



# SOUTHWESTERN JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

THE BIBLE

LUTHER RUSSELL BUSH III

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***Luther Russell Bush III***  
***25 December 1944–22 January 2008***  
***Southwestern MDiv 1970, PhD 1975***

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On top of a small hill in the middle of what used to be the large forest of Wake County, North Carolina resides a simple cemetery. Home to a variety of scholars, administrators, and others affiliated with Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, the cemetery contains a handful of nondescript headstones. On 27 January 2008, L. Russ Bush III, former Academic Vice President and Dean of the Faculty joined these colleagues of yesteryear and an understated yet profound headstone marks his grave. The epitaph describes in brief Bush's positions of service at Southeastern Seminary and also denotes his far more significant titles of "Friend, Husband, Father, Teacher." Through the final words referenced on the headstone Bush still speaks today, reminding all of his students and colleagues of this command from I Peter 3:15–16:

[I]n your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.

The command serves as a fitting summary of both Bush's life-calling and temperament, and also his desire to replicate such in those over whom he had influence. Bush was a throwback to our nineteenth-century Baptist forefathers, the type often classified as the "Gentlemen Theologians."<sup>1</sup> He was an Apologist-Philosopher, known around the world for how he treated all those with whom he agreed and disagreed with gentleness and respect.

<sup>1</sup>E. Brooks Holifield, *The Gentlemen Theologians* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1978).

Luther Russell Bush III was born in Alexandria, Louisiana on 25 December 1944, a Christmas gift, his father would later recount.<sup>2</sup> His family would soon move to Columbia, Mississippi, where his father started a dental practice. Columbia became the town that Bush would call home the remainder of his life, and Bush appeared to have affection for small towns as later he would state,

A small town is a great place to grow up. Formative years form the years. Our roots make us who we are, and small town roots are strong, life-sustaining roots. Bible believing mothers who mold us and then never leave us even when we move away from home are also a blessing from God.<sup>3</sup>

Bush's "Bible-believing" mother, Sara Frances, owned a Christian bookstore and instilled in Bush a love for books and learning, two affections that grew exponentially the remainder of his life.

The Bushes joined the First Baptist Church of Columbia, Mississippi and were very active in the ministry of both the church and the church's denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention. At the age of twelve, Bush was leaving church when a long-time friend of his father's stopped him and asked him if he had ever been saved. The man had seen Bush "under conviction" for several weeks and felt led to meet with him to pray and read Scripture. Later that night, Bush would make his confession of faith in Jesus Christ public and would soon be baptized into the membership of the First Baptist Church of Columbia, Mississippi.<sup>4</sup>

Bush ventured to the Mississippi College for his undergraduate education setting out, at first, in the pursuit of a degree in chemistry. However, after a summer of service at the Southern Baptist Convention's Ridgecrest Conference Center, Bush surrendered to the gospel ministry.<sup>5</sup> Bush's father would recount a conversation he had later that year when he asked the younger Bush what he planned to do with his life and encouraged him simply to follow his heart. After a moment, a great sign of relief came across Bush's face, and he replied, "Well, I believe I will be a preacher."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup>L. Russ Bush Jr., *Memorial Service for L. Russ Bush III* (Wake Forest, NC, 27 January 2008), DVD.

<sup>3</sup>L. Russ Bush III, "John Paul Newport: A Man for A Seasons," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* [SWJT] 29 (1987): 5.

<sup>4</sup>See L. Russ Bush III to Richard Daniels, 4 February 2002, in "L. Russ Bush III: A Biography," *Faith & Mission* 19 (2002): 57, and L. Russ Bush Jr., *Memorial Service for L. Russ Bush III*.

<sup>5</sup>L. Russ Bush III, "Curriculum Vitae," L. Russ Bush Center for Faith and Culture, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, North Carolina.

<sup>6</sup>L. Russ Bush Jr., *Memorial Service for L. Russ Bush III*.

In 1967, Bush was ordained by the First Baptist Church of Columbia, Mississippi. Bush's father was asked to present Bush with a Bible and having done so said, "Russ, I am going to present this Bible to you. And if there ever comes a time in your life that you lose confidence in what it says, I want you to promise your Daddy that you will quit preaching."<sup>7</sup> And, as Bush Jr. said, "He never quit preaching." So, from his early exposure to the Christian faith through his parents, his home church, and his exposure to the denomination, Bush received a rich heritage, a commitment to the Southern Baptist Convention, and a complete confidence in the Word of God.

