

Reason, Imagination, and Universalism in C. S. Lewis

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(ABSTRACT)

Though he is generally known as one of the key voices in conservative Christianity, this thesis demonstrates that C. S. Lewis was in fact far more liberal in his view of salvation than many would expect. Lewis argued for a universalist interpretation of salvation, in which the death of Christ opened up the possibility of salvation for all of humanity, not merely those people who could be identified as Christians. Lewis did believe that people could and did choose Hell over Heaven, however, and still saw evangelism as the duty of every Christian. All of Lewis's writings are in a sense evangelistic, and all attempt to effect the conversion of the reader in the same manner in which Lewis himself was first drawn to Christianity: by baptizing the imagination in the hope that the reason will follow.

Acknowledgements

This project began, as so many in academia do, as a different project entirely. What began as an exploration of Neoplatonic elements in the Christian allegorical tradition has come to fruition as an exploration of C. S. Lewis's theology of salvation and methods of evangelism.

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Christopher C. McClinch

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Introduction

During the second half of the twentieth century, C. S. Lewis has become arguably the most important and influential layman in the Christian world. He is quoted in sermons, read in Christian book clubs, and given to children to educate them in the mystery and joy of the Christian faith. He is considered to be, in many ways, the current patron saint of conservative Christianity. Lewis, however, is frequently less orthodox or conservative than his reputation would lead one to believe. Indeed, his fiction in particular frequently crosses the line separating orthodoxy from the heresy of universalism.

Universalism—the doctrine that Christ’s death and resurrection provide for the salvation of all souls, whether Christian or not—has not always been recognized as an official heresy by the Christian community. Indeed, until the fifth century, the consensus among the fathers of the Church was that all souls could be saved—and there were certain influential thinkers, such as Clement of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa, and Origen who believed that all souls, including that of Satan, *would* eventually be saved. The shift from universalism as official doctrine to universalism as official heresy came as a result of Church reaction to the Arian and Pelagian heresies, which were not strictly universalist, but were similar enough to necessitate a change in doctrine that made universalism a heresy.

Ecclesiastical history is always best understood in the context of the heresies and conflicts that took place on the fringes of orthodox Christianity, and the history of universalism is no exception. Christianity arose within the Roman empire as an obscure offshoot of Judaism, threatened from within by the Gnostics, who referred to themselves as Christians and from without by numerous other religions, including Judaism and the worship of the Roman gods. The early Christians had little control over the other religions threatening them from the outside, save to convert as many of their worshippers to Christianity as possible, but Gnosticism was a threat that they could and did deal with directly. Although it is probably an oversimplification to refer to Gnosticism as a unified

-ism,¹ the Gnostic sects were unified in the sense of stressing revealed knowledge as the only means of reaching Heaven.

The early Christians rejected both the Gnostic “understanding of Jesus as the material form of a heavenly revealer” and the belief that only those to whom God had chosen to reveal His full, hidden truth could be saved. The determinism of Gnosticism proved the particular sticking point for the early Christians and precipitated the rise of universalism as official doctrine. Origen, one of the most powerful and influential of the early universalists summarized his theological objections to Gnostic determinism:

It follows from those who assert these things that what lies within our power is eliminated and with it any possibility of praise or blame or any distinction between acceptable and blameworthy behavior. If things are as they hold, there is no longer any point to the announcement of God’s judgment, his warnings to sinners that they risk chastisement, and the honors and blessings addressed to those who have dedicated themselves to better things. . . . And if one considers the consequences for personal piety of what they assert, faith is vain as well, Christ’s coming is pointless, as are the entire divine plan of the law and the prophets and the efforts of the apostles to establish the church of Christ. (87)

For Origen and his followers, any form of determinism was completely unacceptable, as it erased any consideration of human morality or even Christ’s sacrifice from Christianity. The reason morality disappears in a determinist view of salvation is clear, but the reason determinism negates the necessity of Christ’s death may require some explanation. Origen’s view was that according to determinism, God has already decided who will be saved and who will not, based on criteria completely unconnected to what the people in question did in life. Because their sins have no bearing on their salvation, atonement for their sin is unnecessary. Thus Origen saw determinism as undermining the underlying principle of Christianity—Christ’s death atoning for the sins of the world.

¹ Gnosticism is a catch-all term for a group of religious movements, most of which identified themselves at least to some extent as Christian, but all of which stressed “‘revealed knowledge’ available only to those who have received the secret teachings of a holy revealer” and taught that all who do not receive the revealed knowledge “are trapped in ignorance of the true divine world and the destiny of the Gnostic soul to return there” (Perkins 465).

For Origen, universal salvation was not merely possible; anything less meant the thwarting of God's will by rebellious creations. If God's will could be thwarted, He could not possibly be omnipotent. Therefore, Origen considered universal salvation to be a subject that underlay the very meaning of Godhood.

By the fifth century, the Christian landscape had changed, however. Gnosticism no longer posed a viable threat to orthodox Christianity, but a new heresy had arisen to take its place—Pelagianism. Pelagius and his followers were not followers of Origen—indeed, it is doubtful that Pelagius had even read him—but they, too, preached a form of salvation for souls who had not necessarily accepted Christ as their personal savior in this life. The Pelagians taught that we could live sinless lives and thus be justified without Christ's sacrifice. This belief that salvation was possible without the sacrifice of Christ ever having been made angered Augustine and other orthodox Christians, who attacked Pelagianism and all other doctrines of salvation that did not involve Christ as one's personal savior. Since Augustine's time, universal salvation has been officially listed as a heresy throughout the orthodox Christian community.

Many readers, on running across Lewis's universalist passages—such as the salvation of a follower of the Satan figure in *The Last Battle* or the implication in *The Great Divorce* that souls can choose Heaven or Hell after their death, without any specific mention of accepting Christ—seem to gloss over them, preferring to view Lewis as an essentially conservative Christian with one or two eccentric positions. Closer examination of Lewis's life and writings, however, reveals a pattern that places universalism much closer to the very center of his belief system.

As a youth, Lewis fell away from Christianity largely over logical difficulties with the position taught him in private schools that all the other religions were mere nonsense, but Christianity happened to be exactly correct. Seeing no reason to differentiate Christianity from all the rest of the religions in the history of the world, Lewis ceased to believe. As he came more and more to believe in Christianity, his reading of authors such as George MacDonald and G. K. Chesterton increased rather than decreased his tendency to group the world's other religions together with Christianity. He began to see paganism as prefiguring Christianity, as well as pagans and Christians as desiring the same thing, with the only difference being that more of the truth had been

revealed to the Christians. Because the pagans and Christians desired the same thing and because paganism prefigured Christianity, Lewis began to consider paganism as a possible road to God.

Modernism also led Lewis to become more universalistic, as he saw the world increasingly divided into people who believed in some religious system and people with no religious belief whatsoever. In fact, he once wrote, only half-jokingly, “When grave persons express their fear that England is relapsing into Paganism, I am tempted to reply, ‘Would that she were’” (*God in the Dock* 172). Elsewhere, he echoed a similar statement, saying, “Christians and Pagans had much more in common with each other than either has with a post-Christian. The gap between those who worship different gods is not so wide as that between those who worship and those who do not” (*Selected Literary Essays* 5). Lewis saw a clear hope of salvation for people who followed some creed, but none for those who adhered to no creed at all.

As a scholar, Lewis spent his energies studying the literature of the time when Christianity and paganism battled over the soul of Europe: the middle ages. Lewis saw the middle ages as a time that held answers for some of the problems with the twentieth century, particularly the problem of the atheism introduced by modernism. The middle ages were a time of fervent intellectual activity in the service of religion, a call which Lewis saw as essential for the late twentieth century. Interestingly, he recognized paganism as potentiating the brand of intellectual Christianity that marked the middle ages and thus longed to see Europe, if not Christian, at least pagan and searching for God.

As Britain’s highest-profile Christian layman, Lewis worked his universalist vision of salvation into many of his Christian writings. Even *Mere Christianity*, which presents itself as a distillation of the belief that is common to all Christians, finds its discussion of salvation heavily tinged with universalism. In *Mere Christianity*, however, we begin to see Lewis doing his best to camouflage the universalism in his doctrine. As a disciple of George MacDonald and a student of the middle ages, Lewis was well aware of the history of orthodox reaction to universalism, and so his universalism remains partially hidden. This tendency to disguise his universalism may well account for Lewis’s present reputation as one of the masters of conservative, orthodox Christianity.

In his fiction, Lewis's universalism is more prominent, although we still find him backing away from directly universalist statements. Lewis presents us in his fiction with direct visions of Heaven and technical discussions of the nature of salvation, which inevitably run toward universalism, showing the salvation of non-Christian characters. Indeed, his fiction shows even more controversial—and directly universalist—views of salvation, with souls leaving Hell and going to Heaven, where they are saved after death. However, even here, Lewis backs away from his universalism in direct discussions of the unorthodoxy of his Heaven. This, then, is the ultimate pattern we find in Lewis: he is a believer in universalism because he is a believer in pattern, but he dances into and out of universalism as he deems it rhetorically necessary or politically expedient.

Chapter 1: Atheism and Salvation

Although his reputation at the dawn of the twenty-first century is as a sort of patron saint of conservative Christianity, C. S. Lewis was in reality a man whose religious beliefs were frequently heterodox. Indeed, the view of Christian salvation Lewis presents in *The Great Divorce*, *The Last Battle*, and even in some of his apologetic texts runs in places very close to what both the Anglican and Catholic churches consider to be heresy. Specifically, Lewis in several places presents the possibility that Heaven can be attained through some means other than the acceptance of Jesus Christ in the sense prescribed by Christian churches worldwide, the notion that salvation and damnation are the choice of the soul in question, and that Heaven is open to all, including those who have never heard of or accepted Christianity.

The doctrine of salvation proved a thorny issue throughout Lewis's life, leading in part to his descent into atheism in childhood, serving as the final sticking point preventing his conversion to Christianity as a young man, and providing the most controversial material in his adult Christian writings. As a child, Lewis's chief objection to the doctrine of salvation was the notion that it was somehow unique to Christians—that the Christians were the only ones who had figured out the proper way to worship God. Looking back on his first conscious doubts as to the validity of Christianity, Lewis wrote,

Here [at Cherbourg,¹ where Lewis studied after the collapse of Wynyard School, Hertfordshire²], especially in Virgil, one was presented with a mass of religious ideas; and all teachers and editors took it for granted from the outset that these religious ideas were sheer illusion. No one ever attempted to show in what sense Christianity fulfilled Paganism or Paganism prefigured Christianity. The accepted position seemed to be that religions were a mere farrago of nonsense, though our own, by a fortunate exception, was exactly true. (*Surprised by Joy* 59)

Rather than believe in the unexplained exception of Christianity, Lewis chose to include Christianity with the world's other religions as nonsense. Indeed, he goes on to note that he was "very anxious" to do so (60).

¹ Referred to as "Chartres" in *Surprised by Joy*.

² Referred to as "Belsen" in *Surprised by Joy*.

It is perhaps significant that Lewis's chief conscious reason for rejecting Christianity was intellectual rather than emotional. Rather than reject Christianity because it would condemn untold millions of Jews, Hindus, Moslems, and practitioners of other religions, Lewis rejected it because it was not obviously different from all the religions that were said to be "sheer nonsense." With no clear reason for believing that Christians were worshipping God correctly when the rest of the world was essentially deluding itself, Lewis rejected the ideas of God and salvation entirely.

Although Lewis made his choice to reject Christianity in favor of atheism in 1911 or 1912, at which point he could have been no older than thirteen, his choice represents an intellectual pattern that persisted throughout his life: a search for truth that would satisfy him on both a rational and an imaginative level. On an imaginative level, Lewis was never to separate the religions or mythologies of the world, and he used his powerful rational gifts to construct a doctrine of Christian salvation that would not preclude grouping the world's religions together. Indeed, Lewis's passion and talent for integrating reason and imagination manifested themselves even earlier, beginning in 1905, when the six-year-old Lewis and his brother Warnie created their Animal-Land, which they later referred to as Boxen.

Boxen was a land of anthropomorphic animals which lay across a narrow sea from India. Lewis writes that his stories of Boxen "were an attempt to combine my two chief literary pleasures—'dressed animals' and 'knights in armor'" (*Surprised by Joy* 11). Warnie, however, was interested in a more modern Boxen—"it had to have trains and steamships if it was to be a country shared with him" (11). Because, as Lewis notes, "already the mood of the systematizer was strong" in him, he decided that

the medieval Animal-Land about which I wrote my stories must be the same country at an earlier period; and of course the two periods must be properly connected. This led me from romancing to historiography; I set about writing a full history of Animal-Land. Though more than one version of this instructive work is extant, I never succeeded in bringing it down to modern times; centuries take a deal of filling when all the events have to come out of the historian's head.
(11)

Although the history of Boxen was never fully traced, Lewis notes that “in mapping and chronicling Animal-Land I was training myself to be a novelist” (13). Through his careful construction of a patterned, consistent world, he was also training himself, of course, to pursue the kinds of intellectual coherence he would later expand as a historian, literary scholar, and Christian apologist.

Though it would later inform his apologetics, Lewis’s interest in pattern and rational consistency served only to reinforce his atheism as he grew into adolescence and discovered anthropology and myth criticism.³ In a letter to his friend Arthur Greeves dated 12 October, 1916, Lewis wrote

You ask me my religious views: you know, I think, that I beleive [sic] in no religion. There is absolutely no proof for any of them, and from a philosophical standpoint Christianity is not even the best. All religions, that is, all mythologies to give them their proper name are merely man’s own invention—Christ as much as Loki. Primitive man found himself surrounded by all sorts of terrible things he didn’t understand—thunder, pestilence, snakes, etc: what more natural than to suppose that these were animated by evil spirits trying to torture him. These he kept off by cringing to them, singing songs and making sacrifices etc. Gradually from being mere nature-spirits these supposed being[s] were elevated into more elaborate ideas, such as the old gods: and when man became more refined he pretended that these spirits were good as well as powerful.

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

³ Roger Lancelyn Green and Walter Hooper attribute some of Lewis’s anthropological arguments to his having read Andrew Lang’s *Myth, Ritual, and Religion* and Sir James Frazer’s *The Golden Bough*, but neither author is mentioned in any of Lewis’s letters until after he has already started making anthropological arguments against Christianity. In fact, neither text is mentioned for ten years after Lewis’s first anthropological argument to Arthur Greeves, which is printed below.

into being—one mythology among many, but the one that we happen to have been brought up in. (*Collected Letters* 230-231)

Clearly, Lewis the pattern-maker is at work here. Beginning with what anthropology teaches us about mythmaking (that the earliest myths are explanations of the processes of nature, that the earliest religions are based on protection from the uncontrollable forces of nature and fate, that there is an inherent desire to believe that the forces to which we pray are benevolent, and that we have a tendency to elevate legendary heroes to the status of divinity), Lewis argues that Christianity can be explained perfectly well through an anthropological analysis. It fits the pattern of the classic myth, so there is no reason to believe that it is any different from any other myth.

Ultimately, Lewis's love of pattern would become a primary factor in the universalism inherent in his theology. Just as, when an atheist, he tended not to separate Christianity from other religions when there was no compelling reason to do so, as a Christian, he continued to find patterns between Christianity and the world's other religions. Indeed, when he was to explain his universalist beliefs, Lewis discussed non-Christian salvation as a matter of concentrating on the most Christian parts of one's own religion.⁴

It was perhaps because of his interest in pattern that a chance purchase of George MacDonald's novel *Phantastes* in March 1916 had the effect on Lewis that it did. Looking back on his first reading of *Phantastes* in *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis wrote that

It is as if I were carried sleeping across the frontier, or as if I had died in the old country and could never remember how I came alive in the new. For in one sense the new country was exactly like the old. I met there all that had already charmed me in Malory, Spenser, Morris, and Yeats. But in another sense all was changed. I did not yet know (and I was long in learning) the name of the new quality, the bright shadow, that rested on the travels of Anodos. I do now. It was Holiness.... That night my imagination was, in a certain sense, baptized; the rest of me, not

⁴ For example, in *Mere Christianity*, Lewis wrote, "There are people in other religions who are being led by God's secret influence to concentrate on those parts of their religion which are in agreement with Christianity, and who thus belong to Christ without knowing it" (178).

unnaturally, took longer. I had not the faintest notion what I had let myself in for by buying *Phantastes*. (173-175)

The desire to create a pattern within which MacDonald's novel fits is evident: Lewis compares *Phantastes* to the best elements within the fictions of Malory, Spenser, Morris, and Yeats, but at the same time he indicates that MacDonald's novel did not quite fit the pattern of those other, more famous fictions. The Lewis who sees that *Phantastes* does not quite fit the pattern established by Malory and company is the Lewis of 1955, however, not the Lewis of 1916.

The other interesting observation on the part of the Lewis of 1955 is that his imagination was baptized by his reading of *Phantastes* in 1916, while the rest of him took longer. If we are to understand Lewis in the context of the interplay of reason and imagination, it is essential that we recognize that his imagination was baptized some fifteen years before his reason. The pattern of imagination leading and reason following, even resisting at times, was to repeat itself time and again in Lewis's lifetime, whether in his conversion, his scholarly career, or his writing of Christian fiction.

In 1916, in the first letter in which Lewis mentioned *Phantastes* to Arthur Greeves, Lewis wrote that

I have had a great literary experience this week. I have discovered yet another author to add to our circle—our very own set: never since I first read 'The well at the world's end' have I enjoyed a book so much—and indeed I think my new 'find' is quite as good as Malory or Morris himself. The book, to get to the point, is George MacDonald's 'Faerie Romance', *Phantastes*, which I picked up by hazard in a rather tired old Everyman copy... on our station bookstall last Saturday. (*Collected Letters* 169)

At seventeen, Lewis was keenly, intensely aware of how *Phantastes* fit the pattern of the mythic, world-creating romance—a pattern that clearly privileges imagination in reading—but if, as he later alleged, he had any feeling that "all was changed," there is no evidence of it in the letters.

MacDonald may have initiated Lewis into "holiness," but the version of Christianity in which he himself was steeped was decidedly unorthodox. Before writing his novels, MacDonald had been a Presbyterian minister in Scotland who was stripped of

his parish in 1853 amidst charges of heresy. Specifically, the charges against MacDonald stated “that he had expressed belief in a future state of probation for heathens and that he was tainted with German theology” (*George MacDonald* xxvii). MacDonald, in other words, was a universalist. By the time Lewis read MacDonald, universalism was no longer actively pursued as a heresy⁵—quite possibly because the church had declined as a force which could actively pursue heresy rather than because of any philosophical or doctrinal shift—but universalism still lay squarely outside the Christian mainstream.

Because Lewis speaks of MacDonald as “my master” and wrote that “I fancy I have never written a book in which I did not quote from him,” too much can certainly be made of MacDonald’s universalism in explaining the universalist bent in Lewis’s vision of Christianity (*George MacDonald* xxxvii). After all, the tendency to group all religions together as being of the same type and the question of why only the Christians were eligible for salvation had already expressed themselves in Lewis long before he was exposed to MacDonald’s thought. At most, we may say that in MacDonald Lewis found Christian expressions of ideas he had already developed and thus found his mind encouraged to run in directions where it already naturally ran.

