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**The Hero's Journey of Eustace on the Voyage of Becoming:
What Kind of Animal Do You Want to Be?**

Elizabeth W. McLaughlin

While all the popular fourth grade girls went off to compare nail polish colors during recess, my friends and I would run behind the little hill on the play ground of Burns Park Elementary School, in Ann Arbor, Michigan, to play "Animals." For thirty precious minutes, I became "Wickie Spruceneedle," a very friendly girl squirrel who spent a lot of time gathering nuts for winter and warning her friends not to get eaten. I knew then what kind of animal I wanted to become.

In many of his popular works, C.S. Lewis wrote on the theme of how the Christian life is like a journey of becoming the creature we desire as determined by the small, daily choices we make. This theme is well expressed in the hero's journey of Eustace Clarence Scrubb in the Narnian book *Voyage of the "Dawn Treader"* as he encounters his true dragon-like nature and the surrender to grace that is necessary for conversion. In Lewis's view each decision a person makes to feed his or her ego is a step towards becoming more animal-like while every positive choice makes that person more heaven-like. In the end, the journey of becoming in the Christian life is where each of us surrenders to Christ and allows Him to remake us as the sons and daughters of God. This idea is expressed in the *Mere Christianity* chapter "Christian Behavior" as Lewis explains:

[E]very time you make a choice you are turning the central part of you, the part of you that chooses, into something a little different from what it was before. And taking your life as a whole, with all your innumerable choices, all your life long you are slowly turning this central thing either into a heavenly creature or into a hellish creature: either into a creature that is in harmony with God, and with other creatures, and with itself, or else into one that is in a state of war and hatred with God, and with its fellow creatures, and with itself. To be one kind of creature is heaven: that is, it is joy and peace and knowledge and power. To be the other means madness, horror, idiocy, rage, impotence and eternal loneliness. Each of us at each moment is progressing to the one state or the other. (86-87)

In "Nice People or New Men?" Lewis says that our free will ". . . is trembling inside . . . like a compass. It can point to true North; but it need not. Will the

needle swing around, and settle, and point to God?" (179). He also says that we each take a "share" in our own creation as we see our abilities as gifts from God to be offered back to God. "The only things we can keep are the things we freely give to God. What we try to keep for ourselves is what we are sure to lose" (180). In an interview with H. W. Bowen, appearing in *God in the Dock* as "Answers to Questions on Christianity," Lewis answers the question on what it means to be a practicing Christian:

It means that every single act and feeling, every experience, whether pleasant or unpleasant, must be referred to God. It means looking at everything as something that comes from Him, and always looking to Him and asking His will first and saying 'How would He wish me to deal with this?'(50)

Lewis's discourse on the importance of individual choice resonates with the journey archetype and the classic medieval three-fold path of Purgation, Illumination and Union. In his article on "Stephen Crisp's *Short History as Spiritual Journey*," communication scholar Michael P. Graves aptly summarizes the importance of the journey metaphor in religious discourse:

One of the most pervasive symbols in religious literature, and perhaps the key central symbol in Christian mystical literature, the journey symbol has the ability to compress and express many levels of meaning. (5-6)

This essay traces the spiritual journey of Eustace Clarence Scrubb, a central character in *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader"* as he passes through the stages of spiritual awareness: Purgation, Illumination and Union (Graves 6). Eustace as the reluctant pilgrim, journeys to Dragon Island to face the dragon he has become through the choices he has made. He finds his way back only through the Christian cycle of death, repentance, surrender and resurrection to and through the love of Aslan and his fellowship—*Communitas*—of traveling companions¹. With Eustace, C.S. Lewis gives his readers a fully developed example of the Christian in the process of becoming.

Christopher Vogler, in his book *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers* offers a useful

narrative structure for tracing the physical journey of the hero. Eustace travels full circle on his physical journey and experiences spiritual transformation as well.

