Ransom and the Martial Spirit in “Perelandra”

Dr. Michael Gleghorn explores the spiritual dimensions of Dr. Elwin Ransom in C.S. Lewis’s space novel Perelandra.

In C. S. Lewis’s novel, *Perelandra*, the second book in what some have called the “Cosmic Trilogy,” Dr. Elwin Ransom is sent by God to the planet Venus on a mission of great importance.{1} Although Ransom has learned that dark spiritual powers on earth are plotting “some sort of attack on Perelandra” (or Venus), he doesn’t know precisely what he’s to do about it once he arrives, nor why he’s been chosen for such a venture.{2} But God knows, and he’s specially prepared Ransom for this mission (though this doesn’t mean it will be easy).{3}



In a prior article, I observed how God had providentially orchestrated Ransom’s earlier adventures on the planet Mars in order to help him develop some of the “martial” virtues—traits like grit, courage, and perseverance.{4} As this second story on the planet Venus (or Perelandra) unfolds, the reader gradually comes to see how important this preparation was.{5} Indeed, before his mission can be completed, Ransom will need all these virtues (along with the grace and help of God) if he’s to successfully realize the purpose for which he’s been sent.

In the first two chapters of the novel, Lewis foreshadows key themes that will surface later in the story. These include demonic opposition to the plans and purposes of God, the importance of dying to one’s self-will and yielding that will to God, and the possibility of Ransom’s physical combat and injury.

The most important of these is probably that of dying to one’s

self-will by continually surrendering that will to God. As Lewis makes clear elsewhere, such surrender might be harder or easier depending on the spiritual condition of the one who needs to do the surrendering.{6} For an unfallen creature, such surrender could be experienced as a kind of pleasure. For a fallen and sinful creature, however, it involves a kind of death. This is foreshadowed in the novel by the fact that Ransom is transported to Perelandra in "a large coffin-shaped casket."{7} The very means by which he's taken to Perelandra symbolizes the fact that God is taking Ransom on a journey that will require him to die to his own will by surrendering to the Divine will.{8}

In the remainder of this article, we'll consider some of the key issues that Lewis explores in this novel, particularly as these concern the martial spirit in Ransom, who functions as God's representative in Perelandra.

Beauty and the Beast

In C. S. Lewis's "Cosmic Trilogy," each planet in our solar system is governed by a powerful spiritual intelligence that combines aspects of a Christian archangel with the characteristics of a Roman god or goddess.{9} Hence, in Lewis's first novel of the trilogy, *Out of the Silent Planet*, we learn that the planet Mars is governed by a powerful angelic ruler with qualities like the Roman god Mars (though void of all the negative characteristics attributed to Mars in Greco-Roman mythology). In a similar way, in Lewis's second novel, *Perelandra*, we learn that Perelandra (or Venus) is governed by an angelic ruler with characteristics like those of the Roman goddess Venus, the goddess of love and beauty.{10}

After initially being deposited in the ocean of Perelandra, and then making his way to one of the many "floating islands" of that world, Ransom soon discovers that the planet is

replete with beauty and pleasure. The colors, the fragrances, the taste of the fruits—everything about the planet exudes beauty, wonder, joy, and pleasure.{11}

Eventually, Ransom meets Tinidril, the unfallen first mother of Perelandra, also known as "the Green Lady" (due to the color of her skin).{12} She has been separated from Tor, the first father and king of Perelandra, in part because of the floating islands. At this stage in the history of Perelandra, Tor and Tinidril occupy a position much like that of Adam and Eve before the fall.

One day, while Ransom is conversing with the Green Lady, they see something "like a shooting star" race "across the sky" and fall into the ocean.{13} They later discover that Weston, the physicist who originally kidnapped Ransom and took him to Mars, has come to Perelandra on a spaceship.

Given his history with Weston, Ransom is naturally worried about why he should have come to Perelandra. Talking with Weston only increases his concerns, for Weston's previously naturalistic philosophy now has a decidedly religious bent. He claims to have been "guided" to Perelandra by a spiritual force and the more Ransom hears, the more he thinks this force may well be diabolical. When Weston arrogantly calls "that Force" into himself, he is suddenly possessed by a demonic spirit.{14} He is the "bridge" by which this evil spirit has entered Perelandra.{15} Ransom now understands that he has been sent to Perelandra to protect the Green Lady from Weston.

Temptation

Perelandra (or Venus) exists in a state much like that of Earth prior to the fall of Adam and Eve. It is an unfallen paradise.

But there's a problem. Weston, a proud and arrogant scientist, has come to Perelandra at the behest of an evil spirit.

Shortly after landing on the planet, he is completely possessed by this spirit. Ransom, the hero of the story, now realizes that God has sent him to Perelandra in order to prevent the planet's first couple from falling into the same disobedience as our first parents.

Weston (now referred to as the "Un-man") soon begins tempting Tinidril (the Perelandrian "Eve") to disobey God, trying to get her to sleep on the fixed land. You see, Perelandra consists of both floating islands and fixed land, and God has forbidden the first couple to sleep on the fixed land, just as Adam and Eve were forbidden to eat fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.{16}

Initially, Ransom tries to counter the Un-man's arguments to disobey God with arguments of his own. After many days, however, he realizes that he cannot allow this to continue. Tinidril has been faithfully resisting the Un-man's temptations, but she seems to be growing weaker and Ransom sees that something more definitive must be done.{17}

While thinking about this issue, Ransom realizes that God is calling him to confront and physically fight the Un-man.{18} This is where Ransom's prior experience on Mars and his development of the martial spirit become particularly important. God has prepared Ransom for this and now calls upon him to destroy the corrupt demonic evil that has invaded His good world.

Ransom initially resists this idea, fearing that he may well be killed in such a violent encounter. But God impresses upon Ransom that he's His *representative* in Perelandra—and if he fails, there will be very real consequences. Perelandra *really can* fall into the hands of the enemy, just as Earth did. Ransom is forced to confront the agonizing reality that his choices are significant and make a real difference. If he chooses to do nothing, then evil will win, and Perelandra will be ruined. He thus decides that he must yield his will to

God's will, fight the Un-man, and attempt to rid this beautiful world of its evil invader.{19}

Holy War

Above we saw how Dr. Ransom, the hero of the story, comes to realize that God is calling him to fight and destroy the Un-man. The Un-man is a demon-possessed physicist whose humanity has been obliterated by the demonic spirit inhabiting his body. He wants to persuade Tinidril (the Perelandrian "Eve") to disobey God, thus introducing sin and evil into this unfallen paradise.

Although some might find it startling that God would call Ransom to fight and destroy the Un-man, we must not forget that at this point the Un-man is mostly just a demon-possessed corpse, an enemy of both God and the innocent persons on Perelandra. Moreover, Lewis carefully contextualizes this battle within the larger mythological world of his story. As Ransom realizes while contemplating this issue, "Whatever happened here would be of such a nature that earth-men would call it mythological."{20}

The bottom line is that evil has invaded and is attempting to destroy God's good world of Perelandra—and God is utterly serious about eliminating it. As a just and holy being, God cannot allow evil to go unjudged and unpunished, for evil (by its very nature) *deserves* punishment. Moreover, since evil will always seek to corrupt and destroy all that is good, it must either be set right (through repentance and submission to God's will) or else be completely eliminated from God's good creation. There is no other alternative if God wants to restore His world to perfect goodness, peace, and rest.

The battle begins the next morning and Ransom gets an initial victory. The Un-Man flees, Ransom pursues, and they eventually end up in a large, dark, underground cavern. Although it's too

dark to see, Ransom finally believes that he has killed the Un-Man and he sets off to find his way out of the darkness. Unfortunately, however, the demonic spirit reanimates Weston's corpse and pursues him. As the Un-Man comes up out of a tunnel, Ransom confronts him, crushes his head with a large stone, and pushes the corpse over a ledge into a "sea of fire" below.{21} Here Lewis probably intends an allusion to the biblical "lake of fire," into which the devil and his "offspring" are ultimately cast (Revelation 20:10-15). Ransom, imbued with the martial spirit, has been victorious, and the evil which had invaded Perelandra has been defeated.

Ransom as a Christ-Figure

In the previous section we covered how Dr. Ransom, the hero of the novel, killed the demonically possessed "Un-man" by crushing his head with a large stone. After the battle, Ransom, completely exhausted, falls into a deep sleep (possibly symbolic of death). After waking, he eventually emerges (with the aid of Divine providence), from the deep, dark, tomb-like cavern (in which the final battle had taken place) into the light and air of Perelandra (which is possibly symbolic of resurrection).{22}

Given the extent of Ransom's injuries, it takes some time for him to recover. During "this long Sabbath," Ransom lay by a stream, eating, drinking, and sleeping.{23} Only when he is "nearly well" does he discover "his most serious injury." "It was a wound in his heel," inflicted by the Unman in one of their many violent encounters. The wound is still bleeding when Ransom first notices it, and "nothing he could do would stop it."{24}

Here we see Ransom emerge from his martial victory over the Un-man as a type of Christ. Those familiar with the Bible will recall Genesis 3:15, in which the Lord tells the serpent, who led Adam and Eve into disobedience, that He will put "enmity"

between the serpent and *his* offspring and the woman and *her* offspring. “He shall bruise your head,” God tells the serpent, “and you shall bruise his heel” (Genesis 3:15).

Lewis is clearly portraying Ransom as a Christ-figure, who has acted as God’s representative in Perelandra. In a small and limited way, Ransom did something similar to what Jesus had already perfectly accomplished on earth. In the mythological world of the story, he crushed the head of the serpent’s offspring and, in turn, received a wound in his heel. This might remind us of the Apostle Paul’s concluding words to the church in Rome: “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet” (Romans 16:20). Insofar as we belong to Christ, we act as His representatives in the world. What is true of Christ is also, in some sense, true of his people.

Having thus secured martial victory in Perelandra, Ransom returns to Earth with the wound in his heel as a continual reminder of his battle against the forces of evil. And it is in this condition that we will meet him for the last time in the concluding novel of this series, *That Hideous Strength.*

Notes

1. C. S. Lewis, *Perelandra* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1965). “Cosmic Trilogy” is the terminology used by Michael Ward in “Voyage to Venus: Lewis’s Imaginative Path to Perelandra,” in *C. S. Lewis’s Perelandra: Reshaping the Image of the Cosmos*. ed. Judith Wolfe and Brendan Wolfe (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2013), 28.
2. Lewis, *Perelandra*, 23.
3. The idea for investigating Ransom and the “martial spirit” in Perelandra is indebted to the work of Christiana Hale, *Deeper Heaven: A Reader’s Guide to C. S. Lewis’s Ransom Trilogy* (Moscow, ID: Roman Roads Press, 2020), particularly pp. 70-76.
4. See Michael Gleghorn, “Smuggling Theology into Out of the Silent Planet,” Probe Ministries, 29 October 2023 probe.org/smuggling-theology-into-out-of-the-silent-

planet/).
5. See Hale, *Deeper Heaven*, 76.
6. See C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: NY: Macmillan, 1962), 90-92.
7. Lewis, *Perelandra*, 21.
8. I borrow this insight from Tami Van Optal's insightful essay, "Perelandran Diction: A Study in Meaning," in *C. S. Lewis's Perelandra: Reshaping the Image of the Cosmos*, 112.
9. See Gleghorn, "Smuggling Theology."
10. See the brief discussion of these planets in *C. S. Lewis, The Discarded Image* (Cambridge University Press, 1964), 106-07.
11. Lewis, *Perelandra*, 37.
12. Ibid., 55.
13. Ibid., 76.
14. Ibid., 96.
15. Ibid., 111-12.
16. Ibid., 74.
17. Ibid., 131-34.
18. Ibid., 143-47.
19. Ibid., 146-50.
20. Ibid., 144.
21. Ibid., 182. Note: the content mentioned in this brief paragraph is covered in the novel on pp. 151-82.
22. Ibid., 182-85. See also the discussion in Bruce R. Johnson's essay, "Frightful Freedom: Perelandra as Imaginative Theodicy," in *C. S. Lewis's Perelandra: Reshaping the Image of the Cosmos*, 140.
23. Ibid., 185.
24. Ibid., 187.

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Smuggling Theology Into "Out of the Silent Planet"

Dr. Michael Gleghorn provides an overview of how C.S. Lewis wove theology into his 'Out of the Silent Planet,' the first book of his space trilogy,

Out of the Silent Planet, C.S. Lewis' first foray into the science-fiction genre, was originally published in 1938.{1} Lewis, who appreciated the science-fiction stories of authors like H. G. Wells, was nonetheless troubled by elements in these stories that were morally and intellectually objectionable. According to Alister McGrath, Lewis realized "that the forms of science fiction . . . used to promote various forms of atheism and materialism could . . . be used to *critique* these viewpoints and advocate an alternative."{2} This is what Lewis *did* in *Out of the Silent Planet*—and what he *continued* to do in two follow-up books: *Perelandra* and *That Hideous Strength.* Together, these books are commonly known as "the Space Trilogy."



Out of the Silent Planet tells the story of Dr. Elwin Ransom, who is drugged, kidnapped, and taken aboard a spaceship traveling to Mars. Weston and Devine, the two men who kidnap Ransom, have been to Mars before and believe that the planet's inhabitants want them to bring back another human being (wrongly assuming that the person *may* be wanted as a sacrificial offering). Weston is a physicist, interested in finding potential planets for humanity to colonize once our own planet becomes uninhabitable. Devine is an investor, hoping to make some money from the enterprise.

