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NEST

NEWSLETTER

نشرة موسمية
تصدر عن



June 2024

كلية اللاهوت للشرق الأدنى

ISSUED OCCASIONALLY by the NEAR EAST SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY, BEIRUT - LEBANON
FOR RELATED CHURCHES, SUPPORT AGENCIES AND A SMALL CIRCLE OF FRIENDS

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From the President

On September 30, 2024, I will leave N.E.S.T., having reached the mandatory age of retirement. On this occasion, I would like to share the final words I addressed to the Board of Managers meeting held on May 24:

“In concluding this report for the academic year 2023/24, which is also the last time I will be reporting to the Board, after having served this Seminary for 38 years as a member of the faculty, 29 years as Academic Dean and 12 years as President, and after having taken part in over 60 Board Meetings, I would like to thank the Near East School of Theology for this opportunity of serving God in the field of theological education in teaching, publishing and administration throughout four decades. It is not for me to put before you a record of my achievements and failures. I leave that to the judgment of history and later generations.

There is no doubt that N.E.S.T. today has come a very long way from the N.E.S.T. I joined as an Assistant Professor in the fall of 1986 in the last and worst years of the war in Lebanon. All of us – Board, administration, faculty, staff and students over the years have contributed to the survival and prosperity of our Seminary throughout countless crises and difficulties. I am confident that N.E.S.T., with God’s guidance and protection, will overcome the present crisis and continue to serve the gospel and the churches in this part of the world, as it has done for the last 155 years of its existence as a theological seminary in Lebanon, despite all the wars, famine, genocides and turmoil of the last century and a half. And I am reassured that the Board has made a wise choice of a new president to lead this institution into the next phase. And so, I would like to wish the president-elect success in his leadership of N.E.S.T. and ask God’s blessings on all his endeavors.

Finally, I would like to express my thanks and appreciation to all the current and former members of this Board, to my colleagues on the faculty and staff members for their cooperation throughout the years, and to all friends and partners of N.E.S.T. worldwide for their faithful support.”



Commencement 2024



The Ninety-First Commencement Service took place on Saturday May 25, at 6:00pm in the Grace Chapel. Three students graduated: Arkadi Hanisyan (Master of Divinity), Aline Tahazian (Master of Arts in Christian Education) and Krikor Arabatlian (Diploma in Theological Studies). The speaker was the Rev. Hovhaness Hovsepyan (M. Div. 2012), Senior Pastor of the Evangelical Church in Armenia. The title of Rev. Hovsepyan's address was "Being Shaped by God". The full text of Rev. Hovsepyan's address will be printed in the November 2024 issue of the N.E.S.T. Theological Review.

New President for N.E.S.T

Beirut, Lebanon - May 29, 2024 - The Near East School of Theology is pleased to announce the election of **Dr. Martin Accad** as its eleventh president, effective September 1, 2024. Dr. Accad brings a wealth of experience in theological education, interfaith dialogue, and leadership within the academic and socio-religious communities.

Dr. Accad succeeds Dr. George Sabra, who has led the institution with distinction for over a decade. The N.E.S.T. community expresses its deepest gratitude for his dedicated service and faithful leadership.



Dr. Martin Accad is a distinguished scholar with a deep commitment to theological education and interfaith understanding. He received his Ph.D. in Islam and the History of Christian-Muslim Relations from the University of Oxford in 2001. He served as Chief Academic Officer at the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary in Lebanon from 2001 to 2020, where he also founded and directed the Institute of Middle East Studies. In 2020, he launched a public theology initiative by establishing the independent research center, Action Research Associates (ARA). ARA focuses on dealing with the past through the facilitation of social and political change and the multiple narrative study of Lebanon's civil war history for the purpose of reconciliation through the project "Truth and Reconciliation Lebanon". He serves on the faculties of the ABTS, Fuller Theological Seminary (USA), and N.E.S.T. He has authored over 20 academic journal articles, edited several volumes in his field, and is the author of *Sacred Misinterpretation: Reaching across the Christian-Muslim Divide* (Eerdmans, 2019). Dr. Accad is a regular blogger on Islam, Christian-Muslim dialogue, and current affairs. He is married to Nadia Khouri and they have two children, Mia and Alexandre.

