

18 Arab Female Theologians and Christian Leaders You Should Know About

By Grace Al-Zoughbi Arteen and Graham Joseph Hill

Whether it's Bethlehem, the very humble birthplace of Jesus Christ, or Egypt, the land that Jesus was called out of, or modern-day Lebanon's Sidon and Tyre, where his feet trod, today the voices of Arab women in theology boldly speak about the faithfulness of the Lord.¹ Theology is perceived as "first hand" in the lands of the Bible.

My passion for theology arose in my heart as I grew up in the brown hilly town where the Lord Himself taught parables of wisdom and performed miracles of love. This led me to write about the first love of my life: Jesus. The calling I heard when I was a teenager still burns within me as I remain dedicated to a life of studying His word and teaching others.

Although it is not widely known, Arab women in theology have a very significant and important role and mission. In the midst of political, social, and economic changes in the Middle East, we are committed to fulfilling God's greatest calling for our lives.

In this article "18 Arab Female Theologians and Christian Leaders You Should Know About", we know you will be inspired to learn more about some outstanding and remarkable Christian women who write and serve within an Arab Middle Eastern context and perspective. We members of the 18 include authors, teachers, educators, theologians, counsellors, and preachers. Whether young or not-so-young, ordained or lay, we are keen to make a significant difference in our churches and societies. We pray and believe our voices will be heard through our spoken and written words. We stand united in our goal to be co-workers in the field of theology in Arab contexts and beyond.

Individually, we women are pioneers. In our own way, we each have contributed to the theological education of women in the Middle East. We are pioneers in opening doors for women to learn, teach, and write about theology.

Collectively, our written contributions are a rich, unique, and significant addition to the Arabic theological library. Through our influence, ministries, and efforts, and that of our churches, ministries, and seminaries, our hope is that, in the years ahead, there will be a great many more Middle Eastern women involved in the field of theology.

18 Arab Female Theologians and Christian Leaders You Should Know About

Here are the 18 Arab female theologians and Christian leaders that everyone should know about and read.

Ani Salbashian

Ani Salbashian was born in the Syrian city of Homs. She is a descendant of survivors of the Armenian genocide of 1915.² She grew up in a Christian home and was led to the Lord at the age of 10 by a missionary teacher at a boarding school in Lebanon. She was introduced to her husband, Dikran, by a mutual friend and was engaged to him on their second meeting—and married him at the end of six months. Ani

¹ Micah 5:2 and Hosea 11:1.

² Copied from Ani Salbashian's profile here: <https://paoc.org/events/general-conference-2018/guest-profiles>

Salbashian and Dikran Salbashian have built a thriving youth ministry in Amman, Jordan, and many of their disciples are now in vocational Christian ministry. As pastors of the local church in Amman, Ani Salbashian oversees ministry to the women and children in the church. She is a gifted evangelist. She comes alive when she leads someone to the Lord, sees them baptized in the Holy Spirit, and then disciples them in the ways of Christ.

Because of her love for her original country, Ani Salbashian was actively involved in selecting refugee candidates for relocation to Canada under the sponsorship program of the PAOC and its officers. Her prayers for her native country are being answered when many of the displaced Syrians come under the Lordship of Christ.

Ani Salbashian and her husband host a teaching program on Arab Christian television aimed toward young married couples. She holds a master's degree in theology from the University of Wales in Britain.

Anne Zaki

Anne Zaki was born in Cairo, Egypt, and at sixteen years of age was selected by the government to attend an international school in Canada dedicated to peace and international understanding. Since then she has been cultivating a global perspective on life and faith, having served churches and church-related institutions in the United States and Canada for thirteen years. In September 2011, nine months after the Arab Spring, Anne returned to Egypt with her family, where she currently teaches at the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo and continues to serve the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship in the area of global initiatives. Anne has spoken at gatherings like Missio Nexus, the Global Consultation on Music and Missions (GCoMM), and the Lausanne Movement's Younger Leaders Gathering (YLG).

Anne Zaki has worked tirelessly to integrate her faith and her passion for social justice into her ministry. She has also dedicated much of her time to teaching seminary students about preaching, worship, spiritual formation, psychology, and communication.