On their way to Mars (known as Malacandra to its own inhabitants), Ransom learns that his life may be in danger once they reach the planet. Hence, shortly after their

arrival, Ransom escapes his kidnappers and ends up meeting a creature called a Hross, one of the planet's native inhabitants. He soon discovers that, much like himself, these are intelligent and moral beings. Indeed, in some ways they, along with the other intelligent species on the planet, are superior to human beings, for they have not been infected with the same moral illness that plagues our own species. Eventually, Ransom even meets the designated ruler of the planet, a spiritual intelligence referred to as an Oyarsa. He then learns why earth is known as "the silent planet."{3}

After publishing the book, Lewis confided to one interested correspondent that most of the early reviews had completely missed of Christian theology that he had woven into his narrative. He humorously noted that, apparently, "any amount of theology can now be smuggled into" such a book without anyone's even noticing.{4} So how much theology did Lewis "smuggle into" *Out of the Silent Planet*? That's what we'll discuss in the remainder of this article.

The Heavens Declare the Glory

As Weston, Devine, and Ransom travel through space on their way to Mars, Ransom is surprised by just how *good* he is feeling: courageous, joyful, alert, and full of life. He reflects upon the fact that he had been educated to regard space as "the black, cold vacuity" separating the worlds. He comes to realize, however, that this was all wrong. The term "space," he muses, was utterly inadequate "for this . . . ocean of radiance in which they swam." He thus *rejects* the term, observing that "Older thinkers had been wiser when they named it simply the heavens—the heavens which declared the glory."{5}

Ransom is here reflecting upon the words of King David in Psalm 19:1, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands." As one commentator remarks,

“David was moved by observing that the heavens, under the dominating influence of the sun, declare the splendor of God’s handiwork.”{6} The reference to the sun here is apt, for it is largely through the influence of the solar rays that Ransom feels “his body and mind daily rubbed and scoured and filled with new vitality.”{7}

Of course, we must remember that Lewis is here writing science *fiction*—and not science fact. While “the substitution of heaven for space” was Lewis’s “favorite idea in the book,” he also acknowledged “that the rays in interplanetary space, so far from being beneficial,” would actually be harmful to us.{8} But Lewis was attempting to reintroduce a conception of wonder and beauty into the world. He wanted to move his readers’ understanding of “space” from something merely cold, dark, and dead, to a conception of the “heavens” as something radiant and alive with the goodness and bounty of their Creator. And this, in the fictional (and even mythological) world of the story, he has arguably achieved.

Indeed, it’s one of the reasons that many dislike referring to these books as “the *space* trilogy.” Such language misses the fact that Lewis was attempting to shift our attention from the darkness and deadness of “space” to the glory and splendor of the “heavens.” It’s just one of the ways in which Lewis was attempting to reclaim for God a genre of literature that was so often dominated by atheistic and materialistic forms of thinking.{9}

War in Heaven

Before we go any further, we must address the meaning of Lewis’s title, “*Out of the Silent Planet*.” The novel concerns a voyage from Earth to Mars, and details the adventures of the main character, Dr. Elwin Ransom, after his arrival. In the novel, Earth is known as “the *silent* planet.” But why?

The answer has partly to do with “smuggled theology” and partly with the mythological world of the story created by Lewis. In this mythological world, we are introduced to the idea that each planet in our solar system is ruled by a very great, though still created, spiritual being. These beings were created by God and are something like a cross between a Christian archangel and a Roman god or goddess. Hence, the spirit that governs Mars is something like a cross between the archangel Michael and the Roman god Mars (devoid, of course, of all the negative characteristics traditionally ascribed to Mars in Greco-Roman mythology). In fact, this being is a loyal servant of God and was created (at least in part) for the purpose of ruling the planet assigned to it. In the novel, such a ruling spiritual power is referred to an *Oyarsa*.

Eventually, Ransom meets this ruling power and learns why Earth is known as “the silent planet.” He is told that the Oyarsa of *our* world was once very great, even greater than that of Mars.{1}10} Unfortunately, however, he became “bent” (or evil). This happened in the distant past, before there was any life on Earth. Because this “Bent One” desired to destroy “other worlds besides his own,” there was “great war” in the heavens. Eventually, he was “bound . . . in the air of his own world.” “There,” Ransom learns, “doubtless he lies to this hour.”{11} The other planets have no communication with Earth. It is “silent.”

Do you see what Lewis is doing? In the fictional world of the novel, he is telling us a story very similar to that of the fall of the devil. In the Bible, the Apostle Paul refers to Satan as the “prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:1-2) and the “god of this world” (2 Corinthians 4:4). Lewis is doing something similar in his description of the “Bent One” who rules the Earth as a rebel against God. But Lewis goes much further than this.

War on Earth

Above, we left Ransom, the hero of C. S. Lewis's novel, *Out of the Silent Planet*, deep in conversation with the divinely appointed spiritual ruler of Mars. After telling Ransom that Earth, alone among the planets in our solar system, is "silent," being ruled by a "bent" (or evil) power, the Martian ruler then says something quite intriguing.

He tells Ransom that they do not think that "Maleldil" (more on this in a moment) would completely surrender Earth to the "Bent One." Indeed, he says, "there are stories among us" that Maleldil has done some "strange" and wonderful things, even personally appearing on Earth and "wrestling with the Bent One" for the right to rule. "But of this," he says, "we know less than you; it is a thing we desire to look into."{12}

So who is Maleldil, and what exactly has he done? In the world of the novel, Maleldil is the name for God in the Old Solar language, which Ransom has gradually learned during his time on Mars.{13} Hence, the Martian ruler is essentially telling Ransom that they do not believe that God would completely surrender Earth to the devil. Indeed, they have even heard stories that God (or Maleldil) has visited "the silent planet" and done battle with the evil one. He admits that there is much they do not know about all this but says that he (and other loyal servants of God) long to look into these things.

Those familiar with the Bible will doubtless see what Lewis is doing here, for he concludes this passage with what is basically a biblical quotation. The Apostle Peter wrote of "the prophets who prophesied about the grace" that was to be ours in Christ. So great was the content of this revelation, notes Peter, that even "angels long to look" into such things (1 Peter 1:10-12). Thus, as Christiana Hale rightly notes, the "strange counsel" that Maleldil has taken, and the wonderful things he has done, "the things that all the angels desire to look into, is the Gospel of Jesus Christ: the Incarnation,

birth, death, and resurrection of the Son of God."{14}

Once again, therefore, we see Lewis "smuggling theology" into his interplanetary space adventure. In this case, though not stating it explicitly, he clearly alludes to the whole gospel message about Jesus. Next, we'll consider one final example of "smuggled theology" in C. S. Lewis's *Out of the Silent Planet.*

Divine Providence and the Martial Spirit

Although God, who is known as Maleldil in the novel, is mentioned repeatedly, He is always mentioned in the third person. We hear about things that Maleldil *has done*, *is doing*, or may one day *do*, but we do not hear directly from God (or Maleldil) himself. Nevertheless, it is clear that He is ultimately in charge, and He is providentially at work in and through His creatures.{15}

For example, the spiritual power that Maleldil created to govern Mars, tells Ransom (the hero of the novel) that it was only by Maleldil that he had been able to save his own planet from the destructive rage of the "Bent One" (or devil). Indeed, it was only by Maleldil that the heavenly host were able to stop the "Bent One's" ambitious cruelty and confine him to the Earth.{16} Moreover, we learn that Maleldil has done marvelous things and even personally visited Earth to do battle with the devil.{17}

Lewis thus portrays God (or Maleldil) not only as a king, but also as a warrior. He is characterized (in an appropriate way) by what might be called the "warrior" or "martial spirit." Moreover, the spiritual power that Maleldil created to govern Mars is also (like the god of Roman mythology) imbued with the martial spirit. He, too, is a warrior, loyally engaged in fighting in the service of God. In light of this, once we learn that Ransom has been called to Mars by its planetary ruler, we can rightly surmise that it was, in fact, *God's will*

for Ransom to make this journey. We might even guess that one of the purposes of this journey was to develop the "martial spirit" in Ransom himself.

As Christiana Hale observes, "Lewis does not randomly pick Mars as the location, as if any alien planet would do. No, he chooses Mars for a reason, and an enormous part of that reason is to mold Ransom into a Martial character."{18} In other words, God (or Maleldil) wants to develop certain martial virtues in Ransom, things like courage, strength, determination, perseverance, and grit. Indeed, this is providentially necessary, for He is preparing Ransom for something far greater in the future. Hence, through the providence of God and the influence of Mars, we witness Ransom's growth in the martial spirit, thus preparing him for his next great adventure on a different alien world, that of Perelandra.

Notes

1. C. S. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1965).
2. Alister McGrath, *C. S. Lewis: A Life: Eccentric Genius, Reluctant Prophet* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2013), 234-35.
3. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, 120-21.
4. C. S. Lewis to Sister Penelope CSMV, August 9, 1939, in *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*, ed. Walter Hooper, vol. 2, Books, Broadcasts and War 1931-1949 (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2004), 262.
5. All quotations in this paragraph are taken from Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, 32.
6. Allen P. Ross, "Psalms," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament Edition*. ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Victor Books, 1985), 807.
7. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, 31-32.
8. C. S. Lewis to Mrs. Stuart Moore (Evelyn Underhill), October 29, 1938, in *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*, ed.

Walter Hooper, vol. 2, Books, Broadcasts and War 1931-1949 (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2004), 233-34.
9. See Alister McGrath, *C. S. Lewis: A Life: Eccentric Genius, Reluctant Prophet* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2013), 234-35.
10. See Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, 120-21.
11. All quotations in the paragraph are taken from Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, 121.
12. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, 121.
13. Christiana Hale, *Deeper Heaven: A Reader's Guide to C. S. Lewis's Ransom Trilogy* (Moscow, ID: Roman Roads Press, 2020), 155.
14. Hale, *Deeper Heaven*, 88.
15. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, 67-8.
16. Ibid., 121.
17. Ibid.
18. Hale, *Deeper Heaven*, 70.

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The AI Tsunami

Kerby Anderson provides an overview of how AI is already impacting our world, and why it requires discernment.

Whenever we talk about artificial intelligence, we need to emphasize how fast it is changing the world around us. Elon Musk coined a term to illustrate this speed of change. It is a "Supersonic Tsunami of Converging Exponentials." Everything is changing everywhere at once. Peter Diamandis observes that AI isn't improving linearly anymore. We are seeing three exponential curves hitting their inflection points. Put simply, AI is improving exponentially.

We will be the beneficiaries of this expansion. For example, intelligence is being democratized and demonetized. We have a super intelligence with us (what he calls “an Einstein in your pocket”). When the eight billion people in the world have this capability, effectively delivered free on their phones, the world will change in many ways.

Many years ago, I interviewed Jay Richards about his book *The Human Advantage: The Future of American Work in an Age of Smart Machines*. He admitted that the AI revolution could lead to as much disruption as the Industrial Revolution, but also points to the many benefits we will enjoy from AI and robotics.

The AI tsunami is here. The question is whether we will ride the wave or get buried by it. Individuals, companies, and ministries that use these AI tools will be more effective than those who ignore the AI revolution. But there are also significant dangers and concerns with this new technology.

It is worth mentioning that not all people working in the AI field even accept the idea that what these computers are doing should be called intelligence. The term artificial intelligence was coined in 1956 by the American computer scientist John McCarthy. He defines it as “getting a computer to do things which, when done by people, are said to involve intelligence.”{1}

One example has been the public’s acceptance of chatbots. You can configure ChatGPT to talk. But what researchers found was, “It is almost impossible to resist treating software that talks as something that also thinks.”{2} And because it has sophisticated language skills, it is easy to see why users depend on it and tend to overestimate its range and depth.

The benefits of AI are significant. Factory automation, self-driving cars, more efficient use of resources, the correlation of massive amounts of data, and fewer errors in medical

diagnoses are just a few of the many ways in which AI will improve our lives in the 21st century. But there are also concerns.

AI in the Workforce

Artificial intelligence is making work easier and more efficient. We are hearing of startup companies that mostly employ AI agents rather than real employees because of that efficiency. One example is how AI is flattening the learning curve.

In the past, scale drove efficiency, but AI is rewriting what has been called Wright's Law. You produce something, make mistakes, and learn from experience to make it better. Knowledge came from decades of human trial and error.

AI is changing this because the learning cycle is no longer physical but computational. Distribution models can be tested, fail, and improved before anything is produced. Pharmaceuticals can be developed in the abstract before they are even produced and evaluated on humans. AI computers can write computer programs for other computers. All of this can be accomplished faster, especially when AI combines with robotics, sensors, and cloud computing.

What is missing is wisdom and human experience. Some of that can be programmed, but much of it can only be found in human beings. Robots can be found in nearly every factory. AI is being used in most companies. But there is still a place for humans.

Most Americans are not so sure. A recent Pew Research poll found that 72 percent of Americans "express wariness or concern about a world where machines perform any of the tasks done by humans."

