

Living in Tension ■ The God Who Sees

Beeson

2013



**Reminiscences by Norfleete Day, Anton Fourie, Jim Pounds,
Lark N. Ball and R. Parker Johnson**

Beeson

EDITORIAL TEAM



Dean
Timothy George



Editor
Betsy Childs

Designers
Jesse Palmer
Kevin Qualls
TheVeryIdea.com

Photography
Caroline Summers
Rebecca Long

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Beeson Divinity School

Samford University
800 Lakeshore Drive
Birmingham, AL 35229
(205) 726-2991

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What Were We Thinking?

Looking Back on 25 Years

By Timothy George

I shall never forget June 1, 1988. That was the day I drove from Louisville, Kentucky, to Birmingham to begin the work of what would become Beeson Divinity School. Our charge was a mission impossible—to open a new graduate school of theology by the end of that summer! We had no students, no faculty, no facilities and, besides me, just one employee, our wonderful Joyce Cox, who was secretary-receptionist-general manager—and everyone’s friend.

Immediately I began to pray that God would send us precisely those students who were meant to be a part of this new school. One by one, they began to trickle in that summer—each with a different story but somehow all convinced that God had tapped them on the shoulder for service in the life of the church. There was Rick Garner, a young pastor; Bruce and Glenda Calhoun, our first married couple; Samson Mathangani, a Baptist youth leader from Kenya; Norfleete

Day, a librarian; Rick Evans, a gifted preacher and musician; Rebecca Knight, a wife and mom; Roger Cole, a former missionary; and on and on. The divinity school opened with an inaugural class of 32 students. They stood at the headwaters of what will become, in this our 25th anniversary year, a stream of 1,000 Beeson Divinity School graduates who are active in the Lord’s work today in every continent on earth.

What did we think we were doing back in 1988? Dr. Carl F. H. Henry, who spoke at my installation as dean, described the

challenge that was before us: “The Christian movement needs clearly to exhibit the authority of Holy Scripture, the integration of intellect and piety in theological learning, and the high relevance of the Christian witness to secular society.” He also called on us to take seriously the missionary mandate of the church and to develop a program of theological formation and character building.

In response, I offered these comments, which I reproduce here, exactly as they were spoken then, as a renewal of my own vision and commitment to this blessed community of faith and learning that is Beeson Divinity School.

I come to this moment of consecration and commitment with a profound sense of the providence of God which has brought me, and all of us, to this hour. As we entered this service, we sang of all the saints in ages past, the apostles and martyrs, the missionaries and monks, the reformers and evangelists, all the saints both known and unknown to us, those who, like Abraham and Sarah, set out not knowing exactly where they were going but sure of the call of God which had impelled them to launch forth into the unknown, destined for that city which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God. Today, on this historic occasion, we come to take our place in this noble company of witnesses and saints. Aware of our own weakness and depravity, we

Statue of Ralph Waldo Beeson. ▶

are nonetheless confident that God’s overcoming grace and sustaining love is strong enough to see us through whatever obstacles or challenges may lie before us.

I also bring to this service what an old Puritan divine once called “a mixture of terror and joy, of awful reverence and holy pleasure.” I am deeply grateful for the many ties which bind my life with so many of you on this platform and in this service. On this day, I give thanks to God for a Christian grandmother, now among the blessed departed, who first told me that Jesus loves me; for a faithful wife and loving children; for a wonderful church which suffered the ministrations of a very green and inexperienced pastor; for teachers and professors who introduced me to new ideas and taught me not to be afraid of them; for pastors who believed in me and prayed for me; for students and colleagues and friends, for all of you, I give thanks to God.

We would be less than honest if we did not acknowledge that the Beeson



Divinity School is born in a time of great controversy and strife. In times such as these, we desire to relate with integrity and openness to all of God’s children and to be, in so far as God may allow us to do so, agents of reconciliation and peace. In an age of secularism and relativism, we do not declare theological neutrality. Let it be said for all posterity to hear

that we stand without reservation for the total truthfulness of Holy Scripture and the great principles of historic Christian orthodoxy. On these essential values we cannot and we will not compromise. But we also know that godly teaching must be complemented by holy living, and so we commit ourselves to the disciplines of the Christian faith, to a life of prayer and worship, to witness and discipleship, and social compassion with justice and peace for every person made in the image of God.

In the lingo of contemporary labels,

we will be neither a haven for disaffected liberalism nor a bastion of raucous fundamentalism. We will be evangelical but also ecumenical, conservative but not irresponsible, confessional yet interdenominational. Above all, I pray that we might be a school where heart and head go hand in hand, where the love of God and pursuit of truth join forces in the formation of men and women, called by God, empowered by His Holy Spirit, equipped for the ministry of His church, sent forth into the world to bear witness to the grace of God revealed in the person of Jesus Christ, whom to know is life eternal.

From all of you I beseech your prayers, support and even, as you are prompted to give it, your advice, so that, when all of us here present shall lie in the dust, the work of God’s kingdom might still be advanced through the Beeson Divinity School of Samford University. To this end, I offer my gifts and I pledge my life, through Jesus Christ our Lord who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God forever. Amen. ✝



◀ Dean Timothy George



◀ Students process to the first chapel at the new divinity school.

25 Years of Beeson Divinity School

As we thank God for 25 years of existence of theological education at Beeson Divinity School, we asked five alums to share memories of their years on campus.



by **Norfleete Day**

I thought the summer of 1988 would never end. Having felt led of the Lord to enroll in the newly announced divinity school that would be inaugurated at Samford University that fall, I was

eager to get into the adventure. As a 40-something adult who had been and was continuing to work full-time, I would be a part-time student, but that status didn't make me any less intoxicated with the desire to start my seminary experience by studying Biblical Greek and church history. The curriculum was limited that first semester, but it didn't matter because all the students were new. Indeed, everybody was new—Dean George and two others comprised the faculty, and 31 of us made up the student body. To my delight, four of us were women. Mrs. Joyce Cox, the one and only secretary, took care of answering the phone and registering students for classes in addition to handling Dean George's correspondence and other administrative tasks. She was a blessing to us all with her kind and caring spirit, her overwhelming desire to help us with any and everything, and her keen sense of responsibility.

Because we students were a small group, all of us taking most of the same courses, we had

◀ **Norfleete Day**

many new experiences to share. I remember the first day of Greek class in particular. Dr. Richard Wells, who would be teaching us, did not disappoint me. He strode into the classroom and, after greeting us warmly, opened his Greek New Testament to 1 John. With great enthusiasm, he read the Greek in short phrases, following each phrase with its English translation. His rendering of verse one remains in my memory even these 25 years later: "That which was from the beginning, which our ears have heard (and which keeps on ringing in our ears), which our eyes have seen, and which we continue to gaze upon, and which our hands have handled concerning the Word of life . . ." His explanation of the Greek perfect tense, illustrated by those participial phrases, ignited my heart with a passion for the Greek New Testament that has never diminished.

Church history with Dean George provided its own rewards. Every alum knows that Dean George is a skilled lecturer who makes church history come alive. He can transport the listener, in his or her imagination, to the very time discussed so that you almost feel yourself a participant in the events. I soaked it up like a sponge absorbing spilled water. He brought to life ideas, people and movements that I had heard of but knew little about and enabled



▲ **Richard Wells**

me to put together a sense of the flow of Christian history from its earliest days up to the present.

In addition to the excitement of the classroom, I was enriched enormously by my classmates. Perhaps our awareness of being the first class of students in this new school made us feel privileged. A spirit of openness and community marked our interactions with one another from the beginning. As early as the orientation and registration days, we were seeking to know one another in depth, learning what had brought each one to this day of new beginnings, not just for a school, but for each student. I formed deep and lasting attachments to my fellow students and to the faculty members that still remain strong. Without a doubt, those earliest days

of Beeson Divinity School were some of the richest I have known. The memories, the friendships, the learning are among my most treasured possessions. I thank God for them, for Dean George, for Mr. Beeson and for Samford University. All have been agents of great blessing in my life.

Norfleete Day (M.Div., 1993) went on to earn a Ph.D. in New Testament and was a member of the Beeson Divinity School faculty from 1992 to 2009.



by **Anton Fourie**

"It feels like a dream! This is surreal!" These were my overriding emotions as I walked around the Samford campus in the summer of 1994. My wife and I had just arrived in the United States from South Africa to continue my studies at Beeson Divinity School. The beauty of the surroundings, coupled with the stately architecture of the

campus, not to mention meeting and having class with world-class theologians I had only read about, showed me that dreams sometimes come true.

Meeting students from many diverse backgrounds and experiences was a wonderful and rich experience. Many of those friendships, fashioned around a passion for the Glory of God and sound theology, still continue to bless and influence my life. The present divinity school buildings were being built, so all the classes were held across campus in Burns Hall and Chapman Hall with worship services in Reid Chapel. Watching the present Divinity Hall taking shape was an ongoing adventure that added to the experience, and I well remember the first days in Divinity Hall sitting in these amazing lecture halls with all the latest technological devices to aid our learning experience.

The highlight of being at Beeson Divinity School was undoubtedly the profound privilege to sit at the feet of and learn from our professors! Not only were we exposed to great





▲ Lewis A. Drummond

theology but a true passion for God, the church and, not least, for us, the students. Countless hours were spent picking the minds and experience of the faculty over meals in the cafeteria and coffee in the commons. Many

informal conversations after class continued to shape and inform our theology and passion for Christ-centered ministry. The eternal investment made by the divinity faculty still bears fruit day by day in the ministry of the Gospel.

Part of that “dreamlike” aspect of being at Beeson Divinity School was the privilege I had to be the graduate assistant for Dr. Richard Wells, Dr. Lewis Drummond and Dr. Timothy George. Dr. Wells passionately taught Biblical preaching while clutching a tiny little Bible. Dr. Drummond regaled us with countless stories of crusades and amazing conversions around the world. Dr. George made the Reformation come alive and be as relevant to us today as it was when it happened.



◀ Ken Mathews with Frank, Abby and Jonathan Thielman

Coupled with these amazing experiences were the chapel services where not only our professors preached, but some of my personal heroes of the faith—Dr. John Piper, Dr. J. I. Packer and Dr. Warren Wiersbe—shared and further inspired the students to Christlike character and academic excellence.

Yes, it was like a dream and a little taste of glory. It has forever impacted my life and will be stored in a place of wonderful dreamlike memories to be treasured! Thank you, Beeson Divinity School, for enriching my life.

Anton Fourie (M.Div., 1995, D.Min., 1998) is pastor of Berney Points Baptist Church in Hoover, Ala.

1997 by Jim Pounds

As I sat in Beeson Divinity School’s chapel (not yet named Hodges) that Monday morning in February of 1997, listening to the professors introduce themselves, all sorts of thoughts were flying through my head. “Am I smart enough to be here? Will I be able to perform at a high level? How can I juggle work, school and a family—at age 35? Do I really belong with the rest of these students?” These were natural thoughts, I suppose, for someone who’d been out of school for over 12 years and just stepped out of a second professional career.

Then I heard the voice of one of the professors, “I’m Ken Mathews, and my job here is to make you nervous.”

“Make me nervous? Who is this and why would he say such a thing, even in jest? And how much more nervous can I be, anyway?” I left that opening session and moved on to the next wondering if I was already



▲ Staff, faculty and students, 1996

in way over my head. Everyone was friendly and going out of his way to be helpful, and I was enthusiastic about getting to work, but having been out of school for so long, I was most certainly nervous.

