



CROSSING OVER LINES THAT DIVIDE CHRISTIANS

SAT-7 ARABIC is producing a ground-breaking new talk show that demonstrates the unity Christian believers can find within diversity.

By bringing leaders from different denominations together to discuss the common ground they share, *Cross Over* will encourage viewers to accept and love one another despite their differences.

In each 55-minute episode, a Protestant pastor and a church leader from a Catholic or Orthodox background come together in dialogue. Guided by Presenter Said Melki, the speakers explore the points of agreement between their traditions, including those found within wider topics on which they differ. In one episode of the 13-part series, the conversation will include a leader from the majority religion.

FINDING COMMON GROUND

Melki hopes that the show will help break down barriers between members of different denominations, some of whom may feel that their communities do not share a common background at all. “At this critical time for the Chris-

tians of the Middle East, we must open a line of communication between churches through dialogue and cooperation,” he said.

Instead of taking place in a studio, *Cross Over’s* episodes will be recorded in churches and monasteries. The subjects planned for discussion include prayer, the sacraments, mission work, and worship music. The show will also tackle wider topics, such as family, education, and the arts, as they relate to the Church.

ENGAGING VIEWERS

The show is aimed at viewers of all ages and backgrounds, including those who are not religious. Alongside the discussion, the episodes will feature short clips in which members of the public share their thoughts. Viewers will be invited to take part by responding on social media to a different discussion question each week. These will be provided a week in advance, giving viewers time to share

their thoughts and comments so that they can form part of the next conversation.

As 2017 marks the 500-year anniversary of the beginning of the Protestant Reformation, *Cross Over* is being produced at a very timely moment. The program was partly inspired by the joint declaration signed by the heads of the Catholic and Lutheran Churches in Sweden in 2016. This landmark agreement stated that there is more that unites the two traditions than to divide them.

The team hope that by helping Christians to look beyond what separates them, the show will not only improve relationships between denominations but also encourage viewers to develop tolerant, accepting attitudes towards others in general. In these ways, *Cross Over* will contribute to SAT-7’s goal of helping build strong, peaceful societies in the Middle East. ■

APOLOGETICS PROGRAM COUNTERS PREJUDICE

An impactful discussion program now airing on SAT-7 ARABIC challenges common misconceptions about Christianity in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). By giving viewers a true picture of the faith and promoting acceptance and unity, *The Accuser* aims to help halt the spread of extremism and anti-Christian attacks.

As many non-Christians in the MENA lack knowledge about Christianity, they are often vulnerable to believing rumours that encourage prejudice. *The Accuser* counters misunderstandings by providing a thorough explanation of the basics of the Christian faith, including the Holy Trinity, the Bible, and the nature of Jesus Christ.

MODELLING RESPECT

Each 30-minute episode features Christian and non-Christian guests who are well-known public figures or experts in their fields, including church leaders, activists, academics, and government officials. Alongside the discussion, *The Accuser* includes songs that reflect the episode's theme and short interviews in which members of the public share their thoughts. The set reflects a traditional Eastern atmosphere in which people from different faiths can listen to each other and find common ground.

As with all SAT-7 programs, the show never attacks other religions and treats all viewers with respect and tolerance. Ramzy Bishara, the show's Producer, explains:

"Viewers have the right to ask ques-

tions, and we have the right to provide correct explanations without attacking others' beliefs. By inviting non-Christian guests to speak on their own areas of expertise, we are providing answers in a language that non-Christian viewers will understand."

COUNTERING PREJUDICE

In Arabic, the program's name is "El Mikafaraty", which literally means "one who calls others 'unbelievers'". The 20-episode series warns of the dangers of making accusations against members of other faiths and encourages viewers to accept others as they are.

"A large proportion of the MENA is illiterate, and this makes the region fertile ground for the spread of prejudice. In *The Accuser*, we provide advice on dealing with people who promote hatred and religious discrimination against Christians and other religious minorities," Bishara says.

While many non-Christians in the MENA have the same questions asked by inquisitive seekers around the world, some common misconceptions are based on harmful rumours. These include the ideas that Christians hide

weapons in churches or commit indecent acts during meetings.

The Accuser corrects misunderstandings such as the belief that the verse "God is love" (1 John 4:8) means that God approves of adultery, or that Christians are not loyal to their countries because of the words "we are foreigners and strangers", which appear in 1 Chronicles 29:15. The show explains the true meaning of these verses and highlights the positive contributions that many MENA Christians have made to their own nations.

"WE COULD MAKE EACH OTHER STRONGER"

The show also encourages unity within Christian denominations by highlighting what brings them together. Explaining this ethos, Bishara says, "We could make the variety found among Christian denominations a blessing, instead of a curse. We could complete each other and make each other stronger."

To enable the show's positive messages of unity and peaceful coexistence to reach a wider audience, the team plans to offer *The Accuser* to a national Egyptian television channel for free. ■

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