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The Stylistic Achievement of *Mere Christianity*

GARY L. TANDY

AN encouraging development in Lewis scholarship over the last two decades has been the tendency of critics to pay closer attention to his achievement as a literary artist. Two books published recently by Oxford University Press are representative of this trend: *Planet Narnia* by Michael Ward,¹ and *C. S. Lewis on the Final Frontier* by Sanford Schwartz.² Ward's book argues for the imaginative unity of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, suggesting that each of the seven books is focused on—and creates an atmosphere related to—one of the seven planets of medieval cosmology. Schwartz's work looks closely at the themes, imagery, and structure of the Ransom Trilogy and argues that the Trilogy is more integrated and unified than has previously been assumed; he presents the author of these volumes as one deeply engaged with the modern intellectual revolution, contrary to Lewis' self-styled image as an intellectual and cultural dinosaur. To these we can add Alan Jacobs' study, *The Narnian: The Life and Imagination of C. S. Lewis*,³ with its claim that Lewis' corpus of writing is unified not solely by his Christian worldview, but also by his powerful imagination. Another way to describe this trend would be to say that, in the early days of Lewis scholarship, critics focused primarily on Lewis the person, his role as a Christian intellectual, and the ideas or content of his work. More recent critics have made the case that Lewis' works should be valued for their literary excellence, and that his achievements as a

¹ Michael Ward, *Planet Narnia: The Seven Heavens in the Imagination of C. S. Lewis* (New York, 2008).

² Sanford Schwartz, *C. S. Lewis on the Final Frontier: Science and the Supernatural in the Space Trilogy* (New York, 2009).

³ Alan Jacobs, *The Narnian: The Life and Imagination of C. S. Lewis* (San Francisco, 2005).

writer are equal to that of other, more critically acclaimed, twentieth-century authors.

In these discussions, Lewis' fiction has received the majority of critical attention. His nonfiction prose works—apologetics, literary criticism, book reviews, and essays—have also been analyzed, but to a lesser degree.⁴ An exception to this is James Como's *Branches to Heaven*, a book-length study of Lewis' rhetorical achievement, which asserts that Lewis possessed "... rhetorical gifts arguably unmatched in [the twentieth] century in their adroitness and versatility."⁵ Since Lewis devoted more of his writing life to nonfiction than to fiction, and since this work has been so widely read and appreciated throughout the world, examination of his nonfiction prose is surely justified, especially in regards to the question of whether there exist aspects of Lewis' artistry and imagination that have yet to be adequately described and appreciated.

Such attention seems especially appropriate in terms of Lewis' *Mere Christianity*,⁶ which, although published almost sixty years ago, continues to be extensively read and appreciated by a twenty-first century audience. A recent CNN article notes that the book has remained on the BookScan Religion Bestseller's list a record 513 weeks, or ever since the list was created in 2001.⁷ While popularity is never an adequate measure of literary quality, it is remarkable that Lewis' work of popular apologetics continues to find such significant readership, while other excellent books in the same genre—including G. K. Chesterton's *Orthodoxy*—do not. Not only is *Mere Christianity* still read widely, but it remains the standard for assessing new works of popular apologetics, such as N. T. Wright's *Simply Christian*, whose title (and content) make an obvious allusion to Lewis' earlier effort.⁸

This essay will not attempt to explain the cultural, sociological, and theological reasons for the ongoing relevance of Lewis's work of popular apologetics. It will, however, look closely at several aspects of the work in order to assess its rhetorical and literary achievement. It will also suggest that, while Lewis' understanding of Christian doctrine and his mastery of logical argument are important (and have received the bulk of critical attention),⁹ the

⁴ Typical is C. N. Manlove, *C. S. Lewis: His Literary Achievement* (New York, 1987), which ignores the nonfiction.

⁵ James Como, *Branches to Heaven: The Geniuses of C. S. Lewis* (Dallas, 1998), x.

⁶ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (San Francisco, 2001).

⁷ John Blake, "Surprised by C. S. Lewis," CNN, *Belief Blog*, 17 December 2010.

⁸ N. T. Wright, *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense* (London, 2006).

⁹ See, for example, Como, *Branches to Heaven*; Joe R. Christopher, *C. S. Lewis* (Boston, 1987); Chad Walsh, *C. S. Lewis: Apostle to the Skeptics* (New York, 1949); Richard B. Cunningham, *C. S. Lewis: Defender of the Faith* (Philadelphia, 1967).

success of *Mere Christianity* has more to do with the style through which the author communicated its content. Specifically, Lewis' rhetorical or apologetic theory led him to focus on the core truths of Christianity and to describe them in an appropriate style, given the nature of his readership (including his audience for the original broadcast talks). In short, Lewis was successful in creating a knowledgeable, familiar, and trustworthy *persona* through his use of multiple tones, and he blended rational argument with imagination to create memorable metaphors and analogies that not only supported his assertions, but also captivated both his reader's imaginations and intellects.

Before examining the stylistic achievement of the work, however, it is important to understand the historical context in which *Mere Christianity* originated. As Kathleen Norris has observed in her foreword to its fiftieth anniversary edition, this is a book "that begs to be seen in its historical context. . . ."¹⁰ In his introduction to an earlier edition of *Mere Christianity*, Walter Hooper provides a detailed account of the process by which Lewis' broadcast talks presented over the BBC (which would be revised and published in 1952 as *Mere Christianity*) came to be composed and delivered. As Hooper recounts, in the winter of 1941 Lewis received a letter from the Director of the BBC's Religious Broadcasting Department, the Rev. James William Welch. Welch had read Lewis' recently published apologetic work, *The Problem of Pain*, and concluded that the "quality of thinking and depth of conviction" he found in it should be shared with a wider audience. Consequently, he suggested to Lewis that he deliver a series of broadcast talks on one of two different topics: either "the Christian, or lack of Christian, assumptions underlying modern literature," or "The Christian Faith as I See It—by a Layman."¹¹ Lewis rejected the former, but replied that he would be perfectly willing to give a series of talks on the Law of Nature, or objective right and wrong.¹²

Lewis' enthusiastic acceptance of Welch's proposal is intriguing, particularly since he had never before broadcast over the radio. Nor was he temperamentally inclined to embrace new forms of technology. After his first microphone rehearsal Lewis wrote to his boyhood friend, Arthur Greeves, describing his surprise at hearing his own voice played back to him, and noting that he was "unprepared" for its "total unfamiliarity."¹³ In addition to the strangeness of hearing his voice over the "wireless," Lewis also had to adapt

¹⁰ Kathleen Norris, Foreword, in Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, xvii.

¹¹ Letter of 7 February 1941, in C. S. Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*, ed. by Walter Hooper, 3 vols. (San Francisco, 2004–7), 2:470.

¹² See letter of 10 February 1941, in Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*, 2:470.

