

C. S. Lewis: Drawn by the Truth Made Flesh

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Good afternoon. It is a privilege to celebrate C. S. Lewis's birthday with you. He was an amazing Christian man. Indeed, my main charge this afternoon is to account for his Christianity. That is, the organizers of this conference asked me to address the following question: Why was Lewis attracted to Christianity? This may seem like an odd question to the popular reader of his many Christian books -- Lewis may have always seemed to be Christian. The fact is, however, that Lewis was an atheist at one time in his life (Wilson, 1990, p. 41). In this sense, an account of his move to Christianity could be central to understanding the "man and his message" -- the topic of our symposium today.

I should warn you at the outset that my presentation is not a typical developmental account of Lewis's Christianity. It is not the usual blow-by-blow description of the events and feelings surrounding Lewis's conversion. We have many of these already (e.g., Wilson, 1990; Green & Hooper, 1974). The problem with such blow-by-blows, in my view, is that they focus too much on Lewis himself. This view may be curious, especially when the entire conference today is devoted to Lewis. Nevertheless, the problem with an exclusive focus on Lewis is that it leaves out a vital agent in Lewis's conversion -- the Truth Made Flesh.

Now, those of you who took the time to review the title of my presentation will recognize this term. The "Truth Made Flesh" is merely a variation on a more familiar phrase in the Gospel of John, the "Word made flesh." This "Word," as we come to read in John, is actually Jesus Christ himself, and this is my basic thesis: Lewis was drawn by

the Truth of Jesus Christ himself. Indeed, central to my thesis is that Lewis was drawn by the peculiar nature of this Truth. I say "peculiar" because Christianity violates many secular notions of truth. Our secular notions of truth originate from the Greek legacy to Western culture, where truth has, I will contend, five overlapping, but essential characteristics (see Table on page 6 below). I will attempt to show that Lewis found all five of these popular characteristics of truth wanting and was, instead, attracted to and attracted by the distinctive nature of Christian Truth (or at least a truth that many Christian denominations might endorse).

Major Life Themes: Truth and Relationships

Let us begin with one of two major themes in Lewis's life. Beginning here will also explain why we must focus on truth in addressing Lewis's attraction to Christianity. If Lewis was nothing else, he was a seeker of truth, from his earliest days of childhood. Lewis had all sorts of different terms for his "truth seeker" mentality -- terms such as his "longing," "joy," and "desire," -- but they all, without exception, converge upon his deep-seated wish to reach the most profound levels of human experience. One of his earliest nursery memories, for example, includes his desire to know the hills he saw from his nursery window. I quote from Surprised by Joy: "what we called 'the Green Hills'; that is, the low line of the Castlereagh Hills. They were not very far off but they were to children, quite unattainable. They taught me longing. . ." (p. 7).

Lewis never lost this longing, this reach for the unattainable -- the beyond. Many of us here can attest to the constant and seemingly inexhaustible probings for truth in his many books. Although Lewis is well known for his defense of Christianity, each of his books serves as a focus for his own examination and exploration. We can also see his

passion for truth in his evaluation of great authors and great books -- first as a precocious student and later as a literary critic. As one of his early teachers, The Great Knock, remarked, "It is the maturity and originality of his literary judgments which is so unusual and surprising. By an unerring instinct he detects first rate quality in literary workmanship and the second rate does not interest him in any way" (Lewis Papers, 1982; Wilson, 1990, p. 41). It is my contention that the "unerring instinct," detected by the Great Knock, ultimately led Lewis to long for the "first rate quality" of Christian truth as well.

This longing for truth was not the only major theme of Lewis's childhood and adulthood. One cannot review his complex life without being struck by the significance of his personal relationships. His comradeship with his brother Warnie was "deep" (Wilson, 1990, p. 11), from his earliest days of childhood, and appears to have been unaffected by the three-year difference in their ages. Indeed, until his dying days at the Kilns, Lewis's loyalty to Warnie, and his deep affection for him, were unimpeachable.