Still, it is no great secret that Lewis considered MacDonald a religious teacher of the first rank. In editing his 1946 *George MacDonald: an Anthology*, Lewis wrote:

This collection, as I have said, was designed not to revive MacDonald’s literary reputation but to spread his religious teaching. Hence most of my extracts are taken from the three volumes of *Unspoken Sermons*. My own debt to this book is almost as great as one man can owe to another; and nearly all serious inquirers to whom I have introduced it acknowledge that it has given them great help—sometimes indispensable help toward the very acceptance of the Christian faith. (xxxiii-xxxiv)

Lewis does not elaborate on what parts of the Christian faith MacDonald helped the serious inquirers to accept, but given both the nature of Lewis’s own journey to conversion and the particular nature of MacDonald’s thought, it does not seem too great a

⁵ This state of affairs was extremely recent, however. Morwenna Ludlow notes that “It has been perhaps only since the late nineteenth century that theologians have really felt free to suggest that God will save all people, without being in fear of losing their jobs, their reputations, or even their lives” (3).

stretch to assume that the particular aspects of the faith on which MacDonald shed so much light had to do with the nature and mechanism of salvation.

Lewis is quite careful to obscure MacDonald's universalism throughout the introduction to his collection. In addition to the rather toothless phrase "that he had expressed belief in a future state of probation for heathens and that he was tainted with German theology," Lewis also deliberately skirts the issue of categorizing MacDonald's thought. He writes:

I will attempt no historical or theological classification of MacDonald's thought, partly because I have not the learning to do so, still more because I am no great friend to such pigeonholing. One very effective way of silencing the voice of conscience is to impound in an *Ism* the teacher through whom it speaks: the trumpet no longer seriously disturbs our rest when we have murmured "Thomist," "Barthian," or "Existentialist." And in MacDonald it is always the voice of conscience that speaks. He addresses the will: the demand for obedience, for "something to be neither more nor less nor other than *done*" is incessant. Yet in that very voice of conscience every other faculty somehow speaks as well—intellect, and imagination, and humour, and fancy, and all the affections; and no man in modern times was perhaps more aware of the distinction between Law and Gospel, the inevitable failure of mere morality. The Divine Sonship is the key-conception which unites all the different elements of his thought. I dare not say that he is never in error; but to speak plainly I know hardly any other writer who seems to be closer, or more continually close, to the Spirit of Christ Himself. (xxxiv-xxxv)

Lewis's refusal to apply the term "universalism" to MacDonald's thought—clearly the "*Ism*" to which he referred—is interesting given the expressed intention of his anthology: "to spread [MacDonald's] religious teaching" (xxxiii-xxxiv). Lewis is writing and editing for an audience he expects to be unfamiliar with MacDonald's life and thought, but he refuses to contextualize that thought or comment on what elements thereof might be considered controversial by the standards of orthodox Christianity. Indeed, Lewis deliberately deflects any questions of controversy in MacDonald's thought by writing that "I know hardly any other writer who seems to be closer, or more consistently close,

to the Spirit of Christ Himself.” In other words, anyone who questions MacDonald’s orthodoxy can be seen as allying him- or herself against the Spirit of Christ. This was one of the first cases, but by no means the only one, of Lewis doing his best to slip universalism by the reader in the guise of traditional orthodox Christianity.

In addition to introducing Lewis to holiness and reinforcing his universalism, *Phantastes* helped sate one of the most important passions in Lewis’s life: the yearning for the mythic and the fantastic. This yearning, as in the case of the yearning for pattern, dominated Lewis’s life from an early age—as far back as when he and Warnie created Boxen, one of Lewis’s chief aims was to create a world of animal knights in armor. Given the prosaic nature of the Boxen writings that have survived, however, it is safe to say that Lewis’s passion for myth and fantasy did not truly assert itself until somewhat later, when he found himself leafing through a volume of Longfellow:

I had become fond of Longfellow’s *Saga of King Olaf*: fond of it in a casual, shallow way for its story and its vigorous rhythms. But then, and quite different from such pleasures, and like a voice from far more distant regions, there came a moment when I idly turned the pages of the book and found the unrhymed translation of *Tegner’s Drapa* and read

*I heard a voice that cried,
Balder the beautiful
Is dead, is dead—*

I knew nothing about Balder; but instantly I was uplifted into huge regions of northern sky, I desired with almost sickening intensity something never to be described (except that it is cold, spacious, severe, pale, and remote) and then... found myself at the very same moment already falling out of that desire and wishing I were back in it. (*Surprised by Joy* 15)

Lewis spent much of his adolescence, and indeed of his adult life, searching for this strange longing that he found in northern myth. Indeed, he described himself during one lecture he gave at Oxford as “one who loved Balder before he loved Christ” (Green and Hooper 33).

Malory, Spenser, Morris, and Yeats all provided Lewis with the fantastic world and the sense of longing that he so desired, but his need for myth and longing found its

strongest fulfillment in the Norse mythology where he first discovered it. Even after his conversion to Christianity, he “confessed that: ‘If Christianity *is* only a mythology, then I find that the mythology that I believe in is not the mythology I like best. I like Greek mythology much better: Irish better still: Norse best of all’” (Green and Hooper 33).

The fact that Lewis considered Greek, Irish, and Norse mythologies more satisfying than the Christian myth is surely significant, establishing his final conversion as a purely intellectual matter—rather than being swayed by a beautiful myth, he came to Christianity despite what he perceived as aesthetic deficiencies in the myth. The intellectual nature of Lewis’s conversion—and the concomitant mild disdain for the Christian myth—is illustrative of the way Lewis the rationalist interacted with Lewis the imaginative romantic and lover of myth: Lewis may have often been led by his imagination to ideas and things of beauty, but his reason was always the final arbiter. We should also note that Lewis’s intellectual acceptance of Christianity did not in any way preclude him from slaking his imaginative thirst with other mythologies. Indeed, his Christianity seems to have deepened his appreciation for other mythologies. Because he understood them to be versions of the “true myth” or the “myth he believed,” Lewis found his pleasure in other myths innocuous from a moral standpoint, particularly as they added or altered the emotional weight of the Christian myth. Still, it seems no great stretch to suggest that part of Lewis’s own reason for creating alternate mythologies that retold the Christian story was to try to infuse the mythology that best appealed to his reason with more imaginative appeal.

By the time he wrote *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis had come to refer to the soul-stirring longing for myth and “Northern-ness” as Joy, a phenomenon he dismissed as important only insofar as it led him to actively desire God and Heaven. We may again see the mind of Lewis the patternmaker at work here. He saw the true value of Joy as teaching him to desire something that could not be had in this world. A Platonist before he became a Christian, Lewis first saw the object of the desire that was Joy as “that *Absolute*... beside which we are mere ‘appearances’ (Green and Hooper 102). Once he became a Christian, of course, the “Absolute” was replaced by God.

Throughout Lewis’s adolescence, however, the longing for myth and “Northern-ness” was not recognizable as Joy or as a pointer to God. Lewis was aware of the

pleasurable stab of longing, of course, but he treated it primarily as an aesthetic pleasure that he valued in the writings of Malory, Spenser, Morris, Yeats, and most of all, George MacDonald. The predominant Lewis was still the rational Lewis, rather than the lover of myth and “Northern-ness.”

The rational Lewis and the lover of myth were both to get their next push toward conversion to Christianity in April of 1918, when Lewis first happened upon a volume of G. K. Chesterton’s essays while he was convalescing in a field hospital at the end of World War I. Although Chesterton was just as much a lover of fantasy as Lewis and possessed every bit as powerful an intellect, the deeply Christian cast of his mind made it unlikely in the extreme that Lewis the committed atheist should find himself so attracted to Chesterton’s writings. Lewis himself writes in *Surprised by Joy* that when he first read Chesterton,

I had never heard of him and had no idea of what he stood for; nor can I quite understand why he made such an immediate conquest of me. It might have been expected that my pessimism, my atheism, and my hatred of sentiment would have made him to me the least congenial of all authors. It would almost seem that Providence, or some “second cause” of a very obscure kind, quite overrules our previous tastes when it decides to bring two minds together. Liking an author may be as involuntary and improbable as falling in love. (184)

Whatever antipathies Lewis may have had for Chesterton’s optimism, Christianity, and sentimental leanings, he found himself deeply attracted to the workings of Chesterton’s mind. In addition, he found the same quality of goodness or holiness in Chesterton that he had found in MacDonald. As was the case with MacDonald, he did not recognize the qualities as such until years later, but even at the time, he was struck by the paradox that he, a fierce atheist, should find such an overtly Christian author so congenial.

In reading Chesterton, Lewis was to find a Christian explanation for one of his dominant aesthetic tastes: the taste for myth and romance.⁶ In *Orthodoxy*, Chesterton defined romance and its relation to Christian faith as follows: “I wish to set forth my faith

⁶ Here and elsewhere, “romance” is used to refer to the medieval or modern faerie story, not to the modern genre which takes its name from the courtly love element first introduced in the medieval romances.

as particularly answering this double spiritual need, the need for that mixture of the familiar and the unfamiliar which Christendom has rightly named romance” (13). William Isley commented on Chesterton’s definition of romance, saying, “this definition contains the three crucial elements for understanding Chesterton. It defines romance as a mixture of the familiar and the unfamiliar. It qualifies romance as a spiritual or religious need. Finally, it links romance up with Christendom” (1). To this, one need add only that this definition seems very much to be a precursor to Lewis’s own later definition of joy. Joy, like romance, combines the familiar with the unfamiliar, is a spiritual need, and, for Lewis, at least, is one of the key pointers to Christianity.

Chesterton contributed to Lewis’s intellectual conversion in more ways than merely establishing the pattern connecting romance to Christianity, however. Chesterton, even more so than MacDonald, set Lewis along the road to universalism by constructing an intellectual and spiritual history of the human race in *The Everlasting Man* that saw Christianity as the fulfillment of classical paganism and therefore saw classical paganism as a part of the will and plan of God. Suddenly, in Chesterton, Lewis found a respected Christian writer saying not that the pagans were absolutely wrong and Christianity by some divine happenstance happened to be absolutely right, but rather that the pagans got a great deal right and Christianity happened to get more right. What Lewis took away from *The Everlasting Man* seems to be first and foremost a vision of Christianity as a fulfillment of paganism, but also that the concept of doing God’s will is more important than nominal distinctions of religion and that it is possible to know, love, and serve God without ever having heard of Christianity.

These ideas had an interesting effect on Lewis’s pattern-making mind. As a youth, he rejected Christianity because he saw no logical reason to distinguish it from the myths and legends that he had been told were pure nonsense. As an adult, when he accepted Christianity, he accepted any part of paganism that was not directly contradicted by Christianity because he still saw no logical reason to distinguish Christianity from myth. Indeed, he referred throughout his writings to Christianity as “the myth which I happen to believe.” If anything, Chesterton’s *The Everlasting Man* cemented Lewis’s habit.

The timing of Lewis's discovery of Chesterton merits comment in its own right. World War I was, of course, the defining moment for the intellectuals of Lewis's generation. The savagery and pointlessness of the war gave rise to a cynical modernism that questioned the values of the past and denied the existence of God. The prototypical English youth went into the war an optimistic Christian and came out a jaded atheist; Lewis went in an atheist and came out much closer to being a Christian. He shared at the time the modernist contempt for the ideas of the past, but that, too, was to be short-lived, outgrown while still an undergraduate at Oxford. As such, Lewis was trained and equipped during the period to be the perfect anti-modernist. Where the modernists saw atheism and a contempt for the past as evidence of maturity, Lewis's own maturity brought him to Christianity and a respect for the past that bordered on reverence.

When he returned to Oxford after the end of the war, Lewis was struck by the realization that many of the authors he enjoyed most were in fact Christian, while the authors who were atheists—the ones he felt he should have found more pleasure or enjoyment in—left him somewhat flat:

All the books were beginning to turn against me. Indeed, I must have been as blind as a bat not to have seen, long before, the ludicrous contradiction between my theory of life and my actual experiences as a reader. George MacDonald had done more to me than any other writer; of course it was a pity he had that bee in his bonnet about Christianity. He was good *in spite of it*. Chesterton had more sense than all the other moderns put together; bating, of course, his Christianity. Johnson was one of the few writers whom I felt I could trust utterly; curiously enough, he had the same kink. Spenser and Milton by a strange coincidence had it too. Even among ancient authors the same paradox was to be found. The most religious (Plato, Aeschylus, Virgil) were clearly those on whom I could really feed. On the other hand, those writers who did not suffer from religion and with whom in theory my sympathy should have been complete—Shaw and Wells and Mill and Gibbon and Voltaire—all seemed a little thin; what as boys we called “tinny.” It wasn't that I didn't like them. They were all (especially Gibbon) entertaining; but hardly more. There seemed to be no depth in them. They were

too simple. The roughness and density of life did not appear in their books. (*Surprised by Joy* 206-7).

Even when he did not want to see the pattern, Lewis could not avoid it. Even when he had an emotional stake in the opposite position, his commitment to the truth forced him to consider the possibility that there was something about the Christian or religious writers that attracted him to them, even though he considered them to be grievously mistaken with regard to their religion.

Lewis writes of how he struggled *not* to recognize what underlay the pattern he saw running through the authors he was reading:

The natural step would have been to inquire a little more closely whether the Christians were, after all, wrong. But I did not take it. I thought I could explain their superiority without that hypothesis. Absurdly (yet many Absolute Idealists have shared this absurdity) I thought that “the Christian myth” conveyed to unphilosophic minds as much of the truth, that is of Absolute Idealism, as they were capable of grasping, and that even that much put them above the irreligious. Those who could not rise to the notion of the Absolute would come nearer to the truth by belief in “a God” than by disbelief. Those who could not understand how, as Reasoners, we participated in a timeless and therefore deathless world, would get a symbolic shadow of the truth by believing in a life after death. The implication—that something which I and other undergraduates could master without extraordinary pains would have been too hard for Plato, Dante, Hooker, and Pascal—did not yet strike me as absurd. I hope this is because I never looked at it squarely in the face. (208)

Lewis’s attempts to create non-Christian explanations for his recognized patterns of literary taste were to prove fruitless, of course. As he notes, the hubris implicit in the assumption that he and his contemporaries had grasped a truth that had eluded the greatest minds in Western history is too great to be believed. Led on by a dogged pursuit of the truths behind the patterns he noticed, Lewis increasingly found he had no choice but to become a Christian.

Lewis’s conversion was aided—and indeed completed—by finding that his tastes in personal acquaintances ran as solidly toward Christianity as did his literary tastes. His

circle of close friends—J. R. R. Tolkien, Hugo Dyson, Owen Barfield, A. K. Hamilton Jenkin, and Arthur Greeves—were all Christians by the time Lewis converted to Christianity in 1931. Tolkien, Dyson, Jenkin, and Greeves had been Christians all along, but Barfield went through a conversion of his own that greatly influenced Lewis. These friends—Dyson and Tolkien in particular—helped Lewis to clear his last intellectual hurdles in accepting Christianity by appealing to his own sense of pattern.

In a letter to Arthur Greeves dated October 18, 1931, Lewis wrote of the final obstacle to his conversion, saying,

What has been holding me back (at any rate for the last year or so) has not been so much a difficulty in believing as a difficulty in knowing what the doctrine *meant*: you can't believe a thing while you are ignorant of *what* the thing is. My puzzle was the whole doctrine of Redemption: in what sense the life and death of Christ 'saved' or 'opened salvation to' the world. I could see how miraculous salvation might be necessary: one could see from ordinary experience how sin (e.g. the case of a drunkard) could get man to such a point that he was bound to reach Hell (i.e. complete degradation and misery) in this life unless something quite beyond mere natural help or effort stepped in. And I could well imagine a whole world being in the same state and similarly in need of miracle. What I couldn't see was how the life and death of Someone Else (whoever he was) 2000 years ago could help us here and now—except in so far as his *example* helped us. And the example business, tho' true and important, is not Christianity: right in the centre of Christianity, in the Gospels and St Paul, you keep on getting something quite different and very mysterious expressed in those phrases I have so often ridiculed ('propitiation'—'sacrifice'—'the blood of the Lamb')—expressions wh. I cd. only interpret in senses that seemed to me either silly or shocking. (976)

Here the most important point to notice is Lewis's refusal to leave his intellect out of his conversion. He was too intellectually honest to accept a doctrine that he did not understand. One should also notice how, once again, his attempts at understanding the doctrines of redemption and salvation take the form of trying to fit the unfamiliar doctrine to patterns he could readily see and understand.

Tolkien and Dyson understood their friend Lewis well, however, and appealed to his love and understanding of patterns in explaining the doctrine to which he objected. Lewis continues:

Now what Dyson and Tolkien showed me was this: that if I met the idea of sacrifice in a Pagan story I didn't mind it at all: again, that if I met the idea of a god sacrificing himself to himself (cf. the quotation opposite the title page of *Dymer*)⁷ I liked it very much and was mysteriously moved by it: again, that the idea of the dying and reviving god (Balder, Adonis, Bacchus) similarly moved me provided I met it anywhere *except* in the Gospels. The reason was that in Pagan stories I was prepared to feel the myth as profound and suggestive of meanings beyond my grasp even tho' I could not say in cold prose 'what it meant'. (976-7)

What Dyson and Tolkien did was not so much to explain the doctrine rationally as to point out to Lewis that he already understood the doctrine on a deeper level—that the only time at which he resisted it was when it was labeled Christian. In addition, of course, they reinforced Lewis's conviction that all religions—all mythologies—are of a type, and that there is truth and even a route to God in religions or mythologies other than the Christian.

Lewis's own explanation of the truth he gained from Tolkien and Dyson is as follows:

Now the story of Christ is simply a true myth: a myth working on us in the same way as the others, but with this tremendous difference that *it really happened*: and one must be content to accept it in the same way, remembering that it is God's myth where the others are men's myths: i.e. the Pagan stories are God expressing Himself through the minds of poets, using such images as He found there, while Christianity is God expressing himself through what we call 'real things.' Therefore it is *true*, not in the sense of being a 'description' of God (that no finite mind could take in) but in the sense of being the way in which God chooses to (or can) appear to our faculties. The 'doctrines' we get *out* of the true myth are of course *less* true: they are translations into our *concepts* and *ideas* of that wh. God

⁷ *The Havamal*, no. 138: 'Nine nights I hung myself upon the Tree, wounded with the spear as an offering to Odin, myself sacrificed to myself.'

has already expressed in a language more adequate, namely the actual incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection. Does this amount to a belief in Christianity? At any rate I am now certain (a) That this Christian story is to be approached, in a sense, as I approach the other myths. (b) That it is the most important and full of meaning. I am also *nearly* certain that it really happened. (977)

The notion that Christianity is to be approached in the same manner as other mythologies would become the underlying principle of Lewis's universalism, as well as providing an answer to the dilemma of the possible salvation of the Pagans. If the mythologies, rather than the doctrines, are what matters, then there is room to grow closer to God without necessarily accepting or understanding Christian doctrine.

