Plowing Concrete

RTS alumni plant churches in the spiritually hard ground of New England.
We in the RTS family have received a sacred trust — to preach the gospel of light to those lost in spiritual darkness. This is the same historic gospel with which the Apostle Paul himself was entrusted (Galatians 2:7, 1 Thessalonians 2:4, 1 Timothy 1:11) and that alone is “the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16).

Our commitment to proclaiming this good news has been a hallmark of RTS from its founding in 1966 to this very day. “Standing firm but not standing still” remains our focus in that we remain anchored to the truth of the gospel even while we actively take that truth to the ends of the earth and to very different cultures and settings.

With that in mind, we at RTS labor to produce graduates prepared to fill pulpits, plant churches, serve as evangelists and otherwise carry out the callings to gospel ministry that have been placed on their hearts. These students and alumni enter diverse mission fields around the world and even various cultural landscapes here in the United States.

One prime example of the type of field for which we prepare our students is New England. This region is often identified as “post-Christian,” referring to the gospel heritage in which colonial America was rooted but that was later abandoned in the drift toward theological liberalism and then full-scale secularism. Today, original voices in New England such as Jonathan Edwards have become objects of irrelevance if not outright ridicule.

However, RTS alumni such as the ones featured in “Plowing Concrete” (see page 8) are among those helping reintroduce the historic gospel to one of the birthplaces of the American church. In so doing, they help us understand that while our missional focus takes us to the ends of the earth, some of the places we reach along the way land closer to home than we might imagine. “Re-evangelizing” the United States is a formidable task requiring significant attention.

In addition, new fields of spiritual harvest are sprouting up all over the globe, whether they are near military bases in Germany or among the millions of Muslims in Indonesia. People both stateside and worldwide need to receive the grace of God in Jesus Christ through the preaching and teaching of the inerrant Word of God.

We recognize that gospel ministry comes with a cost — many believers around the world face persecution for confessing faith in Christ. Some pay the price of martyrdom, as did Dietrich Bonhoeffer when he led the resistance against the co-opting of the German church by the Nazis in the 1930s and 1940s (see “Bonhoeffer Visited” on page 14). In whatever persecution we may encounter for the sake of the gospel, however, we know that “light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison” (2 Corinthians 4:17).
TRAVELS

Dr. James Anderson taught a one-hour course on natural law and its application to legal ethics on May 25 at the Charlotte City Club. The course was accredited for continuing legal education by the North Carolina State Bar. On Nov. 18 he will speak at the national meeting of the Evangelical Philosophical Society, San Francisco, on “Positive Mystarianism Undeafeated.”

Dr. Steve Brown taught “Radical Grace” at RTS-Orlando, July 25-29. On Sept. 4 he will preach morning services at Willow Creek Presbyterian Church, Winter Springs, Fla. On Sept. 17 he will speak at a pastor’s conference at Hamannum Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, Madison, Ala. He will preach at the morning worship services at Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church, Fort Lauderdale, Fla., Oct. 9, and teach a seminar at The Billy Graham Training Center, Nov. 7-9.

Dr. Steve Childers spoke at the national Global Church Advancement church planter training conference, July 19-21, Due West, S.C. He is also scheduled to be the plenary speaker for the annual Covenant College mission conference Nov. 8-11, Lookout Mountain, Ga.

Dr. John Currid was a main speaker along with Dr. Mike Milton at the ARP Family Bible Conference at Bonclarken Conference Center in North Carolina, July 25-28.

Dr. Ligon Duncan will speak at the Princeton Regional Conference on Reformed Theology in New Jersey, Nov. 4-5.

Dr. John Frame is scheduled to lecture at Covenant College, Oct. 24-25.

Dr. Mark Futato will participate in the Templeton Colloquium, Boca Raton, Fla., Sept. 15-18, and teach at a Bible conference for Seven Rivers Presbyterian Church, Lecanto, Fla., Oct. 21-23.

Dr. Chuck Hill will speak at the Oxford XVI International Conference on Patristic Studies, Aug. 8-13, on “The Writing Which Says …’ The Status of the Shepherd of Hermas in the Writings of Irenaeus.”

Dr. Reggie Kidd will teach “NT Theology and Language” for Acts 29’s ReTrain program, Seattle, Nov. 11-12.

Rev. Tim McKeown will attend the Northen Mexico Partnership Meeting, Sept. 12-14, Rock Hill, S.C.; officiate a funeral in Arlington National Cemetery, Sept. 30; and travel to Monterrey, Mexico, for the Mission to the World Monterey Vision Trip, Oct. 7-10.

Dr. Mike Milton was the keynote speaker at the fall 2011 Army Chaplain Career Course service, Fort Jackson, S.C., July 18, on “Resting Before Running: A Biblical Call For Spiritual Reflection in Order to Know Spiritual Protection in the Battle.” He will present the paper “In Jesus Name I Pray: Exclusivity in Public Prayer and the Restrictive Contours of Civic Pluralism,” at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, San Francisco, Nov. 17. He will preach at the World Mission Conference at Briarwood Presbyterian Church, Birmingham, Ala., Oct. 21-23 on “A Word From Another World: Messages on the Witness of the Church in the World Today.” He will preach at the Christian Heritage Conference at Christ Covenant Church, Charlotte, Oct. 28-29 on “Music of the Reformation,” lead a small group and teach an Army career course at the U.S. Army Chaplain Center, Fort Jackson, Sept. 12-23, and preach at the Ocean Reef Club, Key Largo, Fla., Nov. 27.

John Muether spoke on June 7 at a pre-conference assembly at the Orthodox Presbyterian Church General Assembly on “Who Narrows the OPC: The Church and Its Historians, and will speak at a Reformation Day conference, Oct. 28-29, at Covenant Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Dayton, Ohio.

Dr. John Oliver was a Bible conference speaker at America’s Keswick, Whiting, N.J., July 31-Aug. 5, on “Stars in the Night: Texts for Times of Testing.”