Anne Zaki has a bachelor's degree in psychology and sociology from Calvin College, a master's degree in social psychology from the American University in Cairo, and an MDiv from Calvin Theological Seminary. She is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in preaching from Fuller Theological Seminary.

Anne Zaki has published extensively. Some of her publications include: "Shall We Dance? Reflections on the Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture" in Krabill (ed.) *Worship and Mission for the Global Church: An Ethnodoxology Handbook*, William Carey Library, 2012; "Psalms for All Seasons Hymnbook" translated Arabic hymns, Faith Alive Publications, 2011; "A Response from a Middle Eastern Christian: Forum on the War in Iraq"- Contributor, Office of Social Justice and Hunger Action, Christian Reformed Church, April 2008; "Multicultural Worship . . . Why Bother?", APCE Advocate (Association for Presbyterian Church Educators), Winter 2008; "When Our World Looks Different: Experiencing the Global Church", Reformed Worship, Issue 83, Faith Alive, March 2007; "The Communion of Saints: Resources from the Worldwide Church", Reformed Worship, Issue 76, Faith Alive, June 2005.

Bassma Dabbour Jaballah

Bassma Dabbour is a Canadian-Tunisian Christian from a Muslim background. She holds a Doctor of Ministry on Leadership. She is the Missiologist and Director of Leadership Development of Voice of the Martyrs Canada. With her husband Rev. Riadh Jaballah, Bassma Dabbour has served the persecuted churches for over two decades. Her book *Online Discipling of North African Isolated Christians of Muslim Background* was published by Tyndale Seminary in 2017. She also wrote “A Feminine Reading of Christian Missions in the Middle Eastern Context: Response 1”, in *When Women Speak*, M. Dale et al., Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, 2018.

Chaden Hani

Chaden Hani is from Lebanon. She is a researcher in peace-building initiatives at the Institute of Middle East Studies (IMES) at the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary. Hani holds a Bachelor of Theology and is currently completing a master’s degree in religion. Originally from a Druze background, she co-pastors a Druze Church in Lebanon which she started with her husband.

Chaden Hani frequently contributes articles related to the socio-political situation in Lebanon to a Monthly Brief published on the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary website <https://abtslebanon.org/category/regional-brief/> and writes periodic theological, socio-political, and church-related blogs on <https://abtslebanon.org/author/chadenhani/>. She leads Peace Building Initiatives through the Institute of Middle East Studies (IMES) with the religious leaders in Lebanon known as the *Church-Mosque Network* and another initiative within the Evangelical Community known as *Forum for Current Affairs*. She is active with the global organization *When Women Speak* which is dedicated to empower women in ministry from all backgrounds following the example of several biblical women.

Grace Al-Zoughbi Arteen

Grace Al-Zoughbi Arteen is a Christian Palestinian born and raised in Bethlehem. She was the fifth top student nationally upon graduating from Saint Joseph’s in Palestine. She completed her undergraduate degree at Bethlehem Bible College in Bethlehem, and a Master of Arts in *The Theology of Transformation: Church, Scripture, and World* from the London School of Theology in 2010. Her thesis entitled *A Study of Six Influential Women: Evaluating their Personal Impact in Old Testament Times and in Palestine Today*, sought to explore the idea of the dignity of women and ways in which women can seek to defend and promote values that are associated with this idea, specifically within strong patriarchal contexts.

Grace Al-Zoughbi Arteen served as a Lecturer in Biblical Studies and Theology (2011–2018) and developed many contextual courses in the area of Biblical Studies. She also served as Head of the Biblical Studies department at Bethlehem Bible College from (2014–2018). Grace is currently working on her Ph.D. degree through the London School of Theology. Her research topic involves the *Theological Education of Women in the Middle East and North Africa*.

Grace Al-Zoughbi Arteen also serves as a member of the MENATE (Middle East and North Africa Association of Theological Education) accrediting committee. She has spoken at global conferences about the Palestinian Church and Christianity in the Middle East and the theological education of women in that region. She loves to write and has translated many English biblical and theological materials into Arabic. Grace recently published an article entitled: “Theological Education of Women in the Arab World: An Exploration of Cultural and Religious Assumptions Impacting their

Participation” in the ATA journal, JAET Vol. 23 No. 1 (March 2019): 57–69. She has written a chapter in the *Arabic Contemporary Christian Commentary: Al-Zoughbi, Grace, “Esther”* in Andrea Zaki (ed.) *The Arabic Contemporary Christian Commentary*, Cairo: Dar Elthaqafa, 2018.

