



# Newsletter C.S. Lewis Society of Central Massachusetts

Exploring Mere Christianity in Science, the Arts, and  
Culture

Spring/Summer 2010 (Volume 1, Issue 3)



Dear Reader,

It is our pleasure to share with you the Spring/Summer 2010 Newsletter of the C.S. Lewis Society of Central Massachusetts. The Society is dedicated to promoting 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](http://www.lewisma.org). If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to email us at [info@lewisma.org](mailto:info@lewisma.org).

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### **I. Special Event: "Problem of Pain" Mini-Conference Planned for Worcester State College**

The Campus Ambassadors ministry at Worcester State College and the C.S. Lewis Society of Central Massachusetts plan to jointly sponsor a "mini-conference" at Worcester State in Fall 2010. 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 that 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. The Fall 2010 Newsletter and the Lewis Society Web Page will provide further details about the mini-conference as they become available. Stay tuned!

### **II. News (Narnia, Lewis, etc.)**

"Chronicles of Narnia: The Exhibition" coming to [Montreal Exhibition Centre](#) and [U.S. Space & Rocket Center](#)

[Billy Graham once likened to Narnia character Puddleglum](#)

[C.S. Lewis International Conference to be held in France, June 2011](#)

[Christian leaders give thumbs up to preview of Voyage of the Dawn Treader movie](#)

[First Look at Voyage of The Dawn Treader Poster](#)

[Lantern Theater Company \(Philadelphia\) Presents "The Screwtape Letters" 5/19-6/6](#)

### III. Book and Film Discussion Club to Resume in Fall 2010

During Fall 2010, the Book and Film Discussion Club is scheduled to meet at the Auburn Public Library at 369 Southbridge Street. The tentative dates and times and the likely books are listed below. The Fall 2010 Newsletter will provide further details.

1. Saturday, September 11, 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"

### 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.

#### **To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World (S,A,C,L)**

James Davison Hunter, Oxford University Press, 2010

"The call to make the world a better place is inherent in Christian belief and practice. But why have efforts to change the world by Christians so often failed or gone tragically awry? And how might Christians in the 21st century live in ways that have integrity with their traditions and are more truly transformative? In *To Change the World*, James Davison Hunter offers persuasive--and provocative--answers to these questions. Hunter begins with a penetrating appraisal of the most popular models of world-changing among Christians today, highlighting the ways they are inherently flawed and therefore incapable of generating the change to which they aspire. Because change implies power, all Christians eventually embrace strategies of political engagement.... Hunter argues that all too often these political theologies worsen the very problems they are designed to solve. What is really needed is a different paradigm of Christian engagement with the world, one that Hunter calls "faithful presence"--an ideal of Christian practice that is not only individual but institutional; a model that plays out not only in all relationships but in our work and all spheres of social life. He offers real life examples, large and small, of what can be accomplished through the practice of "faithful presence." Such practices will be more fruitful, Hunter argues, more exemplary, and more deeply transfiguring than any more overtly ambitious attempts can ever be. Written with keen insight, deep faith, and profound historical grasp, *To Change the World* will forever change the way Christians view and talk about their role in the modern world" (amazon.com).

"If there is a possibility for human flourishing in our world, it does not begin when we win the culture wars but when God's word of love becomes flesh in us, reaching every sphere of social life. When faithful presence existed in church history, it manifested itself in the creation of hospitals and the flourishing of art, the best scholarship, the most profound and world-changing kind of service and care - again, not only for the household of faith but for everyone. Faithful presence isn't new; it's just something we need to recover" (James Davison Hunter, quoted in *Christianity Today*, May 2010, p. 36).

"How should Christians act in the world? The dominant answer in America today seems to be: through politics. But the major model of Christian political action, visible most obviously but not exclusively in the

Christian Right, has been a politics fuelled by resentment and a sense of victimization, actuated by a strong will to power, and a propensity to demonize its opponents. This politics is a capitulation to the worst elements of the contemporary culture it claims to be redeeming. Hunter offers an acute and penetrating analysis of this paradoxical and distressing phenomenon, and carefully charts an alternative course for contemporary Christians, a form of 'faithful presence' within culture and society. The book is brimful of insightful challenges to our conventional understanding of things, and of inspiring suggestions for a new departure" (Charles Taylor, author of *A Secular Age*).

"For anyone interested in American Christianity, whether believer or observer, this is an extraordinarily important and valuable book. Hunter's analysis of culture and the capacity of Christians to influence it (or not) is the most sophisticated and subtle I have ever seen, explaining why most treatments of the subject are gravely inadequate. His treatment of religion and power in the American context is similarly illuminating. Finally his theology of faithful presence offers a promising alternative to most of the approaches on offer today whether from liberals or conservatives" (Robert Bellah, co-author of *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*).

