



# Marion E. Wade Center Friends of the Wade

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## *Make-believe vs. Make Belief* by David C. Downing

Even as adults, C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien enjoyed stories about dragons. Tolkien was one of the world's leading authorities on the classic dragon tale, *Beowulf*. And his main antagonist in *The Hobbit* is a dragon named Smaug. In Lewis's *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, a self-centered boy, Eustace Scrubb, wakes up as a dragon, eventually experiencing his "un-dragoning" by Aslan himself.

Both Lewis and Tolkien also enjoyed biblical accounts of angels, and both created angel-like creatures in their own stories. Lewis's *eldils* in his Ransom trilogy represent his imaginative supposal of how angels might be perceived in a modern-day setting: beings who appear only as "footsteps of light." Tolkien once said that he viewed Gandalf as a kind of angelic helper, sent to aid those doing battle with the evil Sauron.

Though dragons and angels have enriched many a story, there is a fundamental difference. Dragons exist only in the world of "make-believe," the world of fantasy and imagination. The pleasure of contemplating angels, by contrast, comes from the conviction that they actually do exist, a part of the spiritual dimension we (normally) do not see, except with the eyes of faith. The figures of dragons and angels, therefore, suggest two very different kinds of imagination, the *aesthetic* and the *spiritual*.

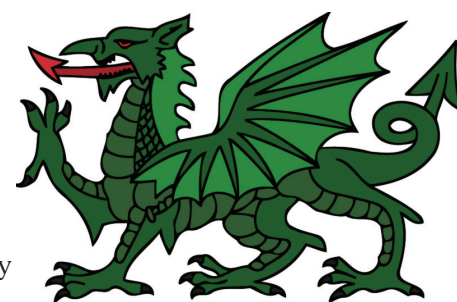
Though he never used the terms *aesthetic imagination* and *spiritual imagination*, C.S. Lewis seemed to intuit the difference in his teenage years, long before he became a Christian. Growing up he fed his aesthetic imagination with children's stories by Beatrix Potter and Edith Nesbit

and, in later years, with classic fantasy and science fiction tales by Jules Verne and H.G. Wells. But when he was 17 years old, he came across *Phantastes*, a work of Christian fantasy by George MacDonald.

Lewis said that the tale had many qualities that he had come to expect in tales of wonder, but that a new quality was present as well—a "bright shadow" that he eventually recognized as Holiness, a glimpse of the moral ideals and spiritual realities that undergirded the story. Lewis said that *Phantastes* "baptized his imagination," causing him to recognize the beauty of holiness, a crucial step in his conversion journey.

After he became a Christian in his early thirties, Lewis used the aesthetic imagination of fantasy to enliven his readers' spiritual imaginations, to visualize in their mind's eye the spiritual world that remains mostly unseen. When one reader asked Lewis what "facts" lay behind his fantasy stories, Lewis replied: "Behind my own stories there are no 'facts' at all, tho' I hope there are truths. That is, they may be regarded as imaginative hypotheses illustrating what I believe to be theological truths." Though Tolkien may not have stated his aims so straightforwardly, he too felt that his Christian faith was embedded in his *Lord of the Rings*, that the fundamental sense of good and evil in our world could be more dramatically portrayed in a fictional setting.

For both authors, and for their mentor, George MacDonald, "make-believe" was a gateway to "making Belief," enlisting the imagination as a powerful tool for reaffirming the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen. **W**



## **DIRECT FROM THE DIRECTORS**

Crystal and David C. Downing

In speaking to audiences in seven different states this past year, we encountered more and more parents who worry about the spiritual listlessness of their teenaged or twenty-something children. And it would seem their concern is well-founded. Recent surveys have shown that, when asked about their religious affiliation, 3 in 10 people under age thirty indicate “None.”

We believe that an important part of our mission and ministry here at the Wade is to help all seekers, but especially young people, connect or re-connect with the family of faith. Our seven Wade authors, who continue to be relevant in this third decade of the new century, are a crucial part of this endeavor.

