



## *Summer Seminars-in-Residence at "The Kilns"*

*Week I: July 7 – 13, 2007*

*Week II: July 15 – 21, 2007*

### **C.S. Lewis and the Truth of Imagination**

Lewis was both a brilliant writer of works of imagination and also a brilliant reader and interpreter of other people's work. What did he believe about myth and imagination? What kinds of wisdom and truth telling can we find in his fiction and poetry and in the work of the poets and imaginative writers who influenced him? In the course of this week, we will explore Lewis' ideas about, myth, allegory, story telling and poetry, and share what he himself learnt from some of his great predecessors, from Dante to Shakespeare, as well as from some of his great friends, such as Owen Barfield and JRR Tolkien.

The theme for all these seminars will be "The Truth of Imagination", a phrase first coined by John Keats. Imaginative writing and the whole human imaginative faculty can become, under God's grace, a means of apprehending truth. C.S. Lewis was fascinated by myth but for a long time could not reconcile it with the strict demands of reason, to which he is also a faithful and important witness. We look at his achievements in reconciling reason and imagination and at some of the writers who influenced him. Through our reading and discussion of Lewis we can begin to construct a theology of imagination which gives full weight to the insights that come through playful creativity but still seeks for a public and objective truth as the content of faith. We can see if such a theology of imagination helps us to be discerning readers of the new works written by our contemporaries. Although our discussion and illustration of these themes will be going on informally in all sorts of ways throughout the week, I will also be providing five lecture/seminars to keep those discussions well fuelled. These will be:

#### **Session 1: Poetry, Playfulness and Gospel Truth.**

Some historical background about the "enlightenment" quarrel between "reason" and "imagination" and then a first look at how poetry and imaginative writing go about the business of truth telling. Illustrated with poems by C.S. Lewis and Seamus Heaney.

#### **Session 2: The Shakespearian roots of Lewis' romance, fantasy and imagination.**

We will read together some great passages from the "magical" plays *Midsummer Nights Dream* and *the Tempest*, and see what parallels there are with the works of Lewis and his friends.

#### **Session 3: Thinking with the Inklings.**

In this session we will plunge deep into the wonderful conversation about truth and imagination which was always going on between Lewis, Tolkien, Barfield, and Williams, touching on some of the works that influenced them, especially Dante, Milton, Wordsworth and Coleridge. What would we say now, if we were there?

**Session 4: History, Story, Myth, Allegory, and Parable. What's the difference?**

We will look together at the way Lewis understood and used these different genres and try to illustrate and explore them all with examples drawn entirely from Lewis' own work. Often these elements are combined; we can probably discern all of them in different ways and places within the Chronicles of Narnia and the Space Trilogy. We will draw largely on Lewis' fiction and poetry for this session.

**Session 5: That was then, this is now.**

What happens if we take the best ideas about the "Truth of Imagination" which we have found through Lewis and the Inklings and apply them to contemporary writing, music and cinema? Who is out there, what's good and what isn't? Let's share our reading and pool our resources. Can we make a constructive Christian critique of the Harry Potter series, The Pullman novels, or "science fiction" that draws heavily on allegory, such as the Matrix? We need to engage with these works in a way, which neither demonises them, nor simply capitulates to their many hidden (and not so hidden) agendas.

Finally, can Lewis' ideas help us not just to be discerning readers, but also to be better writers? We will try to focus on those insights that will help people who are trying to write imaginative Christian literature today.