Prior to receiving his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1967, Bush met Cynthia Ellen McGraw, and they married on 2 June 1968. Cynthia Bush was reared in Louisville, Mississippi, the daughter of the pastor's secretary at the First Baptist Church of Louisville. Cynthia's father was also active in the church, and this led to her involvement in various Southern Baptist student ministries in Glorietta, New Mexico; Gary, Indiana; and Estes Park, Colorado prior to her graduation from Mississippi College in 1968.<sup>8</sup> After graduation, the Bushes moved to Fort Worth, Texas for Russ to enroll at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Bush chose the Texas seminary simply because "it offered more philosophy courses than any other school," attending this school during the days when Robert E. Naylor served as president.<sup>9</sup> Naylor had a famous practice in those days of pronouncing the name "Southwestern" on all incoming students. During Bush's first semester, likely he received the charge from Naylor,

I now pronounce you "Southwesterners." It is a worthy and honorable name; not by what you have done but by a long line that has preceded you. . . . It says something about what you believe about this Book—that it is the Word of God. . . . You will not wear a better name in life than "Southwesterner."<sup>10</sup>

The young Southwesterner's love for the study of philosophy grew to the degree that after completing the Master of Divinity in 1970, Bush applied for further studies in the research doctoral program.

<sup>7</sup>L. Russ Bush Jr., *Memorial Service for L. Russ Bush III*.

<sup>8</sup>L. Russ Bush III, "Curriculum Vitae."

<sup>9</sup>L. Russ Bush III to Richard Daniels, in "L. Russ Bush III: A Biography," *Faith & Mission* 19 (2002): 58.

<sup>10</sup>Robert E. Naylor, "I now pronounce you 'Southwesterners,'" Document on file, Office of the President, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas.

Bush's father stated that Bush's interest in philosophy grew from a deep foundation and advocacy for the classical truths of historic Christianity rooted in Scripture. Bush Jr. explained that his son would often say,

“But there are a lot of people who do not believe the Bible, you have got to tell them another way.” . . . And he would give me some philosophical treatise on how you are supposed to tell somebody about the Bible. I would say, “I declare the gospel, and you defend the gospel, and I think we need a little of both.” But he was one who believed in defending the gospel.<sup>11</sup>

Southwestern Professor of the Philosophy of Religion, Milton Ferguson, enlisted Bush as his teaching assistant during Bush's doctoral studies, but when Ferguson was elected as President at the Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Bush transferred his studies under the supervision of John Newport.<sup>12</sup> In Ferguson's absence, the seminary appointed Bush as Instructor from 1973–1975, teaching full-time until the completion of his degree. Upon graduation in 1975, Bush received the first doctor of philosophy degree awarded at Southwestern, since prior equivalent degrees were awarded as the doctor of theology.<sup>13</sup> He continued to teach although now as an elected member of the faculty, and Bush's experience at the seminary both as a student and as a faculty member would instill a love and devotion to the school through the remainder of his life.

During the early years in Fort Worth, Russ and Cynthia Bush saw the birth of their two children, Joshua Russell and Bethany Charis. Bush also served in various ministry assignments at the First Baptist Church of Dallas, the Travis Avenue Baptist Church in Fort Worth, the First Baptist Church in Godley, and the Mother Neff Baptist Church in Moody, Texas.<sup>14</sup> Bush would teach at the seminary for the next fourteen years while remaining active in local church ministry as well as various positions within the Southern Baptist Convention.

In 1980, Bush and fellow Southwestern professor, Tom J. Nettles (MDiv 1971, PhD 1976), authored what would become perhaps their most famous and significant literary contribution to the Southern Baptist

<sup>11</sup>L. Russ Bush Jr., *Memorial Service for L. Russ Bush III*.

<sup>12</sup>L. Russ Bush III, “Curriculum Vitae,” and Daniels, “L. Russ Bush III: A Biography,” 58. For Bush's evaluation of the work of John Newport, see L. Russ Bush III, “John Paul Newport: A Man for All Seasons.”

