

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

C.S. Lewis and the True Myth: A Reconciliation of Theology, Philosophy, and Mythology

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Abstract

C.S. Lewis was both a student of pagan philosophy and mythology and a Christian. He never was divided between these two pursuits in his life, though he gave the latter its proper priority. What allowed Lewis to keep this balance was his idea of the gospel as the *True Myth*, an idea that helped lead to his conversion and remained at the core of his thinking throughout his life. By this idea of *True Myth*, Lewis was able to not only unite the pagan myths to Christian truth, but also the rest of human thought as well. Thus, in order to understand the nature of this key idea in Lewis's thinking, this paper outlines what Lewis thought of mythology in general as a human phenomenon that bears explaining. The way in which Lewis saw mythology is analyzed in the first chapter according to the categories of the *nature*, the *origin*, and the *function* of mythology. In the second chapter, Lewis's thoughts concerning the idea of the *True Myth* itself are considered. That various dichotomies of thought were united in Lewis's mind by receiving this new idea is demonstrated. After this, the third chapter shows how Lewis's thought fits in with historic and Evangelical orthodox Christian theology. It is argued there that Lewis's idea of the *True Myth* is compatible with an Evangelical theology, and that it opens up many possibilities for exploration. Some of those possibilities are outlined in chapter four, which considers the union of various concerns of contemporary culture with various Evangelical priorities, a union brought about by the idea of *True Myth*.

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Introduction

When C.S. Lewis was young, he had a moment of illumination when he read the words of a poem about a myth, and his whole life was changed. In it the poet wrote,

I heard a voice that cried,
Balder the beautiful
Is dead, is dead. . .¹

And Lewis was struck with stab of longing created by the verse. He would never forget this, and it would cause him to be fascinated by myths and fairy stories for the rest of his life. Some years later, when Lewis was a man, he would have another life changing experience when he realized that “Balder the beautiful” had truly died, but He was not quite whom he had thought.

This paper addresses Lewis’s understanding of the relationship between mythology and the Christian gospel concerning Christ. This relationship concerned Lewis throughout his life. Known as the author of such fictional works as *The Chronicles of Narnia*, or as the apologist who wrote defenses of the Christian faith like *Mere Christianity* and *Miracles*, Lewis worked most of his academic career as a literary scholar and critic, teaching English literature at Oxford throughout the 1930s and 40s and holding the Chair in Medieval and Renaissance Literature at Cambridge from 1954 until nearly before his death in 1963. He was well read in the classics of the Greco-Roman world, the writings of late antiquity—which includes the Fathers of the Christian church—the literary works of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and also with the

¹ C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* (New York: Mariner Books, 2012), 17.

plethora of Romantic authors from the 18th and 19th centuries.² His daily labor was as a scholar and a professor, and few within the American Evangelical context truly understand the nature of his thought in relation to his extensive education and voluminous bibliography of written works. It is my hope that this paper will help not only address the present concern but will also help shed light on the depth of Lewis's thought and increase appreciation for his work.

Lewis and the Question of Myth

Lewis was a man of two worlds. The first world was that of ancient pagan mythology and literature, which he became well acquainted with in his education. Though, it was in the second world of the Christian faith that he would find his home. After Lewis became a Christian, he studied the classic works of Christian doctrine and became familiar with theologians such as Augustine and Aquinas. Throughout his life, Lewis would continue to have a love for and an acute interest in pagan thought and mythology, while also staunchly holding onto the truth of the Christian faith, which he not only believed in, but also spilt a good deal of ink defending. Yet, these two fascinations never seems to have sounded a discord in Lewis, and he rather seems to have resolved this potential dissonance with a major chord. As a result of this harmonization, Lewis was never torn between these two loves, though there was no doubt as to which was the strongest. Instead, Lewis came to see in both pagan philosophy and pagan mythology an anticipation of Christ.³ In this paper, the primary concern is what Lewis thought about the relationship between mythology and the gospel (though he had his own thoughts on the relationship between philosophy and the gospel as well). My goal then is to show that *Lewis saw*

² Adam Barkman, *C.S. Lewis & Philosophy as a Way of Life* (Allentown, PA: Zossima Press, 2009), 21-65. This second chapter is titled 'Rational Discourse and Training,' and is extensive in its account of Lewis's education and his readings.

³ Lewis's first major publication after his conversion, *The Pilgrim's Regress: An Allegorical Apology for Christianity, Reason, and Romanticism*, 7th ed. (Glasgow: Robert Maclehose and Co. Ltd., 1950), which was published originally in 1933, already gives the essential picture Lewis had created in his mind concerning the relationship between paganism and Christianity.

*myths as stories that reveal God's nature partially and without reference in time and space; Lewis then saw the gospel as the "True Myth," in that it is a mythic story that reveals God's nature fully and in time and space.*⁴

This thesis requires some brief explanation before continuing onwards. To do this, the most important words and phrases found in the thesis statement will be briefly clarified while their meanings will then be resolved more fully within the body of the paper. With this, a brief summary of what is to come will be provided as well. First, Lewis's view on the *aspects* of mythology will be explored in chapter 1. What it means for myths to be *stories that reveal God's nature partially* will concern that portion of the paper. As for the exact notion of just what is a myth, it is difficult to pin down. Within the discipline of anthropology, a "myth" is generally considered a story that—as created, told, and received—serves a particular social role for providing a context for the place of individuals within that society and the place of the society within the larger *cosmos*. In other words, a myth is a narrative that is involved in interpreting the experience of reality on the part of those telling and hearing them. Now, of course, to provide a summary of the way mythology is often defined cannot address the controversies and nuances involved in such a definition, but, it is enough for the time being.⁵ Chapter 1, then, concerns

⁴ For the sake of conceptual clarity, this thesis statement involves two clauses with categories of *revelation* that bear explaining. The first one, *Lewis saw myths as stories that reveal God's nature partially and without reference in time and space*, concerns the category theologians refer to as *general revelation*. That is, that God has designed creation in such a way, and designed knowing human beings in such a way, that creation reveals to humanity God's nature (cf. Romans 1:19-20). The second clause, *Lewis then saw the gospel as the "True Myth," in that it is a mythic story that reveals God's nature fully and in time and space*, concerns the category of *special revelation*. That is, that *revelation* in which God has revealed himself as purposing to redeem humanity through Christ. *Special revelation* is considered to be distinct from *general revelation* in that *general revelation* is discovered within the "warp and woof" of creation as it has been since the first moment its existence and throughout all its processes and events, whereas *special revelation* comes by an extra act of God within creation that reveals knowledge concerning Himself both more fully and more distinctly from what could be known only from *general revelation*.

⁵ E.J. Witzel provides a short and comprehensive summary of the relatively uncontroversial definitions of mythology as a social phenomenon. *The Origins of the World's Mythologies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 7.

Lewis's own view of such stories. Chapter 2 will then explore the nature of the relationship between mythology and the gospel in Lewis's thought, which concerns the second clause of the thesis statement. What does it mean for the gospel to be the "*True Myth*"? To answer that question will not only reveal more concerning what Lewis thought about mythology, but it will also reveal more about what he thought about God's *nature* and God's self-revelation through Christ in the gospel: hence, the statement that the gospel *reveals God's nature fully and in time and space*. Indeed, in that statement the voice of ancient and modern orthodoxy is speaking, both in its theology and in its Christology. Yet, Lewis was somewhat unique with regards to the various ways in which he tied pagan mythology together with Christian truth. Though, he himself was not wholly without precedent in doing something like this, and that also will be examined in due course.⁶

Now, the purpose of coming to a better understanding of Lewis on this topic is to show that Lewis provides a working model and a useful example for developing a theological perspective on mythology that Evangelicals can take seriously. This is needed, since Evangelicals currently do not have much of a model or an example for such a perspective within their own ranks. Evangelicals have typically had neither the motivation nor the material for such a task.

Christians throughout history have often dismissed ancient mythology, so this dearth is not too surprising. Mythology has been portrayed by the Christian theologians of the past as demonic deception, as misguided, or simply as rebellious idolatry. And in the modern days, mythology has served as a category, or rather a made-up box, for liberal theologians to put scripture into,

⁶ If any individual thinkers apart from Lewis set the precedent for him in this line of thinking, it would have been G.K. Chesterton (1874-1936) and J.R.R. Tolkien. The influence of these men on Lewis will be discussed in chapters 1 and 2.

providing one more reason why modern-day Evangelicals do not pay much attention to the subject of mythology besides ensuring vehemently that scripture be proven not identical to mythology in any way. Thus, Evangelicals are not really concerned presently to understand what Lewis referred to as “myth became fact.”⁷ Kevin J. Vanhoozer describes the Evangelical perspective fairly well when he writes,

This phrase [myth became fact] has puzzled both critics and admirers as to its implications for his view of scripture. It also places Evangelicals, perhaps the group most responsible for Lewis’s popularity, in something of a quandary when it comes to scripture, for Evangelicals warm to ‘fact’ but sound the alarm over ‘myth.’⁸

Yet there are three reasons why it is important to address this subject. First, we live in a culture that holds to a strong pluralism that wishes to accept all beliefs and belief systems as pointing to the same *truth*, though a rather ill-defined *truth*.⁹ Second, along with pluralism is the tendency, characteristic of contemporary post-modernists, to prioritize narrative as a means for coming to know *truth* (or something like “truth” generally defined), displacing the modernists who enshrine *reason* and the use of dialectic. It is generally felt in some arenas of contemporary culture that something “deeper” about the world, or at least about being human in the world, is revealed by

⁷ C.S. Lewis, “Myth Became Fact,” in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins, 1970), 63-67.

⁸ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “On Scripture,” in *The Cambridge Companion to C.S. Lewis*, eds. Robert MacSwain and Michael Ward (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 75.

⁹ A good example of this is actually found in someone with whom Lewis would have had a profound disagreement. John Hick, “Jesus and the World Religions,” in *The Myth of God Incarnate* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977), 167-185. Hick was originally an orthodox Christian who became convinced that it is not possible that the good God of Christianity could exclude the majority of humanity from within his plan of redemption. Instead, he espoused a view that serves as a good representative for pluralism in general: that there is a “Absolute Reality upon which all perceived reality depends [169],” and that this “Absolute Reality” is revealed indeed in the “perceived reality,” and that Jesus is indeed a revelation of Absolute Reality, but he is not the only, or even the most valid revelation (167). Not only that, but Hick even held Lewis’s appreciation for mythology, writing, “a myth is a story which is told but which is not literally true, or an idea or image which is applied to someone or something but which does not literally apply, but which invites a particular attitude in its hearers. Thus, the truth of a myth is a kind of practical truth consisting in the appropriateness of the attitude to its object [178].” With this, Lewis would have been in agreement, but he would not have denied the actual incarnation as Hick did.

story as told in narrative. Finally, third, this tendency to prioritize narrative has also coincided with a certain strand of thought in the twentieth century which has attempted to find in mythology a revelation of the internal human *psyche*. Both Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung explored this line of thinking in the first half of the twentieth century.¹⁰ Joseph Campbell, inspired by Jung's ideas, developed a systematic way of thinking of mythic stories as representing the "Hero's journey" as he called it, presenting to the contemporary culture the "Mono-myth."¹¹ And this, indeed, is as close as twentieth century academia came to creating a kind of self-conscious metanarrative as opposed to rejecting nearly every other one.¹² But this metanarrative concerns not the destiny of the *cosmos*, but of the individual, who must strive to reach psychological wholeness and completion.¹³ Ironically, this view is itself a consequence of a line of thought that runs straight from the individualism and rational self-interest of the Enlightenment to the present day, but it ends up resting its claims not in rational discourse concerning the *nature* of the world and of morality, but in narratives that are birthed from within the inner *psyche*. Somehow, this inner voice is the wisdom of nature calling to the individual from dark depths, granting them the path to fulfilment.¹⁴ So, pluralism, a prioritization of

¹⁰ Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1965). Freud began this tendency in modern psychology to study ancient myth on the basis of psychological theory, and to apply the interpretation of myth to psycho-therapy. Jung would end up being most well-known for this approach, though his model of the mind was quite different: Carl Jung, *Analytical Psychology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969).

¹¹ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 3rd ed. (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2008).

¹² Most of the other metanarratives of the Western modern world were birthed earlier. Enlightenment progressivism or historicism in the 18th century, and Marxism in the 19th (an outgrowth of the former) to name a couple.

¹³ Joseph Campbell, "Mythological Themes in Creative Art and Literature," in *Myth, Dreams, and Religions* (New York: Viking, 1971), 138-175.

¹⁴ Ibid. Campbell gives his idea of why this must be the case for the psychology of the human being: No other animal endures such a long period of dependency on its parents. And then, suddenly, at a certain point in life, which varies, according to the culture, from, say, twelve to about twenty years of age, the child is expected to become an adult, and his whole psychological system, which has been tuned and trained to dependency, is now required to respond to the challenges of life in the way of responsibility. For Campbell, mythic narrative functions to spark and guide psychological development. Myths are born from within the mind and then told by the elders, who have already gone through the growth process, back to the young so that the young can become mature like the elders are.

narrative, and an increased interest in mythology as a path to self-understanding and self-fulfillment (called here “the need for individuation”) all create an environment in which it is essential for Evangelical theologians to gain a framework from which to respond to these present concerns. It is not enough to respond with just the classic doctrines of the faith put in classical terms, though this is where theologians must begin and, in some sense, never end. Yet, there must also be an appreciation for the insight provided by these three contemporary concerns, and even a kind of proper appropriation of them. This appropriation must not so much be a taking in of such ideas wholesale, but rather a renewed analysis of the *truth* of the gospel in relation to all else that is known. Theologians need to be as eager and equipped to think about these questions as their “opponents” are. Side by side, perhaps, some understanding can be reached. Evangelical theologians have been merely foes too often of their secular counter-parts, who make up much of the academic intelligentsia (regardless of how necessary it might sometimes be to be foes).

Thus, following the first two chapters, which will explain Lewis’s viewpoint on mythology and its relationship with the gospel, chapters 3 and 4 will take up the relationship between Lewis’s thought and Evangelical theology. First, it is necessary to show that Lewis’s perspective of mythology is compatible with both classic Christian theology and contemporary Evangelical theology. Chapter three will, thus, put Lewis in context within both ancient and modern theology. In particular, Augustine, with whom Lewis was quite familiar, will provide the primary dialogue partner for Lewis in lieu of the ancient context. Next, Rudolf Bultmann, a contemporary of Lewis, will represent modern liberal theology in relation to Lewis’s thought. More space must then go to considering, in relation to Lewis, the theology of Carl F.H. Henry, who in many ways is *the* genius of Evangelical theology. All this will lay the groundwork for chapter 4, which will

help show how Lewis can lead the way for contemporary Evangelical theologians to address the concerns of the contemporary context on the basis of their own inherent priorities.

Literature Review

The purpose of this section is to review the categories of literature that were studied in researching this paper. Not every work will be analyzed or even mentioned, but certain authors and certain works will be spotlighted. More than anything, the purpose of this portion of the paper is to help provide an idea of the method by which the different categories of literature were read and studied, and how they are important to the present work.

Lewis's works

Before going on to provide an account of Lewis's bibliography, it will be useful to establish a hermeneutical point. There are many methods and schools of interpretation in the world. Among such schools of interpretation, there are those who go down feminist, Marxist, and Freudian trails. None of these will be tried here upon Lewis. Lewis himself would have hated something like that. Though, he would not have hated good literary analysis, as Lewis was by profession a literary scholar and critic. Most of the exegesis in this paper will concern Lewis's academic works, but some of his literature (poetry, fiction, etc.) will find its way into the content here and there. Of Lewis's literature there needs to be a more careful consideration in regard to his ideas concerning mythology in *The Pilgrim's Regress*,¹⁵ *The Ransom trilogy* (specifically *Perelandra*¹⁶), and *Till We Have Faces*.¹⁷ Lewis's poetry has not been incorporated to any great

¹⁵ Lewis, *The Pilgrim's Regress*.

¹⁶ C.S. Lewis, *Perelandra* (New York: Scribner, 1996).

¹⁷ C.S. Lewis, *Till We Have Faces: A Myth Retold* (New York: HarperOne, 2012).

extent into this research unfortunately, but still in small part. Outside of this small body of fiction and poetry, it is mostly Lewis's non-fictional and generally academic works that will be referred to in order to determine both the development and the maturity of Lewis's understanding of mythology's relation to *truth*.

If the interpretative intentions of this research could be defined by any method, it would be that referred to by the term *critical realism*. That is a technical term, but for the moment it will be translated as simply meaning that when an author intends to mean something and communicates it sufficiently, then that meaning can be understood, provided the context is also grasped. Fortunately for the reader, Lewis lacks for no clarity—he wastes no time confusing his audience as to his intentions or meaning. And when Lewis realizes something might just be confusing, he slows down and even lets the reader in on the problem, not in condescension, but as if he were letting you in upon a secret hard won—he is like reading a literary grandfather, or talking to a good friend.

What follows will be a brief account of the central works in the Lewis corpus that have been relevant to this research. It is unnecessary and impossible, as well as likely unhelpful, to provide an account of all that was read of Lewis. Yet some works should be addressed here, attached to some historical hints at the progression of Lewis's ideas within this chosen selection.

The Pilgrim's Regress, published in 1933, was written in 1932, only a year after Lewis's conversion. It represents the way in which Lewis summed up his vision of the relationship between the gospel, philosophy, and mythology, as well as resolving the tension lying between rationalism and romanticism (the subtitle to the book is *An Allegorical Apology for Christianity, Reason, and Romanticism*). I think this represents his, at that time, matured understanding of his

reading of Chesterton's *The Everlasting Man*,¹⁸ which Lewis first read around late 1925 or early 1926.¹⁹ Chesterton first awoke in Lewis an awareness of the relationship that just might stand between the pagan myths and Christ. It took about seven years, as well as becoming a Christian, for these ideas to bear fruit. Lewis already indicated in his letter of October 18th, 1931 to Arthur Greeves, the basic outline of his thoughts about the relationship between mythology and the gospel, written only within weeks of his conversion (no doubt very thoughtful weeks).²⁰

The Allegory of Love,²¹ published in 1936, was Lewis's first major academic publication. In this work, Lewis deals much with the relationship between the categories of allegory, mythology, and symbol. Lewis had been writing this book since the mid-1920s. By the time he finished it about ten years had passed, and he had gone from being an idealist to a Christian. It is useful since, in it, Lewis deals carefully with the relationship between mythology in poetic form and *language*.

In 1939, Lewis published, in a collection called *Rehabilitations*, the essay "Bluspels and Flalansferes: A Semantic Nightmare."²² Its primary theme is the relationship between meaning and metaphor, as well as the relationship between meaning/metaphor and reality. In it, Lewis's views of *language* and its metaphorical *nature* is explored, setting the background of the stage for the forefront of Lewis's ideas about mythology's *origin* articulated elsewhere.

Perelandra is the second book of Lewis's *Ransom Trilogy*. The unity of history and mythology is a major theme in *Perelandra*. It was published in April of 1943—a chronological fact of some

¹⁸ G.K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2007).

¹⁹ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 223-224.

²⁰ C.S. Lewis, "To A. Greeves, October 18, 1931," in *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis: Volume I* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2004), 975-977. Some of the relevant text of this letter will be given in the second chapter.

²¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love*, Canto Classics ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

²² C.S. Lewis, "Bluspels and Flalansferes: A Semantic Nightmare," in *Rehabilitations* (Philadelphia: Richard West, 1939): 133-158.

importance given what followed over the next two years. About a year later, beginning with “Transposition,”²³ Lewis would write a number of articles on the relationship between theology and mythology, and of both with reality.

“Transposition,”—a title whose metaphor comes from music—was published in May of 1944. This also came out about the same time as the essay “Myth Became Fact.”²⁴ In it, Lewis is concerned about the relationships that exist between “lower” and “higher” orders of reality, or *being*. Lewis addresses the relationship between emotion and physical sensation, between a physical thing and its artistic representation, and, most importantly, between created *nature* and the divine *nature*. Of course, the Incarnation is always implicit in this essay and then finally discussed explicitly at one brief point.²⁵ Though Lewis does not address the topic directly, the way in which the gospel might possibly relate to mythology as a human phenomenon can be at least glimpsed through this essay.

“Myth Became Fact” was published in September of 1944. And though published a year after *Perelandra*, it does carry the theme of history and mythology being intertwined things to further lengths. A passage from the book will serve as a lynchpin in the fourth chapter.

“Is Theology Poetry?,”²⁶ was published in November of that same year, 1944. It concerns the nature of religious language. In it, Lewis discusses what the relationship between “poetic” language and “theological” language is. By implication, he is also discussing what kind of

²³ C.S. Lewis, “Transposition,” in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (New York: HarperOne, 2001): 91-115.

²⁴ Lewis, “Myth Became Fact,” 63-67.

²⁵ Lewis, “Transposition,” 112-113. “I have found it impossible, in thinking of what I call Transposition, not to ask myself whether it may help us to conceive the Incarnation.”

²⁶ C.S. Lewis, “Is Theology Poetry?” in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (New York: HarperOne, 2001): 116-140.

relationship mythology and theology share. Poetry and mythology (by their relationship to the concept of metaphor) are often treated parallel to one another by Lewis, even if they are not equated with each other at every point.

“The Grand Miracle”²⁷ was an essay published in April of 1945. Only about five months after publishing “Is Theology Poetry,” Lewis wrote this article that explores much the same arena as “Myth Became Fact.” But whereas the latter concerns mythology as the model for understanding the Incarnation (which is more than mythology not less) the former focuses on the necessity of the supernatural in the gospel. In it, Lewis provides some of his most poignant descriptions of the gospel in relation to pagan myths. Nowhere else do we get such a vision for what ways that humanity’s mythology might anticipate the reality of the gospel.

This period, from 1943 to 1945, seems to have been a fruitful one for Lewis’s thinking on the *nature* of mythology and its relation to theology. The resolution he had reached by publishing *the Pilgrim’s Regress* in 1933 bore fruit again ten years later. I would say that the writing of *Perelandra* sparked this interest again and kept it alight for the next two years. Lewis would then start publishing the Narnia books in 1950, five years later, which were his own myths or fairy tales. He would have written all except two when he published *Surprised by Joy* in 1955. In *Surprised by Joy*, the central thread follows the course of Lewis’s thought, within the context of the narrative of his own life leading up to his conversion, on the relationship between *truth* and mythology, and between *reason* and *imagination*. It represents not so much mature thought, but rather mature reflection upon his own thinking. In it, Lewis Contemplates rather than Enjoys his

²⁷ C.S. Lewis, “The Grand Miracle,” in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins, 1970): 80-88.

life.²⁸ In January of 1956, *Till We Have Faces* would be published, followed by, in September of that year, *The Last Battle*,²⁹ the last of the *Narnia* Chronicles. This marks the end of the most significant works I can find on mythology and its relationship to reality in Lewis's bibliography. Though he did publish in November of that same year the essay "Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What's To Be Said,"³⁰ as a kind of capstone to his *Narnia* series. And in 1961 he published *An Experiment in Criticism*, which has a chapter entitled "On Myth."³¹

It is also necessary to mention a couple of figures who had some say, if not influence, in Lewis's own thinking about mythology. The first is Owen Barfield, whose *Poetic Diction*,³² published in 1928, held and proposed ideas that Lewis sympathized with. The second is J.R.R. Tolkien, whose nighttime conversation with Lewis—on September 19, 1931—and their mutual friend, Hugo Dyson, was the catalyst that led to Lewis's conversion. And that conversation was upon the topic at hand, the relationship between mythology and reality, myths and *truth*. Tolkien's essay, "On Fairy-stories," represents best Tolkien's own views on the matter, and thus serves as an interpretative fulcrum from which to understand him.³³ The term "true myth," if it came from anyone other than Lewis himself, came not immediately from Lewis or his musings on Chesterton, but from Tolkien (though the idea was first sown by Chesterton).

²⁸ A reference to Samuel Alexander's technical terms *Enjoyment* and *Contemplation*, a philosopher who influenced Lewis's thinking somewhat. *Surprised by Joy*, 217-221. The book Lewis read that gave him these terms was Samuel Alexander, *Space, Time, and Deity* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1979).

²⁹ C.S. Lewis, *The Last Battle* (New York: HarperCollins, 1956).

³⁰ C.S. Lewis, "Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What's To Be Said," in *Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories* (New York: Harcourt, 1936): 35-38.

³¹ C.S. Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961).

³² Owen Barfield, *Poetic Diction: A Study in Meaning* (Middletown, CN: Wesleyan University Press, 1973).

³³ J.R.R. Tolkien, "On Fairy-stories," in *The Tolkien Reader* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1966): 29-99.

Lewis Scholarship

There is a variety of secondary literature that was read for this research. Most of it narrowed in upon the topic at hand, or topics closely relevant to it. There has been much written about Lewis, and Lewis scholars are by no means unfamiliar with analyzing Lewis's thought with regards to mythology. Though, one thing I have noted is that most Lewis scholars say much the same thing as each other when they are attempting to summarize Lewis's views on mythology, particularly when they are discussing his idea of the gospel being *True Myth*. Of those read, the two scholars to consider this idea in Lewis most comprehensively are Adam Barkman and P.H. Brazier. Both of these authors were read early on in the research process and helped me work out what questions to ask in the early stages of reading and formulating thesis statements *ad nauseam*.

Barkman helped in understanding Lewis's broader views on the *nature* of mythology. His work *C.S. Lewis as Philosopher: Philosophy as a Way of Life*³⁴ is one of the most impressive tomes on Lewis published. One helpful distinction that Barkman makes is that he clarifies that for Lewis mythology (though an extra-mental reality) is not a Platonic form. This, though Barkman identifies Lewis as a Neo-Platonist (even if that is a somewhat broad-brush stroke to paint with). Yet, according to Barkman, for Lewis mythology was a "concrete universal" rather than a Platonic form strictly speaking.³⁵ The best way to understand the idea of a "concrete universal," is to think of the analogy of *time and space* (not an analogy Barkman uses): both are

³⁴ Barkman, *C.S. Lewis & Philosophy as a Way of Life*.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 101. So Barkman writes, "First, we must distinguish Myth from myth. On the one hand, Myth with a capital 'M' is part of Reality itself; it is a true aspect of God's concrete nature.... On the other hand, myth with a lowercase 'm' flows from Myth as an imperfect copy does from the perfect original; hence, a myth is a particular story or a series of stories (mythology) which prophets and poets capture in their imaginations and embody in literature." Though Barkman does use the term "concrete universal" with reference to the absolute idealism that Lewis held to during the last half of the 1920's, he does not explain, in technical detail, what that connection precisely is. He does explain what he means by a "concrete universal" though: to quote, "... Myth is processed as a myth or a concrete universal, which has the quality of all universals yet in order for it to remain myth and not merely a universal, it must remain incarnate in a complex particular form... [*Ibid.*, 103]."

“everywhere” and “always,” yet they are not abstract and separate from the concrete physical world but are exemplified concretely wherever and whenever physical reality is. But Barkman states that according to Lewis “Myth” is primarily a theological reality—it is an aspect of God’s own *nature*; and a myth reveals something about God’s *nature*, more or less, depending upon the conditions of the making, telling and receiving of the myth.

Brazier more than any other author helped to define the epistemology Lewis held as to how mythology comes to be known by human beings, and what the epistemic relation is between divine *revelation* as given in scripture and in Christ and that as given in mythology.³⁶ A reading of Lewis will reveal pretty clearly that Lewis did believe that pagan mythology, ultimately, had its source in God’s self-revelation through the Holy Spirit, and Brazier helps outline this aspect of Lewis’s perspective.³⁷

Theological works

In chapter 3, the ancient theologian considered is Augustine, whose *Confessions*³⁸ and *The City of God*³⁹ will be referred to primarily. Augustine represents the common view of pagan mythology held by the ancient church and the Fathers: that it was either simply human error or demonic deception. The modern theologians, represented by Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976), demonstrate a different way of interpreting mythology. Bultmann’s work on the New Testament and the project of demythologization which he pioneered represented the tendency within liberal theology to attempt to categorize scripture as a myth, in particular the Gospels.⁴⁰ This would end up being the position ardently opposed by Evangelical theologians. Thus, finally, Carl Henry will

³⁶ P.H. Brazier, *C.S. Lewis – The Work of Christ Revealed* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012).

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 249.

³⁸ Augustine, *Confessions: Books 1-8*, translated by Carolyn J.B. Hammond (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

³⁹ Augustine, *The City of God* (Overland Park, KS: Digireads.com Publishing, 2009).

⁴⁰ Rudolf Bultmann, “New Testament and Mythology,” in *New Testament and Mythology and Other Basics Writings* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 1-43.

be the Evangelical interlocutor with the position Lewis espouses. Henry represents Evangelicalism, in that Evangelicalism has likely never gone further than Henry on the question of what to say about mythology or how to understand it from a theological perspective. His volumes in *God, Revelation, and Authority* will be the sources referenced in that discussion.⁴¹

Academic works on mythology

In chapter 1, where mythology is discussed, and Lewis is set in context with the academic study of mythology, there are a few sources used that help flesh out this arena of thought. For technical data and information on mythology, as well as for help laying out the basic viewpoints there are on the origins and worldwide spread of mythology, E.J. Witzel's book *The Origins of the World's Mythologies* was the main source.⁴² Witzel has a particular thesis he is arguing for in that book, and, while fascinating, that is not why his book is featured in this review and it is irrelevant to the task at hand. He simply proves helpful as a specialist upon the subject.

For historical context, mostly Max Muller will be referred to. He was an Oxford scholar in the 19th century. Muller preceded Lewis's tenure at Oxford, as well as the tenure of Andrew Lang, another student of folklore and mythology at the University. Muller and Lang were a part of that first generation of scholars who worked at studying mythology and folktale from a scientific perspective and with a scientific viewpoint.

Terms

This last section of the introduction is made necessary by the need for a consistent use of certain terms that should each be clarified before going any further. The terms defined below are my own at points. Nevertheless, they were made to make sense of discussing Lewis's thought on

⁴¹ Carl F.H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 6 vols. (Waco, TX: World Books, 1976-1983).

⁴² Witzel, *The Origins of the World's Mythologies*.

mythology. Yet a justification for each definition does seem necessary. Most of the ideas, implicit or explicit, found within these definitions will be worked out later on in the course of the paper.

1. The “*True Myth*” means the gospel as mythical. It is ultimately flows from the person of Christ himself, the *logos*, as will be seen. It also corresponds to the whole meaningful historical narrative of creation, fall, and redemption and, in it, the particular story of the Incarnation, which is the birth, the life, the death, and the resurrection of Christ, which, though being temporally a part rather than a whole of this narrative, nonetheless comprehends the former.
2. “mythical” means a certain quality found in a story, or within anything in reality—something that has certain internal qualities and so brings about certain mental effects upon knowers of that thing. Stories for Lewis tend to exist on a “spectrum of myth,” sometimes being more mythical, sometimes less so. One story can be more mythical overall than another, and sometimes one part of a story can be more mythical and the rest less so.
3. “mythology” means the phenomenon in human history of making myths and telling them and of them having a certain effect on their receivers, individually and socially.
 - i. When specified, “mythology” can also mean a certain culture’s web of stories that form a whole network of meaning in conjunction with each other. This probably should be distinguished from “folk tale” or “folk tales,” which are somewhat different from the mythology of a culture. Individual folk tales may be connected with one another, or they may not be. They also might relate in some way to the mythology of a culture, but

usually in an indirect way – perhaps a character from within the wider mythology appears in a folk tale.

- ii. “mythology” could also refer to the sum-total of the mythologies found throughout various cultures, in the past and the present.
4. “myth” and “myths” are the individual stories that form a mythology. Typically, these stories would be high on the “spectrum of myth.” Though, no human-told myth has ever been fully “mythical,” since the perfect end of that spectrum is only exemplified in the *True Myth*. Without committing the fallacy of composition, it can be stated that since no merely human myth is perfectly mythical, then no human mythology is perfectly mythical.
5. “the question of myth” is a technical phrase in this paper that refers to the discussion throughout history, articulated in the first chapter, concerning the *nature* of mythology and its importance for understanding *truth*.
6. “the study of myth” is a bit of a confusing term for this reason. Often, the term “mythology” has been used as the technical term for the discipline of studying myths. Yet it has also been used in sense (3) above. I have thought it best to resolve the problem by simply calling the academic discipline “the study of myth” even though it is somewhat arbitrary, even awkward, but this usage avoids local ambiguity.⁴³ Also, any individual in this discipline will be referred to as a “mythologist.”

⁴³ In one place, Lewis himself recognizes this ambiguity which is inherent in such terms, writing: Suppose that a conversation which we overhear contains the remark ‘I’m afraid Jones’s psychology will be his undoing’. Most of us, I suppose, would take this to mean that the state of his *psyche* will endanger his success and happiness. But suppose we then discover the conversation is between two examiners; that Jones is a candidate in the examination; and that psychology is one of the three subjects in which he is being examined. The remark might now bear a different meaning—that Jones, having done fairly well on the other two subjects, had ruined his chances of the prize by his bad work on psychology. In other words,

Chapter 1: Lewis and the Question of Myth

The following chapter will explain the meaning of and argue for the truth of the first half of the thesis statement: *Lewis saw myths as stories that reveal God's nature partially and without reference in time and space*. To begin this task, the question of myth as an intellectual problem in the Western tradition must first be understood. The question of myth is to ask what the relationship between mythology and *truth* is: whether myths tell truths or falsehoods (or at least partially true), whether they are insignificant or significant. It is a question that Lewis was well aware of and also attempted to answer intentionally. The question of myth was first asked, in Western history, among the Pre-Socratic Greek philosophers, and since then it has been asked time and again to this day. Both the original ancient context in which the question of myth first arose, as well as the modern context, which contained Lewis's own cultural environment, provide the overall context in which Lewis's own answer to this question can be fully understood.

To call upon a metaphor, it will be helpful to think of this chapter as resembling a painted picture of Lewis, in which Lewis is in the foreground, but behind him and framing him are his relevant contexts. His immediate context, the ways in which mythology was being studied and analyzed in the academic settings of the 19th and 20th centuries (particularly in Oxford) frames Lewis within the cultivated garden of his own modern intellectual surroundings. The ancient context is the wider landscape that frames Lewis and his academic context within a larger world, the world which gave Lewis both the myths and the question of their truthfulness and their significance.

psychology is the name both of a science and of the things (or even one specimen of the things) which that science studies. [*Studies in Words*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 19-20]

The Ancient Context

That, I say, is the best: never to have known the quarrel between the Rules and the pictures. – *The Pilgrim's Regress*, book eight, chapter eight

The wider landscape which frames Lewis is the long discussion in the Western tradition surrounding the question of myth. Western civilization first became aware of this question *circa* the sixth century BC around the Aegean Sea among the ancient Greeks. This query arose out of an awareness of mythology which had not existed up until that time, and it concerned the relationship of mythology to what have often been called the transcendentals of *truth*, *goodness*, and *beauty*. Put simply—what is the relationship between mythology and reality? Awareness of such things as the transcendentals—the properties of *being*—was also fresh to the Greek philosophers, and that freshness then grew into a new self-awareness about what was said in *language* concerning the world around them. It would be fair to say that the ancient peoples (here, e.g. the Greeks) were very much defined by their religion, which itself was composed of two things.⁴⁴ First, there was the *praxis* of its ritual—the priests, the temples, the sacrifices, the daily habits of relating to the gods in prayers and offerings, etc. Second, there was the *speech* of its mythology. The priest, when sacrificing a bull in a silent (humanly speaking) display, went from ritual to mythology the moment he opened his mouth in prayer to the gods. All of what was

⁴⁴ Here is a general outline of religion that has been heuristically helpful in writing this paper. It is very simplified and seems uncontroversial over the broad scope of how religion is described by various schools of thought. Religion is the way human beings relate to reality as a whole thing, rather than relating to it in daily private and public life according to its partial presence (though religion has most often not been separated from the concerns of daily life). Not only is this way of living meaningful in itself, but it also provides meaning for the rest of human activity. It is comprised of two things: ritual and mythology. All human activity, when it is consciously intended, even if informed by unconscious causes, takes the form of *praxis*, or meaningful action. Properly distinguished but not separable from *praxis* is *speech*, which, by definition, is meaningful and is the act of communicating with *language*. Both *praxis* and *speech* nourish each other with meaning. Thus, ritual is the *praxis* of religion and mythology is the *speech*. Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* is a familiar work that provides a variety of useful ways of thinking about mythology and its relation to religion, even if its conclusions are not subsequently to be adopted. For a work on the origin of religion that would have influenced Lewis, see Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958).

said about the gods was mythological. This means that whatever was said about the gods made sense only within the given context of certain narratives within which the gods and their relation to humanity and the world were understood.⁴⁵

When the ancient Greeks first set out upon the discipline of philosophy—often said to begin with Thales of Miletus in the sixth century BC—they began a process by which the *speech* of philosophy (which is dialectic) would replace the *speech* of religion (which is mythology) at least in the minds of the philosophical. And once dialectic replaced mythology, then the *speech* of mythology and the *praxis* of ritual died on the vine of symbolism. The ritual and the myth, to the philosopher, became only symbols, or partial representations, of something else—the true divine *nature* or history made legend.⁴⁶ Sometimes, as in the case of Xenophanes (c. 570 BC-480 BC), there was a rejection of nearly all mythology (the stories of the gods as told by the poets) as being anything other than being a web of lies and falsehoods. It is not that the Pre-Socratic philosophers (necessarily) rejected the gods' existence or the significance or the reality of the divine, but they did believe that the way to come to know about the divine *nature* was through *reason* in the mind and dialectic in *language* rather than through the myths.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ E.J. Witzel, the Wales professor of Sanskrit at Harvard University, offers a seven-fold definition of myth that is not too dogmatic and can be helpful here—only a couple of the definitions will be quoted:

A comprehensive definition. . . would define myth as a narrative: that is told or recited at certain special occasions. . . that is considered by its owners to be of great and enduring significance. . . and that is therefore a powerful device to create collectively underpinned meaning and collectively recognized truth (regardless of whether such truth would be recognized outside the community whose myth it is). [*The Origin of the World's Mythologies*, 7]

⁴⁶ Xenophanes is an example of wanting to see religion, both the myth and the ritual, confined to speaking in an appropriate symbolical way of the divine *nature*. Euhemerus (4th to 3rd century BC) is an example of defining mythology as embellished history, essentially legends about great men.

