

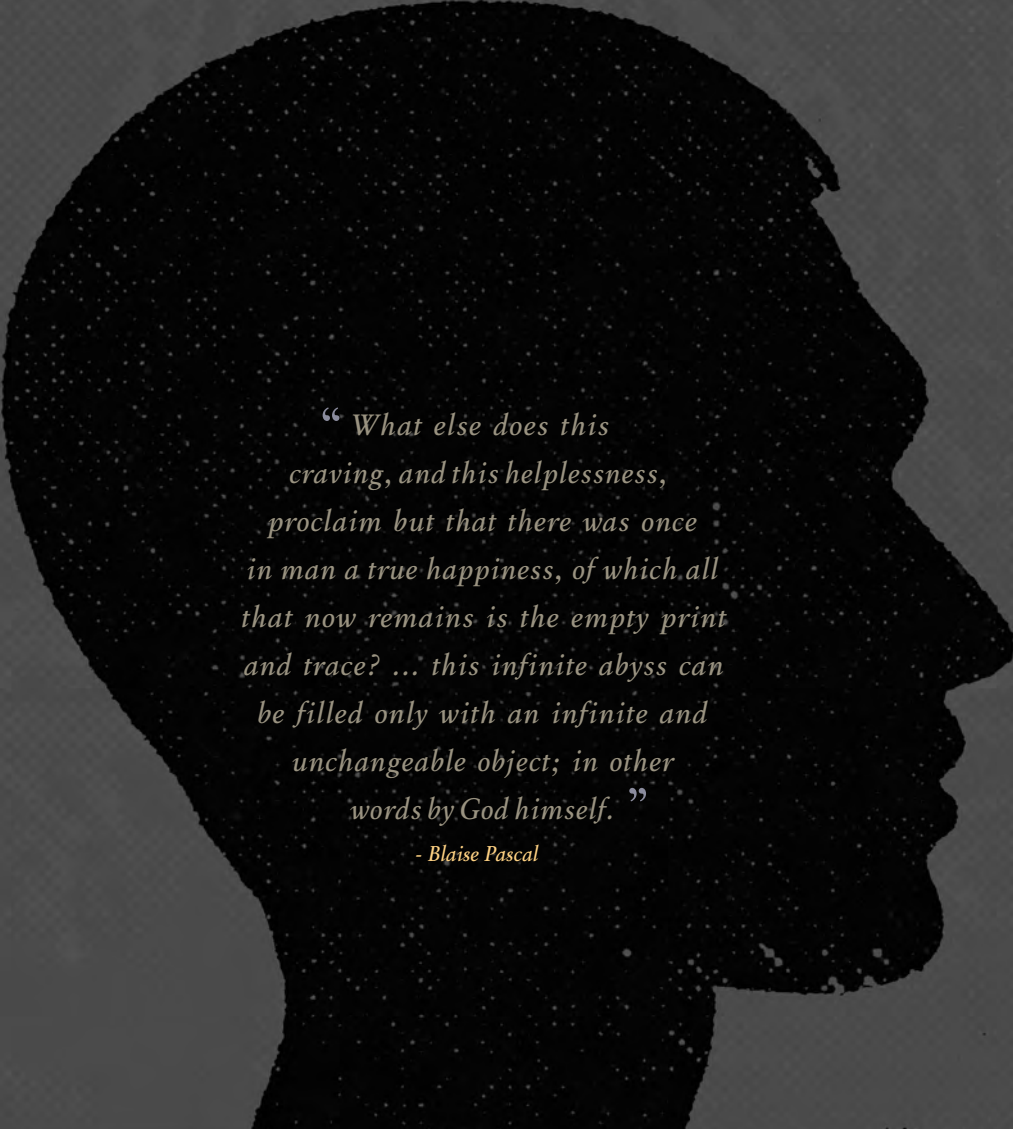
SOUTHERN SEMINARY

*“ What else does this
craving, and this helplessness,
proclaim but that there was once
in man a true happiness, of which all
that now remains is the empty print
and trace? ... this infinite abyss can
be filled only with an infinite and
unchangeable object; in other
words by God himself. ”*

- Blaise Pascal



*Eden, Aristotle and
the Kingdom of Christ*



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A letter from the President

R. ALBERT MOHLER JR.



The late John Lennon, basking in the glow of fame, once remarked of the Beatles – “We’re more popular than Jesus now.”

A few years ago, pop star Elton John gave an interview to a gay-themed magazine related to The Observer [London]. Perhaps Sir Elton is picking up where John Lennon left off.

In the course of the interview, the singer called for religion to be abolished: “From my point of view I would ban religion completely, even though there are some wonderful things about it. I love the idea of the teachings of Jesus Christ and the beautiful stories about it, which I loved in Sunday school and I collected all the little stickers and put them in my book. But the reality is that organized religion doesn’t seem to work. It turns people into hateful lemmings and it’s not really compassionate.”

That’s a pretty straightforward statement. Sir Elton would simply ban all religion. Popular culture exerts a massive influence on society, no doubt. But do pop artists have an inflated concept of their own importance? Elton John admitted as much in the same interview:

“We are all God’s people; we have to get along and the [religious leaders] have to lead the way. If they don’t do it, who else is going to do it? They’re not going to do it and it’s left to musicians or to someone else to deal with it. It’s like the peace movement in the Sixties - musicians got through [to people] by getting out there and doing peace concerts but we don’t seem to do them any more. We seem to be doing fundraisers for Africa and everything like that but I think peace is really important.

If John Lennon were alive today he’d be leading it with a vengeance.”

These words point to the fact that many celebrities believe their art is the driving engine of social change. Never has this rung more clearly than in the new motion picture “Avatar,” James Cameron’s box office colossus that has grossed more than \$1.8 billion in ticket sales. Not only is this movie a box office sensation, it presents a real opportunity for Christians to engage popular conversation, one that is often dominated by movies like “Avatar” and producers of hit music like Elton John.

That is a large part of the discussion in this edition of the Southern Seminary Magazine: What in the world are we supposed to do with popular culture? This question is one that is absolutely crucial for evangelical believers. We cannot dodge popular culture. We are called to proclaim the Gospel in a world that is thoroughly immersed in what amounts to an entire universe of popular culture.

Evangelical Christians have not known exactly what to do with Hollywood from the very beginning and that has been true, at least in some sense, for the Christian church in popular culture going all the way back to the early Christians and the Roman entertainments including the gladiatorial games. “The Banner,” which is an old reformed publication from the Christian reformed church, described what comes out of Hollywood as a

moral bubonic plague.

So what are we to make of “Avatar” and other products of the ubiquitous media that dominate our society? Is James Cameron, like Elton John, intentionally promoting a worldview that seeks change within the culture, even change in the form of sympathy for a worldview that directly conflicts with the Christian faith?

St. Augustine of Hippo, the great fourth century church father, in his famous work “City of God,” argued that Christians are simultaneously citizens of two kingdoms: the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of man. And, he said, followers of Christ are to live as citizens of the city of man, while yet possessing an ultimate allegiance to the city of God. As those who are called to be “in the world, but not of the world,” it is crucial for believers to be able to engage the myriad worldview issues raised by such cultural phenomena as “Avatar.” We hope this issue of the Southern Seminary Magazine will encourage believers toward that end for the glory of God.



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SBTS welcomes Van Loo as VP for enrollment management

By EMILY GRIFFIN

In January, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary welcomed Scott Van Loo as vice president for enrollment management.

Van Loo oversees admissions and student administrative services, which includes financial aid, the registrar's office, graduation and international student services for Southern Seminary and Boyce College. Van Loo is also developing and implementing a student retention and success strategy for both institutions.

Russell D. Moore, senior vice president for academic administration and dean of the School of Theology at Southern, said, "Scott Van Loo is a brilliant visionary and a hard worker with a proven track record of expertise in recruiting, admissions and student retention. His addition to the Southern Seminary team will have great significance for the future."

Van Loo joined Southern from Cedarville University, in Cedarville, Ohio, where he served as director of admissions. At Cedarville, Van Loo was responsible for leading the admissions team in developing and reaching yearly recruitment goals. Prior to being named director of admissions, Van Loo served Cedarville as associate director of admissions recruitment and associate dean of student life. Van Loo is a doctoral candidate in educational leadership for higher education at the University of Dayton in Ohio. ▶

Mohler appointed Schaeffer Chair at World Journalism Institute

By JEFF ROBINSON

R. Albert Mohler Jr. has been appointed to the Francis Schaeffer Chair of Cultural Apologetics at the World Journalism Institute (WJI) at The King's College in New York City.

As the holder of the Francis Schaeffer chair, Mohler, president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, will give a series of lectures to the WJI students at its multi-week course on convergence journalism in May in New York. This will be the second series of lectures by Mohler to WJI students.

The World Journalism Institute's mission is to recruit, equip, place and encourage Christian journalists in the mainstream newsrooms of both America and the world. To that end, WJI offers courses, conferences, internship funding and monographs on the intersection of Christianity and journalism. For more information, or to apply for the course, go to www.worldji.com. ▶





Student life initiatives continue to enhance the SBTS experience

BY EMILY GRIFFIN

Even to the most casual observer, it is easy to see that The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary is making campus-wide upgrades.

In 2008-09, the Southern community saw the Duke K. McCall Sesquicentennial Pavilion rise on the east side of campus and appreciated the appearance of directional signs and flourishing landscaping across Southern's 80 acres. In 2009, the Honeycutt Student Center welcomed the campus mall and the campus' Internet bandwidth was strengthened.

In 2010, remodel work was completed in Cooke Hall and additional upgrades to

classrooms across campus were launched. Renovation of the health and recreation center was completed in March, making it more accessible to students and offering more opportunities for families to use the center together.

Dan Dumas, Southern's senior vice president for institutional administration, has been working with Southern's President, R. Albert Mohler Jr., and the Executive Cabinet to plan, fund and initiate these improvement projects and is excited to see what is yet in store for Southern's campus and students.

"We really want to minister to, and care for, our students. We want to put our capital funds towards the students and their student life experiences," Dumas said. "We are building all the time; we are rolling out large quantities of capital and energy towards projects that are for the students and will only better their experience at Southern as they prepare for Gospel ministry."

Dumas is looking forward to this spring when construction begins on two state-of-the-art conversation pits, which will be located outside of the Mullins Hall and Fuller Hall complexes. These spots will include fire pits, gas grills, Wi-Fi accessibility and comfortable seating for a crowd. The Executive

Cabinet is hoping projects like the conversation pits will further the community spirit that is already prevalent at Southern.

Campus safety and security are also of paramount importance to Southern's administration. This year, a 360° security camera and emergency phone post, which will be connected with the campus safety and security office, will be installed between the Seminary Lawn and Boyce College. Dumas said that within the next 12 to 18 months similar posts will be deployed across campus.

Another major improvement to campus security will be door-entry security upgrades. Within the year, all Mullins Hall outside-entry doors will require a hand scan for admission. Once the technology is installed in Mullins, similar systems will be added to other residence halls.

Dumas and the Executive Cabinet are engaging a master plan to introduce additional campus-wide security measures and facility upgrades, but, as with all growth, expansion is limited by time and funding.

"The big issue is that we want to make sure that we are deploying capital towards strategic, well thought-out student life and security projects," Dumas said. ➤

COME SEE THE NEW AlbertMohler.com

The screenshot shows the AlbertMohler.com website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'BLOG', 'RADIO', 'VIDEO', 'AUDIO', 'ABOUT', and 'CONTACT'. A search bar is on the right. On the left, a 'TOPICS' sidebar lists various subjects like Abortion, Adultery, Anglicanism, etc. The main content area features a blog post titled 'A Roommate is a Roommate? - Coming Soon to a Campus Near You' by Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr., dated Friday, March 26, 2010. The post includes a sub-headline 'KAYLA ELAND AND LINDON PRONTO are roommates at Pitzer College in California...' and a photograph of a large, multi-story building. Below the post, there are social media links for Twitter and Facebook, an email subscription form, and a 'SHARE:' section with icons for Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn.

This screenshot shows a different section of the website, likely a radio show interface. It features a navigation bar with 'VIDEO', 'AUDIO', 'ABOUT', and 'CONTACT'. The main heading is '5-6pm weekdays'. Below this, there's a 'Live Streaming' section with a progress bar and a 'Subscribe to Radio show' button. A location indicator shows 'LOUISVILLE, KY (view other locations) WHKY 870 AM'. There's a 'first | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | Last' pagination link. Below the main content, there are several article teasers with play buttons, including 'God, Sex, and Christianity Lite' and 'An Interview with the Son of Hamas Mosab Hassan Yousef'.

BLOG

Read Dr. Mohler's daily blog and research blog posts dating back to 2005. Clicking on the TOPICS listed along the left side of the website will provide readers with related articles, audio and video clips.

RADIO

The Albert Mohler Program airs every weekday on the Salem Radio Network. Stream the show live from albertmohler.com and listen to high-quality recordings of past radio shows.

AUDIO

Dr. Mohler preaches, teaches and speaks around the country. Listen to audio files of Mohler dating back to 2003. Also included is Mohler's 1993 inaugural convocation service at Southern Seminary.

When you are on albertmohler.com you can use the powerful search engine to search the entire catalog of archived blogs.



SBTS energy conservation strategy to save thousands

By EMILY GRIFFIN

Last year Dan Diffey joined The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary's operations department as the energy education specialist, a position that allows him to explore the SBTS campus and find ways to make it more energy efficient. Southern's campus administration adopted a collection of energy management guidelines and Diffey was brought on board to facilitate these guidelines.

"Our ultimate goal is to save money," Diffey said. "It is all about being good stewards of our money and being better stewards of our environment — which is important."

