

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

***GOD IN THE DOCK: FROM THEORY TO EXPERIENCE,***

***THE ODYSSEY OF THE THEODICY OF C.S. LEWIS***

A Thesis Presented to the faculty of the School of

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Master of Arts in Christian Apologetics

By

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**APPROVAL SHEET**

***GOD IN THE DOCK: FROM THEORY TO EXPERIENCE,***

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Psalm 127 verse 1 reminds us that, “Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it.” (KJV) God has built my house full. I could not have accomplished this task without the love and support of my family. I thank my wife, Teresa, and my sons, Vance, Anthony, and Dalton for all they are and for all they have done to help me during this process. My quiver is full, and my heart is glad and grateful for my wife and sons. I am also grateful for the support of my parents, Marlon, and Janet, during this endeavour. Their love and support have been an anchor throughout my life.

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## ABSTRACT

Problems, for us as humans, can be seen to as a moving target. There are two concerns that immediately come to the forefront. Those concerns are as follows: who defines the problem and how do they define the problem. Answering these two questions provides the direction for answering the next concern. And that concern then turns to how does one solve the problem? For solving a problem involves defining if there is a problem and can it be solved. Quite possibly the most confounding and complex problem to face humanity as a whole and Christianity specifically is the problem of evil. Is this a problem? Is there more than one problem of evil? Can it or they be solved? How does one solve it? These are all questions that the Christian apologist must grapple with in defending the faith.

One such apologist was none other than C.S. Lewis. Lewis was an Oxford don, poet, writer, and Christian apologist. Without a doubt his most famous works are *The Chronicles of Narnia* children's novels. However, Lewis was quite a prolific writer, especially in the world of apologetics. Lewis was not shy in addressing the question and problem of evil. However, it is this writer's assertion that, even though Lewis addressed this topic from a firm foundation that the Christian faith only has the answer to all aspects of the problem of evil, his plan of attack, if you will, would evolve over the course of time and three books. Lewis would begin his apologetic, his theodicy, concerning the problem of evil with his book *The Problem of Pain*. This book examines the problem from a philosophical point of view. His next work concerning this problem that we will examine is *Mere Christianity*. This book comes at the problem from the angle of practical application of dealing with evil. The third book we will examine is his very personal book, *A Grief Observed*. This book handles the problem from an experiential angle.

C.S. Lewis is a person, writer, thinker, and apologist, that has been written about extensively. His life and his works have all been thoroughly examined over the years, and adding one more paper to the pile seems, on the surface, to be pointless. However, it is the assertion of this writer that nowhere have these three books been laid side by side and examined as an evolutionary trilogy of C.S. Lewis' theodicy. To give a full examination of and explanation of this writer's assertion concerning Lewis' theodicy, this paper will begin with Chapter One dealing with the problem of evil itself, as well as various methods of explaining a solution to the problem. Chapter Two will be a biographical sketch of Lewis' life and career. Chapter Three will be our examination of *The Problem of Pain*. Chapter Four will examine *Mere Christianity*. Chapter Five will be looking at *A Grief Observed*. Chapter Six will be the synthesis of these three books to give a clearer picture of Lewis' theodicy.

It is the assertion of this paper that Lewis' theodicy was not merely found in one or more of his books. His theodicy is found in compiling these books and overlaying them with his life. His theodicy is found in his understanding of the presence of evil in this world, some purposes for evil in this world, the participation of God in the evil of this world through the death of Christ on the cross, and the ultimate power over evil being a relationship with God through the evil that is faced in this world.

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## PILGRIM'S PROBLEM

*By now I should be entering on the supreme stage  
Of the whole walk, reserved for the late afternoon.  
The heat was to be over now; the anxious mountains,  
The airless valleys and the sun-baked rocks, behind me.*

*Now or soon now, if all is well, come the majestic  
Rivers of foamless charity that glide beneath  
Forests of contemplation. In the grassy clearings*

*Humility with liquid eyes and damp, cool nose  
Should come, half-tame, to eat bread from my hermit hand.  
If storms arose, then in my tower of fortitude--  
It ought to have been in sight by this—I would take refuge;  
But I expected rather a pale mackerel sky,  
Feather-like, perhaps shaking from a lower cloud  
Light drops of silver temperance, and clovery earth  
Sending up mists of chastity, a country smell,  
Till earnest stars blaze out in the established sky  
Rigid with justice; the streams audible' my rest secure.*

*I can see nothing like all this. Was the map wrong?  
Maps can be wrong. But the experienced walker knows  
That the other explanation is more often true.<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> CS Lewis *The Collected Poems of C.S. Lewis: A Critical Edition*, ed. Don W. King (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2015) 378,379.



## INTRODUCTION

*“For the modern man ... He is the judge: God is in the dock ... if God should have a reasonable defense for being the god who permits war, poverty, and disease, he is ready to listen to it ... Man is on the Bench and God in the Dock.”<sup>2</sup>*

*“... always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you...” I Peter 3:15 (ESV)*

Apologetics is the discipline of defense. The word apologetics derives from the Greek word *apologia*. *Apologia* was used in the legal world, referring to a defendant’s reply to accusations from prosecution.<sup>3</sup> And it has been noted that mankind has pursued a vigorous prosecution against God for perceived miscarriages of justice. Quite often humanity is perplexed at the thought of a heavenly God, even more so considering the presence of evil and suffering in this world. The wrenching reality of evil and suffering with the proposal of a good God is baffling and appalling to many. How do we make sense of it all?<sup>4</sup> It is the call, the responsibility, of the Christian believer, for we are all called to be apologists (I Peter 3:15), to give a clear and resolute reply of this problem of evil. However, Christian apologetics is more than just persuading individuals that a certain set of ideas is correct. Christian Apologetics is principally and practically depicting and demonstrating the truth and trustworthiness of the Christian faith in a faithful and effective manner.<sup>5</sup> Christian apologetics is rooted in Biblical truth applied through faith.<sup>6</sup> However, this faith is contextualized through a culture and an individual. In fact, there is no one way to properly address objections

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<sup>2</sup> C.S Lewis, *God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 268.

<sup>3</sup> James K. Beilby, *Thinking About Christian Apologetics* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 11.

<sup>4</sup> J. H. Christopher Wright, *The God I Don’t Understand* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 17.

<sup>5</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Narrative Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2019), 17,18.

<sup>6</sup> K. Scott Oliphant and Lane G. Tipton, *Revelation and Reason* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 1, 2.

against Christianity. There is as many ways to answer the objections as there are objectors to Christianity.<sup>7</sup> And in answering those objectors, the Christian apologist must be respectful, showing grace and gentleness. The Christian apologist does not try to be cute or fancy. Instead, apologetics is about doing the basics and doing them well.<sup>8</sup> That begins with a knowledge of the basics. Peter writes in I Peter 3:15 that this hope is “in you.” And this knowledge is to be expressed well. This signifies an understanding of one’s audience. Our audience does not define the “hope” but does help define how we express that hope. Christian apologetics is done in a conversation with the culture and those individuals that define it.<sup>9</sup> This conversation involves both the apologist and the hearer. Just as the apologist must consider his or her audience in expressing and defending this “hope”, the apologist’s own life and experiences illuminate the method of apologetics. It is the context of that apologist's life that informs and highlights the methods, means, and message of said apologetic. Let me first illustrate this in a personal way.

In August 1969, my father rushed my mother to the hospital. She was pregnant with me at the time. When they arrived, the doctors gave my mother something to stop the contractions. After a short while, a nurse came over to my father and informed him that if he did not get the doctors to take my mother back quickly it could be too late. When they finally wheeled her back, they discovered that the umbilical cord was wrapped around my entire body, choking not only my life but endangering my mother’s as well. To put it bluntly, they almost lost both of us. But after 24 hours of labor, I was born at 9:15 pm on August 2. The knowledge of that story gave me an understanding of the miracle of my birth and that I had been born for a purpose. That purpose was

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<sup>7</sup> K. Scott Oliphant, *Covenantal Apologetics: Principles & Practice in Defense of Our Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 30.

<sup>8</sup> Voddie Baucham Jr. *Expository Apologetics: Answering Objections with the Power of the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 34.

<sup>9</sup> Benjamin Forrest, Joshua D. Chatraw, Alister E. McGrath, ed, *The History of Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 23.

revealed through an understanding of the scriptures and a grounding in the church. I professed faith in Christ at the age of 7 and surrendered to the ministry at the age of 9, preaching my first sermon at 10. That grounding would inform me that my purpose was the declaring, defending, and demonstrating of the gospel. But it was a more recent event that lit a fire for that purpose.

In December 2021 I found myself in a hospital bed in the COVID ward of my local hospital. Lying in that bed, I was told by my doctor that I had come extremely close to not making it because of the blood clots that I had been throwing. I was diagnosed with COVID right after Thanksgiving. I had gone past the quarantine period when I developed severe hemorrhoids. Because of these hemorrhoids I was scheduled for surgery. During the surgery they realized that I had COVID pneumonia and had been throwing clots in my lungs while at home. My doctor later informed me that had I not needed the surgery I most likely would have died at home from the blood clots. The pain from one area saved me from the likely death of another.

Lying in that hospital bed, I began to re-examine my life and to understand the fragility of life. Now these are not concepts that are new to me. I accepted Christ as my Savior at the age of seven and surrendered to the ministry at the age of nine. Now I have been preaching ever since and have experienced sickness, suffering, and death at every level and have ministered in those settings. I stood at the bedside of a church member as the plug was pulled and they breathed their last breath. I have stood arm in arm and hand in hand with family and friends as they have gone through extreme pain and suffering and even death. These were not just events but emotional events. And yet, it took me to go through what I did to really see. Lying in that bed, not knowing what might happen, I reached for my phone and my Bible app. On that app I turned to Psalm 107 and read, "Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!" Psalm

107:1 (ESV) I continued reading the whole psalm. The reminder that God is good brought me comfort. This was no longer a mental assent but an experiential knowledge.

Two powerful miracles in my life, divided by time, but both pregnant with meaning and significance in my life. Yes, it would have been easy to follow the route of asking the question of why. Oh, actually I did. But the answer I got, from God's word and from a life lived serving Him, established a solid foundation for me to now take my knowledge of life, walk with God, and compassion for the lost and hurting to experience apologetics in a whole new light. The pain and suffering of life were a teacher to me and an illustration of the truth of Romans 8:28, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose." (KJV) Now this truth also compels me to declare and defend the truth of God, His word, His purposes, and His redemption of a fallen world, a world fallen by mankind's decision to sin. That decision to sin would bring evil and suffering into this world. Evil and suffering that must be given an answer to with the truth: the truth of God's word and His will. This is the call and cause of the apologist to give that answer to the proposed problem of evil.

It is the thesis of this paper that C.S. Lewis experienced the same type of personal transformation that would be exposed in his apologetic work on the problem of evil. Lewis understood that mankind tends to treat God as if He is under arrest and anything He says will be held against Him.<sup>10</sup> Lewis had gone through a very gut-wrenching experience as a child. His mother died when he was young. Lewis had prayed for her healing and when she was not healed Lewis turned away from God. Lewis used the experience of evil and suffering in this life as the impetus for his turning to atheism. Lewis turned to reason and learned to compartmentalize. In

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<sup>10</sup> Lewis, *God in the Dock*, 27.

fact, it was the problem of evil that would stand in Lewis' way for much of his life. Art Lindsley, C.S. Lewis scholar, states "the problem of evil was perhaps the greatest of all obstacles that stood between C.S. Lewis and the Christian faith."<sup>11</sup>

In his own struggle with the seeming contradiction between a good God and an evil world and in his formulation of an argument concerning this seeming contradiction, Lewis understood that the foundation would begin with an acknowledgement of real evil in this world.<sup>12</sup> In his apologetic for the Christian worldview, Lewis would argue using two phenomena: humor and the horror of death. Humor was used to show the difference between what is and what ought. Lewis would use the horror of death to illustrate that death is an interloper caused by man's sins.<sup>13</sup> Lewis' own personal struggle with the evil in this world would give him the wisdom to use reason, practical application, and experiential relationship to weave a powerful apologetical theodicy for the problem of evil, a theodicy that would take a lifetime to come into focus. C.S. Lewis, the brilliant thinker, articulate writer, and eloquent apologist, would take the issue of evil, wrestling with it from childhood to adulthood, and provide answers, comfort, and hope to millions who read his books.

My prayer is that through this paper I can illustrate the growth and maturity in Lewis' theodicy and that I can substantiate my argument that Lewis' argument developed from theory to experience, from reason to relationship. Now I know there will be some pushback concerning the issue of reason, some believing reason answers all questions. Others will believe that pathos and emotion will answer the problem of evil. Still others may claim that all that is needed is faith. It is

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<sup>11</sup> Art Lindsley, *C.S. Lewis's Case for Christ Insights from Reason, Imagination and Faith*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2005) 51.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 52.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 53.54.

the assertion of this paper that Lewis' work illustrates that a theodicy is not easily woven, and at the end of the day what is left is a submissive trust in God. In the end Lewis would answer the problem of evil with reason, theology, practical living, and relational faith. A theodicy must be well grounded, well-reasoned, and well tried.

Lewis' theodicy would provide a rational argument for the presence of evil in this world, a redemptive answer for the power of evil in this world, and a relational illustration of the perseverance through the evil in this world. Lewis' theodicy was not found in just one book, but in one life, and that life yielded to the perspective of God over evil and suffering. Ultimately, Lewis' answer for evil was in his relationship with God. This answer would give him peace in the midst of suffering and a hope for a future of no suffering. Lewis' theodicy is that a personal relationship with God is the only hope and answer for the question of evil in this world.

