



## A LUTHERAN REFLECTION ON C. S. LEWIS

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Jovial were the celebrations last November on the fiftieth anniversary of C. S. Lewis's passage into eternal glory. The panegyrics got me thinking about my own journeys through Lewis's works, some repeated more times than I can count. It seemed like a good occasion to read the books I'd missed, reread the ones I loved, and figure out what it was that drew me—and countless others—so strongly to Lewis. Chief among the delights are his calm and accessible accounts of Christianity, his fair dealings with other religions, and the way his storyteller's instincts bring the faith so vividly to life. At the same time, I hoped to sort out what in his thought has left me uneasy, uncertain, and unconvinced. My doubts arise from his over-reliance on medieval astrology and myth to the point that the cross is obscured. This also underlies Lewis's questionable views on gender.

### *The Delightful*

The most basic question Lewis scholarship asks is: how on earth did a reclusive scholar of Renaissance literature, who got married late in life to an unlikely candidate and fathered no children of his own, become one of the most famous children's book authors of all time? As if that weren't enough, how did he go on to have a second fame as the most beloved Christian apologist of the anglophone world, iconic as the ultimate convert from atheism, despite his total lack of formal theological education or training in any kind of pastoral work? And apparently he is even still respected in his own scholarly field and among poets, though I won't even attempt to tackle those parts of his work here.<sup>1</sup>

Regarding his first fame—as a children's book author—the best answer can be found in the recent groundbreaking study *Planet Narnia*: it's a must-read for those who wish to

understand Lewis's imagination.<sup>2</sup> Here I'll venture some thoughts of my own on his second fame, as a theologian and apologist.

For one thing, Lewis was possessed of a rare constellation of theological solidity, spiritual wisdom, a knack for storytelling, and a quick wit. One of these virtues is rare enough; for all four to line up in one mind is well-nigh miraculous. Take, for instance, *The Four Loves* (in my estimation, the most successful and insightful of his strictly theological works; oh, that Lutherans would forever set aside their copies of Anders Nygren's well-meant but dreadfully confused *Agape and Eros* and feast on Lewis instead!). His theological purpose is to give meaning and clarity to love—the fulfilling of the law, the more excellent way, what God *is* (1 John 4:8)—while pointing out the necessary differences between divine and creaturely loves. His spiritual purpose is to help believers purify (or submit for purification) their own assorted loves, that they might be more faithful disciples of their loving Lord. He accomplishes these two ends in part by telling tiny stories that remove the matter from the realm of abstract theory and set it squarely in real life. Affection he illustrates thus: “The child will love a crusty old gardener who has hardly ever taken notice of it and shrink from the visitor who is making every attempt to win its regard.”<sup>3</sup> On the surprising dislike of Friendship for generosity and gratitude: “It was a distraction, an anomaly. It was a horrible waste of the time, always too short, that we had together. Perhaps we had only a couple of hours in which to talk and, God bless us, twenty minutes of it has had to be devoted to *affairs*.”<sup>4</sup> Of misdirected Eros: “Even if the two lovers are mature and experienced people who know that broken hearts heal in the end and can clearly foresee that, if they once steeled themselves to go through the present agony of parting, they would almost certainly be happier ten years hence than marriage is at all likely

to make them—even then, they would not part.”<sup>5</sup> And all this Lewis does with such beautiful, clever, and cut-to-the-quick language that it’s impossible to resist the urge to assemble a pastiche of favorite quotes: “Man approaches God most nearly when he is in one sense least like God.” “Affection can love the unattractive: God and His saints love the unlovable.” “When natural things look most divine, the demoniac is just around the corner.”<sup>6</sup> The fourfold combination of orthodoxy, wisdom, storytelling, and style turns up again and again in Lewis’s apologetic works, from his terribly underrated *Reflections on the Psalms* to *Mere Christianity* to the ever-imitated *Screwtape Letters*.

Lewis’s orthodoxy is no archival thing. Though he had to overcome an early-adulthood disdain for the medieval and ancient, a kind of chronological chauvinism, the conversion to the past did not entail for him a lud-dite rejection of the present. You can hardly find a crisper deconstruction of materialist rationalism—it was Lewis who cured me of an unrecognized, unchosen, culturally absorbed positivism—but right alongside of that you’ll find a calm acceptance of the science of evolution, the enormous age and size of the universe, and the eventual heat death of the universe. His targets were illegitimate philosophical or theological extensions of such scientific undertakings, which he saw to be as unfaithful to science as they were to the gospel.