Thus, the final understanding of Christian doctrine that allowed Lewis to convert with a clean conscience was fundamentally universalist. It considered the quest for God, not official doctrine, to be the supreme truth and revered mythology as one of God's methods of revealing Himself to humanity. Just as important, Lewis's final understanding of Christian doctrine was acceptable to both his imagination and his reason. He was not forced to surrender his love of mythology, nor was he forced to accept any doctrine that made no rational sense to him. Lewis's conversion fell perfectly into the grand pattern in his life of attempting to bring reason and imagination into harmony—a pattern that would reappear as Lewis attempted to explore the literature of past ages, convert others through rational argument tinged with imagination, or convert them through rational fictions.

Chapter 2: The Oxford Don

Although Lewis had actually been a don for five years before his 1931 conversion to Christianity, his entire career as a productive writer of literary criticism and history occurred after his conversion. Lewis was voted a Fellowship to Magdalen College as Tutor in English Language and Literature in 1925. His first lectures at Magdalen gave little indication that he was destined for scholarly greatness; indeed,

having announced as his theme ‘Eighteenth-Century Precursors of the Romantic Movement,’ he discovered that F. P. Wilson was lecturing on ‘English Poetry from Thomson to Cowper,’ and he wrote to his father on 4 December 1925, ‘in fact it is the same subject under a different name. This means that, being neither able nor willing to rival Wilson, I am driven to concentrate on the prose people of whom at present I know very little.’” (Green and Hooper 86)

By 1927, however, Lewis had begun to study Anglo-Saxon, Middle English, and Old Icelandic—the languages of the sagas, ballads, and romances that had enchanted him as a child. His scholarly life was beginning to fuse his reason with the literature that had always been closest to his imagination—and it was in his studies of medieval and Renaissance literature that he was to make his lasting mark on the scholarly world.

Lewis would make his mark nine years later with the landmark *The Allegory of Love*. As with much of the rest of his scholarly work, *The Allegory of Love* attempted to place the literature of the past in its historical context—to help the reader make the imaginative leap of placing him- or herself in the place of a medieval or renaissance reader, in other words. According to Lewis, this imaginative leap is essential, not only in understanding the literature of the past, but also in understanding our own present minds because

whatever we have been, in some sort we are still. Neither the form nor the sentiment of this old poetry has passed away without leaving indelible traces on our minds. We shall understand our present, and perhaps even our future, the better if we can succeed, by an effort of the historical imagination, in reconstructing that long-lost state of mind for which the allegorical love poem was a natural mode of expression. (1)

Again we should notice the Lewis *modus operandi* at work here: the imagination and reason interact to enhance the understanding of the subject at hand. Again, too, the imagination leads the reason; he suggests that the understanding of present and future *follows* the effort of the historical imagination to reconstruct the state of mind that produced the allegorical love poem.

Perhaps the greatest achievement of *The Allegory of Love* is legitimating the study of romantic love within medieval poetry. Lewis points out that courtly love as presented in the allegorical love poem is decidedly different from love as presented anywhere before. Lewis describes the convention of courtly love, saying, “The sentiment, of course, is love, but love of a highly specialized sort, whose characteristics may be enumerated as Humility, Courtesy, Adultery, and the Religion of Love” (2). The medieval view of love is also unique in that it is an ennobling passion, an idea completely foreign to earlier ages.

Lewis discusses the fact that Plato’s *Symposium* does include the idea of human love ascending to the divine, but he points out that Plato’s idea is decidedly different:

In the *Symposium*, no doubt, we find the conception of a ladder whereby the soul may ascend from human love to divine. But this is a ladder in the strictest sense; you reach the higher rungs by leaving the lower ones behind. The original object of human love—who, incidentally, is not a woman—has simply fallen out of sight before the soul arrives at the spiritual object. The very first step upwards would have made a courtly lover blush, since it consists in passing on from the worship of the beloved’s beauty to that of the same beauty in others. Those who call themselves Platonists at the Renaissance may imagine a love which reaches the divine without abandoning the human and becomes spiritual without abandoning the carnal; but they do not find this in Plato. If they read it into him, this is because they are living, like ourselves, in the tradition which began in the eleventh century. (5)

The difference between Plato’s concept of love as an ennobling passion and the medieval concept of love as an ennobling passion is clear. Plato views human love as a necessary first step, to be gotten beyond as quickly as possible, while the courtly lover views human love itself as the goal.

More interesting than the relationship of courtly love poetry to the Platonic conception of human and divine love is the relationship of courtly love poetry to the medieval Church. Lewis insisted on the point that the sentiment of courtly love was characterized in part by adultery. It is probably unnecessary to point out that adultery was condemned by the medieval Church—as, indeed, it has been condemned by orthodox Christianity in all times and places—but it should be mentioned that all medieval marriages were arranged for social or economic interest and that all passion, including marital passion, was considered sinful by the medieval Church. Thus, any passion that the love poets would wish to describe would be considered sinful. Lewis wrote that the Church view of love prompted the love poets to declare that love within marriage was impossible, and it was thus that the “cleavage between Church and court, or in Professor Vinaver’s fine phrase, between Carbonek and Camelot, [became] the most striking feature of medieval sentiment” (18).

Interestingly, while one would perhaps naturally expect a Christian apologist of Lewis’s reputation to condemn the adulterous nature of the courtly love poetry, Lewis simply considers it as interesting poetry. While he hardly speaks of adultery in approving terms, Lewis carefully explains why it is so natural in allegorical love poetry and then explores courtly love as an *improving* passion. Lewis does, however, draw the distinction that courtly love posited love as the source of all *worldly* good. For a Christian such as Lewis—and especially one who was once a Platonist—the importance of the distinction cannot be overstated. Divine goodness came not from human love but from God, and the allegorical love poems demanded as well that the lover be a good Christian, adultery aside.

The allegorical love poem thus integrates the religious with the irreligious, a practice that becomes clear as it reaches its highest level in Spenser. By Spenser’s time, the Church had relaxed its strictures against passion in marriage, and so *The Faerie Queene* is an allegorical love poem in praise of love in marriage rather than love in adultery. The love of the allegorical poem is now finally divine, rather than merely human.

By and large, reaction to *The Allegory of Love* was overwhelmingly positive. Kathleen Tillotson wrote in an early review, “No one could read it without seeing all

literature a little differently for ever after” (477). R. W. Chambers wrote in a letter to Lewis, “on second reading it seems to me quite the greatest thing done in England for medieval studies since Ker’s *Epic and Romance*.” The book is hardly perfect, however. Margaret Hannay sums up the genius and failings of *The Allegory of Love*, saying, “Lewis was a provocative critic, making sweeping generalizations which clarified broad trends in literary history, but generalizations which, by definition, could not be entirely true¹” (58). Joerg Fichte identifies the most serious generalization as Lewis’s insistence on allegory as a classical form: “in his emphasis on the classical derivation of allegory, Lewis fails to account for the sacred-profane tension so characteristic for much of medieval allegorical literature” (19).

Failing to account for a possible Christian derivation of allegory and thus discounting much of the sacred-profane tension in medieval allegories is no minor oversight. Indeed, one can argue that it may be no oversight at all. There is a pattern in Lewis, which we have already observed in his treatment of George MacDonald, of deliberately soft-pedaling—or leaving out altogether—information that would render his deeply-held positions heterodox. As a universalist, Lewis of course had a vested interest in making the sacred and the profane appear as compatible as possible, making it appear quite likely that his narrative of the courtly love poem as a pagan form married to Christian subject matter was an intentional oversimplification.

Lewis followed *The Allegory of Love* six years later with his 1942 *A Preface to Paradise Lost*. As with *The Allegory of Love*, Lewis intended *A Preface to Paradise Lost* to correct what he perceived to be a pattern of misreading. In introducing *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, Lewis writes,

The first thing the reader needs to know about *Paradise Lost* is what Milton meant it to be. This need is specially urgent in the present age because the kind of poem Milton meant to write is unfamiliar to many readers. He is writing epic poetry which is a species of narrative poetry, and neither the species nor the genus is very well understood at present.... The misunderstanding of the species (epic

¹ Lewis himself was occasionally aware of his own overgeneralizations. John Lawlor writes, “On a Collection paper in which I had adopted, too uncritically for him, his view of the medieval antithesis between love and marriage, he himself wrote in parody of me, ‘Mr Lewis seems to forget that Palamon and Arcite both wanted to *marry* Emelye’” (78).

narrative) I have learned from the errors of critics, including myself, who sometimes regard as faults in *Paradise Lost* those very qualities the poet worked hardest to attain and which, rightly enjoyed, are essential to its specific delightfulness. (1-2)

Here again we have Lewis announcing his intent to help the reader make the imaginative leap of putting him- or herself in the place of a seventeenth-century reader who is well-acquainted with epic narrative. Lewis continues to educate through the interaction of reason and imagination, always with imagination taking the lead so that reason can work on what the author intended the text to be.

Lewis spends the first half of the book on the form of *Paradise Lost*, covering such subjects as narrative epic and the role of rhetoric, but for our purposes the book really comes into its own in the second half when Lewis begins discussing the subject matter of *Paradise Lost*. In chapter 10, "Milton and St. Augustine," Lewis explains the moral center of *Paradise Lost*, saying,

The Fall is simply and solely Disobedience—doing what you have been told not to do: and it results from Pride—from being too big for your boots, forgetting your place, thinking that you are God. This is what St. Augustine thinks and what (to the best of my knowledge) Christianity has always taught; this Milton states in the very first line of the first Book, this all his characters reiterate and vary from every possible point of view throughout the poem as if it were the subject of a fugue.... How are we to account for the fact that great modern scholars have missed what is so dazzlingly simple? I think we must suppose that the real nature of the Fall and the real moral of the poem involve an idea so uninteresting or so intensely disagreeable to them that they have been under a sort of psychological necessity of passing it over and hushing it up. Milton, they feel, must have meant something more than that!... If there is no God, then Milton's poem, as interpreted by Addison, has no obvious relation to real life. It is therefore necessary to sweep away the main thing Milton was writing about as a mere historical accident and to fix on quite marginal or subsidiary aspects of his work as the real core. (70-1)

Here Lewis presents not only the moral core of the poem but also one of the dangers of reading it through modern eyes. The modern world calls the existence of God—and therefore the reality of the Fall—into question and cannot read *Paradise Lost* in the spirit in which it was intended. The modernist critic is thus forced to read the poem in ways that ignore its reason for existence.

We should also pay some attention to Lewis's statements about the nature of the Fall. Lewis writes that "everything hangs on [the apple], but in itself it is of no importance" (70). The only thing that is important is the fact of first Satan's, then Adam and Eve's disobedience. Having established disobedience as the center of the poem, Lewis immediately draws back from the poem and discusses the simple demands for obedience that we experience throughout childhood, universalizing Adam and Eve's situation and removing it from its specifically Christian context. He thus explains sin and the Fall in terms that will have emotional—imaginative—resonance for his entire readership. Though the *Preface to Paradise Lost* is a scholarly work of literary criticism, Lewis is carefully setting up the model of sin that he will return to in both his apologetics and his fiction.

In chapter twelve, "The Theology of *Paradise Lost*," Lewis spends a good deal of time refuting Denis Saurat's charges that large parts of *Paradise Lost* are heretical. Many of Saurat's charges Lewis refutes outright as not being heretical or being heretical but not occurring in *Paradise Lost*. One charge which is potentially heretical and which deserves some attention because it sheds light on Lewis's fiction, however, is the charge that Milton regards God as corporeal. The lines Saurat challenges are "nor vacuous the space/ Though I incircumscrib'd myself retire/ And put not forth my goodness, which is free/ To act or not" (VII, 167-170). Essentially, Saurat charges Milton with saying that for God to create something, He must retract some of himself. Lewis's refutation is as follows:

To say that God is everywhere is orthodox. 'Do not I fill heaven and earth, saith the Lord' (*Jer.* XXIII, 24). But it is heresy to say that God is corporeal. If, therefore, we insist on defining (which, to the best of my knowledge, no Christian has ever been obliged to do) the *mode* of God's omnipresence, we must not so define it as to make God present in space in the way in which a body is present.

The *Zohar*² by making God present in such a way as to exclude other beings (for if He does not exclude other beings, why need He withdraw to make room for them?) would seem to commit this error. But does Milton follow it? To be true to the *Zohar* Milton's God ought to say 'The space *is* vacuous *because* I have withdrawn'; actually He says, 'The space is *not* vacuous, *although* I have withdrawn.' And Milton goes on to explain that God's withdrawal consists not in a spatial retraction, but in 'not putting forth His goodness'; that is, there are parts of space over which God is not exercising His efficacy, though He is still, in some undefined mode, present in them. (87-8)

Lewis's understanding of orthodoxy and heterodoxy is very fine, and he defends *Paradise Lost* eloquently from charges of heterodoxy—through shrewd rhetorical analysis, he reaches the conclusion that "the most we can draw is that Milton is perhaps following the *Zohar* where the *Zohar* is perhaps heretical" (89). Moreover, he borrows from this understanding of God's omnipresence for his description of the heavens in the *Space Trilogy*, where Earth is a dead spot in the golden glory of the Heavens. God is still there in some undefined form, but He no longer puts forth His goodness until He invades at the end of *That Hideous Strength*.

Lewis does not defend Milton himself from charges of heresy; it is only *Paradise Lost* that Lewis defends. Indeed, Lewis makes a point of mentioning that "Milton was an Arian; that is, he disbelieved in the coeternity and equal deity of the three Persons" (85). Lewis's charges of heresy against Milton are fascinating for several reasons. First and foremost, of course, is the fact that Lewis was a universalist—itsself a doctrine considered heretical by orthodox Christians. Second, Lewis wrote in his preface to *George MacDonald: an Anthology* that

I will attempt no historical or theological classification of MacDonald's thought, partly because I have not the learning to do so, still more because I am no great friend to such pigeonholing. One very effective way of silencing the voice of conscience is to impound in an *Ism* the teacher through whom it speaks: the

² A thirteenth-century Jewish compilation from which Saurat demonstrates that Milton borrowed some of his theology.

trumpet no longer seriously disturbs our rest when we have murmured “Thomist,” “Barthian,” or “Existentialist.” (xxxiv)

Lewis refuses to classify MacDonald’s heretical thought “because [he is] no great friend to such pigeonholing,” yet he is perfectly willing to pigeonhole Milton as an Arian. The answer to this seeming paradox lies in the nature and history of the Arian heresy.

Much has been made of the role played by the Pelagian heresy in causing the writings of Origen and the other patristic universalists to be condemned as heretical. The Pelagian heresy, after all, shares with universalism a belief in perfecting the soul without declaring Jesus to be one’s lord and savior in this life. The role of the Arian heresy in the decision to condemn the early universalists is often overlooked, however.

Origen, as we know, was a Platonist in addition to being a Christian, and he worked several Platonic doctrines into Christian doctrine, one of the most controversial of which was his understanding of the trinity. According to Origen, Jesus and the Holy Spirit are “subordinate to and eternally generated by the Father” (Trigg 23). This view was consistent with the teachings of Middle Platonism³ as well as third-century Christian thought but would eventually lead to Origen’s legacy being tainted through the Arian heresy. Arius had read Origen and pushed his thought one step further. Origen, in saying that the Son and the Holy Spirit are subordinate to and eternally generated by the Father, was simply restating a Platonic doctrine of hierarchies. In this hierarchical breakdown, all three persons of God were pure spirit, fully divine, though arranged hierarchically. To Arius and his followers, the Son and the Holy Spirit were created beings, different from the angels—or even from humanity—only by degree.

Ironically, Origen, although he was demonized after his death as an intellectual forebear of Arianism, would have agreed wholeheartedly that no true Christian could

³ Middle Platonism—the third-century school of thought that bridged the gap between classical Greek Platonism and Plotinus’s much more spiritual Neoplatonic revolution—taught that all of creation existed in a series of hypostases, in which each all things were generated by the next-higher level of reality, and the lower level reflected back the glory of the higher level. Thus, for a Middle Platonist Christian, God generated the Son, who reflected His glory back while generating the Holy Spirit, who reflected back the glory of the Son while generating the highest order of the angels, and so on. At the lowest level of reality was matter, which reflected the glory of the ether above it but generated nothing.

deny the full divinity of Christ. He is very clear in referring to Christ as “God the Word” in his Commentary on the Book of John, and, unlike the Arians, he considered all three hypostases of the trinity to be fully God, even though he ordered them hierarchically according to their function within the trinity.

Given Lewis’s own universalism and the fact that Origen is the most important intellectual forefather of Christian universalism, it seems possible that part of his focus on Milton’s Arianism stems from a resentment of the heresy that caused Origen to be declared anathema and indirectly aided in universalism being declared heretical. The heresy into which one does not fall—particularly if it aided in the downfall of the heresy into which one *does* fall—always seems particularly odious.

Lewis closes the chapter with a characteristic plea to leave whatever heresies may appear in Milton’s other work to lie undisturbed, however: “The *best* of Milton is in his epic: why should we labour to drag back into that noble building all the rubble which the laws of its structure, the limitations of its purpose, and the perhaps half-conscious prudence of the author, have so happily excluded from it?” (92). Lewis again asks readers to consider Milton in a completely orthodox light; there is no sense, he argues, in searching for heterodoxy in so great a Christian poem. His Arianism aside, Milton is, after all, an instructor according to Lewis’s heart, enticing the imagination with a dramatization of the Fall while educating the reason with doctrine and hierarchy.

Like his discussion of Milton’s heresies, Lewis’s discussion of the role of Satan in the poem paves the way for work he would later do in both his apologetics and his fiction. For Lewis, Milton’s Satan is clearly no hero; he is indeed a figure of scorn. Indeed, Lewis notes that no critic even considered the possibility of Satan as a heroic figure in print until the Romantics. Lewis notes that in Milton’s time,

two dispositions in the minds of his readers... would have guarded them from our later misunderstanding. Men still believed that there really was such a person as Satan, and that he was a liar. The poet did not foresee that his work would one day meet the disarming simplicity of critics who take for gospel things said by the father of falsehood in public speeches to his troops. (100)

To readers who either share Milton’s mind-set because of their Christianity or who can at least make the imaginative leap required to read *Paradise Lost* as though they did believe

in a devil who was a liar, there is no possibility of being fooled by Satan's empty rhetoric.

Even so, however, Lewis notes that it is possible to choose Satan's path with eyes wide open:

To admire Satan, then, is to give one's vote not only for a world of misery, but also for a world of lies and propaganda, of wishful thinking, of incessant autobiography. Yet the choice is possible. Hardly a day passes without some slight movement towards it in each one of us. That is what makes *Paradise Lost* so serious a poem. The thing is possible, and the exposure of it is resented.

