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salt & light

2nd Quarter 2011

THE UNIQUE NATURE OF NEWS

TIM LIEN

CLOUDS OF UNKNOWING

Making Sense of the Tornadoes

MUSCLE MEMORY AND THE SUFFERING OF CHRIST

The Christian in Catastrophe

PLUS:

WONDER IN THE BROKENNESS

THE VICTORIOUS CHURCH

FROM SUPERNATURAL TO SEINFELD

US FREE CANADA \$2.50

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of

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Tuscaloosa, Alabama

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FROM THE EDITOR

It seems a long time since our last issue, but a large part of the reason is that many things have happened since then. There was a tornado, big and devastating, one that in many ways turned our world upside down. There was a conference with Doug and Nancy Wilson in which we grounded ourselves again in covenant, family and community. Of course, we worshipped our God every week, keeping our basis in Him and His perfect will. Now school is starting, vacations are done and there is a new *Salt & Light*, written by Riverwood, as we look back at the unforgettable summer.

Our lead article, *The Unique Nature of News*, is by Tim Lien and speaks of the storm in terms of it being *news*, the nature of that news and the news that underlies it. It is a unique take on the disaster and you will find much to consider as you read.

In *Muscle Memory and the Suffering of Christ*, Amanda Brown views the personal tragedy of cancer and the fight against it with a tender look at memory and how the terrible suffering of our Lord comforts us in those times. It is a perceptive view of the Christian response to pain and loss.

Ragan Brock, one of our college students and a summer intern for the tornado relief effort, has contributed *The Victorious Church*. Ragan speaks of the church from a student's perspective and tells a personal story of her consideration of the church and how her perception has changed. You will be touched and inspired by her journey.

Thomas Howard is the son of Tommy and Pat Howard and is a professor at Gordon College in Massachusetts. His article, *Clouds of Unknowing*, details a native son's take on the tornado and particularly how the Christian seeks answers for disaster from God and from the Word.

Bob Thornton continues his astute and Bible-based study of how God's image is on all of creation, even the very smallest part. In *Schrodinger's Cat and the Already and Not Yet*, we will enter the mystery of whether the cat is alive or dead and will better understand our situation as a Christian in two worlds.

Jeff Miller discusses classical and popular art and its value to the Christian in his article, *Wonder in the Brokenness*. His article speaks to the Christian's view of art and why it is valuable, both in discernment and in interaction with the world.

Ben Waller writes *From Supernatural to Seinfeld*, an insightful look at why man not only will have a final judgment, but why it is *necessary* to us as humans and is ultimately personally desirable. It is thought-provoking and important to understand in a world where man is the measure of all things.

Our Finale piece for this issue is by the American poet, Hart Crane, written about 100 years ago. The title is *The Hurricane*, another type of storm, but a powerful and lyrical look at the theology of the storm and God's power demonstrated in it.

THE UNIQUE NATURE OF NEWS

Especially in Disasters

by Tim Lien

Before this all happened, it didn't matter if you had planned an evening to watch *Modern Family*, the Suspenders could interrupt any programming on the mythic whiff of flurries or hard rain. On April 27, The Suspenders had the facts right, though. This time weatherman James Spann (of ABC 33/40) had indisputable video evidence. A big tornado. "This is once-in-a-lifetime. You never want to see this." And then The Suspenders were silent for a seemingly long on-the-air pause. "Please take cover," he said, "take cover now."

The facts were solid and visible. The news? Terrifying.

A couple days later, there was a piece of news that probably began as a working theory, but an assumption, nonetheless. And as most theories, it couldn't be contained; someone had to speak it. Maybe it started on a broken stoop—a comment more than an assertion—maybe more hopeful than factual. But whether based on authority or quickly moving speculation, it got people moving. The neighborhood turned into a marching crowd. Right down University Boulevard. Right through Alberta City. Straight to the fire station. "We heard that there was food and water here," they said to the *Tuscaloosa News*, "and we just started telling people around us, too."



There was no food and water at the fire station. The news was good but the facts were shoddy.

Don't worry. This won't be another article trying to make sense of disasters. I won't ask "Why God, why?" with a clenched fist. This won't be a defense of God and his goodness. He speaks for himself. It's more entertaining to watch the tired atheists begin lobbing ping-pong balls against the aircraft carrier that is the Church—and high fiving each other like

Somalian pirates in a bass boat.

The really acerbic ones use illustrations of tragedy to show that this non-existent God is powerless and downright devious. Huh? Seemingly unaware of the irony, they postulate this nonsense just as their cuticles are growing, their nose hairs are filtering out dust (making good boogers, of course), their wet-tissue thin retinas are processing images that no video card could ever

it's more entertaining to watch the tired atheists begin lobbing ping-pong balls against the aircraft carrier that is the church

duplicate, and their intestinal system is creatively breaking down the horror of that chili-dog. God's approval ratings survive centuries of terrible and horrifying events. So fair warning, my friends, this

article won't be about *that*.

It will be about news. And disasters.

Now to the academic and enlightened mind, "news" just doesn't sound *scientific*:
"The theater is on fire!"

You can't duplicate news in the lab or poke it from all sides. You can't have Dr. Kobayashi work on parts of it in Tokyo while Dr. Johnson at Johns Hopkins concentrates on establishing a cohesive theory of rows 1-20. Science, by necessity, must stand above. It should never be a part of the story. It should use its five God-given senses and assert good and useful observations. "The printed programs in the theater will burst into flame at 451 degrees Fahrenheit." Now you're talking. Dr. Johnson, looks up from his desk with mild curiosity. "Say, Kobayashi, do think there is a different combustible flash point for a program and for a ticket? Surely, they are composed of different papers, inks, and sealants." The hook is set. Dr. Kobayashi busies the lab staff. His published findings are careful, astute, and praised worldwide: all of the various papers found within the theater, indeed, leap into flame at surprisingly different temperatures. Thank you, Drs. Kobayashi and Johnson. (Note: rice paper is not flame-retardant).



So news is not *scientific* in that sense. But it does not mean that it is not factual, reliable, or based upon good intelligence.

"The theater is on fire!"

News is unique because it demands a response

"That is bad," you might think while watching the news crawl. "Where will I go see movies for the next six months," you might silently wonder, "There goes half-priced matinees."

"I wonder what paper stock the movie posters were made of?" Kobayashi remarks to a lab

assistant over a bowl of tuna and rice. "Hopefully, not rice paper!" They laugh.

"The theater is on fire!"

In a stroke of literary luck, you and the good doctors attend the premiere of *Harry Potter and the Never-Ending Vampire Cash Cow*. Like most movies, it is in a theater. It is engrossing (and grossing, 561 million at the time of publication). So engrossing, in fact, that unbeknownst to your butter-smearred face and the good doctors in row 12, Harold Greeley of Topeka has illegally dropped a half-smoked cigarette in the lobby.

"The theater is on fire!"

Just as the Potter kid is shouting *mirabilis wondermunconium*, someone shouts "the theater is on fire!" The lobby is blocked. Shouldn't there be a brightly lit exit somewhere? Oh good, there it is. Oh no, smoke is coming out of there, too.

