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Steven Paul Mueller

Christology in the Writings of C. S. Lewis: a Lutheran's Evaluation

Ph.D. thesis, University of Durham, 1997

Abstract

This thesis seeks to ascertain and evaluate the Christological content and method of C. S. Lewis as seen throughout his writings. The continuing popularity and sales of his works demonstrate his effectiveness. Lewis referred to his Christian writings as "translations" that expressed Christian doctrine in a manner that was accessible and understandable to the laity. This is reflected as Lewis writes in diverse genres. His apologetic works explain Christian theology directly through modified vocabulary, description, and illustrations. They are characterised by a focused use of logic and by simple distinctions. His fictional works utilise the tools of his academic field (literature), translating theology in a deeper manner, and employing multiple levels of meaning. His devotional works, written later in his life, directly present theology, but with a gentler tone, explaining but not defending his theology.

Lewis's writings are evaluated first in comparison to the basic Christology of the Ecumenical Creeds. In various contexts, he explicitly affirms all of the credal doctrines except for Christ's burial, which is implied. While Lewis's writings have been accused of heresy, most of the charges do not stand up under scrutiny. However, imprecision leaves his writings open to charges of eutychianism and modalism. Secondly, his writings are evaluated from a Lutheran perspective. While substantial agreement is found, there are significant differences in presentation of the virginal conception of Christ, the communication of attributes between His divine and human natures, and the meaning of the descent into Hell.

Overall, Lewis presents classic orthodox Christology. His writings are characterised by accessibility and integrity, as the Christ they present is the Christ of his own faith. Weaknesses in his writings include imprecision which is a result of his lack of theological training, and failure to connect Christology to other Christian teachings, such as the Eucharist.



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A Lutheran's Evaluation

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Introduction

C. S. Lewis is one of the greatest popularisers of Christianity of this century. An adult convert, Lewis wrote numerous books and articles with Christian themes. In 1941 he presented a weekly series of 15 minute talks on the BBC which brought him public attention in England. These talks were subsequently published as Mere Christianity. The following year he published The Screwtape Letters, a work which gave him great popularity in the United States.* Following these events, Lewis gained a wide readership and produced many other books and essays. Since his death in 1963, interest in his work and life has steadily increased. Today his writings are often cited in both popular and academic theological writings. The majority of his books remain in print,[†] and anthologies of his works and lists of favourite quotations abound. He is frequently commended for his clarity and orthodoxy, even by those who would disagree with some of his theological positions. Lewis has been the subject of numerous books and articles; his life has been depicted in plays, on television, and in a Hollywood movie. Stage and screen adaptations of his works have been made, and continue to be produced. His logical arguments for the truth of Christianity and his fictional narratives remain popular to this day.

It is likely that Lewis would have been surprised by this widespread popularity and theological influence. He was a layman whose academic and professional expertise was philosophy and literature, earning a triple first at Oxford in Honour Moderations, Greats and English. Professionally, he lectured in Philosophy at University College, Oxford for one year, followed by thirty years as a tutor of English at Magdalen College, Oxford. In 1954 he was elected to be the Chair of Medieval and Renaissance Literature at Magdalene College, Cambridge — a position he held until his retirement. He was known as a good speaker and preacher, and his writings likewise communicate well. His Christian works often simplify complex theology and enable the lay reader to better comprehend the issues.

Lewis was a layman, something he repeatedly asserts in his writings, and yet he frequently assumes the role of a theologian. Indeed, his work implicitly challenges the reader to consider the nature of theology. Theology is not the sole domain of the professional theologian or the ordained clergy. Rather, it is the task of every Christian, including laity and professionals. Thus Lewis's works address theological issues. He delivered a series of radio talks on basic Christian teaching, preached sermons, and delivered papers on theological themes, freely speculating on a variety of issues. At the same time, he used his lay status in a protective manner. When pressed on a theological issue he could remind the questioner that he was "just" a layman. This lay status also

*This is reflected in Time magazine's 1947 tribute to Lewis which featured his picture on the cover, along with a drawing of a devil. see "Don v. Devil," Time 50 (September 8, 1947), pp. 65-66, 68, 71-72.

†The continuing popularity of Lewis is reflected in the vigorous sales of his books. Approximately 1.5 million copies of his books are sold annually. cf. Tom Mannario and Jo Kadlecck, "Shadowing C. S. Lewis," The Saturday Evening Post 267:1 (January-February, 1995), pp. 78-80.

lends a weight of authenticity to his writing, as he does not present Christianity as part of his profession, or from financial necessity.

Furthermore, while Lewis defended and explained the Christian faith for thirty years, he was also a convert from atheism. In early childhood, Lewis was reared in a Christian home. Following the death of his mother shortly before his tenth birthday, he was sent to boarding school where he soon rejected Christianity. Later in his life, following his education, wartime service, and with an established career, at the age of thirty-one Lewis became a Theist. He converted to Christianity two years later. Within two years, he combined his rediscovered faith with his professional literary abilities to publish The Pilgrim's Regress, an allegorical apology for the Christian faith. Further publications followed at a rapid pace. Lewis's years as an atheist shaped his later writings and arguments for Christianity. However his experience of atheism may be quite different than many would imagine. He did not believe in God, yet in accord with academic custom, he attended chapel services and even Sunday worship. As his academic discipline demanded a knowledge of Christian tradition,* he demonstrated a remarkable awareness of the religion that he emphatically denied. Once Lewis reluctantly confessed the truth of Christianity, he proceeded to address his writings to arguments that he had previously raised against the faith.

This literary critic and lay theologian wrote profusely on Christianity, describing his writing as "translating" theology to make it more intelligible to the layman, an apt image for such work. The work of theology may often seem remote and inaccessible to the ordinary Christian. Lewis interpreted and presented theological substance in new forms to make it more understandable. He wrote of this work,

One thing at least is sure. If the real theologians had tackled this laborious work of translation about a hundred years ago, when they began to lose touch with the people (for whom Christ died), there would have been no place for me.¹

Lewis was a good candidate for this work of translation. His classical and literary education gave him the ability to understand theology and the creativity to express it in a fresh manner.

While Lewis did not claim to be a theologian, his Christian writings must be assessed on theological grounds. Regardless of his intent, he is often received and read as a theologian. Thus the theological content and effectiveness of his work must be evaluated. This is particularly necessary in the central teachings of Christianity, and nothing is more central than Christology. What is Lewis's understanding and depiction of the person and work of Jesus Christ? Surprisingly, this question has received little detailed attention in secondary literature. While there is a significant body of secondary literature it has a different focus. Some considers Lewis's literary works and contributions, some addresses his fictional works, and a good deal of writing discusses his personal life, but there has been less explicit theological evaluation of his work than might be expected. While some writers have discussed Lewis's theology in general, perhaps making some reference to his Christology, these central doctrines of Christianity have not been considered with

depth or comprehensiveness. Indeed, many writers simply describe Lewis as orthodox, or write of his presentation of Christ in one work or series of works,[†] but do not consider his presentation of Christology throughout his writing. Thus many worthwhile things have been written about portions of this topic, but a comprehensive examination has been lacking. This work seeks to present just such a comprehensive examination of Lewis's Christology throughout his writings.

Lewis's writings will be considered according to their genre, and within each genre, chronologically. First his overtly apologetic works will be considered. These books directly present Christian theology, and include The Problem of Pain, Mere Christianity, and Miracles. Second will be his fictional writings, namely The Space Trilogy, The Dark Tower, The Screwtape Letters, The Great Divorce, The Chronicles of Narnia, and Till We Have Faces. These fictional works may also have an apologetic intent, but are of a different genre. The third category of his works is here classified as devotional writings. These non-fictional works do not have the defensive intent or tone of his apologetics, yet they present his ideas on Christianity clearly. Devotional works include Reflections on the Psalms, The Four Loves, and Letters to Malcolm. Finally a collection of personal writings will be reviewed. Among these writings are several with autobiographical intent: the allegorical Pilgrim's Regress, which is an account of his conversion, his autobiography, Surprised by Joy, and a journal he kept following the death of his wife, A Grief Observed. His diaries and correspondence will also be considered with the personal writings. Other writings, particularly those of literary criticism, will be considered where they make relevant contributions to this subject. However, it is the nature of these works that one would not expect to find significant Christology within them.

Following the examination of these works, Lewis's Christology will be evaluated. His writings will be compared with the Ecumenical Creeds, the basic theological authorities which Lewis recognised,[‡] and to which he frequently alludes. Criticism of his theology will be considered, particularly claims that his writings present heresy. Following this, Lewis's Christology will be evaluated from the perspective of Lutheran theology. Lewis was not a Lutheran, and did not write with such an evaluation in mind. Thus differences in theological expression are to be expected. The purpose of this evaluation is to provide for a specific contrast between the theology of Lewis and of this writer, who is a Lutheran pastor and professor of theology. This presentation allows for an evaluation according to a theological standard held by a number of his readers. Following this evaluation, Lewis's effectiveness and weakness will be considered. While some have been reluctant

[†]Three significant Christian writings with which Lewis's discipline demanded considerable familiarity were the Authorised Version of the Bible, The Book of Common Prayer, and Dante's Divine Comedy.

[‡]Most common are works that focus on parallels between Aslan and Christ.

[‡]Lewis worked solidly within the Anglican tradition, and his theology reflects the traditional Anglican sources of theological knowledge: Scripture, tradition, and reason. These influences are evident throughout his writings. The Ecumenical Creeds have been chosen as an evaluative grid because they provide a summary of basic Christology, and because they reflect Scripture and tradition.

to evaluate Lewis's work on theological grounds, it must be evaluated. This layman has been received as a theologian. His writings must be considered theologically.

The Problem of Pain

The Problem of Pain, the first of Lewis's apologetic works, was initially published in 1940. In it he applies his faith to theodicy, and writes with the intent to present and defend Christianity. Lewis was not afraid to grapple with challenges to the Christian faith, and to apply to them the Scriptures and his own reason. The reader of his books will also notice his willingness to leave questions unresolved, if necessary, but before giving in, he struggled to make sense of these issues. Willingness to wrestle with challenges is a hallmark of Lewis's writing, and is particularly evident in The Problem of Pain. He summarised the challenge addressed in this book, saying,

"If God were good, He would wish to make His creatures perfectly happy, and if God were almighty, He would be able to do what He wished. But the creatures are not happy. Therefore God lacks either goodness or power or both." This is the problem of pain in its simplest form.¹

The primary question of this book, while theological in nature, is also philosophical. Lewis blends theology and philosophy together to craft his response to the problem of pain. Typical of Lewis's work, he does not strive for innovation or novelty, but clarity. His goal is not to create new theology, but to explain classic, orthodox theology. He candidly notes his weaknesses, using them as a shield against theological criticism. In the preface to this book, he writes,

If any real theologian reads these pages he will very easily see that they are the work of a layman and an amateur. Except in the last two chapters* I have believed myself to be restating ancient and orthodox doctrines. If any parts of the book are "original" in the sense of being novel or unorthodox, they are so against my will and as a result of my ignorance.²

Clearly here, as in other works, he intends fidelity to orthodox Christianity. The question, of course, is whether he is successful. Lewis may have intended to write as "a layman and an amateur," but his works are often read theologically. One may understand his theological shortcomings, but they must not be ignored. At the same time it should be noted that Lewis generally meets his goal of remaining within orthodoxy, and he accomplishes this with lucidity and insight.

It must also be noted that the chief interest of Lewis in this work is not Christology or even theology. His focus is on what he perceives to be a philosophical question with reference to theology. Nonetheless, this book contains a great deal of Christological exposition. Simultaneously, Lewis's silence on a number of issues and concerns may also communicate his doctrinal understanding by their absence.

Specific Christology in The Problem of Pain

Deity of Christ

The deity of Christ is not particularly germane to Lewis's discussion of pain. However, His deity is assumed, and even stated with doctrinal precision. For example, Lewis notes that one of the

*The final two chapters are on animal pain and heaven, and are more speculative than the rest of the book, hence Lewis's disclaimer.

expressions of Divine goodness is God identifying Himself as “Father.” Discussing this unique father-child relationship, he parenthetically notes his assumptions of Christ’s divinity.

...consider how Our Lord (though in our belief, one with His Father and co-eternal with Him as no earthly son is with an earthly father) regards His own Sonship, surrendering His will wholly to the paternal will and not even allowing Himself to be called “good” because Good is the name of the Father. Love between father and son in this symbol means essentially authoritative love on the one side, and obedient love on the other.³

Such doctrinal insertions are typical of Lewis. Perhaps it comes from a desire to be perceived as orthodox, or to placate theologians who watch for doctrinal error. Unity with the Father and co-eternity are not argued here, merely stated as an assumption of “our faith.” Lewis does not provide supporting arguments in favour of accepting Christ’s claims to deity in this context. Rather, making his orthodox position known, he moves on with the main point of this passage — that filial obedience and fatherly authority are exemplified in the relationship between the First and Second Persons of the Trinity.

This theme of filial obedience is restated in the heart of the book — the chapter on “Human Pain.” Here Lewis narrows the definition of pain to be synonymous with suffering. Immediately after this definition, he continues,

Now the proper good of a creature is to surrender itself to its Creator — to enact individually, volitionally, emotionally, that relationship which is given in the mere fact of its being a creature. When it does so, it is good and happy.⁴

When creatures refuse to submit themselves to their Creator, pain may be the consequence. Self-surrender is not difficult for the creatures when they see it to be in their own interest, but they are often blinded to this realisation. Many consider submission to be a difficult, if not impossible task. In response, Lewis highlights the submission of the Son to the Father.

Lest we think this a hardship, this kind of good begins on a level far above the creatures, for God Himself, as Son, from all eternity renders back to God as Father by filial obedience the being which the Father by paternal love eternally generates in the Son. This is the pattern which man was made to imitate — which Paradisal man did imitate — and wherever the will conferred by the Creator is thus perfectly offered back in delighted and delighting obedience by the creature, there most undoubtedly, is heaven, and there the Holy Ghost proceeds.⁵

The humble submission of the Son to the Father is the ultimate example of filial obedience. Yet this passage employs imprecise language regarding the Trinity. Lewis stresses the unity of the Godhead. “God Himself, as Son from all eternity, renders back to God as Father...” [emphasis added]. Use of the word “as” in reference to Son and Father may imply the reduction of “person” in the Trinity to a temporary function. If consistently applied, this could lead to modal monarchianism. But while the wording is imprecise, it is balanced by the rest of the paragraph. Note the affirmations of credal orthodoxy: (1) their relationship is “on a level far above the creatures,” a clear assertion of the transcendence not only of the Father, but of the Son, (2) the Son is “God Himself,” declaring deity, and, (3) He is “Son, from all eternity,” wording similar to the credal formulation: “Begotten of His Father from all eternity.”

Taken in the context of the paragraph, and the broader context of the book, with its earlier assertion of the co-eternity of the Son, modalism may be discounted from these passages. The problem is imprecision, not heresy. Lewis's intent is to assume the full deity of Christ.

The Incarnation

More pertinent to the topic of this book is the Incarnation and humanity of the Second Person of the Trinity. The doctrine of the Incarnation, and its application to human struggles is not as pronounced in this book as in other writings,⁵ yet when it is discussed, it is with conviction and forcefulness. For example, writing on "Divine Goodness," Lewis asks whether it is appropriate to distinguish between egoistic, selfish love and altruistic love with reference to God. Lewis discards the distinction when referring to Divine love (though not for human loves), noting that opportunities for selfishness occur only in things that inhabit a common world. The transcendent God is incapable of selfishness (or unselfishness) regarding humanity. But when God becomes incarnate, this changes.

When God becomes a Man and lives as a creature among His own creatures in Palestine, then indeed His life is one of supreme self-sacrifice and leads to Calvary.... we Christians can point to the Incarnation and say that when God empties Himself of His glory and submits to those conditions under which alone egoism and altruism have a clear meaning, He is seen to be wholly altruistic. But God in His transcendence — God in the unconditioned ground of all conditions — cannot easily be thought of in the same way.⁶

"Altruism" and "egoism" are meaningless when referenced to the transcendent. But with the Incarnation, they are seen in their fullness. In the Incarnation, and all that it led to, real altruism is seen for the first time in human history. Comparison of one's own life to His reveals an unexpected selfishness. Note also Lewis's assumption that the life of Christ is one of "supreme self-sacrifice," that it "leads to Calvary," and that it is God Himself who "empties Himself of His glory and submits to those conditions...." Incarnation and kenosis are intertwined, and always connected with the passion.

The Incarnation unites in Jesus full deity and full humanity. While Lewis emphasises Christ's unique deity, His humanity always remains evident. An example of this is Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane. The struggle between the human desire to avoid suffering, and filial obedience is a prominent theme in Lewis's writing. It is also a useful paradigm for understanding both human suffering and the Christ. Lewis writes that Christianity does not entail a pursuit of suffering, nor even a passivity to it. Christians naturally try to avoid pain as will any other person. But the Christian will prefer God and His will to other ends, not seeking to escape pain at all costs.

⁵This is, in part, attributable to the sequence of books written. The Problem of Pain is the first of Lewis's theological works, published within nine years of his conversion. His only published Christian works preceding this book are The Pilgrim's Regress, and Out of the Silent Planet. The simplest explanation is that Lewis did not consider the Incarnation to be a major issue to pain. His view on this would change in later years.

Submission to the Divine will may necessitate suffering. Lewis sees the highest affirmation of this in Gethsemane.

The Perfect Man brought to Gethsemane a will, and a strong will, to escape suffering and death if such escape were compatible with the Father's will, combined with a perfect readiness for obedience if it were not.⁷

For Christ to avoid suffering at all costs would have been a denial of His mission. To accept pain without hesitation would be sub-human. The struggle is indicative of humanity, while the submission is a reflection of his divinity (though indeed, His followers are also called to such submission to the will of God).

Lewis presents a very high view of the Incarnation. Christ is indeed "the Perfect Man," but that perfection, which the rest of humanity is unable to attain, does not diminish his humanity. He is subject to human limitations. Christ's wilful assumption of these limitations, and not escaping them through the continual use of Divine power is presented in the doctrine of Christ's Humiliation. Lewis uses the humiliation (but not the term itself) to explain statements Christ made which may trouble some Christians. He explains why such statements need not be problematic.

...it might be argued that when He emptied Himself of His glory He also humbled Himself to share, as man, the current superstitions of His time. And I certainly think that Christ, in the flesh was not omniscient — if only because a human brain could not, presumably, be the vehicle of omniscient consciousness, and to say that Our Lord's thinking was not really conditioned by the size and shape of His brain might be to deny the real incarnation and become a Docetist. Thus, if Our Lord had committed Himself to any scientific or historical statement which we knew to be untrue, this would not disturb my faith in His deity.⁸

Lewis limits this rationale to statements of Christ which seem to contradict scientific or historical facts, not "the mere, vague, climate of opinion that we happen to be living in." So when he considers the existence of Satan and his fall, which is assumed by Jesus, he does not attribute this to the humiliation. Satan's existence is not something which is known to be false.

It would be helpful to know more of Lewis's thoughts on the extent and meaning of the humiliation of Christ, but details are lacking here. The relationship between omniscience and docetism is one of many issues, but Lewis does not consider other pertinent topics, including miracles, in this context. Lewis has provided a *via media*, retaining the traditional, credal understanding of the identity of Jesus Christ as the incarnate God, while making allowance for an apparent conflict of faith and reason.

Person and Office

Jesus Christ, the Incarnate God is absolutely unique, without equal. Some would attribute this superiority to His teaching, but the supremacy of Christ is not due to His teaching alone. A good portion of His teaching was not unique to Him, but was shared by other great ethical teachers. Lewis notes that there has always been human wickedness (which in itself is one of the main causes of pain), and there have been teachers who have called for higher ethics. In evidence, he cites teachers who hold substantial ethical teaching (what he would later refer to as the *Tao*) in common: Zarathustra, Jeremiah, Socrates, Gautama, Christ and Marcus Aurelius. A footnote on Christ

explains, "I mention the Incarnate God among human teachers to emphasise the fact that the *principal* difference between Him and them lies not in ethical teaching (which is here my concern) but in Person and Office."⁹

This is vital to Lewis's Christology. It is not the teaching that distinguishes Jesus Christ. Though His teaching is important, it is not all innovative. Rather, what distinguishes Christ is His person: fully human, fully divine, and His office: the Christ of God.

Implied Christology

One might be tempted to evaluate Lewis's Christology on what is missing from The Problem of Pain. Certainly there are unexplored issues, but these should not necessarily be viewed as a deliberate exclusion. Christology is tangential to Lewis's discussion of pain. One might also note the detached nature of this book. Lewis readily admits in the preface that he is hardly an expert on dealing with pain. His concern was to avoid it, not analyse it. Prior to writing this book, Lewis had experienced pains: the death of his mother, a strained relationship with his father, wartime service, and his subsequent wounding. But the greatest sufferings of his life lay before him. It was in his latter years that Lewis encountered his life's greatest pain, and applied his understanding of suffering. As he experienced his wife's battle with cancer, and mourned her death, Lewis truly faced his own pain. The reader will find an account of this in A Grief Observed.

Lewis readily admitted the shortcomings of this book. In a letter to a lady, dated 12 September 1951, Lewis answered some questions on suffering:

I have not a word to say against the doctrine that Our Lord suffers in all the suffering of His people (see Acts IX.6*) or that when we willingly accept what we suffer for others and offer it to God on their behalf, then it may be united with His sufferings and, in Him, may help to their redemption or even that of others whom we do not dream of.... The key text for this view is Colossians I.24[†]. Is it not, after all, one more application of the truth that we are all "members one of another"? I wish I had known more when I wrote Problem of Pain.¹⁰

Lewis did not view The Problem of Pain as a final answer to these questions, but an attempt to begin the answer. So also, it is not his definitive work on Christology, but only a portion of his Christological thinking.

A Specific Problem: the Problem of Hell

It is one thing to talk about pain in abstract issues, another to consider specific problems. For Lewis, one of the most difficult problems is hell, which he delineates as follows:

The problem is not simply that of a God who consigns some of His creatures to final ruin. That would be the problem if we were Mahometans [sic]. Christianity,

*Acts 9:6 "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do," is clearly an unintended citation. Lewis likely intended Acts 9:5 "'Who are you, Lord?' Saul asked. 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' he replied." All biblical quotations are taken from The Holy Bible: New International Version, (© 1973, 1978, 1984 by the International Bible Society) unless otherwise noted.

[†]Colossians 1:24 "Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church."

true, as always, to the complexity of the real, presents us with something knottier and more ambiguous — a God so full of mercy that He becomes man and dies by torture to avert that final ruin from His creatures, and who yet, where that heroic remedy fails, seems unwilling, or even unable to arrest the ruin by an act of mere power.¹¹

The problem of hell, for Lewis, embraces the wonders of the work of Christ. How could a God who is willing to do so much, consign His creatures to Hell? Lewis continues to further define the problem,

I said glibly a moment ago that I would pay “any price” to remove this *doctrine*. I lied. I could not pay one-thousandth part of the price that God has already paid to remove the *fact*. And here is the real problem: so much mercy, yet still there is Hell.¹²

So much mercy, yet still there is Hell. How can this paradox be reconciled? Ultimately for Lewis, the problem of Hell, as indeed much of the problem of pain, comes back to free will. Free will includes the possibility of rejecting divine mercy. God will not force Himself upon mankind, even if that means they may reject Him.

In the long run the answer to all those who object to the doctrine itself is a question: “What are you asking God to do?” To wipe out their past sins and, at all costs, to give them a fresh start, smoothing every difficulty and offering every miraculous help? But He has done so, on Calvary. To forgive them? They will not be forgiven. To leave them alone? Alas, I am afraid that is what He does.¹³

Lewis comes to his sad conclusion by way of Christology. God has already done everything, but He will not force anyone to believe. Ultimately, if one asks to be left alone, God will regretfully comply.

Atonement Theory

One of the distinctive marks of C. S. Lewis’s writing is a dislike of atonement theories — particularly the Anselmic theory of the atonement, also known as the vicarious satisfaction. Lewis frequently writes against such theories, yet easily slips into using them himself. Consider the following passage, part of his discussion on the fall of man, in which he talks about the Anselm’s doctrine of “our inclusion, by legal fiction, in the suffering Christ.”

These theories may have done good in their day but they do no good to me, and I am not going to invent others... It may be that the acts and sufferings of great archetypal individuals such as Adam and Christ are ours, not by legal fiction, metaphor, or causality, but in some much deeper fashion.¹⁴

Lewis’s main objections are that the Anselmic theory does not help him, and that it explains too much. Yet it is not entirely accurate to say that he avoided atonement theories. He disliked the theory of the vicarious satisfaction as he understood it, and he did not invent new theories, but he did lean on existing theories of the atonement in his explanations of the work of Christ. Often he accomplishes this by avoiding talk of “legal fiction” and concepts of all mankind being “present in Adam’s loins” while retaining the substitutionary death of Christ.

Lewis may claim to avoid certain models, but feels free to pick elements to explain Christ’s work. For example, writing about the inappropriateness of speaking as if sins committed in the past need not trouble the Christian, he says, “The guilt is washed out not by time but by repentance and

the blood of Christ: if we have repented these early sins we should remember the price of our forgiveness and be humble.”¹⁵

Despite his claim not to invent new models, Lewis does speculate on the atonement. One of the more pertinent discussions involves the question: “Why didn’t God just take away the first sins, and set the world right?” Lewis answers.

It would, no doubt, have been possible for God to remove by miracle the results of the first sin committed by a human being; but this would not have been much good unless He was prepared to remove the results of the second sin, and of the third, and so on forever.¹⁶

This is not a formal theory of the atonement, but it is hardly the avoidance of theories either. Regardless of theory, Lewis accepted the reality of the atonement.

Conclusion

The Problem of Pain is not a book about Christology, but the person and work of Christ certainly impacts Lewis’s understanding of pain. The ultimate answer to pain is heaven, which is attained through the redemption of Jesus Christ. He knows and understands human pain, having faced it on behalf of humanity. Until salvation is attained, pain remains part of life — often the consequence of poor choices, or inflicted not by God, but by other people. Lewis did not deny pain. He admitted its reality, and the inability of humans to remove it. He also noted that pain might be used for a greater end, because, “pain insists on being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”¹⁷ If pain is a part of the human experience, it is not the whole experience. Perhaps it may wake a deaf world to the reality of God’s solution. Perhaps it will point to Christ.

Mere Christianity

Lewis's second apologetic work is Mere Christianity, a compilation of three separate books, Broadcast Talks,* Christian Behaviour, and Beyond Personality. The text of these books was originally delivered by C. S. Lewis as a series of radio talks which began in 1941 at the request of the BBC. He spoke weekly for fifteen minutes on Christian themes. Because these radio talks were quite successful, they were published in book form, and eventually bound together as Mere Christianity, his best known and most popular theological work.

The popularity of this book may be attributed to several factors. Perhaps the chief factor of its popularity is the scope of the book. Lewis intentionally limits his writing to teachings which are held in common by most Christian churches. These essential doctrines are what he terms "Mere Christianity,"[†] a phrase not meant to denigrate the Christian faith, but to limit the scope of his discussion. This focus also causes him to avoid proselytisation. He reflects this, saying,

...in this book I am not trying to convert anyone to my own position. Ever since I became a Christian I have thought that the best, perhaps the only, service I could do for my unbelieving neighbours was to explain and defend the belief that has been common to nearly all Christians at all times..... the questions which divide Christians from one another often involve points of high theology or ecclesiastical history which ought never to be treated except by real experts. I should have been out of my depth in such waters: more in need of help myself than able to help others.[‡]

It is likely that much of his desire to focus on such commonality had its roots in his childhood experience with a divided Christianity in Northern Ireland. It is also quite possible that it was influenced by his adult friendships with people of different faiths.[‡]

Lewis claimed to be writing only on mere Christianity in most of his works, and defers to the "real theologians" when faced with challenging issues. Yet when reading his work, one is struck with frequent instances where he strays from his ideal. Discussions of Purgatory or prayer for the dead would not be considered part of a common Christian tradition by many Protestants, but find attention in Lewis's writing. Surprisingly, readers who would vehemently object to these teachings in another context, readily embrace Lewis's writing. In a complex and divided Christendom, readers have been receptive to those who seek to heal the schism of the Church, even if that unity involves overlooking substantial disagreements. Ecumenical interest is higher today than in Lewis's time, and he is frequently cited as a guiding voice. His focus upon common teachings has led to great appeal.

* Broadcast Talks was also published in the United States as The Case for Christianity.

[†]Lewis appropriated the term "Mere Christianity" from Richard Baxter (1615-1691) a Puritan theologian.

[‡]Among those influencing Lewis with different faiths, consider some of his fellow members in the Inklings: J. R. R. Tolkien, a Roman Catholic, Owen Barfield, a theosophist, Charles Williams with his own blend of Christianity and mystical/occultic practices including membership in the order of the Golden Dawn, and other members. For an examination of Williams's spiritual practices, see Huw Mordecai, "Charles Williams & the Occult," in Brian Horne, ed., Charles Williams: A celebration, (Herefordshire: Gracewing, 1995).

Another factor which contributes to the popularity of this work modifies the first. While restricting himself to common doctrine, Lewis does not back away from difficult teaching. Indeed, he argues against oversimplification. Consider the following:

It is no good asking for a simple religion. After all, real things are not simple. They look simple, but they are not.... Reality, in fact, is usually something you could not have guessed. That is one of the reasons I believe Christianity. It is a religion you could not have guessed.²

Lewis is unafraid to approach faith with critical reason, but is equally reliant (if not more so) on revelation. That may lead to complexity, but complexity may validate the faith. He addresses the appropriateness of complex theological topics for the laity at the beginning of Beyond Personality, which considers, with mixed success, the doctrine of the Trinity. He begins,

Everyone has warned me not to tell you what I am going to tell you in this last book. They all say "the ordinary reader does not want Theology: give him plain practical religion." I have rejected their advice. I do not think the ordinary reader is such a fool. Theology means "the science of God," and I think any man who wants to think about God at all would like to have the clearest and most accurate ideas about Him which are available. You are not children: why should you be treated like children?³

Lewis treats his readers as he would like to be treated. If this specialist in Medieval literature could study and appreciate theology, so could other ordinary Christians. Clearly a book written for a lay person would have a different character than one written primarily for theologians, but the topics need not be vastly different. Lewis believed that any Christian could understand, and might want to understand, the theology of the Church. This respect for the reader has enhanced his popularity.

At the same time, he gradually eases the reader into his theology. The opening chapters of Mere Christianity are a good example. He talks of conscience, right and wrong, and laws, but only at the end of Book One does he really begin discussing God. He begins with a more general philosophy and builds up to theology. To be sure, not all are appreciative of this method. Some consider it deceptive, a possibility which Lewis considers. Others are appreciative of his slow, methodical progression from conscience to theology.

A third factor in the popularity of this, and other works, is the accessibility of his writing. Lewis discusses intricate theology, but is willing to explain and illustrate it to make it relevant to the reader. Some of his illustrations are brilliant, others fall flat, and some might open the writing to charges of heresy, but he always attempts to explain as clearly as possible.

One final factor has added to the popularity of this book. Having originally been presented as fifteen minute radio talks, each chapter is concise and to the point. The reader need not labour over chapters for hours on end. A few minutes of reading are sufficient to complete a chapter. Since the book is essentially a transcription of the radio talks, it comes across with a very personable tone. Reading the book, one can easily imagine what Lewis must have sounded like in the original talks.

Reaction to the Book

Mere Christianity has become one of Lewis's most popular works, attracting many laudatory remarks. An early biography of C. S. Lewis expresses a common opinion:

In it he provides as clear a statement of catholic Christianity, the beliefs "common to nearly all Christians at all times," as yet has been written.... *Mere Christianity* is one of the most "original exponents of Christian faith in this century."⁴

Another writer says, "C. S. Lewis' writings are, of course, *the* prime resource for reaching the educated adult.... His Case for Christianity is *the* book to put into the hands of the honest agnostic."⁵ While vastly outnumbered by proponents, there were some early critics of the book. While preparing his manuscript, Lewis sought the opinions of four clergy of various denominations. Two expressed some concern. One of these was Lewis's former pupil, Dom Bede Griffiths, and the other a Methodist minister who noted, "that the book does not really mention, let alone do justice to, the central Christian doctrine of Justification by Faith."⁶

Broadcast Talks

Right and wrong as a Clue to the Meaning of the Universe

The book begins by avoiding Christianity altogether. The first five chapters are brought together under the title, "Right and Wrong as a Clue to the Meaning of the Universe." Here, as in The Problem of Pain, Lewis examines "the *Tao*," but in greater detail. He proposes that there are universal ideas of right and wrong. Even though many people make no attempt to keep them, they show their belief that they exist when they plead for their rights or for fairness. Eventually he posits that these universals are part of the underlying order of the universe, and because of their universality, one may conclude that through this Moral Law, "...somebody or something from beyond the material universe was actually getting at us."⁷ Lewis concedes that this abrupt switch in focus from ethics to religion might irritate many readers who may feel manipulated by his writing. Yet he maintains that it is a logical progression.

Lewis presents moral law and absolutes in order to lay the foundation for a discussion of Christianity. Christianity speaks of repentance and promises forgiveness. This only makes sense when the reader is convinced of sinfulness.

It is after you have realised that there is a real Moral Law, and a Power behind the law, and that you have broken that law and put yourself wrong with that Power — it is after all this, and not a moment sooner, that Christianity begins to talk.⁸

What Christians Believe

Book One ends with the presentation of the Divine Law, and humanity's failure to keep it. It is interesting to note that Lewis not only separates the condemnation of the Law from his presentation of Christian Faith — he even puts it into a separate book. As the second book, "What Christians Believe" begins, it addresses God's response to the sinful state of humanity. "How did God respond to mankind's separation from Him?" Lewis highlights four specific actions. First, God gave a sense of conscience, "...and all through history there have been people trying (none of

them very hard) to obey it. None of them ever quite succeeded.”⁹ This is quite an admission from a man who referred to himself as “a middle-aged moralist.” In his emphasis on the function of the conscience, Lewis stands firmly within the Christian tradition.

Second, Lewis considers the role of paganism, one of the more distinctive marks of his theology. While certainly not original or unique to Lewis, he lays great emphasis on the significance of pagan myths. He writes,

He sent the human race what I call good dreams: I mean those queer stories scattered all through the heathen religions about a god who dies and comes to life again and by his death has somehow given new life to men.¹⁰

Lewis firmly believed that the pagan myths were part of God’s revelation. Such myths were not to be an end to themselves, but serve as preparation for Christ.*

Third, God selected one particular people, the Jews, and taught them about His nature, that there was only One God, and that He cared about their conduct. Through these three methods God responded to the sinful state of mankind. Yet all three of these steps were preparatory. They met their fulfilment with God’s fourth action, the coming of the Christ.

The Claims of Jesus

When Jesus came, He surprised the Jewish people, and others, by making some unexpected, extraordinary claims about Himself. As he discusses these claims, Lewis begins a new line of argument. He is preparing to discuss the possibility that Jesus was merely a great moral teacher — an argument he intends to refute. His first concern is to examine the claims of Jesus.

Jesus spoke as if he were God. Namely, He asserted His authority to forgive sins, spoke as if He had always existed, and stated that He would return to judge the world. Each one of these statements implies deity. Lewis is careful to note that such assertions of Deity should not be quickly discounted. While this age might consider them in a pantheistic light, the people among whom these claims were made would have considered them within the scope of monotheism. Jesus was not claiming to be part of a universal deity, but to be the one God. When He claimed to divinity, Jesus,

...meant the Being outside the world Who had made it and was infinitely different from anything else. And when you have grasped that, you will see that what this man said was, quite simply, the most shocking thing that has ever been uttered by human lips.¹¹

Jesus’ claim was shocking, but people did not react as might be expected. Lewis looks particularly at the claim to forgive sins and says,

In the mouth of any speaker who is not God, [the claim to be able to forgive sins] would imply what I can only regard as a silliness and conceit unrivalled by any other character in history. Yet (and this is the strange, significant thing) even His enemies, when they read the Gospels, do not usually get the impression of silliness and conceit.... Christ says that He is “humble and meek” and we believe Him....¹²

*While Lewis’s writings are filled with mythological images, and his theological works contain numerous examples drawn from paganism, these find their clearest and most orderly exposition in The Discarded Image.

While the significance of so easily accepting Christ's claims may escape many readers at this point, it will soon be used as a portion of his most distinctive Christological argument.

*The Christological Trichotomy**

Lewis now proceeds to unveil his purpose for the entire discussion up to this point — a new evaluation of the claims of Jesus Christ. He distils explanations of the identity of Christ to three: either He was a lunatic, a demon, or He was the Son of God. This same argument appears elsewhere in his writings, but seldom with the forcefulness as it appears here:

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: "I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God." That is the one thing we may not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg[†] — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you may fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.¹³

This argument is the centre of Lewis's Christological approach. Intellectually, Lewis strove for such focused distinctions, and tried to reduce arguments into such a simple form whenever possible. Laying out the options in such a concise manner appeals to those who are wrestling with complex issues. Some have protested that it is oversimplification, that more options exist which Lewis has not considered. However, these critics may fail to understand the breadth which Lewis allows his categories to encompass.

John Beversluis, for example, suggests that more possible explanations for the identity of Jesus exist. One of these might be that Jesus sincerely believed Himself to be the Son of God, but was mistaken.¹⁴ One wonders just what Beversluis would consider the mental state of a person who claimed to be the Son of God, in the sense in which Jesus made the claim, but was not. Such a person would, at very least, be suffering from extreme delusions. While modern sensibilities might balk at the word, "lunatic" Lewis writing over fifty years ago would not. Furthermore, Beversluis and others who use similar arguments confuse messianic claims with divine claims. Noting that others claimed to be the Messiah, he equates them with Jesus. But claiming to be the Messiah does not necessarily involve a claim to be God. Beversluis's dismissal of this argument simply does not stand up to scrutiny.

While Lewis narrows his options of Jesus' identity to three, these are not particularly narrow categories. He does, in fact, allow for other options, but has summarised them with these

*This argument of Lewis's is sometimes called a dichotomy. Both dichotomy and trichotomy are inadequate, as elements of this argument change in different contexts. Lewis presents the essential logic under different terms, but the main point of the argument remains unchanged.

[†]Chesterton uses the same illustration to describe madness and its consequent limitations. "You may say, if you like, that a man is free to think himself a poached egg. But it is surely a massive

possibilities. The difficulty with interpreting these words appears to be based on the focus of the argument. Lewis is not addressing every possibility of Christ's identity. He is writing against one particular hypothesis: that Jesus was merely a good teacher. In arguing against this position, Lewis has distilled numerous possibilities to three.

Some resistance to Lewis's trichotomy arises from the harsh way the options are phrased. False claims to divinity may derive from mental illness, but it is extreme and uncharitable to call one making such claims, "a lunatic — on a level with a man who says he is a poached egg." The difficulty was compounded by the time allotted to Lewis's radio talks. Each of these sections was given in fifteen minutes. In many places, including here, Lewis does not explain his arguments completely. There are, indeed, many arguments as to the identity of Jesus Christ, but they may in the end be condensed into three.

Lewis does not, in this context, provide a more detailed examination of these options, but moves quickly to the next subject. He does this by means of self-disclosure.

Now it seems to me obvious that He was neither a lunatic nor a fiend: and consequently, however strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that He was and is God. God has landed on this enemy-occupied world in human form.¹⁵

In proposing his trichotomy, Lewis has been quite forceful. In the end, there are only three options. After making such a bold statement, he backs off, and draws his conclusion individually, hoping others will follow. "It seems to me obvious..." Lewis believed that Jesus is God.

The Work of Christ

Acceptance of the claims of Christ to be Divine immediately is followed by examination of His work. If one accepts His claims then one must ask, "what has he come to do?" Lewis answers,

Well to teach of course; but as soon as you look into the New Testament or any other Christian writing, you will find that they are constantly talking about something different — about His death and His coming to life again. It is obvious that Christians think the chief point of the story lies here. They think the main thing He came to earth to do was to suffer and be killed.¹⁶

It is an overstatement to say that any Christian writing considers the Passion to be the chief point of the story, especially in modern times. Again, Lewis has limited his discussion to the basic Christian doctrine, but at the cost of oversimplification. Having dealt with the identity of Christ, he looks to His work of redemption, which Lewis rightly believes that to be the chief work of Christ.

Atonement Theory

At the same time a focus upon the work of Christ re-introduces the problematic topic of Atonement theories. How is one to speak of what Christ does? Which doctrines require assent, and which may be ignored? These were significant questions for Lewis in his own faith, and he believed

and important fact that if he is a poached egg he is not free to eat, drink, sleep, walk, or smoke a cigarette." (G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, (New York: Image Books, 1959), p. 25.)

them to be equally significant for others. Lewis notes his perception of atonement theories and their relationship to Christianity.

Now before I became a Christian I was under the impression that the first thing Christians had to believe was one particular theory as to what the point of this dying was. According to that theory God wanted to punish men for having deserted and joined the Great Rebel, but Christ volunteered to be punished instead, and so God let us off.... neither this theory nor any other is Christianity. 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.... Theories about Christ's death are not Christianity: they are explanations about how it works.¹⁷

Lewis balks at a very focused and simplified version of the Anselmic theory of the Atonement. He offers three objections before proposing his own explanation. The first is stated above. These theories are not Christianity, they are explanations of how Christianity works. This is a fair assessment, but does not invalidate the theories. Lewis, who proposes explanations of many things in the Christian faith and how they work is hardly in a position to criticise other explanations on such a level. He later asserts, "A man can accept what Christ has done without knowing how it works: indeed, he certainly would not know how it works until he has accepted it."¹⁸ His observation is true, but surprising from a man who expects that the Christian will seek to know as much about God as possible. True, no one is required to consider these theories, but one would have thought Lewis would have wanted to do so. And indeed, he does desire this examination. He even goes so far as to offer his own theory of the Atonement.

His other objections to atonement theory are based on content. He has defined this theory as stating that God wanted to punish us, but Christ volunteered to be punished instead, so God let us off. Lewis asks, "If God was prepared to let us off, why on earth did He not do so?" and again, "What possible point could there be in punishing an innocent person instead?"

Lewis answers his own questions. What is the point of punishing an innocent person? None, if this is conceptualised in a criminal or punitive sense. This clearly is the model that Lewis has in mind when he rejects the Vicarious Satisfaction. But he immediately continues to say that it does indeed make sense when it is considered in financial terms. There is a point in someone paying the debt of another. Or again, one may consider it in terms of "standing the racket" or "footing the bill" for a friend. Experience has shown that friends often bear the punishment of another.

Lewis shows by these exceptions that he really does not have a problem with theories of the atonement at all, but only one very narrow view of one theory. Here, as in other writings, he may say that theories are unnecessary, and should be ignored, but he immediately offers his own theory of the atonement. One wonders if his aversion to this particular theory has its roots in its presentation within the strict Ulster Protestantism of his childhood. Lewis has offered his own explanation of the atonement, but true to his first objection, he notes that his explanation of the Atonement is only one more picture. "Do not mistake it for the thing itself; and if it does not help you, drop it."¹⁹

The Two Natures of Christ

Lewis finds explanations of the atonement more acceptable when considered as help in getting out of a hole which a person has dug for himself. Such a person is released only by surrendering his self-sufficiency, and receiving help from another. In Christian terms, this is repentance. But only a bad person needs to repent, and only a good person is able to repent perfectly. This dilemma is solved by the Incarnation.

It is impossible to solve this problem without changing something. Lewis proposes, "But supposing God became a man — suppose our human nature which can suffer and die was amalgamated with God's nature in one person — then that person could help us."²⁰ Jesus, who has "amalgamated" these two natures, is able to help mankind. He can surrender his will, suffer and die, being a man; but he can also do it perfectly because he is God. The Incarnation is essential, because only in the union of these two natures could mankind's salvation be carried out. It is unclear precisely what Lewis intended to communicate when he said that the two natures of Christ were amalgamated. His word choice is questionable at best, as amalgamation denotes a mixture of substances. If this terminology were used consistently, it would result in a confusion of the two natures of Christ. Ultimately, it would lead to eutychianism.

In What Christians Believe Lewis presents a basic view of the person and work of Christ. He has a limited understanding of Atonement Theory, and that limited view has led some to question his orthodoxy. Yet when his explanation is read, it is apparent that Lewis really accepts what he seems to deny. He proposes his own version of the Substitutionary Atonement, but the qualifying statement must be considered an integral part of Lewis's understanding. Explanations and theories are fine if they are helpful, but they are not Christianity. A Christian is not required to believe or hold them if they are not helpful. Lewis appears to broaden the limits of Christianity, but in truth, he has repristinated an orthodox expression of the Atonement.

Christian Behaviour

As the title indicates, Book Three, Christian Behaviour concerns practical application of the Christian faith. Lewis is primarily interested in personal and societal morality. As such, there is little Christological material. However, two brief passages are pertinent.

The first offers an intriguing view of temptation. Lewis asserts that bad people really know very little about badness, because they always succumb to temptation. They have led a "sheltered life," and consequently do not learn the full extent of evil. Then he continues,

We never find out the strength of the evil impulse inside us until we try to fight it: and Christ, because He was the only man who never yielded to temptation, is also the only man who knows to the full what temptation means — the only realist.²¹

Christ was tempted, but never yielded. He is sinless, yet has undergone temptation. This is consistent with the Biblical accounts,^{*} yet it is Lewis's unique emphasis that resisting temptation gives Christ a full knowledge of temptation. This knowledge is not due to omniscience (neither does it mitigate a teaching of omniscience), but is a result of experiencing temptation.

In the second passage Lewis describes faith as trust or, "leaving it to God."

The sense in which a Christian leaves it to God is that he puts all his trust in Christ: trusts that Christ will somehow share with him the perfect obedience which He carried out from His birth to crucifixion: that Christ will make the man more like Himself and, in a sense, make good his deficiencies. In Christian language, He will share His "sonship" with us, will make us, like Himself, "Sons of God".... Christ offers something for nothing: He even offers everything for nothing.²²

The intent of the passage is to describe faith in Christ. At the same time, it describes attributes of Christ. He is characterised by perfect obedience which Lewis seems to limit to the earthly ministry of Christ. However, it is doubtful that Lewis intended to limit obedience to the earthly life of Jesus. Rather, this is the portion of His existence which we are able to examine, and during His time on earth, He exhibited perfect obedience to His Father. Furthermore, He is the Son of God. Finally, this obedient Son has some sort of power which allows Him to share his obedience, transform people, and "make good his deficiencies." While the passage might lead to some confusion as to the distinct work of the Second and Third Persons of the Trinity, it would be best to reserve judgement on that issue. Here Lewis is writing of faith, which is efficacious in some manner when trust is placed in Christ. At the same time, if Lewis is weak on his understanding of the Holy Spirit, he presents a highly Christocentric faith.

Beyond Personality

C. S. Lewis writes in the first chapter of Beyond Personality that his intention is to discuss theology, not just "plain practical religion." He continues by describing the relationship of theology and religious experience. Experience is like seeing the ocean, while theology is like a map of the ocean. The map cannot compare with experience, but a map leads one to his destination. This brief defence and explanation of the work of theology is necessary at this point in his writing, for Lewis is entering into a discussion of a challenging teaching — the doctrine of the Trinity.

Throughout his radio talks, Lewis embraced challenging topics, and all within his fifteen minute time limitation. While that provides a refreshing and readable presentation, it also is limiting. The mysteries of the Christian faith are difficult to compress into so concise a form. Yet, seeing Lewis's willingness to discuss virtually anything, his consideration of this topic is not surprising.

In Beyond Personality, Lewis approaches the doctrine of the Trinity from the person and work of Christ. As he returns to his discussion of Christ, he once again reiterates his argument that

^{*}cf. Hebrews 4: 15 "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin." see also Matthew 4:1-11.

He was not simply a great moral teacher. He delineates the basics of the salvific work of Christ, but does so with an amusing set of parenthetical comments which indicate a forthcoming examination of the specific doctrines.

...is not the popular idea of Christianity simply this: that Jesus Christ was a great moral teacher and that if only we took his advice we might be able to establish a better social order and avoid another war? Now mind you, that is quite true. But it tells you much less than the whole truth about Christianity and it has no practical importance at all.... But as soon as you look at any real Christian writings, you find that they are talking about something quite different from this popular religion. They say that Christ is the Son of God (whatever that means). They say that those who give Him their confidence can also become Sons of God (whatever that means). They say that His death saved us from our sins (whatever that means).²³

Lewis is carefully establishing the boundaries of his discussion. He will not in this context discuss societal changes, or the avoidance of war. He readily concedes that following Christ's teaching may well bring these results, but that is not Christianity. The "real Christian writings," of which the Scriptures are foremost, indicate something quite different. Christ is the Son of God who by His death saved mankind from their sins, and they might become children of God through Him. All of these are phrases which need definition and elucidation, a task which Lewis intends to undertake in this book.

Begotten of the Father

When asked to succinctly state his beliefs, Lewis often turns to the creeds, and his explanation of "mere Christianity" is strongly based on his credal understandings. Indeed, Beyond Personality is more a defence of credal orthodoxy than the Biblical texts per se. Hence, looking at the relationship of Christ to the Trinity, Lewis begins with the Nicene article, "...begotten, not made."

One of the creeds says that Christ is the Son of God "begotten, not created"; and it adds "begotten by His Father before all worlds." Will you please get it quite clear that this has nothing to do with the fact that when Christ was born on earth as a man, that man was the son of a virgin? We are not now thinking about the Virgin Birth. We are thinking about something that happened before Nature was created at all, before time began. "Before all worlds" Christ is begotten, not created. What does it mean?.... To beget is to become the father of: to create is to make. And the difference is this. When you beget, you beget something of the same kind as yourself. A man begets human babies, a beaver begets little beavers.... But when you make, you make something of a different kind from yourself.... What God begets is God; just as what man begets is man. What God creates is not God; just as what man makes is not man. That is why men are not Sons of God in the sense that Christ is. They may be like God in certain ways, but they are not things of the same kind. They are more like statues or pictures of God.²⁴

A theologian may wonder at the necessity for this discussion. Is there confusion on the distinction between begottenness and the Virgin Birth? Lewis believed that there was, and therefore goes to these lengths to distinguish the two.

He explains by defining the difference between begetting and creating. To beget is to become a father, and "when you beget, you beget something of the same kind as yourself.... what

God begets is God....” He has avoided any appearance of subordination in his description of the relationship between the First and Second Persons. The Son is the same sort of thing as the Father, not a creature, but God. Lewis stands solidly within the orthodox and patristic tradition. One of the examples used to describe this relationship is the familiar analogy of two books which are eternally stacked together. The upper book could not hold its position, were it not for the support of the lower book. Yet there never was a time when the two books were not stacked. So the Son owes His nature to that of the Father. He is begotten of the Father, but it is from all eternity. There never was a time when the Son was not begotten.²⁵

As the discussion continues, Lewis addresses the inevitable question of time. If the Father did beget the Son, then logic demands that there must have been a time when the Son did not exist, therefore the Son must be inferior to the Father. But Jesus claims equality with the Father. Lewis reconciles these questions by stressing God as the creator of time, existing outside of our time. He does not say the Son was begotten, but ““Before all worlds’ Christ is begotten” [emphasis added]. The language of time is insufficient to discuss that which happened, or is happening, outside of its boundaries.

As Lewis discusses the Trinity, he uses images to describe their relationship. After citing several examples, he cautions,

But as soon as I begin trying to explain how these persons are connected I have to use words which make it sound as if one of them was there before the others. The first Person is called the Father and the Second the Son. We say that the First begets or produces the second; we call it *begetting* not *making*, because what He produces is of the same kind as Himself. In that way the word Father is the only word to use. But unfortunately it suggests that He is there first — just as a human father exists before his son. But that is not so. There is no before and after about it.... The Son exists because the Father exists: but there never was a time before the Father produced the Son.²⁶

His point is clear. There never was a time before the Father produced the Son. Christ is eternally begotten of the Father.

Lewis makes significant use of God’s freedom from temporal constraints. In fact, this theme helps Lewis make rational sense of many of the Bible’s teachings. For example, God’s timelessness makes it possible for God to deal with us as individuals. His saving work is not only for the world, but for each individual person. Lewis expresses this in terms of the relationship between an author and his own novel.*

God is not hurried along in the Time-stream of this universe any more than an author is hurried along in the imaginary time of his own novel. He has infinite attention to spare for each one of us. He does not have to deal with us in the mass. You are as much alone with Him as if you were the only being He had ever created. When Christ died, He died for you individually just as much as if you had been the only man in the world.²⁷

The eternity and timelessness of the Christ make Him accessible to the individual, and also help explain the relationship between the Father and the Son.

*Here he appears to be heavily reliant on, though he does not quote, Dorothy Sayer’s The Mind of the Maker.

Incarnation

The doctrine of the Incarnation, however, impacts the timelessness of God, for God becomes part of His creation. This is a profound and significant point of theology, and Lewis understood the gravity of these words. One of the greatest themes in Lewis's Christology is that of the Incarnation. In *Beyond Personality*, he makes the Incarnation as specific as possible. God did not merely become human, He became a particular human.

The Second Person in God, the Son, became human Himself: was born into the world as an actual man — a real man of a particular height, with hair of a particular colour, speaking a particular language, weighing so many stone. The Eternal Being, who knows everything and who created the whole universe, became not only a man but (before that) a baby, and before that a *fœtus* inside a Woman's body. If you want to get the hang of it, think how you would like to become a slug or a crab.²⁸

The Incarnation means nothing at all if it is hidden in generic platitudes. If God truly became incarnate, it must be in a specific instance. Lewis has here removed any thought of adoptionism. God was incarnate in human flesh as a specific man, a baby, a fœtus. Lewis, in other writings, shows that he is unwilling to speculate on the precise moment of the Incarnation. While believing in the conception by the Holy Spirit, he allows for the possibility that this may have taken place through several different divine actions. Here he presents those things in which he personally is confident. Did the Virgin conception involve the creation of a new spermatozoon? Lewis was uncertain. He thought it possible that it involved the creation of a fœtus. Holding the possibilities as open questions, Lewis provides the earliest moment of which he personally has confidence — in the Incarnation, God was a fœtus. Lewis was not overly concerned with the precise moment the Incarnation began. The important thing is not when it happened, but that it happened. But while he will not stipulate the moment of the incarnation, he will not extend it indefinitely. The Incarnation was complete before the nativity. Lewis was not an adoptionist. He allows for some latitude of interpretation, but desires to remain within orthodox Christianity.

Of far more importance, in Lewis's view, was that the Incarnation meant an enormous change for God. "If you want to get the hang of it, think how you would like to become a slug or a crab." This statement which highlights the drastic action which God took in the Incarnation, is disturbing to many readers. A. N. Wilson reacts to it, saying,

Certainly to explain the Incarnation in a quarter of an hour over the air is a tall order, but Lewis could surely have done better than to say, "If you want to get the hang of it, think how you would like to be a slug or a crab." Apart from being offensive, this is bad theology. God made human beings in His own image and likeness. Human beings did not make slugs or crabs. Man could not "redeem" the slugs even if slugs were in need of redemption.²⁹

One wonders if Wilson understood the point Lewis was making. Naturally, it is offensive to consider being a slug or crab, but it is just that sort of a drastic, offensive change which God underwent in Incarnation. Lewis has chosen to emphasise the drastic change as the Transcendent God became Incarnate. Wilson does not seem to grasp the significance of the analogy. Lewis is not suggesting that human beings are becoming incarnate as slugs or crabs, nor that people redeem

them. He is inviting the reader to consider the drastic change of the Incarnation — a change undertaken for humanity's sake. The impact of Lewis's statement was apparent to Wilson, though not its meaning.

From this radical description of the extent of the Incarnation, Lewis continues his discussion. Because of the Incarnation, Christ became the archetypal man.

The result of this was that you now had one man who really was what all men intended to be: one man in whom the created life, derived from his Mother, allowed itself to be completely and perfectly turned into the begotten life. The natural human creature in Him was taken up fully into the divine Son. Thus in one instance humanity had, so to speak, arrived: had passed into the life of Christ. And because the whole difficulty for us is that the natural life has to be, in a sense, "killed," He chose an earthly career which involved the killing of His human desires at every turn — poverty, misunderstanding from His own family, betrayal by one of His intimate friends, being jeered at and manhandled by the Police, and execution by torture. And then, after thus being killed — killed in every day in a sense — the human creature in Him, because it was united to the divine Son, came to life again. The Man in Christ rose again: not only the God. That is the whole point. For the first time we saw a real man.³⁰

If these words did not follow such a strong affirmation that it was the Son of God who underwent such an extreme change in the Incarnation, the reader might be misled by these words. Talk of the human, created life, being turned into the begotten life, or "becoming the Son of God" could easily lead one into a confusing of the two natures of Christ. But Lewis has framed his words carefully. First he shows how God has descended into humanity. The change of the Incarnation is two-fold. In words which echo the Athanasian Creed, Lewis writes of the human creature "taken up fully into the divine Son."

The emphasis clearly is on the human nature, but understood in terms of the Creeds. Here also, he softens his speculations on the moment of the Incarnation, for his humanity is derived from His mother. Ordinary biological growth and nurture sustained his life. The Athanasian Symbol, and Lewis in following it, capture the affirmation and ennobling of humanity which the Incarnation entails. True, the reason for the Incarnation was the redemption of a fallen humanity, but the method of Incarnation affirms the goodness of God's creation of humanity.

Lewis is unique in his language of what takes place. "...the created life... allowed itself to be completely and perfectly turned into the begotten life." These words are confusing when contrasted to the rest of his discussion of the two natures of Christ. One might conclude that Lewis is proposing a dispersion of the human nature. Yet Lewis repeatedly affirms the continuing existence of the glorified human body of Christ. It would appear that, in emphasising the archetypal role of Christ as the True Man, Lewis has overstated his position.

Statements on the death and resurrection of Christ, also, are informative. In particular, writing on the Resurrection, Lewis has stressed the communion of the two natures appropriately. Because of its union with the Divine Son, the Man in Christ rose again. "not only the God. That is the whole point." The enduring nature of the Incarnation is stated well. While he does not deny this same communication of attributes in the crucifixion, neither does he emphasise it as with the Resurrection. Here he simply says, "He was killed." It would not be advisable to press a conclusion

on the basis of these words, but one wishes that he had completed his formulation for the crucifixion, as he did with the Resurrection.

However, Lewis's chief interest in these words is not primarily to explain the Incarnation, as to demonstrate what it has accomplished. Christ comes as the archetypal man, completing what mankind was unable to fulfil. He writes,

I have called Christ the "first instance" of the new man. But of course He is something much more than that. He is not merely a new man, one specimen of the species, but *the* new man. He is the origin and centre and life of all the new men. He came into the created universe, of His own will, bringing with Him the *Zoe*, the new life.³¹

Christ the archetypal man, has done what was impossible for humanity. He brought the life which mankind was unable to attain by their own power or volition. While unable to "climb up into spiritual life by our own efforts,"³² it has already come down in Christ. While unable to transform "temporary biological life into timeless spiritual life," He has made it accessible by bringing it to mankind and being the first and the greatest type of Man. He is the only true Son of God in the "full and original sense," but His work allows other humans to become sons of God.³³

The work of the Incarnate Son of God on earth did not cease with His ascension into heaven. Considering New Testament expressions such as "born again," "putting on Christ," "Christ being formed in us," or "have the mind of Christ," Lewis writes of the enduring nature of the Incarnation and His ongoing work.

They mean that a real Person, Christ here and now... is doing things to you. It is not a question of a man who died two thousand years ago. It is a living Man, still as much a man as you, and still as much God as He was when He created the world....³⁴

Lewis affirms the orthodox view of the incarnation. If his vocabulary is at times imprecise, he returns to safe ground in the end.

The Atonement

As might be expected, Lewis cannot discuss the work of Christ without commenting on theories of the Atonement. In *Beyond Personality*, Lewis does not attack the Anselmic Theory, nor does he question or examine any particular theory in detail. Instead, he enumerates several formulas to explain the atonement, without criticising any of them.

You can say that Christ died for our sins. You may say that the Father has forgiven us because Christ has done for us what we ought to have done. You may say that we are washed in the blood of the Lamb. You may say that Christ defeated death. They are all true.³⁵

Here Lewis has found a balance in his understanding of explanatory statements. He has learned tolerance of a variety of expressions, and seems to understand that each one articulates a portion of the richness of the work of Christ.

The Trinity

While not strictly part of his Christology, this examination would be incomplete if it did not consider the relationship of Christ to the Holy Trinity. This teaching is central to the Christian faith, and considered to be essential to salvation in the Athanasian Creed. At the same time, orthodox Christianity has maintained that this doctrine is a mystery, beyond human understanding. Lewis attempts to explain the Trinity to his readers, with mixed success. If he errs in this teaching, it is an error of over-explanation.

Reading *Beyond Personality*, one is puzzled by Lewis's presentation of the Trinity. While he strives to live within the "required formulations" of the Creeds, he is also willing to express his ideas of how these formulas are expressed in reality. What emerges is a profoundly divergent emphasis on each of the three persons. The Father and the Son are alternately emphasised, while the Holy Spirit is downplayed. Lewis evidently is uncertain as to the person and work of the Holy Spirit.

Another interesting element is Lewis's discussion of the development of this doctrine. While he expresses a reliance on Biblical texts in working out his Christology, in regard to the doctrine of the Trinity he is much more reliant on experience, and on the corporate experience of the Church which develops this doctrine. As a result, his arguments do not demonstrate the forcefulness which often characterises his writing.

Experiential Realisation of the Trinity

By the Individual

Lewis considered the experience of the individual Christian in prayer to be indicative of the Triune nature of God. While not defining the Persons, he considers a three-fold function of the Godhead, saying,

An ordinary simple Christian kneels down to say his prayers. He is trying to get into touch with God. But if he is a Christian he knows that what is prompting him to pray is also God: God, so to speak, inside him. But he also knows that all his real knowledge of God comes through Christ, the Man who was God — that Christ is standing beside him, helping him to pray, praying for him.³⁶

The experience of prayer reveals God to Lewis on multiple levels: God as the object of prayer, God as the motivator of prayer, God as the enabler of prayer, and, as co-prayer. Knowing Lewis's reliance on credal formulations, it is clear that he must be thinking of the Father as the object, the Spirit as motivator, the "God inside him" and, as explicitly stated, the Son as enabler and priest. Yet the Father and Spirit are not clearly identified. Lewis asserts that the clearest revelation of the divinity takes place in Jesus Christ. In contrast, the other two persons are harder to conceptualise. It truly seems that Lewis is trying to provide an orthodox view of the Trinity, yet by avoiding the specific names of the other two Persons, he invites a modalistic interpretation of these words. Could the three-faceted role be merely functions of a God who exceeds human perceptions and abilities? All three of these roles might be ascribed to Christ alone as easily as they might be

considered the work of the entire Trinity. While this is not likely Lewis's intent here, such a conclusion can not be excluded on these basis of these words.

