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No Beauty We Could Desire-A Lutheran Evaluation of C. S. Lewis' Sehnsucht

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NO BEAUTY WE COULD DESIRE: A LUTHERAN EVALUATION OF C. S. LEWIS' *SEHNSUCHT*

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CHAPTER ONE

Looking *At* Versus Looking *Along*

In an article originally published in *The Coventry Evening Telegraph*, C. S. Lewis wrote of an experience he had while standing in a dark toolshed: "The sun was shining outside and through the crack at the top of the door there came a sunbeam… Everything else was almost pitch-black. I was seeing the beam, not seeing things by it."[1] He then moved so that the beam fell on his eyes: "Instantly the whole previous picture vanished. I saw no toolshed, and (above all) no beam. Instead I saw, framed in the irregular cranny at the top of the door, green leaves moving on the branches of a tree outside and beyond that, 90 odd million miles away, the sun."[2] After meditating on this rather commonplace occurrence, he concluded: "Looking along the beam, and looking at the beam are very different experiences."[3]

Examples of the distinction between looking *at* and looking *along* can be seen throughout human experience. It is one thing to look *at* the nature of love, noting its psychological and biological characteristics, quite another to fall in love, to have every other moment until then look insignificant in comparison. Lewis tells the story of a young man who meets a girl:

> The whole world looks different when he sees her. Her voice reminds him of something he has been trying to remember all his life, and ten minutes casual chat with her is more precious than all the favours that all other women in the world could grant. He is, as they say, 'in love'.[4]

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[1] C. S. Lewis, "Meditation in a Toolshed," in *God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 212.

[2] Ibid., 212.

[3] Ibid., 212.

[4] Ibid., 212.

Along comes a scientist who looks *at* the young man's experience from the outside and describes it as being "all an affair of the young man's genes and a recognized biological stimulus."[5] For Lewis, "That is the difference between looking *along* the sexual impulse and looking *at* it."[6] Or take the mathematician who sits contemplating what he believes to be "timeless and spaceless truths about quantity."[7] But along comes the cerebral physiologist, who "if he could look inside the mathematician's head, would find nothing timeless and spaceless there—only tiny movements in the grey matter."[8] So what is the true or valid experience? Which gives the clearest account of reality, looking *at* or looking *along*?

According to Lewis, in recent history, the answer has simply been taken for granted: "The people who look *at* things have had it all their own way; the people who look *along* things have simply been brow-beaten."[9] If you want the true account of the sexual impulse you go to the scientist, not to the lover. If you want the true account of religion you go to the philosophers of religion, not to the religious. The more accurate account comes from outside explanation rather than inside participation. Lewis argues that this has served to be the foundation of all 'Modern' thought. Elsewhere he says: "It has even come to be taken for granted that the external account of a thing somehow refutes or 'debunks' the account given from the inside."[10] To oversimplify the matter, in the Modern age the scientist trumps the poet. But is this truly the case?

To be sure, there are instances where explaining from the outside gives a more objective and level-headed account than viewing from the inside: "The girl who looks so wonderful while

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[5] Ibid., 212.

[6] Ibid., 212.

[7] Ibid., 213.

[8] Ibid., 213.

[9] Ibid., 213.

[10] Ibid., 213.

we're in love, may really be a very plain, stupid, and disagreeable person."[11] So, the question remains: "Having been so often deceived by looking along, are we not well advised to trust only to looking at?—in fact to discount all these inside experiences?"[12] By no means! Lewis presents two main objections to this dangerous mode of thought. First: "You discount them in order to think more accurately. But you can't think at all—and therefore, of course, can't think accurately—if you having nothing to think *about*."[13] The physiologist could look *at* pain and find out that it exists—"But the word *pain* would have no meaning for him unless he had 'been inside' by actually suffering. If he had never looked *along* pain he simply wouldn't know what he was looking *at*."[14] Second, "you can step outside one experience only by stepping inside another."[15] In other words, the premise is self-defeating because looking *at* necessarily involves looking *along*. One begins to wonder, with Lewis, where does this nonsense end? Put rather simply: "The answer is that we must never allow the rot to begin. We must, on pain of idiocy, deny from the very outset the idea that looking *at* is, by its own nature, intrinsically truer or better than looking *along*. One must look both *along* and *at* everything."[16]

Applied to Theology

In theology there is also a distinction between looking *at* and looking *along*.[17] When done properly, theology should seek to look *at* doctrine in a way that will serve looking *along* the fullness of the Christian life. But this two-fold relationship can easily lead to a sort of tension

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[11] Ibid., 214.

[12] Ibid., 214.

[13] Ibid., 214.

[14] Ibid., 214.

[15] Ibid., 215.

[16] Ibid., 215.

[17] This distinction has parallels with Gerhard Forde's terms of 'primary' and 'secondary' theology addressed in

between lived experience and believed language, where the experience of looking *at* can repress looking *along*, or the experience of looking *along* can repress the experience of looking *at*. In *The Idea of the Holy*, Rudolf Otto[18] maintains that in current Western theological discourse the former is most often the case (looking *at* repressing looking *along*). He argues that the non-rational elements in the idea of the divine have been overshadowed and repressed by the excess of rational attributions.[19] On the one hand, this is to be expected, for theology deals with words, and as Otto states:

> All language, in so far as it consists of words, purports to convey ideas or concepts;--that is what language means;--and the more clearly and unequivocally it does so, the better the language. And hence expositions of religious truth in language inevitably tend to stress the 'rational' attributes of God.[20]

But throughout the years, these rationalistic expositions of religious truth failed to provide room for non-rational components such as the religious experience of the numinous.[21] According to Otto, this was not because orthodox Christianity was preoccupied with the framing of doctrine, for this endeavor was shared by the most extreme of mystics, but rather that in its framing of

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Theology is for Proclamation (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1990).

[18] Otto's work should be viewed with caution and his inclusion in this paper should not be seen as an endorsement. Nevertheless, his work does help to illustrate a point.

[19] It is important to note that by 'non-rational' Otto does not mean 'irrational.' Anders Nygren demonstrates this qualification well in his work *Agape and Eros*, and while he is dealing specifically with the Agape motif, it remains relevant for our current undertaking: "There is in many quarters today an unhealthy cult of the paradoxical and irrational, almost as if the lack of clarity and consistency were sufficient evidence of religious or Christian truth. When we describe the idea of Agape as paradoxical and irrational, we do not for a moment suggest that it contains any logical contradiction or implies a *credo quia absurdum*. The idea of Agape is by no means self-contradictory. On the contrary it is a quite simple and clear and easily comprehensible idea. It is paradoxical and irrational only inasmuch as it means a transvaluation of all previously accepted values." Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros* (London: SPCK, 1953), 204.

[20] Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 2.

[21] It is rather ironic that Otto utilized a rational European method in order to arrive at the conclusion that Christianity had a one-sidedly intellectualistic and rationalistic interpretation. Thus, his argument seems to become self-defeating. But again, his assessment does help illustrate a point.

doctrine orthodox Christianity found "no way to do justice to the non-rational aspect of its subject."[22] What, then, was the result?

> So far from keeping the non-rational element in religion alive in the heart of the religious experience, orthodox Christianity manifestly failed to recognize its value, and by this failure gave to the idea of God a one-sidedly intellectualistic and rationalistic interpretation.[23]

This has far-reaching consequences for the theological task. Regarding Lutheran theological discourse, Otto argues that it "has itself not done justice to the numinous side of the Christian idea of God,"[24] and though Otto's method may undermine his findings, his assessment does help illustrate a point. While in the life and thought of Luther one could see the tension and interplay between rational and non-rational expressions, from Johann Gerhardt onwards Lutheranism "was returning to the doctrine of divine 'apatheia' or passionlessness."[25] Otto maintained that it was Schleiermacher who first attempted to overcome this rationalism that inevitably led to 'apatheia,'[26] and it will be the "task for contemporary Christian teaching to follow in his traces and again to deepen the rational meaning of the Christian conception of God by permeating it with its non-rational elements."[27] In doing this, the tension between non-rational experience and intellectual language can be maintained without leading to either extreme rationalism or mysticism. One is free to look both *along* and *at* existence and being, for looking *along* and *at* exist in symbiotic relationship. However, while both are necessary, it is important to note that both are not equal. As expressed in the words of Gustaf Wingren—"to live is something

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[22] Ibid., 3.

[23] Ibid., 3.

[24] Ibid., 108.

[25] Ibid., 108.

[26] As with Otto, it seems rather ironic that Schleiermacher attempted to overcome this one-sidedly intellectualistic interpretation by seeking to reconcile Christianity with Enlightenment criticisms (thus creating a 'rational' synthesis).

larger and more important than having knowledge."[28] Some, however, have seen Lutheran theology as reversing this maxim, where proper knowledge is something larger and more important than living,[29] where looking *at* somehow debunks looking *along*.

A Critique of Dialectic Lutheranism

Lutherans have at times been accused of over-systematizing law and gospel into a strict dialectic framework,[30] which can in turn lead to a sort of antinomianism or strident moralism. According to this critique, justification serves as a ceiling where the law is seen as the bad news and the gospel is seen as the good news. Richard John Neuhaus points this out in his article, "On Loving the Law of God," which is based upon an essay written by the Lutheran moral-theologian, Gilbert Meilaender. Towards the beginning of the article, Neuhaus shares the story of an experience he had while he was a young Lutheran seminarian:

> I was struck by a professor's forceful declaration that the phrase growth in grace is a contradiction in terms. The grace of the gospel of forgiveness is absolute, unqualified, perfect. It allows for no growth or improvement. The law of God, stating what God demands of us, is the enemy, from which our only refuge is the gospel. Put simply—but upon it entire theological systems have been constructed—the law is the bad news and the gospel is the good news.[31]

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[27] Ibid., 108.

[28] Gustaf Wingren, "The Doctrine of Creation: Not an Appendix but the First Article," *Word & World* IV (Fall 1984): 355.

[29] This type of generalization can be dangerous due to its relative nature. For instance, someone who views looking *along* as a truer or more valid form of knowledge might be skeptical of any doctrinal language that asserts boundaries when looking *at*. The real question, then, should be what is the proper balance between looking *along* and looking *at*, between experiential primary discourse and linguistic secondary discourse (which is also an experience, but of a different kind).

[30] Applied to the previous discussion, this strict dialectic could function as the scientist who looks *at* the young man who is 'in love' and explains it all as an affair of the young man's genes. While this explanation in a sense is true, it does not do justice to the full extent of the reality of the existential experience of looking *along*. Concerning dialectic Lutheranism, the dialectic experience of the cross/resurrection motif may be true, but it is not the sole motif, and by itself it can fail to due justice to the full extent of God's one reconciling work in Christ. It could also be argued that strict dialectic Lutheranism is based solely on experience, on being killed and made alive. But the reality must be that through this dialectic experience there is also linear growth in sanctification.

[31] Richard John Neuhaus, "On Loving Law of God," *First Things* 190 (February 2009): 61.

Neuhaus refers to this view of the function of law and gospel as the "dialectic" framework, where the Christian is addressed as either 'despairing man' (with the gospel) or 'complacent man' (with the law).[32]

Regarding the dialectic framework of law and gospel, Gilbert Meilaender writes in his essay, "Hearts Set to Obey":

> Grace is in no sense a power that enables us to become 'more and more' what God wills we should be; rather, grace is pardon that announces God's acceptance of the sinner and thereby elicits the faith that puts sinners in right relation with God. That grace having been announced, there is no more to be said—other than to say it 'again and again.'[33]

Neuhaus points out that closely connected to this dialectic framework of law and gospel is the key Lutheran phrase *simul justus et peccator*—"always, and at the same time, both justified and sinner." To clarify, neither Meilaender nor Neuhaus are advocating a full rejection of the dialectic framework of law and gospel; rather, as Neuhaus points out in his article:

> Meilaender makes clear that he is offering a critique of a "a certain understanding of Lutheranism" that in its law–gospel dialectic "eventually arrives at a kind of practical antinomianism—which is all too readily accompanied by a strident moralism—but that, were it consistent, would have no reason to pray that our hearts may be set to obey God's commandments."[34]

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[32] In order to further address Neuhaus' concerns, a brief overview of the distinction between law and gospel could be of service. When examining law and gospel, it is helpful to distinguish between a broad and narrow sense. When taken in their broad sense, law and gospel do not differ, and the law is not seen as the bad news while the gospel is the good news. As the *Christian Cyclopedia*, ed. Erwin L. Lueker, Luther Poellot, and Paul Jackson (Saint Louis: Concordia, 2000) puts it: "They do not contradict each other. Both are God's Word; both are in the *OT* and *NT*; both are to be applied to people everywhere, including Christians." But, when taken in their narrow sense, there are distinct differences between law and gospel: "Differences: (a) The Law was written into man's heart: the Gospel is not known by nature, but was revealed through Jesus and the Word of God. (b) The Law contains commandments of what we are to do and not to do and how we are to be; the Gospel reveals what God has done and still does for our salvation. (c) The Law promises eternal life conditionally; the Gospel promises it freely. (d) The Law demands perfect fulfillment and pronounces curses and threats if there is no perfect fulfillment; the Gospel has only promises and comforting assurances. (e) The purpose of the Law is to serve as a curb, mirror, and rule (see also *FC VI*); the purpose of the Gospel is to forgive sins and give heaven and salvation as a free gift."

[33] Gilbert Meilaender, "Hearts Set to Obey," in *I Am the Lord Your God: Christian Reflections on the Ten Commandments*, ed. Carl Braaten and Christopher Seitz (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 260.

[34] Neuhaus, "On Loving the Law of God," 62.

What, then, are Neuhaus and Meilaender advocating as the proper attitude toward the interaction between law and gospel?

