



Arab Baptist Theological Seminary

كلية اللاهوت المعمدانية العربية

www.abtslebanon.org

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This week we had to make the decision of sending our residential students back home and continuing the academic year online. This was not an easy decision to make, as we did not want to be reactive out of unfounded fear. However, we came to the conclusion that this is the responsible thing to do. Our students live in close proximity in our dorm building, and the healthcare system in Lebanon is under-prepared and over-stretched. In addition, with the quickly increasing travel restrictions, this decision could not be delayed. Obviously, this decision was as difficult for our students as it was for us.

On the positive side, we are thankful that we had been developing our online platform. We now have the ability to switch from in-class to online instruction with reasonable effort and without compromising quality. This will also help accelerate our efforts in developing a complete theological degree online.

We continue to trust God as we strive to be faithful to His calling, and we are grateful for the way He has been preparing us for a time like this. We continue to be committed to the formation of our students, leaders in the Arab church, and we will continue to support their living expenses at home as we had done during their time here so that they can focus on their education and training under very challenging circumstances.

COVID-19 is a pandemic affecting communities globally. We pray for you and for all our friends and partners as you face difficult decisions in your own ministries and communities. We cherish your prayers for our community.

Elie Haddad, President



Suffering and Persecution and Other Electives

Each day comes with new choices. Being able to identify God's unique calling for each of us depends on whether our will is fully immersed in His in our constant decision-making process. We endeavor to make our students' experience as personalized as possible. One of the ways we do that is through offering electives that touch on various facets of life and ministry. For this reason, visiting faculty recently came from different parts of the world to offer our second and third year students their elective courses.

Suffering and Persecution taught by Bernhard Reitsma

Bernhard is a professor at the VU (Free University – Amsterdam). He supervises a number of students, two of which are currently serving in Lebanon.

Why does a good God allow people to suffer? Specifically, why does He allow His followers to suffer? If Church leaders want to be equipped for ministry, they need to relate to God in the midst of suffering and help others do that too.

"I tried to have students share their own story and relate that to a biblical thinking about suffering and persecution," Bernhard

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shares, “We have been doing this in class a lot, and it has been intense. The stories are very deep; they show incredible pain. Some people have been in the war in Syria; some had sickness in the family; some experienced persecution. God does not measure the weight of your suffering. He simply sees every tear you shed and collects them all in His bottle.”

He explains about a framework for understanding suffering, “The tendency in our world is to run away from suffering. In this time of our life, God sometimes takes us through suffering to be glorified with Christ. That is a difficult message to understand. It is not because God wants us to suffer, but He works within suffering for the good of the world.”

Many students were overcome with emotion as they left the class due to the intensity of the experience. Yaser from Syria shares, “We learned that when we share in Christ’s sufferings, we will also share in His glory. This course is vital to those who come from war-torn countries such as Syria or Iraq. The course helped me to see that the Lord is with us within persecution and pain. He does not forsake us.”

Encountering God *taught by Jim Purves*

Jim serves as the Mission and Ministry Advisor for the Baptist Union of Scotland. He works with 163 churches that are within the union, supporting the pastors and also the development of mission and ministry.

What are we to expect in our personal experience of God? This course aims to help students relate their personal experience with God, His commands and the communities around them to clear, Scriptural themes. Students looked at key biblical passages and reflected on central, theological convictions regarding an experience of God and expressing it through their personal lives and congregational contexts.

“It is possible to do theological studies abstracted from the ongoing Christian life. It is easy to compartmentalize life, but it is not always good to do so,” Jim shares, “That is why I get students to reflect on the relationship between their theological education and their walk with the Lord. My prayer is that God will continue to use ABTS for His glory and to build up good leaders for the Arabic speaking world.”

Rafed from Syria also shares, “The course gave us valuable information on the Persons of the Trinity. We were able to reflect on God’s attributes and His work around us and in us. We also got to share our personal testimonies with God.”

The Book of Isaiah *taught by David Baer*

David Baer teaches in the Biblical Seminary of Colombia and is the Director of Theological Education Initiative. He mentors and coaches people who have a calling to teach in seminaries.

The book of Isaiah is among the three most frequently quoted books of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament in the Qumran literature and the New Testament. In our day, its lyrical message orients and organizes the Church’s servant-shaped witness and its longing that the Lord’s justice be heard as good news among all the nations.

“Isaiah is a fascinating book,” David shares, “Justice and mercy is a recurrent theme. In a way, justice is not punishment. It is reordering a chaotic situation so everyone in it can thrive. God has to move the powerful aside so the less powerful can thrive.” As to his experience teaching in class, he shares,

ABTS students are thoughtful and intelligent. My excitement is met by their excitement; it is terrible to teach sleepy people. I have not been to Sudan or Morocco, but through the students, I can imagine their context. I have no idea how God will use them, but we make our contribution and entrust them to the Lord.



Our student Elia from Sudan shares his experience, “The course gave us a methodology on how to study the text as thoroughly as possible. I enjoyed looking at the theme of Babylonian exile and return from exile in the book. It made me think of communal hurt in the region and the role of the Church.”