Orientation lasted two days at that time, and I couldn’t wait for it to end; I was ready to get a taste of seminary study. I showed up early for my first class that Wednesday—Introduction to Old Testament—taught by Dr. Ken Mathews (whose job was to make me nervous). As the semester went along, he DID make me nervous, but not in an intimidating or difficult fashion. Rather, he fostered the kind of nervousness that comes with wanting to do your best. I’m not referring to “best” in terms of grades and recognition. Dr. Mathews, along with so many of the other professors, began to instill in us the nervousness that comes with truly wanting to carefully and correctly handle God’s Holy Word.

It was that nervousness that made so many of us register for all the biblical studies electives—taught by Drs. Mathews, Thielman and Day—that were always demanding but incredibly rich. It was that nervousness that drove us to put in extra time when preparing for Dr. Smith’s and Dr. Miller’s preaching classes. It was that nervousness that motivated the extra research when writing papers for Dr. Bray’s and Dr. Humphrey’s theology and doctrine courses. And it was that same nervousness that encouraged us as we each worked in our supervised ministry settings, because it was really starting to sink in that we were preparing for service in the name of our risen Lord.

Our professors—so many of whom are no longer here — made us nervous in their own ways and by their own methods. It became quite clear that they wanted us to understand that we were handling holy things, something never to be done in a casual fashion. As I look around

the country at the 30 or so who graduated with me in May of 2000, almost all still in ministry, I would say that they succeeded quite well. As I talk with fellow graduates from time to time, I find that we all agree that we still get “nervous” when we prepare to preach, research to write or sit down to listen to someone’s personal concerns.

This wonderful place has always been and still remains committed to training pastors who can preach, ministers who can teach and servants who will reach. Those roles aren’t easy and never have been, but Beeson Divinity School graduates fill them with a humble nervousness that comes only because of the school’s instructors who cared and do care enough to instill a deep love and high respect for the things of a Holy God. Soli Deo Gloria!

Jim Pounds (M.Div. 2000) is director of the Extension Division at Beeson Divinity School.

by Lark N. Ball

My association with Beeson Divinity School is the result of a chance conversation with a friend I was visiting in Birmingham. I merely mentioned that I was interested in pursuing a degree in church music, and before I knew it, I was scheduled for an interview with Dr. Paul Richardson in the music department. Dr. Richardson explained my options, and I returned to Baltimore, Md., conceding to the fact that my path to Beeson Divinity School, although accidental on my part, was being ordered by the Lord. I was where God intended, and the study upon which I was embarking was necessary in order for me to fulfill his will for me.

From my first day and my first class, I admired all of my instructors. Each of them, in their own unique way, has impacted my life as a Christian and as a minister of music. I never expected to be able to count my professors among my friends, but the divinity school created a sense of community among the students, staff and instructors. Office doors were always open for advice, for conferences, for counseling. Having the opportunity to interact with faculty personally solidified



▲ President Andrew Westmoreland awards Lark Ball the Doctor of Ministry degree.

what have become lasting relationships. They were my instructors, and despite a sizable student body, they knew me; they were concerned about me. So when I found myself sitting in the lounge outside of Dean George's office, overwhelmed by the process of scheduling classes between two schools, it was no surprise to find both Dean George and Dr. Wallace Williams ready to move (what seemed like) heaven and earth to help me construct a class schedule that suited my needs.

There were occasions during my studies when it seemed as though the windows of heaven opened wide, and the significance of what I was doing and why became crystal clear to me.

Regardless of the class or the subject, at that moment, I would simply get it. I understood what I was as a result of my sin and realized that there was nothing I could do that would come close to rectifying my situation. The horrendous sacrifice Christ made of my behalf was a sobering reality. Finally, my gratitude for having the opportunity to serve as one who facilitates a worship service grew, and my desire to do my very best was overwhelming, sometimes to the point of tears. Those moments are memorable and are engraved in my heart and mind, serving even today as a vivid reminder of the importance of the work in which I engage as a minister of music.

I am grateful to God for

purposefully weaving the fabric of my life to include the instructors and staff of Beeson Divinity School. I know he used them to move me beyond the emotional barriers that had crowded in upon me, limiting my vision of ministry; God used them to help me to get it.

Lark Ball (M.Div., 2004, D.Min., 2010) is minister of music at White Rock Baptist Church in Philadelphia, Pa.

by R. Parker Johnson

I remember well my first day at Beeson Divinity School: Dr. Todd's Greek class. I had been on campus only twice before this very nervous day, and I hadn't a clue how to navigate the confusing floor plan. North wing? South wing? Basement? After running into someone I would later discover was Dr. George, I finally found my class.

I expected seminary to be a serious place with no room for real camaraderie or fellowship. If you had been in Dr. Todd's class that summer, you would have known that these were serious misconceptions. I was warmly welcomed by the other students and ministered to by my very learned professor. Summer Greek was hard, but the professor and

students and were not; they loved God, cared for his people and had a desire to make Christ known, even in the midst of second aorist verbs.

Since graduating in 2010, I have grown even more thankful for my time in what was a very special place. While a student, I very much took for granted the benefits of small class sizes, immediate and personal access to professors, and the quality of the faculty and staff. When I hear my friends discussing the latest books by Gerald Bray, Allen Ross and Kenneth Mathews, I am struck by the amazing privilege of studying under such learned yet humble professors.

It is the faculty and staff that truly set Beeson Divinity School above other great institutions. These men and women are not only passionate about their subjects; they genuinely love the Lord, his people and their students. During my time at the school, several professors consoled me during trying, discouraging and often spiritually dry seasons in my life. Whether it was the work load, personal family issues or just feeling overwhelmed by the future ahead, these professors were willing to offer a shoulder to cry on, to look past immaturity and pride, and to love on their students, among whom I was honored to be named. Seminary



▲ Robert Smith, Jr. prays for Parker Johnson.

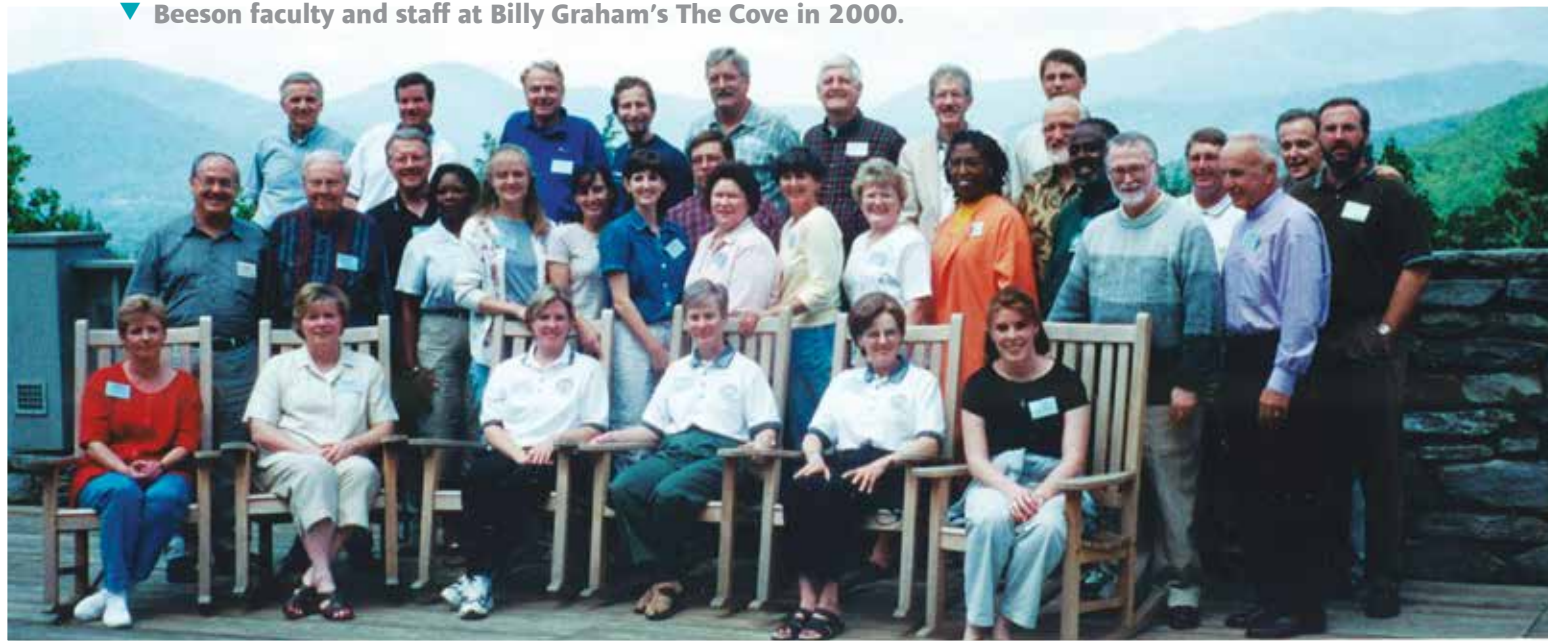
was hard, but we all had help.

I wasn't the most obvious candidate for the student body at Beeson Divinity School, as my call to full-time ministry wasn't clear early on. However, through the practicums and real-life situations discussed in class, the Lord used the school and my local church to confirm just that call. I think about my time with professors such as Gerald Bray, Kenneth Mathews, Robert Smith, Kurt Selles, Carl Beckwith, Mark DeVine and Langston Haygood as crucial in the path to ordination. Among these, however, one stood out among the rest: Mark Gignilliat. The most refreshing time on a weekly basis was unquestionably our mentoring group on Thursday mornings. He and Dr. Mathews gave me a love for the Old Testament, and the Lord used Robert Smith to foster a love of preaching.

I praise the Lord for Beeson Divinity School.

Parker Johnson (M.Div., 2010) is assistant pastor at 2Cities Church (PCA) in Montgomery, Ala. ✝

▼ Beeson faculty and staff at Billy Graham's The Cove in 2000.



▼ Paul Podraza (M.Div. 2010) and Andrew Fulton (M.Div. 2011) in the Global Center.



Living in Tension

A Theology of Ministry

By Douglas D. Webster

Most approaches to ministry try to reduce tension, solve problems and promote success.

This article aims to increase positive tensions and prepare resilient saints. This is what Jesus did in his ministry, and we want to follow his lead. Tension in the ministry is unavoidable, but there are different kinds of tension.

Aerobics is designed to stretch and strengthen your muscles without straining your muscles. We know the difference between being in good shape and suffering shin splints, tendonitis and stress fractures.

Negative tension in ministry is the result of disobedience, ignorance and resistance to the will of God. Positive tension comes from obedience, biblical integrity, faithfulness to the will of God and costly discipleship. We want to reduce negative tension in our lives and ministries and embrace positive tension. This is easier said than done. To keep negative tensions at bay, while thriving on positive tensions, requires discernment, humility and courage. Living in tension distinguishes the followers of Jesus from the admirers of Jesus—from being almost Christians to being altogether Christians.

Positive Tension

Like resistance training in a physical workout, certain tensions are good for us. They are necessary

for our growth and obedience. Where there is no tension, there is no mission. Positive tensions come from being in the world but not of the world. Negative tensions come from being in the world and of the world. We want to be as free as we can from negative tensions, but we don't want to be tension-free. When the apostle Paul wrote to the church at Corinth and told them not to associate

Like resistance training in a physical workout, certain tensions are good for us.

with sexually immoral people, he was referring to believers who were continuing to live sexually immoral lives (1 Cor 5:9). His aim was to minimize the negative tension of unrepentant sexual immorality in the body of Christ. But the Corinthian believers misunderstood what Paul meant. They thought he wanted them to have nothing to do with sexually immoral people in or outside the church. This would have eliminated the positive tension of sharing the gospel with the very people for whom Christ died. As Paul wryly said, "In that case you would have to leave the world" (1 Cor 5:10).