Now this is news. Not the good kind, but it's definitely news. News is unique because it demands

a response. Real news assumes that it is relevant to the hearer. It's not only relevant, but by virtue of its contents, it encourages the hearer to *act* on its contents. Suddenly, the event has intersected with a person.

In a little essay, "The Message in the Bottle" by Walker Percy, Percy describes how news is a unique, *integrating* form of communication. He describes how it is in a category outside normal pieces of information. He goes on to say that, there are certain conditions where news is significant—even to the scientist who normally cannot concern himself with emotional concerns of the commoner. News becomes news when people do not stand above an event in clinical observation, but are necessarily a part of its message.

"But, the theater is on fire!"

Most of the time, Percy writes, we are in postures of objectivity—properly describing events and objects with analytical precision. Tuscaloosa sits on the banks of the Black Warrior River. True. The year is 1517. No, it isn't. The tornado was classified as an E4, with winds anywhere from 168mph-199mph. A cold-compressed cardstock doesn't burst into flame until 550 degrees Fahrenheit. Kobayashi cannot be reached for comment. "Thank you for calling; he is at the theater," his daughter says.

"No, really, the theater is on fire!"

Percy argues that, in a way, all earthlings should have the posture of a "castaway," someone who is on



an island—someone who does not know the whole context of matter, existence, belief, and knowledge—and must be a *part* of the proceedings, not above it. Any outside missive just might be important, because it has bearing on their predicament. News doesn't just want you to assess its validity. It pushes for some action in response to its claims. Some news might be handy, useful—life-giving, even.

"Hey, there! Why are you people still here?!"

As doctors Kobayashi and Johnson begin to succumb to the first stage of smoke inhalation, a bedraggled usher stumbles in and coughs, "There is another exit behind those framed movie posters. It's narrow, but it goes straight to the back parking lot." It doesn't matter that the usher makes minimum wage or that currently his uniform does not comply with the employee handbook. It doesn't matter that

those movie posters are of the rare Art Deco type, printed on rice paper, no less.

The excellent doctors are a part of the story. Their responsible work in their field should be rightly praised, but not too much. News can't be news if it

**Tuscaloosa
was in a
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before
April 27
It took a
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for us to
see it**

doesn't apply to you.

“Whew, he was right.” Parking lots never looked so good.

The truth about disasters: sometimes you see them, sometimes you don't. Sometimes you know the British are coming and sometimes you hear the F-14 overhead after it is already a mile away and its payload has abstractly rearranged your bunker in the *avant garde* modern style. Some more truth about disasters: Tuscaloosa was in a state of disaster before April 27. It took a tornado for us to see it,

though.

Oh no, don't say that again: “The theater is on fire!”

Attention theater-goers: “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.”

And the news? It's just plain good. 

Tim Lien is the Pastor of Riverwood Presbyterian Church. You may contact him at tlien@riverwoodchurch.org.

what if squeezing your hands
tighter and tighter
except
did nothing
accentuate a growing helplessness?
like when my brother
pushed us around on the merry-go-round
the greater force peeling, pulling, sucking
hands and body
and fear catching me suddenly
knowing that any second
effort would have no power
oh you should have heard the screaming
slowing and re-grasping then merriment
at what? relief? thrill?
or resumption of control.

“Effort”
Timothy Lien

MUSCLE MEMORY AND THE SUFFERING OF CHRIST

The Christian in Catastrophe

by Amanda Brown

Memories are a gift and a burden. They comfort us. They chastise us. They empower us. They limit us. And in many ways, they define us. Watershed moments, like holding our children for the first time or saying goodbye to a friend for the last time, give us milestones by which to measure our lives. Little moments, like sitting on the porch at dusk or eating cereal together in the mornings, help us bring order to our days and continuity to a world where things are always changing. Memories tie us together in an almost mystical way. They are fragile, precious things that we pass back and forth amongst ourselves in a shared ritual that stretches across time and cultures.

In recent months I have thought a good deal about memories, particularly in the face of loss and change. As I have wrestled with upheavals in my own life, I have also witnessed those around me facing the loss of children, the deterioration of marriages, and the destruction of homes and all that is familiar in the path of a tornado. I have wondered what place memory holds in finding a new normal after life changes suddenly and sometimes catastrophically.

Grief is so often focused on

what has been lost or may be lost in the future, but I have come to think that it also means mourning the past because it forces us to reconfigure our memories. Although the past is set and cannot be literally changed, memories can be. Sweet memories may suddenly become bitter because those we share them with are gone, either physically or emotionally. Memories shared with others are unique, intimate, comforting. How many times have we smiled or wept at a mere memory that suddenly comes to mind? What happens to those memories if the people we share them with no longer hold them as precious or are no longer here to keep them with us? If we lose those memories, we fear we will also lose our moorings, our ties to a past we thought we knew.

I am only comforted by the knowledge that we have a God that knew us before the beginning of time, ordains each day of our lives, lives each minute with us, and holds our memories in His infinite omnipotence and mercy. I cannot say that it relieves the pain of loss, but it is undoubtedly the only place to find the grace, the strength, and the joy in our memories, even when those memories threaten mutiny and sting us with regret.

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I believe that God planned and uses memories as a powerful gift that allows us to cope

But the power of memory lies not only in those of our conscious minds. It is our muscle memory – those memories held deep in our subconscious, in our sinews and physical selves – that often strengthens and steers us. These muscle memories are so ordinary, so repetitive, that they hardly seem like memories at all. More than thirty years after I first learned it, I can still sit down at the piano and play the theme from “Ice Castles” without looking at the keys, without conscious thinking. I could not tell you the notes or chords that I am supposed to play next and yet the song flows out, unbidden. I must have played that song so many times as a child that it became part of me. How many memories are like that? How many memories are simply parts of the fabric of who we are? I believe that God planned and uses these as a powerful gift that allows us to cope, to go on, even when we find ourselves without strength, joy or faith.

Our family faced the darkest moment of our lives almost a year ago when my husband Warren was diagnosed with a brain tumor. We went from watching our son run in a cross-country meet on a Thursday night to knowing that our lives had utterly and inalterably changed by Friday afternoon. By Monday night, we were in the hospital trying to regroup after three days of no sleep and an invasive brain biopsy, all the while being chased by the hounds of the future. When Warren awoke from the biopsy unable to talk or chew properly, our thin

thread of hope seemed to disintegrate into a million little pieces.

I remember going back that night alone to the hotel room, sitting on the bed, and thinking that I could not do it. I could not wake up and face it again. I could not hold the burden of sadness. I could not even pray. My faith was inadequate. My body was spent. My strength was non-existent. I got up to brush my teeth because I did not know what else to do when a single sentence came into my mind – “This is why Christ suffered and died.” Nothing else was necessary. This was a truth I knew, this was what my parents taught me from the time I could walk or talk. Christ died to save us from our sins, to give us eternal life, to reconcile us with a holy and perfect God. This was my *covenant* muscle memory – acquired from years of watching my parents live the gospel, from years of hearing the words from the pulpit, and from years of living with our covenant family. When my mind and will and strength failed utterly, I was given this truth, simple and sweet.