Dr. Don Sweeting will attend the National Association of Evangelicals board meeting, Oct. 12-13, Washington, D.C., and the Colorado Christian University board meeting, Oct. 20-21, Lakewood, Colo.

Dr. Derek Thomas will be the keynote speaker at the ARP First Presbyterian Spiritual Life Conference at Back Creek Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, Charlotte, Aug. 28, on “Teaching Christ from the Old Testament: Some Guiding Principles” and “Things That Only the Old Testament Will Tell You.” During this event, four RTS professors will give lectures: Dr. Robert Caro on “King David’s Life as a Foreshadowing of Christ and an Example for Us,” Dr. John Currid on “Does the Fourth Commandment Apply to Us Today?”, Dr. Michael Kruger on “Heresy, Orthodoxy, and the Role of the Old Testament in Early Christianity”; and Dr. James Anderson on “Old Commandments for a Brave New World.”

PUBLICATIONS

Dr. John Currid has written a book for the Welwyn Commentary Series (a series on the books of the Bible) titled Strong and Courageous: Joshua (Evangelical Press, Sept.).

Dr. Don Fortson wrote Presbyterian Story: Origins and Progress of a Reformed Tradition (Reformation Press, due fall).

Dr. Chuck Hill wrote “Intersections of Jewish and Christian Scribal Culture: The Original Codex Containing 4, 64, and 67, and Its Implications” in Among Jews, Gentiles, and Christians in Antiquity and the Middle Ages (Tupir Academic Press, Trondheim).

Dr. Andrew Hoffmecker wrote Charles Hodge: The Pride of Princeton (P&R, Nov. 1).

Dr. Simon Kistemaker’s Conversations of Jesus has now been published in Portuguese (2010) as Os Encontros de Jesus.

Dr. Mike Milton’s commentary “On the Road to Sainthood” (a Reformed take on the beatification of John Paul II) was published by the Gospel Coalition, his article “I Am the Living Legacy of the Faith of Our Fathers” by Third Millennium, and his sermon “What God Has Done to Death” by Preaching.com.

Dr. Scott Swain has written Trinity, Revelation, and Reading: A Theological Introduction to the Bible and Its Interpretation (T&T Clark, Sept. [UK], Nov. [USA]), “The Trinity in the Reformers” for the Oxford Handbook of the Trinity (Oxford University Press, Nov.), “In Defense of Proof-Texting” (co-authored with R. Michael Allen) for the Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society (Sept.), and “God’s Lordly Son: Mark 12.35-37 and Trinitarian Christology” for the Theological Commentary: Evangelical Perspectives (T&T Clark, Dec.).

Dr. Derek Thomas has written How the Gospel Brings Us All the Way Home (Reformation Trust, May).

Dr. Don Timmer wrote A Gracious and Compassionate God: Mission, Salvation, and Spirituality in the Book of Jonah as part of the New Studies in Biblical Theology series (IVP Academic, March). He also published reviews of books dealing with various aspects of biblical studies in the 36th issue of Themelios, published by the Gospel Coalition.

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Change! What a small word, but what a huge impact it can have on our lives. Change in employment, or when moving to a new city, or in a family with marriage, divorce or death can also cause great turbulence as we, in our humanity, worry about the unknown repercussions that change can bring. We are all “Frail children of dust, and feeble as frail,” as the hymn *O Worship the King* suggests. Because of our frailty, change may cause us to ask real-life questions when facing a new situation, even one to which God has obviously called us. Some of these questions may be:

“Do I have the energy to start over?”
“Will I fail in this new endeavor?”
“Can I know what circumstances are out there for me?”
“Will my settled life be completely disrupted?”
“How will I cope?”

I prepared for change in my own life a few months ago. As I watched the movers pack our household goods in Atlanta and load the truck bound for Jackson, Miss., I thought, I’m in my sixties. I have pastored churches for 32 years. I am changing my life’s path from serving in parish ministry to joining the staff of a theological institution. What am I doing? The answer, for those in Christ, is that, as we live our lives at God’s pleasure, we often experience great change as we follow where He leads us. God does, after all, “get to say,” as our oldest son once said.

We are now happily settled in our new home, but life is different. How will we adapt to this change? Part of the answer to coping with change is found in Psalm 16 as David ponders the impeccable sufficiency of God in the turbulence of life. While we do not know precisely when David composed this psalm, the central theme fits a number of his life’s experiences. David’s life was filled with change as his life’s journey alternated between joyous celebration and great calamity. After his anointing as a shepherd boy, he experienced, among many other things, fear and danger from King Saul, friendship and fellowship with Jonathan, sin and loss with Bath-sheba, joy and gladness at the installation of the ark in Jerusalem, and anguish and disappointment as his own son Absalom tried to usurp the throne.

Does the turbulence of life ever stop? No, life is a journey of change, which often makes us feel afraid and unsettled. What shall we do? For those who are in Christ, the turbulence of change can be stabilized, as shown in Psalm 16, only because of the certain and powerful providence of God’s place (vv. 1-4), God’s provision (vv. 5-8) and God’s plan (vv. 9-11).

**God’s Place**

As we observe David’s response to life’s challenges, note the following petition in verse 1: “Keep me safe, my God, for in you I take refuge.” Here, David clearly approaches the matter on the basis of God’s place in his life. David has a relationship with the Father, calling Him “my God.” He declares that there is a sovereign God who will protect those He loves. Notice that David does not wonder whether God can provide refuge, but presents this as a fact. He elaborates further on God’s place in his life by saying, “You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing.” David clearly desires to be under God’s paternal care.

For those in Christ, the basic question regarding God’s place in our lives is, “Does God really love me and is that relationship certain?” The thrust of these opening verses is that the comfort and stability with which we navigate change is generated by the certainty of and confidence in God’s sufficiency for us.