The Trinity in the Early Church

While the prayers of an individual Christian might guide him toward a Trinitarian understanding, it becomes more pronounced in the collective experience of the Christian Church. Here Lewis's understanding of the Trinity is seen with greater clarity. It is evident that he considered the formulation of this doctrine to be the development of the early Church. Regardless of one's opinion on the origin of this doctrine, there is no doubt that the terminology employed in the orthodox explanation of the Trinity is extra-Biblical. Lewis writes,

And that is how Theology started. People already knew about God in a vague way. Then came a man who claimed to be God; and yet he was not the sort of man you could dismiss as a lunatic. He made them believe Him. They met Him again after they had seen Him killed. And then, after they had been forced into a little society or community, they found God somehow inside them as well.... And when they worked it all out they found they had arrived at the Christian definition of a three-personal God.³⁷

These words demonstrate the extent to which Lewis's conception of the Trinity was Christocentric. Before the Incarnation, knowledge of God was vague, but it was heightened or sharpened with the coming of Christ.

Knowledge of the Godhead comes into focus with the coming of Christ. Again, Lewis presents his analysis of Christ's claims. He claims deity, but could not be dismissed as a lunatic. What follows is, in this instance, of greater significance. "He made them believe Him. They met Him again after they had seen Him killed." The defence of the deity of Christ hinges on the resurrection. People believed His claims, and they were validated in the resurrection.

Once again, when approaching the Holy Spirit, Lewis retreats into vagueness. Following the formation of the Christian Church, which he aptly notes was formed not by choice, but by force, they became aware of another presence of God. Having been gathered together as a community, "they found God somehow inside them."

How is such an interpretation of the Trinity to be understood? A variety of modes of Divine presence are indicated, but are they distinct or differentiated? It does not take much imagination to conceive of this model being applied modalistically. One God, one Person, is present in different ways at different times. Nothing here indicates that the Three Persons are co-existent or co-eternal. Instead, the Trinity is presented in a manner which may easily be interpreted as differing dispensations of God. The chief manifestation of God is in the Incarnation. Before this, there was a shadowy knowledge of Him, and the same sort of experience followed, though of course informed by the events of the life of Christ.

Lewis's descriptions of the Trinity, based on singular or corporate experience, fall short of the orthodoxy to which he aspired. He has tried to explain the inexplicable, and failed. If these descriptions were to stand alone, Lewis's writings could not be commended as orthodox. But after

making these imprecise statements, Lewis follows with a series of Trinitarian statements which draw heavily on the language of orthodoxy.

Trinitarian Formulas

Lewis is known for creative and original expressions of unoriginal ideas. In his literary works, he drew heavily from successful models of the past and expanded them for the present. This is even more true of his theology. Lewis specifically tried to avoid theological novelty, while expressing what he viewed as traditional, orthodox, “mere” Christianity in fresh words. Yet it is to the time-honoured expressions that he returns in the end.

Having presented his Trinitarian speculations, he returns to traditional formulas of the Trinity, and then attempts to explain a bit further. Consider Lewis’s dogmatic assertion, “God is a Being which contains three Persons while remaining one Being, just as a cube contains six squares while remaining one body.”³⁸ Reversion to geometric images is a common tactic for description of the Trinity. It is interesting, however, to note that Lewis does not use the most common picture — that of a triangle. Instead, incorporating the language of dimensional differentiation, Lewis writes of a square and a cube. In other writings, Lewis makes reference to the fictional discussion of spatial mathematics, Flatland.^{*} While he does not discuss the terms of that book, the parallel is implicit here. Beings who exist in two dimensions would have a hard time conceptualising a three dimensional figure. So also is it difficult for humans to conceptualise the Trinity, which is above and beyond understanding. With this simple statement, Lewis expresses the concept, which is fundamental to a discussion of the Trinity, that plurality and unity may coexist. Of course, such expressions are analogies, and should not be stretched beyond the point of comparison, for ultimately all analogies fall short of the Trinity.

Lewis continues to speak of the differentiation between the Persons of the Trinity. Typically, the focus is on the Father and Son, and only at the end does it move on to the Spirit. Also characteristic, is the insistence on certain formulations.

...we must think of the Son always, so to speak, streaming forth from the Father, like light from a lamp, or heat from a fire, or thoughts from a mind. He is the self expression of the Father — what the Father has to say. And there never was a time when He was not saying it. But have you noticed what is happening? All these pictures of light or heat are making it sound as if the Father and Son were two things instead of two Persons. So that after all, the New Testament picture of a Father and a Son turns out to be much more accurate than anything we try to substitute for it. That is what always happens when you go away from the words of the Bible.... Naturally God knows how to describe Him. He knows that Father and Son is more like the relation between the First and Second Persons than anything else we can think of. Much the most important thing to know is that it is a relation of love. The Father delights in His Son; the Son looks up to His Father.³⁹

^{*}A copy of Flatland was in Lewis’s personal library at the time of his death. If the influence of this book is assumed, Lewis’s use of square figures becomes even more remarkable. Flatland deals with a variety of shapes, but triangles are key to the narrative.

In an interesting switch of language, Lewis applies to the Son words usually used in reference to the Spirit. "Streaming forth..." sounds suspiciously like procession. At the same time, "thoughts from a mind" or "what the Father has to say" amplify the Johannine motif of the Divine $\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\varsigma$, the Word who becomes Incarnate. Note also the eternity of this relationship. "There never was a time when He was not saying it." This relationship, in whatever terms it is pictured, is not temporal. Co-eternity is maintained.

Yet if Lewis toys with the language of procession to describe the Son, having evaluated these images, he returns to more typical expressions. He notes a strong preference for use of the biblical images over other analogies, since analogies may "depersonalise" the Trinity. While these descriptions are quickly embraced by many Christians, it is surprising to see such a statement in Lewis. Despite all his "translation" of theology, his illustration and description, Lewis has come full circle. In the end, he decides that the best language for description of the Godhead is the language that God has used of Himself.

Lewis was no Fundamentalist. He did not adhere to Biblical infallibility. Yet he did believe in the truth of the Biblical account, and puts great credibility in the words of scripture. The language of Father-Son are normative for him, as it is God's self-disclosure. At the same time, that image is one of love, which is the most important thing to know of the Deity. It is interesting to see this characterisation from a man who had had a very strained relationship with his own father. Yet Lewis is not involved in escapism. As Christ is the archetypal Man, so God is the archetypal Father, of which all others are shadowy copies.

Having noted that love is of prime importance to understanding, Lewis finally gets specific regarding the Third Person of the Trinity.

The union of the Father and Son is such a live concrete thing that this union is also a Person.... What grows out of the joint life is a real person, is in fact the Third of the three Persons who are God.... this spirit of love is, from all eternity, a love going on between the Father and the Son.⁴⁰

Lewis does not use the typical language of procession of the Spirit. Instead, he writes of the love which is so vital, that it is itself a person. This expression is not unique, but it is typical of Lewis. The Spirit is the epitome of love. In formulating this understanding, Lewis has been influenced by Western Christianity. The love is mutual. Lewis's statement that love comes from the Father and the Son might easily be exchanged with the credal statement, "who proceeds from the Father and the Son." While not arguing (or even overtly acknowledging) the *filioque* controversy, Lewis stands solidly in the West.

So what is one to make of Lewis's Trinity? In the end, he reverts to orthodox statements, and is guided by the Creeds. In discussing this doctrine he drifts close to error, but manages to pull back to orthodoxy. Here Lewis is not guilty of heresy, but perhaps he is culpable of attempting to discuss theology of which he was not capable, and of over explaining. It is ill advised to try to explain the mystery of the Trinity. To do so in fifteen minute radio segments is simply foolish. In introducing his work, Lewis repeatedly reminds the reader that he is only a layman. While that may

be correct, Lewis is functioning as a theologian. While not formally trained, he did possess as formidable theological education. Still, Lewis is out of his depth in discussing the Trinity.

Conclusion

Mere Christianity is the most direct, explicitly theological book of C. S. Lewis. While he has written other theological and apologetical works, none is as straightforward as this one. Mere Christianity is not filled with the little literary illustrations which so regularly season his other works. It is as close as he comes to writing what he would call "real Theology." Yet he has brought with him his unique and refreshing perspective. Reading this book, the reader begins to see that it is possible for any Christian to approach the mysteries of the faith. Not only the clergy and those with a formal theological education, but all Christians are able to think theologically. Lewis is not always successful. He oversteps his own self-imposed boundaries. He oversimplifies some complex teaching. But in the end, he presents the basic Christian teachings well, with lucidity and accuracy. It is on these grounds that he should be commended.

Miracles

Lewis's goal in Mere Christianity was to translate basic theology for the laity. This was not, however, the extent of his theological interest. His third apologetic work, Miracles, like The Problem of Pain, is focused on removing objections to Christianity. By the time he wrote this book in 1947, his reputation as a lay theologian was secure. His four radio talks had been delivered and published, establishing him as a popular apologist. The Screwtape Letters had been well received, and brought him great recognition, publication of his Space Trilogy and The Great Divorce demonstrated that he could present Christian doctrine in a variety of genres. At this point, Lewis returned his attention once again to apologetics, particularly to the potential stumbling block of miracles. Sayer notes that Lewis wrote this book because, "Many people had told him that they could not accept the Gospels because of the number of miracles recorded in them."¹

Doubtful attitudes towards miracles were not foreign to Lewis. With his educational background, and experience as an instructor in philosophy, Lewis was well acquainted with modern ideas of the miraculous. Particularly significant here is David Hume's sceptical epistemology, which represented a significant attack on the veracity of miracles. This is evident in his 1748 classic Essay on Miracles, which demanded that, "...the ultimate standard by which we determine all disputes, that may arise concerning them, is always derived from experience and observation."² Hume defined miracles as "violations of the laws of nature," a definition which ensured,

That no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind, that its falsehood would be more miraculous, than the fact, which it endeavours to establish; and even in that case there is a mutual destruction of arguments, and the superior only gives us an assurance suitable to that degree of force, which remains, after deducting the inferior.³

While not naming Hume, Lewis clearly writes against such a conception of miracles. Indeed, Lewis's idealism was antithetical to Hume's scepticism. Presupposing that miracles are improbable and unprovable will naturally result in a categorical rejection of any specific miraculous event.

Lewis's response to such ideas developed over a number of years. In 1942 he preached a sermon entitled "Miracles" which observed, "...we shall not regard them as miraculous if we already hold a philosophy which excludes the supernatural."⁴ Much of the content of this sermon is reflected in Miracles. His attention was again directed towards miracles when Dorothy Sayers wrote to him on 13 May 1943, "...there aren't any up-to-date books about Miracles. People have stopped arguing them,"⁵ and asked how to deal with an atheist's objection to miracles. Lewis responded on 17 May, "I'm starting a book on Miracles," a book he completed in 1945 and published in 1947.

Due to the nature of the objections to Miracles, this book is the most philosophical of Lewis's works, providing a defence of the miraculous apart from theology. This different tone and methodology has led to a mixed reaction. Sayer notes that it is one of the least successful of Lewis's books,⁶ flawed and unclear in its central arguments. Nonetheless, portions of Miracles demonstrate the most refined presentation of Lewis's theological and Christological thought.

Nature vs. Supernature

The key to understanding Lewis's exposition of miracles is the distinction between the views of the Naturalist and the Supernaturalist. Simply stated, a naturalistic view looks at the universe as a consistent whole. According to strict naturalism, nothing exists outside of nature, while the supernaturalist position maintains that there is indeed something beyond nature. This distinction is not necessarily that of theism against atheism. Naturalism may have gods, but gods of a different sort than supernaturalism. Lewis maintains that the distinction between these two positions is crucial, for if one consistently holds to a naturalist position, miracles are consequently impossible. Such a presupposition naturally will affect how one examines the evidence for miracles. If they are *de facto* impossible, no evidence will be sufficient to demonstrate their veracity. The supernaturalist position, on the other hand, upholds the possibility of miracles. This does not assert the veracity or historicity of any particular miracle, but rather denotes the possibility of any miraculous event. The supernaturalist would still need to consider the evidence for any single event, but would not categorically dismiss the possibility of miracles.

Is thought Natural or Supernatural?

Lewis's distinction between the natural and the supernatural is a fairly obvious first step in this discussion. The obviousness diminishes, however, as he approaches a crucial subject: thought. Lewis held that the existence of thought and reason was inconsistent with the naturalist position. Naturalism views elements in nature in relationship to other elements. Causation and dependence are keys to understanding the individual components. When this principle was applied to thought and reason, however, Lewis saw an inherent contradiction. Reason claims to be able to alter nature, but is itself a product of nature. Since reason can alter nature, it must consequently be supernatural.

Another element of human thought and reason disturbed Lewis when he examined the naturalist position. If ethical decisions are to have any meaningful significance, they must be based upon free will. Yet naturalism provides no standards to evaluate acts of free will. Without an objective standard, there are no criteria for evaluating human choices. But mankind makes ethical choices, and judges certain acts to be either good or bad. Lewis thought that these challenges were destructive of the naturalist position. As the sole alternative is supernaturalism, Lewis considered naturalism to be self-defeating. More pointedly he saw this as a positive argument for the existence of God.

Lewis's argument did not go unchallenged. At a meeting of the Oxford Socratic Club, on 2 February 1948 G. E. M. Anscombe delivered a paper, "A Reply to Mr. C. S. Lewis's Argument that 'Naturalism' is self-refuting."^{*} Anscombe was a Roman Catholic member of the Socratic Club, who had studied under Wittgenstein. At the time of the debate she was a Research Fellow at Somerville

^{*}Anscombe's paper was printed in *The Socratic Digest*, no. 4 (1948), pp. 7-15. The minutes of the Socratic Club for that evening are found in the same issue of *The Socratic Digest*, along with a brief reply to Anscombe's objections, by Lewis, on pp. 15-16. They have been appended to Lewis's essay on the same subject, "Religion without Dogma" which is found in *God in the Dock*, pp. 129-146.

College, Oxford, and later became a Professor of Philosophy at Cambridge (1970-1986). Anscombe was a qualified and formidable opponent in debate.

Their debate did not address the main thesis of Lewis's book, namely, the possibility of miracles. Rather, it regarded Lewis's cavalier dismissal of naturalism. Still, Anscombe's arguments seemed to undermine one of Lewis's arguments for the existence of God. This was very disturbing to Lewis and many of his readers.

Reaction to the debate, and interpretation of its significance, has been extraordinarily diverse. Walter Hooper has stated that both Lewis and Anscombe claimed victory.⁷ A. N. Wilson views this debate as a pivotal event in the life and work of Lewis. Regarding the outcome of the debate he writes, "That evening at the Socratic club was the first time in the Society's history that Lewis was thoroughly trounced in argument."⁸ Wilson then continues his evaluation:

What had happened at the Socratic Club was no mere intellectual brawl, however. It awakened all sorts of deeply seated fears in Lewis, not least his fear of women. Once the bullying hero of the hour had been cut down to size, he became a child....⁹

Moderating between these extremes. George Sayer writes,

Jack thought that he had been defeated, and he was still unhappy about the evening when he spoke to me about it during Easter vacation. He told me that he had been proved wrong, that his argument for the existence of God had been demolished. This was a serious matter, he felt, because, in the minds of simple people, the disproof of an argument for the existence of God tended to be regarded as a disproof of the existence of God.¹⁰

The influence of this debate upon the psyche of Lewis is difficult to ascertain. The psychosexual interpretation advanced by Wilson is as unlikely as the stolid denial of defeat maintained by Hooper. However, specific actions that Lewis took following the debate may be indicative of his reaction. Chapter three of Miracles which had previously been entitled, "The Self-Contradiction of the Naturalist" was significantly revised in later editions of the book, and retitled, "The Cardinal Difficulty of Naturalism." Lewis softened his approach to more accurately reflect the philosophical positions of naturalism.

The second result is perhaps more significant. Following this debate, Lewis wrote no further apologetic or philosophical books.^{*} Wilson's statement that Lewis "became a child" following the debate reflects the fact that the books which followed Miracles were the first in The Chronicles of Narnia. Yet it must also be noted that Lewis did not devote himself entirely to children's books. He may have avoided overtly apologetic works, or more accurately, avoided the use of philosophical argumentation, but his work continued to be addressed to adults as well as children.

^{*}The publication of Mere Christianity as a combined volume is not considered in this statement, as it was primarily the content of the radio addresses delivered in 1941.

Definition of Miracles

The Possibility of Miracles

Regardless of the significance of the Lewis-Anscombe debate, Miracles continues to be published and read. Lewis's argument against Naturalism was revised, but the basic defence of the miraculous was unchanged, and had not been challenged by Anscombe. Thus his discussion of this topic remains significant. If one holds naturalistic presuppositions — that is, if one believes that there is no possibility of intervention of any sort from outside of a closed universe, miracles are impossible. Lewis embraced the opposite view. There is something, or Someone, beyond nature, and He may do miracles. In this book, Lewis considers a few specific miracles, but is more interested in the general question, "Are miracles possible?" In his discussion, he frames the question in the following way:

[Does God] ...ever introduce into [Nature] events of which it would not be true to say, "This is simply the working out of the general character which He gave to Nature as a whole in creating her"? Such events are what are properly called Miracles: and it will be in this sense only that the word Miracle will be used for the rest of the book.¹¹

Lewis's definition is vital to understanding. A miracle is something which would not occur in the natural order of the universe. Yet he would not agree with Hume in defining miracles as violations of Natural Law. "It is ... inaccurate to define a miracle as something which breaks the laws of Nature. It doesn't."¹² Lewis explains, "It includes a new factor into the situation, namely supernatural force, which the scientist had not reckoned upon."¹³ Far from violating natural laws, miracles are completely in accord with them, for they are in conformity with the architect of those laws. Scientists might view this as inconsistent, but that is a result of missing data.

Lewis defends the possibility of miracles, but does so only within limited parameters. Miracles may occur, and when they do, they are something different than would have ordinarily happened, yet once they happen, the situation immediately returns to the control of the normal laws of nature.

If God creates a miraculous spermatozoon in the body of a virgin, it does not proceed to break any laws. The laws at once take it over. Nature is ready. Pregnancy follows, according to all the normal laws, and nine months later a child is born.... Miraculous wine will still intoxicate, miraculous conception will lead to pregnancy, inspired books will suffer all the ordinary processes of textual corruption, miraculous bread will be digested.¹⁴

Lewis's definition of miracle exists within tightly delineated bounds. Miraculous intervention may occur, but does not continue as an ongoing state.

Objections to Miracles

As Lewis continues to define miracles, he deals with a number of "red herrings," two of which are germane to this discussion. The first asserts the sophistication of the modern mind over previous generations. This position claims that the people mentioned in the Biblical accounts were too primitive to understand how nature works, and so believed that something contrary to nature had

occurred. Lewis cites the reaction of Joseph to the Virgin Birth. Critics may argue that Joseph did not understand the mechanics of conception, and so believed something that was clearly impossible. But, as Lewis notes, Joseph did indeed know that such a conception was contrary to nature. He concludes,

If St. Joseph had lacked faith to trust God or humility to perceive the holiness of his spouse, he could easily have disbelieved in the miraculous origin of her Son as easily as any modern man; and any modern man who believes in God can accept the miracle as easily as St. Joseph did.¹⁵

The point is not that the miracle is easy to believe, but that it was also difficult for Joseph to believe. Whether a culture is primitive or advanced does not discount the possibility of miracles.

The second “red herring” of interest involves the question of life on other planets. Lewis notes that the possibility of other life forms in the universe is used in two contradictory arguments, both of which are used against Christianity.

If the universe is teeming with life other than ours, then this, we are told, makes it quite ridiculous to believe that God should be so concerned with the human race as to “come down from Heaven” and be made man for our redemption. If, on the other hand, our planet is really unique in harbouring organic life, then this is thought to prove that life is only an accidental by-product in the universe and so again to disprove our religion. We treat God as the policeman in the story treated the suspect; whatever he does “will be used in evidence against Him.” This kind of an objection to the Christian faith is not really based on the observed nature of the natural universe at all.¹⁶

At this point, the question is not one of theology, but one of simple logic. Neither option has any bearing on the veracity of the Christian faith. Since there is no clear revelation of other planetary life in the Christian faith, and since science has not, as yet, provided evidence one way or the other, the question must remain open. Lewis summarises the possibilities:

The universe may be full of happy lives that never needed redemption. It may be full of lives that have been redeemed in the very same mode as our own. It may be full of things quite other than life in which God is interested though we are not.¹⁷

Whether there is life on other planets or not has nothing to do with the possibility of miracles. It merely prolongs the question of their possibility. It is interesting, however, to note how Lewis considers the possibility of other life. The possibility is framed in terms of the Redemption. Would other life forms be in need of Redemption? Lewis does not address the question in further detail here. However, he does consider that precise topic in several different ways in his Space Trilogy. It emerges in Out of the Silent Planet where Ransom visits the unfallen world of Malacandra. The same motif emerges to somewhat different ends in Perelandra where the world remains unfallen, but the inhabitants are humanoid, since God had already become man. The Incarnation had an effect in their world, even though they were not in need of a Redeemer. The question continued to interest Lewis, but in the end, remains unanswered.*

*This same question is raised by Austin Farrer who writes, “What is the use of asking questions we cannot answer? A believer must suppose that God will take care of his own, wherever they are. How he has dealt with us, we partly know; how he has dealt with them, we cannot so much as guess. Of one thing only we can be certain; whether they know it or not, God is their God and the Trinity is their archetype.... We may meet races widely different from ourselves; but if they are rational, or

The Necessity of Miracles for Christianity

With miracles defined and the question focused, Lewis continues his exploration, and relates miracles to Christianity. Since he wrote his book to help people with their objections to miracles, he asks, "are the miracles really necessary? Could they not be dispensed with, in order to provide a simplified Christianity?" Lewis is quick to note the futility of this simplification.

All the essentials of Hinduism would, I think, remain unimpaired if you subtracted the miraculous, and the same is almost true of Mohammedanism. But you cannot do that with Christianity. It is precisely the story of a great Miracle. A naturalistic Christianity leaves out all that is specifically Christian.¹⁸

Taken in the context of the rest of Lewis's writings, this is a remarkable statement. Lewis strongly believed Christianity, but embraced it, in part, because Christianity does not negate everything held by other religions. In fact, Lewis repeatedly stated that Christianity allows one to keep all of the true parts of other religions, as long as the Christian doctrine is held whenever there is disagreement. Yet here, in the miraculous, is the key place that Lewis sees a difference. He did not consider the Christian free to pick and choose which teachings he would hold. Christianity is precisely the story of a great Miracle. That Miracle is Jesus Christ, and in particular, His Incarnation and redemptive work. Without these miracles, Christianity fades away. Lewis does not here insist on the acceptance of the facticity of every Biblical miracle, nor does he deny this. Rather, he highlights the central miracles which are, by nature, Christological.⁷

The Meaning of Anthropomorphic Language

There is one further objection which may impair understanding of miracles. The descriptive and anthropomorphic language employed by the Bible may be difficult for a modern person to accept as literally true.

When a man who has had only the ordinary modern education looks into any authoritative statements of Christian doctrine, he finds himself face to face with what seems to him a wholly "savage" or "primitive" picture of the universe. He finds that God is supposed to have a "Son," just as if God were a mythological deity like Jupiter or Odin. He finds that this "Son" is supposed to have "come down from Heaven," just as if God had a palace in the sky from which He sent down His "Son" like a parachutist. He finds that this "Son" then "descended into Hell" — into some land of the dead under the surface of a (presumably) flat earth[†] — and thence "ascended" again, as if by a balloon, into his Father's sky-palace,

capable of God, they live in mutual converse, and express by their dealings one with another their transcendent model, the Trinity of Persons in the Unity of Godhead." (Austin Farrer, *Saving Belief: A Discussion of Essentials*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton Limited, 1964), p. 68.

[†]It should also be noted that Lewis does not directly address the topics of miracles within one's own life, nor of "spiritual miracles" such as the forgiveness of sins in this book. These emphases will be present in his later writings. This is particularly evident as Lewis faces Joy's cancer which, following the prayer of a priest, went into remission for some time. Lewis described this as a miracle.

[†]The descriptive language of the descent into Hell and its substantive meaning is also addressed by Austin Farrer. Farrer presents a traditional image of the harrowing of hell, and concludes, "The mythical colouring of the scene will scarcely commend it to our belief, but the principles it embodies are rational enough. Those who died before Christ must be saved through Christ." (Austin Farrer, *Saving Belief: A Discussion of Essentials*, pp. 155-156).

where he finally sat down in a decorated chair placed a little to His Father's right. Everything seems to presuppose a conception of reality which the increase of our knowledge had been steadily refuting for the last two thousand years and which no honest man in his senses could return to-day.¹⁹

The objection is valid. Anthropomorphic images are freely used in Scripture. Moreover, many Christians hold these images in the literal sense which Lewis describes. He continues,

And let [us] admit at once that many Christians (though by no means all) when they make these assertions do have in mind just those crude mental pictures which so horrify the sceptic.... And the Christians themselves make it clear that the images are not to be identified with the thing believed. They may picture the Father as a human form, but they also maintain that He has no body. They may picture Him older than the Son, but they also maintain the one did not exist before the other, both having existed from all eternity.²⁰

Here is a mature understanding. These images may be held in just the crude manner supposed by the critic, but they are not accurate representations of what is believed, and most Christians realise this. Lewis cautions that one must not judge Christianity (or anything else) from the ideas of children. Images and pictures which fill childish imagination are not the substance of the Christian faith that is held by adults. Still, there are adults who conceive of these matters in primitive images. Explaining the significance of this, Lewis continues, "...when they try to get rid of... 'anthropomorphic' images they merely succeed in substituting images of some other kind."²¹ This is the essence of Lewis's understanding of images — they are necessary for understanding. If images are used, they might as well be familiar, concrete images that communicate rather than philosophical abstractions.

When images are properly used, they provide illustration and analogy of that which is difficult to understand. When examining the images of the New Testament, the reader should look not only at the image employed, but at the full meaning of that image. Consider, for example, the New Testament's description of the Second Person of the Trinity as the Son.

The title "Son" may sound "primitive" or "naïf". But already in the New Testament this "Son" is identified with the Discourse or Reason or Word which was eternally "with God" and yet also *was* God (John i.1). He was the all-pervasive principle of concretion or cohesion whereby the universe holds together (Col i.17). All things and specially Life arose *within* Him, (Col i. εν αυτω εχτισθη. John i.4) and within Him all things will reach their conclusion — the final statement of what they have been trying to express.(Eph i.10).²²

Lewis continues to explain the images,

The assertion that God has a Son was never intended to mean that He is propagating His kind by sexual intercourse: and so we do not alter Christianity by rendering explicitly the fact that "sonship" is not used of Christ in exactly the same sense in which it is used of men. But the assertion that Jesus turned water into wine was meant perfectly literally, for this refers to something which, if it happened, was well within the reach of our senses and our language.²³

¹⁹John 1:1 "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."; Col 1:17 "He is before all things, and in him all things hold together."; John 1:4 "In him was life, and that life was the light of men."; Eph 1:10 "to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment — to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ."

Images are helpful to explain difficult or abstract concepts. The relationship between the persons of the Trinity is a key example. As this relationship is beyond any direct human experience, the only way it may be discussed is by analogy or metaphor. Such expressions are useful, but ought not be pressed beyond their intended sense.

Christological Miracles

The Incarnation

When the Biblical miracles are examined, readers often address their attention to things done by Jesus. Lewis would certainly include these in the category of the miraculous, but they are of secondary importance. The miracles surrounding Jesus Christ personally are much more astounding than the things that He has done, for the life of Christ is framed by two remarkable miracles: the Incarnation and the Resurrection. Of these two, prime miracles, Lewis is most concerned with the Incarnation, which he terms “the Grand Miracle.”

The central miracle asserted by Christians is the Incarnation. They say that God became Man. Every other miracle prepares for this, or exhibits this, or results from this.... And let us admit at once that it is very difficult to find a standard by which it can be judged. If it happened, it was the central event in the history of the Earth — the very thing the whole story is about.²⁴

The challenge of this doctrine, of course, is that God becomes man — a teaching which is impossible to ignore. Echoing his argumentation from *Mere Christianity*, Lewis writes that we may not easily dispense with the claims of Jesus to be God. Identifying Him simply as a good teacher is not a logical response to the claims of Christ and the accounts of His behaviour. Without explicating the options of His identity, Lewis highlights part of his reasoning, saying,

The discrepancy between the depth and sanity and (let me add) *shrewdness* of His moral teaching and the rampant megalomania which must lie behind His theological teaching unless He is indeed God, has never been satisfactorily got over.²⁵

Here Lewis has distilled his three-fold possibility to two. Either Jesus is the Son of God, as He claimed, or He is mentally ill. Assuming that Christ is the Son of God, however, does not answer the questions of the Incarnation. One might fully assert the deity of Christ, and yet deny the Incarnation, thus embracing Docetism. Lewis therefore continues his examination of the Incarnation in more detail. He explains the union of the two natures of Christ by reverting to his prior discussion of reason. Reason is supernatural according to Lewis's argument. If this is true, then a human being is a union of two distinct natures: natural and supernatural. If one accepts this dichotomous nature, it is a small step to apply it to the personal union of Christ. So Lewis writes,

The first difficulty that occurs to any critic of the doctrine lies at the very centre of it. What can be meant by “God becoming man”? In what sense is it conceivable that eternal self-existent Spirit, basic Fact-hood, should be so combined with a natural human organism as to make it one person? And this would be a fatal stumbling-block if we had not already discovered that in every human being a more than natural activity (the act of reasoning) and therefore presumably a more than natural agent is thus united with a part of Nature: so united that the composite creature calls itself “I” and “Me”. I am not, of course, suggesting that what happened when God became Man was simply another instance of this

process. In other men a supernatural *creature* thus becomes, in union with the natural creature, one human being. In Jesus, it is held, the Supernatural Creator Himself did so. I do not think anything we do will enable us to imagine the mode of consciousness of the incarnate God. That is where the doctrine is not fully comprehensible.²⁶

This argument is only as strong as the analogy, and that is where it fails. Lewis states that the personal union would be “a fatal stumbling block” if we were not already familiar with the dichotomy of nature and the supernatural within us. He is incorrect. The dichotomous nature of an individual is not self-evident, nor does the lack of this philosophical construct destroy the personal union of Christ. Had Lewis offered this passage as one possible explanation, it might be helpful. If he had sought other images to supplement his proposal, it might have worked. But to say that without this image, the personal union would be a fatal stumbling block is a most regrettable error. It is passages such as this that led to the serious consequences of the Lewis-Anscombe debate. If Lewis’s logic was shown to be faulty, it would not be particularly significant, but when he has made such absolute statements like this, his defeat is profoundly serious.

This passage may also be of significance, for in it, Lewis comes close to the eutychian heresy. Eutychianism claims that the two natures of Christ were totally mingled together and indistinguishable. Lewis writes of our natural being and the supernatural element of reason uniting to be “the composite creature [that] calls itself “I” and “Me”. His example of natural self and reason is one that is not distinguished in the mind of many readers, but so unified that it is perceived as a complete unity. When one speaks of “I” he speaks of his entire self. If the human and divine natures of Christ are so united, the natures may be indistinct. Yet having used imprecise wording, Lewis qualifies his statements, saying, “I do not think anything we do will enable us to imagine the mode of consciousness of the incarnate God.” Having experimented with new formulations, he retreats to mystery. There is no doubt that Lewis believed the Incarnation to be fact, and was attempting to explain it in a way that would make sense to sceptics. It is unlikely that he held to eutychianism. Unfortunately, he employed a suspect comparison, and so has called his entire argument into question.

Lewis adds another facet to his examination of the Incarnation when he looks at the conception of Christ. For Lewis, the challenge of the Incarnation is the personal union of Christ. If that question is resolved, the virginal conception is much easier to accept.

As far as concerns the creation of Christ's human nature (the Grand Miracle whereby His divine begotten nature enters into it is another matter) the miraculous conception is one more witness that here is Nature's Lord.²⁷

It is easier to believe this unseen miracle if one first believes in the deity of Christ. In the Virgin conception, the power of Nature’s Lord is seen. After the conception, Lewis notes, the miracle is complete, and a normal pregnancy proceeds, apart from miraculous intervention. Such is the nature of the Incarnation. Once the event occurs, nature continues according to her normal patterns.

Imaging the Incarnation

In philosophical argument, Lewis inadequately discusses the Incarnation. By anchoring his argument to one particular philosophical construct, he set himself up for defeat. However, as he continues his discussion of the Incarnation, he returns to descriptive language and illustration. Lewis writes about the Incarnation, employing the motif of descent and ascent. He discusses this theme with three different images: direct description, the picture of a strongman, and the image of a diver.

In the first instance, Lewis describes the work of Christ in the Incarnation, by a direct discussion of His work and the biological events through which it took place. In doing so, he embraces the embryological thought of his time:

In the Christian story God descends to re-ascend. He comes down, down from the heights of absolute being into time and space, down into humanity; down further still, if embryologists are right, to recapitulate in the womb ancient and pre-human phases of life; down to the very roots and sea-bed of the Nature He has created. But He goes down to come up again and bring the whole ruined world up with Him.²⁸

Lewis is citing the outdated developmental theory, “ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny.” This theory posits that one can re-trace evolutionary development in embryology. Hence when one looks at the developing foetus, one may see gills, a tail, or other features of lower animals. While embryologists no longer hold to this developmental theory, consider how Lewis uses this progression. He clearly maintains that the Christ was incarnate within the womb. His descent into humanity went even farther than might be imagined — even lower in the evolutionary cycle. Christ humbled Himself to be the lowest of His creation. This passage might well be read in parallel with Lewis’s controversial words from *Mere Christianity*, that to understand the drastic change Christ undertook in the Incarnation, one might have to imagine himself becoming a slug or a crab. Here Lewis takes the position that through embryology Christ did precisely that. He humbled himself even beyond humanity, into the lowest state of his creation. This expresses the radical nature of the Incarnation. Having descended, He comes up again and brings the whole world with Him. He lowers Himself that He might raise His creation. Note that in this passage, Lewis does not limit the work of Christ to humanity. Rather, he brings up the whole ruined world.

From this direct passage, Lewis moves immediately to two illustrations of the work of Christ as He lowers Himself to raise His creation. The first is the image of the strong man.

One has the picture of a strong man stooping lower and lower to get himself underneath some great complicated burden. He must stoop in order to lift, he must almost disappear under the load before he incredibly straightens his back and marches off with the whole mass swaying on his shoulders.²⁹

Now the imaginative mind of Lewis is unleashed. This time the humiliation of Christ is not seen as a change of physical state, but of place. In order to lift, the strongman must stoop, nearly disappearing under the load. The man’s strength and his person are unaltered, but in stooping to accomplish his task, he almost disappears. This image involves no incarnation or change, but is entirely focused on work. Thus, by itself it is inadequate, but it nonetheless partially illustrates the

humiliation of Christ. Note also, that in raising the burden, the act of the strongman is described as incredible. So it is with the work of Christ. He lowers Himself, almost disappearing in death before rising from the dead. The fact that the strong man takes the burden up with him must not be ignored. Christ lifts up His creation.*

The third image is perhaps the most vivid.

...think of a diver, first reducing himself to nakedness, then glancing in mid-air, then gone with a splash, vanished, rushing down through green and warm water into black and cold water, down through increasing pressure into the death-like region of ooze and slime and old decay; then up again, back to colour and light, his lungs almost bursting, till suddenly he breaks surface again, holding in his hand the dripping, precious thing he went down to recover. He and it are both coloured now that they have come up into the light: down below where it lay colourless in the dark, he lost his colour too.³⁰

The diver first reduces himself to nakedness, setting his clothes aside just as Christ sets aside the regular use of His divine power and glory. The diver leaps, and vanishes through water. The imagery is that of the diver, and yet one cannot avoid birth imagery of water and darkness, giving way to light. The farther down the diver goes, the more he loses his colour. He descends to the very depths, to the death-like region of ooze, slime and decay. Certainly the reader will consider the descent into Hell with such an image. Finally, the diver rises back up, past all the levels through which he had descended, and reveals "the dripping, precious thing he went down to recover." Again the image mixes that of a treasure-seeking diver with a birth motif. Having returned to the surface, both the diver and the object are visible for what they really are. Both now have their natural colour restored.

In each of these passages, Lewis reveals his view of the incarnation. Individually they are prone to greater error than when taken as a whole. The first passage, dealing with embryology, definitely has the union of the two natures, but falls short, due to the outdated scientific explanation. The image of the strongman notes the work of Christ, but lacks any incarnation. The third is the most beautiful, and seems to imply a change in the diver ("...down below where it lay colourless in the dark, he lost his colour too.") but as he emerges from the water, he is essentially unchanged, even if wet. This image, taken alone, could easily be accused of docetism. But taken together, the images are balanced. Together, they show the extreme change of the Incarnation, the depths of the humiliation Christ undertook for humanity, and His desire to raise and ennoble His people. These

*The image of the strongman with a burden on his shoulders may be patterned after Atlas or Samson, or a combination of these images. Consider George Herbert's poem, "Sunday" which draws the parallel between Christ and Samson.

...The rest of our creation
Our great Redeemer did remove
With the same shake which at His passion
Did th' earth and all things with it move.
As Samson bore the doores away,
Christ's hands, though nail'd, wrought our salvation,
And did unhinge that day."

Arthur Waugh, ed., *The Poems of George Herbert*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1907), p. 76.

images are among Lewis's more successful writing in *Miracles* as he does not rely on philosophical constructs, but on imagination and literary figures.

The Corn King

Lewis has employed three depictions of descent and reascent. He bridges from these images, the latter two being his own, to a more universal image -- the Corn King:

In this descent and re-ascent everyone will recognise a familiar pattern: a thing written all over the world.... The doctrine of the Incarnation, if accepted, puts this principle even more emphatically at the centre. The pattern is there in Nature because it was first there in God.³¹

Embodying his belief that all the religions of the world hold elements of the truth, and these truthful portions may be held by Christians in good conscience, Lewis considers a myth of near universal scope. However, he does not consider Christianity to be one further example of an archetypal myth. The Incarnation is the archetype, yet, the Christian Gospel differs in significant ways from the Corn King mythology. It fails to fit predictably into the pattern. Lewis calls this divergence the "oddest thing about Christianity." It is precisely this uniqueness which causes him to take the claims of Christianity more seriously. He compares the myths to the Gospel, noting,

From a certain point of view Christ is "the same sort of thing" as Adonis or Osiris (always, of course, waiving the fact that they lived nobody knows where or when, while He was executed by a Roman magistrate we know in a year which can be roughly dated). And that is the puzzle. If Christianity is a religion of that kind why is the analogy of the seed falling into the ground so seldom mentioned (twice only if I mistake not) in the New Testament?... A "dying God"— the only dying God who might possibly be historical — holds bread, that is corn, in His hand and says "This is my body." Surely here.... the connection between this and the annual drama of the crop must be made. But it is not.... The records, in fact, show us a Person who *enacts* the part of the Dying God, but whose thoughts and words remain quite outside the circle of religious ideas to which the Dying God belongs. The very thing which the Nature-religions are all about seems to have really happened once: but it happened in a circle where no trace of Nature-religion was present.³²

Here Lewis explicates what, for him, was one of the chief attractions of Christianity, but one which He was slow to recognise. In common with the pagan myths, Christ descends in order to reascend. He typifies the myth of the dying God, yet there are significant differences. Unlike Adonis, Osiris, or any of the other myths, Christ is presented in a specific historical context. Furthermore, while Christ is similar to the Corn King, this image is only explicitly used twice in the New Testament. When it seems most likely that this imagery would be invoked, it is conspicuously absent. Likewise,

³¹Lewis's thought on the fulfilment of pagan myths within Christianity, along with an account of his reluctance to acknowledge the truth of the myths outside of Paganism, and his subsequent embracing of them, can be found in *Surprised by Joy*. In presenting pagan myths which prefigure and parallel Christian themes, Lewis employs a tactic characteristic of classic apologetics. For example, Justin Martyr (100-163/165 AD), in his first apology, presents pagan sources which show that pagan mythology contains doctrines which are similar to Christianity. He cites examples including the Resurrection, Incarnation, and immortality of the soul, and then proceeds to argue that Christianity alone is true. cf. "The First Apology," in Thomas B. Falls, *Saint Justin Martyr*, (New York: Christian Heritage, 1948), pp. 52-57.

the core ideas which surround these nature myths are absent in Christianity. The reality of Christ is notably different from the nature religions.

This argument is essential to Lewis. He clings to the truthful elements of the world's myths, carefully delineating the limits of their correspondence. Where there is a divergence, Lewis returns to the Christian accounts. Hence he writes,

The Christians are not claiming that simply "God" was incarnate in Jesus. They are claiming that the one true God is He whom the Jews worshipped as Jahweh, and that it is He who has descended.... [Jahweh] does not die and come to life each year as a true Corn-king should.... Jahweh is neither the soul of Nature nor her enemy. She is neither His body nor a declension and falling away from Him. She is His creature. He is not a nature-God, but the God of Nature.... He is like the Corn-King because the Corn-King is a portrait of Him.³³

The precision of this explanation is of paramount importance to Lewis. The Incarnation is a radical event, the transcendent becoming immanent. It does not involve a nebulous deity, or an adoptionistic reduction. Christ is clearly identified with Jahweh, the creator, He does not derive from Nature. Lewis believes that the world is filled with images of the Corn King and other myths of the dying God because they are patterned on the real occurrence of the Incarnation.* Christ is God Incarnate, a theme which has been restated many times over throughout nature, but Christ is the archetype.

The Work of Christ

To call Christ the archetype of the Corn King and Dying God myths describes a great deal of His person and work, but it is an incomplete description. The work of Christ is far beyond that which is depicted in mythology. Lewis discusses the specifics of the person and work of Christ in his chapter, "The Grand Miracle," and to a lesser extent in the following chapters. Reading these pages, a more developed presentation of Christology emerges.

Christ is uniquely incarnate. While Lewis seems open to diverse speculation on the open questions of Scripture, he is remarkably focused here. He writes,

...I do not think it at all likely that there have been... many Incarnations to redeem many different kinds of creature. [sic] One's sense of *style* — of the divine idiom — rejects it.... If other natural creatures than Man have sinned we must believe that they are redeemed: but God's Incarnation as Man will be one unique act in the drama of total redemption and other species will have witnessed wholly different acts, each equally unique, equally necessary and differently necessary to the whole process....³⁴

This passage is typical of Lewis. He speculates, but does not impose his conclusion on others. Indeed, here he does not even offer a conclusion. He simply states, on aesthetic grounds, that the

*Consider Lewis's words in Surprised by Joy, "Early in 1926 the hardest boiled of all the atheists I ever knew sat in my room on the other side of the fire and remarked that the evidence for the historicity of the Gospels was really surprisingly good. 'Rum thing,' he went on. 'All that stuff of Frazer's about the Dying God. It almost looks as if it had really happened once.'.... If he, the cynic of cynics, the toughest of the tough were not — as I would still have put it — 'safe,' where could I turn? Was there then no escape?" (Surprised by Joy, p. 223-224).

Incarnation must be unique. Also typical is his insistence that his speculation is just that, and should not be considered normative or a final word on the subject.

Having come, Christ continues His work. Among that work, of course, are miracles. One might suppose that a book about miracles would contain a great emphasis on the miracles of Jesus Christ. However, Lewis notes only a few specific miracles performed by Christ. Significant here are miracles connected with the understanding of Christ as the archetype of the Corn King myths, including the feeding of the five thousand.

In discussing these miracles, Lewis again hesitates to draw conclusions. How precisely is it that Christ does miracles? He writes,

...I do not propose to raise the question... whether Christ was able to do these things [miracles] only because He was God or also because He was perfect man; for it is a possible view that if Man had never fallen all men would have been able to do the like.... Whatever may have been the powers of unfallen man, it appears that those of redeemed Man will be almost unlimited.* Christ, re-ascending from His great dive is bringing up Human Nature with Him.³⁵

Lewis is content to state that Christ did the miracles, without defining the mechanism which made them possible. It is, however, surprising to note that Lewis, writing an apologetic work for those who have difficulty accepting the veracity of miracles, would choose to make such a statement. Reference to Matthew 17:20 is an odd strategy. One might think that citing such a challenging verse, or presenting the possibility that Christians might do miracles could create a further obstacle. Yet Lewis's point is not that we might do miracles, but that Christ did. One can accept this fact without knowing on what basis He was able to perform them.

As discussion of the work of Christ continues, Lewis notes that it is focused on suffering.

On the finally selected Woman falls the utmost depth of maternal anguish. Her Son, the incarnate God, is a "man of sorrows"; the one Man into whom Deity descended, the one Man who can be lawfully adored, is pre-eminent for suffering.³⁶

It is not merely suffering, but sacrifice and death that characterise His work. Building on the parable of the two sons,[†] he writes, "For this prodigal the fatted calf, or, to speak more suitably, the eternal Lamb, is killed."³⁷ That sacrifice, in its full effect and with all its ramifications, is beyond our ability to apprehend. "...the mystical slaying of the Lamb 'before the foundation of the world'[‡] is above our speculations."³⁸

The work of Christ is intrinsically connected to suffering and death. Miracles contains an exposition of the vicarious nature of that death.

But only a Man who did not need to have been a Man at all unless He had chosen, only one who served in our sad regiment as a volunteer, yet also only one who was

*Lewis cites a number of Biblical texts to support this claim including Matthew 17:20, "...I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you." Also cited are Matthew 21:21; Mark 11:23; Luke 10:19; John 14:12, 1 Corinthians 3:22, and 2 Timothy 2:12.

†cf. Luke 15:11-32.

‡cf. Revelation 13:8 "All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast — all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world."

perfectly a Man, could perform this perfect dying; and thus (which way you put it is unimportant) either defeat death or redeem it. He tasted death on behalf of all others. He is the representative "Die-er" of the universe: and for that very reason the Resurrection and the Life. He truly dies, for that is the very pattern of reality. Because the higher can descend into the lower He who from all eternity has been incessantly plunging Himself in the blessed death of self-surrender to the Father can also most fully descend into the horrible and (for us) involuntary death of the body. Because Vicariousness is the very idiom of the reality He has created, His death can become ours.³⁹

In typical form, Lewis presents himself as holding no particular theory of the Atonement, saying "which way you put it is unimportant." Yet this passage is an exposition of the Vicarious Satisfaction, a theory which Lewis repeatedly claims to find difficult. He is "the representative Die-er," and "His death can become ours." Lewis, disavowing the specific theory in name, is holding to it in essence. He is at the same time, eclectic, introducing patterns of the Christus Victor motif.

The Resurrection

The Christus Victor theme becomes more evident as Lewis discusses the Resurrection of Christ. The Resurrection is a unique event. It is different than other miracles of the Bible, different than things which are claimed to be miraculous today, even different from other biblical resurrections. In a key passage, he writes,

The New Testament writers speak as if Christ's achievement in rising from the dead was the first event of its kind in the whole history of the universe. He is the "first fruits," the "pioneer of life." He has forced open a door that has been locked since the death of the first man. He has met, fought, and beaten the King of Death.⁴⁰

Consider the language used to depict the work of Christ. He "forced open" the door, and has "fought and beaten the King of Death." The imagery is clearly that of Christus Victor. Lewis has chosen diverse elements of two separate Atonement theories, and employs both as he sees fit.

Conclusion

In Miracles, Lewis tries to deal with objections to the idea of miracles with mixed success. Often the effectiveness of his arguments wanes, as it is based on his own questions, not all of which are shared by sceptics. He frequently limits his arguments to narrow points which are not at issue for many people. The work is far from exhaustive in approaching the many miraculous narratives of the Scriptures. Yet by its very structure, it makes a critical point: the chief miracles are those surrounding the person and work of Christ. These are not miracles done to demonstrate His identity, but miracles involving His very Nature. It simply must be this way. The Incarnation and Resurrection are grand miracles, around which revolves the Christian faith. Ultimately, this must be the focus. As Lewis writes, "Christianity does not involve the belief that all things were made for man. It does involve the belief that God loves man and for his sake became man and died."⁴¹

Introduction to the Fictional Writings

The second category of Lewis's writings are his fictional works. While these works are not overtly theological or apologetic, they do have significant theological content. These books encompass a variety of genres, and were written over a large span of time. The first to be written was Lewis's Space Trilogy, composed for adult audiences, and filled with Christian themes. Paralleling the three books of this series is an unfinished manuscript, The Dark Tower. Because it was not published with the original series and remains incomplete, it will be considered separately. The second fictional work is The Screwtape Letters, a one-sided set of correspondence from a mature devil to a neophyte. As the demon, Screwtape, gives advice to his protégé, Lewis presents his ideas on the Christian life. His third fictional work is The Great Divorce, a visionary examination of purgatory, heaven, and hell. Fourth is a series of books, often classified separately as books written "for children." The Chronicles of Narnia tell the story of another land inhabited by talking animals. Central to these stories is Aslan, a lion who dies and rises to life again. The final work of fiction, Till We Have Faces is a retelling of Apuleius's Cupid and Psyche myth.

If Lewis had written only fictional works, the diversity of these books would be admirable. But as he has also written apologetics, devotional works, and books of literary criticism, the breadth of his writings is remarkable. While the genres of these books are varied, they all follow a consistent thread of Christian themes. Since this Christian content is evident, the nature of these books becomes a significant question. While the casual reader might refer to these books as allegorical, Lewis emphatically denied that they were allegories. In order better to understand this claim, and accurately note the genres of these books, it is vital to understand Lewis's particular definitions of literary terms. The key concepts in Lewis's use of language are metaphor, allegory, symbol, supposal, and myth. Collectively, these may be called poetic language. Such a designation draws on the etymological distinction between *poema* and *logos* which Lewis explains in An Experiment in Criticism.^{*} These will be considered in turn, and then applied to Lewis's writings.

Metaphor & Poetic Language

As Lewis approached the topic of language, he naturally considered the question of literal and metaphorical language. Very little language is absolutely literal. Indeed, many words which are thought to be literal are really metaphors whose metaphorical reference has faded over time. This idea is developed in his essay, "Bluspels and Flalanspheres: a Semantic Nightmare," which is

^{*}Lewis distinguishes between the two, referring to *logos* as "something said" and to *poema* as "something made." *Logos* is the content while *poema* is the elevation of that content into a work of art which gives pleasure. Both are intrinsically interconnected, but serve different ends. "As *Logos* it tells a story, or expresses an emotion, or exhorts or pleads or describes or rebukes or excites laughter. As *Poema*, by its aural beauties and also by the balance and contrast and the unified multiplicity of its successive parts, it is an *objet d'art*, a thing shaped so as to give satisfaction." C. S. Lewis, An Experiment in Criticism, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1961), p. 132.

heavily influenced by Owen Barfield's Poetic Diction.^{*} Poetic Diction explores the relationship between words and meaning. Barfield notes a progression of comparative language. The simplest form of comparative language is simile. Metaphor is more subtle and refined than simile, and myth more sophisticated than metaphor. Lewis embraces similar ideas in "Bluspels and Flalanspheres," and throughout his writings.

In this essay, Lewis notes the necessity of metaphors, saying that they often arise as the only way to articulate an abstract idea. This may be done deliberately, or unconsciously.

It may be that when we are trying to express clearly to ourselves or to others a conception which we have never perfectly understood, a new metaphor simply starts forth, under the pressure of composition or argument. When this happens, the result is often surprising and illuminating to us as to our audience.... And when it does happen, it is plain that our new understanding is bound up with the metaphor.¹

Metaphors are necessary and cannot be ignored. If understanding is indeed bound up with the metaphor itself, there is limited freedom to think apart from metaphorical language. "It is abundantly clear that the freedom from a given metaphor which we admittedly enjoy in some cases is only a freedom to choose between that metaphor and others."² A speaker or writer ignores the metaphorical elements of language to his peril, so that,

...when a man claims to think independently of the buried metaphor in one of his words, his claim may sometimes be allowed. But it is allowed only in so far as he could really supply the place of the buried metaphor with new and independent apprehension of his own.... this new apprehension will usually turn out to be itself metaphorical; or else, what is very much worse, instead of new apprehension we shall have simply words — each word emphasising one more ignored metaphor.³

Lewis applies this necessity of metaphor in his theology. In his apologetic works, he deals with the topic of anthropomorphic language. While anthropomorphic expressions have their limitations, metaphors remain indispensable tools for meaningful discourse about God. In "Horrid Red Things," he considers the possibility of replacing anthropomorphic language in the Creed with philosophic language.

To say that God "enters" the natural order involves just as much spatial imagery as to say that He "comes down" [from heaven]; one has simply substituted horizontal (or undefined) for vertical movement. To say that He is "re-absorbed" into the Noumenal is better than to say He "ascended" into Heaven, only if the picture of something dissolving in a warm fluid or being sucked into a throat is less misleading than the picture of a bird, or balloon, going up. All language, except about objects of sense, is metaphorical through and through. To call God a "Force" (that is, something like a wind or a dynamo) is as metaphorical as to call Him a Father. On such matters we can make our language more polysyllabic and duller: we cannot make it more literal."⁴

Similarly, in "Is Theology Poetry?" he notes that Christianity cannot restate its beliefs apart from metaphor and symbol. "The reason we don't is that we can't.... We can make our language duller; we cannot make it less metaphorical. We can make the picture more prosaic; we cannot be less pictorial."⁵

^{*}The Allegory of Love was dedicated to Barfield, whom Lewis called, "the wisest and best of my unofficial teachers."

The most direct exposition of these linguistic issues, however, is in "The Language of Religion," where Lewis notes that, "there is no specifically religious language." There are only three types of language which theology might use: ordinary language, scientific language, or poetic language. Ordinary language might proclaim a day cold, scientific language might give the specific temperature, but poetic language may describe the cold in such a fashion that one might vividly understand how cold it feels.⁶

This is the most remarkable of the powers of Poetic language: to convey to us the quality of experiences which we have not had, or perhaps can never have, to use factors within our experience so that they become pointers to something outside our experience — as two or more roads on a map show us where a town that is off the map must lie.⁷

Having outlined the essential differences between these three types of language, Lewis is ready to make his key point.

Now as I see it, the language in which we express our religious beliefs and other religious experiences is not a special language, but something that ranges between the Ordinary and the Poetical. But even when it begins by being Ordinary, it can usually, under dialectical pressure, be found to become either Theological or Poetical... [e.g.] I think the words, "I believe in God" are ordinary language. If you press us by asking what we mean, we shall probably have to move in one of two directions. We might say "I believe in incorporeal entity, personal in the sense that it can be the subject and object of love, on which all other entities are unilaterally dependent." That is what I call Theological language, though far from a first-class specimen of it. In it we are attempting, so far as possible, to state religious matter in a form more like that we use for scientific matters. This is often necessary for purposes of instruction, clarification, controversy and the like. But it is not the language religion naturally speaks. We are applying precise, and therefore abstract, terms to what for us is the supreme example of the concrete. If we do not always feel this fully, that, I think, is because nearly all who say or read such sentences (including unbelievers) really put into them much that they know from other sources — tradition, literature, etc. But for that, it would hardly be more information than "There are 15 degrees of frost" would be to those who had never experienced frost.⁸

One cannot escape the use of metaphor. Ordinary and scientific language has its place, but each is insufficient to truly communicate the richness of theology. Poetic language is crucial. Lewis embraces this idea throughout his writings, but does so deliberately in his fictional works. His theology is expressed through metaphor and other poetic language.*

Allegory

To say that Lewis deliberately uses metaphor, however, does not define the genre of his fiction. Does he use poetic language to such an extent that his works become allegorical? The

*This concept is similarly addressed in Lewis's essay, "Is Theology Poetry?" where he asks if theology is *only* poetry. "Does Christian Theology owe its attraction to its power of arousing and satisfying our imaginations? Are those who believe it mistaking aesthetic enjoyment for intellectual assent or assenting because they enjoy?" Lewis answers, "...if Theology is Poetry, it is not very good poetry." If aesthetic enjoyment is the chief criterion, other mythologies would be more satisfying than Christianity. "If Christianity is only a mythology, then I find the mythology I believe in is not the one I like best." (in *The Weight of Glory*, pp. 75, 76). Christianity uses poetic

answer to this is dependent on the definition of allegory. If by allegory one means that a narrative has secondary or parallel meanings, then much, if not all of Lewis's fiction is clearly allegorical. However, this is neither precise, nor the definition which Lewis used. He describes his definition in this letter:

By an allegory I mean a composition (whether pictorial or literary) in which immaterial realities are represented by feigned physical objects, e.g. a pictured Cupid allegorically represents erotic love (which in reality is an experience, not an object occupying a given area of space) or, in Bunyan, a giant represents Despair.⁹

And again, in his master-work, The Allegory of Love, he writes,

...you can start with immaterial fact, such as the passions which you actually experience, and can then invent *visibilia* to express them. If you are hesitating between an angry retort and a soft answer, you can express your state of mind by inventing a person called *Ira* with a torch and letting her contend with another invented person called *Patientia*. This is allegory....¹⁰

Allegory, according to Lewis, is not merely a story with an additional meaning, nor even a story with a fixed second meaning. Rather, a work is allegorical when it presents characters or events specifically to express immaterial ideas, emotions, or identities. Lewis's prime example of allegory is John Bunyan's The Pilgrim's Progress. In this classic allegory, the protagonist, "Christian," encounters a variety of obstacles on a journey. In one instance cited by Lewis, he is held captive by "Giant Despair." Lewis maintains that this is allegorical, since despair is an immaterial emotion personified by Bunyan. Once personified, Giant Despair imprisons Christian, even as despair can cause a person to feel imprisoned.¹¹

If one accepts Lewis's focused definition of allegory, it becomes apparent that none of the books considered in this section are truly allegorical. While all may have deeper meanings, these meanings are not visible presentations of invisible things. Indeed, by this definition, Lewis has written only one allegory, The Pilgrim's Regress, which is identified as an allegory in the extended title.*

Symbolic & Sacramental Writing

If Lewis's fiction is not allegorical, the question of genre returns. How should these books be described? One of Lewis's suggestions is symbolic or sacramental.[†] In The Allegory of Love, Lewis narrowly defines allegory, and then continues, by delineating another possibility.

But there is another way of using the equivalence, which is almost the opposite of allegory, and which I would call sacramentalism or symbolism. If our passions, being immaterial, can be copied by material inventions, then it is possible that our material world in its turn is a copy of an invisible world. As the god Amor and his

language, but it is not *merely* poetry. Through poetic language it communicates more effectively, but the poetic language is expressive of the *logos*, the content which makes the *poiema* reality. *This book, being autobiographical in nature, is considered along with Lewis's "personal" works. †Lewis consistently links the concepts of symbolic and sacramental writing together. In making these concepts virtually synonymous, he writes with a reduced precision that is not readily evident to those who would have a more explicit definition of the sacramental. However, as his definition of these terms is derivative from his platonic idealism, it is resonant with a platonic/augustinian view of the Sacraments. As Lewis uses the terms interchangeably, no attempt will be made to further distinguish them.

figurative garden are to the actual passions of men, so perhaps we ourselves and our "real" world are to something else. The attempt to read that something else through its sensible imitations, to see that archetype in the copy, is what I mean by symbolism or sacramentalism.... The difference between the two can hardly be exaggerated. The allegorist leaves the given — his own passions — to talk about that which is confessedly less real. The symbolist leaves the given to find that which is more real. To put the difference in another way, for the symbolist it is we who are the allegory. We are the "frigid personifications." 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.¹²

Lewis notes that this understanding is found in Greek thought, and makes its first appearance in the dialogues of Plato. The attempt is not to explain inner emotions, but to explicate the *res*, the original patterns and forms, by way of the *res signata*, the copies seen in this world. This is classic Platonism, and fits solidly in Lewis's idealistic world view. Both the allegorist and the symbolist look outside of the phenomenal world, but in opposite directions. The allegorist looks inward and becomes subjective, while the symbolist looks for objectivity in the world of forms. So Lewis in his fiction, claims that he is not attempting to reflect his own thought and emotion, but rather seeks to reveal archetypal truths.

Supposal

Lewis expresses similar thoughts when he describes his writings as "supposals." By doing this, he frees himself from the necessity to follow any other story precisely, including the Gospels, but retains the freedom to use elements as he desires. So, for example, when asked if the Narnian stories were allegorical, Lewis responded,

If Aslan represented the immaterial deity, he would be an allegorical figure. In reality however, he is an invention giving an imaginary answer to the question, "What might Christ have become like if there really were a world like Narnia and He chose to be incarnate and die and rise again in *that* world as He actually has done in ours?" This is not allegory at all. So in Perelandra. This also works out a *supposition*. ("Suppose, even now, in some other planet there were a first couple undergoing the same that Adam and Eve underwent there, but successfully.")

Allegory and such supposals differ because they mix the real and the unreal in different ways. Bunyan's picture of Giant Despair does not start from supposal at all. It is not a supposition but a *fact* that despair can capture and imprison a human soul. What is unreal (fictional) is the giant, the castle and the dungeon. The Incarnation of Christ in another world is mere supposal: but *granted* the supposition, He would really have been a physical object in that world as He was in Palestine, and His death on the Stone Table would have been a physical event no less than his death on Calvary.¹³

So again Lewis writes regarding The Great Divorce,

I beg readers to remember that this is fantasy. It has of course — or I intended it to have — a moral. But the transmortal conditions are solely an imaginative supposal: they are not even a guess or a speculation at what may actually await us. The last thing I wish is to arouse factual curiosity about the details of the after-world.¹⁴

The fact that it has an intended moral does not make the work allegorical. Rather, calling his writing "supposals" allows Lewis to use elements from the Biblical narratives creatively, as well as from other sources, without worrying about changing facts or speculating on details not given in the

Bible. These are not properly stories about Christ, God, Heaven, or any other specific topic, but they do reflect such Christian themes.

Myth

The final way that Lewis would describe his own, and other fictional works, is mythical. Lewis defines myth in An Experiment in Criticism, as a story that (1) is extra-literary, not restricted to the written story, but with expressions outside of the current work; (2) does not need to rely on suspense or surprise. Indeed, the plot of a myth will seem to be inevitable. A work may be entirely unoriginal, and yet be a superb myth; (3) contains little appeal to human sympathy; (4) is always "fantastic," that is, it deals with the impossible, the preternatural; (5) may be either sad or joyful, but is always grave, never comic; (6) renders an experience which is grave, awe inspiring, and numinous.¹⁵

The lack of originality in myth is reflected in Lewis's fiction. Much of his fiction is heavily reliant on other authors. His presentation is new, but the basic story line is familiar. Lewis considered this a virtue. So he would write in introduction of the work of George MacDonald:

...Myth does not essentially exist in *words* at all.... What really delights and nourishes me is a particular pattern of events which would equally delight and nourish if it had reached me by some medium which involved no words at all....¹⁶

The challenge of such a definition of myth, and consequently of Lewis's application of it in his fiction, is that the mythical character is dependent more upon the response of the reader than on the text itself, so that Lewis could write, "...it is plain that for me the same story may be a myth to one man and not to another."¹⁷ One reader may find a deeper meaning in the book, while another may see nothing but the literal meaning, but both have read appropriately. Lewis would neither stifle the reader who found depth in the book, nor demand that all readers discover that depth. It is this flexibility which shows the difference between allegory and other forms of poetic language. A reader who does not understand the allegorical meaning does not understand the book. But if a work is symbolical or mythical, they will be rewarded with the story itself, regardless of whether they find other meanings.