Of course, Lewis's loyalty and affection were not unique to Warnie. Repeatedly, we see Lewis pledging himself to his friends and family, regardless of the suffering these friendships caused him. His relationship with Joy Gresham comes to mind immediately for some of us -- the relationship depicted in the movie Shadowlands. However, any number of other relationships can be called upon to illustrate Lewis's "relationism:" his life-long friendship with his boyhood chum Arthur Greeves, his intimate relationship with his adopted "mother" Mrs. Moore, and his cherished association with his Oxford colleague J. R. R. Tolkien. As Lewis was to say about all these close relationships, ". . . friendship has been by far the chief source of my happiness" (Surprised by Joy, p. 33).

But why mention this penchant for relationships when discussing his penchant for truth? It is my thesis that the two penchants, the two life-long themes of Lewis's life, are inextricable. Look for one and you will invariably find the other. Consider the beginnings of his friendship with Arthur Greeves. To their utter amazement in 1914, both boys discovered that they loved the same book; they were so excited to discover this mutual interest that they were almost shouting. As Lewis writes in Surprised by Joy about this incident, "Both [of us] knew the stab of Joy" (p. 106) [with the word "Joy" capitalized]. The reason I note the capitalization of "Joy" here is that Lewis considered this "feeling" akin to truth. Nor is it totally coincidental that one of Lewis's most momentous relationships occurred with another "capitalized" Joy, his wife. As one biographer, A. N. Wilson (1990), writes, ". . . it was always axiomatic with [Lewis] that friendship began, and perhaps continued with two [people] 'seeing the same truth'" (p. 37).

Now, we should be careful not to assume that Wilson's notion of "seeing the same truth" means simple agreement. Lewis and Greeves relationship, for instance, was to outlast many profound disagreements, so this is not the point of Wilson's remark. I believe that he was referring to something infinitely more profound here: the truth of relationship, the truth of a bond between two living beings who love one another. This was the truth that both Greeves and Lewis saw, and this was the truth that knit them together throughout their lives, despite all manner of threats to their relationship. This is not to say that Lewis was intellectually aware of this connection between truth and relationship in his early days, nor is it to say that Lewis found just any relationship worthy of this treatment. Rather, my contention is that Lewis knew this connection

between truth and personal relationship in his heart. He felt it in his "happiness," as he reports, and he could not help but connect it with "the same truth."

The deeply personal, then, would always capture Lewis's attention at the most fundamental level. And Christianity was deeply personal for Lewis, though he was not always to know this. As Lewis was later to say in Mere Christianity, "[If God] is pure impersonal mind, there may be no sense in asking it allowances for you or to let you off, just as there is no sense in asking the multiplication table to let you off when you do your sums wrong" (emphases added, p. 23). His point in this passage, and my point here today, is that the personal nature of God was the ultimate attraction for Lewis, because it was the potent combination of both personal relationship and truth. I stress "ultimate attraction" here, because Lewis did not always perceive this attraction. In fact, his major life themes -- his search for truth and his devotion to relationships -- were initially to pull him in opposite directions. His search for the truth was to take him into secular scholarly pursuits, while his devotion to relationship was to propel him eventually into Christianity. The reason these were initially viewed as "opposite" by Lewis was that the relational was, for him, inherently personal, while the truthful was inherently impersonal.

The Temptation of Impersonal Truth

Let us take a few moments, at this juncture, to examine the nature of Western and secular truth to understand how Lewis might have viewed it as impersonal and nonrelational. This brief examination, I believe, will help us to understand the profound intellectual and spiritual conflict that Lewis felt most of his life, in varying degrees. You may be happy to know that I will not bore you with all the historical and philosophical sources of our popular notions of truth. As I mentioned earlier and have written about

elsewhere, they stem from some readings of ancient Greek sources (cf. Slife, in press; Slife, 1993; Slife, Hope, & Nebeker, in press; Slife & Williams, 1995). However, they are also sustained and informed by many modernist writers and scholars, perhaps most popularly by my own field of psychology. What is this popular notion of truth? What are its characteristics, particularly those characteristics that are ultimately inconsistent with Lewis's perspective on relationships?

Table 1--Two Types of Truth

The Five Characteristics of Impersonal (Secular) Truth

- A. Propositionality: truth exists as a set of abstract propositions.
- B. Contextlessness: truth cannot exist in any particular location or era.
- C. Necessity: truth cannot be any other way than it is--unchangeable.
- D. Passivity: truth propositions wait for us to discover them.
- E. Comprehensibility: truth can ultimately be rationally understood.

