

# Escape, Grace, and the Logic of Belief: The Enduring Relevance of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*

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## Introduction

Thank you so much for the opportunity to speak to you this evening about one of the greatest English Christian writers of the twentieth century. And, thank you for taking time out of your busy lives to listen to some of my thoughts, observations, and interpretations concerning C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. In this lecture, I plan to explore four key areas:

1. Biographical background that helps us understand Lewis's own coming to Christian faith and how that journey influenced his literary production.
2. The setting of Narnia as a spiritual realm of fantasy escape, not for mere escapism but, rather, for the purposes of evangelism. I want us to see the *evangelum* of escape—that is, imaginative journeying into Narnia reveals the Gospel in beauty, clarity, and truth.
3. The truth of God's grace. Lewis's main purpose for using fantasy tropes is to reveal to unsuspecting readers the truth of grace. Through fantasy narrative, Lewis presents readers with fantasy events that ultimately point us to a reality and history that is fantastically true!
4. And, finally, the logic of belief. Skeptics and naturalists often dismiss Christian faith as nonsensical, irrational, even simple-minded. Ironically, through a children's story, Lewis shows us that we must have the faith of a child, yet he demonstrates that this childlike faith is indeed rational.

After the lecture, we will have time for questions, answers, and discussion. I hope we can interact in productive, engaging, and edifying ways on these issues that remain significantly relevant, for the Gospel of Christ and the Truth of His message never go out of style. Now, may I have your attention, and may the Lord sanctify what is spoken here tonight, for His glory and for our mutual good.

### **Most Unlikely of Converts, Most Powerful of Apologists**

When considering the early life of C. S. Lewis, it is not terribly surprising that he would go on to become one of the most beloved writers of children's novels the world has ever known, and in some ways, it is not unreasonable that he would become the literary friend of Tolkien. However, what is surprising is that Lewis would come to share the Christian faith of his Oxford colleague and dear friend (though as an Anglican whereas Tolkien was a devout Catholic), and more unexpected is that Lewis developed into one of the most influential Christian apologists of the twentieth century. His writings about Christian faith, critical thinking, morality, and the intersections of religion and science continue to inform rational discussion and debate on these topics today, inspiring thinking Christians to delve deeper into the intellectual aspects of faith and to refute the many counter claims of agnostics and atheist fundamentalists, otherwise known as the New Atheists.

Lewis abandoned Christianity early in life and considered intellectualism as an inoculation against the errors and follies of faith. Yet, the very intellectual pursuit of truth that he so loved forced him to confront, head on, the intellectual and moral challenges of theistic belief, and once this reluctant convert bent his knee to his Savior, Jesus Christ, there was no turning back. He became the towering Oxford don and Christian apologist, doing his work as unto the

Lord, who believers loved to read, seekers loved to pursue, and skeptics loved to hate. Whatever one's views of the man, Jack, as he preferred to be called, was remarkable, and his literary and apologetic challenges to his own generation persist today, speaking eternal Truth to temporal, secular power, causing many to look inward to see their own needs and then to look outward to find provision in Christ.

Lewis was born in Belfast, Ireland, in 1898, just as Great Britain was beginning its gradual and, in many ways, painful transition from the Victorian era into the Edwardian period. In 1905, the family moved into their new home, called Little Lea, just on the edge of suburbia. This country setting inspired the play and imaginings of little Lewis and his older brother Warren, who together would ride their bicycles into the country and soak in the beauty of nature. In this charming, almost idyllic setting, Lewis developed a love for fairytales, especially those of Beatrix Potter, Yeats, and James Stevens, and those told him by his nursemaid Lizzie Endicott. So enthralled was Lewis by the fairy worlds of story and the natural beauty of his surroundings, that by the age of six he was writing his own stories and creating his own fantasy realms with his brother Warren.<sup>1</sup>

This world of fairy wonder and idyllic charm was soon darkened by the realities of sickness, pain, suffering, and death, worldly elements that would haunt and revisit Lewis throughout his life, challenging him to grapple intellectually and spiritually with the deeper questions these hardships raise in all who encounter them. Lewis's mother, Flora, became increasingly ill, and at times the house was bustling with doctors and nurses. They soon realized that she was suffering from cancer, and they operated there in the home, which was common at that time. She recovered for a while following the surgery, but then the cancer returned, as did

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<sup>1</sup> Green and Hooper, *C. S. Lewis*, 20-22.

the pain and suffering. She eventually died in August of 1908.<sup>2</sup> Witnessing the sickness and death of his mother weighed heavily upon the mind and soul of little Lewis, especially given the family's Anglican Christian faith which taught the sovereignty of a loving and benevolent God. Lewis prayed earnestly for God to save his mother, but it was not to be. The logical question that began percolating in his mind was, simply, why? Why would a good, loving, and all-powerful God allow his mother to suffer a painful illness and then die, abandoning him to this dark and painful world?<sup>3</sup> These were, and still are, serious questions that cried out for answers, but he would not find sufficient, faith-sustaining answers for another few decades.

