



Arab Baptist Theological Seminary

كلية اللاهوت المعمدانية العربية

www.abtslebanon.org

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A Word from ABTS President, Elie Haddad

DON'T WASTE A GOOD CRISIS...

This was the advice that one of our trusted friends and partners gave me a few weeks ago. His advice was based on the reasoning that, depending on how one responds, crises have the potential to breed innovation. His advice was also based on the reputation that ABTS has garnered throughout the years as a place of innovation. Located in a highly volatile region, crises are not foreign to us. We have learned the hard way that when a crisis hits, we either cling to the mission that God has given us, be prepared to make some difficult decisions, innovate, or we die.

We are not facing a single crisis these days; we are facing a season of crises. The first was a crumbling economy in Lebanon that started mid last year, followed by political and social unrest late last year, then the coronavirus this year. No enterprise can withstand such successive calamities without being either scathed or reshaped. A valid question that a business asks in such difficulties is, "Why bother? It's not worth it." However, when it comes to God's ministry, it is precisely in these calamities that people become all the more starving for meaning



and purpose. This is the time when proclaiming the Gospel is crucial. This is the time for the Church to be ready to bring a message of God's love, hope, and joy in the midst of suffering.

We find ourselves at a crossroads at ABTS today. In terms of economics, we are no longer thinking about growth, or even sustainability. Our immediate concern is survivability. In terms of ministry, however, this is an opportune time to come alongside the Church in responding to the rising challenges that our communities will be facing. So, what do we do?

We have started extensive conversations looking at the future of ABTS, exploring ways to re-envision our ministry. We are having two threads of conversations. The first one is life-giving and energizing, looking at what God is preparing us for and how we can come alongside the Church post-coronavirus. The needs in our communities are changing, the realities of church life are changing, and so are the realities of theological education and leadership formation. The second conversation thread is the more difficult one, looking at how we can survive the current crises and be available and ready on the other side of these crisis to re-grow in the right direction.

A few metaphors are helping us in these conversations. Representing the second conversation thread, I have been thinking of the metaphor of a train, heavily loaded, and having to pass through a tight tunnel. We don't know how long this tunnel will be, but we do know that if we do not trim down the load, then we will crash and burn. We will not survive to see the other side. We are forced to make some tough decisions. We may have to let go of programs or methods that we love and have worked well for years to be ready and available for a new season.

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“What does metamorphosis look like for ABTS? I don’t know. But we are asking the questions, raising the issues, exploring the possibilities, and challenging our pre-suppositions.”



Martin Accad, our Chief Academic Officer, is using a metaphor that represents the first conversation thread. It’s the image of a silkworm which needs to spend some time in a cocoon. Under the wrong conditions, this can be the end of the silkworm. Under the right conditions, a complete metamorphosis is realized, and a butterfly emerges out of it. Martin will be expanding on this and other metaphors in our [first MEC webinar on June 18, 2020](#). Many of you have taken part in our annual MEC (Middle East Consultation) which took place every third week of June. MEC has gone through a metamorphosis of its own and now represents [Middle East Conversation](#) that will take the form of monthly two-hour webinars discussing contemporary issues of global concern but with a distinctive Middle Eastern voice. Martin will present the first keynote on June 18, with one global and one Middle Eastern response, followed by a panel discussion. The topic on June 18 is *A Dynamic Pause: Reflections on Simplicity, Purpose, and Transformation in this time of Pandemic*. Make sure you join us. In addition to the global nature of this conversation, it will give you a peak into our internal discussions at ABTS.

What does metamorphosis look like for ABTS? I don’t know. But we are asking the questions, raising the issues, exploring the possibilities, and challenging our pre-suppositions. This is a spiritual exercise, making sure that we are aligned with God’s vision for our future, and an exercise in innovation, willing to put an end to things that worked well while harnessing all the experience and expertise that we gained and channeling them to shape the future.

We are asking foundational questions: What are the advantages of residential education, and what are the advantages of distance education? What is the best

combination? What is ideal for holistic formation? What does it take to form a community of learning? What is the ideal combination of training leaders within their context – somewhat of an apprenticeship model – and training them within a seminary context – more of a monastic model? As you can imagine, we are having serious but very exciting conversations.

