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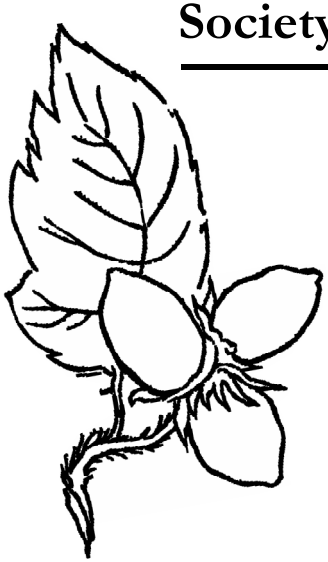
The Charles Williams Society



www.geocities.com/charles_wms_soc

Newsletter

No. 113 Winter 2004

The Charles Williams Society

The Society was founded in 1975, thirty years after Charles Williams's sudden death at the end of the Second World War. It exists to celebrate Charles Williams and to provide a forum for the exchange of views and information about his life and work.

Members of the Society receive a quarterly newsletter and may attend the Society's meetings which are held three times a year. Facilities for members also include a postal lending library and a reference library housed at The Centre for Medieval Studies in Oxford.

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Reading groups

For information about the **Oxford** reading group please contact Brenda Boughton, tel: 01865 515589.

The Charles Williams Society

No 113 Winter 2004

From the Editor

Welcome to the winter 2004 issue, which is only very loosely attached to the year it claims. We are pleased to include the first of the papers given at the 2004 Conference and will be publishing the others in future issues during 2005.

Also included is a piece arising from the Council's discussions as to the future of the Society. I would urge all members to give this their serious consideration and the Council would welcome any feedback at all. You will note that the views of members will be taken up at the October meeting and all who can should attend that meeting to ensure that the future direction of the Society is guided by the membership. All views will be welcomed and considered.

Another point rather buried in the text of the Council meeting report and Stephen Barber's article is Eileen Mable's impending retirement from the chair. I am sure that members will want to join me in thanking her for all her hard work for the Society over many years.

Edward Gauntlett

Society News & Notes

New Members

A warm welcome is extended to he following new members of the Society:

Chris Coulter, Lee University, 458 Barberry Drive NW, Cleveland, TN 37312, USA.

M L Taylor, 97 St Mary's Road, Faversham, Kent ME12 8EG, UK

Ron Kickasola, 1724 9th St PC SE, Hickory, NC 28601, USA

C. S. Lewis Foundation

The C. S. Lewis Foundation is preparing for its sixth triennial C. S. Lewis Summer Institute in England. Oxbridge 2005 will be held July 24-30 in Oxford and July 31 - August 6 in Cambridge, exploring the theme *Making All Things New: The Good, The True and the Beautiful in the 21st Century*.

Part of this two-week event is the Academic Conference in which juried scholarly papers are presented. Scholars may attend for either one or both weeks.

Call for Papers: Visit <<http://www.cslewis.org/programs/oxbridge/2005/callpaper.html> for the Academic Conference and Call for Papers to give you a sense of what will be taking place. See also http://www.cslewis.org/programs/oxbridge/2005/highlights.html for other activities.

For further information, visit the website at www.cslewis.org

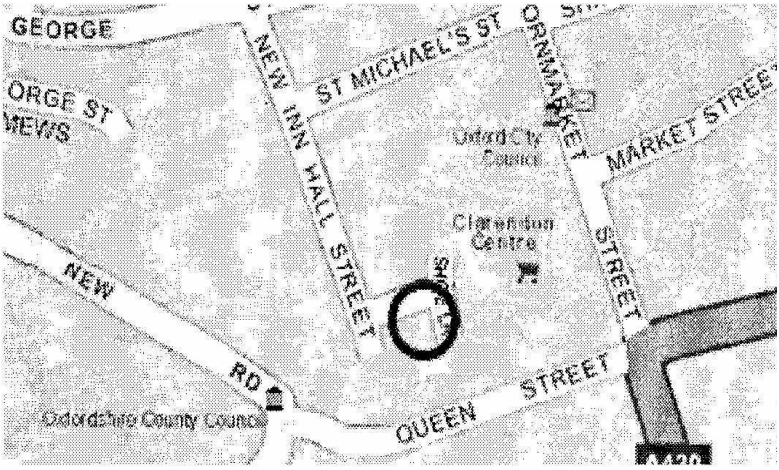
Tolkien Society Conference

We are hoping to be included as a "participating Society" at this conference taking place at Aston University, Birmingham, from August 11th-15th, 2005. If applicable details will appear in a future issue.

