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C. S. Lewis: A Study of a Paradigmatic Figure in a Modern-Postmodern Transitional Age

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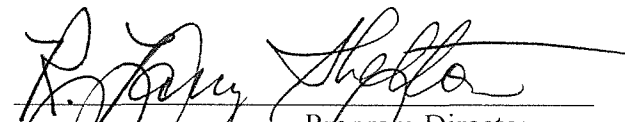


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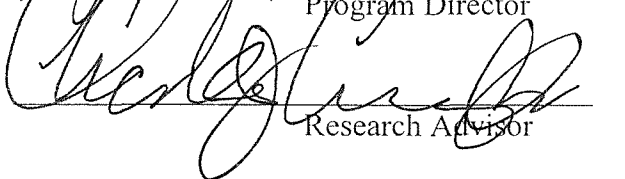
Title: C. S. Lewis: A Study of a Paradigmatic Figure in a Modern-Postmodern
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We, the undersigned, certify that we have read this thesis and approve it as adequate
in scope and quality for the degree of Master of Arts in Theological Studies.



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**C. S. LEWIS: A STUDY OF A PARADIGMATIC FIGURE IN
A MODERN-POSTMODERN TRANSITIONAL AGE**

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATION DEPARTMENT OF MINISTRY
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MASTER OF DIVINITY

BY
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To

Priscilla, my wife

&

Reepicheep, my new favorite mouse.

Sorry, Mickey.

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Introduction

Western civilization is in transition.

After centuries of modernity, western culture is beginning to see the world around it in an entirely different worldview. For the past two to three hundred years, reason and empiricism ruled: if a claim couldn't be proven scientifically, or if a proposition was shown to be unreasonable, then that claim or proposition was discarded as untrue. Truth was defined as that which could be proven through reason or science.

Of course, this posed a sticky problem for the church. After all, how could one scientifically prove the supernatural? How could one make a reasonable argument for a miracle, such as the resurrection of Christ? David Hume, a pioneer of the Enlightenment, asserted the modernist proposition that even if the resurrection did happen, it proves not that Christ was divine but only that he somehow managed to cheat death. Interestingly, however, the church made a tactical error in answering this assault of reason and science upon it: it chose to fight fire with fire, and created its own pseudo-science to demonstrate the truth of the Bible. Faith turned into apologetics—indubitable propositions “proving” the Scriptures.

This attempt to fight modernism by embracing it led to three results: 1) faith became dependent on reason; 2) the paradoxes and mystery of God and the scriptures were harmonized in one-dimensional, often anti-intellectual interpretations; and 3) the church found itself still shackled to modernity when the worldview unexpectedly shifted to postmodernism.

First, in trying to reasonably prove Christianity, the church made faith a result of reason instead of the other way around. Faith depended upon that which could be seen or

proven, or else it wasn't valid. This offered a very shallow faith—one that the world has not found appealing, to judge by the steady decline of the church in the twentieth century¹ despite the barrage of apologetic resources and speakers flooding the continents. These apologetics might have convinced the church; unfortunately, it isn't the church that needs convincing, but the world. And the world's response has been ho-hum at best.

This led to the second effect of modernism on the church. In order to reasonably prove Christianity, the church needed a reliable authority that was consistent with the laws of reason. The Bible, which Christians considered the word of God, was that authority; however, what was to be done with its obvious paradoxes and anomalies, which ran contrary to reason? Modern Christians found they had to work to harmonize these inconsistencies lest their reliable authority be deemed unreasonable—but in doing so, they shoehorned an infinitely mysterious God into their little theological boxes. Again, the world was not convinced. In fact, the tactic backfired when literary and textual critics pointed out vehemently that the modern Christians' attempts to harmonize scripture were anti-intellectual at best, and dishonest at worst.

Finally, there is the issue of the church awkwardly caught in the death grip of modernity as contemporary philosophers began to deconstruct scientism and chip away at propositions that have been embraced as truth for several generations. Theologian Karl Barth once said that “when the church weds itself to the spirit of the age, it will find itself a widow in the next.”² As history enters the third millennium A.D., that is precisely the predicament in which the western church finds itself.

¹ For extensive documentation on the decline in 20th-century church attendance and membership, see Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776-1990* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997).

² Comment made by Barth in casual conversation and repeated by Larry Shelton, Th.D., Professor of Wesleyan Theology at George Fox University, Portland, Oregon, 1999.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, the church embraced modernism gradually, but in the end so completely that the modernist worldview and the church itself became inseparable. At the end of the 20th century, the church is preparing to repeat its mistake: in an attempt to be relevant to the postmodern culture, it is embracing postmodernism just as it formerly embraced modernism. This is a serious danger because, as Barth warned, a church married to the current paradigm will be left with nothing when the paradigm changes. Paradigms come and go; what happens when the postmodern paradigm dies the same death as modernity?

And there is no doubt that it will. Postmodernism is a transitional paradigm—a corrective reaction to modernism. Modernism is, in a sense, postmodernism’s life-force: once modernism breathes its last, postmodernism—which exists only to deconstruct modernism, rebel against its empiricism and rationalism, and shatter its idol of scientism—will follow.

Soon, therefore, the church will once again find itself in the awkward position of trying to distance itself from a paradigm it unwisely rushed to adopt in the name of “reaching the culture.” So what is the church to do? How can Christians avoid riding the pendulum back and forth with each new paradigm shift—or is it even possible?

C. S. Lewis: a Model for Consideration

A compelling answer might be found in the life of C. S. Lewis—probably Christianity’s most popular spokesperson of the twentieth century. Decades after his death, Lewis’ books maintain phenomenal appeal, still selling more than 1.5 million

copies each year in the 1990s.³ The atheist-turned-theist-turned-Christian is considered a theologian to the masses—a layman’s apologist. Even his books for children are filled with theological truths, yet utterly readable and engaging. Citing examples such as *Aesop’s Fables* and *Pilgrim’s Progress*, one scholar points out that while most classic literature migrates from adult libraries to the nursery, Lewis’ astounding achievement is that his books written for the nursery—especially the *Narnia Chronicles*—are so moving and profound that they have “ended in the library—even the libraries of theologians.”⁴

Why? What is the appeal of C. S. Lewis? Why have millions of people of all ages found him so irresistible for so many years? One explanation is that he appeals to the modern mind with his use of rational argument. In *Mere Christianity*, his foundational claims, representational theory of language, and clear use of reason build upon the work of Immanuel Kant and other writers of the Enlightenment.

While highly acclaimed in modernist circles, however, Lewis’ appeal reaches into postmodernist circles as well. His creation of different worlds and realities, his emphasis on divine mystery, his use of narrative to present his theology, his spirituality, and his mystical experiences (such as his lifelong search for the experience he called Joy, which he always capitalized), and even his seemingly self-contradictory claims of anti-foundationalism are clearly aspects of postmodernism.

This is a paradox: postmodernism is by definition the opposite of modernism, the former having come into being for the sole purpose of reacting against and deconstructing the latter. How, therefore, can Lewis communicate so effectively to the modernist and the postmodernist alike, since they are opposed to each other? Can a

³ George Sayer, *Jack: A Life of C.S. Lewis* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994), 413.

⁴ John Wilson, “An Appraisal of C. S. Lewis and his Influence on Modern Evangelicalism,” *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 9 (Spring 1991): 33.

person be a modernist and a postmodernist at the same time, or is there another paradigm that transcends both?

To answer this, one must look beyond the two paradigms—which, for the contemporary philosopher, is nearly impossible. All persons now living have experienced only these two paradigms—roughly, modernism in the first half of this century and postmodernism in the second. For them, trying to comprehend anything else is like a tribal New Guinean trying to comprehend Philadelphia without ever having seen it: even if a member of the tribe traveled there and returned to relate what she had experienced, the others, having lived all their lives knowing only their own culture and their own ways, would have difficulty understanding.

Nonetheless, while attempting to answer the question concerning Lewis' appeal to both modernists and postmodernists, it can be argued that there is indeed a third paradigm with which the current populace is unfamiliar. In other words, the reason for Lewis' enduring popularity and relevance is that he is neither a modernist nor a postmodernist, but instead represents a third, unnamed paradigm which uses the strengths of both.

Viewing Lewis Through a Single Lens

To understand the paradox of C. S. Lewis as a paradigmatic figure—neither a modernist nor a postmodernist—it is instructive to read scholarly attempts to place Lewis neatly in one camp or the other. One such attempt is made by philosopher John Beversluis.

Beversluis, approaching the world as a modernist, makes the mistake of interpreting Lewis through an exclusively modernist worldview and trying to force him

into a single paradigm. He therefore dismisses as a contradiction any variation from modernism, and especially from modernistic rationalism in Lewis' writings, when the fault lies not with the writings but with Beversluis' own single-focus lens.

Beversluis reveals his unbending modernist mindset even in the way he approaches his subject. He divides Lewis' entire case for believing in God into three neat categories: the Argument from Desire, the Argument from Moral Law, and the Argument from Reason.⁵ Then he dispatches each one in turn by comparing it only to the modernist ideal of rationalism, evidently unable to imagine any other standard of comparison.

First, the Argument from Desire focuses on Lewis' lifelong quest for Joy. Based on the famous conversion story in which Lewis calls himself "the most reluctant convert in all of England,"⁶ Beversluis tries to catch Lewis in a contradiction by asking: Why would a person be so reluctant to meet the Object of the Joy he had desired all his life?⁷

In addition to an apparent inability to comprehend the conflict of a sinner meeting a holy God (in fact, the scriptures are filled with persons who desired God but recoiled from him in utter awe or terror),⁸ the question reveals the error of believing, and believing that Lewis believed, that the way to faith is through reason. Beversluis dismisses Lewis' simultaneous attraction and aversion to God as unreasonable, and therefore untenable. However, a careful reading of Lewis' writings will show that although many of his works—especially *Mere Christianity*, *Miracles*, *The Problem of Pain* and *The Abolition of Man*—defended Christianity with reason and logic, Lewis

⁵ John Beversluis, *C. S. Lewis and the Search for Rational Religion* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1985), 7.

⁶ C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace, 1955), 228.

⁷ Beversluis, 20

⁸ See Genesis 3:8, Isaiah 6:5, Ezekiel 1:28, Daniel 10:7-8, Jonah 1:3, Acts 9:4, Revelation 1:17, and many others.

never referred to reason when describing Joy.⁹ To him, it was obviously beyond reason, above reason. Beversluis' insistence that the experience of faith be forced exclusively into the grid of modern rationalism is a great blunder, certainly not supported by the works of Lewis as a whole.

Next, Beversluis attacks Lewis' Argument from Moral Law. Lewis pointed out that people everywhere have an innate sense of lawfulness and unlawfulness, as shown by universal cries such as "That's not right!" and "That's not fair!" Since this internal law clearly exists, he argues, there must be an author of the law; he calls it "Something Behind" the law.¹⁰ Beversluis declaims this as "a very poor argument, one that can be disposed of with unusual speed"¹¹—which he attempts to do as follows:

<i>Summary of Lewis' argument</i>	<i>Example of similar argument</i>
1) If there is Something behind the facts observed by science, it cannot manifest itself externally....it must remain entirely unknown or it must make itself known in some other way.	1) If you are to pass this test, you will have to study very hard.
2) [There is] an internal command urging us to behave morally [which] cannot be observed by science....	2) You did study very hard.
3) Therefore there is Something [a Power] behind the Moral Law.	3) Therefore you will pass this test. ¹²

He uses the obvious fallacy of the second argument to claim that Lewis' argument is parallel and therefore equally fallacious, according to logic and reason. However, he employs only one of modernism's two main definitions of reason: "pure reason," which

⁹ Instead, he used the language of poetry, myth, and mystery; see the whole of *Surprised by Joy*, especially 16-18, 72-73, and 219-222.

¹⁰ See Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, "What Lies Behind the Law," 31-35. The concept of "Something Behind" creation, science, and Moral Law permeates the chapter; the actual words appear on p. 32, in a section on science.

¹¹ Beversluis, 51.

¹² *Ibid.*, 50-51.

is limited to the experience of space and time and discounts anything else as an “illusion.”¹³ However, Kant presents an alternate view called “practical reason,” which is “not of a logical but of a moral nature.”¹⁴ It is practical reason Lewis uses when he defends Christianity by arguing for the existence of a Moral Law.

To add to this, Stephan Körner writes, “*The Critique of Pure Reason*, which is concerned with our judgements [*sic*] of fact, is expressly aware that we also judge that certain things which are not fact, ought to be fact.”¹⁵

In comparing pure reason and practical reason, Grenz and Olson assert that Kant “was convinced that certain rational principles control all valid moral judgments, just as other rational principles lie at the foundation of all theoretical or sense-based knowledge.”¹⁶ Hendrikus Berkhof presents a summary of Kant’s view of practical reason as related but superior to pure reason: “For him intellect, pure reason, and practical reason are the three floors of a building. The windows of these floors offer different views of the outside world. On the first, one sees the world of the senses; on the second, the faraway blue skies. The third opens to a wide landscape. From here one also sees the overall connection with the views of the lower floors.”¹⁷

Beverluis cannot “make the jump” with Lewis from pure reason to practical reason, and thus finds Lewis’ Argument from Morality inconclusive.

Lewis, in fact, sees a clear progression of reason from Moral Law, after the fashion of Kant and his categorical imperative. This will be explored later, but for now,

¹³ Hendrikus Berkhof, *Two Hundred Years of Theology: Report of a Personal Journey*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1989), 2.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁵ Stephan Körner, *Kant* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), 129.

¹⁶ Stanley J. Grenz & Roger E. Olson, *20th-Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age* (Downer’s Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1992), 27.

¹⁷ Berkhof, 6.

the point is to show how a critic viewing Lewis through a single worldview may misinterpret Lewis, leading to an inaccurate critique.

Finally, Beversluis addresses the Argument from Reason. According to Beversluis, Lewis believed that all knowledge hinges on valid reasoning¹⁸ (which Lewis did not, as has been shown) and that reason “commits us to believing in a superior Mind.”¹⁹ He charges, however, that Lewis violates basic principles of logic, fails to prove his argument, and grossly oversimplifies complex theological issues:

Within the compass of less than fifty pages he attempts to prove the objectivity of morality, to refute ethical relativism and ethical subjectivism, to establish the existence of a Power behind the Moral Law, to show that atheism is too simple and theological liberalism too naïve, to prove that Jesus is God and that orthodox Christianity is the only view that faces all the facts, and to offer some practical advice about how to deal with conflicting theories of atonement—all this before wrapping things up with a resounding appeal to accept God’s offer of salvation while there is still time.²⁰

At the end of his critique, Beversluis has packaged Lewis into a tidy bundle: Lewis’ apologetics, he feels, are effectively shown to be irrational, irresponsible and ignorant, communicated with an arrogant contempt for philosophical and epistemological principles. But Beversluis’ argument is an incomplete study based on an erroneous premise. Lewis does not fit completely into a modernist worldview. In fact, the failure of Beversluis and others to “get” Lewis simply proves that he has more range and depth than they.

First, Lewis’ apparent simplicity is perhaps not so simple. For example, just as Beversluis charges that Lewis’ autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*, consists more of

¹⁸ Beversluis, 75.

¹⁹ Ibid., 58.

²⁰ Beversluis, 33

apologetics than autobiography,²¹ one could reply that *Mere Christianity* is as much autobiography as apologetics. Beversluis sees the latter book solely as the progression of an argument. How might he critique it differently if he saw it as the progression of a *life*—the story of Lewis’ own progression from atheism to theism to Christianity? If *Mere Christianity* recounts Lewis’ own intellectual journey, then its simplicity is irrelevant; it worked for Lewis and is therefore valid.

Further, concerning Beversluis’ charge that Lewis’ apologetics are simplistic, it should be noted that simplicity does not invalidate an argument. The example of Jesus comes to mind.

Finally, Beversluis’ strongest point is made in the Argument from Reason. He revels in British philosopher G. E. M. Anscombe’s challenge to Lewis’ reasoning in 1948, which might have prompted Lewis rework his book *Miracles* for later editions.²² Lewis himself never claimed to be an expert logician; he argued ideas, not fine points as philosophers such as Anscombe (and Beversluis) like to do.

It could be mentioned, however, that although Lewis reworked his arguments for a later edition of *Miracles*, he never renounced his central claims. Perhaps Lewis’ Argument from Reason does not stand up under a microscope of pure reason, but Lewis did not seem to think that that microscope was the only lens through which truth could be viewed.

In fact, it is amazing to see Beversluis try to compare Lewis’ two great treatises on suffering while retaining this same single-lens perspective. Beversluis compares *The Problem of Pain*, written in 1940, which he declares an intelligible position, to *A Grief*

²¹ Beversluis, 9-10.

²² Beversluis, 65-69.

Observed—in which, he says, Lewis’ “confidence was nonexistent, his worries all-consuming, and his argument incoherent”²³—with complete disregard for the personal experiences Lewis had suffered between the two.

