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Book review of: *The Medieval Mind of C.S. Lewis: How Great Books Shaped a Great Mind* by Jason M. Baxter

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and notes the distinctiveness of Page's presentation of wonder as a virtue to be cultivated through practices of engagement with both nature and literature. McGowin suggests that children might act as 'exemplars and mentors' in wonder (122) and reminds Christian readers that in the New Creation, 'Learning to see ourselves within Christ, and in Christ among the created world—a living bridge between heaven and earth—is central to our vocation as human beings' (124).

This book illustrates the strength of interdisciplinary scholarship and the value of the arts and humanities on one hand, and the value of the natural sciences on the other. The work of Page and her respondents is informed by close readings of the work of Lewis and Tolkien, but it also draws on knowledge of other academic fields, on personal reflections, and on wider reading of literature and Scripture. In terms of environmental issues, Page draws mainly on American examples and admonishes the evangelical wing of the church, but her message is relevant globally. There is certainly cause for lament, but ultimately this is a book about hope rather than despair, holding out the possibility of Christians 'leading the way in moving the privileged away from an "orthodoxy of more" . . . to make real changes that in turn will loosen the grasp of winter on our global world and bring about the hope of spring once again' (76). Whilst accessible, this is an erudite book, rich in knowledge and wisdom and helpful for spiritual formation. At its heart is Page's appeal that we learn to see ourselves as 'part of the chorus of creation' (115), with a God-given responsibility to care for and seek the flourishing of his awesome, wonderful world.

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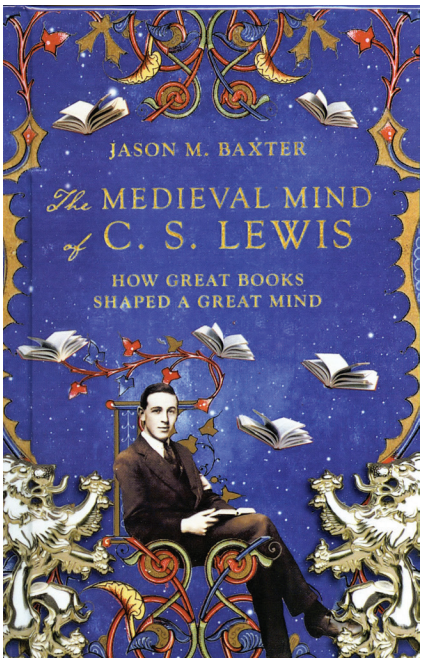
Jason M. Baxter, *The Medieval Mind of C.S. Lewis: How Great Books Shaped a Great Mind*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022.

During my first semester in college, our survey course in history read C.S. Lewis's *The Discarded Image*. Subsequent class discussions made it clear that for the vast majority of students, the text had been frustrating, impenetrable, and difficult to take seriously. This was not the Lewis they knew. They were hardly alone in their bewilderment: C.S. Lewis as medievalist, and more profoundly as disciple of medieval thinkers, is a neglected persona. In his new book, *The Medieval Mind of C.S. Lewis: How Great Books Shaped a Great Mind*, Jason Baxter demonstrates how far this neglect hampers our understanding of the man and restricts our experience of his ideas.



Baxter argues that Lewis's nourishment by medieval mentors gave him models and tools to effectively translate the Christian faith into terms comprehensible to our world, which is foreign in so many ways to the world in which Christianity took shape. Lewis himself claimed that he belonged, in some sense, on the far side of the "Great Divide"—the transformation in cosmology, intellectual endeavor, and basic assumptions about the world that happened in the late seventeenth century, when the old medieval image of the world was "discarded." He described himself as a "dinosaur," an unlikely living specimen from a long-obliterated world, and as a Boethius, who translated the wisdom of the ancients into terms that a new age could assimilate or at least understand (16–17).

Baxter demonstrates Lewis's affection and respect for medieval thinkers and the ways in which their Old Model for understanding the world shaped his own mode of thought as well as his writings. At least as importantly, Baxter introduces readers to the thinkers and thoughts that Lewis admired. And he argues that Lewis was right to be enchanted: the old ideas are still compelling and useful. In Baxter's words, Lewis believed that "being able to see the world with medieval eyes could provide even modern people with a 'model' for thinking about the relationship between the natural and spiritual world" (22). Baxter evidently agrees.

