



## Newsletter C.S. Lewis Society of Central Massachusetts

Exploring Mere Christianity in Science, the  
Arts, and Culture

Spring/Summer 2012 (Volume 3, Issue 3)



Dear Reader,

We are pleased to share with you the spring/summer 2012 Newsletter of the C.S. Lewis Society of Central Massachusetts. We have many interesting books listed in this issue of the Newsletter (please see below). Have a nice summer. We hope to see you when the Book Club resumes in the fall!

The C.S. Lewis Society of Central Massachusetts promotes the exploration of ideas from science, the arts, culture, and everyday life as they intersect with what C.S. Lewis called "mere Christianity." Our objective is to 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 email us at [info@lewisma.org](mailto:info@lewisma.org).

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#### I. News (Narnia, Lewis, Events, etc.)

[The Lion Awakes: A Movie about Lewis and Tolkien's Friendship Scheduled for 2013 \(movie trailer here\)](#)

[Talk by Linny Dey at Southborough L'Abri \("The Dwarfs are for the Dwarfs": C. S. Lewis on Skepticism\) July 13 at 8 pm](#) (L'Abri talks take place in a wonderful old mansion and they are free and open to the public)

[Conference: The Ten Books that Most Influenced C.S. Lewis \(October 2012\)](#)

#### II. 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.

#### **The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society** (S,A,C,L)

Brad S. Gregory, Harvard University Press, 2012

Before the Protestant Reformation, Western Christianity was an institutionalized worldview laden with expectations of security for earthly societies and hopes of eternal salvation for individuals. The Reformation's protagonists sought to advance the realization of this vision, not disrupt it. But a complex web of rejections, retentions, and transformations of medieval Christianity gradually replaced the

religious fabric that bound societies together in the West. Today, what we are left with are fragments: intellectual disagreements that splinter into ever finer fractals of specialized discourse; a notion that modern science—as the source of all truth—necessarily undermines religious belief; a pervasive resort to a therapeutic vision of religion; a set of smuggled moral values with which we try to fertilize a sterile liberalism; and the institutionalized assumption that only secular universities can pursue knowledge. *The Unintended Reformation* asks what propelled the West into this trajectory of pluralism and polarization, and finds answers deep in our medieval Christian past. (For a book review from *Books & Culture*, [click here.](#))

### **Age of Fracture (S,A,C,L)**

Daniel T. Rodgers, Harvard University Press, 2011

In the last quarter of the twentieth century, the ideas that most Americans lived by started to fragment. Mid-century concepts of national consensus, managed markets, gender and racial identities, citizen obligation, and historical memory became more fluid. Flexible markets pushed aside Keynesian macroeconomic structures. Racial and gender solidarity divided into multiple identities; community responsibility shrank to smaller circles. [Th]is wide-ranging narrative...shows how the collective purposes and meanings that had framed social debate became unhinged and uncertain. Through a contagion of visions and metaphors, on both the intellectual right and the intellectual left, earlier notions of history and society that stressed solidity, collective institutions, and social circumstances gave way to a more individualized human nature that emphasized choice, agency, performance, and desire. Cutting across the social and political arenas of late-twentieth-century life and thought, from economic theory and the culture wars to disputes over poverty, color-blindness, and sisterhood, Rodgers reveals how our categories of social reality have been fractured and destabilized. As we survey the intellectual wreckage of this war of ideas, we better understand the emergence of our present age of uncertainty.

### **Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism (S,A,C,L)**

Alvin Plantinga, Oxford University Press, 2011

This book is a long-awaited major statement by a pre-eminent analytic philosopher...on one of our biggest debates – the compatibility of science and religion. The last twenty years has seen a cottage industry of books on this divide, but with little consensus emerging. Plantinga, as a top philosopher but also a proponent of the rationality of religious belief, has a unique contribution to make. His theme in this short book is that the conflict between science and theistic religion is actually superficial, and that at a deeper level they are in concord. Plantinga examines where this conflict is supposed to exist – evolution, evolutionary psychology, analysis of scripture, scientific study of religion – as well as claims by Dan Dennett, Richard Dawkins, and Philip Kitcher that evolution and theistic belief cannot co-exist. Plantinga makes a case that their arguments are not only inconclusive but that the supposed conflicts themselves are superficial, due to the methodological naturalism used by science. On the other hand, science can actually offer support to theistic doctrines, and Plantinga uses the notion of biological and cosmological "fine-tuning" in support of this idea. Plantinga argues that we might think about arguments in science and religion in a new way – as different forms of discourse that try to persuade people to look at questions from a perspective such that they can see that something is true. In this way, there is a deep and massive consonance between theism and the scientific enterprise.

