

The Link

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THE FINAL STEP

Every student starting her/his studies dreams of graduation – the day will come in a year or two, or at most a few years.

On 28th May, a bright, sunny afternoon, thirteen students from the International Baptist Theological Seminary (IBTS) received their graduation certificates. One student received a Certificate in English Language,



Graduating students, teachers, relatives and friends

eight students successfully graduated from the Certificate in Applied Theology course, two students with a Magister of Theology, one student with a Master of Theology, and one student graduated with the Doctor of Philosophy degree. Other students were

validated during the graduation ceremony.

The certificates were awarded by Dr David R. Goodbourn (President, Partnership for Theological Education, Manchester, UK) who came specially for the event and he also gave the graduation address to the whole IBTS community. The Rector of the Seminary, the Revd Dr Keith G. Jones and the ProRector, the Revd Docent Dr Parush R. Parushev addressed the students who graduated and several senior members of the academic staff participated.

Friends and relatives of the graduating students were also present to share in the joy and happiness of this grand occasion. A festive buffet was prepared for everyone, where the celebration continued over savoury dishes and sweet desserts.



CAT students 2009-10

CROSSING THE BORDERS

SICRIE Belfast meeting 7-9 May 2010

As part of the Social Integration on the Cultural and Religious Interfaces in Europe (SICRIE) Grundtvig project, a group from the Czech SICRIE team from IBTS attended a meeting/workshop in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Teams from other partner countries, Bulgaria, Lithuania and, of course, from the host nation Northern Ireland, were all present. The event was led by the leader of the Belfast group, David McMillan. The participants discussed their experiences of reaching out to disadvantaged minorities and of helping them to integrate into the wider society.



Visitors on Belfast tour

The Lithuanian team shared their experiences with old people and other marginalised people in the Lithuanian countryside. By documenting their life stories through photography and interviews, the team tried to show the human dignity of the ostracised individuals and families, thus sensitising the wider society to their plight.

The Bulgarian team related their experience in working with the Roma community of their country. The Roma live in segregated ghetto-like conditions and face discrimination in education, social opportunities and political rights. Because of the anti-Roma prejudice in Bulgarian society the members of this marginalised community are considered to be unfit for



Workshop session

proper education and unsuitable for employment. This creates a vicious circle and makes Roma youth vulnerable to alcohol and drug abuse, and paves a way to the criminal world. SICRIE team members have helped individuals from the Roma community to obtain proper education and spread the message of hope among the youth. They are also working on making the wider society aware of the erroneous nature of anti-Roma prejudice.

The Prague team leader Dr Parush Parushev introduced the three SICRIE projects in the Czech Republic: integration of Burmese refugees into Czech society; work with the Teen Challenge programme helping the marginalised, mostly Roma children, to gain social skills and self-confidence; work with homeless people providing them with basic necessities and spiritual support. Peter Zvagulis shared how the Burmese Baptist refugees appreciate the SICRIE spiritual support in what would otherwise be for them an unfamiliar European environment. Vladimir Parushev, a professional theatre director, told the participants about a special educational project he is designing to stimulate a sense of self-worth for the children and to open them up to learning. Parush Parushev related how SICRIE reflects on the work of IBTS students with the homeless of Prague. Raising public awareness of the problems of marginalised people was among the goals of all three projects.



Group members at the Giant's Causeway

While every presentation was thought-provoking, everybody could learn many valuable lessons from the Belfast group's peacemaking experiences. People's memories of prejudice-motivated violence, the 'peaceline', discussions with Protestant and Catholic participants, all presented as inter-active learning. The Mayor of Belfast addressed the SICRIE participants quoting Psalm 116: 'How can I repay the Lord for all his goodness to me?' It seemed to correspond well with the spirit of SICRIE which is reaching out to those ostracised by prejudice.

The next meeting will be in October in Bulgaria.

Peter Zvagulis

CONFERENCES AT IBTS

At IBTS part of our mission has always been to facilitate the holding of conferences – to bring European Baptists and the wider ecumenical community together.

