

THEOLOGY | CRITIQUE | REVIEW | ESSAY | CULTURE

salt&light

Winter Edition 2015

A Grateful Look Back. A Hopeful Look Forward.

Jeff Pate

Sharing One's Testimony
The Hospitality Sting
Newness in Christ
The Religious Imperative

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*Cover Photo of Riverbend Crossing,
Little Red River, Arkansas*

FROM THE EDITOR

It is the very dead of winter. As I write this, there is a cold wind blowing and a cold rain falling on the leafless trees and brown grass outside my window. Much has happened since last winter here at Riverwood Church and as I consider it, I am warmed by the work of God in His church and His people. We sought to replace a much-loved pastor and his family, and through God's leading and grace we now have Jeff and Lorrie Pate and their children, and we already love them. We look toward spring and the continued renewal of new life and Resurrection, and we can't wait.

Jeff Pate leads off this issue with "A Grateful Look Back, A Hopeful Look Forward," words which express both the feelings of the Pates, and, I believe, the feelings of the church during this time of transition and excitement. In it, we see God working in the lives of the Pate family and we remember His work in our church bringing us to this point.

Peggy Drinkard's beautiful and wise commentaries on the Lord's work in her life in this magazine are a wonderful ministry to all who read them. In "Sharing One's Testimony," she delineates her Christian walk from childhood as she describes what it is really like to walk as a Christian, in both the summers and winters of faith.

One of the web blogs I spend an inordinate amount of time on (according to my wife) is the Christian blog, *Mockingbird* (mbird.com). One of the contributors I particularly enjoy is Sarah Condon. Her piece, "The Hospitality Sting: We Are All the Least of These" is a beautifully done treatise both on humility and how easy we fall into the self-righteous trap. It is a delight to read.

Bob Thornton's beautiful meditations on living in Christ are a great and constant feature of *Salt & Light*. In "Newness in Christ: Our Struggles and Assurance," Bob looks at the ways we become a "new creation" as Christians, even when we are not quite what we want, expect and need to be.

My article, "The Christian Imperative: God and the Nature of Man," is a look at the culture wars that rage in what many are calling, with some justification, the post-Christian era. We are charged to always have an answer, and the article hopefully provides a few together with a list of resources for more detailed answers.

Our Finale piece is "Fear, Forgiveness and Endless Mercy," a look at ultimate sanctification as described in John Donne's beautiful poem, "A Hymn to God the Father."

Stay warm. Spring is coming and God's grace never changes.

A Grateful Look Back A Hopeful Look Forward

By Jeff Pate

"Where did you go to, if I may ask?" said Thorin to Gandalf as they rode along."

"To look ahead." said he.

"And what brought you back in the nick of time?"

"Looking behind," said he."

J.R.R. Tolkien

*from **The Hobbit***

A good friend once said that the Christian life is like traveling down an unfamiliar river. Since you don't know what is ahead, there is a strange mix of uncertainty, and excitement. Rounding a bend in the river could reveal a clear, deep pool inviting you to take a swim or churning rapids that make you want to start paddling back upstream. Then again, the next turn may reveal large rocks that have forced the river to run in yet another direction. But, as this friend pointed out, it's not really until you get downstream that you can look back and see how those turns and obstacles have helped you make your way to the sea.

Periods of transition are good times for such reflection. In our family, this season of change in call and geography kept us at the dinner table a little longer some nights, as we looked back upstream. We talked about how God used a college choir (a show choir at that!) to introduce

Mom and Dad to each other. We talked about how He had the Army play a role in taking us out West, and how we eventually returned there for seminary. We spoke of how oversleeping

one Sunday morning became the means God used to introduce us to Reformed theology!

There were rapids in the journey, like the years I spent teaching middle school and high school, while becoming increasingly aware this was *not* what God had equipped me to do. Knowing this, we then we came to a time and place when the waters were calm and deep, the four years I served in

ministry as a music director in Enterprise and the last five years as a pastor in Brent. The water was calmer but it required strenuous rowing to move forward. In the middle of those two stages of ministry there was the fast moving and exciting years of seminary in Colorado. There, God presented us with obstacles and sheer drop-offs to reveal how vulnerable we could feel



I am confident of two things. First, God has brought our family and Riverwood this far for a purpose. And second, God's purposes are not always easy but they are certainly good.

and how trustworthy He is. When I look back upstream and see how far God has brought us, through so many twists in the stream, I can't help but say with King David, "Who am I, O LORD God, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far? And this was a small thing in your eyes, O God" (1 Chronicles 17:16). Not only do I recognize that it is God who has brought us this far, but He has done so with ease.

In scripture, God often commands His people to recall His marvelous deeds and the works that He has done. These *mighty works* certainly include God's redemptive work, wrought in history, fulfilled in the sinless life, atoning death and victorious resurrection of Christ and then applied through the work of the Holy Spirit. We should dwell often on that marvelous work. But we also see His mighty hand in His works of Providence. The hymnbook of scripture, the book of Psalms, is brimming with songs that read more like history lessons than praise songs as they recount the works that God has done. Psalm 107 is one of many. In it the writer spends a majority of the first 42 verses looking back on how God has delivered His people, repeatedly. Some wandered in the desert and He delivered them. Others sat in darkness and faced death and...He delivered them. Others were fools and lived in sin, and yet... He delivered them. The examples begin piling up as the writer drives home his point: **we are a needy lot and God is a faithful Redeemer.** Finally, he concludes the psalm with this counsel, "Whoever is wise, let him attend to these things; let them consider the steadfast love of the LORD." Wisdom looks back and attends to God's works. Doing so shapes within our minds, our hearts and our mouths, expressions of sincere gratitude.

But the purpose isn't only to elicit gratitude but also to develop confidence: confidence in the steadfast love of our Deliverer. This confidence then enables us to turn our eyes back downstream with an eager and hope-filled expectation of what is around the next turn. In our family's recent past, we have seen God's providential hand work through hurricanes, termites, successes, missed opportunities, flat tires, good deals, bad breaks, running, waiting, singing and even times of silence. He has used all things, whether we considered them to be good or bad in the moment, to guide us along our journey. Since He has revealed Himself as the Lord of the calm, comfortable waters and the Lord of the turbulent, uncertain torrents, we look to the future with confident excitement.

