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The  
**Charles  
Williams**  
Society



**Newsletter**

No. 110

Spring 2004

## The Charles Williams Society

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

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

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### Editorial Policy

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

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

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

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## Contents

**Newsletter No. 110****Spring 2004**

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<b>Officers of the Society</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Reading Groups</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>From the Editor</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Society News &amp; Notes</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Forthcoming Meetings</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Council Meeting Report</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>He Came Down From Heaven. The Christology of Charles Williams</b> <i>Brian Horne</i>	<b>11</b>
<b>Book Reviews</b> <i>Richard Sturch &amp; Edward Gauntlett</i>	<b>29</b>
<b>Editorial Policy and Copyright</b>	<b>35</b>

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### **Reading groups**

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

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The  
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No 110 Spring 2004

### From the Editor

The Charles Williams Society was founded nearly thirty years ago to promote the work of a writer who had died thirty years before that. Two generations have passed since CW raised London in his vision to the status of The City. This same city was that walked round by Victor Watson of Waddingtons to choose street names for the British version of the Monopoly board, where the nearest thing to Macdonalds and Starbucks was the Lyons Corner House.

It is, therefore, inevitably, though regrettably, the case that many of the original members who gave the Society its direction and impetus back in 1975 are no longer with us or no longer as active in our affairs as they once were. So it may be time to instigate changes to the way in which the Society functions and communicates with its membership. To facilitate this there is a questionnaire lurking in this issue, which I hope you will find the time to fill in and return to Brian Horne. The changes that will follow from the results of this and the Council's deliberations seem likely to result in a reduction of the number and nature of our meetings (see the Council Meeting Report on page 9) and this may have a knock-on effect with regard to the Newsletter as this has, traditionally, depended on speakers' papers for its content. I urge you all to make your thoughts and feelings known.

Edward Gauntlett

stories long after Winston Churchill, on whom it seems "H.M." was modelled, had become famous. And he seems unable to resist being rude about Agatha Christie. But his reading has been wide, he introduces us to lots of writers we should never otherwise have heard of, and much may be forgiven one who admires H. C. Bailey. He even gives us potted biographies of all the writers Williams reviews, except in a few cases where they have proved impossible to trace.

The collection itself is a delight. At £25.95, a costly delight, perhaps - the books reviewed seem normally to have cost 7s.6d. - but who are we to complain when we get gems like "Messrs. Cassell, on the jacket, ask 'Why was Nahum afraid of life?' I don't understand. Aren't Messrs. Cassell?"

Richard Sturch.

does a fair job in summarizing the concerns of the novels and the CW version of the Matter of Britain, bringing out the fundamental danger Williams saw in practical occultism and the conflict inevitably arising between the selfless love of mystical religion and the inherent tendency to selfishness of magic.

Edward Gauntlett

*THE DETECTIVE FICTION REVIEWS OF CHARLES WILLIAMS, 1930-1935.* EDITED BY  
JARED LOBDELL. MCFARLAND & Co., 2003.

REVIEWED BY RICHARD STURCH

It feels strange to be reviewing reviews; has this thing really to be done? But readers of this Newsletter have long known that Charles Williams supplemented his income by reporting on batches of thrillers and mysteries, and here is Mr. Lobdell's careful collection of the results. He reveals to us, among other things, that Williams reviewed "The Nine Tailors" and "Murder on the Orient Express" in a single week - what a week that must have been! In fact, here is more than a collection: we have an Introduction, and a discussion of Charles Williams as a detective fiction reviewer, and an essay on the Golden Age of crime stories - Golden, as Mr. Lobdell reminds us, "not necessarily for the quality of the fiction but for the range, for the enthusiasm, for the exuberance, and in a way for the youthfulness of the writers". Adjectives which might well be applied to Williams himself as he comes through in these pages. Not perhaps "youthful" - he was in his forties - but certainly wide-ranging, certainly enthusiastic, and certainly exuberant, with a sense of humour that falls short of wryness only because it manages to be kindly even in dismissal (of one author, for example, "His admirers will admire him, and others have no need to interfere").

Mr. Lobdell's own contributions are somewhat more prosaic. He makes a few errors of fact. Williams does not seem ever to have reviewed anything by C. Day Lewis ("Nicholas Blake"), and John Dickson Carr went on writing "H.M."

## Society News & Notes

### THE MYTHOPOEIC SOCIETY MYTHCON XXXV

Neil Gaiman, the author of *Coraline*, *Stardust*, and *The Sandman* comics series, will be the Author Guest of Honour at Mythcon 35, which will be held from July 30-August 2 at the Michigan League at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, MI.

Gaiman is a bestselling author who writes comic books, fantasy, children's books, songs, and screenplays, and is known world-wide for his adult comic series "the Sandman," his novels *Stardust* (winner of the 1999 Mythopoeic Fantasy Award for Adult Literature), *Neverwhere* (finalist for the 1998 MFA for adult literature), *American Gods* (finalist for the 2002 MFA for adult literature), and his children's book *Coraline* (finalist for 2003 MFA for Children's Literature). Visit his website at [www.neilgaiman.com](http://www.neilgaiman.com) for more information about his many projects.

Mythcon is an annual four-day confer-

ence that focuses on the works of the "Inklings" (J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis and Charles Williams) and/or fantasy and mythic literature. Mythcons are attended by scholars, writers and readers of fantasy literature. The theme of this year's conference is "Bridges to Other Worlds: 35 Years of Mythopoeic Scholarship." In addition to Neil Gaiman, Scholar Guest of Honour Charles Huttar will be on hand to trace the history of invented myths. Dr. Huttar won the Mythopoeic Scholarship Award in Inklings Studies twice, for *Word and Story in C.S. Lewis*, and for *The Rhetoric of Vision: Essays on Charles Williams*.

Activities include papers, panel discussions, readings, entertainment, an art show and dealers' room, a banquet, awards presentations, Bardic Circles, food sculpture and Golfimbul.

