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C.S. Lewis on Ministry: A Model for the Church of England?

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C.S. Lewis was a complex mix of Catholic and Evangelical, much to the displeasure of the Church of England establishment of his day. Through his life and writings, we learn how he viewed Christian ministry in light of the relationship between the church invisible (eternal) and the church visible (here and now, with all its imperfections).

1. Introduction

> The Church exists for nothing else than to draw men into Christ, to make them little Christs. If they are not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time. God became man for no other purpose.[1]

C.S. Lewis is often considered an interfering amateur by professional theologians and churchmen—he is not one of them. His popular apologetics may have irritated the profession in their simplistic certainty but his multitudinous works of philosophical theology reflect a pre-Kantian confidence and depth that the church and the academy lack. He is in effect an orthodox neo-Patristic theologian-philosopher.

Despite his orthodoxy, Lewis was no fundamentalist or exclusivist: intimations of God's salvific actions to humanity could be found in North European Pagan myths, and in Indian and Oceanic religions, and despite his assertion that we are saved by no other name than Jesus, Lewis could see how many people outside the religion of Christianity were acceptable to Christ in judgement and were saved. But neither was Lewis an inclusive universalist; he was a relatively lone figure in arguing amongst many of his liberal Anglican Oxford colleagues two axiomatic principles: the Fall into original sin, and the actuality of hell. In the case of the former, this is a traditional Augustinian model; for the latter, he is at his most original in his doctrine of infernal voluntarism. Gaining more and more creditability with theologians and philosophers of religion today as an explanation of God's loving purposes, Lewis's explanation of hell as self-generated (where we choose hell above salvation) is in accordance with the judgement and will of God: 'All get what they want; they do not always like it.'[2] Lewis's

[1] C.S. Lewis speaking in the Wartime BBC Radio Broadcasts, The Fourth Series, *Beyond Personality: The Christian Idea of God*, 1944, p. 43.

[2] C.S. Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew* (London: Bles, 1955), p. 162. See also, Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (London: Bles, 1945), see Ch. 9, specifically, p. 58.

understanding of atonement therefore reflects an Arminian doctrine of election grounded in faith: all are called into salvation, many exclude themselves; grace is resistible, judgement is final—there is no election outside of faith.

At the centre of Lewis's atonement theory is God incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, crucified, resurrected and ascended, sitting (in the legal sense) in judgement. Incarnation is an essential: we are judged not necessarily by some dispassionate distant and unknowable mono-'god' of human invention, but by God incarnate (here Lewis is reliant upon the descent to reascent model he read from Athanasius). Post-ascension humanity is skating, eschatologically, on thin ice, oblivious to the potential salvation or condemnation it acts out on a daily, hourly basis. Do our brethren fully understand the risks? Can we assist our brethren? Can we *minister* to them if God has done everything? Lewis is at one and the same time *intensely* Catholic and *intensely* Evangelical: humanity has a God-given responsibility to preach and prepare, to assist in the salvation of humanity, yet Lewis also had real and grave doubts about the fitness of *postlapsarian* humanity to undertake such a task.

2. Lewis's Ministry

In *ecclesial* terms Lewis was sacramental and Anglo-Catholic; eschatologically he was Evangelical, nigh implicitly Pentecostal. Lewis's conversion happened outside of church buildings, in the countryside, the natural world (Addison's Walk, Oxford). He was converted through an all-night conversation in this riverside walk (c.f. Acts 8:26–40) to acceptance and belief in Jesus, the Christ, by the 'church' in the form of the ministry of J.R.R. Tolkien and Hugo Dyson. His theology was then written alone in the Bodleian library or in his study at home, then shared with the 'church'—fellow Christians, who ministered to each other—in the backroom of a smoke-laden, beer swilling, public house (The Eagle and Child, Oxford). What does this tell us about Church and the Kingdom of God? What does this tell us about Lewis's understanding of and value accorded to the Church and to ministry?

Lewis' doctrine, as such, of ministry, is intrinsically grounded in his conversion, and therefore the conversion of others. Lewis's conversion was fragmented and sporadic, intensely private and alone—until the final confrontation with J.R.R. Tolkien and Hugo Dyson who tackled Lewis's religious prejudices, convincing him through *reasoned argument* that Jesus was the Christ, the God of Israel incarnated for our salvation. During the 1930s Lewis read deeply, he drank in the Christian tradition focusing more and more on the pre-modern, pre-Enlightenment period, the first 1700 years, so to speak, of the Christian era, drawing him more and more

to Patristic theology. Many of his contemporaries saw his broad rejection of contemporary thinking as a fatal flaw in his work. However, much of this Modernist and Liberal agenda is now—from a post-modernist agenda—seen as flawed in itself and of limited value. Lewis and his fellow Inklings were politically conservative, High Anglican or Roman Catholic, criticised in the 1950s for being reactionary and hostile to the spirit of Modernism and Liberalism. Humphrey Carpenter notes

