

Donald T. Williams, PhD  
381 Talmadge Drive  
Toccoa, GA 30577  
[dtw@tfc.edu](mailto:dtw@tfc.edu)

## MISSION REPORT 2014



From June 6-17, 2014, I traveled to Bhawanipatna, Kalahandi, Odisha, India, for Church Planting International. I was there to teach a seminar on Hermeneutics to thirty evangelists and church-planting pastors associated with Reformed Gospel Fellowship of India. I arrived in Bhubaneswar, the regional capital, on Saturday evening, June 7. Sunday, June 8, I preached to a house church in Bhubaneswar and then traveled thirteen hours by train to Bhawanipatna, where the seminar began Monday morning. I taught six hours a day Monday through Saturday in a very intensive course. Then on Sunday, June 15, we concluded with a joint worship service with the local house church and the thirty students, where I preached on the Lucan Great Commission. Then began the long trek home: thirteen hours by train, and then three planes and four airports over two days to get back to Atlanta on the 17th.

Kalahandi is the western portion of the Indian state of Odisha. It is a place where the Gospel has not penetrated very deeply, and the few Christians there have been known to experience persecution at the hands of militant Hindus. Reformed Gospel Fellowship is led by Rev. Kartik Pal (M.Div.), who teaches at the Protestant seminary in Bhubaneswar and travels to Kalahandi when school is not in session for evangelism. My students were former students of his and others he has recruited to do evangelism and plant churches across that region. Most of them have a good high-school education but lack formal training in theology and ministry. They can't go to Bible School, so I take a little Bible School to them. As they are gathering small flocks of believers and starting house churches with them and thus finding themselves in the role of pastors as well as Evangelists, they are finding the need for more training particularly critical. So I addressed **Hermeneutics** (how soundly to interpret the Scriptures) from the standpoint of how it practically relates to **Theology** (how we understand the Scriptures' teaching) and **Homiletics** (the craft of sermon construction). My experience doing this kind of work with rural pastors in Africa tells me that with men like this who are on the front lines of spiritual warfare, a little sound teaching goes a long way. They know their need they and are ready and eager to take what you give them and "put it on the ground."



**House-Church Worship in Bhubaneswar**

So we talked about some basic principles of Hermeneutics. We saw the importance of **context**— immediate context, canonical context, linguistic context, historical context, etc. *Context* is from two Latin words meaning “with” (*con*) and “text” (*textus*). So context is what comes “with” the text, or what the text comes with. Every text comes with the words that are before and after it (immediate context), with a position in the canon of Scripture (canonical context), with a historical setting and an original audience (historical context), with a particular language with its grammar, etc. (linguistic context). To the extent that we ignore these things we are not reading the text as it was written to be read. To the extent that we read in the light of them, we can recover the **original meaning**, the meaning the text would have had for the audience to whom it was actually written. Everything flows from that. Any personal meaning or contemporary application we derive from the text must be compatible with its original meaning, or it has to be rejected as spurious.



**Teaching. Kartik Interprets into Local Language.**

Then we moved on to principles such as the *Analogia Fidei* (Analogy of Faith): No passage of Scripture should ever be interpreted in such a way as to make it contradict another passage of Scripture. We saw that there is **safety in numbers**: No doctrine should ever be based on only one text, but rather on the themes that resonate throughout the biblical text. And I hit two critical motifs that are often neglected in academic discussions of Hermeneutics. First is Paul's teaching on the **practicality** of Scripture: All of it is *profitable* for doctrine, reproof, correction, etc. (1 Tim. 3:16); the goal of our teaching it is *love*, not fruitless discussion (1 Tim. 1:5-6); therefore, any interpretation that is merely speculative or ends only in wrangling about words (1 Tim. 6:4) is by that very fact to be rejected as, at least, incomplete. We know there is something wrong with it! Second, I stressed the Christocentric nature of the biblical text: **Christ is the key** to all. As Martin Luther said, "The whole Scripture is about Christ only, everywhere." The Old Testament prepares for His coming and predicts it; the New Testament narrates it and explains and applies it. Therefore we must always ask, "How does this passage teach us to love Jesus, to trust him, to glorify his Name, to proclaim his Gospel, to advance his Kingdom, to edify his Church, or to please him by doing his Will?" If you can consistently answer those questions for your people in your teaching and exemplify those answers in your life, I told the men, you will be a good reader and teacher of Scripture and a good servant of our Lord Jesus Christ.



**Teacher's-Eye View of the Class**

All of this was supported by many examples of texts to which these principles apply, texts often supplied by the students themselves in their questions. Then we shifted more into workshop mode, with the students themselves constructing potential sermon outlines out of Ephesians guided by my Socratic questions: What would you choose as your preaching portion? Why? Maybe you should ignore the verse divisions and pick a portion that starts with a capital letter and ends with a period! OK, what is the main idea of this passage? What points would you derive in support of it? What applications would you make of it? And, bottom line, how do the principles of interpretation we've been learning enable the Text itself to give you the answers to these questions? Pay attention to the *process*, I stressed. I am not here to give you answers so much as to give you a process, a methodology that can let you find answers yourself after I am gone, with confidence that you can question the text yourself and know when it is answering you and when you are just reading your own ideas into it instead. (Yes, I know what you're thinking: There are a lot of *American* preachers who could use this kind of instruction!)



**Group Portrait**

My heartfelt thanks to those who gave and those who prayed to make this trip possible. Rev. Kartik and the men in the class particularly asked me to thank you for them. They want you to know that they are anxious to get home and start applying what they have learned. May God grant them to do so, for the glory of his exalted Son. Amen.

Donald T. Williams, PhD  
June 19, 2014



**What one Wears to Preach in India**