Dear AIIA family, friends, and readers —

Thank you for taking the time to once again read along. A few of you have been with us since April 1991 and others of you have joined us along the way. Will we make it to our 30th anniversary in 2021? Only God knows.

If you do not share our Christian convictions or intent to become more proficient at answering the really tough questions about Christian faith, we certainly don’t expect you to support this work financially. But if you do, the early Fall months are a great time to do so. Thanks to those of you who already do so regularly. We are also always especially blessed when we hear from someone who, maybe like you, has been reading along for years but has never before contributed. In any case, please jot us a brief note in the enclosed envelope this month. It’s an encouragement to hear from you.

Our first-ever sabbatical ended on July 31. It was wonderful. We had time to travel, read, think, dream, and gain a fresh perspective on how best to continue doing what we believe God has called us to do. With all that’s happening in Monson these days, e.g. many Appalachian Trail hikers passing through, a new multi-million dollar arts center initiative funded by the Libra Foundation, and more, we believe that we’re more strategically located than ever before to serve in this particular sector on the Mission Field of the Mind. More on that in future issues. Meanwhile . . .

WHAT DO ALPINE WATER TROUGHS have to do with human personality and the case for the existence of a personal omniscient God? If you have not already done so, you should check the June 23rd blog on AIIA’s website.

CAN CHRISTIANITY BE 100% PROVEN? If so, why is faith necessary? If not, why isn’t one faith system (Buddhism, Islam, Wiccan) just as valid as any other? For answers to such questions let me once again direct you to our website where you can read a modern parable in a newly revised edition of a thoughtletter first posted in June of 1994. Click the Resources tab for a double-indexed searchable roster of over 27 years of original articles.

QUESTION OF THE MONTH: Why does the Bible say that God creates evil (Isaiah 45:7)? Is this an error in the Bible — or is God Himself evil? We encourage you to write out your best answer to this question before flipping this paper over and reading our answer.
STAYING IN THE LOOP, AIIA’s new occasional blog, can be viewed with just one click on our website at AIIAInstitute.org — so there’s no reason to lose touch before our next issue comes your way in two months.

OUR COMPLETE FALL SCHEDULE is also posted on the website — and that includes details, dates, times, and topics of all Faith Matters events — including the September 1 session on Simulated Reality. You may want to watch The Truman Show (Jim Carey) or play a round of The Sims to prime your intellectual pump for this discussion.

**NOW . . . THE QUESTION OF THE MONTH.** Why does the Bible say that God creates evil (“I form the light, and create darkness; I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things.” Isaiah 45:7, KJV)? Is this an error in the Bible — or is there actually maybe some sort of evil side of God?

Neither. That question poses a false dichotomy. This is not a Bible error and there is no evil side of God. There is another better way of understanding this verse. First, many current reliable translations render the Hebrew word ra’ (רעה) in Isaiah 45:7 as calamity or adversity, not evil, as does the King James Version. But beyond that it is fully biblical and accurate to acknowledge that the omniscient all-wise God of the universe actually does at times ordain and actively decree that calamitous and even evil things occur in this world. It’s not just that God stands back and passively allows them to happen. He has actually purposefully included them in His sovereign plan for human history. The most significant example of this would be the crucifixion of His own son, Jesus, who was “delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God,” (Acts 2:23).

This is not to say that God Himself either is evil or does evil. Rather, as Dr. Wayne Grudem writes in his Systematic Theology (p280), it “should be understood to mean that God ordained that evil would come about through the willing choices of his creatures.” There is a mystery here that defies our finite human comprehension. But we can affirm that God actively directs everything that happens — even adversity and even the evil in this world that sometimes strikes us as rampant and out of control — “according to the counsel of His will” (Ephesians 1:11, ESV). The “everything” above includes weather events, wars, abuse, atrocities, illness, and every possible circumstance that you can name. The alternative to such an affirmation — get this! — is to say that evil really can get out of control — even God’s control! And that is certainly not a biblical conclusion. How much more accurate and comforting to know that God’s providence extends to every moment and corner of history and that, in the end, if we know Jesus, it will all ultimately be orchestrated for good (Romans 8:28).

WITMER FAMILY REPORT | An album and diary of one family’s effort to anchor the business of life in the bedrock of truth.

In early July, just after we went to press with the previous issue of this paper, Mary had an echocardiogram that showed — amazingly! — that her aortic valve stenosis condition had actually improved since April 2018. Her ejection fraction and pressure numbers were almost at normal levels, which even the cardiologist’s office seemed at somewhat of a loss to explain. And as of this writing she is still experiencing no remarkable symptoms. For this we give glory to the One who alone controls all of life. Whether this marks the beginning of a more complete healing or is a temporary reprieve, we are most grateful to God for this gift, and to you for your prayers.

Those of you who follow the blog on AIIA’s website already knew about this development in real time, which is why we continue to encourage everyone to check the blog regularly or just subscribe to it for a notice when new posts are made.

We had given up our trip West because of Mary’s prognosis, but after receiving this good report we were clear to make a quick trip to Pennsylvania to celebrate my mother’s 90th birthday with her in person. Dad is now approaching 91, and we are grateful that we are able to meaningfully converse with both. The photo at right was taken on July 23. Pictured are my sister-in-law Glenda, brother Randy, sister Gina, brother-in-law Jack Plain, Mary and me, with my folks, Gene & Anne Witmer.

Speaking of aging, the other day I said to Mary, “Remember how when we were dating you used to tickle me under the chin? How about doing that again?” She said, “Which one?”