Spiritual discipline in the church is coupled with compassionate evangelism in the world. We seek the positive tension of being in the world but not of the world. Truth is held in tension. The mature believer learns to say, "I can do all things

through Christ who strengthens me," and then in the same breath to add, "when I am weak, then I am strong" (Phil 4:13; 2 Cor 12:10). The promise of Christ, "I have come that you might have life and have it more abundantly," is in tension with, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (Jn 10:10; 2 Cor 12:9). These positive paradoxes of ministry challenge

a simplistic faith. They require growth in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus to appreciate. Paul said to the believers at Corinth, "I try to please everyone in every way," and to the believers in Galatia, "If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ" (1 Cor 10:33; Gal 1:10). We rest on our heritage: "The faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints," and we live in the present: "He is not the God of the dead but of the living" (Jude 3; Mt 22:32).

Truth in Tension

Like a suspension bridge under permanent tension, the truth is always in tension, and the church is always suspended over the chasm of evil by cables of truth. In an earthquake, we sway, and under a load, we flex, but these positive tensions keep the church stable and strong. The beauty



of God's truth is that apparent opposites are held in tension. This dialectical tension in both doctrine and practice is necessary for us to grasp the fullness of God's revealed truth. Consider the following examples of truths we hold in positive tension.

We believe in the total depravity of humankind and the evidence of God's image even in the vilest sinner. We accept God's unconditional, sovereign control and election of all people, and affirm the freedom and responsibility of each person to respond to God. We believe in the salvific efficacy of Christ's atoning sacrifice on the cross for all those who are called and the universal invitation of the gospel—that whosoever will may come. We believe in the irresistible grace of God and the human freedom of choice to reject as well as accept the gospel. We believe in the eternal security of the saints and in the struggle to remain faithful to the end. We sing two songs: "This is My Father's World" and "This world is not my home, I'm just a passing through." We hold these truths in tension.

Jesus is the embodiment of truth in tension. The Word-made-flesh was full of grace and truth, dwelling in our neighborhood and revealing the glory of the only begotten of the Father (Jn 1:14). "Born of a woman" and "the firstborn over all creation" (Gal 4:4; Col 1:15), the Incarnate One is not only "gentle and humble in heart" but "the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word" (Mt 11:29; Heb 1:3).

The positive tension between the divine and human in Jesus is foundational for how we understand the truth and embrace life. The Chalcedonian Definition was hammered out by the early church in 451. The church circumscribed the nature of the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, "the same perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity." They let the revealed mystery stand. The dual nature of one integrated person, Jesus Christ, is the single best model for understanding the doubleness or tension found in a fully integrated understanding of reality.

Christ's followers embody this truth in tension. We are compelled to say with Paul, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me," knowing that this confidence exists in tension with, "Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Phil 4:13; 3:13). We rest in both infinite hope, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain," and finite contentment, "I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want" (Phil 1:21; 4:12).

We will never graduate from beatitude-based humility nor forsake kingdom of heaven hope. To be in need, yet need nothing; to mourn but to receive all comfort; to grieve but not without hope is the story of the Christian life. We will always be poor in spirit, even as we are exhorted to "be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:3, 48). The truth of evangelism is held in tension. The apostle Peter says, "Always

be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" and Solomon warns, "Do not be quick with your mouth . . . so let your words be few," and Jesus says, "Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs" (1 Pt 3:13; Eccl 5:2; Mt 7:6).

Tension in Nazareth

When Jesus stood up to read the Isaiah scroll in the synagogue on the Sabbath, he launched his public ministry in an obscure Galilean village far from centers of power and influence (Lk 4:14–30). Jesus went home to Nazareth, home to obscurity, to begin his journey to the cross. God's redemptive story has many beginnings in obscurity. Places like Haran, Bethel, Horeb and Bethlehem were not known as power centers. It seems that ministry begins in the least-likely-place-to-succeed and continues on in unpredictable ways with God's blessing. By choosing Nazareth instead of Jerusalem, Jesus introduced a strategic tension. His sense of timing and place were by

God's appointment rather than human calculation.

When Jesus read from the prophet Isaiah, he knowingly triggered the truth tension. He purposefully left the almost inconceivable impression that he claimed to fulfill the messianic promise in himself, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me." This provocative message generated a tension similar to the tension produced by proclaiming salvation

authority was provocative to say the least.

The choice of Isaiah 61 as his text radiated a series of attention-grabbing positive tensions. First, Jesus proclaimed good news for those who had been living on bad news. Then, he declared freedom for the unfree. He promised sight for the blind and liberation for the oppressed. In the middle of a worship service, he proclaimed the good news, bold and clear, putting

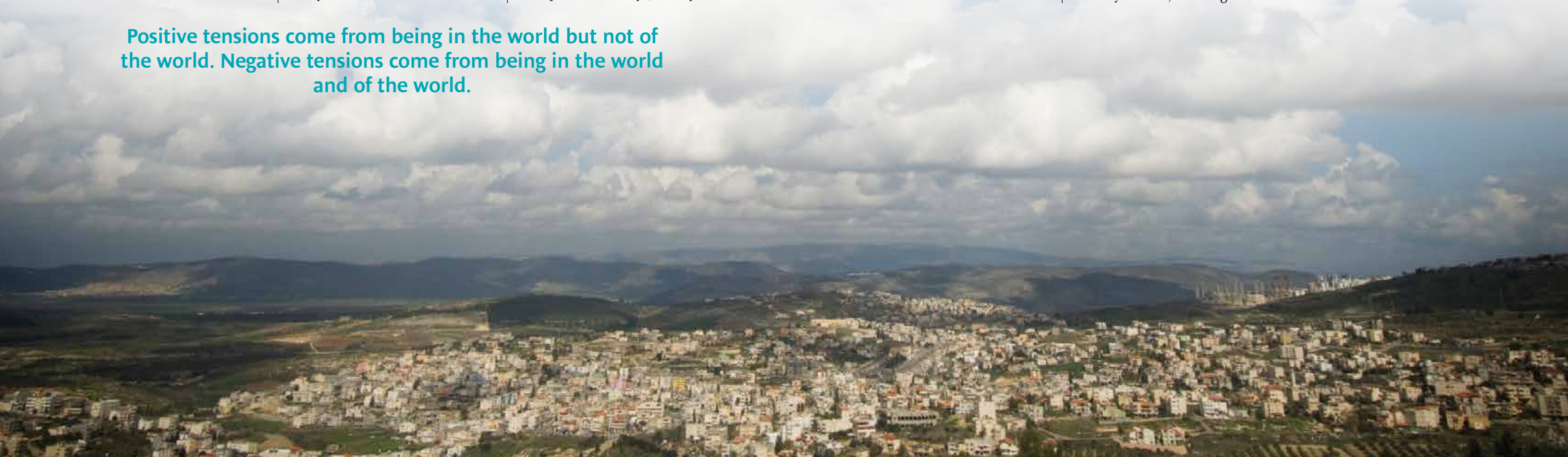
It seems that ministry begins in the least-likely-place-to-succeed and continues on in unpredictable ways with God's blessing.

through Christ alone to today's hearers. Then, he announced in no uncertain terms the coming Day of the Lord, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." The juxtaposition between hometown humility and prophetic fulfillment accentuated the truth tension. How could Jesus, who was known locally as Joseph's son, claim to be Isaiah's long-awaited Spirit-anointed Servant? The audacity of a commoner, the son of an ordinary laborer, claiming divine

evil on notice that its time was limited. Without any reservation, Jesus announced the unheard-of year of Jubilee—"the year of the Lord's favor."

In a matter of minutes Jesus raised the strategic tension by commencing his cosmic-changing ministry in obscurity, the truth tension by claiming his messianic identity among those who knew him as Joseph's son and the relational tension by challenging his hearers to react to his ethnic

Positive tensions come from being in the world but not of the world. Negative tensions come from being in the world and of the world.





reference. He used a proverb to expose their unholy opinions: “Physician heal yourself!” And he was quick to forecast the hostile reaction of the people. But he had hardly let the analogy sink in before cutting to the chase, “Truly I tell you,” he said, “prophets are not accepted in their hometowns.”

His strong first-person declarative statements suggest an authoritative intensity consistent with his explicit and explosive content. Jesus raised the racial tension when he referred to the days of Elisha and God’s apparent neglect of the many widows and lepers in Israel as he helped the widow of Zarephath and Naaman the Syrian. It was like pouring fuel on a fire. Instead of working the crowd and building on their earlier enthusiasm (“All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips”), Jesus crossed the line. There was nothing seeker-sensitive or user-friendly about commencing his public ministry with this in-your-face inaugural sermon. The Gospel of Jesus goes off in that little synagogue like a bomb.

Jesus’ presence and preaching provoked the tensions essential to his mission and ministry. There was tension between the humble setting and its historic significance, between the all-too-human messenger and the divinely inspired message, between God’s mission and the people’s expectations, between Jew and Gentile, and finally between life and death. If our Master could be so bold, so ready to risk the tension in the text and face the danger of an angry crowd, why are we so reticent to apply the gospel the way he did? There is no way we can communicate Jesus’ message today without confronting these very same missional, theological, social and racial tensions. The truth is combustible.

Tension in the Sanctuary

It was the second Sunday of Advent, and the tension in our church was palpable. You could almost feel the storm of emotions inside the building. The gay organist had resigned the week before when the elders voted 22-to-3 to adopt a “standing rule” that precluded a practicing homosexual from serving in church leadership. The rule read in part:

Each person employed by the Church must manifest, in both speech and conduct, a standard of behavior consistent with the decrees of Scripture (1 Tm 4:12; Ti 2:7–8) both during and apart from the performance of duties and responsibilities as an employee of the Church. . . .Violations include, but are by no means limited to, the following: a) Participation in, and/or endorsement of, deviant sexual behavior such as premarital sex, adultery and same gender sex (Lv 18:22, 20:13; Rom 1:26–27; 1 Cor 6:9–10). b) The consistent use of vulgar or profane language (2 Tm 2:16; Ti 2:7–8). c) The repeated use of illegal drugs (1 Cor 3:16). d) A pattern of hypocrisy or deceit (Mk 7:21–23).

A visitor might have had trouble accounting for the strange atmosphere. There was nothing to inform them that this was D-Day in a spiritual battle.

The organist was gone, but his supporters came to church in full force. Gay activists had promised to demonstrate and threatened to disrupt the service. The police were aware of the situation and planned on extra patrols in the area. The choir was still at full strength, although sharply divided on the standing rule. Several older members called the church to see if it was safe to come to the 10:30 a.m. service.

A visitor might have had trouble accounting for the strange

atmosphere. There was nothing to inform them that this was D-Day in a spiritual battle. Stone-faced ushers who, for the most part, were upset with the elders for disrupting the status quo, took their responsibility as “temple guards” seriously. They handed out bulletins as their eyes darted from person to person, exchanging quiet whispers with members who wanted to register their feelings. The ushers saw themselves as official pollsters, taking the pulse of the congregation. The Presbyterian Sunday routine prevailed in an atmosphere of uncertainty and tension. The Advent sermon was entitled, “God’s Christmas Message” from the seventh chapter of Isaiah and the fourteenth verse: “The Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.”

Seven hundred years before the prophecy given to Mary, the prophet Isaiah was called to stand up to King Ahaz. Judah’s king was under pressure to compromise and ally himself with the enemy. Isaiah’s message to the king was to trust in God, “Be careful, keep calm and don’t be afraid. Do not lose heart.” The sign of a young

woman giving birth was originally meant as a sign of condemnation. Ahaz’s refusal to trust in God was to be countered by young women throughout Judah who manifested more faith and trust in the Lord God than the king did. Young maidens named their sons “Immanuel” because they believed what Ahaz denied, that God was with the people of Judah.

