



# Arab Baptist Theological Seminary

## كلية اللاهوت المعمدانية العربية

www.abtslebanon.org

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### Proclaiming Christ to Our Neighbors

Sixteen multinational students spent two weeks with us on campus (from January 7 to 18) for the MENA Islam module residency, part of their Master of Religion (MRel) in Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) studies. They chose MRel, a unique multidisciplinary program, so they can address issues facing the MENA communities in the region and beyond.

Martin Accad, our Chief Academic Officer and MENA Islam module leader says that students learn about Islam through its classical texts as well as from contemporary developments, movements, and varied manifestations. They also reflect and learn about ministry among



Muslims, from Christ-centered witness to dialogue and peacebuilding. We help our students think theologically and biblically about Islam, Muhammad, the Qur'an, and Muslims.

How can the MENA Church have a Christ-centered witness to its dominantly Muslim community? One is prone to ask when taking the MENA Islam module. To this, Dan W. Brown, who is co-teaching the MENA Islam module and the author of the textbook *A New Introduction to Islam*, says:

*"I believe that God has chosen to work primarily through His Church. The right way to reach out is really being clear and honest followers of Jesus with integrity – with no hidden agendas. We should be honest about the problems we face and the questions we ask, and we hope through that they would do the same. Our presence is vital. If we shut ourselves off into our own corners and communities, and we never interact with our neighbors or colleagues, then we haven't given God*

*the opportunity to use that relationship and that witness."*

This module has taught students, such as Paul from New Zealand, to have an honest approach when reaching out to his Muslim friends. Paul shares that he used to avoid asking questions, but the module has taught him to ask questions

honestly in order to learn from Muslims. Reed from the US also shared, "I have enjoyed how our professors challenged us with how biblical and historical facts fit into the Qur'an and how we can use those correlations to witness to Muslims. I think it's great how the Church here is able to reach out despite the differences and how

Muslims are being very receptive towards that." Reed left the residency with the hope that he might be working with interfaith organizations in the future.

Tim from Belgium, on the other hand, shares that his initial plan was only to take the MENA Islam module, as he worked with many Muslim refugees in Europe and later in Lebanon. He says, "soon though, I really wanted to do the whole program, as I love learning, and I hope finishing it will allow me to work in the region at a higher level." He adds, "the attitude towards Muslims and Islam that is fostered during the MENA Islam module really makes a difference in approaching Muslims. We got encouraged to see them through the lens of Christ."

The residency has two main components: studies in the Qur'an on theological topics and on ministry approaches, as well as visits to Muslim leaders of various convictions and guest Muslim lecturers. One of the highlights is always the visit to a mosque during Friday prayers, where students get to observe Muslim



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prayers and to engage in conversations with Muslim mosque goers and with the imam of the mosque. This year, students heard about a variety of topics from Muslim scholars and leaders, such as Jesus in the Qur’an and the Muslim tradition, controversial issues such as Jihad and Islamic Law, to more contemporary approaches to Qur’anic hermeneutics and current ideological trends.

Daniel from Palestine, for instance, teaches Islam and Comparative Religions at Bethlehem Bible College. He is pursuing this module so he can gain more skills and insights from the MENA Islam module faculty to improve his pedagogy and engagement with Islam in a Palestinian context. He shares,



MRel Students joined ABTS Faculty meeting

*“I first studied Islam in the US. Here, I can think of Islam in a MENA context. We met some Sheikhs and religious leaders. Sheikh Shafik Jaradeh is a Shiite thinker. His clarifications of the Shiite belief were very exciting to me, how they think of the Faqih state, how Islamic rule should be, and their politics and religion.”*

Daniel remarks that despite the fact that the dynamics between Christians and Muslims are different in Lebanon than they are in Palestine, he would still be able to apply in Palestine what he learned in Lebanon. Tim also had a great experience visiting the various Muslim figures in Lebanon. He says,

*“Hearing Islamic thought interpreted and expounded upon from very knowledgeable Muslims is much better than the way we usually get our information on Islam. I had the great privilege to pray for the various Sheikhs and Muslim scholars that we visited. Almost all were very grateful and were touched by the prayers. I realized again the power of prayer, as we show others our heart and love for them by speaking to our Creator and Savior on their behalf.”*

Tim was quite touched by this encounter with Muslim scholars, he decided that his research will investigate the methods in which we can conduct interreligious dialogue around religious experience (prayer, contemplation, mysticism) without losing the finality of Jesus and a proclamation of Him and His Kingdom.



Regarding this module’s research project, Zeina from Lebanon who works with children through UNICEF, expressed that she “enjoyed the visit to Resurrection Church Beirut because there is a lot of ministry going on. I always like to associate charity work with the sharing of the Word. My research will be on the ways one can be a witness through social work with Muslims. It is quite related to my work at UNICEF.”