For example, many young people today assume that being a Christian involves taking political stances that they find unattractive. This contemporary problem was anticipated by C.S. Lewis, when he wrote in *The Screwtape Letters* of a senior devil who advised an apprentice tempter to encourage Christians to associate partisan politics with their faith, eventually seeing it as the *most* important part. As the diabolical mentor concludes, “Once you have made the World an end, and faith a means, you have almost won your man. . . . Provided that meetings, policies, and causes matter more to him than prayers and sacraments and charity, he is ours.”

We could give many more examples. But the larger point is that the great Christian voices from the last century continue to speak to questioning minds in our own century. Our task, our role in the larger Christian community, is to apply these timeless insights to our own time and place.

## **Enhancing Knowledge**

Whether you prefer to learn through reading, listening, or participating, the Wade Center has a variety of offerings to enhance your knowledge of our authors.

### **Read VII**

In soon-to-be-published volume 36 of the Wade’s academic journal, *VII*, we see that the work of former Wade directors, Clyde S. Kilby and Lyle Dorsett, continues to bear fruit today. In June 1975, Kilby returned from England with the papers of Robert Havard, C.S. Lewis’s personal physician, including a draft of Dr. Havard’s “Appendix” to *The Problem of Pain*. That unedited appendix, alongside an article examining Lewis’s editorial approach, is being published for the first time in volume 36 of *VII*. Likewise, Dorsett’s work on his biography of Joy Davidman was the first step in the Wade’s ongoing connection to Joy’s son, Doug, who deposited his mother’s papers at the Wade in 2010. Among these manuscripts was an unpublished sermon by Joy, also included in volume 36.

Visit [journals/wheaton.edu/vii](http://journals/wheaton.edu/vii) to learn more about the contents of volume 36 and how to order your print or digital copy.

### **Listen to the WADE CENTER PODCAST**

The scholarship of current Wade co-directors, David and Crystal Downing, is reaching a global audience through a novel format with the Wade Center Podcast. Launched in December 2018 and over 30 episodes later, it has inspired more than 13,000 listens from more than 60 countries. The podcast interviews include a range of figures including bestselling authors, scholars, and creative professionals.

Listen online at [wheaton.edu/listen](http://wheaton.edu/listen) or search ‘Wade Center Podcast’ on any podcasting app or platform.

### **Participate in our EVENTS**

With the goal of offering something for everyone, a variety of events have been planned for the spring. Perhaps it’s a book talk and signing on April 16 that interests some, or a lecture on April 20 that explores Lewis and economics. For younger audiences, there are story times and drama presentations during Spring Break (March 30-April 3). And because their “Feisty Friendship” dramatic presentation has been so well-received, the Downings are developing another one for Alumni Weekend (May 8), “The Truth or Nott,” imaginatively recreating Lewis’s and Sayers’s interaction with an audience after atheist Kathleen Nott canceled their scheduled debate at the last minute.

View a complete listing of all spring events on our Events page: [wheaton.edu/wadeevents](http://wheaton.edu/wadeevents). **W**

# A First for the Wade



On November 1, 2019, the Wade Center did something never attempted in its fifty-plus-year history: it sponsored an evening of ballet!

As part of our Muriel Fuller Celebration of the Arts and in partnership with the Wheaton College Artist Series, we brought to campus Ballet 5:8, a troupe committed to honoring Jesus Christ through the artistry of dance. Inspired by the work of C. S. Lewis, the dancers presented three ballets: two short works that illuminated Lewis's essays "The Weight of Glory" and "Meditation in a Tool Shed," followed by their showcase piece, "The Space in Between," based upon Lewis's *The Great Divorce*.

Over a thousand people, including numerous students, came to the event, many expressing delight and praise afterwards. One Wade researcher wrote us in gratitude for "the exquisite ballet performance," saying she and her family "were mesmerized by the beauty of it all." A young woman unfamiliar with *The Great Divorce*, who came

as a last-minute guest of her mother-in-law, was moved to tears during the ballet and has since been exploring Lewis's novel and asking questions about what she is reading.

