

# *Touchstone*

Volume 31

October 2013

Number 3

## C.S. LEWIS COMMEMORATIVE

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## Editorial

John F. Kennedy was assassinated on Nov. 22, 1963. That same day C.S. Lewis died. The coincidence of the two events meant that Lewis's death and his contributions as scholar, novelist and Christian apologist went largely unremarked. This overshadowing is utterly understandable, but it is another factor functioning to obscure the importance of Lewis's contribution to Christian thought and practice. This edition of *Touchstone* commemorates Lewis, and seeks to assert his continuing importance to Christian faith and witness.

In our lead article, distinguished Lewis scholar Gilbert Meilaender addresses the question of Lewis as theologian. *Touchstone* board chairperson Rob Fennell considers Lewis as an interpreter of the Bible, turning our attention to some of the shorter essays and personal correspondence. In a format new to our readers, Adam Kilner presents an interview with priest and poet Malcolm Guite.

Many Christians first meet Lewis through the best-selling Narnia series, and, in particular, the first volume, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Our column, "From the Heart about the Heart of the Matter," is an appreciation of *The Lion* by teen reader Mia Sams. Lewis's foray into fiction, of course, included his adult fantasy, the Cosmic Trilogy; Michelle Robinson alerts us to the surprisingly contemporary spiritual and moral relevance of the tales.

The profile, by William Haughton, is of Alice Hogman, an extraordinary "nobody." She was among the women who, a generation after the ordination of Lydia Gruchy, took up the challenge of exercising an ordained ministry to which they believed God had called them. *Touchstone* readers will appreciate her courage and faithfulness all the more because she was the mother of our founding chairperson, the late John Hogman. Along with our usual book reviews, Ross Bartlett's review article on the new (electronic) *United Church Manual* is included.

This number is jam-packed, and so this editorial is brief indeed. May you be stimulated and blessed in your reading!

*Peter Wyatt*

## **C.S. LEWIS AS THEOLOGIAN**

**by Gilbert Meilaender**

“One is sometimes (not often) glad not to be a great theologian. One might so easily confuse it with being a good Christian.”<sup>1</sup> This statement, rather similar to other asides in the writings of C.S. Lewis, captures something important about his thought. He was certainly not a professional theologian, and, if we attend to his own description of the nature of theology, we may well want to say that he writes not theology but (very sophisticated) religious reflection. In any case, however we choose to describe his approach, the influence of Lewis’s writings has not diminished over time; on the contrary, it continues to increase.

When, as a graduate student in the Department of Religion at Princeton University, I completed my doctoral dissertation on Lewis in 1976, I was aware that my choice of topic seemed strange to some—perhaps many—of the department’s faculty.<sup>2</sup> Lewis’s thought did not seem to them to merit such sustained attention. As Alister McGrath notes in his recent biography of Lewis, the prominence that Lewis had enjoyed in the 1940s and 50s seemed by then to have faded. “It would be unfair to suggest that Lewis was written off by 1970. Perhaps a more reliable judgment would be that the surging tide that had once swept Lewis to public attention now withdrew . . . Lewis was not discredited; he was simply sidelined.”<sup>3</sup> Fifty years after Lewis’s death, however, it is clear that it would have been premature to suppose that his standing would continue to decline. Quite the opposite, in fact. Taking account of this reality, McGrath titles his concluding chapter “The Lewis Phenomenon.”

### **Lewis and Theology**

There is not, I think, much insight to be gained from trying to decide whether Lewis is properly called a theologian or whether his writings

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<sup>1</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (NY: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1958), 57.

<sup>2</sup> The dissertation, somewhat revised, was later published under the title, *The Taste for the Other: The Social and Ethical Thought of C.S. Lewis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978).

<sup>3</sup> Alister McGrath, *C.S. Lewis. A Life: Eccentric Genius, Reluctant Prophet* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2013), 365-66.

should be classified as theology.<sup>4</sup> If we take seriously what he himself says about the nature of theology and theological language, we might better describe much of his writing as religious rather than as theological.

Theologians unfold doctrines about who God is and what God does. What they provide, Lewis suggests, is something like a map.<sup>5</sup> Studying the map is not necessarily a moving experience and is not likely to help us feel closer to God. It may, in fact, be pretty far from the faith, love and hope that believers feel. Still, the map is important. It is important, in part, because it is based not on how one believer happens to feel or experience God, but on the experience of many. Still more, it is needed if we want to make progress in the faith. The map helps us avoid wrong turns that are likely to lead away from, rather than toward, deeper communion with God.

In addition, the language of ordinary religious reflection is often quite different from strictly theological language. Lewis develops this point in the incomplete, posthumously published essay, “The Language of Religion.”<sup>6</sup> There he develops a distinction between ordinary language (“It was very cold”) and two other kinds of language, each of which transforms ordinary language in the interest of certain purposes. Scientific language (“The temperature was -5 degrees Fahrenheit”) aims at a precision lacked by our ordinary speech—a precision that we can quantify and test, and that can be used to settle disputes about how cold it actually is. But this scientific language does not itself give us any sense of how a very cold day “feels,” a sense of its “quality.” If I have spent my entire life in a tropical climate, and you tell me that it is -5 degrees Fahrenheit where you live, such language will not help me know what it feels like to be there.

Ordinary language might do a little better in communicating this

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<sup>4</sup> Alister McGrath examines these questions in chapter 8 of *The Intellectual World of C.S. Lewis* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013). I think, however, that some of the other chapters in this volume shed more light on Lewis.

<sup>5</sup> For this image and the discussion that follows, see “Making and Begetting,” the first chapter in Book IV (“Beyond Personality”) of *Mere Christianity*.

<sup>6</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Christian Reflections*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 129-41. The essay is incomplete because several pages in the middle of the text were missing from the manuscript edited by Hooper after Lewis’s death.

“feel.” “Your ears will tingle.” “It will hurt just to breathe.” But poetic language exists in large part to try to improve ordinary language on just this point: to convey the quality, the feel, of experience. Lewis uses a poem of Keats as illustration:

Ah, bitter chill it was! The owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold;  
The hare limped trembling through the frozen grass,  
And silent was the flock in woolly fold:  
Numb'd were the Beadsman's fingers.

This language cannot be quantified or tested, but it may, Lewis suggests, convey information that can be given in no other way. It may even convey the quality of experiences we ourselves have never had.

Religious talk, like all talk, begins with ordinary language, but, depending on our purposes, it may quickly turn in directions more like the scientific or the poetic. Theological language, as Lewis describes it, is, strictly speaking, an alteration rather like the scientific. It seeks a precision that is needed and useful for clarifying uncertain or disputed points and for settling disagreements. As such, it is absolutely necessary. Indeed, its precision can be a thing of beauty. But one thing it cannot do: it cannot by itself convey understanding of what, by its very nature, transcends our ordinary experience. For that we need language that is religious but not, in this sense, theological—language more like the poetic. To say “He makes me lie down in green pastures” is such language—religious, though not exactly theological.

With that distinction in mind it makes sense to think of Lewis's writings more as religious than as theological. Rather than providing a map, he is “touching doctrine with the glow of imagination.”<sup>7</sup> Or, as Austin Farrer put it, “[Lewis's] real power was not proof; it was depiction. There lived in his writings a Christian universe that could be both thought and felt, in which he was at home and in which he made his reader feel at home.”<sup>8</sup>

It is this poetic and imaginative exploration of Christian faith that

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<sup>7</sup> Paul S. Fiddes, “On Theology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to C.S. Lewis*, eds. Robert MacSwain and Michael Ward (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 94.

<sup>8</sup> Austin Farrer, “In His Image,” in *C.S. Lewis at the Breakfast Table and Other Reminiscences*, ed. James T. Como (New York: Macmillan Collier Books, 1979), 243.

gives to so much of Lewis's writing a catholicity and breadth that is part of the secret of its power. Since he is not drawing a map, he is free to enter imaginatively into the central mystery of Christian faith (what in *Miracles* he calls "The Grand Miracle" of the Incarnation). He finds hints and intimations of it in the religious experience of many peoples. Hence, he can say quite simply: "I couldn't believe that nine-hundred and ninety-nine religions were completely false and the remaining one true."<sup>9</sup> Or, less simply, but more characteristically, he writes that we would "expect to find in the imagination of great Pagan teachers and myth-makers some glimpse of that theme which we believe to be the very plot of the whole cosmic story—the theme of incarnation, death and rebirth."<sup>10</sup>

If this is the central mystery of Christian faith—that God has taken the stuff of our everyday life into his own life—then every moment of life is lived in the presence of the Eternal. In every moment of life we are "advancing either to heaven or to hell," and those high stakes are played out in the most mundane of decisions.<sup>11</sup> Lewis's ability to see that, and help us to see it, is part of the enduring power of *The Screwtape Letters*. The important choices in life seldom present themselves in extraordinary appearance. "It does not matter how small the sins are, provided that their cumulative effect is to edge the man away from the Light and out into the Nothing. Murder is no better than cards if cards can do the trick. Indeed, the safest road to Hell is the gradual one—the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts."<sup>12</sup>

This sense that eternal issues are at stake in the mundane choices of our everyday life gives to much that Lewis writes a power that cannot be ignored. When "night falls on Narnia" and we get the great scene of final judgment, all the inhabitants of that world have no choice about one thing. All must march past Aslan and look upon him. Some see there

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<sup>9</sup> C.S. Lewis, *God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), 54.

<sup>10</sup> C.S. Lewis, "Is Theology Poetry?" in *They Asked for a Paper: Papers and Addresses* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1962), 158.

<sup>11</sup> C.S. Lewis, "Learning in War-Time," in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965), 44.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

the face they have always longed to see, which they have learned to love, and they enter Aslan's world. Others see there a face they can only hate, for that is the sort of person they have become. They go off into nothingness. Every choice counts. Every choice contributes to determining what we ultimately love.

### **The God Who Hurts**

We have not yet, however, touched upon what I regard as the most powerful and compelling religious theme in Lewis's thought. It is not the theme that first made his religious writings prominent. Indeed, although it is present even in the early writings, it is especially prominent later in his life and can be stated quite simply.

The Christian life hurts. God hurts. That, I think, is what Lewis really has to say, and it is the deepest reason for the power of his writing.<sup>13</sup> "[T]he Divine Nature wounds and perhaps destroys us merely by being what it is," Orual reflects in *Till We Have Faces*.<sup>14</sup> This theme—that God hurts—is perhaps most pronounced in some of Lewis's latest works, especially in *Till We Have Faces*, *A Grief Observed* and *The Four Loves*. Nor is it absent from the Narnia Chronicles. In *The Magician's Nephew*, for example, Digory is forced to choose between obedience to Aslan's command and an action that may save the life of his dying mother.

We could try to avoid this pain by holding on to the beloved—if only in memory—as if she were ours, our possession. That would, of course, be futile, and, still more important, it would be to miss the call of God that comes to us in and through the loved one. It would be to mistake the gift for the Giver. Or we could try to avoid this pain by telling ourselves that there has been no real loss. God's will has been done, and the loved one is now better off. But, true though this is from one angle, it obscures the truth of our experience. Lewis puts the point

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<sup>13</sup> It is, I think, a serious flaw in Alister McGrath's (in other ways) excellent biography of Lewis that it so shortchanges this theme. Although the theme can be found much earlier in Lewis's work (in, for example, *The Pilgrim's Regress* and *The Problem of Pain*), it is especially prominent in three late works: *The Four Loves*, *Till We Have Faces* and *A Grief Observed*. Of these, only *A Grief Observed* receives any sustained attention in McGrath's biography.

<sup>14</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Till We Have Faces: A Myth Retold* (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1956), 284.

very directly in *A Grief Observed*:

If a mother is mourning not for what she has lost but for what her dead child has lost, it is a comfort to believe that the child has not lost the end for which it was created . . . A comfort to the God-aimed, eternal spirit within her. But not to her motherhood. The specifically maternal happiness must be written off. Never, in any place or time, will she have her son on her knees, or bath[e] him, or tell him a story, or plan for his future, or see her grandchild.<sup>15</sup>

This theme—of the tension or rivalry between our natural loves and love for God—is given its most systematic treatment by Lewis in *The Four Loves*, a book rich in insight for Christian moral theology. What makes *The Four Loves* so powerful is that Lewis by no means contents himself only with noting the possible rivalry between particular loves and love for God. With each of the natural loves that he takes up—affection, friendship and erotic love—he begins by depicting for us the sublime within the everyday. Thus, he finds in each of the natural loves an image of what divine love itself is in part. We see one facet of God’s love, for example, in the indiscriminating character of affection. Given familiarity over time, almost anyone can become an object of affection. Hence, this love manifests an implicit openness to the worth of every human being. Friendship, by contrast, is clearly a discriminating love, for we are friends only with certain people whom we have chosen for particular reasons. But, at the same time, friendship is, unlike affection, the least jealous of loves. Our circle of friends will be open to anyone who shares the interest that binds us together, and in that sense friendship is implicitly universal. If affection is jealous but indiscriminating, and friendship is discriminating but not jealous, *eros* is both discriminating and jealous. How, then, might it image for us divine love? In selfless devotion *eros* plants “the interests of another in the centre of our being. Spontaneously and without effort we have fulfilled the law (towards one person) by loving our neighbour as ourselves. It is an image, a foretaste, of what we must become to all if Love Himself

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<sup>15</sup> *Till We Have Faces*, 24.

rules in us without a rival.”<sup>16</sup>

Thus, Lewis’s first move is to evoke the beauty and the splendour of the natural loves, the way in which they give pleasure. And surely, part of the hold of this book upon several generations of readers has been its ability to evoke delight—to help us appreciate the beauty of the natural loves and find in them shafts of the divine glory. But Lewis’s discussion never stops there. He never forgets that “the Divine Nature wounds and perhaps destroys us merely by being what it is.” And so, with each of the natural loves he notes also its insufficiency—the way in which, even and especially at its very best, it may go wrong. Affection is prone to jealousy and wants to possess the loved one. Still more, it needs to be needed. In affection we desire only the good *we* can give, which is not always the good the loved one needs. The love of friendship is always tempted to exclusivity. Rightly excluding those who do not share our special interests, we may easily take pride in our circle of friends and come to value exclusivity for its own sake. And so powerful, almost godlike, is the claim of *eros* upon us, that we may do great injustice in its name. Left to itself, *eros* is likely to be fickle and unfaithful, to work harm and wreak havoc in human life.

Therefore, the natural loves, beautiful and splendid as they are in themselves, must be transformed by charity, by love of God. They must be taken up into a life directed toward God and be reborn—transformed and perfected as “modes of charity.” Lewis’s concluding chapter on charity in *The Four Loves*, among the most powerful pieces of his generally powerful prose, is a haunting depiction of the way in which this needed transformation is likely to be painful. We say that the natural loves are transformed and perfected, but that language does not quite capture the truth of our experience. It may sometimes feel more like death, as if the natural loves must be put to death so that a new life marked by charity can arise.