Since we started expanding this internal conversation, I have been consulting with a few trusted friends and partners who are thoughtful and spiritual, who understand the world of theological education well and believe in the ministry of ABTS. These are people who are willing to ask us all the difficult questions. Their responses and feedback have been invaluable. They are helping us shape our thinking. Their feedback, however, is not only affirming. In a way, they are putting a lot of responsibility on our shoulders. They expect ABTS to be doing this exercise and to be charting the way forward for formation in our region. They are used to ABTS being this laboratory of new ideas and methods. What will this look like at the end of these explorations? We don’t know yet. Stay tuned. And in the meantime, we would really appreciate your prayers.



WILL YOU GO WHERE YOU DON'T KNOW?

Our 2016 Bachelor of Theology graduate, Elias Abi Rashed, shares about his ministry in Lebanon.

Will you come and follow me

If I but call your name?

Will you go where you don't know

And never be the same?

The well-known hymn starts like this. It only takes a monosyllabic, heartfelt reply for God to unleash His great work through us. This is the story of Elias and many of our graduates who joined God's team. God has been using Elias in unreached areas of Lebanon since 2018. We pray that you will trace the goodness of God as you read his account.

Rami had been listening and asking penetrating questions all throughout the Bible study. This was the first home group we had started in the North of Lebanon, and this was his first time visiting. After the session, he approached me and said, "I have been waiting for fifty years to hear these words." Rami had not heard the message of Christ before, so when he finally did, he could no longer let go of Him. In fact, he began to share the gospel with the leaders of his people since he, too, was a leader there.

The gospel is fresh news to the families.

Our ministry in the North started in late 2018 after a young man in the area came to Christ. He then introduced us to his family, and his family introduced us to other families. Almost a year later, the families had formed eight home groups and reached nearly 80 kids, both in the surrounding area and in the nearby refugee camps. A woman, who belongs to one of the home groups, began to invite the 30 kids who played in her neighborhood to her house telling them Bible stories and teaching them how to read. (Most of them do not have access to education.)

Through NEO Leaders¹, we reach out to poor areas where ministry is needed. We do community work, we work with children, we send medical teams, and of course, we focus on

discipleship and training leaders. We started a ministry with local leaders a couple of kilometers away from Beirut with a house group of 20 people and a children's ministry. Before lockdown, we had been training the house group members to start more groups and reach out to their community.

We have seen God move around us and through us in the past year. Those who come to our home groups or trainings tell others what they had learned.

Not everyone there welcomed our presence.

As part of our Discovery Bible studies in the North, attendees share with others the wonderful news they heard. Some receive threats and pressure because of that, but they press on regardless. For instance, when one of our current home group leaders first came to the faith, he shared the Good News with his employer. His employer fired him. Another found a message at his door saying, "If you don't return to your faith, we will burn you alive." Moreover, beside the Bible studies being a means for the gospel, the patients who are seen by our medical team do not leave without having heard of Christ. At times, more than 400 people meet us during a two-day trip, which sometimes brings unwanted attention. However, the threats have decreased as the work slowed down in the past few months due to our current reality (the pandemic, the failing economy, the roadblocks).



¹ NEO Leaders supports the work of many of our graduates around the Arab world.



Elias preaching at church

“Jesus answered my prayer!”

An old woman came to us sobbing. Her son-in-law wanted to divorce her daughter because, during the three years of their marriage, she hadn't borne him a child. A week after we prayed for her, she came to us weeping and dancing for joy. Her daughter was pregnant with twins. She was elated as she cried out, "Jesus answered my prayer!"

A young man fell from the third floor. People thought he died. His mother came to me and said, "If he comes out of this alive, I will believe in Jesus." We prayed for him, and sure enough, we later found out that while he had minor injuries, not one of his bones was fractured.

We are witnessing many answers to prayer, and God is using this to draw people to Himself.

Theological training transformed my ministry.

Words cannot express my gratitude to ABTS. It hasn't only helped me academically and theologically. It has transformed my ministry, my personal life and my spiritual walk. It is a huge part of who I am today. It has reshaped my understanding of the mission of God through the local church. Because of that, we strive to be missional at my local church and reach out to our community in any way we can. While the pastor of my church is away in England, I serve as an associate pastor, working on

discipleship and follow up, sharing a message, and taking part in the worship and praise team.

