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# Hints from Heaven: Can C. S. Lewis Help Evangelicals Hear God in Other Religions?

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DOES GOD GIVE HINTS? And, if he does, can we take the hint? These are questions raised by Lewis for contemporary Evangelical Christians regarding theology of religions. For many Evangelicals, 'C. S. Lewis says so' is an end to (almost) any argument. His incredible ever-increasing influence is illustrated on the popular level by the spectacular success of the blockbuster hit movie, 'The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe', based on his faith-in-fantasy-form book by the same name.<sup>1</sup> However, Lewis crosses

over usual boundaries and is also well-liked by serious apologists and theologians around the world.<sup>2</sup> Hosts of Evangelicals are in the habit of turning to Lewis when wrestling with tough truth questions on the life of faith in contemporary times.<sup>3</sup> His insights on Christian understanding and interaction regarding other religious traditions seem particularly apropos for a

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<sup>1</sup> It was released in my neighbourhood December 9, 2005. The first weekend it easily beat out all the competition, and after four weeks it had grossed \$226 million, winning over 'King Kong' (\$175 million in three weeks) and almost catching 'Harry Potter and the

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Goblet of Fire' (\$277 million in seven weeks). See <http://www.imdb.com/news/sb/2006-01-04/> (January 6, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> The 'C. S. Lewis Resources' compiled by Mike W. Perry in *The C. S. Lewis Readers' Encyclopedia (CSLRE)*, eds. Jeffrey D. Schultz and John G. West Jr. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), pp. 435-44, indicate an extensive international academic audience.

<sup>3</sup> On Lewis' wide-ranging influence among Evangelicals and others see 'The Common Cultural Task: The Cultural War from a Protestant Perspective', in Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus (eds.), *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: Toward a Common Mission* (Dallas: Word Books, 1995), pp. 34-37.

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post September 11, 2001 world engaging globalization and dealing with unprecedented pluralistic diversification.

No issue more urgently haunts Christians in the 'global village' community of the twenty-first century than relations with other religions.<sup>4</sup> Whether wondering about how to relate (and witness) to a new neighbour who is Hindu or Buddhist, worrying about the war on terror involving radical religious extremists, or watching world-impacting events in the Middle East between Jews and Muslims, Christians cannot afford to miss the enormous magnitude of the religions situation today. Evangelicals need to respond reflectively with a carefully crafted Christian theology of religions providing appropriate parameters for relations with religious others. Once again C. S. Lewis supplies helpful suggestions that can be plumbed for adaptation to our contemporary situation.

Lewis believed that pre- and non-Christian religions sometimes contain 'hints' of divine presence and truth. In this way other religions set the stage for the redemptive drama played out in Christianity.<sup>5</sup> Historically, these hints were designed to help people hear the gospel faith when it finally appeared more clearly. Contemporarily, hearing these 'hints from heaven' in other reli-

gions can also help Christians better understand and appreciate religious others. And, by a sort of religious reciprocity, we may hear God's voice even more clearly in our own Christian religion through learning to listen for God's whispers in non-Christian religions. This paper will overview Lewis' theology of religions before offering suggestions for appropriation of his ideas in a thoroughly Christian context of Evangelical commitment.

## I An Overview of Lewis' Theology of Religions

Although Lewis was not a theologian in the formal, professional sense, his lucid, reverent thought provides enlightenment insights on pressing issues in theology of religions.

### 1. Personal

Years after his conversion to Christ from atheism Lewis explains that hints he saw as a literature professor of the divine in pagan mythology helped him to become a Christian. 'My conversion,' he said, 'very largely, depended on recognizing Christianity as the completion, the actualization, the entelechy, of something that had never been wholly absent from the mind of man.'<sup>6</sup> Lewis learned to think of myth as 'good dreams' scattered throughout the imagination of heathen religions

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Hans Küng, *Theology for the Third Millennium: An Ecumenical View* (New York: Anchor Books, 1990), p. 209.

<sup>5</sup> Jerry Root, 'Tools Inadequate and Incomplete: C. S. Lewis and the Great Religions', in *The Pilgrim's Guide: C. S. Lewis and the Art of Witness* (Ed. David Mills. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 225. Cf., p. 223.

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<sup>6</sup> 'Religion without Dogma,' *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics* (Ed. Walter Hooper. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), p. 132. When quoting C. S. Lewis' writings his authorship is assumed in the bibliographical data. Other authors are always identified.

but to see Christianity as a historically 'true myth'.<sup>7</sup>

Lewis, who had been raised nominally Christian but had become an atheist, 'was in part led back to Christianity as a result of his love for and knowledge of the great pagan myths. In Christianity, he concluded, the hints and suggestions in pagan thought were fulfilled'.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, his own experience involved 'a sort of mini-religious evolution'.<sup>9</sup> Paganism for Lewis, then, is 'pre-Christian foundation work'.<sup>10</sup> In Christianity, consistent with the initiative of divine self-revelation in all the best of religious tradition, we have 'the consummation of all religion, the fullest message from the wholly other, the living creator'.<sup>11</sup>

## 2. Rational

Love of logic and analytical argument is characteristic of the great apologist.<sup>12</sup> Lewis' intellectual approach to Christianity is evident in his attitude toward non-Christian religions. He

argues that monotheism is more rational than polytheism and therefore 'the best minds embrace monotheism'.<sup>13</sup> Dualism just does not explain the problem of evil adequately.<sup>14</sup> Only monotheism explains the existence of evil and ultimate reality satisfactorily. For Lewis, only the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ 'bring some sense to the riddle of human suffering'.<sup>15</sup> All the little bits of religion that he thought came into Christianity from earlier religions made it more reasonable for Lewis to believe in Christianity. Logically, 'Christianity is primarily the fulfillment of the Jewish religion, but also the fulfillment of what was vaguely hinted in all the religions at their best'. He could see a rational progression moving toward its climax in the Incarnation because, 'What was vaguely seen in them all comes into focus in Christianity—just as God Himself comes into focus by becoming a Man'.<sup>16</sup>

Even primitive religion is capable of profound insights. In the first of his famous *Space Trilogy* Lewis illustrates the view that civilized religion is possible even to reasonable primitives. The hero, Ransom, is taught by the *hross*, whom he considers a primitive race, 'a first sketch of civilized religion—a sort of *hrossian* equivalent of the shorter catechism'.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, Lewis

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7 Wayne Martindale, 'Myth', *CSLRE*, pp. 287-88.