In response to an overly systematic dialectic framework where justification serves as a ceiling, both Neuhaus and Meilaender seem to be advocating a linear framework of sanctification that fully engages the dialectic framework. Meilaender writes:

> It is in no way contrary to the life of discipleship, that we should, again and again, experience ourselves as simply caught in the tension between the reality of our sin and the reality of God's forgiveness. What *is* contrary to the path of discipleship is that we should rest content in that static condition, that we should not in prayer strain against it as we ask Christ's Spirit to make the history of redemption an ever more effective reality in what we think, say, and do. 'Strive,' says the Letter to the Hebrews, 'for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.'[35]

In other words, the dialectic framework is not in itself problematic,[36] but by itself it can be problematic. For, when the dialectic framework operates as a ceiling then there is nothing to be done except hear the word of law as 'complacent man,' or the word of gospel as 'despairing man.'[37] This should be seen as problematic because it fails to provide room for human experiences outside of despair and complacency. A possible negative result of this is that theological language can fail to leave room for the full extent of human experience, leading to a further compartmentalization where formal doctrine is divorced from lived reality. How, then, does this apply to the distinction between looking *at* and looking *along*?

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[35] Meilaender, "Hearts Set to Obey," 257.

[36] In fact, regarding justification and the person and work of Christ, the dialectic framework should be seen as absolutely correct, for the grace shown in the gospel of forgiveness is absolute, unqualified, and perfect. There can be no room for growth or improvement because grace is all God's action in Christ. The attempt to do something inevitably leads to self-justification rather than justification of the self by God. In this context, the law appears to be bad news because it is God on our backs, a pointed finger, and an accusation. At this point the only refuge is the gospel, the good news that is absolute, unqualified, and perfect without room for growth. Through this lens the Christian must consistently be sent back to square one, back to the Cross—*Crux sola est nostra theologia.*

[37] While the law should be spoken to 'complacent man' and the gospel to 'despairing man,' it is dangerous to maintain that an individual is always either complacent or despairing, for this fails to take into account the varieties of human experience.

Theological discourse should not look *at* theological themes *in vacuo*. Rather, faithful theological discourse should seek to look *at* theological themes in a way that serves looking *along* the Christian life within the wider story of creation, fall, incarnation, redemption, and *eschaton*. For instance, regarding sanctification and the continuing work of the Holy Spirit, there is room for growth in the love and knowledge of God where the law is not seen as bad news. As Bonhoeffer states, "It is grace to know God's commandments."[38] As the psalmist cries in Psalm 119, we should love, cherish, and exult the law of God. And, as Christians have prayed since at least the Seventh Century, we should pray: "O God, from whom come all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works: Give to us, your servants, that peace which the world cannot give, that our hearts may be set to obey your commandments."[39] But, does this then compromise the doctrinal integrity of the dialectic framework?

Through the lens of sanctification Lutherans can see the good news of the law as God's intended structure for human life. Through this lens Lutherans may agree with the "linear" framework of Catholicism, where "the Christian life is understood as a via, a journey (destined -ultimately to end in the vision of God)."[40] This journey, where the law is seen as the good structure for human life, can only take place if it is rooted in the gospel Word that transforms us and gives us a new identity *extra nos*. This in no way contradicts justification and the dialectic framework of law and gospel. Rather, the dialectic and linear frameworks function as two different angles which describe the one reconciling work of God in Christ. Meilaender, after reflecting on George Hunsinger's essay titled "What Karl Barth Learned from Martin Luther," puts it this way:

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[38] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Psalms: The Prayerbook of the Bible* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1970), 31.

[39] Meilaender, "Hearts Set to Obey," 253.

[40] Ibid., 259.

> The terms 'justification' and 'sanctification' point not to different works of God but to two different angles—pardon and power—from which to describe the one work of God in Christ, reconciling the world to himself. These are different ways of describing how God's Spirit draws our lives into the story of Jesus. The language of pardon addresses a truth of our experience—the continuing lure of sin. The language of power articulates the truth of reality—that God is at work, fulfilling his promise to turn sinners into saints.[41]

Placed within the categories of looking *at* and looking *along*, living the Christian life necessarily includes looking both *at* and *along* justification and sanctification as they reflect God's one reconciling work. An overly strict dialectic framework can be seen as relying too heavily upon the experience of looking *at* and *along* the angle of justification (which can fail to leave room for sanctification). An overly strict linear framework can be seen as relying too heavily upon the experience of looking *at* and *along* the angle of sanctification (which can fail to leave room for justification). In response to this, both justification and sanctification must be proclaimed full force, so as not to turn into a zero-sum game. What should distinguish them is not necessarily the order in which they are applied, but rather the circumstances to which they are applied. Meilaender, again, helps clarify the matter:

> To those who are troubled in their hearts and tempted to despair, God's word of grace must be spoken as sheer pardon, free of any demand that might be heard as an accusation. Only grace as pardon can draw the despairing out of themselves, teach them not to look inward (which is, after all, their problem), but outward to the righteousness of Christ. To those who trust that by God's grace they are no longer in bondage to sin and who seek, however haltingly and imperfectly, to bring their lives into obedience to his will, the gift and guidance of God's empowering grace should be offered. Thus, the distinction between justification and sanctification lies not in some wooden order of priority, but is a pastoral art, the skill of discerning whether grace as pardon or as power is needed. And the distinction between these languages is not the chief structuring principle of theology; it is, rather, the pastor's art.[42]

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[41] Ibid., 271.

[42] Ibid., 272.

The question, however, remains as to how the 'angles' of the dialectic and linear frameworks intersect in the life of the believer so that system serves story and knowledge serves living. This is a necessary issue to address, for our secondary discourse about God (such as talk about justification and sanctification), must foster and drive to primary discourse in relationship with God. As was mentioned earlier, our theological secondary discourse has often approached the idea of God according to a one-sidedly intellectualistic and rationalistic interpretation. How, then, does one go about permeating the Christian conception of God with non-rational elements while retaining the proper orthodox theological boundaries? How can the poet be welcomed into an arena that in Modern times has often been ruled by the scientist? This cannot simply be taught, rather—"it can only be evoked, awakened in the mind; as everything that comes 'of the spirit' must be awakened."[43] One individual who excelled in doing this was C. S. Lewis. By further examining his life and thought we might be better equipped to do the same.

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[43] Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 7.

CHAPTER TWO

An Introduction to C. S. Lewis' *Sehnsucht*

In his spiritual autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*, C. S. Lewis recounts three distinct experiences that made a profound impact on his life. The first was the memory of a memory—as he stood by a flowering currant bush on a summer day, there arose in him the memory of when his older brother had brought a toy garden into his childhood nursery. Here he was first confronted with beauty: "What the real garden had failed to do, the toy garden did. It made me aware of nature—not, indeed, as a storehouse of forms and colors but as something cool, dewy, fresh, exuberant."[1] The memory of this memory aroused in young Lewis a sensation that "had taken only a moment of time," but made everything else that had ever happened to him "insignificant in comparison."[2] It was a longing, but longing for what? A desire, but desire for what? And before he could answer, "the desire itself was gone, the whole glimpse withdrawn, the world turned commonplace again, or only stirred by a longing for the longing that had just ceased."[3]

The second occurred while reading the children's book *Squirrel Nutkin* by Beatrix Potter,[4] where he became enamored with 'Autumness' and was overcome by an experience that "was something quite different from ordinary life and even from ordinary pleasure; something, as they

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[1] C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (New York: Harcourt, 1966), 7.

[2] Ibid., 16.

[3] Ibid., 16.

[4] Ibid., 16.

would now say, 'in another dimension.'"[5] As before, the sensation was one of intense longing and desire: "And one went back to the book, not to gratify the desire (that was impossible—how can one *possess* Autumn?) but to reawake it."[6]

The third came while reading the unrhymed translation of *Tegner's Drapa*:

I heard a voice that cried,

Balder the beautiful

Is dead, is dead—[7]

Lewis reminisced, "I knew nothing about Balder; but instantly I was uplifted into huge regions of northern sky.... and then, as in the other examples, found myself at the very same moment already falling out of that desire and wishing I were back in it."[8] Once Lewis had tasted this sensation, he believed that to "'have it again' was the supreme and only important object of desire."[9]

While these three distinct experiences reflected C. S. Lewis' personal encounters with what he called *Sehnsucht*,[10] he maintained that the experience is both common and commonly misunderstood. Due to its non-rational character, *Sehnsucht* is often experienced but seldom talked about. It is looked *along*, but when it is looked *at* one quickly realizes the paucity of words. In fact, one could argue that unless an individual has looked *along* and experienced *Sehnsucht*, there is no way it can really be explained, for there would be no relevant frame of

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[5] Ibid., 16–17.

[6] Ibid., 17.

[7] Ibid., 17.

[8] Ibid., 17.

[9] Ibid., 73.

[10] *Sehnsucht* is a German term with no direct English equivalent. It is roughly translated as "longing." From this point forward the words 'Joy,' *Sehnsucht*, and 'Desire' will be used interchangeably as technical terms that refer to Lewis' specific understanding of this unique experience.

reference. It would be like trying to explain the physical sensations of the sexual impulse to someone who is pre-pubescent. Because of this, offering a concrete definition proves to be rather difficult, and instead, the essence of *Sehnsucht* must be evoked, alluded to, and awakened.[11]

The Thesis Statement

Together, the experiences and glimpses of what Lewis called 'Joy' or *Sehnsucht* served as the central thread of his life[12] and provided him with the ontological lens through which he viewed reality.[13] It is the plan of this paper to further examine Lewis' treatment of *Sehnsucht*[14] by engaging it in dialogue with a Lutheran theological perspective. In doing so, there are two main objectives that I hope to accomplish. The first objective is to demonstrate that the experience of *Sehnsucht* should not be merely dismissed or fully embraced; rather, it should be placed within a proper theological narrative that allows 'Romanticism' (in Lewis' peculiar sense)[15] and reason to

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[11] In order to further clarify what Lewis meant by *Sehnsucht*, and in an attempt to correct some misunderstandings of it, please refer to Appendix One, where I briefly write of its workings in my own life.

[12] After recounting his experiences with *Sehnsucht*, Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 17, writes: "The reader who finds these three episodes of no interest need read this book no further, for in a sense the central story of my life is about nothing else.".

[13] At least until his conversion to Christianity.

[14] This will serve as an introductory treatment of Lewis' *Sehnsucht*. For a more comprehensive treatment see Corbin Scott Carnell, *Bright Shadow of Reality: Spiritual Longing in C. S. Lewis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

[15] In the Afterword to the Third Edition of *The Pilgrim's Regress* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), Lewis says of the term 'Romanticism' (p. 200): "I now believe it to be a word of such varying senses that it has become useless and should be banished from our vocabulary." He goes on to provide at least seven definitions or interpretations of what it is to be 'Romantic' (p. 201):

1) Stories about dangerous adventure

2) The marvelous is 'romantic'

3) The art dealing with 'Titanic' characters, emotions strained beyond the common pitch, and high-flown sentiments or codes of honor is 'romantic'

4) 'Romanticism' can also mean the indulgence in abnormal, and finally anti-natural, moods

5) Egoism and Subjectivism are 'romantic'

6) Every revolt against existing civilization and conventions....is called 'romantic'

7) Sensibility to natural objects, when solemn and enthusiastic, is 'romantic'

But what Lewis meant by 'Romanticism' was not necessarily any of those seven things. In his words (p. 202):

run freely within their proper boundaries. The second objective is to warn the reader of the inherent dangers in over-systematizing the language we use to set our theological boundaries,[16] for when this happens we are bound to compartmentalize theological belief and lived experience, which leads to something far less then being fully human.

The underlying motivation for pursuing this topic is the perception that certain strands of Lutheran theology have at times tended toward an over-systematization which fails to leave room for non-rational components (such as *Sehnsucht*), and leads to what Otto refers to as divine 'apatheia.' This, again, can be seen as leading to a compartmentalization between theological belief and lived experience, leaving the individual fragmented rather than reconciled.

"What I meant was a particular recurrent experience which dominated my childhood and adolescence and which I hastily called 'Romantic' because inanimate nature and marvelous literature were among the things that evoked it. I still believe that the experience is common, commonly misunderstood, and of immense importance: but I know now that in other minds it arises under other *stimuli* and is entangled with other irrelevancies and that to bring it into the forefront of consciousness is not so easy as I once supposed."

[16] This can be seen, for instance, when the distinction between the language of law and gospel operates within a strict dialectic framework that turns into the chief structuring principle of theology instead of serving as the pastor's art.

CHAPTER THREE

Qualities of *Sehnsucht*

After recounting his early experiences with 'Joy,' Lewis goes on to warn that "The reader who finds these three episodes of no interest need read this book no further,"[1] for without living the experience the experience itself would have no meaning. Just as the word *pain* would have no meaning for the physiologist unless he had been inside suffering, so also Joy would have no meaning for the reader unless he had been on the inside of spiritual longing and unsatisfied desire. What, then, is Joy or *Sehnsucht* according to Lewis?

Instead of giving a definition, per se, Lewis underlines the shared qualities and characteristics to his experiences with *Sehnsucht*. This is because, as Otto states regarding non-rational entities—"it can only be evoked, awakened in the mind; as everything that comes 'of the spirit' must be awakened."[2] With this in mind, Lewis says, "It is that of an unsatisfied desire which is itself more desirable than any other satisfaction."[3] He refers to it as Joy, *Sehnsucht,* or Desire, but he uses these as technical terms that must be distinguished from happiness or pleasure: "Joy (in my sense) has indeed one characteristic, and one only, in common with them; the fact that anyone who has experienced it will want it again."[4] While happiness and pleasure can often be found or manufactured, Joy appears on its own terms, and once it is realized, the

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[1] Ibid., 17–18.

[2] Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 7.

[3] Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 18.

[4] Ibid., 18.

experience is gone. Because of this it contains an element of grief, for one is left alienated from the unknown object of desire, and in its place is left only the glimpse of a memory or the longing for longing. But in saying this, Lewis argues that it is a kind of bittersweet grief, a kind of grief we want: "I doubt whether anyone who has tasted it would ever, if both were in his power, exchange it for all the pleasures in the world. But then Joy is never in our power and pleasure often is."[5] If not happiness or pleasure then could it just be characterized as another form of aesthetic pleasure or nostalgia for the past?

