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The  
**Charles  
Williams**  
Quarterly



No. 123

Summer 2007

[www.geocities.com/charles\\_wms\\_soc](http://www.geocities.com/charles_wms_soc)

## 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 magazine and may attend the Society's meetings which are held twice 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.

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### **From the Editor**

There is an encouraging amount of publishing activity (see the Notes section) though it is regrettable, perhaps, that this is restricted to the United States; another instance of the prophet in his own land syndrome. I understand that there is also a certain amount of renewed interest in the possibility of attempting a film of one or more of the novels. However, I have recently been sent copies of the MGM studio readers' reports on CW's novels from when they were being considered in the late 1940's. These are not encouraging, with phrases along the lines of "impossible to film" appearing prominently. The synopses of plots are intriguing and, in one case at least, indicative of a hasty and confused misreading amusingly turning the plot on its head. We will be featuring an article based around these documents in a future issue. Meanwhile, here's an example from which I have removed a character's name so that you can puzzle over which novel is being discussed.

"This is a bewildering story that could be of no possible use to the movies. It has no plot that could possibly be transferred into any other medium. Its chief interest is in its metaphysical value, the purity of its writing, and the spirituality of the man X. It is a story that, in its rambling, learned philosophical discussions, is incomprehensible to most readers."

Edward Gauntlett.

## Society News & Notes

### New Members

We extend a warm welcome to the following new members of the society:

Rev Daniel Medina,  
2921 S.W. 123rd Court,  
Miami,  
Florida 33175-2211,  
USA.

Mr Andrew St John,  
24A Elmwood Road,  
West Croydon,  
CRO 2SG

### Dr Rowan Williams

We have great pleasure in informing members of the society that the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Reverend Dr. Rowan Williams, has done us the honour of accepting our invitation to become President of the society in place of John Heath-Stubbs who died in December last year.

Rowan Williams is not only a distinguished Churchman and theologian but also a poet, and someone who has always placed a high value on literature as a means of articulating the most profound realities of life. Older members may remember that he came to address

the society when we were meeting at Liddon House in the early eighties. He has retained his interest in Charles Williams over the years and I am sure that all members will be delighted to welcome him as president.

### CW Reprints from the US

Apocryphile Press, of Berkeley, California, have reprinted or are about to reprint: *Divorce, Poems of Conformity, The Figure of Beatrice, Henry VII* (forthcoming), *The Image of the City & Windows of Night*.

Wipf and Stock, of Eugene, Oregon, have reprinted or are about to reprint *James I, Reason and Beauty in the English Poetic Mind & The English Poetic Mind*.

None of these are available in the U.K. They can, however, be got through Amazon.com (not Amazon.co.uk).

The Wipf and Stock books can also be ordered through their own website at a 20% discount. The Boydell edition of *The Figure of Beatrice*, which is or was available on this side of the Atlantic, may still be in print.

## **Charles Williams Society Conferences**

- ◆ **Saturday 13 October 2007** (St Matthews, Gt Peter St,  
Westminster – near Victoria Station) 10.30 am – 4.30 pm

Angelika Schneider will be talking on **Williams and Tennyson on the Grail** in the morning, followed by readings from, and discussions of, some of the early poems from *Divorce* and *Windows of Night* in the afternoon. Full details will be announced as soon as they have been finalized. The meeting will incorporate the AGM, the agenda for which follows:

### **AGENDA**

1. Apologies for absence
2. Report on the year's activities by the Hon. Secretary
3. Report by the Hon. Librarian
4. Presentation of the Accounts by the Hon. the Treasurer
5. Report by the Newsletter Editor
6. Report by the Membership Secretary
7. Report by the Hon. Chairman
8. Election of Council Members under paragraph 5 of the Constitution
9. Any other business.

Brian Horne  
Hon. Chairman

- ◆ **4 – 6 July 2008** (Friday to Sunday)

The Residential conference will be held at St. Hilda's College, Oxford upon the theme of **Charles Williams and his Contemporaries**. (See "Call for Papers" elsewhere in this issue.)

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THE SOCIETY'S COUNCIL MET ON FEBRUARY 10<sup>TH</sup> 2007 AT THE  
CHAIRMAN'S FLAT.

The Secretary said that a large box of papers had been received from Dr Mark Baldwin, relating to the late Alice Mary Hadfield. He was asked to send a list of the contents to Grevel Lindop for his advice on which items might be worth keeping in the Reference Library.

The Treasurer said that some subscriptions under the new scheme had begun to come in. There had been some problems. The Current Account stood at present at £430.45, and the Reserve at £8508.98.

The Chairman said that there might be no need for a Membership Secretary under the new scheme. Mrs Kornicka said that during her tenure of the office her main duty had been to 'chase up' members who had not paid; under the new scheme this would (one hoped) be unnecessary. Dr Sturch agreed to continue in the dual role.

Mr Barber suggested we run off some spare copies of "A Myth of Bacon" for sale. This was agreed, on a 'print as needed' basis, subject to the agreement of Mr Hunter as copyright owner.

The Chairman had been in touch with Mr Dan Bailey, a student from Michigan, who wanted back copies of the Newsletter. They could be photocopied, but Mr Barber suggested it would be simpler to put them all onto a CD, which could be permanently available.

Since the last meeting of Council, our President, John Heath-Stubbs, had died. The Secretary had attended his funeral.

For the October meeting, it was agreed, members should be asked to bring specimens of CW's earlier poetry.

