TRADITIONS OF SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE

C. S. Lewis as Spiritual Mentor

Introduction

THERE IS AN EMERGING CONSENSUS in our contemporary society on the importance of people acting as guides to others. While developmental psychologists affirm the contribution mentors can make regarding career and professional choices, self-help groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous and Alanon speak of the value of sponsors for ongoing recovery. In the area of Christian spirituality, the need for sponsors in the conversion process and spiritual guides for ongoing transformation is once again being recognized as important if not essential to the life of faith. As a pastoral theologian, I have for some time been interested in these various forms of mentoring. I believe that they can be of significant help not only for younger people in their formation years, but for all of us throughout life as we face unexpected crises and predictable transitions. I am also convinced that the ministry of being a *spiritual* mentor or guide never was an exclusively clerical domain, and that more lay people should consider this particular form of ministry for themselves—as many already are.

In order to help people name some of the mentoring they have already experienced or done as well as to help lay people recognize their own potential as spiritual mentors, I propose in this article a model or paradigm for such ministry: the Anglican convert and Christian apologist, C. S. Lewis. More than twenty years after his death, he has become one of the most popular Christian writers in the twentieth century with an appeal that transcends ages, interests and theologies. Science fiction fans appreciate his novels; children's imaginations are touched by his *Narnia* tales; fundamentalists value his clear statements on Christianity; many adults find guidance from him regarding the meaning of suffering, the dimensions of grief and the ways of prayer. Lewis also speaks to those of us who study or teach theology because he seems to consider theology itself not only as an intellectual journey (important as that is), but also as a journey of the heart: a search for wisdom and the holy life. If we agree with Pascal's definition of a great man as someone who is not at one extremity or another, but touches both at once, we can see in Lewis's broad appeal intimations of greatness.

There is more than just his appeal as a writer, however; there are the very real accomplishments that can be found in his daily life and ministry.

A professional in his own right as professor of English literature at Oxford and Cambridge Universities in England, he also acted as a lay theologian, preacher and spiritual guide. Believing that the Church means 'the whole body of practising Christians' and that it is silly, even wrong to expect the clergy to do everything,[1] Lewis demonstrated in many ways how mentoring in general and spiritual mentoring in particular can be an important part of lay ministry. This article explores three areas where he mentored others: through teaching, letter-writing and preaching. It attempts to discern what qualities and strengths he brought to these ministries, and the implications of his mentoring for people today who, whether professionally trained or not, see themselves called to mentoring relationships, especially those associated with spiritual guidance.

C. S. Lewis as tutor

As much as Lewis today is recognized for his extensive writings, the primary vocation out of which his writing and all his ministries flowed was that of being a teacher. For over thirty years he taught students, most of that time at Magdalen College, Oxford.

The published remarks of former students whom Lewis tutored provide insight into certain qualities which contributed to his effectiveness as a teacher, and to their own respect for and genuine love of the man. One of those students, H. M. Blamires, describes Lewis as someone who knew both how 'to nourish a pupil with encouragement and how to press criticism when it was needed without causing resentment'. Lewis did not think of himself 'as taking pupils through a course; rather he saw his pupils as having two years or so under his guidance, during which they could start on a process which would occupy the responsive ones for the rest of their lives'.[2] Derek Brewer speaks of him as an ideal tutor who was conscientious, efficient, intellectually brilliant and a man of wide culture. 'One of his most notable characteristics', Brewer says, 'was his magnanimity, his generous acceptance of variety and difference'.[3] Luke Rigby, another student who, like Brewer, had Lewis as a tutor during World War II, confirms this opinion, and then adds:

> What stands out in my memory is the warmth of the man. He was always welcoming and showed total interest and concern. The startling contrast between his achievement . . . and my mediocre promise did not open a gulf; he was a true master, the true teacher. He shared his appreciation and enthusiasm and thereby instilled confidence . . .[4]

These are brief comments from only three of Lewis's thousands of students, but they are representative of many. When we study one of these tutoring relationships in more detail, we gain an even better

understanding of Lewis as teacher and guide, and, as he himself moved toward conversion at the age of 31, of his ministry as a spiritual mentor.