## CHAPTER ONE

### ***SEARCHING FOR UNDERSTANDING: THE PROBLEM OF EVIL***

*“Is God willing to prevent evil but not able? Then he is impotent. Is he both able but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? From whence then is evil?”<sup>14</sup>*

*“I will say to God, Do not condemn me; let me know why you contend against me. Does it seem good to you to oppress, to despise the work of your hands and favor the designs of the wicked?” Job 10:2,3 (ESV)*

How does one even begin to understand, much less explain, the Holocaust? A maniacal dictator systematically rounds up an entire race of people, sending them to concentration camps, and ultimately to their death in gas chambers and firing squads. This race of people were the Jews, God’s chosen people and approximately six million were exterminated. Where were the religious leaders of the church in Germany? Why was no one trying to stop him? Why did it even happen to begin with? Who would allow such evil to exist?

What exactly is said to the mother who just lost her daughter to drug addiction? Or what does one tell a father when his son has committed a crime? How is it possible to bring comfort to a young boy who has been molested by his priest or a young girl who was molested by her coach? What explanation is there to the faithful pastor whose wife tells him she is not in love with him anymore on Valentine’s Day and says she wants a divorce? How does one tell the wife that she

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<sup>14</sup> David Hume *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, ed. Richard H. Popkin (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1980), 63.

did nothing wrong when the husband commits serial adultery? Is it even possible to prepare the mother for the horror when she walks into her son's room to find that he has hanged himself?

Pertinent but disturbing questions concerning all-too-common incidents in the human condition. From Auschwitz to the Russian gulags to the Cambodian Killing fields to the Rwandan genocide, mankind's moral depravity knows no bounds. Not to be left out, nature has a way of generating its own disasters like the Chilean earthquakes, the Krakatoan volcanoes, the Indonesian tsunamis, and hurricane Katrina. And even more recently, a virus, a seemingly natural disease, that looks like it has its roots in human depravity. The indelible mark of pain and suffering has been left on us all through the darkness of this world.<sup>15</sup> Somehow this mark of darkness seems out of place in this world. We feel deep down that this is not right, that it is not the way it is supposed to be.<sup>16</sup> Thomas Hardy may have spoken to the frustration and fatigue of this world in his work *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. He stated the problem this way: "Happiness was but the occasional episode in a general drama of pain."<sup>17</sup>

Where is God in all of this pain and suffering? Why won't He do something about it? Can He not protect us from all this anguish? If He is sovereign, why can't He keep us safe or at least mitigate the harshness of all we face.<sup>18</sup> Or better yet, is He even there at all? Does the reality of evil, pain, and suffering eliminate the possibility of an all-knowing, all-powerful God? If He is there, why won't He intervene? Is He impotent or evil Himself? These are but a few questions that arise in examining the problem of evil. These questions that, for humanity, demand to be answered with answers that do not come easy. How are they answered? Are they even answerable? And if

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<sup>15</sup> Scott Christensen, *What About Evil?* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2020), 1.

<sup>16</sup> Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 7-8.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Hardy, *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (NY: Dover, 2004), 243.

<sup>18</sup> Christensen, *What About Evil?*, 2.



they are answerable, who has given us the most complete answer? Is it a one size fit all answer or is it more nuanced? Is there someone who understands these nuances and answers them?

## THE PROBLEM STATED

Though this paper has given recognition to illustrations of evil, before we can go any further, we must define what is meant by the word *evil*. Defining *evil* is not an easy proposition, even though we can recognize evil rather easily. Evil has been recognized as that which frustrates human goods, and the goods befitting the nonhuman world. It is considered the avoidable suffering of both man and beast.<sup>19</sup> Or to put it another way, evil is an event or act that violates, and goodness is an event or action that brings joy.<sup>20</sup> The overall concept of evil is considered to cover a wide domain that includes everything that is harmful and destructive in the world. Evil is commonly classified into two broad categories: moral evil and natural evil. Moral evils are brought to fruition by moral agents, human beings. Natural evils are those devastating natural occurring events.<sup>21</sup>

Considering the illustrations of and definition of evil and suffering, it is clear that there is sufficient evidence to conclude that evil exists in this world. This evidence only breeds questions. Questions such as: how is evil defined, who defines evil, where did evil come from, and if there is a God, what is His place or role in the existence of evil? And those questions bring us to a problem, the problem of evil. The question of the problem of evil has caused atheists to squeal and Christians to squirm. The problem had been stated as (1) God is good, (2) God is all powerful, and (3) evil exists. Because evil exists it throws doubt, or at least questions, up to the first two statements. It

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<sup>19</sup> Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 615.

<sup>20</sup> William Greenway, *The Challenge of Evil: Grace and The Problem of Suffering* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), 15.

<sup>21</sup> Chad Meister and Paul K. Moser ed. *The Cambridge Companion to the Problem of Evil* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 1,2.

puts those two statements under suspicion. And the suspicion of the statements brings philosophical inquiry. This inquiry led to a philosophical statement concerning the problem of evil. The philosophical question of the problem of evil was classically stated by Greek philosopher Epicurus:

*God either wishes to take away evils, and is unable; or he is able and unwilling; or he is willing and able.*<sup>22</sup>

Eighteenth-century Scottish philosopher David Hume would later restate Epicurus' concerns over God and evil:

*“Is [God] willing to prevent evil but not able? Then he is impotent. Is he able but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both willing and able? From whence then is evil?”*<sup>23</sup>

Hume's strategy in his discussion of the problem of evil is to pose an intolerable dilemma for the theist: either there is an infinite God who is completely mysterious with therefore no basis for a revealed religion or a pantheon of deities indifferent to the sufferings of human beings, all which Hume knows is unacceptable to any orthodox Christian.<sup>24</sup>

The question then arises as to how to respond to this conundrum. Does the existence of evil and suffering invalidate the existence of an all-good and all-powerful God? To further explore the issue, the problem of evil has been divided into two major theoretical versions: the logical problem and the evidential problem. The logical problem explores whether the claims of God are inconsistent with the reality of evil. The evidential problem of evil suggests that even if theism is logically consistent, given the reality of evil, it is probably not true.<sup>25</sup> Is there an answer to both the logical and evidential problems of evil?

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<sup>22</sup> Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith*, 616.

<sup>23</sup> Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. Richard H. Popkin, 63.

<sup>24</sup> James N. Anderson, *David Hume* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2019), 47.

<sup>25</sup> Meister and Moser, *The Cambridge Companion to the Problem of Evil*, 3,4.

## THE PROBLEM SOLVED

The problem of evil is seen as the most obvious and relentless challenge that Christianity must face, even being dubbed the “Achilles’ heel” of Christianity.<sup>26</sup> How do we answer such a challenge? How does the theist, the Christian apologist, answer the objection to Christianity based upon the reality of two claims? These claims being (1) there is an incompatibility between God’s character and the fact that evil exists and (2) the evil exists is real and touches everyone deeply and profoundly.<sup>27</sup> This problem of evil is even seen as a heavy weight burdening the Christian worldview. However, a strong constitution can bear such a heavy load. A strong constitution that is supported by a number of arguments, arguments that stand up against the scrutiny of competing worldviews concerning evil and suffering.<sup>28</sup>

For any serious worldview to be considered as such, they must first believe objective evil exists and explain the existence and nature of evil.<sup>29</sup> A defense against evil attempts to show that arguments from evil against theism are unsuccessful.<sup>30</sup> When a theist sets out to answer the questions of where does evil come from and why does God allow evil, they are giving a theodicy.<sup>31</sup> A theodicy seeks to illuminate a clear purpose of why a good God would allow evil in His creation.<sup>32</sup> A theodicy is the theological mechanism that the apologist uses to answer the problem of evil. A theodicy attempts to show that God is justified in allowing evil to exist.<sup>33</sup> There is not

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<sup>26</sup> Oliphant, *Covenantal Apologetics: Principles & Practices in Defense of Our Faith*, 166.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* 167.

<sup>28</sup> Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith*, 617.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* 617.

<sup>30</sup> Meister and Moser, *The Cambridge Companion to the Problem of Evil*, 4.

<sup>31</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 10.

<sup>32</sup> Christensen, *What About Evil?* 5.

<sup>33</sup> Nash, Ronald. *Faith and Reason* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988), 188.

one definitive example of a theodicy. Some of the more common theodicies include: (1) Free-Will Defense, (2) Natural-Law Defense, (3) Greater-Good Theodicy, (4) Soul-Making Theodicy, (5) Best-of-All-Possible-Worlds Defense, and (6) Divine-Judgement Defense. There is even a newer idea of theodicy that combines elements from Greater-Good and Best-of-All-Possible-Worlds that is known as the Greater-Glory Theodicy.<sup>34</sup> No one clear defense or theodicy has convinced all inquiries about the problem of evil. And considering the book of Job, it is even unclear that a theodicy is even possible.<sup>35</sup> However, apologists from Augustine of Hippo to C.S. Lewis have picked up the mantle to attempt to show from scripture, reason, and experience that there is an answer to the problem of evil.

While atheists and atheism attempt to advance themselves as intellectually and morally superior, they too must answer the problem of evil. Atheists such as Richard Dawkins attempt to wave away evil as something only perpetrated by those who hold to a biblical faith. He even went as far as to call faith evil.<sup>36</sup> However, the question of the presence of evil does not disappear when we attempt to get rid of God. Even the French atheist philosopher and writer Jean-Paul Sartre acknowledges that when a society stopped believing in God there were still real questions concerning pain and suffering or good and evil.

*“... for there disappears with Him [God] all possibility of finding values in an intelligible heaven. There can no longer be any good a priori, since there is no infinite and perfect consciousness to think it. . . . Nor, on the other hand, if God does not exist, are we provided with any values or commands that could legitimise our behaviour. Thus, we have neither behind us, nor before us in a luminous realm of values, any means of justification or excuse.”<sup>37</sup>*

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<sup>34</sup> Christensen, *What About Evil?* 5,6,7.

<sup>35</sup> Meister and Moser, *The Cambridge Companion to the Problem of Evil*, 4.

<sup>36</sup> Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (NY: Houghton Mifflin, 2006,2008), 347.

<sup>37</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 28.

So, if atheism cannot truly answer the problem of evil by trying to vanish it with the thought of vanishing God, and the traditional defenses and theodicies are difficult to sufficiently answer the problem of evil considering the most difficult text of Scripture not giving an answer, what then is the apologist to do. How can the problem of evil be answered? Is it possible to take the truth of Scripture, the reason of philosophy, and the experience of life and combine them all into a theodicy, a theodicy that grows and matures over time but rests upon the unchanging truth? It is the assumption of this paper that such an individual did exist. An individual that struggled with the problem on a personal level. Clive Staples Lewis, Oxford don, writer, apologist, was that individual. Lewis had rejected Christianity as a young man because of the problem of evil. After Lewis' reception of Christ, it was the problem of evil that he would begin his apologetic work on. And when his nation was struggling with an evil madman attacking their country, it was Lewis who responded with a practical theodicy. And when suffering and death came to his home with the death of his wife, it was Lewis' faith that God was the answer to the problem of evil that sustained him through. Lewis understood that God was not the problem concerning evil, He was the solution. He also understood that if we are to truly understand the reason for evil, we must understand our part in it, the fall of humanity into sin. Lewis would build upon the work of Augustine. However, his apologetic work must be seen in the light of his own life. Let us first examine his life and then his three apologetic works concerning the problem of evil. Three works when taken together give us a complete theodicy. Taken separately, each work would seem to be incomplete, not giving a thorough examination of the problem. Each book has its own merit and own deficiencies. However, it is those deficiencies that the next work would correct and build upon. Taken together, they give us Lewis' complete theodicy.

## CHAPTER TWO

### SURPRISED BY MYTH: THE PERSON OF C.S. LEWIS

*“The demand was not even All or nothing...Now the demand was simply All...I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England.”<sup>38</sup>*

*“Lewis struck me as the most thoroughly converted man I ever met...His whole vision of life was such that the natural and the supernatural seemed inseparably combined.”<sup>39</sup>*

*“There are three images in my mind which I must continually forsake and replace by better ones: the false image of God, the false image of my neighbors, and the false image of myself.”<sup>40</sup>*

In the winter of 1898 in Belfast, Ireland was born a unique and remarkable man. A man who would leave an indelible mark on the literary world, the academic world, and the world of Christian apologetics. Clive Staples Lewis was born the second son of a solicitor and a clergyman's daughter.<sup>41</sup> Lewis and his older brother Warren would grow up in a family full of books and imagination. Lewis' ancestry and upbringing were the backbone of his character. In fact, many of his qualities could be traced to an idea of inheritance.<sup>42</sup> Lewis' great-grandfather on his father's side had been a Welsh farmer, and his grandfather, Richard, was a Welsh boilermaker who had immigrated to Ireland. Lewis' father, Albert, not wanting to go into the shipbuilding business, informed his family he wanted to pursue a legal career. Richard Lewis enrolled Albert in Lurgan College under the tutelage of William Thompson Kirkpatrick, a name that will show up later in

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<sup>38</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 2017), 279.

<sup>39</sup> Lewis, *God in the Dock*, from the Preface by Walter Hooper.

<sup>40</sup> Walter Hooper, *C.S. Lewis: A Companion Guide* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1996), 61.

<sup>41</sup> Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life*, 1.

<sup>42</sup> A.N. Wilson, *C.S. Lewis: A Biography* (NY: Norton, 1990), 1.

