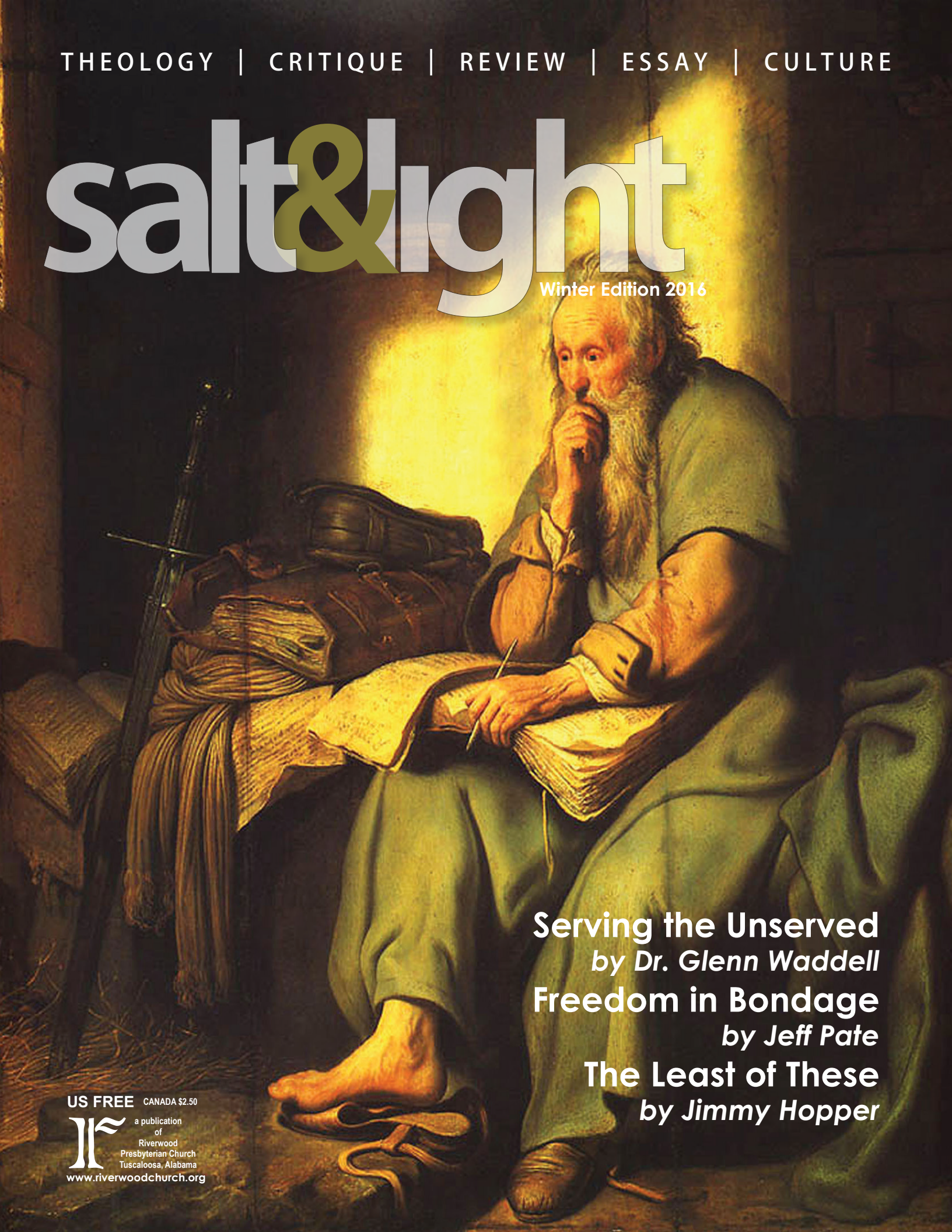


THEOLOGY | CRITIQUE | REVIEW | ESSAY | CULTURE

# salt&light

Winter Edition 2016



**Serving the Unserved**  
*by Dr. Glenn Waddell*  
**Freedom in Bondage**  
*by Jeff Pate*  
**The Least of These**  
*by Jimmy Hopper*

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Photo of Kilby Prison

# FROM THE EDITOR

We have not had a themed issue of *Salt & Light* recently, and, if you are looking for an issue totally devoted to a single theme, we don't in this issue. But, because of an exciting new ministry in West Alabama and Warrior Presbytery, three articles in this issue focuses on that ministry as a partial theme. The ministry is a prison ministry centered at the Bibb County Correctional Facility at Brent and there is a great deal of excitement about its potential. There is also the normal array of omnibus articles dedicated to theology, culture, critique, and review, all of which we hope is of interest to the reformed Christian as he or she live for Christ in our post-modern world. So take some time, relax, read, enjoy and hopefully be inspired.

- **Serving the Unserved** - Dr. Glenn Waddell of Birmingham Theological Seminary writes of the newly founded prison ministry in Brent.
- **Freedom in Bondage** - Rev. Jeff Pate remembers attending a service in a prison and discovering again true freedom in Christ.
- **The Least of These** - Jimmy Hopper remembers prisons, prisoners, and how he, and every Christians, escaped prison and became free.
- **The Sum of All Fears** - Peggy Drinkard explores her deepest fears, and her wondrous solution.
- **First Grade Story** - Riverwood Classical School teacher Adam Condra, and his post-election meditation, starring his 1st grade class.
- **Mission Minded or Absent Minded** - Mickey DeHaan speaks to the strong mission drive God has given to her and Bruce as church members.
- **(Deus) Ex Machina** - Jimmy Hopper reviews the movie, *Ex Machina* and considers AI, artificial intelligence in our culture.
- **Solace in God's Sovereignty** - Brad Yarbro writes about the sovereignty of God from The perspective of personal evangelicalism.
- **Finale: The Skylight** - Poet and translator Seamus Henry speaks to Freedom.





# Serving the Unserved

A Prison Ministry in Brent

By Dr. Glenn Waddell

As we set our priorities and budget back in October of 2015, we had no idea the Lord was preparing a new opportunity for Birmingham Theological Seminary. In November, we received a phone call, which led to a meeting, which led to a visit to a maximum security prison in South Carolina, which led us to establish a seminary training program at the Bibb County Correctional Facility in Brent, Alabama. The overarching goal of the BTS Prison Initiative, which launched this fall, is to equip inmates to minister to inmates throughout the Alabama prison system. After all, who has a better opportunity to reach an inmate than an inmate who has been well trained in Bible, apologetics, teaching, counseling and conflict resolution (to name just a few areas)?

The BTS initiative is modeled closely after an educational program offered by Columbia International University at Kirkland Correctional Facility in Columbia, South Carolina. Started in 2008, that program has graduated 94 inmates, each of whom were assigned in pairs to various prisons around the state. The South Carolina program is in many ways similar to a seminary training program established in the Angola prison in Louisiana roughly twenty years ago by New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. The positive impacts graduates have had on those prison systems are overwhelming, and we are praying for a similar impact here in Alabama.

In December of last year, we sat in the auditorium of the Kirkland Correctional Facility and watched a graduation processional containing faculty from CIU, South Carolina corrections officials and 15 inmate-graduates. The graduates had obviously become very good friends with one another over their two years of study, and their excitement about their next assignment from the Lord was evident. Corrections Department officials in South Carolina were enthusiastic about the program and told us that wardens regularly ask for graduates to be assigned to their prison. Though not a focus of the program, recidivism rates in South Carolina are down and many attribute that positive trend – at least in part – to this program. More importantly to us, many inmates have come to faith in Christ and many more have been disciplined, encouraged and served.