Charles Williams Society Meetings

- **Saturday 2 April 2005**
  Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, Shoe Lane, Oxford OX1 2DP (the entrance to Shoe Lane is opposite the gates of St Peter's College and it runs parallel to Michael Street – see map below). The meeting begins at 11.30, though members may arrive from 11.00 am onwards. There will be a visit to the Reference Library collection and, in the afternoon, a reading of *Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury.* Members are asked to bring copies of the play if they have them.

- **Saturday 8 October 2005**
  Royal Foundation of St Katharine **,** 2 Butcher Row, London E14. Details have yet to be finalised but this will be an all day meeting and incorporate the AGM .



Council Meeting Report

The Council of the Charles Williams Society met on Thursday 25 November 2004 at Dr Horne's home.

The Chairman said that Rosley Books now hoped to get the new edition of *The Image of the City* out before Christmas, and that the plaque at St Albans commemorating Charles Williams had been cleaned.

The Secretary said that he had asked that the Society be included among the participating societies at the Tolkien conference at Birmingham in August 2005, though he had not yet had a reply.

The Treasurer reported that we had £222 in our current account and £8,267 in the reserve. He had settled accounts for the June Conference, and would contact those members who had not yet paid the new subscription rate.

The Chairman reported that Grevel Lindop was about to sign a contract with the Oxford University Press for a biography of Charles Williams. She also announced her wish to retire from the Chairmanship by June 2005 at the latest.

There was a long and careful discussion of the future development of the Society. (A fuller report on this appears elsewhere in this Newsletter. See "The Future of the Society".)

Future meetings were agreed for April 2nd and October 8th, at the Oxford Centre for Mediaeval Studies and at the Royal Foundation of St Katharine respectively.

Questionnaire: Summary of Results

Thirty six answers were received from members: 1 each from France, Belgium, Germany and Australia, 4 from the USA and 27 from the UK.

To the question: To which area of CW's work are you most attracted? 28 replied the novels; 12 the plays; 24 theology; 6 the Inklings; 1 Amen House; 1 the Way of Exchange.

To the question: How many share your interest in CW? Answers ranged from 0 to 20.

To the question: What do you value about the Newsletter and how would members like it to change?
(1) *News*: 21 satisfied; 12 wanted more; 1 wanted less.
(2) *Articles*: 15 satisfied; 16 wanted more; 1 wanted fewer.
(3) *Book Reviews*: 18 satisfied; 13 wanted more; 0 wanted fewer.
(4) *Correspondence and Discussion*: 14 satisfied; 17 wanted more; 1 wanted less.
(5) *Listings*: 21 satisfied; 8 wanted more; 3 wanted less.
23 said they would not like to contribute to the Newsletter and 13 said they would, but with qualifications.

To the question about events: 20 said they would like events in London to continue, 16 wanted meetings in Oxford to continue and there was 1 vote each for the South-west and Reading/Birmingham. 18 said they would prefer occasional conferences rather than single event meetings and 4 were not interested.

To the question about the content of meetings/conferences:
17 asked for more play readings; 25 enjoyed talks/seminars; 2 wanted more discussion of the Inklings connection; 2 wanted more about the poetry and the literary criticism; 6 said they would like a wider range of talks but did not specify what form these might take

35 members were satisfied with their membership. 1 was not.

The Future of the Society: a view from the Council

We think the Society is at a crossroads. The impending retirement of Eileen Mable from the chair of Council, together with other changes we have noticed, have made us think that it is time to reconsider our direction. In February only six members attended our meeting. Few members use the newsletter or meetings to share what they have found in Williams's writing, or why they matter to them. We think there is a danger of our degenerating into a cosy club. The next stage could be oblivion.

We think we need to change our method of operating to suit the times in which we find ourselves. Because our membership is scattered, it may be better to have fewer but longer events: events which people who live at a distance will think it worth travelling to. Should we have more conferences such as the one we held this summer? What about other meetings with some special theme, such as the one we held jointly with the George MacDonald Society, or the one we are holding in the spring in Oxford? A significant part of our membership is in academic life. Should we encourage this by deliberately inviting academic papers, and giving the newsletter an academic section, or even turning it into an academic journal, thereby focusing the attention of a younger generation? Some of our members are clergy or otherwise involved in the church. Should we give the society a stronger theological slant? There is a great interest in fantasy literature at present. Should we make more of Williams as a writer in this tradition?

We also need to refresh our membership. We must not become an inward-looking clique but be prepared to hand on to new people and new ideas. We would also value people with specific skills and experience to offer: for example those currently in academic life or publishing, or with experience in running conferences, or who are simply organized and efficient. If you think we should be doing something, would you be willing to join in yourself?

When Arthur saw Guinevere led in by Lancelot's hand there came into his mind the thought 'the king made for the kingdom, or the kingdom made for the king?' The purpose of the Society is not primarily to increase its membership, nor to put on events, nor to publish a newsletter, nor to maintain a library, nor to encourage reading groups, nor to promote a sense of community and coinherence among us, good though all these things are: it is 'to advance the education of the public by the study of the works of Charles Williams'. That is what our constitution says, and it allows enormous scope in the means provided that we concentrate on the end.

