# THE RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY OF C. S. LEWIS

by

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## PREFACE

C. S. Lewis, born in Belfast, Ireland, in 1898, renounced Christianity at the age of fourteen and became an atheist. In 1929, having been deeply influenced by such religious literary figures as George Macdonald and G. K. Chesterton, he became a Christian Theist and once again a communicant of the Church of England. His conversion was an intellectual one. On one occasion he wrote in response to a request for information about himself, "I'm not the religious type. I want to be let alone, to feel I'm my own master: but since the facts seemed to be the opposite I had to give in." The religious experience of this former Oxford don, now Professor of Medeival Literature at Cambridge University, has had a profound effect on his literary career.

The purpose of this thesis is to determine whether or not there is in the prose writings of C. S. Lewis a consistent religious philosophy, to describe the philosophy, and to illustrate it as it finds expression in his various works. Mr. Lewis's poetry is omitted from the discussion because almost all of it antedates his conversion to Christianity. His purely scholarly works likewise have little bearing on the thesis. The limited scope of this paper further excludes a consideration of his juvenile literature.

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

Among contemporary men of letters in England, Clive Staples Lewis is perhaps one of the most controversial. Lewis is one of a number of "literary evangelists" (T. S. Eliot, Graham Greene, Dorothy Sayers, W. H. Auden, et al.) whose fellows accuse them of academic heresy.[1] It is significant that this best-selling author and winner of the Hawthornden Prize in 1936 should be acclaimed one of the most influential spokesmen for Christianity in the English-speaking world.[2] Even one of Lewis's severest critics admits that his scholarly works are superior to any other literary criticism in England.[3] But in contrast to his sound scholarly works, this same critic calls his writings in defense of Christianity "cheap sophism": Lewis lures his reader onto the straight highway of logic, he says, only to inveigle him down the garden path of orthodox theology.[4]

The tremendous appeal of C. S. Lewis (any British clergyman might envy him his audience) lies perhaps in the fact that he is one of few Christian apologists who can write simply and directly, and yet avoid infuriating the high-brows by what Chad Walsh calls a

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1. "Don vs. Devil," Time, L (Sept. 8, 1947), 65.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p. 72.
4. Ibid.

"pulpit vocabulary or the Sunday School flavor of piety."[1]

Although Lewis repeatedly reminds his readers that he is not a theologian, that his discussion of Christian doctrine is by no means complete, and that many of his views are tentative, he has been severely attacked by a few English clergymen for his presumption to be a theologian and for his glib dismissal of Liberalism.[2] But at least one reviewer suspects that in years to come "C. S. Lewis will be recognized as England's foremost champion of Christianity during those dark times that cried for a voice to reassure the people of the faith of the fathers."[3]

The works of C. S. Lewis may be divided into rather definite groups. His three outstanding and unquestionably enduring contributions to English literature are Allegory of Love, A Preface to Paradise Lost, and English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama (Oxford History of English Literature, III). Among the other shorter pieces of literary criticism are Rehabilitations (a series of essays), and The Personal Heresy (written in collaboration with E. M. W. Tillyard). The inter-planetary novels ("scientifiction") form a trilogy: Out of the Silent Planet, Perelandra, and That Hideous Strength. Mere Christianity is a compilation of three short volumes published earlier as The Case for Christianity (published in England as Broadcast Talks),

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1. Chad Walsh, "Apostle to the Skeptics," Atlantic, CLXXVIII (Sept. 1946), 119.

2. George C. Anderson, "C. S. Lewis, Foe of Humanism," Christian Century, LXIII (Dec. 25, 1946), 1562.

3. Ibid.

Christian Behaviour, and Beyond Personality. These three books, along with Miracles and The Problem of Pain, are a direct defense of Christian Theism. In a class by themselves are the fanciful books: The Screwtape Letters, a satire, The Great Divorce, a dream-vision story, and The Pilgrim's Regress, an allegory. These latter are an indirect defense of Lewis's orthodoxy. The Weight of Glory is a series of addresses delivered at Oxford. The Abolition of Man cannot be properly classified with any of the preceding titles. In this book the author is merely attempting to establish the Natural Law or Traditional Morality which he calls the Tao.[1]

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1. Illustrations of the Tao from the religious and ethical literature of the world are contained in the appendix to The Abolition of Man.

## CHAPTER II

## APOLOGY FOR CHRISTIAN THEISM

It is his unyielding reliance upon reason that sets Lewis apart from many schools of Christian thought. Orthodox Christianity has frequently disparaged reason and contrasted it with faith. The contemporary neo-orthodox movement in European Protestant circles sets revelation in opposition to reason, viewing man as accepting what his reason is unable to encompass. Modern Liberalism appears to ignore the question whether reason can work its way to any objective truth.[1] But Lewis's arguments are based entirely on an appeal to reason. "I am not asking anyone to accept Christianity," he declares, "if his best reasoning tells him that the weight of the evidence is against it."[2] To Mr. Lewis, faith is not the unquestioning acceptance of the unproved, but rather "perseverance in belief after the belief has been thoroughly scrutinized and intellectually accepted."[3] He would not have his readers accept Christianity because of emotional satisfaction or social usefulness, as is evident in the conclusion of one of The Screwtape Letters:

> Only today I have found a passage in a Christian writer where he recommends his own version of Christianity on the ground that "only such a faith can outlast the death of old

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1. Chad Walsh, "C. S. Lewis: Champion of Reason," Christian Century, LXVI (Jan. 19, 1949), 77.