Where *Paradise Lost* is not loved, it is deeply hated. (102-3)

Throughout both his apologetics and his fiction, Lewis comes back to the point that it is possible to choose Satan over God, even knowing what Satan represents. All it takes is the disobedience that lies at the center of the poem. Indeed, Margaret Hannay wrote of Lewis that "If one were to say that Lewis wrote most of his adult fiction to counteract the pernicious image of Milton's Satan, one would not be far wrong" (74).

In his discussion of Milton's Adam and Eve, Lewis introduces a conception of the first man and woman that would later inform *Perelandra*, Lewis writes of Milton's Adam,

The task of a Christian poet presenting the unfallen first of men is not that of recovering the freshness and simplicity of mere nature, but of drawing someone who, in his solitude and nakedness, shall *really be* what Solomon and Charlemagne and Haroun-al-Rashid and Louis XIV lamely and unsuccessfully strove to imitate on thrones of ivory between lanes of drawn swords and under jeweled baldachins.... This royalty is less apparent in Eve, partly because she is in fact Adam's inferior, in her double capacity of wife and subject, but partly, I believe, because her humility is often misunderstood. (118-120)

In *Perelandra*, Lewis was to focus specifically on demonstrating both the innocence and the royalty of Eve, who, though more innocent and even naïve than Milton's Eve, is clearly superior to both Ransom and Weston. The final coronation in *Perelandra* is consciously described in terms echoing Lewis's point about Adam and Eve being what all kings and queens unsuccessfully emulate.

Though not considered the groundbreaking tour de force that is *The Allegory of Love*, *A Preface to Paradise Lost* is still generally regarded as a critical masterpiece. John Lawlor writes, “that book contains what to me is the most remarkable single piece of criticism in Lewis’s entire output—the brilliant account of Virgil as one who ‘added a new dimension to poetry’” (78). Dabney Adams Hart, however, accuses Lewis of nonsensical arguments from analogy in *A Preface to Paradise Lost*. Hart writes,

For instance, in defending Milton against the charge of heresy, Lewis said the only suggestion of the doctrine of latent evil in God was a passage in *Paradise Lost* (V, 117-119) where Adam tells Eve that evil can enter the mind of God or Man without approval and hence without evil effects. Lewis then argued: “Since the whole point of Adam’s remark is that the approval of the will alone makes a mind evil and that the presence of evil as an object of thought does not—and since our own common sense tells us that we no more become bad by thinking of badness than we become triangular by thinking of triangles—this passage is wholly inadequate to support the astonishing doctrine attributed to Milton.”⁴ (116-7)

Hart points out that the analogy, which ignores “the noncomparable components of badness and triangles, takes the point beyond the limits of logic” (117). Hart accuses Lewis of arguing to the imagination rather than to the reason, though he does not draw the parallel to Lewis’s own reading of MacDonald or Lewis’s pattern throughout his writing of trying to lead the reason through the imagination. Thus, Hart becomes exactly like the critics of *Paradise Lost* whom Lewis accuses of criticizing as faults precisely those effects Milton worked hardest to attain. We may quibble regarding the effectiveness of Lewis’s whimsical arguments to the imagination, but we must recognize that they are a part of the pattern that underlies his career—that his fiction consists wholly of arguments to the imagination, with the understanding that the reason will follow. Even in his apologetics, which are nominally written to baptize the reason, Lewis frequently turns back to the imagination to make a particular point.

Lewis’s *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama*, published in 1954, was his next critical work of lasting significance. Published for the Oxford

⁴ *A Preface to Paradise Lost* 84

History of English Literature series (which Lewis referred to, particularly while the book was under contract but had not yet been written, as the O HELL⁵), *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century* is an exhaustive survey of sixteenth-century poetry and prose. In the book, Lewis introduces two of his most interesting and intriguing ideas: the concept of “new learning and new ignorance” and the idea that the Renaissance as we know it never happened.⁶ Lewis begins, of course, with his trademark attempt to help the reader imaginatively place him- or herself in the place of the sixteenth-century reader, saying that “The literary historian... is concerned not with those ideas in his period which have since proved fruitful, but with those ideas which seemed important at the time. He must even try to forget his knowledge of what comes after, and see the egg as if he did not know it was going to become a bird” (4-5). Nowhere is the imaginative nature of the reader’s task made more explicit. In order for the text to make the rational sense we desire it to make, we must pretend that we do not know some of what we actually know. In keeping with the pattern that runs through Lewis, our imaginations must guide our intellects.

Perhaps Lewis’s most shocking statement in *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama* is that there was no Renaissance. Lewis draws a distinction between the revival of Greek and classical Latin—which of course did happen—and a larger intellectual sea change which, he argues, did not, saying

⁵ In a letter to F. P. Wilson, editor of the Oxford History of English Literature series dated January 25, 1938, Lewis wrote, “The O HELL lies like a nightmare on my chest ever since I got your specimen bibliography: I shan’t try to desert—anyway, I suppose the exit is thronged with dreadful faces and fiery arms—but I have a growing doubt if I ought to be doing this” (Hooper 477).

⁶ This was one of Lewis’s particular pet ideas. Nevill Coghill recalls the first time Lewis advanced the notion:

I remember, on one occasion, as I went round Addison’s Walk, I saw him coming slowly towards me, his round, rubicund face beaming with pleasure to itself. When we came within speaking distance, I said ‘Hullo, Jack! You look very pleased with yourself; what is it?’

‘I believe,’ he answered, with a modest smile of triumph, ‘I believe I have proved that the Renaissance never happened in England. *Alternatively*’—he held up his hand to prevent my astonished exclamation—‘that if it did, *it had no importance!*’ (61)

Unfortunately, [the word “Renaissance”] has, for many years, been widening its meaning, till now ‘the Renaissance’ can hardly be defined except as ‘an imaginary entity responsible for everything the speaker likes in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.’... Where we have a noun we tend to imagine a thing. The word *Renaissance* helps to impose a factitious unity on all the untidy and heterogeneous events which were going on in those centuries as in any other. (55)

Lewis’s commitment to examining a doctrine to see whether it is true here leads him to reject the Renaissance as a cultural or intellectual event. Indeed, one of the signs that the Renaissance does not exist is what happens when we find medieval figures who seem to fit our definition of Renaissance people: “Instead of admitting that our definition has broken down, we adopt the desperate expedient of saying that ‘the Renaissance’ must have begun earlier than we had thought. Thus Chaucer, Dante, and presently St. Francis of Assisi, became ‘Renaissance’ men. A word of such wide and fluctuating meaning is of no value” (55). Lewis thus paves the way for a reading of what we term “Renaissance” literature as a continuation of medieval literature, with new ideas added on to a familiar mind-set. Lewis’s critical heterodoxy here is too obvious to merit comment, but it, too, is a form of critical or literary universalism. One typical use of the term “Renaissance” when used as an adjective is to separate out a late medieval work for praise. By debunking the idea of the Renaissance, Lewis forces us to admit the rest of the medieval tradition in which the book in question is steeped.

In demonstrating that the Renaissance as we know it never happened, Lewis sets about challenging some popular assumptions about the sixteenth century. One of the most popular such assumptions is that the sixteenth century is a time when a belief in science replaced a belief in magic—when any magic that appears in the texts is a mere “medieval survival.” Lewis, however, demonstrates that not only was a general belief in magic alive and well during the sixteenth century, but many more people believed in magic in a much more real way than they had in previous centuries. As Lewis says, “The medieval author seems to write for a public to whom magic, like knight-errantry, is part of the furniture of romance: the Elizabethan, for a public who feel that it might be going on in the next street” (8). Driving the point home, Lewis writes, “This supposedly

‘medieval survival’ in fact survived the Elizabethan type of lyric, the Elizabethan type of play, the Elizabethan type of monarchy, and the older English music” (9).

More interesting (at least for our purposes) than Lewis’s discussion of magic in the sixteenth century is the discussion of sixteenth-century Platonism that follows it. Sixteenth-century Platonism was

a deliberate syncretism based on the conviction that all the sages of antiquity shared a common wisdom and that this wisdom can be reconciled with Christianity. If Plato alone had been in question the Florentines would in fact have been attempting to ‘baptise’ him as Aquinas had ‘baptised’ Aristotle. But since for them Plato was merely the greatest and most eloquent of the consenting sages, since Pythagoras, the Hermetic Books, the Sibylline Books, the Orphic Books, Apuleius, Plotinus, Psellus, Iamblichus, and the Cabbala all meant the same, their task was hardly distinguishable from that of reconciling paganism, Judaism, and Christianity in general. (10-11)

Sixteenth-century Platonism was thus a truly universalist doctrine, committed to preserving the wisdom that could be allied to Christianity in several pagan belief systems. As such, the sixteenth-century Platonists were very much in agreement with Lewis himself as to the nature of God and wisdom. Indeed, the logic presented in Lewis’s discussion of salvation for non-Christians in *Mere Christianity* echoes the conception that “all the sages of antiquity shared a common wisdom and... this wisdom can be reconciled with Christianity” almost word for word.

Lewis’s own sympathies with the sixteenth-century Platonists are made clear when he describes their relation to orthodox Christianity: “Hence, paradoxically, it comes about that though the Florentine Platonists were wholly pious in intention, their work deserves the epithet *pagan* more than any other movement in that age. That their conscious purpose was Christian we need not doubt” (11). It should come as no surprise that Lewis sympathizes with the philosophical position of the Florentine Platonists, of course—he himself was both a Platonist and a universalist. He does, however find that Ficino and Pico constantly find themselves pulled away from their consciously Christian intentions: “Yet the actual trend of Ficino’s thought is always away from the centre of Christianity. One has the suspicion that though he and Pico doubtless believed

Christianity to be true, they valued it even more for being lofty, edifying, and useful” (11). In his apologetic writings, Lewis referred to the tendency to value Christianity for being anything other than true as “Christianity and—.” Lewis saw “Christianity and—” as one of the most pervasive errors facing the twentieth century, as it placed something above either God or Christianity.

From the religious fringe, Lewis takes us closer to the center of sixteenth-century Christianity in his discussion of the puritans and the humanists. First, Lewis reminds the reader that the words did not have their modern senses in the sixteenth century. The word “puritan” meant “‘advanced’ or ‘radical’ Protestantism: the marks of a puritan, in my sense, are a strong emphasis on justification by faith, an insistence on preaching as an indispensable, almost the only, means of grace, and an attitude towards bishops which varies from reluctant toleration to implacable hostility” (18). Lewis defines a humanist as “one who taught, or learned, or at least strongly favoured, Greek and the new kind of Latin; and by humanism, the critical principles and critical outlook which ordinarily went with these studies” (18). Far from being opposites as we now conceive them, “in reality the puritans and the humanists were quite often the same people” (18).

Lewis runs counter to conventional wisdom in his assessment of the humanists, pointing out that while “they recovered, edited, and expounded a great many ancient texts in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew,” they were also responsible for the rise of a strict classicism that nearly strangled sixteenth-century European literature (18). Lewis writes that “all the facts seem consistent with the view that the great literature of the fifteen-eighties and nineties was something which humanism, with its unities and *Gorboducs* and English hexameters, would have prevented if it could, but failed to prevent because the high tide of native talent was then too strong for it” (19). Far from paving the way for the brilliance of what we consider Renaissance literature, Lewis contends that humanism did its best to kill it.

Out of his discussion of the unfortunate excesses of the humanists in driving out everything from European culture that was not classical rises one of Lewis’s most important ideas, the New Learning and the New Ignorance. Lewis’s formulation of the idea was that “perhaps every new learning makes room for itself by creating a new ignorance. In our own age we have seen the sciences beating back the humanities as

humanism once beat back metaphysics. Man's power of attention seems to be limited; one nail drives out another" (31). The idea of the new learning and the new ignorance carries great instinctive weight; we can see areas of study being neglected as other areas advance. The idea also seems to be a slightly veiled attack on modernism. Throughout Lewis's scholarly work, he comes back again and again to the idea that twentieth century readers have lost some of the basic knowledge—usually religious—required to read a medieval or renaissance text in the sense in which it was written. The "new learning" of science and philosophy has created a "new ignorance" of religion and the humanities. Indeed, much of Lewis's apologetics and fiction come down to simplifying and thereby relearning what the world has forgotten. Such is certainly the sense of *Mere Christianity*, *The Abolition of Man*, *Out of the Silent Planet*, and much of *That Hideous Strength*.

In addition to revising the common view of the humanists, Lewis subjects the puritans to the same treatment. Unlike the humanists, however, these sixteenth-century Protestants are presented in rather more positive terms than one might expect, particularly from an author who held such sympathy for the Florentine Platonists. Given the "gloom and doom" stereotype of the puritan, it comes as a surprise when Lewis writes that "the doctrine of predestination, says the XVIIth Article, is 'full of sweet, pleasant and unspeakable comfort to godly persons'" (34). Lewis, of course, raises the predictable modern objection to this reassurance: "But what of ungodly persons?" (34). The answer is simple: in the earliest Protestant writings, the question never came up. Martin Luther's⁷ answer "tosses the question aside for ever. Do you doubt whether you are elected to salvation? Then say your prayers, man, and you may conclude that you are. It is as easy as that" (34).

Protestant doctrine was not the only part of this new form of Christianity that was sweet, pleasant, and comfortable. Indeed, Lewis tells us that when the Catholics condemned the Protestants for their lifestyle, it was for sensualism, not asceticism. They feasted rather than fasted, dressed for appearance as well as warmth or modesty, and celebrated the marriage bed where the Catholics celebrated virginity (34-5).

⁷ Luther was, of course, not a Puritan. However, Lewis considered Luther's views on the doctrine of predestination both important and representative because he was the father of the Protestant movement and thus an intellectual forebear of Puritanism.

None of this meant that the puritans were religiously tolerant or open-minded, however. Lewis notes that

A modern, ordered to profess or recant a religious belief under pain of death, knows that he is being tempted and that the government which so tempts him is a government of villains. But this background was lacking when the period of religious revolution began. No man claimed for himself or allowed to another the right of believing as he chose. All parties inherited from the Middle Ages the assumption that Christian man could live only in a theocratic polity which had both the right and the duty of enforcing true religion by persecution. Those who resisted its authority did so not because they thought it had no right to impose doctrines but because they thought it was imposing the wrong ones. Those who were burned as heretics were often (and, on their premisses, logically) eager to burn others on the same charge. When Calvin led the attack on Servetus which ended in his being burnt at Geneva, he was acting on accepted medieval principles. (39)

Here, of course, Lewis's sympathy with the puritans comes to an end. As both a universalist and as a twentieth-century man, he bristles at the notion of burning others at the stake for heterodox religious views. Lewis ultimately condemns the Puritans both for threatening free will and for their tendency to root out and destroy "popery" wherever possible.

Critical response to *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama* has been exceedingly positive overall, with Joe R. Christopher referring to it as "better (if less influential)" than *The Allegory of Love*. Of course, as with any of Lewis's literary criticism, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama* received its share of negative attention as well, chiefly over Lewis's refusal to credit the word "Renaissance" with any meaning and his division of sixteenth-century English literature into the "drab" and "golden" periods. Here, however, it is not difficult to imagine Lewis being deliberately heterodox, hoping to spur critics into rebuttal through the force of his statements. Margaret Hannay writes that "people who disagree with [Lewis's] *own* generalizations, supplying counterexamples from primary texts, are the readers he would most respect" (165). In other words, Lewis's deliberately provocative, heterodox stances

can be read as an attempt to lead the reason into greater understanding through emotion and imagination—the old pattern at work once again.

Lewis's final great scholarly work was *The Discarded Image*, which was published posthumously in 1964. This book attempted to explain medieval cosmology, Lewis's most ambitious attempt at giving the reader all the information he or she would need to read a medieval text from the point of view of a medieval writer. As with the rest of Lewis's books, the primary goal of *The Discarded Image* is to educate the imagination so that it can guide the reason to draw informed conclusions about the literature of the past. The most important point that Lewis wishes to impress on the reader is the importance medieval authors place on books: "In our own society most knowledge depends, in the last resort, on observation. But the Middle Ages depended predominantly on books. Though literacy was of course far rarer than now, reading was in one way a more important ingredient of the total culture" (5). The other point Lewis considers absolutely crucial is that "at his most characteristic, medieval man... was an organiser, a codifier, a builder of systems" (10). With these two points firmly in mind, we are ready to begin reconstructing the medieval universe.

Mapping the medieval universe, and nothing less, is indeed the goal of *The Discarded Image*. Lewis describes the genesis and the necessary complexity of the medieval cosmology, saying,

They are bookish. They are indeed very credulous of books. They find it hard to believe that anything an old *auctor* has said is simply untrue. And they inherit a very heterogeneous collection of books; Judaic, Pagan, Platonic, Aristotelian, Stoical, Primitive Christian, Patristic. Or (by a different classification) chronicles, epic poems, sermons, visions, philosophical treatises, satires. Obviously their *auctors* will contradict one another. They will seem to do so even more often if you ignore the distinction of kinds and take your science impartially from the poets and philosophers; and this the medievals very often did in fact though they would have been well able to point out, in theory, that poets feigned. If, under these conditions, one also has a great reluctance flatly to disbelieve anything in a book, then here there is obviously both a great need and a glorious opportunity for sorting out and tidying up. All the apparent contradictions must be harmonised.

A Model must be built which will get everything in without a clash; and it can do this only by mediating its unity through a great, and finely ordered, multiplicity.
(11)

The medieval situation was, of course, a universalist's or a syncretist's dream. The writers of the middle ages were faced with a multiplicity of texts written from several conflicting religious and philosophical positions, yet they felt compelled to organize them such that their conflicts with one another were resolved in a manner consistent with Christianity. Given Lewis's own universalism, it is easy to see why he found the medieval model of the universe such a fascinating subject. The model combined elements that would have been recognized as heretical if encountered alone with elements that lay at the very center of Christianity, and it did so in a way that, if not in perfect harmony with the orthodox Christianity of the time,⁸ did not result in anyone being burned at the stake for espousing it.

The fact that there was tension, however slight, between the syncretic, harmonizing model and the more orthodox church reveals one of the core truths Lewis was to wrestle with throughout his career as a writer. Official Christianity has never approved of attempts to integrate paganism into its doctrine or to provide philosophical justifications for the salvation of pagans. Lewis mentions the fact that the official church ceded uneasy approval to the medieval model of the universe, but he carefully avoids discussion of what happened to syncretists and harmonizers who were seen as having gone too far. Unlike George MacDonald, who merely lost his parish and, in some circles, his reputation, people accused of universalism in the middle ages frequently lost their lives.

Lewis continues his discussion of the medieval model, saying that it ranks with Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae* and Dante's *Divine Comedy* as one of the three

⁸ Lewis writes,

The Pagan elements embedded in [the Model] involved a conception of God, and of Man's place in the universe, which, if not in logical contradiction to Christianity, were subtly out of harmony with it. There was no direct 'conflict between religion and science' of the nineteenth-century type; but there was an incompatibility of temperament. Delighted contemplation of the Model and intense religious feeling of a specifically Christian character are seldom fused except in the work of Dante. (19)

great medieval works of art. Indeed, says Lewis, “I hope to persuade the reader not only that this Model of the Universe is a supreme medieval work of art but that it is in a sense the central work, that in which most particular works were embedded, to which they constantly referred, from which they drew a great deal of their strength” (12). In this sense, to understand the model is to understand medieval literature.