We shall hold a debate about all this at the October meeting in London. Even if you do not usually attend, please do so this time, and give us your ideas about how we can together best fulfil our function. Otherwise, we may find that in not so many years there may be no society and no newsletter.

Waiting for Conflict: A Creative Response to the Experience of War

By Michael Hampel

This paper was read to the Society at the 2004 Conference

During the "long weekend", the careless title given to the period between the First and Second World Wars, the identity of the nation and the patriotism which derived from it could not have been more sharply defined as citizens struggled to recover from the assault upon them and their kin through the bloodshed and devastation of the war to end all wars. At the same time, the looming possibility of further conflict was ever present and, "weekend" though it may have been, a bellicose "Monday" seemed as inevitable as its temporal counterpart.

As a result of this curious combination of recuperation and tension, the context in which drama was being written and produced had a significant effect upon the development of that drama. As people of a different generation, it is not easy for us to appreciate the context in which we might have received this drama when it was first produced. The religious drama of the 1930s and 1940s was being written and presented on the eve of and during the Second World War.

The patriotism of such writers as G K Chesterton, T S Eliot and C S Lewis was not of one particular type but each made connections between his sense of national loyalty and his Christian faith as well as with his concern for the peril in which he found his country.[1] G K Chesterton saw no contradiction in his move from Anglicanism to Roman Catholicism nor indeed any contradiction between his loyalty to England and to Rome. Indeed, his conversion had been encouraged by what he saw in Ireland of the close integration between religion and social context; something which he believed was no longer to be experienced in his home country. At the same time, his interpretation of patriotism left room for similar expressions of loyalty by foreign nationals for their own homelands. His patriotism was not a rejection of all states other than England but rather a belief that an appreciation of one's own land, properly developed and observed, enabled

one to appreciate and respect other nations.

So it was with two of Chesterton's near contemporaries, T S Eliot and C S Lewis; the connection between their Christian faith and their sense of patriotism was tempered by a broader view of humanity than a limited definition of patriotism would conventionally allow. Perhaps this arose from the unconventional route which their own Christian pilgrimages took. T S Eliot moved from the Unitarianism of his American upbringing to the Anglicanism of his new home in England. Likewise, C S Lewis made a similar journey, his starting point being the Irish Protestantism of Belfast as well as a period of atheism which stemmed from his teenage encounter with the occult, an encounter which left him feeling that there was nothing to be obeyed and nothing to be believed.

Of particular note, however, is the literary connection which both writers made between Christianity and England. For each writer, England in different ways articulated something of an ideal setting for their exploration of the divine. And, in each case, these men deliberately avoided mistaking patriotism for nationalism. In *The Idea of a Christian Society,* T S Eliot warned against the danger of using Christianity to promote nationalism. When this happened, it was usually part of an attempt to protect local interests rather than make connections between the nation and the universal and enduring ideals of Christianity. *The Idea of a Christian Society* was published literally on the eve of war in 1939.[2]

These men thought carefully about the connections which they were making between the Christian faith and the plight of their country. The ritual and symbolism of their preferred expression of the Anglican faith allowed them to seek an image of their country which was at once universal and patriotic in their broad view of humanity. In contrast to these carefully considered world views, those people who received the work of these writers were considerably more diverse in their own understanding of patriotism and Christianity. In other words, their primary concern was the anxiety which they felt either as a prelude to imminent catastrophe or as a result of their actual experience of that catastrophe. They were a very receptive audience but more as a result of reality than theory. This perhaps explains why C S Lewis was the more accessible of these writers in terms of the popular imagination. It also emphasises how important it is that an appreciation

of their work must be set against the context in which they were writing.

It becomes clearer as one considers this context that the designation of the relevant period as the "long weekend" is unsatisfactory and is itself potentially a reflection of an idealised but narrow expression of the state of England in the novels of say P G Wodehouse. The "bright young things" may have possessed the time and money to ignore the threat looming on the horizon but few people at large possessed such time and such money. The writers who turned their attention at this time to the exploitation of religious themes in their writing were the writers who discerned most adroitly the spiritual aridity and cultural wasteland which the devastation and easy bloodshed of the First World War had both revealed and indeed engendered. The cheapness of life and the futility of materialism called into question just what progress was supposed to mean.