Likewise, his sharp remarks on the excesses of the historical-critical study of the Bible, stemming from his own field of expertise in literary criticism, may expose that Bultmann didn’t really grasp what a myth is or burst the bubble of complex hypotheses of authorship and redaction—but they don’t amount to a doctrine of inerrancy or a denial of the human, historical reality of the Holy Scripture. He has a wonderful horse sense about the Bible (perhaps because it charmed him so much less than other ancient narratives), bemused at the sort of

person who “after swallowing the camel of the Resurrection strains at such gnats as the feeding of the multitudes.”<sup>7</sup> His definition of miracles as local intensifications of what God does anyway, everywhere, and ultimately can hardly be improved upon.

Another commendable quality in Lewis—and one that, sadly, seems to characterize his adoring fans considerably less often—is his graciousness toward other Christians and indeed

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toward other religions. I had never thought of Lewis as particularly ecumenical, but after plowing through more than a thousand pages of his writings I can see the ecumenism everywhere; more than that, a real grief over the division of the church. Lewis’s preface to *Mere Christianity* observes, regarding the reception of his work:

Hostility has come more from borderline people whether within the Church of England or without it: men not exactly obedient to any communion.

This I find curiously consoling. It is at her centre, where her truest children dwell, that each communion is really closest to every other in spirit, if not in doctrine. And this suggests that at the centre of each there is something, or a Someone, who against all divergences of belief, all differences of temperament, all memories of mutual persecution, speaks with the same voice.<sup>8</sup>

Despite this sentiment, and the book’s title, Lewis is well aware that there is no such thing, really, as “mere Christianity”: it is a hallway, not a habitation.<sup>9</sup> He acknowledges the essential artificiality of the construct, though I think he did not fully recognize how Anglican his own version of mere Christianity was. It is indeed tempting to believe that there is a plain, unadorned Christianity from which the churches branched out into all sorts of more or less faithful, more or less colorful varieties, but it is the colorful and occasionally questionable branches that are the real thing, not the theoretical distillation. Lewis knew that. Still, the fiction allowed him to speak outside the boundaries of his own communion, and that is a gift all too rarely granted and cultivated.

Akin to this is Lewis’s appreciation, within limits, of other religions, which also came as a surprise to me.<sup>10</sup> What actually destroyed his frail childhood faith was the assertion that all other religions of all other times and places were entirely and absolutely wrong, but by some remarkable stroke of luck his version of Christianity just happened to be entirely and absolutely right. The odds—and the undercurrent of British imperialism—talked him out of belief. It was the common features of the gospel with other religions, especially pagan mythologies, that finally gave him reason to take it seriously. I don’t know of any other theologian (at least since the Cappadocians) who has taken ancient paganism as seriously and loves it as passionately as Lewis did, engag-

ing it without fear and allowing it to enrich and enliven his own Christian imagination.

In the same vein, Lewis goes to great lengths to argue that Jesus was not at all an innovative moral teacher but rightly shares the same basic views as Lao-Tzu and Buddha and the other great religious figures, as seen especially in *The Abolition of Man*. I think Jesus was more innovative than Lewis suggests, but his point is that Christianity is not threatened by its moral nearness to other religions, and equally that morality is not the point of Christianity. “If we did all that Plato or Aristotle or Confucius told us, we should get on a great deal better than we do. And so what? We never have followed the advice of the great teachers. Why are we likely to begin now? Why are we more likely to follow Christ than any of the others?”<sup>11</sup> What sets the Christian faith apart is a historical rather than mythological testimony to the dying and rising God, and that this God does not merely teach but saves by sending a new Spirit.