Grace Al-Zoughbi Arteen is married to Rev. Michael Arteen and together they desire to serve God and share His love with everyone they meet.

Jean Zaru

Jean Zaru was born and lives in Ramallah, Palestine, outside of Jerusalem. She is a Quaker and serves on the board of the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center. She has also served as president of the Jerusalem YWCA and as vice president of the World YWCA. Her life has been devoted to dialogue and non-violent social change. Jean serves as a consultant and resource person for many faith-based organizations, including church-related development agencies. She has been the keynote speaker at numerous conferences around the world and her papers have been published in numerous books and journals.

In August 2008, a collection of Jean Zaru’s writings were published by Fortress Press under the title *Occupied with Nonviolence: A Palestinian Woman Speaks*. In addition, Jean Zaru has been writing Christmas and Easter messages that reached many Quakers and other churches around the world. She continues to address groups from colleges, universities, interfaith groups, and peace-seeking groups from the United States and Europe who are interested in the Middle East and in faith issues.

Jean Zaru struggles for human rights and women's rights. Her work is based on addressing structures of violence and domination and how they can be transformed through active non-violent resistance. She also lectures at the Swedish Theological Institute of Jerusalem. She has written a chapter in *Prophetic Voices on Middle East Peace* called “Peacemaking as a Journey of Transformation: Our Inner Strength and Public Engagement” (CT Press, 2016). Recently, a book was published about *Christian Theology in the Palestinian Context*, with a preface by Patriarch Michel Sabbah, and Jean Zaru’s writing is included in that book and has been published in Germany and internationally.

Madleine Sahwani Sara

Madleine Sara was born and raised in Jerusalem in a Christian Arab Palestinian family. She became a believer while attending the Baptist church in Jerusalem. After marrying Pastor Jack Sara, she teamed up with him in ministry. They focused their ministry and pastoral work at the Jerusalem Alliance Church in the old city of Jerusalem.

Madleine Sara completed an education degree with a double major in education and special education and with a focus on helping people with learning disabilities. She went on to complete a Master of Arts degree at Liberty University with a focus on Christian Counseling and Human Relationships. Later, she earned a doctorate at the Portland Seminary of George Fox University in the area of Spiritual and Leadership Formation. Her thesis focused on the role of women in the Palestinian local church, and is called *Towards Women Leaders in the Palestinian Evangelical Church* (2018).³

³ Sara, Madleine, "Towards Women Leaders in the Palestinian Evangelical Church" (2018). Doctor of Ministry. 249. <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin/249>

Madleine Sara is a lecturer at Bethlehem Bible College, Bethlehem, and a mentor to many emerging Arab women leaders and theologians.

Madleine Sara continues to serve in pastoral ministry in the Alliance Church in Jerusalem, where she preaches and teaches and is part of the pastoral team. She has also established a women's empowerment ministry called *A Pot in His Hand* that enables young Christian women to become leaders, both in church and in society. Madleine Sara has published a book in Arabic on raising children, and edits a women's magazine called *A Pot in His Hands*, and hosts a TV talk-show aimed at encouraging women and empowering them both spiritually and emotionally. Madeline Sara has been a teacher and counselor at Bethlehem Bible College for 16 years. She is also a teacher and trainer for leading women in Palestine and the Middle East, and is part of a leadership committee that works to train and empower leading women in the Middle East and North Africa.

Mary Mikhael

Mary Mikhael was born in 1943 in Syria. She moved to Lebanon in her early teens to pursue an education in Christian Theology. After graduating from the School of Evangelical Theology she began working in a school for the blind. While there, she applied to the Near East School of Theology (N.E.S.T.), for the BA degree in theology, but was rejected! When she asked the reason, she was advised that she was rejected because she was A WOMAN and that she would never be able to get a job with such a degree. She was advised to change her application to a degree in Christian Education and then she would be allowed to take all the theology courses she wanted to—which she did.

