A Christian apologetic is more relevant than ever in an increasingly diverse world.
Chancellor’s Message

by Dr. Ligon Duncan

This coming year, RTS will celebrate its 50th anniversary, which will prompt us to look back at God’s faithfulness to us over the years. In doing so, we’ll also look forward, applying past lessons learned to future circumstances.

One thing we learn from reflecting on the founding of RTS is that the faithful men who shepherded the vision for this seminary did not give in to fear and discouragement. During that time they faced adverse circumstances in the life of the church and responded with resolute faith, and the Lord blessed their faithfulness with an institution that has touched thousands of lives with the gospel worldwide.

Likewise, God’s people today face potentially discouraging circumstances. Whether they be unfavorable legal decisions or outbreaks of racial violence, it’s easy to worry about where our increasingly dark world is headed. But God wants us to learn things in our disappointments.

After all, discouragement is no stranger to the lives of faithful pastors and Christians. God wants us to study our disappointments because when the bottom falls out of our lives, we learn things about what we love that we never knew before. The experience will not always be pretty, but we find where our rest and security lies. When disappointments come, we find the source of our real treasure.

Consider Elijah, who, as documented in 1 Kings 19, sank into the depths of discouragement, fleeing for his life and seeking shelter in the desert. His story illustrates that even people who believe in God’s sovereignty can fail to believe that the Lord is God, that those who fight idolatry can succumb to it.

In our disappointments and discouragements, we are tempted to forget that God is God and that He is good. This is because in such times we are tempted to think there is a greater treasure that has been withheld from us, greater than what God has and can give to us.

During these moments, God graciously exposes our most fundamental idolatry and ruthlessly crushes it in His unfathomable love, fatherly kindness and inscrutable wisdom. He goes after our greatest treasures and leaves us with nothing but Himself, so that we learn, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Do not underestimate God and His ruthless compassion and gracious commitment to His glory, or His commitment to your everlasting joy and good. God will pursue you, ripping out the idols of your soul that otherwise consume you. He is working for your joy, your good, even when you cannot perceive it.

No matter what the circumstances in our culture or our personal lives, He has a plan for your everlasting joy. Do not lose heart, because at those very moments comes the test, and he who endures to the end shall be blessed. M.
Dr. Michael Allen and Dr. Scott Swain will engage with Timothy George, Peter Leithart, Stephen Fowl and Mark Bownald in a panel discussion of their book, Reformed Catholicity, at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Atlanta, Nov. 19.

Dr. Ligon Duncan will preach at University Reformed Church, East Lansing, Mich., Sept. 20; speak at the 9Marks Conference, Sept. 25-26, at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary; speak at the Trinity PCA Fall Bible Conference, Montgomery, Ala., Oct. 18-20; preach at the morning and evening services for Reformation Sunday at Second Presbyterian Church, Memphis, Tenn., Oct. 25; speak at the ETS annual meeting, Atlanta, Nov. 17; and preach at the Magnify Conference at University Reformed Church, East Lansing, Mich., Nov. 20-22.

Dr. Benjamin Gladd will speak on “The Mystery Revealed” at Creation to Consummation 2015, Malaysia, Sept. 14-18.

Dr. Douglas Kelly served as chaplain at the Grandfather Mountain Scottish Highland Games in North Carolina this summer during the annual gathering of the clans (about 10,000 people).

Dr. Don Sweeting will speak at Pacesetters, a senior adult ministry event at Chain of Lakes Community Bible Church, Chicago, Sept. 17, and for the church’s 30th anniversary celebration on Sept. 20. He will also speak at the “Year of the Bible Symposium” Sept. 22 at Colorado Christian University and be the chapel speaker Oct. 15; and will also be a keynote speaker at Moody Bible Institute’s Founder’s Weekend Conference, Feb. 2, 2016.

Dr. Derek Thomas will speak at the Expositor’s Summit 2015 Conference at Southern Seminary, Louisville, Ky., Oct. 27-29.

Dr. Guy Waters will speak on 1 John 2:22 at the national meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Nov. 17-19.

Dr. Michael Allen’s book Reformation Readings of Paul (IVP Academic), edited with Dr. Jonathan Linebaugh, will be released in the fall. He has also contributed the chapter “Sacraments in the Reformed and Anglican Reformation” in the Oxford Handbook of Sacramental Theology ed. Matthew Levering and Hans Boersma (Oxford University Press, July).

Dr. John Curríd has contributed to the NIV Zondervan Study Bible project (notes on 1 and 2 Samuel) headed up by D.A. Carson of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

Dr. John Frame’s Apologetics to the Glory of God (now renamed Apologetics: A Justification of Christian Belief) was re-published this summer in a 20th anniversary edition. His new book is titled A History of Western Philosophy and Theology (P&R, fall).

Dr. Charles Hill has contributed chapters to Studies on the Text of the New Testament and Early Christianity (November) and D.A. Carson’s forthcoming But My Words Will Never Pass Away: The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures.

Dr. Sean Lucas has written For a Continuing Church: The Roots of the Presbyterian Church in America (November).

Dr. Miles Van Pelt and Dane Ortlund are the editors of the new Crossway series Short Studies in Biblical Studies. The first volume, The Son of God and the New Creation, is by Graeme Goldsworthy.