Lewis' life. Albert would eventually move to Belfast to serve as a solicitor.<sup>43</sup> C.S. Lewis' mother, Flora, was trained in mathematics at what is now Queen's University in Belfast. Flora's father, Thomas Hamilton was a Church of Ireland clergyman.<sup>44</sup> On Flora's mother's side were the Warrens, who Lewis would record went back to Norman's.<sup>45</sup> C.S. Lewis would also record that the two families that he sprung up from could not have been more different. His father's people were "true Welshmen, sentimental, passionate, and rhetorical, easily moved both to anger and to tenderness." While concerning his mother's people, Lewis cited that they "were a cooler race. Their minds were critical and ironic, and they had the talent for happiness in a high degree"<sup>46</sup> But from both sides of his family Lewis developed an appreciation for literature. Books were everywhere he looked in their home. Lewis would describe his parents as "bookish or clever people."<sup>47</sup>

Not only was Lewis influenced by ancestry, but he was also greatly influenced by the landscape. What is often forgotten is that Lewis was Irish. The Irish culture of love of language and storytelling greatly influenced Lewis. From his depiction of Heaven in *The Great Divorce* to an idealized version of Ulster in Narnia, the green hills and landscape were never extremely far from Lewis.<sup>48</sup> In Belfast, Lewis and his family lived in a home named "Little Lea." From Little Lea they could see the Castlereagh hills. These hills would later appear in Lewis' book *The Pilgrims Regress* as a symbol of the hearts unknown desire.<sup>49</sup> Unfortunately for Lewis, his idyllic situation would come to a crashing halt.

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<sup>43</sup> Alister McGrath, *C.S. Lewis-A Life: Eccentric Genius, Reluctant Prophet* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2013), 5,6,7.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. 8.

<sup>45</sup> Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Life*, 1.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. 2.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 2.

<sup>48</sup> McGrath, *C.S. Lewis-A Life: Eccentric Genius Reluctant Prophet*, 10.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. 16.

## TRAGEDY

*“With my mother’s death all settled happiness, all that was tranquil and reliable, disappeared from my life.”<sup>50</sup>*

Life for C.S. Lewis seemed to be all good. He was blessed with good parents, an ally in his older brother, good food, and a garden to play in.<sup>51</sup> Nicknames were a constant of their lives together, however C.S. Lewis showed a sense of individualism. As a young boy he suddenly decided to be called “Jacksie.” Over time it was shortened to “Jacks” and finally to “Jack.” He would be known to family and friends for the rest of his life as Jack.<sup>52</sup> Jack and his brother Warren, Warnie to family and friends, enjoyed a good life at Little Lea with their parents, their books, and their imaginations. However, their idyllic life was soon to come to a crashing halt.

Early in the year 1908, Jack’s grandfather, Richard Lewis, had been living with them for months in Little Lea, but was asked to move out because Flora had developed abdominal cancer and they needed the space for nurses. Richard would suffer a stroke in late March and passed away the next month. Flora, Jack’s beloved mother, would die in her bed at home in August 1908.<sup>53</sup> The day she passed away Jack was in his bed with a toothache crying for his mother.<sup>54</sup> He was heartbroken not only for the loss of his mother, but also his disappointment that his prayers had not been answered. He had believed that his prayers for her recovery would be successful. The family would receive another blow when two weeks later Albert’s older brother, Joseph, would die.<sup>55</sup> So much loss, so much hurt, so much disappointment for such a young boy.

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<sup>50</sup> Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life*, 23.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* 4.

<sup>52</sup> McGrath, *C.S. Lewis-A Life: Eccentric Genius, Reluctant Prophet*, 9.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* 22.

<sup>54</sup> Douglas Gresham, *Jack’s Life: The Life Story of C.S. Lewis* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2005), 10.

<sup>55</sup> McGrath, *C.S. Lewis-A Life: Eccentric Genius, Reluctant Prophet*, 24.



Albert, within the span of less than a year, had lost his father, brother, and beloved wife. His attempts at expressing his grief and responding to the boy's grief would frighten Jack. Unable to cope with all the grief, Albert would send Jack off to boarding school, along with Warnie. Away from the land he loves, from the home that he has known, exiled far across the Irish Sea to England.<sup>56</sup> Probably the best expression of Jack's despair and anger would come from a poem in his first published work from 1919.

*I cried out for the pain of man,  
I cried out for my bitter wrath  
Against the hopeless life that ran  
For ever in a circling path  
From death to death since all began;  
Till on a summer night  
I lost my way in the pale starlight  
And saw our planet, far and small,  
Through endless depths of nothing fall  
A lonely pin-prick spark of light,  
With leagues on leagues of stars above it,  
And powdered dust of stars below-  
Dead things that neither hate nor love it  
Not even their own loveliness can know,  
Being but cosmic dust and dead.  
And if some tears be shed,  
Some evil God have power,  
Some crown of sorrow sit  
Upon a little world for a little hour-  
Who shall remember? Who shall care for it?<sup>57</sup>*

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<sup>56</sup> Gresham, *Jack's Life: The Life Story of C.S. Lewis*, 11.

<sup>57</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Spirits in Bondage* reprint (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020)

## TRAINING

In September 1908 C.S. Lewis was sent to Wynard School, Watford England. To say that Lewis hated his time there would be an understatement. He saw it as a complete waste of time. When it was shut down in the summer of 1910, Albert was forced to make new arrangements. From there, Jack would come back to Belfast for a few months at Campbell College. From January 1911 to June 1913, Jack would be enrolled in Cherbourg School, Malvern. From September 1913 to June 1914, He would be enrolled in Malvern College. Realizing that things were not working out for Jack at these institutions, Albert enrolled him with a private tutor, Kirkpatrick. The same Kirkpatrick that had trained Albert in college and had tutored Warnie, was now being asked to tutor Jack.<sup>58</sup>

But before he could continue his education, Jack had to make a friend. A man that would be a close friend to the day Jack died, Arthur Greeves. Greeves was the same age as Warnie and had lived down the lane from them. Jack had heard Greeves was ill and went to visit. But when Jack entered his room and found out Greeves loved Norse mythology as well, this would begin a friendship that would last just a few months shy of fifty years and one in which Lewis would express himself in a way that he could not with others. While other boys might be fascinated with cowboys, or knights, or astronauts, Norse mythology captivated Lewis. This initial shared interest cemented a friendship for life.<sup>59</sup>

In September 1914, Jack Lewis would arrive to begin his studies with Kirkpatrick. Jack would give Arthur Greeves his schedule with Kirkpatrick: 8:00 Breakfast—9:00 Greek Lessons—11:00 Break—11:00 Latin lessons—1:00 Lunch and free time—5:00 Lessons—7:00 Break—7:30

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<sup>58</sup> McGrath, *C.S. Lewis-A Life: Eccentric Genius, Reluctant Prophet*, 26-35.

<sup>59</sup> Harry Lee Poe, *Becoming C.S. Lewis: A Biography of Young Jack Lewis* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 94-100.

Dinner and English Literature.<sup>60</sup> While Kirkpatrick did not make Jack into an atheist, the idea had already been forming from the death of his mother onward, Kirkpatrick did give Jack more ammunition in the cause of atheism. Kirkpatrick also provided for Jack the framework for an analytical ability that would serve him well over the years, including in his later apologetic work.<sup>61</sup>

For nearly three years Jack would study with Kirkpatrick until he had the opportunity to attend Oxford in 1917. However, before he could ever complete his studies there, he had to serve in the Great War. Jack would pass through his training, be commissioned as a Second Lieutenant, and arrive on the frontline trenches on his nineteenth birthday. While in Service, Jack had befriended an Irishman named Paddy Moore. They made a vow that whoever survived would care for the other's family. Paddy would not survive, and Jack would look after Paddy's family in a complicated and confusing relationship for years after. Jack would spend most of February 1918 in the hospital with "trench fever."<sup>62</sup> It was in hospital that Jack would first read Chesterton and plant the seeds for later conversations.<sup>63</sup> After being released from hospital and barely having time to turn around, Jack Lewis was wounded in April 1918 when a shell exploded close to Jack, killing Sergeant Harry Ayres as well. From the wounds Jack would remain in the hospital and then in military convalescence for the duration of the war. Jack would acknowledge nearly all the friends he made from his battalion had been killed. In the year Jack had spent at war, he had gone from a boy to a man.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid. 113, 126.

<sup>61</sup> Devin Brown, *A Life Observed: A Spiritual Biography of C.S. Lewis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2013), 84.

<sup>62</sup> McGrath, *C.S. Lewis-A Life: Eccentric Genius, Reluctant Prophet*, 58-70.

<sup>63</sup> Lewis, *Surprised by Joy, The Shape of My Early Life*, 233.

<sup>64</sup> Poe, *Becoming C.S. Lewis: A Biography of Young Jack Lewis*, 255-257.

## TRUE MYTH

While Jack was convalescing from his war wounds, he compiled a set of poems that he had been working on under the title *Spirits in Bondage*, published in 1919. The poems would give insight to Jack's personal philosophy at the time.<sup>65</sup> While Lewis desperately wanted to be a poet, it would be his prose that would later make such an impact upon the world. But Jack was still growing and making friends, as he returned to his studies at Oxford. In 1919 he met and befriended Owen Barfield. Barfield was the first to show Jack the limits of evolutionary thought, by showing him that if we are relying upon human thought as an evolutionary survival tool how can we have any confidence in it?<sup>66</sup>

Jack would continue to excel in his studies at Oxford, earning a Double First in Literae Humaniores-Mods in 1920 and Greats in 1922. He would even win the Chancellor's English Essay Prize with the subject "Optimism" in May 1921.<sup>67</sup> However, with no job prospects for the future in philosophy, Jack was encouraged to continue with his studies, earning a degree in English Literature. While in the English department Lewis met another influential individual in his journey to understanding "true myth." Jack would meet and become friends with Nevill Coghill, a Christian. But it was not only the friends but the books that would challenge Lewis in his thinking. Authors such as Chesterton, MacDonald, and George Herbert would challenge Jack to think deeper about the Christian faith. In fact, the writers that would align with him philosophically would leave Jack feeling cold and their arguments shallow.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> David C. Downing, *The Most Reluctant Convert: C.S. Lewis's Journey to Faith* (Eugene, OR: WIPF & Stock, 2004), 87.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.* 94.

<sup>67</sup> Roger Lancelyn Green & Walter Hooper. *C.S. Lewis: The Authorized and Revised Biography* (London, UK: HarperCollins, 2003 paperback), 57.

<sup>68</sup> Brown, *A Life Observed: A Spiritual Biography of C.S. Lewis*, 113,114.

Upon completing his studies with a “Triple First,” C.S. Lewis was offered a Fellowship with Magdalen College. It would be from here as an Oxford don that the world would get to know C.S. Lewis. But it was from here that Jack would get to know others that would shape his life and his writings forever. Jack’s next stab at writing would be with his monumental poem, *Dymer*. He would ask Nevill Coghill to proofread several cantos of the poem.<sup>69</sup> This would be significant and point to later interactions between Lewis and fellow writers concerning their works. Lewis would begin meeting with several individuals discussing literature, including a new professor of Anglo-Saxon, J.R.R. Tolkien. Over time this group of Oxford professionals, writers, and friends would become known as the Inklings. The group would include individuals coming and going including Lewis, Tolkien, Owen Barfield, Hugo Dyson, Dorothy L. Sayers, Warren Lewis, Charles Williams, and others.

Before we go any further, it must be said that Lewis’ own version of his testimony can be confusing for some. He seems to record two conversion experiences, one in 1929 and the other in 1931. His distinction between “Theism” and “Christianity” can be puzzling.<sup>70</sup> For the modern evangelical, conversion is a singular act of time. Testimonies are given in churches of the moment of faith. But for Jack Lewis, the conversion was gradual. In fact, Scripture records for us both instances. For the Apostle Paul it was a dramatic experience on the road to Damascus. For the Apostle Peter there is no record of such an event, his was a gradual acceptance of the truth of Christ.

Jack had finally settled down in the Kilns, his home in Oxford. He had his work at Oxford and his friends to meet with regularly. However, these friends continued, both verbally and with

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<sup>69</sup> Poe, Harry Lee. *The Making of C.S. Lewis: From Atheist to Apologist*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021) 100.

<sup>70</sup> Downing, *The Most Reluctant Convert: C.S. Lewis's Journey to Faith*, 139.

their lives and work, to share with Jack the truth about Christ. Maybe it was his father's death in 1929, that pushed Lewis to consider the words his friends were saying. In September 1931, Lewis would meet with Tolkien and Dyson for dinner. After dinner, they would walk along Addison's walk and then on to Lewis' room at Magdalen College. They would stay up to three and four in the morning discussing Christianity and myth. Tolkien and Dyson would remind Lewis that he had no problem with sacrifice in mythology. They would insert to him that Christianity was the true myth.<sup>71</sup> Jack also had read Chesterton's *The Everlasting Man*, with Chesterton's Christian outline of history making sense.<sup>72</sup> All of this was floating around in Jack's mind. Could he have been wrong all this time? Was Jesus and Christianity the true myth?

Lewis' recollections of his own conversion were of a gradual, step by step process. Lewis had referred to his relationship with God as like a chess match. With each move he had made, God had made another to bring him to faith. From being in hospital and reading Chesterton, to his words with Tolkien and Dyson. Tolkien had transformed the idea from truth to meaning and pursued the idea of myth. Tolkien shared that myths are tales that convey fundamental truths, with the most fundamental truth of Christianity being the true myth.<sup>73</sup> Lewis had struggled with sacrifice, propitiation, in the Christian faith, but Dyson and Tolkien that if he could accept pagan myth why not the true myth.<sup>74</sup> But it was on the way to the zoo, when it all came together, and checkmate-Lewis believed. All the doubts and confusion melted away. Lewis believed and his belief caused him to want to write about that faith.

