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Mohler's triage emphasizes doctrinal priority

By AARON CLINE HANBURY

Triage is the first stop in a hospital emergency room. Used to determine the severity and relative importance of a patient's ailment, triage ensures someone with a mild fever does not receive treatment before a stroke victim, and that someone involved in a shooting sees a doctor before a person with a sprained ankle. Generally, emergency room triage staff assigns one of three designations to the patient's condition: immediately life threatening; urgent, but not immediately life threatening; and less urgent.

A visit to a local emergency room alerted R. Albert Mohler Jr., president of Southern Seminary, to this priority-assigning procedure. And, according to Mohler's 2004 article, "A Call for Theological Triage and Christian Maturity," this process provided him with an intellectual tool "most helpful for fulfilling [Christians] theological responsibility."

"Today's Christian faces the daunting task of strategizing which Christian doctrines and theological issues are to be given highest priority in terms of our contemporary context," Mohler writes. "This applies both to the public defense of Christianity in the face of the secular challenge and the internal responsibility of dealing with doctrinal disagreements. ... God's truth is to be defended at every point and in every detail, but responsible Christians must determine which issues deserve first-rank attention in a time of theological crisis."

Toward that end, Mohler suggests a "theological triage" for sifting through the various doctrinal issues surrounding evangelical Christianity. Paralleling the three triage categories, Mohler offers three "levels of theological urgency, each corresponding to a set of issues and theological priorities found in current doctrinal debates":

1. First-level issues, as Mohler presents them, are those on which Christianity stands or falls, the denial of which results in the loss of the Christian faith;
2. Second-level issues often cause division and heated disagreement, the denial or affirmation of which result in the forming of denominations and separate churches; and
3. Third-level issues bring up questions of discussion and certain but tame disagreement, the denial or affirmation of which still allows close fellowship, even within the same church body.

"First-level theological issues would include those doctrines most central and essential to the Christian faith," Mohler writes.

In this first tier of doctrinal importance, Mohler includes such crucial doctrines as the

full deity and actual humanity of Christ, the Trinity, justification by faith and the authority of Scripture. He points briefly to the various presentations of Jesus as less than both fully divine and fully human in the early centuries of Christianity; at the historic councils at Constantinople, Nicaea and Chalcedon, the early church defended an orthodox view of Jesus and condemned such aberrant teachings as heresy. These councils, in dealing with the nature of Christ, addressed decidedly first-level doctrines, according to Mohler.

"Christianity stands or falls on the affirmation that Jesus Christ is fully man and fully God. ... Those who deny these revealed truths are, by definition, not Christians," Mohler writes.

The Trinity is also a first-tier doctrine, according to Mohler, and the earlier church secured an orthodox understanding of the Trinity in her affirmation of the complete deity of the Father, Son and Spirit – demanding that Scripture presents these three persons as one God. In addition, the doctrine of justification by faith and the authority of Scripture are issues that Christians must embrace in order to be, well, Christians. "A denial of these doctrines represents nothing less than an eventual denial of Christianity itself," Mohler argues.

"The set of second-order doctrines is distinguished from the first-order set by the fact that believing Christians may disagree on the second-order issues, though this disagreement will create significant boundaries between believers," Mohler writes about the second tier of his theological triage.

This second set of doctrines cause Christians to divide into congregations and establish denominational boundaries.

A common example of a second-level theological issue is the meaning and mode of baptism. Those in Baptist traditions strongly disagree with Presbyterians about the fundamental nature of baptism, but despite this difference, Baptists and Presbyterians celebrate their unity in the Gospel.

"Standing together on the first-order doctrines, Baptists and Presbyterians eagerly recognize each other as believing Christians, but recognize that disagreement on issues of this importance will prevent fellowship within the same congregation or denomination," Mohler says.

So Christians from wide-ranging congregations and diverse denominations enjoy unity in the Gospel and those areas of non-negotiable Christian teaching. But those same Christians recognize the importance of second-tier doctrines and thus do not maintain the same closeness of fellowship as those within the same denominational or local church body.

"Third-order issues are doctrines over which Christians may disagree and remain in close fellowship, even within local congregations," Mohler writes concerning the final tier of his theological triage.

In this third level, Mohler places debates about eschatology. If a group of Christians affirms the actual, physical return of Jesus Christ, those same Christians may differ, even significantly, about the timetable and sequence of the events leading up to and following Christ's return, according to Mohler. Various interpretive questions exist within Christian theology, but those who unite around both first- and second-level doctrines, may disagree about these various interpretations while maintaining unity within the same church body.

Mohler's theological triage is not meant that one can take certain teachings of the Bible less seriously than others. Rather, this structuring aims at helping Christians navigate those areas of Scriptural fidelity, denominational divides and disagreement within a fellowship. Christians are to fully embrace God's Word, yet do so in a manner faithful to the clearest and most important teachings in Scripture.

"A structure of theological triage does not imply that Christians may take any biblical truth with less than full seriousness," Mohler explains. "We are charged to embrace and to teach the comprehensive truthfulness of the Christian faith as revealed in the Holy Scriptures."

Mohler further explains in his article that a failure to carefully observe theological priorities can result in at least two extremes. He points to the failures of Christian liberalism and American fundamentalism.

"The mark of true liberalism is the refusal to admit that first-order theological issues even exist," Mohler suggests. "Liberals treat first-order doctrines as if they were merely third-order in importance, and doctrinal ambiguity is the inevitable result."

American fundamentalism stands at the other extreme.

"The misjudgment of true fundamentalism is the belief that all disagreements concern first-order doctrines," he writes. "Thus, third-order issues are raised to a first-order importance, and Christians are wrongly and harmfully divided."

Learning from medical emergency procedures can help Christians avoid these two extremes during theological emergencies.

As Mohler concludes, "We must sort the issues with a trained mind and a humble heart, in order to protect what the Apostle Paul called the 'treasure' that has been entrusted to us." 

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From charts, graphs and speculation to Jesus: Jones explains end times views in new DVD series

By AARON CLINE HANBURY

The well known English journalist and poet G.K. Chesterton famously said that "an open mind, like an open mouth, does have a purpose: and that is to close it upon something solid," arguing that one ought to have an open mind, but for the purpose of finding truth, not simply for the purpose of open-mindedness.

Chesterton's keen, pithy insight surely applies to 21st-century readers as much as to its original audience. But in certain theological areas, the mind's mouth may not be able to find the solid formulation on which it should close. One of those theological areas is the manner in which people understand the end of time.

In his new DVD teaching series, Timothy Paul Jones, associate professor of leadership and church ministry and editor of *The Journal of Family Ministry* at Southern Seminary, outlines the four major formulations of eschatology (the end times). Jones' video lectures aim at informing church members about the breadth of thought concerning the end times,

both historically and currently.

The video series, "Four Views of the End Times," presents historical premillennialism, amillennialism, dispensational premillennialism and postmillennialism. Jones tries to provide a balanced perspective for church people who may not be familiar with the different positions, and especially those who assume their view is the only biblically faithful position.

"For a local church, [eschatology] should not be a divisive issue. We need to study the orthodox views of the end times because that helps people think in terms of how there are issues we divide over and there are issues we don't. [Eschatology] is a good test case in a local church to help them see that people we respect in church history held very different views of the end times," Jones said. "[Church members] can see that Augustine held a different view than Charles Spurgeon, that Calvin and Luther held a different view than Billy Graham.

"So I think a study of the end times, looking at it in this way, is just a great example of how we can get people to think as churches about this."

Rather than presenting one particular view as the correct view, Jones focuses on emphasizing the orthodox center of each position. So, according to Jones, ancient statements such as the Apostles' Creed can help us identify what Christians have always believed about the end times: "He ascended to the right hand of God the Father Almighty," the ancient confession asserts, "from there he shall return to judge the living and the dead."

Concerning those orthodox

formulations of the eschaton, Jones contends that the differences should not cause division within a local church, though sadly, they often do.

"[Eschatology] becomes divisive when someone becomes convinced that a certain view of the end times is a test for orthodoxy. And that often comes when people either don't know that other views exist, or don't know that Christians have held different views throughout church history," Jones said.

"When it should become divisive, the point at which we would step aside from one another, is when someone is denying that which has been held by Christians in every time in every place, such as Jesus is physically returning to earth," he said.

Often, according to Jones, the argumentative and seemingly irreconcilable attitudes that accompany end-times issues result in people losing focus of the real meaning of the Bible's teaching: Jesus Christ reigning as king. He sees benefit, then, in church staffs who differ about the details of apocalyptic literature in the Bible, but who affirm the Gospel-center portrayed in the Bible's passages about time's end.

"I served on [a church] staff with a multiplicity of perspectives, and it was good to be able to say at certain points, 'this associate pastor over here will disagree, but here is his view and here is what I think, and here is the truth that we both hold on this issue.' I think it models for the congregation a Christ-like humility," Jones explained. "Now, that is going to require willingness on the part of the staff members to be humble about this.

Jones pointed to Russell D. Moore's *The Kingdom of Christ* as an example of how a shared consensus about the kingship of Christ can bring together differing eschatological perspectives.

But for Jones, a non-divisive spirit concerning the end times discussion does not translate into a theological agnosticism, or eschatological apathy. Rather, Christians should seek humbly to discern the Bible's teaching.

"This is not a relativism that says [formulations of the end of time are] all right in their own way," Jones said. "It says that this is where I'm coming

down on this particular issue, but I recognize that what's more important is that central Gospel truth that all of us share.

"I think we have to recognize that we know in part; our knowledge is incomplete. So these are four different ways that orthodox believers in Jesus Christ have worked out how the end will come and Jesus Christ will return. And perhaps three of them are wrong; we have to be honest about that," he explained. "Somewhere, somehow, one or more of us is interpreting Scripture incorrectly. And that's why we have to seek that central, Gospel-centered unity all the views share."

More than changing his viewers' positions, advancing the study of Christian eschatology or simply participating in an academic exercise, Jones' intention in the "Four Views of the End Times" video study is to promote understanding among Christians about the breadth and richness within orthodox understandings of the eschaton, and how each position celebrates the return of Jesus.