Lewis emphatically denied that his works were allegorical, and yet by means of imaginative, poetic language, he has constructed creative narratives that are filled with meaning beyond their face value. These second meanings are not to be forced on the reader, but the reader who sees them will find great depth in Lewis's writings.

The presence of these often obvious second meanings has naturally led to a comparison of these works with his more candidly theological works. In The Problem of Pain, Mere Christianity, and Miracles, Lewis writes with an explicitly theological or apologetic intent. Some readers find the direct exposition of these books to be particularly helpful, noting their clarity. Others are not so appreciative. Fred Graham, for example, records a dissatisfaction with these works saying, "Lewis's nonfiction is not helpful... the imaginative work can still help modern man in his search for meaning."¹⁸ Walsh takes a more moderate tone. "C. S. Lewis is a good expository writer but a better myth-maker. In his myths he has complete freedom to be not only a theologian and

philosopher but also a prose poet and a creator of a new universe.”¹⁹ When one examines the apologetic or theological writings of Lewis, he sees the work of an amateur. His fictional works allow the reader to see Lewis in his area of professional expertise. Those fictional writings will now be considered in chronological order.

The Space Trilogy

Science Fiction fascinated Lewis, who was intrigued by authors such as David Lindsay, H. G. Wells, and Jules Verne. Imitating these and other writers, he crafted The Space Trilogy, though it is not so much a trilogy as three facets of a single myth.* The interpretation and significance of the Trilogy has puzzled scholars since its publication. Some question its coherence, noting vast differences between the three. Carnell considers Out of the Silent Planet to be the most coherent of the series, Perelandra less so, being a prose poem, and That Hideous Strength being the most disjointed and confused, taking place on earth.¹ Walsh regards Out of the Silent Planet as having a naive appeal, “rather like a Walt Disney animated cartoon with philosophic overtones.”¹ In contrast to this, “Perelandra is perhaps the most perfect.... It is the story of ‘Paradise Retained.’”² Green likewise prefers Perelandra, saying that it is “incomparably more important” than Out of the Silent Planet.³ In contrast to these, Marjorie Nicolson states that the first book “is to me the most beautiful of all cosmic voyages and in some ways the most moving.”⁴ Sayer notes a possible reason for the preference of Perelandra by most readers. “One’s appreciation of Perelandra depends upon how much of Christian mythology the reader accepts.”⁵ According to Hooper and Green, Lewis himself preferred Perelandra to all his other fiction.^{6†} There is general consensus over one point — That Hideous Strength is frequently attacked on various grounds, as to its propriety and accuracy, for it takes place on earth, and its events seem unrealistic. Packer, for example, dislikes all of Lewis’s fiction, but particularly this book of which he says, “That Hideous Strength, despite its fine title,[‡] is hideously bad.”⁷

The root of such criticism is Lewis’s unique blend of early science fiction, fantasy, and Christian myth. Few authors at that time had worked with such a blend. Moreover, it is science fiction from an era when the nature and knowledge of science was different than today, and Lewis was no scientist. The contemporary reader cannot fail to be amused at the conception of the space craft, for example, or of the images of life on Mars and Venus. Yet there is an enduring charm and significance to these books, in part due to their nature as myth. These events did not take place. That should have been obvious from the outset, despite a half-hearted claim to truth at the end of the

*After his death, an unfinished manuscript was discovered and published which appears to be an extension of the trilogy. The Dark Tower, as this manuscript is titled, will be considered separately.

¹Lewis would have been particularly displeased with this comparison, as he did not appreciate the work of Disney.

²It should be noted, however, that in his recent book, C. S. Lewis: Companion and Guide, Hooper quotes several letters of Lewis which show that Till We Have Faces was his favourite book despite its poor reception. Consider, for example, a letter to Anne Scott of 26 August 1960, “for that book, which I consider far and away the best I have written, has been my one big failure both with the critics and the public.” In C. S. Lewis: Companion and Guide, p. 243.

³Packer’s criticism is even more biting, when it is realised that this book’s title was not original to Lewis, but was taken from Sir David Lyndsay’s Ane Dialog, a fact noted by Lewis on the title page. Care should be taken to distinguish Sir David Lyndsay, the source of this title, and David Lindsay, author of Voyage to Arcturus. Both influenced the Space Trilogy, but in different ways.

first book.* The reader today can, if anything, read them more as fantasy, and less as science fiction. Gibson writes on their current role,

If [Out of the Silent Planet] were written today, no doubt it would be ridiculed as the product of scientific ignorance. But we make historical allowance for a work which was consistent with the knowledge of its time.⁸

The reader of the Space Trilogy, then, reads the books in a slightly different manner than the original reader, much as a modern reader might yet read Orwell's 1984 or the writings of Jules Verne or H. G. Wells.

Determining the Christology of the Space Trilogy proves challenging, as Lewis constructs an intricate narrative. He uses deep mythological elements, writing simultaneously on multiple levels. The same essential content is often expressed in parallel with other accounts. This is further complicated by the mythical, non-allegorical writing. One might say with some objectivity that Maleldil is God. One could not make such an objective statement about Elwin Ransom. Yet this does not reduce the literary function of Ransom as a Christ figure. There are times when the Christian implications of the trilogy are quite obvious. So Urang laments, "Lewis takes too many measures, however, to see that the reader cannot fail to entertain this possibility."⁹ Lewis did construct multiple meanings, and would have been delighted if the reader saw them. Even so, he would have been satisfied if the reader merely enjoyed the narrative.

Maleldil: Primary Christology

An examination of the Christology of the Space Trilogy, must start at the primal level — direct references to the godhead in their most apparent form. Here references are found in two forms: passages which speak of Maleldil, or Maleldil the Young, and a few passages which openly make a connection between Maleldil and Jesus Christ. The person and work of Maleldil will be considered first.

The Meaning of "Maleldil"

In crafting his science fiction, Lewis utilised his philological talents. This has an impact on his presentation of the divine. The reader may note the etymological significance of the divine name, Maleldil, as it appears in *Hlab-Eribol-ef-Cordi*, the "Old Solar" language. Consider the following words:

Handra — earth, the element

Malacandra — the planet Mars, the planet as a whole

Eldil — "angel," intelligence

Maleldil — God

Prefixes and suffixes expand root words. Hence the word *handra*, the element earth or dirt can be modified. Altered to *Harandra*, it means the high earth, that is, mountains. Prefixed with *Thulc*, it means silent planet, or the earth. Prefixed with *Mal* and a connecting vowel, it is the name of the

*It is interesting to note that several readers sent letters to Lewis, asking whether the events of Out of the Silent Planet really occurred.

planet Mars, *Malacandra*. This prefix may be derived from the Greek adverb *mala* meaning “very” or “exceedingly.” Thus *Malacandra* might be rendered, “the greater land, the whole of the earth.” Since *Malacandra* was the first planet to bear *hnau*, or sentient life, its name holds the additional, more generic meaning of planet. Thus *Malacandra* is the planet, something greater than the elements of which it is composed, and greater than the individual land forms which comprise it. Expanding the language further, an *eldil* is a non-corporeal life form, similar, but not equivalent to Christian angels. The greatest of the *eldila* (plural) which are encountered are the *Oyeresu* (singular, *Oyarsa*). But greater than these and all other beings is *Maleldil*, one who is *Mal-eldil*, greater than the *eldila*, the greatest spiritual being.

Green and Hooper provide a somewhat different philological interpretation, yet acknowledge that they are guessing. They state that some had assumed that the prefix of *Malacandra* was derived from the Latin, *mal*, meaning “bad.” Instead, they suggest that it is derived from the Hebrew, *Malac*, or “messenger.”¹⁰ This however makes *Malacandra* the messenger of the ground, and *Maleldil* the messenger of the *eldila*. A more likely Hebraic influence would be *Melek*, or “king.” Both explanations, however, are unlikely, as Lewis did not read Hebrew. To avoid any negative connotations of the prefix *mal*, one merely needs to remember that Lewis would not have created a new language, while importing a Latin or Hebrew prefix. *Old Solar* is a unique creation, its interpretation must be centred in these books.

The Person and Work of Maleldil

Creation

Linguistic interpretation is significant when interpreting the work of a competent philologist like C. S. Lewis. Yet philology cannot eclipse the meaning with which the terms are filled by their use in the narrative. Philology may provide an understanding of what Lewis was attempting, but it is the contextual reading of his work that must be definitive. Who is *Maleldil*, and what does he do? First of all, *Maleldil* is the creator. Ransom, in exploring *Malacandrian* understanding hears about *Oyarsa*, the ruler of *Malacandra*. He questions if *Oyarsa* had made the world. “The hrossa almost barked in fervour of their denial. Did people in *Thulcandra* not know that *Maleldil* the Young had made and still ruled the world? Even a child knew that.”¹¹

The question of the relationship of *Maleldil* the Young to the Triune Godhead will be reserved until later. For the moment, it is evident that even children know the Creator. Also significant is that while *Maleldil* made *Malacandra*, on the planet *Perelandra* (*Venus*), the specifics of creation are carried out on the planetary level by the *Oyarsa* of *Perelandra* on behalf of *Maleldil*. Moreover, he created the beings which occupy it, from the *Oyarsa* and *elidila* (the “sky-born”) to the *hnau*, (rational, corporeal beings). “... is not *Maleldil* the maker of them all?...”¹² These are distinct from each other, and may indeed be different species, but each is *hnau*. This diversity is a gift of *Maleldil* who is clearly engaged in a divine role in the act of creation.

Another view of the creative God with reference to earth is seen as Ransom describes Christianity in That Hideous Strength. Jane notes that the Director (Ransom) and those around him,

...never talked about religion.... They talked about God. They had no picture in their minds of some mist streaming upward: rather of strong skilful hands thrust down to make, and mend, perhaps even to destroy.¹³

These thoughts occur as they are speaking of Maleldil. The ability to switch back and forth between Maleldil and God is further evidence of His identity. This image of the divine/human relationship removes any thoughts of synergism. It is not the sacrifices that mankind brings before God which are of prime importance. The downward thrust hands receive the main focus.

In creation, hnau, including humans, are made in the image of God. Both Ransom and the Oyarsa are "copies of Maleldil." Ransom has a corporeal body, unlike the Oyarsa, but both are in the *imago Dei*. So also, the King and Queen of Perelandra are said to be "images of Maleldil." But on Perelandra, which was completed long after the Fall took place on earth, the hnau could only be humanoid, as that had become the form of Maleldil.¹⁴

Providence

The action of Maleldil does not cease with creation, He continues to be proactive through providence. This providence is seen among the hrossa on Malacandra, who have few young, despite the pleasure of begetting them. When Ransom questions why they do not have more children, their simple response astounds him. "Undoubtedly, Maleldil made us so." Maleldil also guides creation mediately through the Oyeresu. When the great war of heaven took place, the Oyarsa of Thulcandra was defeated and driven back to his own planet. There, according to the Oyarsa of Malacandra, the Oyeresu and eldila, "bound him in the air of his own world as Maleldil taught us." Because the "bent" Oyarsa of Thulcandra had damaged Malacandra, Maleldil had also taught Malacandra's Oyarsa to open the handramit, the warm canyons so that the hnau of Malacandra would be able to survive.¹⁵ Maleldil's influence extends to earth as well. Ransom, in leaving Malacandra, was charged to keep watch over the evil men Weston and Devine. He was told that some eldila would help him, and that Maleldil would show him what to do, for "you are here by the wisdom of Maleldil."¹⁶ Ransom was kidnapped to be brought to Mars, yet even this was within the plan of Maleldil who caused it to happen for his own good purposes.

Maleldil, furthermore, is seen acting in a divine capacity at the hour of death. A hross tells Ransom that the best drink of all is "Death itself in the day I drink it and go to Maleldil." The hrossa have certainty of their eternal life in Maleldil. Ransom continues this thought when he explains death to the Lady of Perelandra. At death, "Maleldil takes the soul out of them and puts it somewhere else — in Deep Heaven, we hope." While scarcely a comprehensive exposition of death, this shows a simple reliance on the divine Maleldil for deliverance.¹⁷

Redemption

Most of all, the nature of Maleldil is revealed as he carries out the act of redemption. Such a redeeming act is unnecessary on Malacandra or Perelandra where no fall took place, though it would have occurred if necessary. Rather, the great act of divine redemption took place only once, on earth. This is the redemption which figures so prominently into the Space Trilogy.

What is the most surprising thing about the atonement in this myth is that its specific details are not known outside of Thulcandra. The Oyarsa of Malacandra knows that something may have taken place, but seeks knowledge of the actual events from Ransom. He did not know anything that has happened on Thulcandra since the Bent Oyarsa (Satan) was imprisoned there. He says,

We think that Maleldil would not give [Thulcandra] up utterly to the Bent One, and there are stories among us that He has taken strange council and dared terrible things, wrestling with the Bent One in Thulcandra.¹⁸

Yet he does not know the details of this wrestling. Therefore he continues, "...I wish to hear of... Maleldil's strange wars then with the Bent One...." Eventually, Ransom spends an entire afternoon talking to the Oyarsa. The words of this conversation are not recorded, but the Oyarsa concludes it saying, "You have shown me more wonders than are known in the whole of heaven." From this point on, the Oyeresu and eldila know exactly what took place. They have learned of the passion of Christ.¹⁹

More of the atonement is revealed as Ransom battles with the demonic forces on Perelandra. The tempter tries to convince a woman to sin, by rephrasing the ancient speculation, *Felix culpa Adae* — the sin of Adam was fortunate, for due to that sin, Maleldil became man, and through this Incarnation came the greatest good. Ransom responds,

Of course good came of it. Is Maleldil a beast that we can stop His path, or a leaf that we can twist His shape? Whatever you do, He will make good of it. But not the good He had prepared for you if you had obeyed Him.... He turned to the body of Weston... Do you rejoice that Maleldil became a man?²⁰

Maleldil redeemed sinners by becoming man. This fact is abhorrent to the demons. In Perelandra two redemptive themes are interwoven. Ransom sees that he was brought to Perelandra to prevent another fall into sin. As he is trying to understand his own role, the Divine Voice speaks to him,

"My name also is Ransom," said the Voice. It was some time before the purport of this saying dawned upon him. He whom the other worlds call Maleldil, was the world's ransom.... So that was the real issue. If he now failed, this world also would hereafter be redeemed. If he were not the ransom, Another would be.... Not a second crucifixion: perhaps — who knows — not even a second Incarnation... some act of even more appalling love, some glory of yet deeper humility.²¹

It is interesting to note that the inspiring voice is attributed to Maleldil, not the Spirit. Maleldil is Christ, who would be the ransom if Elwin Ransom fails. If necessary, a Divine redemption would take place, yet this is unnecessary if a fall does not occur.

One more reflection of the atonement is found at the end of *Perelandra*. The king of Perelandra washes Ransom's injured foot saying, "So this is hru.' [blood] he said at last. 'I have never seen such a fluid before. And this is the substance wherewith Maleldil remade the worlds before any world was made.'"*²² With His blood Maleldil remade the worlds. By this act of singular importance, all was transformed forever.

Maleldil and the Trinity

To understand the identity of Maleldil, his relationship to the Trinity must be considered. Scattered throughout the Space Trilogy are simple statements such as, "There was one God, according to [the Hrossa], Maleldil the Young." Ransom seeks more information:

"Where did Maleldil live," Ransom asked. "With the Old One." "And who was the Old One?" Ransom did not understand the answer. He tried again. "Where was the Old One?" "He is not that sort," said Hnohra, "that he has to live anywhere."²³

The hrossa alone refer to "The Old One." The King of Perelandra provides more information. While the Queen was being tempted, the King was learning. "For many hours I learned new things about Maleldil and about His Father and the Third One." Here is the complete Trinity, yet it is an inadequate presentation. There appears to be no point of contact with the Father or the Old One, and little revelation of person or work. His mind contains the number of the elect and the time for the end of the world, for time will go on, "...until the number is made up which Maleldil read in His Father's mind before times flowed." But this is an action within the ontological Trinity. Little is said about the relationship of the economic Trinity. All other references to the Trinity within the Space Trilogy are phrased in terms of the Christian Godhead. Thus, for example, when Ransom confronts Merlinus Ambrosius at St. Anne's, he commands, "*Sta in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti, dic mihi [sic]† qui sis et quam ob causam veneris.*" In the caves of Perelandra, Ransom crushes the head of the Un-man with the Invocation as well. Also on Perelandra, Ransom makes it clear that the Holy Ghost is not the same sort of Spirit as Weston claims to serve and be.²⁴

While it is difficult to assess Lewis's understanding of the Trinity here, it would appear that he affirms the doctrine, but stumbles upon the mystery of it all. Within his fiction, Trinitarian statements are focused almost entirely on the Second Person. The Second Person of the Trinity creates, redeems, restores, and is the mediator to the rest of the Godhead. Precisely what the roles of the Father and the Spirit toward mankind are is difficult to ascertain. If the other two persons are directly active, they are perceived in the context of Lewis's fiction, as the Second Person of the Trinity. This is especially true regarding the Spirit. One may summarise Lewis's presentation here, "if one knows Christ, he also knows the Father and the Spirit."

Though the identity of Maleldil seems obvious, it appears to be a point of confusion to a number of authors. Walsh states correctly, "'Maleldil' is none other than the Second Person of the Trinity."²⁵ Kilby broadens this, "Maleldil represents the Trinity,"²⁶ though he modifies this in

*cf. Revelation 13:8b "...the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world."

†The sentence should read, "...dic *mihi* qui..." as *mihi* is the dative of *ego*.

another work, saying that both Maleldil and Maleldil the young are Christ.²⁷ Kilby further compounds his error when he identifies Maleldil with the Father, and both with Glund Oyarsa, King of Kings (the Oyarsa of Jupiter).²⁸ Glund may be confused with Maleldil, but they are not equal and certainly not the same being. Indeed, Lewis notes that there are many created beings above Glund which are beyond human comprehension. Houston notes that Maleldil's Father is God, and as such, "wholly other."²⁹ Griffin states that Maleldil is God the Father, and Maleldil the Young is God the Son,³⁰ apparently ignoring those passages which seem to recognise no differentiation between the two. Gibson states,

Clearly Maleldil is Christ, the second person of the Trinity, by whom, as the writer to the letter to the Hebrews says, the worlds were made and who upholds all things by the word of his power.³¹

Gibson is quite correct in his identification of Maleldil as Christ. Lewis lacks precision in his descriptions of Maleldil, but his intent is clearly to portray the Second Person of the Trinity, and through Him, to reveal the entire Godhead.

Attributes of Maleldil

A good deal more may be known about Maleldil through his essential attributes. Many are explicitly noted in the account of Ransom's time among the hrossa. At first, Ransom had considered his spiritual responsibility to evangelise the hnau that he met on Malacandra. He abandoned this idea when they began to teach him. He realised that he was being treated as a "savage," and being given, "...a sort of hrossian equivalent to the shorter catechism." As his education progressed, "It became plain that Maleldil was a spirit without body, parts or passions. 'He is not hnau' said the hrossa..."³² Yet this spiritual nature does not argue against Incarnation. Maleldil has taken human flesh, and thereby transformed the universe and the form of sentient life forever. The hrossa do not deny the Incarnation, though they are unaware of it.

Furthermore, Maleldil is omniscient, seeing all in a manner unique to Himself, "Only Maleldil sees any creature as it really is."³³ Likewise Maleldil is omnipresent. The great litany at the end of Perelandra, says, "Where Maleldil is, there is the centre. He is in every place. Not some of Him in one place and some in another, but in each place the whole Maleldil, even in the smallness beyond thought."³⁴ Lewis does not limit the presence or wholeness of God in any way. On the contrary, in the most finite places is found the whole Maleldil. This litany, furthermore shows that Maleldil worthily receives worship from his creatures. This fact is seen again when the Oyeresu descend upon St. Anne's in That Hideous Strength, and the two mortals present, Ransom and Merlin, are momentarily caught up in worship with the Oyeresu.

Maleldil is the Object of Faith

Finally, Maleldil is the object of faith. He is believed in and trusted for salvation. All the hnau on Malacandra and Perelandra believe, as these are unfallen worlds. Ransom believes in God, but does not know, at first, that Maleldil is the true God. In Lewis's mythology, it is only on earth that there is any question of belief. In That Hideous Strength, Ransom will not let MacPhee, a

sceptic who resides with him at St. Anne's, go out to find Merlin. His reasons are twofold. First, MacPhee does not speak Old Solar, but secondly, "...you have never put yourself under the protection of Maleldil." Immediately after this, a man sent to find Merlin is enjoined to trust his faith. If Merlin does not come, Ransom says, "...why then, Dimble, you must rely on your Christianity.... Say your prayers and keep your will fixed in the will of Maleldil.... You can't lose your soul, whatever happens; at least, not by any action of his."³⁵ Dimble is commended to his faith.

There is, however, one unusual strange twist to the idea of saving faith in this book. Faith may be borne mediately, if only for a limited time. This is illustrated by Jane Studdock who, when younger, had rejected Christianity. Ransom asks her,

"Do you place yourself in the obedience," said the Director, "in obedience to Maleldil?" "Sir," said Jane, "I know nothing of Maleldil. But I place myself in obedience to you." "It is enough for the present... He will have you for no one but Himself in the end. But for tonight, it is enough."³⁶

Lewis identifies this as saving faith, yet it is not a lasting solution. Eventually she will need to believe for herself. This faith is such that Lewis says that the whole house — even the sceptical MacPhee, believed through the Director.³⁷ Such faith can be saving faith, but not indefinitely. The person will eventually need a proper faith.

Explicit Identification of Maleldil with God

Imbedded within the Space Trilogy are a number of references which directly identify Maleldil. In Perelandra, for example, the narrator is walking toward Ransom's house. He is tempted to turn back, but keeps going when he thinks of Maleldil, noting, "I knew what Ransom supposed Maleldil to be."³⁸ He knew that Ransom identified Maleldil with God. Secondly, when Ransom is telling the Lady on Perelandra about death, he tells her that death is not pleasant. "Maleldil Himself wept when He saw it."³⁹ This is a clear reference to Christ at the tomb of Lazarus.*

There are also those occasions where Christian terminology is used, such as the uses of the Invocation which have been mentioned already. When messengers are sent to find Merlin, the servants of Maleldil are to say that they have come "...in the name of God and all angels and in the power of the planets..."⁴⁰ Finally, when the time comes for Ransom to leave the earth, he bids farewell to his friends, "Go, my dear friends, Urendi Maleldil."⁴¹ Though this phrase is untranslated, it is clearly a benediction. The name of Maleldil is used in blessing as is the Name of God.

The Incarnation

There is one further aspect of Maleldil which must be discussed, that is, the Incarnation and its significance for the universe. Aside from its necessity in the Atonement, the Incarnation affects the nature of hnau for all times. So, for example, when Ransom talks with the Lady of Perelandra, he is confused at her humanoid appearance.

*cf. John 11:11-45.

"You are shaped like the women of my own kind. I had not expected that. I have been in one other world beside my own. But the creatures there are not at all like you and me".... "But that other world was older than yours," she said. "How do you know that?" asked Ransom in amazement. "Maleldil is telling me.... there are no more of that kind to come. It is only in the ancient worlds they linger yet." "Why?".... "You must know that better than I," she said. "For was it not in your own world that all this happened?... in your world Maleldil first took Himself this form, the form of your race and mine".... "why do you say that such creatures linger only in the ancient worlds?" "Are you so young?" she answered. "How could they come again? Since our Beloved became a man, how should Reason in any world take on another form?"⁴²

This is the radical nature of the Incarnation. Intelligent life can henceforth be seen in no other form. The Incarnation has transformed reality. "What had happened on Earth, when Maleldil was born a man at Bethlehem, had altered the universe for ever."⁴³

There is an immensely practical and comforting side to this as well. Particularly in That Hideous Strength, though also in the other books, humans are afraid of eldila. Ivy Maggs, for example, says that she is afraid of the eldila,

"But I don't feel like that about God. But He ought to be worse, if see [sic] what I mean." "He was once," said the Director. "You are quite right about the Powers. Angels in general are not good company for men in general.... But as for Maleldil Himself, all that has changed by what happened at Bethlehem."⁴⁴

The radical and all-embracing nature of the Incarnation is clearly stated within the Space Trilogy. The Incarnation of Christ was not a random, haphazard event which took place but could have been avoided. It was an event of pivotal importance which changed the universe for all eternity. Reason can no longer be seen in another form, and now God is revealed, immanent, and accessible through Jesus Christ.

Thus Lewis attempts to express an orthodox Christology and doctrine of God, though falling short at times. The presentation of the Trinity is imprecise and undeveloped, though if one is to err, it is far better to err, as Lewis did, in the direction of Christology. Christ is presented to the reader in a fresh and dynamic way. That is the Christology of the primal level, but it is not the only presentation in the Space Trilogy. A second level of Christology is seen in Elwin Ransom.

Elwin Ransom: Second Level Christology

Elwin Ransom develops dramatically throughout the Space Trilogy. Because of this transformation, he will be examined according to the order of the narrative. Ransom, as he is on a walking tour of England, can hardly be expected to be the same as the Ransom that has battled evil on three planets. Consequently, each book will be considered sequentially.

Out of the Silent Planet

In the first book of the trilogy, Out of the Silent Planet, Ransom is not a developed Christ figure. Part of the reason for this is the necessity to bring out details of the narrative, and thus the constraints of length begin to take over. The postscript of the book states that many details did not make it into this volume. Indeed, Lewis indicates that the book contains the minimum number of details necessary for understanding. Walsh states that the central plot of Out of the Silent Planet is

the re-education of Ransom in an unfallen world.⁴⁵ Lewis himself says that the first book is Ransom's *enfance*⁴⁶ What is seen helps prepare the reader to see Ransom's development in other books.

At the beginning of the tale Ransom is called only "The Pedestrian."⁴⁷ He was a philologist and a fellow of Leicester college, Cambridge. Ransom seems to bear a remarkable resemblance to Lewis himself in all of these aspects: walking tours, philology, and University life. Yet one should not consider Ransom an entirely autobiographical character, even if he shows similarities to the life of the author. Indeed, one might make a case for Ransom's resemblance to J. R. R. Tolkien or to Charles Williams. Ransom is a fictional character, produced to fulfil Lewis's literary objectives.

The fact that he was a philologist must have been an important detail to Lewis. Ransom was quickly able to learn Old Solar, surpassing the knowledge of his captors with ease. Although this is not a crucial detail at the moment, his very name serves to philologically foreshadow the continuing narrative. Throughout the first volume, Ransom enacts a heroic role. It is he who teaches the Oyarsa about the incarnation and atonement. It is he who volunteers to return to Earth with Weston and Devine, and to keep watch over them. But he holds little christological significance yet. In fact, the sole event of merit takes place in the first chapter where he serves as a substitute for the simpleton, Harry. Yet even here, Ransom is not a willing victim, but a captive prisoner.

Out of the Silent Planet says that "Ransom was a pious man." He decides to commit suicide rather than be a human sacrifice to the sorns, as his captors thought he would be. Nonetheless, he hoped that he would be forgiven this sin due to its circumstances. When he resists this temptation, he turns to his devotions to keep his sanity and considers mission work on this planet, though it turned out to be unnecessary. Most of all, Out of the Silent Planet serves to prepare the reader to see and understand the cosmological struggle which will be manifested on Perelandra and Thulcandra.⁴⁸

There is one other facet of the character Ransom which can be missed quite easily. A Birth/Rebirth motif fills the narrative, paralleling the nativity of Christ. As Ransom walks on his journey, the Inn is full, there is no room for him to stay the night, and he has to proceed on his way. The inside of the ship, a sphere, is evocative of a womb, and Ransom himself states that "space is the womb of worlds."⁴⁹ When Ransom leaves his interplanetary ship, he emerges upside-down, and head-first, an image suggestive of birth. Ransom has a definite nativity into this series.⁵⁰ This is followed by a time of education, maturation and growth among the hrossa of Malacandra.

Perelandra

If Out of the Silent Planet is a preparatory narrative, Perelandra is a myth come of age. It is a mythical fantasy, a retelling of the Genesis account, and an archetypal account of the struggle of all Christians against evil. In its retelling of creation, it takes off from Lewis's work on Milton's Paradise Lost. Both Perelandra and Lewis's Preface to Paradise Lost were written in the same time

period. It appears that at least part of Lewis's motivation in writing this myth was to correct some of the problems in Milton's work.* As one writer put it, "...those things which disappointed Lewis in Paradise Lost have been altered in Lewis's own Edenic myth, Perelandra; those elements which he most approved of in Milton he sought to emulate."⁵¹ One of the things added to this account is Ransom who clearly serves as a Christ figure — not as Christ Himself, but as a type of Christ. Walsh writes, "...it is hard to escape the feeling that Ransom, the redeemed man, is at least a 'little Christ' to the green folk of Perelandra."⁵² Each step of the narrative develops this theme further.

The Work of Ransom on Perelandra

Ransom is transported to Perelandra by the Oyarsa of Malacandra. He makes the journey in a white coffin-like compartment which protects him.[†] As this vessel plunges into the sea of Perelandra, it dissolves and Ransom begins swimming.⁵³ As in his arrival on Malacandra, the images here are suggestive of birth. Ransom struggles for freedom, passes through water, and emerges gasping for breath. One could see parallels to the watery rebirth of Baptism here as well. The crucial events have taken place. Through miraculous means, a man has been placed on this planet for its salvation.

Yet Ransom does not know why he is present. After his first night's sleep he awakes, and sees a fantastic tree with yellow fruit, silver leaves, and an indigo stem. Coiled around that was a dragon covered with red gold scales. "He recognized the garden of the Hesperides at once." Here Lewis demonstrates his recurring theme that earth's mythology may be reality on another planet. At the same time, he presents an archetypal pattern of Eden. This is further illustrated when Ransom meets the singular female inhabitant of Perelandra, a lady with green skin. When Ransom asks

*Lewis records some notable problems with Milton in his Preface to Paradise Lost. One is Milton's approach to unfallen sexuality. Before the fall, Eve demonstrates a sexual modesty which is inappropriate in a sinless existence (Preface, p. 123), while the lust exhibited by Adam and Eve after the fall differs little from their desire prior to the fall. (p. 128). Secondly, Lewis notes that the most effective character in Paradise Lost is Satan. "...Satan is the best drawn of Milton's characters. The reason is not hard to find. Of the major characters whom Milton attempted he is the easiest to draw.... In all but a few writers the 'good' characters are the least successful.... To make a character worse than oneself it is only necessary to release imaginatively from control some of the bad passions which, in real life, are always straining at the leash.... But if you try to draw a character better than yourself, all you can do is to take the best moments you have had and to imagine them prolonged and more consistently embodied in action. But the real high virtues which we do not possess at all, we cannot depict except in a purely external fashion. We do not really know what it feels like to be a man much better than ourselves. His whole inner landscape is one we have never seen, and when we guess it we blunder. It is in their 'good' characters that novelists make, unawares, the most shocking self-revelations." (p. 101). Finally, Lewis considers Milton's depiction of God the Father to be far too Olympian. (p. 130). Lewis tried to correct all of these in Perelandra. The Green Lady is unashamed of her nakedness, or that of Ransom. Far more time is spent developing the other characters than the un-man (who is, nonetheless, a compelling figure). The doxological chapters at the end of Perelandra provide an image of heavenly worship which is decidedly different from that of the Greek Pantheon.

[†]The coffin which transports Ransom is similar in description and function to the vehicle appearing in David Lindsay's Voyage to Arcturus. Lindsay's ship is described as "a torpedo of crystal." Lindsay's space ship is larger than Lewis's, and offers a pseudo-scientific explanation for its

about her parents, she replies, "I am the Mother.... He [her husband] is the Father." When Ransom fails to understand, she responds that she likewise does not understand everything, and then speaks the following words, reminiscent of the Magnificat,⁵⁴

...my spirit praises Maleldil who comes down from Deep Heaven into this lowness and will make me blessed by all the times that are rolling towards us. It is He who is strong and makes me strong and fills empty worlds with good creatures.⁵⁴

Clear parallels exist between Eve, Mary, and the Lady of Perelandra. It becomes more and more apparent as the time goes on that Ransom is present in this perfect world to prevent its fall. The nature of this temptation will be discussed later. For now, it is sufficient to know that Ransom sees that the woman is being tempted, and understands his role. The temptation comes in the person of Ransom's one-time captor, Weston, who has travelled to this planet in a space ship, transporting demons with him in his body.

After an extended verbal battle with Weston, the Un-man, Ransom realises that he is there as Maleldil's representative. Everything lies in Maleldil's hands, but, "If the issue lay in Maleldil's hands, Ransom and the Lady were those hands." Gradually it dawns on him that what was intended in his struggle here was not merely a spiritual, but a physical battle. Temptation had been resisted, and the Devil is not to be allowed to tempt forever. "...the temptation would be stopped by Ransom, or it would not be stopped at all."⁵⁵

Ransom prepared himself to fight, but doubted his ability to succeed. A Divine voice reassures him, telling him the significance of his name,

"It is not for nothing that you are named Ransom," said the Voice. And he knew that this was no fancy of his own... To connect the name Ransom with the act of ransoming would have been for him a mere pun.... "My name also is Ransom"⁵⁶

Under Divine guidance, Ransom resolves to fight the tempter, realising that he was God's representative.

...if he left it undone, Maleldil Himself would do some greater thing instead. In that sense, he stood for Maleldil: but no more than Eve would have stood for Him by simply not eating the apple, or than any man stands for Him in doing any good actions.⁵⁷

Lewis is intertwining parallel Christ figures. Ransom stands for Maleldil no more, and no less, than others who resist the Devil or do other good works. He applies his Christian faith when he fights for Maleldil. He does this without concern for himself, though he does realise the danger he has put himself in. On the morning of his battle, "He felt pretty certain that he would never again wield an un-marred body until a greater morning came for the whole universe..."⁵⁸

Ransom Fights and Conquers the Evil One

Nonetheless, he begins to fight. As the battle begins, the Un-man taunts him, saying that all who stand up for God eventually recant when they realise that God cannot help them. "Could He help Himself?... *Eloi, Eloi lama sabachthani.*"⁵⁹ Despite these taunts, Ransom joins the battle,

functioning, and yet it is easy to see Lewis's dependency on Lindsay. cf. David Lindsay, *A Voyage to Arcturus*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1963), 43-44.

fighting weaponless with his bare hands. Eventually, the Un-man drags him beneath the sea. They arise in a subterranean cave in utter darkness where Ransom kills the Un-man. Ransom begins to climb out of the cave, finding a stream along the way. The words that follow are evocative of Baptism, "He took the stream for guidance and proceeded to follow it up. In that featureless dark it was some sort of company."⁶⁰ Indeed, the stream eventually led Ransom to an exit. As he climbs, he discovers that the Un-man has been reanimated. Ransom smashes his head with a stone, accompanied with the Invocation.⁶¹ After that, he casts the body into a pit of fire to be destroyed for all time. Significant here is the parallel to the destruction of the Magic Ring in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*.[†]

With the battle complete, Ransom emerges from the cave, into a pool of water. There by the pool he ate grapes and slept. "Indeed it was a second infancy, in which he was breast-fed by the planet Venus herself..." One can draw parallels between the use of the sacraments to restore and sustain him in this time.⁶² As he recovers, Ransom discovers a wound to his heel. It was an human bite which was bleeding and would not stop. He could not remember when he had received the wound. Kilby notes that this wound, "is a symbol of the wounds given Christ in His conflict with Satan.... it splendidly suggests that Christ's wounds for the sins of man will have their final reconciliation."⁶³

Note the implicit Christological parallels here. Ransom fought the Devil (for Weston was possessed) in the place of the woman. He destroyed the evil one, having heard words from Christ's crucifixion. He was dragged down into the dark pit of the earth where he destroyed the enemy once and for all, and fought his way to the surface. In his struggles, he crushed the head of his enemy, though his own heel was injured.[‡] Following his victory, he travels up from the underworld, emerging through a cave. This can be none other than an image of Christ's redemptive work. Sayer notes this as well, saying that in *Perelandra*,

There is a close parallel between Ransom and Jesus Christ. Ransom offers his body and mind so that *Perelandra* can be saved. He undergoes a laceration of the flesh and a symbolic death. He descends into the underworld and, after a lapse of time that may be three days, rises again.⁶⁴

The identity of Elwin Ransom is quite clear.

Finally Ransom, who has undergone all these things, climbs to a valley on top of a mountain where he sees a coffin-like vessel meant to bear him home, accompanied by two *eldila*. The *eldila* speak about him, noting his weaknesses and the grace given him.

Look upon him, beloved, and love him... He is indeed but breathing dust and a careless touch would un-make him. And in his best thoughts there are such things mingled as, if we thought them, our light would perish. But he is in the body of

[†]Luke 1:46-55.

[‡]cf. J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, (New York, Ballantine Books, 1955), pp. 274-276. Kilby states that this is probably an intentional similarity. (Kilby, *The Christian World of C. S. Lewis*, p. 96.) However, it should be noted that in Tolkien's story, the ring is finally destroyed by Gollum, not by Frodo.

[‡]cf. Genesis 3:15, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

Maleldil and his sins are forgiven. His very name in his own tongue is Elwin, the friend of the eldila.⁶⁵

This is an absolutely critical passage, for Ransom is not Christ, he is but a type of Christ. The salvation which Ransom carried out is only an extension of the salvation won by Christ. He did this work at the bidding of Maleldil, and is himself, a forgiven sinner.

Yet this does not diminish the work of salvation accomplished by Ransom. The first words of the King of Perelandra are,

...we and all our children shall speak to Maleldil of Ransom the man of Thulcandra and praise him to one another. And to you, Ransom.... we call you Lord and Father... of Maleldil's instruments in this, you were the chief.⁶⁶

Ransom is subordinate to Maleldil, but he is exalted above all others as the chief instrument of Maleldil. The King reinforces this in his parting words to Ransom, "Farewell, Friend and Saviour, farewell."⁶⁷ Ransom was the saviour of this world, not because he redeemed it, but because he prevented evil from taking control of Perelandra. Walsh states it well. "[On Perelandra] he truly earns the name Ransom, as he enacts the role of a kind of saviour, a little Christ, in rescuing that virgin planet from the downfall that Tellus suffered."⁶⁸

That Hideous Strength

The third volume of the Space Trilogy reveals the work of Ransom on Thulcandra, the planet earth. Of all the Space Trilogy, That Hideous Strength is the volume least like science fiction. Though it deals with some quasi-scientific themes through the work of the National Institute of Coordinated Experiments (N.I.C.E.), yet it is more properly a fantasy based on spiritual themes, or a cosmological struggle between good and evil. It is, however, an apt conclusion to the trilogy. Here the evil goals of Weston and Devine, along with the demonic forces that control them, are seen on earth, their program affecting the reader much more intimately. Here the diabolical goal of a godless immortality is confronted by God's own plan, carried out under the direction of Elwin Ransom. And here, Ransom, "...plays his full role as a 'little Christ,' for the salvation of his native planet."⁶⁹

Ransom has changed since Perelandra. Six years have passed since he travelled to Malacandra,⁷⁰ and his station in life has changed. Ransom has taken the name "Fisher-King," a name out of the Arthurian legends. This is the first hint given to the reader of the intertwined motifs, including science fiction alongside Arthurian and spiritual themes. Ransom, at the outset, is described as, "...a great traveller but now an invalid. He got a wound in his foot, on his last journey, which won't heal." His name was changed to that of his married sister who lived in India. His sister was given information by a Christian mystic named Susa, that evil was going to attack England in force, and she provided Ransom with the money to gather a company together to fight this evil. Properly stated, "He was told that a company would in fact collect round him and he was to be its head." This diverse little society of people which live with Ransom at St. Anne's, is in reality, Logres, and Ransom is the Pendragon. He is the seventy ninth Pendragon in the line of Arthur, Uther, and Cassibelaun. He became Pendragon when he was summoned to the deathbed of

his obscure and unknown predecessor, though the precise reason he occupies this role is never revealed. As Pendragon, Ransom is the "Director" of the group, though its orders come from his masters,

the Oyeresu of the five great planets. Those who join Logres join freely without coercion.

Ransom's role is not dictatorial, yet leadership is always ascribed to him. Urang notes that at St. Anne's, Ransom appears to be "semidivinated."⁷¹ This would be consistent with his prior activity and present roles.⁷²

One may easily see the role of Ransom by following the story of Jane Studdock, an unwilling seer who eventually joins with him. Jane dreams she is in a crypt, which is later discovered to be the crypt of Merlin. She is terrified and wishes someone would let her out. Then,

...immediately she had a picture of someone, someone bearded but also (it was odd) divinely young, someone all golden and strong and warm coming with a mighty earth-shaking tread down into that dark place.⁷³

She is comforted by the presence, but does not know who it is. The sense of anticipation builds.

As the N.I.C.E. expands, a dense fog covers first Edgestow, and then all of England. But as Jane goes up to St. Anne's, she emerges from the fog and sees a different world which is much larger than the one below. She enters St. Anne's and meets Ransom who appears to her to be twenty years old, although he is actually closer to fifty. She notes that "...all the light in the room seemed to run toward the gold hair and the gold beard of the wounded man." This halo of light is evocative of deity. As she looks at him her "...imagination suggested that those arms and shoulders could support the whole house." Indeed, in his weakness, Ransom does support the entire house, not physically but spiritually. As she continues to look him, she realizes that "...this face was of no age at all." This apparent agelessness was the result of his time on Perelandra.⁷⁴

The appearance of the Fisher-King conjured images of Arthur and Solomon in her mind. She found herself thinking of "King" with its connotations of battle, marriage, priesthood, mercy and power. He embodies these attributes as the Pendragon of Logres. Ransom seems able to perceive thoughts and motives at will, though this is not absolute. He seems to know a good deal of what is happening in people's lives, yet needs Jane's visions to see what the N.I.C.E. was doing at Belbury. He lives on a simple diet of bread and wine. Furthermore, the closer Jane comes to him, the less her mind is accessible to the evil Professor Frost.⁷⁵

Jane questions others about Ransom. She receives the following answer from Mother Dimble, "He is a man, my dear. And he is the Pendragon of Logres. This house, all of us here... are all that's left of Logres: all the rest has become merely Britain."⁷⁶ Logres was the name King Arthur gave to his kingdom which he took away from evil spirits.⁷⁷ But who is Ransom? He does not exercise the salvific role he did on Perelandra, though that is part of his identity. Rather, Ransom is the leader of a diverse group. He is the interpreter of events. The salvation of the earth at this time was accomplished not by him, but in a sense, through him.

It was Ransom who confronted Merlin at St. Anne's, not in his own power, but in the words of the Invocation. It is Ransom who forbids MacPhee to fight because he does not believe, but

rather sends the elderly Professor Dimble, a Christian. It is into Ransom's room that the Planetary spirits descend in order to destroy the evil power. Ransom, in short, is a bridge. In past times it was impossible for these eldila to come on earth, lest they destroy it. This world was the dominion of the Bent Oyarsa, the Devil. However, Weston and Devine had kidnapped Ransom and taken him to Malacandra. There he learned to speak Old Solar, and in him, the Oyeresu were able to descend upon this earth again.

And so the wicked man had brought about, even as Judas brought about, the thing he least intended.... Our enemies have taken away from themselves the protection of the Seventh Law. They had broken by natural philosophy the barrier which God of his own power would not break.... I have become a bridge.⁷⁸

This is the role of Ransom here. It is far less Christological than in the previous book, yet there is a sense in which it is so. When Christ was on the earth, he worked immediately. After his ascension, he works mediately, empowering and guiding others. In the framework of this narrative, Christ came to Thulcandra and redeemed the world. He saved Perelandra working through Ransom. And He saves Thulcandra once more, working through Ransom who is working through others.

Yet when this last battle is over, Ransom's job on earth is complete. There comes a time when he must leave. Part of this involves the wound on his heel. Merlin offers Ransom the chance to have his wound healed, but Ransom refuses saying it is, "...my business to bear it to the end." The healing of this wound will take place on Perelandra. This is, again, paralleled by Frodo in The Lord of the Rings. Frodo receives two wounds that do not heal until elves take him to the "far west,"⁷⁹ that is, beyond the end of the world. When the end arrives, Ransom must leave the earth, for no natural death awaits him here. He has gained the immortality which was present in the new world Perelandra, the world which gave him second birth, and nurtured him at her very breast.⁸⁰

So what becomes of Ransom? Denniston realises that, "He will be with Arthur certainly," for Arthur Pendragon was taken from earth alive. Earlier, Ransom had told Merlin that Arthur is on Perelandra, along with all who did not die: Enoch, Elias, Moses, and Melchisedec. They are in the hall of Melchisedec on the cup shaped land of Abhalljin beyond the seas of Lur. There Ransom will be taken to live immortal until the end of the universe and the dawning of the new day.⁸¹ Thus ends the story of Elwin Ransom. As he miraculously arrived on and departed from Perelandra, so he miraculously disappears from earth when his work is complete. As Christ ascended into heaven, so Ransom is taken bodily from the earth, without tasting death again.

Eldila and Other Created Beings

It would be prudent to consider a creature of Maleldil which having a heavenly appearance, is not in a salvific role — the eldila. Eldila are similar, but not identical to angels. The Oyarsa of Malacandra explains the difference using Miltonian understanding. Milton believed that angels were celestial beings who were members of a military order. Thus angels might be said to be a particular kind of eldila enrolled in military service against the Bent Oyarsa. Tolkien thought the word "Eldil" was derived from "Eldar," his word for angelic beings in the Simarillion.⁸² Eldila, "...do not eat, breed, breathe, or suffer death." Their bodies are "...hard to see and the light goes

through it.” They are created beings, different than humans, but still ruled by Maleldil according to the divine order. “Beasts must be ruled by hnau and hnau by eldila and eldila by Maleldil.” They are present in “rank above rank” and dwell in “Deep Heaven.”⁸³

Certain Eldila, the Oyeresu are given authority over a specific planet. At the end of the first book, Lewis says that there is a reference the word Oyarses in the twelfth century platonist Silvestris, (Bernard of Tours). These seem to be “intelligences” or a “tutelary spirit of a heavenly sphere.” The hnau are under their leadership. Out of the Silent Planet, says that the Oyarsa will soon bring an end to Malacandra, which is dead, and give his people back to Maleldil. The Oyarsa of Perelandra made that world. Ransom was ordered to Perelandra, through the Oyarsa, but, “the order comes from much higher up. They all do, you know, in the long run.”⁸⁴ While the eldila have great authority, their reign is limited. The Queen of Perelandra explains this to Ransom,

...there is no obeying them now, not in this world..... not since our Beloved became a Man. In your world they linger still. But in our world which is the first of worlds to wake after the great change, they have no power. There is nothing between us and Him. They have grown less and we have increased.⁸⁵

In this, the eldila rejoice, for the worlds have come of age. They were stewards of creation for a time, but their purpose had been fulfilled.

Evil

In order to fully appreciate the salvation wrought in these books, it is beneficial to examine the evil and the temptation which is faced and overcome. The thread which ties all together is the promise of immortality apart from God, but this is manifest in different ways in the series. In Out of the Silent Planet Weston and Devine engage in space travel. They seek new worlds to colonise for humanity, progressing from planet to planet as the need arises, so that man might live forever. This is thwarted by the Oyarsa who forbids their return, and pledges to destroy their space craft should they attempt to do so. As the Oyarsa talks to Ransom about earth, he concludes that problems exist on earth either because earth has no Oyarsa, or because each one wants to be his own Oyarsa.

In Perelandra the goal of planetary colonisation is still in effect. Here is added the additional element of temptation in paradise as well. Earth’s Oyarsa, “the black archon,” plans to attack Perelandra, but must work mediately, as he is himself bound to the air of earth. He finds the means in Weston, who allows himself to be possessed. Though Weston claims to be working for Spirit, the “essential truth in all religions,” Ransom denies that this is the same as the Holy Spirit. As time progresses, Weston makes it clear who he really serves,

“I am the Universe. I, Weston, am your God and your Devil I call that force into me completely”.... Then horrible things began happening. A spasm like that preceding a deadly vomit twisted Weston’s face out of recognition. As it passed, for one second something like the old Weston reappeared.... howling, “Ransom, Ransom! for Christ’s sake don’t let them”....⁸⁶

Once this transformation has occurred, Weston, who is “the Un-man” for he is now only minimally human, proceeds to tempt the Lady of Perelandra, as Satan once tempted Eve. He tempts her with ten arguments. First he argued that since Maleldil allows people on earth to live on the

land, it makes little sense that He would forbid this on Perelandra. Consequently, the woman must have misunderstood Maleldil. His second temptation focused on thought. Maleldil did not forbid the woman to think about living on the fixed land, therefore it must be acceptable. Third, he tempted her with maturity. She could be "older" (more mature) than the King who will enjoy learning from the woman. Fourth was the temptation to independence. Maleldil was giving her a chance to learn on her own, and wanted her to take control. Fifth, she could be like the women of earth. "Their minds run ahead of what Maleldil has told them... They are, as it were, little Maleldils." Thus temptation comes back full circle to what it was in the first garden, "you shall be gods." Sixth, the Un-man tempts with death. "it is for this that I came there, that you may have Death in Abundance," a negation of Christ's words in John 10:10b "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." Seventh came the temptation of subjectivism: if you can think it, Maleldil must wish it to be. Eighth, he tempted her to judge God. All of Maleldil's commands are good and profitable except one — to live on the fixed land. To this Ransom responds that this may involve learning obedience. "We cannot walk out of Maleldil's will: but He has given us a way to walk out of our will." Ninth, he tempted her by suggesting that the king would want to keep women from reaching their full potential. She should rebel and rise up above his expectations and control. Finally, he tempts with vanity, giving her clothes and a mirror. But possessing these requires living on the fixed land, which would violate Maleldil's command.⁸⁷ These were the temptations used on Perelandra. Once they had been withstood, Ransom, by the will of Maleldil, destroyed the tempter.

Similar temptation is employed in That Hideous Strength. The goal of the N.I.C.E. is to preserve human life indefinitely, and to conquer the universe. Striking similarities exist between the technocratic society of the N.I.C.E., and Orwell's 1984. It would seem, on further examination, that both were influenced by Huxley's Brave New World. The sterile, laboratory-induced system of life seen there, is reechoed in this work. Life is preserved by the technological preservation of the brain, apart from the body. This they refer to as the "real resurrection." For this to work, the assumption is that, "The universe will have no end." Yet there is no plan for many immortal minds. Rather, the eventual goal is that one mind will remain which will be omnipotent over the entire universe. This mind will, in fact, be God, for, "...does it follow that because there was no God in the past that there will be no God also in the future?" The temptation used on the intellectually sophisticated is virtually the same as that used on all people — deification. The whole program is summarised, "Dreams of the far future destiny of man were dragging up from its shallow and unquiet grave the old dream of Man as God.... If this succeeded, Hell would be at last incarnate."⁸⁸

In the end, it turns out that the whole concept of keeping a head alive indefinitely was an illusion. It is not Alcasan who inhabits the brain, but "macrobes," or demons. It is these macrobes which are the hideous strength, and they have the same evil agenda which they have always held. "For the Hideous Strength confronts us and it is as in the days when Nimrod built a tower to reach heaven." Man can become God by his own creation. It is interesting to note the results of their Babel. Merlin, acting with the spirit of Mercury within him, destroys language at the N.I.C.E. With this accomplished, the demons destroy the place and the people. As he brings this judgement

on them, Merlin speaks, "*Qui Verbum Dei contempserunt, eis auferetur etiam verbum hominis.*" "They that have despised the word of God, from them shall the word of man also be taken away." This is the judgement of God for succumbing again to the same temptation.⁸⁹

Conclusion

The Christology of the Space Trilogy is complex. Maleldil is clearly Christ, while Ransom offers another level of Christological understanding. It is a Christology which heavily emphasises the Incarnation, keeping the two natures of Christ intact. This is naturally less clear in the person of Ransom. Regarding the Trinity, Lewis emphasises the Second Person at the expense of the First and Third Persons. Indeed, it might be more accurate to speak simply of his Christology, for that is the focus of his Trinitarian images. The Christology that is expressed is incomplete, but largely consistent with orthodoxy. What is unique is its presentation in this mythic form, and its parallel presentation on multiple levels.

The Dark Tower

Closely related to *The Space Trilogy* is a controversial, incomplete manuscript, The Dark Tower. According to Walter Hooper, the January following Lewis's death, Warren Lewis began to burn many of C. S. Lewis's personal papers. Hooper happened upon the scene, and rescued many of these papers from destruction.* Among them Hooper found 62 hand-written pages of The Dark Tower — the text which would attract the most critical attention. Two pages are missing from this manuscript which breaks off in mid-sentence on the last page. No further portions of this story have ever been found.

The story involves time travel, and features Elwin Ransom and MacPhee from the *Space Trilogy*, along with C. S. Lewis himself as a character. A scientist named Dr. Orfiu has invented a "chronoscope." Early in the story they believe that the device allows them to look forward or backward in time, but as the plot progresses it becomes evident that they are actually looking at a parallel universe. It features a tyrannical society where people are converted into automata after being attacked by a man with a sting in his forehead. "Othertime" appears geographically similar to this world, and similar looking people are in both places. Orfiu's assistant, Scudamour, finds that his own double is a sinister "Stingingman." When that Stingingman attempts to sting his fiancée's double, Scudamour runs into the chronoscope and finds himself in the other world, having exchanged places with the Stingingman. The remainder of the book deals primarily with Scudamour's explorations of the Dark Tower. The manuscript breaks off in mid-sentence as he is reading about temporal mechanics in the Tower's library.

The publication of The Dark Tower has proven to be quite controversial. Many are perplexed by this unfinished work, wondering what Lewis intended. Others are offended by apparent sexual imagery. Still others consider the writing inferior and unworthy of Lewis. Some have even proposed that a fraud has been perpetrated by the publication of an inauthentic work. These objections must be taken seriously, but it appears that this is indeed a genuine work. Moreover, The Dark Tower provides a rare glimpse into the literary process employed by Lewis. The authenticity of the manuscript will be considered, along with its significance, its themes and its motifs.

Authenticity of The Dark Tower

Reading The Dark Tower, it is not difficult to imagine objections to this work. A number of writers have published their concerns. Key to the debate is Kathryn Lindskoog's 1988 book, The C. S. Lewis Hoax. Lindskoog argues that following the death of C. S. Lewis, a number of hoaxes were carried out in an effort to sell more books. Among the hoaxes she alleges is The Dark Tower. Lindskoog cites four primary objections to Lewis's authorship of this story. First, it is "vastly

*The story of this bonfire is found in abbreviated form in Hooper's preface to The Dark Tower and Other Stories, p. 7.

inferior” to the rest of Lewis’s fiction. Second, contradicting Walter Hooper’s statements in the introduction to this book, Lindskoog maintains that it has not been demonstrated that anyone knew of this book while Lewis was alive. Third, portions of The Dark Tower sound suspiciously like excerpts from Madeleine L’Engle’s 1962 novel, A Wrinkle in Time.^{*} Lindskoog considers the similarities too close to be accidental. L’Engle could not have seen a copy of The Dark Tower as it was not published until 1977. Lewis, on the other hand, would not have had enough time to complete this work before his death in 1963 if he had first read L’Engle’s book. Moreover, The Dark Tower is alleged to have been complete in 1939. It is furthermore inconceivable to Lindskoog that Lewis would have plagiarised another author. Finally, Lindskoog considers The Dark Tower to be dissimilar to Lewis’s other writing in style, content, and sexual themes. She concludes, “None of these facts alone can prove that The Dark Tower is a hoax; but, taken together, they are extremely strong evidence.”¹

Lindskoog’s objections are significant, but not conclusive. The Dark Tower is inferior to other writings by Lewis. But that, in itself, is not evidence against it. The manuscript was neither finished nor submitted for publication. It is easily imaginable that Lewis did not consider it good enough to be published. He had sufficient experience with publisher’s rejections in his early literary career, and was no stranger to critical reviews.[†] It must also be recognised that while published editions of Lewis’s other fiction abounds, earlier drafts of these works do not.[‡] The style in itself does not discount Lewis’s authorship.

Lindskoog’s second objection is that, contrary to Walter Hooper’s claims, no one seems to have known about this manuscript while Lewis was alive. Hooper has claimed that Gervase Mathew heard it read at the Inklings in 1939 or 1940, and remembered complaints about the sexual imagery. Lindskoog counters that this reference was only given after the death of Gervase Matthew, and so could not be verified.² The reader should take note of this fact, and realise that there is no way to verify or deny the knowledge of this manuscript by Lewis’s friends. Other evidence must be used to evaluate it.

Lindskoog is quite correct about the writing style. This story is not as well written as other works by Lewis. It is rough, plodding, and fraught with grammatical errors, a number of which are catalogued by Lindskoog.³ She also notes,

^{*}Similarities between The Dark Tower and A Wrinkle in Time include: (1) the control exercised by IT in A Wrinkle in Time is remarkably similar to that of the stingingman in The Dark Tower; (2) in both stories, people are captivated and changed when they approach a sinister man who sits on a chair on a platform; (3) in both stories the victims faces are fixed with unnatural smiles; and (4) in both stories, the victims walk with a jerky rhythm, as though controlled by a force outside of their own body. The similarities are well documented by Margaret Patterson Hannay, C. S. Lewis, (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Company, 1981).

[†]Such as the negative reception of Pilgrim’s Regress.

[‡]It is difficult to determine the degree to which Lewis modified his manuscripts. It is frequently stated that Lewis did not significantly rework his writings. However, some of his writings were meticulously edited. Notable here are his multiple reworkings of Dymmer, as recounted in his diary, All My Road Before Me.

The last section is “an over-long and laboured account” of Othertime mathematics and science that Scudamour reads about in a library there. It is an amazingly long, difficult, inappropriate passage to find in a C. S. Lewis novel.⁴

Her arguments are significant, but not compelling. It is nothing less than naive hagiography to insist that a writer would never make grammatical mistakes, particularly in a first draft of a work. As to the “long and overly tedious section” the reader would do well to compare the difficult sections from The Dark Tower to the beginning of That Hideous Strength which likewise has been characterised as tedious.

Allegations of sexual themes in The Dark Tower are also significant,^{*} yet once again, are not persuasive. It must be remembered that this work was not submitted for publication. Additionally, the reader would do well to consider parallels to sexual imagery in That Hideous Strength. Regarding literary dependencies, there is no simple answer. The imagery employed by The Dark Tower and A Wrinkle in Time is indeed similar, but does not necessarily demonstrate dependence. Lindskoog has raised serious objections, but none is compelling. Lobdell summarises this well.

The point is not whether Gervase Mathew heard Lewis read the story or whether Lewis read it to the Inklings (being dissatisfied and not having a story that “went” anywhere, it would not be surprising if he read something else instead). The point is not whether the story is inferior to Lewis’s other long fiction (it is, though not by much inferior to The Pilgrim’s Regress). The point is simply that the book fits not only as a first attempt at following up Out of the Silent Planet, but as a first attempt at a middle work between Out of the Silent Planet and That Hideous Strength. I would note also that, although there are arid stretches and places where Lewis is still seeking his style, the best parts are too good and too “Ludovician” to be by another hand. I suppose my reaction to the view that the dull parts make it unlikely it was written by Lewis is that they make it even less likely it was written by a forger expert enough to do the good “Ludovician” parts.⁵

Lindskoog has raised significant arguments, however, she has not succeeded in discounting this text. Her arguments have, however, motivated researchers to view this work more critically. Results of this ongoing research, including handwriting and linguistic analysis have demonstrated that this is an authentic writing of C. S. Lewis. Wilson remarks, “A manuscript of this depressing fragment is deposited in the Bodleian Library in Oxford and experts have made it clear beyond doubt that it is written in Lewis’s hand.”⁶ It is tempting to discount inferior writings, but the evidence will not allow it.

Significance of The Dark Tower

The Dark Tower clearly is not on a par with other writings by Lewis, but it remains useful to those who study his writing. This book provides a rare glimpse into the writing method of C. S. Lewis, and demonstrates his literary integrity. He did not publish indiscriminately. Like any other writer, he produced writings which were inferior to his better works. Far from tarnishing the

^{*}The topic of sexual themes within this work is well addressed by Margaret Patterson Hannay, C. S. Lewis (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1981), pp. 252-254.

reputation of an author, this acknowledges that he viewed his own works with a critical eye, and was willing to discard inferior writing.

Another positive element of this work is that it provides further evidence of Lewis's literary dependencies. There are clear developments of themes by H. G. Wells in The Time Machine, David Lindsay's Voyage to Arcturus, Spencer's Faerie Queene, and various mythological stories.* Because this text is a first draft, we are able to see Lewis's use of other authors before it has been polished. Elsewhere the parallels are evident, here they are obvious.

Themes of The Dark Tower

Speculative endings

However, the chief interest in The Dark Tower is not as an instrument for determining literary method, influence, or any other factor. The interest of this fragment is that it provides another fictional narrative by Lewis. Yet therein lies its chief challenge. The story is undeveloped, and breaks off in mid-sentence. Many have read it in frustration, wondering what Lewis might have been intending. Walter Hooper writes in "A Note on The Dark Tower,"

It is teasing to think how Lewis might have continued his story. Weak in mathematics, he may have been unable to imagine a convincing method of extricating Scudamour from the tight place we find him at the conclusion of the fragment. I am afraid we shall never know what end, or ends (if any), Lewis had in mind for his story before he abandoned it to write a number of other works...⁷

Since the time Hooper wrote these words, many have proposed speculative endings for this fragment. Robert Boenig examined Lewis's literary dependencies on H. G. Wells, and then compared themes of The Dark Tower to other works by Lewis, offering one possibility.

