

critique

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CRITIQUE



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ABOUT CRITIQUE

Critique is part of the work of Ransom Fellowship founded by Denis and Margie Haack in 1982. Together, they have created a ministry that includes lecturing, mentoring, writing, teaching, hospitality, feeding, and encouraging those who want to know more about what it means to be a Christian in the everyday life of the twenty-first century.

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Everyone on Ransom's mailing list also receives *Notes from Toad Hall*, a newsletter by Margie Haack in which she reflects on what it means to be faithful in the ordinary and routine of daily life and gives news about Ransom's ministry.

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Cover: Caravaggio, *The Incredulity of St. Thomas*, 1603

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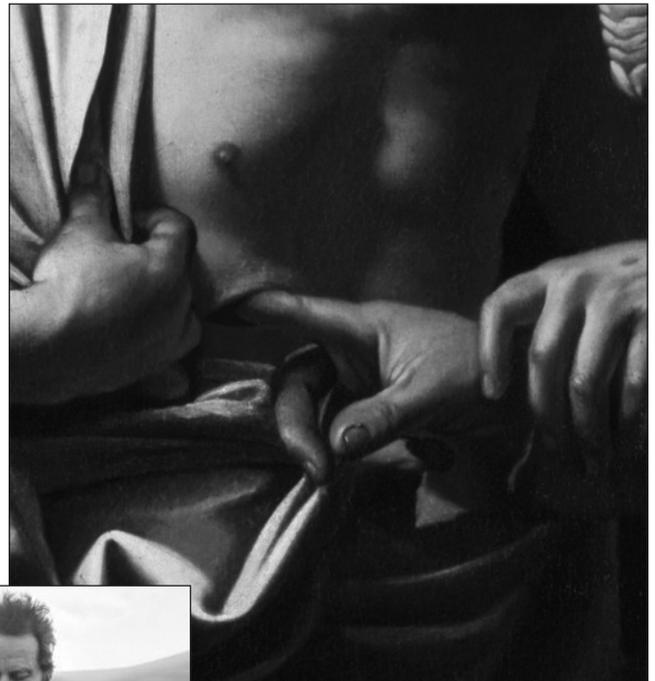
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Random Meaning

by Denis Haack



This past weekend I did nothing and it was profoundly productive. We spent the weekend away from Toad Hall, away from our office and reminders of work and to-do lists yet incomplete, though I love my home and work and find great contentment in its confines. We drove northeast about 70 miles across expansive farm land planted in soybeans, alfalfa, wheat, and corn to the Washington County fairgrounds in St. Elmo, Minnesota, a community small enough to be missed unless you are looking for it. There we stayed for two days, folding chairs set up in the shade of a tree in the middle of the 15th annual Shepherd's Harvest Festival. We walked slowly through the buildings where fiber artists offered their wares in a display of creativity and beauty astonishing in its array of textures, shapes, and colors. There were barns of goats and sheep, llamas and alpacas, and angora rabbits sitting quietly on laps as their owners spun yarn from the wool plucked off their backs. Some people were there to take classes in spinning or dyeing or weaving, while others were obviously networking—I was there to look and be and nothing else. I had a book with me but read precious little since there was so very much to see, people and sheep dog demonstrations, a 4-H bunny agility competition I would

have paid admission to see, sheep shearing and wool felting, and lots of people dedicated to crafts passed on over many generations, hard won skills honed by practice and mentorship and care. It took two days to take it in, and then only partly.

If you are waiting for me to say that I wish you all could have been there, sorry. Don't mean to be mean, but find your own festival. Not knowing anyone, being able to be there without expectations or plans was part of the refreshment. The sort of rest I needed, and enjoyed, and felt afterwards that something deep inside had been touched with healing by the glimpses of glory that surrounded us in the quiet amidst the bustle on that little fairgrounds in a rural small town.

This is part of my story, the sort of rest I need occasionally, a sabbath that sparks energy and creativity and motivation and contentment in my calling. It is a small part of what brings a sense of significance into the disparate details that make up my daily life. Without occasional oasis like that, margins become inadequate and randomness begins to eat away at meaning. Daniel Taylor notes correctly that, "we are constantly looking for a meaningful plot to our lives, for connections between things. Our fear that life is random and meaningless is stronger than the fear of want or violence."

My point is not to suggest that you should need the same thing I do, but that you know what you need and intentionally shape your life to make it as possible as possible. Yes, I am hedging here because our intentions and what is possible do not always mesh in this broken world. The danger comes not from being deflected from what would be best, but from drowning an intentional life in waves of busyness or entertainment or commitments that are nothing more than

agreeable forms of addiction. It's right and proper to fear that life may be meaningless. Not only are there voices proclaiming that this is so, but a sense of meaning can be a fragile thing easily disturbed by shame and guilt, disappointment and weariness of soul. Only the risen Christ is sufficient for the first two and only Christ as Lord of all is sufficient for the second pair.

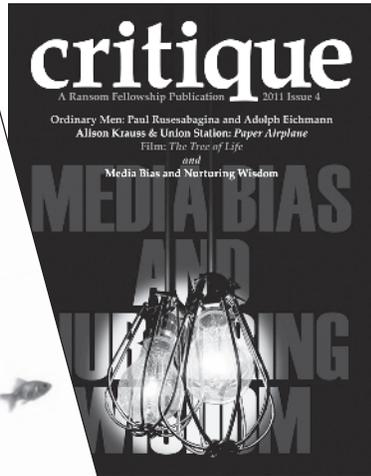
My point is that we take time, in community that is safe and rooted in a tradition of wisdom, to reflect enough on our story that we can identify its parts with enough clarity to see how they bring meaning out of the randomness of life. Even in this broken world there is beauty to be enjoyed and a Creator to be adored. ■

Source: Creating a Spiritual Legacy: How to Share Your Stories, Values, and Wisdom by Daniel Taylor (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press; 2011) p. 15.

For more information on the annual Shepherd's Harvest Festival, go to www.shepherdsharvestfestival.org.



DIALOGUE: READERS RESPOND



To the editor:
Thank you for the great article in *Critique* 2011:6, "On Being Misunderstood." I led a discussion last night in our community group regarding the section on "A post-modern misunderstanding," and the four responses at the end. We had a wonderful study, very challenging and very worshipful. I think that your publications are such a blessing to all of us who read them...and I thank you very much. I also just downloaded *The Imperfectionists* to my Kindle and am enjoying it thus far.

I hope this week brings you joy,
Best,
Dan Saxby
Cincinnati, OH

Denis Haack responds:

Dan: Thank you for taking the time to write. So often we are never certain if our material is being read and discussed as it disappears out into the postal service and Internet, so having confirmation is always satisfying. I'm especially pleased you were discussing something that as Christians we really need to consider seriously but seldom take the time—or have the time—to do so. When we began *Critique* so many years ago, we imagined it as a resource for

small group discussion. We were going to try to keep track of whether people were using it that way, but quickly realized we wanted to be writing and speaking not collecting and collating data. We appreciate finding out this way.

To the editor:

Ok, so I know I am a little late with a word about one of your articles in *Critique*, but I've been going through old issues (I have just been introduced to the publication) and I found myself wanting to share some thoughts prompted by one of the articles.

In Timothy Padgett's article on media bias ("Media Bias and Nurturing Wisdom," *Critique* 2011:4), I could not help but reflect on our nature as storytellers. We are people of narrative. Stories shape our perspectives and worldviews, crafting effective filters for the incomprehensibly large quantities of data thrown at us daily by the world. Moreover, stories help us to see what is important in life; they help us to see what matters in this world and tune us in to that which has true and lasting meaning. Just before C.S. Lewis was converted, he was engaged in a conversation with his good friend J.R.R. Tolkien in which Tolkien challenged his lack of imagination. It was the narrative that won Lewis over in the end, and it's the narrative that continues to win us over. The grandest story of all, the story of history is the Gospel story. It is our story, our narrative. We are the people of the Gospel story. Praise God!

