

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 88: C. S. Lewis: Pointing People to Reality

C.S. Lewis: Did You Know?

Interesting and Unusual Facts about C. S. Lewis

Compiled by Robert Trexler and Jennifer Trafton

A Jack of all genres

C. S. Lewis is probably the most well known, widely read, and often quoted Christian author of modern times. Between 1931 and 1962 he published 34 books. Posthumous collections added many more volumes, and the secondary studies of Lewis reach into the hundreds. The range of his talents included such varied categories as poetry (*Dymer*), allegorical novel (*The Pilgrim's Regress*), popular theology (*Mere Christianity*), educational philosophy (*The Abolition of Man*), space-travel fiction (*The Ransom Trilogy*), children's fairy tale (*The Chronicles of Narnia*), retold myth (*Till We Have Faces*), literary criticism (*The Discarded Image*), correspondence (*Letters to Malcolm*), and autobiography (*Surprised by Joy*). In spite of the variety of genres, Lewis's distinctive "voice" and continuity of thought permeated everything he wrote.

The Inklings

From the mid 1930s to the late 1940s, Lewis met with a group of literary friends every Tuesday and Thursday to share beer and conversation and to critique each other's work. "The Inklings," as they called themselves, included J. R. R. Tolkien, Charles Williams, and Lewis's brother, Warnie. Warnie wrote in his diary, "We were no mutual admiration society. ... To read to the Inklings was a formidable ordeal." Among the works-in-progress forged in the heat of friendly criticism were *The Screwtape Letters*, the Narnia books, and *The Hobbit*. "But for the encouragement of CSL," Tolkien told Clyde Kilby in 1965, "I do not think that I should ever have completed or offered for publication *The Lord of the Rings*." (See Issue 78: J. R. R. Tolkien.)

A mind set on higher things

Lewis's close friend Owen Barfield, to whom he dedicated his book *The Allegory of Love*, was also his lawyer. Lewis asked Barfield to establish a charitable trust ("The Agape Fund") with his book earnings. It is estimated that 90 percent of Lewis's income went to charity. This generosity occurred despite the fact that, according to George Sayer, Lewis inherited his father's "fear of being bankrupt" and both father and son were "inept in the investment of money."

Lewis's gardener, Fred Paxford (who was his model for the character Puddleglum in *The Silver Chair*), discovered during the reading of Lewis's will that he was bequeathed only 100 pounds. Paxford remarked, "Werl, it won't take me far, wull it?" Then he graciously added, "Mr. Jack, 'e never 'ad no idea of money. 'Is mind was always set on 'igher things."

No celebrity tell-all

Lewis wrote *Surprised by Joy* (1955) partly to explain the influences of his childhood on his writings and conversion. His personal physician and fellow Inklings Robert E. Havard said the book should have been called "Suppressed by Jack" because of all the things Lewis did not discuss about his life.

Just call me Smallpigiebotham

Lewis had a fondness for nicknames. He and his brother, Warnie, called each other "Smallpigiebotham" (SPB) and "Archpigiebotham" (APB), inspired by their childhood nurse's threat to smack their "piggybottoms." Even after Lewis's death, Warnie still referred to him as "my beloved SPB." They called their father Albert "Pudaitabird" because of his Irish pronunciation of "potato." Tolkien was "Tollers," Mrs. Moore was "Minto," and Lewis's physician Robert E. Havard was usually "Humphrey" but occasionally "the Useless Quack" or "U. Q." Lewis dubbed his walking companion A. C. Harwood "the Lord of the Walks."

The budding novelist

As children growing up in Belfast, Ireland, Lewis and Warnie spent frequent rainy days indoors making up stories. "Jacks" or "Jack," as he named himself at age three, drew pictures to illustrate his stories about talking animals, which borrowed ideas from Beatrix Potter, Kenneth Graham, and stories of heroic knights. His stories became a part of his brother's larger imaginary world of "Boxen." The characters' dialogue often reflected the adult conversations Jack and Warnie overheard—usually about politics.

Lewis wrote comparing his childhood stories to his later Narnia books: "Animal land had nothing to do with Narnia except the anthropomorphic beasts. Animal land, by its whole quality, excluded the least hint of wonder." However, he also commented that "in mapping and chronicling Animal-Land I was training myself to be a novelist."

Drawing Narnia

Lewis actually considered doing the illustrations for the Narnia books himself but decided he had neither the ability nor the time. Instead, he chose a young artist, Pauline Baynes, who had illustrated J. R. R. Tolkien's story *Farmer Giles of Ham* in 1948. He was never fully satisfied with Baynes's drawings of children and animals, though in his remarks to her he was full of praise where praise was due. "She can't draw lions," he told George Sayer, "but she is so good and beautiful and sensitive that I can't tell her this." When *The Last Battle* won the Carnegie Medal for the best children's book of 1956, Baynes wrote to Lewis to congratulate him. He wrote back, "Is it not rather our Medal?"

Lewis at the movies

In 1933, Lewis wrote to his friend Arthur Greeves: "You will be surprised to hear that I have been to the cinema again! Don't be alarmed, it will not become a habit." Despite his protestation, he did occasionally go to the movies. The film *King Kong* evoked mixed reactions: "I thought parts of 'King Kong' (especially where the natives make a stand after he's broken the gate) magnificent," he commented to a fellow author, "but the New York parts contemptible."

The apologist and the evangelist

In 1955, C. S. Lewis was invited to meet Billy Graham, who was leading a mission sponsored by the Cambridge

Inter-Collegiate Christian Union. Graham remembers the encounter this way: "I found him to be not only intelligent and witty but also gentle and gracious; he seemed genuinely interested in our [mission] meetings. 'You know,' he said as we parted, 'you have many critics, but I have never met one of your critics who knows you personally.'"

Mutual fans

When Lewis sent his book *The Allegory of Love* to Oxford's Clarendon Press, it was given to Charles Williams to review. At that time Williams and Lewis did not know one another, but Lewis had just read Williams's novel *The Place of the Lion*. Williams was writing a letter to Lewis when he received a letter from Lewis praising his novel. Williams's letter to Lewis said that *Allegory of Love* was "practically the only one I have ever come across since Dante that showed the slightest understanding of what this peculiar identity of love and religion means."

Spanning the great divide

Many people who read Lewis's first book after his conversion, *The Pilgrim's Regress*, assumed he was a Catholic, and, in fact, the second edition was published by a Catholic publisher. Lewis marveled in 1940 that "the two people whose conversion had something to do with me became Papists!" (Dom Bede Griffiths and George Sayer). This popularity among and influence on Catholics continued throughout Lewis's life and to the present day. Pope John Paul II spoke of *The Four Loves* as one of his favorite books.

The bard of Oxford

Until his 30s, Lewis had aspirations to be a poet. Against the tide of modernist poets such as T. S. Elliot, Lewis preferred to craft poems with a fixed meter. His retelling of the Cupid and Psyche myth in *Till We Have Faces* began as a poem before finding its final expression as a novel.

Not allegory but "what if?"

"Tolkien disliked the Narnia stories partly because he felt the Christian meaning was too obvious, but Lewis insisted he was not writing allegory in the strict sense of the word. In a letter to a fifth-grade class, Lewis explained that Aslan is not meant simply to "represent" Jesus: "Let us suppose that there were a land like Narnia and that the Son of God, as He became a Man in our world, became a Lion there, and then imagine what would happen."

C.S. Lewis: From the Editor

Carpets, Wardrobes, and the Glory of the Real

Jennifer Trafton

The summer after my freshman year of college, I volunteered to help the C. S. Lewis Foundation renovate The Kilns, Lewis's former home (then in a state of disrepair) just outside Oxford. I don't remember if I went expecting a spiritual boon from touching the domestic relics of the patron saint of American evangelicalism. What I do remember is a back breaking week of painting fireplaces, carrying bricks, and digging flower beds. I particularly remember the day we ordered "topsoil" and a large dump truck rained down upon us a load of exactly that—the top of the soil, complete with clumps of sod, pebbles, candy wrappers, and broken glass. Years later I returned to find, with great satisfaction, that our labor—and many others volunteers' efforts—had resulted in a proper English garden surrounding a proper English house, a haven for Oxford students and a pilgrimage site for Lewis fans.

If reports are correct, The Kilns of Lewis's day wasn't exactly the Ritz. Lewis's stepson Douglas Gresham recalls holes in the roof, rotting wood, light switches that spit fire, ceilings that collapsed, and carpets constantly growing deeper from the accumulated cigarette and pipe ash (since Lewis and his brother believed the ashes kept moths away). Surely not a place for someone whose soaring imagination bestowed upon future generations the stories of Deep Magic and lion-hearted Love. Surely not a place for a brilliant Oxford don whose ability to express complex theological ideas in everyday language has made him the spiritual grandfather of millions.

But, as Lewis knew well, that's precisely what the Christian life is about—knocking on heaven's door while standing two inches deep in pipe ash. It is no accident that someone so well acquainted with a world much bigger than himself should be continually pointing us to the baffling, painful, glorious quagmires and quiddities of the Real.

Here was a man who could happily have spent his entire life in quiet seclusion reading books and taking walks through the woods with a few close friends. Yet he found himself fighting in the trenches of France, "adopting" the mother and sister of his friend who died in battle, welcoming into his home a gaggle of giggly schoolgirls evacuated from London during the second World War, taking his faith public and attracting international attention in a way that scandalized his colleagues, patiently answering thousands of letters from readers all over the world, and marrying an ex-communist American divorcée with two sons and only a few short years left to live. Here was a man whose intellectual honesty forced him to put aside all of the more attractive philosophies that tempted him in order to face up to the only argument that made sense of the world. In supreme contrast to our postmodern, self-indulgent dogmatism of personal opinion, here was a stoop-shouldered, baggy-trousered, tweed-jacketed, beer-drinking Church of England parishioner full of the humility and wonder that comes from standing before the unavoidable thereness and tangible mystery of objective truth.

He wrote in *Mere Christianity*, "Besides being complicated, reality, in my experience, is usually odd. It is not neat, not obvious, not what you expect. ... That is one of the reasons I believe in Christianity. It is a religion you could not have guessed. If it offered us just the kind of universe we had always expected, I should feel we were making it up. But, in fact, it is not the sort of thing anyone would have made up. It has just that queer twist about it that real things have."

Reality is iconoclastic, Lewis reminds us again and again. It bursts all preconceived notions of what life—

and what God—should be like. You might insist that God is a human invention and then be "surprised by joy" into belief. You might spend most of your adult life uncomfortable around children and suddenly become stepfather to two boys. You might plunge into the heart of earthly love only to have it shatter and leave a grief too divinely significant not to be observed. You might order topsoil and be stuck standing in a gritty mess of dry dirt and candy wrappers ... but dig, dig away.

For those of you familiar with Christian History Issue 7 on C. S. Lewis, the issue you are holding in your hands now is not a "remake" of an old classic. It is, we hope, a fresh look at a much-beloved figure. Issue 7 is still available through www.ctlibrary.com and as an audio book from Hovel Audio. See our website, www.christianhistory.net, for more information and for other Lewis-related materials.

With this issue, we say goodbye to our assistant editor Steven Gertz, who has left the "windy city" of Chicago for the even windier climate of Scotland to pursue a masters degree at the University of Edinburgh. We are grateful for his three and a half years of service to the magazine, gathering pictures, writing articles, and sharing his passion for history. In his absence, Mary Ann Jeffreys, Madison Trammel, and LaVonne Neff have all been kind enough to pinch-hit for us in the last inning. Special thanks also to the tireless efforts of the staff of the Marion E. Wade Center, which provided most of the images in this issue.

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Living History

Compiled By Chris Armstrong

The War for Souls

With its own national association (www.cwreenactors.com) and magazine (www.campchase.com) serving an estimated 50,000 re-enactors in the U.S., Civil War re-enactment thrives today. However, until a few years ago, the re-enactors who worked so painstakingly to replicate each detail accurately often overlooked an entire group of participants. On the battlefields and in the camps, these men fought a different war—the war for souls—and some paid the ultimate price. They were the roughly 1,200 to 1,400 Confederate chaplains, 3,000 Union chaplains, and 5,000 Christian Commission volunteers.

Alan Farley (pictured above with his family, in costume) won't let reenactors forget the chaplains or the faith that animated them. Farley, an evangelist who began attending these events as a child in 1984, now portrays General Lee's chaplain—and presents the gospel—at Virginia reenactments. Over the years, Farley and The Re-enactor's Missions for Jesus Christ (www.rmjc.org) have successfully pushed for Sunday morning worship services at re-enactments. They argue that any accurate Civil War portrayal must include the deep currents of Christian devotion and revival in both sides' armies.

Dear to Farley's heart is the National Civil War Chaplains Research Center and Museum, a 10,000-square-foot exhibit space projected to open at Liberty University in Lynchburg in fall 2007.

Pool of Siloam discovered

In fall 2004, workers repairing a sewage pipe in the old city of Jerusalem discovered the edge of an ancient pool. Israel Antiquities Authority officials believed it to be the biblical Pool of Siloam—which John's Gospel names as the place where Jesus cured a blind man. Now further excavations have uncovered a much more elaborate pool and water system than previously believed. This substantiates the site as the Siloam Pool of Jesus' time—a large freshwater reservoir that served as a gathering place and focus of religious pilgrimages for Jews.

"Scholars have said that there wasn't a Pool of Siloam," says New Testament scholar James H. Charlesworth of Princeton Theological Seminary. These scholars have argued that John, whose Gospel is known more for spiritual than historical content, had simply chosen the name to illustrate a point. "Now, we have found the Pool of Siloam ... exactly where John said it was.

The website www.bibleplaces.com/poolofsiloam.htm provides photographs and a brief account of the excavation, and hazards the "wild prediction" that "this will be the archaeological discovery of the decade for biblical studies."

He painted like a saint

Recently beatified (a step toward sainthood) and declared the patron of artists by Pope John Paul II, the Dominican friar Era Angelico (1390/5—1455) will now be the subject of a landmark exhibition at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art. Visitors will see 75 of the artist's paintings, drawings, and manuscript illuminations. But they will not see some of the works that have made Era Angelico famous: untransportable large altarpieces and frescoes like those on the dormitory cells at Florences convent of

San Marco. Born Guido di Pietro, the artist's better-known moniker is an English translation of his Latin handle, *pictor angelicus*, the Angelic Painter. He is best known for his psychologically penetrating, compellingly realistic portrayal of human forms and dramatic stories.

Oldest monks' cells

The birthplace of the Christian monastic movement is marked by the soaring, Coptic-cross-topped towers of St. Anthony's Monastery, one hundred miles southeast of Cairo, Egypt. The monastery's centerpiece Apostle Church dates back only to the 15th century, but excavation beneath the church's floor has revealed a far more ancient treasure: the oldest monastic cells ever discovered. These date back to the fourth century—perhaps from the very lifetime of St. Anthony of Egypt, the man considered the first Christian monk, who died some time around 356 or 357.