One of the earliest students Lewis tutored at Oxford was Bede Griffiths, later to become a Benedictine monk and author of his own conversion story, *The golden string*. Griffiths entered Magdalen College as an undergraduate in 1925, just after Lewis became a tutor of English literature there. 'Lewis was at this time', according to Griffiths, 'no more Christian than I was'.[5] Though the younger man had no contact with Lewis during his first two years, Lewis became his tutor during Griffiths' third year. Those weekly sessions in English literature revealed to the student some of his tutor's gifts:

> Lewis had the most exact and penetrating mind I had ever encountered, and his criticism of the essays which I brought to him . . . was the best education which I could have had. He had always a complete mastery of the subject, and never allowed any looseness of thought or expression. But these criticisms often led on to a general discussion, which was sometimes continued almost to midnight, and we began now to think along almost identical lines.[6]

Lewis's mentoring gradually went beyond the subject of literature for, as Griffiths attests, while their relationship 'ripened into friendship', it was through Lewis 'that my mind was gradually brought back to Christianity'. 'Both he and I came to religion by way of literature', Griffiths acknowledges, and as they read together 'we both began to discover more and more of the religious background of what we were reading'.[7]

Conversion did not happen suddenly for either of them, but involved a long process of shared questions and common readings in Chaucer, Spencer, Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth and Keats. While it was happening, Griffiths says, 'I was probably nearer to Lewis than anyone else'.[8] When the younger man left Oxford still searching, the two continued to correspond by mail. Like the conversion stories of others before them,[9] the turning-point for both men came in solitude when they surrendered to a Higher Power, and knelt and prayed. Though Lewis was converted first and though each man later came to identify his conversion with different ecclesial traditions, both men's stories reveal similar steps and phases: (1) years of searching, (2) a time of self-scrutiny or inventory, (3) the acknowledgment of sin, (4) surrender in solitude, and (5) an experience of God's overwhelming love for them despite their original reluctance, blindness or stubbornness.[10] What is also striking is how each depended on the other for guidance and encouragement during those years of searching—even though Lewis has originally started as the older, more experienced and more educated of the two. Lewis tells us in

his autobiography that Griffiths was 'my chief-companion on this stage of the road',[11] and dedicates his book, *Surprised by joy*, to his friend. Griffiths says that 'we were simply two friends finding our way to what was believed to be the truth'.[12] The younger man also points to some of the underlying dimensions of their relationship:

> He [Lewis] always treated me as an equal in every respect, as I believe that he treated all his other friends. In going through his correspondence with me, which covered more than thirty years, I have been touched to see how unvarying was his friendship, how totally he accepted me, appreciating what I said, disagreeing when necessary, but always with complete sincerity, giving his time and attention to answering my letters, as though he had nothing else to do . . . I think it was through him that I really discovered the meaning of friendship . . . There are not many things in my life more precious to me than that friendship.[13]

C. S. Lewis as letter-writer

Lewis's continuing to correspond with Griffiths after the younger man had left Oxford was characteristic of him, for he consistently maintained relationships by mail when distance separated him from friends. As his fame grew through his books, however, the volume of mail from friends and strangers increased dramatically, and it became more difficult for him to keep up. Still, he answered the letters as soon as he could, sometimes with the help of his brother, Warren. Lewis's response to people in this way became another form of spiritual mentoring: encouraging and guiding others as they faced the questions of life and faith. Clyde Kilby, an editor of some of those letters, tells us that the main reason Lewis answered them so conscientiously was that he believed 'taking time out to advise or encourage another Christian was both a humbling of one's talents before the Lord and also as much the work of the Holy Spirit as producing a book'.[14] Another editor, James Como, describes Lewis as an 'epistolist who steadily corresponded with literally thousands of strangers seeking advice and comfort', many of whom 'attributed their religious conversions, reawakenings and even vocations to Lewis's influence'.[15] One of these was Joy Davidman, the woman Lewis married late in life. Their relationship too began with themselves as 'pen-friends', after Lewis's writings had influenced Joy's own conversion.[16]

Many of the thousands of letters Lewis wrote have been edited and published in separate volumes. Perhaps the most interesting correspondence in which Lewis acted as spiritual mentor is found in the book, *Letters to an American lady*. Here, unlike other books of his published letters, we can discern the dynamics of an ongoing relationship with one person in particular and Lewis's response as guide. These letters were written

to a woman he had never met, a Roman Catholic widow, described by those who knew her as a very charming and gracious southern aristocratic woman who was a writer of articles, poems and stories. Because she wished to remain anonymous when the letters were published, she is referred to simply as Mary, 'an American lady'.[17] Lewis wrote to her from 1950 to a few months before his death November 22, 1963, and even though some of the letters are brief due to the pressure of other responsibilities, Lewis's concern for the woman is evident. His letters to her reveal how spiritual mentoring, while it definitely includes discussion of the spiritual life, often goes beyond so-called 'religious' topics and 'God-talk'.

