Arab Baptist Theological Seminary

كليّة اللاهوت المعمدانية العربية

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A Graduate and a Student Reaching Tens of Thousands in North Africa Through Media

Earlier this year, Wissam al-Saliby, Development and Partner Relations Manager, had the opportunity to meet with a 1999 ABTS graduate, Youssef, as well as the current online student, Zineb. Youssef and Zineb shared with Wissam about their respective journeys and the impact of their studies at ABTS on their ministry.

Youssef, Zineb and Wissam

Youssef

In the early 90s, David King, former ABTS Dean of Students and faculty, visited my country for a church summer camp. I shared a devotion during that camp, and upon hearing that devotion, Dr. King invited me to apply at ABTS. However, I had different plans. Within a year, though, all doors closed, and my plans did not succeed. One year later, Mr. King returned for the summer camp and invited me again to apply. Following the camp, I decided to go for it. I didn't have the ABTS address, so I mailed my application to Dr. King's address in the US. In the meantime, I kept seeking other paths, and doors kept shutting.

In the Summer of 1995, during the summer camp, I had one prayer: "Lord I don't know what I will do next year, but You open doors." After the summer camp, I got a phone call from Lebanon, from former ABTS President Ghassan Khalaf. He asked me if I was still interested in studying at ABTS. When I responded positively, pastor Khalaf said that he will begin the visa application. Four years later, in June 1999, I graduated with a Bachelor of Theology. Studying at ABTS was definitely God's will for my life. It has empowered me significantly.

Today, I preach on two Sundays each month. And in every sermon, I use the hermeneutics, Greek and Hebrew that I learnt at ABTS. Without underestimating the importance of academic study, what greatly impacted me was the day-to-day life with the students and the leadership of pastor Ghassan Khalaf. It changed me greatly, and made me mature.

To me, pastor Khalaf was a mentor, a teacher, a pastor and a father. I believe that seminaries should not only care for academics but also for the students' spiritual lives, helping them to deal with conflicts and teaching them to grow as a community.

Today, my main ministry is producing and presenting a TV show (in my country's local dialect) that runs on Arab Christian satellite channels as well as on the Internet. Zineb and I co-present this program. It includes teachings for the believers, as well as the message of salvation to our people. The satellite channels reach tens of thousands, many of whom call us or call the channel for further information. Our website Asdika

Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed! **Amid the challenges in most Arab countries, we pray that our eyes keep focused on Jesus, *the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Hebrews 12:2***

Please join us in prayer asking for the Church in the Arab world to live in the power of the Resurrection.

Youssef and Zineb presenting the 'Asdika' program

(Friends) has become well known in our country.

Please pray that God will keep using us in the expansion of His Kingdom. Also, please pray for my family that the Lord will fulfill His purposes for us, and that He will be glorified among us. I am married and have two boys aged 10 and 6.

Zineb

I've had a long-felt need – since 2006 – to study theology. A long time ago, I met a Lebanese ABTS graduate who works at a radio station, which is called *Voice of Forgiveness*, and she invited me to study at ABTS too. But I could not travel to Lebanon. It was simply not possible for me to do so.

In 2010, I moved to full-time ministry in Christian media. At first, I would interview Youssef during our Asdika program. Later, we changed our program's style, and I became a presenter and speaker. I needed to present devotions and reflections on Biblical verses and themes, yet I was afraid of making theological and hermeneutical mistakes. I did not have the academic foundations to write devotions that would be heard by tens of thousands. Therefore, I began looking for online courses. And in one of our church gatherings, I met an Egyptian student at ABTS who, unaware of my needs, suggested that I could study online. Her proposal was the fulfillment of my long-felt desire!

In July 2016, I began to study online with ABTS. Among the courses that I completed are New Testament, Home Groups, Effective Faith Sharing and Biblical Interpretation. I am currently enrolled in the courses on Church History, Old Testament Survey and Contemporary Challenges facing the Church.

The course that impacted me the most is Biblical Interpretation. Today, I approach the Bible in an academic way when preparing devotions. I can now write devotions that I could not have written prior to my education. My view and understanding of the Church has matured, beyond what I had learnt in my earlier years. Through my TV show, I interact with believers, seekers and other non-Christians through social media and Facebook. Consequently, I am now capable of presenting my ideas to them in a systematic and better-organized way.

Please pray that the courses which we take through ABTS will be for our development and spiritual growth, not just a title to display on the wall. Please pray for North African countries and for my people there, that faith in Jesus will spread, and that believers will grow in their faith and serving the Lord. Finally, pray that God will raise up servants in all these countries.

I am married and have two daughters aged 7 and 6.

Do you feel called to invest in church leaders currently enrolled at ABTS?

The stories of Youssef and of Zineb are among many stories of how ABTS is equipping the Church in the Arab world and training those who are called to spread the Gospel throughout our region. We would not be able to do so without the scholarship support that our friends and partners provide. **As ABTS grows and as our programs expand, we invite you to partner with us in our mission.**

Scholarship support for one residential theology student per year is US $10,000, and scholarship support for one online theology student, for the whole program, is US $5,000. US and UK gifts are tax-deductible. To learn more, contact Wissam al-Saliby at information@abtslebanon.org.