After an introduction establishing the value Lewis placed on the "long Middle Ages," which includes nearly all of western premodernity until the Enlightenment, the first chapter outlines the overwhelming, yet organized, "cathedral" of medieval cosmology (11, 20). Baxter stresses its power to inspire and enchant medieval men (nearly always men), often in ways foreign to modern sensibilities. The second chapter expands on the enchantment and introduces the importance of understanding it from within. Lewis insisted that instead of simply talking "about" a thing (the medieval conception of the world or some higher reality that lay behind it), we must strive to contemplate it directly. This means encountering medieval thought on its own terms, so that our minds are reshaped by its values instead of merely receiving new facts. Once inside the cathedral, an author can imitate medi-

eval scholars by writing to "renew, recycle, enliven the original, so that the old vision would be credible to those who live in an incredulous age" (51).

The third chapter traces the shifts, largely technological, that lay behind changes in the model in the early modern period. Lewis believed that as intellectual inquiry stopped assuming the cosmos meant something iconically and prioritized, instead, the numbers it could be broken into, humans lost the ability to draw moral meaning from the world around them. The world became a means to power, not an expression of soul.

Here and in the next chapter, on pedagogy and psychology, Baxter explores Lewis's argument that this change in priorities and understanding robbed us of our justification for "spiritual longings" (65). By severing the iconic connections the Old Model had cultivated between the physical and spiritual worlds, this shift reduced such longing to subjective experience, which—along with cold, hard figures—was now considered to constitute true meaning and be sufficient for human flourishing. But in actuality, desires *can* be judged right, and sentiments just, if moral meaning lies outside of subjective experience. And it is right desires that link the appetite and the reason to create a coherent, whole human (80).

Chapter 5 explores Lewis's admiration for Dante's ability to do this—to convey weighty particularity as well as expansive spiritual imagery. Here there is some overlap and repetition: Dante, and Lewis's relationship to him, runs throughout the book. The sixth chapter turns to mystical contemplation and Lewis's uncertain relationship with it. He was taken, Baxter argues, with the possibilities of negative theology (when carefully balanced with a respect for revelation), and the salutary effects of the terror associated with God's holiness. Nonetheless, Lewis was cautious about recommending mystical practices to Christians.

The final two chapters consider the place the Old Model has in our present context. They first explore Lewis's characterization of Christianity as the "true myth." The real events and persons of Christianity share elements with the legends people have told and loved not because they are all equally fantastic inventions, but because other stories emerge as echoes of the truths (and the true longings) represented by Christianity. In the final chapter, Baxter discusses the Old Model's epistemological justifications. Like all models, it was not a perfect representation of the entire universe, but it still provided a useful image, a metaphor simplified according to the priorities of its practitioners. Baxter clarifies that Lewis didn't want people to adopt the beliefs of medieval people but to respect them, recognizing that we too only have an imperfect model (149).

The book is excellently, often beautifully, written, and it presents complex ideas in terms an uninitiated reader can hope to understand. This is not surprising: Baxter, a Dante scholar and author of other books for a general audience, is well equipped for the task. Frequent reiterations and examples—

from medieval authors and especially from Lewis—bring clarity and weight to the analysis. Baxter imitates Lewis's own prioritization of communicating the "feel" of a new idea or another world (37). The strategy works.

Given the tone of the book—a relaxed style, with minimal indexing but academic footnotes—it is sometimes difficult to determine the intended audience. Most of Lewis's writings are described well enough that an interested reader unfamiliar with his work could follow along. But the Narnian stories are given no overall introduction (though individual scenes get basic framing), and pivotal moments in Lewis's life are assumed to be familiar. Baxter's approach suggests he expects his book to be interesting, perhaps primarily, to Inklings aficionados (129).