At the same time, Lewis places no blame on those outside who have not come to believe—he is much harder on those within (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:12,

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“For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge?”). At one point he notes the need for a “full confession by Christendom of Chris-

tendom’s specific contribution to the sum of human cruelty and treachery. Large areas of ‘the World’ will not hear us till we have publicly disowned much of our past. Why should they? We have shouted the name of Christ and enacted the service of Moloch.”<sup>12</sup>

And finally, after a steady diet of Lewis, I cannot but be impressed by his humility. I don’t think it was a literary trope: his frequent pleas for patience, indulgence, and correction strike me as genuine. He regularly (and optimistically) asks the clergy to set him straight. He openly admits that there are parts of Christian teaching that he dislikes, would prefer to avoid, cannot really understand, and even finds rather repulsive. Coming to love the Bible was a struggle for him. He makes no secret of his own inability to live by the moral code that his faith tells him to teach. Even *Surprised by Joy* ends on a note of failure, not triumph. Throughout his corpus he commends not *his* faith but *the* faith, that solid and joyous thing outside himself. Apologetics for him was never nailing an enemy but sharing bread with other hungry souls.

#### *The Doubtful*

As is probably the case with all of us, there is a slender but unbreakable thread binding Lewis’s strengths to his weaknesses; they are materially caught up in each other. What I find troubling in Lewis is wrapped up tightly with what I admire, and disentangling the two is a tricky task.

Take the question of the life to come. Lewis rehabilitates and recalibrates the whole notion of heaven. His vision is not the least bit saccharine; it is strong medicine. However distorted the hope of heaven may have become, however complicit in allowing Christians to neglect the needs and traumas of this earth, it is not a dispensable belief. For Lewis, heaven is intimately connected to the perception of joy that haunted him from his earliest days. And heaven is the fulfillment of personhood, the telos of our

individuality that does not separate us from one another but gathers us all into the one body of Christ: “There is so much of Him that millions and millions of ‘little Christs,’ all different, will still be too few to express Him

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fully... How monotonously alike all the great tyrants and conquerors have been: how gloriously different are the saints.”<sup>13</sup>

But with this comes a doubtful item, a source of obvious trouble to Lewis’s Lutheran fans: his vision requires some variation on the theme of purgatory. As Lewis was not particularly inclined to Roman Catholicism (to the great annoyance of his friend J. R. R. Tolkien), his attachment to purgatory doesn’t stem from the medieval notions of punishment, penance, or payment. It seems rather to be the logical outcome of his view of full personhood. He can’t fathom a “flipping the switch” transition from this life to the next effected by death, simply washing all the sin out of us without the hard struggle of character-building. You see this in his description of repentance: it’s “not something God demands of you before He will take you back and which He could let you off if He chose: it is simply

a description of what going back to Him is like.”<sup>14</sup> We spend our whole lives working our way back to Him (or fleeing from Him), and in the afterlife that process will, he logically infers, continue. He illustrates the inference in *The Great Divorce* and there proposes the theory (which he rightly predicts will frustrate both Catholics and Protestants) that, in retrospect, earthly life will turn out to be the beginning of either hell or heaven for us.<sup>15</sup> Purgatory as a step in the essential conformation of the character to Christ or in defiance of Christ fits in neatly with Lewis’s larger project of making salvation and damnation intelligible to a contemporary audience, which is most vivid in his *Problem of Pain*, a book far more about these questions than about pain in itself.

His depiction of purgatory is not one to be dismissed lightly or with tired confessional polemics. His acute literary instincts were, I suspect, distrustful of a *deus ex machina* at the end of our own lives that might retroactively render every hard choice, every painful sacrifice, every moral victory basically meaningless. His doctrine of purgatory is one of many places where, in reality, he is struggling with the interaction of divine and human agency. “[Y]ou will certainly carry out God’s purpose, however you act, but it makes a difference to you whether you serve like Judas or like John.”<sup>16</sup>

When he attempts to tackle the question directly and analytically, Lewis is not at his best. He flip-flops between exhortations to personal responsibility and acknowledgements that somehow any good done is God’s doing and not our own. Of course, Lewis is hardly the first theologian to be defeated by this topic. Even St. Paul struggled between the sin at large in his flesh (Romans 7:20) and the Christ who now lives in him (Galatians 2:20), and where that left his own particular person remains a mystery.

But if it was indeed his literary instincts that made Lewis resort to purgatory, it is fitting that when he attempted to illumine divine-human

agency in fictional form he succeeded much better. For instance, in *That Hideous Strength*, Ransom gives a disturbing account of submission to God that Jane finds rather hard to swallow, but then the real thing happens.