**God’s Provision**

Having been calmed and encouraged by God’s place in his life, David now describes God’s gracious provision for both the present and the future. He declares that the Lord alone is his “portion” and “cup.” This metaphor illustrates the sufficient, complete nature of God’s provision for David. He is absolutely confident that whatever the Lord’s providence brings into his life, he will be generously shepherded by the sovereign power of his Lord. He reinforces this notion with the words “you make my lot secure.” What confidence!
Notice David’s picture of “the boundary lines” falling in “pleasant places” as he broadens his estimate of God’s provision for his life. In ancient Israel, boundary lines were so critical to a family’s survival that to move a boundary stone carried a curse! David is so content and confident with his Father’s work in laying the boundary lines of his life that he can endure the danger of Saul and the disappointment of treason by Absalom, or anything else that can come into his life. David goes on to give this picture its broadest perspective by writing that God has given him “a delightful inheritance.”

For David, God has not only been impeccable in shepherding his present life but also has made the future as secure as the present. In 2 Samuel 7:16, God promises David that his “house and kingdom will endure forever before me.” David is sure that God’s provision is neither seasonal nor finite, but will endure for eternity. Can you trust God with every facet of your life? David’s answer, whether in quiet calm or thrashing turbulence, is “Yes!”

With the twin certainties of God’s place and provision firmly rooted in his life, David finally addresses God’s plan for his life. David can carry on with confidence and joy because God has a plan! In verse 9, David speaks of a joy so pervasive that his mouth overflows with words of praise because of the love and gratitude in his heart. Verse 10 illustrates he is infinitely comforted because God will never be apart from him, even in death. He has an eternal relationship with the Lord. Finally, in verse 11, David states that, because his heavenly Father formulated his “path of life,” and therefore it is formulated in perfection, he can make this journey in anticipation of the joy of being united with him forever.

Things on our path are not always clear to us, but we can be sure, as David was sure, that the Lord always fashions the path. This sounds a bit simple, and, as a stated truth, it certainly is. However, I submit to you that living it is one of the most spiritually challenging matters on our redeemed journey with the Lord!

I have often encouraged myself and those around me with this description of our relationship with the Father: You cannot know God by interpreting His conduct. You know Him by embracing His character as described and displayed in His Word. David clearly understood and embraced this truth, as this psalm demonstrates. Because of God’s impeccable character, we can follow David’s lead by declaring the following joyous truth: **The whole of my being belongs to and is perfectly shepherded by my Father God, now and for eternity.**

As children of a perfect God we can say, with thanksgiving, that we can live with confidence during change because we belong to Him! 

Dr. Charles Frost is the recently appointed assistant to the chancellor for planned giving at RTS. He comes to the seminary after more than 30 years in pastoral ministry and the military, most recently serving as senior pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church in Atlanta.
To set the proper context for addressing the relationship between Scripture and science, why is training in biblical interpretation so important?

Dr. Yeo: To start, it enriches our understanding of what God is saying to us in His Word. In my youth, I grew up hearing a hodgepodge of interpretations on a variety of topics related to Christianity and the Bible. I began to realize that I didn’t know which view was right because I didn’t know how to correctly interpret the Bible for myself. It was only after I learned sound principles of biblical interpretation in seminary that the Bible became understandable and familiar. I am thus able to communicate that understanding in my teaching ministry today. That’s one of the reasons why all Christians, not just RTS students, need to become proficient interpreters of the Bible also.

What makes a “proficient interpreter of the Bible”?

Dr. Yeo: By getting acquainted with the biblical languages and learning how to exegete the Bible from the Hebrew and Greek texts. From exegesis, they progress to exposition and ultimately toward a biblical-theological understanding of the text. Genre analysis in narrative and poetry is also important, as well as seeing the text within its proper canonical and redemptive-historical setting, with Christ as its center. Foundational to these approaches is our belief that the Bible in its entirety is the divinely inspired, inerrant Word of God.
John, you’re undoubtedly aware of a recent debate surrounding the historicity of Genesis 1. Some people are trying to argue that it is not historical, saying instead that it is “poetic.” What can you say about this?

Dr. Yeo: There has been a longstanding debate surrounding whether Genesis 1 is poetry or narrative. Some Christian scholars believe that if the text is “poetic,” it gives them the validation to interpret it from a non-literal or figurative perspective. Additionally, some scholars will claim that Genesis 1 is not historical. My view is that the text is narrative and should be interpreted literally, but let’s grant for a moment that Genesis 1 is poetry. Does all poetry, by virtue of its genre, necessitate we interpret it non-literally? For example, we learned poems in grade school that were both poetic and historical, such as the one about Christopher Columbus: “In four hundred ninety-two, Columbus sailed the ocean blue . . . .” The history of Columbus being made into a poem does not mean it did not literally happen. In other words, not all poetry is figurative or non-historical.

Dr. Lowe: I think back to something my doctoral supervisor in chemistry said. He studied at Oxford and also had a Christian upbringing. His brother, in fact, was a fine Anglican bishop in Australia, a strong Christian. My supervisor turned his back on it all, yet he was never antagonistic to me. He would say, “Isaac Newton wrote as much on the Bible as he did on science.” I suppose this is how I’ve always felt. Many great scientists, past and present, have been motivated by their Christian beliefs, not stifled.

But some people today, particularly atheistic scientists, are saying that real science is incompatible with things like “intelligent design.” In a recent article in American Scientist, intelligent design was described as “religious prejudice disguised as intellectual freedom.” What is your perspective on this?

Dr. Lowe: At one level, I understand where statements like this are coming from. The scientific method is extremely powerful, because it not only brings clarity to the world in which we live, but it also perpetuates the search for more clarity. It has, if you like, an immune system protecting the life and liveliness of future inquiry. Science, in fact, would rather get wrong answers in the short term if it means encouraging further discussion toward the right answer in the long run. One of the heroes of science, Francis Bacon, once said, “Truth emerges more readily from error than from confusion.”