Even at their very best, therefore, the natural loves fall short. In themselves they are good, but they were never meant to be simply “in themselves”—to be isolated from the God-relation, to be anything other

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<sup>16</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1960), 158.

than modes of charity. In our sin we do isolate and idolize them, refusing to recognize that they are and must remain *creaturely* loves. Because we do so, we will sometimes experience the transformation of our loves as painful. When God redirects them to himself, it hurts. We can, of course, say, with perfect justification, that this redirection is a restoration of them to what they are meant to be. It is a liberation of their true beauty and is in the service of their genuine flourishing. In the Augustinian language that underlies Lewis's treatment in *The Four Loves*, it is the restoring of inordinate love to right order, the restoration of harmony between nature and grace. All true—and truly said. But we cannot always—perhaps not even often—experience this restoration simply as liberation and fulfillment. For all that is “far away in ‘the land of the Trinity,’” and we remain pilgrims on the way.<sup>17</sup> Along that way, nature may often seem wounded by grace.

When, in the theological struggles to which the Reformation gave rise, Protestants depicted a nature so thoroughly corrupted by sin that death and rebirth were necessary, Roman Catholics sometimes thought that this demonstrated an insufficient appreciation of the continuing goodness of creation; of its ability to point us to God. And so, Roman Catholics responded by saying that “grace does not destroy nature, but perfects it.” That is, over against an image of death and resurrection they set an incarnational image—not a destruction of the natural life and a new birth, but the natural life taken up into and perfected within a graced life.

Lewis, mere Christian that he seeks to be, sees the worth of both pictures of the Christian life—and sees it quite profoundly. The deepest truth is captured, he suggests, in the belief that, because the natural life is God's good gift, he will not destroy but perfect it. The natural loves are transformed when they become incarnate as modes of charity. But the sense that our natural loves must die and be reborn also captures the truth of our experience, that is, what this transformation may feel like. It hurts.

Lewis's most haunting depiction of nature wounded by grace

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<sup>17</sup> *The Four Loves*, 191.

comes in one of his least read books, *Till We Have Faces*. Before the story is over, Orual comes to see the harsh truth about her love for Psyche and others. It has been a “gnawing greed.” She comes to see that the kingdom of Glome “was a web—I the swollen spider, squat at its center, gorged with men’s stolen lives.”<sup>18</sup> Yet, her natural loves of affection, friendship, and *eros* were not mere selfishness. They were, in some ways, the natural loves at their best. As Lewis once put it in a letter to Clyde Kilby, Orual is an example of “human affection in its natural condition, true, tender, suffering, but in the long run tyrannically possessive and ready to turn to hatred when the beloved ceases to be its possession.”<sup>19</sup>

Sin builds its throne at the heart of what is best in our nature, and, then, when God draws us toward himself, we may feel the way Orual felt when the Divine surgeons went to work on her. What she experienced was loss and suffering—so great, indeed, that she finally cried out: “That there should be gods at all, there’s our misery and bitter wrong. There’s no room for you and us in the same world.”<sup>20</sup> Striving for independence; striving to isolate her natural loves from the only context in which they could ultimately flourish, Orual had been making war on the reality principle of the universe. How can the gods meet us face to face, she finally asks, till we have faces? She had to be broken to be transformed.

I do not believe there is any theme more central to Lewis’s vision of human life in relation to God, and I think there are very few Christian writers who have managed as well as he to evoke simultaneously in readers both an appreciation for, and delight in, our created life, and a sense of the pain and anguish we feel when that life is fully redirected to the One from whom it comes. “To love at all,” Lewis wrote in *The Four Loves*, “is to be vulnerable . . . The alternative to tragedy, or at least to the risk of tragedy, is damnation. The only place outside Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love

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<sup>18</sup> *Till We Have Faces*, 276.

<sup>19</sup> *Letters of C.S. Lewis*, ed. W.H. Lewis (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1966), 274.

<sup>20</sup> *Till We Have Faces*, 291.

is Hell.”<sup>21</sup> The whole of life, therefore, every ordinary and everyday moment of it, every choice that we make, is charged with the significance of an eternal either/or. This means, I guess, that no moment is simply ordinary.

Here, I think, we find one of the chief reasons for the remarkable staying power of Lewis’s writings. He is not exactly writing theology for the masses. In fact, in the strict sense, he can hardly be said to be writing theology. He gives us something better: the feel, the quality, of a life truly lived before God—in all its splendour, terror, pain, and possibility. Thus he invites us to enter into that “mystical death which is the secret of life.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> *The Four Loves*, 169.

<sup>22</sup> *Miracles*, 135.

## **“THE BIBLE WILL BRING US TO CHRIST”: C.S. LEWIS AS AN INTERPRETER OF SCRIPTURE**

**by Robert C. Fennell**

If you or I had written to C.S. Lewis while he was living, he would almost certainly have answered the letter personally. And if we had asked him how he interpreted the Bible, he might well have said that he didn't: he merely read it. It is not because Lewis was a dolt and didn't understand that reading nearly always means interpreting in some way. It is because he would be the first to say that he was neither a biblical scholar nor a theologian, and it was not his business to teach anyone how to interpret the Bible. He called himself a “professional literary critic,” a “literary historian,” and “extremely ignorant” about contemporary theology and biblical interpretation.

Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that Lewis knew very well, and often read, the Bible, especially after his adult conversion (or return) to Christian faith around the age of thirty-one or thirty-two. Moreover, he was continually exposed to biblical citations and allusions in at least three ways: 1) his regular church attendance at Holy Trinity Church in Headington, near Oxford, where he lived; 2) his professional work at Oxford, then Cambridge, as a teacher of English literature, a literature replete with themes and language borrowed from the Bible; and 3) his belonging in the broader English society, which was not yet as completely rinsed of biblical reference, even in the daily newspapers, as our North American society now is. My admiration for Lewis's work and for a number of aspects of his life suggests to me that it is worthwhile trying to puzzle out what he did, or believed, about biblical interpretation. Given his affection for Scripture, it is somewhat surprising how little has been written about Lewis's engagement with it. But there is certainly no place in his large corpus of writing to which we can point and say, “Here is Lewis's systematized view on interpretation.” Like many Christian thinkers, he just *does* interpretation without commenting much on the process.

Quite a bit could be said about Lewis's treatment of Scripture, or of biblical themes, in his well-known fiction. Both the Narnia stories and

the space trilogy offer much fruit in this way. However, I wish to turn to two other, perhaps less-known, sources: a few of his short essays, and some of his personal correspondence.<sup>1</sup> From these, I hope to show that Lewis variously used, critiqued and also ignored the tools of twentieth century scholarly biblical criticism; that he employed both literary criticism and wisdom about human nature to inform his understanding of the Bible; and that he remained humble (and urged humility) about what can and cannot be said about Scripture.

Lewis, despite his remark about his ignorance,<sup>2</sup> was not a stranger to the critical tools of “higher” biblical criticism. He showed his awareness of those tools, and was alternately appreciative and impatient concerning them. The appreciation was often on the historical side, as he observed, for instance, that most of the Psalms were written after the Babylonian exile, and were not really from the hand of King David, as had been traditionally thought.<sup>3</sup> He was alert to the discrepancies in the Bible as a whole, as in the differing genealogies of Matthew and Luke, and the dissimilar accounts of Judas’ death in Matthew and Acts. He knew well the problems of translation and corrupted manuscripts. He disputed claims that the Bible was inerrant (but did believe in the virginity of Mary and the miracles of Jesus, and was roundly critical of those who precluded the possibility of miracles even before opening the text). He seems to have known the details of the problem of the relationship among the Synoptic gospels, and largely agreed with the findings of those who studied it. (“Of course we agree that passages almost verbally identical cannot be independent”). Lewis also applied the tools of literary criticism in a sophisticated way, which is no surprise, given his training and skill as a scholar of literature. He noted the similarities of form, style, content and genre between the Magnificat of Mary and the much older Psalms, for example.

Lewis’s impatience with the tools of higher criticism is evident,

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<sup>1</sup> Examination of his extensive work in *Reflections on the Psalms* will have to wait for another article.

<sup>2</sup> Lewis, “Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism,” in *Christian Reflections* (London: G. Bles, 1967), 152.

<sup>3</sup> Lewis, “The Psalms,” in *Christian Reflections*, 114.

however. He found the professional biblical scholarship of his day, and the recent past, to be often unhelpful to the cause of the Christian way, and even anti-Christian:

The authority of experts in [New Testament criticism] is the authority in deference to whom we are asked to give up the huge mass of beliefs shared in common by the early Church, the Fathers, the Middle Ages, the Reformers, and even the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup>

Lewis noted, with not a little understatement, that he was “sceptical” of that authority, for it is “hard to persevere in a close study [of the Bible] when you can work up no *prima facie* confidence in your teachers.”<sup>5</sup> In short, much of the approach and the conclusions of nineteenth and twentieth century biblical criticism were, to Lewis, contrary to the gospel and its purposes in the world. Those purposes, to use a term that Lewis would not have, were *evangelical*:

It is Christ himself, not the Bible, who is the true word of God. The Bible, read in the right spirit and with the guidance of good teachers, will bring us to [Christ]. When it becomes really necessary (i.e. for our spiritual life, not for controversy or curiosity) to know whether a particular passage is rightly translated or is myth . . . we shall no doubt be guided to the right answer. But we must not use the Bible . . . as a sort of Encyclopedia out of which texts (isolated from their context and not read with attention to the whole purport of the books in which they occur) can be taken for use as weapons.<sup>6</sup>

The purpose of Scripture, in the end, is not to be excellent history or flawless philosophy, for “the over-all operation of Scripture is to convey God’s word to the reader . . . who reads it in the right spirit . . .” But Lewis did not believe that “it *also* gives true answers to all the questions (often religiously irrelevant) which [a reader] might ask . . . The very *kind* of truth we are often demanding was, in my opinion, never even

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<sup>4</sup> “The Psalms,” 153.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>6</sup> Lewis, “To a Lady [8 November 1952],” in *Letters of C.S. Lewis*, ed. W.H. Lewis (London: G. Bles, 1966), 247.

envisaged by the ancients.”<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, it is unfair to criticize the Bible as unreliable history or poor philosophy. In short, Lewis was careful to regard the Bible as a particular kind of literature—literatures, really—which functioned in a particular way. We cannot expect it to do everything we might like it to do. Thus our manner of reading it has to correspond to the kind of literature it is. In this, I would say Lewis anticipated Hans Frei and the New Criticism by several years.<sup>8</sup> He also pre-empted Frei by arguing that the gospels’ unusual form resembles the realistic-fiction novel (which first appeared c.1850) far more than any other genre that existed prior to the nineteenth century. Commenting on John’s gospel account, which includes odd details like Jesus “doodling” in the dust (8:6) and records that “it was night” when Judas left Jesus’ final Passover meal (13:30), Lewis concluded of the gospel genre as a whole that

[e]ither this is reportage—though it may no doubt contain errors—pretty close up to the facts . . . Or else, some unknown writer in the second century, without known predecessors or successors, suddenly anticipated the whole technique of modern, novelistic, realistic narrative. If it [the gospel account] is untrue [as Lewis contended that many Biblical scholars had suggested], it must be narrative of that kind. The reader who doesn’t see this has simply not learned to read . . . These men ask me to believe they can read between the lines of the old texts; the evidence is their obvious inability to read (in any sense worth discussing) the lines themselves.<sup>9</sup>

Accordingly, Lewis’s resistance to conventional historical-critical tools can also be seen. Writing on various biblical details about which a correspondent was evidently concerned, Lewis noted that the “prayer recorded in Matthew [26:36-46] is much too short to be long enough for

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<sup>7</sup> “To Professor Clyde S. Kilby [7 May 1959],” in *Letters*, 287.

<sup>8</sup> See Frei’s brilliant *The Identity of Jesus Christ* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975) for more on aligning reading styles with biblical genres.

<sup>9</sup> “Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism,” 155, 157. To remedy this fault, Lewis directed the reader to Erich Auerbach, probably meaning the latter’s *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, which was also influential for Hans Frei.

the disciples to go to sleep! *They record the bit they heard before they fell asleep.*<sup>10</sup> It is hard to know here if Lewis was unaware of, or simply rejected, the argument that the prayers in Gethsemane are a theological construction by the gospel writer. It is very unlikely that he is trying to be clever or ironic, for the rest of the letter is quite earnest. So I would conclude that he simply accepted, at least here, the factual veracity of the Matthean record. In the same letter, Lewis noted that “it is probable that all the gospels are based on acts and sayings which the disciples deliberately learned by heart: a much surer method even now than transmission by writing . . .”<sup>11</sup> Again, here he tipped his hand toward trusting that the gospels relate the literal words uttered by Jesus.

In another instance of his uncritical approach, Lewis mused over whether Adam was created as the first human, was “the son of anthropoids” or pre-humans in the evolutionary chain, or was a hermaphrodite.<sup>12</sup> It does not seem to occur to him to treat Adam as a cosmological or theological archetype, composed for literary reasons to illustrate Hebrew theological convictions. If I were more aligned with the Lewis approach, I suppose at this point I would have to admit, “But who is to say there *wasn't* a real man called Adam?” He was impatient with the modernist assumption that since much of the Bible can be read spiritually or allegorically, it *must* therefore be wholly non-literal or non-historical. But in cases like this one, concerning Adam, Lewis leveraged his former agnosticism effectively, and he advised his readers, “We must take our ignorance seriously.”<sup>13</sup> Lewis was neither merely a literalist nor a fideist, and he insisted he was *not* a fundamentalist. The text could and did err. And there were places, to be sure, in which a spiritual or non-literal reading was the only possibility (as in Jonah or Job, for example).

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<sup>10</sup> “To Mrs. Frank L. Jones [1947],” in *Letters*, 211; emphasis added. This would be very hard to argue in the case of verse 44: “So he left them [sleeping] and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.” If they were asleep the third time and not awakened, presumably they did not hear the third iteration of the prayer! Lewis was uncharacteristically careless in his observations here. However, these remarks appear in what is surely a pastoral (and casual) letter from him, and not scholarly exegesis.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

<sup>12</sup> “To Sister Penelope [10 Jan 1952],” in *Letters*, 237.

<sup>13</sup> “Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism,” 166.

