worst that can happen to us is not death, but dishonour" (195). The Tao, in the generic, non-theistic way that Lewis defines it in *Abolition*, "discloses that death need not have a negative value or even a zero value. On the contrary, death for a good cause can have high value, perhaps the highest" (196).

Still, Ward does note that Lewis ends his book with a glimmer of Christian hope. The final listing in Lewis's appendix offers up three quotes on the nature of the good death: Plato's comment from *Phaedo* that philosophy is a practice for death; a Norse quote about Odin hanging sacrificially from the gallows; and Jesus comparing himself to the grain of wheat that dies to produce much fruit (John 12:24-25). "These last three citations," writes Ward, "mark a progress from Pagan wisdom about human death, to Pagan wisdom about divine death, to Christian wisdom spoken by the one whom Lewis believed to be both divine and human, 'the representative "Die-er" of the universe'" (185). Here, as in all of Lewis, general revelation ultimately points to special revelation.

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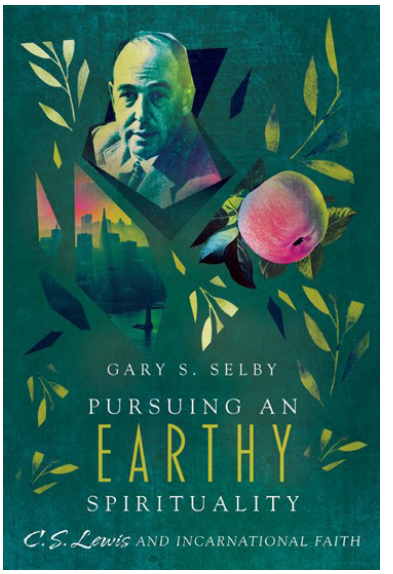
**Gary Selby, *Pursuing an Earthy Spirituality: C.S. Lewis and Incarnational Faith*. (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2019).**

Many Christians experience a tension between living a physical life and working towards the formation of our spiritual lives. It is tempting for us to have a disembodied, often joyless approach to spiritual formation by limiting our growth to what can be kept internal to our mind or soul and therefore separated from physical joy. Gary Selby, in his book *Pursuing an Earthy Spirituality: C.S. Lewis and Incarnational Faith*, provides a compelling alternative, based on the life and writings of C.S. Lewis, to separating our spiritual and physical lives. In his preface, Selby articulates his hope that this book will offer its readers a clear understanding of Lewis's ideas and the "possibility for flourishing in this life (with) a vibrant hope for the life to come" (x). He has achieved this and more. Readers will walk away from this book with a newfound appreciation of both Lewis's writings and the benefits of an embodied, or earthy, spirituality.

As an ecologist, I find great joy and peace when I spend time in God's creation. Yet I have spent a lifetime's involvement in church trying to reconcile what I experience in creation and what I have been taught about spiri-




tual formation. Selby begins his book here—describing a place where even Lewis found himself struggling: we long for joy, yet when we find it in the physical world, we often don't recognize that it could possibly be pointing us to God. Christians may believe that their spiritual life should be spent in pursuit of abstract ideas like holiness, resulting in a disembodied faith that often leaves us wanting more. On the other hand, when joy is found among earthy experiences, these same Christians may not recognize this as spirituality.

In this regard, Selby reminds us of Lewis's journey to faith and how the tension between religious teaching and glimpses of joy left him feeling that spirituality was tied to a set of rules that could not help him return to the experiences of joy he had as a child. Perhaps, therefore, when Lewis was *Surprised by Joy* he also began to understand and write about how we can develop a new understanding of our relationship with God—an understanding that allows for experiencing God in his creation in an embodied way. According to Selby, this "earthy spirituality" is what Lewis helps readers of faith develop through both his fiction and his nonfiction. Selby defines "earthy" as "the embodied stuff of life" (2) and explains that "Lewis gives us a way of cultivating a vision of God in our daily lives, by attending to our longings, our experiences of beauty, and our sensations of pleasure, and looking beyond them to the God who has given them to us. In so doing, he believed, we would come to know this God who abounds in steadfast love" (52).

"Negative spirituality" is how Lewis describes the mistaken idea that faith must be intellectualized or that spiritual development is separate from all things physical. Lewis cautions Christians against negative spirituality in *Miracles* by reminding us that "God is the glad creator" and a God that lived among us in his creation.[1] This term may not have been used often in Lewis's writings, but his writings certainly provide many examples of it, and Selby journeys through them to help us understand how we might reject negative spirituality in our own lives. Many of Lewis's characters reflect a mindset of negative spirituality: Orual in *Till We Have Faces*, the White Witch in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, and Dr. Weston in *Perelandra*. Each rejects beauty, pleasure, and joy. But Selby also helps us see how Lewis demonstrates the *rejection* of negative spirituality in his fiction. In *Out of the Silent Planet*, we see Ransom's realization that space is not what he had been taught—cold

and dead—as an example for how we can reject our perceptions of spirituality as lacking joy. In *The Screwtape Letters*, Screwtape, understanding the importance of physical joys in pointing us towards God, instructs Wormwood to keep the patient focused on the internal.