2. Clive Staples Lewis, Christian Behaviour (New York: Macmillan, 1944), p. 61.

3. Ibid.

> cultures and the birth of new civilizations." You see the little rift? "Believe this not because it is true, but for some other reason." That's the game.[1]

All possible knowledge, Mr. Lewis insists, depends on the validity of rational thought; if human reasoning is not valid, no science can be true. In one of his first books, The Pilgrim's Regress, Lewis makes reason the key to all truth. At the moment when John of Puritania, a prisoner in the giant's "black hole," gives himself up for lost, certain that he is in hell forever, it is the Titaness Reason, "a sun-bright virgin clad in complete steel, with a sword naked in her hand," who outwits the giant, slays him, and rescues John from the dungeon.[2] What happens when reason is abandoned is horribly demonstrated in That Hideous Strength. When Frost and Wither repudiate the Tao and abandon themselves to the demonic forces of evil, they become, like Weston in his struggle with Ransom on Perelandra, Un-Men. The goal of this dehumanization process is the complete elimination of rational (and moral) man.

It is through an appeal to reason that Lewis attempts to prove that what he calls the naturalists are wrong and the supernaturalists right. The difference between naturalism and supernaturalism, he says, is not exactly the same as the difference between belief and disbelief in God.[3] Naturalism could admit of a certain kind of God, a great

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1. Clive Staples Lewis, The Screwtape Letters (New York: Macmillan, 1946), p. 120.

2. Clive Staples Lewis, The Pilgrim's Regress (New York: Sheed and Ward Inc., 1944), pp. 66-72.

3. Clive Staples Lewis, Miracles (New York: Macmillan, 1947), p. 19.

cosmic consciousness arising from the interlocking event called Nature as human mind arises from human organisms. But naturalism cannot accept the idea of a God who stands outside Nature and made it. The difference between these two basic philosophies is that whereas the naturalist believes that a great process exists on its own in space and time and that nothing else exists but this single, total reality called Nature, the supernaturalist believes that one Thing does exist on its own and has produced the framework of space and time and the procession of systematically connected events which fill them.[1]

> This framework, and this filling, he calls Nature. It may, or may not, be the only reality which the one Primary Thing has produced. There might be other systems in addition to the one we call Nature.[2]

By this idea of the possibility of several "Natures," Lewis does not mean "plurality of worlds." Such different solar systems, galaxies, or "island universes," however remote, would be parts of the same Nature as our own sun. It is this reciprocal interlocking within a system which makes it what we call a Nature. Other Natures, Mr. Lewis goes on to explain, might not be spatio-temporal at all. This discontinuity, or failure of interlocking, is what justifies our calling them different Natures. It does not follow, however, that there would be no relation between them, for they would be related by their common derivation from a single supernatural source.[3] God might allow selected

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1. Ibid., pp. 19-20.
2. Ibid., p. 20.
3. Ibid.

events in the one to produce results in the other, causing a partial interlocking at certain points. Thus each of the two Natures, Lewis speculates, would be "supernatural" in relation to the other.

> But the fact of their contact would be supernatural in a more absolute sense - not as being beyond this or that Nature but beyond any and every Nature. It would be one kind of Miracle. The other kind would be Divine "interference" not by the bringing together of two Natures, but simply.[1]

It does not necessarily follow from supernaturalism that miracles occur. The Primary Thing may not interfere with the created natural systems nor ever cause them to impinge on one another. But if we conclude that Nature is not the only thing there is, then miracles could conceivably occur. Of course, if Nature is all there is, obviously nothing else could come into her from the outside. Every finite thing or event must be, in principle, explicable in terms of the Total System if naturalism is true; if any one thing exists for which that kind of explanation is impossible, then naturalism is defeated.

Mr. Lewis points out one very recent threat against naturalism: The older scientists believed that strict laws governed the movements of the smallest particles of matter. Some modern scientists now advance the theory that the individual unit of matter moves in an indeterminate fashion "of its own accord." If this theory is true, it is proof that something exists other than Nature. But Lewis, feeling no certainty that science, whose glory is progress, will not tomorrow abolish this idea of a lawless "Subnature," does not use the theory as a basis for argument.[2] He turns again, rather, to the validity of human reasoning

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1. Ibid., p. 21.

2. Ibid., pp. 24-25.

on which all possible knowledge depends. And this knowledge is inferred from our immediate sensations.

> Put in its most general form the inference would run, "Since I am presented with colours, sounds, shapes, pleasures and pains which I cannot perfectly predict or control, and since the more I investigate them the more regular their behaviour appears, therefore there must exist something other than myself and it must be systematic." Inside this very general inference, all sorts of special trains of inference lead us to more detailed conclusions. We infer Evolution from fossils: we infer the existence of our own brains from what we find inside the skulls of other creatures like ourselves in the dissecting room.
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> . . . If the feeling of certainty which we express by words like must be and therefore and since is a real perception of how things outside our own minds really "must" be, well and good. But if this certainty is merely a feeling in our own minds and not a genuine insight into realities beyond the m— if it merely represents the way our minds happen to w o r k - then we can have no knowledge. Unless human reasoning is valid no science can be true.[1]

And if our thinking is not valid, insists Mr. Lewis, no theory of the universe can be true, for the theory itself is conceived by the thought process. If human reasoning is invalid, every theory destroys its own credentials and is in the end "a proof that there are no such things as proofs - which is nonsense."[2] From his contention that human rationality is a "miracle" in itself, and that the supernatural not only exists but interpenetrates Nature, Mr. Lewis proceeds to ask whether there are, in fact, incursions of the supernatural into Nature. At this point the argument passes from the possibility of "miracles" to

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1. Ibid., pp. 25-26.