In his well-known sermon, *The Weight of Glory*, Lewis addresses those who claim that Joy is merely the admiration of beauty or longing for the past:

> In speaking of this desire for our own far-off country, which we find in ourselves even now, I feel a certain shyness. I am almost committing an indecency. I am trying to rip open the inconsolable secret in each one of you—the secret which hurts so much that you take your revenge on it by calling it names like Nostalgia and Romanticism and Adolescence; the secret also which pierces with such sweetness that when, in very intimate conversation, the mention of it becomes imminent, we grow awkward and affect to laugh at ourselves; the secret we cannot hide and cannot tell, though we desire to do both. We cannot tell it because it is a desire for something that has never actually appeared in our experience. We cannot hide it because our experience is constantly suggesting it, and we betray ourselves like lovers at the mention of a name. Our commonest expedient is to call it beauty and behave as if that had settled the matter. Wordsworth's expedient was to identify it with certain moments in his own past. But all this is a cheat.[6]

The attempt to resolve the tension of *Sehnsucht* by either desiring desire or seeking to satisfy unsatisfied desire ends up being a cheat, for it is neither the experience itself nor the stimuli that aroused the experience that is desired. Lewis continues:

> If Wordsworth had gone back to those moments in the past, he would not have found the thing itself, but only the reminder of it; what he remembered would turn out to be itself a remembering. The books or the music in which we thought the beauty was located will betray us if we trust to them; it was not *in* them, it only came *through*

[5] Ibid., 18.

[6] C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (New York: Macmillan, 1949), 4.

> them, and what came through them was longing. These things—the beauty, the memory of our own past—are good images of what we really desire; but if they are mistaken for the thing itself they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshippers. For they are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never yet visited.[7]

Desiring desire or seeking to satisfy unsatisfied desire inevitably leaves one unfulfilled and wanting more.

Desiring Desire

Two things distinguish *Sehnsucht* from other forms of longing. First, "though the sense of want is acute and even painful, yet the mere wanting is felt to be somehow a delight."[8] While other desires and longings seem to be pleasurable only if their satisfaction is within reach, *Sehnsucht* is felt as pleasurable even when the object of satisfaction is neither known or within reach. Because of this, when the delight of Desire is long absent, one begins to desire Desire, "and that new desiring becomes a new instance of the original desire."[9] While this can seem confusing, Lewis claims that it is simple and easily recognized when we live it: "'Oh to feel as I did then!' we cry; not noticing that even while we say the words the very feeling whose loss we lament is rising again in all its old bitter-sweetness."[10] Because of this, *Sehnsucht* is unique from other forms of longing and desire. Even though the desire remains unsatisfied, the lines between wanting and having are blurred—"To have it is, by definition, a want: to want it, we find, is to have it."[11] Yet the moment we realize that we have it, and the moment we stop to look *at* it, is the

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[7] Ibid., 4–5.

[8] Lewis, *The Pilgrim's Regress*, 202.

[9] Ibid., 202.

[10] Ibid., 203.

[11] Ibid., 203.

moment it disappears. In order to explain this phenomenon, Lewis was heavily influenced by the Australian-born British philosopher, Samuel Alexander, in his work *Space, Time, and Deity.*[12]

Enjoyment and Contemplation

Alexander's theory of "Enjoyment" and "Contemplation"[13] played a pivotal role in Lewis' intellectual journey towards Christianity, and Lewis' explanation of the distinction is worth full mention:

> "Enjoyment" has nothing to do with pleasure, nor "Contemplation" with the contemplative life. When you see a table you "enjoy" the act of seeing and "contemplate" the table. Later, if you took up Optics and thought about Seeing itself, you would be contemplating the seeing and enjoying the thought. In bereavement you contemplate the beloved and the beloved's death and, in Alexander's sense, "enjoy" the loneliness and grief; but a psychologist, if he were considering you as a case of melancholia, would be contemplating your grief and enjoying psychology. We do not "think a thought" in the same sense in which we "think that Herodotus is unreliable." When we think a thought, "thought" is a cognate accusative (like "blow" in "strike a blow"). We enjoy the thought (that Herodotus is unreliable) and, in so doing, contemplate the unreliability of Herodotus.[14]

Lewis argues that instead of the twofold division of the Conscious and the Unconscious, there should be a threefold division of the Unconscious, the Contemplated, and the Enjoyed,[15] because Contemplating and Enjoying are incompatible (in the sense that they cannot occur simultaneously).[16] The moment you start contemplating the enjoyed is the moment enjoyment stops. Lewis applies this distinction to pleasure saying, "The surest way of spoiling a pleasure

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[12] Samuel Alexander, *Space, Time, and Deity* (London: Macmillan, 1920). Alexander gave the Gifford Lectures at Glasgow in 1916–1918. These were later published as *Space, Time, and Deity*.

[13] "Enjoyment" and "Contemplation" are merely another way of saying looking *along* and looking *at*.

[14] Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 217–18.

[15] Ibid., 219.

[16] To be sure, there are definite arbitrary limitations in defining these complex concepts, but the terms helped serve Lewis' purpose and point.

was to start examining your satisfaction."[17] How, then, did this relate to Lewis' concept of *Sehnsucht*?

Once Lewis grasped the distinction between "Enjoyment" and "Contemplation" he was able to see its workings in his experiences with Joy: "I saw that all my waitings and watchings for Joy, all my vain hopes to find some mental content on which I could, so to speak, lay my finger and say, 'This is it,' had been a futile attempt to contemplate the enjoyed."[18] In desiring Desire all Lewis could find was "not the wave" but rather "the wave's imprint on the sand."[19] This realization freed Lewis from deifying Joy and led him to seek Desire's object rather than Desire itself. In the end, Joy was merely a reminder and a pointer saying—"Look! Look! What do I remind you of?"[20] In order to come to this realization, however, he had to follow the dialectic of desire, which for Lewis served as a sort of lived ontological proof.

Seeking to Satisfy Unsatisfied Desire

Lewis believed that if one truly followed the desire of *Sehnsucht* and resolutely abandoned false illusions of satisfaction, then "he must come out at last into the clear knowledge that the human soul was made to enjoy some object that is never fully given—nay, cannot even be imagined as given—in our present mode of subjective and spatio-temporal experience."[21] This argument rested on the premise that nature makes nothing in vain. Although hunger does not prove that we shall eat, it does prove that we live in a world where there is food. While thirst does not prove that we shall drink, it does prove that we live in a world where there is such a

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[17] Ibid., 218.

[18] Ibid., 219.

[19] Ibid., 219.

[20] Ibid., 220.

[21] Lewis, *The Pilgrim's Regress*, 204–5.

thing as water. Lewis believed that Joy was a natural desire, and since nature makes nothing in vain, there must be satisfaction for that desire. While it is easy to head in wrong directions and pursue false objects that promise satisfaction, they inevitably turn out to be dumb idols. But Desire itself contained the corrective to these errors:

> The only fatal error was to pretend that you had passed from desire to fruition, when, in reality, you had found either nothing, or desire itself, or the satisfaction of some different desire. The dialectic of Desire, faithfully followed, would retrieve all mistakes, head you off from all false paths, and force you not to propound, but to live through, a sort of ontological proof. This lived dialectic, and the merely argued dialectic of my philosophical progress, seemed to have converged on one goal.[22]

This goal, according to Lewis, is glory.

The Weight of Glory

Originally preached as a sermon in the Church of St. Mary the Virgin in 1942, *The Weight of Glory* has become one of C. S. Lewis' most famous theological works. He begins by examining the apparent shift from a positive to a negative view of virtue: "If you asked twenty good men today what they thought the highest of the virtues, nineteen of them would reply, Unselfishness. But if you asked almost any of the great Christians of old he would have replied, Love."[23] Lewis sees this shift as being of utmost importance, for "the negative ideal of Unselfishness carries with it the suggestion not primarily of securing good things for others, but of going without them ourselves, as if our abstinence and not their happiness was the important point."[24] The problem with this negative view of virtue, according to Lewis, is that it fails to line up with the New Testament. While there are numerous sections that deal with self-denial, these were never meant to serve as an end or destination.

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[22] Ibid., 205.

[23] C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, 1.

[24] Ibid., 1.

After detailing the apparent shift from a positive to a negative view of virtue, Lewis continues to present his well-known appeal to desire. While we are told to pick up our crosses and follow Christ, Lewis argues, "nearly every description of what we shall ultimately find if we do so contains an appeal to desire."[25] But the notion of desire often raises suspicion—for can one really trust desire? While desire can be directed towards good or evil, it should not be discounted altogether: "If there lurks in most modern minds the notion that to desire our own good and earnestly to hope for the enjoyment of it is a bad thing, I submit that this notion has crept in from Kant and the Stoics and is not part of the Christian faith."[26] At this point Lewis suggests an idea that seems foreign to many accents of Christianity:

> Our Lord finds our desires, not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.[27]

This, then, could make Christianity appear like a mercenary affair, where individuals are rewarded for what they believe, think, say, or do. But Lewis argues that there are different types of reward, and certain rewards are the natural fulfillment of the activity itself. In his words, "The proper rewards are not simply tacked on to the activity for which they are given, but are the activity itself in consummation."[28] According to Lewis, for the Christian heaven is merely the consummation of the activity of his earthly discipleship. However, those "who have not yet attained it cannot know this in the same way, and cannot even begin to know it at all except by continuing to obey and finding the first reward of our obedience in our increasing power to

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[25] Ibid., 1.

[26] Ibid., 1.

[27] Ibid., 1.

[28] Ibid., 2.

desire the ultimate reward."[29] Because of this, as our desire for obedience grows so will our fear of God's wrath dissipate and be recognized as an absurdity.[30] But, Lewis warns, "this will not, for most of us, happen in a day; poetry replaces grammar, gospel replaces law, longing transforms obedience, as gradually as the tide lifts a grounded ship."[31]

Because mankind was made for heaven, Lewis believed that "the desire for our proper place will be already in us, but not yet attached to the true object, and will even appear as the rival of that object."[32] Any earthly good can at best bear only a symbolic relationship to the eternal good of a transtemporal and transfinite destiny that will one day fully and truly satisfy. But, as beings *incurvatus in se*, we seek to satisfy Desire with created things, turning the finite into the ultimate. This grim aspect of human nature is especially fed by the sense of worldliness that dominates the spirit of our age. In a sense, Lewis saw *Sehnsucht* as a tool to break the 'spell' of worldliness:

> Almost our whole education has been directed to silencing this shy, persistent, inner voice; almost all our modern philosophies have been devised to convince us that the good of man is to be found on this earth. And yet it is a remarkable thing that such philosophies of Progress or Creative Evolution themselves bear reluctant witness to the truth that our real goal is elsewhere. When they want to convince you that earth is your home, notice how they set about it. They begin by trying to persuade you that earth can be made into heaven, thus giving a sop to your sense of exile in earth as it is. Next, they tell you that this fortunate event is still a good way off in the future, thus giving a sop to your knowledge that the fatherland is not here and now. Finally, lest your longing for the transtemporal should awake and spoil the whole affair, they use any rhetoric that comes to hand to keep out of your mind the recollection that even if all the happiness they promised could come to man on earth, yet still each

[29] Ibid., 3.

[30] This portion of Lewis' writings may appear to be theologically problematic, as it seems to drift too far towards Platonism and the *Eros* motif. This will be further dealt with in chapter 5.

[31] Ibid., 3.

[32] Ibid., 3.

> generation would lose it by death, including the last generation of all, and the whole story would be nothing, not even a story, for ever and ever.[33]

In other words, the first step in the dialectic of Desire is negative rather than positive; one must first realize that nothing in the world can or will satisfy before they can realize the true object of Desire. How, then, did we come to this overall spirit of worldliness?

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[33] Ibid., 5.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Domestication of Transcendence

In *The Domestication of Transcendence,* William Placher asserts that since the 17th century there has been a major shift in our understanding and approach to God. This shift is evident not only within the life of the church, but has spilled out into the wider culture—in literature, in philosophy, and in the arts. While pre-modern thinkers such as Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin were "struck by the mystery, the wholly otherness of God, and the inadequacy of any human categories as applied to God,"[1] later figures beginning with Descartes turned to an anthropocentric view of the world. Placher labels this as the "domestication of transcendence," a shift away from analogical predication towards univocal and equivocal uses of language. What, then, is meant by these technical terms? Two things are said *univocally* if we mean the same thing in both cases…two usages are *equivocal* if they simply happen to use the same word for completely different meanings," while "analogical predication lies somewhere in between the other two classes."[2]

Applied to the topic of this paper, when talking about God, univocal language could be seen as being utilized by the skeptic who only looks *at* Christianity according to scientific terms and rational categories.[3] For the Christian, who looks both *at* and *along* the Christian life, analogical predication should be used when talking about God, for the being of God transcends the limits of our language and rational categories (and yet God chooses to reveal himself

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[1] William Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 6.

[2] Ibid., 28.

specifically through language, which demonstrates why we necessarily must look both *at* and *along*). Lewis would agree with Placher in saying that those who look *at* the ultimate things of life under solely univocal predication have won the day. Because of the anthropocentric shift, God is not the source of light by which we must look *along* and *at* everything; rather, we set the terms by stepping outside the beam of light, looking *at* it, contemplating it, ceasing to enjoy God and instead putting him in the dock. What is needed is a spell to break the enchantment of worldliness, to point to something more, to affirm the failure of creation's ability to fulfill the Desire of us who are created. For C. S. Lewis, the lived dialectic of Desire helped break the spell of worldliness and gave him a taste for a world filled with wonder, enchantment, and myth.

The Method of Myth[4]

G. K. Chesterton, in his work *Orthodoxy,* asserts: "Poetry is sane because it floats easily in an infinite sea; reason seeks to cross the infinite sea, and so make it finite. The result is mental exhaustion."[5] Poetry and myth can be seen as belonging to the same literary category, that which exalts creativity and imagination rather than just rationality. For "the poet only desires exaltation and expansion, a world to stretch himself in," and "only asks to get his head into the heavens."[6] Myth lifts us into the heavens and allows us to better understand reality, but "it is the logician who seeks to get the heavens into his head. And it is head that splits."[7] Unfortunately, as pointed out by both Lewis and Placher, our current age since the scientific revolution more accurately

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[3] Unfortunately, as Placher demonstrates, this often affects the church as well.