During the past months, the Pate family has spent time looking back and looking forward, but I don't think we are alone. I believe the last months have also been important for the congregation at Riverwood as you have found occasions to consider the mighty works that God has done in your past. Looking back, there was the joy of a new sanctuary for corporate worship. There was the difficult yet crucial work of being bearers of mercy and comfort to a community that faced so much loss three years ago. There was the recent sadness of saying goodbye to dear friends. Further upstream, you will find people who have faithfully served as pastors and leaders, servants and supporters all longing to see the kingdom of Christ expand in Tuscaloosa, Northport and beyond. At what appear to be the headwaters, you will find a small group of committed believers who had a vision for a Reformed congregation that faithfully proclaimed the gospel of grace. But even this group of church planters was continuing in the flow of gospel proclamation

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Sharing One's Testimony

How Much Time Do You Have?

By Peggy Drinkard

Once I was tasked to write my “testimony” as part of an application package for Dallas Theological Seminary’s graduate program for people headed not into the ministry as pastors, but into some sort of work in the church sphere. We know what’s wanted here....some explanation of how we came to be a follower of Christ. I’ve never been able to pinpoint a once and for all moment in time. There have been lots of them, but who’s to say which one “took”? I’m so thankful for the Calvinist paradigm that allows me to understand it in terms of something that happened before the foundation of the world, before the “I” and “My” and “Me” was even on the radar. So very thankful.

Growing up attending a small, country, Southern Baptist church, I experienced a goodly share of fire and brimstone, soul-searching, hell and damnation preaching. “Brother Jack,” one of our pastors, was particularly bad about crying over our souls during sermons; sweat and tears mingling down his face profusely in those pre-AC days while he plead with us so earnestly to get right with God. I wanted to, I really did. My problems always came after sincerely determining to make amends and follow Christ wholly only to sin and start again the tortuous, hopeless cycle of self-doubt. As a kid, I’d ask myself repeatedly if I had REALLY meant it (my latest decision or re-decision or “rededication” as we called it.) I could never trust my answers since my sins called their veracity into question. Since it was all about my decision, or that’s how I understood it then, I spent a lot of time in spiritual angst.

Interestingly, my father at this time became something of a late-life convert. As a child he attended a very formal Presbyterian church where his very formal parents “dropped him off” for Sunday School each Sunday morning. I think that was the extent of their family religious endeavors. At any rate, as the fortyish, married proprietor of a country store that became the informal community gathering center for the men in our neighborhood, Daddy encountered Brother Edwards, a gentle bear of a pastor, who convinced him of the claims of Christ. At the time, Brother Edwards and his family lived in a small rental home my dad built on our property for extra income. After his conversion he convinced the deacons to let him design and build a manse for the Edwards family, and we lost our renters, but not the loving pastoral care of that good man. He saw us through my dad’s sudden, accidental death, and gave us kids a sense of stability through that time, for which I’m also profoundly thankful.

A funny sideline to that part of my father’s story is that he sold beer at the store, and his conversion made that something of a difficulty for our Baptist church leadership. It never came to any painful head though. Daddy garnered a lot of respect at the church. He liked its young, married couples and he and my mother began having them over for barbeques and fish fries. He also took it upon himself to supply and deliver groceries to some of the poor and widows in the congregation and community at large....so I suppose it presented a conundrum. I’m not sure how, if ever, the issue was resolved.

As a kid, I’d ask myself repeatedly if I had REALLY meant it I could never trust my answers since my sins called their veracity into question... (So) I spent a lot of time in spiritual angst....

I think I am coming to the point where I can say with truth and conviction, “He is the Lord, let him do with me what seems good to him.”

I don't remember seeing beer sold at the store. Maybe my dad just dropped it of his own accord...or maybe the deacons chose to overlook it. My own memories of the food and beverage sales we rung up involve fresh slices of garlicky bologna cut behind our meat counter, white bread and mayonnaise, golden rounds of hoop cheese, and cold coca cola in little glass bottles, often sold with a packet of peanuts that were poured into the coke bottle and guzzled down like a gourmet delight. The highway in front of our store was being converted into a four lane, and I was the happy recipient of many of these coke-peanut treats purchased for me by the state highway workers who frequented our store on their breaks and lunches. I spent a lot of peaceful mornings and afternoons sitting on a high, freshly cut bank overlooking the road bed below, overseeing their work. I remember them planting the Japanese wonder-plant on those newly cut-out banks to keep them from washing. I doubt another clod ever slid down those hills once the kudzu began to grow.

All that aside, after my father's death we kept attending the Baptist church for years, but somewhere along the way I ran out of hope that I could stay the course. Like many people of my generation, I began exploring the options of other religions and drugs urged upon us by our rock-star heroes. It was a long, muddled and difficult road that eventually ended, during my senior year of college, in utter despair. Then, into my story, came the merciful “but God.” At the end of my rope, concluding everything was meaningless, I began running into my high school psychology teacher, who was a Christian. He invited me to some Bible studies on the book of John. I began reading the Bible, and was enabled to see some things with fresh eyes. As it turned out, it wasn't about my own decision for Christ at all. It had to do with his

claims on me. I repented, and started down a new road, or it may be more accurate to say down an old one. Poor theology in my early years was not powerful enough to hide Jesus. He was there. I was the one who had checked out. He never did, though I spent a lot of foolish years ignoring and denying it.

Not many years after that I became acquainted with Reformed theology. The Lord gave me a lot of good teachers. (He still does, one of the few but real redeeming qualities of the communications explosion that roared into my early adult life.) One of the first, best things I came to understand better was the total sovereignty of God over time, history, and even our individual life stories. That is a wonder to me. I've seen several instances lately on social media of people taking issue with Christians who mention praying to God about small incidences in their personal lives, like lost car keys, etc. The line runs something like, “I no longer believe in a God who cares about things like that when there are such graver concerns, like Ebola.” I empathize with this viewpoint to the extent that we Christians can be awfully narcissistic and petty in our concerns, which is unbecoming to our profession. But at the same time, I think the absolute, amazing wonder lies in the very reality of what incarnation means. What IS amazing is that God is not only big enough to enter into the large issues, but can also come down into the cares and concerns of our everyday life. Not a kernel of our experience is wasted. The fact that he cares about the little stuff in no way militates against His oversight of the bigger issues. The very argument these critics have magnifies their own “small thoughts” of God....the idea that he can't be bothered with the small stuff because of his concern for the big things...as if He were limited in the scope of His concerns.

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The Hospitality Sting:

We Are All the Least of These

By Sarah Condon

In yet another one of my “live your best life” moments, I started a new scripture study on hospitality last week. As a Mississippian, I was raised to smile broadly at people I find tiresome and to entertain with the latest Jr. League Cookbook. You know, life skills. So, I thought it would be good to study the Good Book in the hopes of making my hospitality mean something. As so often happens, God had other plans.