¹³ Letter of 25 May 1941, in Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*, 2:486.

his writing style to the extreme time constraints of radio broadcasting. This included, for example, composing an explanation of the law of human nature that could be read in fifteen minutes—a reality that Lewis described in one of his letters as his “Procrustes’ bed.”¹⁴ One suspects, however, that the time limitations also had a positive influence on Lewis’ style. Lewis himself noted that, when writing *The Chronicles of Narnia*, the fact that he was writing for children forced him to modify his style, and helped him exorcise his “expository demon.”¹⁵ Readers familiar with portions of Lewis’ previous writings can appreciate the stylistic significance this experience had on the nature of his writings.

Comparison of *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *Mere Christianity* sheds light on the uniqueness of the latter among Lewis’ apologetic writings. In a short essay written in 1956, Lewis made clear why he chose children’s fantasy as the genre for the *Chronicles*: “I wrote fairy tales because the Fairy Tale seemed the ideal Form for the stuff I had to say.”¹⁶ Is it possible that the genre of broadcast talks—with their demand for conciseness and allowance of informal and popular language—provided Lewis with the ideal “Form” for exercising his apologetic gift? In fact, much of what Lewis wrote about the form of the fairy tale—“its brevity, its severe restraints on description, its flexible traditionalism, its inflexible hostility to all analysis, digression, reflections and ‘gas’”—could easily be applied to that of the broadcast talks.¹⁷ As Justin Phillips notes:

Writing for radio is not the same as writing for the printed page. The words have to make sense right away, because the listener does not have the luxury of a second chance. . . . Moreover, if a broadcaster does not engage his listener, the listener will go away, retune to another station or just turn off the radio.¹⁸

In apologetic works, like *The Problem of Pain and Miracles*, Lewis did not labor under the constraint of concise writing; nor were these designed for such a wide audience. As a result, they can at times appear less unified and more prone to digressions, with Lewis pursuing topics that interested him,

¹⁴ Letter of 21 December 1941, in Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*, 2:502.

¹⁵ C. S. Lewis, “On Three Ways of Writing for Children,” in *Of Other Worlds*, ed. by Walter Hooper (New York, 1966), 28.

¹⁶ C. S. Lewis, “Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What’s to be Said,” in Lewis, *Of Other Worlds*, 37.

¹⁷ Lewis, “Sometimes Fairy Stories,” 36.

¹⁸ Justin Phillips, *C. S. Lewis at the BBC: Messages of Hope in the Darkness of War* (London, 2003), 234–5.

but which detract from the focus of the work.¹⁹ When compared to his earlier apologetic writings, *Mere Christianity* seems more focused and unified, no doubt contributing to its greater popularity. Phillips goes on to suggest that the process of preparing the broadcast talks and their review by the BBC staff, "helped to hone Lewis' style into something lean and direct, giving his writing a sharper edge."²⁰ Finally, as will be noted later, the wider audience of the radio broadcasts proved to be a good fit for Lewis' penchant for informal and colloquial language.

If Lewis' eagerness to undertake the broadcast talks seems surprising, the fact that he welcomed the opportunity to address a popular audience on the topic of the Christian faith is not. Lewis' essays reveal that he spent a good deal of time thinking about the challenges and opportunities of Christian apologetics. He noted, for example, that the apologist must be certain that he was answering the "... current scientific attitude towards Christianity, not the attitude which scientists adopted one hundred years ago."²¹ He also noted that the effective apologist must be a student of secular culture, for if Christians "... are to convert our heathen neighbours, we must understand their culture. We must 'beat them at their own game.'"²² When asked to explain basic Christian doctrines to a secular audience during World War II, Lewis was keenly aware that his message was addressed to "outsiders," as he referred to those outside the faith. Moreover, he believed that "England is [now] a part of that vast 'post-Christian' world in need of a special missionary technique—one which must take into account the fact that many people were under the impression that they had rejected Christianity when, in truth, they had never had it."²³ Lewis saw clearly that, in both apologetics as well as in imaginative literature, he was writing for (or speaking to) a post-Christian audience.

Lewis had not merely thought about these ideas casually; in fact, he had developed a well-considered theory of apologetics that took into account the nature of his readership/ audience. Two quotations from Lewis help to illustrate this point. In an address on "Christian Apologetics," Lewis identified four major obstacles to be overcome in communicating religious truths to modern man. Most moderns, he noted, (1) were skeptical about history, (2)

¹⁹ See, for example, the chapter on animal pain in C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York, 1962), 129–43.

²⁰ Phillips, C. S. Lewis at the BBC, 235.

²¹ C. S. Lewis, "Christian Apologetics," in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. by Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids, 1970), 92.

²² C. S. Lewis, "Christianity and Culture," in *Christian Reflections*, ed. by Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids, 1967), 17.

²³ Quoted in Roger Lancelyn Green and Walter Hooper, *C. S. Lewis: A Biography* (London, 1974), 202.

distrusted ancient texts, (3) lacked any sense of sin, and (4) spoke a different language than religious people.²⁴ Clearly, Lewis had considered carefully the beliefs and assumptions of those to whom he was writing/speaking. Elsewhere, he wrote:

When I began [writing apologetics], Christianity came before the great mass of my unbelieving fellow-countrymen either in the highly emotional form offered by revivalists or in the unintelligible language of highly cultured clergymen. Most men were reached by neither. My task was therefore simply that of a translator—one turning Christian doctrine . . . into the vernacular, into language that unscholarly people would attend to and could understand. For this purpose a style more guarded, more *nuancé*, finelier shaded, more rich in fruitful ambiguities . . . would have been worse than useless. It would not only have failed to enlighten the common reader's understanding; it would have aroused his suspicion If the real theologians had tackled this laborious work of translation about a hundred years ago, when they began to lose touch with the people (for whom Christ died), there would have been no place for me.²⁵

It is interesting to note Lewis' emphasis here. His focus is not so much on doctrine or theological knowledge as it is on the concerns of rhetoric, language, and style. He seemed to assume that the content—what needed to be said—was clear and understood; the focus of his efforts, therefore, went into developing the most effective style of communicating those truths to his contemporaries.

Lewis' conception of the apologist as "translator" sheds light on the style of *Mere Christianity*, as well as on that of his other apologetic works. To be sure, these writings generated some negative criticism from theologians and others, including Lewis' fellow Anglican W. Norman Pittenger, who resisted the idea that theological language should be translated into common language.²⁶ For Lewis, however, such reservations were wide of the mark. He argued that the rhetorician (apologist) cannot be hindered from communicating by his love of correctness or technical jargon. Instead, apologetic works have to be judged with consideration of the "audience to whom they were

²⁴ Lewis, "Christian Apologetics," 94–8.

²⁵ C. S. Lewis, "Rejoinder to Dr. Pittenger," in *God in the Dock*, 183.