But for the first time, the very first time, I understood that other dimension of why God chose the cross and not some other way. His reconciliation involved suffering, loss, sadness, regret, pain, and separation. In that act, we were given the memories of Christ. Not just a story to hold on to, but His actual memory, worked into the fabric of our beings. Isaiah 53 tells us that Jesus was a man of sorrows. “He was

A broken Christ who knew my brokenness was the only comfort

despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.” He does not merely understand our grief, he lived it. He bore our grief, this very grief. A broken Christ who *knew* my brokenness was the only comfort in that moment of knee-buckling despair. How desperately alone we would have felt if we had a savior who had only known glory and triumph and not bone-wearing sadness and angst.

We have experienced great mercy in the months since Warren's diagnosis, but our family's journey with cancer is not yet over. We are both better and worse for the wear. But at the end of the day, what will I tell my boys who are walking the road with us? I think I will tell them, first of all, to make memories. Be intentional in it. Then cherish those memories, protect them, share them, savor them. Understand that there is sweet in the bittersweet, so don't begrudge it when those memories cause you to cry as well as smile. Next, make muscle memories. Learning truth, hearing truth, reviewing truth may seem dry and repetitive at the time, but it is what moves our fingers over the keys of a piano when we can no longer even hum the tune. And finally, don't forget that when we became children of God, we became heirs of the Cross. Not just its triumph, but its pain and sorrow. It is what made our high priest the One who can sympathize with our weakness and yet still be God. Through it, He has given us the ultimate muscle memory. ¶

Amanda Brown is a member of Riverwood Presbyterian Church. You may contact her at aespy@bama.ua.edu.

INTERACT WITH CULTURE



RIVERWOOD BOOK TABLE

The Riverwood Book Table is located in the church narthex. Here the church provides books of interest to our members. These volumes include a wide range of subjects such as theology, biography, history, fiction and commentary. While many of these books are not classic “Presbyterian” texts, they have been found to be informative, helpful and are often classics. If one interests you, pick it up and read it. There is a chest on the table for donations to this ministry and they are much appreciated. Whether you contribute or not, we do ask that, when you pick up a book, you make a serious effort to read it. We believe that you and other Riverwood members will benefit from this cultural interaction.

THE VICTORIOUS CHURCH

Seeking Vision and Commitment in the Church

by Ragan Brock

As a college student, my perception of the Church goes something like this; first of all, I base all my assumptions on what I see from the back row every Sunday morning. I stroll in about 10 minutes late to the 11:00 service, and afterwards promptly walk out the door, only speaking to the few people I know who stand as obstacles between myself and the exit. I don't go to Sunday school, I don't volunteer with the youth group or nursery, I don't tithe, and I've never even introduced myself to the pastor. I go eat lunch with my friends, and I call Mom and Dad in the afternoon to tell them about the "awesome sermon" I heard that morning. I am enthusiastic about the church that I "love" when on the phone, but after I hang up, I go sit by the pool with a book and don't even think about the Church again until a week later. The next Saturday night I decide to leave the bar early (as in, 2am instead of 4am) so that I can get a few hours of sleep before I stumble into the church service during the pastoral prayer and sit on the back row next to my buddy. This scenario is repeated week after week, year after year. While there, I read in the bulletin about programs, parties, Bible studies, fellowship groups, but I don't make any steps toward involvement because I am way too busy. I mean seriously, how many of these church people really know what it's like to be a college student in the 21st century? I have no spare time at all.

This picture I have painted of involvement in a local church is generous. For many students, their involvement is significantly less. If they even attend Sunday services, they hop from church to church with no consideration of theology. Where they attend usually depends on where their friends are, proximity to campus, and of course...the later the service the better. Sleep is far more important than being alert and awake on Sunday morning.

This is the story of my church involvement for the first two years of my college life. But the April 27th tornado changed this completely. I was hired by Riverwood to be an intern for the summer, and I can honestly say that my perspective of the Church will never be the same again. Since I began this work, I have been endlessly frustrated because I have felt as if I am doing a favor to this Church by working here, and that no one really cares or appreciates me. I have had the shallow, stupid perspective that I am the only one who cares about mercy ministry, and I am now an expert on how the Church should go about spreading the gospel.

**Seriously,
how many of these
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it's like to be a
college student
in the 21st
century?**

This immature perspective and stubborn pride was shot down, ripped to shreds, and burned alive right in front of my eyes after a meeting with the Session one evening recently. I discovered that I am young, ignorant, and severely off-course when it

comes to my view of the Church and its purpose on earth. I especially discovered this after being yelled at, cried over, and lectured to by Tim Lien the following morning as he told the interns what we had, or should have, learned. After this, I have come to the same humbling conclusion as John Newton: I am a great sinner, and Christ is a great Savior.

In my personal devotion this week (and I'm not trying to fool anyone by this statement, I only had one devotion and it was at 10:30 the night before I wrote this), I read the words to the hymn "The Church's One Foundation" and I was struck by the power and the beauty of the Church at work here on earth. In the first verse it says:

*From Heaven He came
and sought her,
to be His holy bride;
With His own blood
He bought her and
for her life He died.*

Wow. Jesus left heaven and came to earth so that He could die, die for the Church and more specifically and personally, for the members of Riverwood Presbyterian Church. And I'm mad that I don't get enough attention, or that I don't think the Church is doing mercy ministry properly? How blind and foolish.

Not only did Jesus die for the Church, but He chose her to be His perfect bride. In Ephesians 5 Paul compares the relationship between Christ and the church to the relationship between a bridegroom and his bride: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for

her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated

his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church." So we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. Paul continues: "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church."

Just as in marriage two people are joined together and become one person, Christ does the same with His Church. When God looks down from heaven at Riverwood Presbyterian Church, He doesn't see a building full of

sinners who are burdened down with pain and sorrow: He sees His only Son. Why? Because there is no separation; they are one person.

The great hymn continues like this:

*Mid toil and tribulation,
and tumult of her war,
She waits the consummation
of peace forevermore;
Till, with the vision glorious,
her longing eyes are blest,
And the great church victorious
shall be the church at rest.*

**B e c a u s e
R i v e r w o o d
P r e s b y t e r i a n
C h u r c h
i s t h e b r i d e
o f J e s u s
C h r i s t ,
s h e i s
v i c t o r i o u s ,
n o m a t t e r
w h e r e w e
f a i l**

What a thrilling verse. Because Riverwood Presbyterian Church is the bride of Jesus Christ, she is victorious, no matter where we fail. And someday she will be at perfect rest and union with her Maker. Until then, we cry with the saints throughout the ages saying, “How long, O Lord?”

I am thankful for the true privilege of working at Riverwood this summer. I am thankful that I was allowed to spend time getting to know the staff and Session of this Church. I am thankful that I now have real relationships with other members. And I am thankful to God that He brought me down from my lofty perspective of all-knowing college student, and revealed to me that I am more sinful than I can ever imagine. But, through Christ, I am more loved and accepted than I ever dared dream. ☩

Until then, we cry
with the saints,
“How long,
O Lord?”

