

Arab Baptist Theological Seminary

كلية اللاهوت المعمدانية العربية

www.abtslebanon.org

July 2022



The wedding celebrations started at 6pm and ended at 6am the next day. The whole village had shown up after someone had announced it at the souk. In preparation, the women had washed in the river, picked olives and figs from the orchard, and prepared the food. “I was a month or two in the country, and it was the first time I had observed the role of women there. With time, I noticed that the wife and husband treated each other as equals, and some areas had a matriarchal system because the grandmother ruled the house,” one Master of Religion student who serves in a North African country shared.

Another MRel student serves in the Gulf region. A third one serves amid at-risk children in Lebanon. Several of them serve among Arab refugees in their home countries. Could our students have had a less effective reach had they not understood their ministry context? How does culture influence the gospel? Many Christ-followers view life with Christ as a war against culture. They reason that since culture is the byproduct of broken people, it is beyond hope until Christ comes again. Others, however, see beauty in culture since it reflects the Maker’s creative spark. They see that embracing it would result in the gospel flourishing.

We get our understanding of Church, ministry, and gospel from the Bible, yet our approaches are inevitably shaped by culture. In First Corinthians 9:20-23, Paul tells of how he had identified Himself with various people groups so that the gospel might advance and transform them. Paul was a master at cultural analysis and at adapting his message to the context.

1 Corinthians 9:20-23 (NIV)

20 To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. 21 To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law. 22 To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. 23 I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

“I am studying in the MRel program to train for ministry,” Rickard from Sweden shared, “and I really think we [Rickard’s church] have so much to learn in how to reach out to different groups with the gospel as well as peacebuilding and functioning in a multicultural society.” God is using Rickard among different people groups and sub-cultures in the Swedish community, and many of them are Arab refugees. His vision (and that of the church that he leads) is to take the gospel out to the people and to disciple them in their contexts rather than expecting them to naturally walk into his local church.

Rickard stumbled upon Martin Accad’s [kerygmatic approach](#) to sharing the gospel, and in his words, “I started to read more of his writings and soon discovered ABTS and the MRel program. For some time, it had been my dream to come here. It seemed impossible, at first, but God provided and opened the doors.”

On June 20, MRel students joined us on campus for their first in-person student residency at ABTS since 2019 as part of the *Cultural Analysis of the MENA* module. For almost two weeks, they heard from guest speakers, explored cultural sites, and engaged in stimulating discussions. While it was impossible to talk about every culture in the region, the residency was an opportunity to learn more about some cultures in Lebanon and in our students’ ministry contexts. The residency (and the module as a whole) aimed to use tools for contextual exegesis with a focus on missiology, anthropology, and culture. It was also an opportunity to develop research and apply their pre-residency learning.

In the words of Wes Watkins, Assistant Professor of Missiology and lead faculty for this module,

The Cultural Analysis of the MENA module residency was a great success. Two students who lived in the region for more than ten years each said they wish they had taken the course years ago and that it should be required for everyone seeking to minister in the region. Another student said it was the best missions training he had ever taken.

During one of the cultural field visits, the students walked down the narrow, over-populated streets and neighborhoods of a Beirut suburb. There, a few shop owners took the time to explain the history of this area, which was originally purposed to permanently house Armenian refugees fleeing the 1915 genocide. On the way to Hamra Street, where Assistant Professor of Historical Theology Caleb Hutcherson led them on a graffiti tour of Beirut, the group stopped by the still scene of the damaged grain silos at the port of Beirut. Much of the street art in Hamra memorialized that tragedy. Students saw how every piece asserted certain ideologies as it took up public space, and oftentimes, represented those who are marginalized. The tour started with three murals by American artist Brady Black. The murals are almost identical: a young boy carries a backpack and walks away from a country where hope seems dim. The color of the boy’s shirt changes from one mural to another; one is white, one is red and one is green.

“This is my first visit to Lebanon and ABTS. I will never forget the people and the cultural visits. They have been super interesting, but there was a lot to process,” Rickard shared,

You learn so much, but you also get to experience things at a profound level. When we visited a Shia neighborhood in the south of Beirut and a Bedouin tribe in the Bekaa, we got to experience wonderful hospitality, and we got to see



different kinds of societal and power structures. It made me more aware of the kinds of experiences that people from the Middle East bring with them to Sweden and how that affects our way of functioning together.

Our prayer is that God’s Kingdom grows in each of our MRel students’ unique ministry contexts, and that, as they learn to be all things to all people, they may find the most effective ways to share the Good News. Christ’s breaking into any culture is indeed good news!



Follow our ABTS Blog for weekly posts!



July 7
[The Disturbing Daughters of Hope: Reflections on Spiritual Muscle for Troubled Times](#)

June 30
[In Memory of Those Who Lost Their Lives in the Beirut Explosion in Vain. | Write](#)

June 23
[Service Versus Sitting at Jesus’ Feet: While Doing Good, Do We Miss the Best?](#)

Pray with Us!
Prayer Requests from MRel Students and Professors

Sara, student | American serving in Lebanon

Ask that God would get the glory as we MRel students pursue deeper understanding in the fields God has placed us. Ask that God would give us all the help that we need, all the wisdom, discernment and knowledge that we need not just to get high marks, but to grow in His presence, because we want Him to use us beautifully and powerfully for the kingdom. God is up to something greater than these simple projects, but these simple projects are a part of that greater thing. Pray for a deeper enjoyment of Him as we learn and offer our minds up to Him. God is good.

Miles, student | British serving in the MENA region

Please pray that God would guide me as I apply the principles learnt through the MRel to my work. Pray that I would better honour Him and serve others with the deepened knowledge and understanding that comes with my studies. Pray also that I would be able to discern, trust and pursue His will in all the challenges and opportunities that arise in the course of my endeavours.

Ramy, student | Egyptian serving in the MENA region

We need to be filled with wisdom and humility to utilize what we have learned to help people know God more and glorify Him. Also, we pray to have God’s heart for the people and to be guided by His Holy Spirit.

Rickard, student | Swedish serving Arab refugees

I would love for people to pray for the kingdom of God to come—to see His vision happen and the gospel being planted in different people groups in our context. If people would like to pray for that, I would be really grateful.

Brent Hammoud | MRel Program Coordinator

Please pray that the MRel learning experience be inspired by the Holy Spirit and help direct students towards new opportunities to serve and minister the gospel. Pray also that we be people who work through and around culture to love people for Christ faithfully.

Wes Watkins | Cultural Analysis in the MENA module Lead Faculty

Pray for the students as they work on their final module projects, which is a qualitative research project aimed to help them better understand their ministries and ministry contexts.

Abed El Kareem Zien El Dine | Cultural Analysis in the MENA module Support Faculty

Please pray that the MRel students are transformed even more into Christlikeness as they complete this module, where emphasis on cross-cultural mission is highlighted; may they bless others and be blessed.

MIDDLE EAST CONSULTATION 2022 مؤتمر الشرق الأوسط

سلاماً أترك لكم:

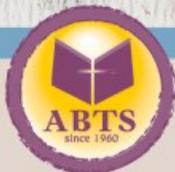
نظريات خدمة السلام وممارساتها
في الشرق الأوسط

Peace | Leave With You:
Theories and Practices for Peace
Ministry in the Middle East

انضموا إلينا عبر الإنترنت -
Join us online on
أيلول/سبتمبر
SEPTEMBER

21, 22, & 23

6pm-9pm Beirut time
من الساعة السادسة
إلى التاسعة مساءً
بتوقيت بيروت



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REGISTRATION OPENS ON SEPTEMBER 1st
Stay updated here: abtslebanon.org/MEC2022