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<sup>71</sup> Poe, *The Making of C.S. Lewis: From Atheist to Apologist*, 143-147.

<sup>72</sup> Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life*, 272,273.

<sup>73</sup> McGrath, *C.S. Lewis-A Life: Eccentric Genius, Reluctant Prophet*, 149-151.

<sup>74</sup> Robert MacSwain and Michael Ward, *The Cambridge Companion to C.S. Lewis* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 205.

## CHAPTER THREE

### SUGGESTING AN ANSWER: *THE PROBLEM OF PAIN*

*“In a sense, it creates, rather than solves the problem of pain, for pain would be no problem unless, side by side with our daily experience of this painful world, we have received what we think a good assurance that the ultimate reality is righteous and loving.”<sup>75</sup>*

*“But Pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks, in our conscience, but shouts in our pain: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”<sup>76</sup>*

Once the true myth became personal faith to C.S. Lewis he was compelled to explore it in his writings. Lewis’ first fleshed out record of his conversion to Christianity was with the allegorical novel *The Pilgrim’s Regress*. This allegorical tale is of a boy named John who flees the stern Landlord of Puritania in search of a far-off island. This island is recognized as Joy and John’s odyssey is Lewis’ own. As a side note, it is noteworthy that when Lewis wrote *The Pilgrim’s Regress*, he was finishing *The Allegory of Love* and experimenting with allegory in the alliterative poem “The Planets.” However, *The Pilgrim’s Regress* suffers from what could be called beginner’s troubles. The tale is full of straw men, ultimately making too strong a case.<sup>77</sup> *The Allegory of Love* would provide for the reader insights into Lewis’ thought and method. Jack’s longing and desire for Joy forms the plot for many of the stories. Lewis’ exploration of the four loves would begin here. Lewis would also explore the inner conflict of good and evil, raising issues of right and wrong. These concepts would be explored in his apologetic work.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (NY: HarperCollins, 2001), 14.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.* 91.

<sup>77</sup> Philip Zaleski & Carol Zaleski, *The Fellowship: The Literary Lives of the Inklings* (NY: Farrar, Strouse, and Giroux, 2015), 189-191.

<sup>78</sup> Poe, *The Making of C.S. Lewis: From Atheist to Apologist*, 170-174.

C.S. Lewis could be noted to be a big picture thinker, involving both reason and imagination to illustrate that the Christian faith offered a more imaginative rendering of reality than his earlier atheism.<sup>79</sup> While the allegorical tale *The Pilgrim's Regress* did not “set the woods on fire” with sales, it did catch the attention of publisher Ashley Simpson. Simpson was impressed with *The Pilgrim's Regress* and asked Lewis to contribute a volume about suffering. This would be Lewis' first apologetic work. He initially submitted *The Problem of Pain* under the pseudonym Nat Whilk, but the publisher insisted it be under his own name. In contrast to *The Pilgrim's Regress*, this book is not autobiographical in nature.<sup>80</sup>

To this day, *The Problem of Pain* provides a valuable exploration of the intellectual issues raised concerning the problem of evil and the suffering and pain that follows.<sup>81</sup> It just seems to be missing something from Lewis himself, emotion. It carries a clinical almost detached view of the subject.<sup>82</sup> This approach would be the beginning stages of Lewis' apologetic reasoning, so it would take time and further experience for it to be fleshed out. The answers that Lewis would present in this book would be developed through life experiences.<sup>83</sup> While some may claim the ideas that Lewis proposes here are underdeveloped, others claim that they are distilled, reduced from the enormity with almost a pastoral tone.<sup>84</sup> Some even see the work as a refreshingly objective view, that is conversational, commonsensical, witty, and logical.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Alister McGrath, *Born to Wonder* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2020), 132.

<sup>80</sup> Zaleski & Zaleski, *The Fellowship: The Literary Lives of the Inklings*, 292.

<sup>81</sup> McGrath, *Born to Wonder*, 133.

<sup>82</sup> Forrest, Chatraw, and McGrath ed. *The History of Apologetics: A Biographical and Methodological Introduction*, 607.

<sup>83</sup> Jerry Root, *C.S. Lewis and a Problem of Evil: An Investigation of a Pervasive Theme* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2009), 63.

<sup>84</sup> Wesley Kort, *Reading C.S. Lewis A commentary* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 43.

<sup>85</sup> Zaleski & Zaleski, *The Fellowship: The Literary Lives of the Inklings*, 292.



It is the view of this paper that this was a subject that, although it was suggested by another person, Lewis had to tackle. Lewis understood that the subject was both intellectually challenging and a recurring philosophical and theological problem. A problem that prevents some from becoming a Christian.<sup>86</sup> Lewis understood how evil, and suffering were a problem for many in believing in and trusting in the God of the Bible. It was a struggle for himself. The problem, for this writer, is that while Lewis would employ his trademark wit and intelligence, he seemed to forget that pain is painful and full of emotional baggage. What is missing from this beautifully written, thought-provoking book is the pathos, the lament of pain. Lament is how we bring our sorrow to God. A fuller examination of this topic would have included not only a basis for understanding evil in an intellectual sense, but also a basis for coping with said evil. However, *The Problem of Pain* would embody Lewis' objectivist view, selecting out of a body of information those bits and pieces that he believed would most honestly make his case.<sup>87</sup> It is the supposition of this paper, however, that Lewis focused solely upon the philosophical reasoning of explaining the problem of evil that he forgot the personal reasoning in dealing with the problem of evil. *The Problem of Pain* is an excellent book, but an incomplete theodicy. Lewis does not give us the last word about the problem of evil, but he does give us a helpful one. It is helpful in objectively examining the human component and limitations of the subject.<sup>88</sup> It would take a lifetime and further suffering to fully flesh out Lewis' theodicy. But to commence our consideration, we must carefully assess this beginning work on the subject. For the sake of examination and understanding this chapter will divide the book into three headings: Foundational Truths, the Fall, and the Future.

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<sup>86</sup> Kort, *Reading C.S. Lewis: A Commentary*, 43.

<sup>87</sup> Root, *C.S. Lewis and a Problem of Evil: An Investigation of a Pervasive Theme*, 46-48.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.* 45.

## THE FOUNDATIONAL TRUTHS

When my youngest son Dalton was little, the two of us would watch the videos of the British stop motion animated series of *The Wind in the Willows* together. These were animated story telling's of the book of the same name. C.S. Lewis, in his introductory chapter to *The Problem of Pain*, would use a passage from that book to illustrate the reality of a fear that grips us all. That fear has caused mankind to act in various ways, including trying to answer the questions of life. One of the questions of life is why is there evil in this world? Lewis would proceed in the pages of the book to give a theodicy to the problem of evil. In laying out his theodicy, Lewis would establish certain foundational truths that must be understood in our examination of evil.

Quite possibly the central, overarching truth of the entire book is not found within its pages- instead it is found in the epigraph. Here Lewis would quote from George MacDonald “The Son of God suffered unto the death, not that men might suffer, but that their sufferings might be like His.”<sup>89</sup> The passion of Christ would become a reference point throughout the book, arguing that pain is Christ’s agony against a deaf sky.<sup>90</sup> With Christ’s suffering being the overarching theme of the book, Lewis would begin to expound some fundamental, foundational truths concerning evil.

Lewis begins his argument with the idea that apart from Christianity there is no problem of evil. Christianity gives evil and pain a context. Apart from the faith and truth of Christianity we would not know what good and evil is. The good defined by Christianity gives evil its context. Psalm 107 reminds us that God is good, and Lewis argues that it is that goodness that gives us understanding of good and evil. Any offerable solution must set the problem in context. Lewis is setting his framework in place before answering the problem. A framework that states that it is

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<sup>89</sup> Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, epigraph.

<sup>90</sup> MacSwain and Ward ed. *The Cambridge Companion to C.S. Lewis*, 208-210.

only when mankind is faced with the dual truths of a suffering world and a good God does pain, evil become a moral problem, as well as the fact that by just asking the question proves that religion comes outside of nature, cancelling the atheistic argument.<sup>91</sup> So, Lewis sets the groundwork that Christianity is the only answer for the problem of evil and pain.

As Lewis begins to set forth his answer for the problem of pain, he does so by correcting various misunderstandings involving divine power, divine goodness, and human happiness.<sup>92</sup> Lewis would argue that we often are guilty of “meaningless combinations of words” that cannot acquire meaning just because the phrase “God can” is added to the other words.<sup>93</sup> If we are to truly examine and understand the issue of evil, we cannot be flippant or callous. We need to rethink what we mean when we say words concerning God and evil. Lewis would argue that we often confuse goodness with kindness that wants to make everyone comfortable.<sup>94</sup>

And while humanity is reaching for comfort, God’s desire is to see His creatures become good, a theme not only included here but in *Mere Christianity* as well. But here in *The Problem of Pain*, Lewis sets out to answer the question of evil by employing two solutions, the free-will defense and the greater-good theodicy. By combining the two, Lewis sought to illustrate humanity’s freedom to choose evil, while also showing God’s decision to use the evil choices of humanity as a corrective agent, as well as showing the consequences of those free choices. While God allows us to choose, He will use those choices as a megaphone to get our attention if necessary.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Richard B. Cunningham, *C.S. Lewis: Defender of the Faith* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, reprint 2008), 169.

<sup>92</sup> Michael L. Peterson, *C.S. Lewis and the Christian Worldview* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2020), 110.

<sup>93</sup> Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 18.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.* 32.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.* 91.

## THE FALL

To illustrate his assertions concerning evil and the answer to it, Lewis would bring to bear the Christian doctrine of the Fall and its consequences. Lewis would begin his assertions concerning the Fall with a chapter entitled Human Wickedness. Here Lewis would expound upon the thought of how evil or wicked humanity is. Using medical terminology, Lewis would exclaim the need for preaching the diagnosis before being receptive to the cure.<sup>96</sup> As part of Lewis' diagnosis are some considerations that he wants the reader to examine. Firstly, Lewis states we need to be careful not to fall into the comparison trap, for this can be quite deceptive. Second, he states that we need to be aware of the confusion of relying upon corporate guilt instead of personal guilt. Thirdly, he states that time does not cancel our sin. Fourthly, Lewis cautions against the reliance upon numbers. This is what would be called today, the "everybody is doing it" defense. Fifthly, Lewis states that we cannot argue from the idea of time in relation to ages or cultures. Here Lewis is making the point that comparisons cannot be made in relation to time period or culture. Sixthly, Lewis points out that humanity has reduced all virtues to kindness. Seventhly, Lewis claims that the issue has much more to do than just moral duty. And lastly, Lewis cautions against humanity's habit of blaming others for our own faults, whether that be God, nature, or some other person.<sup>97</sup> These diagnoses are beneficial to the reader in comprehending Lewis' further arguments concerning evil and its origin.

Before Lewis closes out this chapter, he attempts to tackle and discount a doctrine that he will, in a roundabout way, affirm in the next chapter. In the chapter on human wickedness Lewis denounces the doctrine of Total Depravity. His view of the doctrine is a distorted view.<sup>98</sup> What is

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid. 48.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. 52-60.

<sup>98</sup> Will Vaus, *Mere Theology: A Guide to the Thought of C.S. Lewis* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2004), 50.

so surprising concerning this development is Lewis' own commitment to learning and understanding. His is a view shaped more by others, including the Anglican church, than by study of the doctrine itself. What he states as the doctrine is not the doctrine itself. The doctrine declares that as a consequence of the Fall humanity is enslaved to sin, therefore unable to choose God. The doctrine does not state that people are as bad as they could be, but that people are never as good as they could be. Total Depravity refers to the extent of the corruption from the Fall.<sup>99</sup> The irony is that in the next chapter Lewis would accurately describe this doctrine and humanity's need for a deliverer because of our sin.

This brings us to the specific chapter concerning the Fall. This chapter is where Lewis would combine both free-will and greater-good into his own theodicy. Lewis would begin the chapter with the assertion that evil exists because of the abuse of humanity's free will. Lewis articulates that the doctrine of the Fall guards us from falling into one of two heresies: Monism or Dualism.<sup>100</sup> This act of self-will on the part of humanity is what is meant by the doctrine of the Fall.<sup>101</sup> The question then arises how does man or can man escape from this fall? Is there a solution to original sin? How does humanity escape from being its own idol?

Lewis then affirms the truth that the only solution designed by the Creator Himself is one of God's "assumption of the suffering nature which evil produces."<sup>102</sup> Pain would play an important part in the remedy.<sup>103</sup> Lewis would echo the words of Paul in his letter to the Corinthian church in I Corinthians 15:22, "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." (KJV) This belief in a suffering Savior is what opens the door to the answer for evil. For the God

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<sup>99</sup> Joel R. Beeke & Paul M. Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology Vol. 2*, 64.

<sup>100</sup> Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 63.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. 76.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid. 80.

<sup>103</sup> William Luther White, *The Image of Man in C.S. Lewis* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, reprint 2008), 121.

who would allow creatures the choice to choose evil and endow them with the consequences for that evil, namely pain and suffering, would allow Himself to experience that suffering to redeem said people from their suffering. God communicates His understanding of and conquering of evil through Christ on Calvary.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid. 102.

