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Andrew C. Skinner, and Robert L. Millet
C.S. Lewis: The Man and His Message..

Review by Jared Lafitte

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Skinner, Andrew C. and Millet, Robert L. *C.S. Lewis: The Man and His Message.* (Bookcraft, 1999). 185 pp. ISBN 1-57008-665-6.

C.S. Lewis: The Man and His Message is a collection of essays delivered at the 1998 Brigham Young University Lewis Conference in honour of the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of C.S. Lewis. The book is a compilation of eleven of the fourteen presentations given, with only minor editorial changes. These essays are written from the Latter-day Saints' perspective, and though I do not subscribe to this perspective, I can readily appreciate many of the truths presented. The book is replete with references both to the Bible and to the Book of Mormon.

The authors highlight a variety of Lewis' insights on the theological, ecclesiological and practical issues of Christian living, and many of them note Lewis' eclectic mixture of influences which shaped his Christian faith. In the book's second essay, *Drawn by the Truth Made Flesh*, author Brent Slife explains:

Why, in conclusion, was Lewis attracted to Christianity? My answer is deceptively simple . . . Lewis was drawn to and drawn by the Word Made Flesh [Jesus Christ] – a combination of both the Truth and the Relationship. . . his formal academic training initially steered him toward a completely dissimilar form of truth . . . even after his formal conversion he continued to mix elements of Hellenism with Christianity. However, I believe we see this mixture lessening in his later works, such as *A Grief Observed*, and a fairly complete relationship occurring with Truth. (35)

Slife's insight is emblematic of the overall demeanour of the essays toward Lewis' faith: a diplomatic study which acknowledges Lewis' evangelical foundation accompanied by a gentle but unsuccessful attempt to reconcile orthodox Christianity with LDS perspectives. While some are more explicit about this than others, the essays employ broad, inclusive language to attempt this reconciliation, such as in 'Truth' and 'Relationship' above.

Another example of this is Neal A. Maxwell's essay *Insights on Discipleship*, which conflates 2 Peter 3:11 and 3 Nephi 27:27 to support Lewis' teaching on the 'need to develop composite Christian character' (14). It appeals to Jesus' call to imitate him from both sources, as if Lewis would have drawn equally from the words of Jesus in the Bible and the book of Mormon. The majority of the other essays generally assume this harmonization, and it comes across as naïve at best and vain at worst, because of significant distinctions at the heart of the divide between orthodox Christianity and Mormonism, for example, Jesus Christ's status within the Trinity.

Maxwell also notes Lewis' conception of Christian discipleship and formation as consisting in, more than anything else, attentiveness to holiness amidst the mundane. Lewis was concerned that 'we can end up passing some of life's major exams while still flunking some of the daily quizzes' (12). The call to this type of Christian character is a call to embrace God comprehensively with dependence, not unlike a man's moment-by-moment dependence on air and water and food, wherein it is the ground of one's life rather than an expendable detail of it. Although I was hesitant about the undercurrents behind Maxwell's thinking (namely the divergent and extra-biblical practices inherent to Mormon discipleship), I was encouraged by this nonetheless true and insightful explanation of the development of character for the Christian.

Perhaps less contentiously among the essays, in *God's Megaphone to a Deaf World*, Brent L. Top notes Lewis' discussions of agency, wickedness, and pain. Man in his brokenness bears the difficulties of a sinful world, and God calls man to himself through pain (his 'megaphone', p. 121). Brent explains, 'In reality, these 'bad things' are beneficent tokens of divine love from our Father in Heaven' (129). Again, though I reject the theological persuasions undergirding Top's conception of sin and brokenness, I can readily accept these ideas as true and beneficial as I wrestle through pain and suffering in my own experience.

Andrew C. Skinner explains in his essay *Summing Up the C.S. Lewis Conference* that the principal aim of C.S. Lewis was to 'point us to the greatness of Christ and the salvific message of hope to be found in the doctrine of Christ. We see this effort reflected in his fiction, his didactic prose, and even in his correspondence' (157). As I see it, whether Lewis would subscribe to an LDS theological framework or not (I suggest he would not), his chief aim was to answer the universal questions of whether there is redemption from, and transcendence within, the human experience, vis-à-vis the resounding glories of Jesus Christ. Theological issues aside, the authors successfully evince their goal to examine Lewis' contributions as an

‘observer of the human condition and an astute social critic’ (57) in ways that would appeal to LDS sentiment.

The book concludes with an appendix of the chronology of events in the life of C.S. Lewis, which serves as an interesting miniature biography in itself, as well as an appendix chronicling the writings of C.S. Lewis. The book is a broad journey across a spectrum of the issues of the heart in the Christian experience, and it is well worth consideration.

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