Arab Baptist Theological Seminary

كليّة اللاهوت المعمدانيّة العربيّة

August 2024 | www.abtslebanon.org

"ABTS's ultimate goal is to serve the Arab Church by equipping potential theologians and intellectual leaders who can make a meaningful impact within their own context. The Master of Theology in Middle Eastern (ME) Studies program focuses on topics related to the Middle East, such as religion, history, politics, and economics, from a theological perspective. This program is crucial as it enables the church to comprehend its local context, ensuring that its ministry is integrated with and rooted in its Eastern context, rather than foreign to it." Academic Dean, Walid Zailaa

The MTh in ME Studies is a result of one journey that God led us on. It had long been the desire of ABTS, especially within the purview of its once Institute of Middle East Studies, to develop an international program that trains leaders to be involved in the issues that affect the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region. To achieve that, the MRel (Master of Religion in North African and Middle Eastern Studies) was launched in October 2012. This graduate program had been quite unique in its design, devised for students to acquire a solid academic foundation while giving them the hard skills needed to implement projects in our region.

MRel residency in classroom, 2024

The MRel was our only degree taught in English. With our mission focused on serving the Arab Church, all our other programs are taught in Arabic. However, we wanted the MRel to be an exception because of its international nature. Our strategy was to enroll students from both inside and outside the MENA region, knowing that this mixture will enrich the experience of both. Our hope was that enough interested Arab students would have the language qualifications to enroll in this program. This proved to be a challenge from the outset, which kept the enrolment numbers less than what we had hoped for.

MRel residency during cultural trip, 2024

At the ten-year mark of the MRel, we decided to conduct a complete assessment of the program. We already have a culture of assessment at ABTS. We believe in continuous improvement and in regularly evaluating our programs considering the changing realities around us. We started with an internal assessment, followed by an external one. We contracted Jessy Jaison, an international consultant and an expert in theological education. Jessy conducted a full review of the program after interviewing leadership, faculty, students and alumni, and submitted a report in which she affirmed the uniqueness and the value of the MRel as well as the challenges it is facing.

The assessment also took into consideration the recently launched research-based MTh in Biblical and Theological Studies. This is a second-degree in theology that is taught in Arabic. However, students need enough English comprehension to use English resources and listen to lectures in English without translation. But students are expected to write in Arabic. The question that came up in the assessment is whether this new MTh eliminates the need for the MRel or not.

Jessy during presentation

This question was easy to answer. These are two distinct programs. One specializes in biblical and theological studies while the other specializes in contextual studies, although both are theological. One is a second degree in theology, requiring prerequisite theological background, while the other is a first degree in theology. The opportunity, then, is to find synergies between the two programs and to leverage the strengths of each one in benefit of the other.

Based on that, we ended up making significant changes to the MRel program and rebranded it to reflect all these changes. As of October 2024, the MRel degree will be called Master of Theology in Middle Eastern Studies.

First, we changed the language requirements to match that of the new MTh to make it more accessible to Arab students while still remaining accessible to non-Arabic speakers as well. We also incorporated more theology into the program, making it a solid option for students pursuing a degree in theology, while keeping its strength in contextual studies. The degree now specializes in Middle Eastern studies, rather than generic MENA studies, to better ground it in our context.

In addition, we changed the funding model of this program, also to increase its accessibility by Arab students. We also developed two options for the final project, a research-based option and a practice-based option, to make the degree desirable by both scholars and practitioners.

Currently, we are changing some elements of the curriculum, such as the six-month-long modules, while keeping the strong elements, such as the short residencies in Lebanon, so that the rhythm and schedule become more workable for the students. We also aligned the academic year with that of the MTh so that we can benefit from common components in the curriculum, such as the offering of elective courses.

Our desire is that God continues to use ABTS, our programs, our students, and our graduates, so that Christ is acknowledged as Lord in our region. In the words of our Graduate Program Lead Kees van der Knijff: "This is a long-term investment in the ministry of the Church in the region. At the same time, the program helps people from outside the Middle East to understand the region in a more profound way, enabling them to come alongside the Church in more helpful and fruitful ways." May this be a reality for God's glory.

Are you or someone you know interested in a graduate theological degree that specializes in Middle Eastern studies, whether you speak Arabic or not, this MTh in ME Studies might be the right degree!
Read more here.

Non-Formal Training in Egypt and Syria

As a serious provider of theological education, with a wide spread of formal programs all the way up to a doctoral level, we are very excited about the growth of our non-formal training. This is mainly because it has been growing organically at ABTS, taking the high-quality material that our faculty use in a formal setting and repackaging them for use in a non-formal setting while maintaining the same quality and seriousness. While peacemaking has been at the core of our non-formal training, the variety of offerings is growing as well. Not only that, but the geographical reach of our non-formal program is also steadily growing.

In the last few weeks, two of our faculty members delivered more non-formal education outside Lebanon. Bassem Melki, the Director of our NFT (non-formal training) department and Assistant Professor Abed El Kareem Zien El Dien traveled to Egypt and Syria for these training opportunities.

Fellowship time with Sudanese graduates and students

In Egypt, Bassem and Abed worked with several groups: Egyptian, Sudanese, and Yemeni leaders and their families. The main theme was on family reconciliation. Reflecting on this visit, Bassem commented, "These leaders are true ambassadors of the Lord. The fact that each leader comes from a different background to serve and worship regardless of the pain and the rough path of life is a testimony of His work." Thankfully, the participants found the workshops very helpful and expressed their need for more opportunities like this.