...we can perceive a dim outline of what might have followed.... An escape to the woods (further up, further in?), a meeting with the White Riders in which earlier mistrust gradually breaks down (Hyoï?), the removal of the sting (the man with the lizard in The Great Divorce?), leadership in the final overthrow of evil (Prince Caspian?) and eventual return to framework-time with the Camilla-analogue — who might, according to Hooper's suggestive note might be the real Camilla — are all in the future for Scudamour.⁸

Lobdell pays more attention to the connections to Spencer's Faerie Queen, positing a recasting of Spencer's story of Sir Scudamour and Amoret. He proposes that the continuing story would find Scudamour as a knight rescuing the true Camilla; Orfeu (identified with Orpheus) will, by making

*Dependencies on Wells are admirably dealt with by Doris T. Myers in "What Lewis Really Did to The Time Machine and the First Men in the Moon," Mythlore 13:3 (#49, Spring, 1987): 47-50. For dependencies on Lindsay, particularly the sting, see Richard Hodgens "Notes on Lewis's The Dark Tower," CSL: The Bulletin of the New York C. S. Lewis Society 9:6 (# 102, April, 1978): 1-9. For dependencies on Spencer, see Walter Hooper's "A Note on the Dark Tower," p. 97, "Before Lewis changed Camilla's surname to 'Bembridge' which first appears on page 44, she was called Camilla 'Ammeret'. This suggests that the relationship between Scudamour and the two Camillas might have been based on the characters Sir Scudamour and Amoret in Spencer's Faerie Queene (book III) where the story is told of how the noble and virtuous Amoret, immediately after her marriage to Sir Scudamour, was carried off by the enchanter Busirane and imprisoned until she was released by Britomart."

a last-minute mistake, lose someone; Ransom will be the ransom for the person lost, "...all of which suggests that the book, when finished, would have been sufficiently 'theological' in its concerns."⁹

Later development of themes

These proposed endings and others that have been offered provide plausible, if speculative conclusions to this fragment. But the reader may also find indications in the rest of Lewis's writing. Lewis did not finish The Dark Tower, but some of the themes and characters are easily recognisable in That Hideous Strength. There MacPhee and Ransom return, both better defined and polished. Descriptions of the two Camillas are quite similar to Jane Studdock. Themes and ideas which are embryonic in this work are found developed in later works.

What themes was Lewis attempting in The Dark Tower? Any effort to narrow his work to one single theme would be grossly inadequate. Lewis's writing was rich and mythological, employing imagery on a variety of levels simultaneously. It should not be surprising to find a number of sub-themes at work in one writing. While it is impossible to be definitive in interpretation of an unfinished work, it is possible to note some of the basic ideas which Lewis was exploring.

Perverse Sexuality

One of the chief objections of critics to The Dark Tower concerns unpleasant sexual images. Some have noted the description of the Stingingman and his behaviour are sexually suggestive. Consider the description of the sting.

It was in his forehead, like a unicorn's horn. The flesh of the forehead was humped and puckered in the middle, just below the hair, and out of it stuck the sting.... It was hard and horny, but not like a bone. It was red, like most of the things in a man, and apparently lubricated by some sort of saliva, but none of us would have dreamed of saying "lubricated" or "salivation" at the time: we all thought what Ransom thought —and said: "Dripping with poison. The brute — the dirty, dirty brute."¹⁰

According to Hooper, the phallic nature of this description was one of the things discussed when Lewis read from this work at the Inklings. Hooper writes,

Another point to arise at the Inklings meeting concerned the Stingingman's "unicorn horn" or "sting", which Lewis's friends thought suggested unpleasant sexual implications. I do not think Lewis, consciously or unconsciously, intended any such implication. But he took the objection seriously, and I believe this explains why, in chapter 5, when Scudamour begins to grow a "sting" he bothered to say, "Of course Scudamour has read his psychoanalysis."¹¹

It is not merely the description of the sting itself that has shocked readers, but the use of the sting.

Lewis describes the attack of the stingingman on one of his victims.

A frightful convulsion had passed through the victim's body when he first felt himself seized; and as the point of the sting entered his back we saw him writhe in torture, and the sweat gleamed on his suddenly whitened face.¹²

The victim then goes limp. When he recovers, his face wears a stiff grin. Following four stings, Lewis writes of the perverse behaviour of the Stingingman,

He — or it — began to perform a series of acts and gestures so obscene that, even after the experiences we had already had, I could hardly believe my eyes. If you had seen a mentally deficient street urchin doing the same things at the back of a warehouse in Liverpool docks, with a grin on his face, you would have shuddered. But the peculiar horror of the Stingingman was that he did them with perfect gravity and ritual solemnity and all the time he looked, or seemed to look, unblinkingly at us.¹³

One last incident must be considered. Following the exchange of personalities, Scudamour himself has become the Stingingman. He avoids stinging Camilla, but in the process accidentally stings himself in the hand. Lewis writes, "The tension in his head was relaxed, the throbbing grew less, and the desire to sting disappeared. He felt once more master of himself."¹⁴ Lindskoog expresses a typical reaction when she refers to this as "a startling parody of masturbation."¹⁵

Nor are these the only sexual images. At the beginning of the fragment the character of Cyril Knellie is introduced. He is a Cambridge don whose published works include *Erotici Graeci Minimi*, *Table-talk of a Famous Florentine Courtesan*, and *Lesbos: a Masque*. Likewise, the first description of the Stingingman's room focuses on the endlessly detailed walls, concluding, "As a result, the whole place seemed to be bursting, I cannot say with life (the word is too sweet), but with some obscure kind of fertility. It was extraordinarily disquieting."¹⁶

Sexual imagery pervades this manuscript. Some would discount the fragment on that basis alone, but lack sufficient warrant to do so. It would appear that Lewis is depicting a depravity that expresses itself, in part, sexually. It may be that this theme was so pervasive that Lewis chose not to continue the manuscript, perhaps some of the imagery was unintentional, but its presence must be acknowledged. Interestingly enough, a more restrained use of sexual imagery occurs in *That Hideous Strength*, particularly in the characters of Fairy Hardcastle and Filostrato. One could foresee a story line of Scudamour and Camilla overcoming the perversion demonstrated in Othertime and in our own world as the narrative progresses.

Totalitarianism

A second embryonic theme might be seen in the descriptions of the tyrannically ordered society of Othertime. When victims are stung, they become automata. Their stance is stiff, their eyes are staringly opened, and their faces are fixed with a grin. They work with abandon, but move jerkily, as if controlled from outside themselves. Not all people are fit for this transformation, as it demands a certain type of brain. Those who are chosen come, "...to drink of the fuller life, to be made a servant of the Big Brain."¹⁷ In the process, they seem to lose their identities. This is particularly evident when the inhabitants of the Dark Tower repel an invasion by their enemies, the "White Riders." The "Jerkies" as the automata are known, walk right into the horses of the attackers and are killed. Scudamour's assistant explains, "Do what we will, we cannot make them more like real men and change their direction."¹⁸

Concerning this society, Joe R. Christopher notes, "No doubt Lewis had in mind, symbolically, the conversion of Germans and Italians into fascists, which was under way as he wrote."¹⁹ The captivation of a society by tyrannical dictators, their willing dedication to the work

given to them, their uncritical obedience, and most of all, their rhythmic, artificial walking, reminiscent of the Nazi goose step, all may be seen as evidence of this motif. Again, this was probably not the chief intent of this writing, but it is a likely sub-theme.

Higher Education

Another possible theme of this fragment is a critique of modern education. In The Abolition of Man Lewis criticises contemporary educational trends, particularly the prominence of subjectivism. In other contexts he remains critical of modern education. It is not accidental that the setting for the supernatural assault upon earth in That Hideous Strength is “Edgestow University.” In The Dark Tower, the connection is much more explicit. The story takes place, not in a fabricated University town, but in Cambridge. In a pivotal moment, the observers of the Dark Tower determine that the Tower itself is a replica of Cambridge’s new library.²⁰ While this theme is not developed, one might foresee Lewis critiquing educational trends. Here the escape of Scudamour’s double into the city of Cambridge might have become a significant literary device.

The Antichrist

There is one final latent theme which should be considered. This fragment of a book contains several passages which are highly suggestive of the possibility that Lewis was constructing a supernatural suspense story, similar in scope to That Hideous Strength. He describes the antagonist as a unicorn, and of the Othertime deity as an idol with many bodies but one head. Each of these has significant implications of Lewis’s intent, as they suggest an anti-Christ figure.

The Unicorn

The Stingingman (Scudamour’s double in Othertime) is an interesting, possibly anti-christic figure. He is described as unattractive, his skin has a yellow pallor, he is dressed in the darkest imaginable robes (“The word ‘black’ is inadequate”), and has black hair and beard. The descriptions of his behaviour and his appearance employ images of death. But chiefly the man is described in terms regarding his sting. The first description of this man indicates that the sting, “...was in his forehead, like a unicorn’s horn.”²¹ The observers from our world refer to him most often as the “Stingingman,” but it appears that the inhabitants of Othertime are more accustomed to calling him the Unicorn. Camilla identifies him, saying, “You are the Lord of the Dark Tower and the Unicorn of the Eastern Plain.”²²

Camilla is not alone in calling him Lord. When the “White Riders” are repelled from the Dark Tower, an attendant addresses him, “Hail, Lord.... As no one doubted, you have overcome the barbarians and spread the terror of your name among them.”²³ The Unicorn is honoured and worshipped. When Scudamour’s double first became a Unicorn, he experienced an immediate change in status. “...a Jerky had come into the room swaggering and cracking his whip, and then, after a glance at the Double, had fallen flat on his face. He went out backwards covering his eyes with his hands.”²⁴ Other Jerkies acted similarly. Even Camilla notes the change, addressing him as

Lord, and stating that "...it is unlawful to speak to any unicorn as he was before — when he was only a common man."²⁵

The Unicorns (it is evident from the text that there is more than one) are the highest caste encountered in this depraved society. They enslave subjects with their stings, direct activity, and are worshipped. One more element needs to be mentioned. When Scudamour is speaking to Camilla, he wants to say "Thank God," but finds that he cannot. "...presumably there are no words for this in the language he was using."²⁶ The Unicorn is addressed as "Lord," but there is no vocabulary for "God."

The selection of Unicorn imagery cannot have been made lightly by C. S. Lewis. He was well versed in ancient mythology, and knew that the Unicorn was a Christ-type. Consider this passage from The Discarded Image. Lewis here is writing about medieval conceptions of the earth and her inhabitants, particularly the medieval view of beasts. He writes of one medieval author,

One of the most remarkable things about Isidore is that he draws no morals from his beasts and gives them no allegorical interpretations. He says the Pelican revives its young by its own blood (XII, vii, 26) but draws no such parallel between this and the life-giving death of Christ as was later to produce the tremendous *Pie Pelicane*. He tells us from unnamed "writers on the nature of animals" (XII, ii, 13) that the unicorn is a beast too strong for any hunter to take; but if you set a virgin before him he loses all his ferocity, lays down his head in her lap, and sleeps. Then we can kill him. It is hard to believe that any Christian can think for long about this exquisite myth without seeing in it an allegory of the Incarnation and Crucifixion. Yet Isidore makes no such suggestion.²⁷

Isidore may not have made the connection between the Pelican or the Unicorn, but Lewis certainly did. For him to then use this imagery, indeed the very name of the mythical beast, and not have some connection to Christ would be implausible. Lewis uses the image of the Unicorn in his poem "The Late Passenger." In this poem, rain falls on the already loaded ark, when an animal comes and knocks. Noah calls to his sons to let it in, but not wanting to make any more work for themselves, they lie to their father and claim that the noise is something else. Noah sees the beast fleeing, and says,

Oh noble and unmated beast, my sons were all unkind;
In such a night what stable and what [manger] will you find?
Oh golden hoofs, oh cataracts of mane, oh nostrils wide
With indignation! Oh the neck wave-arched, the lovely pride!
Oh long shall be the furrows ploughed across the hearts of men
Before it comes to stable and to manger once again,
And dark and crooked all the ways in which our race shall walk,
And shrivelled all their manhood like a flower with a broken stalk,
And all the world, oh Ham, may curse the hour when you were born;
Because of you the Ark must sail without the Unicorn.²⁸

The unicorn is a type of Christ. Lewis named his diabolical figure in The Dark Tower the "Unicorn Man." At the same time, figures are not necessarily analogous between the two worlds. Earth's Scudamour is a decent human being, while his double is a monster. The two Camillas are quite different from one another. So we might suppose that the Unicorn man, though employing

imagery which belongs to Christ in our world, is not meant to be Christ, but to be something entirely different — the negation of Christ. Lewis seems to offer an anti-Christ figure. Reflections of this might be seen in That Hideous Strength as Weston, the “Un-man,” mocks Christ, but Weston lacks the forcefulness and literary impact of the Unicorn man.

The Diabolical Head

There is one other anti-Christic element in The Dark Tower. Victims who are brought before the Stingingman are led before an idol. They are told that as they pray to him, he will come from behind them, lay his hands on them and breathe his life into them. They are unaware that it is the Stingingman who actually transforms them.²⁹ It is the description of the idol which is most suggestive.

It is an image in which a number of small human bodies culminate in a single large head. The bodies are nudes, some are male and some female. They are very nasty. I do not think they are meant wantonly, unless the taste of the Othertime in such matters differs remarkably from our own. They seem rather to express a savagely satiric vision, as if the sculptor hated and despised what he was making. At any rate, for whatever reason, shrivelled or bloated forms predominate, and there is free treatment both of morbid anatomy and of senile sexual characteristics. Then, on top there is a huge head — the communal head of all those figures.³⁰

The idea that the idol consists of many bodies with one head is the antithesis of New Testament images of Christ.* In The Dark Tower, however, the image is unpleasant. The idol is not perceived as sexual, even though the bodies are naked, but as “a savagely satiric vision.” The deity of Othertime is antithetical to Christ.

Unlike the Unicorn motif, however, the diabolical head is a theme that is fully developed in That Hideous Strength, though the details are different. In the later book, the head is literally a severed head through which spiritual forces communicate, but in both cases, the image is against the headship of Christ.

Conclusion

In the end, the reader is left to speculate about this book. Lewis did not publish it, or seek its publication. It is unfinished and rough, but it presents some interesting possibilities. What did Lewis intend to accomplish with this work? One need only look at the completed volumes of The Space Trilogy to see the embryonic themes fully developed. While The Dark Tower is not a work that will appeal to the general reader, it shows more of Lewis’s creative thought and vision. Lewis’s theology, in mythical terms, is present though undeveloped.

*for example, Colossians 1:18 “He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.” see also 1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 1:10; 1:22; 4:15; 5:23; Col 2:10; 2:19.

The Screwtape Letters

From the diabolical othertime of The Dark Tower, Lewis proceeds to one of his most famous works — one which directly presents demons, their work, and their conversations. On Sunday 15 July, 1940, as he was leaving the 8:00 Communion at Holy Trinity Church in Headington Quarry, C. S. Lewis thought of an idea for a book. It would be a collection of letters from an older, more experienced devil to a neophyte.¹ Those letters were first serialised in The Guardian, a now defunct high church weekly, and later published together as The Screwtape Letters. While this genesis might lead one to question the nature of the homily in Headington Quarry that week, it is indicative of the nature of Lewis's thought processes. Lewis continually considered thematic ideas and worked with those he considered fruitful.* This thought process may have led to ideas coming up at unexpected times, but the reader certainly receives the benefits of his fertile imagination.

Once the idea took root, Lewis quickly took to the task, and produced a one-sided correspondence. The reader is presented with letters written by the older devil, Screwtape, to his nephew, Wormwood. Wormwood has recently graduated from the "Tempters' Training College," and has been assigned his first human subject. His task is to secure the damnation of this young man. Through these letters, Lewis discusses Hell, the Devil and demons, and their work upon earth including temptation, war, and suffering. None of these subjects is unusual, but the approach of The Screwtape Letters makes the reader consider them anew, from a different perspective. While Screwtape instructs Wormwood in the art of securing his victim for Hell, Lewis reveals what he considers to be some of the varied methods of the demons.

The Screwtape Letters addresses many of the themes prevalent in Lewis's other works, but the tone is profoundly different. Here he bridges the gap between his literary and apologetic writings. Unlike his apologetic works, Lewis makes no attempt to prove his theological points. He simply says them through Screwtape, and lets them stand at face value. This focus makes the reader less likely to focus on the mechanics of the intellectual arguments, and more likely to consider the content itself. Consequently, readers who have balked at some of Lewis's apologetic arguments, or who have bristled over what they consider false dichotomies or straw arguments, have embraced The Screwtape Letters. Yet Lewis's beliefs are clearly stated. The reader will not easily ignore the points of the book.

*It is quite likely that Lewis's consideration of this subject grew out of his interest in Dante's Divine Comedy. Well known to him from his academic work, a remarkable interest in the Divine Comedy was exhibited in Lewis's associates. Perhaps key to this interest was Charles Williams's 1943 book, The Figure of Beatrice, a book which summarised his thirty-year fascination with Beatrice. Dorothy L. Sayers read this book, and was inspired to read Dante in Italian (cf. Ann Loades, "Dorothy L. Sayers and Dante's Beatrice," Seven: An Anglo-American Literary Review 10 (1993): 99), a reading which led to her translations: Hell (1949), Purgatory (1955) and the Posthumously published Paradise (1955). Lewis reflected these themes in The Screwtape Letters (1942), The Great Divorce (1945), and to a lesser degree, in other works including That Hideous Strength (1945).

Reversed Perspective

It is a confusing work for some, for it reverses perspectives. The reader is faced with a text written entirely from a diabolic point of view, where human beings are subjects to be influenced and controlled, or even worse, a source of food for demons. This demonic viewpoint is consistent throughout the book. Nowhere does Lewis interject narrative comments, but allows his point to be made by Screwtape. So effective is he in this, that some have questioned the book's intent. When it was first serialised in The Guardian, one clerical reader cancelled his subscription, saying that much of the advice given in these letters seemed not only erroneous, but positively diabolical.² While the priest misunderstood the genre he was facing, he certainly comprehended Screwtape's arguments. Lewis has meticulously crafted a Hell which mimics Heaven, but where standards are utterly reversed. Satan is referred to as "Our Father below" while God is consistently, "the Enemy." Hell's bureaucracy is the "Lowerarchy." Screwtape refers to the "Miserific Vision" of Hell and is repulsed that, "...at [God's] right hand are 'pleasures for evermore.'" Ugh!" But it is not only in vocabulary that Hell inverts Heaven, but also in behaviour. In a perverse sacramental parody, Hell wants to win souls in order to literally consume them.[†] When Wormwood fails to acquire the soul of his subject, he is himself consumed. "Bring us back food, or be food yourself." The final letter is signed, "Your increasingly and ravenously affectionate uncle Screwtape."³ The extent to which this reversed perspective has been carried out is a major key to the success of this book. Lewis has created a seamless presentation of Hell, and done so with wit, insight, and character.

Reader Responses

Yet these very things, which are signs of the literary integrity for which Lewis strove, also give rise to varied responses from readers. Screwtape propelled Lewis to the fame which he holds to this day. Walsh notes that from the publication of this book, "Lewis was 'typed' as an incisive, witty, and stubbornly orthodox defender of Christianity — a latter day G. K. Chesterton."⁴ Readers referred to Lewis's books often begin with Screwtape. Many have attempted duplication or additions to the letters.

But not all hold the book in such high regard. Many readers consider the book difficult reading, not due to the writing itself, but to the subject matter. Reading of the schemes of demons and of satanic assault on humanity is dreary work. Lewis reflects this feeling in his 1960 preface,

...it was not fun, or fun for long. The work into which I had to project myself while I spoke through Screwtape was all dust, grit, thirst and itch. Every trace of

²Psalm 16:11. It is interesting that Lewis puts this messianic psalm on the lips of a demon.

[†] This is a particularly notable theme in Lewis's essay, "Screwtape Proposes a Toast."

⁴The comparison is particularly appropriate. Like Lewis, Gilbert Keith Chesterton (1874-1936) was a convert to Christianity, though to Roman Catholicism rather than Anglicanism. Both men's writings are difficult to classify as a whole, due to the tremendous breadth of subject and genre. Chesterton wrote apologetic and overtly theological works (e.g. The Everlasting Man, Orthodoxy), Fictional works (e.g. The Father Brown series, The Man Who Was Thursday), and works of literary criticism (e.g. The Victorian Age in Literature which, among many other topics, considers the writings of George MacDonald). Both are known for their clear and creative presentation of Christian themes to a wide audience.

beauty, and freshness, and geniality had to be excluded. It almost smothered me before I was done. It would have smothered my readers if I had prolonged it.⁵

While reader reaction is quite varied, either reception testifies to the effectiveness of The Screwtape Letters. Those who overly exalt them, or imitate them, are proof that the Christian message has been received. Those who find the subject difficult have clearly been affected by the warning message of the reality and possible methods of devils.

Lewis's Belief in the Subject

Another explanation of the success of this book, is that Lewis writes of something which is more than a literary construct. He firmly believed in the reality of devils — and specifically of a personal Devil. Yet he does not go to great lengths to prove this belief. He determines the scope and nature of his presentation. In doing so, he assumes the reality of demons, neither defending nor proving their existence, but stating what he considers their activity to be. While he displays great creativity in his examination of demonic methods, he does not stray far from traditional understanding of these beings.

One error he deliberately avoids is dualism. In his preface to the 1960 edition, Lewis addresses both the existence and relative position of devils.

The commonest question is whether I really "believe in the Devil." Now, if by "the Devil" you mean a power opposite to God and, like God, self-existent from all eternity, the answer is certainly No. There is no uncreated being except God. God has no opposite.... The proper question is whether I believe in devils. I do.... Satan, the leader or dictator of devils, is the opposite, not of God, but of Michael.⁶

Such statements are typical of Lewis. He rigidly holds to the core teachings of the Christian faith, while adding a brief explanation for others. God has no opposite. What is unique to Lewis is his redirection from dualism. He doesn't simply reject dualism, but shows the true opposite of the Devil — Michael. Likewise Hell is not a mirror image of Heaven, but a mockery. There can be no absolute reverse of heaven, since God, the focus of Heaven, has no opposite.

Finally, Lewis cautions the reader who approaches this book, warning him through the entire collection of letters, but also more directly in the preface,

There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors.⁷

Lewis would never have wanted his writings to encourage either error. The writing which was gritty and difficult for him, can be difficult for the reader. It is good for Christians to know demonic tactics, but to show excessive interest would be most unhealthy.

Christology in the Screwtape Letters

Faced with such a picture of Hell and its servants, where would Christian doctrines fit? The Screwtape Letters is a theological work, and does present basic doctrines, but they are spoken in negation and derision by Screwtape. In diabolical negation of truth, some of Lewis's Christology is

revealed. Yet there is little Christological material. The person and work of Jesus Christ receive very little attention in this book. It would appear that here, as in some of his other writings, Lewis simply assumes what he believes to be orthodox Christology, and writes on topics that interest him. There are, however, some notable passages which reveal his Christological thought. Through *Screwtape*, Lewis writes of the Incarnation, of demonic reaction to soteriology, and of the quest for the historical Jesus.

The Incarnation

In three separate passages, *Screwtape* discusses the Incarnation. The first takes place in his initial letter to Wormwood, where he cautions against using argument to keep the subject away from God. Argument should not be used, even though it was once an effective means, because through it, the subject might make a fuller use of reason, and thus see the rationality of the Christian faith.* Instead, the subject is to be directed to feelings, and to a desire for novelty and immediate sensory experiences.† Wormwood is ignorant of these basic things, but *Screwtape* is understanding. “Remember, he is not, like you, a pure spirit. Never having been human (oh, that abominable advantage of the Enemy’s!) you don’t realise how enslaved they are to the pressure of the ordinary.”⁸ While not an extensive consideration of the Incarnation, it is recognised as one of God’s advantages.

Here Lewis reflects Hebrews 4:15, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin.” If God has truly taken on human flesh and has undergone human experiences, he can understand and sympathise with human weaknesses. *Screwtape* sees this as a Divine advantage.

Later, while discussing prayer, he says,

There will be images derived from pictures of the Enemy as He appeared during the discreditable episode known as the Incarnation; there will be vaguer — perhaps quite savage and puerile images associated with the other two Persons.⁹

The Incarnation is attacked as discreditable, but it is a demon who considers it so. The goal of the letter which contains these words is to focus the subject’s attention on the ridiculous things that are passing through his thoughts. *Screwtape*’s advice is to adopt a double edged attack. The subject should be shown the folly of praying to a person, and the silliness of his images for the First and Third Persons of the Trinity. From a demonic point of view, there is no appropriate image for prayer, as prayer is to be avoided. But their consternation also demonstrates what, for Lewis, was an important effect of the Incarnation. While human images of the Father may be inappropriately anthropomorphic, and images of the Spirit are often nebulous at best, it is possible to visualise the Incarnate Son of God. His humanity makes Him accessible.

*This emphasis on the rationality of Christianity is characteristically Anglican.

†Here Lewis provides a defence of apologetics. Demons desire to crush apologetics and the use of reason, as the proper use of reason leads to God. Note also that Lewis emphasises objective facts over subjective experience, while the demons laud subjectivism.

That Screwtape has called the Incarnation a “discreditable episode” does not mean that Lewis viewed the Incarnation as a temporary state, or an adoption for a limited period. The most forceful reference to Christ occurs in the last letter. Wormwood’s subject is killed in an air-raid, and dies a Christian. Screwtape describes the event for his nephew,

He saw not only [angels]; he saw Him. This animal, this thing begotten in a bed, could look on Him. What is blinding, suffocating fire to you is now cool light to him, is clarity itself, and wears the form of a Man.... Pains he may still have to encounter, but they *embrace* those pains. They would not barter them for any earthly pleasure.¹⁰

Having believed in the Christ, the subject sees the Him as clarity itself. In heaven He remains Incarnate, and furthermore remains accessible and comprehensible to the subject. The demonic (and gnostic) theme of the first letter — that physical corporeality is inferior to being pure spirit, is continued to the end. Now it is not only the Incarnation that is denigrated, but flesh itself.* The subject is “this animal... begotten in a bed...” But it is to just such creatures that God has revealed Himself, and it is this animal nature which was assumed by the divine Son. Lewis’s brief presentation of the Incarnation is a restatement of orthodox Christology. What is novel is his application of the teaching, including the possible demonic reaction to these sacred mysteries.

Satanic Reaction to Soteriology

In a brief discussion of soteriology, the reader again can consider demonic reaction to Christian dogma.

What does He stand to make out of them? That is the insoluble question. I do not see that it can do any harm to tell you that this very problem was a chief cause of Our Fathers quarrel with the Enemy. When the creation of man was first mooted and when, even at that stage, the Enemy freely confessed that he foresaw a certain episode about a cross, Our Father very naturally asked for an explanation. The Enemy gave no reply except to produce the cock-and-bull story about disinterested Love which He has been circulating ever since. This Our Father naturally could not accept.¹¹

A crucial theme of The Screwtape Letters is the incomprehensible love of God. Screwtape repeatedly talks of God’s love, and is confident that it is not genuine. God must be hiding an ulterior motive. Nowhere does this issue come so close to the forefront as here. Satan does not understand why God would want to redeem his fallen creation. He cannot accept the explanation of love.

Note that here Lewis offers no theory of how the atonement might be effective. He does not postulate how, or even why, God foresaw the crucifixion. He simply states that God had foreseen it. This echoes the words of Revelation 13:8, “...the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.” The crucifixion was not an accidental occurrence, but was part of God’s foreknown and forechosen plan. This is utterly perplexing to the demons.

*While the reference is subtle, it is interesting to see that Lewis here connects Gnostic teaching with the demons.

The Quest for the Historical Jesus

Screwtape has nothing but scorn for God. He ridicules the Christ, the Incarnation, and His Passion, but he is not ignorant of theology. Screwtape's longest consideration of Jesus Christ demonstrates an awareness of modern theological trends. Through the words of the devil, Lewis rebukes modern theology^{*} as Screwtape turns his attention to the quest for the historical Jesus.

Unlike other theological issues, Screwtape speaks favourably of this endeavour, saying that it is essential and has been promoted by demons. By this point in the letters, the subject has become a Christian. Since Screwtape has given up hope that they will be able to destroy his faith, he directs Wormwood to attempt to corrupt his faith. The encouraged method is to foster the idea that "...Christianity began going wrong and departing from the doctrine of its Founder, at a very early stage."¹² "Accretions and perversions" must be cleared away and the resulting teaching "contrasted with the whole Christian tradition." Screwtape's basic words are an accurate, if simplistic characterisation of the quest for the historical Jesus.

As the letter continues, Screwtape shows how this can be manifested in different forms.

In the last generation we promoted the construction of such a "historical Jesus" on liberal and humanitarian lines; we are now putting forward a new "historical Jesus" on Marxian, catastrophic, and revolutionary lines."¹³

An appraisal of modern theology does indeed reveal such emphases. The letter continues to say that the devils intend to change these constructions approximately every thirty years. Whether one accepts or rejects Lewis's judgement that the origin of these quests are demonic, it is very easy to see multiplication of alternative Christological constructions. However, Lewis was overly cautious in estimating a thirty year interval. Today little time passes between the introduction of new paradigms with which to understand the quest for the historical Jesus.[†]

The letter goes on to explain the perceived demonic benefits of these quests. First, Screwtape says, these quests direct human devotion towards something which does not exist, for each "historical Jesus" is really ahistorical. They reflect the *Zeitgeist*, rather than the texts on which they are supposedly based. Indeed, he continues, since the documents cannot be added to (an assumption which holds far less weight today than it did when first written), each "historical Jesus" is discovered by suppressing certain texts, overemphasising others, and simply guessing at other points. If such an ahistorical Jesus is substituted for the Jesus of the Bible, the object of devotion is called into question and ultimately, the devotion itself will fade.

^{*}This is a consistent theme in Lewis's writings. For example, in "Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism" (1959), Lewis responds to Alec Vidler's *Windsor Sermons* (S. C. M. Press, 1958) on the miracle at Cana, saying, "...it was quite incredible that we should have had to wait nearly 2,000 years to be told by a theologian called Vidler that what the Church has always regarded as a miracle was, in fact, a parable." (C. S. Lewis, *Christian Reflections* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), p. 152. Among others cited in this essay are Loisy, Schweitzer, Bultmann and Tillich. Lewis states that if their work were truly explained to an ordinary layman, he would either leave the church to find one where miracles are believed, or else he would become an atheist (p. 153).

[†]One of the more public contributions to the quest for the historical Jesus is that of the "Jesus Seminar." see Robert W. Funk, Roy Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar, eds. *The Five Gospels: the Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (New York: Macmillan, 1993).

Secondly, each of these theories stresses its particular issue over all else. By doing that, "we thus distract men's minds from Who He is, and what He did." Once this occurs, one particular teaching of Jesus is emphasised so that He is seen solely as a teacher. Then similarities with other moral teachers is obscured, "for humans must not be allowed to notice that all great moralists are sent by the Enemy, not to inform men, but to remind them..."¹⁴ The demons do not want the subject to listen to any moral teacher, and Jesus is a moral teacher, though not merely a teacher. While Lewis does not here present his argument why Jesus could not be merely a moral teacher, he is laying the foundation for that argument as it is expressed in his other works. Here it is simply stated that when Jesus is presented merely as teacher, His person and work are eclipsed. There is indeed much to commend this argument. Transitory issues and causes have repeatedly taken over theology for a brief time. The only thing that seems to matter in these issue-driven theologies is one particular focus. Distraction remains a dangerous possibility, and Lewis attributes it to demons.

Third, Screwtape writes, with these constructions devotional life is destroyed.

For the real presence of the enemy, otherwise experienced by prayer and sacrament, we substitute a merely probable, remote, shadowy, and uncouth figure, one who spoke a strange language and died a long time ago. Such an object cannot in fact be worshipped.¹⁵

Where uncertainty is introduced into the central articles of the faith, piety may decrease. How is a person to know what to believe when every special interest presents its own Jesus, and each construct contradicts the next?

Finally, Screwtape presents what Lewis considers to be the greatest fallacy of the search for the historical Jesus. "No nation, and few individuals are brought into the Enemy's camp by the historical study of the biography of Jesus, simply as biography." Indeed, the materials needed to construct an accurate biography of Christ are not available. Here is Lewis's key point.

The earliest converts were converted by a single historical fact (the Resurrection) and a simple theological doctrine (the Redemption) operating on a sense of sin which they already had.... The "Gospels" came later, and were written, not to make Christians, but to edify Christians already made.¹⁶

The intent of the Gospels, in Lewis's view, is not to provide a biography of Jesus. Faith does not come through a reading a reconstructed biography, either real or imagined, but by an encounter with the facts of the Resurrection and Redemption. Faith comes not through a study of biographies, but through the basic events which are conveyed through those stories, the fact of the Resurrection and the doctrine of the Redemption. All else is supportive of these.

Lewis was no fundamentalist. He did not hold to an infallible or inerrant Bible. He welcomed the use of human reason in criticism and interpretation. What fell under his condemnation was manipulation of the source materials to advance a particular agenda which is foreign to the text. To the extent that he saw this manipulation occurring, he rejected the quest for the historical Jesus.

Conclusion

The Screwtape Letters reveals a small portion of Lewis's Christology, and that presented in reverse, from the mouth of a demon. Still, it is representative of much of Lewis's thinking. The Incarnation is central, as is the Resurrection, which he simply considers historical fact. The doctrine of the Redemption is mentioned, but typical of other writings, no explanation is given of how it is effective. As in other works, modern theology is rebuked for straying from the basics of mere Christianity. While some of the situations faced by the human subject are no longer applicable to people today, The Screwtape Letters remains a popular work, for the basic approach of the book, and its arguments resonate in the reader. This book captures the imagination, and having captured it, communicates Lewis's theology.

The Great Divorce

While The Screwtape Letters provide a glimpse of hell through the words of demons, The Great Divorce begins in Hell and proceeds on to heaven. Similar in scope to some of Lewis's other books, The Great Divorce is also profoundly different. Like The Chronicles of Narnia and The Space Trilogy, it is a fantasy, clearly outside of the experience of normal human existence. Lewis makes a particular effort to note that it has a secondary meaning, but that this meaning is limited. He writes, in the preface,

I beg readers to remember that this is fantasy. It has of course — or I intended it to have — a moral. But the transmortal conditions are solely an imaginative supposal: they are not even a guess or a speculation at what may actually await us. The last thing I wish is to arouse factual curiosity about the details of the after-world.¹

Again Lewis has excluded allegory while allowing for secondary meanings. The Great Divorce takes the form of a recounted dream, though the reader is not told that it is a dream until the end of the book. Purgatory, heaven, and hell are all considered in a fictional context. Lewis brings his creative approach to these subjects, while endeavouring to clarify points of theology that clearly had been troubling to him.

At the same time, the reader must make careful note of the main points of the book, and watch that interpretation does not stray too far from these loci. As Lewis stated above, he did not intend this work to be a guess or a speculation on the details of the afterlife. Descriptions of heaven and hell are given, not that these might be fully understood, but in order to support the narrative. Likewise, the grey town is not really purgatory. The traditional view of purgatory, which Lewis held, is that of a place for those who will be saved. It is not a middle ground from which one could proceed to either heaven or hell. Souls in purgatory are heaven-bound. Rather, the grey city is a middle ground, a writer's invention.

Also of interest to the reader is the unique position of the author in The Great Divorce. The book is narrated in the first person. While never referring to himself by name, Lewis does imply (albeit fictitiously) that these are events which had occurred to him. The book begins, "I seemed to be standing in a bus queue by the side of a long, mean street." When the narrator receives George MacDonald as a spiritual guide,* he notes,

...I tried, trembling, to tell this man all that his writings had done for me. I tried to tell how a certain frosty afternoon at Leatherhead Station when I first bought a copy of Phantastes... had been to me what the first sight of Beatrice had been to Dante....²

*As Lewis notes, MacDonald's role in this book is quite similar to that of Beatrice in Dante's Divine Comedy. MacDonald's Phantastes had been instrumental in Lewis's conversion, and Lewis continually expressed an appreciation for MacDonald's work. In introducing his anthology of MacDonald's writings, Lewis observes that MacDonald was not, technically speaking, a great writer. "The texture of his writing as a whole is undistinguished, at times fumbling." But Lewis proceeds to say, "What he does best is fantasy — fantasy that hovers between the allegorical and mythopoeic. And that, in my opinion, he does better than any man." (in C. S. Lewis, ed. George MacDonald: an Anthology, (New York, Macmillan, 1947), p. xxvi.) Lewis spoke well of much of MacDonald's work, but particularly so of his fantasies and of Unspoken Sermons.

At the conclusion of the book, the author awakes in his cold study. Reading these and other references, one certainly gets the impression that Lewis writes of his own experience. This, in itself, is not unusual, even in fiction. The novelty of this approach becomes evident when compared with Lewis's other writings. While narratives are often in the first person, Lewis's narrator is generally given a fictional identity.

Also of interest in the current work is the similarity of themes, though not of voice, with other works. Particularly interesting is a comparison of this book with The Screwtape Letters. Each presents a different image of hell. One might note an absence of demons in this work, in contrast to The Screwtape Letters which was published just two years earlier. One encounters both saints and angels in heaven, but in the grey city, only souls. Still, the grey city is not, properly speaking, hell. It is a middle ground, something put together to carry the narrative. It is the twilight city. As the fringes of heaven await the morning, so the grey city awaits the night. The souls in that city react differently to the coming darkness: from outright denial to fear. It is apparent that when the darkness falls the grey city will become hell and demons will enter it.

Of particular interest in this book is the application of neo-platonic constructs to heaven, hell, and purgatory. Heaven is the world of absolute, of forms (*res*). Earth is a shadowy representation of that reality (*res signata*) and hell only a ghostly parody of reality. This world-view is found throughout Lewis's writings, but particularly pronounced here. One of the images reflecting this model is a ghost (as the residents of the grey city are called and indeed appear in the fringes of heaven) who wishes to take one paradisaal apple with him to hell. This character had previously stated his desire to take solid matter to sell in the grey city. He somehow manages to pick up one small apple and tries to take it to the bus, when he is confronted by the voice of a nearby waterfall. "Fool... put it down. You cannot take it back. There is not room for it in Hell. Stay here and learn to eat such apples."³ Hell itself is not large enough to hold even one heavenly apple. Later in the book, MacDonald echoes the same thought, saying, "All Hell is smaller than one pebble of your earthly world: but it is smaller than one atom of *this* world, the Real World."⁴ Lewis has modified the platonic world-view. While earth is small, insubstantial, and shadowy when compared to heaven, Hell is even less. It is the absence of reality. Where Christ is — heaven — is *res* for He is the highest reality, the ultimate truth and substance.

Christology in the Great Divorce

For all its creative approaches to the afterlife, the scarcity of Christological material in The Great Divorce is surprising. Indeed, the lack of material about God in general is amazing. It would appear that theology (in the narrow sense) is prolegomenous to this work. Christ is not permanently present in Hell. Much of this book is the consideration of souls who have no real interest in Christ, thus His absence from the dialogue. Yet there are some significant reflections of Christology.

Descent into Hell

The most significant Christological discussion of this book involves the descent into hell. As this is among often disputed doctrines,^{*} it is surprising to find it here. The descent would not generally be seen as part of mere Christianity, the common ground between most Christians to which Lewis normally restricted his work. Yet he includes it, along with his own interpretation of its meaning. It certainly is not foreign to his topic. When discussing hell, one might as well be thorough.

Lewis arrives at this topic from a discussion of the insubstantially microscopic size of hell. The narrator asks MacDonald if it would not be possible for one of the solid people (the blessed souls) to enter the grey city in order to persuade them to come to heaven. But he soon learns that they would not fit in Hell. MacDonald continues to explain,

“Only the Greatest of all can make Himself small enough to enter Hell. For the higher a thing is, the lower it can descend.... Only One has descended into Hell.”
“And will He ever do it again?” “It was not once long ago that He did it. Time does not work that way when once ye have left the Earth. All moments that have been or shall be were, or are, present in the moment of His descending. There is no spirit in prison to whom He did not preach.” “And some hear him?” “Aye.”⁵

In this dialogue, Lewis reveals his thoughts on the descent into hell, yet this line of thought is not completely developed. While he gives his thoughts on the descent itself, and on the preaching, one is left to guess the identity of the spirits in prison. Are these the damned? Probably not, at least not in the classic sense. Some of these hear the preaching of Christ and presumably are delivered. Nor are they those who lived before the time of Christ, as the descent involves people of all times. For the same reason, the spirits in prison are not limited to those who were disobedient in the time of Noah. (1 Peter 3:19-20). Neither would it be right to assume that this is a picture of purgatory *per se*, for it was Lewis's belief that souls in purgatory are all eventually saved, but not all of these hear the preaching. Nor is this image the proclamation of His victory over the hosts of Hell. While not expressly stated, it would appear that Lewis is depicting a variation of the harrowing of Hell, while making a particular effort to include the preaching of Christ. The harrowing becomes timeless, thus applying to all people, and giving them a chance to respond to the Gospel. The spirits to whom the preaching is addressed have the potential of hearing and being saved.

If the identity of the spirits in prison is left unresolved, in other points Lewis is quite clear. Lewis frees the descent from the constraints of time and history. As time is a part of God's creation, events outside of the phenomenal world are outside of time. This simplifies understanding of many events. There is no question of fairness in who did or did not hear the preaching of Christ. Lewis's

^{*}This is largely due to its foundation primarily upon one single Bible passage, 1 Peter 3:18-19, “For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison.” Some theological systems include Colossians 2:15 (“And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.”) as a proof text for the descent into hell. While it may have reference to the descent, it assumes that the purpose of the descent was the proclamation of victory. This does not appear to be the interpretation

understanding applies it to all. "All moments that have been or shall be were, or are, present in the moment of His descending." All of the spirits in prison, whoever they might be, had opportunity to hear the Christ. And with the hearing was the possibility of belief.

The discussion between the narrator and George MacDonald proceeds from here to a discussion of MacDonald's universalism. Lewis argues that MacDonald was not truly a universalist. While this contention is questionable, it does reveal Lewis's intent. If the descent into Hell allows for the salvation of some, many, perhaps even the majority of those who hear, will choose to remain in Hell. Lewis explains (through MacDonald) that there is a possibility that all will be saved, but that damnation also remains a possibility. "Neither [heaven nor hell] is closed. And many may choose eternal death. Those who choose it will have it."⁶ But MacDonald immediately continues to say that humans cannot, while bound by time, discern the unchanging reality of the timeless. The end result may be universal salvation, but damnation remains a possibility. Lewis thus has tempered MacDonald, while remaining in a very flexible position.

One final point on the descent into Hell is also evident in this passage. "Only the Greatest can make Himself small enough to enter Hell." While the narrator asked for one of the blessed souls to preach in hell, it has already been accomplished by the only One who is able to do it. The Greatest, Jesus Christ has descended. The higher a being is, the farther it can descend. The Highest of all empties Himself to descend into hell. The kenosis is complete only in Him.

The Bleeding Charity

The descent into hell is by far the most explicit Christological doctrine in The Great Divorce, but it is by no means the only depiction of Christ. Other material, while given in passing, likewise reveals Lewis's belief. One of the more powerful passages is found in the dialogue between a big man from the grey city, who has been quite argumentative, and a murderer who is in heaven. The ghost immediately protests the presence of the murderer, and asks about his victim. He is told that both are in heaven (though the victim is "deeper" in heaven). At this the ghost grows belligerent. He cannot understand why he has been in the grey city, while a murderer has been in heaven. Finally, the ghost exclaims his objection to the situation, and protests,

"I'm asking for nothing but my rights".... "Oh no. It's not so bad as that. I haven't got my rights, or I should not be here. You will not get yours either. You'll get something far better. Never fear".... "I only want my rights. I'm not asking for anybody's bleeding charity." "Then do. At once. Ask for the Bleeding Charity. Everything is here for the asking and nothing can be bought".... "You weren't a decent man and you didn't do your best. We none of us were and we none of us did."⁷

of 1 Peter 3 used by Lewis. For a more detailed examination, see Austin Farrer, Saving Belief: A Discussion of Essentials, pp. 155-156.

⁷This theme of not getting one's rights appears in Dorothy L. Sayers's play, The Just Vengeance: The Lichfield Festival Play for 1946, (London: Victor Gollancz, 1946). This play occurs in the moment of death of an Airman, when he is given the chance to hear the Gospel. As this occurs, the *Persona Dei* says, "Oh no! there is no justice in the Gospel, There's only love, which does not seek its own But finds its whole delight in giving joy unasked." (p. 56).

Lewis is at his best here as he illustrates grace. Reliance on rights is a hopeless matter when eternal salvation is at issue. "You weren't a decent man and you didn't do your best. We none of us were and we none of us did." That is an apt description of human existence, and should clearly demonstrate Lewis's reliance on Divine grace. While pride may make one hesitant to accept charity, charity is the only hope. Lewis does not write about love in the abstract. He has personified it into Christ. When the ghost objected, basely, to "bleeding charity" the other replies, "Ask for the Bleeding Charity." The love of Christ is seen in His passion, literally in His bleeding charity.

The Suffering God

Another of the souls from the grey city is a mother who had lost her son. She protests of a mother's love and her need for reunion with her son, whose absence has caused her to suffer. As the narrative unfolds, it is clear that the woman desires her son above all else. She seeks heaven, not for the sake of God, but for the sake of her son. When the inadequacy of that desire is stated, the woman objects. Her guide responds, "No, listen Pam! He also loves. He also has suffered. He also has waited a long time."⁸

Here Lewis connects Christ's sufferings with human sufferings. The heavenly guide does not deny the mother's sufferings or waiting (though he does show deficiencies in it), but he points her through her suffering to another. It is Lewis's judgement that the woman was self-possessed, and needed to move away from herself. To do this, she is directed to the suffering of Christ. But focus on His passion does not ignore her suffering. He also loves, suffers, and waits. He waits for this mother to come to Him.

It is such an emphasis on the passion of Christ which is often not seen in Lewis's other writings. One wonders if such an understanding was relevant to Lewis's argument in The Problem of Pain. It seems utterly absent in A Grief Observed. Here Lewis makes the connection. Christ's suffering does not remove present human suffering, nor eliminate affliction in this life. But humanity is not alone in suffering. The Incarnate God knows what it is to suffer. Indeed, Lewis does not restrict Christ's suffering to one time, but speaks of His suffering in the present tense. A Christian may suffer, but is not alone in suffering, for Christ also suffers.*

Praises sung to Christ

Another striking passage occurs at the salvation of one of the souls. This particular man had been carrying a lizard on his shoulder — a symbol of lust.[†] After some time, the man agrees to

*While not developed here, Lewis may have been considering the idea of coinherence which was a particular theme of Charles Williams. His clearest explanation of coinherence may be found in Charles Williams, Descent into Hell, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), p. 78 ff.

†The image of the lizard as lust may be based, in part, on Dante's three beasts. In Canto I of Hell, Dante is prohibited from climbing the beautiful mountain by three beasts: a leopard, a lion, and a she-wolf. (Dante likely appropriate these images from Jeremiah 5:6 "Therefore a lion from the forest will attack them, a wolf from the desert will ravage them, a leopard will lie in wait near their towns to tear to pieces any who venture out for their rebellion is great and their backsliding many.") Dante uses these animals to represent sins which draw people away from God. While there is some dispute over their interpretation, most identify the leopard with sins of lust, the lion with violent

let his heavenly guide kill the lizard so that he might remain in heaven. As he does (and it is a painful event) the lizard is transformed into a solid and beautiful horse — no longer lust, but pure desire, and the ghostly man becomes substantial. At this heaven itself rejoices, the land breaking into song. The song is clearly based on Psalm 110, a messianic psalm which is used heavily by the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Lewis crafts his own psalm, much as he does in *Perelandra*, based on Scriptural themes, with significant emulations and departures from the original. Comparison of the two texts reveals more of Lewis's Christology.⁷

The Great Divorce

The Master says to our master, Come up. Share my rest and splendour till all natures that were your enemies become slaves to dance before you and backs for you to ride, and firmness for your feet to rest on. From beyond all place and time, out of the very Place, authority will be given you, the strengths that once opposed your will shall be fire in your blood and heavenly thunder in your voice. Overcome us that, so overcome, we may be ourselves: we desire the beginning of your reign as we desire dawn and dew, wetness at the birth of light. Master, your Master has appointed you forever: to be our King of Justice and our high Priest.⁹

Psalm 110

The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." ²The LORD will extend your mighty scepter from Zion; you will rule in the midst of your enemies. ³Your troops will be willing on your day of battle. Arrayed in holy majesty, from the womb of the dawn you will receive the dew of your youth. ⁴The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind: "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek." ⁵The Lord is at your right hand; he will crush kings on the day of his wrath. ⁶He will judge the nations, heaping up the dead and crushing the rulers of the whole earth. ⁷He will drink from a brook beside the way; therefore he will lift up his head.

Comparison of the two texts is fruitful. Lewis has changed "Lord" to "Master." As the words are synonymous, this may have been done to lead the reader away from contemplating the more familiar psalm, or to invite a fresh consideration. The psalm speaks of the Messiah being seated at the right hand of God. Lewis includes this teaching implicitly. Rather than writing of the right hand of God, he simply describes it, identifying it with both rest and power. "Come up. Share my rest and splendour" conveys honour and rest at the right hand. Later, Lewis includes power. "From beyond all place and time, authority will be given you..." It is interesting to see that once again, as he deals with a biblical and credal doctrine which may confuse some, Lewis does not go to great lengths to explain it. He assumes the veracity of his image of the right hand of God, and expresses it in such a subtle way that the reader may initially miss the reference.

sins, and the she-wolf with fraud or avarice. As the beasts drive Dante towards hell, Lewis's lizard would keep his subject in hell, and must be killed before he can enter paradise.

⁷A similar reworking of these themes is found in Dorothy L. Sayers's play, *The Just Vengeance*. As the *Persona Dei* goes up to heaven with the people following him, angels give each of the redeemed a new robe and a golden palm. As this happens, they are welcomed with the words, "The earth is yours.... You shall command the eagles, you shall laugh at leviathan; The striped tiger shall sit with velvet feet..." Continuing verses of the welcome also note that the sea, air, and fire is theirs. The play concludes, "The city is yours; proclaim the name of the city! She is set on a rock she cannot be moved...." Dorothy L. Sayers, *Just Vengeance: The Lichfield Festival Play for 1946*, (London: Victor Gollancz, 1946), pp. 79-80.

The psalmist notes that the enemies of the Lord will be made a footstool for His feet — an image which communicated dominion and power in the ancient east. Here Lewis greatly expands and opens the images. The enemies are depersonalised and dealt with in more detail. While the psalmist writes of enemies, Lewis's song refers to "all natures who were enemies." While the first audience of this psalm would likely have pictured their enemies on the ground before their leader, Lewis includes all humanity in this subjection — for all have been enemies of God. At the same time, he alters the image of the footstool. In his version, they are made dancing slaves, backs to ride on, and in more direct reference to the psalm, "firmness for your feet to rest on." The image moves closer to the present, though it seems to be more a courtly image than a modern one.

Where the psalm speaks of the destruction of kings and nations, Lewis softens and personalises it. "Overcome us so we may be ourselves." God seems less vindictive, and more benevolent, vanquishing to save. It was this overcoming that had just been demonstrated in the salvation of the man, and the transformation of lust to holy desire.

Key to the understanding of Psalm 110 is the interpretation of Melchizedek, and the permanent, non-Aaronic, priesthood. Here again, Lewis modifies the psalm. Where the psalmist writes that the Lord is appointed a priest forever, Lewis says that He is appointed forever to be our King of Justice and our High Priest. Christian interpretation of this psalm has been heavily influenced by the Epistle to the Hebrews. In the psalm, the Lord is called a priest. Hebrews, stressing the supremacy of Jesus to the old covenant, names Him High Priest, a title Lewis repeats. However, the title "King of Justice" does mark a departure from the psalm. Melchizedek was King of Salem — literally, "king of peace." The psalmist notes the justice of the Lord as He judges the nations, yet the theme is never explicitly developed. Lewis's psalm of heaven draws heavily on Psalm 110, but also on his own poetic talents. He has woven together a credible psalm of his own which reveals more of the Christ. He is seated at the right hand of God — in rest, honour, and power.

Christ gives life

In another incident a great woman, surrounded by people and animals, approaches. The narrator asks MacDonald if she is Mary (though he lacks the courage to speak her name). She is not. Instead, she is an ordinary Christian who lived an extraordinary life. "Every beast and bird that came to her had its place in her love. In her they became themselves. And now the abundance of life she has in Christ from the Father flows over into them."¹⁰ While simple, the point is significant. She has life in Christ from the Father. That life flows from the Christian into others. Because she allowed that life and love to flow outward, she is great in heaven.

The Problem of Hell: Resolved

Having raised the issue of hell in this book, Lewis must consider it again. What does the existence of hell have to say about the love and power of God? While this issue troubled him when writing The Problem of Pain, here he has resolved it. This does not mean that he likes the

resolution, but that he has come to terms with the doctrine of hell. The solution to this conundrum is free will. God grants free will to humanity, along with its consequences. The ultimate consequence of the abuse of that free will is rejection of God and eventual damnation. Thus Lewis writes,

There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, "Thy will be done," and those to whom God says, in the end, "*Thy* will be done." All that are in Hell, choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no Hell.¹¹

Hell is ultimately total isolation. The grey city expands in all directions, as the souls seek to further remove themselves from others. In the end, total isolation from man and God becomes the greatest hell. When asked if Heaven and Hell are really not just states of mind, MacDonald replies

Hell is a state of mind — ye never said a truer word. And every state of mind, left to itself, every shutting up of the creature within the dungeon of its own mind — is, in the end, Hell. But Heaven is not a state of mind. Heaven is reality itself.¹²

Again, this reflects the influence of neo-platonism on Lewis's images of Heaven and Hell. Heaven is reality itself, not a mental delusion, but *res*, the true reality. In contrast, Hell is the antithesis of reality, it is tragically self-chosen isolation.

Lewis posits an all-embracing Heaven and Hell. "Not only this valley but all this earthly past will have been Heaven to those who are saved. Not only the twilight in that town, but all their life on earth too, will then be seen by the damned to have been Hell."¹³ The reality of their eternal state will consume their earthly memories — not obliterating them, but transforming their understanding. Lewis may have wished for an empty Hell, but he was unable to make such a statement. If free will has any meaning, it must include the ability to reject the Christ and His salvation. Grace can indeed be resisted.

Rebuke of liberal theology

In The Screwtape Letters, Lewis presents a critique of theologians engaged in the search for the historical Jesus, and of liberal theology in general. He resumes this critique in The Great Divorce, by writing of a bishop who lives in the grey city, while clinging to his empty theology.* While the bishop considers his theology to be his triumph, his guide criticises it as following the *Zeitgeist*. For all its seriousness, Lewis infuses the scene with dark humour. The heavenly guide provided to the bishop once shared the bishop's ideas, but changed his mind in later life. When the bishop criticises his friend for believing in a literal heaven and hell, the guide is incredulous. The bishop does not yet believe in Hell, even after living there, but considers the grey city to hold the "continual hope of morning" and says it is "in a sense, Heaven." When his guide explains that he was sent to Hell because he was apostate, the bishop is shocked. He protests that he took hard positions out of integrity, saying,

*It is not clear from the context if Lewis had any particular bishop in mind when writing this section. Clearly it would not be difficult to find clergy holding such views. However, the characters in The Great Divorce are not as readily identifiable as those in Dante's Divine Comedy. This book is not intended to satirise people, but to discuss the issues of salvation.

“When the doctrine of the Resurrection ceased to commend itself to the critical faculties which God had given me, I openly rejected it. I preached my famous sermon. I denied the whole chapter. I took every risk.” “What risk? What was at all likely to come of it except what actually came — popularity, sales for your books, invitations, and finally a bishopric.”¹⁴

Still, the heavenly guide calls the bishop to repentance, faith, and heaven, but the bishop cannot accept. Offered answers to his questions, the bishop wants to continue theological speculation. His guide explains,

I can promise you none of these things. No sphere of usefulness: you are not needed there at all. No scope for your talents: only forgiveness for having perverted them. No atmosphere for inquiry, for I will bring you to the land not of questions but of answers, and you shall see the face of God.¹⁵

He continues, “We know nothing of religion here: we think only of Christ. We know nothing of speculation. Come and see. I will bring you to eternal Fact, the Father of all other facthood.”¹⁶

Lewis presents a traditional image of heaven. Questions answered, the presence of Christ, and the face of God Who is eternal Fact.

In the end, the Bishop is unconvinced. He does not believe in the existence of God, Heaven, or Hell, but he wants to continue studying theology. In fact, the Bishop returns to hell to present a paper at a theological society! The bishop tells his guide the subject of his paper:

I’m taking the text about growing up to the measure and stature of Christ and working out an idea which I feel sure you’ll be interested in. I’m going to point out how people always forget that Jesus (here the Ghost bowed) was a comparatively young man when he died. He would have outgrown some of his earlier views, you know, if he’d lived.... I am going to ask my audience to consider what his mature views would have been. A profoundly interesting question. What a different Christianity we might have had if only the founder had reached his full stature! I shall end up by pointing out how this deepens the significance of the Crucifixion. One feels for the first time what a disaster it was: what a tragic waste... [sic] so much promise cut short.¹⁷

The guide does not respond to this blend of external signs of piety mingled with denial of historic Christianity. The bishop has rejected the gift of heaven. In silence, the guide walks away, and the Bishop returns to Hell, singing a hymn. Lewis’s satire is biting. Many theologians have found themselves rejecting the existence of God and any objective truth. It was such a theological climate which prompted Lewis to popularise and defend traditional Christianity. No one, not even an apostate bishop is beyond hope of salvation, but ultimately, those who reject God will be damned.

Lewis is adamant in his condemnation of liberal theology. While not as scathing, he also includes a rebuke for himself spoken by George MacDonald. MacDonald looks at the narrator with a “piercing glance” and says,

It is nearer to such as you than ye think. There have been men before now who got so interested in proving the existence of God that they came to care nothing for God Himself... [sic] as if the good Lord had nothing to do but *exist!* There have been some who were so occupied in spreading Christianity that they never gave a thought to Christ.¹⁸



While the incident of the bishop in Hell is a rebuke against liberal theology, Lewis uses it, and this passage, as a warning. Each Christian must remember the importance of faith. Christ must be central.

Heaven

The Great Divorce focuses on the souls in Hell, the choices that put them there, and the possibility of salvation. But there is no depiction of Hell itself, only the grey city. Neither is heaven directly seen, at least not “Deep Heaven” but only its fringes. Yet Lewis gives the reader some glimpses of heaven. Each ghost from the grey city hears of the joys of heaven, and is invited to share them, but they must leave Hell behind. In the end, only one of the ghosts is willing to do that, at which heaven rejoices, but the rest choose to return to Hell.

In one of the conversations, a ghost asks, “What *are* we born for?” and hears the response of her guide, “For infinite happiness... You can step out into it at any moment.”¹⁹ That is the invitation. If free will allows one to choose Hell, it is still God’s wish that all should gain Heaven, and He has enabled that through Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

At the end of The Great Divorce, the narrator sees dawn coming to the fringes of Heaven. It may be presumed that, at the same time, night falls on the grey city. At that, he wakes in his study — it was all a dream — and the book ends. The deliberations between the residents of the grey city and those of Heaven, took place on earth. The choices shown there had already been made here.

The events themselves were fictitious, but the content was not. Neither the choices made by the souls, nor the doctrines of the person of Christ were modified for the narrative — only framed within its words. While a complete discussion of the person and work of Christ is not provided in The Great Divorce, it does contain many images which fill in portions of Lewis’s Christology. Christ is revealed as the Bleeding Charity, the Suffering God, and the Life-Giver. He descended into Hell to preach to the spirits in prison, and is seated at the right hand of God in power and glory. Above all, the invitation to Heaven’s bliss is seen.

The Chronicles of Narnia

Lewis encompasses a variety of genres within his fiction. The Chronicles of Narnia introduces yet another fictional genre. These books are often classified apart from the rest of his fiction under the sub-category, "For Children." Yet even the casual reader will notice that these books have a broader intent than such a categorisation might indicate. Many of the references within the books are clearly beyond the comprehension of all but the most gifted children. While these books are certainly appropriate for children to read, it was not Lewis's intent that they be limited to a juvenile audience. On the contrary, Lewis states, "No book is really worth reading at the age of ten which is not equally (and often far more) worth reading at the age of fifty — except, of course, books of information."¹

As an adult, Lewis continued to appreciate and enjoy the books which had caught his imagination as a child. The Chronicles of Narnia includes many of the literary elements which he enjoyed throughout his life: themes of adventure, quests, chivalry, magic, diverse mythology, and a childlike playfulness. Lewis has written stories that he would have enjoyed as a child, and did enjoy as an adult. As one writer stated, "Such fantasy stories should not really be considered as children's stories at all."² They are appropriate for readers of all ages.*

Popularity of the Chronicles

As time passes, these books remain popular throughout the world. Clyde Kilby believes that if nothing else of Lewis' survives into the next century, Narnia will.³ Likewise Thomas Howard says,

My own guess is that if any stories written since Lewis Carroll, Beatrix Potter, A. A. Milne, and Kenneth Grahame have a chance of achieving this sempiternal status, The Chronicles of Narnia are front running candidates.⁴

Part of the reason for this, is that The Chronicles are to be read first and primarily as stories, simply as they stand. The reader is not coerced into searching for a deeper meaning, the literal understanding of the narrative is adequate. So Walter Hooper writes,

...the combination of his vast learning, his superior abilities as a prose-stylist, and his rich and vivid imagination have resulted in the Narnian books being first, though not foremost, extremely well written adventure stories.⁵

These books are more than just adventure stories. Huttar calls Narnia, "...a sort of Bible for a Bibleless age."⁶ J. R. R. Tolkien immediately grasped the Christian significance of the books, but thought them "too obvious." Carnell writes,

Narnia in some ways anticipates Heaven. Monarchy and hierarchy are a natural part of its life. Narnian time is different from Earth time, perhaps closer to eternity. Yet it is not Heaven. Aslan's country lies beyond the End of the World

¹Lewis addresses this idea in his brief essay, "On Juvenile Tastes," where he writes, that the classification of a book as a children's story is really a synonym for a narrative fantasy. "Those who have a story to tell must appeal to the audience that still cares for story-telling.... The right sort [of authors]... label their books 'For Children' because children are the only market now recognised for the books they, anyway, want to write." in C. S. Lewis, On Stories and Other Essays on Literature, ed. Walter Hooper, (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982), p. 51.

and as beautiful and fulfilling as some experiences may be in Narnia, they are but harbingers of Aslan's country.⁷

The Chronicles of Narnia tell the story of an imaginary place, and of fictional characters. And yet there clearly are deeper meanings. Multiple levels of understanding exist within these books — a fact which helps explain their popularity with some readers. They see this “Bible for a Bibleless age” and “anticipation of heaven” and read it to find these deeper meanings.

Genre of the Chronicles

Of all of Lewis's books, these are most often called allegorical. That parallel meanings exist in the Chronicles of Narnia is undeniable. It is difficult to see the vicarious, sacrificial death of Aslan and his subsequent resurrection without seeing Christ. Yet here again, as in the majority of Lewis's writings, he has avoided allegory in favour of a deeper form of poetic writing. His essay, “Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What's to be Said” contains this explanation:

...I wrote fairy tales because the Fairy Tale seemed the ideal Form for the stuff I had to say.... I thought I saw how stories of this kind could steal past a certain inhibition which had paralysed much of my own religion in childhood. Why did one find it so hard to feel as one was told one ought to feel about God or about the sufferings of Christ? I thought the chief reason was that one was told one ought to. An obligation to feel can freeze feelings. And reverence itself did harm. The whole subject was associated with lowered voices; almost as if it were something medical. But supposing that by casting all these things into an imaginary world, stripping them of their stained-glass and Sunday school associations, one could make them for the first time appear in their real potency? Could one not thus steal past those watchful dragons? I thought one could.”⁸

This explanation is clarified in another essay, where he states that this was not his initial goal.