The focus on Lewis is fundamental to the book, but it does result in some lacunae. Like Lewis's, Baxter's Middle Ages belong to the elites. This makes sense in a book about intellectual topics, but when moral formation and broad education are in question, neither Baxter nor Lewis makes an attempt to identify the morality or the cosmologies of the masses who made up most of the premodern world. Similarly characteristic is the exclusive focus on the West. Very occasionally this is acknowledged, but it is not examined (9, 29, 143). An attempt to translate for a globally aware audience Lewis's concept that myths are a "myriad of fragmented colors," each partially representing the white light of the "true myth" (Christianity), would be welcome (125). Perhaps such an extension would be beyond the scope of the book, but something similar *is* begun in the chapter on modern science and medieval myth. There, Baxter gestures to discoveries made in astrophysics since Lewis's day and shows how Lewis's ideas apply to them (147–51).

The choice to focus on the medieval mind *of C.S. Lewis*, rather than, say, the medieval mind of Dante, has certain amplifying effects on the book's audience and scope. We gain a better understanding of a scholar who profoundly shaped Christian thought in the last century. The ideas will reach people who are interested in Lewis but do not yet know that they should be interested in Dante (or Calcidius, or Bernard Silvestris). And by following Lewis into the Old Model, readers access parts of it that remain usable now, long after the world that made it has passed away.

Much of what Lewis accomplished in rearticulating the medieval model was simply to offer *something* to contemplate rather than *nothing*, stemming from a desire to build rather than to destroy, to present real and good things rather than merely to root out the false and evil. Instead of deconstructing ideas and imagination, Lewis builds them up, laying out a clear and compelling image of an integrated world. This book offers the same. If we accept the connection between cosmology and ethics ("if we have nothing more than heads our hearts will wither"), contemplation of it must be good for our souls (143, 85). Like Baxter's and Lewis's medieval mentors, the book works to convince readers that inculcating longing for the right things is one of the

most important tasks of education. At the same time, it gives us glimpses of a reality to long for, offering nostalgia properly cultivated so that it becomes hope rather than idolatry.

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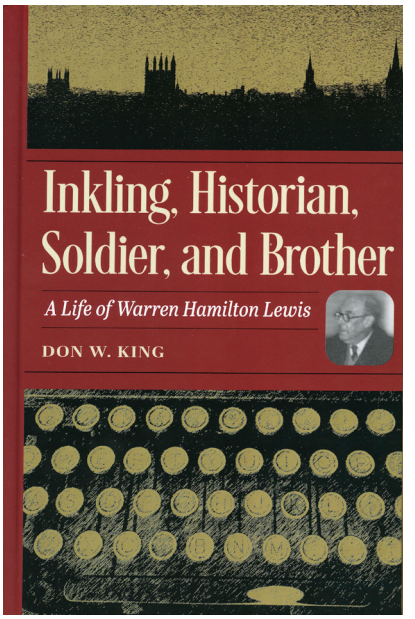
Don W. King, *Inkling, Historian, Soldier, and Brother: A Life of Warren Hamilton Lewis*. Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2023.

Until very recently, Warren Hamilton "Warnie" Lewis was generally known as the brother of C.S. Lewis or as the Silent Inkling. For a considerable period of time, the only adequate scholarly work dealing with him that was widely available was Clyde S. Kilby and Marjorie Lamp Mead's superb edition of *Brothers and Friends: The Diaries of Major Warren Hamilton Lewis* (1982), which included about ten percent of his 1.2 million-word diary, a comprehensive chronology of his life, two genealogies, and a wealth of information about C.S. Lewis and kindred spirits.



In the last two decades, availability of scholarship on Warnie Lewis has changed significantly for the better, largely due to the tireless archival research and writing of Don W. King, which are now crowned by his biography of the "other Lewis brother." King, a professor of English at Montreat College and former editor of *Christian Scholar's Review*, has published extensively on Inklings topics, including a book on C.S. Lewis as a poet (2001), a critical biography of Ruth Pitter (2008), a critical study of the works of Joy Davidman (2015), and a collection of essays on Lewis (2013). In addition, he has edited the letters of Joy Davidman (2009) and of Ruth Pitter (2014), as well as the poems of Davidman (2015), Lewis (2015), and Pitter (2018).

In *Inkling, Historian, Soldier, and Brother: A Life of Warren Hamilton Lewis*, King demonstrates his mastery of the extensive Lewis corpus, both published and unpublished, as well as his skill in synthesizing a vast quantity of mate-