Looking ahead: It was agreed that we plan for a Conference, ideally in June 2008. The theme would be 'Charles Williams and his Contemporaries'. There should be a call for papers as soon as the date and venue were known.. A small organizing group should be established (if necessary, a 'virtual' group), including Dr Suzanne Bray, Dr Horne, Dr Sturch, and Mr Barber.

**CHARLES WILLIAMS'S LAST LETTER**

IMAGES AND CONTENT

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Charles Williams was 'evacuated' during the blitz from London to Oxford, along with the Oxford University Press for whom he worked. He lived in Oxford (beginning 7 September, 1939) at 9 South Parks Road, the home of Professor W. H. Spalding, Chair of Eastern Religion and Ethics.

The war with Germany ended on Tuesday, 8 May, 1945, the day on which Williams wrote his last letter to his wife, who had remained behind in London. We are told in his biography (Hadfield, A. M. *Charles Williams: An Exploration of His Life and Work*. Oxford University Press, 1983.) that Williams celebrated the Victory-in-Europe on Wednesday, 9 May, and that he collapsed on Thursday, 10 May. His wife arrived from London on Saturday, 12 May, and he was operated upon Monday, 14 May. He never regained consciousness, and died on Tuesday, 15 May.

In 1999 I had traded some books with Blackwell Rare Books in Oxford for a signed Charles Williams volume. (It is interesting to note that, "During World War II, [Basil] Blackwell was a good friend to C.W." [King, Roma, ed. *To Michal from Serge: Letters from Charles Williams to His Wife Florence, 1939-1945*. Kent State University Press, 2002. p. 264]). Due to a clerical error, the Williams volume was sold to another customer. To make up for the mistake, Blackwell sent me the next available signed Charles Williams item, a copy of *The Region of the Summer Stars*, which is pictured at the end of this article. It contained the dedication:

"from C.W. Oct. / 44 in recognition of much kindness"

Tucked inside the back cover of the book I found the following letter:

9 South Parks Rd.

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12 May / 45

My Dear Miss Morisson,  
Yesterday I was sure I should have  
to abandon lectures and tutorials and all;  
One of my rare but complete collapses  
swept me. It's ten years since I had one, &  
then it meant an operation. But I begin to  
hope now that I may improve by next week.  
Only I shan't get to the Thanksgiving, nor to  
you afterwards—for which I'm very sorry.  
It would have been – nice.  
May we dine next term for a week or so?  
If I ever manage a mend again!  
My wife, who has rushed down to look after me,  
sends her kind regards.

Ever,

C.W.

The following three references to a “Miss Morison” come from Williams’ letters to his wife in London (King, Roma, ed. *To Michal from Serge: Letters from Charles Williams to His Wife Florence, 1939-1945*. Kent State University Press, 2002.):

1 June, 1944

A letter from Miss Morison, whom you know, asking if I can take four lots next term.

29 November, 1944

Tutorials are becoming a MENACE; Miss Morison rang up last night about next term's—to say that two of her pupils whom she meant to send somewhere for Chaucer had pleaded to come to me for Wordsworth, and she feared I mightn't be here for the summer. So I said I hoped I shouldn't, and now I wait to find out what the number suggested is. I think, if I wanted, I could work in ten by

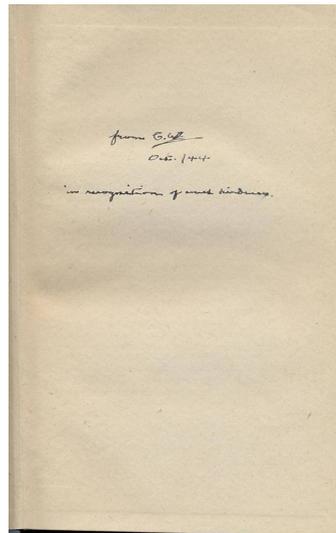
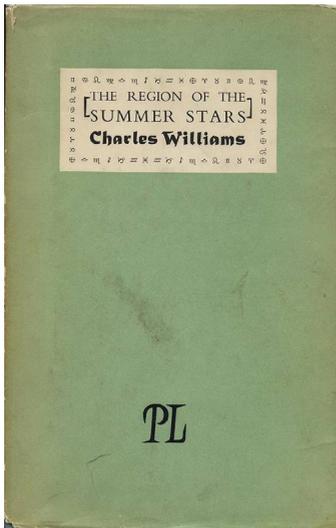
abstracting a little time from the office....

22 February, 1945

Miss Morison rang up last night about next term's lectures & says she wants all the time I can give her for tutorials. She shall have it. Apart from money, we may as well leave in a blaze of occupation...my eyes are continually on having a sum ready for moving. I don't want, we don't want another winter: it's been too long already.

This note to Miss Morison, written Saturday, 12 May, (probably in the afternoon—assuming his wife took the morning train from London to Oxford), sheds light on the time frame of Williams' last five days alive. It implies that he fell ill on Friday, 11 May, rather than Thursday, 10 May, as his biographer states.

We do not know how he spent Sunday, 13 May. He was operated upon Monday, and died Tuesday. This note then, to my knowledge, is the last thing that Charles Williams ever wrote.



9 South Packer Rd.

12 Aug/45

My dear Miss Morrison,

Yesterday I was sure I should have to abandon lectures and tutorials and all; one of my nerves had complete collapse except me. It's ten years since I had one, & then it meant an operation. But I begin to hope now that I may improve by next week. Only I shan't get to the Thanksgiving, nor to you afterwards — for which I'm very sorry. It would have been — nice.

May we live out term for a week or so? If I ever manage a mind again!

My wife, who has rushed down to look after me, sends her kind regards.

Love,

C.W.

