

## Theological Education in the Middle East: Preliminary Observations and Hopes

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It seems that the free and mission oriented church today cares about the Middle East more than at other times during Church history. In South Korea, I have met and interacted with numerous Christians who have a special interest in this part of the world,<sup>1</sup> and the same can be said about the United States and other missionary-sending nations. This is to be expected because evangelicals are few in the Middle East, and often face a difficult life.<sup>2</sup> Sadly, the light of the Gospel is dim in these parts of the world; darkness hovers with few specks of light shining through. Is there hope for this part of the world in which Christianity was born? How are the congregations growing in maturity and vision in a place where there is adversity from both Muslims and 'Christians'?<sup>3</sup>

This survey is written to give a brief description of developments in theological education in the Middle East. It will specifically discuss *evan-*

1. As I write this article in Amman, Jordan, it is amazing and encouraging to see that there are at least two Korean churches in this city, and there is a substantial number of Koreans (18 out of 95) currently studying Arabic at the Kelsey Institute. Most of them intend to use their knowledge for ministry among Arabic speaking people.

2. In most countries of the Middle East, Christians constitute a very small percentage of the population. The only exception is Lebanon, where the percentage of Christians is somewhere between 34 and 41 percent. Egypt is second with anywhere between 8 and 16 percent. In both of these countries, it is the nominal Christians that are the majority by far. In general, evangelicals in these countries are less than 1 percent of the total population. For example, Jordan has between 5,000 and 10,000 evangelicals and between 163,000 and 220,000 Christians (c. 2-3 percent of the population). The figures for Christians in the Middle East are uncertain and vary widely (e.g., see Egypt above). The figures in this essay are from BBC News, "Guide: Christians in the Middle East, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/4499668.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4499668.stm). (accessed October 10, 2008).

3. The sad fact is that evangelicals are opposed by both Muslims and nominal Christians. In fact, a strong argument can be made, at least in some of the countries of the Middle East, that the greater opposition against evangelicals comes from the Orthodox and Catholic Christians.

*gelical* theological education in five countries: Israel, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, and Iraq. A more complete article would include North Africa, Sudan, and the most restricted countries like Saudi Arabia and the other gulf countries. However, since formal or open theological education is virtually non-existent in the restricted countries,<sup>4</sup> and theological education in North Africa and Sudan was recently discussed in an article by Richard Hart,<sup>5</sup> my focus will be mainly on the aforementioned countries.

### Summary of Recent Research and Developments in Sudan and Egypt

Richard Hart, the current president of PTEE (Program for Theological Education Extension) has written a very useful article on this subject which was published in 2004 by MEATE.<sup>6</sup> This section will summarize some of the most important points from his article, with special emphasis on Egypt and Sudan. His research on Israel, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria and Iraq will be acknowledged and referred to under the appropriate sections below.

While the number of Christians in the Middle East is generally declining,<sup>7</sup> it seems that “Evangelical Christians in the Middle East and North Africa continue to increase in number.”<sup>8</sup> Thus, in 2004 Richard Hart was confident that there were over a million Arab evangelicals in the Middle East and North Africa, the country with the largest number being Sudan. He estimated that in Sudan alone, the non-Arab Sudanese evangelical population could be well over one million.<sup>9</sup> Of course, the number of indigenous evangelicals in the rest of the countries of the Middle East is much smaller.

4. Even if there is theological education in these countries it would be unwise to publish an article about it, considering the repressive and hostile governments there. In hostile countries, theological education has to be underground (with considerable risks and effort), or through TV and radio. It should be mentioned that the Asia Theological Association does list Gilgal Bible College in the United Arab Emirates. See [http://www.ataasia.com/members/asm\\_uae.html](http://www.ataasia.com/members/asm_uae.html) (accessed October 13, 2008).

5. See Richard Hart, “Evangelical Theological Education in the Middle East and North Africa,” *MEATE*, vol. 1 (2004): 53-74. MEATE is the journal of the Middle East Association for Theological Education. This essay is relying extensively on this article.

6. See n. 5.

7. See the information from BBC News in n. 2.

8. Hart, “Evangelical Theological Education,” 55.

9. Hart, “Evangelical Theological Education,” 55.

Historically, Evangelicals from all denominations present in the Middle East, “preached the Gospel, opened schools, started health clinics and published Bible portions and Gospel tracts. Through their schools, they declared that reading and education was for every believer, and not just for the clergy.”<sup>10</sup> Therefore, it is not surprising that Evangelicals have been working and are working to increase the availability and quality of theological education in the Middle East.

