

C.S. LEWIS
VIEWS FROM
WAKE FOREST

Collected Essays on C.S. Lewis

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EDITOR

C.S. Lewis Views From Wake Forest
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Introduction

Michael E. Travers

The essays in this volume have been selected from those delivered at the “C. S. Lewis: The Man and His Works, a 21st Century Legacy” conference sponsored by the L. Russ Bush Center for Faith and Culture at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina on October 26th and 27th, 2007. The conference brought together a varied group of C. S. Lewis scholars who spoke from multiple points of view. Speakers addressed Lewis from the standpoint of theology, philosophy, psychology, and literature—often in overlapping and mutually-beneficial ways; “Iron sharpens iron,” the wise man said (Prov 27:17). Conferees naturally found common ground in their appreciation for Lewis and his Christianity, and the exchange of various outlooks on Lewis provided a full-orbed appreciation of the man and a sharpened understanding of his writings. Now, in this volume, selected essays from the conference are gathered together to provide a lasting record of this multi-stranded perspective for thoughtful readers of C. S. Lewis.

Introducing the essays is an account of the history of the posthumous publication of C. S. Lewis’ works by the man best qualified to write the story—Walter Hooper. Walter Hooper is now the Literary Advisor to the C. S. Lewis Estate and has functioned very much in that capacity since the summer of 1963 when he served Lewis as his personal secretary. When Lewis died on November 22, 1963, Walter Hooper was home in the United States at the University of Kentucky and planning to re-join Lewis in January 1964. After Lewis’ death and with the encouragement of Austin Farrer, Warden of Keble College at Oxford, and his wife, Hooper returned to England to edit Lewis’ manuscripts. Hooper remains in Oxford to this day and is still performing the important duty of editing Lewis’ works. The narrative Hooper provides in his address, “Editing C. S. Lewis,” contains observations and

insights that are available nowhere else in print. Hooper not only chronicles the major publications of Lewis' works, he also creates a warm account that he alone, with his intimate knowledge of the history of Lewis publications, could provide. Encouraged by the reminder that "every new book helps to sell the old ones," Hooper pressed to have Lewis' works published in the years following his death. It would have been a tragedy, he thought then (and thinks more so now) for Lewis to have passed into literary oblivion. He had so much to say that needs to be heard. For Hooper, C. S. Lewis has never been dated; he never could be because he speaks to the essential humanity we all share, whatever our gender, ethnicity, or religion. The huge volume of Lewis publications in the last five decades, numbering in the millions and in multiple languages, has proven Hooper to be something of a prophet; he certainly gauged Lewis' works accurately, for Lewis speaks to the issues of life with a refreshing—and at time unnerving—clarity. Readers of Lewis owe much to Walter Hooper, and here is his account of the publication of Lewis' writings.

The remainder of the volume is divided into four parts—"C. S. Lewis as Social Critic—Philosophy, Psychology, Science and Ethics"; "Reasoned Truth and Truth Too Deep for Reason"; "The Baptized Cosmos—Narnia and the Ransom Trilogy"; and "Myths Retold—*The Discarded Image* and *Till We Have Faces*." In all, there are fifteen essays in these four sections which present a wide range of perspectives on Lewis. At the same time, the reader will be struck by the commonalities that tie the chapters together.

Part One looks outward. For many first-time readers of C. S. Lewis, Lewis may be primarily a writer of children's fantasy stories, science fiction, and mythological tales. Lewis did indeed write these kinds of stories, and he did so well. But this popular understanding of Lewis does not represent the whole man. There is more. In *An Experiment in Criticism*, published in 1961, Lewis says that imaginative literature helps us to see "with other eyes" (137), and thereby it enlarges our own moral sympathy and sharpens our own understanding. For those of us now who have the benefit of Lewis' "eyes," we can enlarge our sympathies and understand our condition from his perspective. In this first section, Lewis critiques public life and speaks to the public square. To be sure, Lewis wrote in the middle of the twentieth century, not in the twenty-first century, but much that is fruit in the culture of the early twenty-first century was seed in Lewis' day. And Lewis correctly identified the fruit in the seed. We can learn much about our contemporary culture and recognize our public responsibilities when we read Lewis' social criticism.