> It might or might not be true to say that Christians were in the minority in the senior common rooms of Oxford; but certainly those dons who did profess Christianity generally kept their religion to themselves, attending their college chapel or parish church but not making any display of the fact, and certainly not writing popular books in the hope of converting others to their beliefs. Lewis, in fact, had offended against Oxford etiquette not by becoming a Christian, but by making a public matter of his conversion. He had refused to adopt the detached irony which Oxford has always regarded as an acceptable manner of cloaking one's true beliefs.[3]

Despite his loner character he was not private after his conversion and actively carved out a ministry in response to pneumatological promptings. What was this ministry and how did it affect his ecclesiology? Lewis's fame developed essentially from the war-time *Broadcast Talks*, which led to *Mere Christianity*.[4] He published more, he had his detractors, but his work was received and valued by many. Professionally Lewis was an Oxford fellow—in English Literature; theologically he was, technically, an amateur. As a Christian apologist he valued this amateur status, which gave him a degree of independence from a clerical elite whom he often castigated as Modern and/or Liberal.

3. Ecclesiology

i. A Platonic Dialectic

Lewis's ecclesiology is dialectically Platonic: the *ecclesia visibilis-ecclesia invisibilis*. The real Church exists in eternity and is invisible to us but for intimations bequeathed by the Holy Spirit; the Church is the body of the redeemed—an invisible body, unclassifiable to human sight and reason, the acceptable, before and in Christ. By contrast the visible churches are flawed and sinful, broken, arrogant—they so often get *it* wrong; when 'it' is living out and bearing witness to God's redemption in

[3] Humphrey Carpenter, *The Inklings* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1978), pp. 207–208.
[4] C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (London: Bles, 1952).

Christ, 'it' is the ministry and commission given to them by God. Lewis's ecclesiology is therefore dialectical; one does not exist without the other, but this relationship is supplementary: the visible churches are to be subsumed, eschatologically, into the true Church, the *civitas platonica*. Criticism there may be of this doctrine, but for Lewis, and for many others, it is the only model that makes sense of Church history—that is, God's righteousness and holiness, set against humanity's sinful failure to cure itself of original sin: *eritis sicut Deus*. The Swiss theologian Karl Barth may have considered the *civitas platonica* a serious undervaluing of the visible churches but this does not deny the axiomatic cogency of an *ecclesia visibilis-ecclesia invisibilis* dialectic.[5] Lewis is reluctant to deny that the visible churches are the Body of Christ, but we ignore the *ecclesia invisibilis* at our peril. However, this does not deny the scandal of denominationalism and schism, and the sins of the churches. Lewis invokes this supplementary dialectic through the contorted and inverted thinking of Screwtape, the senior devil, who hopes to ensnare humans and ensure their condemnation:

> One of our great allies at present is the Church itself. Do not misunderstand me. I do not mean the Church as we see her spread out through all time and space and rooted in eternity, terrible as an army with banners. That, I confess, is a spectacle which makes our boldest tempters uneasy. But fortunately it is quite invisible to these humans. All your patient sees is the half-finished, sham Gothic erection on the new building estate. When he goes inside, he sees the local grocer with rather an oily expression on his face bustling up to offer him one shiny little book containing a liturgy which neither of them understands, and one shabby little book containing corrupt texts of a number of religious lyrics, mostly bad, and in very small print. When he gets to his pew and looks round him he sees just that selection of his neighbours whom he has hitherto avoided. You want to lean pretty heavily on those neighbours. Make his mind flit to and fro between an expression like 'the body of Christ' and the actual faces in the next pew. It matters very little, of course, what kind of people that next pew really contains.[6]

But when the local church begins to intimate something of the true Church, the *ecclesia invisibilis*, Screwtape warns the junior demon to steer his patient away from such a church.[7] Personified evil therefore exploits

[5] 'It is best not to apply the idea of invisibility to the Church; we are all inclined to slip away with that in the direction of a *civitas platonica* in which Christians are united inwardly and invisibly while the visible church is undervalued.' Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, (London: SCM Press, 1949), pp. 141–148.

[6] C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (London: Bles, 1942), pp. 5–6.

