On the fiftieth anniversary of his death, C. S. Lewis was memorialized in Poets’ Corner, Westminster Abbey, taking his place beside the greatest names in English literature. Oxford and Cambridge Universities, where Lewis taught, also held commemorations. This volume gathers together addresses from those events.

Rowan Williams and Alister McGrath assess Lewis’s legacy in theology, Malcolm Guite addresses his integration of reason and imagination, William Lane Craig takes a philosophical perspective, while Lewis’s successor as Professor of Medieval and Renaissance English, Helen Cooper, considers him as a critic.

The collection also includes more personal and creative responses: Walter Hooper, Lewis’s biographer, recalls their first meeting; there are poems, essays, a panel discussion, and even a report by the famous “Mystery Worshipper” from the Ship of Fools website, along with a moving reflection by royal Wedding composer Paul Mealor about how he set one of Lewis’s poems to music.

Containing theology, literary criticism, poetry, memoir, and much else besides, this volume reflects the breadth of Lewis’s interests and the astonishing variety of his own output: a diverse and colorful commemoration of an extraordinary man.

"Formidably learned and capable of dazzling eloquence, C. S. Lewis was one of the towering intellects of the twentieth century. Interest in his work and achievements persists unabated. The lucid power and luminous imagination of the mind of Lewis, moreover, is most admirably illustrated in this fine collection of essays by a distinguished and distinctive group of scholars."

—DOUGLAS HEDLEY, Fellow of Clare College, Cambridge; Author, The Iconic Imagination

"This unique and essential volume provides a fitting tribute to C. S. Lewis on the fiftieth anniversary of his death, including the actual proceedings of the historic event at Westminster Abbey, as well as suitably wide-ranging engagements with his remarkable achievements as scholar, theologian, apologist, poet, and imaginative writer."

—ROBERT MACSWAIN, Associate Professor of Theology, Sewanee: The University of the South; coeditor of The Cambridge Companion to C. S. Lewis


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C. S. Lewis at Poets’ Corner
C. S. Lewis at Poets’ Corner

EDITED BY
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AND
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FOREWORD BY
Canon Vernon White
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There was never any real doubt that C. S. Lewis would be widely remembered and honoured on the fiftieth anniversary of his death. Far from indicating that his influence is waning, the passage of time has shown it to be increasing. Why is this? This collection of lectures, essays, talks, reflections, and dialogues about Lewis helps provide an answer. As a literary critic, a Christian apologist, and a creative writer, Lewis had an unerring instinct for the heart of matters that will continue to matter: the matter of language and reality; the matter of God; the matter of the meaning of life itself. Moreover, his arrows somehow hit the centre of their targets convincingly without compromising their complexity; he managed focus without being one-dimensional. His celebrated distillation of theology and religion into “mere” Christianity is characteristic. He regularly treated important and complex issues by translating them into a memorable essence, but without reductionism or crass dumbing down. This might sound like a merely rhetorical device. It was not. Lewis believed wholly and sincerely in the substance of what he was trying to communicate, not just the form of it. Small wonder his thought continues to inspire, and to be honoured. Aspects of it may date: the heart and spirit of it never will.

But was it also inevitable that Lewis should be honoured specifically in Westminster Abbey? Clearly not. All sorts of contingencies are at play here. The Abbey is a place for British national remembrance of many kinds: it honours statesmen and social reformers, monarchs and military leaders, scientists and secret service heroes, engineers and explorers, not just literary and religious figures. So there is no space for every possible candidate. Decisions will depend on a variety of judgements and priorities.
Yet in the end Lewis’s place amongst all these others now seems utterly obvious, entirely right. The oft-quoted final words of one of his essays, used as the inscription on his memorial stone, are an elegant expression of why this is so: “I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen, not only because I see it but because by it I see everything else.”1 In other words, a robust and authentic Christian faith is not an exclusive vision. It is an all-embracing one. Lewis’s vision was never narrowly ecclesiastical but of a God who is truly God precisely because God is of the whole world, not just of the church or of religion. As such he surely sits well with all that social, scientific, political, artistic effort represented in those other Abbey memorials.

To be sure, Lewis had sharp words and warnings to offer about the way in which this “worldly” human effort is sometimes interpreted in a reductionist or self-referential way (not least in his warnings about scientism). But he never retreated from full-blooded endorsement of the world per se, and everything in it, both natural and human. And that is because, for Lewis, its concrete reality (and value) is inseparable from the even more concrete reality of God as its ultimate source. As he wrote elsewhere: “it will be agreed that, however they came there, concrete, individual, determinate things do now exist: things like flamingos, German generals, lovers, sandwiches, pineapples, comets and kangaroos, . . . a torrent of opaque actualities . . . God is precisely the source of this torrent.”2 It was a vision that Lewis pursued not only in explicit apologetic but also in his fictional narratives, which celebrated the wider world of nature; in his science fiction, which encompassed the whole cosmos; in his repeated recognition of all people of good faith and character (whether or not Christian); and in his willingness to broadcast this “mere” Christianity to the whole nation in time of war. So it is that the memorial’s setting in Westminster Abbey is indeed so fitting.

For the Abbey too, founded as the Monarch’s church to serve nation and wider world, is bound to this vision—one that relates God to that wider world, not just to religious or ecclesiastical life.

It is also fitting because of the transcendent frame of the vision. As a full-blooded theist, and (in some respects) a Platonist, Lewis equally affirmed another world, not just this one. There is no contradiction here. The crude caricatures of both Christianity and Platonism, which chide them for downgrading this world by their belief in another, are just that—crude caricatures. It is because of the transcendent source and goal of this world, not in spite of it, that the world matters as much as it does. This vital

2. Lewis, Miracles, 90, emphasis mine.
connection between this world and another appears throughout Lewis’s writing like Blake’s golden thread, woven within it all. It is the same thread that gives “joy”—as he writes about it in Surprised by Joy and “The Weight of Glory”—both its poignant pull and its elusiveness. It appears most memorably in The Great Divorce and in The Last Battle; it becomes gossamer thin in A Grief Observed; but it is never entirely broken. So too in the Abbey. There too transcendence is embodied inescapably in its Gothic architecture, and gestured daily through its liturgies; there too it can be stretched and strained by the many memorials to bitter experience; but there too, like the paschal candle in its most sombre vigils, it is never finally extinguished.

There are other places where Lewis is actively honoured. Most notably there is Oxford, the provenance of several contributions to this collection, where the University’s C. S. Lewis Society has been in continuous existence since 1982. There is Cambridge, where students will benefit from a scholarship supported by proceeds from the memorial service. Likewise there is the work on Lewis carried out by a number of distinguished U.S. institutions. So, when over six hundred people came to a day’s symposium at the Abbey, and many more joined us to dedicate the memorial itself, we were adding to a worldwide tribute that already had great momentum—and all of which is similarly fitting.

None of this, of course, is to idolize either the man or his work. He was of his time and is open to critique like anyone else. But it is to show how much of his work also transcends his time and richly deserves to. Our sincere hope now is simply that this collection of essays, and the memorial itself, will help make this happen, even more.

