

Collegium Intermarium E-Course

The Gospel According to Narnia:

The Christian Worldview of C.S. Lewis

Online lectures in English; major readings and exams/final essay may be done in Polish. Course may be taken at “one’s own pace”

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Course Description:

C.S. Lewis was one of the most popular and prolific Christian writers of the 20th century. This course offers a detailed study and analysis of Lewis’ major works, including theology and apologetics (e.g. *Mere Christianity*, *The Problem of Pain*, and *Miracles*), spirituality (e.g. *Letters to Malcolm* and *The Screwtape Letters*), along with relevant selections from his autobiographical, fantasy, and fiction works (especially, *Surprised by Joy*, *The Space Trilogy*, and *The Chronicles of Narnia*), in order to provide students with a comprehensive overview of his Christian vision of God, humanity, culture, and the cosmos.

Lewis was also a social prophet, challenging the 20th century drift toward skepticism, ethical nihilism and totalitarianism, and promoting the unity of the Church. In this course, therefore, we will explore relevance of his writings to the progress of ecumenical dialogue in the Church, and to the social and ethical challenges faced by western civilization today.

Course Objectives:

- A. The students will become thoroughly acquainted with the principal books and essays of C.S. Lewis relevant to his Christian worldview, and how the perspectives put forward in those writings also are reflected in some of his principal works of fiction.

- B. Students will have the thought of Lewis outlined in systematic form (something he never did himself!) in order to better appreciate his worldview.
- C. Some of the points made by Lewis are contentious, thus, students will become familiar with the main lines of critique of the Christian vision of C.S. Lewis.
- D. The students will learn about Lewis' search for an historic, mainstream Christian orthodoxy as a "springboard" for authentic ecumenical dialogue, as well as the difficulties in finding and articulating this "Mere Christianity."
- E. The students will gain an appreciation for the depth of Lewis' cultural critique of the decline of western civilization, especially the dangers of religious skepticism, moral nihilism, "scientism," and totalitarianism.
- F. This course will equip students in the future to read and more deeply appreciate other great works by Lewis not covered in depth here: for example, *The Four Loves*, *The Pilgrims Regress*, and *Till We Have Faces*.

Required Texts:

- *The C.S. Lewis Signature Classics*. New York: Harper, 2017. This volume contains eight books in one: *Mere Christianity*, *The Screwtape Letters*, *Miracles*, *The Great Divorce*, *The Problem of Pain*, *A Grief Observed*, *The Abolition of Man*, and *The Four Loves*. **Ideally, each student would have a copy of this book in English, to more easily follow the quotations from these books as they appear in the lectures** (Please purchase the paperback rather than the hardcover edition: it's much cheaper, ca. \$35 USD on Amazon at present — and the page numbers in the hardcover edition are not the same as the paperback we will be using). Four of the books in this collection will be read by students and/or analyzed in depth during the class (*The Abolition of Man*, *Mere Christianity*, *The Problem of Pain*, and *Miracles*) while two others are options for the final essay (*The Screwtape Letters*, *The Great Divorce*). **Alternatively, the students may read Polish editions of these four works, but again, the instructor will be using the textbook in English during the lectures.**

- C.S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer*. San Francisco: Harcourt, 1992 edition — an alternative English edition of this book may be used by the students, but this one (above) will be used by the instructor during the lectures. The book is also available on Amazon and from Empik. Polish translations are available from the main libraries in Poland (e.g. from the library at the University of Warsaw), or the student may purchase a hardcopy photocopy from Collegium Intermarium for a fee, plus postage cost. Contact the instructor for details.
- Essays and other excerpts from Lewis’s writings and critical appraisals provided online by Collegium Intermarium.

Course Outline:

- I. C.S. Lewis as the Great Contemporary Apologist for Christianity
- II. The Life and Times of C.S. Lewis
- III. **The Universe that God Intended—and The World We Are Making Instead**
 - A. Change, progress, and “chronological snobbery”
 - B. Twentieth century “naturalism” and “everythingism”
- IV. *The Abolition of Man*
 - A. The major abolitionist: modern science
 - B. Mass social conformity in a post-Christian era
 - C. Was Lewis a reactionary-alarmist or a true social prophet?
- V. **The Epistemology of C.S. Lewis**
 - A. Imagination, myth and metaphor: the organ of meaning
 - B. Reason: the organ of truth
 - C. Faith and Reason
- VI. **Biblical Interpretation**
 - A. General principles: “Transposition,” “Revelation” and “Inspiration”
 - B. Biblical criticism and Biblical mythology
 - C. Did C.S. Lewis really understand the issue of the inerrancy of Scripture?
- VII. **The Theology of C.S. Lewis**

- A. The Doctrine of God**
1. Reasons for belief in God (from *Mere Christianity*)
 2. What is God Like?—story time from *The Chronicles of Narnia*
 3. God and Time
 4. The Doctrine of the Trinity
- VIII.
- IX and X. **B. *The Problem of Pain***: humanity and the fall; theodicy
- XI. **C. The Doctrine of Christ: His Person and Work**
1. The Case for the Divinity of Christ (from *Mere Christianity*)
 2. “Myth Became Fact”
 3. Was Lewis an “Apollinarian?”
- XII. The Saving Work of Christ (from *Mere Christianity*) -- Did Lewis offer a coherent doctrine of the Atonement?
- XIII. **Midcourse exam**
- XIV. 5. Salvation as Sanctification
6. Faith and Works—story time from *Narnia* again!
- XV. **D. The Doctrine of the Church**
1. The Church as the Body of Christ
 2. The Sacraments and Holy Communion (from *Letters to Malcolm*)
- XVI. **E. The Christian Life**
1. Prayer and its problems (from *Letters to Malcolm*)
 2. Moral values and moral freedom (from *Mere Christianity*)
 3. The virtues: especially faith, hope and love
 4. Theology of the body and sexual morality
- XVII. **F. Economic and Political Principles**: did Lewis fail to appreciate the fullness of the Social Gospel?
- XVIII. **G. Christian Eschatology**

1. Devils and Angels
2. Hell (from *The Problem of Pain*)
3. Purgatory (from *Letters to Malcolm*)
4. Heaven, and the Resurrection of the Body (from *The Problem of Pain* and “*The Weight of Glory*”)
5. The Second Coming (from “*The World’s Last Night*”)

XIX-XX. **H. Miracles** (from *Miracles*)

Course Requirements:

Students can choose between two options for graded assignments.

A. The Exams Option

A Midcourse Exam (3 short essay answers to write, about 500 words each): 50% of the student’s mark,

and

A Final Exam (3 short essay answers to write, about 500 words each): 50% of the student’s mark

Or:

B. The Essay Option

A Final Essay: 100% of the student’s mark

The final essay would be ca. 2,500 words in length: an extended, analytical book review of one of the following works by Lewis: *The Screwtape Letters*, or *The Great Divorce*. Both books are included in the main class textbook.

The exams or essay may be written in Polish or in English.

Suggestions for Further Reading:

- Richard B. Cunningham, *C.S. Lewis: Defender of the Faith*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967.
- Terry Glaspey, *C.S. Lewis: His Life and Thought*. Edison: Inspirational Press, 2005 edition.
- Alan Jacobs, *The Narnian: The Life and Imagination of C.S. Lewis*. San Francisco: Harper, 2005.
- Richard Purtill, *C.S. Lewis' Case for the Christian Faith*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004 edition.
- Jonathan Rodgers, *The World According to Narnia*. New York: Warner Faith, 2005.
- Thomas Williams, *The Heart of the Chronicles of Narnia*. Nashville, W. Publishing Group, 2005.