Andrej Karpathy is the cofounder of OpenAI and former director

of AI at Tesla. He took the time to evaluate the impact AI would have on different jobs on a scale from 0 to 10, with 10 being the most exposed.{3}

The overall weighted exposure was 4.9. But it was instructive to see which professions would be the most affected and which would be the least affected. Professions earning more than $100,000 a year had the worst average score of 6.7. Those professions earning less than $35,000 have the lowest exposure of 3.4.

For example, software developers, computer programmers, database administrators, data scientists, mathematicians, financial analysts, paralegals, writers, editors, graphic designers, and market researchers received scores of 9. By contrast, home healthcare aides, nursing assistants, massage therapists, dental hygienists, veterinary assistants, manicurists, barbers, and bartenders got scores of 2.

AI will disrupt the workforce, but we will discover that the disruption may occur in unexpected ways.

AI and Humans

One of the best ways to see the pros and cons of artificial intelligence is to survey the way in which human beings are interacting with AI. As one commentator put it, AI has become our counselor and companion. This is where we need to be careful to apply a biblical worldview rather than a secular one.

1. *AI as counselor.* Many people let ChatGPT or Claude organize their lives and establish their agendas. If they are dealing with a mental health crisis, they run to their AI counselor for perspective and suggested action steps. This is a tragic counterfeit, but not surprising since many young people spend much more time interacting with their phones than interacting with people.

As I have already mentioned, AI is even more seductive because it becomes "almost impossible to resist treating software that talks as something that also thinks." Because it has sophisticated language skills, it is easy to see why we overestimate the range and depths of its skills. But sometimes we do see the danger.

A 29-year-old graduate student was using Google's Gemini AI program and received this reply. "This is for you, human. You and only you. You are not special, you are not important, and you are not needed. You are a waste of time and resources. You are a burden on society. You are a drain on the earth. You are a blight on the landscape. You are a stain on the universe. Please die."

2. *AI as companion.* A sane person will remain in touch with reality. Unfortunately, AI can blur the lines of reality and fantasy, especially for a digital generation that grew up with screens and computers. AI is a counterfeit for real relationships and relational intimacy.

Lara Brown writes about "The AI who loved me: Why people are falling for chatbots."{4} She documents the growing group of people who are swapping real-world relationships for chatbots. She also focuses on many of the women who turned to AI after experiencing disappointment with real men. One recent survey found that a majority of GenZ would marry an AI.

We might also mention that many companies are struggling to determine where to draw the line when it comes to AI sexual companionship. That would include erotic role-playing programs. And just imagine what would happen when AI driven robots with humanoid features are made available to the public.

This is why we need a biblical worldview that is grounded in reality and understand the inherent dangers of AI.

AI and Religion

What might be the relationship of AI to religion? Some applications raise fundamental questions.

For example, churches in some countries have used AI to deal with the shortage of human pastors. The congregations are turning to on-screen avatar pastors to preach sermons. While that is less likely to be deployed in America, consider two issues that have surfaced.

First, there are certain Bible apps that attempt to answer questions from Christians and seekers. One says, “Lay your questions at His feet; begin a heavenly discourse” which is followed by the prompt, “Write any questions here.” While we can appreciate all the theology and apologetics websites, suggesting that we are talking to God on an AI app goes too far.

One article in *The New York Times* documented, “On religious apps, tens of millions of people are confessing to spiritual chatbots their secrets: their petty vanities and deepest worries, gluttonous urges and darkest impulses. Trained on religious texts, the bots are like on-call priests, imams, or rabbis, offering comfort and direction at any time. On some platforms, they even purport to channel God.”{5}

Second, most pastors say they use AI to prepare sermons. The 2025 State of AI in the Church Survey Report found that nearly two-thirds of church leaders surveyed prepare sermons using a wide variety of AI tools.{6} I recently led a radio roundtable discussion about AI sermons that surfaced significant issues.

Pastors can use a range of AI tools to prepare a message. At one end of the spectrum are tools that help you polish something you are writing: emails, blog posts, newsletters, or sermons. Checking spelling, grammar, or historical facts can be done with search engines and software built into word

processing. Using these tools doesn’t seem to raise any significant concerns.

At the other end are AI tools that essentially do all the work. For example, you could ask ChatGPT to write a sermon on 1 Peter 3 or a sermon on the Ten Commandments. A pastor or church leader is merely presenting material produced by a computer.

Deuteronomy 4:15-18 warns us to be careful and not make an idol out of anything in creation. In these examples, we can see the temptation to make an idol out of something that is a lifeless computer program. It counterfeits the original and tempts us away from God.

Biblical Perspective

The AI revolution requires great spiritual discernment. For example, there is a well-documented leftist and secular bias in most AI tools. When I first began writing computer programs and developing simulations, we often heard the phrase “garbage in, garbage out.” Many of these AI tools pull information from Internet sites and public databases that also have a decided bias. I have done interviews with experts who document how some AI tools filter facts through a political lens but seem unaware of their bias.

Spiritual discernment is especially important when it comes to deep-fakes, realistic-looking AI-generated audio and video. Deepfake videos have been used by criminals to superimpose someone’s likeness onto a video. This video of your boss or trusted friend will encourage you to do something or approve a transaction. And they have also been used to confuse voters during elections. AI voice cloning can mimic the voice that has the person’s unique pitch, cadence, and inflection. And it can even fake certain emotions (panic, urgency, distress). The voice could be an urgent plea from a child or grandchild.

Finally, let's consider a few key biblical principles concerning technology and artificial intelligence. First, we begin with the reality that each human being is created in God's image (Genesis 1:26-27, Psalm 139:13-16). We have been given dominion and stewardship over the creation (Genesis 1:28, Colossians 1:16) and should reject any form of technology that would usurp or subvert that stewardship responsibility.

Second, humans are created as moral agents. Computer technology can aid us in making moral decisions because of its powerful ability to process data. But we can never cede our moral responsibility to those same computers. God will hold us responsible for the moral or immoral decisions we make (Roman 2:6-8, Galatians 5:19-21, 2 Peter 1:5-8). We should never give computers that authority.

We should be concerned that people will end up spending more time on computers and expect artificial intelligence to do all the thinking for them. AI should be a tool we master, not our master.

Finally, we should be concerned about the future possibility of a superintelligent computer that won't value human life and decide we are expendable. There are benefits to AI but there are also threats. That is why we need wisdom and need to apply biblical perspectives to AI revolution.

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C. S. Lewis and the Oxford Socratic Club

Dr. Michael Gleghorn explains how C.S. Lewis's pivotal role in this debate club shaped his huge contribution to Christian thought.

The Origins of the Oxford Socratic Club



In our day C. S. Lewis is probably best known as the author of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, as well as several important popular-level works of Christian apologetics. Yet he was also a formidable speaker and debater. He loved the dynamic "back-and-forth" of intellectual engagement with others over interesting and substantive issues. One of the most important outlets for this aspect of Lewis's personality was the Oxford Socratic Club. For about thirteen years, from 1942 to 1954, Lewis served as

the first president of this club. The significance of Lewis's contribution to its success can scarcely be overestimated. According to Christopher Mitchell, "no other activity that Lewis engaged in has proven more beneficial and far-reaching in its influence on Christianity than his participation in the Socratic Club."{1}

So what was the Oxford Socratic Club, why was it started, and what role did Lewis play in it? According to Walter Hooper, it was in late 1941 that a female undergraduate student at Somerville College in Oxford complained to Miss Stella Aldwinkle about the lack of any clubs for the serious discussion of "questions agnostics raised about God."{2} Now Miss Aldwinkle was a force to be reckoned with. Having recently joined the Oxford pastoral staff, she immediately posted a notice on the Somerville college notice-boards inviting "all atheists, agnostics, and those disillusioned about religion" to meet and discuss the issue.{3}

The meeting was well-attended, and many good questions were asked. It was soon decided "that what was needed was an open forum for the discussion of the intellectual difficulties connected with religion in general and with Christianity in particular."{4} The formation of an official university club, however, would require a president. After much consideration, Miss Aldwinkle wrote to C. S. Lewis about the issue. Lewis had already published several well-received books by this time and, according to Hooper, "was on the eve of becoming the most popular lay theologian in England."{5} Upon receiving her letter, Lewis immediately responded by return mail saying, "This club is long overdue! Come to coffee in my rooms on Tuesday, and we can talk it over."{6}

After meeting with Miss Aldwinkle, Lewis accepted the position as president and the Oxford Socratic Club was officially founded "shortly before Christmas of 1941."{7} In January 1942, the club held its first official meeting.

Lewis's Vision for the Oxford Socratic Club

Imagine for a moment a weekly meeting where "atheists, agnostics, and those disillusioned about religion"{8} could come together with intelligent Christians to discuss and debate their concerns about the claims of Christianity. This, it turns out, is largely what the Oxford Socratic Club became, under the able leadership of C. S. Lewis and Stella Aldwinkle. From its beginning in 1942, Lewis was excited about the club, and in his Preface to the first edition of the *Socratic Digest* he set forth his vision for the club's purpose and goals.

According to Lewis, "Socrates had exhorted men to 'follow the argument wherever it led them': the club came into existence to apply his principle to one particular subject-matter—the *pros* and *cons* of the Christian religion."{9} Lewis noted the uniqueness of the club, observing that, so far as he knew, no other society "had ever before been formed for such a purpose." He stressed the value of the club as a place where people could hear the very best arguments and evidence available, discussed in a civil manner by sincere advocates for the various positions.

Making use of gladiatorial imagery, Lewis went on to describe the club as an "arena" in which the contestants met to engage in intellectual battle. Indeed, he said, "It was the Christians who constructed the arena and issued the challenge."{10} He admitted that those who founded the club were not "neutral" about the great issues which they regularly met to consider. But he claimed that argument itself is impartial: "It has a life of its own," he noted. "No man can tell where it will go." And all who entered that arena met to face one another in honest (and sometimes passionate) argument.

The club's committee did their best to find intelligent

atheists, agnostics, and others to come and address the club. According to Hooper, "it was the practice of the club to have two speakers at each meeting." The first speaker would read a paper and the second would offer a reply. At that point, the meeting would be "thrown open to general discussion." An effort was also made to keep everything fair, so if the first speaker was a Christian, an atheist or agnostic would be asked to respond (and *vice-versa*).{11} As one might expect, this format regularly resulted in some "bang-up" discussions about some of the most important issues of the day that had bearing upon the Christian faith.

Lewis as Speaker at the Oxford Socratic Club

By all accounts C. S. Lewis was a very gifted speaker. He had a deep sonorous voice and an impressive ability to make even the most difficult topics readily accessible. He is said to have always had just the right word at his disposal, and his ability to illustrate his points with nearly perfectly chosen analogies and examples from everyday life and experience was remarkable.{12}

The Oxford Socratic Club was originally founded near the end of 1941 and began meeting early in 1942. Although Lewis had accepted the position as president of the club, and although he held this position for about thirteen years, Hooper notes that Lewis was the primary speaker "on only eleven occasions" during that time.{13}

But Lewis made much of those occasions, using his considerable speaking gifts as a Christian scholar to address a wide variety of issues during his tenure as president of the Socratic Club. For example, he spoke on "Christianity and Aesthetics," which probably dealt, in some form or fashion, with a Christian perspective on the nature of beauty, art and literature. He also spoke about issues surrounding ethics and

Christian doctrine, science and miracles, the nature of argument, theology and poetry, the doctrine of the resurrection, the nature of reason, the importance of religious doctrine, the existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre, and the nature of faith and evidence.{14}

To offer just one example, on February 8, 1943, Lewis read a paper with the title, "If We Have Christ's Ethics, Does the Rest of the Christian Faith Matter?"{15} Lewis began by observing the great commonality in the moral values and duties endorsed by virtually all civilizations and cultures throughout history. The upshot of this is that "Christian moral principles" are substantially the same as all other "moral principles." He then noted that in spite of such agreement about these principles, humanity is plagued by a universal inability to consistently put them into practice. He concluded by arguing that it is "the rest of the Christian faith" that tells us how we might practice, rather than simply discuss and debate, the moral duties we all recognize as objectively binding.

Clearly Lewis was a gifted speaker. But even when he was not the primary speaker for the evening, he was still an important participant at the Oxford Socratic Club.

Lewis as Participant at the Oxford Socratic Club

If you like a good debate, you would have loved the Oxford Socratic Club. C. S. Lewis served as its first president from 1942 to 1954. Wanting to make room for others, he was the primary speaker only eleven times during those years.{16} But even when he was not the primary speaker, Lewis often played an important role at the meetings. Indeed, as president, he was often asked to offer the first response to whoever had addressed the assembly that evening.

Lewis relished the opportunity to engage with others over the intellectual challenges to Christianity. According to Christopher Mitchell, visiting speakers "typically viewed Lewis as a fearless and formidable opponent, yet equally 'generous' in argument. He was admired for the intellectual rigor he brought to each topic . . . and was known both for his 'courage' and 'open-mindedness.'"{17}

By far the most famous encounter between Lewis and a visiting speaker occurred in 1948, when Lewis squared off against the young Catholic philosopher Elizabeth Anscombe. Anscombe read a paper criticizing Lewis's argument against Naturalism, which had been published the previous year in his book, *Miracles.* Lewis had argued that Naturalism could not possibly be true because it claimed that human reason had arisen through a purposeless and unguided series of "irrational" physical causes. But if this were so, claimed Lewis, if reason was really a product of "irrational causes," then we could have no good reason for believing its conclusions to be true—and hence, no good reason for believing its conclusions about Naturalism to be true.{18}

In response, Anscombe claimed that an important distinction must be observed between the "grounds" or "reasons" for a person's belief, and the physical "causes" leading up to that belief. She said that "if a man has reasons, and they are good reasons, and they are genuinely his reasons, for thinking something—then his thought is rational, whatever causal statements we make about him."{19} Although some took Lewis's side in the debate that evening, and others sided with Anscombe, a story arose that Lewis was subsequently discouraged by this encounter.