"One of the emphases I keep all the way through this [DVD study] is what I call 'keeping your eyes on the right end,'" Jones said. "The end point of human history is not a particular schema of the end times, the goal of time is not a chart that you can sketch out. The goal of time is Jesus. He is where time is going. And that's one of the things I think is crucial: it's about Jesus. I think when we go wrong studying the end times is when we cease to make it Christ-centered and make it chart-centered instead.

"My hope is that it will encourage people who have grown up only knowing one view of the end times. It will encourage them to dig deeper and study the Scriptures about the end times. I want them to consider the broader implications of the text of Scripture, and to dig into the texts that talk about the end times in a more Christ-centered way ... to give them a fuller, richer view of their Christian heritage, of their history and theology. So they are able to have a wiser and wider perspective." ❧



Photo by Devin Maddox

Maintaining unity when doctrine can be divisive

By HERSHAEL W. YORK

Hershael W. York (Ph.D. Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary) is Victor and Louise Lester Professor of Christian Preaching at Southern Seminary

The all-too-familiar story has very little variation no matter how many times I hear it. A pastor attempts to teach his church some “deep” doctrinal truth while a small but vocal minority objects to this teaching and stirs up others against the pastor and the “new” doctrine. As a result, the church either splits and is diminished in size and influence or the pastor leaves, consoling himself that he was professionally martyred for the sake of truth. Those who opposed him in the church, of course, also feel like they took a bold stand for truth and withstood the wolf in sheep’s clothing. Both sides, however, realize that they lost something that will be difficult to regain: momentum, credibility and trust.

It doesn’t have to be that way, at least not always. While preachers of truth will regularly have to contend with those who resist it, a lifetime of experience informs me that more often than not, the way pastors relate to their people and present truth will either promote receptivity or undermine it.

Mistake 1: uncontrolled emotion. A pastor is welcome to feel anything he wants to feel. Emotions are neither good nor bad. What emotion he shows, however, is another matter. He cannot afford to let his congregation sense either fear or anger him. The minute he acts out of those emotions – and his people perceive that – he has already lost the battle. He has to act out of love for the Lord, love for His people and love for the truth.

Mistake 2: treating disagreement as unwelcome. A threatened pastor hardly seems secure in his belief and cannot inspire confidence. Once I presented a new set of bylaws to a church I served and a precious man in the church openly opposed them. When he finished, I thanked him for his perspective and assured him



Photo by Devin Maddox

that I appreciated his opinion. I knew that, no matter how the vote went, I was still going to be his pastor and responsible to minister to him. I did not want a disagreement about a particular issue to prevent or hinder my ongoing relationship with him or anyone else who might think like him. If a pastor affirms loving and gracious disagreement, then he will seldom have to deal with the kind that is mean-spirited.

Mistake 3: preaching a system rather than the text. When a pastor shows truth in the Scriptures, it’s hard for people to disagree with it unless they are willing to deny the truth of the Bible itself. On the other hand, when he tries to present someone’s logical systemization and uses contentious buzzwords that are never found in the Bible, he

invites a criticism that, though perhaps unjust, seems credible.

Mistake 4: avoidance of biblical tensions. The pastor who only presents one side of the biblical evidence and does not embrace and teach the counterbalancing truth will not have credibility with his church. The Scripture is replete with theological paradox and tensions like the humanity and deity of Jesus, the divine and human authorship of the Bible, the unity and three-personed nature of the Godhead, the absolute sovereignty of God and the full moral responsibility of man. Any pastor who presents only one side of an argument will never convince thinking people and, to the contrary, will open himself to their equally simplistic rebuttals and denials.

Mistake 5: a failure to love. A pastor must never forget that God sent him to love the people, not merely to imbue them with biblical facts. When a congregation hears a pastor’s love for them, they will accept his teaching much more readily. Loving pastors will still face occasional opposition, but it will usually be much less angry in its tone and also less able to stir up others. Jesus said that the greatest mark of our discipleship is that we love each other. No pastor can make disciples of his people if he lacks the most significant element of discipleship himself. 📖

The duty of teaching Baptist distinctives

By JOHN A. BROADUS

EDITOR’S NOTE: John A. Broadus (1827-1895), founder and former professor at Southern Seminary, first published this material as a 35-page pamphlet with the American Baptist Publication Society. This article is a condensed version of excerpts from an issue of “The Baptist Vision.”

A duty we owe to ourselves

We must teach [Baptist] views in order to be consistent in holding them. Because of these we stand apart from other Christians. We have no right thus to stand apart unless the matters of difference have real importance; and if they are really important, we certainly ought to teach them.

This teaching is the only way of correcting excesses among ourselves. Do some of our Baptist brethren seem to you ultra in their denominationalism, violent, bitter? And do you expect to correct such a tendency by going to the opposite extreme? You are so pained, shocked, disgusted at what you consider an unlovely treatment of controverted matters that you shrink from treating them at all. Well, the persons you have in view would defend them-

selves by pointing at you. Thus one extreme fosters another.

A duty we owe to our fellow Christians

It is urged that we ought to push all our differences into the background and stand shoulder to shoulder against Popery. It seems to us that the best way to meet and withstand Romanism is to take Baptist ground. Our brethren of the Protestant persuasions are all holding some “developed” form of Christianity, not so far developed as Popery, and some of them much less developed than others, but all having added something, in faith or government or ordinances, to the primitive simplicity. The Roman Catholics know this, and sometimes say that the Baptists alone are consistent in opposing the [Roman Catholic] Church.

We may say that there are but two sorts of Christianity: church Christianity and Bible Christianity. If well-meaning Roman Catholics become dissatisfied with resting everything on the authority of the church and begin to look toward the Bible as authority, they are not likely to stop at any halfway house, but to go forward to the position of those who really build on the Bible alone.

It is not necessarily an arrogant and presumptuous thing in us if we strive to bring our Protestant brethren to views that we honestly believe to be more scriptural, and therefore more wholesome.

A duty we owe to the unbelieving world

We want unbelievers to accept Christianity; and it seems to us they are more likely to accept it when presented in its primitive simplicity, as the apostles themselves offered it to the men of their time.

For meeting the assaults of infidels, we think our position is best. We can say to the skeptical inquirer, “Come and bring all the light that has been derived from studying the material world, the history of man or the highest philosophy, and we will gladly use it in helping to interpret this which we believe to be God’s Word.” There is in this freedom no small advantage for the truly rational inquirer.

But, while thus free to search the Scriptures, Baptists are eminently conservative in their whole tone and spirit; and for a reason. Their recognition of the Scriptures alone as authority, and the stress they lay on exact conformity to the requirements of the Scriptures foster an

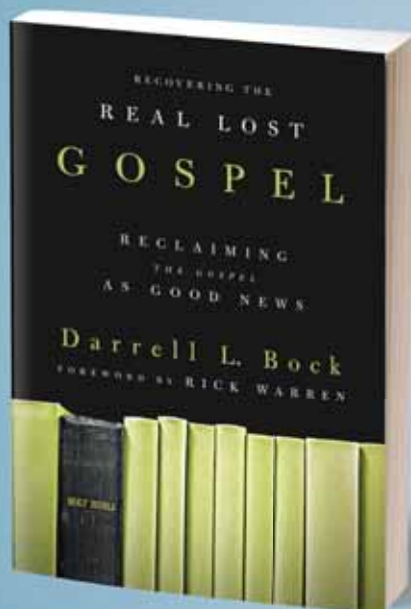
instinctive feeling that they must stand or fall with the real truth and the real authority of the Bible. The union of freedom and conservatism is something most healthy and hopeful.

A duty we owe to Christ

It is a matter of simple loyalty to Him. He met the eleven disciples by appointment on a mountain in Galilee; probably the more than 500 of whom Paul speaks were present also: “And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.”

The things of which we have been speaking are but a part of all the things which Jesus commanded; what shall hinder us, what could excuse us, from observing them ourselves and teaching them to others? Shall we neglect to teach as He required, and then claim the promise of His presence and help and blessing? 📖

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Is God green? Moore interacts with secular students about Christianity and environmentalism

By AARON CLINE HANBURY

Russell D. Moore, dean of the School of Theology, senior vice president for academic administration and professor of Christian theology and ethics at Southern Seminary, responded to the question “Is God green?” in a seminar presentation at the University of Louisville, Oct. 7, 2010, hosted by Highview Baptist Church’s Campus Church.

Speaking to mostly secular students, Moore outlined the evangelical theological perspective and biblical teaching about the earth’s environment.

Referencing the often-quoted Bible verse, John 3:16, Moore told students that John’s statement “God loves the world” extends to the whole creation, not only people.

“And if God loves something, then Christians should love that same thing,” Moore said.

“There are a lot of people who believe that what Christians think about the earth is that it doesn’t matter, it’s all just going to get burned up anyway; the only thing that’s important is getting away from here and getting into

heaven,” Moore said. “That is not what Christianity teaches at all; as a matter of fact, it’s quite the opposite.”

According to Moore, people must ask why the environment matters anyway. Christianity suggests that the reason for the environment’s importance is God’s innate purpose in creation. So rather than simply another thing about which humans need to worry, God created the universe such that it speaks about and reveals God’s glory.

“Sometimes we talk about caring for the earth in the same way that we talk about a stimulus package in Washington, or the way we talk about what the minimum wage ought to be or these other issues as though it is something that can be managed,” Moore said. “Scripture presents, instead though, the created universe in a different kind of way, as something that is vast, mysterious and awe-invoking.

“When you look at how the Psalms speak about the way God takes delight in the earth and God takes delight in the universe – why is that? He takes delight, the Scripture says, that every aspect of nature is pointing to the glory

of God,” he said. “So there is something that you see in the material world around you that tells you something about the grandeur of God, the majesty of God, the character of God and the care and the intricacy of God.”

In this way, Moore suggested, Christians possess a stronger motivation for environmental concern than do secular communities. After all, Christianity presents a holistic outlook about the design and purpose of the earth that a strictly naturalist viewpoint cannot offer. But, according to Moore, Christian and secular culture should converse about the best methods and approaches for earth-care, the environment and the material order. And entering a conversation with secular communities will afford Christians the opportunity to testify about why creation matters.