8 Mark McKim, 'C.S. Lewis and Emil Bruner: Two Mere Christians', *Premise*, (vol. V, No 3 July 1998), p. 15. Cf. *They Stand Together: The Letters of C.S. Lewis to Arthur Greeves* (1914-1963), (Ed. Walter Hooper. New York: Macmillan, 1979), p. 427.

9 Richard A. Hill, 'Paganism', *CSLRE*, pp. 311-12.

10 Thomas C. Peters, *Simply C. S. Lewis: A Beginner's Guide to His Life and Works* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997), p. 137.

11 'Religion Without Dogma', p. 144.

12 George Sayer, *Jack: A Life of C. S. Lewis* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1988), p. 93. Cf. 'The Founding of the Socratic Club', *Dock*, pp. 126-28.

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13 *The Allegory of Love* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), p. 57.

14 'Evil and God', *Dock*, p. 21. See *Mere Christianity* (New York: Collier, 1960), p. 43, pp. 33-36; esp. 36.

15 Peters, *Simply*, pp. 166-67.

16 Peters, *Simply*, p. 54.

17 *Out of the Silent Planet* (New York: Macmillan, 1984 reprint), p. 70.

could be critical of missionaries harshly unaware of elements blessed by God in primitive peoples.<sup>18</sup>

Yet Lewis thinks 'an adult mind' should easily see the superiority of Christianity. Islam is a Christian heresy and Buddhism a Hindu heresy, while the best of Judaism and Platonism are fulfilled in Christianity and real paganism is dead. He suggests we 'divide religions, as we do soups, into "thick" and "clear"'. 'Thick' religions have the most primitive and elemental aspects while the 'Clear' religions have the most advanced and aesthetic aspects, both of which are necessary in real religion. Only Hinduism and Christianity combine both aspects and Hinduism only imperfectly—making Christianity the logical choice for 'real religion'.<sup>19</sup>

### 3. Theological

In perhaps his greatest non-fiction piece, *Mere Christianity*, Lewis makes one of his strongest theological statements on the religions.

If you are a Christian you do not have to believe that all the other religions are simply wrong through and through. If you are an atheist you do have to believe that the main point in all the religions of the whole world is simply one huge mistake. If you are a Christian, you

are free to think that all these religions, even the queerest ones, contain at least some hint of truth. When I was an atheist I had to try to persuade myself that most of the human race have always been wrong about the question that mattered to them most; when I became a Christian I was able to take a more liberal view. But, of course, being a Christian does mean thinking that where Christianity differs from other religions, Christianity is right and they are wrong. As in arithmetic—there is only one right answer to a sum, and all other answers are wrong: but some of the wrong answers are much nearer to being right than others.<sup>20</sup>

For C. S. Lewis, in a sense, all religious faith stands or falls together. If no religious reality is behind the belief of all religions except one, then the possibility of that one being mistaken increases exponentially. Conversely, if all, or at least many, religions have some reality behind their belief, it still makes sense that it is expressed most completely in one particular religion. All religions are certainly not the same. Evidence of divine light given to every human being is apparent in the imagination of pagans but the historical reality of the incarnation of God in Jesus of Nazareth distinguishes Christianity from all other religions.<sup>21</sup>

For Lewis miracles are especially important in Christianity, and cannot be taken away without irreparable

18 'Life on Other Planets', *The Joyful Christian* (New York: Macmillan, 1977), pp. 4-5.

19 'Christian Apologetics', *Dock*, pp. 102-03. Cf. with Lewis' comments on culture and religion in 'Cross-Examination', pp. 265-66 and inferiority of secularism to all theism 'Is Theism Important?' p. 172 (Dock).

20 *Mere Christianity*, p. 29. Cf. Root, 'Tools', p. 221.

21 'Is Theology Poetry?' *They Asked For A Paper* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1962), p. 57.

harm. Buddhism and Islam can do without miracles but Christianity cannot 'because the Christian story is precisely the story of one grand miracle'.<sup>22</sup> Lewis thinks the Incarnation ought not be rejected by identifying Jesus as merely a great moral teacher 'who was deified by his superstitious followers', as this is contrary to Jewish nature and identity and so different from what happened to Plato, Confucius, Buddha, and Mohammed.<sup>23</sup>

Lewis advocated the concept of a universal natural law that has historically been a basis for ethical reflection and action across a wide-ranging spectrum in all world religions.<sup>24</sup> A universal and absolute morality, what Lewis designated 'the Tao', underlies the best in all major theologies and philosophies.<sup>25</sup> Lewis concluded that a surprising similarity exists throughout the moral codes of the world that amounts to a 'universal body of moral and spiritual truth'.<sup>26</sup> The universality

of morality, therefore, is an indicator of the universality of religious reality.

Lewis' belief in the universality of religious reality does not lead to relativism. He is completely committed to the deity and uniqueness of Jesus Christ. He says that, 'there is no parallel in other religions' with Jesus.<sup>27</sup> Buddha, Socrates, and Mohammed never even made such claims about themselves as Christ both makes and substantiates by his very moral force.<sup>28</sup> The Christian 'hypothesis is that God has come down into the created universe, down to manhood—and come up again, pulling it up with Him'.<sup>29</sup> Christian conviction is not lessened but rather enlarged in Lewis' view of the religions.

Suggestions of spiritual truth and power in non-Christian religions never overshadow the significance of the incomparable abundance of truth and life in Christ. Lewis describes the drama of the Trinity as 'perhaps the most important difference between Christianity and all other religions'.<sup>30</sup> An intra-personal relationship of Father, Son, and Spirit provides the pattern and the power for Christian relationship with God. Christians are drawn by the Holy Spirit, through union with Christ, into participation in

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22 'The Grand Miracle', *Dock*, p. 80. Cf. 'Christian Apologetics', p. 99.