2. Ibid., p. 26.

the probability of the greater miracles which constitute the articles of Christian belief.[1]

Mr. Lewis has strong feelings against what he calls Christianity-and-water, by which he means modern Christian Liberalism.

> . . . The view which simply says there is a good God in Heaven and everything is all right - leaving out all the difficult and terrible doctrines about sin and hell and the devil, and the redemption.[2]

But he does not accept the extreme fundamentalist's point of view entirely either, particularly with reference to the latitude he appears to allow in the concept of evolution[3] as God's method of creation,[4] and his attitude toward the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures. Mr. Lewis's application of the term "mythology," however he might conceive of truth as appearing in "mythical" form before becoming incarnate as history, would hardly be accepted by fundamentalists as consistent with the idea of verbal inspiration.[5]

Lewis is intentionally silent on disputed issues among Christians. His purpose is clearly to propagate "mere" historical Christianity, not to persuade his readers to become Anglicans, Roman Catholics, or

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1. John L. Myers, "Miracles: A Preliminary Study," Nature, CIX (Aug. 30, 1947), 275-76.

2. Clive Staples Lewis, The Case for Christianity (New York: Macmillan, 1944), p. 32.

3. Chad Walsh, C. S. Lewis: Apostle to the Skeptics (New York: Macmillan, 1949), p. 129. Professor Walsh says in this connection, "One cannot imagine him voting to prohibit the teaching of evolution in the schools of Britain."

4. Clive Staples Lewis, The Problem of Pain (New York: Macmillan, 1943), p. 121.

5. Lewis, Miracles, op. cit., p. 161, n.

Congregationalists. Having set forth the intellectual respectability of Christianity, his defense of the faith is largely a defense of those miracles which are fundamental to all who embrace Christianity, whether Protestant or Roman or Greek Catholic. His use of the term Christian, it should be noted, is restricted to the Biblical meaning. The name was first given to the disciples at Antioch who accepted the apostles' teaching, and should not be used simply as a term of praise, synonymous with good. Otherwise, as Mr. Lewis explains in the Preface to Mere Christianity, the word is spoiled for any useful purpose.

## CHAPTER III

## AFFIRMATION OF CHRISTIAN DOGMA

The Christian doctrines of the triune God, the incarnate Son, Satan, and fallen man are consistently and systematically woven into the threads of narrative in the trilogy of interplanetary novels and in the fanciful books. And of course a few of C. S. Lewis's volumes appear for the express purpose of presenting Christian dogma.

That Lewis's view of God is trinitarian is beyond question.

> He contains "persons" (three of them) while remaining one God, as a cube combines six squares while remaining one solid body.[1]

The pre-incarnate Son, or "Word," is one with the Father and co-eternal with him.[2] The analogy between the Landlord and the Landlord's Son and the first two Persons of the Trinity in The Pilgrim's Regress is unmistakable;[3] and the oneness of the Father and the Son is expressed in Out of the Silent Planet and Perelandra in the story told to Ransom of how Maledil became man. In Out of the Silent Planet, the Oyarsa of Malacandria in conversation with Ransom says,

> We think that Maledil would not give it /Thulcandra, or Earth/ up utterly to the Bent One /Satan/, and there are stories among us that He has taken strange counsel and dared

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1. Lewis, Miracles, op. cit., p. 103.
2. Lewis, The Problem of Pain, op. cit., p. 33.
3. Lewis, The Pilgrim's Regress, op. cit., pp. 33, 214.

terrible things, wrestling with the Bent One in Thulcandra. . .[1]

When Tor the King on Perelandra relates to Ransom the story of the Thulcandrian race, Ransom declares,

> In our world those who know Maledil at all believe that His coming down to us and being a man is the central happening of all that happens.[2]

Several eldila speak in reply:

> He dwells (all of Him dwells) within the seed of the smallest flower and is not cramped: Deep Heaven is inside Him who is inside the seed and does not distend Him. . . Of many points one line; of many lines one shape; of many shapes one solid body; of many senses and thoughts one person; of three persons, Himself . . . In the Fallen World He prepared for Himself a body and was united with the Dust and made it glorious forever.[3]

Comparatively few references are made to the Third Person of the Trinity. Chad Walsh indicates that on one occasion he said to a friend that

> . . . he regards the Holy Ghost as being, so to speak, God within us; His principal mission is to lead us to Christ. For this reason, the Third Person is singularly elusive when a prosaic description of the Trinity is attempted.[4]

Lewis's theology is highly Christocentric.[5] And he is adamant on one point: Christ was not just a good man and a great teacher, but the Incarnate God.[6]

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1. Clive Staples Lewis, Out of the Silent Planet (New York: Macmillan, 1943), pp. 130-31.