For militant atheists, a belief in God is abhorrent, and their own violent reaction is like an immune response seeking to protect the organism of science from what they see as its greatest threat. As soon as you start saying, “God did that,” they would argue that you are shutting down the search for a naturalistic solution to that problem. So there is scientific bias against God, I believe, making some people want to eliminate Him or at least minimize His involvement exponentially. It’s a tricky issue, because sometimes God has been used as an excuse for not looking further. So Christians have to be careful to not say more than the Bible says. But they also have to be careful not to be swayed by forceful rhetoric, which is not without an agenda.

What would be a real-life scenario that would illustrate how the church can address the issues you’ve raised?

Dr. Yeo: A real-life scenario hitting close to home in the church today is the question of whether or not Adam and Eve were historical persons. This debate is not new, at least from the perspective of conservative evangelicism versus theological liberalism. What makes the present debate novel is that some evangelicals now deny the historicity of Adam and Eve because they say the text is not to be interpreted literally. The claim, however, is a bare assertion, and proponents of this view provide no substantive arguments or firm data to justify their position. Instead, they read whatever they like into the text.

Dr. Lowe: What I was saying before about the scientific method has practical application to speaking with atheists. To begin with, it helps us have real expectations about their responses. The scientific method assumes that anything that shuts down further research is the enemy, meaning anything supernatural. So expect such a friend to not be super-keen to give ground on anything you say! To make matters worse, science is about sniffing out and eliminating bias (in yourself and others), and since you are the sort to believe in the supernatural, who can trust anything you say? This is not to say that all atheists will be aggressive and militant, but in my experience, atheists are most likely to fight you on everything. Conversations regularly turn into tit-for-tat debate. ML

For more interaction between Dr. Yeo and Dr. Lowe, see the information at the top of the page.
IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE THAT A SIMPLE car wash could inspire such anger. But Jon Taylor, pastor of Church of the Redeemer in Manchester, N.H., witnessed it firsthand when he and his fellow church members sought to serve the community by providing free car washes.

“We said, ‘We’re not taking donations; this is free, because we want to give you a picture of God’s grace,’” Jon recalls. “And people would get physically angry with us. One guy threw a $20 bill out the window of his car as he was leaving. It was because they can’t fathom that you can get something for nothing. The notion of grace is antithetical.”

The angry car wash incident in Manchester illustrates the deep-seated sense of self-sufficiency ingrained in the culture of New England. The region often considered the spiritual birthplace of America now serves as one of the regions most resistant to the gospel. “New England tends to be burned-over ground,” Jon explains, referring to the post-Christian ethos that exists in the wake of years of theological liberalism giving way to theological irrelevance.

However, a new generation of ministers is laboring faithfully in this seemingly unfertile field to reintroduce the Reformed faith to one of its places of origin in North America. Six of them are RTS alumni who have served over the past 15-plus years to plant churches in the Presbyterian Church in America denomination. They may not see the results they want as fast as they want them — to a man they testify that church growth in New England is a painfully slow process — but the kingdom of God is increasing as they persevere in preaching the gospel.

The first of the current crop of RTS alumni to set to plowing the spiritual concrete in New England is Doug Domin. He arrived in New Hampshire in 1995 to plant First Presbyterian Church in Concord after pastoring churches in Mississippi, Florida and South Carolina. Like the rest of his fellow alumni, Doug responded to a sense of calling to preach the gospel and plant churches in an area where, relatively speaking, such a gospel presence didn’t exist. Only five churches existed in the entire northern New England presbytery of the PCA when Doug arrived.

Now there are 11, thanks in part to Jon, an RTS-Charlotte alumnus, joining Doug in Concord to serve a church-planting residency, after which he moved to Manchester to plant Church of the Redeemer. “Manchester’s a different place — in Concord, we don’t have a lot of ethnicity,” Doug, an RTS-Jackson alumnus observes, pointing out the fact that, with the influx of French Canadian immigrants in Manchester being one example, the demographic face of New England is

While pastoring First Presbyterian Church in Concord, N.H., Doug Domin (left) helped train Jon Taylor (above right, with his wife, Allie) as a church planter. Dan Rogers (right, with his wife, Michelle) serves to the south in a church plant in inner-city Boston, while David Stewart (below, left) is an associate pastor in Portland, Maine.

RTS alumni plant churches in the spiritually
Arguably there is no place this is more apparent than in Dorchester, Mass., in the heart of inner-city Boston. Here Dan Rogers pastors Christ the King Church Dorchester, an ecclesiastical United Nations in one of the most ethnically diverse locales you’ll find anywhere. “It’s really funny,” says Dan about his current ministry surroundings. “What in the world is a Southern guy doing in the inner city of Boston, and a white Southern guy at that?” The RTS-Atlanta alumnus delights in answering his own question: “I grew up in small-town Southern poverty, raised by a single mom, and that background really prepared me for Dorchester. I find I’ve got a lot in common with the kids growing in these single-parent homes.”

Portland, Maine, may be less than two hours by car from Dorchester, but the two locations share New England and not a whole lot else. In Portland, Doug Warren and David Stewart share a friendly rivalry (“I give Doug a hard time for graduating from Orlando,” David, an RTS-Charlotte alumnus, says with a laugh) and a ministry partnership at Christ the Redeemer Presbyterian Church. Actually, Christ the Redeemer features three RTS alumni, as Doug’s wife, Kristen, also has a degree from the Orlando campus.

Doug serves as full-time senior pastor, while David is a part-time associate pastor of music and discipleship who also teaches part-time at a local Christian school. “We’re the megachurch in our presbytery in that we have an attendance of over 100 on a Sunday morning,” David notes. “There isn’t another church in our presbytery with an attendance over 100, and I’m the only associate pastor that’s not a church planter.”

David’s observation illustrates the reality of the seemingly glacial pace of church planting in New England. The men who accept that challenge and come here to plant churches articulate their callings in different ways, but Al Baker, who spent the last eight years planting Christ Community Presbyterian Church in West Hartford, Conn., gives the most compelling testimony.

