CH667: C. S. Lewis’ Life, Works, and Spirituality

C. S. Lewis (© Marion Wade Center)

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The sweetest thing in all my life has been the longing...to find the place where all the beauty came from.

C. S. Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*

For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

2 Corinthians 4:17-18, NIV

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Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary; Fall, 2013
Mondays, 2:00-5:00 p.m. at Hamilton campus
Contact info: TBA
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Course Description & Objectives:

The course will explore the life, works, and spirituality of C. S Lewis (1898-1963), one of the most influential Christians of the twentieth century. Lewis’ *Mere Christianity* was voted the most important book of the twentieth century by *Christianity Today* in 2000, and many regard Lewis’ explanations of Christianity as the most effective of the twentieth century, especially in English. Millions of children have read his popular Chronicles of Narnia, which are currently being turned into major motion pictures. The first free films have already grossed 1.5 billion dollars. And the day of his death, November 22, is commemorated as his feast day in the Anglican liturgical calendar. This year marks the 50th anniversary of Lewis’ death.

C. S. Lewis fought in World War I, taught as an Oxford fellow for almost three decades, and became the first Professor of Medieval and Renaissance English at Cambridge University. He was highly influenced by the nineteenth-century fantasy writer and novelist George MacDonald, became close friends with J. R. R. Tolkien and Charles Williams, and actively participated in The Inklings. In later life, he met and married Joy Davidman Gresham, and together they faced, fought, and grieved the cancer that took her life.

As the author of over thirty books, C. S. Lewis wrote in apologetics, science fiction, children’s fiction, literary criticism, medieval studies, and spirituality. He delivered radio addresses, wrote copious letters, and penned diaries. His works explored a wide range of issues including sacrifice and redemption; faith, reason, emotion, science, and romanticism; the roles of imagination and the arts; myth, language, and meaning; love and friendship; the problems of evil, pain, and grief; the relationship between this world and others; the nature of allegory; prayer and many other aspects of the spiritual life.
In keeping with Neville Coghill’s statement about Lewis that “no one knew better than he how an understanding of poetry depends on understanding a poet’s universe,” we will be exploring Lewis’ “universe,” with the goal of understanding his writing at a deeper level. This will involve, ironically, looking at his thoughts on the literal physical universe, since space was a lifelong interest for him. But it will primarily mean looking at his metaphorical universe: the friends, the books, ideas, influences on him; and the life events with which his writings interact and to which many of them respond. It will set up the framework for lifelong learning in Lewis rather than attempt to summarize all his writings. Since at least half of the point of reading Lewis is the sheer delight of savoring his language, tone, and imagery, the course will not attempt to take away the need to read Lewis oneself. Rather, it seeks to invite attendees to wander (metaphorically, of course) into Magdalen, Magdalene, and the Kilns; to walk in the Irish and Welsh rains; to gather around the radios of World War II; and to sit awhile in the Eagle and Child, so that when they enter Narnia, Perelandra, and other Lewisian word-built worlds, they will understand at a deeper level the many layers of Lewis’ writing.

The practical application of the course flows out of its content: a deep wrestling with modernity and postmodernity…How do you reach people through reason? and through the imagination? how does one integrate one’s reason with one’s emotions? What is love? What is friendship? How does community foster creativity? How should one respond to evil, pain, and loss? How does one rekindle a sense of wonder where jaded cynicism has set in? And does beauty matter? For anyone who has ever felt that “there has to be more to life than this,” C. S. Lewis beckons one to enter a deeper world of wonder and Joy.

Lecture Schedule (subject to change as necessary)

1. ‘Two Different Strains’ (C. S. Lewis’ Lineage and Childhood; 1898-1908) (Sept 9)
   Required reading: *Surprised by Joy*

2. The Everyman Outer Journey (1908-1931) (Sept 16)
   Required reading: *Surprised by Joy*

3. The Everyman Inner Journey (1908-1931) (Sept 23)
   Required reading: *Surprised by Joy*

4. The Mythopoeic Community and Creativity (1929-1949) (Sept 30)
   Required reading: *Abolition of Man* (1943)

5. The Mythopoeic Community and Myth (1929-1949) (Oct 7)
   Required reading: *The Great Divorce* (1945)

READING WEEK (Oct 14: NO CLASS)

6. ‘A Severe Delight’: The Space Trilogy (Oct 21)
   Required reading: *Out of the Silent Planet* (1938)
   Required reading: *Mere Christianity*

8. Of Mystic Realms: Mysticism, Anglicanism, and the Devotional Life (Nov 4)
   Required reading: *Screwtape Letters* (1942) and *Miracles* (1947; revised 1960); *Voyage of the Dawntreader*

READING WEEK (Nov 11): NO CLASS

9. In the Woods Between the Worlds (1950-1956; Narnia Chronicles) (Nov 18)
   Required reading: *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*

10. “He walks everywhere incognito” (1956-1963; Marriage; Facing pain and death) (Nov 25)
    Required reading: *The Problem of Pain* and *A Grief Observed*

11. Conclusion and Integration (Dec 2)
    Required reading: *Till We Have Faces* (1956)

12. An Inklings Evening (Dec 9 – during regular class time)

   Required Texts (read 1600 pages from the following; it will be very helpful for class discussions if you can use the editions specified below by their ISBN’s, for page numbers vary dramatically from edition to edition):