Lewis acknowledged the strangeness of biblical literature and the distance between us and the ancient cultures in which it was written. This is a cornerstone of modern interpretation, one which The United Church of Canada asserted vigorously in *The Lordship of Jesus*.<sup>14</sup> But Lewis was not content to leave it at that. Given our awareness of this strangeness, one interpretive move made by Lewis that is tremendously helpful is that he did not allow the critical tools and the necessary acknowledgement of cultural distance to become insurmountable obstacles for a contemporary reader. He pressed the question: “What good can we find in reading such stuff?”<sup>15</sup> The short answer, for Lewis, is that the good in reading the Bible arises from discovering in it God’s grace in the midst of our ordinary and extraordinary lives and concerns. The Bible is a help to us, day in and day out, in our growth in grace and holiness.

Another of Lewis’s interpretive gifts was astute insight into human nature. Some insights came from personal experience and observation; much, I would argue, came from his long and profound reading of literature, in which the themes of good and evil, life and death, struggle and liberation, degradation and redemption are continually on display. (Incidentally, this is one of the reasons that, for a long time, the study of literature was regarded as among the best preparations for theological studies en route to ministry: one can learn a great deal about real people and how they behave by reading good fiction.) Because he knew human nature so well, Lewis could read the Bible as a record of the very human, humble, and broken-and-yet-being-healed authors and their communities (and nations) interacting with a loving and merciful God. Even though Psalm 109 is “as unabashed a hymn of hate as was ever written”<sup>16</sup> we need not dismiss it or any portion of Scripture on that basis. Even if the Psalmist here were full of hate and desiring misfortune for his enemies, Lewis reckoned that such verses help direct us to

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<sup>14</sup> David Lochhead et al., *The Lordship of Jesus: Report of the Committee on Christian Faith to the Twenty-Seventh General Council of the United Church of Canada* (Toronto: The United Church of Canada, 1978).

<sup>15</sup> “The Psalms,” 118.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

understanding our own role in causing the suffering and pain of others—others who might feel wronged and troubled as the Psalmist does. Rather than letting us dismiss the author and his Psalm, Lewis turned the tables (as he so often did in his writing) and pointed back to the ruptures in human relationships that sin brings about: “I am inclined to think that we had better look unflinchingly at the sort of work we have done.”<sup>17</sup> He iterates the relational pain that we cause one another; the evils of colonialism; and the injustices anyone with power-over can perpetrate without even being aware of them. These, and our other sins, are as much on display as the pain expressed as vindictiveness in the Psalmist’s maledictions. To such observations Lewis brought the theological and spiritual wisdom for which he is justly famous. He described the need for forgiveness, for example, to serve as the hinge of reconciliation; for neither we, nor those who are our “enemies,” are without sin. He wrote of the justice of God which is beyond our understanding, but which in the end will provide a better outcome than we can imagine.

Though a significant scholar in his own right, and—despite his protestations—a decent theologian himself, Lewis remained humble about what he could not understand in the Bible. He knew that questions about matters like predestination or salvation by faith alone, without works, were not easily resolved, even with close consideration of the biblical witness. Despite all his facility in philosophy and languages and literature, and all his faith, some of the Bible still stumped him:

I take it as a first principle that we must not interpret any one part of Scripture so that it contradicts other parts, and specially we must not use an apostle’s teaching to contradict that of Our Lord. Whatever St. Paul may have meant, we must not reject the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matt. 25:30-46). There, you see there is nothing about predestination or even about Faith—all depends on works. But how this is to be reconciled with St. Paul’s teaching, or with other sayings of Our Lord, I frankly confess I don’t know.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> “The Psalms,” 119.

<sup>18</sup> “To Mrs. Emily McLay [3 August 1953],” *Letters*, 251.

In claiming a kind of agnosticism about such matters, Lewis revealed his humility before the text and the mystery of God that underlies it. When there are perplexing passages (e.g., those that seem to cast God in a malicious light, even though we believe in a loving and gracious God), Lewis advised that

behind the shocking passage be sure there lurks some great truth which you don't understand. If one ever *does* come to understand it, one sees that it is good and just and gracious in ways we never dreamed of. Till then it must just be left on one side.<sup>19</sup>

He applied this advice to himself as well, even with all the critical acumen and knowledge he had at his disposal. This contrasts markedly with the modernist tendency to try to *master* information, and indeed to subdue it. Lewis, the great scholar, counted himself among the “little ones” who are “baffled” by parts of Scripture.

This brief survey of Lewis's approach to the Bible is a skimming of cream from the milk. It gives us some of the rich draught that Lewis offered, but we need a deeper read of his corpus to appreciate the depth of his biblical engagement. The fiction, in particular, is a place I would want to look at some length, though my reading of his fiction suggests to me that it is more like a doctrinal, rather than exegetical, excursion. One of the beautiful integrations Lewis made among faith, Scripture and his writing was his lovely, lifelong and deep infatuation with *story*: narratives that embed the Great Story of God's love and redemptive acts. His generous and gentle appreciation of story was perhaps at the heart of his resistance to overly technical approaches to the sacred text.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 253.

<sup>20</sup> Many thanks to Heather Ferrier for her excellent assistance with research for this article.

## **“THE BAPTIZED IMAGINATION”: THE INFLUENCE OF C. S. LEWIS**

### **AN INTERVIEW WITH MALCOLM GUITE**

**Conducted by Adam Kilner**

*Malcolm Guite (rhymes with “kite”) is a poet, priest and singer-songwriter. He is Chaplain of Girton College and Associate Chaplain of the Church of St. Edward King and Martyr in Cambridge, as well as author of Sounding the Seasons: Seventy Sonnets for the Christian Year. He collaborated with Winnipeg singer-songwriter Steve Bell for the Advent, Christmas and Epiphany album, “Keening for the Dawn.” Deeply influenced by Lewis, Malcolm Guite practises his ministry and his literary craft at the interface between faith and culture. Some of his comments on his own craft and his intriguing commitment to the sonnet form appear in our insert pages. Interestingly, Guite spent some of his teenage years in Hamilton, Ontario, and attended a United Church there. Adam Kilner interviewed him for Touchstone during Holy Week this year.*

**AK:** When did you first encounter Lewis's writing?

**MG:** Well, like a lot of people, I encountered Lewis as a kid. I had my dad, I think, read to me, when I was really quite young. I think he probably read *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* to me and I was just completely enchanted. I didn't read anymore until, at the end of high school, I started realizing I loved poetry and wanted to study English literature. So we had been studying Milton, studying *Paradise Lost* . . . great, but it is quite challenging. So I picked up a book at the school library—I see this book called *A Preface to Paradise Lost*—Lewis. I didn't even figure it was the same Lewis, you know. Then I read “C. S. Lewis”—could it be the same as . . . ? Then I read this book of literary criticism explaining Milton and it was just brilliant. It was the most comprehensible, clearly written, enlightening book about literature that I had ever read.

Now what I didn't realize is that it was also teaching me a lot of theology, because as I was reading his explanation of Milton I'd actually given up on my faith at that time. And I came up to Cambridge where he himself had been a professor and his picture was still there on the steps of the English faculty. Then discovered that this same C.S. Lewis, whose Narnia books I loved, whose books about literature I thought were the best written academic literary criticism I had ever read, also wrote theology. Books like *Mere Christianity* and *The Screwtape Letters*. And suddenly it's like a three-pronged attack. I didn't want to be a Christian again, but the best author I'd ever read, and the most persuasive, is coming at me from three angles.

And actually, after I had become a Christian again, I picked up what was for me one of the most significant Lewis books, *Surprised by Joy*, which is just like a spiritual autobiography. And at that point I suddenly go, "Not only does this guy take and persuade me, but I really resonate with him personally, because there's a line in that book where he's talking about how he gave up his faith, and how he tried to substitute loving English literature for his faith, and how he discovered that the literature he loved best was written by Christians. And he actually says at one point, in a phrase I will never forget, "I suppose in a way my imagination was baptized before I was; the rest of me just took a little longer to follow along." Words to that effect, I'm quoting from memory. My imagination was already on God's side.

So, subsequently, you know, when I was beginning to write a little bit of literature and literary criticism myself, I saw that Lewis was neglected, not by Christians, but neglected by mainstream academia, and I began to join with one or two other slightly rebellious English academics of whom, I guess, another leading one would be Michael Ward, a friend of mine. One of the things I did was to contribute, along with Michael Ward, to a book, *The Cambridge Companion to C.S. Lewis*—Lewis finally, you know, gets the kind of book he deserves. And so I wrote the chapter in there on C.S. Lewis as a poet, and tried to put him a little more into the mainstream.

AK: So, you've gotten to his scholarly study of English lit.—how about

apologetic writings, adult fiction, fiction for children?

MG: I read some of the apologetic writings. I read *Mere Christianity*. I read *Screwtape Letters*, and then I read *Miracles*. I just liked his voice, as it were. Now I have to say the full-on knock-down argument style apologetics didn't get me in the same way that actually the fiction, and funnily enough, the space fiction did. I thought *The Problem of Pain* was a problematic book and in the end I think Lewis came to feel the same himself. Don't get me wrong: I think rational apologetics is important. I don't think you can prove—I don't think you can get the fullness of the Christian faith by a series of logical syllogisms, entirely by the workings of the human mind. But . . . because I believe the Christian faith is true, if you accept the revelation of who God is in Jesus Christ and the witness, then, from that you can reason. You can say, “If I believe this is true then what follows?” So you reason from the faith, and reasoning from the faith should allow you to get a big consistent workable picture of the world, which actually turns out to be, in some ways, more consistent and more workable than the one that starts someplace else.

Theology has been beautifully defined as *fides quaerens intellectum* (Anselm said that)—faith seeking understanding. But earlier on, St. Augustine, who's a big influence on Lewis, said *credo ut intelligam*, “I believe in order to understand.” But I felt Lewis doing what he once called “my bow-wow dogmatism.” “You can't believe this, but I've now demonstrated you must believe this—there you go.”

And later I came across an amazing poem written toward the end of Lewis's life called “An Apologist's Evening Prayer” in which he says, “from all my victories . . . from all my lame defeats, but so much more from all my victories . . . good Lord deliver me. Never let me mistake my own little arguments for your beautiful grace.” Or words to that effect, recognizing that even the most perfectly reasoned argument could end up accidentally putting God into the little box of human reason.

So one of the really interesting things to see is where the Narnia books come into Lewis's life. For all of us, the Narnia books come first and then we read the big rational books like *Mere Christianity*, right? But for Lewis, it's the other way around. The Narnia books come later in

life. He's already written the big rational books, and it's in the fifties that he's writing the Narnia books—or late forties and early fifties. In his maturity, at the height of the powers of his mind, deciding to tell a fairy story and get the truth through that. And I think that's really interesting. I think that's Lewis himself intuiting that, actually in an over-rationalistic culture, even though he's provided some very good rationalistic arguments, the deeper need is for, what he called, with his friend Tolkien, mythopoeia—making stories that give you the truth by indirectly pointing to it.

AK: So he was also in conversation with Tolkien at the same time. And Tolkien, from what I've heard, was not that big a fan of Narnia. He didn't think it made sense.

MG: No, he wasn't and didn't. But Lewis and Tolkien are incredibly important for each other.

AK: How so?

MG: In different ways. The first thing to say is that Tolkien was an essential player in the moves that God made to bring Lewis to Christianity. Lewis was an atheist when he met Tolkien, and Lewis says that he would have had every reason to be prejudiced against Tolkien. In the English faculty Lewis was a literature guy; Tolkien was a language guy. It's a faculty thing. Literature guys don't trust language guys. Lewis was of Protestant, Northern Ireland stock. Tolkien was a Catholic. [Lewis] brought that whole anti-papist thing out of Ireland that was almost in his blood. He actually says in his autobiography that he had a couple of reasons to be suspicious of this guy. And it's clear that the Lord, the Spirit, even though Lewis was an atheist, overruled that. Like the guys becoming friends, you know, in spite of the fact that socially you wouldn't have expected it to happen.

Then, of course, Lewis realized that Tolkien loved exactly the same northern myths and legends that he loved. So, actually, although in the deepest wisdom of God it was Christ who brought them together,

they thought it was Thor and Odin and Loki, you know, and the legends of Asgard, and they actually got together through a thing called the Coalbiters, about Icelandic sagas. And the first way that they started was with Lewis learning Icelandic from Tolkien so that they could read these sagas together. So they had this common love. Then a really significant thing happened with Tolkien and another guy called Hugo Dyson, a famous encounter in Addison's Walk, in the late twenties where Lewis stopped being a full-on atheist—he kind of believes there's some sort of grand idea of Being that might be God, but is probably not personal. And he knows he loves myths and legends, but he can't see how that has anything to do [with faith], and he loves particularly one of the myths and legends, the one about Baldr (also Balder, Baldur), a god who dies.

So, he knows he loves that stuff, but he doesn't believe it's true, and he says to Tolkien one day that it's all lies, although it's lies breathed through silver. And Tolkien goes, “No, no. Myths are not lies; they're truths told in their particular way.” And they began to have this conversation in Addison's Walk—Tolkien and Lewis and Hugo Dyson. Tolkien said something to Lewis on that occasion which was one of those total keys to unlock a dilemma. Because Lewis was saying, “I don't know how the life and death of some guy 2000 years ago makes any difference to me; it's just another historical event.” And Tolkien went more or less to the effect that “You know that the story of Baldr the beautiful moves you to tears—this one who is a god who dies—but you accept it as myth—it's not true. On the other hand, you have history, which has none of the resonance of myth. Has it occurred to you that in the story of Jesus, myth, this constant story that you love; that you find in every culture about a god who dies and goes down . . . maybe one day it was written in history?” And then he said, “The poet, the ordinary human poet, when they're trying to tell a story, writes it down in words; they can't make the characters actually happen in history, but that's God's pen and paper, for telling the great story, and is an historical event. So that in the death and resurrection of Jesus this great mythos, this story, is also fact—it's also history.”

Now one of Lewis's whole problems was that he had this divide between a subjective world of beautiful poetry and myth, and an

objective world of hard, cold scientific fact, stuff that happens. And he couldn't make any kind of bridge between them. So he lived in this divided world, completely divided against himself. Then one evening's conversation put into Lewis's mind that there might be one place in the whole cosmos and one person through whom those two divided worlds just rush together and become one. And that person was Jesus Christ. And that was a really powerful thing for Tolkien to say to him.

But those two were incredibly important for each other. And if you want to know how those friendships really worked, you should read Lewis's essay on friendship in *The Four Loves*. I think that's the best picture you'll ever get on the way his relationships worked.

AK: What's the legacy of the Narnia books?

MG: Well, again I'd say, "baptized imagination." I think any child who reads the Narnia books has just been given a series of beautiful and good images. Images of the good itself, particularly in Aslan. They're always going to be there in their minds. People say it's very difficult to write well about goodness. It's much easier to write vividly about evil. You know, William Blake famously said that John Milton was of the devil's party without knowing it because his Satan seemed to have so much more energy and pizzaz and courage than his Christ. There's no doubt that Lewis knew not only how to describe goodness, but to revel in it and see glory of it and love it. When the children have a romp with the risen Aslan, it's just fantastic.