Thank you for taking a moment to read my gentle rant. I am very pleased to be catching up on your work; it inspires me in mine. May God make us all great storytellers, tellers of his story.

Warmly in the Lamb,
Joseph McDaniels
St. Louis, MO

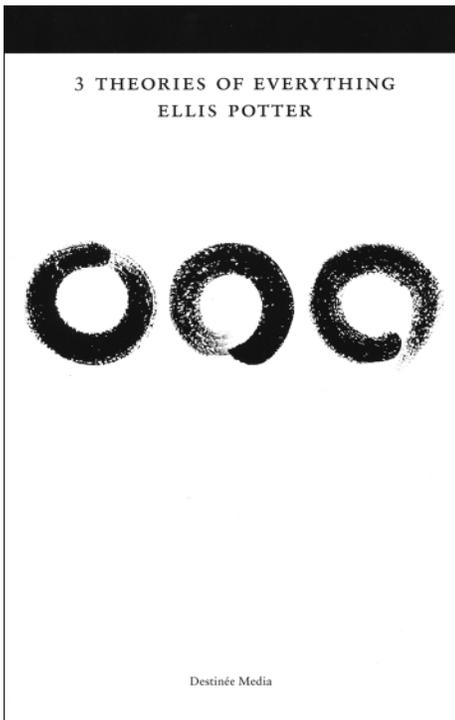
Denis Haack responds:

Joseph: As you might guess, we don't consider timeliness—so called—always a virtue, so no apology needed. As you noted in your rant, the deeper issues don't get stale or go out date, so the material we try to produce we hope doesn't suffer with a quick expiration date. We comment on films that are worth discussing, for example, rather than trying to keep up with whatever movies happen to be showing at the moment. Novelty is, in our view, badly overrated.

Your reflection on Padgett's article in relation to the significance of narrative and story in our lives is certainly correct. The challenge, of course, is that in a broken world multiple narratives are vying for our attention, so that even Christians can approach reporting facts with their perspectives warped by political ideologies without being aware of the problem. Since the ideology feels natural they never question their perspective and so a flawed filter is translated into less than faithful living. Sanctification is a process, thankfully, so the filters on our seeing and thinking can be progressively defined by the grace of God's Spirit in the light of the biblical story. ■

Wondering Whether Things Make Sense

By Denis Haack



I am going to recommend a book in this piece—recommend *strongly* that you read it—and perhaps the best way to begin is by noting two things the author, Ellis Potter, no relation to Harry, believes. He believes that asking questions is good. In fact he believes it is very good, a sign of a vibrant mind and lively imagination, a necessary component to true spirituality, an expression of the natural curiosity that children display spontaneously and that adults must carefully nurture if they want to flourish as human beings. And second, Ellis Potter believes that one of the questions every child asks (and every adult should ask) is *why is there everything?*

Actually, I can tell you a third thing Ellis believes. (I am referring to him as Ellis and not Potter, as I usually refer to authors, not because you might confuse him with Harry, but because Ellis is a friend.) He believes that there are really only three possible explanations for reality—for everything that exists, and that the three explanations can be explained simply and clearly. It may not seem that way. It is true there is a plethora of religious traditions, scientific theories, and philosophical truth claims on offer in our pluralistic world, each claiming to explain everything that is but it turns out they are just variations of the three basic theories. Peel back the details, Ellis says, and you find three possible explanations for reality, or as he puts it in the book I strongly recommend you

read, *3 Theories of Everything*.

I hope I am not being unfair if I suspect at this point that some readers may be wondering if they can skip this article. You are busy, you have precious little time to read, you do not like reading books that are philosophical, and the last time you woke up in a cold sweat about whether there is a theory of everything is precisely never. Trust me on this one. You should read *3 Theories of Everything*.

It is accessible. Yes, it involves philosophy, but this is philosophy for everyone. Ellis Potter is a master teacher, able to explain things simply without ever becoming simplistic. This book isn't written primarily for people with a philosophical turn of mind; it is written for everyone who has the natural wonder of a child. Ellis is asking whether it is possible to look out at life, at reality—at everything in other words—and have some way to make sense of it. You may have forgotten that you are curious about this, but in fact you are—and Ellis not only helps us see why we are naturally curious about it, but how wonderfully satisfying it is to consider the three possible solutions.

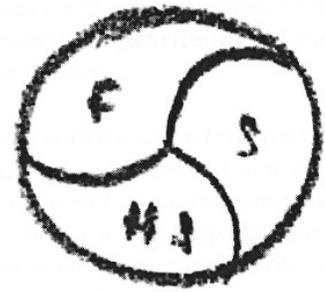
3 Theories of Everything is not merely accessible, it is conversational. Ellis has a lovely way of drawing us in so that we feel we are talking with him over a cup of tea rather than being talked to. And the last third of the book is a series of 45 questions that people have asked after Ellis has



Monism



Dualism



Trinitarianism

talked on this topic, along with his answers. Let me give you a flavor of what I mean:

Why did you originally become a Buddhist?

I grew up in a Christian atmosphere and I kept asking absolute questions. But the Christians I knew were not interested in my questions. They said, "Don't ask questions, just believe. Become like a little child and have faith without asking questions." That didn't make sense to me. It was only later when I came to realize that, in telling us to become like little children, Jesus really did want us to ask and inquire and explore. As a result of my early dissatisfaction with Christianity, I began shopping around and tried out different philosophies and religions. I was in the Rosicrucian Society, the Bahai, the Self-Realization Fellowship of Paramahansa Yogananda, and other groups. I settled on Zen Buddhism because it's very unreligious. Zen Buddhists are always interested in absolutes, and I was interested in absolutes. I also appreciated the fact that they were the only religious group I knew that did not sell jewelry.

The book is also brief, so brief I found myself wishing it were longer. It is based on a lecture Ellis has given to diverse audiences in innumerable settings around the world. He has honed it in discussions in universities and churches, coffee houses and pubs with Christians and skeptics. I first heard Ellis talk about this years ago, and as I read felt I had the delicately distilled core in my hands. It takes no longer to read than to listen to a talk followed by Q&A.

Actually, if I could, I'd give a copy of *3 Theories of Everything* to every

friend I have—Christian and non-Christian. Yes, I know I recommend a lot of books, but I am discriminating about which book to give to which person. This one is that good.

In *3 Theories of Everything*, Ellis models how to speak of and to those who disagree with us about the things that matter most. I get so very weary of the shrill rhetoric, the sarcasm, the straw men that are set up and then ridiculed, the way Christians are dismissive of thinkers and ideas and policies they deem untrue or unwise. Ellis not only treats non-Christians with respect and care, he treats their beliefs, values, and convictions with respect—as Christians should. In an early part of the book, for example, Ellis outlines one of the three possible views of reality, the view that is exemplified by Buddhism. Then he concludes this way:

I have given you a short Buddhist sermon. I don't know if any of you will be converted. I hope that you can understand the power and hope that underlies this worldview and why healthy, intelligent people would devote themselves to it. They are not crazy. There are many lovely people who are committed to this idea of reality.

Christians should love truth so fervently that whenever we describe any non-Christian belief we should do it so objectively that someone that holds that position will say we have treated their worldview accurately, with care. Ellis demonstrates how that can be accomplished without for a moment diminishing his commitment to the gospel.

