



Arab Baptist Theological Seminary

كلية اللاهوت المعمدانية العربية

www.abtslebanon.org

March 2023

A Scholarly Solution for an Unmet Need: THE MASTER OF THEOLOGY PROGRAM

Often in our walks of faith, God gives us the opportunity to look back and see how His hands were hard at work shaping and maturing us over the years. This is no different for ABTS. With the first cohort of the Master of Theology well under way, we have the opportunity to look back and see how the Lord guided us in launching this program.

Our aim at ABTS is to serve the Kingdom by preparing Arab Church leaders and ministers for effective and contextual ministry to their communities. For many years, this took the form of vocational-ministerial training through our Integrated Theology and Certificate in Ministry programs. Through our years of ministry, the Lord made us aware of a need emerging in the Arab Church: a need for contextually trained Arab theologians and scholars who can carry out academic research, publish high-quality theological works in the Arabic language, and contribute to the formation of a theology for the Arab world that engages with the complexity of ministry in the region. With the scarcity of high-quality Arabic-language theological resources available to the Arab Church, the need for theologians who can publish works in Arabic becomes more urgent. "Unless we, as the Arab Church, are

able to produce our own theological publications, we will never be able to engage in effective discussions on theology and ministry," shared ABTS President Elie Haddad. As the Lord grew the ministry of ABTS over the past years, He also stretched us to be part of His work through the Arab Church to meet this need.



ABTS faculty discussing MTh

In 2018, we began conversations both internally and with other seminaries on the emerging need for more research-based theology programs that are contextual to the Arab Church. One of the ideas that came out of these conversations was a Master of Theology program that could prepare Arab scholars and serve as a steppingstone into doctoral studies. Talking about the program, Academic Dean Walid Zailaa shared:

It used to be that Arab theologians wanting to pursue higher theological education, especially those pursuing a master's degree, needed to find programs in the West that, while highly effective, did not prepare students to engage with theology in an Arab context or even in the Arabic language. The Master of Theology is our attempt at covering this gap.

Furthermore, with the intricate challenges and contexts that the Arab Church finds itself in, developing a contextual theology that can help the Church engage its community becomes a vital need. "By helping train and develop thinkers and writers who can engage the Arab Church in new discussions, challenge it with the word of God, and help it strengthen its theological foundation, we can directly invest in the future of the Arab Church" Shared Kees van der Knijff, Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology and program lead for the Master of Theology.

Today, with the Master of Theology, Arab scholars have the opportunity to pursue a high-level scholarly research degree. This is why the program is based on three main pillars: Research Methodology, Biblical Studies, and Theological Studies. These are followed by two periods of directed studies where the student can apply what they learned and carry out their own work on Biblical exegesis and doctrinal analysis. This matrix prepares the student to write an effective academic thesis on a theological focus pertaining to their own ministry context.



Kees being interviewed by Jad

The first academic year began in early October with a short virtual induction followed by the first Research Methodology course of the three that they will take throughout their journey through the Master of Theology. Taught by Walid Zailaa, the course helps students gain the skills necessary to carry out academic research and covers topics like the effective use of citations, how to build an argument around a central claim, and how to structure a research paper. "Through the course, students had the opportunity to delve deep into effective research strategies and test them out through some preliminary topics," shared Walid. "It was a very encouraging course, especially because the students were so engaged with the material. This helped us push further with the material and cover a lot of ground." Ashraf, one of our current Master of Theology students, benefitted a lot from the course. "The Research Methodology course opened my eyes to new ways of engaging critically with texts. I learned to engage with scripture in a high academic way that has been helping me with my studies and with my ministry."



Caleb sharing about the MTh program

In the four months since they completed the Research Methodology course, students have been hard at work on the Historical Theology module. "Through this module, we wanted to approach historical theology as the history of the interpretation of the Bible" shared Caleb Hutcherson who co-taught the module alongside Kees. "We focused on how interpretation and hermeneutics have developed over the years, starting with the early church, moving through the Middle Ages, the reformation, the modern period, and arriving at the postmodern era, and we sought to focus specifically on how Arab Christians interpreted the Bible during each of these eras." Talking about his experience in teaching the module, Kees commented that:

As a teacher, it is wonderful that we get this opportunity to spend so much time with the students and delve deeply into the history of the interpretation of the Bible. The length of the module helped us have deeper conversations and engage with topics on a new level.

Hanane, who is also studying through the program, shared that she learned a lot from the modules.

