

## “Something Other than God”: C.S. Lewis, Christian Thinker



“...all that we call human history – money, poverty, ambition, war, prostitution, classes, empires, slavery – [is] the long terrible story of man trying to find something other than God which will make him happy.” --C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

**Professors:** Fr. Isaac Augustine Morales, O.P. and Fr. Jordan Zajac, O.P.

### Course Description

World War I vet. Oxford don. Poet. Literary critic. Christian apologist. Writer of children’s fiction. Perennial bachelor turned married man and, not long after, widower. In his sixty-five years on this earth, C. S. Lewis wore many hats. At the heart of his life, however, was the transformation that followed upon his conversion to the Christian faith in 1931. Having spent his life to that point looking for “something other than God” to make him happy, he devoted the rest of his life to offering a compelling and winsome vision of Christianity. This course will explore that vision, considering Lewis’s perspective on such questions as the existence of God, the natural law, virtue and the spiritual life, grief, and the nature of friendship, among others. Because Lewis was first and foremost a man of letters, attention will be paid to both his nonfiction and his fiction, including some of his poetry, sermons, and shorter essays.

### Course Objectives

As part of the core curriculum, this course will satisfy the requirements for a 300 Level Theology Course as follows:

- Students will conduct analysis of primary theological sources and the interpretation of relevant contemporary questions from a theological perspective.
- Students will offer critical appraisal of a theological discussion or presentation and comparison of a theological issue or theme between a Roman Catholic perspective and another tradition in an 8-10 page research paper.
- Students will gain a deeper appreciation for the breadth of what counts as theological discourse.
- Students will fulfill an essential component of the College’s mission by engaging “key questions of human existence, including life’s meaning and purpose, ... the importance of moral and ethical reasoning, aesthetic appreciation, and understanding the natural world, other cultures, and diverse traditions.”

### Required Texts

The following texts will be available through the Providence College bookstore:

- C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*
- -----, *The Abolition of Man*
- -----, *The Screwtape Letters*
- -----, *The Great Divorce*
- -----, *A Grief Observed*
- -----, *The Four Loves*
- -----, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*
- -----, *God in the Dock*
- -----, *The Weight of Glory*
- -----, *Till We Have Faces*

The first six of these works are available as part of the *Signature Classics Collection*, a boxed set that also includes Lewis's essays *Miracles* and *The Problem of Pain*. Other readings besides those listed above will be available on Sakai, as noted in the course schedule.

### Course Requirements & Grading

- **Attendance and Participation (20%):** This course will involve a combination of lecture and discussion. See the handout for how participation will be assessed.
- **Daily Writing Assignments (20%):** For most classes, you will be expected to write a paragraph of 100-300 words on one of three questions regarding the readings for the day. See the handout for details.
- **Midterm Exam (20%):** There will be an oral midterm exam during weeks 6 and 7 of the semester.
- **Research Paper (20%):** Students are expected to write an 8-10 page research paper in which they compare Lewis's thought on a particular theological topic with a Roman Catholic perspective on the same topic. Students may (but do not have to) also include a non-Christian perspective addressing the same topic. Obviously, some topics lend themselves to this more than others. Feel free to consult us for sources from a Roman Catholic perspective.
- **Final Exam (20%):** The final exam will have both a written and an oral component. The written component will be take-home format.

### C. S. Lewis Doodle

Those of you who are visual learners may find the YouTube channel [C. S. Lewis Doodle](#) useful. It has a number of Lewis's books and essays read aloud and illustrated.

### Tentative Course Schedule

*Note: This schedule is tentative and may be modified as the semester progresses. Some readings and topics may require more or less time than allotted, and so we may adjust periodically as the need arises. If you miss a class, you are responsible for finding out the assignment for the next class period.*

Week 1

Jan 18 **Course Introduction: Something Other than God**

Jan 20

**The Christian Imagination: The Chronicles of Narnia**

Reading Assignment: *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, 3-99;  
“On Three Ways of Writing for Children” (Sakai)

Week 2

Jan 25

**The Christian Imagination**

Reading Assignment: *LWW*, 100-189; “The Planets” (Sakai); Michael Ward,  
“Narnia’s Secret,” *Touchstone Magazine* (available [here](#))