<sup>13</sup>L. Russ Bush III, “Curriculum Vitae.” Bush's dissertation was entitled, “An Inquiry into the Relationship Between the Critical Problems of Historical Knowledge and Historical Explanation and the Methodological Formulation of a Christian Philosophy of History.”

<sup>14</sup>L. Russ Bush III, “Curriculum Vitae.”

Convention. *Baptists and the Bible* (Moody Press, 1980) served to remind the denomination that Baptists throughout their history had affirmed a belief in the inerrancy and authority of the Bible. The appearance of the volume came just as the convention was undergoing a significant internal debate over the question of the veracity of Scripture. This thorough work virtually completed the historical perspective of the question at hand.<sup>15</sup> Upon the occasion of the publication of a revised and expanded edition of *Baptists and the Bible* in 1999, Bush reflected on the significance of the volume,

*Baptists and the Bible* has never been far from my mind these past twenty years. The SBC continued to struggle over the doctrine of Scripture. I found myself in the middle of a significant portion of that struggle. The knowledge that the worldwide Baptist heritage supported the stance I so strongly defended was one of the most important factors in my assurance that God would bless our efforts if we maintained our commitments with a humble spirit.<sup>16</sup>

Bush's ready defense of the faith in these early years found a regular companion in the Christ-like spirit that characterized both Bush's writing and teaching ministry.

In the 1980s, Bush participated in two sabbatical leaves from the seminary for the purposes of writing and further study. He first studied at the Divinity School and Tyndale House Library at Cambridge University in 1981–1982.<sup>17</sup> During his absence Tom Nettles left Southwestern for a position at Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, a move that altered Bush's view of the seminary. He stated,

In my mind, Southwestern was never the same after that, though I still had every intention of living near the Seminary in south Fort Worth and teaching there until retirement.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup>For favorable reviews, see David S. Dockery, book review, *Grace Theological Journal* 3 (1982): 150–51; R. Albert Mohler, Jr., "A Legacy of Conviction and Courage," *Blog by R. Albert Mohler Jr.*, 23 January 2008; [http://www.albertmohler.com/blog\\_read.php?id=1086](http://www.albertmohler.com/blog_read.php?id=1086) (Accessed 8 September 2008); J.I. Packer, book review, *SWJT* 24 (1981): 104–105; Paige Patterson, "Foreword to the Revised Edition (1999)," in L. Russ Bush III and Tom J. Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible*, rev. and exp. ed. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), xiii–xiv. For critical reviews, see Fisher Humphreys, book review, *Baptist History and Heritage* 16 (1981): 43–45; Dale Moody, book review, *Review and Expositor* 77 (1980): 565–66; and Robison James, *The Unfettered Word* (Waco, Texas: Word, 1987).

<sup>16</sup>L. Russ Bush III and Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible*, rev. and exp. ed., xx.

<sup>17</sup>L. Russ Bush III, "Curriculum Vitae."

<sup>18</sup>L. Russ Bush III and Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible*, rev. and exp. ed., xix.

During Bush's second sabbatical leave from Southwestern, he and his family resided in Washington, D.C. where Bush served as Interim Pastor of the Capitol Hill Baptist Church. During his stay, he made the final revisions on his second book, *A Handbook of Christian Philosophy* (B&H, 1991).<sup>19</sup> Bush's *Handbook* existed originally as a short document he would provide to students taking his class for the first time who needed some background and introductory material. Over time the document evolved into a publishable piece, and the occasion gave Bush the opportunity to add a few appendices on key topics. Naturally, Bush included an appendix on the authority of Scripture stating in his even-handed way that,

Throughout the history of the church, Christian believers have assumed that Christ was the Son of God, that salvation was provided for us by Christ's death on the cross, and that the Bible was the authoritative Word of God. Today, all three of these assumptions have been challenged . . . .

