

LUTHERAN THEOLOGICAL REVIEW

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LUTHERAN THEOLOGICAL REVIEW

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CONTENTS

Standard Abbreviations	4
Editorial Foreword.....	5

ARTICLES

“It’s All in Plato”: An Examination of C. S. Lewis’s Worldview	9
<i>Frederic W. Baue</i>	
C. S. Lewis Responds: Trends in Religion	30
<i>Joel D. Heck</i>	
The Power of Supposing: C. S. Lewis and Children’s Fantasy	43
<i>Ann F. Howey</i>	
Onward Christian Scholars: C. S. Lewis on the Justification and Meaning of Liberal Education	64
<i>William Mathie</i>	
Philosophy Through Story Telling in the Works of C. S. Lewis	72
<i>Angus Menuge</i>	
A Teaching Theologian Looks at C. S. Lewis	91
<i>John R. Stephenson</i>	
Reflections on <i>Reflections on the Psalms</i> (1958)	97
<i>Heather Whitehouse</i>	

SERMONS

Sermon: Monday in the Week of Oculi 2006.....	105
<i>John R. Stephenson</i>	

ADDENDUM

Ruminations on Church Discipline.....	107
<i>Thomas M. Winger</i>	

STANDARD ABBREVIATIONS

- AE *Luther's Works*, American edition, 55 vols (St. Louis: Concordia, and Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1958-).
- Bauer, Walter, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).
- BAG 1st ed., edited by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, 1957.
- BAGD 2nd ed., edited by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker, 1979.
- BDAG 3rd ed., edited by Frederick W. Danker, 2000.
- BELK *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, 12 editions [cite edition used] (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1930-).
- BHS *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1984).
- LSB *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2006).
- LW *Lutheran Worship* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1982).
- NA²⁷ *Novum Testamentum Graece*, ed. Kurt and Barbara Aland, et al. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993).
- TDNT Kittel, Gerhard, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 10 vols (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-).
- TLH *The Lutheran Hymnal* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1941).
- W² Walch, Johann Georg, ed. *D. Martin Luthers sämtlichen Schriften*, 2nd ["St. Louis"] ed., 23 vols (St. Louis: Concordia, 1880-1910).
- WA *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, Weimarer Ausgabe ["Weimar ed."] (Weimar: Hermann Böhlau, 1883-).
- WA DB Weimarer Ausgabe Deutsche Bibel [German Bible]
- WA Br Weimarer Ausgabe Briefe [Letters]
- WA Tr Weimarer Ausgabe Tischreden [Table talk]

Abbreviations for the Lutheran confessional writings:

- AC Augsburg Confession
- Ap Apology of the Augsburg Confession
- SA Smalcald Articles
- Tr Tractate/Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope
- SC Small Catechism
- LC Large Catechism
- FC Ep Formula of Concord, Epitome
- FC SD Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration

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EDITORIAL FOREWORD

Since his death on 22 November 1963, just a week short of his 65th birthday, Clive Staples Lewis's fame has continued to grow and spread, among Christians mainly because of the strength of his apologetics (he has been called The Apostle to the Sceptics), but also because of his theories of education, as well as because of the widespread popularity of *The Chronicles of Narnia* among both children and adults. He has been claimed by many within the neo-evangelical movement as a kindred spirit, though many of his views are in fact problematic for conservative Christians of any stripe, such as his rejection of Christ's work as vicarious satisfaction and his willingness to accept the possibility of salvation apart from explicit faith in Christ.

The undersigned confesses to having a high regard for the work of Lewis ever since university days, appreciating the way he presents the basic teachings of the Christian faith in works like *Mere Christianity*, while at the same time having qualms about the way in which certain key teachings of the faith are sullied by an incipient semi-Pelagian understanding of the human spirit. As for those who are undergoing the *Anfechtungen* of the soul that turns one into a true theologian, the merely intellectual defence of the faith, as important as it is, may at times ring hollow. There one needs not apologetics, but pure proclamation. To that we also need to remember that the Gospel, after all, is in fact foolishness to the Greeks (including the Platonists!).

The enigma and challenge which is C. S. Lewis was addressed at a symposium in March 2006 at Concordia Lutheran Theological Seminary in St. Catharines, entitled "C. S. Lewis Across the Curriculum", sponsored jointly by CLTS and Brock University. This symposium brought together scholars from within the Lutheran community and outside it, to examine all aspects of his work, from his educational theories to his fiction to his Christian apologetics. This issue contains a number of the papers presented at the conference, and is representative but by no means exhaustive. It begins with an article by the Rev. Dr Frederic Baue, an LCMS pastor whose educational background includes a doctorate in English Literature. Baue discusses the Platonic philosophy that undergirds Lewis's thought, noting that this can account for some, if not most, of the aberrations in his theology. The Rev. Dr Joel Heck, both a theologian and an educator in the LCMS, takes a look at the place of Christianity in Lewis's understanding of education and the academic world. Dr Ann Howey, Assistant Professor of English at Brock, next looks at *The Chronicles of Narnia* and their place in the genre of fantasy; she cites numerous critics, Christian and non-Christian,

as they look at these significant children's stories. William Mathie, Associate Professor of Political Science at Brock, looks at a sermon Lewis preached as World War II dawned, noting the realities of war and the necessities of maintaining learning even in a world of such monstrous distractions. Philosopher (and LCMS layman) Angus Menuge examines Lewis's use of storytelling to set forth and defend his philosophy and his faith, noting that **story** may be the way the truth of Christianity might steal past the "watchful dragons" of unregenerate reason. The Rev. Dr John Stephenson of the CLTS faculty then looks at Lewis from the perspective of a teaching theologian, noting where Lewis would be comfortable with the house which is Lutheran theology, and where he and we part company. Finally, Mrs Heather Whitehouse, a CLTS student who happens to be a Mennonite, reflects on Lewis's *Reflections on the Psalms*, to bring the symposium papers to a close. Dr Stephenson then provides a reflection on Psalm 19 in a sermon preached during the symposium.

Also included in this issue, though outside the main theme, is an essay by the Rev. Dr Thomas Winger which ruminates on questions of church discipline as it pertains to pastor and congregation. Lutheran Church–Canada's Commission on Theology and Church Relations, which is presenting a document to the 2008 synodical convention on the proper understanding of pastor and people in Christ's church, encourages the study of this paper along with the official document, as it provides important food for thought as we work through the relationship between the church and the church's ministry.

As I write these words, the church has just entered the second full week of Lent, which directs our thoughts to the substitutionary work of Christ for us. The Gospel for today, which was read in many of our congregations, spoke of God's giving of His Son, not to condemn the world, but to save it, that whoever believes might have eternal life. May the essays in this issue provide food for thought, and help us in our task of defending the faith before the world and of strengthening the faith of God's people through the preaching of that Good News.

EGK

Reminiscere 2008

CLIVE STAPLES LEWIS
(29 Nov. 1898 – 22 Nov. 1963)



“IT’S ALL IN PLATO”: AN EXAMINATION OF C. S. LEWIS’S WORLDVIEW*

Frederic W. Baue

C. S. Lewis, like Miniver Cheevy, was born too late. At his inaugural lecture as Professor of Mediaeval and Renaissance Literature at Cambridge in 1955, he referred to himself as a “dinosaur”.¹ Lewis would have been much more at home in the early 19th century, the time of his beloved Wordsworth. He hated industry, modern progressive schools, innovation, America, and machines, most notably that 20th-century contraption, the automobile, which, after numerous failed attempts, he finally gave up trying to learn to drive. His world was the dreaming spires of Oxford, the sequestered English village, the old-fashioned pub, the homely domesticity of Mr and Mrs Beaver, books, books, books, and the thought-world of the Middle Ages with its literary bridge to Romanticism.

I will argue in these pages that Platonism, or more specifically the Christian neo-Platonism of the Middle Ages, and also the Romanticism of the 19th century, had a determinative influence on Lewis’s worldview, and compromised the purity of his Christian thought to a considerable extent. In approaching this topic, I will first give an overview of Platonic influence in Western civilization, particularly upon the Church. Second, I will outline the Platonism and Romanticism in Lewis, and finally offer a critique in the light of orthodox Christian theology. I must say that I do so with regret, for in my youth Lewis’s writings were a real source of inspiration to me, and it is sad to find oneself in maturity to be at odds with a former mentor. In addition, I realize that at this present time when the whole world seems to be rushing through the wardrobe door into Narnia my criticism will be received with hostility by some and polite dismissal by most. But such is the unhappy lot of a scholar, for whom old Puddleglum is a kindred spirit.

I. OVERVIEW OF PLATONIC INFLUENCE IN THE WEST

Everyone knows about Plato’s cave. As it is described, Plato asks us to

* Presented to the symposium, “C. S. Lewis Across the Curriculum”, jointly hosted by Concordia Lutheran Theological Seminary, St. Catharines, and Brock University, on Monday, 20 March 2006.

¹ George Sayer, *Jack: A Life of C. S. Lewis* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1988, 1994), 359.

Imagine an underground chamber like a cave In this chamber are men who have been prisoners there since they were children, their legs and necks being so fastened that they can only look straight ahead of them and cannot turn their heads. Some way off ... a fire is burning, and between the fire and the prisoners and above them ... a curtain-wall has been built, like the screen at puppet shows between the operators and the audience, above which they can show the puppets.²

In this scene, the prisoners can see nothing but “shadows thrown by the fire on the wall of the cave opposite them.”³

What Plato’s cavemen come up with is a worldview in which true reality is to be found in an invisible, immaterial world of pure or ideal forms. Consequently everything in this visible, material, phenomenal world is an imperfect copy of the pure forms in the ideal world. There are all different kinds of chairs, for example, from the king’s throne to the peasant’s milking stool. But in the ideal world, there is only one perfect chair. So this present world that we can see is not as real as the ideal world, it is insubstantial, transient, like the shadows on the cave wall. A shadowland, if you will.

What intrigues me about this concept is it’s similarity to the Hindu doctrine that life is *dhukka*, or illusion. That is, everything we know and see and experience is just a phantom. Reality lies elsewhere, outside of this present world, and the purpose of existence is to ascend, step by step, through the disciplines of yoga and meditation upon the seven *chakras*, until one attains unto *nirvana*, or *satori* in Buddhism, that is, obliteration of the self in union with the void. Is this coincidental? We have the Indo-European family of languages. We also have an Indo-European family of myths. Uma in Hindu mythology, for example, corresponds to the Greek Hera as chief female deity, and so forth. In both Indian and Greek mythology there is no apocalypse, in contrast to the Norse *ragnarok*. And there seem to be similarities between both Platonic and Hindu philosophies. In discussing this Dr David L. Adams, Professor of Old Testament at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, said to me,

Your point about the connection between classical mythology and that of India is certainly correct. Both ultimately derive from the Sumerian religious mythology. To the west: Sumeria to the Akkadians to the Canaanites/Phoenicians to the Greeks to the Romans. To the east: Sumeria to Elam/Persia to the Indus Valley to India.”⁴

² Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Desmond Lee, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 1955, 1974), 317-25.

³ Plato, 325.

⁴ David L. Adams, memo in peer review of preliminary draft of this essay, 7 February 2006, p. 1.

Was Lewis also influenced by Eastern thought? His *The Abolition of Man* holds up the *Tao* ("the way" as illustrated by the figure of the *Yin* and *Yang*)—from the *Tao te Ching* of Lao Tsu—as its central premise. Interestingly, *Surprised by Joy* is dedicated to Dom Bede Griffiths, O.S.B., Lewis's former pupil who ended up in India as director of a Christian-Hindu *ashram*.

So we are looking at a philosophy which claims that ultimate reality is supersensory, in the realm of spirit and not in the realm of matter. This manifests itself in two practical directions, the *via negativa* and the *via positiva*. As Adams notes,

Both the *via negativa* (the apophatic form) and *via positiva* (the kataphatic form) have their roots in the belief that ultimate reality (and ultimate truth and the ultimate object of desire) lies beyond the sensory realm. The difference is in how one gets in touch with that ultimate reality. The apophatic form emphasizes denial of the sensory realm and withdrawal from it into the inner world, and is especially characteristic of Neo-Platonism (cf. Porphyry, Plotinus, and Pseudo-Dionysius). The kataphatic form emphasizes that the sensory world is something like a "hint" or an "appetizer" that whets the appetite and draws one in and through it, pointing one to the ultimate reality beyond, where alone the appetite can be fulfilled. It is this form that we find in Plato himself, in Augustine, in Romanticism, and in Lewis.⁵

Because the material world is less important, the *via negativa* prescribes withdrawal from the world into contemplation and ascetic practices that put one in touch with the ideal world. And that is just what they did in the academy of Pythagoras and still do in the ashrams of India. The *via negativa* leads to the *via contemplativa*. On the other hand there is the *via positiva*, in which the beauty of this world points to and draws you toward the ideal which is outside the world. The *via positiva* leads to the *via activa*. Who studied under Socrates along with Plato? Xenophon. If one sits and thinks all day like the cavemen, he doesn't have to do anything. But once you step out into the world, shadowy and insubstantial as it may be, you are faced with the problem of how to behave. So we find in Plato a strong emphasis on ethics. And as we may remember from translating the *Anabasis* in first-year Greek, Xenophon behaved admirably in leading his men back from Persia after the Battle of Cunaxa.

While the Holy Scriptures and the teachings of Jesus and the apostles reflect no influence of Plato, it was not long before the situation changed. As early as AD 30, Philo of Alexandria, a Jewish philosopher, tried to adopt a Platonic framework to make Judaism more intellectually respectable to

⁵ Adams, memo, pp. 1-2.

Greek culture.⁶ The same approach was followed by early Christian apologists such as the author of the Epistle to Athenagoras as well as Justin Martyr (c. 100-c. 65) in his *Dialogue with Trypho*.⁷ The Platonist Christian theologian Origen (c. 185-c. 254) was a major influence in the church through the 10th century.⁸ Following in the tradition of Origen's neo-Platonism were Ambrose (340-397), bishop of Milan,⁹ and his disciple Augustine (354-430), bishop of Hippo.¹⁰ While Augustine was an orthodox theologian in many ways, he held a progressive, sanative view of justification. As Uuras Saarnivaara notes, "Theologians are generally agreed that the Augustinian conception of salvation is a combination of Christian and neo-Platonic ideas."¹¹ In this view, "righteousness is not something that is received complete, but rather a gradual process of becoming righteous in which the renewed will of man co-operates with the grace of God."¹² Accordingly there is in this theology, as in Plato, a division between the lower and the higher, the inner and the outer, the real and the imitation. Since reality is "up there", or "in here", man must progress step by step from the shadowlands of this sinful world "further up and further in" to the ideal and pure world in which God dwells, climbing as it were a "stairway to heaven". Not surprisingly, we find in Augustine as in Plato a strong emphasis on ethical behaviour.

The Early and Mediaeval church was dominated by the *via negativa*. In this direction, Christian man was urged to withdraw from the world in order to ascend by contemplation to the ideal heights above. Some of this can be seen in Gnosticism, an early Christian heresy opposed by St John, which held that matter is intrinsically evil and man must escape it somehow. This was done either by asceticism on the one hand—the most obvious approach—or by licentiousness on the other, in which the acolyte by indulging in the sins of the flesh somehow proved his liberation from it. The ascetic tendency appears in the monastic movement in the Western Church, begun by St Benedict of Nursia (c. 480- c. 543). I do not know whether Benedict was a neo-Platonist as most theologians of that time were, but it is clear that the impetus for monasticism arose from the generally neo-Platonic milieu of the early church. The apophatic approach manifests itself also in

⁶ Erwin L. Lueker, ed., *Lutheran Cyclopedia* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1975), 619.

⁷ Lueker, 435.

⁸ Lueker, 592.

⁹ Lueker, 22.

¹⁰ Lueker, 61-62.

¹¹ Uuras Saarnivaara, *Luther Discovers the Gospel: New Light Upon Luther's Way from Medieval Catholicism to Evangelical Faith* [1943] (St. Louis: Concordia, 2005), 8.

¹² Saarnivaara, 6.

mysticism as seen in Plotinus/Porphiry and Pseudo-Dionysius, in which one attempts to communicate with the "cloud of unknowing" by intuitive leap.

After the 12th century the thought of Aristotle comes to the fore and enters Christian theology through the work of St Thomas Aquinas (c. 1224-74). But we pass over this development lest we, like the Scholastics who followed Thomas, become bogged down trying to figure out how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. Luther, who was an Augustinian monk and exhibited a strong Augustinian/neo-Platonic theology in his early lectures, moved quickly away from this position as his evangelical theology developed, as Saarnivaara shows. Calvin (1509-64), however, was perhaps the most Augustinian of the Reformers. There is a tendency toward super-spirituality in his theology, seen most clearly in his denial of the Real Presence of Christ in the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper. This is based on his principle of *finitum non capax infiniti* ("the finite cannot contain the infinite"), a neo-Platonic relegation of the visible to a lower order than the invisible. On the other hand, human reason in Calvin is able to ascend the ladder step-by-step toward heaven. Not surprisingly, there is in the Reformed churches a strong attraction to Apologetics, which we also find in Lewis. And, as in Plato and in Augustine, there is in Calvin a powerful affirmation of the ethical task of the Christian. "The Sovereignty of God" is a byword among the Reformed. And if God is sovereign (which of course he is), then the duty of man is to learn his rules for behaviour and live by them. The court theologians of Queen Elizabeth I (1533-1603) brought Calvinism into the Church of England by the Thirty-nine Articles of 1562. And who was baptized into the Church of England and came back to it later in life? C. S. Lewis.

It remains in this section to draw the connection between Platonism and Romanticism. Not that Romanticism is all that easy to define. But a key characteristic of it is *Sehnsucht*, that is, a longing or desire for the ideal. It believes in the pre-existence of the soul, and therefore the innocence of childhood, in which children, who have just come from the realm of pure forms, are somehow more in touch with that unseen world than we are. The Romantic movement in philosophy and the arts renewed early Medievalism with its emphasis on Plato, in opposition to Aristotle's rationalism and materialism. This is not just a philosophical disposition. The Middle Ages are, in fact, the setting for many Romantic works, such as the novels of Sir Walter Scott and the operas of Richard Wagner. In this regard James Patrick observes that "the search for unity, the unity of man and nature and of the natural and the supernatural, was itself a romantic project."¹³

¹³ James Patrick, *The Magdalen Metaphysicals: Idealism and Orthodoxy at Oxford 1901-1945* (Mercer U.P., 1985), xvii. I wish to thank Professor Ronald Feuerhahn, Concordia

In English letters, it is generally acknowledged that Romanticism begins with the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* by William Wordsworth (1770-1850) and Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) in 1798. In contrast to the Rationalistic outlook of earlier poets like Alexander Pope, Romantic poetry emphasizes feeling, intuition, and sensibility. As one might expect, Plato is there. As Wordsworth himself says concerning the innocence of childhood, “a pre-existent state has entered into the popular creeds of many nations; and, among all persons acquainted with classic literature, is known as an ingredient in Platonic philosophy.”¹⁴ The opening lines of his *Ode: Intimations of Immortality* communicate the idea that the piercing *Sehnsucht* one experiences in childhood is a glimpse of the realm of ideal forms from which the soul descended, and with which the child is in deep communication:

There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,
The earth, and every common sight,
To me did seem
Apparelled in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream.
It is not now as it hath been of yore,—
Turn wheresoe’er I may,
By night or day,
The things which I have seen I now can see no more.¹⁵

Other classic, Platonic lines from this poem have entered into our common fund of speech: “the Child is Father of the Man”,¹⁶ and “trailing clouds of glory do we come”.¹⁷ *The Prelude* has been called “Wordsworth’s crowning achievement, the greatest and most original long poem since Milton’s *Paradise Lost*.”¹⁸ Cast in the form of a journey, it traces the development of the poet, or, as the subtitle says, “Growth of a Poet’s Mind/ An Autobiographical Poem”.¹⁹ That is to say, it is an inner journey. Instead of focussing on the external world the poet delves into the recesses of his own soul, progressing step-by-step “further up and further in” on the path to

Seminary, St. Louis, for directing me to this important book, which places Lewis in the context of Collingwood and other Oxford Platonists of his generation.

¹⁴ William Wordsworth, letter to Isabella Fenwick concerning his *Ode: Intimations of Immortality*, cited in E. Talbot Donaldson, et. al., eds, *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 6th ed., vol. 2 (New York: W. W. Norton, 1993), 188.

¹⁵ Wordsworth, *Ode*, in Norton, 189.

¹⁶ Norton, 189. This line, included in the *Ode*, is originally from Wordsworth’s “My heart leaps up.”

¹⁷ Norton, 190.

¹⁸ Norton, 205.

¹⁹ Norton, 207.

becoming a higher kind of being. This is an essentially Platonic—and perhaps Darwinian—exercise, seen not only in the Romantic poets but in the Mediaeval mystics who went before. Note the Platonic contrast between the inner and outer worlds in the closing lines:

Prophets of Nature, we to them will speak
 A lasting inspiration, sanctified
 By reason, blest by faith: what we have loved
 Others will love, and we will teach them how,
 Instruct them how the mind of Man becomes
 A thousand times more beautiful than the earth
 On which he dwells, above this Frame of things ...
 In beauty exalted, as it is itself
 Of Quality and fabric more divine.²⁰

II. PLATONISM AND ROMANTICISM IN C. S. LEWIS

Having looked at Platonism and Romanticism in general, we now proceed to trace these influences in the work of C. S. Lewis. I will try to show first the presence of *Sehnsucht*, or Romantic longing; second, the Platonic realm of ideal forms, which is the object of desire; and third, the comparative unreality of the material world in which we live.

That Platonism was and continued to be a major influence on Lewis is incontestable. James Patrick reminds us that in 1924, the as-yet unconverted Lewis, still looking for an academic job, began doctoral work on the 17th century Cambridge Platonist Henry More.²¹ Aside from a couple of books of poetry that didn't sell, *The Pilgrim's Regress* (1933) is Lewis's first major published work.²² Apparently he wrote it in two weeks while on holiday, in the first flush of his enthusiasm as a new Christian. This short, dense book traces the journey of a young pilgrim named John, who has had a mystical glimpse of a beautiful island. The longing or desire for the island drives him onward in his sojourn. Of course, like its namesake, John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, it is not a journey in the real world but in the world of ideas. It is deliberately written as an allegory, with various characters standing for ideas and concepts such as Virtue, Reason, and so forth. Like its other model, Wordsworth's *Prelude*, which Lewis read and re-read to the end of his life, this book is autobiographical and deals with the intellectual

²⁰ Norton, 286.

²¹ Patrick, 117.

²² C. S. Lewis, *The Pilgrim's Regress: An Allegorical Apology for Christianity, Reason and Romanticism* [1933] (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1943).

coming-of-age of a young intellectual or poet. And like the *Prelude*, the character arc of the journey winds up in the same place it started, hence the word “regress” in the title.

This indicates that Lewis wound up back in the Church of England where he was baptized as a child. But that his world of thought has been imbued with new ideas is clear from the subtitle: *An Allegorical Apology for Christianity Reason and Romanticism*. Regarding the *Sehnsucht* that forms the centre of this book, Lewis says in the preface, “The experience is one of intense longing ... this desire, even when there is no hope of possible satisfaction, continues to be prized, and even to be preferred to anything else in the world, by those who have once felt it.”²³ Like a star this Romantic longing or desire will lead one faithfully to its object. The atmosphere here is entirely subjective. The journey is similar to that espoused by Augustine, which in the Christian framework substitutes Heaven for the Platonic realm of pure forms, toward which man struggles step by step his whole life. We see that Lewis identifies himself as a Romantic—hence a Platonist—early in life. We will find that this identification carries through all his writings to the end of his life. For example, in a revealing passage in his 1954 essay, “Edmund Spenser, 1552-99,” written during the same period as *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Lewis says of the great poet who drew so much inspiration from the Middle Ages:

Spenser wrote primarily as a (Protestant) Christian and secondarily as a Platonist. **Both systems are united with one another** and cut off from some—not all—modern thought by their conviction that Nature, the totality of phenomena in space and time, is not the only thing that exists: is, indeed the least important thing. Christians and Platonists both believe in an “other” world. They differ, at least in emphasis, when they describe the relations between that other world and Nature. For a Platonist the contrast is usually that between an original and a copy, between the real and the merely apparent, between the clear and the confused: for a Christian, between the eternal and temporary, or the perfect and the partially spoiled. The essential attitude of Platonism is aspiration or longing: the human soul, imprisoned in the shadowy, unreal world of Nature, stretches out its hands and struggles towards the beauty and reality of that which lies (as Plato says) “on the other side of existence”. Shelley’s phrase “the desire of the moth for the star” sums it up. In Christianity, however, the human soul is not the seeker but the sought: it is God who seeks, who descends from the other world to find and heal Man; the parable about the Good Shepherd looking for and finding the lost sheep sums it up. **Whether in the long run there is any flat contradiction between the two pictures need not be discussed here. It is**

²³ Lewis, *Regress*, 7.

certainly possible to combine and interchange them for a considerable time without finding a contradiction, and this is what Spenser does.²⁴

This is also what Lewis does, as we can see in the Chronicles of Narnia. One thinks immediately of Reepicheep's intense longing for Aslan's country, that land he heard sung about in nursery rhymes:

Where sky and water meet,
Where the waves grow sweet,
Doubt not, Reepicheep,
To find all you seek,
There is the utter East.²⁵

Here the child is father of the man—or mouse in this case—and the purer perceptions of childhood guide one in later life to the object of desire. Prince Caspian, who is of Telmarine descent, longs for the old Narnia that he has heard about in songs.²⁶ Young Shasta in *The Horse and His Boy* has the same feeling.²⁷ Even Emeth, the pious Calormene in *The Last Battle*, is at the last guided by his longing to Aslan's country.²⁸

In an important narrative passage in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, Lewis, by authorial intrusion, describes the children's feelings at the first mention of the name of Aslan in terms of Romantic, Platonic desire:

Perhaps it has sometimes happened to you in a dream that someone says something which you don't understand but in the dream it feels as if it has some enormous meaning—either a terrifying one which turns the whole dream into a nightmare or else a lovely meaning too lovely to put into words, which makes the dream so beautiful that you remember it all your life and are always wishing you could get into that dream again."²⁹

These examples should suffice to show the theme of Romantic longing in Lewis.

What, then, of the object of that Romantic longing? In Plato's conception, the object of desire would be the realm of pure forms from which the pre-existent soul emanated and descended into material form. The development of love poetry in the Middle Ages follows the allegorical method. In allegory the characters realize or copy certain ideal forms and principles. In his great work, *The Allegory of Love* [1936], Lewis shows how

²⁴ Lewis, and Walter Hooper, *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1966, 1998), 144. Emphasis added.

²⁵ Lewis, *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader"* [1952] (New York: Collier Books, 1970), 16.

²⁶ Lewis, *Prince Caspian* [1951] (New York: Collier Books, 1970), 41.

²⁷ Lewis, *The Horse and His Boy* [1954] (New York: Collier Books, 1970).

²⁸ Lewis, *The Last Battle* [1956] (New York: Collier Books, 1970), 165.

²⁹ Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* [1950] (New York: Collier Books, 1970),

the poetry of late paganism, in a time when the gods came to be seen more as ideas than real beings, began to use allegory to depict the inner world.³⁰ He notes that Jean de Meun in his work “is talking of the *realisimum*, of the Centre, of that which lies beyond the ‘sensuous curtain’.”³¹ In the essay on Spenser cited above, Lewis discusses “the beauty and reality of that which lies (as Plato says) ‘on the other side of existence’.”³² Lewis demonstrates the progress of this philosophy from Plato through Augustine into early Mediaeval theology and allegorical poetry. As noted above, though Aristotle became a major influence in Christian thought in the 12th century, particularly on the work of Aquinas, Platonism makes a kind of intuitive leap from the Middle Ages to the worldview of Romanticism.³³ And, we might add, to the thought world of C. S. Lewis. One of Lewis’s most telling general observations is that Plato, with his ideal forms, is the doctor of Protestants, whereas Aristotle, with his immediate forms, is the doctor of the Catholics.³⁴

Of course Lewis himself is a kind of doctor to the Protestants; *Mere Christianity* has been read and re-read by generations of Evangelicals.³⁵ Here again the Platonism runs straight through. According to Lewis, “Most of man’s psychological make-up is probably due to his body; when his body dies all that will fall off him, and the real central man, the thing that chose, that made the best or the worst out of this material, will stand naked.”³⁶ Ethical behaviour is of course the way that the “central man” forces the material man up the stairway. “I must make it the main object of life to press on to that other country and to help others to do the same.”³⁷ He describes this object of Christian/Romantic desire as “another world”, “the real thing”, and “my true country”.³⁸

Mere Christianity was written from radio talks Lewis gave over the BBC during the war years of the 1940s. The Lewis of the forties is the Lewis of the thirties and *The Pilgrim’s Regress*. Not surprisingly, we find that this Platonic framework carries over into the Lewis of the fifties, when he was writing the Narnia stories. The realm of pure forms, here translated as Aslan’s country, appears in numerous places in the Chronicles. It is the place

³⁰ Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1936), 113.

³¹ Lewis, *Allegory*, 152.

³² Lewis, *Studies*, 144.

³³ Lewis, *Allegory*, 88.

³⁴ Lewis, *Allegory*, 323.

³⁵ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* [1952] (New York: Collier Books, 1960).

³⁶ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 86.

³⁷ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 120.

³⁸ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 120.

to which Reepicheep journeys in *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader"*. We may recall that as Reepicheep's coracle approaches the end of the world, the wave that carries him goes up, not down—a kind of waterfall in reverse. In *The Magician's Nephew*, the child Digory travels to the walled garden on the wings of the flying horse Fledge. There he retrieves an apple from the Tree of Life for the healing of his sick mother.³⁹ The idea of that realm being the "real thing" or the "true country", as Lewis expressed it in *Mere Christianity*, appears again in *The Last Battle* when the unicorn Jewel exclaims, "I have come home at last! This is my real country! I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now."⁴⁰ Here we see the consummation of Romantic longing when one attains the object of desire. Lucy looks at the intensified scenes that are somehow familiar and struggles to describe them: "'They're different. They have more colours on them and they look further away than I remembered and they're more ... more ... oh, I don't know' 'More like the real thing,' said the Lord Digory softly."⁴¹ Then what happens? Aslan calls them, and they all go running "further up and further in" to a seemingly endless succession of Platonic ideal realms, each more real than the last, each higher, not lower, each inner, not outer.

It is difficult to factor out these three elements: the *Sehnsucht*, the realm of pure forms, and the unreality of the present world, for in Lewis a discussion of one element often includes reference to another. Nevertheless we can isolate enough references to demonstrate that the third element, the relative unreality of the present world in comparison to the realm of pure forms, is a potent idea for Lewis. After all, what was the name of the television program/play/film about Lewis? *Shadowlands*. And properly so. The term and its cognates runs throughout Lewis. In discussing symbolism he says,

We are the "frigid personifications"; the heavens above us are the "shadowy abstractions"; the world which we mistake for reality is the flat outline of that which elsewhere veritably is in all the round of its unimaginable dimensions The Sun is the copy of the Good. Time is the moving image of eternity. All visible things exist just in so far as they succeed in imitating the Forms."⁴²

In the poetry of Jean de Meun, "not only hell and sin and courtly love, but the world and all that is in it, and the visible heaven, are but painted things—appearances on the outside of the wall whose inside no one has seen. What

³⁹ C. S. Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew* [1955], (New York: Collier Books, 1970), ch. 13.

