



# ARAB BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

## كلية اللاهوت المعمدانية العربية

ABTS Newsletter

January 2014

**Middle East Consultation 2014, 16 - 20 June 2014**

### Discipleship Today: Following Jesus in the Middle East and North Africa

Building upon 10 years of successful Middle East Conferences (MEC), the Institute of Middle East Studies (IMES) is pleased to adopt a fresh focus for 2014 in partnership with Near East Initiative (NEI).

MEC 2014 will be in the form of a consultation rather than a conference, allowing more space for participants to interact as well as reflect upon and discuss the issues at hand.

The Middle East Consultation seeks to help practitioners, scholars, pastors, teachers, missionaries, and faith-based NGO workers explore what God has been doing throughout the Middle East and North Africa [MENA].

The consultation will be divided into 5 sessions each day, exploring how God had been working through the following lenses:

**Regional focus:** We will hear stories from individuals who have experienced or been influenced by various

approaches to discipleship in the region as well as to regional practitioners who have had various experiences of and approaches toward the practice of discipleship. Global missiologists and theologians will then help us to reflect theologically and missiologically upon the various themes emerging from the regional testimonies. Taking each region at a day, MEC will discuss Egypt, North-West Africa, Lebanon and Syria, Jordan, and the Palestinian camps.

**Topical Focus:** We seek to explore a variety of important topics related to Christ-centered discipleship within the MENA context, including biblical and theological definitions of discipleship, identity through cultural and sociological lenses, conversion and its subsequent implications, historical approaches to discipleship in the MENA context, and contemporary and possible future approaches to discipleship. Leading these

sessions will be an assembly of global missiologists and theologians, including:

- John Azumah, Associate Professor of World Christianity and Islam at Columbia Theological Seminary, Georgia.

*(Cont'd on page 2)*

In this Issue | Discipleship Today: Following Jesus in the Middle East and North Africa, Page 1-2 |

Christopher Wright Shares About His Teaching at ABTS, Page 3

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+9614400250 | [information@abtslebanon.org](mailto:information@abtslebanon.org) | Mansourieh El Maten, Lebanon - P.O. Box 60

- J. Andrew Kirk, Former Dean and Head of the School of Mission and World Christianity at Selly Oaks Colleges, UK and Senior Research Fellow at International Baptist Theological Seminary, Czech Republic.
- Martin Accad, Director of the Institute of Middle East Studies at the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary, Lebanon.
- Grant Porter, Lead facilitator for Near East Initiatives (NEI).
- Ida Glaser, Academic Director of the Centre for Muslim-Christian Studies at the University of Oxford.

**Interfaith Focus:** MEC 2014 will explore issues of conversion to the Christian faith from Islamic perspectives, inviting Muslims Sheikhs and scholars to reflect and express their views.

Throughout MEC 2014, we will hear first-hand from those who have practiced and been influenced by various approaches to discipleship within the MENA region in an effort to best identify the challenges and opportunities facing the regional church. We raise the question of how the church might best assist individuals and communities to live as faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. In keeping with the IMES ethos and with the MEC tradition, we will also be inviting Muslim voices to contribute to this important conversation, during specific sessions. This will provide us with the opportunity to listen to and interact with alternative perspectives that may challenge our current perceptions.

For more information about the Middle East Consultation 2014, or to apply, please send an email to [IMES@abtslebanon.org](mailto:IMES@abtslebanon.org)

“Emerging communities of followers of Jesus in the Middle East and North Africa, as well as workers among them, have become increasingly aware in the past few years about the huge challenges they face in the area of discipleship. The work that God has been doing in these communities over the past 3 decades is lived out and observed. Our consultation in June will offer the opportunity for all those who care about discipleship in the Middle East and North Africa region to take time to reflect, analyze and understand better, beyond observation and hearsay.” **Martin Accad, IMES Director**

The Mandate of the **Institute of Middle East Studies** is to bring about positive transformation in thinking and practice between Christians and Muslims in the Middle East and beyond, through education, advocacy, and peace-building initiatives.



A Panel from Middle East Conference 2013

Additional media on MEC is on our Facebook page: [MEC 2012](#) & [MEC 2013](#). For more information: [www.abtslebanon.org/IMES](http://www.abtslebanon.org/IMES), [facebook.com/ABTS.Lebanon](https://facebook.com/ABTS.Lebanon) & [imeslebanon.wordpress.com](http://imeslebanon.wordpress.com)

**ABTS Mission:** to serve the Church in our region as it realizes its Biblical mission of having Christ acknowledged as Lord by offering specialized learning resources and equipping faithful men and women for effective service.

## Christopher Wright Shares About His Teaching at ABTS

Second and third year students started the New Year with a new module entitled “The Missional Church”. We were honored to have [Rev. Dr. Christopher Wright](#) give the first course in this module “The Mission of God in the Bible”. Christopher Wright served in the pastoral ministry from 1977 to 1982 in Parish Church of St. Peter & St. Paul, England. He is now the International Ministries Director of [Langham Partnership International](#). During his stay, he shared with us the following reflection on his teaching experience at our seminary.

“**Breakfast, first day at ABTS.** I’m back here again for a few days to teach once more on some biblical perspectives on mission within the Missional Church module. And who else is at breakfast? One student from Syria, one from South Sudan, and another from Algeria. **Lunch.** I meet another from Egypt. **Dinner,** another one from Morocco. And that’s just the first five I’ve talked to on Day One. Where else could I be but ABTS, with its range of students from the far north, far south and far west of this whole region? And what and where is the church in that whole vast area of the Middle East and North Africa? I visualize the millions of Coptic Christians on the one hand, and the few hundreds of believers in small fellowships in Morocco.

I think of the desperate suffering of those in Syria, and the pressures and responsibilities of those in Lebanon. And most recently of the terrible sense of *déjà vu* in South Sudan as fighting erupts again – even among those who are desperately weary after decades of war in that land. What can possibly be the mission of the church in such complex contexts? What does it mean to be a ‘missional church’ here?

The honest answer is, I do not know. But I know the God who does. And I know that what ABTS is trying to do is the right way to help people find answers to those questions. That is, they are insisting that students think



Rev. Wright at the morning devotions



Rev. Wright with part of the second and third year students

deeply *both* about the riches and depths of the biblical and theological resources that God has given us (what does it mean to *be* the church? Who are we and what are we here for? What is our identity and our mission?), *and* about the context in which those questions have to be answered in real flesh and blood. There are no short and easy answers. But intelligent and effective mission demands that we ask the tough questions and wrestle with the God-givens of our scriptures and our contexts. For that hard work, ABTS is clearly a busy laboratory.”