Though of course an exhaustive review of the books that contributed to the medieval model would be too large an undertaking to be worth the effort—Lewis makes the point that virtually every book available to the Middle Ages contributed in some way to the model, whether by adding new details or confirming ones already present—Lewis does provide brief notes on some of the books he considers both important and easily overlooked. These books are a mixed bag, to be sure, ranging from Cicero’s *Somnium Scipionis* to Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy*. Some are Christian, such as Boethius; some are pagan, such as Cicero; some are more difficult to pigeonhole religiously, such as Chalcidius.

Additionally, all but two of the texts Lewis profiles are in some sense Platonic. From these Platonists comes the sense within the medieval Model of the Great Chain of Being, the idea that there is a strict hierarchy that stretches from God down to unformed matter. From them, too, come the ideas of the heavenly spheres, of which the Earth is the lowest and the heavens the highest, and of much of the medieval contempt for the physical body.

Given Lewis’s own Platonism and universalism, it comes as no surprise that he should choose to spotlight this particular group of texts. All were indeed important texts in the creation of the medieval model, but so were many others that are not mentioned here. These, however, allow Lewis to do more than comment on some origins of the model. They also allow him to demonstrate the wide variety of Christian and pagan ideas that can be reconciled by a clever mind without giving off any sense of heterodoxy. No better collection of texts could be found to demonstrate Lewis’s essential point that most pagan ideas can be reconciled to Christianity without lapsing into overt heresy.

One of Lewis’s recurrent points is the difference between the way we conceive of space and the way the thinkers of the middle ages conceived of it. For us, space is an infinite vacuum punctuated by the occasional star, planet, or other bit of matter. For the

people of the middle ages, the sky was something completely different. Those who were true Platonists, of course, believed that all souls originated in the sky and that their descent to earth was a process of losses, diminishment, and accumulation of sins. Even those who did not ascribe to Platonic conceptions of the soul perceived the heavens very differently from modern readers, however.

The Earth sat at the center of the medieval universe, as far from the heavens as it was possible to get. The Earth was also the only realm where things could change or die. Outside the sphere of the Earth were the spheres of “the Moon, Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn; the ‘seven planets’” (96). Outside the sphere of Saturn was the *Primum Mobile*, the sphere of the stars, and beyond this sphere was Heaven itself. This spatial arrangement of the universe causes the greatest difference between the medieval and modern concepts of the universe:

As a modern, you located the stars at a great distance. For distance, you must substitute that very special, and far less abstract, sort of distance which we call height; height, which speaks immediately to our muscles and our nerves. The Medieval Model is vertiginous. And the fact that the height of the stars in the medieval astronomy is very small compared with their distance in the modern, will turn out not to have the kind of importance you anticipated. For thought and imagination, ten million miles and a thousand million are the same. Both can be conceived (that is, we can do sums with both) and neither can be imagined: and the more imagination we have the better we shall know this. The really important difference is that the medieval universe, while unimaginably large, was also unambiguously finite. And one unexpected result of this is to make the smallness of Earth more vividly felt. (98-9)

The medieval universe is thus one in which we are very much kept aware of our situation. We are at the center of the universe not because we are of primary importance but because we are of least importance. Compared to the spheres, we are infinitesimally small. We are also constantly forced to look up to the spheres to the perfection of Heaven, from whence we came and to which we long to return.

Here, too, Lewis works reason and imagination into his critical terminology. His very description of the medieval heavens begins with a thought experiment, an exercise

in imagination. He asks the reader to look into the night sky and then imagine doing the same as a person of the middle ages. Having detailed what the medieval person will see, Lewis turns the discussion of the different sizes of the modern and medieval universes to thought and imagination, saying that while the larger size of the modern universe sounds more impressive to the reason, the imagination treats the sizes of both universes as the same. Lewis here privileges the imagination's perception of the size of the universe, creating the expectation once again that the imagination is to lead the reason into greater understanding.

Lewis also notes that the planets were said to be controlled by intelligences that corresponded to the Roman gods for whom they were named. Interestingly, given the pagan origins for the names and personalities of the planets, Lewis writes, "I have not found evidence that theologians were at all disquieted by this state of affairs" (105). The only planet without a controlling intelligence is Earth. Again, Lewis borrows this tradition wholesale in the *Space Trilogy*, with the Oyarsa of each planet serving as the medieval, Platonic controlling intelligence. In the trilogy, Earth is the only planet without an Oyarsa in communication with the others and with Lewis's God-figure, Maleldil.

In concluding *The Discarded Image*, Lewis finally comes back to the reason the medieval model was discarded: "It is possible that some readers have long been itching to remind me that it had a serious defect: it was not true" (216). Lewis points out, however, that being untrue is somewhat less of a defect in the twentieth century, when our model of the universe is based on mathematics that we cannot envision without oversimplification. Thus, Lewis says, "It would therefore be subtly misleading to say 'The medievals thought the universe to be like that, but we know it to be like this.' Part of what we now know is that we cannot, in the old sense, 'know what the universe is like' and that no model we can build will be, in the old sense, 'like' it" (218). Again, reason must take a back seat to imagination if we are to envision the universe at all.

Lewis closes the book with an uncharacteristically pessimistic statement about the role of truth in constructing new models of the universe. He professes disbelief in the notion that an inrush of new facts forces the adoption of a new model, saying instead that

The new Model will not be set up without evidence, but the evidence will turn up when the inner need for it becomes sufficiently great. It will be true evidence. But nature gives most of her evidence in answer to the questions we ask her. Here, as in the courts, the character of the evidence depends on the shape of the examination, and a good cross-examiner can do wonders. He will not indeed elicit falsehoods from an honest witness. But, in relation to the total truth in the witness's mind, the structure of the examination is like a stencil. It determines how much of the total truth will appear and what pattern it will suggest. (222-3)

Lewis here seems to undermine the notions of truth which we have become accustomed to seeing in his work. Rather, he suggests that we will find the truth we want to find and interpret it in the way we want to interpret it. The process is not dishonest, per se, but it is not exactly honest inquiry, either. At the same time, this process does spotlight once again the role imagination plays in leading the reason. The imagination tends to guide the research that leads to the new model, as the scholar or scientist in question looks for evidence that confirms what he or she suspects to be true.

This can also be recognized as much of the pattern of Lewis's intellectual life. His conversion to Christianity notwithstanding, Lewis seems to have a largely unbroken track record of finding exactly the evidence he was looking for to make exactly the point he wished to make, even at the expense of leaving out information that would contradict or complicate his argument—as in the case of omitting Patristic Christian allegory from his genesis of the allegorical love poem in *The Allegory of Love*. His frequently heterodox arguments highlighted this tendency, of course, as other critics did their best to refute him.

Chapter 3: The Christian Apologist

While Lewis spent much of his scholarly work trying to get his readers to imagine themselves in the position of medieval and renaissance Christians, he spent a great deal of energy composing apologetic works designed to convert his readers into twentieth-century Christians. The apologetic works share the sharp, insightful writing of the scholarly texts, as is to be expected, but somewhat more unexpectedly, they also share Lewis's universalism and his conviction that the best way to convert the reason is by working on the imagination.

One of Lewis's earliest apologetic texts was *The Abolition of Man*, which was published in 1943. Subtitled *Reflections on Education with Special Reference to the Teaching of English in the Upper Forms of Schools*, one of the most interesting things about *The Abolition of Man* is that it goes out of its way to present itself as *not* being an apologetic text. Indeed, Lewis spends the first several pages of the book discussing a textbook for children before he gets to what he calls the *Tao*,⁹ which is the true heart of the book. The textbook is out of harmony with Lewis's *Tao*, his law of right responses, because it operates under the assumption that responses to the outside world are purely subjective; there are no correct or incorrect responses to the world.

Interestingly, Lewis goes to great pains to demonstrate the universality of the *Tao*, pointing out in fact that it is the conception of the law of proper response to things "in all its forms, Platonic, Aristotelian, Stoic, Christian, and Oriental alike" (31). The connection to Lewis's universalist beliefs should be clear. The *Tao* is a means of recognizing the wisdom and awareness of the will of God that cuts across all cultures and religions. If the *Tao* is a part of the will of God and all religions and ideologies contain some concept of the *Tao*, then all people who recognize and attempt to live by the *Tao* can be said to be trying to follow the will of God.

⁹ This is not precisely the *Tao* of the *Tao te Ching*, though Lewis himself sets up the comparison between his *Tao* and the Chinese *Tao*. Lewis's *Tao* is essentially a universal law of correct responses, while Lewis defines the Chinese *Tao* as "the reality beyond all predicates, the abyss that was there before the Creator Himself" (30). As a point of difference, Lewis would definitely say that his *Tao* did not pre-exist God; rather, it was created by God to provide humanity with a set of right responses.

In explaining the need for the *Tao* in education, Lewis demonstrates not only his universalism, but also the Platonism that underlies much of his belief system:

We were told it all long ago by Plato. As the king governs by his executive, so Reason in man must rule the mere appetites by means of the “spirited element.” The head rules the belly through the chest—the seat, as Alanus tells us, of Magnanimity, of emotions organized by trained habit into stable sentiments. The Chest—Magnanimity—Sentiment—these are the indispensable liason officers between cerebral man and visceral man. It may even be said that it is by this middle element that man is man: for by his intellect he is mere spirit and by his appetite mere animal. The operation of *The Green Book* and its kind is to produce what may be called Men without Chests. (35-6)

The doctrine of a mediator between the spiritual and the animal is, of course, Platonic, though most Platonists would cringe at the phrase “mere spirit.” The Platonists considered spirit superior to man because it was not tainted with its association with the flesh. Lewis’s point about people with a disconnect between the reason and the passions is well taken, however. Quibbling about Platonic diction aside, the Platonists considered humanity to be a rational (intellectual) soul married to a sensual (animal) soul. If the rational soul did not rule over the animal soul, the person in question was thought to be barely human.

The image of the man without a chest is an excellent example of Lewis’s propensity for trying to convert the imagination in hopes that the reason will follow. The image is striking enough—as well as accurate enough in terms of Lewis’s argument—to stick with the reader and get him or her to consider more fully the unnatural situation that educating a child outside of the *Tao* creates. Thus engaged, the reason is more likely to work through the rest of Lewis’s argument. As so often happens not just in his fiction but in his apologetics as well, it all begins with a picture.

After a lengthy discussion of what it would mean to try to come up with a new system of morality outside the *Tao*, Lewis returns to the universalism that underlies his conception of the *Tao*, saying,

This thing which I have for convenience called the *Tao*, and which others may call Natural Law or Traditional Morality or the First Principles of Practical

Reason or the First Platitudes, is not one among a series of possible systems of value. It is the sole source of all value judgements. If it is rejected, all value is rejected. If any value is retained, it is retained. The effort to refute it and raise a new system of value in its place is self-contradictory. There never has been, and never will be, a radically new judgement of value in the history of the world. (55)

Here Lewis reinforces the idea, raised when he first introduced the concept of the *Tao*, that all religious systems of morality are essentially one and the same. Thus pagan morality and Christian morality are the same. Where they teach morality at all, they must teach the same morality, as there is no other to teach. From this point, it is a small leap to say, as Lewis does later, that it is possible to reach God through an honest and concerted attempt to follow the morality of another religion.

Before moving on, it is essential that we discuss Lewis's choice to call Natural Law or Traditional Morality the *Tao*. The association with Chinese religion is, of course, impossible to avoid, and it seems as though Lewis would have it so. The question, then, is *why* Lewis would choose to refer to his principle of morality by a name that had such strong ties to a non-Christian religion. The answer seems to be in truly universalizing the concept of the *Tao*. If the concept appears in Christian terms, Platonic terms, or really any traditional Western terms, the reader is free to object that Lewis is merely being Eurocentric when he claims that the *Tao* is universal. By discussing two non-European cultures—the Chinese and the Indian—first when he introduces the *Tao*, however, Lewis is free to claim that the moral law represented by the *Tao* is truly universal. Calling his moral law the *Tao* in place of the Judeo-Christian “Law” also helps Lewis to demonstrate his universalist beliefs, of course.

In his 1947 *Miracles*, Lewis introduces a wrinkle into his pattern of imagination leading reason to new understanding: imagination can also lead reason astray. In particular, Lewis saw a tendency among modern atheists—a tendency he shared when he was an atheist—to dismiss Christianity as mere mythology because of the tendency of its followers to anthropomorphize God. Finding the mental picture of God and the Son as “two human forms, the one looking rather older than the other” ridiculous as an image of deity, they disbelieve the deity that lies behind the mental picture (98). Lewis tells us, however, that “the mere presence of these mental pictures does not, of itself, tell us

anything about the reasonableness or absurdity of the thoughts they accompany. If absurd images meant absurd thought, then we should all be thinking nonsense all the time. And the Christians themselves make it clear that the images are not to be identified with the thing believed” (98). Christians may form mental pictures of a human-looking God and Son because it is easy, but they actually believe in two parts of a non-corporeal God, both of which have existed through all eternity.

Lewis was indeed very conscious of the power of the argument from a ridiculous mental picture, both for good and for evil. As a tool of evil, Screwtape uses the argument from a ridiculous mental picture in advising Wormwood in how to tempt a man without being suspected: “If any faint suspicion of your existence begins to arise in his mind, suggest to him a picture of something in red tights, and persuade him that since he cannot believe in that (it is an old textbook method of confusing him) he therefore cannot believe in you” (*The Screwtape Letters* 37-38). Lewis also uses the argument repeatedly to close down a logical or rhetorical avenue he views as silly. In discussing the trilemma (the quandary over whether to view Jesus as a liar, a lunatic, or the Lord), Lewis dismisses the option of viewing Jesus as a lunatic, referring to a man who incorrectly believed himself to be God as “on a level with a man who says he is a poached egg” (*Mere Christianity* 56). The idea of a man thinking he is a poached egg is ridiculous enough that it has Lewis’s desired effect: it effectively closes down that avenue of inquiry, whether it is truly refuted or not.

Likewise, *Miracles* also demonstrates Lewis arguing from analogy in an attempt to use the imagination to lead the reason to God according to his classic pattern. Lewis spends much of the book explaining that Christianity is the one major world religion that would be reduced to nothing without its core miracles: the Incarnation and the Resurrection. Lewis considers the Incarnation the Grand Miracle of all history, and he offers an analogy to test whether we can regard the Grand Miracle as true:

Let us suppose we possess parts of a novel or a symphony. Someone now brings us a newly discovered piece of the manuscript and says, “This is the missing part of the work. This is the chapter on which the whole plot of the novel really turned. This is the main theme of the symphony. Our business would be to see whether the new passage, if admitted to the central place which the discoverer had

claimed for it, did actually illuminate all the parts we had already seen and “pull them together.” Nor should we be likely to go very far wrong. The new passage, if spurious, however attractive it looked at the first glance, would become harder and harder to reconcile with the rest of the work the longer we considered the matter. But if it were genuine, then at every fresh hearing of the music or every fresh reading of the book, we should find it settling down, making itself more at home, and eliciting significance from all sorts of details in the whole work which we had hitherto neglected. Even though the new central chapter or main theme contained great difficulties in itself, we should still think it genuine provided that it continually removed difficulties elsewhere. Something like this we must do with the doctrines of the Incarnation. (145)

Lewis’s extended analogy of the discovery of the central passage to a fragmented text or symphony allows him to converse with the imagination, which he clearly seemed to prefer, so that it might drag the reason along into considering how the doctrine of the Incarnation illuminates human history.

Lewis, of course, found that the Incarnation illuminates human history quite nicely. He admits that “We cannot conceive how the Divine Spirit dwelled within the created and human spirit of Jesus,” but that presents rather less of a problem than one might expect because “neither can we conceive how His human spirit, or that of any man, dwells within his natural organism. What we can understand, if the Christian doctrine is true, is that our own composite existence¹⁰ is not the sheer anomaly it might seem to be, but a faint image of the Divine Incarnation itself” (147).

Lewis goes on to state that Christ’s descent from Heaven to bring humanity back up to Heaven mirrors the pattern of death and rebirth that we see throughout the natural world: “It is the pattern of all vegetable life. It must belittle itself into something hard, small and deathlike, it must fall to the ground: thence the new life re-ascends” (148). “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” (149). The

¹⁰ Lewis is reintroducing the Platonic idea of a soul that is pure spirit encased within a body that is pure matter.

natural world clearly reflects the pattern of the Incarnation and makes it seem far less strange.

From here, Lewis moves forward into comparing Christianity to ancient fertility religions, referring to Christ as a “corn-king” (150). Jesus very much fits the pattern of the corn-king—the God who dies and is resurrected—but he came out of the one Middle Eastern culture that had no concept of the corn-king or the “dying God.” Lewis writes of the similarity between Christ, Osiris, Adonis, and the other corn-kings, “He is like the Corn-King because the Corn-King is a portrait of Him. The similarity is not in the least unreal or accidental” (153). Lewis explains that the reason the Hebrews were forbidden to worship the nature-gods of the surrounding nations was so that they would be prepared for the real God of Nature when He came.

Lewis’s discussion of Christ as a fertility God seems to be another universalist statement, though as is frequently his wont, he leaves the universalism implicit. If the fertility gods of the ancient Middle East were portraits of Christ, it stands to reason that by worshipping the fertility gods, the people of the ancient Middle East were really worshipping Christ in their own way. Given Lewis’s later comments about salvation being possible for pagans who “are being led by God’s secret influence to concentrate on those parts of their religion which are in agreement with Christianity, and who thus belong to Christ without knowing it,” it certainly seems possible that Lewis is setting up the argument that these religions, which certainly prefigured Christianity, could lead to the salvation of their followers (*Mere Christianity* 178).

If the universalism in Lewis’s discussion of Christ as a fertility God is veiled, it is much more obvious in his “doctrine of a universal redemption spreading outward from the redemption of Man” (163). Lewis writes of all of nature being redeemed and elevated by the miracles of the Incarnation and the Resurrection—which is, of course, the orthodox formulation of the New Creation that dates back to Paul—but he also speaks of Man, the race, being redeemed, rather than men, the individuals. Lewis’s phrasing clearly points not to the potential redemption of the entire human race, but to its actual redemption. Indeed, not just the human race, but all of God’s creation is to be redeemed through the grand miracles of the Incarnation and the Resurrection.

In writing *Mere Christianity*, his final apologetic masterpiece, Lewis saw his purpose as being “to explain and defend the belief that has been common to nearly all Christians at all times” (6). For this reason, this book tends to toe the line of orthodoxy to a far greater extent than do his fictional works, his letters, or even some of his scholarship. Lewis does his best to avoid complicated theological matters—including his own universalism—on the grounds that “the questions which divide Christians from one another often involve points of high Theology or even of ecclesiastical history which ought never to be treated except by real experts” (*Mere Christianity* 6). Lewis’s explanation of why he does not discuss many of the controversies that divide Christians sounds quite rational until one remembers that he frequently comes down on the unorthodox side of such controversies in his fiction—and even his apologetics—without letting the non-Christian reader know that such a controversy even exists. Clearly, Lewis’s apologetics form an important part of his creation of a tapestry of Christianity as he understood it and as he wished his readers to understand it.

