



PROFILES IN FAITH Augustine (354 – 430 AD)

by Dr. Art Lindsley
Scholar-in-Residence



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After Jesus and the apostle Paul, Augustine is arguably the most influential person in the history of the Church. His influence on the Catholic Church is massive, and he had a similarly great influence on the Protestant reformers. Martin Luther was notably a monk of the Augustinian order, and in Calvin's *Institutes*, the Church father quoted most often is Augustine.

Early Life

Augustine was born in 354 AD in Thagaste, Numidia, North Africa and died in 430 in Hippo (both in present-day Algeria). His father was a pagan who was converted on his deathbed, and his mother, Monnica, was a devoted believer in Christ. In his early education, he described himself as rather lazy and an underachiever; however, he showed sparks of brilliance. When Augustine was seventeen, a rich patron, Romanianus, saw this young man's potential as a philosopher. Romanianus had hoped through this patronage to turn the tide against Chris-

tianity and back towards paganism. Ironically, Augustine later converted Romanianus to Christianity.

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While in Carthage pursuing his studies, Augustine started living with a concubine. He never reveals her name, but a year later they had a son whom they named Adeodatus, which means "the gift of God." Augustine struggled for much of his early life with sexual desire. He says:

From a perverted act of will, desire had grown, and when desire is given satisfaction, habit is forged; and when habit passes unresisted, a compulsive urge sets in.

Augustine lived with his concubine for more than a decade until Monnica finally persuaded him to send her away so that he could marry a high society Milanese girl. But, he was required to remain chaste for two years until the girl reached a marriageable age. He couldn't do it. Not long afterwards, he took another mistress.



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In the legacy of
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the Institute
endeavors to develop
disciples who can
articulate, defend, and
live
faith in Christ
through personal and
public life.



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KNOWING & DOING

by Thomas A. Tarrants, III, *President*

Dear Reader ,

Our long-time readers will immediately recognize a new “face” and length to our quarterly publication. Whether you are a long-time or newly-initiated reader, we bid you a very warm welcome to the first edition of *Knowing & Doing*, C.S. Lewis Institute’s newly re-titled and enlarged teaching quarterly. We are endeavoring to bring an even more relevant, helpful resource to your hands each quarter, and it is our prayer that it will help you to grow in both heart and mind.

In the late 80’s, the Institute began producing the *Report*, primarily, as the name implies, to give a brief ministry update to those who faithfully supported our work. As the Institute grew and developed, we included more pieces which were meant to augment conference topics and serve as a supplement to the readings of the Fellows Program. After “trying on” a number of titles, *Knowing & Doing* was chosen because it so clearly reflects the Institute’s aim of life-changing discipleship.

As in the past, you may receive *Knowing & Doing* on request. We do, however, ask for a minimal contribution each year to allow us to continue producing and improving the publication. (Thank you so much for the support we have already received.)

Having just celebrated Thanksgiving and now entering Advent, we are deeply grateful for the grace of God in our lives and on this work. We are grateful as well for the many people who share their talents, time, and treasure with the Institute. We are keenly aware of the enormous strength you bring to the work.

God bless you now and in the new year. We look forward to hearing from you and/or seeing you at one of our conferences.

In Christ,

P.S. Don’t miss the new Tape-of-the-Month program. It is an outstanding opportunity for growth. Details inside.



C.S. Lewis on Grief

by Art Lindsley, Ph.D.

Scholar-in-Residence, C.S. Lewis Institute

A psychiatrist friend maintains that, "All change involves loss, and loss involves grief, and grief involves pain." Since the events of September 11, 2001, there has been much change, loss, grief, and pain. There is a changed perception of our lives, a loss of a sense of safety and security, grief over those lost or grieving with families who lost loved ones, and all of this leads to pain from these and other sources. Although the events of Lewis's life differ from ours, perhaps his struggle with grief can be helpful for us.

Lewis Loses Joy

C.S. Lewis had a number of particularly painful events in his life. His mother died of cancer when he was a young boy, he was sent away to a boarding school with an abusive headmaster later declared insane, he was wounded in World War I, and his father failed to visit him in the hospital despite his pleadings. However, clearly the most painful event was the loss of his wife Joy. They had only been married for a few years. The rather strange circumstances surrounding their marriage are powerfully portrayed in the BBC or Hollywood movie versions of *Shadowlands*. They were married in a civil ceremony in 1956 and later, after Joy was diagnosed with cancer, married by an Anglican priest in 1957. Shortly after this second ceremony, a remission in Joy's cancer occurred. Joy was then able to progress from bed to wheelchair to almost normal walking. The next couple years were filled with remarkable happiness. Joy

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wrote in mid-1957: "Jack and I are managing to be surprisingly happy, considering the circumstances; you'd think we were a honeymoon couple in our early twenties, rather than our middle-aged selves."

C.S. Lewis commented that he experienced later in life the married bliss that most people experience in their early years. However, it didn't last. By late 1959, the cancer returned, and Joy died July 13, 1960. Two of the last things she said were, "You have made me happy," and "I am at peace with God."

A Grief Observed

The loss of Joy plunged Lewis into the depths of grief and pain. Following Joy's death, Lewis kept a journal and wrote down his thoughts because he was personally helped by doing so—with no intent of publication. Later, he published his journaled thoughts under a pseudonym, N.W. Clerk (a pun on the Old English for "I know not what scholar"). *A Grief Observed* was published two years before his own death in 1963. Interestingly, when the book first came out,

many people thought it would be helpful to C.S. Lewis, and he received many gift copies.

The Problem of Pain

Back in 1940, Lewis had published a book titled *The Problem of Pain*, which was a theoretical discussion of the problem of evil and pain. It is a book that still repays reading. He

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Dr. Art Lindsley

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was aware then of the difference between theory and practice. In his introduction to *The Problem of Pain*, he says:

I have never for one moment been in a state of mind to which even the imagination of serious pain was less than intolerable. If any man is safe from the danger of underestimating this adversary, I am that man. I must add too, that the only purpose of the book is to solve the intellectual problem raised by suffering; for the far higher task of teaching fortitude and patience I was never fool enough to suppose myself qualified.

Charles Williams, Lewis's close friend and fellow "In-king" once told Lewis that the weight of God's displeasure was reserved for Job's comforters who tried to show that all was well: "The sort of people," he said, measurably dropping his lower jaw and fixing Lewis with his eyes, "who wrote books on the problem of pain."

In one of his letters, Lewis wrote about the difficulty of applying our beliefs to actual suffering:

The real difficulty is—isn't it—to adapt one's steady belief about tribulation to this particular tribulation; for the particular, when it arrives, always seems so peculiarly intolerable.

During World War II, the bombings of London and the prospect of Nazi invasion was more shattering to him than expected. It was difficult to be detached from this world with the threat of loss being so real. The ups and downs of our changing emotions present a problem. Once Lewis was asked about how he dealt with sorrow. He responded:

In nearly all possible ways because, as you probably know, it isn't a state but a process. It keeps changing—like a winding road with quite a new landscape at each bend.

A *Grief Observed* shows the process through which Lewis dealt with and began to emerge from his grief. But, the process was not pretty or easy. The path was much clouded by fear, doubt, and anger before the gradual lifting of the darkness and breaking through of the sun.

Grief and Fear

Lewis once wrote:

No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear. I am not afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid. The same fluttering in the stomach, the same restlessness, the yawning. I keep on swallowing.

Lewis was afraid of going to places that he and Joy had enjoyed, "our favorite pub, our favorite wood." He was

afraid of his thoughts about God, afraid of what the future would bring:

This is one of the things I'm afraid of. The agonies, the mad moments, must, in the course of nature die away. But what will follow? Just this apathy, this dead flatness?

Darkness and Doubt

Above all, there was a sense of distance from God, what the sixteenth century Spanish monk John of the Cross called the "dark night of the soul" or the sense that the "heavens were like brass" bouncing back any prayer sent heavenward. Lewis says,

But go to Him when your need is despicable, when all other help is vain, and what do you find? A door slammed in your face, and a sound of bolting and double-bolting on the inside. After that, silence.