## THE FUTURE

Having dealt with both the cause and the cure of evil in this world, Lewis turns to an examination of the future, both immediate future and eternal future. With this he examines the greater-good theodicy of how evil and pain can be of benefit to humanity. Lewis argues that pain is evil but can have good consequences. He further states that pain is both a consequence of sin and a tool for altering or reversing those consequences.<sup>105</sup> Lewis would list three possible lessons that could be learnt from the experiences of suffering. First, suffering can illuminate a prideful attitude that believes the person is not wrong but shows them where they are wrong. Second, pain educates the person to the knowledge of the fact that humanity is not self-sufficient. And third, pain will clarify our good from bad moral choices.<sup>106</sup> Out of these three lessons illuminated by Lewis the central one would be the second one which state that pain educates concerning our understanding of who we truly are and our true need of a Savior from ourselves. Because “pain insists upon being attended to” it can be a most powerful weapon for God to get our attention.<sup>107</sup> And in getting our attention with that pain, God wields the weapon to point out our depravity and our desperate need of a suffering Savior.

Lewis would next assert that pain reminds humanity of one especially important lesson that over time has been forgotten, namely that this present world is not our final home.<sup>108</sup> This future and final home would be an operation of God’s divine justice upon humanity with an eradication of evil that would present itself in the possibility of one of two outcomes. Lewis would begin his discussion on these two outcomes with the seemingly most difficult to swallow, hell. It is the one

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<sup>105</sup> Kort, *Reading C.S Lewis: A Commentary*, 59.

<sup>106</sup> MacSwain and Ward ed. *The Cambridge Companion to C.S. Lewis*, 208.

<sup>107</sup> Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 91.

<sup>108</sup> Louis Markos, *Apologetics for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010) 46.

doctrine that, if he could, he would quickly remove from the doctrines of the church, asserting that the idea of hell is not tolerable.<sup>109</sup> Even though he might have wanted to remove hell as a doctrine of the church, one thing is crystal clear, Lewis absolutely believed in hell.<sup>110</sup> However, Lewis was somewhat muddled as to the threshold for hell, whether it was God-inflicted or self-inflicted.<sup>111</sup> Most often, Lewis was true to his free-will defense in treating hell as self-inflicted, going so far as to say, “that the doors of hell are locked on the inside.” He further states that they demanded their freedom and are now “self-enslaved” through all eternity.<sup>112</sup> However, Lewis also states that hell is a “positive retributive punishment inflicted by God.”<sup>113</sup> Lewis is reflecting a theological tension of human responsibility and God’s sovereignty. Scripture teaches both, the human responsibility of repentance and God’s sovereign election in salvation. Lewis is attempting to thread that same needle. Lewis views both concepts of hell as self-inflicted and as God-inflicted, as meaning the same thing. Hell is seen by Lewis as a proper sentence handed down by a just Judge and the continued rebellion of a people who prefer darkness to light.<sup>114</sup> The theological tension is seen as to who did the choosing of eternal destiny, man or God. Lewis believed both, self-inflicted and God-inflicted, to be true. Lewis’ thought on this theological tension might be best illustrated in his poem *God in His Mercy Made*.

*God in His mercy made  
The fixed pains of Hell.  
That misery might be stayed,  
God in His mercy made  
Eternal bounds and bade*

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<sup>109</sup> Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 119-121.

<sup>110</sup> Joe Rigney, *Lewis on the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 253.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid. 254.

<sup>112</sup> Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 130.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid. 124.

<sup>114</sup> Rigney, *Lewis on the Christian Life*, 256.



*Its waves no further swell.  
 God in His mercy made  
 The fixed pains of Hell.*<sup>115</sup>

Now after dealing with a subject that he loathed to discuss, namely hell, Lewis turns his attention to a subject that in some of his other writers he describes in musical terms, namely heaven.<sup>116</sup> For Lewis, the joys of Heaven is the counterbalance to the sufferings of this world for those who have chosen God and self-denial instead of self-indulgence.<sup>117</sup> Heaven is humanity's proper home. It is where humanity is both more human and glorified.<sup>118</sup>

Therefore, there is a powerful sense of desire in the Christian towards heaven. Lewis senses this desire and pushes the reader to desire good things. This desire for God then will turn to desire for unity with Him in heaven. Lewis would draw upon the influence of Augustine implying that our desires in life are really our desires for God and unity with Him.<sup>119</sup> This desire that Lewis speaks of is not a mercenary desire. God does not bribe the individual. Heaven is the reward for the saved believer.<sup>120</sup> This reward is not merely of a place but of a unity with Love Himself, God. If hell is the natural consequence of self-indulgence, then heaven is the reward for self-denial. Heaven is the embodiment place of the seed that dies to live, of the man who loses his soul to live.<sup>121</sup> In this self-denial the believer is in rhythm with Christ, the Eternal Word, who through crucifixion freely sacrificed of Himself in gladness for the glory of the Father.<sup>122</sup> This rhythm is a symphony of comfort to the believer that there is a glorious reward awaiting them with God for eternity in heaven. Christ's self-denial puts the pain and suffering into a unique perspective as but

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<sup>115</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Collected Poems of C.S. Lewis: A Critical Edition* Ed. Don W. King, 227.

<sup>116</sup> Rigney, *Lewis on the Christian Life*, 264.

<sup>117</sup> Cunningham, *C.S. Lewis: Defender of the Faith*, 171.

<sup>118</sup> Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 127-129.

<sup>119</sup> Kort, *Reading C.S. Lewis: A Commentary*, 62.

<sup>120</sup> Rigney, *Lewis on the Christian Life*, 265.

<sup>121</sup> Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 154.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.* 157.

a means in “wining Christ.” (Philippians 3:8) And in “winning Christ” the believer gets heaven too, an eternal reward.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### SIGNIFICANT HOPE: THE POWER OF *MERE CHRISTIANITY*

*“Every Christian is to become a little Christ. The whole purpose of becoming a Christian is simply nothing else.”*<sup>123</sup>

*“The main thing we learn from a serious attempt to practise the Christian virtues is that we fail.”*<sup>124</sup>

*“... it is Pride which has been the chief cause of misery in every nation and every family since the world began.”*<sup>125</sup>

If you were to list some of the greatest compilation of words in the history of the Christian church, that list would include Luther’s *Commentary on Galatians*, Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*, Jonathan Edward’s *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*, Wilberforce’s *Real Christianity*, and this writer would add C.S. Lewis’ *Mere Christianity*. In fact, a survey of church leaders by *Christianity Today* in 2000 ranked *Mere Christianity* as number one among a list of the “100 books that had a significant effect on Christians this century.”<sup>126</sup> Quite possibly the most influential book, other than the Bible, upon the Christian world would be *Mere Christianity*.<sup>127</sup> The remarkable aspect of all this praise and influence is the fact that this was never designed as a book. Lewis delivered these remarks as radio addresses during World War II. Understanding why and how these addresses came about will go a long way to understanding the impact of this book.

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<sup>123</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (NY: HarperCollins, 2001), 177.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid. 142.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid. 123.

<sup>126</sup> “Books of the Century: Leaders and Thinkers Weigh in on Classics That Have Shaped Contemporary Religious Thought,” *Christianity Today*, April 24, 200, 92-93.

<sup>127</sup> William Edgar and Scott Oliphant ed. *Christian Apologetics Past and Present Vol 2*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011) 481.

In C.S. Lewis' writing career, often one work would influence the writing of or publishing of another work. Just as a publisher upon reading *The Pilgrim's Regress* suggested a book on suffering, a BBC producer upon reading *The Problem of Pain* asked Lewis to do a series of radio addresses. The last war, the Great War, had been fought to be the war to end all wars. However, that was not the case. Great Britain now found itself in the middle of a great struggle between good and tyranny. Adolf Hitler and his Nazi part had taken control of Germany and had marched their way across Europe, with nothing separating them from Great Britain except the English Channel. The German Luftwaffe showered bombs on London between September 1940 and May 1941 seventy-one times, with over twenty thousand deaths and injuring tens of thousands more.<sup>128</sup> It was feared that Hitler had planned to invade the UK. It was in this scene of national suffering that Lewis received a momentous letter.

Lewis had increasingly been receiving invitations to speak for some time, but it was one letter that would change his life and impact the church worldwide. The Rev. Dr. James Welch was the Director of Religious Programming for the BBC in 1941. In February of that year, he sent a letter to C.S. Lewis. Rev. Welch had read *The Problem of Pain* and was deeply impressed. He had been looking for someone to give some talks concerning Christianity over the radio, to help calm a worried nation. Welch wrote to Lewis to first applaud *The Problem of Pain* and to ask if Lewis would consider doing the radio addresses. Lewis was intrigued and accepted the invitation.<sup>129</sup>

While the arrangements were being made with Welch's colleague Eric Fenn, Lewis was asked by the Royal Air Force to be a part of a visiting lectureship speaking at RAF stations. He would deliver his first address at No. 10 Operational Training Unit. For the radio addresses Lewis

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<sup>128</sup> George M. Marsden, *C.S. Lewis's Mere Christianity: A Biography* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 19.

<sup>129</sup> Green & Hooper, *C.S. Lewis: The Authorized and Revised Biography*, 240,241.

decided for those to be more apologetic than evangelistic, settling on four talks. These were to be titled: “Common Decency,” “Scientific Law and Moral Law,” “Materialism or Religion,” and “What Can We Do About It.” The title for all four talks together was to be “Right and Wrong: A Clue to the Meaning of the Universe.”<sup>130</sup> Lewis’ second series of five fifteen-minute talks were delivered in 1942 with the title “What Christians Believe.” Lewis would follow these two series up with two more series of radio addresses. These four total radio series were published under the titles of *Broadcast Talks*, *Christian Behavior*, and *Beyond Personality*.<sup>131</sup> Later these three books would be edited and repackaged in 1952 as *Mere Christianity*.

Lewis had believed his original talks for the RAF a failure. However, he was mistaken. The RAF would use Lewis to speak at RAF bases throughout the war.<sup>132</sup> The original radio series of addresses was a tremendous success as well. Lewis’ voice became, after Churchill’s, the most recognized voice at the time.<sup>133</sup> Notwithstanding, the addresses came with divided responses. From these addresses Lewis became somewhat of a Christian celebrity. However, they were not without controversy or opposition. In more liberal circles Lewis was seen as outdated. He even received criticism from no less than George Orwell.<sup>134</sup> Whether criticism or praise at the time, the book that resulted in has had a significant impact upon the world since its release.

But one question remains before we dive into the work itself. From where did Lewis get the idea for such a title and why did he use it? Lewis had been concerned for some time regarding the fact that too many within the church were more concerned with delving into the differences between Christians instead of those things which were in common or united the church. His own

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<sup>130</sup> McGrath, *C.S. Lewis-A Life: Eccentric Genius, Reluctant Prophet*, 207-209.

<sup>131</sup> Zaleski & Zaleski, *The Fellowship: The Literary Lives of the Inklings*, 302-308.

<sup>132</sup> Poe, *The Making of C.S. Lewis*, 242.

<sup>133</sup> Brown, *A Life Observed: A Spiritual Biography of C.S. Lewis*, 86.

<sup>134</sup> Marsden, *C.S. Lewis’s Mere Christianity: A Biography*, 58-84.

circle of friends, the Inklings, was made up of individuals of various denominational backgrounds and Lewis would not be drawn into discussions about divisions. It was around this time that Lewis came across the works of Puritan writer Richard Baxter. Baxter's *Church-history of the Government of Bishops* (1680) was the work in question that Lewis found to be most helpful in expressing a view of faith that he a characteristic of his own writings.<sup>135</sup> Baxter, like Lewis, did not fit neatly into religious boxes. As a Puritan Baxter was Reformed theologically. However, he did not fit solely there. Living through a turbulent period of time, rife with controversies and violence, including the English Civil War, believed that religious labels often distorted or damaged the Christian faith.<sup>136</sup> It was the same "Mere Christianity" that Baxter spoke of that Lewis there could be a core set of beliefs for all of Christianity. He wanted to set about declaring and defending a doctrinal treatise that the vast majority of Christians would agree upon. Lewis believed that his declaration and defense of what he meant by "Mere Christian" was not lowest-common-denominator or vague Christianity but powerful and positive.<sup>137</sup> There are echoes of what he has already written in *The Problem of Pain*, including Christ's substitutionary atonement from the evil of sin.<sup>138</sup> However, whereas *The Problem of Pain* was much more philosophical, *Mere Christianity* has a strong practical sense to it. He describes for us morality from a life that follows a God who suffered to pay for our evil choices. This morality can only be accomplished through the sacrifice of Christ.

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<sup>135</sup> Green and Hooper, *C.S. Lewis: The Authorized and Revised Biography*, 246.

<sup>136</sup> McGrath, *C.S. Lewis- A Life: Eccentric Genius, Reluctant Prophet*, 219.

<sup>137</sup> Marsden, *C.S. Lewis's Mere Christianity: A Biography*, 93,94.

<sup>138</sup> Poe, *The Making of C.S. Lewis: From Atheist to Apologist*, 273,274.

## Book 1: Right and Wrong as a Clue to the Meaning of the Universe

*“For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.”*  
Romans 1:20 (KJV)

*“For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness...”* Romans 2:14-15 (KJV)

In *The Problem of Pain* Lewis sets out an explanation for evil being humanity’s opportunity for choice, through the operation of free-will. Here in Book One of *Mere Christianity* Lewis presents a claim that there is a moral law that details how humans ought to behave. This Natural Law cannot be gotten rid of but can be broken.<sup>139</sup> Lewis identifies the Moral Law as the tune that is played in life and our instincts as the keys that play the tune.<sup>140</sup> Lewis, in fact, introduces the idea that it is that knowledge of right and wrong that distinguishes us as human beings.<sup>141</sup> But this knowledge of right and wrong also informs humanity of the fact that we do not act as we ought. These instincts or intuitions, according to Lewis, do not depend upon religious teachings but on a part of human awareness.<sup>142</sup> As Lewis presents this reasoning he argues however, that the material world does not provide a satisfying answer for our account of right and wrong. Humanity needs a religious base.<sup>143</sup> For Lewis’ apologetic that religious base is the creator of the universe, God, who put Moral Law into our minds. He therefore must be appalled at what He sees in us. And we in turn are frightened at His absolute goodness. God is both our comfort and our terror.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 8.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid. 10.