All my seven Narnia books... began with seeing pictures in my head. At first they were not a story, just pictures. The *Lion* all began with a picture of a Faun carrying an umbrella and parcels in a snowy wood. This picture had been in my mind since I was about sixteen.* Then one day, when I was about forty, I said to myself: “Let's try to make a story about it”. At first I had very little idea how the story would go. But then suddenly Aslan came bounding into it. I think I had been having a good many dreams of lions about that time. Apart from that, I don't know where the Lion came from or why He came. But once He was there He pulled the whole story together....⁹

These stories are just that — stories written for the joy of the narrative. While secondary meanings and parallels fill the books, these are not essential for enjoyment. Thus they embody Lewis's ideals of poetic writing.

Other Interpretations of Narnia

The mythical nature of Narnia has led to many interpretations. Most of these are well within Lewis's designs. More recently, however, several authors have offered psychological interpretations of these books, of the variety that annoyed Lewis when applied to other authors. David Holbrook offers the following interpretation:

*It should be noted that this mental image places the initial genesis of the Narnian stories before his conversion. This strengthens the integrity of the narrative, independent of secondary themes.

...Narnia stories have their origins in the fact of his life that his mother died when he was a baby... It left him... needing to find his way into the other world where the mother was [sic]: the world of death. How do we get there?... through her body: and the Wardrobe is her body (or to be more specific, her birth passage)...¹⁰

Other authors have looked for psycho-sexual meanings throughout these books, providing examples of passages which they allege to be overtly sexual, and inappropriate for children. Though Lewis would have acknowledged the validity of a variety of interpretations, this one would certainly not have found his approval. Secondary meanings abound, but authorial intent must have some influence on interpretation.

The Order of the Chronicles

One final issue which should be considered is the order in which the Chronicles should be read. It seems that the order of reading these books is an endless discussion. Should the series be read in the original published order, or according to the internal time sequence. To follow the first model, the reader starts with The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, the first book published. The chronological order starts with The Magician's Nephew which details the creation of Narnia. Read accordingly, the reader comes as close as possible to a linear history of Narnia. The majority of writers favour this chronological ordering, including Clyde Kilby,¹¹ Walter Hooper,¹² and Douglas Gresham, as well as many others. The latest edition of the books is ordered chronologically, chiefly on the basis of one of Lewis's letters to a child. There are significant reasons to read in the published order, however. First is the simple issue of the integrity of the author. Lewis published the books in this order, reading them in published order follows his initial writing. His letter used to support the chronological reading shows that he supports the reader's choice to read in that fashion, and is not necessarily indicative of his own desires. There are other factors as well. Gibson writes in favour of the published order, saying, "Just as one who reads the Bible for the first time should begin with the Gospels and perhaps the Acts of the Apostles before going back to Genesis, so we begin here...."¹³ Gibson bases this order, in part, to the information supplied in the first books, noting the impact of this on The Magician's Nephew and The Last Battle. "The Genesis and Revelation of Narnia take full advantage of their chronological positions. Both contain mind-stretching elements which are lacking in the other five books."¹⁴

Lewis, in writing a myth with obvious Christian ramifications, placed the central article of theology first. The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe introduces Aslan, and his work of redemption. Secondly, it also introduces a variety of concepts which will prepare the reader for the later volumes. Those writers who attempt to read in a chronological order are trying to create a history of Narnia, with the focus on Narnia, the place. Lewis gives the reader ample information about Narnia in the series, but central to all is Aslan. This discussion will follow the original published order, and begin, as did Lewis, with Aslan.

The Christology of the Chronicles of Narnia

Aslan

Titles and Characteristics

Aslan is the great Christ figure in the Chronicles of Narnia. His name is not an invented word, nor is it the name of a pre-existing deity which Lewis has appropriated. Rather, as Hooper notes, Aslan is derived from a Turkish word, *Arslan* meaning, "Lion." In a 1952 letter, Lewis stated that he found the name Aslan in Lane's Arabian Nights. "And of course, I meant the Lion of Judah."¹⁵ An interesting parallel to the Turkish origins of the name Aslan, is the enchanted candy which ensnared Edmund — "Turkish Delight." The parallel between the desire of nations and the Turkish Delight should not be missed. This diabolical alternative is an inferior substitute for Aslan, as it binds the consumer, whereas Aslan frees.

While his proper name is Aslan, his other names and characteristics help identify him. Aslan is king, "Lord of the whole wood, but not often here, never in my time or my father's time." While the monarchs of Narnia must be human, Aslan is most emphatically not a man. He is the "King of the wood," the "son of the great Emperor-Beyond-the-Sea," King of the Beasts, and the great Lion. "Aslan is the great Lion who comes from over the Sea," and "Highest of all High Kings." The Centaurs reveal that Aslan has nine names with meanings. He comes from the east — the place of the rising sun, and the direction where Christian literature traditionally refers to as the direction from which God comes.¹⁶

Aslan is not just a lion, he is the Lion. Furthermore, he is called Lord, "Courage, friends... whether we live or die Aslan will be our good lord." Yet this Lord is also a beast. He speaks to Bree, a talking horse who had doubted, saying, "Touch me, Smell me. Here are my paws, here is my tail, these are my whiskers. I am a true beast," a striking parallel to Thomas (John 20:27). If Aslan is to be the Saviour and Lord of this world, He must be incarnate as those who populate it. He is, however, incarnate as the highest of beasts, the lion.* Aslan is true beast, yet also possesses divine attributes. His Incarnation is complete. Lindskoog says, "the God in Lewis's books is not semi-animal; he is super-animal."¹⁷ The nature of such incarnation is more fully explored in The Space Trilogy. Here it is a much less crucial aspect, yet still included. Aslan is true beast, and truly the Son of the Emperor.¹⁸

Because Aslan is beast he has the characteristic of wildness. He is not a tame lion. This is frequently repeated in the Chronicles. He cannot be controlled by magic incantations and human contrivances. He comes and goes as He pleases. This echoes Lewis's concerns against images of God as some sort of indulgent grandfather. God is not controlled by his creatures. The characteristic of wildness is also used in a negative manner. In The Last Battle, those masquerading as Aslan and his entourage perpetrate all manner of evil under the assumption that Aslan is "not a

*John 20:27 "Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.'"

tame lion.” Sadly, even those who believe in Aslan fall victim to such statements, evocative of the Biblical warning, “...if possible, [Satan] might also deceive the elect” (Matthew 24:24). The last king of Narnia says in his despair of the apparent behaviour of Aslan, “Those are the very words: not a tame lion. It comes in many tales.” A magician says, “you can’t keep him; its not as if he were a tame lion.” Just as Aslan cannot be compelled to come and go at the will of his creatures, so he will not be held against his will.¹⁹

Aslan is not tame, but his “beastliness” (assuming that word in a positive light), is tempered by his goodness. Mr. Beaver notes, “Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the King, I tell you.”²⁰ Thus goodness is a characteristic of Aslan. Sammons assesses the goodness of Aslan, “Here, Lewis has succeeded in doing what, in his Preface to Paradise Lost [sic], he admits is difficult for any author: portraying a totally good character.”²¹ Aslan is good beyond all goodness.

A number of other characteristics are evident in the narrative. Aslan is patient. He walks along with Shasta in silence, waiting. Finally Shasta asks who He is. Aslan responds, “One who has waited long for you to speak.” Indeed, in this particular story, Aslan is revealed as being extremely patient, guiding Shasta through his entire life, waiting for this moment to come about. But time is not a constraint to Aslan, for he is eternal. He says openly, “I call all times soon.” Some creatures use time as an argument against Aslan’s appearing. Trumpkin the dwarf, for example, mocks Aslan by responding to the report of his appearance, “He’d be a pretty elderly lion by now...” Aslan’s appearance to Trumpkin in strength and vitality proves this wrong. In The Last Battle, Lewis writes, “all worlds draw to an end except Aslan’s country.”²²

Aslan is immutable. Each time he appears, he is the same as before. No matter how much time has passed in Narnia or on earth, Aslan is the same. The only change which might be seen, is that, as Aslan says, “every year you grow, you will find me bigger.” Aslan is merciful, not showing himself to the Dufflepuds when they were not prepared to see him. He would not frighten them by openly revealing himself.²³

Finally, Aslan appears to be omniscient. In a passage which suggests prayer, the question is asked whether Aslan would know of a particular need without being asked. The response is, “...I’ve no doubt he would... But I’ve a sort of idea he likes to be asked.” Even the righteous pagan, Emeth, who thinks that he believes in Tash (though at judgement, his faith is attributed to Aslan), when he discovers that Aslan truly exists, realises that Aslan must be omniscient. Finally, in The Silver Chair, Aslan knew everything that happened at “Experiment house,” a school where a good deal of hazing took place. He knew all that had happened, and at the end of the story, fixes it.²⁴ His omniscience is not limited to Narnia. The identity of Aslan is seen when divine titles and attributes are ascribed to him.

¹⁹This contrasts with Mere Christianity where Lewis writes that through the incarnation, Christ lowered himself to the lowest possible state, a change he compares to a human being becoming a slug or a crab.

Aslan's Effect on People

Aslan's identity is also seen in the effect which he has on people. Just the mention of his name is enough to cause a reaction. This is a lesser theme in the Chronicles, but a revealing one. The children did not know Aslan when they first entered Narnia. It is the Beavers who tell them about him.

At the name of Aslan each one of the children felt something jump inside. Edmund felt a sensation of mysterious horror. Peter felt suddenly brave and adventurous. Susan felt as if some delicious smell or some delightful strain of music had just floated by her. And Lucy got the feeling you have when you wake up in the morning and realize that it is the beginning of the holidays or the beginning of summer.²⁵

Each child responded according to his character. Peter, who was to be high king, and mirrors Simon Peter, feels noble and adventurous. Susan, who is tender-hearted, feels the beauty of the moment, Lucy, the purest of the four feels excitement, and Edmund who was to betray Aslan feels fear. Mr. Beaver notes that, "If there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most or else just silly."²⁶ Thus the White Witch is enraged at the name of Aslan, threatening to kill anyone who speaks his name in her presence. The evil one cannot tolerate the divine name.

Aslan is Prophesied

Aslan does not simply appear to save Narnia. He is active in Narnian history from beginning to end, yet not all see this. There are stretches of time when creatures forget Aslan, and do not know that he will come to save Narnia. During these times He is prophesied:

Wrong will come right when Aslan's in sight,
At the sound of his roar there'll be sorrows no more,
When he bares his teeth winter will meet its death,
And when he shakes his mane there'll be spring again.²⁷

Aslan will bring justice, an end to sorrow, and brings springtime to Narnia's century of perpetual winter. A second prophesy notes that when the four thrones at Cair Paravel are filled (by those Aslan appoints) the White Witch will lose not only her reign but her life. Aslan comes to bring spring, that is, new life, and an end to the Satanic figure.

Aslan is Known is People's Actions Toward Him

Furthermore, Aslan's identity is seen in the reaction of others. He is worshipped by all types of creatures including tree spirits who bow to him as he passes. Aslan is also worshipped by people. On board the Dawn Treader, a flat, golden, iconic image of Aslan hangs on the wall in Caspian's cabin. Furthermore, Aslan is depicted on the king's flag. People pray to him and praise him.²⁸

Aslan is the object of faith. Puddleglum notes when his earthly situation looks bleak, "Aslan's instructions always work: there are no exceptions." This is true, even if the solution is not what might have been expected. He continues, "There are no accidents... [Aslan] knew already all things that would come of them; including this" Aslan is described as ultimate reality. When the

spell of a witch enchants Puddleglum, Eustace, and Jill, the words which break the spell are, "there is Aslan" Their faith in Aslan is so strong that they confess, "I'm on Aslan's side even if there isn't any Aslan to lead it. I'm going to live as like a Narnian as I can even if there isn't any Narnia."²⁹ Such faith is manifested as critical actions are completed in Aslan's name such as cords being cut from a captive prince, and invading enemy territory in time of battle while disguised.³⁰

Furthermore, Aslan's name is used in a manner evocative of the Trinitarian Invocation, "Aslan, Aslan, Aslan." His name is a battle cry: "Narnia, Narnia. The Lion." Aslan is treated in a divine manner by his people.³¹ His prominence and significance is also seen in that his name and person becomes an oath. Caspian uses the oaths, "by Aslan", and "Aslan's mane." Bree swears "by the lions mane", and Tirian, "By the mane." His identity is also demonstrated by his enemies. Some, such as King Miraz deny his existence altogether, saying that there is no Aslan, no lions, and no talking animals. Others such as Trumpkin the dwarf know that lions and talking animals exist, but ask, "who believes in Aslan nowadays?"³²

Aslan is Known by His Works

Aslan may be prophesied, titles may be ascribed to him, and his name may be used as an oath, but the real Aslan is chiefly revealed in his action. Aslan, like Christ, greets his disciples by name in The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe. All who are present are called by their name. This act alone shows that something planned in advance is progressing. Aslan also summons people to come to him. In The Silver Chair, the children think that they have entered Narnia at their own request, but Aslan says "you would not have called to me unless I had been calling to you."³³

People are not always glad to see Aslan. At times he comes in judgement, chastising. When Lucy blames others for not following Aslan, he silences her with a growl. When Edmund and Caspian argue over the ownership of Goldwater Island, where a spring transforms everything to gold,[†] Aslan walks past them, silencing them with his presence.³⁴

But Aslan does not always chastise, He forgives. Indeed, the prime reason for examining this character is to see how he forgives. Most often it is with his presence and love, demonstrating to the person that all has been forgiven. The major cases will be dealt with in detail. For the moment, note the case of Edmund, where Aslan speaks to him privately and forgives him. When they return Aslan tells the others that, "there is no need to talk about what is past."³⁵

*These words parallel John 15:16a "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit..."

†The events on Goldwater Island, including the themes of greed, selfishness, and loss, are influenced by the story of King Midas. In response to his hospitality, the gods granted Midas one wish. He wished that everything he touched might become gold. He did not foresee that all his food and drink would likewise become gold. After he had nearly starved to death, he begged to be deprived of his gift. It was removed from him after he washed in the river Paktolos. The sands of that river have contained gold ever since. See H. J. Rose, A Handbook of Greek Mythology, (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1959), p. 164.

Aslan forgives, and strengthens his people. Strength is frequently pictured as flowing from his mane or carried on his breath. For example, "Lucy buried her head in his mane to hide from his face. But there must have been magic in his mane. She could feel lion-strength going into her.... 'Now you are a lioness.'" This strength flows out of Aslan, and is carried by his breath. Aslan breathes on Susan so she can forget her fears, he breathes on Edmund and "a kind of greatness hung about him." He parallels Christ in His post-resurrection appearances to the disciples and Thomas* as he proves he is not a ghost by breathing on Shasta, which reassures him. Aslan shows mercy to the wicked Telmarines, who were really pirates from earth. When he sends them back, Aslan breathes on the first Telmarine. When he did this, a new look was in his eyes, as if he was trying to remember. Kilby states, "...it is not hard to suppose... that Aslan's breath which brings greatness is like Christ's breath imparting the Holy Spirit."³⁶ Aslan bestows himself, his very nature, and his comfort through his breath and mane.³⁷

Finally, Aslan strengthens in an unusual way in The Voyage of the Dawn Treader. Here the ship is surrounded by darkness at the land of dreams, where all one's nightmares are reality. In the midst of their despair a beam of light shines on boat. At the centre was an object that looked at first like a cross, then an aeroplane, a kite, and finally an albatross.[†] It circled the mast three times and called out in a voice no one understood. It had spoken to Lucy, "courage, dear heart," and "the voice was Aslan's." With the voice there came a delicious smell.³⁸ There is an interesting blending of images in this passage which reveals Lewis's conception of Aslan. The presence clearly parallels the Holy Spirit, as the white albatross suggests, but the voice is Aslan's. The albatross circles the mast three times, suggestive of Trinity. It enlightens the people, showing them the way. The options for understanding this are as follows: 1) It is the Holy Spirit, the spirit of Christ which would explain why the voice seemed to be Aslan's. They speak the same divine word. 2) It can be understood in a modalistic manner, where Aslan is at this time acting in the role of the Spirit. This ought not be stressed too highly, as illustrative materials by nature cannot fully express the mystery of the Holy Trinity. 3) It may express the action of the ontological Trinity, working together in creation. 4) Aslan may be serving in a role of *Deus Revelatus*, and not in the role of the Second Person of the Trinity. Thus this is simply God comforting his people. This topic will be further addressed when the identity of Aslan is discussed.

Note also that a "delicious smell" accompanies the albatross. It was common in the grail legends to ascribe the qualities of brightness and of a pleasant smell to Christ. The Dawn Treader is

*cf. John 20:19-29.

[†]The image of the albatross is likely influenced by Samuel Taylor Coleridge's The Rime of the Ancient Mariner. In Coleridge's poem, an albatross guides a ship safely out of perilous Antarctic ice, only to be killed by the Ancient Mariner's crossbow. Following this senseless killing, the Mariner's shipmates die, and he proceeds on a journey through death, and finally back to his homeland. He finally learns. "He prayeth best who loveth best All things both great and small; For the dear God who loveth us, He made and loveth all." (in James Dykes Campbell, ed. The Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (New York: Macmillan, 1893), p. 110.) Those on the Dawn Treader likewise followed the albatross, but did not seek to destroy it, and continued with Aslan's aid.

led out of the darkness by the albatross, but no one notices when the Albatross disappears.³⁹ The divine figure enlightens, comforting, and leading his people out of darkness into the light.

There is but one more type of passage to consider. Aslan at times strengthens the faithful people by terrifying their enemies. Hence time and time again the lion roars to scare away the white witch, soldiers, evil, bad school children, etc. Aslan will do all to comfort his people.

Aslan Exercises Providence

Furthermore, the nature and identity of Aslan is seen through his providence. Aslan provides for his creatures, keeps watch over them, controls their lives, and is supreme over all other gods and over nature. He provides for people's hunger in The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe where, following a great battle, a meal is miraculously provided for all who are present. Food is provided, even to the unbelieving and ungrateful. In The Last Battle, a group of dwarfs is fed a most wonderful banquet, though they do not see it, believing that they are eating straw. Aslan provides drink to the thirsty. In The Last Battle, Tirian and those with him become thirsty in the midst of battle. They are refreshed from a spring of water flowing from a rock. This parallels to the rock of the Exodus, a type of Christ.⁴⁰

Aslan provides for his people who travel to the end of the earth to see him. There on the last bit of land is found "Aslan's Table," a remarkable feast which is miraculously replenished each day. It was prepared for the nourishment and enjoyment of travellers. From this table, "the smell of the fruit and the wine blew toward them like a promise of all happiness." The reader may see a parallel to the Blessed Sacrament or, as it is near the world's end, to the *Viaticum*, the final reception of the sacrament before a journey or before death, though that is not necessary for proper interpretation. The table is prepared to satisfy the wants and needs of all who come to it.⁴¹

Aslan also shows his providential action in watching over his people. In Prince Caspian, while celebrators sleep, Aslan stays awake, keeping watch. If it is necessary for some to face danger, Aslan makes the situation tolerable. When leopards are sent as messengers to the White Witch (who has the power to turn them into stone), the children know that he would not send them if all was not right. His vigilance is seen when he watches over people in The Silver Chair, where Eustace falls off a great cliff. Aslan rushes over and blows him to safety. Though this complicates Aslan's plan, he does it to protect Eustace from injury or death.⁴²

The clearest demonstration of providence is the story of Shasta in The Horse and His Boy. Here an entire story which had seemed to be arbitrary, and the ordinary passage of time, are reinterpreted from the omniscient perspective of Aslan. Aslan speaks to Shasta at the end,

I was the lion who forced you to join with Aravis. I was the cat who comforted you among the houses of the dead. I was the lion who drove the jackals from you

*cf. 1 Corinthians 10:1-4 "For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ."

while you slept. I was the lion who gave the Horses the new strength of fear for the last mile so that you should reach King Lune in time. And I was the lion you do not remember who pushed the boat in which you lay, a child near death, so that it came to shore where a man sat, wakeful at midnight, to receive you.⁴³

So far reaching is his providence that it includes aspects of Shasta's life of which he himself was unaware. All things had been done for his good and his safety, even those which seemed at the time to be ordinary or even bad circumstances.

Finally, the broad-reaching authority of Aslan is seen in his control of nature and of nature-gods. In Prince Caspian, Aslan wakes the tree spirits as he woke them at the beginning of creation. He commands the trees, and gods such as Bacchus, Silenus, and Bromius, who do his bidding. He also makes it safe for humans to be near these gods. The children remark that they would not like to meet them without Aslan. Aslan even works mediately through Bacchus. Whereas Jesus at the wedding of Cana, turned water into wine miraculously, Aslan does the same through Bacchus, a pagan god. All "gods" are subservient to the true God. Lewis speculates that Bacchus might exist somewhere, but if he does, he is bound, as is all creation, to serve the true God at all times.⁴⁴

Throughout the Chronicles, Aslan is seen at times working mediately. It is he who appoints good government (bad governments can arise on their own.) Aslan appoints thrones and rulers, making Peter first a knight and then High King, but always king, "by the gift of Aslan." The castle where the true kings and queens of Narnia reign is Cair Paravel, which means, "inferior court," "implying its administration is still subordinate to the Emperor-Over-Sea."⁴⁵ Other rulers are under Aslan's dominion also, but mediately, through the high king. Aslan tells Caspian that he reigns as king, "under us and under Peter."⁴⁶

Aslan works among his people, giving them his chief gift, freedom. He frees Edmund from death and Eustace from his dragon state. He frees a river god from a bridge, students from a bad teacher, and frees a teacher from her bad students. An old woman, the former nurse of King Caspian, is freed from her illness. In these and many other ways Aslan bring freedom to Narnia, but the true freedom is the freedom from death experienced by all his faithful.⁴⁷

Aslan Creates and Destroys Narnia

Aslan is also revealed at the creation and destruction of Narnia. The creation is described in The Magician's Nephew. A group of humans arrives in Narnia, finding it empty and dark. In this void, wordless singing starts, seeming to come from all directions simultaneously. "It was so beautiful he could hardly bear it." That singular voice is suddenly joined by countless others, singing in harmony. Following this, the stars appeared. "If you had seen and heard it... the stars themselves were singing and ... the First Voice, the deep one, made them appear and sing." Most enjoy the sound of the music except for an evil magician, and Jadis, who would become the White Witch of Narnia. The singer himself was a lion, and his appearance eclipsed everything else. As the music progressed and changed, effects were seen in the creation. Polly, one of the children

present, "felt that all the things were coming... 'out of the Lion's head'"⁴⁸ This is similar to Tolkien's Simarillion where creation takes place through music.*

The song changed again, and the earth bubbled up, bursting to reveal animals. Aslan separated a pair of each animal and breathed on them. Then a flash of light came, "either from the sky or from the Lion itself..." and Aslan called Narnia to awake. The separated animals began to speak. Not all were given the gift of speech, only the pair that was separated from the others. Some writers have interpreted this to be symbolic of the doctrine of election, as only a few are chosen to speak. This may be looking too far into the text. There are both speaking and mute animals, Aslan created both.⁴⁹ The entire act of creation is not described here. Later the creation of a special garden, a river-god and many other things are revealed. Elsewhere in the Chronicles, Peter affirms, "...Aslan made the trees grow and the Beasts talk."⁵⁰

Since Aslan created Narniā, it is he who calls for the end of the world, and brings it to pass at his command, for "All worlds end except Aslan's country." The final judgement and destruction of Narnia is found in The Last Battle where Aslan commands the end of the world amidst great tribulation, unbelief and apostasy. There are very few faithful, yet a believing remnant exists. First, he "calls the stars home," and they fall from the sky to join him. Then all creatures left in Narnia come to him to be judged. Each one looks in Aslan's face. Some exhibit an immediate fear and hatred. Those who had been talking beasts lose their speech. All of these pass to the left of Aslan and disappear in his shadow. Lewis does not specifically teach annihilationism, only that they are not seen again by the blessed. Their fate is not revealed, as the narrative focuses on paradise. There is no hell explicitly spoken of in the Chronicles, though other books, especially The Screwtape Letters and The Great Divorce along with his non-fictional works, show that Lewis believed in the existence of hell. The other beasts looked at Aslan and loved him, though many of them were afraid. These entered a door at Aslan's right, thereby entering the "Real Narnia" and Aslan's country. Following this, dragons and great lizards come to devour the earth, much as described in the Ragnarok of Norse mythology, a favourite mythology of the young Lewis. Once the destruction is complete, Narnia is left in frozen darkness. Peter, as high king, is ordered by Aslan to shut and lock the door, for he has the golden key. An obvious parallel exists between Peter Peevensie and Simon Peter. Both, in Lewis's expression, hold the keys to heaven.[†] Peter ruled Narnia in its most glorious age and is the High King, thus it is he who finally seals the door.⁵¹

*In Tolkien's myth, Eru is "the One." His first creation was the Ainur or "Holy Ones" to whom he taught music and harmony. This music filled the void and created the world. see J. R. R. Tolkien, The Simarillion, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1977), pp. 3-6.

[†]cf. Matthew 16: 17-19 "Jesus replied, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.'"

Aslan Seen in More Direct Revelation

One particularly clear revelation of Aslan occurs at the end of The Voyage of the Dawn Treader. Narnia is a flat world. The Dawn Treader has travelled as far as she is able, close to the end of the world, where lilies cover the sea. (These, speaking a little prematurely, are evocative of the lilies which adorn churches on Easter morning.) Those who were told to proceed (Lucy, Edmund, and Eustace — the children from earth) leave the Dawn Treader in a small boat, drifting eastward (the direction toward God — the rising sun) for three days. The three days are suggestive of the three days in the tomb. After three days, they reach land, and getting out, see a Lamb. The Lamb is so white they could hardly look at it. He invites them to eat a breakfast of fish, as Christ fed the disciples broiled fish at the lakeside following his resurrection.* The Lamb then speaks to them,

“For you the door into Aslan’s country is from your own world.... There is a way into my country from all worlds”... as he spoke his snowy white flushed into tawny gold and his size changed and he was Aslan himself.⁵²

Aslan appears to them, in the form of two Christological symbols, the Lion and the Lamb,[†] to tell them that they are returning home, but that they would be able to get into his paradisaical country from their world. Aslan then promises to tell them how to get to his world, indeed, “I shall be telling you all the time, but I will not tell you how long or short the way will be; only that it lies across a river. But do not fear that, for I am the great Bridge Builder.”⁵³ Edmund asks Aslan if he is in this world as well.

“I am.” said Aslan, “but I have another name. You must learn to know me by that name. This was the very reason why you were brought to Narnia, that by knowing me here for a little, you may know me better there.”⁵⁴

Here is a clear explanation, and a connection between Narnia and earth, between Aslan and Christ. The last words of Aslan here are written to the reader of the Chronicles as well, “you were brought here so that you may know me better there.” Aslan’s identity is clear, and becomes even more so as his work is considered.

Aslan is Known in Redemption

The high point of the Chronicles of Narnia, and the reason for their widespread popularity among Christians, is the vicarious death of Aslan. Edmund, one of four children to enter Narnia, meets the White Witch, who holds Narnia under a spell of winter. She convinces him that he will be made prince of Narnia, and therefore to betray his brother and sisters to her. But she intends to kill all four children in order to prohibit them from becoming the kings and queens of Narnia, and ending her reign. When the Witch cannot get to all four children, she decides to kill Edmund alone. While she prepares to execute him, he is rescued by some of Aslan’s good creatures. Yet this rescue is not sufficient, for the Witch still lives, and she holds claim on Edmund’s life. The Witch reminds

* cf. John 21:9-12.

† cf. Revelation 5:5b-6a “...See the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals. Then I saw a Lamb looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne....”

Aslan of her “right” to his blood, for the penalty for treachery and betrayal is death, “...his life is forfeit to me. His blood is my property.... unless I have blood as the Law says all Narnia will be overturned and perish in fire and water.’ ‘It is very true’, said Aslan, ‘I do not deny it.’”⁵⁵

The law which condemns Edmund to death for the treachery of betraying his brother and sisters to the evil one is not the invention of the Witch. On the contrary, this is the “deep magic” written on the stone table of sacrifice, and engraved on the sceptre of the Emperor. This “magic,” or law, cannot be overturned. When the suggestion is made to Aslan that the law be ignored, he reminds them that it is the Emperor’s magic and cannot be ignored. Purtill notes, “...Aslan respects his father’s law — that even Aslan cannot simply ignore Edmund’s guilt....”⁵⁶ A solution to the problem is, nonetheless worked out. Aslan makes a secret deal with the witch, trading his life for Edmund’s, though he does not tell anyone about this plan.

That evening, Aslan walks a *via dolorosa*, pacing slowly with his tail and head hung low. He proceeds to the stone table where the witch waits, surrounded by monsters from a child’s nightmare. He is willingly bound, shaved, ridiculed, muzzled, kicked, hit, spat on, and jeered at. In his last living moments the Witch taunts him. Who will save the children now? You have failed. In that knowledge despair and die. Then a great stone knife is plunged into his breast.⁵⁷

Later, Susan and Lucy proceed to care for Aslan’s body. They remove his muzzle, kiss, fondle and clean his face, and pace the ground in despair. At dawn, they hear a great cracking sound. Returning, they see that the stone table is split in two, and that Aslan is gone. He appears before them, proves with his breath and his roar that he is alive, then explains what has happened. The witch knew the law from the beginning of time, namely, that sin’s penalty must be paid. That is the “deep magic,” yet there is a “deeper magic” from before time which she did not know. If an innocent victim should be killed on the stone table, it will break, and death will work backwards.⁵⁸ That is precisely what has happened with Aslan. He was an innocent victim, and an innocent victim killed for another could not remain dead. He rose according to the “deeper magic from before time.”

This death and resurrection secured Edmund’s salvation. It appears in this context that he is never told what Aslan did for him, but other readings demonstrate that he was aware of the sacrifice. Edmund’s transgression and treachery was the occasion for the death of Aslan, but many share in its rewards. Most commentators miss this precise point. Sammons, for example, states, “Aslan is sacrificed only for Edmund, though and this is different from the biblical idea of one individual’s atonement for all mankind.”⁵⁹ Gibson makes a similar statement, “One of the differences [between Aslan and Christ] is that Aslan died for one small boy,”⁶⁰ and Barrett states that Aslan’s death and resurrection “...is not a ‘for everyone’ substitutionary death.”⁶¹ So also Freshwater states that Aslan’s atonement was only for Edmund’s sin.⁶² Kilby follows the same path, but modifies it somewhat. “Aslan dies not for all Narnia’s sins, but only for those of Edmund... but Lewis certainly intended that Edmund should represent all.”⁶³

All of these writers make the critical mistake of not looking at the broad context. If The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe was the only book written, these analyses might be correct.

However, in the context of all seven books, this death is interpreted, and the benefits of Aslan's death applied to others. For example, after Aslan is brought back to life, the first thing he does is to go to the witch's castle and free the statues she has made. He breathes on them, and they come back to life. The parallel to the resurrection of the dead is obvious. This is further reinforced by their behaviour. The statues think that they have been asleep, and friends are united again. This is, however, not to be equated with the resurrection of the dead at the end of time, which is seen in The Last Battle as a separate event. Here the statues are brought back to life and join in the battle that follows.* That battle was initiated by the Witch as she tried to destroy all of Aslan's followers following his death. Salvation had been accomplished, but the final defeat of the enemy was yet to come. Edmund broke the witch's magic wand, and hampered her progress, but it is Aslan who kills her. The battle complete, celebration ensues, and peace reigns over Narnia.⁶⁴

This is the chief image of salvation in the Chronicles, but not the sole image. Another example is the case of Eustace, Edmund's cousin. Lewis deliberately creates the character of Eustace as an unlovable, obnoxious person, yet even he is worthy of salvation. Eustace, after having been troublesome for the whole journey on the Dawn Treader, finds his way on an island, to the lair of a dragon. He watches as the dragon dies, and proceeds to claim the dragon's hoard of treasure as his own. Lying there on the treasure, thinking dragon's thoughts, he becomes a dragon himself. This is an outward manifestation of his sinful nature. Eventually, Eustace repents and realises what his behaviour has been, yet no one could find a way to help him. His salvation had to come from Aslan.

Aslan did save Eustace. Cunningham calls this event Lewis's most striking picture of transformation.⁶⁵ One night, while he was still a dragon, a lion came to him, and led him to a mountain top garden. In the centre of the garden (which was actually in "Aslan's country") was a well. Eustace wanted to bathe in this well, but was told he must undress first. He begins to remove his skin. After removing three layers of his dragon skin, he saw that he was still a dragon. The lion takes over and tears deep into his skin, indeed, he tore all the way down to his heart. Then the lion picked him up and threw him into the water. Eustace emerged as a boy again.⁶⁶

After all of this, Eustace still did not know the identity of the lion. Edmund surprises Eustace by explaining that he had met Aslan. Edmund tells him, "he knows me... He is the great Lion, the son of the Emperor over Sea who saved me and saved Narnia."⁶⁷ Note Edmund's crucial words here. Aslan did not save only Edmund. He saved Narnia as well. Though the occasion of Aslan's death had been Edmund's betrayal, the beneficiaries were all of Narnia.

Aslan had saved Eustace through an act which obviously parallels Baptism. Schakel notes that the thrice attempted peeling of the dragon skin and the bestowal of new clothes is, "the Narnian equivalent of rebirth and Baptism."⁶⁸ Eustace's old dragon-self was destroyed, and a new person

*It is likely that Lewis was paralleling the opening of the graves on Good Friday. Matthew reports that at the death of Jesus, "The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people." (Matthew 27:52, 53).

emerged from the water. Lewis is careful to note that Eustace still had relapses into his old self, "It would be nice and fairly true, to say that 'from that time forth Eustace was a different boy.' To be strictly accurate, he began to be a different boy. He had relapses,"⁶⁹ but he was, all in all, improving because Aslan had changed him.

One more case deserves attention. At the end of *The Silver Chair*, following the death of King Caspian, the children are taken up to the "Mountain of Aslan" which is beyond the end of the world. There Caspian lies dead in a stream with water flowing over him. Eustace, Jill, and "...the Lion wept: great Lion-tears, each tear more precious than the Earth would be if it was a single solid diamond."⁷⁰ They weep for Caspian. Then something remarkable happens. Aslan asks Eustace to get a thorn, which is a foot long and sharp as a rapier, and makes him drive it into his paw.

And there came out a great drop of blood... it splashed into the stream over the dead body of the King... And the dead king began to be changed... he leaped up and stood before them — a very young man or a boy.... And he rushed to Aslan and flung his arms as far as they would go round the huge neck.⁷¹

By the blood of Aslan, Caspian was restored to life in Aslan's country. The children question Aslan about this. Had not Caspian died? Indeed he has, most people have, replies Aslan, "even I have."⁷² By the blood of Aslan, one more soul is saved, the body raised again to eternal life. The salvation won by Aslan for Edmund is given to others as well. It is universal in its scope, yet it is not universalism. Not all enter Aslan's country at the end of time, only those that believe in him and are faithful to the end shall live there.

There is one more aspect of Aslan's death to consider. The stone table and knife used to kill him become quite different after his death. They are treated as relics, as is the cross of Christ in the grail legends. The stone table was not erected for the death of Aslan, but had existed from the beginning of Narnian time. At the time Aslan was killed it looked old, and was inscribed with an unknown language (the deep magic). Years later, the hill of the stone table had been altered so that the place where Aslan was slain was enclosed within a hill. It was known as "Aslan's how" and described as "a round green hill on top of another hill." Inside were tunnels, passages and chambers adorned with the figure of the lion. In the centre of the hill,

the secret and magical chamber... was the Stone itself... split right down the centre, and covered with what had once been writing of some kind: but ages of wind and rain and snow had almost worn them away.⁷³

The stone table had been enshrined, set apart from the rest of the world. Aslan's how is the closest thing to a shrine in all of Narnia. It is somewhat reminiscent of a church nave, focused upon the table of sacrifice. It is seen as the refuge of the "true Narnians" in time of battle.

Similar to the stone table is another relic, the stone knife by which Aslan was killed. After its use in Aslan's death, it is next seen on Aslan's table at the end of the world. It lay there upon the table which seemed odd as it was, "a knife of stone, sharp as steel, a cruel-looking, ancient-looking thing." It was a sacred object. When the last three Narnian Lords had journeyed here, one had taken up the knife in anger. The result was an enchantment of sleep that immediately fell over them, for they were not worthy to touch it, not to mention the abomination of murdering with it.

The knife was brought to that place, "...to be kept in honour while the world lasts." This stone knife appears quite similar to the Holy Grail. It is a holy object, kept in respect for all times.⁷⁴ Likewise there is a similarity to those who dwell on Perelandra in honour for all time (Ransom, Arthur etc.). Many have noted a parallel between this table and the Lord's Supper. Cited as evidence is the red cloth, evocative of the blood of Christ, and the knife, kept there so that, "anyone coming to this table would be reminded of Aslan's sacrifice."⁷⁵ Schakel states, "The table is the Narnian equivalent of the Eucharist..."⁷⁶ Gibson also believes this to be the case, but states that Lewis may have placed the table at this point in the narrative, "...to make the task of the allegorist more difficult."⁷⁷ These simple references would mean little on their own, but joined with the sacrifice on the stone table, they help to reinforce the typical relationship between Aslan and Christ.

A crucial element in the identity and nature of Aslan, remains. Lewis inserts several clues to the true identity of Aslan. One of these already examined is the revelation to the children at the end of The Voyage of the Dawn Treader where Aslan appears as a Lamb, then as the Lion, and finally in another form which is presumably human. Other direct indications are also present. In an interesting connection to this world, Aslan and Father Christmas come at the same time. Lewis himself used this as an explanation to the fuller identity of Aslan. Who else comes at Christmas time? None other than Christ. Similarly, in The Last Battle, the followers of Aslan are thrown into a stable which allegedly contains the god Tash. They believe they are going to their death. To their surprise, when they enter the stable, they find Aslan's country, an enormous world, far larger than the stable. Lucy is not surprised at all. She responds, "In our world too, a Stable once had something inside it that was bigger than our whole world." It is left to the reader to surmise that she is speaking of Christ.⁷⁸

Secondly, in The Voyage of the Dawn Treader, Lucy reads the "Spell for the refreshment of Spirit." The "spell" is adorned with beautiful pictures, and is written on three pages. It is the loveliest story involving "a cup and a sword and a tree and a green hill." Elements of our Lord's passion figure prominently here. Lucy later could not remember the details, but knows it as a "good story." Furthermore, in a marvellous explanation of the Gospel story, we see that as Lucy read the spells, Aslan was made visible. When Lucy wants to hear the story again, Aslan tells her that he will tell her the story, "for years and years." This image of the intrusion of the Gospel account into Narnia illumines the reader's understanding of Aslan.⁷⁹ Aslan typifies Christ.

A final issue which must be considered is the relationship between Aslan and the Trinity. This is a particularly difficult problem made more so by the primary audience for these books — children. Lewis is keeping things as simple as possible. Yet there an interaction of the Trinity is seen in Aslan.

The first hint of this is in the incantations used by people to summon Aslan's help. Both beasts and people call out, "Aslan, Aslan, Aslan" The fact that this is repeated several times shows that it is deliberate. Aslan is the only way to approach God. There is no direct appeal to the Emperor-over-sea, only through Aslan. Aslan's name serves as the name for the entire godhead.⁸⁰ Second is the case of the Dawn Treader in the darkness of nightmares. Aslan seems present as the

Holy Spirit. Third Aslan's role in creation is much broader and more inclusive than the role normally ascribed to Christ. Fourth is a unique passage in *The Horse and His Boy*. The boy Shasta, having run away from what he thought was his home in Calormen arrives in Archenland (a country neighbouring Narnia), which was his true home. Shasta was actually a prince, and had been unknowingly guided on his journey by Aslan. Eventually, Shasta finds himself in a blinding fog, next to a lion. Shasta asks, "Who are you?" He already knows what the lion has done, but does not know his identity. Aslan responds,

"Myself," said the Voice, very deep and low so that the earth shook: and again "Myself," loud and clear and gay: and then the third time "Myself," whispered so softly you could hardly hear it, and yet it seemed to come from all round you as if the leaves rustled with it.⁸¹

This is the closest thing to the explicit revelation of the Trinity to be found in the Chronicles. The first voice, shaking the earth is the voice of creation, the Father. The second is loud, clear and gay, the voice of the one who stands beside him, who speaks with organic means, and the third soft, mysterious voice, is that of the Spirit, which Lewis primarily considered as God in us. Taken by itself, this passage would suggest modalism, but this should not be read in isolation. These are not statements of propositional theology, but illustrations. The charge of modalism cannot be avidly pursued in the fictional writings. Aslan is God active among his creatures as the second person of the Trinity, but he does not act alone.

Narnian Models of the Atonement

Lewis often stressed the avoidance of any one theory of the atonement, drawing from as many sources as possible. Yet in reading the Chronicles, one does see a particular model being expressed. While it may seem, at first, to be the *Christus Victor* model, it is, in reality, a sub-part of that model, the ransom theory. The identification of this theory should not be interpreted, however, to mean that Lewis did not use elements of other theories.

Charles A. Taliaferro, writing in *The Scottish Journal of Theology* notes how the ransom theory finds expression in Narnia.⁸² Somehow, (the method or its legitimacy is not explained to the reader) an evil-doer comes to be in captivity to Satan, that is, to the White Witch. The Saviour gives himself in place of the evildoer. As a result of this, unforeseen by the Witch, she is overthrown. This sense of overthrow is what makes the event seem like an expression of the *Christus Victor* theory.

While the Chronicles make use of elements of other models, including the Anselmic theory (recall that the Emperor's "magic" cannot be overthrown), there is no usage of the Abelardian model. In this model, Christ's life, death, and resurrection are used to lure us back to God. The subjectivism at play here is not used by Lewis. The person of Aslan himself is the lure back. It would be more accurate to consider Lewis's model of the Atonement, if he has one at all, to be an eclectic model. He takes elements from each theory as they best suit his purpose of presenting Christ.

Other Christological Images

There are in Narnia other Christ figures beyond Aslan. Huttar notes that the sacrifice of Aslan is a specific instance of voluntary self-sacrifice, a principle which is valid throughout the entire universe. But it is not the sole such account in Narnia. There are others: Lucy in the magician's house going upstairs to break a spell for the monopods, Caspian journeying to the world's end to awaken the enchanted Lords, Jill, Eustace, and Puddleglum going underground to rescue Prince Rilian.⁸³ Yet these are all subordinate to the primal sacrifice of Aslan.

Conclusion

So who is Aslan? Is he equivalent to Christ? The answer must be no. Aslan was not created to replace Christ, or to explain Christ on a one to one basis, but he is typical of Christ. Lewis wrote,

[Aslan is] an invention giving an imaginary answer to the question, "What might Christ become like, if there really were a world like Narnia and He chose to be incarnate and die and rise again in that world as he actually has done in ours."⁸⁴

As such, he cannot replace Christ. Karkainen considers this in reference to Aslan's "animalness." "Because he is depicted as an animal, Aslan does not compete with Christ; he illuminates Him."⁸⁵

This is best illustrated in a series of letters written by C. S. Lewis to children. He wrote to one child, as to the identity of Aslan on 3 June 1953,

As to Aslan's other name, well, I want you to guess. Has there never been anyone in this world who (1) Arrived at the same time as Father Christmas. (2) Said he was the son of the Great Emperor. (3) Gave himself up for someone else's fault to be jeered at and killed by wicked people. (4) Came to life again. (5) Is sometimes spoken of as a Lamb (see the end of the Dawn Treader) Don't you really know His name in this world.⁸⁶

Even more revealing is a letter Lewis wrote to a worried parent on May 6, 1955, "Lawrence can't really love Aslan more than Jesus.... For the things he loves Aslan for doing or saying are simply the things Jesus really did and said."⁸⁷

Clearly Lewis was writing of Christ. These images are present in the Chronicles, he acknowledged them to be present, and he helped guide people to discover them. Lewis stated in a letter to Thomas Howard, "The reason why the Passion of Aslan sometimes moves people more than the real story in the Gospels is, I think, that it takes them off their guard."⁸⁸ In Aslan, Lewis has successfully "translated" Christ to his readers. John Warwick Montgomery was quite correct in his assessment of the chronicles when he said, "The theme is that basic of all themes, Redemption through Christ."⁸⁹ But it is presented in a new form, in order that it might be understood by many people.

This is also the primary meaning of the story. Yet in a myth of this scale, additional layers of meaning must be present. It is obvious that Aslan is a type of Christ, that Lewis pointed his readers to Christ in their reading. The reader may, consistent with Lewis's intent, see the person, work, and atonement of Aslan, and recognise in that an action similar to that undertaken by the Saviour. That above all is the chief focus of the Chronicles.

Till We Have Faces

The Narnian Chronicles employ Lewis's ideas on myth, providing second meanings that are fairly obvious. Till We Have Faces likewise embodies his ideals of mythical writings, but is more detailed and intricate. It is Lewis's most sophisticated myth, but also the least known. It retells and recasts the myth of Cupid and Psyche, found in Apuleius's Metamorphoses. The original myth is relatively obscure to many readers, though certainly well known to one with a classical education, such as Lewis. Lewis has taken great liberty in his presentation, changing a good portion of the original myth in order to fit his purposes. Kilby notes his method here, saying "What he does in this novel is to overlay the Apuleius story with Christian implications."¹ Some of these implications will be readily discernible, others are more obscure.

The task of interpretation is made more challenging by the nature of the original myth. Gibb notes that the story in its essential components, "...is an allegory of the human soul's love for God."² Another writer states,

Even as told or transmitted by Apuleius, in the second century the story was considered an allegory of how the human soul is purified by sufferings and misfortunes and prepared for the enjoyment of true happiness.³

Kreeft notes that it is also something more,

...though it is labelled "a myth retold." It is a "realistic"(historical) novel of conflicting myths: that of the Greek god of light, Apollonian reason, and that of Ugit the dark god of Dionysian blood and mystery.⁴

While Lewis would not have called it allegorical, these themes are indeed present. In the Introduction to the British edition of Till We Have Faces, which is absent from the American edition, Lewis says that the themes include: a straight tale of barbarism, the mind of an ugly woman, "dark idolatry and pale enlightenment at war with each other and with vision," and "the havoc which a vocation, or even a faith, works on a human life."⁵

With all of these themes interacting together, and the multiplicity of meaning inherent in such a myth, what finally emerges is, "...an extraordinarily subtle tale of a person's lifelong attempt to achieve release from sin."⁶ Subtle is the operative word in this sentence, for Lewis has written a grand myth, using all of the intricacies of classic mythology to his advantage. Furthermore, he has written a novel which is clearly for educated adults. It is, as Gibb says, "...a painful book; Lewis was not a writer to give adult people the easy happy ending. A blissful ending, yes, but that is another thing..."⁷ Lewis would be pleased with this characterisation. Till We Have Faces is the crown of his fiction. He acknowledged that it was the most mythical of all of his works, and worked on this myth, at least mentally, from the time he was an undergraduate student until its publication, so that he could write, "That way, he [I] could be said to have worked at it most of his life."⁸ As early as 1922, Lewis had attempted to tell this story in verse, though only fragments of this effort

survive.* He attempted to write the myth twice in poetic form. Abandoning these efforts, he wrote it as prose in 1955 and 1956, making it the last of his fiction.⁹

Critical reaction to Till We Have Faces has been varied. Most acclaim it as an excellent work, though differing from Lewis's past style and methods. Starr writes, "His novel, Till We Have Faces is considered by many critics his finest narrative, and it marks a radical departure from his others in subject matter, form and style."¹⁰ The reason for the difference in style between this and Lewis's other stories is easy to discover. Gibson says,

The voice here is that of the queen of a barbaric little kingdom of the ancient world. In all of Lewis's other fiction, with the exception of The Screwtape Letters, we hear his own voice either as omniscient author or as first-person narrator.¹¹

Yet it is not questions of voice alone that make this work different. It is important to perceive the role of Joy Gresham in this book's creation. In March, 1955, while Joy was visiting Lewis, they talked about ideas for a book. Joy read the manuscript, offering advice. In April, Joy wrote, "He is now about three-quarters of the way through the book... and says he finds my advice indispensable."¹² In the end, Lewis constructed a piece of fiction unlike any other in the corpus of his writing,* a myth which embodied all of his ideas concerning myth.

Plot Summary

Till We Have Faces is read much less than most of Lewis's other fictional writings, partly due to its complexity. It is a work that challenges the reader, encouraging him to draw on other literary resources, and offering many possible interpretations. The myth takes place in the kingdom of Glome, which is ruled by the tyrannical king Throm. Throm has two daughters, Orual and Redival. During the narrative, his third daughter, Istra (in Greek, Psyche) is born. Throm has a Greek slave named Lysias, or "The Fox" who is tutor to the girls. The first part of the book is an Edenic setting in which a background of violence and hate is contrasted to the love shared by Orual, Psyche, and the Fox. Psyche is a remarkably beautiful child who begins to be worshipped by the people who come to her for healing and food. As a result of this worship, Psyche falls under the wrath of Ungit, a fertility goddess. Psyche becomes "The Accursed," and the kingdom is beset with grievous plagues and sufferings. The third part of the plot is the Great Offering, in which Psyche is offered up to Ungit's son, the god of the Grey Mountain. Following this sacrifice, the land is freed from its plagues. Later, Orual returns to the mountain to bury Psyche, only to find her alive, and claiming to be married to a god whom she has never seen in the light. She lives in a palace which is invisible to her sister. Orual rejects her story, and convinces Psyche to examine her husband in light, as he has forbidden her to do. When Psyche looks on her husband, he knows she has broken her promise to him. The palace is destroyed, and Psyche is sent away. Orual is judged by the god who tells her what has happened to Psyche. Orual sees the beauty of the god, and is terrified,

*Walter Hooper notes that 78 couplets are preserved in The Lewis Papers, VIII: pp. 163-164, and reproduces a number of them in C. S. Lewis: A Companion and Guide, pp. 246, 247.

knowing what she has done. The god tells her, "you also shall be Psyche," which Orual considers to be a judgement against her. The next two portions of the plot tell of Orual's ascension to the throne of Glome, and her reign as queen. These show a prosperous, though sad reign. After some years on the throne, Orual travels to other lands. At the farthest reach of her journey, she discovers a temple to the new goddess, Istra. The story is that of she and Psyche, but the details are wrong. Faced with this deceitful myth, Orual decides to write her account as a case against the gods. In the final section, Orual's case is heard by the gods, and she sees her complaint for what it is, cruel, self-centred and selfish words which have no merit on their own. In the end, Orual who had been jealous and ugly, is brought a vessel of beauty, and is made as beautiful as Psyche. She ends the book with a recognition that the gods were correct all along, and that she was in error. Before she completes the last words, she dies.¹³ That is a skeletal structure of the book, yet it is filled with meaning beyond these words. Some of the Christian themes will be examined along with their relationship to Christology.

Sin

The entire book deals, in numerous ways, with sin. Sin is so pervasive that the one caught in it does not even realise this. Such is the case with Orual. She was writing a case against the gods, when it was she who was wrong. This is because, "...the fallen self cannot know itself,"¹⁴ because there is no self to know. It does not have a face. Kilby interprets this, "By having a face Lewis means a willingness to be honest with the truths of the whole universe...."¹⁵ In the first half of the book, Orual does not realise all of this, but in the second book, she sees the truth, and her real self. She finally realises that she is Ungit, the blood thirsty goddess. "Glome is like a web, and I am the spider." Before the gods, it is seen that she wanted to be her own, and to possess Psyche. As she reads her complaint, she sees that the fine book she believes she is writing is nothing but a vile scribble, far shorter than she had thought. Stripped of her defences, she realises her sin.

The Cult of Ungit

The narrative demonstrates several religious options available in Glome to deal with sin. The first option is the worship of Ungit. Ungit is described as a black stone with no head, hands, or face. She sits in a dark, egg-shaped temple. According to the Fox, she is Aphrodite though more like the Babylonian goddess than the Greek. Ungit is one god in the pantheon, her son is the god of the Grey Mountain.¹⁶ Ungit is identified with the image, but did not fall from the sky as other gods.[†] Rather, she was pushed up from the earth¹⁷ She is served by priests who offer sacrifices and pour the sacrificial blood over the idol. The priest of Ungit sacrificed mostly pigeons, though he had also sacrificed men. Orual tells us that he smelled like blood, burnt fat, singed hair, wine, and stale

*His other mythical recasting, *After Ten Years*, is not included in this corpus. This intriguing retelling of the story of the Trojan Horse is unfinished, and was published posthumously in *The Dark Tower and Other Stories*.

†e.g. The image of Artemis in the temple of Ephesus was alleged to have fallen from heaven.

incense, describing this as, "the Ungit Smell."¹⁸ The priest conducted his duties wearing a bird mask.

Worship of Ungit involved bloody sacrifices, and temple prostitution. It is, in short, wholly pagan. Yet as Kilby notes, "Lewis clearly favors the bloody Ungit over the Greek-style temple in the woods...."¹⁹ There seemingly meaningless sacrifices of fruit and flowers are offered, and the old priest does not seem to believe his religion. Ungit worship at least acknowledges the sinful nature of those who come.

The Influence of Philosophy

The worship of Ungit was the official religion of Glome, yet an alternative soon became known in Greek philosophy. This was brought to Glome by "the Fox," an archetypal Greek philosopher, who is sceptical and suspicious of supernaturalism. Yet he is somewhat superstitious which he attributes to his own weakness and folly. Gibson considers the Fox a Stoic.²⁰

Under the influence of the Fox, the worship of Ungit becomes more rationalistic. The priest has a more realistic image made, and he now talks of her as a representation of the earth as mother, though the common people still worship the old stone image. Lewis clearly considers this a weakening of the Ungit cultus, and parallels these changes to Modernism on the Church.²¹ The book as a whole is addressed to Greeks, that is to say, anyone who holds to the Fox's rationalistic philosophy. However, after death, the Fox realised how empty his philosophy had been. Following his death, the Fox serves another peripheral role. While Orual is in the deadlands, the Fox serves and guides her as Virgil and Beatrice guided Dante.²²

The Great Offering

While respecting Greek philosophy, and learning from it, Lewis did not consider it adequate as a religion.* Much more appropriate were bloody sacrifices which acknowledge the desperateness of the human condition. The solution to humanity's problems involves not only right thinking, but death. Lewis highlights this need in the most dramatic act of worship in Glome, "the Great Offering."

When plagues are covering the land of Glome, the priest of Ungit comes to the king, and tells him about the Great Offering. In past, he said, a man had lain with his sister and killed the child. "We found him out and expiated his sin" and all was right.²³ Another time, a woman cursed Ungit's Son, and floods covered the land. When they "expiated her sin," the river receded. Whenever such disasters occur, there is "an Accursed" who must die. Not just any person can die in the offering, it must be the Accursed, who is identified by drawing lots. Furthermore, "In the Great Offering, the victim must be perfect." This contradictory status confuses the King. The priest responds, "Why should the Accursed not be both the best and the worst?" Although the King does

*The Greek philosophers likewise did not consider philosophy to be adequate as a religion either. Worship in the temples continued along with the teaching of philosophy. This duality is absent in the thinking of the Fox who demands pure rationalism.

not like the thought that his daughter will die, he is relieved that it is not his own death that is called for. He says, "It is only sensible that one should die for many.* It happens in every battle."²⁴

Having decided upon the Great Offering, Psyche is chosen by lot as the Accursed. She is taken up on the mountain, and given up at the Holy Tree.[†] At her death, the plagues ended, and almost immediately, rain began to fall.^{‡25}

Gibson notes the parallel between the Great Offering and Christ, saying,

In the Great Offering, the victim is led up the Mountain to the Holy Tree, suggesting the Via Dolorosa to the "tree" at Calvary. The victim must be perfect — like the passover lamb, therefore, like Christ....²⁶

The parallels are quite apparent, yet this is not an instance of Christology at all. Here is another example of vicarious sacrifice, of which Christ's was archetypal. Here is an example of the partial truth which Lewis believed was present in all religions. It is a valid principle, even outside of Christianity.

Psyche as Christ

The most Christ-like person in the entire myth is Psyche. It is extremely tempting to make Psyche a Christ-figure, yet Lewis has complicated this in a letter written to Clyde Kilby.

Psyche is an instance of the *anima naturaliter Christiana* making the best of the Pagan religion she is brought up in and thus being guided (but always "under the cloud," always in terms of her own imaginations or that of her people) towards the true God. She is in some ways like Christ because every good man or woman is like Christ. What else could they be like?²⁷

These words indicate that Till We Have Faces is not an allegory, but a myth. Psyche is not Christ, she is like Christ. Indeed, she must be like Christ, because she is good, and all goodness conforms to His image. Psyche is not Christ, just as Aslan is not Christ and Ransom is not Christ. But she does exemplify characteristics and behaviour which may broaden understanding of Christ.

Psyche is beautiful, even as a child, and all she touches becomes beautiful. She dreams of the Mountain, crafting stories about it which foreshadow her later life. "'When I'm big,' she said, 'I

*cf. John 11:49-50 "Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, 'You know nothing at all! You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.'"

†It is interesting to note that in Apuleius's telling, the victim was sacrificed on a rock. Lewis has introduced a change with a significant biblical parallel. Galatians 3:13 "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree."

‡The sacrifice of Psyche may also be parallel to the mythical Iphigenia. Her father, Agamemnon, had vowed to sacrifice the fairest thing born in a particular year, and was thus obliged to sacrifice his daughter. There are several variations of this myth, but all of them involve the idea that Iphigenia remained alive after the sacrifice, due to the substitution of an animal in her place. In Euripides's telling of the myth, Iphigenia lived on as a priestess of Artemis. (see N. G. L. Hammond and H. H. Scullard, eds., The Oxford Classical Dictionary, second edition. (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1970), pp. 550, 551). Another possible parallel to Psyche is the daughter of Jephthah found in Judges 11. Jephthah, a military leader, pledged that if he were victorious over the Ammonites, he would sacrifice whatever came out of his house to God as a burnt offering. Tragically, his daughter, who was his only child, came out first. Hearing of his vow, his daughter

will be a great, great queen, married to the greatest king of all, and he will build me a castle of gold and amber up there on the very top.”²⁸ Psyche has been frequently venerated by the people, and is sought for healing and food, but is later rejected by the same people she helped. When she questions this, Orual responds, “You healed them, and blessed them, and took their filthy disease upon yourself. And these are their thanks.”²⁹ The parallels to Christ are evident as he is worshipped, heals, and feeds the people, only to be rejected. When Psyche is confined to await her sacrifice, Orual goes to comfort Psyche, and comes to be comforted in return.³⁰

Psyche knows that she is to be sacrificed, and understands the significance of this. She knows that she must be the accursed, and that her death is necessary. “How can I be the ransom for all Glome unless I die? And if I am to go to the god, of course it must be through death.”³¹ So also our Lord knew that his death was necessary to accomplish the salvation of the world. After she has died, Psyche is called, “the Blessed” the precise opposite of her name during the Great Offering. She now has received a kingdom, though it is not seen by mortal eyes. Her house lies across a river, a symbol of death. The house is glimpsed momentarily by Orual, but only when she kneels by a river, an action which is evocative of Baptism.³²

In Orual’s last vision before the gods, she sees Psyche set to the task of getting a casket of beauty from death, in order to bring it back to Ungit. Many try to shield her from this, but she goes on anyway. When she returns from this descent into hell, she gives the beauty to Orual, who now becomes Psyche. It is nearly impossible to miss the theme of the descent into hell, and its harrowing in this reading. Christ returns from the dead, and gives his riches to the believer.

Many commentators have expressed the similarities of Psyche to Christ, perhaps none better than Gibson,

Psyche forgives Redival with the comment, “She also does what she doesn’t know” Like the High Priest’s remark the King says, “It’s only sensible that one should die for many” And then Orual tells her, “You healed them and blessed them and took their filthy disease upon yourself,” this not only suggests the ministry of Christ but also echoes the messianic statement of Isaiah, “Surely he hath borne our griefs....” And the statement of the Fox that at the Holy Tree she did not cry out even when they left her, reminds us again of Isaiah, “As a sheep before his shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth.” So Psyche, who is to become a goddess, reflects the image of Christ.³³

Starr notes that the beauty of Psyche, her aura of divinity, death on a tree and resurrection all are parallel to Christ, but states that the parallel is incomplete because her resurrection “involves years of wandering and suffering, yet in the end she is the instrument of redemption and salvation.”³⁴

Another writer notes that she is “...a kind of Christ.” but immediately echoes Lewis to say that it would be better to say *anima naturaliter Christiana*.³⁵ Van Der Weel, on the other hand, clearly states that Psyche is a Christ figure,

Despite his disclaimer that Psyche is an instance of the *anima naturaliter Christiana*, she profoundly illuminates, at the highest reaches of myth, the mission, scope and sacrifice of Christ himself.³⁶

insisted that he keep his vow, but asked for two months time to spend with her friends first. Jephthah agreed, and two months later, his daughter was sacrificed. (Judges 11: 30-39).

Lewis has constructed a myth. It may be that he did not intend for such a strong Christ figure, though it appears quite intentional. Yet even if it were unintentional, the imagery exists, and can be demonstrated. While not a perfect, allegorical figure, Psyche exemplifies numerous Christic features. She expands appreciation and understanding of Christ.

Orual

In contrast to Psyche, Orual is quite obviously not a Christ figure. Orual is a human in need of salvation who discovers that grace must be given, not taken. There are certain points when Orual does carry out a small portion of a Christic role. Christopher says that "...both Orual and Psyche may be said to partake of the Christ archetype."³⁷ They participate in this by bearing burdens for others, a concept in which Lewis undoubtedly is reliant on Charles Williams's presentation of coinherence, particularly in his Descent into Hell. In the latter part of Till We Have Faces, Orual attempts to accomplish tasks, such as gathering golden fleece, and fails. But due to Orual's failure, Psyche is able to accomplish those tasks. This is the sole way in which Orual can be said to be a Christ figure. If anything, she is the opposite, for she must reach the realisation that she is Ungit before she can be saved. Orual is a clear example of grace. The beauty which she tried to gain on her own can only be given vicariously by another. Psyche does just that for her.³⁸

Images of the True God

In this book, as in the others, there are some obvious indications of Lewis's Christianity and to Christian concepts. One is when Orual despairs, and considers suicide. A god speaks to her, "You cannot escape Ungit by going to the deadlands, for she is there also. Die before you die. There is no chance after."³⁹ This is a reference to the need for spiritual regeneration.