In the past twenty years, the evangelical churches in Sudan have been growing despite various forms of persecution and the civil war in the country. In 2004, there were at least nine Bible Schools in Sudan: four affiliated with the Presbyterian synods (all of them in Khartoum), two with the Anglican Church, one with the Assemblies of God (also in Khartoum), one under the authority of Sudan Interior and African Inland Churches (Khartoum), and one interdenominational (PTEE).

Four of these schools offer bachelor’s degrees, and four others offer some post-secondary diplomas or certificates. None seem to offer master’s degrees, and this explains why Sudanese expatriates have been studying in evangelical seminaries in Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon. Most “are not likely to return to Sudan.”<sup>11</sup> The Sudanese students have the tendency to stay in other Middle East and North African countries or to immigrate to other countries. It is important to mention that most of the education in Sudan is offered in Arabic, but there are also parallel curricula in English since many Sudanese understand English.

With the signing of peace agreements between Northern and Southern Sudan that occurred in 2005, the official language for public schools in Southern Sudan became English and the local written languages. It is anticipated that more theological institutions will be started in Southern Sudan and that they will offer most of their courses in English and some in the written ethnic languages of Southern Sudan.

A search on the website of the Middle East Association for Theological Education also reveals the existence of Khartoum North Theological Education by Extension. This school is located on the campus of Nile Theological College (Khartoum) and is offering post-secondary education by extension. It is interdenominational and has trained hundreds of professionals from Sudan so far. They teach courses both in Arabic and English, but their goal is to offer education in ten other languages.<sup>12</sup>

10. Hart, “Evangelical Theological Education,” 55.

11. Hart, “Evangelical Theological Education,” 57. Also I personally interviewed Hart by telephone on October 16, 2008, while teaching in Jordan. The information in this paragraph is extracted from Hart’s article. It should also be noted that many of the Sudanese students now have difficulties entering certain countries of the Middle East for theological education.

12. This is, of course, much needed in the southern part of Sudan.

Theological education has been offered in Egypt for centuries (mainly by the Coptic churches), and there are at least seven schools currently active in Egypt. Most of these are found in Cairo, but there are extensions in many other places. Their affiliations vary, but most of them are interdenominational, such as Presbyterian and the Assemblies of God.<sup>13</sup>

The only seminary offering master's degree is also the oldest (the first class graduated as early as 1863): The Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo (Presbyterian). It has been training men and women from all over the Arab world for ministry, and, in 1986, it began a seminary in Alexandria. They currently have 240 students enrolled.<sup>14</sup>

The Middle East Evangelical Theological Seminary (MEETS)<sup>15</sup> currently has centers in Assuit, Sohag, Minya, and Cairo. They cooperate closely with the Global University, which accredited their educational materials. In 2004, over 200 students were registered in the MEETS study programs. According to Hart, the Arab World Evangelical Ministers Association (AWEMA) also offers periodically "continuing education courses."<sup>16</sup> These events help the participants with networking and with information about new education opportunities.

A newer school (about six years old) in Egypt is The National Theological College and Graduate School.<sup>17</sup> This school currently operates in Alexandria and has plans to expand in Jordan (they will start on October 26, 2008). This interdenominational school offers three programs in biblical studies: associate, bachelor, and master's level studies. The students meet twice a year for nine days (in October and March) and work on their assignments back home. Most of the lecturers are from the United States and teach through Arabic translators.

### **Theological Education in Syria and Lebanon**

Richard Hart's overview of theological education in Syria does not list a single seminary. However, he does mention that the evangelical

13. For more details and the names of all of these schools see Hart, "Evangelical Theological Education," 58-62 and 70-71.

14. This information is from the website: <http://www.etsc.org/students.htm> (accessed October 11, 2008).

15. This was established in 1953 by the Assemblies of God in Port Said, Egypt. Hart, "Evangelical Theological Education," 60.