⁴⁰ Lewis, *Last*, 171.

⁴¹ Lewis, *Last*, 168-69.

⁴² Lewis, *Allegory*, 45-46.

the wall shows from without are, in fine, *phenomena*.”⁴³ In *Mere Christianity*, Lewis discusses the difference between our biological life, which he calls *Bios*, and our spiritual life, which he calls *Zoe*, using the Greek words. “*Bios* has, to be sure, a certain shadowy or symbolic resemblance to *Zoe*: but only the sort of resemblance there is between a photo and a place, or a statue and a man.”⁴⁴

This concept is central to understanding the Narnia stories. Poor Prince Rilian in *The Silver Chair* has been in the subterranean realm of the Green Lady for so long and has been under her enchantments so deeply that he thinks he is in the real world and the Narnia above is an imaginary shadowland. Of course he is really in a literal shadowland underground, in comparison to which the Narnia above has the same relation as the Platonic ideal realm has to our copy-world. Somehow he, like the children, retains a wisp of *Sehnsucht* for his true home. But the Witch, like the sceptical dwarfs in *The Last Battle*, argues like a Materialist philosopher:

You have seen lamps, and so you imagined a bigger and better lamp and called it the *sun*. You’ve seen cats, and now you want a bigger and better cat, and it’s to so [sic] called a *lion*. Well, ’tis a pretty make-believe, though, to say truth, it would suit you all better if you were younger. And look how you can put nothing into your make-believe without copying it from the real world, this world of mine, which is the only world.⁴⁵

When Digory brings the Apple of Life to his mother in our world, the contrast is startling:

Just as the Witch Jadis had looked different when you saw her in our world instead of in her own, so the fruit of that mountain garden looked different too. There were of course all sorts of coloured things in the bedroom; the coloured counterpane on the bed, the wall-paper, the sunlight from the window, and Mother’s pretty, pale blue dressing jacket. But the moment Digory took the Apple out of his pocket, all those other things seemed to have scarcely any colour at all. Every one of them, even the sunlight looked faded and dingy. The brightness of the Apple threw strange lights on the ceiling. Nothing else was worth looking at: indeed you couldn’t look at anything else. And the smell of the Apple of Youth was as if there was a window in the room that opened on Heaven.⁴⁶

The philosophical heart of the entire Narnia series—and I would argue of Lewis’s thought itself—is contained in Digory’s speech in the next-to-last chapter of *The Last Battle*:

⁴³ Lewis, *Allegory*, 152.

⁴⁴ Lewis, *Mere*, 140.

⁴⁵ Lewis, *The Silver Chair* [1953] (New York: Collier Books, 1970), 157.

⁴⁶ Lewis, *Nephew*, 180-81.

"When Aslan said you could never go back to Narnia, he meant the Narnia you were thinking of. But that was not the real Narnia. That had a beginning and an end. It was only a shadow or a copy of the real Narnia, which has always been here and always will be here: just as our own world, England and all, is only a shadow or copy of something in Aslan's real world. You need not mourn over Narnia, Lucy. All of the old Narnia that mattered, all the dear creatures, have been drawn into the real Narnia through the Door. And of course it is different; as different as a real thing is from a shadow or as waking life is from a dream."

His voice stirred everyone like a trumpet as he spoke these words: but when he added under his breath "It's all in Plato, all in Plato: bless me, what *do* they teach them at these schools!" the older ones laughed.⁴⁷

Are we laughing? It's so exactly the sort of thing Lewis himself would say. Can there be any doubt that Digory is the voice of the author in these books? Can there be any doubt that Lewis himself, like Digory, is a thoroughgoing Platonist?

III. CRITIQUE OF LEWIS

We now turn to a critique of C. S. Lewis's thought in light of orthodox Christian theology. The first thing that must be said is that there is a problem with combining philosophy with theology in order to make Christianity more palatable to the secular culture. Holy Scripture is a pure stream. Greek thought may have taken something from it (Luther said somewhere that Heracles was a Greek version of the Hebrew Samson), but certainly contributed nothing to it. St Paul in his disputations with the Stoic and Epicurean philosophers in Athens demonstrates a solid command of Greek thought. But in his preaching at Mars Hill (Acts 17) he uses secular culture merely as an illustration, not a point of integration, and proceeds directly to the scandal of the cross. The response? "Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, 'We will hear you again about this'" (Acts 17:32). Would Paul have done any better by diluting his message with pagan philosophy to attract a wider audience? Perhaps. But then the faith of his converts would have been compromised by false doctrine. In this regard Paul speaks candidly of the preconceptions of his audience when he says,

For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of

⁴⁷ Lewis, *Last*, 169-70.

God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men (I Cor. 1:22-25).⁴⁸

Of course there is nothing in Scripture about a Platonic realm of ideal forms, of which this world is but a copy or “shadowland”. Biblical cosmology is quite straightforward: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). Or as the Apostles’ Creed puts it, “I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.” That is to say, heaven, the invisible realm of the angels, and earth, the visible realm of man, were both created by God and are sustained by his almighty power. Earth is not a copy of heaven. The visible is not derived from the invisible. Both are equally real. To insert a Platonic concept into Christian theology diminishes the First Article. As Robert Kolb notes,

It makes a critical difference in one’s understanding of reality if one has a personal Creator God, who creates and preserves through his Word. With no such conception available to Plato, he has to imagine and secure his view of reality in some other way. Augustine’s and Lewis’s failure to have a concept of two kinds of righteousness does not permit them to have anything but a sanative view of justification.⁴⁹

An even more serious error is introduced into Christian theology by this line of thought. If you diminish the First Article, you diminish the Second Article. The Nicene Creed says that the Christ

for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried. And the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures and ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father. And he will come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead, whose kingdom will have no end.

This describes the physical reality of Jesus Christ. Although he was the pre-existent Son of God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, pure Spirit as is His Father, dwelling in eternal majesty and glory in the invisible realm of heaven, he came down into this physical, material world and took on human flesh, becoming one of us that he might physically die to take away our sins and physically rise again to give us the gift of eternal life. Having taken on physical, material, human flesh and blood, he never takes it off. He continues as a man for ever. His divine nature and His human nature are fully communicated for all eternity. That is what the Bible says. Now here is the crux of the matter: if this world is a shadowland, then we are left with a shadow Christ. This is the ancient heresy of Docetism, in which the Christ is

⁴⁸ All Scripture citations from the *English Standard Version* (ESV).

⁴⁹ Robert A. Kolb, peer review of draft copy of this essay, February 2006.

a spirit who only seems to be real. I am not accusing Lewis of Docetism, but he certainly seems to be bordering on it when he says about the Apocalypse, "For this time it will be God without disguise; something so overwhelming that it will strike either irresistible love or irresistible horror into every creature."⁵⁰ Elsewhere he refers to Aslan appearing in Narnia, "in disguise" as it were, as a lion, the son of the great Emperor-over-Sea, but with the indication that he appears differently in other worlds. This leaves the door open to Docetism. Scripture by contrast teaches the reality of the Incarnation of Christ.

The Bible teaches a pre-existent Christ but not the pre-existence of the souls of men. Life begins at conception (Psalm 139). It is created by God at the moment of conception. Death—spiritual death due to original sin—also begins at conception: "I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Ps. 51:5). That means that children are not innocent. They do not come from the realm of pure forms "trailing clouds of glory". Hence the need for the Sacrament of Holy Baptism and ongoing catechesis in the faith by Christian parents. I do not find in Lewis as in Wordsworth a doctrine of the pre-existence of the soul, but I must point out that he diverges from Scripture in his view of the nature of children. Lucy, the youngest of the four Pevensie children, is the first to find her way into Narnia. The older ones all doubt her. She is the only one who sees Aslan from afar when they are lost in the forest while trying to bring help to Prince Caspian. Her faith is somehow more pure. And as the chronicles unfold, older children are excluded. This viewpoint is more Romantic than biblical. In Christian theology, the opposite is true: we progress in Sanctification as we grow older by study of God's Word and proper reception of the Sacrament of the Altar. In Lewis the opposite holds. Children become less innocent as they age.

On the other hand, Lewis seems to retain the Platonic/Augustinian concept of sanative justification, whereby one ascends the ladder toward heaven by ethical behaviour. This heavy emphasis on "Christian behaviour" is at the centre of *Mere Christianity*. As we have seen, however, Holy Scripture, operating in a thought world that excludes Plato, teaches forensic justification. "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:8-10). That is, we are declared reconciled to God at the beginning of the journey. Christ comes down the ladder to us and gives us salvation. The rest of one's life is an expression of that salvation as we do good works which

⁵⁰ Lewis, *Mere*, 66.

glorify God and lay up for us treasure in heaven. That is how we progress in the faith once we have been reconciled to God: “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (II Pet. 3:18). Lewis, like Augustine, confuses Law and Gospel, justification with sanctification.

This is a serious problem, for justification is the doctrine upon which the church stands or falls. One might rightly surmise that the neo-Platonic concept of stepwise ascent to final justification would lead to vagueness about the meaning of Christ’s death and resurrection. And that is exactly what we find in Lewis. To him, vicarious atonement is a “theory”.

The central Christian belief is that Christ’s death has somehow put us right with God and given us a fresh start. Theories as to how it did this are another matter. A good many different theories have been held as to how it works; what all Christians are agreed on is that it does work Theories about Christ’s death are not Christianity: they are explanations about how it works.⁵¹

If that is so, then all of the epistles of the New Testament must be demoted to the category of “theories”. But of course, if we are living in a Platonic shadowland, all of our notions of the meaning of Christ’s death and resurrection would have to be correspondingly unclear. Lewis goes on to say, “Christians would not all agree as to how important these theories are. My own church—the Church of England—does not lay down any one of them as the right one.”⁵² John Drickamer observes that Lewis

was, like many Anglicans, more inclined to a theory of expiation rather than the Biblical doctrine of propitiation. He was somewhat inclined to the idea that Christ paid the price, but he could not accept the idea that Christ had appeased the Father’s wrath. So Lewis failed to understand the Crucifixion at all.⁵³

Raymond F. Surburg had made a similar criticism in 1979:

Lewis unfortunately went along with the idea that there was no one correct meaning of what Christ accomplished by His sufferings and death. He claimed that theories of the atonement were not as important as the **fact** of the atonement itself. He argued that such theories as Penal substitution, limited atonement, vicarious atonement, ransom paid to the Devil,

⁵¹ Lewis, *Mere*, 57.

⁵² Lewis, *Mere*, 57.

⁵³ John M. Drickamer, “C. S. Lewis: Snapshots of His Thoughts”, *Christian News* (12 December 2005): 17 (originally published 1984).

satisfaction made to the Father, were not as important as the reality of what Christ did on the cross.⁵⁴

Another element of Platonic Romanticism that is problematic in Lewis is subjectivism. The validation for all experience is one's inner state of mind. According to Surburg,

The conversion of Lewis in 1929 did not result in his shedding his previous theological baggage which he had obtained from Kant with his insistence on the magisterial use of reason in theology or the Schleiermachiian emphasis on feeling for determining theological beliefs. That fact that Lewis would not abide by the nude text of Scripture accounts for some of the theological aberrations⁵⁵

That may be the crux of the issue. Lewis worked to find integration between reason and feeling. I see the problem as centred in his acceptance of Plato, who worked with both aspects of human discourse. Surburg refers to the pre-Romantic philosopher Kant (Wordsworth and Coleridge actually travelled to Germany to hear him lecture) and the pre-Romantic theologian Schleiermacher. But either way we come out in the same place. The inner state of mind determines everything, as is the case with the logical positivist dwarfs in *The Last Battle* who miss the apocalypse of Aslan because of their philosophy. Not so in Scripture, where things are true and things are real whether you believe them or not. Why else would it be possible to partake of the Lord's Supper to one's damnation (I Cor. 11:29)?⁵⁶

There is also in Lewis a kind of limited universalism. This is clearly seen in *The Last Battle*, where the Calormene soldier Emeth's devotion to the horrible god Tash is credited to him as faith in Aslan. Emeth quotes Aslan as saying,

Child, all the service thou has done to Tash, I account as service done to me I take to me the services which thou hast done to him, for I and he are of such different kinds that no service which is vile can be done to me, and none which is not vile can be done to him.⁵⁷

And so Emeth is admitted to Aslan's country on the same basis that virtuous pagans are admitted to heaven in Roman Catholic theology: works. Contrast this with the clear words of Jesus: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life.

⁵⁴ Raymond F. Surburg, "An Evaluation of the Theological Stance of C. S. Lewis", *Christian News* (8 October 1979): 6-8.

⁵⁵ Surburg, 7.

⁵⁶ Adams comments, "This point runs counter to Platonism by affirming humanity as a 'body/soul unity.' What affects one affects the other. The contemporary problem with this underscores how much we are influenced by the Platonic conception of what it means to be human."

⁵⁷ Lewis, *Last*, 164-65.

No one comes to the Father except through me” (Jn 14:6). If Lewis’s view is correct, there is no need for Christ’s atoning death, much less evangelism.

It is instructive to note what is not in *Mere Christianity*. Lewis says nothing about the Bible, for example. Great battles were fought in the 20th century over the doctrine of Scripture—whether or not the Bible was inspired, inerrant, and infallible. Many Evangelicals who embraced Lewis as a champion of the faith fought the “Battle for the Bible” without noticing that their hero was strangely silent on the issue. I think Lewis, like the men he lived and worked with at Oxford, simply accepted the “assured results of higher criticism”, at least on the nature of the biblical text. In the same way, Lewis like most educated men of his day assumed the validity of the Theory of Evolution: “Perhaps a modern man can understand the Christian idea best if he takes it in connection with Evolution (though, of course, some educated people disbelieve it): everyone has been told that man has evolved from lower types of life.”⁵⁸ He goes on to describe Jesus Christ as a forerunner in the process of what the Eastern church calls *theosis*, or the deification of man.

Now, if you care to talk in these terms, the Christian view is precisely that the Next Step [in the evolutionary process] has already appeared. It is really new. It is not a change from brainy men to brainier men: it is a change that goes off in a totally different direction—a change from being creatures of God to being sons of God. The first instance appeared in Palestine two thousand years ago For now the critical moment has arrived. Century by century God has guided nature up to the point of producing creatures which can (if they will) be taken right out of nature, turned into “gods”.⁵⁹

How is this different from the thought of the Jesuit evolutionary philosopher Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955)?

Not only is Lewis deficient in his view of Scripture, he has no reference to the creeds of the church in *Mere Christianity*. This is a glaring omission. One is at a loss to see how a man can write a book on basic, or “mere” Christianity and not discuss the confessional documents that sum up the basics best of all. For example, the Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed refer to the Last Judgement. The Athanasian Creed is more pointed: “They that have done good will go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil, into everlasting fire.” Not so in Lewis. We have seen that the good pagan Emeth is admitted into Aslan’s country. But there is no everlasting fire in Aslan’s apocalypse. Those who reject Aslan simply disappear into his shadow. George Sayer, who perhaps knew Lewis better than any of his other

⁵⁸ Lewis, *Mere*, 184.

⁵⁹ Lewis, *Mere*, 185, 187.

biographers, shows how Lewis attempted to reconcile the Universalism of George MacDonald with (unorthodox) Christian theology by making Purgatory part of Hell, so that people go to a rather mild kind of hell, but ultimately everybody gets a second chance.⁶⁰ This is what happens when you mix philosophy with theology.

Even so, one is puzzled, even startled, by the spiritism in Lewis. According to Sayer, Lewis

had a strong feeling that Albert [Lewis's father, died 1929] was somehow still alive and helping him. He spoke about this to me and wrote about it to an American correspondent named Vera Matthews. His feeling of Albert's presence created or reinforced in him a belief in personal immortality and also influenced his conduct in times of temptation. These extrasensory experiences helped persuade him to join a Christian church.⁶¹

Note that Lewis re-converted to Christianity in 1929, the year his father died. Charles Williams, with whom Lewis was very close, died in 1945. According to Sayer, "His death was a painful blow to Jack. For a few days afterwards he had a strong sense of Williams's presence around him. He experienced Williams as being in a state of bliss, yet still caring about his friends on earth."⁶² Apparently Lewis experienced the same kind of communion with the departed even more intensely after the death of his wife, Joy, as described in *A Grief Observed*. Sayer sums it up by saying, "But after the pain of the most intense grief has been dulled, he recovers her. She is now in a way more real to him than in life. He is now in contact with her essence."⁶³

If reality is elsewhere, as the Platonists contend, then God cannot be present in material things. This forces one to the conclusion that the sacraments of the church are symbolic, not true means of grace. According to Lewis,

The diffused Platonism, or Neoplatonism—if there is a difference—of Augustine, of the pseudo-Dionysius, of Macrobius, of the divine popularizer Boethius, provided the very atmosphere in which the new world awoke. How thoroughly the spirit of symbolism was absorbed by full-grown mediaeval thought may be seen in the writings of Hugo of St. Victor. For Hugo, the material element in the Christian ritual is no mere concession to our sensuous weakness and has nothing arbitrary about it. On the contrary there are three conditions necessary for any sacrament, and of these three the positive ordinance of God is only the second. The first is the pre-existing *similitudo*

⁶⁰ Sayer, 305.

⁶¹ Sayer, 224.

⁶² Sayer, 291.

⁶³ Sayer, 393.

between the material element and the spiritual reality. Water, *ex naturali qualitate*, was an image of the grace of the Holy Ghost even before the sacrament of baptism was ordained.⁶⁴

We contrast this with the clear words of Holy Scripture. Regarding Holy Baptism,

[God] saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour" (Tit. 3:5-6).

And regarding Holy Communion,

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took break, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me" (I Cor. 11:23-25).

That is to say, the Sacraments are not symbols but are true means of grace, wherein God connects His Word of promise to the material elements, and by them gives to penitent sinners the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

Again, this Platonic super-spirituality and denial of the capacity of material things to contain spiritual things runs from Plato into the church through Origen and Augustine in a direct line to Calvin and the Church of England to Lewis.⁶⁵ One finds the same stream of thought in American (and I assume Canadian) Evangelicalism, with its two main branches in Arminian Methodist and Pentecostal church bodies on the one hand and Calvinist Presbyterian and Reformed denominations on the other. Some Baptists, of course, are Reformed and some are Arminian, but they generally belong under the same umbrella. All Evangelicals share Platonic assumptions to a certain extent, denying the efficacy of the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist, and stressing practical, ethical behaviour in preaching to the neglect of the cross of Christ. One is not surprised to find that this is the very segment of Christendom that is the most enthusiastic about C. S. Lewis, even though they would be horrified if one of their number drank and smoked heavily like Lewis. One society dedicated to the work of Lewis has purchased and renovated Lewis's former residence, The Kilns, and sponsors summer study institutes on Lewis at Oxford. Wheaton College, one of the foremost American Evangelical institutions of higher learning, has an

⁶⁴ Lewis, *Allegory*, 46.

⁶⁵ Conversation with Prof. Norman Nagel of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri, 5 January 2005.

important C. S. Lewis collection, including *The Wardrobe*. It is this segment that continues to keep Lewis's books in print and presumably has made the recent film version of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* such a commercial success, not to mention the *Shadowlands* phenomenon of a few years back.

So on it goes. I can now get a Narnia Happy Meal at McDonald's (though what George MacDonald would say about such things one can only guess). And at Walgreens Drug Store the other day I noticed a display offering Narnia lip gloss, presumably to protect you from chapped lips when you find yourself in a place like Narnia—or Canada—where it's always winter. As I said in the beginning of my paper, the whole world seems to be rushing into Narnia. That's not entirely a bad thing. Lewis writes very well. There is much of merit in Lewis, particularly his apologetic and ethical writings along with his programme for improving our schools. He does confess the reality of Christ's death and resurrection, as opposed to modernist views about Jesus being only a moral philosopher. But the Christian reader must be cautious, lest, like Edmund with the Turkish delight, he become addicted Platonic fantasy and never find his way back to the real world of biblical truth.

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C. S. LEWIS RESPONDS: TRENDS IN RELIGION*

Joel D. Heck

I would like to begin in a typically Lewisian manner. At least five times in his writings Lewis referred to himself as “only a layman”¹ or “an ordinary layman” (*MC*, viii and 105). In the Preface to *The Problem of Pain*, Lewis wrote that he was “a layman and an amateur”, not a theologian. Perhaps most disclamatory of all, Lewis wrote these introductory words to *Reflections on the Psalms*: “This is not a work of scholarship. I am no Hebraist, no higher critic, no ancient historian, no archaeologist”.² And most engagingly of all, in his essay “Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism,” Lewis the layman, speaking to theologians in training at Westcott House, Cambridge, said, “I am a sheep, telling shepherds what only a sheep can tell them. And now I start my bleating.”³

I have the same problem as that of Lewis. Lewis’s field was English language and literature, and I do not have a background in his area of specialty. This paper takes me into the realm of early twentieth century English history, even though I am neither a historian nor an Englishman and certainly not one with a specialty in English history. But it does take me into the discipline of theology and into Lewis studies, and so I dare to proceed.

This paper grows out of the work I did in *Irrigating Deserts*, a book that includes a brief survey of the intellectual climate of Oxford and Cambridge during the Lewis years. My current work on Lewis takes me more deeply into that field in an effort to understand the context within which Lewis wrote and the intellectual climate to which he responded. Because of the wide ranging interests of Lewis, as well as his Oxford University training in Honour Moderations,⁴ Greats,⁵ and English Language and Literature, I could summarize Lewis’s responses to trends in philosophy, science, history, politics, education, English, the Fine Arts, or the social sciences, but I will focus only on some of the trends in religion.

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¹ Once in *Mere Christianity* [*MC*] (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1980), 54; and twice in the essay, “Answers to Questions on Christianity”, which appears in the collection called *God in the Dock*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 60, 62.

² C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), 1.

³ Lewis, *Christian Reflections*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 152.

⁴ Honour, or Classical, Moderations, a difficult course of study in Greek and Latin texts.

⁵ A course of study in ancient history and classical philosophy.

Therein lies one of the problems, or perhaps advantages, in writing on Lewis. You have to write in an interdisciplinary fashion. Lewis is likely to draw on literature, history, philosophy, and theology all in the same book or essay. This, of course, makes the criticism of Lewis that he was writing outside of his area of expertise hollow, for one of the hopes we have for a student of the liberal arts is that the student does the same—drawing on written and oral communication skills, utilizing problem-solving skills, thinking critically on the subject at hand, thinking theologically and historically, with an appreciation of the social sciences, the Fine Arts, and Western culture, and drawing on the grammar, logic, and rhetoric of the medieval Trivium to express his or her thinking cogently.

Four themes stand out in Lewis's theological writings, and therein lies some of his best advice for us: (1) his rejection of modernism, or liberalism; (2) his defence of the supernatural, including miracles; (3) his rejection of scientific materialism; and (4) his rejection of relativism or, conversely, his belief in objective truth, including the truth claims of the Bible. You can see that these issues both overlap one another and speak in a timely way to our circumstances today. Though he addressed these issues chiefly in the 1940s and '50s, these issues remain current, and Lewis's responses to the increasing secularization of the church in twentieth-century England provide us with an answer to many of these same questions today. Although many misunderstand Lewis as a defender of "mere Christianity", thinking that this referred to the lowest common denominator, in fact the term "mere Christianity" meant that he was a staunch defender of historic, biblical Christianity. By the way, this will not be an exhaustive analysis, but cursory, focusing especially on Lewis's lesser known essays in the 1940s.

Some argue that the Christian faith was the largest single influence at Oxford during the 1940s and that Lewis was at the centre of this influence. F. M. Turner wrote, "The single twentieth-century Oxford religious figure whose influence extended far beyond the University was Clive Staples Lewis, who was neither a member of the faculty of theology nor even a theologian."⁶ Adrian Hastings wrote of Lewis, "No formal theologian or clerical writer was half as important, if we are concerned, not with a history of original theology, but one of religion, of widely shared conviction, of the movement of belief and religious behaviour."⁷

Modernism in England challenged many traditionally held Christian beliefs, including belief in miracles and the historicity and reliability of

⁶ Turner, "Religion", chapter 11 in *The History of the University of Oxford*, vol. 8, *The Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 310. See also Adrian Hastings, *A History of English Christianity: 1920–2000*, 4th ed. (London: SCM Press, 2001), xvii.

⁷ Hastings, 493.

many of its sources, and can therefore accept some of the blame for religious decline in Oxford.⁸ The nature of truth was a problem at Oxford, especially among its philosophers, hence their dislike for any assurances of the reliability of the Bible. In this repudiation of truth, and its correlative repudiation of the reliability of the Bible, the modernists were offering a variation on the first question, “Did God really say?” Modernists such as Mr Broad of *The Pilgrim’s Regress* claimed that truth arose from experience, attempting also to commend the Christian faith on rational grounds, but conceding too much to the attempt to redefine Christianity in terms congenial to a cultural and “modern” Christianity. They had not learned what Lewis learned, namely that so often older is, in fact, better.

Lewis’s article for *The Spectator* (1941) entitled “Evil and God” carried the same title as that of Dr C. E. M. Joad, whose article had appeared on 31 January 1941, one week earlier. In this article, Lewis anticipated some of the arguments that he would later deliver over the BBC and that would appear in *Mere Christianity*, such as the attraction of monotheism or dualism above creeds and the emergent evolution of Henri Bergson, both of which Joad had rejected in his article. Evil is parasitic, a corruption of the good and therefore not on the same level as good. Therefore, dualism should be rejected also. Although a rationalist and a socialist who once rejoiced that clergymen would be extinct by 1960,⁹ Joad himself later returned to the Christianity of his youth. That happened in part due to the influence of Lewis, whom Joad debated at a meeting of the Oxford Socratic Club on 24 January 1944 on the topic “On Being Reviewed by Christians”.

Lewis’s essay, “On Ethics” (probably 1942), although undated, probably predates, and anticipates, *The Abolition of Man* (1943) by a year or so. Lewis delivered this essay to an unnamed audience about the fact that ethical systems show much similarity to one another and therefore demonstrate the universal nature of ethics. Christ’s offer of forgiveness would have been meaningless unless people had already known that they had broken the Law, a typically Lutheran Law-Gospel insight. Lewis rejected duty or instinct¹⁰ as

⁸ Brian Harrison, ed., *The History of the University of Oxford*, vol. 7: *The Twentieth Century*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), xxv.

⁹ Tomes, “Joad, Cyril Edwin Mitchinson (1891-1953)”, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004), <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/34193>> (26 April 2005).

¹⁰ In a letter dated 24 October 1940, Lewis wrote to Sister Penelope, “The man who can dismiss ‘sinned in Adam’ as an ‘idiom’ and identify virtue with the herd instinct is no use to me, despite his very great learning” (on Norman Powell Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin* (1927), a book Lewis also mentions in *The Problem of Pain*.) C. S. Lewis: *Collected Letters*, vol. 2, *Books, Broadcasts and War 1931-1949*, ed. Walter Hooper (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2004), 450.

the motive for behaviour, for some other system of thought must determine which duty or instinct must take precedence in any given situation. The source of ethics, therefore, is not a given body of ethical injunctions, but the general human tradition. No one can escape from this human tradition, for it is a given.¹¹

In the twenty-third Screwtape letter, originally part of a 1942 series of articles appearing in *The Guardian*,¹² Lewis showed his familiarity with, and appraisal, of the “Quest for the Historical Jesus”, a nineteenth- and early twentieth-century version of the Jesus Seminar. When Albert Schweitzer’s book *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* appeared in English in 1910, academics at Oxford and Cambridge were greatly interested. Schweitzer had surveyed various theologians, all of whom attempted to reconstruct the real Jesus from biblical and extra-biblical documents. He concluded that each theologian “created Him [Jesus] in accordance with his own character” [the theologian’s],¹³ showing the presuppositions with which these scholars approached the biblical text.

Screwtape commended the Jesus quest to Wormwood for four reasons. First, the quest directs readers to someone who does not really exist, i.e. the quest for the historical Jesus is really a reconstruction of an unhistorical Jesus, the very opposite of its alleged intent. Second, the quest results in Jesus the moral Teacher rather than Jesus the Saviour, the incarnate God who was capable of performing miracles and rising from the dead. Third, the quest destroys the devotional life of the Christian, since it directs the Christian to someone other than the Jesus of Scripture. Fourth, the quest bypasses the issue of faith, looking at Jesus from merely a biographical point of view.¹⁴ Since Lewis described the quest favourably from Screwtape’s perspective, this clearly means that Lewis viewed the quest itself negatively. Screwtape’s four reasons for urging Wormwood to use the quest in his strategy of temptation are Lewis’s four major criticisms of the quest of the historical Jesus.

At the Socratic Club, Lewis presented his essay “Is Theology Poetry?” (1944). Himself a proponent of biological evolution, Lewis wrote unhappily about the views of a contemporary, zoologist D. M. S. Watson,

¹¹ He addressed this issue in his BBC broadcasts, both in the broadcast delivered on 6 September 1941, which became chapter 2 of Book 1, “Some Objections”, and in the talk given on 20 September 1942, published as “The Three Parts of Morality.”

¹² The letters appeared weekly in *The Guardian* from 2 May to 28 November 1941.

¹³ Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Macmillan, 1969), 4.

¹⁴ Gray, Patrick, “Screwtape and the Historical Jesus”, *CSL: The Bulletin of The New York C. S. Lewis Society*, 34.6 (Nov/Dec 2003): 1-7.

More disquieting still is Professor D. M. S. Watson's¹⁵ defence. [Now quoting Watson] "Evolution itself," he wrote, "is accepted by zoologists not because it has been observed to occur or ... can be proved by logically coherent evidence to be true, but because the only alternative, special creation, is clearly incredible." [End of Watson quote] Has it come to that? Does the whole vast structure of modern naturalism depend not on positive evidence but simply on an *a priori* metaphysical prejudice? Was it devised not to get in facts but to keep out God?¹⁶

Here Lewis hit the evolutionary prejudice between the eyes, at least when that prejudice comes from an atheistic perspective.

In his essay, "Horrid Red Things" (1944), Lewis addressed the conflict between science and religion. Science has helped Christians to understand that Christian beliefs do not imply a material heaven, but science has not therefore refuted Christian beliefs. Since all language is metaphorical, Christians need to learn that Christian beliefs are not refuted by a scientific explanation, but that Christianity is truly super-natural, i.e. beyond nature and so beyond the reach of science. That results in a Christianity that is both miraculous and shocking. One does not refute the Christian faith by providing a naturalistic explanation for a miracle, especially when it is just a straw man, but one can distinguish between imagination, which often errs, and proper thinking, which can discern the kernel of Christian truth. And that Christian truth must be either believed or rejected; it cannot be merely explained away.

Lewis stated that Christianity was the completion of something that had always been present in the human mind, that paganism carried hints of a greater truth found in Christianity. Lewis argued that science could neither prove nor disprove miracles, since they, like history, fall outside the province of science as events that cannot be repeated and subjected to the experimental method. H. H. Price's confidence that much of religion was the result of natural forces was subjected to the same response as science's rejection of miracles, arguing that naturalism was self-defeating, that if thought is the natural, but random result of physical and natural processes, he would have no reason to suppose that his thinking was correct.