23 Cf. 'Christian Apologetics', p. 101.

24 James Patrick, 'The Heart's Desire and the Landlord's Rules: C. S. Lewis as a Moral Philosopher', *Pilgrim's Guide*, pp. 70-71 and 83. Cf. Sheridan Gilley, 'The Abolition of God: Relativism and the Center of Faith', pp. 162, 164 and Thomas C. Peters, 'The War of the Worldviews: H. G. Wells and Scientism versus C. S. Lewis and Christianity', p. 206 both in *Pilgrim's Guide*. Cf. also Sayer, *Jack*, p. 302.

25 *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), pp. 17-33. Cf. Sayer, *Jack*, pp. 300, 302 and M. D. Aeschliman, 'Tao', *CSLRE*, pp. 394-95.

26 Gilley, 'Abolition of God', *Pilgrim's Guide*, pp. 162-63.

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27 'What Are We To Make Of Jesus Christ?' *Dock*, p. 157.

28 'What Are We To Make Of Jesus Christ?' *Dock*, p. 158.

29 'What Are We To Make Of Jesus Christ?' *Dock*, pp. 159-60. Cf. 'Rejoinder to Dr. Pit-tenger', *Dock*, Lewis footnotes John 1:12, p. 178.

30 *Mere Christianity*, p. 136.

the divine life of the Father.<sup>31</sup> Christianity is not merely more intellectually advanced than other religions but provides experience of the inner life of God available only in Christ by the Spirit.

#### 4. Experiential

For Lewis religious experience is a legitimate way of knowing God.<sup>32</sup> Aware of and interacting with Freudian and Jungian religious psychology, Lewis agreed with Rudolf Otto that religious experience is essentially a mysterious encounter with the Numinous. At its core authentic religious experience is divine encounter characterized by ineffable awe in God's presence.<sup>33</sup> Otto argues that the 'numinous' experience underlies all religion. Three components, often designated with a Latin phrase, *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, are prominent. As *mysterium*, the numinous is 'wholly other'—entirely different from anything we experience in ordinary life, evoking a response of wondrous silence. But the numinous is also a *mysterium tremendum*, provoking terror because it presents itself as overwhelming power. Finally, the numi-

nous presents itself as *fascinans*, as merciful and gracious.<sup>34</sup>

Lewis likewise regards the Numinous or Awe as 'the seed' of all religious experience.<sup>35</sup> He describes three 'strands or elements' that appear in all developed religion and a fourth in Christianity only. The first is the Numinous, then morality and the joining of morality and the Numinous, and finally, uniquely to Christianity, the historical event of the Incarnation. In Jesus Christ the Numinous was finally manifested visibly.<sup>36</sup> Awe of the Numinous is 'a special kind of fear' that might be called 'Dread' or 'wonder' or even 'a certain shrinking' or 'sense of inadequacy' in the Divine Presence. The Numinous is the object that excites this feeling of awe. Awe in the presence of the Divine or Numinous can be traced back to ancient, possibly prehistoric times.

As a literary scholar Lewis finds the Numinous not only in the Bible but also in a lot of the world's great literature. Awe is not a product of the mind or the growth of civilization or a logical inference from the existence of the universe. Awe is intrinsic to human nature. Accordingly, a sense of the Numinous can be only some strange and inexplicable quirk in the human mind serving no purpose, or a 'direct experience of the supernatural' or

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31 *Mere Christianity*, pp. 136-38. Cf. pp. 167-169.

32 This section draws heavily from Tony Richie, 'Awe-Full Encounters: A Pentecostal Conversation with C. S. Lewis Concerning Spiritual Experience', *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 14:1(2005), pp. 99-122.

33 See Rudolf Otto's *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John W. Harvey (London: 1923). Cf. *The Collected Works of C. S. Lewis* (CWCSL) (NY: Inspirational, 1996), p. 477.

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34 Cf. Rudolf Otto homepage online by Gregory D. Alles under 'Who was Rudolf Otto?' (<http://www.netrax.net/~galles/index1.htm>) (November 19, 2004).

35 'Is Theism Important?' CWCSL, p. 418.

36 See *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (NY: Walker, 1955), p. 348.

'Revelation'.<sup>37</sup> Authentic religious experience, then, is not the exclusive domain of Christianity, though that is where it finds its most explicit and ultimate expression.

### 5. Critical

Lewis is not opaque concerning the faults of other religions.<sup>38</sup> He harangues none other than Augustine for 'a hangover from the high-minded Pagan philosophies in which he grew up'.<sup>39</sup> He criticizes Hinduism for being too pluralistic, arguing that, 'truth must surely involve exclusions'.<sup>40</sup> He finds Hinduism 'hospitable to all gods, naturally religious, ready to take any shape but able to retain none'.<sup>41</sup> His main criticism of Islam is its rejection of the Incarnation.<sup>42</sup> He also dislikes what he considers Islamic extremism.<sup>43</sup> Obviously, Lewis' tolerance

toward other religions is not one of indifference toward 'conflicting truth claims'.<sup>44</sup> He does not simply mix and match religious ideas and options; real differences exist with which we must deal decisively.

Lewis' forthright accent on the possible presence of the demonic in religions sounds an alarm for all people of faith. Chad Walsh says Lewis had a 'kindly attitude toward other religions' but admitted they have flashes of divine truth mingled with diabolical elements and human invention.<sup>45</sup> Religion indeed may be demonic rather than divine. As Lewis' diabolical character, Screwtape, says, the Devil sometimes uses religion in his own interests.<sup>46</sup> In Lewis 'the Devil and his sub-devils are the real rulers of the earth, and our poor planet is the scene of a cosmic struggle between the dominant forces of darkness and the struggling forces of good'.<sup>47</sup> Recognizing demonic deviance in religions is absolutely essential.

Understanding the relation of religion and the natural realm is requisite for all religious traditions. Lewis believed that nature can be 'a valuable and, for some people, an indispensable initiation' to religion, but argues that 'a nature religion' is inadequate on its

<sup>37</sup> See Richie, 'Awe-Full Encounters', *JPT*, pp. 105-06.

<sup>38</sup> Root, 'Tools', p. 235.

<sup>39</sup> *Four Loves* (London: Harcourt, 1960, reprint 1988), p. 121.

<sup>40</sup> *Letters of C. S. Lewis* (8 February 1956). (ed. W. H. Lewis; New York: Harcourt, 1966), p. 267.

<sup>41</sup> *Letters of C. S. Lewis*, (30 April 1959), p. 285. Cf. Lewis' rebuttal of pantheism, *Miracles* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996 ed.), pp. 129-50.