On that second Sunday of Advent, God’s word to Ahaz was God’s word to us. Isaiah’s message ends, “If you do not stand firm

in your faith, you will not stand at all.” There was a tense silence as I moved to the high pulpit. Several in the choir waited until I had ascended the six stairs to the pulpit before departing in silent protest. They had just sung Handel’s chorus; “. . . And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. . . .” Someone from the back of the sanctuary shouted “hypocrite” before making a quick exit. A few gay couples sitting in the balcony also chose the start of the sermon to leave.

I prayed that I would be relaxed and conversational. I did not want the intensity of the situation to come through in my voice and be misconstrued as anger. I wanted to convey a “come, let us reason together” approach. I didn’t want to sound triumphant or defiant. Compassion and conviction must prevail. I wanted to speak the truth in love. When I came to the end of the sermon, I applied Isaiah’s message to our church: “If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.”

“Like Ahaz, we are faced with a choice,” I said. “It is not an easy choice, but the elders of the church have chosen not to condone

immoral behavior in its leadership. We are all sinners in need of God’s gracious redemption, and we know the difference between a repentant sinner and an advocate for sin. Ahaz worshiped in the same temple that Isaiah did, but he also worshiped at the high places and sacred shrines of the cultural religions. And the Lord God judged him for that compromise. The gospel is good news for the sinner but bad news for the unrepentant.”

I did not relish the opportunity to preach this sermon. I hope my

words came out more as a plea than a defense. I was entreating the church to stand firm, not hammering a point. I said,

Accepting theological diversity does not mean that the church is open to heresy. It does not mean that good is evil and evil is good. Inclusiveness at the expense of faithfulness to God's Word substitutes a cultural absolute of tolerance for biblical authority. For us, the primary issue is not unity, but truth; not legalism, but license. We are concerned about the message we send to those who struggle with homosexuality; we want to reach out in compassion. We are also concerned about the message we send to our young people; we want to offer a biblical model of human sexuality. We believe it is possible to be both loving and truthful; filled with compassion and conviction.

I believe that the day is coming, and for some has already arrived, when faithfulness to the Word of God is condemned by our culture as immoral. For our church, this is a defining moment. We have faced a difficult issue that has been thrust upon us. We have not desired nor asked for this attention. If it were up to me, I would never choose this issue as a critical issue of our time, just as I imagine many Christians in first century Rome did not feel that paying homage to Caesar needed to become the life and death issue that it became. We do not choose the defining issue for our time, it is thrust upon us. As far as I am concerned, I wish it had nothing to do with sexuality and personal feelings, but it does. I wish it did not divide churches and families, but it does. It would be nice if it was a simple matter of conservative versus liberal, but it is not. I wish I could say that everyone is entitled to his opinion, each to his own way,

but I cannot. I suppose we could overlook the Lordship of Jesus Christ in this matter and the authority of God's Word and become more open-minded. We could rationalize the issue and claim that it's like the racial issue or the gender issue. We could do a lot with this issue, but what we do will define us. How we respond will separate the sons of Isaiah from the sons of Ahaz. It will determine whether God is for us or against us.

I closed by repeating the words of Isaiah to Ahaz, "If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all." I said, "Amen," and turned to descend the pulpit when an immediate, spontaneous applause erupted throughout the sanctuary. Sermons are not applauded in our Presbyterian church, and this sermon would not have been an exception, apart from the fact that the congregation wanted to make a statement. It was a strong, sustained applause that lasted for several moments after I took my seat. On this second Sunday of Advent, in an atmosphere all too reminiscent

Jesus promised freedom, but the nature of this freedom is found only in being bound to Christ.

of the first Christmas and Herod's intrigue, there was a sign of hope in this moment of shared solidarity. We were standing firm together.

As much as we do not like to face negative tensions, they can have a positive impact on the church. We cannot live tension-free, but by God's grace, these negative tensions (the tensions encountered because of sin and disobedience, ignorance and apathy, faithlessness and apostasy) can become positive tensions, defining and strengthening a Christ-centered household of faith.

Tensioned to Christ

Jesus promised freedom, but the nature of this freedom is found only in being bound to Christ. "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (Jn 8:31-32). Pastor Earl Palmer tells the story of the thinking kite. In his parable, a young boy's kite has a mind of its own. Flying high above, the kite resents the taut line held by a small boy on the ground. "If only I wasn't tied down," says the kite to itself, "then I'd be free to really soar." So the clever kite smuggles scissors on board. When the boy launches the kite and it has reached the heights, the kite with a mind of its own cuts the string. But the thinking kite knew nothing about physics. The kite was no longer held taut against the wind. It flew out of control and crashed. Kites cannot fly tension free, and Christians cannot serve tension free. This why John Calvin wrote, "The whole comes to this, that the Holy Spirit is the bond by which Christ effectually binds us to himself." ✝



Investing in the Ruins

Jeremiah, Friendship and Theological Vocation

By Paul R. House

One of the great benefits of Beeson Divinity School's approach to personal theological education is that students become lifelong friends. This is as it should be, for the scriptures teach that human beings are made for community, since we are made in God's image. Paul and John stress their strong preference for face-to-face fellowship over written communication in their epistles. Jurgen Moltmann observes, "The community of Christ is a community in the

friendship of Jesus. The person who lives in his friendship also discovers Jesus' friends his brothers and sisters, the people he calls blessed." I have found the book of Jeremiah a rich resource for finding friends who share the joys and burdens of ministry. Jeremiah, Baruch and Ebed-melech stood together as their nation fell apart from rebellion against God. They invested in the ruins together.

The Prophet and His Friends

Jeremiah's commissioning clearly indicates he would not be

popular. His early ministry was often lonely (see 11:18-12:6), but he did not revel in his rectitude or solitude. He loved the people and the land. He prayed for his enemies until God stopped him (15:1-2). He grieved that he had to be so contrary to others (20:7-18).

Eventually he was not alone. Chapters 32-45 introduce the scribe Baruch, Jeremiah's closest associate. From 605 B.C. until after 587 B.C., these men were partners in calling, affections and service. Their long association lessened their burdens and presents a

From *Living in Tension: A Theology of Ministry*, vol. 1, by Douglas D. Webster, published by Cascade Books, 2012. Used by permission.



Douglas D. Webster teaches pastoral theology and preaching at Beeson Divinity School. He and his wife Virginia have served churches in Toronto, Denver, and most recently for 14 years at First Presbyterian Church of San Diego.

compelling case for the necessity of friendship in theological vocation.

The book does not reveal how the two met or why they agreed to work together. But there was nothing unusual about their association. Scribes had been working with prophets for centuries in other lands and probably in Judah and Israel as well. John Hilber argues persuasively that ancient scribes were careful to convey accurately what prophets said. Honest scribes did not feel free to change the message. Jeremiah 8:8 reflects this concern for accuracy, for it criticizes “the lying pen of the scribes” that alters God’s word, and makes it “into a lie.”

In 605 B.C., Jeremiah had Baruch write his earlier messages on a scroll. Jeremiah 36 notes that Jeremiah had been banned from the temple for his stringent preaching, so he ordered Baruch to stand in for him “on a day of fasting in the hearing of all the people in the Lord’s house” (36:6). Jeremiah hoped the scroll’s words would spark repentance (36:7). Some months later (36:9), temple leaders and local officials heard Baruch read the scroll (36:11–15). They confirmed that Baruch worked with Jeremiah (36:16–18), then kindly advised Baruch and Jeremiah to hide (36:19). James Muilenburg argues that the audience’s protective reaction likely shows that Baruch had a high reputation. Regardless, the two men were now inextricably linked to the scroll, its contents and to one another.

The scroll’s next audience included King Jehoiakim, one of the shiftest political operators in Israelite history. Unlike the earlier hearers, the scroll does not disturb Jehoiakim in the least. He burns it. Jeremiah and Baruch’s efforts seem to have been for nothing.

Two significant things happen next. First, Jeremiah and Baruch rewrite the scroll, adding many

similar words to it (36:32). Some scholars think this noting of additions indicates Jeremiah and most other prophetic books were edited and expanded for years after the prophets died. In context, however, the statement is a specific recollection of defiance, courage, faithfulness and theologically driven friendship, not a clue about redaction processes.

Second, Baruch receives a personal message from God recorded in 45:1–5. God notes Baruch’s groaning over his circumstances (45:1–3). He informs Baruch he is tearing down centuries of work done for his people (45:4). God then says, “And do you seek great things for

Investing in the ruins testifies that God reigns. The outcome of our labors is not in doubt.

yourself? Seek them not.” Baruch then receives the same reward offered Jeremiah: God’s presence and God’s protection (45:5). Baruch learns ministry is not about prestige. Baruch’s association with Jeremiah may be bad for his career, but it is good for his relationship with God.

Baruch and Jeremiah persevere for 20 more years. At a crucial point, they get help from a Cushite named Ebed-melech. This man rescues Jeremiah from imprisonment in a muddy cistern, bravely confronting King Zedekiah on Jeremiah’s behalf. For his faithfulness, God provides Ebed-melech the same promises of life and divine presence given Jeremiah and Baruch (39:15–18).

After Jerusalem falls, some men kill Babylon’s appointed governor (41:1–3). Fearing Babylon’s wrath, the people ask Jeremiah if they should flee to Egypt or stay in Jerusalem (42:1–6). When Jeremiah counsels the latter (42:7–22) the people deny this is God’s word. They blame Jeremiah’s so-called faulty oracle on Baruch’s

malignant influence (43:3). The people then take the two friends to Egypt (43:4–7), where they probably died, bereft of the comfort of familiar territory.

But prior to departing to Egypt, the two had made an odd purchase. As the Babylonian army besieges Jerusalem, Jeremiah languishes in prison (32:1–5). God tells Jeremiah that he will have the opportunity to buy land outside the city and that he must do so (32:6–8). God tells Jeremiah to invest in the ruins of Judah.

Jeremiah buys the land; Baruch documents the transaction (32:9–14). Quite understandably, Jeremiah asks God why this purchase was necessary (32:16–25). God answers that Jerusalem will be rebuilt, David’s lineage will rule again, and all the promises of the new covenant outlined in chapter 31 will be fulfilled (32:16–33:26).

God will create a new kingdom out of the ruins of the old. As it turns out, Jeremiah has gotten a priceless deal. He has purchased property in the kingdom of God; and his friend Baruch holds the deed.

It would be nice if the book ended with Baruch returning to this spot to put his late friend Jeremiah’s life and words in proper order. This was not to be. Many diligent scholarly works have understandably sought to explain the book of Jeremiah’s seemingly scrambled order and stages of composition. Sometimes a simple answer is best. Perhaps Jeremiah reads like the work of refugees pressed by circumstances because that is precisely what it is. The book’s unsettled contents may mirror Baruch and Jeremiah’s unsettled lives.

Common Cause

We could wish for something neater. Or, we could thank God that for every faithful Christian theologian ever imprisoned, displaced, hounded and exiled, for every writer ever forced by



persecution and deprivation to leave an untidy work, there is a book that reflects and honors their service. We could thank God that we see Jeremiah and Baruch’s friendship in the life of people like Eberhard Bethge, who collected his friend Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s scattered papers and letters and made them available to the world. We could thank God for hope that comes from knowing current friendships will continue forever in God’s kingdom. We could rejoice in knowing the God who rebuilds the ruins of this world.

What are the characteristics of this friendship we can model today? First, we can regularly make common cause with like-minded servants of God. We can work together, diligently using our individual gifts.

Second, we can sharpen one another’s thinking and serving, and thus help one another do good work. Jeremiah spoke God’s word to Baruch concerning his selfish attitude in 45:1–5. Perhaps we who are theologians can do a

better job of helping one another improve our research, writing and teaching. Perhaps we can even learn to do so without first posting our criticisms on the worldwide web.

Third, we can stand with our friends, even when doing so risks our reputations. Jeremiah and Baruch never sold out a friend for political, institutional or professional gain. Sadly, this is partly what makes their friendship so rare.