The degrees she has earned include: a Bachelor of Arts in in Education at the Haigazian College, Beirut; a Bachelor of Arts in Christian Education at The Near East School of Theology, Beirut; a Master of Arts in Christian Education at the Presbyterian School of Christian Education, Richmond, VA; a Doctor of Education from the Union Theological Seminary and Columbia University, New York; and a Diplome, De Doctoral Honoris Causa, from the Faculte Libre De Theologie Protestante De Paris.

Mary Mikhael worked in the seminary N.E.S.T. as a Professor of Christian Education 1984–1991, Academic Dean 1992–94, and President 1994–2011. She was the first woman in the entire Middle East to head a theological seminary as president. It is ironic that it was the very same seminary that had rejected her application to study theology many years before. Mary Mikhael went on to serve as president of N.E.S.T. for 17 years until her retirement in 2011. She has lectured at the American University of Beirut and Haigazian College in Beirut, and has spoken at universities and churches all over the world.

Mary Mikhael has published extensively. Some of her publications include: “Women in Middle Eastern Societies and Churches” (The Ecumenical Review, 64:1, March 2012); “The Syrian War and the Christians of the Middle East” (International Bulletin of Missionary Research, 39:2, April 2015); “St. Paul and the Place of Women in that Church” (Theological Review, 2002); *Joshua: A Journey of Faith* (Presbyterian Women, 2010); *She Shall be Called Woman*, co-authored with Anneke Kaai (Piquant, 2009); “The Christian Woman”, which is Chapter Five of *Arabic Christian Theology: A Contemporary Global Evangelical Perspective*, ed. A. Z. Stephanous, 2019); Four articles in the *Arabic Contemporary Interpretation of the Bible* including “The Role

of Women in the Church” and “The View of the Church Regarding Women Covering the Head.”

During her time at N.E.S.T., Mary Mikhael she wrote numerous articles related to women in the church, Christian education, and theology. During her time at the seminary, she served on the Executive Committee of Women's World Day of Prayer, the Fellowship of the Least Coin, and on many church boards. She has also directed the Women's Program for the Middle East Council of Churches for nine years. After retirement she was appointed by the Presbyterian Synod of Syria and Lebanon to become Communicator with Church Partners around the world regarding the ongoing tragedy in Syria. In 2016, this led to the establishment of an educational ministry for Syrian refugee children from the camps in Lebanon. She currently oversees refugee schooling for 740 children in 6 different locations throughout Lebanon.

Mimi Haddad

Arab female theologians are having an impact both in the Middle East and also in the diaspora. Mimi Haddad is one such example. She is an Arab-American theologian who was raised by parents who were born and raised in Paris and Lebanon. She juggles three different cultures. Her father's family is part of one of the oldest Christian churches in the Middle East, the Maronite Church. Mimi Haddad says that her mother was an extremely devout Christian who cared for refugees in Lebanon.

Mimi Haddad is the president of Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE) International.⁴ She is a graduate of the University of Colorado and Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary (*Summa Cum Laude*). She holds a Ph.D. in historical theology from the University of Durham, England. Palmer Theological Seminary of Eastern University awarded her an Honorary Doctor of Divinity in 2013.

Mimi Haddad has lent her leadership skills to many key groups. She was a convener of the *Issue Group 24* for the 2004 Lausanne III Committee for World Evangelization. She is a founding member and leader of the *Evangelicals and Gender Study Group* at the Evangelical Theological Society. And, she currently serves as part of the leadership team for Evangelicals for Justice.

Haddad is an award-winning author and has written more than one hundred academic and popular articles and blogs. She is author of *Is Gender Equality a Biblical Ideal?* with Sean Callaghan. She has contributed to twelve books, most recently: “Examples of Women's Leadership in the Old Testament and Church History” in *Women in Pentecostal and Charismatic Ministry*, part of the Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies Series 21 (Brill NV, 2016) and “The Invisible Power of Culture to Oppress: What Every Christian Needs to Know about Gender and Justice” in *The Campbellsville Review* 8 (2015–2017). She is an editor and a contributing author of *Global Voices on Biblical Equality: Women and Men Serving Together in the Church*. Haddad has contributed to *Coming Together in the 21st Century: The Bible's Message in an Age of Diversity*, edited by Curtiss Paul DeYoung.