<sup>42</sup> *Taliessin through Logres: The region of the summer stars*, by Charles Williams (Charles Williams. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1948; 1974 ed.), pp. 308-09.

<sup>43</sup> *Mere Christianity*, p. 61. Cf. *Letters To An American Lady*, ed. Clyde S. Kilby (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), pp. 11-12. Lewis also inveighs against humanly invented religions (*Mere Christianity*, pp. 33, 128-29; *The*

*Four Loves*, p. 69, and contemporary culture's religion of sexuality, pp. 98, 100-01 and 110-14).

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991 [1992 reprint]), 53-55.

<sup>45</sup> Chad Walsh, *C. S. Lewis: Apostle to the Skeptics* (New York: Macmillan, 1949), pp. 94, 95.

<sup>46</sup> *Screwtape Letters*, p. 47.

<sup>47</sup> Walsh, *Apostle to the Skeptics*, pp. 84-85.



own. The personal Creator of nature is the only appropriate object of religious affection and devotion.<sup>48</sup> To Lewis, all the religions of the world are either 'nature religions', like ancient paganism, or 'anti-nature religions', like Hinduism or Stoicism. Christianity is unique among the world religions in that it is both 'world-affirming' and 'world-denying'.<sup>49</sup> The Christian doctrines of Creation and Fall are especially relevant in this respect.<sup>50</sup> Christianity realizes that death and suffering are actually unnatural and that 'God really has dived down into the bottom of creation, and has come up bringing the whole redeemed nature on His shoulder'.<sup>51</sup> In Christianity an impasse between the supernatural and the natural, the heavenly and the earthly, the divine and the human, is overcome and integrated in the person of Christ.

## 6. Controversial

Objections have been raised regarding aspects of Lewis' understanding of religions. Some fear an implicit universalism, the view that all souls will eventually be saved. Quite the contrary, for Lewis every person is confronted with the free will choice of fol-

lowing God's will—or not—and spends eternity accordingly.<sup>52</sup> Lewis is refusing only to limit the availability of choice or the extent of Christ's redemptive reach, saying 'though all salvation is through Jesus, we need not conclude that He cannot save those who have not explicitly accepted Him in this life'. He makes it 'clear that we are not pronouncing all other religions to be totally false, but rather saying that in Christ whatever is true in all religions is consummated and perfected'. Contra pluralist universalism, he added that, 'we must attack wherever we meet it the nonsensical idea that mutually exclusive propositions about God can both be true'.<sup>53</sup> A scene from the final instalment of the Narnia series, *The Last Battle*, is illustrative. Emeth, a confused but conscientious pagan soldier, is shocked to learn at the judgment that Aslan (Christ) regards his worship as directed to himself. Aslan explains, 'For all find what they *truly* seek'.<sup>54</sup>

Unfortunately, tragically, when the masses of humanity are considered, only a comparatively few will enter into the narrow gate of life (Mt. 7:13-14).

<sup>48</sup> *The Four Loves*, pp. 21-22. Cf. *The Weight of Glory*, p. 13 and 'Theology', *The Joyful Christian*, p. 34. Lewis affirms God's self-communication through natural creation (*The Four Loves*, pp. 20-21. Cf. *The Weight of Glory*, p. 13 and 'Dogma and the Universe', *Dock*, pp. 46-47).

<sup>49</sup> 'Some Thoughts', *Dock*, pp. 147-48. Cf. Root, 'Tools', pp. 225-29.

<sup>50</sup> 'Some Thoughts', *Dock*, p. 149-50.

<sup>51</sup> 'The Grand Miracle', *Dock*, p. 87. Cf. Root, 'Tools', pp. 229-31.

<sup>52</sup> Root, 'Tools', pp. 231-34 and Kendall Harmon, 'Nothingness and Human Destiny: Hell in the Thought of C. S. Lewis', p. 253, (*Pilgrim's Guide*). Cf. Walter Hooper, *C. S. Lewis: Companion & Guide* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), p. 287, and Richard Purtill, 'Grace', *CSLRE*, pp. 185-86 and Perry C. Bramlett, 'Theology', *CSLRE*, pp. 399-400.

<sup>53</sup> 'Christian Apologetics', p. 102.

<sup>54</sup> *The Last Battle* (London: Penguin, 1956), p. 149; italics added. Cf. 'Religious Syncretism', *The Visionary Christian: 131 Readings From C. S. Lewis* (ed. Chad Walsh. New York: Macmillan, 1981), pp. 134-36.

But a final criterion for who does or does not enter in will be whether one made the hard choices for God and his goodness,<sup>55</sup> not whether one was born in a certain place or time or had a certain local church (synagogue, mosque, temple) on the corner to direct her in the way. Not universal salvation but rather universality of salvation in Christ is the hope of all humanity. Lewis believed, based on biblical passages such as Matthew 25:31-46, as Lynn Summer says, that 'all those who sincerely seek God will one day be a part of his kingdom'.<sup>56</sup>

Lewis left room for those who might be in 'the process of conversion', that is, in a pre-Christian state but moving toward Christ according to the limits of their spiritual light, to be fully converted even if at some post-mortem point.<sup>57</sup> Doubtless this represents Lewis' efforts to integrate divine justice and mercy with human liberty and responsibility. He was open to salvation for adherents of other religions even if only in a post-mortem possibility. This provides for 'the hope of those who follow other religions' without having authentically heard the gospel prior to death.<sup>58</sup>

Perhaps the suggestion that death is not quite a concrete dividing line is not as odd as might first appear. Lewis believed, in Glaspey's words, 'The process of dying begins now, by learning to die to ourselves, our desires, our self-centeredness, our sense of auton-

omy before God.'<sup>59</sup> Undoubtedly, however, Lewis accepted the finality of Hell (or Heaven) as the fruition of choices made against (or for) God and goodness in this life rather than after death.<sup>60</sup> That is what meant by the advice in *Till We Have Faces* to 'Die before you die. There is no chance after.'<sup>61</sup> Heaven and Hell are human choices beginning during earthly life bearing fruit for eternity.