²⁶ Richard B. Cunningham, *C. S. Lewis: Defender of the Faith* (Philadelphia, 1967), 138–9.

addressed,” as well as the “prevalent errors they were trying to combat. I was writing *ad populum* not *ad clerum*. This is relevant to my manner [style] as well as my matter.”²⁷ No doubt it was such features that Avery Cardinal Dulles had in mind when noting, admiringly, that Lewis, in his apologetic works, “wrote in a pleasing English style, free of heavy and technical language. He handled profound problems in simple words that could be understood by readers with no special training.”²⁸

Lewis’ willingness to employ a rather informal, colloquial style in the broadcast talks was not new. In fact, he employed such a style in both his popular works and his literary criticism. The decision to write in this way was made early in his career: following the publication of his allegorical work, *The Pilgrim’s Regress* in 1933, Lewis was criticized by his friend Arthur Greeves over his failure to be more “correct, classical, and elaborate,” to which Lewis responded:

I aim chiefly to be idiomatic and racy, basing myself on Malory, Bunyan, and Morris, tho’ without archaisms: and would usually prefer to use ten words, provided they are honest native words and idiomatically ordered, than one ‘literary word.’ To put the thing in a nutshell you want ‘The man of whom I told you’ and I want ‘The man I told you of.’²⁹

Not only did Lewis break the rules of the prescriptive grammarians, he frequently used colloquial or slang words/expressions in his religious prose. Illustrations of this can be found throughout *Mere Christianity*. In attempting to explain the nature of the universe, he wrote: “I personally think that next to Christianity Dualism is the manliest and most sensible creed on the market. But it has a catch in it.”³⁰ In attempting to explain human nature, Lewis compared humanity to a machine designed by God. But what happens when a machine attempts to function on its own power? “In fact, the machine conks. It seems to start up all right and runs a few yards, and then it breaks down. They are trying to run it on the wrong juice.”³¹ When writing about the call of Christ on our lives, he remarked that Jesus “never talked vague, idealistic gas. When He said, ‘Be perfect,’ He meant it. He meant that we must go in for the full treatment.”³² To help explain the doctrine of the Incarnation,

²⁷ Lewis, “Rejoinder to Dr. Pittenger,” 182.

²⁸ Avery Cardinal Dulles, “Mere Apologetics,” in *First Things*, June/July, 2005, 19.

²⁹ Quoted in Green and Hooper, *C. S. Lewis: A Biography*, 129.

³⁰ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 42.

³¹ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 50.

³² Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 198.

Lewis wrote: if you want to “get the hang of” God becoming man, “think how you would like to become a slug or a crab.”³³ Certainly, the discipline of broadcasting encouraged him “to write for the ordinary person, in a direct and popular way,”³⁴ though it might be more accurate to claim that the broadcast talks gave him the ideal format to apply his already well developed communication skills. In the same way that children’s fantasy provided Lewis with an appropriate form to say what he wanted to say as an imaginative writer, so the broadcast talks provided him with an ideal form to exercise his unique apologetic gifts. In the Preface to *Mere Christianity*, he noted that even though he had made some changes from the original printed version of the broadcast talks, he hoped that he had not altered the “popular” or “familiar” tone he had intended.³⁵

In addition to the decision about “manner” in his broadcast talks, Lewis also made a significant decision about “matter.” As he made clear in the preface to *Mere Christianity*, he decided he would attempt to defend, not the doctrines of a particular Christian denomination, or even those of his own Church of England, but rather that he would put forth what the famous seventeenth-century Puritan Richard Baxter had called “mere Christianity”:

The reader should be warned that I offer no help to anyone who is hesitating between two Christian ‘denominations.’ Ever since I became a Christian I have thought that the best, perhaps the only, service I could do for my unbelieving neighbours was to explain and defend the belief that has been common to nearly all Christians at all times . . . I think we must admit that the discussion of these disputed points has no tendency at all to bring an outsider into the Christian fold. So long as we write and talk about them we are much more likely to deter him from entering any Christian communion than to draw him into our own.³⁶

Clearly, Lewis’ apologetics were created and fashioned for a post-Christian audience. His decision to focus on “mere Christianity” seems especially astute and is likely one of the reasons why his apologetic writings continue to be read and appreciated today, while those of his contemporaries have fallen out of favor. A key tenet of Lewis’ apologetic theory was his concept that the writer’s (or speaker’s) task was to “translate” complex theological language

³³ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 179.

³⁴ Phillips, *Mere Christianity*, 289.

³⁵ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, vii.

³⁶ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, viii.

into simple, contemporary language that could be readily understood by the common reader (or listener). In *Mere Christianity*, therefore, Lewis set about to create a clear and simple style suited to his apologetic purpose—a style that was especially appropriate for the broadcast format in which the lectures were originally delivered. A good example of this style can be found in Lewis' definition of moral rules at the beginning of his chapter "Three Parts of Morality":

In reality, moral rules are directions for running the human machine. Every moral rule is there to prevent a breakdown, or a strain, or a friction, in the running of that machine. That is why these rules at first seem to be constantly interfering with our natural inclinations. When you are being taught how to use any machine, the instructor keeps on saying, 'No, don't do it like that,' because, of course, there are all sorts of things that look all right and seem to you the natural way of treating the machine, but do not really work.³⁷

Here, Lewis employs a familiar analogy. Addressing the reader directly, he uses non-technical words to draw a clear comparison between moral rules and those required to operate a machine.

Closely related to this approach is what has been called Lewis' style of certitude. While this can be identified by specific mannerisms,³⁸ the focus here is not on technique but on posture of mind, tone, or the attitude toward a subject that the style portrays. Winston Weathers describes the tone well: "When writing in the style of certainty, an author, by his stylistic mannerisms, implies that 'What I am talking about is quite true. I am convinced that I am right. I am not asking for discussion or debate. Take it or leave it.'"³⁹ This style often results in a "peremptory Lewis who must have both annoyed and amused his contemporaries."⁴⁰ As Nevill Coghill noted: "Underneath all, I sense in his style an indefeasible core of Protestant certainties, the certainties of a simple, unchanging, entrenched ethic that knows how to distinguish, unarguably, between Right and Wrong, Natural and Unnatural, High and Low, Black and

³⁷ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 69.

³⁸ See Gary L. Tandy, *The Rhetoric of Certitude: C. S. Lewis' Nonfiction Prose* (Kent, OH, 2009).

³⁹ Winston Weathers, "The Rhetoric of Certitude" *Southern Humanities Review*, 2, Spring 1968, 213.

⁴⁰ James T. Como, Review of Gary L. Tandy, *The Rhetoric of Certitude in Sehnsucht: The C. S. Lewis Journal*, Volume 3, 2009, 146.