Let the Children Come to Me

The Students' Compassionate Care Ministry in the Refugee Camps of Zahle

ABTS's student-led Compassionate Care Ministry has been ministering to refugees since 2009. With the help of two Christian humanitarian organizations, Heart for Lebanon and MERATH (ABTS sister ministry), ABTS students go to Syrian refugee camps monthly to serve families living in tents and more than 200 children. The two-hour program that the students prepare for the children includes songs with gestures, games, and a play or a puppet show with a theme that addresses one of their needs followed by a meal.

In the 2016-2017 academic year, the student team, which is made up of seven members, made their first trip to the Zahle camps in November. In January, the students went again to Zahle, but this time they went to another camp due to security issues in the previous camp. The new location is more spacious, whereas tents were being put up everywhere in the old one. The number of kids in the new camp is about 300, so there is a need for more group leaders. Other challenges include a ground full of mud and water puddles and rocks, which makes it hard for the kids to move freely.

"During one of the visits, as soon as the kids saw our bus coming," an ABTS student shared, "they paced and gathered around us excitedly. Some hugged us; others smiled and expressed how long it had been since we last came." Wahiba, third-year student from Algeria, is the team leader this year. She shared, "I enjoyed looking at the kids' drawings. A thirteen-year-old talented girl drew a picture of a house surrounded with flowers, and tears were falling from heaven. She said the tears fell because of the war in Syria. She doesn't have the chance to get a good education. I wish there was a chance for these children to learn." On that day, gifts were also distributed; 250 to 300 kids came.

Wahiba concludes, "The kids have great needs, financial and emotional. We try to make them happy once a month, but that isn't enough. When they tell us that not many people visit and then thank us because we do, when we see their excitement at our arrival, we know our work is not in vain."

In addition to the children's ministry, our community also helped in providing food aid to refugee families, thanks to the generous support of an ABTS partner. Last year, more than 15 ABTS staff and students worked on packaging 125 food packages to 125 refugee families, and helped in distributing them.

Students and staff packaging food for distribution to refugee families

Students presenting a play to children in camps

"The compassionate care ministry is a great opportunity for the students to experience serving in the front line with kids who have been robbed of their past, present and future when this isn't available in their own countries. They are being blessed as they bless. What a humbling experience to serve the Kingdom of God and these children. They draw a smile on their faces and hope to create new, beautiful memories that will shape their future." ***Bassem Melki, Dean of Students***

"All day long, the children in tents hear the TV which their parents set to the Syrian news channel. They hear of death, war and destruction on TV. The ministry of the ABTS students is their only opportunity to hear about love, and about hope – both of which are lacking for these people. I did not understand the impact of your children's ministry until the parents and children asked me, during our regular visitations, 'when is the next time when the children activity will take place?'" ***Heart for Lebanon representative***

"MERATH is excited about ABTS students supporting its partner church in the Bekaa Valley this upcoming year. The students will help to build a playground for refugee children to play on, and conduct children's activities. They will reach out for these children who are in need of a safe place to play and learn, and to be shown love. Students will also assist the local partner church in serving vulnerable families with much-needed basic assistance and encouragement." ***MERATH representative***

Sameh from Egypt helping a Syrian family carry the food package to a vehicle

Students' Prayer Requests

Wahiba, third-year female student from Algeria: Pray for the Compassionate Care Ministry to continue its work with the kids after I graduate this summer. Also, pray that the students would have the energy to serve with all their hearts even when they are tired and have a lot of studying to do.

Eman, second-year female student from Egypt: Please pray for the Compassionate Care Ministry. As we graduate and are off to our countries, pray that God will send in our place people who truly care for these children. Pray that they would help this ministry to grow and that they would serve with a pure conscience. This is a land thirsty for the Word; please pray for committed servants.

First-year male student from Sudan: Please pray for me because I have an infection in my tonsils; it may be caused by the change of atmosphere. Pray for my family who are in Sudan too; my home region is marred by war, famine and sickness.

First-year male student from Sudan: Pray that I might be shaped at ABTS in order to serve in Darfur. Also, pray for its believers in the midst of conflict, and pray that a revival might take place there. Finally, pray for safety on the journey I will take from Khartoum to Darfur, this summer. It is very dangerous to go by land because there are outlaws lurking on the way.

First-year female student from Sudan: Please pray for us always that the Lord will train us for the ministry to which He has called us. It wasn't easy to leave everything behind and come here. Please pray for my family in Sudan and for my son Nelson. Finally, pray that God would strengthen us to fulfil His purposes.

Nevin, third-year female student from Egypt: Pray for us, as followers of Christ, to please God's heart by reflecting Christ's sacrificial love to others rather than fighting for our own personal interests and becoming a snare to them when we should be a blessing. Pray that the Lord would help the needy in my town, Minia. Finally, pray for the Lord's work to be done in Egypt and that there will be reconciliation among its people.

Rami, first-year male student from Syria: When we return to Syria, there will be challenges awaiting us. Please keep us in your prayers. Also, pray for me and my family's health. On February 21, I had to enter the hospital to get a gallbladder stone removed. My son, Jaleel's gums were also severely swollen, and he could barely speak. Praise God; he is better now.