Worse than that, there were doubts about the goodness of God. It wasn't that Lewis was in any danger of becoming an atheist: "The real danger is of coming to believe such dreadful things about Him. The conclusion I dread is not, 'So there's no God after all,' but, 'So this is what God's really like. Deceive yourself no longer.'"

The most awful thoughts of God came into his mind. I remember many years ago when I first read *A Grief Observed*, that I stopped reading

If any man is safe from the danger of underestimating this adversary, I am that man.

C.S. Lewis on Grief

the book for awhile when I encountered these passages. It helps to keep them in context when we remember that this was initially his own private journal, not intended for publication. Also, many people have realized that they were not crazy or alone when they have had similar thoughts. In any case, Lewis feared at one point “that we are really rats in a trap. Or worse still, rats in a laboratory... Supposing the truth were ‘God always vivisects?’ Was God a ‘Cosmic Sadist’ or an ‘Eternal Vivisector?’”

Anger at God

Later, Lewis came to realize that the perverse delight in such thoughts revealed an anger at God and a desire to get back at Him:

In a way I liked them. I am even aware of a slight reluctance to accept opposite thoughts. All that stuff about the Cosmic Sadist was not so much the expression of thought as of hatred. I was getting from it the only pleasure a man in anguish can get; the pleasure of hitting back. It was really just... ‘telling God what I thought of Him.’ And, of course, as in all abusive language, ‘what I thought’ didn’t mean what I thought true. Only what I thought would offend Him (and His worshippers) most. That sort of thing is never said without some pleasure. Gets it ‘off your chest.’ You feel better for a moment.

Even though it is by no means necessary to experience anger at God in the same way Lewis did, it is certainly not unusual. Even a cursory look at the Psalms will confirm this.

Clouds Begin to Lift

Gradually, ever so gradually, some of the clouds of grief started to lift. One of the stages in the process was a consideration of whether Joy’s “coming back” to him would be good for her:

I never even raised the question of whether a return, if it were possible, would be good for her. I want her back as an ingredient of my past. Could I have wished her anything worse? Having got once through death, to come back and then at some later date, have all her dying to do over again? They call Stephen the first martyr. Hadn’t Lazarus the rawer deal?

Unexpectedly, his heart started to feel lighter. “It came this morning, early ... my heart was lighter than it had been for many weeks.” Some of the lifting he attributed to a recovery from physical exhaustion due to a few good nights’ sleep. Gradually, he began to feel in his relationship with God that the door was no longer shut and bolted.

Was it my own frantic need that slammed it in my face? The time when there is

nothing at all in your soul except a cry for help may be just the time when God can’t give it: you are like the drowning man who can’t be helped because he clutches and grabs. Perhaps your own reiterated cries deafen you to the voice you hoped to hear.

Lewis had the striking thought that God had not been experimenting with Lewis’s faith; He knew it already. It was Lewis who didn’t. In some ways, his faith was a “house of cards” that needed to be knocked down in order to be rebuilt with stronger material.

There was no sudden transition from fear, anger, grief and pain to warmth and light. It was “like the warming of a room or the coming of daylight. When you first notice them, they have been already going on for some time.” You can be utterly mistaken about the situation you are really in. You can think that you are stuck in a cellar or dungeon alone when that is not really the case:

Imagine a man in total darkness. He thinks he is in a cellar or dungeon. Then there comes a sound. He thinks it might be a sound from far off—waves or wind-blown trees or cattle half a mile away. And if so, it proves he’s not in a cellar, but free, in the open air. Or, it may be a much smaller sound close at hand—

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Rev. Dr. N.T. Wright

An Interview With: REV. DR. N.T. WRIGHT

by Dr. Art Lindsley

Dr. Lindsley: How did you come to faith in Christ?

Dr. Wright: I was brought up in a Christian home of a middle-Anglican variety, was baptised as a child among praying relatives, and went to a school where there were daily prayers etc. It wasn't until my teens that I realised that most adults in the UK didn't in fact believe in God in any serious way.

I had various 'jumps' forward in my own Christian experience, each one making real for me in new ways things that had been latent before. The first of these that I remember was when I was about seven; it was around that time that I began to realise I was called to ordained ministry. Another of the things I didn't know was that that was unusual! In my early teens I started going to boys' camps run by Scripture Union, at which we had excellent outdoor holidays with strong biblical teaching morning and evening. The combination of a steady church background with exciting biblical study has, I guess, set me up for life.

Dr. Lindsley: What are the top three needs of the Church today?

Dr. Wright: Forgive me saying that's a very American style of question! But, to run with the genre, I suppose I would say: 1. a better grasp of the biblical and historical roots of the faith; 2. a better understanding of the complex world we now live in; and 3. courage, energy and vision to relate the first to the second in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Of course, each of these begs all sorts of questions as to what that grasp, and that understanding, might be, and what the spirit might be leading us to do in our own day. But that's the framework I'd go with.

Of course, a perfectly good answer might just as well have read: 1. prayer; 2. prayer; 3. prayer.

Dr. Lindsley: Which is the most important book you have written?

Dr. Wright: That's up to the critics, and to history. But my guess at the moment has to be *Jesus and the Victory of God*. That, with its predecessor, *The New Testament and the People of God*, which I really see as part of the same 'book', now a series, is taking the major step I think we need to take to address the first of my answers in the previous question.

I am very much aware as a theologian that in fact the most important 'book' I have written, and am writing, is the 'book' which consists of my own life. At the moment there are quite a lot of misprints and errors in this, and I'm keen to put them straight.

Dr. Lindsley: What are the top five most influential books in your life other than the Bible?

Dr. Wright: I assume that, with the Bible, I should rule out the books I most frequently pull off the shelf, and always enjoy using—the great dictionaries and lexicons (I love words), the great Bible dictionaries and reference books like the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* and the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, now both in magnificent third editions.

This is a hard one, because I read as much as I possibly can, and quite different stuff. But as I look back, the works of C. S. Lewis (no, this isn't just because of this magazine!) were hugely influential on me in my teens and early twenties. Many times, in a conversation, or reading a newspaper article, one of Lewis's sharp little insights, not least from the Narnia books, would return and keep me clear-headed.

I was much influenced in mid-teens by Isabel Kuhn's classic *By Searching*, but I haven't re-read it for many years now.

The novels of Chaim Potok opened up for me the world of contemporary Judaism just as I was getting to know, as a historian, the world of first-century Judaism. I still find *My Name is Asher Lev* extraordinarily powerful, not least because of the pilgrimage of the hero through the misunderstanding of his own community—something most theologians know from time to time.

I love poetry and usually have some in my bag when I travel. Often this is T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*, which I love but don't really understand. But my favourite for some years now has been the Irish poet Michael O'Siadhail. His *Hail! Madam Jazz*, a salute to poetry itself (herself) is my favourite collection.

In terms of scholarly works, I have been influenced particularly by my own teacher in his last great work: G. B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible*, now in a new edition for which I wrote a foreword. But two great books ask to be mentioned as well: the commentaries on Romans by two completely different writers, C. E. B. Cranfield and Ernst Käsemann. I don't agree with either of them, but they taught me what the issues were and how to think historically and theologically about them.

Dr. Lindsley: How do you shape your devotional life?

Dr. Wright: My favoured pattern at the moment is to sit down very early in the morning in my study armchair with a pot of tea and three books: the Hebrew Old Testament, from which I read a Psalm, the Greek Old Testament (the Septuagint) from which I read a chapter, and the Greek New Testament, from which I read a paragraph (more or less). I try to be alive to what God may be saying to me, and perhaps through me, at every level, particularly the personal. But equally important is that I then, a bit later, attend Mattins in the Abbey (a said service, mostly consisting of Bible readings interspersed with congregational responses also taken from the Bible, and ending with

prayers for the world, the church, and ourselves). Frequently I will also attend, and sometimes preside at, the Eucharist. Then in the evening, before supper, I will attend Choral Evensong, and allow the work and tensions of the day to be bathed in glorious music and shared prayer. Late in the evening I'm too tired for sustained devotions, but a few moments of prayer will often round the day off.

