the Church has a role of peacebuilding and reconciliation. It focuses on personal peace-making, what is conflict and the biblical ways to solve it while doing God’s Word and sparking a transformation. Students explore the principles and foundations for conflict transformation through reconciliation, mediation and negotiation. They will use this experience for the work of being peacemakers within the ‘restored to peace’ community and through this community to the world.”

*Caleb Hutcherson shares about his course **Historical Perspectives on Salvation from the Community of Atonement.*** “In this course we take a historical-theological look at what Salvation has meant through the history of the Church. Essentially, that means studying how Christians have historically answered the questions ‘What did Christ do?’ and ‘What does that mean?’. We revisit some of the major controversies that have fostered divisive theological stances, exploring how context plays such an important role in the answers people were giving. The most important thing I hope students come away from the course is a more holistic perspective of God’s saving work, and how He intends for that work to continue through the Body of Christ in and for the world.”



*Daniel Buttry, Visiting Faculty, shares about his course **Social Restoration Through the Restored People of God.*** “With the various conflicts all around us it is so tempting as Christians to engage in those conflicts in the same way as everyone else. But we are told not to be conformed to the world but to be transformed by the renewal of our minds. In our class about Social Restoration through the Restored People of God we open ourselves to the renewal of our minds specifically related to conflict and then how with those renewed minds we can become agents of transformation. We then confront the self-limiting beliefs – ‘It can never work in the Middle East’ – with the faith that with God all things are possible.” ■

Throughout the module period, students work on a significant research paper, what we call an integrative project, using an abbreviated form of [action research](#). At the beginning of the module, they identify a specific situation of brokenness that serves as a point of action for them to study through the “lenses” of the various courses. About halfway through the module, they plan and practice a redemptive action, and then continue studying the outcome of the action during the second half of the module.

A second-year student from the West Bank describes his project as follows: “*The situation of brokenness in my project has to do with the interrupted relationship between me and my family. During the Christmas break, I contacted them and am building bridges using the internet. I am also planning to visit after I hand in my project.*” A second-year student from Sudan says, “*in my project, I dealt with a current division in a Sudanese church in Beirut. The action I took was to sit with each leader there and find the root of the problem.*”

Invest in Peacebuilding in the Arab World

Partner with ABTS

ABTS does not only teach peacebuilding in our classroom! Our Institute of Middle East Studies has embarked on a new project, the Peacebuilding Initiatives. These multi-pronged initiatives seek to promote Christ’s model of peace by providing space for diverse people in Lebanon to come together, addressing issues of hurt and facilitating healing.

We invite you to partner with us and invest in Peacebuilding in the Arab world, through our School of Theology as well as through our Institute of Middle East studies!

Contact [Development and Partner Relations Manager Wissam al-Saliby](#) to learn how you can contribute.

Daniel and Sharon Buttry Teach *Social Restoration Through the Restored People of God*

Daniel and Sharon Buttry are respectively Global Consultant of Peace and Justice and Global Consultant for Community Transformation of American Baptist International Ministry. January 9 to 18, they are teaching the “Social Restoration Through the Restored People of God” course which is part of the “Restored Community” module.

On his ministry, Dan shares with us: “A lot of my peacemaking work started when I was a pastor in the city of Boston. I started developing resources that I used in our own congregation. Eventually, I was called to work with our denomination in peace programs.” Sharon also shares, “I am

(restoring the community) came up. This is the fifth time Dan has come to Lebanon, and the second for Sharon. Aside from training students at the seminary, they stay longer for other activities such as working with the Lebanese Society of Educational and Social Development, IMES and the Master of Religion team. Their activities at ABTS also include consulting, strategizing and listening.

What they really enjoy is eating with the students and talking to them. They also enjoy being able to mentor them, hear their stories, pray with them, and develop lasting friendships that are maintained through social media. They are in touch



very contextual in a local ministry in Detroit, and we live in an immigrant gateway for the city. We live right in the urban center where there are very diverse neighbors. I spent most of my year working with Muslim women helping their families.”

Dan was invited to teach a course at ABTS on conflict transformation back in 2007. He later spoke at the Middle East Conference of the Institute of Middle East Studies (IMES). When ABTS developed the modular curriculum, the idea of Dan and Sharon teaching a course on transformed community

with many ABTS graduates that they taught. They see their ministry here as ongoing relationships, not just coming in, doing a course and leaving.

On ABTS’s peacemaking role and interfaith dialogue, Daniel says, “I think that ABTS is a pioneering place, and these relationships are not only important for Lebanon but for the larger world. I see this is a very strategic place for God’s peace to be manifested, and it’s exciting for me to be welcomed here.” ■

ABTS is a ministry of the [Lebanese Society for Educational and Social Development](#) (LSESD). ABTS and LSESD benefit from the support of the [Middle East Bible Outreach](#), a 501(c)(3) corporation based in Atlanta, GA, that coordinates efforts among our US friends.