

Joel D. Heck, *Irrigating Deserts*, and, Richard Hill and Lyle Smith, *Teaching C.S. Lewis: A Handbook For Professors, Church Leaders, and Lewis Enthusiasts*.

Review by Roger White

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Irrigating Deserts: C.S. Lewis on Education. by Joel D. Heck. St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Academic, 2005. 270 pp. ISBN 0758600445 and *Teaching C.S. Lewis: A Handbook For Professors, Church Leaders, and Lewis Enthusiasts*. By Richard Hill and Lyle Smith. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007. 165 pp. ISBN 184718149X

Joel Heck's *Irrigating Deserts: C.S. Lewis on Education* is the Lewis reader's 'Companion and Guide' for matters related to C.S. Lewis and education. What Walter Hooper did in his classic work *C.S. Lewis: A Companion and Guide*,¹ providing an overview of Lewis' life and work in general, Heck does specifically with regard to the subject of education in Lewis' experience and writings. The title, *Irrigating Deserts*, is taken from Lewis' *The Abolition of Man*, where he writes, 'the task of the modern educator is not to cut down jungles but to irrigate deserts'.² In addressing this topic, Heck describes Lewis' philosophy of education as found in Lewis' educationally-themed writings and through examination of Lewis' experience as a student and teacher. Heck's book is intended for professional educators at the university level who are interested in Lewis' thinking related to educational philosophy.

Richard Hill and Lyle Smith approach the topic of education from a very different, decidedly more practical perspective. In *Teaching C.S. Lewis: A Handbook For Professors, Church Leaders, and Lewis Enthusiasts*, these authors provide a resource for those teaching Lewis' works in a variety of academic and non-academic settings. Specifically, they provide individual summaries of seven of Lewis' books plus the Chronicles of Narnia as a whole, and provide teaching strategies and discussion questions related to each book. Hill and Smith additionally extract some key themes from each work for highlighting in group study or classroom settings.

In short: *Irrigating Deserts* looks at education in the life and work of C.S. Lewis. *Teaching C.S. Lewis* is a teacher's aid for those teaching selected works of Lewis.

In looking more closely at *Irrigating Deserts*, one finds three major sections followed by a substantive collection of appendices that make up almost half the book. Part One addresses what Lewis believed and wrote about education. Chapters address his views on the philosophy and practice of education, curriculum, and reading. Part Two examines Lewis' early schooling and later study at Oxford,

looking at the type of student he was and how the educational system influenced him. Part Three considers his work as a teacher at Oxford and Cambridge.

Six appendices conclude this work and provide some of the most helpful material in the book. Heck is to be commended for the research that yielded these valuable sections. Appendix I lists all the books Lewis read between 1922-1927 as described in his diary. The next three appendices (II-IV) describe and summarize three writings on education heavily referenced and critiqued by Lewis in his own work on the subject: *The Norwood Report*, *The Control of Language* (i.e. *The Green Book*), and *The Reading and Writing of English*. Appendix V provides biographical notes on over 150 of Lewis' educational colleagues at Oxford and Cambridge, providing a window through which to see the depth and breadth of Lewis' associations and the rich interdisciplinary sphere of reciprocal influence in which he lived. The last appendix (VI) gives a timeline of Lewis' life, including all dates and locations of his educational experiences and later teaching posts. A glossary of terms, notes on chapters, and a thorough bibliography conclude the book.

Heck is the first to offer a concentrated treatment of Lewis and education in a single volume. While the book is more descriptive than analytical, the strength and value of this reference-oriented work lies in the scope of material collected on this specialized theme.

In *Teaching C.S. Lewis*, the reader finds book summaries along with teaching aids for *The Screwtape Letters*, *Mere Christianity*, *Out of the Silent Planet*, *Perelandra*, *That Hideous Strength*, *The Great Divorce*, *Till We Have Faces* and the *Chronicles of Narnia*. The format for each chapter includes biographical background material on Lewis at the time of writing that particular book, chapter summaries, key themes, study questions, and further reading recommendations. Three appendices give readers further resources for teaching the works of Lewis. These include plans for a one-book reading group, a multi-book reading group, and a syllabus for a university-level course.

The value of Hill and Smith's book is in its appeal to those who teach Lewis in various contexts as well as the range of resources provided for crafting instructional experiences. Since most readers for whom this book was written will probably not be scholars of Lewis' work, having a synopsis of some of Lewis' books with recommended key themes for consideration is useful, as is the provision of a bank of questions on which to draw for discussion. All of these resources provide instructors with useful and practical material for designing their particular course curricula.

Professional educators reading *Irrigating Deserts* may wish that Heck had provided deeper analysis of Lewis' application of his views regarding the purposes, means, and roles of education, as well as more consideration of how Lewis' ideas can be translated into practice today; but Heck's stated purpose to present systematically Lewis' views on and experience in education is clearly met. His thorough work provides a solid and necessary foundation from which these deeper questions connecting theory and practice could be pursued.

Novice and experienced teachers reading *Teaching C.S. Lewis* may find the book summaries reminiscent of those found in Walter Hooper's *C.S. Lewis: A Companion and Guide*. The same books are summarized in both volumes. Even so, chapters in *Teaching C.S. Lewis* include the additional material of key themes, discussion questions, and further reading recommendations. One difficulty with the summaries and key themes is their brevity. While this assists in timely lesson preparation, it doesn't promote depth of understanding. On the other hand, seasoned educators will be glad to see that the discussion questions generally avoid simple recall answers and promote personal reflection through incorporating higher order critical thinking skills. Taken together these resources may be particularly well suited for those readers just beginning their foray into a deeper understanding of Lewis work.

While these books were intended for different audiences, they have related purposes, namely to bring the wisdom and contributions of C.S. Lewis into the tutorial session, seminar, group study, or classroom, regardless of context. In this regard, they are complimentary volumes. A concluding recommendation regarding these two books relates to reading order. Read Heck's *Irrigating Deserts* to glean important insights into the philosophy of education as mediated through C.S. Lewis' life and work. Learn Lewis' thoughts on what education should be and how it should work. With this important theoretical base, continue reading for the emphasis on praxis found in Hill and Smith's *Teaching C.S. Lewis*. Since the latter book excludes the foundational background on the nature of education, it is best utilized in creatively applying the recommended teaching strategies and discussion questions towards the goal of helping readers experience Lewis' writing for themselves. This advice to read the books together is also a plea for a more thorough blending of theory and application, to avoid the pedagogical pitfall of uncritical formulaic reproduction of a teaching guide.

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Notes

1. Walter Hooper, *C.S. Lewis: A Companion and Guide* (London: Harper Collins, 1996).
2. C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996) p. 27.

