

## Report to EBF and IBTSC

### Dr Anthony R. Cross Lecture Trip to Ukraine 14–19 February 2018

At the invitation of the All-Ukrainian Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists Churches (AUC ECB), and its First Vice President, the Rev. Igor Bandura, Dr Anthony R. Cross visited Kiev and the headquarters of the Baptist Union in the nearby city of Irpin to deliver lectures and participate in theological discussions and debates. Dr Cross' visit was sponsored by the European Baptist Federation (EBF) and The International Baptist Theological Study Centre Amsterdam (IBTSC). An Adjunct Supervisor at IBTSC, Cross explored themes from his three most recent monographs: *Recovering the Evangelical Sacrament: Baptisma Semper Reformandum* (2013); *"To communicate simply you must understand profoundly": Preparation for Ministry among British Baptists* (2016); and *Useful Learning: Neglected Means of Grace in the Reception of the Evangelical Revival among English Particular Baptists* (2017).

On Thursday 15 February Dr Cross explored a sacramental interpretation of baptism within the Baptist context, and this was followed by wide-ranging discussion by the members of the AUC ECB Council. The next day he led a seminar on the significance of Baptist theological education with a gathering of the heads of the Ukrainian Baptist educational institutions. This again generated productive discussion and lively debate. It is planned that the first paper will be translated and published in the journal *Theological Reflections: Euro-Asian Journal of Theology*, published by those connected to the countries of the Former Soviet Union. An issue of the journal will also carry an account of Dr Cross' theological development and views, an interview conducted by Oleksandr Geychenko, a Professor at Odessa Theological Seminary, and a lay preacher at the Second Odessa Baptist Church. Professor Geychenko is currently working on his doctorate under Dr Stephen R. Holmes at St Andrews University on a theme which indicates the contribution Ukrainian Baptists are beginning to make to the discussion of Baptist identity: 'Understanding of the Ecclesiological Nature of Wider Ecclesial Structures (Union, Association, Alliance) among Ukrainian Baptists: Analysis and Critical Assessment in Dialogue with the Ecclesiological Contribution of Paul S. Fiddes.'

On the Saturday, Dr Cross presented a paper at an ecumenical day conference at Dragomanov University, Kiev, on 'Crucial Issues of Contemporary Theology: Recent Trends in the Development of Liturgical Theology', organized by the Rev. Dr Sergiy Sannikov, a lecturer at the Odessa Baptist Seminary, a former member of the Board of Trustees of IBTSC, and also a member of the Executive Committee of the EBF. Along with speakers from the Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic, and Ukrainian Orthodox Churches, Dr Cross represented the Protestant, Evangelical/Baptist churches, exploring the work of the Rev. Neville Clark, a leading British Baptist liturgical theologian of the mid-late twentieth century, and his sacramental, ecumenical, and liturgical theology of baptism, focusing on how it answers those who claim that Baptists are, and always have been, anti-sacramental in theology.

Following his conference paper and the subsequent discussion on Neville Clark's theology, Dr Cross was approached by an eminent Roman Catholic scholar who expressed his surprise that Baptists and Roman Catholics do theology in the much the same way. A major thread which ran through all five papers on the day was concern for *aggiornamento*, the retrieval of the tradition of the church for the renewal of the contemporary church and its theology. With the participation of Dr Sannikov and other Ukrainian Baptists in attendance, the day conference was yet another opportunity which showed the breadth and depth of Baptist theology, commitment to unity, liturgy, and dialogue, and is a timely reminder that there are many such opportunities for productive ecumenical engagement if we have the vision to share in them.