3. *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* - Count as 150 pages – $7.19 on gcts.christianbook.com
5. C. S. Lewis, *Till We Have Faces* – 324 pages – $7.49 on gcts.christianbook.com

If you have already read any of the above texts, you need to bring the text to class for the class discussion, but you may substitute for your reading total, anything else written by C. S. Lewis. If you’ve read all of C. S. Lewis’ work, you may substitute any scholarly writing about C.S. Lewis. (Count towards your reading only those works that you read or re-read specifically for this course).
Course Requirements:

1. **Research Paper** (60%) – 15-18 double-spaced pages (Due: December 12 at 4:00 p.m. under professor's office door or in box outside the office; or postmarked on or before the due date). Paper will be graded on strength of argument/thought, quality of research (should be grounded in primary sources but interact with secondary works), clarity of structure, and style (grammar, literary expression, proper format). Please follow the “Guidelines for Church History Research Papers” posted on-line.

   If you would like to substitute a 25-30 double-spaced pages creative writing project for the research paper, please contact the professor before the end of September. CH majors (and anyone considering going on for a Ph.D.) are encouraged to do the research paper unless they already have extensive experience writing CH research papers.

   If all other work for the course is completed fully and all class sessions fully attended, the grade on this research paper/creative writing project will be the final grade for the course.

2. **Reading** (20%) - 1600 pages of reading in the required texts. Please submit a reading log, indicating total number of pages (Due: final day for written work, under professor's office door or in box outside office door; or postmarked on or before the due date)

   Grading method for the reading: If 100% of the reading (and all other assignments) has been completed, the Research Paper (or creative writing project) will be the grade for the course. Otherwise, the proportion of reading not done will be deducted from the grade at the following rate:

   - **100 %** (ex: A to A = no change)
   - **80-99%** (ex: A to A- = 1/3 grade drop)
   - **60-79%** (ex: A to B+ = 2/3 grade drop)
   - **40-59%** (ex: A to B = 1 grade drop)
   - **20-39 %** (ex: A to B- = 1 1/3 grade drop)
   - **Below 19%** (ex: A to C+ = 1 2/3 grade drop)

   For example, if your research paper (or major creative writing project) is an A, if you have completed only 78% of the reading (and completed all other work for the course), your final grade for the course will be a B+.

3. **Application** (15%) – (Due final day for written work, under professor’s office door or in box outside her office door; or postmarked on or before the due date). Choose **ONE** of the following for a 7-8 page paper:

   a. Trace and reflect on the role of *Sehnsucht* in your life.
   b. What was the shape of your philosophical pilgrimage to Christ?
   c. What are the books that have shaped your thought? What books do you think should be shaping your thought?
   d. If C. S. Lewis were alive today, what might he choose as topics to address in apologetic works and why?
   e. Write several letters to a friend who may be struggling in his/her prayer life.
   f. If you’re writing a creative project for your main paper, you may want to do a mini-research paper in place of the Application paper.
g. If you are writing a research paper for your main paper, you may want to do a mini-sized creative writing project in place of the Application paper. Grading of Application paper: If the application is not fully completed, the final course grade may be reduced by up to 1 full grade (ex: A to B).

4. “Inklings Evening” participation (5%) - Bring a 1200-1300 word length piece of your writing to present to the group for discussion in small group format. It may be a summary of the argument of your research paper; an excerpt from your creative writing paper; excerpt(s) from your application assignment; a reflection on some piece of C. S. Lewis’ writing or a theme in his life. (If not completed, this assignment may result in a 1/3 letter grade deduction of the final grade for the course. Ex: from A to A-)

- Class attendance may be taken into account, with one point per missed, unexcused session being taken off of the final grade. Official auditors and those doing the course pass/fail must attend at least 9 of the 12 class sessions.

- Grading scale is the one indicated in the Gordon-Conwell academic catalog guidelines: "Grade A is given for meeting with conspicuous excellence the demands which can fairly be made in relation to the requirements of the course. These demands would normally include unusual accuracy in fact, completeness in detail, perfection in form of work, independence of method, grasp of the subject as a whole and constructive imagination. Grade B is given for exceeding the minimum of satisfactory attainment and for meeting certain aspects of the course with excellence. Grade C is given for attaining satisfactory familiarity with the course and for demonstrating at least some ability to use this knowledge in a satisfactory manner. Grade D is a passing mark but indicates unsatisfactory control over the material. Grade F declares that the course has been failed."

- Plagiarism is considered a serious academic offense at GCTS. Please follow guidelines at http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/wts/plagiarism.html.

- Extensions must be requested by assignment due dates, from the professor for the paper, and from the Registrar for the other assignments. Penalties may be applied in absence of extenuating circumstances (illness, death in family).

- Intellectual Property / Privacy Rights: In order to protect intellectual property and privacy rights, and to foster focused attention and learning: No audio, photographic, or video recordings or transmissions may be made in class without the consent of the professor. No use of electronic social networking/email, access to the internet, or game-playing may be made during the class without the consent of the professor. Students for whom English is a second language or who have learning challenges may seek permission from the professor to record the lectures, for personal use only. This paragraph applies to all visitors and auditors as well.

- Internet Usage: Students are required to refrain from accessing the internet or playing computer/cell phone games, etc. at any point during class sessions, unless otherwise
instructed by the professor. “Surfing the web,” checking email, and other internet-based activities are distracting to other students and to the professor, and prevent the student from fully participating in the class sessions. This paragraph applies to all visitors and auditors as well.