As a professional scholar and literary historian, Lewis was more aware than most of the degree to which a historian or interpreter shapes his or her reader’s understanding of the subject matter at hand, as well as the fact that if no conflict or controversy is mentioned, the reader will naturally assume that none exists. Indeed, both the strength and the weakness of the professional pattern-maker inhere in the fact that the pattern-maker constructs a particular reality through the combination of his or her inclusions and omissions. As such, we must then consider how Lewis deals with such controversies in his apologetics—both when he deals with them and when he chooses to gloss over them—and what the reasoning behind his choices might be. The pattern of inclusions and omissions should reveal much more about Lewis’s mind at work than they do about his purported subject, Christianity.

The most important point of doctrine on which Lewis’s own views were heterodox is, of course, his universalist view of salvation. However, when Lewis chooses to discuss the issues that divide Christians, he chooses to begin with a discussion of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a subject of relatively little importance in his own brand of Christianity. Lewis writes,

Some people draw unwarranted conclusions from the fact that I never say more about the Blessed Virgin Mary than is involved in asserting the Virgin Birth of Christ. But surely my reason for not doing so is obvious? To say more would take me at once into highly controversial regions. And there is no controversy between Christians which needs to be so delicately touched as this. The Roman Catholic beliefs on that subject are held not only with the ordinary fervour that attaches to all sincere religious belief, but (very naturally) with the peculiar and, as it were, chivalrous sensibility that a man feels when the honour of his mother or his beloved is at stake. It is very difficult so to dissent from them that you will not appear to them a cad as well as a heretic. And contrariwise, the opposed Protestant beliefs on this subject call forth feelings which go down to the very roots of all Monotheism whatever. To radical Protestants it seems that the distinction between Creator and creature (however holy) is imperiled: that Polytheism is risen again. Hence it is hard so to dissent from them that you will not appear something worse than a heretic—an idolator, a Pagan. If any topic could be relied on to wreck a book about “mere” Christianity—if any topic makes utterly unprofitable reading for those who do not yet believe that the Virgin’s son is God—surely this is it. (*Mere Christianity* 6-7)

Lewis’s treatment of the subject of the Blessed Virgin Mary is instructive as an example of the way in which he deals with much of the material that has proven so divisive in the history of Christianity. It is clear-eyed, rational, and ends up ducking the question entirely. Moreover, it allows him to slip the question of Christian controversies without mentioning the controversy in which both he and his Christian mentor George Macdonald are embroiled.

Lewis is fair and impartial in explaining not only the Catholic and Protestant positions on the Blessed Virgin Mary, but also the emotional stakes that underlie these theological positions. The Catholic position is wrapped up not merely in reverence for the woman judged fit to mother the son of God, but also in some chivalrous notion of how the ideal woman should be venerated. The Protestant position is wrapped up in a fear that a cult of “Mariolatry” may supplant the worship of the one true God. The

Catholics accuse the Protestants of affording Mary no real importance; the Protestants accuse the Catholics of turning her into an idol.

Interestingly, having set up the divide between Catholic and Protestant understandings of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Lewis walks away from the discussion without deigning to arbitrate. We know, of course, from his previous statement that “I am a very ordinary layman of the Church of England, not especially ‘high,’ nor especially ‘low,’ nor especially anything else” that he comes down on the Protestant side of the discussion, but his decision not to weigh in with an opinion imparts an air of impartiality that is almost certainly undeserved (*Mere Christianity* 6). Although the intent of his book is “to explain and defend the belief that has been common to nearly all Christians at all times” and Lewis’s extensive reading gave him a wide exposure to all sorts of Christian thinking, one must never lose sight of the fact that he writes from a certain theological perspective, from which his ability to escape is dubious.

Lewis further explains some of the difficulties of dealing with controversial points of theology in a book that is meant to be non-denominational, saying,

Oddly enough, you cannot even conclude, from my silence on disputed points, either that I think them important or that I think them unimportant. For this is itself one of the disputed points. One of the things Christians are disagreed about is the importance of their disagreements. When two Christians of different denominations start arguing, it is usually not long before one asks whether such-and-such a point “really matters” and the other replies: “Matter? Why, it’s absolutely essential.” (*Mere Christianity* 7-8)

As with his discussion of the Blessed Virgin Mary, his explanation of his silence on disputed points is both technically correct and a rhetorical ruse. It is indeed correct that Christians of different denominations will disagree as to whether the points they disagree on matter at all, but Lewis also creates the impression in the reader that the issues that divide Christians are ultimately of no importance at all. By creating this impression, Lewis can slip his own heterodox views on salvation by the reader as a difference that may matter to some but is of no ultimate importance.

Of course, the issues on which Lewis’s views are heterodox have historically been considered to be of extreme importance. They cost George Macdonald his parish, they

have caused numerous men to be excommunicated, and they even caused Origen, one of the early Fathers of the Church, to be declared anathema by Justinian I in 553 AD. This series of Church backlashes against universalism may well be the ecclesiastical history to which Lewis refers when discussing aspects of the faith that should only be discussed by experts.

When it comes time to actually discuss salvation, Lewis offers up the possibility of universal salvation while pointing out that according to his belief, not everyone will choose to be saved:

It is just this; that the business of becoming a son of God, of being turned from a created thing into a begotten thing, of passing over from the temporary biological life into timeless “spiritual” life, has been done for us. Humanity is already “saved” in principle. We individuals have to appropriate that salvation. But the really tough work—the bit we could not have done for ourselves—has been done for us. We have not got to try to climb up into spiritual life by our own bootstraps; it has already come down into the human race. If we will only lay ourselves open to the one Man in whom it was fully present, and who, in spite of being God, is also a real man, He will do it in us and for us. (*Mere Christianity* 157-158)

This view of Christian salvation is not nearly so orthodox, or, to use Lewis’s terms, so “merely” Christian as he would make it appear. Numerous Christian thinkers, from Augustine down to Calvin and beyond, have posited that we do not even have the power to appropriate our salvation; that, too, they claim, must come from God. Even Christian thinkers who stress the necessity of making a decision for Christ typically also focus attention on the role of the Holy Spirit in the conversion. Not so Lewis. By placing the decision squarely in the hands of the individual, he makes a much cleaner break with the majority of the Christian tradition than he leads the reader to believe.

Lewis’s following statements are an even more radical departure from the mainstream Christian tradition. Mara Donaldson posits modern fundamentalist Christianity as characterized by an “us or them” mentality, and the Catholic church frequently speaks out on certain beliefs being incompatible with Christian doctrine, but

Lewis's words are inclusive to the point of seeming to admit the possibility of salvation for people we would not typically consider Christians:

Of course, you can express this in all sorts of different ways. 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 has defeated death. They are all true. If any of them do not appeal to you, leave it alone and get on with the formula that does. And, whatever you do, do not start quarrelling with other people because they use a different formula than yours. (*Mere Christianity* 158)

Lewis lists the formulations for the doctrine of salvation in several Christian creeds, but his statement "If any of them do not appeal to you, leave it alone and get on with the formula that does" is curiously open-ended. On first reading, it seems to say, "Pick the formulation from this list that most appeals to you." On closer inspection, however, the phrase "If any of them *do* not appeal to you" seems to open up the possibility that *none* of the orthodox expressions of the relationship between God and man may appeal, but salvation is still possible. After all, any expression of the mechanism by which salvation works is essentially metaphor. It is an imagined construct, infinitely less real than the actual death and resurrection or the actual salvation of the soul. All of these expressions are merely ways of inducing the imagination to lead the reason to Christ. The final sentence serves not just as a warning for Christians of different denominations not to quarrel with one another, but possibly as a warning to all Christians not to assume that someone with a very different understanding of the relations of God and man is not a candidate for salvation.

Furthermore, Lewis constantly reminds his readers that it is very difficult to tell who is and is not a Christian by any definition of the word:

The world does not consist of 100 per cent Christians and 100 per cent non-Christians. There are people (a great many of them) who are slowly ceasing to be Christians but who still call themselves by that name: some of them are clergymen. There are other people who are slowly becoming Christians though they do not yet call themselves so. There are people who do not accept the full

Christian doctrine about Christ but who are so strongly attracted by Him that they are His in a much deeper sense than they themselves understand. There are people in other religions who are being led by God's secret influence to concentrate on those parts of their religion which are in agreement with Christianity, and who thus belong to Christ without knowing it. For example, a Buddhist of good will may be led to concentrate more and more on the Buddhist teaching about mercy and to leave in the background (though he might still say he believed) the Buddhist teaching on certain other points. Many of the good Pagans long before Christ's birth may have been in this position. (*Mere Christianity* 178)

Lewis's suggestion that many people—perhaps even a majority of people—cannot be classified as entirely Christian or entirely non-Christian flies directly in the face of the dualistic rhetoric characteristic of much of the orthodox Christian world. Additionally, his suggestion that it is possible to belong to Christ without consciously accepting Christ is controversial in the extreme. No major catechism accepts the idea of being a Christian without realizing it. It should come as no surprise that this passage was not part of the material Lewis vetted with four clergymen of different creeds before publishing *Mere Christianity*.

Lewis's claim that *Mere Christianity* presents "the belief that has been common to nearly all Christians at all times" is thus more than a little suspect (6). Universalism has not been common Christian belief since the fifth century, when St. Augustine affirmed in *The City of God* that only those who had been called by the grace of God could be saved. Rather, Lewis presents mostly orthodox Christianity, with a subtle attempt made to slip universalism, or at least a modified form thereof, into modern Christian orthodoxy. The subtlety of his attempt is attested to by the fact that Lewis's readership overwhelmingly takes his claim to presenting "mere" Christianity at face value.

Of course, heterodox theology is not the only aspect of *Mere Christianity* to which we should pay some attention. The book is also the richest of Lewis's apologetic works in its attempts to baptize the imagination in hopes of converting the reason. Drawing heavily on the language of war, Lewis paints Christianity as the story of a secret invasion of occupied territory:

Enemy-occupied territory—that is what this world is. Christianity is the story of how the rightful king has landed, you might say landed in disguise, and is calling us all to take part in a great campaign of sabotage. When you go to church you are really listening-in to the secret wireless from our friends: that is why the enemy is so anxious to prevent us from going. He does it by playing on our conceit and laziness and intellectual snobbery. I know someone will ask me, “Do you really mean, at this time of day, to re-introduce our old friend the devil—hoofs and horns and all?” Well, what the time of day has to do with it I do not know. And I am not particular about the hoofs and horns. But in other respects my answer is “Yes, I do.” (51)

Though it was not published in book form until 1952, *Mere Christianity* was given, almost in its entirety, as a series of radio broadcasts during World War II. The language of war—invasion forces, sabotage campaigns, and listening in to radio transmissions from friends from whom we are cut off—is thus immediately related to the concerns of his audience. What strikes the modern reader as over-the-top was merely an acknowledgement of the reality of the British situation—and even more, the French situation, of which Lewis’s British audience would have been well aware—during World War II.

The use of imagination to explain the life-or-death importance of Christianity is typical of Lewis, though it is particularly well done here. The imagination is caught up in what Lewis has to say because of the connection to the war which is on everyone’s mind. The emotional stakes are thus raised, and the reader/listener is prepared to pay attention to the Christian message that follows. Having thus prepared the reader—or listener—imaginatively, Lewis was ready to begin speaking to the reason.

The book, as all of Lewis’s apologetics, is also rife with argument through analogy. Whether the theology he is espousing is orthodox or heterodox, Lewis seems most comfortable when he prepares the reader by providing an illustrative story before launching into his theological discussions. Even when he is doing his best to speak to the reason and argue the case for Christianity, Lewis feels the pull to approach the reason with the imagination already on his side.

Chapter 4: The Christian Fantasist

Given what we have seen of Lewis's use of the reader's imagination to lead his or her reason in both his scholarly and his apologetic works—both of which are forms that traditionally appeal primarily to reason and secondarily if at all to imagination—it should come as no surprise that Lewis spent a great deal of energy in writing apologetic fiction. Interestingly, just as his scholarly and apologetic works go to lengths unexpected in their respective genres to involve the reader's imagination, Lewis's fiction goes to unexpected lengths to involve the reason. Lewis may have believed that imagination should lead reason, but he did not believe in separating the two.

Lewis's fiction is also interesting in that his heterodox theology receives its clearest expression there. Whether this is because Lewis expected a different, more open-minded audience for his fiction than for his apologetics or whether it is entirely due to the distancing effects of fiction, Lewis seems to express most clearly what he actually believed in works such as *The Pilgrim's Regress*, *The Space Trilogy*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *The Great Divorce*, and *Till We Have Faces*. Each of these works is in its own way more Platonic and more directly universalist than Lewis ever allowed his apologetics to be.

Lewis's first work of fiction, *The Pilgrim's Regress*, is in many ways his most rational and least concerned with captivating the imagination. Subtitled *An Allegorical Apology for Christianity Reason and Romanticism*, *The Pilgrim's Regress* is the story of Lewis's own journey from atheist to Christian, consciously modeled after John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Because it is an allegory in the full medieval sense of the word, *The Pilgrim's Regress* is not terribly agreeable to the modern reader. Compared to Lewis's other fiction, the tone frequently comes across as sermonizing, and plot and character are frequently put aside in favor of theological discussion.

The discussion itself is often quite enlightening, however, especially as it sheds light on Lewis's early views of both paganism and the roles of reason and imagination. Indeed, in *The Pilgrim's Regress*, the two subjects are intimately tied together. Lewis writes that the Landlord (God) shows everyone the way to approach Him through pictures and rules. The Pagan people, writes Lewis,

couldn't read, because the Enemy shut up the schools as soon as he took over Pagus. But they had pictures.... Those pictures woke desire.... They had pictures for their eyes instead of roads for their feet, and that is why most of them could do nothing but desire and then, through starved desire, become corrupt in their imaginations, and so awake and despair, and so desire again.... That is the definition of a Pagan—a man so travelling that if all goes well he arrives at Mother Kirk's chair and is carried over the gorge. I saw it happen myself. But we define a thing by its perfection. The trouble about Pagus is that the perfect, and in that sense typical, Pagan, is so uncommon there.... These pictures—this ignorance of writing—this endless desire which so easily confuses itself with other desires and, at best, remains pure only by knowing what it does *not* want—you see that it is a starting point from which *one* road leads home and a thousand roads lead into the wilderness? (148-9)

The first thing to notice here is that Lewis again reaffirms his conviction that pagans can be saved through their own religions if they honestly desire salvation. It is difficult, to be sure, but it is difficult because one must pare away the things in pagan religion which are not God. The second point to notice in the description of the pagans is what happens when a people is guided only by imagination. The pictures, of course, are mental images that appeal to the imagination, sparking desire. With no reason to guide it, though, the odds of getting anywhere with a baptized imagination alone are one in a thousand. Clearly, while it is better for the imagination only to be baptized than for no part of the individual to be baptized, it is far better for the whole individual to be baptized.

Reason without imagination suffers a fate similar to the one suffered by imagination without reason:

The Shepherds could read: that is the thing to remember about them. And because they could read, they had from the Landlord, not pictures but Rules.... Now the Shepherds, because they were under the Landlord, were made to begin at the right end. Their feet were set on a road: and as the Landlord's Son once said, if the feet have been put right the hands and the head will come right sooner or later.... They *were* narrow. The thing they had charge of was narrow. It was the Road. They found it. They sign-posted it. They kept it clear and repaired it. But

you must not think I am setting them up against the Pagans. The truth is that a Shepherd is only half a man, and a Pagan is only half a man, so that neither people was well without the other, nor could either be healed until the Landlord's Son came into the country. (149)

The Landlord's Son is, of course, Jesus, and the Shepherds are the Jews, but what is interesting is Lewis's assertion that the Pagans are somehow necessary to complete the Jews and that Paganism is not the evil it has been made out to be by 2000 years of Christian tradition and 4000 years of Jewish tradition before it.

In the *Space Trilogy*—*Out of the Silent Planet*, *Perelandra*, and *That Hideous Strength*—Lewis began working to convert the intellect through the imagination in more modern fictional forms. Specifically, Lewis turns to science fiction to present his views to a fresh audience. Amazingly, the theology in *Out of the Silent Planet* went largely unnoticed when the book was published. Lewis wrote in a letter “to a lady” that

You will be both grieved and amused to hear that out of about 60 reviews only 2 showed any knowledge that my idea of the fall of the Bent One was anything but an invention of my own. But if there only was someone with a richer talent and more leisure I think that this great ignorance might be a help to the evangelisation of England; any amount of theology can now be smuggled into people's minds under cover of romance without their knowing it. (*Letters* 167)

The theology of the book, for the record, is not much disguised at all. It directly critiques the idea of evolutionary manifest destiny and the anthropological assumption that because religious practice can be documented and explained, there is nothing to religion. Finally, it introduces the idea of Earth as enemy territory, ruled by the Bent One who rebelled against Maleldil. This last description should sound familiar, of course, to anyone who has read *Mere Christianity*.

The science critiqued in *Out of the Silent Planet*—that of evolutionary manifest destiny—is a clear example of reason, presented as rules, gone awry without properly-trained imagination to guide it. A single rule is set up as the chief governing principle, to the exclusion of all others:

I see now how the lord of the silent world has bent you. There are laws that all *hnau* know, of pity and straight dealing and shame and the like, and one of these

is love of kindred. He has taught you to break all of them except this one, which is not one of the greatest laws; this little one he has bent till it becomes folly and has set it up, thus bent, to be a little, blind Oyarsa in your brain. And now you can do nothing but obey it, though if we ask you why it is a law you can give no other reason for it than for all the other and greater laws which it drives you to disobey. (150)

Again, Lewis presents the view that baptized imagination must drive reason if reason is not to become something perverse.

Out of the Silent Planet is also of interest with regard to Lewis's scholarship, as the universe in which it takes place is quite clearly based upon the medieval, Platonic model. Lewis adopts the Copernican revolution, of course, in that the Earth revolves around the sun in its rightful orbit, but space is much more the warm, well-lit affair of the middle ages than the cold, empty vacuum theorized by modern science. Each world is viewed as a hole in space, rather than matter punctuating a vacuum, and there is an Oyarsa serving as the governing intelligence of each world. Lewis's space novels can thus be seen as attempting to do the work of *The Discarded Image* in imparting to the reader a feeling of what the medieval viewer felt in looking up at the stars. As the medieval viewer saw the stars as *Heaven*, not merely *space*, the importance of a modern reader seeing the stars through medieval eyes cannot be overstated. Lewis here uses the medieval model of the universe to inculcate a desire for Heaven—a desire to be bathed in the warm light of God—in the reader.