Lewis made similar arguments on behalf of miracles in his 1945 essay for *The Coventry Evening Telegraph*, entitled "Religion and Science". While

¹⁵ David Meredith Seares Watson (1886-1973) was a professor of paleontology, geology, zoology, and comparative anatomy at University College, London, for much of the period between 1911 and 1965. K. A. Kermack, "Watson, David Meredith Seares (1886-1973)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004), <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/31809>> (16 January 2005). Watson's quotation comes from "Science and the B.B.C.," *Nineteenth Century* (April 1943).

¹⁶ Lewis, "Is Theology Poetry?", *The Socratic Digest*, 3 (1945): 34.

Lewis may have invented an imaginary persona for this dialogue, Harry Weldon, philosopher at Lewis's Magdalen College, was an atheist (a term mentioned in the essay), a friend (Lewis's designation for his conversation partner), and someone with whom Lewis could well have had this conversation. The issue is science as a study of Nature rather than super-Nature. Late in the essay, Lewis argued that the "enormous size of the universe and the insignificance of the earth were known for centuries", according to Ptolemy's *Almagest*, but only in the last hundred years have facts about the size of the universe become arguments against Christianity. As they say these days, there is something wrong with this picture.

The publication of *The Great Divorce* (1945) was a challenge to the increasingly liberal views of the Church of England. The portraits of Anglican clergy in *The Pilgrim's Regress* (1933) and *The Screwtape Letters* (1942) had not flattered them.¹⁷ In *The Great Divorce* the picture of an Anglican bishop in hell who did not believe in a literal heaven or hell demonstrated Lewis's opposition to a growing denial of many historical Christian beliefs. Such stances did nothing to endear him to the Oxford dons who already thought he was out of character for writing theological works without theological training. Two years later, Lewis was bypassed for the Merton Chair of English Literature.

Lewis read the essay "Christian Apologetics" to Anglican priests and youth leaders at the Carmarthen Conference for Youth Leaders and Junior Clergy during Easter (1 April) 1945, at Carmarthen, Wales. This essay is striking for its defence of Christianity and for its similarity to the essay "God in the Dock". I appreciate Lewis's argument for books by Christians on various subjects with their Christianity latent. Aware of the influential Penguin series of books and the *Thinker's Library*, Lewis wanted a series of books produced by Christians that could exceed those series in quality. He also spoke in support of supernaturalism, objective facts, and accepting scriptural teaching even when it seems obscure or repulsive. That is precisely the time when we will progress in Christian knowledge, he wrote—not when it's easy, but when it's difficult.

Other essays flowed from the pen of Lewis. For example, the essay "Religion Without Dogma?" (= "A Christian Reply to Professor Price") was read to the Socratic Club on 20 May 1946. In this essay, Lewis responded to the paper of H. H. Price, entitled "The Grounds of Modern Agnosticism."¹⁸ H. H. Price had been Wykeham Professor of Logic at New College since

¹⁷ William Griffin, *Clive Staples Lewis: A Dramatic Life* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 243, 254.

¹⁸ Published in *The Socratic Digest*, 5 (1962): 39-47 and in the *Phoenix Quarterly*, 1.1 (Autumn 1946): 25ff.

1935, and he was a former Fellow at Magdalen College, Oxford, Lewis's College. Price's specialty was epistemology, especially the problem of how we know the external world.

Lewis argued that faith does not come from philosophical arguments alone, although he esteemed those arguments highly, but also from an experience of the Numinous. Now I disagree with Lewis here, of course, since faith comes from hearing the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). But let's hear Lewis out. Lewis disagreed with Price's position that the essence of religion was belief in God and immortality, arguing that the essence of religion is a thirst for something higher than natural ends, for an object that is both good and good for you. Price had argued that miracles, what he called an accretion, could not be accepted by science and that much of religion was the result of natural forces in action over many years. He was, therefore, arguing for a minimal religion, one which, in Lewis's view, would rob religion of its power. If no dogma is defined, everyone will read this new minimal religion along the lines of their current religion, with Hindus reading it as a Hindu religion, Nazis reading it in Nazi fashion, Communists reading it as an economic struggle, and everyone else doing the same.

The Second World War was clearly in the background when Lewis wrote the essay "Christian Apologetics", since in that essay he mentioned his talks at Royal Air Force camps. He was aware of the decline in religion in Great Britain, for he said that Great Britain was as much a mission field as China, and he also spoke of the almost total lack of a sense of sin. Lewis also wrote an essay for *The Cherwell*, entitled "The Decline of Religion" (1946). In that essay, published during the fall of 1946, Lewis argued that Christianity had not declined in England, but a vague Theism had. The decline was not gradual, but it occurred at that exact moment when chapel was no longer compulsory. In fact, he stated, one could now see where people actually stood, rather than have their spiritual condition obscured by compulsory attendance. Lewis wrote, "The fog of 'religion' has lifted; the positions and numbers of both armies can be observed; and real shooting is now possible."¹⁹ Lewis argued that Christianity was now "on the map" for the younger *intelligentsia* as was not the case in 1920. However, increased interest was not the same as the conversion of England or even the conversion of a single soul. But now back to the essay "Christian Apologetics".

Among Lewis's apologetic techniques are the importance of learning the language of your audience, pointing out the logical argument of *aut Deus aut malus homo* (i.e. that Christ is "either God or a bad man"), affirming the historicity of the Gospels, and even arguing that "though all salvation is

¹⁹ Lewis, "The Decline of Religion," in *God in the Dock*, 220.

through Jesus, we need not conclude that He cannot save those who have not explicitly accepted Him in this life.”²⁰ Principal Nicol Cross, a Unitarian, didn’t like Lewis’s logic. He said at the Socratic Club on 11 November 1946 that “he must allude to the ‘vulgar nonsense’ that ‘a man who said the things that Jesus said, and was not God, would be either a lunatic or a devil.’”²¹ He was quoting Lewis’s BBC address, entitled “The Shocking Alternative”, first delivered on 1 February 1942, an address that later became a part of *Mere Christianity*. I prefer the conclusion of Justin Phillips, who believed that this was the talk that “established Lewis’s reputation as a Christian apologist of the first rank.”²²

Lewis’s essay “The Laws of Nature” (4 April 1945) addressed the same territory as his essay earlier that year, “Religion and Science”. The topic is a naturalistic interpretation of events rather than a supernatural one. A friend of Lewis’s was sad that a particular woman thought her prayers had enabled her son to survive the Battle of Arnhem, fought in September 1944 in Holland just seven months earlier. World War Two was nearly over, and a victory at Arnhem could have hastened the end. The Allies failed both to plan well and to execute their battle plan, resulting in a resounding defeat. Out of the approximately 10 600 men who had fought at Arnhem, most of them British, only 2 398 returned, 1 500 had been killed, and the rest had been captured by the Germans.²³ The friend said that prayer had nothing to do with the son’s survival. He survived because of the laws of nature. But Lewis argued that “in the whole history of the universe the laws of Nature have never produced a single event.”²⁴ The laws do not have a mind, and they have no power; they are merely the pattern to which events conform. The source of these events and these laws, in short, is God. The woman’s prayers **had** protected her son.

Around 1946, Lewis wrote an essay later published by the Student Christian Movement under the title “Man or Rabbit?” In it Lewis argued that one of the distinctive characteristics of a human being was the desire to know things, particularly their truth claims. The question asked by some people of the day was whether they could live a good life without believing in Christianity. Lewis pointed out the fact that being good is not the essence of Christianity, but being remade, taking on the Divine Life, being transformed into a real person, a son or daughter of God, “drenched in joy”. People should not ask how helpful Christianity is, but how **true** it is! And if

²⁰ Lewis, “Christian Apologetics”, in *God in the Dock*, 102.

²¹ *The Socratic Digest*, 4 (1948): 103.

²² Phillips, 147.

²³ See www.arnhemarchive.org.

²⁴ Lewis, “The Laws of Nature”, in *God in the Dock*, 77.

true, then the Materialist view, which places the good of civilization in prime position (since individuals live only a few decades), will be replaced by the Christian view, which places the good of the individual in prime position (since individuals actually live for ever). And, in fact, the person who isn't really interested in knowing about the truth of Christianity is afraid of considering that question because he is afraid that he will find out that it is true. Then he would have to change his way of thinking as well as his behaviour.

At this point I would like to back up in time and rehearse the events that led up to the writing of Lewis's 1947 book *Miracles* (1947). Sir James George Frazer (1854-1941) wrote a twelve-volume work over a period of thirty years, entitled *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (1890-1919). Frazer had argued that many religions contain the story of dying and rising, thereby making Christianity nothing remarkable, but simply another of the mythologies. The seventeen-year-old Lewis had read that book in 1916 while studying with the atheist Kirkpatrick,²⁵ who loved *The Golden Bough*, and wrote to Arthur Greeves about it that same year, agreeing with Frazer's position with a bit of Schopenhauer mixed in,

All religions, that is all mythologies, to give them their proper name, are merely man's own invention—Christ as much as Loki. Primitive man found himself surrounded by all sorts of terrible things he didn't understand—thunder, pestilence, snakes etc.: what more natural than to suppose that these were animated by evil spirits trying to torture him. These he kept off by cringing to them, singing songs and making sacrifices etc. Gradually from being mere nature-spirits these supposed being[s] were elevated into more elaborate ideas, such as the old gods: and when man became more refined he pretended that these spirits were good as well as powerful.

Thus religion, that is to say mythology, grew up. Often, too, great men were regarded as gods after their death—such as Heracles or Odin: thus after the death of a Hebrew philosopher Yeshua (whose name we have corrupted into Jesus) he became regarded as a god, a cult sprang up, which was afterwards connected with the ancient Hebrew-Jahweh-worship, and so Christianity came into being—one mythology among many, but the one that we happen to have been brought up in.

²⁵ His letter to Arthur Greeves on 12 Oct. 1916, above, shows his full acceptance of Frazer's views, reflecting the fact that he read Frazer around this time. Lewis, *They Stand Together: The Letters of C. S. Lewis to Arthur Greeves*, ed. Walter Hooper (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1979), 135. Indeed, Lewis wrote in *Miracles: A Preliminary Study*, "The very man who taught me to think—a hard, satirical atheist (ex-Presbyterian) ... doted on the *Golden Bough*" (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 93. And in *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life*, Lewis wrote of Kirkpatrick, "He was great on *The Golden Bough* and Schopenhauer" (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1955), 139.

Now all this you must have heard before: it is the recognized scientific account of the growth of religions. Superstition of course in every age has held the common people, but in every age the educated and thinking ones have stood outside it, though usually outwardly conceding to it for convenience. I had thought that you were gradually being emancipated from the old beliefs, but if this is not so, I hope we are too sensible to quarrel about abstract ideas.²⁶

Lewis read Frazer again in 1923 as a young Oxford undergraduate, accepting Frazer's view of religion, especially Christianity, as simply a stage in man's intellectual evolution, which would eventually arrive at the point where it would no longer need religion, accepting science as the worldview that explained ultimate truth. Science was the new religion for many at this time both in Oxford and Cambridge. People are always looking for something to believe in, and they will choose the nearest object worthy of veneration, deify it, and then bow down before it. Frazer wrote about dying and rising gods, interpreting them merely as cultural and mythological phenomena. After his conversion in 1931, Lewis came to view the many instances of the dying and rising god, not as proof of Christianity's falsity, but as divine preparation for a true myth.

Then, in the 1940s, Lewis wrote a sermon, "The Grand Miracle", preached on 27 April 1945 at St Jude on the Hill Church, London, focussing especially on the Incarnation of Christ. Lewis argued that to remove the miraculous from Christianity is to kill it, for miracles, especially the miracle of the Incarnation, are integral to it. All other Christian miracles "either prepare for, or exhibit, or result from the Incarnation."²⁷ In this sermon, Lewis mentioned Sir James George Frazer's book, *The Golden Bough*, a book that Adrian Hastings calls "almost the bible of the 1920s."²⁸ Then, in 1947, the same year that Lewis appeared on the front cover of *Time* magazine, the book *Miracles* was published, forming the culmination of this series of events and responding, not only to Frazer, but also to Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976) and his demythologizing of the New Testament.

Just as he was writing this book, *Miracles*, Lewis wrote to Dom Bede Griffiths in 1945. He said,

To write a book on miracles, which are in a sense invasions of Nature, has made me realize Nature herself as I've never done before. You don't *see* Nature till you believe in the Supernatural: don't get the full, hot, salty tang of her except by contrast with the pure water from beyond the world.²⁹

²⁶ *The Letters of C. S. Lewis to Arthur Greeves*, 12 Oct. 1916, p. 135.

²⁷ Lewis, "The Grand Miracle," in *God in the Dock*, 81.

²⁸ Hastings, 223.

²⁹ *Collected Letters*, 2:648, a letter dated 10 May 1945.

This was the time that he was bypassed for two professorates at Oxford, first in 1947 and then again in 1951, largely because of his strong Christian stance and his publication outside of his field. This reminds us of the need to stand firm for our principles in spite of the prejudice or persecution that may come our way, and it strikes me as a natural outgrowth of a good liberal arts education. God certainly blessed Lewis for his convictions and his willingness to speak out in print.

I would now like to turn to three essays from the 1950s and '60s. "Is Theism Important?" (1952) was first presented at the Socratic Club in response to a Socratic Club presentation by H. H. Price, whom we met earlier and who spoke that year on the same topic. Price was at the time Wykeham Professor of Logic at the University of Oxford and a Fellow of New College. Both speakers were sympathetic to one another's views, both finding value in the contribution of philosophy to the Christian faith, particularly in distinguishing between faith as assent and faith as trust, and also in the philosophical proofs for the existence of God, such as the Argument from Design (the teleological argument, developed by William Paley).

In 1958, Alec R. Vidler published a book called *Windsor Sermons*. Vidler was a noted liberal scholar and Dean of King's College, Cambridge. One day Lewis was conversing with the Principal of Westcott House, Cambridge, The Rt Revd Kenneth Carey. After reading at least part of one of Vidler's sermons, entitled "The Sign at Cana", the Bishop asked Lewis what he thought about it. Lewis "expressed himself very freely about the sermon and said that he thought that it was quite incredible that we should have had to wait nearly 2000 years to be told by a theologian called Vidler that what the Church has always regarded as a miracle was, in fact, a parable!"³⁰ In that sermon, Vidler had contended that "the Fourth gospel does not call it a 'miracle' ... but a 'sign'. It should be read more as a parable than as a miracle."³¹ Later in the same sermon Vidler wrote, "So, the water and the six waterpots ... represent the old order of things, which Jesus, who is God's agent in the new creation, transforms into wine." Vidler was using orthodox language, while denying the miracle. Lewis saw the danger of the phrase "more as a parable than as a miracle", which suggested "not a miracle".

Nevertheless, as a result of this exchange with Kenneth Carey, Lewis gave an address on 11 May 1959, entitled "Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism" (also known as "Fern-seed and Elephants"). He spoke to a group

³⁰ Lewis, "Fern-Seed and Elephants", in *Fern-Seed and Elephants and other essays on Christianity*, ed. Walter Hooper (Glasgow: William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd., 1975), 104, n. 2.

³¹ Alec Vidler, *Windsor Sermons* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1958), 68.

of students at Westcott House, Cambridge, future priests of the Church of England.

In that essay, Lewis challenged some of the assumptions of modern liberal theology, many of them expressed in *Windsor Sermons*. His challenges were four: (1) biblical critics lack literary judgement (they read between the lines of ancient texts, not understanding literary genres, e.g. reading John's Gospel as a romance); (2) some apparently claim that the real teaching of Christ came rapidly to be misunderstood and has been recovered only by modern scholars; (3) some claim that miracles don't occur, i.e. they have an anti-supernaturalistic bias, a familiar theme in Lewis; and (4) attempts to recover the genesis of a text often err. This last point he supported with his own experience of having the origin of his own books invariably misunderstood, even by those who lived at the same time, spoke the same language, and lived in the same country and culture. Imagine, he suggested, what happens when you separate the critic from a biblical book by two thousand years, by culture, language, education, and other factors.

On 17 March 1963, just prior to the release of his book *Honest to God*, Bishop J. A. T. Robinson³² published an article for *The Observer* entitled "Our Image of God Must Go". The article summarized his forthcoming book and expressed the urgent need for the church to question the traditional image of God as a supernatural person. This, he thought, would enable Christians to communicate with secular people. *The Observer's* publicity gave great impetus to the book both nationally and internationally.

Later that year *Honest to God* was published, reflecting the growing secularism of the day. The book sold almost a million copies in three years.³³ In *Honest to God*, Robinson suggested that Christians must recast the Christian faith in modern, secular terms, preferring Tillich's description of God as the "ground" of all being and writing, "Nothing can of itself be labelled as wrong." God is not up there or out there, coming to earth as a visitor from outer space. Ethical conduct, according to Robinson, then Bishop of Woolwich, is bound only by love, and moral decisions depend upon the situation. The Bible is little more than a collection of religious opinions. In a 22 February 1966 article in *Look* magazine, James A. Pike told *Look* that Robinson had set aside "the Trinity, the Virgin Birth and the Incarnation." It was a short step from Robinson's cultural modernism to a

³² Anglican Bishop of Woolwich (1919-1983), who served as Bishop from 1959 to 1969. *Honest to God* was considered by many to deny the existence of a personal God. John Warwick Montgomery, *The Suicide of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, Inc., 1970), 231.

³³ Hastings, 536.

radical theology and from there to the Death of God theologians in the United States.³⁴

Lewis wrote a response in *The Observer* exactly one week later under the title, “Must Our Image of God Go?” Lewis rejected Robinson’s modernism, writing, “Does the Bishop mean that something which is not ‘a person’ could yet be ‘personal’? Even this could be managed if ‘not a person’ were taken to mean ‘a person and more’—as is provided for by the doctrine of the Trinity.”³⁵ In this, Lewis was referring to the fourth part of *Mere Christianity*, entitled “Beyond Personality”, arguing that the Trinity is personal, but also beyond personality, that is, something more than a person, something superpersonal and not impersonal, something tri-dimensional, three-personal, or Trinitarian.

In summary, Lewis had a commitment to a thoroughgoing supernaturalism, objective truth, and traditional Christianity instead of a modernism that is so modern that it has to change almost daily.

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³⁴ Thomas J. J. Altizer, Wm. Hamilton, Rd Rubenstein, and P. Van Buren, Harvey Cox, and others.

³⁵ *God in the Dock*, 185.

THE POWER OF SUPPOSING: C. S. LEWIS AND CHILDREN'S FANTASY*

Ann F. Howey

“**S**uppose there were a world like Narnia,” Lewis said to one of his child readers by letter,¹ and countless children and adults have gladly joined him in this supposition—as of 2001, the series had “sold more than 65 million copies in more than 30 languages.”² Nevertheless, there are those who judge Narnia to be an uncongenial place for children because of the books’ genre, violent content, Christian ideology, or gender roles, and thus responses to Lewis’s children’s books range from high praise to utter condemnation. Attempting to evaluate Lewis’s contribution to children’s literature makes one acutely aware of the ideological nature of any evaluation: assumptions (explicit or implicit) of what children’s literature should and should not do are often the basis of judgement. This article draws on the mass of critical opinion about Lewis, but it begins by examining his theories of writing for children—as expressed in various essays and letters—and then moves to his practice of writing for children—as seen in *The Chronicles of Narnia*—and places both theory and practice in the larger context of twentieth-century children’s fantasy. Lewis’s theories of fantasy and children’s literature facilitate reading (and teaching) the Narnian books and the issues that have become the most controversial within them: their Christianity, their narrative strategies, and their representation of gender.

WRITING CHILDREN'S FANTASY

The four essays in which Lewis particularly addresses writing for children are “On Three Ways of Writing for Children”, “Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What’s to be Said”, “On Juvenile Tastes”, and “It All Began

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¹ Quoted in Murray J. Evans, “C. S. Lewis’ Narnia Books: The Reader in the Myth”, in *Touchstones: Reflections on the Best in Children’s Literature*, ed. Perry Nodelman, vol. 1, (West Lafayette, IN: Children’s Literature Association, 1985), 134.

² Doreen Carvajal, “Marketing ‘Narnia’ Without a Christian Lion”, *New York Times* (3 June 2001): 1.

With a Picture”.³ These essays are less formal theories to be applied to writing practice than reflections on his writing practice in the Narnia series. “On Three Ways of Writing for Children”, for example, was presented to the Library Association at the Bournemouth Conference in 1952,⁴ by which time he had written five of the chronicles and seen three of them into print. Besides such formal speeches and essays, Lewis made various comments in replying to letters he received from child readers of the *Chronicles*.

Each of these four essays considers genre and audience. Like his fellow Inklings J. R. R. Tolkien, Lewis felt the need to defend the genre (fairy tale/fantasy) in which he wrote. Tolkien’s “On Fairy Stories”,⁵ delivered as a lecture in 1938 and first published in 1947, examines the history of fairy tales to find that their association with children’s literature is an accidental, recent development. Fantasy, Tolkien argues, should not be dismissed as childish or escapist. While Tolkien’s essay is likely more well-known than those by Lewis (and in fact Lewis refers to Tolkien’s arguments—particularly regarding the association of fairy tale and fantasy with childhood—in “On Three Ways of Writing for Children”),⁶ Lewis also defends fairy tale/fantasy as a legitimate art form by responding to criticisms of it as childish, unrealistic, and frightening; this defence acts as a theory of the genre’s purposes and effects.

Whereas Tolkien defends fairy tales from the charge of childishness by showing that they were never meant to be solely for children, Lewis addresses the charge of childishness itself. To disdain something as being directed towards children implies that “adult” is a privileged term. Lewis attacks this proposition by questioning the maturity of those so concerned with being adult: “To be concerned about being grown up, to admire the grown up because it is grown up ... these things are the marks of childhood and adolescence.”⁷ Furthermore, he distinguishes between growth and change. To “grow” involves the addition of new tastes and experiences; simply to replace old tastes with new is change.⁸ He thus argues against the

³ C. S. Lewis, “On Three Ways of Writing for Children” [hereafter OTW], in *Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories*, ed. Walter Hooper (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1966), 22-34; “Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What’s to be Said,” in *Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories*, ed. Walter Hooper (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1966), 35-38; “On Juvenile Tastes,” in *Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories*, ed. Walter Hooper (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1966), 39-41; and “It All Began with a Picture,” in *Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories*, ed. Walter Hooper (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1966), 42.

⁴ Walter Hooper, “Preface,” in C. S. Lewis, *Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories*, ed. Hooper (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1966), viii.

⁵ J. R. R. Tolkien, “On Fairy Stories,” in *Tree and Leaf* (Boston: Houghton, 1965): 3-84.

⁶ Lewis, OTW, 26.

⁷ Lewis, OTW, 25.

⁸ Lewis, OTW, 25-26.

marginalization of certain genres—fantasy particularly, and children’s literature generally. Because “there is no literary taste common to all children”,⁹ just as there is no literary taste common to all adults, texts should not be prejudged on the basis of a presumed audience. Lewis’s remarks justify fantasy and children’s literature as a legitimate field for artistic endeavour—and by extension scholarship. That such a defence is still needed, that concerns over “childishness” still exist today, may be illustrated by the assumptions of those marketing J. K. Rowling’s books; copies marketed for older readers have different covers than those marketed for younger readers, reassuring older readers that the books are not just for children.¹⁰

Lewis also defends the genre of fairy tale/fantasy against the charge that it is unrealistic. Obviously one of the requirements of fantasy and many fairy tales is the presence of magic. One of the criticisms of the genre is that children will be deceived by the stories and receive “a false impression of the world they live in.”¹¹ Lewis characteristically examines the charge itself to find the flaw in its assumptions. He says, “I think what profess to be realistic stories for children are far more likely to deceive them. I never expected the real world to be like the fairy tales. I think that I did expect school to be like the school stories.”¹² Magic clearly signals the realm of imagination for readers in ways that realistic fiction does not, and thus signals the game being played and the type of belief that is appropriate.¹³

Concerns over fantasy as unrealistic are closely related to accusations of the genre as “escapist”. Tolkien addresses the charge of escapism by using the image of escape from a duty—such as deserting from the army—versus escape from bondage—such as wrongful imprisonment;¹⁴ Lewis also addresses the two meanings of escape by reflecting on the different kinds of longing created. Escapist literature leads to dissatisfaction; the longing it creates is for a life that seems to be possible (as in those supposedly realistic school stories) and yet that never happens. Fantasy, Lewis argues, also creates a longing, but the experience of longing itself is the point; since the reader knows the depicted world is not possible, the longing is “a spiritual

⁹ Lewis, “On Juvenile Tastes”, 39.

¹⁰ See Suman Gupta’s discussion of adult- and children-directed book covers in *Re-Reading Harry Potter* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), especially 4-5. He argues that the differences in colour, style, and content of the images creates a different relationship between reader and text in each case.

¹¹ Lewis, OTW, 28.

¹² Lewis, OTW, 28.

¹³ See W. R. Irwin, *The Game of the Impossible* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1976) for discussion of fantasy as game.

¹⁴ Tolkien, 61.

exercise”,¹⁵ a desire for something beyond this world that enriches the experience of this world. Although Lewis does not use the term “estrangement”, this seems to be the quality that he is identifying: fantasy makes its readers view this world in new and enriching ways because of the enchanted worlds they have visited. As Lewis phrases it, the reader of fantasy “does not despise real woods because he has read of enchanted woods: the reading makes all real woods a little enchanted.”¹⁶ Like Tolkien’s essay, Lewis’s discussion of the effects of fantasy is grounded in his Christian beliefs; the longing created is the longing for the Divine.

Because of his Christian theology, Lewis also asserts that the sometimes violent struggle between good and evil portrayed in much fantasy is not frightening (or at least, not excessively so) to young readers but reassuring. Fantasy does assume that this is “a world of death, violence, wounds, adventure, heroism and cowardice, good and evil”, but rather than seeing that knowledge as fearful, Lewis perceives it as empowering: “Since it is so likely that [children] will meet cruel enemies, let them at least have heard of brave knights and heroic courage.”¹⁷ Fantasy thus conveys hope and inspiration.

Lewis’s remarks engage with continuing scholarly and popular debates over the effects of fantasy and challenge assumptions such as the privileging of adult over child or of realism over fantasy. They suggest something of his practice as well: his choice of the “fairy tale form” for books where divinity is encountered first-hand, and the conflict—sometimes physical—between good and evil in those books. Moreover, Lewis’s essays show his concern for the effects of literature and thus for the audience. His essay “On Three Ways of Writing for Children” deals with the question of audience most explicitly; in defining the “three ways of writing”, Lewis is articulating three possible relationships between writer and reader. This relationship remains a particular concern to scholars of children’s literature. Although children are the target audience, adults write, illustrate, publish, market and even purchase most children’s books. How do adult authors negotiate the difference in life experience between themselves and young readers?

The first relationship Lewis suggests between writer and reader might be characterized as a distant relationship; the writer works with assumptions of what the generic child audience wants or needs and provides that material. Lewis describes this attitude as “giving the public what it wants. ... however

¹⁵ Lewis, OTW, 30.

¹⁶ Lewis, OTW, 30.

¹⁷ Lewis, OTW, 31.

little you like it yourself”;¹⁸ he associates it with the author’s assumption of a position of superiority in relation to the child reader.

The second way might be characterized as a community relationship; the writer is telling a particular story to a particular child. Lewis cites Lewis Carroll, Kenneth Grahame, and Tolkien as examples, for *Alice in Wonderland*, *The Wind in the Willows*, and *The Hobbit* all began with the authors telling stories to individual children. Lewis acknowledges that such authors are still trying “to give that child what it wants”, but the storytelling situation means that “There is no question of ‘children’ conceived as a strange species whose habits you have ‘made up’ like an anthropologist. ... Nor ... would it be possible ... to regale the child with things calculated to please it but regarded by yourself with indifference or contempt.”¹⁹ The story is shaped by the teller, but also by the audience’s immediate reception of it: Lewis describes this as “a community, a composite personality” out of which “the story grows”.²⁰ The personal nature of the relationship affects both writer and what is written.

The third way that Lewis describes might be characterized as an independent relationship; the author creates “a children’s story because a children’s story is the best art-form for something you have to say”²¹ and because the story is one that the author likes. On the one hand, this would seem to involve distance from the audience as well; Lewis seems to be putting the story ahead of any considerations of readers. Nevertheless, the result is a respect for the audience, as authors “must write for children out of those elements in our own imagination which we share with children.”²² Authors in this scenario do not pre-judge who will read or enjoy their fiction, but offer it in the hope of like-minded readers of whatever age. Authors and readers share interests and meet as “independent personalities”.²³ This third approach Lewis asserts is “the only one I could ever use myself”.²⁴

As noted earlier, Lewis’s theoretical writings on children’s literature emerge from his practice of writing the Narnia books; the essays cited were all published between 1952 and 1960, while the *Chronicles* appeared from 1950-1956. Although we should remember Lewis’s own warning that “you must not believe all that authors tell you about how they wrote their

¹⁸ Lewis, OTW, 22. This attitude depends on thinking of children as “a distinct **literary** species” (emphasis in original; Lewis, “On Juvenile Tastes”, 39).

¹⁹ Lewis, OTW, 23.

²⁰ Lewis, OTW, 23.

²¹ Lewis, OTW, 23.

²² Lewis, OTW, 33.

²³ Lewis, OTW, 34.

²⁴ Lewis, OTW, 23.

books”,²⁵ I suggest that Lewis’s distinction among ways of writing for children is particularly crucial to any scholarly reading of the *Chronicles* because it emphasizes the shared imaginings of writer and reader, it warns against privileging message over story, and it suggests ways of reading the narratorial intrusions throughout the *Chronicles*.

THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA: ORIGINS AND WAYS OF READING

In recalling Narnia’s origins, Lewis emphasized image over theology. When asked by publishers to talk about how the series began, Lewis said that “*The Lion [the Witch and the Wardrobe]* all began with a picture of a Faun carrying an umbrella and parcels in a snowy wood”;²⁶ this image Lewis remembers from his teenage years, though he did not begin writing a story to match it until he was “about forty”.²⁷ Whereas many people have assumed that Lewis “began by asking [him]self how [he] could say something about Christianity to children”, he declared such an approach “moonshine”.²⁸ This issue of origins—story or theology first?—also affects readers of the *Chronicles*. If readers come to the *Chronicles* unaware of C. S. Lewis and his other works, including his theological works, they meet Narnia first, on its own terms as story; if readers come to the *Chronicles* from Lewis’s other works, their experience of the story may be quite different.

My own experience illustrates this point. As a reader of the *Chronicles*, meeting them for the first time as a child, the Christian analogies did occur to me, but only gradually; and it may not have been until *The Last Battle* that I had that epiphany, that delightful realization of another way of reading the books. Walter Hooper estimates that, in fact, “only about half Lewis’ readers guess that Aslan is meant to be Christ”, or, more properly, analogous to Christ.²⁹ If one approaches the *Chronicles* aware of Lewis’s reputation as a Christian apologist, one might be looking for those elements and thus easily find them; this may be the reason that Tolkien, for example, objected that

²⁵ Lewis, “It All Began with a Picture”, 42.