“I think that if Christians and non-Christians can be in dialogue with one another about what it means to care for the earth, about what it means to preserve natural resources, about what it means to be compassionate toward animals and toward other aspects of the material creation, if we can have that conversa-

tion, we’re going to be able to have a deeper conversation about ‘What is human flourishing for anyway?’ ‘What is the material world for anyway?’ ‘Why is it that these things are so important and so meaningful?’” Moore asked. “Ultimately, because life is important. And why is life important? If all we are is sentient, carbon-based creatures who are going to be here and gone, then this isn’t a conversation worth having in the ultimate scheme of things. But if you believe that John 3:16 is grounded in reality, that God has a concern not only for life, but for life that is abundant and life that is everlasting; God is not simply allowing this material world to collapse in on itself, but He ultimately is going to redeem it. Then the question is, ‘Where do I fit in the ultimate pattern and purpose for all of that?’”

Moore concluded his talk presenting God’s plan to redeem creation through the life, death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ. Christ, then, is the ultimate purpose of the earth and the universe. ✚

Graham school hosts church planting collaborative

By AARON CLINE HANBURY

Across the world, many students come to the United States in order to attend American colleges. This results in college campuses that essentially function as international melting pots. In His providence, God gathers the nations in small, concentrated communities known as university campuses. Fulfilling the Great Commission, in part, means reaching these assimilated students.

The Billy Graham School of Missions and Evangelism at Southern Seminary hosted a collaborative for church planters ministering to these college communities Nov. 16-18, 2010. The intention of the Collegiate Church Planting Collaborative was to provide church planters in areas in or around college campuses with an opportunity to discuss ideas, struggles and implementation strategies with other planters in similar situations.

“The Collegiate Church Planting Collaborative is an opportunity for planters who are planting churches on or near college campuses to discuss, debate and dialogue about this unique approach to planting,” Chuck Lawless, dean of the Graham School and vice president

for academic programming at Southern Seminary, said.

The CCPC organized its three-day discussion around five “topics” that attendees discussed in small groups. Discussion questions guided conversations among the planters, attempting to tease out both the positive and negative experiences and insights different church planters have. For each topic, a leader would address the whole collaborative, introducing the issue and offering some direction for discussion. The CCPC presented for discussion the need for leaders in a college-context church plant; sustainability with family and ministry; launching new plants; funding; and theological and practical reflections about a single-aged congregation.

The collaborative concluded with a discussion about how to promote and execute more church plants in college communities.

“The Graham School is committed to church planting, and we are excited about partnering with other SBC entities to help facilitate this important discussion,” Lawless said. “We always want to be in dialogue with leaders who are seeking to do the Great Commission in their contexts.” ✚

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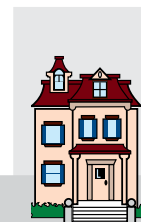
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Developing a Framework for the doctrine of Scripture: John Frame speaks about the God who speaks

John M. Frame, J.D. Trimble Chair of Systematic Theology and Philosophy at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Fla., and Josh Hayes, director of news and information at Southern Seminary, discuss Frame's new book, The Doctrine of the Word of God (P&R, 2010) and other related matters concerning Scripture, theology and apologetics.

JH: What would you say warrants writing a book about the Bible?

JMF: I think the authority of the Bible is probably the most important question that faces the evangelical world today. I see a lot of compromise of the historic doctrine, and I think there a lot of people who are writing books and articles on this today who don't even seem to be aware that the Bible itself talks about the Bible. There is a doctrine of the Bible in the Bible, and if we're going to talk about the Scriptures, we need not only to refer to contemporary scholars and languages and archaeology and all of that, but we need to first of all see what Scripture says about itself, which in the end is what God says about it.

JH: J.I. Packer notes in the book's foreword that until the publication of *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (DWG), there existed no recent works about the doctrine of Scripture that he would consider magisterial. With the current lack of quality, comprehensive volumes about Scripture from an historic evangelical perspective, how aware were you of this as you were planning to write this book?

JMF: I think that Dr. Packer is very kind to say this is magisterial. I wouldn't have thought, nor would I have planned, to gain that kind of compliment by writing my book. There are a lot of older works that do this pretty well – of course, B.B. Warfield's corpus of articles and so on. *DWG* is part of my series called the *Theology of Lordship*. It's just kind of a natural thing to write since I've been teaching the doctrine of the Word of God for more than 40 years.

So that was basically what was on my mind – putting those lectures on paper, elaborating on them, so on and so forth – but I think you're right. It does play a role today, probably a role that is not played by any other single volume.

JH: What do you think makes *DWG*, as you say in its preface, your best book yet?

JMF: I'm getting toward the end of things. I'm 71 years old now, so I'm trying to set forth what's essential and get rid of what's unessential. In my earlier writing, I tried to cover too many things. I tried to gain expertise in a lot of different matters. What I'm trying to do now is

to say what needs to be said and communicate it in a way that's most effective. I think I mention in the preface that I try to go down fewer rabbit trails in order to stick with the fundamentals. I think through God's grace and His empowerment I've been able to achieve that to some degree. As I sit down and read it over, it seems to be easier to follow, the arguments seem sharper and edgier and tighter. God has enabled me to come up with some metaphors –



like the personal-word model and other things – that are helpful. I just think it flows better and it's more instructive and probably more helpful to the people who read it.

JH: What makes the *personal-word model* that you discuss in *DWG* distinct from other approaches to Scripture?

JMF: I think a better description of Scripture – and really a stronger view of Scripture when you get right down to it – is God's personal words to us. Those words are all-authoritative whether they are propositions, commands, questions, poetry, emotional expression – whatever they are, they come to us from God. The fact that they come to us from God makes all the difference. That's a tremendously important point. It's more important

fundamentally than the question of whether God reveals Himself in propositions, although I certainly think He does among other things.

I did my theological study back in the '60s where the big argument between evangelicals and liberals was whether God could reveal Himself propositionally; a proposition is simply an item of information or statement of fact. Of course, the neo-orthodox tradition of the mid-20th century was very much opposed to the idea

of propositional revelation. They thought that it was somehow undignified for God to tell us an item of information. But so much of the Bible is indicative. So much of the Bible is telling us facts, or items of information, if you will; that may trivialize it, but there's so much fact in the Bible – about history of redemption, the fact of God's creation, the fact of Jesus' incarnation, death and resurrection for us – that the attack on propositional revelation is just silly and distant from what the Scriptures themselves teach.

But perhaps we emphasize that too much because, of course, the Bible is not just propositions and

here the liberals had sort of a persuasive case. They wanted to say that God doesn't just reveal items of information – He reveals Himself, He reveals His purposes, He reveals His love for us and all of that. I think our recent studies on the nature of language indicate that language, including the language of the Bible, is not just propositions, but it's also questions, imperative, emotive expressions and all the different genre of literature that we have.

JH: Why do you write in what some call a "self-referential" style (i.e., using first-person terms)?

JMF: I do that because that's just who I am. I like to think of theology as more of a personal conversation. I do think that theology needs to be rigorous, but I want the tone to be that

of a teacher in the church, an elder, an older brother, someone who is helping the readers to enter in more deeply to their relationship with Christ. For a long time I've been opposed to the academic model of theology that says theology is just another academic discipline and that when people write theology they should have all the footnotes and bibliography and other impersonal elements. I think those are valuable tools and skills for theologians to have, but essentially, theology is the *didache* of the New Testament, which is supposed to be the presentation of sound doctrine, and it's supposed to be doctrine that builds people up in the faith.

I don't think that reading academic papers is usually a very good way of building people up in the faith. I'm not saying that's something bad, but I think that theology again is much more than that. I always try to take the role of somebody who is concerned about the hearts and souls of the people who are reading the paper and who himself has a personal relationship with Christ and with the doctrines that I am teaching. If anything, I think that theologians need to pay a whole lot more attention than they do today to the strength of their arguments. I think a lot of theologians don't seem know what it means to put together a sound argument, but that's different from the tone that you establish as a writer.

JH: How do you understand your published works to edify the church as a whole, not only seminary professors and seminary students and pastors, but also the Christian sitting in the pew each week?

JMF: I would certainly hope that when my seminary students get ordained and are out in the pastorate that they will be able to take the material that I've shared with them and present it in a way that can be a blessing to the people who they speak to. I am a seminary professor and an academic for better or worse. I have to play a particular role and that role of course is the training of students to be pastors and to engage in other ministries. Even though I try to achieve a somewhat personal tone, I have to be honest and say it's not a tone that everyone can follow. There are some books that are very popular, like the books that I wrote on worship. But for the most part, if you're going to understand my books, you need some college-level training. Maybe a smart high-school kid could follow them. But I think you need some college-level training to make the best use of them.

JH: Since, as you argue in the book, we would have no doctrine at all without God's

Word, would it be safe to say we could have no knowledge at all without God's self-revelation?

JMF: Oh yes, that's one of the emphases of my work. I teach apologetics also, and one of the emphases of my apologetics teaching following Cornelius Van Til is that there is no intelligible communication apart from God. Certainly, the Lord – the reality of God – is a presupposition for us to have any level of knowledge at all. But of course, what that implies is that any knowledge we have is by revelation – either special revelation, as we call it, which is focused in the Scriptures, or general revelation in which God reveals Himself through the creation. And this should be the general pattern of our knowledge. Of course, a lot of people resist this, but it's what God ordained our knowledge to be by taking His spoken and written words as our foundation and then applying those to the general revelation and the world He created.

JH: So would you also say that all doctrinal divides are an issue of biblical authority?

JMF: Yes, they are. Ultimately, our only knowledge about doctrine comes from Scripture, and so it's Scripture that's always an issue. Now sometimes I think these divisions come about because one party or the other, or both, simply rejects the authority of Scripture, and that's the most serious kind of error that there is. But sometimes divisions among us have to do with parties acknowledging Scripture as the Word of God, but interpreting it differently and having different ways of organizing it and applying it to situations. Those kinds of disagreements, I think, are somewhat less serious. Although, in general, we need to work on them together, some of them are more serious than others. I think the difference between orthodox Christians and Jehovah's Witnesses on the person of Christ is a very serious matter, and of course, it may define whether someone is eternally saved or not. On the other hand, I think the differences between Presbyterians and Baptists about the subjects and the mode of baptism are less serious matters, and we can have good fellowship even though that issue is not resolved.

