Annual Report and Accounts
2015
IBTS Centre Amsterdam

IBTS Centre Amsterdam exists to help train leaders and conduct research that can aid the Christian church in its mission and ministry in Europe and beyond through internationally focused, European based, baptistic theological education. IBTSC’s primary areas of research and education lie in Anabaptist/Baptist histories and theologies, Missiology, and Practical Theology – Identity, Mission and Practice.

IBTSC aspires to deliver high quality theological education and research from a baptistic perspective in an international context developing research, researchers, educators, and leaders who can serve the mission and ministry of churches in Europe, the Middle East and beyond.

IBTSC is an independent Baptist theological institution and a collaborative partner within the Faculty of Theology of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.

IBTS Centre is established in the Netherlands and registered in the Dutch Commercial Register as a Vereeniging (Association).

The members of the Association are drawn from the European Baptist Federation.

IBTS Centre Amsterdam functions as:

A key member of a new Baptist community known as the Baptist House in Amsterdam

Together with the Baptist Union of the Netherlands, the Dutch Baptist Seminary and the office of the European Baptist Federation the Centre in Amsterdam forms a community known as the Baptist House sharing facilities, resources and opportunities for worship and learning.
A multicultural learning community
The Centre in Amsterdam serves the diverse Baptist and wider Christian family. The cohort of students is drawn from Armenia, Canada, Croatia, Cuba, Czech Republic, Ghana, Lebanon, Moldova, the Netherlands, Ukraine and the USA.

A community of higher academic rigour at the forefront of research and reflection on Baptist issues
Academic rigour at both PhD and Masters level programmes is assured through the relationships formed in 2013 with the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU) and Manchester University in the UK. The Centre promotes an academic culture through the programme of intensive weeks of study, the unique annual research colloquium, annual named lecture series, academic events and publications, the hosting of students, scholars and sabbaticals.

A learning community with excellent library resources and lecturing and supervision faculty drawn from across the world
The Centre has over 40,000 texts focused on the Centre’s areas of speciality and excellent online resources. This is augmented by access to the vast holdings of the VU University Amsterdam library and their online resources. Consequently, students of the Centre are well resourced throughout their studies and further aided by the support of an international team of adjunct supervisors and lecturers.

The Centre publishes two academic journals, Baptistic Theologies and Journal of European Baptist Studies
The journals are indexed in the Atla Religion Database® and included in the full text AtlaSerials® collection.

IBTS Centre Amsterdam has three key research areas:
Identity The research into Baptist and Anabaptist Identity is conducted under the general theme of "The

History and Identity of Radical Reformation Traditions”.

Mission The research area of Mission and Evangelism encourages research work in mission and evangelism on the territory of the European Baptist Federation and beyond.

Practice The IBTSC research area of Practice focuses on what is commonly known as the field of Practical Theology and encompasses the areas of ethics, homiletics, justice, peace, religious freedom, conflict resolution, human rights, the ministry and life of the church.

Members of IBTS Centre Amsterdam:
Irish Baptist Networks
Baptist Union of Bulgaria
Union of Baptist Churches, Serbia
Hungarian Baptist Convention of Romania
Baptist Union of Scotland
Baptist Union of Poland
Baptist Union of Denmark
International Baptist Convention
Union of Baptists in Belgium
Baptist Union Serbia
Baptist Union of Czech Republic
Baptist Union of Great Britain
Union of Evangelical Free Churches(Baptists) in Germany
Baptist Union of Norway
Finland Swedish Baptist Union
Union of Baptist Churches in the Netherlands
Egypt Baptist Convention
Baptist Union of Croatia
Convention of Hungarian BC’s in Romania
Baptist Union of Austria
Union of Evangelical Christian Baptist Churches of Armenia
Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia
FEEBF - France
Baptist Union of Romania
Programmes

IBTSC offers two post-graduate programmes to meet a variety of student interests and both can be studied part time.

**PhD programme** as a collaborative centre within the faculty of theology of the [VU Amsterdam](http://www.vu.nl). Colloquiums and Seminars are held in Amsterdam.