²⁶ Lewis, “It All Began With a Picture”, 42.

²⁷ Lewis, “It All Began With a Picture”, 42. Walter Hooper has pointed to the four children who stayed with Lewis during the war as one impetus for the writing of *The Lion*. See *C. S. Lewis: A Companion and Guide* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 402; see also Hooper’s “Narnia: The Author, the Critics, and the Tale”, in *The Longing for a Form*, ed. Peter J. Schakel (Kent State UP, 1977), 106.

²⁸ Lewis, “Sometimes Fairy Stories may say Best What’s to be Said”, 36.

²⁹ Hooper, “Narnia”, 110.

the Christian elements were “too obvious”.³⁰ Through such a lens, the message becomes more visible than the story.³¹

Another circumstance affecting the reception of the story is the order in which the books are encountered. The original order of publication is rather different than what is now usually suggested as the “correct” reading order.³² As Peter J. Schakel argues in his book *Imagination and the Arts in C. S. Lewis*, the order affects the way the reader is introduced to the secondary world—Narnia—and to important characters, such as Aslan.³³ As Schakel suggests, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* introduces readers gradually to the Narnian world, through the physical details of Lucy’s experience as she discovers a world beyond the wardrobe; Lewis’s strategy of using “gaps” creates questions for the reader about where Lucy is, and therefore creates anticipation for more information about this world, its history (also gradually revealed), and its significance to the Pevensie children.³⁴ Schakel points out that *The Magician’s Nephew* uses rather different strategies to introduce Narnia and in several places assumes the reader’s prior knowledge of the place and of Aslan; to read it first is to encounter “vague and unsettling” gaps instead of the “skillful, satisfying gaps found in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*”.³⁵ The “correct order” is still debated; Hooper and the publishers of the *Chronicles* prefer the

³⁰ Hooper, “Narnia”, 110.

³¹ For two (of many) possible ways to “decode” the *Chronicles*, see Don King, “Narnia and the Seven Deadly Sins”, *Mythlore* 38 (Spring 1984): 14-19; or Robert C. Trupia (Msgr.), “Learning Christian Behaviour: The Path of Virtue in *The Chronicles of Narnia*”, *CSL: The Bulletin of the New York C. S. Lewis Society* 24.7-8 (May-June 1993): 1-5.

³² Paul Ford’s *Companion to Narnia* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994) outlines the different reading orders (xxxiv-xxxv). The books appeared as follows (see Ford’s Appendix One for details of composition and publication dates): *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950), *Prince Caspian* (1951), *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (1952), *The Silver Chair* (1953), *The Horse and His Boy* (1954), *The Magician’s Nephew* (1955), and *The Last Battle* (1955-56). The reading order now often suggested follows the internal chronology of events (bracketed numbers indicate time in Narnian Years; see Ford’s “A Comparison of Narnian and Earth Time”, Appendix Three in his *Companion to Narnia: The Magician’s Nephew* (1), *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe* (1000-1015), *The Horse and His Boy* (ca 1010), *Prince Caspian* (2303), *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (2306-2307), *The Silver Chair* (2356), *The Last Battle* (2555).

³³ Peter J. Schakel, *Imagination and the Arts in C. S. Lewis* (Columbia: U of Missouri P, 2002), 40-52. Colin Manlove analyses, in slightly different terms, the “gradual” approach to Narnia exemplified in *Lion*; see his *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Patterning of a Fantastic World* (New York: Twayne, 1993), especially 32-34.

³⁴ Schakel, 45-46. Schakel refers to “reader-response critics” in his use of the term “gaps”, which are “details that need later to be clarified or questions that a reader wants answered, and immediately begins trying to answer by anticipating later events.”

³⁵ Schakel, 49.

internal chronology approach, while Schakel, Ford,³⁶ and other scholars explicitly or implicitly reaffirm the publication order as “correct”.

In a classroom situation—and I speak particularly as an instructor of university classes where one likely has room on the syllabus for only one of the books—the idea of reading order perhaps takes less precedence to practical considerations such as connections to other course material and whether the book will “stand alone” for those students unfamiliar with the rest of the *Chronicles*. In such a situation, either *The Magician’s Nephew* or *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe* works well.³⁷ Both of these texts offer an introduction to the series—*Lion* because it was the first published, and *Magician’s Nephew* because it tells of Narnia’s creation. Because Lewis had not initially planned a sequel, *Lion* stands on its own; it is a self-contained adventure—indeed it is the only adventure where the children spend years in Narnia before returning home.³⁸ Because *The Magician’s Nephew* was written second last of the series and is set a thousand years before any of the others, it too can stand on its own. Although, as previously noted, Schakel asserts that it is richer if read after the others, it nonetheless allows readers discover the place as Digory and Polly do for the first time; unlike *Prince Caspian*, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, *The Silver Chair* or *The Last Battle*,³⁹ it does not have children from our world who have already experienced Narnia and who therefore need little introduction to it. Both works are representative of the series as a whole in their use of Biblical allusions and in their structure of home-Narnian adventure-return (though *Magician’s Nephew* complicates this pattern somewhat).⁴⁰ Thus, both texts offer opportunities to discuss Lewis’s Christianity as it affects the *Chronicles*, narrative techniques in children’s literature, and issues of gender. All of these features have been the subject of controversy in the reception of the *Chronicles*.

³⁶ Ford, xxxv.

³⁷ C. S. Lewis, *The Magician’s Nephew* [hereafter abbreviated *MN*], illus. Pauline Baynes (Harmondsworth: Puffin, 1977); *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe* [hereafter abbreviated *LWW*], illus. Pauline Baynes (Harmondsworth: Puffin, 1977).

³⁸ For further discussion of the “stand alone” nature of *LWW*, see Manlove, 30-31.

³⁹ C. S. Lewis, *Prince Caspian* [hereafter abbreviated *PC*], illus. Pauline Baynes (Harmondsworth: Puffin, 1977); *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* [*VDT*], illus. Pauline Baynes (Harmondsworth: Puffin, 1977); *The Silver Chair* [*SC*], illus. Pauline Baynes (Harmondsworth: Puffin, 1977); *The Last Battle* [*LB*], illus. Pauline Baynes (Harmondsworth: Puffin, 1977).

⁴⁰ *The Horse and His Boy* ([hereafter abbreviated *HHB*], illus. Pauline Baynes [Harmondsworth: Puffin, 1977]) is the only one which does not begin in our world; it and *The Last Battle* are the only books that do not return the child adventurers to their original place.

CONTROVERSY OVER NARNIA: CHRISTIANITY AND THE *CHRONICLES*

Although it is important for students and scholars to recognize the importance of story in the *Chronicles*, Lewis's Christianity obviously informs the series, and recognizing Biblical analogies can enrich the reading experience, as I suggested earlier. Kath Filmer asserts that Lewis "has written a fairy tale which is completely satisfying in its own right, but he has made accessible the deeper levels of meaning to those who seek them, and even at the deepest levels, Lewis has imbued the Biblical elements with new potency by virtue of their contextual link with the fairy tale."⁴¹ For example, Aslan's sacrifice in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* saves Edmund and is the means by which the villain of this particular book is defeated in good fairy tale/fantasy tradition; recognizing this scene as an analogue of the crucifixion suggests the larger significance of that sacrifice as a sign of the love the Lion bears for all creation. That the sacrifice is made out of love is made even more clear in *The Magician's Nephew* when Aslan informs the newly made creatures of Narnia that the Witch has entered their world; he promises them that although "Evil will come of that evil, ... I will see to it that the worst falls upon myself."⁴² The scene in *The Lion* also reflects on the nature of Christ's sacrifice because "when redemption takes place on Narnia it is for Edmund, a human, not for the inhabitants of Narnia."⁴³ Salvation is thus made intensely personal in Lewis's novel. A conversation between Susan and Lucy near the end of the book emphasizes this point; whereas Lucy wants to tell Edmund what Aslan suffered for him, Susan believes, "It would be too awful for him" if he were to "know ... what Aslan did for him."⁴⁴ The fact is that Christians do know or should know what Christ has done, but perhaps it is known so well as creed that it is rather taken for granted. The *Chronicles* as fantasy allows for estrangement: the familiar world, and in this case familiar beliefs, are suddenly seen in a new perspective, with new power.

The danger lies in seeing equations instead of analogies, of reading the *Chronicles* as allegory instead of as fairy tale. Allegory, for Lewis, is a very specific form in which abstract concepts are presented as concrete things: the classic example is the giant Despair in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, where the abstract emotion of despair, with its capacity to overwhelm,

⁴¹ Kath Filmer, "Speaking in Parables", *Mythlore* 40 (Autumn 1984): 20.

⁴² Lewis, *MN*, 126.

⁴³ Filmer, 19. Filmer notes that this implies "the sublime elevation of humankind through the incarnation of Christ."

⁴⁴ Lewis, *LWW*, 163.

becomes a giant who can physically imprison the protagonist.⁴⁵ Christ, on the other hand, is a historical person,⁴⁶ and so is not an abstract concept available to be allegorized. Hence the importance of “supposing”. To a child reader Lewis wrote of his method, “I’m more saying, ‘Suppose there were a world like Narnia and it needed rescuing and the Son of God ... went to redeem it ... what might it, in that world, all have been like?’”⁴⁷ The reason for “supposing”, for Lewis, is the power of fantasy to estrange. As I noted earlier, experiencing Aslan’s sacrifice in Narnia may enable us to experience Christ’s sacrifice in the Gospels in a new way. In addition, readers may be more accepting of fairy tale than of Scripture. In his essay “Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What’s to be Said”, Lewis reflects on the “inhibition which had paralysed much of [his] own religion in childhood” and concludes that the “obligation to feel” appropriate reverence or gratitude for salvation distanced the subject and froze his ability to feel; fairy stories, on the other hand, might “steal past those watchful dragons”, those inhibitions.⁴⁸ Lewis thus does hope that his fairy tales of another world will lead readers to Christianity in this one, but he also seems equally to have wanted them enjoyed as stories—as works of art.⁴⁹

The way Lewis conveys Christian ideology in a fairy tale form, however, has led some readers to condemn the *Chronicles* for being too didactic, for imposing Christian ideology. The series becomes, to quote Philip Pullman, “propaganda”, and if one doesn’t agree with Lewis’s ideology (and Pullman certainly does not), the books are rejected (Pullman calls the *Chronicles* “one of the most ugly and poisonous things [he’s] ever read”).⁵⁰ Some of Pullman’s arguments against Lewis’s series are simply arguments against Christianity (as Pullman perceives it), and their persuasiveness depends largely on readers’ own beliefs.⁵¹ The charge of Christianity as

⁴⁵ Letter to Mrs Hook, quoted in Ford, xxv n. 2.

⁴⁶ For Lewis’s views on the historicity of Christianity, see Hooper, *C. S. Lewis*, 435.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Evans, 134.

⁴⁸ Lewis, “Sometimes Fairy Stories may say Best What’s to be Said”, 37.

⁴⁹ See Schakel, 13-14, where he discusses Lewis’s theories of the way we engage with artistic works, particularly the distinction between using and receiving: “receiving is a much deeper, richer imaginative response. ‘Receivers’ re-enact the fresh, surprising connections made by the creative artist and enter the meaningful relationships through which the work elicits profound and powerful feelings and impact. ... To experience a work of art fully, we must lay aside preconceptions, self-absorbed expectations, and personal needs or cravings.”

⁵⁰ Philip Pullman, “The Dark Side of Narnia,” *The Guardian* (1 Oct. 1998). Reprinted in *The Cumberland River Lamp Post*, online at <<http://www.crlamppost.org/darkside.htm>> (9 Feb. 2006).

⁵¹ In other words, if a book is to be judged “good” or “bad” solely on the presence of Christian content, the judgment will depend on the readers’ understanding of and sympathy

“propaganda”, however, draws attention to the fact that readers today experience the *Chronicles* in a different socio-historical context than that in which the books were written—namely, an increasingly secular society, particularly in children’s education and culture.

The possibility of the books being seen as propaganda is of particular concern for classroom situations. As Holly Bigelow Martin observes, Lewis’s books now have to be “successful ... in sneaking past the kind of ‘academic dragons’” that ban materials that are too obviously religious from public school classrooms.⁵² Lewis’s books—particularly *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe*—are included in some classrooms; Martin gives examples from a 1989 whole-language curriculum and from individual classes (grades 2 to 5). She notes that use in the classroom generally means that “the Christian overtones in the books”⁵³ are ignored by choice or not discussed because of school policy; on the other hand, teachers are “able to cover the ethics brought up in the book[s].”⁵⁴ As fairy tale, as children’s literature, the *Chronicles* are allowed to have a moral, but their specifically Christian elements are downplayed.

The desire to minimize the Christianity of the *Chronicles* can also be seen in recent marketing strategies. Because of the *Harry Potter* phenomenon and the increase in the popularity of children’s fantasy, publishers have repackaged and re-marketed older works. In 2001, memos from HarperCollins were leaked to the press, suggesting that the publishing company had plans “to create new Narnia novels by unidentified authors”⁵⁵ as well as increasing the profile of the original Narnia series. Part of the publishing strategy was to ensure “that no attempt will be made to correlate the stories to Christian imagery/theology.”⁵⁶ The concern, as Douglas Gresham worded it, is that “in today’s world the surest way to prevent secularists and their children from reading it [the series] is to ... link Narnia with modern evangelical Christianity.”⁵⁷ Responses to the Christianity of the *Chronicles* thus reveal cultural anxieties about religion’s place in a multicultural society. Opposition expressed to the publisher’s plans⁵⁸

with Christianity. Pullman’s other arguments have different grounds, and I will return to them later.

⁵² Holly Bigelow Martin, “C. S. Lewis in the Secular Classroom”, *CSL: The Bulletin of the New York C. S. Lewis Society* 22.4 (Feb 1991): 1.

⁵³ Martin, 6.

⁵⁴ Martin, 7.

⁵⁵ Carvajal, 1.

⁵⁶ Carvajal, 1.

⁵⁷ Carvajal, 18.

⁵⁸ For example, see William Murchison, “The Lion, the Witch and the Nonsense”, *Human Events* 06/11/2001: 10; online, Academic Search Premier (13 April 2002).

suggests that secularization is closely linked to commercialism, and thus another cultural anxiety: commercialization of children's culture. Will Narnia and the ideology that informs it sell? Should it sell? Is something lost if it becomes a brand with new novels, plush toys, films? Similar questions can be asked of a number of other children's texts, from traditional fairy tales, to the Harry Potter novels, or Pullman's own *His Dark Materials* trilogy. Traditional fairy tales often have violent acts and portray female characters in ways that uphold patriarchal notions of beautiful, passive heroines; they have been commercialized, most notably by Disney. J. K. Rowling's series has been criticized for making witchcraft appealing; it has become as much a corporate franchise as it is a children's series. Pullman's expression of an oppositional view of Christianity in his series makes it as ideological as he claims Lewis's to be; the marketing campaign launched for *His Dark Materials* went well beyond the usual for young adult fiction in order to capture an adult market,⁵⁹ and there has been a stage play of the series and now a film of the first novel. Lewis's novels thus participate, however inadvertently, in the great debate of what is appropriate for children and what is "good" literature (usually and problematically distinguished from books that sell). Such debates were ongoing in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and they continue today, whether in calls to ban Harry Potter and other books, criticisms of Disney adaptations,⁶⁰ or in accusations of the potential harmful effects of the *Narnia Chronicles*. Nor are the grounds in the debate solely religious: in Lewis's case, narrative strategies and representation of female characters have also been contested issues.

CONTROVERSY OVER NARNIA: NARRATIVE VOICE

As I suggested earlier, Lewis claimed that he wrote stories that he wanted to read himself,⁶¹ and he participates as narrator in many of the stories he tells.⁶² The *Narnia Chronicles* often draw attention to the presence of the narrator, and are thus marked clearly as children's literature; as Lois R. Kuznets points out, "The classic rhetoric of childhood combines" several

⁵⁹ See Julie C. Boehning, "Philip Pullman's Paradise", *Library Journal* (15 Feb. 1996): 175; online, Academic Search Premier (25 March 2003).

⁶⁰ See, for example, Alan Bryman, *The Disneyization of Society* (London: Sage, 2004).

⁶¹ Lewis was responding to an adult who reacted to the high tea described near the beginning of *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe* with "I see how you got to that. ... [Child readers] like plenty of good eating"; Lewis pointed out, "I myself like eating and drinking. I put in what I would have liked to read when I was a child and what I still like reading now that I am in my fifties." See Lewis, OTW, 22.

⁶² See Schakel's discussion of the Ransom trilogy, 72.

characteristics, one of which is “an obtrusive narrator, commenting, addressing the reader, and using richly descriptive prose.”⁶³ The obtrusive narrator’s comments, particularly direct addresses to the reader, establish a relationship between narrator and reader that has the potential to be empowering and comforting, but also has the potential to be alienating.

The narrator of the *Chronicles* often addresses the reader directly; *The Magician’s Nephew*, for example, begins, “This is a story about something that happened long ago when your grandfather was a child”,⁶⁴ and thus sets up a storyteller-listener relationship. As readers, we are not just observers of these characters; we have been positioned to participate actively in the hearing of their story, an effect which is, as Schakel notes, “reinforced ... when children hear the stories [read to them by adults] before they read them” for themselves.⁶⁵ Besides positioning the reader as listener, Lewis invites active participation by appealing to the reader to recognize the emotions of the child characters at key moments, particularly in reaction to Aslan. To describe the effect of first hearing Aslan’s name in *The Lion*, the narrator appeals to an experience most readers are likely to have shared: “Perhaps it has sometimes happened to you in a dream that someone says something which you don’t understand but in the dream it feels as if it had some enormous meaning It was like that now.”⁶⁶ As Schakel notes, “Lewis seeks directly and intentionally to help readers share imaginatively what the children experience.”⁶⁷ Later, after the witch has killed Aslan, and Lucy and Susan have been mourning for him, the narrator again asks readers to apply their own experience to the imagined situation: “if you’ve been up all night and cried till you have no more tears left in you—you will know that there comes in the end a sort of quietness.”⁶⁸ Lewis thus makes these very particular situations universal; we have not, as the child protagonists have, been to this secondary world, but we have likely had emotional experiences equivalent to theirs—and equivalent to the narrator’s, who is able to draw attention to such experiences.⁶⁹ By appealing to those emotions, Lewis accomplishes two things: he invites the readers’ involvement in the story, and he has the opportunity to describe the feelings of these particular characters. The passage about Lucy and Susan just mentioned ends by

⁶³ Lois R. Kuznets, “Tolkien and the Rhetoric of Childhood”, in *Tolkien: New Critical Perspectives*, ed. Neil D. Isaacs and Rose A. Zimbaro (University Press of Kentucky, 1981), 150.

⁶⁴ Lewis, *MN*, 10.

⁶⁵ Schakel, 74.

⁶⁶ Lewis, *LWW*, 65.

⁶⁷ Schakel, 46.

⁶⁸ Lewis, *LWW*, 144.

⁶⁹ For one discussion of the narrator-reader relationship, see Schakel, 78-79.

returning from shared experience to individual: “At any rate that was how it felt to these two.”⁷⁰

One consequence of Lewis’s narrative technique, therefore, is to emphasize similarities in the experiences of readers, characters, and the narrator. While many fictional narratives depend on readers’ identification with characters, Lewis’s books direct that identification by pointing out similarities between readers and characters. This identification is potentially empowering for the reader, since it implies the possibility for readers to be as adventurous, brave, and clever as Lewis’s protagonists are in their best moments. Furthermore, since the narrator implies that he too has experienced these emotions, he foregrounds “those elements in [his] imagination which [he] share[s] with children”, to paraphrase Lewis,⁷¹ and creates what Schakel calls “a personal trusting relation between him and his readers.”⁷²

Dramatizing the storyteller creates a distinct persona to whom readers can relate, but part of that persona involves authority and control because he possesses greater knowledge than readers. For example, when the children first hear Aslan’s name in *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*, the narrator says, “None of the children knew who Aslan was any more than you do”;⁷³ reader and child character are equals in experience, but the narrator knows more. Schakel uses this line as evidence of the type of “gap” that Lewis employs in introducing Narnia and Aslan to readers;⁷⁴ it may stimulate interest in the reader, but it also reinforces the narrator’s authority. That authority is also suggested in the numerous instances where Lewis’s narrator comments on the way he will tell the story and the information he will provide or withhold. In introducing the setting of *The Magician’s Nephew*—that is, turn-of-the-century London—the narrator reviews details of clothes, schools, and meals, but says, “as for sweets, I won’t tell you how cheap and good they were, because it would only make your mouth water in vain.”⁷⁵ This technique encourages, once again, readers’ active participation (the long-lost sweets are more powerfully present by having their description curtailed); nonetheless, it also foregrounds the narrator’s role in judging what is best for readers to hear.

Other incidents demonstrating the narrator’s control of the story make visible the selection process required in all storytelling, introducing a

⁷⁰ Lewis, *LWW*, 144.

⁷¹ Lewis, *OTW*, 33.

⁷² Schakel, 79.

⁷³ Lewis, *LWW*, 65.

⁷⁴ Schakel, 46.

⁷⁵ Lewis, *MN*, 9.

metafictional quality. When Polly and Digory have a quarrel in the wood between worlds, the narrator suggests, “Let us skip on to the moment at which they stood ... on the edge of the unknown pool” because “it would be dull to write [the whole quarrel] down.”⁷⁶ The narrator here suggests his concern with the pace of the story, admitting to glossing over events in the interests of the action,⁷⁷ and implying the common interest of narrator and readers; the narrator omits what he would find dull and “put[s] in what [he] would like ... to read.”⁷⁸

As these examples suggest, the greater knowledge of the narrator does not have to be interpreted as the narrator assuming complete superiority over his characters or readers. But the danger that the tone will shade from the companionable to the condescending is always there. Writers such as Tolkien abandoned the technique for that reason; Sheila Egoff notes that “Lewis was the last major writer to use such authority; even his contemporaries deemed it condescending to children, and its use disappeared.”⁷⁹ The problem is that the technique positions the reader as quite young, as needing the reassuring presence of a narrator who, as Kuznets says, “implicitly promises protection and companionship even when one is reading alone.”⁸⁰ That may not be a position readers are willing to adopt. Responses to the *Chronicles* illustrate this point: the narrator is described by Schakel as “a genial likeable storyteller whose tales are a pleasure to listen to”⁸¹ and is praised by Colin Manlove for “his lack of condescension”;⁸² on the other hand, Penelope Lively criticizes the “condescension” of the narrative voice,⁸³ and Pullman condemns “the reactionary sneering” of the “narrative method”.

The success of Lewis’s technique is admittedly uneven. It appeals to the best in readers, encouraging participation, sympathy, and imagination. However, it sometimes appeals to the worst in readers, when readers are invited by the narrator not to laugh **with** characters, but to laugh **at** them or to judge them. The protagonists are seldom the target, but minor characters are: the “dumpy, prim little girls with fat legs” who flee from Aslan in

⁷⁶ Lewis, *MN*, 39.

⁷⁷ Schakel, 76, notes other instances where the pace of the story is invoked as the reason for narratorial decisions.

⁷⁸ Lewis, *OTW*, 22.

⁷⁹ Quoted in Martin, 3-4.

⁸⁰ Kuznets, 154.

⁸¹ Schakel, 87.

⁸² Manlove, 6.

⁸³ Quoted in Martin, 3.

*Prince Caspian*⁸⁴ or the Dufflepuds in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* are two examples.

In addition, the narrator's intrusions can jar readers out of the story. Directly addressed by the narrator, we may feel included—there is an intimacy to the storyteller-listener relationship. But if the narrator's comments suddenly exclude us—in the way the reader is addressed or by assuming our agreement in an assumption we do not hold to be true—the spell is broken (even if only momentarily). For example, when Uncle Andrew is confronted by the newly created Talking Beasts in *The Magician's Nephew*, he says to them, “Good Doggie”, and the narrator steps in to explain the problem: “no dog that I ever knew, least of all a Talking Dog of Narnia, likes being called a Good Doggie ... any more than you would like being called My Little Man.”⁸⁵ At the time Lewis wrote, “he” was commonly used as a universal pronoun, but this line goes beyond that assumption and therefore raises the issue of gender politics in the *Chronicles*. Female readers may accept “he” as referring to the generic reader, but no young girl is likely to have the experience of being called “My Little Man.” The narrator directly addresses the reader ... who cannot be me. Having said that, I cannot say—I cannot remember—my reaction to this line as a child reader. In all likelihood I ignored it, as one learns to ignore cues suggesting that the normative reader is male. But it requires, consciously or unconsciously on the readers' part, a forgiveness of the storyteller for the slip—and not all readers are that forgiving.

CONTROVERSY OVER NARNIA: GENDER

One of the least forgiving readers might be Pullman, who criticizes the *Chronicles* for, among other things, “misogyny”. Pullman is not the only critic of Lewis, but his status as an award-winning author for young people has given his opinions wider circulation; as Michael Nelson says, “Pullman is no lightweight.”⁸⁶ Pullman's awards include a Carnegie Medal for his young adult fantasy, *The Golden Compass* (*Northern Lights* in UK), and the Whitbread Prize for *The Amber Spyglass* (both part of *His Dark Materials* trilogy); Pullman's comments in *The Guardian* in October 1998 and in other interviews have received, therefore, a great deal of attention.

⁸⁴ Lewis, *PC*, 171.

⁸⁵ Lewis, *MN*, 120.

⁸⁶ Michael Nelson, “For the Love of Narnia,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (2 Dec. 2005): B14; <<http://chronicle.com>> (9 Feb 2006).

Pullman's main evidence of Lewis's "misogyny" is Susan's absence in *The Last Battle*. Pullman quotes Jill's description of Susan, who refuses to talk about Narnia because "she's interested in nothing now-a-days except nylons and lipstick and invitations. She always was a jolly sight too keen on being grown-up."⁸⁷ Pullman asserts that Susan's exclusion in this last novel constitutes "the turning away of Susan from the Stable (which stands for salvation)", and he interprets Jill's comments to mean that

Susan, like Cinderella, is undergoing a transition from one phase of her life to another. Lewis didn't approve of that. ... He was frightened and appalled at the notion of wanting to grow up. Susan, who did want to grow up, and who might have been the most interesting character in the whole cycle if she'd been allowed to, is a Cinderella in a story where the Ugly Sisters win.

Pullman's interpretation of this scene is problematic. To claim that Susan is "turn[ed] away from the Stable" misrepresents Lewis's text. The English characters who appear in the stable are Digory, Polly, Peter, Edmund, Lucy, Eustace, and Jill; they end up there because a train wreck has killed them in England (a fact revealed only at the very end of the novel). When Aslan stands in the stable doorway judging the creatures, they are all from the Narnian world, a world that Susan is not in. Peter, Edmund, and Lucy see their father and mother later, in another section of Aslan's country; they had been involved in the same wreck that killed the others, hence their eternal presence in this afterworld. Susan's whereabouts are unknown, but she was certainly not with her parents, for Peter specifies that his mother and father only are on the train.⁸⁸ The narrative does exclude Susan, but as Mary R. Bowman suggests, Pullman's interpretation of that exclusion as meaning she has been denied salvation ignores the fact that she is still alive, presumably in England.⁸⁹

Susan's potential judgement thus does not happen in the *Chronicles*. She is said to be "no longer a friend of Narnia",⁹⁰ but one need not assume that this attitude will be permanent. Edmund, when he betrays his siblings in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, or Eustace, for the first third of *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, could easily be described as "no ... friend of Narnia" and yet each is redeemed. Susan's attitude as it is described in *The Last Battle* would seem to resemble Lewis's own before his conversion. Nelson argues that "Lewis was portraying Susan making the same mistake he had made as a boy: throwing out the good of childhood with the bad for

⁸⁷ Lewis, *LB*, 124.

⁸⁸ Lewis, *LB*, 125.

⁸⁹ Mary R. Bowman, "A Darker Ignorance: C. S. Lewis and the Nature of the Fall", *Mythlore* 91(Summer 2003): 77.

⁹⁰ Lewis, *LB*, 123.

lack of understanding what it really means to grow up.” Susan might return to Narnia as Lewis returned to Christianity; her character thus represents a faith crisis common to women **and** men, just as Eustace’s refusal to believe in *Voyage* represents a different type of faith crisis.

As both Nelson and Bowman also suggest, the nature of what it means to be “grown up” is at issue. Polly, who is 60 in *The Last Battle*,⁹¹ contests Susan’s definition of grown up; she replies to Jill’s description of Susan with “I wish she **would** grow up. She wasted all her school time wanting to be the age she is now, and she’ll waste all the rest of her life trying to stay that age.”⁹² Susan has not grown, but simply changed interests, to use Lewis’s terms. And to applaud Susan’s new interests is problematic from a feminist perspective. When Pullman interprets an interest in “nylons and lipstick and invitations” as a sign of female sexuality and adulthood, he perpetuates a stereotypical view of female sexuality as all about beauty—and a particular kind of beauty at that, one dependent on consumerism for products, and one directed toward external affirmation of popularity and worth through “invitations”. That stereotype of female sexuality also incorporates competition between women, as Pullman’s Cinderella analogy suggests. To be dismayed that the “Ugly sisters” win is to reaffirm as natural the central conflict in the tale—the competition between women over men.⁹³

If Pullman’s evidence is unpersuasive, he nevertheless raises an important question about gender politics in the *Chronicles*. The mythology of the series is strikingly patriarchal. Aslan, representing the divine, is male and a constant in the series; narratively he acts as helper for the protagonists. (Each book includes at least one male and one female human protagonist.) The antagonists of individual novels may be either male or female, but the males are human, political opponents (such as Miraz or Rabadash) while the females—Jadis/The White Witch in *The Magician’s Nephew* and *Lion*, and the Queen of Underland in *The Silver Chair*—are supernatural sorceresses descended from Lilith.

Tash is the exception to the rule that nonetheless reinforces it. Tash—the god worshipped by the Calormens in *The Horse and His Boy* and *The Last Battle*—does not appear in the former book and only briefly appears in the latter. He is hardly a character, and as Aslan’s mythological opposite he is

⁹¹ Ford, *Companion*, Appendix Two: List of Comparative Ages of Principal Characters in the *Chronicles of Narnia*.

⁹² Lewis, *LB*, 124, emphasis in original.

⁹³ “Cinderella” is one of many traditional fairy tales that is criticized for its conveying of patriarchal ideology. See Karen Rowe, “Feminism and Fairy Tales”, in *Don’t Bet on the Prince*, ed. Jack Zipes (New York: Routledge, 1989), 209-26; or Kay Stone, “The Misuses of Enchantment,” in *Folk and Fairy Tales*, 3rd edn, ed. Martin Hallett and Barbara Karasek (Peterborough, ON: Broadview P, 2002), 391-415.

oddly devoid of action; he appears when his name is invoked and receives his “lawful prey”,⁹⁴ but unlike Aslan, or the sorceresses, we do not see him at work in the world. He may be Aslan’s mythological opposite, but Tash is not Aslan’s narrative equal, even in this last book.