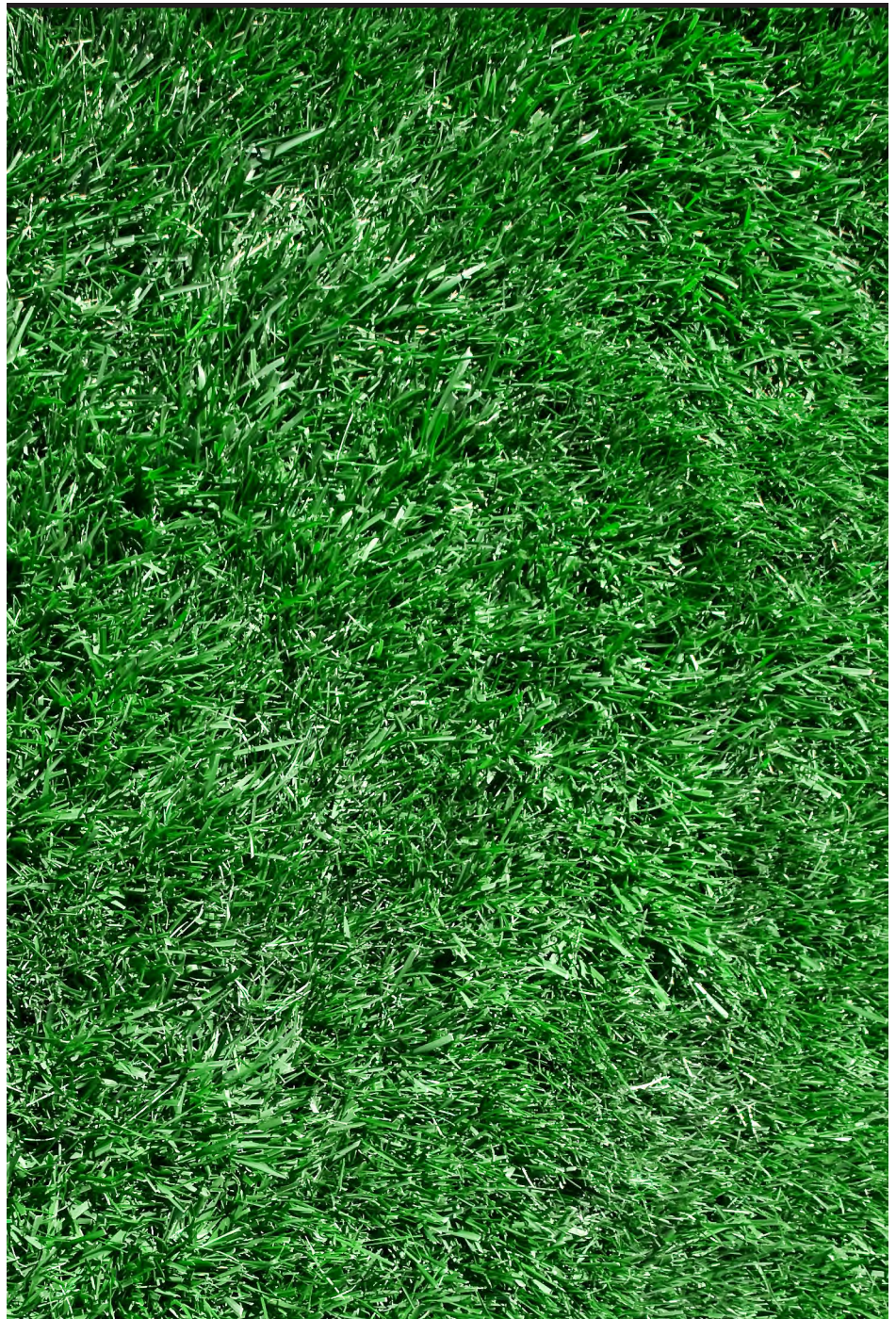
Diffey works directly with representatives of Energy Education, a company responsible for creating and helping implement customized energy conservation programs for school districts, institutions of higher education and large churches. Diffey reviews data and tours campus facilities with the Sodexo facilities management team and Energy Education representatives, who are on campus at least twice a month, and then seeks to implement cost saving measures.

Diffey reported that with the support of Sodexo, and the campus community, Southern is planning on saving at least 20 percent on 2010 energy expenditures with these new energy conservation initiatives, which equates to hundreds of thousands of dollars in savings.

"In the first six months of the program we've saved more than \$115,000," Diffey said. "And we're about to step up into even more cost savings."

The first phase of the program included ensuring that heating and cooling equipment wasn't operating when unnecessary and making sure lights were not on when unnecessary. Diffey cited Alumni Memorial Chapel as an example of lighting expenses that could be cut down.

"It costs more than \$2 per hour to



light" he said. "That doesn't sound like much, but that is about \$50 a day, which computes to more than \$15,000 a year to light the chapel. If no one is using that facility, we should keep those lights off."

Diffey is starting to focus on smaller things, like asking employees to turn their computers off at the end of the work day and turn lights off when rooms and offices are empty, which will compute into thousands of dollars in savings.

"If every individual would turn their computer off when they leave for the

evening they would each save the seminary between \$150 and \$300 each year," Diffey said. "We have enough employees for that to mean saving thousands of dollars each year."

"We are not trying to make people feel uncomfortable; we're just asking them to be good stewards. We are just trying to save nickels and dimes, thousands of times a year. That turns into significant amounts of money, which can be used towards better things, like furthering the mission of Southern." >



Harris calls high schools students to whole-hearted devotion to God

By COURTNEY REISSIG

Idolatry is the overflow of a heart that is not satisfied in God alone, Joshua Harris told middle and high school students at the general session of the Give Me An Answer high school conference at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Harris is pastor of Covenant Life Church in Gaithersburg, Md., and is the author of several books, including his most recent, "Dug Down Deep." The theme of the event was No Idols, and the purpose was to call students to whole-hearted devotion to God.

Harris spoke from Psalm 73:25-26, calling students to see that Jesus is better than anything else the world offers. He challenged them to be people who can say, like the psalmist, that God is enough.

R. Albert Mohler Jr., president of Southern, and Russell D. Moore, senior vice president for academic administration and dean of the School of Theology at Southern, were the other keynote speakers for the event. More than 900 students were in attendance and enjoyed worship led by Shane and Shane and Christian rapper FLAME. ➤

Students issued a challenge at Give Me An Answer collegiate conference

Reporting by GARRETT E. WISHALL and COURTNEY REISSIG

The most fundamental question people can ask regarding the existence of true knowledge is how they can know that God speaks, R. Albert Mohler Jr. told college students at the Give Me An Answer collegiate conference, Feb. 12-13 at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Mohler, president of Southern Seminary, preached from Deuteronomy 4:9-31 to the record 415 attendees.

Russell D. Moore was the other featured speaker for the conference's plenary sessions. Moore, senior vice president for academic administration and dean of the School of Theology at Southern, taught from 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:6, telling students that Paul, speaking through the Holy Spirit, calls Christians to boldness in proclaiming the Gospel to people.

Moore also spoke from James 1:9-18, reminding students that to be prepared to live in a world where God still speaks, only one who speaks. Moore said the James passage reveals three areas where the conflict between the Word of Christ and the word of Satan plays out in the life of every human being.

The conference offered more than a dozen breakout sessions led by Southern Seminary professors. Singer/songwriter Josh Wilson led worship at the annual event and FLAME, a Grammy nominated Christian rapper and Boyce College student, performed a live concert. ➤



SBTS staff and students welcome Be The Match for Professor Stam

By GARRETT E. WISHALL

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary partnered with “Be the Match” in February to host a stem cell donor drive for Carl Stam, associate professor of church music and worship and director of the Institute for Christian Worship at the seminary.

Since spring 2007, Stam has been battling an aggressive form of Non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma. The nature of Stam’s lymphoma is necessitating a stem cell transplant to aid in his recovery.

“We are blessed — and so hopeful for a full recovery,” Stam said. “But it has



come down to this: we must find a stem cell match for a transplant. This is the best chance to eliminate the lymphoma from my body.”

The goal of the drive was to help find Stam a stem cell match and make participants aware of the “Be the Match” organization, which helps patients find a matching donor and assists in funding

transplant procedures. The SBTS stem cell drive had more than 500 participants.

“The support that has come our way from family, friends and strangers, has been a terrific display of God’s love and care for us,” Stam said.

If you were unable to attend the event you can still join the Be The Match registry online at www.bethematch.org. ➤



Snow blanketed Southern Seminary

Snow blanketed the Southern Seminary campus twice this past winter, leading to three and a half days of class cancelations and closed offices ... and three and a half days to play, catch up on sleep and study at home with family or in the dorm room with friends. ➤



SBTS assists NAMB with 'Buckets of Hope' initiative

BY GARRETT E. WISHALL

As residents of Haiti seek to put their lives back together, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary worked in partnership with Kentucky Baptist Disaster Relief to help alleviate the hunger needs in the earthquake-ravaged nation.

Southern Seminary served as the final collection point for the North American Mission Board's "Buckets of Hope" program in the state of Kentucky.

Bob Perkins, director of campus security at Southern, explained that the initiative was the official response to the situation in Haiti from the North American Mission Board. NAMB asked churches and individuals to buy specific food items to put in a five-gallon bucket, Perkins said. Those buckets were then taken to regional collection points and delivered to the central collection location, Southern Seminary.

Once the buckets arrived on Southern's campus, Perkins enlisted dozens of student, faculty and staff volunteers to load the buckets onto pallets and shrink-wrap the pallets. After the buckets were collected and packed, NAMB transported them to Hialeah, Fla., where the Florida Baptist Convention made sure they arrived safely in Haiti.

Each "Bucket of Hope" consisted of a



plastic bucket packed with a standardized set of food items. The food contained in a single bucket will feed a Haitian family for a week. Each bucket also included a \$10 cash contribution to cover the cost of transporting the relief buckets to Haiti.

Coy Webb, disaster relief associate for the Kentucky Baptist Convention, spent a week in Haiti with an assessment team in mid-January and met with two Haitian Baptist Conventions and representatives with the International Mission Board. These

conversations led to the idea for the Buckets of Hope initiative.

Perkins said a company in Indiana donated the pallets for the relief effort. Webb said the two Haitian Baptist Conventions he talked with agreed to present the Gospel orally with the distribution of every Bucket of Hope. He noted that the situation in Haiti will require long-term relief efforts, but the Buckets of Hope initiative provided an opportunity for people to respond soon after the disaster. ➤



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Remembering the orphans in their distress: Adopting for Life 2010

BY GARRETT E. WISHALL

Roughly 600 people came to The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in February to hear about embodying the Gospel by responding to the cry of the orphan at the 2010 Adopting for Life conference.

Russell D. Moore had this to say, in a reflection article on the event:

“On Friday night, the chapel floor here was filled with people on their knees, seeking the face of God, with brothers and sisters laying hands on them and praying. People hugged one another, encouraged one another and total strangers cried as they prayed for new friends,” wrote Moore, senior vice president for academic administration and dean of the School of Theology at Southern Seminary.

“I was able to pray with people who are infertile and grieving, with people who are thinking about whether God is calling them to adopt, with people who are discouraged about the prospects of starting orphan ministries. One man sought prayer in repentance for being an orphan maker, having abandoned his wife and children years earlier through divorce.

“There was a freedom in prayer. It wasn’t ‘habbit-habbit-habbit, in Jesus name, Amen.’ Broken people and hopeful people were crying out ‘Abba.’”

Moore served as one of the keynote speakers, along with Jedd Medefind, president of the Christian Alliance for Orphans, and David Platt, lead pastor of the Church at Brook Hills in Birmingham, Ala.

Breakout session speakers included Kevin Ezell, pastor of Highview Baptist Church in Louisville; Justin Taylor, editorial director and associate publisher at Crossway Books; Randy Stinson, dean of the School of Church Ministries at



Southern; and Bill Bistransky, chief for the Adoption Division in the Office of Children’s Issues, Bureau of Consular Affairs at the U.S. State Department.

The breakouts were largely geared toward practical questions related to adoption, addressing funding an adoption, the nuts and bolts of international and domestic adoptions, ministry to the

birth mother, developing an orphan care culture in your church and other issues.

Christian singer/songwriter Andrew Peterson led worship for the two-day event, with special guest pianist Ben Shive.

Adopting for Life 2011 will be held Feb. 25-26, 2011, at Southern Seminary. See events.sbts.edu for more information. ➤





Nettles named as finalist for Christian biography award

By EMILY GRIFFIN

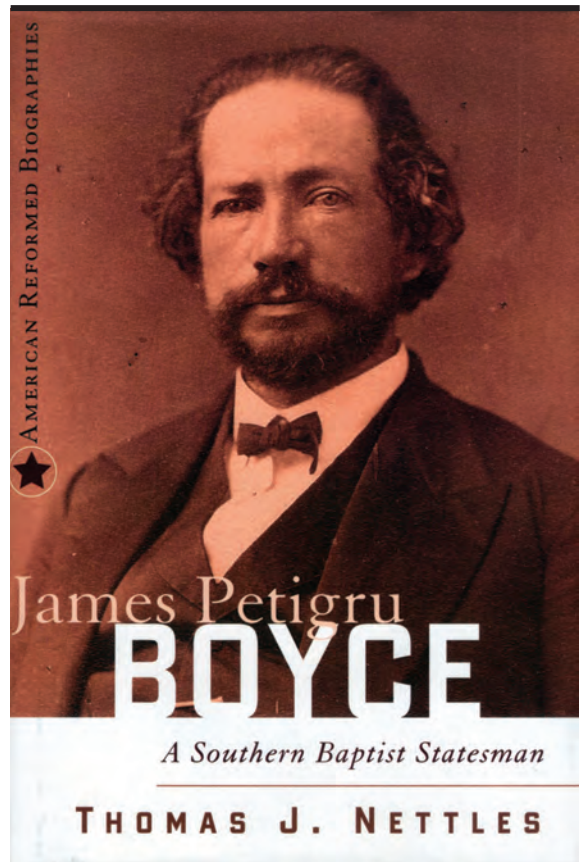
P&R Publishing announced in February that Thomas J. Nettles, author of “James Petigru Boyce: A Southern Baptist Statesman” and professor of historical theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, has been selected as one of three finalists for the 2010 John Pollock Award for Christian Biography.

The award is presented each year by Beeson Divinity School at Samford University, and carries a cash prize of \$5,000 to the author. The winner will be announced in May and an award presentation will be held in the fall.

“James Petigru Boyce,” published in June 2009, chronicles Boyce’s founding of Southern Seminary and focuses on Boyce’s theological development, lifelong struggle in establishing the seminary and the theological controversies that shaped Baptists in the last half of the 19th century.

R. Albert Mohler Jr., president of Southern Seminary, called the biography, “A masterpiece, combining keen insights with a definitive historical account.”

The Pollock Award was established in 2001 and is named for the British author of more than 30 books on religion, the majority of them being biographies of Christian leaders. Recent recipients include Barry Hankins (2009) for “Francis Schaeffer and the Shaping of Evangelical America” (Eerdmans)



and Jonathan Aitken (2008) for “John Newton: From Disgrace to Amazing Grace” (Crossway). ➤

Women at Southern publish daily devotional

By EMILY GRIFFIN

The office of women’s leadership at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary is looking forward to the summer release of the “Women at Southern: A Walk Through Psalms.” This endeavor, which was launched this past winter, includes devotions and testimonies from women of all ages from all areas of the Southern Seminary community.

Jaye B. Martin, director of women’s leadership and instructor in the School of Church Ministries, and Alyssa Caudill are general editors of the project. The devotional book was birthed out of Martin’s desire to raise scholarship money for female students at Southern Seminary and Caudill’s desire to write on Psalms.

“Women at Southern” is a collection of daily devotionals that offer support and encouragement with a spirit of gratitude and personal testimonies about the impact God has made through Southern on the contributing writers. The devotions begin on Jan. 1 and will have no year date, allowing the book to be used over and over again. Each day will have a background passage and a focal verse or verses, allowing women to read through the

book of Psalms slowly and carefully during the year

Each devotional and testimony is a unique piece provided by the ladies most closely affiliated with Southern Seminary, including: students, graduates, staff, staff wives, faculty, faculty wives, Women’s Auxiliary members, board of trustee members and trustee wives and Foundation Board members and member wives.