⁴⁷ This early philosophy itself arose out of a concern about *being*, or what *is*, and what the world is made of. This led to multiple opinions about what the world is composed of and what the fundamental things of the world are and how many—whether fire, or water, or earth, or air, or many of such together, etc. And, in the case of Parmenides (6th to 5th centuries BC), it simply became a concern about *being* in a purely rational concept of existence. A variety of viewpoints begs the question about which among the views is true. Thus, a concern about *being* ended up precipitating a concern about *truth*. And this concern itself precipitated in its turn a concern about *language*, since, it is impossible to begin to use logic and argument to discover which views concerning *being* are true and not at the same time become self-aware about the very thing used to distinguish the true from the false. It was noted before that mythology is a kind of *speech*, which is *language* as it is used socially, and that philosophy, in

One concrete example of this conflict and the tension it created is found in book ten of Plato's *Republic*, a passage that Lewis would have been familiar with. In it, Plato's Socrates argues against poetry and "poets" having a place in the ideal city which Socrates is describing.⁴⁸ Plato has Socrates make two cases against the poets. First, Socrates states that poetry is an imitation of an imitation, thrice removed from the real thing. A physical thing in the world is an imperfect representation of a Form, to which it partially conforms within the world of matter. The poet tells a story and talks about fictional things; thus, mimicking what is already an imitation. The goal of human life is to come to a knowledge of what is real, which is to come to an understanding of the Forms. Poets make the mistake of fleeing in the opposite direction. The second objection Socrates gives is that poetry causes people to mimic certain passions that should rather not be exercised. To engage in pleasure or pain in the poetic is to experience an imitation of the same kind of experience in the actual course of life. Thus, the stories of poets can hinder the development of virtue, which concerns the cultivation of the passions. There is then both an epistemic and an ethical argument that Plato gives against the poet, the teller of myths. And, in conclusion, Socrates gives what is probably the best summation possible of the history of the dealings between philosophy and mythology throughout history:

Well, these points I wanted to recall to complete our justification for wishing to banish poetry from the city, such being its nature. The argument forces us. But let us say to her, lest she damn us as coarse and philistine, that there is an old quarrel between poetry and philosophy: I could quote a lot of passages for that.⁴⁹

its turn, has the *speech* of dialectic, which has a different form and a different effect upon the mind. Thus, another question rises up from the past here, the question of *truth*, which is really a question about the relationship of the words of *language* to *being*. This triad of concerns—over *being*, *truth*, and *language*—would preoccupy Lewis throughout his life and his philosophical development. His insight into the *aspects* of mythology after his conversion became the way in which he could address these concerns, as will be shown below.

⁴⁸ Plato is not merely leveling an argument against the poets who told and sung stories about the gods, but also against the playwrights who told stories equally as injurious to the virtue of the ideal city.

⁴⁹ This "old quarrel" was not much older than a century when Plato wrote this. It is a far older quarrel now. Aristotle, *Poetics*, translator Anthony Kenny (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1-14.

Thus, the ancient philosophers began to ask the question of myth as a result of beginning in the discipline of philosophy. In almost every case, if the question is addressed at all, their answer was a rejection of mythology as either rationally untrue or ethically detrimental.

Lewis fits into this background not simply because he asked the same question of myth, but because he knew that the ancients asked it. His education was grounded in the classics, both in his early education and university training.⁵⁰ Yet Lewis also fed on ancient myths all his life through his readings—most of all on the Greek, Celtic, and Norse myths.⁵¹ Lewis was able to mirror the situation of the ancients by being steeped in mythology like them,⁵² and engaging in philosophical thought likewise. In this, Lewis can be thought of as a kind of microcosm of the Western tradition, as it has questioned its own mythology by dialectic. Thus, the narrative of Lewis's life is the story of the reconciliation of two arenas—the use of *language* in philosophy, which Lewis associated with *reason*, and the use of *language* in mythology, which Lewis associated with the *imagination*. No attempt at a compromise of this sort was made in the ancient world, and it remains to be seen how much of it was attempted in the modern.

The Modern Context

. . . till recently the Northern people had been made to learn the languages of Pagus “and that meant,” said the Guide, “that at least they started no further from the light than the old Pagans themselves and had therefore the chance to come at last to Mother Kirk. But

⁵⁰ Lewis was tutored by William T. Kirkpatrick from 1914 through 1917. While there, Lewis records reading and being tutored in both the mythological and philosophical classics of the ancient world (*Surprised by Joy*, 132-181). He would then take exams at Oxford and get a First in Honour Moderations (a study of Greek and Latin literature) in 1920, and a First in Greats in 1922. Lewis refers to this in *Surprised by Joy*, 201.

⁵¹ “If Christianity is only a mythology, then I find the mythology I believe in is not the one I like best. I like Greek mythology much better, Irish better still, Norse best of all.” Lewis, “Is Theology Poetry,” 119.

⁵² “I have been reading poems, romances, vision-literature, legends, myths all my life. I know what they are like.” C.S. Lewis, “Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism,” in *Christian Reflections* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 191.

now they are cutting themselves off even from that roundabout route.” – *The Pilgrim’s Regress*, book ten, chapter six

It is appropriate, for more reasons than one, to pick up again the historical timeline in the 19th century. The first reason is that Lewis was born at the end of this century, and so it is nearer to him chronologically and foundational for him culturally. The second reason is because, on a greater historical map, the time of the ancient Greek philosophers and the time of the rise of the historical disciplines in the 19th century are truly the two great parallel eras in which concern over the question of myth arose. Before the former of these two eras and in between them there are no other periods that compare to them, and our own is still under the influence of the latter.

Following the Enlightenment, which was a grand attempt to enthrone rational thought, the 19th century began its own grand attempt at historical thought. If the Enlightenment had re-appropriated (by their accounting) the guide of *reason*, then the scholars of the 19th century were busy about following the guide (in their own various ways). Hume’s influence and Kant’s model were driven deep into the minds of European academics, and this resulted in the great emphasis set upon empirical research that reigned during that century.⁵³ The study of history by means of the evidences of the past became the established practice of academia, even supplanting the reign of philosophy and its abstractions. Questions about the origins of humanity, religion, and *language* then took the throne. The arenas of knowledge which studied these subjects—

⁵³ Hume’s emphasis on sense perception as the basis for knowledge provided the need to prioritize empirical research. Kant’s division between a thing as it is (the *noumenal*) and a thing as it appears (the *phenomenal*) then provided the framework in which to set aside metaphysics (i.e. philosophy, classically understood) for the sake of empirical knowledge. Alistair McGrath writes about this period that “The Enlightenment proposed a rationalizing counter-narrative to its mythological antecedents, in effect dismissing the contemporary relevance of the category of myth on rhetorical as much as rational grounds.” *The Intellectual World of C.S. Lewis* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 56.

comparative religion, comparative philology, comparative mythology, etc.—all became established disciplines within this period.⁵⁴

The academics of the 19th century stood in sharp contrast to the ancients not so much at the foundation of their thinking, but instead in the structure of their thinking. The question was still asked of myth—what is mythology’s relation to reality? What measure of truthfulness does it have if any? But, at that time, there developed a nearly singular focus upon the task of attempting to deduce the historical origins of mythology. This had also been attempted in the ancient world, Euhemerus being the original mythologist of this sort. But the ancients did not have comparative studies. And, just like a comparative study of language—in this case, the similarities between ancient Greek and Sanskrit—had led to the discovery of the Indo-European language, so perhaps a comparative study of mythology might also yield the *origin* of myth, or perhaps the original mythology. Thus, the first question asked by the age of historicism was: how did mythology begin?⁵⁵

It would be impossible to provide even a sufficient overview of the scholarship that developed in these areas of study at that time. The goal of this part of the chapter will be merely to provide the aspects of this context relevant to a study of Lewis. To do this, something of how the study of myth came to be a concern at Lewis’s *Alma Mater* and teaching post at Oxford University must be sketched.

⁵⁴ All the comparative studies look for evidence of the development of their subject through time by comparing its elements in chronological order.

⁵⁵ The term “historicism” is taken, at least here, from an essay by Lewis titled “Historicism,” in *Christian Reflections* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967): 124-140.

Most of the academic disciplines in the comparative studies began in Germany and, from there, were appropriated by academia in other nations. Representing this pattern, Max Muller, a German born philologist, came to England to study and teach at Oxford in 1850. He was involved in the comparative study of religion, *language*, and mythology. And, though he was skilled in each of these areas, he managed to not get bogged down in the quickly growing pile of particulars which were overflowing in these disciplines. Instead, Muller became a great synthesizer of ideas derived from within the great mass of data being gathered by various researchers. Muller is, thus, one of the most important academic figures for understanding the comparative studies of the 19th century. The coming of Muller to Oxford began a century long investigation into understanding mythology and its origins within the University, and there is no evidence that this interest had even begun to rise above the horizon of concern at the institution before Muller's arrival.⁵⁶

Over the course of the three quarters of a century that passed between Muller's arrival and Lewis's arrival at Oxford, other scholars would feature prominently in the study of myth among the faculty. Andrew Lang, the Scottish poet and collector of fairy-tales, was one such mythologist at the University. Lang pursued comparative mythology, as well as going on to compile a plethora of folk tales. Later, J.R.R. Tolkien, though not technically a mythologist (or a gatherer of folk tales) would rely upon the memory and influence of Lang in his own work.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ McGrath provides some more context for understanding this shift:

Oxford University was the center of intensive reflection on the nature of myth in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As we noted earlier, cultural interest in comparative mythology had its origins in Germany during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, and is linked with the cultural history of the period—such as in aesthetic sympathies for classical Greek culture, and its dominant historical narrative of progress from superstition to reason. There is little evidence of serious interest in these questions at Oxford, until the arrival of Max Muller (1823-1900). [*The Intellectual World of C.S. Lewis*, 57-58]

⁵⁷ Tolkien refers to Lang's *The Blue Book*, a collection of folk tales, in his essay "On Fairy-stories." It is apparent that Lang's work was a useful source for Tolkien's own reading of fairy story. Although, part of the reason

Mythology in this context was considered in terms of its historical *origin*, and this led to questions concerning its *function* and its *nature*.⁵⁸ On the severer side of reductionism, mythology was defined purely by its *function*, and nothing else. Its *origin* was considered to arise essentially from its *function*. Mythology was thought to come about in the human mind as a result of the process of biological evolution, and because of its *function*, it was able to originate and to continue to have certain effects on human beings throughout the history of the human race.⁵⁹ But Lewis (and Tolkien as well) would have wanted to inquire into the *nature* of myth. This *nature* would then underlie the other *aspects* of mythology: the *origin* and the *function*. The *nature* of mythology would be the fundamental reality itself prior to the all other facts of the case, historical and phenomenological.

Muller himself seemed to think the development of the human mind led first to the rise of *language*, and it was the *nature* of *language* that then gave birth to mythology. In his lecture on *A Philosophy of Mythology*, Muller calls mythology a “disease of language.”⁶⁰ (Later, Tolkien would object to this and call *language* “a disease of mythology”⁶¹). But Muller was not opposed

why Lang features so prominently in the essay is because “On Fairy-stories” was first delivered in lecture format as one of the Andrew Lang Lectures at St. Andrews in 1938.

⁵⁸ Some definition of these terms is in order. To consider mythology’s *origin* is to ask the historical and causal questions—*when did myth start being told* and *what caused it to be told*? To consider mythology’s *function* is to ask *how it affects humans when it is received* and *how it is used when it is told*, whether it is used consciously used for certain effects or unconsciously with unintended effects. And to consider its *nature* is to ask—what is the essence of mythology in itself, without which it would not be what it is? The route typically taken in the modern period has been to deny anything to myths except an *origin* and a *function*, a notably nominalist option.

⁵⁹ Of all the authors read from this time period, there were no exceptions to the belief in the development of the human mind through a process of evolution. But there were quite a few disagreements as to the *nature* of mind itself, and this generally involved a discussion of *language* at least, and likely mythology.

⁶⁰ Max Muller, “A Philosophy of Mythology,” in *Introduction to the Science of Religion* (New York: Arno Press, 1978): 335-403. To call mythology “a disease of language” is to use a phrase with such a potentially negative connotation that everyone with even a glimmer of appreciation for the *language* of mythology decried Muller. Tolkien would reverse Muller’s principle and say that rather “It would be more near the truth to say that languages, especially modern European languages, are a disease of mythology [“On Fairy-stories,” 48].” And Owen Barfield, in *Poetic Diction*, writes “Such a point of view is barely worth discussing, or rather, to the genuine critic, it is *not* worth discussing.” *Poetic Diction: A Study in Meaning* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), 89.

⁶¹ Tolkien, “On Fairy Stories,” 48.

to there being a positive *function* for mythology, which he defined as feeding the human need to perceive spiritual meaning in the cosmos.⁶² Yet, he seems to be continually inconsistent on these points, since he makes a curious comment in one place that mythological language “can never disappear till language becomes altogether commensurate with thought, which it never will.”⁶³ Thus, Muller seems to treat mythology as contingent upon *language*, even if it may always (or at least, did always) remain as a feature of *language*.⁶⁴ As to the *nature* of mythology, Muller was more concerned with the *nature* of thought in relation to the *nature* of *language*. According to Muller, mythology seemed to be a consistent, if not necessary, feature of *language*. But it was only necessary because of the *nature* of *language* itself and not by an independent *nature*.⁶⁵ Muller went further than this and concluded that mythology also necessarily follows from thought.⁶⁶ Muller holds in tension, then, a desire for scientific thinking and scientific methods to be supreme (in this he was a child of the Enlightenment), even while allowing a somewhat revelatory *nature* for mythology. Yet, Muller was no atheist, and it seems not even a strict rationalist, as there is one place where he seems to agree with both Lewis and Tolkien (in a

⁶² Muller writes that mythology is there to “satisfy the religious cravings of the soul (“*A Philosophy of Mythology*, 351),” which means he recognized the reality of such feelings. He was of course not unique in this. In the 19th century, the German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher had already well established the principle of “religious feelings” being the ground for religious knowledge and religious development.

⁶³ The full quotation reads:

Mythology is inevitable, it is natural, it is an inherent necessity of language, if we recognized in language the outward form and manifestation of thought: it is in fact the dark shadow which language throws on thought, and which can never disappear till language becomes altogether commensurate with thought, which it never will. [“*A Philosophy of Mythology*,” 353-354]

⁶⁴ This possibly represents a contradiction in Muller’s thought. If mythology is not a necessary consequence of *language* but only contingent, why is it that it can never not be present? If Muller responds and says that it is the *nature* of *language* itself that prevents mythologies disappearance, then it might be best for him to say that mythology follows necessarily from *language*. It seems, though, that Muller wishes to locate this constancy of mythology in the relation that exists between *language* and thought: since *language* can never perfectly represent thought, so mythology comes about. Thus, a defect in the *nature* of *language* results in mythology. But this still means that *language* necessarily brings about mythology. But it may be better (*pace* Muller) to equate *language* with thought. This is not to equate *language* then with all conscious experience, but it is to relate it to all conscious experience by an unweavable entanglement.

⁶⁵ Refer to the quotation in n. 62.

⁶⁶ The reason why Muller came to this conclusion is some simple transitive logic. If thought necessitates *language*, and *language* necessitates mythology, then thought necessitates mythology.

passage seemingly not noted by either Tolkien or Lewis), writing of a “third faculty. . . the faculty of apprehending the Infinite . . . a power independent of sense and reason, a power in a certain sense contradicted by sense and reason.”⁶⁷ At that time (the volume *Introduction to the Science of Religion* was first published in 1873), Muller was anticipating a whole new approach to the study of mind, while also resting past ideas.⁶⁸

Muller was an historian and a philologist, who focused on the historical and linguistic aspects of mythology. In the last quote, though, it is seen that he did note the connection between the *nature* of mind and the *origin* of mythology. And, near the end of the 19th century, there were also other scholars who began to tend toward a focus upon how the *nature* of mind determines the *function* of mythology. Psychology was a new field of study in that century that was concerned with the scientific study of the human mind and human behavior. In ages past, the study of man (anthropology) had generally been conducted by philosophers and theologians who would observe human nature and behavior according to generally perceived truths, truths gained by mythology, philosophy, or—in the case of Christianity—*revelation*. But the modern psychologists went down into the intricacies of the mind by empirical research, and often allying this methodology to a rejection of immaterial mind. Even so, they managed often to come up with grand schemes to model the human *psyche*, as grand as anything come up with by Medieval

⁶⁷ “Lectures on the Science of Religion,” in *Introduction to the Science of Religion* (New York: Arno Press, 1978), 20. In that passage, Muller is discussing Kant’s influence on Western thought. The whole reads:

This is the vulnerable point in Kant’s philosophy, and if philosophy has to explain what is, not what ought to be, there will be and can be no rest till we admit, what cannot be denied, that there is in man a third faculty, which I call simply the faculty of apprehending the Infinite, not only in religion, but in all things; a power independent of sense and reason, a power in a certain sense contradicted by sense and reason, but yet a very real power, which has held its own from the beginning of the world, neither sense nor reason being able to overcome it, while it alone is able to overcome both reason and sense.

Thus, according to Muller, Kant was perhaps wrong, in some sense, to divide the *noumenal* from the *phenomenal* so sharply so as to ultimately preclude any metaphysic, or at the least the dim shape of one.

⁶⁸ As for the past, Muller was leaning on some of the ideas of the Romantics, which might have included Samuel Taylor Coleridge and his ideas concerning the function of the *imagination*. As for the anticipation, many would identify this “third faculty” with the unconscious mind as later fully developed in psychology.

scholastics.⁶⁹ Sigmund Freud is often considered one of the most important figures in the rise of psychology as a medical practice, and Freud was one of the first to articulate a clear and complete concept of the unconscious mind. For Freud, the unconscious mind explains human behavior ultimately, since unconscious desires and their tensions and resolutions determine the patterns of human behavior.⁷⁰ Freud then applied his theory of mind to an analysis of ancient mythology. Already scholars had connected the *nature* of mind to the *nature* of mythology, but Freud tried to give an account of just *how* the mind goes from its unconscious desires to the creation of myths.⁷¹

Around Freud were gathered many followers, most of whom developed their own theories in their own ways, but who ultimately all continued to hold to the concept of the unconscious mind.⁷² Among these was Carl Jung. And whereas other disciples of psychoanalysis did not put as much energy into theories concerning mythology as Freud had done, Jung did follow in his teacher's footsteps here, and, if anything, took his own theories further. If any name links mythology to psychology, it is Jung's. Not only did Jung provide a theory for how mythology

⁶⁹ Lewis himself appears to have combined many theories of human *nature* together. For a complete treatment, see Adam Barkman's *C.S. Lewis and Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 266-292. Barkman provides a study of Lewis's view of human *nature*, and helpfully covers how Lewis incorporated the unconscious mind into his psychology/anthropology.

⁷⁰ It is interesting to note the progress from Kant's *Forms of Perception*, which define how the mind understands the sense perception of the outer world, to the *Imagination* of Coleridge, which put individual minds in a universal (divine) process, then to the *Unconscious* of Freud. The powers of the human mind is seen to slip into the obscurity, first of pantheistic causes, then of natural processes. This also would inevitably go toward making mythology more and more meaningless (or at least more and more false), even as it was explained more and more by the discipline of psychology.

⁷¹ Note how Freud shifted the question from how sense-perception as comprehended by the mind might lead to mythology, to how unconscious desires as affecting mind (i.e. conscious mind, or, in his terms, "ego") leads to mythology. *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, 30.

⁷² The two primary disciples were Alfred Adler and Carl Jung. Whereas Freud founded *psychoanalysis*, which grounded the unconscious mind in "libido," or sexual desire (*Introductory Lectures*, 128), Adler founded *individual psychology*, the theory of which was grounded in feelings of inferiority, and Jung founded *analytical psychology*, which was grounded in the need for individuation, or psychological wholeness. Both Freud and Jung linked their theory of mind to their theory of mythology and its interpretation, and it was their peculiar motivation to find a link between the insights found in mythology and their therapeutic treatment of patients.

might develop from within the unconscious mind, but he also linked his therapeutic practices to this model. In Jung's thinking, mythology is a revelation of the internal and unconscious processes of the mind. These internal processes are attempting to reach individuation, which is essential for psychological wholeness.⁷³ Thus, Jung linked human psychological development to mythology.

Lewis was well aware of what he referred to as "the new Psychology."⁷⁴ Not only that, but Lewis seemed to accept the idea of the unconscious mind for himself. It had been anticipated by his "master" George MacDonald,⁷⁵ who himself drew upon Samuel Taylor Coleridge, as well as others within the Romantic movement.⁷⁶ Lewis by no means accepted psychoanalysis (or any

⁷³ Jung's model of the mind was not static but was also a map of the development of the mind and is quite intricate. The process by which he described the need for mythological *language* to help the mind in its development is perhaps his most unique contribution to the modern understanding of mythology. His lectures found in *Analytic Psychology* provide a good summary picture of Jung's views.

Lewis at one point provides something of indirect, yet critical, praise for Jung's ideas in one passage, in which he writes:

I am not sure that anyone has satisfactorily explained the keen, lasting, and solemn pleasure which such stories can give. Jung, who went furthest, seems to me to produce as his explanation one more myth which affects in the same way as the rest. Surely the analysis of water should not itself be wet? ["On Science Fiction," in *Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories*, 59-73 (New York: Harcourt, 1966): 71]

So Lewis is saying Jung is wrong, yet in a wonderful way. Jung, perhaps in a desire to bring about the effect of a myth for therapeutic and developmental purposes, himself ended up telling one. His story of the growth of the *psyche* is itself birthed from the same source in the *psyche* as the myths which are supposed to reveal the inner processes of the *psyche*. By attempting to describe the *function* of mythology, Jung has given a description the *function* of which is mythical. One can also sense here Lewis's oft-made distinction between the doctrine and the thing which the doctrine is about.

⁷⁴ Lewis writes in reminiscence in *Surprised by Joy* that "the new Psychology was at that time sweeping through us all. We did not swallow it whole [and here Lewis is referring to himself and his friends, one of whom was Barfield] but we were all influenced," 203.

⁷⁵ Lewis refers to MacDonald as his "master" in his preface to *George MacDonald: An Anthology*, which Lewis edited: "I have never concealed the fact that I regarded him as my master; indeed I fancy I have never written a book in which I did not quote him." Ed. C.S. Lewis (New York: HarperOne, 2001), xxxvii.

⁷⁶ To quote a passage of MacDonald (all the more surprising for having been published in 1867, well before Freud began his work):

But can we not say that they are the creation of the unconscious portion of his nature? [MacDonald is here referring to the products of the imagination] Yes, provided we can understand that that which is the individual, the man, can know, and not know that it knows, can create and yet be ignorant that virtue has gone out of it. From that unknown region we grant they come, but not by its own blind working. Nor, even were it so, could any amount of such production, where no will was concerned, be dignified with the name of creation. But God sits in that chamber of our being in which the candle of our consciousness goes out in darkness, and sends forth from thence wonderful gifts into the light of that understanding which is His

other school of psychology for that matter) as his own position on the *nature* of the unconscious mind. Instead, he preferred to prioritize the conscious mind. But he did link *mythopoeia*⁷⁷ with the unconscious mind, and this will feature in his thought at points.

The modern context that Lewis found himself in had attempted to answer the question of myth by redefining the question somewhat. This redefinition came from the study of history and the study of *language* that ended up linking the study of myth to the study of mind. History, *language*, and psychology would all be areas of learning with which Lewis himself would end up evaluating the aspects of mythology—its *nature*, *origin*, and *function*.

Lewis's Answer

What flows into you from the myth is not truth but reality. . . and, therefore, every myth becomes the father of innumerable truths on the abstract level. Myth is the mountain whence all the different streams arise which become truths down here in the valley; *in hac valle abstractionis*.⁷⁸

In his own time, Lewis was not only aware of the question of myth as it had been asked throughout history, but he also was busy about answering it. The cause for Lewis's interest in the question lies in his life experience. For Lewis, it was not merely an academic exercise to occupy himself with much musings about the *nature* of mythology; in some sense, it was the quest of his life to answer just this question. In the second chapter, a biographical portion will provide a diachronic sketch of Lewis's development up until the time of his conversion, when he was first given the answer he needed to resolve his questioning. In this chapter, the purpose is merely to analyze Lewis's perspective on mythology as a phenomenon in the history of the human mind

candle. ["The Imagination: Its Function and Culture," in *A Dish of Orts: Chiefly Papers on the Imagination, and on Shakespeare* (London: Sampson, Low, Marston & Co., 1867): 1-28]

⁷⁷ "the making of myth," or the process by which myths are made.

⁷⁸ Lewis, "Myth Became Fact," 66. To translate, "In this valley of abstraction."

and its culture. As it is, Lewis's view of pagan myths in general must be understood before his view of the *True Myth* in particular can be grasped. For Lewis, the gospel is the "actual" myth; all others are derivative. There are many pagan *myths* in the plural, but only *one* true Myth.⁷⁹ But the myths all are the many stories which point beyond themselves to the one Story. And that Story is the one that reveals God within the creation, the world of both *time and space*. Since the other stories, without the full awareness of their tellers, point to the Story, they do reveal the *nature* of God *partially*.

In this chapter, the focus will be upon Lewis's view of mythology as myths rather than as *True Myth*. The *aspects* of *nature*, *origin*, and *function* will provide the structure for the rest of the chapter. Lewis's views of these *aspects* of mythology must first be understood so that the way in which he related the *aspects* of mythology to the question of myth can consequently be understood. And the question of myth also concerns the relationship between the philosophical concerns of *being*, *truth*, and *language*.⁸⁰ For the rest of this chapter, the first clause of the thesis

⁷⁹ An important passage concerning the basic shape of Lewis's thought here comes from Adam Barkman (quoted from already in the introduction):

First, we must distinguish Myth from myth. On the one hand, Myth with a capital "M" is part of Reality itself; it is a true aspect of God's concrete nature which, while rationally understood God Himself (i.e. it is "supra-rational"), is "opaque to the [human] intellect," meaning that natural reason could never come to it by its own power; thus, for instance, God *qua* the dying-and-rising-god is Myth. On the other hand, myth with a lowercase "m" flows from Myth as an imperfect copy does from the perfect original; hence, a myth is a particular story or a series of stories (mythology) which prophets and poets capture in their imaginations and embody in literature. Both the first few chapters of Genesis and *The Epic of Gilgamesh* are myths in that they are both imperfect works which come from, and point to, some larger Myth; however, the difference between the mythical elements in scripture and the mythical elements in other stories is that scripture is a more accurate representation of the Myth being communicated since God Himself works in a more intimate way with the prophet than with the pagan poet. Nevertheless, the supra-rational, mythical elements in all religions and religious writings are what cause the Priest in *Till We Have Faces* to say truly, "Holy places are dark places." [C.S. Lewis & *Philosophy as a Way of Lifer*, 101]

⁸⁰ These have already been discussed in n. 4. In particular though, it is the relation between *being*, *truth*, and *language* within the context of the question of myth that is important here. Lewis helps bring mythology and these concerns of Western philosophy together.

will be both explained and defended throughout: *Lewis saw myths as stories that reveal God's nature partially and without reference in time and space.*

Nature

It has already been mentioned that the modern context denied mythology any real *nature*. Rather, most modern scholars defined mythology in terms of its historical *origin*, which is simply to describe a feature of humanity that has evolved in the past and is evolving through time, and its psychological *function*, which for them meant a materialist description of mental processes. The *origin* of mythology then indicates that there are certain psychological effects brought about on human beings by myths that are quite real and cannot be ignored, but this *function* of mythology is either a source of deception or perhaps a source of meaning, but most likely (or most definitely) not of *truth*. But Lewis wished to understand the *nature* of mythology, namely, what is it about mythology that caused it to come about in human history and to have certain continuing effects on human beings. In other words, what is it in the *nature* that brings about the *origin* and the *function*?

Now Lewis at one point does seem to suggest that a story may have an effect upon someone like a myth but not by any means be clearly a myth itself. In a chapter in *An Experiment in Criticism*, entitled "On Myth," he writes, "Since I define myths by their effect on us, it is plain that for me the same story may be a myth to one man and not to another."⁸¹ But does this mean that Lewis thought that mythology is then purely explained as and by mental phenomena? Put another way, is the *nature* of mythology simply an *aspect* of the *nature* of mind? Is it the case that there are particular kinds of things, specifically particular kinds of stories, that may bring

⁸¹ C.S. Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 45-46.

about a mythical effect in the human mind, but that, were there no human minds, the property of being “mythical” would apply to nothing?⁸² Yet, Lewis writes in the same essay that,

There is, then, a particular kind of story which has value in itself—a value independent of its embodiment in any literary work. The story of Orpheus strikes and strikes deep, of itself; the fact that Virgil and others have told it in good poetry is irrelevant. To think about it and be moved by it is not necessarily to think about those poets or to be moved by them. It is true that such a story can hardly reach us except in words. But this is logically accidental.⁸³

In this passage, Lewis proposes a way of thinking about myths that does not match up well to a merely mental notion of mythology. In the first quote above, when he says that a story “may be a myth” he means it may be a myth in that it may affect its receiver as a myth. Thus, between the two quotations there at least appears to be an inconsistency. Probably the only way to resolve the two seemingly differing perspectives present here is to propose that, for Lewis, a story that is a myth remains a myth *even if* it does not bring about a mythic effect on its receiver.⁸⁴ Thus, mythology is not merely a mental phenomenon, but, as Lewis suggests, it has an independent reality from mind, and that this reality is what the mind encounters and grasps in the making and telling of myths.

But what kind of mind-independent reality does Lewis suggest that myths possess? To answer this question, Lewis’s understanding of the relationship between mythology and *being*—or *that*

⁸² In fact, Lewis defines many things as “mythical” in the sense of bringing about a “mythical” effect on human beings. One of the more abundant examples of this in Lewis is his constant reflection on the “mythopoeic” quality of Nature.

⁸³ Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism*, 41.

⁸⁴ Lewis does not address, as far as I know, whether it would be possible for a story that is *not* a myth to have a mythopoeic effect on its receiver. More than that, is it possible for a story to be a myth merely by having a mythopoeic effect on its receiver? Considering Lewis’s entire argument in *The Abolition of Man*, which is that there are certain thoughts which are “true” and certain feelings which are “fitting” in relation to reality, or *being*, it is unlikely that Lewis could have claimed the latter point and remained consistent, though the former point may have been held by him. *The Abolition of Man*, in *The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics* (New York: HarperOne, 2002): 689-738.

which is—must be understood. Note again the portion of the thesis statement that myths are, according to Lewis, *stories that reveal God's nature partially*. If, indeed, Lewis does think this to be the case, then there is at least one way in which mythology relates to *being*; namely, it relates to the *being* of God. This has yet to be fully demonstrated, but the following content of this portion of the paper should make it clearer. Again, for this to be the case, then Lewis would have to think at least that mythology reveals *being* to the mind in some sense. As Lewis states in his essay, “Myth Became Fact:”

What flows into you from the myth is not truth but reality (truth is always *about* something, but reality is that *about which* truth is), and, therefore, every myth becomes the father of innumerable truths on the abstract level. Myth is the mountain whence all the different streams arise which become truths down here in the valley; *in hac valle abstractionis*.⁸⁵ Or, if you prefer, myth is the isthmus which connects the peninsular world of thought with that vast continent we really belong to. It is not, like truth, abstract; nor is it, like direct experience, bound to the particular.⁸⁶

Now this is a statement not about how mythology might reveal God's *nature*, but about how mythology reveals *being* in general. Yet, for Lewis the theist, God is original *being* and the source of all created beings. At this point, it is possible to draw together a few strands that are found in Lewis's thought (as well as in Christian theology in general): namely, the strands of *revelation*⁸⁷ and *analogy*,⁸⁸ and how they relate to the question of the *nature* of mythology, particularly as it relates to the question of *being* (which is: *what is it that exists* and *what is the nature of that which exists?*).

⁸⁵ “In this valley of separation”

⁸⁶ Lewis, “Myth Became Fact,” 66.

⁸⁷ *Revelation* is both that which reveals God and the action by which God is revealed.

⁸⁸ *Analogy* here means the *analogia entis*, or “the analogy of being.” That is to say, that God's being is revealed in what is made because there is an *analogy* or a “similarity” between God and creation which allows for one to reveal knowledge about the other.

In classic Christian theology, *revelation* is divided into the categories of *special* and *general*, with *special revelation* referring to Christ, scripture, and redemptive history⁸⁹ and *general revelation* referring to God as revealed in creation.⁹⁰ Lewis held to this distinction as well, yet he deviated from it in certain respects with regards to the category of *special revelation*. For Lewis, Christ is the supreme revelation of God's *nature*, not just in degree but in kind. But scripture and redemptive history are merely pointing to Christ and cannot be termed *revelation* in the same sense as the Incarnation.⁹¹ But, it is not as simple as saying that Lewis grouped scripture and redemptive history together with all *general revelation*. Likely, the only solution to Lewis's views on *revelation* is to find three categories of *revelation* instead of two within his thinking, whether or not such distinctions were entirely conscious on his part. First, there would be the category of *general revelation*, something Lewis dwells upon so much in his writings it bears little repeating.⁹² Second, there is *redemptive revelation*, which is the history of Israel and

⁸⁹ "Redemptive history" refers to the "acts of God" in history, and, in this sense, to those found within the Old Testament narrative of Israel the covenant people of God.

⁹⁰ Though God reveals himself through all creation, creation itself is varied. Angelic beings are created, but they are not a part of Nature *per se*, and humanity is, though partly of Nature, partly not.

⁹¹ Brazier has a helpful passage for understanding Lewis here:

. . . if it is also accepted that Lewis had a broad respect for natural theology in keeping with Augustine, and that his appreciation saw natural theology not merely as intellectual/philosophical gropings for an understanding of God, but rather as bound up with the revelation in Christ (because a distinction should not be made between general and specific revelation, but rather the degree to which God reveals himself in a multitude of instances), then it can be accepted that the imagination should not be seen as intrinsically flawed and evil, but can under certain circumstances be an oracle through which God gives some understanding of a revelatory nature. [P.H. Brazier, *C.S. Lewis: The Work of Christ Revealed*, 756]

In other words, in Lewis's view, the distinction between the "natural theology" of the pagans and the *revelation* received by the people of God throughout history, and finally in the Incarnation, is one of degree rather than kind. I would disagree with Brazier, and say that whereas Lewis may have seen a spectrum of *revelation* as applying to redemptive history and scripture, and to pagan thought and mythology, he would have put the Incarnation in its own kind—*sui generis*.

⁹² On this note, Lewis writes in *The Four Loves*:

Nature never taught me that there exists a God of glory and infinite majesty. I had to learn that in other ways. But nature gave the word *glory* a meaning for me. I still do not know where else I could have found one. I do not see how the 'fear' of God could have ever meant to me anything but the lowest prudential efforts to be safe, if I had never seen certain ominous ravine and unapproachable crags. And if nature had never awakened certain longings in me, huge areas of what I can now mean by the 'love' of God would never, so far as I can see, have existed. [(New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1960), 20]

And in one passage from his fiction, Lewis provides a poignant and succinct description (through the eyes of Orual) of the powerful effect of nature on the mind, "The sight of the huge world put mad ideas into me, as if I

scripture. And, third, there is the Incarnation, which *reveals God's nature fully* and is perfect without error. It would be almost arbitrary to introduce these distinctions into Lewis⁹³ if it were not for the fact that Lewis did not count the former two categories as free from error or imperfection in revealing God's *nature*. According to Lewis, only the Incarnation reveals God without error within creation and to the human mind (though, of course, the human mind can misinterpret *revelation*).⁹⁴

And what of Lewis on *analogy*? Classically, this is called the *analogia entis*, or “the analogy of being.” Throughout the history of theology, the question of how to speak of God truthfully (though God is infinite, immaterial, and insensible in his *nature*) has been ubiquitous: is *truth* gained by denying that God is like what he makes (*via negativa*, or “The Way of Negation”), or instead by affirming that God is known in what he makes by virtue of a likeness between himself and creation (*via analogia*, or “The Way of Affirmation”)? Theologians have often, as a rule in history, fallen either completely off the one side of the former answer or that of the latter, or they have at least leaned quite far one way over another. Lewis is no exception to this general rule. Though Lewis never denied that denials concerning God's *being* are necessary (i.e. God is *not* this way, or he is *not* identical to these things), he did not think that these denials defined the limits of the knowledge of God. Indeed, Lewis often leaned heavily toward the *via analogia*. One

could wander away, wander forever, see strange and beautiful things, one after the other to the world's end.” *Till We Have Faces: A Myth Retold*, 109-110.

⁹³ Though Barkman does provide some precedent: “In our discussion of Lewis's Christian theory of myth, we have seen that there is a descent of Myth from the mysterious aspect of God Himself, to the Incarnation and finally to revelation and, to a lesser extent, pagan mythology.” *C.S. Lewis & Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 147.

⁹⁴ In a letter to a “Mrs. Johnson” written in 1952, Lewis writes:

It is Christ Himself, not the Bible, who is the true word of God. The Bible, read in the right spirit and with the guidance of good teachers will bring us to Him. When it becomes really necessary (i.e. for our spiritual life, not for controversy or curiosity) to know whether a particular passage is rightly translated or is Myth (but of course Myth specially chosen by God from among countless Myths to carry a spiritual truth) or history, we shall no doubt be guided to the right answer. [*The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis*, vol. 3, ed. by Walter Hooper (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2007), 246]

of the clearest examples of this is in Lewis's adoption of a model for the religious development of humanity that mirrors the German scholar of religion Rudolf Otto's ideas in *The Idea of the Holy*.⁹⁵ In *The Problem of Pain*, Lewis describes how religion might have developed throughout human history in a variety of stages each of which have to do with what could be termed "natural" experiences.⁹⁶ More than that, though, Lewis had as high a view of the knowledge of God gained through the Incarnation as most other orthodox Christian theologians. In *Miracles: A Preliminary Study*, Lewis—in one of his more well-known passages—wrote of the Incarnation that "We believe that the sun is in the sky at midday in summer not because we can clearly see the sun (in fact, we cannot) but because we can see everything else."⁹⁷ The Incarnation is the most perfect *analogy* of the *being* of God, and in which all else that is created can be properly a part of the *via analogia*. So, the *via analogia*, for Lewis, is found in *general revelation*, but it is found this way by virtue of the *analogy* found in the Incarnation as the summit of *special revelation*. And because Lewis was willing to admit, by way of the *via analogia*, a certain partial knowledge of God through the historical experiences of the human race in the development of their religion, then he would also have included mythology as a part of that *analogy* (mythology being the *speech* of religion). Thus, the myths as well as the rituals can be a part of that *analogy* found in *general revelation*. Though this knowledge would only be able to *reveal God's nature partially*, it would be genuine nonetheless.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, in particular, chapters 15 and 16.

⁹⁶ C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 14-22 in particular.

⁹⁷ Lewis, *Miracles: A Preliminary Study*, 176.

⁹⁸ For a short passage in which Lewis gives something of his view of the process of *general revelation*: When He created the vegetable world He knew already what dreams the annual death and resurrection of the corn would cause to stir in pious Pagan minds, He knew already that He Himself must so die and live again and in what sense, including and far transcending the old religion of the Corn King. ["Miracles," in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, 25-37 (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins, 1970), 37]

As a consequence of these thoughts on *revelation*, it is possible to understand more the *nature* of mythology in Lewis's thought. Mythology is an extra-mental reality in that it is a part of the *general revelation* of God in the world. It is indeed a phenomenon of mind, but in the same way that sight is a phenomenon of the mind but light itself is not and yet there is no sight without light. Even so, mythology is to the mind as light is to the eye. And this is a fitting analogy,⁹⁹ as it is the *function* of mythology to reveal reality to the mind, *per* Lewis. In other words, mythology is not merely something known, but that by which *being* is known in *truth*.

⁹⁹ In noting that this is an appropriate analogy, let a curious reflection be made upon this fact. If this analogy of sight and light to myth and *truth* is fitting, why is this so? This is an analogy between created things (the relationship between sight and light, myth and *truth*). But the *analogy* mentioned in the discussion of *revelation* concerns a relationship between God's *nature* and the *natures* of created things. And not merely a "relationship" in a general sense, but a relationship which is a kind of *likeness*, which *likeness* is the basis of linguistic statements of *analogy* (put otherwise as "metaphor") between God and creation, and then also between created things and other created things. Thus, God, who is necessary in his existence, creates a contingent creation which must bear a *likeness* to him (since He is the source of created things by virtue of the *logos*), and the contingent creation is made of many contingent things which bear a *likeness* to each other. But the *likenesses* of created things to each other is not the same as the *likeness* between the Necessary and the contingent. More so, and strangely, it seems as if each contingent thing must bear its own characteristic *likeness* to God (more or less on a spectrum of *analogy*), and that all contingent things as one, or even in groups, bear such *likeness* together as well. And if humanity is the supreme *likeness* to God, the most complete contingent *analogy* of the Necessary, then they may feature several qualities. One, they are themselves most able to know God's *nature* as their own *nature* bears such an *analogy*. To be like is to know like. Second, their creative *function*, the ability to refashion the elements of the world around them, may serve a purpose in relation to their *nature*. Creativity (when right) is the refashioning of the contingent things in the world to be more of an *analogy* to God than they were before such rearrangement. The increase of the *analogy* between the Necessary and the contingent is the role given to humanity. Thus, like begets like (and like delights in begetting like). And mythology has come about through human creativity, if through anything. Here is its root, grounded in *likeness*.