JH: How should we relate the clarity (per-spiciuity) of Scripture to the need to sometimes divide?

JMF: That's a complicated question. I think I'm probably more inclined than other Presbyterians in taking a favorable attitude toward other denominations. Nevertheless, it is difficult. I think it is simply wrong to say that we can't have fellowship with other Christians who disagree with us about anything. I don't think there are any two Christians who agree about everything. You have to draw some kinds of lines there. I think we ought to draw them as broadly as possible without injuring our conscience and the consciences of others. I would

have no problem, for example, in having a church where both infant baptism and confessional baptism are allowed to continue side-by-side. I don't think that would be a bad thing, although most Presbyterians and Baptists seem to assume that we can't fellowship together if we have that difference. I think that's wrong. You see, there is a danger in losing our purity of doctrine, but there's also a danger of shutting other Christians out who we should be having fellowship with and who we should be learning from. We need to balance those two considerations, both with regard to doctrine and with regard to practice. I wrote a book on that, by the way, which is called *Evangelical Reunion* (available on a Web site that I share with Vern Poythress called www.frame-poythress.org).

JH: How can we present the close association between God and His word, which you explain in DWG, without seeming as if we're guilty of "bibliolatry" (i.e., making the Bible itself God)?

JMF: We have to make a distinction between the verbal message that's written down in the Bible and the material media on which it is written down. We need to respect the verbal message as something divine without bowing down before the material medium. People who talk about bibliolatry usually don't bother to make that kind of distinction, and so I think that discussion has become incredibly confused.

The Bible is the Word of God. The Bible is a collection of God's utterances. God is always the speaker, even when there's a human speaker, like Abraham or David. God is always the one who tells the story. He's the speaker of the Scriptures. Of course, the Bible is also the Word of God written down on clay tablets, on parchments, on paper and ink or on digital media. It's the Word of God, but it comes to us through created things. It comes to us through created media, and I say a lot of about that in the book. We talk about the Word of God, but we talk about all the media of the Word and the long process over centuries by which the Scripture comes to us. So you have to make a distinction.

The Word of God is divine, and we ought to reverence His speech just as much as when He spoke it to Abraham, just as much as when He spoke it from Mount Sinai to the people of Israel (who were scared to death, remember). When we hear God's voice, we should bow down before Him. Psalm 56 says, "In God, whose word I praise." That is religious worship directed to the Word of God. But we don't worship the clay tablets or the parchments or the paper or the digital media. Those are part of creation, so we don't bow down before the Bible as a written book. We don't get all scared about throwing it away when it's worn out or that kind of thing.

JH: How should Christians think about the issue of circularity pertaining to ultimate authorities (e.g., "I believe the Bible is God's Word because it says it's God's Word.")?

JMF: I think it's important to recognize that we do have a supreme authority. All intellectual viewpoints are circular in the sense that they start with some ultimate authority – that is a criterion of truth – some way of determining what's right and wrong, what's true and false. If you're a rationalist philosopher, you believe that human reason is the ultimate standard of truth. If somebody comes to a rationalist and says, "Prove to me that human reason is the ultimate standard of truth," then the rationalist has only one choice, which is to present a rational argument. That is an argument that appeals to reason in order to defend reason as a highest authority. He can't really do anything else because if he appeals to some higher authority to validate reason, then he doesn't believe that reason is the highest authority anymore. So that's true in rationalism, in empiricism, in Islam, in Hinduism, and it's true in Christianity. And for us, the Word of God is the supreme authority. How do we defend the Word of God? Ultimately, by referring to the Word of God. There isn't anything higher for us to appeal to, and if we tried to appeal to something higher, then we would be contradicting our own view, and we can't do that.

Remember, though, that the Bible is not just an object. The Bible is a book that contains a lot of content. It presents that content in a way that is geared to persuade its readers. And so when we're arguing for the resurrection, we go to 1 Corinthians 15 and we look at appearances of Jesus to the apostles and then to 500 people at once as if the Corinthians can go and interview the 500 witnesses of the resurrection if they want to. The Bible presents arguments. The Bible presents evidence. So appealing to the Bible is not just a bare appeal to authority. It's an appeal to a book which contains evidence and arguments. It's interesting, however, in 1 Corinthians 15 that when Paul is defending the resurrection, he says over and over again, "This is what we preached to you. If you don't believe in the resurrection, then our preached message is void, and we are foolish." And so even though Paul engages in evidence and argument, his highest appeal is to the Word of God that came through his apostolic preaching.

JH: Why then is the inherent circularity of people's viewpoints not more obvious to them?

JMF: The Bible says that non-Christians know the truth clearly, as in Romans 1, but they suppress that knowledge. That's a theological point explaining unbelief right there. But in regard to the circularity question in Western thought, we've been dealing with a philosophical tradition that maintains autonomy of thought – the idea that human thought can

depend on nothing higher than itself. Human thought depends on human reason, senses, and feelings, but not on anything higher than human thought itself. And people just got used to thinking that way. Even many Bible scholars just routinely assume that the Bible is an object of study by autonomous human reason. They don't even consider the fact that you can't understand the Bible without the Bible's own way of understanding.

It's very difficult intellectually to persuade people who have been taught from their earliest school days that science, philosophy, history and other disciplines have to be done from an autonomous human starting point. Of course, if you're persuaded that human reason has the final say in everything, you're going to mightily resist the idea of God having the final say. It takes a pretty big leap for modern people to consider the ultimate authority of God and the ultimate authority of the Bible, and there are things that can be said about that, but ultimately conversion is just what it's always been – the work of the Holy Spirit.

JH: Do you have any other writing projects planned?

JMF: Yes, there's another book I've written that's scheduled to come out next year dealing with questions about Law and Gospel and about the two kingdoms versus one kingdom. And I have been given the green light by P&R Publishing to write a systematic theology. The deadline for me to complete the manuscript is early 2013.

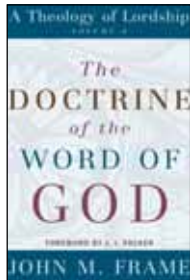
JH: I understand you are also a skilled pianist. Do you have any planned concert tours scheduled – perhaps *Apologetics to the Glory of God: The Musical*?

JMF: No, I don't think so. Maybe it would be better to take one of my other books on a concert tour, but I'm not in shape to do any kind of concert tour. I'm way out of practice. I'm able to play hymns in church, and I'm able to improvise a little bit, but all of my Bach works and stuff like that have left my fingers for the most part.

Most every place I've been, I've been either an organist or pianist or worship director or choir director or something like that. I always take a very deep interest in worship and the music of the church. I've written a couple books on [worship], one called *Worship in Spirit and Truth* and the other, *Contemporary Worship Music: A Biblical Defense*. I took a lot music lessons as a kid, piano and organ and some harmony and counterpoint. I more or less quit my lessons till I got to college and started working on philosophy and other things. 🙏

Literature

Featured



The Doctrine of the Word of God (P&R, \$39.99),
John M. Frame

Review by JOSH HAYES

Poetry, narrative, songs, letters, commanded-cwild-sacrifice, genocidal holy wars and floating axe heads

– these make up the variety of subject matter and genres through which God communicates to mankind. The issue for human beings has always been whether or not they will listen and obey.

“When God speaks, our role is to believe, obey, delight, repent, mourn – whatever he wants us to do. Our response should be without reservation, from the heart. Once we understand (and of course we often misunderstand), we must not hesitate. We may at times find occasion to criticize one another’s words, but God’s words are not the subject of criticism,” John Frame writes in his latest book, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*.

As asserted in Frame’s book, no matter how perplexed by the holy wars they may become, regardless of how appalled they may feel toward God’s seemingly atrocious command for Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac, and

irrespective of how much skepticism they may exhibit toward its miraculous content, human beings are to wholeheartedly receive God’s revelation as true, trustworthy and absolutely authoritative.

Frame’s new book serves as the fourth and concluding volume of his Theology of Lordship series, which also consists of *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, *The Doctrine of God* and *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*. In this fourth volume, Frame advocates a “personal-word” model of divine communication. Scripture, he argues, should be treated as nothing less than God’s personal word, and for that reason, mankind is obligated to believe and obey it.

Frame makes clear that this work differs from others because he does not give prolonged attention and priority to historical surveys and contemporary thought concerning the doctrine of Scripture. Instead, he contends that a correct view of Scripture comes from heeding the Bible’s teaching about the Bible, a circularity that he not only accepts but embraces, recognizing that God’s Word possesses ultimate authority.

“The main difference between this book and other books on the doctrines of revelation and Scripture is that I am trying here, above all else, to be ruthlessly consistent with Scripture’s own view of itself. In that regard, I’m interested in not only defending what Scripture says about

Scripture, but defending it by means of the Bible’s own worldview, its own epistemology, and its own values,” Frame writes.

Nearly 700 pages long, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* consists of four parts collectively making up its 46 chapters, which are accompanied by 17 appendices. In part one, Frame considers the orientation of the book, which entails issues of terminology and method as well as how the book fits into his lordship theology.

In parts two through four, Frame follows the pattern of his multi-dimensional perspective for reality: normative, situational and existential. For readers less familiar with his works, Frame persistently employs these three perspectives to correspond with the lordship attributes of God’s authority, control and presence. This triad of perspectives gives readers a full-orbed framework for relating and applying God’s Word to God’s being and nature, God’s world and their own subjective experience as God’s creatures.

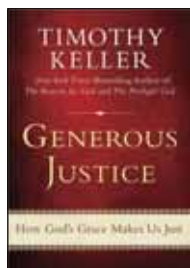
Part two concerns the situational perspective by discussing mainstream liberal views of the doctrines of revelation and Scripture. Presenting the normative perspective, part three provides analysis of how Scripture defines and understands God’s Word. Like part three, part four is highly normative in nature, but in keeping with Frame’s three-perspective scheme, it primarily functions as the existential

perspective by looking at the means by which God’s personal word comes from His mind to human hearts.

