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Milton Walsh, *Second Friends: C.S. Lewis and Ronald Knox in Conversation*

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Milton Walsh, *Second Friends: C.S. Lewis and Ronald Knox in Conversation*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008. 360 pp. ISBN 978-1-58617-240-4.

When reading the title *Second Friends: C.S. Lewis and Ronald Knox in Conversation*, my first thought was, ‘I didn’t realise that C.S. Lewis and the Oxford University Catholic chaplain were friends’. At the beginning of the book’s introduction, the author, Fr Milton Walsh, clarifies his use of the phrase ‘Second Friends’ to place Lewis and Knox in relationship. Lewis’s and Knox’s time in Oxford overlapped by thirteen years (1926-1939), but they only met near the end of Knox’s appointment as chaplain to the University’s Catholic population, when their mutual friend, the Inkling Dr R.E. ‘Humphrey’ Havard, invited them both to join him for lunch. Walsh quotes Havard’s recollection of the lunch as described in the latter’s contribution to James Como’s book *Remembering C.S. Lewis: Recollections of Those Who Knew Him* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005): ‘ “Lewis started well by greeting him [Knox] as possibly the wittiest man in Europe. After that the party flourished, and both afterward expressed their delight with the other” ‘ (p. 13, qt. Como p. 361). Though they apparently enjoyed each other’s company on the few times they did meet, they did not have sufficient opportunity to develop a friendship, since Knox left Oxford not long after this initial meeting. Walsh conjectures that, had they become friends, they would have been ‘Second Friends’, a phrase Lewis uses in *Surprised by Joy* to mean a friend who ‘shares your interests but approaches them from a different angle: “He has read all the right books but has got the wrong thing out of every one” ‘ (p. 14, qt. Lewis p. 199). This phrase is in contrast to a ‘First Friend’, who ‘shares all your interests and most secret delights and sees the world as you do’ (p. 14).

Walsh uses the concept of the Second Friend to show how Lewis and Knox shared many of the same interests and views in theology and apologetics, especially a shared mission to defend the Christian faith from both secular materialism without and liberal modernism within, but the lenses through which they viewed Christianity did not quite align. The greatest cause of this difference was their conception of the

Church. Both were converts: Lewis, from a youthful atheism to the Anglican communion in which he had been raised, and Knox, from the Church of England (including ordination as a priest) to Roman Catholicism. Walsh does describe beliefs and practices of Lewis that point toward the more Catholic side of Anglicanism, including his belief in Purgatory, the use of the phrase 'the Blessed Sacrament', and his practice of regular confession to a priest. However, Walsh also correctly points out that Lewis had legitimate doctrinal differences with Roman Catholicism, including with the doctrine of papal infallibility and the hyper-veneration of Mary, and that Lewis did not side with Anglo-Catholicism. Knox, on the other hand, came to believe that the Roman Catholic Church had an apostolic authority which the Church of England did not have, and this authority meant that the doctrines this Church taught were true. By comparing the thought of Lewis and Knox on the various points of Christian doctrines which they defended, Walsh is able to show how their viewpoints converged on the doctrines which Lewis would have placed under the umbrella of 'mere Christianity', but separated on issues that defined Protestantism over against Catholicism. In particular, Walsh has chapter-length examinations of Lewis's and Knox's thought on: arguments for the existence of God, the divinity of Christ, the interpretation of the Bible (including a valuable introduction to modern principles of biblical criticism with which both disagreed), the possibility of miracles and the supernatural, 'scientism' and evolutionism, the problem of evil and suffering, the importance of love to Christian life, the identity of the Church (the chapter which contains the most disagreements), prayer, and the 'last things' of death, judgement, Hell, and Heaven.

Walsh has a comprehensive understanding of both Lewis's and Knox's works, including publications other than their works of theology and apologetics. (For example, Walsh quotes the theological comments sprinkled within Lewis's *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century (excluding Drama)*, and mentions the theological themes within Knox's detective fiction.) There is a useful appendix comparing both authors' output in the genres of juvenilia, poetry, autobiography, novels, theological fantasies, theology, and literary criticism (using the categories delineated by Walter Hooper, who provides a foreword to the book, in his *C.S. Lewis: A Companion and Guide*), as well as the works not mirrored in the other's *oeuvre*, *The Chronicles of Narnia* for Lewis and translations (including liturgical texts and the Vulgate Bible) for Knox.

Readers thoroughly familiar with the theological and apologetic writings of one or both of the two authors will probably not gain many new insights into each particular author's work (though they may gain some by being reminded of arguments given in the less popular writings of each of the two men). The great

value of this book is in the conversation between the two authors. This conversation shows just how large is the area of doctrine deemed worthy of defence by both of these Christians, though they were of two different communions, and as such is a help to Lewis's stated mission of focusing on what unites the churches, rather than on what divides them. In addition, those who have read Christopher Derrick's *C.S. Lewis and the Church of Rome* and Joseph Pearce's *C.S. Lewis and the Catholic Church* will find this book a valuable supplement to those books' arguments, especially since Walsh takes a different approach by comparing the thought of two great defenders of the Christian faith, one Anglican and one Catholic, instead of focusing on Lewis and his barriers to Catholicism.

Finally, the great delight of this book is in finding a new friend. In his conclusion, Walsh writes, 'Ronald Knox and C.S. Lewis were not friends in this life (although we can hope they are now), but they befriend those who read their books. They may be our first friends who say what we believe, only better; or they may be the second friends with whom we carry on a running debate in our minds. But friends they are' (p. 335). It is to be hoped that readers only familiar with Lewis's works will find a new (and possibly unexpected) friend and ally in Ronald Knox, and that fans of Knox's writings will find a new (and perhaps similarly surprising) friend and ally in C.S. Lewis. We may thank Fr Walsh for his services as matchmaker, and for giving us the opportunity to make a new friend in whom we can delight.

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