[4] Because 'myth' has a variety of meanings, a further definition is necessary. In this paper, myth is used as a technical term to express the reality of things which are beyond empirical observation. It could also be referred to as narrative or story. However, it is important to note here that myth and truth are closely connected, for myth does not arise out of the individual's imagination but rather from an ontology of the Word. In other words, there is one true Myth, and this Myth became Fact in the incarnation.

[5] G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (Colorado Springs: Random House, 2001), 15.

[6] Ibid., 15.

resembles the logician rather than the poet, and discourages this "gigantesque imagination, which is, perhaps, the mightiest pleasures of man."[8] This is not to say that logic or scientific inquiry are useless, but rather, that they must be properly utilized—with humility—for "it is impossible without humility to enjoy anything—even pride."[9] Poets and scientists are both needed, but in recent years the balance has been upset and is in need of a recovery.

In his essay, *What is Myth?*, Clyde Kilby provides an excellent account of the nature of myth. While he maintains that the two most basic characteristics of mankind are to know and to worship, there exists a third characteristic—the imagination—which is necessary to address the mythic core of our humanity. He writes:

> Our present age in particular is convinced that the main avenue to knowing is the making of statements. Yet all statements whatever, indeed all systems, in becoming statements and systems, become self-destructive. One is at sixes and sevens to translate a language of one hundred thousand words into a language of one thousand words. This is man's predicament. What man is, what he feels himself to be, makes a wasteland of language. Yet because of man's insatiable desire to know he requires some sort of verbal actualization… We intellectualize in order to know, but paradoxically, intellectualization tends to destroy its object. The harder we grasp at the thing, the more its reality moves away. [10]

Note the parallels with Lewis who says our dilemma is to taste and not to know or to know and not to taste. In response to this, imagination is necessary because it is able to transcend systems and statements: "By some magic, imagination is able to disengage our habitual discursive and system-making and send us on a journey toward gestures, pictures, images, rhythms, metaphor, symbol, and at the peak of all, myth."[11] While intellectualizing tends to destroy its object through

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[7] Ibid., 15.

[8] Ibid., 37.

[9] Ibid., 38.

[10] Clyde Kilby, "What is Myth?" in Rolland Hein, *Christian Mythmakers* (Chicago: Cornerstone Press, 2002), ix–x.

[11] Kilby, "What is Myth?" x.

overly univocal language, imagination and creativity have a way of preserving the whole of objects through analogical predication, symbol, and gesture. While over-systematizing can flatten and drain away color and life, myth restores.[12] This is not to promote an overly negative posture towards intellectualization, but rather to demonstrate the necessary rhythm between intellectualization and imagination; systems and stories; looking *at* and looking *along*—which has been lacking in our Modern age. Why, then, is this rhythm so fundamentally important?

While theology by definition deals with words, with language, and with statements, these alone can be unsatisfying due to man's fundamentally mythic nature.[13] According to Kilby: "His real health depends upon his knowing and living his metaphysical totality. In myth man discovers and affirms not his disparate nature but his mythic."[14] Knowing and living are both necessary in order to be fully actualized human beings, but as Wingren said: "to live is something larger and more important than having knowledge."[15] Wingren wrote this in order to express that in the ancient church, "people had not yet focused their attention on the contrast… between having knowledge and not having knowledge."[16] Rather, the ancient church saw the fundamental contrast as being a "contrast of *death* standing over against *life*."[17] One can see this in the simple act of breathing, for "Breathing is more important than knowledge about

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[12] Kilby, xi.

[13] For instance, words, language, and statements that are merely about God (secondary discourse) are unsatisfying because of our mythic nature. But the Word is not primarily about God—the Word is living and active and connects us to our mythic totality. This can be seen in the sacraments and in the Word proclaimed through which the Spirit actualizes the reality of the human being in fellowship with God.

[14] Kilby, xi.

[15] Gustaf Wingren, "The Doctrine of Creation: Not an Appendix but the First Article," 355.

[16] Ibid., 355.

[17] Ibid., 355.

breathing."[18] Far too often Wingren's words have been reversed, and knowing has been seen as something larger and more important than living.

In the Modern age, the common assumption is that one can explain the workings of the world through purely scientific means. This directly contrasts pre-Modern civilizations that created elaborate mythologies to explain natural events. While science can describe that which is observable, it cannot address our transcendental nature. It relies upon *a posteriori* rather than *a priori* knowledge. It can look *at* a beam of light but it cannot look *along* the beam to see its ultimate source of being. In fact, take away the source of light and science would cease to exist, for it would have nothing to look *at*. Myth, on the other hand, as C. S. Lewis states, gets at why "we want something else which can hardly be put into words—to be united with the beauty we see, to pass into it, to receive it into ourselves…."[19] This, again, is not to say that scientific systems and statements are unimportant. Rather, they must be utilized within their proper boundaries. It is equally dangerous to flee from scientific statements that reflect empirical observations in favor of imagined anthropocentric mythologies. This again demonstrates that one must look both *along* and *at* everything, for you can only step out of one experience by stepping into another.

Myth Became Fact

In his essay, *Myth Became Fact*, C. S. Lewis responds to his friend Corineus who contended that those who claim to be Christian in the Modern age are in fact not Christian at all. According to Corineus, "historic Christianity is something so barbarous that no modern man can

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[18] Ibid., 355.

[19] Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, 13.

really believe it."[20] What, then, of the millions that claim to believe it? Corineus would argue that "the moderns who claim to do so are in fact believing a modern system of thought which retains the vocabulary of Christianity and exploits the emotions inherited from it while quietly dropping its essential doctrines."[21] While it is unfortunately true that there are those who speak the language of Christianity, using traditional and orthodox signifiers while redefining the signified, this in no way accounts for all who claim to be Christian. Lewis responds to this asking why these "pseudo-Christians" hang on to this vestigial vocabulary, why would they "insist on expressing their deepest thoughts in terms of an archaic mythology which must hamper and embarrass them at every turn?"[22] Would it not be easier to cut the umbilical cord so to say? And if Corineus was right, this is exactly what they would do. But, as Lewis points out: "They will strain the cord almost to breaking point, but they refuse to cut it. Sometimes they will take every step except the last one."[23]

While it would be far easier to cut the cord, to drop the 'archaic mythology' upon which Christianity rests, "it is the myth which is the vital and nourishing element in the whole concern."[24] Lewis quotes Miss Bingley in *Pride and Prejudice* to illustrate this: "Would not conversation be much more rational than dancing?" Mr. Bingley responds, "Much more rational, but much less like a ball."[25] While Corineus wants to adjust Christianity with the times, it is the times that move away. But the myth abides,[26] and "It is the myth that gives life."[27] Would not

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[20] C. S. Lewis, "Myth Became Fact," in *God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 63.

[21] Ibid., 63.

[22] Ibid., 63.

[23] Ibid., 63.

[24] Ibid., 65.

[25] Ibid., 64.

[26] Lewis' point is that myth and truth go together, and that the true myth abides even when it does not fit within our current rational categories.

'modern' Christianity be more rational than 'archaic' Christianity? Yes, much more rational, but much less like Christianity.

To further illustrate this, Lewis takes a closer look at myth by incorporating epistemological categories that resonate with the distinctions of looking *at* and looking *along*, as well as with Alexander's concept of Enjoyment and Contemplation. His argument rests on the premise that "Human intellect is incurably abstract… Yet the only realities we experience are concrete."[28] The young man who was in love and looks *along* the sexual impulse is experiencing a concrete reality. But, the moment he looks *at* the sexual impulse and intellectually apprehends 'love,' he then loses the concrete experience and instead deals with the abstract idea of 'love.' At this point, "the concrete realities sink to the level of mere instances or examples."[29] So, according to Lewis: "This is our dilemma—either to taste and not to know or to know and not to taste—or, more strictly, to lack one kind of knowledge because we are in an experience or to lack another kind because we are outside it."[30] What, then, is the solution?

In response to the dilemma of tasting and not knowing or knowing and not tasting, Lewis claims that myth is at least the partial solution, for—"In the enjoyment of a great myth we come nearest to experiencing as a concrete what can otherwise be understood only as an abstraction."[31] It is important to point out that it is in the enjoyment of myth that this is true and not in the contemplation of myth, for when we contemplate myth it then becomes an abstraction.[32] But,

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[27] Ibid., 65.

[28] Ibid., 65.

[29] Ibid., 65.

[30] Ibid., 65.

[31] Ibid., 66.

[32] This can be seen in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. It is possible to contemplate the Lord's Supper without enjoying it. But, only in enjoying and receiving the Lord's Supper do we receive the forgiveness of sins. This is not to say that we should not contemplate the Lord's Supper, but rather that the contemplation remains an abstraction until it is enjoyed as a concrete reality. This has definite practical implications. We should not primarily

when the myth is received and enjoyed as a story, the principle can be experienced concretely, for—"What flows into you from the myth is not truth but reality (truth is always *about* something, but reality is that *about which* truth is.)"[33] And here, Lewis ties it all together with the conclusion—"Now as myth transcends thought, Incarnation transcends myth. The heart of Christianity is a myth which is also a fact."[34] It is here that worlds collide, and there is "the marriage of heaven and earth: Perfect Myth and Perfect Fact: claiming not only our love and our obedience, but also our wonder and delight."[35] The fact that there are numerous parallels between Christianity and pagan mythology does not mean that the Judeo-Christian Scriptures are false and that we should "be ashamed of the mythical radiance resting on our theology,"[36] but rather that we should offer it an imaginative embrace. For, "God is more than a god, not less; Christ is more than Balder, not less."[37] When one looks *along* and *at* the true Myth, the Myth that became Fact, one is free to look *at* the wonders and delights of the world in a way that brings glory to the

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teach *about* the sacraments (although there is a place for this), but rather we should *do* the sacraments. The teaching *about* is important and a necessary pre-condition, but it ultimately must lead to participation *in*—otherwise the sacraments turn into a lecture instead of a promise.

[33] Ibid., 66. Lewis' words at this point need further clarification. When he uses the term truth it appears that he is referring specifically to secondary discourse, hence truth is about something. When he uses the term reality, he seems to be getting at that which the truth is about, what Forde would call primary discourse. This distinction can also be seen in the difference between looking *at* and looking *along*. One can look *at* the truth of something without experiencing it as a reality. The scientist looked *at* the young man's experience of love, and was truthful in saying it was a matter of the biological stimulus. But the young man, on the other hand, experienced the reality of love as he looked *along* it. Or take the example of breathing, it is more important to experience the reality of breathing than to know truths about breathing. Both truth and reality have an objective standard and are not determined by the individual, but it is more beneficial for the individual to experience as a reality than only to have knowledge about that experience. Better yet is for one to experience as a reality and have knowledge about that reality, to accurately look both *along* and *at* everything. For, reality cannot be experienced outside of truth, they are necessarily intertwined. But, reality can be experienced outside of secondary knowledge of truth—take, for instance, infant baptism.

[34] Ibid., 66.

[35] Ibid., 67.

[36] Ibid., 67.

[37] Ibid., 67.

Source of all life. This sets the stage for Lewis' understanding of faithfully enjoying created things without turning them into ultimate things.

The Dialectic of Enjoyment and Renunciation

As sinful creatures we try to control, manipulate, and repristinate experiences that are pleasurable (such as Joy or *Sehnsucht*), but in doing this we inevitably lose the pleasure. According to Lewis, it is only in living the dialectic of enjoyment and renunciation that enjoyment is truly possible. In *The Taste for the Other: The Social and Ethical Thought of C. S. Lewis*, Gilbert Meilaender provides an analysis of Lewis' dialectic of enjoyment and renunciation. While Lewis in his space trilogy offers an imaginative vision of what the proper posture for unfallen creatures would be toward created things, in the whole of his writings he deals with the reality of our situation as fallen beings through the Christian story of creation, fall, incarnation, redemption, and *eschaton*.[38] Within this story, the proper attitude toward created things as fallen creatures must be more than just receptivity. Instead, it involves "a kind of double attitude toward things—a dialectical movement between enjoyment and renunciation."[39] Related to the Christian story, creation is full of objects of delight and 'Romantic' experiences, but these are still created things. Meilaender states that—"They call us out of ourselves, but they cannot satisfy the heart which seeks in them a full answer to its longing."[40] Or in other words, they serve as signposts that are meant to point toward the Source of life who alone can satisfy Desire. In the words of Lewis, all pleasures are "shafts of the glory as it strikes our sensibility."[41] These shafts should not be looked *at* as the glory but *along* towards the Glory. On the one hand,

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[38] Gilbert Meilaender, *The Social and Ethical Thought of C. S. Lewis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 20.

[39] Ibid., 20.

[40] Ibid., 20.

[41] Ibid., 20.

we enjoy and delight in objects of beauty in the creation; on the other hand, we renounce them as being of little consequence when compared to the Creator who transcends the ideal of beauty.

Lewis summarizes this double pattern of enjoyment and renunciation in *The Problem of Pain*:

> The settled happiness and security which we all desire, God withholds from us by the very nature of the world: but joy, pleasure, and merriment He has scattered broadcast. We are never safe, but we have plenty of fun, and some ecstasy. It is not hard to see why. The security we crave would teach us to rest our hearts in this world and oppose an obstacle to our return to God: a few moments of happy love, a landscape, a symphony, a merry meeting with our friends, a bathe, or a football match, have no such tendency. Our Father refreshes us on the journey with some pleasant inns, but will not encourage us to mistake them for home.[42]

This directly relates to Lewis' experiences with Joy and *Sehnsucht*. The world was full of objects of delight that caused him to become overwhelmed with Desire, but when he looked *at* these created things or experiences as the source of delight he found them to be empty. Over time he realized that the Desire was not in them but rather came through them. They must, on the one hand, be enjoyed with an attitude of thankfulness and receptivity and, on the other hand, be renounced as being of little consequence compared to the Source of delight. This, however, brings up an important question that must be addressed: If God is the source of delight, to which all good created things point, then what of our experiences of pain; would not God then be the source of all pain? And if God is the source of pain, then how can God be good?