AK: So what's the part of Lewis's work that connects with you most deeply?

MG: The fiction choice is from the Narnia books, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. That journeying, that stage, and that image of the land beyond the setting sun and Reepicheep going out brings tears to my eyes and that's the most evocative for me of the goodness of the heavens. And so I'm going to dwell richly in that book all of my life . . . I spent a lot of time at sea when I was a little kid, because I was born in Africa and

brought up there before we moved to Canada, and we went back and forth by sea to England, and I've got a real feel for ships and the sea.

Non-fiction: I think there's a neglected and seriously prophetic book. Prophetic in the sense of speaking out now, speaking truth to power, pointing to the real dangers and evils in society, but also prophetic in the genuinely foreseen developments that have subsequently come. And that is a very short book called *The Abolition of Man*. And it's a book made out of three lectures that he gave in the forties. And in that book he points to the serious danger of our using technology to totally redefine what it is to be human . . . He saw our manipulative designing of our own humanity out of ourselves, our unmaking. And he sees the danger of it; he sees the philosophical reasons for it, and he sees a return to a sense of what he calls the Tao—the law; natural law. We have to get out of the poison of subjectivism. We have to recognize that certain things are good and true in themselves and that we can't just decide culturally to make them into something else.

He was saying that we may have defeated the Nazis, but we haven't defeated the eugenics idea. And the other book that goes with that, from his science fiction trilogy, *That Hideous Strength*, is the novel version of what he is saying in *The Abolition of Man*. And I think we haven't done enough work yet on that; we need to have some books written about what is going on in genetic engineering. What's going on in a kind of silent eugenics, whereby we just do these tests before people are born and the abortion of people who are deemed to be defective, even though Down syndrome people, for example, are radiating love and joy, and showing us a different way. So, I think he really put his finger on that. But it's not the usual C.S. Lewis book, full of beautiful imagery and you feel good when you've finished reading it. It's a wake-up call. And I think that's a book we really need to pay attention to—*The Abolition of Man*.

AK: What has Lewis's influence been on mainstream Christians, as compared to evangelicals?

MG: I think it's probably bigger than people realize. There's a huge number of people who've read Narnia, and whose deep core ideas about goodness come from that book, even though they don't quite realize that they do. But I think that this year is going to be very significant. This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of Lewis's death; maybe it takes fifty years to look back and notice how good somebody is.

The publication of the *Cambridge Companion* is one example. He's going to be inducted into Poet's Corner this November in Westminster Abbey. I'm feeling amazingly honoured, and slightly daunted, that I've been asked to give a lecture accompanying that. So maybe, at last, the church is looking back and saying, "Oh, this guy is broader, more progressive, greater than we realized." You can't just say he was a funny, pipe-smoking guy in a tweed jacket that was of his day. I think we're in for a new golden age, really, of Lewis studies.

AK: So envision Lewis today. Let's just say he was his same energetic self from pre-Narnia; where would he be putting his energy today?

MG: Wow, now that's a really good question. I think he would be addressing constantly the split in our culture between, if you like, science and the arts, between, if you like, public truth and private faith. He would be saying, "There's one truth; there's one God. You don't need to have these as separate things; you need to build bridges between them." I think he would have a go at the whole idea that science is objective and the arts are subjective. I think he would not be trying to write lots of devotional books for people who are already believers in their little corner. I think he would be out there arguing for truth in the public square, talking about the objective truth of what we're talking about. Putting the ideas up for grabs, as he did in Oxford when he ran that Socratic Club, as it was called, where he would regularly invite well-known atheist and anti-Christian speakers to debate with him in open and in public. He would be like St. Paul at Mars Hill in Acts 17.

I think he'd be like St. Paul in another way also. You remember he was debating with everybody, including the Stoics. Remember he said, "Men of Athens, I see that in all ways you are very religious. As I

observed the objects of your worship I saw this statue to an unknown god. He whom you worship as unknown, him therefore I preach.” So what Paul was able to do there was to find somewhere in what was already going on in the culture, a little kernel of the goodness that could open them to God. Even though I think he'd be having good debates, I think he'd also be looking for the hidden good, the little bit of the hem of Christ's garment, if you like, in all sorts of different cultural phenomena, and saying, “Let's work with that, let's start with that,” because, after all, that's how he was brought to faith. The bit of Christ that was already in the pagan myths that he loved was what brought him through. I've heard people say, “How would he react to multicultural society?” I think he would have loved it actually; I think he would have welcomed the opportunity. If he could have had a Hindu neighbour or a Rasta neighbour or whatever, he would sit down and say, “Tell me the stories; tell me the good stories.” And he would be listening to those stories and thinking about where is Christ in those stories. I think he's much less hidebound and xenophobic than he's sometimes portrayed as being.

AK: That's a beautiful way of summing it up. My last question: what advice might Lewis give a liberal Protestant church like The United Church of Canada, or The United Reformed Church in the UK, about its witness today?

MG: I think he might say two things. I think the first thing he'd want to say is, “Think deeply about what the word liberal means.” Where the Spirit is, there is freedom. To be liberal in the sense of generously looking for the good in others; looking at those ways and places in which people in any way are entrapped and enclosed, and trying to set them free, is a good thing. Right? That's what liberal means. *Libera nos a malo*—“Deliver us from evil.”

But liberal came to mean, as it were, less strong, or watered down, or fudged, or hazy. That's not what liberal means. Liberal is a really strong, clear idea, right? Now, Lewis used the phrase, “milk and water Christianity” or “watered-down Christianity,” and he was very clear that the salt wasn't losing its flavour. But you've got to know what the salt is.

So I think he would say, "Examine yourselves. In the attempt to really be liberal in the deepest sense and reach out, have you become liberal in a shallow sense, and have you been less clear in your own minds about the central idea, that God really loves us, really made us, has found us in Christ, and that in Christ we have our own death and resurrection, and in Christ we find a way to heaven?" Can you still, in a sense, hold that up? Now you can hold that up in the most gloriously liberal way you like, but what you're doing is lifting up Jesus Christ so that all people can be drawn to him. Do you know what I mean? Make sure you're liberal about the things you need to be liberal about, and make sure you're clear about the things you need to be clear about. Don't water it down, you know. It's strong stuff and it needs to be strong stuff, because it's going to meet strong opposition. So I think that's one thing that he'd say.

I think the other thing he'd say is really about "gusto." Doing things with gusto. Gusto, of course, relates to tastes. "Taste and see that the Lord is good." Don't reduce Christ to a series of beautifully patent pieces of inclusive language and formulas. I think one of the problems with Western liberal intellectuals is that they make more and more of everything into abstract statements in their heads . . . Be whole-hearted and whole-bodied. You know, don't let your Christianity become a series of nicely-packaged, abstract propositions, increasingly disconnected from the physical stuff of life. The Word was made flesh; don't make it words again.

AK: Is there anything else that you want to say?

MG: Last thing I want to say about Lewis is that Lewis, himself, would be quite, if not disturbed, certainly embarrassed by the attention that is paid to him as a person. He didn't want to be the centre of a kind of cult of anything or person. He's always pointing away from himself . . . to God and the good things of God. And I think Lewis would much rather that his fans got on with doing by his spiritual example the kind of stuff he did, writing good stories, engaging in good debates, teaching in a university, talking to kids, answering letters, walking his dogs, everything to the glory of God, as they see it in the culture they're in,

rather than looking back at the shrine of Lewis. He looked to deflect either up to God or out to God's beautiful creation, rather than back onto himself.

### **O Sapientia**

I cannot think unless I have been thought,  
Nor can I speak unless I have been spoken;  
I cannot teach except as I am taught,  
Or break the bread except as I am broken.  
O Mind behind the mind through which I seek,  
O Light within the light by which I see,  
O Word beneath the words with which I speak,  
O founding, unfound Wisdom, finding me,  
O sounding Song whose depth is sounding me,  
O Memory of time, reminding me,  
My Ground of Being, always grounding me,  
My Maker's bounding line, defining me:  
Come, hidden Wisdom, come with all you bring,  
Come to me now, disguised as everything.

Malcolm Guite, with permission, from *Sounding the Seasons*

## C.S. LEWIS'S COSMIC TRILOGY

by Michelle Robinson

C.S. Lewis began writing what is known as the Cosmic Trilogy<sup>1</sup> in 1937 after lamenting to his friend J.R.R. Tolkien that there was not enough of their favourite type of story being published. “Tollers,” Lewis wrote, “I am afraid we shall have to try and write some ourselves.”<sup>2</sup> With that seed planted, it wasn’t long before Lewis’s first book of what eventually became the Cosmic Trilogy came to life. Comprised of *Out of the Silent Planet*, *Perelandra* and *That Hideous Strength*, the Cosmic Trilogy is an imaginative tale that weaves together fantasy, theology, satire, mythology, poetry and social critique into the story of a cosmic struggle between good and evil.

The Cosmic Trilogy was written in the years 1937-1945 against the backdrop of the Second World War, a time when there were particular ideas and attitudes that found acceptance in society but caused Lewis concern: the practice of vivisection, the support of eugenics and something that Lewis called scientism.<sup>3</sup> When Lewis penned the trilogy he used its narrative as a vehicle to critique some of these ideas. Two individuals whose ideas Lewis directly targeted were Olaf Stapleton and a scientist by the name of J.B.S. Haldane (the latter is said to have been the model for Weston, an amoral character in both *Out of the Silent Planet* and *Perelandra*).<sup>4</sup> Both Stapleton and Haldane enthused about the possibility of interplanetary travel, viewing it as a way in which humanity could take evolution into its own hands and “scatter its seed” from planet to planet.<sup>5</sup>

Lewis’s response through the trilogy voiced a necessary question

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<sup>1</sup> Also referred to as the Space Trilogy or the Ransom Trilogy.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, as cited in A.N. Wilson, *C.S. Lewis: A Biography* (London: William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd, 1990), 153.

<sup>3</sup> David C. Downing explains that, according to Lewis, scientism was a “quasi religious hope of using technology to perpetuate the species on other worlds and to grope toward godhood.” David C. Downing, *Planets in Peril: A Critical Study of C.S. Lewis’s Ransom Trilogy* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), 144.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 37. Downing quotes parts of Stapleton’s book, *Last and First Men* (1930).

to such views: “At what cost?”

### **Book One: *Out of the Silent Planet* (1938)**

*Out of the Silent Planet* introduces us to Ransom, a philologist and fellow from Cambridge College who is abducted by two scientists, Devine and Weston, and taken through space to the planet Malacandra (Mars). Having travelled there previously, Weston and Devine are returning in order to take advantage of Malacandra’s natural resources, specifically its gold. Surmising that on their next visit the inhabitants will require a human sacrifice, they kidnap Ransom so he can be their hostess gift.

Establishing himself as a worthy protagonist, Ransom (whose name acquires added significance over the course of the trilogy) escapes his captors’ clutches soon after landing and becomes a solo explorer in the frightful and delightful “unknown beyond” of Malacandra. On this adventure Ransom meets a collection of rational creatures: *hross*, *sorns* and *pfifltriggi* who live on the planet together in peace.

When Lewis wrote *Out of the Silent Planet*, other fiction books published about space travel—by H.G. Wells, for example—often depicted other planets as threatening environments containing equally threatening life forms.<sup>6</sup> Lewis began his story in a way that encouraged this same presumption, but then surprised readers as he imagined another possibility: an unknown world that is a paradise inhabited by rational and peaceful creatures who live in harmony with their Creator and one another; a universe where threat comes not from a Martian landscape but from Earth.

The narrative of *Out of the Silent Planet* introduces the cosmic hierarchy that is in place throughout the trilogy. Maleldil is the Creator and Ruler of the Cosmos and under him are the *Oyarsa*, intelligent beings in charge of each planet, and the *eldila*, angel-like entities that

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<sup>6</sup> In “The Seeing Eye,” Lewis wrote: “In those days, writers in that genre almost automatically represented the inhabitants of other worlds as monsters and the terrestrial invaders as good. Since then the opposite set-up has become fairly common. If I could believe that I had in any degree contributed to this change, I should be a proud man.” C.S. Lewis, *Christian Reflections* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1994), 173-174.

consider Deep Heaven (space) their home. Everything proceeds from Maleldil and all cosmic life has its rightful place in the order, though as Ransom learns there is one exception—Planet Thulcandra whose Oyarsa had rebelled against Maleldil and become evil (“bent”). Out of harmony with the cosmos, the planet has fallen from its place, cut off from the rest of the universe, and henceforth is referred to as the *Silent Planet*. Ransom, as does the reader, knows it by another name: Earth.

The story of a rebellious angel and a fallen planet will likely sound familiar. Surprisingly, at the time of its publication, few reviewers made the connection, which seemed to have amused Lewis. In a letter written to a friend in July 1939 Lewis commented:

You will be both grieved and amused to hear that out of about 60 reviews only 2 showed any knowledge that my idea of the fall of the Bent One was anything but an invention of my own. But if there only was someone with a richer talent and more leisure I think that this great ignorance might be a help to the evangelization of England; any amount of theology can now be smuggled into people’s minds under cover of romance without their knowing it.<sup>7</sup>

As the novel nears its conclusion, there is a funny scene in which Weston explains his more sinister intents for Malacandra, involving more than the extraction of gold. Ransom translates the speech into Old Solar for the interested Oyarsa and with his paraphrase exposes the folly and pomposity of Weston’s views. Recalling that Weston’s ideas are based on those of J.B.S. Haldane, who enthused about colonizing other planets (and with whom Lewis disagreed), dialogues such as these are quite entertaining. At another point in the novel, while speaking to the Oyarsa about Weston, Ransom says: “I think he would destroy all your people to make room for our people; and then he would do the same with other worlds again. He wants our race to last for always, I think, and he hopes that they will leap from world to world . . . always going to a new sun when an old one dies . . . or something like that.” To which

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<sup>7</sup> *Letters of C.S. Lewis*, ed. W.H. Lewis (London: Geoffrey Bles Ltd, 1966), 167.

the Oyarsa responds, “Is he wounded in his brain?”<sup>8</sup> In the end, Weston and Devine are banished from the planet and sent back to Earth. Ransom, after being given the choice to stay or to leave, chooses to leave on the same space craft.

