

# THE LIFE AND THOUGHT OF C.S. LEWIS

TH 2XL3 / MS 2XL3  
McMaster Divinity College  
Summer School, 2015

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## COURSE DESCRIPTION

C.S. Lewis is one of the most influential Christian writers of the twentieth century. Just over fifty years after his death, his theological writings and works of fiction (which are often one and the same) remain widely read and appreciated. The story of his life demonstrates in a powerful way how his encounter with Jesus Christ definitively shaped both his worldview and his actions. Together we will walk through his life and his major writings, considering his relevance for the contemporary world.

## COURSE OBJECTIVES

### **K**nowing

- To become familiar with the life and major works of Lewis
- To identify the major themes that emerge from Lewis' corpus
- To understand the arguments for the value of contemporary parables/myths

### **B**eing

- To engage in theological reflection on the works of Lewis
- To be challenged by the example of Lewis in leading a Christian life

### **D**oing

- To critically engage with a selected portion of Lewis' work
- To evaluate Lewis' impact on Christian and secular cultures

## SPECIALIZATIONS

- Christian Thought and History
- Church and Culture
- Christian Worldview

## class schedule<sup>1</sup>

### Week 1

*Tuesday, May 26*

- Introduction to the Course
- Young Lewis
- Lewis the Academic
- Lewis at War

*Thursday, May 28*

- Lewis the Atheist
- Lewis' Conversion
- Lewis and the Inklings

### Week 2

*Tuesday, June 2*

- Lewis the Popular Christian Apologist
- *Mere Christianity*
- *The Problem of Pain*
- *Miracles*

*Thursday, June 4*

- Lewis the Writer
- *The Space Trilogy*
- *The Screwtape Letters*
- *The Great Divorce*

### Week 3

*Tuesday, June 9*

- *The Chronicles of Narnia*
- *Until We Have Faces*

*Thursday, June 11*

- Lewis, Joy, and *A Grief Observed*
- Lewis and Evangelicalism
- Lewis and contemporary issues

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<sup>1</sup> Please note that the instructor reserves the right to make alterations to the content and its sequence.

## REQUIRED TEXTS

- Alister McGrath. *C.S. Lewis – A Life: Eccentric Genius, Reluctant Prophet*
- C.S. Lewis. *The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics* [includes *Mere Christianity*, *The Screwtape Letters*, *The Great Divorce*, *The Problem of Pain*, *Miracles*, *A Grief Observed*, and *The Abolition of Man*]

## RECOMMENDED TEXT

- C.S. Lewis. *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life*

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### Primary Texts

- C.S. Lewis. *The Chronicles of Narnia*
- C.S. Lewis. *The Four Loves*.
- C.S. Lewis. *Reflections on the Psalms*
- C.S. Lewis. *The Space Trilogy* [includes *Out of the Silent Planet*, *Perelandra*, and *That Hideous Strength*]
- C.S. Lewis. *The Weight of Glory*
- C.S. Lewis. *Till We Have Faces*

### Secondary Texts

- Carpenter, Humphrey. *The Inklings: C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien and Their Friends*
- Duriez, Colin. *Tolkien and C.S. Lewis: the Gift of Friendship*.
- Green, Roger L. *C.S. Lewis: A Biography*.
- Neuleib, Janice W. *The Concept of Evil in the Fiction of C.S. Lewis*.
- Nicholi, Armand. *The Question of God: C.S. Lewis and Sigmund Freud Debate God, Love, Sex, and the Meaning of Life*
- Reppert, Victor. *C.S. Lewis's Dangerous Idea: In Defense of the Argument from Reason*
- Sammons, Martha C. *War of the Fantasy World: C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien on Art and Imagination*
- Vaus, Will. *Mere theology: A Guide to the Thought of C.S. Lewis*

### Podcasts

- CBC Ideas on C.S. Lewis: <http://www.cbc.ca/player/Radio/Ideas/ID/2411499215/>

## ASSIGNMENTS

	% of grade	due date
• Class participation / primary source readings	20%	June 11
• Movie Review	15%	June 15
• Book Review	25%	June 23
• Thesis paper	40%	July 6

### ***Class participation / primary source readings (email due on June 11 before class)***

- Readings for each class will be assigned from the primary sources and from McGrath's biography. Students will be graded in part on the basis of their participation in class

discussions; comments and questions in these discussions should reflect familiarity with the assigned material. *An email listing completed readings is due on June 11 before the start of class.*

***Movie review (due June 15 by 11:59pm)***

- Watch either *Shadowlands* or *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*
- This review is 3 double-spaced pages in length (apart from a bibliography – a bibliography is only necessary if one chooses to interact with other sources). Use Times New Roman 12 point font, footnotes (if required), and keep the margins at 1¼ inches. Please abide by the MDC style guide (see below).
- In your review, compare the movie with the source material.<sup>2</sup> In your judgement, is the adaptation successful? What artistic liberties do the film makers take? Are they warranted? Are the theological aspects of Lewis' life/work adequately conveyed?