Premarital Counselling taught by *Smyrna Khalaf*

Smyrna Khalaf is a Marriage and Family counselor and an ABTS Board of Trustees member.

This elective aims to help students understand the basic principles of marital relationships. It also offers premarital counselling skills. Smyrna shares how her course serves the students saying, “Whenever leaders start a ministry, they are faced with certain situations and questions related to people’s behaviors and feelings, so the need for counselling arises. A ministry leader should be well trained to offer wise counsel when tackling psychological problems. It is the lives of people, after all, that students will work with, not just books and ideas.”

Our student Susanna from Sudan shared,

I enjoy counselling courses because of my background in psychology. We learned to work hard to understand our different backgrounds and to respect boundaries. We learned not to set high expectations and to lay out everything in the open before making a lifelong commitment. In our Arab countries, premarital counselling is not common, so I would like to work with soon-to-be married couples when I get back to Sudan.

Interpretation of First Peter taught by *Dustin Ellington*

Dustin Ellington is an Associate Professor of New Testament at Justo Mwale University in Zambia. He has been there for nearly ten years. He also was a New Testament professor at the Evangelical Theological Seminary of Cairo for five years.

In preparation for Christian life and ministry, this course has two main purposes. The course equips students with skills for in-depth interpretation of an epistle from the New Testament, using First Peter, so they can equip others to do so as well. The course also guides students to a close and living relationship with the letter for the sake of preaching and teaching in their own contexts. Dustin shares about his experience saying, “Students asked honest questions about their backgrounds and their ministries in light of what the text is bringing up. Real interpretation has to be honest. It deals with questions we have, not just questions asked in the past.”

While taking the course, Abukanidy from Sudan was able to read First Peter several times. He was then able to apply it to a Sudanese context. He says,

Peter was originally writing the letter to scattered believers due to persecution. Similarly, many Sudanese were internally displaced due to war and conflict. In fact, many of my local church members are internally displaced and feel like foreigners. Peter calls the believers “foreigners” in chapter 2 and does not only urge them to abstain from sinful desires but to live good lives among non-believers so they may see their good deeds and glorify God. As I studied the letter, I thought of the message I have for my people.

Finally, Dustin asks for prayer for theological education happening all over the world, specifically in places that are strategic and in need of trained local leaders.

Through our electives, we provide students with a holistic approach that balances between the affective, behavioral and cognitive dimensions of learning. They are better prepared to feel, act and think like Jesus as they develop into future leaders of the Arab world.

Pray with Us: Prayer Requests from Second-Year Students

Susanna | Sudan

Pray that God breaks the barrier between Church and society in Sudan. Pray that He grants peace to the Sudanese people and the freedom for all to practice their faith. It is still difficult to serve God in some areas of the country. Pray that He raises up more servants because the need is great. Pray for my husband and me to press on despite the challenges of ministry in Sudan, and to take hold of every opportunity even as we study.

Elissar | Lebanon

I am now serving with a newly established ministry that focuses on leadership training, church planting, peacebuilding and reconciliation, and advocating women's rights. I ask you to pray for this ministry.

Student from Morocco

Pray that the Lord opens up new opportunities of ministry in Morocco. Also, pray for Lebanon and for the difficult time it is going through.

Yaser | Syria

I ask you to pray for Syria. Pray that the situation there becomes better. Recently, there have been some skirmishes happening between the Turks and the Russians. Pray that this does not escalate. Pray for my family and my ministry. Pray that the Lord guides me as I serve. Also, pray for my sister, and my wife's family to know the Lord.

Zeinab | Syria

I ask you to pray for our ministry here and our graduation. Pray for my parents and my husbands' parents who are still in Syria. Pray that they come to the Lord and find salvation in Him.

Elsadig | Sudan

Pray for my country Sudan and for the ministry I will carry out there. Part of my ministry will include seminars, revivals, youth events and other administrative work at my local church. Pray

also that I might manage my time effectively so I can fulfil all my academic responsibilities. May I learn lessons of perseverance and endurance as I step closer toward the end of this training period.

Niyazi | Sudan

I pray the Lord sends more theologically trained students to the Church in Sudan because of the urgent need. The Sudanese church is big, and there are not enough equipped leaders.

Amin | Sudan

Pray for my two brothers who are distant from the Lord. Pray for Sudan, that the country might know peace at last. I feel that this is the time for us to be ministering there, as the political situation is changing. Pray that the Lord creates opportunities for ministry in Sudan so that we continue to move towards change and towards making the country better.

Pray for ABTS, Lebanon and for Sudan

While Lebanon and the world wrestles with the Corona virus, the Lebanese economic situation continues to be on the brink of collapse. Things have not improved neither for institutions nor for individuals. Still, the new government has not put forward an economic rescue plan.

In the midst of all this, pray that we at ABTS do not respond through fear but in accordance to God's will. Pray for the Church in Lebanon to fix its eyes on Him who is Sovereign so that we are moved with His compassion to help others pass through the crises while modelling to them a Christ-like attitude.

We also ask you to pray for Sudan and the Sudanese Church. Last week there was an attempt to assassinate the Sudanese Prime Minister as the country passes through a period of change. Pray for God's kingdom to spread in Sudan and for freedom and justice to become the new reality in the country.

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