To Beversluis, in other words, *A Grief Observed* is not the journal of a widower in agony, pouring out his rage and confusion toward God, but the treatise of an individual with a “strategy,”²⁴ trying to keep his apologetic dike plugged in the midst of seeming injustice. Beversluis’ mistake would be humorous, if it weren’t so sad. He is unable to distinguish between an apology and a journal. Of modernism’s shortcomings, this is perhaps its greatest: logic, reason and apologetics do not comprehend anguish. This has led other scholars to reject Beversluis’ critique of Lewis because he “misrepresents Lewis in ways that are simply inexcusable” and “ignores every development in recent philosophy that would support Lewis on specific points.”²⁵ (It is also interesting to note that Beversluis does not even attempt to tackle any of Lewis’ fiction or the apologetics found in it. Could this be because of modernism’s limited understanding of reality, or perhaps because modernism cannot perceive truth in any form other than cold, hard reason?)

Beversluis’ greatest misstep is in trying to box a person in, as any good modernist would do, and then tear down that box from within his own worldview. He tries to understand Lewis through his own rationalistic worldview and thus reaches faulty conclusions.

²³ Beversluis, 162.

²⁴ Beversluis, 163.

²⁵ Thomas Talbott, “C. S. Lewis and the Problem of Evil,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 17, no. 1 (1987): 37.

An Overview of Studies of C. S. Lewis

Although C. S. Lewis is known for his rational defense of Christianity in works such as *Mere Christianity*, *The Abolition of Man* and *The Problem of Pain*, it is perhaps somewhat ironic that showing his modernist side is more difficult than one might expect. While he sets out, like a true modernist, to place Christianity on a solid foundation of reason in *Mere Christianity*, he also establishes clear limits to—and criticisms of—scientism, which has been called the religion of twentieth-century modernism.²⁶

Ever since men were able to think, they have been wondering what this universe really is and how it came to be there. And, very roughly, two views have been held. First, there is what is called the materialist view. People who take that view think that matter and space just happen to exist, and always have existed, nobody knows why;...The other view is the religious view...[and you] cannot find out which view is the right one by science in the ordinary sense....Do not think I am saying anything against science: I am only saying what its job is....and a very useful and necessary job it is too. But why anything comes to be there at all, and whether there is anything behind the things science observes...is not a scientific question.²⁷

As a renowned literary critic, Lewis also saw both the value and the limits of textual criticism in establishing the trustworthiness of the Bible.²⁸ Rational science is not the be-all and end-all of discovering truth. In fact, Lewis' most effective way of communicating theological issues is not through rational analysis, as in *Mere Christianity*, but through narrative and allegory, as in *The Space Trilogy*, *The Screwtape Letters*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and *The Great Divorce*. Clearly, it is difficult to pour

²⁶ See Lawrence Cahoon, ed., *From Modernism to Postmodernism: An Anthology* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996), 12; Nancey Murphy & James Wm. McClendon, "Distinguishing Modern and Postmodern Theologies," *Modern Theology*, 5, no. 3 (April 1989): 192.

²⁷ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, NY: Macmillan Press, 1952), 31-32.

²⁸ Richard B. Cunningham, *C. S. Lewis: Defender of the Faith* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1967), 91.

Lewis into a mold of pure modernism, as evidenced by the problems of those like Beversluis who have tried to do so.

Much that has been written about Lewis centers on what may be called his defensive apologetic versus his imaginative apologetic. The first method entails a simple, colloquial use of foundationalism and reason to offer logical proof of God's existence. The second enlists story and allegory to communicate theological truths. The question then arises: if Lewis felt equally at home communicating in both realms—modern foundationalism and postmodern narrative—why and how did he select which medium to use when? Why did he so vigorously employ them both at various times, and with great versatility? The answer lies in Lewis' primary motivation of evangelism.

Lewis the Evangelist

"The proper study of shepherds is sheep, not (save accidentally) other shepherds. And woe to you if you do not evangelize," Lewis said once, in a paper he was reading at Cambridge.²⁹ It is interesting that despite explicit statements like this and many other expressions, there has been debate over the motivation behind the writings of C. S. Lewis. The discussion has become dichotomized, categorizing Lewis either as a defender of and apologist for Christianity, or as an evangelist.

John Wilson argues that Lewis was "an apologist, not an evangelist" because, although he clearly believed in salvation only through the cross of Christ, he "refused to go further."³⁰ This is expressed not as a criticism, but as proof that Lewis should be considered a "defender of faith" rather than an evangelist. However, it is not clear what Wilson meant by going "further" or what, according to Wilson, one must do to gain

²⁹ C. S. Lewis, *Christian Reflections* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1967), 152.

³⁰ Wilson, "An Appraisal of C. S. Lewis," 27; see also 35.

entrance into the “evangelist” locker room. Wilson would do better to say that Lewis’ *style* was apologetic rather than evangelistic. It is entirely possible for a person to be *both* an apologist and an evangelist, and Lewis’ life indicates that he was.

In fact, there is strong evidence that evangelism was the driving force *behind* his apologetic works. Evangelism was very important to Lewis. It was not tent-meeting evangelism or door-to-door evangelism, but this does not disqualify him as an evangelist.

Lewis communicated to ordinary folk. Even Wilson acknowledges admiringly: “Lewis wrote, in simple language, on profound subjects....He was a brilliant debater but, at heart, he was always appealing to commonsense.”³¹ To illustrate Lewis’ great skill in this area, Wilson uses the delightful example of Lewis’ statement that, to understand Almighty God’s limiting of himself to human form, one should try to imagine oneself becoming a slug.³²

Indeed, Lewis’ communications did reach far beyond the walls of the church and were intended to do so. He became world famous when his series of articles, published as the instant bestseller *The Screwtape Letters* in 1941, appeared in the now defunct *Guardian* newspaper. For the next three years he had a series of talks on BBC radio, later compiled as *Broadcast Talks* (in the U.S., *The Case for Christianity*), *Christian Behavior*, and *Beyond Personality*, and finally published as *Mere Christianity* in 1952. He spoke at R.A.F. bases and filled Oxford’s University Church when he lectured there, something only one other person—the Archbishop—could do.³³

In all these pursuits, Lewis was not “preaching to the choir,” as the saying goes, but to those unfamiliar with Christian jargon and scripture. If the newspaper articles,

³¹ Ibid., 35.

³² Ibid.; the original quote is in Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 155.

³³ Cunningham, 31-32.

radio broadcasts and public lectures were meant for the masses, then why would the subsequent books not be? In fact, both books—as well as most of his other works—are evangelistic in nature, intended for unbelievers. Lewis’ speeches were primarily in defense of Christianity, and in this sense Wilson is correct; however, since they were directed to general audiences, evangelism—the desire to share the gospel with the masses—was the intent.

“You may have felt you were ready to listen to me as long as you thought I had anything new to say; but if it turns out to be only religion, well, the world has tried that and you cannot put the clock back. If anyone is feeling that way I should like to say three things to him,”³⁴ says Lewis, obviously speaking to unbelievers. He then goes on to defend the gospel by saying the “three things” and a good many more, anticipating their objections and using language that would be familiar to them. Through simplicity in argument, use of common language, and establishment of a target reader, it is demonstrated that the motivation behind the writings mentioned here (and many others too numerous to discuss) is evangelistic in nature.

Lewis the Rational Apologist

Most contemporary scholars, and even Lewis himself, have agreed that Lewis was a rationalist. Lewis placed a high value on reason and used it effectively in his arguments, appealing to unbelievers who trusted in their own thinking rather than in scripture. His plan of attack was to find an indubitable foundation upon which believers and

³⁴ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 36.

unbelievers cannot disagree, and progress from there. Lewis not only suggested that Christianity could be scrutinized by the tests of reason; he insisted that it should be.³⁵

Richard B. Cunningham says Lewis had great confidence that reason would come down on the side of Christianity—that “reason faithfully pursued is a path that leads to God.”³⁶ Cunningham says reason “helps clarify one’s immortal longings and, when rigorously followed, can lead to a theistic position, and then to revelation and the door of faith.”³⁷ As much as Lewis respected reason, however, he seems to have disagreed with Cunningham that it was the primary or only way to faith, stating instead that all our knowledge depends on a mix of authority, reason, and experience.³⁸

Richard Purtill emphasizes Lewis’ view that faith and reason are not opposed to each other. Unlike many Christians who see the two as enemies, Lewis embraced the title of Christian rationalist. He believed, according to Purtill, that “faith should be based on the evidence, not fly in the face of the evidence.”³⁹ He points out, as others do, that Lewis delineated two types of faith: Faith-A, an intellectual faith, and Faith-B, a religious faith. These have been described in various ways—Beverluis called the first “philosophical,”⁴⁰ and Purtill called the second “faith as a commitment to God”⁴¹—but most researchers on the subject do distinguish between them in some way. Purtill says that “our age is different from many previous ages in that many people are half-educated: not wise enough to assess the arguments for God, not simple enough to trust ‘all those wise men’ who have. Therefore, in our days a number of Christians are confused about their grounds

³⁵ Cunningham, 77.

³⁶ Ibid., 79.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Lewis, *Christian Reflections*, 41.

³⁹ Richard L. Purtill, *C. S. Lewis’s Case for the Christian Faith* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1981), 72.

⁴⁰ Beverluis, 7.

⁴¹

for belief. When their faith is challenged, they either abandon their commitment or retreat to a sort of stubborn insistence: ‘Don’t confuse me with the arguments; I *know* it’s true.’”⁴²

Purtill suggests that this is perhaps why Lewis is so popular: he appeals to an “appetite” for argument that exists in the ordinary Christian. While it is sometimes claimed that faith is just a “leap in the dark,”⁴³ most Christians desire to know that what they believe is true. Lewis’ ability to argue such complex and abstract ideas in language used by the laity appeals to and satisfies that appetite.

However, not all scholars share the view that Lewis esteemed rational apologetics above all else. Robert Holyer presents a deeper Lewis, one who used reason when he saw fit but did not rely on it to “make or break” the Christian faith.

Holyer agrees that Lewis’ rational arguments were “‘absolutely compelling’ to any rational mind,” but immediately adds that Lewis always said belief in God “could never be based on arguments that compelling—indeed, that demonstration of this sort would prove inimical to faith.”⁴⁴ In other words, apologetics that pass the test of reason could still be hostile to belief in God, because belief based solely on reason no longer requires faith.

Holyer also makes the important point that besides reason, Lewis also appeals directly to human experience and to the imagination. In many cases, his goal was not to show that Christianity is irrefutably true by rational proofs, but simply to show that “religious beliefs are neither produced, nor ultimately assured, by argument alone but

⁴² Ibid., 79.

⁴³ Ibid., 78.

⁴⁴ Robert Holyer, “C. S. Lewis – The Rationalist?” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 18, no. 2 (1988), 150.

by...feelings and desires as well.”⁴⁵ Holyer, unlike Beversluis, perceives that Lewis is able to use more than one paradigm to communicate the gospel, and thus he comes to a much deeper and more accurate understanding of Lewis.

As western society moves fully into a postmodern paradigm, contemporary scholars might be tempted to leave behind Lewis’ emphasis on reason and focus instead on his use of postmodern elements such as narrative, spirituality and mysticism. However, while it is a mistake to see Lewis as a total modernist, painting him as purely postmodern would be just as wrong. Indeed, Lewis placed a tremendous significance on reason, using it variously to prove the Christian faith, or merely to remove obstacles to faith. But reason does not complete his case for Christianity.

Lewis the Imaginative Apologist

Scholars have struggled with trying to define Lewis’ other methods. Wilson defines these as “imaginative apologetics” and cites the *Space Trilogy* as just one example of how much theology Lewis packs into his stories. Wilson argues that, though they can be read as fairy tales, “they are full of images and symbols which are easily interpreted. This can give aesthetic delight—we can see the hidden meaning.”⁴⁶ Finally, Wilson argues that reason and imagination are not dichotomous but complementary: “It seems to me that both reason and imagination are necessary for apologetics; Lewis had both. I suspect the sad truth is that, for many Christians, one of these faculties is missing.”⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Ibid., 163.

⁴⁶ Wilson, “An Appraisal of C. S. Lewis,” 33.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 37.

If Cunningham saw reason as total to Lewis' method, Ralph C. Wood places Lewis on the opposite end of the spectrum and argues that Lewis' strength is clearly his imagination. First, however, Wood's comments *against* Lewis' apologetic writings, while not relevant to his case *for* Lewis' imaginative writings, should be mentioned for the sake of thorough discussion.

In a lengthy section, Wood decries Lewis' rational apologetics as his weakest work—*Mere Christianity* “mangles” the gospel and *The Problem of Pain* is “wrong”—and dismisses Lewis' interest in reason as merely a holdover from the part it played in Lewis' own conversion, saying, “We are seldom argued into the Kingdom.”⁴⁸ This last point is not in debate—Lewis himself doubted that reason alone could convert anyone—and the former points are disputed by the many who, believers or not, have found Lewis' apologetics either intellectually brilliant or spiritually life-changing. However, Wood says all this merely to make his point, which is that Lewis' imaginative work is “his best and most readable confession of the gospel.”⁴⁹

Wood's praise for Lewis' use of narrative is poignant. He claims that Lewis sought to do for others what the writings of George MacDonald had done for Lewis himself: baptize the imagination⁵⁰ by explaining difficult ideas, such as *Sehnsucht* and the nature of holiness, through the reader's own imagination.

“Essentially imagination was for Lewis just what the common use of the term would suggest: an exceptionally inventive way of seeing things....it was, first and

⁴⁸ Ralph C. Wood, “The Baptized Imagination: C. S. Lewis's Fictional Apologetics,” *The Christian Century* 112 (30 August–6 September 1995), 813.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

foremost, images.”⁵¹ says Robert Houston Smith. *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, for example, began not with an idea for a theme or a plot, but with an image in Lewis’ mind of a faun walking through the snow, holding an umbrella. From this, the rest of the story began to unfold.⁵²

According to Smith, Lewis believed imagination was not only a good way, but the best and sometimes *only* way to communicate higher truths; he strongly disagreed that anything imaginative is automatically false.⁵³ In a detailed explanation, Smith traces the branches of Lewis’ imaginative apologetics: 1) allegory, which Lewis later abandoned as too artificial; 2) analogy, which he found much more to his liking and used extensively in all his works; 3) myth, which Smith contends was Lewis’ favorite form of communication; and 4) children’s fiction, although Smith makes the point that, for example, the Narnia tales are really adult fiction written for children and the *Space Trilogy* is really a child’s fairy tale for grownups.⁵⁴

Another way to view Lewis’ imaginative apologetic is to see Christianity the way he saw it: as myth. Stratford Caldecott notes that Lewis the atheist and Lewis the Christian both saw Christianity as a myth, but for very different reasons. Lewis the atheist saw Christianity as a fairy tale presented with the appearance of truth. However, Lewis the Christian acknowledged that Christianity is indeed myth, defined as a story of supernatural deity interacting with humanity, and also identified the other defining elements: 1) a hero, whose birth is marked with supernatural favor; 2) an oppressive

⁵¹ Robert Houston Smith, *Patches of Godlight: The Pattern of Thought of C. S. Lewis* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1981), 141.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 142.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 145-151. I propose that examples of these four categories might be: 1) *Pilgrim’s Regress*, *The Great Divorce*; 2) metaphors used everywhere throughout both his fiction and his nonfiction, such as the earlier one about the slug or the famous one about pain being God’s megaphone (*The Problem of Pain*, 95); 3) *Perelandra*, *Till We Have Faces*; and 4) *The Narnia Chronicles*, *The Space Trilogy*.

enemy; and 3) a task in which only the hero can fulfill—recovering a treasure closely guarded by the enemy⁵⁵ (in this case, of course, the souls of his people). Caldecott describes the Christian myth as “the Drama within all drama, the Story that all good stories reflect. The overcoming of death by infinite Love is the Quest at the heart of every quest, and the sacrifice that makes it possible is the essence of all heroism. In the Gospels, literal truth and universal symbolism, history and legend, time and eternity coincide.”⁵⁶

Christians are often uneasy with this idea, primarily because they associate “myth” more with the concept of “make-believe” than with the concept of mystery and profound truth. A popular definition of myth is something that is not true—a fiction, a fable, a fairy tale. Thus, to define Christianity as myth is to belittle the faith. But this is a limited view of myth. It is through myth that a Christian may come to understand spiritual truth. Through myth, things which take enormous courage to believe but which cannot be proved or disproved, such as the resurrection of Jesus Christ, can suddenly be understood as reasonable. Perhaps it could be said, as Lewis might have said, that faith must ultimately walk through the door of the imagination. Caldecott concludes his treatment of Lewis’ use of faith and imagination by saying that “...as Lewis found in his own life, Christian myth becomes Christian experience and in due course, in God’s good time, the proofs from experience that we lacked in the beginning are ours as well. For we do not walk in the dark forever.”⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Stratford Caldecott, “Speaking the Truths Only the Imagination May Grasp: Myth and ‘Real Life,’” in *The Pilgrim’s Guide*, ed. David Mills (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 90.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 92.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 97.