I should say also that, when I'm writing, the line between thinking something through—a topic, a biblical passage, a chapter in a book I'm writing—and praying it through is very fine, and I'm honestly not clear when the one becomes the other.

Dr. Lindsley: How have you been so productive in writing?

Dr. Wright: The need to support a large family (four hungry, and now young adult, children) has had a lot to do with it. I have been blessed (a) with what some people call the gift of the gab—I can talk quickly on most subjects I know something about, and on some I don't! and (b) with the gift of physical stamina. I can sit at the desk, and work at the computer, for long hours on end.

I think something happened when I turned 40 (thirteen years ago now). I suddenly realised that I didn't have to write in the stodgy, boring way that much scholarship has adopted. If the argument was sound, the evidence fully presented, and the conclusions clear, it was real scholarship even if I wrote the way I wanted. From then on I have just loved writing. It's physically demanding but it's usually exhilarating.

One final word, and this is in homage to your "patron saint." Before I ever started serious writing, I was impressed by what Lewis said somewhere, that the best way to develop your writing style is first to know exactly what it is you want to say, and second to be sure you say exactly that. I keep that as an invisible motto over my desk. Whether I live up to it will be for others to judge. ■



Fix Your Eyes Upon Jesus:

The vocation of N.T. Wright and the vocation of the Church in the world



Steven S. Garber

by Steven S. Garber, Ph.D.
Senior Fellow, C.S. Lewis Institute

*N.T. (Tom) Wright:
No other theologian
has so captured
my attention....*

Film is a window into the human heart. Like all art, anytime and anywhere, it both reflects and promotes a culture's understanding of itself, its hopes and dreams, its glories and its shames, its beliefs about reality and truth, about right and wrong, what is to be prized and what is to be despised. For that reason, we cannot "leave our brains at the box-office," as one of my teachers told me years ago. He taught me to take pen and paper into the theater, urging that it would prompt me to think about what I was seeing, remembering to remember that the celluloid story was an argument about the meaning of life.

So I still do that.

A couple years ago I was in California for several days, speaking at several colleges, and one night I saw a film called *The Green Mile*, which features Tom Hanks as the chief guard on death row. His job is to care for the prisoners before they walk "the green mile," i.e. the hallway between their cells and the electric chair. Though Hanks does a wonderful job of

acting the part of a benevolent prison guard who humanizes his place of service through acts of mercy, the screen is soon dominated by a giant of a man, whose story is the heart of the film. Condemned to die for a crime he did not commit, he has the most unusual gift: he can take into his own body the bruises and brokenness of others, and transform them — seemingly for love's sake. There is no 1-2-3 correspondence between its images and anything else I know of in this universe... and yet, the images are powerful, very powerful.

One line in the film specially struck me. As the wrongly condemned prisoner explains the strangeness of his sight to Hanks — what he sees with the eyes of his heart — he tearfully tells of so many situations which are wrong and unfair and sad, summing it up with these words, "That's the way it is every day, all over the world." Yes, hundreds of thousands of times... every day, all over the world.

As I sat in the theater, musing over the movie, I found myself thinking of images and ideas from the work of N.T. (Tom) Wright. There is no theologian who has so captured my attention as he has over the last several years, writing with an unusual pastoral heart about some of the most important biblical themes of our day, and any day. In particular, he offers this vision, which is what helped me to see *The Green Mile* as a reflection upon vocation, living one's life in imitation of Christ, stretched between the glory of God on the one hand, and the sorrows of the world on the other:

We need Christian people to work as healers: as healing judges and prison staff, as healing teachers and administrators, as healing shopkeepers and bankers, as healing musicians and artists, as healing writers and scientists, as healing diplomats and politicians. We need people who will hold on to Christ firmly with one hand and reach out with the other, with wit and skill and cheerfulness, with compassion and sorrow and tenderness, to the places where our world is in pain. We need people who will use all their God-given skills... to analyze where things have gone wrong, to come to the place of pain, and to hold over the wound the only medicine which will really heal, which is the love of Christ made incarnate once more, the strange love of God turned into your flesh and mine, your smile and mine, your tears and mine, your patient analysis and mine, your frustration and mine, your joy and mine. (For All God's Worth, p. 101)

I know that I need to have visions like this set before me, if I am to have the theological grist to be able to sustain my responsibilities and relationships living as I do with the brokenness of the world in and around me. His words make sense of what I know and how I want to live. I wonder how you read them?

This past month Wright came to lecture for the Institute, and hundreds of folks came from all over the area to hear him speak about the nature of Christian hope. The core of his concern was this: that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus has far-reaching consequences affecting life in every way, from the most personal concerns to the most public con-

victions. For many, his vision of the history of redemption, seeing an integral connection between a life of faith, hope, and love here, and its meaning for the future new heavens and new earth, was profoundly challenging and deeply nourishing. As one friend put it: "I have always thought of heaven as a place for my disembodied soul. It changes everything if we are moving to new heavens and a new earth, and if there is a real link between my life here, and the future, if what I do now is part of the kingdom which is coming."

Tom Tarrants, President of the Institute in reflecting midway through the talks that listening to Wright was a bit like "drinking from a fire hydrant," said that tapes would be available for further pondering. In addition we also want to offer a way into Wright's heart and mind through his writing, both for those of you who were there at The Falls Church for his lectures and for those who are eager to learn and listen through his books.

Simply said, he has written something for everyone. From basic apologetics for the historicity of the person and teaching of Jesus, through many shorter collections of homilies and meditations about the person and teaching of Jesus, onto discipline-transforming scholarship on the first-century Palestinian cultural context of the person and teaching of Jesus, he has chosen to serve in a

preaching and teaching ministry set within the colleges and cathedrals of the Church of England; his current appointment is as

*We need people
who will hold on
to Christ firmly
with one hand
and
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other, with wit
and skill and
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with compassion
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pain.*

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Fix Your Eyes Upon Jesus

(continued from page 9)

It is not too much to say that he has taken up a vocation in which he has fixed his eyes upon Jesus.

Canon Theologian of Westminster Abbey in London. But plainly, the thread running through all that he does is a single-hearted focus upon the person and teaching of Jesus. It is not too much to say that he has taken up a vocation in which he has fixed his eyes upon Jesus.

Looking back at my bookshelf, his writings take up a good foot of space. Here are a few that I think you might enjoy.

The Lord and His Prayer

(Eerdmans, 1996.) The Lord's Prayer is one of our truest windows into the very heart of God. It is not a small thing that the Church in every generation has chosen it as a means of catechism, teaching the contours of the faith through its petitions. Wright's reflections take up that task in our time, and are both theologically rich and pastorally attentive, which is his great gift throughout his writing.

Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship

(Eerdmans, 1994.) A series of 12 homilies on New Testament books and themes, here he brings his unusual scholarly skill to bear in sifting through all that might be said, and brings to focus critical ideas and images which lead the eager reader to learn more about the nature of a discipleship rooted in a growing knowledge of Jesus. (The class I have been leading at The Falls Church this fall, studying Wright's work, has used this as one its texts.)

Reflecting the Glory: Meditations for Living Christ's Life in the World

(Augsberg, 1998.) A collection of 53 devotional readings based on New Testament passages which day-after-day draw one into meditations on the vocation of Jesus, and its relevance for ours. (This is the other class text.)

For All God's Worth: True Worship and the Calling of the Church

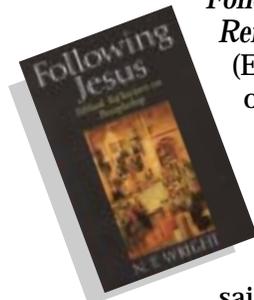
(Eerdmans, 1997.) A coherent life is only possible if there is an integral relationship between one's worship, one's worldview, and one's way of life. Here Wright explores what that looks like, learning to love and worship God while living with the pressures of a fragmenting culture and world.

