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Review of C.S. Lewis on the Fullness of Life: Longing for Deep Heaven

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the interpretation of literature will be disappointed, and Newell clearly states this was not his aim since others have already addressed these issues. Rather, he selected a few representative biblical texts to interpret in dialogue with Lewis (and other thinkers), to demonstrate how the intellect and imagination can team up to gain a better understanding of Scripture. Lewis himself would have approved of this goal. “God’s Word, not me,” he would say, “but if I can be of help, use what I’ve written.” Indeed, this was precisely why he wrote *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer* (1964). He believed his years of experience in prayer might help others, and the many letters he had received by then from people all over the English-speaking world who considered him a spiritual guide, helped overcome his reluctance to offer advice. In that spirit, Newell has taken Lewis at his word and put him to good use.

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Dennis J. Billy, *C. S. Lewis on the Fullness of Life: Longing for Deep Heaven* (Mahwah, New Jersey, 2009). 125 pages. \$14.95. ISBN 9780809145430.

The title of this book is something of a misnomer. It is neither an in-depth study of C. S. Lewis nor an assemblage of extracts from his works, but a series of meditations on the core beliefs that Lewis and Father Billy, a Redemptorist priest, have in common. To be sure, Lewis provides the scaffolding for this volume, which begins with his imaginative reconception of Hell as a matter of mind and will in *The Great Divorce*, and ends with his breathtaking vision of the entry into Heaven (“new Narnia”) at the end of *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Between the introductory Inferno and the concluding Paradiso, each of the six main chapters is launched by an epigraph from Lewis, followed by a brief discussion of its import. But then in most instances Lewis abruptly fades from view, resurfacing occasionally in the form of a quotation, though not much more prominently than the array of other worthies—from Irenaeus to Benedict XVI—who embellish Father Billy’s elucidation of Christian faith.

The subtitle takes better measure of this book, which is suffused with the spirit of Lewis’ *Sehnsucht*—the “longing for Deep Heaven”—or, as Father Billy puts it, “a continual yearning for God that flows, at one and the same time, both from and toward an ever-deepening friendship with Christ” (17). If “friendship” at first seems inadequate to the relationship it defines, the term grows less disquieting, and gains some theological heft, as we read on.

The six principal chapters are devoted to successive stages of the Christian drama of redemption: (1) the birth of the Incarnate Christ; (2) his passion and death on the Cross; (3) his descent into Hell; (4) his resurrection from the dead; (5) his ascension into Heaven; and (6) his return in glory at the end of time. Once it is clear that Lewis is not the main focus of, but rather the springboard for, each of these chapters, we can begin to appreciate the virtues of Father Billy's own voice. Each of his six stages offers its own opportunity for sustained meditation, and each concludes with a series of questions and some disarmingly simple prayers. As we pass from stage to stage, however, the narrative progression becomes increasingly evident, and, in the last few chapters, the symmetries of the two major movements of the drama—descending (chapters 1–3) and ascending (chapters 4–6)—grow ever more edifying with every turn of the page. Father Billy's reflections are at once eloquent and accessible; he seems equally at home in approaching the unfathomable mysteries of the Trinity as he is in considering the problems of everyday life, and as adept in bringing rarified doctrine down to earth as in situating the passage of each and every day within the providential scheme of redemption and glorification.

As a series of meditations on the Christian life, this book seems well tailored for use in group discussion or personal devotion. In the spirit of Lewis' "mere Christianity," it transcends divisions and denominational differences and speaks to Christians of every stripe (even though one chapter, somewhat incongruously, seems addressed specifically to Roman Catholics). It is hard to imagine Lewis objecting to much (if any) of this—aside, perhaps, from his name in the title—and easy to envision Lewis' Christian readers following Father Billy on this journey through the stages of their faith.

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Michael Ward, *The Narnia Code: C. S. Lewis and the Secret of the Seven Heavens* (Carol Stream, Illinois, 2010). 193 pages, including "For Further Reading" and Discussion Guide. \$13.99. ISBN 9781414339658.

This delightful little book might almost be called *Planet Narnia for Dummies*—but if any dummy reads it, he will find himself vastly enlightened and educated; it is a simplified, shortened version of Michael Ward's ground-breaking work *Planet Narnia: The Seven Heavens in the Imagination of C. S. Lewis* (2008). That scholarly work established Ward, in the words of the famous New Testament