Dr. Scott Swain has contributed the chapter “Lutheran and Reformed Sacramental Theology, 17th-19th Centuries” to the Oxford Handbook of Sacramental Theology, ed. Matthew Levering and Hans Boersma (Oxford University Press, July). In April, Common Places (Zondervan blog) introduced the series New Studies in Dogmatics, to be published by Zondervan Academic. The editorial team includes Dr. Swain and Dr. Michael Allen. The first volume, The Holy Spirit by Christopher Holmes, will appear this fall.

Dr. Derek Thomas is co-writing the book Ithtbus: Jesus Christ, God’s Son, Saviour (Banner of Truth, fall) with Dr. Sinclair Ferguson.

ANNOUNCEMENTS & APPOINTMENTS

Jemar Tisby (B.A. Notre Dame ’02, RTS-Jackson M.Div. ’15, Jackson State M.A. candidate, Southern Seminary Ph.D. candidate) has been appointed as the first director of the African American Leadership Initiative at RTS-Jackson and as special assistant to the chancellor.

Ministry & Leadership magazine received an Award of Merit in April from the Evangelical Press Association in the Organizational category for all the 2014 issues.

Matt McQuade is now director of visual media and will help coordinate the video production efforts of all campuses.

Dave Veldkamp, previously applications coordinator and then admissions coordinator at RTS-Orlando, is now the director of admissions and placement at RTS-Orlando.

Matt Stahl, previously executive assistant to the executive director for RTS-Houston, is now director of admissions and registrar for RTS-Houston.

This year RTS-Washington D.C. launched the Institute of Theology and Public Life, a program designed to equip Christians working in political- and public policy-related fields and those who shepherd them. ITPL’s perspective is grounded in a biblical theological framework, tracing God’s work in redemptive history and integrating Reformed understanding of creation, the gospel, the kingdom of God and the nature of human community, among other foundational doctrines. Its mission is to equip believers theologically to exercise
From the Classroom

THE LORD IS MY PORTION

LAMENTATIONS 3:24 INSTRUCTS US IN BOTH GOOD AND BAD TIMES.

NO MATTER WHAT WE FACE OR HAVE IN THIS LIFE, IT WILL ALL COME TO AN END.
THE GOOD AND THE BAD

Many of us are greatly blessed with many wonderful things in this life: family, friends, a home, provision, a country with great liberties, a church family and much more. We could continue to list the positive elements that fill our lives. On the other hand, we have many things that are not so good in this life: sin, selfishness, a country digressing morally and spiritually, war, famine, suffering, pain (physical, emotional, spiritual), death, etc. These things challenge us, and they can cause great pain and trials that even overwhelm us at times. Our days are filled with both the good and the bad.

However, no matter what we face or have in this life, it will all come to an end. Whatever we possess will be lost, for no possession will be taken past the grave. So what is there that provides meaning in this topsy-turvy existence and what will sustain us in this life and in the life to come? Well, the Scriptures reveal an outstanding truth, summed up in a statement found in Lamentations 3:24: “The LORD is my portion,’ says my soul” (NASB).

THE TEXT

The writer of the Book of Lamentations poetically records the experience of the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem and the beginning of exile for Judah. His firsthand description of these events are sobering and shocking. The horror experienced by the people of God was the consequence of their sin and rebellion against Him. Having turned away from Yahweh to serve the gods of other nations, Israel would lose their land and now know what their rejection of God’s presence would ultimately entail — death and destruction.

Even the faithful remnant of Judah would have to endure the dismay of the nation’s fall, and it is likely that many believers lost not only their possession, but also their lives. The writer of Lamentations was one of the saints who had to suffer through this calamity, and his words forever express the anguish of his experience.

Interestingly, in the context of tremendous suffering and loss, in the middle of the book, the writer expresses his faith in the most remarkable manner. He goes from saying, “So I say, ‘My strength has perished, And so has my hope from the Lord’” (3:18, NASB), to confessing, “The Lord’s lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness.’ The Lord is my portion,’ says my soul, ‘Therefore I have hope in Him’” (3:22-24, NASB). Even when things are at their worst, the writer turns in faith to the Lord and declares what he knows to be true: Yahweh is his portion.

OUR PORTION

Every believer can make this statement because it is true for all Christians. But what does it mean that the Lord is our portion? The word “portion” refers to what is distributed to someone to be kept as his or her own. It is an interesting way to express that God has given Himself to His people. Think of it in terms of an inheritance. When someone receives an inheritance, they receive the portion designated to them. No more, no less. God has designated Himself as our inheritance; He is our portion.

It is worth noting that each of the 12 tribes of Israel was allotted an inheritance in the promised land, except for the tribe of Levi! No land was given to this tribe, but they were not without an inheritance. Numbers 18:20 records, “Then the LORD said to Aaron, ‘You shall have no inheritance in their land nor own any portion among them; I am your portion and your inheritance among the sons of Israel’” (NASB, emphasis added).

Christians are like the Levites. We have not been given the land of Canaan, or any other temporal land, but the Lord has given us Himself — freely, fully, truly and forever. God is our inheritance, never to be lost or forfeited. He has given us Himself fully in the person of His Son. In Jesus, we have God! We are His and He is ours. We are His possession and He is our possession, and He has given us His Spirit so that we may know that this is true.