The Doctrine of the Word of God’s fourth section is the bulk of Frame’s book, covering such topics as canon, inspiration, inerrancy, clarity, genre, hermeneutics, transmission and perceived problems. Further, Frame considers how the Word comes to bear upon areas such as teaching and preaching, sacraments, theology and confessions, creeds and traditions. Dealing with the usual matters tied to the doctrines of revelation and Scripture in addition to taking on some areas unique to Frame, this book proves to be comprehensive, fresh and engaging

In his chapter about theology, Frame writes that like good teaching, good theology is a “legitimate communication of the Word of God.” This book is precisely that, a legitimate communication of Scripture’s presentation of the Word of God.

With *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, Frame offers a resource that will doubtlessly become the standard work pertaining to the doctrines of Scripture and revelation for generations to come. As theologian J.I. Packer states in the foreword for the book, Frame’s new book qualifies as both magisterial and indispensable.



Generous Justice: How God’s Grace Makes Us Just (Dutton, \$19.95),
Timothy Keller

Review by AARON
CLINE HANBURY

For better or worse, the term “social justice”

is a buzz word in today’s culture. Some people seem to love a term describing intentional concern for those people who society has disadvantaged. But others appear to chafe at the idea of allegedly liberal propaganda wrapped in a “that-sounds-nice” phrase like “social justice.”

In his newest book, Timothy Keller, senior

pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City, engages the ideas of justice and social care from a decidedly biblical perspective. Simply, Keller’s thesis is that when a person experiences an affecting realization of God’s free, unmerited grace, that person naturally comes to a greater concern for the corporate welfare of his or her community.

“There is a direct relationship between a person’s grasp and experience of God’s grace, and his or her heart for justice and the poor,” Keller explains early in his book.

Developing his point, Keller recalls a pattern from both of his pastoring experiences.

“In both settings, as I preached the classic message that God does not give us justice but saves us by free grace, I discovered that those

most affected by the message became the most sensitive to the social inequities around them.”

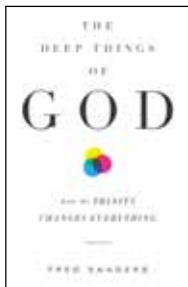
This concern for society should then affect the way Christians think about those around them, interact with the underprivileged and engage their communities. Supporting his thesis, Keller directs his readers through the Old Testament teachings about justice and community care; Jesus’ instructions about justice; the Christian understanding of neighbors; why and how Christians do justice; the relationship of justice and public engagement; and the reason for justice in an ordered creation.

The root of true justice, Keller concludes, is the Gospel. As God redeems His people and renews the world, so Christians should pursue increasingly renewed societies and

emphasize the importance of justice in human relationships.

“The biblical idea of justice is comprehensive and practical, but it is also high and wonderful. It is part and parcel of what God is doing in history,” Keller writes. “God is reconciling humanity to himself – and as a result of the great transaction, he is reconciling all things to himself. He is bringing all things in heaven and earth together in Christ.”

Generous Justice provides helpful and fresh perspective concerning old teachings. And Keller compellingly brings the biblical understanding of justice to application for 21st-century Christians.



The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything (Crossway, \$17.99), Fred Sanders

Review by JOSH HAYES

God is not an iceberg; neither is He a shamrock. Most people likely do not see themselves as need-

ing a 240-page book to tell them that, but Fred Sanders' *The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything* may cause many readers to realize their understanding of the triune God needs more refining than they thought.

As Sanders notes, many Christians' minds jump to H₂O and shamrocks as analogies to

help them conceptualize the Trinity. However, he contends, upon hearing the word "Trinity," Christians' minds should jump instead to Jesus as He is presented in the canonical Gospels. In relation to the Trinity, Christians should think of the Gospel message of how God the Father redeems a people for Himself through His Son Jesus Christ whose work is applied to believers by the Holy Spirit.

What evangelical Christianity as a whole needs, Sanders argues, is a deeper understanding of the Trinity – not only how the persons of the Trinity each function in terms of the economy of redemption, but also how the Trinity has existed for eternity, apart from creation, as the perfectly complete, self-sufficient and ever-joyful God. Sure, evangelicals will give consent to the term, he writes, but Trinitarian

thought does not thoroughly pervade evangelical doctrine as it should. The Trinity and the Gospel are inseparable in nature, Sanders suggests.

"[The] Gospel is Trinitarian, and the Trinity is the Gospel. Christian salvation comes from the Trinity, happens through the Trinity, and brings us home to the Trinity," he writes.

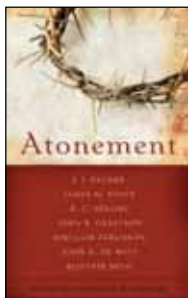
Christians feeling as if their faith needs deepening should not look to some future spiritual epiphany or experience; nor should they look for additional "facts" about God. Rather, Sanders says, Christians' primary need is to realize what they already have in their relationship with the Trinity.

"Our great need is to be led further in to what we already have. The Gospel is so deep that it not only meets our deepest needs but

comes from God's deepest self," he writes.

Some may view the doctrine of the Trinity as unnecessarily abstract, complicated and potentially confusing and divisive. Yet, one's understanding of the doctrine practically affects the entirety of one's life, as *The Deep Things of God* shows in discussing how the Trinity applies to such areas as the shaping of one's theology, salvation's scope and nature, Christ's centrality, Bible reading and prayer.

For readers interested in going beyond the tip of the iceberg with respect to the Trinity, Sanders' *The Deep Things of God* serves as a genuinely reflective, witty and well written resource to assist in this exploration.



Atonement (P&R, \$12.99), Edited by Gabriel N.E. Fluhrer

Review by JOSH HAYES

The book *Atonement* is foolishness – that is, to those who have yet to realize the soul-saving, life-transforming beauty

of the cross. But for those who have experienced the resuscitating and humbling power of the message of Christ crucified, the book will likely prove to accurately appropriate the power of God intrinsically latent in the Gospel.

"The doctrine of blood atonement makes God too personal, too sovereign, and too violent for modern people who prefer Oprah's 'non-judgmental god stuff,' to use her words. For this reason, I have compiled the words of

the [book's] authors into one volume. These men love the atonement and they believe in its beautiful truth so strongly that they can't help but preach it," N.E. Fluhrer, the book's editor, writes in the preface.

A product of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, *Atonement* includes contributions from well known pastors and theologians such as J.I. Packer, R.C. Sproul, Sinclair Ferguson, Alistair Begg, James M. Boice, John R. de Witt and John R. Gerstner. Each contributor discusses various aspects of Christ's atoning death that pertain to the necessity of the atonement, its nature, purpose and other related concepts such as sacrifice, satisfaction and redemption.

Particularly appreciable is Begg's chapter discussing why the preaching of the cross is important for both believers and unbelievers. He describes preaching a "cross-less" Gospel as akin to giving people a placebo rather than the medicine they need. Furthermore, people do

not understand why they need the cross as the solution for their sin because Christians often do not properly explain the nature and extent of people's rebellion against God when sharing the Gospel.

"Why is it that people are not crying to Christ for salvation?" Begg asks. "It is largely because we don't preach the cross." For Begg, discussing the gravity of sin is part and parcel with preaching the cross.

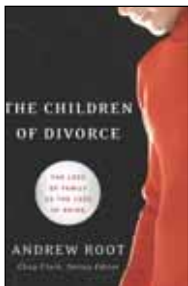
J.I. Packer's chapter about the necessity of the atonement provides clarifying insight into the discussion about whether God's sending Jesus to the cross to save sinners is a conditional or absolute necessity, granted of course that God determines to save sinners at all.

In other words, was Jesus' sin-bearing, wrath-quenching work on the cross only a single way among others that God could have chosen to save His people? Or was the atonement provided through Christ's death an

absolute necessity since it is the only means by which God can save sinners in a way that magnifies His love, wisdom and righteousness in one amalgamated act? Packer frames his discussion of Romans 8:32 around these sorts of questions.

"God didn't have to choose to save anyone. God didn't have to love sinners after they'd lapsed into sin. But he does have to judge sin because he is that sort of God. That is why atonement is necessary. The wrath of God, which is against sinners, that judicial resolve to reject sinners for their sin, has somehow to be dealt with. That wrath has to be, to use the technical word, propitiated," he writes.

For an extensive yet concise systematic look at the death of Christ, readers need not look past *Atonement*.



The Children of Divorce: The Loss of Family as the Loss of Being (Baker Academic \$19.99), Andrew Root

Review by AARON CLINE HANBURY

Blink-182, Papa Roach and Pink are fairly diverse music groups. Set aside a few common denominators of success, roughly the same time-period and broadly defined pop music, and these groups really don't have much in common. But a deeply rooted sense of loss and confusion dominates at least one song performed by each artist. Respectively, "Stay Together for the Kids," "Broken Home" and "Family Portrait" represent loud expressions of children emotionally and even physically

affected by the divorce of their parents.

Papa Roach's angry admission in "Broken Home" clearly communicates a sense of loss, even identity loss. The first verse exclaims: "I can't seem to fight these feelings / I'm caught in the middle of this / My wounds are not healing / I'm stuck in between my parents / I wish I had someone to talk to / Someone to confide in / I just want to know the truth / I just want to know the truth / Want to know the truth / Broken home / All alone."

In his new book, Andrew Root, assistant professor of youth and family ministry at Luther Seminary, points to the above examples, suggesting that parental divorce might be the "defining generational mark" of children born after 1970, much like the Kennedy assassination and Pearl Harbor bombing for the two preceding generations.

Root's book, *The Children of Divorce*, develops from the thesis that "divorce is an

ontological issue, one that impacts our very being-in-the-world." Toward that end, Root explores a brief history of family in Western culture, looks at Anthony Giddens' social theory in relation to late modernity and suggests that social life can provide deeply planted security. Root then turns to theologian Karl Barth, interacting with his theologically anthropology and specifically his relational definition of God's image in humans. And finally, Root promotes ideas to "help those suffering through the loss of their primary familial community."