16. Hart, "Evangelical Theological Education," 62.

17. Introductory information about this seminary is available at [www.ntcgs.org](http://www.ntcgs.org) (accessed October 18, 2008). Hart, interview by author, Jordan, October 16, 2008.

churches provide “alternatives for ministry education.”<sup>18</sup> What is known for sure is that PTEE has trained about 65 students in Syria in 2007 and they continue to work in that country.<sup>19</sup> Also, a graduate of Jordan Evangelical Theological Seminary (JETS) has recently informed me that he was preparing for a “theological education event” with about 90 students “from all Syrian cities, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq.” This event lasted about a week (September 30th to October 5th), and a previous event ended in August 30th, 2008. According to him, the students came “to study the word of God and to be trained to teach and preach.”<sup>20</sup> It seems at this point that formal theological education (in a seminary) for evangelical Syrian Christians takes place only abroad.<sup>21</sup>

In Lebanon, where the Christian population is much greater, formal theological education in colleges is more readily available. Here, evangelicals have been “active in ministry education” since the early 1800s.<sup>22</sup> Currently, there are six evangelical theological schools four of which are in Beirut. Four of these offer the bachelor’s degree, but only the Near East School of Theology (NEST)<sup>23</sup> and the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary offer master’s level degrees. NEST has an extensive library and all of their courses are taught in English.

### **Theological Education in Jordan**

The present and future of theological education in Jordan looks promising partially due to the government tolerance that exists in this country. Three theological institutions have centers in the capital of

18. Hart, “Evangelical Theological Education,” 68. Hart does not describe these alternatives.

19. For a more comprehensive descriptions of PTEE and their work in the Middle East see the discussion below and their website at [www.ptee.org](http://www.ptee.org).

20. Andrew Farhan, email exchange with author, Jordan, September 28, 2008. It seems that the most popular means of ministry training in the Middle East remain “the gatherings that take place when churches want to share teacher resources with their constituencies and their friends.” Thus, “half day, whole day, weekend, week-long and holiday gatherings of Christian leaders are some of the most common means for doing theological education” in this part of the world. See Hart, “Evangelical Theological Education,” 68.

21. JETS has trained several Syrian Christians and currently has one student in the bachelor program.

22. Hart, “Evangelical Theological Education,” 65. Hart, interview, October 8, 2008.

23. This information is from their website: <http://www.theonest.edu.lb> (accessed October 11, 2008).

Amman: Global University,<sup>24</sup> JETS, and PTEE.<sup>25</sup> Jordan has anywhere between 5,000 and 10, 000 Christians, and there are 55 active evangelical churches scattered throughout the country. The only formal theological institution is JETS. This seminary was registered in 1995 with a board composed of several evangelical groups from Jordan and continues to offer quality theological education to students throughout the Middle East. Besides offering a Bachelor of Theology, it also offers a two year and a four year Master of Theology degrees and a Doctor of Ministry degree.

The number of students at JETS tends to oscillate because of visa approvals,<sup>26</sup> but the seminary is expanding and is in the process of building a new seminary with excellent facilities. Although the construction of the seminary has temporarily stopped for lack of funds, there is hope that the construction will be finished soon, perhaps, with the a multimedia center that can be used to offer courses in Arabic via satellite throughout the Arab world.<sup>27</sup>

### **Theological Education in Israel and Palestine**

The only evangelical theological college in Palestine is Bethlehem Bible College (BBC), which offers up to bachelor's level degrees.<sup>28</sup> When

24. Rev. Keith Jones, interview by author, Jordan, September 28, 2008. Jones serves as the regional director of the Global University, which currently has about 20 students studying in Jordan. It offers a Bachelor of Theology degree in English only and does not have any immediate plans for a program in Arabic.

25. Note that the Eastern Mediterranean Nazarene Bible College (EMNBC) had temporal offices in Amman but has eventually relocated. It usually operates in hotels and offer summer courses. Note that unless otherwise noted, the information for this section is based on Hart's article and on my personal communication with him in Jordan on October 8, 2008. The involvement of PTEE in Jordan and in the rest of the Middle East is further discussed below.

26. The numbers of entering students for the last three years (2005-2007) are 27, 20, and 15. Currently, there are 54 students enrolled at JETS. Most of them are from Jordan with 30 and Egypt with 13. There is only one student from Sudan still studying at JETS.

27. Note also that the National Theological College and Graduate School (which currently operates in Alexandria, Egypt) plans to start a program in Amman on October 26, 2008. See the discussion about Egypt above.