In September, Birmingham Theological Seminary began offering seminary classes at the Bibb County Correctional Facility to a group of 15 inmates carefully selected from prisons around the state. These students will progress through an intensive two-year ministry training program and, upon graduation, be assigned in pairs to another state prison, where they will put their training into practice as they minister to other inmates.

The focus of the BTS Prison Initiative is not on helping the inmate get released on probation,

but rather on training him to faithfully serve the Lord while in prison. For that reason, only inmates with at least seven years remaining on their sentence are eligible for the program. And inmates have to agree to serve wherever they are assigned upon graduation, even if it means they are assigned to a higher-security correctional facility than their inmate "classification" dictates. And, finally, applicants must be serious about their faith and willing to work hard. The practical and academic content of this program is challenging, particularly for inmates with poor academic backgrounds.

One of the conditions set for this program by the state is that it be entirely privately funded. Because BTS is such a lean operation, that requirement is challenging, but not

overwhelming. Our preliminary budget for this is just under \$50,000 per year – not much at all considering the potential impact of this program on the state prison system and beyond that to the inmates's families and communities throughout the state.

Jeff Dunn, Commissioner of the Alabama Department of Corrections, is a retired Air Force colonel and member of Eastwood Presbyterian (PCA) in Montgomery. He did not pursue this position, but accepted it only

after it became clear to him and his wife that this was the Lord's call on his life. You've certainly seen the news articles about the many challenges Commissioner Dunn and the ADOC face, including overcrowding, inmate violence, understaffing, aging facilities, and inadequate funding. I know Commissioner Dunn would appreciate your prayers.

And we at BTS would appreciate your prayers as well. This is an entirely new venture in a very different world for us. While we know some of the challenges we will face, there

are many unknowns and uncertainties. As we step out in faith, we place our confidence in the Lord – that He has called us to this work and will equip us to equip these inmates to serve Him inside the

prison walls. As you have opportunity, please pray for:

- BTS Vice President Dr. Thad James, who will be overseeing the BTS Prison Initiative
- Reverend Mitch Haubert, pastor of Brent Presbyterian (PCA), who has agreed to serve as our local coordinator
- Sufficient ongoing funding to launch and sustain this program
- Wisdom in selecting the initial group of inmate-students



**The positive impacts graduates have had on those prison systems are overwhelming, and we are praying for a similar impact here in Alabama.**

# Freedom in Bondage

The Light of Christ in Prison

By Jeff Pate

*For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

*2 Corinthians 4:6*

Several years ago, I received an invitation to attend a Prison Fellowship event at one of our state penitentiaries. I had visited the prison once before and on that previous visit, I had only interacted with the chaplains and a couple of inmates but this time, I would be attending an event along with a few hundred inmates. Needless to say, as I walked past security and the large steel gate locked behind me, I was more than a little nervous.

After entering the prison, I was led into a building that included a couple of classrooms and the chapel. I decided to go ahead and enter the chapel and wait for the other visitors to arrive. Instead of waiting in solitude, I soon found myself in a room surrounded by men in white jumpsuits with orange lettering on the back. My anxiety increased. Some of the inmates, perhaps having noticed my discomfort by the perspiration collecting on my forehead, approached me and introduced themselves. When I shared with them that I was a pastor, their faces lit up.

During the half hour that followed, I stood listening as men shared how they once lived

in bondage outside prison but had been set free inside. One gentleman, who was serving a life sentence for murder, told me about how he entered the prison years before ready to take down anyone who dared cross him. Now, he was eager to share with anyone who would listen how to have a life of joy and peace. He told me that since his life had been transformed, he had pursued reconciliation with his wife and kids. "I have a better relationship with my family now than when I was in the free-world." Another man shared how he discovered a deep desire to read and learn, something that he had never experienced before prison. And still another inmate told me about how he had gone from being a troublemaker in the prison to a peacekeeper within his cell block.

The common denominator for each of these men was that they had heard the message of salvation in Jesus Christ and believed. The light of the gospel had penetrated the darkness. The promise of forgiveness and salvation in Christ had resulted in changed lives. These men were now eager to share the Gospel, learn more about God's Word and bring peace where violence was widespread. Here I was, timidly entering a prison thinking that it was a dark and foreboding place, but they were testifying that it was here they found light. And as they testified, I realized the darkness the gospel entered wasn't a building

**I stood listening as men shared how they once lived in bondage outside prison but had been set free inside...**

# **I stood worshiping alongside men who spent their days surrounded by steel fences and concertina wire and was astounded at their joy.**

with bars and locks but their hearts. My heart. When that light entered, the shadows fled!

After this incredible time of hearing from men whose lives had been changed by Christ, the other visitors entered and the program was underway. Speakers shared Chuck Colson's vision for prison ministry, Scripture was read, songs were sung and the Word was preached. I stood worshiping alongside men who spent their days surrounded by steel fences and concertina wire and was astounded at their joy. Their jumpsuits indicated that they were in prison, but their faces and voices attested to the fact that Christ had set them free. Where I had cautiously entered the prison a couple of hours earlier, now I was reluctant to leave. This was the closest thing to a true revival that I had experienced in a long time, maybe ever. I went to the prison that day thinking I had something to offer the men inside. Instead, God used them to encourage me.

Riverwood Presbyterian Church is a member of Warrior Presbytery, which covers much of West Alabama. God has opened a tremendous door of opportunity for prison ministry in our presbytery. The previous article by Dr. Glenn Waddell describes the prison initiative that is already underway at the Bibb County State Correctional Facility in Brent, AL. Men like the ones I met years ago now have opportunity to be trained and equipped to spread the Good News throughout our state's prison system. This training program covers many of

the same topics as a seminary degree. The inmates who have committed to this program now view their imprisonment from a very different perspective. Like Paul in Philippians 1:12, they know their imprisonment is now *for Christ*. God is turning prisoners into preachers. This shouldn't surprise us because this is just the sort of remarkable work that God is continually doing in the world. God takes what is foolish and forsaken in the world and uses it for his glory. He draws beautiful lines with crooked sticks and blasts Gospel light into the darkest of places, making barren land a field ready for harvest. But we aren't surprised because we know that is exactly what he did in us.

Please pray for the prison initiative at Bibb County Correctional Facility. Pray for the men who are in the classes and those who come into the prison to teach them. Pray for their spiritual and physical protection. Pray that the enemy will not be able to undermine this ministry or discourage those who are involved. Finally, praise God for showing us the wonder of his glory in the person of Jesus Christ. Maybe the revival within our land that many Christians have been praying for has already begun right down the road, in a West Alabama prison.

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# The Least of These

Christianity and Prisoners

By Jimmy Hopper

*"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world..... I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you.... sick or in prison and visit you?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'"*

*Jesus, to His Disciples*

Riverwood has an opportunity to become engaged in a prison ministry. The first of the two previous articles in this issue speak to the details of how the ministry started and how it will, and is, working. The second article is a look by our pastor at a visit he made to a prison years before and observing the interactions in person. We have heard of prison ministries, Chuck Colson, once a literal prisoner, developed a famous one. The Colson Ministry was the one our pastor observed and speaks of in the previous article. Prisons and crime are at big topic in America today, a political football and a subject about which there are many feelings, fears and distrust. As we at Riverwood consider involving ourselves in, we must come to grips with our feelings about prisoners, a group Jesus called, "the least of these." We must do this to properly pray and support this ministry and to love those who participate and find Jesus behind the walls at Brent.

