

Foreword

A modern-day Kohelet might word the warning in the megillah a little differently—“Of making many books about C.S. Lewis there is no end.” In 2005, writing for *The New Yorker*, critic Adam Gopnik¹ takes the C. S. Lewis industry to task, deploring the extent to which the lovers of his work, conservative American Evangelicals in particular, have made of Lewis something akin to the deceased leader of a cult. Gopnik’s article, which points to Lewis’ less exalted reputation in Britain and takes quite a few pot shots at Lewis himself along the way, is written in a snide tone that displays an often-tone-deaf religious sensibility. Nonetheless, he has a point. Lewis’ life story has had numerous iterations in the form of books, plays, and film. I have read and seen a number of them myself. In the end, the interpreters of his life often unconsciously tell us more about themselves than about their subject.

So, why is this book different from all other books? I will admit that what drew me to the opportunity to contribute the foreword was the intriguing angle of approach: *A Hebraic Inkling—C. S. Lewis on Judaism and the Jews*. I had to admit I had not come across that one before.

I was attracted for two main reasons. The first is that I am and have been a Jewish believer in the gospel for close to fifty years. The second reason is that Lewis played a formative role in that faith decision. The privilege of supplying this forward is a welcome pretext to bring to mind my first encounter with Lewis as a young seeker and the effect he had on

1. Adam Gopnik, “Prisoner of Narnia,” *The New Yorker*, Nov 21, 2005: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2005/11/21/prisoner-of-narnia>

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me then, as well as from that point on as I read most of his books and have revisited many of them over the years.

I never encountered Narnia in my childhood years and had never heard of Lewis when someone loaned me a copy of *Mere Christianity* while my struggle to understand the Christian message was already under way. Pausing at the threshold, I came to realize later that I was seeking intellectual permission from myself to exercise a manner of faith that I have come to view as an epistemological category all its own. Lewis helped me get there, and it was not easy.

Although a religiously uncommitted Jew, like many of my peers I had nonetheless a well-formed commitment to the history and heritage of my people, as well as a cultural identity passed down as second nature by my parents and other relatives. Christianity was the bells of the Catholic Church and the crucifixes that seemed to greet my eyes virtually everywhere I looked. It was foreign and threatening. A child of the 1950s, I may have known the number six million before I could count to six and I think I must actually have believed at one point that the Nazis were a species of Christian who simply worked more efficiently to eliminate us than the others had.

This hedge of misunderstanding, suspicion, and distrust I had almost unconsciously erected around the gospel prevented me from encountering its message until a series of dance steps in what I like to call God's choreography upset my complacency. As I found myself increasingly attracted to the gospel's message of forgiveness and new birth, I was simultaneously terrified, wondering what would happen to my "*pintele yid*," the Jewish spark that animated my personhood. If I came too near Christians or their churches, would I have to learn to hunt and play golf or do whatever else gentiles did with themselves on weekends? At that point, a Jewish Jesus or any knowledge whatsoever of the Jewish context of what eventually emerged as Christianity was still unknown to me.

Like many others before me, I was much taken by the patient and friendly tone of Lewis' apologetic writing as he adduced the arguments to make his case. Almost despite myself, I was disarmed, then charmed, and finally convinced. That is, Lewis brought me to the place where I was able

to say I no longer had a justifiable reason to withhold my faith. And for that, I am eternally grateful. Over the years, Lewis' work has continued to delight, edify, and challenge me.

I also read enough about him to be at least somewhat aware of the path of his pilgrim's way and the milestones that marked its progress: the first gentle context of his childhood, the rude thrust from the nest brought about by his mother's death, the Orwellian horrors of the public school, rescue in the form of "Old Knock" Kirkpatrick, the war, the budding career of the young academic, his atheism, his romance with "Northerness" and myth, his encounter with McDonald's "goodness," his famous walk and talk with Tolkien and Dyson and his self-identification as "the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England."

Paul Brazier covers this familiar territory, as many other have done, but he has done so in a way that has provided insight into an element of Lewis' faith that has been, up to now, as far as I'm aware, quite overlooked. It is that not only did Lewis arrive by incremental steps to acceptance of the gospel, once he has accepted it, he seems to have come fairly quickly to the realization that the gospel he had surrendered to and the God he had encountered through it were integrally bound to the wider context of salvation history borne witness to by the children of Israel and their prophets. In short, because C. S. Lewis' God was integrally connected with the both the history and the destiny of the Jewish people, so was he.

And, of course, who would have dreamed that this seemingly insulated don would encounter the embodiment of this realization literally in the flesh in the person of Joy Davidman. Dr. Brazier truly brings Davidman to life. I frankly had no idea we had so much in common. She attended Hunter College; I attended Hunter College. She lived on the Grand Concourse in the Bronx; so did I, albeit when it was in a seedier condition. She had some of her formative spiritual experiences in Central Park as I did. Although she was a generation behind me, I clearly recognize the type of Jew she perceived herself to be prior to her faith decision. My own field of study has certainly taught me that the sub-culture of artistic, politically active, urban, secular Jews that flourished in New York in the early to mid-twentieth century is a world well worth

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exploring. And like her, my own understanding of Jewish identity was truly revolutionized after my surrender to Yeshua.

Dr. Brazier also brings to the fore the extent to which Lewis' reverence for the Hebrew Bible informs his understanding on the new covenant. One of his most penetrating analyses that draws upon this sensibility is that of the portrait of Frank and Sarah Smith in *The Great Divorce*. Here, as Brazier leads us to realize, Lewis has consciously echoed the style and cadence of the prophet Isaiah and the Book of Psalms.

Dr. Brazier's work is replete with well-researched, surprising nuggets. My favorite is Lewis' observation in his foreword to Davidman's *Smoke on the Mountain* that the Jewish follower of Yeshua (my preferred designation) is the only normal human being.

Who knew?

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