Lewis' view is definitely distinguishable from so-called 'second probationism'.<sup>62</sup> According to second probation scenarios one who has wilfully rejected God and lived wickedly has a posthumous chance to convert.<sup>63</sup> Quite to the contrary, Lewis suggests that those already in the process of conversion, perhaps what Wesley called 'the living up to the light they had',<sup>64</sup> might complete that conversion subsequently. This is strikingly similar to what some Church Fathers thought about those living and dying prior to the Incarnation.<sup>65</sup> Eschatological

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59 Glaspey, *Not a Tame Lion*, p. 225.

60 Harmon, 'Nothingness and Human Destiny', pp. 240-42 and 252.

61 Glaspey, *Not a Tame Lion*, p. 225.

62 See *The Great Divorce* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1945).

63 Geerhardus Vos, 'ESCHATOLOGY', *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, (Electronic Database Copyright, 1996 by BibleSoft).

64 Tony Richie, 'John Wesley and Mohammed: A Contemporary Inquiry Concerning Islam', *The Asbury Theological Journal* 58:2 (Fall 2003), pp. 79-99 (p. 84).

65 E. g., see Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanies, Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Volume 2 (PC Study Bible, Electronic Database Copyright, 1996 by BibleSoft), 6.6. Cf. 1 Pet. 3:18-22 and Eph 4:8-10.

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55 Glaspey, *Not a Tame Lion*, pp. 218-22.

56 Lynn Summer, 'Non-Christian Religions', *CSLRE*, pp. 294-95.

57 Root, 'Tools', pp. 231-34.

58 Root, 'Tools', pp. 231-34.

issues are speculative and debatable, but we can posit that God has made proper allowances for such situations. All the difference in the world exists between completing conversion already begun and a post-mortem opportunity to belatedly begin conversion. As the chess masters say, 'Well begun is half done!'

Some suspect Lewis' theology of religions violates the First Commandment, but they misunderstand his message. He is not advocating the 'legitimacy of pagan gods' but suggesting there were hints toward the truth of Jesus long before his historical appearance among humanity.<sup>66</sup> Lewis' antagonism toward pluralism and syncretism is shown in his adamant assertion in *The Silver Chair* that 'There is no other stream' than Aslan (Christ) from which to drink the water of life.<sup>67</sup> All real religion is holy aspiration ultimately attainable only in Christ.<sup>68</sup> But for Lewis a battle rages between faith and its foes.

Lines should not be drawn too sharply between various Christian groups because the 'real fault line' is now Ethical Monotheism vs. Secular Relativism or Hedonism or Materialism. But though Lewis may see the battle primarily as Christianity vs. Unbelief,<sup>69</sup> we must take due notice of the more foundational battle of Belief vs.

Unbelief. This, I think, is why Lewis often affirms forms of theistic belief before preceding to argue his case for Christianity. Syncretism is not the initial issue at all but rather theism versus atheism. Empathetically understanding where he is coming from helps to go where he is going.

## II An Evangelical Appropriation of Lewis' Theology of Religions

Several key components of a consistently Evangelical theology of religions congruous with Lewis's insights may be suggested; the following are especially applicable.

### 1. Uncompromisingly Christian

The fatal tendency of so much religiously pluralistic ideology in vogue today is to trim down (or cut up) Christianity until it somehow fits with other faith expressions in an effort to establish a generic version of religion. The personhood of the Triune God, incarnation of Christ, authority of Scripture, the nature of salvation and spirituality, and almost anything else distinctively Christian is sacrificed in synthesizing all the world religions into a homogeneous whole.<sup>70</sup> Understandably enough, many Evangelicals are reticent on theology of religions precisely because they perceive this propensity in action. Lewis would have none of it;

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66 Peters, *Simply*, p. 138.

67 'Thirst and the Lion', *Visionary Christian*, pp. 149-51.

68 'Religion Without Dogma', pp. 130-31.

69 Michael H. MacDonald and Mark P. Shea, 'Saving Sinners and Reconciling Churches: An Ecumenical Meditation on *Mere Christianity*', *Pilgrim's Guide*, pp. 47-48.

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70 Cf. Harold Netland, *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith & Mission* (Downer's Grove, ILL: InterVarsity, 2001), pp. 158-77.

neither should we. Evangelical theology of religions begins with an uncompromising commitment to Jesus Christ as the unique and absolute Lord and Saviour and to the continuing validity and applicability of historic Christian faith, truth, and life.

The *a priori* assumption of a Christian theology of religions ought not to be anything like, 'How do we change Christianity so it welds well with world religions?' but something more like, 'How does the unchanging reality and verity of Christianity inform and enhance our understanding of world religions and our relations with their adherents?' Now, this affirmation does not assume that Christians may not need to change our attitudes, especially if we have made incorrect and ultimately unchristian assumptions about what an authentically Christian understanding of religious others entails.

We may indeed need to make some drastic changes in our interpretation and application of Christianity to the realm of relations with other religions. Will anyone really argue that the religious prejudice and persecution that has sometimes characterized the history of Christianity is truly an accurate exemplar of how we ought to relate to religious others?<sup>71</sup> Should we be calling fire down on Samaritans and religious others, or are we of a different spirit (Luke 9:52-56)? Some notable changes are necessary; but not changes in the nature of Christianity itself. Changes Evangelical Christians should seek to

address are rather more about how we may best apply the genuine reality and verity of Christianity to relations with religious others.

The first step here, of course, and the hardest step too to be sure, is to plumb the depths of our own *real* Christian religion, uncovering and removing our own presuppositions and prejudices, to thoroughly acquaint ourselves with its true teaching regarding other religions.<sup>72</sup> As Lewis would have it, we need a healthy dose of 'mere Christianity'. Our biggest problem is not that Christianity needs to be changed but that it has already been changed and needs to be rather radically restored to its original estate! Early Christianity arose and existed in a religiously plural environment that probably exceeds our imagination. Yet its witness won the respect of many intense opponents. With conviction and without compromise, Christians can and should once again confront the world, religions and otherwise, in the strength of our own authentic testimony to our experience of the love of God in Christ and the power of the Spirit to transform lives accordingly.

## 2. Faithfully Evangelical

An Evangelical theology of religions is consistent with Scripture, continuous with its tradition, and confirmed in its community testimony. Evangelicals tend to start with Scripture. Whatever else we do, our theology must agree with and conform to Holy Scripture.