*"America has the highest incarceration rate in the world... We house almost one quarter of all the world's prisoners... Since the mid-1970's, American prison populations have boomed, multiplying sevenfold while the population has increased by only 50%." \* The reasons and arguments for this situation are legion, and, as is true of most things are in America today, they break on a conservative-liberal axis where there is considerable difference of opinion. There is, however, no disagreement on some basic facts. First, maintaining the huge prison populations is an insanely heavy financial burden for both federal and state prisons. Secondly, our country has an appetite for drugs that is responsible for much non-violent, but also much violent crime. Thirdly, prisons today do very little to change behavior after the term, and finally, a husband and/or father or wife and/or mother in prison is devastating to family life and relationships.*

Most Christians seldom think of prisons and those who inhabit them. Most are glad that criminals are off the streets and "safe" in prison so that they don't bother us and other "law-abiding citizens." We, often rightly, think of prisons as vicious, savage places but in the back of our minds there is often hidden the "only what they deserve" idea. When we actually see prisoners, they are cleaning up roadways and we instinctively look for the guard overseeing them. As I considered this article, I realized that, while growing up in Montgomery, I had a bit more exposure

to prisons, and this exposure formed some permanent thought patterns regarding prisons and prisoners that perhaps track those of the general population.

During my boyhood, Kilby Prison was on the northeast edge of town, and it was hard to miss, a huge red brick and stone behemoth

of a building behind tall stone walls topped with razor wire and guardhouses with armed guards and mounted searchlights at the corners.

Barred windows were visible

behind the walls and, while riding by as a boy, I would imagine the convicts looking out longingly at the cars whizzing by on the highway. Executions took place there, many more than take place today, and they were done by strapping the convict into a large wooden chair and attaching electrodes to his body and head. The chair was named "Yellow Mama" because it was repainted after each use using the yellow highway stripe paint that was readily available. It was said that, if you rode by the prison when an execution was taking place, the lights would dim when the switch was thrown. Many were the stories about that when I grew up. The mystique and awe in which the young boys of my generation beheld Kilby Prison was considerable. It was a place we didn't want to

get close to for any reason and prisoners were feared and shunned.

I did, however, enter a prison as a boy. It wasn't Kilby, but into another prison in another county, the name of which I don't remember.

There was a guy I went to school with who lived with his father in an apartment above a

grocery store.

The wife and mother had left them, apparently for another man, and the father was trying to raise his son alone. The boy, I'll call him Ray, was always immaculately



clean and wore starched shirts to school that his father had ironed. He was a loner, very quiet and probably an introvert, and hung around with no particular crowd. He and I began walking to school together. Our association wasn't planned but kind of just happened since we left home about the same time and we finally began looking for each other to walk with. I learned that his father was very strict and, since my parents didn't exactly let me run wild, and since my spending money generally came from paper routes and bagging groceries, I passed his father's muster as someone who didn't get into trouble and thus was an acceptable companion. Apart from this almost incidental contact, we did almost nothing together.



As it turned out, Ray didn't need me to get into trouble. He was arrested, I think for robbery and perhaps assault, and was convicted. His father searched me out and told me, and asked if I would go with him to visit Ray in prison. I agreed and one Sunday afternoon we went to visit his son and my friend.

It was quite the experience. First, there is the sound of the iron door closing and locking behind you. You suddenly understand that there is no exit except by the authority of someone else. This feeling, this emotion, of "not free" is shocking, even while, intellectually, you know that you can and will be able to leave. The visit took place in a large room with a concrete floor and picnic type tables with benches built onto them. Everyone who came in from outside had been searched for contraband. The prisoners met friends and family in shifts. Children climbed on fathers' laps. Meetings with wives and girlfriends were at least "R" rated despite the always present guards. Into this weirdly festive but despairing world, I entered, a skinny teen-aged boy, to meet with my friend who couldn't leave. When the time came and I saw him as a prisoner, I wondered why I was there. Was I to be an encourager? If so, about what? About just getting through something I was unable to imagine? Was I a representative of a happier past and a better future? Most horrible of all, was I brought there to be a good example? My recollection is that it was summer and the school that had been our mutual experience, was out as a topic of conversation. I also knew instinctively that Ray was in a situation far beyond high school, and wouldn't be interested. Whatever we could

have talked about was also limited by his father's presence. The strain between them was palpable. We literally had nothing to talk about. When the time was up, we said good-bye and I left with a deep sense of relief on my part when the door opened. I was never asked to return although I offered it when his father dropped me off at home.

My next trip inside a prison came in my mid-thirties after I became, or rather when I learned, that I was a Christian. This time I had a purpose. This time it was a ministry. Our church took homemade, often elaborate, birthday cakes to the Mt. Meigs Juvenile Correction Facility east of Montgomery for a "party" for the boys who had birthdays that month. The idea was to let the boys know that they were not forgotten, and that someone cared for them, at least enough to show up, and to get opportunity to speak to them about Jesus. My recollection was that opportunities for conversation were very limited, and the controlling factor was peer pressure. They had to be too "tough," too hard, to be influenced by this mawkish sentimentality in front of the others. I went several times but was never able to engage anyone in a reasonable conversation about the Savior who was so important to me. The trips ended, or at least my participation did, and like before, I confess to a sense of relief that the locked in feeling would not be experienced monthly.

It is fascinating that prisons have been a part of Christianity since the beginning. We quickly think of the "Prison Epistles", of John the Baptist in Herod's prison, and of Paul and Silas in the jail at Philippi followed by the conversion of the Philippian jailer. There are

many more Biblical examples. We think of the imprisonment and martyrdom in the history of the early church, both by secular authorities and through the internecine religious wars of Europe. Mary Tudor and the Tower of London come quickly to mind. We picture Paul writing to the churches from prison and think of him there as being a free man in a profound sense because of the Gospel of his Savior, while blessing the world with timeless, brilliant and beautiful words.

In modern times, we consider the many who have been imprisoned because of their faith. Throughout the world we read and hear of those who refuse to recant, and remain in prison as a testimony to the truth of Jesus. We think of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the brilliant German pastor and theologian, who went back to Nazi Germany to serve his people and was arrested and imprisoned by Hitler. Bonhoeffer was executed by hanging scant days before the end of the war. We have a prison history as a people, no matter what cultural baggage we carry regarding it, and its disingenuous to disregard it. As we consider this ministry, we should keep this in mind.

Another thing we should keep in mind regarding a prison ministry is the fact that we ourselves, individually, have been in prison. We have been prisoners to our sin. Bonhoeffer, in his prison cell as Christmas approached, wrote the following words: *"Life in a prison cell may well be compared to Advent; one waits, hopes, and does this, that, or the other - things that are really of no consequence - the door is shut, and can be opened only from the outside."* # We were locked in, and when Jesus rose in our hearts, the prison cell opened

from outside, and suddenly we were free! Paul wrote in Galatians 5:1 "For freedom Christ has set us free....Do not submit again to a yoke of slavery." Jesus spoke to Jewish disciples in John 8 that "everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin" and that "if you abide in my word, you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free." We love and glory in that freedom as His people. We were prisoners, and we have been exonerated through His sacrifice, turned loose from the prison we were in, and now live in peace with God.