A boundary had been crossed. She had come into a world, or into a Person, or into the presence of a Person. Something expectant, patient, inexorable, met her with no veil or protection between. In the closeness of that contact she perceived at once that the Director’s words had been entirely misleading. This demand which now pressed upon her was not, even by analogy, like any other demand... In this height and depth and breadth the little idea of herself which she had hitherto called *me* dropped down and vanished, unfluttering, into bottomless distance, like a bird in a space without air. The name *me* was the name of a being whose existence she had never suspected, a being that did not yet fully exist but which was demanded.<sup>17</sup>

Her husband Mark, meanwhile, only begins to fathom the possibility of God once he has suffered a demonic attack luring him deeper into the horrors of the N.I.C.E., which causes him to cry out for help. It is being commanded by the repulsive Dr. Frost to trample a melodramatic crucifix that makes Mark wonder, for the first time in his life, whether there might not be something to Christianity after all. Jane’s and Mark’s stories are not ritualized conversion accounts of choices made by “their own free will,” nor are they due to unambiguous, factual epiphanies of the divine. Their stories are as complex and messy as real life. You don’t come to understand a tapestry better by pulling out all the threads and sorting them into different piles; the same applies to the interweaving of God’s will with our own.

We can, then, accept Lewis’s spiritual wisdom concerning human char-

acter in the Christian life and ponder the mysterious interactions of the divine will with our human one—without resorting to purgatory. For the real difficulty here, I believe, is Lewis’s understanding of the divine character.

This is due to a subtle but serious faultline within “mere Christianity.” Lewis evidently aligns himself with the Neoplatonic stream of the Christian tradition—as illustrated in

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Professor Kirke’s happy discovery at the end of *The Last Battle* that it all was, indeed, in Plato after all. Lewis depicts an upward trajectory to God. He grasps grace enough to recognize that God must do the drawing—the beatific vision is not a reward for those who work hard enough to find Him—yet the essential image is of God distant, great, and centripetal. We must be changed from our flimsy immortality into His likeness before we can have real dealings with Him. “God can show Himself as He really is only to real men.”<sup>18</sup>

Such is the point of his gorgeous, lyrical, mystical *Till We Have Faces*. Orual cannot perceive God's ways because she has clung to herself and her "bareface" ways, while the beautiful Psyche allows herself to be raptured into divinity and "brightface" adoration. There is extraordinary wisdom in this book, but is it Christian wisdom? It captures our longing for a glimpse of God and our furious impotence before God's hiddenness. But we as readers cannot love Psyche as Orual does; we actually love Orual, because her grief is ours. Her dealings with the gods demand an incarnation.

But right here is where Lewis falls short. Neither in his theology nor in his fiction do I see much evidence that Lewis has internalized Jesus' own words in John 14:9, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father." Neoplatonic Christianity likes the idea of an incarnation in principle but can't see through all its consequences: namely, that the Son of God really is *God*. We *have* beheld Him (John 1:14). Assuredly we do not see Him yet in His undimmed glory, but that does not mean that we haven't really seen Him at all, or that what we have seen is not quite yet fully God. I suspect this lack is why Lewis seems perpetually perplexed by the resurrection of the body; Neoplatonism is much more comfortable with the immortality of the soul.

Lewis's purgatorial logic, fictionally expressed in *Till We Have Faces*, is that we must be deified *before* we are willing or able to encounter God face to face. Take this passage from *Letters to Malcolm*:

Our souls *demand* purgatory, don't they? Would it not break the heart if God said to us, "It is true, my son, that your breath smells and your rags drip with mud and slime, but we are charitable here and no one will upbraid you with these things, nor draw away from you. Enter into the joy"? Should we not reply, "With submission, sir, and

if there is no objection, I'd *rather* be cleaned first." "It may hurt, you know"—"Even so, sir."<sup>19</sup>

Such a logic simply has not come to terms with the ministry of mercy of the Son of God among His people Israel and assorted Gentiles. In those cases, there was no preparation, no scrubbing up for the royal audience, no prerequisite transformation. If anything, quite the contrary: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick... For

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I came not to call the righteous, but sinners" (Matthew 9:12–13). The gospel's logic is that *only* in meeting God face to face, at His initiative, amidst our own filth, in spite of all our resistance and sin, can we take even the first and tiniest step toward the restoration of the divine image within us. It isn't God's distant but inexorable pull that does it, but rather God's proactive, invasive sending of His only Son and their Spirit.<sup>20</sup> Lewis is right that

there will be growth in character, even a progressive purgation of sin from our lives (and who knows? maybe even in heaven): but not apart, never apart, from the holy presence of God. According to the Christian faith, holiness is distinguished by its willingness to keep unholy company. That is what it means for the Son of Man to be true God.