Mythcon Organizers promise that this year's conference will present "our usual Mythcon mix of good scholarship, good fellowship, and fun."

To register for Mythcon or to obtain information on Conference accommodations, please visit the Mythopoeic Society Web Site,

<http://www.mythsoc.org/>

mythcon35.html or e-mail Marion P. VanLoo, Mythcon Chair at [mvanloo@dmci.net](mailto:mvanloo@dmci.net).

The Mythopoeic Society is an international literary and educational organization devoted to the study, discussion, and enjoyment of fantasy and mythic literature, especially the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis and Charles Williams. For further information on the Mythopoeic Society, please visit the Web Site, <http://www.mythsoc.org>.

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### CREATING ARTHUR

There is an interesting conference coming up: (Re) Creating Arthur, (Arriving Tuesday 3rd August - leaving Saturday 7th August 2004)

Registration Mrs Lyn Black  
School of Cultural Studies  
King Alfred's College  
Winchester, SO22 4NR  
United Kingdom

See <http://www.wkac.ac.uk/arthur/register.html>

### MEMBERSHIP SURVEY

We are inviting members to participate in a survey intended to provide a guide to the changes necessary to keep the Society relevant, viable and lively.

Please complete the form enclosed with the Newsletter and return it to Brian Horne by the end of May.

### CHARLES WILLIAMS

the centre of all spiritual endeavour (on which point I think Williams and Waite differed). Williams opted for the path *par excellence* of Christian mysticism, that of love. On his way he seems to have tried and, sooner or later rejected as unsuitable for himself, other paths, while retaining a knowledge of their practices. In yoga terms Williams embraced Bhakti (union through love or devotion) but there are also, among others, Raja (mental control), Jnana (knowledge) and Hatha (physical control, often leading to 'magical' powers).

In Knight's discussion the good/bad love/will contrast is quite clear-cut throughout, though it is acknowledged that whereas Persimmons, Mannasseh, Tumulty etc. are undoubtedly nasty people bent on power through evil magic, the Lees and the various characters in *Place of the Lion* are more forgivably fallible merely. However, with *All Hallows' Eve* we are firmly back in the straightforward realms of good versus evil, black magic versus white. Here Knight's thesis is correct and it may be that Williams had developed to that point of view as there is nothing of the ambivalence shown towards Considine in his treatment of Simon the Clerk, though they are in superficial ways very similar.

To be picky, there is a minor (though irritating) error, which I wish had not been carried over from the first edition: throughout the discussion of *The Greater Trumps* Lothair Coningsby is referred to as 'Nigel'.

Knight's short treatment of the Taliessin poems follows that of Lewis in *Arthurian Torso*, and he dwells on the map of Christendom symbolically overlaid with the female figure. A point made here, and arising occasionally in his treatment of the novels, is the value of reading passages aloud. There is a hint that this has formed the basis of some magical work performed by Knight and his associates. The text proceeds to a detailed summary of *The Figure of Arthur* and concludes with a section on *Judgement at Chelmsford* that relates it back to *Descent into Hell* and considers it as a magical ritual to evoke and redeem the spirit of a particular place.

Overall, the book seems to be aimed at the student of occultism who has heard of Williams and ought to know something of his work rather than the student of Williams, for whom the bulk of the text covers familiar ground. Knight

Considine to be the villain where it is not clear from the text that he is. Glen Cavaliero has said that “the attitude to Considine is ambivalent.” This, surely, is because Considine offers a path to expanded consciousness that seems to work. Considine is an ambiguous figure reflecting, I believe, the ideas of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky. In *A New Model of the Universe* Ouspensky writes “The psychology of the superman eludes us because we do not understand the fact that the normal psychic state of superman constitutes what we call *ecstasy* in all possible meanings of the word.” Williams would, no doubt, have been aware of Katharine Mansfield’s death at Gurdjieff’s institute in 1922 and may have had ‘the system’ in mind when working out Considine’s philosophy. If so, Considine is not a mere bad guy like Dracula or Fu Manchu and his motivations will remain incomprehensible to anyone not on his level. What one makes of his dismissive attitude to religion is open to personal choice: Knight regards it as a failing that leads to egotism and the more clear cut gothic tendencies of Simon the Clerk. Equally, however, Considine may be seen as thinking, with Gurdjieff, that orthodox religion is part of the problem holding people back: it is one of the dreams of the bulk of humanity, which is permanently asleep – a dream that persuades them/us to be lazy and not wake up.

The ground is less uncertain in the four novels that follow *Shadows*. In these Knight sees the characters coming into contact with the inner realms or astral matrix from which the physical world emerges through a particular object that belongs to those inner realms. Here he contrasts the villains’ attempts to gain power through control of the magical object and the heroines’ and heroes’ thwarting of their plans through selfless love. Ultimately the conflict Knight finds in Williams’s novels is between love and will. Williams’s heroines and heroes triumph through the action (or Tao like inaction) of unconditional love against those for whom love is subordinate and inferior to power as exercised by the human will. For Knight, white magic is the opening of oneself as a channel for divine forces through unconditional love. This is more mysticism than magic, and a particular form of mysticism at that. For Williams, I believe, the crux is that God can only be known, or “oned with” by love, but this would be impossible without God’s prior demonstration of His love by the revelation of Himself in Christ. In this Williams follows the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, placing Christ at

## SOCIETY CONFERENCE

18 – 20 JUNE 2004

Bookings are now being received for the conference, which will very soon be upon us. You are urged, therefore, to submit your booking reservations as soon as possible. Note that the latest date for the receipt of bookings is 8 May.

This conference promises to be a rewarding three days, even better than the last one (in 2000), which all who attended agreed made a very enjoyable and stimulating weekend. As has been reported, the Royal Foundation of St Katharine has undergone extensive improvements to its accommodation facilities, while retaining its peaceful and spiritual atmosphere. The extending of the conference into Sunday has allowed for more diversity in the programme, as well as providing time for an additional speaker.