Canon Vernon White

3. E.g., see C. S. Lewis and His Circle: Essays and Memoirs from the Oxford C. S. Lewis Society, ed. Roger White, Judith Wolfe, and Brendan Wolfe.
4. Enquiries about donating to the C. S. Lewis Scholarship Fund should be sent to database@alumni.cam.ac.uk.
5. E.g., The Wade Center at Wheaton College, Illinois; The Center for the Study of C. S. Lewis and Friends at Taylor University, Indiana; The Department of Apologetics at Houston Baptist University, Texas; The C. S. Lewis Foundation, Redlands, California; The C. S. Lewis Institute, Springfield, Virginia.
6. The Revd. Professor Vernon White is Canon Theologian at Westminster Abbey and Visiting Professor of Theology at King’s College London. He is the author of Atonement and Incarnation: An Essay in Universalism and Particularity (Cambridge University Press, 1991) and Life Beyond Death: Threads of Hope in Faith, Life and Theology (Darton, Longman & Todd, 2006).
Looking through the cloakroom window I saw, looming over the quad, Elizabeth Tower—the clock tower that houses the bell known as “Big Ben.” I was privileged to be staying overnight in the guest quarters of Westminster Abbey’s Deanery, having played a role earlier that day in the Abbey Institute’s Symposium at St. Margaret’s Church, celebrating the legacy of C. S. Lewis as a Christian apologist.

Alister McGrath and Malcolm Guite gave scintillating presentations on the intellectual and imaginative aspects of Lewis’s apologetics, after which Michael Ward chaired a series of mini-presentations (from William Lane Craig, Michael Ramsden, Jeanette Sears, Judith Wolfe, and myself) and a panel discussion about what contemporary Christian apologetics can learn from Lewis.

All this was topped off by a sumptuous evening meal hosted by the Dean, Dr. John Hall. (Upon seeing the amount of chocolate involved in dessert, Michael Ramsden quipped that everyone at Westminster Abbey “must really love Jesus, because after we eat this we’ll all be meeting him sooner!”)

The following day, Friday 22nd November 2013, the fiftieth anniversary of Lewis’s death, I sat in a choir stall of the Abbey for a service that saw the dedication of a permanent memorial to Lewis in Poets’ Corner (Michael Ward gives more detail about these Westminster commemorations in his interview with Lancia Smith).

It was William Lane Craig who asked if anyone had thought about publishing a book commemorating Lewis on the fiftieth anniversary of his death? We had not, but agreement was quickly secured from various quarters that this was a good idea and I found myself appointed to try getting
such a project off the ground. Michael Ward kindly volunteered to share editorial duties and we approached Wipf & Stock, who promptly said yes.

It became clear that the thing to do was to collect together a written record not only of the Abbey Institute’s Symposium, but also of the memorial service, along with some personal reflections upon it from the blogosphere, and to round out the collection with the presentations made at two other events held in November 2013 in honour of C. S. Lewis, at the universities where he worked—namely Oxford and Cambridge.

On Saturday 23rd November 2013, Magdalene College Cambridge held a conference on “Lewis as Critic,” marking his professional career in the field of English Literature. The complete proceedings from that conference are reproduced here, in the order that the lectures were delivered on the day.

On the evening of that same day, Magdalen College Oxford held a celebratory event and dinner. The speakers on that occasion included Rowan Williams (who had travelled across from the Cambridge conference in order to make his third presentation on Lewis in the space of thirty-six hours!) and Alister McGrath, following on from his appearance at the Abbey Symposium. Since Lord Williams and Professor McGrath are already well represented in these pages, we decided not to include their contributions to the Magdalen event. However, we are glad to include that of Walter Hooper, Lewis’s editor and biographer. We also include a Lewis-tinged lecture given that same week by William Lane Craig at the Oxford University C. S. Lewis Society.

Altogether, these different contributions present a detailed picture of the way Lewis was commemorated in the United Kingdom on the fiftieth anniversary of his death. Their generic variety—interview, address, panel discussion, homily, article, lecture, personal memoir, poetry—aptly reflects the breadth of Lewis’s own output. The numerous fields of expertise represented by our contributors—theology, pastoralia, apologetics, literary criticism, literary history, philosophy, psychology, biography, journalism, music, creative writing—reflects not only the broad sweep of his own interests but also the extraordinarily wide reach of his legacy. Editors of collected volumes like this one often try to impose uniformity on disparate perspectives in order to “theme-atize” their materials. We make no such attempt, but rather consider it a virtue that what follows is so very various. The diversity and colourfulness of these pages deliberately mirrors that of Lewis’s own life and work, for as the inscription on his memorial bears witness, he did not just believe in “Christianity” but also in “everything else.”

Michael Ward and I would like to take this opportunity to thank: all our contributors for agreeing to participate in this collection; everyone at the Westminster Abbey Institute, especially its Director Claire Foster-Gilbert and Canon Vernon White; the Dean of Westminster, the Very Revd.
Dr. John Hall, for granting permission to reproduce the Order of Service; Professor Steven A. Beebe for granting permission to reproduce the photograph of C. S. Lewis in the Order of Service; Simone Fryer-Bovair, organiser of the Cambridge Conference, for allowing us to put its proceedings in permanent published form; Essential Secretary Ltd. and Peter Byrom for help in getting a transcription of the Symposium's panel discussion; Robin Parry and his colleagues at Wipf & Stock; and everyone else who generously gave their support in various ways during the process of putting this volume together.

Peter S. Williams1

1. Peter S. Williams is Assistant Professor in Worldviews and Communication at Gimekollen School of Journalism and Communication, NLA University, Norway. He is the author of A Faithful Guide to Philosophy (Paternoster, 2013) and C. S. Lewis vs. the New Atheists (Paternoster, 2013). He maintains a web presence at www.peterswilliams.com.
Introduction

Interview with
Michael Ward

Michael Ward introduces the Westminster Abbey commemorations in an interview with Lancia E. Smith, who is a long-time supporter of The C. S. Lewis Foundation, the charitable organization that owns The Kilns, Lewis's former home in Oxford.

Lancia, a professional photographer, hosts a popular blog entitled “Cultivating the Good, the True, and the Beautiful” at lanciaesmith.com. In early 2013 she interviewed Michael Ward about the forthcoming commemorative events in Westminster. The following is an edited version of their exchanges:

22nd November 2013 will mark the fiftieth anniversary of C. S. Lewis's death. To honour his extraordinary contribution to the world of literature, Westminster Abbey will be unveiling a permanent memorial to Lewis in Poets' Corner and hosting a Symposium in recognition of his

1. Dr. Michael Ward is Senior Research Fellow at Blackfriars Hall, University of Oxford, and Professor of Apologetics at Houston Baptist University, Texas. He is the author of Planet Narnia: The Seven Heavens in the Imagination of C. S. Lewis (Oxford University Press, 2008), co-editor of The Cambridge Companion to C. S. Lewis (Cambridge University Press, 2010), and presenter of the BBC television documentary, The Narnia Code. He maintains a web presence at www.michaelward.net.
accomplishments and his continuing influence on British national life.