FROM THE ARCHIVES:  
**THE RECOVERY OF SPIRITUAL INITIATIVE**  
BY CHARLES WILLIAMS  
INTRODUCED BY BRIAN HORNE

There is a faded typescript of an address given by Charles Williams to the Church Union's School of Sociology on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1940 on the theme: 'The Recovery of Spiritual Initiative'. The Anglo-Catholic wing of the Church of England in the first five decades of the twentieth century produced some of the finest scholars of the Church. They included Eric Mascall, Gregory Dix, F.L. Cross, A.G. Hebert, Kenneth Kirk, Donald Mackinnon and V. A. Demant. Among their number were some of England's most distinguished literary figures, most notably T.S. Eliot and Dorothy L. Sayers. The organisation known as the Church Union was the channel by which the thinking of these thinkers was more widely disseminated. It held regular conferences on a variety of subjects and its annual School of Sociology meeting attracted eminent speakers. Charles Williams was one. This is not Williams at his best. The talk seems to have been hastily prepared (he admits as much), and there is a disturbing lack of focus. It seems, almost, at times, perfunctory – as though he has been asked to appear and, perhaps out of loyalty to the organisation or affection for its members, he had agreed - but his heart was not in it; his mind does not seem to be fully engaged with the subject. Moreover it is difficult, at certain points, to grasp the significance of his remarks as we do not possess anything of the content of the contributions of those other speakers to which Williams was obviously responding. Nonetheless, the piece is interesting – partly because of its defects and its historical particularity. It has an immediacy and with its asides and interjections one can almost hear the voice. It shows Williams in a very precise historical situation: the period is the darkest hour of the Second World War and Williams had been in Oxford just over a year. He seems to be preoccupied, and his impatience with certain aspects of the institutional church is notable. But the distinctive concepts, however undeveloped, are there, seen in a context that is unfamiliar to most of those who know his work.

Brian Horne

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*THE RECOVERY OF SPIRITUAL INITIATIVE*

[Delivered by Charles Williams to the 16<sup>th</sup> annual Church Union School of Sociology, meeting at St. Hilda's College, Oxford, on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1940]

There is one great difference between me tonight and the two much more eminent gentlemen who have spoken on previous nights. Both, I find, wrote their articles two months ago, or even in the summer. I have not only not written mine two months ago, I was not even asked until two weeks ago: I have made some notes during the last two weeks, and during the last twenty-four hours I have made more as I seemed to understand what you have been getting at. The other difference is that Mr. Eliot addressed you on the past – and you could check his remarks by your knowledge, or at least you could go and look up other knowledge to check his remarks. Mr. Watkin addressed you on the present: and you could and no doubt did dispute his opinions by your own opinions. But on the future you have no knowledge, and you can have very little opinion.

You will probably be saying tomorrow morning, as I have often said on similar occasions, when a speaker has been received with the greatest interest and attention overnight, “A pity he was not more to the point: if only he had said a little more of what we really wanted!” I know it will happen so tomorrow morning: I shall be acutely aware of the fact that whispers of that kind are going round. But of course in fact, when Fr. McLaughlin was good enough to invite me to speak, and when I looked at the subject, it was obvious to me within ten minutes of having written to him saying that I would do what he wished me to do, that the subject of “The Recovery of Spiritual Initiative” was either one of consummate value or else meant literally nothing at all. It was either a pretentious and slightly pompous phrase, or it really dealt with nothing less than the re-establishment of Supernatural Grace as the mainspring of all activity. Therefore I direct your attention to the fact that this contemplation on which you are engaged tonight is a thing which involves every sort of activity, every category of human existence. There are two views, which were both admirably expressed last night, about what is going to happen in the future. One is that everything is going to become a great

deal worse – and almost finally worst. The other is that it is just possible things may have a kind of small back door on some sort of faint hope sometime. The difference between these two views leaves me comparatively cold as far as my personal feelings go, but I agree that there is a difference in principle. One of the two things is going to happen – no-one knows which. Either things will become, humanly speaking, intolerable, or it may be that we shall still inherit a world at least in some ways recognisable.

Well, I got over my emotional Calvinism at the sight of the title. I realised that in fact, though the immediate result of the title was to raise quite seriously the objection that all initiative belongs to God, and the recovery of spiritual initiative is in the strictly human sense impossible, still something perhaps could be done towards making arrangements for it. Something could at least be done towards making it possible that we might just conceivably recognise when it come – which I think extremely unlikely. But still, the possibility is there. And if this is so, then quite obviously any movement towards, not the recovery, but the preparation for the recovery, of spiritual initiative when it operates from its august and awful Centre, must certainly be moral. That is, it must deal with moral activities. They may or may not be what are generally regarded as moral: I do not want myself tonight to stress too much the ordinary things generally understood in casual and colloquial speech as moral.

I will take it for granted, as you will take it for granted, that the spiritual side of the business goes on. I don't know, because I did not attend your study circles, whether what Fr. Mascall said Monday has been at all followed – the relation of ascetical theology to sociology. That way great substitutions lie. That side of the whole business must go without saying. Well, then: we come to the other, the next point. Looking at your syllabus, I have found two sentences and one question in the syllabus on which I base my consideration of the whole matter. One was this: "The recovery of spiritual initiative, if the Church is to be its pioneer, would seem to depend in the first place on an understanding of its prophetic mission in no vague and general sense, but in the actual situation of the English people here and now" – or rather, then and there. The second was that "the recovery of spiritual initiative must depend upon an effective counter-attack from the forces of realism, understanding and love", and the effort of the Church, as I un-

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derstood it, would not be to direct but to inspire, to breathe into, all the cultural activities and social activities of the nation. The question which held me up – really held me up – was “What can you realistically conceive the Church as saying, and by whose mouth, which would intellectually illuminate the nation, not merely strengthen it?” I said it held me up: not in the sense in which I could not conceive of the Church saying anything, but that I felt that I myself could not possibly imagine anything that the Church would be likely to say. And I felt that it would be very difficult for anybody to imagine it. But – and this is where we really come to some kind of preparation for this initiative – whatever the Church said would in ten minutes be degraded.