So much for purgatory. Readers of this journal will not be surprised that my other strong doubt about Lewis is his take on gender. A few caveats are in order. One is that he isn't nearly as bad as his cultured despisers make him out to be. For someone relatively deprived of the company of women most of his life—his mother died when he was very young and his father never remarried, he attended boys' schools, he fought in World War I, he made his living as a scholar at a time when women's higher education was only just beginning—he is evenhanded and respectful. It's clear that his late-in-life marriage to Joy Davidman upended many of his lingering prejudices regarding the female sex.<sup>21</sup> A nice indication of this is the line in *A Grief Observed*: "...I once praised her for her 'masculine virtues.' But she soon put a stop to that by asking how I'd like to be praised for my feminine ones. It was a good *riposte*, dear."<sup>22</sup> And I have never understood the accusation that Susan's defection from Narnia in *The Last Battle* implies Lewis's denunciation of female sexuality (her beauty and marriageability are emphasized in *The Horse and His Boy*, after all!); it's an immature and materialistic adulthood that he's criticizing.

In fact, when Lewis deals with actual individual women, he does quite well, and the intuitive balance he strikes in his storytelling is far better than his theory. Lucy is the real human hero of the Narnia stories, not Peter the High King, and her cognomen is "the Valiant," a huge improvement over the schlocky princess diet that the corporate imagination feeds girls on today. Orual in *Till We Have Faces* is a far more fit sovereign than

her violent, drunken father. One might be inclined to take umbrage that Jane in *That Hideous Strength* is a sham scholar whose real destiny is to give birth to a future Pendragon. But if we weigh her against her husband Mark, she still comes out ahead: he is even more of a sham scholar with no prospects by the end of the story, he allows himself to be manipulated and exploited by the N.I.C.E., and it turns out they only wanted him anyway because of his wife's visionary gift. (And if we pick up the clues from Lewis's autobiographical writings, it's clear that Jane is Lewis's alter ego in the story, not Mark or any other man.) The most highly qualified professional in Ransom's band is Grace Ironwood, an unmarried doctor. The earthly image of fecund Venus is Mrs. Dimble, a plump and barren old woman, and Lewis has the good graces to allow her to dismiss Ransom's theory of marriage as the musings of "a man, after all, and an unmarried man at that"<sup>23</sup>—in other words, Lewis himself. Dealing with "real" people rather than a theory of them, Lewis shows a wonderfully complex range.

But as for that theory: Lewis's basic idea is that God is masculine and creation is feminine, and the pattern is reproduced all the way up and down the great chain of being, including but not restricted to biological sex. Here he keeps company with a great number of twentieth-century theologians who, suddenly and finally realizing that female human beings are not simply inferior or incapable, scrambled to make sense of gender distinctions in the church in a more attractive light by appeal to the divine nature.<sup>24</sup> This was, actually, an innovation. Patristic theologians knew enough to steer clear of aligning creaturely males with the divine, perhaps because they still had living experience of pagan religions. The maleness of Jesus or Fatherhood of God were never arguments in the early church in favor of, for example, a male-only priesthood. It was either the intellectual and emotional incapacity of women, or the social taboo against

their playing any public role, that did it. There has been precious little interest in masculinity and femininity as such for most of Christian history.