The journey starts in the Ordinary World as the hero is established in his home environment (Vogler 15). The opening line of C.S. Lewis's *Voyage of the "Dawn Treader"* instantly establishes the reluctant pilgrim Eustace in his Ordinary World. "There was a boy called Eustace Clarence Scrubb, and he almost deserved it" (1). As we enter the world of Eustace, we find it disordered. His parents were the sort disliked by C.S. Lewis—vegetarian, "up to date and advanced," people who did not smoke or drink and wore funny underwear (1). In turn, their son called them by their first names, and had no friends (1). The Ordinary World of Eustace is that of a selfish, lonely, strange little boy. Eustace is not only estranged from other people, but also from the created world. He ". . . liked animals, especially beetles, if they were dead and pinned on a card" (1).

His estrangement and friendlessness continue as Eustace shows his delight in teasing his cousins Edmund and Lucy who are visiting for the summer. Lewis characterizes him as one ". . . who liked bossing and bullying . . . though he was a puny little person . . ." (2). The choices Eustace makes with his cousins is evidence of the smallness of the boy's inner world. It is this combative, peevish nature that catapults the children into Narnia.

The next stages on the journey are the Call to Adventure and The Refusal of the Call, which begins Eustace's the process of Purgation (Vogler 17). As the *Voyage of the "Dawn Treader"* continues, Eustace is a reluctant pilgrim who is drawn into a painting of the moving ship that he himself tries to destroy (7). Even as the children are drawn into the picture of the dragon-prowed ship,² Eustace clings to Lucy and begins to pull her down before they are taken aboard (8). The soggy and crying Eustace then meets Prince Caspian and Reepicheep, the heroic mouse who becomes his companion and mentor. Prince Caspian establishes the quest of the voyage to seek the Narnian nobles who left during the reign of the evil King Miraz (15-16). Reepicheep has another quest to fulfill as he travels to the Utter East in search of Aslan's Country. Lewis may have employed the voyage of the Dawn Treader on the sea towards the Utter East as a journey metaphor for our journey of life towards heaven.³

Lewis unfolds the Purgation of Eustace in the dialogic encounters between the selfish, bratty Eustace and his traveling companions—and even enemies. Eustace is repeatedly tested and found wanting in his new surroundings. In the first test, he responds with complaining and blame after being offered dry clothes and Lucy's healing balm. He continually complains

about The Dawn Treader and boasts about the ships back in England. Lewis says, "Eustace of course would be pleased with nothing . . ." (23). As companions for the journey, Lewis contrasts Eustace with the characters of Lucy and Reepicheep, who both serve as mentors to the boy. In the encounter where Eustace swings the noble mouse by the tail and then is met with the challenge of the duel, Lewis shows that outer form does not necessarily show the inner character (26-28). It is the action that determines the character.

Concerning the process of becoming, Lewis says in the *Mere Christianity* essay "Let's Pretend" that "the invisible Christ" sometimes works through other people to influence our choices:

The real Son of God is at your side. He is beginning to turn you into the same kind of thing as Himself. [. . .] Some of you may feel that this is very unlike your own experience. You may say "I've never had the sense of being helped by the invisible Christ, but I often have been helped by other human beings." [. . .] If there were no help from Christ, there would be no help other human beings. [. . .] But above all, He works on us through each other. Men are mirrors, or 'carriers of Christ' to other men. (162-163)

For Eustace, this person is Lucy. Throughout the *Voyage of the "Dawn Treader"* she responds to Eustace with patience, compassion and acts of self giving. After the altercation with Reepicheep, Lucy bandages Eustace's wounds (28). Later, when the rest of the crew is on short water rations, Lucy offers Eustace some of hers (60).

Eustace accepts the gifts offered to him, but rejects and questions the motivations of each giver. When Prince Caspian frees him from the slave traders on the Lone Islands, Eustace accuses the Prince of having a good time while he himself is a prisoner (51). Even Pug, the slave trader, is ready to give back the boy and nicknamed him "Sulky" for his rotten attitude. "Threw him in free with other lots and still no one would have him" (51).