“I told my congregation [in St. Simons Island, Ga., in 2002] that it’s a matter of stewardship,” the RTS-Jackson graduate recalls. “We need to go where there’s not much gospel work. And furthermore, when you look back through history, you’ll find that any major thought and movement this country has ever had has begun in New England. Not all of them are good ideas, but this is where they all started. I thought if we can bring by the grace of God, not just us but certainly others who are up here already, a measure of true reformation and revival to New England, then why would things be any different now than in the past? Surely if this were to happen here, it would impact the rest of the country.”

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hard ground of New England.

BY PAUL SCHWARZ
While men like the six RTS alumni who have planted churches in New England (see main article) paint a new scene on the ecclesiastical landscape, some ministers work to revitalize existing churches and help return them to their gospel roots. T.J. Turner, an RTS-Charlotte alumnus, is one such pastor.

Like many of his RTS alumni peers, T.J. (right) is an unlikely candidate for such a ministry, being a native Southerner in the decidedly Northern town of Douglas, Mass., where he is associate pastor at Second Congregational Church. While at RTS-Charlotte, receiving confirmation of his ministry calling and working in the campus bookstore part time, T.J. met a retired pastor who was helping recruit people interested in ministering in New England. “[My wife and I] visited to see if a Georgia boy could even live in New England without getting stoned or something,” he recalls, laughing, “and discovered that we liked it.”

What closed the deal was a visit to a church service in downtown Boston at a nearly 400-year-old Congregational church. “We went inside to see what the service was like,” T.J. remembers, “[but] we heard absolutely nothing of the gospel.” T.J. also met the Reformed senior pastor of the Congregational church where he now serves, and the two men it may not be happening as quickly as many would like, but the faithful preaching of the gospel is bearing fruit. “One of the things we realized as a presbytery,” explains Doug Warren, “is that it’s very easy in this [environment] to fall into this stepchild mentality — ‘Woe is us; it’s so hard here.’ The reality is that there’s no ground that’s too rocky or too hard for Christ. The Lord is bringing his harvest, and He’s well capable of piercing any heart.”

Jon Taylor in New Hampshire tells the story of one such heart-piercing in the life of a husband and wife who are now members of Church of the Redeemer. “When I first met Doug and Denise,” Jon recalls, “we got together at their house, and they had a long list of really good questions. When we got to the end, I said, ‘Let me ask you a question,’ and I asked them the typical Evangelism Explosion [‘Why should God let you into heaven?] questions. Their answer was ‘Because I’ve been a good person.’ That’s all they knew to say, but I don’t think they actually believed that. They had been coming [to the church] for a while, and I think the dots were starting to get connected about grace. I don’t know when it happened, but at some point it did. It was His Word that gave them that vocabulary that we are saved by grace through faith and not of ourselves, whereas before, all they had heard talked about was duty.”

One heart at a time, New Englanders are learning that there really is such a thing as a free car wash. M.


T.J. Turner: Agent of Revitalization

BY PAUL SCHWARZ
When drawing up the prototype for a successful evangelist, an 81-year-old former farmer wearing a flannel shirt and suspenders probably wouldn't make the short list. But in the far reaches of northern Vermont, less than 10 miles from the Canadian border, Herb Shipman carries out an evangelistic ministry to the agricultural world he knows well.

The lifelong Vermonter’s curious journey to his current role as an evangelist in the PCA’s Northern New England Presbytery includes three years at RTS-Jackson in the early 1980s as well as his own Christian conversion at age 37. “I had to straighten the minister out,” Herb remembers when asked how he came to faith in Christ. “We were attending an adult Sunday school class because we thought it was the proper thing for our kids to be in Sunday school, and [the pastor] was teaching a unit on original sin. Well, now, nobody was going to convince me that this baby’s a sinner.”

Eventually, though, Herb envisioned Christ on the cross with a light shining on Him, and realizing that He had died for him. “There’s a difference between [saying you’re not perfect] and knowing you’re a sinner condemned to hell,” he explains.

After his conversion, Herb continued to work in various jobs teaching agricultural skills through local and regional vocational centers. But along with this came what he describes as “an awful burden for my relatives and friends and people I grew up with who attended church but weren’t hearing the gospel.”

He and his wife, Carol, considered going to an international mission field, but eventually, after a three-year stint running a farm supply business, Herb sensed a calling to seminary and pastoral ministry. The proceeds from selling the business funded most of his study at RTS. Upon returning to Vermont, the Shipmans embarked on a series of associate and interim pastorates throughout Vermont and northern New Hampshire.

While on pulpit supply at Trinity Presbyterian Church in St. Albans, Vt., Herb met a local veterinarian and church member who knew some of the same farmers he had taught in his agriculture classes many years before. Upon their meeting, Herb realized that “here [we were] right in the middle of the second-largest milk-producing county in the state and the largest maple sugar-producing county in the world, and with the exception of one widow, there are no farmers in the church and there haven’t been from the beginning!”

They hit upon the idea of starting a Bible study with the farmers, and through the veterinarian’s contacts, Herb began meeting with those interested. He patterned the studies after his old agriculture classes, using professional evaluations of the farmers’ business practices as a bridge to discussing spiritual matters. Herb also borrowed a tool from his RTS days, adapting a religious interview form he re-

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Aviators frequently testify that the two most complicated aspects of any flight are the takeoff and the landing. For Joe Steele, freshly graduated from RTS-Jackson, this is both a literal and figurative reality. He has spent 15 years, first as a commissioned officer in the U.S. Marine Corps and then as a Marine Reservist, flying F-18s and other military aircraft as well as instructing other Marine pilots. Today, while carrying out his Marine Reserve duties and completing a church pastoral internship, he faces what many just-graduated seminarians typically encounter: the wait for a call to a pastorate.