Dr. Accad's appointment marks a new chapter in N.E.S.T.'s distinguished history. His vision for the future includes strengthening the institution's academic excellence, expanding its reach and impact in the region, and fostering deeper interfaith and intercultural dialogue. Under his leadership, N.E.S.T. aims to build on its legacy as a premier institution for theological education in the Near East.

In accepting the presidency of N.E.S.T., Dr. Accad stated: "I am very excited about the vast possibilities afforded by this new role. The N.E.S.T. is an outstanding institution of higher learning, reaching back over 92 years of history since its founding in 1932 in Lebanon, and deeply rooted in the socio-political fabric of the country through a vibrant presence at the heart of Beirut's Hamra district. I look forward to a renewed Christian witness, collaborating with God's people here and everywhere, with the diverse communities of Lebanon, with the brilliant universities in our neighborhood, and with the change-makers of civil society that make Lebanon into what it is: a chaotic force for change in the face of impossible odds, a unique gem waiting to be reborn."

N.E.S.T. Program in Armenia

The second session of training for Evangelical Christian educators and youth leaders took place in late January and early February 2024. Again, N.E.S.T. faculty members Rev. Dr. Wilbert van Saane and Preacher Hala Bitar Khoury spent two weeks in Yerevan teaching Biblical Studies and Christian Education to 39 participants. A third session is now planned for summer 2024.



Dr. W. van Saane teaching Old Testament



Instructor Hala Khoury with class in Armenia

Public Lectures

A series of public talks during the season of Lent was organized around the theme: “My Religious Faith and Political Engagement”. N.E.S.T. invited four Christian deputies from the Lebanese parliament to address this topic on four consecutive Thursday afternoons:



Mr. Hagop Pakaradonian
February 22, 2024



Mr. Melhem Riachy
February 29, 2024

Public Lectures



Mr. Melhem Kahlaf
March 7, 2024



Mr. Ni'mat Frem
March 14, 2024

The talks were well attended. The majority of those who attended faithfully came to all of the sessions. N.E.S.T. received very positive feedback on this series of talks. To be sure, they were not theological lectures in the strict and academic sense of the word, but they were spiritual and autobiographical accounts by politicians who revealed sides of their personalities which people do not normally see or know about. The links that they made to their political work were also appreciated and engendered interesting discussions.

Library “Good News”

New Library System

With the cancellation of the OLIB Library System on December 31, 2023, N.E.S.T. had to purchase and install a new system. After careful examination of different options, N.E.S.T. chose WorldShare Management Services (WMS) – a cloud-based platform designed to meet the changing needs of libraries. The new system is being used by many libraries worldwide, and also by sister institutions in Lebanon. It is more expensive than the old system, but, thanks to a generous grant from the Presbyterian Church in Canada (PCC), N.E.S.T. is enabled to cover two thirds of the cost from the PCC grant.

Agreement with United Theological College

Following a visit during 2023 to Lebanon and N.E.S.T. by several United Church of Australia (UCA) Ministers, a request was conveyed from Dr. Sabra, President of N.E.S.T., to the Principal of United Theological College (UTC), Rev. Dr. Peter Walker that Faculty and students of N.E.S.T. could be provided with access to eBooks held at Camden Theological Library (CTL).

The Library Manager of Camden Theological Library contacted the Librarian at N.E.S.T. to explore the logistics of such an arrangement. Because the N.E.S.T. library is implementing the library management system used by CTL (OCLC WorldShare Management Services (WMS)), such an arrangement was deemed feasible.

N.E.S.T. and UTC are now finalizing a Memorandum of Understanding whereby two eBook collections would be made available to Faculty and students of N.E.S.T.:

1. eBooks purchased from EBSCO (a collection of over 2000+ eBooks which is being regularly increased);
2. Perlego: a multi-disciplinary collection of 1 million eBooks. Access is provided by purchased licenses. The Armenian Missionary Association of Australia has purchased a group of licenses for N.E.S.T.