Understandably, Flora's death deeply hurt Lewis's father, Albert. Unfortunately, Albert responded by retreating deeper into himself, becoming even more alienated from his two boys. Albert couldn't give proper attention nor care to the two boys, and he sent them off to boarding school. Lewis was sent to the very harsh Wynyard School in Hertfordshire, which was run by a tyrannical headmaster. Later, Lewis attended Cherbourg, a preparatory school in Malvern, Worcestershire, where he seemed to have a more enjoyable time than at Wynyard School. His studies during this time did not help him find answers to his deeper questions as to why God would allow his mother to die; in fact, he was driven further and further from faith into atheism. Lewis ultimately lost his faith in the existence of God and the practical relevance of Christianity while studying at Cherbourg school, where most of the teachers assumed all religions, religious thought, and theology were pure nonsense and all notions of religious faith mere illusion.<sup>4</sup> For the next several years of boarding school study and into his time at Oxford, Lewis worked from the assumption that God did not exist and that all religions were mere myth that did not present

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-25.

<sup>3</sup> Jacobs, *Narnian*, 4-5.

<sup>4</sup> Green and Hooper, *C. S. Lewis*, 25-30.

any shred of truth or ultimate meaning, beyond the literary expression of cultural norms and expectations.

In 1913, Albert removed Lewis from Cherbourg and sent him to Malvern College, a secondary school for boys. Because his brother Warren got on famously there, Albert hoped that Lewis would also thrive in this environment. Unfortunately, Lewis did not fare so well, mainly because, unlike Warren who was adept socially and very outgoing, Lewis could not adapt to the socially competitive nature of the school. Albert eventually decided to send him to study with William T. Kirkpatrick who had a profound influence and lasting effect on Lewis's educational and rational development. Kirkpatrick retired from being headmaster at Lurgan College in 1899, and he spent the rest of his career taking in private pupils at Gastons, Great Bookham, Surrey. In 1914, Lewis began studying with Kirkpatrick, and he would never be the same.<sup>5</sup> Lewis was indeed a bright young man, but his mind was not yet sharpened, trained, nor focused. Under Kirkpatrick, he learned the rigors of logic and argumentation, and he delved deeply into the world of philosophy and rational thought. At this point, Lewis's personal and experiential atheism became philosophically sustained and reinforced under the tutelage of Kirkpatrick, who himself gave up training in the Presbyterian ministry when he lost his faith in the existence of the God of the Bible.<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, all the arguments for atheism that Lewis would imbibe and accept under Kirkpatrick were the very points he would spend the rest of his life refuting after his eventual return to faith.

As Lewis began studying with Kirkpatrick, World War I was well underway, and by 1916, the Allies were failing against the German forces. As an Irishman, Lewis could have claimed exemption from conscription, but he believed strongly in his duty to serve. By enlisting

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 34-41.

<sup>6</sup> Jacobs, *Narnian*, 45-48.

voluntarily, he could go to Oxford, join the Officers' Training Corps, and then gain a commission as an officer. He took the scholarship examination and passed, becoming a Scholar of University; however, he was not yet officially a member of Oxford. For that, he needed to pass the Responsions entrance examination. He returned to Kirkpatrick in 1917 to study mathematics, especially algebra, so as to pass the entrance examination. Unfortunately, he did not pass, but he did stay on at Oxford as part of the Officer's Training Corps and became good friends with Paddy Moore, his military training roommate. At this time, Lewis met Mrs. Moore, Paddy's mother, and became infatuated. Lewis and Paddy made a mutual pact that if either of them were killed in battle, the survivor would vow to take care of the other's family.

Both were sent to France to fight on the front. Lewis took sick early on and spent a few weeks recovering in hospital, but he eventually returned to battle on the front and was injured in April of 1918 by "friendly fire"—an English shell went off target and exploded near the Allied forces. Lewis was sent back to London, England, to recover from his injuries and was soon discharged from the military. However, Paddy died in battle, and good to his word, Lewis took in Mrs. Moore and Paddy's sister, Maureen, in 1921 in order to care for them. Lewis kept his promise to Paddy, looking after Maureen until she was married and caring for Mrs. Moore until her death in 1951.<sup>7</sup> There is much speculation and ink spilled over the nature of Lewis's relationship with Mrs. Moore, but whatever the case may be, what shines through clearly is that Lewis was a man of his word, and he sacrificed much to honor his duty to Paddy's mother and sister. Lewis gives life to this same strength of will and nobility in many of his literary characters and narrative plots.