[7] Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, p. 1.

and uses the human fallenness in churches to draw people out of their salvation.[8] Lewis partook in Oxford College Chapel services, but also in his own Parish Church in Headington. He did not separate the two into different classes of Christian; he refused to be so beguiled by the sheer beauty of choral singing and architectural splendour, *in collegium*, that he dismissed the broken and flawed attempts at worship amongst ordinary parishioners: production-line workers from the Cowley car plant, the middle classes at church on Sunday showing off their new hat and clothes, the tone-deaf butcher who dominated hymn-singing—God saw no disparity, why should Lewis?

ii. 'There is Danger in the Very Concept of Religion.'

To speak of Church is to question where religion is leading—what is its teleology? Lewis commented that the whole purpose of the Church was to make little Christs out of people, if not, then the whole function of cathedrals and choirs, clergy and liturgy, missions and the Christian religion, was of no point, no value: the Church exists at the visible end of reality to minister. Religion did not exist for its own sake alone. Lewis considered religion of primary importance, yet it is also to be subject to the severest of criticisms. Lewis implicitly reflects the Hegelian and Barthian concept of *Aufhebung* applied to religion: religion is simultaneously put down, dismissed, yet raised up and valued. We need to be aware of its manifold dangers. Lewis's appreciation of religion is in keeping with the orthodox—with Roman Catholicism and with the Evangelical, but he draws the line at John Henry Newman's over-realised model of the Church (the Church is not a perfect vision of heaven): our church activities must not be over-realised—'there is danger in the very concept of religion.'[9] There are many points where Lewis exhibits a distinct anti-ecclesiasticism, claiming most of our services and liturgy are a failure.[10] Lewis knew that there was no salvation outside of the Church, but then the Church invisible was for him the body of the saved, the redeemed, therefore we must not be captivated by seemingly exclusive polemical circular arguments. Lewis's analysis of the ecclesiology of the Reformation churches is particularly apposite,[11] and concluded in his

[8] For example, Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, pp. 26, 34, 38–39, 45, 61–62, 97–98.
[9] Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer* (London: Bles, 1964), pp. 81f.
[10] He does make the bold statement that our worship fails: 'For our "services" both in their conduct and in our power to participate, are merely attempts at worship, never successful, often 99.9% failures, sometimes total failures.' Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (London: Bles, 1958), p. 82. Lewis was essentially a private man who described himself as inherently 'anti-ecclesiastical' (Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* (London: Bles, 1955), p. 226) and can be considered something of a loner.
[11] Lewis did in effect write a treatise on the church—on the church in the sixteenth century. See: 'New Learning and New Ignorance,' originally part of The Clark

giving a high value to Richard Hooker's Anglican *via media* (the middle way between the Catholic and Puritan), and therefore leaving open the question of visibility of the true church.[12] Although Lewis's doctrine of the Church was Augustinian (the two cities, the *ecclesia visibilis-ecclesia invisibilis*),[13] Hooker's *via media* complemented this position. Therefore, for Lewis, none of the churches since the Reformation can claim the authority the church once had. The Church and therefore ministry should be at the centre of human life. It is not.

The model we have so outlined is also reflected by Lewis in his analogical narratives. Religion is ambivalent in Narnia, yet what it attests to issues from God's truth and for creation's benefit. However, we do find a parody of the corruption of the churches in the opening chapters of *The Last Battle*.[14] Indeed we may ask, rhetorically, why is there no 'Church' in Narnia? What is the role of religion in Narnia? For example, the Stone Table,[15] the remnants of the Pagan cult about the four Pevensie children;[16] Jill and Eustace's attempt to control Aslan through their religious ideas,[17] the cult of Tash in Calormen,[18] and so forth? Salvation in Narnia is an analogy of salvation for the human. What does this tell us about Lewis's understanding of religion and the Church in our reality, *zwischen den zeiten* (between the ascension and the second coming)?

4. Election: 'I was Decided Upon.'

Lewis's emphasis is on individual salvation in a communal context, where the visible church is a *working-out* of salvation. Late in his life he was interviewed by Sherwood E. Wirt (on behalf of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association) which gives us insight into his understanding

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Lectures, delivered by Lewis at Trinity College Cambridge, 1944. This was later reworked to form the 'Introduction' to Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama* (Oxford: OUP, 1954), pp. 2–65.

[12] Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century,* Bk. 2, Ch. 2, pp. 451–463.

[13] Lewis's understanding of the churches and of organised Christian religion reflects an implicitly Augustinian doctrine of the Church from *de civitate Dei*: see, Bk. I. 1 and 35; Bk. XI. 1; Bk. XIV. 1; Bk. XIV. 28; Bk. XV. 1–2; Bk. XV. 4; Bk. XIX. 17.

[14] C.S. Lewis, *The Last Battle* (London: Bles, 1956), pp. 7–16; also, Ch. 3, pp. 31–32.