This past academic year has been no exception. In November we were privileged to have Professor Paul S. Fiddes of the University of Oxford with us for the Nordenhaug Lectures. Paul is a great supporter of IBTS. In the early 1990s Paul was at the heart of setting the direction of IBTS which we have been committed to for the past twenty years. He both stimulated and excited all those who gathered with his erudite lectures which will be published in due course.



Student Week with a special contribution by the Northumbria Community

Then in March we revived an old Rüschlikon custom – student week. Working within the framework of the Consortium of European Baptist Theological Schools, we gathered theological students from throughout Europe for a week together 22-26 March. As well as IBTS students, we had visiting students from the Baptist Theological Seminary of the Netherlands, Tartu Higher Theological Seminary, Estonia, The Northern Baptist Learning Community in Manchester, UK, and South Wales Baptist College, Cardiff, Wales. The week included special contributions by the Northumbria Community. A team of five community members led by the Revd Roy Searle participated by facilitating daily prayers, midday office and compline each day and led

workshops on the Celtic Church and Contemporary Monasticism.

Another event taking place at IBTS from 17 – 20 May was the gathering of The Network of European Baptist Women in Ministry (NEBWIM) with the theme Worship in the Seasons of Life. This was the third NEBWIM gathering and included women from Latvia, Lithuania, Wales, Scotland, Sweden, Russia, Hungary, Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Germany, England, Ukraine and Kazakhstan.

IBTS was stretched to the limit as over 75 people gathered for The European Christian Environmental Network (ECEN) Assembly in June. ECEN is a church network promoting co-operation in caring for creation. The aim of ECEN is to share information and experiences in environmental work among widely varied Christian traditions and to encourage a united witness in caring for God’s creation. The theme was Our Daily Bread: Living in a Time of Climate Change. Participants joined in working groups on Theology, Climate Change, Eco-Management, Food and Transition Living. IBTS is strongly associated with the ECEN family.

Finally, we hosted the EBF Missions Conference 16 – 20 June which brought together the mission enablers of our Baptist Unions.



The European Christian Environmental Network Conference

PART-TIME PhD STUDENTS SPEAK OUT

Every January, airplanes, cars, and trains whisk dozens of part-time PhD students from their homes around the globe to the bitterly cold yet welcoming environment of IBTS. Although these students usually remain in Prague only for a two-week research colloquium, many consider this sojourn to be one of the highlights of the year. What makes study at IBTS such an invigorating event for part-timers? Allow a few students to describe in their own words the variety of experiences they enjoy during their time at IBTS:

I appreciate the fact that fellow researchers are also pastors, leaders, missionaries, editors. We are all grounded in the work of life, not only the work of our research.

Andrew Dyck, Canada



PhD Colloquium

For Belarusian Baptists, it's good to drink from one cup when we have communion.

Leonid Mikhovich, Belarus

I like climbing up the hill to visit the goats and then turning around to look at the view. It's quiet, but deep in the background you can hear the hum of the city.

Mary Raber, Ukraine

I appreciate the way world-class scholars dedicate their time to discuss my questions, pointing the way to clearer thinking and argument.

George Bristow, Turkey

I like being challenged to use the public transport system.

Patti Duckworth, USA

I enjoy the opportunity for exercise—especially when you're living at the top of F building!

David McMillan, Northern Ireland

I appreciate the fellowship and networking with people from so many baptistic communities around the world.

Meege Remmel, Estonia

I love the sense of community I feel when I walk into the chapel each morning.

Melody Maxwell, USA

What else is meaningful about studying at IBTS? Travel to Prague next year and find out for yourself!

ONCE YOU HAVE BEEN THERE...