I casually mentioned this hospitality scripture study to one of my closest friends, “You should totally do it,” I told her. Only retrospectively am I able to admit that I wanted her to do it so that the next time she came for dinner she would

think something along the lines of, “Wow these gruyere canapés are great! And so HOLY.” But, dear reader, before you start throwing shade my way, perhaps you have your own self delusions. I have found in my personal spiritual life that themed Bible studies (be a better wife, be a better mother, be a better hostess) are gateways for allegedly fixing all of my problems. But, as per usual, I went skipping into FixMeVille. I was all about my new life-changing Bible Study. I was going to be the holiest and most hospitable hostess this side of Mississippi. And I was even doling out my one day’s worth (that’s

right, 24 hours to expertdom) of religious wisdom onto my poor friends.

And then, the unthinkable happened. I locked myself out of the house with a 6-month-old baby in arms. And the hidden key was nowhere to be found. And my husband was hours away, on a lake, trying to catch fish. So I called my dear friend. The one who I had informed of my Best Life Hospitality Bible Study. She immediately dropped her actual life and came to

my rescue. We drove to the school and picked up my hungry toddler. She bought me baby formula. We went back to her house and waited for my husband. It took him 7 hours to get home.

When we got to her house she handed me

a beer and fed my family crackers and cheese. In these days of “casual entertaining,” I can easily fall into the trap of thinking that serving “rustic recipes” or using butcher paper/tea candles as my table decor is somehow less contrived (and therefore more sanctified) than using our fine china. It is not. It invokes just as much fear of judgment and anxiety. Real hospitality is opening your home as it is and offering whatever happens to be in the fridge. It is brave and vulnerable. And it is precisely what my friend offered us.

As the evening went on, she ordered pizza.



God didn't want me to read a hospitality Bible study because he had some grand plans for me to become "our Lord and Savior meets Martha Stewart"

She bathed my toddler. At some point in the evening she handed me her phone to check a text message from my husband (because, of course, mine was locked in our house). And there it was, staring at me from the screen of an Android, the Bible study on hospitality I had recommended to her just the day before. Luckily, it was just me and the 6-month-old in the room. Because I started openly weeping. My friend had taken us in, fed us, and bathed us (well, at least my toddler). I was overcome with a kind of indescribable gratefulness.

God didn't want me to read a hospitality Bible study because he had some grand plans for me to become "our Lord and Savior meets Martha Stewart." I believe God intended for me to read the study because he wanted me to remember what it feels like to receive hospitality. Real hospitality. The kind where you sit on the floor chatting with your friend while your baby rolls around on a blanket.

Spirituality, especially women's spirituality, can be laden with self-improvement. There are an endless amount of "mores" in the Christian woman blogosphere. We should love more, give more, and be more hospitable. But what if we've got it all wrong? What if our rightful inheritance is to be on the receiving end?

It is a risky assertion. There is an anxiety that if we saw ourselves as merely receivers, then we would not help the marginalized. The thought goes that if we consider ourselves as needy for God, we might forget the true widows and orphans in our midst. The more I realize I need

Jesus, the less I buy into that concern. As we hear hauntingly in 1 John: We love him because he first loved us. It is the reception of that love that calls us to utter gratitude. And that kind of gratitude does not a passive person make.

When Jesus tells us in Matthew 25:40, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me," he means everyone. All of us. As it turns out, there isn't even another line to stand in. We are all marked The Least of These in one way or another. Hit it, Flannery:

And bringing up the end of the procession was a tribe of people whom she recognized at once as those who, like herself and Claud, had always had a little of everything, and the given wit to use it right. She leaned forward to observe them closer. They were marching behind the others with great dignity, accountable as they had always been for good order and common sense and respectable behavior. They, alone were on key. Yet she could see by their shocked and altered faces even their virtues were being burned away. She lowered her hands and gripped the rail of the hog pen, her eyes small but fixed unblinkingly on what lay ahead. In a moment the vision faded but she remained where she was.

Flannery O'Connor from "Revelation" in *Everything That Rises Must Converge*

Sarah Condon describes herself as an "Episcopal clergy lady" at St. Martin's Church in Houston, TX. She is married with two children. You can follow her insights at the Mockingbird web blog at mbird.com

Newness in Christ

Our Struggle and Assurance

By Robert Thornton

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

2 Corinthians 5:17

We are all pushovers for newness. Whether it's the newest car model, the latest fashion in clothing, or the most recent smartphone, we flock to it. Who doesn't relish that new car smell; who doesn't admire ourselves in the mirror dressed in the latest designer suit; and who doesn't love the selfie just taken with that sleek-design-smartphone upgrade? What is it about newness that is so appealing? Is it the anticipation of encountering a positive experience? The feeling of a unique event? Or, the enviable position of being the first on your block to have the shiny newest toy?

But newness doesn't just mean receiving or getting something new. Another form of newness involves becoming something different or a change. Change can be difficult if not downright painful at times. The greatest newness any human can experience involves our status in Christ. We are called out of an old life of sin and rebellion and into a new one of holiness and sanctification.

God calls us into His family and through the work of Christ we become righteous in God's sight. God sees us through the lens of Christ's perfect record. Our sins are not imputed to our

account and Christ's righteousness becomes our righteousness.

Paul states in *Romans 6: 22-23*, "*But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*"

But our righteousness or justification doesn't make us perfect. Martin Luther calls this *simul justus et peccator*, or "simultaneously just and sinner." Although we just entered our new state, our new life, we are still sinful people.

So, as believers we follow a road of sanctification. It is a journey of becoming what we are going to be when we are perfect. We are being transformed into people who imitate God and glorify Him. In *2nd Corinthians 3:18* Paul says, "*And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.*" We grow in obedience as we travel the road. We put off those things characteristic of the world: falsehood, sexual immorality, theft, malice, covetousness and foolishness. We also grow in holiness in our new life in Christ.

But, because our sin nature goes with us, the road is fraught with potholes and detours. It's no easy journey. It is a struggle. However, we don't struggle alone in our new life. God

The greatest newness any human can experience involves our status in Christ. We are called out of an old life of sin and rebellion and into a new one of holiness and sanctification.

doesn't say, "Okay, now you're saved. You're on your own. Good luck." No. On our conversion we are given a new heart inclined to holiness. Moreover, the same Christ who justifies us also sanctifies us – so the same faith that justifies us, sanctifies us. Christ says in John 15:1-5: *"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."*

We also have the Holy Spirit to make us more Christ-like in our journey toward glorification. In *1st Corinthians 6:11* Paul states, *"And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."*

Being filled with the Holy Spirit means yielding ourselves to His sanctifying work. He equips us for that final day. In that sanctifying work, our union with Christ is increased and our fellowship with the Father is heightened. We increasingly become the image-bearer of God. According to Paul, we are to work out our

salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12). As mentioned earlier we struggle and strive during our journey to glorification. But, Paul also reminds us that we struggle alongside the Holy Spirit, for it is *He* that empowers us in our journey of sanctification. As John McArthur writes, "The truth is that sanctification is God's work, but He performs it through the diligent self-discipline and righteous pursuits of His people, not in spite of them. God's sovereign work does not absolve believers from the need for obedience; it means their obedience is itself a Spirit-empowered work of God."

