

Dear friends,

June is always a busy month at ABTS (Arab Baptist Theological Seminary). Our spring term ends in mid May, and then we hold intensive courses until mid June. The third week of June is the week we have our annual Middle East Conference. This is usually the highlight of our academic year – this year was no different. Finally, right after the Middle East Conference we hold our graduation ceremony, which is a good time to stop and reflect on God’s multitude of blessings to us throughout the year.

Graduation

This year’s graduation was the forty-second in the life of ABTS. We had five graduates this year: two Lebanese, one Sudanese, one Syrian, and one Algerian. Although this is a small group of graduates, we are thrilled at the potential that these strategic leaders have in impacting their communities with the message of the Gospel.



Faculty and Graduates

Tony Maalouf, of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, gave the graduation address this year. Tony is a Lebanese living in

the U.S. and teaches frequently at ABTS as a visiting professor. Tony challenged the graduates with the characteristics of an effective ambassador. Draoui, the Algerian graduate, gave an inspiring talk on behalf of the graduating class. It was Draoui’s birthday on graduation day. Reflecting on the concurrence of both dates, Draoui felt like ABTS was his second mother that was giving him birth again, this time propelling him into a new phase of ministry. Draoui is going back to Algeria to be involved in theological education in his own country.

Middle East Conference

This year’s conference was another major opportunity for transformation and change of attitude without which it is impossible to reach the different “other”, the neglected “other”, or sometimes the hated “other”. This year’s topic was on “Muslim Women at the Intersection of Faith and Culture”. The conference provided an in-depth study on women in Islam as well as several encounters where the conference attendees had the opportunity to learn first-hand about Muslims from Muslims.

As Christians (and the West generally) look at Islam and the Muslim world, many stereotypes and assumptions are projected with regard to the place and role of women in society. Some idealize the Muslim woman as liberated by the veil and in control of the Muslim family, while others see her as suppressed, oppressed and in need of emancipation. The conference helped bring a more balanced understanding of the complex realities faced by Muslim women, an

understanding of her role(s) in society, and what implications these understandings have for us as we seek to faithfully interact with individuals and families within Muslim societies where women play a central role.

The program was mainly divided into five parts. The first part was the morning devotionals that focused on women from the Bible who knew God. The purpose of these devotions was to prepare the conference attendees spiritually and intellectually for the following sessions and to challenge them to look at women as leaders and instigators of faith. The second part was a series of sessions that focused on law and gender in the Islamic world. The purpose of these sessions was to focus in depth on the law (*Shari'a*) and how it is applied differently to men and women in the Islamic communities.



During One of the Evening Public Forums

The third part was a series of sessions focusing on gender and leadership in the Middle Eastern societies and the role each gender plays in leadership. The fourth part was a series of sessions focusing on reaching the heart of Islam with the purpose of helping the participants appreciate and relate to the effective dimension of building relationships with Muslim women.

The fifth part was the evening forums which were open to the public. Muslim and other leaders were invited to give their own

perspectives on the issues being discussed. The forums this year covered the following topics: What is a woman - a theological reflection from a Muslim and a Christian perspective; Christian and Muslim women declaring why they're happy being Christian or Muslim women; Muslim and Christian perspectives on women and men in leadership under God's rule.

Mireille's Ministries

Mireille is heavily involved in the various ABTS ministries and she continues to serve one day a week at a local Christian orphanage. In addition, this year Mireille started to help with a ministry that serves Iraqi women refugees who are staying in poor neighbourhoods of Beirut. This ministry provides for the physical needs of these women as well as giving them spiritual guidance.

Dear friends, Mireille and I are very grateful for your prayers and support. The spiritual needs in our part of the world are enormous and our resources are scarce. Yet God continues to amaze us as we sit back and watch Him at work while trying to be faithful to what He has called us to do. Please continue to pray for our ministry and for the ministry of our graduating students.

If you are interested in becoming our Partner in Mission, please contact Eileen at eileenm@cbmin.org, or go to www.cbmin.org.

***The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,
his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.***

We would love to hear from you. You can contact us at:

**Mireille: mhaddad@cbmin.org
Elie: ehaddad@abtslebanon.org**