

SERIOUS TIMES

MAKING YOUR LIFE MATTER IN AN URGENT DAY

Vol. 1, No. 14

2006 Serious Times Church and Culture Conference

March 23-25, 2006

Gain the latest insights into today's culture, and how to transform it. Featuring Charles Colson, Andy Crouch, Crystal Downing, Brian Godawa, Kelly Monroe, James Sire, and James Emery White. Special musical guests include Michael Card and Jill Phillips.

For more information and to register, go to www.serious-times.com.

Bloody Christians at the Eagle and Child

I spent part of this summer, as I often do, at Oxford in England. I pursue various post-doctoral studies, research in the Bodleian library, and spend the afternoons writing in my favorite pub, The Eagle and Child (affectionately known by locals as "The Bird and the Baby").

If you are a devotee of C.S. Lewis, you will recognize the name of this pub, for as a plaque on the wall reads,

"C.S. Lewis, his brother, W.H. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, Charles Williams and other friends met every Tuesday morning, between the years 1939-1962 in the back room of this their favorite pub. These men, popularly known as the 'Inklings,' met here to drink beer and to discuss, among other things, the books they were writing."

I confess to loving English pubs, and particularly this one. The dark interior, the earthy atmosphere, the informal and congenial banter, and most of all, the aura of the famed literary group and their conversations which still seem to reverberate through the air. And I love the people in the pubs. Every year I find myself in fresh and candid conversations about life and faith, books and spirituality, that tend to flow around their tables and over their pints.

One day, just a few weeks ago, as I sat at my favorite little table just to the side of the fireplace in the "rabbit room" (as the back room where Lewis and friends met is now called), a stream of tourists entered, gazed at the pictures and memorabilia on the wall, and took their pictures. There was a sense of "this is where it happened" written on their faces.

I hardly took notice. It is a common experience on most days. What I did notice was the manager, after they left, muttering, "Bloody Christians."

I was enough of a regular to ask him what the matter was.

"Take a look at this," he said, holding up a menu. "They cost me two pounds each. Two pounds! I ordered hundreds of them, and now I only have ten because they keep getting nicked."

[Translation: "nicked" in England means stolen.]

"You mean people are stealing them?" I asked incredulously.

"Yeah, the Christians take the menus, and the students take the spoons and ashtrays."

"Why the menus?" I asked.

"I don't know, it's what they can get their hands on, I suppose. It got so bad I started making copies of the menu that they could take – for free – but they still take the good ones."

"I'm surprised they don't try and take what's on the walls, then," I mused, looking at the pictures, plaque, and particularly a framed handwritten letter from Lewis, Tolkien, and others commemorating a day they had drunk to the barmaid's health.

"Oh, those aren't real," he said, "just copies. If they were the real thing, they'd be gone in a second."

He paused a moment, and then said, "What gets me is that all these people who come in for Lewis are supposed to be Christians, right?"

Yes, I thought to myself, they are.

The irony is bitter; the manager of the Eagle and Child pub holds Christians and, one would surmise, Christianity in disdain because of the behavior of the Christians who flock to pay homage to Lewis.

So the pilgrims visiting the pub of the greatest Christian apologist of the twentieth century unknowingly offer an even stronger apologetic.

Sadly, it is not one that argues for Christ, reminding us that nothing argues for Christ more than our lives, and nothing argues against Christ more than the same.

James Emery White

Sources

Ralph C. Wood, *Contending for the Faith: The Church's Engagement with Culture*.

Kay Haugaard, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*

Os Guinness, *Time for Truth*.

About Serious Times

Launched in conjunction with the release of the book, *Serious Times* (InterVarsity Press, 2004), the aim of this site is to serve the vision of the book in an ongoing manner. At serioustimessite.com you will find reading lists and book reviews, "whitepapers" on critical issues and strategic links to other sites, small group resources and homeschooling curriculum, tapes/cd's and study guides. You can even sign-up for this bi-weekly "Serious Times Update."