White . . .”⁴¹ This style is well illustrated in the following passage from *Mere Christianity*:

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: ‘I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.’ That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human Teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.⁴²

The style (or tone) of certainty is prevalent in much of Lewis’ nonfiction, not only in his apologetics, but also in his literary criticism and book reviews. It was a style that fit Lewis’ argumentative and didactic approach to much of his communications. This stemmed partially from his opposition to the modern worldview, much of which he regarded as unnecessarily complex, confused, and unstable. It is not surprising, then, that his characteristic prose style should be characterized by simplicity, clarity, and uniformity. Austin Farrer underscores this by contrasting Lewis’ style with that of the liberal Anglican theologian, the Rt. Revd. John A. T. Robinson:

The Bishop of Woolwich captures the attention of his readers by showing them that he is as intellectually worried, as dissatisfied with orthodoxy, and as unable to reconcile conflicting insights as they are themselves. . . . Lewis’ appeal was just the opposite. Muddled minds read him, and found themselves moving with delight in a world of clarity.⁴³

One wonders if the enthusiastic reception of Lewis’ listeners to his broadcast talks was at least partially due to the intellectual certainty and spiritual clarity

⁴¹ Nevill Coghill, “The Approach to English,” in Jocelyn Gibb, ed. *Light on C. S. Lewis* (New York, 1976), 60.

⁴² Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 52.

⁴³ Austin Farrer, “The Christian Apologist” in Gibb, *Light on C. S. Lewis*, 29.

of his words and tone. Such clarity must have been a welcome development to many, given the confusion and fear aroused by the reality of German aggression both at home and abroad.

Certitude, however, was not the only thing found in Lewis' stylistic toolbox. As an accomplished rhetorician, he knew the advantages of varying his style and tone of voice for effect. In fact, at least three other tones of voice can be identified in *Mere Christianity*. These are the judicious, the humorous, and the personal.

According to Weathers, "when writing in the judicious style, the author implies 'What I am talking about is quite reasonable. I am speaking as an objective and logical person. I think you will want to ponder this matter.'"⁴⁴ In *Mere Christianity*, Lewis employs this tone especially when addressing disputed or controversial matters. A case in point is his discussion of the doctrine of the Atonement in his chapter "The Perfect Penitent":

Now before I became a Christian I was under the impression that the first thing Christians had to believe was one particular theory as to what the point of this dying was. According to that theory God wanted to punish men for having deserted and joined the Great Rebel, but Christ volunteered to be punished instead and so God let us off. . . . What I came to see later on was that neither this theory nor any other is Christianity. The central Christian belief is that Christ's death has somehow put us right with God and given us a fresh start. Theories as to how it did this are another matter. A good many different theories have been held as to how it works; what all Christians are agreed on is that it does work. . . . Such is my own way of looking at what Christians call the Atonement. But remember this is only one more picture. Do not mistake it for the thing itself: and if it does not help you, drop it.⁴⁵

Here, Lewis departs from his style of certitude to address a point widely disputed by Christians. Rather than limiting his reader's options, he seems to expand them; rather than using objective, imperative language, he is more tentative. Note, for instance, phrases like "in my view" and "my own way of looking at." It was this characteristic of Lewis' apologetic style that Dulles had in mind when he wrote, referring to Lewis: "He was humble and un-

⁴⁴ Weathers, "The Rhetoric of Certitude," 213.

⁴⁵ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 53-4, 59.

pretentious, willing to recognize the limits of his own knowledge.”⁴⁶ Other notable examples of the judicious tone from *Mere Christianity* include Lewis’ discussion of world religions and Christianity and his response to the complaint that Christian teaching about salvation is exclusionist.⁴⁷ Chad Walsh has suggested that Lewis often employed the judicious style in order to “set up” his readers for subsequent comments that reflected greater certitude:

The tone thus created is calculated to soothe and ingratiate. The reader feels. ‘At least this fellow isn’t trying to shove anything down my throat.’ Then, suddenly, when the reader’s guard is relaxed, the other Lewis springs into action—the Dr. Johnson, who is very definite about certain things, and leaps in with both feet.⁴⁸

Lewis also employed a humorous tone in *Mere Christianity*. Perhaps surprisingly, he uses a humorous analogy, for instance, when explaining how the sexual instinct in humans has gone terribly wrong in modern society:

You can get a large audience together for a strip-tease act—that is, to watch a girl undress on the stage. Now suppose you come to a country where you could fill a theatre by simply bringing a covered plate on to the stage and then slowly lifting the cover so as to let every one see, just before the lights went out, that it contained a mutton chop or a bit of bacon, would you not think that in that country something had gone wrong with the appetite for food? And would not anyone who had grown up in a different world think there was something equally queer about the state of the sex instinct among us?⁴⁹

As with his preference for informality and colloquialism, Lewis’ humorous approach was not merely a new touch that he added to make the broadcast talks more popular. When asked about this approach, even when dealing with complex theological themes, Lewis replied with a two-part explanation. First, it was a matter of temperament that was encouraged by his studies of the “literary men of the Middle Ages and by the writings of G. K. Chesterton,” who, he added, were “not afraid to combine serious Christian themes with

⁴⁶ Dulles, “Mere Apologetics,” 19.

⁴⁷ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 35, 64.

⁴⁸ Walsh, *C. S. Lewis: Apostle to the Skeptics*, 54.

⁴⁹ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 96.

buffoonery.”⁵⁰ Second, it was an antidote to the “false reverence” that he saw in much contemporary religious writing.⁵¹ Lewis added that humor in writing should come naturally to the author, as “forced jocularities on spiritual subjects are an abomination and the attempts of some religious writers to be humorous are simply appalling.”⁵²

Terry Lindvall has demonstrated that Lewis employed several types of humor in his writing, from the joke proper to sophisticated satire.⁵³ In *Mere Christianity*, he turned often to humor, sometimes (as we just read) to lighten up the treatment of a serious or disputed subject, and sometimes to poke fun at his own intellectualism or his theological opponents. Often his humor became a complement to other stylistic techniques, especially his informal, self-effacing, colloquial tone, as well as his use of metaphor and analogy, as can be seen in the following examples:

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.’ I do not claim to know anything about his personal appearance. If anybody really wants to know him better I would say to that person, ‘Don’t worry. If you really want to, you will. Whether you’ll like it when you do is another question.’⁵⁴

For there are two things inside me, competing with the human self which I must try to become. They are the Animal self, and the Diabolical self. The Diabolical self is the worse of the two. That is why a cold, self-righteous prig who goes regularly to church may be fair nearer to hell than a prostitute. But, of course, it is better to be neither.⁵⁵

If anyone would like to acquire humility, I can, I think, tell him the first step. The first step is to realize that one is proud. And a biggish step, too. At least, nothing whatever can be done before it. If you think you are not conceited, it

⁵⁰ Lewis, “Cross Examinations,” in *God in the Dock*, 259.