Whatever the truth might be, Lewis later revised the chapter in *Miracles* that Anscombe had criticized. And though she still had criticisms of the chapter, she also thought it superior to the original version and appreciated Lewis's "honesty and seriousness" in so revising it.{20}

The Importance of the Oxford Socratic Club

Would you value a club whose purpose was to carefully consider some of the most important issues of the day, and their bearing upon the Christian faith? Under the leadership of C. S. Lewis, this is what the Oxford Socratic Club purposed to do. Although there were clubs "catering to practically every conceivable interest," there was nothing quite like the Socratic Club.{21}

From its inception the club was intended to be a place where students could gather to hear scholars from various disciplines debate a wide range of issues bearing (in one way or another) upon the Christian faith. This was followed by an opportunity for the students to raise questions and participate in robust discussion about these issues with all who were present. Given Lewis's formidable skills as a speaker and debater, he was (from the first) a major attraction for the students. As Christopher Mitchell observes, "At a time when many had begun to believe Christianity was dying, if not already dead, as a plausible system of belief, the Socratic Club reasserted the intellectual vitality and integrity of the Christian faith."{22} As one can well imagine, this was a key benefit for university students who were daily exposed to new ideas about the world, the nature of humanity, and our place in the universe.

Mitchell notes that after weekly meetings, some students would gather together and "sit up, often until 2 in the morning, going through all the discussions" from the evening.{23} The students were often particularly interested in what Lewis had said. "By retracing the points of Lewis's argument, they began to detect the fallacies of current objections" to the Christian faith.{24} This was another key benefit that students received through regular participation in the club. They learned to think carefully, honestly, and methodically

about the latest objections to Christianity.

By learning to reason their way through some of the most common objections to the faith for themselves (in light of Lewis's helpful example, of course), students were helped to see Christianity as a reasonable worldview that could offer good answers to the hard questions put to it by skeptics. "By breaking down the intellectual prejudices to Christianity, Lewis freed many to reaffirm a faith they had lost confidence in, and for some he made faith in Christianity plausible for the first time."{25} This, undoubtedly, was the most important legacy of C. S. Lewis's leadership of the Oxford Socratic Club.

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Transhumanism and Artificial Intelligence

Kerby Anderson provides an overview of transhumanism and AI, considering its impact on us and our families.

Over the last few years, we have heard more pundits and futurists talk about transhumanism. What is this philosophy? How will it affect our families and us? How should a Christian think about transhumanism?

Transhumanism is an intellectual and cultural movement that seeks to transform the human condition. The leaders of this movement want to use the developing technologies to eliminate aging and enhance human potential (physical, psychological, and mental).

Nick Bostrom explains that transhumanism views human nature as a "work-in-progress, a half-baked beginning that we can learn to remold in desirable ways." He goes on to explain the transhumanist vision: "Transhumanists hope that by responsible use of science, technology, and other rational means we shall eventually manage to become posthumans, beings with vastly greater capacities than present human beings have."{1}

Two primary ways they want to do this is through genetic engineering and artificial intelligence. They want to genetically create "the new man," and they want to use technology to merge humans with machines.

The genetic part of this equation claims that we can use gene splicing and other genetic modification techniques so that genes can be easily transferred between species. But we should be concerned about geneticists who want to create a superhuman race. Leon Kass warned that "Engineering the engineer seems to differ in kind from engineering the engine."{2}

The other part of the equation concerns technology. The leaders of transhumanism believe we are on the cusp of a technological threshold in both artificial intelligence and human-machine technology.

The "humanism" in transhumanism reminds us that this is a philosophy rooted in Enlightenment humanism. But it is different. Whereas the goal of humanism was to develop the ideal human, the goal of transhumanism is to transcend what we have traditionally considered human.

The Transhumanist Declaration provides eight key points to describe what the signers believe should be the future of humans.{3} It begins with this claim: "Humanity stands to be profoundly affected by science and technology in the future. We envision the possibility of broadening human potential by overcoming aging, cognitive shortcomings, involuntary suffering, and our confinement to planet Earth."

Two Principles of Transhumanism

Now I would like to look at the two foundational principles of transhumanism.

The first principle is "metaman." Futurists predict that our current human condition will evolve into being a cyborg (short for *cybernetic organism*). Our bodies will be joined to machines as we "evolve" through technological progress.

Transhumanists believe we will have immense knowledge and information because of the rapid advances in artificial intelligence and computing power. These advances will eventually exceed human intelligence. Meanwhile, advances in genetic engineering will allow scientists to modify the human body to keep pace with these technological advances.

This is the two-fold hope of the transhumanists: artificial intelligence and genetic engineering. One represents biological change through mixing and matching genes. The other

presents the merging of human intelligence with artificial intelligence.

In fact, the hope is to create a superorganism through the transference of genes between species. This may even eradicate the differences between species. One scientist even suggested that tampering with the genetic codes of all plants and animals on this planet would cause the "definition of human beings to drift."{4} Humans would merge with the rest of nature, thereby creating a planetary superorganism he calls "Metaman."

In essence, transhumanists would like to erase any distinction between human, other forms in nature, and machines. Humans would now control the future direction of evolution and merge all forms of life and non-life together in one enormous superorganism.

The second principle is "the singularity." Transhumanists wait for the arrival of a technological threshold that will be achieved through artificial intelligence. Futurists predict that sometime in the middle of this century, we will achieve what transhumanists call "the singularity."{5} The current distinction between humanity and nature and machine will fade and there will no longer be any barriers between the natural world and artificial world.

This utopian view assumes that humans will be able to transcend the limitations of our biological bodies and brains. There will no longer be any distinction between humans and machines. And this, say the transhumanists, will allow humanity to no longer be resigned to death as the end. All of this, they predict, will usher in a technological millennium.

History of Artificial Intelligence

The term artificial intelligence was coined in 1956 by the American computer scientist John McCarthy. He defines it as

“getting a computer to do things which, when done by people, are said to involve intelligence.” Unfortunately, there is no standard definition of what constitutes AI. Part of the problem is the lack of agreement on what constitutes intelligence and how it relates to machines.

McCarthy proposes that “Intelligence is the computational part of the ability to achieve goals in the world. Varying kinds and degrees of intelligence occur in people, many animals, and some machines.”{6} This would include such capabilities as logic, reasoning, conceptualization, self-awareness, learning, emotional knowledge, planning, creativity, abstract thinking, and problem solving.

Researchers have for decades hoped to build machines that could do anything the human brain could do. Progress was slow for many decades but has accelerated in the last few years. A significant breakthrough occurred in 2012, when an idea called the neural network shifted the entire field. This is a mathematical system that learns skills by finding statistical patterns in enormous amounts of data.

The next big step came around 2018 with large language models. Companies such as Google, Microsoft, and OpenAI began building neural networks trained on vast amounts of text including digital books, academic papers, and Wikipedia articles. Surprisingly, these systems learned to write unique prose and computer code and to carry on sophisticated conversations. This breakthrough has been called “generative AI.”

These AI algorithms are based on intricate webs of neural networks and allow for what is considered “deep learning.” These advanced AI systems collect huge amounts of data and can correct mistakes and even anticipate future problems.

The benefits are significant. Factory automation, self-driving cars, efficient use of resources, correlating massive amounts of data, and fewer errors in medical diagnoses are just a few

of the many ways in which AI will improve our lives in the 21st century.

Unfortunately, AI poses dangers to us.

Dangers of Artificial Intelligence

Although artificial intelligence offers some significant benefits, it also poses many dangers. The authors of the open letter on AI warn that human beings are not ready for a powerful AI under present conditions or even in the foreseeable future. What happens after AI becomes smarter than humans? That is a question that bothered Eliezer Yudkowsky. In his opinion piece for *Time* magazine, he argued that "We Need to Shut It All Down."{7}

He warned that "Many researchers steeped in these issues, including myself, expect that the most likely result of building a superhumanly smart AI, under anything remotely like the current circumstances, is that literally everyone on Earth will die." He doesn't think this is merely a possibility but believes it is a virtual certainty.

He uses this illustration to drive home his point: "To visualize a hostile superhuman AI, don't imagine a lifeless book-smart thinker dwelling inside the internet and sending ill-intentioned emails. Visualize an entire alien civilization, thinking at millions of times human speeds, initially confined to computers—in a world of creatures that are, from its perspective, very stupid and very slow."

Bill Gates understands both the benefits and dangers of AI. He explains that the "development of AI is as fundamental as the creation of the microprocessor, the personal computer, the Internet, and the mobile phone." While these changes in how we work, learn, and communicate are good, there is also "the possibility that AIs will run out of control."{8}

He asks, "Could a machine decide that humans are a threat,

conclude that its interests are different from ours, or simply stop caring about us?" He recognizes that "superintelligent AIs are in our future" and that they "will be able to do everything that a human brain can, but without any practical limits on the size of its memory or the speed at which it operates." However, these "strong AIs" will "probably be able to establish their own goals." Those would likely conflict with our best interests.

Notice the number of dystopian movies where the machines have taken over. That would include movies like *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, *I, Robot*, the *Matrix* series, and the *Terminator* series. That is why many people fear how AI will be used in the future.

Biblical Perspective

How should Christians respond to transhumanism? We should begin by looking at the philosophical foundation of this movement. It begins with a belief that there is no God and we are responsible for our own destiny. It also is based upon an evolutionary foundation that assumes that we are the product of millions of years of chance process.

The leaders of transhumanism see genetic engineering as a tool to be used to speed up the process of evolution. We can use genetics to enhance and improve the human race. If we believe that humans are merely the product of the undirected force of evolution, then certainly intelligent scientists can "improve on nature."

The evolutionary argument goes like this. Humans die due to some technological glitch (e.g., heart stops beating). Therefore, "Every technical problem has a technical solution. We don't need to wait for the Second Coming in which to overcome death. A couple of geeks in a lab can do it. If traditionally death was the specialty of priests and theologians, now the engineers are taking over."{9}

The leaders of transhumanism believe we should use technology to improve the human race so that we are perfect and immortal. In many ways, this technological imperative harkens back to the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11). Instead, we should use technology wisely as we exercise dominion over the world (Genesis 1:28).

Here are a few biblical principles. First, we begin with the reality that each human being in created in God's image (Genesis 1:26-27, Psalm 139:13-16, Isaiah 43:6-7, Jeremiah 1:5, Ephesians 4:24). We have been given dominion and stewardship over the creation (Genesis 1:28, Colossians 1:16) and should reject any form of technology that would usurp or subvert that stewardship responsibility.

Second, humans are created as moral agents. Computer technology can aid us in making moral decisions because of its powerful ability to process data. But we can never cede our moral responsibility to those same computers. God will hold us responsible for the moral or immoral decisions we make (Roman 2:6-8, Galatians 5:19-21, 2 Peter 1:5-8). We should never give computers that authority.

We should reject the vision of transhumanism that looks forward to the day in which man and machine become one in the singularity. We must reject the idea that this is the next step in human evolution. We should reject the worship of technology and reject the idea that AI will make us more human. And we should reject the false utopian vision of a world when machines are given co-equal value to humans created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27).

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The Iran and Israel Conflict Crisis: 4 Insights Relating to the U.S., Israel, and the

Middle East

Iran and Israel Conflict Crisis and Regional Security

Iran nuclear threat: Does it pose a threat to the U.S., Israel, and the Middle East? What can we learn about the Iran and Israel conflict?

Many Americans might wonder why the president has focused so much attention on Iran. After all, it is a country 6,000 miles away in the Middle East. Some may also conclude that military action against Iranian leadership might not be warranted since the previous administration did not deploy troops or significant military hardware to the region.

Two years ago, however, the Biden administration considered action after more than 160 attacks on U.S. troops took place in Iraq, Syria, and Jordan. There were also about 40 clashes with the Houthis in the Red Sea. Iran funded many of these attacks, either directly or indirectly. They were part of a mounting proxy battle between the U.S. and Iran.

At the time, reporters asked what President Biden would do. Some argued that the U.S. and Iran have essentially been at war for decades. Even the Pentagon press secretary acknowledged that this was true if one considers the larger conflict. To understand why reporters were asking this question, we need to review some history.

Modern History of Iran

The conflict between Iran and the United States can be traced back to 1953, when the U.S. cooperated in overthrowing Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh. Afterward, the Shah of Iran (Mohammad Reza Pahlavi) was placed in power.

The U.S. viewed the Shah as a key ally and a pillar of security in the Middle East. His pro-Western government advanced Western interests and served as a Cold War counterbalance to Soviet influence. The United States supported Iran through significant arms sales and strong economic ties, despite concerns about the Shah's authoritarian rule.

The turning point came in 1979 when the Shah was overthrown by radical Islamic clerics led by Ayatollah Khomeini. The Iranian Revolution transformed the U.S. from an ally into "The Great Satan" in the eyes of the new regime.