So we aren't perfect in our newness, but we will be in the end. Here in our newness in Christ we may struggle along the road to glorification. But, our victory is assured. Glory be to God!

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

The Religious Imperative

God and the Nature of Man

By Jimmy Hopper

Even if all our scientific questions are answered, our problem is still not touched at all.

Ludwig Wittgenstein
Austrian Philosopher

Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind and said: "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you will make it known to me. "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding.

Job 38:1-4

I. A CULTURE OF CONDESCENSION

I know some of you, like myself, have been in the position of the telling someone, whether in a group or alone, that you were a believing Christian. As soon as you said it, a half-smile, a slightly raised eyebrow, perhaps a trace of a sneer would appear on the face of your confidant, and you would suddenly feel that he believed you were missing an intellectual brick or two in the edifice of your mind. A good deal of condescension would be directed at you and your lack of discernment.

Now this is disconcerting to us personally; we like to believe that our edifice is at least okay, maybe not Oxford-University-okay, but good enough. We like to believe that we have some basis for our belief, forgetting the very real fact that we would condescend also – except that God has put His hand on us and sent His Spirit to us so that we could see and understand. Given this, it is still disconcerting apart from ourselves, because of what, and especially who, is the basis of the condescension. For the

believer, a person who condescends toward God, the God of Creation, the God of Judgment, the God whose existence defines the moral structure of the universe, is a person involved in a very strange and scary process. We feel the need, as ridiculous as it seems on paper, to defend God. And when we attempt that, we can become very unlike Christ, the God we are attempting to defend. But we are called to interact with the culture and specifically to be able to give an answer. So we need to respond.

The idea of God, especially God as the Creator of man, thus making man answerable to Him, is odious to the postmodern world. Actually, it always has been odious to a large degree. Man, by nature, doesn't like for anything to be bigger than himself. There must be another explanation for existence that is not God, the Creator. Among intellectuals, and to the rank and file, now that their ideas have filtered down, Scientism is the surest thing going, the unassailable idea that can't be touched. The basic tenet of Scientism is that science can and does

explain everything. The corollary is: if Scientism can't explain something, then that something is untrue. To disbelieve this is not politically correct and not intellectually correct, and the disbelief gains both dismay and condescension from everyone. To believe Scientism, however, is to effectively eliminate God from the equation, since He is, by definition, outside the naturalist box of a closed universe.

To demonstrate this attitude, the October 2014 issue of the *Atlantic Monthly* carried an article entitled "Were There Dinosaurs on Noah's Ark?" written by Jeffery Goldberg. Mr. Goldberg wrote about the Creation Museum in Kentucky which seeks to tell the Biblical Creation story through interactive exhibits, movies, and Epcot-type technology. I don't propose to discuss the Creation Museum as such or its purposes. I'm not a person who gets excited about a Disneyesque use of religion for profit. I'm fascinated by the intellectual posture and attitudes of non-believers, one of which Mr. Goldberg appears to be. As he introduces his article, he concedes that he finds "atheism dismaying"; and believes that it is "religion, not science," that answers the questions that "every reflective person must ask. Who am I? Why am I here? How then should I live?" He says that he is "appalled" by Richard Dawkins' description of a universe with "no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but blind pitiless indifference."

However, even with his concerns and dismay about atheism and nihilism, Mr. Goldberg exhibits an ample supply of condescension for

the idea of intelligent design in creation. His description of those who come to the museum as having a "seeming gullibility," and are those who "draw the scorn of sophisticates." No matter what concerns some have, every other idea apart from Scientism, whether of God, of transcendence, of purpose, of structure, is simply too silly to be addressed and must be greeted with laughter and scorn.

Scientism has developed theories, necessary when dealing with ideas of time, distance and physics that cannot be subjected to the scientific method. These theories persist despite the three very real questions Mr. Goldberg raises about what it means to be human. My purpose is to discuss the intellectual climate in which we live as postmodern Christians and, further, to look at what seems to be some very real breaches in the wall that has been erected around Scientism, breaches that come from both inside and outside the Scientism corral, and finally, to make some generalizations about how Christians could proceed living in and seeking to advance the Faith we profess.

II. EVOLUTION AND DARWINISM

The central lightning rod of contention between Christianity and Scientism has been Darwinism since the Scopes "monkey" trial in Dayton, Tennessee in 1925. Darwinism has lost some of its luster but the idea that life came naturally through evolution is still a central tenet of Scientism because, if it could possibly be true, it answers an unanswerable question. So, as we look at the idea of Christian anti-intellectualism, it is a proper starting point.

The idea of God, especially God as the Creator of man, thus making man answerable to Him, is odious to the postmodern world.

Darwinism ...was the answer that the deists of the 18th and 19th centuries searched for in vain. It made the God of Creation unnecessary and resolved the problem of man being secondary to anything.

I have read a fair amount regarding this issue of Scientism and its idea of religious anti-intellectualism for two reasons. First, it is extraordinarily interesting to me because the roots of science, the desire to understand God's world, lay historically in the Christian faith. Secondly, it's fascinating because it is certainly one of the biggest questions Christians face as we interact with the culture in which we find ourselves. In addition to my reading, I have also had the advantage of attending the Riverwood Sunday School classes on Christianity and Science that addressed these questions both scientifically and philosophically. The violations of the laws of probability and what we know as "common sense" that were brought out in those lessons were fascinating.

One of my early reads in exploring this subject was a book of essays written by a Christian named Marilynne Robinson, a brilliant essayist who is also a Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist. It is titled *The Death of Adam: Essays on Modern Thought*. In her introduction to the book, she describes the essays as "contrarian in thought and spirit" and that "They assert, in one way or another, that the prevailing view of things *can be assumed to be wrong*, and that its opposite, being its image or shadow, can also be assumed to be wrong." They undertake to demonstrate that there are other ways of thinking, ways for which better arguments can be made. This was refreshing in this time of political and intellectual correctness, both of which contribute to the scorn for Christians mentioned above.