The Challenge of Jesus: Rediscovering Who Jesus Was and Is.

(IVP, 1999.) This grew out of a series of lectures which Wright gave to a Chicago gathering of IVCF faculty and graduate students several years ago, who were there to reflect upon the meaning of the gospel for the push-and-pull of vocational and disciplinary responsibilities. In the last chapter, he wonders about "an epistemology of love," which in part grew out of a conversation he and I had at the conference, and which has been remarkably fruitful for me.

The New Testament and the People of God and Jesus and the Victory of God

(Fortress, 1992; 1996, respectively.) These are the first-fruits of his proposed five-volume series which are written for his colleagues in New Testament studies (and for anyone really serious about the first-century cultural context of the gospel). Each are major studies, and have already elicited one volume written by other New Testament scholars who are responding to the ground-breaking nature of his work. Intriguingly, words like "story" and "worldview" substantially shape the chapter headings and outline. One more time, his deep interest is in recovering the historicity of Jesus's teaching; for contrast sake, he is the principal antagonist to the Jesus Seminar, the "scholars" who meet in very public settings to decide together what belongs in the Bible and what does not. Somehow, clearly by grace, he has found a way to love these people and honor them as human beings, even as he has so deeply disagreed with them.



Fix Your Eyes Upon Jesus

It is an unusual vocation he has followed, trying to love the Church and the world through his scholarly labor. In doing so, the critics have come calling, from both sides—which is to be expected, I suppose, for someone working so hard between those two worlds. For example, he speaks of his discipline of New Testament studies at “the place of pain” to which he is called to go, holding onto Christ firmly (see above quote) while he spends his days among people whose touchstone, whose starting point, is to deny the resurrection. His own words, which have been such a grace to me, must be first of all words for his own heart:

We discover that the story of Jesus’ ministry is not only the story of what he did in history, but encompasses also the vocation that comes to us in the

present: that we should be, in the power of the Spirit, the presence of Jesus for the whole world. This discovery brings us the most remarkable joy and the most remarkable sorrow. This is our vocation: to take up our cross, and be Jesus for the whole world, living with the joy and the sorrow woven into the pattern of our days. (Reflecting the Glory, p. 10)

The life he writes about, one full of joy and sorrow, is the one that we all live. That Wright helps us remember that Jesus did too is his good gift to the Church as we live in the world. ■



LIFE AFTER DEATH: EXPLORING THE CHRISTIAN HOPE

The Rev. Dr. N.T. “Tom” Wright, Canon Theologian at Westminster Abbey, was warmly welcomed at C.S. Lewis Institute’s large conference in November. Over 300 gathered to hear his fascinating—and full—lectures addressing modern confusion over the resurrection and life and death. Comments following the lectures indicate them to be among the best ever offered.

Tapes are highly recommended!



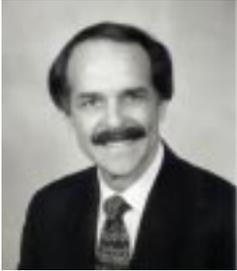
Cassette tapes of the series “Resurrection and Life After Death” by Dr. N.T. Wright are available. The four tape set is in an album and easy to keep in the car for travel. The price of each cassette tape set is \$25, plus tax and shipping in the continental U.S. Please allow 2-3 weeks for delivery. Call to order: 703/620-4056. Visa & MasterCard accepted. Visit our website for more ordering information.



Terrorism Through the Eyes of Faith

by Dennis Hollinger, Ph.D.

Vice Provost and Professor of Christian Ethics, Messiah College



Dennis Hollinger

*Defining visions
for our life
sometimes come when
our foundations
are shaken.*

The events of September 11, 2001 have produced a broad array of conflicting emotions within all of us. We have struggled to know how to think, feel and respond to the attacks. Of course as followers of Christ it should not have come as a total surprise, for we know the world is not the way it's supposed to be. The words of C.S. Lewis at the outbreak of World War II are applicable to our own situation: "The war [attack] creates no absolutely new situation; it simply aggravates the permanent human situation so that we can no longer ignore it. Human life has always been lived on the edge of a precipice..... We are mistaken when we compare war with 'normal life.' Life has never been normal" (*The Weight of Glory*, p. 23.)

But, despite a world view that predisposes us to understand such evil, we are still left reeling within ourselves. As we think about our responses to the new threat of terrorism, it is helpful to recall that our emotions and cognitive processes are ultimately good gifts of God to help us navigate our way in the face of danger, evil and uncertainty within the world. But of course there's a problem.

We are fallen creatures, and thus our emotions and cognitive responses aren't as God intended. While they are still fundamentally good gifts of God, they are twisted, distorted, and miss the mark of their original intention. As those redeemed by God's grace in Jesus Christ, we need to allow our emotions and thinking to be transformed. Thus, terrorism through the eyes of faith needs a clear understanding of our natural emotions and thinking, in contrast to the redeemed perspective.

Righteous Indignation, not Unbridled Anger

Likely one of our first responses to the terrorists acts was anger. Whenever we are attacked physically or psychologically, resentment and belligerence arise within us. Anger is a good gift, for it enables us to deal emotionally with violations, injustices, and evil that threaten our life and integrity. But anger is also fallen, and hence it easily turns to unbridled anger that comes to control us. In its fallen state unbridled anger tends to build a history that won't let go and thus perpetuates disgust, disrespect, and eventually violence, as the blood boils within us. As Horace, the Roman poet, put it, "Anger is a short madness."

It's because of the brutal impact of anger upon both the victim and the offender that the Bible has wise direction, "Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger" (Ephesians 4:26). Thus our natural unbridled anger needs to be transformed into righteous indignation, a holy wrath with strong feelings directed towards the evil, sin and injustice perpetrated. Righteous indignation moves us beyond the uncontrollable outrage directed against individuals to a more principled anger focusing on the evil done. Such redeemed anger is perhaps akin to God's own holy wrath, "For the wrath of

God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth” (Romans 1:18). Such anger arises from God’s own holiness, for sin and evil are direct contradictions to God’s own nature and actions.

If we are not angered by the events of September 11, we likely have little sense of either goodness or evil. But if we live in unbridled anger, we may succumb to the very evil that outrages us in the first place. Thus righteous indignation, not unbridled anger.

Hope, not Fear

After anger, the next emotion many of us felt on September 11 was fear. And, as we hear more of the potential terrorist strategies, fear proliferates. After all, what is terrorism but the attempt to overthrow or control others by engendering intense fear or terror in the hearts and minds of a given people. Fear is a natural emotion and one of God’s good gifts to us. It’s an emotion of distress in response to impending danger, pain or evil, and it enables us to become aware of and respond to these realities.

But, fear has great dangers– most visibly its sinister ability to immobilize and cause paralysis of action. It prevents us from performing responsibilities and engaging new opportunities in life. Thus, fear needs to be redeemed. We might think that the antidote to fear is courage, since it is one of the classical cardinal virtues. But, the biblical response to fear is really hope. Courage tends to reside within our own natural proclivities and self-discipline, while hope is supernatural in its source and nature. Our hope in perilous times is not ultimately in nation, military power, or our own ability to cope; our hope is in a God who is ultimately in control. Christians have hope because we believe that in the midst of terror and evil God is nonetheless there, turning human desecration into good, for “We know that in all things God is working for the good of those who love Him and who are called according to his purposes” (Romans 3:28). There is hope because there is One beyond the finite,

sinful realities of this world, and it is that ultimate hope that motivates and sustains us in a troubled, dangerous world.

If we look at the world from a natural lens, there is reason to fear. But, when we look at the world through a supernatural lens, there is hope, for “The Lord is my light and my salvation– whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life– of whom shall I be afraid?... Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then will I be confident.” (Psalm 27:1-3) Thus hope, not fear.