⁵¹ Lewis, “Cross Examinations,” in *God in the Dock*, 259.

⁵² Lewis, “Cross Examinations,” in *God in the Dock*, 259.

⁵³ Terry Lindvall, *Surprised by Laughter* (Nashville, 1996).

⁵⁴ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 46.

⁵⁵ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 103.

means you are very conceited indeed.⁵⁶

There is no need to be worried by facetious people who try to make the Christian hope of 'Heaven' ridiculous by saying they do not want 'to spend eternity playing harps'. The answer to such people is that if they cannot understand books written for grown-ups, they should not talk about them.⁵⁷

These passages provide comic relief from the serious discussion of moral issues. They also help Lewis make points in striking and memorable ways and promote a winsome *persona* that can find humor in serious topics and does not take itself too seriously.

Another tone that Lewis adopted frequently in *Mere Christianity* is the personal, which may be the primary technique by which he builds *ethos*. Through ethical appeal, the writer establishes a relationship with his audience, reveals an attitude toward his subject, and projects an image. This Lewis did exceedingly well in his various apologetic works, such as his recurring statement that he is not a trained theologian.⁵⁸ Through this, Lewis both disarms and identifies with his readers. He also avoids the negative connotations that he believed many British readers in the 1940s associated with professional theologians. This can be seen clearly in the following comment from his first radio talk, which later appeared in abbreviated form in the preface to *Mere Christianity*:

It's not because I'm anybody in particular that I've been asked to tell you what Christians believe. In fact, it's just the opposite. They've asked me, first of all because I'm a layman and not a parson, and consequently it was thought I might understand the ordinary person's point of view a bit better. Secondly, I think they asked me because it was known that I'd been an atheist for many years and only became a Christian quite fairly recently. They thought that would mean I'd be able to see the difficulties—able to remember what Christianity looks like from the outside. So you see, the long and short of it is that I've been selected for this job just because I'm an amateur not a professional, and a beginner, not an old hand.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 128.

⁵⁷ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 137.

⁵⁸ See, for example, Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, viii.

⁵⁹ Quoted in Walter Hooper, *C. S. Lewis Companion and Guide Introduction* (San Francisco,

Throughout *Mere Christianity*, Lewis can be seen building on this *ethos* by emphasizing the very reasons he was asked to speak over the “wireless.” He frequently reminded listeners that he was not a trained theologian,⁶⁰ and he repeatedly discussed Christian doctrine in the context of his former views as an atheist or introduced a new topic by stating, “before I became a Christian.”⁶¹

In addition, while Lewis could not be called a confessional writer by any stretch of the imagination, he did provide his readers with occasional glimpses of his personal life. For example, he began the chapter “Christian Marriage” in *Mere Christianity* by noting that he had never been married himself and was therefore speaking as an “amateur”: as he put it, I “can speak only at second hand.”⁶² Such transparency and honesty built empathy with his readers and provided opportunities to present the Christian faith in a convincing manner. This quality was noticed early by reviewers of the radio talks. As one reviewer in *The Guardian* wrote in 1943:

Mr. Lewis is that rare being—a born broadcaster; born to the manner as well as to the matter. He neither buttonholes you nor bombards you; there is no false intimacy and no false eloquence. He approaches you directly, as a rational person only to be persuaded by reason. He is confident and yet humble in his possession and propagation of truth. He is helped by a speaking voice of great charm and style of manifest sincerity.⁶³

Lewis’ readers have often commented on this *personal* aspect of his writings and broadcasts, and have seen it as more than a rhetorical device. In a recent collection of essays, for example, readers (many of whom never met him in person) often described Lewis in terms of personal friendship. As one wrote, “I appreciate Lewis’ logical arguments and his remarkable imagery, but his greatest legacy to me has been his gift of speaking as a friend, sharing his joys and sorrows.”⁶⁴ Another reader suggested that Lewis feels like a friend because of the honesty, clarity, and courage he displays in his writing.⁶⁵ This personal tone helps the reader identify with the author and view him as an approachable person, not a distant intellectual or professional.

1996), 306.

⁶⁰ See, for example, Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, viii, 32, 54, 115, 148, 153.

⁶¹ See, for example, Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 35, 38, 45, 53, 64, 140.

⁶² Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 104.

⁶³ *The Guardian*, 21 May 1943, quoted in Hooper, C. S. *Lewis Companion and Guide*, 327.

⁶⁴ Daniel Bailey in Mary Anne Phemister and Andrew Lazo, eds. *Mere Christians: Inspiring Stories of Encounters with C. S. Lewis* (Grand Rapids, 2009), 59.

⁶⁵ Anne Atkins, in Phemister and Lazo, *Mere Christians*, 55.

Lewis also made frequent direct references to his audience that served to create an image of an author who both understands and respects his readers. A good example of this can be seen in the way Lewis began the final section of *Mere Christianity*:

Everyone has warned me not to tell you what I am going to tell you in this last book. They all say 'the ordinary reader does not want Theology; give him plain, practical religion'. I have rejected their advice. I do not think the ordinary reader is such a fool. Theology means 'the science of God', and I think any man who wants to think about God at all would like to have the clearest and most accurate ideas about Him which are available. You are not children: why should you be treated like children?⁶⁶

Lewis also revealed his respect for his readers when, on at least two occasions, he advised that they should skip over a particular chapter if it was not helpful.⁶⁷

Overall, Lewis' *persona* in *Mere Christianity* is complex, including multiple tones or voices. Even in a book that appears relatively simple at first glance, which began life as a series of fifteen-minute radio broadcasts to explain complex theological ideas in layman's terms, multiple expressions of the author can be identified: the dogmatic and certain Lewis who drives home his points with forceful confidence; the judicious and reasonable Lewis who presents ideas for his readers to ponder and does not try to shove anything down their throats; the humorous, occasionally sarcastic, and witty Lewis, who invites his readers to laugh with him at the absurdity of human thought and behavior, and can humorously point out the excesses of both atheists and fundamentalist Christians; and the personal Lewis, who comes across as a knowledgeable, trustworthy, and authentic guide. There is little doubt that it was not only Lewis' matter or content, but his manner or style that led to the book's enduring popular and artistic success. Lewis was not only an informed apologist, but a masterful rhetorician who managed varied tones to win his readers' attention, interest, and assent. He drew from a wide variety of tones and styles, and the combination created an entirely unique *persona*. James Como sums up this distinctive person nicely:

The voice, which is settled yet suggestive, familiar and knowing, almost intimate yet never hortatory, is ubiquitous

⁶⁶ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 153.