Ms. Robinson's initial essay was the longest in the book and was titled simply "Darwinism." Ms. Robinson is quick to make a distinction between evolution and Darwinism. She defines a very real evolution as the change that occurs in organisms over time. Darwinism, she claims, is something very different. It is "an interpretation of the phenomena (of evolution) that claims to refute religion and is.....antithetical...to the assumptions...(of) Judeo-Christianity.

In the essay, she doesn't argue the "science" of Darwinism, but instead uses a devastating philosophical and anthropological argument. She says that if Darwinism and social Darwinism (the offshoot from *The Descent of Man*) were correct, humanity and the world would look a lot different. In fact, she defines that world by the evil that has been actually perpetrated by tracking an intellectual line that both practiced and expanded the tenets of Darwinism. A quick and admittedly shallow look at this - it is a very large subject - is instructive.

III. THE INTELLECTUAL LINE AND A CULTURE OF DEATH

First, before Darwin was published, there was Robert Malthus and his population theories. Malthus declared that people increase faster than the means to sustain them, thus a disaster must take place - war, famine, or disease - to bring about subsistence for all. The weak would die out in these "Malthusian Catastrophes" and the strong would survive. Darwin had already defined man by race alone so you can imagine the categories.

Darwin, of course, is next in line. He gave an authority, an authenticity, to the Enlightenment search for total answers outside of God. In his scientific studies of variations in species, he looked for some big picture idea, some “theory of relativity” idea that would make his work significant and famous. He found it in Malthus’ writings. When he read Malthus in 1838, he wrote, *“I happened to read for amusement Malthus on Population and being well prepared to appreciate the struggle for existenceit at once struck me that under these conditions favorable variations would be preserved and unfavorable ones would be destroyed. The result of this would be the formation of a new species. Here then, I had at last a theory in which to work.”* The non-humanistic, non-Judeo Christian idea of the “continuous cull,” as Ms. Robinson succinctly puts it, made social Darwinism possible, and led to the outrageous idea that all life happened accidentally and had a natural cause. It was the answer that the deists of the 18th and 19th centuries searched for in vain. It made the God of Creation unnecessary and resolved the problem of man being secondary to anything. I have always believed that Darwin and his theories would have thrilled Thomas Jefferson, who sought gamely to make God an indifferent deity who created, but then watched the creation run without further interference. Darwin and Jefferson missed each other by a mere twenty-five years.

Frederic Nietzsche is next in the panoply of disaster. *Man and Superman. The Will to Power.*

Beyond Good and Evil. The movement toward power to survive and conquer. The idea that there is nothing else but power to have or look forward to. This operates in the weather of the ancient idea of nihilism in which there is no intrinsic goodness or meaning. Nietzsche’s philosophy works in Richard Dawkins’ idea of existence, that there is “no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but blind pitiless indifference.” In that world, what earthly difference does anything make? Do as you wish. Take what you want. Nietzsche, in the line of Malthus and Darwin, delivered the philosophical underpinnings to a disastrous series of ideas and historical events.

Next in line is Sigmund Freud, “shaper of the modern soul,” to use Ms. Robinson’s phrase. She describes him as rejecting the supposed “myths” of Judeo-Christianity and replacing them with his own mythology. In it, religion is “delusional,” external to reality, and “happiness” is only related to the pleasure principle and is impossible to truly obtain. He rejects “love your neighbor” on the grounds, that “it is contrary to human nature.” In his ideas of ego, super ego, id, and libido, he defines all human behavior, both in cause and effect. In essence, the structure he supposed/imposed on the human mind made it an engine of aggressive force and desire fulfillment and redefined pathology as “the restraining of these forces.”

So this line of thinkers - Malthus, Darwin, Nietzsche, and Freud - has been significant in building the prevailing cultural dynamic. This

... the structure (Freud) supposed/imposed on the human mind made it an engine of aggressive force and desire fulfillment and redefined pathology as “the restraining of these forces.”

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dynamic, Scientism based on Darwinism, with its survival-of-the-fittest overlay and its strong racist component (Charles Darwin's theories are extraordinarily, even shockingly racist), were significant parts of the culture of death that pervaded the 20th Century with its great genocides. We think of Stalin, Hitler, Pol Pot, Mao Tse-tung, four of those responsible for the death of millions, along with other leaders of genocides and even vicious criminals who were influenced by Darwinism. Adolph Hitler was strongly influenced by the racial aspect of Darwinism and he stands alone as the poster boy of racial genocide in the eyes of history. Pol Pot was educated in Paris with its Darwinian biases, and those ideas were put to use in the "killing fields" of the Khmer Rouge. Stalin, perhaps the most vicious of them all, built Soviet society on a base of the destruction of millions of the peasant class that he believed was holding up entry into the industrial world. This is the world we would have everywhere if Darwinism was truly how man developed.

IV. ON BEING HUMAN

That humanity has deplored the end games of the previously listed group of neo-Darwinians indicates a very different idea of humanity, what it means, and why we are as we are. In 2011, Doug and Nancy Wilson came to Riverwood for a Covenant and Community Conference as Riverwood and Tuscaloosa sought to cope with the tornado that ripped through the city in April. One topic of conversation was the interaction Rev. Wilson had with Christopher Hitchens, the atheist thinker and writer. A documentary, *Collision*, had been filmed during a series of debates about Christianity and

atheism and it was shown at a movie night at the church. In conversations with Doug Wilson, we discovered that the two men had a great amount of respect for each other and even a level of friendship. The debate was a battle of two superb intellects. Both men were prepared and both made points. A key point that was made over and over, however, had to do with morality. Hitchens' position was that morality had nothing to do with religion. However, Wilson constantly made the point that he was the one who could account for the origin of his morality and that Hitchens could not. Indeed, Darwinism, the survival of the strong, makes morality and caring for others (instead of one's own self) a liability.

Marilynne Robinson has spoken to the idea that being human is incompatible with Darwinian thought in several places, but especially in two recent books of essays. The first of these, *Absence of Mind*, speaks directly to the aggressive atheistic campaigns of the 21st Century against religion. Their attacks do not take into consideration the human mind, thus its "absence." The subtitle of the book is "The Dispelling of Inwardness from the Modern Myth of the Self," an ironic capsule of her idea that the any explanation of the soul of man lies outside of naturalism. The book was published by the Yale University Press, one of a series called "The Terry Lectures," and seeks to make an unexplainable human consciousness a part of the Religion/Scientism debate.