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<sup>7</sup> Green and Hooper, *C. S. Lewis*, 46-66; Jacobs, *Narnian*, 92-93.

After recovering from his injuries sustained during the war, Lewis returned to complete his studies at Oxford with a scholarship awarded to war veterans. He finished his studies by 1923, earning a First Class Honours in the Honour School of English Language and Literature. In 1924 he accepted a temporary position at Oxford as a philosophy tutor, replacing E. F. Carritt who was on a one-year leave to America. Then, in 1925 Lewis was awarded an official five-year fellowship in Magdalen College, Oxford, as Tutor in English Language and Literature, where he met and became friends with J. R. R. Tolkien. Of course, they were not immediately fast friends, as Lewis thought Tolkien to be a bit of a dinosaur. However, this friendship would help usher in one of the most significant changes in Lewis's life, and many people would consider this seemingly chance meeting to be most providential.<sup>8</sup>

Ever since the death of his mother, Lewis had been running away from God. Throughout his skepticism and angry rejection of the Christian God, he had not really examined the alternatives. The rejection of God was easy enough, but discovering God's replacement continued to be an intellectual and spiritual problem. The issue resurfaced in a seemingly innocuous way, concerning the existence of creativity and mind in humans. Lewis asked, why do intellect and imagination exist in the first place? Where do they come from, and why do humans seem unique in possessing these cognitive faculties? He soon realized that strict naturalistic materialism could not answer these tough questions adequately. Lewis reasoned that random, unthinking natural causes could not give rise to such metaphysical qualities, and he could find no clear survival benefit to artistic expression and intellectual pursuits. If anything, Lewis surmised, these contemplative faculties make it harder for humans to survive, as time is "wasted" thinking and creating instead of hunting, gathering, and providing for progeny.

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<sup>8</sup> Green and Hooper, *C. S. Lewis*, 66-88.

Lewis continued to struggle with various ultimate questions in philosophy that deal with origins, meaning, destiny, and especially morality. His examinations of such philosophers as Hegel and F. H. Bradley left him dissatisfied, and he found the theism of Berkeley much more convincing. In 1929 he decided that God indeed exists, necessarily, and he moved intellectually and spiritually from atheism, to agnosticism, and then to theism. Through much meditation and self-examination, and after many discussions with his Christian friends J. R. R. Tolkien and Hugo Dyson, Lewis finally accepted Christ as God and became a Christian. The key intellectual point that opened his mind and heart was the consideration that all the various pagan myths about dying gods were types of divine truth pointing to Christ who was myth made real: Christ was God in the flesh who entered human history and fulfilled all the hopes of the pagan myths.<sup>9</sup>

Lewis's intellectual life had come full circle, moving from nominal childhood Christianity, into doubt and skepticism over the death of his mother, to hard-nosed atheism and then a tempered agnosticism via rigorous philosophical study, to philosophical theism after examining the logical and existential strengths and weaknesses of atheism, and, finally, to Christian theism (Anglicanism) upon further analysis of the biblical claims of Jesus Christ. Providentially, this most unlikely of converts went on to be one of the most powerful Christian apologetic voices in the twentieth century. There is no doubt that Lewis was an accomplished literary scholar whose ideas are still read and discussed today, publishing such works as *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (1936), *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (1942), *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama* (1954, volume 3 in the *Oxford History of English Literature*), *An Experiment in Criticism* (1961), and dozens of scholarly

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 90-118.

articles on medieval and renaissance literature, myth and fairytales, fantasy literature, and science fiction.

Arguably, his greatest and most enduring work (and to many readers, his most endearing) was in the realm of Christian apologetics—the philosophical, theological, and historical defense of the Christian faith. Indeed, many of his Oxford colleagues did not approve of his apologetic work, and some critics have argued that he was denied the position of Chair of Medieval Studies at Oxford due to anti-Christian prejudice,<sup>10</sup> but Lewis soldiered on, publishing such books as *The Pilgrim's Regress* (1933), *The Problem of Pain* (1940), *The Screwtape Letters* (1942), *The Great Divorce* (1945), *Mere Christianity* (1952), and *Surprised by Joy* (1955), among so many other theological and apologetic texts. His Christian theological and philosophical views also permeate his beloved works of literature, including *The Space Trilogy* (1938-45), *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1949-54), and *Till We Have Faces* (1954). Through his scholarly, popular, and literary work, Lewis returned intellectual and artistic respectability to biblical Christian faith. Not everyone who reads Lewis's works will come to believe as he did regarding Christ and Christianity; however, those who do engage his writings with an honest and open mind cannot say simply reject Christianity and its teachings as mindless, irrational drivel. To do so would be, itself, irrational, belying intellectual dishonesty and epistemological prejudice.