It has been my privilege to interview Dr. Michael Ward, lead organizer of this fast-approaching celebration.

SMITH Dr. Ward, what is the significance of Poets’ Corner—especially from a British point of view?

WARD Poets’ Corner is perhaps the most famous part of Westminster Abbey. Over one hundred poets, novelists, dramatists, and other artists (including actors and musicians) are buried or commemorated there. The first poet to be buried in the Abbey was Geoffrey Chaucer, the “father of English poetry,” in 1400. Others who have been honoured include Shakespeare, Wordsworth, the Brontë sisters, and Jane Austen.

To be memorialized in Poets’ Corner means you’ve received national recognition for your contribution to the arts. Westminster Abbey has been at the heart of religious and civic life in England for over a thousand years and is known as “the coronation church.” William the Conqueror was crowned there on Christmas Day 1066. Our present monarch, Queen Elizabeth II, was crowned there in 1953. So, for C. S. Lewis to be memorialized in the Abbey is an indication of the respect in which he is held and an acknowledgement of his enduring place in the world of English letters.

SMITH Why is this particular event significant—globally and within the community of Lewis scholars and readers?

WARD Globally, because Westminster Abbey is renowned worldwide and almost everything that happens there receives attention internationally.

It’s significant among the community of Lewis scholars and readers because so much of that community has, hitherto, been based in America, and now things are beginning to even themselves out. In comparison to Americans, the British have been rather slow to recognize Lewis’s importance. I don’t say that the British have completely ignored him till now; he has always been reasonably popular here, but less so than in the United States. Part of that is simply to do with differences in
national temperament: the British (and, in particular, the English) are reluctant to make an enthusiastic noise about their favourite authors because we fear being mocked for it. “Moderation in all things,” tends to be the English way! Partly it’s to do with a strain of Anglophilia in certain parts of American culture. And partly, perhaps, it could be to do with the fact that “a prophet is not without honour, save in his own country.”

Another reason it’s significant within the community of Lewis scholars is because several attempts have been made over the years from within that group to have Lewis memorialized in the Abbey, and at last the Abbey has said yes. Dr. Stan Mattson of the C. S. Lewis Foundation had suggested it on previous occasions; I myself had tried back in 1998; I think various other people had tried too—and always the Dean of the Abbey, whose sole decision it is, had declined. But now the present Dean of the Abbey, Dr. John Hall, has graciously consented to the suggestion and it’s going ahead. So, I know that a lot of people within the community of Lewis scholars and readers will be pleased—delighted—and I think everyone who has petitioned the Abbey about this matter over the decades can consider themselves to have contributed to the present positive situation.

In the official press release announcing this memorial, Vernon White, Canon Theologian at Westminster Abbey, said: “C. S. Lewis was an extraordinarily imaginative and rigorous thinker and writer, who was able to convey the Christian faith in a way that made it both credible and attractive to a wide range of people. He has had an enduring and growing influence in our national life.”

There is a fairly widespread belief that Lewis was less well accepted by the British after World War II and was hailed as an evangelical hero in America. Neither side of this spectrum is really accurate. Obviously, the British people were deeply influenced by Lewis through his broadcast talks and his “popular” writings. And Americans went through a period after his death of declining interest in Lewis, which was later followed by a renewal of esteem that hasn’t waned. From your perspective, what is Lewis’s enduring and growing influence on British national life?
The most easily recognisable influence, I think, has been through the popularity of The Chronicles of Narnia. Those books, and in particular the first, The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, are very widely known in Britain. People have grown up knowing about Narnia and it's now an established point of reference in the culture at large. Several times in recent years, I've been watching BBC comedy programmes and have observed various comedians making jokes—usually friendly sorts of jokes, I'm pleased to say—which assume knowledge of magic wardrobes or how time stands still when you're in Narnia or the danger of eating Turkish Delight. And these comedians are right: everyone in Britain, pretty much, can be expected to know about these things. The Chronicles represent that aspect of Lewis's influence which is truly national and ubiquitous, and who can say exactly what that impact has been? All I can say is, from the reading I've done and from countless conversations I have with people over the years, that it's immeasurable and very largely positive.

The other aspects of his influence—his Christian apologetics (such as The Screwtape Letters and Mere Christianity) and his academic writings (such as The Allegory of Love and A Preface to Paradise Lost)—are more confined to particular groups within the nation. And there again, it's impossible to quantify. But many, many people have been brought into a Christian faith, or strengthened within an existing faith, by his writings and by his personal example; and many scholars, both Christian and non-Christian, have been inspired by his academic output. It's really remarkable how much of an influence Lewis has had, in his imaginative writings, his apologetics, and his professional works of literary criticism. By any standards, it's an outstanding achievement and an unparalleled range of influences.

Then, of course, there's an influence that is related to Lewis, but not directly part of his own life and work, I mean the Shadowlands story of his marriage and bereavement. This was first of all a BBC television film, then a West End stage-play, then a feature film starring Anthony Hopkins, and finally a BBC radio-play. The writer, William Nicholson, managed to get four iterations of the drama, which is quite extraordinary! A lot of people who may know very little about Lewis will have encountered Shadowlands, but of course the story has
been greatly simplified and dramatized and romanticized and actually bears only a fairly loose connection to reality. Still, it’s part of the overall picture of Lewis’s place in the British national consciousness, and worth bearing in mind. Lewis is widely thought of not just as a writer, but as a man who loved and lost, who suffered bereavement but still trusted in God. And although *Shadowlands* is very unreliable, it is at least right in those respects and has had a part to play in making Lewis known to certain people who might otherwise never have heard of him.

SMITH How did the idea for this memorial come about?

WARD The Abbey has an Institute for public education; it puts on lectures, debates, seminars, and other events of various kinds. One of the canons at the Abbey, Vernon White, thought that the fiftieth anniversary of Lewis’s death would be a good time for the Institute to organise some sort of event focusing on Lewis’s work as a Christian writer and apologist. Canon White got in touch with me to discuss ideas and, in consort with the Institute’s Director, Claire Foster-Gilbert, we decided to have a one-day Symposium, featuring two lectures from leading Lewis scholars, plus a Panel Discussion in which a group of invited experts would assess Lewis’s legacy for Christian apologetics in the twenty-first century. The Institute was already planning a programme of events for autumn 2013 under the title “Telling the Truth,” and so we agreed to incorporate the Lewis Symposium within that larger undertaking.

