



Arab Baptist Theological Seminary

كلية اللاهوت المعمدانية العربية

www.abtslebanon.org

October 2021

“
**WE DECIDED TO STAY BECAUSE
THE NEED WAS GROWING**”

Our new faculty member Kees van der Knijff shares about his calling and ministry



“Where there is no vision, the people perish,” the Bible says in Proverbs 29. We are thankful for our faculty who work hard toward fulfilling our shared vision of seeing God glorified, people reconciled, and communities restored through the Church in the Arab world by training faithful men and women for effective service. We are also thankful for Kees from the Netherlands, an Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology and teacher in our Master of Religion program, and who joined us this April. In a recent interview, Kees shared about his calling and ministry at ABTS. As you read his words, we pray that you rejoice in God’s work through him.

What made you decide to study theology?

I started studying econometrics, which is the mathematical variant of economics. Though I obtained a Bachelor in that field, I had begun to see, throughout my time of study, that econometrics was not the area where I wanted to spend the rest of my life. I did enjoy it, but I saw that I did not have the same objectives and dreams of the people in the field. I desired to do something meaningful to me and to serve the Church, so I began to study theology, and I kept on doing so until I got my PhD in Systematic Theology from the Protestant Theological Seminary, Amsterdam.

Growing up, theology always captured my interest. My father was a theologian, and I had a few friends who were studying theology. I thought there was a lot of theological confusion

among people, and since God gave me a desire to study theology and good concentration skills, I thought it would be good to use my talents in this field.

When did you get the calling to serve overseas?

At first, I thought of pastoring a church in the Netherlands, but once the idea got clearer between 2009 and 2010, I sought to serve the Church in a different part of the world. One year later, when I met my wife, we had that conversation from the very start, and we were on the same page.

When I was young, an old missionary in my congregation influenced young people, including me, to care for mission and the worldwide Church. At that time, I started reading the biographies of several missionaries, and somehow, the idea filled my heart and mind. When I began to study theology, I began to give it serious thought.



Was Lebanon the first country on your mind?

No, for a very long time, my wife and I had no clear idea where we would go, so we had discussions with [GZB](#), the organization we are with now. In September 2019, they asked us if we would be willing to think about Lebanon. Back then, we were told that



Lebanon was a relatively stable country in the region, and soon after, the revolution started here. Regardless, we visited last year in February just before the pandemic, and then, it was clear to us that we would be serving here.

What made you decide to stay with everything that is happening in the country?

We knew when we decided to come to Lebanon that things were not likely going to get better in the near future. The needs here were growing and not diminishing, and that is exactly why we needed to stay. We had to learn to be a bit more flexible than we used to be in the Netherlands because anything could happen.

In the dark weeks of August, in which we felt most people around us were losing hope with the extended power cuts and growing lines at the gas stations, we felt that just our presence here was a sign of hope for some people. That was wonderful because, at that stage, we weren't yet sure how we can be fruitful in the country. Once, during the fuel crisis, as I waited in a long queue of cars at a gas station, a woman who had just left the gas station drove back to where I was. She rolled down her window and thanked me for staying in Lebanon because that gave her hope. Perhaps, sometimes, God uses small things.

How is your experience teaching in the MRel program so far?

I love doing this. I am now in the midst of my first elective course. My initial experiences are wonderful, and the students are very motivated. I am offering a course on the relationship

between prayer and providence. I assigned the students a few texts, which offer different perspectives on the old tension around the idea that God is unchanging and the conviction that prayer makes sense.

The Master of Religion students are all over the world, so it's interesting to hear their different standpoints. In general, the students are very prayerful and have a very traditional understanding of God's immutability, which for me, is interesting because modern theologians find that it makes no sense to ask change from an unchanging God.

This is my first time teaching a course online. Since students are in different parts of the world, we have no synchronous classes. I try to meet them one on one virtually just to get to know them better. I had to develop a new set of skills for video lecturing, and I certainly have to think outside the box.

Why is theological education important for the Church in the region?

One of the main themes you see in the Bible is that God really wants us to know Him. What I see in churches around the world is that there often is a bit of distance between the things we say we believe and the way we practice our faith. Our practices can correct our beliefs, but oftentimes, it is our beliefs that have to change the way we do things.

In order for a church community to grow in faith, they need to be educated themselves, but they also need leaders who know how to study the Bible and know about the traditions of the church. So, if at ABTS, we are able to educate these kinds of

people that are in the practice of the church but are also able to reflect on it and its surrounding community, this would be an amazing resource for the Church in the Arab world.

Join us in prayer for Kees and all our faculty members who are passionate about serving the Arab Church in the region.