In contrast, the female supernatural figures do act in Narnia and are given narrative prominence as the antagonists of the children and of Aslan. In each case, their power is shown to be subordinate: Aslan kills the White Witch in *Lion*⁹⁵ and Prince Rilian and Puddleglum together kill the Queen of Underland in *The Silver Chair*.⁹⁶ Furthermore, it is not that these women are evil **and** powerful, but as Jean E. Graham argues, they are evil **because** they desire power: “the will to power” or “love of Power” makes them monstrous, supernatural (something that does not happen to men who desire power).⁹⁷ Females can only be antagonists if they are supernatural, and their powers are always clearly made both monstrous and subordinate in the mythological system of the books. That hierarchy of power extends to the mortal realm; although there are Kings and Queens of Narnia, the highest authority is always a king, and the characters who gather as Narnia’s first government in *The Magician’s Nephew* are, with one exception, male.⁹⁸

The human protagonists of the novels, however, offer a different perspective on Lewis’s representation of gender. Karla Faust Jones argues that of the female heroes in the *Chronicles*, “none ... conforms to a familiar female stereotype”;⁹⁹ Graham, too, acknowledges that younger female characters in the series are portrayed as “adventurous”, although “the approved adult women who occasionally appear on the periphery are highly domesticated.”¹⁰⁰ Indeed, while girls and boys share the adventures, and while Lewis focalizes the novel through each of his protagonists at least once, female characters are more often the focalizing agents. As Schakel suggests, Lucy, in particular, often focalizes the action of *Lion*, *Prince Caspian*, and *Voyage*; Jill’s perspective dominates *The Silver Chair*. *The Magician’s Nephew*, *The Horse and His Boy*, and *The Last Battle* give more precedence to male protagonists, but even there, the perspectives of Polly, Aravis, and Jill are provided, and it is Lucy, in *The Last Battle*, who tells

⁹⁴ Lewis, *LB*, 121.

⁹⁵ Lewis, *LWW*, 160-62.

⁹⁶ Lewis, *SC*, 158.

⁹⁷ Jean E. Graham, “Women, Sex, and Power: Circe and Lilith in Narnia”, *Children’s Literature Association Quarterly* 29.1/2 (Spring/Summer 2004): 40.

⁹⁸ Lewis, *MN*, 111.

⁹⁹ Karla Faust Jones, “Girls in Narnia: Hindered or Human?” *Mythlore* 49 (Spring 1987): 19.

¹⁰⁰ Graham, 41.

Tirian the story of what has been happening in the stable.¹⁰¹ Focalizing the story through female characters provides motivation for their actions and emphasizes their active participation in the adventures.

But what sort of participation are they granted? They are not allowed to fight; in most of the books (*The Last Battle* is the exception), battles are the province of men. Father Christmas declares in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, that “battles are ugly when women fight.”¹⁰² Lewis here would seem to be voicing the opinion of his time; most western military organizations did not allow women in combat situations until more recently. However, that one statement does not reflect the reality of all the books, as Jones notes: both Susan and Jill are (or become) excellent archers, and Lucy rides with the Narnian troops in *The Horse and His Boy*; Lucy and Jill exhibit skills of leadership and pathfinding.¹⁰³ And it is here interesting to note the effect of reading order on any reading of gender. In *Lion* and *Prince Caspian*, the “girls” tend to be involved in the emotionally-charged scenes of mourning or celebration with Aslan; later novels, however, put female protagonists in a wider variety of adventures, culminating with Jill’s participation in the battle on Stable Hill in *The Last Battle*.

Moreover, the novels suggest awareness, to a certain extent, of the problems of gender stereotypes. Characters who voice such stereotypes are challenged. In *The Magician’s Nephew*, Digory’s claim that “girls never want to know anything but gossip and rot about people getting engaged” is part of an argument with Polly where he wants his own way, and Polly’s “How exactly like a man” is part of the same angry argument.¹⁰⁴ Edmund’s complaint in *Prince Caspian* that girls “never can carry a map in their heads” is followed by Lucy’s comment, “That’s because our heads have something inside them”, and the whole expedition getting lost while following Edmund and Peter.¹⁰⁵ As Jones notes, “the link between mindless stereotyping and irrational behaviour seems evident.”¹⁰⁶ At times, then, the narrator explicitly questions sexist assumptions.

Lewis’s gender politics are, therefore, complex, as perhaps befits an author who is combining Christian tradition and various legends—each with gender-laden baggage—to create his own mythology in a modern fairy tale—a genre with its own traditions about gender roles.¹⁰⁷ The world that

¹⁰¹ Schakel, 74.

¹⁰² Lewis, *LWW*, 100.

¹⁰³ Jones, 15-16, and 18.

¹⁰⁴ Lewis, *MN*, 50.

¹⁰⁵ Lewis, *PC*, 105, 109.

¹⁰⁶ Jones, 18.

¹⁰⁷ Lewis’s representation of race might also be explored in similar terms; racism is another of Pullman’s criticisms of the *Chronicles*.

Lewis creates is patriarchal in its politics and its cosmology—much like our own; because of that similarity to our world, its models of young girls resisting gender stereotypes and participating in adventures despite fears and uncertainties may be empowering. As Janice Radway and others have shown, readers do not passively receive stories; instead, in a process that Radway describes as “narrative gleaning”, readers take from stories the elements they need, elements that empower their own “supposing”.¹⁰⁸

CONCLUSION

Manlove says that the *Chronicles of Narnia* “helped begin a renaissance in children’s literature,” and along with Tolkien’s works, they helped develop “the present popularity of the genre of fantasy.”¹⁰⁹ Lewis’s legacy in the field of children’s literature cannot be underestimated. His essays contribute to debates about the value of children’s literature and fantasy—debates that continue today as another generation of readers discover, not only Lewis’s Narnia, but Tolkien’s Middle Earth or Rowling’s Hogwarts or Pullman’s alternate Oxford. The *Chronicles* have inspired other writers—whether to integrate Christian beliefs with fantasy literature or to react against such beliefs—for above all the *Chronicles* affirm that children’s literature can address profound issues of the individual’s relationship to society and to the divine.

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¹⁰⁸ Janice Radway, “Girls, Reading, and Narrative Gleaning: Crafting Repertoires for Self-Fashioning Within Everyday Life”, in *Narrative Impact: Social and Cognitive Foundations*, ed. Melanie C. Green, Jeffrey J. Strange, and Timothy C. Brock (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 2002), 183-204.

¹⁰⁹ Manlove, 8.

**ONWARD CHRISTIAN SCHOLARS:
C. S. LEWIS ON THE JUSTIFICATION AND MEANING OF
LIBERAL EDUCATION***

William Mathie

The text I mean to discuss is a short sermon Lewis delivered at an Evensong service in the Church of St Mary the Virgin at Oxford University in the fall of 1939—on 22 October.¹ The title attached to that sermon is “Learning in a Time of War”. Because I failed to supply an exact title for my paper to the organizer of the symposium for which it was originally prepared, that gentleman was forced to guess what I meant to focus upon in my discussion. He fairly supposed that I planned to connect Lewis’s war-time essay, to the pursuit of liberal arts and to find in Lewis’s essay what might help us as Christians in this time of cultural conflict. My question he supposed was something like this: How might Lewis help us gird ourselves for the “culture wars”? This is not entirely misleading—certainly I do mean to comment on the implications of Lewis’s sermon for liberal education—but I think one caveat needs to be noted. Noting it will serve to introduce my actual theme. Many of us have taken lately to speaking of contemporary disagreements in and outside the university or between the voices that prevail in the university and the world outside as “culture wars”, and there are both good and bad reasons for the use of this metaphor. But I think we ought to remind ourselves as we take up this metaphor that it is a metaphor: “culture wars” are not wars. What is at stake in culture wars is important—maybe more important than what is at stake in some actual wars—but there is a difference. Few get killed in the culture wars. There is a danger for liberal education and for the life that is lived—or ought to be lived—in the university that is posed by the issues we have in mind when we speak of the culture wars. And I do hope to find help in confronting this danger in Lewis’s sermon. But we ought still to remember—or we rather we ought to call to mind since most of us are not in a position to remember it—what war is.

* Presented to the symposium, “C. S. Lewis Across the Curriculum”, jointly hosted by Concordia Lutheran Theological Seminary, St. Catharines, and Brock University, on Monday, 20 March 2006.

¹The text of Lewis’s sermon I have used is to be found in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (New York, Macmillan, 1949), 43-54. My references are to the pagination in this volume and I have added in square brackets paragraph numbers.

Here are some words of Lewis that get at what I have in mind. They are not taken from Lewis's sermon but from a letter he wrote at about the same time as his sermon, at a time when Lewis worried that he might himself be called to duty in the war just at that moment breaking out with Germany's march into Poland:

My memories of the last war haunted my dreams for years. Military service, to be plain, includes the threat of every temporal evil: pain and death, which is what we fear from sickness; isolation from those we love, which is what we fear from exile; toil under arbitrary masters. ... which is what we fear from slavery: hunger, thirst, and exposure which is what we fear from poverty. I'm not a pacifist. If it's got to be it's got to be. But the flesh is weak and selfish, and I think death would be much better than to live through another war.²

The first thought that may strike one about Lewis's sermon to the undergraduates who were present for Evensong in the Oxford church on this occasion and were far more likely than Lewis (who was then forty-one) to be called to the battlefield, is the absence from it of anything like this description of the horrors of life at war. I suspect that the explanation for this absence is that Lewis knew full well that none of this needed to be said here, that his listeners had a strong, even exaggerated, if only imagined, sense of what Lewis spoke of in his letter. They needed calming from the emotions set off by the outbreak of war. The situation in which Lewis preached in the autumn of 1939 is suggested by the single word that is the title of the chapter of Churchill's memoirs that begins to narrate the events of that same season: "War". What Lewis did not need to call to his listeners' attention is, of course, something far more distant from our own lives as Canadians in 2007, though the danger suddenly confronting young Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan in the past year may remind us that the dangers of war and the demands it makes upon us are not entirely absent even in 2007.

What exactly is the aim of the argument that Lewis makes in his sermon? One can say what I have already said, that Lewis means to calm his hearers, to reduce their sense of the extraordinary character of their situation, and even to overcome the dangers to their successful performance of the tasks they had just begun to take up as young members of the university, what Lewis defines in the first sentence of his sermon as "a society for the pursuit of learning". And some of what Lewis says in his sermon makes perfect sense in relation to this statement of his aim. To argue, for example, that the condition created by war is not abnormal, that crises in human affairs are the true norm, serves exactly this aim of reducing excitement. And if the

² *Collected Letters*, vol. 1 (Harper Collins, 2004), 258.

excitement arising out of war is a dangerous distraction, it is, as Lewis points out, only one of many distractions that are always there to tempt the scholar. Scholars who will accomplish anything, according to Lewis, are precisely those who will seek knowledge even under very unfavourable conditions. But to confine ourselves to this sensible counsel is to ignore what is in fact at the core of Lewis's argument, and it is to this we must now turn.

The questions Lewis supposes to grip the minds of his congregation of young scholars as he begins his sermon are whether it makes any sense to begin a scholarly life likely to be interrupted by military service or death, or to take any interest in the subjects of scholarly concern "when the lives of our friends and the liberties of Europe are in the balance" (43). Lewis does not directly answer these questions or resolve these doubts. He rather introduces a new question, one which he says every Christian ought to have asked himself not now but in peacetime. The new question, or doubt, is how we can justify devoting any portion of our lives on earth to scholarly research—or even be psychologically capable of doing so—knowing that everything we do in our lives must carry us towards heaven or hell. How is Lewis's new question related to the one already in his hearers' minds? Lewis says that it seems to him that we shall not be able to answer his congregation's original questions until "we have put them by the side" of his new question. What he means in part, it seems, is that what is at stake here is much more than what is at stake in the war about to engulf the continent, so that if our interest in learning or human culture can be maintained under the shadow of this eternal alternative of heaven or hell "it can stand up to anything." So what does this mean for our perception of the threat posed by war and our response to that threat? It leads us to see, he says, that war does not create an "absolutely new situation" but only "aggravates the human condition so that we can no longer ignore it." And this is not merely to say that there are no normal times, that the nineteenth century was not as tranquil as we think. It is to say rather that "human life has always been lived on the edge of a precipice" and to mean by this that "human culture has always had to exist under the shadow of something infinitely more important than itself" (44). But why is the fact that human life has been lived "on the edge of a precipice" equivalent to the fact that human culture has had to exist—or had to be established—under the shadow of the eternal? This we must finally consider. In any case, what Lewis does now observe is that the creation of human culture through the pursuit of knowledge and beauty has only occurred in fact because human beings did not allow the many plausible reasons—imminent dangers or crying injustices—that might have led them to put off that pursuit to do so.

That human beings have in fact pursued knowledge and beauty despite their circumstances, however terrible, does not, of course, show that they have acted rightly or reasonably. We must justify the activity of the scholar “in a world such as this” (45). And this means, Lewis says, that we must **always** be able to answer the question: “How can you be so frivolous as to think of anything but the salvation of souls?” And **at the particular moment** of Lewis’s sermon it means that we must also be able to answer the question, “How can you be so frivolous as to think of anything but the war?” Now Lewis’s answer to both questions is partly the same. Those who object to the pursuit of knowledge and beauty think that our life can become wholly religious in the sense that all of our activities can be called “sacred,” or that our life at war can become “all war.” But what each imagines is impossible. Human life for the convert to Christianity, or for the man who joins the army, will remain mostly what it was before conversion or enlistment. Neither war nor our religion can occupy the whole of our lives though the reason this is so is in each case quite different. War cannot do so because it is “a finite object, and therefore intrinsically unfitted to support the whole attention of a human soul” (46). I may on some occasion like the one in which Lewis speaks have an absolute duty to risk my life and even to die for my country but I cannot properly live for my country. “He who surrenders himself without reservation to the temporal claims of a nation, or a party, or a class is rendering to Caesar that which, of all things, most emphatically belongs to God: himself” (47).

But why may religion not properly fill the whole of our lives in such a way as to exclude all of our ordinary or “natural activities”? In one sense, it must do so for the Christian; the Christian may not refuse anything to God for the sake of culture, politics, or any other human concern. In another sense, it cannot do so, and the Gospel itself tells us to continue in our ordinary or natural duties, even tells the soldier to obey his officers. The well known solution of this paradox is that our natural human activities are acceptable if offered to God, sinful when they are not. But what exactly does this mean for Lewis? It may be straight-forward enough in some instances as, for example, when Bach wrote the words on the score of his St Matthew’s Passion, “for the Glory of God alone.” And appropriately enough Karl Barth speculates that when the angels in heaven play for their Master they play Bach. But what of Mozart whose works the angels play when they play *en famille* according to Barth? How do we distinguish? Lewis loathes the notion associated with Matthew Arnold and his followers that cultural or intellectual activities have *per se* a spiritual quality that the work of a farmer or computer technician lacks. The work of the cleaning lady and the work of Mozart “become” spiritual and equally pleasing to God when “done humbly ‘as to the lord’” (48-49). This does not mean that it is a matter of

indifference for us as to whether we are a plumber or a soldier or a scholar; but it does seem to mean that where we find ourselves is a fair indication of where we ought to be. Sent to Oxford by their parents and permitted by the government to continue their studies, Lewis's listeners may reasonably suppose "that the life which [they], at any rate, can best lead to the glory of God at present is the learned life" (49).

Lewis clearly discourages any of his listeners who might suppose that they ought leave their studies to join the war effort before this is demanded of them by the government. So again what is it to perform the work in the world to which we are called as scholars? It is not "to make our intellectual inquiries work out to edifying conclusions." Lewis here quotes Bacon who says that this would be "to offer the unclean sacrifice of a lie" to "the author of truth." Nor is it even to concern ourselves much—if at all—with how exactly what we are doing or studying is to the glory of God. This is rather something we can leave to be discovered by our superiors who come after us. For us it is enough to act in what Lewis describes as "obedience to our vocation". Or, one can say that in order to serve the glory of God in our work as scholars we need only pursue knowledge and beauty for their own sake. More exactly, Lewis says we need only seek knowledge and beauty for their own sake in such a way as "does not exclude their being for God's sake." So long as we seek knowledge and beauty we can know that we please God because God is the creator of the appetite that we seek to satisfy. Lewis accepts the "teleological argument that the very existence of an appetite or faculty" proves that they must have a proper function in God's scheme. What becomes effectively critical in distinguishing between what is done for God's sake and what is done sinfully is recognizing when our intellectual activities have become sinful or impure. How do we recognize this point? Lewis says that we can know that this has happened to us—that we have become sinners—when we realize that we have come to love our knowledge or knowing of the thing more than the thing we have come to know. Or—another way of saying this Lewis employs—we are delighting not in the exercise of our talents but in the fact that they are our talents, "or even in the reputation they bring us" (50).

Now there are two more important steps in Lewis's argument I want to examine before I conclude, but before I turn to these I want to reflect further on the distinction between the right and sinful ways of loving knowledge or knowing Lewis makes. Though I cannot—here and now—adequately assess the distinction Lewis draws, I do want to at least introduce into our discussion two very different if perhaps finally consistent ways of viewing the difference Lewis speaks of. I shall try to do so by introducing what two others who have reflected upon this difference have said. The first witness I want to call upon is John Henry Newman. In his *Discourses on the Idea of a*

University Newman became and remains the best known and most articulate champion of an understanding of education as the pursuit of learning for its own sake rather than for any further purpose—of something very like Lewis’s notion of the pure pursuit of learning. But in the eighth of his *Discourses* Newman speaks of the powerful and almost unavoidable tendency of education understood in this way—one may even add as properly understood at least in human terms—to become a religion of its own other than, and even opposing, the life lived in obedience to the teaching of the Gospel. My second witness is a man who was my own teacher, but no Christian, and even a sceptic as to the claims of religion. Concluding a short and powerful essay, “What is Liberal Education?”, Leo Strauss like Lewis and Bacon warned against the temptation to wish to be edifying. “Philosophy can only be intrinsically edifying”, is the way he said this. But then he went on to speak of the pleasure that is intrinsic to philosophy in these words:

We cannot exert our understanding without from time to time understanding something of importance; and this act of understanding may be accompanied by the awareness of our understanding, by the understanding of understanding, by *noeisis noeseios*, and this is so high, so pure, so noble an experience that Aristotle could ascribe it to his God.³

Should we take this formulation of the aim of liberal education as conflating or properly linking what Lewis wants to distinguish: the love of our knowing and the love of the thing we have come to know? In the words that follow those cited Strauss claims that the experience he has described is “entirely independent of whether what we understand primarily is pleasing or displeasing, fair or ugly.” Indeed, he concludes, this experience of understanding

leads us to realize that all evils are in a sense necessary if there is to be understanding. It enables us to accept all evils which befall us and which may well break our hearts in the spirit of good citizens of the city of God. By becoming aware of the dignity of the human mind, we realize the true ground of the dignity of man and therewith the goodness of the world, whether we understand it as created or as uncreated, which is the home of man because it is the home of the human mind.

The passage of Lewis’s sermon I have just discussed sets out what Lewis calls “the essential nature” of the learned life. I suppose that what he means by this is that the pursuit of knowledge and beauty is justified, even in the shadow of the eternal question of whether we shall be saved or damned, so long at least as it is not sinful in the way just described because it is the

³*Liberalism: Ancient and Modern* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), 8.

satisfaction of a God-given appetite and so a contribution to God's plan, even if we do not see ourselves how this is the case. But if this is the heart of Lewis's argument, it is not the whole of it. He adds now that learning also has indirect values. The indirect values he speaks of arise out of the fact that the world is not Christian. "If all the world were Christian, it might not matter if all the world were uneducated" (50), Lewis says. Because the world is not Christian there will be a culture outside the church whether there is one inside or not. And so good philosophy becomes necessary in order to answer bad philosophy. And if we should suppose that what Lewis is describing begins to look like the effort to make learning edifying, there is a sort of answer to this possible objection in the outline Lewis gives of how good scholarship may serve as an antidote to bad philosophy. What is needed above all, he thinks, is real knowledge of the past, as this may help the uneducated to question the popular thinking of the moment. "The learned life then is for some a duty. At the moment it looks as if it were your duty." These are the words with which Lewis begins the paragraph that follows upon his account of the "indirect values" of the learned life. Is the fact that it is a duty for some to pursue this life a consequence of the existence of bad teaching in the world that must be answered? Or is the duty entailed in the very existence of the appetite for learning and beauty? Lewis does not say.

An unkind but not entirely false interpretation of Lewis's sermon as a work of rhetoric would say that he has changed the subject. He has replaced the question disturbing his listeners, how they can continue in their studies when the lives of their friends and the liberties of all Europe are at risk, with a new question: how can the Christian devote any of his life to scholarship when the fate of his soul is at risk? He has replaced the question in the minds of his listeners with a question that is at once more profound and more easily answered, by the Christian at least. In the concluding paragraphs of his sermon Lewis barely suggests another way in which learning and a time of war are related. Here he addresses three ways in which war opposes the learning that Lewis has argued may be the duty of many of those attending Evensong on this occasion. Of the first, the excitement that may distract the learner from his work, I have spoken already. The second threat war poses for the student is an increased sense of the necessary futility of the work in which the student is engaged, the sense that it is a work that can never be completed. Here an answer is implied in the universal experience of middle life that many of our dreams must be put aside with the growing recognition that life is too short for the fulfilment of all but a few of our hopes. To be sure, it may be objected that this is only an answer for those who have reached this point and that "Nature herself forbids you to share that experience" (52). But here the Christian account of things supplies an answer available to us at any age: we must leave the future in God's hands.

It is “our daily bread”, not a secure future, for which we are enjoined to pray.

The third enemy, fear, links war and learning even more closely. And here Lewis comes closest to addressing the horrors of war he himself had spoken of in the letter I mentioned at the beginning of my remarks. In part, Lewis addresses those horrors by denying their larger significance: war does not make death any more likely—all of us must die—and it does not even increase the chances that our deaths must be painful, or make it less probable that we shall die at peace with God. In fact war—being at war or living under its cloud, as students at Oxford and their countrymen did in the fall of 1939—brings a great good. That good is the awareness that we must die, that all animal life and all of our hopes are doomed to a final frustration. In times of peace only the wisest realize this. “Now the stupidest of us knows” (53). I conclude with the fine words with which Lewis concludes his sermon:

We see unmistakably the sort of universe in which we have all along been living, and must come to terms with it. If we had foolish un-Christian hopes about human culture, they are now shattered. If we thought we were building up a heaven on earth, if we looked for something that would turn the present world from a place of pilgrimage into a permanent city satisfying the soul of man, we are disillusioned, and not a moment too soon. But if we thought that for some souls, and at some times, the life of learning, humbly offered to God, was, in its own small way, one of the appointed approaches to the Divine reality and the Divine beauty which we hope to enjoy hereafter, we can think so still.

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PHILOSOPHY THROUGH STORY TELLING IN THE WORKS OF C. S. LEWIS*

Angus Menuge

1. INTRODUCTION

C. S. Lewis was perhaps the best known Christian apologist of the Twentieth Century. For those who wanted a straightforward, philosophical defence of the faith, he wrote such works as *The Problem of Pain* and *Miracles*. Why, then, did Lewis also write so much fiction? Was it an admission, as A. N. Wilson has claimed,¹ that he wasn't up to the philosophical rigour of the academy? Was it merely a self-indulgent exercise in fantasy for its own sake? The answer to both of these questions is “no”. Lewis did not engage in fiction as an alternative to philosophy or apologetics. He believed that stories were a more potent way of revealing the truth of a Christian worldview.

Why did Lewis believe story telling had power to convey philosophical ideas? How did Lewis use story to argue against the scientific materialism dominant in his day? How did he make a compelling case for an alternative Christian philosophy of life? These are the questions I will address in my presentation today.

2. THE POWER OF STORY

A. Showing and Telling

Some philosophers—and I used to be one of them—think that there is only one way to do philosophy: you carefully define your terms and then provide a rigorous step-by-step argument for the thesis you wish to defend. Of course, such an approach is excellent for displaying the logical connections between ideas with utmost clarity. But it tends to overlook the problem of human nature. If human beings had godlike objectivity, unmoved by biases and untainted by self-deception, then a sound, rigorous argument is all they should ever need to be fairly persuaded of anything. But what we actually find is that human beings are masters of the art of evasion. We do not like to

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¹ A. N. Wilson, *C. S. Lewis: A Biography* (New York: Norton, 1990).

be told to believe anything, but will always fight fiercely for our independence. If a conclusion is unwelcome, we can always throw out a premise, even if we don't have a very good reason to do so. We can get pedantic about the meanings of words, or fixate, quite unfairly, on the supposed motives of the arguer. If all else fails and we can show nothing wrong with an argument, we can go off in a huff, declaring, "Well that's just your opinion, but I think otherwise."

In the case of Christian apologetics, the situation is even more difficult. The natural man, being an enemy of God, does not want to hear or accept the case for Christian truth. He may have posted "watchful dragons" that look out for any sign of a Christian message, because he is afraid—quite rightly—that being a Christian means giving up his old life, and finding a new life under Christ. Because arguments bring the claims of Christianity out into the open, they are quickly spotted by the watchful dragons; the draw-bridge goes up, and the battlements are prepared to fend off attack.

But there is another reason why a formal approach is unsatisfactory. There are people whose watchful dragons have grown quite sleepy, but who are still quite unmoved by a strong argument for Christianity. For them, Christianity is no longer what William James called a "live hypothesis". It is not among the serious competitors for a worldview or a way of life, because it has already been dismissed, as an outmoded superstition or a merely cultural product designed to maintain social order, oppress women, supply lemon bars, or the like. People in this camp are simply left cold by arguments. Even if they can discern no error of fact or logic, the argument remains incredible because the conclusion is incredible. More importantly, they have no sense that if true, Christianity is a valuable truth. They don't think they are missing out on anything momentous, on anything that could really make their lives richer and more meaningful.

But there is an alternative to formal argument. Suppose that you believe an earthquake is coming which will kill everyone unless they cross an old and narrow bridge that spans a gorge. Your interlocutors admit the risk of earthquake but they aren't impressed by the bridge. To some the bridge looks unsafe, and they are afraid of crossing over to the other side. Others aren't really afraid of the bridge but dismiss it because it is old and narrow; they hope to find a newer, wider bridge to avoid the earthquake. Perhaps you've tried arguing that the bridge will support them and that they will be safer on the other side. But they remain either afraid or indifferent. At this point, it may be smarter to give up on telling them what to think and to do some showing instead. You may want to declare, "As for me and my family, we'll cross the bridge." Your actions show that you trust the bridge and have confidence that the other side is safer. Those left behind may start to feel left

out, and may be inspired by your example. What you showed them by actions may be more persuasive than anything you can tell them to believe.

We see the same dynamic in Scripture. On several occasions, people ask Jesus for advice on how to live. But Jesus is well aware that the human heart does not really want to be told. When an expert in the law asks Jesus, “And who is my neighbour?”, Jesus knows it will not help him simply to tell him, “everyone”, and to provide a theological argument for that conclusion. Jesus knows that the expert, like all of us, is seeking to limit his responsibilities and will find ways to claim that not everyone really counts as a neighbour. So instead of telling the man what to think, he shows him the plight of a robbery victim in the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). The expert doubtless sees himself in the priest and Levite, other experts in the law, who can rationalize their action of walking by on the other side. But he also sees the example of Christ-like compassion in the good Samaritan, and grasps that this is the higher standard to which he is called. And perhaps, if the Gospel changes him, the expert begins to see that the most important lesson of the parable is not moralism, or what it takes to be a good man. Rather, we begin to see that the moral standard is too high for us, that like the robbery victim, we are helpless and wounded by sin, and must fall on the mercy of the true Good Samaritan, Christ Himself.

B. Taking it Personally

Lewis, I believe, did not view it as merely an interesting historical and literary fact that Jesus used parables. Parables show where direct instruction only tells. But they do more than that. They bring abstract ideas alive by incarnating them in the concrete forms of plausible characters and events with which we more readily identify. We are able not only to see truth, but also to taste it. Soon what was only a story about others infects us, and becomes our story. Lewis saw that who we are and what we care about is bound up with our life story and that this life story is permeable. Unlike our defences against rational argument, which may be impenetrable, at the heart of our self-conception is a set of stories that can be changed organically, by the influence of new stories that come from outside, but may ultimately stay with us.

In his book, *After Virtue*, Alasdair MacIntyre was right to argue that stories—ostensibly about other people and other circumstances—can help to define the reader’s own role in life, supplying a vocabulary of appropriate actions and responsibilities. For as MacIntyre pointed out,

man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal It is through hearing stories about wicked stepmothers, lost children, good but misguided kings, wolves that suckle twin boys, youngest sons who receive no inheritance but must make their own

way in the world ... that children learn ... both what a child or parent is, and what the cast of characters may be in the drama into which they have been born Deprive children of stories and you leave them unscripted, anxious stutterers in their actions as in their words.²

Although stories appear to be all about other people, if the story succeeds, the reader finds himself identifying with the story's protagonists, and experiencing the moral insights which their successes and failures represent. Recall how Nathan awakens David's moral sensibility by telling an unsuspected parable of David's sins of adultery and murder, before announcing that David is "the man" in the parable (II Sam. 12:1-7). Lewis saw the key to the power of story in its mythic quality, the myth being a point of contact between abstract and concrete. In reading a myth, "[y]ou were not knowing but tasting; but what you were tasting turns out to be a universal principle."³ In reading the parable of the Prodigal Son, one tastes folly, dissolution, loneliness, repentance and forgiveness, yet what one tastes are universal facts about temptation and restoration.

Stories do not merely tell us about virtue: like a benign infection they become a part of our organism, shaping and defining who we are, and how we look at and feel about the world. They help to develop virtuous people—"men with chests", as Lewis put it in *The Abolition of Man*—because they draw us beyond our egotistical desires to see how we should play our role in community. Every hero communicates the message "Go and do likewise." Every villain provides a limit to what one can willingly allow oneself to become. Stories will be even more powerful if they are seen as echoes of The Great Story, with Jesus as the ultimate hero and victor over evil who also graciously forgives our failings and enables our own halting approximation to heroism. This is precisely what Lewis himself hoped to achieve in his *Chronicles of Narnia* and the Space Fiction trilogy.

3. MATERIALISM AND SCIENTISM

My focus today is what Lewis had to say by way of exposing the inadequacies of scientific materialism. **Materialism** is the metaphysical assertion that the physical world is all there is: anything transcendent or supernatural is denied. **Scientism** is the related epistemological claim that materialistic science is the only way to acquire objective knowledge about

² MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 216.

³ C. S. Lewis, "Myth Became Fact", in Walter Hooper, ed., *God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), 66.

the world. Since materialistic science cannot detect the existence of objective moral values or of the soul, traditional ethics and religious views cannot claim to be knowledge. Ethics must either be abandoned altogether or reduced to something more obviously compatible with materialism, such as the prerogative of our genes (evolutionary ethics), a cultural construction (cultural relativism), or simply the interest of the most powerful people (might makes right).

Lewis presents several characters who embody the ideas of scientific materialism. I will focus on three: Uncle Andrew and Eustace Clarence Scrubb from the *Chronicles*, and Weston from the Space Fiction trilogy.