"Insightful, creative, refreshing, challenging, realistic, and calm but hard-hitting, *To Change the World* offers a sharp, critical and constructive vision for American Christianity that simply must be engaged by all sides. Hunter gives us big-picture, alternative thinking at its best. His deft interrogation of the Christian political left, right, and center in America nails it, just as his constructive, alternative vision rings true in its promise. A rare achievement and a must-read for people of faith in these times" (Christian Smith, author of *Soul Searching* and *Souls in Transition*).

"It is groundbreaking, it is comprehensive, and it is visionary. Above all, it is wise, both sociologically and theologically. No Christian entrusted with institutional leadership or cultural power should miss the chance to read it. It will be provoking better Christian conversations about culture for years to come, and may well help our secular neighbors understand what Christians really are, or should be, aiming for -- even when we use slogans like 'to change the world.' Bravo" (Andy Crouch).

[Review of "To Change the World" in Books & Culture by Andy Crouch](#)

[Christianity Today's overview of "To Change the World" and interview with James Davison Hunter](#)

### **Belief: Readings on the Reason for Faith (S,A,C,L)**

Francis S. Collins, HarperOne, 2010

"Is there a God?" is the most central and profound question that humans ask. With the New Atheists gaining a loud voice in today's world, it is time to revisit the long-standing intellectual tradition on the side of faith. Francis Collins, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Language of God* and renowned physician and geneticist, defends the reason for faith in this provocative collection. Collins is our guide as he takes us through the writings of many of the world's greatest thinkers -- philosophers, preachers, poets, scientists -- both past and present, including such luminaries as C. S. Lewis and Augustine, and unexpected voices such as John Locke and Dorothy Sayers. Despite the doubts of a cynical world, this essential companion proves once and for all the rationality of faith."

"In the twenty-first century, many seem to have concluded that the spiritual experience and the life of the mind ought to occupy separate domains, and that disruptions, conflicts, and disenchantments will result if the firewall comes down. Surely humanity's ongoing search for truth is not enriched by such limitations. In the words of Socrates, the key to a fully mature and richly rewarding life, both for us as individuals and as a society, is to 'follow the argument wherever it leads,' unafraid of the consequences. If this collection of essays provides even a small encouragement in this direction for the seeker, the believer, or the skeptic, that will be gratifying indeed." -- from the Introduction

### **Refractions: A Journey of Faith, Art, and Culture (A,C,L)**

Makoto Fujimura, NavPress, 2009

"An artist with the craftsmanship and global appeal of Makoto Fujimura comes along all too rarely. Such

an artist with a strong faith commitment who both inspires and leads other artists--now that's really rare. Mako is a fine writer. I learned, and was provoked and frequently moved by these reflections that through Mako's eye have become unique refractions" (Philip Yancey).

**After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion (C,L)**

Robert Wuthnow, Princeton University Press, 2010

"Robert Wuthnow, [a] distinguished sociologist of religion...focuses on...a group that is not just the harbinger of the future but that already constitutes about half the country's adult population. Wuthnow has a great deal to say about marriage, weddings, marital happiness and parenting [and] describes modest changes in worship services and programs that might help congregations engage young adults, especially unmarried ones" (Peter Steinfeld, *New York Times*).

**Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults (C,L)**

Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, Oxford University Press, 2009

"Unlike the nonsense delivered in news magazines and opinion polls, *Souls in Transition* is serious scholarly research about religion among emerging adults. The sober, fair-minded presentation of evidence about what is and what is not happening among Americans age 18 to 23 is refreshing" (Robert Wuthnow).

**Man and Woman, One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul's Letters (C,L)**

Philip Barton Payne, Zondervan, 2009

"Does Paul teach a hierarchy of authority of man over woman, or does he teach the full equality of man and woman in the church and home? In *Man and Woman, One in Christ*, Philip Barton Payne answers this question and more, injecting crucial insights into the discussion of Paul's view of women. Condensing over three decades of research on this topic, Payne's rigorous exegetical analysis demonstrates the consistency of Paul's message on this topic and its coherence with the rest of his theology. Payne's exegetical examination of the Pauline corpus is thorough, exploring the influences on Paul, his practice as a church leader, and his teachings to various Christian communities. Paul's theology, instruction, and practice consistently affirm the equal standing of men and women, with profound implications for the church today. *Man and Woman, One in Christ* is required reading for all who desire to understand the meaning of Paul's statements regarding women and their relevance for Christian relationships and ministry today. This work has the potential of uniting the church on this contentious issue."

