



Newsletter C.S. Lewis Society of Central Massachusetts

Exploring Mere Christianity in Science, the Arts, and
Culture

Fall 2010 (Volume 2, Issue 1)



Dear Reader,

It is our pleasure to share with you the Fall 2010 Newsletter of the C.S. Lewis Society of Central Massachusetts. The Society promotes the exploration of ideas from science, the arts, culture, and everyday life as they intersect with what C.S. Lewis called "mere Christianity." It is our hope that we can facilitate engaging discussion and reflection of topics of enduring value for Christians and non-Christians alike. To learn more, we invite you to visit our web site at www.lewisma.org. If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to email us at info@lewisma.org.

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I. Special Event: "Problem of Pain" Mini-Conference at Worcester State College on September 22

The Campus Ambassadors ministry at Worcester State College and the C.S. Lewis Society of Central Massachusetts will jointly sponsor a "mini-conference" at Worcester State on **Wednesday, September 22 from 3:00-5:00 PM** in the **Blue Lounge of the Student Campus Center**. The event will consider selected issues related to the question, if God exists, is good, and is all-powerful, why is there so much pain and suffering in the world? This question has perplexed theologians, philosophers, and suffering people for centuries. Our objective is not to provide a systematic treatment of the question. Instead, the mini-conference will feature the experiences and insights of two speakers. First, Monica Nelson will explain her struggles and experiences with serious breast cancer in an interview format facilitated by Linda Bourie; the interview will then open up to questions from the audience. Second, Stan Bohall will provide an overview of Lewis's classic book, "The Problem of Pain." A variety of books related to the problem of pain will be available at cost at a book table following the presentations. For directions and a campus map, click [here](#).

II. Book and Film Discussion Club to Resume on September 18

In the fall term, the Book and Film Discussion Club will continue to meet at the Auburn Public Library at 369 Southbridge Street at the dates and times listed below (for directions click [here](#)). All are welcome to attend and you do not need to own the books to participate.

1. Saturday, September 18, 9:00-10:30 AM, C.S. Lewis "The Problem of Pain"
1. Saturday, September 25, 9:00-10:30 AM, C.S. Lewis "The Problem of Pain"

2. Saturday, October 9, 9:00-10:30 AM, book to be determined by attendees
2. Saturday, October 23, 9:00-10:30 AM, book to be determined by attendees

3. Saturday, November 13, 9:00-10:30 AM, C.S. Lewis "Voyage of the Dawn Treader"
 3. Saturday, November 20, 9:00-10:30 AM, C.S. Lewis "Voyage of the Dawn Treader"

III. News (Narnia, Lewis, Events, etc.)

["Chronicles of Narnia: The Voyage of the Dawn Treader" Movie Trailer](#)

[Screwtape Letters at Westside Theatre Celebrates 100th Show and Extends to Open Run](#)

[Screwtape Letters to Play at Waypoint Theatre Company \(Tuscon, AZ\)](#)

[Screwtape Letters to Play at Warehouse Theatre \(Greenville, SC\)](#)

["Freud's Last Session" \(A Conversation with C. S. Lewis\) Off-Broadway Show Opens in New York City](#)

[C.S Lewis Novel "The Great Divorce" To Be Made Into A Movie](#)

[Conference: The Vibrant Dance of Faith and Science](#)

[Overseas Ministries Studies Center Artist In Residence Program](#)

IV. Books of Interest

Here we summarize a variety of books at the intersection of mere Christianity and science (S), arts (A), culture (C), and everyday life (L). We also include recent books on the life and work of C.S. Lewis (designated "Lewis") and books for kids (K). Unless otherwise indicated, summaries are from amazon.com or the publisher's web site. Please note that some of the books delve into controversial issues. While the books in the Newsletter are not officially endorsed by the Society, they can be good starting points for further discussion and reflection.

A Reasonable God: Engaging the New Face of Atheism (S,C)

Gregory E. Ganssle, Baylor University Press, 2009

Calmly engaging the philosophical arguments posed by best-selling authors Daniel Dennett and Richard Dawkins, and to a lesser extent, Christopher Hitchens and Sam Harris, Gregory Ganssle's *A Reasonable God* is a nuanced, charitable, and philosophically well-informed defense of the existence of God....Surveying topics including the relationship between faith and reason, moral arguments for the existence of God, the Darwinian theories of the origin of religion, he pays particular attention to, and ultimately rejects, what he determines is the strongest logical argument against the existence of god posed by the new atheists, put forth by Dawkins: that our universe resembles more of what an atheistic universe would be like than it does with what a theistic universe would be like.