Yet, before leaving this thought behind entirely, the reality of sin must be reckoned with. This ability to refashion *likeness* unto more *likeness* is not currently functioning as it should in our race. Our own *likeness* to God has been obscured (though not destroyed), and so our creative activity is poisoned at the well (though it still runs with water). We cannot trust ourselves or our own knowledge grounded in *general revelation* to guide us in action. For all our action is creative, either fashioning ourselves and the world to be more like God or unfashioning ourselves and all which we act upon into a kind of *unlikeness* to God. What can be done? What can be done has not nor is not done on our part. God, who at first fashioned all things, is refashioning all things according to his *likeness* by the *logos* through whom he first made all things. And the *logos* (the necessary Word of God) became contingent and lived among the contingent *likenesses*, who in their *unlikeness* could not comprehend his *likeness*. But, through the *likeness* the *logos* bore, some have seen God, in some sense, as he is, so that they might be born unto this *likeness* again. This is one outline of the *True Myth*, to which Lewis would turn to make sense of much of his own thought, to unify the myths with the philosophy (to unify the act of story-telling with the act of thinking, narrative with logic, plot with argument, outlining the union of thought and tale).

Origin

The *origin* of mythology is something of a puzzle. To this day, it has nothing quite like a satisfactory answer in the academic context of today. For Lewis, the question of the *origin* of mythology arises immediately out of the relationship between mythology and *revelation*. All *revelation* is meant to be known by someone at some point—*revelation* becomes *revelation* in a full sense at the point of becoming and being known. Lewis’s epistemology of mythology is inseparable from his overall psychology, which is his understanding of the human mind. In particular, how Lewis thought that the mind grasps mythology, and so can create it, must be understood. It is best at this point to focus on what Lewis thought about the relationship between *imagination* and *reason*.¹⁰⁰ But, to do that, we must begin by leaving Lewis be and referring to a friend of his.

In a book called *Poetic Diction*,¹⁰¹ written in 1928 by Lewis’s good friend Owen Barfield—who dedicated the book to Lewis—there is the formulation of an understanding of the

¹⁰⁰ The history behind a self-conscious understanding of the *imagination* has its roots in the Romantic movement. It was Coleridge who distinguished between the primary and the secondary “Imagination,” relating the imagination to reality, or *being*, itself:

The Imagination then I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary Imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary Imagination I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate: or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead. [*Biographia Literaria*. Chapter XIII, ‘On the Imagination, Or Esemplastic Power’]

Following Coleridge, but from a theistic rather than a pantheistic point of view, Lewis’s “master,” George MacDonald, also wrote on the subject of the *imagination* and its role in creativity and knowing. Writing in a somewhat different vein, MacDonald states “Our hope lies in no most perfect mechanism even of the spirit, but in the wisdom wherein we live and move and have our being. Thence we hope for endless forms of beauty informed of truth.” “The Imagination: Its Function and Its Culture,” 1-28.

¹⁰¹ Lewis refers to *Poetic Diction* in *Surprised by Joy*, writing,

But I think he [Barfield] changed me a good deal more than I him. Much of the thought which he afterward put into *Poetic Diction* had already become mine before that important little book appeared. It would be strange if it had not. He was of course not so learned then as he has since become; but the genius was already there [200].

imagination, which, if not influencing Lewis, rather reflects the development of both Barfield and Lewis's ideas about the *imagination*.¹⁰² In it, Barfield argues that there are two *principles* in the mind: namely, the *poetic principle* and the *rational principle*.¹⁰³ The *rational principle* distinguishes between things and abstracts. But the *poetic principle* is the *aspect* of mind that perceives the unity between things, and from this perception of unity comes "meaning," and from "meaning" comes metaphor in *language*, and it is this growth that bears mythology.¹⁰⁴ In Lewis's "Great War" with Barfield,¹⁰⁵ Lewis and Barfield discussed the role of the *imagination* in coming to know *truth*.¹⁰⁶ This took place while Lewis was not a Christian, and he argued at that time that if any *truth* is arrived at by the workings of the *imagination*, then that *truth* would simply be discoverable by *reason* once known. Thus, the *imagination* seems to provide knowledge of what is true but it cannot not justify such knowledge. The *imagination* may serve, then, as a kind of short-cut to truths, a kind of intuition, which can then be confirmed by

¹⁰² *Poetic Diction* deserves a summary that cannot be given here. But, it is helpful to know what Lewis meant by saying of the fact that Barfield had influenced him "It would be strange if it had not." Here, Carnell provides four ways in which Lewis was influenced by Barfield (this would be between the early 1920s when Lewis returned to Oxford and the late 1920s, by which Lewis was nearing conversion): 1) that mind is a reality apart from neurology; 2) that "chronological snobbery" should be rejected; 3) that the spiritual is immanent in phenomena; and, 4), that it is necessary for knowledge to come through the *imagination*. *Bright Shadow of Reality*, 65-67.

¹⁰³ *Poetic Diction*, 103.

¹⁰⁴ It is interesting to note the correspondence between Barfield's notion of the *poetic principle* and Max Muller's "third faculty," which is "the faculty of apprehending the Infinite, not only in religion, but in all things; a power independent of sense and reason..." *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, 20. The reality of something in the mind other than *sense* and *reason* is constantly referred by various thinkers in the last two centuries, each in their own way.

¹⁰⁵ The "Great War" between Barfield and Lewis was a continuous discussion between the two, in part conducted by exchanging letters, in which they argued over the role of the *imagination* in understanding reality. What precipitated it was Barfield's conversion to Anthroposophy after which Barfield insisted that knowledge of the "supersensible" was possible by means of the *imagination*. Lewis, who at the start of the Great War was likely still a materialist, argued strongly against Barfield's position. At that time, he was still a champion of an empiricist approach to knowing reality.

¹⁰⁶ It is important to note here that Lewis, and Barfield, distinguished between the faculty of either recalling sensory data or creating mental versions of sense data, which Lewis terms *phantasy*, from the *imagination* proper, which concerns the perception and creation of meaning. In one letter, Lewis writes that the former faculty "ought to be called imagination if we literary meddlers hadn't spoiled that word for its plain sense." *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis: Volume 3*, 683-684.

reason.¹⁰⁷ Barfield argued otherwise, saying that the *imagination* gives a knowledge of “Truth,” with a capital “T,” whereas *reason* provides knowledge of “truths.”¹⁰⁸ Lewis, ever the empiricist at that point in time, attempted to argue that knowledge of “supersensible,” or “supernatural,” things was bound to be uncertain, even if such things existed, which Lewis was certain, at least at first, that they did not.¹⁰⁹

When Lewis became a Christian in 1931, there was a remarkable shift in his thinking upon these foundational points.¹¹⁰ In some sense, he came to Barfield’s side. But, whereas Barfield had become an Anthroposophist, Lewis had become an orthodox Christian. But Lewis still ended up maintaining, with Barfield, that the *imagination* was a real source for knowledge, which he would have been unlikely to do before in the few years leading up to his conversion, the years that contained the denouement of his Great War with Barfield. And the primary way that *imagination* works is in metaphor and mythology. Mythology arises out of the *imagination*. But, in all this there is yet a catch. In his essay “Bluspels and Flalansferes: A Semantic Nightmare,” Lewis concludes by writing that:

But it must not be supposed that I am in any sense putting forward the imagination as the organ of truth. We are not talking of truth, but of meaning: meaning which is the antecedent condition both of truth and falsehood, whose antithesis is not error but nonsense. I am a rationalist. For me, reason is the natural organ of truth; but imagination is the organ of meaning. Imagination, producing new metaphors or revivifying old, is not the cause of truth, but its condition.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ C.S. Lewis, “Magdalen College – Oxford [1927],” *Letters: Vol. 3*, 1600-1604.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 1619-1620.

¹⁰⁹ This, even though Lewis, by the time of the letters referred to above was already an idealist. Yet he still denied the ability for human beings to have certain knowledge of the Absolute, or the “supersensible.”

¹¹⁰ The letter written to Arthur Greeves, October 18th, 1931, only within a few weeks of his conversion, already gives insight into just how much Lewis’s thinking was coming together in the time even immediately following his decision to move from theism to Christianity. *Letters: Vol. 1*, 975-977.

¹¹¹ Lewis, “Bluspels and Flalansferes,” 157-158.

Here, it seems Lewis is distinguishing his own position from Barfield's. The *imagination* itself does not provide knowledge (which is true opinion in *language*). Instead, for Lewis, though *imagination* leads to mythology—so that mythology would be impossible without the *imagination* and is a direct product of it—mythology itself reveals *truth* and not just *meaning*.¹¹² This brings about a conceptual tension in need of resolution, since Lewis also never states that what is known by mythology is identical to that which is known by *reason*; and, in fact, he wishes to deny just that. Nor does Lewis seem to think that mythology is an amalgam of knowledge from the workings of both *reason* and *imagination* (as all knowledge flowing through *reason* from *imagination* would seem to be anyways given Lewis's model). Rather, Lewis seems to think of mythology as something that arises in the mind between *imagination* and *reason*. As *imagination* provides *meaning* for the *reason* to judge, so mythology comes about from what meaningful material is provided by *imagination*; but, in some sense, before *reason* abstracts. Something of a hint of just this is provided by Lewis in a letter, where he writes about the one who makes a myth that “in a myth he puts what he does not yet know and cd. [could] not come to know in any other way.”¹¹³ Here, Lewis seems to be siding with Barfield in concluding that

¹¹² But, given the statement Lewis makes in “Myth Became Fact,” it might almost be best to word this differently: “What flows into you from the myth is not truth but reality (truth is always *about* something, but reality is that *about which* truth is), and, therefore, every myth becomes the father of innumerable truths on the abstract level (66).” This statement seems to throw a wrench into some of what is being said in this paper at this point, but it causes less trouble in actuality within Lewis's thought, as will be seen below.

Also, in a letter from 1926, when Lewis was in his idealist stage, he wrote:

My skepticism begins when people offer me explicit accounts of the super-intelligible and in so doing use all the categories of the intellect. . . . Seeking to know (in the only way we can know) more, we know less. I, at any rate, am at present inclined to believe that we must be content to feel the highest truths ‘in our bones’: if we try to make them explicit, we really make them untruth. [*Letters: Vol. 1, 670-672*]

Here, something sort of different is being said. The picture in the former is a myth from the *imagination* fathering many truths birthed then by *reason*. The latter, which represents an earlier time in Lewis's life before his conversion, is about a mode of knowing Lewis says that provides us with truth in “in our bones.” This seems to represent an immaturity in Lewis at the time—a kind of groping for a notion of what to do with the *truth* found by mythology.

¹¹³ C.S. Lewis, “To Father Peter Milward – 26 Sept. 1960,” in *Letters: Vol. 3, 789-790*. There is no doubt that, being written three years before his death, this letter reveals Lewis's mature thought on the *nature* of mythology.

there are truths that can only be known by mythology and not by *reason*. Yet, *truth* seems to not come by the *imagination*, but only meaning. This means, at least, that it is impossible to collapse the *imagination* and mythology together—either in the sense of mythology being merely a product of the *imagination*, or of being the product of both *imagination* and *reason*. Thus, it seems almost as if another faculty, or at least process of mind, is being suggested by Lewis, distinct from both *imagination* and *reason*, yet not separate from either in the same manner that they are not separate from each other.

One aspect of Lewis’s thought that helps provide the identity of this faculty or process by which mythology is created and known, and so perceives *truth*, is his views on the creative process itself, particularly that of literary creation. In a letter to Dorothy Sayers, Lewis distinguishes between *phantasy*, “The mere image-making faculty,” from the faculty of creativity: “Now distinct from all these we have the plastic, inventive, or constructive power, *homo faber*. This wants to make things out of any plastic material, whether within the mind or without; stone, metals, clay, wood, cloth, memory, & imagination.”¹¹⁴ The identity of this “constructive power” that Lewis refers to is difficult to discern. Is it a distinct faculty of mind in the same way as *imagination* is? Or is it simply an ability of the mind in its conjoined faculties? And, is there a

¹¹⁴ C.S. Lewis, “To Dorothy L. Sayers - 14/12/55,” in *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis: Volume 3*, 683-684.

Lewis is distinguishing *imagination* in this technical sense as the root of creativity from that “mere image-making faculty.” Gregory Bassham lays out a good definition of the “image-making faculty” as Lewis and others have often held to:

Following Kant, it has been customary to distinguish two types of (imagistic) imagination: *reproductive* and *productive*. Reproductive imagination is the power of reproducing mental “copies” of objects that have previously been perceived (e.g., recalling what one’s fourth-grade classroom looked like). Productive imagination, by contrast, is explicitly creative and constructive. This is the faculty of ‘fancy,’ the power of recombining perceived originals into new and sometimes fantastical combinations, such as a winged horse or a golden mountain. [“Lewis and Tolkien on the Power of the Imagination,” in *C.S. Lewis as Philosopher*, edited by David Baggett, Gary R. Habermas, and Jerry L. Walls, 245-260 (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 245-246]

It is often the case that the “reproductive imagination” is referred to on the popular level as simply an aspect of “memory.” And the “productive imagination” is often what people mean by “imagination” generally.

distinction between the *mythopoeic* faculty in particular (if there is such a faculty) and the “constructive power” in general? Note that Lewis has said that this constructive faculty will use any materials (one of these is “imagination,” but Lewis likely means *phantasy* by this rather than *imagination* technically). But what materials are used is not the fundamental issue at hand. It is rather what is made of them, what the product made of certain materials finally is. In this case, if the product is a myth, then what materials were used matters not.¹¹⁵ And this “constructive power” does not only use many varied materials, but it also produces many different kinds of products: the tables and chairs of the carpenter as well as the myths of the story-teller. As far as I can tell, unfortunately, Lewis makes no clear distinctions here. The best interpretation that can be given, it seems (while noting that Lewis may not have entirely drawn all this together himself in quite this way), is that the “constructive power” includes the *mythopoeic* ability, the ability to make and to receive myths, but that this “power” can be referred to in varying ways depending upon which product it is producing.

But this “constructive power” itself then must be identified still. I cannot find that Lewis is clear at any point on this matter. But there is a hint, found in an older source, that may be helpful, but only indirectly so. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the Romantic poet, distinguished between the “primary Imagination” and the “secondary Imagination.” The “primary Imagination,” according

¹¹⁵ Elsewhere, Lewis writes of myths that “What really delights and nourishes me is a particular pattern of events, which would equally delight and nourish if it had reached me by some medium which involved no words at all—say by a mime, or a film.” *George MacDonald: An Anthology—365 Readings* (New York: HarperOne, 2001), xxx. In other words, the materials which are used to communicate the myth are irrelevant to the *nature*, *origin*, and *function* of the myth itself. This thought is actually surprising. One would think that Lewis would have affirmed the necessity of a linguistic representation of a myth in the mind. But he likely did. What he says above would only mean that the communication of a myth externally does not require words, but it would be first be represented in terms of *language* within the mind of the myth-teller, and then, consequentially, regardless of the medium of communication, within the mind of the myth-receiver in *language* as well. Note that it seems most appropriate to say that *language* “represents” the myth rather than “understands” it. To understand something seems to be to apprehend it by *reason* and so have rational and perhaps abstract knowledge about it. But a myth is, at least partially, opaque to this kind of understanding.

to Coleridge, is the “repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM.” More importantly for the present task, Coleridge identifies the “secondary Imagination. . . as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation.”¹¹⁶ Now the primary imagination referred to by Coleridge is roughly parallel with what Lewis and Barfield meant by the *imagination* (though with some significant differences, just as Barfield and Lewis differ). But the secondary imagination is instead more like this “constructive power” that Lewis refers to and is very much like the ability to make myths as defined by Lewis.¹¹⁷ And it is this notion of the *imagination* as “co-existing with the conscious will” which is the most helpful. Lewis would have, of course, believed that one of the faculties of the human mind (not dealt with much at all in this paper) is that of *free-will*, the capacity for choice.¹¹⁸ Now, let it be supposed that Lewis would have or could have essentially thought of *free-will* as “co-existing” with the other faculties of mind. Thus, the *reason* meets the *will* at the point where someone chooses to reason discursively by developing or following a logical argument, or to make a moral choice;¹¹⁹ *imagination*, then, meets the will where meaning, metaphor, and myths are made. *Free-will* is also responsible for all other creative acts upon any materials and for all purposes. What purpose is in the mind will determine what materials are used and what products result. Thus, the “constructive power” is simply identical to all points

¹¹⁶ All quotes are from Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, Chapter XIII. Cf. n. 100.

¹¹⁷ Coleridge himself blew up the capacities of this secondary imagination out of proportion for someone like Lewis when he wrote that “It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate: or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify.” Lewis would have seen *reason* “to idealize” and the *imagination* “to unify.” As to the primary imagination, Lewis probably would have denied its existence in Coleridge’s sense (though perhaps holding to it in a theistic sense, by postulating the influence of the Holy Spirit on human beings), and instead kept the secondary imagination, which he would have identified as that which is the “organ of meaning” and is responsible for the unifying perception of the world.

¹¹⁸ For a discussion of Lewis’s view of the *will*, cf. Barkman, 286-292.

¹¹⁹ Lewis distinguished within *reason* between the discursive reason, which argues by a chain of reasoning to its conclusion, from the intellect, which grasps self-evident truths. Cf. Barkman, 281-283.

where the *will* in conjunction with the other faculties of mind engages in the arrangement of certain materials into certain forms for certain purposes. In the case of mythology, the *will* is primarily engaged with the *imagination*, the “organ of meaning.”¹²⁰ Thus, to make sense of Lewis’s thought, it is best to think of this co-existence of *free-will* with the faculties of the mind in general as making sense of both the general human creative abilities and the particular *mythopoeic* ability. This proposal seems to provide some unity within Lewis’s thought, and it is possible that he did or could have thought this way.

But the question that led us down this road of thinking about what lies behind the creation of myths has not been answered. How does describing the *mythopoeic* ability help us solve the question of how mythology is a source of truths distinct from *reason* if *imagination* merely provides *meaning* and mythology comes about from what is provided by *imagination*, but, in some sense, before *reason* abstracts? In truth, Lewis does not provide an account of how this takes place. We are left, then, with a strange gap. The reason for it is simple enough—how can anyone provide a description of that which operates beyond the abstractions, the descriptions and the distinctions of *reason*? To define mythology by *reason* would not give one access to the mystery of the apprehensions of myths. But while a description might not be in order, a possible connection (in all frustration, itself a description) that reveals why mythology accesses *truth* can perhaps be given.

Referring to someone other than Lewis yet again (yet one whom Lewis knew well), we find a helpful guide in Tolkien. In his essay, “On Fairy Stories,” Tolkien first recognizes the modern distinction between imagination in the sense of *phantasy*—as he terms it the “mere image-

¹²⁰ Cf. Lewis, “Bluspels and Flalansferes,” 157.

making” faculty—and “the power of giving to ideal creations the inner consistency of reality.”¹²¹ Tolkien at first almost seems mistaken in thinking this technical sense of *imagination* to be about “the power of giving to ideal creations the inner consistency of reality.” Surely, he means instead that it is something like the “organ of meaning”¹²² as Lewis calls it, or the “unifying principle”¹²³ as Barfield does. But Tolkien is seen, at a second glance, to perhaps not be so mistaken. If one were to give “ideal creations” the “inner consistency of reality,” then one would need to grasp the “inner consistency of reality” first before the “ideal creations” themselves could be made. And if one were to engage in that creative process, this would then be like what was noted previously: the coexistence of *free-will* in operation with *imagination* for the purpose of creation (or, in Tolkien’s terms, “subcreation”). This coexistence is what makes the *imagination* “the power of giving to ideal creations the inner consistency of reality.” This is to say more than Tolkien outright, but it helps show how he has not misidentified his terms.¹²⁴ Tolkien calls this creative process “Art,” which he says is the “operative link between Imagination and the final result, Sub-creation.”¹²⁵ Having defined the creative process, Tolkien wishes to define more specifically “a quality of strangeness and wonder in the Expression,” and for this definition he musters the term *Fantasy*. *Fantasy* is a product which has the quality of “unlikeness to the

¹²¹ Tolkien, “On Fairy-stories,” 68.

¹²² Cf. Lewis, “Bluspels and Flalansferes,” 157-158.

¹²³ Cf. Appendix II in Barfield, *Poetic Diction*, 183-196.

¹²⁴ Tolkien makes the curious move of removing the distinction between *phantasy*, the imagination as the “mere image-making” faculty, and *imagination* in the technical sense. Instead he says that “the perception of the image, the grasp of its implication, and the control, which are necessary to successful expression, may vary in vividness and strength: but this is a difference of degree in Imagination, not a difference in kind. “On Fairy-stories,” 68. Tolkien might be confused at this point (as he admits “Ridiculous though it may be for one so ill-instructed to have an opinion on this critical matter [68]”). Surely, the difference between *imagination* in the technical sense and *phantasy* must be more than a better grasp of images from within, even if of their “implications.” Though, to be fair, perhaps *imagination* could be thought of as providing an “extra-linguistic,” or “proto-linguistic,” meaning to sense-perception. This would then be the basis of much of our linguistic meaning, if not all. Perhaps this is how *language* is formed as a rule in the first place. This might also explain the visuality of reading or the auralness of listening; or, in a better general term, the “sensuality” of all linguistic interpretation, with full regards to the readers of Braille.

¹²⁵ Tolkien, “On Fairy-stories,” 68.

Primary World” and “freedom from the domination of observed ‘fact.’”¹²⁶ For the reader of Tolkien, it is hard not to let all of this evoke his Middle Earth. Yet Tolkien was not merely trying to justify or explain his excursions into *Fantasy* himself—the topic of the lecture “On Fairy-stories” is indeed the folk tales and myths of the past. Though the inhabitants of the past most often did not intend to create secondary worlds for the sake of “Art,” (at least not self-consciously, though even that they sometimes did) nevertheless, the ability by which they created myths was the same as that by which Tolkien created his myths, at least on Tolkien’s view. The important point is that *Fantasy*, in one way or another, tends toward a kind of meaningful unity in its productions, an “inner consistency,” which, if not directly resembling the real world, mimics it in this consistency. If that ability by which myths are created has such a tendency, then this allows the possibility that these myths might reveal something of *truth*. But not the kind of *truth* revealed by facts—the truths of *sense*, *reason*, and experience in the “Primary World.” Instead, it is founded upon “a recognition of fact, but not a slavery to it.”¹²⁷

The process underlying Tolkien’s *Fantasy* is not quite identical to the “constructive power” that Lewis mentions (at least it is not obviously so), just as Lewis’s “constructive power” is not exactly like Coleridge’s “secondary Imagination.” But both these men’s thought were known by Lewis and were a part of the same tradition in which he, more or less, deliberately took part. This ability to create mythology is at root an ability to grasp reality and understand *truth* because of the link between the mind that makes and the reality in which mind makes. But, the *imagination* as Lewis defined it does not get to this *truth*. *Imagination* is, in one sense, a passive thing, in that the *will* receives as gifts from the *imagination* its fruits (metaphor is as much a gift of Nature as

¹²⁶ Tolkien, “On Fairy Stories,” 69.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 75.

the grain of the fields, but it is a field that can be planted and harvested likewise). But, in another, it is immensely active, an organism never still, ever growing. But it gives no *truth* itself. The *reason* can discern and judge *truth* on the basis of the *imagination's* products; and the “constructive power,” through myth-making, can also come into a kind of apprehension of reality that is rightly judged as true. Of course, it is not only through myth-making, but through myth-hearing that the *truth* is come by. But the distinction between myth-making and myth-hearing is perhaps indistinguishable if one remembers that myths are, as Lewis said, “extra-literary,” and have a *nature* that is independent of mind and founded upon a reality that is other than the minds in which they form and are received.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ Coleridge has been mentioned so far, but not a friend of his, William Wordsworth, who wrote into a poem something of the mystery of mind that the Romantics and Lewis contemplated:

Who that shall point as with a wand, and say
This portion of the river of my mind
Came from yon fountain? . . .
Hard task to analyse a soul, in which
Not only general habits and desires,
But each most obvious and particular thought—
Not in a mystical or idle sense,
But in the words of reason deeply weighed—
Hath no beginning. . .

- William Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (1799), 247-249, 262-267

And George MacDonald wrote also about the mysterious *origin* of man's creative endeavors and the weight of their meanings:

One difference between God's work and man's is, that, while God's work cannot mean more than he meant, man's must mean more than he meant. For in everything that God has made, there is a layer upon layer of ascending significance; also he expresses the same thought in higher and higher kinds of that thought: it is God's things, his embodied thoughts, which alone a man has to use, modified and adapted to his own purposes, for the expression of his thoughts; therefore he cannot help his words and figures falling into such combinations in the mind of another as he had himself not foreseen, so many are the thoughts allied to every other thought, so many are the relations involved in every figure, so many the facts hinted in every symbol. A man may well himself discover truth in what he wrote; for he was dealing all the time things that came from thoughts beyond his own. [“The Fantastic Imagination,” in *A Dish of Orts: Chiefly Papers on the Imagination, and on Shakespeare*, 203-208 (London: Sampson, Rowe, Marston & Company, 1867)]

This Romantic appreciation of the depth of the mind from which its creative energies flow not only lies in the back of Lewis's own thinking but also that of modern psychology with its contemplation of the unconscious mind. It has always been long noted that the human mind is deeper than what consciousness knows at any given time, but often, at least among the philosophers, the importance lay more in what was conscious than what was not, and the modern context has often reversed that order of priority. Lewis himself attempted a balance of the two, recognizing the vastness of the mind's caverns while staying at home upon the surfaces of the mind, where the sun of reality shines revealing *truth*. But, of course, God owns the depths as well as the heights. And the depths and heights of the mind

As to the historical *origins* of mythology, Lewis was somewhat of an inveterate agnostic. Any time he brings the matter up, he proposes hypotheses—which are usually just a combination of then current scientific hypotheses and his own insights—but he never sticks to any one of them with anything more than curious interest.¹²⁹ Lewis did believe that biological evolution explained the present state of living things, but he was always careful to distinguish this from some of the more popular and expanded philosophical notions of evolution that had become so prevalent by his time. He also assumed that there was a particular point in time when humanity first told a myth, in one place writing “Most myths were made in prehistoric times, and, I suppose, not consciously made by individuals at all.”¹³⁰ But it would be likely that Lewis would identify the beginnings of *mythopoeia* with the time when humanity was created in the *imago dei*. Since, for Lewis, even if our biological ancestry is animal, our spiritual is divine (though both would ultimately be divine): there was a moment of special creation for humanity.¹³¹ Lewis also

are paralleled in the outer reality of the world, as Lewis has Psyche suggest when speaking with her sister Orual in *Till We Have Faces*, 81:

“ . . . The Priest has been with me. I never knew him before. He is not what Fox thinks. Do you know, sister, I have come to feel more and more that the Fox hasn’t the whole truth. Oh, he has much of it. It’d be dark as a dungeon within me but for his teaching. And yet . . . I can’t say it properly. He calls the whole world a city. But what’s a city built on? There’s earth beneath. And outside the wall? Doesn’t all the food come from there as well as all the dangers? . . . Things growing and rotting, strengthening and poisoning, things shining wet. . . in one way (I don’t know which way) more like, yes, even more like the house of” –

“Yes, of Ungit,” said I.

Thus, as Psyche states, “it would be as dark as a dungeon within me” but for the activity of *reason*, but more ought to be said than what *reason* confers, though we “can’t say it properly.” Orual interrupts her sister near the end by referring to the “house of Ungit,” the earth-goddess of the nation Glome. So Lewis recognized that within pagan religion, its ritual and its mythology, the depths of reality were perceived by the human mind, however imperfectly—Thus, to each part of reality a part of mind fit to take it in.

¹²⁹ In “De Audiendis Poetis,” written near the end of his life, Lewis mentions that he thinks that the anthropological discipline of looking for the origin of mythology has helped the modern world: “If the choice, for his [Mr. Speirs] generation, lies between reading the romances as frivolous or arbitrary fancy and reading them with constant reference to *The Golden Bough*, let them by all means take the second alternative.” In *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 13.

¹³⁰ “Preface,” in *George MacDonald: An Anthology*, xxxi.

¹³¹ Of course, his view on this matter puts him at odds with much of American Evangelical theology, even if he has been loved by Evangelicals in general. This potential conflict anticipates the concerns of chapter 3, where Lewis’s relationship to Evangelical theology will be on trial.

relinquishes concern for how mythology developed over time into what it is today or was in the past, recorded for posterity in literary form.¹³² It was not that Lewis was entirely skeptical about such historical questions; in part, it was because he understood his amateur status in most discussions of that sort.¹³³

Function

Two subjects must be covered when discussing the *function* of mythology. First, a discussion of how myths affect human beings is needed—a distinct but not separate topic from that of how mythology is created and known in the mind, and when and in what manner it originated in history. Second, a discussion of how myths are used or represented is needed as well, which correlates here to a discussion of mythology and *language*. Lewis’s views on these aspects of the *function* of mythology will be covered in following before this chapter concludes.

It is difficult to make a distinction between the making of myths itself and the effect of mythology on human beings in Lewis’s thinking. Without having ever been affected by a myth,

¹³² Lewis, “To Father Peter Milward SJ 26 Sept. 1960,” in *Letters: Vol. 3*, 1189-1191. In that letter, Lewis is writing about the study of the origins of legend of the Grail, about which he comments “I think it is important to keep on remembering that a question can be v. [very] interesting without being answerable.”

¹³³ Yet, to a certain extent, Lewis was skeptical, if not about all historical investigation into the origins of mythology, about many attempts to trace out the beginnings of human myths. In a letter to Father Peter Milward near the end of his life, Lewis wrote:

I think it is important to keep on remembering that a question can be v. [very] interesting without being answerable. . . . We haven’t even got anything that can be quite accurately called ‘*the* Grail legend’. We have a number of romances which introduce the Grail and are not consistent with one another. No theory as to the ultimate origin is more than speculation. The desire to make that origin either Pagan or (less commonly) heretical is clearly widespread, but I think it springs from psychological causes not from any evidence.

In that passage, Lewis is primarily referring to the study of one particular example of a mythology, namely, “the Grail legend.” But he applies his skepticism in general principle as well, writing in the same letter:

A story does *not* grow like a tree nor breed other stories as a mouse begets other mice. Each story is told by an individual, voluntarily, with a unique artistic purpose. Hence, the germination goes on where historical, theological, or anthropological studies can never reach it—in the mind of some genius, like Chretien or Wolfram. Those who have written stories will come nearer to understanding it than those who ‘studied the Grail legend’ all their lives. [“To Father Peter Milward SJ - 26 Sept. 1960” in *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis: Volume III*, 1189-1190]

or by the “mythic” at all, it seems no one could ever create a myth.¹³⁴ Thus, firstly, that which is mythic in its *nature* (whether it is Nature or a myth itself that is mythic) can affect humanity and cause *mythopoeia*. And not only physical reality, but also the internal *psyche* itself is a source of this mythic-ness, but not without reference to the surrounding creation.¹³⁵ So is Lewis’s thinking, but not much concerning this topic will be discussed here. The second way in which mythology affects human beings is that mythology gives to society a framework for meaning.¹³⁶ In this sense, though *imagination* is “the organ of meaning,”¹³⁷ there develops an independent system of meaning over time within cultures, expressed in *language*, though this web of meaning itself is

¹³⁴ This point recalls the basic pattern of what Lewis said concerning theological understanding in *The Four Loves*, “Nature never taught me that there exists a God of glory and infinite majesty. I had to learn that in other ways. But nature gave the word *glory* a meaning for me [20].”

¹³⁵ In this respect, Lewis agrees with Jung and others within the discipline of psychology in locating the origin of myths and the human reaction to them in the structure of the mind, even though that structure must itself have an outer world to make sense of itself in. The effect of the mythic and of mythology on the human mind is a result of a correlation between mind and *being*. For an example of Lewis’s view of the *psyche* in relationship to the formation and reception of myths, this passage from *A Preface to Paradise Lost* is revealing:

Milton’s theme leads him to deal with certain very basic images in the human mind—with the archetypal patterns, as Miss Bodkin would call them, of Heaven, Hell, Paradise, God, Devil, the Winged Warrior, the Naked Bride, the Outer Void. Whether these images come to us from real spiritual perception or from pre-natal and infantile experience confusedly remembered [Lewis is referring to Jungian and Freudian ideas here] is not here in question; how the poet arouses them, perfects them, and then makes them re-act on one another in our minds is the critic’s concern. [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1942, 48]

In that passage, Lewis is reflecting on whether or not the effect of the mythic is a result of a kind of divine illumination upon the mind (no doubt what Lewis has in mind)—i.e., from our “higher” functions—or rather as a result of unconscious desire and memory—i.e. our “lower” functions. Note that Lewis is, at this moment, content with either to complete his critical business. His guard is lower here. Perhaps he would be content to think these images affect us by both our “higher” and “lower” functions in the mind.

¹³⁶ Lewis has a paragraph in *The Discarded Image* in which he demonstrates an awareness of this arena of thought in anthropological studies:

Savage beliefs are thought to be the spontaneous response of a human group to its environment, a response made principally by the imagination. They exemplify what some writers call pre-logical thinking. They are closely bound up with the communal life of the group. What we should describe as political, military, and agricultural operations are not easily distinguished from rituals; ritual and belief beget and support one another. [(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 1]

Lewis’s mention of “ritual and belief” here also justifies this paper’s use of the terms “ritual” and “mythology” to describe the *praxis* of religion. It is also interesting to note a connection between Lewis and Barfield at this point. Lewis speaks of “pre-logical thinking” (i.e. pre-rational thinking or thought which precedes *reason’s* abstractions) and says that “Savage beliefs,” are based upon *imagination*. This relates somewhat to Barfield’s notion of the evolution of mind, that earlier in human history, the *poetic principle* was dominant, and that, over time, the *rational principle* has come to hold more sway over our perception (c.f. *Poetic Diction*, chapter iv. “Meaning and Myth”).

¹³⁷ “Bluspels and Flalansferes,” 157-158.

perceived with the *imagination*. Lewis is by no means alone in affirming that mythology serves just such a societal role. The idea that mythology provides a framework of meaning for individuals and for societies is by no means original to Lewis nor did he add much to the notion, and so it can be mentioned, and left be. But the third way, and the most significant for Lewis, is that myths can cause *Sehnsucht*, or *Joy*.¹³⁸

This is what was referred to in the beginning of the introduction to this paper, when Lewis was “stabbed” with a sense of longing because he read, in Longfellow’s translation of *Tengner’s Drapa*, of the myth of the death of Balder. Perhaps this kind of experience, more than any, defined Lewis’s childhood development and his life. *Sehnsucht* was how he *felt* the myths that he read and the significance of them. And it came because of his reading of these myths. Lewis admits that he went back again and again to the ancient myths precisely to recreate the experience he had when he was young.¹³⁹ The reason why this carries such weight within Lewis’s thinking about mythology is because it is *Joy*, this intense longing, which makes *truth* relevant to the *affections*.¹⁴⁰ Lewis’s life was often defined by dichotomies: *reason* and *imagination*, myth and fact, the abstract and the concrete, and, in this case, *truth* and *affections*. Here, we see the tendency for Lewis to understand mythology as the key that helped him unify

¹³⁸ The term *Joy*, in the upper case, is a technical term for Lewis. He uses it most consistently and effectively in his autobiography *Surprised by Joy*. It refers to what is sometimes called *Sehnsucht*, or a sense of poignant longing incited usually by some aesthetic experience. Lewis describes it thus: “. . . an unsatisfied desire which is itself more desirable than any other satisfaction. I call it Joy, which is here a technical term and must be sharply distinguished both from Happiness and from Pleasure [*Surprised by Joy*, 17-18].”

¹³⁹ “To ‘get it again’ became my constant endeavor; while reading every poem, hearing every piece of music, going for every walk, I stood anxious sentinel at my own mind to watch whether the blessed moment was beginning and to endeavor to retain it if it did [*Surprised by Joy*, 169].”

¹⁴⁰ *Affections* are more than emotions. Emotions are physical experiences, but *affections* are the “direction” of an emotional experience. They are the conscious awareness of a feeling as a feeling by or for something, and inextricably linked with conscious motivation. They concern what we want *to be*, *experience*, and *do*. The relationship between emotions and the conscious experience of them is something Lewis deals in quite some detail in his essay “Transposition,” 91-115.

principles, *aspects* of reality and of human *nature*. The experience of *Joy* and its relation to mythology is just another example of this in his thinking.¹⁴¹

In considering the *function* of mythology—what it *does* and the manner in which it affects humanity—it is appropriate to consider *how* mythology is used by a discussion of *language*. No doubt, more could be said, and Lewis did say more about how mythology is consciously and unconsciously employed by human beings with many motivations and for a variety of purposes. But, most important of all is a discussion of *language*, by which myths are told and understood. In *language* is also found metaphor, and metaphor is the fabric of the weave of mythology.

It should not be forgotten that Lewis was alive during a war, a war that was being fought between what might be called the reductionist nominalists and the metaphorist realists.¹⁴² On the one hand, the reductionists took words and set down rules for meaningfulness, usually coming to the conclusion that truthful statements applied only to sensible realities, such as the position and movement of matter (and that was about it for them; the logical buck stopped there).¹⁴³ For these,

¹⁴¹ Lewis does admit to being occupied with this experience in *Surprised by Joy*, and his concern is borne out in his pre-conversion writings. In his cycle of poems titled “Spirits in Bondage,” published in 1919, he wrote:

Atoms dead could never thus
Stir the human heart of us
Unless the beauty that we see
The veil of endless beauty be.

- XXVI. Song

And though simply put, the phrase “the veil of endless beauty” is a surprising one for the young Lewis. Admittedly, Lewis was leaving behind materialism for a kind of metaphysical dualism at this time. He would finally completely abandon his materialism for a kind of pantheistic idealism for a long while before becoming a theist, which one can nearly hear reading these lines. But there is a romanticism in these words not too approachable by an idealist merely concerned with apprehending rational truths (perhaps we may have expected then “Unless the order that we see, The veil of endless reason be”) or by a dualist for whom Nature is an evil set against the spiritual good.

¹⁴² Doris T. Myers outlines this period in her *C.S. Lewis in Context* (Kent, OH: Kent State University, 1994), 1-11. One of Myers concerns is to place Lewis within this context, and thus to save him from being relegated to an author of science fiction and of irrelevant apologetics (not such bad things though!). She hopes to show that Lewis was truly a part of the literary and intellectual milieu of his time. Speaking about Lewis’s approach to the subject of *language*, she writes, “In the process of reaching an informed, intellectually based decision to embrace Christianity, he had to decide how to evaluate language [1].” Note the term “decide.” Myers is pointing out that Lewis had to choose a side.