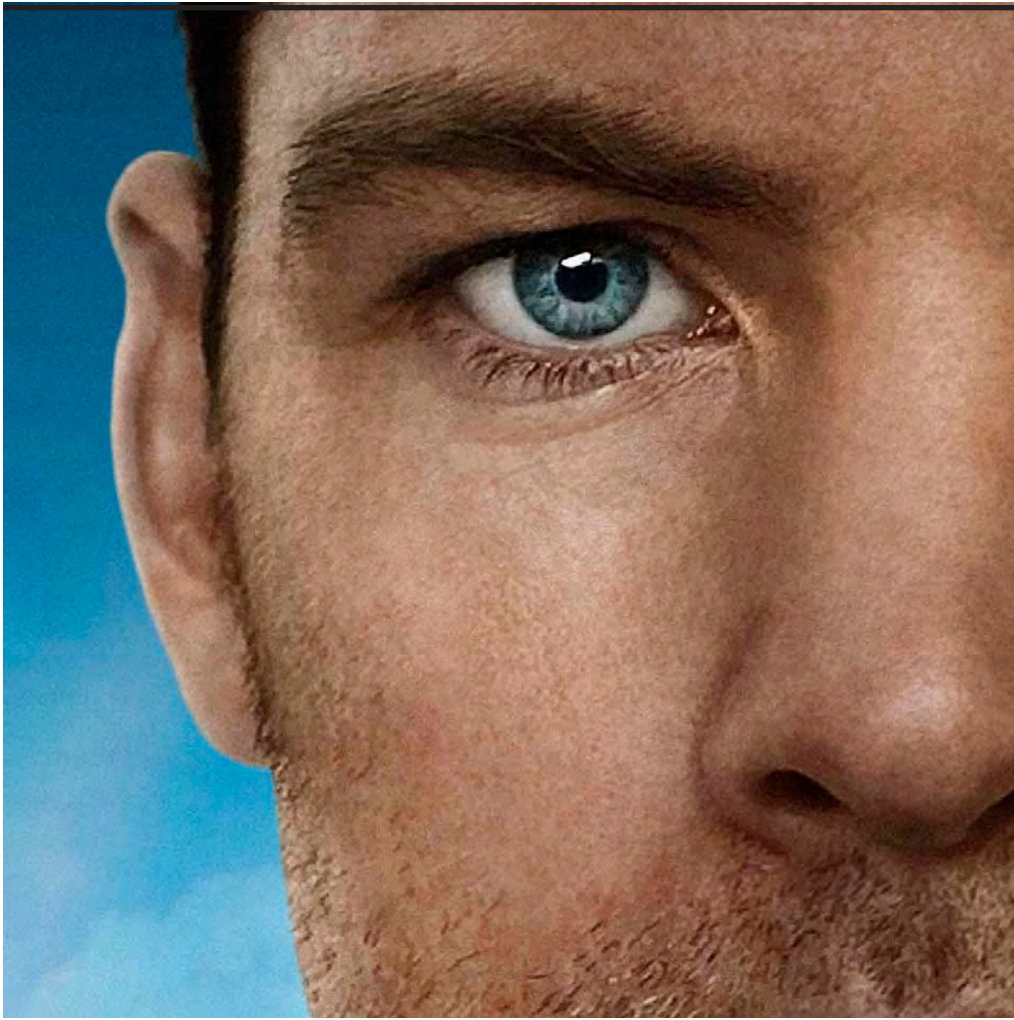
Martin and Caudill designed the book to allow more than 400 contributing writers to have the opportunity to relate to other women on campus and impact the Kingdom for God’s Glory. If you would like a copy of the “Women at Southern” devotional call the office of women’s leadership at (502) 897-4085 or email sbtswomensdevo@gmail.com. ➤

Southern iPhone App

theology meets technology



sbts.edu/iphone



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— just propaganda mediated through some “shock and awe” technology.

And in the end, a group of people (including some, I’m sure, who love the counter-propaganda on their local country music station about such things) stood and applauded as the “wicked” U.S. military went down, quite literally, in flames.

Of course, James Cameron is the same man whose moving images and music caused theaters full of “family values” Christians to tear up and cheer two teenagers fornicating in an abandoned car on the RMS “Titanic.”

Despite my eye-rolling here, I’m not really all that bothered. Propaganda isn’t dangerous, after all, when we know it’s propaganda.

Still, movies of all sort ought to remind us of the power of images, and what they can lead us to think and feel.

Wonder how much propaganda we’re latching on to without ever even knowing it’s there?

From www.mooretothepoint.com, originally posted on Dec. 18, 2009.



“Avatar:” Rambo in Reverse

By RUSSELL D. MOORE

If you can get a theater full of people in Kentucky to stand and applaud the defeat of their country in war, then you’ve got some amazing special effects.

I just left opening night of James Cameron’s gazillion-dollar epic film “Avatar.” The reviews were right. The plot is laughably cliché. The special effects are the most jaw-dropping you’ve ever seen. But what I wasn’t quite ready for was the preachiness of the propaganda.

The medium was George Lucas; the message Che Guevara. At one point in the movie, Southern Seminary student Daniel Patterson turned to me and said, “This is ‘Perelandra’ meets ‘Jurassic Park.’” Yes, and then it became

“Rambo”... in reverse.

First, from the preemptive war talk to the “blood for oil” theme to the napalm in the jungles to the “shock and awe,” the film couldn’t have been less nuanced. The American military was pure evil, while the Pandoran tribes people were nature-loving, eco-harmonious, wise “Braveheart” smurf warriors.

When it comes to issues of war and peace, I don’t mind a message in a movie. American citizens can and do disagree about whether Vietnam or the Iraq War were right. Christians disagree about whether these wars were just (and many would argue they were just, but unwise).

Some who believe the wars were warranted and just still oppose some of the tactics used. And most who oppose going to war in some of these places, still hope for their country to win those wars once they’re entered.

For this film, there was no argument here, no appeal, no real narrative

Dances with “Avatar”

By DENNY BURK

I liked “Avatar” the first time I saw it . . . when it was “Dances with Wolves.” Kevin Costner’s name didn’t appear in the closing credits of “Avatar,” but it should have.

The plot was nearly identical to the 1990 Costner flick. Pretty much, “Avatar” is “Dances with Wolves” plus some amazing special effects, a little post-Bush-era leftism, and a heavy dose of pantheistic creation-worship.

If you like the spectacle of innovative, grandiose special effects, you might like seeing this movie in the theater. Otherwise, I wouldn’t bother with it. You’ve already seen this story before.

From www.DennyBurk.com, originally posted on Dec. 24, 2009.



"Avatar"

By CHAD O. BRAND

First, let me say that I enjoyed the film very much. It was entertaining, it was a generally good story, a little predictable, perhaps, and even more so for those who have followed James Cameron over the years (and who has not?). Most of the characters were compelling, though not all of them, and the film kept me interested the whole way through. So I enjoyed the film, and I feel the need to say that first, because next I am going to offer some criticism.

The movie was clearly political, far more political than Cameron's earlier films. Not only is that clear from the film itself, but Cameron himself has said so on more than one occasion. It is anti-human, or at least, anti-most humans. The little bit at the end that says, in effect, the Na'vi decided to allow a few aliens to remain on their planet is a punctuation to that. But the film is filled with anti-most-humans sentiment throughout. Of course, what it is against is about as interesting and surprising as the fact that the Canadian-born producer will make money on this venture. It is anti-military, anti-non-green, anti-American (at least Bush and Reagan's America) and anti-Custer.

And I have to say, that is fine with me. Film makers have the freedom to promote whatever agenda they might have in their films, and we, the movie-going public, can buy it or not — literally and figuratively. The problem with the film for me was that the people Cameron likes are portrayed in a sensitive, sympathetic and realistic manner, but the ones he does not like in the film are,

generally, not portrayed in this manner. Colonel Quaritch is the best example. Cameron clearly wants us to hate him, and we do. All of us hate him. But that is just the problem. No one is that monochromatic. I lined up and waited for two hours the night "Star Wars" debuted. We hated Darth Vader, but we sensed that there was another part of his story that we did not yet know about. So, we could hate him, but in a way (we could) kind of "bracket" that hate.

No one can bracket their hate toward the Colonel. He's just a bad guy. The same is true, but to a lesser degree of Parker Selfridge, the "head" of the project. Sully, Neytiri and Dr. Grace, on the other hand, are complex individuals with mixed emotions, conflicting commitments and polychromatic personalities. I think Cameron could have done a better job depicting the Colonel and Parker. But maybe he could not bring himself to believe that such persons really are more subtle than he

thinks they are. Maybe Cameron should live in the real world for awhile and have lunch with some real military people and even play cards with a few Republicans.

Some have noted that this film is similar to "Dances with Wolves." I see the similarity, but I don't care about that. If someone came up with a completely new genre it would probably be a bad film. Someone once said there are only 17 country and western songs out there, and that the really creative person is the one who finds a way to repeat one of those songs in a new and fresh way. I agree with that.

Oh, and by the way, the ending leaves everything wide open for a sequel. What? A sequel to a James Cameron film? No one would ever expect that!

I liked the film. I will probably watch it again. But I am not going to accept the worldview.

From <http://chadowenbrand.blogspot.com>, originally posted on Jan. 2, 2010. ➤



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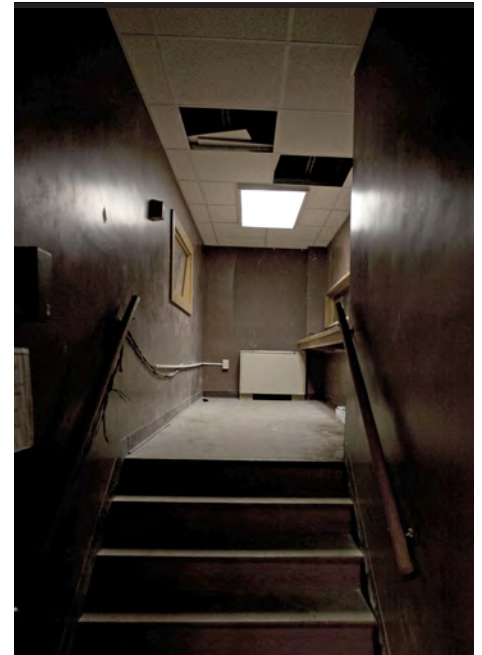
Cooke Hall welcomes a new look

By EMILY GRIFFIN

In 1970, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary built Cooke Hall in order to house the School of Church Music, known today as the School of Church Ministries.

Cooke Hall, which is attached to Alumni Memorial Chapel, provides offices, classrooms, a recital hall and practice music rooms for the school. The building was named after trustee V. V. Cooke, who purchased the seminary's first music building, which today serves as the home for Southern's president.

Cooke Hall was enlarged in 1985 and went under massive renovations in 2009 that were completed in early 2010. The School of Church Ministries hosted a grand re-opening of Cooke Hall in February. Dean Randy Stinson and the faculty of the school welcomed students, staff and friends of the school for a tour of the facility, which includes new artwork, carpeting and lighting fixtures and a new conference room. ➤



'Holy Subversion: Allegiance to Christ in an Age of Rivals:' A Q&A with Trevin Wax, recent SBTS graduate and author

By GARRETT E. WISHALL

“So, how can we as communities of faith live in a way that subverts the ‘Caesars’ that rule people around us ... and seek to rule us too? The rest of this book is devoted to answering that question.”

So writes Trevin Wax at the outset of his recently-released book, “Holy Subversion: Allegiance to Christ in an Age of Rivals” (Crossway: 2010). Wax has served as associate pastor for education and missions at First Baptist Church of Shelbyville, Tenn., for the last three years. In December, he graduated from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary with his master of divinity degree. Southern Seminary Magazine recently caught up with Wax for a few questions about his new book.

What is the thesis of your book?

Wax: This book is really a call to the church to intentionally discover what the idols are in the prevailing culture and then to deliberately subvert those idols by the way that we live. It is a very practical book on idolatry.

The way that the book is set up is that it takes the early Christians as our example and shows how they were deliberately subverting the Caesar worship of the day, the cult of Caesar worship, by proclaiming that Jesus Christ was Lord and by living according to the reality that Jesus is Lord and that God raised Him from the dead.

So, by taking that truth and living according to that truth, they were a very subversive bunch. Not subversive in the revolutionary, “We are overthrowing the government” kind of way, but by challenging the powers and principalities of that age in the way that they lived. We as Christians don’t live under a Caesar, but there are idolatries in our world that are grappling for our attention and affection.

In the book, you talk about subverting the idols of self, success, money, leisure,



sex and power. Regarding leisure, you write “Instead of being a friend to a hard worker, leisure often morphs into a taskmaster that squeezes the life out of us.” Explain what you mean.

Wax: I think leisure is one of the prevailing idols in our churches and sometimes I think pastors are afraid to touch it. Leisure should be a friend to us. God has created us to enjoy rest and recreation. For example, sports are a gift from God. We can honor God in our sporting activities and our entertainment choices. We shouldn’t be so hyper-spiritual in the sense that we can’t enjoy the good things in life that God has given us.

But we in the United States, including in our churches, have made work something that is necessary only to create time for our leisure activities, and to supply the money we need for our leisure activities. Take sporting events. Sports are a great way to instill discipline in your kids and to show them what teamwork is all about and sportsmanship, but what happens when sporting events compete with church? Too often I think ball is a modern day Baal. No matter what we as parents tell our kids about the importance of God in our lives and the priority of church, if church runs up against a ballgame and ball wins, we have demonstrated something completely different than what we have said.

Define success, biblically.

Wax: Faithfulness. Faithfulness to Christ’s call. Faithfulness to fulfilling God’s role for each one of us individually. Success looks different for different people. We, as a church, are often guilty of taking the world’s definition of success and imposing that on the church and on believers and it puts a

certain kind of pressure on church leaders that we weren’t meant to bear. We have this mindset that a successful church is always a growing church numerically. So, part of the problem is how we have defined success.

We must remain faithful to doing what God has called us to do, day in and day out, week in and week out, seeking first His Kingdom, leaving the results in God’s hands and not just taking what the world sees as success and imposing it on the church and then trying to build that up. God calls me to be faithful and I have to leave the results in His hands. Success in the eyes of God is different from success in the eyes of the world. Sacrifice, serving and suffering; those are the three characteristics of success. When you look at Jesus speaking to His disciples and He is defining what greatness is He is constantly pointing them back to sacrifice, suffering and serving.

What do you hope people take away from the book?

Wax: I hope they are challenged by the call to cast out our idols and to lean heavily on Christ, on His finished work on the cross and on the implications of His resurrection. That their lives would be shaped and formed by who Christ is and what He has done for us and in such a way that the idolatries that are in our world and that take hold of our heart sometimes, without us even knowing, are exposed and dealt with so that we are able to move forward in a more positive light.

