



The  
**Charles  
Williams**  
Society



**Newsletter**

No. 94 Spring 2000

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## 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 King's College London.

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### Officers of the Society

President: **John Heath-Stubbs**

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Chairman: <b>Mrs Eileen Mable</b><br/>28 Wroxham Way<br/>Harpenden<br/>Herts, AL5 4PP<br/>01582 713641</li> <li>◆ Secretary:<br/><b>Revd Dr Richard Sturch</b><br/>Islip Rectory<br/>The Rise, Islip<br/>Oxford, OX5 2TG<br/>01865 372163</li> <li>◆ Treasurer: <b>Mr Richard Jeffery</b><br/>Lothlorien<br/>Harcourt Hill<br/>Oxford, OX2 9AS<br/>01865 248 922</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Membership Secretary:<br/><b>Mrs Lepel Kornicka</b><br/>15 King's Avenue, Ealing<br/>London, W5 2SJ<br/>020 8991 0321</li> <li>◆ Librarian: <b>Dr Brian Horne</b><br/>Flat 8, 65 Cadogan Gardens<br/>London, SW3 2RA<br/>020 7581 9917</li> <li>◆ Newsletter Editor:<br/><i>Until the appointment of a new editor, please send all newsletter material and editorial correspondence to <b>Eileen Mable</b>.</i></li> </ul> |
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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 (temporary) Editor**

Reading groups are now very popular – certainly in the UK. There was a time when the Society had a number of them, both here and in the States. Now only one remains and this meets regularly in Oxford. It would be good if there were more.

Such groups are not easily organized from the centre. Some readers might like to look at the membership list to see if there are others anywhere near who might like to form a group to meet in a home to read and discuss a chosen book of C.W.'s. Other interested friends, not necessarily Society members, could also be invited to join.

There is much to commend such groups. Members learn from one another in shared discussion and the group can promote friendship. This is not editorial theorising. Until recently I led for seven years a group which met in my home to read and discuss poetry together and it was both profitable and enjoyable for all of us.

The AGM at the Oxford meeting is at the later than usual time of 1pm to allow members some time in Oxford beforehand if they wish. The Revd. Graham Leonard will speak at 2.30 on “Obedience to the ‘general law of things’”. It has a tantalising sub-title (see Forthcoming Meetings). Join us if you can.

With all good wishes,  
Eileen Mable

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## The Newsletter

### *Two vacancies*

There are now two vacancies to be filled.

Andrew Williams, our **Production Editor**, who sets up this Newsletter so admirably, will be unable to do so for much longer because of increased family and work responsibilities.

If you can use a computer (the Society purchased the necessary equipment for setting up the Newsletter a few years ago) please consider whether you could take over from Andrew. The role involves placing and formatting material supplied by the editor within a pre-defined template using straightforward desk-top publishing software. Documents are either submitted in electronic format on disk or can be scanned in as text. The production editor also maintains the electronic database of Society members which is used to generate the mailing labels for dispatching the Newsletter.

Andrew can supply full details of exactly what is involved and would, I know, most certainly help his successor settle into the work. He would

assist with the installation of the computer, scanner and printer and provide guidance on the use of the software packages used.

Andrew can be contacted at 22 Ramsay Road, London, W3 8AZ (020 8993 4478 or 0780 1106909).

We still need an **Editor** (this is not a job I wish to continue with indefinitely). I will happily give details of what is involved to anyone interested. An enquiry does not mean that you will be press-ganged into doing the job.

I am quite sure that we have members capable of undertaking the work of Editor and Production Editor. I ask them to consider whether these are responsibilities they might take on for the sake of the Society.

Eileen Mable.

## Charles Williams Society meetings

- ◆ **Saturday 6th May 2000**  
Annual General Meeting in Pusey House, St. Giles, Oxford at 1 pm. At 2.30 pm the Revd. Graham Leonard will speak on “Obedience to ‘the general law of things’”. The talk will discuss the Way of Affirmation in the light of recent changes in attitudes to the universe (including genetic engineering and the Internet).
  
  - ◆ **Saturday 14th October 2000**  
A recording of the talk on Charles Williams given by the late Anne Scott to the Oxford Branch of the University of the Third Age. The meeting will take place in the Church Room of St. Matthew’s Church, St. Petersburg Place, Bayswater, London, W.2. at 2.30 pm.
  
  - ◆ **Meetings in 2001**  
Society meetings next year will be held on the following Saturdays: **10th February** (Oxford), **9th June** (Bayswater) and **13th October** (Bayswater).
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## Charles Williams Society Conference

**Friday 16th and Saturday 17th June 2000**

If you have not already booked a place at the Conference please do so as soon as possible. The last date for the receipt of applications is 8th May.

