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Recent Dissertations

C. S. LEWIS: FROM A MARIAN PERSPECTIVE **Dissertation Abstract**

*Rev. Arthur Mastrolia**

In recent years, the life and writings of C. S. Lewis have received much attention from both Christian scholarship and the reading public. Lewis was recently called "the twentieth-century's favorite Christian writer." In 1996, there were sixty of his works available in print, provided by thirty-five publishing companies in the United States alone! Popular interest was in great part sparked by the recent Hollywood re-make of the original British film *Shadowlands*. The author's personal library is housed at the Marion E. Wade Center of Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois, which was founded in 1965 for the purpose of setting up a study center on the works of seven popular English writers of Christian literature of the twentieth century. The renewed interest in Lewis as a writer of Christian apologetic and religious fiction has prompted scholars to present Lewis's theology and spirituality to an interested readership as literature rich in Christian tradition and orthodoxy which addresses issues of vital concern to humankind in the latter part of the twentieth century. The "New York C. S. Lewis Society" (which is in fact an international organization) sends its monthly Bulletin to over 600 members striving to foster and share an appreciation for the author's works.

C. S. Lewis may be considered a "popular writer," and his works continue to appeal not only to those interested in theology and spirituality, but also to a wide popular audience. This does not mean, however, that Lewis was not a serious theologian—despite the fact that he did not consider himself as such. It is precisely because he has made theological exposition accessible through popular literature that I chose to study the theological implications of his spiritual reflection. I am convinced that his writings have had profound spiritual impact on very many people who find in them and in his life story an access to theological truths which they otherwise would not have taken from systematic theological treatises.

Because of his continued popularity as a religious guide, theologians should become familiar with his thought and evaluate his status as an influential Christian author of the twentieth century. Because his own pilgrimage to the Christian faith was

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a reasoned and logical one, and because his writings reflect life experiences, he is widely received as a modern Christian apologist in a post-Christian era. Lewis was able to address theological truths in a language attractive to the non-professional reader as well as to readers of diverse Christian communities. He only and always wanted to elucidate "mere Christianity."

Many religious authors (especially non-Catholic apologists) are admittedly not willing to be explicit about the role of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the economy of salvation, because there does not exist a broad consensus on that role among the various Christian communities. Lewis was very explicit in his confirmation that this was precisely the reason why he himself would say little about Mary other than asserting the theological presuppositions and implications involved in the virgin birth of Christ. Since Lewis did not consider himself a theologian, and because he was not a Roman Catholic, we should not expect to find an explicit Mariology in his works. Instead, what I attempt to bring to light is the Marian "attitude" (ethos, principle, dimension) which I have found not only to be present to Lewis's thought, but also to be a driving—if unconscious—force in his expositions on the nature of Christianity. I wish to assert that while the content of his works is not mariological, his perception of Christian discipleship is strongly Marian. The challenge of this endeavor is to highlight precisely this dimension and to verify the presuppositions contained therein by recourse to the generally accepted parameters of mariological thought in an attempt to be able to validly recommend the appreciation of this popular modern author in a Marian perspective.

My approach for describing Lewis's "Marian attitude" is first to give a presentation and brief exposition of five of the major themes which Lewis employs in his writings, followed by an analysis of his writing style—particularly as employed in his fictional works. Next, an overview of the theological heritage of the Anglicanism which influenced Lewis, as well as the influence of two of his own admittedly most favorite modern Anglican theologians is given, in order to show that a Marian attitude would not be foreign to his mind. Here are explored the thought of major Anglican theologians of the seventeenth century—the so-called "Golden Age" of Anglicanism—whose theology influenced Lewis, a scholar of the history of English Literature. I then consider the critical influence of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century Anglican theologians, George Mac Donald and Charles Williams.

Following this, I attempt to draw a definition of a "Marian attitude," by recourse to some of the earliest teachings of certain Fathers of the Church regarding Mary's role in the history of salvation, supplemented by recent magisterial teachings on Mary as well as recent insights of Scriptural exegesis of pertinent Marian texts. Once arrived at a definition of a "Marian attitude," I apply the definition to certain of the major spiritual and theological works of C. S. Lewis to see the proposed correspondence between this attitude and the attitude which comes out of Lewis's writings.

Finally, since his experience of joy was a driving force in Lewis's life, I attempt to illustrate how the type of joy which we find in the Lucan Magnificat of the Blessed Virgin Mary resonates well with Lewis's understanding of Christian joy. All of this is an effort to substantiate the claim that a "Marian attitude" is central to his theology and spirituality.