Ragan Brock is a junior at the University of Alabama, majoring in English. She worked as a Riverwood tornado relief intern during the Summer 2011 and is working as an intern with the Riverwood youth group during the Fall semester. After college she hopes to be in full time ministry and is thankful for the experience she is gaining right now. She is open to questions, comments, and criticisms. You may email her at ragan.brock@gmail.com.

INTERACT WITH CULTURE



RIVERWOOD MOVIE NIGHTS

Movies are important purveyors of ideas and culture and are a part of the 21st Century canon. At irregular intervals, Riverwood will have a Movie Night on Sunday evenings. We will screen a movie that is of interest to the Christian community and provide an opportunity to discuss it. Join us for profitable Christian interaction with the questions and ideas provided by movies.

*Joyeux
Noel*

*Sweet
Land*

CLOUDS OF UNKNOWING

Making Sense of the Tornadoes

by Thomas Albert Howard

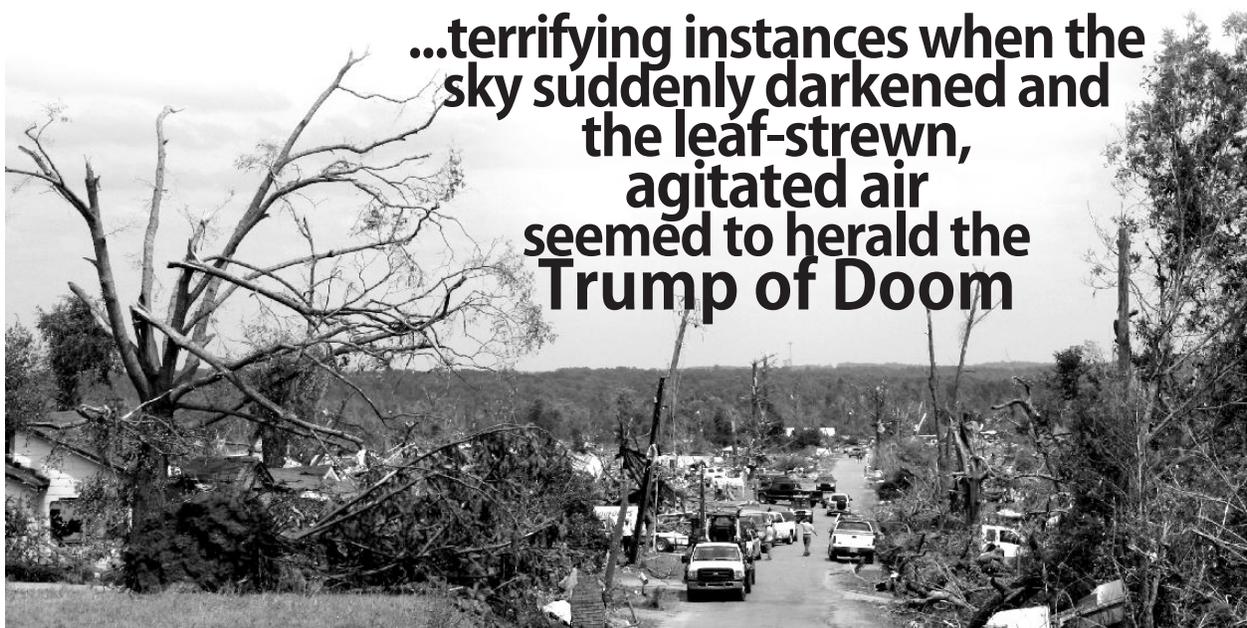
Growing up in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, one knew that tornadoes weren't just things that happened to other people. This disquieting knowledge came in the form of regular tornado drills held at school. Children would be told to leave their belongings at their desks and file quickly into the hall, away from classroom windows. There we would sit, side by side, placing our arms behind our necks and touching our chins to raised knees. This way, the boys liked to joke, if an actual twister hit we were ready to say our prayers and kiss our asses goodbye.

While I recall a couple of terrifying instances when the sky suddenly darkened and the leaf-strewn, agitated air seemed to herald the Trump of Doom, no actual tornadoes struck my school—or my home,

where the linen closet or bathtub served, in my parents' judgment, as the refuge of last resort.

Those hit by the recent tornadoes in Tuscaloosa and across the South and Midwest will not have the luxury of remembering only close calls. They have to reckon with the thing itself: in places, a more-than-half-mile-wide path of complete destruction. "I've never seen devastation like this," President Barack Obama said during his visit to my hometown. Looking at the magnitude of the devastation in Tuscaloosa or in Joplin, Missouri, one senses what it must have felt like to emerge from the rubble of a bombed German city at the end of World War II.

Unlike last year's oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico



Tuscaloosa and the South and Midwest will recover... Even so, the agony and the wormwood will endure

(where Tuscaloosans like to vacation), this tragedy comes not from the stupidity of man, but from the hand of nature. And unlike hurricanes, which arrive gradually and affect a wide area, tornadoes are localized, sudden, and furious. For that reason, I've often thought they raise questions of theodicy in a particularly acute manner. Why was my house leveled, while my neighbor's stands? Why did the tornado's path come down Fifteenth Street and not Lurleen Wallace Boulevard? Why did the Angel of Death visit here and not there, now and not then?

Tuscaloosa and other parts of the South and Midwest will recover, although it will take months or even years. Even so, the agony and the wormwood will endure. The top

floor of my late grandmother's house was lopped off as if from a single, giant ax blow. My aunt and uncle lost their garage and every tree in their yard. All that remains of the drugstore my mom used to schlep me to when I was young are its concrete foundations. The collapsed remnants of several churches had to be bulldozed. But more important than bricks and



mortar are the lives lost: 236 in Alabama alone, 329 across the South, and hundreds more dead or missing in Missouri. Many families were left with an empty bedroom or an unfilled chair at dinner.

As they have done in other times of calamity, many turned to Scripture to make sense of it all. Though the Bible Belt can yield a narrow Biblicism, it has also enriched Christian understanding in its tradition of storytelling, and in its insistence that you can never wrestle with God enough if it's done in the spirit of an honest lover's quarrel. Flannery O'Connor recognized this well in her remarkable essay "The Catholic Novelist in the Protestant South": "The Hebrew genius for making the absolute concrete has conditioned the Southerner's way of looking at things. That is one of the reasons why the South is a storytelling section....

Our response to life is different if we have been taught only a definition of faith than if we have trembled with Abraham as he held the knife over Isaac."

On the first Sunday after the tornadoes hit, my parents' church turned not to the story of Abraham but to the book of Job. "What did you do, Job? What did you do, Tuscaloosa?" the pastor Tim Lien asked, before

...people of good will stand to learn something from this struggle – something about our shared fragility and about the all-too-human art of being a wounded lover of “th’ Almightye”

criticizing the well-intentioned but misguided questions offered by Job's friends. The “whys” of life's tragedies will often remain, he went on, and we must allow them to dangle in all their vexing inscrutability. Often the best we can do is try to expose the bad answers and let the questions themselves wean us from disordered affections.