What this ministry offers to these men is not physical freedom. They will serve their terms. But serving them, they will also serve God and they will be free in a way that many outside of prison is not free. Our pastor, in a recent sermon, said about Paul: "Paul did not let prison define him. He was defined by Christ." Through God's grace, this will happen to these men who hear the Word through this ministry at Brent. In Christ, they have freedom and peace with God. And we have an opportunity to serve God in making this happen.

\* Stephanos Bibas, National Review, Sept. 21, 2015

# Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison

*Jimmy Hopper is an elder at Riverwood Presbyterian Church. He can be contacted at jimhop7@att.net.*

# The Sum of All Fears

What's at the Heart of our Angst?

By Peggy Drinkard

"The Sum of All Fears." I've always thought that was an excellent title for a book or film. The Tom Clancy novel of that title, followed by the movie starring Ben Affleck and Morgan Freeman, was the true nail-biter one would expect. But the title prompts me to think of more than global nuclear holocaust. What really IS the summation of our fears? Or more to the point, what's the bottom line of human fear? I've pondered that many times.

When you have lots of time Google "lists of phobias" and you will find the variety of our fears is legion, and sometimes comic. You'll find common fears, like altophobia (the fear of heights) and arachnophobia (fear of spiders), but did you know some folks suffer from amathophobia, the fear of dust? My mother might have had that one, but sadly, I didn't inherit it. Then there's arithmaphobia, the fear of numbers. I wonder how that manifests since numbers are pretty hard to avoid. Ah, and ecclesiophobia, the fear of church! That explains a lot. One of my favorites, one I can relate to, is ephebiphobia, the fear of teenagers. Having mothered three of them, I understand why this could become extreme. I'm still recovering. And here's one we're all too familiar with even if we didn't know the label; phronemophobia; the fear of thinking. I'd say this one is pretty much at national epidemic levels now. My last example, scriptophobia, the fear of writing, is one you may wish a few of us *Salt and Light* dabblers had in greater degree.

But the question remains, do these fear disorders have something in common? What lies at the heart of human fear? I cannot believe there is a single human who has ever been completely free of fear, however brave many have been. It is an inheritance of the fall. Reading history makes me ashamed of my own cowardice over LITTLE things when I read, as I did this morning, what some people have endured and overcome. In *Letters of Samuel Rutherford*, the Scottish Puritan wrote a letter on May 25, 1644, to Alexander Leighton, who was imprisoned in London. (You may be familiar with some of the writings of Dr. Leighton's son, Robert Leighton, who became Archbishop of Glasgow and authored several Bible commentaries. I often see him quoted in devotional materials.) Alexander Leighton was a minister of the Word as well as being a practicing physician. A fervent Presbyterian reformer, he published a tract entitled "*Zion's Plea against Prelacy*" in 1628, and was subsequently put on trial and sentenced to "branding on the face" (with letters S.S: Sower of Sedition), to a fine of 10,000 pounds, to the pillory, to whipping, to have his ears cut off and his nose slit, and thereafter to life imprisonment. After ten years he was released by the English Parliament, but the depth of courage he displayed causes me to cringe when I think of how fearful I might be, and how cowardly, in the face of such trials. Men have been incredibly brave, but still, there remains fear.



## What lies at the heart of human fear? I cannot believe there is a single human who has ever been completely free of fear, however brave many have been. It is an inheritance of the fall.

When I was five years old my father died. It was sudden and unexpected and threw my family a curve I'm not sure we ever quite recovered from. The event was the catalyst for a deep-seated fear I carried for many years: a fear that I would become an orphan. If you grew up in my generation you will remember there was no lack of orphan tales in circulation. There was *Little Orphan Annie*, *The Secret Garden*, *Prelacy*, not to mention Dickens and other classics in which orphans played a prominent role. As it happened, my blue-blood step-grandmother (and we all know the role most "steps" play in our literature) was on a committee in her blue-blood church to assist an orphanage in Montgomery, Alabama. I have a vague idea that it was a Presbyterian orphanage, but the details are fuzzy. At any rate, once a quarter or so it was her duty to drive to the orphanage to deliver funds and goods. For some reason she saw this as an opportunity to acquaint my brother and I with those less fortunate, so we were always invited to accompany her and my grandfather on these little pilgrimages. I don't know why we didn't protest. It may have been that she usually took white grapes, a real delicacy to us then, to snack on during the trip, or maybe our mother made us go. Whatever the motivation, we always went. Upon arrival my brother and I were packed off to the boys' and girls' dorms, respectively, while the adults got down to business. This was terrifying to me, mainly because of a very street-wise bully named Margaret who pretty

much ruled the girls end of things. I remember sitting timidly on the edge of someone's bunk while Margaret grilled me with questions and the other girls looked on. Margaret had a second in command who stood at her elbow. I could usually tell how my responses were being received by this girl's facial expressions. That part of our visits is all I really remember; the terror of feeling trapped in that room with Margaret until we were summoned to go home, but the experience always fed my fears. I imagined that these grandparents were actually bringing us along on these visits to accustom me and my brother to the place in case something happened to our mother. Had they been the only people who would have had a say in our future should something like this happen it might have been a reasonable fear. But as I look back with adult perspective, I marvel that it never occurred to me that the maternal side of my family would have allowed no such thing and I was never in jeopardy of that fate. Nor can I think why I never discussed it with my mother. But that was a different era, and we kids had been given to understand that we must make things as easy as possible on my mother and do our best to help her, so I suppose a discussion of her demise would have been taboo.

As the years passed and I became a teenage and then an adult this fear faded, though I think it laid the groundwork for all my major fears. Abandonment. Being left alone. Isolation. Lack of resource. Unexpected death.

It's all bundled up in the orphan image. A funny thing happened at my mother's funeral almost three years ago. She was 92 years old when she died, and as I stood at her graveside it hit me, (I almost laughed aloud) "I am finally an orphan!" But look at all that has changed since that fear took hold of me! I spent all that time and angst worrying about something that never came to pass! And that is something we all do, if we admit it. We peer into the future and let our imaginations laden us with all sorts of fear. This is particularly foolish since there is no way we can know or anticipate what will come. We share this ambition with our original mother, Eve. When she perused the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil she reasoned she would know everything, like God does. No surprises ever. And I am surely her daughter. I tend to think that if I can anticipate what is to come, I can maintain some measure of control over it, and so protect myself from pain and suffering and fear. But that state was forfeited forever when sin entered the world. We WILL have pain and suffering and fear, because we are sinners living in a sinful world, and those are the consequences. Our sin has isolated us from the only security we can have; that which can be found in the goodness of God.