2. Clive Staples Lewis, Perelandra (New York: Macmillan, 1944), p. 228.

3. Ibid., p. 230.

4. Walsh, C. S. Lewis: Apostle to the Skeptics, op. cit., p. 78.

5. Ibid.

6. A detailed theological discussion of the doctrine of the Incarnation is found in Miracles, pp. 131-158.

> I am trying . . . to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: "I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God." That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic - on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg - or else He would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon: or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.[1]

Throughout his books Lewis stresses the deity of the virgin-born Christ as well as his humanity. Maledil, worshipped in the interplanetary novels by the Malacandrians and the Perelandrians (inhabitants of Mars and Venus, respectively) is none other than the Christ of God.[2]

When Ransom, on Perelandra, faces physical combat with the Un-Man (Weston's body now abandoned to the forces of evil and an instrument of Satan), the voice of the invisible Maledil speaks: "It is not for nothing that you are named Ransom. . . . My name also is Ransom."[3] It is some time before Ransom comprehends the meaning of these words: He and his world had been redeemed by Maledil; but if he (Ransom) failed in his mission on Perelandra - to prevent a Fall in this unspoiled world - Another would be the ransom, for Venus would be redeemed. . .

> Yet nothing was ever repeated. Not a second crucifixion: perhaps - who knows - not even a second Incarnation . . . some act of even more appalling love, some glory of yet

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1. Lewis, The Case for Christianity, op. cit., p. 45.
2. Walsh, C. S. Lewis: Apostle to the Skeptics, op cit., p. 79.
3. Lewis, Perelandra, op. cit., pp. 153-54.

> deeper humility. . . . The small external evil which Satan had done in Malacandra was only a line: the deeper evil he had done in Earth was as a square: if Venus fell, her evil would be a cube - her Redemption beyond conceiving. Yet redeemed she would be.[1]

It is clear that in Mr. Lewis's thinking Christ's primary mission in the Silent Planet was one of Atonement. But in keeping with his non-sectarian presentation of Christian dogma, he scrupulously avoids any particular theory of how the Atonement works. (In the Preface to The Case for Christianity Lewis mentions the distress of a Roman Catholic priest who felt he "went too far about the comparative unimportance of theories of the 'Atonement.'") But the following excerpt from The Case for Christianity is typical of the importance he attaches in various of his books to the doctrine of the Atonement:

> But supposing God became a man - suppose our human nature which can suffer and die was amalgamated with God's nature in one person - then that person could help us. He could surrender His will, and suffer and die, because He was man; and He could do it perfectly because He was God. You and I go through this process only if God does it in us, but God can do it only if He becomes man. Our attempts at this dying will succeed only if we men share in God's dying, just as our thinking can succeed only because it is a drop out of the ocean of His intelligence: but we can't share God's dying unless God dies; and He can't die except by being a man. That is the sense in which He pays our debt, and suffers for us what He Himself needn't suffer at all.[2]

The most complete treatment of the Resurrection, and the doctrine of the Ascension which necessarily follows, appears in Miracles.[3] Lewis attempts to answer sympathetically the difficult questions raised by

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1. Ibid., p. 154.

2. Lewis, The Case for Christianity, op. cit., p. 50.

3. Pp. 171-76.

the skeptics, for his earlier atheism led him, too, to look upon Christianity as a series of primitive crudities: "the vertical ascent like a balloon, the local Heaven, the decorated chair to the right of the Father's throne." [1] He points out that the Resurrection is the central theme in every Christian sermon reported in the Acts of the Apostles, and the four Gospels were written because of that miracle.[2] The importance of this doctrine does not lie in the fact that above five hundred men witnessed the action of the rising from the dead, but rather that they witnessed the state of having risen - i.e.; they beheld Christ in His resurrected body. The meaning of the Resurrection Lewis further expresses thus:

> The New Testament writers speak as if Christ's achievement in rising from the dead was the first event of its kind in the whole history of the universe. He is the "first fruits," the "pioneer of life." He has forced open a door that has been locked since the death of the first man. He has met, fought, and beaten the King of Death. Everything is different because He has done so. This is the beginning of the New Creation: a new chapter in cosmic history has opened.[3]

The language of Tindril the Queen in conversation with Malacandra seems to echo the general resurrection which Christ's resurrection foreshadows.

> Our bodies will be changed, but not all changed. We shall be as the eldila, but not all as the eldila. And so will all our sons and daughters be changed in the time of their ripeness, until the number is made up which Maledil read in His Father's mind before times flowed.[4]

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1. Lewis, Miracles, op. cit., p. 177.
2. Ibid., p. 172.
3. Ibid., p. 173.
4. Lewis, Perelandra, op. cit., p. 226.

The Ascension, Mr. Lewis says, cannot be isolated from the Resurrection. If the Physical Body were not an objective reality, (some would argue that it was not), some explanation must be invented for the disappearance of the corpse.

> . . .If it were real, then something happened to it after it ceased to appear. You cannot take away the Ascension without putting something else in its place.[1]

About a personal Devil Mr. Lewis has a great deal to say. In fact, in one of his addresses he quipped, "The association between him /the Devil/ and me in the public mind has already gone quite as deep as I wish: in some quarters it has already reached the level of confusion, if not of identification."[2]

"Our Father Below" is of course Screwtape's inspiration in his letters to Wormwood. That Satan is a very real Being, playing a definite and important role in the cosmos and in the life of every man, is clearly evident in The Screwtape Letters and indeed in all of Lewis's religious works, including the inter-planetary novels. In Out of the Silent Planet, the Oyarsa of Malacandria, capable only of approximating a conception of the Evil One, calls Satan ". . . the Bent One, the lord of your world, who wastes your lives and befouls them . . . ."[3] The description of the Un-Man on Perelandra conveys a vivid picture of Lewis's Satan as clever but perverted; strong, but repulsive.