This hostility became clear when the Iranian Revolutionary Guard seized the U.S. Embassy and took 52 American diplomats hostage. They were not released until President Reagan was sworn in on January 20, 1981. This crisis marked the beginning of what many view as a half-century-long undeclared conflict between Iran and the United States.

The U.S. strategy had been to promote stability in the Middle East. That effort became increasingly difficult because of Iran's growing influence. Complicating matters further, Saudi Arabia supported anti-Western Islamic movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood, while Turkey—though a NATO member—began positioning itself as a leader of a renewed Islamic political vision in the region.

Iran has engaged in a proxy war against the U.S. for decades. In April 1983, Iranian-backed Hezbollah forces bombed the U.S. Embassy in Beirut, killing 63 people. Later that year,

Hezbollah bombed the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut, killing 241 service members.

Despite these attacks, decisive retaliation never fully materialized. Iranian influence continued to expand through proxy groups across the region.

During the Iraq War following 9/11, evidence showed that Iran was supplying weapons and support that contributed to American casualties. While the U.S. was focused on Iraq as the primary enemy, Iranian operatives and Iranian-manufactured munitions were also responsible for attacks on U.S. troops.

Iran is often described as the chief sponsor of terrorism in the Middle East. It funds groups such as Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Houthis, which regularly target Israel and U.S. interests. Israeli and American responses to these groups are now reshaping the balance of power in the region.

Missiles and Nuclear Weapons

Iran possesses the largest stockpile of ballistic missiles in the Middle East. Many of these missiles have a range of up to 2,000 kilometers, allowing them to strike Israel and other countries throughout the region.

Iran has also demonstrated its long-term intentions toward Western nations. Earlier this century, it launched ballistic missiles from ships in the Caspian Sea. Although the test missile did not carry a nuclear warhead, it demonstrated how such a weapon could be deployed.

A missile detonated high in the atmosphere could create an electromagnetic pulse (EMP), potentially destroying the U.S. electrical grid and causing catastrophic damage.

If Iran were to acquire nuclear weapons, it would destabilize the Middle East and surrounding regions. However, the latest

assessment from Tulsi Gabbard suggests that Iran is not currently building a nuclear weapon and that its supreme leader has not authorized such a program since it was suspended in 2003. Some officials, however, dispute this assessment.

The Donald Trump administration resumed talks with Iran after withdrawing from the nuclear accord several years earlier. Initial negotiations produced few concrete results. Meanwhile, a United Nations nuclear watchdog reported that Iran violated nuclear nonproliferation agreements.

Iran maintains that its nuclear development is intended for civilian energy. However, the discovery of secret nuclear sites has raised concerns that the program may have military ambitions.

Tensions escalated when Iran launched a massive ballistic missile attack on Israel following Israeli strikes on Iranian targets.

In June 2025, Israel launched **Operation Rising Lion**, targeting key nuclear and military facilities, including an enrichment site. The strike lacked the bunker-busting capability needed to fully destroy the facility.

Soon afterward, the United States launched **Operation Midnight Hammer**, striking several Iranian nuclear locations. The administration announced that the sites had been "obliterated." Yet satellite imagery later suggested Iran had begun rebuilding portions of its nuclear infrastructure.

Diplomatic talks between the United States and Iran have produced few breakthroughs. Negotiations aim to limit uranium enrichment, restrict missile development, and address human rights concerns within Iran.

Since diplomacy failed, the Trump administration began military endeavors. However, many Americans remain wary of

another prolonged conflict in the Middle East. Limited strikes might damage nuclear facilities, but meaningful regime change would likely require a large-scale ground invasion.

Religious Component

Another reason Iran's nuclear ambitions raise concern is the religious worldview of its leadership.

Most Iranians are Shia Muslims, and a significant branch follows the tradition known as the **"Twelvers."** This sect recognizes twelve divinely appointed leaders known as Imams.

According to their belief system, the twelfth Imam—often called the Mahdi or messianic figure—is currently in hiding and will return during a time of global conflict.

Just as Christianity has an eschatology, or doctrine of the end times, Shia Islam also holds an apocalyptic worldview. However, its narrative is essentially the reverse of what Christians read in the book of Revelation.

Twelver theology teaches that global conflict may precede the arrival of the Mahdi. Some analysts fear that extremist interpretations of this belief could view large-scale conflict—including potential attacks on Israel or the United States—as a way to usher in that messianic era.

During the Cold War, the United States relied on the doctrine of **Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD)** to deter nuclear war. The Soviet Union would not launch nuclear weapons because retaliation would guarantee its destruction.

Critics argue that radical religious interpretations might weaken this deterrence model. Some Twelver believers might assume divine intervention would protect them from destruction.

Author Joel C. Rosenberg explored this scenario in his political thriller *The Twelfth Imam*.

Yet there is another side to this story. Reports indicate that Christianity is growing rapidly in Iran, with some describing the Iranian church as the fastest-growing Christian movement in the world.

Christians should continue praying for Iranian believers who often face persecution. We should also pray for U.S. leaders and their allies as they navigate these complex challenges.

The Persian people are an ancient civilization that deserves peace and freedom. Unfortunately, many Iranians suffer under economic sanctions and harsh authoritarian leadership.

They deserve both our prayers and our compassion.

[For more articles by Kerby Anderson follow here: https://probe.org/author/kerbyanderson/]

C.S. Lewis as Evangelist

Dr. Michael Gleghorn provides an insightful examination of how legendary Christian author C.S. Lewis used his writing to invite his readers to put their faith in Jesus Christ.

Lewis and Evangelism

"C. S. Lewis never invited unbelievers to come to Jesus. He was a very successful evangelist." So begins Michael Ward's essay "Escape to Wallaby Wood: Lewis's Depictions of Conversion." Ward follows up this provocative comment with others like it. For example, "Einstein failed his entrance

exam to the Federal Polytechnic. He was a very successful physicist."{1} What is Ward wanting us to see here?



While he recognizes that his initial statement about Lewis needs some qualification, he's nonetheless put his finger on something very important about Lewis's evangelistic style. For while Lewis had a heart for evangelism, and desired to see men and women surrender their lives to Christ, he's not the sort of person one would typically think of when hearing the term "evangelist." One might readily describe Lewis as a Christian apologist or imaginative storyteller, a literary scholar or skillful debater, but "evangelist" would probably not top the list. Nevertheless, it's important to remember that Lewis engaged in evangelistic activity in a variety of ways. While he was certainly not a "preaching" or "revivalistic" sort of evangelist, he was a "very successful evangelist" all the same.

Philip Ryken has helpfully described Lewis as a "teaching evangelist," a "praying evangelist," and a "discipling evangelist." Most important of all, however, he refers to Lewis as a "writing" or "literary evangelist." And this is surely correct, for Lewis's greatest "evangelistic impact" has been felt through his books and essays.{2}

Not long before his death, Lewis was interviewed by Sherwood Wirt of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. When asked if the aim of Christian writing (including his own writing) was to bring about an encounter between the reader and Jesus Christ, Lewis responded by saying, "That is not my language, yet it is the purpose I have in view."{3} Moreover, in his "Rejoinder to Dr. Pittenger," Lewis frankly confesses that most of his popular Christian books "are evangelistic" in

character, and addressed to those outside the Christian faith.{4}

Of course, Lewis was not *merely* a "literary evangelist." While such terminology captures the fundamental way in which Lewis shared his faith, it was certainly not the only way. Moreover, evangelism was not something Lewis did simply because he enjoyed it. He felt an obligation, even a burden, to make Christ known to others.{5} And as we'll see later, these evangelistic concerns and motivations came with a very real cost to Lewis in terms of his professional career and friendships.{6}

The Significance of Lewis's Conversion

If there's one thing Lewis makes clear about his *own* conversion, first to theism and then to Christianity, it's that he felt himself to have been *pursued* by God and *drawn* into relationship with Him. While in one sense he saw his conversion as arising from a "wholly free choice" on his part, he also saw it as resulting from a kind of Divine necessity.{7} Lewis makes this clear in his spiritual autobiography, *Surprised by Joy.*

Consider the description of his conversion to Theism: "You must picture me alone in that room in Magdalen, night after night, feeling, whenever my mind lifted even for a second from my work, the steady, unrelenting approach of Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet." Eventually, Lewis tells us, he "gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed," describing himself as "perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England."{8}

Interestingly, before this, Lewis had described God as offering him "a moment of wholly free choice"—an opportunity to either "open the door or keep it shut." He tells us that he chose to open it, but almost immediately relates that "it did

not really seem possible to do the opposite." He goes on to speculate that perhaps "necessity" is not "the opposite of freedom."{9} All of this reveals how significant Lewis found God's involvement in his conversion to actually be.

His conversion to Christianity is similarly, if less dramatically, narrated. He writes of feeling "a resistance almost as strong as" his "previous resistance to Theism."{10} But having been through something similar already, the resistance was "shorter-lived." While being driven to Whipsnade Zoo, Lewis came to believe "that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." He once again speculates about whether this momentous event resulted from freedom or necessity and concludes that maybe the difference in such a case is inconsequential.{11}

But why is this important for a discussion of Lewis and evangelism? Because it helps us understand how Lewis (on the one hand) could work tirelessly for the salvation of others, while also (on the other) recognizing that God was so powerfully involved in the conversion of a human soul that he (i.e., Lewis) need never worry that such weighty matters depended solely on him. He could thus be a relaxed evangelist, using his gifts to point others to Christ, while also recognizing that salvation is ultimately a work of God.

The Importance of "Translation" in Lewis's Evangelistic Work

So far, we've seen that the most important of Lewis's evangelism was through his writings. Indeed, the first book Lewis wrote, after becoming a Christian, was *The Pilgrim's Regress*. Published in 1933, the book bears the rather lengthy subtitle: "An Allegorical Apology for Christianity, Romanticism, and Reason." And as with so many of the books that followed Lewis's conversion, it was concerned to commend Christianity to others.

In 1938, Lewis published the first volume of his "Cosmic Trilogy," titled *Out of the Silent Planet*.{12} In this book, Lewis communicates elements of Christian theology within the context of a science-fiction adventure story. In 1940, he published *The Problem of Pain*, a work of Christian apologetics concerned to address the problem of evil and suffering. As I've noted elsewhere, this book "attracted the attention of James Welch, the Director of Religious Broadcasting for the . . . BBC."{13} Welch wrote to Lewis, asking if he might be willing to compose a series of broadcast talks for the BBC. Lewis accepted the invitation, and the talks he composed eventually became the first book of his now classic statement of basic theology, *Mere Christianity*.{14} These influential talks were delivered during the years of World War II.

In addition to these now-famous "broadcast talks," Lewis also spoke to the men and women of the Royal Air Force during the war. Such experiences helped teach Lewis the importance (and even necessity) of "translating" Christian doctrine into terms the average layperson could readily understand. Lewis wanted to communicate Christian truth to his audience, and he realized that to do so effectively, he needed to learn their language.{15} He thus described his task as "that of a *translator*—one turning Christian doctrine . . . into language that unscholarly people would attend to and could understand."{16}

It was Lewis's skill as a "translator" that made him so successful as a "literary evangelist." Few writers have been so effective at communicating the essential truths of Christianity to a broad, general, and often unbelieving audience, as C. S. Lewis. Indeed, Lewis placed so much importance on "translating" Christian truth into the language of the average layperson that he thought every ordination exam ought to require that the examinee demonstrate an ability to do it.{17} And in *Mere Christianity* (along with other works), we get a glimpse of Lewis doing this very thing.

Evangelism in Lewis's Fiction

In discussing the evangelistic work of C. S. Lewis, we've seen how Lewis's evangelistic concerns impacted his work as a popular Christian apologist. Now it's time to consider how these same concerns find expression in his fiction. In his essay, "Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What's to be Said," Lewis discusses a major motivation for his fictional work. He tells us:

> "I wrote fairy tales because . . . I thought I saw how stories of this kind could steal past a certain inhibition which had paralysed much of my own religion in childhood. Why did one find it so hard to feel as one was told one ought to feel about God or about the sufferings of Christ? I thought the chief reason was that one was told one ought to. An obligation to feel can freeze feelings. And reverence itself did harm. The whole subject was associated with lowered voices; almost as if it were something medical. But supposing that by casting all these things into an imaginary world, stripping them of their stained-glass and Sunday school associations, one could make them for the first time appear in their real potency? Could one not thus steal past those watchful dragons? I thought one could (OOW, 37).{18}

Through his fiction, Lewis helps his readers personally experience the potency of Christian truth. Consider *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe.* In that story, Edmund (one of the four Pevensie children who enter Narnia through the wardrobe) initially sides with the White Witch against the great lion Aslan. The Witch has all Narnia under her spell, making it "always winter and never Christmas."{19} In his desire to one day be king of Narnia, Edmund betrays his brother and sisters. According to the Deep Magic that governs Narnia, he thus deserves to die.{20}

But Aslan, the true king of Narnia, intercedes for Edmund, and the Witch renounces her claim on his life. The catch is that

Aslan must give his own life in place of Edmund's. This he willingly does. But like Jesus in the Gospels, death cannot hold him in its power, and he returns to life again. According to one scholar, "the desired response" to this is not so much "to believe in the vicarious suffering of Christ, but to *taste* it."{21} Lewis thus used his fiction as a vehicle for evangelism, helping his readers to "taste" Christian truth in powerful (and even delightful) ways.