In those letters, Lewis discussed everything with her—from the price of books to his love for his homeland, Ireland, and his numerous visits there: 'All the mountains look like mountains in a story, and there are wooded valleys, and golden sands, and the smell of peat from every cottage'.[18] However, when she is faced with an unnamed 'terrible affliction', Lewis is not afraid to offer serious advice: 'The great thing, as you have obviously seen, (both as regards pain and financial worries) is to live from day to day and hour to hour not adding the past or future to the present'. In another letter, he suggests that she avoid taking other people's inventories: 'Try not to think—much less speak of *their* sins. One's own are a more profitable theme!' Concerning the paradox of ministry, he tells her that 'very often I expect, the service He really demands is that of *not* being (apparently) used, or not in the way we expect, or not in a way we can perceive'. For the most part, any advice he gives is presented in the context of his own life: 'What most often interrupts my own prayers is not great distractions but tiny ones—things one will have to do or avoid in the course of the next hour'.[19]

This is perhaps the most common characteristic of Lewis's guidance: a willingness to share his sacred journey in all its joy and sorrow with her. Describing his life and others' as 'a wandering to find home', he tells her of his marriage in 1956 to Joy Davidman, and how 'no one can mark the exact moment at which friendship becomes love'. He speaks of the adoption of Joy's two sons as his own, and the adjustment that produced: 'My brother and I have been coping with them for their Christmas holidays. Nice boys, but gruelling work for two old bachelors! I'm dead tired now'. When his wife dies of cancer four years later, he acknowledges his sense of overwhelming loss and speaks of his own insights into the dimensions of grief: 'It isn't a state, but a process. It keeps on changing—like a winding road with quite a new landscape at each bend'. As his life draws to a close, Lewis enunciates a principle underlying all mentoring: 'we are members of one another whether we choose to recognize the fact or not'.[20] He also talks about an experience

of personal conversion and reconciliation with a long-time (and long-dead) enemy:

> Do you know, only a few weeks ago I realized that I at last *had* forgiven the cruel schoolmaster who so darkened my childhood. I'd been trying to do it for years; and like you, each time I thought I'd done it, I found, after a week or so it all had to be attempted over again. But this time I feel sure it is the real thing. And (like learning to swim or to ride a bicycle) the moment it does happen it seems so easy and you wonder why on earth you didn't do it years ago.[21]

His last letters to the American lady allude to his own death and confirm his belief in resurrection. He tells her that 'it will be fun when we at last meet', and, in farewell: 'I am quite comfortable but very easily tired . . . So you must expect my letters to be very few and very short. More a wave of the hand than a letter'.[22]

Sheldon Vanauken, author of *A severe mercy*, summarizes what many experienced through Lewis's letter-writing. For him, Lewis was 'a strong, genial, stimulating, loving presence in my life, . . . above all, a friend'.[23] One other observation can be made. As much as Lewis's writing to people had a positive effect on their lives, he too learned, even to the point of incorporating that style of composition into two highly readable and successful books which took the form of letters: *The Screwtape letters*, and *Letters to Malcolm: chiefly on prayer*. The latter, published posthumously, discusses, as Lewis did with the American lady, the dimensions of prayer, including its many distractions.[24]

C. S. Lewis as preacher

Not a great deal is written about Lewis as a lay preacher, especially when we consider the amount of space his biographers give to other aspects of his career. When we turn to some of Lewis's published remarks as well as the recollections of friends, however, we discover how extensively he was involved in this form of spiritual mentoring.[25] Not only did he preach at various Oxford and University of London chapels throughout his career, he also served during World War II on the Staff of the Chaplains' Department of the Royal Air Force. This was at the time he was giving his ecumenical 'Broadcast Talks' for the BBC explaining what he called 'plain Christianity'.[26] Such involvement—in addition to his other professional responsibilities—might surprise us and even Lewis himself. As a friend of his recalled, 'Lewis often said that if anyone had told him in his atheist days that he would someday step into a pulpit and preach he would have considered that man raving mad'.[27]