The second book in which she develops these ideas more fully is her 2012 volume, *When I Was a Child I Read Books*. Regarding the Scientism

The self-awareness of man, the “humanness” of man, the mind of man, the “astonishing nexus” of mind and “soul,” are unexplainable inside the naturalist box.

attempt to explain man, she writes, “*We have not escaped, nor have we in any sense diminished, the mystery of our existence. We have only rejected any language that would seem to acknowledge it.*” She goes further and speaks of our unexplainable uniqueness and mystery, names it as our “soul”, and quoting St. Paul, explains the origin of our self awareness. In this long, but important quote, she writes: “*Having read recently that there are more neurons in the human brain than there are stars in the Milky Way, and having read any number of times that the human brain is the most complex thing in the universe and that the mind is not identical with the brain but is more mysterious still, it seems to me this astonishing nexus of the self, so uniquely elegant and capable, merits a name that would indicate a difference in kind from the ontological run of things, and for my purposes, “soul” will do just fine. Perhaps I should pause here and clarify my meaning, since there are those who feel that the spiritual is diminished or denied when it is associated with the physical. I am not among them. In his Letter to the Romans, Paul says, “Ever since the creation of the world, [God’s] invisible nature, namely His eternal power and deity has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made.” If we are to consider the heavens, how much more are we to consider the magnificence energies of consciousness that make whomever we pass on the street a far grander marvel than our galaxy? At this point of dynamic convergence, call it self or call it soul, questions of right or wrong are weighed, love is felt, guilt and loss are suffered. And, over time, formation occurs, for weal or woe, governed in large part by that unaccountable capacity for self-awareness.*”

The self-awareness of man, the “humanness” of man, the mind of man, the “astonishing nexus” of mind and “soul,” are unexplainable inside the naturalist box. Man, who the world would make dominant, is dominant for reasons that are based on being made in the image of God. Marilynne Robinson, Francis Schaeffer, Dorothy Sayers, David Bentley Hart, Doug Wilson, and many, many others have debated, and debated profoundly, the idea of God being the imperative in explaining what exists and why it exists.

V. BREACHES IN THE WALL

There have been a number of breaches in the wall of Scientism from the inside, from proponents of these theories and beliefs. They echo the idea that a Darwinian “creation,” as Wittgenstein noted in his quote at the beginning of this article, does not, and cannot answer the questions we need answered to explain the reasons of existence, structure, being and morality. Wittgenstein is not alone. These concepts are now being questioned by scientific, and particularly by philosophical intelligentsia.

I actually decided to write about this subject when I read a fascinating, short but very dense book by the American philosopher, Thomas Nagel. The title is *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Surely False*. Dr. Nagel outlines and defines the problems with the naturalistic idea that Scientism has all the answers. He admits that he doesn’t have the answers, and further

says that he can't believe in a Creator, that he lacks the *sensus divinitatis* that he says enables, even compels, believers to see the purposes of God but recognizes that believers do have a viable answer to what is unanswerable through Scientism. Like Ms. Robinson, a large part of the problem lies in explaining the human mind (her "soul") and human consciousness. In the book, he, an atheist, defines the ability of theism to find answers and the mark of God on man as follows: *"The interest of theism even to an atheist is that it explains in another way what does not seem capable of explanation by physical science. The inadequacies of the naturalist and reductionist world picture seem to me to be real. There are things that science as presently conceived does not help us to understand, and which we can see, from the internal features of physical science, that it is not going to explain. They seem to call for a more uncompromisingly mentalistic or normative form of understanding. Theism embraces that conclusion by attributing the mental phenomena found within the world to the working of a comprehensive mental source, of which they (men) are miniature versions."*

So *Mind and Cosmos* doesn't have answers, since Dr. Nagel realizes that he lacks the Holy Spirit, which is necessary to believing the answers. He looks instead toward discovery of a teleological impulse, yet to be discovered, that would possibly explain it. In reality, to my mind, it would raise the same questions of origins and first causes. Nagel doesn't have the answers, but he certainly has outlined the problem and this is a breach in the wall of Scientism.

Years ago I read or heard (I don't remember which) that Christianity was the only system

able to answer the right questions. I suspect that this may have come from Dr. Francis Schaeffer, who I read extensively in my early fervor. Now it seems that there are many like Dr. Fagel. Some I've read that have serious questions about naturalistic and reductionist non-"answers" are Antonin Sertillanges, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Jacques Barzun, and the several practicing scientists and philosophers Dr. Thornton mentioned in the Sunday School series.

A fascinating and different look at the nihilism, the lack of purpose, the anger and ennui of a world in a box, is the recent book by Hubert Dreyfus, a professor of philosophy at UC Berkeley and Sean Dorrance Kelly, Professor and Chair of Philosophy at Harvard University. In *All Things Shining: Reading the Western Classics to Find Meaning in a Secular Age*, they seek meaning in a modern, nihilistic world using classical literature, from *The Odyssey* to *Moby Dick*, as they seek re-engagement with the world. Their search begins with the idea that the ancient Greeks engaged with the world more than modern man and in a way that provided satisfaction and meaning. The very need to seek this strikes me as a sad commentary on the naturalistic, reductionist world our culture has constructed and the attempt to find meaning within it in their book qualifies as a breach in the wall.

Don't get me wrong: the arguments in *All Things Shining* are often engaging as the authors, both obviously brilliant men, discuss the classics in this way. However, the ideas are ultimately silly and ridiculously elitist, making it difficult to appreciate the arguments in any pragmatic way. Two of their "means," ways to have a meaningful

(The authors) are unable to see the possibility that Jesus was who He said He was, and that this "reconfiguring" was the ultimate event of history.

With Christian and social structures “destroyed,” man was able to make his own “truth,” make his own choices, and authenticate them himself

life, are instructive. One is to make a ritual of simple things in life, for example, drinking your morning coffee. Make it Starbucks-quality as to aroma and taste. Drink it in pleasant surroundings and use a white cup to increase the visual pleasure through the contrast of black and white. And it will be meaningful.

Another is to make a ritual of events, going to a concert, sporting event, etc. Look forward to these events; immerse yourself in them; remember them. Each is called a “whoosh” moment by the authors and they supposedly make life worthwhile - gusto and all that. After I read this, my wife and I attended a college football game featuring our favorite college team. After a long play for a touchdown, I looked at her and said, “That was a whoosh!” Ever the pragmatist, she asked me, “Are you all right?”