Sehnsucht and Pain

In *A Grief Observed*, Lewis provides an incredibly open and honest account of his struggle with grief over the loss of his wife Joy Davidman. While he once saw God as the source of all Joy and Desire, in the midst of personal and intense pain this perception was brought into

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[42] C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Macmillan, 1948), 103.

question, for if God is the source of pleasure must he not also be the source of pain? Instead of then turning to materialism and rejecting the existence of God, Lewis became increasingly afraid that God was real but not necessarily good: "I am more afraid that we are really rats in a trap. Or, worse still, rats in a laboratory. Someone said, I believe, 'God always geometrizes.' Supposing the truth were 'God always vivisects'?"[43] Lewis continues, "What reason have we, except our own desperate wishes, to believe that God is, by any standard we can conceive, 'good'? Doesn't all the *prima face* evidence suggest exactly the opposite? What have we to set against it?"[44] Notice the abrupt change. Throughout his life Lewis argued that there is an unsatisfied desire in each of us that nothing in this world can satisfy—only God can fulfill the ultimate longings of our heart, for he is the Source of all delight and all things good and beautiful. But when faced with extreme grief and pain, Lewis wondered if God were not a Cosmic Sadist, who "Time after time, when He seemed most gracious He was really preparing the next torture."[45] Granted, Lewis admits that these words were more of a 'yell' than a thought. But when examining it from a more rational point of view, he comes to see that his wife's death did not really introduce anything new into the universe that he did not already know. He asks:

> What grounds has it given me for doubting all that I believe? I knew already that these things, and worse, happened daily. I would have said that I had taken them into account. I had been warned—I had warned myself—not to reckon on worldly happiness. We were even promised sufferings. They were part of the program. We were even told, 'Blessed are they that mourn,' and I accepted it. I've got nothing that I hadn't bargained for. Of course it is different when the thing happens to oneself, not to others, and in reality, not in imagination.[46]

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[43] C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (New York: Bantam, 1976), 33.

[44] Ibid., 33–34.

[45] Ibid., 35.

[46] Ibid., 41–42.

Lewis had looked *at* suffering and pain in the world, and in thinking about them he was able to get God off the hook by rationalizing that a greater good could come from them. But, when forced to look *along* suffering and pain and participate in them in a real and personal way, he realized that his faith (from his own perspective) had been a house of cards:

> The faith which 'took these things into account' was not faith but imagination. The taking them into account was not real sympathy. If I had really cared, as I thought I did, about the sorrows of the world, I should not have been so overwhelmed when my own sorrow came. It has been an imaginary faith playing with innocuous counters labeled 'Illness,' 'Pain,' 'Death,' and 'Loneliness.' I thought I trusted the rope until it mattered to me whether it would bear me. Now it matters, and I find I didn't.[47]

What, then, about Lewis' conception of Joy and *Sehnsucht*? Did Lewis' grief over the death of his wife cause him to reject the dialectic of Desire that played such a pivotal role in his life? When put to the test, was *Sehnsucht* merely a house of cards that had to be knocked down in order for true faith to take hold? In order to address these rather difficult questions, it will be helpful to place Lewis' concept of *Sehnsucht* within a wider theological context.

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[47] Ibid., 42–43.

CHAPTER FIVE

A Theological Evaluation of C. S. Lewis' *Sehnsucht*

Rather than human speculation and desire, God's revelation must be the guiding principle used to interpret all existence and reality. Here Martin Luther's distinction between the ministerial and magisterial roles of reason can be helpful. William Lane Craig states that, for Luther, "In the magisterial use of reason, reason sits over and above the gospel like a magistrate and judges whether it is true or false."[1] This contrasts the ministerial use of reason, which "submits to and serves the gospel as a handmaiden."[2] For Luther, it was the Holy Spirit alone who should serve in the magisterial role, and reason must play the role of a servant. Reason was, however, a God-given instrument that should be faithfully used and cultivated in service to the gospel. This same distinction can be applied to human experience.

In the magisterial role of experience, experience frames and forms theological belief and judges whether it is true or false. Under this role, if theological language conflicts with lived experience, it is the language that changes. An example of this can be seen in attitudes and perceptions held towards the exclusivity of the gospel. One might wonder how a loving God could condemn 'good' people to hell because they hold to a different religion. Theoretically, one might confess that Jesus is the only way to heaven, but when the implications of this language confront the real people they love and care for, the magisterial use of experience reframes

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[1] William Lane Craig, *Hard Questions, Real Answers* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2003), 37.

[2] Ibid., 37.

theological belief in order to make it 'fit' their individual context.[3] What can result, then, is either constant fluctuation or fragmentation of belief as it continually changes with the winds of experience.

As opposed to this, the ministerial use of experience subordinates experience to God's revelation in Word and Spirit. Oftentimes, experience is an instrument that defends and supports that which is believed in faith. An example of this could be seen in C. S. Lewis' *Sehnsucht*, where spiritual longing and desire reflects and points outside of itself to the beauty and meaning of God and his created world. But, to be sure, there are other times when experience challenges and confronts our faith in God's goodness with the sin and ugliness of the world. While under the magisterial use of experience the language used to express belief then changes; under the ministerial use of experience, faith is held despite evidence to the contrary. Within this ministerial use, however, one must be careful to not simply dismiss experience without wrestling with it and engaging it. For, if theological language does not speak to the realities of human existence, it runs the risk of turning into an abstract system or theory that fails to hold up to the weight of the concrete human story.

The question, then, remains as to how this can be further applied to Lewis' *Sehnsucht*, and as to whether Lewis' view of *Sehnsucht* operated according to a ministerial or magisterial use of experience. If he viewed *Sehnsucht* primarily through a magisterial use of experience, then it would be wise to label it as theologically suspect. But, if he approached it according to a ministerial use of experience, then there could be insights that would further benefit our theological discourse today by providing a framework in which one can look at the 'Romantic'

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[3] Rather than an alleged hypothesis, there is growing statistical data that confirms this as a real phenomenon among the members of many denominations, including the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. See especially the statistical data gathered by Professor Robert D. Putnam at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

elements in creation and culture while remaining faithful to orthodox boundaries. In order to further evaluate Lewis' interpretation of *Sehnsucht*, the work of John Beversluis and Anders Nygren will be utilized.

The Critics: John Beversluis

In *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation*, Yale professor Harold Bloom argues that most American worshippers have moved away from traditional Christianity and instead have embraced pre-Christian Gnostic beliefs.[4] This Gnostic creed stresses knowledge of an inner self, which then leads to freedom from the natural world that is bound by time and decay. While Bloom is sympathetic to such a transition, orthodox Christians have cause for concern, for Gnosticism and Christianity are in no way compatible. Bloom's argument traces the American transition to African-American influence in the early 19th century, and while this may very well have been a factor of the current resurgence, the roots in fact go back much further. One individual who has attempted to point out the incompatibility of Christianity and Gnosticism, specifically through his critique of C. S. Lewis, is John Beversluis.[5]

According to Antony Flew, *C. S. Lewis and the Search for Rational Religion* by John Beversluis provided "The first systematic and radical critique of C. S. Lewis's theological arguments."[6] Beversluis' work takes aim at a comment made by C. S. Lewis in his perennial classic, *Mere Christianity*: "I am not asking anyone to accept Christianity if his best reasoning

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[4] Harold Bloom, *The American Religion: The Emergence of The Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993).

[5] As with Otto's writings, the inclusion of Beversluis' writings should not be seen as an endorsement. While many of Beversluis' arguments against Lewis fall short, he does raise important questions that should be further addressed, specifically regarding the incompatibility of Christianity and Gnosticism.

[6] John Beversluis, *C. S. Lewis and the Search for Rational Religion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), front cover.

tells him that the weight of the evidence is against it."[7] After examining Lewis' arguments, he concludes that they fail.[8] While Beversluis examines a variety of Lewis' arguments, this paper will focus on his critique of *Sehnsucht* and the *argument from desire*.

Beversluis begins by citing Romans 1:20, the traditional endorsement of natural theology, which he cites as being "the attempt by reason unaided by faith to prove the existence of God."[9] He goes on to claim that while Lewis thought most of these arguments unsuccessful, he did accept a few of them, particularly the *argument from desire*. Now this argument differs from other apologetic arguments because it rests not on "an excessively abstract and sterile academic exercise,"[10] but rather on "the sensibilities of the religious life by focusing on man's transcendental longings, on our craving for something that no finite object can ever fully satisfy."[11] He then correctly points out that this argument in no way originated with Lewis or with Christianity, but was an instance of natural theology that can be seen since at least the time of Plato who spoke of "certain recurrent stirrings within the human heart, of a deep and unquenchable desire that impels the soul to look beyond the world of the senses to a higher realm where it can find 'true pasture.'"[12]

Specifically in the *Republic* and the *Symposium,* Plato developed an argument that reflected his Theory of Ideas and the World of Forms. Put simply, the natural world cannot satisfy our deepest yearnings, for "in all our temporal loves, satisfactions, and goods, we are really desiring

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[7] C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 140.

[8] Overall, Beversluis' argument appears to be a straw man, using deductive logic to dismiss Lewis' inductive method. However, Beversluis' work does raise important questions that are often left ignored.

[9] Beversluis, *C. S. Lewis and the Search for Rational Religion*, 8.

[10] Ibid., 8.

[11] Ibid., 8.

[12] Plato, *The Republic, 506.* Cf. *Symposium,* 192, 211.

some more ultimate good of which these earthly attachments provide only an 'inkling.'"[13] In the footnotes, Beversluis points out that Lewis used the term 'inkling' in Plato's sense, where "Temporal goods provide a dim but nevertheless genuine glimpse of man's true end."[14] The pagan *argument from desire* set forth by Plato was then Christianized by St. Augustine as expressed by his famous statement: "you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."[15] After living the dialectic of desire and further reflecting upon it, Lewis became convinced that St. Augustine was right. Any examination of Lewis' *argument from desire* must then further examine and expound the Platonic and Augustinian influence. In order to do this, a brief overview of Platonic origins could prove to be helpful.

Platonic Origins

In the *Timaeus*, Plato set forth a basic distinction between the physical and eternal worlds that could be argued as having immeasurable influence upon all Western cosmological thought. According to Plato, the physical world is a world that changes and perishes, and because of this it is the object of opinion and unreasoned sensations. As opposed to this, the eternal world never changes or perishes, and thereby is apprehended by true reason.[16] This could be seen as roughly paralleling the philosophies of Parmenides and Heraclitus, with Parmenides advocating that all reality is changeless (eternal world), and Heraclitus claiming that all reality is in a continual state of flux (physical world). According to Anthony Kenny, "Much of Plato's most energetic philosophizing was devoted to the task of reconciling, or disarming, these two champions."[17]

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[13] Beversluis, *C. S. Lewis and the Search for Rational Religion*, 8.

[14] Ibid., 170.

[15] Saint Augustine, *Confessions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 3.

[16] See Plato, *Timaeus*, 28a.

[17] Anthony Kenny, *Ancient Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 205.

Plato would assert that since nothing comes into being or changes without cause, the natural world must have been created by a demiurge (god) that looked to the unchanging and eternal world of Forms. In this model, the demiurge (god) did not speak the world into existence *ex nihilo*, but rather looked to the eternal world of Forms as the archetype.[18] While Plato saw the demiurge as basically good and free from envy or selfishness,[19] the Gnostics transformed this demiurge into an evil and fallen god who created an evil and fallen universe. This, then, led to a body-soul dualism that saw the material creation and physical body as bad, and the eternal world and immaterial soul as good. How, then, does this relate to Christianity?

Since the time of Jesus, it can be argued that Christianity has been in conflict with body-soul dualism, and unfortunately, these Gnostic elements have often spilled into it. As Beversluis points out, St. Augustine 'Christianized' many pagan elements found in Platonic and Hellenistic thought. A former Manichean-Gnostic, he struggled with the tension between body-soul dualism, and at times remained overly influenced by its emphasis of soul over body and spirit over matter.[20] As St. Augustine was influenced by Manichaean-Gnosticism, so has the church been influenced by St. Augustine,[21] including C. S. Lewis. Beversluis' insists that Hellenistic and Platonic systems are incompatible with orthodox Christianity. However, these Platonic influences seem to appear throughout Lewis' writings while remaining under the radar, for very

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[18] Under this model the term 'demiurge' is more helpful than 'God.' Following Anselm's definition of 'God' set forth in the *Ontological Argument,* Plato would see the 'Forms' as 'God' and not the 'demiurge'.

[19] This interpretation of Plato's cosmology in the *Timaeus* was influenced by the work of Anthony Kenny in *Ancient Philosophy*.

[20] This is not to say that St. Augustine was not an orthodox theologian, but rather to express the reality of the tension between our lived experiences and our theological beliefs.

[21] To be sure, St. Augustine's vast influence should be honored and appreciated, and when he appears to be mistaken, our first response should be to ask what he got (in his interpretation of scripture) that we seem to be missing. To demonstrate the vast influence of Augustine, Anthony Kenny says: "Of all the philosophers in the ancient world, only Aristotle had a greater influence on human thought." *Ancient Philosophy*, 115.

few Christian treatments of Lewis' work seem to point out the Platonic thread.[22] An exception to this is N. T. Wright, the Bishop of Durham.