Satan and his demons apparently make use of the bodies of men who have sold him their souls. The Un-Man was he who had been Weston,

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1. Lewis, Miracles, op. cit., p. 178.

2. Clive Staples Lewis, The Weight of Glory (New York: Macmillan, 1949), p. 56.

3. Lewis, Out of the Silent Planet, op. cit., p. 152.

now used to house the incarnate Devil. When Ransom, in Perelandra, looks upon the Un-Man, it begins to smile.

> We have all often spoken. . . of a devilish smile. Now he [Ransom] realized that he had never taken the words seriously. The smile was not bitter, nor raging, nor, in an ordinary sense, sinister; it was not even mocking. It seemed to summon Ransom, with a horrible naivete of welcome, into the world of its own pleasures, as if they were the most natural thing in the world and no dispute could ever have occurred about them. It was not furtive, nor ashamed, it had nothing of the conspirator in it. It did not defy goodness, it ignored it to the point of annihilation. Ransom perceived that he had never before seen anything but half-hearted and uneasy attempts at evil. This creature was whole-hearted. The extremity of its evil had passed beyond all struggle into some state which bore a horrible similarity to innocence. It was beyond vice as the [Green] Lady was beyond virtue.[1]

The Pilgrim's Regress portrays the Devil as having been an angel of God, who through pride - or rather greed in this allegory - was excluded from heaven. (Isaiah 14: 12-14). Mother Kirk says,

> He had been born in the mountains and was one of our Landlord's own children, but he had quarreled with his father and set up on his own, and now had built up a very considerable estate in another country. His estate marches, however, with this country: and as he was a great land-grabber he always wanted to take this bit in --and he has very nearly succeeded.[2]

John of Puritania remarks that he has never met any tenants of his, to which Mother Kirk replies,

> . . . You may have met the Clevers, who are tenants of Mr. Mammon: and he is a tenant of the Spirit of the Age: who holds directly of the Enemy.[3]

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1. Lewis, Perelandra, op. cit., p. 113.

2. Lewis, The Pilgrim's Regress, op. cit., p. 94.

3. Ibid.

Mr. Lewis points out that Christ on one occasion attributes human disease quite explicitly to Satan;[1] and the Fall of man is shown in the following quotation from The Problem of Pain to be the result of his activities in the mind of man:

> We do not know how many of these creatures /Paradisal men/ God made, nor how long they continued in the Paradisal State. But sooner or later they fell. Someone or something whispered that they could become as gods - that they could cease directing their lives to their Creator and taking all their delights as uncovenanted mercies . . . so they desired to be on their own, to take care for their own future, to plan for pleasure and security. . . They wanted. . to "call their souls their own." But that means to live a lie, for our souls are not, in fact, our own. They wanted some corner in the universe of which they could say to God, "This is our business, not yours." But there is no such corner. They wanted to be nouns, but they were, and eternally must be, mere adjectives.[2]

Satan's purpose in the seduction of man is in sharp contrast to God's plan for a redeemed humanity. "One must face the fact," writes Screwtape, "that all the talk about His /The Enemy's/ love for men, and his service being perfect freedom, is not (as one would gladly believe) mere propaganda, but an appalling truth." He continues:

> He really does want to fill the universe with a lot of loathsome little replicas of Himself - creatures whose life . . . will be qualitatively like His own, not because He has absorbed them but because their wills freely conform to His. We want cattle who can finally become food; He wants servants who can finally become sons. . . We are empty and would be filled; He is full and flows over. Our war aim is a world in which Our Father Below has drawn all other beings into himself: the Enemy wants a world full of beings united to Him but still distinct.[3]

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1. Lewis, The Problem of Pain, op. cit., p. 124.

2. P. 68.

3. Lewis, The Screwtape Letters, op. cit., pp. 45-46.

Perhaps the most vivid portrayal of Satan and his power as the "Oyarsa of Thulcandra" is in That Hideous Strength. His strategy as he operates through the N. I. C. E. (National Institute for Co-ordinated Experiments) is profoundly clever and, as the title of the novel suggests, endued with hideous strength. It is significant that when Withers is attempting to lead Mark Studdock to that point of surrender to the powers of evil beyond which there is no return, it is a representation of Christ on the Cross that he is asked to "trample on and insult in other ways" as a test of his ultimate expression of loyalty to the N. I. C. E.[1] It is apparent that Satan reaches the zenith of his power over man's soul when he succeeds in causing him to "trample the Son of God underfoot,"[2] repudiating the vicarious work of Christ on the cross.

The doctrine of man begins with his creation and fall and ends with his immortality. What man might have been had he not listened to that "someone or something" who whispered rebellion in his paradisal state is suggested in the pristine beauty and virginal glory of Perelandra and the character of the Green Lady who was "beyond virtue."

The Fall is depicted to John of Puritania in The Pilgrim's Regress. Mother Kirk speaks again:

> . . . The enemy got to know the farmer's wife: and, however he did it, or whatever he said to her, it wasn't long before he persuaded her that the one thing she needed was a nice mountain-apple. And she took one and ate it. And then - you know how it is with husbands - she made the farmer come round to her mind. And at the moment he put out his hand and plucked the

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1. Clive Staples Lewis, That Hideous Strength (New York: Macmillan, 1946), p. 397.