The Five Characteristics of Personal (Christian) Truth

- A. Concreteness: Truth is real and "objective."
- B. Contextuality: Truth resides in our particular context.
- C. Agency: Truth could choose to act otherwise than it does.
- D. Activity: Truth takes the initiative and seeks us as much as we might seek it.
- E. Irreducibility: some of the Truth can only be fathomed by the heart.

The first characteristic is truth's **propositionality**. That is, truth is thought to exist as a set of logical propositions or, more commonly, as a set of principles. This aspect of popular truth is readily seen in our culture's rendition of ethical codes. Most professional organizations, for instance, represent their ethics in written propositions, because propositions are thought to be sufficiently abstract and impersonal to be applicable to all the situations in which professionals might encounter ethical questions. In this sense, the abstract and impersonal nature of propositions makes them ideal for the universal nature of ethics. You may remember Lewis's analogy of the multiplication tables -- his exemplar of impersonal, abstract, and universal propositions. The propositional nature of multiplication tables seemingly allows them to be applicable to any situation. The

problem is, as all elementary teachers (and Lewis) know, the mere memorization of these tables (or any set of abstract propositions) does not mean that they will be applied correctly, or used at all. In other words, propositions may be universal, but their abstract and impersonal nature gives them no necessary connection to concrete situations, where all people live.

This suggests the second characteristic of secular truth -- its **contextlessness**. By "contextlessness" I mean that the propositions of truth cannot reside in any particular context or situation. Although multiplication tables and ethical codes can be represented on a particular piece of paper, the truth of these propositions does not exist in any special location or era, because it must be applicable to all locations and eras. Truth, then, is not in any particular context; it lies in some metaphysical realm outside all contexts. It only enters particular contexts when it is translated and tailored to the special situation at hand, so it cannot already be part of the situation in the first place. In this sense, the truth of the multiplication tables must be translated and tailored to particular contexts, because the logic of these mathematical propositions is thought to be utterly contextless.

The third characteristic of our popular notion of truth is its **necessity**. This characteristic implies that truth is the way it is, because it is the way it has to be -- necessary. It must be as it is, and it cannot be any other way. The propositional nature of truth can, again, illustrate this. Logical propositions are considered to be necessary in this same way: If Socrates is a man, then Socrates must (of necessity) be mortal. There is no other way. Multiplication tables and all the relationships they represent must be the way they are; they cannot be otherwise. They have no free will and they are unchangeable -- carved in stone. In this sense, the truth is already and forever

determined, and its nature and all things that might be associated with it also have to be the way they are -- of necessity.

The fourth characteristic of Western, secular truth is its **passivity**. That is, truth is not something that acts on its own accord. As I mentioned, it has no will of its own, nor any means of extending itself to others. Multiplication tables do not teach themselves to us, nor do they care whether they are taught by others. Rather, truth propositions, such as multiplication and morality, lie "out there," uncaringly, waiting for us to discover them. In much the same sense that truth is necessary, and already and forever determined, it is also passive and does not intervene in our affairs or reach out to us on its own. This is not to say that when we do discover this form of truth, it will not change us or suggest important implications for our lives; it is merely to say that we must discover and comprehend this truth for it to have these effects. It does not discover and comprehend us; we must discover and comprehend it.

This need for comprehension relates directly to our fifth and final property of Western truth -- its **comprehensibility**. Because truth is propositional, determinate, and passive, it is something that is perfectly comprehensible. Our rationality permits us to comprehend the rationality of truth. This is not to say that truth is not deep or complex, perhaps even a bit obscure and esoteric. The point is, however, that secular truth is ultimately comprehensible. Given enough time and enough study, we will be able to wrap our minds around every bit of its wisdom, every one of the mathematical relationships represented by the multiplication tables. This, of course, has been the guiding premise of science, since it was formulated over three centuries ago -- namely,

that the mathematical laws and truths of nature will eventually surrender themselves to us, completely.