Now I wish to make this point first, because I do think that it is of the utmost importance. The recovery of spiritual initiative is not going to be, as you obviously all know, a Thing that is Done. If in fact it is to be done at all, it will have to go on being done every second and every day for ever and ever and ever. And it is an unfortunate fact that the mere existence of anything in this world may tend (I won't say that it does not also make it better and more beautiful – it may) to degrade and spoil it. I except, of course, things which are sustained by peculiar and supernatural virtue. And when you come to this question of intellectual statements and of prophetic missions and of inspiring all sorts of activities, you come to something which is going to be dealt with very largely by works. It is a very great compliment, if I may so, to this school and its speakers, that whenever I have been here, I have observed nothing of dullness, no kind of cliché. But it is certainly true that when you have had your intellectual statements or your prophetic utterance, if it is to go into different parts of the Church, then it is immediately going to be spoiled. One of the greatest difficulties which the Church has to contend with is, not the fact that it is served by insincere men, in the least: but that it is served by men who tend (I do not wish to sound superior) – men who blanket their message by making heroic efforts to talk in a way nobody listens to. I can give you two examples which occur to me: I cannot swear that I have actually heard them, but I have heard things very much like them. This is not a question of ‘simple’ language at all. I know all about that. I have been buffeted all my life by complaints that I do not talk in a way that Mothers’ Unions can understand – and I may add that I was not rebuked by the Mothers’ Union but by the

people who look after them. But I am not talking about straightforward sermons. I have heard many of them, and I hope I have benefited from them, or at least been instructed by them. I heard an extraordinarily good example of the straightforward sermon only recently in Oxford – no highbrowism: none of the kind of thing of which you will accuse me this morning. But neither did it say that “the unexampled panorama which lies before us is . . . x y z!” The moment you say “unexampled panorama”, it becomes impossible to see anything. I am perfectly serious when I suggest that this is what happens. It does happen. It happens! There is no phrase more calculated to deaden every ear than the phrase “the trumpets are calling everyone to battle!” Nobody is called to the battle. Nobody has the slightest reaction at all (though of course miracles are always possible). The phrase produces no more effect than the placards we used to see before the War bearing the words “Tragic Death of Peer” – no reaction whatever. People only felt that somebody had died. Nobody felt that it was tragic. And I do insist with all the energy I can that that is what is happening, and that you cannot produce a real prophetic message and then translate it into these terms and still have any results. For some obscure reason it has been supposed that if you turn a prophetic message into that kind of language everybody will flock into the streets behind your banners and come prancing down to Lambeth or somewhere to do something. Take the very word “Crusade” – I ask you! . . . Does anyone if the word “Crusade” is used take any notice? except in an historical sense, when in a few cellars in Oxford ancient people open their bleared eyes and murmur “Peter! Peter!” But if you see anywhere that the Archbishop has undertaken a crusade – would you have it put about anywhere that you were in a crusade? and you know you would not, because you know it would not produce the slightest effect on any human life. It is a very serious business. All over the country it has gone on, for a very long time, and shows no sign of slackening. All your real efforts are in danger of being clouded, confused and spoilt by this. It sounds like an insignificant piece of almost personal preoccupation – the cobbler sticking to his last - but it does need insisting upon because you can see the thing happening. You know it happens in secular affairs. We all go about saying so. People read the leading articles and listen to sermons in exactly the same way – why? because “the trumpets are sounding in the unexampled panorama . . . ”

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“Christian culture” – there you have a phrase to which the thing is now happening. The poor little phrase of two words began innocently enough some years ago, and they are rapidly becoming completely spoiled. Mr. Mackinnon may say, and you may or may not agree with him, that Christendom is a corpse. I am quite sure that the two words “Christian Culture” are in danger of becoming an extremely unpleasant corpse. But will that stop them being used? At the very precise moment when your Chairman or Secretary or Officers are beginning to feel slightly dubious as to whether they can again put the phrase “Christian Culture” into this syllabus, at that very moment the thing will be spread everywhere, and everybody will be saying “Christian Culture is the thing . . . . we must defend Christian culture . . . . Christian culture this . . . Christian culture that . . . .” This is a very serious and sad fact: but it happens to be the way that time works. The only thing is an extreme moral effort, a moral effort perhaps particularly on your part, not because you are any greater sinners than the rest of us, but because it is your job somehow to get this fact across. These phrases blanket everything they mean. The purpose of words is either to sharpen meaning or to soften meaning, and a word which begins by sharpening meaning may end by softening meaning. This is a moral comment to be made on the situation, and I think it is a general principle, but I do not know what you are going to do about it.

But what I am sure is that if any serious spiritual initiative is to be awaited and hoped for, then it is a moral duty to see that our instruments for it are kept as clear, as fine, as right as possible, and that the use of words, precisely because they are so important, is one of the instruments which can most easily be spoiled, and being spoiled is in very grave danger of spoiling everything that one is trying to do. I am not trying myself here to do more than merely remind you of that translation of the Greek which applies to our Divine Lord – the word “Word”. I do think that it should be remembered much more frequently than it is.