Father Maximous Elantony of Saint Anthony's made the discovery as he searched under the Apostle Church's floor for ritual basins his predecessors used to build into their church floors. With the help of contractors, Father Maximous found first one basin, then a deeper, older basin. This second find turned out to belong to an eighth-century church whose foundation lay intact beneath the Apostle Church.

Further digging beneath this older foundation revealed the ancient cells. One contains a brick cooking stove; another, a basin used for soaking the palm fronds from which the monks wove mats or baskets. The cells are so well preserved that one observer remarks, "It is as if someone just lifted off the roof." Father Maximous wants to restore the cells, then cover them with a glass floor so that, while the church continues to be used for prayer, worshippers may see these ancient "closets" where some of the world's first Christian monks prayed.

The abbot and the pendulum

This October, the Italian town of Bologna recreated Foucault's Pendulum, one of history's most famous scientific experiments. The French physicist Jean Bernard Foucault first performed it in Paris's Pantheon in 1851, setting in motion a heavy weight on an 11-meter-long line. The gradually twisting path of the pendulum proved that the earth rotates as it moves through space.

Bologna was Foucault's hometown, but the city also sponsored this event for another reason: Researchers have shown that 61 years before Foucault's experiment, a monk of that city demonstrated the same principle by a different method. Abbot Giovanni Battista Guglielmini scaled Bologna's 78-meter Torre dei Asinelli and dropped 16 balls to show that they would fall to earth at a point slightly eastward from the point of release.

Although the abbot's calculated deviations were wrong, the balls did consistently fall millimeters to the east. Guglielmini had proved decisively the fact of the earth's rotation. But no one understood his difficult explanation of the experiments! So the title of "prover of the earth's rotation" was reserved for Foucault.

Guglielmini was only one of many monastics who advanced the sciences from the scientific revolution onward. In 1851, the year of Foucault's experiment, a young monk named Gregor Mendel began the university studies that launched him into the study of genetics. He was sponsored by St. Thomas Monastery, in Brno, the Czech Republic, whose friars taught philosophy, mathematics, mineralogy, and botany and conducted research in a scientific library, mineralogical collection, botanical collection, and herbarium.

A new tale of two cities

Why did the Christian West undergo the 17th-century scientific revolution when China and the Middle

East had been so much more advanced scientifically in the medieval period? Where did the ideas for freedom of thought and the accountability of rulers originate? Why were universities started, hospitals founded, and slavery abolished?

Christian Heritage (<http://www.christianheritageuk.org.uk>), based at the 12th-century Round Church in Cambridge, England, addresses these questions on its twice-weekly walking tours of Cambridge University. Walkers visit the buildings where Cranmer, Cromwell, Milton, Newton, and Wilberforce lived and studied, and learn about these and other Christian leaders. Those who take the tour experience vividly the truth that, despite the culpability of the church in wars, persecutions, and much else, Christianity made many positive cultural contributions that undergird modern, secular Europe.

Meanwhile, across the Channel, a talk with former World Team Europe director Kermit Horn (www.worldteam.org) might just net you and some friends a Christian history walking tour in Paris. Horn's less frequent and less formal walks (currently once a month) began as a personal quest to "see if I could find any footprints of God in Paris." In a story line that includes both Christian contributions to French and European culture and Enlightenment reactions to corrupted Christianity, Thomas Aquinas, Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples, William Farel, Jean Calvin, and Blaise Pascal make their appearances along with Descartes, Voltaire, Rousseau, and Derrida. Experiencing this story as living history, says Horn, "strengthens and encourages the faith of struggling Christians in post-Christian Europe who have been educated to believe that the God they love has brought no good to the countries and cultures they love."

If European tours remain out of reach for you, two books to read on the continent's Christian heritage are Francis Schaeffer's *How Should We Then Live? The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture* and Rodney Stark's *For the Glory of God: How Monotheism Led to Reformations, Science, Witch-Hunts, and the End of Slavery*.

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Campus Ministry Cambridge Style

The roots of InterVarsity and other evangelical college clubs.

Collin Hansen

Campus ministries have spurred tremendous growth in the evangelical movement during the last 50 years by shaping minds and stirring hearts for missions. Mid-20th century ministries, such as Campus Crusade for Christ and the Navigators, have much in common with movements at the University of Cambridge during the 18th and 19th centuries that directly led to InterVarsity Christian Fellowship.

Evangelical faith garnered a cold reception at British universities during the late 18th century. Church of England stalwarts at Oxford were hostile to the Methodist movement led by the Wesleys. In 1778, Oxford expelled six students for organizing a Sunday-night Bible study.

Cambridge was not much different. Charles Simeon was a typically nonreligious student when he enrolled at King's College, Cambridge, in 1779. Yet Simeon took required participation in Communion seriously. "Satan was as fit to attend as I," he admitted. But after Holy Week meditations on Christ's sacrifice, he woke up Easter morning exclaiming: "Jesus Christ is risen today; Hallelujah! Hallelujah! From that hour," he said, "peace flowed in rich abundance into my soul, and at the Lord's Table in our chapel I had the sweetest access to God through my blessed Savior."

During three years of college, Simeon did not meet a single serious Christian. After graduation, he began serving as vicar of Holy Trinity Church near the college in Cambridge. When Simeon began his tenure at Holy Trinity, only a few Church of England clergy considered themselves evangelical. Partly due to his vibrant, Cross-centered preaching, evangelicals increased their share to one-third by Simeon's death in 1836.

Under Simeon's preaching in 1827, four students organized a Sunday school for Cambridge's impoverished children. On their first Sunday, 220 kids attended the class, dubbed the Jesus Lane Sunday school.

The Jesus Lane lot spun off other groups. Former Jesus Lane teachers encouraged two first-year students to launch the Daily Prayer Meeting in 1862. They attracted around 100 of the university's 2,000 students and featured evangelistic speakers, prayer, singing, and Scripture reading.

By 1877, there was enough evangelical activity that students from across Cambridge's 17 colleges organized the Cambridge Inter-Collegiate Christian Union (CICCU), which focused on evangelism and encouraged students to pursue missionary careers. CICCU president J. E. .K. Studd invited D. L. Moody and Ira Sankey to Cambridge in 1882. Studd's father had earlier professed faith in Christ during a Moody visit to London.

Moody and Sankey's visit to Cambridge got off to a rocky start. The first night, the students jeered Moody throughout his message on Daniel. Not many bothered to show up the next two nights.

Studd scrambled to salvage the visit. As captain of the cricket team, he had some influence. So he composed a letter for the school newspaper that appealed to his classmates' pride. A warm reception for Moody, Studd explained, would dispel rumors that Cambridge students could not behave "even as well

as those far below them in the social scale" or gasp Oxford students. During Moody's last nights at Cambridge, large audiences listened attentively. After Moody departed, missions giving increased and more students showed interest in Cambridge's graduate theology school.

More than a century later, CICCU still witnesses for Christ as Cambridge's longest-tenured student group, and its legacy extends across the Atlantic. CICCU joined similar groups from other campuses to form British InterVarsity in 1919. Nine years later, InterVarsity leader Howard Guinness left for Canada to aid Christian students there. Scattered evangelicals on U.S. campuses heard about InterVarsity in Canada and requested help starting their own chapters.

Evangelical faith still may not be the most popular thing at universities. Without these forerunners, though, today's campus ministries might not be nearly so vibrant.

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Mind in Motion

He tasted many philosophies, but he was always stuck on reality.

J. I. Packer and Jerry Root

He was an imaginative Belfast Irishman, in whom a cultivated Oxford accent replaced his father's oratorical brogue, and for whom Oxford was home.

He was a brilliant expositor and debater, whose powers of logical analysis, bright brisk narrative, and vivid illustration were stunning.

He was a heavyweight academic with a self-possessed forthrightness that unnerved some of his students. He worked hard and expected others to do the same. Woe to you if Lewis was your tutor and you were lazy!

He was a teacher of literature who seemed to have read all the literature there was in English and Europe's other main languages. He was once called the best-read man of his generation. He wrote effortlessly and brilliantly.

He was somewhat eccentric, careless about clothes and home comforts and quixotically meticulous in keeping promises and observing routines. In his fifties, he enjoyed three years of great happiness married to a crippled Jewish divorcée from America.

His clubbable, booming jollity masked shyness; his schoolboy humor masked seriousness; and his reading, teaching, writing, and endless dialectics masked a longing for deep and close relationships. "You'll never get to the bottom of him," his friend J. R. R. Tolkien once said.

Such was Clive Staples Lewis, "Jack" to his friends, fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford, from 1925 to 1954, and professor of medieval and Renaissance literature at Cambridge from 1954 to 1963, who died of kidney failure on November 22, 1963, a week from his 65th birthday. It was the day Kennedy was shot.

He had become a clear-headed Christian in 1931, after almost two decades of professed atheism—that is, of denying all the realities of the high church Anglicanism in which he was reared and to which he now returned. Inwardly, his conversion turned him right around, giving him a lifelong desire to make known his recovered faith. Walter Hooper says he never knew a man who was so completely converted. Outwardly, however, his life as an Oxford don was unchanged.

His habits of mind also continued unchanged. He was already thinking the way he believed Christians should. All through his life, realism, or objectivism—that is to say, aiming always to discern and adjust to the reality that was **there**, both outside and within him—was the mark of his mind. "I want God, not my idea of God; I want my neighbour, not my idea of my neighbour; I want myself, not my idea of myself." Plato and common sense combined to feed his passion for reality and to arm him against the subjectivism that projects onto the world whatever one wants it to be. Lewis's powers of fantasy would offer him imaginary worlds of all sorts, but his inner demand for factuality forbade him to take up mental residence in them.

He recovered his faith primarily through argument. In 1943, he wrote: "On the intellectual side my own

progress (was) from 'popular realism' [i.e., naturalism, the belief that the material order, called Nature, is all there is] to Philosophical Idealism; from Idealism to Pantheism; from Pantheism to Theism; and from Theism to Christianity. I still think this a very natural road."

Yet it was not the whole story. From childhood, Lewis had known moments of what he called *joy*; meaning, very precisely, a sweet ache of sensing—and in that moment longing for—a reality of life, light, and beauty beyond ordinary experience. These aching moments, which he thought were common (though constantly misperceived), set a person searching for something not yet known.

In fact, these moments were wake-up calls from God, pointing to him as the ultimate reality that alone satisfies all longings. Lewis displays this autobiographically in his allegorical *Pilgrim's Regress* (1933) and his anecdotal *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (begun in 1948, published in 1955). He speaks of the "dialectic of desire," whereby these moments of joy critique all supposed human fulfillments, and says that in his conversion "this lived dialectic, and the merely argued dialectic of my philosophical progress, seemed to have converged on one goal."

The quest begins

Lewis's journey away from the Christian faith started at an early age. Through the trauma of the death of his loved and prayed-for mother when he was nine, estrangement from his orthodox churchman father, and grim times in two supposedly Christian boarding schools, his childhood religion sickened and died.

Then two-and-a-half teen years of study with W. T. Kirkpatrick, "the great Knock," a retired headmaster and disputatious rationalist, left Lewis convinced, first, that any God who existed would be a bad God and, second, that there is no real evidence of God's existence at all. Lewis took these views into the Army (1917) and to post-war Oxford (1919), and voiced them in his first book, a slim volume of poems titled *Spirits in Bondage* (1919).

Yet recurring moments of joy and the sustained impact of George MacDonald's *Phantastes*, which Lewis said "baptized" his imagination, convinced him that there was in reality something to be sought and found.

His resultant feeling that life must be lived as an exploratory search found expression in two long poems, the unfinished "Quest of Bleheris," written at Kirkpatrick's, and *Dymer*, written at Oxford. By then, Lewis had looked hard at both occultism and spiritualism to see if they would help in his quest, but had concluded that they would not.

Lewis's Oxford friend Owen Barfield convinced him that if physical reality is all there is, thought itself (being a mere byproduct of matter) would lack validity and significance. To maintain his Kirkpatrick-inspired quest for a rational account of reality, Lewis saw that he must believe, as he later expressed in *Miracles*, that "reason is something more than cerebral bio-chemistry." Henceforth, Lewis's intellect no longer oscillated away from his imaginative questings into paths of dogmatic materialism, but sought a worldview that would somehow unite intellect and physical matter.

As a competent philosopher (he taught philosophy in his early Oxford days), Lewis now revisited the idealist view, still up and running at Oxford, which saw matter as having in some sense the nature of mind. What was then called pantheism (i.e., seeing everything as expressing some sort of divine reality; today we label this view panentheism or monism), lies at the end of that road, and Lewis's investigation went all the way. But he found the coherence and clarity that would warrant conviction lacking throughout, so he moved on.

Hamlet, meet Shakespeare

Then, in the mid-1920s, through the impact of friends and of G. K. Chesterton's *The Everlasting Man* (1926), he found himself thinking that "Christianity was very sensible apart from its Christianity." Also, as never before, he began to feel that the living, personal God of theism (so different from idealism's fuzzy, abstract, non-demanding Absolute Spirit) was tracking him down.

He became morally serious: "For the first time I examined myself ... and ... found what appalled me; a zoo of lusts, a bedlam of ambitions, a nursery of fears, a harem of fondled hatreds. My name was legion." He felt haunted and hunted. "Amiable agnostics will talk cheerfully about 'man's search for God.' To me, as I then was, they might as well have talked about the mouse's search for the cat." Finally, in 1929, "I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed."

Nevertheless, at that time he did not think he could truly know God personally any more than Hamlet could know Shakespeare. It seemed as if his quest might end there, but his pursuit of truth was to lead him further still.

Certainty about the Incarnation came two years later, after a late-night talk with J. R. R. Tolkien gave him the idea that the pagan dying-and-rising-god myths were "good dreams" given by God to prepare the ground for myth to become fact in Jesus of Nazareth. Lewis realized that while Hamlet could not break out of the play to meet the author, Shakespeare could write himself into the play as a character, making the introduction possible. The Incarnation was, in some ways, like this.

"I was driven to Whipsnade one sunny morning," Lewis writes in *Surprised by Joy*. "When we set out I did not believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and when we reached the zoo I did. ... It was ... like when a man, after long sleep, still lying motionless in bed, becomes aware that he is now awake." Wanderer Lewis had reached home at last.

The closing pages of *Surprised by Joy* review Lewis's intellectual path through this final phase, and the concluding section of *The Pilgrim's Regress* shows how he now saw human reality through his newly-converted eyes. All the seeds of his later Christian writings are found in these two places.