Those who heard Lewis preach relate how much they experienced his sermons as a form of *personal* spiritual guidance despite their being part

of large, crowded congregations or a vast radio audience. A colleague of Lewis's at Oxford, Father Gervase Mathew, tells us that no matter what the occasion, Lewis always 'forged a personal link with those who heard him'.[28] Erik Routley, a student at Oxford during the war years, suggests that so many people felt that linkage because of Lewis's personal attentiveness and serious concentration on his listeners when he spoke. According to Routley, this was Lewis's 'great secret' and it explains why so many people had 'precious memories' of him.[29] Routley was present on two occasions when Lewis preached in Oxford's Church of St Mary the Virgin. Lewis's first sermon there, in the place where such notables as John Wesley and John Henry Newman also had preached, was delivered in the fall of 1939. That Lewis as a layman had been asked to preach at St Mary's was evidently a public recognition of his varied talents in other areas, since Walter Hooper, his biographer, says that 'perhaps the greatest accolade given Lewis' was this invitation.[30] As Routley remembers the occasion:

> It was odd enough in those days to have a preacher there who wasn't a clergyman of the Church of England, and I thought I would go along. The service was held at 8.00 p.m. on Sunday, and I suppose I arrived about ten minutes before eight. There was hardly a seat to be had.[31]

The young man's initial curiosity was rewarded, for he heard Lewis preach one of the great sermons of his career, 'Learning in war-time'.

'We are members of one body,' Lewis told his congregation, 'but differentiated members, each with his own vocation'. Whatever our vocations might be, rooted as they are in our upbringing, talents, choices and circumstances beyond our control, all find their value in one principle: 'The work of Beethoven, and the work of a charwoman, become spiritual on precisely the same condition, that of being offered to God, of being done humbly "as to the Lord"'. Discerning our vocation also includes, Lewis said, leaving the future in God's hands:

> Never, in peace and war, commit your virtue or your happiness to the future. Happy work is best done by the man who takes his long-term plans somewhat lightly and works from moment to moment 'as to the Lord'.[32]

Routley returned to the University Church in June, 1941, to hear Lewis preach the sermon entitled 'The weight of glory', described by two of his biographers as 'perhaps the most sublime piece of prose' ever to come from Lewis's pen.[33] Again, Routley tells us, 'the place was packed solid before the service began', and yet, the manner in which

Lewis 'used words as precision tools, the effortless rhythm of sentences, the scholarship made friendly, the sternness made beautiful—these things all made it impossible for the listener to notice the passing of time'.[34] What especially touched his listeners was the power of Lewis's convictions, evident in the passage which is the origin of the sermon's title:

> It may be possible for each to think too much of his own potential glory hereafter; it is hardly possible for him to think too often or too deeply about that of his neighbor. The load, or weight, or burden of my neighbor's glory should be laid daily on my back, a load so heavy that only humility can carry it . . . There are no *ordinary* people. You have never talked to a mere mortal . . . (I)t is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit.[35]

Routley left the church after the service, deeply moved by what he called Lewis's poetry in the service of the gospel.

Stuart Babbage, a chaplain in the British Royal Air Force, gives us another account of Lewis's preaching, this time to a congregation not composed of young university students. In *C. S. Lewis: speaker and teacher*, Babbage describes 'one unforgettable night' when Lewis spoke to a select congregation of servicemen. As he tells the story, Lewis had been warned earlier that the officers and airmen to whom he would preach that evening would possibly face some form of ostracism from their more skeptical comrades for their participation in the religious service. Lewis had said then to Babbage that 'it might be helpful if I told them something of what it costs me to be a Christian'.

That evening, with the Air Force chapel just as uncomfortably crowded as any Oxford church, Lewis evidently remembered his earlier conversation. As Babbage recalls the scene:

> Lewis stood in the aisle, a dishevelled and dumpy figure in a baggy suit. Having invoked the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, he announced his text: 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me'.

So skillful in his use of metaphor and story, Lewis then went on to describe in vivid imagery the torture and brutal death of Jesus. He did not stop there, however, but brought the experience of Jesus into dialogue with his own:

> Lewis told us what it had cost him, as an Oxford don, to be a Christian . . . His liberal and rational friends, he explained, did

> not object to his intellectual interest in Christianity; . . . but to insist on seriously practising it—that was going too far. He did not mind being accused of religious mania, that familiar gibe of the natural man; what he was unprepared for was the intense hostility and animosity of his professional colleagues.