These five characteristics, then, are the characteristics of truth that I believe many people in the Western world would affirm. Lewis's familiar example of the multiplication tables evidences this popularity, because we do not have to go to the rarefied realms of theology or philosophy to show the commonness of these characteristics; we can see them being taught in our elementary schools everyday. Although few people would articulate these characteristics in the fashion I have here -- and probably not use the labels for these characteristics that I have provided today -- I would argue that most people of our popular culture would affirm these characteristics as the way in which truth is.

The Attraction of Christian Truth

How then does Lewis's eventual (mature) view of Christianity violate these characteristics, from Lewis's perspective? To even imply that it violates these familiar and, in some sense, cherished notions of truth may be provocative. Many of us may have applied these characteristics of popular truth -- knowingly or unknowingly -- to Christian truth. However, the singular nature of Christianity (from Lewis's perspective) is easily evidenced by Christ's astounding pronouncement: "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). Notice that Christ does not say that he knows the truth, or that he carries with him the propositions of truth, or that he exemplifies these propositions. Christ says that he is the truth. Jesus Christ is the Word or Truth made flesh. Needless to say, this concrete, embodied truth is a radical departure from Hellenistic and thus Western

traditions of a propositional truth, and it is in this radical departure that this embodied truth violates all the characteristics that I just outlined.

Concreteness. Lewis was very aware of the concrete nature of Christian truth in his early days as a Christian. In the Screwtape Letters, for example, Lewis describes the divine presence as "completely real" and there "in the room" with us (p. 22). Of course, this concrete truth is not a Newtonian materiality, with the concrete having to be a sensory experience. However, as Lewis shows, this truth is an "objective" presence nevertheless (Surprised by Joy, p. 220), one that allows us to converse and form a relationship with it. We have, declares Lewis in Surprised by Joy, "a commerce with something which, by refusing to identify itself with any object of the senses, or anything whereof we have biological or social need, or anything imagined, or any state of our own minds, proclaims itself sheerly objective. Far more objective than bodies, for it is not, like them, clothed in our senses. . ." (emphasis added, p. 220).

Such a claim should not be too surprising for a Christian. Christians consider the historical Christ, as the Truth Made Flesh, to continue to live, so that a real relationship can be formed with an objective and divine presence, even today. One cannot form a personal relationship with an abstract set of propositions. Some of us may have enjoyed learning the multiplication tables. However, few of us, I would wager, would consider this a personal relationship with the tables themselves. This is because, at least in part, the tables are abstractions and thus do not have the necessary concreteness with which to form a relationship. It is this concreteness of Christ or God that Lewis felt himself moving inexorably toward, throughout his life. As Lewis writes in Surprised by Joy,

"Every step I had taken, from the Absolute to 'Spirit' and from 'Spirit' to 'God,' had been a step toward the more concrete, the more imminent, the more compulsive" (p. 237).

Of course, another way to understand this embodied truth is to understand ourselves as Christ's "body." In this sense, the Truth of Christ is literally in and operating through us as concrete beings. Consider Lewis's writings in Mere Christianity on this point: "And let me make it quite clear that when Christians say the Christ-life is in them, they do not mean simply something mental or moral [or propositional]. When they speak of being "in Christ" or of Christ being 'in them,' this is not simply a way of saying that they are thinking about Christ or copying Him. They mean that Christ is actually operating through them. . ." [their bodies] (p. 49). This aspect of Lewis's theology -- the realness and concreteness of Truth -- is part of the appeal that Lewis has for many Latter Day Saints, because Latter Day Saints not only believe in an embodied Christ but an embodied God as well.

Contextuality. Of course, an embodied truth -- even if it is the Christian church as "Christ's body" -- cannot very well be a contextless truth. Recall that our Hellenistic notion of truth puts it outside our lived experience and in some metaphysical realm. This was the Greek way of making propositional truth available to, though not locatable in, all contexts. The tables of multiplication can be represented on paper, but they do not literally exist there; they exist in some transcendent realm of mathematics or logic. The effect of this contextlessness on conceptions of God, or what Lewis called the Absolute, is quite dramatic. As Lewis phrased it in Surprised by Joy, "We could talk religiously about the Absolute: but there is no danger of Its doing anything about us. It was 'there'; safely and immovably 'there.' It would never come 'here,' never (to be blunt) make a

nuisance of Itself. This quasi-religion was all a one-way street. . . There was nothing to fear; better still, nothing to obey" (p. 210).