<sup>141</sup> Kort, *Reading C.S. Lewis: A Commentary*, 87,88.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid. 88.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid. 90.

<sup>144</sup> Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 28-31.

## Book 2: What Christians Believe

*“Thy hands have made and fashioned me: give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments. I know, O LORD, that thy judgements are right, and that thou in faithfulness hath afflicted me. Let I pray thee, thy merciful kindness be for my comfort, according to thy word unto thy servant.”* Psalm 119: 73,75,76 (KJV)

*“For Christ also once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God...”* I Peter 3:18 (KJV)

As Lewis began his second book compiled into *Mere Christianity*, he starts off quite interestingly. As he begins his apologetic, Lewis concedes that other religions may have some truth, but Christianity is all true.<sup>145</sup> He does this as he begins to describe as to why he came to Christian faith, starting with his original argument against Christianity, evil. To answer the problem of evil he suggests two possible answers, dualism, or the Christian view that evil is secondary to and dependent upon good. Humanity’s own awareness of good and evil suggests that there is a standard. The source of that standard being God. So good is defined as being in right relationship with God. Lewis proceeds to give the reader responses from God to humanity concerning evil. God first grants humanity a general capacity to understand right and wrong, the conscience. Second, God preserves in humanity the prospect of divine help against evil. Thirdly, Lewis describes how God revealed himself to a people, the Jews, to understand who He is as God. And lastly, Lewis recounts the atoning work of Christ as the sacrificial substitute for humanity in victory over evil.<sup>146</sup> Thus, Lewis gives a fuller, more detailed theodicy from the work of Christ as the perfect submission for perfect suffering.<sup>147</sup> His suffering provides the answer to our suffering, to gain an eternity free from suffering.

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid. 35.

<sup>146</sup> Kort, *Reading C.S. Lewis: A Commentary*, 92-94.

<sup>147</sup> Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 58.



## Book 3: Christian Behavior

*“If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.” James 1:26,27 (KJV)*

*“Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.” Psalm 119:11*

Lewis, who originally sits down at the microphone, now putting pen to paper looks out at a country in dire hurt. Not only hurting from the war and its uncertainties but also hurting morally. As he is contemplating the “national character” he insists that Christian service is the answer, spending more time on practicing the Christian life than to “Sin” and “Salvation” combined.<sup>148</sup> For Lewis this character or service is morality, a notion that is like a set of instructions for optimal performance.<sup>149</sup> As Lewis begins his apologetic concerning morality, he groups morality into three departments: relationships between individuals, what is going on inside the individual, and the individual's relationship to a creator.<sup>150</sup> With regard to the development of these three, Lewis contrasts virtue with vice proclaiming that pride is the chief vice and cause of all misery for all humanity.<sup>151</sup> Quite telling is the reality that our attempts at virtue end in failure, which introduces the necessity of faith. This faith in Christ will be our salvation from despairing of our moral failings. Lewis here returns to the struggle of understanding the Sovereignty of God and human responsibility. The Christian virtues, while taxing, will lead the believer into a deeper relationship with God.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid. 94,95.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid. 95.

<sup>150</sup> Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 75.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid. 123.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid. 142-149.

## Book Four: Beyond Personality

*“Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.”* Matthew 22:37 (KJV)

*“Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.”* Ephesians 5:1,2 (KJV)

After having delivered a theory of morality upon the terms of loving one’s neighbor, Lewis takes a turn now to theological virtues, or faith in God. Lewis’ own faith in God would be shaken later with the death of his wife. However, that faith would stand because of the foundation that is described here in *Mere Christianity*. With book four Lewis deals with the character of God and humanity’s relationship with Him.<sup>153</sup> Lewis understood the dangers of wading into theological waters, of turning away listeners originally and readers now. But Lewis was willing to take the chance understanding that “theology was practical.”<sup>154</sup> To begin his theological look at who is God, Lewis declares that we must first understand the difference between the creation of God and God Himself.<sup>155</sup> Lewis does this to begin his introduction of the understanding of the Trinity, of one God, three persons. In understanding who God is, humanity understands then who we are and our relationship to God. For Lewis, this relationship is one of impartation from God to the believer. What is imparted is God Himself, His own life. Lewis makes the distinction between imputed and imparted, believing that the relationship is given to the believer, instead of just being declared.<sup>156</sup> This then becomes an intimate relationship, one in which the believer is to become a “little Christ.”

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<sup>153</sup> Kort, *Reading C.S. Lewis: A Commentary*, 103.

<sup>154</sup> Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 153-155.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid. 157-159.

<sup>156</sup> Kort, *Reading C.S. Lewis: A Commentary*, 105.

It is the believer's sole purpose.<sup>157</sup> Thus, the believer moves from moral living to Christlikeness. It is that relationship with God that would be tested but would provide Lewis with the hope that he would need for the next chapter of his life.

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<sup>157</sup> Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 177.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SORROW AND QUESTIONS:

#### THE PETITION OF *A GRIEF OBSERVED*

*“No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear.”<sup>158</sup>*

*“My idea of God is not a divine idea. It has to be shattered time after time. He shatters it Himself.”<sup>159</sup>*

*“I need Christ, not something that resembles Him.”<sup>160</sup>*

Probably no other aspect of Lewis' life is more complicated and confusing than his relationship with women, more precisely his relationship with his wife Joy Davidman. On April 23, 1956, in a civil ceremony with no fanfare and with only two witnesses, C.S. Lewis married Helen Joy Davidman Gresham, an American divorcee sixteen years younger than Lewis. To Lewis this was a marriage of convenience, allowing Joy and her two sons to remain in Great Britain after her visa expired and would not be renewed. After the ceremony Lewis hopped aboard a train to Cambridge to return to his normal activities. None of his closest friends knew anything about what he had just done. In fact, most believed he would remain a bachelor.<sup>161</sup> However, what would happen over the next several years between these two individuals would be one of the most interesting love stories and the resulting book after Joy's death would be, quite possibly, Lewis' most profound work.

Born to Jewish parents in Manhattan's Lower East Side on April 1915, Helen Joy Davidman never quite fit in to her surroundings. Joy's parents, Joe and Jen, had experienced the

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<sup>158</sup> C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (NY: HarperCollins, paperback 1994), 3.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid. 66.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid. 65.

<sup>161</sup> McGrath, *C.S. Lewis-A Life: Eccentric Genius, Reluctant Prophet*, 320,321.

stigma of being Jews in New York. However, Joy was an exceptional child.<sup>162</sup> Joe and Jen were educators themselves and recognized their daughter's intellect. They believed that a child's mental age was more important than chronological age in grade placement. They enrolled Joy at nine years old into P.S. 45, a junior high school run by Angelo Patri who was recognized as the foremost authority on children in America.<sup>163</sup> Joy Davidman's intellect shown through by graduating from high school at the age of fourteen. She then turned around and graduated from Hunter College at nineteen with her BA in English. She would then complete her MA in English from Columbia University at twenty.<sup>164</sup> She began writing as a teenager and by the time she was in college at Hunter, she was the associate editor of the college's literary magazine, the *Echo*.<sup>165</sup> After graduation, Joy continued her writing earning herself the Yale Younger Poets Series Award for one of her poems. She then was invited to Hollywood to do some screenwriting, but after writing four scripts that were all declined, she returned to New York.<sup>166</sup>

Joy would continue her writing and, disillusioned by the world she found herself in, she joined the Communist party. There she would meet fellow writer Bill Gresham. Even though the marriage produced two sons, it was extremely turbulent. During these turbulent days, Joy began to search and try to discover something more. Her "Damascus Road" experience brought her to faith in God. This would be the impetus for her leaving the Communist party. The changes would also end her marriage to Bill. But it was during her search that she found the works of a British

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<sup>162</sup> Abigail Santamaria, *Joy: Poet, Seeker, and the Woman Who Captivated C.S. Lewis* (NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2015), 9, 10.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.* 13.

<sup>164</sup> Don W. King, *Yet One More Spring: A Critical Study of Joy Davidman* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 1.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.* 3.

<sup>166</sup> McGrath, *C.S. Lewis-A Life: Eccentric Genius, Reluctant Prophet*, 322.

writer by the name of C.S. Lewis. His writings and their later correspondence would eventually change her life forever.

Lewis' biographer Chad Walsh had suggested to Joy for her to write to Lewis. C.S. Lewis would receive his first letter from Joy Davidman in January 1950. Jack would write her back. This would begin their correspondence, culminating with Joy travelling to England in 1952 to meet Jack.<sup>167</sup> Joy arrived in London August 1952 quickly making friends including Michal Williams, the widow of Inkling Charles Williams. Joy along with friend Phyl would meet Jack and George Sayers for lunch in Oxford in September 1952. Joy would make a lasting impression upon Jack. They saw much of each other over her stay in Oxford. While Joy was in England, she received a letter from Bill stating their marriage was over. He had been carrying on an affair with her cousin Renee. After her initial pain and anger, she continued her attempt to win Jack over. But by January when she was scheduled to leave, she felt spurned.<sup>168</sup>

When Joy returned home to say that things were tense would be an understatement. Ironically, Joy and Renee, wife and mistress, were pushing Bill for action in officially ending the marriage. Joy was resolute in taking the boys back to England with her and staying there. Bill relented for her to go. So, in November 1953 Joy returned to England with her two sons to begin a new life. Bill would finally file for divorce and their marriage was over. Now it was time for Joy to really start again, maybe with Jack! But one thing would come up that would challenge Joy's hope of a home in England with Jack and the boys. The British Home Office decided not to renew Joy's ability to stay in England. What was she to do?<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Brown, *A Life Observed: A Spiritual Biography of C.S. Lewis*, 201,202.

<sup>168</sup> Santamaria, *Joy: Poet, Seeker, and the Woman Who Captivated C.S. Lewis*, 225-248.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.* 249-295.

No one knows exactly when Jack and Joy's relationship began to change or when Jack began to have feelings for Joy. Jack decided to marry Joy in a civil ceremony to allow her and the boys to stay in England. However, just as Joy was set to begin her new life with Jack, she took a fall which precipitated a trip to hospital. There, she was told she had cancer, cancer everywhere. The prognosis was not good. Jack would write to Dorothy L. Sayers after Joy had come home from the hospital that his feelings most certainly had changed. Those feelings moved Jack to ask Rev. Peter Bide to first perform the "laying on of hands" for Joy's healing and then asked if he would perform a proper religious wedding service for Jack and Joy in the hospital.<sup>170</sup>

As if on cue, Joy's cancer went into remission. As celebration of the good news, Jack took Joy on a honeymoon to Ireland. There she met some of Jack's family and old friends. Even after returning to the Kilns, it seemed as if this was the happiest time of Lewis' life. He had his friends, the Inklings, a new Chair at Cambridge, and Joy. He even began writing again. He wrote *Reflections on the Psalms* (1958) and *The Four Loves* (1960), both reflecting Joy's influence. They even planned a trip to Greece with Roger Lancelyn Green and his wife. However, the news came: the cancer was back. The trip went ahead. It was the last trip for Jack and Joy.<sup>171</sup>

As she was dying, Joy told the chaplain, "I am at peace with God."<sup>172</sup> However, Lewis was not at peace. He was devastated. He had lost a wife, a woman he had nurse through illness, and had come to deeply love, even to his amazement. He also lost a literary soulmate, one who was both encourager and inspiration. And it was his bereavement over her death that was the inspiration

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<sup>170</sup> Green and Hooper, *C.S. Lewis: The Authorised and Revised Biography*, 375-381.

<sup>171</sup> McGrath, *C.S. Lewis-A Life: Eccentric Genius, Reluctant Prophet*, 339,340.

<sup>172</sup> David Barratt, *C.S. Lewis and his World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 36.

for him to write down his thoughts. He held nothing back. He did not filter himself. He poured his grief out on the page.

The result of his literary grieving process is a book that disturbs some and encourages others, *A Grief Observed*. The book was first published in 1961 under the pseudonym N.W. Clerk. The N.W. was for Nat Whilk, the Anglo-Saxon for ‘I know not whom.’ Clerk in medieval usage meant ‘scholar’ It was not until 1964 that it was published under his own name.<sup>173</sup> *A Grief Observed* is unlike anything else that Lewis had written. It is raw, full of feeling, quite unlike his autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*, which Dorothy L. Sayers referred to as having “businesslike brevity.”<sup>174</sup> While earlier, Lewis would be hesitant to let the reader into his feelings, here he pours it all out for the reader to see and hear. We hear not only his grief, but his confusion and frustration as well. Lewis’ own mother had died of cancer, leaving two young sons, and now it seemed history was repeating itself with Joy and her two sons, David and Douglas. Whether it was the remembrance of his mother, the intense feeling for Joy, anger with God, or a combination of those or even other motives, Lewis gave the reader something rather intense and, dare I say, special. For with this one book, we see a window into not only C.S. Lewis himself, but also a map of sorrow.<sup>175</sup>

If *The Problem of Pain* was, as Charles Williams saw it, an echo of the words of Job’s “comforters,” then *A Grief Observed* is more in line with the words of Job himself. While *The Problem of Pain* treats evil and suffering dispassionately, *A Grief Observed* is all about private feelings and emotions concerning evil and suffering.<sup>176</sup> These feelings and emotions wrestle with

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<sup>173</sup> Green and Hooper, *C.S. Lewis: The Authorised and Revised Biography*, 258.