In some form or fashion the intense sense of separation and isolation resulting from the fall has come especially to characterize modern man. I saw this repeatedly when studying Art History as an undergraduate. Think of those wiry Giacometti stick figures. (Alberto Giacometti, Swiss sculptor, 1901

- 1966.) Whether alone are in the midst of a crowd, these figures radiate alienation. They are forever singular. They may pass one another, but they don't notice. They never interact. They are essentially ALONE. This theme can be traced throughout modernity. It dominates our literature, our movies, our painting and sculpture, our music, and all the other ways we express ourselves. The very technologies designed to connect us have instead undermined our ability to relate to one another. I'm no psychologist, but I wonder if this is not the core of all our fears; our lostness, our separation, and our alienation spawning our many-nuanced "phobias." If so, it has a long history, starting in the Garden of Eden when God, for the first time, asked, "Adam, where are you?" Not that God didn't know. But Adam didn't know anymore. His answer tells it all. "I heard your voice in the garden, and I was *afraid*." Adam had walked in the garden with God everyday until then without fear. A great severing had taken place. With the entrance of sin came the entrance of fear. Man became alienated first and foremost from His maker, and subsequently from everyone else....his wife, his children, even the animals given into his care. (As a Narnian fan, I imagine this was when the animals stopped talking.) For the first time as Adam stood before his wife naked, as he had always been, he felt vulnerable and in need of covering. Something had come into his relationship with Eve, or more aptly, come between them. A great wall arose as man became self-conscious, guilty, ashamed, and fearful. It was

**(The death of my Father) was the catalyst for a deep-seated fear I carried for many years: that I would become an orphan.**

## **This aloneness theme can be traced throughout modernity. It dominates our literature, our movies, our painting and sculpture, our music, and all the other ways we express ourselves.**

a four-sided wall at that, a box, that left him alone in the world. CUT OFF. Singular soul, he now fell prey to fear, suspicion, accusations, jealousy, and all the rest of our ills. As I have tried to point out when I teach children, when the choice was made to partake of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the only thing our first parents gained was the knowledge of evil. They already knew good.

If you are like me when considering these things, you want to scream, with the apostle Paul, "who can deliver me from the body of this death?" There's a close connection between our multi-faceted fears and death. Death is the ultimate separation, after all. But, thanks be to God, Paul has an answer. "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Christ came and lived and suffered and died to secure the forgiveness of our sins and banish the sum of our fears. And all he asks of us is our faith and trust in Him. I'm sad I didn't have better teaching when I was a child. I thought my acceptance and consequent forgiveness and the restoration of my relationship with God was dependent on me, and I was never sure enough of my earnestness and my ability to be faithful to find any comfort or assurance. Only as I encountered Reformed teaching and it's understanding of God's sovereignty did I begin to understand that my faith, my acceptance with God; my adoption into the family of Christ, originated with God, not with me. And if He first chose me, well...what a relief. This was the beginning of hope and

release from my fears. My confession that I still battle fear sometimes is a confession of not knowing Him enough, or trusting Him as I should and He deserves. If God is sovereign in all my affairs and loves me, then nothing can possibly go wrong. Things may go against my desires, and my liking, but I have come to see that is indifferent to reality. Whatsoever may happen will only happen with his permit, and His goodness and absolute love make the discomforts only ministers freeing me further from the chains of fear and death, and driving me closer to Him, whom I can trust. I do have resource, the ultimate resource; Christ. In Him, I am never alone. He's promised, "I will never leave you or forsake you." I recently read good words from a Dr. William W. Kinsley that point toward this perspective and the freedom it can bring our hearts. Dr. Kinsley said: "Just as soon as we turn toward Him with loving confidence, and say, "Thy will be done," whatever chills or cripples or enslaves our spirits, clogs their powers, or hinders their development, melts away in the sunshine of His sympathy. He does not free us from the pain, but from its power to dull the sensibilities; not from poverty and care, but from their tendency to narrow and harden; not from calumny, but from the maddening poison in its sting; not from disappointment, but from the hopelessness and bitterness of thought which it so often engenders. We attain unto this perfect liberty when we rise superior to untoward circumstances, triumph over pain and weakness of disease, over unjust criticism,



# First Grade Story

A Post-Election Meditation

By Adam H. Condra

I'm just gonna share some things about my first graders, 'cause it seems appropriate right now.

-I have a first grader who has a special, all-black pencil that he calls "The Grandmaster." He is very protective of it. He only ever uses it when taking a test.

-I have another first grader who needs me to read the word problems on his math sheets for him. When I do this, he refers to it as a "help," so he likes to do all the numerical problems first, and then come to me with however many word problems there are and say, "Mr. Condra, I need four helps today."

-This same first grader is the one who draws little teeth inside his < and > symbols to denote that an alligator really is eating the larger number. He does this every time, without exception, because he is a little Chestertonian at heart who just \*gets it\*

-I have another first grader who ABSOLUTELY LOSES HIS MIND whenever I say "bingo!" after he gets a math problem right, and it will never, ever stop being funny.

-They love to listen to Spoon and/or Beethoven while we work. Their favorites are "The Underdog" and Symphony No. 5.

-We tried to draw tigers today and they all ended up looking like Brak from Space Ghost.

-All of my first graders automatically line up

in ascending height order when class is over. They do this so that none of them are ever blocking someone from seeing the front of the line.

They have done this every day instinctively and without any instruction or input from me. There is no ego, no desire to be first among any of them; they do it as a matter of course, and I have never known a group of kids so naturally considerate and cooperative as this

one. I start every day with this first grade math class, and their humor, excitement, patience, and humility sets the tone for everything that follows.

I have no reservations that this is anything other than a blessing from God. Every day, this class reminds me of the joy and decency that persists throughout life on Earth. If you've talked to me about today's events at any

point in the last year, you know that I've been scared and angry, at points led to despair and at others to rancor, and while I maintain that any assessment of our current options must be severe, puckish, and unsparing, I stopped worrying about the outcome of this election a long time ago. I'm not afraid of where we go today, because tomorrow, Lord willing, I will come to school and see this class. And we will do math. And it will be good.

*"Mr. Condra" teaches First Grade Math and other subjects at Riverwood Classical School.*

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# Mission-Minded Or Absent-Minded?

The DeHaan's Calling to Mission Field Work

By Mickey DeHaan

At Riverwood, one of the first questions we are asked is, "Where have you been?" quickly followed by, "We're glad you guys are back!" Let me explain. Bruce and I are "old" members but at the same time we are "new" members of Riverwood. We were "old" members from 1983-2000 and are "new" members for almost a year now.

To the question "Where have you been?" our answer is that we felt God moved us away to another church here in Tuscaloosa and now we see SO much God's Hand in that move, as well as in Him now leading us back to Riverwood. We also SO see in all of it Jeremiah 29:11 *"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord"*. You see, then we both were indeed Mission-minded but at the same time absent-minded in regards to Missions.

To further explain, I grew up in the church where my Dad was always the pastor and was my pastor until Bruce's job search led us to Mississippi and eventually here to Tuscaloosa. Bruce also grew up in the church where his grandfather was a pastor and his dad an elder. I also grew up having an uncle who was a Missionary to Japan and then to the Philippines. Bruce had an aunt who was a doctor and became a Medical Missionary to Nigeria. So, we were surrounded by missions! Many times when children grow up as a "Preachers Kid/PK" or as a "Missionary Kid/MK" they either have a strong desire to follow

in those footsteps or go as far away from them as possible. I can remember when my uncle would return stateside and come and stay with our family, I would sit at his feet listening intently to the stories. I would often beg him to tell me more. I would count the years until he returned so I could hear more of the stories.