Corbin Scott Carnell takes the “baptized imagination” concept to another level, focusing not on the stories Lewis wrote but on the story he lived. Through the Inklings, a group of intellectuals who met for hours each week in a local pub, batting around theories of theology and language, Lewis’ mystical understanding of Christianity matured. He was shaped the most through his intellectual sparring with Owen Barfield about imagination, reason and language, and especially through his deep friendship with Charles Williams:

Atheism had appealed to Lewis as a dogmatic system, something one could prove by hardhitting dialectic. His earliest efforts in theology after he became a practicing Anglican show that he would have liked to make Christianity as neat and foolproof as atheism had once seemed....As Lewis came under the influence of Williams’ eclectic thought with its strongly mystical bent, certain important changes resulted....[Through] this friend who lived his loyalties contagiously yet without seeking to defend them with compulsive logic, Lewis’ ideas were reshaped [to allow] paradoxes, ironies, and tensions....”⁵⁸

This was a crucial step in Lewis’ dawning awareness that reason could not account for everything, and that imaginative story or myth often revealed different or deeper truths than logic. Carnell even suggests that Williams’ influence in these areas was directly responsible for most of Lewis’ best work.⁵⁹

By all accounts, however, the most significant influence upon Lewis’ developing imagination was the work of George Macdonald. Lewis read him avidly and admired both his deep spiritual devotion and his “ability to make the crimson and gold of mythopoeic never-never lands the vehicle of Christian truth.”⁶⁰ Macdonald moved Lewis toward more metaphysical and symbolic uses of language to express the highest truths

⁵⁸ Corbin Scott Carnell, *Bright Shadow of Reality: Spiritual Longing in C. S. Lewis* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), 63.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 64-65.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 68.

until he learned to find meaning in both reason and imagination. Carnell argues that “it is this dual approach which makes him unusual in an age when it has been fashionable either to damn reason and live for art or to reject artistic statement as empirically meaningless.”⁶¹

This is the key to understanding Lewis’ appeal to both modernists *and* postmodernists. Lewis virtually married intellect to imagination; his uniqueness is his ability to operate easily in both realms—the rational world of the modernist, and the imaginative world of the postmodernist.

The Modern Lewis

Along the timeline of western history, modernism is a mere glitch, appearing for only about three hundred years before dissolving away again in the second half of the 20th century. Its starting point is debatable: some say it was the 16th-century Reformation, when authority shifted from the church to the individual, and thought shifted from belief to the skepticism of Erasmus and Montaigne; some pinpoint the 17th-century scientific revolution of Galileo, Newton, Descartes and others; other argue for the 18th-century French and American Revolutions, or even the 19th-century industrial revolution of the 1800s.⁶² One theory determines its starting point not by the calendar but by Descartes’ assertion (“I think, therefore I am”), which gave the individual a central position in the universe and viewed him as an autonomous, rational being.⁶³ In view of all these factors, a practical starting point is the beginning of the 18th-century Enlightenment.

⁶¹ Ibid., 72.

⁶² Cahoon, Introduction to *From Modernism to Postmodernism*, 13.

⁶³ Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 2-3.

Lawrence Cahoone defines modernism as the notable rise of numerous factors, including rationalism, individualism, humanism, capitalism, secularization, democratization, and significant advances in science and industry.⁶⁴ In summary, it can be seen as the birth of a civilization “founded on scientific knowledge of the world and rational knowledge of value, which places the highest premium on individual human life and freedom, and believes that such freedom and rationality will lead to social progress through virtuous, self-controlled work, creating a better material, political, and intellectual life for all”—or, on the negative side, a movement of “ethnic and class domination, European imperialism, anthropocentrism, the destruction of nature, the dissolution of community and tradition, the rise of alienation, the death of individuality in bureaucracy.”⁶⁵

Modernism is a large area of study with many facets. To discover tendencies toward modernism in some of Lewis’ writings, it is useful to compare them to a manageable model of modernism. Nancey Murphy and James McClendon have created a helpful model which groups the characteristics of modernism into three axes: epistemological foundationalism, the representational-expressivist theory of language, and atomism or reductionism.⁶⁶

The Epistemological Axis

Epistemological foundationalism is “the view that knowledge can be justified only by finding indubitable ‘foundational’ beliefs upon which it is constructed.”⁶⁷ Every claim must be justified by supporting claims that are also justified, either by reason or by

⁶⁴ Cahoone, 11.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 12.

⁶⁶ Murphy/McClendon, 192.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 192.

empirical evidence, until one reaches a foundational proposition which cannot be disputed and thus requires no further justification; if not, the argument becomes circular and must be rejected. Since the modernist questions and discards any claims found to be circular or without foundation, a natural effect of foundationalism is skepticism. Therefore, Murphy and McClendon establish an epistemological axis with optimistic foundationalism at one pole and pessimistic skepticism at the other.⁶⁸

Depending on one's perspective, *Mere Christianity* is either Lewis' most popular and complete defense of Christianity or the most flawed. It is probably the book most quoted by his supporters and the most criticized by his opponents. As has been mentioned, the book describes a teleological apologetic and perhaps the same rational journey Lewis himself went through on his road from atheism to theism to Christianity. Although not every reader has been convinced, the argument in *Mere Christianity*—along with his personal experience—did convince Lewis.

So what is Lewis' message? Since his intended audience was unbelievers, he did not use the Bible to make his case. He started with good and evil, sin and sin's consequences, believing his hearers could not fathom grace or forgiveness until they were conscious of sin.⁶⁹ Therefore he developed his argument in three steps: 1) we are aware of the existence of a Moral Law; 2) since there is a Moral Law, there must also be an author, Something Behind that law; and 3) since evil exists, not on its own but only as a rebellion against good, there must be a good for it to rebel against. He concluded that this was the God described in Christianity. Stan Grenz and Roger Olson describe Kant's position, which foreshadows that of Lewis: "Religion could be established, [Kant]

⁶⁸ Ibid., 192-193.

⁶⁹ Michael H. Macdonald & Mark P. Shea, "Saving Sinners and Reconciling Churches: An Ecumenical Meditation on *Mere Christianity*," in *Pilgrim's Guide*, 43-44.

argued, on the basis of practical reason—the ethical dimension of existence and the corresponding moral faculty of the mind. For him, the moral sphere is the proper domain of religion. There it reigns supreme, shielded from the findings of science.”⁷⁰

Lewis makes the case for the existence of God on philosophical grounds, and more specifically on moral grounds: he bases his entire argument on the existence of Moral Law. He points out that people everywhere have standards for behavior, as illustrated when one person objects that another has violated one of these standards; the offender hardly ever rejects the standard, but instead attempts to justify the reason for breaking it.⁷¹ Stephan Körner states, “Indeed, to adopt the legal metaphor which Kant uses in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, we are ‘in possession’ of specifically moral concepts and specifically moral principles. Examples would be concepts such as ‘duty’ and principles such as ‘inflicting pain for the mere sake of doing so is always wrong.’ About the fact that we have such principles there is general agreement.”⁷² Like Lewis, Grenz describes Kant’s “categorical imperative” as a set of “universal principles of conduct” or “a supreme principle of morality”⁷³ in which moral life consists of living by principles that one wishes all to follow.⁷⁴ Incidentally, this again echoes the example of Jesus, who simply said, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

While scholars debate whether Moral Law actually exists and how we can be certain of it, Lewis still succeeds in his plan of attack by, interestingly, appealing not necessarily to reason but to the human heart. After all, how many people—both children

⁷⁰ Grenz & Olson, *20th-Century Theology*, 31.

⁷¹ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 17, 21.

⁷² Körner, 127.

⁷³ These definitions are taken from Stanley J. Grenz, *The Moral Quest: Foundations of Christian Ethics* (Downer’s Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1997), 31; and Grenz, *Primer*, 78.

⁷⁴ Grenz, *Primer*, 78.

and adults—have uttered the words: “That’s not fair!” How many have found themselves to be victims of gossip, betrayal, cheating, slander, inequality and injustice? Reading the first few pages of *Mere Christianity*, the reader can already relate to occasions of Moral Law in action. Purtill confirms: “No matter how skeptical we are about morality in theory, as soon as a moral issue enters our lives we find ourselves making judgments about rightness and wrongness. Whether it is a public issue such as the war in Vietnam, Watergate, or the American hostages in Iran, or whether it is an injustice or injury of a personal kind—a robbery, a rape, an act of cruelty done to or by someone we know—sooner or later something will cut through our theoretical moral skepticism or relativism and make us say, ‘That is wrong.’”⁷⁵

Further, whether or not he is accused of oversimplifying, Lewis does reach his goal of building his case upon an indubitable and incorrigible foundation in the eyes of his readers. Holyer states that Lewis’ strongest philosophical argument for Christianity is that he begins with premises which are “widely known to be true by both Christians and non-Christians, theists and non-theists, and entail conclusions which are themselves important Christian beliefs. Such arguments...are claimed by some philosophers to be precisely what Christians need if their beliefs are to be fully rational.”⁷⁶

Once this foundation is laid, Lewis moves on to the next stage. He takes Kant’s categorical imperative one step further by pointing out that if there is a Natural or Moral Law, reason dictates that it cannot have been written without a writer—a Power behind the Moral Law. Note that he is describing a philosophical view, not a religious view, of that Power; he has yet to introduce any concept of God. Cunningham suggests that “Both

⁷⁵ Purtill, pp. 17-18

⁷⁶ Holyer, 150.

reason and morality point to the existence of God, but this says nothing about what kind of God he is or how he is related to the world.”⁷⁷ Beversluis also distinguishes between philosophical views of God as, for example, the force that somehow caused the universe to come into being, and religious views of God as the purposeful creator and redeemer, seeking intimacy with and adoration from his creatures.⁷⁸

Paralleling this stage of Lewis’ thought, the writings of Kant also address the issue of the “Something Behind” the Moral Law. In developing his argument on practical reason, Kant offers examples of ideas such as freedom, morality, and God as having objects which cannot be perceived. Körner explains: “The postulates of practical reason state that the Ideas of God, freedom and immortality have ‘objects’—but no, of course, objects which can be given to perception. They are not objects in the sense of *The Critique of Pure Reason*, that is to say, manifolds of perception which have synthetic unity or which are instances of the schematized Categories. They are non-phenomenal ‘objects’ whose existence is guaranteed only by the apprehension of the moral law.”⁷⁹ Berkhof adds, “The postulates of practical reason are final concepts, which do not release further possibilities for new developments from within them. They stem from the moral world and serve only that world.”⁸⁰

Cunningham sees this stage of the argument as two-fold: “With his own peculiar twist, Lewis uses the moral argument to establish not merely a Lawgiver but also man’s guilt before the Law.”⁸¹ Many perhaps would stop here, having established the existence of a Higher Power. However, this is only stage two of Lewis’ argument; it is not the end

⁷⁷ Cunningham, 173.

⁷⁸ Beversluis, 5.

⁷⁹ Körner, 164.

⁸⁰ Berkhof, 8.

⁸¹ Cunningham, 165.

point. Lewis is arguing not for “mere theism” but “mere Christianity,” following the progressive nature of his own conversion to believing in Christ as God himself.

Finally, Lewis narrows the focus to seeing this Power that exists as the Christian view of God: “My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of *just* and *unjust*? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line. What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust?”⁸² Lewis saw that there is good and evil in the universe. However, unlike dualism, which maintains that good and evil are equal powers, Lewis saw good as that which stands in right relationship to the ultimate God, while evil is that which does not. Good, he argues, can exist for good’s sake, but evil cannot exist independently, for evil’s own sake; it can exist only as a rebellion against good. Therefore, evil is inferior to good. Lewis sees this as support that God, against whom good is measured and identified, must exist.⁸³ This again strikes a Kantian chord that the highest good cannot be realized unless God exists.⁸⁴

The element that best ties Lewis to modernism is his connection to Kant’s idea of practical reason—the aspect of modernism with which he was most comfortable and effective. Lewis’ entire purpose for his argument is based upon foundationalism—“the view that knowledge can be justified only by finding indubitable ‘foundational’ beliefs upon which it is constructed.”⁸⁵ Knowing that his audience would not tolerate “The Bible says so” as proof of God’s existence, he established a foundation for that existence by pointing to the evidence for a Moral Law—a universal sense of right and wrong—which

⁸² Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 45.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁸⁴ Körner, 167.

⁸⁵ Murphy/McClendon, 192.

is something virtually all people can agree upon. Most people have been placed in a situation where they had to appeal to the Moral Law to attempt to correct an injustice or grievance. Beversluis' criticism implies that Lewis overshot the runway; however, it also points out clearly what Lewis had intended to do all along: establish indubitable foundations that all could agree upon as a basis for proving the existence of God.

On the first axis in the Murphy-McClendon model, where would Lewis be placed? One reasonable position would be near Descartes—an optimistic foundationalist because “for him [Descartes], God guaranteed that ideas represent a real world.”⁸⁶ However, another author suggests that Lewis started at the other end, pessimistic skepticism, and only after a harsh collision with reality did he slide toward optimistic foundationalism: “He began by doubting just about everything, doubting even the things we take for granted as everyday reality. Then World War I came along and threw him out of the ivory tower. Forced to spend a couple of terms in the trenches in Ypres, Lewis realized that some things in life are, in fact, quite real. Mud, for example—and the German bullet that very nearly put him out of circulation for good.”⁸⁷

The Linguistic Axis

The second Murphy-McClendon axis is linguistic in nature. Modernism asserts a representational theory of language—one that sees words merely as representations of objects.⁸⁸ “Gun” has no meaning beyond the object it represents: a mechanical device, using a controlled explosion to discharge an object from its barrel at high speed. However, modern philosophers ran into trouble with words that represented things other

⁸⁶ Ibid., 193.

⁸⁷ John McTavish, “The Most Reluctant Convert in All England,” *Touchstone* 7 (September 1989), 44.

⁸⁸ Murphy & McClendon, 193.

than objects (such as ethics, duty, love), so they added an expressivist or emotivist theory of meaning in which language identifies the speaker's *attitudes* and *emotions* about an object, not simply the object itself.⁸⁹ Although the two theories are more correlative than polar, a person's view of the first will affect her view of the second. Therefore, this axis places the representational theory at one pole and an expressivist or emotivist theory at the other.

While defining his terms in *Mere Christianity*, Lewis gives a good example of the difference between the two theories and hints at his preference. He points out that the English word “gentleman” originally meant a male person who had some land and a coat of arms. Over time, however, people decided that “gentleman” should be a compliment—not an objective identifier of a man who had land and a coat of arms, but an identifier of a man who acted as they thought a man with land should act—that is, well-mannered. The problem is that there were already words to identify such men: courteous, honorable, brave. Now that the word “gentleman” intrudes upon the meaning of those words, there is no word left to describe a man who has land and a coat of arms. He distinguishes between the representational theory of language and the expressivist theory by saying, “When a word ceases to be a term of a description and becomes merely a term of praise, it no longer tells you facts about the object; it only tells you about the speaker's attitude to that object.”⁹⁰

Similarly, Lewis points out that the word “Christian” was invented simply to identify people in Antioch who accepted the teachings of Christ and his apostles: “There is no question of its being extended to those who...were ‘far closer to the spirit of Christ’

⁸⁹ Ibid., 195.

⁹⁰ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 10.

than the less satisfactory of the disciples. The point is...only a question of using words so that we can all understand what is being said. When a man who accepts the Christian doctrine lives unworthily of it, it is much clearer to say that he is a bad Christian than to say he is not a Christian.”⁹¹ Seeking an incorrigible understanding of the word “Christian” and of what one is, Lewis emphasizes the representational theory of the meaning of language, concluding that “obviously a word which we can never apply is not going to be a very useful word.”⁹² Lewis concludes that words should represent objects as descriptions of fact, since trying to “spiritualize” or refine a word beyond its objective, representational meaning actually lessens the meaning.⁹³ Thus Lewis shows a clear preference for the representational theory of language.

Another way to detect Lewis’ representational preference is to note his criticism, or caution, toward the expressivist theory in *Studies In Words*, where he expresses subtle doubt that meaning comes from the one who expresses the words. First, he raises the issue of what he calls “verbicide,” or the murder of words: 1) exaggeration or inflation (i.e. substituting *tremendous* for *great*); 2) “verbiage,” by which he means “the use of a word as a promise to pay which is never going to be kept” (i.e. — using *significant* to mean absolute); 3) the use of a word as a “party banner” or slogan; and, perhaps the greatest offender, 4) “the fact that most people are obviously far more anxious to express their approval and disapproval of things than to describe them.”⁹⁴ Hence, words lose their descriptive quality and increase their evaluative quality. This argument supports the idea of Lewis’ preference for the representational theory of language. Lewis felt that, contrary

⁹¹ Ibid., 11.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ C. S. Lewis, *Studies in Words* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 7.

to postmodernism, students should share in the same exploration to attempt to find the origin of words for the purpose of the more accurate reading of old books, saying dryly that those seeking to study literature free from philology are “crying for the moon or else [living] a lifetime of persistent and carefully guarded delusion.”⁹⁵ Reading poetry with a non-philological method frees the mind to produce whatever meaning it happens to consider at the time, and thus the poem becomes the reader’s and not the poet’s. Lewis was concerned with mistranslation of a poem or text, and perhaps there is a danger. However, in agreement with postmodernism and its anti-metanarrative view, Lewis holds this opinion to be his own and not one that should be forced upon others.⁹⁶ In other words, to each his own.