The conference will be held at The Royal Foundation of St. Katharine, 2 Butcher Row, Limehouse, LONDON E14 8DS.

## Society news

### C.W. on the Web

The Society now has its own modest Web site thanks to Richard Sturch and assistance from a member of the Tolkien Society. The Internet address is: [http://www.geocities.com/charles\\_wms\\_soc](http://www.geocities.com/charles_wms_soc)

There is also now a Society section on the Web site of the Alliance of Literary Societies: <http://www.sndc.demon.co.uk>

This includes a copy of the article on Charles Williams by Gerry Hopkins in the *Dictionary of National Biography*.

### A new hymn book

Our Secretary is a man of many talents. *An Otmoor Hymnal* is a collection of 50 hymns (some modern, some translations from great hymn-writers of the past) by Richard Sturch and intended for local use. Richard has a few spare copies which are obtainable from him for £1.20 each (inc. postage).

### Boydell and Brewer books

The publishers, Boydell and Brewer, confirm that *The Figure of Beatrice*

(£15.99) and *Arthurian Poems: Williams*, edited by David Llewellyn Dodds (£14.99) are still both available in paperback. These may, if necessary, be obtained direct from the publisher at PO Box 9, Woodbridge, Suffolk, IP12 3DF.

### Second-hand C.W. books

Anyone looking for out-of-print C.W. titles may like to contact any of the following second-hand book-sellers:

- ◆ Toby English, Antiquarian & Secondhand Books, 10 St. Mary's Street, Wallingford, Oxon., OX10 0EL.  
Tel: 01491 836389
- ◆ Ian Blakemore, Rosley Farm, Rosley, Wigton, Cumbria, CA7 8BZ.  
Tel: 016973 49923
- ◆ Daeron's Books, 106 High Street, Two Mile Ash, Bucks.  
Tel: 01908 568989

Aidan Mackey is now only trading G.K. Chesterton titles. His stock of books by C.W. and other Inklings has been transferred to Ian Blakemore.

## Council meeting report

The Council of the Charles Williams Society met on Saturday 5th February 2000 in St. Matthew's Church Room, Bayswater.

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- ◆ The Secretary reported correspondence with a Russian editor and translator of C.W., Dr. Natalia Trauberg, who had helped organize a Williams Conference in Russia in 1995.
- ◆ There is now a Society section of the Web site of the Alliance of Literary Societies. The Society also has a small Web site of its own. (Further details are given under Society News).
- ◆ Andrew Williams would be unable to continue preparing the Newsletter for printing after this year and earlier relief would be welcome. A permanent Editor was also urgently needed.
- ◆ A number of papers had been given to the Society, including a letter from Michal Williams and an address on C.W. given by Canon Michael Stancliffe in Westminster Abbey in 1965.
- ◆ In a reply to a letter from the Secretary the Dean of Westminster had confirmed that Charles Williams' name was still on the list of those regularly considered for a place on the 'Poets' Window' in the Abbey.

Richard Sturch

### **Annual General Meeting**

Please note that the Annual General Meeting of the Charles Williams Society will be held at 1 pm on Saturday 6th May 2000 in Pusey House, St. Giles, Oxford.

Members of the society are urged to attend if they are able to do so.

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## Subscription renewals

Members are reminded that subscriptions fell due on 1st March 2000 for the financial year 2000-2001.

The current subscription rates for individual/joint members are:

- ◆ **UK members: £10/£15**
- ◆ **Concessions £6/£9**
- ◆ **Overseas £12/£17 or \$22/\$30**

Prompt payment of subscriptions is greatly appreciated. Members are also urged, where possible, to pay subscriptions by standing order (direct debit). To pay by standing order simply complete the appropriate section of the membership renewal form. Please note that this arrangement can be rescinded at any time. Members who have already made arrangements to pay by standing order, need not return this form.

*Anyone whose subscription is not paid by 1st September will no longer be considered a member of the society and no further newsletters will be sent.*

Membership forms and enquiries about membership should be sent to:

**Mrs Lepel Kornicka**, 15 King's Avenue, Ealing, London, W5 2SJ  
Tel: 020 8991 0321.

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## New members

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

- ◆ Ian Blakemore,  
Rosley Farm,  
Rosley,  
Wigton,  
Cumbria,  
CA7 8BZ.
- ◆ Michael O'Rourke  
14 Wells Road  
Tilgate  
Crawley  
West Sussex  
RH10 5JJ
- ◆ Albrecht Wilkens  
Prausestrasse 36-38  
12203 Berlin  
Germany

## The Doctrine of Exchange

The following paper was delivered by the Rt. Revd. John V. Taylor at a meeting of the Charles Williams Society on Saturday 16th October 1999.