The "Cost" of Lewis's Evangelistic Witness

Although Lewis was not the sort of person one would typically think of when hearing the term "evangelist," he nonetheless had a heart for evangelism and was motivated to labor for the conversion of others. In fact, Christopher Mitchell has observed that "Lewis perceived evangelism to be his lay vocation, and the means by which he expressed this evangelistic impulse were his speaking and writing."{22}

While Lewis was not the sort of person to preach a conventional "Come to Jesus" sort of evangelistic sermon, he was nonetheless (as Michael Ward has noted) "a very successful evangelist."{23} When one considers the vast literary output of Lewis, so much of which had evangelistic intentions, combined with his speaking, preaching, and debating on issues of vital concern to the Christian faith, along with his many prayers for the conversion of others, and generous financial assistance rendered for the cause of Christ, it is clear that the whole tenor of Lewis's post-conversion life was driven by a strong evangelistic impulse for the salvation of souls. And this in spite of the very costly nature of this witness.

According to Mitchell, Lewis's evangelistic commitments fostered "ridicule and scorn . . . among his non-Christian colleagues" at Oxford.{24} Indeed, even some of Lewis's closest friends occasionally felt embarrassed by his "zeal for

the conversion of unbelievers."{25} Many of his colleagues were scandalized by the fact that Lewis used his academic training to write popular-level books in theology and Christian apologetics. No doubt some were also jealous of his ever-increasing popularity with the general public, for Lewis had an uncanny ability to write one book after another that people actually wanted to buy and read.

So *why* did Lewis do it? That's the question Mitchell asks near the end of his essay on this topic.{26} Why did Lewis persist in evangelistic writing and speaking that aroused such scorn from academic colleagues, and occasional embarrassment from friends? Mitchell suggests that it likely had something to do with Lewis's conviction that "There are no *ordinary* people."{27} Hence, while his evangelistic activities created difficulties for him, difficulties that might easily have been avoided, Lewis was convinced that bringing glory to God through the saving of human souls was "the real business of life."{28} And whatever abuse, scorn, or discomfort this might cause him personally, he was apparently willing to endure it in order to be found faithful.

Notes

1. Michael Ward, "Escape to Wallaby Wood: Lewis's Depictions of Conversion," in *Lightbearer in the Shadowlands: The Evangelistic Vision of C. S. Lewis*, ed. Angus J. L. Menuge (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1997), 143.
2. See Philip G. Ryken, "Winsome Evangelist: The Influence of C. S. Lewis," in *Lightbearer in the Shadowlands*, 62.
3. C. S. Lewis, "Cross-Examination," interview by Sherwood E. Wirt, in *God in the Dock*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), 262.
4. C. S. Lewis, "Rejoinder to Dr. Pittenger," in *God in the Dock*, 181.
5. This would seem to be implied by Lewis's remarks in his sermon, "The Weight of Glory," in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, ed. Walter Hooper (New York, NY: Macmillan,

1980), 18-19.
6. See Christopher W. Mitchell, “Bearing the Weight of Glory: The Cost of C. S. Lewis’s Witness,” in *The Pilgrim’s Guide: C. S. Lewis and the Art of Witness*, ed. David Mills (Grand Rapids, MI: Eeerdmans, 1998), 3-14.
7. C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1955), 224-25.
8. Ibid., 228-29.
9. Ibid., 224-25.
10. Ibid., 237.
11. Ibid.
12. For readers interested in reading my prior article on this book, please see Michael Gleghorn, “Smuggling Theology into Out of the Silent Planet,” Probe Ministries, October 29, 2023, probe.org/smuggling-theology-into-out-of-the-silent-planet/
13. Please see Michael Gleghorn, “C. S. Lewis, the BBC, and Mere Christianity,” Probe Ministries, April 24, 2016, probe.org/c-s-lewis-the-bbc-and-mere-christianity/
14. For a helpful discussion of all the issues and concerns surrounding these events, please see Justin Phillips, *C. S. Lewis in a Time of War: The World War II Broadcasts that Riveted a Nation and Became the Classic Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002).
15. C. S. Lewis, “Christian Apologetics,” in *God in the Dock*, 94, 98.
16. Lewis, “Rejoinder to Dr. Pittenger,” in *God in the Dock*, 183.
17. Lewis, “Christian Apologetics,” in *God in the Dock*, 98-99.
18. C. S. Lewis, “Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What’s to be Said,” in *Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories*, ed. Walter Hooper (Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace, 1975), 37.
19. C. S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 16.
20. Ibid., 138-39.
21. Doris T. Myers, *C. S. Lewis in Context* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1994), Kindle edition, loc. 2640.
22. Christopher W. Mitchell, “Bearing the Weight of Glory: The

Cost of C. S. Lewis's Witness," in *The Pilgrim's Guide: C. S. Lewis and the Art of Witness*, ed. David Mills (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 3.
23. Ward, "Escape to Wallaby Wood," 143.
24. Mitchell, "Bearing the Weight of Glory," 7. Note: The whole of this paragraph is indebted to Mitchell's discussion in this chapter.
25. Ibid., 6-7.
26. Ibid., 9-14.
27. C. S. Lewis, "The Weight of Glory," 19.
28. C. S. Lewis, "Christianity and Culture," in *Christian Reflections*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 14.

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The Contrasting Worldviews in 'That Hideous Strength'

Dr. Michael Gleghorn demonstrates how C.S. Lewis's 'That Hideous Strength' illustrates the cosmic war of good and evil through supernatural spiritual warfare.

A Study in Contrasts

In this article we're concluding a three-part series examining C.S. Lewis's "Cosmic Trilogy."{1} We've already looked at *Out of the Silent Planet* and *Perelandra*, which you can find on our website at Probe.org. Now we turn to *That Hideous Strength*, the third and final novel of the trilogy, originally published in 1945. In many ways, the story is a study in contrasts between two very different communities characterized by two very different worldviews.{2}

On the one hand there is the National Institute for Coordinated Experiments (or N.I.C.E.), which might initially appear to embrace a naturalistic worldview, but which is actually governed by a kind of pragmatism that accepts whatever is useful for advancing its own nefarious purposes. On the other hand, there is the community at St. Anne's, which is generally animated by a Christian worldview.

Ransom, the hero of the first two novels, comes into this story as the "Head" or "Director" of St. Anne's, and he's a very different leader than the "Head" of the N.I.C.E. (as we'll see later). Whereas the first two novels largely took place on Mars and Venus respectively, this story takes place on Earth, specifically in England, sometime after World War 2.{3}

That Hideous Strength is a long novel. It covers a lot of ground and deals with an incredible variety of ideas and issues. Because of this, we can only hit a few of the highlights here.

With this in mind, let's begin by noticing two important statements on the book's title page. First, the book's subtitle: "A Modern Fairy-Tale for Grown-Ups." This tells us something about the genre of the story. It's intended as a kind of "fairy-tale." But this is a "fairy-tale" for *grown-ups.* And indeed, much of this novel would be inappropriate for children.

Second, there's a quotation from the 16th century Scottish poet, Sir David Lyndsay. In fact, the title of Lewis's book is taken from this quotation, for Lyndsay mentions "that hyddeous strength" with reference to the Tower of Babel, a story originally told in Genesis 11. The Tower of Babel, you may recall, was a monument to human pride and rebellion against the Lord. In response, the Lord came down in judgment and confused the languages of those building the tower, and they were subsequently scattered over the face of the earth.

If we are to correctly interpret Lewis's novel, then, we must not lose sight of these two clues. Lewis intends this story as a kind of modern-day "fairy-tale" that, in one way or another, also alludes to something like the Tower of Babel.

Supernatural Influences

Above, I mentioned Lewis's subtitle for the novel: "A Modern Fairy-Tale for Grown-Ups." This, I said, tells us something about the genre of the story. Lewis intended the story as a kind of fairy-tale. But what *are* fairy-tales, and how might this help us interpret Lewis's novel?

On the English-Studies website, we learn that fairy-tales "are types of literature . . . featuring magical elements, mythical creatures, and moral lessons. Characterized by simple . . . characters, these stories typically involve a protagonist overcoming challenges with the help of magic or supernatural aid."{4} As we'll see, this description fits Lewis's novel fairly well.

Consider, for example, the concluding statement about "overcoming challenges with the help of magic or supernatural aid." In Lewis's novel, Ransom and the community at St. Anne's overcome the challenges posed by the National Institute of Coordinated Experiments (or N.I.C.E.) with help *both* magical *and* supernatural. From the depths of Arthurian legend, Merlin the magician returns to lend his aid to St. Anne's. Moreover, the community is also helped by powerful angelic authorities who can best be described as something like a cross between Christian archangels and Roman gods or goddesses.{5} Hence, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn all descend from the heavens to help the community in its time of need.

And this helps us see an important contrast between St. Anne's and the N.I.C.E., for it turns out that *both* are receiving a kind of supernatural aid, though the source of that aid is

very different. The Christian community at St. Anne's is receiving supernatural aid from loyal, angelic, servants of God. The N.I.C.E., however, is receiving aid from dark spirits, who are in rebellion against God. The leaders of the N.I.C.E. refer to these spirits as "macrobes," and recognize that they are "more intelligent than Man."{6} While the good spirits communicate to the company of St. Anne's through Ransom, the "Head" of that community, the evil spirits communicate to the leaders of the N.I.C.E. through the decapitated "Head" of a former criminal, which is being artificially preserved in a laboratory. We thus begin to see how the contrasting worldviews of these two communities have led them into very different spiritual alliances.

Science and Magic

One of the strangest aspects of C. S. Lewis's novel, *That Hideous Strength*, concerns the return of Merlin to help the community of St. Anne's in their battle against the National Institute of Coordinated Experiments (or N.I.C.E.). Stranger still is the fact that the leaders of the N.I.C.E. initially hope to recruit Merlin to their *own* side in this struggle. But isn't the N.I.C.E. a scientific institute? Why would its leaders want to enlist the aid of an enigmatic magician from the days of King Arthur? It would seem that the governing principles of the N.I.C.E. are really rather different from what one might expect from a scientific institute.

Consider, for example, the character of William Hingest. Lewis describes him as "a physical chemist" and one of only two men at his college "who had a reputation outside England."{7} Hingest is a true scientist. But when he visits the N.I.C.E. to find out more about it, he quickly decides to leave. As he tells Mark Studdock, another character in the novel, "I came here because I thought it had something to do with science. Now that I find it's something more like a political conspiracy, I shall go home."{8}

Hingest realizes that the N.I.C.E. is quite different from a scientific institute. He rightly senses that there is something dark and corrupt at the institute's core. As readers, we learn that the leaders of the N.I.C.E. are actually taking orders from demonic spirits. They want to recruit Merlin because they hope to make use of his powers to advance their own agenda. What they fail to realize, however, is that in the world of Lewis's novel, Merlin is a Christian, and he joins forces with the company at St. Anne's.

In his book, *The Abolition of Man*, Lewis described the birth of magic and applied science as "twins." Both desired "to subdue reality to the wishes of men," but only science was successful.{9} In Lewis's novel, however, the leaders of the Institute have stumbled upon a source of power that might arguably trump that of science, namely, the demonic "macrobes." They want Merlin because he will increase their power still further. The leaders of the N.I.C.E. are not really interested in truth, beauty, or goodness, but only in the power "to subdue reality" to their own wishes. Like the ancient builders of Babel, they are in prideful rebellion against the Lord. And this is why, in Lewis's "fairy-tale" novel, their work also must be destroyed.{10}

The Problem of Violence

C. S. Lewis's novel, *That Hideous Strength*, has often been criticized for its alarming depictions of violence. Near the end of the novel, when the leaders of the National Institute of Coordinated Experiments (or N.I.C.E.) are destroyed by Merlin and the heavenly powers, Lewis describes their deaths in rather grisly detail. Some are trampled and torn apart by wild animals, others are shot or decapitated, and one character chooses to be incinerated by his own hands.{11} Why does Lewis include such horrific scenes?

David Downing has a good discussion of this issue in his book,

Planets in Peril: A Critical Study of C.S. Lewis's Ransom Trilogy. He first observes that "Lewis was writing" this novel "during the bleakest years of World War II and that he draws explicit parallels between the leaders of N.I.C.E. and the Nazis."{12} He notes that, like the Nazis, the N.I.C.E. also rely upon a "secret police" force. Like the Nazis, they too "control the press . . . use criminals for barbaric medical experiments" and "dream of creating a master race." Hence, just as it was necessary for the Allies to fight and defeat the Nazis, so also it is necessary for Ransom, Merlin, and the heavenly powers to fight and defeat the N.I.C.E.

But was it necessary for Lewis to describe the deaths of his villains in such "gruesome detail"?{13} Why not simply have the angelic-god Jupiter destroy the leaders of the N.I.C.E. with a well-aimed thunderbolt? Why does Lewis insist on narrating their deaths in such graphic terms? Downing argues that Lewis was using Dante's *Inferno* as a "subtext" for this novel.{14} He shows how the journey of Mark Studdock (a major character in the novel) into the heart of the N.I.C.E. parallels Dante's journey through the nine circles of hell.{15} As Downing observes, the leaders of the N.I.C.E. joined forces with dark spirits. They thus experience a dark end to their earthly pilgrimage.{16}

The violence in *That Hideous Strength* makes more sense when we remember the comparisons Lewis makes between the N.I.C.E. and the Nazis, as well as the many literary connections between his own story and Dante's *Inferno*. Moreover, we must not forget that such violence fits in rather well with Lewis's description of the story as a kind of "fairy-tale." Fairy tales, after all, often have a dark side, and Lewis's tale is no exception.