Haddad has published with the *Ashland Theological Journal*; *Christian Ethics Today*; and the CBE's journals, *Mutuality* and *Priscilla Papers*; the *Evangelical Fellowship of India*, and the *Evangelical Fellowship of India Commission on Relief*; *Her.meneutics*;

⁴ Dr. Mimi Haddad's profile is duplicated from her profile at CBE International: <https://www.cbeinternational.org/content/dr-mimi-haddad>

Sojourners; and the *William Carey Development Journal*. Her most recent article, "A Life of Silence Breaking: Katharine Bushnell, MD" was published in *Catalyst*.

Haddad is an adjunct assistant professor of historical theology at Fuller Theological Seminary and Zinzendorf School of Doctoral Studies. Mimi has taught for colleges and seminaries around the world. She currently serves as a gender consultant for World Vision International, World Relief, and Beyond Borders. She has appeared on pod-casts with Daniel Fick; Fuller Theological Seminary's president, Mark Labberton; G.L.O.B.A.L. Justice; and Red Letter Christians. Mimi and her husband, Dale, live in Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota.

Najla Kassab

Najla Kassab is President of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) and Director of the Christian Education Department at the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon (NESSL). She obtained her Bachelor of Arts degree in Christian Education from the Near East School of Theology (N.E.S.T.) in 1987 and her Master of Divinity from Princeton Theological Seminary in 1990.

Najla Kassab's career has revolved around Christian education at the synod level and, through conferences and workshops, she has encouraged women in ministry for 24 years. The National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon offered Kassab a preaching license in 1993 and, in March 2017, awarded her full pastoral ordination. Najla Kassab has served as a member of the WCRC Executive Committee since 2007. She also hosted the 2015 Executive Committee meeting in Lebanon. For the past two-and-a-half decades, Najla Kassab has worked with NESSL as Director of Christian Education, focusing on empowering women. She was elected to the WCRC Executive Committee at the 2010 Uniting General Council and is involved in ecumenical work with the WCC, MECC, and FMEEC.

Najla Kassab was elected president of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) at its 2017 General Council in Leipzig, Germany. In a public address to the World Communion of Reformed Churches she said: "Here I stand, a Middle Eastern woman in the pulpit of Luther; if just Luther imagined that, this could have been his 96th question to the church—not why there is a women in this pulpit, but why did take this long?"⁵ She lives with her husband, Rev. Joseph Kassab and their three children in Beirut, but her work frequently takes her to Syria.

Niveen Sarras

Niveen Sarras is pastor at Immanuel Lutheran Church of Wausau. She earned her Ph.D. in Hebrew Bible from Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago and a Master of Divinity from Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary. Her Ph.D. thesis was on *Amos 2:6a: A Map of An Ancient Israelite Legal System, Or a Hyperbolic Indictment of Social Injustice* (The Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 2013).

Niveen Sarras was born and raised in Bethlehem, Palestine. She publishes articles relating to violence in the Hebrew Bible, including "Daughter Zion Identifies with Syrian and Iraqi Women: A Reading in the Book of Lamentations," *Word and World*, Jan. 2017.

In July 2018, Niveen Sarras presented an article entitled "Refuting the Violent Image of God in Joshua 6–11," at the Otto A. Shults Community Center, Nazareth College,

⁵ <http://wcrc.ch/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/GC2017-WittenbergSermon-EN.pdf>

Rochester, New York. Sarras taught a class called *An Introduction to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* at the continuing education program in Marathon County with the University of Wisconsin. Currently, she is teaching a course called *An Introduction to Feminist Theology* through the UW-Extension and at the Lay School of the ELCA East-Central Synod of Wisconsin. Niveen Sarras has written commentaries for Luther Seminary on a range of biblical passages and themes. She is the author of “The Prophet Amos and Palestinian Women” (*Journal of Lutheran Ethics*, 13:5, September 2013) and “A Palestinian Feminist Reading of the Book of Jonah” (*Journal of Lutheran Ethics*, 15:8, September 2015).

Rima Nasrallah

Rima Nasrallah is Assistant Professor of Practical Theology at the Near East School of Theology in Beirut. She holds a Ph.D. in Practical Theology from the Protestant Theological University in Amsterdam, a Research Masters from the Vrij Universiteit in Amsterdam, a Masters in Living Reformed Theology from the Vrij Universiteit Amsterdam, and an MDiv from the Near East School of Theology in Beirut. Her specialty is Liturgical-Ritual Studies with a focus on lived religion. In addition, Rima Nasrallah’s research is concerned with Women and Gender Issues, Disability, Eastern Christianity, and Christianity in Later Modernity.

