



# Novosibirsk Biblical Theological Seminary

## INFORMATIONAL NEWSLETTER

Issue #4

### What good is a theological education anyway?

*Eduard A. Genrikh*  
*NBTS President*

Although our forefathers dreamt about the day when we would have the opportunity for theological education, this kind of question on occasion arises in our Union.

During the first years of religious freedom after the Soviet breakup, those ministers who longed to receive theological education used the opportunities offered by numerous theological institutes. Soon afterward, the numbers decreased, especially in the on-campus programs. The lack of students forced many educational institutes to close. The reasons for this vary. One is the paradigm shift in values that took place in Russia at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century. The Baptist churches were not immune to this shift. Young believers succumbed to the temptation to improve their material prosperity, while others just tried to survive in the new environment. By the means of movies, mass media and new social media, the concept of quick, easy success and prosperity was planted in the consciousness of the people. The turbulent growth of Russian capitalism gave birth to a powerful, secular intellectual development and a severe decline of moral values.

Today, some secular universities have even begun theological faculties of Orthodoxy or Islam. In addition, interdisciplinary studies of theology and secular education are promoted. If this succeeds, a considerable quantity of young people will have a theological (i.e. religious) education from a secular perspective. This religious smattering will lead astray an entire young generation. The syncretism of Christian and pagan beliefs will be advanced even further. This will produce a generation of intellectual and religiously educated people, but without the inner moral values to live a Christian life. They lack spiritual rebirth, which cannot be provided through school or education, but only through the sound proclamation of the Gospel of Christ through the Lord's people in the church—the body of Christ.

Such an outlook on these developments in the Russian society challenges the church and our system of theologi-



cal education. If the Christian community and our Russian Baptist Union fail to reply adequately to that challenge, we will encounter a growth of religious-scientific misconceptions, which will be difficult to overcome.

Therefore the church is in desperate need of trained pastors and theologians, capable of countering the emerging heresies. Needed are brothers who put God first in their thinking, who subordinate their mind to Scripture, brothers who dedicate their bodies to glorify God, and whose spirits enjoy fellowship with the Lord. That is one of the most important reasons for ministers in the Russian Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (UECB) to acquire theological education.

The near future has to be considered earnestly in order not to lose the current generation for God and His Kingdom. A serious investment as in personnel and in finances has to be made, in order to gain fruitful results in the expansion of the kingdom of God in Russia.

That means it is necessary to encourage and send the best young and dedicated brothers to the best seminaries, including the Novosibirsk Biblical-Theological Seminary, where they receive a sound theological education. Welcome to NBTS!

## Why do we all need theology?

**Igor V. Shayfulin**  
NBTS Professor  
of Systematic Theology



We are all often guided in our lives by stereotypes, or habitual patterns of behavior. We have been inculcated in something by the upbringing we received in our families, and by the community around us. Our thoughts, actions, decisions are influenced by our past—by our entire background—which largely determines our individuality. This has an impact both on small, insignificant issues, such as tying our shoelaces or choosing our tie, and on fundamental, important aspects of our lives, such as the choice of a wife.

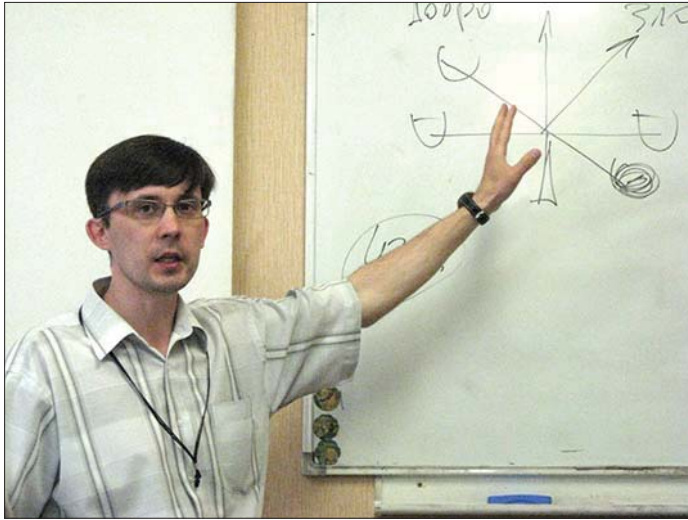
For the church, the question of guidance in our lives should be especially relevant. Our way of life, how we look at ourselves and our surroundings should be based on biblical teaching, not because something is accepted in some kind of community, or because we were brought up in some unique way, or that we have gotten accustomed to something. Such teaching should shape all aspects of the life of the church as a whole and of individual believers.