Further up and further in

Lewis's mind did not stop working when he became a Christian—rather the reverse. Besides composing his lecture courses and his academic masterpiece, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama*, plus his series of apologetic books covering much of the ground traversed in his own journey, plus several books full of essays, addresses, and articles on many topics looked at from a mainstream Christian standpoint, Lewis now labored to shore up Western culture, which he believed was about to come apart.

Lewis saw the civilization of which he was a product and a part as threatened by a pincers movement of two mutually reinforcing evils: subjectivism and scientism. Latter-day subjectivism would sweep away the morality given in universal natural law (the Tao, as he calls it) in favor of man-made ideals of behavior—immoralities, really. Scientism, meaning trust in scientists to advance our welfare and solve our problems, would sweep away the humanity experienced in the relationships of everyday life in favor of technocratic enslavement by a power-hungry elite.

Lewis threw down the gauntlet in his 1943 Durham University lectures, *The Abolition of Man*, and followed it up with a novel, *That Hideous Strength: A Modern Fairy-tale for Grown-ups* (1945), a sort of mythic parable in which he displayed ghoulish practitioners of subjectivist scientism invading a Durham-like university to pursue dehumanizing manipulations of all sorts.

One thing leads to another. In *The Abolition of Man*, Lewis argued, echoing Plato, that in educating children one must instill "emotions organized by trained habit into stable sentiments," otherwise they will

grow into "men without chests," lacking strength of character to control their unruly passions. Basic virtue—dutifulness, justice, prudence, self-control, love, fidelity, and so on—will not then survive, and society will sink into pagan barbarism.

Lewis therefore began writing fantasy tales for children that would teach these virtues by example. These are the Narnia stories (1950-56), seven tales built round the almost allegorical figure of Aslan, the lion Savior-Lord. In these and his other works of fiction, Lewis used the mythical manner to focus with imaginative and searching force realities that would get inside us to haunt us better than mere formal definitions could ever do.

One of the insights that Lewis the educator emphasized is that all reality is iconoclastic; that is, it constantly breaks up inadequate understandings of itself in order to take us on to a more adequate grasp of the world. Minds, therefore, must ever continue in object-oriented, self-critical thinking, constantly seeking to reach, as the talking beasts of Narnia phrased it, "further up and further in." This, Lewis would have said, is the will of God for us all. And who can doubt that he was right?

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 88: C. S. Lewis: Pointing People to Reality

Hearts in Training

Lewis employed his imaginative gifts to dispel his readers' illusions and educate their feelings.

Doris T. Myers

In *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, one of the Narnia series, Eustace, a factual-minded, thoroughly modern boy, meets a fallen star named Ramandu. On hearing that Ramandu is a star, Eustace says, "In our world, a star is a huge ball of flaming gas." Ramandu replies, "Even in your world, my son, that is not what a star is but only what it is made of."

This distinction between *scientia* (knowledge, the makeup of things) and *sapientia* (wisdom, the significance of things) informed all of Lewis's writings, especially his fiction. Except for a brief period as an undergraduate when he tried to adopt modernist skepticism, Lewis spent his life pursuing wisdom. The pursuit led him to the philosophy of Plato and Wordsworth, but he also practiced the common sense Christianity of Samuel Johnson. Even though Lewis was a Platonist, he did not often talk of the visible world as a mere shadow of the real. In *Letters to Malcolm*, he says, "In fact we should never ask of anything 'Is it real?,' for everything is real." We may think of our world as a stage set, but it is a real stage set. Because he thought everything was real, Lewis could create imaginary worlds with gusto.

The good, the bad, and the ghostly

In his worlds, missing reality is the prime error. It happens in two ways: either to focus completely on facts and miss significance, or to become self-centered and miss the real beauty of creation. In Lewis's stories, the good people either possess or acquire the ability to touch reality, while the bad people are entangled in illusion. Like the inhabitants of Dante's hell, they lack the good of the intellect.

Lewis's fiction was based on his approach to reality from the beginning, but it became more profound as he followed his imagination. In *The Pilgrim's Regress* (1933), a satirical allegory dashed off in the heat of his adult acceptance of Christianity, the pilgrim John travels, confused, through the intellectual milieu of the early 1930s. But after he is baptized, he retraces his steps and sees the illusions of modernism. In *The Great Divorce* (1946), angels, saints, and the environment of heaven are real. They are so solid and heavy that the tourists from hell are mere ghosts in comparison, and the very grass hurts their feet. They are offered the chance to become real, but they prefer to cling to their whiny, self-centered illusions. In *The Screwtape Letters* (1942), Screwtape, a senior devil in the Lowerarchy of hell, writes to his nephew Wormwood, a field tempter, to teach him how to lead his client away from reality. But Wormwood's temptation efforts are ineffectual; his client dies in an air raid and meets "Them" [the angels] with joy and recognition.

To eternity and beyond

In 1938, Lewis began to publish his space trilogy. All three novels picture the solar system not in terms of what it is made of, but in terms of what it means not cold, empty space, but golden warmth so full of angelic powers that the planets seem like relative emptiness. These novels show Lewis's growing desire to use popular fiction to turn his readers' hearts toward what is real. In *Out of the Silent Planet*, Ransom, the hero, says, "What we need for the moment is) a body of people familiarized with certain ideas."

By the time Lewis wrote *Perelandra* (1943) and *That Hideous Strength* (1945), he had realized that

"certain ideas" were not as important as the training of feelings. In 1943 he delivered the Riddell Lectures, later published as *The Abolition of Man*. In it he explains that in literature and the other arts, the child must be guided to feel pleasure in works that are delightful and well made and to "hate the ugly" with "a just distaste." He must learn to "give delighted praise to beauty, receiving it into his soul and being nourished by it, so that he becomes a man of gentle heart."

Perelandra exemplifies the delighted praise of beauty in a hymn to creation, the praise of the great cosmic dance. This hymn worships the Creator with such plenitude that sometimes reading groups have divided it among different voices and recited it in a worship service. *That Hideous Strength* teaches the hatred of ugliness and evil by the actions of Frost and Wither. There is an Objective Room, where everything is subtly out of shape. Frost uses it to train neophytes to abandon their natural emotions in favor of (falsely) scientific objectivity. Mark receives this training, but he escapes from it and is healed by reading a children's story.

Through the wardrobe

After finishing the adult fantasies, Lewis turned to writing his best-known work, the Chronicles of Narnia. These stories take their place with *The Wind in the Willows*, *The Velveteen Rabbit*, and *The Little Prince* as childhood classics. They are exciting and skillfully told, but also theologically profound and deeply devotional. And therein arises a problem. It is easy to think that children should immediately identify Aslan with Jesus. Instead, they need to "freely receive" this beautiful art into their souls and be nourished by it.

Now that *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* has been made into a movie, it is being touted as "The Passion of the Christ for Kids," and there are numerous websites explaining the cognitive doctrines of Christianity in language worthy of the grammarian Pulverulentus Siccus (Full-of-Dust Dry) in *Prince Caspian*. The allegorical correspondence between events in the stories and cognitive doctrines may be what the Chronicles are *made* of, but it is not what they *are*.

As Lewis explains in his essay "Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What's to Be Said," at first he had no intention of promoting Christian ideas. He began to write *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* because he had begun to see images: "a faun carrying an umbrella, a queen on a sledge, a magnificent lion." The fairy tale seemed the best literary form to handle the events that were growing from the images. Later on, he began to see how the stories could be used to get away from stained-glass boredom and cultivate Christian feelings, especially among children who were alienated from Sunday school. To teach the Chronicles as Christian doctrine is to defeat Lewis's purpose in writing. Similarly, to demand that the reader respond with the "delighted praise of beauty" is to foster the literary snobbery that Lewis hated.

Trying to enjoy the Chronicles is self-defeating, like trying to fall asleep. The only way to succeed is not to try. A child who likes fantasy (not all children do) will benefit from the Chronicles naturally. An adult who likes fantasy can get the greatest value from them by reading them to a child without comment unless the child asks questions. Lacking a suitable child, the next-best course for the adult is to read the Chronicles on vacation.

The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe is especially beautiful in its portrayal of the children's relationship to Aslan. Lewis provides images that feel like the Christian's exchange of love with Jesus. It is like hugging and being hugged in lush fur, like being tossed in the air and caught by velvet paws, like riding on a swift animal as big as a horse but smooth-gaited as a cat, like being called "dear heart" and "my son." Aslan breathes on the children to give them courage; he roars when the White Witch suggests that he might not keep his word, for he is fearsome as well as loving. He goes meekly to meet his death; he is mocked and tortured. Lucy and Susan weep bitterly; so do adults and sophisticated junior high students.

How did a middle-aged bachelor come to write *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*? He did it by writing the book he would like to read himself. He treated children like people, patiently and respectfully answering their questions. And he took very seriously what Jesus said about entering the kingdom of heaven as a little child.

Something better

After the Chronicles, Lewis wrote his adult masterpiece in the training of feelings, *Till We Have Faces*. He called it "far and away the best I have written," but then added ruefully, "That book) has been my one big failure both with the critics and with the public." Fifty years later, it is still Lewis's best book, but also the one least known by the public. Like its heroine Orual, it is both stepchild and princess. Some people have never tried to read it, but a few others read it over and over.

The Chronicles of Narnia educate the feelings through pleasure, as befits fiction for children. *Till We Have Faces* asks us to follow a woman who has had a miserable life, partly because she felt unjustly treated by God, but mostly because her self-centeredness rendered her unable to perceive reality. It is a very complex, subtle picture of the human spiritual journey, and those who are humble enough to perceive their own faults in Orual can find catharsis and repentance in it. By feeling compassion for Orual, we may learn to accept Christ's compassion for us.

There is a lot of Orual in Lewis, but his imagination, combined with his feelings for beauty and the real, gave him hope. In *Letters to Malcolm*, published posthumously, he imagined what heaven would be like, then concluded, "Guesses, of course, only guesses. If they are not true, something better will be."

Doris T. Myers is the author of two books on Lewis's fiction, C. S. Lewis in Context (Kent State Univ. Press, 1994) and Bareface: A Guide to C. S. Lewis's Last Novel (Univ. of Missouri Press, 2004).

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Making Doctrine Dance

Why Lewis defied convention and opposition in order to bring Christian truth into the public arena.

Christopher Mitchell

Dorothy L. Sayers once described G. K. Chesterton as a kind of "Christian liberator" who blew into the church "gusts of fresh air, in which the dead leaves of doctrine danced with all the energy and indecorum of Our Lady's Tumbler." Sayers's comment comes very near the mark in capturing the role C. S. Lewis has played since Chesterton's death in 1936. Like Chesterton before him, to the English-speaking church Lewis has been nothing less than a Christian liberator.

As early as 1942, C. S. Lewis was already a bestselling author. In 1947, he was heralded as "one of the most influential spokesmen for Christianity in the English-speaking world" by *Time* magazine, which featured his picture on the front cover. "With erudition, good humor and skill," the *Time* article proclaimed, "Lewis is writing about religion for a generation of religion-hungry readers brought up on a diet of 'scientific' jargon and Freudian clichés.) [He] is one of a growing band of heretics among modern intellectuals: an intellectual who believes in God) not a mild and vague belief, for he accepts 'all the articles of the Christian faith.'"

The article attributed much of Lewis's remarkable success to his "talent for putting old-fashioned truths into a modern idiom" and giving "a strictly unorthodox presentation of strict orthodoxy." Three years earlier, *The Times Literary Supplement* had already suggested something similar: "Mr. Lewis has a quite unique power of making Theology attractive, exciting and (one might almost say) an uproariously fascinating quest."

But Lewis, like Chesterton, made the dead leaves of doctrine dance in a way that went against British social and academic convention. It was generally accepted that one's religious orientation should remain a private matter. Lewis's determination to take his Christian faith public with the aim of converting others was simply unacceptable, and to many downright indecent. His work in theology and apologetics, which appealed to vast audiences outside the university, defied academic protocol and created a great amount of ill feeling. According to his former student Harry Blamires, Lewis was acutely sensitive to the fact and once told him, "You don't know how I'm hated."

Lewis was clearly uncomfortable with the publicity his success brought. As early as 1941, responding to a comment made by Dom Bede Griffiths concerning his growing public persona, he acknowledged the growing tension within himself: "As for retiring into 'private life,' while feeling **very** strongly the evil of publicity, I don't see how one can. God is my witness I don't **look** for engagements."

Despite this tension, Lewis chose to go against the social and academic conventions of the day because of his understanding of the gospel mandate, the eternal value of every human soul, and the spiritual state of British society.

"The work is urgent"

Lewis was acutely aware that the biblical mandate to evangelize had particular implications for his own life and career. He had received the best education the British university system could offer. He held an academic post at arguably the most prestigious English university of his day. He was highly skilled in the art of debate and possessed unusual literary gifts. As a Christian, he knew that he was under orders to

bring these things into the service of Christ and his church.

Moreover, he did not believe he had the option of thinking that such work was the sole task of professional theologians or clergy. He was as equally yoked to the gospel as they and, therefore, was obliged to do what he could for the evangelization of Britain. "The work is urgent," he declared, "for men perish around us."

Much of Lewis's sense of urgency was due to the spiritual state of Britain. By the middle of the 20th century, Christianity had been so successfully assimilated into the whole fabric of English social and intellectual society that what was left, he observed, was not Christianity at all but a vague "spirituality and theism" supported by a firmly established moral code. This situation was rooted in 19th-century anti-clerical and anti-theistic forces that tended to reduce the Christian faith to what Lewis described as "mere 'religion' 'morality tinged with emotion,' 'what a man does with his solitude,' 'the religion of all good men.'"

Consequently, pupils in the current school system were learning neither the content of nor the case for Christianity. The younger generation was "never told what the Christians say and never heard any arguments in defense of it." The reason for the prevailing agnosticism or indifference among those of this generation was therefore not so much an antipathy towards Christianity as a lack of instruction.

The apologist's task

If this was the case, then there was reason to hope that the ignorance and incredulity of the students (as well as people in general) could be removed. To accomplish this, Lewis suggested, we must begin by clearly defining what the Christian faith is that is, the "faith preached by the Apostles, attested by the Martyrs, embodied in the Creeds, expounded by the Fathers" and then give a reasonable exposition and defense of it. He added that while each of us holds many opinions which we believe to be true and consistent with Christianity, it is not the business of the apologist to defend *them*. "We are defending Christianity; not 'my religion.' When we mention our personal opinions we must always make quite clear the difference between them and the Faith itself."

With these points in mind, Lewis's job, as he understood it, was plain. First, he had to break down people's intellectual prejudices against Christianity. This meant showing them the fallacies in their objections to belief in such a way as to make faith in Christianity intellectually plausible.