Rima Nasrallah is an ordained pastor in the National Evangelical Church of Beirut, Lebanon. She lives with her husband and two children in Beirut. She has published extensively. Some of her publications include: *The Broken Body and Broken Bodies: A Liturgical Theological Reflection on Aabled and Disabled Bodies* (forthcoming); *Worship and Spirituality in The Middle East*, in *Edinburgh Companions to Global Christianity*, Vol. 2 (forthcoming); “Mission – Religion – Values . . . In a Fragmented World Mission as Connection,” in R. Edwards-Raudonat et al. (eds.) *Mission in Solidarity – Life in Abundance for All*; “Beiträge zur Missionswissenschaft,” *Interkulturellen Theologie* herausgegeben von Dieter Becker und Henning Wrogemann Band (41, LIT, 2017, 21–32); “Rearranging Things: How Protestant Attitudes Shake the Objects in the Piety of Eastern Christian Women,” in the *Journal for Material Religion: The Journal of Objects, Art and Belief* (22:1, 2016, 74–95); “Kinesthetic Piety: Eastern Christian Women’s Varying Practices in Protestant Homes,” in *Quéstions Liturgiques* (96, 2015, 149–172).

Rola Adel Sleiman

Rola Sleiman is a Lebanese-Syrian female pastor and the first woman to be appointed to Christian ministry in the Arab world. She was the first woman to be ordained in a Middle Eastern Church on February 26, 2017 in Tripoli, Lebanon.

“Sleiman was born in Tripoli, Lebanon, to a Syrian father and Lebanese mother. She grew up in the Evangelist Presbyterian Church of Tripoli and later studied theology at the Near East School of Theology from 1993 to 1997 through the sponsorship of the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon. She began to officiate at services in Tripoli when the regular pastor was away during 2006 and replaced him permanently in 2009. The Synod eventually voted by a majority of 23 to 1 to ordain her in 2017 as his replacement so that the church could host baptisms and other services that could only be presided over by an ordained minister. Looking back on

that process, she admits that she needed “a lot of silence, patience, and effort” to wait as God unfolded His plan in her life.”⁶

Ruba Rihani Abbassi

Ruba Rihani holds a bachelor’s degree in journalism and media from Yarmouk University, Jordan. In 2007, she earned her master’s degree in women’s studies from the University of Jordan. Her vision is to see the Arab woman self-sufficient and empowered socially, intellectually, and economically, and to motivate her to pursue a better life in order to live in dignity and prosperity, not in humiliation and poverty. In 1999, she founded Arab Woman Today Center (AWT), and continues to run it today. Ruba Rihani began her work with a radio program entitled “The Woman Today” which was broadcast on Trans World Radio (TWR). In 2013, she launched the television program “Start from Here” which is currently being broadcast all over the world on Sat-7.

Ruba Rihani is the author of the book *The Arab Woman-Embracing Her Potential* (Ruba Rihani, 2018). This book is a practical theology and resource for churches and other groups in the Arab world. As a Christian Arab Evangelical leader, Ruba Rihani examines women’s roles in the Arab world, the structures of patriarchy they face, as well as their resilience in settings of violence and oppression. The book challenges churches in the Arab world to wrestle with the theological, cultural, and ecclesial structures that affect women, and to seek ways to honor women and value them equally alongside men.

In spring of 2019, Ruba Rihani completed the “WE LEAD” Program from George W. Bush Institute in Dallas, Texas. Because of her training on women economic empowerment, she developed a new training program at AWT to help improving women’s economic status in Jordan. Ruba Rihani is a personal and community development trainer who has worked hard to empower Jordanian and Christian women in Jordan and the Arab world through workshops and annual conferences, where women are trained to acquire leadership skills as well as various other skills on how to manage their psychological, social, and spiritual lives. Ruba Rihani currently lives in Jordan and is married to Dr. Nabeeh Abbassi. She has three grownup children: Ramzi, Rami and Randy.