I do hope that churches as communities will seek to put into practice a lot of what is in this book. There is a lot of insight for individuals, but I would love to see churches intentionally trying to live out the things in this book. ➤

Eden, “Avatar” and the Kingdom of Christ: Just what are we to do with popular culture?

Moderator: R. Albert Mohler Jr.

*Panelists: Theodore J. Cabal, Mark T. Coppenger,
Russell D. Moore and James Parker III*



Mohler: We are going to talk about Eden, “Avatar” and the Kingdom of Christ: What in the world are we supposed to do with popular culture? Recently the James Cameron movie “Avatar” passed the \$1.8 billion mark in box office sales. This occasions an opportunity for a conversation about popular culture because in this one movie we have not only a box office sensation, we have a real challenge to considering how Christians should consider popular culture and engage in the conversation that is prompted by Hollywood.

In his book “The Great Movies,” Roger Ebert said “we live in a box of space and time, movies are windows in its walls, they allow us to enter other minds not simply in the sense of identifying with the characters, although that is an important part of it, but by seeing the world through another person’s eyes as another person sees it.”

The apostle Paul wrote, “finally brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise think about these things.” (Phil 4:8)

This is a conversation we need to have. The question is: Where do we begin? The title of this panel, “Eden, “Avatar” and the Kingdom of Christ” is not accidental. What we have in “Avatar” is a new secular “Eden,” or at least an “Eden” very different than the Eden we find in the book of Genesis.

Coppenger: I will say this; there is a hunger for Eden and something paradise-like. I was reviewing the Chicago train system last night: 60 stations have a sort of paradise-Eden name. There are over 20 “parks:” Melrose Park, Oak Park, Highland Park, Lake Forest, Buffalo Grove, Willow Springs. There is never a stop that is called “Asphalt Expanse” or “Concertino Wire with Flapping Plastic Grocery Bag.” We have that hunger, and so we fashion a variety of movies to meet this hunger. There is this hunger, but the world supplies it in very ideological ungodly ways.

Mohler: and highly technological three dimensional ways.

Coppenger: It struck me that the “Avatar” characters who come in — the dangerous guys with the high technology — and attack the primitive



people: I thought of “Avatar” as one of those characters. You have the simple people making “Facing the Giants” and “Fireproof” with inexpensive equipment — those who are trying to do their less-than-high production value Christian films — and then come these sky warrior characters with their massive budgets and their blowing up of Christian values. I think this movie is that big mother-ship coming in with the helicopters around it.

Parker: As far as Eden goes, I think there is this longing for Eden. Look at C.S. Lewis: that’s one way he ultimately became a Christian — there was this longing, this unfulfilled something that could not be fulfilled in this life. When you read some of the articles about some of the people who come out of “Avatar” who are in deep depression and suicidal because this Eden isn’t real ... it doesn’t exist. It does exist but it doesn’t exist through pantheism or

animism. The great and glorious news of the Gospel is there shall be new heavens and a new earth — this Eden shall be restored and it shall actually be available to human beings.

Mohler: A study indicated that a significant number of persons, frankly a frightening percentage of persons, said that they would rather live in “Avatar’s” Pandora than here on earth. The idea that somehow the movie is presenting a superior creation to the one we know is a challenge isn’t it Dr. Moore?

Moore: Yes. There is always going to be that person who wants to escape from life. We all knew that “Star Trek” convention guy in high school, that guy who is just obsessed with a particular movie, television series or film as a way of escape.

It seems like when you look at these things, they kind of bounce back and forth between utopia, between this



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vision of Eden, and then dystopia between some sense of the apocalypse. So you've got "Avatar," but you also have "The Road," which has all but a remnant of humanity essentially being destroyed. So it seems to me that in popular culture you have people's longings and then you also have that fear, that fear of death and that fear of judgment, and they're being expressed the best way that people know how. Then you have people who are kind of looking at those things and it resonates sometimes deeper than they understand.

Mohler: It's interesting that you mentioned in juxtaposition "Avatar" and "The Road," because both are now a focus of a lot of attention in the movie world with cinematography because they spent vast amounts of money. In the case of "Avatar," to create this "Eden" kind of world and for "The Road" they had to come up with ways to basically destroy the earth.

Both of them are Hollywood successes, but when you start looking at why we are drawn to those things, I think it's because we are drawn to a knowledge of sin and its effects, as in "The Road," but we are also drawn to a hope for something better. It's rather superficial to see how Hollywood spends all this money and imagination to try to get at where the Christian Gospel has been all along.

Cabal: Worldviews always contain an Eden, an eschoton and a problem in between that must be solved. So it's little surprise that a move like Cameron's is going to present that and you have people who are longing for it. The problem isn't that there is a longing for Eden or a longing for something that's beautiful and good; the problem is the answer that the movie presents. It reminds me a bit of Rousseau's state of nature philosophy, if you can just get people out of civilization, or Thoreau,

if you can point back to a pond it will all be okay.

One of my favorite movies as a child was "Tarzan," the old 1930s Johnny Weissmuller primitive version, where Jane comes from the outside and almost gets eaten by crocodiles on her morning swim but Tarzan is there to protect her, the animals are all there to help and to cheer, and if the bad guys from the outside world come in, you just make an ape call and here comes the elephants. It is sort of the example you see in "Avatar" when the weird dinosaurs come to the aid of the people.

The problem with the movie is of course that primitive cultures are not like what we see in the movie. People are called primitive traditionally for a reason, not just because they don't have technology. Just as we see the Na'vi people wore war paint, they learned it somewhere. They cried when they killed an animal but they don't seem to cry when they kill the bad guys. In real life, primitive people can be pretty ugly and so a return to nature may be a nice longing but it can also end up (not so nice).

Mohler: What about humanity in this film, in particular the human characters, not the Na'vi? What do we make of its antipathy towards human beings Dr. Coppenger?

Coppenger: I wrote once that some of the best movies are the invisible ones, those movies that make you not really aware that you are in a movie. "Avatar" screamed at every point saying "I am doing a hack job here, I have overlooked that and so forth," and one of the big things it screams is hatred of humanity. It's a romanticism, an adoration of the primitive. It's a terrible, terrible lie about humanity. It hates man, and it hates capitalism; it hates the army and I think it hates sexually purity. It's this whole package of things so anti-Christian and sub-Christian, but Cameron's got the money to defame it all. It's just shocking to me. In our town there was this great applause at the end, perhaps there was a standing ovation. It was just like cat nip to the people in the audience. Yes we hate capitalism, we hate the military, we hate this and that and, by the way, we love animals.

Mohler: The capitalism angle is fascinating because Cameron spent multi-millions of dollars on new technology and he is charging people to see >D

that movie: he is a capitalist.

Coppenger: 20th Century Fox is distributing “Avatar” and Cameron is using materials from “Avatar” all over the place. Self referentially, it’s really inconsistent.

Mohler: Dr. Moore you described the movie as “Rambo” in reverse.

Moore: Yes, what you have is a turning against the military and what worried me about the movie wasn’t so much that it was anti-military but that it was anti-authority. It was a celebration of a revolt against authority and against a kind of a nihilism that’s there in the freedom of the people uniting against it.

What was interesting to me, as I was watching it in a blue collar neighborhood in Louisville, Ky., where you have a bunch of people who are voting for John McCain, listening to Merle Haggard and who have the little “I support troops” bumper stickers, was that at the end of the movie they are standing up and applauding too. What concerns me is not so much the message but the fact that most people aren’t really getting or seeing the message. Keep in mind, this is the same James Cameron who had evangelical Christians standing up and applauding to scenes of fornication in “Titanic.” It’s so subtle the way that you become emotionally connected to a film before you really realize what’s going on and that’s what worries me. It’s not so much the kinds of obvious propaganda that come through but the kinds of propaganda that come in and shape us and change us in ways we don’t even recognize.

Parker: Francis Schaeffer points out just the point you are making, and that is the power of film. That’s the emotional, manipulative power of film. So you can enjoy the film on a certain level — maybe the cinematography, maybe something else — but when you find yourself routing for what you know to be wrong, it shows the incredible power that film has over people and that’s why it is such an incredibly powerful medium.

Mohler: Looking at the story line of “Avatar,” you see that it has its own evangelistic message. It has its own meta-narrative, the Christian meta-nar-

ative, of creation, Fall, redemption and consummation. It’s all there, it has its own apocalypse and it has its own religion. When you look at the screenplay it’s very clear that the religious message is pointed in a way that you might not catch while watching it. There is an insistence that this is not some kind of superficial religion, but that this is real religion. There is this pantheism with the tree and its interconnected roots and all the rest — by the way we did catch that Sigourney Weaver’s character is named Grace Augustine? James Cameron knows what he is doing here;



there are hints of reference points to the Christian Gospel in this recasting of a completely different gospel.

Coppenger: I taught environmental ethics a couple years ago at Elmhurst College. I took the standard text, it was by textbook publisher McGraw-Hill, and I think it had 84 readings and of the 84, three were Christian: St. Francis, Annie Dillard and Wendell Berry. The rest were all over the place. But Gaya, the earth-mother, pantheism thing was everywhere, and it is so strong that people are actually appreciating Spinoza. He is one of the most unreadable philosophers, what he has written is just obscure, but they love the way he says that there is one substance and that substance is god and everything is god and so forth. So people are driven so

much by this pantheism, and panentheism, to read obscure philosophers.

Speaking to one thing Dr. Moore said, it’s so odd that you have to create this sort of black-light shop paradise when the world we are in is the most beautiful thing on earth. Whether you are from Rockies or the Great Plains or the southern pine forests, there is nothing that beats that. But Cameron takes us into this black-light poster shop from the 1960s and we put on the little glasses like we did in the 1950s, it’s so retro but God’s creation is extraordinarily splendid as it is.

Cabal: To me the thing that leapt out was this overtly religious message. The name of the movie is a little bit of a concern immediately for a Christian, and Cameron knows what he is doing. It is a glorification of pantheism all the way. Cameron knows exactly what he is doing regarding the Gospel because remember just a couple of years ago he was the executive producer of “The Lost Tomb of Jesus” on the Discovery Channel. That program was trying to say they found the original tomb of Jesus and His family.

Cameron is in your face even though it is a mixture of science fiction where the religion can be explained in naturalistic terms, it is still very much appealing to the average what I like to call “post-modern religionist” who is not real clear as to what he is after. To these people it doesn’t matter if it makes a lot of sense, everything is god impersonally but they can also pray to this god.

Mohler: Popular culture is not a new challenge; it goes all the way back to the early generations of Christians. The kind of thinking that has been demonstrated in this conversation is something that ought to be a part of our constant conversation as part of holding each other accountable as Christians. We need to talk about what we watch, what we read and what we listen to, and then we need to discuss what it is doing to us and to our children. Doing that will also help our mission field because if this is the story that millions of people are paying to see, then that gives Christians an opportunity to present people with the story of stories – which is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. ►

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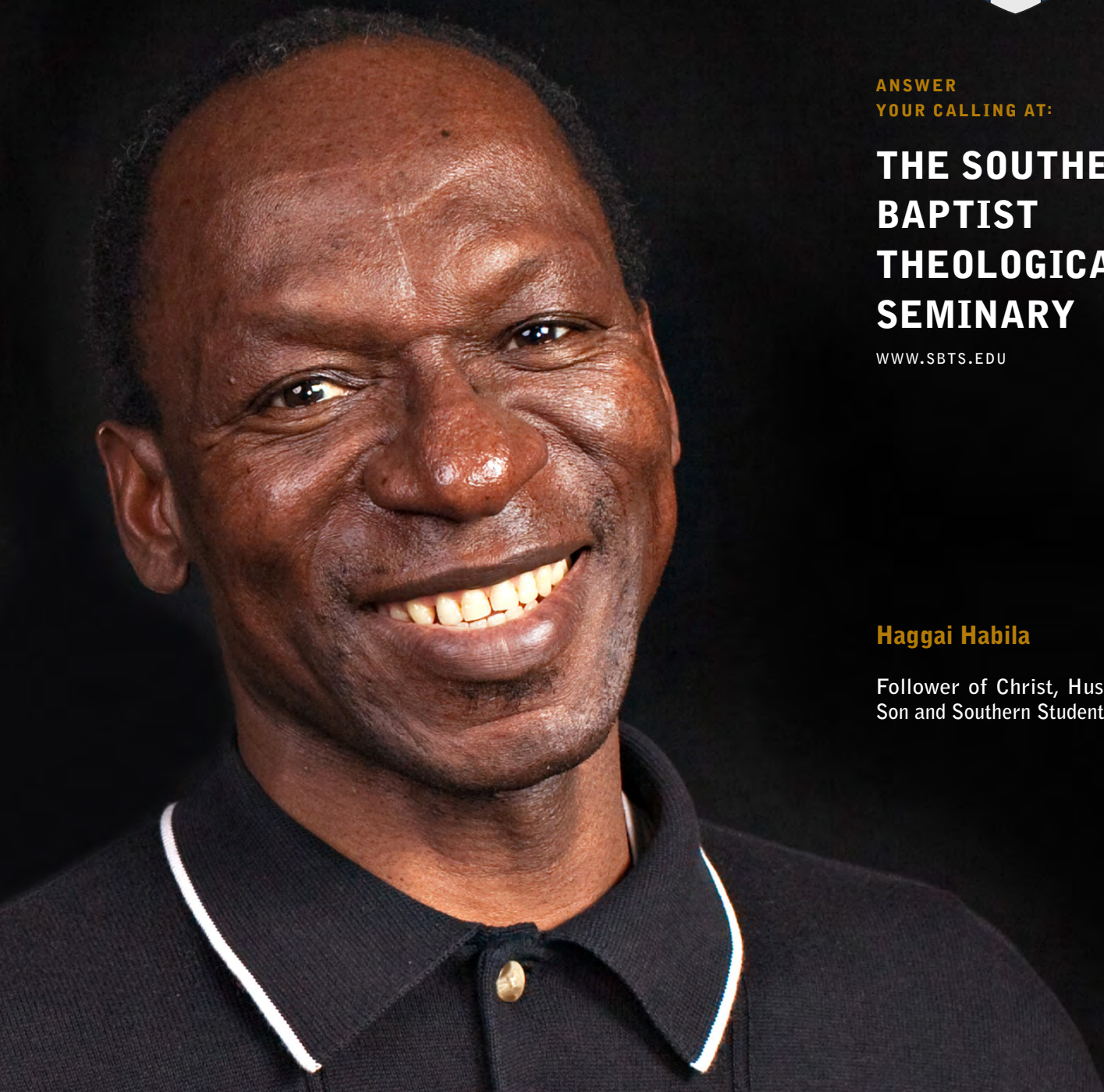
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Attack of the Hollywood “Sky People”

BY MARK T. COPPENGER, PROFESSOR OF CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS AT THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

This year, the Academy Awards did not so much honor “Avatar” as become “Avatar.”



While James Cameron’s profit-hungry, high-tech, Dragon Assault Ship, took shots at Judeo-Christian theism, the military, capitalism and ecological sanity, the Na’vi, in the form of the low-budget films, “The Blind Side” (which honored God) and “The Hurt Locker” (which honored soldiers), emerged victorious. It seems that plausibility still has the power to bring down high-gloss foolishness, as in “Avatar’s” Eywaism, with its “tree of souls.”

