

# Arab Baptist Theological Seminary

## كلية اللاهوت المعمدانية العربية

October 2016

### Interview with Martin Accad, Chief Academic Officer

**Introduction by Elie Haddad, ABTS President** | It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you ABTS's new Chief Academic Officer, Martin Accad. Martin is no stranger to ABTS. He joined in 2001 and served as Dean of Students, as Academic Dean, and has been serving as Director of the Institute of Middle East Studies that he founded at ABTS. Martin is an expert in Islamic Studies and Christian-Muslim interaction. His commitment to God, to the mission of God, and to loving the people that God loves, coupled by a vision for a local church that is prophetic, loving, and skilled in proclaiming Jesus in our majority context, renders him an exceptional leader for a time like this.

We are grateful for the ministry of Perry Shaw who led the Theology Department for a number of years and was key in transforming its curriculum. Perry will continue to serve as a faculty member while he manages to fulfill the increasing demand for his contribution to global theological education. Martin's appointment was approved by the Board of Trustees starting this academic year. As his main focus will be to provide direction and vision for both academic departments, he will be supported by a highly competent faculty team who will manage the daily operation.

These changes are taking place at a crucial time in our region and will allow ABTS to be well-positioned to follow God's leading for this next phase of ministry.

**In June 2016, the Board of Trustees approved the appointment of IMES Director and Faculty, Martin Accad, as ABTS Chief Academic Officer. We interviewed Martin in order to gain a better understanding of his role in the new structure and how he sees God guiding ABTS in the years ahead.**

**What are the duties and responsibilities of the Chief Academic Officer?**

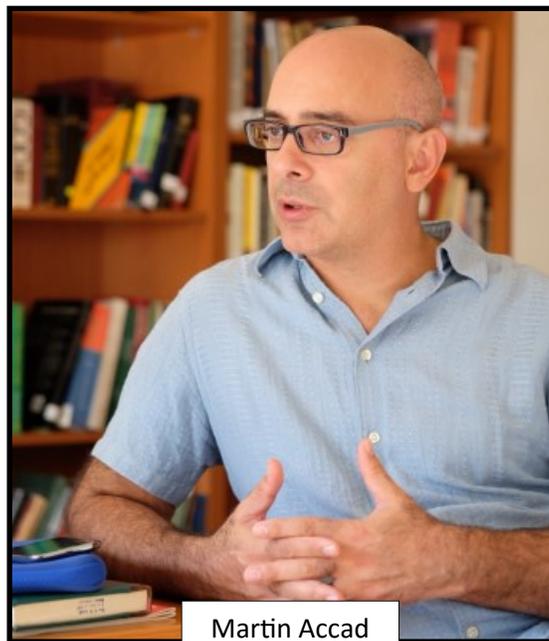
I view my role as leading the educational vision and mission of ABTS. I will not be involved in the routine day-to-day management of academic affairs but more in strategic planning and thinking, helping the academic team to think strategically.

The reason why I feel I can turn my attention to strategic thinking and leadership, rather than manage day-

to-day affairs, is because I'm working with a very competent team. The main people on the team will be Walid Zailaa, who will be leading academic programs, Caleb Hutcherson who will be leading faculty development, and Bill Merrifield who will be leading innovative learning, which is the name we give our growing distributed learning department. With these three people, we have a competent and professional team, along which I'll be helping drive the bigger picture.

**How do you feel God is leading ABTS, and thus leading you in your new position, in the coming five years?**

I was Assistant and Associate Academic Dean for 3 years, and then the Academic Dean of ABTS for five years, so eight years in total. I really didn't want to go back to this day-to-day routine. But what made me accept the invitation to take up the



Martin Accad

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CAO position is my sense of where ABTS is today and where God is calling us in the future. I think that God has been leading ABTS towards having a greater impact regionally and even globally, but also nationally. We feel that God is calling us to be involved in helping the Church go through a similar transformation to the one that He has taken us through as a community of learning at ABTS. For instance, one of the significant changes that God has been doing at ABTS is to make us far more engaged with our Muslim context and in training leaders for the church who are also far more engaged. Another area where we feel God wants us to go is that of research. I think we have gradually been developing a very competent and knowledgeable faculty in the various disciplines of the theological curriculum, but more importantly, most of them have an approach to their discipline which is very specifically Middle Eastern in focus. And I think we can have a contribution in the fields of research and writing and influencing at a new level in a way that we couldn't have ten years ago. I think that God is going to increase that aspect of ABTS even more as we continue to be active in faculty development and planning. We're always thinking about how to grow the human resource better within ABTS, and I think that God is maybe asking us to maximize more the potential of the resources that He has been bringing to us. We also recently recruited someone who is going to be leading innovative learning at ABTS. We feel that God wants us to use creative and innovative educational methods in order to serve the region more effectively, to serve a much broader population. Through creative approaches to education, we want to be able to form leaders and reach people in places where traditional education cannot go, through distributed learning, online education, hybrid formats, etc.