Of course, waiting for new orders — whether from God or His human agents — is nothing new to Joe. In fact, a military reassignment brought him to RTS in the first place. Five years ago, while stationed at a Marine base in South Carolina, he had filled out what’s known in Marine-speak as a “dream sheet” of places where he and his family wanted to be assigned. As often happens, though, Joe didn’t get his first choice. “You put down where you want to go,” he observes, “and then you eventually end up going where the Marine Corps needs you.”

Apparently, the Marines needed him in Meridian, Miss., as a flight instructor at the Naval Air Station there. Today Joe sees God’s providence in the assignment. “It ended up being a perfect fit for us,” he notes, “because I found myself about an hour and 30 minutes from RTS-Jackson and networked into a church that loved us and gave us more than adequate opportunities to test our gifts for ministry.”

Joe had sensed an internal calling to ministry dating back to his time in South Carolina, but his arrival in Mississippi confirmed that calling. In 2008 he left active Marine duty, transitioned into the Reserves and enrolled at RTS-Jackson full time. He continued his Reserve duties and interned at North Point Presbyterian Church in Meridian while making the drive down Interstate 20 for RTS classes.

This may have made Joe an atypical student, but then again, he has an atypical background. First off, he grew up in Utah in a Mormon family in which both of his parents taught Sunday school. Providentially, though, their next-door neighbors were believers who invited the Steele children to a vacation Bible school. “My mom had some reservations about the Mormon faith,” Joe recalls, “and I’m not even sure my mom knows why, but for some reason, [my parents] allowed my sisters and I to go to [VBS].” This started a process in which Joe’s parents revisited the church and professed faith in Christ, and 11-year-old Joe did likewise.

Joe’s early family experiences also engendered in him a love for flying, specifically through an uncle who graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy and was a Navy pilot during the Cold War. “I grew up meeting him coming back from deployments,” Joe remembers, “and he would take me flying occasionally in little Cessna 152s or 172s and let me take the yoke and do some touch-and-goes.”

His heart duly captured by Christ and by aviation, Joe embarked on a military career that included an education at Virginia Military Institute and deployment in Iraq. “I think like a lot of young men,” he observes, “I was drawn into [the military] by the discipline and the challenge. I knew that the military would require a lot. I’m an oldest child, and I know oldest children tend to be drawn to challenges naturally, but that was true for me. And the fact that I was able to learn how to fly and be taught by the military was a twofold benefit.”

Another benefit of Joe’s military experience has been its effect on preparing him for church leadership. “One of the reasons why I love [the Marine Corps] so much,” he says, “is that it places such a high premium on basic, timeless leadership principles.” He notes that the motto for The Basic School, which provides initial training for Marine officers, is Ductus Exemplo, or “Leadership by Example.” As Joe explains, “In the Marine Corps [you] don’t ask anyone to do anything you’re not willing to do yourself, you give the people under you an example to follow, you take care of your people, and you look out for their welfare. If you take care of the people under you, you’ll be amazed what they are willing to do for you in return. “The parallels of how that relates to church leadership are striking. You look at Christ and how He led — the washing of the disciples’ feet and how He was constantly putting the needs of His disciples before Himself — all those things are transcendent leadership qualities.”
Throughout his military career, and from VMI to Iraq to RTS and beyond, Joe has followed the Lord’s orders — and example. Today, though, he awaits His next call. At this writing, Joe is one of the candidates for a pastorate at a church that serves an American military installation overseas. He also has opportunities to consider church-planting work near other American bases.

RTS alumnus Doug Hudson recruited Joe to consider these possibilities. “He’s a leader and a wonderful communicator,” says Doug, who helps coordinate such church-planting efforts. “[One of my RTS professor friends] says he’s probably one of the best preachers he’s heard in [his] years as a professor there.”

No matter where Joe ends up, he plans to stay in the Marine Reserves at least five more years so he can complete the necessary 20 years for his retirement pension. This would require one weekend every month and two weeks every year of active duty, but Joe notes that the Marines typically provide enough flexibility in the service time that weekends would not have to be served on Sundays, thus enabling him to minimize missed pulpit time.

As Joe reflects on his RTS experience and prepares for his next marching orders, he offers words of advice for those wrestling with a possible call to ministry. “As I began to intern and work with God’s people,” he says, “God in His grace began to work in me a love for the local church and for people, and a desire to serve them. If I were speaking with a young man entertaining a call to ministry, [I would not first ask] whether or not [they] can teach or preach logically. Those are very important things not to be minimized, but [first I would ask,] ‘Do you love the church? Do you love the people God has placed you over? Do you genuinely desire to serve them?’”

Time will tell how Joe follows the leadership of his Commanding Officer in setting this example.
How did you come to write about Bonhoeffer?

In 1988, the summer I came to faith in Christ, the guy leading me in that direction gave me a copy of Bonhoeffer’s *The Cost of Discipleship* and asked me if I’d heard about him. I said I hadn’t, and he told me the basics, and I was shocked, because it was one incredible story. I was further moved because my mother grew up in Germany under Hitler and lost her father in the war. He was an unwilling, reluctant German soldier who would listen to the BBC with his ear literally pressed against the radio because he’d get in trouble. I thought that Bonhoeffer was somebody who spoke for Germans and Jews, most importantly for the Jews of Europe.

After I wrote the Wilberforce book, people kept asking me who I would write about next, and I never thought I’d write one biography, much less two. But I heard that question so often that I eventually thought, *Only one other person has captured me the way Wilberforce did, and that’s Bonhoeffer.*

So I found myself leaping into that. I had no idea whatsoever what I was getting into — that I would write the book I wrote, that I would say anything controversial, that I would find anything new, or that I would find out that Bonhoeffer was such a serious Christian all the way to his execution. I had heard that he had slid off into some sort of post-Christian humanism; to discover that was completely untrue was a bit of a shock. I was amazed by how much I discovered that was news — to me and a lot of people who thought they knew Bonhoeffer.
Q What else did you discover that surprised you?