If it can be shown (and it can) that Jesus spoke and taught as if every part of Scripture were true and if it can be shown (and it can) that the apostles everywhere assume the full authenticity and authority of Scripture; and if it can be shown (and it can) that the New Testament bears the same marks of authenticity as the Old, then it seems that veracious biblical authority is not an issue to be taken lightly, nor is it to be discussed superficially, nor is it to be denied by one who calls Christ Lord and Master (Teacher).<sup>20</sup>

During his time in Washington, D.C., Bush was contacted first by the new president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina. Lewis Drummond, a professor of evangelism from Southern Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, had taken over at Southeastern in the aftermath of a great battle between the Board of Trustees and

<sup>19</sup>Carl F.H. Henry, book review, *Faith & Mission* 9 (1991): 82–3, stated, “*A Handbook for Christian Philosophy* is a resource for beginning philosophy of religion students . . . [and] an initial exposure to many of the relevant concerns that face the beginning collegian or seminarian venturing into this sphere of study. . . . The beginning student in philosophy of religion will find this book a relevant sourcebook.” This is high praise from someone Bush considered the “greatest living Baptist theologian.” See Bush, book review of *Carl F.H. Henry* by Bob E. Patterson, *SWJT* 27 (1985): 71.

<sup>20</sup>L. Russ Bush III, *A Handbook for Christian Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 194. While at Southwestern, Bush also authored *Understanding Biblical Inerrancy* (Fort Worth: Columbia Publications, 1988) and *Classical Readings in Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983).

the administration and faculty over whether the seminary would remain accountable to the denomination and the school's confession of faith. In urgent need of a supportive academic advisor, Drummond sought Bush. After a time of consideration, Bush stated, "In what was probably the hardest decision of my life, certainly for my family, we decided to accept President Drummond's invitation to be his new dean of the faculty."<sup>21</sup>

Much has been written to describe the situation into which Bush walked.<sup>22</sup> A former president had vowed upon his resignation in 1987 to exert every ounce of his energy toward the future demise of the school. A faculty had sought the aid of an outside organization complete with press-kit and union-type aura. A student body had been alternatively stirred and acquiesced to act in an undisciplined manner. After unanimous opposition from the faculty and the rumors of certain accreditation intervention, all Bush possessed was the support of seventy-three percent of the Board of Trustees. While the faculty and supporters of the old administration likely considered this the same unacceptable situation of a pastor accepting a call to a church with a divided deacon board and full congregational opposition, Bush saw it completely different.

Like the unseen horses and chariots residing on the mountains around Dothan when Elisha assured his servant "Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them," (2 Kings 6:16), Russ Bush went in faith to Southeastern trusting that he would have all the assistance, seen and unseen, that he would need. In one of the great acts of courage in contemporary Southern Baptist history, Bush and his family began their ministry in Wake Forest not by might nor by power, but by the Spirit (Zech 4:6) along with gentleness and kindness. Paige Patterson would later recount,

[Bush's early tenure] was one of the most incredibly difficult times anyone could have ever gone through. He was cursed . . . and accosted. . . . But in the final analysis, he overcame by his sheer Christlikeness. . . . By the time I arrived at Southeastern some years later, I discovered that he had won over the hearts even of those who were his bitterest enemies.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup>L. Russ Bush III and Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible*, rev. and exp. ed., xix.

<sup>22</sup>For a concise timeline see James C. Hefley, *The Truth in Crisis*, vol. 4. (Hannibal, MO: Hannibal Books, 1989), 144–68.

<sup>23</sup>Keith Collier, "Southwestern Seminary mourns the passing of Baptist professor, author and statesman," *Southwestern Seminary*, January 2008; <http://www.swbts.edu/pressreleases/story.cfm?id=A7888A1C-15C5-E47C-F98A80C2E0964372> (Accessed 2 November 2008). Bush would later reflect in *Baptists and the Bible*, rev. and exp. ed., xix, "Nevertheless, with some exceptions, I grew to love the Southeastern faculty. For a mixed set of reasons I knew it was best (for the school and for them) for most of them to retire

Drummond and Bush set forth by resolving to keep the seminary accountable both to the denomination and its original confession of faith. Bush stated in his address to the Board of Trustees on 11 March 1991,

Southern Baptist seminaries are covenant communities. We collectively work within the framework and guidelines of confessional documents, something that we do not normally ask of pastors, church staff, or lay people. But we do this as a testimony to our supporting community. We ask for their financial support, and we ask for the minds of their children. We have been given a role of teaching authority in the body of Christ, and thus we must give account of the trust placed in us.

Our confessional affirmation at Southeastern is the Abstract of Principles, framed and adopted first by the original faculty of Southern Seminary in the last century. It is a historic confession of substance and depth. It is a testimony to our Convention that the faith once delivered to the saints is maintained and defended in our classes today. . . .