On Sunday 18 February, Dr Cross was invited by the Rev. Volodymyr Boiko to be one of the preachers at Svyatoshino Baptist Church, Kiev, and to share in worship with the over 300 who regularly fellowship there. What struck him was that the church was filled with people of all ages, and the good number of young people was a particularly welcome sight. Throughout the service the youth choir played a prominent part, leading in song, dramatic Bible readings, and poetry. Here would be a wonderful opportunity for exchange programmes between the young people from East and West to share fellowship, outreach, and become familiar with different expressions of the Baptist family, as well as one another's cultures and stories. Not only did Dr Cross find the experience of worshipping with Ukrainian Baptists deeply significant for him personally, but he was also moved by the churches' provision of an eye clinic set up in the downstairs rooms, offering both diagnosis and treatment by fully-trained optometrists to anyone who needed it without charge.

As of 1 January 2018 there were 2,600 churches and groups, 320 church plants, over 110,000 members in the AUC ECB, with weekly worship attendance of around 200,000, and as of the previous year there were 320 church plants. There are thirty-six missions co-operating with the Baptist Union of Ukraine, which also has several publishing centres, and one printing press. The AUC ECB is served by six seminaries, four institutes, and eleven regional colleges. Dr Cross reports that here there are great opportunities for Baptist churches, colleges and seminaries in the West to seize, not only for prayer, but to foster and develop links with Ukrainian Baptists. He sees this not as a one way process, but as a genuinely and fruitful two-way and reciprocal relationship which will further build Christ's church and the spread of the gospel.

While aid is also being sent from the EBF, Ukrainian Baptists are actively involved in supporting and sending relief to the churches in Eastern Ukraine, for the past four years the war zone in the east of the country which seems to be long forgotten now by many in the West. There are forty-four Baptist churches and 2,060 church members on the Crimean Peninsula that has been annexed by the Russian Federation. Eighty-six Baptist churches exist in the occupied territories of the Luhansk and Donetsk regions, known as the Anti-Terrorist Operation Zone (ATO), whose members number 4,638. Half a dozen churches in the conflict zones lack pastors and priests. Over 1,500 church members from Eastern Ukraine, who escaped from war to peaceful regions, wish to return back home to their local churches once hostilities cease.

#### **How the churches help:**

- **Help with food:** food packages delivery (child health clinics, kindergarten, schools, other groups of people), soup-kitchens. The charity dinners present opportunities to organize a Bible study groups for teens.
- **Help with medicine for health clinics.**
- **Help with clothes.**
- **Drilling of the wells in many cities.**
- **Working with children.**
- **Evangelism, opening of the Bible school.**
- **Bringing order to the destroyed church.**

During the last three years over 1,000 tons of humanitarian aid has been distributed, including food packages, hygiene products, heaters, thermal underwear, water heaters, etc. About ninety tons of essential goods and food aid were delivered in August 2017 alone. Up to 500 tons of coal and firewood for heating were purchased and delivered to people in greatest need. Up to 100 tons of heating equipment was delivered to the inhabitants of the 'gray zone' only this winter. A significant number of drinking water wells were drilled. More than 40,000 people were served food at the churches' social canteens.

#### **Please pray for:**

- The seminaries and colleges ask us to pray for them, and the development and spread of reflection on theology and practice in dialogue with the global Baptist community.
- Pray for the situation in the East, and for the churches in uncontrolled territories which are required to register according to new regulations set in place
- Relief aid to refugees and people in need in the occupied territory.
- Rehabilitation camps and programs for children from the ATO zone.
- New churches being started in the 'gray zone'.
- Chaplains' ministry at the front, at military units, in hospitals, and among widows with children.
- Ministry of the Christian Medical Association in the ATO zone.
- Material support of projects and expansion of their sphere of influence.

- The establishment of small businesses in the gray zone to provide people with jobs (bakeries, greenhouses, farms).
- Assistance in providing means for housing improvement, and minimum living conditions.

Dr Anthony R. Cross

14 March 2018.



*Dr Cross*



*Dr Cross addressing the AUC ECB Council - at the front Dr Sergiy Sannikov, translator Andre Khudyakov, Dr Cross, and the Rev. Igor Bandura*



*The Rev. Volodymyr Boiko, senior pastor of Svyatoshino Baptist Church, Kiev.*



*The Youth Choir of Svyatoshino Baptist Church*