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I hope that what brings you together in this Society is pre-eminently an affection for the memory of Charles Williams and such a love of his writings in all their variety that you are happier to hear his words repeated, however familiar they may be, than to listen to someone else's opinions about them. That is certainly how I feel, so I shall let him speak for himself more than I talk about him, and I can't believe that any true devotee will feel that I am selling you short by so doing.

There is an essential distinction between the truth *about* something or somebody and the truth *of* something or someone, and it is the latter which evokes the more profound response.

Charles Williams has always appealed to me and disturbed me by the daring of his thought. He is one of that fascinating category of lay theologians who are primarily creative writers in some other field, as poets, literary critics, novelists or playwrights. He is naturally associated with Lewis and Tolkien, but might as happily be linked with another Oxford author, Dorothy L. Sayers. He would not have invited comparison, but was certainly the greatest poet of them all, and his work covered the widest variety of genres. But the point I am making is that all of them let their creative imagination romp freely over the cloistered and cosseted lawns of theology to the great enhancement of their general usefulness. Williams's fiction is consistently the most fantastical of them all, with its neo-medieval supernaturalism. Fair enough, if unusual as a literary genre; the shock is that he does not see it as fiction but theological reality - the Satanic urge in every generality or monopoly to eliminate every particularity portrayed in *The Place of the Lion*, for example, or, in *Shadows of Ecstasy* the fascination of irrational New Age pseudo-mysticism for a society bereft of the sense of God. In all the novels

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the fantasticated evil is defeated by persons of heroic God-centredness. But, as a statement of my chosen theme, I turn to one in which, while evil is portrayed in tragic vividness, the daring fantasy is focussed upon the resources of the God-centred. The Doctrine of Exchange, together with his concept of Romantic Theology, are both essential elements of Williams's lifelong exploration of the Co-inherence of the Human and the Divine. So let us plunge into his most daring and explicit presentation of Exchange in the sixth of his novels, *Descent into Hell*, published in 1936.

The year before, Williams had written a verse drama on the trial and execution of Archbishop Cranmer, and you will remember that this novel is set in a country town where, four centuries earlier, a Protestant priest, condemned to the stake, had almost taken his own life out of sheer terror, but had at the end gone to his death with surprising courage. A modern descendant of the martyr, young Pauline Anstruther, has since childhood been plagued by encounters with her own *doppelganger*, so that she dreaded being outside on her own, almost to the point of paralysis. Eventually she confides this terror to Peter Stanhope, who is rehearsing the local amateur theatrical group, including herself, in one of his own plays. I abbreviate his reply:

“Listen – When you go from here, when you're alone, when you think you'll be afraid, let me put myself in your place, and be afraid instead of you.... For what can be simpler than for you to think to yourself that since I am there to be troubled instead of you, therefore you needn't be troubled?... Haven't you heard it said that we ought to bear one another's burdens?”...

“And if I could”, she said, “if I could do - whatever it is you mean, would I? Would I push my burden on to anybody else?”

“Not if you insist on making a universe for yourself,” he answered. “If you want to disobey and refuse the laws that are

common to us all, if you want to live in pride and division and anger, you can. But if you will be part of the best of us, and live and laugh and be ashamed with us, then you must be content to be helped. You must give your burden up to someone else and you must carry someone else's burden. I haven't made the universe, and it isn't my fault. But I'm sure this is a law of the universe, and not to give up your parcel is as much to rebel as not to carry another's..."

She stood up. "I can't imagine not being afraid", she said.

"But you will not be," he answered, also rising, certainty in his voice, "because you will leave all that to me. Will you please me by remembering that absolutely?"

"I am to remember," she said, and almost broke into a little trembling laugh, "that you are being worried and terrified instead of me?"

"That I have taken it all over," he said, "and there is nothing left for you."

"But if I see it after all?" she asked.

"But not 'after all'," he said. "The fact remains – but see how different a fact, if it can't be dreaded! As of course it can't – by you. Go now, if you choose, and keep it in your mind till – shall I see you tomorrow? Or ring me up tonight, say about nine, and tell me you are being obedient to the whole fixed nature of things."

"I'll ring up", she said. "But I... it sounds so silly."