[15] C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (London: Bles, 1950), pp. 80, 87–88, 101, 113, 116, 124–25, 134–35, 134, 138, 150, 153–54, 159–161.

[16] C.S. Lewis, *Prince Caspian: the Return to Narnia* (London: Bles, 1951), pp. 91, 110, 119, 130, 174, 178, 184, 197).

[17] C.S. Lewis, *The Silver Chair* (London, Bles, 1953), Ch 1.

[18] Lewis, *The Horse and His Boy* (London: Bles, 1954), and *The Last Battle* (London: Bles, 1956).

of ministry and laity, of witness and evangelism.[19] Lewis talks about his conversion, that he was 'decided upon.' Lewis comments that it is not enough to want simply to be rid of one's sins, what is important is

> …to believe in the One who saves us from our sins. Not only do we need to recognize that we are sinners; we need to believe in a Saviour who takes away sin. Matthew Arnold once wrote, 'Nor does the being hungry prove that we have bread.' Because we know we are sinners, it does not follow that we are saved.[20]

In the context of what Lewis had recounted in *Surprised by Joy*, Wirt asked whether he believed that he had made a decision at the time of his conversion:

> I would not put it that way. What I wrote in *Surprised by Joy* was that before God closed in on me, I was in fact offered what now appears a moment of wholly free choice. But I feel my decision was not so important. I was the object rather than the subject in this affair. I was decided upon. I was glad afterwards at the way it came out, but at the moment what I heard was God saying, 'Put down your gun and we'll talk.'[21]

Lewis, the intellectual, continued by asserting that what he did, his response to God, was a deeply compelled action, and yet paradoxically it was also in many ways the freest action because no part of him was beyond or outside the response (c.f. John 3). For Lewis it did not appear feasible to respond in any other way. Lewis understood that it is God who initiates, that God is the eternal subject. Wirt was pressing Lewis to own that he controlled the situation of his conversion, yet Lewis quite rightly owned that the initiative lay with God. Lewis answered further that it was a case of everyone coming to terms with the claims of Jesus Christ upon his or her life, if not then they would be guilty of inattention or of evasion.

This is not about religious choice, or for that matter postmodern, post-Christian, religious consumerism, this is essentially about election, not necessarily the doctrine of election that we might find in the more traditional Roman Catholic approach or for that matter the more hard-line Calvinistic doctrine, where there is to be identified a specific and particular elect. This is more to do with God's election of people raised

[19] Sherwood E. Wirt and C.S. Lewis, 'I was Decided Upon,' and Sherwood E. Wirt and C.S. Lewis, 'Heaven, Earth and Outer Space,' *Decision* II (Sept 1963), p. 3, and *Decision* II (Oct 1963), p. 4. The two parts were reprinted together as, 'Cross-Examination,' in C.S. Lewis, *Undeceptions: Essays on Theology and Ethics* (Walter Hooper, ed.; London: Bles, 1971), pp. 215–2.

[20] Lewis, 'Cross Examination,' p. 217.

[21] Lewis, 'Cross Examination,' p. 217.

up to bear witness to what God has done for our salvation, in Christ. Essentially what we have here is a doctrine of election that asserts that all are elected by, through and in Christ's death on the Cross; it is then a question of response, a question of turning to be for Christ, to put down one's gun of rebellion as Lewis terms it, to remove the crown of sin, religion and pride (Rev 4:10). This implies the *potential* salvation of all. This does assert the place for human participation through free will in Lewis's understanding of salvation, which can be interpreted as coming from an Arminian perspective. But, *postlapsarian*, we can do no good for ourselves, any good in us comes from *prevenient* grace; therefore we can do ourselves an evil—we can refuse God, we can hold out against God.

5. A Catholic-Evangelical?

Lewis asserted that he was, in effect, a Catholic-Evangelical. Writing to the editor of *The Church Times*, in 1952, Lewis commented that there is a thread of unity between the Evangelical and the Anglo-Catholic not found in the Anglican establishmentarian, liberal or modernist, a thread that bears witness to the supernatural nature of the faith and the biblical witness of salvation history and the Christ event. This unity applies not only to Anglican Evangelicals and Anglo-Catholics but to orthodox Christians throughout the world and within Christian history. Lewis continued, 'Perhaps the trouble is that as supernaturalists, whether "Low" or "High" Church, thus taken together, they lack a name. May I suggest "Deep Church."'[22]