What impact should this have on how we live? We must not concentrate too much on temporal matters, whether good or bad. We enjoy every blessing God gives us, and rightly so. We dislike every evil we suffer, and rightly so. But whether there be good or bad, our present and constant treasure is the Living God! The whole of Lamentations 3:24 says this: “The Lord is my portion,’ says my soul, “Therefore I have hope in him.” We must live with the Lord as our portion. This keeps us from clinging to the fading treasures and pleasures of this world, for God has given us the greatest possible portion!

Is the Lord enough for us? Think of God’s greatness, His infinitude and His power. He fills all of creation, the whole universe! He is even beyond creation, space and time. Our brains start to malfunction as we seek to grasp the greatness of God: His eternality, omnipotence, omniscience, everlasting love, etc. This is the God who has come to us in Jesus Christ. He is our portion! Let us delight ourselves in our Portion this day! As Christians, we are the richest of all because we have the Son of God. And it is the Risen Lord who will sustain us, both in this life and in the life to come.

Dr. McKelvey is assistant professor of Old Testament at RTS-Jackson. He has recently been ordained as a minister by the Presbyterian Church in America.
The street on which I live is remarkably diverse. Alongside several American families there are also an above-average number of internationals. When we (the Brits) moved into the cul-de-sac, our neighbors included people from Cuba, Russia, Israel, Jamaica, Germany and Poland.

Just as notable as its ethnic diversity, however, is the religious diversity represented in our street. In the five years we’ve lived here, there have been two families of evangelical Christians, an Eastern (Russian) Orthodox family, self-described “lapsed Catholics,” observant Reform Jews, secular Jews, Muslims, Hindus, atheists and some whose religious convictions I’m still trying to figure out.

I imagine our street is more diverse than the average street in Charlotte, North Carolina. But its diversity is practically a microcosm of Western culture. It illustrates the bewildering and unprecedented variety of religious and cultural outlooks — or worldviews — we find around us today. And this striking plurality of worldviews presents some real challenges for Christian apologetics and evangelism.

Put simply, a worldview is a way of viewing the world. It’s not a view in a physical sense, but rather a philosophical view. A worldview is an overall outlook on reality, an all-encompassing perspective on everything that exists and matters to us as human beings. Stated more precisely, a worldview is a network of ultimate beliefs, ideas, values and assumptions about the universe and our place in it that shapes how a person understands their life and experiences (and the lives and experiences of others) and how that person acts in response.

A worldview also typically has a narrative dimension; it includes a “grand story” about where we came from, how our lives have been shaped by the past, what our place is in the world, and where our world is heading. Worldviews are typically communicated in terms of stories. In every culture or subculture there is a dominant narrative, passed from one generation to the next, which defines how people within that culture understand their place in the cosmos.

Everyone has a worldview, whether or not they’re aware of it. Indeed, I’d say most people aren’t aware they have a distinctive worldview that shapes how they interpret their experiences, and fewer still have critically reflected on their own worldview and their reasons for holding it.

Worldview, then, is one of the most significant things about people, because of the role it plays in their interpretation of their experiences and their responses to those experiences. But what are the basic ingredients of a worldview? What kinds of “ultimate beliefs, ideas, values and assumptions” constitute a worldview? I’ve found it helpful to analyze worldviews in terms of five major areas they address, either explicitly or implicitly.

First of all, a worldview reflects a theology: a perspective on God. Is there a God? What is God like? Is God a personal being? How does God relate to the universe? How does God relate to humans? How does God relate to me?

Secondly, a worldview includes an anthropology: a perspective on human beings. What kind of beings are we? Where did we come from? For what purpose (if any) do we exist? Where are we heading? Why are humans significant and worthy of dignity — if indeed they are? What fundamentally distinguishes us from other organisms on this planet?

Thirdly, a worldview reflects an epistemology: the philosophical term for a perspective on human knowledge.
is truth? Is truth objective and attainable? What do we know and how do we know it? What are the main sources of our knowledge? Can we know anything with certainty — or even with confidence? Should we rely on divine revelation, human reason or some combination of the two?

Fourthly, a worldview incorporates a distinctive perspective on ethics. What is morality? Is morality real or illusory? Is it objective or subjective? Are there any moral absolutes? What is the highest good we should aim for? What are our fundamental duties in life? Are there “human rights” — and if so, where do they come from? What does it mean to be a “good person” — and why should we be good?

Fifthly, a worldview reflects what theologians call a soteriology: a doctrine of salvation. Christians, of course, are very conscious of this doctrine, since it is centered on the person and work of Jesus Christ. But all human beings have a doctrine of salvation in a broader sense: everyone thinks there’s something wrong with the world, and everyone has some ideas, however rudimentary, about how the wrongness of the world is to be put right.

With this basic understanding of worldviews before us, let’s turn to consider the connection between worldviews and Christian apologetics. The Bible gives a very clear mandate for believers to engage in apologetics — that is, a reasoned defense of the Christian faith. Just to give one example, Peter exhorts us to always be prepared to give an answer to those who ask us the reason for the hope we have (1 Peter 3:15). The Reformed tradition has always affirmed the place of apologetics in Christian preaching. But as I noted earlier, our 21st-century cultural situation raises some particular challenges. So here I suggest five reasons why it’s particularly helpful for Christians to think in terms of worldviews as we engage in apologetics.