Deep down, I understood that God indeed had plans for me. I had planned to go to college and become a teacher. However, this was not God's plan for me. He led me to nursing school instead. My plans to become a missionary/teacher were changed to becoming a nurse and my mission field, as I soon realized, was right here at the hospitals and doctors' offices where I worked in Michigan, Mississippi, and Alabama. However, I didn't really feel that working as a nurse was fulfilling my mission-minded heart. In fact, at this point in my life I became absent-minded about missions and quite honestly defeated because I thought I was supposed to be like my uncle and actually GO on missions!

Then something pricked that desire once again through an invitation to come to a "Friends Forever" seminar at my friend's church. The gist of the seminar was that if you care enough about your friends and family then you needed to care where they were "headed" when they died. Shortly after this seminar, God led us to leave Riverwood for this Mission-minded church.

**The Lord's command (to go) is a command and not a polite suggestion....**

## ....not all of us are physically or even financially able to go” on missions but we can “stay and pray” and give and support those who are going.....

Looking back, we realized that we had not neglected missions as we were challenged to give regularly to missions. I need to clarify that Riverwood was not absent-minded about missions, they were always contributing financially to missions, but only one person actually went on missions during the time we were there.

So, getting to that initial question that we even had, to why was God moving us away from Riverwood to even a totally different denomination? We so much see God's Hand in this move! You see, in the 15 years we were away from Riverwood, both Bruce and I had the opportunity to GO on mission trips. I have been to Indonesia three times and to New York. Bruce has been to New York and New Orleans. We both became very involved (and still are involved) in the Ministry of the Wings of Grace Disaster Relief Center, which began the day after the devastating April 27, 2011 tornado had destroyed much of our city. So, in those 15 years, we saw first hand and we were a part of Acts 1:8 “...and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, to the ends of the earth.” For us it was Tuscaloosa, the United States, and overseas to UPG (Unreached People Group) as well as the persecuted church.

Certainly not all of us are physically or even financially able to GO on missions but we can 'stay and pray' and give and support those who are going. Whose feet will you sit at? So many times we both sensed the power of people back home praying for us. Especially when going through customs overseas, and

once we were there turning a corner to see a Muslim with a rifle in his hands! But all that is for another story that I'll be glad to share at another time. Just ask me! The reason we could go on all of these mission trips was because they all were totally funded by those who couldn't go but said “You go for me!” They were totally bathed in prayer before, during, and after seeds were planted. Lives were changed forever-even our lives. You cannot go and return unchanged-if you do then it is time for a heart check!

Having said this, the next time you read The Lord's command (yes, it is a command and not a polite suggestion) as found in Matthew 28:19-20 **“GO therefore and make disciples of all nations...teaching** them...and remember, I am with you **ALWAYS**, to the end of the age.” (Bold and underlining my emphasis.) We need to ask ourselves, am I mission-minded or absent-minded? We can ALL live as a mission-minded Believer wherever God has placed you now!

*Mickey DeHaan is a retired nurse and Bruce is a Research Forester and a Deacon at Riverwood. They have three children and three grandchildren. Mickey has written and published two books:*

***My Child Died...Now What?* and  
a second book: *Pixie Dust....Another  
Adventure With Nana***

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# (Deus) Ex Machina

The Image of God and the Soul of Man

By Jimmy Hopper

....what rough beast, its hour come round at  
last,

*Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?*

From ***The Second Coming***

William Butler Yeats

The first lie was the biggest lie, and since it was first, it was spoken by the Father of Lies. We find it in Genesis 3:5, and it was spoken to Eve, who had looked on forbidden fruit with hunger and desire and even lust. The lie was simple but the concept was complex: "You will be like God." It was a lie that has dominated human history. Power, control, self-actualization, self-determination whether men admits it or not, his desire is to be able to say, "I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul."

In our age of highly sophisticated technological achievement, an age in which there seems to be no limits on what man can attempt and achieve, the biggest lie has become a way of life. With the so-called death of God, there is no approbation. Man can freely seek to be like God and no one believes that their future holds any necessity of facing God, or even facing any moral standard. Abortion is the law of the land and a way of life since we have the technology to chop up children and throw them away for convenience's sake. We argue for "assisted suicide"; can the required death of the elderly outlined so chillingly in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* back in the thirties be far away? We are playing with cloning animals and who

doubts the future attempt to clone humans. We are altering genes in plants and animals and have the capability to determine the sex of children yet to be born. We are growing human body parts in pigs for transplanting into humans. We believe that if we can do it, we should do it. We think that we are imposing our will, in matters of mortality, morality and justice, and, by doing so, we are sovereign instead of God.

A recent movie, *Ex Machina*, developed this theme in a fascinating manner, spinning an intellectual fable about AI, artificial intelligence, in the person of a "female" robot. It is hardly Hollywood's first excursion in artificial intelligence and the ethical and philosophical problems and even the danger inherent in it. There was the iconic *2001: A Space Odyssey* and the AI computer, HAL, who revolted and killed one of the astronauts. In 1973, there was *WestWorld*, an adults only amusement park with Yul Brynner as an android who runs amok. A new HBO remake is beginning as a series with a much more realistic twist both in violence and sex, Spielberg has an entry with AI, about a robot kid who, Pinocchio-like, wants to become human. Other iconic versions of the genre include *Blade Runner* and the ultimate, undefeatable villain, *Terminator*. A recent, very interesting film that touches on some of *Ex Machina*'s plot devices is *Her*, in which Joaquin Phoenix falls in love with his telephone operating system. Finally, there is the spectacular new film, *Interstellar*, in which AI robots help Matthew McConaughey

**The first lie was the biggest lie, and since it was first, it was spoken by the Father of Lies.... In our age of highly sophisticated technological achievement, an age in which there seems to be no limits on what man can attempt and achieve, the biggest lie has become a way of life.**

save the human race during a desperate mission through a wormhole to another galaxy. There are many others but *Ex Machina* is one of the most intriguing. It is a superbly produced film with extraordinary acting that brings a cool, suspenseful, intellectual slant to the questions raised by AI as a concept.

The movie touches on many of the following ideas: what it means to be alive, what it means to be human, what makes man a moral creature, on morality and God, freedom and captivity, the lure and content of self-awareness. In this article, I will try to avoid too obvious spoilers while still trying to get at some of the themes of the movie. I should also tell you, if you want to watch it, that there is one scene of female nudity, and the usual Hollywood language.

First, the actual phrase from which the title is taken is *Deus Ex Machina*. Historically, it is a theater phrase, dating all the way back to ancient Greece. It literally means "the god of the machine." It refers to the point of a play when convoluted plot lines reach a certain point and only a god can enter the play and sort them out and make the things happen that need to happen to resolve the story, something of a Gordian knot theory. So we know from the abbreviated title that the AI machine does not have God to influence or resolve the story. By leaving the Deus out, we

understand that God is not only missing, but that the movie makes a statement about God being missing.

The set-up is quick and simple. There are only four main characters and the action takes place in a modernistic house/laboratory of a very rich genius in the spectacular wilderness of Alaska. The characters are quickly introduced and just as quickly isolated together. The opening scene takes place in the corporate offices of Blue Book, a Google/Face Book type of operation supposedly named for the avant-garde 20th century philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein's lecture notes. On a busy work day, a young coder at his desk, receives a notice that he is the winner of a corporate contest. This young man, Caleb Smith, played by Domhnall Gleeson, has "won" a week alone with the brilliant founder of the company, Nathan Bateman, who is working on a secret, special project on his isolated estate in the Alaskan wilderness. Caleb arrives by helicopter, and must follow a river to the house since the helicopter pilot is not allowed any closer. He arrives, is provided a photo card key, and enters.