Fourth, we can invest in the ruins together. God does not promise us that biblical Christianity will win the day, if winning the day means evangelicals possessing prestige, power and influence. Dietrich Bonhoeffer ended his teaching career instructing eight people in a rural farmhouse, faithfully investing in the ruins. Investing in the ruins testifies that God reigns. The outcome of our labors is not in doubt. As co-heirs with Jesus the Christ, we have a place in the choicest territory.

I conclude by speaking quite candidly and gratefully. I could not have made it this far without Christian friends. In particular, at a crucial time in my life, certain friends mediated Christ’s delivering strength to me. Not all my friends agree with me theologically or denominationally. But because we share faith in Christ, I will enjoy their company forever. I counsel all of you, especially younger friends getting started, not to put the great things you seek for yourself before affection for God and his servants. Rather, emulate Jeremiah and Baruch’s courageous and godly friendship. Your life will be richer for it. ✚

This article is an excerpt of the presidential address given by Dr. Paul House to the Evangelical Theological Society on November 15, 2012.

■ Paul R. House is professor of Old Testament and Hebrew at Beeson Divinity School.

The God Who Sees

An interview with Bruce Persons

By Betsy Childs

Bruce Persons began his studies at Beeson Divinity School in the M.Div. program in 2011. He has been Deaf since infancy, and his classroom learning is facilitated by an American Sign Language interpreter. All master of divinity students are required to spend at least two weeks immersed in a culture not their own, and, in July 2012, Persons traveled with a group of divinity students to Turkey to fulfill that requirement.



Tell us about your early years and how you lost your hearing.

I grew up in Smithsburg, Maryland. My entire family is hearing, and they are devout Christians. I contracted spinal meningitis when I was 10 months old, and I survived that disease by the grace of God. The only loss I experienced as a result of this illness was with my hearing. My parents decided to learn American Sign Language [ASL] immediately so that they would be able to communicate with me.

What was your early experience in the church?

Church has always played a significant part of my life. I attended Trinity Lutheran Church (Evangelical Lutheran Church of America) until I was 13 before moving to a Deaf congregation at Frederick Church of the Brethren. My early experience in the church has been wonderful and positive, and I was loved by everyone in that congregation. However, I failed to understand that the God of the Bible was an intimate and personal one that is able to communicate with me through a visual language.

Although English is my written language, ASL is my primary “spoken” language. Throughout childhood the only way I observed people communicating with God was through spoken English. My relationship with hearing people outside my family was limited at best due to communication barriers. Moreover, since Jesus was a hearing person, and the Bible made no mention of Him using a visible signed language during His earthly ministry, I mistakenly concluded that He could not relate to me. If I could not express my feelings clearly to Him in my spoken language, how could He sympathize with my struggles and frustrations?

When did you begin a personal relationship with Jesus?

When I was 13, my father heard about a local Deaf church through a friend in Boy Scouts of America and started attending there with me. For the first time, I was able to receive the Gospel message through ASL, and many of my childhood notions about God were changed as I witnessed Deaf Christians worshipping, praising, praying and receiving God’s Word through ASL. I realized that God’s ability to relate with people and understand people’s needs transcended everything else, including apparent communication barriers. I began to meet with my pastor on a weekly basis during the school year, and because he took the time to make sure that my questions were answered and to share the Gospel message, I started my Christian journey with the Lord when I was 15.

How has being Deaf shaped your faith?

First, I realized that there is more to this world than what I can see (2 Cor. 5:7). Second, physical deafness is not one of the worst things that can happen to a person. People can survive without hearing anything, but there is a human condition that is much more dangerous: spiritual “deafness.” In my sermons and conversations with other people, the connection between physical and spiritual deafness is often mentioned and emphasized because many people – Christians or not – will go through this life and not hear Lord Jesus Christ calling them into a personal relationship with him. It is a truly tragic event when one becomes completely “deaf” to the good news for their salvation.

Why did you decide to come to Beeson Divinity School?

I heard about Beeson while attending a ministry conference

in Birmingham back in 2008 from Dr. Rickey McClain, a 2010 Beeson D.Min. graduate. At that time, I was contemplating attending seminary after I completed my undergraduate studies. Dr. McClain suggested that I check out the school because it is committed to historical Christian orthodoxy and places great emphasis on Scriptural preaching and communal living.

How is your experience different from that of other theology students, and how is it the same?

While my fellow colleagues share many commonalities during our journey at Beeson, such as sharing notes for an upcoming Greek exam, trying to decide which classes to take and growing together as fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, my experience is probably diametrically different from them. For instance, I am coming from a cultural context where people are largely unreached with the message of the Gospel (it is often said that only 2% of the entire Deaf population in North America are professed believers, and only 1% of those people are serving within churches in some sort of ministerial capacity).

What did you do on your trip to Turkey? What is the situation for Deaf people in Turkey, and how did you interact with them?

We stayed in Istanbul for most of our trip. We visited, met and listened to several missionaries, ministers, Iranian refugees and indigenous believers from Turkey tell about their conversion stories and their life in Turkey. They shared about ministry to Turkish people, to Iranian refugees and believers trying to make their way to Europe and America, and to people from all over the world. We also had an ample opportunity to experience the dazzling and chaotic (and crowded!) city of Istanbul where ancient history



◀ Beeson students in Turkey, left to right, Dion Culliver, Dr. Kurt Selles, Tyler Gresham, Jonathon Lookadoo, Bruce Persons, David Tew, R.J. Voorhees, Andrew Johnson, Steve Hands and Michael Novotny

clashed with modernization. We toured several historical and cultural sites, mosques and churches in Istanbul such as Hagia Sophia (Aya Sofya), the Blue Mosque, the Grand Bazaar, the Church of the Holy Savior in Chora, Union Church of Istanbul and Union Han, and the Patriarchal Church of St. George. We also enjoyed excellent Iranian cuisine served by our host family along with several Iranian refugees. Near the end of our trip, we went to the ancient city of Ephesus (near present-day Izmir), and we toured the ruins there and the shrine of Mary, located on a mountain near the ancient city. We were surprised by how big and magnificent Ephesus was, especially considering the fact that only 25% of the entire city has been excavated to date!

The highlight of this trip for me (other than Ephesus) was being able to see two missionaries interacting with some Deaf Muslims on several occasions. The missionaries estimated that there are about 90,000 Deaf and Hard

of Hearing people in the entire city of Istanbul (only 0.5% of the total city population), but there are no known Deaf Christians or churches in that city. Since the Deaf people are widely scattered, the missionaries are having a hard time locating their gathering places since they tend to meet at “Deaf clubs” throughout the city. If they find a group of Deaf people, the second tough phase of their ministry begins: building relationships while dealing with complicated cultural and social issues since Muslims have a general mistrust of the West (especially those living on the Asian side of Istanbul).

My experiences interacting with the Deaf Muslims were eye-opening and rewarding. I was surprised with how easily and quickly I could bridge our communication gap and communicate with them in a limited sense, given that Turkish Sign Language and American Sign Language are different. They were especially fascinated and very

curious about the Deaf people in America and how they are different from those in Turkey. Above all things, they were generous and hospitable toward me because I was from America (we noticed a similar thing wherever we went in Turkey). It was remarkable to see one of the missionaries share the Gospel message with three Deaf Muslim men as they discussed the significance of Muhammad and Jesus Christ. The Spirit of God was on the move because, while no decisions to follow Christ were made that night, one of the Deaf Muslim men’s eyes lit up as the missionary explained the substitutionary atonement of Christ and his ability to forgive all of our sins. The seed of the Gospel was planted in his heart.

What do you hope to do after you leave Beeson Divinity School?

I hope to become a pastor for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing people in America. I am especially passionate about raising up a new generation of disciples—especially the current one—and proclaiming the good news to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing people. I might even continue studying to get a Ph.D. or doctorate degree someday in the future in order to teach and train Christian leaders to lead the church. ✝

Global Center

Beeson Students Around the World

Beeson Divinity School requires all M.Div. students to participate in a Cross-Cultural Ministry Practicum where they have the opportunity to reside and minister in a culture different from their own while being supervised by on-site mentors. Here are photos from just a few of the trips that students have taken.



Beeson League of Churches

After Dr. Russell Levenson (D.Min. 1997) heard Bruce Persons’ testimony at an advisory board meeting, he knew that his congregation would want to be involved in equipping Bruce for ministry. His church, St. Martin’s Episcopal Church in Houston, Texas, became the first church in the Beeson League of Churches.

The Beeson League of Churches was established as an opportunity for churches to partner with and invest in the students of Beeson Divinity School. As a partner, a congregation commits to give to the Beeson League of Churches scholarship fund. This gift is

distributed in its entirety to a current Beeson student, selected by both the church and the divinity school scholarship committee. What makes the League of Churches not only a partnership but also a unique opportunity is the possibility of involvement by the student with the partnering church.

The parish of St. Martin’s is looking forward to meeting Bruce in person and supporting his theological education. If your church would be interested in supporting a student’s education by joining the Beeson League of Churches, please call Carolyn Lankford at (205) 726-4480.

Top left: **Joshua Wilson** (left) with translator **Elaji** in Buono village, Senegal; Top Center: **Austin Baker** preaches with a translator in Cuba; Top Right: **Jocelyn and Jessie McAlpine, Doug Barnwell**, and Interim Global Center Director **David Parks** in Penang, Malaysia; Left Center: **Patrick Bone** in Niger; Right Center: **Drew Phillips** on the island of Yap in Micronesia; Bottom Left: **Chris Yancey** with a child in Madrid; Bottom Right: **Alyse and Andrew Fulton** in Rwanda

Beeson Portrait

Le-Ann Little

By Betsy Childs

If you've ever called, emailed or met with Dean Timothy George, you've met Le-Ann Little. As secretary to the dean, Little is less a gatekeeper than she is a one-woman welcoming committee. She combines an unassuming, conscientious spirit with gracious hospitality and a warm smile for everyone who comes into the dean's office.

Little grew up in Huntsville, Ala., where her father, Jim Splawn, worked for NASA. Other children might dream of meeting an astronaut; Little's father went to work with them every day. As a NASA engineer, he had many responsibilities, which at one point included training Skylab astronauts to work in a weightless environment. Little and her two brothers, Mike and Mark, fully appreciated how cool it was to have a dad who worked for the space program. Her favorite memories are of attending company picnics at NASA and getting to try on a real space suit. The whole family traveled to Cape Canaveral for the moon launch of Apollo 11 in 1969 as well as the first night launch of the space shuttle Challenger in 1983.

Little remembers her mother as hostess extraordinaire. Her mother's example has served Little well as she presides over the teapot at every reception in the dean's office. Jo Ann Splawn went back to college when Little was in the second grade, and she graduated with honors Little's junior year of high school.

Little's journey to Samford University began when her cousin told her about the school. A few weeks later, a Samford admission counselor visited her high school. Little recalls, "Talking to her sealed the deal. I took the application, completed it, added a signature, enclosed the fee, stamped and mailed the envelope and then waited (impatiently) for a response. After I was accepted and replied affirmatively, I told my parents that it would probably be a good idea to visit the campus!"

When Little arrived on campus, Divinity Hall was still a men's dormitory. She looked for a church and chose Shades Mountain Baptist, then under the leadership of Charles T. Carter. It was in Sigurd Bryan's Old Testament class during her sophomore year that she met Jeff Little, who would become her husband after graduation. The Littles have been married for 30 years and have two daughters, Lauren and JoAnna.