Lewis was aware that some see materialistic science as a surrogate religion, and exalt the scientist as the great pioneer whose unstinting concern for technological progress will dispel the illusory fog of our superstitious past. They are likely to look down on the moral reservations ordinary people have about the dangers of scientific abuse, and to sympathize with Uncle Andrew, when he says, "Ours ... is a high and lonely destiny."⁴ Yet Lewis's portrait of Uncle Andrew is an effective critique of scientific materialism, because it shows us both the damage this idea causes and its internal inconsistencies.

When Digory and Polly stumble into Uncle Andrew's study, he locks the door and tells them: "I wanted two children. You see I'm in the middle of a great experiment. I've tried it on a guinea-pig and it seemed to work. But then a guinea-pig can't tell you anything. And you can't explain to it how to get back."⁵ Uncle Andrew believes that science is the only way to discover knowledge and that it is unethical to stand in the way of scientific progress. He is entirely unconcerned about the means used to achieve that end. A man without a chest, Uncle Andrew has no sense of the intrinsic value of Digory and Polly as human beings. He is not concerned with whether he is violating their dignity by using them. Indeed, he uses deception, pretending that his magic rings are merely attractive bracelets, to trick Polly into putting one on. When he sends her to another world, he has no real idea whether he is harming her or even killing her. And we learn later that he does not actually know if it is possible to return to this world.

By all traditional standards of morality, and even according to most moral theories, Uncle Andrew is quite unscrupulous. He breaks the promise he made to his godmother, Mrs Lefay, to burn a magic box from another world, because he thinks the progress of science is more important than honesty. He agrees, however, with Mrs Lefay's disdain for ordinary people: "She had got to dislike ordinary, ignorant people, you understand. I do

⁴ Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew* (New York: Harper Trophy, 1994), 21.

⁵ Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew*, 15-16.

myself.”⁶ We begin to see that Uncle Andrew’s scientism, his worship of science, has led him to a sort of secular Gnosticism. He believes that scientists are exempt from the moral rules binding ordinary people because of their special, secret knowledge. In fact, as Janice Daurio has persuasively argued,⁷ Uncle Andrew operates with a Nietzschean two-level morality. When Digory rebukes Uncle Andrew for breaking his promise to Mrs Lefay, Uncle Andrew’s reply is revealing:

“Rotten?” ... “Oh, I see. You mean that little boys ought to keep their promises. Very true: most right and proper, I’m sure But of course you must understand that rules of that sort, however excellent they may be for little boys—and servants—and women—and even people in general, can’t possibly be expected to apply to profound students and great thinkers and sages.”⁸

The effect of this two-level morality, is that, like Nietzsche’s aristocratic supermen, Uncle Andrew has the special privilege of doing things which would be impermissible for any ordinary person to do.

However, we soon see a number of weaknesses in this high-sounding philosophy. Uncle Andrew tries to ennoble his work, describing as it a selfless quest for scientific knowledge: “No great wisdom can be achieved without sacrifice.”⁹ But, in reality, he is extremely selfish and vain. He is far more willing to sacrifice others than himself. Digory quickly perceives that the real effect of Uncle Andrew’s philosophy is that “he can do anything he likes to get anything he wants.”¹⁰ While Uncle Andrew is concerned with increasing his personal knowledge and power as a scientist, by discovering whether there are other inhabitable universes, he has no concern for any other person he sends there to find out.

“And what about *them*?” said Digory. ...

“You will keep looking at everything from the wrong point of view,” said Uncle Andrew... “The whole point of sending anyone into the Other Place is that I want to find out what it’s like.”¹¹

Uncle Andrew has blinded himself to how the world seems from someone else’s point of view. He does not have the magnanimity to put himself in another person’s shoes. When Digory challenges him by asking why he

⁶ Lewis, *The Magician’s Nephew*, 20.

⁷ Janice Daurio, “‘Is it Good to Be Bad?’ Immoralism in Narnia”, in Gregory Bassham and Jerry L. Walls, eds, *The Chronicles of Narnia and Philosophy* (Chicago and La Salle, IL: Open Court, 2005), 119-29.

⁸ Lewis, *The Magician’s Nephew*, 21.

⁹ Lewis, *The Magician’s Nephew*, 26.

¹⁰ Lewis, *The Magician’s Nephew*, 21-22.

¹¹ Lewis, *The Magician’s Nephew*, 24-25.

didn't go into the other world himself, he replies, "Me? Me? ... A man at my time of life, and in my state of health, to risk the shock and danger of being flung suddenly into a different universe? ... Do you realize what you are saying? Think what Another World means—you might meet anything—anything."¹²

When Digory rebukes him for his cowardice, Uncle Andrew returns to his two-level morality:

"You don't understand. I am the great scholar, the magician, the adept, who is *doing* the experiment. Of course I need subjects to do it *on*. ... But the idea of going myself is ridiculous. It's like asking a general to fight as a common soldier."¹³

Yet a few pages later, Uncle Andrew traps Digory into completing the second part of his experiment, by reminding him of traditional moral virtues: "I *hope*, Digory, you are not given to showing the white feather. I should be very sorry to think that anyone of our family had not enough honour and chivalry to go to the aid of—er—a lady in distress."¹⁴ Uncle Andrew is willing to appeal to an ethics which he ignores in his own life in order to manipulate others. It serves Uncle Andrew's purposes admirably to violate the Golden Rule, by holding others to moral standards from which he exempts himself. Such "immoralism" is always appealing if one has the power to get away with it.

But matters quickly change when Uncle Andrew meets Jadis of Charn, who is far more powerful than he. As Janice Daurio writes,

The immoralist's ethic is impossible to believe in consistently. Although Andrew thinks Jadis is a "dem fine woman" ..., he constantly complains about her haughty treatment of him. He thinks it is unfair of her to treat him, a fellow magician, like a slave, and meekly protests her "regrettable violence" in flinging Aunt Letty across the room. ... Yet on Andrew's own principles, Jadis is exempt from ordinary rules of morality, and so she is not treating him or Aunt Letty unfairly.¹⁵

When his own interests are at stake, Uncle Andrew maintains that everyone, even those more knowledgeable and powerful than he, should treat him fairly. So Uncle Andrew's claim that his special scientific status exempts him from normal moral rules is exposed as a mere rationalization of his own desires. We learn later that the real reason Uncle Andrew became a scientist was not the disinterested desire for knowledge or human advancement, but

¹² Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew*, 25.

¹³ Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew*, 25-26.

¹⁴ Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew*, 27.

¹⁵ Janice Daurio, "'Is it Good to Be Bad?' Immoralism in Narnia", 127.

vanity.¹⁶ He wanted fame and wealth for himself and this fuelled his indifference to unethical means of achieving it.

Behind Uncle Andrew's deficient moral sense is an inadequate view of truth. As a materialist, Uncle Andrew does not believe anything has intrinsic value. Even truth is not valuable for its own sake, but only if it is useful, if it grants power. When he finds himself at the very creation of Narnia, he is at first alarmed and frightened by marvellous events that do not fit his materialistic worldview, and thinks only of how he can escape. But his interest is piqued when he discovers that a piece of a London lamppost grows into a brand new one:

The commercial possibilities of this country are unbounded. Bring a few old bits of scrap iron here, bury 'em, and up they come as brand new railway engines, battleships, anything you please. They'll cost nothing, and you can sell 'em at full prices in England. I shall be a millionaire.¹⁷

Uncle Andrew has no real "taste for the other"; he cannot understand what is going on either in Narnia or London, because he cannot humble himself to understand the true nature of things. In truth, he does not know what human beings are. He only cares about what they are for. And he does not understand who Aslan is or what he is doing. He actually thinks he could take over Narnia as a health resort and business venture by shooting the lion.

Uncle Andrew's materialism and scientism have closed his mind to the transcendent. As Kevin Kinghorn argues,¹⁸ although Uncle Andrew thinks of himself as a great sage, he is severely lacking in several intellectual virtues. Because Uncle Andrew does not value truth for its own sake, but only useful truth that fits with a preconceived materialist ideology, he refuses to accept the ample evidence of transcendence. At first he hears Aslan's song bringing creatures into being, but he tells himself that this is simply impossible:

"Of course it can't really have been singing," he thought, "I must have imagined it. ... Who ever heard of a lion singing?" And the longer and more beautiful the Lion sang, the harder Uncle Andrew tried to make himself believe that he could hear nothing but roaring. Now the trouble about trying to make yourself stupider than you really are is that you very often succeed. ... He soon did hear nothing but roaring in Aslan's song. Soon he couldn't have heard anything else even if he had wanted to.¹⁹

¹⁶ Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew*, 83.

¹⁷ Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew*, 120.

¹⁸ Kevin Kinghorn, "Virtue Epistemology: Why Uncle Andrew Couldn't Hear the Animals Speak", in Bassham and Walls, 15-26.

¹⁹ Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew*, 137.

Seeing is not believing, and as Romans 1:18 reminds us, human beings are quite capable of suppressing divine truth if it threatens their sense of independence. In fact, Uncle Andrew goes on to exchange the truth about Aslan for a lie (Rom. 1:25), constructing an alternative, virtual reality to hide from divinity. He disregards the abundant evidence of a power and magic far greater than his own, and believes Narnia is simply a commercial opportunity and that he could kill Aslan like a normal wild beast, simply because he wants to believe these things. He also believes that the talking animals who are curious about him want to attack him, not because of any evidence of hostile intent, but because he had never liked animals and “years doing cruel experiments” on them “had made him hate and fear them far more.”²⁰ Although the animals never threaten Digory and Polly in any way, this fear makes him believe that the “brutes will eat the rings along with the children and I’ll never be able to get home again.”²¹ Above all, Uncle Andrew lacks a Socratic sense of his own limitations, and would rather reinterpret the facts to suit his worldview, than modify his worldview to accommodate the facts. Although Uncle Andrew repents of his magic after his experience in Narnia, this is not because he ever understands what is going on. The problem is not merely intellectual but spiritual. Aslan tells us that even He cannot get through Uncle Andrew’s hardened heart:

“This world is bursting with life for these few days because the song with which I called it into life still hangs in the air and rumbles in the ground. ... But I cannot tell that to this old sinner, and I cannot comfort him either; he has made himself unable to hear my voice. ... Oh Adam’s sons, how cleverly you defend yourselves against all that might do you good!”²²

Uncle Andrew shows us what scientific materialism can lead to. But how are such people formed in the first place? And is the hardening of the heart we see in Uncle Andrew inevitable? To answer these questions we turn to the boy who almost deserved his name, Eustace Clarence Scrubb.

Eustace is exactly the sort of boy likely to become a man like Uncle Andrew—if nothing intervenes to prevent it. The trouble begins at home. Eustace is raised by modernist, progressive parents, who do not believe in the vocation of father and mother, preferring to be called by their first name. Harold and Alberta were, of course, “vegetarians, non-smokers and teetotalers and wore a special kind of underclothes.”²³ Eustace learns from his parents’ example to be a chronological snob, who believes that new ideas are inherently superior to old ones, and to be a pragmatist, fixated on the

²⁰ Lewis, *The Magician’s Nephew*, 139.

²¹ Lewis, *The Magician’s Nephew*, 137.

²² Lewis, *The Magician’s Nephew*, 185.

²³ Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (New York: Harper Trophy, 1994), 4.

latest technological advances and useful information. The books he liked were about “grain elevators”,²⁴ and “exports and imports and governments and drains, but they were weak on dragons.”²⁵ Yet because he read no fairy stories and had no interest in heroic adventures that did not literally happen and were not directly useful in a modern technological society, Eustace had an atrophied moral imagination. Eustace was a boy without a chest, who was really only concerned with his own advantage. Although he claimed to be very progressive and enlightened, he actually liked “bossing and bullying”²⁶ so that he could get his way. Eustace is an anti-social individualist, concerned about his own advancement, but so detached from any sense of community or even common humanity that he is unable to make a single friend.

Yet Eustace’s selfishness had been made invisible to him by his indoctrination in self-righteous progressive ideology. Just as Uncle Andrew could deceive himself into believing that his exploitation of others was a sacrifice made necessary by his higher calling to advance science, Eustace told himself that his most selfish actions reflected enlightened motives that those old-fashioned Pevensies and Narnians could not appreciate. When on board the Dawn Treader, he complains that giving Lucy a whole room to herself “is really lowering girls”,²⁷ claiming to be concerned about equality and feminism when actually he simply wanted the room for himself. Like Uncle Andrew, Eustace is always looking for special reasons to exempt himself from the moral rules that he assumes bind other people. When water is rationed, Eustace would be outraged by anyone else taking an extra measure, but claims he is especially sick, and rationalizes deception and theft as especially noble actions:

So I just got up and took my cup and tiptoed out of the Black Hole we slept in, taking great care not to disturb Caspian and Edmund, for they’ve been sleeping badly since the heat and the short water began. I always try to consider others whether they are nice to me or not. ... All was going beautifully, but before I’d drawn a cupful who should catch me but that *little spy* Reep. I tried to explain that I was going on deck for a breath of fresh air (the business about the water had nothing to do with him) and he asked me why I had a cup.²⁸

Eustace is becoming more and more like Uncle Andrew, learning to wrap his selfish actions in a mantel of self-righteous double-talk. When Lucy

²⁴ Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, 3.

²⁵ Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, 87.

²⁶ Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, 4.

²⁷ Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, 31.

²⁸ Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, 73.

kindly offers him some of her water ration, he cannot appreciate the nobility of her self-sacrifice, nor does he have the nobility to decline the gift, since nobility belongs to the antiquated traditional morality that he rejects without ever really having known it. Instead, he artlessly accepts her offer because “[Lucy] says girls don’t get as thirsty as boys. I had often thought this but it ought to be more generally known at sea.”²⁹

After a storm which requires all hands to repair the Dawn Treader, Eustace churlishly slinks away onto the island. Claiming that the others are “fiends in human form”,³⁰ he really just wants to avoid hard work. Eustace recognizes no loyalty to other human beings, just because they are human. He has no sense of the community on board the Dawn Treader of which he is part, and recognizes no vocation to contribute to that community. The absurdity of his position is quickly revealed. Although he walks off into the island to avoid work, Eustace quickly becomes lonely, and projecting his own selfishness onto the others, starts to be afraid that they will sail off without him, unable to see that “there was not the least chance of their doing any such thing.”³¹ His modernist individualism is shown to be bankrupt. Although he wants to avoid contributing to the community, he clearly depends on its benefits. But Eustace does not realize this until, thinking dragonish thoughts on a dragon’s horde, he awakes to find himself a dragon. At last Eustace, a rather frail boy, had the power to make others do as he wanted and to take revenge on the others for their imagined mistreatment of him.

But the moment he thought this he realized that he didn’t want to. He wanted to be friends. He wanted to get back among humans and talk and laugh and share things. He realized that he was a monster cut off from the whole human race. An appalling loneliness came over him. He began to see that the others had not really been fiends at all. He began to wonder if he himself had been such a nice person as he had always supposed.³²

Unlike Uncle Andrew, Eustace learns to see the reality of his own moral condition. He also starts to see that his smugly progressive prejudices had blinded him to the truth about Narnia. He had tried to view Narnia through secular modern lenses. Unable to appreciate the otherness of Narnia, he had asked to be put on shore so he could “‘lodge a disposition’ against them all with the British Consul.”³³ He had boasted about the superiority of our

²⁹ Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, 74-75.

³⁰ Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, 71.

³¹ Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, 81.

³² Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, 92.

³³ Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, 27.

“liners and motorboats and aeroplanes and submarines”³⁴ to the Dawn Treader. Ironically, he had even complained that the others “shut their eyes to the Facts”,³⁵ when in fact it was he who refused to acknowledge the existence of anything transcending the secular and the familiar. While Eustace repents of his moral failings, he needs something more to open his eyes to the truth. Aslan himself removes his sinful, dragonish flesh, and Eustace is baptized and wrapped in a new robe of righteousness. From then on, he “began to be a different boy.”³⁶

Eustace is a success story, a prodigal son like Lewis himself, who is brought to his senses and drawn into Christ’s kingdom. But Lewis does not shy away from the darker side of the equation, those who resolutely reject God’s grace. Perhaps Lewis’s best portrait of spiritual corruption is found in another devotee of scientific materialism, Weston, who appears in the first two volumes of Lewis’s space fiction trilogy. If a man has no chest, he may, like Eustace, be filled with Christ. But he may also, like Weston, be invaded by demonic power.

In *Out of the Silent Planet*, Weston dreams of interplanetary colonization. Like Eustace, he is a chronological snob who thinks that classics and history are “trash”³⁷ and that science is the only source of knowledge (scientism). Although he is less selfish than Uncle Andrew, and is concerned for the survival of the human race, he thinks that the importance of this goal justifies sacrificing many individuals, telling Ransom, “You cannot be so small-minded as to think that the rights of an individual or of a million individuals are of the slightest importance in comparison to this.”³⁸ Ransom learns that Weston’s plan is to take him to Malacandra (Mars) as a sacrifice to the primitive life forms there. In fact, it is the arrogance of Weston’s scientific materialism and his fear of otherness that prevent him from seeing the intellectual and moral superiority of the alien life forms (the sorns).

Finally, Weston and his accomplice Devine are captured and brought before Oyarsa, the head eldil (angel) of Malacandra. Despite Oyarsa’s vast superiority, Weston continues to see everything from his condescending progressive worldview. He continues to believe that humans are the apex of intelligent life and argues that humans have the right to colonize other planets even if it means killing off indigenous creatures. Oyarsa tells Weston that he is arbitrarily selecting one moral principle and ignoring all the others

³⁴ Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, 29.

³⁵ Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, 30.

³⁶ Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, 112.

³⁷ Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet* (New York: Scribner, 2003), 27.

³⁸ Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, 27.

that balance it. He is taking the traditional idea of “love of kindred”³⁹ and making it into a false god, the only principle of action, while rejecting all the other principles of traditional ethics that govern the proper treatment of individuals. This explains the irony that Weston claims to care for the human race, yet does “not love any one of the race.”⁴⁰ Worshipping a Gnostic abstraction called humanity, Weston does not recognize the worth of individual humans.

Weston does not learn what he should from Oyarsa’s instruction. But he does come to admit that human beings are not the only intelligent life. From this he concludes that human dominance is not the prime prerogative. What matters is the progress of life. In *Perelandra* we learn that Weston has modified his philosophy. At first the changes seem hopeful. Weston admits that it would have been wrong to kill the intelligent life on Malacandra,⁴¹ but only because he had come to believe that no particular species mattered, only Life itself. Weston is now a follower of emergent evolution and believes in “an unconsciously purposive dynamism”⁴² (not unlike Daniel Dennett’s “Mother Nature”⁴³). He has moved away from materialism and is now willing to spiritualize the Life-Force. He even claims that he really means the same thing as Christians do by the Holy Spirit, although the Life Force is impersonal and blind, but the Holy Spirit is personal and discerns all things.

Weston’s empty chest has started to draw on the idea of a nebulous spirituality. As an enlightened, progressive thinker, Weston assumes that spirituality is essentially good. He does not have the touchstone of Christ to test the spirits (I John 4). As a result, Weston has no sense that the new “guidance” he has discovered, which taught him the Old Solar language, is of demonic origin. He does not consider the fact that guidance cannot come from an impersonal force, but always derives from a person. He falls for the lie that the Devil and God are simply two pictures of the same reality. He views God as the ultimate goal and the Devil as the dynamic means of getting there.

The reaching forward, the dynamism, is what people like you always call the Devil. The people like me, who do the reaching forward, are always martyrs.

³⁹ Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, 138.

⁴⁰ Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, 138.

⁴¹ Lewis, *Perelandra* (New York: Scribner, 2003), 90.

⁴² Lewis, *Perelandra*, 90.

⁴³ Daniel Dennett, *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life* (New York: Touchstone, 1995).

You revile us, and by us come to your goal... The world leaps forward through great men and greatness always transcends mere moralism.⁴⁴

We are back with Nietzsche's two-level morality. This time the justification for exempting oneself from the moral prohibitions of the Tao is obedience to the Life Force. If it serves the Life Force, Weston is willing to murder Ransom, sell England to the Germans and "print lies as serious research in a scientific periodical."⁴⁵ The unrecognized face of the Life Force is that of Satan, who proceeds to expel Weston and inhabit his body like a parasite. Weston is replaced by the Unman, the remains of a human being that has completely abandoned the moral sense that makes it human. A man with a withered chest may end up being no man at all. A man like Weston whose progressive chest is swept clean by the rejection of materialism, may become home to "seven other spirits more wicked than itself" (Mt. 12:45).

4. A CHRISTIAN ALTERNATIVE

Lewis not only criticizes materialism and scientism, but presents a compelling Christian alternative. He does not so much argue for the merits of the Christian worldview as provide appealing portraits of figures who exemplify Christian qualities, even though some readers may not at first realize that the qualities are Christian. Part of the package is Lewis's case for the Tao, the universal law of human nature that applies to all human beings equally. But Lewis also shows the human need for redemption, and the healing and reorientation of a Christ-centred life.

We have already seen that a boy as insufferable as Eustace can be called to repentance and a new life in Christ. But how is the new Eustace different, and why should a non-Christian prefer the new Eustace to the old? For one thing, the new Eustace is capable of authentic magnanimity. He does not merely say how supportive he is of progressive causes; he actually starts to care for other people. When the Dawn Treader is about to be destroyed by a sea serpent, Eustace hacks "at it with all his might. It is true that he accomplished nothing beyond breaking Caspian's second-best sword into bits, but it was a fine thing for a beginner to have done."⁴⁶

From that time on, Eustace becomes a full member of the community, sharing in their adventures and living out his assigned vocation. But it is only in *The Silver Chair* that we see how great his transformation is. Even in our world, Eustace no longer wants to be a bully, but stands up to the other

⁴⁴ Lewis, *Perelandra*, 95.

⁴⁵ Lewis, *Perelandra*, 95.

⁴⁶ Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, 117.

bullies viewed by the progressive Head as interesting psychological cases.⁴⁷ When he reaches Narnia, this former republican humanist boldly declares to the owls, "I'm the king's man; and if this parliament of owls is any sort of plot against the King, I'm having nothing to do with it."⁴⁸ The portrait of Eustace is realistic. He still has weaknesses, and gets sidetracked by the promise of fires and baths and meals at Harfang. He does not want to go through with the last sign, releasing Rilian, who appears to be a dangerous madman, from the Silver Chair. But in both cases, Eustace sees his mistake and completes the task assigned by Aslan. He can move beyond the rationalization of selfish behaviour; he no longer uses self-righteous euphemism to cover up moral failures. He can accept his errors for what they are, because he trusts in Aslan's righteousness, not his own. He has abandoned the smug idea that he has all the right answers, and knows that "in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). By not depending on his own righteousness, Eustace is set free to do all he can to serve Aslan and his neighbour. Even the non-Christian reader will be drawn to the nobility of the new Eustace.

An even sharper contrast with the scientific materialist is provided by Digory. Uncle Andrew and Weston believe that progress requires sacrifice. But because they believe themselves to be especially enlightened, neo-Gnostic individuals, they generally mean that other people can be sacrificed to advance their own cause. Uncle Andrew may be willing to risk his health to gain secret knowledge about the contents of Mrs Lefay's box, but he is not willing to sacrifice his own heart's desire out of obedience to a higher claim. Yet this is just what we see Digory do.

While in Charn, Digory's curiosity had gotten the better of him and he started to look and behave just like Uncle Andrew.⁴⁹ He violates Polly's dignity by preventing her from leaving, and rings a magic bell that awakens Jadis. This starts a chain of events that ultimately brings her evil into Narnia at its very beginning. Aslan tells Digory to collect a magic apple whose seed will grow into a tree to protect Narnia from the witch for many centuries. When Digory reaches the walled garden on the hill, Jadis tempts him into disobeying Aslan with his heart's desire. Digory desperately wants to bring healing to his dying mother, and Jadis points out that he could use his ring to go straight back to London with one of the magic apples. But Digory fights the temptation. He has a conscience, and realizes that he made a promise to

⁴⁷ Lewis, *The Silver Chair* (New York: Harper Trophy, 1994), 5.

⁴⁸ Lewis, *The Silver Chair*, 54.

⁴⁹ Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew*, 55.

Aslan.⁵⁰ He knows his own mother would expect him to keep that promise, so that his love for her cannot justify ignoring other moral constraints. But it is not mere ethics, but the contrast between the characters of Jadis and Aslan that wins the day. Jadis is unconcerned with leaving Polly behind,⁵¹ and obviously does not really care about his mother. But Aslan had shed tears for her like Christ's at the tomb of Lazarus (John 11:35). The decision is a hard one but Digory stands by his promise to Aslan.

He was very sad and he wasn't even sure all the time that he had done the right thing; but whenever he remembered the shining tears in Aslan's eyes he became sure.⁵²

Digory gives up on his hope to take the apple to his mother, and trusts that Aslan does care for her. He learns later that if she had eaten the apple, his mother would have enjoyed an eternal, but cursed life, like Jadis. But because he was obedient to Aslan and trusted in him, Digory is allowed to take a different apple which will restore his mother to health. Lewis presents the Christian life as one of sacrifice and trust, but one which is richly blessed with rewards. Digory is responsible for the Fall of an entire world, but through his faith, nothing can separate him from Christ Jesus.

Moving to an even higher level, we encounter Ransom, outwardly a physically unimpressive Cambridge philologist, but destined to be a Christian superhero. While John Milton wrote *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, C. S. Lewis's *Perelandra* pursues the supposal of paradise retained: what if the Adam of an Eve of another world survived Satan's attacks, and the world never fell?

The Adam and Eve of *Perelandra* live perfectly attuned to the will of Maledil (God). Everything they need is provided for them without the need to plan or store or build for the future. Ransom is sent to *Perelandra* to battle the principalities and powers that will be sent to attack it. The demonic appears in the form of the Unman that takes over Weston's body. The Unman tempts the Green Lady to disobey Maledil by staying over night on the Fixed Land, which would allow people to make their own provisions for the future and thereby assert their independence from Maledil. At first, Ransom "could not understand why Maledil should remain absent when the Enemy was there in person."⁵³ Then he realizes that "He himself was the miracle."⁵⁴ He at first tries to avoid the call, thinking it must be a spiritual struggle that his physical body was unable to accomplish. But he comes to

⁵⁰ Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew*, 177.

⁵¹ Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew*, 178.

⁵² Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew*, 179.

⁵³ Lewis, *Perelandra*, 140.

⁵⁴ Lewis, *Perelandra*, 141.

see that God works through means, that “If the issue lay in Maledil’s hands, Ransom and the Lady were those hands.”⁵⁵ The Fall had disrupted the original unity of body and soul, but “Even on earth the sacraments existed as a permanent reminder that the division was neither wholesome nor final. The Incarnation had been the beginning of its disappearance.”⁵⁶ Now that God had become man and made Christians members of his own body, he would “save Perelandra not through Himself but through Himself in Ransom.”⁵⁷

Lewis is clearly taking issue with the Gnostic idea that disdains the body and claims that our battles are purely spiritual. Ransom is called to physically kill the Unman’s body. But this does not mean that what he is doing can be understood purely materialistically. Ransom’s physical battle would also be a spiritual battle with spiritual consequences. It was up to him to prevent Perelandra’s fall: “Whatever happened here would be of such a nature that earth-men would call it mythological.”⁵⁸ But Lewis knew that in Christianity, myth became fact, and that real-world actions have a sacramental cast, a source of meaning that comes from beyond them. Ransom embodies the idea of a faithful Christian, living out the spirituality of ordinary life through what appears to be the purely physical work of destroying Weston’s body.

Nothing encourages us to think that Ransom’s vocation is either easy or in his own self-interest. Unlike Uncle Andrew and Weston, Ransom does not seek any advance in his own power or knowledge. He is called to risk his life on a seemingly impossible quest. He is not Indiana Jones, but a rather slight philologist who could not recall ever winning a fight in all his life.⁵⁹ But he discovers that those whom God calls, He also equips. Just as the Pevensie children in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* are gifted by Father Christmas, Ransom’s eyes are opened to the pure evil animating Weston’s body and he discovers an unexpected weapon, “a torrent of perfectly unmixed and lawful hatred. . . . The joy came from finding at last what hatred was made for.”⁶⁰ After Ransom’s dreadful onslaught, the Unman’s body is severely damaged, but he flees on a fish with Ransom in hot pursuit. There is an underwater struggle in which Ransom appears to die, yet reemerges to find a subterranean cavern (the baptismal imagery is powerful). After some climbing, Weston appears again and Ransom at last smashes Weston’s head with a stone and heaves his body over a cliff into a

⁵⁵ Lewis, *Perelandra*, 142.

⁵⁶ Lewis, *Perelandra*, 144.

⁵⁷ Lewis, *Perelandra*, 145.

⁵⁸ Lewis, *Perelandra*, 144.

⁵⁹ Lewis, *Perelandra*, 146.

⁶⁰ Lewis, *Perelandra*, 158.

sea of fire. Echoing Genesis 3:15, Ransom crushes the Enemy's head, but is wounded in his heel and nearly dead from his exertion.

Like Digory, Ransom does not seek his own good, but is obedient to the will of God. Like Digory, he is rewarded. Ransom's body is not only repaired, it is renewed by "a second infancy",⁶¹ although, as the glorified body of Christ retains marks of the crucifixion, Ransom retains the wound in his heel. But Ransom is also rewarded in another way, by seeing the good that his work has accomplished for Perelandra. The eldila Perelandra and Malecandra appear, and Malecandra tells Ransom, "To-day for the first time two creatures of the low worlds, two images of Maledil that breathe and breed like the beasts, step up that step at which your parents fell, and sit at the throne of what they were meant to be."⁶²

Unlike the early Eustace, Uncle Andrew, and Weston, Ransom is a man with a chest, able to sacrifice his safety and even his life for causes greater than his own interest. His mind is opened to the Tao, and to a transcendent framework of meaning for life. To the extent that even secular readers admire Ransom's heroism and are drawn to his example, their imagination is pre-baptized. For although Ransom is not Christ, he is, like all Christians, a little Christ. Ransom may succeed in getting past the reader's watchful dragons and contacting his heart. Lewis did not merely write about characters who either lacked or possessed a chest. He aimed to develop the chest in the reader. At the very least, this would strengthen the reader's sense of objective morality, helping them to see the validity of the moral law. But the nobility and sacrifice that the reader loves in Ransom is more fully revealed in Christ Himself. Enough hints are left in *Perelandra* to encourage the reader to move beyond fiction to the biblical portrait of Christ.

5. CONCLUSION

For Lewis, fiction was not an alternative to philosophy and apologetics. It was a way of showing a world of value that would bypass the reader's rationalizations and develop their chest. Lewis agreed with Scripture, that as a man thinks **in his heart**, so is he (Proverbs 23:7). Intellectual argument that fails to engage a person's heart will not fundamentally change them. Unless we can make people care about moral goodness, any argument for moral values can easily be repelled or ignored. Unless we can help people to see their true condition and need for a saviour, the apologist's arguments for

⁶¹ Lewis, *Perelandra*, 185.

⁶² Lewis, *Perelandra*, 197.

Christ's divinity are viewed either as a coercive threat to personal autonomy or as irrelevant side-shows. Yet once the reader's heart is opened and developed to see the moral law and the need for a saviour, these arguments will appear in their real force, and help people to clarify what they believe. In that way, the *Chronicles* and the Space Fiction trilogy are the ideal preparation for formal apologetics, systematic theology and Christian philosophy.