A second item of merit is the idea of facelessness. Why should the gods, or God, listen to human complaints when we don't know who we are? Until people acknowledge their sin, what is the point of arguing? "How can they meet us face to face till we have faces?"⁴⁰ The problem is not with God, but with humanity. As Payne says, "Lewis was expressing a universal truth: man will find his true self only in communion and union with Christ."⁴¹

Another item worthy of note are the words of Bardia who says, "I wonder, do the gods know what it feels like to be a man."⁴² Gibson notes, that this "...could appear in the Old Testament. It expresses the need for the incarnation."⁴³ And this expression, from a Pagan, is even more effective.

A fourth notable item is found in the words of Orual at the end of the book, "I know now, Lord, why you utter no answer. You are yourself the Answer." Orual had been asking Job-like questions, and was amazed at the silence. Mankind may attempt to question God, but already has the answer — God Himself.

Finally, there is a marvellous passage on Divine Justice in which Orual questions the Fox, "Are the gods not just?" He responds, "Oh no, child. What would become of us if they were?"⁴⁴

This reinforces Lewis's continual emphasis that it is much better to receive Divine mercy instead of justice.*

Conclusion

Till We Have Faces offers much less Christological material than the rest of Lewis's fiction. It does, however, provide helpful portraits of Christ figures. The substitutionary death and continuing life of Psyche is a reflection of the vicarious passion of Christ who himself might have said, "How can I be the offering unless I die?" and who is also both Blessed and the Accursed. As the kingdom of Glome received the rain at Psyche's sacrifice, and as Orual received beauty when Psyche returned from the Underworld, so also mankind receives the fruits of Christ's death and resurrection, life everlasting.

*He repeatedly emphasises this theme. One of the more notable sections is in The Great Divorce with its presentation of Christ, the Bleeding Charity.

Devotional Writings

In his fiction, Lewis writes with the skills of his profession. Using various literary genres, he translates Christian theology for his readers, placing it in an imaginative context. His apologetic works directly presented Christian teaching. The third major division of his works is unique. The works which make up this category might best be described as devotional writings. These three books, Reflections on the Psalms, The Four Loves, and Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer, differ from previous non-fictional works in several ways. They have little apologetic intent. They are less forceful, more candid and conversational in tone, they are addressed to Christians, and intended for edification. Thus Lewis says in the opening pages of Reflections on the Psalms,

...this is not what is called an "apologetic" work. I am nowhere trying to convince unbelievers that Christianity is true. I address those who already believe it, or those who are ready, while reading, to "suspend their disbelief." A man can't always be defending the truth; there must be a time to feed on it.¹

All three of these books were written after his marriage, and indeed, after Joy's cancer went into remission. They also were written after his debate with G. E. M. Anscombe, which may account for the different tone of these books. These writings provide a glimpse into the Christian thinking of the mature Lewis, and show a different facet of his theological thought. They will be addressed in the order of their publication.

Reflections on the Psalms

The first devotional work is Reflections on the Psalms, a book dedicated to Austin and Katherine Farrer. Here Lewis brought together his Christian faith and his professional literary skills. He begins the book, "This is not a work of scholarship.... I write for the unlearned about things in which I am unlearned myself."² This disclaimer is only partially correct. Unlike most of his professional writings, Lewis worked with the Psalms only in translation, as he did not know Hebrew. At the same time, he was well acquainted with the Psalter. His daily attendance at his college chapel with its regular reading of the Psalms led to an intimate familiarity with their content. His work in this book was so well regarded that soon after its publication, Lewis was invited to join the Archbishop's Commission to Revise the Psalter.³

As Lewis applies his skills as a literary critic and poet to the Psalms he reveals his understanding of prophecy, messianic expectations, and of scripture in general. In these areas his self description may be correct, but in discussing the poetry of the Psalms, Lewis is an expert. He based his comments on the Coverdale translation, (which is used in the Book of Common Prayer), not only for its familiarity, but also for its rendering of the Psalm's poetry. He maintains that the Psalms must be read as poetry if they are to be understood, and then offers his understanding. While he is discussing the Psalms, Lewis addresses the person and work of Jesus Christ. He writes of the Incarnation, of different ways of understanding Christ, and of Christ types outside of the Bible.

The Incarnation

Lewis's chief Christological motif is the Incarnation. Frequently he relies on credal formulations in choosing his own words. Consider the following passage where Lewis discusses what it means for the Psalms to be the word of God. "We are taught that the Incarnation itself proceeded 'not by the conversion of the godhead into flesh, but by taking of (the) manhood into God'; in it human life becomes the vehicle of Divine life."⁴ Likewise, Lewis maintained, the word of God was not converted into literature, but literature was taken up "to be the vehicle of God's word." This is an interesting avenue for the explanation of inspiration,^{*} but note how Lewis understands Christological doctrine. Quoting from the Athanasian Creed, Lewis simply says, "we are taught..." His statement is strictly within the bounds of orthodoxy for he has merely restated the credal formulation.

Birth

Delineation of credal doctrine with such introductions as "we are taught..." is typical of Lewis's writing. It is also typical that, having stated the orthodox formula, he presents his own understanding of that doctrine. This is particularly evident as he discusses the content of the Psalms. Lewis discusses Psalms, and the Song of Solomon, which apply bridal imagery to the people of God. He considers parallel images in other religions, and looks within the scriptures for the fullness of this motif. Considering Psalm 45, he says,

Read in this sense, the Psalm restores Christmas to its proper complexity. The birth of Christ is the arrival of the great warrior and the great king. Also of the Lover, the Bridegroom, whose beauty surpasses that of man. But not only the Bridegroom as the lover, the desired; the Bridegroom also as he who makes fruitful, the father of the children still to be begotten and born. (Certainly the image of a Child in a manger by no means suggests to us a king, giant killer, bridegroom, and father. But we would not suggest the eternal Word either — if we didn't know. All alike are aspects of the same central paradox.)⁵

Lewis's glosses on this psalm offer a rich understanding both of Scripture and of the Christ. The paradox of the Incarnation is that this Child in a manger is indeed a warrior, king, lover, bridegroom, and father. The Child is far more than outward appearances would suggest. None of these things would have been guessed, just as it would not have been imagined, apart from revelation, that He is the divine Logos. The Christ is far more complex, rich, and meaningful than sometimes depicted. It is this richness that Lewis tries to elucidate. Note also, the expansion of the theme. He is a warrior, but in his parenthetical explanation, Lewis recasts Him as "giant killer," introducing an image evocative both of a biblical theme (David slaying Goliath) and a fairy tale (Jack and the Beanstalk) to explain the power of the Christ.

^{*}The strength of this tactic, however, is a focus on Christ who is Himself the revelation of God. (cf. Hebrews 1:1-2 "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son...") For a more detailed presentation of inspiration by an associate of Lewis, see Austin Farrer, The Glass of Vision (Glasgow: The University Press, 1948), pp. 35-56.

Jewish Heritage

The Christ became incarnate and was born in a specific time and place, to a particular mother, among a particular people. As he explains his understanding of the Christ, Lewis places an emphasis upon His Jewish heritage. It is likely that he was influenced by his relationship with his wife, Joy, who was Jewish, but he may have included this emphasis regardless of his marriage. Jesus was a Jew, a fact frequently reflected in the Gospels. Lewis notes that Jesus used Hebrew poetry, which is expressed in parallelism. Explaining the form of this poetry, he says,

I think, too, it will do us no harm to remember that, in becoming Man, He bowed His neck beneath the sweet yoke of a heredity and early environment. Humanly speaking, He would have learned this style, if from no one else (but it was all about Him) from His Mother.⁶

This simple explanation upholds the real humanity of the Christ. He had a specific human heredity, and normal developmental factors exercised their natural influence upon Him. He learned from his surroundings, and particularly from Mary. This Jewish influence continues throughout His human life. Rephrasing an idea expressed in other works, Lewis writes of the lack of novelty employed by Christ. Here the emphasis is on the Jewish source of his teaching. "...constantly our Lord repeated, reinforced, continued, refined, and sublimated the Judaic ethics, how very seldom He introduced a novelty."⁷ Any attempt to understand the Christ apart from his Jewish heritage will miss crucial understandings.

Finally, Lewis uses the Incarnation to speak well of the Jewish people. In one chapter of this book, he considers the curses contained in the Psalms and says,

Our first impression is that the Jews were much more vindictive and vitriolic than the Pagans. If we are not Christians, we shall dismiss this with the old gibe "How odd of God to choose the Jews." That is impossible for us who believe that God chose that race for the vehicle for His own Incarnation, and who are indebted to Israel beyond all possible repayment.⁸

It may be that Lewis's inclusion of this theme was precipitated by his relationship with Joy. Knowing her provided a greater awareness of the inappropriateness of anti-Semitism. There is no place for anti-Semitism in Christianity. The Incarnation of Christ as a Jew declares it unacceptable.

Christ the Archetypal Man

In the Incarnation, God became human. Lewis believed that this meant that he became not only a specific man, but also the Archetypal Man.

There was, after all, no description of Himself which He delighted in more than the "Son of Man"; and of course, just as "daughter of Babylon" means Babylon, so "Son of Man" means Man, the Man, the archetypal Man, in whose suffering, resurrection, and victories all men (unless they refuse) can share. And it is this, I believe, that most modern Christians need to be reminded of. It seems to me that I seldom meet any strong or exultant sense of the continued, never-to-be-abandoned, Humanity of Christ in glory, in eternity. We stress the Humanity too exclusively at Christmas, and the Deity too exclusively after the Resurrection; almost as if Christ once became a man and then presently reverted to being simply God. We think of the Resurrection and Ascension (rightly) as great acts of God; less often as the triumph of Man.⁹

This is an amazing passage in the context of the rest of Lewis's words. Often his emphasis is almost exclusively on the Deity. Here he clearly proclaims the enduring humanity of the Christ, which ennobles all humanity. Christ is both God and Man and His work is accomplished by both natures. Lewis strongly presents the personal union.

Perfection

Although Christ is fully human, he is also unique. He claimed to be perfect and sinless, something unattainable for the rest of humanity. Surprisingly, this claim seems to be far less controversial than might be imagined. In a passage similar to *Mere Christianity*, Lewis writes,

He denied all sin of Himself. (That indeed, is no small argument of His Deity. For He has not often made even on the enemies of Christianity the impression of arrogance; many of them do not seem as shocked as we should expect at His claim to be "meek and lowly of heart". Yet He said such things as, on any hypothesis but one, would be the arrogance of a paranoiac. It is as if, even where the hypothesis is rejected, some of the reality which implies its truth "got across".)¹⁰

Christ is a human being, similar, connected, and related to us, yet He is fundamentally different. The Incarnation is an entirely new event. He is God in human flesh. Nothing is truly analogous to this, hence differences from the rest of humanity, such as perfection and sinlessness, are manifest.

Christ the Redeemer

The Incarnate Christ comes to redeem his people. Here Lewis comes upon a Psalm so clear that he does not hesitate to declare its messianic content, though maintaining that this is a "second meaning."

Again in [Psalm] 49, we have "No man may deliver his brother... [sic] for it cost more to redeem their souls; so that he must let that alone forever." (7,8). Who would not think that this referred to the redeeming work of Christ? No man can "save" the soul of another. The price of salvation is one that only the Son of God could pay; as the hymn says, there was no other "good enough to pay the price." The very phrasing of our version strengthens the effect — the verb "redeem" which (outside the pawnbroking business) is now used only in a theological sense, and the past tense of "cost". Not it "costs", but it did cost, more, once for all on Calvary. But apparently the Hebrew poet meant something quite different and much more ordinary. He means merely that death is inevitable.¹¹

This is a remarkable passage for Lewis. He frequently shuns descriptions of the atonement such as he uses here. Christ pays the price, once for all on Calvary, and only Christ is fit to do this. He even quotes a hymn to support his claims when he ordinarily did not appreciate hymnody.* This motif and even the methods are rare for Lewis, and yet serve to explain the Psalm to the reader.

*Lewis repeatedly notes his personal dislike for hymnody. For example, "The 'sentimentality and cheapness' of much Christian hymnody had been a strong point in my own resistance to conversion." ("Christianity and Culture," in *Christian Reflections*, p. 13); "...Christianity was mainly associated for me with ugly architecture, ugly music, and bad poetry." (*Surprised by Joy*, p. 172.); and finally he describes them as "...fifth-rate poems set to sixth rate music." ("On Church Music," in *God in the Dock*, pp. 61, 62).

Christ the Suffering King

The chief Christological content of this book is found as Lewis looks for such “second meanings” in the Psalms. As he begins to discuss these meanings, he considers two figures:

Two figures meet us in the Psalms, that of the sufferer and that of the conquering and liberating king.... The Sufferer was, I think, by this time generally identified with (and may sometimes have originally been intended as) the whole nation, Israel itself — they would have said “himself”. The King was the successor of David, the coming Messiah. Our Lord identified Himself with both these characters.¹²

The combination of these two disparate figures is striking. Lewis notes the personification of Israel, and Christ’s self-identification with that personification. The Psalms provide essential information about the Messiah. Not only is He the Son of David, but He comes to suffer.

Regarding His kingly status, Lewis examines Psalm 110, the appointed Psalm for Evensong on Christmas Day in the Book of Common Prayer. Lewis makes frequent use of this passage, here using it to explain the correspondence between Christ and Melchizedek.

Melchizedek is a priest-king. In some communities priest-kings were normal, but not in Israel. It is thus simply a fact that Melchizedek resembles (in his peculiar way he is the only Old Testament character who resembles) Christ Himself. For He, like Melchizedek claims to be Priest, though not of the priestly tribe, and also king. Melchizedek really does point to Him; and so of course does the hero of Psalm 110 who is a king but also has the same sort of priesthood.¹³

In Melchizedek the royal and priestly offices converge, so also in Christ. In that way, Melchizedek prefigures Christ who is a royal priest.

Christ the Teacher

Christ is also revealed through His teaching. Here Lewis’s understanding of Christ is seen, along with evidence of his literary method. Aspects of Christ’s teaching are implemented in Lewis’s writing as well. In essence, Lewis believes that Christ’s teaching is more complex than is often realised.

We may observe that the teaching of Our Lord Himself, in which there is no imperfection, is not given us in that cut-and-dried, fool-proof, systematic fashion we might have expected or desired. He wrote no book. We have only reported sayings, most of them uttered in answer to questions, shaped in some degree by their context. And when we have collected them all we cannot reduce them to a system. He preaches but He does not lecture. He uses paradox, proverb, exaggeration, parable, irony; even (I mean no irreverence) the “wisecrack”. His teaching therefore cannot be grasped by the intellect alone, cannot be “got up” as if it were a “subject”. If we try to do that with it, we shall find Him the most elusive of teachers. The attempt is (again, I mean no irreverence) like trying to bottle a sunbeam.¹⁴

And again, he writes,

Yet it is, perhaps, idle to speak here of spirit and letter. There is almost no “letter” in the words of Jesus. Taken by a literalist, He will always prove the most elusive of teachers. Systems cannot keep up with that darting illumination. No

¹²Lewis notes that the figure of the Sufferer is found in Psalms 13, 28, 55 and 102, the King in Psalms 2 and 72.

net less wide than a man's whole heart nor less fine of mesh than love, will hold the sacred Fish.¹⁵

Christ is much more complex than many would make Him. One cannot truly master His teachings, and He cannot be contained. Lewis tried to maintain the complexity and richness, not to minimise it.

Christ the Example

Lewis considers the person and work of Christ in great detail, but the discussion is not complete unless it is applied. An essential facet of the work of Christ is seeing Him as an example. To be sure, He is not merely an example, but He does provide a model for His people. Consider the following,

How ought we to behave in the presence of very bad people?... If they are outcasts, poor and miserable, whose wickedness has obviously not "paid," then every Christian knows the answer. Christ speaking to the Samaritan woman at the well, Christ with the woman taken in adultery, Christ dining with publicans, is our example. I mean, of course, that His humility, His love, His total indifference to the social discredit and misrepresentation He might incur are examples for us...¹⁶

The actions of Christians towards other people ought to follow the example set by Christ.

Christ types in other cultures

One final element must be considered regarding Lewis's Christology in Reflections on the Psalms. He considers several extra-biblical accounts of Christ figures. The first is from Plato.

Plato in his Republic... asks us to imagine a perfectly righteous man treated by all around him as a monster of wickedness. We must picture him, still perfect, while he is bound, scourged, and finally impaled (the Persian equivalent of crucifixion). At this passage a Christian reader starts and rubs his eyes. What is happening? Yet another of these lucky coincidences? But presently he sees that there is something here which cannot be called luck at all.... Plato is talking, and knows he is talking, about the fate of goodness in a wicked and misunderstanding world. But that is not something simply other than the Passion of Christ. It is the very same thing of which the Passion is the supreme illustration. If Plato was in some measure moved to write of it by the recent death — we may almost say the martyrdom — of his master Socrates then that again is not something simply other than the Passion of Christ. The imperfect, yet very venerable, goodness of Socrates led to the easy death of the hemlock, and the perfect goodness of Christ led to the death on the cross, not by chance, but for the very same reason; because goodness is what it is, and because the fallen world is what it is. If Plato, starting from one example and from his insight into the nature of goodness and the nature of the world, was led on to see the possibility of a perfect example, and thus to depict something extremely like the Passion of Christ, this happened not because he was lucky, but because he was wise.... Plato probably did not know that the ideally perfect instance of crucified goodness which he had depicted would ever become actual and historical.¹⁷

Here Lewis brings together Pagan antetype and Christian fulfilment explicitly. Plato's impaled righteous man and Christ are related by the goodness of the victim. It is the nature of this world to destroy goodness, whether the imperfect goodness of Plato's victim or Socrates, or the perfection of Christ. Far from detracting from Christ, Plato's righteous man has prefigured Him, and whether

Plato was cognisant of this or not, the truth of his writing endures. The fullest revelation is in Christ, but that does not negate earlier expressions of this truth.

Lewis next turns his attention to other striking parallels between Paganism and Christianity, those cases of Pagan deities “who are killed and rise again, and who thereby renew or transform the life of their worshippers or of nature.”¹⁸ Lewis notes three primary interpretations of these parallels. The first is an anthropological approach which considers the parallels to be indicative of a common origin. All myth, draws from common experience (in this case, agricultural), and all express similar understandings. Christianity, according to this understanding, offers nothing more than paganism. The second approach is that of some early Christian Fathers who considered such myths to be of Satanic origin. The third means was that of Lewis who maintained that,

...in mythology divine and diabolical and human elements (the desire for a good story), all play a part... there is already a likeness permitted by God to that truth on which all depends. The resemblance between these myths and the Christian truth is no more accidental than the resemblance between the sun and the sun’s reflection in the pond.¹⁹

Lewis clearly states his understandings of the pagan parallels. He believes them to be intentional, the work of God and an expression of Divine truth. But he would not allow this to diminish the Christian account. The parallels are evident, but the Gospel is the highest expression of those myths, the very thing they were prefiguring. The greatest understanding belongs to those who see the fulfilment of the myths.

When I meditate on the Passion while reading Plato’s picture of the Righteous One, or on the Resurrection while reading about Adonis or Balder, the case is altered. There is a real connection between what Plato and the myth-makers most deeply were and meant and what I believe to be the truth. I know that connection and they do not. But it is really there. It is not an arbitrary fancy of my own thrust upon the old words. One can, without any absurdity, imagine Plato or the myth-makers if they learned the truth, saying, “I see...[sic] so that is what I was really talking about!”²⁰

In Reflections on the Psalms, Lewis provides a broad picture of the person and work of Christ, prefigured in mythology, and in the prophecies of the Old Testament. Both serve similar purposes, but employ different methodology.

The Four Loves

The second of Lewis’s devotional works is his semi-academic work, The Four Loves. In this book, he differentiates four basic types of love: affection (στοργη), friendship (φιλια), romantic or erotic love (ερος), and charity (αγαπη). Walsh notes, “It is thematically closely akin to Till We Have Faces since it analyses four kinds of love...”²¹ The two books share similar themes, but they are explicated in vastly different ways. The current work is a direct exposition of Lewis’s ideas about love. At the outset, he thought that this work would end up lauding gift-love and deriding need-love, but found such a simplistic division inadequate. He does, however, indicate how need-loves might mature as they are carried out in the life of a Christian.

As might be expected, there is little direct reference to Christology in this work. To be sure, a Christian cannot discuss love without reference to the work of Christ, but it is not present in this book to the degree which might be expected. God is "Love Himself," though whether Lewis intends to apply this directly to Christ, or to the Godhead in general is unclear. It is clear, however, that the greatest examples of God's love are seen in the work of Christ.

Deity of Christ

The deity of Christ is simply an assumed fact of this book. Defended by apologetics in other works, here it is proclaimed. His deity is evident as Lewis discusses Divine love.

Divine Love is Gift-love. The Father gives all He is and has to the Son. The Son gives Himself back to the Father, and gives Himself to the world, and for the world to the Father, and thus gives the world (in Himself) back to the Father too.²²

It is interesting that no mention is made of the Holy Spirit within that love, yet this is not written to explain the Trinity, but to demonstrate love. The relationship between the Father and the Son is the highest example of gift-love. This love is uncompromising and absolute, giving everything to the other. In this love there is no distinction of rank or honour. The Father and the Son are both fully divine, in the unity of the Trinity.

Humanity of Christ

Assuming Christ's deity, Lewis discusses the four loves. In the process, Christ's incarnation and real humanity are addressed. First, Lewis upholds the uniqueness of Christ. He is perfect, and not at all what might have been expected. In his discussion of affection (στοργη), Lewis notes that this love may be applied inappropriately, yet he is unwilling to consider such misapplication to be pathological. It is sin that leads to the wrong use of affection. In that regard, the Christ is different from other human beings.

Greed, egoism, self-deception and self-pity are not unnatural or abnormal in the same sense as astigmatism or a floating kidney. For who, in Heaven's name, would describe as natural or normal the man from whom these failings were wholly absent? "Natural" if you like, in a quite different sense; archnatural, unfallen. We have seen only one such Man. And He was not at all like the psychologist's picture of the integrated, balanced, adjusted, happily married, employed, popular citizen. You can't really be very well "adjusted" to your world if it says you "have a devil" and ends by nailing you up naked to a stake of wood.²³

The Incarnate Christ was a perfect human being, unfallen, "archnatural." Being perfect, He was misunderstood. He would not have been regarded as well adjusted. He is unique in His sinlessness, but was rejected by the world. But in most other ways, He was just like any other human being. This book does not go to great lengths to demonstrate the true humanity of Christ, but the examples given are indicative of the love which characterised Him. That love was expressed as any other human would express it.

Christ exhibits patriotism. Lewis looks at Christ's lament over Jerusalem^{*} as an indication that He expressed love for his country. He did not speak in anger or hatred, but in patriotism. He did not want to see harm come to his country. Furthermore, Christ expresses the deepest of human emotions. Augustine described the desolation which he felt at the death of his friend Nebridius, saying, "this is what comes... of giving your heart to anything but God."²⁴ Lewis responds that while this seems like good advice,

I think that passage in the Confessions is less a part of St. Augustine's Christendom than a hang-over from the high-minded Pagan philosophies in which he grew up.... We follow One who wept over Jerusalem and at the grave of Lazarus, and loving all, yet had one disciple whom, in a special sense, he "loved."²⁵

Jesus loved, grieved, and wept. All of these are human emotions. Perhaps the strongest emotions faced by Christ were those related to the crucifixion. Applying this to his readers, Lewis writes, "Even if it were granted that insurances against heartbreak were our highest wisdom, does God Himself offer them? Apparently not. Christ comes at last to say 'Why hast thou forsaken me?'"²⁶ These emotions are indicative of His humanity.

The Ultimate Love of Christ

Lewis makes these passing references to the person of Christ, but the most significant Christological material is found as he describes the love of Christ for His creation. In this section, Lewis attempts to relate human loves to God's ultimate love. He readily admits that this comparison will be inadequate. God's love is primal gift love and the source of all other loves. "In God there is no hunger that needs to be filled,[†] only plenteousness that desires to give."²⁷ This love is seen in the work of Christ.

God, who needs nothing, loves into existence wholly superfluous creatures in order that He may love and perfect them. He creates the universe, already foreseeing — or should we say "seeing"? there are no tenses in God — the buzzing cloud of flies about the cross, the flayed back pressed against the uneven stake, the nails driven through the mesial nerves, the repeated incipient suffocation as the body droops, the repeated torture of back and arms as it is time after time, for breath's sake, hitched up. If I may dare the biological image, God is a "host" who deliberately creates his own parasites; causes us to be that we may exploit and "take advantage of" Him. Herein is love. This is the diagram of Love Himself, the inventor of all loves.²⁸

In this paragraph, Lewis has reached the heart of his book. So complete is Divine love that He creates, despite knowing what His creation would do to Him. This would be a striking passage by any writer — for Lewis it is extraordinary. He typically avoided such graphic depictions as this, but here embraces the horror. The love of God includes even this, and it must be faced. Not only does he plainly discuss the passion of Christ, he also emphasises the foreknowledge of the passion. The

^{*}Matthew 23:37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing."

[†]This contrasts with Lewis's depiction of demonic hunger for lost souls to be literally consumed in The Screwtape Letters, and even more dramatically in Screwtape Proposes a Toast.

sacrifice of Christ was not a random event, it was planned and chosen by a willing victim. That exemplifies love, and reveals Christ.

Imitation of His love

As is often the case with Lewis, he considers the person and work of Christ, and readily makes application to the lives of his readers. He shows not only what Christ has done, but also an example which may be fruitfully followed. Lewis broadly applies the imitation, saying,

....our imitation of God in this life... must be an imitation of God incarnate: our model is Jesus, not only of Calvary, but of the workshop, the roads, the crowds, the clamorous demands and surly oppositions, the lack of all peace and privacy, the interruptions.²⁹

In the Incarnation, He became a human being and a servant. His people are to follow His example. Lewis envisions a broad imitation, not merely in large and dramatic gestures, but at all times — in small actions.. Here also the Christian is to emulate Christ's love. One can easily imagine the mature Lewis, prizing quietness, solitude, or small groups of friends, applying these words to his own life. He would not have been troubled by a large sacrifice, but constant interruptions disturbed him. Even here, he would say, must I imitate Christ.

One particular human love which Lewis addresses, is the relationship between husbands and wives. Lewis considers the challenging words about the relationship between spouses found in Ephesians 5. It is significant that this book was written after his marriage, and even copyrighted by his wife, Joy. Thus he makes significant comments about the interpretation of these verses.

We must go back to our Bibles. The husband is to be head of the wife just in so far as he is to her what Christ is to the Church. He is to love her as Christ loved the Church — read on — *and give his life for her* (Eph V, 25). This headship, then, is most fully embodied not in the husband we should all wish to be but in him whose marriage is most like a crucifixion; whose wife receives most and gives least, is most unworthy of him, is—in her own mere nature—least loveable. For the Church has no beauty but what the Bridegroom gives her; he does not find, but makes her lovely. The chrism of this terrible coronation is to be seen not in the joys of any man's marriage but in its sorrows, in the sickness and sufferings of a good wife or the faults of a bad one, in his unwearying (never paraded) care or his inexhaustible forgiveness: forgiveness, not acquiescence. As Christ sees in the flawed, proud, fanatical or lukewarm Church on earth that Bride who will one day without spot or wrinkle, and labours to produce the latter, so the husband whose headship is Christ-like (and he is allowed no other sort) never despairs.³⁰

Lewis does not back away from these verses, nor does he downplay the theme of headship. Neither does he allow the headship of the husband to be separated from its very nature — being like Christ. Seen in these terms, headship involves crucifixion, suffering, and forgiveness, all carried out in love. It is only when a husband emulates the example of Christ that Lewis is willing to concede headship. The husband is to be head of the wife in so far as he is to her what Christ is for the Church, and at the end of the passage, he says that the husband is allowed no other sort of headship than this Christ-like headship. Perhaps he held such ideas throughout his life, more likely, they were developed in his marriage. Either way, Lewis looks at these verses clearly. There can be no headship apart from the imitation of Christ's absolute giving love.

Transformation of love

When he began, Lewis intended to write a book showing the superiority of gift-love to need-love. He quickly modified this, realising that many need based loves are also valuable and noble. Still, perfect gift-love, the kind of love demonstrated by God in Christ Jesus, is the supreme example of love. Lewis concludes this book by discussing how the various natural loves may be transformed and ennobled to become charitable and perfect. In doing so, he compares this transformation to the Incarnation.

The natural loves are summoned to become modes of Charity while also remaining the natural loves they were. One sees here at once a sort of echo or rhyme or corollary to the Incarnation itself. And this need not surprise us, for the Author of both is the same. As Christ is perfect God and perfect Man, the natural loves are called to become perfect Charity and also perfect natural loves. As God becomes Man "Not by the taking of the Manhood into God," so here; Charity does not dwindle into merely natural love but natural loves taken up into, made the tuned and obedient instrument of, Love Himself.³¹

The Incarnation was an elevation of humanity, not a debasement of the deity. Christ Jesus, perfect God and perfect Man, has lifted humanity up into the Godhead. Humanity remains humanity, but has been ennobled. Similarly, natural love is perfected when it becomes an imitation of God's love and of God who is Love Himself.

The Four Loves provides Lewis's meditative comments on love, and tangentially, on the person and work of Christ. He has provided a minimal amount of Christological material, yet what he provides is rich. His portrayal of Christ's love is intense and graphic. The Christian who remembers the great love shown to us by the Saviour will seek to emulate that love.

Letters to Malcolm

In his final devotional work, Lewis returned to the comfortable genre of letters written to a friend. Throughout his life he maintained a lively correspondence with many people.* He frequently complained about the amount of time his correspondence took, yet he endured. Earlier in his career, Lewis penned a fictional correspondence in The Screwtape Letters. Twenty-one years later, he returned to a fabricated correspondence, though different in scope. Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer represents itself as a one-sided series of letters from one friend to another.† They discuss a variety of subjects but chiefly, as the title indicates, prayer. It is very conversational, and easily expresses some of Lewis's ideas about prayer.

Douglas Gresham, Lewis's step-son, says of this book,

This is the last book that Jack wrote before his death, and it is redolent of the new-found understanding that the experience of his marriage and then the loss of his loved wife had brought him. The deeper wisdom of understanding, added to the already deep wisdom of knowledge.³²

*This correspondence is evidenced by five published volumes of letters which are considered in the next chapter.

†The name fictional recipient, Malcolm, may be an allusion to George MacDonald's character Malcolm, Marquis of Lossie.

This maturity of thought is evident in this book's content and tone. At the same time, however, Lewis seemed unsure of its quality, writing in a letter dated 22 April, 1963, "I've finished a book on Prayer. Don't know if its any good."³³ Lewis's friend J. R. R. Tolkien noted in his copy of this book, "The book is not 'about prayer, but about Lewis praying'. But the whole book is always interesting."³⁴ Tolkien has appropriately noted the subjective character of this book. As it develops, Lewis presents his conception of prayer, and of Christ.

The Tragic Redeemer

Throughout this book, Lewis stresses the omnipotence of God, with particular reference to that power expressed in Creation. Prayer is addressed to Almighty God who not only deserves prayer, but is powerful enough to answer. Yet power is not the only divine characteristic.

Don't imagine I am forgetting.... that God, besides being the Great Creator, is the Tragic Redeemer. Perhaps the Tragic Creator too. For I am not sure that the great canyon of anguish which lies across our lives is *solely* due to some pre-historic catastrophe. Something tragic may, as I think I've said before, be inherent in the very act of creation.³⁵

This cryptic passage is left unexplained, but may illuminate a great deal of Lewis's theological thought. He questions whether humanity's fall into sin is the sole cause of suffering, but does not suggest other causes. The reader is left to wonder what Lewis had in mind. The passage restates a theme that Lewis employed in The Problem of Pain. God is not the cause of pain, even though He foreknew that it would occur. Thus there is an element of tragedy in Creation.

Incarnation

Here, as in the rest of his writings, Lewis is unwilling to make the Incarnation a debasing of God. Echoing credal language, he writes,

In the Incarnation God the Son takes the body and human soul of Jesus, and, through that, the whole environment of Nature, all the creaturely predicament, into His own being. So that "He came down from Heaven" can almost be transposed into "Heaven drew earth up into it," and locality, limitation, sleep, sweat, footsore weariness, frustration, pain, doubt, and death are, from before all worlds, known by God from within. The pure light walls the earth; the darkness received into the heart of Deity, is swallowed up. Where, except in uncreated light, can the darkness be drowned?³⁶

Consider Lewis's credal dependencies: "He came down from Heaven" is taken from the Nicene Creed. The *Quicumque Vult* says that the personal union of Christ does not consist of the conversion of the Godhead into flesh, but rather taking the manhood into God. Lewis extrapolates to say that one can almost say "Heaven drew earth up to it." Again, the *Quicumque Vult* says that Christ is, "...of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting." Lewis is precise to say that in the Incarnation, the Son takes both body and human soul, clearly striving to articulate credal orthodoxy. He expands the passage to demonstrate the completeness of the Incarnation. In becoming man, God also took up "locality, limitation, sleep, sweat, footsore weariness, frustration, pain, doubt, and death." There is

³⁶This may, however, be a statement reflecting modesty rather than uncertainty. Lewis did, in fact, submit this book for publication.

direct identification between the Divine Son and humanity. In the Incarnation, all of these human experiences are directly known by God, for He experienced them.

The Incarnation, which allows God to experience human weakness, also ennoble humanity. The Son of God became human, and thus elevated humanity. Lewis extends this to note that we may say that all people, therefore, partially resemble Christ.

Therefore of each creature we can say, "This also is Thou: neither is this Thou." Simple faith leaps to this with astonishing ease. I once talked to a continental pastor who had seen Hitler, and had, by all human standards, cause to hate him. "What did he look like?" I asked. "Like all men," he replied. "That is, like Christ."³⁷

This is a startling statement, but when taken as a whole is a remarkable confession of the efficacy of Christ. He has taken humanity up into Himself. That may be recognised in any person, yet differences are readily apparent.

Images of Christ

The Incarnation has ramifications for prayer, the subject of this book. As a person prays, they will likely envision an image of God. Lewis writes,

Since there can be no plausible images of the Father or the Spirit, it will usually be an image of Our Lord. The continual and exclusive addressing our prayers to Him surely tends to what has been called "Jesus-worship"? A religion which has its value; but not, in isolation, the religion Jesus taught.³⁸

The Incarnation enables speculation about the appearance of Christ. It remains difficult to imagine the Father or the Spirit since there are no adequate images for them. But Christ became human — a form which can be imagined. Such depiction is natural, yet Lewis cautions that this image not result in prayers addressed only to Christ. To do so may lead to a denial of the Trinity. The image may be helpful, but it may detract from prayer to the entire Trinity.

As Lewis continues to discuss mental images, he notes a personal difficulty. St. Ignatius encouraged people to visualise the scenes of the Bible (*compositio loci*) in their meditation, but Lewis found this ineffective. When he imagined the setting, he knew that he was imagining it incorrectly, which distracted him, and second, he kept on imagining more and more of the scene, and never returned to the spiritual import. However, he notes one exception.

There is indeed one mental image which does not lure me away into trivial elaborations. I mean the Crucifixion itself; not seen in terms of all the pictures and crucifixes, but as we must suppose it to have been in its raw, historical reality. But even this is of less spiritual value than one might expect. Compunction, compassion, gratitude — all the fruitful emotions — are strangled. Sheer physical horror leaves no room for them. Nightmare. Even so, the image ought to be periodically faced. Even so, no one could live with it. It did not become a frequent motive of Christian art until the generations which had seen real crucifixions were all dead.³⁹

The image, while necessary, is horrible and cannot be lived with,³⁹ yet it must periodically be faced. Lewis also says that every one of God's actions towards humanity, including the crucifixion, might have been done for one person.

It is an old and pious saying that Christ died not only for Man but for each man, just as much as if each had been the only man there was. Can I not believe the same of this creative act — which, as spread out in time we call destiny or history? It is for the sake of each human soul. Each is an end. Perhaps for each beast. Perhaps even each particle of matter — the night sky suggests that the inanimate also has for God some value we cannot imagine.⁴⁰

Lewis is not content to discuss abstract theology. It must be applied personally.

Gethsemane

One point of Scripture which Lewis uses for personal application is the image of Christ in Gethsemane. Here he explains and applies it in detail.

It is clear from many of His sayings that Our Lord had long foreseen His death. He knew what conduct such as His, in a world such as we have made of this, must inevitably lead to. But it is clear that this knowledge must somehow have been withdrawn from Him before He prayed in Gethsemane. HE [sic] could not, with whatever reservation about the Father's will, have prayed that the cup might pass and simultaneously known that it could not. That is a logical and a psychological impossibility. You see what this implies? Lest any trial incident to humanity should be lacking, the torments of hope — of suspense, anxiety — were at the last moment loosed upon Him — the supposed possibility that, after all, He might, He just conceivably might, be spared the supreme horror. There was precedent. Isaac had been spared: he too at the last moment, he against all apparent probability. It was not quite impossible... [sic] But for this last (and erroneous) hope against hope, and the consequent tumult of the soul, the sweat of blood, perhaps He would not have been very Man. To live in a fully predictable world is not to be a man.⁴¹

Lewis first implicitly considers the two natures of Christ. If Christ, as God, is omniscient, how can He pray for something that He knows will not happen? If He has foreknowledge, why does He pray? Lewis does not resolve this, other than to say that the knowledge must somehow have been withdrawn from Him. Without employing the language or precision of theology, Lewis is writing of the kenosis. Having the knowledge by nature, Christ does not always or fully access it.

Christ faced all trials and sufferings. He hoped for escape from the suffering, He prayed for a miracle. This agonising prayer and hope against hope are evidence of His true humanity. It is this very point that makes Gethsemane relevant to Lewis. The suffering of Christ in the garden is indicative of what it means to be human.

We all try to accept with some sort of submission our afflictions when they actually arrive. But the prayer in Gethsemane shows that the preceding anxiety is equally God's will and equally part of our human destiny. The perfect Man experienced it. And the servant is not greater than the master. We are Christians, not Stoics.⁴²

It must be remembered that this book was written after Joy Lewis's death and near the end of his life. Lewis had experienced great grief and hardship. He had prayed unfulfilled prayers. Thus the

³⁹It is interesting to note the parallel of this in *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*. At the moment of Aslan's sacrifice, Lucy and Susan turn away from the horror of the scene.

application of Christ was particularly meaningful. If He experienced these emotions, others may experience them also.

Throughout his Christian life, but particularly in his later years, Lewis was interested in connecting the work, and particularly the passion of Christ to human suffering. Christ's suffering demonstrates His humanity. He is like us in every way, consequently, He suffers.

Does not every movement in the Passion write large some common element in the sufferings of our race? First, the prayer of anguish; not granted. Then He turns to His friends. They are asleep — as ours, or we, are so often, or busy, or away, or preoccupied. Then He faces the Church; the very Church that He brought into existence. It condemns Him. This also is characteristic.... There is, then, nothing left but God. And to God, God's last words are "Why hast thou forsaken me?" You see how characteristic, how representative it all is. The human situation writ large. These are among the things it means to be a man. Every rope breaks when you seize it. Every door is slammed shut as you reach it.⁴³

Christ was the perfect Man, fully human, He consequently experienced all these things. He has undergone all that we have to face, and more, for He was forsaken by God. Christ faced not only the human situation, which is bad, but even, "the human situation writ large," suffering intensified.

While this may appear bleak, it was a great comfort to Lewis in his own suffering.

Lewis knew that life was often difficult, but he did not avoid the challenges, nor would he ignore them. Having undergone suffering, Lewis comforted others.

Some people feel guilty about their anxieties and regard them as a defeat of faith. I don't agree at all. They are afflictions, not sins. Like all afflictions, they are, if we can so take them, our share in the Passion of Christ.⁴⁴

Afflictions are never willingly chosen, they are imposed, yet they can be transformed in the life of the Christian. The suffering of Christians was directly related to the suffering of Christ, as a sharing of His passion.

Conclusion

Lewis's devotional works provide an interesting glimpse into his Christian life and understanding. The Christology they present is anchored in the creeds, and applied to both the author and to the reader. While there are lacunae, the Christology these works present is consistent with orthodox Christianity. The greatest application of Christ is in the ennobling of humanity in the Incarnation, and in the connection between the sufferings of Christ and Christians. As he claimed he would do, Lewis "fed on the truth" and invited his readers to the table.

Personal Works

The final category of Lewis's writings is a collection of works which offer a portrait of the private life of C. S. Lewis. All of these works are personal in nature, though several were nonetheless written for publication. These include The Pilgrim's Regress, an allegorical autobiography published two years after his conversion to Christianity, and Surprised by Joy, a more typical autobiography written twenty years later. Related to these is A Grief Observed, a journal that Lewis kept following the death of his wife, Joy, in 1960. This journal was published pseudonymously. Also included in this category are writings of a private character including All My Road Before Me, a diary that Lewis kept from 1922-1927, and various collections of letters written by Lewis. These writings provide a glimpse of the personal life and thought of C. S. Lewis.

Autobiographical Works

The Pilgrim's Regress

The Pilgrim's Regress is unique among the works of C. S. Lewis. The first of his Christian writings, it is an allegory heavily reliant upon Bunyan's The Pilgrim's Progress, covering the same portions of his life as Surprised by Joy. The later book is characterised by a different tone and more developed writing style. In the preface to the third edition, Lewis would write that this book had two chief faults: needless obscurity and an uncharitable temper.¹

Lewis wrote this while he was researching for The Allegory of Love, and unlike the rest of his fiction, deliberately wrote this book as an allegory. In the narrative, the protagonist, John, is born in Puritania where he is taught to fear the Landlord, even though the Landlord has imposed many rules which he finds impossible to keep. As the book progresses, John travels from Puritania to meet Mr. Enlightenment, who denies that there is a Landlord, finds himself imprisoned by the Spirit of the Age, only to be rescued by Reason, hears of red dwarves who live in the North called marxo-manni (with subspecies: Mussolimini, Swastici, and Gangomanni). Eventually John meets Mother Kirk who directs him to the Landlord's Island. Though there are subtle points to the allegory, the main correlations are obvious.

The story tells of Lewis's path to Christianity. In the preface, he says that his own conversion led from popular realism to philosophical idealism, to Pantheism, to Theism, and finally to Christianity.² Like Surprised by Joy, it focuses primarily on his pre-Christian life, hence there is little mention of Christ, "the Landlord's Son." Indeed there are only four specific references. The first says, "The Landlord's Son once said, if the feet have been put right the hands and the head will come right sooner or later."³ Two other references apply situations from Christ's life to the protagonist. In the first, Death tries to frighten John, saying, "The Landlord's Son who feared nothing, feared me."⁴ No further explanation is given, but it would appear that Lewis is alluding to Christ's prayer in Gethsemane. The third reference to Christ regards His humanity. Near the end of the book, as John and Virtue speak to one another, John asks,

"Is it wholly wrong to be ashamed of being in the body?" "The Landlord's Son was not. You know the verses — 'When thou tookest upon thee to deliver man.'"

¹This paraphrases the words of Jesus as He washes His disciples feet (John 13).

“That was a special case.” “It was a special case because it was the archtypal case.”⁵

In the Incarnation, Christ became the archetypal Man. He was not ashamed of His humanity, nor is it the cause of sinfulness. The fourth reference is the most significant. A large portion of this book presents Lewis’s conception of the fulfilment of Pagan mythology within Christianity. He writes of the Rules (the Law), which the Shepherd People (the Jews) were given, and of the pictures (myths) which the pagans knew.

The pictures alone are dangerous, and the Rules alone are dangerous. That is why the best thing of all is to find Mother Kirk at the very beginning, and to live from infancy with a third thing which is neither the Rules nor the pictures and which was brought into the country by the Landlord’s Son. That, I say, is the best: never to have known the quarrel between the Rules and the pictures. But it very rarely happens.⁶

The Landlord’s Son is the revealer of that which is neither the Rules nor the pictures. Christ’s revelation was not a repristination of the law or pagan mythology, but something different — the Gospel. Here, as in other works, Lewis continues to stress that this further revelation does not refute the Law or mythology, but brings them to fuller life and greater understanding.

One must question the paucity of references to Christ within an autobiography which is chiefly concerned with a man’s conversion to Christianity. Explanation may be found in the nature of Lewis’s conversion. When Lewis spoke of his conversion, he often was referring to his conversion to Theism, in 1929. He did not become a Christian until 1931. The Pilgrim’s Regress was published in 1933. Christ is present, His Incarnation, life and ministry are noted, but He is seen as little more than a revealer. It is not until later works that a more balanced picture of Christ is presented.

Surprised by Joy

Twenty-two years after publishing his allegory, Lewis returned to the task of autobiography. By this time he was well known as a Christian writer and speaker. Repeatedly asked about his conversion from atheism, he realised that The Pilgrim’s Regress was inaccessible to many readers. In response, Lewis prepared Surprised by Joy: the Shape of My Early Life. The preface of this book states, “The book aims at telling the story of my conversion and is not a general autobiography, still less ‘Confessions’ like those of St. Augustine or Rousseau.”⁷ Still, the book contains a great deal of autobiographical information from his early life. There is a heavy emphasis on Lewis’s childhood, adolescence, and education, as these help the reader understand Lewis’s rejection of Christianity (at age 13) and later conversion. As with The Pilgrim’s Regress, there still is less Christological material than might be expected in an account of a conversion. Yet the references to Christ are much more explicit than in his earlier work.

Shortly before his tenth birthday, Lewis’s mother died. Naturally, this was a significant formative event in his life. Lewis had prayed for his mother’s recovery, but those requests had been

denied. However, this in itself did not lead to a rejection of God. Indeed, his reaction shows a general apathy towards the divine. He explains,

I had approached God, or my idea of God, without love, without awe, even without fear. He was, in my mental picture of this miracle, to appear neither as Savior nor as Judge, but merely as a magician; and when He had done what was required of Him I supposed He would simply — well, go away.⁸

This reaction is characteristic of the young Lewis. God existed, but had little relevance. It is noteworthy that the roles which Lewis said he did not ascribe to God at this point, Saviour and Judge, are both part of the work of Christ. Not acknowledged in earlier life, they form part of his evaluation of his experience.

Before he tells the story of his conversion, Lewis describes his rejection of Christianity. Much of the book, like *Pilgrim's Regress*, is concerned with his departure from the Christian faith, and therefore ignores Christ. But as he moves closer to faith, references increase. One of the more interesting passages, and one of great significance for Lewis is the following.

Early in 1926 the hardest boiled of all the atheists* I ever knew sat in my room on the other side of the fire and remarked that the evidence for the historicity of the Gospels was really surprisingly good. "Rum thing" he went on. "All that stuff of Frazer's about the Dying God. Rum thing. It almost looks as if it really happened once".... If he, the cynic of cynics, the toughest of the toughs, were not — as I would still have put it — "safe," where could I turn? Was there no escape?⁹

Lewis was unsettled by this evaluation of the evidence for the Gospels. With his love of mythology, the combination of that evidence with reference to the Dying God myths was compelling. Again, the example cited here is one with direct Christological import.

Three years later, Lewis reluctantly admitted his faith in God. However, he cautions the reader, "It must be understood that the conversion... was only to Theism, pure and simple, not to Christianity. I knew nothing yet about the Incarnation. The God to whom I surrendered was sheerly non-human."¹⁰ In recounting this first conversion, he evaluates it in Christological terms. What distinguishes Christianity from theism, according to Lewis, is the Incarnate Christ.

The vast majority of this book, fourteen chapters, is concerned with Lewis's life until his conversion to theism. The final chapter is a brief description of his progress from theism to Christianity. Lewis sought the religion where the hints of Paganism were fulfilled, and found two possibilities: Christianity or Hinduism. He rejected Hinduism because it seemed to be, "...a mere oil-and-water coexistence of philosophy side by side with Paganism unpurged..." and because it lacked the historicity of Christianity.¹¹

This deduction led him once more to the primary sources for Christianity — the Gospels. Lewis writes,

I was now too experienced in literary criticism to regard the Gospels as myths. They had not the mythical taste. And yet the very matter which they set down in their artless, historical fashion — those narrow, unattractive Jews, too blind to the mythical wealth of the Pagan world around them — was precisely the matter of

*Sayer identifies this man as T. D. ("Harry") Weldon, tutor and lecturer in Greats at Magdalen College, Oxford. Cited in George Sayer, *Jack: C. S. Lewis and His Times*, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), p. 132.

the great myths. If ever a myth had become fact, had been incarnated, it would be just like this. And nothing else in all literature was just like this... and no person was like the Person it depicted.... Here and here only in all time the myth must have become fact; the Word, flesh; God, Man. This is not "a religion," nor "a philosophy." It is the summing up and actuality of them all...¹²

Lewis's examination of the evidence led him to Christianity where he saw the fulfilment of pagan mythology. What he saw made sense, and was unique. He became a Christian when he saw the reality of the Incarnation.

In the last pages of this book, Lewis describes, as closely as he is able, the moment of his conversion. "I was driven to Whipsnade one sunny morning. When we set out I did not believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and when we reached the zoo I did."¹³ It is a simple account, not of a dramatic conversion experience, but of acknowledgement of a change. It is also significant that, writing an account of these events later in life, Lewis identifies his conversion to Christianity with belief in Jesus Christ. This may seem like an obvious point, even an essential one, but for Lewis, once atheist, once theist, it was particularly significant.

Surprised by Joy does not provide the details of an autobiography, and indeed tells nothing of Lewis's life after his conversion. A number of biographies have been written to provide details of later years, and different perspectives on Lewis's childhood. Surprised by Joy, in contrast, shows the essential events of his conversion. When compared with The Pilgrim's Regress, this book gives evidence of a development in his Christian thought, and a deeper understanding and acknowledgement of Christ.

A Grief Observed

While A Grief Observed is not, properly speaking, autobiographical, it is of such a personal nature, and is so revealing of Lewis's private thoughts, that it should be considered along with his autobiographical works.* The relationship between Jack and Joy Lewis has been the subject of intense interest and scrutiny. They were married in 1956 in a civil ceremony, so that Joy could remain in England, but did not live as husband and wife. In early 1957, Joy was diagnosed with terminal bone cancer. The following March, with Joy hospitalised on her death bed, they were married in a Christian ceremony. Remarkably (Lewis would say, miraculously), Joy recovered. Sadly, two years later the cancer returned. When Joy died on 13 July 1960, Lewis was devastated.

*Some writers have contended that A Grief Observed is, at best, semi-autobiographical, and that Lewis overstated his feelings for literary impact. George Musacchio offers four reasons to support this theory. (1) "The book's elegiac elements suggest that it is conscious art and not autobiographical journal. (2) Lewis's way of dealing with the first rejection of Dymer suggests that he may have created a mourner *in extremis* as a way of working through his own grief. (3) Psychological studies suggest that this mature, stable Christian would not have been as shattered as the speaker of A Grief Observed. (4) Lewis's letters of the time do not suggest such extreme grief but on the contrary show a sad acceptance of the expected death." (George Musacchio, "C. S. Lewis A Grief Observed as Fiction," Mythlore 12:3 (#45, Spring 1986): 26-27). Each of these arguments falls short of understanding the complexity of grief. It is probable that Lewis polished his journal for publication, but the emotions expressed are reflective of grief.

In working through his grief, he kept a journal, which was published in 1961 under the pseudonym N. W. Clerk.*

This short book is very personal and candid. The pain, frustration and anger of a grieving man are evident. Lewis wrestles with his ideas about God, justice, and suffering. In The Problem of Pain, he had looked at the challenge of suffering in generic and philosophical terms. Here it is seen specifically and personally. The effect of this book on understanding the rest of Lewis's writings has been the subject of much interesting discussion. Space does not here allow a full exploration of its meaning, nor a recounting of the grief process, nor a psychological investigation into the feelings of Lewis. Rather, we look for one key element: what is the role of Christ?

That question must be asked in the context of this book. In the beginning, Lewis expresses the personal crisis he faces:

Not that I am (I think) in much danger of ceasing to believe in God. The real danger is of coming to believe such dreadful things about Him. The conclusion I dread is not, "So there's no God after all," but, "So this is what God's really like. Deceive yourself no longer."¹⁴

Lewis could not return to atheism. The blow to his faith was the possibility that the real God was sadistic, a fatalistic conclusion. Thus Lewis does not deny God, but reassesses his own faith.

A recurring theme in Lewis's writings is that Christ is the archetypal Man. If He faces trials, it is only natural that other people will also. When Christians face suffering, it may be understood as a participation in the suffering of Christ. Considering the prevalence of that theme, its application in this book is interesting. Lewis admits the connection, but notes that it is of no consolation. When he feels that God is silent at the time He is most needed, Lewis writes,

I tried to put some of these thoughts to C. this afternoon. He reminded me that the same thing seems to have happened to Christ: "Why hast thou forsaken me?" I know. Does that make it easier to understand?¹⁵

Here is Lewis's problem. The very solution which he offered as a consolation for others fell short of his expectations. He remained cognisant of this aid, but took no consolation in it. Later, in frustration, he writes,

What reason have we, except our own desperate wishes, to believe that God is, by any standard we can conceive, "good"? Doesn't all that *prima facie* evidence suggest exactly the opposite? What have we to set against it? We set Christ against it. But how if He were mistaken? Almost his last words may have a perfectly clear meaning. He had found that the Being He called Father was horribly and infinitely different from what He had supposed. The trap, so long and carefully prepared and so subtly baited, was at last sprung, on the cross. The vile practical joke had succeeded.¹⁶

Here he identifies with Christ, particularly in His feelings of being forsaken. Still, this gives him no consolation. If Christ felt forsaken, what might the rest of humanity expect? Lewis would later call such speculation, "filth and nonsense,"¹⁷ but here he reveals his struggle. His logical reasoning provided far less consolation than he had expected. There is no escape from grief. It cannot be

*N. W. stood for "Nat Whilk," which in Anglo Saxon means, "I know not whom." Lewis used this pseudonym, and its initials, to publish certain poems. "Clerk" referred to one who could read and write. In the book, Lewis refers to his wife as "H," Joy's first initial.

avoided or ignored. The Christian faith may provide comfort to the grieving, but does not nullify the sense of temporal loss, nor does it necessarily remove the pain of mourning.

The final references to Christ concern images. Near the end of the book, he notes that the photographs of his wife are all bad, but explains, that all images whether photos or imagination, fall short of reality. Drawing a parallel, he says,

Tomorrow morning a priest will give me a little round, thin, cold, tasteless wafer. Is it a disadvantage — is it not in some ways an advantage — that it can't pretend the least *resemblance* to that with which it unites me? I need Christ, not something that resembles Him. I want H., not something that is like her.¹⁸

Even the Sacrament was not concrete enough for Lewis at this time. He considered it an image which falls short of the reality. This is the first expression of a need for Christ in this book. Lewis struggles with his faith, and returns, not to the reasoned arguments, but to Christ Himself.

Continuing to write of images, he says,

Images, I must suppose, have their use, or they would not have been so popular.... To me, however, their danger is more obvious. Images of the Holy easily become holy images — sacrosanct. My idea of God is not a divine idea. It has to be shattered time after time. He shatters it Himself. He is the great iconoclast. Could we not almost say that this shattering is one of the marks of His presence? The Incarnation is the supreme example; it leaves all previous ideas of the Messiah in ruins.¹⁹

The reality of God is different than all expectations. Even the Incarnation itself shattered human ideas. The Christ was different than most expectations.

A Grief Observed offers a glimpse at the personal struggles of C. S. Lewis in a time of sorrow. The question that must be asked again is, “where is Christ?” Lewis’s suffering finds little connection with the suffering of Christ, nor is there any recorded contemplation of His suffering. Indeed, there is little of Christ whatsoever. This minimal role is the result of Lewis’s extreme grief. Near the end of this book, he decides to stop his journal and reflects on what he has written, “The notes have been about myself, and about H., and about God. In that order. The order and the proportion exactly what they ought not to have been.”²⁰ Lewis recognised the weaknesses of his journal. It was too egocentric. He realised that he did not respond as his apologetic works might suggest. What he recorded was his experience of grief. Had Lewis responded any other way, this would not be a personal account of grief, but another detached, academic treatise. It would lack the compelling power, poignant emotion, and genuine character contained in this journal. A Grief Observed is not a work to be used in apologetics or evangelism. It is not intended to convert or explain the faith. Instead, it reveals a human being who falls short of his expectations, but relies on his faith.

²⁰This is similar to Orual’s reaction at the end of Till We Have Faces. She thought that she had written an articulate case against the gods, but retrospectively described it as a “vile scribble.”

Diaries

All My Road Before Me is a diary that Lewis kept from 1922-1927. As his conversion to Theism took place in 1929, and his conversion to Christianity was in 1931, this diary is of little relevance for Lewis's theology. The chief interest here is the personal information it contains, along with his thoughts during the writing and publishing of Dymer. However when the diary is examined one finds that, despite his professed atheism, Lewis has a stronger connection to Christianity during this period than might have been imagined.

For example, one finds several examples where the atheistic Lewis makes casual reference to God. An entry dated 28 May 1923 says, "At supper last night I had felt my weak gland in my throat beginning to swell: but thank the Lord it was no worse today...." and again between 17-20 January 1924 he writes, "...praise God, I got rid of my various disorders."²¹ Lewis was certainly not professing his faith, yet these are unexpected words from an atheist.

This diary also demonstrates that Lewis engaged in theological discussion. Consider this entry from 1922:

Cranny* and I talked theology. I asked him why people in his position, who didn't believe that Jesus was a God, spent their time in patching up a sinking ship instead of setting to work on the new one. He said he didn't think there was going to be anything new. He thought that evolution had first of all tried successive types, then settled down to the development of one type, MAN: in the same way we had first had successive religions and would now settle down to the development of one. I wonder if the mastodon talk in the same way.²²

Here Lewis confronts an apostate priest who denies the deity of Christ. There is no indication that Lewis disagreed with Macran's theology, only that he questioned his integrity. Similar condemnation of priests, bishops, and theologians would find a place in Lewis's later writings. It is interesting to see it present before his conversion.

Another entry, dated 18 Oct. 1922, recounts another theological discussion, this one regarding the nature of the Gospels.

I said that one got very little definite teaching in the Gospels: the writers had apparently seen something overwhelming, but been unable to reproduce it. He[†] agreed, but added that this was so with everything worth having.²³

Lewis does not express the confidence in the historicity of the Gospels that mark his later works, yet he demonstrates a familiarity with their content.

Finally, and perhaps most telling, the diary records occasions when Lewis attended worship. At the same time, he expresses an uneasiness with the Eucharist. For example, on Christmas Day, 1922, he attended worship in Belfast with his father and brother, then wrote, "I then remembered that D[‡] was probably turning out this morning for Maureen's first communion, and this somehow emphasised the dreariness of this most UNcomfortable [sic] sacrament."²⁴

*The Rev. Dr. Frederick Walker Macran, 1866-1947.

†Alfred Kenneth Hamilton-Jenkin.

‡D is Janine Moore, mother of Lewis's war-time friend Edward "Paddy" Moore who died during the war. Afterward, Moore and Lewis lived together until she entered a nursing home in 1948. The

All of these references indicate that, despite his atheism, Lewis was not isolated from Christianity. He was surrounded by it, and thought that he understood it. Indeed, he had consciously rejected the Christian faith. It was only when he objectively reconsidered it that he would return to Christianity. By then, his diary would be abandoned. Years later, Lewis would write, "If Theism had done nothing else for me, I should still be thankful that it cured me of the time-wasting and foolish practice of keeping a diary."²⁵

Correspondence

Throughout his life, C. S. Lewis maintained a lively correspondence with many different people. Many of these letters have been published posthumously in five separate collections.* Some additional letters have been published along with other works, and many letters remain unpublished. The letters are addressed to various people, from family members and friends to complete strangers. Some answer questions posed by the correspondent, some offer Christian encouragement, and others provide insight into the personality of Lewis. The letters frequently reveal Lewis's theology. Those letters of Christological significance will be considered, according to the doctrine addressed.

Identity of Christ

Before considering the doctrines, however, it is necessary to have some idea of the identity of Christ. Lewis realised that many popular ideas about His identity were not Biblical. In an extended letter written to a lady, Lewis writes of his discovery of Christ.

Everyone told me that [in the Gospels] I should find a figure whom I couldn't help loving. Well I could. They told me I would find moral perfection — but one sees so little of Him in ordinary situations that I couldn't make much of that either. Indeed some of His behaviour seemed to me open to criticism e.g. accepting an invitation to dine with a Pharisee and then loading him with torrents of abuse. Now the truth is, I think, that the sweetly-attractive-human-Jesus is a product of 19th century scepticism, produced by people who were ceasing to believe in His divinity but wanted to keep as much Christianity as they could. It is not what an unbeliever coming to the records with an open mind will (at first) find there. The first thing you find is that we are simply not *invited* to speak, to pass any oral judgement on Him, however favourable; it is only too clear that He is going to do whatever judging there is; it is *we* who are *being* judged.... The first real work of the Gospels on a fresh reader is, and ought to be, to raise very acutely the question, "Who or What is this?" For there is a good deal in the character which, unless He really is what He says he is, is not loveable or even tolerable. If He *is*, then of course it is another matter; nor will it then be surprising if much remains puzzling to the end. For if there is anything in Christianity, we are now approaching something which will never be fully comprehensible.²⁶

Examination of the primary sources moved Lewis to question popular opinion about Jesus Christ.

The Gospels provide far less information about Him than many people think. He is not often seen in

precise nature of their relationship has been the subject of much debate. Maureen was Moore's daughter.

*These collections are: (1) The Letters of C. S. Lewis, (2) They Stand Together: The Letters of C. S. Lewis to Arthur Greeves, (3) Letters to An American Lady, (4) C. S. Lewis Letters to Children, and (5) The Latin Letters of C. S. Lewis. More letters are scattered throughout other books by and about Lewis.

ordinary situations, and when seen, His behaviour is shocking. Lewis would not tolerate over simplifications of Christ. The key question which must be asked is His identity. "Who or What is this?" The answer is crucial, for if He is not what He claims to be, there is nothing loveable or tolerable about Him. If His claims are true, He will remain incomprehensible, never fully understood.

These words are certainly not intended to keep people from contemplating the person and work of Christ, but they do remove false options including the explanation that Jesus was merely a good human teacher. In Mere Christianity Lewis refutes that misconception. In his letters, he repeats his objections. "When I said it was 'no good' trying to regard Jesus as a human teacher I only meant that it was logically untenable..."²⁷ Lewis believed that such explanations of Christ's identity did not stand up to scrutiny.