<sup>71</sup> See Ergun Mehmet Caner and Emir Fethi Caner, *Christian Jihad* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004).

<sup>72</sup> Jerry H. Gill, *Faith in Dialogue: A Christian Apologetic* (Waco, TX: Jarrell/Word Books, 1985), p. 105.

Lewis, who felt the beauty of and belief in Scripture more important than theories or dogmas about Scripture, still stoutly vouchsafed its status for carrying the Word of God and sought to sculpt his own life and writings according to its teaching and practice.<sup>73</sup> Evangelicals can and should discern what the Bible really says about religions. A careful consideration of the Bible suggests a more subtle and sophisticated stance toward so-called outsiders than some assume.<sup>74</sup> Indeed the first and foremost concern of a biblical theology of religions is actually for correct adoration of the justice and mercy of God's own holy character.<sup>75</sup>

Taking all the statements of the Bible for what they are worth leaves ample room for dynamic possibilities concerning its revelation regarding relations with other religions. John 1:9 and 14:6, and Acts 4:12 and 17:27-28, for examples, should be understood along side, not against, each other. For another example, Romans 2:12-16 and 10:9 should be taken together. The obvious fact that the same writers make such strongly contrasting declarations certainly suggests they were more dynamic, less dogmatic and more relative, less rigid than we sometimes

tend to be today. Avoiding or attacking passages outside our pet paradigms will not work. The only theology of religions worthy of the label 'Evangelical' is one that truly takes God's whole revelation seriously.

Evangelicalism is more aware today of the need to know what has gone before in order to be ready for what may come after, and of its responsibility to continue the witness of the historic Christian tradition it represents.<sup>76</sup> Though many views have vied for supremacy during centuries of Christian development, several significant figures, even fathers in the faith, held views basically similar to that of C. S. Lewis. For examples, we might mention Justin Martyr (c. 110-65) and Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-216). Another extremely important precedent, the renowned revivalist-theologian John Wesley (1703-91), a founder of the modern Evangelical movement, affirmed God's gracious compassion beyond the borders of institutional Christianity.<sup>77</sup> The inclusion of such high calibre Christian thinkers and leaders in a class convinced that God's providential reach is borderless establishes that the position is not aberrational or exceptional and is not inimical to essential orthodox and Christianity. Even more lucrative, however, is the likelihood that these profound, pious Christians from the past can help effec-

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<sup>73</sup> Cf. Perry C. Bramlett, 'The Bible', *CSLRE*, pp. 98-99.

<sup>74</sup> E. g., Frank Anthony Spina, *The Faith of the Outsider: Exclusion and Inclusion in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

<sup>75</sup> See Tony Richie, 'God's Fairness to People of All Faiths: A Respectful Proposal to Pentecostals for Discussion Regarding World Religions', *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 28.1 (forthcoming Spring 2006).

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<sup>76</sup> E. g. Robert E. Weber, *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999).

<sup>77</sup> In addition to an in depth analysis of Wesley, I also survey Justin, Clement, and others in Richie, 'John Wesley and Mohammed', *ATJ*, pp. 79-99.

tively lead Evangelicals today into the future in a world of religious faiths.

Prominent 'Evangelical friendly' theologians, such as Wolfhart Pannenberg for example, not formally Evangelical but amicably sharing some interests, espouse views essentially aligning with Lewis and others like him.<sup>78</sup> Along with Canadian Baptist Clark Pinnock a virtual host of Evangelical authors are rising up to articulate a more sensible and sensitive theology of religions in the same vein.<sup>79</sup> Given the enormous popularity of Lewis among many Evangelicals, and their frequent appeals to him, the application of Lewis' thought on religions by Evangelicals is evident.<sup>80</sup> Even Pentecostals and Charismatics are

joining the journey toward broader beliefs about other religions.<sup>81</sup> Many disagree, of course, as is their right to do, and some label as un-Evangelical any opponents.<sup>82</sup> But the view that only a narrow, pessimistic view toward the unevangelized or religious others is fully Evangelical is being strenuously challenged.

Accepting and embracing God's universal affection and activity are not sops to political correctness or liberal agendas. Rather, they are expressions of themes running throughout Scripture and Christian history that have come more to the fore in this generation because of the religious diversity of society today. Lewis was not a liberal! He did not pander to politics! A straightforward standard for discerning the Evangelical-ness of any theology of religions is the litmus test of its loyalty to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. No less and no more ought to be asked or expected.

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78 Cf. Wolfhart Pannenberg, 'The Revelation of God in Jesus', in *Theology as History* (Ed. James M. Robison, NY: Harper & Row, 1967), pp. 101-09 and 118-25.

79 E. g., Clark Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992); John Sanders in *No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992); Gerald R. McDermott, *Can Evangelicals Learn From World Religions: Jesus, Revelation, & Religious Traditions* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000); John Stackhouse, Jr., ed., *No Other Gods Before Me? Evangelicals and the Challenge of World Religions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001), and Timothy C. Tennent, *Christianity at the Religious Roundtable: Evangelicalism in Conversation with Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002).

80 Cf. Gerald R. McDermott, 'What if Paul Had Been From China? Reflections on the Possibility of Revelation in Non-Christian Religions' and Miriam Adeney, 'Rajah Sulayman Was No Water Buffalo: Gospel, Anthropology, and Islam', in Stackhouse, *No Other Gods Before Me*, pp. 28, 32-33 and 70.

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81 E. g., Amos Yong, 'On Envisioning a Pentecostal-Charismatic Theology of Religions', *JPT* 14 (1999): pp. 81-83, 'Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Theology of Religions', *Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series* (Sheffield: Sheffield, England; 2000), and *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003).

82 E. g., Ramesh P. Richard, *The Population of Heaven: A Biblical Response to the Inclusivist Position on Who Will Be Saved* (Chicago: Moody, 1994). Diverse views are well laid out in *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, eds. Stanely N. Gundry, Dennis L. Okholm, and Timothy R. Phillips (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996).

### 3. Devotedly Truthful

Our quest for Evangelical identity and theological truth inevitably calls for involvement with other Christians and other religions.<sup>83</sup> The question regarding the reality of truth in other religions can be confronted in one of several ways. First, we might simply deny or ignore the suggestion that other religions have any truth at all. Second, we might admit they have some truth but downplay its significance. Thirdly, we might wrestle through the implications of the presence of truth in non-Christian religions from the perspective that Christian truth is uniquely revealed and authoritative. Fourthly, we might conclude that all religious truth is relative.