¹⁴³ Barfield explained well the approach and the method of the logical positivists, writing:

the phenomenon of *meaning* in the mind was explained by such things as association and repetition. On the other hand, the metaphorists set down no rules, but attempted to understand something inherent in *language* and in mind itself—the metaphors that in both their creation and usage reveal reality, communicating the unity of things rather than their distinction.¹⁴⁴ And mythology, for Lewis, is composed of metaphor. But, more than that, on a deeper level, it is the summit of metaphor. When metaphor has most ascended, it is most mythical. It is metaphor arising from within the context of a story, from which the metaphor receives meaning and in which it gives meaning.

To see this work out, first it is helpful to explore a distinction Lewis commonly made between allegory on the one hand and mythology on the other. In *The Allegory of Love*, Lewis goes on to describe the distinction between the two:

The difference between the two can hardly be exaggerated. The allegorist leaves the given—his own passions—to talk of that which is confessedly less real, which is a fiction. The symbolist leaves the given to find that which is more real. To the difference another way, for the symbolist it is we who are the allegory. We are the ‘frigid personifications’; the heavens above us are the ‘shadowy abstractions’; the world which we mistake for reality is the flat outline of that which elsewhere veritably is in all the round of its unimaginable dimensions.¹⁴⁵

Thus, allegory is metaphorical by all counts. It uses certain things to stand for other things, and this is at least what metaphor is. Yet, for metaphor to be useful as metaphor, in some sense it

Its [logical positivism] corollary, that all the propositions of logic are mere tautologies, is the heart of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*. . . and it is this broom with which it is hoped to sweep away, as meaningless, all statements not related to physically observable events or verifiable events, to limit the sphere of man’s knowledge to the increasingly tentative findings of physical science, and to dismiss all other affirmations as meaningless. [*Poetic Diction*, 16-17]

¹⁴⁴ Among these warriors for metaphor were the four members of the Inklings best known: namely, C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, Owen Barfield, and Charles Williams. All of these fought for the right of metaphor, story, and mythology to communicate real knowledge in an age that valued only science (poorly defined as it may have been) as the road to *truth*.

¹⁴⁵ Lewis, *The Allegory of Love*, 57. In this passage, the “Symbolist” is the *mythopoeic* author.

must grasp at a true similitude, not merely an apparent or assumed one, from which a true unity is perceived. Lewis goes on to speak of the thought of Hugo of St. Victor, who stated that the first condition which a sacrament must have “is the pre-existing *similitudo* between the material element and the spiritual reality. Water, *ex naturali qualitate*, was an image of the grace of the Holy Ghost even before the sacrament of baptism was ordained.”¹⁴⁶ Thus, metaphor in *language* reveals the unity of *being*. This might be the case with allegory, but it is most definitely the case with mythology, but in the “Symbolist’s” sense. Lewis clarifies this differing sense by writing “Symbolism is a mode of thought, but allegory is a mode of expression. It belongs to the form of poetry, more than to its content. . . .”¹⁴⁷ The sense is clear enough—symbolism has to do with how something is *grasped* in the mind; allegory has something to do with how something is *stated* in writing, or by speaking as the case may be. Thus, someone who writes an allegory may be able to do so because they have experienced “symbolism” in the mind; but, if that is the case, then they might possibly make a myth.¹⁴⁸ An allegory requires no symbolism necessarily, though its author may have it; but a myth must have symbolism at work in the mind of its creator as a “mode of thought.”

Thus, a distinction should be made in Lewis between every use of metaphor, including literary uses (of which allegory is one) and the *function* of metaphor. Whether or not that should read

¹⁴⁶ *The Allegory of Love*, 58.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁴⁸ Lewis is careful to note in *The Allegory of Love* when an author goes beyond allegory into mythology. In one place, writing of the poet Gower, Lewis says:

We have here one of those rare passages in which medieval allegory rises to myth, in which the symbols, though fashioned to represent mere single concepts, take on new life and represent rather the principles—not otherwise accessible—which unite the whole class of concepts. All is shot through with meanings which the author may never have been aware of; and, on this level, it does not matter whether he was or not [275].

Lewis’s common motifs are sounded throughout this short passage: mythology as a living thing, full of unconscious meaning, a unifying principle. Remember Lewis’s definition of mythology as “extra-literary” from *An Experiment in Criticism*, 43.

rather “the *function* of mythology” is still a question to be asked of Lewis.¹⁴⁹ I have been hard pressed to find an explicit statement of this in Lewis, yet it is found clearly in Barfield who writes,

Now by our definition of a ‘true metaphor’, there should be some older, undivided, ‘meaning’ from which all these logically disconnected, but poetically connected ideas have sprung [i.e. metaphors]. And in the beautiful myth of Demeter and Persephone we find precisely such a meaning. In the myth of Demeter the ideas of waking and sleeping, of summer and winter, of life and death, of mortality and immortality are all lost in one pervasive meaning. . . . Mythology is the ghost of concrete meaning. Connections between discrete phenomena, connections which are now apprehended as metaphor, were once perceived as immediate realities.¹⁵⁰

Now, setting aside Barfield's ideas about the development of mind and language—which Lewis may or may not have disagreed with entirely—this seems to express the idea proposed above that, for Lewis, mythology is the “summit of metaphor.” There are indications that Lewis would have thought the same as well. In a similar paragraph from “Myth Became Fact,” Lewis writes,

In the enjoyment of a great myth we come nearest to experiencing as a concrete what can otherwise be understood only as an abstraction. At this moment, for example, I am trying to understand something very abstract indeed—the fading, vanishing of tasted reality as we try to grasp it with the discursive reason. . . . But if I remind you, instead, of Orpheus and Eurydice, how he was suffered to lead her by the hand but, when he turned round to look at her, she disappeared, what was merely a principle becomes imaginable. You may reply that you never until this moment attached that ‘meaning’ to that myth. Of course not. You are not looking for an abstract ‘meaning’ at all. If that was what you were doing the myth would be for you no true myth but a mere allegory. You were not knowing, but tasting; but what you were tasting turns out to be a universal principle. The moment we

¹⁴⁹ On this point, in one place in “On Fairy-story,” Tolkien dismisses Muller’s definition of mythology as a “disease of language,” responding that “It would be more near the truth to say that languages. . . are a disease of mythology [48].” Both Tolkien and Lewis, as well as Barfield, would hold that all language is highly, if not nearly wholly, metaphorical. Yet here Tolkien sets *language* below mythology for a moment. *Language* arises from within a *mythopoeic* humanity. Humanity is not primarily linguistic, but *mythopoeic*. The foundations are made of story not grammar.

¹⁵⁰ *Poetic Diction*, 91-92.

state this principle, we are admittedly back in the world of abstraction. It is only while receiving the myth as a story that you experience the principle concretely.¹⁵¹

All the same stuff is here as was in Barfield—the unity of mythic meaning, the relationship between mythology and metaphor (implicitly), the contrasting of abstraction and a mythic story. What metaphor *does* is found most mature in mythology and in the myths.

A further question must still be asked that has been lingering, namely, did mythology develop out of metaphor, or did metaphor out of mythology? In other words, did metaphor begin at the peak and descend, or did it start at the foot of the mountain and then ascend to the summit? I know what Barfield's answer would be, but I am not so sure about Lewis's. Barfield was not considering such things as the fall of humanity into sin when he wrote *Poetic Diction*. But Lewis would have considered such a doctrine as true after his conversion. It is not too hard to guess, or even know where Tolkien stood when he wrote "The incarnate mind, the tongue, and the tale are in our world coeval."¹⁵² By my count, that makes two out of these three for near certain. It might then be not so difficult to trace from there where Lewis himself might have stood.

¹⁵¹ "Myth Became Fact," 66.

¹⁵² Tolkien, "On Fairy-stories," 48.

Chapter 2: Lewis and the True Myth

While the first chapter discussed Lewis's answer to the question of myth as asked in the ancient and modern contexts, his full answer has yet to be seen. Yes, Lewis did have particular views on the *nature*, *origin*, and *function* of mythology considered as a phenomenon of human experience; yet, it is impossible to fully understand those views without understanding his view of what he called the *True Myth*.¹⁵³ The *True Myth* is the gospel,¹⁵⁴ which is the narrative of creation, fall, and redemption found in the whole of the biblical story, and, in it, the particular narrative of the Incarnation, the life, the death, and the resurrection of Christ in history (I can see no reason why Lewis would not have agreed with this basic synopsis).

This chapter will not be structurally related to discussions over the *nature*, *origin*, or *function* of mythology as the first chapter was, though the concepts are present. The philosophical concerns of *being*, *truth*, and *language* will appear again, as these were Lewis's concerns. The first half this chapter will be a somewhat biographical sketch of Lewis's relationship to the question of myth. It is only somewhat biographical because its purpose is not so much to give an account of Lewis's life, but rather to show how, from his childhood until his conversion, his experiences and his education gave him both the question of myth in need of answering and also a variety of dichotomies in need of resolution. These were the dichotomies of *reason* and *imagination*, of *truth* and mythology, and of *truth* and *affections*.¹⁵⁵ Each of these dichotomies and their resolution will serve as the structure for the second portion of this chapter.

¹⁵³ This term serves as a part of the title of the chapter, and as a technical term defined in the introduction.

¹⁵⁴ "gospel" is a word that means "good news" from the Greek *euangelion*, meaning a public proclamation of a favorable event; but it is *euangelion* on the basis of a story, a myth, not merely an event without either context or characters, and with universal not just local implications.

¹⁵⁵ *Affections* is a term referred to in the last chapter in n. 140. The particular *affection* under discussion here is *Joy*, and it is most definitely an *affection* that motivated Lewis throughout his life and provided "direction" for his choices.

The metaphor of a portrait painting, in which Lewis is framed by a surrounding landscape, was appropriate for the first chapter, and it is also appropriate in this second chapter. But this chapter shall begin much closer to Lewis's portion of the frame, beginning with a biographical sketch and then widening the perspective to consider how Lewis used his new-found understanding of the *True Myth* and the way in which it resolved the dichotomies in his own mind, dichotomies relevant to answering the question of myth from ancient times.

Biographical Sketch

It was always like that with Fox; he was ashamed of loving poetry ('All folly, child') and I had to work much at my reading and writing and what he called philosophy in order to get a poem out of him. But thus, little by little, he taught me many. *Virtue, sought by man with travail and toil* was the one he praised most, but I was never deceived by that. The real lilt came into his voice and the real brightness into his eyes when we were off into *Take me to the apple-laden land or The Moon's gone down, but Alone I lie.*
- *Till We Have Faces*¹⁵⁶

At the beginning of this paper, Lewis's reading of Longfellow's translation of *Tegner's Drapa* of the myth of Balder's death was set as the prologue. It was one of three experiences which Lewis had while he was young that ended up enamoring him with myths and fairy-stories. This seemingly accidental fascination was brought about when Lewis was between six and eight years old (which would have been between 1904 and 1907). During this time, Lewis recounts that "I was living almost entirely in my imagination; or at least that the imaginative experience of those

The reason why *truth* is related to *affections* here is that, say, in the case of *reason* it is easy to see how it relates to *truth*. *Truth* is that thought *about* something which corresponds to its *being* rather than not. Typically, *truth* is represented to us in propositional content in the form of sentences with the context of *language*. But what about the *affections* might relate to such? Are *affections* "about" something in a way which corresponds to *being*? At least after his conversion, Lewis wanted to say that there is a proper relationship between the *being* of things and *truth* as a result of *reason*, and also between the *being* of things and *affections* as a result of the emotions, or *feelings*. Read especially *The Abolition of Man*, in particular the first portion, 'Men Without Chests.'

¹⁵⁶ Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, 9-10.

years now seems to me the more important than anything else.”¹⁵⁷ Then, during that period, he had three, what could be called, aesthetic experiences. The first he recalls in *Surprised by Joy*:

The first is itself the memory of a memory. As I stood beside a flowering currant bush on a summer day there suddenly arose in me without warning, and as if from a depth not of years but of centuries, the memory of that earlier morning at the Old House when my brother had brought his toy garden into the nursery. It is difficult to find words strong enough for the sensation that came over me. . . . It was a sensation, of course, of desire; but desire for what? Not, certainly, for a biscuit tin full of moss, nor even (though that came into it) for my own past. . . . And before I knew what I desired, the desire itself was gone, the whole glimpse withdrawn, the world turned commonplace again, or only stirred by a longing for the longing that had just ceased. It had taken only a moment of time; and in a certain sense everything else that ever happened to me was insignificant in comparison.¹⁵⁸

These experiences bear such quotation because it is Lewis’s own description of what he called *Joy*, and what many have called *Sehnsucht*.¹⁵⁹ The second is as follows:

The second glimpse came through *Squirrel Nutkin*; through it only, though I loved all the Beatrix Potter books. . . . It troubled me with what I can only describe as the Idea of Autumn. It sounds fantastic to say that one can be enamored of a season, but that is something like what happened; and, as before, the experience was one of intense desire.¹⁶⁰

The third experience is the one already referred to, and it is recounted as follows:

¹⁵⁷Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 15.

¹⁵⁸ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 16. Note how suddenly this first experience came. There is a kind of hopeless attempt on Lewis’s part to convey the connection between his thoughts at the time and the experience. The experience did not strike him without an associated cause—some might call it *nostalgia* on the basis of the fond memory of times gone by, but Lewis recognized this possibility but accounted more to the cause than that, probably on the basis of having actually experienced mere *nostalgia* before and finding it distinct. He never equates *nostalgia* with *Joy*.

¹⁵⁹ Carnell writes about *Sehnsucht* in Lewis and relates Lewis’s experience and writings to the motif of *Sehnsucht* throughout literature in general:

This is a study of an attitude which has been responsible for some of the most powerful, and some of the most controversial, works of literature. It may be tentatively set forth as a special kind of longing—a longing difficult to describe, for two reasons: it is surrounded by a misty indefiniteness which seems essential to its very nature, and second, there are overtones of sentiment and emotion in certain expressions of the attitude which may seem mawkish when examined in cold prose. [*Bright Shadow of Reality: Spiritual Longing in C.S. Lewis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 13. (though, admittedly, Lewis does not do a poor job avoiding “mawkishness”)]

¹⁶⁰ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 16-17.

The third glimpse came through poetry. I had become fond of Longfellow's *Saga of King Olaf*: fond of it in a casual, shallow way for its story and its vigorous rhythms. But then, and quite different from such pleasures, and like a voice from far more distant regions, there came a moment when I idly turned the pages of the book and found the unrhymed translation of *Tegner's Drapa* and read

I heard a voice that cried,

Balder the beautiful

Is dead, is dead -

I knew nothing about Balder; but instantly I was uplifted into huge regions of the northern sky, I desired with almost sickening intensity something never before described (except that it is cold, spacious, severe, pale, remote) and then, as in other examples, found myself at the very same moment already falling out of that desire and wishing I were back in it.¹⁶¹

It is accurate to say that these three experiences, which preceded essentially the whole of Lewis's education, defined what he desired and sought for the rest of his life. Lewis himself comments, following these accounts, that "The reader who finds these three episodes of no interest need read this book no further, for in a sense the central story of my life is about nothing else."¹⁶² These experiences would be the foundation for the dichotomies which would characterize his intellectual development; most of all, the dichotomy of *truth* and *affections*. Throughout his life, he would need to wonder whether or not what he felt about the world had any connection whatsoever with reality. Until he became a Christian, he would generally dismiss such longings as mere emotional experiences with no bearing upon *truth* about *being*. Of course, this would always be admitted by Lewis only with a torn heart—he never truly forgot the experience of *Joy* even as a materialist.¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 17.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁶³ It is hard not to hear an echo of Lewis's childhood experiences with *Joy* when reading,
But only the strange power
Of unsought Beauty in some casual hour
Can build a bridge of light or sound or form

It is of some note that these things took place to Lewis in the order that they did. The first experience was unattached to any literary or mythic context and may have been forgotten by Lewis over the years who would have had no definite object of desire to return to in order to find again the *Joy* he had experienced. But the second was attached to the reading of a literary work; it may be fair to say that if Lewis was already a reader up till that point, his fate as a reader of fiction and faerie was sealed by *Squirrel Nutkin*. Finally, if he had not been so suddenly struck by the myth of Balder and attached his experience of *Joy* to the mythic sort of stories, we may not have been privy to the insights of Lewis on the *aspects* of mythology, since he pursued a study of mythology throughout his life not out of professional interests, but intensely personal ones.

Following these experiences—which were also followed by or accompanied by the death of Lewis’s mother—¹⁶⁴Lewis began his formal education away from home. If those three experiences had been glimpses of a paradise unknown, it was nonetheless a paradise lost too soon for the young Lewis, who went from losing his mother to going away from home to an

To lead you out of all this strife and storm. . . .
One moment was enough,
We know we are not made of mortal stuff. . . .
For we have seen the Glory—we have seen.
- *Spirits in Bondage*, XV. Dungeon Grates

For Lewis, “One moment was enough” to awaken him to something about the *being* of things that he was unaware of beforehand. And this was written by Lewis in 1919, sometime before becoming a Christian. Though, at the time of writing this, Lewis was affirming the goodness of “Spirit” over against an evil or ambiguous “Nature,” or mere matter [cf. Adam Barkman, *C.S. Lewis & Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 109-110 and 30-34]. This period of time [1918-1920] existed in the in between of Lewis being a materialist of some kind, first a Lucretian materialist (atoms and void and evolution is all there is) [cf. Barkman, 23-30] and Stoical materialist [“. . . everything is necessary and all the real philosopher—the man who lives according to his beliefs—can do is staunchly will what he wants, even though what he wants is necessary. . . Barkman, 36].

¹⁶⁴ Lewis was not quite sure whether these experiences took place before or after his mother’s death: “I cannot be absolutely sure whether the things I have just been speaking of happened before or after the great loss which befell our family. . .” *Surprised by Joy*, 18.

unhappy existence in a boarding school and then to some other (not much happier) schools in the following years.¹⁶⁵

Three periods can be distinguished in Lewis's education. The first was the period that followed his three experiences and his mother's death when he was first sent to boarding school. During those years—between about eight and fourteen years old—he would pass between various schools, proving himself an adept student, but by no means did he have the chance to truly develop his talents. Yet, he did continue to read poetry and fantastical stories during this period, but he did this on his own account, no doubt, at least in part motivated by the *Joy* he had experienced reading of Balder, and because of the *Autumn-ness of Squirrel Nutkin*. The second period of his education began when he entered William T. Kirkpatrick's tutelage.¹⁶⁶ There he prepared to enter Oxford and the academic profession.¹⁶⁷ If there was any time in his life that Lewis became aware of the power of *reason*, it was during this period. Yet, his love of the fantastical did not cease while he was with Kirkpatrick. If anything, it was during time that it matured even more.¹⁶⁸ Thus, the dichotomy of *reason* and *imagination* was hardened into place,

¹⁶⁵ Lewis provides an account of his schooling experience in *Surprised by Joy*.

¹⁶⁶ William T. Kirkpatrick was a Scottish teacher who had been a headmaster over Lewis's father when he was a boy. *Surprised by Joy*, 128-131.

¹⁶⁷ Lewis quotes from a letter that Kirkpatrick wrote to Lewis's father about the younger Lewis, "You may make a writer or a scholar of him, but you'll not make anything else. You may make up you mind to *that*." *Surprised by Joy*, 183.

¹⁶⁸ Lewis, in *Surprised by Joy*, recounts reading the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in Homeric Greek (145); Dante's *Inferno* in Italian (144); "Milton, Spenser, Malory, *The High History of the Holy Grail*, the *Laxdale Saga*. . . *Beowulf* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (both in translations), Apuleius, the *Kalevala*. . . [147]" All of these, Lewis says were ordered and read by himself of his own free will in addition to his mandatory curriculum. And while at home over the holidays, Lewis recounts, "The long hours in the empty house passed delightfully in reading and writing. I was in the midst of the Romantics now [163]." He goes on to mention the numerous poetic authors he read—Keats, Shelley, William Morris and his mythological works: *Sigurd the Volsung*, *The Well at the World's End*, *Jason*, and *The Earthly Paradise* (163-164); he also mentions his developed familiarity with Norse mythology [165]; also, "*The Faerie Queen* and *The Earthly Paradise* [174]." Lewis recounts more than these, but this list gives an idea of what he consumed during this time. Also, it was near the end of his period with Kirkpatrick that Lewis finally read *Phantastes* in 1916.

Now, to summarize Lewis's attitude at this time, note how he describes it:

Such, then, was the state of my imaginative life; over against it stood the life of my intellect. The two hemispheres of my mind were in the sharpest contrast. On the one side a many-islanded sea of poetry and

unbroken until a later time. It was not from Kirkpatrick that Lewis learned to love more the workings of the *imagination*—that would come from his own continued readings. The third period of his education was at Oxford, which began when he took exams in 1916 through 1917, at the end of which he entered the British armed forces and was sent to the front line in France. Following his recovery from injuries sustained at the front-lines, Lewis returned to civilian life in 1918, and then went back to Oxford in 1919 to finish his requirements to teach.

After he finished his Oxford requirements between 1922 and 1925, Lewis began to lecture and teach at Oxford, which marked the beginning of his professional academic career. His education had given him tools for thought, both for *reason* and *imagination*.¹⁶⁹ His earlier experiences of *Joy* were still undergirding his interest in mythology. Yet, during this period, Lewis continued to dismiss *Joy* and the myths that caused it as either auxiliary or adjunct in coming to a knowledge of *truth*.¹⁷⁰ But a certain course of events began to take place (somewhat overlapping with the years of Lewis's education but most of these events happening afterwards) which took the concern for mythology birthed in Lewis by desire and spun it all a new weave and pattern not before considered by him.

This new weave worked its way subconsciously into Lewis's mind when he was still quite young—seventeen years old in October of 1916—while he was still being tutored by Kirkpatrick. Lewis “picked out an Everyman in a dirty jacket, *Phantastes*, a *faerie Romance*,

myth; on the other a glib and shallow “rationalism.” Nearly all that I loved I believed to be imaginary; nearly all that I believed to be real I thought grim and meaningless. [170]

¹⁶⁹ Lewis would lecture and teach philosophy in 1924 and 1925. Cf. Barkman, *C.S. Lewis and Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 44. This would be how he would continue to hone his reasoning abilities and his philosophical education. Yet he never left behind the life of the *imagination*, though it at this time it did not seem to play too much a part of his professional career.

¹⁷⁰ This effectively cut off the *imagination*, the root of mythology, from the *affections*, the root of desire, and from both *being* and *truth* in Lewis's thinking.

George MacDonald”¹⁷¹ and began to read. This was Lewis’s first encounter with MacDonald, whom he would later call “my master.”¹⁷² He met there what he called “Holiness,”¹⁷³ and for the first time the fantastic was, for Lewis, a window into the real world:

Up till now each visitation of Joy had left the common world momentarily a desert. . . . Even when real clouds or trees had been the material of the vision, they had been so only by reminding me of another world, and I did not like the return to ours. But now I saw the bright shadow coming of the book into the real world and resting there, transforming all common things and yet itself unchanged.¹⁷⁴

For the first time, the fantastic concerned *being* in *time and space* and could speak *truth* in the words, the *language*, of a storyteller.

After another five years, while Lewis was at Oxford, a few incidents occurred that also disturbed his philosophical balance. He describes one of the incidents as being the conversion of some of his friends (one of them being Barfield) to Anthroposophy, which involved a belief in the supernatural, in something other than the material world reduced to its fundamental parts and interactions.¹⁷⁵ Then Lewis encountered a helpful distinction he would hold on to for the rest of his life when he read the philosopher Samuel Alexander’s *Space, Time, and Deity*. In it, he learned of the distinction between *Enjoyment* and *Contemplation*.¹⁷⁶ *Contemplation* is the mind’s

¹⁷¹ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 179. [George MacDonald, *Phantastes: A Faerie Romance* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000)]

¹⁷² Lewis, ed., *George MacDonald: An Anthology – 365 Readings*, xxxvii.

¹⁷³ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 179.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 181.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 205-209.

¹⁷⁶ Samuel Alexander, *Space, Time, and Deity*. Lewis describes this in pages 217-221 of *Surprised by Joy*, and he describes Alexander’s distinction thus:

When you see a table you ‘enjoy’ the act of seeing and ‘contemplate’ the table. Later, if you look up Optics and thought about Seeing itself, you would be contemplating the seeing and enjoying the thought [217].

Lewis says of this idea that he “accepted this distinction at once and have ever since regarded it as an indispensable tool for thought [218].” Where it becomes relevant is that Lewis applied it to his experience of *Joy*:

I saw that all my waitings and watchings for Joy, all my vain hopes to find some mental content on which I could, so to speak, lay my finger and say, ‘This is it,’ had been a futile attempt to contemplate the enjoyed. [219]

focus upon any object of thought, and *Enjoyment* is that focus itself. This distinction between these two mental modes helped Lewis make sense of his experience of *Joy* and he began to contemplate that there may be *something* which this desire corresponded to. Lewis's *Joy*, he perceived within himself, was equivalent to his mind's *Enjoyment* of some *Contemplated* object, typically objects he found in some myth or the object was the myth itself. The *affection* of *Joy* was brought about by his perception of something, in some sense, outside himself. And even though this perception may only have been a perception of something merely within his own *psyche* (as far as Lewis could tell), Alexander's distinction nonetheless provided him with a mental mechanism by which to understand his own *affections* in their relationship with the objects of his thought. This provided Lewis with the beginnings of an intellectual justification for linking *truth* with *affections*.

But it was ten years after reading *Phantastes* that Lewis would read yet another book that this time would not only link mythology to *being* but would also link the Christian gospel to mythology. This was G.K. Chesterton's *The Everlasting Man*, which Lewis read either late in the year of 1925 or early in the year 1926.¹⁷⁷ In *The Everlasting Man*, the link—as Lewis would come to see it—between pagan mythology and the gospel is spelled out nearly in its entirety.¹⁷⁸ But it seems that, though the idea was sown, it had not yet sprouted at the moment of reading,

In other words, when Lewis read of Balder in the myth, he was *Contemplating* Balder but *Enjoying* (in an accidental word play) *Joy*. But the moment he attempted to *Contemplate* the *Joy*, then he ceased to *Contemplate* Balder, who, in some mysterious sense, brought about the *Enjoyment* of *Joy*. *Being* must be *Contemplated*, but *affections* about *being* must be *Enjoyed*. If *affections* are *Enjoyed* themselves, then they cease to be related to an object proper to them, much as *truth* in *language* must also be related to *being*. I cannot think about a table right in front of me and think about my thinking about the table at the same time.

¹⁷⁷ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 223. Though Lewis first read Chesterton while he was recovering from his war wounds in 1918 (190-191).

¹⁷⁸ In some sense, Lewis never greatly modified Chesterton's views, which will be considered in more detail in the second part of this chapter. But he did think upon them in his own way, and add to them uniquely as well. Carnell notes as well that Chesterton's "influence on him seemed to increase with time." *Bright Shadow of Reality*, 57.

unlike the more immediate effect that reading *Phantastes* had on Lewis. Instead, it would take a second event to shake Lewis free from ignoring the threads of thought that were yet to come together. One day, a fellow atheist commented to him that “the evidence for the historicity of the Gospels was really surprisingly good. ‘Rum thing,’ he went on. ‘All that stuff of Frazer's about the Dying God. Rum thing. It almost looks as if it really happened once.’”¹⁷⁹ This stunned Lewis, who described this man as “the hardest boiled of all the atheists I ever knew”—¹⁸⁰“Was there then no escape?”¹⁸¹ There is no indication that this atheist had himself read Chesterton (which would have made his comment far less surprising): maybe he had, maybe he had not. But his comment was timely for Lewis, who only recently had the idea of *True Myth* sown in his mind. Now it was coming out of the soil and into the light.¹⁸²

All the tensions in Lewis caused by the unreconciled dichotomies brought about by his experiences and his education now had a resource to potentially reconcile them. But it would take another seven years for these resolutions to become conscious in Lewis’s mind much less

¹⁷⁹ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 223-224.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 223.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 224.

¹⁸² As far as I know, until this point, the idea of the gospel being *True Myth* had never been considered by Lewis, though the idea that the gospel is merely a myth had been most definitely considered from an early age. There are some letters to his childhood friend Arthur Greeves, written in his teenage years, that bear this out:

All religions, that is, all mythologies to give them their proper name are merely man's own invention - Christ as much as Loki. . . . Often, too, great men were regarded as gods after their death—such as Heracles or Odin: thus, after the death of a Hebrew philosopher Yeshua (whose name we have corrupted into Jesus) he became regarded as a god, a cult sprang up, which was afterwards connected with the ancient Hebrew Jahweh-worship, and so Christianity came into being - one mythology among many, but the one that we happen to have been brought up in. [“Letter to A. Greeves, October 12 (?), 1916,” in *The Collected Letters: Vol I*, 230-33]

I distinctly said that that there was once a Hebrew called Yeshua, I think on p. 2 (II!!) of my letter: when I say “Christ” of course I mean the mythological being into whom he was afterwards converted by popular imagination, and I am thinking of the legends about his magic performances, and resurrection, etc. That the man Yeshua or Jesus did actually exist, is as certain as that the Buddha did actually exist: Tacitus mentions his execution in the Annals. But all the other tomfoolery about virgin birth, magic healings, apparitions and so forth is on exactly the same footing as any other mythology. [“Letter to Arthur Greeves, October 18, 1916,” in *The Collected Letters: Vol. I*, 234-37]

accepted. Though he converted to theism in 1930,¹⁸³ it was not until a year later in the Autumn of 1931 that Lewis would become a Christian. His conversion, though the fruit of years, nevertheless came forth nearly overnight beginning with a nightlong conversation between Lewis, Tolkien, and another friend, Hugo Dyson.¹⁸⁴ Their discussion concerned the relationship of mythology and *meaning*. And, by the end of this talk, Lewis was somewhat taken aback by their insights. It was in this conversation that Tolkien and Dyson were intending to show Lewis that the gospel contained all that rich *meaning* and deep *affections* which Lewis preferred in pagan mythology but scorned as false in the Christian story. Thus, the necessary spark was lit that incited Lewis to reach an acceptance of the idea that his reading of Chesterton's *The Everlasting Man* had planted in his mind nearly six years previously. And the acceptance of this idea—an acceptance only separated by ten days from his conversion—¹⁸⁵ provided him with the solution of his dichotomies: of *reason* and *imagination*, of mythology and *truth*, and of *truth* and *affections*. The accepted idea, with its full form if not full maturity, was the idea of *True Myth*. And it is to Lewis's understanding of this reconciling idea that we must turn to for the rest of this chapter.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸³ I have decided to side with Alistair McGrath against Lewis himself on the date of Lewis's conversion to theism. Cf. McGrath, *C.S. Lewis – A Life: Eccentric Genius, Reluctant Prophet* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Press, 2013), 141-146. Whereas McGrath dates Lewis's transition to theism in 1930, Lewis does to 1929 in *Surprised by Joy*, 228-229.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. *Surprised by Joy*, 216 for a reference to Lewis's friendship with Dyson.

¹⁸⁵ Lewis made the decision to become a Christian on September 28, 1931—less than ten days after his conversation with Tolkien and Dyson. Lewis accounts for this at the end of *Surprised by Joy*, 236-238.

¹⁸⁶ It does not seem possible to know whether or not Tolkien used the term "true myth" for the gospel in this conversation, but the term is featured in his letter to Arthur Greeves on October 18, 1931. Lewis, *The Collected Letters: Volume I*, 975-977.

It would then be approximately a year after his conversion, while in Ireland, that Lewis would write *The Pilgrim's Regress*, which was published in 1933. It would represent, after a seven-year process since the reading of Chesterton in 1926, the resolution of mythology and *truth* in Lewis's thinking, particularly with relation to the gospel. It is also worth noting that the rest of this chapter can trace out Lewis's thoughts on *True Myth* precisely because it was following his conversion that he became so prolific. He needed to resolve his *imagination* and his *reason* before he could truly be productive, and this resolution would take place once he discovered the resolution between mythology and *truth*, which itself required him to accept the meaningful reality of Christ in the gospel, namely, *True Myth*.

The Reconciliations of *True Myth*

Set on the soul's acropolis the reason stands
A virgin, arm'd, commercing with celestial light.
And he who sins against her has defiled his own
Virginity: no cleansing makes his garment white;
So clear is reason. But how dark, imagining,
Warm, dark, obscure and infinite, daughter of Night:
Dark is her brow, the beauty of her eyes with sleep
Is loaded, and her pains are long, and her delight.
Tempt not Athene. Wound not in her fertile pains
Demeter, nor rebel against her motherright.
Oh who will reconcile in me both maid and mother,
Who make in me a concord of the depth and height?
Who make imagination's dim exploring touch
Ever report the same as intellectual sight?
Then could I truly say, and not deceive,
Then wholly, say, that I BELIEVE.
- C.S. Lewis, 'Reason'¹⁸⁷

“Tempt not Athene. Wound not in her fertile pains Demeter, nor rebel against her motherright.” Such were the twin failures that Lewis wished to avoid throughout his life. Athene was the Greek and Roman goddess of war (hence “arm’d”), as well as of wisdom and reason, the female counterpart to both Ares and Apollo. Lewis evokes the image of the Parthenon, a temple to Athene, set atop the acropolis at Athens, which itself evokes the history of philosophy in its search for *truth* as it extends through time from its early days within the city of Plato and Aristotle. Then Lewis refers to Demeter, the goddess of the earth and its fertility, who was also a mother goddess. This poem is a great contrast between Athene and Demeter, who each represent respectively *reason* and the *imagination*.¹⁸⁸ In this sonnet, Lewis fashions nothing like a ladder to

¹⁸⁷ I found this poem reading Michael Ward's article, “The Contemporary State of C.S. Lewis Scholarship,” *The Sewanee Theological Review* 55, no. 2 (Easter 2012): 144. In the article, Ward mentions Malcolm Guite's commentary on the poem, which I read after writing this chapter, and was helpfully confirmed on a couple points, though Guite says far more and sheds wonderful light on the relationship between the sonnet and Lewis's rational and imaginative development. Malcolm Guite, “Poet,” in *The Cambridge Companion to C.S. Lewis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 294-310.

¹⁸⁸ By “*imagination*” Lewis is referring not to *imagination* as *fancy* or *phantasy*, the image-making faculty, but to the *imagination* in the Barfieldian sense, the “organ of meaning,” the metaphor-making faculty.

climb the distance set between “the depth and height,” but he does plead for it. The end result of such a reconciliation would result in belief, a confident affirmation that what one has for opinions is true. And the space in which the “maid and mother” and “the depth and height” stand apart is *being* itself. To see them together is to see a glimpse of the whole of reality in unity, both of God and of creation. But how can the “touch” of *imagination* and the “intellectual sight” of *reason* “Ever report the same”? Note that “the same” refers to *truth*, *truth* about *being*. Thus, for Lewis when he wrote this poem (which seems to be not long before his conversion),¹⁸⁹ it seemed as if *imagination* might give *truth* differently than *reason*. The children of Demeter and the commerce of Athene both seem to be *truth*; yet they are both, as found in the form of words and of thoughts, so different from one another in structure and meaning.

It is possible that the resolution of this dilemma may be suggested by some questions that can be asked of this allegory—carefully, of course, so as not to collapse it under its own metaphorical weight. First, what is it that *imagination* is the mother of? And also, to ask perhaps beyond the answering of the poem, who bears the seed and fathers her children? As for that latter question, only a hint of how it is going to be answered will be given—let the reader understand.

To address the needed reconciliation mentioned in the sonnet, the aim of this portion of chapter two will be to see the reconciliation of each of the three dichotomies of *reason* and *imagination*, *truth* and mythology, and *truth* and *affections* in their own turn by the idea of *True Myth*. These occupied the mind of Lewis throughout his life, and his cry “Oh who will reconcile” should probably be read as a prayer, and one that was answered him, however impartially it could be in this life.

¹⁸⁹ Guite, “Poet,” 306.

Reason and imagination

That there was a conflict between *reason* and *imagination* in the mind of the unconverted Lewis needs little more justification. And the cause lurking behind this internal war was the distinction between two vastly different experiences—between the experience of *Joy* on the one hand, and that of intellectual enlightenment on the other—and two largely distinct results of those experiences. On the one hand, logical and abstract truths *without reference in time and space* and, on the other, metaphorical and concrete what-seemed-like truths which impinged upon *time and space* yet also seemed distant from the abstract truths.

Reason even before Lewis's conversion had its own story within his thought, not just in relation to the *imagination* but to *being* itself. And while the *imagination* and questions of *meaning* were important for Lewis leading up to and following his conversion, *reason* also provided him with good reasons for abandoning his old materialism for idealism, which finally led him to theism.¹⁹⁰ If *reason* works at all in the mind to know *truth*, it is because there is a real parallel in kind between *reason* and reality.¹⁹¹

Likewise, the *imagination* seemed to have as legitimate a claim to reveal *truth* about *being* within the mind as did *reason*. Note, that it “seemed” to have this right. Lewis (before he was a Christian), in dialogue with Tolkien, once referred to myths as “lies breathed through silver.”¹⁹² What he meant was that the myths were beautiful, and that they provided aesthetic experience

¹⁹⁰ James Patrick comments on Lewis during his Oxford years as a student transitioning into the faculty that he became by 1923 “part of a small but important Thermidorian reaction against the positivist revolution. . .” This was an important shift into the idealism which he would hold to until his conversion to theism in 1930. James Patrick, “C.S. Lewis and Idealism,” in *Rumours of Heaven: Essays in Celebration of C.S. Lewis*, eds. James Patrick and Andrew Walker (Guildford, Surrey: Eagle, 1998), 159.

¹⁹¹ Lewis mentions something he calls the “psycho-physical parallelism” of reality to refer to this relationship between mind and *being*. “Bluspels and Flalansferes,” 159.

¹⁹² Tolkien, “On Fairy-stories,” 74.

which, though pleasing to the *affections*, offered no insight into the *nature* of reality.¹⁹³ But, at this point, Lewis seemed to be in an intellectual knot caused by some measure of inconsistency. Though mythology, or poetry as metaphor, perhaps may not be a venue into *truth* as such, what of the *imagination* in general? In a letter to Cecil Harwood (one of his friends, along with Barfield, who had converted to Anthroposophy), he wrote, “. . . we must be content to feel the highest truths ‘in our bones’: if we try to make them explicit, we really make them untruth.”¹⁹⁴ This letter was written not long after Lewis had read *The Everlasting Man*, and he did not seem, at that point, to recognize how close he was to a solution. When Lewis speaks of “explicit” truths, he means the deliverances of *reason*, and by “in our bones,” he likely, even if not entirely, is speaking of the products of the *imagination*.¹⁹⁵

To clarify the problem even further, let us return to the two questions given above. First, what is it that *imagination* is the mother of? The “highest truths” would seem to be a good candidate for an answer. But so would metaphor. Yet, by the definition Barfield would give, metaphor is likely identical to the “highest truths.” In the same letter to Harwood, Lewis writes, “My skepticism begins when people offer me explicit accounts of the super-intelligible and in so doing use all the categories of the intellect.”¹⁹⁶ Here is where it becomes most apparent that Lewis is contrasting *reason*, “the categories of the intellect,” and the *imagination*, and proposing *imagination* as the

¹⁹³ Though, for the brief period of time between 1918 and 1920, during which time he wrote *Spirits in Bondage*, Lewis did seem to escape the tendency to treat *beauty* and the *affections* of aesthetic experience as nothing but brain activity which reveal nothing true about reality, though pleasant and desirable.

¹⁹⁴ Lewis, "Letter to Cecil Hardwood, October 23, 1926," in *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis: Volume I*, 670-72.