Where *Out of the Silent Planet* smuggled in its theology and concerned itself primarily with preaching against evolutionary manifest destiny, theology in *Perelandra* “is not smuggled in but carried in through the front door” (Downing 46). *Perelandra* is concerned with the Fall, essentially retelling the story of the temptation of Eve with a happy ending. Weston, the scientist who had kidnapped Ransom—the philologist who serves as the *Space Trilogy's* hero—plays the part of Satan in the Edenic world of *Perelandra*, while Ransom is there to stop him.

Weston has been possessed by a devil who tempts *Perelandra's* Eve—the Green Lady—to disobey Maleldil's command and sleep on the fixed, rather than the floating islands. Weston—or really the Un-man inhabiting him—points out that there is no real

reason not to sleep on the fixed land, aside from the fact that Maleldil said not to do so. Indeed, as we discover after Ransom battles and kills the Un-man to preserve the Green Lady's unfallen state, Maleldil's sole reason for prohibiting the Green Lady from sleeping on the fixed land was to afford her the opportunity to obey Him for the pure sake of obedience and thus come into her own as queen of Perelandra. With Ransom's help, she succeeds where Eve failed.

Lewis's method of using the imagination to guide the reason is clear here. He breathes new life into the biblical story of Adam and Eve, placing the same moral dilemma on a different planet with a different cast of three-dimensional characters. Having thus assured that his audience will react viscerally to the story of Adam and Eve as they perhaps never have before, he weaves in a theological meditation on the nature of obedience and the idea that true freedom exists only in complete obedience to God.

The final volume of the *Space Trilogy*, *That Hideous Strength* concerns itself with reintroducing the war and invasion imagery that Lewis first introduced in *Out of the Silent Planet* and *Mere Christianity*. Its main purpose is to excite the imagination with the reality of spiritual warfare—which spills into physical warfare here as it did in *Perelandra*—in the hopes that the reader will choose sides in the war Lewis already saw being fought for the soul of the world. Unlike the first two novels in the *Space Trilogy*, *That Hideous Strength* takes place entirely on Earth and features Ransom only as a peripheral character. Its primary characters are Mark and Jane Studdock, “a pair of anchorless modern intellectuals in an unfulfilling marriage, who undergo diametrically opposite pilgrimages as the story unfolds” (Downing 53).

Mark begins working for the National Institute of Coordinated Experiments (N.I.C.E.—an acronym which will prove deeply ironic), only to discover that the institute's ultimate goal is nothing less than to turn men into gods. In describing the N.I.C.E., Lewis places it in terms that make it clear that the problem lies with unbaptized reason raised up to a guiding principle:

The physical sciences, good and innocent in themselves, had... begun to be warped, had begun to be manoeuvred in a certain direction. Despair of objective truth had been increasingly insinuated into the scientists; indifference to it, and a concentration upon mere power, had been the result.... Dreams of the far future

destiny of man were dragging up from its shallow and unquiet grave the old dream of Man as God. (203)

As happens throughout Lewis, when the reason has nothing to submit to, it attempts to raise itself up to the place of God, always with disastrous consequences.

Mark does possess some natural instincts that serve to keep his reason from following in the same direction as the directors of the N.I.C.E. Indeed, placed in the N.I.C.E.'s "Objective room," Mark's instincts seem to wake the baptized imagination he needs to preserve his sanity:

That idea of the Straight or the Normal which had occurred to him during his first visit to this room, grew stronger and more solid in his mind till it had become a kind of mountain. He had never before known what an Idea meant: he had always thought till now that they were things inside one's own head. But now, when his head was continually attacked and often completely filled up with the clinging corruption of the training, this Idea towered up above him—something which obviously existed quite independently of himself. (310)

Mark's Idea of the Straight or the Normal is, of course, an Idea in the Platonic sense. It is a principle that underlies the actual physical objects in the world and is thus something more real than reality. The Idea also saves him from falling in with the inner circle of the N.I.C.E., which saves his life at the end of the novel. The necessary conclusion, therefore, is that Lewis saw in Platonism a solution to the problems of Godless materialism facing the modern world.

Jane's pilgrimage is less dramatic and less fraught with danger because she allied herself with the side of God from the beginning. While Mark is intellectually tortured as a prelude to being fit to serve the N.I.C.E., Jane joins Ransom's household and is welcomed in with open arms and a spirit of love. Her pilgrimage is much more one of self-discovery, culminating with the realization that "It now appeared that almost anything might be true.... Maleldil might be, quite simply and crudely, God" (234).

The Chronicles of Narnia, perhaps the best known of all Lewis's works, are a series of fairy tales that present Christianity through allegory. In the books, children from England are transported to the fantastic country of Narnia, where they help Aslan (the lion who serves as Narnia's Christ-figure) to guide things according to his will. In an

essay titled “Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What’s to Be Said,” Lewis described the conscious thought process behind the Narnia books, saying,

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. (*Of Other Worlds* 37).

Lewis’s success in capturing the feelings one is supposed to have about Christ and Christianity is a point that is by and large beyond question. *The Chronicles of Narnia* are perhaps the crowning achievement in Lewis’s attempts to baptize the imagination of his readers in the hopes that the reason would follow. More than fifty years after the publication of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, these books are still read by children and adults alike for the stories, and even those who would not read the gospels are still exposed to the Christian message.

Much-loved as the Narnia books are, their theology is frequently less orthodox than readers might expect. Nowhere is this more clear than at the end of *The Last Battle*, Lewis’s apocalyptic novel about the end of the Narnian world. In the novel, Narnia has been torn apart, both from within as a false Aslan (an antichrist figure) gathers followers to himself, and from without as the Calormenes attack under the banner of their devil-god, Tash. Everyone has died and the world of Narnia has been destroyed when the children run across Emeth, a Calormene youth in Heaven. As Emeth tells the tale of how he came to be there, the universalism of Lewis’s view of salvation comes to the fore.

Emeth begins by saying, “For always since I was a boy I have served Tash and my great desire was to know more of him, if it might be, to look upon his face. But the name of Aslan was hateful to me” (202). Remembering that Tash is the devil-god of the Narnia books while Aslan is the Christ-figure, we can be expected to feel some surprise

at seeing someone who admitted to serving Tash and hating Aslan in Heaven. This scene is deliberately set up to produce a sense of shock approximating what a Christian might feel on meeting a Satanist in Heaven.

At the same time, however, close examination of Emeth's language begins to point to the reason he is there in Heaven. He describes his life as one of service to Tash and his two great desires as being "to know more of him" and "to look upon his face." There is a clear parallel to the Christian ideal of dedicating one's life to knowing, loving, and serving God. The word choice seems deliberate, intended to evoke "know, love, serve" in the reader's ear. The deliberately Christian phrasing of Emeth's dedication to Tash also echoes Lewis's statement in *Mere Christianity* that "There are people in other religions who are being led by God's secret influence to concentrate on those parts of their religion which are in agreement with Christianity, and who thus belong to Christ without knowing it" (178). Emeth in this story is definitely one of these people.

Continuing his story, Emeth describes how he infiltrated Narnia, only to find that the Calormene forces were acting at the behest of a talking monkey who was passing himself off as a priest of "Tashlan—for so they mixed the two words to pretend that they were all one" (203). Told that he could meet Tashlan by entering a certain hovel, Emeth responded with a properly Christian mixture of fear and desire:

But when the Cat had followed in and had come out again in a madness of terror, then I said to myself, Surely the true Tash, whom they called on without knowledge or belief, has now come among us, and will avenge himself. And though my heart was turned into water inside me because of the greatness and terror of Tash, yet my desire was stronger than my fear, and I put force upon my knees to stay them from trembling, and on my teeth that they should not chatter, and resolved to look upon the face of Tash, though he should slay me. (203)

Again, Emeth echoes thoughts Lewis lays out in *Mere Christianity* on the mixture of fear and desire that God inspires in Christians: "We cannot do without it, and we cannot do with it. God is the only comfort. He is also the supreme terror: the thing we most need and the thing we most want to hide from" (38). Lewis's theory of salvation, presented over and over again, is that those who conquer their fear, as Emeth does, and face God

will achieve salvation; those who give in to their fear and hide from God will never achieve salvation.

Finally, having stepped through the door and entered Heaven, Emeth encounters Aslan and realizes he has spent his life serving the wrong God. Aslan comforts him, however, in a conversation that leaves no doubt whatsoever as to the universalism of Lewis's view of salvation:

Then I fell at his feet and thought, Surely this is the hour of death, for the Lion (who is worthy of all honor) will know that I have served Tash all my days and not him. Nevertheless, it is better to see the Lion and die than to be Tisroc [emperor] of the world and live and not to have seen him. But the Glorious One bent down his golden head and touched my forehead with his tongue and said, Son, thou art welcome. But I said, Alas, Lord, I am no son of thine but the servant of Tash. He answered, Child, all the service thou hast done to Tash, I account as service done to me. Then by reasons of my great desire for wisdom and understanding, I overcame my fear and questioned the Glorious One and said, Lord, is it then true, as the Ape said, that thou and Tash are one? The Lion growled so that the earth shook (but his wrath was not against me) and said, It is false. Not because he and I are one, but because we are opposites, I take to me the services which thou hast done to him. For I and he are of such different kinds that no service which is vile can be done to me, and none which is not vile can be done to him. Therefore if any man swear by Tash and keep his oath for the oath's sake, it is by me that he has truly sworn, though he know it not, and it is I who reward him. And if any man do a cruelty in my name, then, though he says the name Aslan, it is Tash whom he serves and by Tash his deed is accepted. Dost thou understand, child? I said, Lord, thou knowest how much I understand. But I said also (for the truth constrained me), Yet I have been seeking Tash all my days. Beloved, said the Glorious One, unless thy desire had been for me thou wouldst not have sought so long and so truly. For all find what they truly seek. (204-6)

If Lewis is frequently subtle in his universalist statements, he is not so here. The notion that any good deed is done to the glory of God is not repeated anywhere in orthodox Christian creeds; it is entirely Lewis. Indeed, Lewis's statements go beyond the ones that

cost George MacDonald his parish on grounds of heresy. MacDonald speculated on a period of probation in the afterlife for pagans; Lewis here asserts that if the pagans are making an honest and concerted effort to live a virtuous life for virtue's sake, they will be accepted into Heaven.

While Emeth's appearance in Heaven in *The Last Battle* lays out a great deal of Lewis's universalist theology, his vision of salvation receives far more complete treatment in *The Great Divorce*. Modeled after Dante's *Divine Comedy* and written in response to Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, *The Great Divorce* tells the story of a bus trip to Heaven by a group of souls from Hell. Once in Heaven, the souls have the choice of remaining there or returning to Hell. Interestingly enough, most choose to return to Hell. It is significant to note that the souls who remain in Heaven remain there not because they choose to accept Christ, but because they choose to relinquish their sins; likewise, the souls who return to Hell return there not because they reject Christ but because they choose to retain their sins. Ultimately, this seems to be the clearest statement of Lewis's view of salvation: Heaven is open to everyone, but it is essential that one be the type of person who would choose Heaven over Hell.

Lewis begins *The Great Divorce* with a brief tour of Hell, so that we might see the type of place it is and the type of soul that chooses to remain there. In Lewis's vision, Hell is an unpleasant place, though surprisingly free of fire, brimstone, demons, or any of the other images we associate with Hell:

I seemed to be standing in a bus queue by the side of a long, mean street. Evening was just closing in and it was raining. I had been wandering for hours in similar mean streets, always in the rain and always in evening twilight. Time seemed to have paused on that dismal moment when only a few shops have lit up and it is not yet dark enough for their windows to look cheering. And just as the evening never advanced to night, so my walking had never brought me to the better parts of the town. However far I went I found only dingy lodging houses, small tobacconists, hoardings from which posters hung in rags, windowless warehouses, goods stations without trains, and bookshops of the sort that sell *The Works of Aristotle*. I never met anyone. But for the crowd at the bus stop, the whole town

seemed to be empty. I think that was why I attached myself to the bus queue.
(13)

This is an odd enough description of Hell that we have difficulty at first recognizing it as such. We can see that the place is unpleasant—it is deserted, and it resembles an endless bad side of town. We can also see that something supernatural is going on—time seems to have paused here for hours. Beyond that, however, there is no clear indication that we are beginning the story in Hell.

Once the narrator joins the queue, we begin to get a clearer picture of the type of soul that chooses this dismal city over Heaven. The line is impossibly long when the narrator arrives, but people begin to leave it as things come up. A fighting couple storms away, preferring pride over the chance to ride up to Heaven. Another man complains about the company with whom he is standing in line and gets knocked down for his trouble. He, too, limps away rather than swallow his pride and rejoin the queue. A young couple then leaves the line, too wrapped up in one another to be bothered to wait for the bus. Finally, a woman gives up her place in the line for money. None of these people choose the dismal city over Heaven, *per se*; they simply have something they prefer over Heaven. This is to be the recurrent pattern of damnation in Lewis.

On the bus on the way to Heaven, the narrator converses with some of his fellow travelers, who fill him in on the nature of Hell. When the narrator asks a bulbous-nosed soul in a bowler hat why Hell seems so empty, the soul replies,

The trouble is that [the people in Hell are] so quarrelsome. As soon as anyone arrives he settles in some street. Before he's been there twenty-four hours he quarrels with his neighbour. Before the week is over he's quarrelled so badly that he decides to move. Very like he finds the next street empty because all the people there have quarrelled with *their* neighbours—and moved. So he settles in. If by any chance the street is full, he goes further. But even if he stays, it makes no odds. He's sure to have another quarrel pretty soon and then he'll move on again. Finally he'll move right out to the edge of town and build a new house. You see, it's easy here. You've only got to *think* a house and there it is. That's how the town keeps on growing. (20)

The quarrels that force the eternal expansion and desolation of Hell are, of course, the result of the self-centeredness characteristic of the place. Every soul wants nothing more than to be left alone to its sin, and so they distance themselves from one another so as not to be interfered with. The quarrels and relocations are also significant because each quarrel and relocation takes the soul farther from the bus stop, the one means they have of reaching Heaven.

It is interesting that, far from being tortured in Hell, the souls even have the ability to think themselves houses. This is in line with Lewis's view of Hell not so much as a place of punishment as a place where souls go to do whatever they want to do without any interference from God. In a sense, Lewis sees the existence of Hell as a mercy, since the souls who arrive there would find themselves more tortured by the presence of God than by His absence. In keeping with the idea that Hell is a creation of divine mercy, the people there can have whatever they want just by thinking about it, although the soul the narrator notes that the goods are "not very good quality, of course" (23).

The goods are of low quality because there is nothing of the divine in them—an idea Lewis borrowed from the Platonists and which informs much of his physical descriptions of Heaven—but the soul to whom the narrator is talking has a plan to rectify the situation. He has no intention of remaining in Heaven, but he intends to bring some of the heavenly commodities back to Hell so that he can jump-start an economy and a civilization:

I'm not going on this trip for my health. As far as that goes I don't think it would suit me up there. But if I can come back with some *real* commodities—anything at all that you could really bite or drink or sit on—why, at once you'd get a demand down in our town. I'd have something to sell. You'd soon get people coming to live near—centralisation. Two fully-inhabited streets would accommodate the people that are now spread over a million square miles of empty streets. I'd make a nice little profit and be a public benefactor as well. (23)

The capitalist ghost illustrates one of the fundamental problems in Hell: the souls there continue to cling to things that mattered on earth, long after they have lost any significance. He wants to bring real things back from Heaven, not so that he can enjoy

them but so that he can sell them, turning a profit in a place where money is unnecessary because anything one wants can be had simply by thinking about it. This conversation can indeed stand as a metaphor for all of Hell; the entire place is characterized by choosing hollow pleasures that no longer matter over the full-fledged pleasures of God and Heaven.

On arriving in Heaven, the narrator finds it both familiar and utterly unlike anything he has ever experienced before:

I got out. The light and coolness that drenched me were like those of summer morning, early morning a minute or two before the sunrise, only that there was a certain difference. I had the sense of being in a larger space, perhaps even a larger *sort* of space, than I had ever known before: as if the sky were further off and the extent of the green plain wider than they could be on this little ball of earth. I had got “out” in some sense which make the Solar System itself seem an indoor affair. It gave me a feeling of freedom, but also of exposure, possibly of danger, which continued to accompany me through all that followed. (27-8)

The feeling of a cool summer morning is as close as one could expect to earthly Heaven, but Lewis is quite careful to let us know that this is not earth. Indeed, for Lewis, the reason we enjoy a cool summer morning so much is because it is a reminder of Heaven, a small stab of Joy.

The feeling of the vastness of Heaven is another nod to Lewis’s Platonic idea of Heaven as the ultimate reality, with Earth and Hell being progressively less real. Other details reinforce the notion that Heaven is more real than Earth or Hell: the shades are transparent in the light of Heaven, and the Heavenly grass does not bend under their feet. In fact, walking on the grass is painful because it is much more solid than their feet.

The feelings of exposure and danger are the most interesting idea introduced in Lewis’s initial description of Heaven. One would think, after all, that Heaven would be a place of safety and comfort, where ideas like danger or physical pain would be completely foreign. It will become clear, of course, that for the souls who choose to remain in Heaven, the danger, sense of exposure, and physical pain of walking on the grass disappear, but the narrator feels them because he comes to Heaven with an Earth-bound mindset that has more in common with Hell than with Heaven. Until he and the

other ghosts learn to surrender to Heaven, they will find it an oppressive place. This is the catch, as it were in Lewis's view of salvation. Salvation is open and available to anyone, but to be saved, a person must desire God more than he or she desires anything else. Until he or she does, even Heaven will seem oppressive.

Desiring God more than anything else proves very difficult to do, however. Indeed, the narrator sees soul after soul choose to get back on the bus to Hell rather than surrender to Heaven. The first that gets back on the bus does so because of a sense of honor. He insists on his rights, and on getting no more and no less than he deserves. Unfortunately—and Christianity is very clear on this point—Hell is no more and no less than any human being deserves. He is unwilling to relinquish his self-sufficiency, and thus chooses to return to Hell on his own terms.

Even those we would normally consider to be Christians have no guarantee of salvation. After the soul who demands his rights has gotten on the bus, the narrator runs across the ghost of an Anglican bishop in conversation with a saved soul who he had known in life. The bishop has clearly lost his faith, though his vocabulary is still ecclesiastical. Indeed, he has ceased even to believe in Heaven and Hell, despite where he has been and where he is currently standing: "Oh, in a spiritual sense, to be sure. I still believe in them in that way. I am still, my dear boy, looking for the Kingdom. But nothing superstitious or mythological..." (39). The saved soul to whom the bishop is talking is incredulous and asks the bishop where he believes he has been. The bishop replies, "Ah, I see. You mean that the grey town with its continual hope of morning (we must all live by hope, must we not?), with its field for indefinite progress, is, in a sense, Heaven, if only we have eyes to see it? That is a beautiful idea" (39).