But the most fascinating thing in *All Thinks Shining* is not the “whoosh” and coffee, or even *Moby Dick*. It has to do with a discussion about individuals who “reconfigure” culture. This is defined as someone who “would introduce new practices and a new mood that transformed people’s understanding of themselves and their world.” Their chief and perfect example is Jesus. They write: “*Reconfigurers (of culture) are either gods or madmen. But which of these is only determined in retrospect. To see how reconfiguring actually works, we need to look at the purest example of successful reconfiguring we have—the work ascribed to Jesus. Whether or not a person named Jesus actually existed—and if so, whether he did what Jesus is supposed to have done—is no doubt a fascinating historical*

question. But it is not our concern here. What is relevant for us instead is the phenomenon of reconfiguring itself. As he is described in the Gospels, Jesus totally transforms people’s understanding of what it is to be a human being. This is a superhuman thing to do. Like a god, the Biblical Jesus reveals a new Christian world.”

When I read this, I was literally astonished. They actually, rather brilliantly, realized what Jesus had done, the results of His work, even admitting that he was either a “god” or a “madman.” He claimed to be God. The things He accomplished are the basis of lifestyles of millions today, two thousand years later, and yet it doesn’t click. They are unable to see the possibility that Jesus was who He said He was, and that this “reconfiguring” was the ultimate event of history. Again, there must be the *sensus divinitatis* but their conclusion in itself is a breach in the wall of the materialistic box.

VI: CHRISTIAN REACTION: MAD OR SAD

In 1976, about the time I recognized the *sensus divinitatis* in myself and understood that I was a believer, Dr. Francis Schaeffer wrote a significant book with the interesting title: *How Should We Then Live? The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture*. In it, he traces themes of Western history and philosophy and tracks the gradual disintegration from Reformation into modernity and, in the following twenty-five years, post-modernism. The book uses art and popular culture to define the trends and show the deterioration of a culture that was Christian in a titular sense. Schaeffer seeks to show how our civilization became one seeking only

“personal peace and affluence” and this, alone with philosophical trends, two horrific world wars, and general spiritual malaise led to the revolt of youth and intellectuals in the 60s.

What followed was the beginnings of post-modernism, spoken of by Schaeffer as “existential methodology.” With Christian and social structures “destroyed,” man was able to make his own “truth,” to make his own choices, and authenticate them himself. It is important to always understand that in post-modernism, at its base, there are no standards, and whatever works for the individual is what works and by definition is good. This is the case even if it is nothing (ultimate Nihilism). That is your truth and you have a right to live by it. The intellectual condescension we experience comes from this: Christians (supposedly) hold to a world view that won’t allow this “freedom” that is the basis of existential methodology and believe in a “pretend” religion that won’t allow this freedom.

So how should we then live? Schaeffer says that a first step is not to follow in the same path of existential methodology by isolating Christianity from the culture and the world. We must apply our beliefs to the entire cosmos, whether we speak of creation, science, sexual mores, medicine, art, entertainment, culture, justice, politics, history, all aspects of life. The Bible affirms much about all of these strands of society. They are not bigger than God, or separate from God, and we are called to address everything with a view of who we are: subjects in the kingdom of God.

How do we do this? There are two ways. We can fortify ourselves in enclaves, gird ourselves for war, and go after the culture. To a large degree, those who do are considered “fundamentalists” or the “silent majority” or the “religious right,”

and see those opposing us as enemies, to be taken down and unceremoniously shamed. We can get mad. We aren’t turning the other cheek any longer. We’ll fight. We’ll organize and throw the bums out and win, thinking it will mean something, the political battle. They are, after all, awfully condescending toward us and it can be embarrassing.

Or we can go another way. This one is both considerably different and more difficult. We are to live as the Apostle says and as far as we are able, to live in peace with other men. We are to live so that we are held up as good examples, doing the works in which we glorify God. We are to preach the Gospel to all men, as God gives us opportunity, and we are to look at a fallen world that has not acknowledged God with great sadness and great love. We are, after all, required to do the impossible. We are required to love our enemies. We daily feel, think, and act in ways that would make us God’s enemy had He not chosen to touch us and give us our own *sensus divinitatis*, that wondrous gift of love. It is that which allows our enmity to be forgiven but also calls and *requires* us to forgive the enmity of others.

In light of these requirements, and in light of what Christians have faced through the centuries and even today, condescension is a small thing indeed, but we do need to give an answer, and to answer in a way that reflects God’s love for us and for humanity. Christians need to be those whose ideas of man match those of Ms. Robinson, and more than that, of the Word of God. Man is complicated, wonderfully made and exalted since we know he is made in God’s image. This is not easy when combined with the knowledge of original sin in ourselves, as it always must be. Answering men who maintain that man, not God, is the ultimate, the measure of all things, is difficult

and often seems impossible. It is impossible, in fact, without the Spirit of God, but we are called to do it and are given the miraculous Word of God – *Sola Scriptura*, Scripture alone – as the ultimate authority. We live in very dangerous but interesting times. We need to pray daily that we personally, that Riverwood, and the church universal will fulfill this work with love and grace.

A Reading List

If you have made it this far, congratulations, and if you wish to read further there are a number of books available that address the current intellectual climate and the necessity for Christians to address it. Listed below are the books mentioned in this article, and also some others that might be helpful together with comments. All are widely available.

The Death of Adam

Marilynne Robinson

Great essays from one of the finest Christian minds writing today.

Absence of Mind

Marilynne Robinson

A small (135 pages) brilliant series of essays based on The Terry lectures on “Religion in light of Science and Philosophy.”

When I Was A Child I Read Books

Marilynne Robinson

Essays both personal and public. I’m glad I lived long enough to read “Wondrous Love.”

All Things Shining

Hubert Dreyfus and Sean Dorrance Kelly

A brilliant, ultimately sad, and often funny effort to find meaning for life apart from God.

How Should We Then Live?

Francis A. Schaeffer

Schaeffer was the first to have Christians address the culture without vilifying it. His writing demonstrates a profound love for those who are victimized by the prevailing world view.

Mind and Cosmos

Thomas Nagel

Short (128 pages) and very dense, it is really worth reading. No answers but he really understands, and courageously, I believe, speaks to it.

The Case for Civility

Os Guinness

The Irish Christian intellectual deplores the fact that both Christian and secular thinkers are unable to talk to each other and even seek to disallow public dialogue.

Christianity and Liberalism

J. Gresham Machen

Written in 1923 when mainline churches had begun to deny the orthodox faith in the name of naturalism, this is still the classic, and one of the best, defenses of the faith ever written.

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that wound its way through centuries of church history to the true headwaters, which had gushed forth from the Rock Who commanded, “Go and make disciples of all nations!”