¹⁹⁵ This would seem to be consistent with the position Lewis will be shown to have had in the next portion of this paper, on *truth* and mythology. Also, note that this would be consistent with Barfield's basic position, elucidated in *Poetic Diction*. That book was published in 1928, and at the time of writing to Harwood, Lewis was already well into being an idealist. No doubt, Barfield's Great War with Lewis had already affected how Lewis approached certain patterns of thought, as he wrote in *Surprised by Joy*, "Much of the thought which he [Barfield] afterward put into *Poetic Diction* had already become mine before that important little book appeared. It would be strange if it had not [200]."

¹⁹⁶ Lewis, "Letter to Cecil Hardwood, October 23, 1926," in *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis: Volume I*, 670-672.

only real competitor to *reason*. And note what the *imagination* is supposed to give an “account” of which the *reason* cannot; namely, the “super-intelligible.”¹⁹⁷ Yet, Lewis never wished to dethrone *reason* from its proper place, even its highest place (“Set on the soul's acropolis reason stands”). The real question then would be how Lewis would reconcile the children of *imagination*, metaphor and otherwise, to the abstract truths of *reason*, so that both could be known to reveal *truth*. Or, in other words, what *tertium quid* would judge these two compatible?

In a letter to Arthur Greeves, written within a month of his conversion, Lewis wrote:

Now the story of Christ is simply a true myth: a myth working on us in the same way as the others, but with this tremendous difference that *it really happened*: and one must be content to accept it in the same way, remember that it is God's myth where the others are men's myths: i.e. the Pagan stories are God expressing Himself through the minds of poets, using such images as He found there, while Christianity is God expressing Himself through what we call 'real things.' Therefore it is *true*, not in the sense of being a 'description' of God (that no finite mind could take in) but in the sense of being the way in which God chooses to (or can) appear to our faculties. The 'doctrines' we get *out of* the true myth are of course *less true*: they are translations into our *concepts* and *ideas* of that wh. [what] God has already expressed in a language more adequate, namely the actual incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection. Does this amount to belief in Christianity? At any rate I am now certain (a) That this Christian story is to be approached, in a sense, as I approach the other myths. (b) That it is the most important and full of meaning. I am also *nearly* certain that it really happened.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁷ The “super-intelligible” stands for something like the “super-natural,” but not necessarily the supernatural in the sense of something “beyond” or “above” nature, which is the world at least in part accessible to the senses. The super-sensible might just be anything that is not accessible to the senses. In the Great War between Lewis and Barfield, Lewis pointed out that the epistemological question posed by Kant was not that the human mind cannot have access to the “super-intelligible” but that it cannot have “pure” access to anything outside of the mind, whether it is material or immaterial. The proper distinction is between the real and phenomenal, and not between the sensible and the supersensible. Such was Lewis's view before he became a Christian, and he likely did not change it much, except he allowed for knowledge of the “super-sensible” then. That was a step up from his materialist days—during that stage, Lewis would not have acknowledged even the existence of the supersensible, or at least the supernatural. Lewis, “Magdalen College, Oxford [1927],” in *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis: Volume III*, 1600-1604.

¹⁹⁸ Lewis, “Letter to A. Greeves, October 18, 1931,” in *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis: Volume I*, 975-977.

Stephen J. Caldecott gives something of a summary of what ways that Lewis could see the mythic in the gospel: Jesus Christ fits this pattern for the hero. Just as he fulfills the prophecies of the Old Testament, he also fulfills the universal archetype of the mythic hero (although in both cases he does so partly by turning expectations on their head). He is born to a virgin and is called the “son of God.” He enters a world oppressed and enslaved (primarily by sin, but also by the Romans). He receives his mission when he is baptized in the Jordan: the Holy Spirit then drives him into the desert for a time of trial; there he battles

Here we find the essential materials for not only Lewis's view of *True Myth*, but also for the way in which he would reconcile the various dichotomies in his thought. Presently, though, *reason* and *imagination*. The *True Myth* has the same *function* as the pagan myths, but it has a different *origin*, in that it does not arise to perception from within the minds of humanity, by their *imagination* forming metaphor and myths, but instead it arises from within God himself by His own action, or expression: it is "God's myth."¹⁹⁹ Thus, for Lewis, *special revelation* is identified with "the actual incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection," which is a "myth working on us the same way as the others."²⁰⁰ Lewis also saw, then, that the gospel does *reveal God's nature fully*, yet not exhaustively because of human mental finiteness. *True Myth* is "the way in which God chooses to (or can) appear to our faculties." Now, here an interpretation of what Lewis is saying hovers between two choices. The first interpretative choice would be that God has chosen to reveal himself in the mode of mythology among many other ways of *revelation*. The second

spiritually with the 'dragon' Satan; he returns from this skirmish to recover the lost treasure of his Father's kingdom, the human race; by giving his life for his friends he succeeds in undoing the enchantment of original sin; finally he is raised to new life and, in the book of Revelation, is rewarded with the hand of the 'princess' Israel, the 'new Jerusalem... prepared as a bride' (21:2). The story of Jesus Christ is, clearly, whatever else it may be, a myth. ["Speaking Truths Only the Imagination May Grasp: Myth and Real Life," in *The Pilgrim's Guide: C.S. Lewis and the Art of Witness*, 86-97 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 90-91] But it is difficult to find one set of events that correspond to some other abstract "mythic" set of events. In fact, a decent and approximating set of many such examples could be given. It is hard to pin down the mythic. In some way, the gospel itself is the "real" set of events that are truly "mythic" in quality to which other stories might correspond, thus, becoming mythic. So, there is no abstract "mythic-ness," but only the concrete "mythic-ness" of the *True Myth*. But it should be noted that our perception of the *True Myth* is limited, and so there must be depths in it rarely if not ever fully contemplated by ourselves, now or in eternity.

¹⁹⁹ In *The Allegory of Love*, Lewis refers to allegory as a "mode of expression" and to "symbolism" (i.e. the mythological *function* of the mind) as a "mode of thought." As it is, the distinction is a fine and a good one and does seem to represent Lewis's view on the distinction between allegory and mythology quite well. Yet the curious thing is that, in this case of *revelation*, for God, "symbolism" is a "mode of expression" as well as a "mode of thought." It is how God communicates with humanity. *The Allegory of Love*, 58.

²⁰⁰ Though, remember that there is two kinds of *special revelation* for Lewis: that of *redemptive revelation*, as found in the history of Israel and the Old Testament literature, and that of the Incarnation, which is the ultimate *revelation*. The larger story of creation, fall, and redemption is an aspect of *True Myth*, but the Incarnation is its centerpiece, and the part that defines the whole. In "The Grand Miracle," Lewis speaks of the Incarnation as a missing piece of some artwork, which, when taking its proper place, makes sense of the whole. Its fittingness would confirm its place. Lewis, "The Grand Miracle," 81-82.

choice is that God reveals himself solely by mythology (in the most basic sense, whatever doctrine we get through the mythic *revelation* is a result of *revelation* rather than it itself). The latter interpretation could itself be interpreted as either meaning that the mythic is the only possible way that God could reveal himself to us (on the basis of the abilities of our created faculties), or that God could reveal himself otherwise to us, but has chosen to do so solely through the gospel as the *True Myth*. I think the former interpretation of the latter choice is the more likely option, since the latter interpretation is equal, in possibility, to the first interpretive choice of Lewis's meaning.²⁰¹ Thus, the *imagination*, which gives to birth to mythology through metaphor, is what encounters the *being* of God in the gospel, which *reveals God's nature fully*. Then, taking note of Lewis's own position that the *reason* judges the products of the *imagination*, the *reason* judges the *truth* of the gospel and finds within it a lack of contradiction, internal consistency, and coherence with what else is known of reality. *Reason* gives the "concepts and ideas of that wh[ich] God has already expressed in a language more adequate," namely, the *True Myth*.²⁰²

²⁰¹ A quick elaboration is needed at this point. To say that *God necessarily reveals himself to humanity through a myth* is not the same as saying that *God necessarily reveals himself through a myth*. It is by virtue of his creation of humanity with the minds that they have that then God must reveal himself through a myth, a myth through which will come the "facts" and "abstractions" of doctrines. Thus, *revelation* as it has happened is defined by conditional and not absolute necessity. Note that "facts" and "abstractions" are not disparaged, but their limitations are emphasized by Lewis. Yet, even the myth of the gospel is limited in the sense that it comes into finite knowers, and, thus, can only be so comprehended. In this sense, it is true at least that *A finite creature necessarily only finitely knows God who is infinite*, whether that knowing is through a myth or otherwise. Lewis indicates as much as this in the letter quoted, and so has any Christian theologian.

²⁰² Before Lewis was converted, while he was an idealist, he held to a view of Christianity that he describes as such:

Absurdly. . . I thought that 'the Christian myth' conveyed to unphilosophic minds as much of the truth, that is of Absolute Idealism, as they were capable of grasping, and that even that much put them above the irreligious. Those who could not rise to the notion of the Absolute would come nearer to the truth by belief in 'a God' than by disbelief. Those who could not understand how, as Reasoners, we participated in the timeless and therefore deathless world, would get a symbolic shadow of the truth by believing in a life after death. [*Surprised by Joy*, 215]

It is interesting to note that, according to this account, Lewis in some ways "switched" his position on the relationship between "the Christian myth" and the *truth* as grasped by *reason* by the reasoning of an idealist. Later, he would see the myth as more instructive than the abstract "truth." Note as well the *timeless* nature of the truths to which Lewis refers. It was not only the myths of the pagans that were *timeless*, reflective of the simple and

It is helpful to take note for a moment the question Lewis asks near the end of his letter to Arthur Greeves, “Does this amount to belief in Christianity,” and recall the final couplet of the sonnet above “Then could I truly say, and not deceive, then wholly, say, that I BELIEVE.” Lewis is asking whether or not the gospel can “report the same as intellectual sight” even though it arose from *revelation* provided to the *imagination* through a mythic story, *the* mythic Story. *Imagination* and *reason* are not reconciled by one of them ruling over the other, or by one subsuming the other, but rather by being partners in purpose by both receiving from God the knowledge of God, the *truth* of God in the gospel story; they are two eyes, both set within the mind—one to capture an image, the other to give depth and to distinguish. But, what of *truth* do they both grasp apart from one another?²⁰³

Truth and mythology

In “Bluspels and Flalansferes: A Semantic Nightmare,” Lewis refers to the distinction, of his own creation, between the “Master’s” and the “Pupil’s” metaphors.²⁰⁴ A Master’s metaphor is one which is created by one who understands something apart from the metaphor in order to teach another who does not have an understanding about that thing; whereas a Pupil’s metaphor is one which is relied upon to understand something without which there is no other access to the

continuous reality of the gods, but also the truths of their philosophy, and so it is for philosophers today. No philosopher, contemporary or not, expects all the truths accessible to *reason* to be *timeless*, unaffected by the passing of events. Yet, I would think that all would suppose that there are truths that remain true regardless of any and all temporal progression. What connection can there be between us who are in time and these *timeless* facts?

²⁰³ Overall, let us be cautious about divvying up the human mind, as Lewis himself was careful to not go about too dogmatically in that task. This had been the great task of ancient, medieval, and modern philosophers and psychologist. But, there is some doubt of its truthfulness in Lewis’s thought, and in those who influenced him. In the poet Wordsworth, there is a line that Lewis would have read, which reads:

. . . But who shall parcel out
His intellect by geometric rules,
Split into province by round and square?

- William Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (1799), 242b-244

And so Lewis himself would share the reticence of the Romantics for being too certain of *reason*’s analysis of the rest of the mind.

²⁰⁴ Lewis, “Bluspels and Flalansferes,” 137-141.

thing in the understanding.²⁰⁵ Lewis then sets these two kinds of metaphor as the two ends of a spectrum, and all metaphors exist, more or less, nearer one end than another.²⁰⁶ But then Lewis introduces a twist, that, except for the case of describing what is perceived directly by the senses, all our *language* is metaphorical in nature.²⁰⁷ Perhaps worse than that, most, if not all, of what we end up with is Pupil's metaphors,²⁰⁸ and we seem then to be at their mercy. Lewis then offers some relief. We speak in many metaphors, rather than just one, which helps clarify much in the end.²⁰⁹ But, no matter what, there are only three options: "Either literalness, or else metaphor understood: one or another of these we must have; the third alternative is nonsense."²¹⁰ Notice that the distinction between what is true and what is false has not entered into Lewis's discussion, since *reason* is "the organ of truth," and *imagination* is "the organ of meaning."²¹¹

²⁰⁵ Peter Macky comments on Lewis's contribution to the understanding of metaphor thusly:

The heart of Lewis' contribution to understanding metaphors is his distinction between master's and pupil's metaphors. A master's metaphor is one he has chosen in order to communicate something I know directly to a person who does not know it directly. For me (the master) the metaphor is optional. If another person knows the reality directly too, then I can speak about it literally to him. A pupil's metaphor is one I have received from someone who knows the subject better than I do. In that case I am a pupil, and my thinking and understanding are dependent on the metaphor. If I know nothing else about the subject, then I am totally dependent on the metaphor for the slight inkling of meaning I have gained. If, however, I later come to know the reality directly, then the metaphor becomes optional. Then I can speak about the subject literally. ["The Role of Metaphor in Christian Thought and Experience as Understood by Gordon Clark and C.S. Lewis," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* no. 3, vol. 24 (September 1981): 244-245]

²⁰⁶ "Bluspels and Flalansferes," 140-141.

²⁰⁷ To quote Lewis from "Horrid Little Red Things," "All language, except about objects of sense, is metaphorical through and through." "Horrid Little Red Things," in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins, 1970), 71.

²⁰⁸ At first sight, this might be confusing. Surely every Pupil's metaphor must begin as a Master's metaphor. Perhaps this is the case. But, as far as we know, most of our metaphors, deeply laden within our *language*, are to us Pupil's metaphors, in that, we need them to understand the things we are speaking about and we cannot find a way around them by which we know what we are referring to apart from those metaphors. From whence they came seems mysterious, though many explanations can be offered. The best seems to be that they came, and come, through people interpreting insensible realities (or things perceived to be realities) with reference to the objects and experiences of *sense*, which are physical realities. On a reductionist view, this means physical realities are all there is. On a Christian view, this means simply that physical realities serve a purpose for human knowing and *revelation*.

²⁰⁹ "Bluspels and Flalansferes," 151-152.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 153.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 157.

Thus, the *imagination* “producing new metaphors or revivifying old, is not the cause of truth, but its condition.”²¹²

But then, Lewis introduces one more turn in his final analysis:

It is, I confess, undeniable that such a view indirectly implies a kind of truth or rightness in the imagination itself. I said at the outset that the truth we won by metaphor could not be greater than the truth of the metaphor itself; and we have seen since that all our truth, or all but a few fragments, is won by metaphor.²¹³

Lewis is then talking of two senses of “truth” in the above passage: “Truth we won by metaphor,” namely the abstract intellectual conceptions that *reason* can name as true; but also “the truth of the metaphor itself.” Now, such a knot of words requires some help unwinding, for we ourselves could have our heads spin trying to think of two kinds of “truths.” But the solution may be rather simple. It may be best to think that Lewis is, ultimately, proposing a fundamental category, *truth*, which is the correspondence between mind and *being*, from which the different kinds of truths are but species. This Lewis refers to in following:

And thence, I confess, it does follow that if our thinking is ever true, then the metaphors by which we think must have been good metaphors. . . . —if there is not, in fact, a kind of psycho-physical parallelism (or more) in the universe—then all our thinking is nonsensical.²¹⁴

Of course, mind itself is a part of *being*. Thus, mind, nature, angels, God, all are in some sense related to one another in a manner which allows metaphor in *language* to itself be a *revelation* of reality. This is to imply much, and Lewis concedes this, “And so, admittedly, the view I have taken has metaphysical implications. But so has every view.”²¹⁵

²¹² Lewis, “Bluspels and Flalansferes,” 157.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 157-158.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 158.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 158.

Now, Lewis did not go from a critical discussion of *language* to a metaphysical discussion of *being* on merely the authority of *reason*. Though Lewis admits here “I am a rationalist,”²¹⁶ he is not admitting that he is an Enlightenment rationalist whose sole authority is *reason*. Indeed, that would be a mad thing for him to do after admitting so much power to the *imagination* and nearly painting himself in as a Romantic reactionary. But Lewis did not go so far as that. He admitted instead the proper role of *reason* in the mind. We have already seen how Lewis could reconcile *reason* and *imagination*, since both reveal reality in their own way, and no longer be troubled about whether or not he had access to *being* within his mind from one rather than the other. But now, we can note how difficult it may be after all to come to an exact definition of *truth* by way of Lewis.

Next, we note what Lewis wrote in “Myth Became Fact,” that “What flows into you from the myth is not truth but reality.”²¹⁷ But we note that in this passage Lewis has written as well that “every myth becomes the father of innumerable truths on the abstract level.”²¹⁸ Now, this passage here does land us in some confusion again, but it can be resolved as well. We have also noted in chapter one the relationship between mythology and metaphor in Lewis’s thought. Well, here those observations bear full fruit. There, I wrote (referring to Lewis’s own thought) “so mythology comes about from what is provided by *imagination* but, in some sense, before *reason* abstracts.” But the difficulty is that if *imagination* is the mother of “motherright,” the Demeter of the mind, then how is her child mythology “the father of innumerable truths on the abstract level”? Note that *imagination*’s children are more numerous than just mythology; the abstract

²¹⁶ Ibid., 157.

²¹⁷ Lewis, “Myth Became Fact,” 66.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 66.

truths could be considered her children as well. But mythology holds a special place as a fruitful offspring.

But this is strange. *Sense* provides us with immediate particular experience²¹⁹ and *reason* with abstract truths about the whole of *being*. This creates the dilemma “either to taste and not to know or to know and not to taste.”²²⁰ Yet, help comes from other quarters: “Of this tragic dilemma myth is the partial solution. In the enjoyment of a great myth we come nearest to experiencing as a concrete what can otherwise be understood only as an abstraction.”²²¹ Thus is the *nature* of mythology. A *nature* rooted in the “psycho-physical parallelism” within reality. Mythology is a hub, a “mode of thought,”²²² through which the metaphor-creating *imagination* can then quickly provide a profound unity of thought for the *reason* to discover many truths about *being*.²²³

²¹⁹ Ibid., 65.

²²⁰ Ibid., 65. Of course, here, the distinction between Enjoyment and Contemplation rears its head again.

²²¹ Ibid., 66.

²²² As Lewis terms it in *The Allegory of Love*, 60.

²²³ The following note is intended to be a corollary of Lewis’s thought thus far on the relationship between myths and metaphors: it may be what he himself thought, or it may not be; but it at least seems to be consistent with his thought.

A myth is itself a complete, or nearly complete, metaphor; the more complete, the more mythical the myth. Remember the spectrum of myth—perhaps a spectrum of metaphor would be appropriate to think of as well. The more complete a metaphor, the more things it can unite and thus create, in a sense, more meaning than a less complete metaphor might. Every myth is a metaphor which is much nearer the side of completeness; a story that functions metaphorically. The mythic quality of a story is determined by how well the story as a myth functions metaphorically, that is, in creating meaning which unites things, and establishes, before the mind, their relationship. And, not only their mere relationship, but their proper relationship: not only the relationship that they actually do have in reality but also that which they ought to have. This is perhaps a good way of distinguishing *truth* from *goodness* in some definitive terms. Metaphors that concern *truth* uphold the unity that things actually have at the moment of the metaphor’s usage. But metaphors that concern *goodness* portray the relationship things ought to have in reality, but, at the moment of usage, do not. And this lack in the *being* of something or many things may be an evil, if there is resistance to a right unification; but it may also simply be the finite recognizing its finiteness and first perceiving and then longing to become unto right *being* yet more. Thus, in some sense, all ethical statements are just such metaphors. If we were to go further, we might say that metaphors of both *truth* and *goodness* (and a single metaphor may share in both) are metaphors of *beauty* inasmuch as more right unity is perceived at once. The more that a metaphor portrays unity to the mind by revealing the relations between things, and the more that these increasingly many relations are “right,” then the more beautiful to the mind will be the perception that comes through that metaphor. Now, of course, *truth*, *goodness*, and *beauty* are not perceived by *language* alone in metaphor, but in and through all *analogy* in created *natures* and in its relationship within itself and to God’s *being*.

And it is when we consider why myths are like this, able to reveal *truth*, that the *True Myth* comes into our vision so suddenly. Following this discussion of mythology, Lewis then writes (with some added parentheses for translation), “Now as myth [human myths] transcends thought, Incarnation [True Myth] transcends myth.”²²⁴ Thus, “the heart of Christianity is a myth which is also a fact.”²²⁵ Even so, the old pagan myths were fictions in some sense, *without reference in time and space*, even if they were thought to reveal something like *truth*: “The old myth of the Dying God, *without ceasing to be myth* [emphasis original], comes down from heaven of legend and imagination to the earth of history.”²²⁶ The Incarnation, thus, took place *in time and space*.²²⁷ Mythology has its roots, as a human phenomenon, in the mind; yet, because of that “psycho-physical parallelism” it reveals something of at least the physical world of nature. Yet Lewis also did say “or more.” It was not exactly a subtle hint—there also seems to be a “psycho-divine” parallel; and, Lewis would have suggested this “physical-divine” parallel as well.²²⁸ Mythology is fit as the agent to *reveal God's nature fully* inasmuch as it is the mythology of *True Myth*.

Thus, in Lewis, *reason* supplies us with rational *truth*. Yet we are also supplied by the *imagination*, and particularly supplied by the vehicle of mythology, with imaginative *truth* as

²²⁴ Lewis, “Myth Became Fact,” 66.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 66.

²²⁶ Lewis, “Myth Became Fact,” 66.

²²⁷ Not enough scripture has been referred to thus far in this paper, but one passage seems to have affinity with this notion, that the mythic has become a part of our temporal and concrete reality:

That which was in the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us. . .

- 1 John 1:1-2

Unless otherwise noted, all scriptural quotations will be from the English Standard Version (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001).

²²⁸ We may as well go the whole way and revisit the first chapter’s discussion of *revelation* and the *analogia entis* at this point. All that God makes “parallels” him in some manner, so that he might be known through what he has made inasmuch as he has created minds capable of receiving such knowledge through what has been made. Another way in which this point could be tied to Lewis is to use his distinction between Master’s and Pupil’s metaphor. For God, the world itself is a Master’s metaphor; and, above all, his Incarnate Son is the supreme metaphor. To us, though, all theology is Pupil’s metaphor.

well in a different kind of mental mode, and also very likely not in the same “mode of expression” in *language*.²²⁹ Rather, narrative seems to be the mode of *language* myths are met in, and none the less is true in the case of the *True Myth*. And, thus, if merely human myths already were able to be “the father of innumerable truths on the abstract level,”²³⁰ then it may be the case that the *True Myth* is the father of *all* truths on the abstract level.²³¹

Truth and Affections

Lewis throughout his life linked the reading or hearing of myths with the experience of *Joy*, as much as this can be seen from the biographical sketch given above. And whereas Lewis did think of *reason* and *imagination* as *faculties* of the mind, he also gave a considerable role to what I have called *affections*, of which *Joy* was the primary concern throughout Lewis’s life.²³² This, along with *sense*, memory, *phantasy*, conscience, the unconscious mind, and the *will* make up the plethora that Lewis saw the soul composed of.²³³ And Lewis did suffer as much with the

²²⁹ To refer again to *The Allegory of Love*, 60.

²³⁰ “Myth Became Fact,” 66.

²³¹ To quote another scripture for the sake of its suggestive power at this point (though contextually irrelevant):

Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

- John 14:5-6

²³² Lewis was concerned with other *affections* as well. An *affection* in this paper is defined as involving emotional experience but not merely being emotional experience. An *affection* is brought about by the conjunction between *reason* determining whether or not something or some decision will cause pain or pleasure—and also determining whether or not an action ought to be done or not, and whether or not it is worth doing—and the emotions, which creates a situation of motivation where someone “feels” whether or not they wish to do or not to do something, or to prefer something or not on the basis of a kind of rational calculation (though not necessarily a “true” calculation). The emotional experience of apprehending this motivation is an *affection*. Each *affection* within the *affections* could be generally categorized as either a desire or a fear. This fits rather well with what Lewis may have held to, namely, a belief that human beings have a faculty of the sensitive soul (to be explained in n. 233) called estimation which “seeks out ‘intentions’ . . . which are, for the lack of a better word, things toward which the soul moves. . . [or flees for that matter]” Barkman, 271.

²³³ Barkman takes pains to define Lewis’s psychology in chapter seven of *C.S. Lewis & Philosophy as a Way of Life*. Following *The Discarded Image*, Barkman traces out an Aristotelean model of human nature in Lewis’s thought, which is mostly like that of Albert the Great. Thus, there are three kinds of soul: vegetable, sensitive, and rational. The vegetable soul concerns the unconscious functions of the body, and is not discussed in great detail by Lewis, according to Barkman. The sensitive soul is composed of five senses and five wits: the wits are, common sense, which collects and organizes the sensations from the five senses; the sensitive imagination, which creates and stores immaterial representations of a physical sensations; estimation, which determines whether or not something should be pursued or avoided, and indicates this to the conscious individual by either pain or pleasure, desire or fear;

enmity between his *affections*—either the *Joy* experienced rarely or the aesthetic pleasure experienced more often—and his *reason*, which seemed to deliver *truth*, but in a manner quite distinct from the working of the *affections*. Thus, a similar problem as that which existed in the conflict of *reason* and *imagination* is present here: namely, how can the *affections* at all be related to *being* and so provide one with *truth*?

There is one distinction that must be made between these two differing dichotomies Lewis faced. While it is easy to see the way in which both *reason* and *imagination* work in conjunction with *language* (even the internal *language* of thought) both to mean and to judge, it is more difficult to see the connection between the *affections* and reality. But Lewis believed that the intellect²³⁴ could perceive *truth* immediately, and so could the *imagination*.²³⁵ Why could he not hold that the *affections*, particularly *Joy*, might not themselves have some kind of proper relationship to *being*? Why could *Joy* not tell him that it was right to desire *something*, even if he

the sensitive memory, which records the various estimations caused by the estimation; and phantasy, which organizes the immaterial representations of the sensitive imagination and the estimations of the sensitive memory, much like common sense organizes the input of the five senses. The rational soul is composed of *reason*, which is divided into intellect, which apprehends self-evident truth, and discursive reason, which takes the results of the intellect and goes through logical steps from self-evident truths to discover more of truths; the conscience, which is the capacity to be aware of what ought to be done and ought not to be done; free-will, which is the choosing faculty; rational memory, which remembers “heavenly desire [273-274]”—a Platonic turn—and which remembers the ideas of *reason* and the *imagination* and reflects upon these; the final faculty is that of the rational *imagination*, which creates (or discovers) meaning. Barkman has a bit of trouble fitting the unconscious mind into the model, since Lewis did accept this aspect of “the new psychology” into his thinking. Barkman, 266-292.

Now, Barkman does amazing work showing how Lewis throughout all his thought kept a fairly consistent view of human *nature*, at least throughout his post-conversion years as a Christian. Yet, one gets the sense that Lewis was far less consistent than might be hoped on these points. For one, what Barkman terms the “sensitive imagination” is what Lewis elsewhere calls *phantasy* in one place [cf. one of the Great War letters, *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis: Volume III*, 1619-1620], which Barkman instead applies more specifically to another faculty of the sensitive soul. It may be that in following the Medieval model Lewis himself outlined so well in *The Discarded Image*, Barkman at points may assume too much of Lewis’s own psychology.

Most of this paper has concerned the two major faculties of the rational soul, namely, *reason* and rational *imagination*. Note that emotional experiences such as involved in the *affections*, which concern pain and pleasure, desire and fear, love and hatred all arise from within the sensitive soul, it would seem, but in reaction to both sensitive and rational soul, as well as vegetable presumably. But, of course, there is no need to confuse medieval models that Lewis only may have held to with heuristic models used in this paper to help understand Lewis’s thinking.

²³⁴ Take note here of the distinction between intellect and discursive reason within *reason*.

²³⁵ Which *truth* is in an apprehension of the unity of *being*, and could also result in the creation of proper metaphor.

did not know what precisely that something was?²³⁶ In this sense, Lewis was looking for the *affections* to be a part of the “psycho-physical” as well as “psycho-divine” parallels within reality.

Further understanding can come from reading and understanding a part of a line in the sonnet above concerning the *imagination*: “. . . her pains are long, and her delight.” Lewis often connected the insights of the *imagination* with the experience of *Joy*,²³⁷ as if the *imagination*, in its working, could produce the experience. So, an encounter with imaginative insight at least could bring about such a longing as *Joy* was. Thus, Lewis seems to think that the *affections* react upon what is perceived by the *imagination*, and *reason* as well.²³⁸ And just as *truth* is perceived by *reason* in one mode and *imagination* in another, so the *affections* perceive *truth* about *being* in their own mode.

Now, where *True Myth* provides a way for the *affections* to be related to what is real—to reveal what should be loved or hated, what should be desired or shunned—is that it presents one with

²³⁶ Lewis’s life, as he describes it in *Surprised by Joy*, is like a search on his part if but a chess game on God’s. Also, earlier, only a year after his conversion, Lewis would portray his life as search through the allegory of *The Pilgrim’s Regress*, which the form of a quest story, set in motion by the experience of *Joy*.

²³⁷ There is a passage in *Poetic Diction* where Barfield explains aesthetic experience in a way relevant to Lewis’s own experiences:

When I try to describe in more detail than by the phrase ‘aesthetic imagination’ what experience it is to which at some time or other I have been led, and at any time may be led again, by all of these examples, I find myself obliged to define it as a ‘felt change of consciousness’, where ‘consciousness’ embraces all my awareness of my surroundings at any given moment, and ‘surroundings’ includes my own feelings. [48]

Here, Barfield explains something like what Lewis went through in his own “aesthetic experience,” as well as whatever he went through by the experience of *Joy*. As to Lewis’s constant attempt to renew the experience, Barfield writes, “It [the ‘felt change of consciousness’] lives during the moment of transition and then dies, and if it is to be repeated, some means must be found of renewing the transition itself [52].” In a moment the mind, through either *reason* or *imagination* (though Barfield is talking the *imagination* here) comes to a further understanding of *being*, which is *truth*, and there is generally some kind of emotional experience which can be properly termed an *affection*, since it will generally motivate someone to pursue further knowledge if only for the sake of the experience accompanied by the increase in understanding.

²³⁸ Now, these “reactions” to the products of the *reason* and the *imagination* are merely possible but not necessary. They may not accompany an increase in understanding at all, whether or not that increase actually equates to having a knowledge of *truth*. In this case, to understand merely means to perceive that one has a further apprehension of things by one’s opinions; whether or not the opinions are true and therefore knowledge is another question.

the rightful and supreme object of both desire and fear.²³⁹ Emotional experience without context can provide no such assurance, and even the many contexts that it has throughout human experience cannot provide comfort. But the *True Myth*, being mythic, can give just such an assurance.²⁴⁰ It has already, by *imagination*, united all (not merely some) things in the mind, and already, by *reason*, been shown true; thus, if *affections* are properly bound to *True Myth*, they are appropriately bound to reality.²⁴¹ Yet, it would be useful if Lewis provided some account of how this might work.

In his essay, “Transposition,” Lewis gives a fascinating account of a theological concept that he called *transposition* and he applies it to a number of relations that exist in reality. At core, *transposition* concerns the representation of a greater thing (God, i.e. “the spiritual”) by a lower thing (nature), which he calls “symbolism,” or the union of a greater thing with a lower thing, which he calls “sacramental.”²⁴² Lewis first attempts to work out the relationship between God and creation: “Put in its most general terms, our problem is that of the obvious continuity between things which are admittedly natural and things which, it is claimed, are spiritual.”²⁴³ Heavenly things are described by earthly things—perhaps the “heavenly things” then either do not exist or are less than the “earthly”? Then, Lewis turns to the example of the relationship

²³⁹ Thus, in a deft move, *True Myth* not only reconciles *truth* to the *affections*, but it also reconciles the *affections* themselves, revealing that fear as well as desire, pain as well as pleasure, serve a purpose. In the fear of God and in the desire for God, all of human *nature* reaches its appointed *telos*.

²⁴⁰ Note, that Lewis defined what was mythic about a certain story was that “What really delights and nourishes me is a particular pattern of events.” Note that Lewis ties emotional experience, even the notion of being nourished, to the reception of a myth. *George MacDonald: An Anthology – 365 Readings*, xxx.

²⁴¹ To quote another scripture of great suggestive worth:

[Jesus said] “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.”

- Luke 14:26

It is worth mentioning that the scriptural content which refers to the fact that Jesus is worthy of all the human capacity both to desire and to fear is quite thick. The Incarnation, which *reveals God’s nature fully*, also reveals the proper object of human *affections*.

²⁴² Lewis, “Transposition,” 102-103.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 94.

between the physical sensations of the body and the emotions. Physical sensation is not identical to emotional experience; yet different emotional experiences may be accompanied by the same physical sensation, but still remain qualitatively different conscious experiences. Physical sensations are enriched by union with the emotions.²⁴⁴ Lewis applies the same logic to the relationship between mind and body, and, interestingly, to the Incarnation (though he is careful at this point to avoid any kind of Docetism).²⁴⁵ Here Lewis provides a model for how it may be that the *affections* are able to react to *reason* and *imagination* in a way which give a real apprehension of *being* (given that *being* is first truly grasped in the mind's *faculties*). As *sense* is enriched by *affections*, so *affections* are enriched by *reason* and *imagination*.

Thus, *reason's* abstractions, *imagination's* metaphors and myths, and the *affections'* feelings and intentions all relate to *being* in a manner which is meant to reveal *truth*. The *True Myth*, the gospel (which, ultimately, is simply Christ himself, his person and his work), is that which unifies all of reality by one and in one mythic Story, which we receive as a myth. The result, in our minds, of receiving without rejecting the *True Myth* is *truth* itself. Lewis's theological perspective of mythology is seen, thus, to be quite revealing of the *nature* of theology itself. Yet, it remains to be seen how compatible Lewis's perspective is with that of classic Christian orthodoxy, and also with that of the contemporary Evangelical community.

²⁴⁴ Thus, these "enriched" physical sensations become the content for the *affections*.

²⁴⁵ Lewis, "Transposition," 112.

Chapter 3: Lewis and Myth in Theology

The goal of this chapter will be to demonstrate that Lewis's answer to the question of myth is compatible with an historically orthodox and Evangelical theology. This is an important achievement, since some have questioned not only Lewis's orthodoxy, but also his good standing within popular Evangelicalism.²⁴⁶ If Evangelicals are to find in Lewis a help in developing a theological perspective on mythology then this compatibility must be demonstrated and not merely assumed.

To go back to the beginning, when Christianity originated in the ancient world, it came with a theology. At that time, ancient philosophy was about five hundred years old, having extended from Greece throughout the greater Mediterranean world. And just as philosophy had replaced the *speech* of mythology,²⁴⁷ so Christian theology did just the same. In some sense, the pagan philosophers practiced theology as well, if theology is merely defined as *speech* about the gods, or the divine *nature*.²⁴⁸ Yet, Christian theology was distinct in that it was based on the

²⁴⁶ One Evangelical leader, pausing at the point of contact between Lewis and Evangelicalism, asks, "Why has he been so significant for me, even though he is not Reformed in his doctrine, and could barely be called an *evangelical* by typical American uses of that word?" John Piper, "Lessons from an Inconsolable Soul," *Desiring God*, 2010, accessed June 10, 2018. In some sense, that is what all thoughtful Evangelicals should ask with regards to Lewis (with some detractors of "Reformed").

²⁴⁷ To recall, the heuristic model this paper has adopted defined the *speech* of religion as mythology and the *praxis* of religion as ritual. Philosophy replaced the *speech* of religion, and, ultimately, the ethics of the philosophers replaced the *praxis* as well, even if that ethic included the social respect given to religion and to the gods. Cf. n. 1, chapter 1.

²⁴⁸ Obviously, mythology was often *speech* about the gods, if not nearly always. But the philosophers spoke of the divine *nature* in terms of its absolute relations to the world rather than as a string of inter-linked stories about the affairs of gods and men. Philosophy is concerned with *process*, whereas mythology is concerned with *narrative*. Both *process* and *narrative* occur through time, but one involves the causal relations between things without reference to motivations, intentions, and actions as *narrative* does refer to.

As an ancient confirmation of just such a division, Augustine, in the *City of God*, refers to the Roman scholar Marcus Varro, who subdivided the theology of the ancient world (Varro's contemporary world) into three categories: the mythical (what Augustine calls in the Latin *fabular*, or "fabulous," as in "fables" or "tales"), the physical (which Augustine calls *naturale*, or "natural"), and the civil. For the ancient pagan world, according to Varro, their mythology was their "fabulous" theology, and their philosophy represented their "natural" theology. *The City of God*, translated by Marcus Dods (Overland Park, KS: Digireads.com Publishing, 2009), 147 [book 6, chapter 5].

Incarnation, the history of redemption, and the exegesis of scripture. Nevertheless, a marriage of sorts took place between philosophy and theology, which, in some sense, completed the replacement of mythology as the *speech* of the peoples of Europe ultimately.²⁴⁹ And just as the pagan philosophers themselves had so often been skeptical of mythology and of the poets' so-called lies, the early Christian theologians, the early church Fathers, adopted the same skepticism, except they did away with the whole pagan framework, and brought in the Christian gospel instead as their foundation for thinking in general.²⁵⁰ The pagan myths were wholesale rejected (and understandably so), and not much else was said about them.

Lewis himself was quite aware of this history and understood that within the broad context of historical orthodoxy his own fascination with myths *qua* myth could be seen as an aberration. But, of course, ultimately, Lewis was concerned with the gospel itself as the *True Myth* and was able to prioritize the *truth* of the gospel amidst his own interests, interests that were responsible, in part, for leading him to Christ. For Augustine, who serves here as a foil for Lewis in the context of ancient Christianity, it was an interest in philosophy rather than mythology which had helped lead to his conversion (though philosophy played a part in Lewis's conversion as well),

²⁴⁹ Though the folk tale never died in the West, the wider mythologies of Greece, Rome, the Norse, Germanic, and the Celtic peoples generally were subsumed by Christian theology over time as those cultures were changed, sometimes gradually over time. The elements of these mythologies was preserved, frozen, within the literature of the West, as Lewis argues in *The Allegory of Love*, 102-103:

We are apt to take it for granted that a poet has at his command, besides the actual world and the world of his own religion, a third world of myth and fancy. . . . Go back to the beginnings of any literature and you will not find it. At the beginning the only marvels are the marvels which are taken for fact. . . . In the fulness of time the third world crept in, but only by a sort of accident. The old gods, when they ceased to be taken as gods, might so easily have been suppressed as devils: that, we know, is what happened to our incalculable loss in the history of Anglo-Saxon poetry. Only their allegorical use, prepared by slow developments within paganism itself, saved them, as in a temporary tomb, for the day when they could wake again in the beauty of acknowledged myth and thus provide modern Europe with its 'third world' of romantic imagining.

²⁵⁰ Thus, for the Christians, the Incarnation and the history of redemption as revealed in scripture was their primary source of knowledge about what is real; but for philosophic schools, such as the Platonists or Aristotelians, it was the grand metaphysic, adapted as it may be, of their founder. The philosophical concerns of *being*, *truth*, and *language* remained Christian concerns, but without the alternating angst or apathy of pagan philosophy. Instead, an attitude of confidence, though not pride, characterizes early Christian theology.

and it is to Augustine we must turn in order to set Lewis against the context of ancient Christian theology. Thus, Lewis is again framed against the ancient landscape.