### **Book Two: *Perelandra* (1943)**

The second novel in the trilogy begins some time following Ransom’s return to Earth from Malacandra and recounts another trip he takes into space, this time to the planet Perelandra (Venus). Ransom is summoned there by the Oyarsa of Malacandra because “the black archon” of Earth’s bent Oyarsa “is meditating some sort of attack.”<sup>9</sup> Ransom is chosen for the adventure in part because he can speak Old Solar, the common language of rational creatures in the Solar System. This turns out to be an important skill as Ransom does a considerable amount of talking on Perelandra, mostly with a green human-like inhabitant aptly referred to as the Green Lady. She is clearly an Eve figure on this planet, depicted by Lewis as a new Eden. Weston, a returning character from *Out of the Silent Planet*, arrives on Perelandra, is possessed by the Bent One and expertly assumes the role of the Tempter. With the set established and the characters on stage, the main drama begins—a reimagining of the story of the temptation in the garden. There is, however, one notable addition in Lewis’s version that does not appear in the Genesis original: the character of Ransom, the counter-tempter.

*Perelandra* is copiously descriptive, sometimes frustratingly so, as Lewis takes great pains to describe a landscape in such vivid detail that it takes on the import of a major character. Some of Lewis’s biographers and critics have found it unreadable because of this.<sup>10</sup> Yet, it is hard not to admire Lewis’s literary skill as he invites his readers to experience, not just witness, this strange new world.

To step out of the forest would have been a minute’s work on

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<sup>8</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet* in *The Cosmic Trilogy* (London: The Bodley Head, 1990), 95.

<sup>9</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Perelandra* in *The Cosmic Trilogy* (London: The Bodley Head, 1990), 142.

<sup>10</sup> See Alan Jacob’s critique in *The Narnian: The Life and Imagination of C.S. Lewis* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), 243.

Earth; on this undulating island it took him longer, and when he finally emerged into the open an extraordinary spectacle met his eyes. All day there had been no variation at any point in the golden roof to mark the sun's position, but now the whole of one half-heaven revealed it. The orb itself remained invisible, but on the rim of the sea rested an arc of green so luminous that he could not look at it, and beyond that, spreading almost to the zenith, a great fan of colour like a peacock's tail. Looking over his shoulder he saw the whole island ablaze with blue, and across it and beyond it, even to the ends of the world, his own enormous shadow. The sea, far calmer now than he had seen it, smoked towards heaven in huge dolomites and elephants of blue and purple vapour, and a light wind, full of sweetness, lifted the hair on his forehead."<sup>11</sup>

His descriptive eloquence amplifies not only the beautiful but also the loathsome. The depiction of Weston the Un-Man is positively chilling as Lewis deftly captures subtleties such as tone of voice, facial grimaces and a mouth that monotonously moves as if "munching rather than talking."<sup>12</sup> The dialogue is dense (remember that Ransom does a lot of talking!) and loses traction after a while. But, for the reader willing to engage ideas, the dialogue is rich theologically and philosophically.

### **Book Three: *That Hideous Strength* (1945)**

The final book in the trilogy, *That Hideous Strength*, takes place on Earth, a fitting setting for the final showdown between good and evil. The reader is re-acquainted with some familiar characters including Devine (called Lord Feverstone), Weston's partner in *Out of the Silent Planet*, and our favourite philologist, Ransom. But the main characters of the story are Mark and Jane Studdock, a husband and wife who journey along juxtaposed paths. Mark, a sociologist, is ambitious yet insecure, and becomes increasingly involved with an evil scientific

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<sup>11</sup> Lewis, *Perelandra*, in *The Cosmic Trilogy*, 158-159.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

institution called N.I.C.E. (National Institute of Coordinated Experiments). Each choice he makes takes him further and further into the corrupt and evil ways of the institution. In contrast, his wife, Jane, a scholar and clairvoyant, joins the fight for good at St. Anne's, a small, almost utopian community headed by Ransom. These two contrasting settings are the backdrops for the novel's fast-paced and progressively disturbing action. This third book is longer, darker and markedly different in style from the previous two. The noticeable change of style prompted reviewers to label the book a "Charles Williams novel written by C.S. Lewis," because it bears similarities to the dystopian works of Charles Williams, friend of Lewis and fellow Inklings.<sup>13</sup> Lewis apparently directly quotes a poem by Williams via one of his characters in the novel.<sup>14</sup> This in itself isn't unusual in that Lewis frequently wove the influences of his fellow Inklings into his writing. However, the supernatural thrillers of Williams, with their blend of the "realistic and the supernatural"<sup>15</sup> is thought to have heavily influenced the elements of Lewis's third novel, which positions commonplace dynamics of institutional politics, career ambition and strained marriages alongside more fantastic features such as demon-possessed heads, Merlin the Magician, psychic powers, and an attempt at world domination by the forces of evil. It is a narrative that certainly showcases Lewis's imaginative abilities to coax random and incredible elements into an engaging whole. Though it is the third book in the trilogy, *That Hideous Strength* can easily be read and enjoyed as an independent novel.

### **Good and Evil: The Choice between Divergent Paths**

In *Mere Christianity* Lewis wrote:

. . . Every time you make a choice, you are turning the central part of you, the part of you that chooses, into something a little different from what it was before. And taking your life as a whole, with all your innumerable choices, all your life

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<sup>13</sup> Green and Hooper, as cited in Sanford Schwartz, *C.S. Lewis on the Final Frontier: Science and the Supernatural in the Space Trilogy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 92.

<sup>14</sup> Downing, *Planets in Peril*, 133.

<sup>15</sup> Schwartz, *Final Frontier*, 92.

long you are slowly turning this central thing into a Heavenly Creature or a Hellish Creature.<sup>16</sup>

These words of Lewis could be used as an apt summation of one of the overarching themes that propels the Cosmic Trilogy. It is through the characters' "innumerable choices" that they draw ever closer to the heavenly or the hellish. On the hellish side, Weston becomes the Un-Man, his own sense of being lost in a chasm, "a big black hole,"<sup>17</sup> undoubtedly fashioned by his own decisions. Devine's greedy and self-interested course of action leads him to be quite literally swallowed up and buried beneath the earth. And Mark Studdock continually stifles his better judgment, the cumulative effect of which climaxes in a scene where he is given a crucifix and ordered to smash it. It is a decisive moment that brings to light what really has been at stake in each decision all along: selfish ambition or God.

In contrast, the *heavenly* is most obviously embodied in the character of Ransom, the hero whose actions and decisions in another direction lead to a remarkable transformation over the course of the trilogy. He develops from a "round-shouldered," "shabbily dressed" man in his late thirties, at the beginning of *Out of the Silent Planet*, into a radiant, almost otherworldly being with a face "of no age at all" and a voice "like sunlight and gold" in *That Hideous Strength*. At the end of the trilogy Ransom is taken up into Deep Heaven, back to Perelandra, where he will live out his days.

These two divergent paths are sharply defined in Lewis's trilogy, perhaps reflecting a theology that "there are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says in the end, 'Thy will be done.' All that are in Hell, choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no Hell."<sup>18</sup> The choices that are made are of critical importance and are ultimately about choosing *God* or *Self*. "From the moment a creature becomes aware of God as God and of itself as self, the terrible alternative of choosing God or self for the

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<sup>16</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, in *The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), 81.

<sup>17</sup> Lewis, *Perelandra*, in *The Cosmic Trilogy*, 227.

<sup>18</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, in *C.S. Lewis Signature Classics*, 506.

centre is opened to it . . . it is the fall in every individual life, and in each day of each individual life, the basic sin behind all particular sins.”<sup>19</sup> The decision to choose God (Maleldil) or self-interest is before the main characters in the trilogy and it is their corresponding choices and inclinations that determine their destinies as champions or villains, as heavenly or hellish. Moreover, the decisions are of cosmic import as they affect the entire divine order.

This stark contrast between characters has been viewed by critics as a weakness of the trilogy. While it may be problematic for some, it nevertheless is an appealing aspect of the Lewis style. Not only does the stark portrayal of good and evil provide an obvious contrast between the hellish and the heavenly (thereby demonstrating the distance between where self-interest leads us and where God created us to be); it also is an ingenious way for Lewis to challenge some of the (previously noted) popular wisdom of his day. To take an example from *Perelandra*, when the Un-Man Weston is tempting the Green Lady, the arguments he employs do not, at times, appear unreasonable. But by the mere fact that the words flow from the mouth of a character so unmistakably horrid (the Devil himself), the reader is forced to re-assess the so-called reasonableness of the idea!

### **The Trilogy in 2013**

So why might someone consider reading the Cosmic Trilogy today, a series that was published seventy years ago? In his recent biography of Lewis, Alister McGrath wrote that *That Hideous Strength* is a work that “shows [Lewis] to have been a prophetic voice, offering a radical challenge to the accepted social wisdom of his own generation.”<sup>20</sup> I would add that the trilogy as a whole, read in our own context, continues to offer a prophetic voice to my own generation. Certainly, for anyone reading the trilogy in 2013—a year in which a six billion dollar project has been announced to launch a one-way trip to Mars in the name of progress and the expansion of humankind—Lewis’s themes

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<sup>19</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, in *C.S. Lewis Signature Classics*, 592.

<sup>20</sup> Alister McGrath, *C.S. Lewis: A Life* (Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2013), 236.

have particular reverberations. It is stunning to note how relevant some of Lewis's scenarios are. Consider today's general acceptance of practices such as factory farming that treat animal life as valuable only in so far as it is of use to humans; or the establishment of corporate monocultures that are largely unaccountable to the public; or the controversial extractions of resources which put environmentally sensitive areas at risk and reduce them to mere "areas coloured pink" on a map;<sup>21</sup> or the rapid advancement of science and technology that in many ways exceeds our moral capacity to handle the results of such advancement (e.g., highly sophisticated weapons of war, genetic manipulation, widespread electronic surveillance and the NSA). Quite simply, we are daily challenged with the decision to choose between God and our own self-interest. In light of all of this, the Cosmic Trilogy can be read as a contemporary cautionary tale.

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<sup>21</sup> This is in reference to a scene when N.I.C.E discusses the sale of Bragdon Wood, a walled garden that contained Merlin's Well: "It was not called, 'the sale of Bragdon Wood.' The Bursar called it the 'sale of the area coloured pink on the plan which, with the Warden's permission, I will now pass round the table.'" *That Hideous Strength* in *The Cosmic Trilogy*, 324.

## **FROM THE HEART – ABOUT THE HEART OF THE MATTER**

**by Mia Sams**

When I was younger, I enjoyed reading so much; I would read every single day, often one book, or sometimes two books per week. My very first chapter-book was *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. I still remember being so excited about the fact that I had finished it, and just had to brag about it every 10 minutes to my parents. Now that I am in high school and have much less time to read for pleasure, I have forgotten how to read without analyzing every single word and structural device. Reading *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* again for the first time in years has reminded me of how simply to enjoy a good book.

Getting the chance to read this novel again has given me a whole new understanding of the book as it relates to Christianity, because it allowed me to see so many parallels between *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and the Bible. This novel is written in a way that allows for so much imagination. For example, when Edmund escapes from the Witch and comes back to Aslan and his siblings, what occurs is the conversation between himself and Aslan. Almost as the prodigal son came back to his father, Edmund comes back to his brother and sisters. And as the father of the prodigal son forgives him and rejoices that he has returned, Aslan forgives Edmund and graciously allows him to rejoin them.

For me, the most interesting part of the book is right before Aslan is killed by the Witch, on his walk with Lucy and Susan. It could be considered an unnecessary portion of the book—one that only serves the purpose of having the girls tell about the death of Aslan. However, I think that this scene played a big role in the way I saw Aslan as a leader, and as reflecting Christ. Aslan walking toward his death at the altar in so many ways mirrors Jesus walking to his death at the cross. The reader gets to see Aslan painted in a different light than ever before, as someone who is tired and afraid and sad. Just as Jesus was seen as someone who could never be defeated until his death at the cross, Aslan was a majestic, fearless and strong leader until the night of his death. I found this particular section to be so interesting and meaningful, reading this as a teenager, because through the short, two page ordeal, you learn so much more about Aslan than you do in the remaining fifty pages of the novel. He is truly shown as a Christ-like figure at this point.

In many ways *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* serves as a different way of telling the Gospel. Although it is not an outright religious novel, many of the values of Christianity such as forgiveness, respect, humility and love are present. Beyond all that, reading *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* has taught me the importance of faith, either in God and his greatness, or the possibility that perhaps Narnia may be real. Reading this novel as a young child, I did not pick up on many of the religious connotations, but it taught me Christian values that help me and will continue to help me to live morally.

*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* is one of those books that you can read over and over again and still get new meaning out of it every single time. As C.S. Lewis himself so famously said: “Someday you will be old enough to begin reading fairy tales again.” I think this means that as you get older and become more mature, you start to see fairy tales from a different, more meaningful perspective. This is most definitely true, especially in C.S. Lewis’s works. I will continue to read *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* over again—from the little details to the greater story—until I have grasped all the meaning, which will probably be never!

I can say for sure that reading *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* had a great impact on my imagination as a child and helped me grow in my faith as a teen. All I can hope for now is that it will help me grow even more when I read it as an adult. After all, “once a king or queen of Narnia, always a king or queen of Narnia.” And I am definitely a queen of Narnia.

## **PROFILE**

### **AN EXTRAORDINARY “NOBODY”: THE PIONEERING MINISTRY OF ALICE HOGMAN**

**by William Haughton**



#### **Introduction**

Alice Hogman was a pioneer—both as an early ordained woman and as a partner in a ground-breaking two-clergy marriage. Yet hers is not a household name—even in her own denomination, The United Church of Canada. Having ministered primarily in smaller communities and congregations, well-deserved recognition of her gifts and contributions came from the relatively small circle of people with whom she served. However, Alice’s was a remarkable life in ministry that can offer us inspiration and encouragement as we try to walk faithfully along the path God has set for us.

#### **Early Life and Education<sup>1</sup>**

Alice Mary Walker was born November 25<sup>th</sup>, 1922, in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Her parents, Maurine (née Moore) and Philip, were married in 1919, and Charles, her only sibling, was born in 1920. In Alice’s youth, the Walkers lived in relative prosperity. Philip, a former lieutenant colonel in the Canadian Expeditionary Force during the Great War, owned a successful elevator business, which afforded the family a comfortable two-storey house in a middle class neighbourhood.

Church involvement and music were important parts of Walker

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, details of Alice’s life have been offered graciously by her husband, Rev. Bill Hogman, as well as by her daughters, the Rev. Kathy Hogman and Susan Hogman, in phone conversations and e-mail correspondence.

family life. Philip was an elder and Sunday school superintendent at St. Stephen's Presbyterian Church—later St. Stephen's-Broadway United after a 1925 amalgamation. Maurine was a gifted musician and teacher who trained Alice in piano and voice. It was a happy and fortunate childhood.

During Alice's teenage years, however, tragedy struck the Walkers when Philip died of kidney failure in 1937. Following his death, the family was thrown into "abject poverty." They lost their house and were forced to move into a rented home, in a relatively lower class neighbourhood. To make ends meet, Charles left school for a job at the Bank of Commerce while Maurine took in borders and taught music lessons. From this point on, she made sure to instill in Alice an awareness of the importance of getting an education and a career of her own.