First of all, the difference in teachings and traditions gives rise to such a variety in the modern Christian world. At least, that is what we have to discuss when we compare different denominations. And we need to reflect about our foundational values.

Often in the church community, the opinion can be heard that for the average believer, there is no need to delve into the intricacies of Christian doctrines, that theology is a kind of a “far-from-practical life” or scientific sphere, that “library dust” will not help solve pressing church, or personal, problems. We should be categorically clear about the pernicious fallacy of this approach. After all, theology is—in the broadest sense—a certain set of beliefs about God and His role in the universe, His dealings with man, etc. In this sense, every man has his theology, because he has his own views on all these issues. Moreover, the Christian is, in fact, imbued with theology. The question is not whether someone has theology, but rather what kind of theology it is, what views on the fundamental questions of life are held by people. Sound religious beliefs lead to appropriate results in life, while wrong ones lead to disaster and disappointment. This is what Christ said in the Sermon on the Mount, when He compared two men who built their houses on different types of ground (Matthew 7:24-27).

Therefore, one of our most important tasks as Christians is the constant process of deepening in our theology,





assessing our beliefs in order to be confident that we are on the right path, that we are building the “house” of our spiritual life on the one really solid foundation. The only criterion for making this assessment is Scripture. We have no other equally reputable source that would reveal the fullness of God’s revelation to mankind. Only the Bible can give us everything we need to guide our lives and form our views, that is, our theology. Let me recall one example from Scripture that shows the severe consequences for believers who have shown disregard for deeper study of God’s Word. The writer of Hebrews admonishes believers for remaining ignorant of the most basic doctrines of the church despite being believers for a long time. The severe consequences of such biblical illiteracy should encourage us to reflect on the importance and priority of receiving ongoing church teaching (Hebrews 5:11-6:8).

We can build our church life solely on habits, traditions, or even someone’s personal authority, but these things will not not give us a solid foundation. If our external circumstances change unexpectedly we may find ourselves with no clear guidelines, no sensible priorities. Only Christian teaching—theology built on Scripture—is able to give us the necessary foundation. Much more can be said on this subject than is possible in this small essay, but I would like to add just one illustration from church history, which shows a tight connection between doctrine and the real life of the church. All of the ancient church fathers were practicing ministers. Their views and teachings—used by the whole church (including us) since those early years—were not formed in a “silent office,” but at the “front line” of active church ministry. For them, purity of doctrine was the primary measure of the purity and truthfulness of the church, and lifestyle merely confirmed this truthfulness, not vice versa. This example is worthy of emulation in our time as well.

## Pursuing the Highest Level of Theological Education

The Christian book market in Russia has seen a great quantitative improvement in the last 10 years. Unfortunately, quality didn’t keep pace with the quantity. The overwhelming majority of new theological books are translations. The decision of which books will be translated is driven by economics and not by content. Often these books concentrate on topics of interest in Russia, but they present a very diverse theological background. Therefore, much literature adds to theological conflicts in the churches instead of aiding spiritual development. It became very noticeable that there is a great lack of Russian authors and theologians who could write and answer the manifold questions and issues faced by Russian churches today.