The second point is this. Christian culture - I permit myself now to use the phrase perfectly seriously. Something was said, and very admirably said, on Monday, about the relation of our civil to our religious tradition. The phrase “Christian culture” does to a certain extent seriously imply this, and in going back to this now, what I am going to suggest is that, if the revivification of all activities is to take place, then it is to take place in that state of things which we call culture. There has

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been a good deal said by people with far more knowledge about our various social classes, and so on. But I should like to direct your attention to what a lot of you know far more about, and that is the people who attend the various L.C.C. and other Council Institutes. No doubt they are of the same kind as the people go to the W.E.A. – but I know nothing about them, and I do know something about the people in the L.C.C. You have there a very large of regular attendants at classes very largely cultural. You have what Mr. Eliot, in the paper in “Christendom”, spoke about as being the rise of the lower middle classes, not the proletariat. “May it not be that the next phase of our culture will leave these people very much as they are, and that the dominant influence may be that of the class which will tend to provide most of the technicians and bureaucrats – in other words, the lower middle class?”

That is very largely true. And the people who come to these institutes are very largely the lower middle classes. I suggest to you that what I have felt for myself for some years, in fact, ever since I became connected with them, that these are the people who are capable of re-energising your culture. I think myself (it would take too long to go into the reasons) that they are, much more than your more academic students, a centre of power. There is about these people a capacity and freshness for culture, for dealing with culture, which I have, on the whole, with many exceptions, yet to find elsewhere. And I think the difference is largely because their culture has not already been petrified behind them. It is a very remarkable that when you get among undergraduates who come very largely from cultured homes, in those homes, whether or not Christianity is a living thing, it is almost certain that culture is already petrified. There is a curious difference in tone about the way in which (speaking very generally) the upper middle classes feel and talk about – Beethoven, Shakespeare, Michael Angelo. There is faintly – ever so faintly – if I can borrow the term corpse-like, there is something already faintly redolent of Death. You may entirely disagree with me on that. I can only say that it is my own experience; not merely the greatest effort but the greatest capabilities have come from the people I have known among my own students. They are the people who really read Dante, who really know about Wordsworth and about Spanish painting. These are the people who will do a good day’s work and will then come and read all night. I feel this more and more strongly. Until I

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was dragged from my bombed and beloved London and brought down to this provincial centre, I had observed this, and I had learned more from these people, who certainly produce more intelligent remarks on “Romeo and Juliet” – I mean to say they send me postcards saying “Do you think line (a) in scene (x) is related to line (b) in scene (y)?” – I’d never noticed it before. If we are seriously thinking (if you tell me you are thinking of something entirely different I shall be sorry but not surprised), if we are really thinking of the re-energizing of all values by spiritual grace, then in this Christian culture business, it is principally with these people that we are concerned.

If, recognizing this, we think the Church can inspire that culture, we must remember that one thing will make it very difficult. What will happen will be that the members of the church will charge in and say – “Now if we can only make it Christian, everything will be all right.” You will dash madly into a class studying Dante as a great poet and you will deliver automatically an address saying that Dante exemplifies the Great Catholic Age of Europe. If you are going to re-energize the arts, then for heaven’s sake remember that the arts are autonomous. You cannot put “the Church” (that is, if you mean anything short of the divine mystical City of God) over them; and only God can put over the divine mystical City. You cannot go down and make out a completely fresh arrangement of English poets, making Frances Ridley Havergal superior to Milton because Milton was an Arian (not that he was). And it seems to me again that it is a matter which this school might very well bear in mind, that in so far as you are engaged and concerned with these things it is of the highest importance to allow all these categories of activity their autonomy. It is again a moral business. I am quite sure – I may be wrong – but I am quite sure that up to this moment (nearly nine o’clock – and one can’t be sure beyond the moment!) the damage that has been done to sincerity, to honesty, to integrity by the extremely well-meant and foolish seizure of the great arts in the name of some ecclesiastical system is – well, it is very dangerous in every way. And it is peculiarly dangerous because it will – I have seen it happen – result in doing the exact opposite of what you mean to do. It will put the people, the people I am thinking of, entirely out of conceit with everything you are trying to put into them. They are not normally extreme materialists or extremely opposed to Christianity. They are communist, they are this, that, and the other, but they are

perfectly intelligent and extraordinarily fair-minded. But if you go down and chit-chat to them on things which are obviously untrue, they will revolt . . . I do not mean to say that the members of the Church, lay or clerical, go down and deliver short addresses, but there is a kind of tendency – you sometimes hear it being talked about – to say “Could not we use this to show people where Christian culture comes in?” You won’t influence the character of, or modify, culture by making it Christian by a short cut. If it is Christian, it is Christian because the principles of Christianity are the principles of Creation. Eventually the whole thing is resolved by this principle. But it is a serious mistake to let anything but this principle finally resolve the situation.