I still remember my first day at IBTS. I arrived at the reception, while a couple of hours before I was still in Italy. Jolana, the receptionist, welcomed me with a big smile. I needed to wait, she told me, before some people, whom I did not yet know, would come and take me to G building, the place where I would spend the next nine months of my life. This is a weird name for a building, I thought, I didn't know yet that that name would come to mean a lot to me during the year. Tima and Yulia, our course leaders, and Jenya, the student president at that time, came to greet me and to take me to my room. I only spent a few minutes with them but I was sure that I would love them. G building was still empty, the other stu-



CAT students 2009-10

dents were in the city or in some other place, but it was not long before I met them; Yanita and Gery from Bulgaria, Irina from Kazakhstan, Igor from Russia. Other students would arrive later, but in the beginning we were just this small group. That was it! The adventure was about to begin.

Here I am now, nine months later, the Certificate in Applied Theology (CAT) successfully completed. But in nine months, living as a residential student in IBTS, I gained much more than that. G building became more than just the place where I lived. It became the place where new deep friendships have begun, friendships which will last for the rest of my life. It's been a place where we shared our laughing, our crying, where we just gathered together to play some games, to talk about everything, where we spent time in prayer, but, most of all, where our faith has been challenged through life in community. The people, whom I did not know at the beginning, Tima and Yulia, Jenya, and my colleagues in the CAT programme, have become some of my best friends. I have also become a different person, through the chapel morning prayers, through the lectures that I attended, through discussion with my new friends. All of these have contributed in my spiritual growing and formation. IBTS is all of this, a place where we can study and equip ourselves for whatever we will be called to do, to serve God; a place where we make new friends and where we grow spiritually. But most of all, once you have been there, IBTS is a place which will never be forgotten.

Daniele Podesta (Italy), CAT student 2009-10

A VIRTUAL COMMUNITY

What is the essence of a virtual community? The heart of IBTS is in Prague, with its resident faculty, students and staff, yet a vast extended network of affiliated members are flung around the globe, connected by annual gatherings and the web. How can a robust and genuine virtual community exist?

This is not an issue solely for IBTS. The church I pastor in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Underwood Memorial Baptist Church, podcasts its services and sermons each week (<http://underwood.libsyn.com/>). I receive regular emails from people who tell me that they enjoy 'going to church with us' as they listen online. Each time, this phrase gives me pause for thought. Do you really 'go to church' when you download a message and listen to it in isolation? Isn't the essence of church the people, the fellowship, and the coming together? Even the word community begs the question. It is derived from the Latin *communitas* (*cum*, 'with/together' + *munus*, 'gift'). How could this web extension be church or community?

According to a December 2009 report by Harris Interactive, an average adult spends thirteen hours a week online, with twenty per cent of adults online for about two hours a week and fourteen per cent online twenty-four hours a week. Compare this to the time an average adult spends in worship, or the number of hours a full time student spends in class in a given week. For many, the question regarding the viability of a virtual community is moot. For people who spend more time online than off, this potentially alienating modern reality already meets their ancient human needs for contact and sociability. Virtual life is their community. The crux comes in how one understands community; what makes one authentic or not seems to be determined by those who comprise the group itself. Technology becomes a tangential detail.

It is conceivable that a person could live on campus, or regularly attend a worship service, and yet have little meaningful contact with other people there, while those who engage in virtual

association are much more plugged in with the minutiae of others' lives. Often the people who participate in our church fellowship via the web know more about what's on the church calendar than those who weekly sit in the pews. Participating or opting out in community life seems to be driven by factors beyond electronics or physicality.

So, how do we cultivate a robust community, both virtual and tangible? The challenge for IBTS is to facilitate the dialogue, discipline and continuity across the distance that is required for any vigorous study, and to encourage deep and lasting connections between those members of the extended IBTS family who are inclined towards reaching out to one another. Common worship and meals, coffee breaks, informal meetings at the satellite campus, Facebook, and Skype all give opportunities for bonds to form and deepen. The key to authentic community here, as elsewhere, is living out a genuine interest in one another, wherever we may be located.

*The Revd Jamie P. Washam
(PhD student at IBTS)*



LIBRARY CONFRONTS MODERN CHALLENGES

It has been very busy in the library lately. Those IBTS friends who visit us physically will have probably noticed changes in the information system in the library and will already have become aware of new services, one of which is the Thematic book display. Those of you who are only virtually connected with the library almost certainly appreciate our new Library Newsletter and revised Moodle.