Second, he had to prepare people's minds and imaginations to receive the Christian vision. Lewis was thoroughly committed to using his academic position and training to nurture an intellectual and imaginative climate favorable to Christianity.

"If the intellectual climate is such that, when a man comes to the crisis at which he must either accept or reject Christ, his reason and imagination are not on the wrong side," Lewis argued, "then his conflict will be fought out under favourable conditions. Those who help to produce and spread such a climate are therefore doing useful work: and yet no such great matter after all. Their share is a modest one; and it is always possible that nothing nothing whatever may come of it. That does not mean we should down tools."

Lewis's awareness of the useful part played by the apologist, coupled with his concern about the pervasive ignorance of Christianity within British society, compelled him to step forward and attempt to elucidate and defend the basic teachings of the Christian faith in the language of every day, something he later designated "mere" Christianity.

A forum for honest argument

Lewis's statements concerning the purpose of the Oxford University Socratic Club, of which he was the

president from 1942 to 1954, shed additional light on his involvement in the apologetic enterprise.

"In any fairly large and talkative community such as a university," he explained, "there is always the danger that those who think alike should gravitate together into coterie where they will henceforth encounter opposition only in the emasculated form of rumour that the outsiders say thus and thus. The absent are easily refuted, complacent dogmatism thrives, and differences of opinion are embittered by group hostility. Each group hears not the best, but the worst, that the other groups can say."

Lewis perceived that each side misunderstood the other's position because the two sides never had a truly honest encounter with each other. He was convinced that, if Christianity was ever to confront successfully the contemporary intellectual forces arrayed against it, it would have to do so in an arena where argument itself was decisive.

Thus the Socratic Club was specifically designed to provide a university forum where the best minds of each opposing party could meet in honest disputation about the pros and cons of the Christian religion. The club's name reflected the Socratic exhortation to "follow the argument wherever it led."

Lewis envisioned the Socratic meeting as an arena where Christian and non-Christian could dispute the claims of Christianity, where the various intellectual prejudices against Christianity could be properly challenged, and where the integrity of the Christian's belief system could be demonstrated. Accordingly, non-Christian speakers who were specialists in their fields of study were invited to come and "propagate their creed."

Puddleglum vs. the positivists

Lewis did not limit the role of apologetics to the academic arena, however. A complete presentation and defense of what Christians believe must attempt to open not only an intellectual space favorable to Christian truth, but also an imaginative space. If a person's encounter with Christ is to be fought out under friendly conditions, both reason and imagination need to be brought onto the side of Christianity.

Lewis did this supremely well in his fiction. Whether he was explicating the anatomy of temptation by means of one demon writing to another, exploring the nature of the separation between heaven and hell by having a bus load of denizens from hell take a day trip to heaven, or laying out the Christian cosmology through an interplanetary adventure that takes us from Mars to Venus and back to Earth, Lewis combined theological reflection with poetic imagination in order to draw his readers inside the Christian story.

One of the most memorable and apologetically significant examples of this comes in *The Silver Chair*. The Green Witch has just denied the existence of a world above ground, implying that the children's ideas about Narnia are nothing more than imaginary projections of the things of Underworld, "mere" metaphors having no relation to what is real, and empirically unverifiable. Puddleglum, having broken the witch's enchantment by stamping on her fire, launches a rebuttal. He observes that, if her world is the only real one, it is not worth living in. What is more, their so-called made-up world seems a "good deal more important" than her real world.

In the eloquent speech of a web-footed Marshwiggle, Lewis is challenging the underlying assumptions of the logical positivists who, like the Green Witch, claimed that nothing is true that cannot be proven by observable fact (and therefore that all statements pertaining to the supernatural are meaningless). Against this position, Lewis through the mouth of Puddleglum defends the validity of revelation (in this case a reality beyond what is empirically verifiable). Ultimately, he is claiming that the supernatural exists, that language can express its truth, and that imaginative literature is capable of depicting its reality.

Lewis's achievement

Knowing the value the Christian faith places on the human soul, aware of the separation between faith and learning that had occurred during first half of the 20th century, and believing himself obligated to do what he could for the salvation of Britain, Lewis stepped forward in an attempt to close the gap between the learned community and the community of faith. At a time when many had ceased to believe that Christianity was a plausible picture of reality, Lewis reasserted its intellectual vitality and integrity. In doing so, he also reasserted Christians' right to enter into the public arena against those who routinely denied them that place.

By a rare combination of theological reflection and poetic imagination, Lewis thus achieved the equally rare distinction of making theology "attractive, exciting and an uproariously fascinating quest," causing once again the dead leaves of Christian doctrine to dance.

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 88: C. S. Lewis: Pointing People to Reality

Literary Time Travel

As a scholar and a teacher, Lewis sought to see the present through the eyes of the past.

Bruce L. Edwards

CS. Lewis had a day job. It is strange to think of it that way, for most of us perhaps imagine the prolific Lewis investing countless hours at his desk crafting whimsical children's fantasies or creating formidable arguments to advance "mere Christianity." In fact, he was a renowned scholar of medieval and renaissance literature—first at Oxford, then later at Cambridge—for almost 30 years. How illustrious and gifted was he? Enough to shock his profession by inaugurating rather than climaxing his career with a magnum opus entitled *The Allegory of Love*. This work skillfully and effortlessly transported modern readers into the medieval worldview, helping them see what chivalry and the courtly tradition of love looked like from the inside out, demolishing the clichés that had built up around this historical period. It exemplified and forecast all of the salutary traits of his literary scholarship (and later apologetics and fiction) that would astonish colleagues and endear him to his students. Here on abundant display, just as in the *Chronicles of Namia* or *The Problem of Pain or Miracles*, are his incisive wit, rhetorical eloquence, perspicaciousness of coverage, and, most importantly, his respect for the past.

Kenneth Tynan, a former pupil of Lewis's, captured it well: "The great thing about him as a teacher of literature was that he could take you into the medieval mind and the mind of a classical writer. He could make you understand that classicism and medievalism were really vivid and alive—that it was not the business of literature to be 'relevant to us, but our business to be 'relevant' to it. It was not a matter of dead books covered in dust on our shelves. He could make you see the world through the eyes of a medieval poet as no other teacher could do. You felt that you had been inside Chaucer's mind after talking to him."

Oddly enough, given this sterling reputation as a learned and enthusiastic expositor of medieval and renaissance literature, C. S. Lewis rejected the term "literary critic." At its worst, this implied for him a set of tasks that enshrined what his friend Owen Barfield called "chronological snobbery"—a scholarly disdain for the past and our ability to recover or understand rightly the works and worldviews of antiquity. Besides, many in the collegiate world declared, the past—even if it were possible to recover it faithfully—would invariably be wrong about everything.

Lewis was not so defeatist and skeptical about the past, though he knew as well as anyone that it was hard work to wade into history and write confidently and accurately about its texts and personages. The term "literary historian" best fits him, since it calls attention to the primary motivation that characterized Lewis as a reader and lover of literature: to show the past to be alive and influential for the present—and the future. His own scholarly approach, expressed in a letter to a colleague, Kathleen Raine, only two weeks before his death, was to display in every project "plenty of fact, reasoning as brief and clear as English sunshine, and no personal comment at all."

To read, he declared in his last and most visceral work of literary scholarship, *An Experiment in Criticism*, is not to "aggrandize the self," but rather to transcend it, leaving behind one's prejudices and preconceptions and breaking through the provincialism of one's own times. To read and to research with this goal forced the scholar to recognize that "in coming to understand anything we are rejecting the facts as they are for us in favor of the facts as they are."

Searching for the "facts as they are," putting aside the self, and letting the past come forward to

challenge the present—these sentiments were not only integral to Lewis's most enduring scholarly works, they were also of one piece with his Christian worldview. It is this same respect for history that brought him to the enriching concept of "mere Christianity." He argued in his essay "On the Reading of Old Books" that in the company of our ancient and medieval brothers and sisters we find unity amidst the divisions in Christendom—that only by going outside of our own age can we discover the truth that "measured against the ages 'mere Christianity' turns out to be no insipid interdenominational transparency, but something positive, self- consistent, and inexhaustible."

From his lively survey *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century* to his examination of medieval cosmology in *The Discarded Image*, Lewis's literary histories show his desire to reach backward into time to guide and to guard the present, thus equipping readers to see the past with fresher and less biased eyes. The scholarship that results from such conviction is the report of an intrepid explorer who has experienced what it is to look through others' eyes, to think as they thought, and to behave as they behaved within their cultural period.

As he explains in his 1939 meditation on scholarship, "Learning in War-Time,"

"Most of all, perhaps, we need intimate knowledge of the past.... A man who has lived in many places is not likely to be deceived by the local errors of his native village; the scholar has lived in many times and is therefore in some degree immune from the great cataract of nonsense that pours from the press and the microphone of his own age."

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Knights & Martyrs

The medieval tradition of chivalry gave Lewis a unique perspective on the proper Christian response to war.

Michael Ward

In the *Cambridge Review* obituary of C. S. Lewis, the anonymous author wrote: "It is Chaucer's Knight ... who comes most often to mind when one remembers C. S. Lewis. ... He was a chivalric figure, and his imagination ran most richly in the forms of chivalry and adventure." As a medievalist, Lewis was intimately acquainted with the tradition of chivalry and knightly courage, and, indeed, in some ways he embodied that tradition himself. The knight, in Lewis's view, was not a dead ideal, but a real possibility even in the modern world. Lewis thought and wrote a great deal about martial and military matters, both in his imaginative works and in his nonfiction. This is not surprising when one remembers that he lived through two World Wars and served as a soldier in the first. He volunteered for active service in the Great War (as an Irishman, he could not be conscripted), joining the army in June 1917. He arrived in the trenches of France later that year on November 29 (his 19th birthday) and served for six months before being wounded by friendly fire during the Battle of Arras in spring 1918. He was invalided back to England and spent six months convalescing. In sum, one—and-a-half years of his life were spent as a soldier: first training for war, then fighting in war, then recovering from war. Lewis abandoned his childhood faith several years before becoming a soldier. He did not return to Christianity for more than a decade after the end of the Great War. However, his willingness to fight in the armed forces did not stem from his atheism. Both during his period of unbelief and during his years as a practicing Christian, Lewis thought military service was justifiable. It was not pleasant—in fact, it was in many ways appalling and repulsive—but that did not automatically mean that it was wrong. In promoting knightliness rather than pacifism as the correct response to war, Lewis shows his determination to help his readers think through this difficult issue and focus on what he believed was real (though unpleasant), rather than turning to a fanciful but more palatable alternative.

Just war

Lewis once explained his views to a pacifist society in Oxford (the address now published as "Why I Am Not a Pacifist"). He argued that although war was highly disagreeable, it could not be shown never to have done any good. Referring to his own wartime service, he reasoned that "if a Germanised Europe in 1914 would have been an evil, then the war which prevented that evil was, so far, justified."

Of course, there were many examples of useless wars; mere were even more examples of wars which failed to do all the good that the leaders claimed they would achieve. But some wars served—at least in part—a good purpose. Lewis gave his address in 1940, near the start of World War II. By the end of that conflict, in 1945, the evil of Nazi tyranny had been defeated. Despite the terrible cost of defeating Hitler, Lewis believed that a pacifist surrender to Nazism would have been a greater failure than all the failings that were involved in tackling it with armed force. As early as 1933, Lewis had understood the true nature of Hitler, calling him "as contemptible for his stupidity as he is detestable for his cruelty."

Besides arguing that some wars were useful and legitimate, Lewis claimed that many respectable human authorities defended the right to go to war—including Plato, Aristotle, Homer, and Virgil. Furthermore, many Christian authorities defended the right of the Christian to do the same. Lewis found approval of the use of force in the writings of the apostles Paul and Peter, as well as in the works of Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Thomas Cranmer. Lewis did not adopt his martial views lightly; he remembered the

trenches too well to do that. He told his pacifist audience: All that we fear from all the kinds of adversity, severally, is collected together in the life of a soldier on active service. Like sickness, it threatens pain and death. Like poverty, it threatens ill lodging, cold, heat thirst and hunger. Like slavery, it threatens toil, humiliation, injustice and arbitrary rule. Like exile, it separates you from all you love. Like the galleys, it imprisons you at close quarters with uncongenial companions. It threatens every temporal evil—every evil except dishonor...

If a given war were necessary and justifiable, Lewis thought it would be dishonorable not to serve as a soldier when called upon to do so by properly constituted civil authority.

The honorable knight

Lewis's concept of honor comes largely from his understanding of medieval chivalry, a tradition he held in great respect. In his radio talks broadcast during the Second World War (later published as *Mere Christianity*), he claimed that "the idea of the knight—the Christian in arms for the defence of a good cause—is one of the great Christian ideas." He promoted this ideal in various articles, such as "Private Bates," "Talking About Bicycles," and "The Necessity of Chivalry."

The place where he communicates most about the nature of martial honor *imaginatively* is in *Prince Caspian*, the second of his Chronicles of Narnia. In that story, King Peter, a brave knight and commander, determined to defeat the tyranny of the usurping King Miraz, is equally determined to abide by the rules of honor. So, when Peter and Miraz meet in single combat and Miraz trips and falls, Peter does not exploit his advantage, but waits for his enemy to rise to his feet. Peter's brother, Edmund, watching from the sidelines is impatient:

"Oh, bother, bother, bother. Need he be as gentlemanly as all that? I suppose he must. Comes of being a Knight and a High King. I suppose it is what Aslan would like."

In this crucial moment and indeed throughout *Prince Caspian*, Lewis communicates through story the same message that he presented elsewhere through rational argument, namely that warfare must observe rules and limits if it is to be justifiable. Free-for-all brutality, humiliating prisoners, targeting non-combatants, unfeasible war aims—these things are certainly not honorable military conduct.

On the home front

Although Lewis did not serve in the Second World War, he did what he could to assist the British war effort. He joined the Oxford branch of the Home Guard, the local defense volunteers; he also toured Royal Air Force stations, giving talks about Christianity to airmen, most of whom had a life expectancy calculated in weeks rather than years. In his talks, Lewis would speak about taking up the cross to follow Christ and would reminisce about his own wartime experience. One chaplain who heard him speak recalled how Lewis "never showed any emotion, although I think his listeners knew instinctively that his thoughts had been hammered out in the furnace rather than stored inside a glacier."

Lewis also addressed the University of Oxford in a sermon at the University Church of St. Mary the Virgin, reminding his congregation that war—however demanding it may be—is not an absolute, that the life of the mind could and should continue despite it. This sermon, now published as "Learning in War-time," argues that war is one of the things that civilizations have to go through every now and again to preserve civilized life. War does not replace that life, but serves and rescues it. War is a means, not an end.