28. The site of Bethlehem Bible College ([www.bethlehemcollege.edu](http://www.bethlehemcollege.edu)) is unclear about the programs they offer. They list 18 faculty members including those who teach in extensions, but most of them seem to be part-time and do not have a degree beyond an M.A. It is interesting that very few of them have the Master of Divinity Degree; perhaps, only five of them. Five of the instructors

Richard Hart wrote his article in 2004, he mentioned the possibility of an extension in the area of Galilee and the fact that BBC was hosting a regular extension course in Gaza City.<sup>29</sup> The good news is that in 2008 the extension of BBC in Galilee opened with about 40 students and six full-time professors.<sup>30</sup> There are other qualified professors who help at the college when they are needed. Located in Nazareth, the college offers a bachelor's degree in biblical studies and off-campus classes in Haifa and Kufur Yassif in Galilee region. So far, there are about 20 local ministers (pastors, church leaders, and volunteers) who graduated from this college. The college is accredited by MEATE.

In Israel, the Israel College of the Bible (ICB) was established in 1990 to train the leaders of the Messianic congregations. It offers Bachelor of Theology and master's level degrees and is accredited by the Asia Theological Association and the European Evangelical Accrediting Association. The only other evangelical institution which offers master's level degrees in Israel is Jerusalem University College. However, this college does not offer degrees that focus on ministerial training such as a Master of Divinity degree. It only offers two Master of Arts degrees: Biblical History and Geography and Middle Eastern Cultures and Religions. ICB only offers classes in English.

Nazareth Center for Christian Studies started its ministry in September, 2007 with "20 qualified and very dedicated students."<sup>31</sup> The Scottish theologian, Dr. J. Bryson Arthur, is the first president. According to its website, the school offers a Bachelor of Divinity and a Master of Theology. It is important to note that these are "English-medium degrees which involve intensive reading and writing in English. Classes are taught in English and Arabic. Students are required to have a sufficient level of English to begin a course of study."<sup>32</sup> The courses are "of international standard and internationally accredited." This school also offers a Pre-Master Certificate, a Diploma in Divinity, and a Certificate in Leadership Development.

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listed on their website have Ph.D. degrees, but I have not been able to find one who has his/her degree in biblical studies (one in Arabic Language and another in Counseling).

29. Hart, "Evangelical Theological Education," 63.

30. Most of the information about the Galilee extension is from Pierre Tannous. Tannous, email exchange with author, Jordan, October 15, 2008. He is an outstanding M.Div. graduate of Torch Trinity Graduate School of Theology, who now teaches in Galilee Bible College.

31. The information for this section is from their website: <http://www.nazarethcenter.com/> (accessed October 16, 2008). I thank Habil Yousif from JETS for pointing out to me the opening of this school.

32. See <http://www.nazarethcenter.com/> (accessed October 16, 2008).



The Master of Theology program “is aimed at Christians who hold a degree in theology or a related subject and who are seeking to advance their studies in a specialized field. The degree is also open to those who hold degrees in other disciplines and who have subsequently completed the NCCS Pre-Masters Certificate.”<sup>33</sup> The student can choose from three areas of specialization: biblical studies, contextual missiology, and applied theology. It takes from two to three years to complete these degrees.

According to Hart, other institutions and research centers located in Israel and Palestine sponsor “short courses, special lectures, tours, archaeological digs and research projects” which contribute to the training of Christian leaders.<sup>34</sup> Thus, there is no master’s level degree for evangelical Christian students from Palestine or Israel interested in pastoral work in Arabic. They can study in Arabic in Jordan, Lebanon, or Egypt, but they cannot obtain a master’s level degree from an evangelical institution in Israel unless they are able to study in English.<sup>35</sup>

### **Theological Education in Iraq<sup>36</sup>**

The evangelical work began in Iraq in 1840. The first evangelical Presbyterian church, which still exists today, was planted in Mosul. The evangelical work in Baghdad began when a group of people started prayer meetings in homes prior to 1930. In 1930, the British army took the church of Saint George as a place for their worship services. As a result, the indigenous Presbyterians were able to meet at the same church right after the service of the British army. During the 1930s, a church was built for the evangelical believers and was inaugurated during the Christmas service. Due to the construction projects in the surrounding area where the church was built, the church was demolished and a piece of land was granted to the Presbyterian denomination to build a church, a school, and a parsonage. The church was inaugurated in August 1954. In 1957,

33. See <http://www.nazarethcenter.com/> (accessed October 16, 2008).

34. Hart, “Evangelical Theological Education,” 63.

35. Of course, if they speak a foreign language (English, French, etc.) The Israeli students have the liberty to go and study abroad. Pierre Tannous is an example of such a student. His ability to understand English qualified him to study at TTGST, which offers courses both in English and Korean.