I think our vision is always bigger than us. In some ways, that's a good thing because we're being stretched constantly. It can also be exhausting, so we need to be careful not to spread ourselves too thin. We don't want to overreach, yet we want to be sensitive to where God is calling us. We want to be wise in growing at the same rate as the vision that God is giving us.

I am looking forward to all of it. I love big challenges, and I feel that the position as it has been set up is a big challenge.

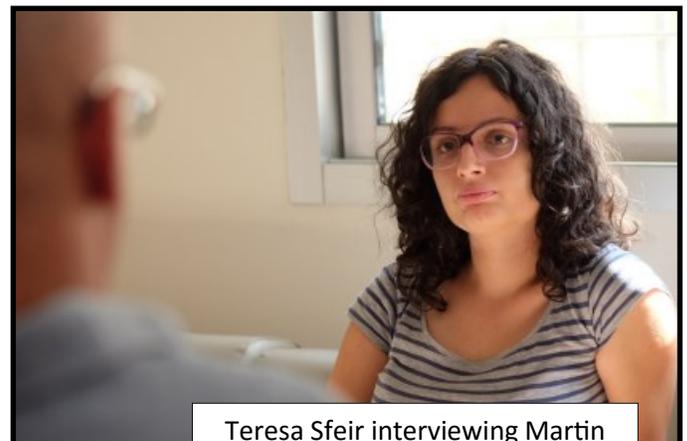
**And how will your involvement with the Institute of Middle East Studies (IMES) look now?**

I pulled out of IMES as much as I can and we recruited a new person to manage the programs, Elias Ghazal, a very competent leader, who will do a great job in managing the projects. I will continue to lead the Master's program (MRel) for credential purposes. The main other area where I decided to remain involved in IMES as well is the Peacebuilding Initiatives, because these simply go beyond

IMES. I think this is one of the places God is calling ABTS to go. The sense that God is leading us in this direction came from group strategic planning, where we felt that we now needed to pay attention over the next 3-5 years on peacebuilding. It has been the second strategic goal of IMES for a few years now, but we hadn't developed it yet. And so, we have a strong sense that this is where God wants us to focus. And it makes a lot of sense, of course, since the situation we are living in in the MENA region has so many conflicts. We've had five or six years of uprisings and bloody wars and violence in Syria, Yemen, Bahrain, Iraq, and other places. So I'm not sure where God is going to take us with that.

We are in the process of recruiting one or two people to strengthen the Peacebuilding Initiatives and this whole area of activity. We are in the process of planning and implementing five main initiatives within the peacebuilding. And so we have been working with youth in a program called The Feast. This is one program we will be growing, hoping it will have a greater impact in the years to come. The second one aims at working with religious leaders. A third initiative includes working with young political leaders and members of parliament. A fourth one will be working with churches and Christian organizations. The fifth hopes to bring together all of these different constituencies from diverse backgrounds and places to a national day of prayer with focus on Lebanon. But that's a longer term project.

The goal of our Peacebuilding Initiatives is to encourage the church be much more of a peacemaker in society and a catalyst for change in the MENA region. This will involve training, modelling and leading in this field. The Church will have a much greater impact, not just within the walls of the Church, but actually in society and communities, at the national and international levels. We want to work towards increasing peace in this region, and we feel that a Christ-focused approach has more to bring than other approaches out there. ■



Teresa Sfeir interviewing Martin

## Returning Students, their Summer Ministries and Prayer Requests

**By September, ABTS second and third year residential students were back and ready for a new year. With the exception of one Syrian student, their summers were spent in their home countries serving the Lord there and training to become Arab Church leaders. We would like to share with you the accounts of some of our returning students.**

**Male student from Sudan |** This summer, I held Bible studies and gave Biblical teachings at my church because our youth only receive Islamic education at governmental schools. I also made several home visits, especially when ministering to those who do not know Christ, and I gave out Bibles. I also served in the other two churches in the area: The Evangelical Church of Al Bager and the Catholic church of Saint Peter and Paul.

*Prayer Request.* There were challenges. For instance, the church building is weak since it is made up of clay. It fell apart because of the heavy downpour of rain, and though we spent days rebuilding its roof, it still needs a lot of work. There also is a need for more servants, and Christians are persecuted in the capital Khartoum. Therefore, pray with me that the Lord would help us in the face of these challenges.