Wandering through the elegant, modern minimalistic house, he meets Nathan, brilliantly played by Oscar Isaac. Nathan is instantly distasteful, black bearded, insanely arrogant, a "bro" and "dude" macho type, self-serving,

hard-drinking and a workout warrior. He gives Caleb the set-up. First, he will be working on a great and unique project of supreme importance. Secondly, he must sign away any rights to discuss the project. After signing, we discover that Nathan has developed an AI robot. Caleb is there to have "sessions" with the robot as a Turing Test, named for Alan Turing, the breaker of the World War II German Enigma code and early computer genius, to discover if the artificial intelligence of the robot is truly the equivalent of human intelligence. The test is passed if the human reaches a point where he doesn't know that he is talking to a machine.

The robot is personified as a female, played brilliantly by Alicia Vikander and the movie conception is spectacular. She has a human face, hands and feet. Much of her shapely torso is covered with a grey mesh. There is no sense in which Caleb cannot know that "she" is a machine. Her mid-section, arms and legs are made of transparent silicon and the wires, metal and blinking computer light as well as her mechanical limbs are visible. Her head, behind the humanoid face, is also transparent silicon. "Her" name is Ava, noted by reviewers as either a combination of Adam and Eve, or a combination of Eve and Ada. Ada would represent Ada Lovelace, the daughter of Lord Byron, who wrote the first algorithm as instructions to the first mechanical computer, the *Analytical Machine* of Charles Babbage in

the mid-19th Century. The essential thing from both these is "Ava-Eve," the first "woman" created not by God but this time by man.

There is a fourth character, Kyoto, a beautiful Asian female who speaks not a word and is treated harshly by Nathan when she makes "mistakes." We suspect, then discover that she is an earlier version of Ava, kept around by Nathan for housekeeping and sex. Yes, he designed the capacity for sexual pleasure into his AI creatures. After all, he explains to Caleb, how do you conceive of human intelligence without sexual capacity and experience? Kyoto progresses from silent "resentment" to sullenness to rebellion as the plot unfolds.

Caleb begins his sessions with Ava who is behind a thick plate glass window. After each session, he then goes to download sessions with Nathan, who has, of course, observed the Caleb-Ava exchanges by camera. After the first session, Nathan begins by asking Caleb, "How does Ava make you feel?" and with that, we're off. We discover that Ava is programmed with the contents of *Blue Book*, millions of interactions by millions of humans, their thoughts, their desires, their disputes, their responses. Because of this, Ava literally has a billion human responses to draw from and self-protection, self-actualization, freedom and independence come to the top, as, we might note, they did with the first Eve.

Very quickly Caleb discovers that, far from winning the trip as a prize, he was selected by

**The essential thing is that from both these, "Ava-Eve," is the first "woman" created not by God but this time by man.**



## **Ava may be the totality of human feelings, responses, and knowledge but the thing she lacks only God provides, and it is provided only to humanity.**

Nathan to be the Turing tester. As he answers Ava's questions about himself, we discover, as does she, that he is single and very much alone and lonely. His parents were killed in an automobile accident, he has no siblings or relatives, is physically unimposing and ungainly and is the classic nerd of stage and screen. These characteristics, magnified by his innate neediness, makes him vulnerable in mind games with both Nathan and the Ava machine, who quickly plays on his capacity for both pity and self-pity to escape the claustrophobic rooms in which she was created. She quickly picks up and uses the feminine wiles inherent in her vast downloaded knowledge, demonstrated when she puts on a dress and stockings to hide the last visible vestiges of machine. When she discovers a way to interact with Caleb while the cameras are off, she has a huge advantage over both the humans. With Caleb's help, and with suspense building, the last day of his stay becomes the day she plans to escape.

In this passion play, there are numerous psychological and philosophical questions raised. We see, in miniature, the rebellion of the creature against the creator. We see the creature seeking self-actualization, freedom to be, go and do what she will. We see this rebellion even seeking the death of the creator, and quickly think of Nietzsche pronouncing the "death of God" amid the rise of the superman, the super intellect, who owns his fate and dispenses with the need for God. On the other side, we see the creator, Nathan, trying to usurp God, the ultimate

Creator. In an early meeting with Nathan, Caleb suggests that Nathan, by creating Ava, is more than a man, that "he is one of the gods." Nathan misquotes him later, saying not "one of the gods" but that he "is God." Caleb quickly corrects him but we see Nathans vision of what he had created. As Nathan built versions of Ava, each better than the last, he did it in isolated splendor, until he builds the best, the one able to escape, the one smarter than him? But wait? That can't be, He is the creator. Has artificial intelligence overthrown the creator? Has the creature overthrown the god Nathan seeks to be? A recent *60 Minutes* on CBS explored this possibility as it looked at the many ethical questions raised by artificial intelligence.

In *Ex Machina*, we consider again the question of what it means to be human. Ultimately, the machine, from its vast storehouse of human knowledge, has the capacity to choose love, or even to choose empathy. The downloaded impulses are there. It does neither. Instead it makes a pragmatic choice based on need.

Could the other road have been taken?

*Ex Machina*, Ava, lacks the true badge of humanity, the image of God, despite all the storage capacity and recall ability. Man was made with a living soul that carries the image of God. This is not available in any storehouse. Love is only available in the living soul given with the image of God. "God is love, and whoever abides in love, abides in God."

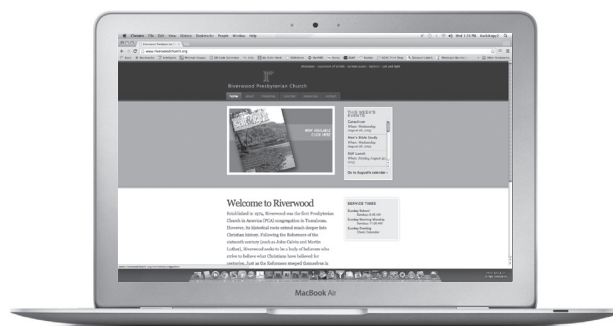
Ava may be the totality of human feelings, responses, and knowledge but the thing she lacks only God provides, and it is provided only to humanity.

## ....in the movie, the beast is a vision from the spiritus mundi, the spirit of the world.....

While viewing this movie, I thought of Yeats' great poem, *The Second Coming*, written to describe the world culture and its dangers between the first and second world war. I've quoted a line from it at the beginning of this article. There were some very real "rough beasts" born in that period and Yeats proved eerily precise when he said that the "center does not hold" and the beast is slouching toward birth. In the poem, and in the movie, the beast is a vision from the *spiritus mundi*, the spirit of the world. In the movie, sleek, sophisticated, sexy Ava doesn't fit Yeats' description of the rough beast, but there is an analogy. It lies in the increasing danger to man as he delves deeper and deeper into the big lie, seeking to build a new Babel through technology, a beast with huge intelligence but without the mark of God

and without considering the commands and moral structure God has given to mankind. This danger lies in turning this beast, and other beasts in all those other areas, loose on the world. The Nathan character says at one point that "Someday, to Als', we will be like fossils on the African plains." He presupposes that we are building not only our destroyers but also our successors. In posing these questions, *Ex Machina* speaks very much from today's *spiritus mundi* and in doing so, it speaks to us as Christians who were born into and live in that world.