That he came from such a spectacular family. I had no idea that his father was practically world-famous — he was one of the most famous psychiatrists in Germany for the first half of the 20th century. He was a huge figure in scientific and medical circles, well known throughout Europe. So to realize that Bonhoeffer wasn’t just this brilliant guy, but the son of this brilliant guy, and that his family was filled with people like this, gives you a picture of the context of his life. And then I realized that he was much more theologically conservative than I had been led to believe.

All that contrasted with what has been presented about him. A group of theologically liberal Bonhoeffer scholars somehow protected their version of his legacy from the disinfectant of sunlight. In fact, they created a slightly different Bonhoeffer, or in some cases a dramatically different Bonhoeffer, than the one I found in Bonhoeffer’s own letters and journals.

Q Can you elaborate on the controversy in what you wrote?

Some of the liberal Bonhoeffer scholars have flipped out because I think they had a good thing going for about five decades, and to have some non-academic come in and write what I did didn’t make them very happy. But strangely, some people on the conservative side have bought into the liberal version of Bonhoeffer and don’t accept my story about him, seemingly without doing the research on their own. They reject him as being theologically unorthodox.

But if you apply common sense and read what Bonhoeffer wrote himself — and there’s tons of it — it’s clear what kind of a person he was. Of course, some have accused me of creating my evangelical version of Bonhoeffer and don’t accept my story about him, seemingly without doing the research on their own. They reject him as being theologically unorthodox.

Everything from Bonhoeffer’s own letters and journals.

Q What else do today’s evangelicals learn from Bonhoeffer?

The main thing is to realize that on some level, theology is worthless unless we live it. This is a particular challenge for us as evangelicals — you can say, “I believe this and this,” but at some point God says, “If you’re not living it, I don’t want to hear about it.” Sometimes we can worship an idol of theological correctness. It doesn’t mean that theology isn’t extremely important, and anyone who says it isn’t is wrong. At the same time, it’s not everything, and Bonhoeffer challenges us to understand that the two have to be one — our life and what we say we believe. You can’t fool God with a statement of theology.

There’s something in Bonhoeffer that challenges us because he lived it out, wrote about it and preached about it. A lot of people have said the book got them thinking about that, and I’m glad. His life and theology get us thinking about the deeper issue of what it means to follow God.

We’re always looking for shortcuts in our broken sinfulness, and sometimes theology can be a shortcut — I can say this and this, as if that justifies me before God. Whereas God would say, “I’m less interested in your theological statement than I am in your heart and those things you can hardly put into words.” So Bonhoeffer is a good corrective for us as believers to try to look at things more from God’s point of view.

To learn more about Eric and his writing, visit www.ericmetaxas.com.
From Mountains to Mondays

THE TRANSFIGURATION HELPS US RETURN FROM GLORIOUS EXPERIENCES TO MUNDANE MATTERS.

by Dr. Mike Milton

What does a Christian do with Mondays? This has long been a deep question of the soul for pastors and others ministers who have given their all in seeking to faithfully communicate the gospel in a service of worship, who have unburdened their souls of the message that God has put upon them during the prior week. Yet this question is equally poignant for any Christian who has tasted of the divine glories of Christ in Word, sacrament and prayer on the Lord’s Day with the Lord’s people. You were “in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day,” but you are up to your eyeballs in what you feel is the mundane on Monday.

How should we think biblically about the issue of moving from mountains to Mondays? May I direct us to one of the best places in God’s Word to get an answer: Mark 9 and the Transfiguration. There we read:

“And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. And Peter said to Jesus, ‘Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.’ For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified.

And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, ‘This is my beloved Son; listen to him.’ And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only” (vv. 2-8).

To really get a biblical reflection on our “Monday morning blues” condition, we best also read on to verse 14: “And when they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and scribes arguing with them.”

Here is what I took away, as I battle my own mountain-to-Monday malaise:

1. WE NEED MOUNTAINS

As sure as the Lord revealed the glory of Christ, the promised Redeemer who had been anticipated by Elijah, Moses, and the Old Testament patriarchs and prophets, with the obvious intent of unveiling the transfigured glory of the Son of God to Peter, James and John—those inner-circle disciples—so, too, we need to see Christ lifted up and glorious in our lives. He comes to us, and we are reminded of His exalted position as we hear the Word and put the emblems of our salvation—the bread and the cup—to our lips. We experience His presence and power in the assembly of the saints at our church meetings, or perhaps at a retreat. We need mountains.
2. BUT WE CANNOT LIVE THERE
Peter didn’t know what to say, so he said something that got no divine traction: “Let’s do something!” Yet the impetuous apostle’s response was unremarkable, for the Father tells the disciples what to do: “This is My beloved Son; listen to Him.” Listen. Don’t build a monument to your experience. Listen, and learn Christ. And so what we find of God on Sundays, we take away in our hearts, not to erect new programs or new campaigns (not that those are bad), but we just listen. Mondays may be the best time to just “listen” to what we saw on Sundays. Listen for the voice of Jesus speaking to us on Mondays about the Word that came to us on Sundays. I have always felt that the best and most spiritual responses to the Word of God are not immediately after a message, when our “flesh,” as it were, may be responding to soaring rhetoric, but rather in the mundane stillness of the next day. We cannot live in revival meetings or retreats. But we can listen and learn and feed on Christ in our hearts by faith.

3. THERE IS A WORLD IN NEED
Verse 14 informs the text and provides a fitting response to any question about lingering on mountaintops. In the passages that follow, Jesus and the three disciples come down from the mountain to witness a great crowd, but also religious leaders arguing with the people. The issue? A boy with an unclean spirit and a question about healing. Jesus said that faithlessness marked the entire scene. One is reminded of Moses coming down Sinai to discover his brother leading a similarly faithless scene with a great crowd. But where Moses broke the tablets of the Law, Jesus broke through the boundaries of pain and sin and heartache and questioning, healing the child. There is so much work to be done.