And while we were talking about the Symposium, I asked whether it might not be an opportune moment to revisit the notion of a Poets’ Corner memorial. Vernon indicated that the time could be ripe, and so I approached several friends and colleagues who agreed to be co-signatories to a letter that I wrote to the Dean, suggesting that very thing. The co-signatories were:

i. Helen Cooper, Professor of Medieval and Renaissance English at the University of Cambridge. She holds the professorial chair that Lewis was the first occupant of;²

² Helen Cooper held Lewis’s old Chair from 2004–14.
INTRODUCTION

ii. The then President of the Oxford University Lewis Society, Ryan Pemberton;

iii. Alister McGrath, author of *C. S. Lewis, A Life*, and Professor of Theology, Ministry and Education at King’s College, University of London;³

iv. Michael Ramsden, Director of the Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics;

v. Dr. Judith Wolfe, Fellow of St. John’s College, Oxford, and editor of *The Journal of Inklings Studies.*⁴

The Dean of the Abbey, Dr. John Hall, wrote back very positively and it was agreed that news of the memorial would be announced in November 2012, giving us a whole year to raise the money for it. The Abbey doesn’t fund such memorials itself, so it is up to me, as the main initiator of the project, to find the necessary support from Lewis’s readers and admirers round the world. Jason Lepojärvi, the current President of the Oxford Lewis Society, is helping oversee the finances.

Even a relatively small memorial, such as this one, costs a huge amount of money because anything that affects the fabric of the Abbey has to be of high quality, both in materials and design. Also, the Abbey requires, quite properly, an additional sum as a contribution to the ongoing maintenance of memorials. And finally, certain other incidental expenses also need to be met by supporters of the project (for instance, the cost of producing the Order of Service).

The names of contributors will be compiled into a list and deposited in the Bodleian Library in the University of Oxford, among the papers of the Oxford Lewis Society, so that future generations of scholars can see who helped this memorial to be realized. We won’t mention the size of individuals’ contributions, because we understand that people have all sorts of claims upon their giving and the amount you donate is not really the relevant thing. Any amount is very gratefully received, be it large, medium, or small. What we want is for

³ Alister McGrath is now the Andreas Idreos Professor of Science and Religion at the University of Oxford, Director of the Ian Ramsey Centre for Science and Religion, and Fellow of Harris Manchester College.

⁴ Judith Wolfe is now Lecturer in Theology and the Arts, School of Divinity, University of St Andrews.
this list to demonstrate the extent of Lewis’s readership; and it will also provide an opportunity for people whose lives have been deeply impacted by Lewis’s work to put that on record in a permanent form in the library of the university where Lewis spent most of his career.

SMITH Can you tell me anything about the design of the memorial, and how it will be worded?

WARD It will be a flag-stone kind of memorial, embedded in the pavement of Poets’ Corner. The exact size and shape and location will be decided by the Abbey authorities, taking into account the existing memorials and the space available and so on. Ptolemy Dean, Surveyor of the Fabric at the Abbey, will have oversight of all the practical details relating to its design and manufacture.

Regarding the wording: obviously Lewis’s name and dates are the main things. As for a possible inscription from his own writings: I took soundings among Lewis experts and among the co-signatories to the letter, and the most popular option was the closing sentence of one his most famous addresses to the Oxford Socratic Club, the university debating society of which he was President for many years:

\[
\begin{align*}
I & \text{ believe in Christianity} \\
\text{as I believe that the Sun has risen,} \\
\text{not only because I see it} \\
\text{but because by it I see everything else.}
\end{align*}
\]

We put this suggestion to the Abbey and, after careful consideration by a committee that deals with these things, they approved the idea. It’s an eminently suitable quotation, memorable, meaningful, not overlong, and with a beautiful balance to it. I will have a chance to explain some of the deeper thinking behind the choice in a note in the Order of Service, so that the congregation can understand the way it neatly ties together many different areas of Lewis’s life and work. The fact that it comes from an address entitled “Is Theology Poetry?” makes it particularly apt for Poets’ Corner, I think.
SMITH

It's been fifty years since Lewis died and in that period his reputation has been developing in various ways. How would you describe what his legacy is and is becoming?

WARD

It's too big and too varied to speak about in just a short answer. You only need to look at the huge numbers of books and articles that are published about Lewis every year to see the size of it. Some people dislike Lewis intensely. Some people simply dismiss him. But I think that the majority of those who engage with him seriously, even though they may disagree with him, find him stimulating, helpful, even inspiring in a number of different ways, as a scholar, as a thinker, and as a writer.

I think that, as time goes by, people are coming to realize that Lewis, whether you happen to agree with him or not, is a very substantial figure who needs to be reckoned with. His combination of intellect, imagination, and faith is rare. It's influential. At the very least, it's interesting. I think it's not insignificant that the publishing houses of Lewis's two universities, Oxford University Press and Cambridge University Press, have in recent years begun to publish scholarly works that address and analyse his impact. OUP has to date published three titles on Lewis's writings, and CUP has published *The Cambridge Companion to C. S. Lewis*. As time goes by and Lewis's readership shows no sign of waning—on the contrary, it only seems to be growing and deepening—he is coming to the attention of many people who wouldn't automatically regard him as worth consideration. But an enduring audience, fifty years after death, is unusual and can't be ignored for ever. And I think the fact that Lewis's great friend, Tolkien, is also showing no signs of disappearing from the cultural landscape reacts favourably on Lewis's own standing.

The two men together are now established, I think, as unavoidably major figures from the middle of the last century. If you want to understand the intellectual and imaginative history of the English-speaking world over the last sixty or seventy years, you have to take these two into account. They're becoming increasingly rooted as a pair of giants, like Wordsworth and Coleridge, for example, from the previous century.

SMITH

What do you hope will be the broader outcome of this event and the memorial?
WARD The unveiling of the memorial is bound to receive a lot of media attention round the world, and I’m sure that that will result in people being introduced to or reminded of Lewis’s works.

More generally, I hope the whole two-day memorial event will focus people’s minds on carrying Lewis’s legacy forward into the future and help engender ideas about how that might best be achieved. It’s important in every generation for there to be talented artists, diligent scholars, and faithful apologists who are able to work both through argument and through story. By thinking about what Lewis achieved in these respects, people will be encouraged, I hope, to find ways of emulating and updating his example in the modern day.

SMITH I would imagine that you will feel a sense of satisfaction in seeing this accomplished. With this particular milestone in the Lewis community and the wide spectrum of Lewis admirers, what are you most pleased about and proud of?

WARD There are two things that most please me about this event. The first is that it’s going to be international and will feature almost every conceivable constituency in what you might call “the Lewis world”: people who knew him, people who worked with him, theologians and philosophers and poets who admire him, scholars who have studied and written about him, professors who have tutored and lectured on his works, priests and pastors and ministers who have handed on his wisdom, children who love Narnia, regular readers who just like his stories or his style, and so on and so forth. And I’m particularly pleased that it will involve people who knew him and worked with him, because their number, alas, is getting smaller every year. This is really the last chance for a gathering of this kind on such a scale.

And the other thing that especially pleases me is that this event is being organized by British people and in an Anglican context. Lewis himself was British and Anglican, and at last he is being commemorated by his countrymen in that setting, but with the whole world, as it were, welcome and involved at the same time. So many previous Lewis-related events have been principally American and Evangelical, and although those events have often been excellent and I’ve been proud to be
associated with many of them myself, this event is different. It feels like a sort of home-coming or a long overdue recognition. It’s going to be, I trust, a very happy occasion for everyone who attends, wherever they come from and whatever their particular connection with Lewis. I count myself tremendously fortunate to have a role in helping bring it about.