Writers, particularly those of a religious bent, considered that the broken pieces of society, scattered across the wasteland of that society, might be reconstructed by what Karl Mannheim called "collective energy"[3] and what Dorothy L Sayers called "creative energy" in her work of theology and literary criticism, *The Mind of the Maker.*[4] It is perhaps significant for our purposes that Sayers' theory as developed in this work itself sprang from her first religious play *The Zeal of Thy House* which she wrote for the Canterbury Festival of 1937. Here, in the final speech of the Archangel Michael, the Archangel draws an analogy between the creative work of God and the creative work of man. Before she would develop her theory in her 1941 work, she drew on similar themes in her war-time essay, *Begin Here,* published as a direct response to the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939.[5] In that work, she called for the harnessing of creative energy in order to begin the work of reconstruction which would inevitably result from the contemporary crisis. And her understanding of reconstruction was not just physical; it was also spiritual. Indeed, she saw in the people's reaction to the exigencies of war an expression of shared experience which was both patriotic and universal. It was no coincidence that her essay was published within a few months of Eliot's *The Idea of a Christian Society.* Indeed, her very title was intended to indicate an actual response to Eliot's assertion that something had to be done if people were to be able to extricate themselves from the paralysis of fear and dread and plant the vine of salvation in the spiritual desert in which they were

living.

In this fragmented world, the human being was also in danger of being dehumanised. As a result, the temptation was always there for the writer to continue the trend of the nineteenth century for escapist romanticism. To a certain extent, of course, the cinema provided this particular means of escape, although that medium was partly using the device as propaganda in order to harness the energy which the creative artists were seeking as part of their attack on the wasteland of contemporary society. It is significant then that the theatre, which might also have been an obvious means of escape from sordid reality, was being led in a quite different direction by playwrights such as T S Eliot and Christopher Fry. These men, conscious of the climate of impending war and of war itself, inspired by the tenets of their Christian faith, and sensible of a patriotism which avoided nationalism, exposed the dark night of the soul on the public platform and pointed to Christ as the route to salvation.

The particular effect of impending warfare on the development of drama in this period might perhaps best be illustrated by a comparison and contrast between T S Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* and *The Family Reunion.*[6] The first of these two plays was written in 1935, very much within the scope of the period under discussion but clearly at a certain remove from the reality of the Second World War. It was written for the Canterbury Festival and was therefore intended for what might be described as a "specialist" audience. Although it is not a pageant play, it is of course historical in its setting. In this play, there is a distinction drawn between murder and martyrdom. The act of Becket's murder led to the saint's martyrdom. The anxiety lies in the question as to whether pride led to his murder or holiness to his martyrdom. The confusion between the two routes itself leads to the question as to whether the "right deed" is being done for the "wrong reason". So it must have been for those young men who found themselves facing war and the inevitable call to arms. Did a desire to harness collective energy against a common foe make their patriotism honourable or was it marred by a desire for martyrdom?

By the time Eliot wrote *The Family Reunion,* it was 1939 and the reality of war had a profound effect upon his drama, not least in terms of its setting. The Chap-

ter House of Canterbury Cathedral was exchanged for the commercial theatre where an audience racked by the anxiety and guilt which war occasions sat and witnessed a directly contemporary dramatic setting in which crime and punishment vie with confession and absolution as the answers to society's contemporary predicament. Harry Monchensey believes he has killed his wife who has fallen overboard from a ship on which she and her husband were travelling. He returns to the family home of Wishwood to discover that time appears not to have moved on since his departure. His mother has atrophied life itself in the cold and gloomy interior of the place. Harry wants to be punished for what he believes he has done but finds no such easy route away from his guilt but is forced rather to take the more painful route of expiation at the hands of his childhood love, Mary. It is with her that he comes closest to regaining the lost innocence of his childhood. Guilt and lost innocence were very realities for Eliot's 1939 audience.

Charles Williams too, a friend of C S Lewis and member of the Inklings group, although he maintained the pageant style of dramatic production in most of his drama, nevertheless used the directly contemporary setting of the Second World War in one of his plays, *The House of the Octopus,* written in 1945. There may have been something expiatory in the writing of this play on the part of Williams himself. This curious and rather troubled man had kept an open mind as far as his reaction to the First World War had been concerned. He had set that conflict within the broader scope of man's innate and historical inhumanity to man such that he almost suggested that this particular war had something purgative about it, annihilating former sins and wickedness. As A M Hadfield, however, points out, this may have been a reflection of some youthful naivety on Williams' part.[7] Certainly, by the time he came to write *The House of the Octopus,* his attitude had matured and sharpened.

This play is set upon a Pacific island on which a Christian community is threatened with extinction by the Japanese. Although all of the islanders with only one exception do indeed lose their lives, the victory nevertheless lies with the Christians in that all but one have avoided the apostasy which could otherwise save their lives. The one who survives the massacre lives to continue the Christian mission. Few members of the audience in 1945 will have failed to make a connection between the martyrdom of these islanders and the sacrifice for their own

island home which the dead of the Second World War had made.