But if there are those who do not believe the doctrines taught by our Articles of Faith, if they publically deny those doctrines or if they teach contrary to them, then I think we all can agree that such a one should not be teaching here. Those who do believe, affirm, and teach in accordance with this confession should be themselves affirmed by the administration, the trustees, and the churches of the SBC. We cannot go on forever in suspicion and confusion. It is not right to accuse people unjustly. Neither is it right to overlook a serious lapse in the faith. We have been under fire for years, not only at Southeastern but in all of our SBC schools. We cannot expect every person to agree on issues not specifically addressed in our documents. We must allow intelligent minds to expand our understanding of doctrinal statements. But we also must secure the theological integrity of this institution for future generations.<sup>24</sup>

or to move on to other ministry opportunities. Nevertheless, I saw in some of them a true sense of their calling, and in most cases I felt the courage of their convictions. The doctrine of biblical inerrancy was not their doctrine, however, and they were, for the most part, very forcefully opposed to it.”

<sup>24</sup>L. Russ Bush III, “Statement to the Board of Trustees, March 11, 1991,” in Keith Harper and Steve McKinion, eds., *Then and Now: A Compilation and Celebration of Fifty Years at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary* (Wake Forest, NC: Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2000), 101–103.

Bush's perseverance prevailed. The seminary would not only adhere faithfully to its confession, *Abstract of Principles*, but would later add concurrently *The Baptist Faith and Message* of the Southern Baptist Convention.<sup>25</sup> In future years, Bush would famously recount for the student body and those who would gather for the seminary's convocation exercises the importance of confessional accountability. He would state,

I hold before you today two books. The first one contains the Abstract of Principles. The second one the Baptist Faith and Message 2000. . . . The Abstract is engraved on a plaque that hangs on a wall near the Dean's Office in Stealey Hall. The Abstract of Principles is the oldest doctrinal confession approved by Southern Baptists. It was composed by Basil Manly, Jr. in 1858. The Baptist Faith and Message 2000 is the most recent confession adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention.

So Southeastern is rooted doctrinally in Baptist history. We stand where Baptists have stood in the past and we stand where they now stand. These words express our common faith.

Now these confessions are not a substitute for the Bible. The Bible alone is infallible, inerrant as the word of God written. But nevertheless we believe these Confessions, though they are not the Bible, they are faithful summaries of the key biblical doctrines as most Baptist theologians have understood them in the past, and as Baptist church leaders understand them today.

We sign these documents as a testimony to each other and the world. Here we stand. This we believe. This we defend.<sup>26</sup>

After Lewis Drummond resigned due to illness, Paige Patterson of Dallas, Texas and a leader in the conservative movement was elected as the next president at Southeastern. As Patterson was making preparations to begin his new assignment in Wake Forest, Bush wrote him and eagerly explained,

We must keep in mind that we are doing the unprecedented here. We are taking a school founded in one tradition and

<sup>25</sup>See Melissa King, "SEBTS trustees require new faculty to sign BFM; increase budget by \$2M," *Baptist Press*, 17 April 2001; <http://www.bpnews.org/bpnews.asp?id=10694> (Accessed 8 September 2008).

<sup>26</sup>L. Russ Bush III, "Convocation Remarks at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary," replayed during the *Memorial Service for L. Russ Bush III*.

changing it to another tradition that is contrary to the desires of the alumni and of the support base that was built up over the past generation. . . . The difficulties that we have faced, and have now overcome, are so formidable that in every other case it has been found impossible. . . . The victory is won, even if the treaty is not yet signed and even if some islands are still in the possession of the former empire.<sup>27</sup>

This prophetic statement would signal years of exponential growth and revitalization during the Patterson-Bush administration.<sup>28</sup>

While Bush was working to reestablish Southeastern internally, Bush's peers outside the seminary recognized his academic achievements and leadership and selected him as National President of the Evangelical Theological Society.<sup>29</sup> In his 1994 presidential address to the society entitled, "The History of the Future," Bush reminded his fellow scholars,

We are living and making the history of the future. What we teach and do today will be what future Christians consider to be their heritage. The principles we adopt, the critical methods and assumptions we accept, the hermeneutical methods we follow, and the selections of data we highlight will be considered as the foundations by those who follow us. Be not so ready to innovate, to seek the new merely for the sake of newness.<sup>30</sup>

Bush's rare combination of prophetic meekness would serve the society well and Bush would remain active throughout his ministry.<sup>31</sup>

Bush would serve the Southern Baptist Convention in a variety of capacities during the years of the Conservative Resurgence, and in

<sup>27</sup>L. Russ Bush III to Paige Patterson, 22 May 1992, Paige Patterson Papers, Closed Archives, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas. Used with permission.