The Children of Divorce is both well-written and surprisingly enjoyable, even though Root feeds his book with the clear distress of his own parents' divorce. In the introduction, Root writes about his own experience when his parents decided to separate.

"When [his mother] discussed the relief and pain of admitting the defeat of her marriage, I could only feel the defeat of the commu-

nity that was the cause of my very existence. Hearing her quiet, earnest explanation, I could almost feel myself sliding back into nonbeing. I felt numb, cut loose, unbound," he admits. "It was like the scene late in the movie *Back to the Future*, where Marty begins to become transparent as it looks like he will fail to bring his teenaged parents together. It seemed as if I were fading into nothingness."

A remedy to this loss-of-being problem, according to Root, is the church. The local church congregation, celebrating the Gospel in both preaching and relational life, functions as "both the location and the activity that can provide young people with a place to belong, a place to be-with others in suffering and hope."

HISTORY HIGHLIGHT

Intermediate examinations at the seminary

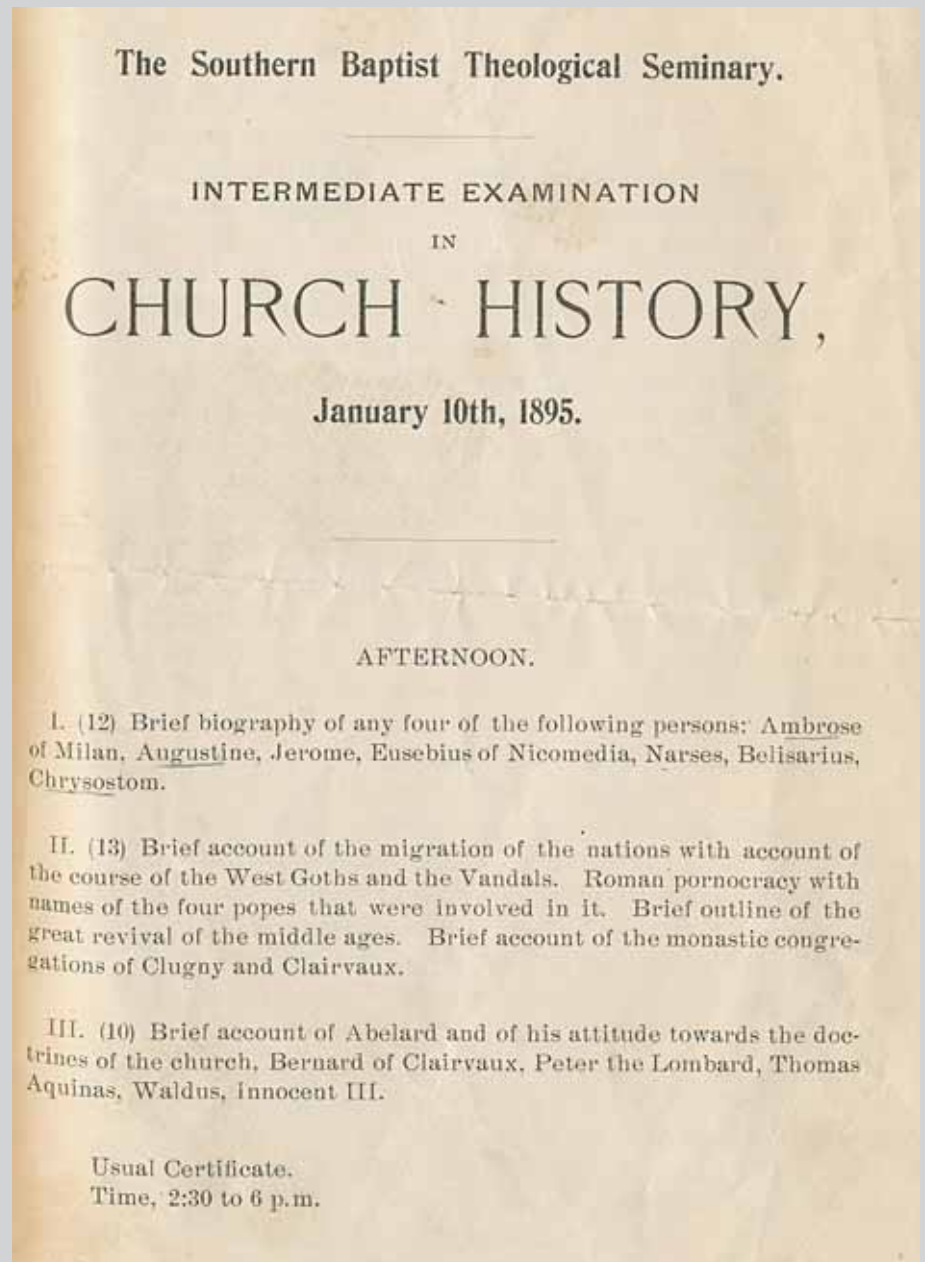
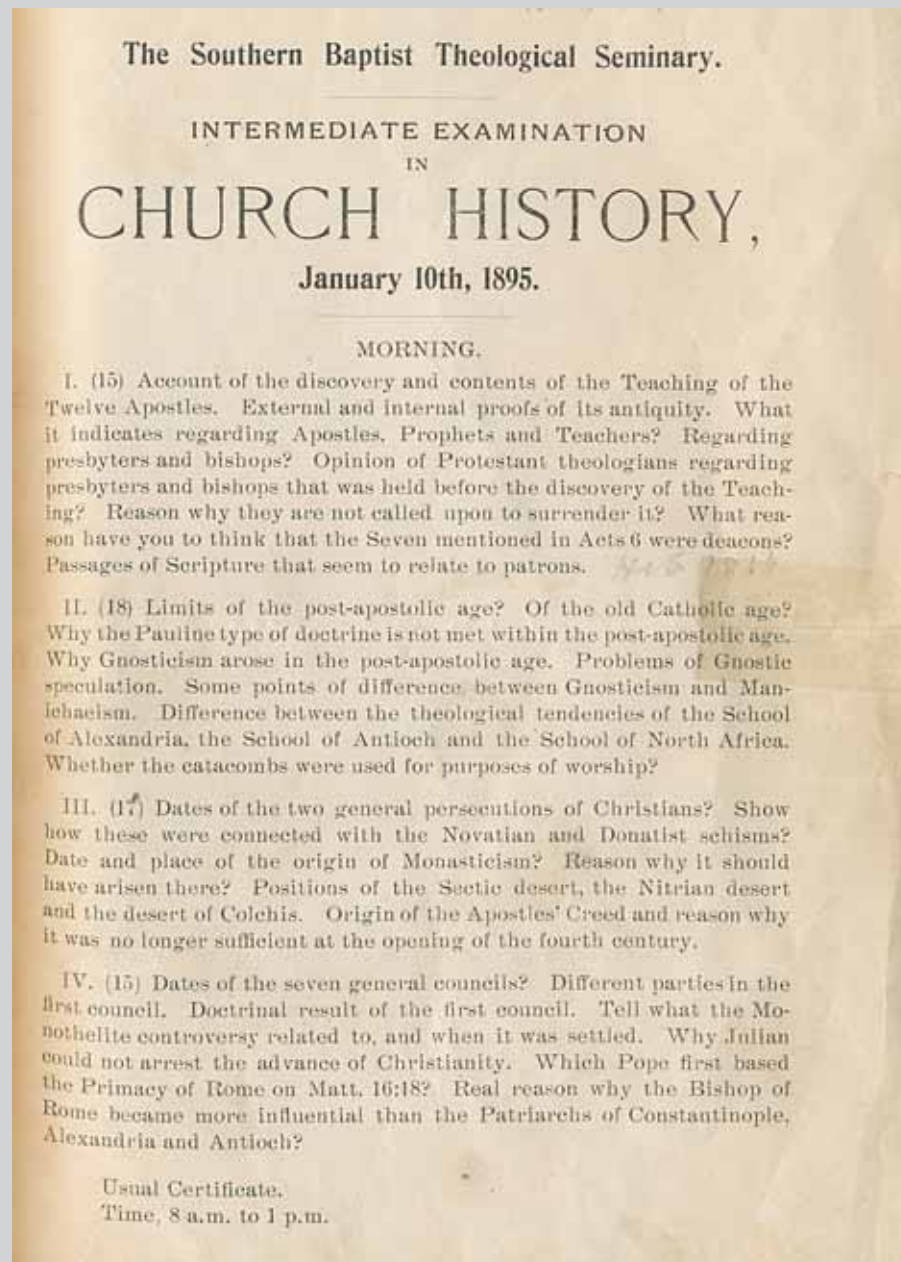
By STEVE JONES

The month of January marked the trying period of intermediate examinations for seminary students in the 19th century. These examinations were notoriously difficult, each lasting a full day, and they were administered during the course of the entire month. These intermediate examinations were followed by three more months of study culminating in final examinations, which were delivered in a similar fashion in May.

The following intermediate examination in church history was administered by William H. Whitsitt, Jan. 10, 1895. This exam was divided into two sections, the first being administered from 8 a.m. - 1 p.m. and the second from 2:30 p.m. - 6 p.m. Take a moment to see how you would have fared studying under Whitsitt.

Of the 54 students enrolled in church history during that year, 39 went on to graduate from the course. William Owen Carver, who would later go on to serve on the faculty at Southern Seminary from 1898-1943, was among the students graduating from Whitsitt's course that year.

To learn more about historical seminary exams, the history of instruction at the seminary, or other archival resources available to you at SBTS, visit the archives on the second floor of the library or at archives.sbts.edu 



Southern Story: Mary Kassian

By: COURTNEY REISSIG

Mary Kassian, distinguished professor of women's studies at Southern Seminary, never set out to become an author, speaker and professor. Her journey towards theological education began out of necessity, not a set plan to become a theologian.

"There was never intentionality on my part to write or be an author or be engaged in a theological setting. Really, everything was 'I love Jesus,' 'I love the Bible' and 'I believe that anyone who is serious can study Scripture and know Scripture,'" she said.

As she and her husband served in their church, they saw a need to personally study theology to be better prepared to minister to the people in their lives. This desire has led her to become an expert on feminism and the effects of feminism on the church and culture.

