

Reflections

MARCH 2021

Set Me Free

Pastor and author Gavin Ortlund wrote this about C.S. Lewis's poems: "I love his poems. They demonstrate the same spiritual insight and facility with words that characterize his prose and make him my favorite writer."¹ Two short poems by Lewis are set forth below, the first of which is among Ortlund's favorites. (If you don't regularly read poetry, you might find it helpful to consider the advice of Leland Ryken, Professor of English Emeritus at Wheaton College: "The most important rule for reading poetry is simple: poetry requires us to read slowly and meditatively."²)

The Apologist's Evening Prayer

From all my lame defeats and oh! much more
From all the victories that I seemed to score;
From cleverness shot forth on Thy behalf
At which, while angels weep, the audience laugh;
From all my proofs of Thy divinity,
Thou, who wouldst give no sign, deliver me.

Thoughts are but coins. Let me not trust, instead
Of Thee, their thin-worn image of Thy head.
From all my thoughts, even from my thoughts of Thee,
O thou fair Silence, fall, and set me free.
Lord of the narrow gate and the needle's eye,
Take from me all my trumpery lest I die.³

Pilgrim's Problem

By now I should be entering on the supreme stage
Of the whole walk, reserved for the late afternoon.
The heat was to be over now; the anxious mountains,
The airless valleys and the sun-baked rocks, behind me.

Now, or soon now, if all is well, come the majestic
Rivers of foamless charity that glide beneath
Forests of contemplation. In the grassy clearings
Humility with liquid eyes and damp, cool nose
Should come, half-tame, to eat bread from my hermit hand.
If storms arose, then in my tower of fortitude —
It ought to have been in sight by this — I would take refuge;
But I expected rather a pale mackerel sky,
Feather-like, perhaps shaking from a lower cloud
Light drops of silver temperance, and clovery earth
Sending up mists of chastity, a country smell,
Till earnest stars blaze out in the established sky
Rigid with justice; the streams audible; my rest secure.

I can see nothing like all this. Was the map wrong?
Maps can be wrong. But the experienced walker knows
That the other explanation is more often true.⁴

As you meditate on these poems and consider them in light of your own walk with the Lord, are there ways in which they resonate with you?



*"Let me hear in the morning of your steadfast love, for in you I trust.
Make me know the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul."*

PSALM 143:8 (ESV)

¹ <https://gavinortlund.com/2016/08/28/my-three-favorite-c-s-lewis-poems/>

² Leland Ryken, "10 Things You Should Know About Poetry",
<https://www.crossway.org/articles/10-things-you-should-know-about-poetry/>

³ C.S. Lewis, *Poems*, edited by Walter Hooper (New York: HarperOne, 2017), p. 198.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 182.

