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## Review of Conversations with C.S. Lewis: Imaginative Discussions about Life, Christianity and God

Lyle W. Dorsett

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then this book will be worth the purchase price just for Merrie's story. As I hopped and skipped through this volume, I also enjoyed the stories of many other friends and acquaintances, such as Walter Hooper (always delightful in everything he writes about Lewis), Don King (*the* expert on Lewis' poetry), Wayne Martindale and Jerry Root (beloved professors at Wheaton College and editors of *The Quotable Lewis*, 1989), and Michael Ward (most deservedly well known for his intriguing book *Planet Narnia*, 2008).

*Mere Christians* not only offers essays by Lewis scholars such as those mentioned above and others (including Ronald Bresland, James Como, Lyle Dorsett, David Downing, Colin Duriez, Paul Ford, and Thomas Howard); it also provides the notable Lewisian encounters of people like Jill Briscoe, Francis Collins, Charles Colson, George Gallup, Thomas Monaghan (Domino's Pizza Founder), novelist Anne Rice, and Philip Yancey. However, as good as the essays of these well-known people are, perhaps most enjoyable are the stories of people like Atessa Afshar, one of only a few Iranian-born women working in full-time Christian ministry, and Eddy Benmuvhar, a man of Jewish parentage born and educated in Istanbul.

Toward the end of his life, Lewis wrote: "My own eyes are not enough for me, I will see through those of others" (*Experiment in Criticism*, 1961, 140). Through *Mere Christians* readers get to see through the eyes of fifty-five other sons and daughters of God, not only their view of Lewis, but their view of life, Christ, and so much else. In this book, Phemister and Lazo serve up a rich feast for all those who have tasted before of the Lewisian banquet. And those who have not will learn from this book why they should hurry to the table.

Will Vaus  
Monterey, Virginia

Robert Velarde, *Conversations with C. S. Lewis: Imaginative Discussions about Life, Christianity and God* (Downers Grove, Illinois, 2008). 192 pages. \$15.00. ISBN 9780830834839.

Ever since the late Chad Walsh wrote *C. S. Lewis, Apostle to the Skeptics* (1949), the list of books on Lewis' life and writing has continued to grow. Occasionally, serious and (usually) charitable students of Lewis and his works question the need for more books on the celebrated author. Quite honestly, when asked to review this book it seemed questionable whether it was even worth reading, let alone reviewing for *Sehnsucht*. But my skepticism vanished after reading the first few pages. Indeed, this unique little book by author and Christian apolo-

gist Robert Velarde captured my interest from the first page: “C. S. Lewis died in 1963, but I met him last week. At least, I think I did. He appeared in my hospital room, sitting quietly in a worn but plush vinyl chair, working on a crossword puzzle in a tattered newspaper.” I love stories and this one hooked me. I was so drawn in by the first chapter that I only put it down long enough to refill my coffee cup.

Professor Lewis would view a lot of what has been published about his works with a jaundiced eye. But the astute English scholar and creative writer would like this unique and engaging book. Why? Because Velarde, like the Oxford Christian, knew that most people enjoy a good story and that biblical truth can most easily be slipped past those “watchful dragons” when camouflaged as nothing but a good tale.

Velarde is a seminary-trained evangelical who is steeped in Scripture and theology. He is also a student of Professor Lewis’ life, times, and writings across several genres. Furthermore, this one-time agnostic who was pointed to Christ by *Mere Christianity* is an astute observer of contemporary culture. He understands that writing a fictional story from a skeptic’s angle of vision might disarm folks predisposed to turn a deaf ear to decidedly Christian nonfiction.

In this cleverly nuanced story, the main character is Thomas Clerk (a play on N. W. Clerk, Lewis’ pseudonym for *A Grief Observed*). Tom meets the spirit of Lewis in a fashion reminiscent of *A Christmas Carol*. When Jack finally convinces Tom, who is hospitalized with cancer and undergoing chemotherapy, to embark on a Narnian-like wardrobe venture into the past, they go to Jack’s boyhood home. There, Tom learns about *Sehnsucht* and Jack’s pain in the wake of his mother’s death from cancer. Besides encountering Jack’s struggles with the problems of pain and evil, Tom is led into the presence of William Kirkpatrick, the “Great Knock,” and he is quickly faced with the relative merits of theism and atheism. After leaving Surrey, Tom is taken on a motorbike ride where he learns of Lewis’ conversion. There are stops in this adventure at “The Bird and Baby.” There he meets some of the Inklings before traveling south to the BBC in London for a radio broadcast. Eventually the trip includes a visit to the hospital bedside of Mrs. Lewis, who suffers with cancer like Tom.

By the end of the journey, Velarde has pointed the reader to many of Lewis’ books and to Jesus Christ. Finally, Tom must face the truth that it is more reasonable to engage a pain-filled world with Lewis’ Christian worldview than with the hopeless agnostic philosophy he had embraced without much critical thought.

Despite my delight in *Conversations with C. S. Lewis*, there are some minor criticisms. The book does not need a bibliography, since the author provides a chapter-by-chapter appendix revealing where Lewis wrote or said what is attributed to him. That said, what is provided is of limited scope. Why, for instance, do we find listed four of Norman Geisler’s apologetical works and none of the im-

portant books by Thomas Howard, Clyde S. Kilby, Jerry Root, and Chad Walsh? Even more disappointing is the way Velarde ignores some of the important women in Lewis' life besides his mother and his wife. How rich it would have been and how much more he could have engaged women readers if Sister Penelope, Stella Aldwinkle, Ruth Pitter, Dorothy L. Sayers, and Jean Wakeman had made appearances. And, in this vein, why are we not given a richer glimpse of Joy Davidman the brilliant poet, apologist, novelist, essayist, and critic rather than merely the bedridden victim of cancer? To the point, the author unintentionally reinforces some of Lewis' critics who accused him of being prejudiced against women.

In the final analysis, Velarde is to be commended for both taking the reader on delightful fantasy journey and providing a unique piece of Christian apologetics. The book deserves a wide readership.

Lyle W. Dorsett

*Billy Graham Professor of Evangelism*

Beeson Divinity School, Samford University, Birmingham, Alabama

Don W. King, ed., *Out of My Bone: The Letters of Joy Davidman* (Grand Rapids, 2009). xxxi + 421 pages. 22 b&w photos. \$28.00. ISBN 9780802863997.

Don King has edited a remarkable volume that will interest both Lewis specialists and the general public. Although the title only mentions the letters, the book also contains King's fascinating critical introduction; a biographical chronology; Davidman's autobiographical essay "The Longest Way Round"<sup>1</sup> (previously very hard to find); several of her poems; and extracts from letters she received from her first husband, Bill Gresham, Chad Walsh, Warnie Lewis, and various other friends. Eight pages of photographs are also included.

The letters were written between 1936, when Davidman was just twenty-one years old, and 1960, shortly before she died at the age of forty-five. The contents are very enlightening and help the reader to understand their author's complex personality, ideas, and cultural background. In the first section, we accompany Davidman in her first steps as a published writer, in her love-hate relationship with New York Judaism, and in her intellectual struggles with the Communist Party and Marxist ideology. Later on, we gain insight into her difficult marriage, the frustrations of being a housewife with young children in an isolated district, and

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<sup>1</sup> First published in David Wesley Soper, ed., *These Found the Way: Thirteen Converts to Protestant Christianity* (Philadelphia, 1951), 13–26.