But perhaps the most practical thing Lewis did in his war service was to pray for his enemies, praying every night for the people he was most tempted to hate. He told his brother in a letter that Hitler, Stalin, and Mussolini were at the top of his prayer list. He wrote to another correspondent that when he prayed for Hitler and Stalin, he tried to recollect how his own cruelty might have blossomed under different

conditions into something as terrible as theirs, to remember that Christ died for them as much as for him, and that, at bottom, he himself was not "so different from these ghastly creatures."

A higher ideal

It was as he contemplated Christ's example that Lewis qualified his respect for the knight at arms. Although he considered the knightly ideal a high one, it was not the highest which may be why his most chivalric Namian character, the "martial mouse," Reepicheep, is gently satirized even as he is held up for our admiration. Lewis wrote in "Christianity and Culture" that "to the perfected Christian, the ideal of honor is simply a temptation. His courage has a better root and, being learned in Gethsemane, may have no honor about it. But to the man coming up from below, the ideal of knighthood may prove a schoolmaster to the ideal of martyrdom. Galahad is the son of Lancelot."

In other words, there may be shame to be endured, not just honor to be enjoyed. Christ set his face like flint in the garden of Gethsemane and endured the Cross, despising its shame (Heb. 12:2), before going to an ignominious death.

However, the martyr's death is even greater than the knight's service. Although it may sometimes be justifiable to kill your enemies, the highest wisdom, when it can be rightly and conscientiously achieved, is self-sacrifice.

The last thing to mention about Lewis's part in the British war effort was his decision to receive evacuees from among the many, many thousands of children removed from the dangers of the London bombings to the relative safety of other locations. It was their presence in his household that prompted him to begin his most famous story, the story of a kingly lion who both commands an army and sacrifices himself: "Once there were four children whose names were Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy. This story is about something that happened to them when they were sent away from London during the war because of the air-raids."

The retelling of the gospel story in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* illustrates how a true king is both warrior and martyr. Of all Lewis's responses to war, it is highly fitting that this should be best known.

Michael Ward is chaplain of Peterhouse, University of Cambridge. His doctorate from St. Andrews University, Scotland, examined Lewis's theological imagination and its links with medieval cosmology.

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C.S. Lewis: Christian History Timeline

C.S. Lewis: His Life & His Works

His Life

Nov. 29, 1898 Born in Belfast, Ireland

1901 Queen Victoria dies

1908 Mother Flora dies of cancer

1911 Ceases to be a Christian while studying at Cherboug House, a preparatory school for Malvern College

1912 The Titanic sinks

1914-1918 World War I

1914-1917 Studies with W. T. Kirkpatrick ("the Great Knock"); during this time he reads George MacDonald's *Phantastes*, which "baptizes" his imagination

1917 Begins studies at University College, Oxford; meets Paddy Moore and his mother Mrs. Janie Moore; joins army and is sent to France

1918 Wounded in action and hospitalized in London; Paddy Moore is killed in battle

1919 Returns to University College, Oxford

1924 Begins tutorial work at University College

1925 Elected Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford

1925 G. K. Chesterton publishes *The Everlasting Man*

1926 Meets J. R. R. Tolkien.

1929 Confesses on his knees in his Magdalen rooms that "God is God"; father Albert dies in Belfast

1930 Lewis and Moores move into The Kilns

1931 Accepts truth of Christianity while riding to Whipsnade Zoo

1932 Warren Lewis retires from the army and moves into The Kilns

1933 Circle of friends called "the Inklings" forms

1936 Meets Charles Williams

1939 First evacuated children arrive at The Kilns

1939-1945 World War II

1940-41 Gives lectures on Christianity for the Royal Air Force

1941 Preaches famous sermon "The Weight of Glory" at the church of St. Mary's in Oxford

1941-1944 Gives 25 talks on BBC radio; these talks will eventually become *Mere Christianity*

1942 First meeting of the Oxford Socratic Club

1945 United Nations founded

1945 Charles Williams dies

1946 Awarded honorary Doctor of Divinity by University of St. Andrews

1947 Featured on the cover of Time magazine

1949 George Orwell publishes *1984*

1950 Receives first letter from Joy Davidman Gresham

1951 Mrs. Moore dies

1952 Meets Joy Davidman during her trip to London

1953 Joy moves to England with her sons David and Douglas

1954 J. R. R. Tolkien publishes *The Lord of the Rings*

1954 Accepts Chair of Medieval and Renaissance Literature at Cambridge University

1956 Marries Joy in a legal ceremony

1957 U.S.S.R. launches "Sputnik" into orbit

1957 Ecclesiastical marriage at Joy's hospital bed; Joy's cancer goes into remission

1960 Joy dies

Nov. 22, 1963 Dies at The Kilns and is buried in the parish churchyard

Nov. 22, 1963 John F. Kennedy is assassinated

1973 Death of brother Warren Lewis

His Works

1919 *Spirits in Bondage: A Circle of Lyrics* [under pseudonym Clive Hamilton]

1926 *Dymer* [under pseudonym Clive Hamilton]

1933 *The Pilgrim's Regress: An Allegorical Apology for Christianity, Reason and Romanticism*

1936 *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition*

1938 *Out of the Silent Planet*

1939 *Rehabilitations and Other Essays*

1939 *The Personal Heresy: A Controversy* [with E. M. W. Tillyard]

1940 *The Problem of Pain*

1942 *The Screwtape Letters*

1942 *A Preface to 'Paradise Lost'*

1943 *Perelandra*

1943 *The Abolition of Man*

1945 *That Hideous Strength*

1946 *The Great Divorce*

1947 *Miracles*

1948 *Arthurian Torso* [poems by Charles Williams with commentary by C. S. Lewis]

1949 *Transposition and Other Addresses*

1950 *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*

1951 *Prince Caspian*

1952 *Mere Christianity*, combining *Broadcast Talks* (1942), *Christian Behaviour* (1943), and *Beyond Personality* (1944)

1952 *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*

1953 *The Silver Chair*

1954 *The Horse and His Boy*

1954 *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama*

1955 *The Magician's Nephew*

1955 *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life*

1956 *The Last Battle*

1956 *Till We Have Faces*

1958 *Reflections on the Psalms*

1960 *The Four Loves*

1960 *Studies in Words*

1960 *The World's Last Night and Other Essays*

1961 *A Grief Observed* [under pseudonym N. W. Clerk]

1961 *An Experiment in Criticism*

1962 *They Asked for a Paper: Papers and Addresses*

1964 *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer*

1964 *The Discarded Image*

Posthumous collections include

Poems (1964), *Letters of C. S. Lewis*, ed. W. H. Lewis (1966), *Of Other Worlds* (1966), *Christian Reflections* (1967), *God in the Dock* (1970), *Fern-Seed and Elephants* (1975), *The Dark Tower and Other Stories* (1977)

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The Postman's Knock

Lewis scaled a mountain of mail with wisdom, wit, and courtesy.

Andrew Cuneo

Thousands upon thousands of letters written in the hand of C. S. Lewis make up what is now the last original material being published under Lewis's name, much of it for the first time. Written on elegant Magdalen College letterhead (given to him by American friends), scraps of wartime economy paper (of discernibly lower grade than pre- and post-war paper), and thin sheets of typing paper (torn into thirds to get three letters out of one sheet), the letters of C. S. Lewis have accumulated into a monument of Lewis's thought, theology, and charity. One could characterize Lewis's letters as he himself characterized the letters of Charles Lamb: "You'll find his letters as good as his essays: indeed they are almost exactly the same, only more of it."

More of it indeed: At last count, the number of letters collected so far total about 3,400—and they continue to come in. Such a prolific correspondence dispels the image of the isolated bachelor Oxford don, hopelessly out of touch with his times. In fact, few professors could have been more aware of the drift of popular thought and the state of the common cultural soul.

Food for thought

On a given morning, Lewis might write to his publisher, Geoffrey Bles, and haggle over the title of his latest book; he might write a tactful letter to his former pupil John Betjeman, a major poet of the day who still resented his old tutor; or he might write to the American Dr. Firor in thanks of precious wartime food that supplemented the severe British rations.

How greatly, in fact, Lewis admired his American culinary benefactors: "The arrival of that magnificent ham leaves me just not knowing what to say. If it were known that it was in my house, it would draw every housebreaker in the neighborhood more surely than would a collection of gold plate." As Lewis quipped to another generous American, "Every third meal we eat is 'on America.'"

Most letters, however, were from correspondents who wanted Lewis to address a particular theological or personal question, for Lewis had become a touchstone of modern Christian thought in the 1940s and 1950s. The following note to Mrs. Ursula Roberts, a correspondent whom he had never met, shows Lewis's typically direct style:

To Mrs. Ursula Roberts, 31 July 1954:

I am certainly unfit to advise anyone else on the devotional life. My own rules are 1. To make sure that, wherever else they may be placed, the main prayers should not be put "last thing at night." 2. To avoid introspection in prayer—I mean not to watch one's own mind to see if it is in the right frame, but always to turn the attention outwards to God. 3. Never, never to try to generate an emotion by will power. 4. To pray without words [that is, silently] when I am able, but to fall back on words when tired or otherwise below par. With renewed thanks. Perhaps you will sometimes pray for me?

All the hallmarks are there, in a form as condensed as a great moralist could make them: mature

theology, practical advice, and simplicity of language.

Alongside the stream of popular inquiries were manuscripts from aspiring poets and novelists (some of whom sent entire works unsolicited) and the usual business correspondence of an academic with other academic friends he rarely saw. ("One's real friends are precisely the people one never gets time to write to," he notes to Dorothy Sayers.)

Sifting through the stack of mail each morning called forth a peculiar versatility in Lewis: He had to turn from matters literary to theological to pastoral in a succession of minutes. One can understand, then, Lewis's picture of the ideal life in *Surprised by Joy*, where he describes a day with "almost no mail" when he would "never dread the postman's knock."

If this sounds like an exaggeration, it is worth remembering that this picture emerges from at least two hours of answering letters a day for approximately twenty years. If Lewis took a holiday, it only compounded matters upon return. He wrote a remarkable number on Christmas Day itself—and they were not only Christmas cards.

Drudgery and drollery

From a strictly stylistic perspective, what a forge for Lewis's habitually clear expression this daily ritual must have been. To descend from a letter to T. S. Eliot down to a humble London convert and back up to Dorothy Sayers required intense modulation of tone and complexity. In all of Lewis's letters, high or low, the English is translucent, and when he chose to write in French, Anglo-Saxon, Greek, or Latin, no shine is lost.

The hammer of such a routine can be noticed particularly in the successful books where Lewis simply adopts the letter as his literary form: *The Screwtape Letters* and *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer*. Something of Lewis's mind worked to the rhythm of the short burst of a letter, with its balanced phrases, its one-off chance to communicate Christian truth in nearly axiomatic sentences.

Lewis did have a devoted secretary, fortunately, to help him with the burden of daily mail. A great deal of the writing was a joint endeavor, in which Major Warren Lewis would type (hunt-and-peck method with two fingers) a full response or simply take down a dictation from his brother. Many letters, in fact—especially those treating current political events—Warren wrote himself and signed "C. S. Lewis."

Drudgery also gave way to drollery at points. "An anonymous postcard," recalled Lewis in 1958, "tells me that I ought to be flogged at the cart's tail for professing to believe in the Virgin Birth. ... An unknown American writes to ask me whether Elijah's fiery chariot was really a Flying Saucer. I encounter Theosophists, British Israelites, Spiritualists, [and] Pantheists." One writer even wished to know whether Lewis had traveled to Mars and Venus—a journey that would have been a notable feat for the late 1930s.

The virtue of courtesy

Given that Lewis met what Chaucer terms "God's Plenty" through the post, the question remains: Why would he answer, as he did, every correspondent? Doubtless, Lewis saw his salvation being worked out through relationships, and, from a steady caretaking of Mrs. Moore at the Kilns to the steady correspondence with the faceless thousands, Lewis demonstrated by action what transpires when one human being treats another with attention. Lewis gave theological and intellectual advice through his letters; perhaps more importantly, he also gave his time—generously.

Admirers and detractors almost invariably overlook this virtue of *courtesy* in Lewis, even though a host of his contemporaries attest to it. Lewis *chose* to answer all his correspondents, and that deliberate act

of the will, repeated and sustained, points to a man who, like the Apostle Paul, would write to the church around the world. For C. S. Lewis knew a great deal more people than the Inklings and his male Oxford and Cambridge colleagues. He knew and cared for women, for the evangelical leaders and laity of his day, for the poor, and for the ordinary Briton who valued his intellectual clarity. In the thousands of letters still being masterfully edited for publication by Walter Hooper, how often the Magdalen don's dip pen ends with the short, perfect, and courteous, "Yours, C. S. Lewis."

Andrew Cuneo is assistant professor of English at Hillsdale College in Michigan.

Meeting children as equals

"Perhaps ... you will sometimes say a prayer for me?"

By his own admission, C. S. Lewis was shy around children. Perhaps, in part, this was the result of circumstances: For most of his life he was a bachelor (not marrying until he was in his late fifties when his two stepsons were almost teenagers). In spite of limited contact and his own natural reserve, Lewis was nonetheless a caring godfather to the young children of several friends—including Lucy Barfield to whom he dedicated *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. But even in these instances, his most comfortable connection was usually via the written word.

We see this demonstrated in a letter to his goddaughter Sarah. After explaining why domestic responsibilities will prevent him from being present at her confirmation, Lewis confesses: "If I had come and we had met, I am afraid you might have found me very shy and dull. (By the way, always remember that old people can be quite as shy with young people as young people can be with old. This explains to you what must seem the idiotic way in which so many grown-ups talk to you)."

However, in this same letter to Sarah, Lewis goes on to give warm and practical advice about taking her first communion. Though he might have felt hesitant about his ability to relate to his goddaughter in person, Lewis was careful not to neglect his role as spiritual mentor in her life. But just as significantly, the advice that he gives to Sarah is counsel he could as easily have given to an adult. In other words, in spite of his natural reserve with children, Lewis still met them "face to face" as equals. It is this genuine connection that enabled him to write so effectively for children—whether in creating his seven Narnian tales or in answering a single letter from one of his young readers. Indeed, evidence of this respectful understanding can be found scattered throughout his letters to children.

For example, Lewis responded thoughtfully and without a trace of condescension to the many literary questions of his youthful correspondents, offering helpful insights such as, "A strict allegory is like a puzzle with a solution: a great romance is like a flower you can't quite place." Or, "Of course you're right about the Narnian books being better than the tracts; at least, in the way a picture is better than a map."