A Science and Religion Primer (S,C)

Heidi A. Campbell and Heather Looy (eds.), Baker Academic, 2009

A Science and Religion Primer is a unique resource: an encyclopedia, an annotated bibliography, and a survey of the relationship between two equally complex fields. Editors Heidi Campbell and Heather Looy begin their work with four chapters from expert contributors: history of the science and religion dialogue, the role of philosophy in the science and religion dialogue, theology's intersection with the science and religion dialogue, and science and technology in light of religion. Entries cover such diverse topics as philosopher of science Karl Popper, the anthropic principle, Gaia, theodicy, hermeneutics, Intelligent Design, and more.

The Polkinghorne Reader: Science, Faith, and the Search for Meaning (S,C,L)

John C. Polkinghorne, Templeton Press, 2010

John Polkinghorne is a world authority in the field of science and religion. He has written numerous books in this area, and his thinking is hugely influential. This book brings together his thoughts on several core issues in the debate: God, science and technology, and Christianity.

Genesis and the Big Bang: The Discovery of Harmony between Modern Science and the Bible (S)

Gerald L. Schroeder, Bantam Books, 1991

In this groundbreaking book, physicist Gerald Schroeder takes on skeptics from both sides of the cosmological debate, arguing that science and the Bible are not at odds concerning the origin of the universe.

Building Cultures of Trust (S,C,L)

Martin Marty, Eerdmans, 2010

American society is experiencing a profound crisis of trust, from government to mass media to educational and religious institutions. Whether we acknowledge it or not, this crisis affects us all. In *Building Cultures of Trust* Martin Marty proposes ways to improve the conditions for trust at what might be called the "grassroots" level. He suggests that it makes a difference if citizens put energy into inventing, developing, and encouraging "cultures of trust" in all areas of life -- families, schools, neighborhoods, workplaces, and churches. His analysis is particularly poignant and his conclusions especially helpful when he advocates trust-building in the religion-versus-science debate, rather than the confrontational postures that characterize much of that debate today. Marty believes that such efforts at trust-building will do more than just trickle up to larger areas of society; they will become slow-spreading habits of honesty, inspiring trust on a culture-changing scale.

The Radical Disciple: Some Neglected Aspects of Our Calling (S,A,C,L)

John Stott, Intervarsity Press, 2010

In what is likely the last book by the leading evangelical churchman of the twentieth century, John Stott explores eight neglected aspects of Christian discipleship that demand another hearing.

Christians in the Movies: A Century of Saints and Sinners (A,C)

Peter E. Dans, Rowman & Littlefield, 2009

Christians in the Movies traces the arc of the portrayal in film of Christians from 1905 to the present. For most of the first six decades, the portrayals were favorable and even reverential. By contrast, from 1970 on, Christians have often been treated with hostility and often outright ridicule. This book explores this shift through in-depth reviews and commentaries on 100 important films, as well as briefer discussions of about 75 additional Christian-themed films.

The Wisdom of Pixar: An Animated Look at Virtue (A,C)

Robert Verlarde, Intervarsity Press, 2010

Robert Verlarde unpacks the movies of Pixar and shows how they display the best of classic Christian virtues. Pixar's films resonate with us because of their moral character. Their virtuous themes of hope and courage, friendship and love connect with our deepest human longings. Whether we identify with the plight of a lost fish or the adventures of toys, bugs or cars, Pixar's characters help us build our own character, with the kind of virtue that we want for ourselves and those around us.

Sacred Space: The Quest for Transcendence in Science Fiction Film and Television (S,C,L)

Douglas E. Cowan, Baylor University Press, 2010

From the millennial dreams of a future bright with potential to the promise of evolution from some as-yet-undreamed engine of creation, science fiction's visions of transcendence animate the pages of *Sacred Space*. Drawing on the most popular examples -- *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, *Battlestar Galactica*, *Babylon 5*, and *Stargate SG-1*--as well as the lesser known but no less important, Cowan reveals the multivalent religious ideas present in this media. Why do these themes that consistently appear in science fiction matter? What do they reveal about the often ambivalent relationship between outer space and our spirits? Cowan insightfully shows how these films and shows express and reinforce culturally constructed conceptions of transcendent hope, and along the way provides a provocative reflection on what this

ultimately says about our culture's worldviews, hopes, and fears.