Jan 27

**The Christian Apologist**

Reading Assignment: *Mere Christianity*, Books One and Two (pp. 1-65);  
“On Being Human” (Sakai)

Week 3

Feb 1

**The Christian Apologist**

Reading Assignment: *Mere Christianity*, Book Three (pp. 69-150);  
“Man or Rabbit?” (*God in the Dock*, 108-114)

Feb 3

**The Christian Apologist**

Reading Assignment: *Mere Christianity*, Book Four (pp. 153-227)

Week 4

Feb 8

**C. S. Lewis, Theologian and Children’s Writer**

Reading Assignment: “Is Theology Poetry?” (*The Weight of Glory*, 116-140);  
“Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What’s to Be Said” (Sakai)

Feb 10

**The Question of Miracles**

Reading Assignment: “Miracles,” “Horrid Red Things,” “The Laws of Nature,”  
and “The Grand Miracle” (all in *God in the Dock*)

Week 5

Feb 15

**Is Moral Relativism Compelling?**

Reading Assignment: *The Abolition of Man*, 1-51; Selections from *The Latin Letters of C. S. Lewis* (Sakai)

Feb 17

**Moral Relativism**

Reading Assignment: *Abolition of Man*, 53-101; “We Have No  
‘Right to Happiness’” (*God in the Dock*, 354-360)

Week 6

Feb 22

**\*\*\*Midterm exam this week and next\*\*\***

**Administrative Monday: No Class**

Feb 24

**Demons, Heaven, and Hell**

Reading Assignment: *The Screwtape Letters*, 1-56; “The Trouble with ‘X’” (*God in the Dock*, 161-165)

- Week 7**  
 Mar 1      **\*\*\*Midterm exam if you didn't take it during week 6\*\*\***  
               **Demons, Heaven, and Hell**  
               Reading Assignment: *Screwtape*, 57-109
- Mar 3      **Demons, Heaven, and Hell**  
               Reading Assignment: *Screwtape*, 111-175
- Week 8**  
               **Spring Break**
- Week 9**  
 Mar 15     **Demons, Heaven, and Hell**  
               Reading Assignment: *The Great Divorce*, 1-87; “Nearly They Stood” (Sakai)
- Mar 17     **Demons, Heaven, and Hell**  
               Reading Assignment: *Great Divorce*, 89-146; “The Weight of  
 Glory” (*The Weight of Glory*, 25-46)
- Week 10**  
 Mar 22     **Grief**  
               Reading Assignment: *A Grief Observed*; “Five Sonnets” (Sakai)
- Mar 24     **The Nature of Love**  
               Reading Assignment: *The Four Loves*, 1-39
- Week 11**  
 Mar 29     **The Nature of Love**  
               Reading Assignment: *The Four Loves*, 41-72
- Mar 31     **The Nature of Love**  
               Reading Assignment: *The Four Loves*, 73-115
- Week 12**  
 Apr 5      **The Nature of Love**  
               Reading Assignment: *The Four Loves*, 117-148
- Apr 7      **The Nature of Love**  
               Reading Assignment: *The Four Loves*, 149-180
- Week 13**  
 Apr 12     **Love of Self and Love of Family**  
               Reading Assignment: “Two Ways with the Self” and “The Sermon and the  
 Lunch” (both in *God in the Dock*)
- Apr 14**    **Holy Thursday**

Week 14

Apr 19

**A Myth Retold**

Reading Assignment: *Till We Have Faces*, 1-88

Apr 21

**A Myth Retold**

Reading Assignment: *Till We Have Faces*, 89-174

Week 15

Apr 26

**A Myth Retold**

Reading Assignment: *Till We Have Faces*, 175-284

Apr 28

**A Myth Retold**

Reading Assignment: *Till We Have Faces*, 287-352

Week 16

May 3

**Virtuous and Vicious Membership**

Reading Assignment: “The Inner Ring” and “Membership” (both in *The Weight of Glory*)

May 5

**Retrospect: C. S. Lewis, Christian Thinker**

Reading Assignment: “Some Thoughts,” “Meditation in a Toolshed,” and “First and Second Things” (all in *God in the Dock*)