"It is silly sooth," he answered, "and dallies with the innocence of love. Real sooth, real innocence, real love. Go with God." They shook hands, and slowly, looking back once, just

before she reached the lane, she went out of his sight.

Stanhope, turning his eyes from her parting figure, looked at the rehearsal and then settled himself more comfortably in his chair... He recollected Pauline; he visualised her going along a road, any road; he visualised another Pauline coming to meet her. And as he did so his mind contemplated not the first but the second Pauline; he took trouble to apprehend the vision, he summoned through all his sensations an approaching fear. Deliberately he opened himself to that fear, laying aside for awhile every thought of why he was doing it, forgetting every principle and law, absorbing only the strangeness and the terror of that separate spiritual identity... His own eyes began to seek and strain and shrink, his own feet, quiet though they actually were, began to weaken with the necessity of advance upon the road down which the girl was passing. The body of his flesh received her alien terror; his mind carried the burden of her world.

[Meanwhile Pauline, on her way home, found her mind wandering over the details of another player's costume and the flowers in her garden.] She nearly came to a full stop; then, with slackened steps, she went on, blinking at the sunlight. She realized she had been walking along quite gaily. It was very curious. She looked down the road. Nothing was in sight - except a postman. She wondered whether anything would come into sight. But why was she so careless about it? Her mind leapt back to Stanhope's promise, and she knew that, whatever the explanation might be, she had been less bothered for the past ten minutes than ever before in any solitude of twenty years. But supposing the thing came? Well then, it came, but till then why suppose it? If Peter Stanhope was taking trouble, as he was, because he said he would, there was no conceivable reason for her to get into trouble.

She had promised to leave it to him; very well, she would. Let him - with all high blessing and gratitude - get on with it. She had promised, she had only to keep her promise.

Towards the end of the novel, having encountered her double, her true self, without terror, Pauline in her turn is able, across the intervening centuries, to take voluntarily upon herself the horror of that 16th century martyr, so enabling him, all that long time before, to walk triumphantly to the fire.

What makes this elegantly crafted tale so startling is that Williams should believe that such an exchange might be a literal possibility if we allowed ourselves to realise the full potential of our God-given co-inherence in love. In the pamphlet he wrote in 1941 on the Way of Exchange he asserted:

Compacts can be made for the taking over of the suffering of troubles, and worries, and distresses, as simply and as effectively as assent is given to the carrying of a parcel. A man can cease to worry about  $x$  because his friend has agreed to be worried by  $x$ ... No doubt the first man may still have to deal directly with  $x$ ; the point is that his friend may well relieve him of the extra burden.

Such was the affirmation he could make so positively in the essay he wrote in 1941 called 'The Way of Exchange'. It reads as a statement of experience. But the terminology and the idea were being explored in his writings for ten years before that. The second of his novels, *Many Dimensions*, published in 1931, told how a young secretary saved a man trapped in the past by taking into herself his burden of spiritual dereliction.

In his exploration of the principle of Exchange, Williams clearly saw it as a derivative potential of the greater truth of the Co-inherence of God with humanity and consequently of person with person. Others, of whom I think he must have been aware, were affirming that truth in different words. The Baron von

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Hugel, for example, chief mentor to Evelyn Underhill, wrote:

Spirit and spirit, God and the creature, are not two material bodies, of which one can only be where the other is not: but, on the contrary, as regards our own spirit, God's Spirit ever works in closest penetration and stimulation of our own; just as, in return, we cannot find God's Spirit simply separate from our own spirit within ourselves. Our spirit clothes and expresses His; His Spirit first creates and then sustains and stimulates our own.

The great Jewish exponent of the mystery of Co-inherence, Martin Buber, writing more as a philosopher and a humanist than a theologian, stressed the validity and necessity of two ways of relating to the world. Because I believe his is an important exposition of that Way of Exchange which Williams himself described as a law of the universe, I should like to quote Buber at some length. In his small masterpiece, *I and Thou*, which unhappily was not published in English until the early sixties, he wrote:

To man the world is twofold, in accordance with his twofold attitude. He perceives what exists round about him - simply things, and beings as things... it is to some extent a reliable world... It is your object, remains as long as you wish, and remains a total stranger, within you and without. You perceive it, take it to yourself as the "truth", and it lets itself be taken; but it does not give itself to you. Or, on the other hand, man meets what exists and becomes as what is over against him... It comes even when it is not summoned, and vanishes even when it is tightly held. It cannot be surveyed, and if you wish to make it capable of survey you lose it. It comes, and comes to bring *you* out... between you and it there is a mutual giving: you say *Thou* to it and give yourself to it, it says *Thou* to you and gives itself to you.