Justice, Not Revenge

After anger and fear, terrorism tends to breed an emotional response of revenge. This is a natural retort wanting to hit back, get even, and take out vengeance on the evil doers. Revenge has roots in our created being, for it is the innate desire to make right the wrong. But, as fallen creatures, that deep impulse becomes twisted, excessive and misguided. Revenge wants to strike back without principle or limitation on the basis of emotional outrage. Since September 11, we’ve heard the language of revenge, as people pour out contempt towards Muslims, Arabs, and people of middle-eastern descent. Even Arab Christians in this country have had to fear for their lives.

But, in place of revenge, we need justice. Life in a fallen world calls for justice, even as believers are called to a spirit of forgiveness that ultimately seeks restoration. A voice for justice in a world that seeks unrestrained vengeance is a voice for fairness, not just emotional outrage. Justice seeks to limit our passions and feelings and to respond from principle, not internal sentiments. It is never in personal hands, but develops mechanisms to effect it. Justice is not arbitrary, but is supported by evidence. It has often been symbolized by the blindfold on “lady justice” to ensure that justice, not revenge, is our response to evil.

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Terrorism Through the Eyes of Faith

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*If we
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Without justice, revenge builds a history of injustice, perpetuates more acts of violence, and the spiral begins—generation after generation—a reality we know all too well throughout the world. The ultimate goal of justice is restoration and peace, for “The fruits of justice shall be peace” (Isa. 32.17). Thus justice, not revenge.

Mortality, not Invincibility

Until September 11 we thought that as a nation we were invincible. Thus, one of our first responses was, “How can this happen to us?” We are accustomed to thinking of ourselves as in control, for since the industrial revolution the Western modern world has mastered nature, natural resources, reproduction, the human genome, life, death, and much in between. As moderns, we have assumed that we could solve all problems, set things right, and determine good outcomes according to desired ends.

Then came September 11. Amazingly, the terrorists used our own instruments of control, our technology, back against us. With a handful of people and a few hundred thousand dollars, the terrorists were able to do what no other nation or army on earth could do. And, now we have come to realize—we are not invincible.

If there is anything we learn from the attacks on our nation, it is our own mortality. That is the biblical perspective, for God is Creator; we are creatures. God is infinite; we are finite. God is eternal; we are temporal. As C.S. Lewis noted, events such as war or terror in the past made death real to humans, for they thought it good for us to be always aware of our mortality.

I am inclined to think they were right. All the animal life in us, all schemes of happiness that centered in this world, were always doomed to a final frustration. In ordinary times only a wise man can realize it. Now the stupidest of us knows.... If we had foolish un-Christian hopes about human culture, they are now shattered. If we thought we were building up a heaven on earth, if we looked for

something that would turn the present world from a place of pilgrimage into a permanent city satisfying the soul of man, we are disillusioned, and not a moment too soon. (The Weight of Glory, p. 32)

A sense of mortality in the face of terrorism leads us to humility, not triumphalism; to realism, not utopianism. It evokes wisdom, not arrogance. It is in mortality that we seek dependence upon God and find salvation in Christ. Thus mortality, not invincibility.

Global, not Parochial

By nature we seek to preserve ourselves, our own group, and our own nation. Particularly in time of crisis, when our very existence is threatened, we turn to that which is safe and familiar. Our natural proclivities are in one sense good, for the familiar eases our discord. Thus, our natural response to September 11 was to be parochial, and to think of ourselves. And, certainly we can with good warrant argue that moral responsibility always begins at home.

But, as we know too well, parochialism (the restriction of concerns to the narrow and limited—to those like me) leads to prejudice, ethnocentrism and racism. Parochialism is able to see only “my group” and “my nation” as the center of reality and the bearer of good. All else is deemed to be evil.

In contrast, God calls us to be global Christians. Global Christians know that while national, racial, and ethnic identities are important, they are not the defining marks of a Christian. They are always to be secondary to both our humanness and our identity as members of the universal Church, the Body of Christ. As world Christians, we recognize that we have brothers and sisters in Christ in almost every nation and tribe. Thus, we can never look out just for us. Being a global Christian reminds us that we must be concerned for terrorists threats not only on our own turf, but all over the world—some which have gone on for years. Global faith always keeps Christ’s Great Commission central, recognizing that some national responses can

have dire consequences upon our attempts to invite men and women across the globe to experience God's grace in Jesus Christ.

The more we know of terrorism the more we realize that it is a world issue, not just an American issue. Parochialism will cut us off from this reality and from the responsibilities we share in our world. It will blind us to the work that God is doing around the world. Thus global, not parochial.

Mystery, Not Certainty

In the aftermath of September 11, many have yearned for certainty regarding God's actions on that day. Where was God and what was God up to? It's only natural to seek certainty in the divine realm, for it brings consolation in the face of threat and evil in our world. As a result, some believers have felt the need to make pronouncements regarding God's involvement in this terrorist act, and with certitude assert judgment, causality or other kinds of divine action.

Clearly, there are many things about God's actions and character we know with confidence. For example, we know that God is personal, triune, and simultaneously transcendent and immanent. We know that He is a God of mercy who wants to redeem us and who has taken the initiative to reveal himself to us in the written word, the Bible, and the incarnate word, Jesus Christ.

But clearly, there are some things about divine actions we just do not know, and this is especially true of the ways of God in human history—his judgments, actions and permissions within the world. As Isaiah the prophet put it, "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (55:9). Thus, we need to affirm some degree of divine mystery that we will never fully comprehend and capture within the limits of finitude. There are three such mysteries that are pertinent for our times.

First, there is mystery regarding human suffering and evil within the world. If God is good and all powerful, then why are there terrorist acts within the world? All humans have

wrestled in some fashion with that question, and a whole book of the Bible is devoted to it— Job. Interestingly, in the biblical drama, after all of Job's loss, suffering, and anguish from his "friends," he never gets an answer to his question. God never answers the philosophical, theological or practical life questions surrounding suffering and evil. What Job receives is a new vision of God: "I had heard of you, now my eyes have seen you" (Job 42:5). The reality of evil, suffering, and terrorism in our world cannot be attributed to God, but clearly, God has the power to intervene. Thus, the why's and wherefore's of God's action in the face of the evil of September 11 remain a mystery.

Second, there is mystery in God's judgments in history. Some were, of course, quite certain that the terrorist acts were divine judgment against America and thought they knew the reason for them. It is quite clear that God's judgment comes in history; it is less clear how it comes. For one thing, the judgment of God is always at work against human sin and injustice, as there are continual reverberations from actions and character that fly in the face of God. And likely, the list of why God is judging us is more extensive and closer to home than we think. Moreover, it is hard for us to comprehend what is clear in the biblical story, that judgment and redemption are sometimes mingled in ways that defy human imagination.

Third, there is mystery to God's work of redemption in the midst of evil situations. God's ways of awakening, of vindicating justice and righteousness, and of drawing humans to himself are always beyond our limited perceptions. If redemption was limited to our preconceived notions of how God can or must work, such redemption would hardly be worth the time.

A sense of mystery in our understanding of and relationship to God is significant for deep spirituality. After all, would we really want to entrust our lives to one we'd figured out? We would be trusting in the finite.

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Profiles in Faith: Augustine

(continued from page 1)

He says, "I thought it should be too miserable unless folded in female arms." His sexual desire in part prevented him from considering Christ. His infamous prayer was "God, give me chastity and continence—but not just now."

Conversion

After an initial dabbling in paganism, Augustine was drawn into more than a decade of fascination with the dualistic sect Manichaeism. He was drawn to this rather strange set of beliefs, among other things, by its mocking of the Bible (of which he approved at the time) and its explanation of evil (by postulating an all-good and an all-evil God). Gradually, though, he became disillusioned with Manichaeism. Many objections accumulated. After a meeting with the celebrated Manichaean teacher Faustus, his questions remained unanswered. He became sorry that he had become involved with the sect, and he began to search earnestly for the truth. He began to consider the possibility that if truth was to be known, perhaps it would be known through divine authority.