## **Narnia and the Evangelum of Escape**

One of the most charming aspects of Lewis's masterpiece, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, is the land of Narnia itself. As with all good mythopoeic fantasy, there must be an engaging realm

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<sup>10</sup> See Mitchell, "Bearing the Weight of Glory," for analysis of how Lewis's public evangelism and publishing of Christian apologetics and theology hurt his academic career and professional advancement at Oxford.

of imaginative, fantastical escape. However, the point of the escape is not mere escapism or escape for the purpose of banal, pointless entertainment. Rather, the imaginative journey into other realms of creation must serve a larger cognitive, emotional, moral, and spiritual purpose. For Lewis, as with his peers and forefathers in the craft, his fantasy realms and creations served this larger mythopoeic purpose. As Colin Duriez rightly points out, Lewis drew heavily from the mythopoeic theories of the sacred or redemptive imagination of the Romantic poets, as did his literary mentor George MacDonald and his dear friend and fantasy subcreator J. R. R. Tolkien. Like these and other high fantasy writers of mythopoeic literature, Lewis believed that the escape into another world is to search for a deep and abiding joy that surpasses our earthly understanding. Lewis acknowledged a deep longing in the human heart that he called *Sehnsucht*, which points to an otherworldly joy. This longing for joy, a deep sense of spiritual homelessness in this material world, compels the writer to write fantasy and that invites the reader to enter fantasy realms in search of the Master's Home, the very Kingdom of God wherein there is a mansion prepared for those who seek him.<sup>11</sup>

Yet, despite Lewis's own idealism regarding the spiritual function of proper fantasy escape, there were critics, as in the Victorian and early Edwardian periods, who feared the detrimental effects of an overindulgence in fantasy reading, namely that readers, especially children, will become so enamored with the other worldly that they will be useless in their daily lives. Lewis, of course, would have none of that, saying pointedly that fantasy does not distract us from life but, rather, adds value to it: "But at its best it can do more; it can give us experiences we have never had and thus instead of 'commenting on life,' can add to it."<sup>12</sup> Lewis addresses those critics who feared that fantasy and mythopoeic stories were harmful in that it set up

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<sup>11</sup> Duriez, "Romantic Writer," 104-05.

<sup>12</sup> Lewis, *Of Other Worlds*, 38.

unreasonable expectations and returned readers to the real world “unsettled and discontented.”<sup>13</sup> Lewis argued the exact opposite, claiming that the fairy story or the fantasy tale “paradoxically enough, strengthens our relish for real life. This excursion into the preposterous sends us back with renewed pleasure to the actual.”<sup>14</sup> Lewis argues clearly that escapist literature does not prejudice the mind and imagination against the real, and it does not result in depression because of unrealistic expectations established by the fantastic that are left unfulfilled in the real world. Rather, Lewis believes that fantasy enlivens the imagination and re-educates the sensibilities such that the real world is better understood, seen in a new light, and given new significance. The real is reimagined and remystified, such that we can see true magic within the created world that skeptical naturalism and dull realism reduces to mere physicality. Ironically, and importantly, Lewis suggests that the dangers of mere escapism come from realistic tales, not fantasy. The realistic tales in which children read about “themselves” or about other children having similar experiences as themselves are the ones that do the most damage to children, because they merely feed their ego and offer up unrealistic expectations that ultimately disappoint.<sup>15</sup> [PROVIDE EXAMPLE OF REALISTIC STORY BEING A PROBLEM ACCORDING TO LEWIS]

If, in fact, the function of escapism in fantasy is to encourage readers to re-experience the real in newly enlightened spiritual ways and to understand deeper truths in the real that are revealed in the fantastic, then what, exactly, is this truth that Lewis wishes to illuminate? By following the children into Narnia and back again, readers discover the very same things the fictional children do, that God is a God of love who created us in love and who saves us through love by sacrificing himself to pay for the penalties of our sin so that, by faith, we might enjoy

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 29-30.

community with him for an eternity. In short, Lewis attempts to use fantasy escape to prepare readers' hearts and minds to consider and even accept as true the very Gospel of Jesus Christ. How does Lewis accomplish this lofty literary goal? First, he deals on the level of fantastic myth and urges readers to consider how in Christ myth became historically real. Lewis considered myth and fantasy as creative ways in which the author as subcreator, sparks the imaginations of readers and goads them into perceiving eternal truths.