Library team

A major change in library staffing has occurred recently and with it, a re-definition of the role of the library (not to serve as storage of information but as a place for inspiration) and a different work plan has been brought in. It is to continue in tradition, but also to review the policy and re-articulate the broad philosophy which under-girds the library and thus answer the present challenges. In the future we plan to enhance library provision in three major directions: building a strong library team, improving the service to students and creating a long-term strategy concerning print and electronic resources.

The latter issue (electronic resources) is probably the biggest challenge our library faces. In a new digital era more and more materials are available online and we are forced to follow this development in information technology.

Moreover, the increasing number of part-time students obligates us to supply them with resources which are accessible from every place in the world. Providing access to appropriate electronic resources at IBTS is accomplished in three ways: by subscribing to electronic databases, arranging trials of online databases and finding new and relevant open-access resources. During intensive teaching blocks, when many young researchers attend their lectures



Quiet place for study with variety of books

at IBTS, the library team offers them trial access to a few chosen online databases (the latest being ATLA Historical Monographs and Oxford theological databases). Furthermore, in cooperation with other theological libraries, new full-text online databases are offered to our students (the newest ones are Digital Library of Classic Protestant Texts and Karl Barth Digital Library). Currently IBTS is subscribing to eight online databases which include periodicals, e-books and dissertations. The overall response of our students to this development is positive and usage of online databases has increased. The library team interprets this as a support of their efforts and as a confirmation of correct routing of the library. We may not know the final goal, but having the right route might help.

Zdenko Š. Širka, Head Librarian

COMMUNITY BLOG

Blogging seems to have become an almost compulsory activity for anybody in the public sphere. The academic world has certainly yielded to it as well: now you not only supposedly 'publish or perish', but also 'blog, and therefore exist'. In some ways, we have resisted the trend. After all, IBTS has always been keen on living and growing together more than reporting about it. Yet on the other hand, the ease with which blog entries flow, their informality and immediacy, sound like a good idea. Thus, two academic years ago, we launched our seminary's Community Blog (<http://blog.ibts.eu/>).

The idea behind it is that we do this blog jointly; it is more than one person's territory. We reflect on various issues which we find important, upsetting, funny, or as a reason

to pause and reflect. Occasionally, we comment on a book we've read, let off steam about some political or environmental issue, or share impressions from our travels. I think we're more serious in our tone than we intended to be (although you'll find some quirky entries too!). But then, this still may change, just as the IBTS residential community changes regularly, each year having a unique 'taste' to it.

If you have not stumbled upon this Community Blog yet, we hope you will! It will provide you with yet another way of keeping in touch with IBTS. And, of course, you are welcome to comment or send your thoughts to be shared with others! After all, we are also a dispersed community – the more we hear from you, the richer IBTS becomes.

Lina Andronovienė

IMPORTANT PUBLICATIONS AT IBTS

TRACKING GOD

The Revd Docent Dr Ivana Noble

This book offers an introduction to some of the themes of theology. From the very beginning, however, it insists on the contribution to be found in the different Christian traditions. The reader is enabled to view these traditions as part of a common heritage. Drawing on the wealth of these understandings of what it is to be Christian can be an inspiration for those from very different church structures, and even for people who seek to understand their own spiritual journey and search for God, without identifying themselves or their journey with any particular church.

A number of important theological questions are covered in the book. It starts with a look at theological method before examining the idea of divine revelation. This is followed by investigating the nature of authority and authorities in different churches and where these coincide and come into conflict. The historical and cultural contexts of theology and its roots in religious experience are also examined. Each theme has a biblical and patristic part, as well as a genuinely reciprocal discussion involving contemporary Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant theologians.