As Uncle Screwtape advises his young apprentice Wormwood to keep his subject making small choices towards evil, so does Eustace follow in the direction of *via negativa*, "the almost constant regression and denial of the spiritual" (Graves 7). In *The Screwtape Letters*, the wiser demon notes:

[H]e must be made to imagine that all the choices which have effected this change of course are trivial and revocable. He must not be allowed to suspect that he is now, however slowly, heading right away from the sun on a

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line which will carry him into the cold and dark of utmost space. (57)

As chronicled in Eustace's diary aboard the Dawn Treader, these choices toward evil include sloth (58), hubris "I had been kidnapped and brought away on this *idiotic* voyage without my consent and it was hardly *my* business to get *them* out of their scrape" (60) and finally attempted theft of the precious water (61).

Eustace must now face the monster he had become. Lewis may have been inspired by George MacDonald in the development of Eustace becoming a dragon. In MacDonald's fairy tale *The Princess and Curdie*, the young miner boy is given the ability to see into the character of a person by shaking his or her hand. Curdie wishes to use this ability to warn others, but is told by the Princess, "To such a person there is in general no insult like the truth. He cannot endure it, not because he is growing a beast, but because he is ceasing to be a man" (MacDonald, Chapter 8). With this perspective, each person becomes the creature that he or she has chosen to become. Eustace enters the spiritual process of Illumination and must face the truth that he has ceased to be a little boy and has become a dragon.

As the Dawn Treader lands on an unknown island for repairs following a raging storm, Eustace rests under a tree while the others are working (*Dawn Treader* 64). He decides to sneak away from the activity to sleep, but does not want to be left behind. Lewis says "[H]is new life, little as he suspected it, had already done him some good" as Eustace exits the woods and begins to climb the hill (65). Eustace has begun to enter Illumination as he begins "almost for the first time in his life, to feel lonely" (65). This desire for the companionship of his comrades is the dawn of understanding. Eustace panics and gets lost in the fog. "He was in an utterly unknown valley and the sea was nowhere in sight" (66). The boy is facing new territory without the security of his own self-centered world.

Eustace's concerns turn to survival and he finds a pool to drink from. He then witnesses the final draught and death of an old dragon crawling out of his lair (68-69). Even in his fear, he empathized with the ancient beast showing that his heart was awakening to another outside himself (69). He soon crawls into the dragon's cave and finds treasure. Responding with greed, he fantasizes about how he will benefit from the treasure and slips a gem-encrusted bracelet on his arm and falls asleep (71-72).

As Eustace awakens, his Illumination continues. His arm hurts and he sees that there is a dragon beside him. Then he realizes the truth: "Sleeping on a dragon's hoard with greedy, dragonish thoughts in his heart, he had become a dragon himself" (75). This revelation brings relief and the longing for community.

He realized that he was a monster cut off from the whole human race. An appalling loneliness came over him. He began to see the others had not really been fiends at all. He began to wonder if he himself had been such a nice person as he had always supposed. He longed for their voices. He even would have been grateful for a kind word from Reepicheep. (76)

From this epiphany, Eustace begins the process of becoming a boy again through death and repentance evidenced by his changing behavior. He cries tears of repentance (76, 79) and attempts to communicate with the others. Lucy responds (79) and the company finally deduces that the dragon is the absent Eustace (82). The dragon-boy tries vainly to communicate, and it is "... clear to everyone that Eustace's character had been rather improved by becoming a dragon. He was anxious to help" (83). He supplies his comrades with food, a tree for a new ship's mast, and experiences for the first time in his life the new "pleasure . . . of being liked and . . . of liking other people" (84). Reepicheep, formerly perceived as his chief enemy, became his chief comforter during this time (85). Purgation is completed with Eustace's death to self and repentance; Illumination and Union continue the process as Aslan enters the picture.

Illumination and Union for Eustace come through surrender and resurrection in the love of Aslan, the Christ figure. Here Lewis demonstrates clearly how the process of becoming includes the interplay of individual choice and the surrender to grace. As Eustace recounts his transformation to Edmund, he is told by the Lion to follow him up to the top of a mountain where there was a well in the middle of a moon-lit garden (88)⁴. The Lion told the dragon he must undress before seeking relief in the pool for his sore leg.