The first reason is the contemporary challenge of pluralism, illustrated by the diversity of religious and philosophical outlooks represented in my own neighborhood — and yours too! We’re faced with a diversity of worldviews like never before, and our apologetics must be equipped to address it.

Secondly, Christians today need to recognize that we no longer enjoy the cultural common ground that previous generations enjoyed. Some approaches to apologetics take that common ground too much for granted, which means they often fall flat when dealing with contemporary unbelievers.

Thirdly, as I explained before, our worldviews have a huge impact on how we reason about the world and our experiences of it. Since apologetics is about reasoning with people to lead them to the truth, it follows that our method in apologetics must be worldview-sensitive.

Fourthly, the Bible affirms a fundamental antithesis between belief and unbelief, between those who are in Christ and those who are not (Romans 8:5-8; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25 and 2:14-16). Believers have different ultimate commitments, standards and values than unbelievers, and the way we engage in apologetics should recognize that basic biblical truth.

Finally, having studied apologetics for over 20 years, I’m convinced that most of the objections to Christianity we encounter today are grounded in anti-Christian worldviews from the very outset. The objections themselves make assumptions that are fundamentally at odds with a biblical worldview. This means that these common objections take a non-Christian worldview for granted and then criticize biblical Christianity on that basis. But as any logician will tell you, that’s circular reasoning! Worldview-oriented apologetics is well placed to expose the fallacious nature of these objections.

Dr. Anderson is associate professor of theology and philosophy at RTS-Charlotte. This article is based on his workshop at The Gospel Coalition National Conference in April. An audio recording of the complete presentation is available at resources.thegospelcoalition.org/library/worldview-apologetics-worldview-evangelism.

For Further Reading

The full-length version of this article may be found in the digital version of this issue — visit rts.edu/site/resources/M-L.aspx.

Also, Dr. Anderson’s book What’s Your Worldview? can be purchased at www.mindandheart.com.
According to Emilio Garofalo, *Jaws* is a Christmas movie. He contributed this tongue-in-cheek piece of unconventional wisdom to a blog that gives Christian perspective on film, "reasoning" that the cinematic classic is set in the middle of the American summer, which is right around Christmas-time in his homeland of Brazil.

His perspective on *Jaws* notwithstanding, the RTS-Jackson alumnus helps provide pastoral leadership and theological training to the Brazilian church, as does fellow alumnus Valdeci da Silva. The two men came to the United States for doctoral degrees (Valdeci was one of the first graduates of RTS’ Ph.D. program in intercultural studies) and then returned to their home country.

Besides being an occasional amateur film critic, Emilio is a church planter and a seminary professor. He pastors a congregation in Brasilia (the nation’s capital) and teaches classes both at a Presbyterian seminary there and at the Andrew Jumper Graduate Center in Sao Paulo (see “Andrew A. Jumper Scholarships” on page 11).

The Brasilia native began the church plant in 2011 upon his return to Brazil after seven years stateside for seminary. “Some elders from here in Brasilia called me and asked me if I would like to join them and be the church planter,” he says.

Emilio Garofalo (above, left, with his wife, Anelise) attended RTS through the influence of his friend Valdeci da Silva (above, right).
“My family and I hadn’t really considered going back to Brasilia itself — we thought we’d go somewhere else in the country. But in the Lord’s providence that’s where the call came.”

God confirmed the call promptly. What began with the Garofalos and two other families four years ago has grown, according to Emilio, “beyond our craziest expectations.” In less than a year the church became “particularized” (set apart from its mother church), attendance is at about 300 people, and a church plant of its own is in the works.

“It’s been interesting to see how there’s a thirst in Brazil for simple, expository, Reformed preaching,” Emilio observes, “and for simple worship and regular sacraments of the Bible, without anything too fancy.” Besides seeing new converts, he has also noticed an influx of people from other church traditions who, as he explains it, “desire something more solid in terms of spiritual food, looking for deeper instruction and for a more profound type of fellowship.”

With this in mind, Emilio also sees the increasing need for people capable of helping prepare future pastors in Brazil. “Our denomination, the Presbyterian Church of Brazil, has several seminaries, and we are always looking for ways to improve the quality of the teachers,” he says, explaining that seminary education in Brazil typically starts at the undergraduate level, not the graduate level as seen in the United States. “In the last decade or two, several [Brazilian men] have gone to the U.S. to different schools, including RTS, to get doctoral degrees in order to come back and not only serve the church in pastoring but in training future pastors.”

Emilio taps into what he calls his “academic vein” by teaching systematics and apologetics at the seminary in Brasilia, as well as practical theology at Andrew Jumper in Sao Paulo. “That is my secondary function,” he emphasizes.

“My main function is shepherding the local church.”

One of Emilio’s shepherding partners in Brazil, located in what he laughingly calls the “Deeper South,” is Valdeci, whom he credits with influencing him to attend RTS. “Emilio was my student here in Brazil,” Valdeci says, “and I had the privilege of teaching two modules for his Ph.D. program when I was invited to Jackson to teach. Emilio is the kind of student who becomes your friend and then he partners with you. I have been very blessed by my friendship with him. We get together for prayer, sharing our concerns and our victories.”