Despite the adversity that followed her father's death, Alice thrived. She was a brilliant student and, after graduation from Gordon Bell High School in 1941, she won a Veterans' Scholarship to attend the University of Manitoba. Still living at home, Alice majored in English Literature and Music, receiving an honours bachelor of arts degree in 1945. While a student, she worked at her campus newspaper, *The Manitoban*, and as a clerk for the Canadian Wheat Board. She was also active in the Student Christian Movement (SCM).

## **Ministry**

At university Alice developed an intense interest in the person of Jesus and the faith she had been taught as a child. That thirst, and the study which nourished it, led to an affirmation of faith and her call to ordained ministry.<sup>2</sup> Through the SCM, she was notified of the great need for pastors as a result of the Second World War—many clergy had gone overseas—and it was through the SCM that she was given a first taste of pastoral ministry.<sup>3</sup> The summer after her graduation from the University of Manitoba, she was appointed to serve a three-point charge in

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<sup>2</sup> Alice Walker, "Ordination Sermon," preached at the ordination service of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario Conference, 1989.

<sup>3</sup> During the war, the United Church filled many vacant charges through the SCM. See Valerie J. Korinek, "No Women Need Apply: The Ordination of Women in the United Church, 1918-1965," *Canadian Historical Review* 74:4 (1993), 496, and Lois Wilson, *Turning the World Upside Down: A Memoir* (Toronto: Doubleday, 1989), 18.

northwestern Ontario, between Dryden and Kenora—which she served by bicycle. She so enjoyed this work, and received such affirmation, that she decided to enroll at United College, Winnipeg, and seek ordination.

In late summer 1945, Alice was one of four students to matriculate at United College. When she communicated her desire for ordination to the session at St. Stephen's-Broadway, she was told that, as a woman, she would never be the minister of *that* congregation.<sup>4</sup> Though she faced such discrimination, regrettably common for women of the era, her time at United College was one of challenges met and opportunities taken. She was at the top of her class each year—Professor Gordon Harland said that she was the best student he had ever had. She also gained experience in a variety of ministry settings. One summer, for example, she served a four-point pastoral charge in Manitoba's Interlake district. Toward the end of her studies, she served a pastoral charge near Winnipeg as “weekend supply.” In this period Alice continued to live at home, supporting her mother and grandmother. To supplement household income, she also gave music lessons.

Around this time, Alice met William (“Bill”) Hogman, a fellow student at United College. According to family lore, it was Bill who first was infatuated with Alice. After they met, he began registering for the same classes as Alice and otherwise “followed her everywhere.” Happily for Bill, Alice was such a good student that he could ask her, honourably, for regular tutoring. The two were engaged on Alice's 26<sup>th</sup> birthday, November 25<sup>th</sup>, 1948, and wed on June 29<sup>th</sup>, 1950.

Alice also became friends with fellow student Lois Wilson at United College.<sup>5</sup> Wilson mentions Alice prominently in her autobiography, as she remembers Alice's advice to seek ordination before getting married, since, at the time, ordination was not open to married women. Wilson decided not to follow that advice and, after getting married in 1950, was not ordained until United Church policy made it

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<sup>4</sup> This is unfortunate, but not surprising. Korinek shows that, although the ordination of women was permitted beginning in 1936 with the ordination of Lydia Gruchy, this action was widely seen in the United Church as something which would and should remain the exception. It was not until 1965 that all formal barriers to women's ordination were lifted and not until the 1980s when women began entering ordained ministry in numbers approaching those of men. See Korinek, “No Women Need Apply,” especially 506-508.

<sup>5</sup> The United Church's first female moderator, among many significant offices and honours in her career.

possible for her in 1965.<sup>6</sup>

Alice received a Diploma in Theology (equivalent to today's Master of Divinity) in the spring of 1948 and was ordained that year, perhaps the seventeenth woman so ordered in the United Church.<sup>7</sup> This illustrates how few women were ordained in the years and decades immediately following Lydia Gruchy.<sup>8</sup> Alice was settled in the three-point Sandford Pastoral Charge outside Winnipeg, where she served until 1950. After leaving Sandford, Alice was, for a few months at the end of 1950, associate minister at Old St. Andrew's, a congregation in Winnipeg's north-end. Although Bill was still in his last year at United College, they decided to start a family and Alice began a period away from her ministry career to focus on her role as parent. Susan, their eldest, was born in 1951 in Winnipeg.

After his graduation and ordination in 1951, Bill was settled in the four-point Emo Pastoral Charge near Fort Frances, Ontario. In Emo, Alice was in high demand as a substitute minister and preacher throughout the area, and on both sides of the Canadian-U.S. border. It is significant to note that the Hogmans became early pioneers of something that has become more commonplace today—the clergy-couple.<sup>9</sup> While the family was in Emo, John was born in 1953. John, of course, was to become founding chair of the editorial board of *Touchstone*.

In 1957, Bill accepted a call to Gladstone, Manitoba, a two-point

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<sup>6</sup> Wilson, *Turning the World Upside Down*, 23 and 44. This significant encounter is noted by Korinek, "No Women Need Apply," 500-501, and by Phyllis D. Airhart, "Women in The United Church of Canada," in *The Encyclopedia of Woman and Religion in North America*, eds. Rosemary Skinner Keller and Rosemary Radford Ruether (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006), 364.

<sup>7</sup> *Yearbooks, 1936-1948*, The United Church of Canada. "Perhaps" because only initials are used in some cases in the Yearbooks, thus obscuring gender.

<sup>8</sup> Approximately 18 female ordinands, in total, from 1936 to 1948, is a very small number. Alice, like those other pioneers, would often have had the experience of being the first ordained woman many had ever met.

<sup>9</sup> The first clergy couple in the United Church came into being when Margaret Butler was ordained by Montreal and Ottawa Conference in 1947. Her husband, Arthur Melvin, had been ordained in 1946 while Margaret was denied ordination. The following year, 1947, she was ordained but not given a charge of her own. Instead, she joined her husband, presumably to do unpaid and largely unrecognized ministry, in the Cookshire Pastoral Charge, Quebec-Sherbrooke Presbytery. See Korinek, "No Women Need Apply," 496-503, and Airhart, "Women in The United Church of Canada," 363. The United Church's 1947 *Yearbook*, xii, refers to her as Mrs. Arthur Melvin Butler.

charge between Winnipeg and Neepawa. Kathleen was born in Gladstone, in 1959, and though Alice now had primary parenting responsibility for three young children, she continued to preach regularly. Also, at this time, she was one of the team involved in writing *The New Curriculum*.<sup>10</sup>

While in Gladstone, Alice and Bill were so taken by their encounter with missionaries on furlough from Angola that they put their own names forward for overseas work. Though thinking initially they would like to go to Africa, they were appointed in 1961 to serve with the Presbyterian Church in Trinidad and Tobago. Stationed in Princes Town, Bill's ministry involved travelling to the different congregations of their presbytery to administer the sacraments while Alice served as a supervisor of Christian Education in the extensive education system of the Presbyterian Church—which at the time ran fifty-one elementary schools, one high school and a teachers' college. Alice taught school and coordinated the work of other missionaries who had been sent by such organizations as the Women's Missionary Society (WMS). She was secretary of her presbytery and synod, and played a key role in writing a new Sunday school curriculum: the *Caribbean Christian Living Series*.<sup>11</sup>

The Hogmans travelled home to Manitoba in 1965 for a year-long furlough, returning in 1966 to Fyzabad in Trinidad, where Bill was minister. Alice, meanwhile, became minister of the three-point La Romaine Pastoral Charge where, in lieu of a salary, she was supplied with car and driver.<sup>12</sup> This was a successful and rewarding period of ministry for Alice. Two of the three congregations—La Romaine and Canaan—built new church-buildings during her tenure. On Saturday mornings, she would teach music lessons to students who went on to lead music in worship or even to teach lessons across the island. Writes someone familiar with Alice's ministry in Trinidad: "Her influence in the community and church cannot be measured."<sup>13</sup>

In 1969, Alice and Bill felt it was time to return to Canada, so they accepted a call to Norwood United in Winnipeg. Bill was to be the primary pastor, with Alice serving as "assistant." Tragically, this was for

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<sup>10</sup> Under the direction of its editor, a fellow Winnipegger, Peter Gordon White (1919 - 2013).

<sup>11</sup> Mabel Brandow, *The History of our Church Women in Trinidad 1868-1983* (Altona, MB: Friesen Printers, 1983), 54.

<sup>12</sup> There was only one salary allowed for a missionary family.

<sup>13</sup> Brandow, *The History of our Church Women in Trinidad*, 54-55.

Alice a “devastating experience.” She left this ministry and the Church’s ministry for a time, after only one year at Norwood. Her family recalls one crushing remark, typical of the attitude there: “Why should we pay her to do what a minister’s wife is supposed to do for free?”

After a year, Alice went back to school, earning a teaching certificate in 1972. She embarked on a new career teaching English for half a year at Stonewall Collegiate Institute, 25 kilometres north of Winnipeg, and, for five years at Marymount School, in Winnipeg, from 1973 to 1977. Alice taught girls who were living in group homes and striving to overcome such challenges as abuse, addiction and mental illness. Though not her primary vocation, Alice found this to be a rewarding ministry, feeling that she was making concrete and profound differences in the lives of her students.

In 1977 Alice and Bill accepted a joint call to Knox United, Fort Frances, Ontario—approximately 350 kilometres west of Thunder Bay. At first, the two shared a single ministry position, though this was interrupted briefly when Alice accepted a six-month appointment to the United Church congregations in Nestor Falls and Sioux Narrows.<sup>14</sup> This period was perhaps the happiest period of shared ministry for Alice and Bill. They enjoyed their work and time together immensely. It was also a period of growth and vitality for Knox, which was rewarding for the Hogmans. In 1980, the congregation was able to offer them an extra half-time position. They served there until 1985.

Alice and Bill were one of the first clergy-couples in the United Church, and indeed, in North American Protestantism. When Lois Wilson was ordained in 1965, she and her husband, Roy, knew only one other clergy-couple: the Hogmans.<sup>15</sup> In 1978, the Hogmans attended the Ecumenical Clergy Couple Consultation, near Cincinnati, Ohio—the first meeting of its kind. There were 106 couples at this conference: eight from The United Church of Canada, and Bill remembers that they were the oldest couple, apart from a very small number representing Anabaptist or Pentecostal traditions. Indeed, an account of that meeting notes that “role

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<sup>14</sup> They also supplied, for a ten-month period, the United Church of Christ congregation in neighbouring International Falls, Minnesota. Alice and Bill took turns preaching there on alternate Sundays.

<sup>15</sup> Wilson, *Turning the World Upside Down*, 44.

models of couples in their forties or older are few and far between.”<sup>16</sup> Their experiences and example of ministry make Alice and Bill, though unwittingly, an historically significant clergy-couple.

In 1985, Alice and Bill accepted a call to Teulon United Church, 60 kilometres north of Winnipeg, where again they shared a single position. While living in a manse in Teulon, with retirement in mind, they bought a home of their own in Winnipeg Beach in 1987. Alice retired from full-time ministry in 1989. In June of that year, Alice’s ministry was honoured by the invitation to preach at the ordination service of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario Conference. Her sermon on that occasion evidences a preaching style that is personally engaged, ably illustrated, spiritually arresting, and informed by wide reading. Commenting on Paul’s declaration in Romans 1:14 that he is a debtor to all, she observed:

And I am unashamed to confess that I conclude my formal ministry in the church up to my neck in debt to a loving husband and family first, and then to people from every congregation that we ever served, not to mention those outside congregational life. Standing on the podium to receive an Oscar, the Academy Award winners start to name those who share the honour with them. Here we stand, all of us, ministers of the Jesus Christ! Our debt is inexhaustible and profound, for as Kierkegaard truly said, “Love is preserved in its infinite debt.”

Other extant sermon manuscripts testify to Alice’s gifts as a preacher and, on this occasion, her gifts were at last made known to the wider church.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> John P. von Lackum III and Nancy Jo Kemper von Lackum, *Clergy Couples: A Report on Clergy Couples and the Ecumenical Clergy Couple Consultation, Kings Island Inn, Mason, Ohio, October 30-November 2, 1978* (New York: National Council of Churches in the USA, 1979), 5. They estimated in 1979 that there were between 650 and 1,000 clergy-couples within mainline Protestantism in North America—as many as 5,750 if the Salvation Army as well as Pentecostal and other groups were included. Another early and interesting discussion of clergy-couples is E.M. Rallings and David J. Pratto, *Two-Clergy Marriages: A Special Case of Dual Careers* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984). As of 1984, Rallings and Pratto estimated that there were 1,200 clergy-couples in mainline Protestant denominations in the United States.

<sup>17</sup> Among Alice’s sermons is one published in a volume of sermons—and commentaries on those sermons—of United Church ministers: *Not Necessarily My Best Sermon*, ed. Peter Gordon White (Toronto: The United Church Publishing House, 1988), 44-51. Alice’s entry was “Salvation at the Eleventh Hour,” a Good Friday sermon on the text of Luke 23:39-43. She did not consider this one of her better sermons, though I would argue that it is one of the better in that volume, being biblical, compelling and clear.

**Retirement**

In 1989, Alice and Bill retired to Winnipeg Beach, although in subsequent years they provided supply ministry in both the Hartney and Carmen Pastoral Charges. Alice was quite active—especially as a guest preacher until 1995—though she maintained her reading in theology even after that. In September 1999, with their three grown children all living on the west coast, Alice and Bill decided to move to Vancouver, where daughter Susan had a house with an “in-law” suite. They became active in Highlands United Church and Alice involved herself in its UCW. In Vancouver, they especially enjoyed walking the beach together. As Alice’s health deteriorated, she walked the beach with a cane, then a walker and, finally, with Bill pushing her wheelchair. Alice died May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2010.

**Significance and Conclusion**

We live in an age of celebrity. We have celebrity athletes, authors, chefs and even celebrity pastors—those who preach at famous churches, who are invited to speak at conferences and who churn out best-selling books. Alice Hogman was far from a celebrity pastor. Yet, as a pioneering ordained woman and partner in a ground-breaking two-clergy marriage, she carved out a remarkable career in ministry that is noteworthy for church historians and working ministers alike.