We look forward to seeing many of you there.

## SUBSCRIPTION

## RENEWALS

As usual in the spring issue, a subscription renewal form is enclosed. If you pay by direct debit (and have already altered the amount in line with the increases) please ignore the form. Those members who renew annually, paying by cheque, are asked to complete and return the form as quickly as possible. Thank you.

## ANNE RIDLER’S

### MEMOIRS

We look forward to the publication of Anne Ridler’s *Memoirs* this spring. Anne’s reminiscences range over a long life and career as a daughter, wife and mother, poet, scholar, librettist, biographer and translator and recall the experiences and insights of one of the most accomplished women writers of the last century. The book will be of interest not only to those who were fortunate enough to know Anne personally but also to many who value her poetry and her contributions to Charles Williams studies. Ordering information is enclosed.

## Charles Williams Society Meetings

- ◆ **Friday 18 to Sunday 20 June 2004**  
Society Conference at The Royal Foundation of St. Katharine, London E14. From 5 pm, on 18 June to 4 pm on 20 June (See Notes).
- ◆ **Saturday 30 October 2004**  
Joint meeting with the George MacDonald Society at Pusey House, St Giles, Oxford. This meeting will commence at 10.30. There will be three or four speakers.

*THE MAGICAL WORLD OF CHARLES WILLIAMS* BY GARETH KNIGHT  
SUN CHALICE BOOKS, OCEANSIDE, CALIFORNIA, 2002

REVIEWED BY EDWARD GAUNTLETT

This volume is an expanded reprint of the relevant section from Gareth Knight's *The Magical World of the Inklings* (without the illustrations) published by Element Books in 1990. The author has taken the opportunity to add forty pages covering *The Figure of Arthur* and *Judgement at Chelmsford* while omitting much of the short section on *Witchcraft* from the earlier volume.

In his opening chapter Knight makes two important points that did not appear in the earlier work. Firstly he asserts that the novels and poems

provide illustrations of the practicalities, pitfalls and potential of magic in most of its forms and phases. Indeed the tenor of his books tends not to condemnation of a magical view of the world but the elevation of magic, its redemption in a sense, to a form of mystical and transformative interchange.

Secondly, he provides what might have been a justification for writing the book, saying that the "problem that Williams' occult knowledge and background poses to most of his commentators is that they have no experience and little knowledge as to what occultism is in its deeper and more responsible reaches." The unstated subtext here is the fact that Gareth Knight, a Christian occultist with decades of experience and about 20 books on magic to his name, is well placed to comment on the practicalities, pitfalls and potential alluded to.

Knight takes the novels in order, beginning with *Shadows of Ecstasy*. The section on this is one of the longest, and in it Knight takes some trouble over the ambiguities in the plot and the ambivalence towards Considine. The dubious morality and justifications for Caithness's actions and motives are discussed (in a way that would have benefited from the contextualizing of Williams's look at the role of the church led persecutions in *Witchcraft*). However, I think Knight wants

## Council Meeting Report

The Council of The Society met on 21 February at St Matthew's, Bayswater

The Secretary said that Bruce Hunter had agreed that excerpts from Williams's writings be placed on the Internet, provided that he was told which. Members were asked to make suggestions. He had been sent a DVD of *The Two Towers*, which should contain some material on CW. This was passed to the Librarian, who would see whether it might be possible to play it during the Conference. Regent's College were sending us copies of four of the novels which they were re-publishing. They had also asked if we could suggest any writings of CW on the relations between faith and the imagination. Members were asked to look for possible passages.

There followed discussion of the joint meeting with the George MacDonald Society in October. The MacDonald Society had two speakers in mind (though the health of one was uncertain), and one or two possible others.. Dr Sturch had also offered to give a paper. It was agreed that the meeting should begin informally at 10:30, and that a good timetable, if there were four speakers, would be to have papers at 11, 12, 2 and 3, ending the formal part of the meeting at 4.

The Librarian had received a copy of CW's detective-story reviews.

The Editor said that the new edition of *The Image of the City* was now imminent.

Conference. Dr Horne said he had only had five applications so far, as members had been specifically asked not to send these in while he was away.

There was considerable discussion about the number of meetings that should be held, as attendance at the London meetings had been very poor. There was a feeling that it would be worth experimenting with a calendar of only two meetings, perhaps in March and September, these to consist of more than just one paper - possibly a reading or debate as an extra element. One meeting in 2005 could well be at the Oxford Centre for Mediaeval and Renaissance Studies, where the Refer-

ence Library was now housed; Dr Horne would consult about possible dates. Mr Barber agreed to include a section on this matter in the Questionnaire. No suggestions for speakers were immediately forthcoming, though it was agreed that it would be an excellent idea to invite the present Vicar of St Silas', Kentish Town as the "extra element" for one meeting.

The Chairman said that Anne Ridler's *Memoirs* were to be published by the Perpetua Press. Order forms would be in the next newsletter.

NOTE: In the last Council meeting report the autumn meeting was said to be on October 24th. This should, of course, have been October 30th, as given elsewhere in the Newsletter.