<sup>174</sup> Zaleski & Zaleski, *The Fellowship: The Literary Lives of the Inklings*, 451.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid. 469.

<sup>176</sup> McGrath, *C.S. Lewis-A Life: Eccentric Genius, Reluctant Prophet*, 343,344.



God concerning evil and suffering and come out the other end with faith intact. Just as Job had to trust God in the end, so does C.S. Lewis and so do we.

### The Voice of Grief

*Here the whole world ( stars, water, air,  
And field, and forest, as they were  
Reflected in a single mind)  
Like cast off clothes was left behind  
In ashes yet with hopes that she,  
Re-born from holy poverty,  
In Lenten lands, hereafter may  
Resume them on her Easter Day.<sup>177</sup>*

These are the words Jack would write for Joy, at her request for an Epitaph. The words would be engraved on a marble plaque near the spot where her ashes were scattered at the crematorium.<sup>178</sup> Be that as it may, it would be *A Grief Observed* that would be the voice of Lewis himself to express his grief, anger, doubt, frustration, and ultimately his faith upon the death of Joy. Quite possibly no other work, apart from the Book of Job, combines doubt and faith so alluringly. It is that doubt, that struggle, that unfiltered raw emotional expression of grief that for many is distressing and disturbing to read.<sup>179</sup> Lewis was famous for not being comfortable in expressing his emotions, and yet here they are in full view, without reservations. Gone are the cold, clinical answers for pain, here are the questions of why and where. Gone are the cock-sure answers

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<sup>177</sup> King ed. *The Collected Poems of C.S. Lewis: A Critical Edition*, 396,397.

<sup>178</sup> Green and Hooper, *C.S. Lewis: The Authorised and Revised Biography*, 399.

<sup>179</sup> McGrath, *C.S. Lewis-A Life: Eccentric Genius, Reluctant Prophet*, 341.

of the philosopher, replaced by the questions of the practitioner. This is unlike anything Lewis has written before, but possibly the most honest and the most autobiographical of all his works.

It is that honesty that many are confused by. Lewis, who up to this point had seemed so assured in all his writings, now appears to be struggling to understand and provide some sort of answers. The apologist with all the answers now comes across as being full of doubt. Some even proclaim that his honest doubts emerge to become a turning away from faith. However, this is a conclusion not based upon the merits of the book itself or really a knowledge of Lewis himself.<sup>180</sup> Rather, *A Grief Observed* is an honest assessment of his first argument concerning evil, an assessment of himself, and an assessment of his relationship with the God who he has said he believes in. Lewis himself stated “You never know how much you really believe anything until its truth or falsehood becomes a matter of life or death to you.”<sup>181</sup> And it was to the depths of despair that Lewis would go to discover whether his faith was real or not. A despair that he was not afraid to vocalize in statements like: “Meanwhile, where is God?” and “Not that I am (I think) in much danger of ceasing to believe in God. The real danger is of coming to believe such dreadful things about Him.”<sup>182</sup> These are not unprecedented experiences for C.S. Lewis. It was he who cried: “Cancer, and cancer, and cancer. My mother, my father, my wife. I wonder who is next in the queue.”<sup>183</sup> Now the cumulative experiences reveal that the answers given in *The Problem of Pain* were inadequate.<sup>184</sup> And it is here in this most vulnerable of personal writings that C.S. Lewis would voice his doubts, his struggles, providing for the reader a window into his soul and into a deeper understanding of the truth that doubts are not disbelieving and struggling is not sin. Just as

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid. 345.

<sup>181</sup> Lewis, *A Grief Observed*, 22.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid. 5,6.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid. 12.

<sup>184</sup> MacSwain and Ward ed. *The Cambridge Companion to C.S. Lewis*, 215.

Job and King David, C.S. Lewis understood that God is not afraid of our doubts or questions. It is those doubts that make us cling even harder to God, such as Lewis did.

### The Victory over Grief

And it was these doubts and questions made Lewis realize that there are no easy answers but THE answer, Jesus.<sup>185</sup> And it is that answer that Lewis personified in his own bereavement. Through his bereavement Lewis would re-present the Christ story.<sup>186</sup> Lewis had claimed in his previous apologetic works that it was the suffering of Christ on the cross that was the ultimate victory over the suffering of this world. And now Lewis believes he can share in Christ's cross and correspondingly in the resurrection. This is a repetitive theme that Lewis has used since his conversion, a going down to go up.<sup>187</sup>

Chapters 1 and 2 were cries from the depths of misery and bereavement. Chapter 3 is where Lewis begins the turn of understanding. The consideration of his understanding now turns to God. Where Lewis has been bowing under the pressure of this bereavement, now he understands that God has vicariously done what we could not, that God bears our burdens, that we are not alone in our hurts, our struggles.<sup>188</sup> Lewis now understands that this suffering has not been testing God. It has been, however, a testing of C.S. Lewis. Lewis has explored all the possible options in his despair. He has struggled to understand amid his suffering why God would allow Joy to die, especially in such a fashion. Lewis would wonder about several things: Is there no God? If He is

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<sup>185</sup> Lewis, *A Grief Observed*, 65.

<sup>186</sup> MacSwain and Ward ed. *The Cambridge Companion to C.S. Lewis*, 214.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid. 216.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid. 215.

there, He must be sadistic, maybe faith is nothing but a dream. Finally, Lewis realizes the shifting has not been for God, but for the believer, for Lewis himself.<sup>189</sup>

Lewis is beginning to realize that though his love for his wife was great, and he wished he could have taken her pain away by bearing it himself, that love still had its limits. It is limited by our own humanity, our own fallen state. He also realizes that by the fact that God could and did bear our suffering. This very fact allows the believer to bear the risk of faith, certain that its result is secure. This great book is a record of Lewis' faith being tested and maturing, not a loss of or recovery of.<sup>190</sup> Lewis understood, like all great Christian thinkers and writers, that the "dark night of the soul" comes to all believers, and our faith shows its worth when the stakes are high. But in the end, it is that Christian faith that is the ultimate answer to the human dilemma of evil, pain, and suffering. Furthermore, he grasps now the understanding that even if the Christian faith were not true (which thankfully he understands even more now its truth) that this world and all its worldviews holds nothing else of value and no ground to stand upon.<sup>191</sup>

For Lewis, death had always been an ending. His mother's death brought, in many ways, the end of his childhood and innocence. The death he saw on the frontlines of a war brought into focus an attitude of enjoy life, because tomorrow it ends. His father's death brought a finality to some of his disappointments with life. And now his love, Joy, has died. However, her death and his crisis of faith brought about a new understanding. His faith, now secure on the fact that death is not final, understands that death is instead a gateway to much greater, more intense experiences with God than what we find here. The victory of his faith over grief understands now that death is

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<sup>189</sup> McGrath, *C.S. Lewis-A Life: Eccentric Genius, Reluctant Prophet*, 345,346.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.* 347.

<sup>191</sup> Cunningham, *C.S. Lewis: Defender of the Faith*, 199.

the end of endings and the promise of so much more with Christ. Grief can be endured because we do not do it alone and there is promise of it all ending.<sup>192</sup>

### The Value of Grief

I have often said as a pastor that those who declare the Bible to be boring or one dimensional have never read the Bible. One thing is clear from scripture, and that is that God is not afraid of our questions or doubts. He included those in the Bible for a reason. One book in the Bible that holds a key to our understanding God and our relationship with Him is the book of Job. Job begins to question and even doubt God's understanding of his situation. Job cries out for answers. In this book God does not give the answers Job requests, but in steads challenges Job.

There are many parallels between the story of Job and Lewis' *A Grief Observed*. Just as Job had done many years prior, Lewis began to wonder if he had been wrong about God all along. Could God be a monster after all, he questioned. However, it was his working through all his thoughts and emotions and the truth that he still clung to that the sun finally came out and he finally approached a sense of peace and confidence in God.<sup>193</sup> This book demonstrates that it is ultimately a complete trust in the sufficiency of Jesus Christ on a daily basis that holds the key to dealing with evil and all of its ramifications. It also demonstrates that all of us have our questions and doubts, but it is when we truly turn them over to Christ that we have our answers.

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<sup>192</sup> Rowan Williams, *The Lion's World* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2012), 130,131.

<sup>193</sup> Harry Lee Poe, *The Completion of C.S. Lewis* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022) 300,301.

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE SUMMARY OF THEODICY

*“The world is a dance in which good, descending from God, is disturbed by evil arising from the creatures, and the resulting conflict is resolved by God’s own assumption of the suffering which evil produces.”<sup>194</sup>*

*“Grief is not, as I thought, a state but a process: like a walk in a winding valley which gives you a new landscape every few miles.”<sup>195</sup>*

*“...the Christian religion is, in the long run, a thing of unspeakable comfort. But it does not begin in comfort, it begins in the dismay I have been describing, and it is no use at all trying to go on to that comfort without first going through that dismay.”<sup>196</sup>*

How does an academic paper take a lifetime of experiences and a lifetime of writings and boil them down to a summary? On the surface this is not an easy task. However, it is a task that this writer has been pursuing this entire paper and a task that the writer has had a lifetime of application. As I have stated earlier, I am a pastor, presently a bi-vocational pastor. I prepare and preach three sermons a week and work a secular job, as well as for the last two years working on my Master’s degree. If there has been one virtue that has been gifted to me and honed over a lifetime of preaching, it is the ability to look at and take the complex of problems, concepts and boil them down to their bare essence to make them understandable to the flock. A preacher friend who passed away much too soon, Rev. Randy Kilby, used to call it putting the cookies on the bottom shelf. What has been a difficult process for me in going back to school, is the understanding

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<sup>194</sup> Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 80.

<sup>195</sup> W.H. Lewis and Walter Hooper, *Letters of C.S. Lewis* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2017), 639.

<sup>196</sup> Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 32.

that for academic papers it appears to be the opposite process. What I have found so reassuring in this research is that Lewis had the same ability, of course at a much higher level than mine, of taking complex thoughts and getting to the point. His ability to reach the masses with the complex issues bewildered and angered many of his colleagues in academia. Even today many try to discount his works, at their own peril. His work on the problem of evil is well worth examining.

But the question arose as to where to begin and end with his work on the subject. Two of the three that I chose for this paper, *The Problem of Pain* and *A Grief Observed*, are well documented concerning the question of evil. *Mere Christianity* is often examined by itself as a work to be examined. These works are not exhaustive in his appraisal of the problem of evil. Lewis would tackle this issue in sermon, fiction, and other forms of literature. Lewis had been moved toward faith in Christ through literature and it was fitting that he would use literature in his expression of and defense of his faith.<sup>197</sup> But in taking these three over different time periods and through different circumstances, this paper wanted to show that Lewis employed various methods and responded to different challenges in an aspect of growth and maturity upon the subject. As well as showing both strengths and deficiencies in the approach of modern apologetics.

C.S. Lewis would believe and argue that the Christian faith provides a narrative that would make sense of all things. Life only finds its fulfillment in the narrative of the Christian faith, according to Lewis.<sup>198</sup> So for Lewis the only answer possible for the problem of evil is the Christian faith. How do we find meaning for life considering that evil exists? Lewis would assert that the human sense of right and wrong are clues to the meaning of the universe. And it is the Christian

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<sup>197</sup> Edgar and Oliphant, *Christian Apologetics: Past & Present Vol. 2*, 479.

<sup>198</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Surprised by Meaning: Science, Faith, and How We Make Sense of Things* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 98.

faith that provides the meaning of right and wrong.<sup>199</sup> So Lewis would begin his apologetic concerning evil with *The Problem of Pain*. It was his best work on the subject at the time. But there is one central theme that God and evil exist, but belief in God is the principal way of making sense of evil.<sup>200</sup> However, *The Problem of Pain* does not resolve the issue. This book does tend to treat the subject of evil very dispassionately, with an idea that it can be approached objectively. Lewis at the time was only interested in solving the intellectual problem of evil. Therefore, for many it was an evasion of evil's consequential suffering, and a reduction of evil to abstract ideas. For this reason, it is easy to see the crisis of faith in *A Grief Observed*. "Rational faith" seems to fall apart when hit with the personal realities of suffering.<sup>201</sup> But it would lay the groundwork that, when viewed in totality with the other works, would give a reason of hope in the face of evil.

In placing the three works of *The Problem of Pain*, *Mere Christianity*, and *A Grief Observed* together one can discern Lewis' treatment of the questions surrounding the issue of evil. He uses no one clear method. His method is himself, his wit, his imagination, and his literary acumen. His strength is that he was an atheist who became a Christian. His path to God took many twists and turns, which provided him with a knowledge and understanding of the problems confronting Christianity, namely the problem of evil.<sup>202</sup> For Lewis to find the joy that he had been searching for his whole life in all of those twists and turns, he knew he must tackle the issue of evil and suffering. He knew that for himself and his readers to hold fast to a Christian faith in an ever-increasing secular society, he must work out the crisis of suffering. Lewis would much prefer

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid. 23.

<sup>200</sup> Root, *C.S. Lewis and a Problem of Evil*, 61.

<sup>201</sup> McGrath, *C.S. Lewis-A Life: Eccentric Genius, Reluctant Prophet*, 344.