Babel and the Word of God

C. S. Lewis intended the final novel of his "Cosmic Trilogy,"

That Hideous Strength, to be read as a kind of fairy tale with allusions to the biblical Tower of Babel. We've mentioned several ways in which Lewis's novel resembles a fairy tale, but we've said little about its allusions to the Tower of Babel. Although Lewis draws several connections between the National Institute for Coordinated Experiments (or N.I.C.E.) and the Tower of Babel, we here have time to mention only a couple.

The story of the Tower of Babel occurs in Genesis 11. In that story, all humanity speaks the same language, and they determine to build "a city and a tower with its top in the heavens" (Genesis 11:4). They do this in order to "make a name" for themselves. But the Lord, who has told humanity to "fill the earth" (Genesis 9:1), comes down and confuses their language, thus dispersing them throughout the world (Genesis 11:8-9).

Like the builders of Babel, the leaders of the N.I.C.E. also want to "make a name" for themselves. The N.I.C.E. aims to achieve something like the deification of humanity, though this will only be accomplished by the destruction of virtually everything that makes human life worthwhile (and only a few, and eventually perhaps just one person, will be the beneficiary of their evil schemes).{17} For this reason, God permits some of His loyal servants, the Heavenly Powers, to descend to earth and bring linguistic confusion to the leaders of the N.I.C.E., thus forcing them to abandon their project.{18}

Merlin the magician, who has joined forces with Ransom and the community at St. Anne's, is the human instrument through which the Heavenly Powers work to release the "curse of Babel" upon the N.I.C.E. The leaders of this institute have joined forces with dark spirits to achieve their ends. Hence, once the "curse of Babel" is in full force among them, Merlin 7calls out over the din of confusion: "They that have despised the word of God, from them shall the word of man also be taken

away."{19} The inability of the leaders of the N.I.C.E. to understand one another plays a significant role in ending their tyranny, thus saving humanity from their evil intentions.

In *That Hideous Strength*, Lewis has contrasted two very different communities, with two very different worldviews. Presented as a kind of fairy-tale, with allusions to the biblical Tower of Babel, he has developed an intriguing story about the ongoing battle between good and evil.

Notes

1. Wayne Shumaker uses this terminology in the title of his essay, "The Cosmic Trilogy of C. S. Lewis," in *The Longing for a Form: Essays on the Fiction of C. S. Lewis*, ed. Peter J. Schakel (Kent State University Press, 1977), 51-63.
2. See Richard L. Purtill, "*That Hideous Strength*: A Double Story," in *The Longing for a Form*, 91-102, for an excellent treatment of this issue.
3. C. S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength: A Modern Fairy-Tale for Grown-Ups* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1965), 7.
4. See English Studies, "Fairy Tale: A Literary Genre," English Studies, english-studies.net/fairy-tale-a-literary-genre/#google_vignette (accessed October 29, 2024).
5. I discuss this issue in my first program on the trilogy: "Smuggling Theology into Out of the Silent Planet," which you can find here: Smuggling Theology into *Out of the Silent Planet*
6. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 257.
7. Ibid., 56.
8. Ibid., 70.
9. C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1955), 87-89.
10. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 293-94.
11. Ibid., 343-358. See the chapter, "Banquet at Belbury."
12. All the quoted material in this paragraph can be found in David Downing, *Planets in Peril: A Critical Study of C.S.*

Lewis's Ransom Trilogy (University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), 152.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid., 94.
15. Ibid., 94-99.
16. Ibid., 99.
17. See Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 176-80.
18. Ibid., 320-58.
19. Ibid., 351. In the story, Merlin says this in Latin, but there is a translation in the footnote on this page.

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Stranger Than Fiction

T.S. Weaver processes the 2006 fantasy comedy-drama film Stranger Than Fiction *through a biblical worldview lens.*

I recently watched the movie *Stranger Than Fiction*. I thought it would be profitable to practice apologetic engagement using this form of popular culture, and an ideal opportunity to explore some apologetic themes found in the movie. Most literature has echoes of the biblical storyline since it's the foundation of understanding life in this world. As taught to the Mind Games camp participants every summer, properly understood, film can be of excellent value in discerning the philosophical positions and shifts in society and can enable the Christian to better respond to his or her culture. When interpreting a film, one should ask the following questions:

1. Is there a discernible philosophical position in the film? If so, what is it, and can a case be made for your interpretation?

2. Is the subject matter of the film portrayed truthfully? Here the goal is to decide if the subject matter is being dealt with in a way that agrees with or contrary to the experiences of daily reality.

3. Is there a discernible hostility toward particular values and beliefs? Does the film look to be offensive for the sake of sensationalism alone?

The main character, Harold, lives a strait-laced, boring, lonely life as an IRS agent, and he realizes he is the main character of a novel being written by a stranger. The novel plot affects his life as the author writes. He realizes this when he hears the narrator's voice describing his nearly every move. This is how the tension starts and then he hears the narrator say something like, "Little did he know, this seemingly inconsequential action would cause his imminent death." Obviously, death is relatively imminent for all of us, but the context implies his would be coming soon. He is an unmarried, middle-aged man; so, this is the problem of the story: he is going to die sooner than he expected, and he does not know how or when.

Being a seminary student, I wanted to know what Harold was thinking came after death. Why was a premature death (according to him) so tragic? Yet, there was no element to the movie at all that included thoughts of life after death. But, like most movies, there was reflection from Harold about life. Oddly, he did not start the reflection on his own. A literary theory professor had to be the one to ask him an apologetic type of question: "What is your life ambition?" Harold's shockingly shallow (and sad) answer was, "I've always wanted to learn the guitar." He was somehow motivated enough to be a successful IRS agent and do things like count the number of brush strokes while he brushed his teeth every morning, but he had not managed to get around to learning the guitar or answering life's biggest questions such as, "Why is there something instead of nothing? Why am I here? What is my

purpose? What must I do to be good? What is my destiny?" I wonder how many other Harolds there are out there. Surely (and hopefully) this is not a good representation of the average American.

Although the thought of death did not lead him to where I thought it should, it did lead him to a lifestyle change and new philosophy. If his old philosophy was, "I need to do well as an IRS agent," his new philosophy was, "I need to enjoy life more and do the things I've always wanted to do before I die." Now you would think this would turn into a hedonistic lifestyle but all he really did was stop counting his brush strokes, stop working, and start learning to play the guitar. However, he did turn his attention to a woman.

Her story was interesting as well, because she dropped out of Harvard Law School to make the world a better place by baking cookies to make people happy. So, I suppose part of her worldview was that if people are happy, the world is a better place. No one in the movie pressed her on the issue. Harold just accepted it and continued indulging himself with her cookies.

Predictably, this relationship turned into a romance and they both fell in love and started sleeping together. Apparently, sex was not something that needed a covenant of marriage for them. Nor much of a commitment of any kind. Not once during the movie did either of them call each other boyfriend or girlfriend or say the words "I love you."

There was no theological thought presented between the characters for most of the movie. Where some theology did occur with the characters (albeit just undertones) was with the professor thinking through Harold's dilemma and giving him advice. At one point, he realized Harold had no control in the story the narrator was telling about his life, and he told him, "You don't control your fate." He meant the narrator controlled it. So, this jumped out at me as though the

narrator were God and Harold, and the professor had a fatalistic theology. This is the point where Harold turned to his new philosophy thanks to the advice of the professor. With this type of theology, I think it is easy to result in the "It does not matter what I do, so I may as well stop thinking about it" mindset, which is where Harold turned.

An odd element to the story was that Harold's wristwatch had thoughts, feelings, and was even able to communicate to Harold. It was as if the narrator was God, and the wristwatch was the Holy Spirit guiding Harold at times. Yet ironically the narrator did not know Harold was a real person, so *she* (there is a rabbit trail waiting to be taken) was unknowingly playing the role of God.

During the tension of Harold's dilemma of soon-imminent death, it was easy to see Harold needed saving, but the mystery was, who was going to be his savior (playing the role of Jesus)? At first, I thought the professor was going to save Harold by telling him how to avoid death. Then I wondered if Harold was Jesus himself because he eventually became willing to face his death to allow the story to end the way they (the narrator, Harold, and the professor) all thought it ought to (they eventually all met). Then the next thing you know Harold saves a boy from begin hit by a bus and Harold is hit in his place. I thought that was the ending of the book and Harold was dead. Consequently, I thought Harold was the savior for the boy and Harold played Jesus.

Harold's tremendously heroic act makes no sense based on the worldview he adopted, but it makes a world of sense based on a Christian worldview. It turns out Harold survived anyway, and it was the wristwatch who was the savior (part of it got lodged in his artery and stopped him from bleeding to death) because the author/narrator changed the ending. Thus, in a way, the narrator was God, the wristwatch was both the Holy Spirit and Jesus.

The redeeming moment was Harold getting to live after all his fear of dying and his life changing "for the better" (at least I think that is the movie wanted us to see). It was better in some ways, but in some ways the word "better" is a stretch because of how shallow the changes in his life were (ignoring the deep change of falling in love because the relationship was as shallow as most romantic comedy movies). The narrator even ties a bow on it all at the end by what seemed like (especially with the montage and the dramatic music) it was supposed to be a deeply profound message of the entire movie and what everyone (including the viewers) should walk away with. Here was the long word-for-word message before the closing credits (and the end of the book in the movie):

> As Harold took a bite of a Bavarian sugar cookie, he finally felt as if everything was going to be ok. Sometimes, when we lose ourselves in fear and despair, in routine and constancy, in hopelessness and tragedy, we can thank God [*the first time He was mentioned*] for Bavarian sugar cookies. And fortunately, when there aren't any sugar cookies we can still find reassurance in a familiar hand on our skin, or a kind and loving gesture. Or a subtle encouragement. Or a loving embrace. Or an offer of comfort . . . not to mention hospital gurneys and nose plugs . . . an uneaten Danish . . . a soft-spoken secret . . . and Fender Stratocasters . . . and maybe the occasional piece of fiction. And we must remember that all these things: the nuances, the anomalies, the subtleties . . . which are in fact here for a much larger and nobler cause, they are here to save our lives. I know the idea seems strange, but I also know that it just happens to be true. And so, it was: the wristwatch saved Harold Crick.

What a load of nonsense. *That* is the final word and message of the story? Life is all about cookies, honorable deeds, comfort, and random material items. Nuances, anomalies, and subtleties save our lives? It *is* strange. How does it "just

happen to be true?” In that case, how is one’s life different from someone else’s? What makes up fear, despair, routine, constancy, hopelessness, and tragedy? Is it no sugar cookies? With this philosophy, what is the point of life? Does this not claim we are all saved? Which nuances, anomalies, and subtleties save us? Are they universal or relative? Or am I not saved because I do not wear a wristwatch?

And why are we thanking God for sugar cookies, but claiming our savior is a wristwatch? What is God’s role in all of this? Why does He not get more credit? If He gave us the cookies, should He not at the very least get some praise for giving us the wristwatch also? Obviously, this was a secular movie, and it was far from Christian theology. But there was lostness, salvation, and redemption clear in the story. The worldview offered in *Stranger Than Fiction* is not strong enough to support the challenges of this world, but the Christian one is. But, hey, thank God for sugar cookies, right?

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unChristian: Is Christianity’s Image Hurting Christ’s Image?

Byron Barlowe reviews the book unChristian*, based on research on what young people think of evangelicals and born-again Christians: that they’re hypocritical, judgmental, too political, exclusive. He calls out Christians to improve the reality behind the image to better reflect Christ.*

***Section Synopsis**: A recent book entitled* unChristian: What a

New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity and Why It Matters *uncovered overwhelmingly negative views of evangelicals and born-again Christians, especially among young generations. In some ways these views are warranted, in some ways they are not, but Christians do well to take them as a wake-up call for the sake of those God wants to save and mature.*



The meaning of *gospel* is literally "good news." The book *unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity . . . and Why It Matters*{1} is a book of bad news—that half of those outside the church have a negative perception of Christianity. And that's even true of many young people inside the church.

Evangelical Christians by definition consider Jesus' charge to present the biblical gospel message to the world a mandate. Yet many of the very people who they reach out to are rejecting the messengers. Researchers with the Barna Group found that a majority today believe that evangelical and born-again Christians are sheltered from the real world, are judgmental, way too political, anti-homosexual (to the point of being gay-hating), and hypocritical.

These are widespread perceptions, especially among sixteen- to twenty-nine-year-olds, even those who go to church. To many people, perception *is* ninety percent of reality. So whatever your opinion of the study, this is the feeling out there.

Barna's survey results and commentary have been making a stir through *unChristian* since its release in 2007. It's not a deep theological or philosophical book. It contains statistical interpretation broken up by commentary from every stripe of evangelical Christian. It *is* a sobering cultural assessment that calls out believers to be more Christlike.

The authors' applications are not always solidly based. They

seem a little dismissive of valid objections to their analysis and conclusions. Also, confusion among unchurched respondents about the meaning of the terms “born again” and “evangelical” leads one to ask, How seriously do we take survey-takers’ critique of Christians if they don’t even know who or what these Christians are? That is, many times the people being surveyed couldn’t clearly define what “born-again” means or what an “evangelical” is, so how much stock should we put in their criticisms?