An important thing to realize is that *3 Theories of Everything* addresses one of the premier issues of our postmodern world. Though it is

true that the basic questions of life do not change, the shape they take differs from generation to generation. Ignoring or forgetting this is one reason why arguments for faith can be compelling for one generation but unimpressive for another. It's not that the reasons themselves are necessarily weak. It's just that they do not address the questions that are keeping people from faith, so as a result the faith is made to appear weak or implausible. Listening carefully to what is being asked is the essential first step in commending the gospel of Christ—and Ellis Potter is a careful listener.

One question very much in the air today is whether it is possible for any single religion or worldview to actually provide an explanation for everything. Isn't it presumptuous to even suggest such a thing? Besides, with more than one option out there, who is in a position to determine which is the final or absolute explanation? It can seem discouraging, so some people simply stop being curious about it. The only time it comes up is when someone claims to have the final truth, and that, they are told, is intolerant and intolerable. "But some people keep asking," Ellis notes. "They want to know what life is really about. What does it all mean? They want the truth. They don't want to just 'fit in' with their culture or believe what their parents taught them. They want to know what is real and actual and they don't care what it turns out to be like." *3 Theories of Everything* is written for them—for those who have not lost their natural childlike curiosity, and for those who have lost it but want it back.

Ellis shows that the three possible theories are Monism, Dualism, and



PORTRAIT OF THE AUTHOR BY ANDRZEJ BEDNARCZYK, PROFESSOR OF PAINTING AT AKADEMIA SZTUK PIĘKNYCH IN KRAKOW, POLAND. SKETCHED DURING A LECTURE IN KAZIMIERZ IN 1991.

Trinitarianism. One thing they hold in common is the conviction that something is broken. “They each understand,” Ellis says, “that there was a perfect beginning and then something went wrong, so that we now live in a situation that is not the way it was intended to be.” Each view of reality then attempts to explain what is wrong and the way back to the perfection that has been lost, a way back home.

“Monism,” he says, “is the belief in one *One*, a total unity that is the ground of everything.” In other words, regardless of how everything appears, behind everything and defining everything is a single unity of all that is—perhaps it is a spiritual *One*, as Buddhism and Hinduism believes, or a material one, as Naturalism believes. But for Monism the point is that everything in reality and life boils down to that reality and so being enlightened to that Oneness can overcome what is wrong.

Dualism says there are two opposites behind everything: light and dark, good and evil, male and female, yin and yang. Reality is actually made up of these two great opposing forces and so the need is to find some way to harmonize them, to keep them in balance. This is the sort of thinking that motivates Taoism and Confucianism.

And finally, Trinitarianism is the view of reality that is presented in the Bible. Monism has taken the unity we experience in life and made it absolute and Dualism has done the same thing with the diversity we experience. Trinitarianism celebrates both unity and diversity by revealing them in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

We see a clear description of this reality in the Bible. God is perfectly unified

as one God, and yet God is perfectly diversified in the three persons of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There is unity and diversity in absolute reality. There is not one God who chooses to reveal Himself in three ways in order to create the appearance of diversity, and there are not three persons who choose to unite and cooperate in order to create the appearance of being unified. The original reality is 100% unified and 100% diversified. It’s a 200% reality that cannot be comprehended by simple logic.

Here is a proverb I made up to capture the essence of this reality: God alone is God, and God is not alone. You cannot make this statement about any other God or original perfection. You can say Buddha alone is Buddha, but that is all. The rest is silence. You can say Krishna alone is Krishna and Allah alone is Allah, but the rest again is silence. If the God of the third circle wants to talk to somebody, He talks among Himself, because He is three persons. A God who wasn’t diversified could not talk among Himself. He would have to create something else to talk with. He would require a creation in order to be personal, whereas the God of the third circle is intrinsically personal, independent of His creation. His creation does not complete Him but rather expresses Him.

If the original perfection is both unified and diversified, it means that when we experience unity in reality it shouldn’t be a problem, and when we experience diversity in reality it shouldn’t be a problem. In other words, unlike Monism, the third circle does not regard diversity as the cause of suffering, and does not see the solution to suffering as involving a detachment from diversity. Also, unlike Dualism,

the third circle does not attempt to resolve suffering by balancing opposites. Instead, the third circle sees variation and contrast as a part of the original perfection, and therefore, as a normal part of reality itself.

Trinitarianism has a unique, and uniquely powerful solution to what has gone wrong so that a way back home is opened to us. And Ellis explains how when you understand the basic ideas behind this dynamic view of reality all sorts of things begin to make sense: objective and subjective truth, relationship and identity, form and freedom, needs, spirituality, and personality. In fact, everything begins to make more sense. Which is why we recommend *3 Theories of Everything* to you. Strongly. ■

Source: *3 Theories of Everything* p. 2, 9, 26, 38-39, 103-104.

Book recommended: *3 Theories of Everything* by Ellis Potter (*Destinée Media*; 2012) 111 pages.

RESOURCE

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Bringing Home the Bacon

by Steve Froehlich

In the current tug-o-war about gender responsibilities in Christian marriages, many couples have the challenge of deciding who “brings home the bacon.” The tension is made more acute by the unstable economy and the uncertainty of employment. Who has the more marketable and employable skills? Then, many couples face the upheaval and imbalance created by military service, long-term sickness, or education. If she has a promising medical career before her, should he consider being a stay-at-home “Mr. Mom”?

For us as Christians, the question really is: Does the Bible speak directly to, or may we draw reasonable inferences from the Bible about who is to be the primary bread winner for the family?

As Karl Johnson (executive director of Chesterton House Center for Christian Studies at Cornell University) observes—correctly, I believe—in many ways this is a very modern question. It’s not the sort of question we would have asked prior to the modern industrial era in which the family’s income-producing economy was moved outside the home. We currently live with a dramatic operational disconnection between income-work and family-work, and this is a real challenge for us as Christians as we try to live all of life coherently to the glory of God.

While I lay no claim to being a sociologist, it seems to me that what we have now in the average American family is really a two-economy system: a non-income producing economy of the home is funded by an income-producing economy outside the home. In this two-part system, there are at least two ways families are managing these two economies. (1) One spouse attends to the income economy outside the home, and the other spouse attends to

the non-income economy inside the home. (2) Both spouses attend to the income economy outside the home, and responsibility for the non-income economy inside the home is contracted out to hired labor (childcare, house cleaning, yard care, etc).

In the more agricultural model of pre-industrial times (and certainly Bible times), the relationship of work and family was extremely fluid, one overlapping with the other without much distinction yet not excluding the assistance of contracted labor. It’s possible that a more technologized (is that a word?) culture, at least with respect to work and family, is creating the possibility of a dynamic more like that of the agricultural model (e.g. telecommuting from home...although it didn’t work out so well for *Jon & Kate Plus Eight*).

Any understanding about the relationship of work and family has to begin by looking at Genesis 1-2. Work predates the Fall and is part of God’s good world and is part of the design for his very good image bearers. Men and women are jointly charged with stewardship and flourishing of the earth, both preservation and creative development, maintenance and cultivation. So, before we are tempted to think about male/female or husband/wife roles, we have to think about what is foundational—if you are human, you are made to work. It’s important that we define work as both sustaining provision (our daily bread) and creative fulfillment (fruitfulness).

As Paul elaborates in Romans 12:1-2, our work is worship, a spiritual service primarily offered to God. “I appeal to you,” he writes, “by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.” And if specific

acts of work are a consequence of spiritual gifting, then work is also for the edification (the building up and completing) of those we serve by our work. “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Corinthians 12:7).

Certainly part of the common good is income-generation or wealth-production for the benefit and provision both of self and others. But it gets complicated within the context of the family since income is only one of several significant priorities important to sustaining the family system in general and a Christian family in particular.