Lewis and Ancient Theology

Between the two men discussed presently there is a great gulf which must be appreciated. Whereas for Augustine, the reading of Homer's *Iliad* when he was young was a cause of great discomfort, for Lewis, when studying with Kirkpatrick, it was a joy.²⁵¹ For Augustine, even reading Virgil's *Aeneid* (which the young Augustine liked to study),²⁵² was remembered later with sorrow, but Lewis was fascinated by this poem for the rest of his life in its native tongue.²⁵³ Augustine experienced disgust at the sight of the fictional dramas that were performed in the ancient world at which people wept and shed tears because of events portrayed that never had taken place and were, in horrid addition, performances held in honor of false gods. Lewis experienced *Joy* when he was young at the reading of an ancient myth, and though it was *Joy* and not sadness and tears Lewis experienced, he was nonetheless greatly affected by the fictional myths he encountered. And, though Lewis would decry his incessant search to experience *Joy* again and again, there is in him none of the grief that Augustine expresses, or the regret.²⁵⁴

²⁵¹ Augustine, *Confessions: Books 1-8*, translated by Caroline J.B. Hammond (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), book 1, chapter 23. Refer to *Surprised by Joy*, 140.

²⁵² Refer to *Confessions*, book 1, chapter 21.

²⁵³ So much so, that he would take energy to attempt a translation of the *Aeneid* in his spare time later in life. The portions that survive were published in 2011. C.S. Lewis, *C.S. Lewis's Lost Aeneid: Arms and the Exile*, edited by A.T. Reyes (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011).

²⁵⁴ Lewis does recognize that his continual grasping for the experience of *Joy* was wrong-headed. He recounts of this searching that "This, I say, is the first and deadly error, which appears on every level of life and is equally deadly on all, turning religion into a self-caressing luxury and love into self-eroticism (*Surprised by Joy*, 168)." Yet, he would also describe his experience as a real glimpse of the real, of *being*:

What I like about experience is that it is such an honest thing. You may take any number of wrong turnings; but keep your eyes open and you will not be allowed to go very far before the warning signs appear. You may have deceived yourself, but experience is not trying to deceive you. The universe rings true wherever you fairly test it [*Ibid.*, 177].

Contrast this discussion of the experience of *Joy* with Augustine's repentant regret:

. . . I was made to master the wanderings of some fellow called Aeneas (meanwhile neglecting my own wanderings), and to weep for Dido's dying, just because she killed herself for love. And all the time—

As to the *nature* of mythology, Augustine could not conceive of it as being anything other than deception or, at best, meaningless, since it concerned things which had not actually taken place. And while Lewis and Augustine would have agreed that the events described in the pagan myths did not really happen *in time and space*, Lewis no doubt accorded to them an “extra-literary” *nature* that Augustine would not have. The expressions of fiction and fantasy are valuable for Lewis as revelatory of *being*, whereas for Augustine they would be either false and therefore lies,²⁵⁵ or they are more plainly sinful for being about false gods, and, therefore, idolatrous. This is a far cry from the mood of MacDonald, Tolkien, and Lewis for whom stories and myths have value in themselves because of the value of the mythic itself.

But there is a point of concord between the two men. Augustine valued pagan philosophy because it pointed to the *truth* of the gospel even if it could not see so far as Christ himself.²⁵⁶

pitable though I was—in such matters I endured my own dying away from you, O God, my life; and I shed not a single tear. [*Confessions*, book 1, chapter 21]

Of course, Augustine and Lewis would agree as to the proper object of certain *affections*, such as *Joy*, but they evaluate the worth of pagan myths and poetry differently. Perhaps, after the fossilization of mythology over the centuries, such as Lewis describes in *The Allegory of Love*, a man like Lewis would not feel so threatened by its paganism as Augustine would in the world of late antiquity, when pagan religion was still very much a part of educational and public life for many.

²⁵⁵ In this, Augustine echoes Plato’s condemnation of the poets and tellers of myths as detrimental to the life of a good society (cf. chapter 1, pg. 3-4). Augustine also held to a definition of *truth* which makes it easy to understand his position: “. . . all things are true insofar as they exist, nor is anything a falsehood except when it is believed to exist but does not (*Confessions*, book 7, chapter 15).” Now, Augustine’s definition is one Lewis would have held to, since Lewis would simply say that to speak of the fantastic or poetic that is not believed to represent things which “exist” is not lying as long as one does not affirm their existence. So far so good, yet Lewis would have allowed that the fictional, which does not exist, could speak of that which did exist in a truthful manner. Augustine would likely have gone so far as this (consider the parables of Jesus), but he would still have decried the mythology of paganism as being a falsehood that was actually believed by the pagans (in some sense). This again evokes what Lewis said about their not being, for the poet of the ancient world, a “third world of myth and fancy [cf. n. 243],” but only those of every day life and of believed religion. In this environment, it is not surprising that ancient Christianity decried all myths for their association with pagan idolatry.

²⁵⁶ In one place, Augustine writes of this appropriation of philosophy:

Moreover, if those who are called philosophers, and especially the Platonists, have said aught that is true and in harmony with our faith, we are not only not to shrink from it, but to claim it for our own use from those who have unlawful possession of it. [*On Christian Doctrine*, book 2, chapter 40]

In the same place, Augustine writes, in a manner which is suggestive of our present topic:

. . . all branches of heathen learning have not only false and superstitious fancies and heavy burdens of unnecessary toil, which every one of us, when going out under the leadership of Christ from the fellowship of the heathen, ought to abhor and avoid; but they contain also liberal instruction which is better adapted to the use of the truth, and some most excellent precepts of morality; and some truths in regard even to the

The one true God was out of reach of *reason* for Augustine, but not out of sight. Now if Lewis considered ancient mythology to be rather a product of *imagination* than *reason*, then he would simply have gone further than Augustine on this point. And Lewis did go as far as Augustine where *reason* is concerned.²⁵⁷ Yet, Lewis most definitely went further where *imagination* and mythology is concerned. Augustine, under the influence of Neoplatonic thought, held that divine illumination is necessary for any human being to have knowledge of anything that is true. On this, Lewis would have agreed,²⁵⁸ but he would have accorded divine illumination to the *imagination* as well as to *reason*. Yet, Augustine lived over a millennium before the Romantic reaction to the Enlightenment would produce such an interest in the *imagination* as a faculty of mind. Augustine, then, did not even have the chance to reject something like Lewis's understanding of mythology. It was not yet present for him to either accept or reject. Of course, in this, Augustine represents the situation of ancient Christianity entirely.

worship of the One God are found among them. Now these are, so to speak, their gold and silver, which they did not create themselves, but dug out of the mines of God's providence which are everywhere scattered abroad, and are perversely and unlawfully prostituting to the worship of devils. [*On Christian Doctrine*, book 2, chapter 40]

Now, of course, among the "false and superstitious fancies" Augustine would count the pagan myths, and he was likely right to do so. But, it also meant he could not see through them, as Lewis did, the gleam of *truth*. Yet Augustine did see the gleam of *truth* in the education, morality, and worship of the pagans (by which Augustine likely meant not the *ritual* of religion, but instead the sense of reverence for the divine). It is a close thing to Lewis's appreciation of *truth* concerning God's *nature* as seen *partially* in the pagan myths.

²⁵⁷ In one passage, Lewis notes of Plato's doctrine of creation in the *Timaeus* that it was ". . . an amazing leap (though not made without the help of Him who is the Father of lights) by an overwhelming theological genius; it is not ordinary Pagan religion." C.S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1958), 79-80. Here, Lewis admits two things. One, the idea that a pagan could receive help from God to come to true knowledge about reality. Second, that there is something better in this Platonic reflection on creation than what "ordinary Pagan religion" could offer (perhaps more than the myths?). It also reveals something of a spectrum of *truth* among the pagans present in Lewis's thinking (to introduce another spectrum into this paper).

²⁵⁸ It is important to note that Lewis may have agreed to this position because of Augustine. Brazier, *C.S. Lewis: The Work of Christ Revealed*, 242-243. Barkman refers to Lewis as being Neoplatonic in his basic approach to philosophy from within Christianity (53).

Thus, Augustine represents the typical ancient Christian reaction to pagan mythology, which identified them as false stories about false gods.²⁵⁹ As to the *origin* of mythology, Augustine also represents the classic view: myths either arise from the sinfulness of fallen humanity or from demonic deception working upon human fallenness.²⁶⁰ On this point, Lewis would not have been in complete disagreement. Lewis recognized the fact that the sinfulness of humanity twisted their myths, as well as everything else about them.²⁶¹ But for Lewis, mythology does not merely arise *ex novo* from human fallenness; it is a twisting of something good. The *mythopoeic* is not inherently evil, but it has become evil quite often.²⁶² One should not get the idea that Lewis liked that the pagans worshipped the wrong gods.²⁶³ As for demonic deception, it is obvious that Lewis was prepared to admit it as possibly responsible for the twisting of myths, as he would

²⁵⁹ Though, as was noted in n. 253, there should be a distinction drawn between fiction and falsehood. But Augustine would simply have applied both to the pagan myths.

²⁶⁰ In one passage from *The City of God*, Augustine puts all these together (along with a decidedly Euhemeristic view of mythology):

A far more credible account of these gods is given, when it is said that they were men, and that to each one of them sacred rites and solemnities were instituted, according to his particular genius, manners, actions, circumstances; which rites and solemnities, by gradually creeping through the souls of men, which are like demons, and eager for things which yield them sport, were spread far and wide; the poets adorning them with lies, and false spirits deceiving men to receive them. [*The City of God*, 172 (book 7, chapter 18)]

²⁶¹ This idea can be found in *The Pilgrim's Regress* where History tells John that "the Landlord" sent the "Rules" to the "Shepherd People" (the Jewish people who received the law), and that he sent "pictures" to the pagans. But the pagans "went on making up more and more stories for themselves about the pictures, and then pretending the stories were true [153]." But there is not merely corruption among the pagan myths, since "Just when their own stories seemed to have completely overgrown the original messages and hidden them beyond recovery, suddenly the Landlord would send them a new message [154]."

²⁶² Tolkien put this notion into a poem, in which he states:

. . . though we dared to build
 gods and their houses out of dark and light,
 and sow the seed of dragons, 'twas our right
 (used or misused). The right has not decayed.
 We make still by the law in which we're made.

- Tolkien, "Mythopoeia."

²⁶³ Though Lewis did seem to think it better to worship something rather than nothing, if that were possible: If the Northernness seemed then a bigger thing than my religion, that may partly have been because my attitude toward it contained elements which my religion ought to have contained and did not. . . . some kind of quite disinterested self-abandonment to an object which securely claimed this by simply being the object it was. . . . I came far nearer to feeling this about the Norse gods whom I disbelieved in than I had ever done about the true God while I believed. Sometimes I can almost think that I was sent back to the false gods there to acquire some capacity for worship against the day when the true God should recall me to Himself. [*Surprised by Joy*, 76-77]

have admitted such malicious influence upon every other arena of human rebellion. Thus, Lewis, while admitting what Augustine affirmed, went further than Augustine in thinking that the pagan myths revealed something about *being* that was neither meaningless nor false.

So it can be seen that Lewis was in agreement with Augustine on key points. They both held that pagan myths were falsehoods inasmuch as they were merely tales of false gods. They both held that human sinfulness and demonic deception could and did play a role in the making of myths (though Lewis may have preferred to term this “the twisting of myths”). Yet, Lewis went further than Augustine in thinking about the *nature*, the *origin*, and the *function* of mythology within human experience, and in identifying the gospel itself as mythical.²⁶⁴ This contrast represents the way in which Lewis both agreed with and differed from historic Christian orthodoxy—though, arguably, without himself ceasing to be orthodox.²⁶⁵

²⁶⁴ It cannot be overemphasized the significance of this line of thought in Lewis and in those who sympathized with a similar perspective. Just as ancient Christianity had recognized the value of pagan philosophy as fulfilled in Christ, so Lewis recognized the value of pagan mythology fulfilled likewise. All human *language* in its modes of expression, both thought and tale, has, in varying extents, anticipated the Incarnation of the *logos*. For we are human, made in the image and likeness of God, and when God in his own *nature* came, he came also bearing human *nature* (not just “a” human *nature*). And these *natures*, though distinct (more distinct than can be imagined), bear a mysterious *analogy*, by which we are enabled, through the salvation found in the gospel, to become “more” like God within our own *nature* than we yet are. And at every point along this “spectrum of likeness,” we ourselves bear an internal *logos* made external in *language*, which at every point in our history has desired to express *truth* as known. Hence, both the philosophy and the mythology of our past.

It was this insight that the ancient Christians had, yet they never contemplated the gospel as *True Myth* in quite the way some modern-day Christian thinkers have. We live in an interesting day, when just such a theological insight is coming into its own. And just as a recognition of the value of philosophical reasoning in the ancient context bred a robust Christian project of theology and philosophy for some centuries, so can a recognition of the value of mythology bring about a project of *mythopoeia* for as much time to come. (Though, to be admitted, Christians have for centuries already done just this before the modern context during the medieval period, yet they may not have been so self-conscious of it).

²⁶⁵ In an interesting sense, this picture of things contradicts the other picture of Lewis as a man out of his times, lost in ancient and medieval times thankfully long forgotten (or that ought to be forgotten). This is not at all the case, Lewis’s thoughts on the *nature* of mythology set him within his own modern context, but without at the same time banishing him from the ancient and medieval worlds. He was a modern man informed by the past, rather than a modern man rejecting the past, or a modern man ignorant of the past.

Lewis and Modern Theology

Moving forward into the modern context, a vastly different environment is confronted. The interest in mythology present in the 19th century, combined with the rise of liberal theology, tended to cause the conflation of theology with mythology.²⁶⁶ Rather than Christian theologians rejecting myths as all false and evil, instead many within their ranks began to call theology itself mythology. Not only that, but they did not complain about this terminology, and instead called theology better off for being mythical rather than factual.²⁶⁷

Fairly representative of the modern theological context, the New Testament scholar Rudolf Bultmann exemplified the result of such a perspective. Bultmann approached the New Testament as a work of mythology, which, according to Bultmann, referred to a model of reality that could not be accepted by modern man.²⁶⁸ But, behind the mythological language of the Bible lay the “real” meaning; namely, a description of reality that goes beyond merely objective descriptions of it. The way to get to this “real” meaning was to put the Bible—in particular, the New Testament—through the interpretive framework of “demythologization.”²⁶⁹ This would lead to

²⁶⁶ This interest in mythology arose from both the Romantic reaction to the Enlightenment seeking other ways of knowing aside from rationalism, and the study of comparative religions and mythology, which provided material for the Romantics to glean from. Add to this, the assault on the reliability of the biblical witness on the basis of higher criticism, which led to the tendency of theologians to focus the locus of *revelation* within the inner self. Higher criticism itself paralleled the rise of the comparative studies which provided the material of mythology to the modern world. Romantics and theologians alike gleaned from the same field.

²⁶⁷ Carl Henry would summarize this epoch well:

Few concepts have in fact encountered and endured such radical revision throughout the long history of ideas as has the concept of divine revelation. Especially within the last two centuries divine revelation has been stretched into everything, stripped into nothing, or modeled into innumerable compromises of such outrageous extremes. [*God, Revelation, and Authority: God Who Speaks and Shows – Fifteen Theses, Part One*, vol. 2, *God, Revelation, and Authority* (Waco, TX: World Books, 1976), 7]

²⁶⁸ Bultmann thought that the New Testament described reality as a three-tiered *cosmos*: “The world picture of the New Testament is a mythical world picture. The world is a three-story structure, with earth in the middle, heaven above it, and hell below it.” Rudolf Bultmann, “New Testament and Mythology,” in *New Testament and Mythology and Other Basic Writings* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 1.

²⁶⁹ For Bultmann’s own definition of “demythologization:”

By ‘demythologizing’ I understand a hermeneutical procedure that inquires about the reality referred to by mythological statements or texts. This presupposes that myth indeed talks about reality, but in an inadequate way. It also presupposes a specific understanding of reality. [“On the Problem of

an understanding of human existence in terms of God's purpose for humanity, which could not be known objectively, but only through the internal human awareness of God and their choice to have faith in him.²⁷⁰ This is a radically different approach to mythology than that which Lewis trekked.²⁷¹ For Bultmann, not only is mythology an attempt to reach for *being*, but it is a faulty one at that. As much any modern intellectual might say, but that only some *truth* could be stripped out of mythology (somehow without damaging either *truth* or the mythology) evokes some incredulity. Yet, Bultmann represents the tensions prevalent among modern theologians who seemed to love to have their cake and eat it too: a Christian *truth* untouched by objective investigation into the realities of *time and space*; but nevertheless, somehow, meaningful as merely *without reference in time or space*.²⁷²

Demythologizing (1961)," in *New Testament and Theology and Other Basic Writings*, 155-163 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 155.]

²⁷⁰ Thus, for Bultmann, to provide such a picture of reality beyond observable fact is to provide a theology. Mythology and science both are faulty because they cannot accomplish this goal. Instead, for Bultmann, the philosophy of Existentialism accomplishes this goal instead by allowing a demythologizing of the New Testament which reveals the *truth* behind it, perceived by the internal self. To quote, "Demythologizing seeks to bring out the real intention of myth, namely, its intention to talk about human existence as grounded in and limited by a transcendent, unworldly power, which is not visible to objectifying thinking." Thus, ". . . demythologizing wants an understanding of the world that is free of every world picture projected by objectifying thinking, whether it is that of myth or that of science." Bultmann, "On the Problem of Demythologization (1952)," in *New Testament and Mythology and Other Basic Writings* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 99-102.

Apart from being somewhat obscure, Bultmann's project is easily open to criticism on numerous fronts. Most of all, his reliance on Existentialist philosophy to discover the meaning behind biblical texts is a suspect hermeneutical method. This results in what McGrath calls a "re-mythologization" rather than a demythologization of the New Testament. *The Intellectual World of C.S. Lewis*, 69. This reflects something of the entire situation of modern theology and the study of myth. To treat scripture as mythology in their sense, they must finally misinterpret it.

²⁷¹ Lewis mentions Bultmann frequently in "Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism," 187-205. Lewis mentions him though with more humor than serious interaction. The literary critic in Lewis cannot understand why Bultmann the biblical critic has so much trouble simply reading.

²⁷² Not all theologians outside of the ken of the conservative and Evangelical reaction to modern theology have agreed with its major trends (the term "modern theology" is somewhat synonymous with "liberal theology" in this paper). Karl Barth is an example of this. Barth criticized both conservative and liberal theologians for thinking that if some portion of scripture was not historical, then it could not be true (82). Instead, Barth introduced three categories: two for the historical, namely, saga and history, and one apart, myth (81-87). Barth says of myth that . . . its tales and their events and figures are obviously pictures and embodiments of what happens always and everywhere and to that extent does not happen 'anywhere or at any time'. . . . in the case of all intelligent persons it makes the demand that they should look through this story, that they should not cling to it as such, but that in all the enjoyment of its events and forms, spurred on by its cheerful play, they should press on to its true non-historical, timeless and abstract sense, to a perception of the eternal truth

Within this context, some of what Lewis affirmed sounds suspicious, yet some of it also reassuring. Lewis did wish to discover the mythic in theology, but not in the same manner as the modern theologians. His personal intellectual history was different than most of his counter-parts in the discipline of theology. Whereas Lewis had begun enjoying myths and then later came to study of the Bible and Christian doctrine, most modern theologians had begun with a study of scripture and doctrine, which they then came to think untrue by their rational investigation, finally ending their course by attempting to define theology as mythology (in a great variety of senses). Lewis's fundamental case against them was that they had made a mistake in attempting to collapse the Christian story of the Incarnation, as told in the Gospels, into a literary myth, since the Gospels bore no resemblance to the myths as a literary phenomenon.²⁷³ He also

presented in the play. . . . It [myth] has always been a worthy *alter ego* of philosophy. [*Church Dogmatics: Volume III, Part 1 – The Doctrine of Creation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1960), 84-85]

Thus, Barth agrees with Lewis as to myths being stories that concern what is true *without reference in time and space*. Barth though seems also to agree with Lewis in a general sense as to what the content of myth ultimately concerns:

The customary definition that myth is the story of the gods is only superficial. In myth both the gods and the story are not the real point at issue, but only point to it. The real object and content of myth are the essential principles of the general realities and relationships of the natural and spiritual cosmos which, in distinction from concrete history, are not confined to definite times and places. The clothing of their dialectic and cyclical movement in stories of the gods is the form of myth [italics original]. [*Church Dogmatics: Volume III, Part 1 – The Doctrine of Creation*, 84]

To say that “*the general realities and relationships of the natural and spiritual cosmos which. . . are not confined to definite times and places,*” seems as good a definition of myth as Lewis attempted to provide, though perhaps without the reflection and conceptual consequences characteristic of Lewis's thought on these same points. The distinction between Barth and Lewis, of course, is that Barth had no conception of Christ, the gospel itself, as *True Myth*. Though a similar framework for thinking about the *nature* of mythology is present, there is not the same integration of a concept of myth into an understanding of the gospel as that which *reveals God's nature fully and in time and space*.

²⁷³ To get a flavor for how Lewis treated a typical modern theologian on this point, read his comments on Bultmann:

Finally, from the same Bultmann: “The personality of Jesus has no importance for the Kerygma either of Paul or of John. . . . Indeed the tradition of the earliest Church did not even unconsciously preserve a picture of his personality. Every attempt to reconstruct one remains a play of subjective imagination.” [from the citation in Lewis's article: Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, translated by Kendrick Grobel, vol. I (S.C.M Press, 1952), p. 30]

So there is no personality of Our Lord presented in the New Testament. Through what strange process has this learned German gone in order to make himself blind to what all men see except himself? [“Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism,” 192]

As for treating the Gospels, or any other part of the New Testament at least, as myth, Lewis is as humorously pointed:

opposed their attempts to take the Incarnation out of the realm of *time and space* and find it still significant and truthful.

The tendency, then, of modern theology was to collapse theology into (vaguely) defined mythological categories to save theology's meaningfulness from the assault of "objective" investigation. This inevitably drew a response from Christian intellectuals in the 19th and 20th centuries who reasoned instead from a position rooted in historical orthodoxy. In America, the Princeton theologians, such as Charles Hodge, B.B. Warfield, and John G. Machen worked to define this sort of response. But this movement, while serving as the foundation of American Evangelicalism in its theology, chronologically preceded much of Evangelicalism's later common culture. By the 1940's it would be possible to define Evangelicalism as having a coherent culturally identity, coincidentally around the time that Lewis began to be tentatively read and appreciated among American Christians and American culture in general.²⁷⁴ Since that time, with some risings and some fallings of recognition, Lewis has come to be influential among Evangelicals, as either a story-teller (as with his *Narnia* Chronicles) or as an apologist (as with *Mere Christianity*). Though, in order to see if Lewis's views on mythology can be counted compatible with an Evangelical theology, some concrete example of an Evangelical is needed.

In what is already a very old commentary I read that the Fourth Gospel is regarded by one school as a 'spiritual romance', 'a poem not a history', to be judged the same canons as Nathan's parable, the Book of Jonah, *Paradise Lost*, 'or, more exactly, *Pilgrim's Progress*'. After a man has said that, why need one attend to anything else he says about any book in the world? [Ibid., 190]

The problem, of course, for the author of that passage, or at least for the one whom the author describes, is that Lewis had studied *Paradise Lost* and *The Pilgrim's Progress* and knew as he knew of the nose on his face that they were nothing like the Gospels. Lewis makes this clear in following, saying, "I have been reading poems, romances, vision-literature, legends, myths all my life. I know what they are like. I know that not one of them is like this." Ibid., 191.

²⁷⁴ McGrath helps summarize this time period:

Lewis seemed a total outsider to American evangelicals in the late 1950s and early 1960s, when most within the movement regarded even watching movies as spiritually dangerous. What evangelical would want to be associated with someone who smoked heavily, drank copious quantities of beer, and held views on the Bible, the Atonement, and purgatory which were out of place in the evangelical community of that age? [And now! Comment mine] While some evangelicals warmed to Lewis's apologetic writings in the 1960s, most regarded him with distrust. [C.S. Lewis: *A Life*, 365]

For our purposes, Carl F.H. Henry (1913-2003) will serve as the counterweight and foil to Lewis for the rest of this chapter, just as Augustine did in the first section.

Henry was quite aware of who Lewis was, and, though hardly influenced by him, was sympathetic to Lewis's work.²⁷⁵ But Henry was engaged in a different project from that which interested Lewis. Henry was a professional theologian, while Lewis was not.²⁷⁶ Lewis was instead a literary scholar whose concern was understandably about the nature of such things as genre, metaphor, myth, and story-telling. Whereas Henry was concerned to take up a defensive posture against certain modern theologians concerning the relationship between theology and mythology, Lewis was able to take a more creative approach, which his education and experience uniquely fitted him for.

Probably the major distinction between Henry and Lewis is that Henry did not have any clear position on the *nature* of mythology as revelatory of *being*.²⁷⁷ Henry did give a necessary

²⁷⁵ Though Henry does not refer to Lewis often in *God, Revelation, and Authority*, when he does, his references ring of familiarity with Lewis's work and an appreciation of Lewis's fundamental orthodoxy. He does not lump Lewis together with the other modern theologians he addresses. McGrath unveils an account which not only reveals Henry's trust in Lewis, but also some of the early connections between Lewis and Evangelicals in general:

Though few knew of it, both John Stott and Billy Graham sought Lewis's counsel as they prepared for Graham's mission to the University of Cambridge in 1955. In that same year, Carl F.H. Henry had invited Lewis to write some apologetic pieces for the flagship evangelical journal *Christianity Today*. [*C.S. Lewis: A Life*, 373]

In addition to this, *Christianity Today*, of which Henry was the first editor, published an article in 1998 (which McGrath refers to), written by J.I. Packer where he described Lewis as "the Aquinas, the Augustine, and the Aesop of contemporary evangelicalism." [As cited by McGrath in *C.S. Lewis: A Life*, 374: J.I. Packer, "Still Surprised by Lewis," *Christianity Today*, 7 September 1998] J.I. Packer has himself been an influential author among Evangelicals (another British author alongside Lewis to be so, a list that would include John Stott who was noted above), and his comment on Lewis is revealing of just how much influence Lewis had upon Evangelicals even until the turn of the century.

²⁷⁶ A fact Lewis would constantly depreciate himself on throughout his life. He was quite self-conscious of the fact that he wrote of theology in the public sphere while not technically being a theologian.

²⁷⁷ Indeed, for Henry, the dichotomy was between mythology on the one hand and *truth* on the other. To quote:

The most critical question in the history of thought is whether all the convictional frameworks through which different peoples arrive at the meaning and worth of human life are by nature mythical, or whether perhaps at least one of these perspectives stems from divine revelation and has objective cognitive validity. [*God, Revelation, and Authority: God Who Speaks and Shows – Preliminary Considerations*, vol. 1, *God, Revelation, and Authority* (Waco, TX: World Books, 1976), 44]

critique of the misunderstandings of mythology by those theologians who wanted to find in myths a possible source of real *revelation* where science and history had supposedly failed them.²⁷⁸ But, in this, Lewis and Henry were alike. Lewis was just as critical of the modern project of making merely human mythology more than it could be through grand attempts to redefine it as the only possible vehicle fit for divine *revelation*. Yet, Lewis was willing to find in mythology one possible (and actual) vehicle for *revelation*, even if a partial one for myths *qua* human-told myths. More than that, Lewis had particular views on the relationship between human psychology, *language*, and mythology which allowed him to hold this view consistently. And, mostly importantly, Lewis understood the *nature* of the gospel as essentially mythical, the mythical-ness from which the mythic in all other myths comes. But for Henry, while understanding the relationship of *language* and *revelation* is absolutely key as well,²⁷⁹ his

Thus, the *nature* of mythology is to be the subjective means by which humans find meaning, but that has no basis in objective facts. Fundamentally, Henry is right. If all humanity has for thought is mythology and philosophy, which are both often *without reference in time and space*, then, even if objective validity is accorded at least to (some) philosophy, humanity is stuck with uncertainty concerning values and meaning. But the Incarnation, by being *True Myth*, has revealed the meaningful in *time and space* (in two senses, by revealing the meaningful inherent in creation and also by revealing God *qua* God in creation). Henry would want to agree with that last statement, but he words it in this way, “The Logos of supernatural revelation towers as the only effective barricade against the meaninglessness of the world and human life.” *God, Revelation, and Authority: God Who Speaks and Shows: Fifteen Theses, Part Two*, vol. 3, *God, Revelation, and Authority* (Waco, TX: World Books, 1979), 192.

²⁷⁸ As Henry writes:

Yet the underlying fact remains that an assertion cannot be considered mythical if it is true and historically factual. The device of embellishing myth as a revelational concept provided a theological escape from both special historical revelation and the divine disclosure of truths. This flight from revelational history was conditioned either by positivistic historiography that explained human events without supernatural referents, or by an evolutionary approach to comparative religions... [*God, Revelation, and Authority*, vol. 3, 254]

Thus, as Henry notes, categorizing theology as mythology was often a way of escaping the reductionist claims of modern thought wholesale. Henry wants to say that they are not running from a burning building into cool clear air; instead, they have ended up with theology that is by definition false. Henry is perhaps wrong, though, at least by Lewis’s reckoning, to say that an assertion cannot be “mythical” if it is either “true” or “historically factual,” or both.

²⁷⁹ Henry’s *God, Revelation, and Authority* is at least by a majority an argument for *language* as the vehicle for divine *revelation*.

concern was for the intelligible and the rational expressions of divine *revelation*—what can the myths say that these expressions cannot say or do not say? That is Henry’s refrain.²⁸⁰

The situation is somewhat parallel to what was found in the ancient context when Augustine was considered: a recognition of the rational and then either an ignorance of or an ignoring of the imaginative. Lewis would have agreed with the recognition of the rational, and even with its proper prioritization;²⁸¹ but he would have disagreed with the exclusion of the imaginative. As for Henry, he expressed understandable reserve about reliance on the imaginative and the mythic for any kind of *revelation*, even if partial. In all regards, Henry would rather abandon any notion of *revelation* as occurring at all outside of the intelligible (by which Henry means the rational).²⁸² As for Lewis’s notion that the gospel as *True Myth* could *reveal God's nature fully*, it is likely

²⁸⁰ This is a great dichotomy for Henry, who writes:

Decisive for the evaluation of myth are how one relates myth to objective truth and to external history, and what religious significance one attaches to rational truth and historical events. The basic issues reduce really to two alternatives: either man himself projects upon the world and its history a supernatural reality and activity that disallows objectively valid cognitive statements on the basis of divine disclosure, or a transcendent divine reality through intelligible revelation establishes the fact that God is actually at work in the sphere of nature and human affairs. [*God, Revelation, and Authority*, vol. 1, 45]

To put it succinctly, either man alone is the source of theology or God is. If man alone is, then theology is just the mythology of the modern theologian. If God is, then it is at least more than mere mythology, and Henry says it is utterly different, being “rational truth and historical events.” It is at this point that Lewis would interpose that “psycho-physical” and even “psycho-divine” parallel and note that man’s *psyche* may be capable of perceiving in reality much, but only because God has ordained it so. Essentially, I cannot imagine Henry would disagree, yet Henry cannot admit the mythic into theology since he is on the defense at this point. Add to that, Henry charges that mythology says, ultimately, nothing about *being*. It is the faulty projection of fallen man. Henry echoes, within the modern context, the viewpoint of Augustine and the Fathers.

²⁸¹ As has been seen, Lewis would lend to *reason* the lead position in the soul for judging between the true and the false, without also discounting the role of the *imagination* in the production of *meaning* (refer to chapter 2).

²⁸² For example, Henry writes:

To resort to new linguistic perspective or myth worsens rather than helps the problem. A myth can be translated into another myth but not into valid truth any more than into historical fact. If we are talking merely about the power of perspectival suggestion, then art and non-verbal forms would be less confusing and more serviceable than a linguistic perspective that covertly and illicitly implies a communication of valid truth. [*God, Revelation, and Authority*, vol. 3, 252]

Now, Henry is obviously right if he means that one cannot take a myth that refers to reality *without reference in time and space* and just state that its content is either identical to truths or reveals truths about events *in time and space*. That would be to deceive or to be deceived. But the problem Henry refers to at the start is that of *truth*. Are the claims of Christianity true? Statements, by their mythological character, cannot resolve this question, that is what Henry is saying. And, no doubt, he is right. No mere myths can resolve that. The Incarnation is needed. But the Incarnation is the most mythic of all myths, if Lewis’s position is taken. Henry could not account for this element in divine *revelation*.

that Henry would claim no affinity with it. And that is if Henry had been fully aware of Lewis's position, which he was not it would seem. Instead, in a footnote, Henry comments about Lewis that "Lewis connects divine truth both with human imagination and divine revelation, and maintains this correlation even in regard to the incarnation which he considers wholly historical."²⁸³ Now, here Henry has nailed in one stroke what he misses with another. He is right to give Lewis the credit for believing in the historical Incarnation (unlike, it is fair to say, nearly all if not all liberal theologians), but wrong when he says that Lewis connected "divine truth both with human imagination and divine revelation." Rather, Lewis connected all "divine truth" with *revelation* given through both *reason* and *imagination*. And, in the case of pagan mythology and philosophy, God's *nature* was revealed in them and by them *partially*, and in varying degrees of partiality. And that *revelation* was partial because of human fallenness and sinfulness, and because it was not identical to the Incarnation, which is the *True Myth*. This is but a brief yet useful outline of Lewis's understanding of *general revelation*, and one which Henry would not have disagreed with.²⁸⁴ Let no mistake be made in interpretation. Lewis did not intend to treat the pagan myths as legitimate revelations of God from God, at least in the same sense as scripture and the Incarnation, and neither did he wish to equate the latter with the former. What Lewis did rather was ultimately propose a way of thinking about the *nature* of divine *revelation* and of the

²⁸³ *God, Revelation, and Authority*, vol. 1, 67.

²⁸⁴ To quote:

We must keep in mind that myths in all cases are championed by their proponents not as imaginative representations but as accounts of some actual divine incursion or participation in the affairs of man and the world. This agrees completely with the biblical representation that the divine Creator is universally revealed, but that man in sin subverts and reduces the truth of God into myriad alternatives. It accords also with the scriptural emphasis that the Creator-Redeemer God, who has specially revealed himself in Judeo-Christian history, exposes all false gods as spurious inventions of a wayward humanity. [Ibid., 46]

The same picture of humanity as having the universal *general revelation* of God but having it in twisted form is there in Henry as well as in Lewis. Henry may read too much into ancient psychology at first—what the ancients' thought of their own mythology is not always easy to access or to understand. But, Henry is basically right, as Lewis noted in *The Allegory of Love* distinguishing between the ancient poet who only had "the actual world" and "the world of his own religion" and the modern poet who has the "world of myth and fancy. . . . The marvelous-known-to-be-fiction" (103).

recipients of *revelation*. In other words, above all, Lewis has given us a theory of *revelation*, which rests upon a certain anthropology and results in gaining insight into theology proper. And the key to this proposal is the concept of *True Myth*.²⁸⁵

Note that Henry does not at any point respond to anything like Lewis's view of mythology, though he does respond to the views of the modern theologians upon the same. Henry's defensive posture in the theological arena should not be regretted—he was in the right to not only put up the barricades but also to sally forth and deal damage to the faulty ideas of mythology and theology prevalent when he wrote. Lewis's view itself does not run afoul of Henry in particular (at least not necessarily). In this, Henry well represents the position of Evangelical theology with regards to Lewis. Lewis is liked, but kept at arms length, if not outright held for questioning. The reasons for this are well grounded. Lewis at a few key points manages to raise eyebrows among Evangelical theologians, and there is probably nothing that sinks Lewis in Evangelical eyes faster than his rejection of biblical inerrancy.²⁸⁶ Yet, though

²⁸⁵ Michael Christensen provides a helpful passage in which he describes the effects of Lewis's considerations of *revelation*:

It can be concluded at this point that Scripture for Lewis functions as myth, as well as historical fact. It has most of the qualities of imaginative literature and all the characteristics of myth, requiring an imaginative embrace to perceive meaning.

Myth, it must be remembered, does not mean lie, error, illusion or misunderstood history. The term has little to do with fact or history but transcends both. Properly understood, myth is a medium of divine revelation bringing a level of understanding superseding that which can be known through facts and history. To regard a portion of Scripture as myth, far from being less than true, is to acknowledge a higher truth and a deeper reality than could otherwise be expressed. [*C.S. Lewis on Scripture*, 76-77]

Christensen does not address the concern Henry would have with this possible effect of Lewis's viewpoint: namely, how does one define the *truth* of a "higher truth and a deeper reality than could otherwise be expressed" apart from "facts and history"? Lewis would likely argue that the imaginative power of the gospel never sets aside the rational grasp of *truth* and history; but neither does facts and history deny the imaginative. If one, such as Henry, replied that he would not know how to define the revelations of the *imagination*, Lewis would reply that no such definition is required—to provide one would be to deny the uniqueness of an imaginative grasp of *truth* in the gospel, which reveals the reality of *being*. But Lewis would still grant that *reason* receiving *revelation* must never be set aside as in any sense contradictory to mythology and *imagination*, as if one had to choose between the two.

²⁸⁶ Christensen's *C.S. Lewis On Scripture* does an excellent job of summarizing Lewis's views on inspiration and inerrancy (cf. n. 285). Lewis's lack of belief in inerrancy did not mean he thought scripture was not *revelation* or that the Holy Spirit did not inspire it. Yet, granting this, Lewis not only believed that scripture had historical errors, but also moral ones. Lewis comments on Psalm 109 "I do not mean that God hears and will grant such prayers as that psalmist uttered. They are wicked. He condemns them. All resentment is sin." ("The Psalms," in

Lewis cannot be considered an Evangelical by all his doctrine, this does not exclude the elements of his thought that are consistent with Evangelical doctrine. In addition, Lewis shares the Evangelical priorities.²⁸⁷ One can hold to Lewis's ideas of *True Myth* and not accept his rejection of inerrancy: there is no inherent connection between this one idea in Lewis and his other erroneous views.

Add to this the fact that Evangelicals do not have anything quite like Lewis's view of the gospel as *True Myth*, and, as will be discussed in chapter 4, there are reasons why it is valuable to glean from Lewis's insights upon these points. Thus, the intention of this chapter has been to show at first that Lewis is not out of accord with historical Christian orthodoxy, yet has a theological perspective of mythology that was not held by the ancient church Fathers.²⁸⁸ Not only that, but Lewis is not out of accord with Evangelicalism either, which has been concerned with defending the *truth of revelation* against the denials and transmutations of modern theologians. To switch the tables, it is the modern theologians who are out of accord with historic Christianity, and it has been the priority of Evangelicals, and of Lewis, to maintain it. Thus, Lewis is rather out of

Christian Reflections (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 148-149) Though, Lewis's belief that there are errors in scripture did not arise from any of the "chronological snobbery" which he had rejected by the time he became a Christian. Instead, when he calls the imprecatory prayers of the psalmist "sin" he does so not on the basis of some "rational" modern perspective on ethics, but on the basis of the teachings of Jesus. His perspective is not that the ancients didn't know better but we do, but rather that the ancients didn't know better but neither do we. We both need the Incarnate Christ.

²⁸⁷ If it were possible to list these priorities, they might look something like this: 1) the Incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus; 2) the inspiration and inerrancy of scripture; and 3), the priority of gospel-telling in the public life of the individual Christian and the church corporately. Lewis would agree with all three. In one passage, Lewis displays a deep concern for the priority of the gospel and the salvation of others: ". . . the Christian knows from the outset that the salvation of a single soul is more important than the production or preservation of all the epics and tragedies in the world. . ." ("Christianity and Literature," in *Christian Reflections* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 12) Note how great an admittance that is coming from Lewis! Lewis has laid upon the alter in that passage all that was probably, in this world, most dear to him.