The differences in scale are striking. By Oscar time, best picture winner, “The Hurt Locker,” had made only \$17 million worldwide, while “Avatar” had made over \$700 million in the U.S. alone. As for “The Blind Side,” featuring best actress winner, Sandra Bullock, it cost \$30 million to make, compared to “Avatar’s” \$500 million.

Of course, big studios with big budgets can make good stuff, and low-budget films can be lame or pernicious, but spiritually-toxic blockbusters are

Hollywood staples. Take Cameron’s earlier film, “Titanic,” for example. It was another Dragon Assault Ship doing damage to the “simple creatures” below. Sure, the production values were stunning, and Cameron was smart to piggyback on one of history’s most compelling tragedies, but by idolizing the unholy sexual liberties of an unmarried couple and suggesting a universalistic reunion in the afterlife, he dismissed biblical morality and theology.

Of course, it’s unreasonable to expect that a man who’s been married five times (and divorced four) to get love right. A measure of *Schadenfreude* is excusable when one hears that Kathryn Bigelow, who beat him out for best director, was his third wife, the one he left for one of his actresses, Linda Hamilton. Indeed, going to Cameron for advice on relationships is as smart as letting Simon Magus teach Sunday school.

This is not to take away from Cameron’s extraordinary craft. Who can fail

to be impressed with the green-screen juxtaposition of metamorphosized actors within a computer-simulated magical forest? And a quick review of other Cameron productions brings to mind such razzle-dazzlers as the metallic, puddling-and-reconstituting villains of the “Terminator” series, the “chestburster” scene in “Aliens,” and Arnold Schwarzenegger’s Harrier jet acrobatics in “True Lies.” Cameron knows how to knock your socks off.

Contrast this with the earnest, convicting, but sometimes embarrassing efforts of tiny Christian “studios.” As spiritually powerful as “Fireproof” was, I found one of the scenes a little painful to watch — the one where Kirk Cameron rescues the child from a burning house. Supposedly trapped by the same flames that are keeping his fire department colleagues at bay, he manages to escape through a hole in the floor. Problem is, the flames just aren’t that impressive. The viewer can easily imagine a fireman’s running right



META

through them.

If you want to see really terrifying flames, check out Ron Howard's "Backdraft," starring such big names as Robert DeNiro, Donald Sutherland and Scott Glenn. Not surprisingly, it was nominated for sound and visual effects Oscars. So striking were the images that Universal Studios Hollywood opened a "Backdraft" attraction. Of course, to be fair, it took a ton of money to do this, and few Christian producers have or are willing to commit this many dollars to achieve stunning film effects.

Still, some amazing things have happened on the cultural battlefield, where shoestring productions have enjoyed some success. Take the case of Sherwood Baptist Church in Albany, Georgia. For only \$100,000 and with only five professionals in the cast and crew (the rest being volunteers from the church), Sherwood produced "Facing the Giants," which grossed, in the US, over \$10 million — a hundred-fold return. At the same time, the heretical

and blasphemous "The Da Vinci Code" cost \$125 million, and grossed a whopping \$758 million worldwide, but this was still only a six-fold return.

Yes, the majors can come up with magnificent and spiritually acute productions. "The Lord of the Rings" series was a big box-office success and an Oscar winner in 2003, as was "Chariots of Fire" two decades earlier. But the big studios are more likely to come up such godless (and Oscar-winning) fare as "Million Dollar Baby" (pushing assisted suicide), "American Beauty" (indulging the perversities of mid-life crisis), "Platoon" (slandering the military), and "Cider House Rules" (glorifying abortion).

Year after year, such exotic behemoths fill the skies, firing down on the churches, marginalizing and mocking their sensitivities, values and teachings. But, now and then, a band of Na'vi will show up the big guys. In a film culture keen on such abortion promos as "Cider House Rules" and "Vera Drake," a

little movie called "Bella" surfaced in 2006 and won the People's Choice Award at the Toronto Film Festival. The product of Metanoia Films (Greek for "repentance"), a company devoted to presenting "the good, the true and the beautiful," "Bella" told the story of a single, pregnant waitress fired for missing work. Though she wanted an abortion, the cook and his family dissuaded her with their loving care. As her perspective turned toward preserving life, strains of the Fanny Crosby hymn, "I Am Thine, O Lord," emerged on the soundtrack. The film cost only \$3.3 million to make, but grossed over \$8 million in its first year.

So those dismayed at the powerful assault of Cameron's pantheism and eco-pacifism, can take heart. As formidable as his resources may be, his ideological projects are still vulnerable to small, truth-saturated, artfully executed counter-films. May there be more of these, and better ones at that. ➤

Apocalyptic themes dominate the box office

BY JAMES PARKER III, PROFESSOR OF WORLDVIEW AND CULTURE AND ASSOCIATE DEAN FOR WORLDVIEW AND CULTURE AT THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

In the last couple of decades there have been a spate of films that have had apocalyptic themes. At best these themes are just going to be vague approximations of truly biblical apocalyptic ideas. At worst they will be downright misleading and erroneous.

The fundamental question that comes to mind for me is ‘why do secular Hollywood producers and writers even have these kinds of themes in their movies in the first place, since most of them are pretty thoroughgoing secular kinds of people, and “apocalyptic” is a biblically and theologically rooted motif?’ I think the reason that they write and produce such films, and people respond to such films, is because human beings are created in God’s image, and as image bearers, there are some truths that they know intuitively. Second, our culture lives with a “Christian memory” and Christian theism and the basic biblical worldview is in our collective cultural memory. This memory may be vanishing, but it isn’t completely gone yet.

There has been a shift in apocalyptic movies around the turn of the century. During the 1990s, there were several movies that either portrayed a post-

apocalyptic end caused by mankind (“Water World”) or films that portrayed the coming end of the world through either alien invasion (“Independence Day”), asteroids (“Armageddon”) or dinosaurs (“Godzilla”).

In these films, the scripts suggest that human beings, with their intelligence and technology can save the day. It may be a close call, but they can do it. The movie “Deep Impact” is about the impending collision into planet earth of a comet that will end life as they know it. But the day will not be saved through human ingenuity or scientific rationality alone but will also include non-rational means. One sees the same shift in the TV series “Star Trek” from the earlier to the later years. One can observe a theme throughout these films: evil has become secularized. It is not a spiritual or satanic threat, not a threat from a holy God, but accidents of nature

(comets, asteroids) or human error and blundering. There is little spiritual dimension to these apocalypses.

We saw a change in emphasis in the apocalyptic genre around the turn of the century through the addition of more overtly spiritual and theological overtones. In 1999, Arnold Schwarzenegger starred in “End of Days,” a movie whose theme centers on the attempt of Satan to take over the world. The last scene has Schwarzenegger in a church where he drops his huge gun and overcomes evil by spiritual means. “Children of Men” was based on the spiritually charged pro-life novel by P. D. James. In this film the end of the human race is inevitable because women are unable to get pregnant since all men have become sterile. Some people put “Avatar” in the apocalyptic category. I don’t see it as apocalyptic per se but rather as another rather stilted “good guy versus



bad guy” adventure (with a love interest thrown in).

The movie “9” is an exception to the spiritual components, in many ways a throwback to the 1990s, except that it is about robots and not living beings. In “The Book of Eli,” the hero battles in a post-apocalyptic world to save humanity’s future by preserving the last copy of the Bible. “2012” is an end of the world as-we-know-it science fiction disaster film brought on by nature, ending with an ark scene where a remnant of mankind is saved. “Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time” is set in medieval Persia and has an air of Aladdin’s tales about it, complete with demons, magic and a beautiful oriental princess; “Legion” is Scott Stewart’s supernatural thriller where God gives up on humanity and decides to take it out, but the archangel Michael decides to try to save mankind from God

and His hosts of angels. This one is a full-blooded theological apocalyptic film but the problem is that they get their theology all backwards. Louis Leterrier’s “Clash of the Titans” pits Perseus (born a Greek god but raised a man) against the gods in order to save humanity.

Many of the recent apocalyptic films have more overtly religious and supernatural themes, in contrast to many of the earlier ones, which were more naturalistically based. However, this isn’t necessarily good news because theological error is not an improvement over philosophical error. Whether the apocalypse is “naturalistically” or “spiritually” induced, if it isn’t biblically accurate, then damage is done to truth.

Conrad Ostwalt, speaking at a conference on religion and film, has said he believes that Americans are substituting Hollywood “doomsday” ideas of

the end for a more biblically-shaped view. (Journal of Religion and Film 2.1, 1998 np). Robert Johnston (Reel Spirituality, pg. 171) argues that with the evangelical church becoming more “mainstream” culturally, “we have difficulty portraying world destruction at the hands of a Sovereign God ... a real apocalyptic consciousness is largely missing from contemporary Christian thought. So enter Hollywood to deal with our millennial fears.”

Hollywood is right in its intuition that there is an apocalyptic truth at the heart of the universe and lurking deep within the heart of man, but since they ignore the truth of biblical revelation, they get it wrong. The record of the future needs to be set straight by clear, faithful biblical teaching on the end times. This will provide a hope that is grounded in truth and in God’s character and is thus something that can be trusted. ➤

“Avatar:” entertaining environmentalist evangelism

BY THEODORE J. CABAL, PROFESSOR OF CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY
AND APPLIED APOLOGETICS AT THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

“Avatar,” the highest grossing movie of all time, won three Academy Awards. But “Avatar’s” significance goes beyond box office receipts and awards. What’s really in play here is the environmentalist evangelism of writer and director James Cameron packaged as entertainment.

Entertainment

Make no mistake. “Avatar” is spell-binding entertainment. No environmentalist has ever enjoyed such a glorious medium as this for preaching his message. The visual feast plied liberally in friendly local theaters across the world has yielded open-hearted audiences. Thousands of costumes and props, 50,000 square feet of sets and an entire Na’vi language demanded a year and a half in the making for this blockbuster. Lifelike digital characters resulted from state of the art cameras acquiring actors’ movements and simultaneously translating them into 3-D computer generated imagery. Actors’ facial movements captured by tiny cameras on their heads were transformed into digital countenances. These dazzling visuals ate up 17 gigabytes of storage per minute.

“Avatar’s” message creatively utilizes stock-in-trade science fiction. Human

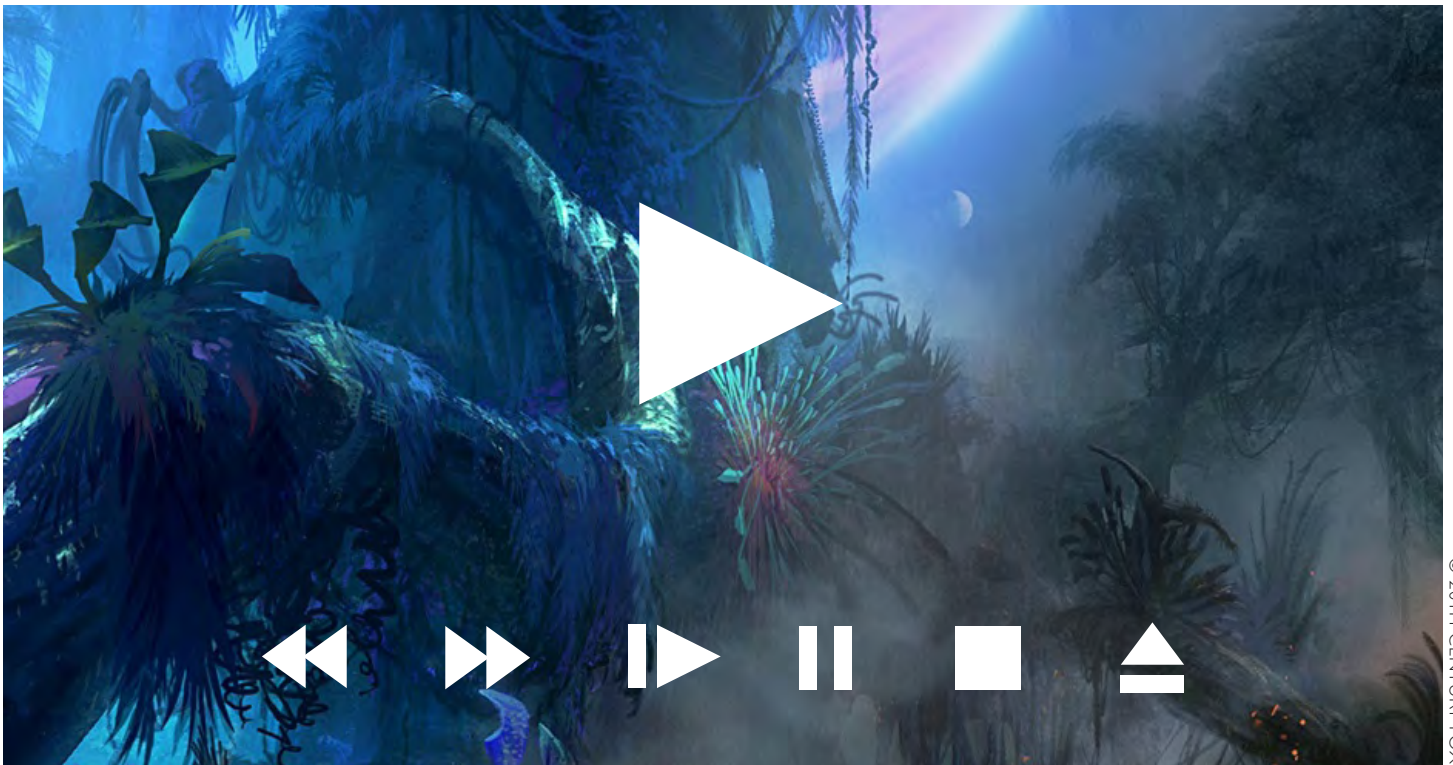
consciousness can be permanently up/downloaded yielding trans/post-human creatures. Unobtainium, the element being mined on Pandora, is a mainstay science fiction term for something extremely rare and costly. But captivating the average viewer is the basic bad guys vs. good guys storyline. The plot incorporates courage, selflessness, love, loyalty and respect. “Avatar” is fun because there is meaning in its universe.

Evangelism

The entertainment, however, comes with a hefty price. One must endure Cameron’s hardcore evangelism. His missionary zeal for various causes gushes throughout. Some convictions are evidenced by what he opposes. Anti-militarism (which doesn’t apply to the Na’vi military), is reinforced by stereotyped heartless soldiers. Anti-capitalism is apparent when the bottom line of the

greedy mining company’s “quarterly statement” transcends humane treatment of the natives. In this economy the hero, Jake, can’t afford treatment for his spinal injury — but is promised the remedy if he’ll sell out to the evil system. Anti-civilization/technology is evident when the good, the true and the beautiful can only be found in the primitive lifestyle of the native peoples.