This “public square” section begins with James Como’s address, “Culture and Public Philosophy: Another C. S. Lewis.” Como sees Lewis as a realist about the “great decline” and cultural idolatry of the mid-twentieth century. Lewis analyzed his culture in as clear-headed a manner as he explained the beliefs of “mere Christianity,” and we can learn from his insights. In this chapter, Como looks through the eyes of the medieval monks who cultivated the wastelands of their day and, with this model in mind, presents a Lewisian guide for us as modern-day “monks” to civilize the cultural wasteland of our own day. For Como, Lewis is like a prophet who declares that we must be “emissaries” to the “ruined and ruinous” culture of our own day. The biblical admonition is to be salt and light (Matt 5:13-16), and Lewis proclaims that duty to us anew in the face of our own time and place. Como’s comments on Lewis are a tonic, providing a bracing antidote to those who might merely enjoy Lewis’ fiction for its own sake and not heed his cultural critique—a critique that resonates so singularly well in our own day. Lewis takes the long view and the outward view, Como demonstrates, and so should we.

In “The Hangman’s Duty: C. S. Lewis on Christian Citizenship in Wartime,” Justin Barnard offers an analysis of Lewis’ thinking about a Christian’s responsibilities in times of war. Lewis’ observations about war, while grounded in the particular conflicts of his time, have an always-contemporaneous ring to them, for he thinks in terms of universal principles that apply to all warfare. Barnard analyzes Lewis’ practical comments on a Christian’s duty in war-time, making explicit a tacit principle in Lewis’ thinking that is helpful to us today. Specifically, Barnard sees a principle of “epistemic moral certainty” in Lewis’ writing on the subject that not only helps explain Lewis, but may be helpful to us today as well. In truth, Barnard’s analysis of Lewis helps us get past the counter-productive impasse of those with differing positions who think the other party is merely stating ungrounded assumptions and drawing “conclusions” that are, in point of fact, merely personal preferences. Barnard’s article looks in two directions—an understanding of C. S. Lewis and a helpful perspective on our own time.

Taking up Lewis’ controversial position—and one that is opposed to the modernist orthodoxy of Lewis’ day and our own—that we should be suspicious of science, Michael Muth draws on Lewis to think about the place of science in our own culture. “Can Science Be Saved? C. S. Lewis on Science, Magic, and Ethics” dares to think about the most entrenched idol of modern and post-modern times, science, and ask what its limits ought to be. For some people, particularly those with a naturalistic worldview that disavows any supernatural or transcendent realities (or those who regard such supernatural

realities, if they exist, as irrelevant in any event to our lives here and now), we cannot ask moral questions of science. In fact, they say, we should not ask such questions. For others, science must be limited by certain ethical and moral parameters that address issues that are fundamental to our humanity. In his chapter on Lewis' comments on science, Muth provides a balanced analysis of what Lewis actually said about science and "scientism" and then considers how Lewis' thinking might offer a framework for us to think about science and its implications today. Because science and technology are even more pervasive today than in Lewis' time, the problem of science is more acute for us now. Lewis' characteristically clear thinking about science blows away the smokescreens and looks squarely at the issues themselves.

The final essay in the public square section is Byron Brown's "The Colour of Things in Dark Places': C. S. Lewis and the New Science of Psychology." By the time Lewis was converted to Christianity, psychology had won the day in the academy and become the entrenched orthodoxy of modernism. The dominant strain of psychology in Lewis' day—and in our own—was one based on philosophical materialism and naturalism. For a "science" grounded in such presuppositions, the "real" was to be understood as what is material and temporal. But what if, alternately, the "real" were the spiritual and transcendent? Lewis asks. Brown develops the implications of such a reversal and examines them in Lewis' works, particularly those with an autobiographical element to them, and then considers how Lewis might provide perspective to those people today who believe in transcendence and yet wish to make sense of the human mind. As with the other chapters in the "C. S. Lewis as Social Critic" section, Brown "looks along" Lewis as Lewis "looks at" modern culture and by doing so finds helpful tools for our time.