Lewis related these hurtful memories, Babbage tells us, because of his concern for those who were listening to him. He also reminded them by way of concluding that any form of ostracism they might face was not so unusual or unexpected if each of them recalled the original gospel story of a man who experienced new life in spite of suffering and even death. The simplicity of Lewis's message and the personal witness he gave profoundly affected his listeners, 'for this was powerful preaching, born of intense and personally felt emotion'.[36]

According to Babbage, a number of factors obviously contributed to Lewis's effectiveness as a preacher: his ability as a story-teller; his speaking clearly and directly in 'patterns of ordinary conversation'; his bringing into dialogue (as a pastoral theologian would) contemporary experience and Christian tradition. Most important, Babbage posits, was Lewis's instinctive appreciation of empathy and self-identification. He knew how 'to disarm his hearers by placing himself on the same level as those to whom he spoke'. This was not just clever deception or mere posturing: 'Lewis was emphatic that he was neither a professional theologian nor a clergyman. He was, he insisted, a "mere Christian"', struggling like the rest of his listeners to understand and make sense of life and the Christian heritage. Lewis's 'itinerant ministry', travelling the length and breadth of England during wartime instead of staying safe within Oxford's hallowed halls, revealed to Babbage Lewis's vast charity and that he had a 'pastor's heart'.[37]

The foundation of Lewis's mentoring

Clearly, Lewis was a very effective spiritual mentor, a layman of many gifts and qualities, all of which he brought to his ministry. Some of those qualities have already been named: his personal warmth and hospitality, his sense of humour and magnanimity, his willingness to share the wisdom gained from personal experience and reflection upon it. In retrospect, perhaps Lewis's greatest quality, the one which connects all the others, was his care: a deep and abiding concern that Austin Farrer, a colleague and friend of Lewis, described as Lewis's 'taking of the world into his heart'.[38] This capacity for loving was manifest in his compassion and profound respect toward others. It was also evident in his genuine humility: that joyful acceptance of himself as a 'mere Christian' who desired nothing more than to 'compare notes' with others rather than 'presuming to instruct'.[39] Most of all, when we consider all of Lewis's

mentoring, this care was manifest in what his brother Warren called Lewis's 'remarkable talent for friendship'.[40] As our research shows, many people considered Lewis beyond his degrees and scholarly achievements (even in spite of them) as, quite simply, a friend: someone who cared deeply about them, treated them as equals, loved them as they were. Judging from his many friendships as well as his numerous writings on that theme, it is no wonder that he tells us in *Surprised by joy* how 'friendship has been by far the chief source of my happiness'.[41] As a manifestation of his care, it was also the foundation of his mentoring.

A story told by Clifford Morris expresses not only how Lewis's friendship and care were often linked in people's minds, but also how Lewis believed friendship itself, like prayer, is based upon trust and speaking the truth to one another:

> I remember that I once wanted to speak to him (Lewis) about something that was in the nature of a very personal and delicate matter, and he must have sensed my diffidence. I shall never forget . . . how he turned to me, how he smiled at me, and how he then said with tremendous affection, 'My dear Morris, *friends* can say *anything* to one another, and be quite sure that no confidence will be broken'. His written words—so deservedly popular—and his spoken words to private individuals—so remembered and cherished—were freely given, but not without care.[42]

As Morris's story reveals and Lewis's other relationships confirm, Lewis as spiritual mentor encouraged and invited people, through his care, to speak from the heart—to speak openly and honestly about themselves in ways that often led to greater depth in the relationship as well as, in many cases, to conversion, 'a change of heart'. John Henry Newman equated friendship with 'heart speaking to heart',[43] and in the history of Christian spirituality, it is one of the most ancient and valued practices. The desert fathers and mothers believed that this *exagoreusis*, opening one's heart, leads to *hesychia*, inner peace of heart, and John Cassian, writing in the fifth century, speaks of its healing power: 'The foul serpent from the dark underground cavern must be released; otherwise it will rot'.[44] Carl Jung, writing in the twentieth century, would agree with Cassian on the need for self-revelation, but he also was convinced that any guidance which leads to healing or transformation depends not only on honest communication between people, but on the wisdom and care of the guide: 'The practice of this art lies in the heart; if your heart is false, the physician within you will be false'.[45]

Now we begin to see why Farrer referred to Lewis's friendship and care in terms of the heart. The qualities Lewis brought to his ministry, especially his care, had a transforming effect on people, helping many to

discern a direction in their lives as well as the presence of a caring God who is with us as friend and companion on our journeys. Such charisms used for community service have often been associated in the past with the power of ordination. The chaplain Babbage, for example, quoted earlier, compared Lewis's care to his having a pastor's heart. What Lewis's ministry teaches us, however, is that one does not have to be 'officially' ordained to manifest a care called 'pastoral' nor that only the ordained have the power to effect dramatic change. As Chad Walsh writes in *Light on C. S. Lewis* when discussing one form of Lewis's mentoring: 'Though no bishop ever laid hands upon his head, he was a genuine pastoral counsellor via the postal system to many fellow pilgrims who perhaps never sat in the study of an ordained minister'.[46] In some mysterious way, all Lewis's forms of spiritual mentoring transcended the distinctions between those who are or are not ordained, revealing that there is no greater ministry than that advocated by Jesus: 'I call you friends . . . love one another as I have loved you' (John 15,12–17).

