

Elevenes with C. S. Lewis

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Fall term, 2017

Grace Church

Syllabus

Description

Arguably the most effective Christian apologist of the 20th century, the words of C. S. Lewis continue to speak powerfully in our day. This fall we will attempt to give an overview of the major themes of Lewis' popular writing, drawing on his major apologetic works as well as his *Chronicles of Narnia* and other works of fiction. Necessarily we will be giving very brief introductions to these themes, perhaps somewhat like you might have heard if you were able to have a conversation with Lewis over "elevenes" in his rooms at Magdalen College, Oxford.

Tentative Schedule

Date Topic

9/24 Introducing Someone Who Needs No Introduction: *The Life and Writings of C. S. Lewis*

10/1 The Grand Panorama: *C. S. Lewis on the Meaning of Life*

10/8 Stories We Live By: *C. S. Lewis on Narnia and the Importance of Stories*

10/15 Baptizing Lewis' Imagination: *George MacDonald's Influence on C. S. Lewis*
Led by Don Lauser

10/22 The True Myth: *The Relationship of C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien*
Led by Ty Camp

10/29 The Lord and The Lion: *C. S. Lewis on Aslan and the Christian Life*

11/5 Sharing the Faith: *C. S. Lewis on Apologetics*

11/12 "Men Without Chests": *C. S. Lewis on Education*

11/19 "The Cardinal Difficulty with Naturalism": *C. S. Lewis' Argument from Reason*

11/26 That Hideous Strength: *C. S. Lewis on Scientism*

12/3 Screwtape Letters: *C. S. Lewis on Temptation*

12/10 In the Valley of the Shadow of Death: *C. S. Lewis on Pain and Suffering*

12/17 "Further Up and Further In": *C. S. Lewis on Hope and Heaven*

Some Relevant Resources

McGrath, Alister. (2014). *If I Had Lunch with C. S. Lewis: Explaining the Ideas of C. S. Lewis on the Meaning of Life*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

This book was the inspiration for the title and format of this course. Several of the titles I use for the weeks of the class are lifted directly from McGrath. This spin-off from McGrath's biography of Lewis is an abbreviated and very approachable summary of Lewis' key ideas.

McGrath, Alister. (2013). *C. S. Lewis—A Life: Eccentric Genius, Reluctant Prophet*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

McGrath's biography is detailed and less glowing than some. One point he argues extensively is that Lewis was off by a year on the date of his conversion given in *Surprised by Joy*.

McGrath, Alister. (2014). *The Intellectual World of C. S. Lewis*. West Sussex, U.K.: John Wiley/Blackwell.

A collection of 8 academic essays on issues that McGrath thought needed a more detailed analysis than he could incorporate into his biography. Thus, while *Lunch* is at a more popular level than the biography, this volume is at a more scholarly level. Chapters include: the philosophical context at Oxford in the 1920s, the concept of myth in Lewis's thought, Lewis' metaphors of light, Lewis's argument from desire, Lewis's apologetic method, and Lewis as an Anglican and theologian.

Nicholi, Armand. (2002). *The Question of God: C. S. Lewis and Sigmund Freud Debate God, Love, Sex, and the Meaning of Life*. New York: The Free Press.

A psychiatrist who took his analytic training under Freud's personal physician wrote this book as the text for his very popular course at Harvard. This work was the basis for the PBS mini-series on The Question of God.

Carpenter, Humphrey. (1978). *The Inklings: C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, Charles Williams, and their Friends*. London: George Allen & Unwin.

The definitive study of the Inklings group.

Jacobs, Allen. (2005). *The Narnian: The Life and Imagination of C. S. Lewis*. New York: HarperSanFrancisco.

An erudite biography by a professor of English at Wheaton.

Gresham, Douglas. (2005). *Jack's Life: The Life Story of C. S. Lewis*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman.

A glowing biography by the "stepson to his beloved mentor, C. S. Lewis".

White, Roger, Wolfe, J., & Wolfe, B. N. (2015). *C. S. Lewis & His Circle: Essays and Memoirs from the Oxford C. S. Lewis Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Short essays from an interesting collection of people including Elizabeth Anscombe, Rowan Williams (on *That Hideous Strength*), Walter Hooper, Peter Bide (who married Jack and Joy), and Owen Barfield.

Williams, Peter S. (2013). *C. S. Lewis vs the New Atheists*. Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster.

Interleaves Lewis' ideas with those of contemporary Christians responding to the new atheists: Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Daniel Dennett, and Sam Harris. Includes chapters on scientism, the argument from reason, and the problem of goodness (i.e. W. R. Sorley's contention that a wholly good personal God is necessary for objective moral values to exist).