Having offered these brief background thoughts, let’s return to the main question: Who brings home the bacon? The short answer is that I can find no explicit directives in Scripture given to families for identifying whether the husband or wife is to assume responsibility for the production of income. I believe one reason for this is that the Bible does not regard money as the standard by which we value our selves or our accomplishments. In our modern culture, money has become the standard of worth, not person or work.

Nevertheless, I don’t believe the Bible is completely silent on this question of income-producing responsibility, but its wisdom comes to us more by way of inference.

Sanctification

The husband is given the responsibility of being head of the family. However, the primary focus of this responsibility is sanctification—taking the lead, setting the tone, of submitting his life to Christ as a means of saving grace so that (as St. Paul states explicitly in Ephesians 5) his wife may be presented to Christ gloriously whole and holy. Paul also encourages spouses and parents to



shape marital and parental decisions with the Spirit's sanctifying work in view (1 Corinthians 7:14). So, how we order our family life (including who brings home the bacon) has the goal of encouraging sanctification.

Does the way we are ordering our work and family responsibilities move us more and more toward Christlikeness and closer and closer to relationships that affect sanctification and wholeness in Christ?

Children

There is the very practical consideration of childbearing and rearing. Because women and wives bear children, it seems very natural for men and husbands to bear primary provisional responsibilities during that season of life. However, how seriously do we take the need that children have for the nurture and presence of both parents? The task of provision does not exempt a father from nurturing his children, nor does the task of childbearing exempt a mother from contributing to the provision of the family.

When children are in view, does the way we distribute the responsibilities for nurture and provision fully engage both parents, regardless of whether that provision is income producing?

Differences

Then there is the general sense of male/female differences. Generally speaking, men and women value different priorities in life and in marriage. Security tends to be a priority for women—men know this because this is what they attack when they use their power against women. Security for women is important in part due to the general difference in physical strength between men and women, a difference that tends to make women more attentive to relationships. Men, by contrast (and in part because of

their physical strength) tend to be more task-oriented—their identity hangs more upon what they can accomplish. Because of these differences, men tend to see themselves and be seen as the material providers. However, following these general distinctions, women then tend to see themselves and be seen as the non-material providers, as the providers of what is needed for the sustaining of relationships. But these are generalizations that prove more or less accurate in individual situations.

Considerations

What then are factors that might contribute to sorting out the decisions about ordering the family?

1. Husbands, are you taking the lead by laying down your life for your wife's sanctification, the process of her becoming more and more glorious, more and more like Christ?
2. Wives, are you supporting your husband's leadership by laying down your life for his sanctification?
3. Are you sharing in the mutual responsibilities of nurture and provision? Are you valuing each other for the contribution the other is making? ...

(Visit Ransom's Web site to find the complete article with five additional questions from Steve Froehlich.)

This is not a formulistic or simplistic yes/no answer. However, it is the most faithful answer I can offer given what I understand the Bible to teach. The bottom line is that God does not give us a script that makes decision-making simple. I think one of the significant reasons God frames our lives in this way is so that we lean hard on him—were we self-sufficient and independent, we would have little need for him, and a life lived apart from his grace would be disastrous

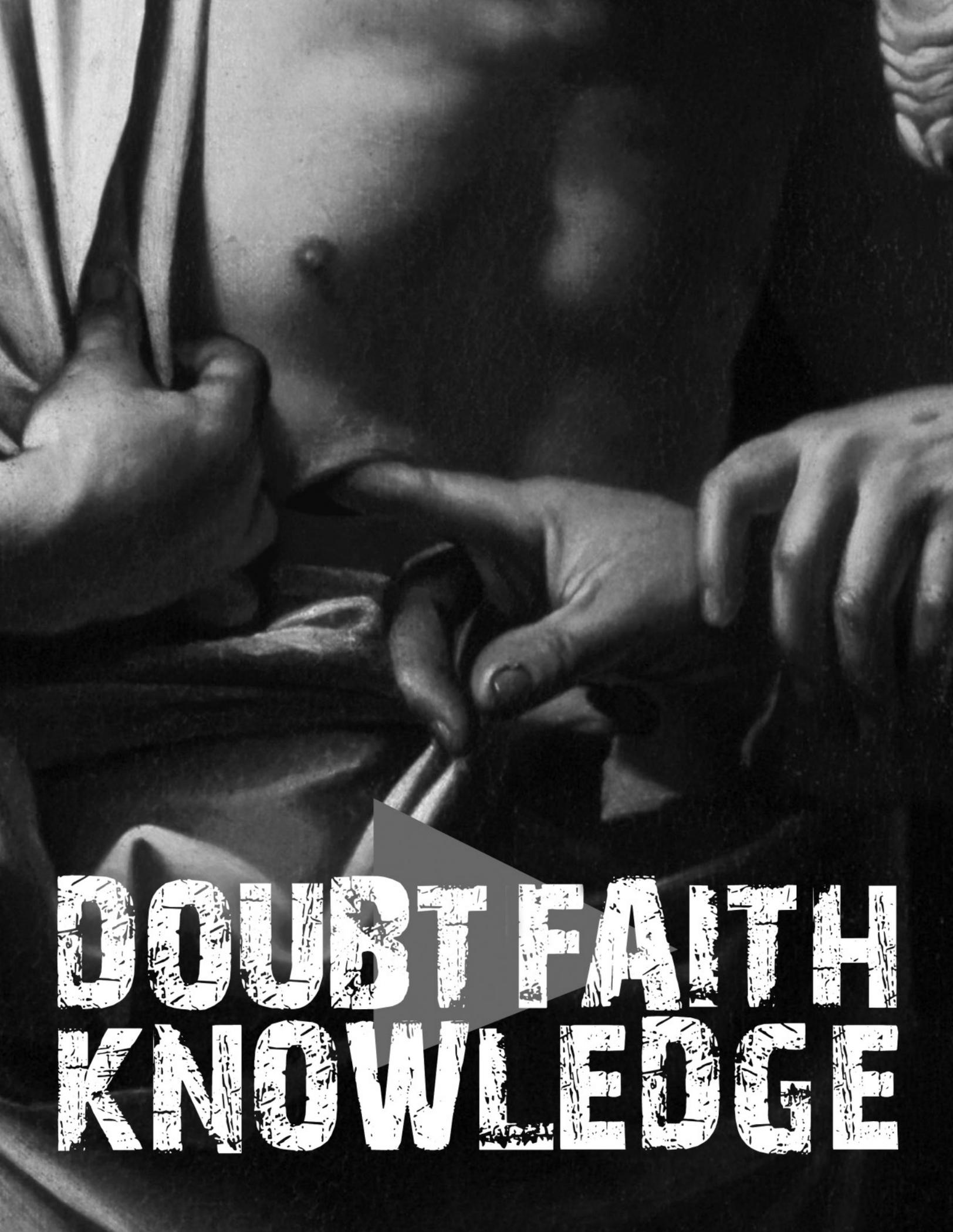
for us.