Charles Williams articulated his Christian response to the conflict perhaps the most plainly of his fellow writers. His theory of what he called "co-inherence" was that in which Christ substitutes himself for man, taking upon himself his deterioration, inability, grief, evil and death and offers in exchange his creative power, joy, fullness, love and life. Thus, according to Williams' theory, Christ and man co-inhere in love with each other and each man and woman co-inheres in love with each other. This concept might have made Williams an obvious candidate for the role of pacifist during the conflict but this was not so. He saw the co-inherence with Christ through his sacrifice on Calvary as lying above and beyond life and death in this world. This informed his creative writing and enabled him to support the concept of war not as an expression of hatred of one's enemies but as a means of stopping one's enemies from confounding the co-inherence of love or the broader view of humanity which we have already seen in Eliot and Lewis: a form of patriotism associated more with human beings than with land.

Christopher Fry, twenty years younger than Williams, was indeed a pacifist, informed by his Quakerism. However, he knew that victory for the Nazis would mean the subjection of the human values with which Fry lived his life. As a result, and rather like Williams, he accepted the necessity of participation in the war effort. Williams had been unfit for military service; Fry enlisted in a non-combatant corps in the army. Not to have opposed Hitler would have been "….a martyrdom. And I didn't feel sure that martyrdom was right."[8] So, he found himself doing the wrong deed for the right reason, as it were. His earliest memories had been of the deaths of family and friends in the First World War and his home's close proximity to a cemetery meant the constant sight of the funeral cortege. All but two of his plays include military characters.

The play which most characterises the concept of warfare is *A Sleep of Prisoners* written in 1951. It is interesting that his best defined reaction to the Second World War is produced six years after the cessation of violence but perhaps this pacifist needed longer to reflect on what had happened and on what it had meant. It is also telling that, while some commentators on Fry point to his light-hearted and expansive drama of the post-war period being a response to human need for

such diversion, they often fail to note the place of this most poignant and sombre of plays sitting in their midst. That is not to say that there is not much humour in the play but, like the dark and shadowy setting of the interior of a church at night, the images of death and destruction cast their shadow over that humour. It might, however, be more accurate to say that the humour sheds light on the images of death and destruction. Fry's concept of comedy has been interpreted as a redemption of joy from the ennui of life.[9] Fry himself described a world in which the "enormous miracle" had been "domesticated".[10] The idea was that, if Fry was correct, the conventional virtues were likewise domesticated and Fry wished to set joy at least free from this mundane state of affairs. In other words, he was divinising joy by associating it with redemption or the divine comedy which Dante had long previously articulated in a poetic drama which had itself so inspired Charles Williams. When a connection is made between Williams and Fry, the pattern is complete and one sees far greater depth in the comedies of Fry than the careless critic has otherwise allowed. Fry himself makes the connection between himself and Williams when he acknowledges his debt to that man.

In addition to his theory of co-inherence discussed above, Williams also expressed his understanding of sacramental doctrine in the "Way of the Affirmation of Images". This articulation of the *via positive* owed much to Dante and a further connection between Williams and Dante in this respect is made by Dorothy L Sayers, who translated Dante for Penguin Classics between 1949 and her death in 1957, when she dedicated *Inferno* to Charles Williams "the dead master of the affirmations".[11] Christopher Fry's encounter with Williams' theory came through a neat précis of that theory as Williams was parting from Fry one day in Oxford. According to Fry, he called to him, "When we're dead we shall have the sensation of having enjoyed life altogether, whatever has happened to us."[12]

> He was not at all saying that everything is for the best in the best of all possible worlds. He was saying …. that there is an angle of experience where the dark is distilled into light: either here or hereafter, in or out of time: where our tragic fate finds itself with perfect pitch, and goes straight to the key which creation was composed in. And comedy senses and reaches out to this experience. It says, in effect, that groaning as we may be, we move in the figure of a dance, and, so moving, we trace the

outline of the mystery.[13]

Fry, who, as we have seen, was ambivalent about the justification for warfare, introduces ambivalence into this contemporary play set some time during the Second World War. His four soldiers have been interned by the enemy in a church behind the lines. Two of them, Peter Able and David King, hold different views on the nature of their predicament. King is incensed by Able's apparent ambivalence and he attacks his comrade in a murderous assault which only their fellow soldiers confound. There is, of course, an implied parallel with the attack by the biblical Cain on the biblical Abel: in Fry's play, not blood brothers but brothers in the bloodshed of warfare. Able is also a parallel for Fry himself and there may be something cathartic about Fry's playing out of his own anxieties before an audience which has felt the full effects of the world only recently turned upside down.

It would be interesting to know more about the reactions of the audience of 1951 when this play was first produced. At a remove of six years since the end of the conflict, one senses that the anger which King displays will have abated enough for more of these people to share the ambivalence of Able which is also the ambivalence of Charles Williams and Christopher Fry.