Many thanks to UTC in the persons of Dr. Clive Pearson, former Principal of UTC, who first initiated this cooperation and to the current principal, Rev. Dr. Peter Walker, as well as to the Armenian Missionary Association of Australia!

Seminary Spring Retreat

A two-day retreat was held on the week-end of May 3-5, 2024 in the Evangelical Conference Center in Dhour Shweir. Altogether, 21 members of the community (students and faculty) met around the theme of “The Sermon on the Mount” discussing and reflecting on its message about “Christian Character”, “Christian Righteousness” and “Christian Devotion”. In addition to daily worship, social interaction, and walks in nature, the N.E.S.T. community also attended the ecumenical Good Friday service on May 3 in the Shweir Orthodox Church. The town of Dhour Shweir is distinctive for its unification of the date of Easter for its Orthodox, Greek Catholic and Maronite church communities.



Retreaters in Dhour Shweir

ATIME Students Encounter

The Association of Theological Institutions in the Middle East (ATIME) organized a general meeting for students of all seminaries in Lebanon on Feb. 20, 2024 in the Sagesse University in Beirut. All seminaries took the day off and sent as many students as they could to this event. N.E.S.T. was represented by 8 students along with the President and faculty members Dr. Rima Nasrallah and Dr. Martin Accad. The theme of the meeting was “The Deposit of Faith: To Know What We Have Received and How to Transmit It to Others”. Two major lecture and discussion sessions were held; Dr. Accad co-lead one of them. The rest of the day was spent in personal acquaintance, common meal, hymn singing and spiritual entertainment.



NEST participants in ATIME conference

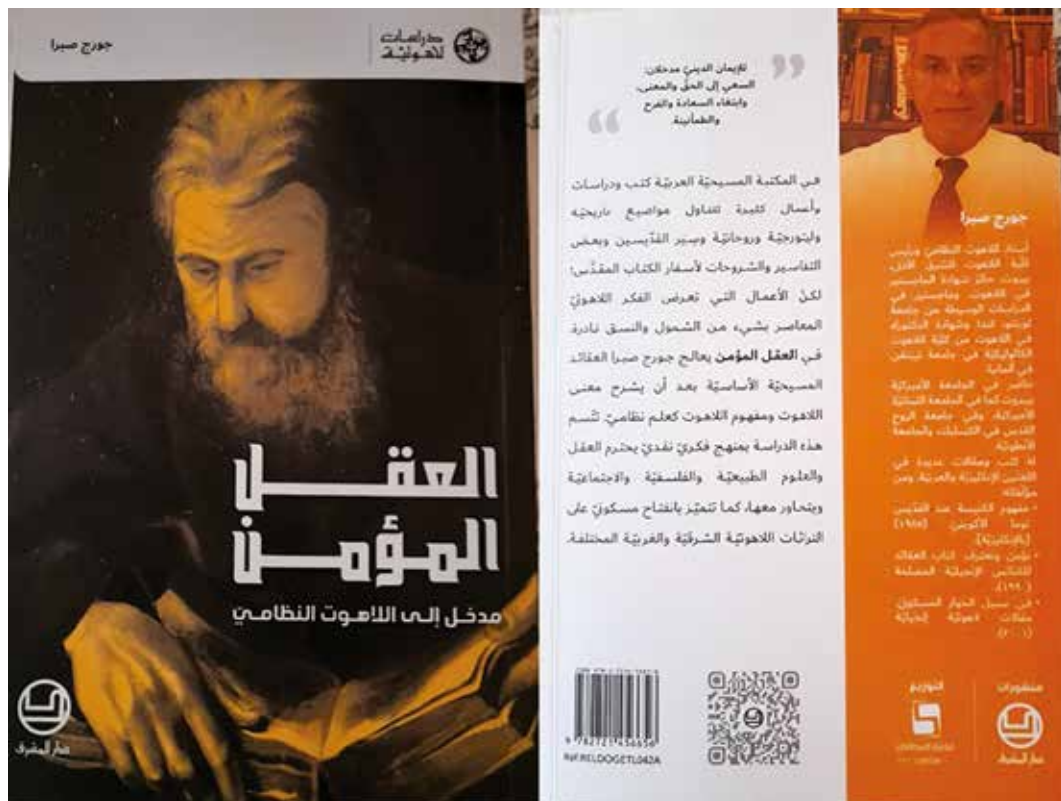
The “Presidential Wall”