Now this honesty will be one of the things of high importance in this hypothetical future by which the City is being refounded; if honesty fails, then the whole thing fails. And I suggest to you that it does fail a little sometimes without our intending it, on the very controversy regarding Christianity itself. I am not suggesting or attributing any insincerity to the champions of the faith. I am not suggesting they really do not try to think of the right answers to the right problems. I do suggest that their style is hopeless. “Oh, Style!” you say. But the whole thing is a matter of style. The whole thing is – how are you going to do it? Crudely expressed, my chief objection to the champions of Christianity is that the objections to Christianity do not come from them. You may really sympathise with the other fellow, but you never sound as if you really felt the force of his argument. You say “Yes – of course – but – er - ” etc. etc. We ought to be thinking of the objections to Christianity. Why should the objections to Christianity be left to outsiders? Let us see them, see where they are, feel them, almost create them: and then we may have the energy that belongs to Christianity. It is no good sitting round waiting, and then saying “Yes: many great minds have thought of that: wait till tomorrow and I’ll tell you what some of them have said.” My whole point is that the objecting is left to them. It is a very doubtful thing whether the Divine City itself, or that pale and feeble image of it about which we dream, can function and thrive except by in some sense including its opposite. And for heaven’s sake don’t say that I want the Devil to be part of the Celestial City. If we are really to think about freedom, of a free state, then some people will disagree, and it will be of very great value to honesty. Intellectual initiative cannot recover itself by wait-

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ing for the other fellow to produce it, and then saying “Oh yes, we know the answers”. If you meet these people I am talking about then you must go prepared to feel in that way the things that they will say. And the answers must be such as grow out of it. The people I am talking about are perfectly intelligent and perfectly sensitive. And the sensitiveness of their minds is a thing which is, I think, very often overlooked. If we are going to recreate Christian culture we have got to re-live culture, and we have got practically to set aside the Christian part of it; that is not to say, of course, that the religious life should be dropped, or anything of that sort. It is saying that you have to relive the whole thing. Through that centre of honest integrity, that centre of combined religious and cultural unity, from that, I think, it is humanly possible, if God so will, that it may be done. But I am quite sure that if we go on building the walls in our own way, using words that nobody listens to, offering answers that are obviously silly, nothing will happen.

I remember reading an article by a distinguished prelate which said that the happiness in every man’s life was nine times as great as the sadness. It is probably untrue and anyhow meaningless. What is the good of writing like that? Then I remember a Roman priest who said “You wouldn’t ask Christ for a soft job would you?” Well – of course, perhaps you wouldn’t, but I think you would. If you have not, you have all yearned to bear greater temptations than you have to bear. We have all asked “Don’t let this happen”. What is the good of pretending about these things? In the present situation there is a lot of evil and folly and stupidity – “Against stupidity even the gods contend in vain”. And it has got nothing to do with cleverness or being frightfully brilliant or anything of that sort. It is a mere bit of moral honesty.

Another point I wish to make is the relation of spiritual things to matter. This is not entirely disconnected with what I have been saying, because there comes in again this question of style. The way in which people talk normally about matter and the body – I mean Christians – very often has about it a slightly derogatory sense. There is always a slight feeling that the body has fallen further than the soul, - that it is a poor thing. And we may say “Of course God likes you to enjoy things;” as though you said “Of course your father likes you to play in the garden – don’t make too much noise, and don’t tread on the flower-beds, but yes, father likes to see you happy.” There is something of this sort in the way that matter and

the “holy and glorious body” are talked about. It would take far too long to go fully into this, but I would merely point out that if we are going to recover initiative we shall have to understand what is being felt. As a matter of fact the public utterances of the Church of England do not give the impression of feeling and knowing what is felt. How many sermons, addresses, and talks have you read on what are usually called Moral Problems, that suggest what is really felt? The people to which you should go to find out are the great poets. They are used here and there, and come in very nicely, and the phrase “poetic scene” is used, and that sort of thing – poetic scene! But how often do the people who concerned, for example, with young lovers – how often do they suggest in any way that they know what is happening? I go back continually to this – we do not know what is happening. If you see a young couple, don’t you say “Oh, yes, of course, it is quite natural: go on and enjoy yourselves while you can – it won’t last long. It’ll pass over into quiet affection, and then where will you be?” But what they are thinking of was defined by the great Victorian poet, Patmore: “What in its ruddy orbit lifts the blood,/ Like a perturbed moon of Uranus? Reaching to some great world in ungauged darkness hid?” That is the kind of thing the people to whom you are talking are feeling. They wouldn’t put it quite like that, but they feel like that. I once went into a wine-vault at the bottom of Ludgate Hill, and the waiter there was talking to me about his young woman and he produced precisely and exactly the phrase Dante used six or seven hundred years ago. “You know what it is, Sir: you feel that if anyone hits you, you don’t want to hit them back”. Dante said “It could not have been at that moment but that if someone had injured me I should have forgiven him.” Until we understand that, I do not see how any room is to be made for that great regeneration of all things by supernatural grace which is what we assert that we desire.

I come back finally to putting it like this. There are, I think, two principles which one might lay down generally. The first is humility. I do not mean in this case humility of the members of the Church. I mean in a kind of way a humility of the Church as a whole, of the Church as it exists on earth. People who will be humble by themselves have a way of being extraordinarily arrogant when all together. People who really feel that they know nothing will feel that five hundred thousand of them know a great deal. I know this cuts at the root of democracy, but

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never mind. They will in fact not do what the Lambeth Conference of some years ago did, when I should think for the first time in history a great synod said that it felt that in its fathers it had sinned, and said so perfectly simply. I think that there is a sense in which real corporate sensitiveness to humility – I do not mean corporate acts of humility – I mean the heart’s real lowness – must be discovered on this earth.

And secondly, there is a sense in which everything depends on a certain amount of honesty. It was suggested in your syllabus, and very admirably suggested, that “the recovery of His people’s spiritual initiative may come from a source outside the Church, although it would inevitably be handicapped by doing so: and reforming Churchmen have themselves often expected it to do so.” That is certainly true as it stands, and the fact of the handicap. But I think there is also a sense in which the Church, humanly speaking, has to exchange her gifts, the gifts she has, for the gifts which are not primarily hers – all must in some sense, of course, but you know what I mean. She has to include the opposition. She has to include all this great sensitiveness, but she can’t do it by grabbing, for she must have a sense of their superiority in their own degree. It’s all a matter of perspective. This is what we are really, so to speak, about. I cannot see any way of setting up the City of God other than the way of which the Lady Julian said “that when the soul becomes sensual, there the City of God is set up.”