⁶⁷ See Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 144, 166.

in his nonfiction. Oddly, unself-conscious self characterizations and candid direct address establish a distinctive *persona* that goes beyond the usual boundaries suggested by the concept of ethical proof.⁶⁸

The final element of Lewis' achievement in *Mere Christianity* lies in the realm of the imagination, a category that is often reserved for discussions of his imaginative fiction. In fact, critics have not infrequently dismissed Lewis' apologetic works and assigned greater artistic value to his fiction. As Dennis Hollinger has argued:

It may well be that C. S. Lewis' greatest appeal to the postmodern mind will not be through *Mere Christianity*, *Miracles*, or *The Problem of Pain*, but rather from *The Chronicles of Narnia* or his science-fiction trilogy. These books give a symbolic portrayal of the Christian life world, appealing to beauty, symmetry and wholeness of life.⁶⁹

Hollinger is, of course, addressing the specific question of Lewis' potential appeal to postmodernists, though contained within his comment is the suggestion of a false dichotomy between reason and imagination. Alan Jacobs' observations are helpful on this point:

When we talk today about receptiveness to stories, we tend to contrast that attitude to one governed by reason—we talk about freeing ourselves from the shackles of the rational mind and that sort of thing—but no belief was more central to Lewis' mind than the belief that it is eminently, fully rational to be responsive to the enchanting power of stories.⁷⁰

As Lewis himself stated, "The imaginative man in me is older, more continuously operative, and in that sense more basic than either the religious writer or the critic."⁷¹ What is not so often noted is the work of imagination in Lewis' nonfiction. As Jacobs has observed, however, "The same impulse that had produced *The Allegory of Love* and *Miracles* and *Mere Christianity* also

⁶⁸ Como, *Branches to Heaven*, 158–9.

⁶⁹ Dennis Hollinger, "The Church as Apologetic: A Sociology of Knowledge Perspective," in Timothy R. Phillips and Dennis L. Okholm, eds., *Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World* (Downers Grove, IL, 1995), 190.

⁷⁰ Jacobs, *The Narnian*, xxiii.

⁷¹ Undated letter, in Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*, 3:516–7.

produced *The Chronicles of Narnia*.⁷² Avery Cardinal Dulles has identified Lewis' imagination as one of the chief reasons for his success as an apologist: "Gifted with a lively imagination, he had an extraordinary facility for finding apt analogies from common life to illustrate abstract philosophical points."⁷³ There is not space here to cite all of Lewis' analogies and metaphors from *Mere Christianity*; however, the following examples identify some of the kinds of imagery he favored, and illustrate some of the more striking and effective analogies and metaphors he employed to clarify and illuminate theological concepts.

Like all good writers, Lewis favored metaphors and analogies that would be most familiar to his readers. He tended to avoid learned literary allusions, which would have been easy for him to formulate but difficult for some to follow. When he did refer to literature it was usually to children's literature, such as his reference to *Beauty and the Beast* at the beginning of the chapter "Let's Pretend."⁷⁴ More representative is his discussion of morality as "directions for running the human machine" at the beginning of the chapter "Three Parts of Morality" (referred to above).⁷⁵ Writing at a time when the advance of industrialization had not entirely faded from his reader's mind, Lewis employed images of machines, factories, and production to help explain spiritual truths. When, for example, he addressed the common question, if "Christianity is true why are not all Christians obviously nicer than all non-Christians?," he replied (in part) by evoking a series of analogies, illustrating the complexity of the claim, including that of a factory:

To judge the management of a factory, you must consider not only the output but the plant. Considering the [outdated] plant at Factory A it may be a wonder that it turns out anything at all; considering the first-class outfit at Factory B its output, though high, may be a great deal lower than it ought to be. No doubt the good manager at Factory A is going to put in good equipment as soon as he can, but that takes time. In the meantime, low output does not prove that he is a failure.⁷⁶

The spiritual point that Lewis wanted to make is that God will improve both, but perhaps not in the same way or at the same time.

⁷² Jacobs, *The Narnian*, xxv.

⁷³ Dulles, "Mere Apologetics," 19.

⁷⁴ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 187.

⁷⁵ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 69.

⁷⁶ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 210–11.

Another example of Lewis' use of common metaphors and analogies can be found in his references to current events, such as war. When addressing the importance—and difficulty—of forgiveness, for example, he wrote:

Every one says forgiveness is a lovely idea, until they have something to forgive, as we had during the war. And then, to mention the subject at all is to be greeted with howls of anger. It is not that people think this too high and difficult a virtue: it is that they think it hateful and contemptible. 'That sort of talk makes them sick,' they say. And half of you already want to ask me, 'I wonder how you'd feel about forgiving the Gestapo if you were a Pole or a Jew?' So do I. I wonder very much.⁷⁷

Later in the same chapter, he takes up the tricky question of killing in wartime. Such an act is not the same as murder, he argued, nor does it violate Christian teaching. To illustrate this point, he created an imaginary scenario from World War I in which he and a young German had just killed each other in battle and then met, immediately afterwards. "I cannot imagine that either of us would have felt any resentment or even any embarrassment," he concluded. "I think we might have laughed over it."⁷⁸

While the use of metaphor and analogy can be found throughout *Mere Christianity*, it is in the book's final section that Lewis' imaginative skills are most clearly on display. He explained the nature of theology in terms that could be understood by the common reader, and defended its practicality through use of analogy: "Now, Theology is like the map."⁷⁹ Here again, Lewis demonstrated what he meant when he argued that an apologist must translate theological language into "the vernacular, into language that unscholarly people would attend to and could understand."⁸⁰ Lewis also employed metaphor and analogy to explain complex theological concepts, such as the Trinity and the way in which God (through Christ) interacts with man in spiritual formation. Both efforts illustrate his skill as an imaginative writer, as well as his belief in the compatibility of reason and imagination. This section, in fact, is so loaded with effective examples of metaphor and analogy that, if each had been excluded from Lewis' original broadcast talks, their length would have been reduced significantly.

Lewis' title for the final section of *Mere Christianity* helped illustrate that,

⁷⁷ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 115.

⁷⁸ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 119.

⁷⁹ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 154.