In an article published in *Touchstone: A Journal of Mere Christianity*, N. T. Wright reflects upon the legacy of C. S. Lewis sixty years after his death. His assessment effectively demonstrates the delicate balance one should use in approaching Lewis' writings—namely being able to praise the man and his vast influence while still critically examining those portions that seem to be theologically problematic. For Wright, the most troubling aspect of Lewis' work was his implicit Platonism, and apart from Beversluis,[23] he is one of the few individuals to point this out. He writes:

> I find Lewis frustratingly fuzzy on heaven and immortality. He clearly believes in the bodily resurrection and the essential materiality of the ultimate future world, but—quite apart from the astonishing fact that in talking about Jesus he never in this book mentions his Resurrection—he persistently refers to "Heaven" in ways that go, to my mind, far too far towards Plato. He frequently draws back from this, insisting for instance on the importance of sacraments because God made the material world and likes it, but I'm not sure he has fully integrated his positive view of the material creation into his assumed view of heaven. He tells us that if we aim at heaven we'll get earth thrown in, and this is not only true but appealing; but he never indicates how this works out, never engages with the New Testament's picture of the new heavens and new earth which ultimately make sense of the whole thing. Thus he can say, in a moving but I think deeply misleading passage, that "the anaesthetic fog which we call 'nature' or 'the real world' [will] fade away"; I regard this as a substantial hostage to Platonic fortune. This problem emerges particularly in his repeated insistence that all human beings have an immortal soul, which is the "real" part of them, and which is to be one day either a creature of loathing and horror or one we might be tempted to worship. I simply don't think this is either biblical or helpful, and I fear that those who read Lewis will at this point have their traditional expectations of a kind of Christianity-and-Plato reinforced where they should have them undermined.[24]

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[22] The cause of this 'avoidance' can be debated. Because of Lewis' vast influence on many Christians (including myself), there can be a tendency to defend him on a more personal level rather than fully examining the theological implications of his work. As with St. Augustine, Lewis' writings must be subordinated to scripture, but we should first ask if he was seeing something that we seem to be missing in our interpretation of scripture.

[23] While Beversluis points this out, he tends to go too far and throw the baby out with the bathwater. Because of this, many Lewis admirers are turned off by his method and approach, perhaps rightfully so.

[24] N. T. Wright, "Simply Lewis," *Touchstone: A Journal of Mere Christianity* 20 (March 2007): 31.

According to Wright and Beversluis, the Christianity-and-Plato stream must be eradicated rather than reinforced, for Hellenistic and Platonic systems are incompatible with Christianity. But did Lewis truly attempt a synthesis between Hellenism and Christianity? At times, as pointed out by Beversluis and N. T. Wright, Lewis' writings did appear to tend too much toward Platonism. However, this does not mean his work should be dismissed, for while he did at times tend toward Platonism, he also offered distinct perspectives and correctives for these errors that could directly combat the Christianity-and-Plato synthesis.

After pointing out the Platonic influence in Lewis' work, Beversluis goes on to critique the Augustinian framework of love and desire through his critique of Lewis' *argument from desire*, pointing out that it is an attempted synthesis of Platonic and Christian thought which are by nature incompatible. He states:

> The Christian gospel has as its purpose neither the satisfaction nor the setting in motion of man's natural desire for happiness. Its purpose is to persuade men to repent of their sins, and it does not look upon sin as the result of an unavoidable and regrettable ignorance. In setting forth the view that man is intended for fellowship with God the biblical writers did not see themselves as merely underwriting a thesis that Greek philosophy had established on its own centuries ago. Nor does the biblical view picture human beings as desiring and groping for some good of which they have a dim awareness or "inkling"; it pictures them as at odds with God and in flight from him. We are fallen creatures whose relation to God is defined in terms of enmity, not aspiration.[25]

Elsewhere he states:

> The Platonic view knows nothing of the radical evil in man insisted upon by Christianity; it accounts for his pursuit of false objects by claiming that he is ignorant. The biblical view, on the other hand, knows nothing of the Platonic notion of desire; it accounts for man's pursuit of false objects by claiming that he deliberately and knowingly disobeys God. If our desire for God were really as strong and systematically operative as the Platonic view suggests, we could not be as wicked as the Bible claims we are. On the other hand, if we really are that wicked, our desire for God could not be as strong as the Platonic view claims it is. To say, with Lewis, that

[25] Beversluis, *C. S. Lewis and the Search for Rational Religion*, 24–25.

> we desire God in his attractiveness but flee from his severe side is to give birth to a philosophical hybrid, a conceptual mongrel that lacks the authentic pedigree of either parent.[26]

Regarding the incompatibility between Christianity and Platonic thought, Beversluis' argument succeeds in demonstrating certain differences between the two.[27] The Biblical writers did not see themselves as underwriting an already established philosophical or religious system, nor did they view human beings as being primarily ignorant rather than sinful. It is also true that we are fallen creatures whose relationship with God apart from Christ is defined in terms of enmity, not of aspiration. But, as Harold Bloom demonstrated, most American worshipers are abandoning these traditional tenets of the Christian faith in favor of a form of Gnosticism. Because of this Gnosticism-and-Christianity synthesis, it is often difficult to faithfully distinguish between the two camps, for their differences tend to fly under the radar within a cloud of their seeming similarities.[28]

While Beversluis does effectively demonstrate some of the dangers of Platonic and Gnostic influence upon Christianity, his analysis falls short on two accounts. First, his understanding of the Christian gospel is rather narrow and reflects the over-systematization of theological language. When he says that the purpose of the Christian gospel is "to persuade men to repent of their sins,"[29] he assumes that this is the only correct 'angle' to view God's one work of reconciliation. While repentance is necessary, it is neither the end of the Christian gospel nor its fullest expression. Beversluis appears to fall into the strict dialectic framework of justification

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[26] Ibid., 22.

[27] While he succeeds in demonstrating the differences, he fails to point out if there are any similarities, and in doing so his analysis appears to be rather one-sided.

[28] While these differences are subtle, the implications of these differences have overwhelming implications and consequences. See especially N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008).

[29] Beversluis, *C. S. Lewis and the Search for Rational Religion*, 24.

that fails to leave room for either our created nature or a linear framework of sanctification. A second way that Beversluis' argument is problematic is that he tends to misrepresent Lewis' position by approaching it *in vacuo*.[30] By failing to adequately represent either the Christian gospel or Lewis' position, Beversluis effectively disarms a straw man with a straw man, leaving the real work of Lewis to be reckoned with.

The Critics: Anders Nygren

In his seminal work, *Agape and Eros*, Anders Nygren provides an exhaustive account of the idea of love through the fundamental motifs of Agape and Eros. While the methods of his motif-research have been debated, his sweeping historical assessment of the Eros and Agape themes are invaluable. According to Nygren, the uniquely Christian concept of Agape is "the transvaluation of all ancient values,"[31] but throughout history it has inevitably reassumed a certain measure of those values. The primary culprit of distorting the fundamental nature of Agape, according to Nygren, is the Eros motif. While some see Agape as the sublimation of Eros (possibly Lewis?), Nygren sees Agape and Eros as two distinct and separate streams with no possibility for synthesis or convergence:

> The mistake is commonly made of representing Agape as a higher and more spiritualised form of Eros, and of supposing that the sublimation of Eros is the way to reach Agape. The thought of "the heavenly Eros" reminds us that that is not the case; for heavenly Eros may be a sublimation of sensual love, but it is not itself capable of further sublimation. The heavenly Eros is the highest possible thing of its kind; it has been spiritualised to an extent beyond which it is impossible to go. Agape stands alongside, not above, the heavenly Eros; the difference between them is not one of

[30] For instance, Beversluis fails to take into account Lewis' imaginative works, which were an important part of his overall thought. For more on this, see chapter 22 in Gilbert Meilaender, *Things that Count: Essays Moral and Theological* (Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2000).

[31] Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 30

> degree but of kind. There is no way, not even that of sublimation, which leads over from Eros to Agape.[32]

Dietrich Bonhoeffer echoes this sentiment in *Life Together*, saying: "Human love [Eros] can never understand spiritual love [Agape], for spiritual love is from above; it is something completely strange, new, and incomprehensible to all earthly love."[33]

While Eros can provide an account for man's love for God, in whom one can find their *summum bonum* and ultimate happiness, it cannot provide an account for God's love for man, which is indifferent in value. As Luther states in Thesis 28 of the Heidelberg Disputation: "The love of God does not find, but creates, that which is pleasing to it. The love of man comes into being through that which is pleasing to it."[34] While man's love is by nature acquisitive, God's love is by nature kenotic. While man loves as a means to an end, for God self-giving love is means and end. While the Apostle Paul held to the uniquely Christian and kenotic nature of Agape, the acquisitive nature of Eros gradually began to spill over from the beginning of the early church.[35] This spill over can be seen in the work of St. Augustine, who in turn heavily influenced C. S. Lewis (as well as the church at large).

Augustine saw all love as acquisitive love. For him, "To love means to direct one's longing and desire to an object by the possession of which one expects to be made happy."[36] Man by nature wants to be happy, but man inevitably looks for happiness in the wrong places. Only Christianity can fulfill the natural desire for happiness, but not everyone recognizes this. Hence,

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[32] Ibid., 52.

[33] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (New York: HarperCollins, 1954), 35.

[34] Martin Luther, *Heidelberg Disputation*, quoted in Gerhard Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 21.

[35] Nygren asserts that the uniquely Christian concept of Agape was largely missing from the history of the church until the Reformation when Luther restored it. The extent of his interpretation can be debated.

[36] Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 476

"in aiming at your own happiness, you are unwittingly reaching out towards Christianity."[37] Love and the desire for happiness are intimately connected and serve as the defining mark of what it means to be human. From this human perspective, our whole life exists in "a ceaseless pursuit of advantages."[38] In the words of Nygren:

> When Augustine takes desire and the longing which is centred in the self and its interests, as the chief marks of all human life, even of the highest, he intends no disparagement of humanity; it is simply a way of saying that we, unlike God, have not life in ourselves and of ourselves, but from Him. *Desire is the mark of the creature;* it is grounded in God's own will and plan.[39]

Desire is not, however, the mark of the Creator, for "God alone is the Immortal who has life in Himself; therefore He needs nothing that is outside Himself. God has His '*bonum*' in Himself, and that is why there cannot be found in Him any need or desire."[40] Within this theological framework, men in their sinning are in actuality searching for a god (albeit in the wrong places) who provides identity, security, and meaning. This is accurately reflected in the words ascribed to G. K. Chesterton: "A man knocking on the door of a brothel is knocking for God."[41] A possible critique of this framework is that appears to be heavily egocentric rather than theocentric in nature. It could be seen as replacing God with the idol of an ideal in a way that uses God as a means to an end (desiring God's things instead of God himself). How, then, does this interact with the writings of C. S. Lewis?

Most likely, Anders Nygren would claim that C. S. Lewis' writings are merely another version of the Eros motif, and because of this should be seen as theologically suspect. There are, indeed, numerous parallels with the Eros motif in Lewis' work, but this does not mean that his

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[37] Ibid., 477.

[38] Ibid., 479.

[39] Ibid., 479.

[40] Ibid., 479.

work should be fully dismissed. While Nygren effectively critiques the Eros motif as a ladder to climb to God, he appears to fail to provide a proper place for it to function within our created nature or the linear framework of sanctification. This, then, appears to lead to an over-systematization of theological language where justification is the only 'angle' to view God's one work of reconciliation. In other words, the Eros motif viewed through a 2nd article lens should most definitely be identified and eradicated, but through the lens of the 1st article Eros exists as a reality reflecting the nature of our humanity, and through the lens of the 3rd article God's Agape can be seen as transforming our Eros by directing our desire to its proper object—to God himself. Again, the Eros motif must not serve as a prescription for how one comes into fellowship with God,[42] but it can serve as a description reflecting the reality of our human situation and Christian journey. As Lewis wrote, "If there lurks in most modern minds the notion that to desire our own good and earnestly to hope for the enjoyment of it is a bad thing, I submit that this notion has crept in from Kant and the Stoics and is not part of the Christian faith."[43] What, then, does this mean for the theological task?

The proper theological boundaries must firmly oppose any egocentric systems that attempt to climb the ladder to God, but in doing so they must leave room for humans to be human and for Christians to be transformed by God towards holiness. Desire is a mark of our humanity. Desire is not, by itself, good or bad, but is dependent upon that which it is directed towards. The pertinent question is whether our desire is directed towards God or towards self. This could and should lead one to believe that desire, as an experience, must be viewed according to a ministerial use of experience which serves God's one reconciling work in Christ. When this

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[41] The exact origin of this quote is unknown.

[42] As the Gnosticism-Christianity synthesis would maintain.

[43] C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, 1.

happens, one is free to look along the 'Romantic' elements in creation and culture, such as *Sehnsucht*, while remaining faithful to orthodox theological boundaries. Human experience, including Desire (as expressed in the work of St. Augustine and C. S. Lewis), can be seen as a God-given instrument that can be faithfully enjoyed and continually transformed in service to the gospel.

CHAPTER SIX

Lewis' Ministerial View of *Sehnsucht*

If Lewis interpreted *Sehnsucht* according to a magisterial and egocentric use of experience, then his understanding of *Sehnsucht* should be viewed as theologically suspect. But, if he interpreted *Sehnsucht* according to a ministerial and theocentric use, then his insights could very well serve to bridge the at times fragmented gap between theological language and the reality of lived experience. While through the writings of John Beversluis and Anders Nygren we have seen some of the implicit dangers in the Platonic and Gnostic threads of the Eros motif when applied to the 'angle' of justification, it remains to be seen whether Lewis himself operated according to this Eros motif. According to Beversluis, the answer would most definitely be yes, but he tends to base his argument upon a straw man in order to attack a straw man. According to Nygren, the answer would most likely be yes, and between the two (Beversluis and Nygren), Nygren's analysis should be given far more weight. But both of these conclusions seem to rely too much, if not exclusively, upon the 2nd article 'angle' of justification. While Lewis' writings did at times ring of Platonism,[1] these instances seem to be limited to the 'angles' of our created

[1] Much of this is most likely due to the strong influence Platonism had upon Lewis in his early years. This influence can be seen in a letter written in 1930 before he converted to Christianity regarding an experience he had of 'Joy': "To-day I got such a sudden intense feeling of delight that it sort of stopped me in my walk and spun me round. Indeed the sweetness was so great, & seemed so to affect the whole body as well as the mind, that it gave me pause—it was so very like sex. One knows what a psychoanalyst would say—it is sublimated lust, a kind of defeated masturbation which fancy gives one to compensate for external chastity. Yet after all, why should that be the right way of looking at it? If he can say that It is sublimated sex, why is it not open to me to say that sex is undeveloped *It*?—as Plato would have said. And if as Plato thought, the material world is a copy or mirror of the spiritual, then the central feature of the material life (=sex), must be a copy of something in the Spirit: and when you get a faint glimpse of the latter, of course you find it like the former: an Original *is* like its copy: a man *is* like his portrait… However, one cannot be too careful: one must try to hold fast to ones duties (I wish I did) which are the prose of the spiritual life and not learn to depend too much on these delightful moments." C. S. Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis* (3 vols; New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 1:877–88.

nature and the linear journey of sanctification. While this could very well still be theologically problematic, Lewis also made unique contributions that served to undermine Platonic and Gnostic influences when they were in conflict with Christianity. This is especially evident when one traces Lewis' spiritual and intellectual development throughout the whole of his life.