The “whys” will certainly linger. Often they will be channeled into anguished, grief-stricken prayers. While prayer can be “exalted manna, gladness of the best,” as George Herbert wrote in his poem “Prayer,” they can also be “the Christian plummet sounding heav'n and earth / Engine against th' Almightye,” as he put it in the same poem. A common practice in many Baptist churches is “testimony time”—a time when anyone, “led by the Spirit,” can stand up and indicate how God is speaking to them. In one especially vivid moment from my childhood, I recall one man, whose daughter had recently died, standing up and, expressionlessly, quoting Job 13:15 to the congregation—“Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him”—before sitting down again.

Many people in my hometown and across the middle of the country share this sentiment in the aftermath of these tornadoes. The restoration of faith, hope, and love will come in due time. But the path from here to there will not pass through dry Leibnizian formulas about the necessity of things as they are,

but through an anguished, Bible-invoking caterwauling about the way things ought to be. This caterwauling might at times appear maudlin, ill-formed, or uncouth, as individuals struggle to fit their personal and family tragedies into the greater Divine Comedy of redemption. Even so, Catholics, Protestants, and all people of good will stand to learn something from this struggle—something about our shared fragility and about the all-too-human art of being a wounded lover of “th' Almightye.” ¶

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SCHRODINGER'S CAT & THE ALREADY AND THE NOT YET

The Image of God and Quantum Physics

by Robert Thornton

If one has left this entire system to itself for an hour, one would say that the cat still lives if meanwhile no atom has decayed. The psi-function [the probability of finding the cat in one state or the other] of the entire system would express this by having in it the living and dead cat (pardon the expression) mixed or smeared out in equal parts.

~Erwin Schrödinger

...this dual citizenship that we believers enjoy causes us to groan for glory, a groaning that is both soothing and intensified by the indwelling Spirit, who functions as an engagement ring assuring us of the future consummation of our union with our glorified Bridegroom.

~from **Dual Citizens**

Jason Stellman

This is the third in a series of articles on quantum mechanics and Christianity. Like the two previous articles this one addresses an aspect of the counterintuitive reality of quantum mechanics and how it reflects God's character.

I imagine that physics department heads love theoretical physicists. Unlike their experimental brethren who consume millions of dollars of university department budgets with colliders, super colliders and particle accelerators in their investigation of subatomic particles, theoretical physicists only engage in thought

experiments. Net cost? Zero. OK, maybe a couple of hundred dollars for blackboards and chalk.

“What's a thought experiment,” you ask. Simply put, a thought experiment is a mental exercise that considers a principle. According to Wikipedia the common goal of all thought experiments is “to explore the potential consequences of the principle in question.” They are exercises that can or cannot be performed in reality. Many times they are used when actual experiments cannot be performed. For example, Einstein used a thought experiment of what it would be like to run alongside a beam of light in order to explore his Theory of Relativity. There are a variety of uses of thought experiments. They can refute the status quo, solve problems, generate

new ideas, support decision making, and predict future events.

Thought experiments are carried out in several disciplines including philosophy, law, mathematics and, of course, physics. Within the area of physics probably the most famous thought experiment is entitled Schrödinger's Cat.

**As Christians
we live under
a tension
of carrying
out a spirit-
empowered
ministry
and of waiting**

Schrödinger's Cat was the brainchild of Erwin Schrödinger, a Viennese physicist, considered to be one of the fathers of quantum mechanics. Schrödinger became known for the Schrödinger equation, a mathematical description of the so-

called quantum state of particles. For example, it describes the probability of the location of an electron within a hydrogen atom. In 1933, Schrödinger won the Nobel Prize in physics for his work.

Albert Einstein, a big opponent of quantum mechanics, wrote a paper in 1935 along with two colleagues – Podolsky and Rosen – as a criticism of one aspect of quantum mechanics called quantum entanglement. The paper became famous as the EPR paradox.

Quantum entanglement, simply put, describes a situation where two particles share a quantum state, which is "a given direction and energy, or some other given condition." The strangeness comes when the two particles are separated. If the direction and energy of one of the particles changes, the direction and energy of the other particle instantaneously changes regardless of the distance separating the two. So, if the information about one particle is known, you immediately know the same information about the other without measuring it.

The counterintuitiveness of quantum entanglement prompted Schrödinger, who was convinced that quantum mechanics was incomplete, to correspond with Einstein. In that exchange of letters Schrödinger came up with a thought experiment to further show the strangeness of quantum mechanics – Schrödinger's Cat.

The traditional, or Copenhagen, interpretation of quantum mechanics states that a system collapses or folds into a specific state only when it is measured. Otherwise, it exists in two states

simultaneously.

Practically speaking, this is illustrated by the double slit experiment. In the experiment electrons, which are particles, are shot at a screen. But first they must pass through a barrier with two closely placed slits.

When they strike the screen they form an interference pattern (a series of light and dark bands), the property of waves. It is only when a detector is placed behind one slit or another do the electrons act like particles and pass through one slit or another and form two bands – the property of particles.

So, according to the Copenhagen interpretation prior to being measured by the detector, an electron, acting like a wave, passes through both slits simultaneously.

In the Schrödinger's Cat thought experiment, Schrödinger proposed a situation where a cat is placed in a box which is then closed. Inside the box, along with the cat, is a Rube Goldberg type apparatus consisting of a radioactive material that decays at one particle per hour, a Geiger counter, a hammer and a vial of poison. When a particle decays the Geiger counter detects the decay and triggers a device that drops the hammer onto the vial thus breaking it and releasing the poison which kills the cat.

There is a 50-50 chance that a particle will decay each hour setting off the mechanism and the cat will be found dead when the box is opened. According to the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics, the cat, while sealed in the box, is simultaneously alive and dead and only becomes

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I'm saved!
But, wait!
How can this be?
You're still
in the water**

one or the other when the box is opened and the cat is observed.

Schrödinger expressed it this way in his correspondence: If one has left this entire system to itself for an hour, one would say that the cat still lives if meanwhile no atom has decayed. The psi-function [the probability of finding the cat in one state or the other] of the entire system would express this by having in it the living and dead cat (pardon the expression) mixed or smeared out in equal parts.

Of course the idea of the thought experiment was to illustrate the paradoxical nature and out-and-out weirdness of quantum mechanics.

At the heart of this weirdness is a certain tension. The scientists know that mathematically it is correct. No one will dispute this. However, the counterintuitiveness of quantum mechanics, especially related to particles being in two states at the same time, engenders a level of nervousness in the world of theoretical physics.

Quantum mechanics is not the only discipline that fosters tension over a simultaneous existence. Within the Reformed Faith there is a similar tension that occurs in the believer's life. Like the electron that goes through two slits simultaneously, the believer lives in a world described as "already and not yet."

As Christians we are, in one sense, already in the Kingdom of God and in another sense, not yet completely there. So, we live under a tension of carrying out a spirit-empowered ministry and of waiting.