This is the mythopoeic nature of high fantasy, according to Lewis's and Tolkien's theory of mythic, fantastical literary creation. Pearce explains Lewis's view of the spiritually instructive function of myth: "Since we are made in the image of God and since we know that God is the Creator, it follows that our creativity is the expression of the *imageness* of God in us. As such, all myths, as the product of human creativity, contain splintered fragments of the one true light that comes from God. Far from being lies, they are a means of gaining an inkling of the deep truths of metaphysical reality."<sup>16</sup> Thus by telling and retelling myth, fantasy writers can open hearts and minds to bits of truth, and by retelling the One True Myth, the Gospel of Christ, through mythopoeic fantasy, Lewis believed that he could prepare unbelieving hearts and minds to consider the truth claims of Christ. Some Christian readers are confused, even put off, by Lewis expressing the Gospel as myth made real, but this in no way is a heretical notion. In a letter to his friend Arthur Greeves, Lewis explains:

Now the story of Christ is simply a true myth: a myth working on us in the same way as the others, but with this important difference that *it really happened*: and one must be content to accept it in the same way, remembering that it is God's myth where the others are men's myths: i.e., the Pagan stories are God expressing

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<sup>16</sup> Pearce, "Narnia and Middle-earth," 120-21.

Himself through the minds of poets, using such images as He found there, while Christianity is God expressing Himself through what we call “real things.”<sup>17</sup>

Thus, by recasting the Gospel, the “true myth,” within the context of his mythopoeic fantasy tale, Lewis attempts to open the hearts and minds of readers to the possibility that the history of Christ is God’s story, His-story, history—that it actually happened in the real world as Aslan’s tale happens in the imaginative world of Narnia.

Therefore, escape into fantasy in general, and into Narnia specifically, functions as a kind of literary evangelum. Lewis uses literary production and imaginative escape evangelistically. Steven Smith argues that in the Narnia tales, Lewis engages in pre-apologetics, preparing the hearts and minds of his readers to consider the claims of Christ more seriously through imaginative tales that make the supernatural at least plausible if not wholly possible:

As we speak of creating a disposition to *hear* the gospel as ‘pre-evangelism,’ we can speak of creating a predisposition to *believe* the truth of the Christian vision and to doubt the alternatives as ‘pre-apologetics.’ Because it attempts to change the readers’ vision or imagination, to give them new assumptions about what is, or can be, true, pre-apologetics is done primarily through story, through stories that undermine the secular story and make believable the Christian story.<sup>18</sup>

John Bowen reinforces this view that Lewis uses fantasy evangelistically by explaining that Lewis understood his mythopoeic fantasy stories as a kind of apologetic and evangelum that encourage readers to know Christ in their real world:

In some ways, Lucy and Edmund at this point stand for all of us, so that Aslan’s words to them are Lewis’ words to us: that Aslan is trying to communicate with

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<sup>17</sup> Hooper, *They Stand Together*, 427-28.

<sup>18</sup> Smith, “Awakening from the Enchantment,” 169.

us, to draw us to believe in him and pursue him to his land. Our job is to listen to the flashes of joy, and to follow. And hopefully our experience of Narnia will enable us to recognize where those flashes come from, and move towards their Source. . . . Lewis' intention is clear: that our knowledge of Aslan in Narnia should enrich our knowledge of Jesus in this world. . . . Lewis' concern is rather that our experience of Aslan in Narnia should give us a fresh understanding for who Jesus really was and is.<sup>19</sup>

Whatever readers eventually think of Lewis's fantasy tales, and whatever critics come to say about the larger thematic purposes of these charming and lasting stories, one thing is for certain: they cannot be dismissed as mere escapist fantasy that wastes the time and energies of readers. First and foremost, Lewis aimed to delight his readers with fascinating stories and engaging fantasy realms. Yet, he also sought to edify them intellectually and spiritually, fully believing that rationality and spirituality are not mutually exclusive. Drawing from his Inklings colleagues and the mythopoeic writers before him, namely George MacDonald whose *Phantastes* baptized Lewis's young imagination, Lewis uses fantasy escape as a mechanism by which readers, willingly or not, are encouraged to see the numinous within the material realities of daily life.

### **Finding the Truth of Grace in Imaginative Fiction**

On the one hand, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* presents readers with the classic fantasy trope of good versus evil, with the forces of good eventually emerging victorious over the oppressive designs of evil. It is easy to be swept away in the larger, external manifestations of this epic battle between good and evil such that we overlook the far more important battle

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<sup>19</sup> Bowen, *Spirituality of Narnia*, 38-39.