Rula Khoury Mansour

Rula Khoury Mansour is a Palestinian Protestant theologian from Nazareth and a citizen of the State of Israel. She is also a lawyer who holds a bachelor’s degree in Law from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. She worked as a public prosecutor for 13 years and was the deputy head of the public prosecution office in Nazareth, becoming the first Palestinian to hold such a post in Israel.

⁶ Profile adapted from her biography at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rola_Sleiman#targetText=Rola%20Adel%20Sleiman%2C%20B.Th,Syri%20father%20and%20Lebanese%20mother. Further online articles about Rola Sleiman are here: <http://wcr.ch/justice/ordination-of-women/profile-rola-sleiman>, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/03/rola-sleiman-arab-female-pastor-170330073956533.html>, <https://stateofmind13.com/2017/03/04/lebanon-has-the-arab-worlds-first-ever-ordained-female-priest-rola-sleiman-in-tripoli-is-pioneering/>; <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/story/first-arab-woman-ordained-presbyterian-minister-word-sacrament/>, <https://www.christianpost.com/trends/arab-worlds-first-female-pastor-rola-sleiman-breaks-bread-and-tradition.html>, and https://www.huffpost.com/entry/arab-worlds-first-ordained-female-pastor-is-historic_b_58b732b1e4b0563cd36f643e

Rula Mansour holds a Master of Arts in Conflict Resolution and Mediation from Tel Aviv University (graduated with *Cum Laude*). In 2018, she received her Ph.D. from the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies / Middlesex University. The topic of her Ph.D. dissertation is *Conflict Management Approaches in Palestinian Baptist Intra-Church Conflict in Israel Between 1990 and 2016, in Dialogue with Miroslav Volf's Theology of Reconciliation: An Analysis and Critical Evaluation*. (Ph.D. thesis, Middlesex University / Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, 2018). Her dissertation will be published by Langham Publications in 2020. Rula Mansour was awarded a Langham scholarship for her Ph.D. studies, becoming the first female Langham graduate from the Middle East and North Africa.

Rula Mansour's areas of interest include the theology of reconciliation within a Middle Eastern context, anthropology, conflict resolution, and church conflict. She wrote a chapter titled "The Church in the Face of Injustice: Two Case Studies" in *Why the Church? A Contemporary Perspective on the Role of the Church in the Arab World* (2019). She is also a speaker locally and internationally (USA, Hong Kong, UK, and Jordan). She currently serves as the Director of Peace Studies at Nazareth Evangelical College. She is married to Bader Mansour and they have three teenage boys: Adi, Rami, and Sami.

Shadia Qubti

Shadia Qubti was born and raised in Nazareth. She is a Christian Palestinian Israeli involved in various initiatives that encourage and inspire Palestinian women and youth to advocate for peace. She was raised in the Baptist church in Nazareth. Her faith had an important role in shaping her identity, particularly being a "minority of a minority" as a Palestinian Christian and citizen of Israel. She studied International Relations and English Language at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem (2007), and Conflict Resolution and Nonviolent Action at Trinity College University in Dublin (2009). From 2009–2016, Shadia Qubti has served as Projects Manager in Musalaha—an organization that promotes reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians. Currently, she works as a manager in external engagement, governance, and faith and development for World Vision.

Some of Shadia Qubti's articles include: "Shadia Qubti: Creating Grassroots Platforms for Collaborative Peacemaking." *Evangelicals for Social Action* (3 April 2018). Available at <https://www.evangelicalsforsocialaction.org/compassion-and-justice/shadia-qubti-creating-grassroots-platforms-collaborative-peacemaking/>; "Is Anger a Christian Virtue? Use Your Anger." *BMS World Mission, Engage*, Autumn 2016. Available at https://issuu.com/bmsworldmission/docs/engage_autumn_2016-web; "What is Peace (Salam) from a Biblical Perspective?" *Bethlehem Bible College* (21 September 2016). Available at <https://bethbc.edu/blog/2016/09/21/what-is-peace-salam-from-a-biblical-perspective/>

Smyrna Khalaf Moughabghab

Smyrna Khalaf Moughabghab is a Lebanese counselor, educator, and supervisor. She has been lecturing at the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary in the suburbs of Beirut, Lebanon, since 2011. Khalaf Moughabghab holds several degrees, including a B.S. in Liberal Arts from Excelsior College, an M.A. in Marriage and Family Counseling from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and a Ph.D. in Counselor Education and Supervision from Regent University in 2019. Since 2005 she has had her own practice, ministering among the churches in Lebanon, and involved in trauma

work in the Middle East (training and supervising professionals). She also has a parenting TV segment on Sat-7.