Evolving in Monkey Town: How A Girl Who Knew All The Answers Learned to Ask The Questions (S,C,L)

Rachel Held Evans, Zondervan, 2010

Rachel Held Evans recounts her experiences growing up in Dayton, Tennessee, a town that epitomized Christian fundamentalism during the Scopes Monkey Trial of 1925. With fearless honesty, Evans describes how her faith survived her doubts and challenges readers to re-imagine Christianity in a postmodern context, where knowing all the answers isn't as important as asking the questions.

An Introduction to Bioethics, 4th Edition (S,L)

Thomas A. Shannon and Nicholas J. Kockler, Paulist Press, 2009

This book provides an introductory survey of various bioethical issues facing society from beginning of life issues to end of life issues, and several issues in between.

The Good and Beautiful Life: Putting on the Character of Christ (C,L)

James Bryan Smith, Intervarsity Press, 2010

"I have never met a person whose goal was to ruin his or her life. We all want to be happy, and we want it all of the time." So begins James Bryan Smith in *The Good and Beautiful Life*. The problem is, he tells us, we have bought into false notions of happiness and success. These self-centered decisions lead us further into the vices that cause ruin: anger, lust, lying, worry and judging. Eventually we find ourselves living a beautifully packaged life of self-destruction. Following the Sermon on the Mount, ...[Smith] guides us to look behind these character flaws and to replace our false beliefs with Jesus' narratives about life in the kingdom of God.

Wired for Intimacy: How Pornography Hijacks the Male Brain (C,L)

William M. Struthers, Intervarsity Press, 2010

Pornography is powerful. Our contemporary culture has been pornified, and it shapes our assumptions about identity, sexuality, the value of women and the nature of relationships. Countless Christian men struggle with the addictive power of porn. But common spiritual approaches of more prayer and accountability groups are often of limited help. In this book neuroscientist and researcher William Struthers explains how pornography affects the male brain and what we can do about it. Because we are embodied beings, viewing pornography changes how the brain works, how we form memories and make attachments. By better understanding the biological realities of our sexual development, we can cultivate healthier sexual perspectives and interpersonal relationships. Struthers exposes false assumptions and casts a vision for a redeemed masculinity, showing how our sexual longings can actually propel us toward sanctification and holiness in our bodies. With insights for both married and single men alike, this book offers hope for freedom from pornography.

Beauty for Truth's Sake: On the Re-enchantment of Education (A,C)

Stratford Caldecott, Brazos Press, 2009

Much of the confusion and meaninglessness of the twenty-first century stems from the fragmentation of knowledge. Our postmodern times cry out for a return to wholeness. Enter Stratford Caldecott, who calls for renewal in education in *Beauty for Truth's Sake*. By reclaiming the classic liberal arts and viewing disciplines such as science and mathematics through a poetic lens, the author explains that unity is present within diversity. Ultimately, God is behind all truth.

The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict (C)

William T. Cavanaugh, Oxford University Press, 2009

The idea that religion has a dangerous tendency to promote violence is part of the conventional wisdom of Western societies, and it underlies many of our institutions and policies, from limits on the public role of religion to efforts to promote liberal democracy in the Middle East. William T. Cavanaugh challenges this conventional wisdom by examining how the twin categories of religion and the secular are

constructed. A growing body of scholarly work explores how the category 'religion' has been constructed in the modern West and in colonial contexts according to specific configurations of political power. Cavanaugh draws on this scholarship to examine how timeless and transcultural categories of 'religion' and 'the secular' are used in arguments that religion causes violence. He argues three points: 1) There is no transhistorical and transcultural essence of religion. What counts as religious or secular in any given context is a function of political configurations of power; 2) Such a transhistorical and transcultural concept of religion as non-rational and prone to violence is one of the foundational legitimating myths of Western society; 3) This myth can be and is used to legitimate neo-colonial violence against non-Western others, particularly the Muslim world.

Pilgrims of Christ on the Muslim Road: Exploring a New Path Between Two Faiths (C,L)

Paul-Gordon Chandler, Rowman & Littlefield, 2008

Paul-Gordon Chandler presents fresh thinking in the area of Christian-Muslim relations, showing how Christ -- whom Islam reveres as a Prophet and Christianity worships as the divine Messiah -- can close the gap between the two religions. He illustrates his perspective with examples from the life of Syrian novelist Mazhar Mallouhi, who seeks to bridge the chasm of misunderstanding between Muslims and Christians through his novels.