2. The reference is to Hebrews 10:29, New Testament translated by Charles B. Williams. Chicago: Moody Press, 1949.

> fruit there was an earthquake, and the country cracked open all the way across from North to South: and ever since, instead of the farm, there has been this gorge, which the country people call the Grand Canyon. But in my language its name is Peccatum Adae.[1]

This mighty gulf, impossible for the Pilgrim to span without the supernatural aid of Mother Kirk (who seems to symbolize the third Person of the Trinity) represents, apparently, the vast distance between God and man, created by sin.

Lewis, while attributing the Fall to the work of the "Prince of this World," the "Dark Power" who "went wrong" by wanting to be "the centre,"[2] believes that man's free will is the thing that made the Fall a possibility.[3]

> Some people think they can imagine a creature which was free but had no possibility of going wrong, but I can't. If a thing is free to be good it's also free to be bad. Why, then, did God give them free will? Because free will, though it makes evil possible, is also the only thing that makes possible any love or goodness or joy worth having. A world of automata - of creatures that worked like machines - would hardly be worth creating. The happiness which God designs for His higher creatures is the happiness of being freely, voluntarily united to Him and to each other in an ecstasy of love and delight compared with which the most rapturous love between a man and a woman on this earth is mere milk and water. And for that they've got to be free.[4]

The only sin that can be conceived as the Fall was the sin of self-will,[5] wanting "to call their souls their own." And what man

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1. Lewis, The Pilgrim's Regress, op. cit., pp. 94-95.
2. Lewis, The Case for Christianity, op. cit., p. 43.
3. Ibid., pp. 41,42.
4. Ibid.
5. Lewis, The Problem of Pain, op. cit., p. 68.

lost by that act of self-will was his original specific nature.[1] The human spirit, once the master of human nature became "a mere lodger in its own house, or even a prisoner; rational consciousness became what it now is - a fitful spot-light resting on a small part of the cerebral motions."[2] This corruption of the spirit and limitation of its powers all subsequent generations fell heir to,[3] for

> . . .it was not simply what biologists call an acquired variation; it was the emergence of a new kind of man - a new species, never made by God, had sinned itself into existence. The change which man had undergone was not parallel to the development of a new organ or a new habit; it was a radical alteration of his constitution, a disturbance of the relation between his component parts, and an internal perversion of one of them.[4]

That God could have arrested this process by a miracle, Mr. Lewis agrees; but He would have thereby declined the problem which He had set Himself when He created the world, "the problem of expressing His goodness through the total drama of a world containing free agents, in spite of, and by means of, their rebellion against Him."[5] Lewis says he thinks the most significant way of stating the real freedom of man is this:

> If there are other rational species than man, existing in some other part of the actual universe, then it is not necessary to suppose that they also have fallen.[6]

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1. Ibid., p. 70.
2. Ibid., p. 71.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., p. 72.
6. Ibid., p. 73.

This belief finds expression in the author's imaginative creation of Perelanda - a planet unspoiled by sin. Adam and Eve might have been Tor the King and Tendril the Queen. At least the possibility of it seems to be part of the scheme. On this point, however, Lewis says,

> But it must always be remembered that when we talk of what might have happened, of contingencies outside the whole actuality, we do not really know what we are talking about.[1]

Lewis vigorously denies the doctrine of Total Depravity ensuing from the Fall for two reasons: first, "on the logical ground that if our depravity were total we should not know ourselves to be depraved," and secondly, "because experience shows us much goodness in human nature."[2] Elsewhere he says further, "I have seen men, for the most part, grow better not worse with advancing years."[3]

The doctrine of man includes the idea of immortality which leads to the discussion of heaven and hell, both of which receive considerable attention from Mr. Lewis. The writer of a Time magazine article discussing The Screwtape Letters says that "writers, as Dante and Milton knew, have usually felt more at home in Hell than in Heaven."[4] Perhaps Mr. Lewis has more to say about hell, but he seems no less at home in writing about heaven.

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1. Ibid., p. 72.
2. Ibid., pp. 54-55.
3. Ibid., p. 96.
4. "From Heaven to Hell," Time, XLIII (Jan. 24, 1944), 94.

> Lewis's idea of Heaven is not the 20th Century's watered-down version of ineffable, gaseous, ecstasy, but a state as real as Sunday morning breakfast.[1]

The fear of being ridiculed for talking about "pie in the sky" and of being accused of trying to escape from the responsibility of making the present world a happy one by dreaming of another, makes one shy nowadays, says Mr. Lewis, of even mentioning heaven.

> But either there is "pie in the sky" or there is not. If there is not, then Christianity is false, for this doctrine is woven into its whole fabric. If there is, then this truth, like any other, must be faced, whether it is useful at political meetings or no.[2]

Heaven is not a bribe, for it offers nothing that a mercenary soul can desire. "It is safe to tell the pure in heart that they shall see God," Mr. Lewis explains, "for only the pure in heart want to." In Mr. Lewis's opinion, although there have been times when men think they do not desire heaven, he thinks it is perhaps nearer the truth to say they have never desired anything else.[3] There is a desire with which man is born, a passionate yearning for something:

> All the things that have ever deeply possessed your soul have been but hints of it - tantalising glimpses, promises never quite fulfilled, echoes that died away just as they caught the ear. But if it should really become manifest . . . you would know it . . . Beyond all possibility of doubt you would say, "Here at last is the thing I was made for." . . . It is the secret signature of each soul . . . /which/ has a curious shape because it /the soul/ is a hollow made to fit a particular swelling in the infinite contours

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1. "Don vs. Devel," op. cit., p. 66.