Smith  What will be involved in the two days?

Ward  During the afternoon and evening of Thursday 21st November, there will be four events:

i. a lecture by Professor Alister McGrath, looking at how Lewis presented the Christian faith through rational argument;

ii. a lecture by Dr. Malcolm Guite, looking at how Lewis presented Christianity through story and poetry;

iii. a service of Choral Evensong—as happens every evening in the Abbey;

iv. a panel discussion that I will chair, featuring William Lane Craig, Michael Ramsden, Jeanette Sears, Peter S. Williams, and Judith Wolfe.

Then on Friday 22nd November, there will be a Memorial Service, at which the Lewis memorial will be formally unveiled; Walter Hooper, Lewis’s editor and biographer, will lay flowers on it. The service will feature hymns, prayers, and readings both from Scripture and from Lewis’s works, including an audio-recording of his own voice reading a passage from *Mere Christianity* (a passage that, by a pleasing coincidence, contains the phrase “telling the truth”). There will also be a specially commissioned choral anthem, a setting of one of Lewis’s poems, composed by Paul Mealor. The address will be given by Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, and now Master of Magdalene College, Cambridge (the college where, of course, Lewis finished his career).

Smith  Where will the Symposium events take place?
The two lectures and the panel discussion will take place in St. Margaret's Church, which is right next door to the Abbey and is part of the overall Abbey foundation.

Will there be any official gatherings before or after the conference?

Dr. John Hall will kindly be hosting a dinner for the lecturers and the panelists on the Thursday night in the Deanery. There'll also be a reception for a number of invited guests, after the Memorial Service, in the Jerusalem Chamber—a beautiful fourteenth-century room where the translators of the Authorised Version met in 1611, and where Henry IV famously died in 1413. The room can only accommodate about seventy people, so the guests will be mostly those with a particular connection to Lewis—relatives, colleagues, friends, former students, and so on.

Are there any final details you would like to add?

I ought to add that the Westminster events will not be the only commemorations being held in England for the fiftieth anniversary of Lewis's death. There will be a day-conference at Magdalene College Cambridge, a celebratory event at Magdalen College Oxford, and the Oxford University C. S. Lewis Society will also be marking the occasion.

But as regards the Westminster events specifically: one very exciting piece of news, which I alluded to earlier, is that the Director of Music at the Abbey, Professor James O'Donnell, has suggested that a special piece of music, a choral anthem, be commissioned for the Memorial Service. He asked me to propose some passages that might serve for the libretto, so I pored over Lewis's poetry, looking for poems that were short enough and lyrical enough to be viable candidates for a musical setting. There were lots of contenders, of course, but eventually I settled on three possible choices ("Love's As Warm As Tears," "The Naked Seed," and "After Prayers, Lie Cold"), which I submitted to the Abbey for their consideration. I also suggested Paul Mealor as a suitable composer, having greatly admired his motet, Ubi caritas, which he wrote for the 2011 Royal Wedding; and James O'Donnell instantly agreed that
Paul would be a very fine choice. Paul consented to come on board and to work on that poem which was—very happily—the first choice of both the Dean and myself, namely “Love’s As Warm As Tears.”

An anonymous donor has kindly come forward to fund the commission and my hope is not only that this piece of music will bring beauty and creativity to the Memorial Service, but also that it will become a standard part of the choral repertoire in this country—maybe even throughout the world—and be performed long after these commemorative events have passed into history. The poem in question is suited equally, I think, to weddings and funerals, but is also apt for any religious service or musical concert that aims to celebrate human and divine love. The way the poem talks about love as being “as warm as tears”, “as fierce as fire”, “as fresh as spring”, and “as hard as nails”, makes it applicable in all sorts of circumstances. I suspect Lewis was wanting to allude to the four elements (water, fire, air, and earth) in those four descriptions. Subtly, he’s suggesting that love informs the entire cosmos, it “moves the sun and the other stars”—in Dante’s immortal line.

SMITH How can readers and Lewis admirers participate and help support this effort?

WARD If you pray, please pray that this whole project will be edifying and successful. If you want to attend the events, please feel free to come to London in person on 21st and 22nd November. And if you don’t pray or can’t come, then please at least make a donation or encourage others to do so! And please also spread the word in general through social media. We still need to raise nearly £15,000. Any money raised over and above the costs of the memorial will go towards a new C. S. Lewis Scholarship at the University of Cambridge.5

SMITH My thanks to Dr. Ward for his efforts to bring the Lewis Memorial to fruition and for his generous sharing in this interview.

5. Donations to the scholarship may still be made. Enquiries about how to contribute should be directed to database@alumni.cam.ac.uk.
PART ONE

Symposium
It is a great pleasure to be able to contribute to Westminster Abbey’s series of public lectures on “Telling the Truth” by exploring how C. S. Lewis used rational argument to commend and communicate the Christian faith. Lewis is now firmly established as one of the greatest apologists of the twentieth century, with a continuing legacy of influence in the twenty-first. Few apologists have achieved anything approaching his impact, which transcends denominational barriers.

Lewis was British, and a layman of the Church of England. The decision to honour him here at Westminster is an important reaffirmation of his
cultural and religious identity, here at the heart of the British religious and political establishment. Lewis's genius is such that he is loved and valued far beyond the confines of Great Britain and the Church of England; yet, as the recent anniversary events here in Britain have made abundantly clear—attendances have been huge!—Lewis is both remembered and admired here, in this nation and church.

Lewis also appeals to both fans and academics. If I might borrow a phrase from Gregory the Great (c. 540–604), his works are "like a river, both shallow and deep, in which a lamb may walk and an elephant swim." The point that Gregory was making was that the Bible could be read and appreciated at multiple levels, popular and academic. And that is most certainly true of Lewis. Lewis is read and loved by a wide readership. Yet this anniversary year has marked an important transition, in that Lewis is now being taken with increased seriousness by academics, especially at Oxford and Cambridge. Many of you will have read Rowan Williams's brilliant engagement with Narnia. It is surely significant that one of the world's greatest theologians, a former archbishop of Canterbury who is now Master of Lewis's old Cambridge college, takes such delight in Narnia, and helps us find new depths of meaning within it.

This recognition is long overdue. The foundations for this recognition were laid as long ago as 1946, when the ancient Scottish University of St. Andrews awarded Lewis the honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity. Professor Donald Baillie, Dean of the university's Faculty of Divinity, declared that Lewis had "succeeded in capturing the attention of many who will not readily listen to professional theologians," and had "arranged a new kind of marriage between theological reflection and poetic imagination." The passing of time has confirmed that Baillie was right on both counts. Perhaps, to use a musical image, Lewis is better seen as an arranger than as acomposer. But some of his theological "arrangements" and "variations on themes" seem to have captured the popular imagination, where the originals did not.