Is Lewis merely promoting a pair of religious tribes over others? No; he comments that those in the *centre* who are deeply prayerful, thoughtful, and orthodox to a mere core are nearer deep Christians in other denominations than modernisers and liberals on the edge. In proclaiming a mere core to the faith Lewis comments that objections and hostility came not from deep Christians in all denominations but, 'more from borderline people whether within the Church of England or without it: men not exactly obedient to any communion.'[23] Lewis continues, speaking of the Church in the feminine, that, 'It is at her centre, where her truest children dwell, that each communion is really closest to every other in spirit, if not in doctrine. And this suggests that at the centre of each there is a something, or a Someone, who against all divergences of belief, all differences of temperament, all memories of mutual persecution, speaks with the same voice.'[24] In the context of this proposition Lewis also asserts that the various churches are like rooms leading off from a

[22] Lewis writing to *The Church Times*, Feb. 8, 1952. See: C.S. Lewis, *Collected Letters, Vol. III*, p. 164.
[23] C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, pp. viii–ix.
[24] C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, pp. viii–ix.

lobby, the Christian entering the faith is like coming into the hall. The hall represents salvation, ownership by Christ. Ecclesial involvement is an essential, it is represented by the rooms, but it exists at a lower level than the immediate existential relationship between the believer and God in Christ.[25] This relationship is at the heart of Church and represents something of a Platonic form. Is this what Lewis means by 'Deep Church'? And does it represent something of a connection, a rebuttal of the sharp distinction, between the invisible Church and the visible congregations? Pneumatogically ordered depth of faith and commitment mark out some as belonging to the real invisible Church.

i. Deep Church*: praeparatio evangelica*

So if we are decided upon, and if the Spirit of God is selective about who represents the Church, and what forms of church he validates and endorses (Lewis's broadly defined Catholic and Evangelical, but not necessarily, for Lewis, liberal, modern and establishment), then what is left for ministers, priests, and a clerical elite? What can the ordained do that the laity cannot? Lewis comments that what he is personally doing in his Christian ministry is preparation for evangelism: he cannot convert; it is the Holy Spirit who converts. All he can do is prepare for change which will lead to salvation. Lewis was therefore essentially a missionary: he wanted to bring people to the faith, to the point of conversion, irrespective of whether they claimed to be religious or not, went to church or not. Lewis's aim was also to enable people to find that their faith had become real (whether they were Roman Catholic or Anglican, Methodist or Presbyterian), that is, to see and to know God in and through Christ because what happened two thousand years ago was true. Lewis's aim was to bring about an encounter of the reader with Jesus Christ. Therefore, when writing to Sister Penelope on one occasion he described himself, his work, as a preparation for evangelism: 'Mine are *praeparatio evangelica* rather than *evangelium*, an attempt to convince people that there is a moral law, that we disobey it, and that the existence of a Lawgiver is at least very probable and also (unless you add the Christian doctrine of the Atonement) that this imparts despair rather than comfort.'[26] Therefore, in terms of ministry, Lewis saw himself as preparing his readers for the gospel, for the good news, not necessarily converting them. Lewis saw his role, public and private, in *bearing witness* to Christ. He was in effect a pre-evangelist—for Christ's sake.

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[25] C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, pp. viii–ix.

[26] Lewis writing to Sister Penelope CSMV, May 15, 1941. See: C.S. Lewis, *Collected Letters, Vol. II: Books, Broadcasts and War 1931–1949* (San Francisco: Harper, 2004), pp. 484–485.

ii. Deep Church: *in mirabilibus supra me*

So where does this place Lewis in comparison with the Anglican clerical elite in the Oxford of his day? Lewis critically identified a type of Anglican cleric who believed very little, if nothing at all, of what was considered traditional-orthodox doctrine (in relation to dogma and the Bible), and took issue with them. An example is Lewis's debate with leading Anglican bishops over the reductionist, demythologising approach to John's Gospel in the work of two Anglican clerics—Rev Dr Alec R. Vidler and Rev Dr Walter Lock—whose de-mythologising approach was reminiscent of Bultmann. When faced with a hermeneutic of suspicion by these so-called experts, Lewis simply turned the hermeneutic on them: he was innately sceptical of them. Furthermore parts of the Anglican establishment had reacted to the BBC radio talks with characteristic aloof and disdain: Lewis was deemed to be not qualified—he was not one of them. Some clergy within the Church of England regarded him as an outsider who had strayed into theology without being qualified to speak on the subject. Lewis was, to them, an uninformed amateur, an interfering nobody. Lewis did see himself as an ordinary layman in the Church of England (and technically he was an amateur), but in relation to some of its clergy he commented that,

> Once the layman was anxious to hide the fact that he believed so much less than the Vicar: he now tends to hide the fact that he believes so much more. Missionary to the priests of one's own church is an embarrassing rôle.[27]