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A TEACHING THEOLOGIAN LOOKS AT C. S. LEWIS*

John R. Stephenson

From the movie *Shadowlands* most of you are familiar with the house in the Oxford suburb of Headington where C. S. Lewis lived and worked when he wasn't teaching or dining at Magdalen College or having a pint with his fellow Inklings. In the past decade the Kilns has been restored as the headquarters of the C. S. Lewis Foundation Study Centre. During his lifetime, though, it was home, a place where Lewis thrived amid great bursts of literary productivity.

I'd like during this half hour to picture theology in architectural terms and to consider Lutheran theology as a particular building. It goes without saying that, were C. S. Lewis to return to earth, the house known as Lutheran theology could never be for a him a second Kilns, a place for him to keep his slippers and pipes and books, a lodging in which he could be snugly comfortable.

But, as I argue that, forty-some years after his death, Lewis can inform and stimulate Lutheran teachers and students of theology as they go about their task, I'd like to suggest that Lewis fits in nicely as an occasional house guest in the building known as Lutheran theology. We shall discover, though, that he would be more at home in some rooms and on some floors than on others. And we'll have to ask whether we would want to take on board suggestions he might have to offer concerning possible improvements of structure and decor.

Permit me, then, to don the mantle of a realtor and in this guise to try to interest C. S. Lewis in the building known as Lutheran theology. Although I'm the son of a realtor, I would soon starve if I had to earn my bread as a member of this profession, and I fear that my architectural metaphor will fall flat before long. On our tour of the premises we shall spend altogether more time in the basement of the building than is customary when a realtor takes you round a house. For if C. S. Lewis were going to spend the occasional weekend in the detached house that we might pompously call Wittenberg Manor, he would hang out mostly in the basement, and, if he were on good terms with the inmates of the dwelling, he would push for some home improvements precisely down in the basement.

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In a way, the theology of Karl Barth was a one-storey dwelling, what they call a ranch house in the States and what we in Canada term a bungalow. God spoke, what He spoke you find in the Bible, and you go from there. But, unlike Barth, the edifice of classical Lutheranism does have a functioning basement, albeit one that you usually don't see from the outside. The seventeenth-century theologians spoke of how we know some articles of faith from two sources. By reason even before you get to supernatural revelation you have more than an inkling of the existence of God, of the binding quality and permanent content of His Law, and of the fact that human life does not end in the grave. In other words, the old Lutherans, and that in some of the textbooks still used around here, found a place and a role for what is known as natural theology.

So, as we descend into the depths of the building, Lewis's eyes light up as we enter the finished side of the basement. Lewis can throw himself in an armchair and toast his feet at the roaring gas fire and give animated readings from *Mere Christianity*, *The Abolition of Man*, and *Surprised by Joy*. In these surroundings he can carry out his great life's work, which was to be one of the twentieth century's chief apologists for classic Christian Theism.

When I recollect the three factors that drew Lewis in his teens and twenties away from classic Christian Theism, it strikes me that the intellectual climate hasn't changed overmuch in a hundred years. Lewis was dragged from professing the first article of the creed in first place by a dabbling in the occult, which turned for a while into something along the lines of an addiction. Secondly, as he was perplexed by the plurality of competing religions in the world, he could no longer believe that the universe is the handiwork of the one God who has spoken definitively in His Son. And, thirdly, Lewis was burned by fire as he tried to manipulate God, as through certain prayer techniques he tried to generate certain spiritual experiences at whim from his own resources. If we had time at our disposal, I'd like to connect these three perennial factors that led the youthful Lewis astray with the present state of affairs on this Brock campus.

I agree with the observation that people are much more likely to be attracted to Christianity by such factors as artistic beauty and personal holiness than they are by the whole range of arguments that have been marshalled by all the apologists from Justin Martyr through C. S. Lewis. But apologetics at its best shows that the Faith is not reason's foe but its fulfilment, and we are deeply in Lewis's debt for his strenuous labours in pounding the bulwarks of unbelief, in demolishing the obstacles that unregenerate reason throws in the way of faith.

When Lewis puts his pipe down, he notices that even the finished side of our basement is dingy, draughty, and leaky. Why, it hasn't had much work done on it for centuries! Wasn't Abraham Calov the last one to repair that

foundation wall when he attacked the Socinians at length and in detail more than three hundred years ago? And weren't Pieper and Hoenecke the last ones to give the walls a coat of paint when they wrote their major works a century ago? Yes, Professor Lewis, you're welcome to do lots of work in the finished side of our basement. Repair the wall, insulate the room, fit new carpets, rearrange the furniture. We acknowledge that there is such a thing as natural theology and that it has its uses in the sphere of apologetics, but we are mighty glad that you do the work for us.

As we prepare to head up to the first floor (which Lewis would have called the ground floor), our guest looks with dismay at the unfinished side of the basement in our Wittenberg Manor. Oh dear, it's a mess of mice and mildew, dark empty space not at all integrated into the building. It would mess up my governing metaphor if I called it a vacuum, which would be more accurate. Now the basement of Roman Catholic theology is finished on both sides, and the theologians devote much of their effort to developing this floor of the house in the enterprise known as "fundamental theology". Anglicans likewise pursue the discipline of philosophical theology. So the sometime Oxford tutor and lecturer and later Cambridge Professor—you might say he went down to go up in the world—strides into this dank hole and suggests some massive changes. Once they're accomplished, he'd like us to spend much time in here, doing philosophical theology with the aid of such volumes as *The Problem of Pain* and *Miracles* and with the help of many articles that flowed from his pen. But the realtor has to disappoint his potential client: between now and the Last Day Lutherans are not going to major in philosophical theology; one side of our basement is never going to be finished.

Light streams into Wittenberg Manor through the large windows of the first floor, which symbolize the Spirit-filled Word of God. A pious man, Lewis reads his Bible, but we can't expect him to be a professional exegete. So he doesn't have many comments on the kitchen where the food is prepared, though he does suggest that his friend Austin Farrer, who drank the occasional beer with the Inklings, might offer a helping hand with his original New Testament studies. And didn't Dr Feuerhahn, once of Westfield House and now of St. Louis, once say that Farrer, one of the most luminous homilists of his generation, could teach us Lutherans how to preach the Gospel? So Farrer could help out in the dining room, where Word and Sacrament ministry is offered in the liturgy. But Lewis himself can't be expected to be a theologian of the means of grace. And yet Lewis did speak and write of how he found the myths of Graeco-Roman antiquity as different from the four Gospels as chalk is from cheese. Lewis withstood the massively influential New Testament scholar Rudolf Bultmann by upholding the historicity, that is, the factual reliability, of the Gospels. So perhaps he

can after all offer some help in the kitchen with the preparation of our exegetical meat and potatoes.

In order to keep my oratorical ball rolling, let's pretend that dogmatic, or systematic, theology gets carried out in the living room, which in the old days of Lutheranism was much more a fancy front parlour than it is today. In these surroundings Lewis feels distinctly out of place, because the classical Anglicanism to which he belonged has, for a variety of reasons, always minored in dogmatics, or systematics. But wait, there's an alcove in the corner, near a bay window, that's reserved for Christian ethics. More than one Lutheran theologian wants to demolish that alcove and tear out that bay window, because they take the dreadful Marcionite view that there can't be such a thing as Christian ethics. But Lewis is already snugly seated in that corner of the front room and reading in mellifluous tones from *The Four Loves*. The distinctions made in this literary gem and the fresh look it takes at the inter-relation of the four kinds of love can, I think, be most helpful to both the instructor and the instructed as they examine the various dogmatic loci, especially if they ever wish to relate this subject-matter to laypeople.

By now the architectural metaphor is starting to limp and as I head upstairs with Lewis to the second floor (his first) of Wittenberg Manor I am clueless as to how to relate the bedrooms to the discipline of theology. But this floor of the house boasts a cozy family room where the residents and the visitors can relax and unwind. This is a good location for the discussion and pursuit of spirituality, which deals with the subjective side of our piety and life in Christ. Some Lutherans would like to board up this room, but, hey, Luther wrote on this topic, Arndt wrote a classic about it, and this seminary devotes to it an elective offering. Perched on a sofa and downing a beer, Lewis falls into conversation on the correspondence between Screwtape and Wormwood, on the *Letters to Malcolm*, and on the *Reflections on the Psalms* that Mrs Whitehouse, a professional woman turned divinity student, is speaking about at this conference.

The tour of Wittenberg Manor is approaching its end, but a window seat at the east end of the house, whence one can spy the rising sun, catches Lewis's attention and, being a little fatigued, he sits down. You've guessed it: we have reached the dogmatic and highly practical topic of eschatology. Lewis's celebrated fiction has much to teach the theologian. Sacred Scripture unfolds its teaching to you in the shape of narrative, not philosophically-tinged dogmatics. So in the family room Lewis had a friendly encounter with Bo Giertz. And in the last volume of the *Chronicles of Narnia* Lewis presents deep doctrine with deceptive ease. How can the Narnians mistake a donkey decked out in a lion skin for the glorious and inimitable Aslan? In his account of Narnia Lewis offers a low-key, whimsical version of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, and especially in the last

volume of the series he sounds a trumpet call to Holy Christendom in these days of what might well be the final apostasy.

Such leading theologians of the twentieth century as Barth and von Balthasar did much to encourage an eschatological viewpoint to which we give the name of universalism; they have stimulated the hope that in the end all the creatures made in God's image will blessedly behold His face. Someone said to me recently that the universalist illusion strips the Christian life of all its drama. The lay theologian Lewis took on those theological giants von Balthasar and Barth in the little narrative *The Great Divorce*. Far too synergistic for Missourian tastes, this little volume nevertheless deals universalism a body blow.

As Lewis rests for a moment on the window seat his gaze fixes on the storm clouds filling the sky on the other side of the pane, and I recall with wonder that in some lectures delivered before the University of Durham in 1943 and published under the title *The Abolition of Man* Lewis, that most staid of Prayer Book Anglicans, exercised the charism of prophecy a good decade and a half before the charismatic movement got under way. Cast out the age-old wisdom of natural law and an eerie project will get under way as the so-called Conditioners impose a perverse moral code that cuts against the grain of created nature. As he wrote in another work, "Of course language is not an infallible guide, but it contains, with all its defects, a good deal of stored insight and experience. If you begin by flouting it, it has a way of avenging itself later on."¹ The province of Ontario abolishes husbands and wives leaving only spouses and surviving spouses, while the kingdom of Spain banishes fathers and mothers from birth certificates in favour of progenitor #1 and progenitor #2. How did Lewis, sixty years ago, see so clearly the moral mess that is Canada today?

As we eventually go down the garden drive to bid Professor Lewis farewell and he accepts our invitation to pay regular visits to Wittenberg Manor and keep sprucing up the finished side of the basement, he and we take in the shape and the grandeur of the entire building at a glance, and we notice that the house of his own thought was built on an identical foundation and according to the same overall structure. As I allude to the image of Christ as the chief cornerstone, I at last and with relief discontinue all architectural metaphors to close by focussing on a thoroughgoing Christocentricity that Lewis shares in common not only with all true Lutherans but supremely with all true Christians.

As I myself study and teach theology, I derive constant profit from a brief essay Lewis wrote, published in the volume *God in the Dock*, dealing with the topic of women's ordination and entitled "Priestesses in the Church".

¹ C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (London: HarperCollin, 1960), 8.

The university teacher of English jumps into this subject from the perspective of a snippet of dialogue in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. If Miss Bingley ever gets her way by having dancing removed from society balls, she will, of course, change society balls into an entirely different kind of gathering. By the same token, argues Lewis, should women ever be ordained into the presbyteral order that continues the apostolic ministry in the Church, then the Christian religion would be changed into something completely different from what its divine Founder once established. Lewis's point holds good for those churches that take ordained ministry seriously in a liturgical-sacramental context. With the position he espouses in this essay, Lewis decisively takes sides in the grand debate that rages right now in all the confessions and denominations of Western Christendom. Is Christianity a given received from the hand of its Founder to be handed on inviolate across all generations till the end? Or is it a waxen nose whose shape can be altered to accommodate the felt needs of people of different times and places? As he faced this question, Lewis firmly gave an answer that places him on the side of Archbishop Akinola against Archbishop Williams. Since he confessed Jesus Christ as the Incarnate Son and Word of God whose words and deeds have unabated definitive force, C. S. Lewis will always be an honoured guest in our Wittenberg Manor, at any rate as this building is conceived by this seminary and by the church body that we serve.

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REFLECTIONS ON
REFLECTIONS ON THE PSALMS (1958)*

Heather Whitehouse

INTRODUCTION

Good Morning. It is a pleasure to speak with you today about C.S. Lewis and his *Reflections on the Psalms*.

Perhaps, first, however, you may wish to know at least a little about the presenter today. I was a career civil servant, a former manager of Freedom of Information and Privacy for Ontario. My chief hobby is farming. I have a small fruit farm in Niagara-on-the-Lake on which I raise enough grapes to make several hundred bottles of wine annually, and I harvest 40 assorted fruit trees and 500 feet of raspberries—all of which makes me quite interested in the agricultural bent and imagery of many of the Psalms.

On retirement I became a full-time Master of Divinity student at Concordia. Not a Lutheran, as it happens—by conviction I am a Mennonite; good farming instinct there—but I found it convenient to attend Concordia and I have found it tremendously invigorating. Presently, I am in my 3rd year in seminary and am spending this year as a vicar, or as the Mennonites put it, as a student pastor at my home church, which is Bethany Mennonite Church in Virgil. That’s enough of an introduction as to my perspective on the Psalms. Now for Lewis.

In this work, right from the first page, Lewis explains the framework and context within which he is writing: After writing many works of Christian apologetics, he writes that in this instance he is not. As Dr Heck said last evening when referring to Lewis’s *Reflections on the Psalms*, he does not hold himself out as an expert Hebraist, nor an archaeologist, nor historian, nor a higher critic. Rather he states he is writing as a confessing Christian, presumably for other confessing Christians. He also indicates that he is not making an attempt at a comprehensive assessment of each of the 150 Psalms, nor even every major theme within the Psalter. Instead this work is a reflection concerning his views, attitudes, understandings and meditations with respect to a select group of themes. In the case of each of these themes

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Lewis addresses what seemed to him difficulties he himself encountered when he first began reading and praying the Psalms.

I propose today to speak on seven major themes which Lewis discussed: (1) Psalms of Judgement; (2) Psalms which curse an enemy; (3) the conception of death in the Psalms; (4) the act of worship in the Psalms; (5) Psalms devoted to the Law; (6) Psalms praising God; and (7) Psalms which have second meanings, that is, Messianic Psalms.

In thinking about Lewis's reflections I was searching for some common thread or threads which run throughout his discussion of each theme. The essential link which he develops is the dichotomy between Judaism and Christianity: Firstly he begins with reflections on the ancient Judaic religion which produced the Psalms. Secondly, he reflects on these Psalms in the age of Christ and the early church in which they took on new meanings.

As it is now virtually 50 years since Lewis wrote *Reflections on the Psalms*, it does not seem fair to try to read it as if this were still the mid-1950s. I was only a child then. Therefore, as a thinking person in preparing to speak with you, I have asked myself: How do I think this writing stands up? Would a person writing 50 years later express his thoughts in the same manner? Thus, of necessity, I offer my own reflections on his reflections of the Psalms.

1. PSALMS OF JUDGEMENT

The first major theme Lewis addresses is that of divine judgement. The ancient Jews had a very different perspective on divine judgement than Christians do. They thought of God's judgement in terms of juridical proceedings as Christians do. The difference is this: typically Christians picture the proceedings as a criminal case with themselves in the dock, and they pray to be delivered at the time of death and on the *Dies Irae*, the Day of Judgement. In contrast, typically Jews viewed the proceedings as civil and thought of themselves as the plaintiffs. One hopes for pardon; the other for justice with heavy damages and often with revenge. Lewis wrote of the Jewish Psalmist: "He is quite sure, apparently, that his own hands are clean. He never did to others the horrid things which they are doing to him ... all this, of course, has its spiritual danger. It leads into that typical Jewish prison of self-righteousness that our Lord so often terribly rebuked."¹ He wrote:

¹ C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (Glasgow: Fount, an imprint of HarperCollins, 1998), 14-15. Hereafter, page references to this edition will be given parenthetically.

I think there are very good reasons for regarding the Christian picture of God's judgement as far more profound and far safer for our souls than the Jewish. But this does not mean that the Jewish conception must simply be thrown away. I, at least, believe that I can still get a good deal of nourishment out of it. It supplements the Christian picture in one important way.... [It] reminds us that, perhaps, we are faulty not only by the divine standard, but also by a very human standard. (11)

2. THE PSALMS WHICH CURSE AN ENEMY

The second theme Lewis discussed is the cursings in the Psalms. He wrote, "in some of the Psalms the spirit of hatred strikes us in the face like the heat of a furnace mouth" (17). Perhaps, the most devilish of these cursings is the insertion on the otherwise lovely Psalm 137, which offers a blessing on anyone who will snatch up a Babylonian baby and dash its head against the pavement. Christians have always had a terrible time with verses such as this one. One option some Christians have taken is simply to ignore and leave totally alone this type of verse as it is so contemptible.

As a Mennonite, I am called to pacifism, so I find the blood-letting of many of the Psalms dismaying; likely more so than might be the case for C. S. Lewis. There is no way one can make such sentiments sound pious. Lewis wrote, "The reaction of the Psalmist to injury, though perfectly natural, is profoundly wrong" (22).

In Psalm 58:9-10 the religious Psalmist wrote, "The righteous will rejoice when he sees the vengeance ... so that a man shall say ... Doubtless there is a God who judges the earth." The ferocious parts of the Psalms remind us that there is wickedness in the world and that God hates wickedness. The Christian would say, hate the sin but not the sinner.

Is the old jibe "How odd of God to chose the Jews? out of line for Christians? Lewis answers, it certainly is! He wrote it "is impossible for us who believe that God chose that race for the vehicle of his own Incarnation, and who are indebted to Israel beyond all possible repayment" (24).

Lewis then tackled the question, "How then can we explain even if we do not agree with the position of the ancient Psalmist?" Lewis noted that it is not the little men, but the great men, the potential saints, who sometimes become most fiendish inquisitors and worse. Those who are readiest to die for a cause are also likely the ones to be most likely to kill for a cause. Lewis added, "of all the bad men, religious bad men are the worst" (27).

3. THE CONCEPTION OF DEATH IN THE PSALMS

With respect to the idea of death, the Jewish people at the time the Psalms were composed had a very different concept than was emerging at the time of Jesus.

The ancient faith of Israel did not have a belief in either heaven or hell. Rather they believed that on death a person went to a place called *Sheol*. The typical Jew in those days did not like to think a great deal about *Sheol*. No good could come of it. *Sheol* was not a place especially established for particularly good or particularly evil people. It was a place of shades and ephemeral spirits, and while not only evil people went there, it definitely had unpleasant associations. It reminded one of the Witch of Endor who could conjure up a ghost from the grave. In those days, in place of a hope of heaven, the Jewish person had earthly hopes of peace and prosperity.

At the time of Christ the Jewish view was in process of metamorphosis. The older view was still maintained by the Sadducees, who denied the resurrection of the body, but now there was another group, the Pharisees, who affirmed that there was a bodily resurrection, and it was the Pharisees who ultimately prevailed within Judaism. The Christian faith always held out both heaven and hell, and with them came the alternative fears of damnation and hopes of eternal life after death.

4. THE ACT OF WORSHIP IN THE PSALMS

Judaic worship in the time of the Psalmist and at the time of Christ is quite distinct from Christian worship in several key respects. Lewis wrote, "It is in the process of being worshipped that God communicated his presence to men" (79). And for the Jewish Psalmist God chiefly communicated Himself when He was worshipped in the Temple. In later times a quorum of 10 men—women did not count—could hold corporate worship in the synagogue. For a time Temple and synagogue existed along side each other, but when the temple was destroyed Judaism was mutilated.

For the early Hebrews worship was all of a piece. It was total unity. They felt the very presence of God in the Temple. Psalm 68:25 reads "It is well seen how you go into the sanctuary ... the singers before (you) the minstrels follow (you)."

Another characteristic of the Jewish people was—and is—that they do things with gusto. This is why David felt free to dance with such total abandon naked before the Ark which was being brought into Jerusalem. He was worshipping God freely and fully. When we speak of gusto in worship, music and dance were not enough; in Psalm 96:12 "the trees of the forest

sing for joy.” Lewis wrote of Psalm 68: “I suspect that the poet drew no distinction between ‘beholding the fair beauty of the Lord’ and the acts of worship themselves” (41).

Unfortunately, in time the sacrificial rites became distinguishable from meeting with God. Sometimes, amongst the Jews, the sacrifice rivalled—or even displaced—meeting with God. Lewis noted that the priests certainly had a keen interest in the sacrificial aspect. Nevertheless, the Psalmist knew a corrective for such imbalance. Psalm 50:9 spoke to this issue. In this Psalm God said to Israel, “I will not accept a bull from your house.” The Jews knew what God considered “true worship”, if they would only hear and obey.

Lewis wrote that for Christians worship was experienced differently. “The Jews did not know what it cost to redeem their souls ... the broken body and the shed blood”. He added, therefore, “There is for us a spiritual counterpoint where they had only a simple melody” (45).

I have found the Psalms particularly useful to me in my devotions. Many are contemplative and I find them bring me to a spiritual place where I can enter and more effectively hear God speak into my soul His precious Word.

5. PSALMS DEVOTED TO THE LAW

A number of Psalms pay exquisite tribute to the Law. The Psalms in praise of the Law always surprise and mystify most Christians because the two faiths have very different understandings of the function and effect of the Law. By the Law I do not mean simply the 10 Commandments, but rather the entire 613 statutes and ordinances which the Jews believe God decreed they follow. In the Jewish understanding, the Law is entirely beneficial, setting the parameters for a good, healthy, and God-pleasing life.

C. S. Lewis considered one of the Psalms in this class of Psalms to be his favourite. He wrote of the 19th Psalm: “I take this to be the greatest poem in the Psalter and one of the greatest lyrics in the world” (53). Given that introduction, let me share with you this Psalm:

¹ The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. ² Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. ³ There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. ⁴ Their measuring line goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them he has set a tent for the sun, ⁵ which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy. ⁶ Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them, and there is nothing hidden from its heat. ⁷ The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; ⁸ the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the

commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; ⁹ the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever; the just decrees of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether. ¹⁰ More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. ¹¹ Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. ¹² Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults. ¹³ Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me! Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression. ¹⁴ Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer. (ESV)

Even today on *Simchah Torah*, the Jewish holiday commemorating the giving of the Law, Jews rush forward to kiss the *Torah* which contains the Law that is being paraded about the synagogue.

In the Psalm 119:47 the poet wrote, “I find my delight in Your law.” The Jewish perspective with respect to keeping the Law is that man is able to keep the law—or at least enough of it that the scales of justice are tilted towards good rather than evil and, thus, in his view God will reward him in the after-life.

In contrast to this perspective the Christian understands that unless all of the Law is kept, the Law has been broken. Unfortunately, no one is capable of keeping the entire Law. The Law shows us our faults, but does not give us the ability to meet God’s demands. That is the curse of the Law. Therefore, man without Christ as mediator faces God’s wrath.

6. PSALMS PRAISING GOD

A word about praising. The following points apply to the Jew as to the Christian. When Lewis first became a Christian, and for some time afterward, a stumbling block for him was the clamour amongst religious people that we praise God. Still more, the suggestion that God demanded praise bothered him. He wrote “We all despise the man who demands continued assurances of his own virtue. We despise still more the crowd round every dictator, millionaire and celebrity who gratify that demand” (77).

Lewis came to best understand the sense in which God demands praise when he thought of a beautiful picture which calls forth from us our innate admiration and appreciation. It is in this sense that art, nature, and God properly demand praise.

A related point for Lewis was his observation that all enjoyment of a beloved flows to praise. The healthy and unaffected person praises their lover. The Psalmist in telling everyone to praise God is doing what all men do when they speak about what they care about.

7. PSALMS WITH SECOND MEANINGS: MESSIANIC PSALMS

Christians believe that a group of Psalms actually have a second “allegorical” sense or meaning which is connected with the central truths of Christianity as concern the incarnation, the passion, the resurrection, the ascension, and the redemption of man.

This group of Psalms are amongst the most important Psalms to me. They support my understanding of Jesus’ claims on my heart. This year at Bethany I hope I will have opportunity to preach on the Messianic Psalms and to share their rich meanings with fellow believers in corporate worship. I also hope to lead a small Bible study group in exploring the Messianic Psalms.

Of course, not every one accepts the “allegorical” meanings of the Psalms, which I find so convincing. Lewis wrote “Such a doctrine, not without reason, arouses deep distrust in a modern mind” (85).

If then modern people are to accept these meanings, in the words of Lewis, “We have a steep hill to climb” (86). Will thorough sceptics accept these second meanings? Perhaps not. They may appear coincidences. However, many people will see in these Psalms more than coincidence.

Lewis wrote that the original meaning of the Psalmist remains true. However, for Christians some Psalms take on a Messianic meaning in light of a fuller knowledge than the author possessed. In Lewis’s words, “We are prolonging [the authors’] meaning in a direction congenial to it. The basic reality behind the words and the full truth is one and the same” (88). This is especially relevant since Jesus claimed to be the second meaning of the Scriptures. In addition to Isaiah chapter 53 and the Song of Songs, which are outside the scope of this work, there are numerous references to Christ in the Psalms.

Here are a few examples Lewis noted. From Psalm 2, “Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His Christ.” Or consider the words of Psalm 22, which Christ also said at the time of His death: “My God, My God why have you forsaken Me?” Or what of the words of Psalm 16: “You will not abandon My soul to hell or let Your Holy One to see corruption.” These and many more verses in the Psalms attest to the fact that Jesus is the Christ.

REFLECTIONS ON LEWIS’S REFLECTIONS ON THE PSALMS

In reflecting on a few particular points I have to note that Lewis wrote in a different era than today. His use of **non**-inclusive language is noticeable, and

quite a few women would be dismayed by it. Lewis also wrote as a college don at an upper class English university and as a confessing Christian, and he wrote specifically for a Christian audience. In developing the Jewish-Christian dichotomy as he does, Lewis presents Christianity as the successor and completer of Judaism. In our multicultural society today, one wonders how well a Jew might resonate with this perspective.

Reflecting much more generally on Lewis's *Reflections on the Psalms*, I find myself immensely impressed by his intelligence, his thought, insight and wisdom. In all of these respects the book was thoroughly engrossing and a complete joy on which to read and to reflect.

Heather Whitehouse is a student at Concordia Lutheran Theological Seminary, St. Catharines.

SERMON:
MONDAY IN THE WEEK OF OCULI 2006*

John R. Stephenson

Psalm 19

¹ The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. ² Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. ³ There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. ⁴ Their measuring line goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them he has set a tent for the sun, ⁵ which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy. ⁶ Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them, and there is nothing hidden from its heat. ⁷ The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; ⁸ the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; ⁹ the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever; the just decrees of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether. ¹⁰ More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. ¹¹ Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. ¹² Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults. ¹³ Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me! Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression. ¹⁴ Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer. (ESV)

Since the sun, the moon, and the stars speak from the sky in such a way that they can be understood in every language spoken here on earth, there's nothing all that weird about the talking animals of Narnia. Thanks be to God that, at a time when the Western world in general and educated folk in particular were tuning out the voice that booms forth from every nook and cranny of reality, Divine Providence raised up a servant who did so much to take out so many earplugs.

C. S. Lewis also helped us hear God's voice speaking through each person's conscience in the clear tones and unchangeable content of the natural moral law. The deafer our society becomes to this imperative voice, the more civilization degenerates into barbarism. We marvel that sixty years

* This sermon was preached at the Monday Vespers of the C. S. Lewis Symposium, 20 March 2006.

ago an Oxford academic was given to prophesy what Canada has become today.

To this point C. S. Lewis has got the message of the nineteenth Psalm to the same extent as did the philosopher Immanuel Kant, who was moved to awe and wonder by “the starry firmament without and the moral law within.” So far, so good, but there’s more and by far the best to come.

As we gather in worship before an altar over which hangs the image of the crucified Jesus, we cannot forget Aslan. The sun is the greatest player in the sky, apart from whose light and warmth all is cold and lifeless, a soggy mass of despair. Paul identified the apostles with the voices from the sky, and the Church Fathers saw Christ Himself in the sun that comes forth as a bridegroom from his chamber. This is why Christians automatically pray toward the East as we find our only source of hope and strength in the rising sun, the greater Aslan, Jesus Christ our Lord, true God and true Man in one divine Person, the only Saviour of humankind.

Within the communion of saints and from the other side of the altar C. S. Lewis undoubtedly joins us in singing Psalm 19, but, since he is unaccustomed to the Psalm tones some of us know so well from *Lutheran Worship*, we may picture him booming this text in the Anglican chant with which he was so familiar from his college chapel and his parish church.

As we give thanks for the Lord’s faithful servant, we enjoy a deep unity in Christ our Lord, the Head of the mystical body, a unity that cuts across and makes bearable the painful confessional divisions of Holy Christendom.

Together, then, we implore the heavenly Father through the merits of the Bridegroom who stepped forth from His chamber to take flesh and give Himself for all that the full voice of Psalm 19, which encapsulates the special Christian calling of C. S. Lewis, may everywhere be heard so that multitudes may be drawn into the life of the God who is Love, to Whom be ascribed, as is His most just due, all might, glory, majesty, dominion, and power, now, henceforth, and unto countless ages. Amen.

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In its 2005 convention Lutheran Church–Canada requested (res. 05.1.04a) the Commission on Theology and Church Relations to prepare a study document on matters of church and ministry. The document “Pastor and People Together in Christ’s Church” has been shared with the church for reflection and study and will be included in the 2008 convention workbook. In this document the CTCR did not directly address church discipline (as requested by the resolution), but commend the following article to initiate the discussion. Written originally for the 2005 Faculty Forum of Concordia, St. Catharines, it is published also at the request of that faculty.

RUMINATIONS ON CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Thomas M. Winger

The topic of church discipline and/or excommunication has been profoundly divisive in our church in recent years—though perhaps it has always been so, as far back as the early Saxon immigrant congregations’ strife with Bishop Stefan. There has been little progress in the intervening years, even though an imposing edifice has been erected by the dogmaticians and pastoral theologians of our tradition, sometimes upon rather insubstantial biblical foundations. Such a construction cannot be quickly or easily renovated. But, as is so often done with the old Victorian terraced homes in my neighbourhood, it may be helpful or even necessary to strip out the plaster, expose the plumbing and wiring, and discover what needs to be redone.

So rather than offering an exhaustive and authoritative pronouncement on the subject, the following study presents “ruminations”, what the Germans might humbly call *Randbemerkungen*. These ideas are meant to probe and explore the doctrine and practice of church discipline, together with its history in the writings of our fathers and its biblical roots. In doing so, I proceed from the following questions, posed originally by the faculty of Concordia Lutheran Theological Seminary, St. Catharines:

- How is church discipline to be defined (using Matt. 18)?
- What are some valid reasons for practising church discipline?
- Can a distinction be made between church discipline and “pastoral discipline” (where the pastor acts alone, without elders, council or voters)?