Just remember, though — before the mission, before the campaign, before undertaking seminary or Bible training, or even before preparing for next week’s sermon: we do need that mountain. But we cannot live there. We belong down here where a world is in need of the healing Word of Christ.

Now, what will you do with your Monday?

Dr. Milton is the chancellor elect and chief executive officer elect at RTS. He will assume the chancellor and CEO positions in 2012. Visit his blog at www.rts.edu/Blog/Milton.aspx.
agreed to keep in touch. When the previous assistant pastor took a call to be a senior pastor elsewhere, T.J. took a call to replace him, with the goal of eventually becoming a senior pastor at another Congregational church.

T.J. sees his current position as a strategic opening. “There’s a lot of opportunity for revitalization in New England,” he observes, “because there are so many small churches, many of which don’t have pastors and are looking for someone kind of perpetually, [and] who are willing to let people come in and preach the gospel even though in a lot of cases they haven’t had that in decades.” He then tells about how when his current senior pastor first came to Douglas, his first task was to preach the gospel and evangelize the elders, one of whom testified to having never heard the gospel preached in his church.

Though growth is slow, as typical with any gospel ministry in New England, T.J. observes the ongoing results of such faithful preaching. In Douglas, what 10 years ago was a dying church of 30 people now sees about 125 people on a typical Sunday and — more importantly — has converted elders and a healthy gospel-centeredness.

For more information about T.J. and his ministry, visit www.themissingchurch.blogspot.com.

John Yeo wrote an extended dictionary article on “Name Theology” in the Lexham Bible Dictionary (Logos Bible Software, forthcoming).

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Dr. Peter Lee received a Ph.D. in Semitic and Egyptian languages and literature on May 14 from The Catholic University of America.

Rev. Kenneth McMullen was chosen at the June meeting of the ARP General Synod as vice moderator elect for the 2012 Synod Meeting.

Dr. Dan Timmer joined the steering committee of the Society of Biblical Literature’s “Sabbath in Text and Tradition” Group, responsible for organizing program units for the Society’s annual meetings until 2016.

ALUMNI PUBLICATIONS

James H. Grant Jr. (M.Div. ’08), pastor of Trinity Reformed Church, Rossville, Tenn., has written the book 1 & 2 Thessalonians in the Preaching the Word Commentary series (Crossway, April). It is endorsed by Walter C. Kaiser Jr., president emeritus and distinguished professor of Old Testament and ethics at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary; and by Timothy George, dean of Beeson Divinity School and executive editor of Christianity Today.

Dr. Ligon Duncan and RTS recently published an extensive volume chronicling the Life of Samuel Patterson, evangelist and former president of both institutions. How Big Is Your God: The Spiritual Legacy of Sam Patterson, Evangelist (RTS/CA Publishers) by Rebecca Barnes Hobbs (former RTS student), details Patterson’s simple, Christlike, devoted life through his years as a young man, pastor, U.S. Navy chaplain, president of FCA, founder and president of RTS, and lifelong evangelist who introduced hundreds to Christ. Few men have been a more humble servant of God or a stronger influence on others’ lives for the kingdom of God.

CAMPUS EVENTS

Charlotte

Dr. Ligon Duncan, adjunct professor of theology at RTS, and senior minister of First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, Miss., is the guest speaker at the fall banquet, Oct. 27.

He is associate dean and associate professor of systematic theology at the Columbia campus of Erskine Theological Seminary and director of the Institute for Reformed Worship.

Houston

Christ Evangelical Presbyterian Church and RTS-Houston are sponsoring a Marriage Enrichment Weekend led by Dr. Jim Coffield, Oct 9-11.

Jackson

Rev. David Robertson, senior pastor of St. Peter’s Free Church (previously the pulpit of Robert Murray McCheyne), Dundee, Scotland, is the speaker for the missions conference, Sept. 6-8.

Orlando

A Theology of Work is a two-credit course elective to be taught by alumnus Orlando Rivera (M.Div. ’92). The course, co-sponsored by Lifework Leadership/Orlando, will end with an Aug. 20 seminar in the fellowship hall that is free to the general public. For more information, visit www.rts.edu/Orlando/freeseminar.

The public is welcome to attend the President’s Forum Community Lunches in the fellowship hall from noon-1 p.m. Please RSVP at 407-366-9493.

Schedule is as follows:

Aug. 31, Q&A on “Theological Education for the Global Church” with Dr. Richard Pratt, founder/president, Third Millennium Ministries.

Sept. 7, Q&A on “Gospel Leadership” with Rev. Ray Cortese, senior pastor, Seven Rivers Presbyterian Church, Lecanto, Fla.

Sept. 21, Q&A on “Frontiers: Ministering to the Untouched, Unengaged, Unreached” with Dr. Greg Livingstone, pioneer missionary to the Muslim world and founder of Frontiers.

Oct. 5, Q&A on “The Minister’s Role in a Layman’s Life” with Ret. VADM Scott Redd Sr. (senior cabinet member for President George W. Bush), and Q&A on “Notes from a Front Row Seat” with Scott Redd Jr., assistant professor of Old Testament and dean of students.

Nov. 9, Q&A on “Jobs Partnership: Transformation Through the Power of Employment” with Rev. David Outing, executive director of Jobs Partnership of Florida.

In celebration of the King James Bible’s 400th year, The Legacy of the King James Bible by Leland Ryken will be the One School One Book event.

Ryken will lecture on “Fallacies About the King James Bible” on Oct. 17. The second lecture, “Reflections on a Life With the King James Bible” will be held on Oct. 18. Ryken is a professor of English at Wheaton College.

NEW “FAITH FOR LIVING” APP

A free Faith for Living With Mike Milton app for iPhones and Android phones can be downloaded through an app-market search for Faith for Living.

The app includes video from Dr. Milton’s weekly program on NRB TV, a library of his audio sermons, a catalog of his blog entries, samples of his music, and the opportunity to order his CDs and books.
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