What, Now, of Joy?

While Lewis claimed that in a sense 'Joy' served as the central story of his life, after his conversion to Christianity he increasingly downplayed its importance, both in his own life and in the life of the fellow believer. At the end of his spiritual autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*, when asked—"What now of 'Joy'?"—Lewis responded:

> To tell you the truth, the subject has lost nearly all interest for me since I became a Christian.... I believe that the old stab, the old bittersweet, has come to me as often and as sharply since my conversion as at any time of my life whatever. But I now know that the experience, considered as a state of my own mind, had never had the kind of importance I once gave it. It was valuable only as a pointer to something other and outer.[2]

These few sentences serve as the key to understanding Lewis' interpretation of *Sehnsucht*. After spending the bulk of his spiritual autobiography tracing the influence of Joy, he concludes by saying that "the subject has lost nearly all interest for me since I became a Christian."[3] The experience of *Sehnsucht* is ultimately valuable only in its ability to point to something outside of itself, but one is only capable of coming to this realization through the lens of faith.[4] One would expect, then, that Lewis' preoccupation with Joy would diminish in his later writings, but on further investigation this does not seem to be the case.

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[2] Lewis, *Surprised By Joy,* 238.

[3] Ibid., 238.

[4] Without faith, *Sehnsucht* would be more desirable than any other satisfaction, thus becoming an idol. Through the lens of faith, one is able to see that *Sehnsucht* is not the object of desire, for the ultimate object of our

In Lewis' later writings, despite dismissing the importance of Joy after his conversion to Christianity, he continued to refer to it as a repeating theme. For instance, in *Mere Christianity*, arguably his most famous apologetic book, the *argument of desire* is clearly expressed through his writings on 'hope.' In his well-known sermon, *The Weight of Glory*, Lewis appeals to the experience of *Sehnsucht* as pointing to our eternal destiny of glory. In *The Problem of Pain*, the chapter on heaven upholds the seemingly Eros motif of Desire. By examining these different positions, it appears that Lewis lived a contradiction. On the one hand, he said that the subject of Joy had lost nearly all interest for him since he became a Christian; on the other hand, most of his Christian writings were full of the subject of Joy. Rather than being accidental, the apparent contradictory treatments of *Sehnsucht* could be seen as intentional as they reflect Lewis' given purpose and point.

Lewis' Apologetic Method

In *Rejoinder to Dr Pittenger*, Lewis responds to the remarks made by Dr. Pittenger in the article 'A Critique of C. S. Lewis' which appeared in *Christian Century*. According to Lewis, the weakness in Pittenger's critical method was that he judged Lewis' books *in vacuo*—"with no consideration of the audience to whom they were addressed or the prevalent errors they were trying to combat."[5] This demonstrates the danger of strictly looking *at* an author's work without taking into account the wider context of the author's purpose and point.[6] This also seems to be the very mistake that John Beversluis tended towards in his assessment of Lewis' writings. Who,

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desire, as St. Augustine demonstrated, is God himself.

[5] C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock*, 182.

[6] The task of writing necessarily involves both looking *along* and looking *at*. An author looks *along* an experience or thought, and then must look *at* that experience or thought in order to communicate it in language. The critic must be careful to not dismiss an author's work solely by looking *at*, for the critic must share a frame of reference with the author by at one time also looking *along* the experience or thought. For the most part, if the critic has never looked *along* the experience or thought, it is questionable whether he is capable of effectively looking *at*

then, was the audience that Lewis was addressing and what prevalent errors was he trying to combat regarding his writings on *Sehnsucht*?

Lewis saw most of his books as being evangelistic and "addressed to *tous exo*."[7] Because of this, he maintained that "It would have been inept to preach forgiveness and a Saviour to those who did not know they were in need of either."[8] Or put another way, it would have been futile to proclaim a sovereign God who ruled over and above the universe to those who believed that nothing existed over and above the universe. In light of this, Lewis' inclusion of Joy and *Sehnsucht* in his evangelistic writings can be seen as an apologetic tool that is meant to break the spell of worldliness and awaken a sense of need for something other and outer.[9] In a letter composed in 1954, Lewis writes: "All joy (as distinct from mere pleasure, still more amusement) emphasizes our pilgrim status: always reminds, beckons, awakes desire. Our best havings are wantings."[10] This pilgrim status contrasted the Modern view of a permanent status, where the world was seen as being all there is, all there was, and all there ever will be. How, then, did Lewis address a distinctively Modern audience?

Lewis believed that the Modern age was dominated by a this-worldly materialism which was ruled by those who prided themselves in solely looking *at* things, as if this form of

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[7] Ibid., 181.

[8] Ibid., 181.

[9] It is important here to distinguish between apologetics and preaching. C. S. Lewis did not see himself as a preacher, he saw himself as an apologist. An apologist can be seen as operating more according to anthropological categories; this should not be true of a preacher (although this is unfortunately often times the case). William Willimon writes regarding the task of preaching: "We are to be 'God people,' those who 'interject Jesus into the conversation' in a world that would rather think in exclusively anthropological categories. To be a preacher is to be trained to talk about what God wants to talk about and to talk in the way that God talks (i.e., *Scripture*)." William Willimon, "Pastors Who Won't Be Preachers: A Polemic Against Homiletical Accommodation to the Culture of Contentment," *Journal for Preachers* 29:4 (2006): 40, quoted in David J. Peter, "Reaching Out Without Losing Balance: Maintaining a Theological Center of Gravity in Preaching," *Concordia Journal* 35 (2009): 274.

[10] C. S. Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis* (3 vols; New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 3:523.

knowledge was somehow superior to looking *along*. In order to combat this, he sought to awaken a desire for otherworldly transcendence which served to validate a place at the table for those who see the need to look both *at* and *along* everything.[11] This was not meant to diminish the importance of science or logic, but rather to round it out and color it with the mystery and wonder of God's created order. In doing this, he did at times use Platonic arguments which resemble the Eros motif, but these arguments were primarily descriptive rather than prescriptive in nature as they reflected the reality of our created nature and linear journey of sanctification. How can this be seen?

Instead of being completely antagonistic, there are certain shared characteristics between Platonism and Christianity regarding their ontological description of the world. For instance, both believe that there is more to this world than that which meets the eye—some sort of spiritual reality along with the physical reality we touch and feel. Both also believe that there is something wrong with the world as we know it, and that the individual is in need of something more to repair this wrong. At times, Lewis used these shared ontological characteristics between Platonism and Christianity in order to engage an increasingly materialistic and worldly audience. This served to demonstrate that there is something more to reality than reason and rationalism can fully apprehend. However, the parallels between Platonism and Christianity stop at these broad abstractions (and even these abstractions are far from being identical).[12] To use theological language, Platonism can function as the law saying, "there is more to this life and you are separated from this 'more,'" but it can do nothing to bridge this gap to 'moreness'. To clarify,

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[11] It would be interesting to conduct a historical study that examined the role of creative arts within Modern Western societies. Could the rise of Modern Industrialism have served to marginalize the role of the arts and other creative expressions?

[12] To clarify, these parallels exist only as broad and abstract principles. This does not mean that Platonism and Christianity are in any way identical, even at the level of abstraction, but rather that there are certain shared (albeit very few) characteristics.

Platonism and Gnosticism do offer false alternatives to bridge this gap, but they all fall short. Lewis appealed to the descriptive nature of Plato's ontological arguments, but he stopped short of appealing to the prescriptive alternative of Plato's metaphysical arguments. How is this further evidenced in Lewis' work?

Lewis believed *Sehnsucht* was an experience common to man that reflected the reality of our status as human beings, whose ultimate desires can only be satisfied by God. Rather than awakening sin, this common experience awakens desire for something that can never quite be fully grasped in our current spatio-temporal state of existence. While the attempt to satisfy this desire according to egocentric terms would inevitably lead to a form of *caritas idealism*,[13] Lewis does not claim that *Sehnsucht* by itself leads directly to faith. If he did, then it would appear that he was operating according to the Eros motif as the prescriptive means of the 'angle' of justification. Rather, Lewis claims:

> Thus we must admit that Faith, as we know it, does not flow from philosophical argument alone; nor from experience of the Numinous alone; nor from the moral experience alone; nor from history alone; but from historical events which at once fulfill and transcend the moral category, which link themselves with the most numinous elements in Paganism, and which (as it seems to us) demand as their pre-supposition the existence of a Being who is more, but not less, than the God whom many reputable philosophers think they can establish.[14]

Relating this to the specific experience of *Sehnsucht* and the numinous, Lewis would say that "until religion comes and retrospectively transforms it, it usually appears to the subject to be a special form of aesthetic experience." In other words, *Sehnsucht* is an experience that is common to humanity, but it cannot work faith or fellowship with God. But, when one is brought into

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[13] See chapter one in Regin Prenter, *Spiritus Creator*, trans. John M. Jensen (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1953).

[14] Lewis, *God in the Dock*, 175.

fellowship with God, faith serves as the lens through which we interpret this experience.[15] In the *Problem of Pain,* Lewis is clear on this point saying: "I am not, of course, suggesting that these immortal longings which we have from the Creator because we are men, should be confused with the gifts of the Holy Spirit to those who are in Christ. We must not fancy we are holy because we are human."[16] While it does not lead directly to faith, *Sehnsucht* can be used as an attempt to help people identify with a common experience that awakens need. Lewis was not living a contradiction when he dismissed the importance of Joy in his own life yet gave it such prominence in his writings; rather, he used that which is common to man as an apologetic tool that points toward the reality of God. At this point it will be helpful to further examine C. S. Lewis' apologetic method.

When explaining his role as an apologist, Lewis writes:

> My task was therefore simply that of a *translator*—one turning Christian doctrine, or what he believed to be such, into the vernacular, into language that unscholarly people would attend to and could understand… I may have made theological errors. My manner may have been defective. Others may do better hereafter. I am ready, if I am young enough, to learn… One thing at least is sure. If the real theologians had tackled this laborious work of translation about a hundred years ago, when they began to lose touch with the people (for whom Christ died), there would have been no place for me.[17]

While some critiqued Lewis' method as being vulgar, Lewis responded:

> But let all that pass. Suppose the image is vulgar. If it gets across to the unbeliever what the unbeliever desperately needs to know, the vulgarity must be endured. Indeed, the image's very vulgarity may be an advantage; for there is much sense in the reasons advanced by Aquinas (following Pseudo-Dionysius) for preferring to

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[15] Martin Luther expressed this when using the categories of the hidden and revealed God: "If you believe in the revealed God and accept his Word, he will gradually also reveal the hidden God, for "he who sees me also sees the Father," as John 14:9 says. He who rejects the Son also loses the unrevealed God along with the revealed God. But if you cling to the revealed God with a firm faith, so that your heart is so minded that you will not lose Christ even if you are deprived of everything, then you are most assuredly predestined, and you will understand the hidden God." (WA 43:460, 26–35; LW 5:46)

[16] Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 135.

[17] C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock*, 183.

> present divine truths *sub figures vilium corporum* [under the figures of vile bodies] (*Summa Theologica,* Qu. I, Art. 9 *ad tertium*).[18]

For Lewis, as for Wingren, living is something larger and more important than having knowledge. Lewis readily admits the possible shortcomings of his theology, but he is primarily driven by the concrete need of the unbeliever who is spiritually dead and in need of a savior. While this demonstrates Lewis' apologetic method, what then of the application of Lewis' concept of *Sehnsucht* to the life of the believer? Is *Sehnsucht* only helpful as an apologetic tool for unbelievers, or can it faithfully play a role in the linear journey of sanctification within the Christian life?

Sehnsucht Within the Christian Life

C. S. Lewis viewed his experiences of *Sehnsucht* according to a framework that is best expressed in terms of relationship. This relational framework is clearly demonstrated in his *Letters*. Lewis writes regarding *Sehnsucht*:

> The delights of those days were given to lure us into the world of the Spirit, as sexual rapture is there to lead to offspring and family life. They were nuptial ardours. To ask that they should return, or should remain is like wishing to prolong the honeymoon at an age when a man should rather be interested in the careers of his growing sons. They have done their work, those days and led on to better things.[19]

These few lines effectively demonstrate the role *Sehnsucht* can play in the life of the believer while remaining faithful to orthodox theological boundaries. In the early days of the faith journey *Sehnsucht* may appear to be of immense importance. But, as one grows and matures the obsession with 'Romantic' experiences should be replaced with an outward focus of love and service for others. Jean Varnier expresses this well in his work *Community and Growth*, saying:

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[18] Ibid., 182.

[19] C. S. Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*, 1:974.

"People enter community to be happy. They stay to make others happy."[20] This can also be seen, as Lewis expresses, in a romantic relationship between a man and woman.