From Lewis as social critic, Part Two turns our attention to Lewis as Christian theologian and apologist—Lewis presenting and defending "the faith that was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). Lewis' defense of the faith ran along multiple tracks: he offered rational arguments, he pressed moral arguments, and he expressed the longing for God which is there in every human heart (Augustine 3). At the same time, Lewis himself never claimed to be a professional theologian; he protested on more than one occasion that he was simply a layman helping other laymen understand the basic tenets of "mere Christianity" (Preface, *Mere Christianity*, viii; Introduction, *Reflections on the Psalms*, 1). He claimed he did not wish to meddle in what he thought were the finer points of theology; these, he stated, were reserved for the "real experts" (Preface, *Mere Christianity*, viii). In fact, Lewis may have been more an apologist than a theologian. Even in his apologetics, however, he is

conscious of his limitations and does not presume too far. He saw himself simply as a “translator—one turning Christian doctrine...into the vernacular, into language that unscholarly people would attend to and could understand” (“Rejoinder to Dr. Pittenger” 183; cf. “Christian Apologetics” 98). Lewis was acutely aware that apologetics could be dangerous to the apologist, for his pride might get the better of him and he might come to think that he actually understood profound spiritual truths when they still contained an element of mystery (“Christian Apologetics” 103; “The Founding of the Oxford Socratic Club” 128; letter of 2nd August 1946 to Dorothy Sayers, *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*, Vol. 2, 730). Even granting Lewis’ humility as an interpreter of Christianity and as an apologist, however, it is still this Lewis—the theologian and defender of the faith—whom many readers know. Without a doubt, C. S. Lewis is one of the twentieth century’s most popular Christian writers, and he produced a major body of work in apologetics.

The section on C. S. Lewis as theologian and apologist begins with an unflinching and nuanced examination by Bradford Mercer of Lewis’ understanding of divine sovereignty and human responsibility. In “Compulsion and Liberation: God’s Sovereignty and Human Responsibility in the Writings of C. S. Lewis,” Mercer considers the apparently conflicting claims that Lewis made at various times in his life on a subject that has divided great theologians and separated denominations. Mercer’s analysis of Lewis’ work is both representative and comprehensive, and it is faithful to the contexts in Lewis’ works. The subject is a difficult one at best, and Lewis’ writings on the matter cannot be reduced to a superficial sermon. He knew that the issue of divine sovereignty and human responsibility was a complex and ultimately mysterious one. Readers of this essay will come away refreshed in their appreciation of Lewis’ articulation of Christianity at the center where, he claims, “her truest children dwell” (Preface, *Mere Christianity*, xii).

The second essay in this part is Gregory Anderson’s “*Reflections on the Psalms*: C. S. Lewis as Biblical Commentator.” *Reflections on the Psalms* (1958) is Lewis’ only piece of biblical commentary. Because it comes late in Lewis’ life, Anderson suggests that the claims of some scholars and biographers that Lewis gave up on apologetics and theology in 1947 appear to be unfounded, for Lewis’ ability to make spiritual matters accessible to the general reader prove to be unabated in his commentary on the Psalms. In fact, *Reflections on the Psalms* gained him an invitation from Lambeth Palace to join The Commission to Revise the Psalter. While we may not agree with every claim that Lewis makes in *Reflections on the Psalms*, the work is a helpful antidote to those scholarly works which tend to atomize the biblical texts, for it begins

where all effective studies on the Psalms arguably should begin—with the Psalms as coherent and unified poems. As poems, Lewis claims and Anderson demonstrates, the Psalms appeal to their readers by combining ethics, emotion, and logic. The point is that the Psalms employ more than reason to communicate, and this understanding is one of the contributions Lewis makes to their study. Anderson's study of Lewis' work on the Psalms opens up these three ways of entering the world of the Psalms and understanding them as they were composed. Christians throughout the ages have loved the Psalms, and Anderson explicates how Lewis "rehabilitates" the Psalms for modern Christians who may not know how to appreciate the Psalms appropriately.