The ghost of the bishop seems to represent how Lewis saw much of the Anglican church: as having lost their faith but still proclaiming their Christianity. Lewis uses the bishop to demonstrate how ridiculous this defanged Christianity—what he frequently referred to as "Christianity and water"—really is. Given the description of Hell and its inhabitants, it is ludicrous to believe that anyone could for a moment consider the possibility that it is Heaven, but the bishop manages to delude himself just so. Still, he sees religion as a matter of hope and social agendas, not in the sense of actual relationships to God that Lewis advocates. From the bishop's perspective, the idea that

any place can resemble Heaven with the proper outlook does not seem nearly so ridiculous.

The saved soul still feels the necessity of pointing out the bishop's errors and attempting to steer him toward salvation, of course, so he points out that the "grey town" is in fact Hell. The bishop is indignant, not at the fact that he has been in Hell, but because he feels that the saved soul has been dealing with the matter without the reverence he feels it deserves. Again, we see here the pattern of the damned souls placing too much importance on the wrong things while ignoring the things that matter.

The saved soul laughs off the bishop's indignation, saying "Discuss Hell *reverently*? I meant what I said. You have been in Hell: though if you don't go back you may call it Purgatory" (40). This is one of the most important lines in the novel in terms of Lewis's theology, especially when one remembers that Lewis's Anglican faith officially teaches no concept of Purgatory. Even more interesting, this is not the Catholic conception of Purgatory, either. According to Catholic doctrine, Purgatory is a place where "the souls of the just who die with the stains of sins are cleansed by expiation before they are admitted to heaven. They can be helped, however, by the intercession of the faithful on earth" (Hardon 273-4).

According to the Catholic view of the afterlife, Hell and Purgatory are distinct; there is no crossover. Purgatory is reserved for the souls of the just, making it a sort of ante-Heaven, while the unjust are condemned to Hell, with no hope of entry into Purgatory or Heaven. Lewis's view of Hell seeming to be Purgatory for the redeemed is extremely unorthodox, as his clear implication that any soul in Hell desiring entry to Heaven can journey there and then treat Hell as Purgatory in retrospect.

While Lewis's view of Purgatory differs greatly from the Catholic view, it holds a great deal more in common with the views of Origen, an early father of the Catholic Church who was declared anathema by Justinian I in 553. Origen, like many of the early fathers, was convinced that all souls had the opportunity to be saved. Indeed, Origen believed that all souls, including that of Satan, *would* eventually be saved. Lewis does not go so far, believing that all souls have the opportunity to be saved, but that many souls choose not to be. Lewis and Origen are in agreement over the nature of Purgatory, however, both believing that

every soul was in need of purification because every soul had been tainted by its union with the flesh. All souls must therefore endure the trial by fire mentioned in 1 Corinthians 3:10-15, which “awaits us all at the end of life.” The length of purgation depended on the soiled condition of the soul. Those souls that were merely tainted by the flesh could be purified in an instant, whereas those that had been truly contaminated by sin would require a longer period of cleansing. (Clayton 517)

The idea of Purgatory as a spiritual necessity for anyone who would be saved is at the core of Lewis’s view of salvation. In fact, Lewis’s universalism in some senses can be said to spring from his view of Purgatory as a spiritual necessity. Because he believed all religions to be fundamentally similar and all human beings to be estranged from God through sin, he believed that all human beings, regardless of their religion could find God if they truly sought Him, but only provided that they were cleansed of their sin first.

Told that he has been in Hell/Purgatory for his sins, the bishop expresses uncertainty as to what sins he is guilty of. Told that he went to Hell for his apostasy, the bishop is indignant: “This is worse than I expected. Do you really think people are penalised for their honest opinions? Even assuming, for the sake of argument, that those opinions were mistaken” (40). The saved soul, however questions the honesty of the bishop’s opinions:

I know we used to talk that way. I did it too until the end of my life when I became what you call narrow. It all turns on honest opinions.... Let us be frank. Our opinions were not honestly come by. We simply found ourselves in contact with a certain current of ideas and plunged into it because it seemed modern and successful. At College, you know, we just started automatically writing the kind of essays that got good marks and saying the kind of things that won applause. When, in our whole lives, did we honestly face, in solitude, the one question on which all turned: whether after all the Supernatural might not in fact occur? When did we put up one moment’s real resistance to the loss of our faith?... You know that you and I were playing with loaded dice. We didn’t *want* the other to be true. We were afraid of crude Salvationism, afraid of a breach with the spirit

of the age, afraid of ridicule, afraid (above all) of real spiritual fears and hopes.
(40-41)

Essentially, says the saved soul, the bishop was damned and he himself was nearly so before he became “narrow” because they were thoroughgoing modernists. They lost their faith not for reasons of intellect but for reasons of fashion. Belief in God and Heaven were old-fashioned, so they rejected them. For Lewis, modernism was the most serious spiritual danger of the twentieth century because it replaced Christianity with a spiritualized atheism that led nowhere. Unlike paganism, which could lead to God through a path of virtue, or atheism, which was at least intellectually honest and could be countered through logical refutation, Lewis saw modernism as robbing people of their souls without giving anything back.

To nail the point home, Lewis has the bishop tell the saved soul how real and important his religion is to him. The saved soul responds, “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” (45). On one level, the saved soul’s response is an attack on the pseudo-religion Lewis saw within modernism. Spiritualized atheism has little indeed to do with Christ. On another level, however, this seems to be yet another universalist statement. It says that religion and doctrine do not matter so much as searching for God. While salvation is only attainable through Christ in Lewis’s vision, the statement “we know nothing of religion here,” coupled with the instances we see of non-Christians being saved in his fiction, make the implication quite clear that Christ can save a person who truly wants to be saved, regardless of his or her religion.

Some time after the bishop has re-boarded the bus, the narrator runs across George MacDonald, who will proceed to serve as his guide through Heaven. MacDonald was, of course, the man Lewis credited with baptizing his imagination, as well as a former minister who had lost his parish amidst charges of heresy stemming from his universalism. By placing MacDonald in Heaven at all, Lewis is, of course, making a statement about his views on universalism. Had Lewis agreed with the church authorities, we would hardly see MacDonald in Heaven. MacDonald is, in fact, the only recognizable historical figure we actually meet anywhere in *The Great Divorce*,

suggesting that a major reason for writing the novel may well have been to rehabilitate MacDonald's reputation among Christian readers.

Once MacDonald has entered the novel, Lewis uses him to explain some of the stickier theological points in *The Great Divorce*. When the narrator asks how it is that souls can leave Hell and enter Heaven, since Christianity traditionally holds God's judgment to be final, MacDonald responds in terms that seem calculated to confuse more than they reveal:

It depends on the way ye're using the words. If they leave that grey town behind it will not have been Hell. To any that leaves it, it is Purgatory. And perhaps ye had better not call this country Heaven. Not *Deep Heaven*, ye understand.... Ye can call it the Valley of the Shadow of Life. And yet to those who stay here it will have been Heaven from the first. And ye can call those sad streets in the town yonder the Valley of the Shadow of Death: but to those who remain there it will have been Hell even from the beginning. (66-7)

Again, the universalism of MacDonald's response is evident. The souls who choose to leave Hell and come to Heaven can be said never to have been truly in Hell, while the souls who return to Hell can be said never truly to have been in Heaven. Moreover, it is not God's will but human will that determines whether a soul is saved. All souls have the opportunity of turning Hell into Purgatory, but as we see, very few actually avail themselves of that opportunity.

The narrator then goes on to press MacDonald on the unorthodoxy of the system of self-determined salvation, saying, "But there is a real choice after death? My Roman Catholic friends would be surprised, for to them souls in Purgatory are already saved. And my Protestant friends would like it no better, for they'd say that the tree lies as it falls" (69). Rather than answer the question, MacDonald dodges it without making any attempt whatsoever to camouflage the fact that he is doing so:

They're both right, maybe. Do not fash yourself with such questions. Ye cannot fully understand the relations of choice and Time till you are beyond both. And ye were not brought here to study such curiosities. What concerns you is the nature of the choice itself: and that ye can watch them making. (69)

It is interesting that Lewis would raise the obvious objections to his conception of Heaven and then promptly dismiss them as though they were of no importance whatsoever without actually addressing them first. Indeed, the narrator chooses not to press the point, immediately changing the subject to ask how it is possible to choose Hell over Heaven. The point is thus glossed over without being satisfactorily answered. Coming back to a point raised in *Mere Christianity*, Lewis has essentially defined the objections out of existence by asserting that they are of no importance and will be resolved after death. Unfortunately, while this technique is quite effective at extricating oneself from a rhetorically sticky position, it is much less so as an apologetic for a particular heterodox position.

While steering away from the sticky issue of whether or not there is a real choice after death, MacDonald does express the clearest, simplest formulation of salvation to be found anywhere in Lewis:

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. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek find. To those who knock it is opened. (72)

The serious desire for joy is, of course, not restricted in any way to Christians. Indeed, Lewis himself first learned to desire joy through pagan mythologies and only came to desire Christ much later. Heaven itself, however, *is* restricted to those who desire joy more than they desire anything else. Placing anything above the joy of knowing God means choosing Hell.

At the end of his sojourn in Heaven, the narrator asks MacDonald one final time about universalism, pointing out that in MacDonald's books, there is a clear suggestion that all souls will be saved, but MacDonald once again dodges the question:

Ye can know nothing of the end of all things, or nothing expressible in those terms. It may be, as the Lord said to the Lady Julian, that all will be well, and all will be well, and all manner of things will be well. But it's ill talking of such questions.... Because all answers deceive. If ye put the question from within Time and are talking about possibilities, the answer is certain. The choice of

ways is before you. Neither is closed. Any man may choose eternal death. Those who choose it will have it. But if ye are trying to leap on into eternity, if ye are trying to see the final state of all things as it *will* be (for so ye must speak) when there are no more possibilities left but only the Real, then ye ask what cannot be answered to mortal ears.... For every attempt to see the shape of eternity except through the lens of Time destroys your knowledge of Freedom. Witness the doctrine of Predestination which shows (truly enough) that eternal reality is not waiting for a future in which to be real; but at the price of removing Freedom which is the deeper truth of the two. And wouldn't Universalism do the same? Ye *cannot* know eternal reality by a definition. Time itself, and all acts and events that fill Time are the definition, and it must be lived. (121-2)

Here it should be noted that MacDonald does not say that universalism is an error; rather, he says that we should pay more attention to what happens within time than at the end of time. Lewis walks a delicate tightrope here, managing to address the subject of universalism without condemning his universalist mentor or offending his more orthodox readership. Granted, as so often happens in Lewis, he resolves the sticky situation through a dodge; MacDonald's answer boils down to "Universalism may or may not be correct, but don't worry about it."

With such a heterodox doctrine as universalism, however, we can read the refusal to condemn as tacit acceptance—particularly since MacDonald has no difficulty whatsoever in condemning beliefs he finds heretical. Moreover, only when the subject of universalism is raised explicitly is there any hint that universalism and true choice after death are anything other than purely orthodox Christianity. All in all, Lewis's policy seems to be one of stealth universalism, writing largely orthodox texts that slip their universalism in past the reader's defenses. Both *The Last Battle* and *The Great Divorce* are more orthodox than heterodox, but both become far more interesting where they break from the mass of the mainstream tradition.

Lewis's marriage of imagination and reason and his universalism both reach their ultimate expression in his final novel, *Till We Have Faces*. This novel, subtitled *A Myth Retold*, is the retelling of the myth of Cupid and Psyche from the perspective of Orual, Psyche's ugly, jealous sister. Through her jealousy and selfishness, Orual is responsible

for Psyche's alienation from Cupid and for her misery. She becomes a powerful queen after Psyche is sent out into exile and wins fame for her military prowess and statecraft, but she is still miserable. Traveling through the countryside, she comes across a temple dedicated to the new goddess Istra, who, Orual discovers, is her sister Psyche. After hearing a version of the story of Istra in which she comes across as the villain, Orual declares her intention to write her complaint against the gods.

Shortly afterward, Orual has it revealed to her in a dream that she is Ungit, the goddess she so hates: "Without question it was true. It was I who was Ungit. That ruinous face was mine. I was that Batta-thing, that all-devouring womblike, yet barren, thing. Glome was a web—I the swollen spider, squat at its center, gorged with men's stolen lives" (276). Her first thought at the terrible realization is to commit suicide, but the voice of a god tells her not to, saying, "You cannot escape Ungit by going to the deadlands, for she is there also. Die before you die. There is no chance after" (279).

Although this is a pre-Christian story drawn from a Pagan myth, the voice of the God has just revealed to Orual the secret to Christian repentance and salvation in Lewis's eyes. Dying to oneself is the key to salvation for Lewis. Orual had become what she most hated by living exclusively for herself; the only way to save herself from that fate was to die to herself. Interestingly, throughout Lewis, dying to oneself is held equivalent to desiring God more than anything else and is thus a signal of salvation, whether there is a conscious acceptance of Christ or not.

Orual is then invited in a dream to make her complaint against the gods, which turns out to be a confession of her jealousy. Out of this confession comes the deep realization that she is Ungit and has no possible chance of ceasing to be Ungit by her own power, but her repentance leads to her forgiveness. At the very end of the story, Psyche brings her beauty in a casket, and Orual becomes Psyche. Shortly thereafter, she dies.

Till We Have Faces is ultimately Lewis's final statement on repentance and forgiveness. No character in any of his fiction is less worthy of forgiveness than Orual, but she is forgiven. Even though she is a pagan figure who spent her life cursing the gods, she is forgiven. This idea of divine, unmerited forgiveness is the ultimate idea Lewis desires to impart throughout his fiction. The forgiveness of Orual is designed to spark the imagination, to get the reader to consider both what he or she needs to repent of

and the possibilities of his or her own forgiveness. This, then, is the final use of the baptized imagination for Lewis: it is meant to be turned inward, to get the reader to “put on” the character and examine one’s own life rationally in that light.

Conclusion

Though he is known at the dawn of the twenty-first century as a powerful force in late twentieth-century conservative Christianity, C. S. Lewis was in fact far more liberal in his approach to salvation than many might suspect. As a young man, he turned to atheism because he saw no reason why Christianity should be proclaimed as the one, true road to salvation while all the rest of the world's religions were proclaimed to be mere nonsense. As an adult who believed that salvation did indeed lie in Christ, Lewis maintained his belief that the rest of the world's religions were fundamentally similar to Christianity; where he had believed all religions false as a young man, he came to believe all religions true, at least to a degree, in his maturity.

Coupled with his universalist view of salvation, and indeed leading to it in many ways, was a fairly unique vision of the roles of imagination and reason in a properly balanced spiritual and intellectual life. Shaped by his own first experience with reading George MacDonald's *Phantastes*—to which he credited much of his later conversion to Christianity—Lewis believed that the role of the imagination was to lead the reason to correct conclusions, whether intellectual or spiritual. Thus, perhaps the most persistent pattern that runs throughout his work—whether scholarly, apologetic, or imaginative—is an attempt to baptize the reader's imagination in hopes that the reason will follow.

In his scholarly work, Lewis was pre-occupied with teaching his readers to make the imaginative leap of reading medieval and Renaissance texts not as modern readers, but rather as medieval or Renaissance readers would have. After all, medieval and Renaissance readers and authors shared beliefs and concerns—primarily religious—that are not necessarily shared or even recognized by modern readers. This imaginative reading, Lewis argued, would give readers a greater understanding of the texts as their authors wrote them and their intended audiences received them. The pattern of the imagination leading the reader to a fuller and more correct understanding than could have been reached by reason alone is clear. It should be noted, however, that Lewis does not argue for the primacy of imagination over reason except insofar as he uses imagination to guide the reason along the most productive paths possible. Once the reader has learned to make the imaginative leap, Lewis expects him or her to make all judgments and criticism using the reason. Thus, his pattern of the interaction of reason and imagination has more

to do with establishing the proper relations of the two than with which one is superior to the other.

Within his apologetic works, Lewis uses the imagination to persuade the reader to accept Christianity. As with scholarly work, apologetics is a field typically more closely associated with reason than with imagination—an acceptable definition of apologetics might be the attempt to prove the truth of Christianity through argument—but for Lewis the imagination always leads the reason to its proper conclusions. Thus, Lewis tended to make arguments by analogy throughout his apologetics. The effect of the argument by analogy is to convince the imagination of the truth of a line of argument so that the reason may follow, though it frequently serves as a rhetorical dodge by introducing a non-equivalent set of components or closing down an avenue of inquiry without actually refuting it. Lewis gives the impression throughout his apologetics, however, of using the argument by analogy not to dodge or confuse an issue, but rather to prepare the way for serious theological discussion with an illustrative story. Rather than trying to bypass the reason, Lewis instead attempts to enlist the aid of the imagination in convincing the reason.

Lewis uses the arguments through analogy that pervade his apologetics to introduce his universalism, as well. Having presented the life cycle of plants as an analogy for the Incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ in *Miracles*, for example, Lewis goes on to point out that this is the same pattern we find in the ancient grain-god religions of the Middle East. Thus, he argues, these religions were worshipping Christ without knowing it. This is, indeed, the primary formulation of Lewis's universalism throughout his Christian writings: the notion that a person may belong to God without knowing it, even while he or she consciously pursues a religion other than Christianity. As long as the person in question honestly desires goodness—as embodied by Lewis's concept of the *Tao*—he or she is to be considered a likely candidate for salvation.

In his fiction, Lewis was to take the tendency to argue to the imagination a step further. Here, he was working in a medium directly intended to appeal to the imagination, though he was as careful to weave theology that would appeal to the reason into his fiction as he was to weave material that would appeal to the imagination into his scholarly and apologetic works. As always, Lewis wrote for both the reason and the

imagination, with the conscious expectation that the imagination would help to guide the reason. Lewis's fiction was therefore largely allegorical, with an expressed goal of "casting [Christian doctrines] into an imaginary world, stripping them of their stained-glass and Sunday school associations, [to] make them for the first time appear in their real potency" (*Of Other Worlds* 37). Thus Lewis intended to present the rational doctrines of Christianity in a form that carried fresh appeal for the imagination.

As in his apologetics, Lewis smuggled a fair amount of universalism into his fiction. Indeed, Lewis's universalist leanings are more open in his fiction than in his apologetics, with musings on the necessity of Paganism in *The Pilgrim's Regress* and the salvation of decidedly non-Christian characters in *The Last Battle*, *The Great Divorce*, and *Till We Have Faces*. In addition, noted universalist George Macdonald plays the Virgilian role of guide through the afterlife in *The Great Divorce* and explains Heaven and Hell to Lewis's narrator in decidedly universalist terms. Lewis's fiction was written primarily for a mass audience which was not necessarily interested in Christianity, which makes it interesting that his fiction is also the most universalist of his work. The conclusion that he was attempting to indoctrinate his readers not merely in Christianity but in his own particular brand of universalist Christianity is unavoidable.

Through his clever integration of imagination and reason, Lewis's apologetics and fiction became one of the most effective bodies of evangelical work in recent Christian history. If anything, he proved more effective than his mentor George MacDonald at baptizing the imaginations of his readers that they might be led to God. Also like his mentor, however, the ultimate version of Christianity to which he wanted to lead his readers was universalist—the clear message throughout Lewis's body of work is that the search for God is far more important than the doctrine in which it is couched.

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