There is still a great need for preachers and pastors across vast Siberia and beyond, but the seminary needs to look ahead. There is likewise an urgent need to provide sound theological education for the minister as well as for the layman. A wide variety in our academic program ensures not only training for ministry, but also makes an important contribution in preparing a generation of indigenous theologians. Two of our teachers are enrolled in a doctoral program by distance education. The workload and the financial investment are an additional burden. But this investment will enable us in the future to offer a doctoral program in Russia, accessible and tailored for the need of Russian churches and ministers.



Our Ph.D. students Revald Gerhard and Pavel Togobitsky with Dr. Robert Provost, the President of the Slavic Gospel Association by the Baptist Bible Seminary in Pennsylvania, USA.

## Our students: Boris Kashenetsky

### NBTS M.Div. Program



All people are doing theology in their lives; the only question is whether it corresponds to the truth of Scripture. In turn, this depends on the seriousness of their approach to the issue of education in this sphere.

In 2004, I got my first higher education degree, and it helped to lay a good financial foundation in my life. However, this education failed to provide the most important things—it did not give answers to my deepest and most burning questions: “Who am I, and what is the meaning of my life?”

Still having these questions two years later, I came to Grace Baptist Church in Krasnoyarsk. Thank God for the staff of the New Life Mission, “New Life,” because He directed me by their hands to the church. August 2006 is unforgettable for me – I turned to Christ. The most important questions of my existence were revealed. Peace and the joy of life came to me.

Growing in Christ and participating in music ministry, I began to think about new questions. What is my purpose in Christ? Where exactly will I be most useful for Him?

The more I talked with the brothers, the more I realized that nobody can give an unambiguous answer about building our lives outside the walls of the local church. Most young Christians are looking for a job from the

ordinary perspective of making a better living. I always thought this was wrong, but I could not voice my opinion, perhaps because I had such job. My wealth was above average, but my heart was dissatisfied with the time I was spending in vain.

After finishing a course for young ministers, I tried to preach. I then felt the whole burden of what a responsibility proclaiming the Word of God is! I already knew the need of the church for ministers. But most of all, I wanted to help young Christians to learn how their way of life should be chosen based on the will of God. This question is one of the most important among young Christians, both after finishing college and then working in their field.

At this time, I began to understand that every Christian should not only be aware of his theology, but also to be able to integrate it into every area of his life, because this gives him the opportunity to choose the right way in every situation. Whether he is an engineer, a lifeguard or a banker, he always has to know where God is in his work, and why God has placed him there. Only in this way is the Christian able to worship God through the entirety of his life.

The Lord was preparing me for an important choice – career or ministry. I was eventually invited by one of the elders of our local church to apply to Novosibirsk Biblical Theological Seminary. After five months of praying and two fasting, my wife and I decided to make the application.

Today—over and over again—I am firmly convinced that having a clear understanding of Christian theology gives us the opportunity to be more dedicated and productive in our main purpose—to be “salt and light.”



## Thanksgiving and Prayer Needs of NBTS

We are thankful to all who have been praying for our students, professors, for funds, our building renovation, etc. There are 60 men in the Distance Learning program and 10 men in the Full Time program; two of our professors continue their Ph.D. study at Baptist Bible Seminary (USA). The renovation of the building to meet new code requirements of the fire department and sanitary service is near the finish. Praise be to God!

We prayed for the successful graduation of our students (held on June 7) and for their fruitful ministries in local churches.

We pray for the enrolling of new students for the Distance Learning Preaching and Bachelor of Theology programs, and for God's providence in preparation of devoted brothers to study in NBTS.

We pray for the development of strong, sound theology in the churches of the Russian Union of Evangelical-Baptists, for a biblical way of dealing with all controversial issues, and for our helpful participation in the process.

We continue to pray for the funds needed to reconstruct the seminary building to add a dormitory for students and their families.

We also pray for recovery of the health of one our full time students, Vadim Gira, who broke his back.

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