Several years and jobs later,



▲ Le-Ann Little

Little returned to Samford part-time to work for university president Dr. Thomas E. Cortis. After a few years, she moved across the quad to work full-time in the divinity school as a faculty secretary. Little says, "In the few

years we worked together, I was introduced to volumes about Anglican history written by Gerald Bray, the tunes of 'Lewie' Drummond on his saxophone, conversations about the Old Testament with Ken Mathews, the artistic flair of Calvin Miller and the infamous 'Fishbowl' of Robert Smith (You pick it, you preach it!)."

For the past 10 years, Little has worked in the Office of the Dean. She was at first intimidated by the job, in part because she followed an extremely capable list

of predecessors. But she found there was much to enjoy about working for George. "The subjects of my daily work are very broad and so interesting," Little says. "It isn't every job that one can learn a little Latin, German and Italian all in one day!" She transcribes all of George's books, articles and sermons, and she enjoys building friendships with people all over the world as she communicates on behalf of the dean.

Little finds her work rewarding because she knows she is

contributing to the impact of Beeson Divinity School around the world. She sees her role as one component of a chain reaction; the staff supports the faculty members who teach and mentor students who go out to minister in the uttermost parts of the world. Her father taught the astronauts how to function in space. Little is part of a team of people preparing future pastors to function in the challenging path of ministry. ✝

Beeson Names New Advisory Board



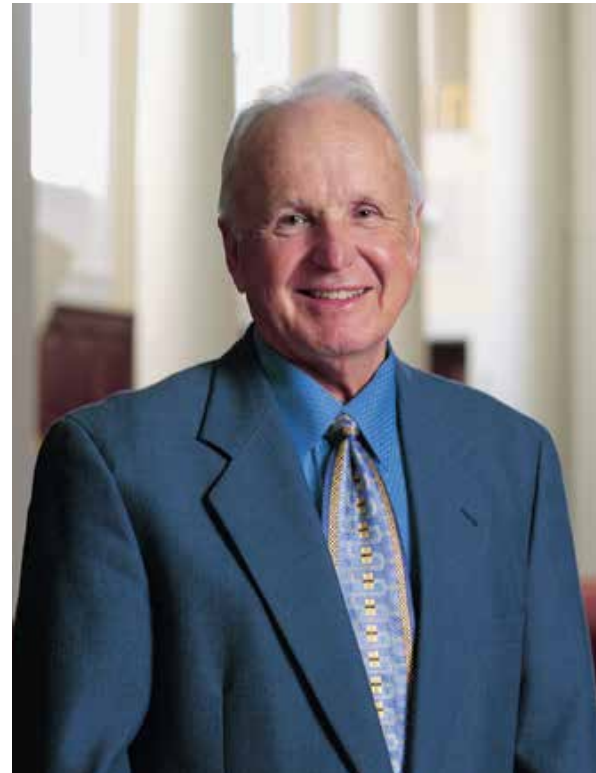
Beeson Divinity School welcomed members of a new advisory board to campus April 24, 2012, for the board's inaugural meeting. This board was created to confirm and strengthen the divinity school's legacy for future generations, and exists to expand the influence, reputation and resources of Beeson Divinity School. Members will participate in the continued shaping of the school's strategic plan, advocating for programs and initiatives that will further the institution's aims and will ensure its financial stability.

▲ Members of the advisory board include the following: (first row) Victor H. Hanson III, Timothy George, Roger D. Willmore, J. Norfleete Day, James Earl Massey, Carolyn Maull McKinstry, Charles T. Carter; (second row) J. Alan Carter, W. Clark Watson, Gary Fenton, Susan Todd Doyle, John-Michael van Dyke, Leland Hull, Collin Hansen, Richard E. Simmons; (third row) Ralph Douglas West, Drayton Nabers Jr., Tim Kallam; (not pictured) Richard Bewes, Edwin Hurley, Russell J. Levenson Jr., Thomas C. Oden, J. I. Packer, Cokiesha Bailey Robinson, Charles W. Colson (in memoriam)

Community News

News and Updates

New Baptist Chair of Divinity in Honor of Charles T. Carter



In July 2012, Samford University's board of trustees announced the formation of an endowed chair in its Beeson Divinity School to honor longtime trustee and Baptist pastor Charles T. Carter.

"We are honoring Charles Carter because he is the most respected Alabama Baptist leader of our generation, a great preacher and pastor for many years, and a faithful professor at Beeson Divinity School," said Dean Timothy George. The purpose of the new chair is to ensure the faithful teaching of the rising generation of ministers. The chair will be filled after the funds to endow it have been raised.

Dr. Carter served as pastor of Shades Mountain Baptist Church in Vestavia Hills, Ala., for 26 years, retiring in 1998. Since his retirement from Shades Mountain Baptist, he has served tirelessly as an interim pastor in numerous churches in Alabama and Mississippi.

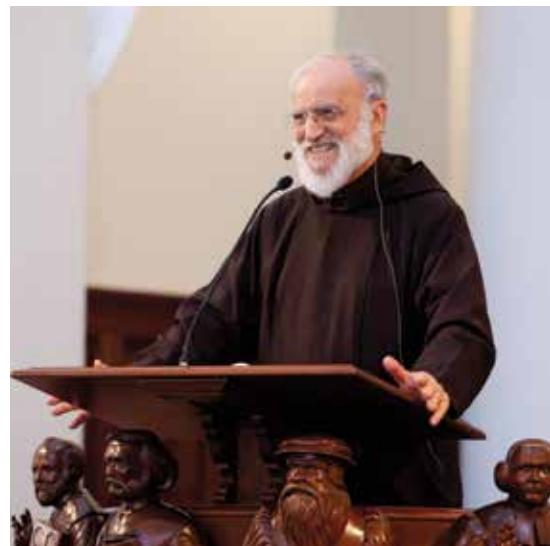
Carter has held several leadership roles in the Southern Baptist Convention. He was chair of the Resolutions Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1995 when it adopted the Resolution on Racial Reconciliation, which apologized for the role that slavery played in the founding of the SBC and repudiated racism.

For more information on this new chair, please contact Carolyn Lankford at 205-726-4480.

Preacher to the Papal Household Visits Divinity School

On Feb. 21, 2012, Capuchin Father Raniero Cantalamessa, preached in a chapel service at Beeson Divinity School. Father Cantalamessa is the preacher to the Papal Household, the only individual allowed to preach to the pope. He has held this position since 1980, serving Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI. He spoke at Beeson by joint request of Dean Timothy George and Bishop Robert J. Baker of the Catholic Diocese of Birmingham.

Cantalamessa preached on Acts 2:1-12 to a packed chapel. He quoted Martin Luther throughout the message and said, "Every religion starts telling people what they must do to achieve salvation. . . . Christianity doesn't start with duties; it starts with telling people what God has done for them. Christianity is a religion of grace."



Timothy George Addresses Synod of Bishops at the Vatican



▲ Pope Benedict XVI greets Dean George.

In October 2012, Dean Timothy George represented the Baptist World Alliance as a fraternal delegate at the 13th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops of the Catholic Church. The theme for the Vatican conference was The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith.

Other fraternal delegates included Russian Orthodox Bishop Hilarion,

African Methodist Episcopal Bishop Sarah Davis and Geoff Tunnicliffe of the World Evangelical Alliance. In his remarks to the synod, George emphasized the need for unity among all Christians and warned of the growing assault on religious freedom around the world.

Finch Delivers Reformation Heritage Lectures

Dr. Karen Petersen Finch of Whitworth University delivered the 24th annual Reformation Heritage Lectures at Beeson Divinity School. Her topic was "John Calvin, 'Postmodernism' and Power."

"Calvin is the most caricatured of all theologians," Finch remarked, saying that he has been characterized as the "theologian of 'No.'" She sought in her lectures to reclaim John Calvin from negative stereotypes, arguing that, as a Christocentric thinker, Calvin is a theologian of abundance.

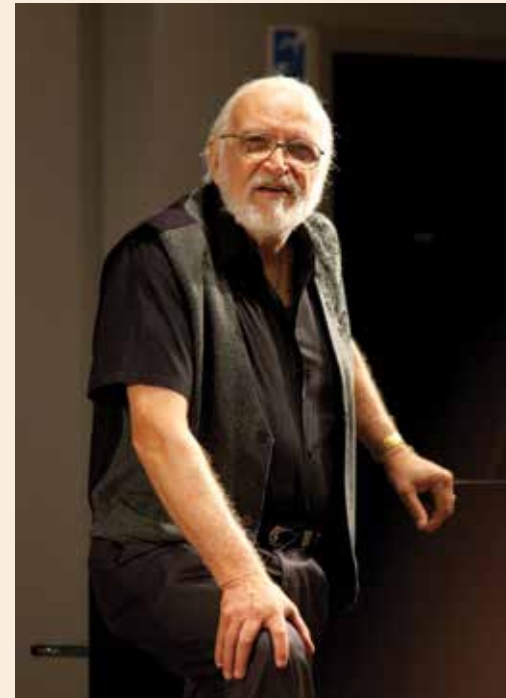


Finch spoke pastorally, drawing on Calvin and the Apostle Paul to warn divinity students of the hidden perils of pride. "In causing us to claim too much, pride causes us to claim too little," she said. ". . . Because we believe that our hands are full, we walk away from Christ's bounty empty-handed."

Finch serves as Assistant Professor of Theology at Whitworth University in Spokane, Washington. She is an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church (USA).

In Memoriam Calvin Miller

1936 - 2012



Beloved Beeson Divinity School professor Calvin A. Miller died Aug. 19, 2012, from complications following open heart surgery. Dr. Miller is survived by his wife, Barbara Joyce Miller, and their adult children, Melanie and Timothy.

Miller served as professor of preaching and pastoral ministry at Beeson Divinity School from 1999 to 2007, when he became distinguished professor and writer in residence. Miller wrote more than 40 books, including *The Singer*, *Letters to a Young Pastor* and *Preaching: The Art of Narrative Exposition*. His most recent book was *Letters to Heaven: Reaching Beyond the Great Divide*.

Dean Timothy George reflected on the life of Dr. Miller: "Calvin Miller brought to his work at Beeson Divinity School a lifetime of experience as a pastor, poet, evangelist, apologist, artist and writer of renown. He had a palpable love for Jesus Christ and his church and he will be greatly missed both here at Beeson and throughout the Body of Christ."

Beeson Alumni

News and Updates

Day and Lama Named 2013 Distinguished Alums

Janeth Norfleete Day (M.Div. 1993)



was a member of the very first entering class of students at Beeson Divinity School (you can read her reminiscences of that first semester on page 4). She flourished in her studies and went on to earn a Ph. D. in New Testament from Baylor University. Day returned to Beeson and was a member of the faculty until she retired 2009. Over the course of her

career, she taught biblical studies—both Greek and Hebrew—and spiritual formation. Throughout her time on the divinity school faculty, her love for her students was deeply evident.

Day’s award was presented to her during the Biblical Studies lectures on February 5, 2013.

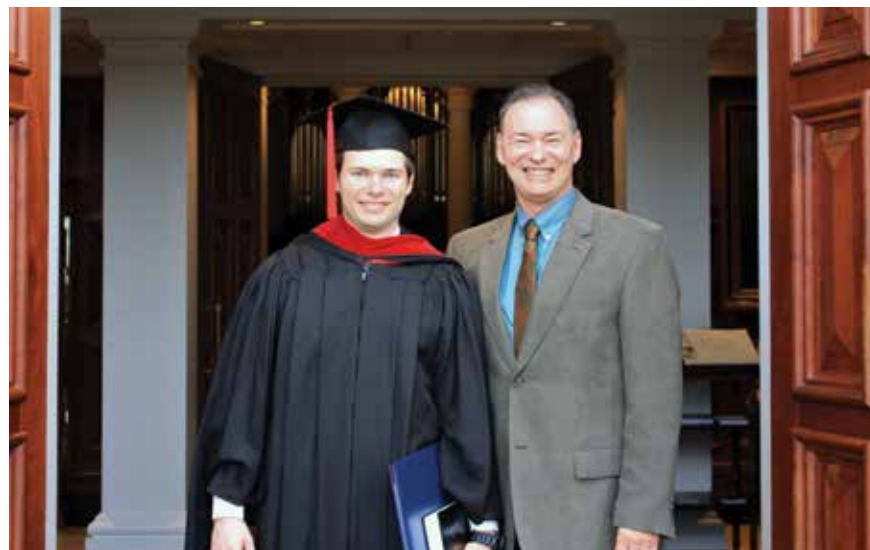
Accepting the award, Day said, “My experience at Beeson Divinity School is a marvel of God’s grace.”