The next chapter tackles a subject that, for many in our culture, is a social issue. For Lewis, however, it was a spiritual matter. How does Lewis understand hierarchy and how do his understandings of hierarchy help us today—or even fit our culture at all? These are the questions that Steve Boyer considers in "A Kneeling and a Sceptered Love: Lewis' Perilous Passion for Inequality." A superficial reading of Lewis has resulted in more heat than light on this subject, for his opponents brand him as a misogynist and see his claims about hierarchy as merely a smokescreen for male power over women. Boyer demonstrates, however, that Lewis' understanding of hierarchy is much larger and deeper than gender, for hierarchy is grounded in the created order—or, more properly stated, in the relationship of God and his creation. That relationship is, necessarily, unequal—and it is this inequality which is built into creation. Lewis celebrates this inequality and encourages modern people to do the same. Were Boyer (or Lewis) to leave it at that, however, might hierarchy not become dangerous? Could it not encourage political, social and sexual abuse? Of course; history is full of examples of such abuse. The abuse of hierarchy and inequality, however, is not a reason to reject it altogether. In this chapter, Boyer looks critically at Lewis' comments on inequality and hierarchy and offers perspective for us today on this vexed subject.

The last chapter in this section demonstrates the expansive scope of Lewis' spiritual view and the effectiveness of his Christian witness in his writings. In "Wilderness, Arcadia and Longing: Mythic Landscapes and the Experience of Reality," Kip Redick considers how the landscapes in Lewis' fiction evoke spiritual longing—what Lewis often called *Sehnsucht*—in the reader. Of course much has been written on Lewis' expression of "the argument from desire" or the spiritual longing for God inherent in all people of all times and in all places. In this chapter, Redick defines and explains spiritual longing, shows how Lewis' landscapes evoke it, and outlines the tradition in which Lewis is writing. Redick comments on the landscapes in the Space Trilogy,

Narnia, and *Till We Have Faces* which stir up the reader's spiritual longing. The only disappointment in this chapter is that Redick does not write more.

Part Three, "The Baptized Cosmos—Narnia and the Ransom Trilogy," explores some of what Lewis wrote on the longing we all share for something this world cannot satisfy. Lewis once wrote that "all the leaves of the New Testament are rustling with the rumour [sic]..." of a reality grounded in God Himself ("The Weight of Glory" 37). In a similar vein, he believed that all of nature and all of our experiences "rustle" with hints of God, attracting us to Himself. For Lewis, one way God draws us to Himself is by creating in us a desire that only He can satisfy. St. Augustine confesses his similar conviction that God made us in such a way as to be incomplete without Him—and we know it instinctively (*Confessions* 3). We sometimes call this notion "The Argument from Desire." The argument proceeds like this: there is a desire in the human heart which nothing in this world can satisfy; all desires were made to be satisfied; if nothing in this world can satisfy the desire in the heart, then it must be satisfied by something in another "world." Lewis came to understand that it is not "something" in another world that satisfies this spiritual desire, but it is God Himself who satisfies it (*Surprised by Joy* 221-227). He often referred to this desire that cannot be satisfied with such words as *longing*, *joy*, or *Sehnsucht*. To use another of Lewis' favorite images, we live in the "Shadowlands," and our real "home" is with God. He is the real Reality, and we long to be re-united with him. For writers like Lewis—and countless others—God provides hints of Himself in everyday objects and events. In the third section of the book, "The Baptized Cosmos," we look at longing and joy in Lewis' fiction.