And that curious tension (to use a word already dying!) is the Nature of the City. And this integrity of approach, this humility of recognition, this effort as far as possible to maintain in all things and at all times continual recognition of freshness, continual labour against any and every cliché, any use of words that is biased and inadequate, all this is as much as can be done on that side. The rest, in a sense, must be left to what I began by saying of the great substitutions of Ascetical Theology and to the will of God. God only knows what will happen to our culture, but if it exists I see no reason why something itself continuing with that desire of passion and integrity should not offer itself to the Divine Will, why something might not conceivably be done to prepare for the initiative, which is the supreme prerogative of the Divine Will.

At the very end of “Paradise Lost”, Eve, you will remember, had some kind of

recognition of something like it, some tiny, simple, growing thing, when it pleased the divine Milton to put in the word “seed” there. She is speaking about everything being lost and somehow or other fruition is going to happen –

“Though all by me is lost,  
Such favour I unworthy am vouchsafed,  
By me the promised Seed shall all restore.”

The first thing that strikes the listener of this introductory course to the writings of Charles Williams, recorded live at Regent College, is that the students are having a good time. Professor Wilkinson is clearly an entertaining instructor, preferring interactive teaching methods and sensitive to the needs and interests of his class. He also has a thorough, in-depth knowledge of Williams’ work and presents it in a structured and comprehensible manner. All the main themes are cov-

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LOREN WILKINSON,  
« **UNDER THE MERCY** » :  
**THE LITERATURE & THEOLOGY OF CHARLES WILLIAMS,**  
REGENT COLLEGE, VANCOUVER, 2005 (10 CDs, TOTAL TIME  
10½ HOURS).  
REVIEWED BY SUZANNE BRAY

ered : coinherence, the Way of Exchange, the City, romantic love, the affirmative and negative roads to God. Discussions of three of the novels (*The Greater Trumps*, *The Place of the Lion*, *Descent into Hell*) are particularly fascinating, as Professor Wilkinson uses both plot and text to illustrate their creator's primary concerns. We may add that the lecturer's clear and pleasant voice makes his teaching easy to listen to.

But – and it is a very big but – those aspects of the teaching which make the course attractive for actual participants, turn the live recording into something of a trial for those listening at home. Very careful editing, more sophisticated production and a detailed course booklet are sorely needed. We do not need to know about moving chairs or times of other events in the college. Neither are we interested in anecdotes about students in the class or a visiting speaker who addressed the students some weeks before. While Professor Wilkinson has a good microphone, the students are usually barely audible and sometimes cannot be heard at all. This means that we may hear the answer to a question without knowing what the question was. It also means that the lengthy sections devoted to plays readings of *Seed of Adam* and sections of *Cramner* are rather a waste of time for the listener as the amplification is poor and the students, with one or two honourable exceptions, are mediocre readers, possibly on account of the lack of rehearsal.

The course notes on Disc 10 are obviously those provided for the participants in Vancouver. They are much less helpful for the listener elsewhere. Many of the texts discussed are difficult to obtain, but the listener needs them in order to understand the discussions. It is also irritating to hear a question about and then analysis of the passage on, let's say, page 46, when one's own copy of the work is in a different edition. In order to follow the CDs properly a course booklet with

copies of the short texts and detailed notes would be essential.

These weaknesses are not Professor Wilkinson's fault. It is clear that he would be capable of producing an excellent recorded lecture course for the general public. Unfortunately, this isn't it. These CDs would be useful as a revision aid for the students actually present at Regent College or those who missed part of the course for some reason. However, regrettably, interactive, face-to-face teaching requires one pedagogical technique; lecturing on audio or video disc for a wider audience demands another. A successful adaptation would require very skilled editing and substantial additional material.

Reading *The Justice of the Night* evoked the atmosphere of that famous opener "Last night I dreamt I went to Manderley again." The poems are closely linked with, and there is a distinct sense of, place, often in a British countryside dotted with buildings. The signs of human habitation usually point to our groping for the spiritual essence underpinning or infusing the whole: churches and graveyards. Through these buildings we try to pin this essence down, though "There is no

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## POETRY REVIEWS:

*THE JUSTICE OF THE NIGHT*, BY GLEN CAVALIERO  
(TARTARUS PRESS 2007 HBK £12.99 / \$26.00)  
ISBN 978-1-905784-01-1

AND

*PLAYING WITH FIRE*, BY GREVEL LINDOP  
(CARCANET 2006 PBK £9.95)  
ISBN 978-1-85754-790-0

REVIEWED BY EDWARD GAUNTLETT

absolving those who would net the absolute.” (‘Here and Now’)

The landscape – omnipresent – is generally indifferent or dangerous or both. There is plenty of decay, reminiscent of Poe or Lovecraft, as in “and tattered nettles grow where brambles ripen” (‘Mater’) or “the carcass of a church / Wafture of mould and of decaying leaves..” (‘Armistice’). There is also a great deal of weather, emphasizing the effect of the environment but also engaging all our senses, with resonances of Peter Redgrove’s work and the synaesthesia he evokes. Like Redgrove, Cavaliero is a visionary, taking us beyond the manifestly seen and felt.