To all those prayerfully considering how to honor your Lord and King by ordering your family wisely, obediently, and for his glory, remember that the Spirit of God is present with you as you pray, study, discuss, listen, and learn. Do not be immobilized by the myth of having to make the perfect or ultimate decision. Like the manna God provided, you will have wisdom for today's decision, even the wisdom to refine yesterday's decisions. If you find yourselves getting angry at or withdrawing from each other, you may be sure that the real issue at hand is not the bacon. Finally, do not forget that bacon is one of Satan's most effective ploys to defeat and distract you in your marital and parenting relationships. Do not underestimate the fact that, in handling money, you are opening yourselves up to the idolatry of money even though the occasion for taking up the discussion is your desire to honor God in our family. Be on guard. Don't be afraid, but don't be naïve. You will face pressure to comply with the demands of culture and parents to shape your family to please others. But your goal is to make decisions as faithful stewards of the grace entrusted to you, so that, paid and unpaid, inside and outside the family, all your work is to the glory of God and the good of those you serve by your work. ■

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Steve Froehlich serves as pastor of New Life Presbyterian in Ithaca, N.Y., and board president of Chesterton House center for Christian Studies at Cornell University. His interests include the intersection of Christianity and the arts, especially literature and film. He and his wife Sheryl have three sons and two grandsons.



DOUBT FAITH
KNOWLEDGE

READING THE WORD

By Denis Haack

 If you read the New Testament, you will probably notice that some of the disciples of Jesus are mentioned quite often. Peter shows up regularly in the text, and so does John—their names each appear in the Gospels at least a hundred times. On the other hand, others of the disciples are mentioned hardly at all. One of those who didn't rate much attention is Thomas.

We know little about him from the Scriptures except that he was a follower of Christ and apparently a twin. Several times in St. John's Gospel (11:16, 20:24, 21:2) he is referred to as "Thomas (called Didymus)." Thomas means twin in Aramaic and Didymus means twin in Greek, so he essentially had the same name in both languages. Thomas appears with the other disciples in passages that list their names (Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; John 21:2; Acts 1:13), but other than that he is mentioned only four times, and then rather briefly (John 11:16; 14:5; 20:24, 26; 20:27, 28). Complicating the issue, the way he's mentioned makes us remember him not as The Twin, which is apparently how his friends knew him, but as the disciple who doubted. So he's remembered as Doubting Thomas. Which in terms of faith, doesn't seem to be the best of all possible reputations for an apostle. As I was growing up, people in the church would say, "Now, don't be a doubting Thomas," as if that

is somehow encouraging (which it wasn't) and as if evoking his memory will somehow make us believe more readily (which it didn't.)

A significant thing about Thomas' doubt is that it involved Jesus' resurrection, which is supposed to be at the center of our faith as Christians, the historical fact on which we are to base our hope. The story of his doubt, it seems to me, is a story not of disgrace, but of grace. So, if you have ever found yourself doubting, like I have, or if you know someone who has doubted, the story of The Twin and the resurrection is good news.

Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."

A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which

are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:24-31)

Perhaps because so little is revealed about Thomas in the Scriptures, a number of legends grew up about him in the first couple of centuries after his death. There is, for example, an apocryphal book called The Acts of Thomas, dating to the third century and originally written in Syriac, which purports to tell us some of his life and ministry after Christ's resurrection. Though The Acts of Thomas has never been accepted as canonical, it does support a tradition for which there is other evidence in history. That tradition states that as the apostles spread out to the ends of the earth preaching the gospel, Thomas ended up in India. Today there remains a *Mar Thoma* Syrian Church in India, with ancient roots that they proudly trace to St. Thomas.

In any case, in The Acts of Thomas we're told that Thomas wasn't particularly pleased to be called as a missionary to the Indian subcontinent. The story goes that after Christ's death and resurrection, but before his ascension into heaven the apostles divided up the world, so that together they might be faithful to the Lord's command that they go into all the world with the gospel. When the lots were cast, Thomas got India, but he didn't want to go. He wasn't strong enough for the long arduous journey.



"I am a Hebrew man," he is reported to have said, "how can I go among the Indians and preach the gospel?" That night Jesus appeared to him, and assured him that his work in India would be filled with grace, but still Thomas refused to change his mind. "Wherever you would send me, send me," he told the Lord, "but somewhere else, because I won't go to India."

About that time a wealthy merchant from India named Abbanes arrived in Jerusalem. He had been sent by his king to find a skilled carpenter, and so went to the marketplace where he happened to meet Jesus who told him he had a slave who was just the carpenter he was looking for. After Abbanes and Jesus had worked out the details for the sale, Jesus took the merchant to meet Thomas. Pointing to Jesus, Abbanes asked Thomas if this was his master, and Thomas acknowledged that, indeed, Jesus was his Lord. "I have bought you from him," Abbanes told him, and before long Thomas was on his way to India. The king who had purchased him eventually became a Christian, the story goes, and soon a thriving church had been established. And though no one knows for sure how St. Thomas' life ended, The Acts of Thomas says that he was martyred for his faith, after the wife of a powerful Indian official was converted to Christianity. The husband was displeased at his wife's profession of faith, and arranged for Thomas to be killed.

The legend of Abbanes taking Thomas to India against his wishes

has a certain charm, I think, but the text of Scripture I quoted earlier contains a far deeper wisdom. It provides reasons for faith, unveils what knowledge is truly vital, and reveals that doubters are welcome among the

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people of God. Doubting, it turns out, doesn't disqualify us from being a disciple. Doubt isn't unbelief; it's faith with honest questions.

It's been three days since the crucifixion, and now, early on Sunday morning before dawn, Mary Magdalene walks to Jesus' tomb, and is shocked to find it open. The huge stone they had rolled over the entrance has been rolled back, they can see right inside, and the body isn't there. She runs to

find Peter and John. "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb," she told them, "and we don't know where they have put him!" The two disciples run to the tomb, John wins the footrace, and arriving first looks in and sees the linen burial cloths they had wrapped Jesus' body in laying there spread out on the floor. Peter arrives and runs right into the cave they had used as a tomb to bury Jesus. They examine the shroud, see the cloth used as a wrap around Jesus' head folded and placed off to one side, and John, the text tells us, "believed," even though they still didn't understand how the Old Testament taught that the Messiah was to die and then be raised to life again.

Mary Magdalene had accompanied them back to the tomb, and after John and Peter went home, she remained outside the tomb, crying. As she cried, she bent over to look once again into the tomb, but this time found it occupied. Two angels, dressed in white were calmly sitting where Jesus' body had been laid, one at the head and the other at the foot. "Why are you crying?" they asked her. "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." For some reason she turns back, and discovers a man is standing behind her. She figures he is the gardener, and he asks her the same question the angel asked. "Sir, if you have carried him away," she replies, "tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

And then Jesus does something that should take our breath away.



His body has been forever changed, scarred by the torture and bloody death he has experienced, and Mary through her tears cannot recognize him though she had followed him, believed in him, and loved him. I imagine there were a lot of ways in which Jesus could have revealed his identity to Mary, but he chose to do it in the warmest and most personal way imaginable. He said only one word, but it was all she needed to hear. He simply said her name, and in hearing that, she knew it was the Lord. Jesus told her she must not try to hold him to his earthly pilgrimage for a heavenly one now awaited him. Instead she was now a witness to the greatest event in all of history, the resurrection of the One who was God, had entered humankind, had embraced suffering and death, had overcome the grave, and who would now ascend to the Father bringing our humanity into the very Godhead itself. So Mary took the news to the rest of the disciples. "I have seen the Lord!" she told them (John 20:1-18).

Some scholars, attempting to explain the miraculous stories found in the New Testament, have suggested that these texts were inserted into the canon much later, by a church who wanted a certain view of Jesus upheld. As happens with many martyrs, people had come to think of Jesus as alive to them, so church leaders added the resurrection narrative to make the text adhere to what they were claiming was orthodox doctrine. There are numerous problems with this theory,

but I'll mention just one now because it involves the text I've been discussing. In the first century, the prevailing Roman and Jewish outlook was profoundly patriarchal—women were not even allowed to give evidence in a court of law. They were considered untrustworthy, witnesses whose testimony could not be believed. Yet in the resurrection narrative, the first witness Jesus appoints is a woman, Mary. This simple fact not only undercuts the notion that these were later additions to the text to get people to believe the resurrection, it reveals one way in which Jesus undercut the unjust perspective of a patriarchal society.