It was particularly through the preaching of Ambrose, bishop of Milan, that Augustine began to believe that which he once thought absurd. Ambrose was learned and eloquent and particularly convincing in the way that he defended the Old Testament against Manichaean objections. Augustine says:

For now those things which heretofore appeared incongruous to me in Scripture, and used to offend me, having heard diverse of them expounded reasonably, I referred to the depth of the mysteries, and its authority seemed to be all the more venerable and worthy of religious belief.

Later, while in the throes of an intense internal philosophical struggle, Augustine threw himself in tears to the ground in the garden of his house. Then from the neighboring garden, he heard a child's voice repeating over and over the words, "Take and read. Take and read ..." Believing it to be a heavenly prompt, he picked up a copy of St. Paul's epistles and read the first verses he found.

They were Romans 13:13-14: "Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh in regards to its lusts."

Immediately after reading this sentence, light seemed to penetrate his understanding and "all the darkness of doubt vanished away." He went and told his mother, Monnica, who had been praying for him for years, and she leapt for joy.

Augustine soon resigned his professorship in Milan and retreated to Cassiciacum with Monnica and a group of friends. It was his strong desire to have a community of philosopher/friends that would serve the Church not as priests or bishops, but as writers and thinkers.

Augustine on Friendship

One of the lesser-noted aspects of Augustine's life is the value he placed on friendship. This is true not only in the period in Cassiciacum mentioned above, but also later in Thagaste and Hippo. Peter Brown, in his excellent biography *Augustine of Hippo*, says: "Augustine was an imperialist in his friendships. To be a friend of Augustine's meant only too often becoming part of Augustine himself." The death of an early friend was a crisis point in his life. In his *Confessions*, he says that it was "a friendship that was sweeter to me than all sweetness that in life I had ever known ... I who was his other self ... half of his own soul ... one soul in two bodies." When his friend died, Augustine had a horror of living be-

cause he did not want to live as half a being; yet he was afraid to die lest his friend die wholly and completely.

Yet, when Augustine looks back on his friend who died and on other friendships in his pre-Christian years, he sees them as falling short of the true meaning of friendship:

... There can be no true friendship unless those who cling to each other are welded together by You in that love which is spread throughout our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given us.

His infamous prayer was, "God give me chastity and continence—but not just now."

Profiles in Faith: Augustine

Augustine was quite clear that the origin of friendship was need. It is pride to think that one can exist alone. When he was wearied with the scandals of the world, he threw himself entirely on the charity of his friends and rested in their love. He says:

Whenever I feel that a man burning with Christian charity and love for me has become my friend, when I entrust any of my plans and thoughts to him, I am entrusting them not to a man but to Him in whom he abides, so as to be like Him, for God is charity, and he who abides in charity abides in God.

Thus, God's love is the very essence of true friendship. It is in this love that we have the binding cement of friendship.

Good conversation and good food around the dinner table were Augustine's delight. By the end of Augustine's life, visitors were so many that a hostel was built to lodge them. These visitors would meet around Augustine's table: Gothic monks, hermits from islands off Sardinia, and others from throughout the world. He had written on his table some lines warning against gossip that I have seen translated in various ways. The most memorable, "Who loves another's name to stain, shall not dine with me again." Peter Brown translates the words: "Whoever thinks that he is able to nibble at the life of absent friends must know that he's unworthy of this table."

On one occasion when some fellow bishops forgot his rule, Augustine got so angry that he said they should either rub these verses off the table, or he would get up and go to his room in the middle of the meal. Thus, we see that he was often concerned for his friends' reputations.

Once Augustine wrote to Severus, "As for me when praise is given me by one who is very near and dear to my soul, I feel as if I were being praised by part of myself." After he was bishop in Hippo in an early period, his friends Severus, Possidius, Evodius, Alypius, and Profuturus, were there with him. Gradually, though, each one left to become bishop of distant cities. He saw them sometimes on special trips or at Church Councils,

but he came to miss their presence especially as he became consumed by the details of ecclesiastical life. He writes later in life:

But when you yourself begin to surrender some of the dearest and sweetest of those you have reared, to the needs of churches situated far from you, then you will understand the pangs of longing that stab me on losing the physical presence of friends united to me in the most close and sweet intimacy.

As he became more and more a public figure in the debates with the Donatists and the Pelagians, he had less time to cultivate his close group of friends, but he never ceased to value them and carve out time for them when possible.

The City of God

In terms of significance for our time, Augustine's book *The City of God* stands out as valuable. Augustine began writing this work in 413 AD, and it appeared in installments over the next thirteen years. It was written in order to respond to a devastating tragedy—the destruction and sack of Rome. In 410 AD, Alaric and the Goths, barbarians from the north, sacked Rome. Jerome described the emotional impact: "The whole world perished in one city." Some had suggested that Christianity was the cause of this awful event. The pagan gods were displeased with the empire's embracing of Christ. Augustine's answer

was *The City of God*. It would be an oversimplification to say, though, that this work was solely about the sacking of Rome, because much of the book sets out a positive philosophy of creation, time, evil, freedom, and above all, a Biblical perspective of history.

It has become a classic because of its brilliance and depth. Augustine can pack a lot into a small sentence. For instance:

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to stain,
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Profiles in Faith: Augustine

(continued from page 17)

God's son
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without
destroying
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and founded
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way for man
to be man's
God through
God's man.

God's son assuming humanity without destroying His divinity established and founded this faith, that there might be a way for man to be man's God through God's man.

One of his great contributions is a tough-minded perspective on suffering and death. For instance, he says:

And who is so absurd and blinded as to be audacious enough to affirm that in the midst of the calamities of this mortal state, God's people, or even one single saint, does live, or has ever lived, or shall ever live, without tears and pain.

Particularly, he addressed the pain and grief to those that lost all they had to the barbarian armies:

They lost all they had? Their faith? Their godliness? The possessions of the hidden man of the heart which in the sight of God are of great price? Did they lose these? For these are the wealth of the Christian to whom the wealthy apostle said, 'Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us therewith be content.

But what about those believers who were cruelly put to death? How do we reconcile our faith in God with that? Augustine says:

But it is added, many Christians were slaughtered, and were put to death in a hideous variety of cruel ways. Well, if this be hard to bear, it is assuredly the common lot of all who are born into this life. Of this at least I am certain, that no one has ever died who was not destined to die sometime. Now the end of life puts the longest life on a par with the shortest . . . That death is not to be judged an evil which is the end of a good life; for death becomes evil only by the retribution which follows it. They, then, who are destined to die, need not inquire about what death they are to die, but into what place death will usher them.

Augustine was clearly aware of the depth and reality of evil but placed this within a Biblical context. Biblically, you can have good without evil (as in God's original creation or in heaven) but you cannot have evil without good. Evil is, in Augustine's terms, "privatio boni"—a privation of the good. Evil exists as a parasite on its host. The very fact that we can identify evil proves that we know what is good. Tragedy is the compliment that evil pays to goodness. The greater the tragedy the greater the good presupposed. There is certainly a problem of evil that believers need to address, but there is also an argument for the existence of a good God from the reality of evil.

In a short article about Augustine, it is impossible to even begin to do justice to his genius. Perhaps, though, I can interest you in knowing more. Various works of Augustine's are readily available, such as *Confessions* or *The City of God*. Other, secondary, works are also helpful, such as Peter Brown's *Augustine of Hippo* or Gerald Bonner's *St. Augustine of Hippo: Life and Controversies*.

Augustine's life shows one who passionately sought God with both his heart and his mind. His most famous quote speaks to us all: "You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you." ■

*You have made us for
yourself,
and our hearts
are
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their rest
in you.*

C.S. Lewis on Grief

(continued from page 5)

a chuckle of laughter. And if so, there is a friend just beside him in the dark.

Often, there can come this shift in perspective so that you perceive that you are not so confined or alone as you thought.