***Book reflection (due June 23 by 11:59 pm)***

- Choose a book-length work of C.S. Lewis from the bibliography (fiction or non-fiction).
- This reflection is 5 double-spaced pages in length (apart from a bibliography – a bibliography is only necessary if one chooses to interact with other sources). Use Times New Roman 12 point font, footnotes (if required), and keep the margins at 1¼ inches. Please abide by the MDC style guide (see below).
- If you select a work of fiction, focus on interacting with the theological themes present in the narrative. This is not a plot summary; I am interested in what *you* discover in reading the book.
- If you select a work of nonfiction, be sure to address the following questions:
  - What remains pertinent for contemporary Christians?
  - What (if anything) is more a reflection of Lewis' culture and/or personal biases and is no longer helpful?
- Be sure to organize your paper logically, with an introduction that maps out the areas you address and a conclusion that summarizes the salient points in your observations.

***Thesis paper (due July 6 by 11:59 pm)***

- Papers for all three specializations (see below) must be demonstrably related to the course content.
- All thesis papers are 15 to 17 double-spaced pages in length apart from the bibliography. They must use Times New Roman 12 point font, footnotes, and have 1¼ inch margins. Footnotes are to be indented, single spaced, and use Times New Roman 10 point font. Please abide by the MDC style guide (see below). Students will only follow the poor example of mixing fonts found in this syllabus on the cover page of their paper if they are so inclined.
- All papers will make a clear thesis statement in their introduction and support this thesis in their bodies.
- Use headers to break up the body of the text and to keep your work organized.

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<sup>2</sup> Even though McGrath's biography antedates *Shadowlands*, it is still a good, scholarly representation of Lewis' life and can therefore be used as 'source material.'

- The successful paper will exhibit consistent argumentation, clear and direct prose, and engage with secondary as well as primary sources.
- **Christian Thought and History**
  - This specialization will engage directly with the theology found in the life and works of C.S. Lewis.
  - The following are examples of possible topics:
    - The Role of Women in the Thought of C.S. Lewis
    - The Development of Lewis' Thought: Comparing and Contrasting *The Problem of Pain* and *A Grief Observed*
    - Redemption and Eschatology in *The Last Battle*
    - *Perelandra*: A World Without the Fall
- **Church and Culture**
  - This specialization will connect the theology found in the life and works of C.S. Lewis with a contemporary context.
  - The following are examples of possible topics:
    - Narnia versus *His Dark Materials*: How Good is Secular Humanism at Fantasy?
    - From Narnia and Middle Earth to Dungeons and Dragons: Have Christian Themes Continued in Contemporary Fantasy?
    - *Mere Christianity*: Help or Hindrance?
    - C.S. Lewis and Ecumenism: A Way Forward?
- **Christian Worldview**
  - This specialization may borrow freely from the above specializations. Students in this specialization may also choose other topics, provided they are demonstrably related to the course content.

## GENERAL COMMENTS

- Academic dishonesty is a serious offence that may take any number of forms, including plagiarism, the submission of work that is not one's own or for which previous credit has been obtained, and/or unauthorized collaboration with other students. Academic dishonesty can result in severe consequences, e.g., failure of the assignment, failure of the course, a notation on one's academic transcript, and/or suspension or expulsion from the College. Students are responsible for understanding what constitutes academic dishonesty. Please refer to the Divinity College Statement on Academic Honesty: <http://www.mcmasterdivinity.ca/programs/rules-regulations>
- Please follow the McMaster Divinity College style guide for all assignments: <http://www.mcmasterdivinity.ca/sites/default/files/documents/MDCStyleGuideMarch0413.pdf>
- McMaster Divinity College uses inclusive language for human beings in worship services, student written materials, and all of its publications. In reference to biblical texts, the integrity of the original expressions and the names of God should be respected. The NRSV and TNIV are examples of the use of inclusive language for human beings. It is expected that inclusive language will be used in chapel services and all MDC assignments.

- Assignments must be submitted on the day they are due before 11:59 pm via email in .doc, .docx or PDF format. Afterwards, assignments are considered late and will incur a late penalty of 1% per day (not including weekends). **No assignments will be accepted after the cut-off day of July 8.**
- There are no course extensions for summer courses. In the case of a genuine emergency, contact the office of the registrar: thomn@mcmaster.ca.
- Please turn off your cell phone or set it to silent mode before the class begins.