**Eman from Egypt |** After serving at a conference with the youth of Bani Sewf near Fayyum, I served at the Evangelical Church of Bani Sewf for fourteen days. Then the Lord sent me to another conference for the underprivileged youth in Fayyum. Those kids often got into fights, and during the biggest, they got out weapons and took the wooden stands off the bed. Though this highly tense fight took place, we were comforted to know later that many of the youth were actually listening to God's Word.

*Prayer Request.* I have learned this summer that God doesn't necessarily use us when we are in the forefront of a ministry; sometimes He calls us to be in the back, unseen and yet manifesting God's glory. Pray with me

that the Lord would further use me in the lives of those kids coming from deprived areas.

**Abir from Egypt |** At first, we didn't get involved in much ministry as my husband Maher had broken his arm. After a while, my husband and I began to serve in the villages of Minia, and we started the Masira (Journey) ministry, which is an informal gathering held twice a week and is accompanied by a time of food and fellowship. The ministry targeted Christians who weren't attending church and encouraged them to do so, regardless of what church they choose to attend.

*Prayer Request.* We aren't sure where God will call us to serve upon our graduation this year – in Minia or elsewhere.

Pray for us. I trust that the Lord will lead us to the place where He wants us to serve Him.

**Male student from Palestine |** I got the chance to serve at my church and help the believers to see the unreached in a different light. Some of the people around us who do not know Christ began to attend our church, which is very unusual, and we ministered to them and gave out Christian praise CDs. Then, I flew to Germany where I was introduced to an Arab church led by a Lebanese pastor. Through that church, I was invited to an evangelism conference. There, I shared my testimony, following which I was invited to the homes of many conference participants. Now that I'm at ABTS, we're keeping in touch through phone messaging.

*Prayer Request.* Please pray that I stay in touch and follow up through the internet with the brothers who need discipleship in Palestine. Also pray that we might live out our faith uncompromisingly and without attacking our culture. Finally, please pray that my level of English will rise considerably so I may be able to pursue further theological education after completing my studies at ABTS.

**Karam from Egypt |** I got to serve in a five-day conference for a great number of young men and women. Fifty-four of these came to know Christ and got baptized. During that conference, I translated to ministers coming from the US. I also served at my church, which is Grace Church in Minia, Egypt. I spoke on two Sunday



From Sudan



Eman

evenings, led several Bible studies and helped in the children's ministry.

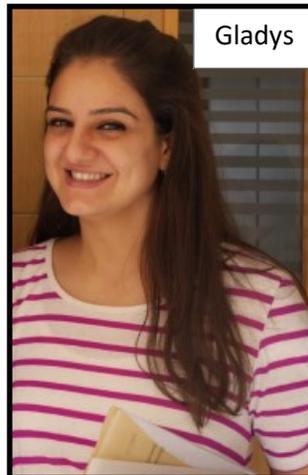
*Prayer Request.* Please lift the people of Minia in prayer, and pray with us that we may reach out for those who didn't get the chance to hear the message of the gospel.

**Wahiba from Algeria** | In Tizi Ouzou, my church shifted from a home setting into a building and joined the Algerian Protestant Church Association. Therefore, our church became officially recognized. This gave us more freedom, and our pastor baptized more than forty believers, including my brother, within six months. During the summer, I served at church by preaching in the ladies' meetings, and I served with children through leading the worship and the Bible lessons. I also did several home visits in order to encourage women who weren't openly following Christ.

*Prayer Request.* I would appreciate your prayers for the youth of my church in Algeria. And pray that the Lord would grant me the wisdom to be a peacemaker and to serve among them as disputes can arise because of the age and behavioral differences. Youths are the future of



Karam



Gladys

the Church, and it is my vision to serve among them.

**Gladys from Syria** | This summer, I stayed in Lebanon and got the chance to serve in several conferences. One of them is the Catalyst conference where I met all the leaders who write resources for youth in Arabic. I also met youth leaders from Syria, Jordan, Iraq and Lebanon. My role was to communicate with them all throughout summer to motivate them to write. Aside from that, I served in a 5-day Youth for Christ camp, and in a conference for Syrian refugee children coming from a non-Christian background. The kids remembered me from last year's conference. It was wonderful to know that we had left an impression on the kids.

*Prayer Request.* Join me in prayer for Catalyst and my ministry in Catalyst. In this ministry, I am privileged to be editing the writings of Arabic writers for Arab youth ministry leaders.

Would you consider supporting the equipping of future leaders for the Arab Church?

We invite you to partner with us in fulfilling our mission of serving the Church in the Arab world, by providing scholarship support to one or more of our students. This Academic Year, we have more than 100 students in our various programs.

Contact Partnerships Manager [Wissam al-Saliby](#) today to know how you can contribute.