So what is Lewis's approach to telling the truth, and why has it been so successful? In this lecture, I am going to explore Lewis's distinctive understanding of the rationality of faith, which emphasises the reasonableness of Christianity without imprisoning it within an impersonal and austere rationalism.

Lewis himself was an atheist as a younger man, convinced of the fundamental irrationality of faith, and its incapacity to accommodate the
brutality and senselessness of the Great War, in which he fought from 1917–18. Yet Lewis’s decision to limit himself to a rationalist worldview proved to be imaginatively sterile and uninteresting, leaving him existentially dissatisfied. It became clear to Lewis that pure reason offered him a bleak intellectual landscape that he could not bear to inhabit. Yet this, his reason insisted, was all that there was. To believe otherwise was pure fantasy. Lewis’s imagination taught him that there had to be more. “Nearly all that I loved I believed to be imaginary; nearly all that I believed to be real I thought grim and meaningless.”

Lewis’s study of English literature, especially the poetry of George Herbert, left him with gnawing doubts about his atheism. Herbert and others seemed able to connect up with a world that Lewis was tempted to dismiss as illusory, yet which haunted his imagination. “The two hemispheres of my mind were in the sharpest contrast. On the one side, a many-islanded sea of poetry and myth; on the other, a glib and shallow rationalism.” Might, Lewis wondered, the deepest intuitions of his imagination challenge the shallow truths of his dogmatic reason? And even triumph over it?

So how did Lewis break free from this rationalist prison? Lewis’s understanding of the reasonableness of the Christian faith rests on a distinct way of grasping the rationality of the created order, and its ultimate grounding in God. Where some favour deductive arguments for the existence of God, Lewis offers his own distinct approach which is more inductive than deductive; more visual rather than purely rational.

Lewis’s approach is difficult to simplify, as it is highly nuanced. But perhaps we could set out the key aspects of his approach as follows. The truths of the Christian faith lie beyond the reach of human reason; yet when those truths are presented and grasped, their rationality can easily be discerned. And one hallmark of that rationality is the ability of the Christian faith to make things intelligible.

It is clear that Lewis was drawn to Christianity because of both its intellectual capaciousness and its imaginative appeal. It made sense of things, without limiting itself to what could be understood or grasped by reason. Lewis, it seems to me, echoes a theme we find in the final canto of Dante’s Divine Comedy, where the great Florentine poet and theologian expresses the idea that Christianity provides a vision of things—something wonderful which can be seen, yet which proves resistant to verbal expression:

From that moment onwards my power of sight exceeded

7. Ibid.
That of speech, which fails at such a vision.  

For Lewis, there is always a sense of a “beyond,” a “numinous”—something of enormous significance that lies beyond our reason, hinted at more by intuition than by logic. This point had been made earlier by G. K. Chesterton (whom Lewis greatly admired). “Every true artist,” Chesterton argued, feels “that he is touching transcendental truths; that his images are shadows of things seen through the veil.” While the intellectual capaciousness of the Christian faith can be rationally analysed, Lewis hints that it is best imaginatively communicated.

Lewis invites us to see Christianity as offering us a standpoint (a Platonic synoptikon, if you like) from which we may survey things, and grasp their intrinsic coherence and interconnectedness. We see how things connect together. Lewis consistently uses a remarkably wide range of visual metaphors—such as sun, light, blindness, and shadows—to help us understand the nature of a true understanding of things. Where some argue that rationality concerns the ability of reason to give an account of things, Lewis frames this more in terms of our ability to see their relationships. This has two highly significant consequences.

First, it means that Lewis sees reason and imagination as existing in a collaborative relationship. Reason without imagination is potentially dull and limited; imagination without reason is potentially delusory and escapist. Lewis develops a notion of “imagined”—not imaginary—reality, which is capable of being grasped by reason and visualised by the imagination.

Secondly, it means that Lewis makes extensive use of verbal illustrations or analogies, to enable us to see things in a new way. Lewis’s famous apologetic for the doctrine of the Trinity in *Mere Christianity* suggests that our difficulties arise primarily because we fail to see it properly. If we see it another way—as, for example, an inhabitant of a two-dimensional world might try to grasp and describe the structure of a three-dimensional reality—then we begin to grasp its intrinsic rationality. Lewis’s apologetic often takes the form of a visual invitation: “Try seeing it this way!” The rationality of the Trinity needs to be shown, not proved—and it is shown by allowing us to see it in the right way.

Perhaps this helps us appreciate the special appeal of Lewis’s Chronicles of Narnia, which present a way of seeing things, embodied within stories, which turns out to be rationally plausible and imaginatively attractive. Lewis’s Oxford colleague Austin Farrer suggested that Lewis’s apologetic approach might initially look like an argument, but on closer inspection,

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it turned out to be an encouragement to see things in a new way, and thus grasp the rationality of faith. Lewis, Farrer suggested, makes us “think we are listening to an argument,” when in reality “we are presented with a vision, and it is the vision that carries conviction.”

For example, consider Lewis’s imaginative visualization of a theological truth—the entrapment of the human soul through sin in *The Voyage of the “Dawn Treader.”* Lewis’s opening line in this book is seen by many as one of its most memorable features: “There was a boy called Eustace Clarence Scrubb, and he almost deserved it.” Eustace Scrubb is portrayed as a thoroughly unsympathetic character, whom Lewis develops as an example of selfishness. It’s difficult to like him to begin with, and it’s just as difficult to feel sorry for him when he changes into a dragon as a result of his “greedy, dragonish thoughts.”

The thoroughly obnoxious Eustace encounters some enchanted gold. He believes this will make him the master of all! But instead, it masters him. Lewis loved old Norse mythology, and borrowed the Norse story about the greedy giant Fafnir, who turned himself into a dragon to protect his ill-won gain. So Eustace becomes a dragon. Now having become a dragon, how does Eustace stop being one? Lewis presents Eustace’s initial transformation into a dragon and his subsequent “undragoning” as a double transformation that reveals both Eustace’s selfish, fallen nature and the transforming power of divine grace.

*The Voyage of the “Dawn Treader”* provides a brilliant description of Eustace realizing, to his horror, that he has become a dragon. He doesn’t like this at all, and he frantically tries to scratch off his dragon’s skin. Yet each layer he removes merely reveals yet another layer of scales beneath it. He simply cannot break free from his prison. He is trapped.

But salvation lies to hand. Aslan appears, and tears away at the dragon flesh with his claws. And when the scales are finally removed, Aslan plunges the raw and bleeding Eustace into a well from which he emerges purified and renewed, with his humanity restored. The storyline is dramatic, realistic, and shocking. But the power of the narrative brings home the Christian themes that Lewis believed could not be described as effectively through a series of well-intentioned theological lectures. And while Lewis drew his dragon imagery from Norse mythology, the story of the “undragoning” draws on the rich ideas and imagery of the New Testament.

So what are we to learn from this powerful and shocking story, so realistically depicted? As the startlingly raw imagery of Aslan tearing at

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11. For the narrative, see Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, 91–92.
Eustace’s flesh makes clear, Eustace has been trapped by forces over which he has no control. The one who would be master has instead been mastered. The dragon is a symbol, not so much of sin itself, as of the power of sin to entrap, captivate, and imprison. It can only be broken and mastered by the redeemer. Aslan is the one who heals and renews Eustace, restoring him to what he was intended to be.