The story of the resurrection in the Scriptures reveals that God is not some far off deity, but is our Father. The apostolic message is that the one risen from the dead is both fully man and fully God, whose relationship with his people is personal. He is our elder brother, and he knows us by name. That Mary would recognize Jesus through her tears when he said her name is a reflection of this reality.

Perhaps Mary hadn't looked at this man closely, since she assumed he was a gardener, a person best known for being in the background. Perhaps she was distracted by the two angels

who were sitting a few feet away from her inside the tomb an experience I assume most people would find intensely distracting. Whatever the reason, she was now talking to Jesus without recognizing him, and what opened her eyes was his saying her name: "Mary." It was the Lord. He was alive. He had been dead, most assuredly dead and buried, but here he was, alive. One word, but it was all she needed.

Someday, the Scriptures tell us, all of God's people will appear before this one whose body is forever scarred by the whipping, the nails, and the spear they thrust into his side. His humanity is real and never sentimentalized. He will be enthroned as King of kings, and in consummating his kingdom righteousness will cover the earth like

**FAITH ISN'T BELIEVING
WITHOUT PROOF—IT'S
TRUSTING WITHOUT
RESERVATION.**

—WILLIAM SLOANE COFFIN

water covers the sea. He will be worshiped by all of creation, but always knows his people by name (John 10:3, Revelation 3:5).

"What matters supremely," J. I.



Packer says, “is not, in the last analysis, the fact that I know God, but the larger fact which underlies it—the fact that he *knows* me... I am never out of his mind.... He knows me as a friend, one who loves me; and there is no moment when his eye is off me, or his attention distracted from me, and no moment, therefore, when his care falters.... There is unspeakable comfort... in knowing that God is constantly taking knowledge of me in love, and watching over me for my good. There is tremendous relief in knowing that his love to me is utterly realistic, based at every point on prior knowledge of the worst about me, so that no discovery now can disillusion him about me, in the way I am so often disillusioned about myself... There is... great cause for humility in the thought that he sees all the twisted things about me that my [friends] do not see... and that he sees more corruption in me than that which I see in myself... There is, however, equally great incentive to worship and love God in the thought that, for some unfathomable reason, he wants me as his friend, and desires to be my friend, and has given his Son to die for me in order to realize this purpose.”

If you struggle with faith because you have unanswered questions, knowledge you desire in the hope it will make things certain, remember that what you know and don't know is important, but not supremely so. There is a greater knowledge that does not depend on us, that embraces us within a greater love, and for which

no doubt arises. That is the knowledge that truly matters.



hen, a week later, on the following Sunday, the disciples are together behind locked doors, afraid that the authorities that arranged for Jesus' crucifixion might come after them. Then without warning Jesus is with them. “Shalom,” he tells them. “Know the peace that comes only from knowing me.” And he shows them his hands and his side—the scars of his crucifixion so they would know that there was no mistake that he was real, human, with a real body, and had really died and really rose to life again. He tells them he's sending them out as his Father had sent him into the world, and then he breathes on them so they would receive the Holy Spirit. But Thomas wasn't there, he had missed the meeting, and when the rest of the disciples told him what they had experienced, he expressed doubt. “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side,” he told them, “I will not believe it.”

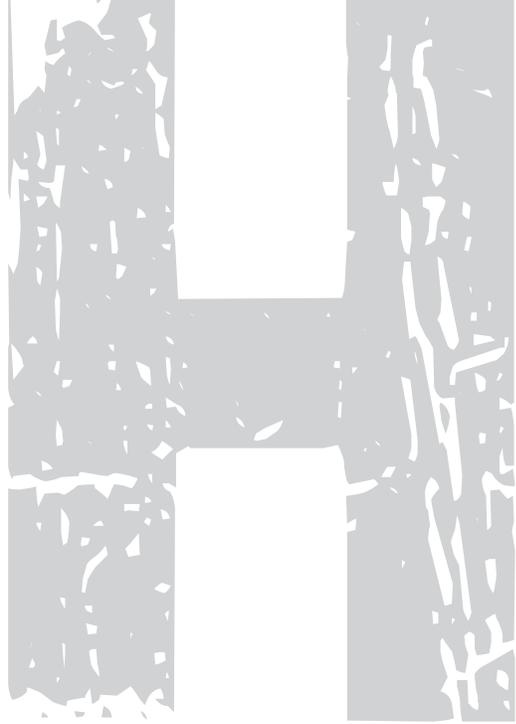
Another whole week goes by. Once again the disciples are together on Sunday, but this time Thomas is there. And once again, Jesus appears in the room with them. “Shalom,” he says again, “Be at peace.” And then,

wonder of wonders, he turns right to Thomas. “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

What's interesting about all this, particularly in relationship to Thomas, is that a few chapters earlier we find him saying something that seems remarkably different and deeply courageous. It's in John 11 in the story of another resurrection from the dead, this time of Jesus' friend Lazarus who died and then was brought back to life by Jesus.

When the news of Lazarus' death arrives, Jesus and his disciples aren't in the province of Judea where Lazarus lived, but were across the Jordan River in the area where John the baptizer had originally had his ministry. Jesus says they should go back to Judea, but the disciples aren't so sure. “‘But Rabbi,’ they said, ‘a short time ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going back there?’” (John 11:8) Whether they were concerned for Jesus, or simply scared for themselves, going back to the place where people wanted to stone you to death doesn't seem like a good plan.

Jesus tells them that Lazarus is dead, and that it's important he go and then out of all the disciples, Thomas speaks up. “Then Thomas (called Didymus),” John 11:16 records, “said to the rest of the disciples, ‘Let us also go, that we may die with him.’” Thomas was willing to follow Christ even into the face of danger, and told his friends that even if it meant



death, they should be willing to follow Christ.

How is it possible for Thomas to be willing to die for Jesus and then later doubt the other disciples' report of Jesus' resurrection? On this the text of Scripture is silent, and so we must speculate with care.

One possibility that is sometimes mentioned is that his courage in chapter 11 is simply bravado, a bold front put on to look good in the eyes of his friends, his fellow disciples. I find that implausible, if for no other reason than it takes courage to reveal your doubts especially if you are the only doubter in the middle of a group of believers, and after the resurrection Thomas didn't hesitate to let them know he had doubts that Jesus was alive. It seems more plausible that he showed the same courage in both texts.

Perhaps the answer to reconciling these two texts lies elsewhere. Full disclosure: the reason I think this is that the more I think about these texts, the more I identify with Thomas. In the story of the resurrection I am more like Thomas than I am any of the other characters who appear in the narrative.

I am certainly not like Mary, at the tomb so early that morning, 2000 years ago. I did not see the empty tomb, I did not run my hands over the huge stone that had been rolled from the entrance, I did not hear the angel's question, and I did not hear Jesus say that one, tender word, her name that opened her eyes and caused her to see.

I wasn't there to run with John and Peter to the tomb, and I wasn't there the following Sunday when Jesus appeared and showed the disciples the scars on his body. Like Thomas, I have to rely on the reports of others, and I have known, over time, both courage and doubt.