Few commentators have attempted to make any connection with the context in which drama was being written and produced during the period in between the two world wars and the period of warfare itself. Even the great Allardyce Nicoll in his oft-quoted *British Drama* races through the period from the mid-1930s to the post-war period as if nothing in particular was happening to British theatre. He suggests that the best one might have hoped for as a member of the play-going public were distracting comedies, revivals and Shakespeare. He suggests, "There were new plays as well, but it was not an hour for the dramatist, and the theatre was again being disrupted for a time when the heavy bombing of London began in the summer of 1940."[14] This attempt to divorce a rich period in British drama from its context seems bizarre. The work of Eliot and his contemporaries marked a watershed in the history the British theatre which remained unchallenged until the anger of the dramatists of the 1960s turned it in a new direction. And yet the backdrop of war before which they achieved what they did is taken

too much for granted and the commentators tend to forget that the theatre of war transfixed an audience far greater than that which spent two and six on a seat in the upper circle. In other words, it was impossible to write drama in any other context.

That religious themes provided some of the raw material for these dramatists is both unsurprising, as we have seen, but also, to a certain extent, surprising. This is because the inter-war years in particular were characterised by an increasing sense of detachment between church and state. This was partly because the churches lost their political and social role to a great extent as the state inevitably got to grips with reconstruction after the bloodiest conflict in the country's history. The rise of socialism which followed the emancipation of the lower classes which had fought alongside officers and gentlemen was not embraced by the hierarchy of the Church of England which contributed to a growing sense of its detachment from the influential spheres of political, social and economic activity.

It was left with its conventional roles of liturgical and ecclesiastical activity and, on this intellectual level, it was able attract fewer people to its teaching and witnessing. At the same time, on the intellectual level, it possessed few friends. As Adrian Hastings suggests in his *A History of English Christianity,* the "principal intellectual (as distinct from social) orthodoxy of England in the 1920s was no longer Protestantism, nor was it Catholicism or any other form of Christianity. It was a confident agnosticism."[15] This was true most clearly in the literary circles like the Bloomsbury set which suggests that those dramatists who chose to articulate their response to the causes and effects of war in a religious context were perhaps as courageous in their own way as those few church leaders who chose to espouse socialism as a proper expression of the Christian faith at this time. Virginia Woolf sums up the general attitude within the literary intelligentsia when she heard of T S Eliot "conversion" by which she meant his espousal of the Anglican Church in 1927:

> I have had a most shameful and distressing interview with dear Tom Eliot, who may be called dead to us all from this day forward. He has become an Anglo-Catholic believer in God and immortality, and goes to church. I was shocked. A corpse would seem to me more credible than he

> is. I mean, there's something obscene in a living person sitting in the fireplace and believing in God.[16]

The crucial aspect of this comment is that a move by dramatists in the direction of religious drama as a result of the context of war could neither be taken for granted nor be treated as a natural response: it was a particular response to a particular context but it was the most significant theatrical response, given what Allardyce Nicoll does and does not say about the period in question.

There is, however, also a possibility that artistic expression in this turbulent period of Britain's history became what might be described as the unofficial Christianity of the time both as a result of growing ambivalence on the part of people to the official Church as secularisation developed but also as the result of people's doubt and despair seeking solace in aesthetic beauty – artistic expression which sprang from a love which *did* ask questions. Charles Williams may not have succumbed to the inevitable conscientious objection which many of his colleagues and friends thought would be the result of his theory of co-inherence, a theory which governed most of his creative writing from the 1930s onwards. Many people, however, did question the relationship between church and state, Christianity and patriotism, which appeared in the eyes of some to condone the death and destruction of so many and so much.

This may have been in part encouraged – at least unconsciously – by the Church itself as it promoted or at least tolerated these expressions of unofficial Christianity.

And these artistic expressions also informed the general development of artistic expression such that no appreciation of the development of the creative arts in the period between the wars and immediately after the Second World War is possible without reference to some of the leading exponents of religious artistry. As John Wolffe points out, C S Lewis was the literary mouthpiece of the Christian faith in print and on radio; Walter Hussey at St Matthew's, Northampton, brought modern art into the parish church and subsequently into Chichester Cathedral. In addition, he commissioned choral music from the likes of Benjamin Britten. Stanley Spencer exhibited his work in his own local parish church at Cookham in Surrey.