However, in his (in)famous essay "Priestesses in the Church?"—the first word chosen for its alarm factor—Lewis argues that a church with priestesses wouldn't be much like the church at all anymore. The church is, evidently, an exercise in representation, with the priest standing in alternately for us and for God: note here again the distance of God from His creatures on earth. Lewis reasons that, since God is ultimately masculine and we are feminine to Him (men too), we could have a priest in the guise of a

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woman who addresses God on behalf of all of us feminine creatures, but the same woman could not address us on behalf of the masculine God—her very body would invalidate it. "Only one wearing the masculine uniform can (provisionally, and till the *Parousia*) represent the Lord to the Church: for we are all, corporately and individually, feminine to Him. We men may often make very bad priests. That is because we are insufficiently masculine. It is not cure to call in those who are not masculine at all."<sup>25</sup>

Notice that this is not even an appeal to the few verses of Scripture that restrict women's authority in the church: it's a highly dubious theory of gender that sidesteps the Scripture altogether, which itself has no problem

with Deborah the judge speaking for God, or Huldah the prophet, or King Lemuel's oracular mother, or Junia the apostle, or Priscilla the teacher. The closest kin you'll find in the Bible to such notions of gender as religiously significant are Baal and Asherah! The LORD, for His part, stringently warns against depicting Him as either male or female (Deuteronomy 4:16), despite the convention of masculine pronouns for the divine.

I've already noted that Lewis's weaknesses are bound up with his strengths. So it is here, too. For it is precisely his open, imaginative embrace of pagan mythology that led him down the wrong path. As the aforementioned *Planet Narnia* demonstrates beyond any shadow of a doubt, Lewis had a lifelong fascination with astrology—not the superstitious or predictive part of it, but the worldview it represented. It was his antidote to the vast realms of empty space, born of a longing for an integrated cosmos where the planets were friends and all was one beautiful whole. In ancient and medieval cosmology, each planet had a god—our planets are of course still named after them—as well as a metal, a set of characteristics, even plants and animals associated with them. It was from this rich well that Lewis drew the imagery for the *Chronicles of Narnia*, each book capturing the ambience of a planet and its god. The same astrological imagery informs the *Space Trilogy*, though in a less systematic way.

But the imagery of ancient myths traces well-worn and stereotypical orbits. Of the seven planets (which include the sun and moon) in this system, five are male and two are female. The two females neatly illustrate how the world has nearly always chosen to see women: as either mothers (Venus) or virgins (the moon). The female moon also happens to be the only one of the planets that shares the earth's orb, thus the only one entangled in the sin of the human race; all the male planets are safely beyond contamination. The male planets are not



defined by sexual qualities: the sun is vision and generosity, Mercury is language, Mars is war, Saturn is death and decay, and even Jupiter is festal pomp and splendor—which despite the lack of obvious sexual reference is so inherently masculine and glorious that, as noted in *That Hideous Strength*, humans have often mistaken this god for God Almighty.

*Planet Narnia* made it clear to me that this mythological mapping of the masculine and feminine is what undergirds Lewis's assertions about men and women in the church, and to a degree also in marriage—and therefore why it had always sat uneasily with me. It is not a biblical account of gender (insofar as such a thing could even be supposed to exist). The Scripture depicts good men and bad men, good women and bad women. It often contrasts persons of the same sex, militating against an essential quality inhering in gender: think of Cain vs. Abel, Mary vs. Martha, Saul vs. David, Orpah vs. Ruth, even Aquila and Priscilla vs. Ananias and Sapphira. Christians looking for a compelling account of gender, faithful to the gospel and attuned to the movement of history, will do better to look beyond Lewis for help.

One final note of concern. It may not be a just one; there is something rather disagreeable about criticizing someone's work for what is *not* found there instead of engaging what is. But the fact is that I find very little of the cross in Lewis's work. Yes, of course, Aslan dies for Edmund's sake: but when it's done, it's done, and there are no scars on his paws, and it plays no material role in the rest of Narnia's history except to put Aslan beyond the reach of death. Lewis's evocations of divine glory here and elsewhere give no indication that the risen and ascended Son of God still bears the wounds in his hands and side. Mark in *That Hideous Strength* discovers a third category beyond the Normal and the

Diseased, beyond the Straight and the Crooked, which is Jesus on the cross: but the insight is carried no further. Salvation is restorative, but reality is not altered by God's willing assumption of death into himself. It is a truism, perhaps, that Anglicanism places the incarnation at the center of the gospel while Lutheranism places the crucifixion there, and so perhaps my discomfort is an expression of my relative location. Certainly I don't want to play the incarnation and crucifixion off one another. But I suspect that Lewis's inability to accept the full consequences of the incarnation is a result of his gentle avoidance of the cross. Lewis inspires me in many ways: but he does not show me how God's cross can be taken up in aesthetics and even into the very fabric of reality.