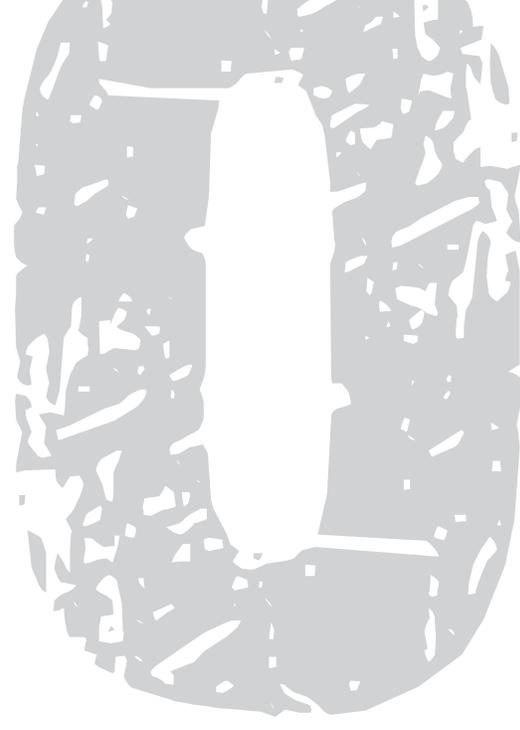
I identify with Thomas, because like him, I wasn't there. But there is another reason why I identify with him. I find it easy to believe courageously when there is plenty of evidence of God's grace and presence, but remarkably difficult to believe when things get out of control.

**BE PATIENT TOWARD
ALL THAT IS UNSOLVED
IN YOUR HEART,
AND TRY TO LOVE
THE QUESTIONS
THEMSELVES.
—RAINER MARIA RILKE**

Sure it was risky to go back to Judea, but they were going back with Jesus. He was there, he was present, and so believing was easy and courage was within reach. But here after the resurrection, it's different, and the

difference makes all the difference in the world. For Thomas, at least, Jesus was no longer present, nothing seemed to make much sense—he had been killed, his enemies had won, the earth had plunged into sudden darkness, his lifeless body had been placed in a tomb, and Roman soldiers guarded the corpse. After so many miracles, after having Jesus there for three uninterrupted years, suddenly things had spiraled badly out of control. And at times like that, for some of us, at least, it is harder to believe. When God's grace and presence seems clear, I find it easy to have a courageous faith, but when they are withdrawn, when things are closing in and getting darker, when all I have is indirect evidence, I find doubts appearing unbidden and strangely resistant to argument. Like Thomas, I have the witness of others who know the Lord's grace, and I have the promise of the Lord's word, but sometimes still I find it hard to trust and easier to doubt.

But notice—there's more. Because even though Jesus rebukes Thomas for his lack of trust—"Stop doubting and believe"—it is a very gracious rebuke. Thomas insisted on more evidence than was necessary. He did not need to feel the scars on Jesus' body because so many of his friends had seen Jesus that it made sense to believe he had risen from the dead. Thomas had good and sufficient reasons to believe in the resurrection, as we do. Still, Thomas' doubts did not disqualify from being part of God's people, nor did it get him erased from the list of



the apostles. In the New Testament the apostles are seen as the foundation stones upon which the church is built (Ephesians 2:20-21)—and the good news is that one of those stones doubted, and not only still became part of the foundation, but the entire edifice didn't crumble down as a result.

Jesus heard his doubt, and rather than dismissing it, responded to it, taking it seriously, as doubts and honest questions always should be treated. And indeed Thomas' doubts were resolved. "My Lord and my God!" Thomas said, which was, and is, exactly right.

Some readers point out that not only did Thomas refuse to believe the witness of his friends to Christ's resurrection, he wasn't present when Jesus met with the disciples that first Sunday when Jesus showed them his hands and his side. We don't know where Thomas was, or why he wasn't there, but it's easy to assume that Thomas was so discouraged by Jesus' death that he stayed away on purpose. If so his doubts were his own fault, this line of reasoning goes, the result of poor choices. But the text doesn't tell us that, so we really don't know. He might have missed because he had the flu, or because the others neglected to tell him they were planning to meet. Who knows? The important thing is that Jesus doesn't chide him for being absent, and neither should we. Even though his doubt might have been resolved had he been at the first meeting, Jesus still responded to his

doubt with grace.

Occasionally there are believers who say they never experience doubt. Perhaps that is true, but I frankly find it very difficult to believe, not because I experience doubt but because of what the Scriptures teach about the life of faith. I suspect such believers either don't have the courage to admit their doubts or do not reflect on their faith deeply enough to notice them. I can't know for sure.

Still, I do know some things. I know there is a vital difference between being an unbeliever with doubts and being a believer with doubts. I know that doubts do not disqualify us from God's family, and deserve to be addressed with grace and unhurried care. I know we do not earn God's attention by being good at faith (whatever that would look like), but when by faith we trust the promises of God even while we know our knowledge is limited and always will be. And I know that in the end the knowledge that saves is his knowledge of us, not the other way around.



In *The Screwtape Letters*, C.S. Lewis imagined what advice a senior devil would give a younger devil who had been assigned to undermine the faith of a follower of Christ. In one of the letters that Screwtape, the senior devil, writes to Wormwood, the less

experienced devil, he has Screwtape mention that troughs—those spiritual dry times, those periods in which God's grace and presence seems

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—JOHN A. HUTCHINSON

absent—that these troughs are of great importance in a Christian's life.

"We want cattle who can finally become food," Screwtape says of Satan and his demonic hordes; "he [meaning Christ] wants servants who can finally become sons. We want to suck in, he wants to give out. We are empty and would like to be filled; he is full and flows over. Our war aim is a world in which Our Father Below has drawn all other beings into himself; the Enemy wants a world full of beings united to him but still distinct.

"And that is where the troughs come in. You must have often wondered why the Enemy does not make more use of his power to be sensibly present to human souls in any degree



he chooses and at any moment. But you now see that the Irresistible and the Indisputable are the two weapons which the very nature of his scheme forbids him to use. Merely to override a human will (as his felt presence in any but the faintest and most mitigated degree would certainly do) would be for him useless. He cannot ravish. He can only woo.... Sooner or later he withdraws, if not in fact, at least from their conscious experience.... It is during such trough periods, much more than during the peak periods, that it is growing into the sort of creature he wants it to be. Hence the prayers offered in the state of dryness are those which please him best. We can drag our patients along by continual tempting, because we design them only for the table, and the more their will is interfered with, the better. He cannot 'tempt' to virtue as we do to vice. He wants them to learn to walk and must therefore take away his hand; and if only the will to walk is really there he is pleased even with their stumbles. Do not be deceived, Wormwood. Our cause is never more in danger than when a human, no longer desiring, but still intending, to do our Enemy's will, looks around upon a universe from which every trace of him seems to have vanished, and asks why he has been forsaken, and still obeys." ■

Sources: Material adapted from "Thomas" and "Thomas, Acts of" in Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible edited by David Noel Freedman (2000), The Gospel of John (II) by William Barclay (St. Andrew Press; 1968), and from The Acts of Thomas in the public domain online (www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/actstthomas.html). Packer from Knowing God (InterVarsity Press) p. 37. The Screwtape Letters by C.S. Lewis (Time; 1961) p. 24-25.

SAME KIND OF BAD

By Denis Haack



I was listening to Tom Waits' latest CD, *Bad as Me* (2011) recently, and suddenly a long forgotten memory floated into my consciousness. I was in a coffeehouse, I would guess the year was 1977, and was concentrating on something, ordering or reading, I don't remember, but I do remember suddenly becoming aware of the music in the background. A growling voice that for a moment I took to be Bob Dylan, but as quickly realized was someone else. Whoever it was had taken the traditional Australian folk ballad, "Waltzing Matilda," and rewritten the lyrics so that they reflected the reality not of a man hiking across the empty bush of the outback of Australia but a man struggling to make his way lost on the streets of an urban jungle in America.