⁸⁰ Lewis, "Rejoinder to Dr. Pittenger," 183.

while God is *personal*, he is, in another sense, “Beyond Personality.” In short, God’s interaction with His created beings transcends human personality. His desire is thus to transform men and women from mere creatures to sons and daughters; indeed, in Lewis’ metaphor, God wants to make each of us into “a little Christ.”⁸¹

To effectively communicate these spiritual ideas, Lewis employed imagery that contained a discernible pattern. In explaining the doctrine of the Trinity, for example, he began with what might be called static images, such as a cube or book. Just as a cube can be seen as six squares while remaining one cube, God can be viewed as “a being who is three Persons while remaining one Being.”⁸² Or, imagine two books lying on a table, one on top of the other; the position of the first determines that of the second. Imagine also that the books have always been in that same position. This helps explain how “the Son exists because the Father exists: but there never was a time before the Father produced the Son.”⁸³ Lewis then moved a step further in his analogy:

In the same way we must think of the Son always, so to speak, streaming forth from the Father, like light from a lamp, or heat from a fire, or thoughts from a mind. He is the self-expression of the Father—what the Father has to say. And there never was a time when He was not saying it.⁸⁴

Though it transcends his earlier use of mere static pictures, Lewis was not entirely satisfied with this imagery, for each made “it sound as if the Father and Son were two things instead of two Persons.”⁸⁵ To solve this difficulty, he re-introduced the biblical imagery of the love between a father and a son, which:

... turns out to be much more accurate than anything we try to substitute for it. . . . Naturally God knows how to describe Himself much better than we know how to describe Him... Much the most important thing to know is that it is a relationship of love. The Father delights in His Son; the Son looks up to His Father.”⁸⁶

Lewis understood, however, that even this imagery was not entirely satisfactory or complete. Because God is, by definition, “beyond personality,” Lewis

⁸¹ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 177.

⁸² Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 162.

⁸³ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 173.

⁸⁴ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 173–4.

⁸⁵ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 174.

⁸⁶ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 174.

wanted to employ an even more dynamic image that would provide greater clarity to his explanation of the Trinity:

[I]n Christianity God is not a static thing—not even a person—but a dynamic, pulsating activity, a life, almost a kind of drama. Almost, if you will not think me irreverent, a kind of dance. The union between the Father and the Son is such a live concrete thing that this union itself is also a Person.⁸⁷

By this Person, of course, Lewis is referring to the Holy Spirit. He then evokes further imagery to add to his description of the relationship of the Spirit to the other two persons of the Trinity: “God is love, and that love works through men—especially through the whole community of Christians. But this Spirit of love is, from all eternity, a love going on between the Father and the Son.”⁸⁸

Having moved from the static imagery of lines, cubes, and books to the dynamic imagery of drama, dance, and eternal love flowing between the Father and Son, Lewis might have felt that he had pushed the analogy as far as possible with words. He apparently concluded, however, that one final series of images was needed in order to illustrate, as fully as possible, the importance of the Trinity:

The whole dance, or drama, or pattern of this three-Personal life is to be played out in each one of us: or (putting it the other way round) each one of us has got to enter that pattern, take his place in that dance. There is no other way to the happiness for which we were made. Good things as well as bad, you know, are caught by a kind of infection. If you want to get warm you must stand near the fire: if you want to be wet you must get into the water. If you want joy, power, peace, eternal life, you must get close to, or even into, the thing that has them. They are not a sort of prize which God could, if He chose, just hand out to anyone. They are a great fountain of energy and beauty spurting up at the very centre of reality. If you are close to it, the spray will wet you; if you are not, you will remain dry. Once a man is united to God, how could he not live forever? Once a man is separated from God, what can he do but wither and die?⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 175.

⁸⁸ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 176.

⁸⁹ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 176.

Lewis' rich combination of vivid imagery and powerful rhetoric help made the spiritual life not merely comprehensible to his readers, but attractive and desirable.

Lewis then attempted to explain how the Trinity interacts with human life to create sons and daughters of God, returning to the same pattern described earlier—static imagery moving to dynamic imagery—to illustrate this. He defined the terms “making” and “begetting,” for example, by pointing out that “. . . men are not Sons of God in the sense that Christ is;” they are more like statues or pictures of God.⁹⁰ As he explained: “A statue has the shape of a man but is not alive. In the same way, man has . . . the ‘shape’ or likeness of God, but he has not the kind of life God has.”⁹¹ He then concluded with another compelling image: “And that is precisely what Christianity is about. This world is a great sculptor’s shop. We are the statues and there is a rumour going round the shop that some of us are some day going to come to life.”⁹²

Another static image employed in the same section is that of toy soldiers. Evoking images from his own active imaginative childhood (mirroring, no doubt, that of many of his readers), Lewis posed the question: “Did you ever think, when you were a child, what fun it would be if your toys could come to life?”⁹³ On one level, he used the image of a lifeless toy soldier as a picture of man without Christ. But then he completes the imagery by picturing Jesus as the one toy soldier in the entire collection that came to life after being killed in battle.⁹⁴

As with his description of the Trinity, Lewis now moved to a more complex, dynamic imagery to illustrate how men and women become the sons and daughters of God. He began with the same striking phrase employed earlier: “Every Christian is to become a little Christ. The whole purpose of becoming a Christian is simply nothing else.”⁹⁵ To this picture, he added another childhood metaphor: the concept of playing dress up, or “Let’s Pretend.” When we call God “Our Father,” he writes, as the Lord’s Prayer instructs us to, what we are really doing is taking the first step in the spiritual transformation process, which he referred to as pretending.⁹⁶ Borrowing another metaphor that he had employed earlier, Lewis explained: “. . . [Y]ou are trying to catch the good infection from a Person. It is more like painting a portrait than like

⁹⁰ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 158.

⁹¹ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 158.

⁹² Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 159. Readers of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* will recall Aslan restoring to life the statues that the White Witch had created by turning her enemies to stone.

⁹³ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 179.

⁹⁴ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 180.

⁹⁵ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 177.

⁹⁶ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 188.

obeying a set of rules.”⁹⁷ However (just as he had pointed out earlier), this process is not one that we can do on our own:

God looks at you as if you were a little Christ. Christ stands beside you to turn you into one. I daresay this idea of divine make-believe sounds rather strange at first. But is it so strange really? Is not that how the higher things always raises the lower? A mother teaches her baby to talk by talking to it as if it understood long before it really does. We treat our dogs as if they were ‘almost human’; that is why they really become ‘almost human’ in the end.⁹⁸

Lewis then employed a series of metaphors to describe the radical nature of the transformation into being “a little Christ.” For Lewis, the point is that God wants not just part of our intellect, body, or emotions, He wants all of us. Therefore, Christ is the arborist who will not settle for a branch to be cut but insists that the whole tree come down, or the dentist who will not settle for a tooth to be drilled or crowned but insists that it be extracted,⁹⁹ or the harvester who wants to grow wheat and insists that the grass be ploughed up and the field re-sown.¹⁰⁰ As Christ informs us, “Hand over the whole natural self, all the desires which you think innocent as well as the ones you think wicked—the whole outfit. I will give you a new self instead.”¹⁰¹ To these Lewis (borrowing an analogy from George MacDonald) pictured God as rebuilding the house that we had intended only to repair: God, however, wants to provide us with more than a decent little cottage, He wants us to reside in a palace.¹⁰²

The image of the palace is consistent with several other images in the same section that appear to be intended not just to explain concepts, but to cause the reader to desire the spiritual life. These metaphors tend to be more poetic in nature and to create more of a sense of awe or wonder. At the conclusion of the chapter entitled “Is Christianity Hard or Easy,” for example, Lewis employs a royal metaphor to capture the significance of the Christian life:

What we have been told is how we men can be drawn into Christ—can become part of that wonderful present which the young Prince of the universe wants to offer to His Father—that present which is Himself and therefore us in

⁹⁷ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 189.