Eustace obeys and strips off his skin, by scratching it off. "It was a lovely feeling" (89). He does this three times as several layers of scales and skin come off. But it was no good.

Then the Lion said . . . You will have to let me undress you. I was afraid of his claws, I can tell you, but I was pretty nearly desperate now. So I just lay flat on my back and let him do it. The very first tear he made was so deep that I thought it had gone right into my heart . . . it hurt worse than anything I've ever felt. (90)

Lewis describes this same process of animal-like undressing that is a metaphor for Christian submission in the *God in the Dock* essay "Man or Rabbit?" The essay addresses whether it is possible to live a moral life without being a Christian. The professor's response

about our transformation from rabbit to man is:

All the rabbit in us is to disappear—the worried, conscientious, ethical rabbit as well as the cowardly and sensual rabbit. We shall bleed and squeal as the handfuls of fur come out; and then surprisingly, we shall find underneath it all a thing we have never yet imagined: a real Man, an ageless god, a son of God, strong, radiant, wise, beautiful and drenched in joy. (112)

Aslan then throws Eustace into the waters of baptism and he emerges a boy again! The lion dresses Eustace in new clothes before he is returned to the company. This re-clothing of the boy as a restored creature illustrates that Eustace's true "boyhood" is not something he has earned, but rather an identity that is bestowed by Aslan.

As Lewis says in "Christianity and Literature" from *Christian Reflections*:

Our whole destiny seems to lie in the opposite direction, in being as little as possible ourselves, in acquiring a fragrance that is not our own but borrowed, in becoming clean mirrors filled with the image of a face that is not ours . . . I am saying only that the highest good of a creature must be creaturely—that is derivative or reflective – good. (7)

As Eustace moves into the stage of Union, he confesses to Edmund, "I'm afraid I've been pretty beastly" (91). And Edmund humbly replies, remembering his own journey of becoming in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, "That's all right [. . . .] you were only an ass, but I was a traitor" (91).

Eustace resumes his process toward the final spiritual stage of Union through the choices he makes throughout the rest of the Narnian stories. "To be strictly accurate, he began to be a different boy. He had lapses . . . the cure had begun" (93). Eustace sails on with his companions to fulfill the quest, attacks a sea serpent (97), and voluntarily accompanies the rest on the Dark Island (152-153) and even sails with Caspian, Edmund and Lucy to see Aslan's Country.

Reaching Union, Eustace returns to England and ". . . back in our own world everyone soon started to say how Eustace had improved" (216). He reappears as a central protagonist in *The Silver Chair* and *The Last Battle*.

As Lewis concludes the title address in *The Weight of Glory*, it is important that Christians remember the enormous consequence of our daily choices in the light of what we are becoming on the road to the Father's House:

It may be possible for each to think too much of his own potential glory hereafter; it is hardly possible for him to think too often or too deeply about that of his neighbor [. . .] It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which . . . you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror . . . such as you meet in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations [. . . .] There are no ordinary people. [. . . .] Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbor is the holiest object presented to your senses. (18-19)

For C.S. Lewis, for Eustace, and for us all, we get to choose what kind of animal we become in the journey of Life. The signposts of Purgation, Illumination and Union—bring us to where we will choose to be forever. "We would be at Jerusalem."

Notes

- ¹ Victor Turner discusses the Communitas of the journey in "Liminal to Liminoid" in *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: Performing Arts Publications, 1982), 20-60.
- ² The description of the Dawn Treader is very similar to the ships of Lewis's beloved Norse mythology.
- ³ For an excellent treatment on the metaphor of the sea, read Michael Osborn's article "The Evolution of the Archetypal Sea in Rhetoric and Poetic" in the *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, Vol. 63 1977, page 347-363.
- ⁴ Reminiscent of William Morris's *Well at the World's End*.

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