Kees during a faculty meeting

**Late September, our faculty gathered for a retreat in the Lebanese mountains.
[Read all about it here!](#)**

Middle East Consultation 2021

Towards a Dynamic Church: Making Disciples, Developing Leaders, and Engaging Society in Lebanon and Beyond



Control rooms during MEC 2021

The growth of the Church in the region never ceases to amaze us. Perhaps, part of what makes the Middle East Consultation stand out every year is its enactment of a miniature gathering of the global Body of Christ. We get to see a broad view of God's work in our Arab countries and in the world, and that usually leaves us wondering how we can be part of it.

This year, the consultation ran virtually from September 30 to October 2. We heard practical and engaging insights from local practitioners and church leaders, theological reflections by our faculty, and contributions from regional and global leaders. The speakers engaged in daily panel discussions and answered the questions of participants. During the discussion group sessions, we heard valuable lessons from the participants' unique ministry contexts.

Day 1: Making Disciples

In an interview, Moufid Tohme, Pastor of the Church of Christ, Lebanon, and Fouad Kahwaji, Pastor of the Jesus Prince of Peace Church, Lebanon, shared live examples from their own experiences with disciple making. What are the best methods for disciple making? How can Christian organizations work with local churches for effective disciple making? These are some of the questions they attempted to answer.

Warrick Farah, a missiologist and theological educator in the Middle East, stressed the importance of the ongoing multiplication of disciples, for the lack of it would be an anomaly in the Church. We also heard a thoughtful contribution from Alan Hirsch, an Australian author and thought leader in the missional Church movement.

Day 2: Leadership Development

The next day, we interviewed Jerair Ghazarian, Pastor of Word of Life Church, Lebanon, and Andrew Salameh, Pastor of the Church of the Nazarene, Lebanon. They both shared pertinent accounts of leadership formation while drawing on their ministries.

Grace al-Zoughbi from Palestine, adjunct faculty at ABTS, touched on the need for female leaders in service of the Church and society. “When we provide women with a space where they can think, research, write and lead,” she shared, “we stop thinking of them as second-rate ministers.” Elie Haddad, ABTS President, then took us on a journey through the Book of Acts and showed us how God was using hardships to develop His Church just as He is today in Lebanon. He spoke on the biblical notion of leadership and the priesthood of all believers.

We also heard from Perry Shaw, a Researcher in Residence at Morling College, Sydney, and adjunct faculty member at ABTS, who spoke about the types of leaders in the Church and key issues pertaining to training leaders on all levels.

Day 3: Social Engagement

Alia Abboud, the Chief Development Officer at the Lebanese Society for Educational and Social Development, and Maher El Hajj, the National Director of Youth for Christ Lebanon, shared how they have witnessed the Lebanese Church reaching out to its community through their work with local churches. Samira Luka, Director of the Coptic Organization of Dialogue and Social Work in Egypt, also shared about her ministry context.

ABTS faculty member Martin Accad then shared challenging thoughts about relief work without hidden agendas and helping the underprivileged in a sustainable way that preserves their dignity. He also focused on leveraging the strengths of churches and NGOs. After that, Greg Okesson, Dean at Asbury Theological Seminary, Kentucky, spoke on public missiology. “Heaven and earth were not meant to be separate,” he shared. How can we then have a “thicker” understanding of the gospel, which encompasses all areas of public life?

We praise God for such rich discussions and contributions from our speakers and participants! This year’s consultation brought up so many relevant issues to the Arab Church, so we pray that the content helped equip both our speakers and participants for more impactful ministry in their contexts.

[Subscribe to our weekly blog](#) to read a series that provides thoughtful analysis on the discussions and topics presented during MEC 2021.

Pray with Us: Prayer Requests from Some of Our Faculty

Kees van der Knijff | Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology

Please pray for the faculty in general, especially those who have been teaching a lot. The past year has been quite draining as they had to rethink their older courses and shift the residential program into a new learning format. Pray that they are given energy and encouragement as they move forward.

Grace Al-Zoughbi | Lecturer in Theological Education

My prayer is that the Lord will raise up leaders from the students, both men and women, and equip them to dream for the Middle East. Please pray that the Lord instills His vision in their lives and that He continues to inspire us as we transmit words of knowledge and truth to them.

Bassem Melki | Dean of Faculty

Pray for a new, fruitful academic year, and pray for all our students in all our programs. We long to see them grow as the Holy Spirit transforms their hearts and characters.

Nabil Habiby | Lecturer in New Testament Studies

Many of the faculty are attempting to finish their PhDs while we continue to learn how to teach online. Pray that God grants us strength and wisdom as we balance between these two responsibilities.

Wes Watkins | Assistant Professor of Missiology

Please pray that our students would be equipped to proclaim the praises of God who called them “out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9) among peoples in the region who have never heard of this good news before.