Implications for our mentoring

What are some of the implications of Lewis's mentoring for our own ministries? What are some lessons he as spiritual mentor can teach us, a people of a different age and members of a seemingly more complex society and Church? Presupposing that each of us will draw his or her own conclusions, let me initially delineate some here.

First, Lewis can help us recognize the importance of friendship, *our* friendship, as the foundation of any mentoring we do. We may not have all Lewis's talents and qualities, but all of us, made in God's image, have the capacity to reach out with care, to offer others our friendship when it is appropriate to do so. The inter-relationship between friendship and mentoring is affirmed not only by Lewis's ministry, but by such people as the Yale psychologist, Daniel Levinson, in his work, *The seasons of a man's life,* and by such groups as Alcoholics Anonymous.[47] Even Thomas Merton, echoing the words of Lewis to Morris, describes the spiritual director as primarily a friend with whom we can say 'what we really mean in the depths of our souls, not what we think we are expected to say'.[48] We can see in this unity of opinion that just as there are no 'ordinary people', fundamentally there really is no ordinary mentoring if it is done with respect, compassion and care.

Second, as Lewis's mentoring reveals, it is often difficult to distinguish spiritual mentoring from other forms. While the spiritual mentor's relationship may be characterized by more depth and focused more on the 'spiritual' dimensions of life, such as conversion, vocation and the quality of our relationships with neighbour and God, it is often closely intertwined with other forms of mentoring like those of being a teacher, sponsor or counsellor. As Lewis's relationship with Bede Griffiths shows,

spiritual mentoring *in practice* sometimes only occurs because other forms of mentoring have, in fact, preceded it. Perhaps the real difference between spiritual mentoring and other forms is related more to the Christian beliefs and vision the spiritual mentor brings to the relationship than to any difference in specific functions. Certainly, if we agree with Lewis that 'there is no essential quarrel between the spiritual life and the human activities as such',[49] we can see that to exclude any of the ordinary activities of 'mere Christianity' is to deny the fundamental goodness of creation, the unity of our humanity-divinity, and the sacredness of our journeys through time.

Third, Lewis's ministry teaches us that our spiritual mentoring can take many forms. It need not be limited to only one-to-one relationships, but can include large groups inside or outside of liturgical settings. What is important in spiritual mentoring is not whether we are ordained, but that we are convinced of the value of mentoring and that, through our pastoral care, we are able to forge a link with others and speak a language of the heart.

Fourth, Lewis's mentoring reminds us that any linkage between ourselves and others depends on the willingness *and courage* to share our lives and stories—not as people with all the answers, but as those who are searching too for wisdom in the midst of multiple responsibilities and uncertainties. Lewis's sermon to the Norfolk airmen bears this out: honestly sharing our struggles and dreams brings us closer to one another, not farther apart. As Lewis said so often, 'we are members of one another', and the sharing of our stories confirms how much we have in common.

Fifth, although we are not necessarily as talented as Lewis, we all have the ability and responsibility to identify and develop the qualities we do have. We can do this in the same way Lewis did: by taking time to reflect on our experiences and the questions which they raise. This reflection is not only theology in its most basic sense as 'faith seeking understanding', but also a form of prayer which can become a daily practice and discipline. Through our contemplation, we might develop an ever-deepening gratitude and wonder for all those who have loved us first—long before we had awakened to a Higher Power of Love. We might begin to see what they have contributed, and what we, in turn, can contribute to other lives. Such reflection, what Lewis described as 'going down into the cellar',[50] might even help us begin to accept and celebrate both our strengths and limitations, in their totality, as resources for our ministry.

Sixth, Lewis's many significant relationships consistently demonstrate how all mentoring, especially spiritual mentoring, is a form of empowerment which helps others discern their vocations, acknowledge their gifts, and begin to give shape to their dreams. As Lewis's and Griffiths'

relationship also reveals, there is a paradox present in such empowering. Helping others discern their call and encouraging them to risk changes can affect the mentor as much as the person being mentored. In a very real way, mentoring contributes to each person's process of ongoing conversion and discernment of vocational response. This mutuality in mentoring, so often experienced by those who call themselves friends, affirms the most fundamental belief of all Christians: it is not Christianity in the abstract that saves, but Christianity in the flesh.