I can also pass on what I learned at the seminary to others since much of my work centers on training emerging leaders to launch new ministries and plant churches. For instance, we recently trained new leaders to take on the new Bible study ministry that we launched in Mount Lebanon. I also train leaders with an organization called 10/40 Hope. I am the Regional Director, so I work with leaders in other countries and oversee the ministries there.

God continues to use us during the pandemic.

Our ministry has slowed down, but it hasn't stopped. We simply moved online. We are using online platforms such as Zoom and WhatsApp for our home group studies. We met people who wouldn't have joined us otherwise. We are also trying to help struggling Lebanese families through distributing food and hygiene packages. Moreover, we are filming videos that help train our staff.

Of course, we are all praying for Lebanon in these exceptional times. The Church must be active in ways it hasn't been before. The time is now.

Prayer

I ask you to pray for the groups with whom we work and those who are meeting Christ for the very first time. I lastly ask you to pray for me that I balance between service, family and studies. I have been studying for a Master's in Global Leadership [hybrid courses] with Fuller Theological Seminary for the past month or so, and it is quite relevant to what I do.

Our graduates' ministries are a good reminder that we serve a Mighty God. We are grateful to Him as we come alongside and train leaders like Elias who are the reason for our ministry. Join us in prayer for our graduates as they serve God in these critical times in different parts of the Arab world.





Our annual Middle East Consultation has been reimagined and a new type of MEC 2020 has taken shape:

Middle East Conversation

We look forward to having you join us for **monthly online webinars!**

The first webinar will take place on **June 18, 4:00-5:30 pm** Beirut Time (GMT+3)
A Dynamic Pause: Reflections on Simplicity, Purpose, and Transformation in this Time of Pandemic.

Registration opens on **June 1st**, make sure to **visit our website!**

Pray with Us: Prayer Requests from Staff and Faculty

Jimmy Geagea

Peacebuilding Field Coordinator

Jesus, during this phase, You showed us Your power and care by healing people of all ages and walks of life from physical, mental and spiritual ailments.

Please God, be present near those who need your loving touch because of COVID-19. May they experience Your power of healing. Take away the fear, anxiety and feelings of isolation.

We lift to You our concern for the people who are prone to severe illness such as the elderly and those with chronic health conditions. Let them feel Your love.

Roula El Azzi

Executive Assistant

Let us pray that the pandemic ends and airports soon open so those who are trapped away from their loved ones can return home.

Chaden Hani

Peacebuilding Researcher

Both my husband and daughter work in the medical field; our house has been like a hospital for the sick lately. We are taking in and nursing people who come to us tired. I then ask you to pray that God's

people would show mercy to those who are suffering and show them Christ in practical ways. Pray also for our alumni who serve the Lord in different parts of the Arab world.

Marcelle Saad

Student Affairs Assistant

Please pray that our residential students, who remain on campus, will be able to make it to their home countries soon. As they continue their year there online, pray that the Lord helps us to stand by their side despite the distance.

Brent Hamoud

IMES Programs Coordinator

Please pray for insights and inspiration as our faculty prepare to hold an "online residency" in place of the traditional residency for our current Master of Religion module. Pray also that our students may be given strength and focus as they try to attend to the demands of work, family and studies while in lockdown.

Nabil Habiby

Adjunct Faculty

Pray that God continues to grant us the

strength to be people of hope and courage in a time of despair and fear.

Abed El Kareem Zien El Dien

Core Faculty

Let us pray for the economic and health situation of Lebanon. We pray that the virus spread would be restricted as people begin to leave their homes. Pray for protection over our professors, students and staff.

Moreover, I would like to praise the Lord for His faithfulness. He has brought me thus far, as I have completed my Doctorate in Ministry.

Joubran Hasbany

Maintenance Coordinator

Pray for the ministry of ABTS in these times. We know the ministry is God's, so it will continue, but we pray even so for it. Pray also that Lebanon undergoes a current of radical change.

"Faith does not operate in the realm of the possible. There is no glory for God in that which is humanly possible. Faith begins where man's power ends."

— George Müller