Part Three begins with Samuel Joeckel's "The Spirit of Comedy in *The Chronicles of Narnia*." Starting from what some readers might think an unlikely source, the ancient Greek god Bacchus, Joeckel suggests that in *The Chronicles of Narnia* Lewis expresses wildness and laughter as good things. Now Bacchus in many ancient accounts is given to drunken revels and lewdness. Joeckel suggests, however, that Bacchus is tamed in Narnia and comes to represent a healthy impulse in the good characters of the stories. Laughter and joy in Narnia are cleansed of their impurities and become simply delightful expressions of goodness and joy; they are "baptized," as it were.

It is not all joy and laughter in Narnia, however. Even in these children's stories, Lewis faces squarely the evil side of things. Longing for God is good, but that same longing is often twisted into sinful desires that destroy the image of God in us, not build it up. Longing cuts both ways. It is this side of Narnia that Elizabeth Hardy considers in her essay, "A High and Lonely

Destiny: Sources for Jadis, the White Witch, in Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*." Hardy examines two English writers whom Lewis admired—Edmund Spenser and John Milton—and in their poetry she finds prototypes of Jadis and demonstrates the literary lineage of Lewis' White Witch. Despite her claims to power and priority, Jadis is a pretender to the throne of Narnia and a trickster. Like Satan in *Paradise Lost*, to choose one of the prototypes Hardy comments on, Jadis has twisted the naturally good longings for deity into a desire for her own divinity. Aslan does not fill her with joy as he does Peter, Susan, and Lucy Pevensie early in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*; rather, he fills her with hatred and fear. Hardy's analysis of the earlier analogues to Jadis in Spenser and Milton enriches our understanding of Jadis and our appreciation of what Lewis is doing with her character. Jadis and the other evil characters in *The Chronicles of Narnia* are the reasons why the cosmos must be "baptized" if it is to be joyful.

Too bad Philip Pullman does not see it that way. In his fantasy trilogy, *His Dark Materials*, Pullman offers an alternative to Narnia which inverts all that is good in Narnia. Taking his cue from Pullman's trilogy, David Rosenberg offers an incisive and up-to-date analysis of how Lewis presents the created order in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Is the created order in Narnia evil or good? Is Pullman correct in his claims that Lewis denigrates the material world so as to elevate heaven? What is the relationship of God to his creation? These are Rosenberg's starting points. Rosenberg's essay goes in two directions, analyzing Pullman's *His Dark Materials* with singular clarity and explaining Lewis' appreciation of the created order as one of God's self-revelations. What better world than Narnia in which to come to such an appreciation? Rosenberg shows us one way in which Narnia helps us think afresh about our own world.

For the writer of the last chapter in this section, two of Lewis' novels in the science fiction trilogy, *Out of the Silent Planet* and *Perelandra*, not only suggest a baptized cosmos; they incarnate it. In "Why Wells is from Mars, Bergson from Venus," Sanford Schwartz demonstrates that Lewis removes us from earth to the other planets so that we can "re-view" the cosmos and our place in it from a thoroughly transformed perspective. In Schwartz's fresh reading of the science fiction trilogy, Lewis begins with the modern ideas of Darwinian evolution and Bergsonian cosmic development and transforms the natural into the spiritual. Readers go along for the inter-planetary ride, as it were, finding their own modernist assumptions challenged, shown to be wanting, and finally re-shaped in terms of the Christian tradition. What was it Lewis said about "smuggling theology past the watchful dragons"?

Part Four reminds us that Lewis taught medieval and Renaissance English literature at Magdalen College, Oxford from 1925 to 1954 and at Magdalene College, Cambridge until a few months before he died in 1963. While he is known popularly for his apologetics and his fiction, he wrote scholarly works that were significant contributions to the field and, of course, he wrote fiction and poetry himself. We might say he was a practitioner as well as a scholar. Lewis' first work of literary scholarship, *The Allegory of Love* (1936), was an influential study of the allegorical love poetry of the Middle Ages. A few years later, he "rehabilitated" John Milton's important Christian epic for the modern reader with the publication of *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (1942)—still an accessible and helpful introduction to the great poem for modern students, many of whom know little about Milton's Christianity and who may even be hostile toward it. And in 1954 he published the magisterial *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama*—a comprehensive and fresh look at an important period of English literature. This final section looks in two directions—first to Lewis' understanding of the medieval worldview and then to his last novel, *Till We Have Faces*.