Therefore Lewis asserted platonically that 'I walk *in mirabilibus supra me* and submit all to the verdict of real theologians.'[28] Lewis's use of '*in mirabilibus supra me* ' (wonders too far beyond me, things too great for me) is important for he is referring to wonders far beyond human understanding, or even, in Lewis's context, things too great for me. He apparently acknowledges the superiority of professional theologians. Or does he? He also uses this phrase on another occasion. Writing on God's relationship to law and truth, Lewis commented: 'But it is probably just here that our categories betray us. It would be idle, with our merely mortal resources, to attempt a positive correction of our categories—

[27] C.S. Lewis, 'Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism,' in *Christian Reflections*, (London: Bles, 1967), pp. 152–66, quote, p. 166.

[28] 'Transposition,' (1st ed.) a sermon given in Mansfield College, Oxford on Whit Sunday, May 28, 1944, published in, *Transposition and Other Addresses* (London: Bles, 1949), pp. 9–20. A reworked and extended 2nd edition of the sermon as an academic paper was published in 1962. Lewis, 'Transposition,' (2d ed.) in *They Asked for a Paper* (London: Bles, 1962), pp. 166–82.

ambulavi in mirabilibus supra me.'[29] Only in this instance he walks (*ambulavi*) not before the professional theologians who claim superiority, but before God: therefore Lewis the 'amateur' and his theologian critics, the 'professionals,' are all inferior to God in matters and wonders that are far beyond them, things too great for them. Only it is no good hiding in paradox and seeming ignorance, it is no good watering down the faith into a de-mythologised human-centred religion, for we are called to bear witness to God's salvific actions for humanity. Lewis's invocation of *in mirabilibus supra me* is therefore Platonic and pneumatological, because it claims that the truth is beyond us, in the other realm, eternity, however, we get glimpses, intimations, we can see shadows of the truth, impartations from the Holy Spirit, but the real truth, the full revelation, is beyond us.

Lewis's most acerbic criticism of these 'modern' and 'Liberal' Anglican clerics and their ministry was to suggest that they were in effect religious prostitutes. Lewis wrote,

> A great deal of what is being published by writers in the religious tradition is a scandal and is actually turning people away from the church. The liberal writers who are continually accommodating and whittling down the truth of the Gospel are responsible. I cannot understand how a man can appear in print claiming to disbelieve everything that he presupposes when he puts on the surplice. I feel it is a form of prostitution.[30]

Lewis's (Catholic) sacramentalism would assert that once ordained such a priest/minister still has the authority in relation to God in Christ but he can make mistakes, pronounce erroneous doctrine and behave in a heterodox manner which the laity should distance themselves from. And today? Recently a senior cleric on retirement lamented that the Church of England was fast becoming a religious society of amiable agnostics. Indeed the phrase 'amiable agnostics' was used by Lewis in *Surprised by Joy* in his criticism of the broad religionists of his day![31]

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[29] C.S. Lewis, 'The Poison of Subjectivism,' in *Religion in Life* XII (Summer 1943), pp. 80–81. Reprinted in *Christian Reflections* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1967), pp. 72–81.

[30] Lewis, 'Cross-Examination,' p. 216.

[31] 'Amiable agnostics will talk cheerfully about "man's search for God." To me, as I then was, they might as well have talked about the mouse's search for the cat.' C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, p. 220.

6. Creedal Orthodoxy

At the heart of Lewis's understanding of ministry is the gospel, conveying/preaching the good news of God's salvation wrought by the Christ on the cross. Therefore we are talking about knowledge and understanding that changes—pneumatologically—the individual, in a perlocutionary manner, opening them to salvation, binding them, as they assent, into a community: the Church, the body of Christ. This is how salvation worked in the ultra-early Church, as recounted in The Acts of the Apostles.

So what is this body of knowledge and understanding—this mere core—that the Church is called to bear witness to, and that should be at the heart of its ministry? It is rooted in Jesus's comments at the Last Supper (Luke 22:19; cf. 1 Cor. 11:24): do this in remembrance of me. Remember me is the injunction Jesus gives to his Church: remember me for what I am and what I have done for you. This body of knowledge forms, for Lewis, the ground of 'Mere Christianity.' First, not one denomination is the true and only one (the hall metaphor we noted earlier[32]). Second, he asserts that at the heart of the Christian faith is a biblical testimony: the heart of the Christian faith, the basics, are in some ways summarised by the creation and the fall into original sin set out in the book of Genesis, by the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and the second coming of God in Christ, in the New Testament, but also the four 'last things' from the book of Revelation as well as the Gospels.[33] This is Lewis's basic summary of the faith. Lewis believed in the traditional faith, set out by the apostles, the early church, and the early church fathers, which was biblical. Primarily, for Lewis, the faith is creedal. In expounding what the Christian faith is about, it is simple: it is summarised in the creed. However, to go further, when questions arise, there has to be a method, a principle by which to address questions, doubts, queries, to expand and expound on the faith. If Lewis has a method in his theology and his understanding of ministry it is two-fold: one element is broadly Catholic, the other broadly Evangelical: the content was derived from the fifth century Patristic theologian Vincentius of Lérins and the seventeenth century Puritan Richard Baxter.