In her sermon at Manitoba Conference she described the reluctant response of Moses to God’s call as an excuse: “I am a nobody.” Identifying with the feeling any ordinand might have, she observed of her own experience: “In my case I had a better excuse than most of you. ‘I was nobody,’ and I often pleaded that excuse to God. In the world of the fifties, women in ministry were not yet generally approved. But God obviously wasn’t listening.” The span of her career witnessed significant growth in the numbers of ordained women and clergy-couples. Those who followed her in these roles, and indeed all of us throughout the church, whether we know it or not, owe a debt of gratitude to the perseverance and pastoral gifts of Alice—and others like her. Her servant leadership, excellence in preaching and enduring pastoral love helped broaden the mind of the Church about the possibilities of ministry and even of human society.

## REVIEW ARTICLE

### THE “SIMPLIFIED” UNITED CHURCH MANUAL

by Ross Bartlett

In May 2010 the General Council Executive (GCE) mandated the simplification of church court processes and *The United Church Manual* by adopting the following motion, directing the General Secretary to “initiate a project to simplify our processes in order to reduce significantly the complexity and size of *The Manual* and make it more user-friendly, with an interim report for submission through the General Secretary to the November 2010 meeting of the GCE, and a full report to the May 2011 meeting of the Executive.”<sup>1</sup>

The working group, consisting entirely of staff, sought input from across the church and received “several hundred replies from individuals, congregations, presbyteries, Conference committees,” and so on.<sup>2</sup> As one who participated in that process I was pleased to see that several of my concerns were addressed in the draft that went to General Council. The working group has produced an effective and high quality draft of the simplified *Manual*. It achieves its aim of clarity and accessibility of language without sacrificing too many details inherent in the governance of a large, diverse and complex organization like the United Church. The authors deserve our thanks for the degree to which they fulfilled a difficult mandate. Having said this, as a regular user and frequent instructor in *The United Church Manual*, I would like to raise some concerns and questions about this project, so that we might all be more fully aware of the challenges and potential of this new resource.

In the background of the drive to simplify this document is the conviction that the changed contexts of many congregations leads to a lack of capacity and willingness to “carry out ministry through highly prescriptive processes.” The perception that the processes of the church are negatively restrictive and prescriptive flows through the draft simplification of *The Manual*. The authors wish to make clear that the by-laws exist to reflect mission as the church’s primary focus and not for their own sake as ordering principles. On that basis, the staff group

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<sup>1</sup> “Simplification of Church Processes,” 41<sup>st</sup> General Council, 2012, Workbook, Reports, 154.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

became convinced that trying to provide specific provisions for every conceivable possibility was futile and, perhaps more importantly, would “create the impression that people cannot be trusted to do the right thing unless it is prescribed for them.”<sup>3</sup> In terms of the relationship among church courts, the goal was to substitute language seen to be more “relational” than “adversarial,” for example, substituting “responsibility” for “duty” and “power.” Another major change in the form of the *Manual* is the use of electronic formats and hyper-links to provide the details that are removed from the text in the process of simplification. This allows for “policy agility” when the GCE makes changes. The report suggests that the power of the Executive be expanded in order to facilitate “even more responsive and agile decision-making” in areas not currently included in its powers.<sup>4</sup>

### **General Observations**

I remain concerned that it was considered adequate and acceptable by The United Church of Canada that such a major undertaking be carried out entirely by General Council staff members. This is not a comment on the individuals involved or the quality of their commitment or output, but a concern about a trend to reduce the role of elected members and standing committees to merely consultative status in denomination-shaping projects.

Another concern is with the assumption that the *Manual* ought to be simple, as if simplicity were a virtue in and of itself. Certainly there is no virtue in inaccessible language or obscurity! No doubt some *Manual* sections have outlived their usefulness or are framed in excessively legalistic prose. Some re-ordering and rationalization can lead to greater functionality. However, much of the complexity in the text is a direct reflection of the issues involved. Rather than the text being at fault, what may be at issue is our desire to seek easy solutions to complex challenges. The text is not intricate because certain unnamed souls delight in confusing the rest of us! It has evolved along with our capacity to invent new and different forms of error. This human tendency is not likely to disappear simply because the *Manual* is simplified.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 158.

Years in the courts of the Church have taught me that the *Manual* is invoked for purposes of both control and justice. It is possible for people to employ their expertise with the *Manual* and parliamentary procedures to suppress other voices. Thus there are times when the apparent complexity of bylaws is used to close down the Spirit's movement rather than assist its flourishing. Some may even delight in a multiplication of legalities! Yet we should not blame the tool for the misuse to which it is put. Indeed I have seen many examples of situations where people—deliberately or not—were trampling on others and could be called into line because we hold a common book of rules. There are folk (often the most vulnerable in our systems) who have been protected from bullies because someone else invoked the rules by which fairness to all is protected. Having taught polity and practice to aspiring clergy for nearly twenty years, I am not often reassured by their instinctive responses to the situations we study. In dealing with case studies it is all too easy to respond in ways that are at variance with the wisdom of the *Manual* and that could have disastrous long-term results.

In November 2010 Church members were invited by email to participate in consultations on the project. One question asked: “How could we recast our processes to facilitate and encourage, rather than prescribe and constrict, ministries?” There is an assumption in this question that following the rules is bad or having procedures is restrictive. I recall few situations where the *Manual*, applied honestly and fairly, has had a negatively restrictive effect. Most often, its employment prevents folk from doing whatever they feel like doing, without regard for factors such as accountability, consequences or justice in relationships.

If my understanding is correct, the civil courts have, on numerous occasions, rendered the judgment that the processes of the United Church, as outlined in the *Manual*, are adequate and sufficient for the protection of natural justice—assuming they are followed. One hopes that a thorough revision of the *Manual* in an increasingly litigious age will not leave us open to costly civil litigation.

### **An Electronic Text**

The primary form of the new *Manual* will be electronic. This involves the use of hyperlinks to provide the necessary details as well as other helpful

resources. A hyperlink is a highlighted portion of text in an electronic document which connects the reader to another web site or document that provides further information. The extant draft does not yet have hyperlinks, so evaluating the content is not possible at present. However, we can reflect in principle on the benefits and challenges of this technology.

The use of web-based documents as a code of rules and procedures for a widely dispersed organization prompts a series of questions. For instance, what is the "status" of the text in the hyperlinks? Currently, there are the by-laws in the *Manual* and a series of handbooks. The by-laws can only be altered by the General Council or the GCE. The handbooks are issued periodically by various working groups without necessary reference to the courts of the church and on occasion are at variance with the *Manual*. Is the hyperlink text more akin to by-laws or to handbooks? Most of the time, the *Manual* is consulted for precise details. Now the details will be in the hyperlinks. What is the process for changing such details? The authority to modify that text is, in essence, the power to alter the *Manual*.

Having the details available through hyperlinks raises usage concerns that must be addressed. For one, it assumes internet comfort and accessibility in different parts of the country. These are problematic assumptions. Many pastoral charges do not have internet access in the church building. Let's assume a presbytery court is meeting in such a church. Having crucial material only on the internet may delay actions or require further meetings of the court. How will courts ensure that crucial details are not being overlooked in decision-making if they need to be interpolated from other locations rather than being available in a single source to all participants in the discussion?

A second concern is the timeliness of citations from an electronic *Manual*. Some readers will remember the days when the *Manual* was in the form of a small binder and, when changes were made to the text, new pages were issued which replaced the discontinued text. A constant challenge was ensuring that the *Manual* citations were updated responsibly. The advent of differently coloured covers for each edition relieved that concern somewhat. With an electronic *Manual* we return to previous challenge of ensuring that the courts are constantly up to date.

Certainly, the electronic version allows for greater “policy agility” and more rapid response to shifting circumstances. Will the onus be on *Manual* users to regularly check for updates or will some method of notification be created? Having been caught by changes in handbooks published scant months apart, I have a genuine concern about this.

### A Wish List

While we are engaged in this important process, there are a number of circumstances where greater clarity of the *Manual*'s intent would reap significant benefits. Over the years I've noted that some users see the text as defining the rigid centre line down which all must walk; for others, it shows us the edges of the road within which we may travel. Phrased differently: quite apart from *must* and *shall*, some people maintain that if something is specifically *not allowed* or not accounted for in the *Manual* it should not occur; others take the position that if something is not *expressly forbidden* then it should be permitted. I certainly have my convictions on the subject: a definitive declaration on that point might assist in resolving some confusion.

Obviously simplification eliminates various elements in the existing *Manual*. Generally this has been done quite fairly and judiciously in the electronic text. There are some places of concern that I want to note as examples of how simplification can lead to unintentional alteration. For instance, in the electronic text 3.2.1 in the matter of baptism, there is no mention of the provision of sponsors as an alternate route to baptism where neither parent is a member of the Church (*Manual* 010[b]).<sup>5</sup> It may appear in the hyperlink, but as the text stands it eliminates an honoured United Church practice. In some instances, change appears to increase rather than loosen restrictions. In 7.3.1 (electronic text) regarding the membership of the governing body of a local ministry we read: “There is

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<sup>5</sup> At the risk of appearing pedantic, the practice in the electronic text of resetting the numbering of sections to 1 at the beginning of each new chapter is not helpful. The divisions in the text: Introduction to Governance; Local Ministry Unit; Presbytery; Conference, Initiating Action and Change; Congregational Life; Entering Ministry, Pastoral Relations; Conflict Resolution, Oversight and Discipline are more intuitive than in the current *Manual*. However, in each “chapter” the sections number from 1. Thus the text could contain a plethora of sections each numbered 1.2.4 (for example). A running series of sections that continued from chapter to chapter would be more efficient and less prone to confusion for users, particularly in the context of meetings.

one exception to the requirement in (a) above for governing body members to be full members of the congregation: People who are not full members may be elected in special circumstances with the presbytery's approval." This seems tighter than the current bylaws regarding the participation of adherents in local governance—for instance on the Committee of Stewards.

Two more examples will suffice to demonstrate concerns. In the chapter on "Pastoral Relations" we read the following: "Every member of the order of ministry is a member of a Conference" (1.1.1). Though this statement is true, it is interesting that there is no similar assertion regarding the presbytery, which is generally understood as the primary court of membership for those in the order of ministry. In the chapter on "Oversight, Conflict Resolution and Discipline," there is a reference (6) to "Informal Conflict Resolution Processes." Recalling the days when the *Manual* had "informal" and "formal" hearings, and we did away with the former because of rampant problems, the language of "informal" is unfortunate as it may lead some to engage in the sort of practices which we sought to eliminate.

## **Conclusion**

I am pleasantly surprised by the draft of the new Manual. The challenges facing it—and they are considerable—have more to do with the technological features of the venture. In the end, I think we will benefit from this new departure, but along the way the GCE will need to pay close attention to questions of access to the text, the method and manner of changes to the hyperlinks and ensuring that, as far as possible, alterations can be incorporated by users in timely and well understood ways. One continuing benefit of the parallel print version of *The Manual* is the standard of a common text generally accessible. This print parallel must be maintained if the new form is to have credibility among those it is designed to guide.

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Kicking at the Darkness: Bruce Cockburn and the Christian Imagination.*

**Brian J. Walsh. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2011. Pp. 224.**

This is an unusual sort of book, a challenge for a reviewer. After reading Walsh, I spent weeks contemplating the book and trying to decide how it should be read. My conclusion? *Kicking at the Darkness* is really a conversation, an intensely engaged discussion about the meaning of life, with three participants: Bruce Cockburn, as he has spoken through his songs; Brian Walsh, as he assesses his own life and its meaning; and the reader, brought face-to-face with self and world.

This is not a particularly useful book for someone seeking information about Cockburn's life. Walsh avoids biography almost entirely, drawing the reader's attention to moments in Cockburn's life only in the course of his discussion. This book is not even particularly helpful for someone who wants to read about Cockburn's songs; the lyrics appear in fragmented form and as they are relevant, instead of being presented in chronological order and read singly.

On the other hand, this is a very good book for someone who wants to encounter God in the midst of messy life in a complicated world. Walsh's rhetorical strategy is oriented toward that task. This book is committed to the question mark. Rare is the page that does not contain one or two. Indeed, most paragraphs contain at least one and often more.

What happens when being prophetic does not mean looking for fresh air from within a closed-window oppression, but rather changing perspective entirely? What if we are outside looking in? What if the window is looking into a thirty-foot tower near Phnom Penh full of thousands of skulls from killing fields? Skulls that appear to "whisper, as if from a great distance, /of pain, and of pain left far behind"? "Eighteen thousand empty eye-holes peering out at the four directions." What then? What does this Jonah have to say looking into that window (55)?

The questioning mode draws the reader into conversation. Walsh continually asks the reader to engage heart and mind in the effort to think about the world, what God is doing in it, and what that has to do with the reader.

Walsh draws out major themes and motifs in Cockburn's work that call for reflection. Cockburn's concern for the defenceless—the environment, poor and oppressed humans, those suffering from war and other forms of violence—is on full display. Walsh's own interest in contemporary manifestations of empire is helpful on these issues. However, Walsh is also able to identify poetic motifs that are less evident. He calls our attention to the ways in which windows have been significant for Cockburn from his earliest work—and have been developed as a theme over time (see earlier references). The same can be said about homes, the creation dance and water.

Walsh's most significant contribution, though, may be his account of Cockburn's "worldview." The language of "worldview" is current in Reformed circles (Walsh is Christian Reformed Chaplain at the University of Toronto, in addition to teaching at Trinity and Wycliffe Colleges) and is popular at the Institute of Christian Studies in Toronto (where Walsh was a faculty member). A worldview is an account of the whole; as Walsh says, "worldviews tell us both what the world *is* and what it *ought to be*" (20).

In order to clarify Cockburn's worldview, Walsh asks and answers four questions: Where are we? Who are we? What's wrong? and What's the remedy? These questions are discussed most obviously in the latter half of the book, after Walsh has oriented us to Cockburn's themes. Walsh finds Cockburn placing us in a complicated world where evil is present but God is at work, where we meet and live destruction, but where joy will find a way and love wins.

There are times in *Kicking* when Walsh's contributions seem to overwhelm Cockburn's. Walsh includes several long, homiletic or prayerful poems of his own (41-44, 91-99, 155-62). I found the contrast between Cockburn's precise brevity and Walsh's multi-page contributions to be startling—and not to Walsh's advantage. Moreover, these sections tend to draw our attention to Walsh and away from Cockburn and our reflections.

*Kicking* is evidently intended for people familiar with Cockburn's work. The book might be useful for a reader who has no experience of the music, but I strongly recommend at least some listening beforehand—or, perhaps, at intervals as meditative moments, while reading *Kicking*.

Handled in that way, the book could be very useful for private spiritual development or as a theme book for a retreat or small-group study.