As comforting and entertaining as looking back is, this time of transition also demands that we turn our attention forward to what lies ahead. Truth is, I don’t know exactly what circumstances we will face in Tuscaloosa or what specific situations will come up in ministry at Riverwood. As much as we all like cool, deep water, I’m sure that there will be rapids and hazards to face. However, I am confident of two things. First, God has brought our family and Riverwood this far for a purpose. And second, God’s purposes are not always easy but they are certainly good. Together, we will know His presence in the worship and fellowship of His people and in the moments of humble repentance and reconciliation. Together, we will experience stretches of heart-wrenching sorrow and times of wide-mouthed joy. So let’s look back with gratitude for what God has done and forward with expectation as we continue this

grand journey together, making our way to the sea and even beyond!

PIPPIN: “I didn’t think it would end this way.”

GANDALF: “End? No, the journey doesn’t end here. Death is just another path, one that we all must take. The grey rain-curtain of this world rolls back, and all turns to silver glass, and then you see it.”

PIPPIN: “What? Gandalf? See what?”

GANDALF: “White shores, and beyond, a far green country under a swift sunrise.”

PIPPIN: “Well, that isn’t so bad.”

GANDALF: “No. No, it isn’t.”

J.R.R. Tolkien

from *The Lord of the Rings*

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These people still don’t have a good grasp on INCARNATION. Not that I do, but I think I’m beginning to understand it a little better.

One thing I do know. God had mercy on a small, insignificant child of the South and shaped her experience so that she could come to know Him, and love Him, and be thankful. (The cultivation of thanksgiving is something I’ve been impressed with the last few years and an idea worthy of its own article. It’s no accident that the scriptures are full of admonitions to render thanks. It is quite life changing and powerful.) Of His providences toward me, of His orchestration of “my story,” or my “testimony,” I think I am coming to the point where I can say with truth and conviction, “He is the Lord, let him do with me what seems good to him.”

And that is enough. This prayer, written by Flannery O’Connor, is a perfect summation of my own feelings just now.

“Dear God, I cannot love Thee the way I want to. You are the slim crescent of a moon that I see and my self is the earth’s shadow that keeps me from seeing all the moon. The crescent is very beautiful and perhaps that is all one like I am should or could see; but what I am afraid of, dear God, is that my self shadow will grow so large that it blocks the whole moon, and that I will judge myself by the shadow that is nothing. I do not know you God because I am in the way. Please help me to push myself aside.”

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FINALE

Fear, Forgiveness and Endless Mercy

Being continually astonished, as I am, at the snail's pace of Sanctification, and having committed a sin, even the sin that you've committed so many times before, have you ever thought: "Well, that's it. I can't be forgiven for **that** again. Not **that**, the one I've confessed to so often." You think that you can't call upon Him having done **that** again, all the while telling yourself desperately that now you have to go to Him, even in your shame.

But what of the sin that caused others to sin? And what about the sin that damaged someone else, even irrevocably? Can you possibly bring those to Jesus? And what about the sin you love, the sin you have run to even after saying, over and over, "never again"? What about those sins? Can you bring those to Jesus?

Yes, you must. You call on Him because you really have no other choice. You call on Him because, as David said, "Against You and You only have I sinned" and because you can't live with the shame and fear and pain of unconfessed sin. You call on Him because to not call on Him is the ultimate sin, the sin of unbelief, of doubting His mercy, His love and His forgiveness.

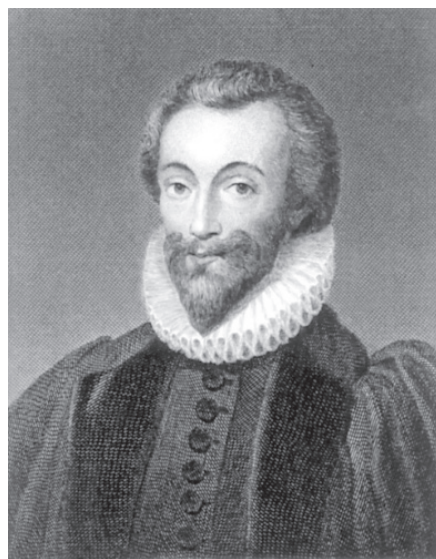
John Donne, (1572-1631) was a scholar, Elizabethan adventurer, womanizer, and poet who became an Anglican priest and the Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral in London. As he considered his life, he wrote of God's work and mercy to him in the great metaphysical poem, *A Hymn to God the Father*. In it he looks at our need for the mercy, forgiveness, and great patience of God until we are sanctified and our fears are finally ended. Read it and be comforted.

A Hymn to God the Father

Wilt thou forgive that sin where I begun,
Which was my sin, though it were done before?
Wilt thou forgive that sin, through which I run,
And do run still, though still I do deplore?
When thou hast done, thou hast not done,
For I have more.

Wilt thou forgive that sin which I have won
Others to sin, and made my sin their door?
Wilt thou forgive that sin which I did shun
A year or two, but wallow'd in, a score?
When thou hast done, thou hast not done,
For I have more.

I have a sin of fear, that when I have spun
My last thread, I shall perish on the shore;
But swear by thyself, that at my death thy Son
Shall shine as he shines now, and heretofore;
And, having done that, thou hast done;
I fear no more.

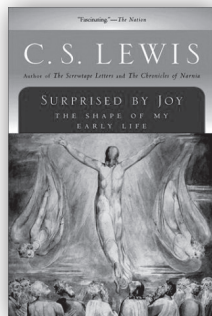


John Donne

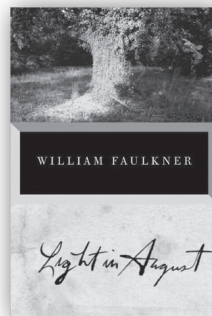


INTERACT WITH CULTURE

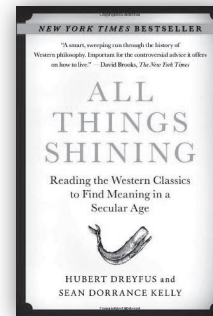
RIVERWOOD BOOK GROUP



Surprised by Joy
C.S. Lewis



Light in August
William Faulkner



All Things Shining
Herbert Dreyfus &
Sean Dorrance Kelly

The Riverwood Book Group meets each Monday evening at 7:30 PM in the home of Kay Kirkley, at 1745 Ridgemont Drive. We select the books we will read together, an eclectic combination of fiction, history, theology, biography, commentary and drama, then we meet to look at them through the lens of the Gospel, "sharpening each other" through discussion. If you enjoy books, ideas, fellowship, and coffee, join us. Everyone is welcome.



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