²⁸⁸ Not even among the medievals, eager as they were to preserve and study the texts of the Classical world, did a sophisticated view of the relationship between theology and mythology develop as it is found in Lewis and other Christian thinkers contemporary to his time. Though, there was perhaps an anticipation of something like it in the intricate fascination of the medieval theologian with allegory and its relationship to theology, in particular, to biblical interpretation.

accord with the modern theologians, at least one element he shares in common with Evangelicals. In the arena of asking the question of myth, though, Evangelicals have not provided an answer but have only responded to the answers of the modernists by and large so far. But Lewis did attempt an answer, and it is an answer that fulfills what Evangelicals lack and also does not adopt the faults of the modern theologians. That does not mean that more distance cannot be covered to develop a theological perspective on mythology from an Evangelical standpoint. Lewis is not the road itself; he only has walked a ways further down it than we have. If we can walk any further, he would be glad.

Chapter 4: A Theology of Mythology

In the middle of the 19th century, Max Muller asked, “What can be in our day the interest of mythology?”²⁸⁹ Though a question written over a century ago, it could not have been written a century before. Something took place within the intellectual environment of European culture in the 19th century that brought about renewed interest in the question of myth, and the search for an answer to it has not died down since. And in our present day, Muller’s question could be asked again.

At the end of the last chapter, it was suggested that Lewis could help Evangelicals develop a theological perspective on mythology. This theology of mythology²⁹⁰ can then be used to assist Evangelical theology in making sense of its various *loci*, especially regarding certain contemporary concerns. Lewis is especially fit to help in this task. Not only is his theology compatible with Evangelical theology,²⁹¹ but he drew upon the many resources of the Western heritage and the Christian tradition. As such, Lewis serves as a reservoir of sorts for thinking about the question of myth. Lewis’s own views on mythology were adopted and adapted from other thinkers, many of whom were his contemporaries or nearly so. Some he merely read, such as MacDonald and Chesterton; and others were friends whom he knew, such as Tolkien and Barfield. His roots go down into the soil of ancient pagan mythology, into the Christian adoption

²⁸⁹ Muller, 335.

²⁹⁰ This is a nod to Muller’s own term, “a philosophy of mythology,” which he uses as the framework for his address “A Philosophy of Mythology.” For Muller, this means a developed understanding of mythology: its *nature*, its *origin*, and its *function*. Muller proposes that most thinkers have considered there to be common elements of mythology, that it “does certainly not mean what it seems to mean.” Rather, there are three possible ways to look at myth, as an explanation of (1) “a system of religion”; (2) “a phase in the human mind”; (3) “an inevitable catastrophe of language.” [*An Introduction to the Science of Religion*, 338]

²⁹¹ The Evangelical concerns are for the truth of the Incarnation, the inerrancy of scripture, and evangelism. Lewis upheld the first and the last of these concerns without flinching; yet, with the middle concern, he is found to be incompatible with a strictly Evangelical theology. Nevertheless, as was argued in chapter 3, his understanding of the gospel as *True Myth* ought to be an open concept for Evangelicals and it is an idea that Evangelicals can take in wholeheartedly, even while not following Lewis’s theology in every respect.

of mythology through allegory in the Middle Ages,²⁹² and into the renewed interest in mythology birthed by the Romantic movement in the 19th century, which was itself a reaction to Enlightenment rationalism.²⁹³ Add to this all his own personal interest in mythology sparked by the experience of *Joy*. It is simply the case that there has been no Evangelical theologian so far with quite the same experiences and concerns as Lewis had. This is not to say there have not been Evangelical theologians who were better educated theologians *qua* theologians than Lewis (Carl Henry being an example), but not those with the combined elements of an extensive acquaintance with myth, a comprehensive literary education, and developed literary skill. These elements in Lewis helped him foster the concept of *True Myth*, which itself is the most helpful theological contribution Lewis happened to make.²⁹⁴ For half of his life, Lewis fleshed out the varying aspects of this idea, even if he did not invent it from whole-cloth.²⁹⁵ And no one has worked on it quite so well since. To begin with a source other than Lewis when considering the relationship between mythology and theology is to step backwards, no matter what sort of leap might follow.²⁹⁶

²⁹² Cf. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love*, 102-104.

²⁹³ Romanticism became characteristic of literature in the 19th century, and also of many Christian authors in particular. Lewis's "master," George MacDonald, is one example of this embrace. Cf. George MacDonald, "The Imagination: Its Function and Its Culture," 1-28.

²⁹⁴ The only competitors would be his two arguments for the existence of God—(1) the argument from desire [found in the preface to *The Pilgrim's Regress*] and (2) the argument from reason [found in *Miracles: A Preliminary Study*]. These two along with the idea of the *True Myth* constitute Lewis's original contribution to Christian theology (even though, as with most ideas, they have their precursors).

²⁹⁵ Though the term "true myth," does not occur, as far as I could tell, in Chesterton's *The Everlasting Man*, the idea is there. Following the influence of Chesterton, Lewis seems to have picked up the term "true myth" from Tolkien, or indirectly from speaking with him. It occurs for the first time in Lewis in "Letter to A. Greeves, October 18, 1931," in *Collected Letters: Volume I*, 975-77. Cf. Chapter 2, "A Biographical Sketch."

²⁹⁶ This is not to say that Lewis is necessarily the most helpful theologian anywhere else. For most theological matters, other theologians, including other Evangelical theologians, would serve better. Even in the area of apologetics, which Lewis was rather skilled at, he has, by now, been outclassed in the last sixty years since his death by the rise of a rather sophisticated wave of Christian philosophers who have transformed the arena of Christian apologetics. Though, Lewis may still be the master among the apologists in appealing to the *imagination*.

The rest of this chapter will concern the marriage of Lewis's thought to an Evangelical theology, which must be accomplished before the way in which such an amalgamated theology can help address certain contemporary concerns can be outlined. These contemporary concerns are those of pluralism, the prioritization of narrative, and the need for individuation. These in turn must be connected to the Evangelical priorities of Incarnation, inerrancy, and evangelism. As will be seen, the idea of *True Myth* not only is able to address the contemporary concerns but also invite the Evangelical priorities into these concerns.²⁹⁷

An Outline of a Union

In *Perelandra*, the second novel in the *Ransom Trilogy*, Lewis notes a peculiar union, disunion, and reunion:

Long since on Mars, and more strongly since he came to Perelandra, Ransom had been perceiving that the triple distinction of truth from myth and of both from fact was purely terrestrial—was part and parcel of that unhappy division between soul and body which resulted from the Fall. Even on earth the sacraments existed as a permanent reminder that the division was neither wholesome nor final. The Incarnation had been the beginning of its disappearance. In Perelandra it would have no meaning at all. Whatever happened here would be of such a nature that earth-men would call it mythological. All this he had thought before. Now he knew it. The Presence in the darkness, never before so formidable, was putting the truths into his hands, like terrible jewels.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁷ It should be noted before continuing that Lewis is generally not considered a serious theological figure within academic circles. Robert MacSwain comments, “. . . the most substantial studies of Lewis's work have been from literary scholars. Outside of evangelical Christian circles, theologians and specialists in religious studies have for the most part kept their distance [“Introduction,” in *The Cambridge Companion to C.S. Lewis*, edited by Robert MacSwain and Michael Ward, 1-12 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 4].” But even though this is understandably the case (since Lewis was himself, within academia, a literary scholar) he spoke too much about theology to be ignored by its students. And Lewis is more than an apologist (as should be clear by this point). MacSwain adds concerning Lewis's relevance:

However. . . academic theology can ill afford to disregard C.S. Lewis. If only because he is so influential, scholars and students need to be familiar with the specific content of his many books in order to know (and if necessary counter and correct) his impact on the masses. But, more positively, it is at least possible that Lewis—despite not being an academic theologian himself—might have something to teach academic theologians about their own subject. [“Introduction,” 4]

²⁹⁸ Lewis, *Perelandra*, 122. And in the first book of the *Ransom Trilogy*, Lewis has a similar passage, in which the character Ransom is instead on the planet Malacandra (Mars):

Christian theology is Incarnational in nature; it concerns the historical facts in narrative of creation, fall, and redemption. Lewis here presents a vision of Christian theology as the reunification of knowledge. Humanity was once created to perceive reality in such a way that “truth,” “myth,” and “fact” were not distinct from one another but were perceived as a unified whole by the mind of man. The fall has severed these things, what Lewis calls the “unhappy division between soul and body.” In the Incarnation, the first fulfillment of redemption, these have begun to be unified again within the human mind. They will be fully reunified at the second coming of Christ, in the new heavens and the new earth, the coming together of all things.²⁹⁹

Thus, for Lewis, theology can be seen as the expression in *language* of that *truth* which is not merely identical to the abstract universal truths of *reason*. It is possible, instead, *per* Lewis to distinguish three distinct kinds of truth which correspond roughly to what is mentioned in *Perelandra*. There are the truths of philosophy, which are perceived by *reason* and are abstract yet anytime and anywhere true for the concrete. There are then the truths of mythology, which are perceived by the *imagination* and are universal yet anytime and anywhere true in the concrete.³⁰⁰ Finally, there are the truths of history (what has actually happened in the past), which are perceived by *reason* and *sense* and are contingent within the concrete yet are providential.³⁰¹ Though we have noted throughout this paper that Lewis was concerned with the

They [the *handramits*] were gigantic feats of engineering, about which he had learned nothing; feats accomplished, if all were true, before human history began. . . before animal history began. Or was that only mythology? He knew it would seem like mythology when he got back to Earth. . . . It even occurred to him that the distinction between history and mythology might be itself meaningless outside of Earth. [*Out of the Silent Planet* (New York: Scribner, 1996), 143-144]

²⁹⁹ For another suggestive passage:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him *all things hold together*.
- Colossians 1:15-17

³⁰⁰ Cf. Barkman, 102-103 in which Barkman discusses the concept of a “concrete universal.”

³⁰¹ The truths of history should be defined broadly, as including both knowledge of past events and persons and of knowledge of the operations of the physical world throughout time. There is no fundamental difference in

nature of truth, these different kinds of “truths” in Lewis must be distinguished from *truth*, which is ultimately the union, the sum, of these “truths.” Humanity’s fall no doubt affected their entire nature; yet, in particular, it has resulted in the terrible collapse of beauty, the epistemic disaster of disunion—our minds are no longer able to perceive *truth* as it is in full—we see through a glass darkly.

It is impossible to attempt to comprehend this union in the mind at present. It cannot be experienced yet ourselves. Yet, if the Christian story is true, then one man’s mind was already unified—whether it was unified before or after he rose from the dead is too much to guess—and his mind was that which came up with such things to say as “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.”³⁰² It was one of the insights of twentieth century theology (though not unanticipated by all that came before, if not expressed in the same way) that all theology is at root Christological.³⁰³ Lewis would, in his own way, agree with such a statement by way of *True Myth*.

Now, a theology of mythology deals with only one aspect of *truth*, namely, that which is mythological in nature. It is an aspect currently estranged from its kin—both the philosophical and the historical—and it has received much less attention from the theological multitude.

how we come to know historical and scientific facts, though there are differences in the methods of coming to know. Historical and scientific truths are not abstract and necessary like the truths of metaphysical principles (e.g. *ex nihilo nihil fit*) or mathematical propositions, neither are they quite like mythical truths, which represent universally true principles to the mind in a manner and mode that is different from the way *reason* grasps metaphysical truths. Both Nature and the past history of humanity are understood by means of *sense*, *reason*, and still, ultimately, *imagination*; but this holds for all kinds of truths. Different sorts of true statements are not allocated to each part of the mind to the exclusion of the operation of the others, since the mind’s faculties always act (except in the case of psychosis) together in knowing. But the degree in which one faculty is operative and the degree to which the *will* is engaged with each faculty varies; and this is what distinguishes the way in which different sorts of true statements are known.

³⁰² John 14:6a

³⁰³ Karl Barth (cf. chapter 3, n. 272) was most influential in putting Christology into the center of theological reasoning during the 20th century. Again, while such a maneuver might not appear at root original (as it is not), it was nonetheless essential in Barth’s battle against theological liberalism. These liberal theologians were the sort who were making out theology as mythology, while Barth was fighting back, making out theology as Christology. In Lewis, something of a cross purpose is maintained. The idea of *True Myth* makes out mythology itself to be, ultimately, Christology; and, indeed, Christology itself as mythic.

Philosophical and historical truths abound in the literature of Evangelical theologians, but the mythological truths less so. The reason for this is clear: mythology is a term that has become associated with meaninglessness or falsehood, or worse, corruption. Given this wasteland, what could such a theology possibly look like?

First, it is important to note that a theology of mythology touches upon various of the classic *loci* of theology. In theological anthropology (as distinct from historical anthropology) it provides a vision for the psychology of man, and a way to understand his epistemic functioning—the inter-play between *reason* and *imagination* as distinct but not independent producers of knowledge. In doing so, it can help provide a way of thinking about *revelation*, and the nature of how God reveals himself to humanity in *language*. Thus, such a theology also can ultimately provide an account of what Lewis referred to once as “the language of religion.”³⁰⁴ By providing an account of *revelation*, this theology can also go so far as to provide material for thinking about theology proper, concerning the *nature* of God himself (theology proper has always been the realm of philosophical truths). In one sense, it is not as difficult to conceive of the union of historical and mythological truths as it is to think of the union of philosophical truths to either of these, since the former both concern narrative, or the progression of purposeful events. How can such things be unified with the truths of a philosophical nature?³⁰⁵ It may be a kind of folly to think that any of these differing kinds of truths could be reunified in the mind

³⁰⁴ Lewis wrote an article on this topic entitled, “The Language of Religion,” in *Christian Perspectives* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967): 159-174. In it, Lewis distinguishes between “Scientific,” “Ordinary,” and “Poetic” language, setting up a spectrum upon which to measure the language of religion, by which he primarily means the *language* of theology and theological reasoning. He ends up placing it between Ordinary and Poetic language in general rather than considering it a special class. On the two ends of that spectrum, it would seem appropriate to set the functioning of first *reason* and the *imagination*. It is curious that Lewis provides no special place for either theology or philosophy, yet it is probably that he would distinguish these among other things by how they are known rather than how they are communicated.

³⁰⁵ This evokes the philosopher Gotthold Lessing’s “Ugly Broad Ditch” [*On the Proof of the Spirit and of Power* (1777)]. This is the divide that is supposed to exist between the eternal truths of *reason* and the contingent truths of history.

before the end of the beginning, but when they are, it will be the knowledge of God possessed. But before then, the best hope theologians have to understand this reunification is to survey the Incarnation and see how philosophy, mythology, and history have been conjoined in and by it.³⁰⁶

I do not attempt to lay out a comprehensive theology of mythology here—I am overwhelmingly underprepared for that. But before advancing onwards to consider how the Evangelical priorities can relate to the contemporary concerns on the basis of such a theology, first a few potential problems that might arise before launching out on such an endeavor must be dealt with. None of these objections necessarily stop one from accepting the idea of *True Myth*, but they might hinder being able to appropriate Lewis's whole thinking on the matter as legitimate.

The Fallenness of Myth

The first problem arises from the fact that mythology is imperfect. Whatever mythology is as a particular human phenomenon, including as a mode of knowing, it has obviously participated in the fall of humanity in general. But, the same can be said for philosophy, as well as for history and science for that matter, inasmuch as we are unable to see the coherent whole in each of these individual disciplines of knowledge, and unable to see the coherent whole they might form together. Any objection against mythology must also be an objection leveled against all means and methods of human knowing by and through *language*. Some might assume that mythology and its fruit is different from the truths of philosophy and history, and that the metaphysical and the physical, accessed through by *sense* and *reason* rather than through the *imagination* are sufficient for coming to a knowledge of *truth*. But it is in the perception of unity by the *imagination* that metaphor is created, which is an essential part, if not nearly the whole, of our

³⁰⁶ The early church appropriated history without hesitation, and philosophy with little. But mythology was by and large rejected.

language.³⁰⁷ And, it is with our *language*, our words and thoughts, that we speak of things in the metaphysical and in the physical. Hence, the mythical impinges on the other realms of thought more than we might wish to admit.³⁰⁸ Our myths, as well as our metaphors, may often be false,

³⁰⁷ As an addendum, this holds for even the most abstract and logically consequential of linguistic statements. A mathematical equation, which is a statement about quantity in strictly logical form, itself is a linguistic statement that has meaning for the thinker and speaker of it. The words used correspond to abstractions in the most abstract sense, rather than to the concrete unities of *being*. If a perfect myth is the ultimate metaphor, then the mathematical proposition may represent the ultimate abstraction (by which individual things are counted apart from one another). Yet there are unities in mathematics by virtue of logical operations, and in the practice of finding equations to represent complex relations within sets, mathematics engages in a kind of metaphor. Mathematics is also an example of the metaphysical rather than the physical, having more to do with philosophy than history. Yet, history (in this case, natural history) is already seen to be united then to philosophy in the discipline of science, which applies the truths of mathematics to the physical world. By analogy, the Incarnation must work in a similar way, by bringing together notions within knowledge which are generally defiant to unification. Note as well that the metaphysical could not be known by human beings were it not for the physical (imagine a human being conceiving of a triangle in the abstract without having seen them in the physical world), but that does not mean that the metaphysical must collapse in upon the physical and be indistinguishable from it (the materialist wishes to be rid of the metaphysical, and the idealist wishes to be rid of the physical). Rather, such a factor is an indicator that we human beings are made to perceive these things in unity. For all of our *truth* seeking has been defined by discovering what way we were to speak about something in our *language* in order to understand it best. Now, the metaphysical can be revealed in the physical because, though they are distinct from one another, they are not separate. They are, by an analogy, one in essence, distinct in *hypostasis*. This echoes a profound example of metaphysical truth, in this case, found by theological reasoning. The problem of the general and the particular, the one and the many, comes to a resolution in Christian theology proper. By all counts the doctrine of the Trinity seems to be an example of philosophical reasoning concerning the metaphysical. Yet, no doubt, the Trinity is the fundamental reality of *being* from which flows our world of the various made one. Surely, in some sense, the Trinity, God himself, can be perceived by the physical and by the mythical. If this doctrine of *True Myth* holds its own weight, and if we, without going a Docetic way, accept the Incarnation in all its physicality and historicity, then something just like this seems to be true.

³⁰⁸ Lewis, writing in “Bluspels and Flalansferes,” comments on the language used in various fields of knowledge that:

The percentage of mere syntax masquerading as meaning may vary from something like 100 per cent. in political writers, journalists, psychologists, and economists, to something like forty per cent. in the writer of children’s stories. Some scientists will fare better than others: the historian, the geographer, and sometimes the biologist will speak significantly more often than their colleagues; the mathematician, who seldom forgets that his symbols are symbolic, may often rise for short stretches to ninety per cent. of meaning and ten of verbiage. The philosophers will differ as widely from one another as any of the other groups differ among themselves: for a good metaphysical library contains at once some of the most verbal, and some of the significant literature in the world. Those who have prided themselves on being literal, and who have endeavoured to speak plainly, with no mystical tomfoolery, about the highest abstractions, will be found to be among the least significant of writers: I doubt if we shall find more than a beggardly five per cent. of meaning in the pages of some celebrated ‘tough minded’ thinkers, and how the account of Kant or Spinoza stands, none knows but heaven. But open your Plato, and you will find yourself among the great creators of metaphor, and therefore among the masters of meaning. If we turn to Theology—or rather to the literature of religion—the result will be more surprising still; for unless our whole argument is wrong, we shall have to admit that a man who says *heaven* and thinks of the visible sky is pretty sure to mean more than a man who tells us that heaven is a state of mind. [156-157]

The echoes of Barfield are here apparent. Refer to chapter iii of *Poetic Diction*, “Metaphor,” in which Barfield makes one comment that sheds light on all Lewis has said above, “Mankind never employed so many Figures of Speech, as when they had hardly any words for expressing their meaning [72].”

or partly false, which is to say partly true. But all our myths, including our metaphors, can only be partially true inasmuch as they are not identical to the Incarnation. Which is as much as saying that our very *language*, used every day for our daily lives as well as in the “higher” pursuits of knowledge, is only ever partially truthful inasmuch as it is not the Word of God as spoken in the Incarnation of his Son. Only the *logos* can be the complete Word, which is to say, the complete Metaphor. No doubt, since pagan myths have spoken of gods and goddesses falsely worshipped, individual myths ought to be approached cautiously. But I do not think there is much danger that people today would worship these false deities, at least not in the modern West. If they were in such danger, then it would not be a wholly evil sign. A pagan can be shown the *truth* of the gospel, which he has tasted in his myths, much faster than a materialist, who believes no myth, can be convinced that there is a true one (though perhaps the materialist will hunger more than the pagan if he has hungered at all for God).

The Elusivity of Narrative

Stories are ancient and often obscure things (by the standards of logic). They are older than maybe anything else of distinctly human origin.³⁰⁹ And myths are always stories. And while not all stories are equally mythical,³¹⁰ nevertheless, all stories are in some sense mythical. To tell any story is to engage in *mythopoeia* even if poorly or wickedly. And, it would go without much saying, that the *True Myth* of the Incarnation, the Christological narrative, is itself a story, and it is rich and good.

³⁰⁹ Lewis refers to the past history of mythology in one case, writing, “Most myths were made in prehistoric times, and, I suppose, not consciously made by individuals at all.” *George MacDonald: An Anthology*, xxxi. Presumably, Lewis would apply these criteria to *language* itself. *Language* is not “made by individuals at all” either, at least not in the whole. Words and myths, *language* and metaphor, are phenomenon above and beyond any one person’s conscious effort.

³¹⁰ The idea of the spectrum of myth is best recalled here.

Yet, still, any narrative is an elusive thing. It might seem to speak *truth*, but we cannot find within the plot something like an argument, or a logical progression of thought. Does this mean that it cannot be a good means of revealing *truth*? There seems to be an infinite number of stories to tell; yet, distinct patterns which seem to hold for them all. There are laws of story-telling, narrational laws, which, if broken, will be known as surely as if an equation was mistaken in physics or an argument logically invalid. A story-error is, of course, different from a mathematical or logical error. And this need (more felt than known precisely) for story to be consistent indicates that it speaks of reality and is not an arbitrary fancy. And even the constancy of Nature (note that all moderns are sure that we have something like *truth* concerning the physical world) can fool the observer as to its variety; just as the variety can fool someone just as well by the perception of general principles. And, lest anyone think that the laws of Nature, as simple and few as they are, do not allow for the beauty of variety, then such a one should find more beautiful corners of the world to stand in (or look out a window as the case may be). There are parallels between the physical and metaphysical realms and the mythological, or narrational, realm. The laws are simple; the world (or worlds) is not. The variety, even possible infinitude, of stories does not exclude them from revealing *truth*, no more than the massivity of infinity excludes mathematics from *truth*, or the possible infinitude of space-time and matter and its arrangements exclude the physical. Myths are not runaway phantoms of words.

The Problem of Holiness

It has been an oft-noted piece of trivia that Lewis died on the same day as John F. Kennedy and Aldous Huxley, November 22, 1963. Though not on the same day, there was another Christian writer, an Evangelical in this case, who died that same year as well. His name was A.W.

Tozer,³¹¹ and in a curious passage I found in one of his many books, there is a relevant matter lurking that should be attended to:

It is my own belief (and here I shall not feel bad if no one follows me) that every good and beautiful thing which man has produced in the world has been the result of his faulty and sin-blocked response to the creative Voice sounding over the earth. The moral philosophers who dreamed their high dreams of virtue, the religious thinkers who speculated about God and immortality, the poets and artists who created out of common stuff pure and lasting beauty: how can we explain them? It is not enough to say simply, "It was genius."

What then is genius? Could it be that a genius is a man haunted by the speaking Voice, laboring and striving like one possessed to achieve ends which he only vaguely understands? That the great man may have missed God in his labors, that he may even have spoken or written against God does not destroy the idea I am advancing. God's redemptive revelation in Scripture is necessary if the vague stirrings toward immortality are to bring us to restful and satisfying communion with God. To me this is a plausible explanation of all that is best out of Christ. But you can be a good Christian and not accept my thesis.³¹²

In what is a fascinating (probably accidental) collision between an Evangelical exclusivity and Romantic notions of divine inspiration (of a theistic sort), Tozer provides what might be a good description of what happened in Lewis's own life. Was not Lewis one of those men "haunted by the speaking Voice"? What was *Joy* but a voice, even if of one crying in the wilderness?

The problem presented here is not merely the fallenness or imperfection of merely human myths, or of the human means of knowing myths, but the exclusivity of the *True Myth* as a myth that is known as one. It is not so much a question of whether or not the gospel is a myth (*the Myth*), but whether or not the fact that it is a myth excludes other stories and story-making. As Lewis's theology of *True Myth* was not only a description of reality but a prescription for creative endeavor, this is an important objection to consider. Above it was argued that myths are

³¹¹ To note, Tozer was an author with extensive readings in the theological authors of the Christian tradition that would have equaled that of Lewis.

³¹² A.W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1982), 79.

not necessarily useless when partial and imperfect because they tend toward revealing the reality of the *True Myth*. But, does conceding the reality of the *True Myth* exclude other myths (pagan or otherwise) by *fiat*, not by making them *functionless* in themselves, but by rendering them irrelevant, and, perhaps, obstructing? Maybe it is true that pagans who have tasted myths already are better prepared for the feast of the gospel. But, should we engage in reading and hearing myths, or engage in myth-making at all? Or should we rather leave the genius now to the *True Myth*?

In one sense, Tozer proposes that which confirms the idea of *True Myth*. How could all that was “best out of Christ” not include the mythical? And if *mythopoeia* is one of those things resulting from the “faulty and sin-blocked response to the creative Voice” then how could there not be something originally mythical in “the creative Voice” itself, though it was corrupted within humanity? But it remains nonetheless an objection against activities Lewis was fond of recommending—namely, the enjoyment of old myths and the making of new myths, but from within an awareness of the *True Myth* that the pagans of old did not share. This objection to the *mythopoeic*, potentially hidden in the necessary exclusivity of an Evangelical theology, probably will hold some weight with Evangelicals in general.

Of course, we should note that pagan myths are indeed lies inasmuch as they were believed. But, in them, something of *truth* was grasped, it seems, even though it was partial. Tozer’s point would obviously carry much weight concerning these myths, these partial truths and partial lies. But since there is a *True Myth*, which (at a deep level) explains the others, certainly we should not expect that this myth, “God’s myth,”³¹³ would put an end to human creativity. Perhaps not,

³¹³ To refer again to Lewis’s letter to Arthur Greeves of October the 18th, 1931, *Collected Letters: Vol. 1* (975-977).

but Tozer's point could lead one to think that when the *will* engages in creative action (in this case, *mythopoeia*) it is ultimately meant to engage in obedience; namely, living out the reality of the *True Myth*, since, in some sense, we are now a part of that myth. And no doubt, if this objection falls right out of Tozer's logic, it would seem right. The enjoyment of pagan myths and the creation of new ones is faulty, because it may not lead to obedience to God, and, therefore, *goodness*. But Lewis was not entirely unaware of this point.

In one place, Lewis does portray the ethical concern of the artist and the author. In his essay, "Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What's To Be Said," Lewis writes of the author in the creative state of mind that:

He will ask how the gratification of this impulse will fit in with all the other things he wants, and ought to do or be. Perhaps the whole thing is too frivolous and trivial... to justify the time and pains it would involve. Perhaps it would be unedifying when it was done. Or else, perhaps... it looks like being 'good,' not in a merely literary sense, but 'good' all around.³¹⁴

Lewis, in this passage, is distinguishing between the "Author," who is interested in creating on the basis of internal impulses, and the "Man," who is the whole responsible self, considering the ethical consequences of his creative action. Lewis knew, without exception, that it was no good thing to create merely any fairy story. Tozer's possible objection would be that any such production is unnecessary—"the gratification of this impulse" to create would be to respond inappropriately to "the speaking Voice." It would be better to pray fervently than to write feverishly, so Tozer would say to the genius "haunted."

This is potentially a powerful objection to the project of *mythopoeia* (begun itself in light of and motivated by the *True Myth*) that was begun by Christian authors such as MacDonald, Lewis,

³¹⁴ Lewis, "Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What's To Be Said," 35.

and Tolkien. No complete refutation can be given without too much presumption, or without running the risk of flippancy. Tozer's point is planted deeper in the soil of spirituality than any potential refutation, at least of any that could be given here. Tozer is not asking for less than myth-making, but more. If the union of knowledge consists in the knowledge of God, then might not all mental pursuits apart from such knowledge be faulty? No doubt faulty at least, but no one has likely ever considered all human knowledge of creation (even that which has undergone rearrangement by the *imagination*) that is not of the Maker as useless, much less evil. That would be perhaps to fall into an accidental Manichaeism. Though Tozer does not fall into that pit, and neither would most who raise the problem of holiness. For now, let it rest thoughtful, and reverent.³¹⁵

³¹⁵ Tolkien provided what might be a satisfactory answer to this problem:

Fantasy can, of course, be carried to excess. It can be ill done. It can be put to evil uses. It may even delude the minds out of which it came. But of what human thing in this fallen world is that not true? Men have conceived not only of elves, but they have imagined gods, and worshipped them, even worshipped those most deformed by their authors' own evil. But they have made false gods out of other materials: their notions, their banners, their monies; even their sciences and their social and economic theories have demanded human sacrifice. *Absus non tollit usum*. Fantasy remains a human right: we make in our measure and in our derivative mode, because we are made: and not only made, but made in the image and likeness of a Maker. ["On Fairy Stories," 75]

And Lewis himself recognized that the unholiness of human *mythopoeia* is simply a product of our own sinfulness. The source from which it springs is pure, and we corrupt it. Lewis notes this, writing in one place:

And indeed the only way in which I can make real to myself what theology teaches about the heinousness of sin is to remember that every sin is the distortion of an energy breathed into us - an energy which, if not thus distorted, would have blossomed into one of those holy acts whereof "God did it" and "I did it" are both true descriptions. We poison the wine as He decants it into us; murder a melody He would play with us as the instrument. We caricature the self-portrait He would paint. Hence all sin, whatever else it is, is sacrilege. [*Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer* (New York: Harcourt, 1964), 69]

Though he does not say it explicitly in that passage, Lewis could be implying that all of our *mythopoeia* is an anticipation and even celebration, faulty or sinful as it may be, of a glorious thing to come about through our divine-image-bearing selves. Perhaps, one day, we will no longer need to tell myths since the very lives we live will be mythic themselves. Once creation is unified in itself, and man in himself, and both with each other in Christ and with Christ, then the moment by moment existence of all things will contain without reserve all that was anticipated in the moments of mythic *fantasia*. How many of us have longed to live in the stories or the fictional worlds we loved? Whatever was good in them will be better when the perfect has come.

Also, Tolkien's idea of Fantasy as "a human right" is perhaps our answer. By "right" Tolkien means something that no one can say ought not to be done by any ethical imperative. No one ought to do so, but neither ought they not to do so. It is a value rather than a duty. The only necessary myth is the *True Myth*, and it can, all on its own, satisfy the mythic soul of man. Yet, we can, by our creative privilege and ability, exercise such a right as an act of free worship, rather than due worship.

The Contemporary Concerns

What follows is an analysis of the ways in which a theology of mythology might be relevant to the contemporary context, which is characterized by certain concerns.³¹⁶ The first of these concerns is pluralism; the second, the prioritization of narrative; the third, the need for individuation. These were mentioned and somewhat defined in the introduction, but they will be further defined in the following three sections. These three contemporary concerns will be addressed so as to also relate them to the three Evangelical priorities of Incarnation, inerrancy, and evangelism.

Pluralism

Pluralism is the view that the variety of viewpoints that exist concerning *being* can all provide equal access to *truth*. On the surface, this viewpoint seems loaded with contradiction. But, at a second glance, there appears to be some credibility to it. There are three facts of the matter that cannot be avoided or denied. The first is that mythology is universal as a means of understanding the world. The second that where philosophy has arisen³¹⁷ it has always had adherents who have concluded that *being* is not merely atoms and void or ceaseless becoming, but that there is a permanency which is the source and pattern of all things observed. And the third fact is that there is a great variety of beliefs as to the *nature of being* among humanity, by their mythologies and their philosophies. It might, therefore, on the surface seem useful to infer that there is a unity of *being*, which might be called “God,” that all humanity grasps after to understand, but all

³¹⁶ For a basic definition, “contemporary context” stands for something more specific than the “modern context” that has often been referred to so far. The contemporary context primarily means the twenty-first century, with roots going back to the middle of the twentieth century, which was an era that saw a sufficient number of cultural shifts to mark off the start of a new era. Also, American culture is the primary referent as well, yet the concerns discussed in following are characteristic of Western culture in general.

³¹⁷ Philosophical reasoning, or dialectic, in general is not unique to Western civilization, but does characterize it more than other cultures.

understand only partially. Since all understand reality partially, it is ethically imperative for all to be tolerant of those viewpoints which are different from their own. In one sense, pluralism is a deft move, both intellectually and ethically speaking. It not only seems to solve the problem of *truth*—namely, that there are a variety of viewpoints, mutually contradictory or at least different, concerning *being*—but it also seems to solve the ethical and practical problem of intolerance, which is the persecution of some by others because of differing beliefs. And it goes almost without saying that pluralism is antithetical to the Christian view of reality. Christianity is not antithetical to pluralism’s desire for tolerance (Christians are to be tolerant for other reasons),³¹⁸ but to pluralism’s understanding of *truth* and so of *being*.

How can a theology of mythology, such as Lewis models, help address this concern? To begin with, pluralists have pointed out the fact that there are so many different opinions of *truth* among humanity. But the ancient world, as well as the medieval and the modern, has typically resorted to argument or dialectic to sort the true from the false. But what has transpired in the last century is a decreased trust in *language* to convey *truth*.³¹⁹ Often this tendency has been called “post-

³¹⁸ A strange inconsistency exists at this point. What would seem to lead to intolerance, on the pluralist’s view, is thinking that another is wrong in their belief, that another has opinion for belief rather than knowledge. But most people in the history of the world with a philosophical position (and this includes pluralists) have believed that the position that they espouse is right, to the extent that some others are wrong. If the pluralist attempts to dodge this, he should be asked if he thinks an Evangelical Christian is right in thinking the Incarnation more than a mere myth but true. The pluralist may object that the reason that the Evangelical is wrong is because he has dared to assume that another might be wrong; but in making this judgment, the pluralist has included himself in his own category of those who judge others wrong. It is all rather self-defeating. Rather, it may not be so much thinking someone else wrong that leads to intolerance, but rather a defect in understanding how differences of belief should be handled. The problem is not so much dialectical as ethical.

³¹⁹ Barfield points out this inevitable epistemic and linguistic, and ultimately metaphysical, drop-off in *Poetic Diction*:

It is of course in attempting to describe more precisely the nature of the ‘somewhat’ that science both parts company with the man in the street and keeps changing its ground. In the nineteenth century the real world was assumed to consist, in the last resort, of things. The things got smaller and smaller—molecules, atoms, electrons—but they were at least *there* and if you had a powerful enough microscope you would, it was assumed, see something like a number of billiard-balls, or little solar systems. . . . Twentieth-century science has abolished the ‘thing’ altogether; and twentieth-century philosophy (that part of it, at least, which takes no account of imagination) has obediently followed suit. There are no objects, says the voice of Science, there are only bundles of waves—or possibly something else; adding that, although it is

modernism,” and its adherents “post-modernists.” Setting aside the difficulty of defining post-modernism (which is a tendency of thought rather than a system of thought), it is important to note that most pluralists cannot be post-modern if, by the term “post-modernist,” one is being identified by his view of *language* and its relation (or lack of relation) to *truth*. The reason for this is that post-modernism tends to reject the metanarrative of the pluralist—namely, that there is an “Ultimate Reality” which is partially accessible by the mind through *language*.

An example of this metanarrative can be found in the theologian Maurice Wiles. Wiles proposes a kind of ontological parity between mythical “truths” and the physical “facts” of the world. This is even applied to the Incarnation, Wiles suggesting that there is a parity between the

convenient to think of them, it would be naïve to suppose that the waves or the something else actually exist. There is no ‘referent’, echoes the philosophy of linguistic analysis deferentially, no substance or underlying reality which is ‘meant’ by the words. There are only descriptions, only the words themselves, though it ‘happens to be the case’ that men have from the beginning so persistently supposed the contrary that they positively cannot open their mouths without doing so. [18-19]

What Barfield does not specify above is the mistake someone would make by thinking that because merely “bundles of waves” exist, that no objects would. The objects simply would be the “bundles of waves,” or rather the quantum fields from which they form. But what twentieth century philosophy has been troubled with, at least on the analytic side, is the existence of different things together as a whole. Supposedly, the existence of one thing could perhaps be explained self-referentially, but if many distinct things exist together, what makes them cohere? And how would we perceive the difference between one thing and another thing, in *sense* and in *reason*? And if we do perceive this difference, by what does the mind perceive their cohabitation if not by the *imagination*? Thus, given that multiple things exist, it may be impossible to comprehend their existing together merely by rational means. A simple conceptual explanation given by *reason* would be that many contingent things exist together because God, who is self-existent and exists necessarily, has created each to cohere with every other. But this rational answer cannot answer just what the nature of this union is, only that it is (whatever it consists of) and how it came about. And, even in accounting for how it came about, much metaphor cannot be avoided. How can we understand “making” at first without knowing about carpenters, engineers, and architects? It is impossible for the creature to observe the moment of its own creation. Yet so separated from *sense* and memory, *reason* can conceive of a first moment, but it cannot get an understanding of it in the same sense as it would of its own experience. The problem is multiplied many-fold when thinking of how a creature can understand God, who is fundamentally distinct from what he has made in a manner other than the way in which different contingent things differ from each other. To understand “that God is” or “that God does so and so” is what *reason* is best at. But to understand “what God is” or “what God does,” or even “why God does so and so,” requires *imagination*. The apprehension of the *imagination* is qualitatively distinct from the apprehension of *reason*, and the final comprehension of anything can only take place when the apprehensions of the whole mind—*sense*, *reason*, *imagination*, *affection*, etc.—cohere in their apprehension of any particular thing, whether that be of God or of that which God has made. Thus, the old distinction between appearance and reality may be, if not abolished, overcome by the human mind in the end. “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.” – 1 Corinthians 13:12

actual life of Jesus as known historically and the myths told about him in the Gospels as known mythically. To quote:

We would want, I suggest, to affirm two things. First that his [Jesus'] own life in its relation to God embodied that openness to God, that unity of human and divine to which the doctrine points. And secondly that his life depicted not only a profound human response to God, but that in his attitudes towards other men his life was a parable of the loving outreach of God to the world.³²⁰

This is as close as someone who does not believe in the historical Incarnation can get to its *truth* without actually affirming it. This is also why Evangelicals balk at the notion of mythology in theology—if this is the fruit what should we make of the tree? Wiles seems to think of Jesus as a kind of incarnation, whose life is a metaphor of God's nature, which *reveals God's nature partially*.³²¹ It is not enough merely to speak of Jesus historically, but he must be referred to by myths if his life is to be truly understood as a kind of *revelation*. But Wiles is motivated to think this way by his soteriology, as he writes:

If, selecting from our Christian language, we call God-acting-towards-mankind the Logos, then we must say that *all* salvation, within all religions, is the work of the Logos and that under their various images and symbols men in different cultures and faiths may encounter the Logos and find salvation. . . . We should gladly acknowledge that Ultimate Reality has affected human consciousness for its liberation or 'salvation' in various ways.
..³²²

And so the great *non sequitur* of pluralism is put on display. Why should anyone think that "Ultimate Reality" has revealed itself at all? Surely, the Enlightenment rationalists did not (generally) think so, though they thought *reason* could reveal inert *being* in all its metaphysical or merely sensible depths and heights. If "Ultimate Reality" has affected "human consciousness"

³²⁰ Maurice Wiles, "Myth in Theology," in *The Myth of God Incarnate* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977), 162.