### **iDisorder: Understanding Our Obsession with Technology and Overcoming Its Hold on Us (S,C,L)**

Larry D. Rosen, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012

iDisorder: changes to your brain's ability to process information and your ability to relate to the world due to your daily use of media and technology resulting in signs and symptoms of psychological disorders - such as stress, sleeplessness, and a compulsive need to check in with all of your technology. Based on decades of research and expertise in the "psychology of technology," Dr. Larry Rosen offers clear, down-to-earth explanations for why many of us are suffering from an "iDisorder." Rosen offers solid, proven strategies to help us overcome the iDisorder we all feel in our lives while still making use of all that technology offers. Our world is not going to change, and technology will continue to penetrate society

even deeper leaving us little chance to react to the seemingly daily additions to our lives. Rosen teaches us how to stay human in an increasingly technological world.

**The Art of Faith: A Guide to Understanding Christian Art and Architecture (A,C,L)**

Judith Couchman, Paraclete Press, 2012

Practical and easy to read, this book unfolds the ancient world of Christian images for believers who want to enrich their faith, college students studying art history, and travelers to religious sites. With this book in hand, you can visit museums, churches, or other sacred places and identify a work of art's style and meaning. Or even explore the signs and symbols of your local church. Whatever your relationship to art or Christianity, open this book when you're curious about a painting, sculpture, symbol, or other sacred work.

**The Juvenilization of American Christianity (C,L)**

Thomas E. Bergler, Eerdmans, 2012

Bergler traces the way in which, over seventy-five years, youth ministries have breathed new vitality into four major American church traditions – African American, Evangelical, Mainline Protestant, and Roman Catholic. Bergler shows too how this "juvenilization" of churches has led to widespread spiritual immaturity, consumerism, and self-centeredness, popularizing a feel-good faith with neither intergenerational community nor theological literacy. Bergler's critique offers constructive suggestions for taming juvenilization.

**Members *Are* Ministers: The Vocation of All Believers (C,L)**

Paul F. Goetting, Cascade Books, 2012

"Goetting describes the nasty divorce in our congregations between Sunday and Monday. As one church member witnessed, "No Pastor has ever asked about my work." Goetting's goal is to invert the pyramid of church leadership so that the people in the pew discover their callings. Goetting draws on the Reformation – along with modern leadership theories – to paint a new picture of ministry. Goetting's real goal is to mess with our imaginations about how a congregation works. Consequently handle with care. The calls for 'ministry in daily life' are growing. Goetting's contribution to these voices is an important one." – Rick Bliese, Luther Seminary

**Renovation of the Church: What Happens When a Seeker Church Discovers Spiritual Formation (C,L)**

Kent Carlson and Mike Lueken with Forward by Dallas Willard, IVP Books, 2011

2012 *Christianity Today* Book Award winner! 2011 *Leadership Journal* Top Book of the Year! Co-pastors Carlson and Lueken tell the story of how God took their thriving, consumer-oriented church and transformed it into a modest congregation of unformed believers committed to the growth of the spirit – even when it meant a decline in numbers. As Kent and Mike found out, a decade of major change is not easy on a church. Oak Hills Church, from the pastoral staff to the congregation, had to confront addiction to personal ambition, resist consumerism and reorient their lives around the teachings of Jesus. Their renewed focus on spiritual formation over numerical growth triggered major changes in the content of their sermons, the tenor of their worship services, and the reason for their outreach. They lost members. But the health and spiritual depth of their church today is a testimony of God's transforming work and enduring faithfulness to the people he loves. Honest and humble, this is Kent and Mike's story of a church they love, written to inspire and challenge other churches to let God rewrite their stories as well.

**The Vampire Defanged: How the Embodiment of Evil Became a Romantic Hero (C,L)**

Susannah Clements, Brazos, 2011

Vampires first entered the pop culture arena with Bram Stoker's 1897 novel, *Dracula*. Today, vampires are everywhere. From *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* to the *Twilight Saga* to HBO's *True Blood* series, pop culture can't get enough of the vampire phenomenon. Bringing her literary expertise to this timely subject, Clements reveals the roots of the vampire myth and shows how it was originally immersed in Christian values and symbolism. Over time, however, vampires have been "defanged" as their spiritual

significance has waned, and what was once the embodiment of evil has turned into a teen idol and the ultimate romantic hero. Clements offers a close reading of selected vampire texts, explaining how this transformation occurred and discerning between the variety of vampire stories presented in movies, TV shows, and novels. Her probing engagement of the vampire metaphor helps readers make Christian sense of this popular obsession.

**Believing in the Resurrection: The Meaning and Promise of the Risen Jesus (C,L)**

Gerald O'Collins, SJ, Paulist Press, 2012

After clarifying the meaning of Jesus' resurrection from the dead, this book presents the reasons that support believing in it and accepting the promise it conveys.