The principle of Exchange is in fact at work throughout the interactions of the whole physical universe. But Buber saw that it becomes a new phenomenon when combined with consciousness. In his essay *Between Man and Man* he said:

What is peculiarly characteristic of the human world is above all that something takes place between one thing and another the like of which can be found nowhere in nature... It is rooted in one being turning to another as another, as this particular other being, in order to communicate with it in a sphere which is common to them but which reaches out beyond the special spheres of each. I call this sphere, which is established with the existence of man as man, but which is conceptually still uncomprehended, the sphere of "between". Though being realised in very different degrees, it is a primal category of human reality. This is where the genuine third alternative must begin.

The denial of this sphere of "between" as Buber called it, or the refusal of the fact of our human co-inherence and the way of exchange, to use Charles Williams' terminology, is the nub of the sin against the Holy Spirit, the giver of mutual awareness. The counterplot of the novel *Descent into Hell*, which gives the story its title, describes the stubborn insistence of the scholarly Lawrence Wentworth to surrender any part of his self-sufficiency and self-will. Such egotism is inherently lonely, and it is not good that man should be alone, not merely because we need company but because we need substance, the substance we can receive only as a gift from other people. Martin Buber maintained that the 'I' of our familiar 'I-it' experiences is not the same as the 'I' that responds to an 'I-You' relationship. The one is what we call our ego; the other 'I', and only the other, is a person. 'Egos appear', said Buber, 'by setting themselves apart from other egos. Persons appear by entering into relationships with other persons.' And he seriously proposed that the fact explains what he called 'the eclipse of God in the modern world'. When humanity becomes stuck in the realm of 'I-it', and sees everything

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as an object, we can think of God only as another object, a super-object maybe, but an object none the less, which we try to prove, which we want to use. But the living God can never be known as an object among the other objects I experience; and my ego, in its self-absorbed individualism, is not open or silent enough to know when God addresses himself, or through what he presents himself, to me. Only the 'I' that is a person relating to other persons is capable of becoming aware of God as the mystery, the Other, giving himself to me, saying 'You' to me, and enabling me to say 'You' to him.

Martin Buber saw that humanity today is in danger of becoming stuck in the I-it mode of perception through our increasing reliance upon the power of technology. Williams also saw that the Way of Exchange was a human capacity we may be in danger of losing from that same reliance, and in the same year in which he wrote *He Came Down from Heaven* with its exposition of 'substituted love' - that is, the way of exchange - he exposed the danger of technology in his first cycle of Arthurian poems. In one of these he takes the invention of coinage in place of barter as an example of both the enhancement and the peril.

Kay, the king's steward, wise in economics, said:  
'Good, these cover the years and the miles  
and talk one style's dialects to London and Omsk.  
Traffic can hold now and treasure be held,  
streams are bridged and mountains of ridged space  
tunnelled; gold dances deftly across frontiers.  
The poor have choice of purchase, the rich of rents,  
and events move now in a smoother control  
than the swords of lords or the orisons of nuns.  
Money is the medium of exchange.'

But Taliessin, as the poet among them, foresees that the new device will generate voracious demands of its own and so, instead of being humanity's servant, become its tyrant.

Taliessin's look darkened; his hand shook  
 while he touched the dragons; he said 'We had a good thought.  
 Sir, if you made verse, you would doubt symbols.  
 I am afraid of the little loosed dragons.  
 When the means are autonomous, they are deadly; when words  
 escape from verse they hurry to rape souls;  
 when sensation slips from intellect, expect the tyrant;  
 the brood of carriers levels the good they carry.  
 We have taught our images to be free; are we glad?  
 Are we glad to have brought convenient heresy to Logres?'

The Archbishop's is the voice of the divine opportunism which foresees the risk, yet dares to take it in the faith that even disaster may be the occasion for a new step to a higher level in the way of exchange. By destroying self-sufficiency it may bring home the two-sidedness of exchange; in order to offer oneself as burden-bearer and life-giver one must be ready to depend on another's similar service. It may be more blessed, because more difficult, to receive.

The Archbishop answered the lords;  
 his words went up through a slope of calm air;  
 'Might may take symbols and folly make treasure,  
 and greed bid God, who hides himself for man's pleasure  
 by occasion, hide himself essentially; this abides –  
 that the everlasting house the soul discovers  
 is always another's; we must lose our own ends,  
 we must always live in the habitation of our lovers,  
 my friend's shelter for me, mine for him.  
 This is the way of this world in the day of that other's;  
 make yourselves friends by means of the riches of iniquity,  
 for the wealth of the self is the health of the self exchanged.  
 What saith Heracleitus? – and what is the City's breath? –  
*dying each other's life, living each other's death.*  
 Money is a medium of exchange.'