This is not to say, however, that Lewis thought the meaning of words remains constant. He acknowledged that meanings do change, like a tree growing new branches which then grow branches of their own; however, he observed that most speakers “neither know or care about the tree” and use words without thinking about their meanings. The danger is that using words mindlessly, to mean whatever one wants them to mean, can result in the “dumbing down” of language.⁹⁷

Next, Lewis concedes that words and language do have emotional nuances, but he delineates between language that is emotional (arousing emotion) and language that is emotive (expressive of emotion): “We do not talk only in order to reason or to inform. We have to make love and quarrel, to propitiate and pardon, to rebuke, console, intercede, and arouse.”⁹⁸ However, Lewis felt the emotional meaning does not come from

⁹⁵ Ibid. 3.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 9.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 314.

the speaker, as an expressivist theorist might suggest, but indirectly from another area. Language—especially poetic language—does not create emotion itself; instead, it utilizes the imagination to create the *grounds* for emotion to express itself.⁹⁹ He reiterates this in *Christian Reflections*: “I think that Poetic language often expresses emotion not for its own sake but in order to inform us about the object which aroused the emotion.”¹⁰⁰ To put it another way, words stimulate emotion through imagination.¹⁰¹

All good writing instructors teach this crucial methodology: *show, don't tell*.

Lewis expounds on it:

Do you think your readers will believe you just because you say so? You must go quite a different way to work. By direct description, by metaphor and simile, by secretly evoking powerful associations, by offering the right stimuli to our nerves (in the right degree and the right order), and by the very beat and vowel-melody and length and brevity of your sentences, you must bring it about that we, we readers, not you, exclaim ‘how mysterious!’ or ‘loathsome’ or whatever it is. Let me taste for myself, and you’ll have no need to *tell* me how I should react to the flavour.¹⁰²

Here Lewis does not directly proclaim his support of the representational theory of language, but he does challenge the expressivist theory quite extensively and finds it wanting, especially in its limited ability to communicate emotion to the reader or hearer. Perhaps it is because of this understanding of the representational-expressivist theory of language that Lewis connected so completely with his readers through fiction. Combining Lewis’ representational theory from *Mere Christianity* and his anti-expressivist side from *Studies In Words* puts Lewis at the representational end of the second axis in the Murphy-McClendon model.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 317.

¹⁰⁰ Lewis, *Christian Reflections*, 132.

¹⁰¹ Lewis, *Studies in Words*, 323.

¹⁰² Ibid., 317-318.

The Reductionistic Axis

Finally, the third axis of modernism is atomism or reductionism. Reductionism attempts to understand reality by reducing it to its smallest parts.¹⁰³ The reductionist believes that everything is better understood when broken down or reduced in this way. In science, for instance, water is better understood if examined as a molecule of two parts hydrogen and one part oxygen. In religion, the gospel is better understood when reduced to four spiritual laws or eight irrefutable proofs.

Reductionism can be correlated to the shift away from traditional authorities, such as the church, the government, and the scripture, to the authority of the individual—the smallest part of the whole. Murphy and McClendon write that this modern approach “sees the individual as prior to the community, and the community as merely a collection of like individuals, a mass.”¹⁰⁴ Therefore, Murphy and McClendon add a reductionistic axis, completing their three-dimensional model of modernism. At one pole of the reductionistic axis is individualism: only the individual can know what is real, and is therefore given the power to decide for him or herself. The opposite pole is collectivism, which sees all individuals as interchangeable or expendable. The way that this is reconciled with the elevated view of the individual is that “Both collectivists and individualists base their arguments on metaphysical positions, the former claiming that social wholes, and not their human elements, are the true historical individuals.”¹⁰⁵

To define Lewis within this reductionistic axis, the question to ask might be: from where or whom does Lewis receive his authority? Is it from the scripture, the church, or the individual rational will? In other words, does authority come from the individual or

¹⁰³ Murphy/McClendon, 192.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 197.

the collective? Even then, this question is not as easy to answer as it might seem. The paradox of Lewis requires a complex answer.

Looking back on himself as an atheist, Lewis remembers a contempt for all authority, therefore giving authority only to himself and his own rational will: “But, of course, what mattered most of all was my deep-seated hatred of authority, my monstrous individualism, my lawlessness. No word in my vocabulary expressed deeper hatred than the word *Interference*. But Christianity placed at the center what seemed to me a transcendental Interferer.”¹⁰⁶ Interestingly, however, he also accepted authority from poetry. When the poet Yeats mentioned “ever living ones” as if he was certain they existed, and certain that contact between their world and this one was possible, Lewis was surprised and perplexed: “Here was a pretty kettle of fish. You will understand that my rationalism was inevitably based on what I believed to be the findings of the sciences, and those findings, not being a scientist, I had to take on trust—in fact, on authority. Well, here was an opposite authority. If he had been a Christian I should have discounted his testimony, for I thought I had the Christians ‘placed’ and disposed of forever.”¹⁰⁷

For the first time, Lewis realized that spirituality was not synonymous with Christianity, and it was this realization that led him into spiritualism, theosophy, pantheism and even the occult. However, it also served as the starting point in his journey toward theism and eventually to Christ. When his evolution was complete, Lewis continued in many ways to rely on the authority of his own individualism—either his rational will or his imagination; but he now acknowledged authority from a higher source

¹⁰⁶ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 172.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 175.

as well. To Lewis the Christian, authority came from many sources, yet all of them pointed to God.

He struggled, however, with giving authority to the Church—in his case, the Anglican Church—even after he became a Christian. He disliked the crowds, the noise, the “perpetual arranging and organizing,” and especially the organ,¹⁰⁸ not to mention his least-favorite thing of all: “What I, like many other laymen, chiefly desire in church are fewer, better, and shorter hymns; especially fewer.”¹⁰⁹ John McTavish writes: “Lewis started going to church. He sat through sermons and sang ear-grating hymns and did what he could to bring his fuzzy religion down to earth. Even parish life, however, even worship, didn’t help so much as his trusty old intellect. Once again, then, Lewis’ razor-sharp mind came to the rescue, slicing through all the religious verbiage until everything narrowed to a choice between Hinduism and Christianity.”¹¹⁰

He found religion at its richest in small groups with “good men praying alone and meeting by twos and threes to talk of spiritual matters.”¹¹¹ Of the church, he wrote, “Thus my churchgoing was a merely symbolical and provisional practice. If it in fact helped to move me in the Christian direction, I was and am unaware of this.”¹¹² Further, his marriage to Joy Davidman Gresham created quite a controversy in the church when a bishop refused to marry them because Gresham was divorced. Lewis’ tensions with the church indicate that he rejected authority from the church, placing it instead with the individual. For much of his Christian life, as in his early years, Lewis listened to the authority of his own individual will.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 234

¹⁰⁹ Lewis, *Christian Reflections*, 96.

¹¹⁰ McTavish, 45.

¹¹¹ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 234.

¹¹² Ibid.

Authority also came from the Bible for Lewis, although, writing for the unchurched, he rarely included scripture in his apologetic discussions. He read primarily out of the New Testament and rarely out of the Old. In fact, his only commentary on the Old Testament is *Reflections on the Psalms*. But he takes issue with the fundamentalist view of the authority of scripture, specifically the issue of inerrancy. Approaching the Bible as a literary critic, he regards it not as “impeccable science or history” but rather as “an untidy and leaky vehicle.”¹¹³ He recognizes narrative from history and concludes, for example, that Job was not an actual living person and that the creation account is poetic rather than historical.¹¹⁴ The Bible, Lewis maintains, “contains good literature and bad literature.”¹¹⁵

However, in the stories, poems and histories of the Bible, and even in the surface imperfections and contradictions, Lewis senses its realness and authority. Though inerrantists may cringe at them, Lewis’ literary criticisms of scripture do not reduce it to bad literature or something to be discarded, but instead offer proof that scripture is a narrative account of God: “If ever a myth had become fact, had been incarnated, it would be just like this.”¹¹⁶ To squeeze the scripture into either an inerrantist’s or a literary critic’s view is to squelch its authority and turn it into just another (ordinary) classic. It is in the sloppy realness of its pages that the narrative’s main character is seen and understood.

Scripture is not the Word of God in the literal sense of a book written perfectly by a perfect God. Instead, Lewis writes, “It carries the Word of God; and we receive that

¹¹³ C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1958), 112.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 109-110.

¹¹⁵ C. S. Lewis, *Literary Essays* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 144.

¹¹⁶ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 236.

word from it not by using it as an encyclopedia or an encyclical but by steeping ourselves in its tone or temper and so learning its overall message.”¹¹⁷

Whether as a literary scholar, a layman, an apologist, a lecturer, or a broadcaster, Lewis sees something sacred and holy in the scriptures. He holds it as a book like none other and states that no other book makes the kind of claims about itself as does the Bible. Compare this statement from Lewis the literary critic:

It is, if you like to put it that way, not merely a sacred book but a book so remorselessly and continuously sacred that it does not invite, it excludes or repels, the merely aesthetic approach. You can read it as literature only by a *tour de force*. You are cutting the wood against the grain, using the tool for a purpose it was not intended to serve. It demands incessantly to be taken on its own terms: it will not continue to give literary delight very long except to those who go to it for something quite different.¹¹⁸

to this statement from Lewis the Christian layman:

We may observe that the teaching of Our Lord Himself, in which there is no imperfection, is not given us in that cut-and-dried, fool-proof, systematic fashion we might have expected or desired. He wrote no book. We have only reported sayings, most of them uttered in answer to questions, shaped in some degree by their context. And when we have collected them all we cannot reduce them to a system. He preaches but He does not lecture. He uses paradox, proverb, exaggeration, parable, irony; even the “wisecrack”. He utters maxims which, like popular proverbs, if rigorously taken, may seem to contradict one another. His teaching therefore cannot be grasped by the intellect alone, cannot be “got up” as if it were a “subject”. If we try to do that with it, we shall find Him the most elusive of teachers. He hardly ever gave a straight answer to a straight question. He will not be, in the way we want, “pinned down”. The attempt is like trying to bottle a sunbeam.¹¹⁹

Given the tension he experienced with authority and the Church of England during his Christian years and his high regard for the scripture, particularly as the mysterious Word of God, Lewis gets his authority from scripture and, even more so, from

¹¹⁷ Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, 112.

¹¹⁸ Lewis, *Literary Essays*, 144.

¹¹⁹ Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, 112-113.

his own *interpretation* of scripture. The Church of England and its traditions did little for his discipleship, so many of his views of scripture came primarily out of his own study (and perhaps, to some degree, out of discussions with peers around him such as the Inklings).

Lewis constantly qualified his apologetics by insisting he was a layman, not a theologian. Statements such as this might be taken to mean that Lewis did get authority from others, but it might also confirm that although there are other, more qualified exegetes of scriptures, he continues to receive his authority from his own interpretations.

Lewis' reliance on the authority of individual interpretation of Scriptures, as well as his occasional expressed suspicions of the "collective" (in reference to socialism), would place Lewis on the reductionistic axis of the Murphy-McClendon model toward the individualism pole. Even the manner in which he presents his apologetics is designed to appeal to the individual rational will. The argument is given, and one is left to draw one's own conclusions, right or wrong. In fact, Lewis goes even further in supporting the authority of the individual's own process: he admonishes others to allow the individual conclusions to be reached and not to interfere with the individual's process. He writes, "When you have reached your own room be kind to those who have chosen different doors and to those who are still in the hall. If they are wrong they need your prayers all the more; and if they are your enemies, then you are under orders to pray for them. That is one of the rules common to the whole house."¹²⁰

For all these reasons, C. S. Lewis appeals to the modern mind and is sometimes even mistaken for a pure modernist by scholars. When one filters Lewis through the modern grid, he can pass the test and fit snugly within that model. He is an optimistic

¹²⁰ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 12.

foundationalist, standing on the shoulders of Immanuel Kant; he supports the representational theory of language; and he shows his confidence in the individual's ability to know what is real by appealing directly to personal reason and logic.

Of the three axes in the Murphy-McClendon model, therefore, his position on the epistemological axis (as an optimistic foundationalist) is perhaps the one which identifies him most strongly with modernists and causes them—whether critics or supporters—to include him in their camp. His position on the remaining two axes—the linguistic axis (as a representational theorist) and the reductionistic axis (as an individualist)—also show accurately how Lewis fits into modernity. However, as a shift takes place from Lewis the Modernist to Lewis the Postmodernist, conflicts arise with all three axes, but especially the latter two.

The point is not to establish that Lewis was a modernist, but to establish and understand his *appeal* to modernists. He certainly had a modernist side. However, at the same time he was highly critical of modernist theologians, who, he says, “by God’s grace, become fewer every day,”¹²¹ and even called the extreme modernist an “infidel in all but name.”¹²² Again, in *The Great Divorce* he emphasizes their wrong-headedness through a modernist character, a Ghost so set on seeking truth through rational inquiry that he cannot accept the existence of God; he ultimately turns away from the threshold of heaven.¹²³

From modernism to postmodernism, the changing worldview has cast a different shaft of light on previously-held perspectives, including perspectives on Lewis. Yet the shift only illuminates new delights in his work. Modernism has faded, but Lewis remains

¹²¹ C. S. Lewis, *The Grand Miracle* (New York, NY: Ballentine Books, 1970), 38.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 42.

¹²³ C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1996), 45-47.

as golden, if not more golden, than ever. How have the works of C. S. Lewis managed to shine so gracefully in the new postmodern milieu, when other works from his era have long since fallen out of print?

The Postmodern Lewis

George Barna implies that Generation X, also known as the Baby Busters (those born between 1965 and 1985), is the first generation to live entirely within a postmodern worldview and notes the challenges this new worldview brings: “With most Busters rejecting notions such as the uniqueness of Christianity, the existence of absolute moral truth, and the authority of the Bible, there are virtually no restrictions left in place to limit or guide their thinking about proper personal or corporate spiritual development.”¹²⁴

Postmodernism is a difficult beast to cage; indeed, it covers many philosophies, ideas and theories, and any attempt to define it precisely is sure to lead to frustration. It is more abstract than modernism and resists the clean categorizations that are the very soul of modernism. Murphy and McClendon, after creating their three-dimensional, three-axes model of modernism, go on to define postmodernism as “any mode of thought that departs from the three modern axes.”¹²⁵ In other words, postmodernism is anything besides the three modern axes or anything that might appear in *other* dimensions as well.

There has been a misconception that postmodernism is a new phenomenon of the late twentieth century. This may be explained in part by two important events in 1951: publication of a significant article by W. V. O. Quine, “Two Dogmas of Empiricism,” which questioned foundationalist bases for knowledge; and the death of Ludwig

¹²⁴ George Barna, *The Second Coming of the Church*, (Nashville: Word, 1998), 71.

¹²⁵ Murphy & McClendon, 199.

Wittgenstein, whose influential postmodern works on language philosophy were published posthumously.¹²⁶

However, the earliest signs of postmodernism appeared during the Enlightenment with the rise of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), the “patron saint” of postmodernism.¹²⁷ Nietzsche became the greatest foe of the Enlightenment, arguing that there is no “true world” and that no one can really know truth, in the modernist sense. This made Nietzsche a nihilist, seeing truth more as a function of the internal workings of language itself than as an external reality.¹²⁸

Nietzsche also rejected the Enlightenment’s construction of concepts, claiming that this led to generalizations which missed the point that no two things or occurrences are identical. For example, Nietzsche saw the Enlightenment’s concept of a leaf as a falsification of the leaf’s reality. If one looks closely at two leaves that have been lumped into the same category, as Nietzsche contends, they are in fact very different.¹²⁹ To miss these distinctions by constructing a category is, in a sense, to deny the leaf’s true reality. Following Nietzsche, postmodernism picked up steam as the 20th century began. Later, Jean-François Lyotard (*The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*) and Michel Foucault (*The Archaeology of Knowledge & The Discourse on Language*, and *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*), among others, took the baton in the latter 20th century.

¹²⁶ Nancey Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism & Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity, 1996), 87.

¹²⁷ Quoted in Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, (William B. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, MI, 1996), 88.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 91.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 89.