The problem with this quasi-religion -- this attempt to cast Christ into some transcendental realm, "out there," according to Lewis -- is that the historic Jesus was the truth, and the truth, in Jesus's case, existed in a particular time and a particular place. That is, Jesus was a fully contextual being who claimed to be truth. As Lewis notes so persuasively in The Problem of Pain, "Either [Christ] was a raving lunatic of an unusually abominable type, or else He was, and is, precisely what He said[-- the truth]" (p. 21). And, as I said a moment ago, Jesus lives, from the Christian perspective. If Jesus was a fully contextual and divine Being historically, why would we presume that he can no longer be such a being following his resurrection? We have already heard how Lewis considered this divine presence to be real and concrete. As Lewis notes in Miracles, "If God is the ultimate source of all concrete, individual things and events, then God Himself must be concrete, and individual in the highest degree" (p. 87). Doesn't Christ promise us that he is with us in our particular contexts? His truth is not some abstraction, which we then have to translate into a particular context; his truth is part of the context itself -- through the Holy Spirit and through the people who have him in their hearts.

I should note that Lewis's early Christianity had many propositional and contextless qualities. His conversion was initially to theism and not to the Incarnation, as Green and Hooper show (p. 103-104). However, Lewis soon came to realize that if Christian truth only provides us with abstract principles or abstract divinities, then we are truly lost, because the details of how these principles get applied are crucial to what is right and wrong in a particular context. As the saying goes, "the devil is in the details."

You can be sure that Wormwood, Lewis's demon in The Screwtape Letters, would have been happy to exploit these details. Christian truth, however, is not a set of contextless abstractions, but a personal and concrete presence with which we can truly form a relationship, because He is literally part of our context. As Lewis notes in The Problem of Pain, ". . . the intimacy between God and even the meanest creature is closer than any that creatures can attain with one another" (p. 37).

Agency. What other quality of Christian truth is required for such a personal relationship? So far, a truly personal relationship for Lewis requires some type of objectivity or embodiment and some type of contextuality or specificity. Could humans form a relationship with a being of necessity? What would such a being be like? If Christ is the truth, as He claimed and as Christians believe, and the truth is necessary, as modern notions of truth assume, then Christ himself would have had to act out of necessity. That is, the historical Jesus had to do -- of necessity -- whatever he did. All his actions were predetermined. He had to follow unchangeable and necessary natural laws, or be constituted in some unchangeable and necessary way. In either case, as Lewis painstakingly shows in his book Miracles, he could not have performed any miracles, because miracles are, by definition, violations of necessary and unchangeable laws. Jesus also could not have been moved by the pain and suffering of others -- which he was -- and he could not have been tempted by sin -- which he was. Christians, of course, believe that Christ made all the right choices, despite these temptations. However, Christians also believe that Christ could have done otherwise; he could have sinned; he just didn't.

This agency of Christ -- this ability to do otherwise -- is central to relationship, because Christ (and God) have made certain commitments to us, such as a pledge to love us. What would his love mean if Christ were not able to do otherwise? That is, how meaningful would your spouse consider your pledge of love, if you could not do otherwise? How meaningful would the phrase "I love you" be, if you were determined -- out of necessity -- to say it? Similarly, how much stock would we put in Jesus's healing of the sick, or his compassion for the poor, when every action and attitude were determined out of necessity -- he had to do and be what he was. His agency -- his ability to change, even when he did everything correctly -- is crucial to the meaning of his actions.

God is no different. Why would we praise God if He has to, of necessity, do whatever he does? What would His love mean for us, if He has to love us? Why would we pray to Him? Is prayer merely for our sake, or is it possible that we are trying to move God, just as the sick and the suffering moved Jesus? Lewis does not consider the agency of God to be inconsistent with his changelessness. As he says in Miracles, "The living fountain of divine energy. . . , does in fact, for us, commonly fall into such and such patterns. But to think that a disturbance of them would constitute a breach of the living rule and organic unity whereby God, from his own point of view, works, is a mistake. If miracles do occur then we may be sure that not to have wrought them would be the real inconsistency" (p. 97).

