



## OCTOBER 2017 NEWSLETTER



### **Apologetics for a Secular Culture by Dr. Michael Payne**

Dr. Payne with Riga, Latvia, class



### **Learning how to Interpret by Jim Roszell**

Jim Roszell (left) in Kiev at KRBC

From September 11-16, I had the privilege of teaching a course on the Introduction to Apologetics at the Baltic Reformed Theological Seminary in Riga, Latvia. The students represented a cross section of the Christian community, including campus workers from IFES (IVF in America), full-time pastoral seminary students, lay leaders, and pastors, etc. The leadership of BRTS, including Artis and Janis, along with Pastor Alvis from the Reformed Fellowship Bible Church in Riga, were very helpful and supportive in the work I was able to share in during my time in Riga.

The questions from the students were challenging and very practical. The issue of 'what' is Apologetics from a Reformed perspective, occupied the first half of the course, with the 'how' of apologetics taking up the remaining portion of the course. Our theme verse for the course came from 1 Peter 3:15-16 with an emphasis on responding with 'gentleness' and 'respect' to those who ask for the reason for our hope.

God is doing a great work in Riga, in the midst of a very secular and anti-Christian culture. The religion of consumption and immediate gratification, has taken deep root in Latvian culture. The absence of a clear witness to the glory of God and the Gospel of Christ has taken its toll.

I hope this course will equip servants of Christ to better address the questions and issues the church is confronting in its witness to Christ's gospel. Thanks to ITEM for making my trip possible.

I had the privilege of going to Ukraine to teach Hermeneutics (Interpretation) at Kiev Regional Bible College this September. I had between 12 and 17 students depending on their work schedule. I greatly enjoyed interacting with students, college staff and the people of Gospel House Church. The students showed real excitement and enthusiasm for learning and therefore the class times were very engaging even with the sometimes difficult material covered. In covering the different rules of hermeneutics involved in different Bible genres such as narrative, poetry, prophecy, parable, epistles, wisdom, and gospel, we would turn to verses and passages that exemplified these principles. Then as an exercise we would make applications from the passages and books of the Bible. These times initiated great discussion and interaction among and with students.

In the afternoons, I walked around Vyshneve (Cherry Town), the community where the host church is located, and enjoyed the beautiful fall weather and scenery of Ukraine. I had an opportunity to go into Kiev on two occasions, one to shop for souvenirs and the other to attend a Harvest Festival in downtown Kiev, where there were thousands of people hearing the Gospel preached by evangelist Nick Vujici. Several hundred responded to his call to accept Christ.

Finally, I want to express my appreciation to Pastor John Birkett, who helps prepare instructors for their trips and teaching in Ukraine. His help was invaluable for my preparations. His knowledge of and experiences in Ukraine were of immeasurable help to me – thanks John!



Mosque in Timor, Indonesia Class in Andhra Pradesh, India

## **Discovering the True Way to God** by **Dr. Rob Toornstra**

What is God doing across Asia? India and Indonesia are two countries saturated with religion. Just as Paul walked through the marketplace in Athens and took note of the overwhelming religious presence (see Acts 17), one can't look far without seeing signs of worship. India is predominantly Hindu, with statues and images of the goddess Ganesh (one of over 3 million Hindu deities) everywhere along the streets of major cities and in the rural countryside. Indonesia has the highest concentration of Islam in the world. Those not practicing Islam are devotees of Hinduism. But whether Hinduism or Islam, the underlying worldview is the same: One must climb his/her way up to heaven. So, whether by presenting small baskets of gifts meant to curry favor with the gods (Hinduism), or whether striving for obedience so that Allah will be pleased (Islam), the burden is on the individual to earn salvation.

Yet, God is not absent from these places! In fact, He is placing in the hearts of many a hunger for Himself. Christianity is growing at a significant pace in India in spite of strong opposition from the majority-Hindu Indian government. In Indonesia, small churches are organizing and growing as the gospel is preached. Yet pastors in both locations unfortunately lack adequate training that can help them effectively minister the gospel to their churches.

In August, God graciously allowed Pastor Bill Wilton and myself to travel to these two countries. For three days in each country, we taught preaching skills to pastors and elders. In India, approximately 30 men – pastors, elders, and denominational leaders – attended as we studied how we can preach Christ-centered sermons from the gospels. In Indonesia, nearly 100 high school students, teachers, local pastors and elders participated in a class on how to read and interpret the Bible.

These conferences met a vital need. Pastors often preach sermons that unwittingly tilt towards legalism, telling their congregants what they must do – with no basis in the gospel. Preachers often cannot spend any length of time away from their home, their family, and their churches to attend seminary in another city – and certainly not in another country. ITEM meets this need by providing teachers on the ground to train leaders for ministry in the local context.

In spite of high temperatures with no air conditioning, a short trip to the hospital (for stitches for a cut to my head), and a few other minor hiccups, God blessed with overwhelming response. Listening as the students worked through the text demonstrated that they were “getting it.” Eager learners, the students expressed great appreciation for all they had learned, and invited ITEM back. We trust that God will strengthen His church in these countries that long for the good news of the gospel.

### **Opportunities to Pray for ITEM**

1. **Praise for Michael Payne teaching Apologetics at Baltic Reformed Theological Seminary (Sept. 11-15), for Jim Roszell teaching Hermeneutics at KRBC (Sept. 8-18), for Eugene Oldham teaching Pneumatology in Croatia (Sept. 13-18), and for John Lewis teaching Philippians in Bangalore and Chennai, India, (Sept. 14-25).**
2. **Pray for John Van Schepen who will teach “God and Man” in Kenya Sept. 29-Oct. 5.**
3. **Pray for Dick Moes and Tom Smith leading a preaching conference on “Preaching Christ from Poetry Passages (Psalms)” Oct. 12-14 in Ukraine and Dick and Maurice Sikes leading the same conference in Romania Oct. 19-21.**
4. **Pray for Bob Smart, who will teach “Marriage and Family in Indonesia Oct. 9-13.**
5. **Pray for your church leaders as they consider adding ITEM to their budgets or offerings lists and end-of-year gifts.**

In the U.S. send to ITEM, PO Box 31456, St Louis, MO 63131 or through PayPal at [www.ITEM.org](http://www.ITEM.org). Email: [lwhesterberg@gmail.com](mailto:lwhesterberg@gmail.com). Contributions to ITEM in Canada may be sent to ITEM, c/o Action International Ministries, 3015 A, 21<sup>st</sup> Street NE, Calgary, Alberta, Canada T2E 7T1. **New Phone # 618-939-5069.**