Cahoone sketches a timeline of the spread of postmodernity in western society. In 1917, German philosopher Rudolf Pannwitz coined the term “postmodern” to describe the nihilism he observed all around him. In the 1930s, Federico de Onis, Bernard Iddings Bell, and Arnold Toynbee used it to describe, respectively, the backlash against modernism in literature, the failure of modernism in the realm of religion, and the phenomenon of the growing working classes surpassing the capitalists in social significance. By the 1970s and 80s, it described the reaction against modernism in architecture, philosophy, and even the social and natural sciences, and by the 1990s it completely infused pop culture and media.¹³⁰

Although postmodernism cannot be clearly defined, Cahoone distinguishes it from modernism in five broad areas: presentation versus representation, origin versus phenomena, unity versus plurality, transcendence versus immanence, and constitutive otherness.

Presentation indicates the presence of an object or experience, which in modernity is considered more reliable than something merely represented by thought or language. Conversely, representation implies that the thing in question is not truly present, but only a representation of it—which postmodernity sometimes views as more reliable than its actual presence: “It [postmodern representationalism] denies that anything is ‘immediately present’In some cases, it argues that presentation actually presupposes representation.”¹³¹ Taken to this extreme, representationalism rejects the idea that there is any objective reality and favors only the subjective representation of what is real. It

¹³⁰ Cahoone, 3.

¹³¹ Ibid., 14.

should be noted that this postmodern idea of “representation” is not to be confused with modernism’s representational theory of language.

While there is a place in Christianity for objective discovery and apologetics, this representational element of postmodernism should, and probably will, force apologetics back into its rightful place as one of many means of seeking truth and shift emphasis toward wrestling with the deep, unresolved mysteries of God. Stanley Grenz suggests that “...we cannot simply collapse truth into the categories of rational certainty that typify modernity. Rather, in understanding and articulating the Christian faith, we must make room for the concept of ‘mystery’—not as an irrational complement to the rational but as a reminder that the fundamental reality of God transcends human rationality.”¹³²

The second concept, origin, has to do with the source—the ultimate foundation. Modernism interests itself in the source of the thing in question. In modernity, the aim of rational inquiry is to find a common indubitable belief, or foundation, upon which all can agree, thereby arriving at foundational truth. Cahoon claims that postmodernism, on the other hand, doubts that it is possible to discover the origins or foundations of anything, and even doubts that they exist; indeed, if they do exist, they are of no consequence. Instead, postmodernism takes things at “face value,” seeing the surface of things—phenomena—as requiring no reference to a deeper meaning. Further, in postmodern literary criticism, the story is the thing—not the author’s intentions or meanings, which are unknowable.¹³³ It should be noted that this view that the story stands on its own authority represents a significant shift away from modernity’s emphasis on origins, observations, and empirical proofs to postmodernity’s emphasis on personal narrative.

¹³² Grenz., *Primer*, 170.

¹³³ Cahoon, 14-15.

Third, postmodernism “tries to show that what others have regarded as a *unity*, a single, integral existence or concept, is plural,” writes Cahoon. “Everything is constituted by relations to other things, hence nothing is simple, immediate, or totally present, and no analysis of anything can be complete or final....[Even] the human self is not a simple unity....It would be more true to say I have *selves*, than a *self*.”¹³⁴ Surprisingly, this postmodern concept of plurality is partially based in modern structuralism, which perceived that—for example—a culture, while a unity, is also a network of elements defined in relation to one another.¹³⁵

Transcendence, the fourth concept, asserts the existence of societal and natural values which are above society and nature. In other words, there is such a thing as true goodness, or nobility, or courage. Postmodernism rebuts this idea by saying that these norms or values are not transcendent—that is, existing independently of the culture or processes they prescribe—but immanent—that is, inherent within those cultures and processes. The postmodern sees every ideal as merely a product of that ideal’s own time and culture, created for particular purposes in a particular context.¹³⁶ There is no standard—such as, perhaps, Immanuel Kant’s categorical imperative or even Lewis’ Moral Law—that transcends space and time. It seems that relativism develops out of this rejection of transcendence and idealism.

The first four concepts are negative reactions against aspects of modernism; the fifth, constitutive otherness, is a positive. Postmodernism sees that elements of a unit maintain unity through an active exclusion of other possible elements. Obvious examples are: white people maintain their unity by excluding nonwhites; the royal family maintains

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

its unity by excluding non-royals. In linguistics and philosophy, a language such as Portuguese maintains its unity or cohesion by being “not” Swedish and “not” Mandarin; a philosophy such as capitalism maintains cohesion by being “not” communism and “not” socialism. Apparent unities are “constituted by repressing their...relations to others.”¹³⁷ Postmodernism seeks to include the excluded and demarginalize the marginalized—for example, in literary criticism, by sometimes deliberately ignoring well-known themes to emphasize obscure or even nonexistent ones.¹³⁸ Likewise, postmodern theology splinters into various fragments—feminist theology, African-American theology, Native American theology—in an attempt to avoid repression or exclusion of “other,” previously marginalized groups.

To understand Lewis’ appeal to the postmodern, a somewhat different approach will be used than was applied to modernism. Plugging Lewis into an existing model is much less clear-cut and even less desirable when it comes to postmodernism. First, a major distinction of postmodernism is its rejection of modern constructions. Postmodernism is defined differently by different people; it is nearly impossible to create a complete definition or model of this worldview. Second, if a postmodern model could be successfully constructed, Lewis would not fit as neatly within it as he did in the modern model.

For example, postmodernism criticizes *presentation* in favor of *representation*. On one hand, Lewis argues against this by stating: “Unless there is some objective standard of good, over-arching Germans, Japanese and ourselves alike whether any of us obey it or no, then of course the Germans are as competent to create their ideology as we

¹³⁷ Ibid., 16.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

are to create ours.”¹³⁹ In other words, how can the subjective moral philosophy of the English be considered superior to that of the Third Reich? Yet there is a sense that it is. Therefore, Lewis insists that an objective standard does exist.

On the other hand, Lewis makes himself quite comfortable with the postmodern idea of representation in *The Screwtape Letters*. Using a bit of subjectivity himself, Lewis represents data through a reality modified by the thought and language of a demon, shining it through a unique lens to communicate theology in a creative manner which modernism would not allow. When the *Letters* were first published in an Anglican newspaper, the *Guardian*, some readers had such difficulty adjusting to this use of language that one cleric, believing Lewis to be advocating rather than merely representing evil, wrote to cancel his subscription.

To further explore Lewis’ appeal to the postmodern, one must understand several characteristics that appear to run throughout all the different areas of postmodern studies. Numerous facets of two primary characteristics of postmodernism will be examined: anti-foundationalism and use of narrative.

Anti-Foundationalism

Perhaps the strongest characteristic of postmodernism is its vehement rejection of first-principle foundations—that is, the idea that any theory or proposition can be stripped down to its most foundational element or elements to determine their validity, which in turn determines the validity of the entire proposition. Postmodernism contends that there is nothing truly knowable, nor are there any indubitable foundations which, once “proven,” may be relied upon as a basis for belief.

¹³⁹ Lewis, *Christian Reflections*, 73.

After earlier showing Lewis to be a foundationalist, delving into this area might appear contradictory. It cannot be stated that Lewis was an anti-foundationalist, considering that *Mere Christianity* is based upon a foundation of Moral Law, and that he spent much of his earlier years as a scholar defending Christianity by use of foundationalism. In the same book, however, he states that there are questions “to which I may never know the answer: if I asked them, even in a better world, I might be answered as a far greater questioner was answered: ‘What is that to thee? Follow thou Me.’”¹⁴⁰ This statement alludes to meaning that runs far deeper in significance than supposedly fixed propositional truths.

Later in his career, however, Lewis seemed to seek something far deeper than apologetics. He began not only to question foundations but also to doubt that modernism’s epistemological foundationalism was a perfectly reliable highway to truth. While he cannot be described as totally anti-foundational, through this shift Lewis began to show hints of anti-foundationalism. These are most notable in the changes he experienced between his two books on suffering, in his anti-scientism, and in his lifelong search for Joy.

The Collapse of Foundations

In 1940, nearly twenty years before he had lost or even met his wife, Lewis published *The Problem of Pain*, an attempt to take a reasonable approach to the issue of suffering by tackling its central dilemma: “If God were good, He would wish to make His creatures perfectly happy, and if God were almighty, He would be able to do what he wished. But the creatures are not happy. Therefore God lacks either the goodness, or

¹⁴⁰ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 7.

power, or both.”¹⁴¹ Lewis labels these two apparently irreconcilable qualities “Divine Omnipotence” and “Divine Goodness.”

Lewis’ premise concerning divine omnipotence begins with gaining a more accurate understanding of the word “impossible.” The reader is reminded by Lewis that the word is usually followed by an explicit or implicit “unless,” indicating that an impossibility is, in fact, a possibility with help.¹⁴² For example, A is impossible unless B happens. There are however things which are impossible “under all conditions”—intrinsic impossibilities which are not things but nonentities. These impossibilities are often created by mixing vastly different and sometimes opposite propositions—the “apples and oranges” problem—in an attempt to disprove something. Thus, when a question is asked: if God can both create anything and do anything, can he create a boulder so heavy that he cannot lift it? Lewis calls this kind of argument “self-contradictory” and says that in no way can such an argument be used to analyze the attributes or capabilities of God: “His Omnipotence means power to do all that is intrinsically possible, not to do the intrinsically impossible. You may attribute miracles to Him, but not nonsense. This is no limit to His power....It is no more possible for God than for the weakest of His creatures to carry out both of two mutually exclusive alternatives; not because His power meets an obstacle, but because nonsense remains nonsense even when we talk it about God.”¹⁴³

Next, the misunderstanding of “Divine Goodness,” according to Lewis, is rooted in—again—an inaccurate word definition. Lewis notes that the “goodness” of God these days is usually to means “lovingness” and thus “kindness,” by which is really meant a

¹⁴¹ C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1962), 26.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 28.

sort of grandfatherly benevolence that desires to see people enjoying themselves.¹⁴⁴

However, Lewis questions the leap from goodness to kindness. After all, does not the Lord rebuke and discipline those he loves, and cannot that rebuke be seen as loving, even if not kind in the traditional sense?

In *A Horse and His Boy*, the unrecognized Aslan terrorizes Aravis and Shasta from behind, chasing their horses and tearing open Aravis' back with his claws. But this is a two-fold demonstration of love to Aravis and her friends, as Aslan later explains: only terror could give the exhausted horses enough speed to complete their life-or-death mission on time, and Aravis also needed to learn the pain she had inflicted unknowingly on others.¹⁴⁵ Aravis' wound was not an act of hatred or anger, but one given by a loving figure in the spirit of discipline, for the growth and highest benefit of the beloved. Surely, however, this could not be seen as kindness. Love can, in fact, sometimes seem extremely unkind.

"If God is Love, He is, by definition, something more than mere kindness," explains Lewis. "And it appears, from all the records, that though He has often rebuked us and condemned us, He has never regarded us with contempt. He has paid us the intolerable compliment of loving us, in the deepest, most tragic, most inexorable sense."¹⁴⁶

Lewis contends that the Divine definition of "goodness" is more complete and mature than the human one—for, he argues, the creature cannot have a more accurate view of goodness than does the Creator:

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 39-40.

¹⁴⁵ C. S. Lewis, *A Horse and His Boy* (New York: NY: Harper Collins, 1954), 152-154, 216

¹⁴⁶ Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 41.

The problem of reconciling human suffering with the existence of a God who loves, is only insoluble so long as we attach a trivial meaning to the word 'love,' and look on things as if man were the centre of them. Man is not the centre. God does not exist for the sake of man. Man does not exist for his own sake.... We were made not primarily that we may love God (though we were made for that too) but that God may love us, that we may become objects in which the Divine love may rest "well pleased"...

...Divine goodness, therefore, does not mean the excluding of pain and suffering, but a laboring to mold the beloved into something lovable. Therefore the purpose of a God who is Love is not to be content with humanity as it is, but to shape it into something with which he is "well-pleased."¹⁴⁷

So Lewis concludes that the presence of suffering in the face of a "good" and "almighty" God neither contradicts logic, nor disproves the existence of an omnipotent God: "We can, perhaps, conceive of a world in which God corrected the results of this abuse of free will by His creatures at every moment: so that a wooden beam became soft as grass when it was used as a weapon, and the air refused to obey me if I attempted to set up in it insults. But such a world would be one in which wrong actions were impossible, and in which, therefore, freedom of the will would be void."¹⁴⁸

The Problem of Pain is Lewis' rational attempt to explain pain to a suffering world. However, it is incomplete without his second work about pain. After the death of his wife of four years, Lewis wrote a journal of what he thought and felt in his grief, first published in 1961 under the pseudonym N. W. Clerk as *A Grief Observed*. There is no clearer picture of an open, vulnerable and emotional C. S. Lewis. Whereas *The Problem of Pain* was almost an academic exercise in rational objectivity, *A Grief Observed* was an emotive, subjective outpouring of grief. Robert Walter Wall notes that many Lewisian

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 48, 42.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 33.

scholars “start and stop” with the well-reasoned, theological offering of the first book.

However, the latter book rounds out the issue:

The questions of *Pain* are ‘legal’ questions, so that suffering is best subdued by a system of cogent (and perhaps accurate) propositions of theology and philosophy with their logical conclusions. Yet when Lewis actually lives within the context of suffering and experiences pain first-hand, as *Grief* describes, he calls into question the legitimacy of and then finally extends those very beliefs developed in *Pain*. Two different contexts, two different treatments of the problem are brought into a profound dialectic that provides the reader with a more comprehensive picture of what is really at stake in human suffering.¹⁴⁹

Clearly, *The Problem of Pain* presents an understanding of suffering for the modernist mind; however, *A Grief Observed* presents that understanding to the postmodern. It is here that the reader is introduced more fully to the mystical side of C. S. Lewis; it is here that the once-clear foundations of Lewis’ own theology of suffering begin to crumble. Lewis discovers during this journey that sound reason and unshakeable propositions—even true ones—are not enough.

Biographers have suggested that Lewis’ controversial four-year marriage to Joy Davidman Gresham before her death were among Lewis’ happiest years.¹⁵⁰ The couple were married in Joy’s hospital room by a sympathetic minister who performed the ceremony despite the objections of the Anglican Church, since Joy was a divorcee. The reason for the marriage was ostensibly so that Joy could remain in Britain after her visa expired.¹⁵¹ However, Lewis grew exceptionally close to Joy and her sons during the next

¹⁴⁹ Robert Walter Wall, “The Problem of Observed Pain: A Study of C. S. Lewis on Suffering,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 26, no. 4 (December 1983): 444.

¹⁵⁰ Sayer, 369.

¹⁵¹ Brian Sibley, *C. S. Lewis Through the Shadowlands: The Story of His Life with Joy Davidman* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 1994), 125.

four years and was shattered when she succumbed to cancer in 1960. Joy's son wrote that Lewis was never quite the same following her death.¹⁵²

Lewis is brutally honest in *A Grief Observed*. The foundations of Divine Omnipotence versus Divine Goodness crumble in the face of his suffering. Though still seeing God as omnipotent, he could not understand why an all-powerful God would remove himself from the sufferer's perception. He found himself asking the same questions that *Pain* attempted to answer:

Meanwhile, where is God? This is one of the most disquieting symptoms. When you are happy, so happy that you have no sense of needing Him, so happy that you are tempted to feel His claims upon you as an interruption, if you remember yourself and turn to Him with gratitude and praise, you will be—or so it feels—welcomed with open arms. But go to Him when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain, and what do you find? A door slammed in your face, and a sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside. After that, silence.... Why is He so present a commander in our time of prosperity and so very absent a help in time of trouble?¹⁵³

Lewis went beyond questions to accusations. In his torment he lashed out at God, calling him a “Cosmic Sadist,” characterized by unreasonableness, vanity, vindictiveness, injustice, and cruelty.¹⁵⁴ He went on to write: “If God's goodness is inconsistent with hurting us, then either God is not good or there is no God: for in the only life we know He hurts us beyond our worst fears and beyond all we can imagine. If it is consistent with hurting us, then He may hurt us after death as unendurably as before it.”¹⁵⁵

A foundationalist like Beversluis would see these statements as contradictory. After all, how could God be perfectly good, according to Moral Law, yet also cruel and sadistic at the same time?

¹⁵² Douglas H. Gresham, *Lenten Lands* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1988), 130.

¹⁵³ C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1961), 4-5.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 35, 37.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

Lewis accepted foundationalism, but he also understood that spirituality went beyond reason and the mind. As he later wrote, spiritual intimacy with God came through other sources, even suffering: “God has not been trying to experiment on my faith or love in order to find out their quality. He knew it already. It was I who didn’t. In this trial He makes us occupy the dock, the witness box, and the bench all at once. He always knew that my temple was a house of cards. His only way of making me realize the fact was to knock it down.”¹⁵⁶

Although Lewis believed in foundations, he realized that there was much more to God and the Christian life than finding out what those foundations are. There is a place for foundations, Lewis believed, but that place has its limits. Similarly, postmodernism in general rejects the rationalistic foundationalism and empirical truth of modernism; however, this does not deny the existence of truth altogether. Truth comes from other means. Each of Lewis’ two books on suffering is incomplete without the other. The foundations established in the first do maintain logical validity, but even their validity is meaningless without the conflicts and mysteries of the second.