Valdeci attended RTS-Jackson through the influence of Dr. Elias Medeiros, professor of missions at the campus and a fellow Brazilian who frequently returns to his homeland for teaching and other ministry. “I was teaching in one of our seminaries here in Brazil,” Valdeci recalls, “and people knew I wanted to go for further education. So when Elias came to Brazil, he was teaching in a mission school, and one of his friends who knew me invited me to his house and introduced me to him, and Dr. Medeiros [worked] to get me approved to RTS.”

Upon returning to Brazil after graduating from RTS, like his good friend Emilio, Valdeci began dividing his time between seminary teaching and pastoral ministry. Today he is the vice president of the Andrew Jumper Graduate Center in Sao Paulo, which involves both administrative and teaching roles.

As for his pastorate, Valdeci took on the revitalization of a congregation founded by European immigrants in the 1950s. “I have worked there for 14 years now, and I tell you, church revitalization is tough work with a lot of challenges,” he confesses. “But the Lord has blessed; over the last three or...
four years it has really begun to grow.” A church with perhaps 12 people when he arrived now has about 100, and the congregation has helped plant other churches.

Valdeci and Emilio both see the theological development of pastors as a key component to continued fruitfulness in gospel ministry in Brazil. “A common experience here is to see pastors with no training at all,” Emilio explains. “They’ve been installed or ordained as pastors, yet they lack even the minimal understanding of biblical interpretation, of how to use the Scriptures, of what is worship, and so forth. When they notice their lack of training, they say, ‘Please help me prepare to go back into ministry a few years down the road, and send me to seminary — help me learn, help me grow.’ There’s a great thirst for Reformed theology in Brazil.”

As the gospel penetrates deeper in the “Deeper South” of Brazil, men like Emilio Garofalo and Valdeci da Silva help their fellow proclaimers of God’s Word to lay deeper theological roots.

For more information in Portuguese about the Andrew Jumper Graduate School in Brazil, visit cpaj.mackenzie.br (the site can be translated into English).
while I went to Jackson for the D.Min. After talking to my elders, I decided to go with my family to RTS in April 2000. We must study continually, because those who stop learning stop teaching. To take a doctorate program was my dream, so when the opportunity came, I was very happy, knowing it could be very useful in my ministry. Although my time in Jackson was only 17 months, God used it intensively to prepare myself to serve Him better.

I have dedicated my life to preaching and writing. My latest project is an expository commentary of the New Testament — right now I’m writing the Luke commentary, and my purpose is to complete commentaries for all the books of the Bible. Books go farther than we can, because they last longer than we live!

The major instrument to draw people to faith in Christ is biblical preaching. The majority of the churches that preach faithfully, under the power of the Holy Spirit, have experienced strong growth. Also, most healthy church growth in Brazil has a family-groups component. The home, not only the sanctuary, must be a strategic place to share the gospel and bring people to faith in Christ.

Brazils facing its worst crisis, mainly one of integrity. Government corruption, economic depression, bankruptcy of marriage, an explosion of false churches, the growth of atheism, and people leaving the church all signal a terrible situation. But in the midst of this, we have a great opportunity to preach, because people feel broken and helpless.

I think that Brazil will be a powerful missionary nation. Several denominations and hundreds of churches are committed to this vision, with strong local churches growing in grace and in numbers, and with powerful preachers committed to the gospel.

In traveling throughout Brazil, preaching in more than 1,000 churches of different denominations and talking with hundreds of church leaders, I have seen signs of revival. Despite our bad political and economic situation, I’m very enthusiastic about the future of the church in Brazil. I want to spend my time, my energy, my whole life working for God. We must be like candles, shining with the same intensity until the end.
Jim Davis pastors
in the shadow of Ole Miss while working on a Distance M.Div. degree.

Once upon a time, Jim Davis wanted to be the governor of the state of Florida.

He even went so far as to attend college at Florida State University in Tallahassee, about as close to the governor’s mansion as one can get. Something happened on the Orlando native’s way to that mansion, though — he encountered salvation through faith in Christ alone, and God radically redirected his ambitions.

Today Jim serves on the pastoral staff of Grace Bible Church in Oxford, Mississippi, home of the University of Mississippi (known the world over, of course, as Ole Miss). In the meantime he works toward a degree in the Distance Master of Divinity program offered by his “hometown” RTS-Orlando.

To be sure, a seminary degree would not have been part of Jim’s résumé plan in college: “I remember one day looking at [my goal to be governor] and realizing it didn’t give me the satisfaction I thought it should. I started to wonder if something was off with my values.” This realization pushed Jim onto a spiritual quest: “I started praying every night for two weeks, ‘God, I don’t know if You’re real, but I don’t have faith and I’m not happy, so if You’re real, You can really respond to this.’”

That’s when a staff member with the local chapter of Cru (then known as Campus Crusade for Christ) introduced himself to Jim. “Today he would tell me he only came up to me because I happened to be the president of the fraternity,” Jim explains, “but I knew this was the Lord answering my prayer. We had lunch, and he shared the gospel with me, and it made complete sense. I saw my sin, and the weight of what Jesus was offering, in a way I’d never seen it before.”