C. S. Lewis opted for the third approach. The first two do not deal with truth at all; they run from it like frightened children. The fourth destroys truth. Only the third approach works through tough questions raised by truth's presence in unexpected places. It also has the advantage of placing the religions within the scope of God's providential program instead of outside the bounds of God's power and purpose.<sup>84</sup> Jesus Christ the Son of God is fully and finally affirmed as the only absolute and universal Saviour and Lord whose gracious presence and influence reaches into the whole world by the Holy Spirit (see Acts 4:12; Ps. 139:7).

Self-disclosure is the nature of God. Sometimes God's self-revelation is obscure and preparatory.<sup>85</sup> That is not because of God's shortcomings but because of ours. The Christian Bible, consisting of the *Old* and *New* Testaments, is based upon the premise of progressive revelation. God accommodates himself to our present level of understanding and experience to help us know him as much as is possible while preparing us for further facets of more intimate and correct knowledge and love. Therefore, truth in non-Christian religions, dim or distorted though it may be from the Christian perspective, may be indicative of authentic divine presence and influence.<sup>86</sup> The Paraclete is certainly sent forth as the Spirit of Truth to testify to the truth (John 14-16). And as the Jewish apocryphal writer so surely said, 'the Spirit of the Lord fills the whole world' (Wisdom of Solomon 1:7).

I suppose some less cautious Christians may become smug, on the one hand, by an assumption of superiority. On the other hand, more careful Christians may have a very different reaction. Unless we are willing to assert (against apostle Paul) that we have attained unto final perfection in knowledge (Philp. 3:12; 1 Cor. 13:9), we must admit that we are also still on the journey of truth. That is not to say that we expect new revelations contrary to presently known truth or new religions to spring up everywhere throughout whatever succeeding centuries of time

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**83** See Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, pp. 215-19. Though Yong is specifically addressing Pentecostals, his point is relevant for all Evangelicals.

**84** Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Age* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), pp. 268-75.

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**85** Cf. Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), p. 178.

**86** Cf. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, pp. 198-99 and 219-20.

may be left to humanity. That would, in fact, be quite counter to the revealed truth that has been already made perfectly plain (cf. John 14:6). That is not how *progressive* revelation works at all. It faithfully builds on what has gone before.

Rather, it is altogether possible to be convinced that final and ultimate truth has been made known not only through and by but in the Lord Jesus Christ and yet be contritely aware our own understanding of that truth and its tremendous implications has not been exhaustively perfected. If we are willing then to honestly acknowledge the somewhat provisional nature of truth, the obnoxious errors of imperialism or arrogance toward those we humbly believe have not yet understood the ultimate and absolute significance of 'the truth that is in Jesus' (Eph. 4:21) will not surface so readily as might at first be assumed by some. In fact, some challenging truths that stretch Christians might surface instead.<sup>87</sup>

#### 4. Honestly Experiential

The rationalistic reductionism of much of contemporary society and spirituality is caving in under a stringent post-modern critique.<sup>88</sup> The fact that human beings are complex entities characterized by vast epistemological subtlety and variety is becoming increasingly clear. We are not less than but more than rational creatures. We know by intuition and imagination, by experi-

ence, as well as by intellect.<sup>89</sup> As already shown, Lewis anticipated many of the concerns of postmodernism, arguing for a universal category of numinous religious experience. His carefully crafted arguments demonstrate the legitimacy and authenticity of religious experience as a way of knowing God.

An Evangelical theology should come to terms with the universality of religious experience. People of faith everywhere testify to ineffable encounters with the divine. Indeed these experiences are interpreted according to the prevailing theological worldview of the recipient. The Christian, the Jew, and the Muslim describe amazingly similar experiences but each tells the story in his or her own religious words. The Taoist, Hindu and the Buddhist do the same. Christians can discount these experiences as fraudulent manifestations of misguided faith. We can surmise that they may have a psychological or sensate origin or base.

We can take any of these or several other type tracks to invalidate the spiritual experiences of non-Christians if we so choose. The problem is these same arguments can be used against Christian claims of encountering God. But *surely* our own religious experiences are real. Therefore, unless we are willing to surrender the entire category of religious experience, a price too heavy to pay, we ought to approach the existence of religious experience in

<sup>87</sup> Gill, *Faith in Dialogue*, p. 104.

<sup>88</sup> See Henry H. Knight III, *A Future for Truth: Evangelical Theology in a Postmodern World* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), pp. 86-98.

<sup>89</sup> Cheryl Bridges Johns, 'Athens, Berlin, and Azusa: A Pentecostal Reflection on Scholarship and Christian Faith', *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* (2005), pp. 136-48, cuts to the heart of the postmodern condition.



other faiths from a somewhat different viewpoint.

God created human beings in the divine image (Gen. 1:26-27). Though distorted and twisted by sin, the *Imago Dei* has been damaged but not destroyed and remains the essential definition of what it means to be human.<sup>90</sup> (Classic doctrines of prevenient/common grace explain that universal preservation of the image of God in humans is not a merely natural process.) All humans share a spiritual nature enabling knowledge and, to some extent, actual relationship with God (Acts 17:27-28). Therefore, the Holy Spirit, universally present and active, vivifying all living beings (Ps. 104:30), is experienced in some measure or manner by all human beings (Num. 16:22; 27:16), even though not in the full Christian sense (Rom 8:2).

While religious others really encounter the presence of God, Christians uniquely participate in the very life of God by the Spirit through Christ (2 Cor. 13:14). Authentic spiritual experience, therefore, is a reliable but fallible indicator of God's presence and influence in people's lives. It is reliable because it is real. It is fallible because it can be and perhaps often is errant. Better than denying or discounting religious experience among the religions is spiritual discernment for authenticity and integrity.<sup>91</sup> Jesus

taught us to know a tree by its fruit (Mt. 7:15-20). When the fruit of faith is good or bad, the religious root it springs from must be likewise. Simply put, only God is good and where good is, God is; where good is not, God's presence is not being affirmed (Mt. 19:17). Where there is evil we may safely say that diabolical or demonic possibilities are present (Jn. 10:10).