A Common Word: Muslims and Christians on Loving God and Neighbor (C,L)

Miroslav Volf, Ghazi bin Muhammad, and Melissa Yarrington (eds.), Eerdmans, 2009

In late 2007 Muslim leaders from around the world together issued in the pages of The New York Times an open letter to Christian leaders inviting cooperation as a step toward peace. That letter, "A Common Word between Us and You," acknowledged real differences between the two faiths but nonetheless contended that "righteousness and good works" should be the only areas in which they compete. The 138 signatories included over a dozen grand muftis, an ayatollah, and a Jordanian prince, and the document was widely considered a groundbreaking step toward reconciliation between Islam and Christianity -- two major religions with a great deal in common. That original letter and a collaborative Christian response -- "Loving God and Neighbor Together" -- both appear in this remarkable volume. Building on those original momentous documents, A Common Word further includes subsequent commentary and dialogue between Muslim and Christian scholars addressing critical and frequently asked questions.

Before I Go: Letters to Our Children About What Really Matters (C,L)

Peter Kreeft, Sheed & Ward, 2007

Renowned Catholic writer Peter Kreeft presents 67 things he has learned about life, faith, morality, priorities, marriage, and more as his legacy to his children-- and to readers. He shares his practical wisdom, as well as his concern for truth and goodness, in a beautifully written and compelling style.

Money Enough: Everyday Practices for Living Faithfully in the Global Economy (C,L)

Douglas A. Hicks, Jossey-Bass, 2010

Douglas Hicks looks at how Christian faith applies to the practices of economic life -- spending, saving, giving especially as an alternative to a life of unbridled consumerism. This book offers reflections for people of faith and anyone who wants to connect their Monday through Saturday lives with their faith and live a more integrated way. It takes a look at how to realistically apply Christian principles in these especially perilous economic times.

Believing Again: Doubt and Faith in a Secular Age (C,L)

Roger Lundin, Eerdmans, 2009

In *Believing Again* Roger Lundin brilliantly explores the cultural consequences of the rather sudden nineteenth-century emergence of unbelief as a widespread social and intellectual option in the English-speaking world. Lundin's narrative focuses on key poets and novelists from the past two centuries -- Dostoevsky, Dickinson, Melville, Auden, and more -- showing how they portray the modern mind and heart balancing between belief and unbelief. Lundin engages these literary luminaries through chapters

on a series of vital subjects, from history and interpretation to beauty and memory. Such theologians as Barth and Balthasar also enter the fray, facing the challenge of modern unbelief with a creative brilliance that has gone largely unnoticed outside the world of faith. Lundin's *Believing Again* is a beautifully written, erudite examination of the drama and dynamics of belief in the modern world.

A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix (C,L)

Edwin H. Friedman, Seabury Books, 2007

Ten years after his death, Edwin Friedman's insights into leadership are more urgently needed than ever. He was the first to tell us that all organizations have personalities, like families, and to apply the insights of family therapy to churches and synagogues, rectors and rabbis, politicians and teachers. *Failure of Nerve* is essential reading for all leaders, be they parents or presidents, corporate executives or educators, religious superiors or coaches, healers or generals, managers or clergy. Friedman's insights about our regressed, "seatbelt society," oriented toward safety rather than adventure, help explain the sabotage that leaders constantly face today. Suspicious of the "quick fixes" and instant solutions that sweep through our culture only to give way to the next fad, he argues for strength and self-differentiation as the marks of true leadership. His formula for success is more maturity, not more data; stamina, not technique; and personal responsibility, not empathy.

The Cambridge Companion to C. S. Lewis (Lewis)

Robert MacSwain and Michael Ward (eds.), Cambridge University Press, 2010

A distinguished academic, influential Christian apologist, and best-selling author of children's literature, C. S. Lewis is a controversial and enigmatic figure who continues to fascinate, fifty years after his death. This Companion is the first comprehensive single-volume study written by an international team of scholars to survey Lewis's career as a literary historian, popular theologian, and creative writer. Twenty-one expert voices from Oxford, Cambridge, Princeton, and Wheaton, among many other places of learning, analyze Lewis's work from theological, philosophical, and literary perspectives. Some chapters consider his professional contribution to fields such as critical theory and intellectual history, while others assess his views on issues including moral knowledge, gender, prayer, war, love, suffering, and Scripture. The final chapters investigate his work as a writer of fiction and poetry. Original in its approach and unique in its scope, this Companion shows that C. S. Lewis was much more than merely the man behind Narnia.

C. S. Lewis (Who Wrote That?), 2nd edition (K)

John Davenport, Chelsea House Publications, 2010

This British author is best known for his *Chronicles of Narnia* series, beginning with the book *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. While Lewis' fantasy series has remained popular with young readers, his more serious and adult fare such as *The Screwtape Letters* and *Mere Christianity* showed him to be a deft writer for all ages.

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