The work of the sculptor Jacob Epstein became popular in several church settings, not least his *Christ in Majesty* at Llandaff Cathedral which dictates much of the interpretation of the architectural appreciation of that building for obvious reasons. Architecture itself played a part in expressing the Christian faith as a direct result of the effects of the Second World War when Coventry Cathedral was destroyed by enemy bombing and was rebuilt as a companion piece to the shell of the old cathedral. Likewise and consequently, Britten's *War Requiem,* commissioned for the consecration of the new cathedral at Coventry, articulated the sombre reality of war and a religious response to it. At the same time, the use of a new piece of music to contribute to the blessing of a new church building was itself an act of sanctioning of the creative arts as an expression of the sacramental.[17]

It would be too much to say that all of this was the result of war but it would be inadequate to ignore the context of war in a proper understanding of the creative arts in this moment when the world was set alight by man's inhumanity to man. The broader view of humanity which the writers under discussion here took to inform their art was the Christian antidote to the dehumanisation which was both the cause and effect of war.

Michael Hampel, Charles Williams Society, June 2004

Michael Hampel is Senior Tutor of St Chad's College in the University of Durham and has just been appointed Residentiary Canon and Precentor of St Edmundsbury Cathedral, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk.

ENDNOTES

[1] For an analysis of patriotism and nationalism in relation to these writers, I am particularly indebted to John Wolffe and his excellent work, *God and Greater Britain: Religion and National Life in Britain and Ireland 1843-1945,* Routledge, London and New York, 1994

[2] T S Eliot, *The Idea of a Christian Society,* Faber and Faber, London, 1939
[3] Karl Mannheim, *Diagnosis of Our Time: Wartime Essays of a Sociologist,* London, 1943, pages 134ff
[4] Dorothy L Sayers, *The Mind of the Maker,* Methuen, London, 1941
[5] Dorothy L Sayers, *Begin Here,* Victor Gollancz, London, 1939
[6] This comparison is suggested in William V Spanos, *The Christian Tradition in Modern British Verse Drama: The Poetics of Sacramental Time,* Rutgers University Press, New Jersey, 1967
[7] A M Hadfield, *An Introduction to Charles Williams,* Robert Hale, London, 1959, page 40
[8] Quoted in Glenda Leeming, *Christopher Fry,* Twayne Publishers, Boston, 1990, page 3
[9] Spanos, op. cit., page 305
[10] Christopher Fry, 'A Playwright Speaks' in *The Listener,* XLII (February 23, 1950), page 331
[11] Another very direct effect which war had upon literature might be the fact that it was an air-raid and the need for something to read in the shelter which caused Sayers to seize Williams' *The Figure of Beatrice* one night and become mesmerised by the power of Dante so much that she set about reading the original for herself; an incident which eventually led to the commissioning from her by Penguin of a new translation of *The Divine Comedy.*
[12] Christopher Fry, 'Comedy' in *Adelphi,* XXVII, 27 (November, 1950)
[13] Fry, 'Comedy', op. cit.
[14] Allardyce Nicoll, *British Drama,* Harrap, London, 1978, page 245
[15] Adrian Hastings, *A History of English Christianity 1920-1990,* London, 1991, page 221
[16] Quoted in Kenneth Hylson-Smith, *The Churches in England from Elizabeth I to Elizabeth II, Volume III: 1833-1998,* SCM Press, London, 1998, page155
[17] See Wolffe, op. cit., page 210-11

Book Reviews

Richard Barber: *The Holy Grail: Imagination and Belief*. London, Allen Lane, 2004 £25.

Nigel Bryant: *The Legend of the Holy Grail*. D. S. Brewer, 2004 £25.00.

Reviewed by Stephen Barber

The Holy Grail has become such a trap for the unwary that a new book that is clear, comprehensive, and above all sane, is greatly to be welcomed. When one adds that the writer (no relation) includes accounts of Williams's *War in Heaven* and the Taliessin poems the Williams enthusiast can really feel that his cup runneth over.

Richard Barber (RB) is qualified in several different ways for this work. Firstly, he is not an academic who, as he points out, would have an academic reputation to worry about. Secondly, unlike so many who venture into this field, he is scholarly, reading his texts in the original, and citing his sources. Thirdly, he is a professional writer who has already written numerous books on Arthur and related matters. Fourthly, he has earned his living as a publisher, indeed managing director of Boydell and Brewer, in which capacity he has edited a long series of Arthurian Studies, which have included not only translations of some of the key texts previously unavailable in English, but also Dodds's edition of Williams's Taliessin poems, as well as the other volume under review. Finally, he is modest and has not only not mentioned these claims apart from the first, but has also not published his own book but submitted it to another firm like anyone else.