Kassian's informal theological training began in her early 20s. While in college, she was faced head-on with the feminist movement, and began to see a need for solid resources for women about what it means to be a godly woman.

"At the time, there weren't that many resources available, so I started putting together a study for my discipleship group. My husband, when I was 22 or 23, said, 'Mary, this has been so helpful for these women, why don't you get it published?' So, not knowing what that would mean, I sent it off to publishers and Crossway Books accepted it. In retrospect, it is crazy that here a 22-year-old from Alberta, Canada, with no theological education, no related degree [wrote a book]. The only thing I had was this little group of women wrestling through what womanhood is all about.

Starting as a Bible study among young women in Alberta, is the book *Women, Creation, and the Fall*. By the time her book released, the Baptist Joint Committee on Canadian Life asked Kassian to study how feminism was affecting the government policy at that time. Because of this, she began studying feminism as a philosophy and ideology.

"I began seeing a pattern developing by how feminism had moved from us claiming the right to name ourselves to naming a worldview. It was domino effect [leading to] naming God. I began to see these patterns which led to my second book which was, in its first release, titled *The Feminist Gospel*," Kassian said.

Now titled *The Feminist Mistake*, this book, caught the attention of a lot of people in the theological world, including those on The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, and in the Southern Baptist Convention.

Through relationships within CBMW and other avenues, Kassian was invited to begin

teaching classes at various seminaries. Dorothy Patterson, professor at SWBTS, invited her to teach and develop courses for Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary based on her book. But due to her commitment to her family, Kassian was unable to accept full-time teaching positions at any of the seminaries where she taught as an adjunct instructor.

She remembers at one point Mary and R. Albert Mohler Jr. invited her for dinner with them. Giving her a blank sheet of paper, Mohler essentially said, "Here is your job description you write it based on what you can bring to the table at Southern."

That was something she could work with. She began teaching women's leadership courses for the now-named School of Church Ministries in 2005.

"I couldn't drop everything and stop being a wife and mom, or expect my husband to drop his life and change the direction he feels God has our family going. That just violates everything I believe. You can't teach it if you are not living it," Kassian said.

Kassian's study of biblical womanhood, feminism, and culture began with her and has poured out of her own life. She believes her entire life is ministry, rather than relegating ministry to some small subset of what she does in her everyday life.

Kassian has been married to Brent for 28 years, and even their dating relationship was ignited in the context of ministry.

"We were in a rock band playing to bikers and in prisons and high schools. He was the long-haired hippie guitar player and I was the keyboard player. Our relationship was forged in the crucible of ministry, and that has been the story of our lives," she said.

Both graduating with degrees in rehabilitation medicine, Brent has been a bi-vocational minister since graduation. He was a teaching pastor for 15 years and is now a chaplain for a professional football team in Canada.

The Kassians have three sons, Clark (married to Jacqueline), Matt (NHL player for the Minnesota Wild) and Jonathan (finishing college and still at home).

Kassian's path toward Southern was not a traditional one. Though her background is in medicine, she has studied at the doctoral level at the University of South Africa. But while her story is not one that fits the mold of a track toward

professorship, it is a story of obedience to God and commitment to studying His word.

"I tell women to be obedient to what God calls them today. You seek His will and His guidance. When you are obedient in the small things, He gives you greater responsibilities. If you aren't in the small, you won't be in the big. Don't despise the small things," Kassian said. "My theology has been forged through

necessity. It is a story of encouragement to a lot of women who can't stop doing life to get a theological degree. Housewives need doctrine. Mom's of pre-schoolers need doctrine. Doctrine plays a part of every woman's life. Theology is life." 📖



From hockey pucks and punk rock to the solid rock

By JOSH HAYES

Dan Sluka says Christian girls should not date him. For one, he is married. And furthermore, he is a former hockey prodigy-turned punk rock star-turned devoted follower of Jesus Christ – any godly father’s dream for his daughter, right?



Photo by Devin Maddox

Actually, things turned out well for Sluka and his wife Kendele, who have now been happily married for 3 ½ years. As he puts it, his wife’s family embraced him, even as a “tattoo-sleeved, checkerboard

slip-on-wearing” former punk rocker who was, at the time, fresh to the Christian faith.

Sluka, a master of divinity student concentrating on worldview and culture studies at Southern Seminary, grew up in Troy, Mich., playing hockey. In fact, as one who began playing at age 3, he labels hockey his first identity in life.

“We didn’t go to church,” he said. “We did hockey. That was it.”

By age 9, Sluka was playing in the elite leagues, and as he excelled at the sport into his teenage years, he noted that during tournament play he broke some of hockey legend Wayne Gretzky’s records. Spectators considered him

a prospect for the National Hockey League. Hockey was his life at this point, he said.

“I honestly can’t remember doing homework one time in high school,” Sluka said. “I didn’t do anything else. Hockey was just consuming.”

Although he found himself playing junior hockey during his college years, Sluka started to feel burnt out. After breaking his leg during a tournament and forced to sit on the sidelines for six months, he said he began to wonder what he should do next. He soon entered the band phase of his life.

As a child who had witnessed the effects of alcohol abuse, Sluka began spending his time with “straight-edge kids.” Straight edge is a label that refers to a subculture of hardcore punk rock consisting of people who commit to living a drug- and alcohol-free lifestyle in reaction to the type of habits and abuses normally associated with rock-and-roll culture. From within this subculture, Sluka put together a band. By the age of 20, he and his band had signed with an indie (independent) music label. They produced two full-length albums and toured in the United States and Canada.

At the time, Sluka thoroughly enjoyed the benefits of his punk-rock identity.

“I just wanted to be liked and known – it was so cool having my own words shouted back into my face,” he said, describing the self-gratifying nature of experiencing a sea of hundreds of teenagers with their eyes glued to him as they sang along with his lyrics.

“It was such a cool thing, but at the same time, it was unhealthy for me because I wanted that,” he said.

However, the wave of punk-rock success would soon fade as the band broke apart on the brink of their second album.

During what he called the worst summer of his life following his college graduation, Sluka struggled to find a job utilizing his degree in history and secondary education. Though never to the point of considering suicide, he became very apathetic toward life, imbibing an “I don’t care” attitude, as he described it.

What changed his life, Sluka said, was, in his words, “so simple” – an invitation from his cousin to visit a Bible study.

He said he cannot remember the biblical text the group studied, but he described his experience with Scripture that evening as one where the flat letters on the page suddenly became three-dimensional and things clicked in his mind for the first time. He then entered the third identity phase of his life – the Jesus phase.

“That night I met Jesus, and when I say, ‘I met Jesus,’ I mean that I went from knowing about Him to actually knowing Him in that moment, in that instant, and my life was changed ever since then,” Sluka said.

During the course of the following months, God began opening doors of opportunity for leading and teaching through Bible studies, he said, noting that during this period he met his wife, Kendele.

In fall 2006, a deep encounter with the Lord as he read Psalm 69 brought him to consider entering some form of full-time ministry. In January 2008, he began attending Moody Theological Seminary and Graduate School in

Plymouth, Mich., taking evening classes while working full-time.

As his first book in seminary, Sluka read SBTS professor Tom Schreiner’s *Paul, Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology* (IVP Academic). The book not only excited him about the life of Paul and becoming a student of theology, but it also served as a plank in the bridge that led Kendele and him to Louisville.

As he heard more from friends about R. Albert Mohler Jr., president of SBTS, and professors such as Bruce Ware and Schreiner, he and his wife made the decision for him to transfer to Southern Seminary. The growing adoption movement and the emphasis on international missions within the Southern Baptist Convention appealed to the Slukas as well.

With the desire to pursue the best seminary education available, Sluka enrolled at Southern in January 2010. As one blessed to have complete financial assistance for seminary, he does not take lightly the opportunity before him, thanking God each day for the time he has at Southern, as he walks up the hill to campus from his Grinstead apartment.

“When I walk to school everyday, I walk up that hill and I see these banners for the seminary, and I get so excited and I thank God,” he said. “I don’t want to let a moment go by, so I study so hard. I don’t want to waste a moment.”

Sluka and Kendele attend Highview Baptist Church’s East campus. He will finish his M.Div. coursework during the summer and then plans to pursue doctoral work, considering studying apologetics and Christian aesthetics. 📖

W encourages women to be wise in a wild world

By COURTNEY REISSIG

We live in a culture that exalts wildness, Mary Kassian told the nearly 300 women gathered for the W Conference, Nov. 19-20. Women from all around the region descended on the campus of Southern Seminary to hear Kassian, distinguished professor of women’s studies at SBTS, speak about what it means to be a “woman of the Word” in a world gone wild. In addition, there were numerous break-out sessions offered to help women dive deeper into the study of biblical womanhood.

“According to the Bible, wildness is a lot more than breaking a set of rules. It is a heart attitude that disregards God and says ‘I will do it my way.’ If a girl is wild, it is her attitude, not her behavior that is the core problem,” Kassian said.

True womanhood is about who we are on the inside, and that feeds into who we are on

the outside, Kassian continued. But we live in a culture where it is growing increasingly more difficult to be a wise woman.

In her first session on Friday night, Kassian laid the foundation for our culture’s current disdain for true womanhood. Tracing the feminist movement through culture, Kassian showed that this attitude has left a tragic mark on women today. This progression of feminism can be traced through culture in television shows from “The Mary Tyler Moore Show” to “Sex and the City.” The world we live in has assimilated to the ideology of feminism. Everything around us, Kassian said, is attempting to eradicate traditional views of womanhood.

“We live in a world where wildness has been normalized. It used to be that wildness was deviance, now it is normative,” Kassian said.

But this is not a new idea. Kassian asserted that wildness actually began in the Garden of

Eden, when Eve wanted to have her own way and believed Satan’s lie. Women have been assaulted with the consequences ever since.

Kassian’s new book, *Girls Gone Wise in a World Gone Wild*, is a study contrasting the wild woman of Proverbs 7 with the wise woman of the Bible. In her final Friday evening session, she walked the women in attendance through what the wild woman looks like, showing that every woman has “wildness” in her. She concluded the conference with hope for change, highlighting seven observations about true womanhood from 1 Peter 3:1-7.

