Arab Baptist Theological Seminary

كليّة اللاهوت المعمدانية العربية

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What Is the Next Milestone for Theological Education at ABTS?

It is our desire and our vision to see God glorified, people reconciled, and communities restored through the Church in the Arab world. Despite the conflicts and hostilities in the region, God is growing His Church in unprecedented ways. The need for leaders is rapidly growing to support the growth of the Church. Consequently, we are seeking to make our training more accessible to the growing number of leaders who cannot leave their ministry for many years to come and study at ABTS. We already offer a fully online Certificate program, which is equivalent to one year of residential studies. Our desire is to build on the Certificate to offer a full Bachelor in Theology that can be pursued from a distance. In order to learn what delivery method works best, we decided to run a pilot test, with our residential students, in offering the *Missional Church* module in blended format. Our second-and-third-year students took this module from November 30, 2017 until January 19, 2018. While courses were online for the most part, a few sessions were taken in a classroom setting on some weekdays.

Second-year student Rasha from Syria describes her experience,

> "What I liked about the blended module is the amount of readings we had. I also enjoyed the fact that I could voice my opinions through the forums. Sometimes, in a classroom setting, I might avoid getting into discussions for the lack of time, which wasn't the case online. In addition, the videos that professors uploaded of their courses were very helpful. You learn as if you are in class while also getting to participate."

Earlier this month, the ABTS Online faculty members who were involved in teaching the pilot module met to evaluate the blended delivery experience. One of the positive things that faculty members noticed about the experiment was that the level of discussion on the online forums was rich and profound. They were also impressed by the quality of the students' course projects.

Mike Kuhn, Assistant Professor in Discipleship and Biblical Theology, notes,

> "The blended format is exciting because it has such great potential for extending ABTS reach into the world via the internet. It was an adjustment for our students and for me as well although, in the end, I believe they came to appreciate the possibilities of online learning. One advantage I noticed was that every student in class was 'speaking up' online. So, everyone's voice was heard, which is not always true in the classroom. One thing is sure, in this module, ABTS was a learning community whether as students or faculty."

Wes, Assistant Professor of Missiology, also notes,

> "The blended learning approach for *The History of Church Expansion* course provided new avenues to study the topic that is not as accessible in the traditional format. With the publication of a new learning resource in Arabic (Ruth Tucker's *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya*), students were able to spend quality time in internet forums integrating the theory from class lectures with practical examples from readings in the book."

This will be a great leap forward. Pray for us as we design a blended program that meets the needs of a larger group of part-time and online students. There are still a few obstacles that we need to overcome. We believe that the face-to-face component is very important. This raises a challenge since students are spread all across the Arab world. Do we fly them all to Beirut for face-to-face classes? Do we send faculty members to clusters of students in different countries? How can we offer a program that is effective and accessible, yet financially sustainable? Pray for God's guidance and provision as we try to overcome these hurdles. Our goal is to launch this program within two years.

February and March Electives

The purpose of electives, as is the case with all our courses, is the formation of effective Christian leaders for the Kingdom of God. Electives cater to the unique character of each of our diverse students. Some students, for instance, may choose an elective that relates to their specific ministry. We invite you to read about some electives that our second-and-third-year students took within the past couple of months.

Women from Joshua to 2 Kings

Each of the authors of these Old Testament books aimed to show how God used (or opposed) ordinary (and some extraordinary) people in His great mission to redeem humanity. Many of these biblical figures are women, and, like fingerprints, each of these women has a unique story and a distinct personality. What a cast of characters! In addition to studying background and interpretation, the students explore ways in which the accounts of God's work in these women's lives can be used to enrich the faith of all God's people, male and female (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

According to third-year student Eman from Egypt,

> "This course seemed to be tailored exclusively for women. It is refreshing when most of our church sermons usually focus on male characters. I believe there is more to learn from the female characters of Joshua to 2 Kings. This course inspired me to help the women around me to have a 'voice' and to be an active part of society."

This course is designed to empower our female students to serve in their Arab communities, and to create awareness among our male students about the importance of women in ministry and for the Kingdom.

Understanding and Applying the Letter to the Hebrews

In this course, students are introduced to a socio-rhetorical approach to the letter, surveying major themes and arguments in the context of honor-shame culture. Particular focus is given to contemporary challenges to faithful perseverance in Arab contexts.

According to second-year student Makki from Sudan,

> "We dissected Hebrews and dove deep into it. During the first session, we read all thirteen chapters in different Arabic translations. It focuses on the deity of Christ – that He is above the angels and the prophets. It also presents Christ as our High Priest and as the Author and the Finisher of our faith. In all, the letter exhorts believers to hold fast to Christ and His work."

At the end of this course, students are able to teach and apply the message of the book of Hebrews in their own lives and in the lives of the community where they minister.

First Peter

In this course on First Peter, students develop scholarly skills in understanding the "literary context" of the epistle. This allows them to comprehend the content of the letter more clearly and deeply. The course also focuses on the contextualization of the epistle.

The classes of this course initiated on March 14. ***Second-year student, Fahmi, from Sudan describes his expectations,***

> "First Peter stresses the necessity of believers enduring suffering and persecution. I expect that this course will help me meet [figuratively] the author of the epistle, Peter. I expect that I will have a firmer grasp of what it means to learn from Christ's sufferings. This will help me endure the trials that come my way. I know this course will be very encouraging."