Anti-Scientism

Perhaps the strongest characteristic of the postmodern worldview is its criticism of scientism. Rejecting the authority of science as self-evident, postmodernity accepts instead the authority of narrative and experience. Jean-François Lyotard defines modernism as “any science that legitimates itself with...an explicit appeal to some grand narrative, such as the dialectics of Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 61.

of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth,” and postmodernism simply as “incredulity toward metanarratives.”¹⁵⁷

Postmodernism reacts strongly against scientific propositions and the belief in the existence of valid, universal claims. It elevates diversity and finds itself somewhat intolerant of the idea of a single unity. Where science has gone wrong, Lyotard contends, is in the misconception that scientific truisms somehow represent the totality of knowledge.¹⁵⁸ In fact, Lyotard argues that knowledge is categorically different from science, but is something higher: “Knowledge in general cannot be reduced to science, nor even to learning. Learning is the set of statements which, to the exclusion of all other statements, denote or describe objects and may be declared true or false. Science is a subset of learning.”¹⁵⁹ Lyotard calls narration the “quintessential form of customary knowledge.”¹⁶⁰

Scientism has reversed the roles between science and narrative and established itself as the sole grid through which all knowledge is legitimized. Lyotard responds: “What I say is true because I prove that it is—but what proof is there that my proof is true?”¹⁶¹ In science, however, that proof comes from the scientist (the sender) finding another (the addressee) to validate the argument, who then in turn becomes the sender to another. Without this partnership between sender and addressee, verification of the scientist’s statements is impossible. Lyotard suggests, “The truth of the statement and the competence of its sender are thus subject to the collective approval of a group of persons

¹⁵⁷ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiii and xxiv.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

who are competent on an equal basis. Equals are needed and must be created.”¹⁶² Note, however, Lyotard’s description of the transmission of narrative: “the narrator’s only claim to competence for telling the story is the fact that he has heard it himself. The current narratee gains potential access to the same authority simply by listening.”¹⁶³ In other words, science must use narrative to legitimate itself, transmitting a statement of truth from the sender to an addressee who in turn becomes an authority merely by telling the story. Lyotard explains that knowledge “includes notions of ‘know-how,’ ‘knowing how to live,’ ‘how to listen’, etc. Knowledge, then, is a question of competence that goes beyond the simple determination and application of the criterion of truth, extending to the determination and application of criteria of efficiency, of justice and/or happiness, of the beauty of a sound or color, etc.”¹⁶⁴

Lewis seems to echo Lyotard’s argument against scientism and frequently targets it in both essays and fiction.¹⁶⁵ His small tolerance for scientism as a metanarrative is illustrated with great humor and clarity through Weston, the scientist caricature in the *Space Trilogy*. Evidently the name “Weston” represents western civilization and some of its many flaws: in the first book, western rationalism, and in the second, western materialism, as the Un-Man tempts the Lady of Perelandra with “beautiful things.”¹⁶⁶ Weston represents all that Lewis finds wrong with scientism; he worships empirical data and sees the survival of the human race as completely contingent upon the advancement of science. Consider his arrogant justification of his actions to Oyarsa, a type of God-figure:

¹⁶² Ibid., 24.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 20.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 18.

¹⁶⁵ Cunningham, 46.

¹⁶⁶ C. S. Lewis, *Perelandra* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1944), 135.

“To you I may seem a vulgar robber, but I bear on my shoulders the destiny of the human race. Your tribal life with its stone-age weapons and bee-hive huts, its primitive coracles and elementary social structure, has nothing to compare with our civilization—with our science, medicine and law, our armies, our architecture, our commerce, and our transport system which is rapidly annihilating space and time. Our right to supercede you is the right of the higher over the lower.”¹⁶⁷

In taking this stance, Weston completely fails to comprehend that the inhabitants of the planet have something important to say. Ransom, however, lives with them and learns their language and culture. Only then does he truly understand the purpose of Oyarsa’s calling upon him. In translating the narrative of the planet from Oyarsa (the sender), Ransom (the addressee) becomes the sender to Weston and Devine and thus becomes the authority.¹⁶⁸ This pattern parallels the postmodern idea that knowledge and authority come through narrative.

By contrast, Lewis exposes the limits of science and its primary tool of observation. The scientists, hearing Oyarsa’s voice and not knowing its source, observe a nearby *hross* with closed eyes and hypothesize that it must be a witch doctor in a trance, performing ventriloquism to create the voice. Weston then makes a ridiculous speech designed to intimidate the *hross*, complete with wild threats and hilarious posturing. With dry wit, Lewis observes: “On Weston’s hypothesis his action ought to have been impressive. Unfortunately for him, no one else shared his theory of the elderly *hross*’s behavior.”¹⁶⁹ The *hross* turns out to be asleep. Weston’s misplaced trust in science, and

¹⁶⁷ C. S. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1938), 135.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 134-141.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 127.

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¹⁶⁷ C. S. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1938), 135.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 134-141.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 127.

in his own powers of observation and deduction, makes him the laughingstock of all the onlookers. In this way Lewis clearly shows the limitations of scientism.

In *Perelandra*, Weston goes beyond proclaiming science as the hope and salvation of humanity to deifying science as the totality of knowledge. “In so far as I am the conductor of the central forward pressure of the universe, I am it. Do you see, you timid, scruple-mongering fool? I *am* the universe. I, Weston, am your God and your Devil.”¹⁷⁰ Interestingly, the moment Weston states this, he finds himself physically used as a tool of evil, transformed into the demonic Un-Man.

In fact, much of Lewis’ mistrust of scientism and its conquest appears almost more prophetic than critical when, for example, Feverstone in *That Hideous Strength* exalts science as the savior of humanity: “If Science is really given a free hand it can now take over the human race and re-condition it: make man a really efficient animal. If it doesn’t—well, we’re done.”¹⁷¹

Lewis’ anti-scientism zeal shows through his essays as well. In *The Abolition of Man*, he expresses concern with the conquest of nature and subsequent dehumanization of humanity. He argues:

We reduce things to mere Nature *in order that* we may “conquer” them. We are always conquering Nature, because “Nature” is the name for what we have, to some extent, conquered. The price of conquest is to treat a thing as mere Nature. Every conquest over Nature increases her domain. The stars do not become Nature till we can weigh and measure them; the soul does not become Nature till we can psycho-analyse her. The wresting of powers *from* Nature is also the surrendering of things *to* Nature...as soon as we take the final step of reducing our own species to the level of mere Nature, the whole process is stultified, for this time the being who stood to gain and the being who has been sacrificed are one and the same.¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ Lewis, *Perelandra*, 96.

¹⁷¹ C. S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1946), 41.

¹⁷² C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1944), 79.

However, a distinction is made between science and scientism, the latter being seen as the underlying force behind modernism. Postmodern scholar Walter Truett Anderson defines scientism merely as “the worship of facts,” whereas science, properly understood, is “the constant attempt to falsify one’s hypotheses and find better ones.”¹⁷³ Michael Aeschliman says that scientism is “a misuse of science...the misapplication of scientific method” because it acknowledges only what is observable.¹⁷⁴ Thomas C. Peters says scientism is neither the careful empirical methods nor the wonderfully beneficial discoveries of true science, but a “unique combination of atheism, materialist philosophy, evolutionism, hostility to religion, and doctrinaire adherence to the universal validity of the scientific method.”¹⁷⁵ Carnell suggests that the sin of Weston and Devine is “not in their method but in trying to use that method out of its proper place.”¹⁷⁶ In *That Hideous Strength*, among other places, Lewis makes this distinction explicit: “The physical sciences, good and innocent in themselves, had already, even in Ransom’s own time, begun to be warped, had been subtly 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.”¹⁷⁷

Apparently Lewis was concerned that scientism was corrupting the innocence of science in the name of power and progress. He looked beyond the temporal and envisioned science conquering not just the earth but other worlds as well. *That Hideous*

¹⁷³ Walter Truett Anderson, *Reality Isn’t What It Used to Be* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990), 258.

¹⁷⁴ Michael D. Aeschliman, *The Restitution of Man: C. S. Lewis and the Case Against Scientism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1983), 20.

¹⁷⁵ Thomas C. Peters, “The War of the Worldviews: H. G. Wells and Scientism versus C. S. Lewis and Christianity,” in *The Pilgrims Guide*, 206.

¹⁷⁶ Carnell, 118.

¹⁷⁷ Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 203.

Strength shows science without God or morals, manipulating systems and experimenting on children and criminals.¹⁷⁸ Scientists and ethicists may debate whether Lewis' concerns were valid. However, they cannot debate that he had them.

Sehnsucht and the Search for Joy

A common thread throughout C. S. Lewis' life was his search for Joy—a mystical search which appeals to the postmodern mind, and the third aspect of his anti-foundationalist streak. While Lewis argued much of his apologetics from a foundationalist standpoint, seeking to prove incorrigible foundations for Christianity did not fill a void in his life; from his earliest years he believed there was more to learn and understand. This journey was a mystical one, perhaps best described in *The Pilgrim's Regress*.¹⁷⁹

Lewis' concept of Joy was certainly not based on foundationalism. He made no propositional statements, no clinical diagnoses to define it. In fact, he could only describe it as “an unsatisfied desire which is itself more desirable than any other satisfaction” characterized by “the fact that anyone who has experienced it will want it again.”¹⁸⁰ He even called it “something quite different from ordinary life...something, as they would now say, ‘in another dimension....’”¹⁸¹ This parallels the view of Murphy and McClendon that postmodernism admits to dimensions outside of their three-axis, three-dimensional model. Indeed, Lewis attempted to explain something that could not be placed anywhere within the model of modernity.

¹⁷⁸ Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 43.

¹⁷⁹ Kathryn Lindskoog, “Bright Shoots of Everlastingness: C. S. Lewis's Search for Joy,” *Perspectives* 8 (September 1993), 17.

¹⁸⁰ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 17-18.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

Lewis called it *Sehnsucht*—a German word for a keen, poignant longing or yearning, similar to nostalgia in that it implies alienation from what is desired.¹⁸² There is more to the word than mere representation of an intangible object; defining *sehnsucht* this way excludes emotion and experience from its meaning and fails to capture the sense of the word. *Sehnen* is the German root, meaning “to long for” or “to yearn after”, and *sucht* indicates sickness, passion, or rage¹⁸³—that is, an almost unbearable intensity of emotion. *Sehnsucht* denotes a passion behind the longing, a homesickness for a place not visited in many years.

Lewis first experienced Joy—this sharp pang of longing—as a “memory of a memory”:

As I stood beside a flowering currant bush on a summer day there suddenly arose in me without warning, and as if from a depth not of years but of centuries, the memory of that earlier morning at the Old House when my brother had brought his toy garden into the nursery. It is difficult to find words strong enough for the sensation which came over me....It was a sensation, of course, of desire, but desire for what? Not, certainly, for a biscuit tin filled with moss, nor even (though that came into it) for my own past...and before I knew what I desired, the desire itself was gone....¹⁸⁴

His second experience with Joy came as he read *Squirrel Nutkin* by Beatrix Potter: “It troubled me with what I can only describe as the Idea of Autumn. It sounds fantastic to say that one can be enamored of a season, but that is something like what happened....And one went back to the book, not to gratify the desire but to reawake it.”¹⁸⁵ He recognized again that this experience was of great importance.

His third came while reading about the death of Balder in Longfellow’s *Saga of King Olaf*: “I knew nothing about Balder; but instantly I was uplifted into huge regions of

¹⁸² Carnell, 15.

¹⁸³ Wood, 813

¹⁸⁴ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 16.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

northern sky, [and] I desired with almost sickening intensity something never to be described...and then, as in the other examples, found myself at the very same moment already falling out of that desire and wishing I were back in it.”¹⁸⁶

Lewis cautions the reader that although these three experiences might seem trivial, they are in fact the central basis for his life. It is through this search for Joy that he eventually comes into a relationship with Christ: if not for these experiences, he might have missed the experience of salvation altogether.¹⁸⁷

The remainder of Lewis’ life, at least up to his Christian conversion, was driven by his search for Joy—a series of mountaintops and valleys, finding that intense pang, losing it, and then trying to find it again.

As a teenager, Lewis thought Joy was driving him toward sex, which he later learned had nothing to do with Joy. In fact, his experiments with sexual self-fulfillment had the opposite effect on Lewis: the cycle of temptation, guilt, and fierce prayers for deliverance which appeared to go unanswered contributed to his subsequent loss of faith as a young man.¹⁸⁸

Lewis also sought Joy in magic and the occult, which he describes almost like a powerful drug addiction: “It is a spiritual lust; and like the lust of the body it has the fatal power of making everything else in the world seem uninteresting while it lasts. It is probably this passion, more even than the desire for power, which makes magicians.”¹⁸⁹ Lewis later cautions that Joy is not to be confused with a thrill, as he had described in his occultic phase: “Only when your whole attention and desire are fixed on something

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Sayer, 68.

¹⁸⁹ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 60.

else—whether a distant mountain, or the past, or the gods of Asgard—does the ‘thrill’ arise. It is a by-product. Its very existence presupposes that you desire not it but something other and outer. If by any perverse askesis or the use of any drug it could be produced from within, it would at once be seen to be of no value. For take away the object, and what, after all, would be left?—a whirl of images, a fluttering sensation in the diaphragm, a momentary abstraction.”¹⁹⁰

Lewis eventually came to realize that Joy was a desire for something else, something beyond itself. Interestingly, in one of his foundationalist-based books, he declares that the object of Joy’s desire is God alone: “He Himself is the fuel our spirits were designed to burn, the food our spirits were designed to feed on. There is no other. That is why it is just no good asking God to make us happy in our own way without bothering about religion. God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there.”¹⁹¹

Lewis’ Joy was beyond the realm of modernism—inexplicable, uncategorizable. There is nothing in either expressivist or representational language to describe it; it must be experienced. Joy does not mesh well with the maxims of foundationalism. Instead, it is found in the mystery embraced by postmodernism, a mystical thing which can be known only by experience.

Lewis avidly pursued Joy in nature, art, literature and mythology, but these also turned up empty; until at last, through George Macdonald’s *Phantastes*, the concept of

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 168.

¹⁹¹ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 54.

holiness entered his definition of Joy—and, over the next decade, he came to understand that “what he really wanted...was to merge with the Absolute.”¹⁹²

At the end of his autobiography, Lewis explains the outcome of his quest for Joy. While his whole life was based on seeking it, Joy lost its importance once he converted to Christianity. Lewis claimed that although the “old stab” of Joy came to him with the same frequency and intensity after his conversion as before, it took on a different role. He writes, “It was valuable only as a pointer to something other and outer. While that other was in doubt, the pointer naturally loomed large in my thoughts.”¹⁹³ Lewis’ spirituality was not based on reason. When he struggled with doubt, his assurance came not from well-considered propositions, but from that longing which pointed to the Creator. Joy had become the assurance Lewis needed in his spiritual journey.

In summary, though Lewis defended Christianity from a foundational standpoint, he was not a foundationalist in the modernist sense of the word. Through the death of his wife, his early foundationalist explanations collapsed. The very answers he gave in *The Problem of Pain*, he found himself questioning in *A Grief Observed*. Nevertheless, through his grief, Lewis passed a spiritual milestone in his faith—a depth that could never be achieved through rational observations and theology lessons.

Next, Lewis questioned the ability of science to reveal all knowledge and expressed a serious mistrust of scientism. This questioning can be seen as somewhat blasphemous to modernism’s primary religion: an amoral scientism. His reservations can be found through the full spectrum of his writings, and he constantly raises concerns about science’s conquest of nature and dehumanization of people.

¹⁹² Lindskoog, 18-19.

¹⁹³ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 238.

The third anti-foundational aspect of Lewis is more positive in nature: a belief that there is something more than mere foundations, namely the transcendent experience he called Joy. He portrays God as a chess master who used this longing for Joy to draw Lewis to himself, and eventually to faith in Christ, who is the object of Joy.

Through these three aspects of anti-foundationalism, Lewis questioned the black-and-white foundations of modernism. He saw more gray areas and acknowledged the mysteries of life and nature, as well as the supernatural.

Lewis' Use of Narrative

Story arose as a result of postmodernism's rejection of the "Enlightenment hubris"¹⁹⁴ with its three metanarratives—rationalism, scientism and consumerism.¹⁹⁵

Grenz says:

As the twentieth century unfolded, anthropologists became increasingly aware of the foundational importance of myths in human society. Some scholars argued that myths are more than just stories that primitive cultures tell; in fact, they embody the central core of a culture's values and beliefs and are in that sense fundamentally religious....Postmodern thinkers speak of these systems of legitimizing myths as 'narratives' (or 'metanarratives'). They contend that a narrative exercises a force apart from argumentation and proof and, in fact, that it provides the principal means by which every community legitimates itself.¹⁹⁶

Early in his autobiography, Lewis shows this emphasis on individual story. He claims his early experiences of Joy so defined his personal story that if the reader finds no interest in them, there is no point in reading further.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 44.