Lewis explores: the internal struggle of sin within our own hearts and the righteous judgment we cannot escape. The main point of drawing readers imaginatively into Narnia is to give them a fictional encounter with the most fantastical mystery of all: the grace of God. Lewis's story presents us with fantasy events that ultimately point to a history that is fantastically true.

The doctrines of grace are a distinguishing feature of the Christian faith, for although other faith traditions may have notions of forgiveness that are based upon individual merit brought on by paying or working for forgiveness in one form or another or based upon pure chance or whim of the deity, grace is unique to the message of Christ and the biblical understanding of God. Grace is an undeserved gift; it is an act of kindness or mercy freely given to an undeserving individual. The person does not deserve it, did not earn it, and cannot expect it. Grace is not contingent upon the merit of the recipient, but rather, upon the love of the one offering it. Grace dances outside of karma, if you will. Grace breaks the cycle of sin, punishment, and death, and it brings the sinner into right relationship with God.

Lewis presents readers with many instances of Christian grace throughout the novel. For example, Lucy shows sincere grace toward Mr. Tumnus by forgiving him for his deceit and treachery.<sup>20</sup> He does confess, repent, and ask for forgiveness, but Lucy is under no overt obligation to forgive him. She deserves justice, and he deserves punishment for his sin against her. Yet, out of grace, Lucy forgives him. She shows this same selfless grace toward her brother, Edmund, who maliciously lies about the existence of Narnia just to save his own pride and to hide his larger betrayal of aligning with the White Witch. When Lucy and Edmund return from Narnia and meet up with their siblings, Lucy is excited that she now has objective confirmation

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<sup>20</sup> Lewis, *Lion*, 20-22.

of the existence of Narnia—Edmund has seen it too and can corroborate her story. Sadly, Edmund decides to lie:

When Peter suddenly asked him the question he decided all at once to do the meanest and most spiteful think he could think of. He decided to let Lucy down.

“Tell us, Ed,” said Susan.

And Edmund gave a very superior look as if he were far older than Lucy (there was really only a year’s difference) and then a little snigger and said, “Oh, yes, Lucy and I have been playing—pretending that all her story about a country in the wardrobe is true. Just for fun, of course. There’s nothing there really.”<sup>21</sup>

Lucy is rightly upset, and she storms from the room in reasonable exasperation. Edmund’s betrayal here is infuriating, and he doesn’t even bother to apologize once they all go through the wardrobe together into Narnia and discover that he had been lying all along and that Lucy had been telling the truth. Instead, Edmund’s pride ushers in even more horrendous sin, and he later betrays his siblings and the Beavers to the White Witch. That sin, on so many levels, is unforgivable, because not only did he betray his family, but he also betrayed the forces of Aslan; in other words, Edmund turned his back on God and sided with the forces of evil. Despite his great sin, Aslan’s troops show mercy and rescue him from the Witch. Aslan forgives him and has a private spiritual talk, after which Edmund apologizes to his siblings and repents of his evil behavior. With encouragement from Aslan, the others forgive Edmund as well.<sup>22</sup> In each of these instances, the wrongdoer deserves punishment, but out of grace, Mr. Tumnus and Edmund receive forgiveness and acceptance.

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 44-45.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 136-39.

Lewis illustrates the centrality of mercy, grace, and forgiveness to Christian teaching, faith, and practice. But why must the followers of Christ show grace in their own lives? Why must there be forgiveness in this life? Christians are to show grace and forgiveness because Christ shows it to them; there is grace in the effect (the created order) because there is Grace in the first cause (God himself who brought the universe and this created order into existence). The ultimate expression of God's grace is His self-sacrifice on the cross in the person of Jesus Christ. On the cross, the innocent Christ took the righteous judgment of God the Father upon himself, standing in as a substitute for His people (for all who believe in Him), becoming the propitiation or the satisfaction of God's holy and righteous wrath against evil and sin, and redeeming His people thus saving them from the penalty of their sin—death. In the crucifixion, God's divine characteristics of holiness, righteousness, and justice are integrated, without contradiction or diminishment, with his qualities of grace, mercy, and love.<sup>23</sup> Herein lies the main distinctive of Christianity, and Lewis uses mythopoeic fantasy to illustrate these core doctrinal truths of the faith.