<sup>28</sup>See Paige Patterson, "What Athens Has to Do with Jerusalem: How to Tighten Greek and Hebrew Requirements and Triple your M.Div. Enrollment at the Same Time," *Faith & Mission* 17 (1999): 56.

<sup>29</sup>Bush was the first Southern Baptist to serve in this position.

<sup>30</sup>L. Russ Bush III, "The History of the Future—Or What Should We Do Now?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38 (1995): 4.

<sup>31</sup>In 2001–2006, when the society engaged in a debate over the theological position, "Open Theism," Bush served to provide steady leadership and lead the society to reaffirm its historic position on inerrancy. See Jason Hall, "Prof's motion aimed at refining ETS statement, avoiding split," *Baptist Press*, 8 December 2003; <http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?ID=17227> (Accessed 8 September 2008); and Jeff Robinson, "Inerrancy statement bodes well for ETS, former president says," *Baptist Press*, 12 December 2006; <http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?ID=24585> (Accessed 8 September 2008).

recognition of this service as well as his specific investment at Southeastern, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary honored Bush with their Distinguished Alumni Award on 14 June 2006. Southwestern's president was now Paige Patterson, who had returned to Texas after serving with Bush for eleven years in North Carolina. Patterson explained,

Few will ever know the extent of the difficulties through which he walked during the first few years of his assignment in Wake Forest. One can safely say, however, that much of what has been accomplished in the dramatic reversal and return to the faith of our fathers at Southeastern Seminary, as well as to the phenomenal growth of the institution, can be laid directly at his feet.<sup>32</sup>

Earlier that month, Southeastern Seminary, now led by Bush's third president, Daniel Akin, opened the newly formed L. Russ Bush Center for Faith and Culture in honor of Bush's contribution to the school, her faculty, and her students. Serving as the Center's first director, Bush explained his vision,

It is my desire, and that of my colleagues at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, that the new L. Russ Bush Center for Faith and Culture will provide a platform from which the Christian message will be able to engage every aspect of non-Christian thought . . . and counter the false spirits of the age . . . by proposing Christian faith as the only true way. . . .

As God gives us grace, we pledge ourselves to present biblical truth in the brightest light we can. Engaging the culture: Defending the faith. That is the ultimate purpose of the new Bush Center for Faith and Culture at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. May God give us the grace to see His truth shine ever brighter until Jesus comes to lead us home.<sup>33</sup>

Presenting biblical truth in the brightest light articulates again the unique spirit of Bush's calling and ministry. It came as no surprise that the text of Scripture Bush selected for the theme of the Bush Center was 1 Peter 3:15–16.

<sup>32</sup>Paige Patterson, "Distinguished Alumnus L. Russ Bush—Baptists and the Bible," in *Southwestern News* 64 (2006): 50.

<sup>33</sup>L. Russ Bush III, "FIRST PERSON: Engaging the culture," *Baptist Press*, 25 May 2006; <http://www.bpnews.org/bpnews.asp?id=23334> (Accessed 8 September 2008).

Bush's contribution to the seminary, the denomination, and other areas of ministry were many, but the testimony of his students reveals his ultimate effectiveness. Bush enjoyed working with students, and they—although not always immediately—enjoyed and honored him. In 2003, Bush recounted,

One of the joys of my life has been the opportunity to work for almost thirty years in an academic environment. Seminary students come in all flavors, but each one makes their mark somewhere in the world; and a student's mark is an expression of the impression a Faculty makes on him or her. Being only one member of a large Faculty sufficiently dilutes one self-promoting ego, and yet the classroom remains a most satisfying place to work.<sup>34</sup>

Alvin Reid, a student of Bush and eventually one of his colleagues at Southeastern, said in a tribute to Bush,