In Syria, Bassem, with his wife Roula, and Abed led a conference on reconciliation and peacemaking for the Syrian Baptist Union pastors and spouses. Although they did not know what to expect, the participants were excited to meet under one roof for the first time in twenty years. Once the ice was broken, it became clear that the Lord had a plan to guide them through their spiritual and personal challenges. Pastor Mazen Hamati and his wife Rania reflected on this time together:

> *We were very thrilled to participate in the reconciliation training for individuals, which was held for the first time for pastors and their spouses. The sessions offered valuable biblical insights into the challenges we've faced at home and in church. This encouraged me as a pastor, and my wife as a women's minister, to begin organizing study groups on the topic of reconciliation among individuals.*

During the Non-Formal training in Syria

Abed explained that this training was crucial for rebuilding trust and fostering essential healthy relationships among Baptist ministers while resting in the Lord. Roula's presence was needed to provide a

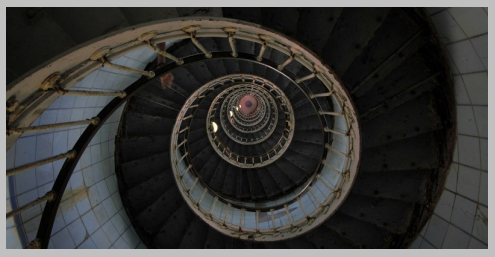
listening ear and encourage the women who were able to share with her their thoughts and personal challenges.

We feel humbled and thrilled to have the opportunity to play a small part in what the Spirit is doing among these churches and their leaders. The non-formal training is proving to be a powerful catalyst for change. We are grateful to God of the way He is shaping this program and the opportunities that He is giving us to serve His Church in the Arab world.

"The fact that each leader comes from a different background to serve and worship regardless of the pain and the rough path of life is a testimony of His work."

Check out our latest blog posts:

Reading Apocalyptic in the Context of the Middle East: Fueling Conflicts or Urging Justice



Against Simplification: Embracing Complexity as a Theological Virtue

In December 2023, ABTS President Elie Haddad announced his plan to retire by the end of the 2024 – 2025 academic year.

Read more about this announcement here.

Our search committee continues to seek candidates to fill the role of the new

ABTS PRESIDENT

Anyone seeking further information should email Search@ABTSLebanon.org

Pray with Us!

Ashraf | MTh student | Egypt
Please pray for guidance and strength in facing challenges, and for wisdom and clarity in decision-making. Pray for the well-being and protection of my loved ones. Also, pray that God would surround us with His presence.

Hanane | MTh student | Morocco
Please pray that the Lord opens doors for me to implement the lessons I am learning and for constructive change within and around our churches. Pray for the role of women in theological education and ministry within the region in general and in Islamic contexts in particular. Pray that the Lord helps me have more balance and discipline in my life as a student who wears many hats. Finally, pray for unity among the churches in my country because it will strongly impact the growth of His Kingdom and create more opportunities to share our experiences with other churches.

Saif | MTh student | USA
Please pray for my son who struggles with a wheat allergy, for me for strength and perseverance to complete my studies, and for my wife that God may bless her abundantly in her new job.

Kamal| MTh student | Lebanon
Please pray that the Lord continues His good work in me so that I continue learning and growing in the Word while at the same time investing in the lives of others.

George | MTh student | Lebanon
Please pray for steadfast faith and the safe delivery of our anticipated baby, a joyous occasion my wife and I eagerly await. Pray also for my ministry in Lebanon and the Arab world, where I work to spread the Gospel and support church planting. I seek spiritual and physical protection, strength, and wisdom to fulfill my responsibilities and positively impact the community.

Kees van der Knijff | Graduate Programs Lead
Please pray with us for our current students who are working hard to finish their final projects amid busy ministries and life. Also, please pray for our alumni to use the knowledge and skills they gained in the program to serve the church and society in the Middle East. Pray for the new students who are interested in understanding the Middle East and the Church in the Middle East in profound ways.

Lebanon
Please keep Lebanon in your prayers. While the news might cause anyone to be fearful, anxious, and uncertain, we trust in God's sovereignty. Join us in praying for the southern region of Lebanon where the war keeps escalating. Pray for those who are displaced and hurt. Pray for the church to live out its calling during this time and be ready to witness through word and deed.

MIDDLE EAST CONSULTATION مؤتمر الشرق الأوسط

MEC 2024

Interpersonal Reconciliation
المصالحة بين الأفراد

Practicing Reconciliation in the Middle East

ممارسة المصالحة في الشرق الأوسط

Join us on **September** 25, 26, & 27
انضمّوا إلينا في **أيلول/سبتمبر**

Moore Conference Center مركز مور للمؤتمرات

ABTS - كليّة اللّاهوت المعمدانيّة العربيّة

ABTS since 1960

كلية اللاهوت المعمدانية العربية
Arab Baptist Theological Seminary

Translation to English is provided

APPLY NOW! قدّم طلبك الآن

WhatsApp: +961 71 400 915

MEC@abtslebanon.org www.abtslebanon.org/mec2024