These are good and relevant questions.

On the presumption, however, that the questions must not be allowed to dictate the answer, we must begin with an awareness of how the terms of

debate may press us into using language and categories that are foreign or at least unhelpful. Firstly, the questions presuppose that church discipline is defined by Matthew 18. This is not an assumption that we should make uncritically. Secondly, the questions focus on the relationship between the local congregation and the pastor in exercising discipline. This is a sign of our times; but one should not assume that this distinction or opposition has always been the critical one in theological reflection on the practice of church discipline. At the very least, the question arises of what is meant by “church” if it is placed in opposition to “pastor”. And finally, we must examine the very term “church discipline”. Is there a danger that, by adopting this as a distinct category, we may be going the way of Calvinism, which views “discipline” virtually as a separate means of grace? Are we using “discipline” in its biblical sense? Is discipline identical to the process of excommunication, and what do we mean by that?

CHURCH DISCIPLINE – DEFINITIONS FROM THE DOGMATICIANS

Having begun with our present concerns, it may be helpful to move backwards in time through the pastoral handbooks and dogmatics texts of our tradition. We find in Franz Pieper a representative summary of the questions and issues of both our time and his.¹

In certain cases, however, the pastor must suspend from Communion [*Das Suspensionsrecht des Pastors*]. The pastor’s right of suspension has been discussed much in times past and present. However, the discussion has not always been entirely correct [lit. “with one voice”!] (cf. Walther, *Pastorale*, p. 163 f.). The thing that must be maintained is that the pastor is personally and directly responsible not only to the congregation, but also to God, with regard to the persons he admits to the Lord’s Supper. Therefore the pastor has both the right and the duty to suspend those whose admission to the Sacrament would be contrary to God’s will and ordinance. Walther specifies: “A pastor, though without authority to excommunicate [*in den Bann zu tun*] a member of his congregation, must suspend a member from Communion [*demselben doch das heilige Abendmahl nicht reichen zu können*] when he has committed or lives in a manifest mortal sin [*eine offenbare Todsünde*] and will not repent; has committed a theft and will not return the stolen goods; has insulted or offended someone or a whole congregation, or has been offended by someone, and in either case will not be reconciled, Matt. 5:23–25; 18:28 ff.; Luke 17:3, etc. In such a situation it becomes necessary to

¹ One must not ignore the role of the translator in imposing another layer of history and development on top of Pieper’s thoughts in his original context. For this reason, Pieper’s original German is included at crucial points in this lengthy quotation.

suspend [*die Notwendigkeit der sogenannten Suspension*] from the Holy Supper, that is to say, the pastor refuses to commune such a member until his offense has been removed, or demands that the member postpone his Communion until he gives evidence of repentance [*here the translator omits a reference to Absolution*], or of readiness to be reconciled, and the like. A pastor may not and must not become partaker of other men's sins, 1 Tim. 5:22. Certainly he must, then, have the right of suspension from the Lord's Supper in all cases where he by admittance to the Lord's Table would knowingly assist in the commission of a grievous sin and thus become partaker of other men's sin. As emphatically, therefore, as our old orthodox theologians deny the right of pastors to excommunicate [*den Bann zu erkennen*] without the congregation, so emphatically they defend the pastor's right to suspend from Communion." It must, however, be kept in mind that the pastor by suspending does not excommunicate [*den Bann*], as many mistakenly have claimed, but he merely demands postponement of the person's communing until the person in question shows signs of repentance and removes whatever obstacles, according to the Word of God, forbid his going to Communion.

Of course, the suspended person always retains the right of appeal to the congregation [*an das Urteil der Gemeinde*] from the verdict of the pastor, and this for two reasons: (1) the administration of the Lord's Supper is entrusted originally to the congregation and the pastor has suspended as the servant [*Diener*] of the congregation (*minister ecclesiae*); (2) the suspension temporarily affects the relation of the suspended to the congregation. But in the meantime the suspension stands. If it should happen that the pastor justly suspended a person, but the congregation condemned and annulled the suspension [*this sentence is inserted by the translator to explain the one word Konfliktfall*], and despite proper instruction and a thorough review of the case, perhaps even by synodical officials [*here the translator paraphrases the phrase, durch eingehende Verhandlungen*], refuses to change its mind, the pastor must nevertheless rather suffer removal from office than give the Lord's Supper to a person to whom, according to God's Word, he must deny it. Under our church polity [*unsern kirchlichen Verhältnissen*] we have rarely experienced such conflicts. In most cases the pastor succeeded in convincing the congregation of the propriety of the suspension. Now and then the pastor was convinced by his congregation, or by other advisers called in, that the suspension was unjustifiable. At our theological schools a number of typical cases in which suspension ought not to be applied, might well be discussed at length.²

What can we note from this lengthy discussion? Firstly, it is commendable that Pieper does not simply cite the procedure of Matthew 18, but references a diversity of Scripture passages and considers the issue from

² Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1953), 3:388-90.

a pastoral perspective. Secondly, it is apparent that Pieper intends to defend the authority of the pastoral office against the emerging congregationalism of his time. The problem of his day was not clericalism but anti-clericalism. On the other hand, his treatment is troublesome in some respects. Firstly, he has allowed the conflict between pastor and voters' assembly to colour his treatment, rather than allowing the flow of Holy Scripture to orient his thought. Therefore, secondly, the discussion takes on a decidedly juridical, legal, even political flavour, particularly as it has been translated by men of a subsequent generation. We have talk of verdicts and appeals, of church polity and synodical officials. There seems to be little concern here for the salvation of souls or the reconciliation of the brethren, the restoration of the Communion of the church. The translators have even omitted a reference to Absolution as the goal of the process! Finally, there is a pre-occupation with a dubious distinction between "excommunication" (the ban), and what Walther had labelled "the **so-called** suspension" (Walther's suspicion of the term has been omitted by the translators).

One can't help but suspect that the contours of Pieper's treatment have been moulded by the early experiences of the Saxon immigrants. One of the allegations against Bishop Stephan was that he had abused his unchallenged authority to excommunicate by using it to silence his opponents—without cause. In Walther's *Church and Ministry* [*Kirche und Amt*], written in response to the supposed tyrannical clericalism of both Grabau and Stephan, the pastor's exercise of excommunication is at the head of the queue. Walther writes in thesis 9C:

C. The minister has no right to inflict and carry out excommunication without his having first informed the whole congregation.

1. Scripture Proof

It is certain that the office of the keys in a more narrow sense, namely, the power publicly to loose and bind, is also entrusted to the incumbents of the ministry of the Word. Nevertheless, it does not lie within the power of the minister to excommunicate a sinner without his having first informed the congregation. Otherwise the congregation would have to obey the minister blindly, even in matters pertaining to salvation. Here he deals not merely with a clear doctrine of the divine Word but with a judgment of a person's spiritual condition [*Seelenzustand*]. And this judgment is of such a nature that it closes heaven to the person in question and forbids him brotherly fellowship with Christians, and vice versa. Therefore, although the public enforcement of excommunication belongs to and must remain with the incumbents of the ministry of the Word, according to the Lord's command and sacred institution, nevertheless, it must be carried out according to the Lord's express command and order only after the whole congregation (that is, the minister and hearers) has considered and made the final judicial decision on the matter.

For so it is written: “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear you, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’ And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them” (Matt. 18:15–18).

Here Christ clearly gives the supreme jurisdiction to the church or congregation, as our Confessions say, and He desires that a sinner in a congregation be regarded as a heathen and a tax collector and that the dreadful judgment of excommunication be pronounced on him only after manifold private admonitions and the public admonition before and by the congregation have proved themselves fruitless, so that the congregation has unanimously decided to excommunicate him through its pastor.

For this reason even Paul did not desire to excommunicate the incestuous person at Corinth without the congregation, but he wrote them that, though he himself regarded the sinner as deserving excommunication, the congregation itself (“when you are gathered together”) should put away from among themselves that wicked person (1 Cor. 5:4, 13). So also St. John severely rebuked Bishop Diotrophes because he loved to have the preeminence (*philoprōteuōn*) and arbitrarily cast out of the church pious Christians who perhaps opposed his tyranny (3 John 9–10).

However, it is hardly necessary to mention that what the congregation did man for man at the time of the apostles (2 Cor. 2:6; 1 Tim. 5:20) also may be done by the presbytery or consistory alone, wherever a ruling congregation is represented by a presbytery or consistory made up of ecclesiastical and secular states, so that the excommunication is valid and legitimate if only it is accomplished with the knowledge and consent of the church members.³

Though Walther is broadly consistent with Pieper his pupil, certain aspects of Walther’s language suggest that his thought has not yet moved as far along the axis of congregationalism. Firstly, Walther prefers to speak of the pastor “informing” the congregation of the excommunication he has pronounced, though admittedly he proceeds to speak of their “final judicial decision”. Secondly, his appeal to the congregation is referenced more clearly to Matthew 18, where the concern is that the whole church be involved in the attempt at reconciliation (and so Walther’s language is

³ C. F. W. Walther, *Church and Ministry (Kirche und Amt)*, trans. J. T. Mueller (St. Louis: Concordia, 1987), 321-23.

occasionally less judicial and more churchly). Thirdly, note carefully that Walther defines the church as the minister and hearers together, not as the laity alone. Finally, Walther in the last paragraph reflects his old-world roots, in which voters assemblies were unheard of, and the authority of the larger church lay in presbyteries and consistories. Walther has no trouble imagining that these councils of pastors, or councils on which pastors were in the majority, could legitimately represent the church in carrying out discipline. We must be careful to remember that, with perhaps a few exceptions, voters' assemblies in which the laity gather to conduct church business are almost exclusively an invention of the New World in the 19th century.

Before we leave Walther's *Church and Ministry*, one of his citations from the private writings of the Lutheran fathers will be of interest. Walther quotes Gerhard in support of his contention that pastors do indeed have the right to administer church discipline:

From all this it is evident that Christ has granted to the office of the ministry such power. The first is clear from the fact that the office of the ministry consists in the preaching of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, the exercise of the binding and loosing keys, the administration of church discipline. But all this could not be done without such power given to the church. For the preservation of the unity and wholeness of the mystical body, those who maliciously continue in sin must be excluded from the communion of the church, and those who repent must again be received (1 Cor. 5:7; 2 Thess. 3:14). But this could not take place were the church without such power.⁴

The pastor's authority is, as in Walther and Pieper, referenced to the church—but it is significant that Gerhard does not set laity against pastors, or local congregation against clergy. This is apparent from a second quotation Walther offers from Gerhard:

Neither major nor minor excommunication may be administered by the ministers of the Word without the decision of the ecclesiastical senate [church council] or the consistory, because the power of excommunication does not belong to the bishop but to the elders who represent the whole congregation. In Matt. 18:17 we are told: 'Tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church,' that is, the elders and the council of seniors, 'let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector,' who are outside the communion of the church. Indeed, major excommunication may be administered only with the knowledge and confirmation of the whole congregation. 'I indeed ... have already judged In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit ... deliver

⁴ Walther, 217, quoting Gerhard, *Loci theologici*, "De min. eccl.", par. 191-92.

such a one to Satan' (1 Cor. 5:3–5). 'This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man' (2 Cor. 2:6).⁵

Two items in this citation are significant. On the one hand, Gerhard reflects the church structure of his time and place by referring to the consistory as that body which rendered final judgement in cases of church discipline. Secondly, and less helpfully, Gerhard introduces a distinction between major and minor excommunication—a distinction which, as we shall see, Luther had pointedly rejected in the Smalcald Articles. This is one of those points at which the third generation of Lutheranism reintroduced in their own fashion some of the abuses of the mediaeval church that the Reformation had so carefully set aside.

THE BOOK OF CONCORD

If we now shift our attention to the confessional writings of the Book of Concord, it will not be with undue haste. Here we will find that the focus of debate in the 16th century was rather different than in Walther and Pieper. Whereas the Missouri Synod later become thoroughly preoccupied with the relationship between the pastor and the laity within the local congregation, at the moment of the Reformation the divide was most keenly felt between the **bishop** and the local congregation or congregations gathered together into a parish. It is of crucial importance when dealing with confessional texts to distinguish between *Ortsgemeinde* "local congregation", *Gemeinde* (which can refer to a parish consisting of more than one local congregation), and *Kirche* (the whole church). Furthermore, in each instance the church is understood to consist not of laity in opposition to pastors, but of pastor and people, teachers and hearers, shepherd and flock together. Thus, when the confessional writings speak of the authority of the church, pastor and people are together in view. When the church's authority is confessed against the bishops, this is not anti-clericalism but anti-tyranny.

The Ban – The Smalcald Articles

But before we come to the texts where this distinction is crucial, we should consider the most directly significant paragraph from the Book of Concord—Luther's treatment of the abuses of Roman Catholic excommunication in the Smalcald Articles:

We consider the greater excommunication [*den großen Bann*], as the pope calls it, to be merely a civil penalty which does not concern us ministers of

⁵ Walther, 328, quoting Gerhard, *Loci theologici*, "De min. eccl.", par. 286.

the church [*Kirchendiener*]. However, the lesser (that is, the truly Christian) excommunication [*der kleine, das ist der rechte christliche Bann*] excludes those who are manifest and impenitent sinners from the sacrament and other fellowship in the church until they mend their ways and avoid sin. Preachers should not mingle civil punishments with this spiritual penalty or excommunication. (SA III.ix)

It is astonishing that this simple paragraph has been so blithely ignored by later dogmaticians and pastoral theologians. Here Luther rejects the distinction between a greater and lesser excommunication or ban (the terms are equivalent, one Latin, one German). Better put, Luther rejects the one and accepts the other. On the one hand, Roman bishops, who exercised in mediaeval society considerable civil authority in addition to their churchly role, had co-mingled the two realms by applying civil penalties to theological problems. For example, heretics were not merely excluded from the church, but were exiled, imprisoned, or even executed. Other such penalties might include the loss of trading privileges and other means of making one's living. Luther steadfastly rejects the idea that either bishops or other authorities in the church should use such civil penalties to punish sin or coerce repentance—that is to say, he rejects the “greater ban/excommunication”.

On the other hand, Luther is clear that what the Roman Church considered merely the “lesser ban” is truly Christian. Note carefully Luther's language here: the lesser ban is exclusion from the Sacrament (the Lord's Supper) and other fellowship in the church. Here we find no distinction or levels of punishment between suspension from the Lord's Supper and other churchly penalties. Reflecting on this in the light of Luther's theology as a whole, we should find it disturbing that many later Lutheran writers perpetuate the idea that withholding the Body and Blood of our Lord is merely a lesser penalty, a sort of “suspension”; while the removal of the impenitent sinner from the membership list, denying him the right to vote and the dignity of a Christian burial, is somehow a greater penalty! The irony of Luther's comments is that the Roman Church had inverted the penalties, calling what was lesser greater, and what was greater lesser. For what penalty could be greater than to withdraw the life-giving, forgiving and strengthening Communion in Christ's Body and Blood? We, too, must be careful in our use of language lest we suggest that outward penalties of churchly fellowship are more serious than the penalty which denies fellowship with our Lord.

Potestas Jurisdictionis

A similar distinction is at work in the Augsburg Confession and its Apology when Melancthon considers the *potestas ordinis* and the *potestas*

jurisdictionis. In Roman theology, these terms had referred to two aspects of a bishop's office. On the one hand, he had the authority of any priest to consecrate the bread and wine to become Christ's Body and Blood, and the authority to forgive sins by speaking the Absolution. This was the *potestas ordinis*, the authority of his holy order. On the other hand, he had civil or judicial authority: to hear cases in which priests were charged with crimes, to render judgements in marital disputes, and in the confessional to probe the sinner's conscience and judge whether he was sufficiently penitent to receive the absolution. This was the *potestas jurisdictionis*, or authority of judgement.

Melanchthon, to put it briefly, accepts the first *potestas* wholeheartedly, and carefully modifies the second. In doing so, he denies those aspects of the episcopal office that were unique to bishops, and asserts that by divine right a bishop has no more authority than any ordinary pastor. He writes:

Therefore, the episcopal office [*das bischoflich Amt; iurisdictione episcoporum*] according to divine right is: [Latin: "according to the Gospel, or, as they say, by divine right, this jurisdiction belongs to the bishops as bishops, that is, to those to whom the Ministry of Word and Sacrament has been committed:"] to preach the Gospel, forgive sins, judge doctrine and to reject doctrine which is contrary to the Gospel, and to exclude from the Christian congregation the godless, whose godless nature is manifest, without recourse to human authority, but alone through God's Word. And for this reason parishioners and churches are bound to be obedient to the bishops, according to this Word of Christ, Luke 10[:16]: "He who hears you, hears Me." (AC XXVIII:21-22)

Note again that Melanchthon claims the divine authority of a bishop is identical to the divine authority of a parish pastor (the only distinction is by human right). What is significant to our discussion is that he then clearly and unequivocally maintains the divine right of a pastor to excommunicate the godless, so long as no civil penalties are imposed. In the Apology he puts it succinctly:

We like the old division of power into the power of the order and the power of jurisdiction. Therefore a bishop has the power of the order, namely, the ministry of Word and sacraments. He also has the power of jurisdiction, namely, the authority to excommunicate those who are guilty of public offenses or to absolve them if they are converted and ask for absolution. (Ap XXVIII:13)

It takes enormous theological dexterity for some later Lutheran theologians to accommodate this statement to their system. But for the sake of honesty we must admit that Melanchthon shows no interest in the involvement of a voters' assembly, nor does he appeal to the congregation as the source of the

pastor's authority. In fact, the only authority behind the action is Christ Himself.

Now, we must not suppose he is suggesting that a pastor should act tyrannically, nor as a lone ranger. There is a proper role for the whole people of God, which we shall highlight when we turn to Matthew 18. But we must be careful not to distort the Book of Concord to defend territory threatened in another time and place. Melanchthon and Luther were simply not concerned with the rights of laity against clergy in this matter. Rather, they were concerned with tyrannical bishops who used excommunication as a ruthless weapon against both pastors and laymen.

Thus, in the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, which is just as much a treatise on the authority of bishops, the pastoral office and the church are concepts used with casual interchangeability. Later theologians were keen to quote Melanchthon's interpretation of Matthew 16, "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church":

In addition, it is necessary to acknowledge that the keys do not belong to the person of one particular individual but to the whole church, as is shown by many clear and powerful arguments, for after speaking of the keys in Matt. 18:19, Christ said, "If two or three of you agree on earth," etc. Therefore, he bestows the keys especially and immediately on the church, and for the same reason the church especially possesses the right of vocation. (Tr 24)

But it is important to note the parallel interpretation given in the previous sentence, which is hardly ever cited:

In all these passages Peter is representative of the entire company of apostles, as is apparent from the text itself, for Christ did not question Peter alone but asked, "Who do you say that I am?" (Matt. 16:15). And what is here spoken in the singular number ("I will give you the keys" and "whatever you bind") is elsewhere given in the plural ("Whatever you bind"), etc. In John, too, it is written, "If you forgive the sins," etc. (John 20:23). These words show that the keys were given equally to all the apostles and that the apostles were sent out as equals. (Tr 23)

For Melanchthon there is no contradiction between saying that the keys were given to the apostles and that they were given to the church. One is not a representative of the other, nor does one delegate a power to another. Both church as a whole and pastors within it can claim to speak for Christ Himself. For once Melanchthon has made the claim that pastors derive their authority from the office of apostle (Tr 10, German) it is a short step to claiming that apostle, bishop, and pastor equally (Tr 61) have the right and responsibility of withholding the Sacrament from the impenitent sinner, which in the language of the Book of Concord is identical to excommunication:

It is certain that the common jurisdiction of excommunicating those who are guilty of manifest crimes belongs to all pastors. This the bishops have tyrannically reserved for themselves alone and have employed for gain. (Tr 74)

The final sentence of this citation alludes to one other problem we need to keep in mind: the reservation of cases. Within the mediaeval penitential system, certain high-handed sins such as murder and adultery could not be forgiven by the local parish priest, but were reserved to the bishop. The problem with this was at least twofold. Firstly, the bishop had no direct pastoral care of the individual, and so could not be expected to deal wisely and evangelically with the situation. Secondly, ruthless bishops tended to use this prerogative as a weapon against their enemies, withholding absolution and thus excommunicating people for improper motives (“used it for profit”, Tr 74).

The Keys and the Office of the Keys

The reservation of cases helps us to understand a number of statements in the Treatise concerning the giving of the Keys. This is another unwieldy subject, whose depths cannot be plumbed within this study. But one point is clear: when the Treatise insists that the Keys are given to the church, the statement is not meant to divide clergy from people, as if “church” meant voters’ assembly or laity alone. The point was that the pope and his bishops had no exclusive hold on Christ’s keys. If a Christian was truly penitent, no bishop had the right to deny the gift of Christ’s forgiveness. It was readily available from the local priest, indeed in a pinch, from any Christian. This is the import of Melanchthon’s statement in Tractate 23-24 which we cited above. For “church” read “whole church”, not the papacy alone.

NEW TESTAMENT TEXTS

Matthew 18

And so in this journey backwards through the ages, we finally come to what is often considered the *sedes doctrinae* of excommunication—though this tradition is somewhat disconcerting. Although there is no space here for a full exegesis of the passage, it is possible to uncover some causes for concern over its traditional use.

Jesus, at least as the evangelists organize things, has a habit of telling parables and giving lessons in groups of three. Thus, for example, in chapter 15 of Luke’s Gospel we have the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the Prodigal Son. Read together, the parables give a clear and coherent

picture of God's concern to seek out and restore even the least child lost from His kingdom, and the great joy in heaven when the lost is found.

In Matthew 18 we find a similar, but often ignored, grouping. Our pericope is framed by the parable of the Lost Sheep and the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant. This suggests that the theme of all three is recovery, restoration, and forgiveness. This perspective is important. What is most troubling about the use of Matthew 18 in our tradition (and particularly in our constitutions) is that it is treated as a legal procedure for excommunication. It may indeed be useful for this purpose, but to treat it as such is to miss entirely the point of Jesus' instruction. For, although excommunication may indeed be **one result** of the process describe by our Lord, it is most certainly an **undesirable** result. What Jesus is describing here is a process by which you may **regain** your brother, not **lose** him. This is a process for reconciliation and forgiveness, not excommunication. If the process fails, then excommunication takes place. And even then, as our pastoral handbooks make abundantly clear, the goal of excommunication is still **restoration**.

The second significant exegetical point that bears emphasis, is that Jesus is addressing a **specific situation** in life, not outlining a procedure to deal with any and every. He says, "If your brother sins [against you], go and tell him his fault" The textual variant is indeed important, but not crucially so. Whether Jesus is speaking only of sins that are directly against you, or of a brother's sins of which you simply become aware, the general situation is still the same. The lesson deals with sins that have not yet become public, which are known by Christian brothers, and teaches how to deal with them before they get out of hand. It seems clear that the sin only becomes public at stage three, when it is brought to the attention of the church. It would therefore be quite absurd to impose this as a structure upon other, incompatible circumstances. That is to say, if a sin is already a public scandal, it would seem peculiar to walk mechanically through these steps, as if they were a legal requirement to be fulfilled before the judgement of excommunication could be rendered.

Thirdly, we must consider the meaning of the word "brother". It should be accepted without tedious demonstration that in the New Testament this is equivalent to Christian. In other words, Christ is speaking to any Christian who finds himself in this situation, and gives advice on how to effect repentance and reconciliation. It would therefore be an alien distortion of the text to treat it as a procedure for pastoral care. A pastor may indeed find it helpful on occasion to invoke the aid of his elders or other Christian brothers when approaching an unrepentant sinner. But, again, to treat it as a legal requirement that a pastor cannot impose discipline upon such a person without first bringing two or three other Christians is to misapply the text.

For the pastor's authority within his office is of a different nature than the Christian brother's.

Finally, we should consider the meaning of "church". It seems an unjustifiable and anachronistic distortion to gloss this word with "voters' assembly" or "laity". For, as we have attempted to demonstrate through reading the Book of Concord, "church" is never in opposition to clergy—though it may indeed be used in opposition to tyranny and usurpation of power. Thus, it is entirely possible in Matthew 18 that "church" is used in contrast to individual attempts at reconciliation. So, if you can't work it out yourself, bring it to the whole body. But, more importantly, "church" (as the pericope itself defines it) is the place where forgiveness takes place. Therefore, "tell it to the church" would seem to refer to the liturgical assembly in which the means of grace happen, rather than to a legislative assembly. "Church" then means both pastor and people together.

If this is indeed the correct interpretation of this pericope, it can be an extremely positive tool in the life of the church. Impenitent sinners can be dealt with privately if possible, and publicly if necessary. But the life and vitality of Jesus' words is sapped if it is reduced to a judicial procedure, and its goal is distorted if it is seen merely as a way to excommunicate someone without risking a law suit (as it was once described in a pastoral theology class). Likewise, far from **restricting** the place where forgiveness can happen to the gathering of believers, the pericope shows the **richness** of God's grace. Not only can pastors forgive and retain sins in private (Jn 20), but when appropriate, the church as a gathered body can do the same.

Other New Testament Texts

We see this richness and diversity of God's gifts in the oft-cited case recorded in I Corinthians. When in chapter 5 Paul chastises the Corinthians for tolerating the immorality of the man living with his father's wife, he demands that they excommunicate him:

³ For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. ⁴ When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, ⁵ you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. (I Cor. 5:3-5)

Pastoral handbooks wishing to stress the unique authority of congregations to excommunicate will point out that Paul tells them to carry out the action. But surely this is a distortion of the text. For Paul declares that by his apostolic (that is to say, pastoral) authority he has already rendered the judgement. But because he is not present with them, he calls upon the

congregation to carry it out. There is no suggestion in the text that Paul lacked the authority to excommunicate the man. In fact, Paul warns the Corinthians that if they do not take care of it before he gets there, they will really see his authority in action:

² I warned those who sinned before and all the others, and I warn them now while absent, as I did when present on my second visit, that if I come again I will not spare them—³ since you seek proof that Christ is speaking in me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you. (II Cor. 13:2-3)

Thus, it is entirely improper to claim that this case from Corinth confirms that only the congregation may excommunicate. On the contrary, it gives evidence of the diversity of God's dealing with men. Both Paul and the congregation had an obligation to act, when faced with the immensity of this scandal. And we must not forget Paul's final words: that the goal was not the cleansing of the community by exclusion of the man, but the re-inclusion of the man through the proper use of Law and Gospel, "so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord."

"Discipline" in the Scriptures

In the beginning we questioned the use of the term "church discipline", and so it would not be wise to leave the NT without seeking a definition. For this language also seems to suffer from procedural and judicial overtones that are absent from the New Testament. For consider the language of Hebrews 12:

⁷ It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?⁸ If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.⁹ Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live?¹⁰ For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness.¹¹ For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.¹² Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees,¹³ and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. (Hebrews 12:7-13)

From this we learn that discipline is not reserved for gross sinners, but is the lot of all Christians. And discipline is something for which we should be thankful. It is what a father does for the sons he loves. Discipline is not identical to punishment. Certainly there are different kinds of discipline. But it is deeply regretful that the word has been co-opted among us to refer almost exclusively to the process of excommunication. For discipline in the New Testament is a conforming to the suffering Christ that produces an

enduring character in God's children. If only we viewed what we call "church discipline" in this way.

CONCLUDING POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

In concluding it will be helpful to return to the original questions. Of the three we have gone some way towards answering the first and third, and some basic answers have emerged to the second. Nonetheless, the reservations expressed about the terms of debate have proved legitimate. The question of whether the pastor or voters assembly has the power of excommunication is a question wrongly put. On the one hand, as Walther and Pieper rightly insisted, it is necessary to defend the pastor's right, authority, and duty to suspend the unrepentant sinner from participating in the Holy Communion. On the other hand, this right has only recently been disputed, and so its defence cannot be the foundation of our doctrine or practice in the matter. More importantly, when theology is framed in terms of rights and duties it is being run according to the Law not the Gospel.

At the time of the Reformation the question had far more to do with how the unrepentant sinner might best hear God's Law, and even more, how the repentant sinner might receive absolution. The tyranny of bishops and their reservation of cases had deprived men of the comfort of the Gospel. Thus, the Reformers' defence of the pastor's right to administer both excommunication and Communion, as two sides of the same coin, was not about power politics but about the care of souls.

Today we are in danger, ironically, of falling not into Calvinism but into Romanism. Church discipline and excommunication have been so narrowly defined that they have effectively been excluded from use. Rather than a bishop taking discipline out of the pastor's hands, we have constitutions that forbid a pastor to use an important tool in his kit. Now, this is not a plea for pastors to act tyrannically or to impose the ban more often. It is a plea for the pastor and laity to work together, each according to their calling from God, in admonishing and reconciling their brothers and sisters. Two practical examples may clarify.

If a pastor in his ongoing care of his flock becomes aware of a deep spiritual crisis in one of his members, if, for example, John Smith admits that he is pursuing an adulterous affair and is tormented by it but not yet ready to forsake it, what should the pastor do? Clearly one of the tools in his care of this man is to withdraw Communion fellowship (for reasons that should be obvious) until Mr Smith is brought to repentance and Absolution. But should the pastor bring the news to the elders and the voters' assembly? No. In fact, it would be a scandalous dereliction of duty if he did. For John is

relying on the pastor's confidence while he struggles with this sin, and the pastor has vowed not to disclose sins confessed to him—it matters not whether an absolution has yet been pronounced. Has John been suspended or excommunicated? We have discovered above that it is a distinction without a difference, for to be removed from the fellowship in Christ's Body and Blood is to be excluded from the Communion of the church (excommunicated). The question that remains is what role the rest of the congregation have. In this case, according to the few details offered, they have no specific role at all, for the case remains private between the man and his pastor. Matthew 18 simply does not apply.

Now consider Jane Smythe, whose affair with a colleague at work has become known to her close friends and family, to their great scandal. Following our Lord's wise words in Matthew 18, her sister-in-law approaches her privately with conversation and admonishment. Unsuccessful, she returns with a few wise fellow Christians, but is still rebuffed. The following Sunday, the unrepentant Mrs Smythe communes, and after the service her friends and family gossip madly about the offence she has caused. Word goes round that the pastor and the congregation are unconcerned about Jane Smythe's behaviour, suggesting that adultery is insignificant and the Lord's table common. In this case, a public sin now needs to be dealt with publicly. "Tell it to the church." The pastor is advised of the situation, and in due course the whole congregation are led to treat her as a tax collector and sinner. Of course it is more complicated than that, but the point is that where the sin is public and scandalous, the entire congregation must be brought into action. The pastor's role, in addition to any practical counselling he might be able to offer the family, is to apply Law and Gospel to the woman. One step is to withhold the Lord's Supper as a warning and as a protection against unworthy use. The woman's Communion has thus been broken. What is the role of the rest of the congregation? To render a judgement? To give orders to the pastor? To carry out a sort of "higher excommunication" consisting in removing Mrs Smythe from the Board of Christian Education and taking her card out of the parish Rolodex? This is hardly what our Lord had in mind. Rather, they are to use their own brotherly admonition and love in each and every opportunity of their individual callings to restore the her. What they are doing is not "excommunication", but carrying out the consequences of the excommunication and working together to reach its goal—the reconciliation of the sinner to God's kingdom.

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