**MA Programme** in Baptist Histories and Theologies as an approved partner with the [University of Manchester](http://www.manchester.ac.uk) with intensive teaching delivered in Amsterdam.

Rector’s Report

In the year 2014-2015 we have carried out our first full working year in Amsterdam as the IBTS Centre Amsterdam. This has involved doing many things for the first time, managing ongoing transition issues, and developing and establishing new working patterns at every level from the financial to the educational. One year of operation does not make us experts but it gives us actual practice in context to reflect upon as we go forward. In this report I will focus on a number of the ‘key’ points related to our activities.

Events and Publications

Last November we held the now bi-annual Hughey lectures on Church History. These were delivered by Dr Curtis Freeman from Duke University who is a renown Baptist theologian and author of a recent major volume titled Contesting Catholicity. His topic was ‘Undomesticated Dissent’ and he used three historical persons to present his topic: John Bunyan, Daniel Defoe and William Blake. All three have memorials in Bunhill Fields cemetery. The cemetery, where many other dissenters have been buried, locates an identifiable tradition, which is more about ‘the living faith of the dead’ than ‘the dead faith of the living’. ‘But for that living faith to be kept alive, it must be remembered’, said Freeman. The lectures were then followed by a conference entitled ‘Convictional Theologies’. This conference sought to critically reflect upon the work of Baptist theologian James Wm. McClendon who has been described as ‘the preeminent progressive Baptist theologian of his era’. The conference began with Professor Nancey Murphy, the late McClendon’s wife reflecting upon his life and work and reading from Volume 1 and 2 of the recently published Collected Works of James Wm. McClendon. Both the lectures and the conference were very well attended.

Many of the Conference papers were included in our [Journal Baptist Theologies](http://www.journalbaptisttheologies.com) vol. 6: 1 & 2, and vol. 7:1. Other work on various themes by newer and more
established scholars was published in our Journal of European Baptist Studies vols. 13:2 & 13:3 and 14:1. These publications have meant that we have been able to bring our Journal publications up to date and we have now shifted the production of these Journals from Prague to Amsterdam. We are grateful to those who have spent considerable time on these issues. In the future we aim to develop the distribution of these Journals in relation to disseminating the work and research being done at IBTSC and by other Baptist scholars.

On the 7th November 2014 we welcomed Dr Neville Callum from the Baptist World Alliance. As a result of this visit a one page report on the IBTSC appeared in the January edition of the Baptist World Magazine.

In January we hosted our two week Annual Research Colloquium. At various points there were 13 IBTSC staff/adjuncts, and associates present, 11 VU Promoters, as 29 students offered reports. Students and staff were welcomed once more at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU) for a reception. Prof. Pete Ward from Durham led a seminar paper on Ecclesiology and Ethnography.

Students and Student Progression

The above ‘events’ indicate some key moments which supplement the regular ongoing work of delivering the MA programme and PhD supervision. In the MA programme one student successfully completed her MA in Baptistic Histories and Theologies and two others have moved on to the Dissertation stage. In turn we have 26 students presently registered on the Vrije Universiteit PhD programme. Two students have ‘graduated’ this year already and we anticipate one more by the end of the year. Next year (2016) we anticipate that up to 6 of the existing students will graduate through their Vrije Universiteit promotion. We have another 10 students in our pre-registration programme preparing proposals and seeking registration with the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. Some of our areas of research as reflected in PhD activities include:

- A Theology of Work: Towards a Character and Lifestyle for Witness in the Workplace in Nigeria
- The Bible, Convictions and Conflict: A consideration of the role of convictions in the use of the Bible in moral reasoning in the context of conflict in Northern Ireland
- Christian Formation and Modes of Belonging amongst Turkish Evangelicals in Light of Matthew’s Vision of Christian Community
- The dynamics of embodied theology in acts of worship of the Bulgarian Pentecostal community