i. '*quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus*'

First, was an appeal to the basic core of the faith established in the centuries after Christ's resurrection-ascension, a basic core that was essentially complete by the mid-fifth century, but with much of the detail worked out by the mid-eighth century. This common core to the faith

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[32] C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, pp. viii–ix.

[33] Lewis writing to *The Church Times*, Feb. 8, 1952, in *Collected Letters, Vol. III*, p. 164.

was endorsed by Scripture and by the developing church tradition. Lewis commented that,

> To a layman, it seems obvious that what unites the Evangelical and the Anglo-Catholic against the 'Liberal' or 'Modernist' is something very clear and momentous, namely, the fact that both are thoroughgoing supernaturalists, who believe in the Creation, the Fall, the incarnation, the Resurrection, the Second Coming, and the Four Last Things. This unites them not only with one another, but with the Christian religion as understood '*ubique et ab omnibus*.'[34]

The phrase '*ubique et ab omnibus*' ('everywhere and by everyone') is important. It is from a fifth century monk by the name of Vincentius of Lérins who was asserting that we should hold on to that which has been believed by all:[35] Vincentius wrote to establish a general or common rule to identify truth from falsity. Vincentius's rule is in essence succinct and simple: it is the authority of the Bible, holy Scripture. All questions of doctrine and ethics must be measured against the canon of Scripture, answered from the Bible. But this, Vincentius acknowledges, is problematic because there are so many interpretations of Scripture. The rule of Scripture is then qualified by an appeal to that which has been endorsed universally since the earliest days of the church—from antiquity as he puts it, from the earliest times.

ii. 'I am a Christian, a Meer Christian'

Second was the principle of a mere or basic core to the faith drawn from the writings of the seventeenth century Puritan and Church historian Richard Baxter. From his reading of Baxter, Lewis gleaned the term, 'Mere Christianity,' but more importantly what it represented.[36] Baxter commented that, 'You know not of what Party I am of; nor what to call me; I am sorrier for you in this than for myself; if you know not, I will tell you, I am a Christian, a *Meer* Christian, of no other Religion; and the Church that I am of is the Christian Church, and hath been visible where ever the Christian Religion and Church hath been visible.'[37]

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[34] Lewis, *Collected Letters, Vol. III*, p. 164.

[35] Vincentius of Lérins, *The Commonitory of Vincent of Lérins, for the Antiquity and Universality of the Catholic Faith against the Profane Novelties of all Heresies*, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Volume 11, Sulpitius Severus, Vincent of Lerins, John Cassian* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), pp. 207–60.

[36] Lewis writing to *The Church Times*, Feb. 8, 1952, in *Collected Letters, Vol. III*, p. 164

[37] Richard Baxter, *Church–History of the Government of Bishops and their Councils* (London: Thomas Simmons, 1680), p. xvii.

This twofold methodological source (Vincentius of Lérins and Richard Baxter) comes together in the rule of faith (*regula fidei*), which was established in Lewis's apologetics from early on, and is that which evaluates theological opinion and the life of the church by measuring against what has been firmly established and believed. This is the aim; the objective was in Lewis's content driven method. The objective of the *regula fidei* in Lewis's case was specifically defined by Vincentius of Lérins's '*quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus*,' and Richard Baxter's 'I am a Christian, a Meer Christian, of no other Religion; and the Church that I am of is the Christian Church.' The *regula fidei* as the rule of faith was rooted in Scripture, in Paul's comments in Romans, where all is to be seen in proportion to faith (in the Greek New Testament, ἀναλογίαν τῆς πίστεως, or the 'analogy of faith' Rom. 12:6).

iii. Criticisms

There are criticisms that Lewis only approached the Patristic superficially. Lewis was probably better read in many of the Early Church Fathers, the Patristic heritage of the church, than many theologians today. Much of this reading was in support of his professional work in Medieval and Renaissance literature, as well as his apologetics, though, as Mark Edwards has demonstrated, he did not spend as much time studying the fathers as many today would have expected of him:

> He appears to have devoted little time in his mature years to the perusal of the Fathers…This is not to deny that he advanced the study of early Christian authors who are neglected in most histories of the 'development of doctrine'; it is not to deny that the contours of orthodoxy were more apparent to him than to many of the critics…[38]

In effect, Lewis pointed his readers to the early church fathers in the context of Vincentius of Lérins' comment that here you will find the measure of your faith; if you are puzzled and confused by contradictory doctrine and ethics, by Modern and Liberal tendencies, look to what was held always, by all. However, Lewis was no Patristic scholar, further, he did not spend his mature years in antiquarian studies of Patristic scholars: he wrote theology *immersed* in Patristic theology. This mature development was prefaced by his reading and absorption of Augustine's *Confessions* and *The City of God* in 1936–37, to the extent that for his own pleasure and use he made his own translation of *de civitate Dei*!

One of the more absurd criticisms of Lewis was levelled by W. Norman Pittenger, an American Professor of Apologetics, who accused

[38] Mark Edwards, 'C.S. Lewis and Early Christian Literature,' in *C.S. Lewis and the Church: Essays in Honour of Walter Hooper* (Judith Wolfe and Brendan N. Wolfe eds.; London: Continuum, 2011), pp. 23–24.

Lewis publically and in print of heresy. Lewis refuted the accusation by showing that Pittenger had simply got the accusation wrong: what Lewis was supposed to have written, he had not. Pittenger had misread. Lewis in response went on to expose Pittenger's Christology as thin, weak, and according to Patristic standards heretical. Pittenger claimed that the disciples and followers of Jesus simply valued him *as if* he was God, that there was no ontological divine reality to Jesus, no incarnation, and so forth.[39]

7. A Unifying Universal Principle

Lewis identified the universal testimony of the Church as the ground and as an indicator of ministry. There is therefore a unifying universal principle against which all modern or contemporary forms of church are measured, and are often found wanting. This unifying universal principle is at its strongest in the early and Patristic churches where scripture is developed as a validating mechanism. Overall, this relates to the invisible Church spread out in eternity, and though Platonic, the relationship is defined in somewhat mechanistic terms pneumatologically. Lewis's understanding of revelation, where revelation is at the heart of Church and ministry, is governed by transposition. Described by Lewis as his contribution to the philosophy of the incarnation, transposition relates closely to kenosis and the *communicatio idiomatum*. The relationship between God and humanity in revelation is defined, for Lewis, by transposition.[40] The understanding that is imparted, revealed, is transposed: it is changed, diminuted, diluted, through our reception of revelation, like a symphony for full orchestra transposed for solo piano, or a tree represented by pencil lines on paper. Revelation is itself transposed, reduced, lessened, and changed, but essentially still true to the original: the appearance is altered but the essence is true to the form. This is broadly Platonic in the manner in which the transposed is defined by the truly real in eternity. At the centre of transposition is the incarnation, which is represented by a transcription, a diminution (Phil 2:6–11)—this can be traced to the *communicatio idiomatum*, the triune relationship, and human epistemic limitations. It is transposition that governs the reality we perceive of the visible Church, and therefore our feeble and halting attempts at ministry—whether lay or clerical, implicit or explicit. In the context of the visible churches Lewis sought to promote a fundamental essence, a mere core, a sheer essence that was at the heart of the faith endorsed twofold: by Scripture, and by this developed patristic church tradition.

[39] See: P.H. Brazier, 'The Pittenger-Lewis Debate: Fundamentals of an Ontological Christology,' in, *The Chronicle of the Oxford University C.S. Lewis Society*, Vol. 6, No. 1, January 2009, pp. 7–23.

[40] Lewis, 'Transposition,' 2d ed., p. 181.

Lewis innately distrusted anything modern where it contradicted the patristic foundations of theology.

8. Conclusion

Ministry and Church cannot be seen as separate. For Lewis the churches are both a group of people who bear witness to what God has done in Jesus Christ and therefore assist in the salvation of humanity, but also to a greater or lesser degree, they *might* be seen as the community of the saved. Teleology: the end game is all, it is what is important for Lewis. For Lewis it is no good only seeing the church as human-centred, as orientated towards human needs within a closed single-level universe. The true church is not Rome or an Evangelical congregation; the true church exists in eternity and what we take for the visible church is, if we follow Lewis's logic, a transposition: the eternal church, the bride of Christ, transposed to a greater or lesser degree, the body of Christ being forged, created, within the temporal messiness of our reality. We can all *attempt* to partake in this ministry, but there is no certainty as to the veracity and usefulness of our ministerings.

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