A. K. Lama (D.Min. 2002)



started his career as a veterinarian in his native India. Lama was a Buddhist until he encountered some Christians in 1978. He struggled for several years, fearing persecution, until he surrendered his life to Christ in 1983. Lama became active in student ministry and eventually became a full-time student minister. Lama and his family moved to Birmingham in 1998 where he earned a doctorate in ministry and his wife, Asangla Ao (who is also a medical doctor), earned a master of divinity degree. Now they work in Asia with Transforming Leaders in Asia, a ministry founded and directed by Lama that equips and disciples Christian workers. He also serves as general secretary of the Council for Baptist Churches in North East India. Lama’s award was presented in a chapel service on March 5, 2013.

In May of 1990, **Ernie Carroll** was the first student to receive a degree from Beeson Divinity School. In this, Beeson’s 25th year, Ernie’s son **Nathan Carroll** was the first student to receive the Master of Divinity diploma at the commencement service last December.



Alumni Spotlight

Last fall, divinity alumnus **Gregg Morrison** (M.Div. 1996) and Samford University trustee Lev Bragg joined A. K. Lama, general secretary of the Council for Baptist Churches in North East India [CBCNEI], in Guwahati, India, to teach at a CBCNEI seminar. Morrison taught “Preaching the Gospel from the Gospel of Mark” and Bragg, a medical doctor, taught a course on marriage and family.

Morrison was on staff at Beeson Divinity School during the time that Lama was completing his D.Min. degree. Bragg, whose son Hunter is a student at Beeson Divinity School, attends Shades Mountain Baptist Church with Morrison. The seminar in which they taught was one of more than 150 that Lama directs each year. Lama also runs a nonprofit ministry called Transforming Leaders in Asia [TLA], which purchased bicycles for the pastors who attended the seminar. Morrison says that the most memorable moment from their time in Guwahati was seeing the Meitei pastors receive their bicycles. Each pastor who accepts a bicycle signs a statement that he will use it to share the good news.



▲ Gregg Morrison, A. K. Lama and Lev Bragg



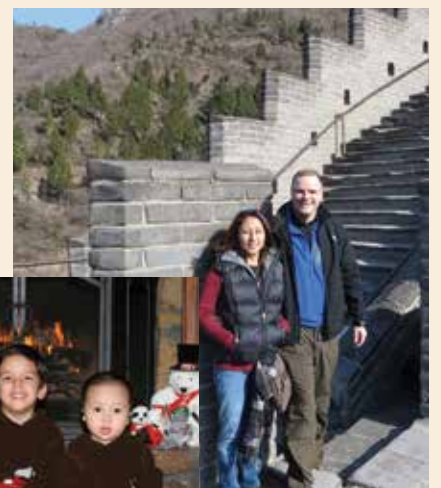
▲ Gregg Morrison prays for the pastors who have received bicycles.

Penlands Adopt from China

Chip Penland (D.Min. 2010) grew up fluent in sign language. Although he can hear, both of his parents were Deaf. Penland is now pastor of Kirby Woods Baptist Deaf Church in Memphis, Tenn. He is married to Traci Wilson Penland, who was adopted from war-torn El Salvador when she was just four months old.

The Penlands’ first son, Elisha, was born while Chip was a student in the doctor of ministry program, but the couple had always felt called to adopt. Because both Chip and Traci are fluent in sign language and lead a Deaf congregation, they were uniquely suited to adopt a child with a hearing impairment.

In November 2012, the Penlands traveled to China where they welcomed two children into their family. Charles “Trey” is two years old and Hard of Hearing. Rosalee is four years old and profoundly Deaf. Trey and Rosalee are settling into life in Tennessee and are learning American Sign Language. Please pray for the Penlands and the many other couples in the Beeson Alumni Community who are in some stage of the adoption process.



▲ Chip and Traci Penland at the Great Wall of China



▲ Rosalee, Elisha and Trey Penland

Alumni Updates

Eric F. Mason (M.Div. 1994) is



professor of biblical studies and chair of the Department of Biblical and Theological Studies at Judson University, Elgin, Ill. He also serves as regional coordinator for the Midwest Region Society of Biblical Literature. He is editor of two recent books, *Reading the Epistle to the Hebrews: A Resource for Students* (Brill, 2011) and *A Teacher for All Generations: Essays in Honor of James C. VanderKam* (Brill, 2012).

Todd Ross (M.Div. 1999) previously served as pastor of Sparta Baptist Church in Sparta, Ga., and Providence Baptist in Grand Ridge, Fla., and currently works as an underwriter for the Sheffield Group in Birmingham. He is also preparing to serve as small-group leader for a group of fathers of children with special needs at the Church of Brook Hills.

Bridget Rose (M.T.S. 2000)



edited the book *Prayers of the People* (Insight Press 2012), a collection of prayers written in honor of Sarah Shelton, pastor of Baptist Church of the Covenant in Birmingham.

Patricia Anne Outlaw

(D.Min. 2002) was appointed pastor of Bethel A.M.E. Church in Homewood, Ala. She also continues to teach pastoral counseling and spiritual formation at Beeson Divinity School.



Jay Watson (M.Div. 2002) celebrated his fifth year as lead pastor of Life Community Church in Nolensville, Tenn., a church plant of Brentwood Baptist Church.

Melody Maxwell (M.Div. 2003)



was named the director of the Great Commission Center at East Texas Baptist University in Marshall. She holds a Ph.D. from the International Baptist Theological Seminary in Prague, Czech Republic. She previously served with Woman's Missionary Union and Samford University.

Jon Parks (M.Div. 2004) and his wife, Tanya, moved to Slovakia in summer 2012. Based in the city of Kosice, they minister among the Roma Gypsy people as field personnel with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.



Chad Raith (M.Div. 2004) was named assistant professor of religion and philosophy at John Brown University in Siloam Springs, Ark.



Jake Andrews (M.Div. 2005) was appointed as a research associate in the Cambridge Inter-faith Programme, University of Cambridge. After earning a Ph.D. at the University of Aberdeen (2009), he held two posts at the University of St. Andrews, where he taught theology and worked on the After Augustine project. His book *Hermeneutics and the Church: In Dialogue with Augustine* was published by University of Notre Dame Press in October 2012.

Chase Reynolds (M.Div. 2005)



continues to serve as facilitator of a Bible translation program for the Yetfa tribe in Papua, Indonesia. His team is developing a writing system for the previously unwritten Yetfa language; they are also working on a set of 25 oral chronological Bible stories for the preliterate Yetfa people.

Mark Sheerin (M.Div. 2005) moved to Atlanta, Ga., to work as the COO of Sherrill and Hutchins Financial Advisory. Formerly, he worked with World Vision in Seattle, Wash., as the International Church Relations program officer.

Seth Tarrer (M.Div. 2005)



and his wife, Mary, were appointed missionaries with United World Mission. He will teach Old Testament in an interdenominational Protestant seminary in Buenos Aires, Argentina. After completing a Ph.D. at the University of St. Andrews (2009), he taught Bible at Briarwood Christian School. His book, *The Law & the Prophets: A Christian History of Interpretation of True and False Prophecy in the Book of Jeremiah*, will be published by Eisenbrauns.

Rob Foley (M.T.S. 2006) and



his wife, Leah, live in Denver, Colo., where he works as the community life coordinator at Denver Seminary.

Mark Hutton (M.Div. 2006) serves as pastor for spiritual formation and community development at Central Presbyterian (EPC) in St. Louis, Mo. He is also completing a D.Min. at Covenant Seminary.

Brian Cosby (M.Div. 2007) was named lead pastor of Wayside



Presbyterian Church (PCA) on Signal Mountain, Tenn. He is the author of *Giving Up Gimmicks: Reclaiming Youth Ministry from an Entertainment Culture* (P&R Publishing).

Brian Fulton (M.Div. 2007) moved to the north side of Chicago to plant a church called MissioDei Lincoln Square.



Joshua Posey (M.Div. 2007) became pastor of First Baptist Church of Stevenson, Ala., in March 2012.



Marshall Wilmhoff (M.Div. 2007)



is in his fifth year on staff with Young Life in Lexington, Ky. He spends the majority of his time with college students. Wilmhoff is also under care of the Ohio Valley Presbytery with hopes to be ordained as a minister of the Presbyterian Church in America.

Kaelan Clay (M.Div. 2008) recently returned from a nine-month deployment in Afghanistan. He serves as a battalion chaplain in the Marine Special Operations Command. He is stationed at Camp Pendleton, Calif.

Brian Argo (M.Div. 2009) is senior pastor at Saranac Lake Baptist Church, in Saranac Lake, N.Y.



Jerome Bell (M. Div. 2009) teaches full time at Paul Bryant High School in Tuscaloosa, Ala., and is an adjunct instructor at Southeastern Bible College. He is married to **Hope Bell** (M.T.S. 2011), a chaplain at Gentiva Hospice in Birmingham.



Chase Kuhn (M.Div. 2009) is pursuing a Ph.D. in systematic theology at Moore Theological College in Sydney, Australia. He also serves as an assistant minister at St. Thomas' Anglican Church, North Sydney.



Chris McCaghren (M.T.S. 2010) serves as special assistant to U.S. Representative Spencer Bachus (Alabama 6th District) and has begun his doctoral dissertation at Vanderbilt University.

Ryan Hamilton (M.Div. 2010)



serves on the staff of Independent Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, Ala., as assistant youth director.

Paul Podraza (M.Div. 2010) is a church planting apprentice with Celebration Community Church in Celebration, Fla., and hopes to soon plant a church with Converge Worldwide.

Aaron Ashlock (M.Div. 2011) is youth/associate pastor at Oak Knoll Baptist Church in Haltom City, Texas.



Joel Busby (M.Div. 2011) serves as college pastor at Mountain Brook Community Church and director of University Christian Fellowship in Birmingham.

He and his wife, Mandy, also continue to serve in partnership with Canaan Christian Community in Montrouis, Haiti.

Lauren Doss (M.Div. 2011) is coordinator of cultural engagement at the University of Evansville in Evansville, Ind. She works with international students, helping them transition to life in America and adjust as university students.

Andrew (M.Div. 2011) and **Alyse** (M.Div. 2011) **Fulton** were



ordained as deacons by Bishop Foley Beach of the Anglican Church in North America on behalf of the

Province de l'Eglise Anglicane au Rwanda. They reside in Birmingham and serve at St. Peter's Anglican Church.

Jonathan Haefs (M.Div. 2011) was called as the lead pastor of Shades Valley Community Church in Homewood, Ala., in February 2012.



Corey Jones (D.Min. 2011) became the pastor of Tabernacle Baptist Church in Burlington, N.J., in 2012.



Patrick King (M.Div. 2011) joined the staff of Trinity Presbyterian Church in Plymouth, Mich., Jan. 1, 2012. He provides direction for community groups and

adult education. Upon completing ordination in early 2013, he will serve the church as an assistant pastor.



Robbie Crouse (M.Div. 2011) is a second-year Ph.D. student at Wheaton College in systematic theology.



Benjamin Smith (M.Div. 2011) joined the Beeson Divinity School staff in 2012 as alumni relations officer.