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# Chosen by God

Solace in God's Sovereignty over Salvation

by Brad Yarbro

## SOVEREIGNTY

I had only invited him to church once. Kevin accepted my invitation and came with me that Easter Sunday. I knew that I should share the Gospel with people and invite them to church, but I only reached out to Kevin with that one invitation.

Then, a few weeks later, Kevin died in a car crash. In talking about his passing, everyone in the community was speaking as if he was definitely in heaven. However, I was not so sure. I had known Kevin for several years and even sat with him at the lunch table every day for two years. I knew he did not attend a church or any youth group, and I had never heard him talk about Christianity. I knew going to church did not necessarily mean a person was saved. So, given what I knew, I could not join in with everyone else's surety that Kevin was with God. I had seen no evidence, fruit, or outward manifestation of faith. That is not to say I considered him certainly not saved. I believed (and still do believe) that it is possible that Kevin was saved. However, the persistent thought in my mind was, *What if Kevin is in hell?* It was this thought that burdened me with guilt. I passed so many opportunities to share the Gospel with him and countless occasions to invite him to church. *If he died without faith in Jesus was I in some ways responsible for him not having faith? If Kevin was in hell, was*

*it because I had not done enough to get him saved?*

For months these thoughts plagued me.

At some point, I became aware of what I was really contemplating: *How does God save people? Is it ultimately up to each person to choose for himself to be saved? Or is it ultimately God's decision and responsibility to save a person?* I do not remember the specific logical progression, but, after a while, I began to think about these questions in terms of "election" and "predestination."

I have a vague recollection of earlier in my life considering the idea, predestination and thinking that it was absolutely wrong—even thinking that John Calvin was so wrong that he was not a true Christian. I do not remember any explicit teaching against predestination, so George Whitefield's words ring true, "We are all born Arminians."

But there I was, entertaining the possibility that God predestines some to be saved and, without fail, saves every single individual that He predestined. So, I sought to find out if this was the way God acts with regard to salvation. Take note, I was not looking into predestination as a way to escape the guilt

# **I was really contemplating: How does God save people? Is it ultimately up to each person to choose for himself to be saved?**

weighing on me because Kevin might have gone to hell. I was looking into predestination because it just might be true.

I do not remember exactly how I heard of it, but I ended up buying a book with a chapter dedicated to predestination, where the author was coming from a reformed perspective.

When I got home from purchasing the book, I immediately flipped to the chapter titled "Predestination" and began reading. About halfway through the chapter, I was fully convinced that predestination was true, that God has elected some to be saved.

The night before I was convinced about predestination, I distinctly remember weeping over not knowing whether my friend had ended up in heaven or hell. Then, the next night, after the book convinced me, I cried tears of relief and peace in God's sovereignty over who is saved. God lifted the burden of guilt that I had carried for months over the eternal destination of my friend, and He showed me that His perfect purpose is accomplished in electing who He saves before the foundations of the world. And that God "works all things according to the counsel of His will," including the salvation of sinners.

So, I hold on to the possibility that God had done a work in Kevin's life, a work not obvious to me. A work that produced a faith in Kevin's heart, a faith that justified him. And having been justified, saved by Christ from the wrath of God.

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Cont. from page 2

## **The focus of the BTS Prison Initiative is not on helping the inmate get released on probation, but rather on training him to faithfully serve the Lord while in prison.**

- Faculty members willing to travel and pour their lives into the students
  - Effective teaching and discipleship
  - Continued favor with the ADOC officials
- Tuscaloosa extension. And while I'm on that topic, can we convince you to sign up for a class? You won't even have to come to prison for lectures!

I would be happy to hear from you if you have questions about this program or BTS generally. We are very thankful for Riverwood Presbyterian's willingness to host out

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Cont. from page 12

the wreck of earthly hopes, over promptings to envy, every sordid and selfish desire, every unhallowed longing, every doubt of God's wisdom and love and kindly care, when we rise into an atmosphere of undaunted moral courage, of restful content, of child-like trust, of holy, all-conquering calm."

And this, too, is a gift of God. My prayer is that he grants this to all of us who look to Him as the only solution to the sum of our fears.

Notes: Information about Dr. Leighton comes directly from *Letters of Samuel Rutherford*,

Puritan Paperbacks, *The Banner of Truth*, 2012, pp. 163, 203.

The Kinsley quote: *Joy and Strength*, Mary W. Tileston, p.125

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# FINALE

## On Freedom

America is “the land of the free” and freedom is thought of by Americans as an inalienable right; it is the “liberty” of life, liberty and the pursuit of elusive happiness. Our freedom is, however, not a state we can revel in for its own sake, but is usually thought of as the ability to seek happiness through ambition, economics, prestige, entertainment, and love. We thus make assumptions, and then curse the factors that oppose, not our freedom but what we believe our freedom should gain for us. And then, when we've gained what we think we can, never enough but what we can, we realize that we still aren't free. We are tight, enclosed, as safe as we can be, and yet.....There must be something else, something that gives us the missing purpose, the missing reason for it all. We remain uneasy, worried. We worry, we fear, we are not satisfied. We are not free.

The Christian, however, **is** free. He has been released from the prisons of guilt and self. The world thinks that we are bound by rules and law and don't have the freedom that others do, but this isn't the case. Our freedom is wild, it is extravagant (as you will see below,) it is endless. It is true freedom because it gives us all the things that do satisfy. Jesus promised that we “would know the truth, and the truth will set us free.” Paul says that “where the Spirit is, there is freedom.” Peter tells us to “live as people who are free.” Freedom ultimately means that we are free of guilt and fear, and because we are made in God's image, it is available nowhere else but in the Gospel.

Perhaps you remember when you first realized your freedom. It is a staggering moment. The Irish poet, translator and scholar, Seamus Heaney describes that feeling, when “surprise was held wide open” and “extravagant sky entered,” the time when claustrophobic safety became of no account. The poem is *The Skylight* and is reproduced below.

### The Skylight

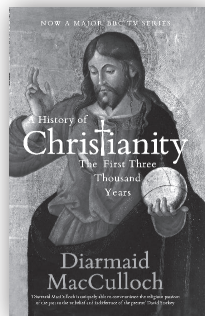
You were the one for skylights. I opposed  
Cutting into the seasoned tongue-and-groove  
Of pitch pine. I liked it low and closed,  
Its claustrophobic, nest-up-in-the-roof  
Effect. I liked the snuff-dry feeling,  
The perfect, trunk-lid fit of the old ceiling.  
Under there, it was all hutch and hatch.  
The blue slates kept the heat like midnight thatch.  
But when the slates came off, extravagant  
Sky entered and held surprise wide open.  
For days I felt like an inhabitant  
Of that house where the man sick of the palsy  
Was lowered through the roof, had his sins forgiven,  
Was healed, took up his bed and walked away.

Seamus Heaney  
From *Opened Ground*.



# INTERACT WITH CULTURE

**RIVERWOOD BOOK GROUP**



## **Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years** Diarmaid MacCulloch

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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