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The strength and soundness of Charles Williams lay in his constant ability to look beyond his own intuitive fears or enthusiasms and see a greater potentiality. He seems to be ever ready to take the divine perspective of 'What shall we make of this?' even when it entailed also taking the divine risk. In the Arthurian poems the Archbishop represents the spiritual vision which sees, beyond immediate advantage or danger, the abiding truth embodied and concealed within the innovation. Since truth about God and God's way is always wrapped in parable, his speech makes subtle use of the words of that most difficult of Jesus' parables, the tale of the Unjust Steward, to disclose the doctrine of exchange. Through that use Williams introduces a further insight he was to pursue - our general failure to acknowledge how much of ourselves we have in fact received from others. In the essay he wrote in 1941 on the Way of Exchange he says 'It is regarded as Christian to live "for" others; it is not so often regarded as Christian doctrine that we live "from" others - except certainly in rare experiences. There has been, everywhere, a doctrine of unselfishness, but that the self everywhere lives only within others has been less familiar.' More famously he had in the previous year expressed that insight in the witty poem he contributed to *Time and Tide*, his 'Apologue on the Parable of the Wedding Garment':

The Prince Immanuel gave a ball;  
cards, adequately sent to all  
who by the smallest kind of claim  
were known to royalty by name,  
held, red on white, the neat express  
instruction printed; *Fancy Dress*.

Within Earth's town there chanced to be  
a gentleman of quality,  
whose table, exquisitely decked,  
centred at times the Court's elect;  
there Under-Secretaries dined,

Gold Sticks in Waiting spoke their mind,  
or through the smoke of their cigars  
discussed the taxes and the wars,  
and ran administrations down,  
but always blessed the Triune Crown.

The ball drew near, the evening came.  
Our lordling, conscious of his name,  
retained particular distaste  
for dressing up, and half-effaced,  
by a subjective sleight of eye  
objectionable objectivity –  
the card's direction. 'I long since  
have been acquainted with the Prince  
at public meetings and bazaars,  
and even ridden in his cars,'  
he thought; 'his Highness will excuse  
a freedom, knowing that I use  
always my motto to obey:  
Egomet semper - I alway.'  
Neatly and shingly achieved  
in evening dress, his car received  
his figure, masked but otherwise  
completely in his usual guise.  
Behold the Palace; and the guest  
approached the Door among the rest.  
The Great Hall opened: at his side  
a voice breathed: 'Pardon, sir.' He spied,  
half turned, a footman. 'Sir, your card –  
dare I request? This Door is barred  
to all if not in fancy dress.'  
'Nonsense.' 'Your card, sir!' 'I confess  
I have not strictly... an old friend...  
His Highness... Come, let me ascend.

My family has always been  
in its own exquisite habit seen.  
What, argue?' Dropping rays of light  
the footman uttered: 'Sir, tonight  
is strictly kept as strictly given;  
the fair equivalents of heaven  
exhibit at our Lord's desire  
their other selves, and all require  
virtues and beauties not their own  
ere genuflecting at the Throne.  
Sir, by your leave.' 'But – ' 'Look and see.'  
The footman's blazing livery  
in half-withdrawal left the throng  
clear to his eyes. He saw along  
the Great Hall and the Heavenly Stair  
one blaze of glorious changes there.  
Cloaks, brooches, decorations, swords,  
jewels - every virtue that affords  
(by dispensation of the Throne)  
beauty to wearers not their own.  
This guest his brother's courage wore;  
that, his wife's zeal, while, just before,  
she in his steady patience shone;  
there a young lover had put on  
the fine integrity of sense  
his mistress used; magnificence  
a father borrowed of his son,  
who was not there ashamed to don  
his father's wise economy.  
No he or she was he or she  
merely: no single being dared,  
except the Angels of the Guard,  
come without other kind of dress

than his poor life had to profess,  
 and yet those very robes were shown,  
 when from preserval as his own  
 into another's glory given,  
 bright ambiguities of heaven.

Below, each change was manifest;  
 above, the Prince received each guest,  
 smiling. Our lordling gazed; in vain  
 he at the footman glanced again.  
 He had his own; his own was all  
 but that permitted at the Ball.  
 The darkness creeping down the street  
 received his virtuous shining feet;  
 and, courteous as such beings are,  
 the Angels bowed him to his car.