**Dietrich Bonhoeffer's "Letters and Papers from Prison": A Biography (C,L)**

Martin E. Marty, Princeton University Press, 2011

For fascination, influence, inspiration, and controversy, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Letters and Papers from Prison* is unmatched by any other book of Christian reflection written in the twentieth century. A Lutheran pastor and theologian, Bonhoeffer spent two years in Nazi prisons before being executed at age thirty-nine, just a month before the German surrender, for his role in the plot to kill Hitler. The posthumous *Letters and Papers from Prison* has had a tremendous impact on both Christian and secular thought since it was first published in 1951, and has helped establish Bonhoeffer's reputation as one of the most important Protestant thinkers of the twentieth century. In this, the first history of the book's remarkable global career, National Book Award-winning author Martin Marty tells how and why *Letters and Papers from Prison* has been read and used in such dramatically different ways, from the cold war to today. In his late letters, Bonhoeffer raised tantalizing questions about the role of Christianity and the church in an increasingly secular world. Marty tells the story of how, in the 1960s and the following decades, these provocative ideas stirred a wide range of thinkers and activists, including civil rights and antiapartheid campaigners, "death-of-God" theologians, and East German Marxists. In the process of tracing the eventful and contested history of Bonhoeffer's book, Marty provides a compelling new perspective on religious and secular life in the postwar era.

**Henri Nouwen and Spiritual Polarities: A Life of Tension (C,L)**

Wil Hernandez, Paulist Press, 2012

Highlights the tension-filled nature of our journey and shows us, via Nouwen's example, how we too can navigate our way through it in a transformative way.

**Still: Notes on a Mid-Faith Crisis (C,L)**

Lauren F. Winner, HarperOne, 2012

In the critically acclaimed memoir *Girl Meets God*, Lauren F. Winner chronicled her sojourn from Judaism to Christianity. Now, in *Still: Notes on a Mid-Faith Crisis*, Winner describes how experiences of loss and failure unexpectedly slam her into a wall of doubt and spiritual despair: "My belief has faltered, my sense of God's closeness has grown strained, my efforts at living in accord with what I take to be the call of the gospel have come undone." Witty, relatable, and fiercely honest, Winner lays bare her experience of what she calls the "middle" of the spiritual life. In elegant and spare prose, she explores why—in the midst of the overwhelming anxiety, loneliness, and boredom of her deepest questioning about where (or if) God is—the Christian story still explains who she is better than any other story she's ever known. *Still* is an absorbing meditation combining literary grace with spiritual wisdom. It is sure to resonate with anyone looking to sustain a spiritual life in the midst of real life.

**A Free People's Suicide: Sustainable Freedom and the American Future (C,L)**

Os Guinness, Intervarsity Press, 2012

Nothing is more daring in the American experiment than the founders' belief that the American republic could remain free forever. But how was this to be done, and are Americans doing it today? It is not enough for freedom to be won. It must also be *sustained*. Cultural observer Os Guinness argues that the American experiment in freedom is at risk. Summoning historical evidence on how democracies evolve,

Guinness shows that contemporary views of freedom – most typically, a negative freedom from constraint – are unsustainable because they undermine the conditions necessary for freedom to thrive. He calls us to reconsider the audacity of sustainable freedom and what it would take to restore it. "In the end," Guinness writes, "the ultimate threat to the American republic will be Americans. The problem is not wolves at the door but termites in the floor." The future of the republic depends on whether Americans will rise to the challenge of living up to America's unfulfilled potential for freedom, both for itself and for the world.

**C.S. Lewis Goes to Heaven: A Reader's Guide to *The Great Divorce*** (Lewis)

David G. Clark, Winged Lion Press, 2012

"If you want a great guide to [Lewis's] *The Great Divorce*, you can't do better than David Clark, who introduces readers to a host of fascinating historical and literary characters – illuminating this popular novel with theological insight and devotional delight. Clark's tour of C. S. Lewis' version of heaven and hell provides a truly refreshing holiday." Terry Lindvall, author of *Surprised by Laughter: The Comic World of C.S. Lewis*.

**The Chronicles of Narnia and Philosophy: The Lion, the Witch, and the Worldview** (Lewis)

Gregory Bassham and Jerry L. Walls (eds.), Open Court, 2005

The *Chronicles of Narnia* series has entertained millions of readers, both children and adults, since the appearance of the first book in 1950. Here, scholars turn the lens of philosophy on these timeless tales. Engagingly written for a lay audience, these essays consider a wealth of topics centered on the ethical, spiritual, mythic, and moral resonances in the adventures of Aslan, the Pevensie children, and the rest of the colorful cast.

**III. Book Club to Resume in September**

The fall 2012 Newsletter (due out in August) will provide details about the books that we plan to discuss in 2012/2013. Among the books being considered are *The Narnia Code*, *The Horse and His Boy*, *Till We Have Faces*, *Out of the Silent Planet*, *Miracles*, and books by G.K. Chesterton, Henri Nouwen, and E. Nesbit.

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