He often wrote humorously of his shared love for animals: "Reepicheep in your coloured picture has just the right perky, cheeky expression. I love real mice. There are lots in my rooms at College but I have never set a trap. When I sit up late working they poke their heads out from behind the curtains just as if they were saying, 'Hi! Time for you to go to bed. We want to come out and play.'"

Many of his letters include thoughtful words on spiritual matters: "Yes, people do find it hard to keep on feeling as if you believed in the next life: but then it is just as hard to keep on feeling as if you believed you were going to be nothing after death. I know this because in the old days before I was a Christian I used to try."

And there is always evidence of an honest concern for the individual child: "It makes me, I think, more humble than proud to know that Aslan has allowed me to be the means of making Him more real to you. ... Perhaps, in return, you will sometimes say a prayer for me?"

In one of his last letters to a young correspondent, written less than a month before his own death, C. S. Lewis penned these words, words that speak poignantly to each one of us, both child and adult—no matter what our actual age: "If you continue to love Jesus, nothing much can go wrong with you, and I hope you may always do so."

Marjorie Lamp Mead is associate director of the Marion E. Wade Center and co-editor of C. S. Lewis: Letters to Children (Simon & Schuster, 1995).

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 88: C. S. Lewis: Pointing People to Reality

The Way of Friendship

What an Oxford don learned in the "school of virtue."

Colin Duriez

"You modify one another's thought; out of this perpetual dog-fight a community of mind and a deep affection emerge." That is what C. S. Lewis said about his enduring friendship with Owen Barfield, who greatly influenced his bedrock views on imagination and myth.

C. S. Lewis's writings often concern friendship and even more often are shaped by his friendships. Characteristically, his writings, from the Chronicles of Narnia to his scholarly *The Discarded Image* (on the medieval picture of the world), seek to rehabilitate values and virtues once known and lived out in what he called the Old West. He saw this as a civilization and consciousness increasingly lost to us since an unprecedented fracture that occurred, he speculated, early in the 19th century. Loss of these old virtues and values, he famously argued in his essay, *The Abolition of Man*, put the very future of our humanity in jeopardy. One of the central values he sought to rehabilitate, both in his fiction and in his nonfiction, was that of friendship. In his life, his friendships played a dramatic role, shaping and coloring his years.

Lewis took a classical and Judeo-Christian view of friendship, seeing it as "the school of virtue." Properly lived out, friendship could open one's eyes to previously unseen aspects of reality. In our modern times—in the new, post-Christian West and its sphere of influence—friendship can function in a restorative way, bringing us back into contact with lost reality. The friend who follows the proper character of friendship, with its inner laws, can be very like the traveler in John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, a book deeply important to Lewis. The pilgrim has to face dangers and tribulations, finding that "shortcuts" are anything but. Bunyan writes, "Some also have wished that the nearest way to their father's house were here, that they might be troubled no more with either hills or mountains to go over, but the way is the way, and there is an end."

A shared vision

Lewis's belief in the restorative and perception-changing nature of friendship is revealed particularly well in comments he made about two friends, Hamilton Jenkin and his Ulster friend Arthur Greeves.

In *Surprised by Joy* he reports, "The first lifelong friend I made at Oxford was A. K. Hamilton Jenkin, since known for his books on Cornwall. He continued (what Arthur had begun) my education as a seeing, listening, smelling, receptive creature. Arthur had his preference for the Homely. But Jenkin seemed able to enjoy everything; even ugliness. I learned from him that we should attempt a total surrender to whatever atmosphere was offering itself at the moment; in a squalid town to seek out those very places where its squalor rose to grimness and almost grandeur, on a dismal day to find the most dismal and dripping wood, on a windy day to seek the windiest ridge." Jenkin exhibited "a serious, yet gleeful, determination to rub one's nose in the very quiddity of each thing, to rejoice in its being (so magnificently) what it was."

In Lewis's science fiction novel *That Hideous Strength* (1945), two characters become friends through a shared vision of the "quiddity" or thereness of things. Like Lewis and Jenkin, the fictional Arthur and Camilla Denniston like weather of all descriptions. Jane, a central character in the story, is surprised to discover this when she is invited on a picnic with them on a foggy autumn day. Arthur explains: "That's

why Camilla and I got married. ... We both like Weather. It's a useful taste if one lives in England."

Rather like the texts of literature, a friend provides another vantage point from which to view the world. For Lewis, his different friends opened up reality in varying ways. Owen Barfield, for instance, was very different from Arthur Greeves, who had revealed to Lewis he was not alone in the world. Though Barfield shared with Lewis a view of what was important, and asked strikingly similar questions, the conclusions he came to usually differed radically from those of Lewis. Throughout the 1920s, the two had waged what Lewis called a "Great War," a long dispute over the kind of knowledge that imagination can give. As Lewis put it, it was as if Barfield spoke his language but mispronounced it.

Lewis's friendship with J. R. R. Tolkien, like that with Barfield, was based upon irreducible differences as well as likenesses. [See [Issue 78: J. R. R. Tolkien.](#)] Initially, the two were drawn together by a love of myth, fairytale, and saga, a bond that deepened when Lewis became a Christian. There were emerging differences of temperament, churchmanship, and storytelling style, however, which strained yet enriched the friendship.

Guests at a common feast

Furthermore, in Lewis's group of friends, the process of opening up reality was richly interactive, a constantly moving play of light. He memorably expresses this in his chapter on friendship in *The Four Loves*. In the following excerpt, "Ronald" is Tolkien and "Charles" is Charles Williams. Both of them, along with Barfield, were members of the Inklings, a group of literary friends surrounding Lewis in Oxford.

"In each of my friends there is something that only some other friend can fully bring out," Lewis wrote. "By myself I am not large enough to call the whole man into activity; I want other lights than my own to show all his facets. Now that Charles is dead, I shall never again see Ronald's reaction to a specifically Caroline joke. Far from having more of Ronald, having him 'to myself' now that Charles is away, I have less of Ronald. Hence true Friendship is the least jealous of loves. Two friends delight to be joined by a third, and three by a fourth ... each bringing out all that is best, wisest, or funniest in all the others."

Ultimately, for Lewis, a group of Christian friends is participating in a feast in which God "has spread the board and it is He who has chosen the guests."

Colin Duriez lives in the English Lake District and is the author of a number of books on Lewis, including Tolkien and C.S. Lewis: The Gift of Friendship (Paulist Press, 2003).

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 88: C. S. Lewis: Pointing People to Reality

The Great Iconoclast

Lewis had always believed that God shatters our images. But the death of his wife put his faith to the ultimate test.

Jerry Root and Jennifer Trafton

During the 1952 Christmas season, C. S. Lewis invited Joy Davidman Gresham—an American with whom he had corresponded for over two years—to spend the holidays at his home, The Kilns. Joy asked Lewis to autograph her copy of his book, *The Great Divorce*. He wrote, "There are three images in my mind which I must continually forsake and replace by better ones: the false image of God, the false image of my neighbours, and the false image of myself. C. S. Lewis 30 December 1952 (from an unwritten chapter on Iconoclasm)."

Though the planned chapter was never written, this simple inscription captures an idea central to Lewis's life and work: the idea that reality is iconoclastic—it breaks images or idols. An image of God (or of another person, or oneself) formed after reading a book, hearing a lecture or sermon, or having a conversation with a friend may temporarily give greater clarity of thought. But if it is held too tightly, it becomes an idol that must be broken in order to allow a better image to take its place. One might say that Lewis's entire relationship with the woman who eventually became his wife was encapsulated in the words he wrote on that December day.

Surprised by Joy

It was a story no one could have predicted. Lewis first came to know Joy through her fan letters. They met in person at Oxford's East Gate Hotel in September 1952. Lewis was a 55-year-old scholar and confirmed bachelor. Joy was a 37-year-old ex-Communist Jew from Brooklyn, a recent Christian convert, and a poet whose marriage to writer Bill Gresham was foundering on the rocks. As Joy went through a divorce, moved to England with her two sons, and was diagnosed with cancer, the unlikely romance that blossomed between her and Lewis shocked everyone.

Lewis married Joy secretly in the Oxford registry office in 1956 to keep her from being deported back to the U. S. The next year, he married her again "for real" in a religious ceremony at what was thought to be her deathbed. But once more, reality shattered expectations: Joy's cancer went into remission, and the two enjoyed three very happy years together. Her sharp wit and intelligence matched his own, and she had a deep influence on Lewis's own favorite of all his books, *Till We Have Faces*, as well as *The Four Loves*. Whether she was managing the finances, sharing his love for poetry, or patrolling the woods behind The Kilns with a shotgun to keep away amorous trespassers, Joy turned upside-down the aging scholar's bachelor existence. Lewis remarked to his friend Neville Coghill, "I never expected to have, in my sixties, the happiness that passed me by in my twenties."

Such happiness did not last, however. Joy's cancer returned with a vengeance and took her life on July 13, 1960. Like any bereaved husband, Lewis plunged into grief, even asking whether God was a good God or a "Cosmic Sadist." He weathered his own dark night of the soul by analyzing his suffering in a poignant little book called *A Grief Observed*, published under the pseudonym N. W. Clerk in 1961.

Severe Mercy

Over the course of his intellectual pilgrimage, Lewis's realism had led him to a robust form of Christianity

that held up under life's stormy weather. He had always insisted on facing up to The Way the World Is, rather than settling for the way he thought it was or wanted it to be.

In the book that established his academic reputation, *The Allegory of Love*, he argued, "The universe is a battlefield in which Change and Permanence contend." Throughout all of the changes in life, the *temporarily* real fades, and what we are left with is the *eternally* real. He wrote in *Surprised by Joy* that God in his mercy kicks out the walls of the temples we build for him because he wants to give us more of himself—that God "cares only for temples building and not for temples built." Before Lewis met Joy, he had been corresponding with his former student Sheldon Vanauken after the death of Vanauken's wife, Davy. In one letter he gently suggested that Vanauken had had a flawed and idealized view of love—and that "you've been given a severe mercy" (from which came the title of Vanauken's book *A Severe Mercy*).

With Joy's death, these beliefs went head to head with raw experience. The ideas in *A Grief Observed* were no different from those expressed in his earlier books, but this time they were accompanied by the "ouch" of profound personal pain as Lewis's own temples were kicked apart.

Loving Joy (whom he called "H." in the book) had been a continual exercise in shedding false ideals in favor of a real, unpredictable, flesh-and-blood woman. "All reality is iconoclastic," he wrote. "The earthly beloved, even in this life, incessantly triumphs over your mere idea of her." Joy was always pulling him up short "so unexpectedly, by being so thoroughly herself and not me."

Just as his image of Joy had been incomplete, he realized, so had his image of God: "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. Could we not almost say that this shattering is one of the marks of His presence?"

In words reminiscent of those he had written in Joy's copy of *The Great Divorce* years before, he reasserted his desire to reach beyond his changing perceptions and feelings in order to find what was eternally real: "Not my idea of God, but God. Not my idea of H., but H. Yes, and also not my idea of my neighbor, but my neighbor."

The Journey Continues

Many people who have seen the movie *Shadowlands* have wondered what happened to Lewis's faith after the shattering effect of loss. One can already see in *A Grief Observed* the rebuilding taking place. Pain did not make him bitter or despairing; it caused him to turn up the volume on themes he'd been talking about for decades.

Just before his own death, Lewis wrote *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer* (published posthumously). It was a practical, conversational outpouring of thoughts on devotional life to an imaginary correspondent—a book marked by the humility of one who knew from hard experience that, while God is absolute and unchanging, his own understanding of God's ways was not.

Here again, Lewis reminded readers that reality is iconoclastic. But what was earlier an expression of intellectual searching or emotional agony now became a call to worship: "God must continually work as the iconoclast. Every idea of Him we form He must in mercy shatter. The most blessed result of prayer would be to rise thinking, 'But I never knew before. I never dreamed ...'" God can offer no gift to his creatures greater than the gift of himself. Whether through the mind's quest or the heart's sacrifice, Lewis believed that the Christian journey must always lead "further up and further in."

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 88: C. S. Lewis: Pointing People to Reality

The Jack I Knew

A Conversation with Douglas Gresham

When Douglas Gresham was eight years old, his mother, Joy Davidman, introduced him and his brother David to the man who would eventually become their stepfather: C. S. Lewis, known to his friends and family as "Jack." Gresham chronicled this remarkable relationship in [Lenten Lands: My Childhood with Joy Davidman & C. S. Lewis](#) (Macmillan, 1988). In addition to serving as the Creative and Artistic Director of the C. S. Lewis Company and co-producer of the upcoming film version of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, Gresham has recently published a new biography of Lewis, [Jack's Life: The Life Story of C. S. Lewis](#) (Broadman & Holman, 2005). In it, he calls Jack "the finest man and best Christian I have ever known."

In the introduction to your new book, you write, "This is merely the simple recounting of the story of what I believe to be the extraordinary life of an extraordinary man." What are you trying to offer in your biography of Jack that is different from the other biographies of him that have been published?

All too often, Jack's personality and his traits of honor, courage, duty, and commitment seem to get lost in the verbiage that clutters the pages of books about him. His wonderful sense of humor, his consciousness of his own sinfulness and of his salvation from it—these are missing from most writings about him, yet they were the essential characteristics of his personality.

I suppose I have tried to write about what sort of man he really was.

Your book focuses on the private, home life of Jack, with his public life taking place off stage, so to speak. In what ways did Jack have a far more demanding domestic life than most Oxford students and dons of his day?

Jack's unconditional acceptance of the responsibility to care for the mother and younger sister of Paddy Moore, his friend and fellow soldier who died in the war, resulted in his living a very difficult life for the 30 years that he stood by his commitment. Initially, when he was a student at Oxford, he did his best to provide a home and sustenance for this little family out of the meager student's allowance that his father provided. This allowance would have been ample for one undergraduate living in college, but for a young man trying to support a family, it was a pitifully small amount at the time.

In addition to financial difficulties, he was always working, either at his studies, to which he was very dedicated, or in the succession of temporary homes that they inhabited. Jack found himself not only a student, but also a domestic servant, a handyman, carpet layer, occasional carpenter, removalist (every time they moved from one residence to another it was Jack who did the hard work), assistant cook, and so forth.

"Jack was the finest man and best Christian

Amazingly, he was able to put his practical skills into a wide variety of tasks while still keeping up with his academic pursuits, and all this without complaint or resentment.

Jack's brother Warnie thought it was a waste for such a brilliant man to be peeling potatoes and cleaning dishes all those years. How do you think such a life of domestic responsibility helped form Jack into the kind of person who could write *Mere Christianity*, create Narnia, and be the spiritual shepherd of millions?