We will finally leave you with the words of Daniel:

*“I learn a lot from a Muslim’s devoutness, commitment and spirituality. Of course, there are fundamental differences between Muslims and us. We differ in the fundamentals of faith such as the nature of God, the way to salvation, the holy texts, how to know God and so on. We shouldn’t discard the fact that we are different in essence, but we should be seeking the positive aspects in others as well. If we do this, our engagement with our Muslim neighbors will be transformed.”*



**Let us pray for this diverse group of MRel students who serve in different contexts with different challenges. As Paul shared, “maybe we can pray together that people would focus on what God is doing, without focusing on their own agendas, or their religion of interest. Then, we can live out God’s will.”**



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## Forum for Current Affairs: Discussions on the Church-Mosque Network

*“We believe that Christ is the ultimate Healer, yet we value medical research, hospitals and physicians. We believe that God is the ultimate Defender for His children, yet we value lawmakers, justice courts and lawyers. We believe that no peace can surpass the peace of God in Christ Jesus, which exceeds all understanding, but why do we find little value in peacebuilding among communities?” Bassem Melki*

On February 6, the Institute of Middle East Studies (IMES) team held a forum for current affairs at ABTS that highlighted our third peacebuilding initiative, the [Church-Mosque Network](#). This initiative came to life in response to several developments in the region such as the “Arab Spring” in 2011 and the emergence of extremist groups such as ISIS in 2014. Its ultimate purpose is to limit the possibilities of armed conflict between Christians and Muslims in Lebanon, working together for the common good. We invited a number of leaders from evangelical churches giving them room to voice their concerns, hold us accountable and walk alongside us as we explore new ways that will allow the Church to build bridges with our fellow Lebanese Muslims.

Martin Accad, our Chief Academic Officer and IMES Director, led the discussion and encouraged all those who were present to approach the topic with “intentional humility”, asking the tough questions without hesitation. After that, Chaden Hani, Peacebuilding Initiatives Researcher, gave a general overview of the [Church-Mosque Network](#). Bassem Melki, ABTS Dean of Students and pastor of a local Church, gave a biblical perspective on peace and shared from his own personal experience with peacebuilding. During the forum, it was emphasized that our peacebuilding initiatives are by no means an alternative to evangelism. Nor are they everyone’s calling or gift. We are called to share and live the Gospel, each according to one’s own talents and in reflection of the church’s multiple ministries. Just as we are called to reconcile people to God, conflict resolution is vital to our witness. The discussion among the participants was vibrant and enthusiastic as many expressed their thoughts, ideas, questions and concerns. It was a wonderful time to allow the Holy Spirit to inspire us and guide our plans, knowing that this is the first of many steps to come.

The Church-Mosque Network starts by breaking barriers of fear that hinder communities from getting to know each other as they are. If we are the Body of Christ, why do we fear welcoming the other and letting them discover and know who we are?

With weekly blog posts, and a monthly Regional Brief which discusses regional news with a Biblical and Missiological spin, we invite you to read and subscribe to our [IMES Blog!](#)



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## Pray with Us: Prayer Requests from Third-year Students

### *Fahmi, Sudan*

Please pray that I would be able to share the Gospel in a way that is contextually-relevant to my people in Sudan. Pray also that the political and economic situation will improve in Sudan.

### *A student from Mauritania*

Please pray for me that the Lord would grant me peace and health. My goal and my wish is to delve deeper into the knowledge of God's Word, allowing it to work in me, so pray that my academic performance would continue to glorify God. I would love it if I can study for a Master of Divinity or even a PhD. Then I would be able to help people like me, who came from a non-Christian background, on a deeper level.

### *George, Lebanese Palestinian*

Please pray for God's protection upon me from all sides. Pray that I might be grounded in the faith and my theological knowledge would continue to increase so I would be ready to reach out for others. I also ask you to pray for my future marriage to my fiancée, and that the Lord would lead the way in every aspect of life.

### *Habil, Sudan*

Please pray for ministry with young adults upon graduation and that I may continue

my work on the [Khebz w Meleh](#) initiative. I would also like to start vocational training for young adults so that they might benefit on many levels. Also, pray for my family who is still stuck in the Nuba mountains since 2006. I haven't seen them since then. I would also like to get married after graduating, so I ask you to pray for that too.

### *Makki, Sudan*

Please pray for my impending ministry in Sudan, and that things will get better by the time I am back. Pray that the country will know stability. Also, pray for my three-year-old son Nelson as we go back. The educational system in Sudan is vastly different than it is here in Lebanon.

### *Nason, Sudan*

Please pray that the Lord will help me and my husband Makki to finish what we started here at the seminary. May He then give us the ability to apply what we learned here in Sudan. Pray that the Lord would provide a place to stay as we go back. I also ask you to pray for the Sudanese Church.

### *Sam, Sudan*

Please pray for me to continue in the lifelong process of learning even after graduation. Pray that I might be able to

face the challenges I will meet upon returning to Sudan in the midst of the ongoing turmoil. I also desire to have a firmer grasp of the English language so I can later go for my Masters.

### *A student from Sudan*

My dream is to start a Bible teaching center in Sudan with the purpose of developing biblical curricula. I would also like to offer a systematic study of the Bible with a focus on furthering God's kingdom in society and training leaders to have an active role. Please pray that I can make this happen despite the challenges that might come in the way. Pray for the Lord's help so I can teach His people and increase their knowledge of His Word. If they gain a deep knowledge of Scriptures, then they can be of influence and beneficial to one another.

### *A student from Jordan*

The nearer I am to the end of my academic journey, the greater the yoke of responsibility becomes. Please pray that all my fears would disperse, and I would put my trust in the One who brought me here today. Also, pray for me as I raise my two teenage kids. It can sometimes be a challenge for a single mother.

For more prayer requests, you can visit [our Prayer Requests webpage](#).