This last section begins with Lewis' explanation of the medieval model of reality. In "*The Discarded Image: Patterns of Truth and Fantasy*," David Hogg asks two questions. First, did the people of the European Middle Ages have a coherent model of reality? And, if so, did Lewis get it right? Lewis had good reasons for writing about the worldview of medieval Europe—not only to describe its great beauty, but also to help us see that we moderns also have a perspective from which we view our world. We would do well to take Lewis' hint and look at our own modern model of reality. We may not spend much time thinking consciously about the way we look at the world, but our understandings of it are framed in a largely naturalistic and materialistic way that excludes the transcendent; like others before us, we have certain blind spots. Hogg re-examines modern culture by seeing it alongside medieval culture with Lewis as his guide.

In "The Classical Sub-text in *Till We Have Faces*," Ian Storey helps us understand Lewis' last novel which was sub-titled, "A Myth Retold." To be sure, Lewis "re-tells" the ancient Greek myth of Cupid and Psyche—this much is readily apparent. It should come as no surprise to us either then that he would suffuse allusions to classical literature and mythology throughout the novel, for one of his university degrees, we should remember, was in the "Greats"—classics, philosophy, and ancient history. Like countless other writers before him, Lewis "married" his Christianity with classical Greek and Roman literature, expressing the one through the other. He is in good

company here, from Augustine and Aquinas to Luther and Calvin, and from Chaucer and Shakespeare to Dante and Milton. Storey's analysis mines one rich vein of Lewis' imagination and deepens our appreciation for *Till We Have Faces*.

Complementing Ian Storey's explanation of classical allusions in *Till We Have Faces*, Stephen Yandell explains the novel's medieval affinities. The idea that the novel would reflect medieval influences should not surprise us any more than finding its classical allusions, for Lewis was a medievalist by profession. Specifically, Yandell discovers motifs and patterns in the fourteenth-century anonymous *Pearl* poem which are paralleled in *Till We Have Faces*. The multiple layers in the novel, its loss-and-regain patterns, and even its dream-vision motif echo the *Pearl* poem, and understanding the earlier poem helps us understand the novel. Readers of Michael Ward's *Planet Narnia: The Seven Heavens in the Imagination of C. S. Lewis* will find in Stephen Yandell's study another layer to enrich their re-reading of Lewis's last work of fiction.

It has been said often, but that does not make it less true: C. S. Lewis was a man for all times. He wrote about matters that were universal in significance, and he did so in ways that made difficult issues accessible to all people of good will. Theology and philosophy, psychology and ethics—he spoke to their central issues with insight and clarity. He was truly a man for all seasons. He was also a man for all readers, for he communicated in multiple types and registers of writing—imaginative fiction, poetry, literary criticism, apologetics, biblical exegesis, social criticism, satire, and hundreds of letters. The essays in this volume reflect the breadth of Lewis' writings. At the same time, Lewis' Christian faith gave him a unified and coherent voice, so it comes as no surprise that the present essays demonstrate a remarkable coherence. When Lewis wrote social criticism, he did so from a Christian perspective. In his apologetics, he remembered what he had learned early in life as an atheist and provided Christian answers to universal questions. In his imaginative writings, Lewis incarnated a spiritual longing in his characters and evoked that same spiritual longing in his readers—certainly one of the reasons why his fiction is perennially popular. Finally, Lewis positions himself squarely in the great, central Christian tradition in Western literature, helping his readers think about the important issues of life from this perspective. Lewis' Christianity permeated every aspect of his character, unifying all he thought and wrote. “I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen,” Lewis said in “Is Theology Poetry?,” “not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else” (106).

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