Timeline of C. S. Lewis' Life

1898 November 28, 1898: Clive Staples Lewis is born in Belfast to Albert J. Lewis and Flora Augusta Hamilton Lewis (who had married August 29, 1894 and had their 1st son, Warren Hamilton Lewis, June 16, 1895).

1899 January 2, 1899: C.S. Lewis baptized into the Church of Ireland.

1908 August 23, 1908: C.S. Lewis's Mother Flora Lewis dies at 46 years old; September 1, 1908: nine days after his mother's death, C.S. Lewis is sent off to boarding school where he joins his brother Warren at "Belsen" (also known as "Oldie's") Wynyard School, Watford, Hertfordshire, England.

1910 June 1, 1910: C.S. Lewis leaves Belsen and returns to Ireland; September 1, 1910: C.S. Lewis enrolls in Campbell College, Belfast close to his childhood home of Little Lea,

1911 January 1, 1911: C.S. Lewis begins at Cherbourg House; after leaving Campbell College in December of the previous year, Lewis enrolls in "Chartres" in preparation for attending Malvern College. ("At Chartres I made my first real friends. But, there, too, something far more important happened to me: I ceased to be a Christian.")

1913 June 1, 1913: C.S. Lewis leaves Cherbourg House, after spending two years there and losing his faith in Christianity; September 1, 1913: C.S. Lewis enrolls in Malvern College, which he calls "Wyvern" in *Surprised by Joy*, and remains there until June 1914.

1914 April 1, 1914: C.S. Lewis meets Arthur Greeves. Lewis later said Greeves was "After my brother, my oldest and most intimate friend."; September 19, 1914 Lewis arrived at Great Bookham to begin two and a half years (till March, 1917) of private studies with William Kirkpatrick (the "Great Knock"); December, 1914 Lewis is confirmed at St. Mark's, Dundela, Belfast ("My relations with my father help explain (I am not suggesting that they excuse) one of the worst acts of my life. I allowed myself to be prepared for confirmation, and confirmed, and to make my first Communion, in total disbelief" *Surprised by Joy*, p. 161.)

1917 April 29, 1917: C.S. Lewis enters University College, Oxford; June 8, 1917: C.S. Lewis joins other Oxford undergrads in military training; September 25, 1917: C.S. Lewis assigned to the Somerset Light Infantry; November 17, 1917: C.S. Lewis sails for France, arrives in the trenches in the front line of World War I in the Somme Valley in France on his 19th birthday.

1918 April 15, 1918: C.S. Lewis wounded in the Battle of Arras; his close friend "Paddy" Moore killed in battle; December 24, 1918: after stays at multiple hospitals, C.S. Lewis discharged from hospital, demobilized, arrives home December 27, 1918.

1919 January 13, 1919: C.S. Lewis returns to University Classes (and stays at Oxford for the next 35 years).

1922 August 4, 1922: C.S. Lewis graduates with 1st class Honors from University College in both the first two years of studies in classics ("Moderations") and the second two years of classic studies ("Greats"); October 13, 1922 begins studying English Language and Literature.

1923 July 15, 1923: Lewis awarded 1st class honors in English Language and Literature.

1924 October 14, 1924: Lewis begins one-year position of giving lectures in philosophy to Oxford undergraduates.

1925 May 20, 1925: C.S. Lewis elected Fellow of Magdalen College.

1929 September 25, 1929: Albert Lewis, C.S. Lewis's father, dies.

1930 February – June, 1930: C. S. Lewis comes to believe in God [cf. McGrath (2013), *C. S. Lewis*, Ch. 6].

1930 October 11, 1930: C.S. Lewis, Warren Lewis, and Paddy Moore's mother, Jan Moore, jointly purchase "The Kilns" and move in.

1931 October 1, 1931: C.S. Lewis confirms his return to Christianity; Lewis tells Arthur Greeves in a letter, "I have just passed on from believing in God to definitely believing in Christ — in Christianity.... My long night talk with Dyson and Tolkien" [one night in September 1931] "had a good deal to do with it."

1940 April 25, 1940: C.S. Lewis hosts the first evening meeting of the Inklings; J.R.R. Tolkien is also a member of this literary group that would regularly meet at Lewis' rooms at Magdalen College or adjourn to "The Eagle and Child" pub (affectionately known as "The Bird and the Baby"); October 18, 1940: *The Problem of Pain* published.

1941 June 8, 1941: C.S. Lewis preaches "The Weight of Glory" from the pulpit of St. Mary's, Oxford; August 6, 1941: C.S. Lewis gives first radio talk that would eventually be a part of *Mere Christianity*.

1942 January 6, 1942: First meeting of the Socratic Club, a forum for debates between atheists and Christian, with Lewis serving as president till 1954. Presenters include A. J. Ayer, Antony Flew, J.B.S. Haldane, Michael Polanyi, and Gilbert Ryle.