revelation to the justification of iconography. It does not seem to say: 'Here we have images, how best can we justify them? Let us work out a theory which does just that. And, behold, we have a convincing one to hand, namely, the Incarnation'. Or does it say that? A sceptical historian trying to evaluate the motives of John's work might, possibly, arrive at such a conclusion; or, at least, suggest that John's justification was, psychologically speaking, more complicated in its motives than the theologian and his interpreters make out. Was Williams being as disingenuous as that? He was in love with the art of poetry, of that there is no doubt, and was persuaded of his own high vocation as a poet. Was he invoking a convenient formula to provide a theological justification for this quasi-religious estimate of that calling? Perhaps not consciously; he certainly never developed his claim beyond this instance. But the instance remains interesting for a number of reasons. First, his aesthetics is based, at least in theory, not, as is usually the case in the Western theological tradition, (Thomas Aquinas is the great exemplar here) on the doctrine of creation, but on the doctrine of the Incarnation. There have, of course, been exceptions; notably, in our time, Hans Urs Von Balthasar, at the centre of whose theological aesthetics is the figure of Jesus Christ, the form of the Word Incarnate '.....the visible image of the Father, the sensuous sign *par excellence* of the invisible economy of the Divine Logos' (Aidan Nichols, *Say It Is Pentecost* T & T Clark. Edinburgh. p. 21) This has extremely interesting consequences for aesthetic theory but, unfortunately, we have no time to pursue them here; our subject is Christology, not aesthetics. Secondly it illustrates a sensibility that was rooted in the particular, that was incapable of separating religion from life, theology from aesthetics, Christology from art, theory from practice. (This capacity to make unexpected connections and this drive to unite beliefs, theories, practice gathered from a variety of contexts in a coherent whole is uncommon in professional theologians but it was the only way Charles Williams could do his work and live his life.) We could say, in conclusion, that, for him, a line of well-fashioned poetry was not only an aesthetic pleasure it was a theological statement, and a doctrine precisely articulated not only offered the revelation of a divine truth, but was also an invitation to the enjoyment of intellectual delight.

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*the Poetic Mind*, OUP. Clarendon Press. p. 119)

The Incarnation is seen as the means by which heaven and earth, the natural and supernatural, are united; the paradoxical point at which God and humanity are joined, and the Absolute presents itself in the particularity of mutable and apprehensible flesh; our flesh. I used to think that Williams was not being entirely serious in making this claim - and, of course, it is presented in jocular form - that as both and aesthetics an theology it was both specious and untenable. Now I am less sure; and I wonder, now, if it is fanciful to introduce a comparison with one of the great theologians of the Byzantine tradition: John of Damascus. What is the basis of John's defence of icons? It is the fact of the Incarnation. If the Almighty had not united himself to matter in the form of the man Jesus there could be no ground for the representation of divinity in the manner of images, but because this has occurred, because Jesus had appeared in history, because he could be observed and worshipped, there was, not only no reason why matter should not be used to represent the divine, there was a positive injunction placed upon human beings to do exactly this. Icons, on this argument, become an indispensable part of the fabric of Christian worship and theology.

In the former times, God, who is without form or body could never be depicted. But now when God is seen in the flesh conversing with men, I make an image of the God whom I see. I do not worship matter: I worship the Creator of matter who became matter for my sake, who willed to take His abode in matter; who worked out my salvation through matter..... God's body is God because it is joined to His person by a union which shall never pass away. (*On the Divine Images*, Trans. David Anderson. St. Vladimir's Press. NY. 1980. p. 23)

Now I admit that, on the surface, John's argument is presented differently from Williams's: it is one which advances from a theological position on the nature of

## HE CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN. THE CHRISTOLOGY OF CHARLES WILLIAMS

Brian Horne

It is a truth universally acknowledged, but perhaps still worthy of uttering, that a genuine Christology will arise, not out of detached speculation about the nature of divinity, the meaning of the universe, the purpose of life or, to borrow the words of the Stoics, the contemplation of the origin, meaning and destiny of all things, but out the focusing on a 'particularity'; from the attempt to reveal the meaning of an event in history.

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honour and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, 'This is my Son my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased'. (2 Peter. I. 16 - 17)

As with the author of the second letter of Peter, so with Charles Williams. Consider this:

There had appeared in Palestine, during the government of the Princeps Augustus and his successor Tiberius, a certain being. This being was in the form of a man, a peripatetic teacher, a thaumaturgical orator. There were plenty of the sort about, springing up in the newly-established peace of the Empire, but this particular one had a higher potential of power, and a much more distracting method. It had a very effective verbal style, notably in imprecation, together with a recurrent ambiguity of statement. It continually scored debating-points over its interlocutors. It agreed with everything on the one

hand, and denounced everything on the other. For example, it said nothing against the Roman occupation; it urged obedience to the Jewish hierarchy; it proclaimed holiness to the Lord. But it was present at doubtfully holy feasts; it associated with rich men and loose women; it commented acerbically on the habits of the hierarchy; and while encouraging everyone to pay their debts, it radiated a general disapproval, or at least doubt, of every kind of property. It talked of love in terms of hell, and of hell in terms of perfection. And finally it talked at the top of its piercing voice about itself and its own unequalled importance. It said it was the best and worst thing that had ever happened or ever could happen to man. It said it could control anything and yet had to submit to everything. It said its Father in heaven would do anything it wished, but that for itself it would do nothing but what its Father in heaven wished. And it promised that when it had disappeared, it would cause some other Power to illumine, confirm, and direct that small group of stupefied and helpless followers whom it deigned, with the sound of the rush of a sublime tenderness, to call its friends. (*The Descent of the Dove*, The Religious Book Club. London. 1939. pp. 1 -2)

This is the high style of a master of rhetoric. The passage begins quite simply: 'There had appeared....'; but the movement of the prose urges the reader forward - there must be no lingering - creating its effect by the building up of antinomies, paradox upon paradox, until it culminates in that unexpected coda: 'sublime tenderness ....', alighting finally on the little word 'friends'. Rhetorical it certainly is, but there is much more than rhetoric here, and what that 'more' is we shall investigate presently. This description of the event out of which all Christology arises, is found in the opening pages of Charles Williams's history of the Church, *The Descent of the Dove* published in 1939. Or to be more precise - and to use the author's own description of the book, his 'Short History of the Spirit in the Church'. It is, perhaps, more a work of theology than of history; an attempt, to use Williams's words when defining theology, of 'measuring eternity in opera-

and Man in the flesh; and the principle of the creation had therefore been a unity of man - soul and body - in flesh.... We have, except for the poets, rather lost this sense of the body; we have not only despised it too much, but we have not admired it enough. (*He Came Down From Heaven*, p. 125)

He entitled one of his last essays *The Index of the Body*, an essay in which the human body is perceived to be not merely one of the most important vehicles for the communication of heavenly beauty, but also as a microcosm of the whole created order. Human beings might distort the structure of their own existence and corrupt its forces, but they were ultimately powerless to destroy a pattern that had been decreed by the Father and embodied in its perfection by His Incarnate Son. 'The Sacred Body is the plan upon which physical creation was built, for it is the centre of physical creation'. (*The Image of the City*, p. 86) (This essay was originally printed in *The Dublin Review* 1942 and suffered some censorship by nervous editors) In view of all this, it is hardly surprising that he should respond so positively to the speculations of the *doctor subtilis*. 'Of course', says Williams, coming upon that text, 'if Christ in his human nature is predestined before all things, that is why the human body is as it is'.