Conception of Christ

References to various points of Christology are scattered throughout Lewis's letters. One subject of his correspondence was the virginal conception. In addressing this doctrine, Lewis draws parallels to and divergences from ordinary experiences. He wrote to Fr. Peter Milward on 23 May 1951,

...Mary was not the Bride of the Holy Ghost *in the same sense* in which the words are used in ordinary marriages; whereas she was the mother of Jesus in exactly the same sense in wh. my mother was my mother....²⁸

Lewis explained the second proposition with greater clarity than the first. It is much simpler to describe common experiences than unique miracles. The conception is beyond normal experience, but all people have mothers. To speak of Mary as the mother of Jesus is readily understandable. Regarding the miraculous element, Lewis tolerated a broad latitude of interpretation. Echoing his words in Mere Christianity he wrote to a lady,

The exact details of such a miracle [the Virgin Birth] — an exact point at which a supernatural enters this world (whether by the creation of a new spermatozoon or the fertilisation of an ovum without a spermatozoon, or the development of a foetus without an ovum) are not part of the doctrine. These are matters in which no one is obliged and everyone is free, to speculate.²⁹

It must be noted that some theologians would contend the third possibility, the development of a foetus without an ovum, would be tantamount to a denial of the real humanity of Christ. Yet Lewis would not insist on this explanation. Indeed, he does not defend any of these options, merely stating that we are free, but not bound, to speculate. He was content to accept the miracle without demanding absolute explanations.

Incarnation

As Lewis's understanding of Christology was focused on the Incarnation, references to it are easily found in his letters. One extended letter, to his friend Owen Barfield, contains Lewis's understanding of Christ's perfection. The two friends disagreed about the meaning of Gethsemane. Lewis repeatedly noted that in the garden, Christ felt fear, therefore people should not be surprised

of or ashamed by fear. Barfield answered that if He was afraid, He must not have been the perfect man. Lewis responds,

One must beware of interpreting "perfect man" in a sense which would nullify the temptation in the wilderness: a sense on which, at first, one would be tempted to comment (a) — as regards the stones and bread — "Imperfect men have voluntarily starved", (b) — as regards Satan's demand for worship — "Most men have never sunk so low as to feel this temptation at all". If we are to accept the Gospels, however, we must interpret Christ's perfection in a sense which admits of his feeling *both* the commonest and the most animal temptations (hunger and the fear of death) *and* those temptations which usually occur only to the worst of men (devil-worship for the sake of power). I am assuming that the stones and bread represent hunger: but if you prefer to regard them as primarily a temptation to *thaumaturgy* ("If thou be the Son of God, command these stones") then it falls into my second class.³⁰

Temptation does not negate Christ's perfection. Indeed, the temptation was essential if He was to face the same plight as humanity. In this paragraph, Lewis applies the temptations faced by Christ to all people. Whether the temptations faced are base and common or shockingly perverse, they have been faced, and avoided, by Christ. Lewis continues, addressing the fear of Christ,

What is it to the ordinary man to die, if once he can set his teeth to bear the merely animal fear? To give in — he has been doing that nine times out of ten all his life. To see the lower in him conquer the higher... he has been letting this happen since the day he was born. To relinquish control — easy for him as slipping on a well-worn shoe. But in Gethsemane it is essential Freedom that is asked to be bound, unwearied control to throw up the sponge, Life itself to die.... Only He who really lived a human life (and I presume that only one did) can fully taste the horror of death....³¹

Here Lewis takes his application of Gethsemane to a new level. Not only is Christ's fear in the garden related to human suffering, it is more intense. For an ordinary person to die, give in, or lose control is unpleasant, but not unusual. But in Christ it is perfection that submits to these things. Only He really lived a human life, since only He lived perfectly. Only one who knows the fullness of life will completely know the horror of death. Fear does not nullify His perfection, but rather demonstrates it.

Finally, Lewis addresses Barfield's Christology.

Your idea of Christ as *suffering* from the mere fact of being in the body, and therefore tempted — if at all — to hasten rather than postpone his death, seems to imply that he was not (as the Christian mystery runs) "perfect God and perfect man" but a kind of composite being, a δαίμων or archangel imprisoned in a vehicle unsuitable to it.... This is mythological in the bad sense. The Son was certainly not incarnated in such a sense as not also to remain God (if He had been, the universe would have disappeared). I don't pretend to have an explanation: but I take it that the precise *differentia* of the Christian doctrine is that "Something which eternally *is* in the Noumenal world (and is impassible, blessed, omniscient, omnipotent etc.) nevertheless once *was* in the phenomenal world (and was suffering, etc.)". You can't regard the earthly life of Jesus as an episode in the eternal life of the Son: as the slavery to Admetus was an episode in the immortal life of Apollo. I need not say that, on my view, the doctrine (do you hold it?) that what was incarnated was "One of the hierarchies" (or "one of" the "anythings") appears to me quite incompatible with the position given to Christ by his own

words by his followers (*Aut deus aut malus angelus* is as true as the old *aut deus aut malus homo*.)³²

This passage upholds the true deity and humanity of Christ. Christ did not suffer merely from being in the body. Such a Gnostic understanding of the body is not in accord with the scriptural account, and it would speak against Christ's perfection. Along with this, Lewis stressed that the Incarnation does not reduce the true deity of Christ. Christ is eternally God. The Incarnation did not negate His deity, if so, Lewis notes, the universe would vanish, for it cannot exist apart from the presence of God and without His providence. This is a strong affirmation of His deity. Christ is eternally in the Noumenal world, even during His earthly ministry. Thus in the Incarnation He continues to possess divine attributes. For a time He was in the Phenomenal world, though without leaving the Noumenal. Thus He possessed human attributes such as suffering.

Lewis is discussing the communication of attributes without employing the precise language of theology. The Incarnation is not a reduction of the deity or an abrogation of divine attributes and functions. There never has been a time when the Second Person of the Trinity was not true God. In the Incarnation, He did not step out of the Noumenal and into the Phenomenal, He was in both simultaneously. That is the uniqueness of the Incarnation.

Humanity

Elsewhere, Lewis discusses the humanity of Christ in more detail. On 29 July 1942, he wrote to Sister Penelope, C.S.M.V., who was translating Athanasius's *De Incarnatione*, regarding the proper translation of the Latin text. Lewis wrote,

About "became Man" versus "a man". There is, you will admit, a very obvious sense in which He "became a man" — a man of a particular height and weight, the Son of a particular Mother, who was in one place and time and *not* (in that mode) elsewhere. The Fathers, writing in a language with no definite articles, didn't have to plump for one or the other.³³

The Incarnation was absolutely specific. Jesus possessed concrete physical characteristics, and was, according to his human nature, subject to human limitations. At the same time, the language allows for the translation that He became Man, representative of all humanity. Lewis employs the anarthrous text to justify both translations. The one incarnate as a specific human being is the representative of all humanity.

As the letter to Sr. Penelope continues, Lewis addresses an apparent theological error.

Are you correct in saying "the Person, the Ego of the incarnate lord is God"? I had thought that there was a human *soul* involved. (when one speaks of His humanity we don't mean simply His body), and that the human and divine natures together made one Person. Your way of putting it suggests that there was simply a human body with God *substituted for* the human soul one would ordinarily have expected. Is this right? I thought not, but I don't know....³⁴

The same thought is amplified in a 1947 letter.

³²Here again Lewis refers to the same logic that characterised Mere Christianity and Miracles. Lewis allows no middle ground for Christ. Either He is accepted according to His testimony or He must be rejected. He cannot be simply a teacher, or anything less than God Himself.

- (1) The doctrine that Our Lord was God and man does *not* mean that He was a human body which had God instead of the normal human soul. It means that a real man (human body *and* human soul) was in Him so united with the 2nd person of the Trinity as to make one Person.... if the Divine Son had been removed from Jesus what would have been left would have been not a corpse but a living man.*
- (2) This human soul in Him was unswervingly united to the God in Him in that which makes a personality one, namely, Will. But it had the *feelings* of any normal man: hence could be tempted, could fear etc. Because of these feelings it could pray "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me": because of its perfect union with His Divine Nature it unwaveringly answered "Nevertheless, not as I will but as thou wilt...." God could, had He pleased, have been incarnate in a man of iron nerves, the Stoic sort who lets no sigh escape him. Of His great humility he chose to be incarnate in a man of delicate sensibilities who wept at the grave of Lazarus and sweated blood in Gethsemane. Otherwise, we should have missed the great lesson that it is by his *will* alone that a man is good or bad, and that *feelings* are not in themselves, of any importance. We should also have missed the all-important help of knowing that He has faced all that the weakest of us face, has shared not only the strength of our nature but every weakness of it except sin. If He had been incarnate in a man of immense natural courage, that would have been for many of us almost the same as His not being incarnate at all.³⁵

Lewis makes several key points. The first regards the human nature of Christ. The *Quicumque Vult* says Christ is, "...Perfect God, and Perfect Man of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting...." In the first letter, Lewis expresses the orthodox doctrine, but qualifies his assertion. In the second, he is confident. If a human consists of body and soul, then the human nature of Christ must be both body and soul. To say any less is to diminish His humanity.

From this point, Lewis discusses the personal union. The union of the two natures of Christ is that of the Divine Son of God and of a human soul and body. These are perfectly united in will, without diminishing either the deity or the humanity. Because He has a human nature, He feels human feelings: temptation, fear, grief, etc. Because of His divine nature, He wills what God wills. Human feelings are not inherently sinful, though some of them may become sinful if they are acted upon. Had He not experienced these feelings, He would not have been truly human. In fact, Lewis applies Christ's feelings to show the extent of the Incarnation. He is fully human, and human beings have emotions and feelings, some of which may be considered weakness, but are not inherently sinful. Christ's Incarnation meant a sharing of these weaknesses. This acceptance of the validity of human emotion seems to have been quite difficult for Lewis. From childhood he learned to focus on cognition over emotion, on objectivity over subjectivity. But in these personal writings, and in his contemplation of Christ, a gradual acceptance of his own emotions, and his perception of real human emotions in Christ begins to appear.

*It should be noted that Lewis does not discuss the inseparability of the two natures of Christ here. His writings reflect the fact that he believed Christ still possesses His human nature.

Christ's Suffering:

In Gethsemane

Christ's experience of human emotions was a source of consolation and encouragement for Lewis. He frequently reminds his correspondents of Christ's experience and its meaning for His people. To a lady, he wrote,

You needn't worry about not feeling brave. Our Lord didn't — see the scene in Gethsemane. How thankful I am that when God became man He did not choose to become a man of iron nerves; that would not have helped weaklings like you and me nearly so much.³⁶

The struggles of Christ comforted Lewis in his own struggles. When the priest who solemnised his marriage wrote to ask for prayer in the face of illness, Lewis wrote, "I don't see how any degree of faith can exclude the dismay, since Christ's faith did not save Him from dismay in Gethsemane."³⁷ Similarly he wrote, "Fear is horrid, but there's no reason to be ashamed of it. Our Lord was afraid (dreadfully so) in Gethsemane. I always cling to that as a very comforting fact."³⁸ In each of these letters, Lewis reminds struggling Christians of the challenges faced by their Lord. In a different context, he addressed the same subject in relation to Christ's omnipotence.

About the omnipotence of the Word of God who Himself is the Word: as far as it is a word of command, I agree. As far as it is a word of prayer, I hesitate. For it can be replied that He Himself in the Garden of Gethsemane entreated but did not obtain.³⁹

Christ, who is omnipotent according to His divine nature, did not always or fully use that omnipotence during His earthly ministry.

Forsaken by God

Christ's state of humiliation is evident, also, in His crucifixion. On the cross, Christ asks why He has been forsaken by God. Some question the meaning of this forsakenness. If He is the Second Person of the Trinity, how can He be forsaken without denying the unity of the godhead? Lewis responds, "The Father was not *really* absent from the Son when He said 'Why hast thou forsaken me?' You see God Himself, as man, submitted to man's sense of being abandoned."⁴⁰ Such a submission is possible only if He is not using His divine power. It is evidence of Christ's humiliation.

Human Suffering Joined to Christ's Suffering

Lewis maintained that the suffering of Christ is related to the afflictions of Christians. He repeatedly asserted that the suffering of Christians may be united with Christ's passion. He explains in a letter to a lady,

I have not a word to say against the doctrine that Our Lord suffers in all the suffering of His people (see Acts IX.6[†]) or that when we willingly accept what we

^{*}*De omnipotentia verbi Domini qui ipse Verbum est, quatenus est verbum imperans, consentio. De omnipotentia ejusdem verbi, quatenus oratio est, haesito. Potest enim respondi quod ipse in horto Gethsemane oravit nec impetravit.*

[†]the reference is incorrect. Lewis probably intended Acts 9:5 where Saul learns that by persecuting Christians, He is persecuting Christ who says, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."

suffer for others and offer it to God on their behalf, then it may be united with His sufferings and, in Him, may help to their redemption or even that of others whom we do not dream of.... The key text for this view is Colossians 1:24.* Is it not, after all, one more application of the truth that we are all "members one of another"? I wish I had known more when I wrote Problem of Pain.⁴¹

According to Lewis, suffering applied in this manner must first be willingly accepted. This does not mean that afflictions are voluntarily chosen, only that once recognised, they are accepted. Lewis notes, "...even those tribulations which fall on us by necessity, if embraced for Christ's sake, become as meritorious as *voluntary* sufferings and every missed meal can be converted into a fast if it is taken in the right way...."⁴² Any type of suffering, properly understood, may be used in this way.[†] Even humiliation may be seen in this light.

...we should mind humiliation less if [we] were humbler. It is, at any rate, a form of suffering which we can try to offer, in our small way, along with the supreme humiliation of Christ Himself. There is, if you notice it, a very great deal in the N.T. about His humiliations as distinct from His sufferings in general.⁴³

It should be noted that Lewis is not referring to Christ's state of humiliation, but to the various humiliating things which happened to him. These are a consolation to Christians who may face humiliation, and may join their suffering with His.

Lewis believed that the suffering of Christians could be their share in the passion of Christ. These letters demonstrate that he believed them to be in some sense meritorious when offered in this way. The suffering is offered to God, where it "...may help to their redemption or even that of others...." Christian suffering may be directly related to Christ's suffering. In Lewis's view, this focus on the benefit for others may make it easier to endure affliction.

Descent in to Hell

Another Christological doctrine addressed in Lewis's correspondence is the descent into Hell. He explains his understanding in a letter written to a lady,

Also the doctrine of Christ's descending into Hell (i.e. Hades, the land of the dead: not Gehenna the land of the lost) and preaching to the dead; and that would be outside time and would include those who died long after Him as well as those who died before He was born as Man. I don't think we know the details; we must just stick to the view that (a) all justice and mercy will be done, (b) but nevertheless it is our duty to do all we can to convert unbelievers.⁴⁴

This short passage reveals much of Lewis's thought on this doctrine. Christ descended into Hades, but not to Gehenna. There He preaches to the dead, inclusive of all times. Lewis implies that this preaching offers some sort of a second chance, but admits that we do not know the details. In application he walks a middle ground. The descent reminds Christians to trust God, for "all justice and mercy will be done," but this is not an excuse for complacency. "It is our duty to do all we can to convert unbelievers."

*Col 1:24 "Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church."

[†]Here Lewis again reflects the idea of coinherence advocated by Charles Williams.

In another letter, Lewis makes reference to the Descent into Hell. Writing on Easter Saturday, he says, "With a grateful heart I salute you and yours on this solemn and serious day on which the Lord preached to the souls in prison."⁴⁵ While Lewis maintained that the preaching took place outside of time, from an earthly perspective, he thought that the descent took place on Saturday.

Resurrection

Lewis's belief in the Resurrection of Christ is unquestioned. When a lady wrote, wondering if the resurrection of Christ was simply a resurrection of His spirit, not His body, he answered, "...Luke XXIV... makes it clear beyond any doubt that what is claimed is *physical* resurrection."⁴⁶ Later he would insist that a resurrection of spirit would be no comfort. Letters with one correspondent discussed the eldila in his Space Trilogy. Lewis noted that angels seem to cause fear, but in contrast,

...the Risen Lord excites terror only when mistaken for a ghost, i.e. when not recognised as *risen*. For we are in one most blessed sense *nearer* to Him than to them: partly of course because He has deigned to share our humanity, but partly, I take it, because every creature is nearer to its creator than it can be to superior creatures.⁴⁷

Had Christ been present merely as a spirit, He would have continued to frighten His followers. They were terrified when they believed Him to be a ghost, but when they were confronted with the evidence of the bodily resurrection, they were comforted.

Lewis made one further application of the resurrection. Because of His resurrection and glorification, Jesus Christ did not reach old age. Lewis wrote, "I rejoice that the Lord, who took upon Him all our other miseries, willed not to take old age: in the One True Man, lives youth everlasting."⁴⁸ In the resurrection, Christ lives in everlasting youth and vitality. The resurrection is permanent.

Glorification

When a young man asked Lewis about heaven, offering his own conjectures, Lewis responded, and in writing, offered some ideas on Christ's glorification.

Can we assume that whatever is true of the glorified body of our Lord is equally true of the glorified body of each Christian? I doubt it, His natural body did not undergo dissolution. I don't quite accept the implication of your phrase "restricted by external quantity", for restriction suggests imperfection. But to be in one place (or therefore not in another) seems to me possibly hard on the perfection of a finite creature — as it belongs to the perfection of a statue to end where it does or of a musical note to be just so loud (neither more nor less) or of a metrical verse..... Of course, I'm only guessing.⁴⁹

Lewis first offers the caution that it is not necessarily valid to predicate attributes to the glorified bodies of Christians which are true of the glorified body of Christ. In this he is correct, yet the example used to support this is spurious. That human bodies undergo dissolution is not relevant to

**Gaudeo quia Dominus qui ceteras miseras nostras omnes suscepit non voluit senilitatem suscipere; in Uno Vera Homine aeterna juventus.*

this point, for they have not yet been glorified. Apart from this, Lewis wisely maintains a distinction.

He continues, speculating about the local presence of the glorified Christ. Lewis suggests that it is necessary for a finite being, particularly a perfect finite being, to be locally present. If this is correct, then an illocal presence would demonstrate imperfection. Unfortunately, Lewis does not continue the discussion. It might equally be claimed that illocal presence is necessary for the perfection of the divine nature. At the same time, Lewis believed that Christ was, in some way, omnipresent. When Mary Shelburne* wrote to him of the possibility of entering a nursing home, Lewis responded, "If you do ever have to go to a Home, Christ will be there just as much as in any other place."⁵⁰ His words may indicate that he considered the omnipresence to be according to Christ's divine nature only, though there is no resolution of the question here.

The Intercession of Christ

The ascended Christ remains active. Among His ongoing work is intercession. Writing to Dom Bede Griffiths, Lewis addressed the issue of charity in prayers. How does one pray for people such as Hitler or Stalin?[†] Lewis writes that it helps if one has, "A continual grasp of the idea that one is only joining one's feeble little voice to the perpetual intercession of Christ who died for these very men."⁵¹ The intercession, and indeed, the sacrifice of Christ, applies to all people.

Atonement

One of the most interesting aspects of Lewis's correspondence is seen in letters which answer questions from his readers. One question that arises in his correspondence with Dom Bede Griffiths regards his conception of the Atonement. Lewis had asked Griffiths for his opinion about Mere Christianity. In a significant letter, Lewis writes,

I think I gave the impression of going further than I intended in saying that all theories of the Atonement were "to be rejected if we don't find them helpful." What I meant was "need not be used —" a v. different thing. Is there, on your view, a real difference here: that the Divinity of Our Lord *has to be believed* whether you find it a help or a "scandal" (otherwise you are not a Xtian at all) but the Anselmic theory of the Atonement is *not* in that position. Would you admit that a man was a Xtian (and could be a member of your Church [Roman Catholic]) who said "I believe that Christ's death redeemed man from sin, but I can make nothing of the theories as to *how!*"⁵²

Lewis softens his statements against the Anselmic theory of the Atonement, and then restates his position. One must believe in the deity of Christ to be a Christian, but one does not have to subscribe to any particular theory of the atonement. Belief in the fact of the atonement was all that was required, not a particular theoretical understanding. The following year, Lewis offered an even greater concession.

*Who, incidentally, was the aunt of the young man who wrote the preceding letter.

[†]Lewis addresses Adolph Hitler similarly in Letters to Malcolm, where he writes of a pastor who had seen Hitler and had ample reason to hate him, but nonetheless stated that he looked "Like all men... That is, like Christ." (Letters to Malcolm, p. 74).

I shouldn't have written as I did if I had thought that there was a consensus of theologians in favour of the Anselmic theory. I believed that it was not to be found either in the New Testament or most of the Fathers. If I'm wrong in this, it is a matter of plain historical ignorance.⁵³

Note that Lewis does not cite a change of opinion, but says that he would not have written as he did. Griffiths had apparently convinced him that the Anselmic theory was much more prevalent than he had previously assumed, yet Lewis does not concede his primary point. He might consider himself ignorant as to the frequency of this motif, but he still insisted that the theory itself did not have to be believed.

Conclusion

The letters and all of his personal writings, provide a glimpse into the life of C. S. Lewis. He offers his thinking on a number of Christological doctrines, provides further explanations of his writing, and applies his faith to himself as well as to others. What emerges is a man who realises his total dependency on God. He stated this in a letter intended to comfort a woman to whom he provided financial assistance. He tells her that having to accept charity reminds people that they are dependant upon others, and upon God. Lewis wrote, "It took me a long time to see this — tho', heaven knows, with the Cross before our eyes we have little excuse to forget our insolvency."⁵⁴ It may have taken him a long time to see it, but through his personal writings this vision becomes prominent. Lewis realises that he owes everything to Christ.

An Evaluation of C. S. Lewis's Christology

The writings of C. S. Lewis present a diverse and creative portrayal of the person and work of Christ. Lewis was not a systematician, nor does he attempt to provide an outline of his Christology. The Christological material which he presents is chosen according to the need or issue being addressed, and varies by genre. At times he takes great care to restate classic Christian orthodoxy, at other times he explores new modes of expression. Evaluation of his Christology must consider his differing intentions. As he desired to remain within the bounds of orthodoxy, his adherence to credal Christology will be addressed first. Second, since Lewis frequently expressed reservations about theories of the atonement, this subject will also be considered. Finally, claims that Lewis drifted-into Christological heresy will be examined.

The Credal Christology of C. S. Lewis

Lewis had no desire to be theologically innovative. Indeed, he repeatedly stated that his objective in writing on Christianity was to elucidate the theology of the Church. Frequently he speculates on theological topics, but often concludes with credal language, stating what "has to be believed." Since Lewis appealed to the basic confessions of the Church, his writing will be compared to Christological propositions from the Apostles and Nicene Creeds, and the *Quicumque Vult* (commonly, if imprecisely known as the Athanasian Creed). These comprise Lewis's primary theological authority.*

Deity of Christ

The Only Begotten Son of God, begotten not made

The symbols of the Church all testify the Deity of Christ. Against Nestorianism, they proclaim that He is the "only begotten Son of God" and that He is "begotten, not made." In *Mere Christianity*, Lewis discusses this very issue. He rightly, if pedantically, distinguishes between the begetting of the Son of God and the Virgin birth. "When you beget, you beget something of the same kind as yourself... What God begets is God...."¹ To speak of Christ being the only begotten is to acknowledge that He is not a creature, but truly divine.

Eternity

While this emphasises the deity of Christ, His Sonship may cause some to question his deity and co-equality with the Father. Human beings naturally think of the relationship between parents and children in temporal terms. Parents can easily remember the time before the birth of their children. If there was a time before the Son was begotten, can he truly be said to be of equal deity? Lewis answered such time-bound questions with the language of the Creeds. In *Mere*

*It might also be argued that Lewis used the Thirty-Nine Articles as an additional theological authority. This is evident, for example, as he defends his belief in purgatory where he claims that he does not hold to "the Romish doctrine." This is an application of Article 22. However, the vast majority of his references are to the ecumenical creeds.

Christianity he writes that while the Son owes His Nature to the Father, He is nonetheless begotten from all eternity. There never was a time when the Son was not begotten.² This theme continues as he discusses the Trinity. He calls the Son, "... the self expression of the Father — what the Father has to say. And there never was a time when He was not saying it."³ In Miracles he notes that some people are offended by the "primitive" idea that God has a Son, just like mythical deities, and particularly so when the Father is anthropomorphically depicted as an old man. Lewis responds that while some Christians may indeed hold such mental images, "...they also maintain the one did not exist before the other, both having existed from all eternity."⁴ The New Testament identifies the Son with the *λογος*, "...the Reason, Discourse or Word which was eternally 'with God' and yet also *was* God."⁵ The Problem of Pain notes the differences between the First and Second Persons of the Trinity while maintaining the eternity of the Son,⁶ and Reflections on the Psalms upholds this attribute of Christ, saying that He is the eternal Word.⁷ Lewis believed in the eternity of the Son, and demonstrates this in his writings.

Of one substance with the Father, equality

The Son is begotten but not inferior to the Father. Christian orthodoxy asserts that He is "of one substance with the Father." While Lewis does not directly use the credal language, he does make frequent reference to the equal deity of Christ. In Miracles he says explicitly that the eternal Word, "...was eternally "with God" and yet also *was* God."⁸ In The Problem of Pain, while discussing the humble submission of Christ to the Father, he notes, "...in our belief, [our Lord is] one with His Father and co-eternal with Him as no earthly son is with an earthly father..."⁹ The Son is fully Divine and of equal Godhead with the Father.

All things made by Him

The co-substantiality and equality of the Son and the Father is demonstrated in creation. Consistent with Biblical references^{*} and the Creeds, Lewis maintains that the Son was involved in creation. "All things and specially Life arose *within* Him, (Col i. εν αυτω εχτισθη John I.4)..."¹⁰ It is interesting that Lewis focuses on John 1:4 which notes the life that was in the Logos, but does not cite verse 3, which is the more specific text on the creation. He has assumed the credal doctrine, and moves to a more specific point: the creation of life.

The role of Christ in creation is particularly evident in Lewis's fiction. In the Chronicles of Narnia, it is not the Emperor-over-Sea, but His Son, Aslan, who creates the world.¹¹ In Out of the Silent Planet, Ransom learns that Maleldil the Young made and ruled the world.¹² Here Lewis's fiction is clearer than his prose. It is the Second Person of the Trinity who creates.

^{*}Lewis refers to John 1:3, 4 "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life and that life was the light of men." He also cites Colossians 1:16-17 "For by him [Christ] all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together."

True Deity

Finally, evidence of the deity of Christ is present throughout Lewis's writings. In his fictional works this is revealed in the action of the Christ-figures, and in the reaction of others to them. Aslan, the Creator and Saviour of Narnia, has divine attributes and titles. He is called Lord, is worshipped, forgives sins, performs miracles, and raises the dead. In the Space Trilogy, Maleldil creates and preserves both temporal and eternal life. He is omniscient, omnipresent, and receives the worship of His creatures. Psyche in *Till We Have Faces* receives the worship and honour of the crowds before they reject her, and eventually is acknowledged among the gods. Each of these figures, which are parallel to Christ, demonstrate deity.

In his non-fictional writings, Lewis strongly asserts the deity of the Christ. All attributes which are ascribed to God are also ascribed to Christ. While He was on earth, the phenomenal world, He still was God Himself, eternally in the noumenal realm.¹³ Yet for Lewis, the strongest evidence for Christ's deity was His self-affirmation. His apologetic works examine the personal claims of Christ. If He is not who He claimed to be, what are the logical alternatives? Jesus could not have been merely a good moral or ethical teacher. Either He was God, as He claimed, or He was a liar or a lunatic.¹⁴ Lewis believed in the Deity of Christ and reflected that directly in his apologetic works, and indirectly in his fiction.

Incarnation

Came down from heaven

Lewis's chief Christological theme is the Incarnation. In this, however, he is unwilling to be bound by a literalistic application of descriptive language. As an example, he notes that the Son of God, "...is supposed to have 'come down from Heaven,' just as if God had a palace in the sky from which He sent down His 'Son' like a parachutist."¹⁵ Lewis demonstrates that such a description is not meant spatially, though some Christians might naively imagine it to be such. Rather, it is indicative of the profound change of the Incarnation. Assuming that it is merely demonstrative of the change undertaken, Lewis continues to discuss the Incarnation.

Virginal Conception and Birth

In temporal terms, the beginning of the Incarnation is the miraculous conception of Christ. Lewis discusses this event in *Miracles*, indicating that the virgin birth was as difficult for the participants to believe as it is for any modern reader.¹⁶ There is no way to accept the event without conceding it as miraculous. Having acknowledged that, Lewis explores this miracle. He considers the nature of the virginal conception in *Miracles* and *Mere Christianity*, but perhaps most directly in a letter where he notes that the details of this miracle are open to speculation.¹⁷ These words are typical of Lewis's approach to doctrinal theology. Scripture and the Creeds state that Mary was a virgin when Jesus was conceived.* Lewis states the essential teaching, and then speculates in areas where the doctrine is not specific. He offers three possible explanations. Two of these, the creation

*Lewis believed in the Virgin Birth. However, he makes no reference to the alleged perpetual virginity of Mary.

of a new spermatozoon or fertilisation without a spermatozoon can be held without negative consequence. However, his third option, the development of a foetus without an ovum, is inadequate. Such a statement could easily be construed to support Docetism. Christ is of the same human substance as his mother. One questions just how a child would be of his mother's substance apart from an ovum. Lewis is correct in stating that these details are not part of the doctrine, but such a minimalistic approach to doctrine is fraught with consequences. Lewis's unwillingness to be dogmatic in his speculation has led him to allow for a possibility which could undermine the real humanity of Christ.

Lewis saw parallels to the virgin birth in mythology. In The Discarded Image he discusses the medieval image of the unicorn. According to Isidore, the only way for a hunter to kill a unicorn is to set a virgin before him. The ordinarily strong unicorn lays his head in the virgin's lap and sleeps. Only then can the hunter kill it. Lewis continues, "It is hard to believe that any Christian can think for long about this exquisite myth without seeing in it an allegory of the Incarnation and Crucifixion."¹⁸ This and other parallels to Christian revelation within pagan myth caught Lewis's imagination, and strengthened his belief. At the same time, he believed that Christianity was not just one more instance of the mythology, but was in fact the fulfilment of the earlier myths.

Of His mother's substance

Concerns of Docetism which may arise with Lewis's imprecision regarding the nature of the virgin birth fade when the next article of the creeds is introduced. According to His human nature, Christ is of the substance of His mother, a teaching Lewis explicitly states. In Mere Christianity, he writes that the Christ's "created life," the "natural human creature," was derived from his mother.¹⁹ In Reflections on the Psalms Lewis uses similar words, writing that Jesus employed Hebrew parallelism, which He likely learned from His mother. He then reminds the reader, "...in becoming Man, He bowed His neck beneath the sweet yoke of a heredity and early environment."²⁰ Jesus had a human heredity which He received from Mary. This is something to which the reader can relate, for, "Mary... was the mother of Jesus in exactly the same sense in which [sic] my mother was my mother."²¹ Having speculated on the details of the virgin birth, Lewis returns to a restatement of credal doctrine. Jesus was fully human, of Mary's substance.

Reasonable soul and human flesh

The Creeds are further concerned with the nature of Jesus' humanity. The Athanasian Creed states that He is, "Perfect God, and Perfect Man of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting." Lewis is careful to maintain the entirety of the Incarnation here reflected. In Letters to Malcolm he writes, "In the Incarnation, God the Son takes the body and human soul of Jesus, and through that, the whole environment of nature, all the creaturely predicament, into His own being."²² In another letter he questioned Sister Penelope's translation of Athanasius's De Incarnatione when she said that "the Person, the Ego of the incarnate Lord is God." Lewis responded that he thought that a human soul was involved, for Christ's humanity involved more

than his body.²³ Here Lewis seems uncertain, but in a later letter he wrote confidently, "...a real man (human body *and* human soul) was in Him so united with the 2nd person of the Trinity as to make one Person."²⁴ Lewis maintained that Christ was fully human, therefore He must have had a human soul.

Real humanity

One charge frequently brought against Lewis's Christology is that it is so focused on Christ's deity that the reader is left to wonder about His humanity. It is true that Lewis's Christology stresses the divine nature, and yet his writings contain specific, concrete references to Christ's human nature. One of the most dramatic references is in Mere Christianity where Lewis makes the Incarnation as specific as possible.

The Second Person in God, the Son, became human Himself: was born into the world as an actual man — a real man of a particular height, with hair of a particular colour, speaking a particular language, weighing so many stone.²⁵

Lewis would not allow for a Gnostic devaluation of the physical body. God created the body and God assumed a human body as his own. Lewis recalls this in The Pilgrim's Regress, saying that the "Landlord's Son" was not ashamed to be in the body.²⁶ When Owen Barfield said that he thought Christ suffered because He was in the body and was therefore tempted to hasten his own death, Lewis responded that this would deny His being perfect God and perfect man.²⁷ The body is not a burden, but is part of the nature of Christ. He is truly human.

Not only is Christ truly human, He is exceptionally human. Jesus Christ is the Archetypal Man. Hence Lewis writes regarding the title which Christ applied to Himself, "Son of Man." "'Son of Man' means Man, the Man, the archetypal Man, in whose suffering, resurrection and victories all men (unless they refuse) can share."²⁸ He comes not only to redeem humanity, but to ennoble it. His Resurrection and Ascension are not merely great acts of God, but also the triumph of Man. This emphasis on Christ as the Archetypal man is seen again in Mere Christianity. "I have called Christ the "first instance" of the new man.... He is not merely a new man, one specimen of the species, but *the* new man. He is the origin and centre and life of all the new men."²⁹ Even the humanity of Christ is something greater than might have been expected.

The true humanity of Christ is demonstrated as He faces a variety of human situations and responds appropriately. The highest example of this, for Lewis, was in Gethsemane. As Christ struggles before His death, His theanthropic nature is evident. Many of Lewis's works, non-fictional, fictional, and correspondence, deal with His passion in Gethsemane. It provides an example and strength to the Christian, but it also demonstrates Christ's humanity. For example, in Letters to Malcolm, "But for this last (and erroneous) hope against hope, and the consequent tumult of the soul, the sweat of blood, perhaps He would not have been very Man. To live in a fully predictable world is not to be a man."³⁰ The suffering and prayer of Gethsemane proclaims Christ's deity and humanity.

Significance of the Incarnation

Lewis clearly held to the reality of the Incarnation, viewing it with awe. Throughout his writings he upholds its significance. For example, the Space Trilogy presents a variety of sentient species on Mars, which was created before the Incarnation, but on Venus, the sentient beings are humanoid. How could they take any other form once Maleldil had become a man? The Incarnation also changed humanity's perception of God. In That Hideous Strength, Ransom notes that Maleldil once was frightening, as are the *eldila*, but, "...all that has changed by what happened at Bethlehem."³¹ That same idea is expressed in The Screwtape Letters, where the demons call the Incarnation, "...that abominable advantage of the Enemy's."³²

Lewis was particularly interested in the Incarnation, as it was prefigured in Pagan mythology. He explicitly deals with the corn-king myths, and alludes to other mythical figures such as Osiris, Balder, and Adonis. And yet having seen the pattern in other mythology, a crucial step in his own conversion was the realisation that, "Here and here only in all time the myth must have become fact; the Word, flesh; God, Man."³³ Once it happens, it surprises humanity by being different from expectations. Lewis would call the Incarnation the great iconoclast, for "it leaves all previous ideas of the Messiah in ruins."³⁴ The Incarnation is a unique event foreseen in nature and throughout the world, and yet exceeding all expectations. It is of paramount importance for the Christian.

The Personal Union of Christ

Lewis clearly believed that that Christ was both true God and true man. The union of these two natures and their relationship to each other is a challenging part of Christology. Lewis presents the personal union, with varying degrees of success, in a number of contexts. The particular relationship of the two natures, the communication of attributes, and the kenosis is included in the next chapter, "The Christology of C. S. Lewis: A Lutheran Evaluation." These are doctrines where Lewis and Lutheranism diverge.

Union not by conversion of Godhead into flesh, but by taking manhood into God

The Athanasian Creed says that Christ is one, "...not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh but by taking of the Manhood into God." Lewis cites this formula to describe the Incarnation. In Reflections on the Psalms, he writes, "...we are taught that the Incarnation itself proceeded 'not by the conversion of the godhead into flesh, but by taking of (the) manhood into God'; in it human life becomes the vehicle of Divine life."³⁵ Again in Mere Christianity, "The natural human creature in Him was taken up fully into the divine Son."³⁶ And in Letters to Malcolm,

In the Incarnation God the Son takes the body and human soul of Jesus, and, through that, the whole environment of Nature, all the creaturely predicament, into His own being. So that "He came down from Heaven" can almost be transposed into "Heaven drew earth up into it,"³⁷

Lewis repeatedly quotes or paraphrases these words from the Creed because their point is critical to his understanding of the Incarnation. Deity is not diminished by the Incarnation — mankind is ennobled. Humanity becomes what it was intended to be, and what it one day will be, in Christ.

The Work of Christ

Suffered under Pilate

The second aspect of Christology is the work of Christ. Here also, Lewis adheres to the basic credal doctrine regarding Christ's ministry. As the creeds say that He suffered under Pontius Pilate, so Lewis cites the role of Pilate to demonstrate the historicity of the biblical account.³⁸ However, it is the suffering of Christ which is the more prominent emphasis. Throughout his writings he notes that Christ suffers, that He is pre-eminent for suffering, and that He was tortured to death.³⁹ Yet it is in his later writings that the theme of the suffering Christ is most pronounced. Having witnessed the suffering of his wife, Lewis focused more on the suffering of Christ. He would write in Letters to Malcolm that the suffering of Christ reflected the human situation of suffering and rejection, and of how the horror of the crucifixion must periodically be faced.⁴⁰ In The Four Loves, he discusses the boundless love of Christ which causes Him to create the universe while He foresees His suffering, a suffering that Lewis graphically portrays.⁴¹ While the suffering of Christ is mentioned in earlier books, and indeed seen in his fictional works as well, it is in his later writings that it becomes most poignant.

Death

The creeds simply declare that Christ died. Lewis's writings likewise note the death of Christ with simplicity. In Miracles he writes that, "Christianity... does involve the belief that God loves man and for his sake became man and died."⁴² Christ's principal work was to suffer and be killed.⁴³ He is the perfect man, and therefore the only one who could perfectly die, as the "representative Die-er."⁴⁴ His death is foreseen from the foundation of the world,⁴⁵ is foretold through prophecy, and is seen in the dying God myths.⁴⁶ Likewise, the theme of the death of Christ is prevalent in Lewis's fiction. Aslan dies for Edmund's treachery on the Stone Table, Maleldil wrestles with the Bent One on Thulcandra in order to become a ransom. Elwin Ransom battles the Un-man on Perelandra to end his temptation of that planet. Psyche becomes the accursed, sacrificed on a tree for everyone. The most ironic reference to the death of Christ is spoken by a damned Bishop who considered the death to be a tragic waste.⁴⁷ In satirising the Bishop, Lewis showed the deep meaning of the death.

Burial

Following His death, Christ was buried. Surprisingly, this simple detail of the events is not specifically mentioned by Lewis. He writes of the death and resurrection, but never mentions His burial. The closest reference comes at the death of Aslan. Susan and Lucy care for his body, but do not move it from the stone table. Aslan is restored to life without being buried first. In all other contexts, Lewis simply assumes that it happened.

Descent into Hell

Among the more disputed of the Christological doctrines is the descent into Hell. Based primarily upon 1 Peter 3:18-20,^{*} it is simply stated in the Apostles and Athanasian Creeds. Despite this paucity of information, Lewis makes significant use of the descent. Before his conversion to Christianity, he published a series of poems titled Spirits in Bondage, but his original title was Spirits in Prison, a clear allusion to 1 Peter 3.[†] Though the poems do not regard the work of Christ, the allusion is significant for the atheistic Lewis. Following his conversion, he made more use of this theme. On Perelandra, Ransom kills the demonic Un-man in a subterranean cavern, prior to his “resurrection” to the planet’s surface. Psyche, in Till We Have Faces, is sent on a journey through the under-world to acquire a casket of beauty from death to give to Orual. In Miracles, Lewis describes the Incarnation and ministry of Christ in terms of a diver descending to the depths in order to recover a “precious thing.” He finds it when he descends “...into black and cold water, down through increasing pressure into the death-like region of ooze and slime and old decay...”⁴⁸ While all of these stories draw upon the imagery of the descent into Hell, they do not adequately reveal Lewis’s understanding of the descent.

Lewis does, however, explain his interpretation of the descent. In a 1952 letter, he wrote that the descent was to Hades, the “land of the dead,” not to Gehenna, the “land of the lost.” The descent took place outside of time, and so could include people who lived before and after his Incarnation. Yet in this letter, Lewis does not offer an interpretation of what happened, but says, “...all justice and mercy will be done, but nevertheless it is our duty to do all we can to convert unbelievers.”⁴⁹ Clearly Lewis considers the descent to be for the sake of those who had never heard of Christ, but does not apply to the damned. Thus the descent provides for the spread of salvation. This restates the argument of his 1945 work, The Great Divorce. Here George MacDonald, Lewis’s guide, says that the descent took place outside of time, so that, “All moments that have been or shall be were, or are, present in the moment of His descending. There is no spirit in prison to whom He did not preach.”⁵⁰ The descent is into Hell, but it is Hell before the final judgement. MacDonald says that some hear, and presumably are saved by Christ’s preaching. This is reflected in the narrative as a ghost from Hell is able to enter Heaven. Lewis portrays Christ’s descent into Hell as the offering of salvation, outside of time to those who have or will have died. It is not to suffer the punishment for sins, but the proclamation of the possibility of salvation.

Resurrection

Lewis strongly believed in the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ, and incorporated it on many levels into his writings. He reminds his readers that the earliest Christians were converted by a single fact, the Resurrection.⁵¹ It was not merely a resurrection of the soul, but of the body,⁵²

^{*}1 Peter 3:18-20 “For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built.”

[†]The title was changed by the publisher to avoid confusion with another book titled Spirits in Prison.

which was foretold by Christ.⁵³ Both natures of Christ were united in the Resurrection, so that it was not only the divine, but also the human who rose.⁵⁴ Though some deny this fact, including a damned Bishop,⁵⁵ Lewis displayed it prominently and often referred to it.

His fiction also contains images of the resurrection. Aslan is alive and whole following his sacrifice. Psyche is seen alive after the Great Offering. Ransom also is alive and well after his victory on Perelandra. Lewis's illustrations of the work of Christ in *Miracles* also portray the resurrection. The Strongman who stoops to pick up an enormous load emerges, against all hope, the diver who plunges to the depths of the sea returns with the object that he sought. Christ is the one who changes everything by His victory.

The New Testament writers speak as if Christ's achievement in rising from the dead was the first event of its kind in the whole history of the universe. He is the "first fruits,"* the "pioneer of life." He has forced open a door that has been locked since the death of the first man. He has met, fought, and beaten the King of Death.⁵⁶

Lewis strongly held to the biblical accounts of the resurrection and reflected this throughout his writings. It displays the power, glory, and triumph of Christ.

Ascension

The ascension of Christ is an important doctrine for Lewis. In *Miracles*, he repeatedly answers the objection that Christianity seems to be based on an antiquated world view. This is particularly true as he discusses the Ascension, for some might envision a heaven just beyond the clouds, where Jesus sits on a gold throne set to the right of His Father. Faced with this simplistic understanding, Lewis considers the possibility that Christians could simply reject this teaching. He replies that this may only be done if the post-resurrection appearances of Christ are the appearances of a ghost, or are a hallucination. These things might fade away, "...but an objective entity must go somewhere — something must happen to it."⁵⁷ He continues to state that if the Ascension is denied, either the physical resurrection must be denied, or another explanation must be made to explain the missing body of Christ. Lacking such an explanation, he holds to the resurrection and ascension.

In a 1942 sermon on miracles, Lewis discussed the Ascension in similar terms, and said, "...it is very rash to assume that the story of the Ascension is mere allegory." In this sermon, he speculated that Christ withdrew from this dimension to worlds beyond human experience. He compares this possibility to modern physics which proposes a variety of ideas beyond observable experience.[†] If hypotheses such as these may be entertained by the modern mind, Lewis proposed that,

a being still in some mode, though not our mode, corporeal, withdrew at His own will from the Nature presented by our three dimensions and five senses, not necessarily into the non-sensuous and undimensioned but possibly into, or through, a world or worlds of super-sense and super-space.⁵⁸

*cf. 1 Corinthians 15:20 "But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep."

†He refers specifically to Schrödinger, whose explanation of an atom involved seven dimensions.

While he does not insist on this interpretation of the Ascension, he maintains that it makes the doctrine more logical to the modern reader while upholding the integrity of the biblical account.

Sits at the Right Hand of God

The Creeds state that following His ascension, Christ sits at the right hand of the Father in heaven. In his discussion of the Ascension, Lewis noted that he did not envision a crass image of two chairs placed side by side. Neither did he provide an interpretation of what the session means. However, in The Great Divorce, he paraphrases Psalm 110, a messianic Psalm.* Where the Psalmist writes, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet," (Ps 110:1) Lewis writes, "Come up. Share my rest and splendour till all natures that were your enemies become slaves to dance before you and backs for you to ride, and firmness for your feet to rest on."⁵⁹ As this paraphrase continues, he writes of authority, power, and strength being given to Christ forever. Lewis thus removes spatial considerations, focusing on the meaning of Christ's session. He rules in perpetual power and honour.

Christ's return for judgement and His eternal kingdom

Lewis's writings consistently hold to the return of Christ for judgement, and His eternal reign. Though denied by some, Lewis noted that these teachings were part of the Christian faith as it was understood, "*ubique et ab omnibus*,"[†] and therefore united Christians.⁶⁰ His essay, "The World's Last Night" begins by quoting the Apostles Creed and various Bible passages on Christ's return, summarising, "If this is not an integral part of the faith once given to the saints, I do not know what is."⁶¹ Still, there is considerable anxiety among Christians regarding eschatology. Lewis notes that many are apprehensive because they are reacting to those who would see this doctrine as Christ's central message.⁶² He did not agree with the centrality of this doctrine, but maintained that it was an integral part of the faith, and so must be accepted. The clear teaching of Christ is that, "(1) he will certainly return. (2) That we cannot possibly find out when. (3) And that therefore we must always be ready for him."⁶³ Readiness is vital, for the return of Christ will be for judgement, and will be "...something so overwhelming that it will strike either irresistible love or irresistible horror into every creature. It will be too late then to choose your side."⁶⁴

Lewis's general approach to Christ's return and subsequent judgement thus acknowledges the parousia, and stresses preparation. The return itself will be marked by judgement. Responding to those who would try to delete this teaching, he writes,

If there is any concept which cannot by any conjuring be removed from the teaching of Our Lord, it is that of the great separation; the sheep and the goats, the broad way and the narrow, the wheat and the tares, the winnowing fan, the wise and foolish virgins, the good fish and the refuse, the door closed on the marriage feast, with some inside and some outside in the dark.... It is from His own words that the picture of "Doomsday" has come into Christianity.⁶⁵

*It is interesting to note that Lewis does not discuss this aspect of Psalm 110 in Reflections on the Psalms, looking instead at its ramifications for the Incarnation (since it is the Psalm appointed for Christmas Day), and at the parallels to Melchizedek.

[†]"everywhere and by everyone."

In this passage, Lewis mentions seven specific teachings of Jesus which demonstrate the judgement. The theme of judgement also finds a place in his fiction. At the end of The Last Battle, Aslan judges all creatures at the end of the world, some entering paradise, and others disappearing into his shadow. In The Great Divorce, the souls in the grey city are aware that it is twilight, but true night and darkness is coming. The Screwtape Letters is candid regarding the salvation or damnation of souls. Lewis certainly maintained that Christ's return would be marked with judgement. But this judgement is not a burden for believers. While his depiction of judgement includes damnation, the chief focus is on paradise. Some may pass into Aslan's shadow, but the story focuses on the redeemed. Souls may return to the Grey City, but the reality of Heaven is greater and more substantial. Christ's judgement ends with His joyful and eternal reign.

Lewis's presentation of Christology is consistent with the Creeds. Often the doctrines are stated directly from these symbols, frequently they are explained and illustrated. While he occasionally uses imprecise language or speculation, he returns to the essential language and content of the creeds. The Christ presented in both fictional and non-fictional contexts is largely consistent with historic orthodoxy.

Atonement Theory

Lewis's greatest personal challenge in Christology regarded theories of the Atonement. How is the work of Christ to be understood and explained? Lewis claimed to avoid these explanations, and yet eclectically uses elements from various theories in his own writings. One theory, however, finds no significant use in his writing. The Abelardian theory of the atonement considers Christ's chief work to have been being an example to humanity. While Lewis frequently views Christ as example, he is consistently unwilling to make the exemplary role of Christ the centre of His work. Christ was an example, but He was not merely an example. Indeed, Lewis's Christological writing resisted any reduction of Christ to being just an example, just a teacher, etc. This theory of the atonement is not an influential model for Lewis. Other explanations, however, prove to be more complex.

Lewis writes frequently of his objection to theories of the atonement. It becomes readily apparent that what Lewis finds objectionable is a particularly narrow expression of the Anselmic Theory of the Atonement.* Lewis understood this theory to say, "...God wanted to punish men for having deserted and joined the Great Rebel, but Christ volunteered to be punished instead, and so God let us off..."⁶⁶ His words against atonement theory are directed against this explanation.

*This theory is also known as the Vicarious Satisfaction, Substitutionary Atonement, or Latin Theory of the Atonement. Anselm explicates this in Cur Deus Homo. It must be noted, however, that Lewis's comments on Anselm's theory are not entirely justified, but are based on his perceptions of the Anselmic theory. It is difficult to ascertain Lewis's source for the Vicarious Atonement, though he certainly would have been aware of its presence in Dante's Divine Comedy. In the Seventh Canto of Paradiso, Beatrice explains the atonement to Dante in Anselmic terms. see Dorothy L. Sayers translation, Paradise (London: Penguin Books, 1962), pp. 107-111.

Objections to Atonement Theory

In various contexts, Lewis presents three basic objections to theories of the atonement. First, he did not find the explanations helpful. They did not answer all his questions and seemed too simple. Second, he was troubled with the logic of the Anselmic theory as he understood it. If God was going to forgive sin apart from merit, why did He not simply forgive? Was it truly necessary that such a drastic step was taken? In response, Lewis came to understand that as long as humanity had free will, God would have to repeat this forgiveness infinitely, and yet this answer did not dispel his questions. Similar was the question of justice. What is the point in punishing an innocent person? God is just in punishing sin, but is it just to punish one who never sinned? Lewis's third objection was pragmatic. When he first became a Christian, he thought that one had to accept this particular theory. He eventually came to the conclusion that the explanation is not Christianity, but is a proposed explanation of how Christianity works. A person can be a Christian without holding to any specific theory of the atonement. "A man can accept what Christ has done without knowing how it works: indeed, he certainly would not know how it works until he has accepted it."⁶⁷ Writing to Dom Bede Griffiths, Lewis restates this idea.

I think I gave the impression of going further than I intended in saying that all theories of the Atonement were "to be rejected if we don't find them helpful." What I meant was "need not be used —" a v. different thing. Is there, on your view, a real difference here: that the Divinity of Our Lord *has to be believed* whether you find it a help or a "scandal" (otherwise you are not a Xtian at all) but the Anselmic theory of the Atonement is *not* in that position. Would you admit that a man was a Xtian (and could be a member of your Church [Roman Catholic]) who said "I believe that Christ's death redeemed man from sin, but I can make nothing of the theories as to *how!*"⁶⁸

Reading Lewis's ideas on the atonement, there is little doubt that he was influenced by Gustaf Aulén's 1931 book, Christus Victor, which was in Lewis's personal library at the time of his death. Aulén argued that legal theories of the Atonement, such as the Anselmic Theory, did not become prominent until the Middle Ages. Before that time, and particularly in the patristic era, the prevailing understanding of the work of Christ was as victory.* This victory was frequently depicted in terms of liberty for captives, secured by the payment of ransom to a captor. Seen in such a form, Christ's death is payment, or ransom, made to the devil, thereby gaining freedom. Yet in taking the ransom, the captor is defeated. Gregory the Great explained this defeat in terms of a baited hook. Christ's humanity and mortality were the "bait," but the devil was "hooked" by the deity of Christ. When the ransom is paid, ruin is brought upon the captor. The themes of victory, of ransom, and of financial models of payment are prevalent in Lewis's writings.

Lewis's Use of Atonement Theory

Lewis objected to atonement theories, yet examination of his writings shows that he really objected only to a narrow expression of the Anselmic theory. Indeed, Lewis uses atonement theories. His utilisation of these explanations would best be called eclectic, for he freely chooses

from a variety of expressions as they suit his purpose. While he did not have much regard for the Anselmic Theory, he was also able to write,

You can say that Christ died for our sins. You may say that the Father has forgiven us because Christ has done for us what we ought to have done. You may say that we are washed in the blood of the Lamb. You may say that Christ defeated death. They are all true.⁶⁹

This mixing of themes is Lewis's ultimate view of the atonement. He offers a rich expression that draws on diverse models.

The Christus Victor Model

Lewis was strongly influenced by the *Christus Victor* model of the atonement. It is likely that the richly mythopoeic themes in this theory appealed to his interest in mythology. At the same time, the strong motifs of warfare and victory over evil were compelling in time of war. These influences, compounded with Lewis's dislike of what he believed to be the Anselmic theory made him receptive to other presentations of the atonement. This need was satisfied by the *Christus Victor* theory. Lewis's writings are filled with images that reflect this model — of the Christ conquering the devil in order to free humanity. In *Miracles*, he writes that Christ, "has forced open a door that has been locked since the death of the first man. He has met, fought, and beaten the King of Death."⁷⁰ Similar images are scattered throughout his writings, but are most evident in his fiction. For example, the figure of Ransom, in his work on Perelandra, is heavily reliant on the *Christus Victor* model. Ransom is at first shocked and appalled by the thought that what is expected of him is a physical confrontation, but once he realises this, he engages the enemy. Despite his belief that he would be seriously injured, he fights and kills the un-man in a subterranean cavern. Having killed the demonic figure, Ransom casts his body into a pit of fire to be destroyed. It is with physical strength, below the surface of the planet, that evil is destroyed. So also, the Christic figure, Aslan. While embracing elements of the Anselmic theory, critical elements of the Victor theory are prominent. Aslan dies as a substitute for Edmund, but this pays a debt not to Emperor, but to the White Witch as a ransom. Following his resurrection, Aslan proceeds to the Witch's castle where he breaks down the gates and restores to life those whom the Witch had turned to stone. The destruction of the castle gates is particularly reflective of the medieval images of the Harrowing of Hell, which described Christ's destruction of the gates of Hell, in order to lead the prisoners forth to life. Aslan then leads his newly-quickened followers into battle where the witch is finally killed and her magic destroyed. The parallels to the *Christus Victor* motif are numerous. Having accepted the ransom, the evil one finds that she has been destroyed, and is vanquished.

Were victory the only component of this theory, this theme would be evident in Lewis's writings, but when one includes the sub-theme of paying a ransom to the captor, it becomes even more obvious. Aslan conquers the White Witch, but first offers payment to her for the crimes of

*Aulén certainly overstated the predominance of the Christus Victor Theory. It was a common motif, but even if it was dominant, it was one theory among many.

Edmund. He is the ransom for the captive child. Likewise, when Ransom is wrestling with his role as saviour of Perelandra, he hears the voice of God.

“My name also is Ransom,” said the Voice. It was some time before the purport of this saying dawned upon him. He whom the other worlds call Maleldil, was the world’s ransom.... So that was the real issue. If he now failed, this world also would hereafter be redeemed. If he were not the ransom, Another would be.... Not a second crucifixion: perhaps — who knows — not even a second Incarnation... some act of even more appalling love, some glory of yet deeper humility.⁷¹

Maleldil identifies Himself as Ransom for He is the world’s ransom.

In his non-fictional writing, Lewis also considers the Atonement in terms of paying a debt or ransom. While he objects that the Anselmic theory is unjust when it punishes an innocent person, he continues to clarify it. There is no point in punishing an innocent person if it is a criminal offence, but this is not unusual when put in financial terms. One can pay another’s debt.⁷² The same motif is present as Lewis discusses Psalm 49.

The price of salvation is one that only the Son of God could pay; as the hymn says, there was no other “good enough to pay the price.” The very phrasing of our version strengthens the effect — the verb “redeem” which (outside the pawnbroking business) is now used only in a theological sense, and the past tense of “cost”. Not it “costs,” but it did cost, more, once for all on Calvary.⁷³

Lewis easily saw the atonement in financial terms, as paying a ransom. As he envisions the ransom being paid, not to God, but to the Devil, this is an expression of the *Christus Victor* theory.

Vicarious Satisfaction

Lewis’s ideas on the atonement are largely based on the *Christus Victor* model, and he frequently criticises the Anselmic theory, yet elements of the Vicarious Satisfaction are found in Lewis’s writings. The redemption of Aslan is primarily presented as one of victory. The ransom is paid to the Witch, and yet the ransom itself is necessitated by the Emperor’s magic, which cannot be overthrown. The occasion of Aslan’s sacrifice was the treachery and condemnation of Edmund. Aslan dies in the place of Edmund, clearly a vicarious death. Likewise Ransom fights to victory over evil, but is not from that world. He was transported to Perelandra to fight evil. While he was involved in mortal combat, the inhabitants of Perelandra did not have to face that trial. Ransom was their substitute. Psyche faces death in the Great Offering, in order to free the land from its drought. In this, she was the substitute for all Glome. All of these fictional images of Christ involve substitution — a notable component of the Anselmic theory.

In his non-fictional writings, Lewis also delineates the substitutionary death of Christ. In *Miracles*, he describes Christ’s death using language that is remarkably similar to Anselm’s *Cur Deus Homo*. He writes that the Redeemer had to voluntarily become a man, apart from necessity, and that He had to be perfect. He would undergo a perfect death, “...and thus (which way you put it is unimportant) either defeat death or redeem it.” He dies in the place of all others, and is, “the representative ‘Die-er’ of the universe.... Because Vicariousness is the very idiom of the reality He has created, His death can become ours.”⁷⁴ The only essential element of the Anselmic theory

which is missing from this passage is that the “payment” is made to God. It is remarkable, for all his objections to this theory, to see how much Lewis reverts to its basic principles.

In 1942, Lewis wrote again to Dom Bede Griffiths about the Anselmic theory. This letter may explain some of Lewis’s thoughts on this theory.

I shouldn't have written as I did if I had thought that there was a consensus of theologians in favour of the Anselmic theory. I believed that it was not to be found either in the New Testament or most of the Fathers. If I'm wrong in this, it is a matter of plain historical ignorance.⁷⁵

The degree of consensus on this theory of the atonement is an uncertain matter. Yet it is significant that Lewis was willing to concede his ignorance if the majority of theologians were against him. This letter reflects the basic arguments of Aulén’s book, which was written just eleven years earlier. If he was in error, Lewis was willing to admit his mistake, and sought correction.

Lewis was partially in error. His arguments against the Anselmic theory seem somewhat inconsistent when compared to his own presentation of the atonement. And yet, his key point remains correct. Theories of the atonement may be helpful, but they are not, in themselves, essential. It is surprising, however, that Lewis, who sought explanation and clarity in other areas of theology, did not use these tools to explain the work of Christ. Finally, the reader should recognise that while Lewis often wrote against theories of the atonement, he did not seek to keep his readers from these explanations. If they were of little help to him, they might still be valuable for others.

Christological Heresies

Discussion of Christology, as of theology in general, involves not only a positive expression of doctrine, but an avoidance of heresy, and a distinction between orthodoxy and heterodoxy. Among the more serious critics of C. S. Lewis are those who would claim that he did not adequately avoid heresy, or even that he embraced heretical concepts. One of the most direct of these critics was Norman Pittenger who wrote,

Mr. Lewis’ Christology, his doctrine of Christ is outright Docetic, even Gnostic. It falls into at least two classical heresies: Apollinarianism in which the true human mind of the Incarnate Lord is replaced by the divine mind, and Eutychianism in which the human nature as a whole is “swallowed up” in the divinity of our Lord.⁷⁶

Lewis responded to other criticisms in Pittenger’s article⁷⁶ but did not respond directly to the allegations of Christological heresy. Pittenger, along with other critics, has noted that Lewis’s Christology is focused strongly on His deity while neglecting his humanity. Urang, disagreeing with Pittenger’s assessment of heresy, nonetheless laments a lack of reciprocity in the Incarnation, since, “in C. S. Lewis’ Christology... the emphasis is almost exclusively on the deity of Christ, rather than on his humanity.”⁷⁷ Likewise Derrick, who writes of Lewis’s relationship to the Church of Rome, sees in Lewis, “...a naturally Gnostic or Manichaean bent...” and considers Lewis to be, “...ill at ease

⁷⁵His response, “A Rejoinder to Dr. Pittenger,” first published in *The Christian Century*, vol. LXXV (26 November 1958), pp. 1359-61, and has been reprinted in *God in the Dock*, pp. 177-183.

with incarnation generally.... While accepting the incarnational principle, did he perhaps see it as something which was not entirely trustworthy and needed to be kept under control?"⁷⁸

Lewis certainly did not consider his theology heretical. Indeed, his stated goal was to restate orthodox doctrine in a fresh manner. Yet he was not formally trained in theology and used novel and sometimes imprecise language. Moreover, much of his doctrinal thought is expressed in myth and narrative. It is difficult to exercise the precision necessary in theology within these genres while avoiding allegory. If the theology is too precise, it is difficult to avoid an allegorical correspondence. If allegorisation is avoided, a writer may more readily be accused of heresy. Lewis's writing allows for broad interpretation — a characteristic which may cause some to find heresy where it was not intended. Even so, the charges are significant, and key Christological heresies should be considered with reference to Lewis's writings.

Docetism

Docetism, the teaching that Christ only appeared to have a human body is related to Gnosticism which maintains, in part, that matter is evil, and thus incompatible with the transcendent goodness of God, who is pure spirit. If matter is evil, God could not truly become incarnate in a material body, but could only appear human. It is true that Lewis strongly emphasises the Deity of Christ, but he certainly was not a Docetist, nor does an emphasis on Christ's divinity make him a Gnostic. Indeed one would have to ignore the significant Incarnational themes throughout Lewis's writings to construe him as a Docetist. In The Problem of Pain, Lewis says,

...I certainly think that Christ, in the flesh, was not omniscient — if only because a human brain could not, presumably, be the vehicle of omniscient consciousness, and to say that Our Lord's thinking was not really conditioned by the size and shape of His brain might be to deny the real incarnation and become a Docetist.⁷⁹

Lewis demonstrates that he was aware of Docetism, and sought to avoid it. His recurring themes of the real suffering of Christ and His connection to humanity argue against Docetism. His fiction also emphasises the Incarnation — a teaching which is antithetical to Docetism. Aslan is true beast, and repeatedly described in terms of His "animalness." In the Space Trilogy, Ransom finds a variety of sentient life on Mars, which is older than earth. But on Venus the hnau are humanoid. This was the only possibility once Maleldil had become incarnate. Following the Incarnation, all hnau looked like Him. Lewis stresses the physical suffering and death of Christ. The resurrected Christ is not spirit only, but also flesh. His explanation of the Ascension again demonstrates his belief that Christ was truly Incarnate in human flesh, and remains in that body. These writings refute the charge of Docetism.