The key is that agency and, indeed, the ability to change one's own actions and attitudes do not preclude commitment and covenant. That is, God and Christ can be unchanging without having also to be unchangeable. Another way to put this is that the

trustworthiness of God and Christ is unchanging, because these divine beings will always choose to be trustworthy, not because they are made to be trustworthy -- out of necessity. What kind of relationship would we have if they were made to be trustworthy? Again, we have many "relationships" with inanimate and perhaps trustworthy objects, e.g., cars, bank accounts, multiplication tables. However, we usually use the term "impersonal" for such relationships, and reserve the term "personal" for relationships among embodied beings that possess agency.

Activity. This agency raises another question about the characteristics of secular truth: How passive is the Truth Made Flesh? Recall that popular notions of truth assume it just lies there -- in some metaphysical realm -- until it is discovered. This passivity means that some type of method is necessary to dig it out. This passivity was, of course, the impetus for scientific method -- to discover the truth. Because the truth wasn't looking for us, we had to go looking for it. But is this the case with Christian Truth -- the Word Made Flesh -- from Lewis's perspective? Absolutely not. As Lewis describes the moment of his conversion in Surprised by Joy, "You must picture me alone in that room in Magdalen, night after night, feeling, whenever my mind lifted even for a second from my work, the steady, unrelenting approach of Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet. That which I greatly feared had at last come upon me. In the Trinity Term of 1929 I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed. . ." (p. 228).

In this sense, as Lewis realized, the Truth is seeking us as much as we are seeking it. It is -- or rather, He is -- not waiting around for us to come up with certain methodologies. He is not waiting to be discovered in this passive Western sense. As Lewis put it in Mere Christianity, "When you come to know God, the initiative lies on

His side. If He does not show Himself, nothing you can do will enable you to find Him." From Lewis's perspective, Christ and God -- via the Holy Spirit -- are alive and active. God has intervened through his Atonement and is continuing to intervene in our particular lives, whether we know Him -- the Truth -- or not. Indeed, none of us would know the truth without this activity, this dynamic intervention, because no human-made method would ever reveal this truth without revelation by the Truth itself. Certainly, none of us could form a personal relationship with this Truth without its reaching for us as we reach for it. This activity, then, was again one of the attractions of Christianity and, indeed, all relationships for Lewis.

Irreducibility. My discussion, at this juncture, has begun to shade into Christianity's final violation of the secular notion of truth, according to Lewis -- its violation of truth's comprehensibility. Although all these characteristics are important to Lewis and his attraction to Christianity, I will attempt to show how this particular violation of comprehensibility was especially important to Lewis. For now, remember that secular truth -- through the various methods of science, etc. -- is presumed to be ultimately comprehensible. The necessary propositions of truth should be able to be discovered and completely understood by a nimble and patient rationality.

However, it was this characteristic of popular truth, as evidenced in his "long night talk" (They Stand Together, p. 425) with Henry Dyson and J. R. R. Tolkien, that proved so central to Lewis's conversion. Before this talk, Lewis saw the truth as a set of logical propositions that were ultimately grasped by the intellect. Unfortunately, this perspective made little sense of many aspects of the Truth Made Flesh. For instance, Lewis could not wrap his fertile mind around the Atonement: "What I couldn't see," he

was to write, "was how the life and death of Someone Else (whoever he was) 2000 years ago could help us here and now -- except in so far as his example helped us" (Wilson, 1990, p. 125-126). In other words, Lewis could not make logical or propositional sense out of the Atonement; it was not comprehensible and thus could not be truth. Christ could only be modeling the truth, through his example, because then Christ would be exemplifying some separate truth.

In their long night talk, however, Tolkien and Dyson argued persuasively that the incomprehensibility of the Atonement story was not a problem with the story, but a problem with Lewis. When Lewis read stories about other gods -- such as Adonis or Bacchus -- Lewis was prepared to "feel the myth as profound and suggestive of meanings beyond my grasp even tho' I could not say in cold prose 'what it meant'" (Wilson, 1990, p. 126). The point of Tolkien and Dyson was that Lewis laid aside his ability to appreciate myth when it came to Christianity, and became rigidly narrow and propositional. Lewis should understand, instead, that "the story of Christ is simply a true myth; a myth working on us in the same way as the others, but with this tremendous difference that it really happened: and one must be content to accept it in the same way" (They Stand Together, p. 427).