But I should like to end with what could be his most interesting and provocative use of this theory. The reference occurs, not in a theological context, but in the third of his books of literary criticism, *Reason and Beauty in the Poetic Mind*. The subject under discussion is John Milton, and, speaking of the peculiar difficulties of portraying - as Milton tries to do in *Paradise Lost* - Omnipotence and Omniscience in a work of art, Williams says, in an impudent way:

.....If Christianity were not true, it would have been necessary, for the sake of letters, to invent it. It is the only safe means by which poetry can compose the heavens, without leaving earth entirely out of the picture. The Incarnation, had it not been necessary to man's redemption, would have been necessary to his art; the rituals of the Church have omitted that important fact from their paeans. (*Reason and Beauty in*

than either the ecstatic language of the mystics or the more abstract, philosophical vocabulary of some of the Fathers. While this vocabulary of substitution and exchange, emphatically used by Williams, might suggest a more immediate union between the natures that was propounded at Chalcedon, which would lead in the direction of the confusion of natures, monophysitism is avoided by the use of the complementary concept of co-inherence. The divine and human natures of the Incarnate Lord do not merge into one another, are not confused, they co-inhere. Williams had been very impressed by G.L. Prestige's essay on co-inherence which concluded his study *God in Patristic Thought*; Williams found his own theological sensibility confirmed by that work. So divinity and humanity exchange lives in that pattern of co-inherence, 'perichoresis', 'circumincessio', which is the historical Jesus. Here in the Incarnation is the utmost joy; the Fall could neither cause nor prevent it; the 'schism in reason' simply became the circumstances of its occurrence.

But there is further reason, also anthropological. I can think of few other theologians who so consistently emphasises the significance of the human body as does Charles Williams; who so powerfully argues for the possibility of the revelation of the supernatural in and through the natural; who contends that human flesh, fragile and weak though it may be, is capable of being the vehicle of divine glory. And so he writes the body 'was holily created, is holily redeemed, and is to be holily raised from the dead. It is, in fact, for all our difficulties with it, less fallen, merely in itself, than the soul'. (*The Image of the City*, p. 84) This is what attracted him to Dante's striking vision of the Resurrection in the fourteenth canto of *Paradiso*; 'Come la carna gloriosa e santa fia rivestita': 'the holy and glorious flesh'. Of these lines from the *Divine Comedy* Williams writes: 'The brightness which her (i.e. Beatrice's) body shed directed attention to this future. The Resurrection was held in the word 'vita'; it is the whole life that here sings, of which.... the flesh has been the incident and means.' (*The Figure of Beatrice*. Faber and Faber. London. 1943. p. 207) But he comes to justify his contention that the human body is capable of being the vehicle of divine splendour by establishing it, not upon some quasi-panteistic theory about the nature of matter, but upon the flesh-taking of the Divine Son.

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The principle of the Incarnation had been the unity of God

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tion', of tracing the course of the 'bright cloud and the rushing wind' in creation. Is this the beginning of Williams's Christology? It is without doubt an arresting beginning but this was not the first time Williams had considered the person of Christ; this was not his first work of theology.

Before we move on to examine that Christology we must be prepared to recognise what it is we are dealing with when we approach Williams's writings. There is a remarkable degree of intellectual coherence in the variegated assemblage of his works; remarkable precisely because there is such a variety of literary form. But it is a coherence that is achieved not only by the consistent application of certain theological motifs, but also by the pervasive spirit of a singular sensibility: that of the poet. Here we have a mind that moves more easily in the world of images and symbols than in the sphere of abstract concept; a mind that is as concerned about the exact shape of a line of poetry and the precise placing of a word or even a punctuation mark in a sentence than in the observation of academic conventions. (He was, e.g. irritatingly vague in his referencing - strange in a man who wrote often in praise of accuracy). And his writing has a peculiar density; a density of texture that is the feature of poetry rather the density of the philosophical treatise. Its customary method is the method of contraction not the method of expansion; of the condensation of thought to a metaphorical expression rather than the discursive exposition of a conceptual position; its mode is allusive rather than explanatory. None of his theological essays presents any factual information or arguments that are not already well known, but Williams reorganises these facts and arguments; presents them in new relationships; makes unexpected connections; arranges them like poetic tesserae to form the desired pattern of the verbal mosaic. The contemporary theologian, like the contemporary philosopher or historian, leaves little unsaid; he or she tends to see his or her task as one in which the investigation, argument, point of view, must be presented with as much logic, openness, lack of mystery as can be achieved. Williams's writing deliberately leaves things unsaid and often depends for its effectiveness on the reader's sensitive awareness of what is beneath the surface; on his or her ability to make connections with the world beyond the confines of theological study. In short the reader is expected to exercise a different, and sometimes more difficult because more complex, attention to writing of this kind. Fur-

thermore we shall find his Christology appearing not only where we expect to find it - in his theological essays - but in odd corners of novels, in glancing references in the lines of poetry, in passing comments in reviews of books that, superficially, have nothing at all to do with Christianity.