After his conversion, Jim eventually became a full-time staff member with Cru in Italy, where he met his wife, Angela (an Ole Miss alumnus), who went through a cancer scare that brought them back to the States to serve with Cru at Mississippi State University in Starkville. Later, after Angela’s complete recovery, the Davises returned to Italy for a one-year mission with Cru. During this stage of their mission, the Lord was stirring within Jim a new passion.

“When we were in Starkville,” he says, “the Lord gave me opportunities to teach the Bible, first in small-group settings and then in larger groups. I didn’t know much, but every time I learned something new, I looked for an audience. I didn’t know if it would ever move into a church setting, but the idea began to pop up in my head.” By now Jim had begun taking RTS courses online through what is now known as the Global Campus, as part of a partnership agreement between RTS and Cru (see “Partners in the Mission” on page 16).

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by Paul Schwarz
EDUCATION
The Davises’ return to Italy incorporated Cru campus ministry with church planting in conjunction with a friend’s involvement in the Acts 29 church planting network. “I saw the benefit of the local church in the context of hard soil,” observes Jim as he reflects on their experiences. “When we were [previously there], we were trying to start a student ministry where there was no church. But I knew what a blessing it would be to reach students where there was a church. The church planter didn’t speak Italian at the time and didn’t know anybody, but my wife and I spoke Italian, so we decided to go and help get the church established and reach students. And it worked — though it’s small and fragile, the church is still there. I clearly saw the marriage of church planting and student ministry.”

Upon relocating back stateside again, Jim found the ideal transition from campus ministry to pastoral ministry, as friends in Oxford who had planted Grace Bible Church in 2008 asked him if he would fulfill the role of an associate pastor. A key to Jim’s agreement to take the position was that the continuation of his RTS education was written into his job description.

“The church started in somebody’s backyard, and then we moved into a conference center in town, and then we moved into a strip mall and outgrew that,” says Jim when asked about Grace Bible’s growth. “A year ago last spring, we had a Sunday when 132 people couldn’t even get in the building. So we began praying for something else.” That “something else” became a newly renovated middle school, which accommodates the 500 to 700 people who attend on a typical Sunday.

Jim deflects credit for the growth of Grace Bible, instead highlighting the ministry of J.D. Shaw, the lead teaching pastor, and the membership all the staff members with the Cru chapter at Ole Miss. “They’ve been a huge blessing,” Jim says. “They’re bringing the gospel to college students, and they bring them to Grace and they hear the Bible taught, whether it’s on Sunday or Wednesday.” For Jim’s part, he leads an early-morning Bible study called “Theology Thursday” with a group of Ole Miss students who, as he puts it, “see how the Bible fits together.”

At this point Jim tells the story of an Ole Miss student named Tyler, who had been invited to the weekly meeting of the Cru chapter: “He looked in the room and thought, I can’t do this — what am I doing here? He turned around to leave just as some girls from our church were walking up, and they said, ‘Come on in!’ So he went in and heard the gospel preached by one of the men who founded Grace Bible. Tyler came to faith that night, and quickly plugged into the church. He came to all my Bible studies, served at every opportunity, and never even missed a Wednesday night service.

“It’s a great example of Cru and the church working together — the more he plugged into the church, the more it fueled his desire to share his faith with his friends. And the more he got involved in Grace, the more that benefited Cru, and we would have never known him if not for the way the Lord used Cru.”

Grace Bible also nurtures a strong partnership with other churches in the Oxford area. “J.D. Shaw had a desire for Bible-believing churches to cooperate more in the city,” Jim

Though RTS firmly believes that residential learning is the best way to prepare for gospel ministry, the seminary recognizes that not everyone is able to relocate for a degree program. For those like Jim Davis (see main article) who are unable to leave a particular ministry or job in order to move to campus, RTS-Orlando’s Distance Master of Divinity program offers a flexible way to earn a fully accredited M.Div. degree.

Through the Distance M.Div. track, one can complete up to 70 credits through distance education, while finishing the remaining 36 credits in only six weeks of hybrid courses offered on the Orlando campus. Since hybrid coursework incorporates online learning, students are able to complete two to three courses in each residential week on campus.

Distance M.Div. students enjoy a cohort-like experience as they take online courses in the fall and spring semesters and meet on campus each January and July. For most working students, the program can be completed comfortably in five years, though students have the flexibility to complete the program in as few as three years or as many as seven (Jim has taken the longer approach).

In order to successfully complete the Distance M.Div. program, students must begin hybrid courses in the summer term and complete certain courses in hybrid residential format, even if they are offered fully online.

Interested individuals can contact Dave Veldkamp at dveldkamp@rts.edu to see how RTS can put together a schedule for them.
explains, “so [pastors] began praying together — at first it wasn’t a lot more than that.” Eventually, though, it led to cooperative efforts such as last year’s citywide sermon series on marriage, with several pastors coordinating their preaching around 1 Corinthians 7.

The local pastors who have participated in the sermon series include Curt Presley, an RTS-Jackson alumnus and senior pastor at Christ Presbyterian Church. Jim identifies Curt as an experienced pastor in town who had greatly influenced him in ministry. “We just had a situation where a young woman whose family is in Curt’s church came to our church,” Jim says, “and she [was going through some health challenges]. Having Curt there to say to him, ‘Walk me through this, because I’ve never been through anything like this, and you know the family,’ and having him there to speak into some rather complicated scenarios has been a huge blessing.”