Finally, Lewis teaches us that genuine mentoring transcends space and time. An encounter with a mentor is not wholly dependent on physical meetings, but on the deepest level of communication: the communion of souls. This communion of souls is clearly demonstrated in all Lewis's mentoring relationships, most especially with the American lady. In retrospect, we can see how—though they never met—in a very real sense they had.

Conclusion

The ancient Irish had a word for someone who acts as a friendly mentor to another human being. The word is *anamchara,* Gaelic for 'soul friend', someone who joyfully embraces our life, questions, and suffering as an extension of his or her own. The Irish also believed that anyone without a soul friend was 'like a body without a head' or like 'the water of a limey well, not good to drink nor good for wishing'.[51] C. S. Lewis stands in that tradition. For many of us, when we read his books or the stories about him, we encounter a friend who opens windows on our souls revealing *our* belief in the ministry of all the baptized, our search for a united Church which values the gifts of everyone, *our* need for friendships and genuine community.

To propose Lewis as a model of spiritual mentoring is in no way to deny his human limitations. As various friends of his admit, Lewis could be stubborn when he thought he was right as well as intolerant of certain aspects of modern life which we might consider essential to an informed citizenry. (He refused, for example, to listen to a radio or read a daily newspaper, stating that if anything were important enough someone would tell him). His views on women and the headship of families—at least until he met and married Joy Davidman—would be considered by many today as archaic, if not outright sexist. Still, as we have seen, his gifts far surpassed his limitations, and even some of those limitations can be seen, like our own, as the reverse side of certain strengths. Whether or not we agree with all of Lewis's opinions (and we would be unthinking cultists if we did), many of us, like the Cambridge scientist who met him for the first time, perceive him as 'a very good man, to whom goodness did not come easily'.[52] In that recognition, we are given hope in our own struggle to live holy lives.

Anyone who considers Lewis a soul friend and visits his beloved Oxford experiences his presence in certain places: Magdalen College where he tutored and wrote so many letters, the Church of St. Mary the Virgin where he preached, the Eastgate Hotel where he first met Joy Davidman, the Eagle and Child pub where he and the Inklings met each week. While the words of Shakespeare, 'Men must endure their going hence', imprinted so starkly on Lewis's tomb in the country churchyard, remind us of the reality of death and of our own mortality, those other places and Lewis's own words remind us of a greater reality: how our friendships survive death itself. As he wrote in his last book:

> Then the new earth and sky, the same yet not the same as these, will live in us as we have risen in Christ. And once again, after who knows what aeons of the silence and the dark, the birds will sing and the waters flow, and the lights and shadows move across the hills, and the faces of our friends laugh upon us with amazed recognition.[53]

Edward C. Sellner

NOTES

[1] See C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, Macmillan, 1952), p 65.
[2] H. M. Blamires, quoted in Warren Lewis, ed, *Letters of C. S. Lewis* (New York, Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1966), p 17.
[3] See Derek Brewer, 'The tutor; a portrait,' pp 42-48, in James T. Como, ed, *C. S. Lewis at the breakfast table* (New York, Macmillan, 1979).
[4] See Luke Rigby, O.S.B., 'A solid man', pp 38-40 in Como, *C. S. Lewis at the breakfast table.*
[5] Griffiths, Bede: *The golden string* (Springfield, IL, Templegate, 1954), p 32.
[6] *Ibid.*, p 48.
[7] See *idem*, 'The adventure of faith', pp 11-15 in Como, *C. S. Lewis at the breakfast table.*
[8] *Ibid.*, p 11.
[9] Both St. Augustine and Thomas Merton, for example, discuss in their autobiographies how, after years of searching and struggling with questions, each experienced the culmination of his conversion process in solitude. See Augustine, *The confessions*, Book VIII, Chapter 12, and Merton's *The seven storey mountain* (New York, Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1948), pp 215 ff.
[10] See Lewis, *Surprised by joy* (New York, Harcourt, Brace & World, 1955), pp 226-229 and see Griffiths, *The golden string*, pp 102-108.
[11] Lewis, *Surprised by joy,* p 234.
[12] Griffiths, 'The adventure of faith', p 16.
[13] *Ibid.*, pp 19, 24.
[14] Clyde S. Kilby, ed, *C. S. Lewis: Letters to an American lady* (Grand Rapids, Mich., Eerdmans, 1967), p 7.
[15] See Como, *C. S. Lewis at the breakfast table,* pp xxi-xxv.