As you enter N.E.S.T. lobby and turn your face to the left you will see a new display of the pictures of 10 N.E.S.T. presidents to date: from Gaius Greenslade (1932-1948) to George Sabra (2012-2024), passing through Horace McMullen, Cullen Story, Hovhaness Aharonian, Verne Fletcher, Ray Kiely, Wanis Sema'an, Hovhannes Karjian, and Mary Mikhael. All served N.E.S.T. to the best of their abilities, and altogether they tell the story of N.E.S.T. throughout its 92 years of existence.



Faculty Publication

Last month (May 2024), Dr. George Sabra published a 470-paged book in Arabic entitled: **العقل المؤمن: مدخل إلى اللاهوت النظامي** [The Believing Mind: An Introduction to Systematic Theology]. The back cover says: “The Arabic Christian library contains many books, studies and works that deal with historical, liturgical, spiritual and hagiographical topics as well as some scriptural commentaries, but rare are the works that present contemporary theological thought in a comprehensive and systematic manner. In *The Believing Mind*, George Sabra treats the basic Christian doctrines after explaining the meaning of theology and the notion of theology as a systematic knowledge. This is a book that is characterized by a critical intellectual method that respects reason and the natural, philosophical and social sciences and dialogues with them; it is also distinguished by an ecumenical openness to the different eastern and western Christian traditions.”



Alumni News

Ordinations



Lukas Berkenkamp (SiMO 2017/18) was ordained in Bergkirche, Osthofen, Germany, on January 21, 2024.



Levon Kardashian (M. Div. 2003) was ordained in Sydney, Australia, on February 10, 2024 in the Beenleigh Region Uniting Church



Samer Anis Najm (M. Div. 2023) was ordained in the National Evangelical Church of Beirut on February 11, 2024. Samer and his wife Ankinah (B.A.C.E., 2007) live and work in Dubai. Samer will be ministering to the N.E.C.B. members in the United Arab Emirates alongside his work as an engineer.

Alumni News



Khairallah Atallah (M. Div. 2020) was ordained in the Presbyterian Church of Lattakia, Syria on May 17, 2024.



Adon Naaman (M. Div. 2019) was ordained in the Presbyterian Church of Homs, Syria, on September 8, 2023, in the presence of Christian and Muslim religious leaders.

May you all exalt the Lord our God in the midst of God's people; offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God and boldly proclaim the gospel of salvation and rightly administer the sacraments of the New Covenant.
God Bless you all!

Doctorate Awarded

Heartiest Congratulations to **Domenik Ackermann** (SiMO 2014/15) on receiving his doctorate in theology from the Theology Department of Boston College, USA.



Congratulations!

Khalil Haddad (M. Div. 2021) and Evangeline Hammond (SiMO 2019/20), who met as students at N.E.S.T., got married on April 27, 2024 in St. John's Church in Byblos.



In Memoriam



John Derksen
1951 - 2024

We received the sad news of the passing of John Derksen, former faculty member at N.E.S.T. on January 14, 2024. John died as a result of a tragic accident while vacationing with his family in the Caribbean. He had taught Old Testament at N.E.S.T. for four years (1994-98). John was a very active member of the N.E.S.T. community, especially in the Spiritual Life Committee; his students loved and appreciated him.

May he rest in the God's eternal!

N.E.S.T. Theological Review Digital Offer

The complete set of the issues of the NEST Theological Review, from 1978 until 2022, is now available in a pdf digital form. It is available for purchase at the special price of \$ 700.



For inquiries, please contact:
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 Editorial Secretary
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We continue to depend on your prayers and support. Our ministry is indeed your ministry. You can continue to support us in any of the following ways:

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Your contribution is deeply appreciated

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