*Wasted and wounded, it ain't what the moon did,
I got what I paid for now.
See ya tomorrow, hey Frank, can I borrow a couple of bucks from you
To go waltzing Matilda, waltzing Matilda,
You'll go waltzing Matilda with me.*
["Tom Traubert's Blues" on

Small Change (1976)]

The song was compelling, the orchestral accompaniment perfect, the voice able to capture a heart's cry that felt caught in a broken world, drained of hope, yet yearning for a way out. I had trouble remembering when I had heard a song so sad.

Some of that yearning appears as ironic wit for this musician, a sense of humor that brings into focus the seedy shape of the bars and cheap dives lining the street.

*The piano has been drinking,
my neck tie is asleep
And the combo went back to New York,
the jukebox has to take a leak
And the carpet needs a haircut,
and the spotlight looks like a
prison break...
And the piano has been drinking...
And the piano-tuner's got a hearing
aid...
And the owner is a mental midget
with the I.Q. of a fence post.*

["The Piano has been Drinking" from *Small Change* (1976)]

But then the mood of the music changed once again, and this time the attention was inwards, to the poisonous blind alley that is alcoholism.

*Well I got a bad liver and broken heart
yeah,
I drunk me a river since you tore me
apart
And I don't have a drinking problem
cept when I can't get a drink
And I wish you'd a known her, we were
quite a pair.
She was sharp as a razor and soft as a
prayer.
So welcome to the continuing saga,
she was my better half,
and I was just a dog*

["*Bad Liver and a Broken Heart*" on *Small Change* (1976)]

By then I had asked the barista who the musician was. Tom Waits on *Small Change* I was told. Ever since, I've looked forward to each new CD that Tom Waits has released.

Over the decades, Waits has carefully shaped a musical persona for himself. "If there has been," Tim Adams writes in *The Guardian*, "a constant theme of his career—which has taken in two Grammy awards, scene-stealing acting roles for the likes of Robert Altman and Terry Gilliam, an Oscar nomination, and a unique gift for performance that made his rare live shows just about the hottest ticket in any town—it is the constant sense of imminent dereliction. His first album, *Closing Time*, made when he was 24, already saw him adopting the broken-down voice of a survivor of all that life and love might throw at him. The hats he has taken on and off since as a performer, late-night barfly, all American hobo, fairground huckster, have all suggested several lifetimes of hard-won experience." Waits' voice is perfectly in tune with his career. His growl, with a raw almost desperate sound, has a quality that seems to effortlessly embody brokenness within the masterful creativity of a serious artist. Still, it is not all artistic imagination: Waits' early years included abandonment by his father, excess and hard drinking, and living out of a suitcase in cheap flop houses. All that changed when he met his wife in 1980 on the set of a movie they were both working on. Since then they have carved out privacy for themselves, raised a family, and nurtured their art together.

Waits' latest CD, *Bad as Me* (2011), the songs written and produced by

AS ME

Waits and his wife, Kathleen Brennan, is one of his best. Inventive, collaborating with some of the best names in popular music (including David Hidalgo of Los Lobos, Flea of Red Hot Chili Peppers, and Keith Richards of the Rolling Stones), the songs give voice to the reality of brokenness that regardless of what religious and philosophical beliefs we hold, we all know we share.

*You're the head on the spear
you're the nail on the cross
you're the fly in my beer
you're the key that got lost
you're the letter from Jesus on the
bathroom wall...*

*i'm the mattress in the back
i'm the old gunnysack
i'm the one with the gun
most likely to run
i'm the car in the weeds
if you cut me I'll bleed
you're the same kind of bad as me*

[*"Bad as Me"* on *Bad as Me*
(2011)]

"Braying and crooning in Salvation Army finery like a visitor from our last Depression," says Will Hermes in *Rolling Stone*, "*Bad as Me* riffs on money, jobs, and bosses; also love, war, and unending struggle as the norm. It's no big departure for a 61-year-old singer-songwriter who has been representing as a skid-row bard since his twenties. But it plays to the moment as Waits refines his prickly brand of time travel. It might also be his most broadly emotional set ever."

The 13 tracks on *Bad as Me*, with three more on the deluxe edition that I recommend, do not ramble but get right to the point. Many sound like a ballad but contain mere hints of a story that the listener needs to piece

together. And as usual, Waits' begins with ordinary things, the stuff of everyday life that we seldom imagine would be the ideal topic for a song. "I'm the last leaf on the tree / the autumn took the rest / but they won't take me." There are laments of a musician leaving to go on tour and unable to stop, songs full of questions, and songs marking the deep sadness when love has slowly died. "i wanna drown / like a fly in the honey / because she stole the blush / from the rose." Waits is an intelligent observer, a man deeply enough rooted to recognize that context can transform the ordinary into something extraordinary. "I'm always looking for sounds that are pleasing at the time," Waits told Sasha Frere-Jones in *The New Yorker*. "The sound of a helicopter is really annoying until you're drowning, and it's there to rescue you. Then it sounds like music." (By the way, an added benefit in the deluxe edition, besides the three bonus tracks, is a booklet filled with Tom Waits' photography— as creative and personal as his music.)

Tom Waits has never allowed his calling to entertain audiences with his music to interfere with a stubborn insistence that his music call us to reflect on the fact that life is lived out in the shadow of death.

*Like a tin can feeding
like a skinned hand bleeding
like a tramp choir crying
like a camp fire dying...
like a string that's broken
like a thing that's smoking
like a blue flame burning...
like more cold coffee
like a child that's fainting
like a wild ass painting
what is it like?
what is it like after we die?*

[*"After You Die"* on *Bad as Me*
(2011)]

The lyrics are compelling because Waits compresses the ultimate question we must face into questions that take their shape from observations so ordinary as to seem irrelevant. Little moments of loss and disappointment become metaphors for the greatest loss of all.

Of all the songs on *Bad as Me*, the third track, "Talking at the Same Time," was one I had to listen to several times the first time I played the CD. Waits sets aside his trademark gravelly sound for a poignant tenor and the rich accompaniment—guitars, horns, keyboards—brings the headlines into focus not by adopting a political perspective but by helping us hear the cacophony that passes for political discourse.

*...all the news is bad
is there any other kind?
everybody's talking at the same time*

*well it's hard times for some
for others it's sweet
someone makes money when
there's blood in the street
don't take any lip
stay in line
everybody's talking at the same time*

*well the dog is in the kitchen
and the war drags on
the trees wait by the freeway
all the money is gone
well she told me she would leave me
i ignored all the signs
and now everybody's talking at the
same time
everybody's talking at the same time*

[*"Talking at the Same Time"* on
Bad as Me (2011)]

At a time when mention of such things usually evokes anger Waits presents us with a quiet song of sorrow. The song is all the more subversive as a result.

Tom Waits composes and performs his music from the perspective of the back alley, the people that inhabit the edges of urban spaces and that can be easily forgotten because they have neither power nor voice in the public square. It is not often pretty in those corners of society but the image of God shines brightly in the search for love and lasting relationships even in the face of repeated disappointment. Waits seems to understand that, and grants dignity to those who voice would not be heard, except in his. ■

(See Back Page for artist credits and pics.)

BACK PAGE (TUNED IN: TOM WAITS, CONTINUED)



Sources: Adams in *The Guardian* (October 22, 2011) online (www.guardian.co.uk/music/2011/oct/23/tom-waits-interview-bad-as-me); Hermes in *Rolling Stone* (October 25, 2011) online (www.rollingstone.com/music/albumreviews/bad-as-me-20111025); Waits in *The New Yorker* (October 31, 2011) online (www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/musical/2011/10/31/111031crmu_music_frerejones?currentPage=all).

CD recommended: *Bad as Me* (deluxe edition) by Tom Waits (2011).