Viola Raheb

Viola Raheb was born in Bethlehem, Palestine. She gained her master's degree in Education and Evangelical Theology from the Ruprecht-Karl-University in Heidelberg/ Germany and her Ph.D. in Advanced Theological Studies from the University of Vienna.

From 1998 until 2002, Viola Raheb headed the educational work of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and Palestine. She is a researcher at the University of Vienna on the Faculty of Protestant Theology in the Department of the Studies of Religions. She is a member of numerous organizations and committees on ecumenism and interreligious dialogue.

Viola Raheb has authored various articles and book chapters focusing on reading the Bible through the eyes of Christian Palestinian women. Some of her publications include: "In Conflict with the Old Testament about the Land," in Khoury, Rafiq/Zimmer-Winkel, Rainer (eds.) *Christian Theology in the Palestinian Context* (Berlin, 2019); "Reading Micah 5 in Modern Bethlehem," in *Micah (Wisdom Commentary)* O'Brien, J. (Minnesota, 2016); "Women in Contemporary Palestinian Society: A Contextual Reading of the Book of Ruth," in Silvia Schroer/Sophia Bietenhard (ed.), *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible and the Hermeneutics of Liberation* (Sheffield Academic Press, New York, 2003).

God Will Ignite Our Imagination, Through These Women, to Dream for the Present and Future of the Church and the World

These are only a few of the Arab women who are involved in theological education and the ministry of the church. There are many others who prefer to remain "invisible" and not profiled. For that, they are worthy of our great respect.

As for the women we have profiled in this article, I urge you to get to know them and their writings. Listen to their challenges but also read their stories of hope, and their dreams for the present and the future. Invite them to speak in your churches and at your conferences. Their lives and works will inspire you.

My prayer is that God will raise more women in every country in the Middle East, who are hungry to know Him more, and who are called to do greater works for Him in their societies and cultures.

Theological Education started with women in this part of the world. In their book, *Christian Women in the Patristic World*, Lynn Cohick and Amy Brown Hughes highlight the influence, authority, and legacy of women in the second until the fifth century. As they discuss often ignored protomartyrs, theologians, teachers, ascetics, and politicians of the Early Church, they remind us that the first church started in this Holy Land. They demonstrate the potential of these women to ignite our imagination to dream for the present and the future of Christian theology and literature. The roles and status of women in the early Christian world—including Perpetua, Helena, Monica, Paula, and Eudocia—can be the models for many women in the Arab world who are involved in ministry, leadership, theology, socio-political work, and theological education in the twenty-first century.

Further Reading and Resources

This blog post is part of a series on female theologians. See also:

“23 Latin American Women and USA Latinas in Theology and Religion You Should Know About.” By Juliany González Nieves

“18 Asian Female Theologians You Should Know About (Plus Others For You To Explore).” By Jessie Giyou Kim and Graham Joseph Hill

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Graham Joseph Hill is Director of Research at Stirling Theological College (University of Divinity) in Melbourne, Australia. He has planted and pastored churches, and been in theological education for twenty years. Graham is also Writer-Theologian in Residence at Thornleigh Community Baptist Church, which is a healthy, missional, and Christ-centered church in the northern suburbs of Sydney. Graham is the author or editor of 6 books (with 5 more coming in 2019/2020) including *Global Church* (IVP, 2016), *Healing Our Broken Humanity*, (IVP, 2018, with Grace Ji-Sun Kim), and *Salt, Light and a City* (Cascade, 2017). He also directs TheGlobalChurchProject.com

Cover Image: A picture of the Samaritan woman by the well. This is from a Greek Orthodox church in Nablus, Palestine, where it is thought that the biblical story originally took place. I (Grace Al-Zoughbi Arteen) think it is significant for the article especially because I see Jesus as a teacher communicating theological truths to the Samaritan woman, in our land! And SHE was a receptive student who told all Samaria about her theological encounter with the Lord-and subsequently they believed!