

C.S. Lewis on Pantheism

By: Robert L. Withers

For the past two or three years I've been reading *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis*. (Is it possible that in the future there will be a volume titled, *The Collected Emails of So and So?*)

I've been in the third and final volume for awhile. One of the reasons for this is that I don't want it to end – I'm like this with some books, and I can be especially like this with a series of books, when I get to the last one I feel as if I'm nearing the end of a delightful vacation and I don't want it to end. I learned the other day that Lewis could be like this; on December 7, 1953, he wrote to Tolkien:

Dear Tollers,

I have been trying – like a boy with a bit of toffee – to take Vol. 1 slowly, [Lewis is referring to the *Lord of the Rings*] to make it last, but appetite overmastered me and it's now finished: far too short for me. The spell does not break

On December 10, 1953, Lewis wrote to R.B. Gribbon about a book by D.E. Harding, *The Hierarchy of Heaven and Earth*. Within the letter Lewis observes:

Of course H's [Harding's] God is immanent in all things: but it is not the affirmation of immanence, but the denial of transcendence that constitutes Pantheism.

Lewis's observation struck me on a couple of fronts. The first was that it was yet another example of how my mind can accept a definition without analyzing and testing it. I find this to be especially true of propositions and definitions presented to me in my early years.

In the present instance, sometime in my teenage years I was taught that Pantheism is the belief that God is all things and that all things are God. That is a fair enough definition of Pantheism. The thing is, that while I've certainly encountered and responded to Pantheism in many forms, particularly its New Age forms, that I don't know that I've ever hit the nail on the head the way Lewis did in this letter. I've certainly expressed what Lewis wrote when I've responded to Pantheism and the New Age, but where it has

taken me a few strikes of the hammer to make my point he did in one strike.

I could argue many things about the warped immanence of Pantheism, but I don't think anything along that line brings the subject into focus the way Lewis's succinct statement does – yes, there are problems with the form of immanence found in Pantheism, but the biggest problem with Pantheism is the denial of transcendence.

While I had made it to first or second base, Lewis circled the base paths and crossed home plate. Better yet, in cricket parlance, while I was scoring ones in my overs, Lewis was scoring sixes.