Aslan reveals the truth of grace and forgiveness by laying down his own life, serving as a fantastical typological agent for the very person of Jesus Christ. According to Jay Ruud, Lewis's scholarship and reading in late medieval and early renaissance literature informs his own literary production, namely, the degree to which he used typological literary devices popular in medieval literature in his own stories. Ruud argues that the best way to understand the character of Aslan and the significance of his self-sacrifice is typologically, and the theological nature of Aslan's sacrifice is best understood in terms of medieval Christian doctrines of atonement: "This divine romp that satisfies all spiritual hunger or weariness is the restored right relationship with God. As

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<sup>23</sup> For more information on the theological significance of Christ's crucifixion, see Stott, *Cross of Christ* and Hogsette, *E-mails to a Young Seeker*, 149-56.

Christ's sacrifice satisfies God's justice and restores man's relationship with God, so Aslan's sacrifice has restored the children in Narnia, and his romp with them, like his sacrifice itself, demonstrates his love and compassion—what Anselm saw as the motivation for Christ's actions."<sup>24</sup> While his good friend Tolkien did not dare write a character that typologically represents the incarnation of God the father in the human person of Christ, Lewis boldly translates Christ's incarnation and atoning self-sacrifice into the Lion-King of Narnia who willingly submits his innocent life to the White Witch as ransom for the guilty and as satisfaction of the moral law (the Deeper Magic), thus using mythopoeic fantasy to introduce new readers to the person of Christ or to represent Christ to other readers who may know of him but may not quite understand him. Here is the very heart of Lewis's literary evangelum.

Thus, the greatest picture of grace, and its relation to love, is Aslan's selfless sacrifice. Edmund violates the clear moral law, the Deep Magic, and as the Witch rightly notes, he must pay the price for that violation with his life. That is the law, and justice must be served, for without following the moral law there can be no true justice. However, Aslan knows the Deeper Magic:

[T]hough the Witch knew the Deep Magic, there is a magic deeper still which she did not know. Her knowledge goes back only to the dawn of time. But if she could have looked a little further back, into the stillness and the darkness before Time dawned, she would have read there a different incantation. She would have known that when a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitor's stead, the Table would crack and Death would start working backward.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ruud, "Aslan's Sacrifice," 21.

<sup>25</sup> Lewis, *Lion*, 163.

Aslan's self-sacrifice satisfies the justice of the law, the Deep Magic, and it ushers in the reality of mercy and grace through divine love, which is the full expression of the Deeper Magic. This grace will save Edmund's life and satisfy justice required by the law. Does Edmund deserve this? No. He rightly deserves punishment, justice. But, Aslan gives this gift to him out of selfless love, and thus this ultimate act of grace is also an ultimate act of love, echoing Christ's teaching that the greatest act of love is for a man to lay down his life for his friends (John 15:13), a divine love that Christ expresses on the cross when he lays down his life to save His people (those who believe in Him).

Here is the clear expression of Lewis's imaginative pre-apologetics or evangelistic writing: he is illustrating and explaining simply (though not simplistically) Christ's atoning death and resurrection unto life. Just as Christ was flogged and scourged, humiliated, crucified unto death, and then raised to new life, Aslan is tormented, humiliated, sacrificed unto death on the Table of the Law (what a powerful image), and brought back to life. The Table upon which Aslan is killed breaks and he comes back to life, symbolizing in Christian theology how Christ's atoning death on the cross broke the bonds of the Law, meaning that those who put their faith in Christ are no longer found guilty under the Law of God. Rather, Christ has paid that penalty, for all who believe, past, present, and future. We get a glimpse of the wide effect of this atoning work when the followers of Aslan who have been turned to stone by the Witch are brought back to life again, as Aslan triumphantly breathes the breath of life into them and they spring back to full health and vibrant life.<sup>26</sup> This is a wondrous mythopoeic picture of divine grace.

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 167-69. For further discussion of how Lewis illustrates the Christian creedal belief that Christ entered into Hell and freed those bound there, see Clark, "Redemption Story," 23, and Hinton, "'Deeper Magic,'" 56.

## **The Logic of Belief: Fantasy and the Rationale for Faith**

Lewis was one of the leading Christian apologists of the early twentieth century, providing logical and historical defenses of the Christian faith. In his mind, faith and reason go hand in hand; he did not believe in a blind, uninformed, ignorant faith. Rather, he held to a faith that was rooted in evidence and sound logical thinking, and he encouraged believers and non-believers to consider the truth claims of Christ from the realms of logic and reason, in addition to personal spiritual experience. Lewis argued convincingly in his many apologetic books and essays that no matter what worldview people hold, be it theistic, atheistic, agnostic, pantheistic, naturalistic, or whatever, everyone has faith in something. The question for Lewis was in what does a person hold his or her faith, and is that particular faith reasonable.