I will never be able to describe how much I learned from this module. It helped me look at how we practice our faith in a critical way. A lot of the things we do today we inherited from older generations without thinking about them. The module helped me understand where our practices and beliefs come from and how we can better understand them so we can better serve the Kingdom. Alongside the Research Methodology course, what I've learned so far has equipped me to better engage with theological writings and understand the historical context it comes from. As a leader in my church here in Morocco, it was crucial for me to pursue higher-level theological education so that I could serve the believers here who are currently studying theology and so that I could later continue my education and pursue a PhD.

Over the coming years of their education, our students will have the opportunity to grow and mature into effective theologians and scholars who can help fill the need for Arabic-language theological resources for the Arab Church. As they engage in new studies and develop contextual and relevant approaches to theology for ministry in the region, we pray that the Lord forms them into a new generation of scholar-leaders who can directly influence their churches and serve the growth of the Kingdom in the Arab world.

MENA Islam Module Residency

Earlier this year, our [Master of Religion](#) (MRel) students took part in lectures and group discussions on campus as part of the MENA Islam module residency. They also met with experts and practitioners and gained insight into Muslim culture in Lebanon and the Arab world. Because our students are already involved in ministry, they brought many of their rich experiences to the classroom. Emile from Lebanon is one of our MRel students. He is the Chief of Operations at Together for the Family Lebanon and has been serving Muslim Syrian refugees in Lebanon since 2016. He shared:

Attending the MRel residency was an eye-opening experience that gave me the opportunity to gain knowledge of different approaches to Islam from a positive, kerygmatic, and reconciliatory stance as a Christian. I am grateful to have had the chance to meet students from around the world and to learn about the various ministry experiences they are part of.



MRel students visiting a mosque

MENA Islam is co-taught by Daniel Brown and Martin Accad. Daniel serves as the director of the [Institute for the Study of Religion in the Middle East](#) and author of the main textbook for this module, [A New Introduction to Islam](#). Its Arabic translation was recently published by Dar Manhal Al Hayat in partnership with ABTS. The module focusses on providing a strong theoretical understanding of Islam as well as developing the applied skills needed to work in the region and among MENA communities worldwide. Daniel shared:

I have found that what Christians often expect from programs on Islam is basic, practical, step-by-step training for ministry. What we offer in this module is a much bigger picture. We try to give students a bigger framework and to challenge some basic assumptions about the relationship between Christianity and Islam. This will then impact how they think about their own context and history. It's a big picture module and that's what I like about it. When we are exposed to challenging ideas, we have the opportunity to process them ourselves and make them relevant in our own contexts.

As our MRel students develop a coherent knowledge of Islam and Islamic texts, we pray that they find practical approaches to Christian-Muslim relations as well as peacemaking strategies for conflict transformation in each of their unique ministries.



MRel students visiting Saida

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[Deconstructing the Kerygmatic?](#)

- Pray with Us -

Some of our Master of Theology (MTh) Students and Faculty

Kees van der Knijff | Program Lead

Pray for wisdom for ABTS leadership and faculty throughout the process of developing and refining this new Master program so that it will shape our students and their ministries in profound ways.

Walid Zailaa | MTh Faculty and Academic Dean

Please pray for the faculty and students as we keep on developing this program, which is key for emerging scholars in the Arab World.

Hanane Jaber | MTh Student and Certificate in Ministry Program tutor

Please pray that the Lord gives my husband and me the wisdom and grace to balance between what He has entrusted us with. Pray that I am faithful to our children, our church, my studies, and my outreach ministry. Also, pray for our children who have been facing some difficulties at school because of their faith.

Ashraf Zaki | MTh Student and Certificate in Ministry Program tutor

My wife and I are praying for a miracle to happen in our lives. Pray that He grants us wisdom in our ministry, and that He teaches me to balance between my different responsibilities. It has been on my heart to start a teaching project on Biblical Hebrew and Greek, so I ask you to pray for that as well.

Georges El Khoury | MTh Student

Through my journey of studying theology for the past 9 years, I have learned that Biblical training is vital for ministry in the Arab world. I ask you to pray that the Lord grants us all the strength to persevere in our studies despite any difficulties we may face. Also, pray that He keeps us humble, and that we continuously seek to grow closer to Him throughout our theological journey.

Elia Shehata | MTh Student and Certificate in Ministry Program Lead

I ask you to pray for my family, that we better understand His calling for our lives. Pray that He gives me wisdom so that I learn to manage my time better. Also, pray for the strength and perseverance I need to carry out my responsibilities in an effective manner.