2. Lewis, The Problem of Pain, op. cit., pp. 132-33.

3. Ibid., p. 133.

> of the divine substance, or a key to unlock one of the doors in the house with many mansions.[1]

The failure of the soul to fill the vacancy which is its capacity for God, the restlessness which is interminable because the soul refuses to find its rest in Him who made it, the impossibility (to use Carlyle's terminology) of the Infinite in man to bury itself beneath the finite - this seems to add up to hell for Mr. Lewis. If the ecstasy that was attainable is forever lost, its loss is hell; and the doctrine of hell can really be understood only in contrast to heaven and the meaning of participation in the "Great Dance" so ingeniously described in Perelandra.[2]

In The Problem of Pain Mr. Lewis considers some of the objections to the doctrine of hell: the objection to retributive punishment as such, the apparent lack of proportion between eternal damnation and transitory sin, the intensity of pain suggested not only by medieval art but by Scripture itself, the idea that no charitable man could enjoy the blessings of heaven while a single soul remained in hell, and finally - but not least important - the argument that the ultimate loss of a single soul means the defeat of omnipotence.[3] The discussion of these various and difficult objections, while highly theological, is suprisingly readable.

Perhaps one of the clearest expressions of Lewis' belief about hell is to be found in The Great Divorce. The ghosts who, transported by the

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1. Ibid., pp. 134-35.
2. Lewis, Perelandra, op. cit., pp. 229-35.
3. Pp. 110-16.

celestial bus, are given an opportunity to visit the Green Plain are told they need never return to the Grey Town (Hell). But almost without exception, for one reason or another, they choose to leave the borders of the celestial mountains.

In the end, the decision is forever the individual's. Decisions made on earth are usually made eternally (not just for eternity). The Ghosts were unmoved by the pleas of the Solid People. What they had chosen before death they were still choosing and would choose, all the arguments and constraining of the Spirits in heaven notwithstanding.

The Teacher in The Great Divorce (who is the spirit of George Macdonald) utters what Lewis obviously believes:

> There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, "Thy will be done," and those to whom God says, in the end, "Thy will be done." All that are in Hell, choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no Hell. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek find. To those who knock it is opened.[1]

While Mr. Lewis seems to think it is theoretically possible for a soul in hell to change his mind after death (at least one of the ghosts did not make the return trip on the bus), he shows the extreme improbability of any change of heart. This point is very well illustrated in the case of the apostate bishop. After a thought-provoking conversation, full of subtle implications of apostacy in ecclesiastical circles, the ghost of the bishop stumbles upon an excuse for taking leave of the Spirit of Dick:

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1. Clive Staples Lewis, The Great Divorce (New York: Macmillan, 1946), p. 69.

> Bless my soul, I'd nearly forgotten. Of course I can't come with you. I have to be back next Friday to read a paper. We have a little Theological society down there . . . I'm taking the text about growing up to the measure of the stature of Christ and working out an idea . . . that Jesus was a comparatively young man when he died. He would have outgrown some of his earlier views, you know, if he'd lived. As he might have done with a little more tact and patience. I am going to ask my audience to consider what his mature views would have been . . . what a different Christianity we might have had if only the Founder had reached his full stature! I shall end up by pointing out how this deepens the significance of the Crucifixion.[1]

A further concept of hell is expressed by the spirit of George Macdonald in conversation with the dreamer: those who remain in hell have been there from the beginning, as the redeemed have always been, in a sense, in heaven:[2]

> . . .Both good and evil, when they are full grown, become retrospective. Not only this valley but all this earthly past will have been Heaven to those who are saved. Not only the twilight in that town, but all their life on earth too, will then be seen by the damned to have been Hell. That is what mortals misunderstand. They say of some temporal suffering, "No future bliss can make up for it," not knowing that Heaven once attained, will work backwards and turn even that agony into a glory. And of some sinful pleasure they say "Let me but have this and I'll take the consequences": little dreaming how damnation will spread back and back into their past and contaminate the pleasure of the sin. Both processes begin even before death. The good man's past begins to change so that his forgiven sins and remembered sorrows take on the quality of Heaven: the bad man's past already conforms to his badness and is filled only with dreariness. And that is why, at the end of all things . . . the Blessed will say, "We have never lived anywhere except in Heaven," and the Lost, "We were always in Hell." And both will speak truly.[3]

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1. Lewis, The Great Divorce, op. cit., pp. 39-40.

2. Ibid., p. 63.

3. Ibid., pp. 63-64.

Mr. Lewis admits that there is no doctrine which he would more willingly remove from Christianity than the doctrine of hell; but it has the full support of the Scriptures, it has always been held by Christendom, and is supported by reason. If a game is played, Lewis insists that it must be possible to lose it.[1] The person who chooses to live wholly in the self and to make the best of what he finds there, finds hell.[2]

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1. Lewis, The Problem of Pain, op. cit., p. 106.