But “Avatar’s” sternest sermon point is its in-your-face religious environmentalism or, better, full-blown religion of nature. This is not just the stuff of standard postmodern religion found in much popular media today. The title itself is defined as an incarnation of a Hindu deity. Pro-panteism is rampant. A network of energy flows through all living things. Deceased ancestors are consulted via the “Tree of Voices.” Celebration abounds at the “Tree of Souls” where worshipers experience special closeness to the guiding force/deity. After converting to Eywa enthusiasm,



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even the hard-core scientist (Sigourney Weaver) exclaims, “We’re not talking about pagan voodoo but something that is real biologically: a global network of neurons.”

These religious themes are not incidental. Cameron has proven before he has religious axes to grind. He produced the provocative, but academically bankrupt “Lost Tomb of Jesus.” Based on a capricious interpretation of an ancient tomb in Jerusalem, the so called “documentary” claimed discovery of the bones of Jesus. Overwhelming scholarly rejection of this project, however, at the very least demonstrated how right at home Cameron is in the science fiction genre.

Environmentalism

“Avatar” utilizes the staples of the environmentalist movement for its message. An advanced but decadent civilization has already plundered the earth and now greedily supplants the primitive but morally superior native culture. Human pursuit of Pandora’s unobtainium at all costs leads to the savage treatment of the eco-conscious Na’vi.

Before production of the film, 20th Century Fox executives requested Cameron remove some of the “tree-hugging” religion from the movie. His response?

“No, because that’s why I’m making the film.” The purpose, he later explained in an MTV interview, was to entice audiences with “eye candy,” jolt them from environmental “denial” and induce work for change. He even noted the potential for using “Avatar” to create environmentalist curriculum.¹ “Avatar” embodies superb environmentalist evangelism at its confrontational best.

“Avatar’s” “gospel” cannot save. Ironically, the values preached in the movie make no sense from within its own worldview. For example, its anti-civilization theme is undermined when humans can only access the Na’vi primitive utopia by technological means. In fact, the only way to save the Na’vi utopia is by up and downloading the main character Jake’s consciousness into a genomically informed, bio-engineered avatar. Pretty technological.

But more importantly, why should anyone fundamentally care about Cameron’s values in the first place? If there is no Creator and only an impersonal universe, what makes Na’vi values right and human values wrong? If the world is all there is, how can exploitation be wrong? Isn’t that the way of all animals? Given the vastly different worlds of the Na’vi and Jake, how can they recognize good in the other? Whence the personal, objective moral compass

that compels us in the theater to cheer the Na’vi vs. our kind? In a universe without transcendent values, why should anyone care about Pandora or the earth’s environment or anything at all? *Objective values make sense only in a creation laden with purpose grounded in its transcendent, personal Creator.* And only the biblical worldview reveals humans as created with more worth than animals, yet so radically damaged by rebellion to the Creator that they cannot save themselves.

But right here “Avatar” discussions can lead to a discerning Christian witness. How Na’vi prayers can be answered by an impersonal world force is hard to understand, but those rescued by Jesus can testify firsthand of their Creator who truly hears — and is not limited by His creation. Jake set aside his humanity and in becoming a Na’vi saved them from a temporary destruction, but he had no power to deliver from their ultimate deaths. The true Creator who answers prayer also so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, that whoever believes in Him might have eternal life. This one and only God-Man saves forever those who believe in Him. That’s the true story that hearts long for, that hearts need. And it’s not entertainment; it’s real life. ➤

Longing for the Garden

BY TIMOTHY PAUL JONES, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF LEADERSHIP AND CHURCH MINISTRY AT THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

The story is a familiar one — a creation filled with promise and a serpent filled with lies, a woman contemplating forbidden fruit, the man silent by her side. A choice was made, a hand was extended and the cosmos was forever changed.

No one on earth today has ever stood in the spot where Adam and Eve took their first taste of cosmic treason. Yet our souls still bear the scars of their ancient exile from Eden. Even those of us who thrive in the cities cannot seem to escape our yearning for a garden where natural harmony abounds. Top billings in online listings of “Best Cities to Live In” inevitably require not only plentiful sidewalks and public-transit systems but also slivers of the Eden in the form of spacious parks and tree-lined parkways.

Even in urban neighborhoods where the only foliage in sight is a single wisp of a weed straining through a crack in the sidewalk, the street names are likely to wax botanical — Elm Park and Oak Lawn, Evergreen Avenue and Pine Street. As my Southern Seminary teaching colleague Mark Coppenger pointed out, condominiums at the corner of Asphalt Avenue and Pavement Place don’t attract many purchasers. Our primeval parents left the Garden of Eden, but somehow the Garden never left us.

Eden at the cineplex

This year, evidence of humanity’s hunger for Eden is as near as the neighborhood movie theater. Yet the blockbuster film “Avatar” presents a paradise very different from the one described in Scripture. On a forest moon known as Pandora, blue-fleshed tribes of Na’vi coexist

in idyllic unity with the life of the natural world. Eywa, the mother goddess, balances and personifies this matrix of life. Although she appears at one point to answer a prayer, the “great mother” is neither personal nor transcendent.

Ultimately, a scientist discovers that the inner life of Pandora is a biological network of “electrochemical communications.” When creatures die, their spirits are absorbed into Eywa. Living Na’vi are able to link themselves with this living network and commune with spirits from the past. In the year 2154, an ex-Marine named Jake Sully joins a Na’vi clan with less-than-noble intentions — but, when a greedy corporation joins with the military to take Pandora from the natives, Sully musters the Na’vi to defeat his former comrades.

This is not a new story-line, of course. Apart from the stunning three-dimensional animation, virtually everything in “Avatar” is recycled from earlier features. This film is equal parts “Dances with Wolves” and “Star Wars” with tip-offs to “The Matrix” and an ancient Hindu tale tossed in along the way. As it turns out, the theology of “Avatar” is nothing new either.

A nature-embedded god?

The God of the opening chapters of

Genesis is like no other deity in Ancient Near Eastern literature. He infinitely transcends the cosmos and yet intimately involves himself with his creatures. His Spirit hovers over the chaos before creation. Yet he also spins a spouse for Adam from a piece of bone and converses with his creatures in the cool of the day.

What popular films ranging from “Star Wars” to “Avatar” propose in place of such a God are forms of pantheism, the belief that “all is God.” The presence of pantheistic tendencies in a film doesn’t mean that a Christian can’t appreciate the vivid flora of the planetoid Pandora or the sweeping saga of Anakin Skywalker. It does, however, call Christians to think critically not only about the images on the screen but also about the theological claims in the script.

Pantheism appeals to humanity’s hunger for a perfect natural world by embedding God within nature. This has far-reaching consequences for our perspectives on God and the world: If God and the cosmos are one, creation is neither fallen nor broken; the cosmos is merely imbalanced. Sin is no longer rebellion against God but a failure to maintain balance and harmony with nature.

Manifold forms of pantheism may be found in Hindu practices and pagan philosophies that predate Christianity. Modern pantheism, however, traces back to the centuries following the Protestant Reformation — and pantheism attracted far less applause than than

now. The Roman Catholic Inquisition executed Giordano Bruno for proclaiming pantheist perspectives; the Jewish community of Amsterdam excommunicated philosopher Benedict Spinoza on similar charges.

In the 19th century, earlier trends toward pantheism mingled with the idealism of Prussian philosopher Immanuel Kant to spawn “transcendentalism.” Transcendentalists such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau promoted pantheistic ideals in American contexts, with Emerson declaring himself to be “part or parcel of God.” In the latter half of the 20th century, appeals to a pantheistic goddess provided many feminists with a neo-pagan path away from Judeo-Christian beliefs. Today, the shelves beneath the “Religion and Spirituality” sign at your local bookstore bulge with books from the ideological heirs of Western transcendentalism and Eastern pantheism.

The problem with pantheism

The problem with pantheism is precisely the same as its attraction. In the words of C.S. Lewis, “The pantheist’s God does nothing, demands nothing. He is there for you if you wish for him, like a book on a shelf. He will not pursue you.” The pantheist “God” is a deity in the background, available in all things but interrupting nothing.

Whatever else the God of Scripture may or may not be, He is never imprisoned in the background. He suspends the spinings of the solar system and hurls hailstones from the heavens. He slays the firstborn sons of Egypt and splits the sea for the children of Israel. And all of these acts were preparatory for that moment when God would invade human history amid the amniotic fluids of Mary’s womb and reveal His glory through a cross and empty tomb. To merge God with creation is to discard the centrality of God’s revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ.

This is quite clear in a recent Huffington Post article in which columnist Jay Michaelson praises the pluralistic possibilities of pantheism: For the one who believes that all is God, “sometimes God is

Christ on the cross, sometimes the Womb of the Earth. Sometimes God is Justice, other times Mercy. This is how sophisticated religionists have understood theology for at least a thousand years.”

Here’s the challenge for churches in all of this: The perspectives of the supposed “sophisticated religionists” are more common among the people in the pews than most of us would care to admit. According to a recent Pew Forum study, nearly one-fourth of professing Christians believe there is “spiritual energy” to be found within such natural entities as trees and mountains. Sociologist Christian Smith discovered that



most teenagers — even in evangelical churches — see their faith as “part of the furniture in the background of their lives.” While not full-fledged pantheism, the practical implications of such a position differ little from pantheistic perspectives. Once I relegate God to the background of life, God can be construed as whoever or whatever I desire.

Exiles from the garden, seekers of the city

On a fan site for the film “Avatar,” one thread includes suggestions for helping people to deal with their despair once they realize that the world of Pandora is “intangible.” And, indeed, this dream

is intangible — though not for the reasons that participants in the discussion seem to think. A Pandoran paradise is unattainable because God and nature are not one. The cosmos is cursed, and all creation groans beneath the weight of humanity’s sin.

Furthermore, God never intended Adam and Eve to live as noble savages in a primitive paradise. Before sin ever entered Eden, God designated human beings as vice-regents with a responsibility not only to nurture the natural world but also to fill the earth with new communities (Gen 1:28; 2:15). Communities and cities were part of God’s good design from the beginning. At the end of time, God consummates his plan not with a return to Eden but with the creation of a “holy city” where the promise of Eden is fulfilled (Rev 21:2; 22:1-2).

Does this mean that Christians should purge themselves of every concern for nature and the created order? Far from it! Creation is the theater of God’s glory and the context of divine redemption. Even in the shadow of the curse, the natural world declares God’s wonders (Ps 19:1-6). Christians in particular bear a responsibility to steward God’s creation wisely and never wastefully.

These concerns are not, however, a call back to Eden. Sin has turned us into exiles from a world that once was, but God is preparing his children for the glory of a realm that is yet to be (2 Cor 4:17-18; 1 John 3:2). Everything that is precious and good in this present world foreshadows a city “whose designer and builder is God” (Heb 11:10) — a city that includes not only gates and streets but also crystal-clear waters and a life-giving tree (Rev 21:21; 22:2-3).

“It’s so hard ... to get over it, that living like the Na’vi will never happen,” one person declared regarding his post-“Avatar” blues. “I think I need a rebound movie.” He is partly right. Remaining in a primitive paradise will never happen — it was never intended to happen. But no “rebound movie” will ever satisfy the yearnings of his soul. What he senses is the groaning of creation. And what creation groans for is not a restoration of Eden but the revealing of God’s Son with the blood-redeemed heirs of his kingdom (Rom 8:16-23). ➤

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Using movies and television to talk about God with your kids

BY RANDY L. STINSON, DEAN OF THE SCHOOL OF CHURCH MINISTRIES AT THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Making God the topic of everyday conversation is a challenging and necessary task of parenting. It requires diligence, creativity and intentionality. If we are going to discuss God and His Word and our need for the Gospel “when we rise up and when we sit down,” (Deut 6) then movies and television can provide some good opportunities. Keeping in mind that age and maturity will dictate much of this, here are some categories and strategies you may find helpful.

General principles:

While there are some good things on television, much of it is either inappropriate or at the very least a complete waste of time. Shows that use explicit language or display scenes of sexuality should be avoided. This applies to commercials as well. In our home we have several alternative stations to which we turn in order to avoid the inappropriate content. This is not convenient or easy but it is necessary if you want to avoid putting improper things before your eyes. This means that there will be many movies you will never watch or will wait to rent the video so that you will have “editorial” control. We have found that there are several movies that have a poor or inappropriate storyline but still have redemptive selected scenes we have watched as a family. Finally, the quantity of television viewing should be minimal. Too much television disengages the mind, stifles creativity, and otherwise keeps one from healthy energetic outdoor activity.

Categories of conversation:

Good versus evil

There are many movies and television programs that have a clear good versus evil storyline that can prompt some great conversations about God and the cosmic battle going on “against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” (Eph 6:12) Discussions about why we are inherently compelled to root for good and fight against evil almost always lead to the need for the Gospel and ultimate victory in Christ. Movies like “Star Wars,” “Lord of the Rings” and “The Chronicles of Narnia” are particularly helpful in this regard.

Creation

The psalmist says, “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork,” (Ps 19:1). Thanks to recent technology and some very tenacious cinematographers there are some fantastic television programs on Animal Planet and the Discovery Channel. It is

impossible not to talk about the greatness of God when observing the precision hunting techniques of a pod of killer whales or the fascinating shapes and colors of hundreds of different sea creatures. The majestic appearance of various landscapes from all over the world also point to God’s goodness and creativity, and can help broach the subject of our appreciation of aesthetics and beauty. Some shows reveal how things are manufactured and mass produced. Others provide accounts of incredible human achievement such as the construction of Hoover Dam or the San Francisco Bridge. This frequently leads to conversations about how God has made the human mind and results in thanking God for kinds of things human beings are capable of doing. In addition to this, the History Channel can provide opportunities to talk about God’s superintendence of all things and His use of people, places, and things to accomplish His will.

Character

Identifying and celebrating displays of good character is another way to point to God and His requirements for us. Things like courage, integrity and hard work can often be found in selected scenes of various movies. It is easy to discuss the courage displayed in “High Noon,” the commitment to family in “Cinderella Man.” It is also easy to discuss issues like betrayal in “Braveheart,” racism in “Remember the Titans,” and suffering and revenge in “The Count of Monte Cristo.” Selected battle scenes can be helpful in discussing sacrificial love, protection and toughness.

Sports

In spite of the many pitfalls of sports (hero worship, idolatry, fanaticism), there are plenty of redemptive moments that have not only provided enjoyment for our family but have given us opportunities to talk about various themes. The whole idea of victory and defeat can lead to deep conversations about the groaning of our hearts and all of creation for an ultimate victory (Rom 8). Paul uses athletic imagery to describe the Christian life and observing the discipline and adherence to rules required in a sporting event helps to bring this to life. Displays of good or poor sportsmanship, or demonstrations of pride or humility can lead to discussions about teamwork, the body of Christ, the importance of maintaining a good testimony and being committed to something much bigger than one person. >■

A desire to serve

BY R. ALBERT MOHLER JR., PRESIDENT OF
THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

For more than 150 years The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary has been positioned at the vanguard of theological education and ministry training. Four courageous founders, led by the indomitable James P. Boyce, launched Southern Seminary as a school devoted to training ministers of the Gospel for more faithful service. From her founding days, Southern Seminary has sought confessional accountability through the historic Abstract of Principles, and a healthy commitment to serving the church of Jesus Christ.