The immersion in the water of the well is immediately familiar, picking up on the New Testament’s language about baptism as dying to self and rising to Christ (Rom 6). (The omission of this aspect of the “undragoning” of Eustace in the recent movie version of The Voyage of the “Dawn Treader” was one of the more irritating and unnecessary of its many weaknesses.) Eustace is then tossed into the well by Aslan, and emerges renewed and restored.

You see my point. Lewis takes a classic theological doctrine, and transposes it into a narrative—a narrative that is embraced imaginatively, and not simply rationally understood. He breathes new life into a traditional doctrine by inviting us to see it. We are shown what sin is all about, not merely told about it.

Although some have tried to force Lewis into a purely rationalist way of thinking, this does not do him justice. Lewis does not try to prove the existence of God on a priori grounds. Instead, Lewis invites us to see how what we observe in the world around us and experience within us “fits” the Christian way of seeing things. Lewis often articulates this way of “seeing things” in terms of a “myth”—that is to say, a story about reality that both invites its “imaginative embrace,” and communicates a conceptual framework, by which other things are to be seen.12 The imagination embraces the narrative; reason consequently reflects on its contents.

So how does this approach to the reasonableness of faith work out in practice? Let’s consider Lewis’s celebrated “argument from desire,” exploring both its rational structure and its apologetic appeal.

The starting point for Lewis’s approach is an experience—a longing for something undefined and possibly undefinable, that is as insatiable as it is elusive. Lewis sets out versions of this argument at several points in his writings, including the Chronicles of Narnia. The most important statements of the argument, however, are the following:

1. The Pilgrim’s Regress (1933), written shortly after his conversion to Christianity, in which Lewis sets out an allegorical account of his own conversion, focusing on the theme of desire.

12. For a detailed discussion, see McGrath, “A Gleam of Divine Truth: The Concept of Myth in Lewis’s Thought,” in The Intellectual World of C. S. Lewis, 55–82.
2. The university sermon “The Weight of Glory,” preached in Oxford in June 1941, and subsequently published as an article in the journal *Theology*. This is the most elegant statement of the argument, which is here framed primarily in terms of the human quest for beauty.

3. The talk “Hope,” given during the third series of Broadcast Talks for the British Broadcasting Corporation during the Second World War, and subsequently reproduced as a chapter in *Mere Christianity*. This is generally considered to be Lewis’s most influential statement of the argument.

4. The autobiographical work *Surprised by Joy*, in which the theme of “Joy” plays a significant role in arousing Lewis’s openness towards God.

In *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis described his childhood experiences of intense longing (which he names “Joy”) for something unknown and elusive, triggered off by such things as the fragrance of a flowering currant bush in the garden of his childhood home in Belfast, or reading Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s poem in the style of the Swedish poet Esaias Tegnér. Lewis’s epiphany of “Joy” bathed his everyday world of experience with beauty and wonder. But what did it mean—if it meant anything at all? What way of seeing it might help him to make sense of it? How was he to interpret it?

While an atheist, Lewis dismissed such experiences as illusory. Yet he became increasingly dissatisfied with such simplistic reductive explanations. His growing familiarity with what he termed the “Christian mythology”—Lewis here uses the term “myth” in the sense of a “narrated worldview”—led him to appreciate that these experiences could easily and naturally be accommodated within its explanatory framework. What if God were an active questing personal agent, as Christianity affirmed to be the case? If so, God could easily be understood as the “source from which those arrows of Joy had been shot at me ever since childhood.”

In the 1941 sermon “The Weight of Glory,” Lewis develops this theme further by exploring the human quest for beauty. Lewis argues that this is really a search for the source of that beauty, which is mediated through the things of this world, but not contained within them. “The books or the music in which we thought the beauty was located will betray us if we trust to them: it was not in them, it only came through them, and what came through them was longing.”

Without a Christian way of seeing things, this longing remains “uncertain of its object.” Its true goal remains to be identified and attained.

Christianity, Lewis declares, gives us the intellectual framework that both interprets the experience, and leads us to its true goal. In his own way, Lewis reworks the point so famously made by T. S. Eliot in *The Dry Salvages*:

We had the experience but missed the meaning.
And approach to the meaning restores the experience.

In *Mere Christianity*, Lewis sets out this approach in a somewhat different way, while still appealing to the elusiveness of our experiences of “Joy.” The experiences he had in mind are shared across the human spectrum, often expressed in quotidian language as a sense of there being “something there.” The great Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky, for example, spoke of “a nostalgic yearning, bordering at times on unendurably poignant sorrow,” which he experienced in “the dreams of my heart and in the reveries of my soul.” Bertrand Russell, one of the most articulate and influential British atheist writers of the twentieth century, put a similar thought into words as follows:

The centre of me is always and eternally a terrible pain . . . a searching for something beyond what the world contains, something transfigured and infinite—the beatific vision, God—I do not find it, I do not think it is to be found—but the love of it is my life . . . it is the actual spring of life within me.

Russell’s daughter, Katharine Tait, recalled that he was contemptuous of organized religion, dismissing its ideas mainly because he disliked those who held them. Yet Tait took the view that her father’s life was really an unacknowledged, perhaps disguised, search for God. “Somewhere at the back of my father’s mind, at the bottom of his heart, in the depths of his soul, there was an empty space that had once been filled by God, and he never found anything else to put in it.” Russell was now haunted by a “ghost-like feeling of not belonging in this world.”

These are the kinds of experience to which Lewis appeals—a sense of hovering on the brink of discovering something of immense significance, linked with a sense of sorrow and frustration when what seemed to be so close tantalizingly disappears. Like smoke, it cannot be grasped. As Lewis puts it: “There was something we grasped at, in that first moment of longing,

which just fades away in the reality.”17 So what does this sense of unfulfilled longing mean? To what does it point?

Some, Lewis concedes, might suggest that this frustration arises from looking for its true object in the wrong places; others that, since further searching will only result in repeated disappointment, there is simply no point trying to find something better than the present world.

Yet Lewis suggests that there is a third approach, which recognizes that these earthly longings are “only a kind of copy, or echo, or mirage” of our true homeland. Since this overwhelming desire cannot be fulfilled through anything in the present world, this suggests that its ultimate object lies beyond the present world. As he says in *Mere Christianity*: “If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.”

Here, as throughout his apologetic writings, the starting point of Lewis’s approach does not lie with the Bible or the Christian tradition, but with shared human experience and observation. How do we make sense of them? Lewis’s genius as an apologist lay in his ability to show how a “viewpoint” which was derived from the Bible and the Christian tradition was able to offer a more satisfactory explanation of common human experience than its rivals—especially the atheism he had once himself espoused.