Scott Rutherford (M.Div. 2012) is youth minister at Trinity Episcopal Church in Marshall, Texas.



Rev. James "Jim" Robert Hayes (M.Div. 1996) died of cancer Sept. 4, 2012, in Birmingham, Ala. He is survived by his wife, Sherrell, son, Jay, daughter-in-law, Kathy, four granddaughters and two great-granddaughters. Hayes was a Presbyterian pastor.

Rev. William "Bill" Clyde Byars (M.Div. 1997) died Friday, Aug. 17, 2012, in Society Hill, S.C. He is survived by his wife, Carol, and his daughter, Jodie L. Braswell. Byars pastored several Presbyterian churches in South Carolina before his retirement in 2012.

Nancy Janell Norton (M.T.S. 1998) died of cancer Dec. 5, 2012 in Irondale, Ala. She is survived by her husband, John, and her sons, Kevin and Scott. The Nortons were missionaries with the International Mission Board in Fukuoka, Japan for over thirty years.

Rev. Dr. Daniel Calhoun Johnson, Jr. (D.Min. 2008) died of cancer Jan. 16, 2011. He is survived by his wife, Stephanie, his sons, Daniel and Michael, his daughter, Anna, and his mother, Sarah. Calhoun was Deaf and spent 26 years in ministry and mission to the Deaf in Louisiana and North Carolina.

Paula Denise Davis (M.Div. candidate) died February 15, 2013, of complications after a kidney transplant. She is survived by her parents, Douglas and Cynthia Davis, and her sister, Tracy.

For more updates, including marriages and births, sign up to receive our Connect e-newsletter by emailing Benjamin Smith at bsmith1@samford.edu.

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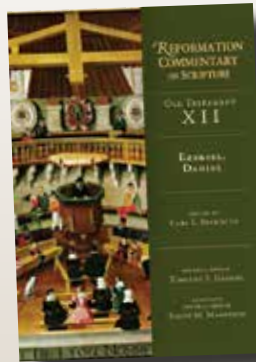


Faculty Bookshelf

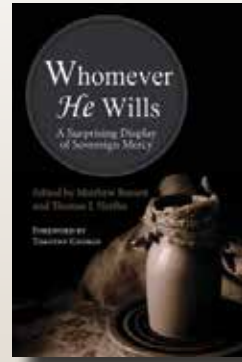
Beeson Faculty Share Their Scholarship

“Throughout the Psalter the reader will be confronted with the tension of living in a world that is not only alienated from God but antagonistic to him and his people. They must, therefore, find their direction and confidence in his word. And in so doing, they will also find their hope that someday the LORD will judge the world and vindicate them.”

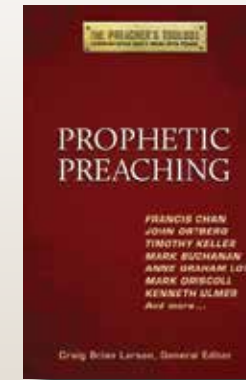
Allen P. Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms*, Vol. 1



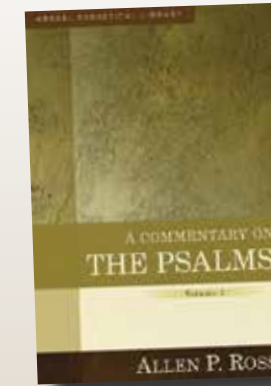
Ezekiel, Daniel (Reformation Commentary on Scripture) edited by **Carl L. Beckwith** (IVP Academic, 2012)



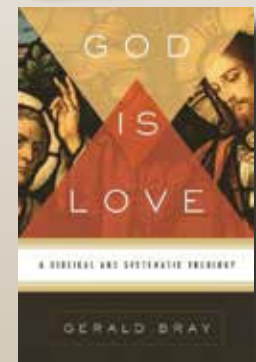
“Total Depravity: A Biblical and Theological Examination”
D. Mark DeVine in *Whomever He Wills: A Surprising Display Of Sovereign Mercy* edited by Matthew Barrett and Tom Nettles (Founders Press, 2012) Foreword by **Timothy George**



“Challenging Hearers”
Lyle W. Dorsett in *Prophetic Preaching* (*The Preacher’s Toolbox, Book 1*) edited by Craig Brian Larson (Hendrickson Publishers, 2012)



A Commentary on the Psalms, Volume 1
Allen P. Ross (Kregel, 2012)



God Is Love: A Biblical and Systematic Theology
Gerald Bray (Crossway, 2012)

“The treasure we have received is not for hoarding but for sharing, and it is our duty to go out and find those whom God has called to be his sheep.”
Gerald Bray, *God is Love*



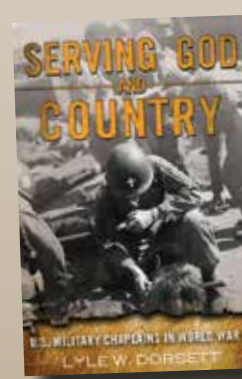
A Brief History of Old Testament Criticism
Mark S. Gignilliat (Zondervan, 2012)



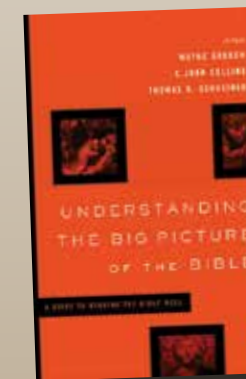
“The Speeches in Acts: Historicity, Theology, and Genre”
Oswaldo Padilla in *Issues in Luke-Acts: Selected Essays*, edited by Sean Adams and Michael Pahl (Gorgias Press, 2012)



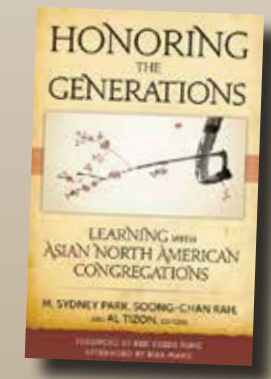
“The Kingdom and Eschatology”
Gerald Bray in *The Kingdom of God* edited by Christopher W. Morgan, Robert A. Peterson, (Crossway, 2012)



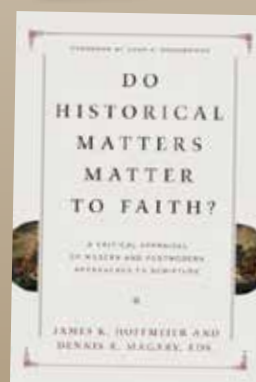
Serving God and Country: United States Military Chaplains in World War II
Lyle W. Dorsett (Berkley Hardcover, Penguin Group, 2012)



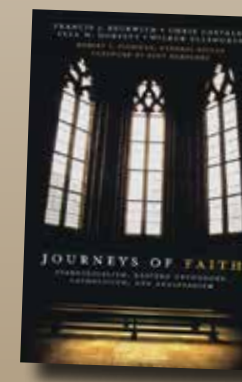
“Introduction to the Prophetic Books”
Paul R. House in *Understanding the Big Picture of the Bible: A Guide to Reading the Bible Well* edited by Wayne Grudem, C. John Collins, Thomas R. Schreiner (Crossway, 2012)



Honoring the Generations Learning with Asian North American Congregations edited by **M. Sydney Park**, Soong-Chan Rah, and Al Tizon (Judson Press, 2012)



“The Peril of a ‘Historyless’ Systematic Theology”
Graham A. Cole in *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith?* edited by James K. Hoffmeier and Dennis R. Magary (Crossway, 2012)



“A Journey to Anglicanism”
Lyle W. Dorsett *Journeys of Faith: Evangelicalism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Catholicism, and Anglicanism* edited by Robert L. Plummer (Zondervan, 2012)



Trinity, Freedom, and Love: An Engagement with the Theology of Eberhard Jüngel
Piotr J. Malysz (T & T Clark, 2012)



The Christ Letter: A Christological Approach to Preaching and Practicing Ephesians
Douglas D. Webster (Wipf and Stock, 2012)

Growing Up at Beeson

A Pilgrim's Progress

By Christian George

When Beeson Divinity School celebrated its first year of birth in 1988, I was pushing seven. The Riverchase Galleria had just opened, the crown of the Summit had yet to be scalped and Highway 280—the artery of the city—boasted two proud lanes that snaked to nowhere.

It was a sacred season of life, for me and for Beeson Divinity School. In fact, the only thing greener than Samford's lush quad was the divinity school's first faculty. Back then, I collected a warehouse of memories. Kicking soccer balls around the fountain, jumping steps on brakeless roller blades, meandering barefoot on sizzling sidewalks. Maybe it was because I was so short, but the halls of the religion department seemed eternally stretching (the original offices of the divinity school were located in Burns Hall). Everything looked taller back then. Reid Chapel's steeple. Davis Library's bell tower. The trees that peppered the promenade. Even the racquetball courts seemed bigger than the shoeboxes they actually are.

My father taught me to play. I wasn't good at first; in fact, the racquet was as big I was. But eventually, I learned the angles. You see, racquetball is a game of reflex. It's a game of strategy and muscle memory. As counterintuitive as it is, sometimes you've got to hit the ball off the

back wall in order to place the ball on the front wall.

I think there's some theology in that. When I enrolled in Beeson Divinity School to begin a master of divinity degree, I discovered that Christianity is a lot like racquetball—you've got to go back in order to go forward. Back to the Scriptures. Back to the source. Back to the banner cries of the great traditions of the faith. You don't have to be at Beeson long before you're surrounded by such traditions. The walls are splashed with them. In fact, I still have a

crick in my neck from continually raising my gaze to the dome's great cloud of witnesses.

Every once in a while, I'll go back to Beeson. I'll return to Gerald Bray's church history classroom where I learned to contrast *homoousia* and *homoiousia* (just an iota, but it makes a big difference). I'll sit in the desk where Frank Thielman taught me to parse Greek verbs until I was blue in the brain. I'll venture up to Dr. Robert Smith's hallowed lair and stand behind the preaching lab's notoriously transparent pulpit. Getting x-rayed



Timothy and Christian George ▶

at the airport is less invasive!

If these walls could talk, they would wax nostalgically. They'd recount professors such as Calvin Miller, who taught me that preaching is a lot like painting, only with paragraphs instead of pigments. And Patricia Outlaw, who knows "all God's children have issues." They'd recount Charles Carter's powerhouse sermons and Lyle Dorsett's spontaneous prayers. They'd speak of students such as David Riker, who didn't graduate until he took every single class in the curriculum (he still holds the record, I believe). And Jonathan and Karla Bean, who took Jesus seriously when he said, "Make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28). Each wall and each hall would

testify to God's amazing grace in designing the blueprints of a school such as Beeson Divinity School, and then filling its rooms with those who dared to dream it into existence.

If you ever find yourself driving on Highway 31, take a moment to look around. Atop Red Mountain to your east stands the towering statue of Vulcan, the Roman god of iron and industry. Atop Shades Mountain to your west stands the bleached temple of Sibyl, the Greek goddess of seduction and promiscuity. But way down in the valley, sandwiched between the two idols of our age—between the elevation of ambition and the lure of lust—stands a cross, a cross resting atop the dome of Hodges

Chapel. If two and half decades at Beeson Divinity School taught me anything, it's that the way up is the way down. As the Puritans posited, it's only in the valley that we receive the vision. And the only thing more sacred than a master of divinity is being mastered by divinity.

So on this, the 25th year of Beeson Divinity School's existence, let me just say, "Happy Birthday, little brother! You're all grown up." We have two fathers to thank for that. ✝

■ **Christian T. George (M.Div. 2007)** is the assistant professor of biblical and theological studies at Oklahoma Baptist University. His most recent book is *Godology*.

You can play a part in preparing future **pastors** by contributing to our Student Scholarship Fund

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