So much has changed since that first class gathered in antebellum Greenville, South Carolina, but that which matters most remains strikingly unchanged – the urgency of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the necessity of training God called men and women in sound doctrine and devotion, a desire to serve and strengthen the local church, the neediness of a world separated from Christ and the resolve to pursue these things unto the glory of God.

The convictions Southern Seminary was founded upon remain just as important today as they did in 1859, and they buoy this institution through times of social change, encroaching secularism and even our current economic disruption. Thankfully, our current recession does not jeopardize our survival, but it does threaten to mitigate the effectiveness with which men and women can be trained for ministry.

The current economic downturn has affected each one of us, but perhaps none of us have been challenged during this time of national recession more than the students training for Gospel ministry at Southern Seminary. Many of our students are juggling multiple jobs and working difficult hours to support themselves and their families as they pursue God's call on their lives. In light of this, I want to ask you to join me in supporting the students training for ministry at Southern Seminary by making a contribution to the Annual Fund.

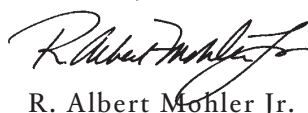
The seminary is currently assessing funds avail-

able for student scholarships and determining the tuition rates to be charged for the upcoming academic year. Perhaps God has blessed you, like many in the Southern Seminary family, with abundant financial resources. You can invest in eternity by investing in the students at Southern Seminary.

Whether your gift is large or small, now is the time for the entire Southern Seminary family to stand with the men and women training for ministry, and you can demonstrate your support of God's call on their lives by making a donation to the Southern Seminary Annual Fund.

Thank you for standing with me and, more importantly, with the students of Southern Seminary, who are training to change the world through the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Sincerely,



R. Albert Mohler Jr.
President



Leaving a legacy through a planned gift to Southern Seminary

BY JASON K. ALLEN, VICE PRESIDENT FOR INSTITUTIONAL ADVANCEMENT AT THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE SOUTHERN SEMINARY FOUNDATION

Like an ocean liner leaves a wake behind her, so each person leaves a legacy from his or her time on earth. Legacies vary in style and consequence, but without question the greatest legacy you can leave is a Gospel legacy.

One of the most profound, yet often overlooked, realities of Scripture is that leaving a Gospel legacy does not have to end when you go to heaven. Rather, the Bible teaches that a Christian can actually influence others to heaven, from heaven. Such influence can be achieved through the trickle-down effect of one's life and ministry and the impact of one's financial resources rightly directed. One such way to further the Lord's work posthumously is through making a planned gift in your estate to Southern Seminary.

A planned gift is a contribution made in light of your overall estate and financial plans and is typically a gift given from your assets rather than income. Planned gifts encompass everything from outright gifts of property to gift annuities, charitable trusts, revocable trusts, wills and other estate planning devices. Each gift furthers the mission of the seminary, while also offering numerous benefits to donors.

Planned giving can enable you to accomplish a maximum Kingdom investment in a way that is most prudent from a taxation standpoint and most beneficial in light of your overall financial objectives and family desires. Moreover, from a biblical perspective, we know that everything we have belongs to God and, as stewards of His resources, we are encouraged to store up treasures in heaven as an investment for eternal purposes (Matt 6:19-21; 1 Tim 6:17-19). Kingdom-minded estate planning

allows one to do just that.

Until Jesus returns, your resources channeled through proper estate planning can continue, in perpetuity, to defend the faith, spread the Gospel and prepare pastors, teachers, missionaries and church leaders for more faithful service in the cause of Christ. All of this and more can be accomplished by making Southern Seminary the beneficiary of your planned giving.

In order for Southern Seminary to continue offering the very best in theological education, we depend on dedicated supporters using their God-given resources to help sustain and further our work. As you reflect on God's financial blessings in your life, we encourage you to consider leaving a legacy of equipping pastors, missionaries and other Christian workers who will impact the lives of many for generations to come.

We welcome the opportunity to discuss with you how you can partner with us in furthering the mission of Southern Seminary while at the same time accomplishing your financial and charitable goals. Please contact us at (502) 897-4143 or email us at instrel@sbts.edu.



Estate giving as our final act of stewardship

BY EMILY GRIFFIN

Jim Kragenbring refers to The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary's Legacy Center Hotel as "a bit like my home away from home." Kragenbring, who lives in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area, is both a student at Southern Seminary and a valued member of the seminary's Foundation Board, responsibilities that keep him on campus regularly.

Several years ago, Kragenbring began work towards a master of arts as a distance student — providing him the opportunity to be on campus for classes once or twice a year. In 2006, Kragenbring joined the Southern Seminary Foundation Board and used his professional training in business and finance to assist the Southern Seminary administration and Board of Trustees with the management of the seminary's endowment — a task that he refers to as a privilege.

Kragenbring is founder and principal of Kragenbring Capital, LLC, and is under the pastoral care of John Piper at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minn. Southern Seminary Magazine spoke with Kragenbring about his service to the seminary and also the importance of establishing a Christ-honoring financial plan.

What inspired you to contribute to the Southern Seminary Foundation?

"My giving of time and money is generally motivated by faith in Isaiah 55:11 — 'that the Word of the Lord will never return void, rather it will always accomplish what He desires.'

"I believe that the best way I can actualize that faith is by supporting organizations that stand on the Bible as the Word of God and aim to train men and women for intellectually-rigorous, culturally-engaged, biblically-saturated ministry. There is no finer example of this than Southern Seminary.

How did you determine that planned-estate giving was the best method of charitable giving for you?

"I don't know that it's the *best* method — I would encourage both annual giving and estate giving, if one is able. But with so many folks having suffered losses in capital markets during the past few years, annual giving is harder now that it has been for many people. In spite of these capital losses, estate giving remains a means of giving that is possible for most people.

"Why make an estate gift? My answer is simple: don't waste your death! I'm admittedly borrowing a phrase here. Several years ago my pastor (John Piper) wrote a book titled 'Don't Waste Your Life' to exhort young people to develop a bigger vision of what 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 means in their lives. And 'don't waste your life' is a good exhortation for all of us — whether we have days or decades to live.

"But at this point, I'm somewhere between 'old' and 'young.' And

even though I'm not yet 'old,' estate planning still matters. In fact, as soon as you contemplate needing a will, you have started to ask questions about how you want to die.

"Of course, there is biblical guidance on this question. Proverbs tells us a good man leaves an inheritance for his children's children. So, should I ever get married and have children, I would hope to do so. But what does it mean to leave an inheritance? Does it mean 'leave it all to your kids?' And if we are leaving an inheritance, what ought to be our goal in so doing?

"In my view, if your goal in estate planning is to preserve your family name, or to make certain your children can retire early to a life of self-indulgent leisure, or to make certain your grandchildren never have to work a day in their lives — you're wasting your death!"

How have you personally been blessed through your giving and participation with the Foundation Board?

"To begin, it is a blessing to work with so many wonderful folks on the Foundation Board as well as with Jason Allen and his incredible staff in the office of institutional advancement. Likewise, the ability to be engaged, even in a small way, in the broader life of the seminary is a consistent, ongoing encouragement. God is at work in many different ways at Southern, and it is an encouragement to see. He continues to bring gifted, committed students in record numbers who are giving their lives to Gospel ministry. We have an extraordinary faculty that models how a humble shepherd ought to care for sheep while at the same time engaging in the highest level of scholarship. And, we have administrators committed to excellence in management because they recognize excellence in the classroom requires excellence in the stewardship of the seminary's budget and assets. To not recognize, and participate, in this work of the Lord would be to miss an extraordinary blessing." >



Sharing your blessings: your estate planning blesses future generations

BY EMILY GRIFFIN

Charles Barnes' introduction to Southern Seminary came as a new student at the University of Louisville in 1955. On a Sunday afternoon a group of seminary students knocked on the door of the Louisville native and extended him an invitation to attend East Baptist Church, which was located in downtown Louisville.

Barnes accepted the student's invitation and soon became involved with the church. "I quickly learned that there were a number of seminary students working in that downtown church, which was actually more like a mission," Barnes said. "I got to know those students and their wives over the next couple of months. So my journey with Southern Seminary started on a Sunday afternoon with those students knocking on my front door and inviting me to come to a local church."

Barnes' formal relationship with Southern Seminary came in 1986, when he was invited to join the Foundation Board. Over the years he has chaired the Foundation Board on two occasions, having just finished his second two-year term in 2009. Barnes also served on the Southern Seminary Board of Trustees from 1992-2005; the maximum number of years that any one individual can serve.

Barnes contends that all of the Foundation Board members, including himself, maintain three responsibilities: to be a good ambassador and advocate for the seminary, to seek out those who may be able to significantly support the seminary through their resources, and to give of themselves while living and in passing.

"I think everyone has a stewardship responsibility, which most Christians recognize. But, we also have a stewardship responsibility after we're gone — as for what happens to what the Lord may have blessed us with and then we leave behind," Barnes said. "We need to take that responsibility through our estate planning."

Through their estate plan, Barnes and his wife Shelva have arranged for some ongoing stewardship to Southern,

just as they have while they are living. He explained that setting up a planned giving arrangement is an uncomplicated process.

"It's as simple as meeting with your attorney and your financial advisor and arranging your stewardship to the Lord even after you're gone," he said. "If you pass without a will or an estate plan, the laws of the state do take over."

Barnes has never looked at what he's done with his time and resources as being something that he was going to get a return for.

"I looked at it as an opportunity for me to be part of sharing the Word and sharing what the Lord has blessed me with," he said. "Having said that, you do get some satisfaction from seeing young people go through the seminary and become very effective in the Lord's work."

Barnes served professionally for 40 years as a banker and executive officer of a Louisville bank holding company. He and Shelva raised two sons, a pediatric neurologist at Vanderbilt University Medical Center and an electrical engineer for Hewlett-Packard.

The Barnes' are members of Hurstbourne Baptist Church in Louisville. Now in retirement, Barnes remains active within his church and denomination. He is one of three laypersons to have served as president of the Kentucky Baptist Convention and today he serves as a member of the KBC Great Commission Task Force. ➤



Kentucky born retailer's legacy abounds at Southern Seminary

By Emily Griffin

James Hughes Anderson was born in Point Pleasant, Ky., on Nov. 6, 1862. Anderson's father, a Kentucky retailer, instilled in his son the value of hard work and the importance of saving money and responsible stewardship. Anderson heeded his father's advice and by age 22 he had saved \$2,200, which he used to purchase and manage a retail store in Hopkinsville, Ky.

Anderson's business flourished and by 1907 he was prepared to enter an ownership partnership of the Miller's Store — a prominent department store in the south. Anderson moved to Knoxville, Tenn., in 1907 to join the Miller's Store leadership team as president and chairman of the board, positions he held from 1907 until early 1949 when he resigned his 41-year career due to failing health.

Anderson's business reputation and work ethic garnered him tremendous respect in Knoxville. An unnamed newspaper clipping profiled Anderson on his 86th birthday and reported that even at age 86, Anderson still arrived at his office each day at 9 a.m. and his involvement in the Knoxville community and his church remained as strong as ever.

Outside of the office, Anderson was an active member and deacon of his church, First Baptist Church of Knoxville, and an active Southern Baptist statesman. Anderson served as president of the Tennessee Baptist Convention from 1918-20, and was vice president of the Southern

The image shows a newspaper clipping. The headline at the top reads "J. H. Anderson Led Long, Useful...". Below the headline is a black and white portrait of an elderly man with glasses, wearing a suit and tie, identified as J. H. Anderson. To the right of the portrait is a short obituary-style text. To the left of the portrait, there is a column of text from another article, partially visible, mentioning "D PRESS", "persons", "19, and", "of 900", "rest Sat-", "through", "Wood", "urn, Ind.", "ther com-", "tly ing", "olished", "n isolated", "e Girard-", "00 on the", "ippi River", "d east of", "American", "persons", "hundreds".

Baptist Convention in 1920. He also served as a trustee of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary from 1926-1949 and was chairman of the Southern Seminary board of trustees from 1936-1942. Anderson was an active supporter of the East Tennessee Baptist Hospital in Knoxville.

Anderson married Miss Annie Walker in 1886. The Andersons welcomed three children: daughter Jane, daughter Margaret Anderson McClellan, and son S.W. Anderson. Following the death of his first wife, Anderson married Janie Cree Bose, then principal of the Baptist Women's Missionary Union Training School in Louisville, Ky., in 1930. Mrs. Bose Anderson had a son, Fred Bose.

Anderson died Sunday, May 22, 1949.

An undated, untitled newspaper clipping announcing Anderson's passing, wrote, "Though a man of wealth, with the gift of making money in large sums, he was yet a humble Christian man, quickly and often moved by generous impulses to share his abundance with causes and institutions he delighted to promote."

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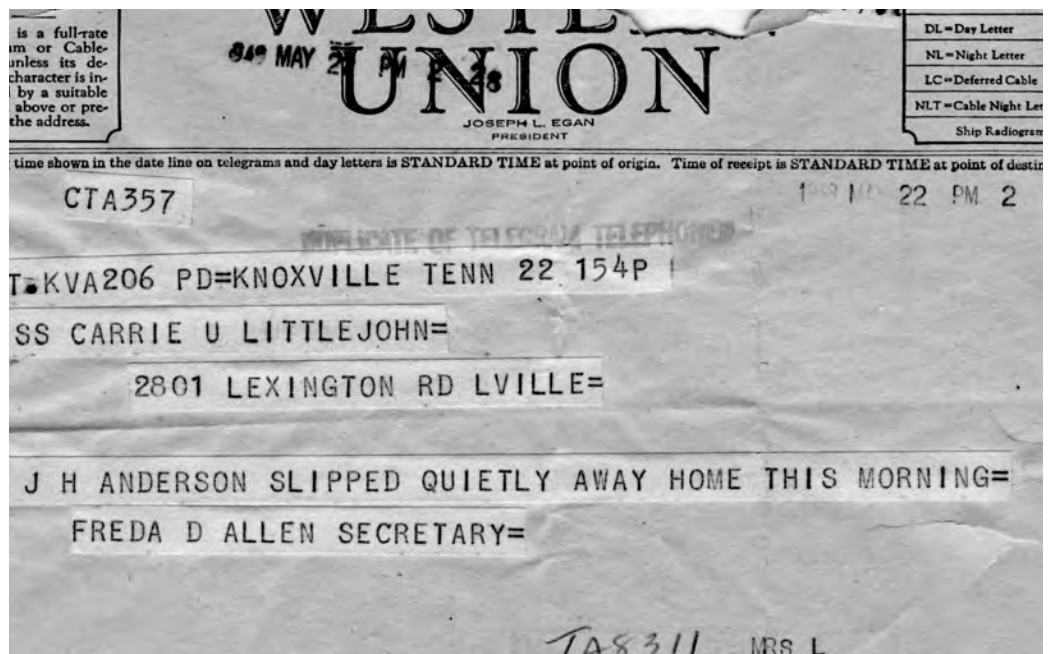
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J. H. Anderson, Layman, Dies i Knoxville After Long I

J. H. Anderson, prominent Baptist layman, died at his home in Knoxville, Tenn., on Sunday morning, May 22, at 10:30 o'clock. Death came to him in his eighty-sixth year and brought to a close a long illness.