In his directly theological works, Williams made cautious, but always poignant, use of his doctrine of exchange to illuminate central themes of the Christian faith. In *The Descent of the Dove* he quotes the martyrdom of Felicitas early in the third century as an example of the co-inherence of Christ and the believer through the Holy Spirit. ‘Her name was Felicitas; she was Carthaginian; she lay in prison; there she bore a child. In her pain she screamed. The jailers asked her how, if she shrieked at *that*, she expected to endure death by the beasts. She said: “Now *I* suffer what *I* suffer; then another will be in me who will suffer for me, as I shall suffer for him.”’

The Way of Exchange, or, as Williams often called it, Substitution, can most obviously be applied to the Christian doctrine of atonement. His biographer quotes one of his poems which makes this connection. It ends:

Be stretched upon this cross now; make me one,  
 In a most dreadful consecration,

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With all your sin and punishment; retrieve  
In me, in me, your proper way to live,  
And make me your anointed: O in me  
Work out the fairer you that is to be,  
And find that love is one with sanctity!

So it is surprising that his contribution to a symposium on ‘What the Cross means to me’, written in 1943, should focus primarily upon justifying the ways of a Creator who persists in preserving a Creation which has gone so distressingly wrong. Even so he does say towards the end:

He was not like us, and yet He became us. What happened there the Church itself has never seen, except that in the last reaches of that living death to which we are exposed He substituted Himself for us. He submitted in our stead to the full results of the Law which is He... By that central substitution, which was the thing added by the Cross to the Incarnation, He became everywhere the centre of, and everywhere He energized and reaffirmed, all our substitutions and exchanges.

As I said at the start, Charles Williams is essentially a creative writer, essentially an originator. He likes to quote occasionally from the early fathers and monastics, but very rarely refers to his contemporaries. And he looks always to the most daring and advanced realisation of a new idea. With regard to the Way of Exchange, for example, he wrote: ‘Our chief temptation is to limit its operation. We can believe it happily of ourselves as regards our lovers and our friends. We find it an outrage that we should be intimately inter-related, physically and spiritually, to others who have offended our pride or our principles.’

Williams recommended those who took that concept seriously and wished to put it into practice, to begin with small burdens such as sleeplessness, anxiety and slight pains. He said that to believe in such possibilities encourages humility and gives ‘a faint insight’ into ‘loving from within’, which is God’s prerogative.

And he added: 'We have to avoid portentousness; we have not to promise anything we cannot do. But perhaps there is very little that could not be done.'

With that last phrase he gives himself leave to concentrate upon the higher flights and the more supernatural experiences of co-inherence and exchange. In spite of claiming these as laws of nature, he dwelt very little on the lowlier, commonplace ways in which most people experience them. It was only during the year before his death that he wrote his second cycle of Arthurian poems, in one of which he acknowledged that lowlier level of mutual dependence and exchange in the company of the God-centered:

... at the first station  
 were those who lived by a frankness of honourable exchange,  
 labour in the kingdom, devotion to the Church, the need  
 each had of other.

What distinguishes the ethos of this society as imagined by Williams from the normal experience of life seems to be the shared awareness of what is taking place between each and all, and the joy in generosity which springs from it.

... nay, servitude itself  
 was sweetly fee'd and freed by the willing proffer  
 of itself to another, the taking of another to itself  
 in degree, the making of a mutual beauty in exchange,  
 be the exchange dutiful or freely debonair.

That does sound a little folksy in the style of William Morris, though with a stronger blend of theology infusing it. Charles Williams himself considered that it was the necessary context in which the next level of more intimate mutual responsibility comes to be regarded as natural and normal.

The Company's second mode bore farther  
 the labour and fruition; it exchanged the proper self

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and wherever need was drew breath daily  
in another's place, according to the grace of the Spirit  
'dying each other's life, living each other's death'.  
Terrible and lovely is the substitution of souls  
the Flesh-taking ordained for its mortal images  
... since It deigned to be dead in the stead of each man.

I hope that in this company it will not be judged as sacrilege if I voice my regret that Charles Williams instinctively gave such scant value to the more natural, accessible experiences of Exchange and Co-inherence because I feel that, had he done so, many more people might have been able to recognize what he was describing as their own. This is, however, the common weakness of the great. The high courtliness of the language he liked to use when naming God was characteristic of the spiritual aristocrat for whom only the ultimate is acceptable. They are rare beings and we can only rejoice in their splendid integrity.

But, as an example of the greater regard for the lower levels of the same Way of Exchange, I would like to quote a more contemporary poem by John Wain, not least because, in its conclusion, it endorses the Image of Romantic Theology as Charles Williams understood it.