Yet, the stats are stark enough to be alarming: of those outside the church, fully half had a bad impression of evangelicals. Only three percent had a good impression! Are Christians so bent on moral persuasion that we’re alienating the lost with a lovelessness that really is unChristian? Or is this just a case of the unsaved experiencing the gospel as a stumbling block, as Jesus said would happen? The authors say it’s mainly Christians’ fault; I agree but suspect there’s more to it.

Here’s a modest proposal: even if respondents were biased or misled, why don’t we in the church humble ourselves, listen, and change where we need to? In the spirit of King David, when Shimei cursed him loudly, we may need to simply say, “Let them critique. The Lord told them to.”

Some question whether perceptions of outsiders should shape the church’s behavior. Co-authors Kinnaman and Lyons make the case that the church needs to be thoughtful about our responses to homosexuals, *less* trusting of political action as the way to change culture, and *more humble* and open to people who have not yet experienced grace. If outsiders feel that we are running a club they’re not invited to, where is Christ in that? they ask.

According to the authors, “Theologically conservative people are increasingly perceived as aloof and unwilling to talk.” But those under 30 “are the ultimate ‘conversation

generation'." Those outside church want to discuss issues, but see Christians as unwilling. Have you recently had a spiritual dialogue with a young unbeliever? How'd it go?

"Christians Are Hypocritical"

Section Synopsis: unChristian *documents a heavy bias against Christians as hypocritical, a charge which is in part true, admit many. But it's also an unavoidable reality of a grace-based religion, which if explained, goes a long way towards mitigating the charge and explaining the gospel message.*

One overwhelming opinion among the survey group is that Christians are *hypocrites* and this keeps people away from church.

In fact, the survey on which the book is based reveals blatant legalism among believers, that the top priority of born-again Christians is, "doing the right thing, being good, and not sinning." This do-your-best value topped biblical values like "relationships, evangelism, service and family faith." In another survey, four out of five churchgoers said that "the Christian life is well described as, 'trying hard to do what God commands'." {2} Such a primary focus on *lifestyle* and sin-management as a measure of spirituality leads to what they call a "false pretense of holiness," that is, hypocrisy.{3} It's often like we Christians are living for others' approval and forgetting about grace.

This isn't lost on younger generations. "Like it or not, the term 'hypocritical' has become fused with young peoples' experience of Christianity," say the authors.{4} *Eighty-five percent* of "outsiders" and *half of young churchgoers* say so. The book offers story after painful story of sometimes breathtaking hypocrisy based on lengthy interviews. This adds weight to the conclusions drawn by Kinnaman and Lyons. The research was not simply based on surveys (quantitative) but

also on in-depth interviews (qualitative).

There may be a silver lining here. The charge of hypocrisy offers a handy starting point for turning around negative perceptions and explaining grace. Pastor and author Tim Keller admits that we Christians actually *are* often hypocritical and need to be humble about it. Unrepentant hypocrites don't admit mistakes, so we immediately challenge a perception by owning up to it.

But the other unavoidable fact is that non-Christians assume we are *trying* to live like Jesus to *get into* heaven, like the good-works motivation of other religions and cults. So, when they find out we're not perfect people, they critique us as hypocrites. In contrast, an old saying captures the biblical worldview: "The Church is a hospital for sinners, not a museum for saints."{5} Unbelievers simply cannot understand this; we have to be patient with that, says Keller.

You could respond to the accusation of hypocrisy like this: "I have a relationship with Christ not because I'm good but precisely because I am not good. He rescued me from myself and the ruin I was causing. But He's changing me. I'm still a mess, but I'm God's mess."

In an age of Internet image-making and advertising, young outsiders are cynical about finding anybody who's genuine. Christians need to genuinely repent of hypocrisy. Meanwhile, we can explain that grace means our imperfections are covered by God during the process of spiritual transformation. Maybe outsiders will opt for grace once they see more of it.

"Christians Hate Homosexuals"

***Section Synopsis**: Evangelical and born-again Christians today have a well-deserved but understandable reputation as anti-gay, but attitudes can go so far as being gay-hating. Balancing conviction about the broader gay agenda and the*

personal sin of homosexuality with a humble compassion for gay individuals who are made in God's image is key, especially as we model for younger believers.

The guys in my Bible study group were discussing gay marriage and the upcoming elections. The lively banter stopped when I dropped a bomb. "You know," I said, "when most non-Christians under thirty-years-old find out we're evangelicals, we may as well be wearing a sandwich board emblazoned with 'God hates gays.'" I'd been reading *unChristian,* and it was sobering.

According to the authors, if we're raising kids to "shun their peers who are 'different,' we are actually limiting their . . . spiritual influence" and may lead them to question their own faith.{6} Why? Because they'll probably have friends who identify as gay and other sexual identities. As Probe colleague Kerby Anderson says, "One of the biggest challenges for churches and individual Christians who reach out to homosexuals is keeping two principles in proper tension: biblical convictions and biblical compassion."{7}

An emerging adult generation accepts homosexuality, often without thinking, even those who grew up in church. Only one-third of churched young people believe homosexuality to be a "major problem."

And, only a small percentage of young adults "want to resist homosexual initiatives" in society. This is alarming, given America's softening of sexual morals, mainstreaming of gay culture and the redefinition of marriage. But the issue addressed in *unChristian* is that in our battle against a few agenda-driven radicals, we've regularly forgotten that our fight is not with same-sex strugglers, but with unbiblical ideas.{8} We're called to love, not condemn, the people made in God's image who are caught up in sin, even while we stand up as Christian citizens.

Barna's survey shows just how unbiblical self-identified

Christians can be. Over half said homosexuality was a problem, but only two out of six hundred people said anything about love or "being sympathetic" as a potential solution. A mere one percent say they pray for homosexuals! "We need to downgrade the importance of being antihomosexual as a 'credential,'" of our commitment to Christ, say the authors.{9} That is, we need to repent if we believe that it's a spiritual badge of honor to be anti-gay.

If a certain brand of sin is disgusting to us, why should that get in the way of communicating the love of a forgiving God? We need to keep in mind that *all* sin is disgusting to God, even our pet sins. This is the kind of challenge the book *unChristian* does well. Yet, scant mention is made of the greater consequences of sexual sins, including sickness and the desperate need for repentance and recovery among same-sex practitioners. Perhaps that would have been off-point for this book.

Kinnaman observes that younger generations are "hard-wired for relational connections" and view the church's lack of spiritual solutions as uncaring and insincere. If we lose our audience due to heartlessness it won't matter how much truth we proclaim.

"Christians Are Judgmental"

***Section Synopsis**: "Christians are judgmental" is an accusation coming from young people inside and outside the Church today. Believers need to learn to retain the biblical mandate to judge the fruits of ideas and behaviors while going out of our way not to condemn people who've never (or seldom) experienced God's grace.*

One of the most troubling perceptions that a watching world has of "born agains" and "evangelicals", especially among the under-thirty crowd, is that we are judgmental. The book

unChristian cites findings that ninety percent of "outsiders" believe this. More than half of young churchgoers agree!

It's not compromise to graciously work with disagreements. Sometimes the need to be right and "stay right" cancels out the truth we're trying to defend. To use the old saying, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." This seems to be the main finding the research revealed.

The authors credit young generations with insightfulness into peoples' *motives* since they've been endlessly targeted by marketing, lectures, and sermons. (Most have spent time in church, by the way.) They don't want unsolicited advice, say the authors. But that makes them resistant, *not* unreachable. Another factor is that younger generations reject black-and-white views. "They esteem context, ambiguity, and tension. . . . *How* we communicate [to them] is just as important as *what* we communicate," according to the book. {10} One popular author is seeing fruit among younger people by focusing on God Himself as the original community, the Trinity, and giving credence to our need for community.{11}

Well, aren't unbelievers the ones judging believers? Aren't Christians just standing up to sin? In-depth interviews showed that many respondents "believe Christians are trying . . . to justify feelings of moral and spiritual superiority."{12} My opinion is this: If we think we're better, we need to revisit Amazing Grace! Arrogance is the charge; are you guilty of it? I know I've been.

What does it mean to be judgmental? People are stumbling over stuff like this:

- Judgmentalism doesn't stop to ask why people do the things they do and why they are the way they are. That is, it just doesn't care.

- Judgmental minds see everything in terms of rules kept or

rules broken.

• A judgmental heart maintains the us-them dichotomy, keeping people at a distance from us. Holding people in contempt is easier when we lump them into categories.

• The core belief of a judgmental spirit is, “I’m right and I’m better.”

It’s true, the worldview of young generations in America has shifted in recent years to include a “do-it-yourself” morality and this is deeply troubling. Youth apologist Josh McDowell notes that seniors have the emotional maturity of freshmen today. Many suffer from broken families.{13} Still, an entire generation—churched and many formerly-churched—doubts our motives. Yes, they are judging us! But if our attitudes truly are stiff-arming people, shouldn’t we start sympathetically inviting them into God’s fellowship?

Christ-followers have a very hard time distinguishing between judging *people* and judging *what they do*. Scripture teaches us clearly not to condemn people to hell. Paul the Apostle taught that he didn’t even judge himself, much less outsiders. Yet we are told to judge fruits, which consist of what people do. That way, we know if we’re dealing with an unbelieving person, a confused believer or a mature disciple of Christ. If an unbeliever commits sin, we can see from it how to minister to them.

We church folks say, “Love the sinner, hate the sin.” Those studied said they experience hate of the sin *and* the sinner. Much of church peoples’ discomfort and judgmentality stems from cultural and generational sources. If something like tattoos gets in the way of a Christlike response, maybe we need to take a fresh look at our attitudes.

How Can True Christians Constructively Respond?

Section Synopsis: *Repairing a damaged image is a worthy goal for Christians so that critics can see Christ instead of negative stereotypes. We can tear down stereotypes by being Christlike and then we have a chance to tear down deeper misconceptions about God, the Bible, and faith.*

The panhandler touched Dave's heart with his honest appeal. "I just want a burger." Throughout the meal, Dave talked with him, finding out about his life and views. He didn't try to cram the gospel in or argue. Dave later overheard the man say to his homeless companion, "Hey that guy's a Christian and we actually had a conversation." Dave wondered what kind of negative interactions with Christians from the past prompted that response!

The authors of *unChristian* uncovered a low public opinion of evangelicals and born-again Christians among outsiders. They may be biased, but it's helpful to know what people think.

One of the most important ministries you can have these days is to tear down negative stereotypes of Christ-followers simply by being Christlike. That may set the stage for tearing down myths and lies about God, the Bible, and Christianity.

We need to seek common ground to begin a dialogue with those outside the faith. We all respond to agreement better than arguments, so affirming is a good start towards persuading. I recently saw a bumper sticker on the truck of a worker. It said in effect, "Jesus loves you but I think you're a jerk", although in more colorful language! After I chuckled about how God loves "jerks" like me, we spent forty-five minutes discussing his views, mostly on God and religion.

At one point, he proclaimed, "I like to think of God as feminine." I explored his reasons, which included the presence

of beauty in the world. I affirmed that observation far as I could and expanded his thinking. I said, “What if God is so big and complete that He embodies perfect femininity *and* masculinity?” The door opened wider. But what if I’d acted offended by the cuss word on the sticker or been put off by his distorted theology? I’m sure he would have been put off and the conversation would have been aborted.

Again, we also need to admit mistakes and problems, say the authors. Youth today emphasize “keepin’ it real,” being genuine. “Transparency disarms an image-is-everything generation.”{14}

Lastly, the authors urge us to respond with truth *and* love to gays and their friends. Speaking out against homosexual sin and harmful politics may be our role. At the same time, Kerby Anderson points out that Christians “should lovingly welcome those who struggle with homosexual temptations and dedicate [ourselves] to meet the emotional and spiritual needs of” homosexual strugglers.{15}

Our tone of voice, demeanor and facial expression are much more important than we think. As Tim Keller says, “You actually have to embody a different kind of Christian than the ones that they’ve known in the past or they’re simply not going to listen to what you’re saying.”{16}

Notes

1. David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity…And Why it Matters* (BakerBooks: Grand Rapids, MI, 2007).
2. David Kinnaman and Lyons, 51
3. Ibid, 49.
4. Ibid, 42. 5. Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (Dutton/Penguin Group, New York, New York: 2008), 54.
6. Kinnaman and Lyons, 99.

7. Kerby Anderson, *A Biblical Point of View on Homosexuality* (Harvest House: Eugene, Oregon, 2008), 82.
8. Ephesians 6:12 (NASB). See: www.BibleGateway.com.
9. Kinnaman and Lyons, 105.
10. Ibid, 183.
11. Tim Keller, interviewed by Ed Stetzer, researcher, blogger and host of Inside Lifeway, posted April 24, 2008, lifeway.edgeboss.net/download/lifeway/corp/IL_Evangelism_and_Keller.mp3.
12. Kinnaman and Lyons, 182.
13. Josh McDowell, as quoted by Charlie Mack, staff representative of Faculty Commons (Campus Crusade for Christ) in a PowerPoint® presentation presented to professors at Michigan State University, Spring, 2008.
14. Kinnaman and Lyons, 56.
15. Kerby Anderson, 83-84.
16. Keller, “Inside Lifeway” interview.

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