1943 January 6, 1943: Publication of "The Abolition of Man"; April 19, 1943: Publication of "Christian Behaviour," more radio talks.

1947 September 8, 1947: C.S. Lewis appears on the cover of *Time* magazine.

1949 October 20, 1949: Last evening meeting of the Inklings.

1951 January 12, 1951: C.S. Lewis's friend--and co-owner of The Kilns—Mrs. Moore dies.

1952 September 24, 1952: Meets Joy Davidman Gresham, an admiring American author, over lunch.

1953 November 1, 1953: Joy Davidman returns to England with her two sons.

1954 June 4, 1954: Lewis accepts chair of Medieval and Renaissance English at Cambridge University.

1955 January 7, 1955: Takes up residence at Cambridge University.

1956 April 23, 1956: Marries Joy Davidman in the Oxford Registry Office; September 26, 1956: Publication of "Till We Have Faces: A Myth Retold"; October 19, 1956: Joy hospitalized for cancer.

1957 March 21, 1957: Marries Joy, who is thought to be dying, in a Church of England ceremony in the hospital; April 1, 1957: receives Joy and her two sons into "The Kilns" where she may die in peace.

1958 June 1, 1958: Joy's cancer goes into remission; July, 1958: Lewis and Joy fly to Ireland for a belated honeymoon.

1959 October 13, 1959: Joy's cancer returns, but Lewis and Joy proceed in April 1960 (a week after publication of *The Four Loves*) with planned trip to Greece, visiting Athens, Rhodes, and Crete.

1960 July 13, 1960: Joy dies at the age of 45.

1961 January 16, 1961: Lewis nominates J. R. R. Tolkien for the 1961 Nobel Prize in Literature; June 24, 1961, Lewis is diagnosed with an enlarged prostate gland, but planned surgery was canceled because his kidneys and heart were both failing.

1963 June 7, 1963: Meets long-time correspondent Walter Hooper of University of Kentucky who moves in to the Kilns and becomes his personal secretary; July 15, 1963: Lewis suffers heart attack and falls into a coma, last rites administered, but then Lewis recovers; November 22, 1963: Lewis dies just before his 65th birthday. On this day Aldous Huxley and John F. Kennedy also die.

Substantially revised from a version at: <http://www.thestonetable.com/events/timeline.sd> accessed 17 August, 2014.

Books by C. S. Lewis

Popular

Apologetics/Spiritual

The Problem of Pain (1940)

The Screwtape Letters (1942)

The Abolition of Man (1943)

The Great Divorce (1946)

Miracles: A Preliminary Study (1947)

Mere Christianity (1952)—sections previously published as “Broadcast Talks” starting in 1942

Reflections on the Psalms (1958)

The Four Loves (1960)

Letters to Malcolm, Chiefly on Prayer (1964)

Autobiographical

Pilgrim's Regress (1933)

Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life (1955)

A Grief Observed (1961)

Children's literature: “The Chronicles of Narnia”

The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe (1950)

Prince Caspian: The Return to Narnia (1951)

The Voyage of the Dawn Treader (1952)

The Silver Chair (1953)

The Horse and His Boy (1954)

The Magician's Nephew (1955)

The Last Battle (1956)

Science Fiction: “The Cosmic Trilogy”

Out of the Silent Planet (1938)

Perelandra (1943)

That Hideous Strength (1945)

Other Fiction

Till We Have Faces: A Myth Retold (1956)

Scholarly

The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition (1936)

A Preface to Paradise Lost (1942)

English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama (1954)

Studies in Words (1960)

An Experiment in Criticism (1961)

The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature (1964)

Poetry

Spirits in Bondage (1919)

Dymer (1926)

Recommended Readings for Week 2
The Grand Panorama: C. S. Lewis on the Meaning of Life
(readings are by C. S. Lewis unless otherwise noted)

Assigned:

1. “Right and Wrong as a Clue to the Meaning of the Universe,” Book I, Chapters 1-5, of *Mere Christianity*.
2. “The Weight of Glory,” Sermon preached at Church of St. Mary the Virgin, Oxford, June 8, 1942.

Optional:

3. “Is Theology Poetry?” Paper presented to an Oxford debating society called the “Socratic Club” in 1944.

Other relevant resources:

4. Keller, Timothy. “A Meaning that Suffering Can’t Take from You,” Chapter 3 of *Making Sense of God: An Invitation to the Skeptical*. New York: Viking, 2016, pp. 57-76.
5. McGrath, Alister. “Arrows of Joy: Lewis’s Argument from Desire,” Chapter 5 of *The Intellectual World of C. S. Lewis*. West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014, pp. 105-128.