All that having been said, let us return briefly to that opening passage of *The Descent of the Dove*. For theologians suspicions about Williams's orthodoxy might immediately have been aroused as ears catch the phrase of the second sentence: 'This being was in the form of a man....' Only the form of a man? Not a real person? Those suspicions will not have been dissipated by the strange and insistent use of the impersonal third person pronoun throughout the passage. '....it was present at doubtfully holy feasts; it associated with rich men and loose women ....' and so on. From the start you might have detected a distinct flavour of docetism here. In addition to this there may be the sense of an Arian reading of the Incarnation: that use of the impersonal pronoun suggests a creature rather than a consubstantial Son, a lesser kind of divinity despite the talk of Fatherhood. What is going on here? Is Williams really to be judged guilty on two counts of heresy? If we were to evaluate his Christology solely on the evidence of this passage from *The Descent of the Dove*, I think that conclusion would be difficult to avoid - even when we remember that Paul in his famous passage from the second chapter of the letter to the Philippians had similarly made use of that term 'form': 'form of God', 'form of a slave,' 'human form'. And I do not think it is easy to excuse him even when we remember the historical context of the book, when we see that part of his intention is to shock readers into a recognition of the explosiveness of the event of Jesus Christ. He was writing against a background of theologically liberal attempts at 'humanising' the figure of Jesus; against efforts to empty out his terrifying strangeness. Williams had, by this time, read both Kierkegaard and Barth - had indeed been responsible, in his work at the Oxford University Press, for the first translations and publications of Kierkegaard's works in English, and had included several excerpts from Barth's *Epistle to the Romans* in his own anthology of readings, *The New Christian Year*. He even says at one point in this same volume: 'It is an alien Power that is caught and suspended in our midst' and he had little time for what he called 'immature and romantic devotions to the simple Jesus, the spiritual genius, the broad-minded inter-

Son of the Father, must be seen as the agent of creation. The Fourth Gospel's assertion: 'All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being' is amplified and extended by Williams in the following way:

He (Adam - humanity) *had* been created, of course, but according to a special order which involved the non-created.....He was the only creature (whose) flesh was in unique relationship to the sublime flesh which was the unity of God with matter. The Incarnation was the single dominating fact, and to that all flesh was related... The Incarnation was the Original from which the lesser human images derived. (*He Came Down From Heaven*, p. 129- 130)

So, to put it crudely, the Son is the instrument of a world which is brought into being so that He himself, in the womb of the Virgin, takes flesh to Himself. What the Fall of Adam did was to determine the circumstances within which the purpose of God, already present to the Godhead from all eternity, to unite himself with matter, was achieved.

Why did Williams find this interpretation of the person and work of Christ so attractive; what made him so determined an advocate of so unusual a reading of it? The answer lies in his anthropology: his apprehension of what human life is for; and central to this are the twin principles of co-inherence and exchange. For him all genuine human life operates on the basis of exchange. That is simply a definition for him; an irreducible fact; an assumption basic to all his theology as well as his anthropology. And if this is true, the highest and deepest joy for human beings must lie in the exchange between themselves and their Creator. The nodal point and the source of all joy is the person of the Word made flesh. Some notion of exchange, I would suggest, will be present in all orthodox interpretations of the Incarnation and the Atonement, but, so far as I am able to ascertain, no theologian has so emphasised its centrality as Williams does. The concepts of exaltation and glow found in the language of deification of the fathers of the early Church are surely what he means by joy, but his word is more intensely human, more closely linked to the quotidian experiences of personal love and desire

It is clear that this Incarnation, like all his other acts, might have been done to himself alone. It was certainly not necessary for him to create man in order that he might himself become man. The Incarnation did not involve the Creation. But it was within his nature to will to create joy, and he willed to create joy in this manner also. (*He Came Down From Heaven*. p. 119)

To postulate that the Incarnation had always been ordained by God as the goal and consummation of his creative activity is one thing; to suggest a hypothetical independence from creation is quite another. It is possible to draw a distinction between, on the one hand, the will to incarnate, and, on the other, the historical circumstances of the act, but the references of the scholars to circumstances are specifically to humanity's fallen condition. Here is Westcott again:

....it can fairly be maintained that we are led by Holy Scripture to regard the circumstances of the Incarnation as separable from the idea of the Incarnation, and to hold that the circumstances of the Incarnation were due to sin, while the idea of the Incarnation was due to the primal and absolute purpose of love foreshadowed in Creation....(*The Epistles of St John*. p. 288)

It is nowhere suggested that creation itself is a circumstance, a stage-set made necessary for the drama of the flesh-taking, which is precisely Williams's suggestion in this particular passage. Whereas Westcott sees creation as an action of God which culminates in the union of Himself and man in the person of Jesus Christ, Williams postulates creation as a kind of by-product of God's primary intention: which is to take matter to Himself in the personal union of the Son with human nature. If it were possible to establish an order of metaphysical precedence in the activity of the Uncreated, Incarnation would take precedence over Creation.

From this it follows, with a kind of relentless inevitability, that Christ, the

national Jewish working-man, the falling-sparrow and grass-of-the-field Jesus'. And still more strikingly: 'They will not serve. The Christian idea from the beginning had believed that his Nature reconciled earth and heaven, and all things met in him, God and Man. A Confucian Wordsworth does not help here'. (*The Descent of the Dove*, p.53) Even so, and taking into consideration his penchant for the rhetorical flourish, which could lead him into dramatic overstatement, we might still feel, uncomfortably, that this picture stands in an uneasy relation to the formulations of the ancient creeds of the Christian Church. Nor can the particular passage that I quoted at length be excused on the grounds that it is 'poetic writing'. Only bad poetry is vague and inaccurate; good poetry can be the most precise of languages; and Williams was as aware of that as any other poet.