Our waiting is a forward look toward a future of greater blessing, a fullness that is yet to come. Paul

describes this in I Corinthians when he says "I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge—even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you—so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Don't get me wrong. I am not saying that our salvation is somehow incomplete, or that we must do some work in order to obtain salvation. Far from it. Paul tells us in Titus 3: "But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through

Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life."

Perhaps a practical illustration is in order at this point. Let's look at the example of the Coast Guard Rescue Swimmers. These are the brave men and women who jump from helicopters into raging seas to rescue drowning mariners. They are the Coast Guard equivalent of the Navy SEAL, Army Ranger, or Air Force Pararescueman. Their training is just as grueling as evidenced by the extremely high

attrition rate – over fifty percent. In fact there are only about three hundred swimmers service-wide. In short, they are the best of the best at what they do.

Now, picture, if you will, that you are a boater on the Gulf out for an afternoon of fun and fishing. Suddenly, a severe storm comes up. The sky

Perhaps the most glaring aspect of the already and the not yet for the believer is in the area of freedom from sin

becomes the color of granite. Wind and rain sting your face like wasps. Waves as high as two-story houses surround you. Your boat begins to founder. You radio the Coast Guard.

Then the unthinkable happens. You find yourself in the water holding onto a piece of debris that five minutes ago was part of your boat, tossed by angry waves and being pulled out to the open sea with absolutely no hope of swimming to shore. Basically, you are minutes from drowning.

But, suddenly, you hear a strange whup-whup-whup sound and from the clouds a white and orange Coast Guard helicopter materializes just above you. Then, a Coast Guard Rescue Swimmer plunges into the raging waters.

Now, with your knowledge of Coast Guard rescue swimmers, how would you, the drowning man or woman, respond?

I proffer that most reasonable people would immediately think, I'm saved! And, I think you would agree. But, wait. How can this be? You're still in the water. The waves are raging about you. And, you're still swallowing way too much salt water.

The answer is that, because of the rescue swimmer's reputation, you know it is a foregone conclusion that you are saved. It is only a matter of time that you'll be on dry land, safe and warm.

This is how you should think of your salvation within the context of the already and the not yet. Like the drowning victim in the waters with the rescue swimmer, our hope is securely founded in the finished work of Christ. And yet, like the confident expectation of a helicopter ride to dry land and

safety, there is a forward look toward "the day of our Lord Jesus Christ."

There is even more scriptural support for the already and not yet. First, on the subject of salvation we see the immediacy of our deliverance in Ephesians 2, "For by grace you have been saved through faith.

And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."

And again in II Corinthians 6:1-2: "Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For he says, 'In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you.' Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation."

Regarding the not yet we see that Romans 13:11 says, "Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed." And again in Hebrews 9:27-28 it says: "And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him."

There is no doubt. We are saved by grace the moment we are called to come to Christ, however, there is a fuller measure of salvation which we will receive when Christ comes again.

Regarding our adoption as sons and daughters of God we can, perhaps, see a clearer picture of the already and the not yet at work. Think of yourself as a child in an orphanage who is suddenly and undeservedly adopted by Bill Gates, the richest man

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in the word. As he signs the papers you officially become the child of a virtual modern day king even though you are still physically in the orphanage sitting in your austere room wearing your secondhand clothing.

Like the beginning of earthly adoption, the already of our heavenly adoption is obvious from scripture. Galatians 4:4-6 says: "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons." And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"

Again we read in Romans 8:15-16: "For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!' The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,..."

Yet, as in the example of the earthly child who's just been adopted and looks forward to living in a mansion, wearing the finest clothes, eating the finest foods, and receiving the finest education, we look forward to our full inheritance. Romans 8:23 says, "And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies."

Perhaps the most glaring aspect of the already and the not yet for the believer is in the area of freedom from sin. As Christians we know that we are forgiven, that Christ's work on the cross has forever taken away the curse of sin. Yet, if we are truthful, we know that, although forgiven, we still sin. On the other hand, as Christians, sin has no hold on us. We are daily dying to sin.

An example of the "already" of our freedom from sin is found in Colossians 1:13-14 in which Paul declares, "He has delivered us from the domain of

darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."

Again in Romans 6:1-2, Paul states, "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?"

But, our struggle with sin is real and is acknowledged in scripture. We see the "not yet" in our spiritual lives and, as the Apostle John put it succinctly in 1 John 1:8, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

We can see from scripture that we do indeed live in the tension of the already and not yet. In a sense, we live now like Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, and Jacob did while awaiting God's promise of a heavenly city as stated in Hebrews 11, those who "died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth" and, for whom, "God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city."

What can we say then? We are indeed like Schrödinger's cat. We live in a spiritual quantum world, a closed box if you will, simultaneously dead and alive in this present age. We are dead to sin, yet alive in Christ, and we possess our salvation, but not completely. Because of this, Paul states that we "see through a glass, darkly." And when Christ comes again, we will see him "face-to-face." Meanwhile, we will continue to long for that future Kingdom, experience that tension between the already and the not yet until he comes.

Come quickly, Lord Jesus! 

Dr. Robert Thornton is an elder of Riverwood Presbyterian Church. You may contact him at rthorn3423@comcast.net.

WONDER IN THE

BROKENNESS

Finding God In A World That Is Not Our Home

by Jeff Miller

One of the first things that comes to people's attention when they come to a Reformed church from other stripes of Christianity is that people seem to be more free with regard to lifestyle choices. An area of this that gets a lot of attention is media and art. At one time in my past, I was in a tradition that shunned cinema, theater and many types of music and literature. It supposedly led to sensuality and temptation. The creators of it were definitely NOT Christian and therefore much discernment should be employed to be sure all external ideas were at least congruent with Christ, if not in total agreement. It became much easier to just ban movies altogether and limit other areas to 'Christian only.' As with any legalism, there were always gray, inexplicable areas such as 'Classical' music and literature and there was a real quandary when Christian rock music came on the scene, but that's another story. Legalism is always a never-ending slippery slope toward death.

So, it begs the question, why DO we not only allow, but encourage people in our church community to involve themselves with the arts and media? (Hat tip: Some of the following is springing off of ideas borrowed from my friend Greg

Wilbur whose ideas you can check out at: gregwilbur.wordpress.com.)

First, God has put us on his Earth for His glory. Unbelievers show His Glory in that, among other things, the 'good' works that they do are only done by His issuance of common grace to all people. In relating to the arts, creators show attributes of God, whether consciously or not. The very act of creating is a reflection of God's character. "In the beginning, God created..." That does not speak to the content of the creation, however. If a film shows the depravity of man, it is in agreement with Scripture. If a film shows redemption or sacrifice, it shows us an attribute of God and serves as a reminder of Christ. Goodness, kindness, patience, etc, are all obvious signposts. This is not to say that we

shouldn't be discerning about what we choose to let in - we certainly should. If we find that we are watching a movie with excitement because we heard there was a steamy scene in it, we might have a sin issue with lust cropping up in our heart. This is why there's no reason for Christians to watch

Creators show attributes of God, whether consciously or not...The very act of creating is a reflection, of God's character

pornographic film, for instance. We know that mankind is depraved and selfish. We know that porn promises things which it cannot deliver. The only thing porn can do is leave you desolate, dissatisfied, and dumbfounded at your own momentary stupidity.