In the last year the Vrije Universiteit has introduced a number of new regulations concerning ‘external’ research students. This requires each student to have a ‘training plan’ and for some who do not have a Dutch Research Master’s Degree or equivalent to obtain an additional 30 European (Academic) Credits. These changes are a response to new governmental regulations and involve a desire to maintain quality. Negotiating these changes has provided us with some challenges and will certainly increase our administration demands. So far, however, the practices of IBTSC in terms of a two-week orientation/intensive period and an annual colloquium has provided a context through which the new regulations can be satisfied. It is our hope, going forward, that the Vrije Universiteit will continue to provide us with the academic validation of research activities that are shaped in an international context of student and staff but have contextual application in relation to ministry and mission.

Staff

IBTSC continues to be served by a wide range of tutors including many of the IBTS Prague staff who have taken on the role of adjunct supervisors and tutors. In addition to providing IBTSC supervision these staff remain active in a wide range of teaching, supervising, research, and writing activities throughout Europe and sometimes beyond. In addition to this I have a full time post and the services of Dr Toivo Pilli are obtained for the equivalent of a half time post.

This year at the end of July we marked the ‘retirement’ as full time member of staff and variously Academic Dean, Rector, Vice-Rector Dr Parush Parushev. Parush’s contribution to IBTS since he joined the staff in 2000 has been considerable. In the
last two years he has acted as Rector and carried forward the IBTS Prague experience as well as his personal academic credentials and abilities into the new IBTSC situation. The contribution which Parush has made was acknowledged and recognised at the BoT meetings in April 2015. We are pleased that Parush will continue as an adjunct teacher and supervisor.

Managing the future with this change in staff will be one our great challenges not least in the light of the already reductions which took place in the move. Here, however, we are deeply thankful for the support we are going to receive from three directions:

Rupen Das has been seconded to us from CBM to teach in the MA program and assist in the others. He will be based in Amsterdam for a period of three years.

David and Dorothy McMillan have been accepted for training by BMS World Mission with a view to becoming BMS mission workers. The intention is that, following training at the BMS International Mission Centre in Birmingham (September to December 2015), they will be seconded as BMS mission workers to the International Baptist Theological Study Centre (IBTS Centre) in Amsterdam for a period of at least four years.

Richard and Jo-Ann Matiachuk are a Canadian couple who have offered to come and visit IBTSC two or three times over the next year to give help for periods of two to three weeks in the library.

We consider these gifts from these individuals and organisations as a gift from God. It is our hope that these people and partnerships will not simply support IBTSC but help shape its incarnation in providing the sort of research and researchers that can support the ministry and mission of our churches and Unions in Europe and beyond. In this respect identifying specific areas of research which will so serve and then seeking to find the resources and people to pursue it and then disseminate results will become one of our concerns as well as supporting those who come with already determined ideas.

Last year, I reported that we had appointed new staff in terms of a part-time administrator and part-time librarian. In this last year Marianne and Pieter have proved invaluable in helping us to negotiate change, undertaking tasks that have gone beyond that expected of them, and supporting the vision. We are thankful for them. We are also appreciative for the contribution of our Board members who as volunteers give time and energy to help this organisation not simply survive but develop.

**Conclusion**

IBTSC is now able to plan for the future building on the past and improvising our tradition for our new context. In this I acknowledge that we benefit considerably from the partnership and support we receive from European Unions and churches and individuals and churches throughout the world. We also appreciate greatly the help given by organisations such as the Canadian Baptist Mission, American Baptist International Ministries, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, and the Baptist Missionary Society. We do not take this support for granted. We appreciate their interest in the European context and will seek to make these relationships meaningful as we begin to move from our transition stage to defining our own identity in a new context. We continue to appreciate and benefit from our partners in ‘Baptist House’, the EBF, the Dutch Baptist Union, and the Dutch Baptist Seminary. Again, we are at a very early stage of seeing how the reality of proximity can develop more fully in terms of cooperation and shared activity in one European country can lead to our own IBTSC contribution to Europe and beyond.

Dr Stuart Blythe
Rector IBTSC Amsterdam