To make the most of the evening, David Downing offered a lecture on *The Great Divorce* prior to the ballet in order to help those who wanted to better understand the spiritual fantasy. Then at the conclusion of the ballet, we hosted a reception at the Wade Center for patrons as an opportunity to introduce them to our building, artifacts, and authors. We were filled to capacity!

One family summarized the evening perfectly: "Everything went like clockwork and coalesced into a day of rare experiences which we will remember for years to come." Most importantly, as they note, the Wade's first [ballet] put God first: "We are in awe of such talent and are so very grateful for the opportunity to see God's awe-inspiring work bestowed upon us with generosity." **W**



Upper: Ballet 5:8 dancers in a scene from "The Space in Between"; Lower (l-r): David Downing offering a lecture on *The Great Divorce*; Crystal Downing enthusiastically welcoming Ballet 5:8 to the Wade; ballet patrons streaming through the Wade Center for the reception.

# Mere Christianity: An Accidental Classic

C.S. Lewis's *Mere Christianity* has sold over 3.5 million copies in the 21st century, translated into 36 languages so far. In 2000, it was named as the #1 most influential book among Christian readers, according to a survey conducted by the editors of *Christianity Today*.

This is an amazing impact for a book that was released with no fanfare or publicity. After all, *Mere Christianity* was not considered to be a new book, but a collection of three previous books published in the States under different titles. Those three books, in turn, were based upon four series of broadcast talks that Lewis gave over BBC radio between 1941 and 1944.

The story begins in February 1941 when J.W. Welch of the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) wrote to Lewis inviting him to give a series of four brief talks. Welch had been impressed by Lewis's book *The Problem of Pain* (1940), and he suggested that Lewis might talk about modern literature as viewed by

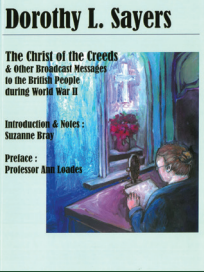
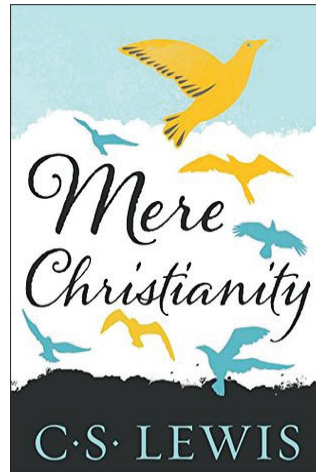
a Christian or else the Christian faith itself as understood by a layperson. Lewis chose the latter—one of those “two roads diverging” moments that may have influenced the rest of Lewis's life and his ongoing legacy.

Lewis spent most of those first four talks discussing the Moral Law

within. He felt that many people of his generation had lost all conviction of sin, viewing human deficiencies in terms of psychological complexes or social injustices. They could not hear the good news of salvation, Lewis thought, until it was clear to them that they were indeed lost and in need of saving.

Lewis's first series of talks generated so much interest—over a million listeners by the end of August—that the producers of the BBC asked him to add a fifth talk to answer the deluge of letters that had come pouring in. Before the series had even ended, Lewis was asked to do a second series of talks, and then a third, and a fourth.

By the end of World War II, it is said that Lewis's voice was one of the most recognized on BBC radio, after that of Winston Churchill himself. **W**



## book talk

If it weren't for Dorothy L. Sayers, we may never have heard of

*Mere Christianity*. Before thinking to ask Lewis to deliver broadcast talks in 1941 (see adjacent story), BBC radio recruited the far more famous Sayers. Written copies of those broadcasts are now available thanks to Suzanne Bray, Professor of English at Lille Catholic University in France.

Titled *Dorothy L. Sayers: The Christ of the Creeds and Other Broadcast Messages to the British People during World War II*, Bray's finely edited volume demonstrates Sayers's ability to explain ancient Christian creeds using lively examples and lucid prose. After two broadcasts in August of 1940, Sayers was asked to do at least six more in 1941. As Bray states in her helpful introduction, “if Dorothy Sayers and T.S. Eliot had not already proved their ability to speak on Christian themes on the radio, it is unlikely that Lewis would have been asked at all.”