Next, as believers, we are the only ones who can apply a Biblical worldview to a particular work or idea. This seems self-evident, but we usually go about this in reverse. We often think as the world does. Though we don't necessarily use the words, we often act as if the creation affects the word/action of the Creator Himself. When Nietzsche says that God is dead, his idea doesn't affect God's existence nor the validity of His Word. It's logical that since ideas like that appeal to the evil nature in man, many are willing to accept things as truth on face value. For the believer, however, we take what we

know and are learning about God and the Gospel and apply those precepts to ideas/items with which we come in contact and pose questions about the creation's veracity and validity based upon Scriptural principles, rather than personal desire, sheer emotion or current cultural belief. We bring questions such as: "What does the Bible say about murder, injustice, racism, classism, infidelity, peace, mercy, love, endurance, devotion, etc.?" Based on what the Bible says and teaches, do we find any truth, beauty, and transcendence in what is presented or is there only a reminder of the darkness and death to be found without God? These are a few of the questions we find necessary to ask about any

subject with which we are involved. We ask questions such as these because we want to discover reflections of God's character and see examples of His truth in this broken world.

Third, we wish to understand the world around us so that we can discuss and reason with those around us, both in and outside the body of believers, in a cogent manner. Sometimes it is as important to understand why you disagree with something as it is to understand why you agree with something else. This is one reason that we often have discussions in our community based around movies and books with which we largely disagree. It helps to be able to discuss and debate ideas in a civil, family environment where the foundational beliefs are the same – particularly if you find yourself likely to have to discuss these things outside the family, as it were, at a later time.

The larger problem that comes from all of this is in the less thought-out, more consumable art, music, film, and writing so prolific today. This is true in the specifically 'Christian' arena as well as the rest of the world's media. So much of what is produced is simply for public consumption and economic profitability. This is not new, obviously. Publishers, songwriters, performers, authors, agents, attorneys, licensing agents, visual artists, etc, all want to be paid, and with good right, for their time investment and production. So the best way to keep the bucks rolling in, particularly for the

**W h e n
Nietzsche
says that
God is dead,
his idea
doesn't
a f f e c t
G o d ' s
existence
n o r . t h e
v a l i d i t y
o f H i s W o r d**

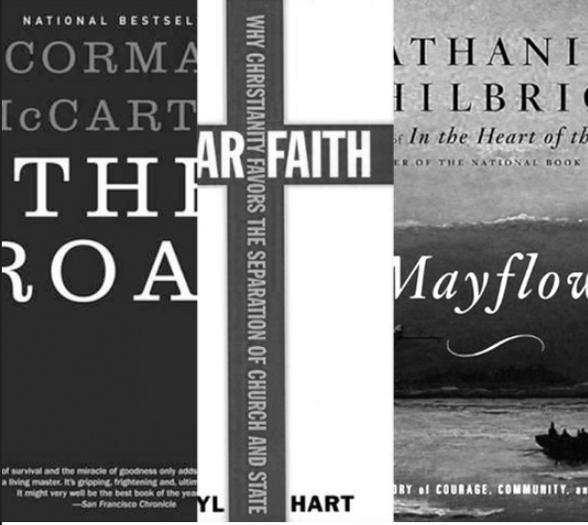
ancillary people involved in the process, is to produce more and more. Combined with the explosion in availability with radio, television and internet, the result has been a complementary explosion of material for consumption in bite-size format. The songs must be less than 4 minutes, and usually very repetitive so that the 'hook factor' is great. The book must not be so thick as to drive print costs up and appear daunting to the consumer. Instead of presenting logical, thorough arguments, give us 'Seven Easy Steps to Success.' These are typical of the "oversight of critical process" prevalent in the West today. There is an occasional glimpse of something profound, but these are largely trite or clever or entertaining and have little value or impact on our lives. While they may be completely innocuous, there is a temptation to spend our time only with those items which are so easy and convenient to the point of being ubiquitous, that we eschew items which would likely stimulate more ideas and even cause more reflection upon God.

Getting involved in arts and media is a strange, beautiful thing. We are to be sharpening ourselves and each other through His Word so that in the midst of a world which is not our home, we sift through rubbish and find glimpses of Him which remind us of who He is, what He has done and gives us hope of our eternal home at the end of our journey.

Soli Deo Gloria II

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INTERACT WITH CULTURE



RIVERWOOD BOOK GROUP

This group meets each Monday evening at 7:00 pm in the Church library to discuss books we have chosen to read. We cover a wide range of theology, fiction, history and commentary, looking at all subjects through the lens of the Gospel and “sharpening each other” in our interaction. If you enjoy books, Christian fellowship and good coffee, please join us. All are invited. Upcoming selections include *Mayflower* by Nathaniel Philbrick, *Secular Faith* by Darryl Hart, and *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy.

FROM SUPERNATURAL TO SEINFELD

The Reality and Need for a Universal Judgment Day

by Ben Waller

According to a man named Harold Camping, the world was supposed to end on May 21, 2011. Being absolutely convinced, he and his followers went to great lengths to get this message to their friends, family, and the rest of the world. Clearly, they were wrong. Many atheists and skeptics across the nation laughed, derided and ridiculed Mr. Camping and his followers. Many Christians across the nation sighed, remembering Jesus' words in Matthew 24:36 that “concerning that day and the hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.” This public, broadcasted failure must have been very disheartening for Mr. Camping. I'm sure it was also very frustrating for many Christians, as now the idea of a universal Judgment Day may seem to many people a little more far-fetched and absurd than it did before May 21.

However, I would like to attempt to address the skepticism that may exist in the hearts of many people. I would like to prove to you that the idea of a universal Judgment Day, a day where all of the deeds of men are exposed and judged, may not be as unreasonable as you think. In fact, though it's not clear to you, it may be something you might actually desire.

This year I began watching a popular television

the idea of a universal Judgment Day...may not be as unreasonable as you think... and may be something you might actually desire

series called “Supernatural.” The show is based on the life of two fictitious



brothers, Sam and Dean Winchester, and their adventures as “hunters”—people who travel the country and kill evil supernatural beings such as vampires, werewolves, ghosts/spirits, demons, and many others. In an episode of Season 1, Sam begins to have dreams and visions of people dying. These visions all too quickly become a reality. Dean, at first doubtful of these visions, is troubled when he sees that they do become true and he and Sam rush to stop the next forecasted death from happening.

When trying to find the murderer, the brothers expect a demon or a supernatural being to be the cause of the death. However, what they find is even more disturbing. Sam sees a vision of a young man named Max who has telekinesis (the supernatural ability to move objects with the mind) sending a knife through his mother's forehead. We find out that Max as a child was abused by his stepfather and his uncle. Unfortunately, his mother had always been there, seeing the abuse happen but never doing anything to stop it and never telling anyone. Max had recently discovered his telekinesis and was using it to have revenge on his family for what they had done to him as a child.