It was in this way, then, that Lewis was able to justify the irreducibility of the Truth Made Flesh to himself. The Word of the Lord -- incarnate in Jesus Christ -- was too large and too all-embracing for the finite mind to absorb (Wilson, 1990, p. 126). Indeed, this irreducibility was attractive to Lewis in the same way that his medieval studies were attractive. Although there is no doubt that much of Christ and his Heavenly

Father are comprehensible, there is also little doubt that Christ and his Father are not completely reducible to intellectualisms.

As Lewis put it in A Grief Observed, perhaps the most mature expression of his Christianity, "My idea of God is not a divine idea. It has to be shattered time after time. He shatters it Himself. He is the great iconoclast. Could we not say that this shattering is one of the marks of His presence?" (Wilson, 1990, p. 284). Lewis realized that God is not merely a proposition to be comprehended; He is a Being to be held in "awe" and loved (Surprised by Joy, p. 220). If Christ were totally comprehended, then we would no longer need Him, because we could depend upon what we had comprehended. If God could be fully captured by our intellect, then we would be God ourselves.

This does not mean, however, that we are caught in some mere mysticism as Christians. If Lewis's writings show us nothing else, they show us how much of Christian doctrine can stand up to the criteria of rationality. And whatever we cannot wrap our minds around intellectually, we can wrap our hearts around spiritually. In fact, Lewis's realization of the importance of myth for understanding Christianity was the main impetus for his foray into mythical writings, such as the Chronicles of Narnia and the Space Trilogy. Lewis formulated stories and myths that could convey the truth of Christianity when his propositional apologetics could not. Aslan, for example, in his land of Narnia, was able to embody the Truth, as a Christ figure, in ways that no rational argument could ever provide.

Conclusion

Why, in conclusion, was Lewis attracted to Christianity? My answer is deceptively simple, despite the circumlocutions of my presentation today. The answer is

that Lewis was drawn to and drawn by the Word Made Flesh -- a combination of both the Truth and the Relationship. That is, Lewis was inexorably and inevitably drawn by the peculiar nature of Christianity, replete with its concreteness, contextuality, agency, activity, and irreducibility. However, his formal academic training initially steered him toward a completely dissimilar form of truth, making him suspicious, if not completely skeptical of Christian truths; they were myths, not propositions or facts. This impersonal notion of truth led Lewis away from Christianity for a time. Indeed, even after his formal conversion, he continued to mix elements of Hellenism with Christianity (e.g., the dualism of spirit and matter in his book Miracles -- Wilson, 1990, p. 213).

However, I believe we see this mixture lessening in his later works, such as A Grief Observed, and a fairly complete personal relationship occurring with Truth. This relationship occurs in spite of -- or perhaps because of -- the terrible grief he suffered as a result of his wife's death. As he said of his marriage, "The most precious gift that marriage gave me was this constant impact of something very close and intimate yet all the time unmistakably other, resistant -- in a word, real" (Wilson, 1990, p. 260). In this sense, it was the resistant, irreducible other of his wife Joy that drew him to her, and it is my contention that it was the irreducible, but inviting, Other of God that drew him into personal relationship with Him.

Why was Lewis able to move toward to this personal truth? How was he able to move away from the impersonal truth that has seemed to capture so many other Western thinkers? This is where, I believe, Lewis's relationalism was to win out over his loyalty to secular truth. Ultimately, he realized that the greater profundity lay with the personal rather than the impersonal. His scholarly training initially prevented this personal truth

from being intellectually acceptable. This is, in part, why he worked so hard at his apologetics -- to make Christianity intellectually acceptable -- acceptable in the Hellenistic mold. However, when he converted, and as he matured in his Christianity, he allowed the Truth Made Flesh to mold him. He stopped trying to make God into his Hellenistic image and allowed God to make him into His image.

This means that we cannot overlook the power of God in Lewis's conversion. It is not the case, for example, that Lewis was psychologically attracted to the “truth flavor of the month” or the challenge of a truth that held mystical as well as rational elements. Rather, Lewis was selected and nurtured by God in much the same way that Lewis might have selected and nurtured one of his own students. We, in this symposium, can only be grateful that Lewis yielded to that nurturing. We can only hope that we will similarly yield.

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