All worldviews have philosophical presuppositions from which to begin, and Lewis sought to explain if these presuppositions were reasonable to hold or not. Truth claims about the origins of the universe, the meaning of life, the nature of existence, the foundations of morality, and the fate of life after death, according to Lewis, should all be tested in terms of logic, evidence, and lived experience. Early in the novel, the veracity of the existence of Narnia becomes Lucy's central truth claim that must be tested and verified. The only problem at first is that Lucy is the only child to find and have an adventure in this magical land when she mysteriously passes through the fantastical wardrobe. Upon her return, she is excited to share her adventures, but none of the other children believe her: the story is just too fantastic, and no one else experienced it with her to verify her claim. In a material world where no one normally has such experiences, it's reasonable for the others to think she is just imagining things and having a

bit of fun, but when she insists Narnia is real and becomes upset when no one believes her, they become reasonably concerned about her mental and emotional wellbeing.<sup>27</sup>

Lucy needs multiple attestation or independent verification to convince the others that Narnia exists and that she had an adventure there. If one person has a fantastical experience, it can be explained as a subjective dream or hallucination (note this is a possible explanation but not necessarily a refutation of the experience). In the very least, it is simply one person's experience and no one can really refute it or confirm it. Either way, there is no good reason to trust that this extraordinary event actually occurred. However, if someone else experiences the same thing, and then others beyond that witness the extraordinary events, then there is multiple, independent verification, and there is greater reason to trust the events happened. Lucy almost got this independent verification when Edmund finds himself mysteriously transported to the land of Narnia, but upon returning to the real world, he lied, further infuriating Lucy and further vexing the other children.<sup>28</sup> Who is telling the truth? How can the children know?

Leave it to the quirky Professor Kirk to solve these logical problems through the use of abductive logic, or the argument to the best explanation. In this logical method, which is commonly used in the sciences, investigators start with various possible explanations for a phenomenon, and then test each of them, ruling them out one by one until left with the best possible explanation. That conclusion is held until more information or evidence is found to encourage embracing a different possible explanation. Peter and Susan come to Professor Kirk because they are concerned that Lucy seems to be lying about Narnia, and he shocks them: "How do you know," he asked, "that your sister's story is not true?"<sup>29</sup> Professor Kirk then

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<sup>27</sup> Lewis, *Lion*, 24-25.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 44-46.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

explains that Lucy is either lying, she is insane, or she is telling the truth and thus Narnia exists. He determines that she is most likely not lying, because Edmund is the one who normally lies. He then clarifies that she is most likely not insane because none of her other behaviors suggest mental illness. Thus, barring any other explanation, she must be telling the truth. Narnia exists.<sup>30</sup>

Note that this scene is the fictional application of Lewis's famous liar, lunatic, or Lord defense of the claims of Christ. In *Mere Christianity* Lewis argued that we cannot view Christ simply as a good moral teacher: he is either a liar, a lunatic, or he is Lord God as he claimed to be. If Christ is lying then he is not a good man and not a good moral teacher. Nothing in history, Lewis notes, suggests Christ was lying. If Christ were a lunatic then why consider him a good moral teacher? Lewis further notes that there isn't historical evidence enough to suggest Christ was insane. By ruling out these two options, Lewis argues that we are left with the final option: Christ is Lord, he is God, he is who he claimed to be.<sup>31</sup> While one may choose not to believe this, one cannot say that the conclusion is based on ignorance or blind faith. Lewis uses stringent rules of logic supported by historical evidence to arrive at this conclusion.

Just as many people in Lewis's day, especially other academics, could not believe that an Oxford don would speak this way about the claims of Christ and the teachings of historic Christianity, Susan and Peter are dumfounded by Professor Kirk's candid assertion that, based upon logic, Lucy may very well be telling the truth. Until more evidence presents itself, logic suggests that they believe Lucy's claims. Ultimately, this logic is upheld, because more evidence eventually is revealed when the rest of the children find their way to Narnia as well, thus providing sufficient multiple attestation to confirm Lucy's story and to affirm the reality and

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 47-50.

<sup>31</sup> Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 47-52.

existence of Narnia. Their faith is now substantiated, and the logic of Efland confirmed: Narnia does exist just as Lucy said it did.

Through this magical tale, Lewis reminds us that faith in the supernatural, in the reality of God as the divine First Cause who brought our material world into existence, who superintends our world and our lives, and who established a moral law by which we can better live our lives and enjoy relationship with God and our fellow humans, this faith, Lewis confirms, is a reasonable faith. It is not mere blind faith in the unknowable or mere hope in wish fulfillment. Indeed, on some level, one must believe in order to see, but throughout his life and work as a Christian thinker and writer, Lewis shows us all that one need not check one's rational mind at the door when entering into the hallowed ground of faith in Christ.

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