Hopkinsville, and has been a member of the Tennessee Valley Bank since its founding in 1916 as the first bank in the state.

For many years he was a member of the First Baptist Church of Knoxville.



Anderson designated several beneficiaries in his will dated June 21, 1946, including Southern Seminary. Anderson's gift to Southern Seminary was held in trust and has gradually been given to the seminary at a rate of three percent each year. As of July 31, 2009, the market value of the seminary's interest in this trust was \$2.1 million.

Anderson's stepson, Fred Bose, was also a beneficiary. Bose married but didn't have any heirs. After Bose's death, his wife became the sole remaining beneficiary of the Anderson trust. When Mrs. Bose died in 2009 Southern Seminary was entitled to an additional gift of \$1.5 million.

The terms of the trust allowed for the total amount of the gifts to be transferred to the seminary outright, a blessing for the seminary as it deals with the effects of the economic recession.

Jason Allen, vice president for Institutional Advancement and executive director of the Southern Seminary Foundation, said he was blessed to learn that Anderson, being gone over 60 years, is still greatly impacting and

faithfully serving Southern Seminary and the Kingdom of Christ just as he did while he was living.

"I hope this story is an encouragement to others to consider the seminary in their estate planning," Allen said. "Anderson gave his time and money to the Kingdom while living and in his passing he is still furthering the mission of the seminary - to raise up and train those that will minister to the flock and take the Gospel to the ends of the earth. This man who is in heaven is influencing others for the Kingdom from the Kingdom.

"The words of Christ in Matthew 6 are clear; He intended for us to lay up treasures in heaven and not merely on earth. When Mr. Anderson made this intentional stewardship decision more than 60 years ago, he decided to influence the Kingdom posthumously and he is doing just that. It is a dramatic and consequential thought to realize that each one of us has similar power, maybe not to the scale of Mr. Anderson, but as we make decisions about how our resources are used posthumously we can influence others for the Kingdom as well."

The Kingdom of God: It has come and will come

BY RUSSELL D. MOORE, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT FOR ACADEMIC ADMINISTRATION
AND DEAN OF THE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY AT THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Following is an excerpt from Russell D. Moore's chapter in "A Theology for the Church," edited by Daniel L. Akin and published by B&H Academic in 2007.

A Christian's eschatology does not consist in his prophecy charts but in his funeral service. At a funeral the church is perhaps at its most theological. Our crying reminds us that death is not natural but a horrible curse to be abhorred. Our recitation of Psalm 23 and John 11 reminds us that in Christ we have already been delivered from the power of death — that His story is our story. Our placing the body in a casket reminds us of the metaphor of sleep used often in Scripture to convey to us that one who sleeps will also wake. Our burying the body in the earth reminds us that we are only creatures, formed from the clay — but creatures who will one day be called forth from the dust once again. At a funeral our hymnody is the most theological, the most resistant to the fads and trends of Christian music.

In Scripture the eschaton is not simply tacked on to the Gospel at the end. It is instead the vision toward which all of

Scripture is pointing — and the vision that grounds the hope of the gathered church and the individual believer. In the face of death, we see faith, hope and love. This is what we mean when we speak of Christian eschatology — the study of the last things or ultimate matters.

What does the Bible say?

Perhaps clearer than any other set of doctrines, eschatology reminds us that the Bible is one coherent story, with one author and one theme. The story line begins in an innocent garden and ends in a glorious garden city, with a bloody and violent war in between. All along the way Scripture speaks of God's purpose to build a kingdom for His anointed, incarnate Son as the firstborn among many brothers.

Eschatology, then, is inherently messianic — in both Old and New Testaments. Thus, one cannot understand God's ulti-

mate purposes unless one understands that God's purposes find their goal and content in Jesus Christ.

The Old Testament: eschatology as cosmic

The opening passages of Scripture reveal something of God's eschatological purposes since they present God's pleasure in the creation of the entire cosmic order, both the heavens and earth. Man's image-bearing vice-regency under the Creator is "over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth" (Gen 1:26).

The curse that comes about as a result of the Adamic Fall is likewise cosmic in its extent — resulting in a disruption of the natural order, a degradation of the animal creation, a frustration of human labor, spiritual alienation from God, con-



flict between the human and demonic realms, disharmony between the sexes and a bloody reign of death extending eastward from Eden (Gen 3:14–23). The judgment of God on the creation at the Noahic flood typifies God’s final judgment — one that is cosmic in its extent and is followed by a new creation (Gen 6:9–9:17; 2 Pet 3:4–13).

The promises of God of a restoration of the creation include material blessings, the inheritance of land promised to the descendants of Abraham, the defeat of all enemies and shalom for the people of God in a new order. God typifies these promises by bringing Abraham’s seed into the land of Canaan but always with another horizon before them of a permanent, cosmic restoration in which all their enemies are under their feet and all is set right with the creation.

Throughout the prophets, the Spirit points to a final order in which the curse on creation is reversed: animal

predation is no more (Is 11:6–9), nature itself will be in harmony with humanity (Is 60:19–22), the demonic order is crushed (Is 27:1; Hab 3:13), and all the nations stream to Israel bringing their wealth into her gates (Is 60:1–14; Micah 4:1–5).

The picture then is not of an eschatological flight from creation but the restoration and redemption of creation with all that it entails: table fellowship, community, culture, economics, agriculture and animal husbandry, art, architecture, worship — in short, life and that abundantly.

Against this hope lies the reality of cosmic death — a reality rooted in the persistence of human death. The Old Testament affirms the inevitability of human death in the post-Eden epochs. “We must all die,” says a woman to king David. “We are like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again” (2 Sam 14:14).

The New Testament: eschatology as already

The kingdom of God dawns in a peasant Jewish virgin’s uterus. The kingdom of God prophecies of the Old Testament find their goal in Jesus of Galilee, who is himself the promised King and the bearer of the Kingdom and who inaugurated the Kingdom 2,000 years ago.

The New Testament repeatedly emphasizes that Jesus is the descendant of Abraham and of David (Matt 1:1–17; Luke 3:23–38). As the angel Gabriel put it to the young girl of the house of David: “He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:32–33), evoking both Abrahamic and Davidic promises.

When He is conceived, Mary sings a song of the triumph of the Kingdom >□

that echoes the song of Hannah more than 1,000 years earlier in view of the coming Davidic kingdom (1 Sam 2; Luke 1:46-55). Like Hannah, Mary is convinced that God will keep His promises to the patriarchs and that He exalts the humble and humbles the exalted.

The gospels apply the covenant fulfillments to Jesus directly, equating Him with Israel itself. Indeed Jesus recapitulates the life of Israel. Like Israel under pagan rule, He escapes from a baby-murdering tyrant and is brought out of Egypt. “Out of Egypt I called my son,” says Hosea, referencing the exodus of God’s “son” Israel from Egypt. And yet Matthew applies this prophetically to the young Jesus (Matt 2:15; Hos 11:1).

The nations, represented by eastern magi, stream to Jesus and give Him gifts of frankincense and myrrh (Matt 2:1-12), exactly as Isaiah had promised (Is 60:1-6). Jesus is identified as the messianic King by a prophet who is spiritually, Jesus says, the fulfillment of Malachi’s promise of a returning Elijah (John 1:19-34). Jesus is then anointed by the Holy Spirit and is pronounced the regal Son of God, as He passes through the Jordan River and immediately takes on the enemy of God’s people (Matt 3:13-4:1). In the temptation accounts, Jesus wanders for 40 days in the wilderness, where he is tempted (1) with food, (2) with proving God’s vindication of Him and (3) with grasping for the kingdom promises (Matt 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13). He explicitly ties these events to Israel’s wilderness wanderings when Israel believed their present plight annulled their revealed eschatology. Jesus, however, overcomes.

Advancing forward God’s Kingdom, Jesus applies temple language to Himself — to His own body (Matt 12:6). Like Ezekiel’s eschatological temple, the living water of the Spirit flows from Jesus bringing life as it streams toward the tree of life (Ezek 47:1-12; John 7:37-39).

At His crucifixion, Jesus relives the attack of the nations and the abandonment by God typified by his ancestor David. The curses of the Mosaic Law come upon Israel there. With Day of the Lord imagery, the sky turns dark and the earth quakes. As David was warned, the kingly son of David is beaten with rods as the discipline of God, though not for His own sins but for the sins of the world (2 Sam 7:14-15; Ps 89:32-33;



Matt 27:29-30; Mark 15:19). The Gentile nations mock Him — even gambling for the faux royal garments with which they had mocked His claimed kingship (John 9:16-24).

By His resurrection, Jesus marks the cataclysmic onset of the new Kingdom order. As Israel was promised, the righteous remnant — one man — is raised from the dead through the Spirit in view of the nations. Upon His resurrection Jesus identifies His disciples as His “brothers” (John 20:17) — language used in the Old Testament to identify the parameters of the inheritance, the people of Israel (Lev 25:46; Deut 17:15, 20).

Jesus eats with His disciples and commands Peter to “feed my sheep” — royal imagery that speaks of the coming of the last days of glory of Jerusalem in a restored Israel (Jer 3:15-18). When Jesus’s disciples ask Him if He plans now to restore the kingdom to Israel, Jesus points to the coming of the Holy Spirit and the apostolic authority to proclaim the kingdom to the nations (Acts 1:6-8).

In Jesus’s resurrection from the dead, the apostles see the onset of the last days — the enthronement of the promised messianic King. At Pentecost, the disciples proclaim that the long-awaited eschatological Spirit has now been poured out on Jesus’s disciples, thus

signaling that God has vindicated Him as the true Israel, the righteous Son of David and the faithful King whom God will not abandon to the grave (Acts 2:14-41; Rom 1:1-4). The coming of the Spirit is seen as a sign that God’s anointing was upon Jesus, an anointing He has now poured out on those who identify with Him (Acts 2:34). This means that Jesus is the Davidic Messiah whose enemies will be made a footstool for his feet, in keeping with the ancient prophecies. Peter identifies the coming of the Spirit with the prophet Joel’s promise of the last days and the climactic Day of the Lord (Acts 2:16-21). In the resurrection the apostles preach God is keeping His promises to Abraham and to David, and through it God will bring about the promised restoration of Israel (Acts 3:17-26).

The apostle Paul joins with the other apostles in hailing the missionary task of the early church as grounded in the dawning Kingdom of Christ. Paul explains that the resurrection of Jesus is inherently eschatological; indeed it is the hoped-for, last-days resurrection of the dead anticipated for centuries by the 12 tribes of Israel (Acts 26:6-8). Paul sees those among the Gentile nations turning to Christ as a fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise to bless all peoples



through Abraham's seed (Rom 15:8-13; Gal 3:7-4:7). The apostles, meeting at the Jerusalem Council, identify the Gentile conversions as evidence that God, as promised, has granted the Davidic throne to Jesus in a global, indisputable latter-day reign (Acts 15:1-29).

Eschatology as not yet

The New Testament makes clear that the Kingdom arrives in two stages, and that one of them is not yet here. Jesus announces, "An hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live" (John 5:25). The writer of Hebrews points out the obvious reality that, though God has promised to put all things under the feet of the Son of Man, "at present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him" (Heb 2:6-9). The New Testament thus constantly warns believers (and unbelievers, for that matter) not to assume that the Kingdom is here in its fullness but to be ready for its sudden and cataclysmic arrival. Jesus does not give exhaustive details about the end of the age, telling His disciples that the Father Himself sets the timetable for such events by His own authority (Acts 1:7; Matt 24:36). Jesus does, however, reveal the existence

of a heaven and a hell, in one or the other of which all humans will find themselves immediately upon death (Luke 16:19-31). He affirms unequivocally the resurrection of the body, along with the Old Testament witness, against Sadducees who deny it (Mark 12:18-27). When asked about the end times, he looks to the coming destruction of Jerusalem in Rome, and then beyond it, to the final tumult of earth history that climaxes in the realization of the prophet Daniel's vision, "the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Matt 24:30; Dan 7:13-14).

Jesus speaks of the "birth pains" of tribulation but counsels His disciples not to think the end is here until they see this visible and glorious coming of the Son of Man in the eastern skies (Matt 24:24-50). He affirms through stories that the Kingdom, though almost invisible in the present age, will one day stand majestically over every rival (Matt 13:1-52; Mark 4:21-33). Those with eyes to see, therefore, will seek this kingdom — not its temporal counterfeits (Luke 12:13–21, 31).

Jesus speaks of the Lord's Supper He institutes at the onset of the new covenant as pointing to another meal that He will eat with his disciples when "it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God"

(Luke 22:16, 18), a promise of a messianic banquet rooted in Old Testament eschatology (Is 25:6; Ps 23:5). At this Passover table — and throughout His ministry — Jesus promises His disciples that the kingdom they seek is in some aspect yet before them. "I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom," Jesus tells them, "that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the 12 tribes of Israel" (Luke 22:29-30). Jesus commands His disciples not to seek greatness or prominence in this life since their glory and rule will come in the resurrection, at the "regeneration" of the universe, when Jesus and his coheirs rule over all things (Matt 19:28). Sharing this glorious rule with Jesus in the future, however, means also sharing "the cup," His "baptism," the suffering He endures in the present (Matt 20:22-23; Mark 10:27-39).

On this last day, Jesus tells His disciples, they will face judgment and be rewarded according to their faithfulness through trials. In keeping with His role as Davidic king, Jesus will judge all humanity, separating the "sheep" of Israel's flock from the "goats" of the unbelieving world. The criterion will be whether they know Jesus, a knowledge that is seen in the way they treat His ignominious "brothers" in this life (Matt 25:31-46). At this judgment those whom Jesus endorses will share in the Kingdom; those He indicts will "go away into eternal punishment," into "eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt 25:41, 46). He warns that national identity or religious self-righteousness will not save. Some of the sons of Israel will find themselves in hell, while Gentiles celebrate at the messianic banquet table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Luke 13:27-29). The judgment of hell, Jesus warns, is final and irrevocable (Luke 16:26).

Jesus commands His followers to be ready for His return, even as they scatter across the world proclaiming the kingdom through the power of the Spirit. The "already/not yet" structure of His advent is seen even in the days following His resurrection. Jesus tells the disciples to wait for the Spirit, but He then ascends to the Father's presence. An angelic messenger tells the witnesses to the ascension that Jesus — this same Jesus — will return from the skies in the same manner (Acts 1:10-11). ➤



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