Dean's instinct is just to kill Max and prevent this and possible future murders from happening.

Sam begs for a chance to talk to Max, to reason with him. In a powerful scene, Sam confronts Max and tells him that he knows what happened. He knows that he has telekinesis, and he knows what he is about to do. He tells him that he doesn't have to do it. He tells Max that he shouldn't kill his mother and finally have that vengeance. With red cheeks and teary, bloodshot eyes, Max looks at Sam and asks a chilling question—"Why?" We watch as Sam struggles to give Max a good answer, one that will satisfy his longings for justice and retribution while still preserving Max's fading value for human life, and perhaps saving his very soul. Sam looks at him concerned, distressed, and the best answer he has is "You just can't."

Sam knows something that I think we all know intuitively. Evil must be punished, yet it is not good for us to exact revenge on those who have hurt us, although they might rightly and justly deserve. Sam knows that what happened to Max was evil; but if Max were to continue to take these matters into his own hands, he would become something less than human. Max has already started on this road, having killed his abusive stepfather and uncle, and Sam knew that the further Max got, the more difficult it would be for him to turn around.

Although this is an episode of a fictional TV show, the situation is very possible (except for perhaps the telekinesis) and may hit close to home for many people. There is no way to know how many people have been abused and the perpetrators have not had to answer for their crimes. There is no telling how many wrongs have been done and the world around has not even noticed. This leads us to a sobering question: if there is no Judgment Day; if every deed will not be exposed and some will go unpunished,

unpunished by human courts, then why shouldn't we take revenge? Why shouldn't Max have done what he intended to do? Sam's answer wasn't enough. For all Max knew, they would never get punished! The injustice, the evil that was done to him, who else saw it and who else was going to do something about it?

It is because of situations like these that I think we all want a Judgment Day to be true. We feel the tension in our hearts between this cry for justice and an unexplainable understanding that it may not be ours to carry out. We all believe that there is value to human life in some way or another. We know that things like serial killing, genocide, and stabbing someone in the forehead who may have hurt you deeply, are wrong. They must be punished. Justice must be served. It is stamped indelibly on our hearts. Where does it come from? I believe that it is written on the heart of each human by the Creator. We must believe in a Judgment Day, or we have every reason to carry out revenge in whatever way we please. It would be a dark, hopeless world.

The scary thing about a universal Judgment Day, however, is that it includes us. I believe that each of us is afraid, deep in our hearts, that were we to be truly exposed, even our good deeds wouldn't be good enough. We wouldn't hold up in a universal court, especially if the Judge is Holy and demands perfection. None of us would meet these standards. Many of us, rather than dealing with a sense of guilt, rather than trying to justify our existence, push aside the notion of a Judgment Day. We cover up what we know to be true with a façade of courage and cynicism. We laugh at the idea of our motives and deeds being judged, and try to convince ourselves and others that it's ridiculous. Or we may try to convince ourselves that we're ok, that we really

**The scary thing about a universal Judgment Day...
is that it includes us**

We are the ones who are guilty, but He was the one who was condemned

are good people because we haven't behaved the way many others have behaved. An example of this is demonstrated in the ever-popular sitcom "Seinfeld." Jerry, Elaine, Kramer, and George took us through nine hilarious seasons of ridiculous adventures, where we laughed at their misfortunes, their failed relationships, and among many other things, the way they treated people so selfishly. Remember how the show ended? They found themselves in court, being tried for their "character." They never thought of themselves as bad people. They had made mistakes, yes, but they were certainly decent. But when they were examined in court, they were sentenced to jail. A comical ending really, but what if that's a picture of what happens to us? Except that it's not jail, but Hell? Is it so ridiculous to believe that there is a Judgment Day and that we might not be found worthy in the eyes of a Righteous Judge, and that we would be punished?

In our world, there is much injustice, much crime, much wrong, and much evil. If we were all to be measured against a perfect standard of justice and righteousness, we would find that we all fall short. We all want justice to be done, we all want evil to be punished and dealt with, but we don't want to deal with ourselves. And we know that we can't go around killing everyone that does wrong. What's the answer?

The answer is this. There is a Judgment Day, and every thought, word and deed will be exposed and judged on a perfect scale. But the Judge Himself has left the bench. We are the ones who are guilty but He was the one who was condemned. We are the ones who deserve to be punished but the Judge was killed in our place. He was treated like the worst you can

imagine. He was treated like a rapist, like a murderer, like a child-abuser, like a liar, like a thief, and like a self-righteous bigot. But He was raised from the dead, and He lives now to intercede for the guilty. He'll come back to judge—we all know it, though many of us don't like believing it—but right now, He holds back his judgments. Instead, He offers us forgiveness so that we can be reconciled to our Creator. Forgiveness so that we can be reconciled to others, so that instead of having vengeance on them when they wrong us, we can hold back our judgments and absorb their debt, as the great Judge did for us. I want to tell Sam Winchester: "That's why we don't have to send knives into people's foreheads. Jesus already took the nails for the worst kind of people – people like me." Jesus, the one who always was and is now and will always be, through whom the world was made, and yet who was born in a manger—He is the only human whose justice and righteousness meet the perfect standards of God. Therefore, He has the right to judge. But He offers His own goodness and perfect justice freely to those who trust Him so that when you are called to give an account for your deeds, you aren't judged according to them. Those deeds died with Jesus and you are judged according to His life and His deeds. And His deeds measure up. Perfectly. Forever. Judgment Day wasn't May 21 but it's coming one day. I think you believe it. The question is, do you know the Judge? I do. And that's why I won't be afraid when it comes. ☩

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FINALE

The Hurricane

On April 27 and in the days following, I, and much of Tuscaloosa, was searching for words to match the sight of and the emotions evoked by the staggering, unbelievable destruction that the E4 tornado, in some 15 minutes, left in its wake across our city. In doing this, I continually came back to a poem I had first read in college written by Hart Crane, a relatively obscure but influential American poet

writing in the 1920s. Crane spent some time in Mexico and around the Gulf of Mexico and he spoke to his observance of a hurricane in the poem below. It is an astonishing account of God's power, rightly considered in theological terms, as the One who owns and causes the storm. As a Christian, it is interesting to consider this poem in light of the tornados of April 2011, in our city and state.

The Hurricane

Lo, Lord, Thou ridest!
Lord, Lord, Thy Swiftling Heart

Naught stayeth, naught now abideth
But's smithereened apart!

Ay! Scripture flee'th stone
Milk-bright, Thy chisel wind

Rescindeth flesh from bone
To quivering whittlings thinned—

Swept—whistling straw! Battered,
Lord, e'en boulders now out-leap

Rock sockets, levin-leathered!
Nor, Lord, may worm out-deep

Thy drum's gambade, its plunge abscond!
Lord God, while summits crashing

Whip sea-kelp screaming on blond
Sky-seeth, high heaven dashing—

Thou ridest to the door, Lord!
Thou bidest wall nor floor, Lord!

~Hart Crane (1899-1932)

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