As he continues to serve at Grace Bible, Jim projects to finish his RTS-Orlando Distance M.Div. degree in another two to three years. His educational and ministry track probably won’t lead him to become governor of Florida like he originally planned, but regardless, he is being equipped for a different kind of higher office: pastor.

To learn more about Grace Bible, visit www.gracebibleofoxford.com — more information about the RTS Distance M.Div. can be found at www.rts.edu/site/rtsnearyou/orlando/mdiv/nontraditional.aspx.
What is your ministry background, and how did you develop a heart for theological education?

I have served with Cru for 28 years, all of those with its campus ministry. I worked for about eight years at Northwestern University near Chicago as a field staff member, for about five years with our regional leadership team in Indiana, and then for about 15 years in my current role.

During my time in Chicago I earned a Master of Arts in Christian thought and systematic theology from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Several years later I received a Th.M. and then a Ph.D. in Christian theology and ethics from Duke University, graduating in 2007. My family and I have lived in Orlando for the last eight years.

When I was at Northwestern, I began to realize I had gifts in teaching and in helping people grow deeper in the faith. I started in the master’s program at Trinity out of a desire to be a steward of God’s gifts in my life and to grow in my effectiveness in understanding, interpreting, applying and teaching the Scriptures. I did my theological education at Trinity part time while in ministry, which was a great combination because it gave me a great place to reflect on ministry questions and address issues.

After I finished at Trinity and moved to Indiana, I was working more administratively, but I ended up getting involved in theological training. I was asked to teach a course at Cru’s Institute of Biblical Studies in the summer of 1995, and then I was asked if I was interested in becoming a national coordinator of theological training. That led to a fresh calling in my life as I began thinking about who I was and about the needs of Cru. So I began taking initiative with some of our leaders, and in the summer of 1997 I started directing the IBS program, and things grew from there.

One of the larger realities in Cru back then was organizational change that created a place where theological development became more important. That’s when I started working with Marc Rutter, who holds two degrees from RTS-Orlando and who now oversees leadership development and human resources for Cru in the U.S., to begin developing partnerships with seminaries.

You mentioned Cru’s Institute of Biblical Studies. What does that entail?

When Bill Bright founded Cru in 1951, he had a vision for recruiting seminary graduates to serve with the ministry. Back then, though, there wasn’t much interest from seminary graduates with serving with a group where you had to raise your own financial support. What ended up happening was that many of the people who joined Cru, and my experience reflected this — my background was in engineering — didn’t have biblical and theological training.

So in the early 1960s, Bill recruited someone who had finished a seminary doctorate to join Cru to start the in-house IBS program. When people joined Cru, they spent their first three summers as a new missionary receiving basic biblical and theological training.

Over time, though, we began launching summer mission venues, which slowly began to push IBS out to the margins. When I joined Cru in 1987, I did have to take some theological training as a new missionary, but beyond that, it became more of an organizational elective than a requirement. Cru had an accredited seminary, the International School of Theology, that ran the summer IBS program, but it was mostly new staff attending.
When Marc Rutter and I started working together, we inherited the IBS curriculum after ISOT closed down. We started asking ourselves what the biblical and theological development needs of our staff were, so we made some changes to the curriculum. One of the things we discovered was that it wasn’t integrated into our leadership development system, aside from new missionaries. So by 2002 we moved Cru back to formal theological development requirements for all campus staff members, and then in another five years we had requirements for the whole organization.

The IBS course offerings include Old Testament Survey, New Testament Survey, Bible Study Methods, Biblical Interpretation, Church History, Apologetics, Christian Worldview and others. They’re designed to give our staff a basic biblical and theological foundation for a lifetime of ministry.

Why is that biblical and theological foundation so important?

One reason is because our staff members use the Bible every day in ministry. They’re on the front line sharing the gospel and trying to ground new believers in the faith, so they need to be people with growing biblical and theological depth.

Second, the gospel is a sacred trust, as the Apostle Paul says. We want to help our staff members be stewards of that trust.

Third, we’re an organization focused on helping bring the gospel in partnership with many others to every person in the world, which was Bill Bright’s original vision. Ironically, we can be gospel-rich in terms of proclamation, but gospel-deficient in terms of growing in our own understanding and experience of the gospel. Theological development helps ground our staff members in a growing understanding and experience of the gospel, and helps them address their questions.

Another more recent reason is that our ethnic audience in ministry is changing. Every year there’s a growing gap between the ethnic complexion of our Cru missionaries, who are primarily Caucasian, and our ministry audience. For example, in our campus ministry almost half the students on campus are from Asian, African, Latino or Native backgrounds, so how do we contextualize the gospel, crossing cultures more effectively? Theological education is important to answering that question.

I used to think Bill Bright was theologically shallow because every year he would come to our staff conferences and give the same message about the incomparable Christ. But after working with Cru for a number of years, I realized that I was theologically shallow, that Bill was always pointing us to the compelling center of Christ and the gospel in our mission. Those are the kind of leaders Cru wants to develop, and theological development plays a role in that.

How do seminary partners like RTS fit into Cru’s theological commitment?

When our International School of Theology closed, we realized we wanted Cru staff members, as they received our in-house IBS training, to be able to receive graduate credit for it. We also wanted to make it easier for staff members to receive theological training outside of Cru. So we decided to develop partnerships with a number of evangelical seminaries.