36. Much of the information about Iraq comes from two theology students from that country. Their names, however, need to remain confidential. Iraqi students, email exchange with author, September 30, 2008. The information about the work of Entrust and JETS comes from Habil Yousif, Assistant Professor of New Testament Studies at JETS and from the website at [www.entrust4.org](http://www.entrust4.org). I would like to thank all of them for their great help and insights on theological education in Iraq.



an Egyptian pastor, Haleem Tawfik, was appointed as the formal pastor to the church.<sup>37</sup> By 1945, the first evangelical church in Baghdad, “The Protestant Presbyterian Church,” was founded.

Before 2003, there were only five evangelical churches in all of Iraq. Two were located in Baghdad, one in Mosul, one in Kirkuk, and one in Basra. However, none of these churches had a seminary or other venue of formal theological education before 2003. The leaders of these churches were depending upon the Presbyterian churches of Egypt, and the Egyptian churches even sent pastors to minister in some of the churches in Iraq. The church also had connections with Jordan and Lebanon.

Beginning in 1990, many Iraqis left the country. While many of those people were already Christians, others became Christian in Jordan. JETS trained Iraqi Christians for many years, but very few of them returned to Iraq. At this time, the Presbyterian Christians still do not have an institute for theological education in Iraq. When the Korean missionaries came to Iraq in 2003, the Presbyterian churches in Baghdad with an association of Korean churches started Iraq Evangelical Seminary (IES). This was intended to be an interdenominational school. In 2004, Dr. Sang-Bok David Kim (President Emeritus of Torch Trinity Graduate School of Theology) came to Iraq as the chairman of IES and officiated the opening ceremony. When the safety situation in Iraq worsened, the Korean missionaries were forced to retreat to Jordan with the intention of coming back when times become more conducive for ministry. This has not happened yet, and the Presbyterian Christians still do not have an institute for theological education in Iraq.<sup>38</sup>

The Christian and Missionary Alliance Church started in association with the Christian and Missionary Alliance Church of Lebanon. Thus, the senior pastor of C&MA of Iraq was trained in Lebanon for four years at CAIT “Christian Alliance Institute of Theology.”<sup>39</sup> In 2004,

37. This information is from the Arabic version of Hareth Yousif Ghanema, *The Protestant and the Evangelicals in Iraq* (Al Nasher Al Maktabi: Baghdad, 1998), 154. It was kindly translated and given to me by Habil Yousif from JETS.

38. It is important to notice that PTEE has been continuously active in Iraq since the 1990s, so the possibility for theological training for evangelicals has existed. In fact, many of the present leaders (some of whom teach in various schools) have been trained by PTEE, and some also worked as tutors for PTEE. In the middle 1990s, PTEE classes were established in Iraq in cooperation with the Evangelical Church. Tutors were trained in Baghdad and taught classes in the Presbyterian churches in Basra, Kirkuk, and Baghdad. After 2003, when other denominations were established, PTEE classes continued in the Presbyterian churches and later in the Baptist and the Alliance churches. From 2007 to 2008, 44 students took PTEE classes in Baghdad. Hart, interview, October 08, 2008.

39. This seminary still exists in Lebanon in Jdeitet el-Metn. See <http://>

this institute came to Iraq to start a theological seminary in Baghdad. The school sent two teachers to Baghdad to teach four or five subjects; one of the teachers taught an intensive course, and the other teacher stayed in Baghdad more than four months teaching four different subjects. Five students took courses with the visiting professor until they finished all the requirements for these courses.

In time, as the situation in Iraq became worse, the foreign teachers could not visit Iraq anymore. The teaching plan for the Iraqi students had to change. Thus, during 2005, the school offered only intensive courses which lasted a few weeks, but the classes were moved to Jordan. Thus, the students had to go to Jordan periodically to receive the necessary teaching, but this method was not very cost effective and CAIT eventually had to stop their theological training. Currently, there are some American missionaries from C&MA church in the north of Iraq (in the Kurdistan area). One of them is teaching courses to Iraqi students.

The Assemblies of God Church in Baghdad started theological studies by correspondence through the ICI Global University in July 2005. The students were to attend modular courses every five to six months in Baghdad, but the political situation in Baghdad started to deteriorate. The leadership decided to move the courses to Erbil in Kurdistan, 450 km north of Baghdad. In Erbil, students attended courses for one week at a time. All of the professors were American. Because the safety situation was deteriorating and the American professors were unable to enter Iraq, the program stopped in 2007 after an unsuccessful attempt to offer lectures by satellite. The school could not provide a connection with a steady signal.