Ivana Noble is an associate professor of Ecumenical Theology at the Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University, Prague and Senior Research Fellow at the International Baptist Seminary in Prague

THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF CULTURE IN A POST-COMMUNIST CONTEXT

The Revd Docent Dr Ivana Noble

The idea for this book arose from conversations with my (IN) Central and Eastern European students over the last decade. One theme kept coming up: how to

do our own theology, something that would be a gift to others, just as we have received gifts from them during our theological studies, usually in the West. There has been a long-term plea for a theology that would reflect our specific historical experience and our different contexts, how the search for God and experiences of God were expressed in that context, what sort of language helped in sharing them, what symbols helped to preserve and cultivate them. So it was that I decided first to give courses on theology in a dialogue with various cultural meditations of meaning amidst the meaninglessness of our world, our memory and our desires for the ultimate fulfilment, and later to write this book.

EXPLORING BAPTIST ORIGINS

Edited by Anthony R. Cross and Nicholas J. Wood

This book is crammed with fresh insights based on recent Baptist scholarship from the first decade of the twenty-first century. The essays are at times refreshingly wide ranging in scope... while others delicately probe historically significant documents and ideas in early Baptist life with a thoroughness and precision that is nothing short of brilliant. *Stephen Brachlow, Professor of Spirituality, Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, Richmond, Virginia, USA*

These complementary essays... raise questions of astonishing relevance for modern Baptists and all students of religious history. Old themes are revisited in a fascinating way by this important collection in the first of a promising new series.

Ken R. Manley, Distinguished Professor of Church History, Whitley College, University of Melbourne, Australia

These essays show the rigour and the vigour that characterises much of what is being done today within the field of Baptist studies, both historically and theologically. I warmly commend this excellent volume. *Ian M. Randall, Director of Research, Spurgeon's College, London, United Kingdom, and Senior Research Fellow, International Theological Seminary, Prague, Czech Republic*

Contributors are Anthony R. Cross, Paul S. Fiddes, Brian Haymes, Larry J. Kreitzer, Crawford Gribben, Stephen R. Holmes, and Keith G. Jones.

QUINQUENNIAL REVIEW

IBTS has university status in its own right in the Czech Republic awarding the European Union Bologna standard Magister in Theology. In addition to this status as a university sector institution in the Czech Republic we are validated by the University of Wales in Great Britain for the award of Master of Theology degrees, a Post Graduate Certificate in Theology, a Master of Philosophy and a Doctor of Philosophy degree.

Every five years we are subject to extensive investigation by a panel of experts from British Universities to see if we still merit this validated status and such an investigation took place last year and we passed with good results. Here we simply give you the summary conclusions after the extensive review –

The Panel commended the College (IBTS) on the following achievements:

- Their exemplary staff development and publications,

- The continued development of learning resources including the embedded virtual learning environment, since the previous review,
- The pastoral care of students, and the fostering and developing of scholarly dialogue, within a wide range of contexts and backgrounds,
- The way the college is addressing environmental concerns,
- The development of the Certificate in Applied Theology programme that feeds the masters programmes,
- And the management of the MPhil/PhD including the innovative use of the Postgraduate Certificate in Theology as an entry programme.

The Panel were extremely impressed with the running of the courses and the achievement of high academic standards and would like to recommend to the Validation Board an unconditional approval for its continued validation.

So it seems IBTS is in good shape!

STUDENT & ALUMNI news



The son of **LEONID MIKHOVICH** (Belarus) our PhD student, Timothy, was born on 24 February 2010.

RHODA SAAD (CAT 2003) and Sergio Voitenko were married on 10 April 2010 in the Golden Crown Hotel in Nazareth. They are moving to the USA, where Sergio has work.

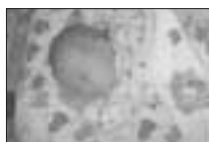


After a long period of service at IBTS, **VANESSA LAKE** (MTh 2008) has moved back to the States, working as Assistant to the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

YANA STASIUK (CAT 2008) and Stas Siurkan were married on 25 April 2010.



Anna Kravtsev, the daughter of **ANDREY KRAVTSEV** (MTh 2002) was born on 5 March 2010.



The son of **ILYA KOROTKIY** (CAT 2006) was born on 26 April 2010 and named Mark.

In its drive to become an ecoseminary, IBTS prints each copy of the LINK on 100% recycled paper.