[16] See Clyde Kilby and Marjorie Lamp Mead, eds, *Brothers and friends* (San Francisco, Harper & Row, 1982), p 244 and Lyle Dorsett, *And God came in,* (New York, Macmillan, 1983), pp 69 ff.

[17] For a description of the American lady and Lewis's relationship to her, see Clyde Kilby, ed, *Letters to an American lady,* pp 8–9.

[18] *Ibid.,* pp 12, 30–32, 43.

[19] *Ibid.,* pp 67, 93, 70–71 respectively.

[20] *Ibid.,* pp 81, 63, 89, 109.

[21] *Ibid.,* p 117.

[22] *Ibid.,* pp 116 and 121.

[23] Vanauken, Sheldon: *A severe mercy* (New York, Bantam Books, 1979), p 229.

[24] See Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm: chiefly on prayer* (New York, Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1963), especially pp 23, 90–91.

[25] See, for example, the preface in C. S. Lewis, *The weight of glory and other addresses* (New York, Macmillan, 1949) where Lewis speaks of 'the too numerous addresses I was induced to give during the late war and the years that immediately followed it'; also Walter Hooper, ed, *They stand together,* (New York, Macmillan, 1979), p 491, where Lewis, in a letter to his friend, Arthur Greeves, discusses spending his vacation lecturing and preaching to the Royal Air Force.

[26] Lewis, C. S.: *Broadcast talks* (London, Geoffrey Bles, 1942), p 5.

[27] Green and Hooper, *C. S. Lewis: a biography,* (New York, Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1974) p 184.

[28] Mathew, Gervase: 'Orator', p 96 in Como, ed, *C. S. Lewis at the breakfast table.*

[29] Routley, Erik: 'A Prophet', p 36 in Como, ed, *C. S. Lewis at the breakfast table.*

[30] Hooper, Walter: *Through joy and beyond,* (New York, Macmillan, 1982) p 97.

[31] See Routley, 'A Prophet', pp 33–34.

[32] See Lewis, *The weight of glory and other addresses,* pp 43–54.

[33] Green and Hooper, *C. S. Lewis: a biography,* p 203.

[34] Routley, 'A Prophet', p 34.

[35] See Lewis, *The weight of glory and other addresses,* pp 1–15.

[36] See Stuart Barton Babbage, 'To the Royal Air Force', pp 99–101 in Carolyn Keefe, ed, *C. S. Lewis: speaker and teacher* (Grand Rapids, Mich., Zondervan Publishing Co., 1971).

[37] *Ibid.,* pp 94–97.

[38] Farrer, Austin: 'In his image', p 242, in Como, ed, *C. S. Lewis at the breakfast table.*

[39] Lewis, C. S.: *Reflections on the psalms* (New York, Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1958), p 2.

[40] Lewis, Warren, ed, *Letters of C. S. Lewis,* p 13.

[41] Lewis, C. S.: *Surprised by joy,* p 33.

[42] Morris, Clifford: 'A Christian gentleman', p 198, in Como, ed, *C. S. Lewis at the breakfast table.*

[43] Newman's personal motto was *'cor ad cor loquitur'.* See Brian Martin, *John Henry Newman: his life and work* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), p 141.

[44] See Sr. Donald Corcoran, 'Spiritual guidance', pp 448–451 in *Christian spirituality; origins to the twelfth century,* edited by Bernard McGinn and John Meyendorff (New York: Crossroad, 1985).

[45] See Jung, *The Spirit in man, art, and literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966).

[46] See Chad Walsh, 'Impact on America', p 116 in Jocelyn Giff, ed, *Light on C. S. Lewis* (London: Geoffrey Bles Ltd., 1965).

[47] See Daniel Levinson, *The seasons of a man's life* (New York, Alfred Knopf, 1978), p 97, where he describes mentoring as simply friendship with someone a little more experienced who acts as a guide. Regarding the A.A. sponsor see Alcoholics Anonymous, *Questions and*

answers on sponsorship (New York: A.A., 1976) and my *Guidance on our journeys* (Center City, MN, Hazelden Publications, 1984).

[48] See Thomas Merton, *Spiritual direction and meditation* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1960), pp 40, 29.

[49] See C. S. Lewis, *The weight of glory and other addresses,* pp 47–48.

[50] See Luke Rigby, 'A solid man', pp 65–66.

[51] *Book of Leinster,* 283 b, lines 26 ff, my translation.

[52] See Derek Brewer, 'The tutor: a portrait', p 64.

[53] Lewis, C. S.: *Letters to Malcolm: chiefly on prayer,* p 124.