But, of course, it would be absurd to evaluate Williams's Christology solely on the basis of this passage. As I have said, he had already written a substantial essay on the Incarnation before his history of the Spirit in the Church saw the light of day. This was the book for which, as a theologian, he is best known: *He Came Down From Heaven* published in 1938. It is easy to approach this work with the wrong presuppositions. The title prepares us for an essay on the Incarnation - indeed I called it that a few moments ago - whereas its subject is actually reconciliation and redemption; an essay on the Atonement. But the reason why we can also see it as a substantial work of Christology is that Williams, like many of the early Greek Fathers, chooses to focus his interpretation of the salvific work of Christ, not on the Cross but the Word made flesh. That having being said, it will be observed that one of the characteristics of his theology is that he never, even for the purposes of organisational convenience, allows the separation of the categories of Incarnation and Atonement in his theological system. It will further be observed that his particular way of explicating the dogmas of Christianity is determined by a mind and an imagination that are rooted in a belief in the Supernatural and its constant penetration into the world of everyday experience. Just as in *The Descent of the Dove* he describes theology as 'the measurement of eternity in operation', so here in *He Came Down From Heaven* he describes religion as 'the definition of the relationship between earth and heaven' (*He Came Down From Heaven*, Faber and Faber. London. 1950. p. 12) And, as it is primarily a treatise on the Atonement, we would do well to approach its Christology via the

theory of the Atonement he proposes.

The first chapters contain an exposition of the Fall and its consequences for the human race, the prime consequence of which is to introduce into human nature what Williams calls 'the actual schism in reason'. The chapter that examines the Genesis story is entitled: 'The Myth of the Alteration of Knowledge'. '.... they (Adam and Eve) knew good; they wished to know good as evil. Since there was not .... anything but the good to know, they knew good as antagonism. All difference consists in the mode of knowledge'. (p. 21) He is uncomfortable with the Old Testament language of 'covering' and 'forgetting' sin on the grounds that facts cannot be erased from history, cannot be made not to have been. As man has chosen to know good as evil there is the inescapable fact of evil and the fact cannot simply be forgotten. And he remarks: if the High and Holy One is prepared to forget what has been is he not 'only finding felicity by losing fact'? (p. 39) The consequences of the Fall cannot be put aside, undone in a miraculous action of the restoration of Edenic innocence, they can only be transformed; changed from within human nature itself. Evil must be known as good; death known as life. In the fourth chapter, 'The Precursor and the Incarnation' he alludes to phrases from Julian of Norwich and Augustine of Hippo to support his interpretation.

All is most well; evil is 'pardoned' - it is known after another manner; in an interchange of love, therefore as a means of the good. 0 felix culpa - pardon is no longer an oblivion but an increased knowledge, a knowledge of all things in a perfection of joy. (p.59)

Yet how is this transformation to take place? If the facts are inescapable it must be accomplished from that place in which the facts are experienced, i.e. from within the life of humanity, and yet it cannot be done by humanity; our reason is in schism and our life is one of impotence. The answer is the paradox of the Incarnation. We may already be hearing echoes of *Cur Deus Homo*, but our expectations will be disappointed if we are looking for a version of Anselm's argu-

The belief that the Incarnation was in essence independent of the Fall has been held by men of the most different schools, in different ways and on different grounds. All however in the main agree in this, that they find in the belief a crowning promise of the unity of the Divine Order; a fulfilment, a consummation, of the original purpose of creation; a more complete and harmonious view of the relation of finite being to God than can be gained otherwise. (*The Epistles of St John. The Greek Text with Notes and Essays*, Second Edition. John Murray. London. 1886. pp. 317 -318)

Whether Williams knew this particular essay of Westcott or that of any of the other scholars that Westcott cites, is impossible to say; he himself refers only to Duns Scorns, but, interestingly, quotes from Westcott's own translation of the medieval master. What we can say is that he is more daring - perhaps more foolhardy; more imaginative and, perhaps, less intellectually secure, than Westcott or any of the others.

The theory appears in a number of places, and in a variety of contexts, in his work. In his history of the Church, *The Descent of the Dove*, it is discussed briefly in a Postscript to the text. In his review of two books by Denis Saurat (*Regeneration* and *The Christ at Chartres*) for the periodical *Time and Tide* (2 November 1940), as in his essay 'Natural Goodness' printed in *Theology* in 1941 (November), he speaks of it as a permissible belief for Christians and clearly leans towards it himself. Anne Ridler states categorically that he did hold the theory; an assertion which is borne out by the sequel to *He Came Down From Heaven*, the extended essay *The Forgiveness of Sins* (bound with *He Came Down From Heaven* in the 1950 Faber edition from which the following quotes are taken). In the opening of the third chapter of this later work he claims that 'the beginning of all this specific creation (the universe) was the will of God to Incarnate'. (*He Came Down From Heaven*, p. 119) He acknowledges in a footnote that he is following 'an arrangement of doctrine' which might be regarded as unusual but which he believes to be within the bounds of orthodoxy. He follows up the sentence with an assertion in which a far more unusual position is advanced.

was drawn instead first by his intense preoccupation with the purely human aspect of creation, and, secondly, by his notion of the centrality of the principle of exchange, in the direction of the Incarnational theology commonly associated with Duns Scotus and the Franciscans of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. That is, that the Incarnation of the beloved Son was due to the primal and absolute purpose of love foreshadowed in Creation, and was in no way the result of the sin of human beings. This interpretation of the doctrine may be regarded as unconventional, as he himself remarked, but it is not forbidden to Christian belief, nor is it, of course, restricted to Duns Scotus and the Franciscan tradition or to those centuries; there are modern advocates of the theory, in addition to Charles Williams: B.F. Westcott in the nineteenth century and, more tentatively, Karl Rahner in the twentieth. Even Duns Scotus's older contemporary, Thomas Aquinas, was prepared to admit that it was possible to argue that the Incarnation was ordained from Eternity and might have taken place whether the Fall had occurred or not, but was unwilling, himself, to agree that such a theological position was the most 'appropriate' in the light of what was to be apprehended in Scripture:

... since everywhere in the Sacred Scripture the sin of the first man is assigned as the reason of the Incarnation, it is more in accordance with this to say that the work of the Incarnation was ordained by God as a remedy for sin; so that, had sin not existed, the Incarnation would not have been. (*Summa Theologica*, Pt III, Q. I, Art. iii. Translation by the English Dominican Fathers. Burns & Oates. London. 1912)

But he is quick to add: 'Although the power of God is not limited to this - even if sin had not existed, God could have become incarnate'. He was quite prepared to see the Incarnation as the culmination of God's original creative act.