2. Ibid., p. 111.

## CHAPTER IV

## CHRISTIAN ETHICS

The interplanetary novels and the fanciful books have much to say indirectly about Christian ethics, but Christian Behaviour and Beyond Personality leave little doubt as to what Mr. Lewis means by morality. The Abolition of Man lays the groundwork.

Since human beings everywhere, whether they admit belief in a real right and wrong or not, demonstrate that they know the Natural Law - i.e., that they ought to behave in a certain way, that they should do this and should not do that - it is clear that the validity of traditional morality (the Tao)[1] is established. Men prove it every time they appeal to some kind of standard of behavior which they expect other men to know about. So trivial an argument as "That's my seat, I was there first" serves to illustrate Mr. Lewis's point.

The Tao, embraced in general by Plato and Aristotle, Hebrews and Christians, Stoics, Orientals, and others alike, is not just one among a series of possible systems of value.[2]

> It is the sole source of all value judgements. If it is rejected, all value is rejected. If any value is retained, it is retained. The effort to refute it and raise a new system of value in its place is self-contradictory. There

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1. Mr. Lewis gives a fuller explanation of his use of the term Tao in The Abolition of Man, p. 11. Briefly, it is a Chinese word meaning "the greatest thing," "the Way," "the Road."

2. Clive Staples Lewis, The Abolition of Man (New York: Macmillan, 1947), p. 28.

> never has been, and never will be, a radically new judgement of value in the history of the world . . . The rebellion of new ideologies against the Tao is a rebellion of the branches against the tree: if the rebels could succeed they would find that they had destroyed themselves. The human mind has no more power of inventing a new value than of imagining a new primary colour, or, indeed, of creating a new sun and a new sky for it to move in.[1]

Screwtape expresses little concern that the "characteristic truths of the past" might "correct the typical errors of the present," because

> Hell has conditioned the intellectual climate of Western Europe so that no one except the specialists reads old books . . . Great scholars are now as little nourished by the past as the most ignorant mechanic who holds that "history is bunk."[2]

It is true that here Mr. Lewis is making a negative point about the "Historical Point of View," but the further insinuation that modern ideology ignores Traditional Morality (the Tao) seems implicit. Lewis is quite insistent that if we are to have values at all, we must accept the ultimate platitudes of "Practical Reason" (again on the moral issue he appeals to reason) as having absolute validity.[3]

The supernatural origin for the Tao is an ultimate necessity, for to reduce the Tao to a mere natural product is to "undo all the labour" of the previous journey.

> You cannot go on "explaining away" forever: You will find that you have explained explanation itself away. You cannot go on "seeing though" things forever. The whole point of seeing through something is to see something through it. It is good that the window should be transparent, because the street or the garden beyond it is opaque. How if you saw through the garden too? It is no use trying to "see through"

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1. Ibid.
2. Lewis, The Screwtape Letters, op. cit., p. 76.
3. Lewis, The Abolition of Man, op. cit., p. 32.

> first principles. If you see through everything, then everything is transparent. But a wholly transparent world is an invisible world. To "see through" all things is the same as not to see.[1]

Mr. Lewis discusses Christian morality in three parts: first as it concerns itself with "fair play and harmony" between individuals; secondly, with harmony inside the man; and thirdly, with the purpose of life as a whole: what man was made for, and what God's purpose in him and for him is.[2] The "Cardinal Virtues" of the Christian life are an outgrowth of the religious philosophy which Mr. Lewis describes. But watering down the rigid demands of the Christian faith to only a "shallow system of good behaviour or ethical culture," is in Mr. Lewis's thinking (as one of his reviewers points out) one of the serious heresies of our day.[3]

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1. Ibid., p. 50.

2. Lewis, Christian Behaviour, op. cit., p. 2.

3. George C. Anderson, "C. S. Lewis, Foe of Humanism," Christian Century, LXIII (Dec. 25, 1946), 1562-63.

# CHAPTER V

## CONCLUSION

There can be no doubt that C. S. Lewis is a theist and a Christian. He says so in so many words; and his expressed beliefs conform, with a high degree of consistency, to historic Christian dogma as set forth in Doctrine in the Church of England and summarized briefly in "The Apostle's Creed," to which most orthodox Christians subscribe. The doctrines of Christianity which Mr. Lewis considers essential, and which, incidentally, are all the doctrines generally accepted by the orthodox as "fundamental" or "cardinal," are illustrated or exposited in his books.

"It is clear," observes Chad Walsh, "that Lewis, no matter how novel his methods of presentation, has set out to win over the public to a highly orthodox brand of Christianity. His ten books might be looked upon as a serialized commentary on 'The Apostle's Creed.'"[1]

In 1947 Lewis wrote in Oxford's magazine Cherwell,

> Perhaps no one would deny that Christianity is now "on the map" among the younger intelligensia as it was not, say, in 1920. Only freshmen now talk as if the anti-Christian position were self evident . . .[2]

One may suppose that Mr. Lewis has had a hand in making Christianity intellectually respectable not only at Oxford, but in Britain and throughout the English-speaking world. Newman and Wesley and a host of others

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1. Chad Walsh, "C. S. Lewis: Apostle to the Skeptics," op. cit., p. 119.

2. "Don vs. Devil," op. cit., p. 74. Original source unavailable.

have in past generations aroused the religious thinking of Britons; but when a scholar, deemed worthy of contributing volume three to a monumental literary work like the Oxford History of English Literature, proposes Christianity as the answer to all philosophic speculation, his audience is unusually attentive.

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