Anyone who has dipped into Bruce's *The Development of Arthurian Romance* (one of Williams's sources) or Loomis's *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages* will know that the field is vast and trackless, more resembling the forest of Broceliande than normal scholarly territory. RB makes some simplifying assumptions, of which the key one is that the fundamental texts are relatively few and all written within about forty years. The first is *The Story of the Grail*, begun by Chrétien de Troyes around 1190. This introduces the wounded king, the myseri-

ous castle, the procession with the grail and the bleeding lance, and the unasked question. Chretien did not live to finish his work, but his material was found so fascinating that twenty years later it was supplied with no fewer than four successive continuations and two prologues. There were no concepts of copyright or literary property in those days, and several important works were in fact composites by different hands. Then Robert de Boron supplied the grail with a history connecting it with Joseph of Arimathea. The *Perlesvaus* linked the grail more closely with the main Arthurian story. The material was incorporated into the composite work, which used to be known as the Vulgate Cycle but which has been renamed the Lancelot-Grail, as one major episode, the *Quest for the Holy Grail*. Our dear familiar English Malory comes at the end of this process and, from the point of view of sources, though not of course of literary merit, is late and derivative.

RB handles all this material with refreshing clarity, quoting key passages from the originals and showing how the grail became a dish, a cup and a chalice, sometimes in the same work at different times. Then he goes on to consider its links to the cult of relics, as the grail and the bleeding lance associated with it are supposed to be relics of the Passion. He also considers the developing cult of the eucharist, the increased ceremonial of the mass, and the institution of the feast of Corpus Christi, all associated with the same time and place as the French grail romances. His key point is that the grail is not a single thing but a literary concept, one which symbolizes a spiritual as well as a chivalric meaning and one which is deliberately veiled. But this section of his work abounds with insights, too many even to summarize. Here are just two: he suggests that too little attention is given to the historical contextof scholarship, and argues that Welsh nationalism was responsible for suggesting that Peredur in the Mabinogion was earlier than Chretien whereas he consider is later. With this goes the whole edifice of Celtic origins, to which Loomis was so wedded, and which, incidentally, Williams rejected. He deals similarly with the idea that any episode in a later romance formed part of a jigsaw which, if only completed, would lead to the discovery of a lost original.

In the final section he considers modern versions of the grail legends. I want only to say that there is an extensive treatment of Williams. *War in Heaven* he finds

enjoyable but somewhat dated, but he gives high praise to the Taliessin poems, which he expounds accurately, arguing that Williams made his own myth and used the legend as the mould for his individual and intensely Christian philosophy. There is also much else, which I do not have space to touch on.

As a footnote to this, Nigel Bryant's *The Legend of the Grail* is a valuable project. This is not a retelling, but rather a reworking of the relevant parts of the original French material – which Bryant has previously translated – into a single consistent story. It is therefore not like a normal modern retelling, such as those by Roger Lancelyn Green or Rosemary Sutcliff, and should rather be compared to Joseph Bédier's reconstruction of the Tristan story from the surviving sources. I have to say that I found it rather heavy going, but then of the medievals I prefer Wolfram and Malory, and of the moderns Wagner and Williams, to the French stories which started the whole thing off. But Bryant can claim to have given a single coherent and consistent account of what the French stories were getting at, without their endless digressions.

Stephen Barber

Letters

In Newsletter 112 Gillian Lunn asked for the source of two phrases by W. H. Auden. They come from the last stanza of his poem 'September 1, 1939', which runs:

Defenceless under the night
Our world in stupor lies
Yet, dotted everywhere,
Ironic points of light
Flash out wherever the Just
Exchange their messages:
May I, composed like them
Of Eros and of dust,
Beleagured by the same
Negation and despair,
Show an affirming flame.

Though the poem is one of Auden's most celebrated, its author came to dislike it, and eventually omitted it from his Collected Poems. However, Auden's readers have insisted on its rescue, and it is now be found in *The English Auden* and in the current *Selected Poems*, both edited by Edward Mendelson. (John Fuller's *W. H. Auden: A Commentary* gives the background.) It is modelled on Yeats's 'Easter 1916', and like it, has come to be invoked at times of national crisis: I heard an American poet say how audiences responded to it after the September 11 attacks on the USA. Though not relevant to this poem, Auden frequently expressed his admiration for Williams, and Williams also admired Auden, engaging him as editor for *The Oxford Book of Light Verse*, and reviewing *New Year Letter* favourably.

Stephen Barber

Editorial Policy

The Charles Williams Society's Newsletter and Web site have two functions. Firstly, to publish material about the life and work of Charles Williams. Secondly, to publish details of the activities of the Society.

Contributions to the Newsletter are welcome. If you wish to submit a contribution, please take note of the following:

- Submissions should be sent to the Editor, preferably on floppy disc; otherwise by email attachment to: Edward.Gauntlett@down21.freeuk.com.
- Submissions on paper should be typed double spaced and single-sided.
- All quotations should be clearly referenced, and a list of sources included.
- Submissions of just a few hundred words may be hand written.
- The Editor reserves the right to decide whether to publish a submission. Usually the main article in any issue will be a paper previously read before the Society; in most cases such papers will be published as received, with little or no editorial input. Other submissions may be edited.

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