God the Iconoclast

Sometimes we need to have our categories smashed, to think outside our self-imposed boxes. J.B. Phillips once wrote a book titled *Your God is Too Small*. Periodically, we need to have our inadequate ideas about God enlarged. God Himself is the great idol smasher, destroying inadequate ideas of Himself so that we might grasp a more true vision. Lewis wrote: "My idea of God is not a divine idea. It has to be shattered time after time. He shatters it Himself. He is the great iconoclast."

This smashing even applies to some of our questions. Some of our questions are unanswerable, at least in the way we ask them. Lewis says:

When I lay these questions before God, I get no answer. But rather, a special kind of 'no answer.' It is not the locked door. It is more like a silent, certainly not uncompassionate, gaze. As though He shook His head not in refusal but waiving the question. Like, 'Peace, child; you don't understand.' . . . Can a mortal ask questions which God finds unanswerable? Quite easily, I should think. All nonsense questions are unanswerable. How many hours are there in a mile? Is yellow square or round? Probably half the questions we ask—half our great theological and metaphysical problems—are like that.

Later, Lewis writes:

Heaven will solve our problems, but not by showing us subtle reconciliations between all our apparently contradictory notions. The notions will be knocked from under our feet. We shall see that there never was any problem.

Lewis's faith was gradually restored to its robust quality, as we can see in his final book, *Letters to Malcolm*. He had suffered his worst pain and come out on the other side.

It is hoped that these insights might be helpful, although I am aware of the dilemma Lewis described in *The Problem of Pain*:

All arguments in justification of suffering provoke bitter resentment against the author. You would like to know how I behave when I am experiencing pain, not writing books about it.

When we all experience pain, a little courage helps more (Lewis observes) than much knowledge, a little human sympathy more than much courage, and the least tincture of the love of God more than all. ■

Terrorism Through the Eyes of Faith

(continued from page 15)

Would we really seek to glorify one we fully understood? G.K. Chesterton, with great insight, once wrote: "We are perhaps permitted tragedy as a sort of merciful comedy: because the frantic energy of divine things would knock us down like a drunken farce. We can take our own tears more lightly than we could take the tremendous levities of the angels. So we sit perhaps in a starry chamber of silence, while the laughter of the heavens is too loud for us to hear" (*Orthodoxy*, p. 160).

And so, as we seek to understand God's presence and ways on September 11, 2001, we see mystery not certitude. But, in that mystery we find the hope of the world that binds our wounds, evokes our trust, ensures our freedom, and guides our paths for a journey in a very precarious world. ■



Hearing God in a Time of Crisis

by M. Blaine Smith, D.Min.

Founder and Director, Nehemiah Ministries



M. Blaine Smith

*Defining visions
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are shaken.*

James Michener was an astoundingly creative and productive author. The historical novels he wrote required intensive research and the most acute understanding of cultural nuances. The production of one such tome would be an outstanding accomplishment for any writer. During his lifetime Michener authored *forty-three* of them, completing one a year for several decades, researching one while writing another. He continued to write until he was 92. He also moved numerous times, residing as often as possible in the region of the world he was researching for another major work.

Two stunning factors in Michener's transformation into one of the great writers of all time offer encouragement to each of us in realizing our own potential. One is that he didn't begin writing novels until he was 40. His example brings to mind that some of us are simply late bloomers by nature, and that there can be vital benefits to being so. We shouldn't lose heart if we have a major dream that hasn't yet been realized even though we're well into our adult years. We each operate on different clocks, and God has radically different timetables in unfolding his plan for each of us.

Equally interesting is that Michener's decision to become a writer emerged from a severe personal crisis—a near-death experience, in fact. Michener had dreamed of becoming a novelist for years, but had dragged his feet—not fully confident of his potential nor wanting to take the risks involved. Then a plane he was on crashed, after making three attempts to land on the South Pacific Island of New Caledonia. Michener, a military correspondent with the navy at the time, went immediately to his quarters, sat down and wrote, "I'm going to live the rest of my life as if I were a great man. ...I'm going to concentrate my life on the biggest ideals and ideas I can handle." He began work the next day on *South Pacific*.

Michener's experience, which he termed a "theophany," reminds us that God may use a crisis—even a severe one—to help us better understand his purpose for us and changes in direction he wants us to take. The point is especially redemptive to consider at this time, when our nation is reeling with grief over the events of September 11, and many of us continue in disillusionment and shock.

I'm not suggesting that God *caused* the tragedies of that day in order to bring us certain benefits or to teach us certain lessons. None of us has the slightest idea what was in his mind in these events, and we are on horribly inappropriate ground to speculate. It *is* highly appropriate, though, to ask how God may want us to grow personally through these calamities. It's not only permissible to ask the question, but critical, if we're to fully realize our potential for Christ. Stewardship of our life requires it.

Compelling Examples in History

We find endless examples in history of notable individuals who had a defining moment in the midst of a major crisis. There is Victor

Frankl, who in the excruciating circumstances of a Nazi concentration camp, concluded that while his torturers could control many aspects of his life, they absolutely, positively could not control how he felt or thought about his experience. His insight led to an important new movement in psychology, logotherapy, and inspired his book *Search for Meaning*, which has influenced millions.

Also inspiring is the experience of Maria Montessori. After graduating from medical school in 1896 and becoming Italy's first female physician, she was denied the privilege of practicing medicine in that country due to her gender. Instead, she was assigned the demeaning role of caring for "idiot" children. Montessori decided she could *educate* these supposed incorrigibles, and within months had them reading and writing at normal levels. The experience defined her life calling and transformed her into an educational prophet who radically influenced the thinking of twentieth century teachers.

Pioneer aviator Amelia Earhart had a near-death experience at age 5, which also changed her forever. She raced a sled down a snowy slope, defying custom and lying flat on it like a boy. At the bottom of the hill she encountered a horse and buggy straight across her path. With no time to stop or maneuver the sled around it, she skillfully glided it underneath the carriage—an impossible feat had she been sitting up, as was "proper" for a girl. In her autobiography, she reflected that the experience transformed her life and gave her the courage to take major risks.

A more recent example is John Walsh, who while grieving his son's apparent kidnapping and murder, conceived *America's Most Wanted*—a TV program he continues to host, which has aided the apprehension of hundreds of elusive criminals.

Of course, there is also the example that many of us as believers find most inspiring of all—that of Saul of Tarsus, who went through a radical shift in his thinking about Jesus Christ and his life mission after he was blinded by God on Damascus Road.¹

How Crises Arouse Visionary Insight

There are at least six ways a crisis can open us to understanding our life's purpose and mission more fully.

1. Crises activate our right-brain thinking.

One important reason a crisis may foster critical insight into our life's direction is that it frees us from our bondage to the left-brain thinking that normally dominates our outlook. Left-brain activity is essential for most of the routines and functions of daily life. But far-reaching visionary inspirations always evolve from our brain's right hemisphere. Since our left- and right-brain functions are exclusive to an important extent, the Eureka-I've-found-it insights rarely emerge when we're preoccupied with routine responsibilities.

This is why those pace-setting epiphanies about our life's mission usually occur when we're on vacation, on retreat, in the shower or doing something mindless and relaxing. These are activities that free our right brain to function more fully and creatively. A crisis, ironically, may bring the same benefit, for it forces a break with our normal routine and compels us to set left-brain activities aside. Human potential writer Gene N. Landrum goes as far as to call crisis "the mother of creativity."²

This isn't to say that we should *seek* a crisis or that we have to have one to precipitate a life-changing vision for our future. There are much more pleasant ways to encourage such inspirations, to say the least; a vacation at the beach or a personal retreat in the mountains may accomplish the purpose just as effectively. But, it is simply to say that the crises we inevitably experience can be the setting for breakthrough epiphanies about our life as well. This is true, in part, because of how God has fashioned our intellect and creative process.

2. Crises knock out the props that keep us too grounded in our present security and unwilling to risk.

(continued on page 22)

There are at least six ways a crisis can open us to understanding our life's purpose and mission more fully.