Lewis’s apologetic approach is to identify a common human observation or experience, and then show how it fits in, naturally and plausibly, within a Christian way of looking at things.18 For Lewis, Christianity provided a “big picture,” an intellectually capacious and imaginatively satisfying way of seeing things. Lewis was always emphatic that nothing can be proved on the basis of observation or experience. Yet while such observations of nature or our own experiences prove nothing, they can suggest certain possibilities, and even intimate what they might mean. That’s what Lewis was trying to express when he wrote:

> A true philosophy may sometimes validate an experience of nature; an experience of nature cannot validate a philosophy. Nature will not verify any theological or metaphysical proposition (or not in the manner we are now considering); she will help to show what it means.19

17. For what follows, see Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 135–36.
18. Lewis’s apologetic method is often misunderstood. For a correction of earlier accounts of his approach, see McGrath, “Reason, Experience, and Imagination: Lewis’s Apologetic Method,” in *The Intellectual World of C. S. Lewis*, 129–46.
That’s what Lewis’s mentor G. K. Chesterton was also getting at when he remarked that “the phenomenon does not prove religion, but religion explains the phenomenon.”

Lewis’s approach could be framed like this: Christianity holds that the natural order—including our own reasoning—is shaped by the God who created all things. As Augustine of Hippo and Blaise Pascal had argued before him, Lewis affirms that the absence of God causes us to experience longing—a yearning for God, which we misinterpret as a longing for something located within the finite and created order. Conversion is thus partly about a semiotic transformation, in which we realize that something we believed to be pointing to one thing in fact points to something rather different.

We could set Lewis’s argument out more formally as follows. We experience desires that no experience in this world seems able to satisfy. Yet Christianity tells us that we are made for another world. And when things are seen in this way, this sort of experience is exactly what we would expect. The appeal is not so much to cold logic, as to intuition and imagination, resting on an imaginative dynamic of discovery. Lewis invites his audience to see their experiences through a set of Christian spectacles, and notice how these bring what might otherwise be fuzzy or blurred into sharp focus. For Lewis, the ability of the Christian faith to accommodate our experience, naturally and easily, is an indicator of its truth.

As Lewis states this approach from desire, therefore, it is not really an argument at all; it is more about observing and affirming the fit between a theory and observation. It is like trying on a hat or shirt for size. How well does it fit? How many of our observations of the world can it accommodate, and how persuasively? Lewis’s way of thinking also shows some similarity to a related approach within the natural sciences, now generally known as “inference to the best explanation.” This approach recognizes that there are multiple explanations of observations, and suggests how criteria might be identified to determine which such explanation is to be considered as “the best.”

The same approach is found in Lewis’s “argument from morality.” This is sometimes portrayed in ridiculously simplistic terms—for example, “experiencing a sense of moral obligation proves there is a God.” Lewis did not say this, and did not think this. As with the “argument from desire,” his argument is rather that the common human experience of a sense of moral obligation is easily and naturally accommodated within a Christian framework.


For Lewis, experiences and intuitions—for example, concerning morality and desire—are meant to “arouse our suspicions” that there is indeed “Something which is directing the universe.” We come to suspect that our moral experience suggests a “real law which we did not invent, and which we know we ought to obey,” in much the same way as our experience of desire is “a kind of copy, or echo, or mirage” of another place, which is our true homeland. And as we track this suspicion, we begin to realize that it has considerable imaginative and explanatory potential. What was initially a dawning suspicion becomes solidified as a growing conviction that it makes sense of what matters to us naturally and persuasively.

So what can be learned from Lewis's approach? Perhaps I could mention two points in bringing this lecture to a close.

First, Lewis helps us see that apologetics need not take the form of a slightly dull deductive argument, but can be understood and presented as an invitation to step into the Christian way of seeing things, and explore how things look when seen from its standpoint. “Try seeing things this way!” If worldviews or metanarratives can be compared to lenses, which of them brings things into sharpest focus?

And second, we need to realize that Lewis's explicit appeal to reason involves an implicit appeal to the imagination. Perhaps this helps us understand why Lewis appeals to both modern and postmodern people. I see no historical evidence that compels me to argue that Lewis deliberately set out to do this, constructing a mediating position between two very different cultural moods. The evidence suggests that he saw things this way naturally, and never formalized it in terms of a synthesis of these two very different modalities of thought. Lewis rather gives us a synoptikon that transcends the great divide between modernity and postmodernity, affirming the strengths of each, and subtly accommodating their weaknesses.

Yes, Lewis affirms the rationality of the universe—but does so without plunging us into an imaginatively drab world of cold logic and dreary argumentation. Yes, Lewis affirms the power of images and narratives to captivate our imagination—but does so without giving up on the primacy of truth. As the churches face an increasingly complex cultural context in which they must preach and minister, Lewis offers insights and approaches that are potentially enriching—and, I venture to suggest, culturally plausible and intellectually persuasive.

In the end, Lewis tells the truth by showing the truth. He offers us an intellectually capacious and imaginatively compelling vision of the Christian faith, perhaps best summed up in his lapidary statement at the end of his essay “Is Theology Poetry?” Using a powerful visual image, Lewis invites
us to see God as both the ground of the rationality of the world, and the one who enables us to grasp that rationality.

I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen, not only because I see it but because by it I see everything else.22

This beautifully crafted sentence is a fitting memorial both to Lewis himself and his rich understanding of faith. How appropriate that it adorns the memorial to be unveiled in this Abbey tomorrow!

I must end. Let me do so by noting a parallel between Lewis and the great Genevan reformer John Calvin. Neither Lewis nor Calvin had any children, though both were stepfathers to children from their wives' earlier marriages. When Calvin was mocked by his critics for being childless, he offered an intriguing rebuttal. Anyone, he declared, who read his books and came to share his way of thinking was his child. And when seen that way, Calvin turned out to have rather a large family! I think the same is true of Lewis. Many of us find that our ways of thinking have come to be deeply shaped by Lewis; to put it another way, we share something of his intellectual DNA. Those of us gathered here today at Westminster are Lewis's children, meeting for a family celebration. Not one of us here today is a physical descendent of Lewis, but we are all linked to him through our imagination and reason. I think we all share in the delight of this family occasion, made possible both by the generosity and discernment of this great institution, Westminster Abbey, and by the genius and talent of C. S. Lewis himself. May both flourish in the next fifty years!

In the foregoing essay in this volume, Alister McGrath explored the various ways in which C. S. Lewis appeals to reason in his apologetics, though he has pointed out that this appeal to reason and to what he calls “reasonableness” is, in fact, constantly interwoven with an appeal to imagination, a series of invitations to look at things in a new way, to imagine how a world might look if Christianity were the case. I agree with Dr. McGrath that in Lewis’s mature work appeals to reason and imagination are complementary, balanced, and mutually enfolded. However, in this essay I want briefly to distinguish from this interwoven thread the imaginative strand and to look specifically at the role imagination played both in Lewis’s own *praeparatio evangelica* and in his subsequent apologetic writing, taking apologetics in its broadest sense to include both his fiction and his poetry.


2. A video of Dr. Guite’s lecture is available online: https://youtu.be/lOxbeQLFXsk.