¹⁹⁵ Fergus Macdonald, "The Story and the Myth," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 16 (Spring, 1998): 35.

¹⁹⁶ Grenz, *Primer*, 44.

¹⁹⁷ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 17.

The authority of knowledge in postmodernism comes not from empirical evidence or logical argument, but from the narrator herself. Lyotard states that narrative is comprised of three parts: the sender, the addressee and the hero. At one point, the sender (narrator) is the addressee (narratee) as the story is transmitted to her. The fact that she has heard the story is what gives her authority; she now becomes the authority on the story merely because she has heard it herself.¹⁹⁸

In the *Screwtape Letters*, Lewis uses this same technique with a twist. The reader eavesdrops as the sender, Screwtape, transmits knowledge to the addressee, Wormwood. In this way the reader becomes a kind of secondary or invisible addressee, who gains knowledge of demons and their plan, and thus also becomes an authority.

As the narrator of the *Narnia Chronicles*, Lewis often interrupts the story to comment to the addressee. For example, in *Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, as Eustace stumbles into a dragon's lair, Lewis quips: "Most of us know what we should expect to find in a dragon's lair, but, as I said before, Eustace had read only the wrong books."¹⁹⁹ Here Lewis is the sender of the story, the reader is the addressee and Eustace is the object. Lewis claims to know about dragons simply because he has read the right books, and assumes the reader has too. If the reader is not already an authority on dragons, he will be after hearing Lewis' story. Eustace, on the other hand, knows nothing because has not heard the stories. Although the point of the book is not to make the reader an expert on dragons but to expose Eustace's fundamental character flaw (that is, his dragonish heart), this wry, charming passage delivers a powerful point which underscores that authority is transmitted through story.

¹⁹⁸ Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 20-21.

¹⁹⁹ C. S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1952), 92-93.

Story is what legitimizes authority in the postmodern context. The modernist may “prove” scientifically that dragons are not real, but to the postmodernist, such proofs do not necessarily constitute complete knowledge. In postmodernism, authority is not based on rational proofs but is passed from sender to addressee through story. The sender transmits the story to the addressee, who now has the authority and competence to become a sender of the story.

Though this example is from a children’s fantasy, it shows Lewis’ understanding of the power of story to impart knowledge. Postmodernism had just been born when the *Narnia Chronicles* were written; however, this is what makes Lewis such an interesting paradigm for the modern-postmodern transitional age. He never completely fit the mold of modernism, and postmodernism was too new for him to align himself with it consciously in his lifetime. However, he was a master storyteller with a brilliant imagination. It is less likely that Lewis *decided* to adopt postmodernism than that he simply *transcended* it—especially in the way he communicated the story of Christianity through narrative.

The Three Acts of Story and Mystery

Story is, in essence, a three-act play: a beginning, a middle and an end.²⁰⁰

MacIntyre sees human life or selfhood as a “concept of self whose unity resides in the

²⁰⁰ Madan Sarup, *Identity, Culture and the Postmodern World* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 15. See also Loren Wilkinson “Stories, Your Story and God’s Story,” *Crux* Vol. 33, no. 3 (September 1997): 30.

unity of a narrative which links birth to life to death as narrative beginning to middle to end.”²⁰¹ He notes this pattern of story in all things human:

Indeed a conversation is a dramatic work, even if a very short one, in which the participants are not only the actors, but also the joint authors, working out in agreement or disagreement the mode of their production. For it is not just that conversations belong to genres in just the way that plays and novels do; but they have beginnings, middles and endings just as do literary works. They embody reversals and recognitions; they move towards and away from climaxes. There may within a longer conversation be digressions and subplots, indeed digressions within digressions and subplots within subplots. But if this is true of conversations, it is true also *mutates mutandis* of battles, chess games, courtships, philosophy seminars, families at the dinner table, businessmen negotiating contracts—that is, of human transactions in general.²⁰²

Life and knowledge consist not of absolute foundations, but of individual stories. Scripture, in a postmodern worldview, is seen as narrative and not a book of systematic, categorized doctrines and theologies. Modernism has effectively reduced the Bible to a series of propositions and thus trivialized the Christian faith. Interestingly, however, the Bible seems to fit more comfortably in the postmodern worldview, as a presentation of God’s story, than in the modern worldview as a book of truisms and maxims. Trevor Hart writes: “It is the story of God’s dealings with his world and with his creatures in and through the particular histories of Israel and Jesus the Christ. It is this story—the gospel or good news focused in Jesus—upon the basis of which the church today fashions its identity, and in conformity to the contours of which it seeks to live its life. To be a

²⁰¹ Alasdair MacIntyre, “The Virtues, the Unity of a Human Life and the Concept of a Tradition,” *From Modernism to Postmodernism: An Anthology*, ed. Lawrence Cahoon, (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996), 536.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 541.

Christian is in some sense to have one's own story shaped in a decisive way by and taken up into this other larger story of God's redemptive action in the world."²⁰³

Like all stories, the Bible also asserts a theme. It is a book of the human condition, a collection of human stories making up the larger story of God's redemption. There is always a beginning, middle and end. The author of Ecclesiastes sums up the human story in seven verses, first by very briefly acknowledging the beginning and the end ("a time to be born and a time to die"), and then using the remaining verses to describe the middle (3:2-8). In the Bible story, the first act begins definitively with בְּרֵאשִׁית —*b^erosh'et*—"in the beginning." At the other end of the story, Revelation describes in symbolism and metaphor the end of the biblical narrative. There is a divine proclamation in Revelation 22:21—"ναί, ἔρχομαι ταχύ" ("Yes! I am coming soon!") and a response "Αμήν, ἔρχου κύριε Ἰησοῦ" ("Amen, Come Lord Jesus!"). Thus, the Bible story ends.

There is an unwritten rule of storytelling: begin the story as close to the action as possible. Bring the story as close to the present (read: *the middle*) as possible. Too much detail not only bores the recipient but also lessens the intrigue of the story. A great storyteller finds wealth in mystery. An effective story's opening and closing chapters have little to say. Unanswered questions and darkened corners of the past deepen the story and cause wonder. Predictability provides little reason to progress, and interest in the story remains on a shallow level. Unpredictability is a good rule of thumb for the beginning novelist, a guideline which might well have been inspired by the unpredictability of the human story.

²⁰³ Trevor Hart, *Faith Thinking: The Dynamics of Christian Theology* (Downer's Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1995), 143.

The great mystery of story lies in the beginning and the end. Much time, money and energy has been spent asking the unanswerable questions, “Where did I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going?” Wilkinson explains:

Even when we know the main details of our lives—which most of us do—most of us have entertained the possibility that there might be more: that if there isn’t some mystery about us, there ought to be. Perhaps this is because the details themselves aren’t enough to match the depth we feel within us....Our own memory emerges out of the mist. We don’t remember much at all of the things which shaped us. We know our past by hearsay, and pictures in old photo albums. But direct memory of the first part of our individual stories is not available to us.²⁰⁴

Perhaps, Wilkinson ponders, this is why people are so fascinated by adopted children, or amnesiacs searching to fill the unknown gaps in their lives.

The Great Divorce also follows the postmodern pattern of story, especially in the way it begins and ends in mystery. At the very beginning, the narrator finds himself inexplicably standing in a bus queue “by the side of a long, mean street,” observing the darkened gray city around him. The sense is surreal because he does not know how he got there, but he does not question it and immediately begins participating in the story. Even then, the images are not concrete. The narrator “seems” to be standing there; time has paused, and he can discern little about the strange city or the other people in the queue, except that they tend to be negative, reluctant to wait, and unhappy. When the bus does arrive and the people board it, the narrator and the reader still have no knowledge of its purpose, origin, or destination.²⁰⁵

The ending is just as mysterious: the narrator suddenly snaps out of slumber to the striking of a clock and the wailing of a siren.²⁰⁶ Nothing more is said. No chapter is added

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 30.

²⁰⁵ Lewis, *Great Divorce*, 13.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 125.

to tell what the narrator did about the dream after waking, nor how it changed him or his life. The end of the narrator's story remains a mystery, despite new revelations discovered within the dream.

Mystery is found throughout the *Narnia Chronicles* as well. Originally, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* was the first book of the series, published in 1950. From this story, the reader has no knowledge about the wardrobe. How has it come to be a doorway into Narnia? How does it link Narnia to England? For that matter, what is the background of Professor Digory, the owner of the house with the wardrobe? The reader suspects Digory knows something about the wardrobe when Lucy's tales of Narnia are challenged by her siblings, and Digory points out that logic *supports* Lucy's story: "There are only three possibilities. Either your sister is telling lies, or she is mad, or she is telling the truth. You know she doesn't tell lies and it is obvious that she is not mad. For the moment then and unless any further evidence turns up, we must assume that she is telling the truth."²⁰⁷ Professor Digory's use of reason to support the possibility of realities *beyond* reason echoes Lewis' argument for the existence of God in *Mere Christianity*.

To the very end of this book, Lewis offers no explanation about the mystery of the wardrobe. Not until he publishes *The Magician's Nephew* in 1955 (which in later printings becomes the first of the *Narnia Chronicles*) is the origin of the wardrobe is revealed as made from a tree that had been brought back from Narnia and had grown in Digory's backyard. Even then, though Lewis explained the mystery behind the wardrobe, he introduces a whole new mystery to the origin issue: where did Digory's magician uncle get the magic rings that first send Digory to Narnia? That riddle is never solved. The beginning and end remain mysteries.

²⁰⁷ C. S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1950), 52.

Another great mystery concerns Reepicheep, the talking mouse, whose story is told in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. He first appears in *Prince Caspian* as if from nowhere; his origins, like most characters in these and other stories, are never revealed, although it is hinted that his ancestors freed Aslan by chewing off the ropes that bound him on the Stone Table in *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*. Reepicheep, one of the most humorous of all Lewis' characters, is brave, bold, and fiercely loyal to Caspian and to Narnia. However, one thing surpasses even this allegiance: his desire to meet Aslan at the end of the world. When finally the seafaring children reach the Last Sea, he says his goodbyes, paddles to the place where the world ends, and vanishes over the edge. "Since that moment," concludes Lewis, "no one can truly claim to have seen Reepicheep the Mouse. But my belief is that he came safe to Aslan's country and is alive there to this day."²⁰⁸

Postmodernism is less concerned with origins than with the middle of the story. While there is a teleological consideration in narrative—that the story is taking the person somewhere—efforts to discover that destination are secondary to where the person is now. Postmodernism focuses on the middle, on attempting to understanding what story a person is a part of.

The conclusion of this story has yet to take place; in "real life," Christianity finds itself still in the middle of the Bible story. As the church lives in the middle of the Bible story, individuals live in the middle of their own stories. Wilkinson writes, "To be in the middle is the human condition....[F]inding oneself in the middle of a story whose end is a mystery is not a unique or vaguely shameful situation. It is the situation we *all* are in:

²⁰⁸ Lewis, *Dawn Treader*, 226.

middled, and muddled—in the middle of a story, in the middle of a journey.”²⁰⁹ Being in the middle creates in the participants a struggle to understand their own individual roles, as well as the role they might play in another’s story. MacIntyre explains:

We enter upon a stage which we did not design and we find ourselves part of an action that was not of our making. Each of us being a main character in his own drama plays subordinate parts in the dramas of others, and each drama constrains the others. In my drama, perhaps, I am Hamlet or Iago or at least the swineherd who may yet become a prince, but to you I am only A Gentleman or at best Second Murderer, while you are my Polonius or my Gravedigger, but your own hero. Each of our dramas exerts constraints on each other's, making the whole different from the parts, but still dramatic.²¹⁰

The tension of living one’s own story while relating to others’ stories adds depth to a story. Wilkinson says that as individuals “we want to see our lives as part of a larger story. Our great question therefore is to find out what story we are in and what our place in it is... We find ourselves in the middle of a story—but what story?”²¹¹

MacIntyre argues that the quest to solve life’s mystery shapes and strengthens character. “It is in the course of the quest and only through encountering and coping with the various particular harms, dangers, temptations and distractions which provide any quest with its episodes and incidents that the goal of the quest is finally to be understood. A quest is always an education both as to the character of that which is sought and in self-knowledge.”²¹²

MacIntyre sees two elements within the mystery of story that fuel these quests: unpredictability and teleological character: “Like characters in a fictional narrative we do not know what will happen next, but nonetheless our lives have a certain form which

²⁰⁹ Wilkinson, 30-31.

²¹⁰ MacIntyre, 544.

²¹¹ Wilkinson, 31.

²¹² MacIntyre, 550.

projects itself towards our future.” Concerning unpredictability, he states, “It is crucial that at any given point in an enacted dramatic narrative we do not know what will happen next.”²¹³ Why? Because, in story, there needs to be progression, a process that is directed toward an end. A predictable book will lie unfinished; there is no desire to continue to read if the story is already known. In the human story, MacIntyre argues: “We live out our lives, both individually and in our relationships with each other, in the light of certain conceptions of a possible shared future, a future in which certain possibilities beckon us forward and others repel us, some seen already foreclosed and others perhaps inevitable. There is no present which is not informed by some image of some future and an image of the future which always presents itself in the form of a *telos*—or of a variety of ends or goals—toward which we are either moving or failing to move in the present.”²¹⁴ Madan Sarup ponders these elements by looking back on the life story:

In our reflections we consider what the possible paths were, and what would have happened if we had chosen them. What would have happened if I had said ‘yes’? What if I hadn’t done that? We still ask these questions even if nothing can be done about these decisions taken so many years ago. We still ask these questions even though we know that we can never know what the ‘right’ decision would have been. We often consider alternatives, but we do not continue to explore imaginatively all the bifurcating paths.²¹⁵

Grenz urges that the church “must make room for the concept of ‘mystery’—not as an irrational complement to the rational but as a reminder that the fundamental reality of God transcends human rationality.” Later, he adds, “Central to our task in thinking through the faith in a postmodern context is an obligation to rethink the function of assertions of truths or propositions. We must continue to acknowledge the fundamental

²¹³ Ibid., 546.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 546.

²¹⁵ Sarup, 25.

importance of rational discourse, but our understanding of the faith must not remain fixated on the propositionalist approach that views Christian truths as nothing more than correct doctrine or doctrinal truth.”²¹⁶ It is this mystery that gives meaning to a person’s story, and thus to the person’s life. It shapes identity. Marva Dawn describes a key component to the church’s mission to the postmodern world: “One great challenge for people in our times is the lack of genuine story, one that is coherent and gives meaning to their lives.”²¹⁷

Redemption and Narrative Convergence

Whether postmoderns know it or not, God is the author and ultimate goal of their stories—the “larger story” they are seeking. Macdonald explains, “The danger is that we stop at the initial point of contact, rather than helping people to see that their felt needs are symptoms of a greater need—the need for redemption.”²¹⁸ That need for redemption climaxes in the center of God’s story with a narrative convergence between God and humanity, the Incarnation. Through Christ, God transcends distant natural laws and involves himself directly in the story of each individual. Lewis’ most profound example of this narrative convergence is in the *Narnia Chronicles*.

To the postmodern, each person is the owner of his or her own story, and no story is seen as greater than the other. There is no grand metanarrative that transcends all other stories; each person’s story is independent.

Lewis illustrates this masterfully in *A Horse and His Boy*, the story of a desperate mission to save Narnia from military occupation. The hero is lost in despair on a dark

²¹⁶ Grenz, *Primer*, 170.

²¹⁷ Marva Dawn, “Pop Spirituality or Genuine Story,” *Word & World*, 18 no. 1 (Winter 1998): 45.

²¹⁸ Macdonald, 43.

road when suddenly Aslan appears, walking with him and telling his story: “I was the lion who forced you to join with Aravis. I was the cat who comforted you among the houses of the dead. I was the lion who drove the jackals from you while you slept....And I was the lion you do not remember who pushed the boat in which you lay, a child near death, so that it came to shore where a man sat, wakeful at midnight, to receive you.” However, when Shasta inquires about Aravis’ life, Aslan replies, “I am telling you your story, not hers. I tell no one any story but his own.”²¹⁹

Later, Aslan comes to Aravis to explain *her* story: “The scratches on your back, tear for tear, throb for throb, blood for blood, were equal to the stripes laid on the back of your stepmother’s slave because of the drugged sleep you cast upon her. You needed to know what it felt like.” But when Aravis asks what became of the slave, Aslan responds again, “I am telling you your story, not hers. No one is told any story but their own.”²²⁰

While emphasizing individual stories in the *Narnia Chronicles*, Lewis is equally effective at illustrating narrative convergence, when God’s story comes down and blends with each person’s own story. Throughout the books, Aslan’s story continually converges with the characters’ own stories. In *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, he appears only in Eustace’s story to remove the skin of the dragon which Eustace had become.²²¹ In *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*, he dies to pay for the sins of one—Edmund—and salvation is presented not on a grand scale but on an intimate, individual level.²²² In *Prince Caspian*, he appears only to Lucy while she is still with the others: “I can see him

²¹⁹ Lewis, *A Horse*, 175-6.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 216.