Youth is often marked by an excessive amount of hormones and sexual drive. A magisterial view of experience (if it feels good do it), would say that since this is a natural desire, individuals should feel free to gratify this desire freely. Once sexual desire is gone, there is no reason to stay in a romantic relationship that is *only* ruled by acquisitive love. This path promises happiness, but proves to be empty and meaningless. A ministerial view of experience, shaped by faith, acknowledges the reality of the sexual drive but places it within the wider context of the Christian narrative. Sexual desire is good, but it must be gratified within the proper boundaries, that being the covenant of marriage. Once married, the covenant exists to help preserve love and desire within its proper boundaries. If desire starts to languish, the covenant remains in order to preserve the relationship. It is the permanence of the covenant that frees us from our egocentric and selfish tendencies. Through the years, as the relationship matures, the man and woman within marriage should focus more on each others happiness, not their own desires (although this should not be disinterested, for love seeks to enjoy its object). The couple entered marriage to be happy; they stay in marriage to make each other happy, and in doing so fulfill each other's happiness.

The infancy of an individual's spiritual journey is often marked by 'Romantic' experiences and powerful emotions. A magisterial view of experience (ruled by emotion) would set this season up as the norm and standard for the Christian life. When the powerful emotions become absent, the magisterial view says that there is either something wrong with the individual's relationship with God, or God must be absent. The ministerial view of experience,

[20] Jean Varnier, *Community and Growth* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1979), 36.

shaped by faith, acknowledges the reality of 'Romantic' experiences and powerful emotions but places them within the wider context of the Christian narrative. Experience and emotion are good, but they must be placed within the proper boundaries of the baptismal covenant. Once baptized, God's Word defines the relationship, not experience or emotion. When 'Romantic' experiences or powerful emotions are absent, the certainty of God's Word and promise remain. Our relationship with God is a divine reality that comes to us *extra nos*, not a spiritual ideal which we must realize. It is the permanence of the baptismal covenant that frees us from our egocentric and selfish tendencies, providing the proper boundaries so that we can grow in our love and desire for God. Through the years, as faith matures, a believer increasingly focuses not on experience or emotion but upon love and service.[21] This freedom of 'outwardness' exists only because the Christian's identity is firmly rooted and established in the person and work of Christ. And precisely because of this new identity, the original desire (which was marked by experience and emotion) is increasingly transformed by God in his one reconciling work as it is directed towards its proper object (God himself, not God's 'things'). How, then, can this relational view of *Sehnsucht* be seen through a specifically Lutheran theological lens?

Sehnsucht Within Lutheran Discourse

When looking *at Sehnsucht* through a Lutheran lens, it could be tempting to dismiss it as theologically suspect and as another example of the Christianity-and-Plato strand of Eros religion that needs to be rejected rather than reinforced. However, this runs the risk of over-systematizing our theological language under solely the 'angle' of justification, which can in turn fail to leave

[21] The emphasis upon love and service can be seen throughout Lewis' writings concerning *Sehnsucht*. Towards the end of *The Weight of Glory*, Lewis writes (p. 14): "It may be possible for each to think too much of his own potential glory hereafter; it is hardly possible for him to think too often or too deeply about that of his neighbour. The load, or weight, or burden of my neighbour's glory should be laid daily on my back, a load so heavy that only humility can carry it, and the backs of the proud will be broken."

room for our created nature and the reality of sanctification which all demonstrate God's one reconciling work in Christ. When this happens, the theological system can be maintained, but most likely by compartmentalizing it apart from an individual's lived experiences. Because of this, we should seek to not only view reality according to a 2nd article dialectic lens, but also according to the whole of the Christian story as expressed in the narrative of the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd articles. This approach could be seen as unifying rather than fragmenting language and experience, for the angles of creation, justification, and sanctification all reflect God's one work of reconciling the world to himself in Christ.

It might be argued, however, that this could serve to dilute the integrity of justification as the article upon which the church stands or falls. But this again demonstrates the over-systematization of the dialectic framework, which can focus too much upon individual salvation and in turn fail to leave room for the reality of creation and sanctification. Oswald Bayer addresses this error in his comments entitled "Theses on the Doctrine of Justification," saying: "The Lutheran understanding of justification can appear to concentrate too much, if not exclusively, on the personal salvation of the individual."[22] If justification is indeed the article upon which the church stands or falls, then it needs to encompass not only the salvation of the individual, but also the entire meta-narrative and myth of the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd articles which reflect God's one reconciling work. Or, as Bayer writes, "Justification is an event which should be perceived in its social and universal breadth as well as in its existential depth."[23] Our theological language must not simply dismiss experience, but rather it must acknowledge the reality of experience (which marks our humanness), while placing it within the proper parameters of God's revelation. Neither language nor experience should sit on the magisterial

[22] Oswald Bayer, "Theses on the Doctrine of Justification," *Lutheran Quarterly* XXII (Spring 2008): 72.

throne, for both are to function ministerially as a handmaiden in service to the gospel. When this is done, one is free to look both *at* and *along* the 'Romantic' elements of human experience in creation and culture while remaining faithful to orthodox boundaries.

No Beauty We Could Desire

C. S. Lewis' spiritual journey was marked by a gradual progression from the abstract to the concrete, from Platonic speculation to Christian revelation. He demonstrates this gradual progression by writing of his conversion to Christianity in his spiritual autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*:

> I felt a resistance almost as strong as my previous resistance to Theism. As strong, but short-lived, for I understood it better. Every step I had taken, from the Absolute to 'Spirit' to 'God', had been a step towards the more concrete, the more imminent, the more compulsive… I know very well when, but hardly how, the final step was taken. I was driven to Whipsnade one sunny morning. When we set out I did not believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and when we reached the zoo I did. Yet I had not exactly spent the journey in thought. Nor in great emotion. 'Emotional' is perhaps the last word we can apply to some of the most important events. It was more like when a man, after long sleep, still lying motionless in bed, becomes aware that he is now awake.[24]

For Lewis, the continual attempt to satisfy unsatisfied desire found its end in the concrete person and work of Jesus Christ—the Myth that became Fact. Upon being awakened, Lewis' view of *Sehnsucht* had been retrospectively transformed. It became valuable only as a pointer to something other and outer—to God himself.

So what, now, of Joy? Is there room for it and other 'Romantic' experiences within the context of our Lutheran theology? And how does this relate to the tension between lived experience and believed language? Upon further reflection, it appears that the heart of our Lutheran theology rests precisely upon 'Romantic' experience. It is by participating in (looking

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[23] Ibid., 72.

both *at* and *along*) this experience that the tension, in a sense, is resolved. For, in this Word-formed and mythic ritual, language and experience become unified and we experience as a concrete reality what otherwise would remain a mere abstraction. C. S. Lewis expresses this well in his poem, *No Beauty We Could Desire*:

> Yes, you are always everywhere. But I,
> Hunting in such immeasurable forests,
> Could never bring the noble hart to bay.
>
> The scent was too perplexing for my hounds;
> Nowhere sometimes, then again everywhere.
> Other scents, too, seemed to them almost the same.
>
> Therefore I turn my back on the unapproachable
> Stars and horizons and all musical sounds,
> Poetry itself, and the winding stair of thought.
>
> Leaving the forests where you are pursued in vain
> --Often a mere white gleam--I turn instead
> To the appointed place where you pursue.
>
> Not in Nature, not even in Man, but in one
> Particular Man, with a date, so tall, weighing
> So much, talking Aramaic, having learned a trade;
>
> Not in all food, not in all bread and wine
> (Not, I mean, as my littleness requires)
> But this wine, this bread...no beauty we could desire.[25]

The reality of God's one reconciling work in Jesus Christ, which becomes actualized in us and for us in a real and mysterious way at the Lord's Supper,[26] is the answer to unsatisfied desire. For, at this sacred (and yet quite ordinary) table, worlds collide, and there is "the marriage of heaven and earth: Perfect Myth and Perfect Fact: claiming not only our love and our

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[24] C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 237.

[25] C. S. Lewis, *Poems* (New York: Harcourt, 2002), 124.

[26] This is not to say that we only experience this concrete reality in the Lord's Supper, for the Holy Spirit can work through the Word when and where he pleases, but we can be sure that we experience this concrete reality

obedience, but also our wonder and delight."[27] At this table, we are brought into fellowship with the Myth that became Fact, and confirmed and nourished in our identity as children of God through his pardon and power. When we learn to rest in the divine reality of this identity through God's Word and promise, we are free to celebrate the 'Romantic' elements of human experience in creation and culture, as God continually transforms and sanctifies our created nature (with its desires) through his one reconciling work in Jesus Christ. For in Jesus Christ, desire has been and will be fully satisfied.

Conclusion

It is true, as St. Augustine famously said—"you [God] have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."[28] While this might seem to make the Christian life a selfish and egocentric affair (as Beversluis and Nygren would most likely argue), part of the problem may be that we fail to read the words immediately surrounding this well-known maxim: "You stimulate him [man] to take pleasure in praising you… [A]nd they that find Him shall praise Him."[29] As Meilaender writes, "It seems right that we should desire to be in the presence of the God who made us, but the desire Augustine here articulates cannot be described as a merely selfish desire to possess God. His desire is not to possess but to praise."[30] And while our journey towards praising and resting in God will certainly be marked with experiences of pain and self-sacrifice, "we should not speak of the way (self-sacrifice) as if it were the goal (joy in God's

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particularly in the Lord's Supper.

[27] C. S. Lewis, "Myth Became Fact," 66.

[28] St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 3.

[29] Ibid., 3.

[30] Gilbert Meilaender, *The Way that Leads There: Augustinian Reflections on the Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 10.

presence)."[31] For if we do, we will inevitably lose what C. S. Lewis refers to as our joy in total dependence: "For this tangled absurdity of a Need… Grace substitutes a full, childlike and delighted acceptance of our Need, a joy in total dependence. We become 'jolly beggars.'"[32] Beggars—because we are creatures of deep need (*Wir sind Bettler: hoc est verum*).[33] Jolly—because God has met that need in Jesus Christ, filling our empty hands with riches beyond which there is no beauty we could desire.

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[31] Ibid., 21.

[32] C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1960), 131.

[33] Luther's alleged last words, translated as "We are beggars: that's the truth." Found in *Tischreden* (*WATR* 5.318.2–3).

APPENDIX ONE

PERSONAL EXPERIENCES WITH *SEHNSUCHT*

Generally, *Sehnsucht* appears most often during childhood.[1] For most, the question is not whether or not they have experienced *Sehnsucht*, but rather whether or not they can remember it. Many things can evoke it—a story, a place, a season, a smell—but it is important to note that it cannot be manufactured or produced. What aroused *Sehnsucht* at one moment may not necessarily bring it about at a later moment. It can be seen as functioning as the wardrobe in Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*: the Pevensie children accidentally stumbled into Narnia through it, but when they expected to enter through it they found the door closed.

My first memory of *Sehnsucht* occurred when I was around three or four years old. My parents attended an adult Bible-study, and while the adults were upstairs talking, the kids were sent downstairs to play. On one specific week we were left downstairs to view the BBC film version of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, and as I sat there watching, I felt as if I had entered another dimension of the world—a dimension that could be described as nothing other than magical. In a way, Narnia felt more real to me than life.[2] I did not know what the adults were talking about upstairs, nor did I care, I had glimpsed what I thought to be the secret of the universe, and I was determined to discover more of this divine mystery.

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[1] At least it did for me. The case could be made that children have a better ability to view the world with a sense of wonder and enchantment. As we grow older we often become numb to the 'magic' of the ordinary surrounding us. This is by no means always the case, and often times old age returns with a renewed sense of awe. In order to further clarify, it is important to note here that *Sehnsucht*, in Lewis' sense, is not longing for the past (for if this were the case then children would not experience it), but rather for something other and outer that we have never fully seen or realized.

[2] What I eventually came to find out was that life was a lot more like Narnia than I had then realized. It is the 'everyday' occurrences that now seem the most enchanted. G. K. Chesterton was the first bring this to my attention.

Ever since that moment I have been haunted by recurrent stirrings of *Sehnsucht*: from the yearly trips to grandma's house at Christmastime (full of presents waiting to be opened, freshly fallen snow, a crackling fire, and the bittersweet taste of grandma's hot-fudge that was only to be enjoyed once a year), to the first smell of Fall (a perfect mixture of burning leaves, cool-crisp air, and trees rustling with their changing colors); from the alluring piano melodies of George Winston, to the fairy-tales which I knew were not true but nevertheless seemed real. Amidst these and many more encounters with *Sehnsucht*, I was vexed with desire and longing. I did not know for what, but I knew that at its core the world was filled with beauty and meaning, and I wanted to share in this beauty and meaning with everyone I loved and cared for. To be sure, I knew something had gone drastically wrong with the world (for how else could there be so much suffering, pain, and evil?), but my experiences with *Sehnsucht* brought with them the hope that things would one day be put to rights. Of this I was sure.

In high school I was introduced to the apologetic writings of C. S. Lewis. Here was the man who served to awaken *Sehnsucht* in my childhood, and who now was the first to put into words that which I thought was inexpressible. For the first time, I realized that I was not alone in my secret—others felt it too. I slowly began to open up and hint to others of my experiences, and I actively inquired into how *Sehnsucht* fit within my wider Lutheran theological framework. But, to my chagrin, there not only seemed to be little room for it to fit, there seemed to be a general consensus that it was theologically suspect. "God only speaks through Word and Sacrament," I was told, "so there is no room for him to speak in these 'Romantic' experiences." I knew and agreed that God spoke through Word and Sacrament, but I also believed that there were lived experiences that pointed to the beauty, glory, and majesty of God. On the one hand, I held to theological language that repressed 'Romantic' experience; on the other hand, I was existentially

sure that there was room for 'Romantic' experience within orthodox Lutheran theology.[3] By looking *at* I came to one conclusion, by looking *along* I came to another; this led to a type of compartmentalization between the language I believed and the experiences I lived. I have been wrestling with this tension ever since.

[3] Take, for instance, the sacraments. What can be more 'Romantic' than God's presence in, with, and under the physical elements of bread and wine? But this was not pointed out to me, it was explained to me. I approached a mystery with a rational explanation. I primarily looked *at* the Lord's Supper within a rational theological system rather than looking *along* and *at* the fellowship of the Lord's Supper as a ritual within the Divine narrative.

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