⁹⁸ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 194.

⁹⁹ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 196.

¹⁰⁰ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 198.

¹⁰¹ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 196–7.

¹⁰² Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 205.

Him. It is the only thing we were made for. And there are strange, exciting hints in the Bible that when we are drawn in, a great many other things in Nature will begin to come right. The bad dream will be over: it will be morning.¹⁰³

Here, readers of Lewis' imaginative writings will no doubt recall the Narnian *Chronicles* with their royal personages, but also, in the last line of the quote, Aslan's arrival when the curse of the White Witch is broken and spring has at last been restored. Lewis then employs another striking image—the promise that we can become gods and goddesses:

If we let Him—for we can prevent him, if we choose—He will make the feeblest and filthiest of us into a god or goddess, a dazzling, radiant, immortal creature, pulsating all through with such energy and joy and wisdom and love as we cannot now imagine, a bright stainless mirror which reflects back to God perfectly (though, of course, on a smaller scale) His own boundless power and delight and goodness.¹⁰⁴

Finally, Lewis turns to an image that he would later use to good effect in *The Great Divorce*:

God became man to turn creatures into sons: not simply to produce better men of the old kind but to produce a new kind of man. It is not like teaching a horse to jump better and better but like turning a horse into a winged creature. Of course, once it has got wings, it will soar over fences which could never have been jumped and thus beat the natural horse at its own game.¹⁰⁵

Readers familiar with Lewis' fiction will now find themselves back in familiar

¹⁰³ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 200.

¹⁰⁴ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 206. Lewis did not believe that God would turn men and women into literal gods and goddesses. In this quotation, he seems to have been referring to Jesus' statement in John 10:34–6: "Has it not been written in your Law, 'I said you are gods'? If he called them gods, to whom the word of God came . . . do you say of Him . . . 'You are blaspheming,' because I said 'I'm the Son of God'?" Apparently Jesus was alluding to Psalm 82:6: "I said, 'You are gods, and all of you are sons of the Most High.'" The Hebrew term, of course, is *elohim* (as it is in Psalm 8:5), which is sometimes translated "angels" (as in the Septuagint, Hebrews 2:7), or "mighty ones," "magistrates," "Jewish rulers with authority," or "judges." Judges in the Old Testament not infrequently exercised "godlike" judicial authority and sovereignty. The passage from Psalm 82 refers to judges who violated the Law. Jesus' argument thus appears to be that, if the divine name had been applied by God to mere men, there could be neither blasphemy nor folly in its application to the Incarnate Son of God Himself.

¹⁰⁵ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 216.

territory. In *The Great Divorce*, after the Angel kills the lizard of lust resting on the shoulder of one of the ghostly visitors, the lizard is transformed into a great stallion, "... silvery white but with mane and tail of gold."¹⁰⁶ Similarly, the transformation of the formerly lustful ghost into "... an immense man, naked, not much smaller than the Angel,"¹⁰⁷ may be seen as the fictional counterpart to Lewis' promise that, if we let Him, God will transform us into "... a dazzling, radiant, immortal creature . . ."¹⁰⁸

Many more images and patterns could be identified throughout *Mere Christianity*. These examples, however, demonstrate how Lewis effectively used his imaginative powers. They also illustrate that Lewis' ability to make complex theological concepts both understandable and attractive rested, to a considerable extent, on his skilled selection of metaphor and analogy.

Just as Lewis' style in *Mere Christianity* was based on his theory of apologetics, his dependence on metaphor and analogy was likely based on (or at least influenced by) his theory of language, much of which he adopted from his friend, Owen Barfield. As Lewis wrote in *Surprised by Joy*, "Much of the thought which he [Barfield] put into *Poetic Diction* had already become mine before that important little book appeared."¹⁰⁹ Doris Myers provides a succinct summary of Barfield's position:

In order to know something, a person must recognize it, and to recognize it, he must be able to relate it to other things. Such relationships are concepts, and concepts must be expressed by resemblances and analogies—metaphors. Since Barfield defines knowledge as 'the ability to recognize significant resemblances and analogies,' it follows that our knowledge of the universe depends on metaphor. And since human intelligence is a participation in the cosmic Intelligence, the knowledge that human beings gain through metaphor corresponds with the way the universe really is.¹¹⁰

Throughout *Mere Christianity*, Lewis attempts to describe the universe and to reveal the ways of God to his readers in understandable ways. His masterful use of metaphor and analogy is perhaps the most significant way in which he succeeds at this. Through metaphor and analogy, he appeals not only to the intellect, but also to the imagination of his audience.

¹⁰⁶ C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (San Francisco, 2001), 111.

¹⁰⁷ Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, 111.

¹⁰⁸ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 206.

¹⁰⁹ C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (New York, 1955), 200.

¹¹⁰ Doris T. Myers, *C. S. Lewis in Context* (Kent, OH, 1994), 8.

This essay began with the observation that, as Lewis scholarship has matured, critics have paid greater attention to his achievement as a literary artist. Myers could be said to have initiated that trend with the claim that it is literary craftsmanship that “will ensure Lewis a permanent place in the canon.”¹¹¹ One suspects that part of the reason critics have been slow to accept Lewis as a serious artist is the popular nature of much of his work. Like his Oxford colleagues, who respected Lewis’ literary criticism but scoffed at his forays into popular apologetics, science fiction, and children’s fantasy, contemporary critics are liable to regard Lewis as more of an entertainer than a literary craftsman. For his part, Lewis rejected the notion that such categories were mutually exclusive. Many of the writers he most admired, from Chaucer to Morris to Chesterton, succeeded at both. A comment that Lewis made about Dorothy L. Sayers, reveals his view on this matter. On the occasion of her death, he noted that Sayers was both “a popular entertainer and a conscientious craftsman,” and that, “with a very few exceptions, it is only such writers who matter much in the long run.”¹¹² It is a statement that can equally be applied to Lewis, who approached the writing of criticism and popular apologetics seriously, and who demonstrated, in *Mere Christianity* and elsewhere, that he was both a popular entertainer and a conscientious craftsman. Lewis’ readers can be thankful for Welch’s recognition of his potential as a radio presenter able to revitalize the BBC’s religious programming during the Second World War. Because of Welch’s invitation, Lewis was given the perfect opportunity to exercise his apologetic gifts and, ultimately, to create a book that continues to explain and illuminate mere Christianity in clear, imaginative, and memorable ways. •

¹¹¹ Myers, *C. S. Lewis in Context*, xiv.

¹¹² Quoted in Phillips, *C. S. Lewis at the BBC*, 219.