Nobody ever learns how strong temptation can be until they have overcome it. Jack

I have
ever
known."

overcame many of the temptations that beset us every day, and having done so he gained a great understanding of the nature of temptation and also of people and their behavior. The private Jack was the man who fought against anger, impatience, intolerance, and all the other daily temptations, and mostly defeated them. The public Jack was the man who then went to the trouble of writing down all that he had learned from those battles so that others would benefit.

How did Jack's sense of knightly honor and chivalry, which comes across so clearly in his writings, affect how he lived his daily life and how he treated people?

Those concepts are very much evident in the way that he lived his life from moment to moment. Jack was always ready to defend those who were defenseless, to help the helpless. He would step in anonymously to help all sorts of people in all sorts of need. Jack made his sense of charity a watchword of his life, and there are many today whose education is owed to anonymous donations from him. Jack paid for my schooling as one of his many charitable exercises long before he and Mother were married.

His sense of duty is exemplified by the fact that at the age of 18 he volunteered to fight in World War I when he had no need to do so [because he was an Irishman]. He felt that it was his duty to defend the country which had given him so much. "Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends," and Jack laid his life down day by day for the benefit of all whom he encountered and on a wider scale by writing his books. Who could count the millions of people whom his daily living has deeply affected?

What is your favorite story from Jack's life?

I am rather fond of the time that he took 32 German prisoners during the First World War. Jack and his platoon were approaching a shell-shattered French farmhouse, and his experienced and battle-wise Sergeant Ayers didn't like the look of the place. It was too quiet and inoffensive looking. So he suggested that Jack take half the platoon and conceal themselves in front of the house while he, Sergeant Ayers, took the other half and stormed the house from the back.

Jack and his men waited under scant cover while Sergeant Ayers and his men stormed into the back of the house roaring at the top of their voices and firing their rifles at the windows and doors. Immediately, the German soldiers inside came bursting out of the front door. Jack and his men immediately rose to fire, but the Germans threw their weapons away and raised their hands, crying for mercy. At once, Jack emerged from cover and calmly walked up to the two terrified German officers who were leading the men, accepted their surrender, and formally took them prisoner along with their men.

When all the fuss was over and the Germans had been sent under escort back to the prisoner-marshalling area, Sergeant Ayers gently reproved Jack, saying, "Sir, you might have at least drawn your pistol." Jack had to admit that the thought had never even crossed his mind. He had to all intents and purposes been unarmed all the time.

Describe a typical day at The Kilns when you lived there with Jack and Joy.

It would often start before dawn as I heard Jack rise at about five and make his early morning cup of tea in the kitchen (my bedroom was off the kitchen). Jack would take a tea tray to his study and begin work on his correspondence. He would stay there until about 8:00, when he would join my mother for breakfast. Then he would return to his study to work or finish writing letters. I would go about my own pursuits, perhaps helping Fred (Paxford) in the gardens or paddling my kayak on the lake.

Lunch was at 1:00, and I was expected to be on time. Afterwards, Jack would usually go out for a walk. Sometimes I would accompany him, but more often he went his way and I returned to my own adventures. In bad weather, I would stay in the house and read, but it would be very severe conditions

indeed that kept Jack indoors. Sometimes he would meet friends for a pint in a pub somewhere, then walk home and retire once more to his study, writing or correcting exam papers, or doing whatever duty was upon him at the time.

At 4:00, Jack and sometimes Warnie would join Mother for tea in the "common room," and I would come in around then to raid the larder for whatever goodies were not guarded. Then the grownups went back to work, and I returned to the serious business of growing up, which I did reluctantly I have to admit.

Dinner time was 7:00, and the family once again gathered at the dining room table. After dinner, Jack would join Mother, and they would read, play Scrabble, or enjoy conversation until it was time for bed. Warnie often joined them, and sometimes I was there too. But more often, I was adventuring either in a book or outside. Finally, the day would close on a late evening cup of tea with some biscuits or cake, and then to bed.

You recount in your book how difficult a relationship Jack had with his own father. How do you think this influenced his relationship with you as your stepfather?

I don't think it did. Jack was sufficiently self-aware to swiftly apprehend any behavioral patterns in himself that may have originated in his childhood, and if they were disadvantageous, he would curb them. The one he had most difficulty with was his constant fear of penury, a trait that he shared with Warnie. His technique for dealing with it was to give away as much money as was asked of him whenever it was asked or whenever he became aware of dire need in someone else.

What kinds of things did you and Jack do together?

Many things—walking, sawing firewood, discussions, entertaining visitors, all kinds of everyday things. We talked about almost everything under the sun.

Did he ever talk to you openly about his grief after your mother's death?

It was rather more that we shared our grief with each other. If we tried to talk about it, though, we would both dissolve in tears, and that was a very embarrassing experience for those brought up to believe in the "stiff upper lip" philosophy of English schools of the time.

What is the most important thing Jack taught you?

To think (and I mean really think) rather than to emote, and that both men and women must learn to control their emotions rather than allowing their emotions to control them.

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C.S. Lewis: Recommended Resources

Since the number of books about C. S. Lewis has risen to flood levels, we asked the experts in this issue to give us their recommendations for the best ones.

The unanimous choice for the "must-have" reference book on C. S. Lewis's life and work is Walter Hooper's ***C. S. Lewis: A Companion and Guide*** (HarperCollins, 1996). Hooper's authoritative 940-page volume gives a thorough overview of Lewis's life, major works, key ideas, and bibliography, as well as a helpful "Who's Who" and "What's What."

In addition to the numerous collections of Lewis's writings that Walter Hooper has already edited, he has spent several decades collecting and editing Lewis's letters, culminating in the definitive three-volume ***Collected Letters*** published by HarperCollins (2004, 2005). While you're perusing Lewis's extensive correspondence, don't forget his ***Letters to Children***, edited by Lyle W. Dorsett and Marjorie Lamp Mead (Simon & Schuster, 1995).

Jack: A Life of C. S. Lewis, written by Lewis's former student and friend George Sayer (Crossway, 1988, 1994), is generally acknowledged to be the best overall biography. David C. Downing's ***The Most Reluctant Convert*** (InterVarsity, 2002) illuminates Lewis's intellectual journey to faith, Lyle W. Dorsett's ***Seeking the Secret Place: The Spiritual Formation of C. S. Lewis*** (Brazos Press, 2004) traces Lewis's spiritual development, and Alan Jacobs's new biography, ***The Narnian: The Life and Imagination of C. S. Lewis*** (HarperCollins, 2005), explores his imaginative development.

Lewis's stepson Douglas Gresham does a wonderful job of humanizing Lewis in his biography, ***Jack's Life: The Life Story of C. S. Lewis*** (Broadman & Holman, 2005), a book that would be appropriate for younger readers as well. ***C. S. Lewis: Images of His World***, the classic pictorial biography by Clyde S. Kilby and Douglas Gilbert (new edition by Eerdmans, 2005), is full of photographs of Lewis's family, friends, and favorite haunts.

As Doris Myers says in her article "Reading over Lewis's shoulder" on page 28, you can learn a lot about Lewis by following him through his favorite books. A top-notch group of scholars does just that in ***Reading the Classics with C. S. Lewis***, edited by Thomas Martin (Baker, 2000).

Another fascinating way of getting to know Lewis is by reading the recollections of those who knew him. Two classic collections of these remembrances are ***C. S. Lewis at the Breakfast Table***, edited by James T. Como (Macmillan, 1979) and ***Light on C. S. Lewis***, edited by Jocelyn Gibb (Geoffrey Bles Ltd., 1965).

Humphrey Carpenter's ***The Inklings*** (George Allen & Unwin, 1978) and Colin Duriez's ***Tolkien and C. S. Lewis: the Gift of Friendship*** (Paulist Press, 2003) both provide insight into some of Lewis's closest friendships.

As you explore the realms of Narnia, you can ask for no better guide than Paul Ford's encyclopedic ***Companion to Narnia: A Complete Guide to the Magical World of C. S. Lewis's The Chronicles of Narnia*** (HarperCollins, revised ed. 2005). For a general introduction to Lewis's thought and fiction, Clyde S. Kilby's pioneering work ***The Christian World of C. S. Lewis*** (Eerdmans, 1964) is still one of the best.

Here are a few other resources to add to your library:

David Downing, *Into the Wardrobe: C. S. Lewis and the Narnia Chronicles* (Jossey-Bass, 2005), *Into the Region of Awe: Mysticism in C. S. Lewis* (InterVarsity, 2005) and *Planets in Peril: A Critical Study of C. S. Lewis's Ransom Trilogy* (Univ. of Mass., 1992).

Bruce Edwards, *Not a Tame Lion: The Spiritual World of Narnia* (Tyndale, 2005) and *Further Up and Further In: Understanding C. S. Lewis's The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (Broadman & Holman, 2005).

Wayne Martindale and Jerry Root, eds., *The Quotable Lewis* (Tyndale, 1990).

Doris Myers, *C. S. Lewis in Context* (Kent State Univ., 1994) and *Bareface: A Guide to C. S. Lewis's Last Novel* (Univ. of Missouri, 2004).

Leland Ryken and Marjorie Lamp Mead, *A Reader's Guide through the Wardrobe: Exploring C.S. Lewis's Classic Story* (InterVarsity, 2005).

Peter J. Schakel, *The Way into Narnia* (Eerdmans, 2005) and *Word and Story in C. S. Lewis*, edited with Charles A. Huttar (Univ. of Missouri, 1991).

Jeffrey D. Schultz and John West, Jr., *The C. S. Lewis Readers Encyclopedia* (Zondervan, 1998).

More bibliographic recommendations, as well as information on Lewis and related writers, can be found at Bruce Edwards's "C. S. Lewis & The Inklings Resource Site" (<http://personal.bgsu.edu/~edwards/lewis.html>). Another very popular website, full of photos, biographical information, articles, news, and forums, is "Into the Wardrobe" (cslewis.drzeus.net).

Finally, no list of C. S. Lewis resources is complete with mentioning the ultimate resource for any serious researcher: the Marion E. Wade Center at Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois, which houses a vast collection of books, periodicals, photographs, letters, first editions, dissertations, and memorabilia. Besides, where else can you stick your head inside the wardrobe itself?

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 88: C. S. Lewis: Pointing People to Reality

Dorothy Sayers: "The dogma is the drama"

People Worth Knowing

An interview with Barbara Reynolds by Chris Armstrong

A gifted public communicator, Dorothy L. Sayers (1893-1957) believed that those who slept through church had no idea what dynamite the gospel really was. Through her plays and essays, she tried to get people to see, as she said, that "the dogma is the drama." And she succeeded brilliantly—opening up the power and truth of orthodox Christianity for many who had abandoned the lukewarm cultural faith of England's religious establishment. CH&B senior editor Chris Armstrong talked recently with Sayers's friend, biographer, and collaborator in Dante translation, Dr. Barbara Reynolds, from her home in England.

An accomplished scholar in her own right—for 22 years lecturer in Italian at the University of Nottingham, a Dante translator, and general editor of The Cambridge Italian Dictionary—Barbara Reynolds is also the president of the Dorothy L. Sayers Society (with a membership around 500), author of the New York Times notable book Dorothy L. Sayers: Her Life and Soul, and editor of five volumes of Sayers's letters. Dr. Reynolds's 1989 book, The Passionate Intellect: Dorothy L. Sayers' Encounter with Dante, is one of this interviewer's favorite works of intellectual biography.

What was Dorothy L. Sayers like as a person? The portraits of her that I have read leave the impression of a person who was larger than life—even intimidating.

She radiated intellectual ardor. Dante called this "the mind in love"—it was a gift Dorothy possessed all her life. This passionate intellectual energy could sometimes be quite overwhelming. She would come and stay with me, and we would talk and go out to meet people and come back late at night; then she would start on some very difficult point in Dante, such as Ptolemaic astronomy, what the position of the stars might be at a certain point; and this would go until two or three in the morning. I was a great deal younger then; I was 21 years younger than she was, and she was in her 60s. But she was going strong, and her mind was not missing a thing. Perhaps I mislaid a star or two, and she would say, "Where are your wits, woman?"

Exceptional, really. I have never met anybody who compared with her in energy and expanse of mind or breadth of vision. I was amazed at this great tidal wave that flowed over me, and when she had been to stay, I used to go to bed for a couple of days to recover!

One of the best-known creative products that flowed from this "tidal wave" of intellectual energy was her mystery stories, which have never been out of print. What is it about these that still compels and speaks to us today?

Certainly, she told stories masterfully—plotting with care and insisting on the "fair play" rule, by which readers are given enough evidence to solve the mystery by the end of the book. And her main characters, Lord Peter Wimsey and Harriet Vane, are both attractive and interesting figures. They develop and deepen—especially in that later sequence of novels which includes *Strong Poison*, *Have His Carcase*, and *Gaudy Night*. This is partly because Sayers wove the threads of her own experience, thoughts, and feelings into the fabric of their characters. This depth dimension in the characters fascinates readers, and they seek out other stories in the series.

But more important for Sayers than bare story were a number of recurring ethical themes that she wove into her tales. A good example of this is ***Gaudy Night***—one of her best novels. The story involves the dawning awareness on the part of Harriet Vane, an Oxford-trained scholar like Sayers herself, that no relationship can ever be sound that is not founded on the integrity of each party.

Harriet has continued to serve as a recognizable, living example of the modern, creative, independent woman, battling to reconcile the conflicting claims of the personal and the impersonal. Still today I hear many women, even young women, responding to ***Gaudy Night*** along these lines: "How is it that Sayers knows exactly what I feel?"

How did Sayers move from writing popular mystery stories to creating religious plays?

In 1936, Dorothy Sayers was invited to write a play for Canterbury Cathedral, where a series of dramas was being produced. One of these was the celebrated drama by T. S. Eliot, ***Murder in the Cathedral***. At that point, Sayers was known primarily for her mystery stories. She had written only a few poems related to the Christian faith, but Charles Williams, a member with C. S. Lewis of the famous Inklings group, had read and admired one of these early works—a brief poetic drama entitled "The Mocking of Christ"—and recommended her for the task.

Sayers consented, and the result was ***The Zeal of Thy House*** [published in 1937]—a story featuring the architect William of Sens, who had rebuilt part of Canterbury Cathedral after it was destroyed by fire in 1174. Sayers's lifelong motif of human creativity—its nature and its limits—first comes to the fore here.

And from ***Zeal***'s success came invitations to write other plays. One of these was the BBC radio nativity play ***He That Should Come***, broadcast on Christmas Day, 1938. A follow-up of 12 plays on the whole life of Christ, ***The Man Born to be King***, found even greater success, captivating audiences with its lively characterizations and realistic dialogue. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. William Temple, called these plays "one of the most powerful instruments in evangelism which the Church had had put into its hands for a long time past." C. S. Lewis admired them very much and used to read them every Lent. And even today they continue to be produced.