### 5. Openly Optimistic

Certain Evangelicals suggest the best position on the fate of the unevangelized or adherents of other religions is cautious agnosticism.<sup>92</sup> We just do not and probably cannot know. Of course, that is true of the final fate of all souls, even Christians. None of us can say anything with certainty regarding the finality of someone's eternal destiny. That is definitely God's domain. Unfortunately, and I say this as a former agnostic (regarding ambivalence on the existence of God),<sup>93</sup> agnosticism is not usually plain and pure. Often it is unconsciously (or not) coloured either by pessimism, the usual, or optimism, the exceptional. Those who are really optimists often opt for open faith. Those who are full pessimists become fierce atheists. Agnosticism is a way out for those who may not want to take either of these options. But it is not really always the *via media* that it represents itself to be.

90 Cf. Thomas C. Oden, *The Living God: Systematic Theology I* (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 2001), pp. 151-52.

91 Cf. Amos Yong, "Not Knowing Where the Wind Blows...": On Envisioning a Pentecostal-Charismatic Theology of Religions', *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 14 (1999): pp. 81-112 (pp. 81-83) and *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, pp. 29-30 and 243-55.

92 Cf. David L. Edwards and John Stott, *Evangelical Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue* (Downer's Grove, ILL: InterVarsity, 1991), p. 327.

93 My history of a journey from agnosticism to faith is one of the reasons I am so attracted to the thought of C. S. Lewis.

In my own case, agnosticism was a way of being pessimistic about God's existence without exposing me to insurmountable logical fallacies latent in formal atheism. Agnosticism in such form is more a furtive unfaith. While I dare not presume to speak for anyone else, I cannot but suspect some 'agnostics' on this issue may have a similar mindset. Not wanting to come out and say the vast majority of humanity is doomed to be damned without so much as a shot at salvation they are 'agnostic'. If so, they are really pessimistic about such salvific possibilities. I believe this to be an unsatisfactory option. So did C. S. Lewis; his position on the question is quite openly optimistic.

Personally, I have found three moves helpful. First, is to accept the possibility that some of those who have not authentically heard the gospel are not automatically damned. This view does not assume anyone is automatically delivered either. We are not talking about universalism but universality. God in his wisdom, power, and goodness has made provision for all people to enter relationship with him according to their own context. A response of faith and obedience at the level of one's light is still essential. The emphasis here is on relation not religion; no religion, not even Christian religion, much less non-Christian religion, is finally really salvific.<sup>94</sup>

Second, is to understand the process by which God deals with non-Christian peoples. God's grace and

power are made universally available to all through Jesus Christ. Some are directly and knowingly exposed to the gospel, others indirectly and unknowingly meet the Christ of the gospel, but all have some opportunity to graciously know God. Soteriology is perhaps much more dynamic and fluid than Evangelicals have traditionally perceived. Conversion, though a definite crisis experience, does not begin or end then. A positive process of becoming (or negatively of unbecoming!) a Christian is consistent with an Evangelical soteriology. Some have already entered the process of conversion though they are not yet converted.<sup>95</sup>

Third, is to affirm the priority of Christian mission and evangelism.<sup>96</sup> Though some may know Christ after a manner without having explicitly heard the gospel, the temporal and eternal benefits of full knowledge and experience of Christ as revealed in the gospel are infinitely inestimable. Christians, therefore, in accordance with the Great Commission of Christ to the Church are charged with obedience to that divine mandate through reaching

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**95** Clark Pinnock calls them 'not-yet-Christians' in *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (InterVarsity Press: Downer's Grove, IL, 1994), pp. 213-14. Gerald McDermott's work on Jonathan Edwards's dispositional soteriology suggests similar directions. See his *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods: Christian Theology, Enlightenment Reason, and Non-Christian Faiths* (Oxford University Press, 2000).

**96** Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), pp. 244-47.

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**94** Cf. Barth in David L. Mueller, *Karl Barth: Makers of the Modern Theological Mind* (Waco: Word Books, 1976), pp. 91-93.

the world with its witness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. No theology of religions that undermines the energy of evangelistic witness to the world should be acceptable to Evangelicals.

### III Conclusion

My approach throughout this paper assumes modern Evangelicalism has matured enough to allow and embrace variety and diversity so long as essential commitment to the gospel is ardently affirmed.<sup>97</sup> I also expect approbation from those who affirm C. S. Lewis as a champion of Christian faith and life in a world increasingly characterized by widespread cultural anomy. Many of us have turned trustingly to Lewis for help against encroaching scientism, imposing pseudo-intellectualism, or increasing secularity. Can he also offer us guidance regarding the rampant ideology of religious pluralism by giving us a good alternative, a conscientiously Christ-

ian theology of religions that ably accounts for the reality of pluralism? I think so.

Lewis' theology of religions offers help to contemporary Evangelical Christians in key ways. First, it helps us see that faithfulness to biblical, historic Christianity and hospitable openness to religious others are not necessarily incompatible. Second, it helps provide a powerful apologetic against a serious and not altogether unfounded charge of religious elitism and exclusivity without compromising Christian teachings. Third, it helps to open up possibilities of dialogue with non-Christian traditions that can lead to heartfelt witness of the gospel's transforming power in our own lives. Fourth, it also helps contribute to our appreciation for God's glory through the all-encompassing wisdom, power, and goodness of God's providential affection toward and activity among all people everywhere at all times. And, yes, fifth, it helps us hear God's voice ever more clearly both in others and in ourselves. Evangelicals interested in addressing today's world with an authentic gospel word could do a lot worse.

<sup>97</sup> Gregory A. Boyd and Paul R. Eddy, *Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), pp. 178-92.

### Shadows and Chivalry

#### Pain, Suffering, Evil and Goodness in the Works of George MacDonald and C.S. Lewis

Jeff McInnis

McInnis studies the influence of George MacDonald on C.S. Lewis. Beginning with the authors' early experiences of suffering and their literary reactions to it, McInnis shows how MacDonald's writings helped transform Lewis from an imaginative doubter and escapist into a believer in the reality of God and his goodness. While other books have only mentioned the fact that Lewis called MacDonald his 'master', and that MacDonald's *Phantastes* helped 'baptize' Lewis' imagination, this study traces the overall effect of MacDonald's works on Lewis' thought and imagination.

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