

Editorial: Celebrating God's Faithfulness to Southern Seminary

Stephen J. Wellum

ONE OF THE most beloved hymns of the past century is "Great is Thy Faithfulness." It is so loved because it expresses well the biblical truth that the Triune God of Scripture is one who is true to his character, unchanging in his promises, and faithful to his people. Despite our lack of

faithfulness and our propensity to go our own way, even as the people of God, our God never fails. For he is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb 13:8). It is because of the Lord's great love, compassion, and faithfulness that we are not consumed (Lam 3:22-24). From Genesis to Revelation, our God is presented as the promise-maker, the promise-keeper, and the sovereign Lord of the universe whose plans and purposes cannot be thwarted. We, then, as his people,

may have hope, confidence, and full-assurance that he will always remain faithful to what he has

promised. In fact, it is due to these great truths that the people of God throughout the ages have been able to rest in God's promises, despite appearances to the contrary, to believe and to know that the kingdom of God will never fail, that the gates of hell cannot prevail against the church even though Satan's rage is great, and that nothing in all of creation can separate the child of God from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 8:28-39).

Now what the people of God have rested in and celebrated throughout history, we at Southern Seminary specifically take time to celebrate this year, since 2009 marks the 150th anniversary—the sesquicentennial—of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Begun in the fall of 1859 in Greenville, South Carolina, under the excellent leadership and godly vision of James P. Boyce, Southern Seminary was founded as the flagship seminary of the Southern Baptist Convention with the goal of preparing God-called individuals for more excellent gospel ministry. It was Boyce's

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vision that regardless of a person's educational background, there needed to be a seminary that prepared and trained God-called ministers to proclaim the whole counsel of God to the churches and to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. From the seminary's humble beginnings in 1859, through its relocation to Louisville, Kentucky in 1877, during difficult times in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and down to our present-day, it is very evident that the Lord's faithful hand has rested on Southern Seminary.

Specifically, God's faithfulness may be uniquely witnessed in how the Lord has preserved Southern Seminary over the years both in terms of her commitment to historic Christianity and to fulfilling her calling in training God-called individuals for gospel ministry. In this regard, one only has to consider the history of theological education in this country, let alone around the world, to note how rare it is to find seminaries, schools, and institutions that have celebrated their sesquicentennial and are still training ministers for the church who maintain anything resembling historic, orthodox Christian belief. Generally speaking, schools that began well in terms of their commitment to a confessional orthodoxy and who were committed to training gospel ministers for the church have, sadly, not finished well. Unfortunately, for many of these institutions, their commitment to the gospel is now only a distant memory, a matter of historical record. But not so with Southern Seminary. No doubt, the last 150 years of Southern Seminary's history has witnessed some high and low points as Greg Wills's article in this issue admirably points out. For a time, it looked like Southern Seminary was going to follow the path of so many institutions that had begun well but that eventually ended up compromising their commitment to historic Christianity. However, in the case of Southern Seminary, ultimately for reasons only known to him, God has been pleased to preserve and keep her over the years so that the same vision and commitment to the truth of God's Word that pulsated in her original founders is still alive and

well today. For this, we at Southern Seminary pause to give God thanks, acknowledging without any hesitation or confidence in ourselves, that this is God's doing from beginning to end, a testimony to, and affirmation of, the biblical truth that God's faithfulness is very great indeed.

To commemorate, then, Southern Seminary's sesquicentennial, this edition of *SBJT* is devoted to articles which recount the history, legacy, and vision of the seminary, as well as Forum contributions from those who have been associated with Southern over the last number of years. For our anniversary celebration, the three words—truth, legacy, and vision—capture nicely the last 150 years. “Truth” in that we continue to ground all of our education, instruction, and theological beliefs in a commitment to the full authority, infallibility, and inerrancy of Scripture as God's Word written. “Legacy” and “vision” in that we continue to uphold and pass on the vision of J. P. Boyce and the other founders of the Seminary, as we stand on their shoulders, to equip and train God-called ministers for gospel ministry so that we can fulfill the mandate of the Great Commission in this country and around the world. And we do so proudly as the flagship Seminary of the Southern Baptist Convention, along with our sister institutions, thankful to the churches of the Convention who have prayed, sacrificially given of their financial resources, and labored together to encourage and support the training of gospel ministers. In addition, to honor the anniversary of the Seminary, readers of *SBJT* will notice that we have made some changes to the format of the journal, which we hope only makes it better.

It is our earnest desire, as you read this commemorative issue, that it will not only inform you of the history and legacy of Southern Seminary, but that it will also lead you to celebrate God's faithfulness with us and to pray for us. Pray that we will continue to stand for the truth and not waver, that we will continue to train individuals for gospel ministry, and that we will be found faithful to our great God who is always faithful to his people.