The essay *The Gospel of Creation* of 1883 by B.F. Westcott is his own apology for the validity and appropriateness of such a view of God's action in the world.

ments. The forensic framework of Anselm's theory is totally absent from these pages; instead of the language of debt, Williams employs the language of substitution. In God, as man, an act of substitution can be observed - indeed, it is the supreme act of substitution to which all other acts exchange are related and from which they derive their meaning.

In a book review for the periodical *Time and Tide*, entitled 'Anthropotokos' published in the same year as *He Came Down From Heaven*, the summary of his position on the Incarnation stresses the centrality of the concept of exchange - a concept closely related to that of substitution. And he does this by means of the use of the symbol of the city - always, for him, the symbol of the redeemed life.

What is the characteristic of any city? Exchange between citizens. What is the fact common to both sterile communication and vital communion? A mode of exchange. What is the fundamental fact of men in their natural lives? The necessity of exchange. What is the highest level of Christian dogma? Exchange between man and God, by virtue of the union of Man and God in the Single Person, who is by virtue of that Manhood, itself the City, the foundation and the enclosure ..... This office of substitution did not need Christendom to exhibit it.... Christendom declared something more; it declared that this principle of substitution was at the root of the supernatural, of universal life, as well as of natural. (*The Image of the City*, Ed. Anne Ridler. OUP. London. 1958. p. 112)

Exchange is defined as part of the nature of the Godhead. It is seen as the root principle of all existence, divine as well as human, and the operation of exchange, already known in the life of the Trinity as the co-inherent relationship of the three Persons, is embodied in an earthly counterpart as the co-inherence of divine nature and human nature in the person of Jesus Christ. There is no doctism in this articulation of his Christology. Over and over again Williams adverts to one of his favourite Christological formulations - from the, so-called, Athanasian creed - a document which he referred to more than once as 'that great

humanist Ode': 'One not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh but by taking of the Manhood into God'. There is, similarly, no Arianism here either. What there is, of course, is a strong sense of deification, though he nowhere uses this term - though he does once use the rather odd word 'divinitized'; of the natural world being supernaturalised by the entry of the Second Person of the Trinity into the particularity of a human life. This is not to say that Williams did not argue powerfully for the reality of the human flesh of Christ; the sight of that was never to be lost - despite what he had written in the opening pages of *The Descent of the Dove*. In that same review article for *Time and Tide* he comments on the Nestorian controversy: 'Such remote Christological quarrels in the slums and boulevards of the Near East are not without interest today. It was the real nature of Perfection as credible and discoverable by men that was then in question, and it is still perfection that we are at', and then in a remark critical of what he sees as the victory of Alexandrian Christology in the conflicts of the fifth century, he says: 'The loss of (the title of the Virgin) "anthropotokos" has damaged Christendom; the Middle Ages attempted to recover it by fables, but in general it has been left too much to the revolts against Christendom to demand what should be one of the splendours of Christendom'. (*The Image of the City*, p. 111) 'Anthropotokos' - bearer of the anthropos, man; such insistence would hardly indicate a Christology which saw humanity subsumed into divinity, a subsumption which might be hinted at by too strong an attachment to that phrase from the Athanasian creed: 'the taking of the Manhood into God'. One of 'the revolts against Christendom'? It seems as if he has Nestorianism in mind and this movement of his thought, which might be read as a certain sympathy with what was condemned at the Council of Ephesus is, at first, somewhat surprising; for I would suggest that his formulation of the person of the Incarnate Lord in terms of an exchange between humanity and divinity would make Monophysitism more attractive to his vision of the Incarnate Word; but this is not, actually, the case. In fact, his rejection of both Nestorianism and Eutycheanism is spelled out in a quite different, and unexpected, part of Williams's writings: in a novel, *The Greater Trumps*.

I can think of no modern novelist, perhaps no novelist in the history of prose fiction, who would place a scene involving the singing of the Athanasian creed at the centre of the plot. But so it is with this novel published in 1932.

Three of the characters are attending Morning Prayer in a village church on Christmas Day; and, as anyone familiar with the rubrics of the Book of Common Prayer will remember, Christmas Day is one of the days in the Church's calendar on which the Athanasian creed is appointed to be sung at Morning Prayer.

All the first part went on in its usual way; she knew nothing about musical settings of creeds, so she couldn't tell what to think of this one. The men and the boys exchanged metaphysical confidences, they dared each other, in a kind of rapture... to deny the Trinity or the Unity; they pointed out, almost mischievously, that though they were compelled to say one thing, yet they were forbidden to say something else exactly like it. . . . All this Nancy half-ignored. But the second part... for one verse held her. . . . the words. . . . sounded to her full of sudden significance. The mingled voices of men and boys were proclaiming the nature of Christ - "God and man is one in Christ"; then the boys fell silent, and the men went on, "One, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh but by taking of the manhood into God." On the assertion they ceased, and the boys rushed joyously in, "One altogether, not" - they looked at the idea and tossed it airily away - "not by confusion of substance, but by unity" - they rose, they danced, they triumphed - "by unity, by unity" - they were silent, all but one, and that one fresh perfection proclaimed the full consummation, each syllable rounded, prolonged, exact - "by unity of person". (*The Greater Trumps*, Faber and Faber. London. 1954. pp. 109 -110)

Thus does Williams present his Chalcedonian orthodoxy. Yet, in another area of his Christology he gives the appearance of being distinctly unorthodox; and we are now arrived at what may be his most original contribution to the subject.

He did not subscribe to the traditional view that the Incarnation was necessitated by the Fall, what he called the schism within the human's very being; he