³²¹ Though one might wonder what Wiles might finally mean by the "loving outreach of God to the world" if that outreach is not simply the Incarnation itself and its consequences

³²² Wiles, 181.

at all, then why in such a partial way? What strange advantage has the pluralist to say that he has the true account of the interactions of the “Logos” with humanity? No doubt, it is upon the basis of the empirical study of so many different belief systems that the pluralist bases his conclusion. But, on this account, it is the pluralist who, through his powers of observation, has come to learn what others who have not through their particular encounters with the “Logos.” What the pluralist has alone learned is that all these particular *revelations* and myths were of the same *being*, and that all the seemingly disparate truths were telling the *truth*.

Now a pluralist will only take this position so far. Some things believed cannot be true, including the belief that one has encountered the *True Myth* (rather than “a true myth”) in the Incarnation, as this belief could not be true if the pluralist were right. Also, the horrendous things done by humanity to humanity, at times because of belief, were not in “parity” with “Ultimate Reality.” But, as Wiles argues, if there is a parity between the myths told about Jesus and the actual life of Jesus, even if the myths are not historically true, then the myths can be understood as true *qua* a myth.³²³ They serve as an ethical guide, because they are truly still only yet partially revelatory of “Ultimate Reality.”³²⁴

It is true that Lewis would have himself argued that since *myths are stories that reveal God’s nature partially* that at least some *goodness* would leak through them. As a result, Lewis would have a category for such myths as Wiles proposes. But Lewis also has the concept of the *True Myth* that *reveals God’s nature fully*. And, on this account, the Incarnation is not cut off from

³²³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 162-163.

³²⁴ Note that there is something at least dimly Kantian about this appeal to an ethical norm being fundamental in order to discern whether or not one has access to knowledge of “Ultimate Reality” through a myth or otherwise. I.e. Wiles assumes that whatever the actual life of Jesus was, it was at least in part ethical, and if we find something unethical about Jesus in the Gospels, it is either the Gospels or Jesus that is faulty with reference to a transcendent ethic however defined. The myth of God incarnate, inasmuch as it is on par with the ethical in the life of Jesus, reveals “Ultimate Reality” through him.

sensible historical realities by being mythical. Thus, what the pluralist has wanted to hold on to in the myths he could continue to keep even if he drops his pluralism. Of course, the pluralist is motivated primarily by what he sees as a faulty soteriology in classic Christianity, but that cannot be addressed here. What can be addressed is one observation gained, in part, from considering the pluralist; namely, that there are different kinds of truths concerning *being*—metaphysical, physical, and mythical truths. Leaving aside the metaphysical and the physical, the mythical can be addressed by agreeing with Wiles in affirming that God's nature is revealed through "various images and symbols," including myths, even pagan myths. Yet, there is a *True Myth*, and in it there is a *revelation* of *being* that speaks more certainly than even the pluralist could hope to within his own metanarrative of the many partial revelations of the whole.

It is the Evangelical priority to uphold the reality of the Incarnation which seems to relate most to the contemporary concern of pluralism. Pluralists states that "various images and symbols" reveal *being* partially; yet they also propose that they are aware that it is "Ultimate Reality" which is responsible for the revealing. Thus, even though the particularity of the Incarnation is denied, the generality of *revelation* is not. But Evangelicals, along with historic Christianity, have also held to the generality, or universality, of the *revelation* of God in the Incarnation. The whole is revealed in the particular. The Incarnation, this one man Jesus Christ, is the locus within creation where God's *nature* is revealed fully to all universally. As for the pluralist, they can only admit to the universality of *revelation*, with no locus in which God's *nature* is revealed fully, only particular revelations where God's *nature* is revealed partially. Thus, they would agree with the first clause of Lewis's own view, which states, *myths are stories that reveal God's nature partially and without reference in time and space*. They would not agree with the second that the *True Myth* is a *mythic story that reveals God's nature fully and in time and space*. Rather, the

Christian story is one among many which belong to the first category, that of mythology. Yet, the pluralist makes a mistake when he substitutes for the Incarnation in the second clause of the thesis statement his own corresponding category; namely, pluralism itself as the philosophy which makes sense of the disparate religious and philosophical viewpoints of humanity. The judge of *truth* is pluralism itself and the pluralist himself. Evangelicals have often aimed just this critique at pluralism and its unconscious (or subconscious) hubris. Yet, they have not been able at the same time to appropriate the same concern for myth, for “images and symbols,” which pluralists evoke. A theology of *True Myth* can supplement the pluralist notion of mythology as a partial *revelation* for an Evangelical notion of mythology as found both in *general* and in *special revelation*.

The Prioritization of Narrative

The pluralist (at heart a modernist who happens to be a theologian) must be left behind now and exchanged for the post-modernist. For it is the post-modernist who prioritizes narrative as a means of coming to know something like truths, but not a comprehensive *truth*—³²⁵narrative not as metanarrative but as particular narratives. David Bentley Hart helps define this tendency in the contemporary context, describing the post-modernist view of meaning:

In a world of ungovernable plurality, composed of an endless multiplicity of narratives, there can be no grand metanarrative that extracts itself from, and then comes to comprise, all the finite and culturally determined narratives that throng the horizons of meaning; no

³²⁵ This is a tricky distinction when discussing post-modernism. It is true that the idea of *truth* does not have quite the same meaning for a post-modernist as it might for some others. Sometimes complete skepticism reigns when it comes to the referring power of *language*, with even the reality of the physical world not so much denied as not affirmed. Can *language* reveal anything at all? This is the starting question of post-modernity, and it is a frustrating question, since to answer it seems to deny the validity of the question. If one answers it in the negative, having used *language* to answer it, he has made the answer to the question self-referentially incoherent. But if the answer is affirmative, the question then becomes—how does *language* reveal anything at all? This is the question that all must answer, and most post-modernists have determined to join ranks with others trying to answer it. The real distinction between the post-modernists and the modernists then is rather how they say *language* refers to reality. Whatever answer is given then to the second question will have much to do with the view of *truth* that one has. And, it is often in trying to answer this question that one get their understanding of *truth*.

discourse can triumph over the particularities of all the stories that pass one another by in the general congress of cultures; there is no overarching dialectic by which a single and rationally ascertainable truth might be set above all merely contingent truths.³²⁶

Thus, the post-modernist cuts off the metaphysical limb but wishes to keep the mythical, but only in the sense of particular stories that maybe have internal coherency, but none of which can be prioritized over another. In this case, the prioritization of narrative is not the prioritization of some particular narrative over another. But, as Hart could imply, the post-modernist has admitted at least this: it is by narratives that cultures create and cultivate meaning. And, for some, *language* has no ultimate meaning apart from the category of story and the mode of narrative. The post-modernist might even grant something to metaphor, although nothing quite like a Barfieldian concept of the perception of the unity of things. Such a metaphysical view of reality would go well beyond what the post-modernist would wish to allow.

Yet, there is a fatal inconsistency in the post-modernist's position. Hart notes that:

The 'modern' indicates not a single comprehensive narrative, but a single metanarrative ambition: a desire to transcend the conditioned finitude and contingency of stories by discovering the meaning, limits, and motives of *all* stories, by way of a representation of the absolute, the universal, or the rational. The 'postmodern' condition, however, is an awareness that all metanarrative structures stand upon a shifting surface of dead and living metaphors, while all 'truths' are endlessly fluid. . . . It becomes a meta-metanarrative, the story of no more stories, so told as to determine definitively how much may or may not be said intelligibly by others who have stories to tell; it completes not only the critical but the metanarrative projects of modernity (which prove to be indistinguishable).³²⁷

Thus, this post-modern prioritization of the particular narrative over against a "metanarrative ambition," the modernist ambition which attempted to establish a dialectic of *truth* over the

³²⁶ David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 5.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

mythical, is itself guilty of what it professes to arraign. It seems as if the post-modernist has denied any access to *truth* of that rational sort, but truly what he has done is deny access to *truth* by any who attempt to tell the “wrong” kind of stories—namely, those stories which attempt to give meaning to other stories, or perhaps to all stories. The difficulty with this, as indicated by Hart, is seen in the fact that all *language* is an interlinked system of metaphor, both “dead and living,” and to distinguish where one meaning, or one narrative, ends and where one begins over against where another might begin or end, is simply impossible. To define the limits of a single narrative, even to defend it, is to exercise, even if accidentally, the control of one narrative over another, even if it was hoped to avoid just this. And this is precisely what post-modernists do when they engage in this revolution to dethrone the metanarratives of the past or the present. By the necessity of consequence, they have also engaged in constructing a metanarrative, albeit one ill-defined, as their “rules” (paradoxically) do not allow too much structure.

Yet, something should be recognized—a fact that Lewis himself would have conceded—that there have been and are many attempted myths, many attempted metanarratives, that have been plainly (or less plainly) wrong.³²⁸ *Per* Lewis, it is then the *True Myth* that is the metanarrative

³²⁸ On this point, Kath Filmer, writing of Lewis’s view of metaphor, happens to mention the view of a Marxist interpreter of metaphor. This interpreter writes that “. . . metaphor is never an innocent figure of speech,” it instead represents a “a bourgeois ideological system. . . which corresponds to the assumption of power by the middle classes during the years of developing industrialism in Europe.” [As referred to by Filmer: Robbe-Grillet, Alain. *Snapshots/Towards a New Novel*. Trans. Barbara Wright. London: Calder and Boyars, 1965. In Filmer, “The Polemic Image: The Role of Metaphor and Symbol in the Fiction of C.S. Lewis,” in *The Taste of the Pineapple: Essays on Lewis as Reader, Critic, and Imaginative Writer*, edited by Bruce L. Edwards, 149-165 (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1988), 153]

Now, regardless of the fact that this writer probably intended to refer to certain particular metaphors, there is a strange metanarrative present here. It is the metanarrative of (perhaps all) metaphor being the tool of the haves against the have-nots. Of course, this must exclude the metaphors that must be infused within the dialectic of the author himself, metaphors themselves used in argument against another position. Filmer notes that “How we apprehend reality influences our thoughts and our actions. Metaphors which deepen and extend the human perception of reality have the ability to influence our thoughts and our actions. In other words, they function as arguments [159].” Now this seems very true. Metaphors function by “convincing” our minds even before we have reasoned. Thus, they are powerful, and, perhaps, by some counts, dangerous. And they are—but to what (or to whom)? If they are dangerous against the good, then surely it is right to censure them. But if they can be helpful for

which defines all others and supplants other supplicants to its throne. It is likely we should just admit that, if it is impossible to not possess a metanarrative, it then becomes necessary to have the right one. Now this is where the ugliness might begin. The ethical concern often raised by post-modernism against modernity is that violence has often been used against others on the basis of being “in the right.” The concern is much the same as that which concerned the pluralist—to claim “rightness” is to allow for “wrongness.” But of course, in this case, *goodness* has then been allowed a place within reality, and there is nothing with nearly as much immediate claim to be metanarrative as the ethical.

Yet, the idea of *True Myth* can come to the rescue here as well. So far, throughout this paper, the focus has been upon the relationship between mythology and *truth*. But, the relationship between mythology to *goodness*, as well as to *beauty*, has not been explored nearly at all. And the *True Myth* refers to *goodness* and *beauty* as well as *truth*. The metaphysical, the physical, and the mythical are all a part of our knowledge since they are the *dimensions* of contingent reality. But *truth*, and *goodness*, and *beauty*, these are those things which are known by the three *dimensions* of contingent *being*. They are the *properties* of God’s *nature* in the *logos*, as perceived by us yet being very real.³²⁹ What has been revealed in the gospel, in the *True Myth*, is

the good, then it ought to be right to utilize them. And if the greatest exemplification of *goodness* came about through the Metaphor of the *True Myth*, then metaphor itself is ultimately appraised and not condemned.

³²⁹ There is an echo here of the nominalist/realist divide as it especially was debated in the Middle Ages. *Truth*, *goodness*, and *beauty* are the three *properties* of the *logos* as perceived by us, otherwise called the transcendentals. And there are also three *apprehensions* of the transcendentals, which are the three *dimensions* of created *being*: the metaphysical, the physical, and the mythical, which are present to our minds by and in created things. The transcendentals are known each wholly by the mind; yet, in the end, remain distinct from each other. But the transcendentals cannot be separated, just as the three *apprehensions* of them cannot be separated. And the transcendentals are known in created things by created things. It might be appropriate to call God one particular thing and all created things other particular things. But all created particular things share one property in common—they are each created. And it is by virtue of their creation that they both are distinct yet resemble each other and cohere together, in causation and purpose, with each other. Their distinction, resemblance, and coherence is for the *revelation* of God in creation. Creation both exists to reveal God and to have God revealed to it. Creation reveals God by the metaphysical, the mythical, and the physical *apprehensions* of the mind. And these *apprehensions* are as they are by virtue of the structure of creation itself.

not merely *truth*, as unified in the Incarnation, but also *goodness* and *beauty*, unified as well from the dichotomies of good and evil, beautiful and abhorrent, and from the lack of unity in the metaphysical, the physical, and the mythical as represented within and by our minds.

Understanding the Incarnation as the *True Myth* can then help open the way for conceiving of the unification of these *apprehensions*—the metaphysical, the mythical, and the physical—as each revealing the transcendentals, which can then open the way for conceiving of the unity of the transcendentals themselves as the *properties* of the *logos*. And since it is the *logos* who became incarnate, it is no surprise that it is by the Incarnation that our knowledge is (or rather is being and shall be) unified. And this unification cannot be finalized in the present before the One once Incarnate returns. And, while waiting patiently in the present, those who have received the *True Myth* are waiting not on their own mental powers or upon the opportunity for power over others to resolve the disunities within, but they wait upon the resurrection, which will fully renew the mind. Thus, the post-modernist, concerned that those over-confident in their knowing would overpower others, have not taken seriously their own understanding of how narratives, or metanarratives, affect their recipients. He should consider that the *nature* of the metanarrative may determine the actions of its believers. The *nature* of the metanarrative determines its use, or at least ought to. And the introduction of “ought to” into this state of affairs appropriately comes about by the *True Myth* itself. *Goodness* is the fruit of this narrative. It is likely that the fruit of any other metanarrative that attempts to take the rightful place of the *True Myth* will be corrupt

The idea that not only did the gospel, perceived and received as *True Myth*, unify Lewis’s own thinking, but provided him with such a vision of unified reality with reference to the transcendentals is summarized by Jerry Walls, who writes:

As is well known, it was his conversion to Christianity that allowed Jack to bring the two hemispheres of his mind together. It was in Christianity that he discovered a true myth, a beautiful story that not only spoke to our imaginations and longing for goodness and meaning, but was also rooted in real history. In short, Christianity provided a way to hold together Truth, Goodness, and Beauty. [“Introduction,” in *C.S. Lewis as Philosopher: Truth, Goodness, and Beauty*, edited by David Baggett, Gary Habermas, and Jerry L. Walls, 13-19 (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 18]

and rotten. It would be a corruption expected if this *True Myth* were true. More than that, if it is true, then the post-modernist's own unavoidable metanarrative will be itself a source of decay in the end. If it is *goodness* that is desired of meaning, and meaning as found in narrative, then, without delay, the *True Myth* should be embraced.

It seems that the Evangelical concern for inerrancy relates most to the contemporary concern of prioritizing narrative. If the present culture wishes to prioritize narrative, but not prioritize one narrative over another, what shall they do? Prioritize every member of the *genus* narrative in an egalitarian manner? This is obviously not the case, since there are many narratives that are unacceptable in the post-modern (or the modern) canon. But Christianity has something to offer that the post-modernist cannot. We have the biblical story. The biblical story concerns the Incarnation, and so is rightfully subsumed under the Incarnation in terms of purpose and priority.³³⁰ Thus, the biblical story of creation, fall, and redemption—a weave whose pattern is the Incarnation—is an aspect of the *True Myth*. Indeed, even though the *True Myth* is “extra-literary,”³³¹ nevertheless, it is found in the various literary forms of scripture. Lewis, regarding myths as “extra-literary” in nature, was able to believe in the *truth* of the Incarnation without believing in the absolute *truth* of scripture. An Evangelical would rightly prefer not to go down that same path. Instead, an Evangelical theology of mythology could offer an appropriate vehicle for the *True Myth*: namely, the inerrant word of God given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It seems reasonable to assume that, since the communication of the quality of a mythic story grows

³³⁰ Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”

– Luke 24:44

³³¹ Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism*, 43.

more difficult the more mythical the story, only an inspired and inerrant communication in *language* could give the whole of scripture the ability to convey the *True Myth* in its fullness.³³²

The Need for Individuation

Lewis, in an address titled “De Futilitate,” identified one of the primary problems of the contemporary context:

The eschatological hopes which supported our more remote, and Christian ancestors, and the secular hopes which supported the Revolutionaries or even the Liberals of the last century, have both rather faded out. There is a certain vacuity left: a widespread question as to what all this hustling and crowded life is *about* [emphasis original], or whether indeed it is about anything.³³³

Here, Lewis notes that the transition from the medieval to the modern context, until the 19th century, involved a measure of hopeful expectation in the daily life and the intellectual developments of Western society, and that this expectation, at least in the intellectual sphere, is fading or has faded. And, in his own time, Lewis was not alone in making this observation. Writing in the year 1946, following his experience during the Second World War as a prisoner in the concentration camps, Viktor Frankl noted that:

The existential vacuum is a widespread phenomenon of the twentieth century. . . . Man has suffered another loss in his more recent development inasmuch as the traditions which buttressed his behavior are now rapidly diminishing. No instinct tells him what he has to do, and no tradition tells him what he ought to do; sometimes he does not even

³³² It would be possible, of course, to say that all that is needed for scripture to be able to convey the *True Myth* is the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, even an unparalleled inspiration, and that inerrancy should not necessarily be inferred from this fact. Indeed, Lewis even admitted that pagan myths were, by some measure and at least in some cases, the result of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (cf. Brazier, *C.S. Lewis – The Work of Christ Revealed*, 249). Though, Lewis did not deny that it was possible for God to inspire an inerrant scripture, only that he had not. But, even while putting both scripture and pagan thought on a spectrum of divine influence, it might still be possible to simply set scripture completely to the node of *truth*, or as far as possible from the node of falsehood.

³³³ C.S. Lewis, “De Futilitate,” in *Christian Reflections* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 70.

know what he wishes to do. Instead, he either wishes to do what other people do (conformism) or he does what other people wish him to do (totalitarianism).³³⁴

Frankl wrote as a psychologist and Lewis wrote as a literary scholar, but both took note of the same fact. Both recognized that a loss of tradition has led to this present state. And it is this skepticism, as well as pessimism, which has given birth to the contemporary concerns addressed already. In some manner, both pluralists and post-modernists have attempted to resolve the problem of the “vacuity left” by the loss of tradition in the West. The pluralist does so by postulating the existence of “Ultimate Reality,” known partially to humanity by mythology. The loss of this mythological tradition has led to our current vacuity of meaning. Thus, to reclaim the value of mythology as a partial revelation of *being* will help to fill our current “existential vacuum.” The post-modernist takes a different tact. He not only recognizes the loss of tradition but praises the loss of the traditional metanarratives. But he does intend to replace the surety of metanarrative with the search for meaning. As Frankl writes, “What matters, therefore, is not the meaning of life in general but rather the specific meaning of a person’s life at a given moment.”³³⁵

The term “individuation” means to become able to apprehend and to comprehend meaning. This is a capacity of the mind, and the primary function of the *imagination* in Lewis’s thought. The term, though, is used in Jungian psychology to stand for the process by which the parts of the human *psyche* become unified in their ability to comprehend meaning and to act.³³⁶ One way

³³⁴ Viktor E. Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, revised and updated (New York: Washington Square Press, 1985), 128.

³³⁵ Frankl, 131.

³³⁶ “The task consists in integrating the unconscious, in bringing together ‘conscious’ and ‘unconscious.’” Carl G. Jung, *Symbols of Transformation*, trans. by R.F.C. Hull (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 301. Note that, as with Lewis, Jung recognized the human need, psychologically speaking, for the union of the *psyche*. In another place, Jung describes this process of individuation more, writing:

I have tried to fuse these two currents of outer and inner experience. . . and have termed the process of the fusion of the two currents the transcendent function. I found that the conscious current went one way and

in which Jung spoke of this process was by the receiving of mythology. Since mythology arises from within the human *psyche*—in particular, the unconscious mind—it is able to provide an interpretative framework, which, when apprehended by the mind can spark and help complete the process of individuation. Lewis himself took note of this of this concept, writing in one essay that, “For Jung, fairy liberates Archetypes which dwell in the collective unconscious, and when we read a good fairy tale we are obeying the old precept ‘Know thyself.’”³³⁷ Jung represents an attempt to find meaning in narratives that are birthed from within the inner psyche. Somehow, this inner voice is the wisdom of nature calling to individuals from dark depths, granting them the path to fulfilment.

From the tone of both Frankl and Lewis it can be inferred that, though meaning has been gradually sucked out of the life of the modern individual and society, there is a need for meaning. Indeed, Frankl identifies the search for meaning as the primary *function* of humanity: “Man’s search for meaning is the primary motivation in his life. . .”³³⁸ But what can fulfill it? And here, there is some debate among the moderns. On the one hand, Jung seems to find the key that opens the mysteries of meaning in the *psyche* itself. On the other, Frankl objects, writing,

the unconscious another, and I could not see where they could become together. The individual tends toward an abysmal split, for the intellect can only dissect and discriminate, and the creative element lies out of reach of the intellect in the unconscious. The possibility of mediation between the conscious and the unconscious, which I have formulated in the transcendent function, came as a great light. [Jung, *Analytical Psychology*, 34]

Jung and Barfield are also parallel here, with Jung distinguishing between the intellect and the creative element (with the latter located in the unconscious and the former in the conscious mind), and Barfield between the *rational principle* and the *poetic principle*. In one place, Barfield describes the situation of creative inspiration as tending toward the balancing of the two principles, “And it should be apparent that, the more perfectly balanced are the two principles in the poet himself, the more control he has of his inspiration. . . [Poetic Diction, 169]” In Lewis, the idea comes across clearly in the passage quoted from *Perelandra*, where Lewis speaks of “that unhappy division between soul and body which resulted from the Fall [122].” Though there are great differences between Jung, Barfield, and Lewis, the common motif between them is that of the need for the union, or reunification, of the *psyche* in order to understand *truth* and to act in the world rightly (i.e. to pursue *goodness*, or to become unto proper *being*).

³³⁷ C.S. Lewis, “On Three Ways of Writing for Children,” in *Of Other World’s: Essays and Stories* (New York: Harcourt, 1966), 27.

³³⁸ Frankl, 121.

“What is called self-actualization is not an attainable aim at all, for the simple reason that the more one would strive for it, the more he would miss it. In other words, self-actualization is possible only as a side-effect of self-transcendence.”³³⁹ Thus, the dichotomy of the internal and the external, the subjective and the objective is raised. Is meaning discovered in the particular of the human *psyche*, or is it discovered by the *psyche* in the general whole of *being*?

Lewis answered this question as a Christian. For Lewis, meaning is rooted in God himself, in the divine *logos*, the *logos* as revealed within creation. And, since that which has been made comprehends all things, both subjective and objective, both mind and object, meaning is immanent in all. It is apprehended according to God’s intention to reveal the *logos* to the human mind, which is itself designed to come to *truth* through meaning by the relationship that exists between *sense*, *imagination*, and *reason*, as well as the other *faculties* of the *psyche*. At the foundation of this process is the “psycho-physical,” and even “psycho-divine,” parallels within *being*.³⁴⁰ In this, Lewis has much more in common with Frankl than Jung; yet, Frankl did not address the need for mythology in the course of “the will to meaning,” whereas Lewis and Jung do.

It is true that the term “meaning” in the contemporary context has often simply meant “purpose,” so that to ask “what is the meaning of this?” is to ask “what is the purpose of this?” But that does not entirely wreck the technical meaning of “meaning” for Lewis. To perceive the unity of things in a linguistic framework by the functioning of metaphor and mythology is a necessary step in coming to know the purpose of things. If individual things have purpose, it is unlikely that the whole of which they are a part has none. Rather, it would seem that the purpose

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, 133.

³⁴⁰ Cf. chapter 2, pg. 21.

of the whole determines, in some sense, the purpose of each part. The whole which comprehends the whole of reality is the *logos*. To know the *logos* results in knowing the particulars, the individuals. And it is necessary for individual human beings, as noted by Frankl, to know their purpose by apprehending meaning. Without this, there is a devastation of the *affections*—an aimlessness, a depression of the mind. To starve the *psyche* is to kill the self, and only misery can be the fruit of meaninglessness.

It appears obvious to the Christian that the gospel is the answer to humanity's need for meaning and purpose. But exactly *how* does the gospel answer this need? If the gospel functions as a myth when it is received by the mind, then this would be the way in which we are fed by "God's myth."³⁴¹ For Lewis, his conversion and his apprehension of the idea of *True Myth* coincided. For him, it was a conscious experience, which, once it took place, he was unsurprised by. The gospel did to him what he had always expected that which was true to do. The unity of things, and, thus, the purpose of things, particularly of the individual self, is comprehended by the *True Myth*. Certainly, *reason* can apprehend those truths which it grasps; but it is through the working of a myth through and upon the *imagination* that *truth* about *being* is grasped and felt, though not possessed or held with a conceptual ownership. What is known by a myth is certainly known, yet it is not grasped in the same way that a concept is by and within *reason*.³⁴² Individuation cannot take place by the certainty of *reason*, but only by surrender to the richness of the *True Myth*, which will grant *reason* her due prize.

³⁴¹ The term "God's myth" is from the letter written by Lewis to Arthur Greeves not long after his conversion:

Now the story of Christ is simply a true myth: a myth working on us in the same way as the others, but with this tremendous difference that *it really happened*: and one must be content to accept it in the same way, remember that it is God's myth where the others are men's myths. [*The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis: Volume 1, 975-977*]

³⁴² Cf. Lewis, "Myth Became Fact," 66.

Thus, the Evangelical concern for evangelism can be related to the need for individuation. To evangelize is to announce the gospel, which is the *True Myth*. If it operates upon the mind of another as a myth, then it can fulfill the need for individuation—the need for the mind to be able to grasp meaning and purpose and so be whole. A theology of mythology can then also provide a conceptualization of sanctification. At least in part, to be sanctified is to be made able to receive the *True Myth* more and more as the myth that it is. Holiness of mind makes mind more *mythopoeic*, not less. In this case, the ancient pagans, by making and receiving myths, were doing something good, but in a poor way. The light of the image of the true God was fractured into the many-colored spectrum of false gods, as it is to this day. But in the contemporary context, it seems, the prism has been darkened some, and neither God nor gods can get through. If there is a vacuum of meaning in the present day, then the *True Myth* can fill it. And, though in one sense ancient pagans could understand God better, modern man may have more of an unknown hunger for God. What food there is consumed faster in famine than in plenty, and it takes less energy to fill a vacuum than to displace matter.

It is true that people often perceive the same need differently. What for Lewis was a consciously understood need for the reconciliation of *reason* and *imagination* may manifest itself differently in different persons. Not many are likely concerned with the same problem as Lewis faced; not many are too bothered to understand, explicitly, how mythology can relate to *truth*. But realities are stubborn things. If we are in need of meaning, and if our need for meaning must be fulfilled, at least in part, by some myth, what are we to do? One can be physically hungry without knowing what carbohydrates are or how digestion works, and so one can need a myth without knowing exactly what the need is for. But the mind is not well without myths, and we are made most well by this Myth.

Summary

And so, a theology of mythology can be a helpful tool. Not only can it provide a way for theologians to comment carefully on the disciplines of psychology and historical anthropology, but it also provides a theological vision for the unity of knowledge and of knowing. And, by a consequence of this latter point, it can also provide an indication of the unity of *being*. By an analogy, this theology can be likened to a key that can open up a treasure trove. And the lock into which it fits is the way in which theology is typically, and rightfully, conducted by means of *reason*. And the two notched sides of this keyhole are both the philosophical and the historical means of knowing. But the key is to pay attention to mythology as the means of knowing the mythical. As this means is not typically utilized, it is good to pay it some mind. There is a great solid door named falsehood in the way of reaching *truth*, and while a lock in the door is a hopeful sign, it is a vain sign without the key. But that does not keep anyone from peering through the keyhole.

Conclusion

You've probably reached the stage too of having theses written on yourself. I received a letter from an American examiner asking, "Is it true that you meant this and this and this?" A writer of a thesis was attributing to me views which I have explicitly contradicted in the plainest possible English. They'd be much wiser to write about the dead, who can't answer.³⁴³

I came across this record of a conversation between Lewis and some of his colleagues early on in my readings. Lewis paints, in hapless strokes, the efforts of a certain would-be-thesis-writer (An American one at that). It did nothing to ease my anxiety about trying to write a thesis on the man. But, I have had one advantage that the student referred to by Lewis did not have—Lewis cannot answer me. Without knowing it, I have been among those "much wiser." But I hope that he has been well-represented and well-explained, so that even Lewis himself would agree it was so.

The progression of the paper has been structured by four intentions. The first intention was to show what Lewis thought about mythology itself, as a reality and phenomenon of the human experience. Even if someone disagrees with Lewis's own thoughts on mythology, no one can deny the reality of mythology itself. It is as obvious a presence in the history of humanity as that of *language* itself. Lewis's description of the *aspects* of mythology—its *nature*, *origin*, and *function*—occupied the content of the first chapter. In it, it was seen that *Lewis saw myths as stories that reveal God's nature partially and without reference in time and space*. Thus, the relationship between mythology and *revelation* was anticipated in the first chapter.

The second intention was to reveal how Lewis related the reality of Christian truth to the *nature* of mythology. Thus, the idea of the gospel as the *True Myth* formed the warp and woof of that

³⁴³ Lewis, "Unreal Estates," in *Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories* (New York: Harcourt, 1966), 94.

portion of the paper. It was necessary to give something a brief biographical sketch of Lewis in that chapter, the purpose of which was two-fold. First, this sketch outlined the origin of various dichotomies which etched themselves onto Lewis's mind during the years of his life prior to his conversion—dichotomies later resolved by the acceptance of the gospel as *True Myth*. Second, this sketch also described the development of the idea of *True Myth* from inception to fruition, or elucidation. The idea was planted by the reading of *The Everlasting Man* and cultivated by six years of intellectual tension until it finally became ripe for the harvest at his conversion. The fruit of it was three decades of fertile authorship. Throughout the majority of Lewis's written works the idea of *True Myth* is present, and often central in curious and even unexpected places.³⁴⁴ The second half of chapter 2 concerned the resolution of the various dichotomies³⁴⁵ in Lewis's thinking by way of the *True Myth*—or, rather, by use of the idea of *True Myth*. In the second chapter, it was seen that *Lewis then saw the gospel as the "True Myth," in that it is a mythic story that reveals God's nature fully and in time and space*. Thus, the second chapter completed what the first chapter anticipated; namely, a complete sense of the relationship between *revelation* and mythology.

The third intention was to demonstrate that Lewis's idea of *True Myth* is compatible with historic Christian theology and with modern Evangelical theology. There is a variety of ways that mythology has been approached by Christian theology in the last two thousand years, and most of these approaches have treated mythology as a rather poor category by which to reach *truth*. And none in the ancient and medieval contexts quite embraced mythology in the indulgent way that much of modern theology has done. As this embrace is not appreciated by Evangelicals

³⁴⁴ It is, within Lewis, a kind of key idea. In other words, by referring to this idea, even when it is not explicitly present in Lewis's thinking, one can make sense of how what he is saying fits into his whole framework of thought.

³⁴⁵ These are the dichotomies of *reason* and *imagination*, *truth* and mythology, and *truth* and *affections*.

(for just reasons) Lewis's own embrace of mythology is suspect to most in the Evangelical world. Before it could be proposed that Lewis's notion of *True Myth* deserves Evangelical appropriation, this matter needed some resolving.

The final intention was to formulate an outline of what an Evangelical theology of mythology might look like on the basis of Lewis's thought. This outline anticipates a theology which is a vision for the unification of the mind's faculties in perceiving and, thus, of the mind's knowledge, indicating the unity of *being* itself. The focus of such knowledge will firstly be of God's *nature*, but then also of the *natures* of all things in creation. Some help is offered by such a theology in the present by enabling theologians to become more self-aware of the way in which they have come to know of God, as well as of all other things which abide in his presence. Though, it is important to recognize that more help is offered in the hope of the glory of God, the hope for a reconciliation already known and experienced yet not fully realized. Thus, this theology would not so much have an eschatology within itself as around itself—or, rather, ahead of itself. This theology of mythology could be quite relevant both to Evangelicals and to the contemporary culture—a useful fact for Evangelicals who often are thinking of how to address those in the present context. Three contemporary concerns were identified in modern society and related to three Evangelical priorities by way of *True Myth* for the purpose of demonstrating the relevancy of a theology of mythology.

There are a few matters that have, over the course of this research, presented themselves as being possible subjects for further study. The first would be to explore the relationship between metaphor and mythology that a study of Lewis suggests.³⁴⁶ Another would be to develop a theory

³⁴⁶ Refer to Chapter 1: Lewis's Answer, Function. One thing that was mentioned at places in the paper was the idea of a "spectrum of myth," which referred to the increasing or decreasing mythic quality of a story. Such a difference in quality must be inferred. There are two different kinds of spectrums: ones which have two poles which

of the relationship between the effects of literary forms and the effects of myths on the minds of their hearers, particularly if one is studying myths as told in certain literary forms. A third would be to explore if there are any realities in the world other than the supreme one of the Incarnation which might also make sense of some of the elements found within the myths of humanity, what Lewis once referred to as “ferlies,” even if these “ferlies” often end up being only the intangible products of the mind.³⁴⁷ A fourth would be whether or not a theology of mythology can provide a philosophy of story, of the *aspects* of stories, tales, and myths.³⁴⁸

are two opposites (which are either definite or indefinite), and those whose first pole is the lack of one quality or quantity and the second the complete possession of that quality or quantity. The spectrum of myth is of the latter sort. It is perhaps inconceivable to think of a story with no mythic quality, at the pole of absence, but there is no doubt which story must be set at the pole of perfection: namely, the *True Myth*. One thing which must be established, though, is the distinction between the *True Myth* as it is and the *True Myth* as told, as referred to and represented. The form of the *True Myth* as found in the Gospels is well told, but no literary form, even of the Gospels, can comprehensively represent the *True Myth* in its fulness (though scripture can represent it without error). Also, it is important to note that the *True Myth* does not merely occupy the pole of perfection on the spectrum of myth, it is identical to it. There is no abstract quality of perfect mythic-ness into which the *True Myth* has found its place by corresponding to it. The spectrum of myth does not come out of a potentially Platonic view of myth. Instead, the *True Myth* as it is in God (the *logos* of God) is not separate from the *True Myth* as realized in creation in the manner in which Platonic Forms and concrete physical reality are separate. And, just as human beings are each more “human” as they conform to the *logos*, so stories are more “storied,” myths more mythic, when they conform more and more to the *True Myth*.

³⁴⁷ Interest in both the second and third possible departures for research was sparked by a passage in Lewis: A satisfactory theory of ferlies and their effect is, I believe, still to seek. I suspect that it will not succeed unless it fulfills two conditions. In the first place, it will have to be sure it has exhausted the possibilities of purely literary analysis before it looks further afield. . . . But literary art can never be solely responsible for the effect of literature, for literature can never be pure like music. It has to be ‘about’ something, and the things it is ‘about’ bring their own real-life quality into the work. . . . The second condition, therefore, is that the theory should deeply study the ferlies as things (in a sense) in the real world. Probably such things do not occur. But if no one in real life had either seen, or thought he saw, or accepted on hearsay, or dreaded, or hoped for, any such things, the poet and romancer could do nothing with them. As anthropologists we may want to know how belief in them originated. But it will illuminate the literary problem more if we can imagine what it would feel like to witness, or to think we had witnessed, or merely to believe in, the things. What it would feel like, and why. [“De Audiendis Poetis,” 17]

³⁴⁸ In one place, Lewis suggests that there have only been three attempts in history to define “Story” in such a way:

Aristotle in the *Poetics* constructed a theory of Greek tragedy which puts Story in the centre and relegates character to a strictly subordinate place. In the Middle Ages and the early Renaissance, Boccaccio and others developed an allegorical theory of Story to explain the ancient myths. And in our own time Jung and his followers have produced their doctrine of the Archetypes. [“On Story,” in *Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories*, 3-21 (New York: Harcourt, 1966), 3]

Now, whether or not Lewis is right in his historical surmising is beyond me. But he humbly does not presume to be providing anything like a full answer to the question himself. But he proposes, implicitly it seems, that it can (and should) be done.

And to make a final observation, Lewis grants us a celebration of myth-making as being an aspect of human *nature* that comes from our creation in the *imago dei*. For Lewis, this meant a diving into the sea of myths as found in the Western world, whether ancient, medieval, or modern. But there are more points than West on the compass of the earth. Just as it is wise for the Western individual to remember the past of their surroundings—so full of thought and tale—so also it is wise for those within other cultures of differing origins to remember their own pasts, though not to the exclusion of others. The West itself is an amalgamation of many cultures, influences, and sources over millennia.³⁴⁹ It is no different in the case of other civilizations and cultures—of China, of India, of Africa, or the Americas, etc. If the past myths of all these are as pagan as those in the West (as all human pasts are pagan), they should be appreciated nonetheless in much the same manner that Lewis appreciated the pagan myths of the West (in light, of course, of the truth of the *True Myth*). It is not that anyone is morally obligated to do so; it may just be wise for some. Much good can come of collective memory, when that collective memory is rooted in the good and true things understood by *imagination*. Though good, these

³⁴⁹ I looked abroad and, lo, I saw,
By books some and borrowed thought,
The sight of a river, strong and flowing
Ever to the Ocean. 'Ere my eyes
Rose by sun's heat, rarified from far,
The mists of myth, till mountains of logic
Cooled the vapors, casting these down
Crag and cliffs—clouds of darkness
Falling far to fell their burden.
From high heavens, heaped by rains
Near without end, knowledge coursing
With streams of words washed into that
Low wide river, listing with current
Of thinking and thirsting, of thought and tale,
Seeking the source, a Sea of mind.
And I am myself an eddy itself—
Not a mere craft nocking these waters,
But bursting the banks with flood.
So hear and heed, hearer and doer—
Many streams met and made this river.

things will remain imperfect—as no human things are yet perfect—but God himself has given the Perfect, and in His Light we see light, as well as the whole world around us. And the act of *mythopoeia*, so valuable to Lewis as a response to *Joy*, should be counted dearly valuable by all. Lewis linked the gospel to Western myths and then told his own myths of *Westernness*. Even so, if those who have belonged to the same heritage, or that of other times and spaces, thoughts and stories, were to do the same by linking their myths to *truth* and *goodness* and *beauty*, then wonderful things might come about. And, as Lewis was surprised by *Joy* that day when he read of the Norse god Balder, even so, a world in which the collective thoughts and tales of our pasts are remembered and remade is one in which more can be even so surprised.

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