And yet—after all these criticisms—I must confess that there is almost no novel I have loved better than *That Hideous Strength*. And there are no books I was more eager to read to my own son than the Chronicles of Narnia. And I have never turned to Lewis without being rewarded, even if the reward was a rip-roaring argument. I doubt very much I could have come to a deeper understanding of many aspects of the Christian faith without Lewis as teacher, friend, and sparring partner. My criticisms are not meant to scare anyone off from taking adventuresome leaps outside the usual domains of Christian thought; quite the contrary. Lewis may have been more of a literary scholar than a theologian, but he wouldn't have been nearly as interesting a theologian if he hadn't been a literary scholar. Most truth is found by swimming through error. We should count ourselves lucky if our orthodoxies were even half as instructive as Lewis's mistakes. *LF*

#### Notes

1. See, for example, *The Cambridge Companion to C. S. Lewis*, eds. Robert MacSwain and Michael Ward (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), and Michael Ward,

"How Lewis Lit the Way to Better Apologetics: Why the path to reasonable faith begins with story and imagination," *Christianity Today* 57/9 (November 2013): 36ff.

2. Michael Ward, *Planet Narnia: The Seven Heavens in the Imagination of C. S. Lewis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

3. C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (London: Fontana, 1970), 35.

4. *Ibid.*, 66.

5. *Ibid.*, 98–99.

6. *Ibid.*, 9, 38, and 95, respectively.

7. C. S. Lewis, "Fern-Seed and Elephants," in *Essay Collection and Other Short Pieces*, ed. Lesley Walmsley (London: HarperCollins, 2000), 243. Collectors looking to get the maximum number of Lewis's theological essays in a minimum number of books will want this volume; unfortunately, it is out of print and correspondingly expensive.

8. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 9.

9. *Ibid.*, 11–12.

10. On the limits, see my article "Salvaging C. S. Lewis's *The Horse and His Boy* for Mission and Cultural Awareness," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 38/3 (2014): 126–9.

11. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 137.

12. Lewis, *The Four Loves*, 32.

13. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 190, 191.

14. *Ibid.*, 60.

15. C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, in *The Best of C. S. Lewis: Five Best Books in One Volume* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), 154.

16. C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Collier, 1962), 111.

17. C. S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 318–19.

18. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 144.

19. C. S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm, Chiefly on Prayer* (New York: Mariner, 2012), 108–9.

20. The credit for this insight goes to Andrew L. Wilson, who first pointed out the weak christology of such Neoplatonic accounts of salvation while we were reading Dorothy Sayers's translation of Dante's *Divine Comedy* together.

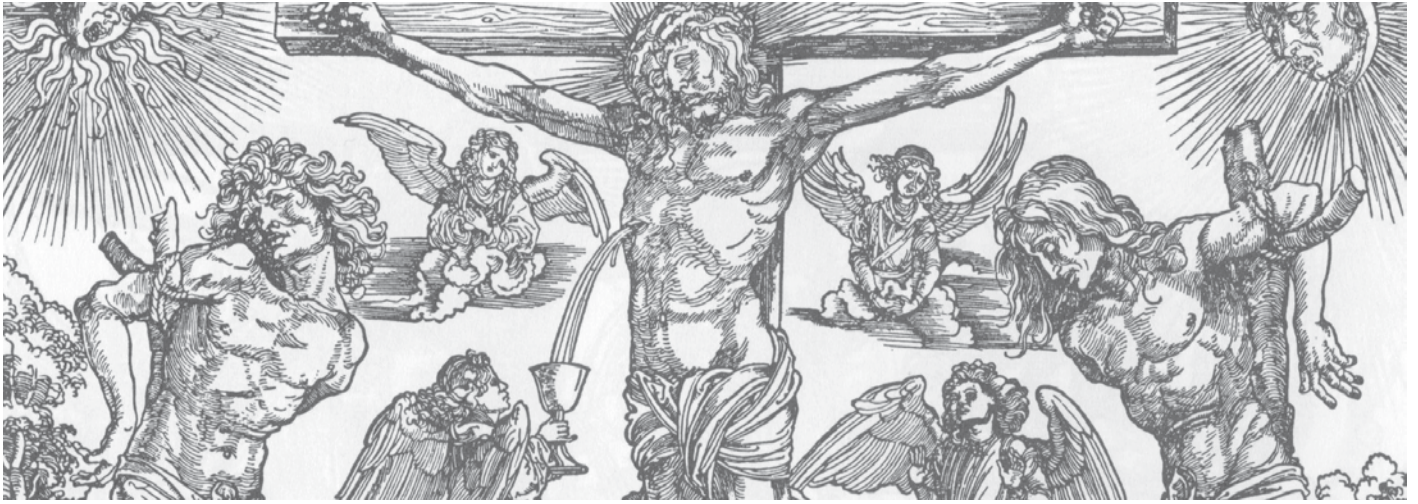
21. Ann Loades, "C. S. Lewis on Gender," in *The Cambridge Companion to C. S. Lewis*, 160–73.