Two more plays followed, both well worth reading today: ***Just Vengeance***, which is in some ways her most difficult and rewarding play, and ***The Emperor Constantine***, which is still producible in shortened form.

When she began writing her plays, Sayers was not yet doing any of the lay theological writing for which she later became renowned. How did this happen?

In April 1938, following the success of her radio play ***He That Should Come***, the editor of the ***Sunday Times*** invited Sayers to contribute an article for Passion Sunday. She wrote "The Greatest Drama Ever Staged is the Official Creed of Christendom." This and a companion article, "The Dogma is the Drama," also published in April 1938 in ***St Martin's Review***, launched her into yet another career as a public apologist and theological writer.

A sentence from a letter Sayers wrote at the time gives you a flavor of these essays: "The dogma of the Incarnation is the most dramatic thing about Christianity, and indeed, the most dramatic thing that ever entered the mind of man; but if you tell people so, they stare at you in bewilderment."

How did her role as a public Christian writer expand in wartime?

As soon as the Second World War was declared, her publisher Victor Gollancz invited his most marketable author to write what he called "a wartime essay." She responded with a book of 152 pages titled ***Begin Here***. This book and a related series of books on national reconstruction that Sayers conceived and edited

—***Bridgeheads***, she called it—laid out four themes.

First, Sayers emphasized the irrevocable nature of time and the need for redemptive human activity: The future is here and now; the past is irretrievably gone; what has gone wrong cannot be undone, it can only be redeemed. Second, she placed creativity at the core of what it means to be human beings made in the image of the Triune God. Third, she grieved over how a mechanistic, capitalist society had devalued work from God-given vocation to a mere means of sustenance. She believed that a mechanized society has diminished the essential nature of human beings by imposing on them repetitive, numbing work. Fourth, she also believed that the prevalently economic structure of society had degraded education by directing it to commercial ends.

Underlying all these themes is a concern for individual freedom and responsibility, or what she called, in reference to Dante, "the drama of the soul's choice." Both the genre of the mystery novel and the peculiar powers of theater allowed her to portray people's moral choices in powerful ways. And, when she discovered Dante later in life, his masterful handling of this theme (among others) gripped her and drew her in.

Just as she objected to over-pious, precious portrayals of Jesus that hid his true humanity (she once observed, "At the name of Jesus, every voice goes plummy"), Sayers felt that both conformity and sentimentality prevented people from acting out of their own convictions and God-given creative energy.

Her chief solution was education. As she wrote in the Statement of Aims for ***Bridgeheads***, "Education which fits the citizen for peace must be taken at least as seriously as the armament which fits him for war, and the necessary expenditure of thought and money cheerfully incurred." Sayers insisted that out of human disaster and calamity comes the opportunity for fresh creative efforts: "the resurrection of faith, the revival of learning, and the reintegration of society."

You mention her work on Dante. It was this that brought you two together in the summer of 1946, when you, representing the Society for Italian Studies, invited her to come and give a talk on Dante for a summer school held at Cambridge University. How had this mystery writer and public theologian reached the point of giving scholarly talks on a medieval poet?

In 1943, Dorothy Sayers first encountered Dante through a book by Charles Williams titled ***The Figure of Beatrice***. The following summer, as the first bombs flew overhead, she brought Dante's *Inferno* with her into an air-raid shelter in her hometown of Witham, Essex. She had completed her B.A. and M.A.—among the first awarded to women students at Oxford—in French, and she more or less learned Italian in order to read Dante. In any case, she finished ***Inferno***—in Italian—in five days. She was 51 years old.

Almost immediately, Sayers wanted to produce a new English translation of Dante—a translation that was first of all readable, that would give people access to Dante's tremendous storytelling power. She also saw that Dante's ideas were relevant to the lasting truth of Christianity. The notes and commentaries in her Penguin translations of ***Inferno*** and ***Purgatory*** are not merely factual glosses, they interpret what Dante says in relation to what goes wrong with society at all times.

That is her chief originality, something that I tried to continue in volume three, and it may also be found in her volumes of papers on Dante, soon to be re-released by Wipf and Stock publishers. All in all, since they were published, Sayers's Penguin ***Divine Comedy*** has had at least two million English-speaking readers.

The theme of integrity—being true to oneself and, so to speak, to the Truth himself—seems to run throughout Sayers's work. You talked about that as a central theme in one of her best novels, *Gaudy Night*. Can you leave us with another example of how that manifested itself in her life and work?

Yes, I think we find this same concern for integrity in the way she put together her dramatic BBC radio

series on the life of Christ, ***The Man Born to be King***. Before the play had even been produced, the press began reporting that Sayers had put "slang" in the mouths of the characters in a particular scene. There was an immediate response: Concerned Christians—never having heard the play itself—began a letter-writing campaign designed to pressure the BBC into toning down their writer's language. Some even went so far as to charge Sayers with blasphemy.

Sayers responded to this criticism in a letter to Dr. James Welch, the BBC's director of religious broadcasting, who had requested that she create the plays in the first place: "Nobody cares ... nowadays that Christ was 'scourged, railed upon, buffeted, mocked and crucified,' because all those words have grown hypnotic with ecclesiastical use. But it does give people a slight shock to be shown that God was flogged, spat upon, called dirty names, slugged on the jaw, insulted with vulgar jokes, and spiked up on the gallows like an owl on a barn-door."

In her letter to Dr. Welch, Sayers confessed to being "frankly appalled at the idea of getting through the Trial and Crucifixion scenes with all the 'bad people' having to be bottled down to expressions which could not possibly offend anybody." The Roman soldiers, she insisted, "must behave like common soldiers hanging a common criminal, or where is the point of the Story?" I think this really exemplifies her deep conviction that we must be true to life both in our own artistic work and in our understanding of the Incarnation.

As it turned out, Welch saved the plays, supporting and defending Sayers staunchly through the ordeal. And when the public finally heard ***The Man Born to be King***, it responded in an overwhelmingly positive way. Appreciative, even rapturous letters poured in from listeners of all ages, with many listeners testifying that they had been deeply affected by the broadcasts.

That, I think, was only natural: Dorothy Sayers had written, as she always did, out of the courage of her convictions—refusing to back down or water down "the drama of the dogma."

Erasmus's Revolutionary "study Bible"

Edwin Woodruff Tait

October 31, 1517 is the date most people think of as the beginning of the Protestant Reformation—the date that changed Western Christianity forever, when Luther posted his 95 theses on the door of the Wittenberg Castle church. But at the time, the publication of Erasmus of Rotterdam's New Testament in the spring of 1516 might have seemed more important.

Today we would call Erasmus's work a "study Bible." It had three parts: the Greek text, which Erasmus edited; his new Latin translation, a more elegant and accurate alternative to the traditional Vulgate; and brief scholarly comments on exegetical issues. Erasmus prefaced this monumental work of scholarship with an exhortation to Bible study. The New Testament, he proclaimed, contains the "philosophy of Christ," a simple and accessible teaching with the power to transform lives.

In words that would become prophetic, Erasmus declared his disagreement with those who wanted to keep the Scriptures from the common people: "If only the farmer would sing something from them at his plow, the weaver move his shuttle to their tune, the traveler lighten the boredom of his journey with Scriptural stories!" Ironically, Erasmus's work was unintelligible to plowmen, or to anyone outside a small intellectual elite: Erasmus wrote exclusively in Latin.

Born in Rotterdam, Erasmus spent his life traveling throughout Europe, living in such cultural centers as Paris, Basel, and the university towns of Italy. Between 1499 and 1517, he spent about five years in Cambridge, England, doing much of the work on his New Testament. In England he found many of his warmest admirers. Sir Thomas More, author of *Utopia*, persecutor of Protestants, and future Catholic martyr, was a close friend, and English aristocrats (including church officials) frequently sponsored Erasmus's work.

Erasmus's ideas dazzled young English intellectuals. Like many of his fellow humanists, he began by studying the pagan classics. He then turned to the New Testament and the church fathers, believing that the Bible and the early church modeled a Christianity with more practical relevance for people's lives than academic speculations or popular rituals.

Bilney's bruised bones

One of the many young scholars whose lives were changed by Erasmus's work was Thomas Bilney, a Cambridge fellow who began reading Erasmus's Latin New Testament for the style, but soon found far greater value in the content. In Bilney's words: "Immediately, I seemed unto myself inwardly to feel a marvellous comfort and quietness, insomuch as my bruised bones leaped for joy."

Throughout the early 1520s, Bilney exercised a gentle yet powerful influence at Cambridge. The great preacher and eventual martyr Hugh Latimer, for instance, was converted to evangelical ideas through Bilney. His most influential convert initially, however, was Robert Barnes, who presided over lively theological discussions at the White Horse Inn.

Barnes was Bilney's opposite in personality. The gentle, ascetic Bilney slept only four hours a night and generally ate only one meal a day, saving the other meal for prisoners or other needy folk. He regarded

music as a frivolous diversion, and was sorely tried by a neighbor who played the recorder. Barnes, by contrast, was a jolly, talkative Augustinian friar, in his element quaffing beer with friends.

We do not know for sure who took part in the White Horse Inn discussions. But we do know that most of the leading names of early English Protestantism were at Cambridge at some point during the early 1520s, including (besides Bilney, Barnes, and Latimer) Thomas Cranmer and the biblical translators William Tyndale and Miles Coverdale. Through their translation (an important model for the King James Version), Erasmus's wish became reality in England: The Scriptures became the possession of ordinary Christians. But this happened at the cost of Tyndale's life, and he was only one among many of the "Cambridge Reformers" to pay such a price.

Thomas Bilney was the first of these reformers to pay for his beliefs with his life. He became a licensed preacher in 1525, and soon stirred up trouble by exhorting people to pray directly to God rather than asking for the prayers of the saints. Twice angry hearers dragged him from the pulpit. Cardinal Wolsey, the powerful ecclesiastical statesman whose arrogance did much to turn people against the Catholic church, hauled him in on two occasions for interrogation as a Lutheran, and on both occasions Bilney denied the accusation. He even swore an oath not to preach Lutheranism. Eventually, threatened with condemnation as a heretic, Bilney agreed to a public declaration of repentance and reconciliation with the church.

After his release, Bilney was plagued by such deep depression that his friends were afraid he would commit suicide. Convinced that he had denied Christ by confessing that his teaching was heretical, in the end he found peace by seeking a new condemnation.

A faith to die for

Bilney told his friends that he was "going up to Jerusalem," resumed open-air preaching, and began handing out copies of Tyndale's New Testament. He was arrested and condemned to death as a relapsed heretic, though Bilney saw himself not as a rebel against the Catholic church, but as a preacher of evangelical faith within it.

Thus the spiritual father of so many English Reformers died at the hands of the church he refused to leave, a martyr less to Protestantism (which on many points he never accepted) than to an evangelical faith born of the reading of Scripture and similar in many ways to the reforming Catholicism of Erasmus.

Unlike Bilney, Erasmus was incapable of being a martyr to either Catholicism or Protestantism. He hoped he would be able to die for Christ, he quipped, but was unwilling to die for Luther. The Protestantism that eventually triumphed in England in some ways resembled Erasmus's faith more than Luther's, but it was an "Erasmianism" sanctified by the blood of martyrs.

Continental Protestants have always found such English forms of Protestantism as Anglicanism and Methodism maddeningly untheological, and English-speaking evangelicalism is often faulted for its vague experientialism. But the combination of evangelical piety with what John Wesley called a "catholic spirit" and C. S. Lewis called "mere Christianity" remains a living and powerful force today. Bilney's example shows that a piety focused on the study of Scripture and the joyful leaping of bruised bones rather than on theological definitions can also give timid scholars the power to face the flames.

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 88: C. S. Lewis: Pointing People to Reality

Changed Lives

Why read Christian biography?

John Piper

Hebrews 11 is a divine mandate to read Christian biography. The unmistakable implication of the chapter is that, if we hear about the faith of our forefathers (and mothers), we will "lay aside every weight and sin" and "run with perseverance the race that is set before us." If we asked the author, "How shall we stir one another up to love and good works?" his answer would be: "Through encouragement from the living and the dead." Christian biography is the means by which "body life" cuts across the generations.

Good biography is history and guards us against chronological snobbery (as C. S. Lewis calls it). It is also theology—the most powerful kind—because it bursts forth from the lives of people like us. It is also adventure and suspense, for which we have a natural hunger. It is psychology and personal experience, which deepen our understanding of human nature (especially ourselves). Good biographies of great Christians make for remarkably efficient reading.

Biographies have served as much as any other human force in my life to overcome the inertia of mediocrity. Without them, I tend to forget what joy there is in relentless labor and aspiration. Before Jonathan Edwards was 20 years old, he wrote 70 resolutions which for years have fired my work. Number 6 was "to live with all my might, while I do live."

When I came to be pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, I began to hunger for biographies to charge my pastoral batteries and give me guidance and encouragement. Since I believe very much in the pastor-theologian, I recalled not only Edwards but, of course, John Calvin. How Calvin could work! After 1549, his special charge in Geneva was to preach twice on Sunday and once every day of alternate weeks. But what amazes me is that between 1550 and 1559 he took 270 weddings. That's one every other week! He also baptized (about once a month), visited the sick, carried on extensive correspondence, and sustained heavy organizational responsibilities. When I look at Calvin and Edwards and their output, it is hard for me to feel self-pity at my few burdens. They inspire me to break out of mediocre plodding.

George Muller, the 19th-century philanthropist who devoted his life to caring for orphans, has for years been a pacesetter for me in prayer. His Autobiography is a veritable orchard of faith-building fruit. In one section he tells us that, after 40 years of trials, "I saw more clearly than ever that the first great and primary business to which I ought to attend every day was to have my soul happy in the Lord."

For ten years, he explained, he went at this backward. "Formerly, when I rose I began to pray as soon as possible and generally spent all my time till breakfast in prayer." The result: "Often after having suffered much from wandering of mind for the first ten minutes, or quarter of an hour, or even half an hour, I only then began really to pray."

So Muller changed his pattern and made a discovery which sustained him for 40 years. "I began to meditate on the New Testament, from the beginning, early in the morning...searching into every verse for the sake of obtaining food for my own soul. The result I have found almost invariably this, that after a very few minutes my soul has been led to confession or to thanksgiving, or to intercession, or to supplication; so that though I did not, as it were, give myself to prayer, but to meditation; yet, it turned almost immediately more or less into prayer."

I have found Muller's way absolutely crucial in my own life: Be with the Lord before I am with anyone else, and let him speak to me first.

Living theology. Flawed and encouraging saints. Stories of grace. Deep inspiration. The best entertainment. Brothers and sisters, it is worth your precious hours. Remember Hebrews II. And read Christian biography.

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