It is clear from these attempts that after “the fall of the old dictator regime in Iraq, many churches and Christian organizations tried their best to be spiritually involved in the building up the country of Iraq.”<sup>40</sup> The following two attempts are also part of the Christian effort to provide theological education to Iraq.

In 2004, the executive committee of JETS agreed to start an extension site in Baghdad. In November of the same year, this committee was commissioned to rent a facility and to purchase furniture, equipment, and computers for the extension in Baghdad. Classes began in 2005 with 10 students from different churches. However, the instability of the country was the main reason for several times of temporarily closing down the extension. In 2006, because of this security issue, a decision

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[www.meate.org/allmembers.htm](http://www.meate.org/allmembers.htm) for more information on theological schools in the Middle East.

40. Habil Yousif, email exchange with author, September 09, 2008.

was reached to move the extension to northern Iraq. In 2007, the center relocated to the northern city of Erbil. The leadership of JETS tried many times to acquire the Kurdish government's written approval, but with no success. It was only a verbal approval, which was inactive in many ways. Unfortunately, lack of financial resources also contributed to reaching the decision that the extension must be closed. There is a plan to offer one or two courses every year.

It is important to state that the students who started studying at this extension were able to finish half of their program for the two year diploma in biblical studies. It is noteworthy to say that teaching was conducted mainly by one American and four JETS Iraqi graduates who hold a Master of Arts, a Master of Divinity, two Master of Theology degrees.

Entrust,<sup>41</sup> after several months of investigative research, began first-generation training in the summer of 2005. The first training group to be established was Arabic-speaking, mixed male and female students, mostly from a Christian background. Later in 2005, a second Kurdish-speaking all-male group was started in another city. In 2006, two separate groups of women of various Christian backgrounds were formed in yet another city. This year, two other groups are in the process of formation.

For each group, the goal is to provide five years of training that consists of short intensive sessions four times per year. Courses cover a variety of subjects from basic discipleship to more advanced subjects such as hermeneutics and apologetics. The goal over the next five to ten years is to see this training replicated by nationals and the establishment of a national governing board. As this happens, Entrust's role will move from education to mentoring and then to consulting. Eventually, it is hoped that the ministry will become entirely national so that Entrust can move on to other fields.

41. Entrust was formerly known as BEE (Bible Education by Extension) International. It is a Christian non-profit organization based in Colorado Springs, CO (USA). They seek "to aid the church in responding to the need for servant-leader training for both men and women through accessible, transformational, biblical training." Their goal is to leave behind a comprehensive training system administered by nationals that is self-replicating. "The Entrust method incorporates the best adult educational principles and uses a discussion format rather than pure lecture. It is believed that this method is both more educationally sound and more able to be reproduced by trained nationals." For more information about Entrust see <http://www.entrust4.org/> (accessed October 10, 2008).

### The Program for Theological Extension (PTEE)<sup>42</sup>

PTEE was established in 1981 by Egyptian, Jordanian, and Lebanese educators with the intention to train church leaders and pastors. The website of PTEE makes it clear that their intention is to provide evangelical theological education for church leaders wherever they live in the Arab world. At this time, they are equipping and training Arabic-speaking leaders in the Middle East, North Africa, and even in the Arab diaspora (Sweden and United States). In 2007, about 300 students were trained by PTEE throughout the Arab world and beyond.<sup>43</sup>

They currently offer “three accredited, university-level, academic awards:”<sup>44</sup> Bachelor of Theology (36 course), Diploma of Theology (24 course), and Certificate of Theology (12 course). PTEE is in the process of developing a secondary program that has the potential to provide alternative credentials to High School diplomas to help local Christians with employment. PTEE is also developing an extension-based degree of Master of Arts in Ministry. However, the Master of Arts program is not a priority,<sup>45</sup> and its strongest program is the Bachelor of Theology.

The PTEE program (just like ENTRUST) has several strengths. It does not require a seminary building and can literally go where the students are. PTEE uses only Arabic speaking tutors and Arabic resources; thus, the students do not need to know English or another theological language. Also, PTEE provides training for all levels of leadership. It is struggling in some areas because of a lack of Arabic speaking tutors. In addition, the high cost of developing a course (c. \$125,000) prevents PTEE from expanding at a faster rate.