²²¹ Lewis, *Voyage*, 112-115.

²²² Lewis, *Lion*, 155-157.

all the time,” she states to Edmund. “He’s looking straight at us.”²²³ The rest of the group fails to see Aslan, though he is standing among them.

The *Narnia Chronicles* illustrate the redemption that comes as a result of this narrative convergence between God’s and a human’s stories. In this way, Lewis shows that although Christ died for the whole world, in a deeper sense redemption is an individual event, rather than an archetypical event to redeem a faceless global community. Though there are many accounts of redemption in the *Narnia Chronicles*, two stand out among the rest: the convergence of Aslan with the characters of Edmund and Eustace.

In *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*, Aslan strikes a deal with the White Witch for the soul of Edmund the traitor, and as a result Aslan must be sacrificed. The crucifixion is beautifully pictured in this children’s tale as Aslan willingly surrenders to the witch and her army, allowing himself to be bound upon an altar and finally run through with a sword. However, Aslan comes back to life, much to the children’s thrilled astonishment.

“But what does it all mean?” asked Susan when they were somewhat calmer.

“It means,” said Aslan, “that though the Witch knew the Deep Magic, there is a magic deeper still which she did not know. Her knowledge goes back only to the dawn of time. But if she could have looked a little further back, into the stillness and the darkness before Time dawned, she would have read there a different incantation. She would have known that when a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitor’s stead, the Table would crack and Death itself would start working backward.”²²⁴

In this scene, Lewis offers certainly one of the clearest literary examples ever written of atonement and grace. Soteriology is explained not as a series of propositions in

²²³ C. S. Lewis, *Prince Caspian* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1951), 152.

²²⁴ Lewis, *Lion*, 178

a theologian's treatise. The workings are presented by Lewis in a narrative as an example of convergence of the stories of the divine and humanity. Here the reader can understand how Christ's death relates to the individual on a personal and intimate level.

While Edmund's story explains Aslan's act of redemption, Eustace's focuses on the result of this act upon a person. In *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, Eustace, through his own greed and selfishness, has turned into a dragon. He is disconsolate because he can neither communicate with the other children nor fit into their boat, which is his only chance of returning home. As if in a vision, Aslan appears and tells him to peel off his dragon-skin, which he tries in vain to do. Finally Aslan offers to do it for him: "The very first tear he made was so deep that I thought it had gone right into my heart. And when he began pulling the skin off, it hurt worse than anything I've ever felt. The only thing that made me able to bear it was just the pleasure of feeling the stuff peel off."²²⁵

The narrator goes on to wrap up the work of Aslan upon Eustace's body and character. "It would be nice, and fairly nearly true, to say that 'from that time forth Eustace was a different boy.' To be strictly accurate, he began to be a different boy. He had relapses. There were still many days when he could be very tiresome. But most of those I shall not notice. The cure had begun."²²⁶ Indeed Eustace goes on to appear as a primary character and hero in the final two books of Narnia—definitely a changed young man.

Edmund and Eustace illustrate the theme of redemption in the *Narnia Chronicles*. In these children's fantasies, Lewis uses narrative imaginatively to communicate the saving grace of Christ, so that even the casual reader might understand.

²²⁵ Lewis, *Voyage*, 115-116.

²²⁶ Lewis, *Voyage*, 119-120.

In *The Great Divorce*, the theme of sinful bondage and redemption is revisited when an Angel meets a Ghost with a lizard on his shoulder. At first, the Ghost seems to control lizard, but soon it is clear that the lizard is in control. The Angel asks over and over again to kill the lizard, but the Ghost gives many excuses: he wants the advice of a doctor, he wants to discuss it later, he fears its removal might kill him, and he fears it will hurt too much (note the presence of pain in redemption in this example and in the example of Eustace). When the Ghost finally lets the Angel kill it, the Ghost becomes a man of glorious substance and the lizard a beautiful stallion, which he mounts and rides off toward the distant mountains.²²⁷

The difference between Lewis' apologetic works and his imaginative works might be defined this way: when he wanted to defend the gospel, he used reason and argument—but when he wanted to *communicate* the gospel, he used story. Indeed, Lewis harnessed the power of story to enable the message to be received and understood by ordinary people. Lewis presents the story at the point where every reader is located in relation to his own life story: in the middle. In this way a commonality, and thus a relationship, develops between Lewis and the reader. Lewis seems to understand the power of story and uses it masterfully with an “economy of metaphors”²²⁸ in a way that neither forces biblical truths on his readers, nor insults their intelligence by explaining the metaphors. Francis Rossow writes, “Whenever Lewis throws a Gospel-rock into the water, the reader not only recognizes the point of impact but also experiences the thrill of seeing an ever widening circle of doctrinal ripples.”²²⁹ He emphasizes not the foundations

²²⁷ Lewis, *Great Divorce*, 97-101.

²²⁸ Francis C. Rossow, “Giving Christian Doctrine a New Translation: Selected Examples from the Novels of C. S. Lewis,” *Concordia Journal* 21 (July 1995): 282.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 282.

of Christianity but the story itself, and this is why, posthumously, he still enjoys a huge following among those with a different worldview—the postmodern worldview—than the one he lived with for most of his life.

The theologian has difficulty attempting to argue against theology found in story, because story is not the proper playing field for such a debate. Story presents the human condition through characters and scenarios. The reader can relate to these characters because story is living and active.²³⁰ According to Lyotard, it is through story that true knowledge is developed. Narrative defines competence by a three-fold criterion: know-how, knowing how to speak, and knowing how to hear.²³¹

Similarly, the *Narnia Chronicles* communicate on an individual level, telling each person's own story. This might explain their popularity not only among children, but among adults—teachers, pastors and theologians. Difficult theological concepts and divine mysteries are presented not as intellectual propositions, but as stories lived out simply in the lives of the characters. The reader can relate to characters more easily than to abstract ideas because abstraction divorces truth from life, and thus is helped to understand the narrative convergence between God's story and the reader's story.

Language Games

William C. Placher notes that “Philosophers go astray when they try to impose one set of rules on all forms of language. It makes no sense for scientists to condemn poets because their statements cannot be empirically tested, for instance, just as it makes no sense for a soccer fan to condemn basketball players for picking up the ball with their

²³⁰ Perhaps this is why story is so effective at reaching people with truth—because it echoes the communication methods of the Master Communicator, whose Word is “living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword” (Hebrews 4:12).

²³¹ Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition*, 21.

hands—that would be judging by the rules of the wrong game.”²³² Modernism, by limiting itself to one way of using language, has judged reality by the rules of the wrong game. Postmodernism sees language as unlimited.

Language games were first described by Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein. He asserts that each use of language exists within a separate and unique set of rules, and during the dialogue, the participants must become aware of the rules within that particular discourse. Lyotard likens language games to chess, in which pre-set rules determine the way each piece is allowed to move. He adds that “Great joy is had in the endless invention of turns of phrase, of words and meanings...But undoubtedly even this pleasure depends on a feeling of success won at the expense of an adversary—at least one adversary, and a formidable one: the acceptable language, or connotation.”²³³ Grenz notes that adopting language games is the first step to rejecting an objective reality. He writes, “No proposition can be limited to a single meaning...because its meaning is necessarily dependant on its context, the ‘language game’ in which it appears. Thus, any sentence has as many meanings as the contexts in which it is used.”²³⁴

In the newspaper articles which became *The Screwtape Letters*, Lewis invented a clever language game to illustrate the inner workings of evil by turning common Christian terminology on its head. What Christians call “bad” and “evil,” Screwtape, a demon, naturally considers “good.” What Christians call “God,” Screwtape of course calls “the Enemy.” In this way, all the normal uses of these words are inverted. White is black, black is white—the reader is forced to participate in the language game to

²³² William C. Placher, *Unapologetic Theology: A Christian Voice in a Pluralistic Conversation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 58.

²³³ Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition*, 10.

²³⁴ Grenz, *Primer*, 114.

understand the book. The story has already been mentioned earlier of one offended minister who, failing to understand the rules of this particular game, apparently believed that Lewis himself (not Screwtape, the demon who used the language in this upside-down way) was advocating sinful behavior and canceled his subscription to the newspaper.

Lewis and Myth

Alasdair MacIntyre expands on this way of thinking: “Deprive children of stories and you leave them unscripted, anxious stutterers in their actions as in their words. Hence there is no way to give us an understanding of any society, including our own, except through the stock of stories which constitute its initial dramatic resources. Mythology, in its original sense, is at the heart of things.”²³⁵

The church is reluctant to associate myth with the Bible. Perhaps it feels that labeling Christianity a myth would identify it as untrue, or would reduce it to one story among many, just another myth among thousands. However, myth does not mean a fictional tale, but rather a “figural or poetic rendering of divine purpose and activity” which is “necessary for the kind of truth the Bible conveys.”²³⁶ *Myth* then is a story of God directly at work in the human condition.

Lewis supports this concept of myth. He sees human intellect as incurably abstract and experience as the only concrete reality. Through myth, Lewis argues, one can experience a reality that would otherwise be just an abstraction:

What flows into you from the myth is not truth but reality (truth is always *about* something, but reality is that *about which* truth is), and, therefore, every myth becomes the father of innumerable truths on the abstract level. Myth is the mountain whence all the different streams arise which become

²³⁵ MacIntyre, 547.

²³⁶ Henry H. Knight III, *A Future for Truth: Evangelical Theology in a Postmodern World* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1997), 110.

truths down here in the valley....Or, if you prefer, myth is the isthmus which connects the peninsular world of thought with that vast continent we really belong to. It is not, like truth, abstract; nor is it, like direct experience, bound to the particular.²³⁷

Lewis contends that just as God became man without ceasing to be God, so myth has become fact without ceasing to be myth. The importance of myth is so great that he even states: “A man who disbelieved the Christian story as fact but continually fed on it as myth would, perhaps, be more spiritually alive than one who assented and did not think much about it....God is more than a god, not less; Christ is more than Balder, not less. If God chooses to be mythopoeic—and is not the sky itself a myth—shall we refuse to be mythopoeic? For this is the marriage of heaven and earth: perfect myth and perfect fact: claiming not only our love and our obedience, but also our wonder and delight....”²³⁸

Lewis found a uniqueness in Christianity, a richness in its story and myth. As a literary critic and professor of medieval literature, as well as an appreciator of Norse and Celtic myth, he not only developed a sincere love of story but also learned to detect myth from historical fact. He saw the power of story to communicate; he saw the world of truth it can open. He saw narrative as a tool for communicating truth to his fellow human beings, choosing to speak through children’s tales and other forms of story. Through his love for mythology and literature he learned the art of suggesting truth to the reader through the actions—both positive and negative—of the characters, rather than through didactic lessons or moral propositions that others can simply choose to accept or reject. Story, for Lewis, became a vehicle to present Christ’s salvation and doctrine to an unbelieving world. Through story, the reader becomes engaged with the characters and

²³⁷ Lewis, *Grand Miracle*, 41.

²³⁸ Lewis, *Grand Miracle*, 42.

progresses with them through the mountains and valleys of their quest. Story makes people think in an entirely different way. It forces them to experience truth.

One misconception about postmodernism is that it rejects absolute truth. This is only partially true: it rejects the modernist definition of truth, which is confined to only that which can be proven. Truth has a different value to the postmodernist; it means something entirely different. The truth the postmodernist seeks is not found in a book of propositions and well-argued systematized doctrine. It is found in life, which is to say that truth abstracted from life is not truth, or at least is worthless to life. If philosophy hopes to address us as incarnated, involved, active and ever changing living creatures. The only way to capture this aspect of the human condition is through narrative.

Without fully knowing what postmodernism would become, Lewis utilized a tool that is completely postmodern. Through the other lands, worlds, planets and even dimensions (as in *The Screwtape Letters* or *The Great Divorce*) created in his stories, Lewis is able to present the gospel in a way theological treatises cannot, and therefore is able to explain Christianity far more effectively than academic theologians ever could. To Lewis, the birth and life of Christ came out of myth, and he had no difficulty returning Christianity full circle back to its roots. Perhaps this is why Lewis' most popular work is his fiction. He saw Christianity as alive, and only through story could he have treated the truths of this faith so well.

Conclusion

No doubt the reader will find exceptions to what has been written in this study of C. S. Lewis, probably in the writings of Lewis himself. He vehemently rejects subjectivism and trumpets reason, yet also condemns modernist liberal theology. He

claims like a true modernist that words and language represent objects, yet also dabbles in postmodern language games, which change word meanings in each new context.

In fact, as a result of modernism's dominance over western culture for the last three centuries, individuals have been mistakenly trying to pigeonhole people into certain categories. It is impossible to paint Lewis with a single broad stroke. He writes fiction, yet defends truth. He is a foundationalist, yet a mystic. He argues for Moral Law, yet sees truth in things beyond it such as myth. He insists he is not a theologian, yet he illustrates profound doctrines through children, a lion, and a knee-high talking mouse.

Above all, however, C. S. Lewis is a paradox of worldviews. To the modernist, he is a champion of foundational apologetics, reductionistic individualism, and the representational theory of language. For devotional readings, the modernist might suggest *Miracles*, *The Problem of Pain*, or *Mere Christianity*. However, to the postmodern, Lewis is a storyteller, a questioner of empirical propositions and a respecter of mystery. For a devotional, the postmodern might choose *The Great Divorce* or all seven books of *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

Neither view is complete, nor can either paint a complete picture of Lewis without the other. Lewis, in fact, transcended both worldviews, for he had developed that greatest of all perspectives: a kingdom worldview that kneels to no other. In this worldview, Lewis found the freedom to take the best of both modernism and postmodernism (which encompasses everything that is not modernism) and create fresh new ways to tell a timeless story of eternal salvation. While there are many intellectual signposts on his journey toward God, there are also a number of spiritual or even mystical experiences, and he invites both modernists and postmodernists to come along. Francis Rossow states:

“The customary language for doctrine becomes so familiar we don’t hear it, or, if we do, it goes in one ear and out the other...Lewis not only provides us specific ways to [put the old wine of Christian doctrine into new wineskins] but also functions as a catalyst to come up with our own fresh and imaginative ways to communicate Spiritual truth.”²³⁹ He found no limits to his methodology. If he chose to debate doctrine, he wrote a reasoned apologetic. If he chose to bring it to life, however, he wrote a story.

As the church enters with the rest of the world into the twenty-first century, it finds itself in somewhat of an identity crisis, reacting in one of two ways to the rise of postmodernism: either standing boldly yet ignorantly against it, or wrapping itself completely within it and building a new “postmodern church.” Both paths are extreme.

The beginning of the twenty-first century sees society in a postmodern worldview. Yet postmodernism finds modernism as its source of strength by feeding off of it. Postmodernism exists for one reason: to stand against its predecessor. It exists to correct modernism. In a sense, postmodernism is a virus. It lives off its host, unwittingly killing it in the process. Yet when the host is dead, the virus will die shortly thereafter. Modernism has been short-lived and has nearly disappeared; it is not the climax of history. Postmodernism is little more than a transition, a corrective reaction to the extremities of its predecessor. One can only guess what the next age will look like, but more than likely, it will not be postmodern. Perhaps it will resemble medieval times once again—the era which preceded modernism, and the era in which Lewis, as a literature professor, was an expert.

For the church, this means one thing, as modeled by the paradigmatic example of C. S. Lewis: it must transcend both worldviews. Lewis showed a way to escape secular

²³⁹ Rossow, 296.

worldviews and present the gospel any way one can: by being neither a modern nor a postmodern Christian, but a kingdom Christian with a kingdom worldview. When the church aligns itself with any other worldview, it is doomed to ineffectiveness when the secular worldview shifts again—and rest assured, it will.

Before it rushes on to embrace the next rising worldview, the church can and should look at Lewis as one outstanding model for this kingdom worldview to better understand its role in the world. Whatever the literary form—autobiography or allegory, myth or metaphor, fantasy or apology—in the minds of his readers, he covered the territory thoroughly and compellingly, with an unparalleled balance of intrigue and clarity. He used every tool in his toolbox, from any and all worldviews. Perhaps the best explanation of his enduring appeal, through modernism, through postmodernism, and probably beyond, is found in this simple tribute from his sometime-critic, John Wilson:

“...Lewis was a good communicator. All his works are readable. He could communicate to people who had absolutely no theological, or biblical, knowledge. I would be hard pressed to think of any Christian writers who can do that today.”²⁴⁰

Let the church take note.

²⁴⁰ Wilson, 35.

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