Through this course, students not only understand First Peter, they will also identify with its content for the sake of living, teaching, and preaching the letter in their particular contexts of ministry.

Encountering God: Theology and Experience

In this course, we explore what it is, in terms of experience, to be Christian. What are we to expect, in our personal experience, from God? Is there a 'normal experience' of God in the Christian life? We look at key, biblical passages and reflect on how they correlate to our present experience and challenge our future expectations. We reflect upon central theological convictions regarding a growing relationship with God, and we look at how these impact our life and witness to Jesus Christ.

Our second-year student from Mauritania states,

> "This course is showing me how I can truly sense that God is right here, right now. When I came to Jesus from a non-Christian background, I thought I could literally move a mountain or send a demon away trembling with fear, just like that. I couldn't help harboring a tinge of doubt when my attempts failed. This course is allowing me to see that I can experience God's power in my daily life. It is dispersing my doubts and deepening my faith."

By the end of this course, students become able to relate their own experiences of God to themes in the New Testament Scriptures, and understand how the Scriptures invite them to develop and mature in their own understanding and practice of 'faith'. They become better bearers of the presence of God into personal and communitarian relationships.

The Book of Proverbs and Arab Proverbs

This course presents an introduction to biblical wisdom literature. It offers an overview of the history, structure and interpretation methods of the Book of Proverbs. Because comparing the proverbs of different cultures is enriching, this course also compares between the Book of Proverbs and Arab proverbs, highlighting topics such as the depiction of women and poverty.

According to second-year student Habil from Sudan,

> "You can share the wisdom of the Book of Proverbs with all people groups because it is universal, and it touches on our daily-life experiences. Because proverbs provide such an insightful scrutiny of communal ideology, studying Arab proverbs helped me understand the region better."

Through this course, students are able to understand the Book of Proverbs, its theology and its literary genre. This encourages them to apply these proverbs in their own daily lives as they seek to serve others in a manner that glorifies God.

Pray With Us: Our First-Year Students' Prayer Requests

Abir, first-year Bachelor of Theology female student from Sudan

Please pray that God would give me the strength to fulfil my academic requirements. After I graduate, pray for my ministry in Sudan and for the children I will be serving.

Abu Kindy, first-year Bachelor of Theology male student from Sudan

Pray for me to endure the academic pressures because the result will be beautiful. I ask you to pray for my wife and kids who are in Sudan. I am communicating with them every now and then, and I can't wait to see them this summer.

Awad, first-year Bachelor of Theology male student from South Sudan

Pray for my ministry in Sudan. My hope is to plant a church in the area of Raga in South Sudan. My heart is always there, and I often have dreams about Raga. Pray for my family members, who have not yet met Christ; I am the only born again believer in my family. My final prayer request is to find a good wife; it is my desire to get married in 2018, if God allows.

Awney, first-year Bachelor of Theology male student from Egypt

I ask you to pray for me because I am getting married this summer, and pray that God would lead me to where I should be.

Eilia, first-year Bachelor of Theology male student from Sudan

Please pray for my three-year study period at ABTS. I also ask you to pray for me that I might be able to see my family this summer. I haven't seen them for nine years because of the war in Darfur.

Fady, first-year Bachelor of Theology male student from Egypt

I am engaged to a girl from my country, and it is hard to be away. Pray that God would encourage and strengthen me during this time. May He also fill me with His Presence so that I may tread deeper into the Knowledge of Him.

Hazem, first-year Bachelor of Theology male student from Syria

Join me in prayer for peace to prevail in Syria and for more biblically sound churches to emerge there. Please pray for my father and mother who serve in a Baptist church in Damascus.

First-year Bachelor of Theology male student from Egypt

Please pray that I would constantly be open to God's transforming power. Pray for my church in Egypt and for the unity of all churches. I hope to have a role in making that happen.

Nabou, first-year Certificate in Theology male student from Syria

The Turkish army is now shelling the area of Afrin in Syria and has raided it by air and land. It was a relatively safe area before. Afrin is where Zainab [Nabou's wife] comes from. Please pray for the people of Afrin and for us that we might be able to finish our education.

Nouh, first-year Certificate in Theology male student from Algeria

Please keep me in your prayers. Pray for me that I might be able to excel in my studies and to remain persistent even when I am feeling down. Sometimes I find it hard to fit in despite the fact that I am always smiling and make others laugh. Please pray for my family in Algeria who have not yet accepted Christ.

Rafed and Hiba, first-year Certificate in Theology couple from Syria

We ask you to pray for peace to fill our country Syria once more. We will be graduating by the end of this year, so pray for our family's return to Syria, and pray for our ministry there. It is our heart's desire to be a blessing to others. Finally, we ask you to pray for the seminary, for the professors and staff members that they might find comfort in Christ.

Waheed, first-year Bachelor of Theology male student from Sudan

Right before I came to Lebanon, my dad was suffering from high blood pressure and cholesterol. He might have to undergo a surgery if his arteries get clogged. He is now exercising and eating healthy in the hopes that his cholesterol level will decrease, and he would not need surgery. Please pray for him. I also ask you to pray that the Lord would show me in what kind of ministry I should get involved just as he showed me that I must study theology.

Yaacoub, first-year Certificate in Theology male student from Syria

Pray that the Lord would comfort the hearts of my country's people. Please pray for the YouTube series we are making so that the message would be received without offending anyone.