### Conclusions

There is much good news about evangelical theological education in the Middle East. There are increasing opportunities for ministers of the Word to obtain a quality, properly accredited theological education in most areas of the Middle East, especially up to the bachelor’s level. At the master’s level (not to mention the Doctor of Philosophy level),

42. Hart, “Evangelical Theological Education,” 53-74. I have also consulted the academic manual of PTEE (the English version printed in 2007); the website of PTEE at [www.ntcgs.org](http://www.ntcgs.org); and Hart, interview, October of 2008. I thank Dr. Hart for all the help and information that he provided for this research.

43. PTEE trained students in 2007 in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt, Sudan, Palestine, Israel, Sweden, Germany, and the United States. In the past, students were also trained in Bahrain, Abu Dhabi, Spain, and other countries.

44. See <http://www.ptee.org> (accessed October 13, 2008).

45. The Master degree in Arabic is also not a priority for Global University.

there are still several countries<sup>46</sup> where such a degree cannot be obtained in Arabic. The students have to travel abroad to study beyond the Bachelor level and/or to learn English. Both Sudan and Iraq are in serious and immediate need of a seminary that offers the Master of Divinity in Arabic.<sup>47</sup> In Sudan, the needs go even further. Given the great number of evangelical Christians in Sudan (c. 1 million), there is a need of “massive investment” to develop theological education.<sup>48</sup>

Considering the restrictions and lack of safety that are present in some of these countries, they would have to rely heavily on local tutors and churches to provide quality theological education (e.g. PTEE). The plans of JETS to offer courses via satellite throughout the Middle East are expected to provide more quality undergraduate and graduate theological education in Arabic.<sup>49</sup>

Another pressing need in the Middle East has to do with translating major theological works into Arabic. All the theological institutions in the Middle East must work together in translation projects, or at least inform each other of translation projects in progress.<sup>50</sup> In addition, the Middle East theological institutions suffer from lack of funds and qualified staff to teach in Arabic language.<sup>51</sup>

The Christians in the rest of the world (especially in the Western world and Korea) have a brotherly “obligation” to get involved and help them in all of these areas. Churches can and should unite together to sponsor translation projects. They should sponsor Arabic tutors and

46. The countries are Iraq, Israel (with a few exceptions), Sudan, and Syria. Note that even though it is possible to study for a master’s level degree Israel, this cannot be done in Arabic.

47. “Iraqi churches are in big and desperate need for theological school to produce pastors and leaders for the churches.” Iraqi students, email exchange.

48. This is the informed opinion of Dr. Richard Hart. Hart, interview, October 16, 2008. See also note 11. According to him, Sudan needs around 8,000 primary schools in the Christian south.

49. However, for many students this may not be the best way to be trained. Especially in the Arab world, it seems that the more personal and involved teaching approaches of both PTEE and ENTRUST are more effective.

50. See the insightful suggestion of David Martin: “Every Bible college or seminary in the Arab world needs to try to make translation a major budget item.” Martin, “A Biblical Philosophy of Christian Education for the Arab World” (master’s thesis, Jordan Evangelical Theological Seminary, 2003), 78. For example, Wayne Grudem’s *Systematic Theology* is in the process of being translated into Arabic.

51. Note that even JETS, which offers a Doctor of Ministry degree has to rely heavily on visiting professors to teach their graduate courses. Only two professors at JETS have doctoral degrees, and the situation is similar at most of the schools in the region.

train students from the Middle East in their seminaries so that they can go back to teach in the Middle Eastern countries.

It is by no means easy to work with the “soil” in the Middle East. Many seeds have fallen into a rocky ground, but in many places the seed cannot even be sowed. There are missionaries who have worked hard for decades with little to show. However, by God’s grace manifested through the light and power of the Gospel, the cross of Jesus Christ can again bring healing and light in a part of the world where darkness has spread through centuries of persecution and spiritual famine.

Can anything good come out of the Middle East? I say, “Come and see!” Even more importantly, “Come and work in the Middle East!” Or, at least, teach the Christians at your home to love their brothers and sisters in the Middle East. The Christians in the Middle East greatly need our assistance. We should all pray to witness in the twenty-first century God bringing down the “iron curtains” that prevent the spread of the gospel in the Middle East, just as we have seen in the twentieth century the destruction of the barriers in the communist nations. May the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ shine brightly in the Middle East this century!