**When Athens Met Jerusalem: An Introduction to Classical and Christian Thought (C,L)**

John Mark Reynolds, Intervarsity Press, 2009

"Close to the truth, ah, so close," writes John Mark Reynolds about one of the best ancient Athenian philosophers. That's what Athens has to do with Jerusalem. That's what Plato has to do with Christendom and eventually with Christianity today. The story of the origins of Christian thinking that Reynolds tells is not the one we often hear from the pulpit. There is no bashing of intellectuals, no rejection of the machinations of the mind in favor of the intuitions of the heart, no substitution of faith for the role of thinking. Reynolds himself was brought back to Christ through the reading of Plato's *Republic*. Astonishing? Yes, but read Plato as Reynolds does and it all makes sense. Written with the passion of a lover of truth and the Word of Truth found finally in Christ, this book will challenge any student of either the ancient Greek philosophers or the beliefs of the early church" (James W. Sire, author of *The Universe Next Door* and, with scientist Carl Peraino, *Deepest Differences: A Christian-Atheist Dialogue*).

**Surprised by Grace: God's Relentless Pursuit of Rebels (L)**

Tullian Tchividjian, Crossway Books, 2010

"God's compassion and pardon are utterly shocking in their lavish abundance -- that's a lesson God himself pounded into the epic life-story of one man who kept resisting in whatever way he could. *Surprised by Grace* retells that man's true story -- in a gripping presentation that will open readers' eyes wider than ever to God's relentless, purposeful, and inexhaustible grace. The man's name isn't new to anyone. It's Jonah, the famous Old Testament prophet. This fresh unfolding of his story seeks to

recapture the staggering effect it had on those who first encountered it so many centuries ago -- the same shock effect that's desperately needed today among those who think they know God's heart far better than they really do. In a powerful journey through unforgettable events and imagery, *Surprised by Grace* reveals how relentlessly God pursues rebels (a category that ultimately includes everyone), though he has every right and plenty of reasons to give up on us all."

**Faith at the Edge: A Book for Doubters (L)**

Robert Wennberg, Eerdmans, 2009

"Have you ever doubted your faith? Have you ever, deep down in your heart, doubted that God was really present in your life? Or wondered whether everything you believed in as a Christian was false? Call it existential doubt. Call it "the dark night of the soul," as one Christian saint famously did. Whatever you call it, it's real. It is personal, it is painful, it is distressing, and it can last for years -- maybe even a lifetime. You are not alone. Such crises of the soul have come upon saints throughout Christian history -- from John of the Cross in the sixteenth century to Mother Teresa in our own time. In fact, there may be something of this God-doubting in all of us. At some point in our Christian walk, most of us have traveled -- or will travel -- this dark path. In *Faith at the Edge* Robert Wennberg draws from his own experience with doubt to address such troubling issues. But he also calls upon the wisdom and insight of such figures as Blaise Pascal, G. K. Chesterton, Simone Weil, C. S. Lewis, and Martin Marty. Laying out a theologically insightful account of what happens during doubt, Wennberg helps us understand how we can cope with these dark episodes and even profit from them spiritually."

**It's Beginning to Hurt: Stories (L)**

James Lasdun, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009

"The stories in this remarkable collection -- including "An Anxious Man," winner of the National Short Story Prize (UK) -- are vibrant and gripping. James Lasdun's great gift is his unfailing psychological instinct for the vertiginous moments when the essence of a life discloses itself. With forensic skill he exposes his characters' hidden desires and fears, drawing back the folds of their familiar self-delusions, their images of themselves, their habits and routines, to reveal their interior lives with brilliant clarity."

**The Hidden Story of Narnia: A Book-by-Book Guide to C. S. Lewis' Spiritual Themes (Lewis)**

Will Vaus, Winged Lion Press, 2010

"When ten-year-old Anne Waller from Suffolk England wrote to C. S. Lewis in 1961 with a question about The Chronicles of Narnia she never expected to receive a reply. However, not only did Lewis answer her letter, he also outlined the spiritual themes in each of the Narnia books. That letter served as inspiration for Will Vaus to write The Hidden Story of Narnia. Nearly 50 years later, Anne Waller Jenkins has written a preface for The Hidden Story, praising the author's "gift of clarity" and the "sheer joy and merriment" of his style."

**A Sword between the Sexes?: C. S. Lewis and the Gender Debates (Lewis)**

Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, Brazos Press, 2010

"What did C. S. Lewis really think about gender roles? In this book, a widely recognized expert on male and female roles evaluates Lewis's understanding and presentation of gender, revealing that he ended his life thinking differently about gender than many of his followers assume. This is the first book to provide a close examination of Lewis's thought on gender and what it means for today. It addresses the tension between faith and science and offers insight into the continuing debate over gender relations, egalitarianism, and complementarianism. The book will appeal to readers of C. S. Lewis and those who are interested in gender issues."

**The Screwtape Letters Study Guide (Lewis)**

Michael Poteet, Progeny Press, 2001

Provides detailed background on *The Screwtape Letters*, definitions of key terms, and discussion questions for each of the 31 Screwtape letters.

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