Apollinarianism

Pittenger also charges that Lewis's Christology is Apollinarian, which says that the human mind of Christ was replaced by the Divine mind. This likewise fails when Lewis's writings are considered. His focus on the prayer of Christ in Gethsemane demonstrates the human mind and will of Christ. Echoing the language of the Athanasian Creed, Lewis repeatedly stated that the

Incarnation involved a human body and soul. Christ was fully human. Lewis even stated that if the Divine Son had been removed from Christ, what would remain would not be a corpse, but a living human being. These statements are irreconcilable with Apollinarianism.

Eutychianism

However, the claim that Lewis tends toward Eutychianism has more substance. Lewis's desire to show that Christ was both God and Man led him to call Christ, "a composite creature," and to speak of the human nature being "amalgamated" with God's nature." This language could easily lead one to suspect a mixture of the two natures to produce a unique, third nature. He also uses the analogy of the union of reason and flesh to make one person. Since most people do not consider themselves to have two separate natures, suspicion of monophysite Christology is understandable. However, Lewis qualifies his statements, noting that there really is no way for ordinary humans to understand the consciousness of the Divine Christ. He considers the union to be above human understanding, and a mystery. It is doubtful that Lewis held to a Eutychian Christology, yet his imprecise language may lead some to that conclusion.

Modalism

One further heresy that must be considered is Modalism. While this is a Trinitarian Heresy, it has significant importance to the Second Person of the Trinity. Modalism teaches that there is only one God, one personality who reveals Himself in different modes or expressions. This may be illustrated as God wearing three different masks. It is the same person behind each mask, but perceived in a different manner. Lewis did not advocate a modalistic Trinity, yet his work has been said to have modalistic inclinations. Hence a brief examination of his Trinitarian understanding is in order.

In his non-fictional works, Lewis spends considerable time explaining the Trinity, at times using questionable descriptions. Most significant here is The Problem of Pain, where he discusses submission. He notes that the Son submits to the Father, but in describing this, he refers to God *as* Father and God *as* Son. The immediate context seems to indicate that Lewis is stressing the unity of God, but the method of description may evoke images of one person changing roles. While submission infers a plurality, Lewis's description may unintentionally stress the unity to the detriment of the Trinity.

In Mere Christianity, Lewis considers the development of the doctrine of the Trinity in early Christianity. This, he says, is the origin of Theology.

People already knew about God in a vague way. Then came a man who claimed to be God.... They met Him again after they had seen Him killed. And then, after they had been forced into a little society or community, they found God somehow inside them as well.... And when they worked it all out they found they had arrived at the Christian definition of a three-personal God.⁸⁰

One's preconceptions will be particularly evident in the interpretation of this passage. If the reader assumes the doctrine of the Trinity, he will see it in these words, and yet the lack of names may lead some to suspect modalism. However, after writing these words, he reverts to more typical language.

“God is a Being which contains three Persons while remaining one Being, just as a cube contains six squares while remaining one body.”⁸¹ Lewis did hold to the doctrine of the Trinity, even though his discussion tends to confuse the distinction between the three persons.

The doctrine of the Trinity becomes somewhat more problematic in Lewis’s fiction. Any presentation of the doctrine of the Trinity requires a degree of precision which is difficult to attain in a fictional work without resorting to allegory. Thus it is not surprising to find uncertain Trinitarian images in his fiction. This is particularly true in the *Chronicles of Narnia* where Lewis obviously offers Christian allusions, yet writes for children. Aslan clearly is a Christ figure, dying and rising again to forgive the sins of others. But he is also seen creating the world and giving faith. In *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, Aslan appears as an albatross and gives encouragement. Aslan thus seems to fulfil the roles not only of Christ, but of the Father and Spirit as well. At the same time, He is the Son of the Emperor-over-sea. This Emperor is also depicted as God, but is completely unknown. His is the deep magic which necessitates the death of Aslan, and His magic cannot be changed, but He is utterly transcendent. The Godhead in Narnia is focused almost entirely upon Aslan, which indeed appears modalistic. The imprecision of Narnia may be partially explained by the intended readers. The *Space Trilogy*, however, was written for adults. In this series, God is referred to as Maleldil. The Redeemer is, properly, Maleldil the Young, though most often is referred to simply as Maleldil. There is some passing reference to “the Old One,” who is illocal, and cryptic reference to “the Third One,” but most references to the Divine are simply to Maleldil.

Overall, while Lewis uses the language of the Trinity, his writings are focused not on the transcendent God, but on the immanent, on the Incarnate Christ. Walsh correctly notes that, “Lewis’s theology is highly Christocentric.”⁸² This is particularly evident in his fiction. Christ is not only the Incarnate God, He is virtually the only comprehensible person of the Trinity. The reader is left with a vagueness of the Father and the Holy Spirit, likely so because the vagueness was Lewis’s. In the end, it would appear that Lewis believed that if one knew Christ, he would know the Father and the Spirit also.

Are Lewis’s writings heretical? While his imprecise language may leave questions in the minds of some readers, he clearly intended to express orthodox theology. It is also significant to note that if Lewis erred, he was not persistent in error, but sought correction. So, for example, before publishing *Mere Christianity*, he sent it to four clergymen for their critiques. Before he published his fiction, he read portions of it before the Inklings. Lewis may have strayed into imprecise language. There were times when his expression of doctrine fell short of the orthodoxy to which he aspired. But in these times, he was an errorist willing to be corrected, not a heretic.

Conclusion

C. S. Lewis presents his Christology in a variety of different forms, from direct discourse to fictional accounts. His stated intent is to present orthodox theology in new patterns. This he does, often repeating the words from the Creeds or a paraphrase of them as that which “has to be believed.” While he repeatedly speculates on topics which he considers open questions, he typically

returns to the core beliefs of the Ecumenical Creeds. His writings have included nearly all of the credal material directly, and all of it indirectly. At times his Christology lacks the precision of good theology, a fault which is easily attributable to his lack of formal theological training. It best succeeds when Lewis uses the skills of his own formal academic training.

The Christology of C. S. Lewis: A Lutheran Evaluation

The idea of a Lutheran evaluation of and response to the Christology of C. S. Lewis might seem like an exercise in futility. Why should Lewis, a member of the Church of Ireland as a child, and of the Church of England as an adult convert from atheism, be evaluated on the basis of a theology which was not his own? Such evaluation is bound to reveal that Lewis's theology does not satisfy the demands of confessional Lutheranism, nor was he concerned with such a theological standard. In fact, Lewis repeatedly stressed his desire to articulate mere Christianity, that which most Christians hold in common. So why evaluate him on these terms? The reason is that such an evaluation is typical of the way that all theological writings are evaluated. Whether acknowledged or not, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to remove the structure and concepts of one's own theology as an evaluative grid when considering another theology. Such a reading is normal and expected, but has a greater degree of integrity when it is openly faced. As this writer is an ordained Lutheran pastor and professor of theology at a Lutheran University, it is from this theological perspective that he would naturally first assess the theology of another.

Indeed, the subject of this thesis reflects a Lutheran ethos. While Christology is a vital teaching for all Christians, it finds a particularly strong emphasis within Lutheranism. So Francis Pieper writes,

... we generally call the doctrine of justification the central article of the Christian doctrine, the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*. But this article is directly based on the doctrine of Christ, on the doctrine of Christ's theanthropic Person and theanthropic work.¹

As Pieper infers, the Christocentricity of Lutheranism is assumed to such a high degree that it is often not mentioned explicitly. This is noted by Robert Preus who, in introducing the core theology of the Lutheran Confessions* says,

Whether our Confessions speak of original sin (FC, I) or Baptism (LC, IV) or justification (Ap, IV; FC, III) or the Lord's Supper (LC, V) or predestination (FC, XI), it is always Christ and His work that crowds into the discussion. This is particularly true in Melancthon's discussion of justification by faith in the fourth article of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession.²

This same emphasis is found in Luther's writings as well.* In the Smalcald Articles, Luther writes a brief summary of the person and work of Christ (which was not, at that time, disputed), and

*The Lutheran Confessions include the three Ecumenical Creeds (Apostles, Nicene, and Athanasian), The Augsburg Confession (1530), The Apology of the Augsburg Confession (1531), The Smalcald Articles (1537), The Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope (1537), Luther's Small (1529) and Large (1529) Catechisms, and The Formula of Concord (including both the Solid Declaration (1576) and Epitome (1577)). These are bound together in The Book of Concord (1580). All quotes from the Lutheran Confessions are taken from The Book of Concord, trans. Theodore G. Tappert et. al., (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959) unless otherwise noted. Another significant edition is the Triglot Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, (St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1921) which contains the confessional writings in German, Latin, and English. Also noteworthy is Hans Lietzmann, et. al, editors, Die Bekenntnisschriften der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche, 10th edition, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986). This work is the critical edition of the Lutheran Confessions in German.

concludes, “Nothing in this article can be given up or compromised,[†] even if heaven and earth and things temporal should be destroyed.”³ Again he writes in the Large Catechism, summarising the second article of the Apostles Creed, “Indeed, the entire Gospel that we preach depends on the proper understanding of this article. Upon it all our salvation and blessedness are based, and it is so rich and broad that we can never learn it fully.”⁴ Writing on the Gospel of John, he says, “Everything depends on the article of Christ, and everything is involved in it. Whoever has this article has everything....”¹⁵ Christology is of pivotal importance to Lutheran theology.

One further facet of Lutheran theology must be mentioned. Modern Lutheran theology is as diverse and varied as theology in any other denomination. No attempt will here be made to include all theological viewpoints which are presented under the Lutheran name. Lutheranism has always identified itself with the Lutheran Confessions as found in The Book of Concord. Theologians are free to engage in other theological expression and speculation, but the theological standard remains unchanged. These confessions define Lutheranism. Hence the Lutheran evaluative grid which will be employed is that of the Lutheran Confessions, and of those systematicians who accept and articulate the theology of these historic confessions.

What Lutherans Appreciate About Lewis’s Christology

While Lewis did not profess Lutheran theology, and indeed contradicts it at several points, there are a number of aspects of Lewis’s writing that are particularly attractive to Lutheranism. The first is his willingness to explain and scrutinise theological statements. Good theology stands up under investigation. Lewis is willing to ask questions, and to explain his beliefs in new and creative terms. At the same time, his explanations have limits. He is unwilling to proceed beyond what he sees as essential Christian teaching. While he explains and “translates” theology, he is also willing to believe things which transcend human reason and experience. If a doctrine is truly mysterious, or if an event is supernatural, Lewis remains willing to believe. While the limits of his explanations may be different than those of Lutheranism, this willingness to explain within limits is attractive to Lutheranism.

A second feature of Lewis’s theological expression that is appealing to Lutheranism is his appreciation for theological expression of the past, and his cautious attitude towards novelty in theology. Lewis’s chief theological contributions are not of content, but of presentation. He did not consider novelty to be essential, or even valuable, to theological expression.⁵ He did not merely

[†]It should be noted that while Luther is often quoted by Lutheran theologians, most of Luther’s writings are not directly authoritative. The confessional documents in The Book of Concord reflect Luther’s theology indirectly. Three confessional documents, namely the Small and Large Catechisms and the Smalcald Articles were written by Luther. These are the only writings of Luther specifically subscribed to by Lutheranism.

¹The Latin text adds, “nor can any believer concede or permit anything contrary to it.”

[†]*Darum liegt es gar an diesem Artikel von Christo, und hangt alles darin; wer diesen hat, der hat es alles. ...*

⁵This is evident in his introduction to Athanasius’s, “The Incarnation of the Word of God,” which is reprinted as “On the Reading of Old Books,” in God in the Dock, pp. 200-207. Here Lewis recommends that readers take up at least one old book for every modern book that they read because

repeat the theological expression of the past, but rather sought to present it in language and methods which would better communicate its content. This resonates quite well with confessional Lutheranism which sees an ongoing need to present its theology and to consider new theological issues, while at the same time norming its theology according to Scripture and the Confessions.

Third, Lutheranism is particularly comfortable with the general character of Lewis's Christology. Traditional Lutheran theology is characterised by a high, Johannine Christology, as is Lewis's writing. Indeed, both Lutheranism and Lewis have frequently been accused of an over emphasis on the deity of Christ, to the expense of his humanity. Both have been accused of a lack of reciprocity between the two natures. Both would respond that this is appropriate, while still maintaining the real humanity of Christ.

These are some of the features of Lewis's Christology which resonate well with Lutheran theology. There is, to be sure, significant agreement in most points of Christology. The first confessions of the Lutheran Church are the Ecumenical Creeds. Where Lewis is consistent with these symbols, Lutheran theology concurs. At the same time, the explanation of certain doctrines will find a different expression. At times these are minor, but three variances are of greater seriousness. These are: (1) the nature of the Virginal Conception, (2) the union of the human and divine natures of Christ into one person, and the communication of attributes between those two natures, and (3) the meaning and purpose of the Descent into Hell.

Virginal Conception

The first Christological issue where Lutheran theology would question Lewis's presentation is the Virgin Conception of Christ.* Lewis discusses this issue directly in Miracles and in Mere Christianity where he states a belief in the factuality of the Virgin Birth and speculates on its particular details. While holding to the reality of this miracle, he also properly notes that the Virgin Conception is difficult to believe. Indeed, he states in Miracles that it was as difficult for Joseph to believe this miracle as for any modern man. It would be appropriate to note also that it was likewise difficult for Mary to believe.† If these participants could believe this miracle, which was in conflict with their biological knowledge, so can a modern believer. Such a conception can only be seen as miraculous if it is to be believed.

Such a forthright profession of the Virgin Conception has led some to brand Lewis as a fundamentalist. This issue was the first to divide American Protestants into Fundamentalist and

they are often easier to understand, their content has stood the test of time, and they are free from the contemporary world view which is so easily ignored. He states that this is particularly true for books of theology.

*Often called "Virgin Birth" the doctrine properly focuses on the conception itself. This does not negate the Matthean teaching that Mary remained a virgin until the birth (Matthew 1:25a "But [Joseph] had no union with her until she gave birth to a son."), but rather focuses on the nature of Christ (Matthew 1:20b "...what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit").

†Joseph's initial incredulity and the divine response is found in Matthew 1:19-21; Mary's parallel response is found in Luke 1:34-37.

Liberal Camps.* However, such a characterisation of Lewis falls short of full understanding. While Lewis concurred with some doctrines championed by the fundamentalist movement, he was at variance with others.† Acceptance of the Virgin conception does not, in itself, make one a fundamentalist. At the same time, such a strong affirmation of this doctrine has enhanced Lewis's popularity with both conservatives and Fundamentalists.

Lewis's approach to the Virgin Conception is typical of his theological method. The biblical material dealing directly this topic is minimal. Of the four Gospels, only Matthew and Luke present the Virgin Conception — Matthew from Joseph's perspective and Luke from Mary's perspective. Matthew also notes that this miracle is a fulfilment of the Isaiah's prophecy (7:14) "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel."[†] Likewise, the Ecumenical Creeds state the reality of the Virgin Conception, but provide no explanation of the precise biological details. As Lewis approaches this doctrine, his intent is to present the traditional Christian faith, but also feels free to consider the possibility that the Holy Spirit created a new spermatozoon, or fertilised an ovum without a spermatozoon, or even that He created a foetus without an ovum.

Lutheran theology would take issue with this final possibility. One contemporary Lutheran systematician writes, "As in the case of the Resurrection, Confessional Lutheranism affirms the *fact* of the Virgin Birth precisely to support the *meaning* of the Virgin Birth."⁶ While all of Lewis's speculative possibilities maintain Mary's virginity at the time of conception, the creation of a foetus

*The Fundamentalist movement is somewhat difficult to define, as it has gone through several significant phases. A response to modernism, many would cite the publication of the 12 volume, multi-author work The Fundamentals (1910-1915) as its beginning. The list of essential doctrines was quickly distilled to five: the inerrancy of Scripture, the virgin birth, the substitutionary atonement, Christ's bodily resurrection, and the historicity of miracles. (cf. Walter A. Elwell, ed., Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984. p. 433.) The term "fundamentalist" was first used in the 1920's by Curtis Lee Laws, a conservative of the Northern Baptist Convention. Also significant in the early development of Fundamentalism was William B. Riley, a Baptist Pastor in Minnesota, who founded the World Christian Fundamentals Association in 1919. This group, strongly influenced by The Scofield Reference Bible (first published in 1909) was dispensationalist, and sometimes substituted premillennialism for the historicity of miracles in the list of fundamentals. (cf. J. D Douglas, ed., New Twentieth-Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, second edition, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991, p. 345.) As time passed, fundamentalism became concerned with the teaching of Evolution (which led to the Scopes trial), and in the 1970s, became proactive in the political arena (e.g. Jerry Falwell and "The Moral Majority").

†A significant doctrine where Lewis differs from Fundamentalism is the inerrancy of Scripture. For an examination of Lewis's views on the Bible see Michael J. Christensen, C. S. Lewis on Scripture: His Thoughts on the Nature of Biblical Inspiration, the Role of Revelation and the Question of Inerrancy, (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1979). Another significant divergence is over the substitutionary atonement, which has already been examined. It is assumed here that "Fundamentalism" should be used in its proper sense, that is, those who subscribe to a particular group of doctrines. Unfortunately, popular use of the word "Fundamentalism" often dilutes the meaning of the word, making it a synonymous with anti-modernism, or with still less precision, a synonym for "conservative." Thus one may read of "Islamic fundamentalists." Such a reduction of meaning only serves to reduce the accuracy of communication.

†While the Hebrew word *Almah* may be translated either "virgin" or "young woman," the Greek word employed by the Septuagint and by Matthew and Luke is *παρθενος*, a more precise word

without Mary's ovum undermines its meaning. It's meaning is that Christ is both true God, of the same substance as the Father, and true Man, of the substance of Mary. While Lewis does state that Jesus is of Mary's substance, this is mitigated by his speculation that Christ's human nature might have been created as a foetus, without an ovum, for it is from the ovum that the human substance is derived.

In contrast, the Lutheran dogmaticians consistently note that the human nature of Christ is of Mary's substance. Graebner, for example, says, "...the manner in which the incarnation took place was by conception in the womb of a sinful woman, from whom the Son of God took His human nature, but without a stain of sin..."⁷ Likewise Pieper writes,

"That which is conceived of her is of the Holy Ghost." The "of" ("εκ") in [Matthew 1] v. 16 ("of whom was born Jesus" denotes the *materia*, the "of" in v. 18 ("She was found with child of the Holy Ghost") denotes the *causa efficiens*.⁸

Martin Chemnitz, one of the writers of The Formula of Concord, contrasts possible ways that the Christ might have become Incarnate with the way He actually was Incarnate, saying,

He could have formed for Himself or assumed a human nature either, as in the case of Adam, from the dust of the earth or, as with Eve, from a bone, or from some mass of material apart from the natural conception and birth. But He willed in His own flesh in which the entire fullness of the deity dwelt bodily to endure all the things which pertain to conception and nativity, in order that He might expiate our unclean conception and corrupt birth and make them holy by His own conception and birth, which the Son of God Himself sustained in His own flesh, just as we do, but apart from sin... For it is required of the nature of maternity that the body of the child be made up of some material, that the child produced in the womb gestate and be nourished up to the time of birth, and finally that the child emerge from the womb into the light of day. All of these things happened in the case of the Virgin mother.⁹

Lutheran Christology is particularly concerned that both natures of Christ be maintained. While Lewis is particularly strong in supporting the real deity of Christ, to say that Christ is incarnate apart from Mary's ovum casts doubt on his real humanity. How else might He receive from her a truly human nature? As Lewis offers no further explanation, Lutheran theology would take issue with this presentation.

Two Natures of Christ

It is in discussion of the meaning and interaction of the human and divine natures of Christ that the challenges of Christology become evident. This is a particular interest of Lutheran theology, which has developed the doctrine concerning the communication of attributes to a very high degree. Naturally, Lewis does not use the categories and formulation of Lutheran theology in his writings, however, he does consider this topic. While he never fully develops the distinction, one can see the beginnings of a balanced Christology.

It is clear that Lewis, while emphasising the divine nature to a greater extent than the human nature, did believe that Christ was truly human and divine and that these two natures

meaning "virgin." (cf. "παρθενος," in Gerhard Friedrich and Gerhard Kittel, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Volume V, pp. 826-837.

somehow formed one person. In Miracles he compared the union of the eternal logos with a human organism to the union of reason and flesh in one person, while in Mere Christianity he spoke of the human and divine natures being amalgamated into one person. While these explanations may fall short, particularly any talk of amalgamation, the desire to show the union of the two natures is evident.

Lutheranism concurs with this basic premise while expanding its significance and using more precise language. Thus The Formula of Concord states in Chalcedonian language,

...in this single undivided person there are two distinct natures... These two natures in the person of Christ will henceforth never be separated, blended with each other, or the one changed into the other, but in the person of Christ each remains in its nature and essence through all eternity.¹⁰

Likewise Pieper writes, "...the two natures are in real communion with each other, that the divine nature interpenetrates the human nature, and that both are always together and always act together."¹¹ A real, personal union is maintained simultaneously with a distinction of natures. While Lewis described this as an amalgamation, the Formula specifically disavows any blending of the natures. This is so formulated to avoid the Eutychian heresy.

Communication of Attributes

The Idiomatic Genus

The doctrine of the two natures in Christ as presented by Lutheranism, is expressed by most Christian theologians. Where Lutheranism parts company with other denominations is on the interrelationship of those two natures, particularly on the communication of attributes between the two natures. This communication is divided into three sub-parts or *genera*: the idiomatic genus, the majestic genus, and the apotelesmatic genus. The first of these, the idiomatic genus, considers those attributes which properly belong to one nature or the other. Kolb defines this, saying, "such properties as are peculiar to the divine or human nature are truly and really ascribed to the entire person of Christ, designated by either nature or by both natures."¹² Consequently, seemingly contradictory statements may be made about Christ, as they apply properly to one nature or the other. As an example, Pieper says that according to Scripture, Christ is both eternal and thirty years old.¹³ According to His divine nature He is eternal, yet His human nature had a specific age.

When applied, this genus prevents the separation of the Divine Son from the passion of Christ. So the Formula of Concord writes,

On account of the personal union... it is not only the bare human nature (whose property it is to suffer and to die) that has suffered for the sin of the world, but the Son of God himself has truly suffered (although according to the assumed human nature) and in the words of our plain Christian Creed, has truly died, although the divine nature can neither suffer nor die.¹⁴

This teaching finds further application in the discussion of Mary. Considering the question once denied by Nestorius, who sought to isolate the two natures of Christ, the Lutheran Confessions asked whether Mary could rightly be called θεοτοκος ("God-bearer," frequently translated "mother of God"). Nestorius replied that Mary could be referred to as χριστοτοκος, "Christ-bearer" but not as

θεοτοκος, for she was the mother of the human nature, not the divine. Idiomatically, this seems correct, but the two natures are indivisibly joined together into one person. Hence the Lutheran Confessions reply, "...Mary conceived and bore not only a plain, ordinary, mere man but the veritable Son of God; for this reason she is rightly called, and truly is, the mother of God."¹⁵ This is not a statement about Mary, rather, it is an affirmation of the personal union in Christ.

Lewis, in his writings, describes the idiomatic genus, without specifically naming it. For example, in Miracles, he identifies the Incarnate Christ with Jahweh,¹⁶ and compares Christianity to the Corn-King myths. Jahweh does not die and rise each year as a true Corn-king should, but He does die and rise once. To say that Jahweh died and rose is an expression of the idiomatic genus. Mortality is a human attribute, but in the personal union, it may be ascribed to the entire Christ. Likewise in the resurrection, "...the human creature in Him, because it was united to the divine Son, came to life again. The Man in Christ rose again: not only the God. That is the whole point."¹⁷ Late in his life, Lewis would write of the significance of the Incarnation, saying,

It seems to me that I seldom meet any strong or exultant sense of the continued, never-to-be-abandoned, Humanity of Christ in glory, in eternity. We stress the Humanity too exclusively at Christmas, and the Deity too exclusively after the Resurrection; almost as if Christ once became a man and then presently reverted to being simply God. We think of the Resurrection and Ascension (rightly) as great acts of God; less often as the triumph of Man."¹⁸

The natures of Christ are united in all His work.

The Incarnation and consequent Personal Union is not merely a temporal state. Throughout his writings, Lewis stresses the enduring character of this miracle. In the passage above, he says that the humanity is never-to-be-abandoned. Likewise in Mere Christianity he says of the present nature of Christ, "It is not a question of a man who died two thousand years ago. It is a living Man, still as much a man as you, and still as much God as when He created the world."¹⁹ The same theme is present in his fictional writings. In The Screwtape Letters, the demons say that He "still wears the form of a man."²⁰ That form, in Lewis's thinking, was eternally young and vital. Despite the taunts of mockers who say that He must be very old, Aslan does not appear to age but is perpetually young and strong. In That Hideous Strength, Ransom, a Christ-figure, appears to be a young man. At the end of the story he is taken to live on Perelandra until the end of the worlds. The perpetual youth of Christ was a source of strength for Lewis, who wrote in a letter, "...the One True Man lives youth everlasting."²¹ The Christ remains human, but is glorified, and therefore does not age. While he did not acknowledge the vocabulary, Lewis wrote of the idiomatic genus.

The Majestic Genus

The second category, the majestic genus, is more controversial, and more distinctly Lutheran. J. T. Mueller defines it, saying "...the Son of God ... really communicates the properties of His own divine nature to His assumed nature for common possession, use, and designation."²² Graebner is even more direct, saying, "...the perfections which the divine nature has as essential attributes, the human nature has as communicated attributes, such as omnipresence, omniscience, omnipotence."²³ Likewise, Scaer notes,

What is distinctively Lutheran is the understanding that because of this personal union, the man Jesus... always possesses the divine majesty with all of God's attributes, a point which the Reformed have continued to oppose.²⁴

The majestic genus focuses not merely on divine power and honour, but also on essential divine attributes.

At issue is a key philosophical presupposition: what is the relationship between the finite and the infinite as these relate to the Incarnation? One of the essential divine attributes is to be infinite, while human beings are by nature finite. How are these two contradictory characteristics to be resolved if God is incarnate? Calvin and all who follow his theological constructs, maintained that *finitum non est capax infiniti*, the finite is not capable of the infinite. If this dictum is presupposed, the full communication of the divine attributes must be judged impossible. Lutheran theology, however, rejects this presupposition and reverses it. *Finitum est capax infiniti*. When the reference is the Incarnate Christ, the finite is capable of the infinite. The impact of both of these positions is seen in two specific attributes: omnipresence and omniscience.

Lutheran theology ascribes to the incarnate Christ the attribute of omnipresence. Pieper notes that the key point here is

...whether or not the Son of God, after His incarnation, is always present, wherever He is, in His human nature; in other words, whether or not He is always present as the God-Man. The answers given to these questions are characteristic of the varying Christological trends. The Lutheran reply is definitely in the affirmative. Lutheranism declares that the Son of God, after His incarnation, is always and everywhere incarnate.²⁵

Likewise, The Formula of Concord states,

Wherever this person is, it is the single, indivisible person, and if you can say, "Here is God," then you must also say, "Christ the man is present too." And if you could show me one place where God is and not the man, then the person is already divided.²⁶

The essential point for Lutheran theology, is that Christ is never divided, but after the Incarnation, He is always both God and Man. He does not abandon His humanity, or leave it behind.

Lewis spoke of the omnipresence of Christ, but does not clearly define the nature of that omnipresence. In a 1961 letter he states that the perfection of a finite creature may demand a local presence. If Christ was perfectly human, does this not necessitate that he be finite? However, his questions end, "Of course, I'm only guessing."²⁷ While Lewis does not provide further statements about this issue, it appears that he accepted the Calvinistic limitation.

²⁴The Formula of Concord here quotes from Martin Luther's "Great Confession Concerning the Holy Supper." This document was written as Luther disputed with Zwingli regarding the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. It became evident in that debate, and in theological dialogues to this day, that differing expressions of the mode of Christ's presence in the sacrament are essentially Christological in nature. If it is categorically impossible for Christ to be in more than one place at the same time (as Zwingli maintained), it is consequently impossible for Him to be present in the sacrament, and an alternate explanation must be proposed. Luther maintained that Christ, as the theanthropos, was not bound by the limitations of a finite body, and thus could be really present in the sacrament.

A second issue which shows the nature of the majestic genus is omniscience. As with omnipresence, Lutheran theology is willing to ascribe omniscience to the Incarnate Christ. Pieper states,

[Scripture] predicates to Him, according to His human nature, a twofold knowledge: the knowledge communicated by the divine nature to the human nature by virtue of the personal union, and the knowledge peculiar to the human nature as its natural, essential attribute. The former is infinite (*omniscientia*) while the latter is finite and capable of growth (*scientia naturalis, habitualis, experimentalis*).²⁸

Had he said that the two types of knowledge were the properties of each respective nature, this would be the idiomatic genus. However, here he specifically states that both types of knowledge are exercised by the human nature: one by nature, the other, omniscient knowledge, by communication.

Lewis specifically addresses this divine attribute, when he considers the possibility that Christ, in His earthly ministry, may have made scientific or historical errors. He ascribes such possible errors to Christ's genuine humanity. He then explains,

I certainly think that Christ, in the flesh was not omniscient — if only because a human brain could not, presumably, be the vehicle of omniscient consciousness, and to say that Our Lord's thinking was not really conditioned by the size and shape of His brain might be to deny the real incarnation and become a Docetist.²⁹

Again, Lewis appears to have accepted the Calvinist presupposition of the compelling limitations of human flesh, and thus is at variance with Lutheranism.

Humiliation/Kenosis

If the majestic genus is to be properly understood, however, it must be seen in the context of the Christ's states of humiliation and exaltation. The divine attributes are communicated to the human nature, but were not always used by Christ. Koehler defines both states, saying,

In His divine nature Christ always and fully did use His majesty and power (John 5:17; Hebr. 1:3[†]); but in His human nature, to which all this majesty and power had been communicated, He did not make constant and full use of the same. The humiliation of Christ, therefore, consists in the non-use of the divine power and majesty which He possessed also in His human nature."³⁰

Likewise, the Formula of Concord,

This majesty He had immediately at His conception, even in His mother's womb, but, as the Apostle testifies (Phil. 2:7[†]) laid it aside (*se ipsum exinanivit*), and, as Dr. Luther explains, He kept it concealed in the state of His humiliation, and did not employ (*usurpavit*) it always, but only when He wished.³¹

Christ's possession of essential divine attributes, does not negate His real humanity. In His state of humiliation, Christ did not always or fully use the divine attributes. Conversely, in His state of exaltation, He makes full use of His divine power.

[†]John 5:17 "Jesus said to them, 'My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working.'" Hebrews 1:3 "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven."

[†]Philippians 2:7 "but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness."

It should be noted that the word “kenosis” (“emptying”) is generally seen as a synonym for “humiliation,” because of its use in Philippians 2:5-11, the *sedes doctrinae* for this teaching. However, the word “kenosis” is often avoided in Lutheran theology due to a particular misapplication of this word. In the nineteenth century, a group of Lutherans, led by Thomasius and strongly influenced by the theology of Schleiermacher, held that the divine nature, not the human nature, was the subject of the humiliation. The divine nature was emptied of all divine attributes, forsaking them during the Incarnation, while still enjoying full Trinitarian participation within the Trinity.³² This movement, known as kenoticism, does not accurately portray the doctrine of the humiliation, which states that Christ did not *forsake* His divine attributes, but rather did not *use* them fully. Because of this aberration, the term “humiliation” is preferred.

Lewis makes particular note of the kenosis, often applying it as an example to Christians. He invites the reader to consider the changes undertaken by Christ. In Miracles he employs the images of a strongman, stooping to pick up a great burden which nearly overcomes him, only to succeed, of a diver who plunges into the depths, losing his colour, but who returns with a precious object from the death-like region below, and of the Christ becoming incarnate not only as a man, but first as a foetus. In Mere Christianity he compares the changes undertaken by Christ to be similar to a human being becoming a slug or a crab. Each of these images demonstrate the drastic nature of the Incarnation.

Lewis repeatedly stated his belief that the higher something is, the lower it can descend. This is a particularly notable theme in The Great Divorce and Miracles. Only Christ can humble Himself enough to be the Redeemer. In The Problem of Pain, he writes that in the Incarnation, “...God empties Himself of His glory...”³³ Lewis considers this kenosis to be the explanation for apparent scientific or historical errors which Jesus may have made. He explains,

...it might be argued that when He emptied Himself of His glory He also humbled Himself to share, as man, the current superstitions of His time. And I certainly think that Christ, in the flesh was not omniscient — if only because a human brain could not, presumably, be the vehicle of omniscient consciousness, and to say that Our Lord’s thinking was not really conditioned by the size and shape of His brain might be to deny the real incarnation and become a Docetist. Thus, if Our Lord had committed Himself to any scientific or historical statement which we knew to be untrue, this would not disturb my faith in His deity.³⁴

It must be noted that Lewis does not indicate any specific inaccuracies in this context, but rather states that if they had been made, they would not be troubling, because of the kenosis. Lewis considered Christ in Gethsemane to be the key example of this humiliation. Christ prayed for deliverance which would be meaningless if He had omnisciently known that it was impossible. Christ was still God, but the knowledge seemed to have been removed from Him. This also is evidence of the kenosis.

The Apotelesmatic Genus

The third division of the communication of attributes is the apotelesmatic genus. Kolb refers to this genus as “the principle of the actions of office,” and defines it, saying, “...in his

actions each nature within Christ performed what is peculiar to itself, with the participation of the other.”³⁵ Pieper similarly defines this genus.

All official acts which Christ... performs for the salvation of men, He performs according to both natures, by each nature doing what is proper to it not by itself and apart from the other nature, but in constant communion with the other, in one undivided theanthropic action.³⁶

So also the Lutheran Confessions state, “Christ is our Mediator, Redeemer, King, high Priest, Head, Shepherd, etc., not according to one nature only, whether it be the divine or the human, but according to both natures.”³⁷ The apotelesmatic genus is concerned that the two natures of Christ not be divided or isolated, but that the personal union is maintained without confusion of the natures. His entire salvific work is undertaken by both natures. Lutheran theology resists any effort to divide Christ again.

Lewis makes no specific reference to the apotelesmatic genus, even as he makes no specific mention of any of the genera. However, he consistently presents the work of Christ without differentiating between the two natures, and expresses no divergent opinions.

Descent into Hell

A third Christological doctrine where Lutheranism notes specific differences with Lewis is the descent into Hell. The Formula of Concord briefly discusses the essential issues, first differentiating it from the burial of Christ, and then explaining the meaning of the descent. “...after the burial the entire person, God and man, descended into hell, conquered the devil, destroyed hell’s power, and took from the devil all his might.”³⁸ The controversy which occasioned this article of the Formula involved one simple question: was the descent part of the Humiliation or Exaltation of Christ? Did He descend in order to suffer, thus paying the penalty earned by humanity? The Confessions respond negatively. When Christ declared from the cross, “it is finished” (John 19:30), he meant not merely His life, but His entire work. The descent into Hell was not to suffer, but to proclaim victory.

Likewise, the Lutheran Confessions ignore all thoughts of Christ offering salvation, or a second chance to those in hell. While this is not developed in the Formula, it finds significant expression in the later dogmaticians. So Pieper writes, explaining the meaning of 1 Peter 3,

What Christ did in the prison the verb *εκηρυσεν* describes. The verb *κηρυσσειν* does not necessarily mean to proclaim “salvation,” or “the Gospel” ... but it is a *vox media* and means as much as *annuntiare*, *publice pronuntiare*, to make public announcements.... In 1 Peter 3:18 ff. the context in several ways decides against the preaching of the Gospel and for a preaching of judgment, or the Law. The text does not speak of people who had no opportunity to hear the Word of God on earth, but the *κηρυσσειν* pertains to those to whom the Word of God has been preached on earth in rich measure and for a long time and under warning external circumstances (the building of the ark), but who rejected the Word in unbelief and so perished in the Flood.³⁹

Graebner more narrowly states that after His burial and quickening, Christ “...appeared in the prison of condemned spirits, a herald of their judgment and His victory.”⁴⁰ Scaer, likewise says, “The Descent into hell is the manifestation of God’s victory in Jesus over Satan and his claim on

mankind.”⁴¹ Scaer’s continuing discussion claims that this is an expression of the *Christus Victor* theory of the Atonement. Confessional Lutheranism is unanimous in its conclusion that the descent was a proclamation of victory.

Lewis’s presentation of the descent is at odds with the Lutheran presentation. He wrote that the descent was to Hades, not Gehenna. Christ did not descend to rescue those who were truly damned. Lewis considers the descent to be for the sake of those who had never heard of Christ, but does not apply to the damned. Thus the descent provides for the spread of salvation. Furthermore, the descent takes place outside of time, so that his preaching can be heard by all who have not yet heard. Lewis portrays Christ’s descent into Hell as the offering of salvation, outside of time to those who have or will have died. It is not to suffer the punishment for sins, nor is it a proclamation of victory, but rather the proclamation of the possibility of salvation.

Conclusion

Overall, a Lutheran evaluation of C. S. Lewis’s Christology is cautiously positive. Lewis’s presentation is at odds with Lutheranism regarding the descent into hell and the majestic genus. He presents issues differently than Lutheran systematicians regarding the other genera of the communication of attributes, and his explanations of the Virginal Conception are broader than those used by Lutheran systematicians. However, the bulk of his Christology, being grounded in Scripture and the ecumenical creeds is consequently consistent with Lutheranism.

Conclusion: The Effectiveness of C. S. Lewis

C. S. Lewis strove to present orthodox Christianity in new and “translated” forms. In this, he was largely successful. While he speculated about theological issues, he would return to credal formulas as statements of the Christian faith. Some of his discussions involve interesting applications of theological thought, yet his conclusions were generally repristinations of classic orthodoxy. Since he endeavoured to restate such basic teaching, it must be asked why his writings are still read in the place of, or as a supplement to sources which he was “translating.” How is it that more than thirty years after his death, Lewis popularity and influence continues to grow?

Much of his effectiveness is directly related to his style of writing, and to the content of his work. The Christ of Lewis’s writings is the Christ of his conversion. Lewis wrote for people who asked the same sort of questions that he asked. Since he faced broad and challenging questions, his writings appeal to a wide variety of people. Some of the key components of his Christology help explain its effectiveness. First, Lewis presents Christianity in general, and Christ in particular, not as the negation of all other religions, but as the fulfilment of the highest and best religious thought. Secondly, some books present his theology in simple, logical terms. Third, some of his writings present theology by means of rich, imaginative writing. Finally, part of the effectiveness of Lewis lies in his personality. These four factors help to explain his continuing effectiveness.

An essential step in Lewis’s conversion was the realisation that while Christianity makes exclusive claims and at times contradicts other religions, this does not negate true elements in other religions. Lewis’s own spiritual quest considered the great religions of the world. He concluded that the ethical teachings of Christianity are quite similar to those of other religions. The difference between Christ and other religious or ethical teachers is not content of teaching, but person and office. His teaching is similar to other great teachers, but He claims to be more than a teacher. He upholds similar ethics, but also fulfils them in the redemption.

Similarly, and perhaps of greater consequence for Lewis, figures similar to Christ are found in the world’s mythologies, even in pagan myths. Lewis had a great love for mythology where he saw clear prefigurement of Christ. For example, he made frequent reference to harvest deities, or “Corn-Kings” who annually die and rise again. Christ dies and rises again, fulfilling these myths. Still, He is not one further example of this mythology. He is the prototype and the fulfilment which all other expressions reflect. In His incarnation, life, death, and resurrection, myth became fact, and the pagan mythologies were fulfilled. This theme of Christianity fulfilling and exceeded other religions, and other mythologies finds regular expression in Lewis’s writings. Not only does he explicitly discuss these fulfilments, he also develops mythological themes and crafts new myths which continue to point to Christ. His prose affirms the usefulness of these genres while his fiction develops them. Christianity is the highest expression of the truth, but not its only expression. It does not exist in a vacuum.

A second factor in Lewis’s conversion and writing is logic. Lewis had a great love of logic and reason. His education with W. T. Kirkpatrick emphasised logic and critical thinking. His acceptance of Christianity included a logical evaluation of its claims. Lewis could not have believed

the Christian faith if he was unable to make sense of it. This does not preclude the possibility of the miraculous or mysterious, but a logical coherence was vital.

Likewise, Lewis's readers often note an appreciation for his lucid logical arguments. While he certainly does not address every question, he does consider the chief claims of Christianity. It was typical of Lewis's logic to reduce an issue to a narrow and sharply defined set of alternatives. His discussion of Jesus Christ employs such a focused use of logic. Is it logical to say that Jesus Christ was just a good teacher? Lewis denied such a claim. Since Jesus claimed to be God, He could not have been merely a good teacher. He might have been a liar, or a lunatic, or a devil from Hell, but He was not just a good teacher. He repeats this Christological argument several times in his writings, and it is perhaps his best known logical argument. Many have taken exception to this reasoning. Some object to the language Lewis uses. For example, he says that one who sincerely, but falsely, claims to be the Son of God would be a lunatic, "on the level of a man who claimed to be a poached egg." Such a brash expression has annoyed some readers. Others argue that there are other possibilities beyond those that Lewis proposes. However, to present a number of other alternatives requires an extension of Lewis's presuppositions. In presenting this argument, Lewis is speaking of the possibility of making Jesus merely a good teacher. One may certainly make other assertions, but this does not invalidate Lewis's essential logic. The success of this argument is its simplicity and focus.

Lewis is often commended for his lucidity and focus. Indeed, many have noted that what is most notable in his writings is common sense. This is evident as he approaches the Bible. He was not a biblical literalist and was willing to look at the transmission of Christianity with a critical eye, yet he generally holds to the simplest reading of a text. Questions might arise regarding particular readings, but the essential points are straightforward. What the text says is ordinarily what it means. Application may be difficult, but the need to apply the Bible is obvious. In an era when Christians may be confused by the work of many theologians, such a simple acceptance and defence of Christianity appeals to many readers. The teaching may be challenging, but may also have a greater integrity. Lewis preferred this "straight Christianity," to "Christianity and water." This is his logic applied. Logical argument was vital to his understanding, but it has its limits. Part of Christianity's appeal is that it is something that could not be figured out. At times it transcends expectations. Lewis's presentation of Christianity is logical yet believing, conservative, yet intellectual. This combination enhances his impact on many readers.

A third factor which explains Lewis's effectiveness is the nature of his writings. While some of his work is very focused and logical, a great deal of his writing does not directly present logical arguments. Much of Lewis's writing is richly imaginative. This also was important both in His conversion, and in his continued understanding of Christ. Lewis's personal and professional background was literary. He was a literary critic and professor and an excellent story teller. He had a great love of books, particularly imaginative, mythopoeic writings. Many readers, even critics, have noted that one of Lewis's chief virtues was his ability as a story teller and myth-maker. This is largely attributable to his method of crafting a story. He was simultaneously unoriginal and very

original. He made extensive use of the writings of other authors. Basic story lines, literary tools and motifs are freely borrowed from others. Till We Have Faces, for example, retells of the myth of Psyche and Cupid. The Space Trilogy was significantly impacted by David Lindsay's Voyage to Arcturus, H. G. Wells's The First Men on the Moon, Spencer's The Faerie Queene, Milton's Paradise Lost and many other books. Lewis freely drew from his deep literary background and incorporated diverse elements into his own writings. At the same time, he did not simply retell the story, he recast it. The general flow of the narrative may be dependant on past literary patterns, but Lewis's retelling transforms the stories. Often readers do not even recognise the literary dependencies. Lewis wrote with deliberate complexity and richness. Because they are mythical, his stories often contain multiple levels of understanding. Many readers have sought to make them allegorical, but with the exception of The Pilgrim's Regress, this fails to account for their intent or their depth. Rather, Lewis has crafted his fiction in a manner which provides different levels of reading. This depth rewards the reader.

Lewis's story telling is regarded by many as the high point of his work. His stories communicate not only cognitively, but affectively as well. The characters of Aslan, Maleldil, Ransom or Psyche all convey cognitive data about Christianity, but their impact transcends the cognitive domain. The recasting of Christian elements allows the reader to consider its claims anew. Indeed, it is not only in his fiction that Lewis uses stories. Other writings contain shorter illustrations which likewise utilise his literary skills, such as his images in Miracles which describe the work of Christ (e.g., the strongman and the diver). These demonstrate his use of literary illustrations to better explain Christianity. Lewis's use of imaginative writing appeals to many readers.

One final factor which explains Lewis's effectiveness is his personality. His writing is candid and conversational. Readers of Lewis often imagine that they know what he would say about various issues. They have opinions about what his voice sounded like, an impression which derives from the tone of his writings. This illusion of knowing Lewis is enhanced by the volumes of correspondence, his autobiographical materials, and by recent theatrical and cinematographic depictions of his life. Ironically, Lewis would have been uncomfortable with such personal scrutiny, yet his life has been closely examined.

Several elements of Lewis's life are particularly relevant to his effectiveness. One of the most significant is the fact that Lewis was a convert to Christianity. He had been an atheist, and did not want to become a Christian, but when he confronted the evidence, he felt that he had no logical choice. An examination of its claims led him to believe the veracity of the Christian faith. The fruits of this conversion are evident in his writings. Lewis wrote what he thought and what he experienced. His writings address common objections to Christianity which he himself once raised. Having discovered answers to his questions, Lewis repeats both the question and the answer for his readers. What emerges is a genuine consideration of some common questions, and solutions which have satisfied many readers.

Additionally, the convert who wrote about his own experience also wrote as an individual Christian. Lewis was a layman, an “outsider” with no vested interest in what he was writing. He did not earn his living from his theological writing, but from his professorship in a secular field. While a critic may discount the work of a priest or a professional theologian as part of his career, Lewis did not rely on his theological writing for his support. At the same time, even though he was a layman, he was a remarkably well educated layman. He demonstrates a familiarity with Biblical Greek and with primary theological sources. When Lewis explains theology to his readers, it is obvious that he understands that theology.

Closely related to this is Lewis’s ecumenicity. He repeatedly stated that his intention was to focus on the teachings which most Christians held in common. This is a particularly notable theme in Mere Christianity, but is also prevalent throughout his writings. Lewis was a member of the Anglican Communion, but was neither ordained nor employed by the church. When he wrote of common Christian teaching, his readers believed him. It might be argued that his foundation in Anglicanism with its historic emphasis on the *via media* encouraged this focus on common doctrine. At the same time, his personal life experiences may account for this ecumenical interest. Lewis was an Ulsterman who had seen first hand the division between Protestants and Roman Catholics. While echoes of this antagonism are heard at times in his writings, Lewis truly sought common ground. His close personal friendships were with people of diverse religious backgrounds, a factor which may also account for some of his ecumenical interests. Regardless of the reason, readers from many denominations find commonality in Lewis’s expression of Christianity. This certainly has enhanced his effectiveness.

Another aspect of Lewis’s personality which enhances his reception is his intelligence. The reader of Lewis’s works encounters a unique and deep style of writing. Lewis may write about theological issues, but he speaks in scientific, literary, and cultural terms. He makes reference to a variety of sources, assuming the reader will be familiar with them. The reader is treated with integrity and respect.

One further facet of Lewis’s personality which is evident within his writing is his honesty. His works reveal a man who struggled with life’s key issues, questioning many things and seeking solutions to difficult problems. The success of recent stage and film productions of The Shadowlands, a semi-biographical account of his marriage and the death of his wife show the interest with which many people have viewed his life. He was not merely a writer, but a regular person with his own trials and struggles. His personal history, as well as his writings, reveal a man who tried to apply his faith. This genuine struggle adds credibility and integrity to his work.

Lewis’s effectiveness may be ascribed to a variety of factors. His presentation of Christ does not belittle other religions, yet holds to the integrity and truth of Christianity. His approach is clear and logical, but also imaginative. His writings are honest, reflecting his own experiences and ideas. While many who assess Lewis’s work focus on one of these factors, the unique effectiveness of Lewis is that he does not use one of these elements, but all of them. He has the breadth of knowledge to see the fulfilment of pagan mythology and non-Christian religions. He is

simultaneously logical and imaginative, scholarly and devotional, impressive and unassuming. His writings embrace diverse methods and genres. Consequently it is unusual to find a reader who appreciates all of Lewis's writing, but one rarely finds a reader who dislikes it all. Lewis's use of these diverse elements allows him to reach a more diverse audience.

The Weaknesses of C. S. Lewis

C. S. Lewis was an effective writer. His books present a broad range of material from direct discourse and explanation to fiction, children's stories and mythology. Beyond these forms, he also wrote significant books within his academic interests. Many books in all these categories are still being read today. Still, there are weaknesses and inadequacies in his writing which must be considered.

Perhaps the chief weakness in his theological writings was also one of his strengths. Lewis was a layman. While that provided him with an enhanced sense of objectivity, it also adversely affected his writing. Lewis was well read in theology, but was untrained. Consequently, his words may tend towards imprecision, which may lead some readers to suspect heresy. At other times his writings are precise, but awkward. Additionally, his use of fictional and mythical forms richly conveys his theological thought. However, these forms are equally prone to misapplication and misinterpretation. Stories may communicate on a deeper level than direct discourse, and yet are challenging. It is difficult to express one's desired theology precisely without resorting to allegory. As Lewis strongly resisted allegorical writing, his fiction may not communicate theologically with the clarity of his other writing. These weaknesses are understandable, but remain weaknesses.

While some readers are strongly attracted by Lewis's use of common-sense logic, many critics have disputed his arguments. He is frequently accused of using questionable dichotomies, of reducing an argument to two positions, while ignoring other valid positions. He is likewise accused of simplistic reasoning, dismissing a counter argument too easily. His logical constructs are frequently very tightly focused, but that is not always apparent to the reader. An argument which appeared solid to Lewis may easily be dismissed by some readers.

Lewis's writings may be less effective today due to the passage of time. Some of his writings appear dated. Certain material and allusions within them are less significant to the modern reader as when first written. His use of now-outdated embryology in Mere Christianity illustrates this. The point he makes, that Christ humbled Himself, is good. The illustration however, is now of little value. Similar situations may exist within his writings. Frequent references to World War II were certainly appropriate when first written, but are far less effective with younger readers. None of these criticisms is to fault the writer, but are the consequence of passing time, and a diverse world.

The Resurrection

An assessment of Lewis's Christological weaknesses should include subjects which he does not discuss or develop adequately. One significant shortcoming of Lewis's work is the lack of a

strong connection between the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of believers. The interconnection between Christ and Christians which is seen in 1 Corinthians 15 does not consistently find a place in his presentation. Lewis does write of the resurrection of the dead. However, this does not seem to be the source of consolation in his own life.

The clearest depiction of bodily resurrection is found in the Narnian Chronicles. In The Last Battle, Narnia is destroyed and the faithful enter Aslan's country. This paradise is similar to Narnia, but bigger, and, "Everyone you had ever heard of (if you knew the histories of those countries) seemed to be there."¹ This includes many of the significant characters from earlier in the series who are mentioned by name. As the children from earth explore Aslan's country, they see that it is not only for Narnians. Aslan's country is connected to other worlds, including a paradisaical England. As they look at this country, "...they saw their own father and mother, waving back at them across the great, deep valley...."² They are told that it is easy to reach them, but before they go to them, Aslan appears, and their attention turns from reunion with their family to reunion with Him.

The Great Divorce also depicts reunions in heaven, but of a different type. Here one heavenly representative comes to meet each soul, while the rest of the blessed remain in "Deep heaven." Some of those sent are family members or friends, but they shatter all expectations. A woman comes to her husband, but he hides behind a tragedian who will not receive heaven's joy. A man comes to his wife who wants heaven only to be reunited with her son, but cannot enter heaven for that reason alone. Her husband explains, "You will be solid enough for Michael to perceive you when you learn to want someone else besides Michael.... You're treating God only as a means to Michael."³ Her selfish love has no room for others, not even for her God. Other souls are met by friends, or familiar people who come to explain heaven's reality to them. The narrator, ostensibly Lewis himself, is met not by a family member, but by George MacDonald. Another man, who cannot accept charity, is met by a forgiven murderer, and not the murderer's victim who is also in heaven. These meetings hold out the possibility of reunion with others, but reunion with God must be primary.

Narnia vividly presents the reunion of Christians in heaven. The Great Divorce upholds eventual reunion with others, following a reunion with God. This image falters, however, in Lewis's own mourning. He does not take the comfort from this belief as he grieves for Joy, or for other family members and friends. So he writes in A Grief Observed,

...all that stuff about family reunions "on the further shore," pictured in entirely earthly terms.... is all unscriptural, all out of bad hymns and lithographs. There's not a word of it in the Bible. And it rings false. We *know* it couldn't be like that. Reality never repeats. The exact same thing is never taken away and given back.⁴

In letter written three weeks after Joy's death, he clarifies his thinking.

"I believe in the resurrection.... [sic] but the state of the dead *till* the resurrection is unimaginable. Are they in the same *time* that we live in at all? And if not, is there any sense in asking what they are "now"?"⁵

As his journal progresses, he questions the resurrection. "There is also, whatever it means, the resurrection of the body. We cannot understand. The best is perhaps what we understand the least."⁶ In Letters to Malcolm, he speculates,

About the resurrection of the body. I agree with you that the old picture of the soul re-assuming the corpse — perhaps blown to bits or long since usefully dissipated through nature — is absurd. Nor is it what St. Paul's words imply.... We are not, in this doctrine, concerned with matter as such at all; with waves and atoms and all that. What the soul cries out for is the resurrection of the senses.⁷

Lewis stumbles on the precise nature of the resurrection. He believes that it will happen, but is unwilling to commit to a concrete understanding. What is the state of the soul in timeless paradise? The time-bound mourner cannot comprehend the answer. Thus this doctrine was of little comfort to Lewis in his sorrow.

A second factor which may explain Lewis's reluctance in viewing heaven as a reunion is his motif of "First and Second Things." This is most clearly explained in a 1942 essay of the same name.

...every preference of a small good to a great, or a partial good to a total good, involves the loss of the small or partial good for which the sacrifice was made.... You can't get second things by putting them first; you can get second things only by putting first things first.⁸

Reunion with God is the primary joy of heaven. Reunion with others is a "second thing." So the woman in The Great Divorce could only be seen by her son if she learned to want God. The "second thing" is lost apart from the "first thing." The children in Narnia will indeed be reunited with their parents, but their attention is first drawn to Aslan. Lewis is essentially correct, but his writings are weak in applying this. With the "first thing," reunion with God, in place, the second thing will also occur. The resurrection should be a cause of comfort and joy.

The Eucharist

Another significant connection missing from Lewis's writings is the Eucharist. As there is a strong connection between Christological doctrine and the presence of Christ in the sacrament, one must wonder why Lewis does not make this connection in his writings. He certainly did believe that Christ was present in the Eucharist. In The Screwtape Letters he notes that the real presence of Christ is experienced in the Sacrament.⁹ Likewise, in Mere Christianity he says that this is one of three things which "spreads the Christ-life to us."¹⁰ And yet, in A Grief Observed, he writes,

Tomorrow morning a priest will give me a little round, thin, cold, tasteless wafer. Is it a disadvantage — is it not in some ways an advantage — that it can't pretend the least *resemblance* to that with which it unites me? I need Christ, not something that resembles Him. I want H., not something that is like her.¹¹

How is it that Lewis, who has such a strong presentation of the glorified human nature of the resurrected and ascended Christ, does not connect that presence concretely to the Sacrament?

The answer is two-fold. First, Lewis was aware of the different denominational views of the sacrament, and did not want to cause further division. Secondly, he was not confident of his own belief in these matters. This is clearly reflected in Letters to Malcolm where he writes, "You

ask me why I've never written anything about the Holy Communion. For the very simple reason that I am not good enough at Theology. I have nothing to offer...."¹²

As he continues, he notes that he does not know how the disciples first understood Christ's words of institution. In trying to understand their meaning, he demonstrates that he is aware of the major views of Christ's presence. To the language of transubstantiation, he responds, "I find 'substance' (in Aristotle's sense), when stripped of its own accidents and endowed with the accidents of some other substance, an object I cannot think...."¹³ In response to a symbolic position, he says,

I get on no better with those who tell me that the elements are mere bread and mere wine, used symbolically to remind me of the death of Christ. They are, on the natural level, such a very odd symbol of *that*.¹⁴

He similarly notes that if the act is only a memorial, then its value is subjective, and "...dependent on the recipient's sensibility at the moment of reception...."¹⁵

Having responded to three major descriptions of Christ's presence, he summarises his own position,

However, then, it may be for others, for me the something which holds together and "informs" all the objects, words, and actions of this rite is unknown and unimaginable. I am not saying to anyone in the world, "Your explanation is wrong." I am saying, "Your explanation leaves the mystery for me still a mystery."¹⁶

In this, the last book that Lewis wrote before his death, he reveals the reasons for his silence on this topic. Similar to his writings on theories of the atonement, he avoids all explanations, while holding to the basic teaching. This is done by retreating to mystery. He thus does not deny the presence of Christ, nor does he define it. His Christology does not illuminate his ideas on the Eucharist.

The Enduring Legacy of C. S. Lewis

C. S. Lewis set himself to the task of translating theology, of bringing the content of the Church's essential teaching to the ordinary person. His tools were his significant literary skills and a variety of genres. While his presentation of Christology has weak links, it is nonetheless largely successful. One wonders, however, about the continuing usefulness of Lewis's writings. What will last of his writing, and what will fade? At this point, almost all of Lewis's writings remain in print, and continue to sell at a rapid pace. Indeed, there seems to be a great hunger for his writing, and an interest in his work. Despite his intention, Lewis is now largely read as a theologian, and will likely remain a popular theologian for quite some time.

While this may be a helpful state of events for many people, it is not without its consequences. The success of Lewis has made it nearly inevitable that Christians who write popular books will be compared to him. Many people are watching for the "next C. S. Lewis,"* but to no avail. Attempts to produce writers who emulate Lewis's writings will not produce the spontaneity or

*For an insightful consideration of this topic, see Alan Jacobs, "The Second Coming of C. S. Lewis," *First Things* (November, 1994) 27-30.

depth of writing which Lewis attained. If Lewis had used one writer's material as a standard for his work, it is unlikely that he would have written the variety of books that he did. It was his willingness and eagerness to work with new forms and narratives that led to his most enjoyable writing. Modern writers ought to be encouraged, not to emulate one past writer, but to write new material.

Emulation of Lewis's writing ought not consist in simple adherence to the forms which he used. However, he may be seen as a paradigm for popular theology in diversity of writing style and genre, and in his willingness to present orthodox theology in new language. The need for translated theology remains today. Lewis was one writer among many who addressed the need. His books will continue to be read, his translation of theology may continue to be very helpful, but the task of presenting that theology in new terms and varied genres remains as much a need today as it was when Lewis first wrote. His challenge remains as valid today as when he first wrote,

One thing at least is sure. If the real theologians had tackled this laborious work of translation about a hundred years ago, when they began to lose touch with the people (for whom Christ died), there would have been no place for me.¹⁷

Appendix: A Chronology of the Life & Works of C. S. Lewis

- 1898 29 Nov. Born in Belfast
- ca. 1903 (age 5) Begins writing Boxen
- ca. 1904 Names self "Jacksie"
- 1905 Moves to "New House" in the country ("Little Lea")
- 1908 23 Aug. Mother dies — sent to Boarding School
- 1908 Wynyard School Hertfordshire
- 1910 Cambell College, Belfast
- 1911 Malvern Preparatory School
- 1913 Malvern College, Worcester
- 1914-16 Studies with tutor W. T. Kirkpatrick ("The Great Knock") in Surrey
- ca. 1915 Reads Phantastes
- 1917 Begins study at University College, Oxford
- World War I interrupts Oxford studies
- Nov. Arrives on the front lines
- 1918 Hospitalised once for trench fever, later after being wounded
- Discharged from army
- 1919 Jan. Returns to Oxford as Student
- Spirits in Bondage (pseudonym: Clive Hamilton)
- 1920 Takes a First in Classical Moderations
- 1922 Takes a First in Greats
- 1923 Takes a First in English Language and Literature
- 1924 Becomes substitute tutor in Philosophy, University College, Oxford
- 1925 Elected Tutor of English Language and Literature at Magdalen College, Oxford
- 1926 Dymer (pseudonym: Clive Hamilton)
- Meets J. R. R. Tolkien
- 1929 Trinity Term: conversion to Theism
- 25 Sept. Father dies
- 1931 Late summer — writes that he has accepted Christianity
- 1933 Pilgrim's Regress
- 1936 Allegory of Love
- Meets Charles Williams
- 1938 Out of the Silent Planet
- 1939 Evacuated children arrive at the Kilns
- The Personal Heresy
- 1940 First weekly Inklings meeting
- The Problem of Pain
- 1941 Four Radio Talks (later compiled into Mere Christianity)
- 1942 Preface to Paradise Lost
- The Screwtape Letters
- Broadcast Talks/The Case for Christianity
- 1943 Gives Riddell Memorial Lectures — (become The Abolition of Man)
- Perelandra
- Christian Behaviour
- 1945 That Hideous Strength
- The Great Divorce
- Beyond Personality
- Charles Williams Dies
- 1946 Awarded Doctor of Divinity degree, *honoris causa*, St. Andrew's University
- 1947 Miracles
- 8 Sept. Lewis on cover of Time
- 1948 Mrs. Moore enters nursing home. Lewis visits daily.
- Arthurian Torso
- 1949 Transposition and Other Addresses
- 1950 The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe

- 1951 Mrs. Moore Dies
Prince Caspian
- 1952 Doctor of Letters, *honoris causa*, L' universit  Laval, Quebec
Mere Christianity published
The Voyage of the Dawn Treader
Joy visits
- 1953 The Silver Chair
- 1954 English Literature in the Sixteenth Century (Excluding Drama)
The Horse and His Boy
Elected Professor of Medieval and Renaissance Literature at Magdalen College,
Cambridge
Joy moves to England
- 1955 Surprised by Joy
Magician's Nephew
- 1956 Till We Have Faces
The Last Battle
- 23 Apr. Civil marriage
Joy diagnosed with cancer
- 1957 21 Mar. Christian marriage
Mid year — Joy's cancer in remission
- 1958 Reflections on the Psalms
- 1959 Elected Honorary Fellow of University College, Oxford
Doctor of Letters, Manchester University
Joins Bishop's Commission for Revision of the Psalter
Joy's cancer returns
- 1960 The Four Loves
Studies in Words
The World's Last Night and Other Essays
- 13 July Joy Dies
- 1961 A Grief Observed (pseudonym: N. W. Clerk)
An Experiment in Criticism
- 1962 They Asked for a Paper
- 1963 22 Nov. Dies

Posthumously Published Works:

All My Road Before Me
Boxen
The Dark Tower and Other Stories
The Discarded Image
Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer
Spenser's Images of Life
Various Collections of Essays & Letters

Notes

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