<sup>202</sup> Cunningham, *C.S. Lewis: Defender of the Faith*, 20-22.



to reach for and achieve delight than deal with suffering, however he understood the gravity of the issue and decided to weigh in with an answer to provide hope and security for the believer.<sup>203</sup>

And weigh in on the issue he did. Through the three works that this paper has examined, *The Problem of Pain*, *Mere Christianity*, and *A Grief Observed*, Lewis has given us a complete theodicy when these works are examined as a whole. Now this paper understands these are not the only works of Lewis that address the issue of evil. However, the other works echo the sounds from these three works. So, to summarize C.S Lewis' theodicy through the three books outlined would be as follows.

To begin with, Lewis set out the idea that any knowledge of evil begins with the Christian faith.<sup>204</sup> The only way humanity can even define evil is by a standard. A standard that has been supplied by the Creator Himself. And as Creator has evidenced His standard through the universe. This standard is set out in a Natural or Moral Law. This Law refers to what we ought to or not to do.<sup>205</sup>

Furthermore, Lewis sets out the idea of what this paper will call *the depravity of freedom*. Lewis refers to this as humanity's free-will. He proposes that God created beings with the capacity for free-will and it was in the abuse of that free-will that evil entered this world.<sup>206</sup> Here Lewis refers to the Christian doctrine of the Fall, where sin entered the world and with sin all the pain, sorrow, and evil was unleashed upon humanity. This Fall would also illustrate the fact that

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<sup>203</sup> Gregory S. Cootsona, *C.S. Lewis and the Crisis of a Christian* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 121.

<sup>204</sup> Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 14.

<sup>205</sup> Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 3-29.

<sup>206</sup> Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 63.

humanity cannot fulfill this Moral Law. Sin has so marred the human experience that it is impossible for humanity to live up to any morality.<sup>207</sup>

What humanity would need would be a substitute. This aspect of Lewis' theodicy is what this paper will call the sacrificial atonement. God in Christ would voluntarily suffer, redefining the subject of suffering through the cross.<sup>208</sup> Fellow Inkling Dorothy L. Sayers would emphasize the fact that since God created humanity with the possibility of evil, He was honest enough to experience it Himself.<sup>209</sup> Lewis would refer to this idea this way:

*“The perfect submission, the perfect suffering, the perfect death were not only easier to Jesus because He was God, but were possible only because He was God.”<sup>210</sup>*

The next aspect of Lewis' theodicy would involve what this paper refers to as the sanctifying purpose of suffering. Lewis believed that God would use pain and suffering as a means to an end. He will make us complete through the suffering we experience here on earth.<sup>211</sup> In fact, in his writings Lewis would employ five purposes for suffering including: 1) Suffering can cause us to hold tight to God, 2) Suffering is God's megaphone to rouse us, 3) Suffering can lead to humility, 4) Suffering shatters our idea of God, and 5) Suffering can lead us to hope.<sup>212</sup> Therefore, for Lewis, suffering was a tool that God would use to mold and shape the believer to be in a closer relationship with Him. This would hurt, but in the end would lead to completeness in Him. Like the potter with the clay on the wheel, God mold us for relationship with Him. (Jeremiah 18)

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<sup>207</sup> Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 142.

<sup>208</sup> Amy Orr-Ewing, *Where is God in all the Suffering?* (UK: the Good Book Company, 2020), 122.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.* 63.

<sup>210</sup> Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 58.

<sup>211</sup> Peterson, *C.S. Lewis and the Christian Worldview*, 117.

<sup>212</sup> Cootsona, *C.S. Lewis and the Crisis of a Christian*, 131-136.

Lastly, Lewis' theodicy would include what this paper calls the submissive trust in suffering. This is closely related to the last idea but goes another step further. Where the previous apologetic statement relates to the idea of a greater good served by suffering, this concerns the internal submission to and trusting in the fact that God is working all things for our good. (Romans 8:28) It would take the death of his wife to stretch Lewis' understanding of suffering, and his understanding of God through suffering.<sup>213</sup> Now when *A Grief Observed* was first published, many were confused by the opening sections despairing tone.<sup>214</sup> But it was that despair that caused him to turn to God for answers and yet none came. It was then that Lewis understood that, although as humanity we are always looking for answers that explain everything, some things have no answers here on earth. Lewis' previous writings often competed with clever unbelievers in a dash to see who would win, Christianity or a skeptical wit.<sup>215</sup> Here Lewis understood that wit, or a clever mind could not provide any answer, any hope, any satisfaction from the loss of his wife. This might be why so many are disturbed by this book, it strips away any façade, any pride of intellect or reason. This book causes us to realize that at the end of the day there is faith, a complete trust in and surrender to what God is doing in our lives. Suffering is not a test for God, but a test for us. It is here where the believer comes to the realization that what is needed is not clever answers but a relationship with the one who not only created us but loved us enough to send His Son and die for us. In the light of Him and His love, it makes the things of this world seem far less important. (Philippians 3:8) Lewis' search for JOY ended not in accolades or achievements, but in suffering, and trust in the One who allowed the suffering.

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<sup>213</sup> Root, *C.S. Lewis and a Problem of Evil: An Investigation of a Pervasive Theme*, 93,94.

<sup>214</sup> Markos, *Apologetics for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, 46.

<sup>215</sup> Chad Walsh, *The Literary Legacy of C.S. Lewis* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, reprint 2008), 209.

## CONCLUSION

*“We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.”*  
II Corinthians 10:5 (ESV)

Is it possible to answer the problem of evil and did C.S. Lewis accomplish it if it is possible? These are two questions this paper has tried to answer. Along the way of research, prayer, and deep personal reflection, this writer has come to several conclusions concerning theodicy and C.S. Lewis. It is still the assertion of this paper that Lewis’ theodicy grew and adapted to life and understanding through a deeper walk with God. It is also the assertion of this paper that what accounts as apologetics in general and theodicies specifically are lacking in both understanding and application. Let’s be clear, Faith without Reason is vacuous, and Reason without Faith is vanity. However, Faith is a journey and the answers we apply today may not be sufficient tomorrow.

Lewis began his theodicy from the philosophical direction of stating a rational argument for the presence of evil in this world. The fact that he had been teaching philosophy for a year prior to this book could have been the reasoning behind such an approach. While he relays sound theology in his explanation of evil, it is roundly accepted that the book falls flat in an understanding of or appreciation of the effect of suffering to the individual. In his attempt to be rational, it appears that he had pulled off an almost impossible task of removing all emotional dispositions.<sup>216</sup> This is where a reasoned approach to apologetics and a theodicy falls short. This was a good start for

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<sup>216</sup> Victor Reppert, *C.S. Lewis’s Dangerous Idea: In Defense of the Argument from Reason* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2003), 36.

Lewis, but it needed more. It needed to be fleshed out in a practical manner that would answer some questions in a difficult period, say a world war.

For the next attempt at answering the problem of evil, Lewis went at it from a different angle in developing a moral apologetic.<sup>217</sup> After establishing the fact that the only way we understand right from wrong is from the Christian faith, Lewis now turns to let us understand that while there is a moral law humanity always fails in its attempt at keeping it. In other words, even if we want to do good, evil is still present in our hearts keeping us from fulfilling the good. Without further information, this too can lead to hopelessness in an individual.

Along the way of these two approaches, Lewis also informs the reader that while suffering is to be avoided, God uses the suffering in His approaches with humanity as a “megaphone”. Again, without further explanation this could lead to one believing in an almost sadistic God who is enjoying the pain of others for His pleasure. This greater-good theodicy also falls short by itself.

It is in his final approach to this subject that for Lewis reveals the deficiencies in the other approaches by themselves. If he had leaned upon these approaches alone, Lewis most certainly would have fallen away. However, he came to the realization that what was needed was not more explanations but one answer, Jesus. True faith asks questions, for God is not afraid of them. But true faith also accepts the fact that the answers may never come, and we must trust that God is working it all out, even if we don't understand. In the book of Job, God never gives Job the answers he was looking for. Job must rely upon and surrender to the fact that God is God and Job wasn't and God was working in ways that Job did not know about. There is absolutely no indication that Job knew about what happened in the first chapter of Job. And yet, by the end of that book Job is

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<sup>217</sup> David Baggett and Marybeth Baggett, *The Morals of the Story: Good News about a Good God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP), 2018.

being told to trust God. C.S. Lewis was experiencing the same idea. Lewis could not fathom the reason for or any possible good outcomes from his wife's cancer and death. However, Lewis finally understood that what he needed was more Jesus. We have been called to give a reason for the hope or faith that is in us. (I Peter 3:15) We should have reasons for our hope, but at the end of the day there is faith. Faith is not stepping out into the complete unknown, but it is stepping out with complete assurance.

It is the assertion of this paper that taken separately these approaches by Lewis are incomplete. However, taken together offer the most reasoned, rational, respectful, redeeming answer to evil. In apologetics we should never be hamstrung to a single method or philosophy, we really should use an all approach. For the believer has been called to love God with all heart, soul, mind, and strength. (Mark 12:30) In loving God completely, we are called to love our fellow man as well. In loving God and fellow man, we should use every tool in the toolbox to explain and defend the faith. It took C.S. Lewis a lifetime of education and experience to offer a complete theodicy. By compiling these three books by Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, *Mere Christianity*, and *A Grief Observed*, we have expressed that complete theology.

Before we conclude, let me first address some concerns and questions that might be swirling around. Now I know that some might dismiss my conclusions and thesis as some form of fideism. If that is the case, first let me say thank you because that puts me in good company with Lewis himself, for many have labeled *A Grief Observed* as a fideist response to the problem of evil.<sup>218</sup> Second, fideism is a pejorative term used to label others. Fideism is seen as faith that rejects reason, or a faith that must be accepted without questions.<sup>219</sup> As I have stated before faith asks

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<sup>218</sup> Reppert, *C.S. Lewis's Dangerous Idea: In Defense of the Argument from Reason*, 30.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.* 29.

questions, but faith also accepts the answers given, whatever they may be. Reason informs our faith, but faith goes beyond what is seen, felt, or reasoned out. It was faith that caused Naaman to go and dip seven times in the Jordan, even if it didn't make sense. It was faith that caused a woman with an issue of blood to reach for the hem of Jesus' garment to be healed. Illustration after illustration could be used from both the Bible and personal experience

It is biblical, right, and reasoned what C.S. Lewis proposed as a solution to the problem of evil. Humanity's willful disobedience to God brought evil, pain, and suffering into this world. There is a Natural Moral Law that God has provided humanity to live by, but our sin, our will, proves that we can't keep it. God does work things together, the good, the bad, and the ugly, for His glory and our good. (Romans 8:28) Therefore, suffering can be and is used by God for the greater-good. God did see fit to personally, through the incarnation and the cross, to suffer with and for humanity. God has prepared both a punishment for and reward away from evil in hell and heaven. All of these are right and truly answer the problem of evil. However, what happens when evil specifically visits you or someone you love for no apparent reason?

As a pastor, I have stood by the bedside as family has had to "pull the plug" on a loved one. In that moment does the pastor tell them "The fall" is responsible for their loved one's death? I have stood at the graveside of a family burying their adult son from suicide by hanging, with the mother being the one finding the body. Does one tell them that there is a greater-good for their pain? No! What is needed at those moments is what Lewis cried out for, more Jesus! What is needed is the Divine Grace that only a suffering Savior can give. When we are truly suffering, we don't need something that resembles Jesus (our solutions to evil). What is needed is Jesus Himself!

It may have taken Lewis a lifetime and varying attempts at answering evil, but, in the end, Lewis understood the answer for evil is a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. And that

relationship would allow Lewis to understand that God permits evil, punishes evil with evil, uses evil to test and discipline those He loves, brings good out of evil, and ultimately will redeem His people from the presence and power of evil altogether.<sup>220</sup> Lewis' theodicy is ultimately reason that has a firm grounding in faith and faith that can give a reason for that faith. He began with cold reason and ended with a reasoned faith. It is the prayer of this writer that his progression has been illustrated by this paper, and that the modern apologist must remember both reason and faith are intertwined in our approach to the problem of evil.

Apologists need to remember that we are not involved in a match of wits. Academic acceptance or celebrity status is not the goal for the apologist. Human beings are wounded and damaged by sin and are blinded to how things really are. Arguments from an apologist cannot cure blindness. Blindness must be healed and only God can perform that miracle. The apologist then has a limited but important role.<sup>221</sup> The apologist is to show that our faith is reasoned and that it works. There is no greater test to show that faith works than evil and suffering. Even if that suffering is deemed undeserved or just punishment, faith in Christ is the only hope, the only answer to evil in this world. C.S. Lewis was tested by evil and came out the other end with a deeper relationship with Christ. His answer over evil was that relationship, a relationship that provides a solid theodicy, and a theodicy that can give comfort and hope to those facing evil and suffering.

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<sup>220</sup> J.I. Packer. *Concise Theology*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1993), 74.

<sup>221</sup> Alister E. McGrath. *Mere Apologetics*. (Grand Rapids, MI: 2012), 45.



**THE APOLOGIST'S EVENING PRAYER**

*From all my lame defeats and oh! Much more  
From all the victories that I seemed to score;  
From cleverness shot forth on my behalf  
At which, while angels weep, the audience laugh;  
From all my proofs of Thy divinity,  
Thou, who wouldst give no sign, deliver me*

*Thoughts are but coins. Let me not trust, instead  
Of Thee, their thin-worn image of Thy head.  
From all my thoughts, even from my thoughts of Thee,  
O thou fair Silence, fall, and set me free.  
Lord of the narrow gate and the needle's eye,  
Take from me all my trumpery lest I die.<sup>222</sup>*

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<sup>222</sup> C.S. Lewis. *The Collected Poems of C.S. Lewis: A Critical Edition*, ed. Don W. King 328,329.

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