22. C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 48.

23. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 168.

24. I have documented that process in Eastern Orthodoxy in my book *Woman, Women, and the Priesthood in the Trinitarian Theology of Elisabeth Behr-Sigel* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2013). Much of the logic that applies there applies to Lewis as well.

25. Lewis, "Priestesses in the Church?" in *Essay Collection*, 402.



## SPIRITUAL CARE FOR PASTORS UNDER SIEGE

*Paul Robert Sauer*

If only every Sunday were like Easter Sunday. In terms of church attendance, congregational energy, and the embrace of the centrality of the gospel message by parishioners, there are few Sundays like it. Visitors appear without invitation. Non-member schoolchildren attend and bring their parents along. For one day, it is a glimpse of what the church can and should be on every Sunday and feast day of the year—before it is back to the reality of Doubting Thomas Sunday, where once more the crowds retreat to their irregular attendance, and sports and dance programs compete for precious Sunday morning hours. As much as Easter is the pinnacle of the church year, for me it is always one of the most depressing times of the year. It is a dream that comes so tantalizingly close to reality, only to flitter away before it can be fully grasped or enjoyed.

A 2007 University of Chicago study found that clergy have higher job satisfaction rates than any other profession, with 87.3% of clergy indicating that they are “very satisfied” with their job.<sup>1</sup> Yet a 2011 Duke University study found that clergy depression rates were higher than those of any other profession and, at 11%, nearly double the national average!<sup>2</sup> There is likely some correlation between those clergy who are not satisfied in their profession and those who experience work-related depression.<sup>3</sup> Having spent thirteen years both as a pastor and as a part of my district’s praesidium,<sup>4</sup> however, experience tells me that the high job satisfaction and the high depression rates probably go hand in hand and are experienced by many clergy in the course of their ministry.

The Duke study provides some insight:

“Pastors may have created a life for themselves that is so strongly intertwined with their ministry that their emotional health is dependent on the state of their ministry,” said Rae Jean Proeschold-Bell, the Clergy

Health Initiative’s research director, and assistant research professor at the Duke Global Health Institute. “So it’s possible that when pastors feel their ministry is going well, they experience positive emotions potent enough to buffer them from mental distress. Of course, the converse is also true.”<sup>5</sup>

Some may argue that the nature of pastoral ministry tends to attract those who have a higher propensity for depression: those who have great emotional need are often drawn to a deeper relationship with God, Who offers a sense of healing and worth to individuals broken and weighed down. That viewpoint, however, has largely been refuted by a three-year Alban Institute study that concluded in 2007.<sup>6</sup> While there are no doubt some persons with a clinical propensity toward depression who are attracted to the pastoral ministry, there are significantly more pastors whose experience with depression begins only after ordination.

The reason for the high rates of depression is varied. The very nature of pastoral work frequently places clergy in positions of emotional distress. Much of pastoral ministry is being present with people in the midst of their difficult situations. Counseling couples in broken relationships, praying with parishioners who are sick and dying, visiting parish youth who have found themselves in prison, and generally bringing the presence of Christ and his church to people in challenging times can take an emotional toll on pastors. Some reports indicate that as many as 75% of clergy who were serving in Oklahoma City prior to the bombing in 1995 had left their parishes within three years after the event.<sup>7</sup> The pressures of ministering in the face of both natural and manmade disasters place clergy in a difficult position where they are providing care but often too busy or reluctant to receive care themselves.

Having learned, to their credit, the lessons following the