Selby also argues that Lewis offers an alternative to negative spirituality. He explains that "becoming spiritual means growing in self-awareness . . . and expanding one's consciousness of others, the world around us, and most importantly, the presence of God" (80). In *Perelandra*, Ransom's awakening of consciousness when "baptized" by the globe hanging from the tree is a suggestion of how Christians might awaken and experience God. This kind of consciousness will result in choices that allow us to experience God in an embodied way: choices that are virtuous, that foster community, and that ultimately give us hope.

Selby uses a wide breadth of Lewis's writings to develop his argument. While he depends heavily on *Till We Have Faces* and *The Screwtape Letters*, he also provides examples from the Narnia books, the Space Trilogy, and Lewis's nonfiction. My one criticism of the book is that at times there were so many examples that I felt I lost my place in Selby's arguments. The first three chapters provide a solid description of what is meant by an "earthy spirituality" and Lewis's concept of negative spirituality. However, when Selby transitions to what he frames as Lewis's alternative to negative spirituality in chapters 4-8, I frequently found myself wondering how any given topic was related to earthy spirituality. These chapters do more to offer ways Christians should live out consciousness and choice than they make strong connections to how these attributes connect to the idea of an embodied (earthy) spirituality.

Regardless, I found this book surprisingly important to those of us who advocate for Christian environmental stewardship. It provides a relevant theological grounding and reminds us that spirituality is not separate from the created world. As I read the book I was struck by how Lewis's alternatives to negative spirituality—pursuing virtue, living in inclusive communities, and pursuing hope—all related to ways in which I think about creation care as love of neighbor. I realize this was not Selby's purpose in this book; however, it is written in such a way that any reader will be able to see applications to their own personal life and interests. This book serves as a reminder that the pursuit of an embodied (earthy) spirituality will bring us to a place where we more deeply experience joy in relationship with God, our creator.

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## Notes

[1] "The thought at the back of all this negative spirituality is really one forbidden to Christians. They, of all men, must not conceive spiritual joy and worth as things that need to be rescued or tenderly protected from time and place and matter and the senses. Their God is the God of corn and oil and wine. He is the glad Creator. He has become Himself incarnate. The sacraments have been instituted. Certain spiritual gifts are offered us only on condition that we perform certain bodily acts. After that we cannot really be in doubt of His intention. To shrink back from all that can be called Nature into negative spirituality is as if we ran away from horses instead of learning to ride" (Lewis 214).

## Work Cited

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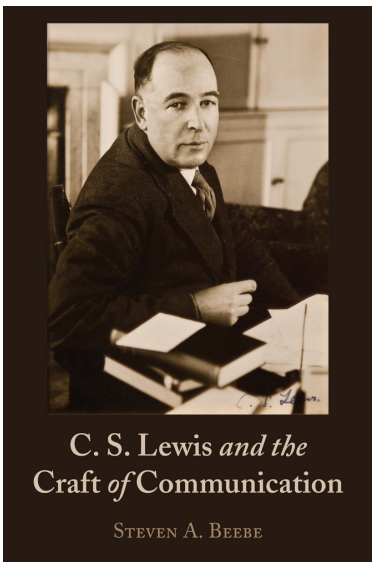


Like so many others overwhelmed by the growth industry called C.S. Lewis studies, I find it difficult to keep up with the sheer volume of books published on, about, by, or with C.S. Lewis over the last two decades. So it came as a surprise to learn that a book had been written about Lewis as a communicator and a double surprise to find myself not merely reading, but quite enjoying, the book. Steven A. Beebe is a fan, an enthusiast, a scholar, a lover, and a database of all things Lewis. From the obscure and hidden aspects of Lewis's lifelong friendships to the clichés that show up on bookmarks and tea towels ("*You can never get a cup of tea large enough . . .*"), Beebe knows his Lewis inside and out. And while it is not the primary aim of his book to do so, he offers a sort of bird's eye view of not just Lewis, but of much of the best that has been said about him since his death. While Beebe's work is not quite a one-stop shop for all one needs to know about Lewis, it does nevertheless scratch many of the itches one might have to know the man, his biography, and his method.

The book's preface starts with the story of Beebe's claim to fame in Lewis scholarship: through his archival research at the Bodleian Library, he discov-