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Review of Women and C.S. Lewis

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Book Reviews

Carolyn Curtis and Mary Pomroy Key, eds., *Women and C. S. Lewis* (Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2015). 287 pages. \$17.95. ISBN 9780745956947.

Over the past several decades, C. S. Lewis has been accused, by many capable writers and researchers, of being a misogynist. The myth lingered for many years, contaminating and catalyzing discussions among scholars and fans alike. No one has officially taken the critics to task until the publication of *Women and C. S. Lewis*. Carolyn Curtis and Mary Pomroy Key have compiled twenty-six short essays, divided into five sections, on the topics surrounding C. S. Lewis and women, which whet the appetite for deeper study. Without a doubt, these women have achieved their goal of creating a book that is valuable to both scholars and more casual readers. These essays are written by a wide variety of established Lewis scholars, alongside newer voices in the field, and scholars in other disciplines. There is also some variety in the theological perspectives of these authors. For example, Lewis's views on the ordination of women are discussed by some who would agree with Lewis and others who would disagree.

The common thread throughout *Women and C. S. Lewis* attempts to respond to the accusation that Lewis was sexist. The first section of the book looks at Lewis's relationships with women throughout his life, from his mother, to Mrs. Moore, to his wife, Joy Davidman. This section along with section two (how girls and women are portrayed in Lewis's fiction) and section four (Lewis the influencer), are perhaps the strongest parts of the book. Dr. Devin Brown's chapter where he answers the question "Are *The Chronicles of Narnia* sexist?" stands out among the rest. Dr. Joy Jordan-

Lake's chapter highlighting the ways Lewis attacks gender stereotypes in *The Great Divorce* is one of the best essays in this collection, along with Andrew Lazo's chapter on *Till We Have Faces* and Joy's immense influence on Lewis and this novel. As Lazo states, "*Till We Have Faces* represents the crowning achievement, a culmination, of Lewis' thinking on gender" (140).

As Steven Elmore writes in his chapter, when we examine the writings of C. S. Lewis, we find that he is "far more nuanced and complex as a writer than his worst critics [. . .] give him credit for being" (118). As it turns out, Lewis's views on women were more progressive than his critics suppose. The strongest case against the charge of misogyny against Lewis is most likely his marriage to Joy and his friendships with many other intelligent women such as Dorothy Sayers, Elizabeth Anscombe, Ruth Pitter, etc. So the chapters that discuss these relationships are also well worth the time.

Although the book is brimming with insight, some chapters do feel a bit short and end rather abruptly, but that may just be the nature of this type of compilation. After all, there are other, longer, more academic books that do go into more depth on some of these issues and accusations. In the end, *Women and C. S. Lewis* is well worth reading as a good overview and preliminary defense of Lewis's views on women. At the conclusion of the book, co-editor Carolyn Curtis writes, "We conclude that both Lewis' life choices and his writings take a high view of women, noting that the direction of his attitudes about women continues higher as his life goes on" (269).

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Ron Dart, *C. S. Lewis and Bede Griffiths: Chief Companions* (Abbotsford, BC, Canada: St. Macrina Press, 2016). 62 pages. \$9.95. ISBN 9781530176434.

This sixty-two-page "booklet" contains a "CliffsNotes" or abridged version of the friendship between C. S. Lewis and Dom Bede Griffiths (1906-1993, born Alan Richard Griffiths), a convert to Catholicism and Benedictine, later Camaldolese, monk-priest. The stated justification for this short study is that "there has virtually been no work done on the forty-