This above all is precious and remarkable  
How we put ourselves in one another's care,  
How in spite of everything, we trust each other,  
Fishermen at whatever point they are dipping and lifting  
On the dark green swell they partly think of as home  
Hear the gale warnings that fly to them like gulls.  
The scientists study the weather for love of studying it,  
And not specially for love of the fishermen,  
And the wireless engineers do the transmission for love of  
wireless,  
But how it adds up is that when the terrible white malice  
Of the waves high as cliffs is let loose to seek a victim

The fishermen are somewhere else and so not drowned.  
And why should this chain of miracles be easier to believe  
Than that my darling should come to me as naturally  
As she trusts a restaurant not to poison her?  
They are simply examples of well-known types of miracle  
The two of them,  
That can happen at any time of the day or night.

It was in keeping with his nature that Williams, like Dante, should experience the over-mastering encounter with the real presence and otherness of God through the image of a girl whom, in his case, he was later to marry. But the same revelatory and life-changing encounters, when what is there makes itself known, comes to bring you out, addresses you, take place, it seems, more frequently in Wordsworthian than in Dantean romantic imagery. Through my membership of the Alister Hardy Research Centre I have come to know that a high proportion of adults can look back on some experience of “otherness” which has made them aware of God. It is something which they find very difficult to associate with what they think goes on in churches, but it remains with them and changes their view of the world. Much the same holds of the young, including children as young as six years old; again and again they are made aware of the same reality, though many of them, after reaching ten years of age, repress the memories because they hear no reference to such a reality in the adult world.

I would dare to make a small but, I believe, important distinction, which Williams and von Hugel do not make, between that aspect of God which I can feel and know, and that aspect which makes me feel and know. We can never be directly aware of the Spirit, since in every experience of meeting and recognition he is always the go-between who recognizes the otherness of things as well as his co-inherence. But you can never know the otherness of the Holy Spirit, only the aliveness that his presence brings, the inertness that comes from his absence. He acts anonymously and unnoticed. As the American poet W. H. Merwin writes:

You see a wind in its signs but in itself not.

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You hear a spirit in its motion, in its words, even  
In its stillness, but in itself not. Know it here in the stance  
Of a prophet, and his beard blown in a door-way.

After his second critical meeting with Beatrice, Dante dreamed of a “lord of terrible aspect” who carried the sleeping girl in his flaming arms. That fiery figure is usually named love, but it would not be amiss to call him the Holy Spirit. For it is he that *presents* the girl to the boy in such an intense current of communion and vision that he will never be the same again. Charles Williams, in his account of Dante’s first meeting with Beatrice, quite clearly makes this identification:

‘Certainly that first communication of charity and humility, that first sensible coming of the Holy Ghost, is, in terms of time, unique. But terms of time are not the only measurement.... The lord of terrible aspect then has so far defined himself. He is the image of a quality by which the truth of another image is seen, and that other image is a girl in Florence, as it might be in London or San Francisco, in the thirteenth century or in the twentieth.’

Dorothy Sayers also uses the same language of recognition and awareness. ‘Beatrice thus represents for every man that person – or, more generally, that experience of the Not-self - which, by arousing his adoring love, has become for him the *God-bearing image*, the revelation of the presence of God.’

But to return, with gratitude, to Williams himself. I am grateful to him for his awareness that in dealing with the Holy Spirit in any I/Thou relationship we are entering a realm of vast possibilities. I am going to end with a quotation from one of my earliest mentors, Bishop Joe Fison of Salisbury (who was literally worn to death by the problems of his diocese):

There is no possibility of contact with the Divine without running the risk of being destroyed by the demonic. That is why Biblical religion at its best is the deadly enemy of the false

“safety, certainty and enjoyment” of mother-possession. It is always either bliss or perdition, salvation or damnation, the greatest curse or the most wonderful blessing in life. It cannot be the one without running the risk of being the other, promise and peril must always co-exist. So long as we refuse that total commitment to the Creator by the creature, that humbling awareness of the infinite by the finite and that hazardous encounter between the Holy and the sinful, which are only possible when the great deeps of the unconscious as well as the shallows of consciousness are broken up - for just so long we shall have no reality in our conscious experience to correspond with the words, Holy Spirit.

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## Editorial Policy

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

- ◆ Submissions should be sent to the Editor.
- ◆ Submissions over 300 words should be made on floppy disc, typewritten paper, or by e-mail.
- ◆ Submissions under 300 words can be hand-written.
- ◆ Submissions on paper should be one-sided and double spaced.
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