The action of ‘The Dark Tower’ completes Browning’s ‘Childe Roland’ and in that reference brings out the danger of landscape changing about us in some way that disorients and can be a very real threat. In this it refers back to an earlier piece in the collection: ‘Points of Recognition’. There is the image of the route we have taken vanishing, our memories distorting, and the landscape of the past altering as we arrive at ..... what? We might be happy (though not necessarily) but there is always the hint of a threat. This comes out again in ‘Settlement’ in which the gradual effect of civilization upon the landscape is described and the last verse gives our current preferred view of the countryside – the quiet, picturesque domicile of the second homers. But this peace and order is effectively destroyed by the last line in which “the nuclear reactors waiting out of sight behind the hill” lurk like some enemy biding its time invisibly in the dead ground – un-

seen but sensed on the edges of awareness.

The poems set a scene with vivid imagery before progressing to a metaphysical speculation, often tinged with poignancy or regret (but not cheap sentiment), perhaps for time or love lost in the mists that shroud the past. The poet seems to be in a landscape largely familiar to him, which is symbolic of his life. In this landscape he wanders about freely, life being not linear but an organically evolved environment, and he revisits significant places and events – alone. ‘Wakey Wakey!’ takes him in dream to a place now changed; and in ‘Dismissal’, for instance, the landscape / memory is becoming defaced and it is time to let go.

The spirituality that saturates all these landscapes is not always or necessarily comforting – but it is always there; in ‘Elegy for James’ it is known only as “the secret” at the centre of life and hence of all. Those two great mysteries, those two powerful gods: Love and Death, lurk between and within the lines of these verses. We are notified, however, at the beginning, in ‘The First Lesson’ that the universe is a game – a bit rough at times perhaps – but “boundless play” all the same.

Like Calaviero’s, Grevel Lindop’s volume is divided into four sections, but in *Playing With Fire* these are more obviously differentiated thematically. These poems are more public and present, though the ghost of Robert Graves flits through a couple in the first part, which touch on the family. In the second part there are love poems, often dealing openly with sex, sometimes indicating its links with ancient mysteries (‘Glossolalia’ and ‘Myth’), but also grounded in the domestic (‘Nights When You Wake’). In these there is no tinge of regret or bitterness in remembered sexual experiences; this happened – good, memorable, but long over and past (e.g. ‘The Snowball’). There are, however, intimations of mortality and the knowledge that eventually all will be past and gone (‘That Month’, ‘The Mirror’ and ‘To Ekazati’).

One of the secrets in Lindop’s poems is about sex. This is explicitly stated in ‘Watching’ where each desire fulfilled opens onto another and so fulfilment leaves a hunger – “a new pleasure with a new sorrow in it” – and can never be

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complete, nor experience / life completed. But this is nevertheless not dwelt upon with unhappiness, but rather with curiosity: “Also I wonder if / it will be pain or pleasure to remember these things.”

The long third section describing a visit to a London strip club is notable for its explicit realism, frankness, humour and honesty, as in ‘Private Dance’ sonnet XIII “What the hell am I doing here?” with its penultimate line “one possible answer is going on stage right now.” The whole section, full of intimate detail and remarkable in its sustained virtuosity describes something discontinuous from life (for the men – not the women – the semi mythical aspect being brought out by dropping ‘The Cave of the Nymphs’ in half way through) but yet part of life. ‘Private Dance’ sonnet I explains: “we’re in sanctuary this afternoon, / a rich dim island rounded with the flow / of music, taste, desire in circulation.”

The final section of the book takes us a little way into more sombre realities: autumn – of the year and of life; death. In ‘Untitled’ there is an articulation of the past as a landscape, any part of which might be revisited: “time, which is not a line / but spreads about me, patched and collaged.” But Lindop has non-attachment fairly mastered and doesn’t dwell on loss: “Why should I care? / It will all have to go, and there is a secret joy / in knowing that.” There may be an implicit warning in the title, *Playing With Fire*, but the emphasis is on playing.

**Call for Papers:**

Conference Organised by the Charles Williams Society;

*Charles Williams and His Contemporaries.*

St. Hilda's College, Oxford, U.K. 4<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> July 2008.

The conference aims at setting the life and work of Charles Williams (1886 – 1945) in its context. Of particular interest, of course, will be papers on Williams himself and papers which deal with the lives and work of those who knew him in London and/or Oxford, and arguably influenced him or were influenced by him. ( e.g. Coventry Patmore, A.E Waite, Alice Meynell, J.R.R.Tolkien, C.S Lewis, Dorothy L. Sayers, Evelyn Underhill, T.S. Eliot, W.H Auden, Robert Graves, John Heath-Stubbs) But papers need not be confined to these areas and submissions on a variety of aspects of the period will be welcomed. They may cover literary, theological, historical, biographical ground.

Those attending the conference are likely to be people from a wide range of backgrounds -some extremely knowledgeable about Williams and others much less so. Papers as presented should be prepared with this in mind – though versions for publication will need the usual supporting apparatus of footnotes, references etc.

We are asking that papers should last approximately 20 – 25 minutes: 4,000 – 6,000 words.

Academic panel: Dr. Suzanne Bray (Lille Catholic University), Dr. Brian Horne (King's College, London), Professor Grevel Lindop (Manchester University), Dr. Stephen Medcalf (Sussex University). (Prof. Charles Huttar, Hope College, Holland, USA)

Please send any questions and propositions for papers (250 – 350 words) to Dr. Richard Sturch at [charles\\_wms\\_soc@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:charles_wms_soc@yahoo.co.uk) (there is an underlining in the spaces between charles wms and soc) by 11<sup>th</sup> January 2008.

BLHorne  
Chairman of the Council of the Charles Williams Society.

## Editorial Policy

The Charles Williams Quarterly and the Society's Website 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 Quarterly 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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