Hearing God in a Time of Crisis

(continued from page 21)

Realizing our potential, and finding God's best for our life in any area, always requires steps that, from our human standpoint, seem like risks. The willingness to risk, and to risk big, is absolutely essential if we're to experience life as God intends it and open ourselves fully to his provision.

This openness to risk is often strong when we're young and imagine that we have an endless future to redeem any mistakes. As we grow older, we typically grow too risk-averse. We may still long for greater adventure, a stronger sense of mission and work that more clearly taps our potential. Yet, we've hit a stride in life that's comfortable, and we fear risking what we've gained for the sake of an uncertain future.

Sometimes a crisis knocks out a prop directly that is standing in the way of God's best for us. A woman wants to go into business for herself and has the talent to do so, but sticks with a job that has her working far beneath her potential. Then the company she works for goes bankrupt. Now, unemployed, she realizes she has much less to lose by starting her own venture and takes the plunge.

In other cases a crisis knocks out a prop indirectly and symbolically. In the days following September 11, as the networks aired the unthinkable footage of the Twin Towers collapsing repeatedly in an almost endless video loop, who among us didn't reflect often on how the possessions in which we personally take security are temporary and can vanish in a second? That insight in itself is redemptive, and can free us to risk losing what we have for the sake of God's greater purpose for our life. In that spirit we may be able to recognize more clearly a new direction he wants us to take.

3. Crises deepen our appreciation for the gift of life itself, and strengthen our sense of urgency to seize the opportunities we have.

In the same way, a crisis reminds us that life itself is an unspeakable gift of God; the opportunities we have are not endless, and choices do not present themselves forever. We're awestruck that God has given us the privilege of life, and more determined now to make some-

thing of it. It was this realization, springing from his close brush with death in the plane crash, which convinced Michener to begin writing, a decision that changed the course of his life—and literary history—forever.

4. Crises draw us closer to God and open us more genuinely to his direction.

The greatest potential benefit of a crisis, far and away, is that it can strengthen our relationship with Christ. We're driven in our brokenness to seek his comfort, and in our helplessness to seek his help and direction.

Of course, a crisis may do just the opposite: it may ignite our anger at God for tearing from our life something we treasured. This reaction is normal and human, and can be a necessary part of the grieving process through which we recover and heal. When David and a team of helpers were returning the ark to Israel from Philistine, God slew two of David's assistants who touched the ark inappropriately. David's immediate response was anger at God and fear (1 Chron. 13:9-11).

Yet, in time the experience humbled David and deepened his relationship with God. That outcome is the ideal for each of us—and the sooner we can reach that point the better. In many cases a crisis thrusts us there immediately. This clearly has been the case for many of us who have been stunned by the tragedies of September 11. We've felt compelled to pray for those who are suffering and to seek God's encouragement for ourselves. And we've recognized more fully than ever how desperately we need God's help in a life that now seems far less stable than we imagined.

It's in this state of mind and heart that God is best able to *communicate* with us, and in which important insight into our life's direction is most likely to come.

5. Crises stimulate our desire to help others, and help us better recognize how our life can benefit others.

The events of September 11 demonstrated the worst possible side of human nature. Yet, they quickly brought out the very best in

*Crisis:
the
mother
of
creativity.*

people as well, as millions throughout the world were deeply moved to look for some way to extend their help.

Whether or not we are able to assist with this or any crisis directly, the fact that it arouses our desire to help is itself a positive factor. We can be startled to discover just how deeply we're capable of caring for others and hurting over their misfortune, and how greatly we yearn to do something significant to make a difference. Even a crisis that slams us and disables us personally can bolster our compassion for others, for it deepens our empathy for those who are suffering the same hardship.

It's at this point when our compassion is ignited that we're most inclined to ask the right questions about our life's purpose and mission. We're also best positioned to understand the answers God may give us, and to recognize steps of faith he wants us to take.

6. Crises help us appreciate the resilience God has put within us, and strengthen our courage to take challenging steps essential to realizing our potential.

One reason we hesitate to take vital steps of faith is that we fear failure too greatly. We imagine we won't be able to handle an experience of loss that might occur, and will never recover.

Yet, in fact, God has made us each far more resilient than we normally realize. A crisis can bring us face to face with this extraordinary fact of human nature. We discover that we are capable of picking up the pieces of our life and moving on. Over time we find that God works many miracles, healing our devastation and bringing fresh life out of the ashes. This discovery can revolutionize the way we think about risk, and enable us to entertain possibilities for our life we would never have considered.

Greg Lukens, a friend of mine who was blinded at 13 in a tragic dirt bike accident, expressed it to me this way: "I stared adversity in the face, and asked what would be the worst that could happen if I lived a normal life. I realized I might trip over a rock from time to time, or fall in an occasional ditch, but that would be it. I decided I could handle these setbacks and wouldn't let the threat of them hold

me back from living fully." He went on to live a highly active life and to found a major audio supply company, which he continues to manage. He has kept his life moving at full throttle toward dreams that are important to him, in spite of what most would term a serious handicap.

Greg's secret is a profound recognition of his own resilience—one that goes much deeper than most of us experience. Here lies an important secret for each of us in unlocking our own potential. The appreciation of our resilience that grows out of a personal crisis can make an enormous difference, in finding the courage to take risks and in our ability to think big about our future.

Looking Forward

It seems almost trivial to say that the events of September 11, 2001 will change our lives forever. Since early on that day news commentators, political and religious leaders, and friends with whom we've spoken have reminded us of this fact continuously. None of us disputes their assessment. The question of *how* these calamities will change us is the critical one.

Our immediate need is to look as carefully as we can at how we can assist with emergencies around us and extend our help to those with urgent needs.

Our longer-term need is to come to grips with our own life's direction from this point forward. God will call some of us to make important changes in light of these events and others to stay the course. Nothing will benefit us more in weighing the options than to devote some generous time to prayer and quiet reflection about our future. It helps greatly to realize that we're in a better position at a time such as this to understand Christ's leading than we normally are. We should listen carefully to the stirrings of heart we experience at this time, for in them we may be hearing the whispers of God. ■

Notes and book recommendation

¹ For further elaboration on how crises affected most of the historical figures mentioned here, see Gene N. Landrum, *The Eight Keys to Greatness: How To Unlock Your Hidden Potential* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1999).

² Op. Cit. p. 227. I highly recommend Landrum's book; although not written from an explicitly Christian perspective, and unfortunately poorly edited, it has some excellent discussion of right- vs. left-brain thinking, as well as of how crises can foster creative and visionary insight.

Editors Note: *The preceding article is excerpted from a longer article by the same title available in its entirety on the Nehemiah Ministries website: www.nehemiahministries.com.*

Blaine Smith is founder and director of Nehemiah Ministries, a non-profit organization dedicated to helping Christians realize their personal potential. Blaine counsels, offers seminars, and writes. He has published eight books through InterVarsity Press, including Knowing God's Will. Nehemiah Notes, Blaine's free monthly newsletter, is available in printed and e-mail versions. For more information on Blaine and Nehemiah Ministries, visit the website.

COMING IN 2002

- ◆ **Dr. Os Guinness**, “The World After September 11: An Analysis of the Opportunities and Challenges Facing Believers in Light of the Terrorist Attack” Conference, January 25-26, 2002, location to be announced

UPCOMING EVENTS

- ◆ **Rev. David Prior**, “Effective Discipleship in the Marketplace,” four NEW seminars, Tuesday evenings, February 5, 12, 19, 26, 2002: “Money,” “Sex,” “Accountability,” and “Truth and Lying,” respectively; 7:30-9:00 PM, The Falls Church Episcopal, Falls Church, VA
- ◆ **Dr. Ravi Zacharias Conference**, June 7-8 at McLean Bible Church, Vienna, VA
- ◆ **Dr. N.T. Wright Conference**, September 27-28 at The Falls Church Episcopal, Falls Church, VA
- ◆ **Dr. Dennis Hollinger Conference**, November 8-9, location to be announced

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