We live in a day when . . . [h]eroes are actually hard to find. Russ Bush is my hero. He epitomizes a love for culture, for knowledge, and for the gospel I so hope to emulate. He demonstrates how one does not have to compartmentalize life. One can be a thinker and a spiritual person, a lover of the Great Commission and a lover of great ideas, a scholar and a practitioner. He in many ways reveals the goal of education at Southeastern, in the words of [P]resident Akin, to use our head, our heart, and our hands for the glory of God and the sake of the gospel.<sup>35</sup>

Thomas White, another one of Bush's students and now vice president for student services and communications at Southwestern Seminary, spoke of Bush's personal investment in the lives of his students,

I will never forget the classes held in his home hosted by his lovely wife Cindy. I will never forget the president of the Evangelical Theological Society taking time to talk with me, a student, in the halls of an ETS meeting. . . . I will never forget his insistence on holding my daughter immediately after he received the Distinguished Alumni Award from Southwestern Seminary. On January 22, 2008, our sorrow was Bush's gain

<sup>34</sup>L. Russ Bush III, *The Advancement* (Nashville: B&H, 2003), xi–xii.

<sup>35</sup>Alvin Reid, "A Tribute to L. Russ Bush, III (1944–2008)," *Blog by Alvin Reid*, 27 January 2008; <http://alvinreid.com/archives/306>; (Accessed 8 September 2008).

as a brilliant man of godly humility went home to be with his heavenly Father. Southern Baptists lost a great theological educator, and I lost a mentor and a friend.<sup>36</sup>

In 2005, Bush learned that he had cancer and began to receive treatment and persevere yet again through one final battle. Of this experience, he took the opportunity to proclaim his belief in the sovereignty of God,

Open theism is not true. . . . God knew about this. My job is to learn what God wants to teach me from this as fast as possible. God already knew about this cancer. God has obviously chosen me to endure this. It's a surprise to me. It's not a surprise to God.<sup>37</sup>

Bush maintained his optimistic spirit, continued to labor in his studies, attended denominational and theological society meetings, and spent time with his family until he went home to be with the Lord Jesus on 22 January 2008.

At a memorial service held in the chapel at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary on 27 January 2008, many spoke and offered reflections on the life and ministry of L. Russ Bush III. Tom J. Nettles was asked to read a letter he had sent to Bush only a few weeks before Bush's passing. Nettles' profound statements portray the eschatological hope that believers in Jesus Christ share and Russ Bush spent his life defending. Therefore, the following excerpt from Nettles' letter serves as a fitting end to this memorial treatment of Southwestern's son, Southeastern's dean, and his family's "Friend, Husband, Father, Teacher."

Russ, you have built your life around defending the truthfulness of the book about Jesus, showing people the land where Jesus walked, and multiplying the evidences of Jesus' victory over sin, death, and the grave. Your heavenly Father is now saying, "Come up here and see the place where Jesus is seated, yet uttering infallible words of intercession for the people he has loved and redeemed."

You have seen the empty tomb, you will see the living Lord;  
You have seen Jerusalem, the home of David's earthly throne,

<sup>36</sup>Thomas White, "My Remembrance of L. Russ Bush: A Personal Perspective," *SBC Today*, 23 January 2008; <http://sbctoday.com/2008/01/23/my-remembrance-of-l-russ-bush-a-personal-perspective/> (Accessed 8 September 2008).

<sup>37</sup>Lauren Crane, "L. Russ Bush dies following cancer battle," *Baptist Press*, 23 January 2008; <http://www.bpnews.org/bpnews.asp?id=27242> (Accessed 8 September 2008).

you will see the eternal throne of David's greater Son; You have cherished the written word, you will soon hear the voice like the sound of many waters saying, "Enter thou into the joy of your Lord."

. . . You have fought the fight, you have kept the faith, and by God's providence you have finished the course. Now there is the crown of righteousness.<sup>38</sup>

With Appreciation For  
L. Russ Bush III (1944–2008)  
One who faithfully made a defense for the hope that was within him,  
always with gentleness and respect (I Peter 3:15–16).  
Defending the Faith, Engaging the Culture

<sup>38</sup>Tom J. Nettles to L. Russ Bush III, 17 January 2008, Used with permission.