“You are not immune to going wild,” Kassian exhorted her audience. The wild woman did not become wild overnight. It is little steps in wildness, and not understanding that all of us have wildness in our hearts, that leads to full-blown wildness.

“Wildness warps our womanhood,” Kassian said, showing that these issues are crucial not

only to our own souls, but also to the display of the Gospel in our lives.

“Sexuality and gender are not about me. They are critical images that reveal the nature and character of God. When we get it right, we put the Gospel on display. When we get it wrong, we distort the message they are designed to display,” Kassian added.

True womanhood is not about a checklist to maintain, a personality to conform to, or even a cultural expectation. It is about Jesus Christ and His work in our lives, leading us to be obedient to His authority in our lives.

“Getting biblical womanhood right puts the Gospel on display,” Kassian said. “If this is not central in our strivings to be godly women, we are laboring in vain.”

This only happens when women know their Bibles, and more importantly, know their Savior. And that brings great hope to a lost and dying world. 📖

Announcements

Podcast from Dr. Mohler



Thinking in Public is a forum for extended intelligent conversation about important theological and cultural issues with the people who are shaping them. Visit www.albertmohler.com for more information.

Free sewing class

The free sewing class led by Mrs. Barbara Gentry meets from 6-7:30 p.m. on Mondays in Fuller Room 16. Sewing machines are provided at no cost. No experience is required, but women with experience may also participate. Knitting and crocheting lessons will also be offered. Mrs. Gentry leads the class assisted by Mrs. Kathy Vogel. For questions, you can call Mrs. Gentry locally at 380-6448 or Mrs. Vogel at 742-1497.

Doxology Ensemble auditions

Doxology Vocal Ensemble will have auditions by appointment only. This select acappella vocal group represents the seminary in concerts on and off-campus during the year. Email assistant director Will Gerrald for more information about auditions at will.gerrald@gmail.com.

Chapel choir

Singers needed for Tuesday chapel services. The chapel choir meets every Tuesday at 9 a.m. to prepare music for the Tuesday seminary chapel. This choir is open to any seminary student or spouse. Students can receive one hour of elective credit with no course fee. Join us for rehearsal Tuesdays at 9 a.m. in Cooke Hall, choral rehearsal room.

D.Min. student requests help with English grammar

Help needed reviewing English grammar and style adherence to the SBTS manual of style on writing assignments for Korean D.Min. student, Man Bae Kim. Kim is willing to pay an hourly rate. Those interested must possess high competency in English grammar, a firm grasp on the SBTS manual of style and at least a cursory knowledge of the requirements of D.Min. projects.

Free book

Through the generosity of a Christian foundation, Tom Elliff, former president of the SBC, has provided free copies of his book, A Passion for Prayer, for all SBTS students. The foundation asks only that you make a commitment to read the book within two months. If you would like a copy, or if you want copies for your church staff, come to the Billy Graham School office in Norton 164.

Essentials for the minister's wife

Seminary Wives Institute is offering the "Essentials for the Minister's Wife," I and II classes in J-Term this winter. The core courses of our practical curriculum, Essentials deals with God's plan for marriage, calling and priorities, child rearing, budgeting, contentment, preparing for common ministry situations and much more. The dates and times are as follows:
Essentials I, Jan. 11 and 12, 9 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.
Essentials II, Jan. 13, 10:30 a.m. - 4:15 p.m.; Jan. 14, 9 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.

The cost is \$20 total for both courses which must be taken together. No child care is available. Returning students may register on eCampus.

IMB contact

Jon Clauson, an M.Div. graduate and current PhD student at SBTS, is now working

with the International Mission Board to assist people in Kentucky, Ohio and Indiana who are considering service overseas. If interested in talking with him, contact Jon at jsclauson@gmail.com

Financial aid incentive

Something new with financial aid presents an incentive to take more classes. M.A. and M.Div. students taking 12-14 hours will receive a \$150 credit for the semester. Students who take 15+ hours will receive \$300. This money will be applied in the middle of the semester, after billing has closed. To qualify, students should complete the online application for financial aid at <http://finaid.sbps.edu> Please direct questions to financialaid@sbts.edu

Student handbook

Students must abide by all institutional policies outlined in the student handbook. The most current version online is always operative, and is accessible at <http://www.sbps.edu/documents/Handbook.pdf>

Ministry Resources

Ministry position postings

Full-time and part-time ministry positions may be found on e-campus through the Help Desk's link to Ministry Resources.

Résumé service

Start or update your résumé file with Ministry Resources by submitting our on-line candidate form. Visit the Church Resources quick link on www.sbps.edu for the simple instructions. The office is also eager to counsel you over your resume and ministry preferences. Visit Norton 150 or call ext. 4208.

Health and Rec

The Health and Recreation Center (HRC) will be open: M-F - 6 a.m. - 10 p.m. Sat. - 9 a.m. - 9 p.m. The swimming pool closes 30 minutes before the rest of the HRC, except Wednesdays when it closes at 6 p.m.

Holiday hours

9 a.m. - 9 p.m., Monday, Jan. 17

Aerobics schedule

- The Gauntlet T & F 7 - 7:50 a.m. Men ONLY.
- Fitness Boot Camp M, W & F 8 - 8:45 a.m.
- Mommy and Me Power Walking M, W & F 10 - 11 a.m.
- Practical Pilates M, T & R 4:45 - 5:45 p.m.
- Aqua Alive T & R 5 - 5:45 p.m.

- Fast Blast Aerobics T & R 6 - 6:45 p.m.
- Body Sculpt T & R 9 - 9:45 p.m.

Intramural volleyball

Co-ed Volleyball takes place every Monday at 6:30 p.m. in the main gym of the HRC.

Boyce basketball game against Dayspring

7 p.m. Friday, Jan. 7

The main gym, both locker rooms, and pool will be closed two hours prior to the game and will be closed for the duration of the night.

Highlands Latin School basketball tournament

Friday and Saturday, Jan. 14-15

Highlands Latin School will be hosting a basketball tournament in the main gym on Friday and Saturday. The main gym will close at 3 p.m. on Friday and will remain closed for the duration of the weekend.

Boyce basketball game against Crown College

7 p.m., Friday, Jan. 21

The main gym, both locker rooms and pool will be closed two hours prior to the game and will be closed for the duration of the night.

Boyce basketball game against Johnson Bible College

2 p.m., Saturday, Jan. 22

The main gym, both locker rooms, and pool will be closed two hours prior to the game and will be closed for the duration of the night.

Group swim lesson registration

Monday, Jan. 24 - Feb. 8 • \$20 per child.

Register at the HRC front desk. This session of group lessons will take place Feb. 9 - 25 from 3:30 - 5 p.m. Wednesdays and Fridays.

Children's program registration

Monday, Jan. 24 - Feb. 7

\$20 for one child; \$10 for each additional child Register at the HRC front desk. Kid's Fit and Motor Skills will run Feb. 7 - April 28.

Intramural registration

Monday, Jan. 24

Registration for all intramural activities will open Jan. 24. Register at the HRC front desk or by emailing hrc@sbts.edu

- Call the HRC at 897-4720 with questions about scheduling and events.
- Visit the weekly calendar on the Health and Recreation Center page of the SBTS Web site to see what is happening at the HRC
- HRC on Facebook and follow us on Twitter (SBTSHealth_Rec).



CHAPEL SCHEDULE

Chapel resumes at start of spring semester

Previous chapel messages available at www.sbps.edu/resources/.



3 Questions

WITH
Mike Cosper
*worship and arts pastor for
Sojourn Community Church
Louisville, Ky.*

1 *Many people are probably familiar with what a worship pastor does, but how do the arts fit into your role as a pastor?*

In truth, we hardly use the term “art” in our church, preferring to talk about the concept of creativity. I believe creativity is a universal human trait, which some express on canvases or with music, and others express in the color of their pick-up truck. Hebrews 10:24 says we need to “consider” how we can spur one another. As an arts pastor, I’m looking for ways that we can harness creativity and imagination for that purpose – blessing and confronting one another in new and surprising ways. This sometimes means visual art, sometimes architecture and sometimes it means working to help the congregation understand art and media in the surrounding culture in the light of the Gospel.

2 *Currently, the church seems to reflect the culture in terms of the arts, whereas in the past, the church directed the culture in terms of the arts. How can the church once again form culture instead of forming to culture?*

This is a really complex issue. All culture arises from some kind of traditioning process. Even abstract art and atonal music - stuff that’s non-referential - arises from a tradition of abstraction and deconstruction. Culture is a dialogue of ideas, and the leading voices of culture have a short reign on that throne. To be a helpful voice in that dialogue, I think the church needs to do a few things. They need to dis-enculturate the Gospel. That means severing the connections between the core of the Gospel and the cultural attachments and

identities that build up over time, whether that’s politics, ethno-centrism or a cultural hierarchy. I think there are a number of issues that have caused a rift between the church and the creative community. Some of that’s for good reason, but much of it is a hedge to the Gospel that needs pruning. That requires a vigorous understanding of Christian liberty, and a fierce willingness on the part of leaders to guard that liberty. It also requires a prolific culture. Christian artists and culture-makers need to get to work, developing their craft and building something positive. The attitude of the church (like the attitude in much of academia for the last half-century) has been one of reaction and deconstruction. If Christian creatives got busy and became prolific, the cream would rise to the top. This too requires dis-enculturation and Christian liberty. It also requires patronage. Christians need to be willing to invest in the arts – both in the local church and in the marketplace. If Christians don’t invest in the arts, the artists will go elsewhere to make a living and pay their bills.

3 *Aside from all things church, what else captures your interest?*

I’m a big fan of the Colts (I grew up in Indiana), a big fan of food (I’m a decent cook) and I watch too much TV – everything ranging from “Mad Men” to “Community.” I also love literature. Salman Rushdie and Cormac McCarthy are my favorites, but I could also get lost in Flannery O’Connor or Annie Dillard any day. And of course, I’m somewhat guitar-obsessed. I like old Fender guitars and boutique tube amps. 🎸

Towers

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