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***Awe and Expectation: On Being Stewards of the Gospel.***

**Allen G. Jorgenson. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010. Pp.134.**

In this skilfully composed volume, Canadian Lutheran theologian and educator Allen Jorgenson looks at the age-old question of stewardship with fresh and faithful eyes. Too many church conversations about stewardship are exclusively preoccupied with money. In contrast, Jorgenson offers a view of stewardship that is broader, richer, and more satisfying than our usual fussing about budgets. Grounded in his experience as a pastor, scholar and disciple, he presents a theologically astute series of reflections. The style of writing is generous, open and accessible.

Each chapter addresses a different aspect of stewardship, yet retains an overarching view that sees each Christian's life as a steward in an integrated way. Chapter One addresses the sacraments, which call to mind and re-present for us the life of God in Christ Jesus. They enact the heart of the Christian way each time we celebrate together. In the sacraments, a communal inheritance is entrusted to all. Similarly, each person's distinctive vocation is grounded in the sacramental life, and our daily service in God's name is a dimension of our stewardship. In all this, we are awed, astonished even, by "the promise that God will care for us," ever faithful to the covenant (14).

Chapter Two turns to the themes of justification and justice. Here our stewardship is located in our deep identity as Christ's people, Christ who shows us—and transforms—what it means to be human. Central to that identity in Christ is our adoption into the household of God. There we seek to steward justly God's gifts for the good of all, as did the ancient steward, whose "aim was to order the household so . . . the good, the true,

and the beautiful could flourish” (23).

It is not until Chapter Three that Jorgenson turns to fundraising, the element we typically associate with “stewardship.” Money, bugaboo and blessing that it is, represents so much in our culture that it is hard to capture, and then remember, its theological significance as a sign of our labour and productivity. Jorgenson boldly calls us to view stewards as those “through whom God works to redeem money, so as to make it a contagion of salvation” (32). Constant reminders that we live “under the lordship of the Spirit” help us to be free from “the potential idolatry of money” (32). Those who lead the work of fundraising have the striking role of inviting us to give, to share our money and therefore to join in life *together with the whole Body*. These are steps toward freedom from the idolization or fetishization of cash. We learn from the self-emptying Jesus that all giving serves the mission of God in the world.

Chapter Four contains a graceful exegesis of the Lord’s Prayer. Here we pray for our daily bread, which is “a stand-in for all that is required to meet our needs” (61). God’s concern for our physical well-being is expressed through our readiness to share with one another. But—significantly—this is only provision for today, today’s bread, with no anxiety for tomorrow. Chapter Five pursues similar themes in reflecting on our stewardship of bodies. Chapters Six and Seven—on teaching and proclamation—touch closely on the work of pastors, but Jorgenson reflects on the ways these tasks and benefits are given to the whole Body of believers. Sharing in Jesus’ self-emptying, teachers and preachers are called to build up the whole community. Then all of us make ourselves vulnerable to what we receive from the Word. This takes place in the context of worship, where all stewards are “transformed into agents of reconciliation in the world” (116).

The cumulative effect of these chapters is a re-ordering of our attitudes toward money and other resources by recasting our sense of what it means to be human. Undergirding Jorgenson’s writing is a robust and christologically-grounded ecclesiology. In this, he is well-served by his Lutheran formation. A number of forays into Luther’s theology add considerable depth to his reflections on being a steward. He offers these in ways that are especially helpful for those of us less familiar with Luther’s teaching.

Finally, Jorgenson's multi-focal approach helps move our imagination about stewardship away from the annual "program" toward viewing it as a life-long "process" for congregations and disciples together. We never cease to be stewards: it is in our DNA as Christ-followers. In sharing all good gifts, we discover that giving is itself "the mode by which we receive God's reign" (117).

I warmly recommend this book to preachers, teachers, committees, and any who follow in Jesus' way—stewards, all.

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***The Blaikie Report: An Insider's Look at Faith and Politics.***

**Bill Blaikie. Foreword by Lloyd Axworthy. Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 2011. Pp. 224.**

The Honourable Bill Blaikie has written a political memoir that is well worth reading. As the subtitle promises, it provides an insider's perspective on the political life of Canada over the past three decades. As with any political memoir, there is lots of name-dropping—from Indira Gandhi and the Dali Lama—to a multitude of teachers and political colleagues from Winnipeg to Ottawa and beyond. It makes for an interesting read, whether one is a political junkie or not. The style of quoting himself from past speeches or statements seems strange; yet perhaps it serves to keep the context clear.

As a career parliamentarian, Blaikie has been extremely busy attempting to influence the political direction of Canada in matters of utmost importance to the common good, such as medicare, Aboriginal rights, water and the environment, nuclear arms, trade, war, and globalization. Readers come to appreciate the necessity of a loyal opposition within the parliamentary system, and, as is Blaikie's intention, could be persuaded of the importance of citizen participation in electoral politics. Political life, however, requires a thick skin that not many of us have or indeed could acquire. It is a tribute to say that Blaikie appears to have kept his humanity—and continued to play his bagpipes, inflict

haggis on both friend and foe, and lift up the Immortal Bard, Robbie Burns. Although he bemoans the loss of civility within parliament, he appears to have kept his own intact.

Moreover, Blaikie has kept his vision of a just society intact. His vision, he writes, is a continuation of the social gospel movement. He notes the influence of Walter Rauschenbusch's *A Theology of a Social Gospel* on J.S. Woodsworth and sees himself as continuing this legacy, as well as the legacy of Tommy Douglas and Stanley Knowles. Blaikie admits that he knew nothing of the social gospel tradition while growing up in Transcona, then a CNR working class community outside of the City of Winnipeg, but he learned of it through his education at the University of Winnipeg and at Emmanuel College, where he also was influenced by liberation theology and progressive Catholic teachings on social justice and the economy.

Do not come to Blaikie's book expecting a fuller treatment of the social gospel movement. He makes no mention of Salem Bland or R.B.Y. Scott, for instance. Neither does he allude to the social gospel movement as it influenced Methodism or Presbyterianism, nor as it spread through settlement houses and the work of deaconesses. His idea of the social gospel is solely tied, it seems, to the above-named individuals who ran for office and engaged directly within the political machine. Blaikie, however, is not a scholar; he is a practitioner. Taking on the mantle of the social gospel and the office of the Hebrew prophets, Blaikie views himself as living his faith by representing and defending the masses, and speaking truth to the elite who wield money and influence at the expense, he says, of national sovereignty and human rights.

Blaikie wants people to know that his politics are grounded in his religious faith and in his role as a United Church minister. He laments the cultural wars that have marginalized or ignored the religious perspectives of left-leaning believers, achieved with the aid of the media. He dislikes what he sees as the self-righteousness of the religious right that focuses on individual morals and smug certainties, and does not recognize "social sin." Moreover, he argues that the Westphalian notion of relegating religion out of the public arena is ultimately dangerous. Aware of the global resurgence of religion—he mentions *God is Back* (by John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge)—and the attempts of anti-theists

such as Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins to blame religion for all societal ills, Blaikie's memoir can be read as a powerful "coming out" text for religious people who engage in left politics. Indeed, he describes the formation of the NDP Faith and Justice Commission as just that, a "coming out party" (221).

Of course Blaikie is not advocating that any religious agenda should dominate the public arena, but he is arguing that it not be ignored. While he has convinced me that his political work is part of his religious faithfulness, I am less convinced as to whether such is efficacious in dismantling the unjust powers and principalities that dominate our world. Perhaps I should take heart in knowing that the original social gossellers also lost their optimism—and some of them their faith—but that their legacy did continue.

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### *The People's Jesus*

**Robin Scroggs. Edited by Marshall Johnson. Foreword by Alexandra Brown. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011. Pp. 241.**

Until his retirement, the late Robin Scroggs was Edward Robinson Professor of Biblical Theology at Union Theological Seminary in New York. In this well-written study he investigates what "common folk" (1) in the early churches believed about Jesus. He assumes that New Testament texts were written by Christian members of social elites, differentiated from "common folk" by their education and social milieu. To get at what "common folk" believed, he identifies certain christological titles and concepts as "major linguistic centers around which the early church focused its faith," and traces "their trajectories" within the New Testament (7). The result is an insightful study of different understandings of Jesus underlying the major New Testament writings.

Scroggs argues that Christian faith begins with faith in Jesus (3), not with what can be known historically about him. The first trajectory he

explores is the understanding of the resurrected Jesus as Lord of the cosmos, found in Hellenistic Christianity. Scroggs names this the “Cosmocrator” trajectory. It is exemplified in Philippians 2:6-11, one of the liturgical fragments embedded in New Testament writings that he believes give an indication of “what the church as a whole” (15), common folk and elites, believed. This trajectory remained within the framework of Jewish monotheism, but complicated it with an exalted understanding of Jesus’ person. Though Christians affirming this faith remained subject to Roman rule, they believed that Jesus had dethroned the principalities and demonic powers formerly ruling the cosmos, and were replaced by Jesus’ liberating rule. This Cosmocrator trajectory focuses on the divinity of Jesus’ person, not his teaching. Here Jesus’ resurrection and exaltation is the centre of faith. According to Scroggs, this understanding of Jesus eventually came to predominate in the early church.

Interestingly, Scroggs argues that the notion of Jesus as the Christ was a minor christological trajectory in the early church, primarily situated in debate with Jewish opponents (63). By the time Paul wrote his letters in the fifties CE, Christ had become Jesus’ second name (71-72) and titles like “Lord” were functioning to describe Jesus’ person and saving significance.

The second trajectory Scroggs investigates is the “Son of Man,” who was, according to Scroggs, an essentially religious figure who would judge people in terms of their faithfulness to God. This trajectory was located in Palestinian Christianity and connected to traditions about Jesus’ teachings and actions. Originally Jesus probably taught about the Son of Man, preparing people for his coming. The Gospel of Mark and the Q document (29) distinguish Jesus and the Son of Man, nonetheless also connecting the two: the judgment of the latter would vindicate the ministry and person of Jesus (34). Salvation lay in faithfulness to Jesus’ teaching. In time, probably in light of Jesus’ death and resurrection, he became identified with the Son of Man, as in the Gospels of Mark and John.

Both the Son of Man and the Cosmocrator trajectories interpret Jesus in terms of pre-existing mythic concepts and express a profound sense of his coming and resurrection as a decisive event in salvation history. Mark’s Gospel “remains firmly within the Son of Man

trajectory”(100). Matthew uses various christological titles freely (53) to illuminate aspects of Jesus’ person, teaching and work. Matthew’s christology holds that Jesus is “the true interpreter of God’s will as expressed in Torah” (107). For Luke, Jesus is “the fulfiller of the promises of God to Israel and . . . the innocent proclaimer of God’s rule in the world” (109). John’s Gospel understands Jesus ultimately as the divine Logos, but uses “Son of God” to denote Jesus’ relationship to God; the title Christ or Messiah when debating Jewish opponents; and “Son of Man” to emphasize God’s acting in Jesus (62). Paul adopts the Cosmocrator trajectory, but reasserts an eschatological hope and “the ultimate priority of God over Christ” (115). Scroggs also surveys the christologies of Hebrews, Acts and Revelation.

Though Scroggs eschews any quest for the historical Jesus, he does posit an image of Jesus as seen through his teachings (36). There are excellent summaries throughout the book, but no final conclusion. Perhaps this was intentional. The result is a thought-provoking and insightful book demonstrating the diversity of christologies present in the New Testament and how these tend to be united in affirming the ultimate saving significance of Jesus’ death and resurrection.

This will be a useful book for students of the New Testament and for clergy looking to deepen or refresh their understanding of its christologies.

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***The Other Jesus: Rejecting a Religion of Fear for the God of Love.***

**Greg Garrett. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011. Pp. 118.**

In recent years Christianity has been viewed and defined in a very negative light by public opinion. Terms such as judgemental, intolerant and hypercritical have unfortunately become the norm, not the extreme. According to Greg Garrett, these views have not just come out of

nowhere; they are the product of present and past actions, by a wide variety of forms of Christianity. Garrett even goes so far as to say, "Many American Christians have warped the figure of Jesus almost beyond recognition to support agendas of intolerance, imperialism, political power, and self-congratulatory salvation" (5). It is this view and definition of Christianity today that Garrett attempts to counter in *The Other Jesus*. For Garrett, Christianity is not about intolerance and self-congratulatory salvation, but instead is a religion of justice, acceptance, and, first and foremost, love.

Coming out of a largely conservative evangelical background, Garrett left the faith traditions of his youth and discovered different ways of viewing God, Jesus and the Christian tradition as a whole. In the preface of this book Garrett offers a number of reasons for writing on theology, yet is quick to caution that his thoughts and work are not intended to be the end-all book on theology. Instead Garrett wants to encourage readers to question what they have been told, and to find their answers in the lived experience of their lives and the lives of others. Garrett presents his book as a statement on the possibilities for a faith more grounded in love, and invites a wide range of readers to add their voices to the story of faith. As Garrett says himself, "If you are a seeker interested in what you know of Jesus but repelled by what you know of Christianity, this book is for you" (viii).

*The Other Jesus* is divided into ten chapters, all of which deal with contemporary issues facing Christians. Garrett explores topics such as the Bible, sacramental practices, sin and salvation, the end times and, maybe the most contemporary of issues, "living in a multi-faith world" (108). Each chapter begins with a description of a major idea or theme and ends with a number of questions and suggestions for further reading, making this book an excellent choice for a study group. Within each chapter, Garrett offers a very personal glimpse into his own faith journey, as well as highlighting others' perspectives and influences on Christian thought and practice. The content is accessible by a wide variety of readers. Garrett uses words and concepts, such as evangelical, soteriology and anthropocentric, that would be understood by most academics and educated pastors; yet strives to find ways of explaining them so that readers unfamiliar with these words and concepts can still be engaged.

Garrett is not only able to reach a wide variety of readers, whose backgrounds and education on the topics may differ, but also readers from different age brackets. Garrett accomplishes this by using thought-provoking and inspiring examples about living out one's faith; one of the most profound is the description of Pastor Tony Campolo, who throws a surprise birthday party for a prostitute in a local donut shop at three o'clock in the morning (6). Garret also engages the different ages of his readers by referencing a wide variety of sources. Within a short time period, such as that seen in the chapter entitled *Sin and Salvation*, readers can expect to learn about a theological concept as described by Thomas Aquinas and Augustine and have it explained, moments later, through the words of JK Rowling (68). Garrett uses explanations from Rowan Williams, Phyllis Tickle, Maya Angelou and even from Bono, the lead singer of U2, all of which keeps the reader engaged and wondering whom Garrett will quote next.

In the end, Garrett succeeds in his goal of offering another definition of Christianity, one that counters the widespread understanding of Christians as judgemental and hypocritical. As the title suggests, Garret offers a wonderfully thought-out and well written rejection of a religion of fear, promoting instead one of love. It is a book that will make you laugh out loud in one moment and then think deeply about your own perceptions and understandings of Christianity in the next, all the while keeping you engaged and thinking about which of his books you will read next.

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