

**David Clark, *C.S. Lewis: A Guide to His Theology*,
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C.S. Lewis A Guide to his Theology. Blackwell Brief Histories of Religion. David Clark. 200 pp. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007. ISBN 9781405158848

The number of books about C.S. Lewis' writings seems to grow year on year, particularly from American writers and publishers. Most of these volumes are introductions written for the general reader. Why do academics eschew a serious systematic study of Lewis despite their respect for him? David Clark (Professor of New Testament and Greek, Vanguard University), in *C.S. Lewis a Guide to his Theology*, provides what appears initially to be a general introduction, aimed very much at American Evangelicals, asserting the Biblical basis of Lewis' theology; but does he have anything new to say? The answer is yes, though in subtle ways. Essentially, Clark extrapolates the Scriptural ground of Lewis' works. This is, in effect though unstated explicitly, his primary aim, and is achieved through an examination of Lewis' life, though also through the meta-narrative that underpins Lewis' apologetics. This takes the form of an introductory assessment of redemption and anthropology, spirituality, purgatory and resurrection, that is, teleologically, the end-game of life.

Clark's work consists of seven chapters: '1. From Atheist to Apologist', focuses on Lewis' life and development, his conversion(s), and the roles assigned to him as a mature Christian. '2. Lewis Looks at his World' considers the theology of aesthetics and morality. '3. Lewis Reaches out to His World' considers Lewis' approach to the story of redemption as the myth that entered history, with particular attention to his re-presentation of the redemption story in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and *Perelandra*. '4. Humanity in God's Creation' explores Lewis' anthropology, angelology, and his perception and respect for animal life in creation. '5. Walking by Faith' examines what Lewis wrote and taught about faith. '6. God's Plan for the Soul', deals with sanctification, and therefore the thorny topic of Purgatory (*The Great Divorce*), and the question of universalism. Finally, '7. God's Plan for the Body - and the Universe', explores what Lewis believed and presented about resurrection and creation, in particular *post mortem* sanctification, including what Clark terms, 'judgement by fire': the burning purity of the angel in *The Great Divorce* - Lewis' metaphor of fire whereby the glory of God would appear as light to the righteous, but as fire where sin was still present (a metaphor Clark roots biblically in the Parable of Dives and Lazarus). Clark concludes with the question,

‘Did Lewis Pass the Test?’ In answer he asserts that Lewis contributed much to our understanding of Biblical Theology, especially teleologically, eschatologically, and how we may face judgement. Clark’s analysis of purgatory, and his own logical arguments about sanctification and purgation, is amongst the most piercingly succinct and accurate that I have read in relation to what Lewis believed and wrote; Clark critically examines what evidence can be gleaned from the New Testament, and how Lewis interpreted this analogically.

Lewis was an Anglican who endorsed Richard Hooker’s *via media*; reason was therefore as important as Scripture and church tradition. Is not the Biblical basis of Lewis’ work just one aspect? Is Clark filtering for North American Evangelicals, or does he see Lewis’ work in a wider context? – the answer is a cautious yes. Methodologically although this is an introduction to the scriptural ground of Lewis’ dogmatics, Clark does extrapolate using reason in the way Lewis did – to bring out the truth of scripture. Clark is to be congratulated for carefully, subtly, questioning one myth: that in comparison with so-called professionals and experts Lewis is an amateur (p. 164f). Admittedly Lewis contributed to this myth, but I am firmly of the opinion that this was a smoke screen erected by Lewis to separate him from a clerical élite in the ‘modern’ and ‘liberal’ Church of England of the mid-twentieth century. Lewis may not have graduated in theology, but he was far more qualified than thousands of theology graduates today. Lewis gained a triple First from Oxford; he was a trained philosopher and a believing Catholic–Evangelical who did not hide behind a seemingly disinterested academic exposition of what other theologians have said. Second, he did not get lost in semantic analysis and linguistic nihilism where we end up not speaking or writing because the act of speaking and writing is considered to be culturally conditioned and oppressive! In analyzing the Scriptural ground of Lewis’ theology, Clark inevitably if implicitly raises the question of what is a theologian, and what is the ground of our doctrine and ethics. Lewis sought to return to theology’s Patristic and Biblical roots, eschewing – or being highly suspicious of – pronouncements from modern philosophers and liberal theologians. Clark understands this and can see its importance. Lewis was neither an amateur nor a professional – he was a prophet, calling the church(es) and individual Christians back to an orthodox-biblical faith, the faith of the Fathers. This ground is also the ground of Clark’s assessment of Lewis’ theology.

Therefore Clark in conclusion can assert that the theology of Lewis is centred around one word: redemption. As a new believer he began to look around at his world and asked: “What on earth (pun intended!) is God up to?” The Scriptures gave him the answer he sought: God has acted and continues to act in human history to restore his world and his universe to himself. That “treatment”

includes us, and when our redemption is complete, he will even use us in his redemptive plans for nature, Lewis believed. (p. 168).

This is certainly a better than average introduction for the average reader of Lewis' *corpus*, and is certainly recommended for a general audience, particularly given that Clark does have some original perceptions.

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