We looked for a number of criteria in potential seminary partners. One is that Cru has a 17-point statement of faith, and we wanted consistency with our theological identity as an organization. A second criterion was friendliness toward students in full-time ministry, those rooted in their ministry context but wanting to be able to pursue theological training in the context of that ongoing ministry. The third criterion was willingness to grant graduate credit for our
IBS classes. The fourth criterion was to achieve a reflection of the theological diversity within Cru as a Protestant evangelical missionary organization, which is why we partner with covenantal schools like RTS as well as dispensational schools like Dallas Theological Seminary.

In addition, we wanted partnerships in the major geographic areas of the country, so that if you drew a 500- to 600-mile circle around each of the schools we work with, there would be a school for every staff member. It didn’t totally work out that way because our partners are more heavily concentrated east of the Mississippi, but that probably reflects the demographics of Cru in some ways as well.

Regardless, our seminary partnerships allow us to focus on our core strengths as an organization, which are communicating the gospel to a lot of different people cross-culturally and helping ground people in the faith. We’re not trying to run our own accredited institution — our partners do that. It’s a huge win for Cru and has been very positively received by our staff members.

How do the seminary partnerships integrate with Cru’s IBS program?

One way is that IBS is like a seminary extension site. Each of our partners is approving the instructors, syllabi and courses we offer, with a memorandum of understanding with each school that spells out how that process takes place. They grant credit for our courses, which staff members can then apply toward degree requirements at any one of our schools. Also, because all courses are accredited by the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada, staff members can even transfer credit to other ATS-accredited schools outside our partnerships.

Another way they integrate is that our partners provide faculty members who teach courses for us. For example, Dr. Mark Futato from RTS-Orlando started teaching at IBS in 1998, and he has taught at least one course for us every year since then. We’ve also had several other faculty members from RTS and each of our partner schools. It’s a great blessing to us to be able to leverage their expertise.

For more information about Cru’s seminary partnerships, visit ibs.cru.org and click on Seminary Partnerships.
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their responsibility for the public good. For more information, e-mail itpl@rts.edu.

NEW TITLES FOR RTS OFFICERS

The RTS executive committee recently approved the following personnel title changes proposed by Dr. Ligon Duncan, chancellor and CEO:

Dr. Robert Cara, chief academic officer, is now provost and chief academic officer, the ranking academic officer under the chancellor. Dr. Cara will continue to work with all RTS campuses to coordinate all academic programs.

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Brad Tisdale, chief financial officer, is now the chief operations and chief financial officer. He will lead the chancellor’s office and all RTS operations systemwide.

Lyn Perez, chief development officer, is now the chief advancement officer. He will continue to serve as the president of the RTS Foundation and continue to head up communications, marketing, branding, alumni, special events and information technology, and assist the chancellor with development.

Steve Wallace, chief operating officer, is now executive director of RTS-Global, acting director of RTS-New York City and assistant board secretary for the chancellor.

Kevin Collins, director of admissions, placement and marketing at RTS-Orlando, is now the overall director of enrollment for RTS. He will remain in Orlando but will coordinate all campus admissions officers. He is also now assistant director of the RTS D.Min. program.

Polly Stone, director of institutional assessment, is now chief institutional assessment officer. She will continue to work with the provost/CAO to oversee all accreditation requirements and academic assessment for RTS.

Ken Wiandt, controller, is now the director of finance and will take on more responsibility in the accounting office.

Dr. Donald Fortson, who in addition to teaching church history at RTS-Charlotte and leading the D.Min. program there, is now overall director of the RTS D.Min. program.

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Dr. Kruger, campus president, will continue his Women’s Bible Study on Romans beginning Sept. 9 at 9:30 a.m. E-mail cairing@rts.edu to register.

A campus preview day will be held on Oct. 20. Inquire at admissions.charlotte@rts.edu.

Orlando

A concert featuring the artists from The RTS Collective CD will be held Aug. 26 in Pamplin Chapel. CDs will be available for sale for $9.99.

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The “From Embers to a Flame” Conference will be held Sept. 9-10.

Dr. Joel Beeke, president and professor of systematic theology and homiletics at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, will be the missions conference speaker Sept. 15-16.

Dr. Daniel Sweeney will be the Marriage and Family Counseling conference speaker Sept. 29-30.

Dr. Carl Trueman, professor of church history at Westminster Theological Seminary, will be the Spiritual Life Conference speaker March 1-2, 2016.

Washington D.C.

The Fall Festival will be held Aug. 29 from noon–3 p.m.

Beginning this fall, during the 2015-16 academic year, RTS will celebrate its 50th anniversary.
Buy Music, Help Students

Five RTS students — Josh Bales, Rachel Cohen, Tim Inman, Ben Jones and Mark Nicks — have recorded 10 songs on a CD specifically to raise funds for student scholarships at the seminary. These students, some of whom have previously released albums of their own, are connected with the worship services at several Central Florida churches.

Some of the hymns on the CD, titled *The RTS Collective: Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, were written by the students.

Visit www.rtscollective.com to learn more about the CD project and how to purchase either a physical copy or a download from CD Baby, Amazon or iTunes. Either way, you’ll be helping RTS students prepare for a lifetime of gospel ministry.