

C. S. Lewis on the Incomparable Christ: With Special Emphasis upon Soteriological Implications in His Christology

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Introduction: Which Jesus Do You Know?

In the A. D. 2000 London Lectures on Contemporary Christianity, “The Incomparable Christ: Celebrating His Millennial Birth,” John Stott posed a challenge to the audience: “[W]hich Jesus are we talking about? For the fact is that there are many Jesuses on the overcrowded shelves of the world’s religious markets.”¹ Because there are so diverse images of Jesus, Christians are struggling with the question “which Jesus do we worship?” Stott’s survey of the incomparable Christ was built upon the doctrine of the double authorship of Scripture.² In other words, for him, the operative assumption for confirming the centrality of Jesus Christ in Scripture, history and mission is the doctrine of inspiration.

Along with Stott, many modern apologists seek to invite people to meet the real Jesus. I fundamentally agree with Stott that we need to ask which Jesus we talk about nowadays and that we should confirm the authority of the Bible to know who Jesus is. This high view of Scripture, however, does not necessarily preclude other options. Especially, we ought to seriously question how the uniqueness of Christ’s person and work can be explained to those who do not yet believe in the divine authorship of Scripture. In this regard, this study will seek an alternative approach – not to replace Stott’s proposal but to humbly complement it – exploring another Anglican writer, Clive Staple Lewis’ Christology.

It must be noted that Lewis was not a professional theologian, so he did not leave any systematic treatment on Christology. My study, therefore, needs to place particular emphases and make some connections more explicitly than Lewis himself may have done. The essay will first explore Lewis’ critique of the quest for the historical Jesus, which

1. John Stott, *The Incomparable Christ* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2001), 16.

2. Stott, *The Incomparable Christ*, 19.

risks relativizing the uniqueness of Jesus' salvation. I will, secondly, investigate soteriological implications derived from his appeal to natural law, showing how it is related to Christ's salvific work. The third part will show how the Christological formula of 'begotten not made' in the Nicene Creed shapes his Christological reasoning with special attention to the contrast between the two types of life (the *bios* and the *zoe*). These analyses will show that Lewis offered a remarkable apologetical model for arguing for the incomparability of Christ in an increasingly secular setting, where tradition and doctrine have not been welcomed for a long time.

The Problem of the (Un)historical Jesus

Lewis explicitly casted sceptical eyes upon various images of Jesus circulated in his time: "There have been too many historical Jesuses – a liberal Jesus, a pneumatic Jesus, a Brathian Jesus, a Marxist Jesus. They are the cheap crop of each publisher's list like the new Napoleons and new Queens Victoria. It is not to such phantoms that I look for my faith and salvation."³ It is necessary to distinguish the academic quest for the historical Jesus from popular constructions, but Lewis intentionally avoided doing so. In his eyes, there is no fundamental difference between the two, because the real significance of Jesus does not lie in how we think about this Jewish man's life.⁴

In his various writings, Lewis tackled the fatal errors made by those who reconstructed the historical Jesus. They can be grouped into three. First, he disapproved its method, ranging from the 19th-century Romantic reconstruction of Jesus's life to Rudolf Bultmann's scepticism to it, who eventually undermines the significance of 'history' in the Christian faith.⁵ Lewis' negative view is well presented in *The Screwtape Letters*. In this satirical work, a senior demon Screwtape gladly welcomes people's growing interest in the life of his chief enemy, Jesus Christ, as follows:

3. C. S. Lewis, "Why I am Not a Pacifist," in C. S. Lewis, *Essay Collection: Faith, Christianity and the Church*, ed. Lesley Walmsley (London: Harper Collins, 2000), 292.

4. In contrast to those who tried to find the uniqueness of Jesus in his moral teachings, Lewis argued that Jesus' ethical lessons are not fundamentally different from those of other great thinkers in history. See C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (London: Fontana Books, 1956), 74; *The Abolition of Man* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 27-52.

5. For further study of Bultmann's existentialist approach to history, see Rudolf Bultmann, *New Testament & Mythology and Other Basic Writings*, ed. and trans. Schubert Ogden (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 133-35, 156-60.

In the first place [these constructions of Jesuses] all tend to direct men's devotion to something which does not exist, for each historical Jesus is *unhistorical*.... In the second place, all such constructions place the importance of their Historical Jesus in some theory He *is supposed to* have promulgated.... Our third aim is, by these constructions, to *destroy the devotional life*. For the real presence of [Jesus], otherwise experienced by men in prayer and sacrament, we substitute a merely probable, remote, shadowy, and uncouth figure, one who spoke a strange language and died a long time ago.... And fourthly, besides being unhistorical in the Jesus it depicts, religion of this kind is *false to history* in another sense. No nation, and few individuals, are really brought into [God's] camp by the historical study of the biography of Jesus, simply as biography.⁶

Here Lewis was critical to the quest for the historical Jesus, not simply because it risks distracting people's piety and devotional life; rather, as shown above, the real problem of the quest for the historical Jesus lies in the fact that it is *unhistorical* by nature.⁷

Secondly, many biblical scholars risk confusing the role of historian with that of historicist. In contrast to the historian's work, for Lewis, "The mark of the Historicist is that he tries to get from historical premises conclusions which are more than historical; conclusions metaphysical or theological or (to coin a word) atheo-logical."⁸ Especially, modern scholars' approach to Scripture can easily turn into a theological mode of historicism: they not only presuppose a naturalist worldview, nearly demolishing any supernatural element in Christology;⁹ they are also flawed by a bias against the past, assuming that pre-modern people presented an unscientific, thus wrongful, picture of Jesus Christ.¹⁰ Lewis called this kind of progressivism a "great myth" shaped by modern historicism, which sees history mostly in terms of evolution or development.¹¹

6. C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters: Letters from a Senior to a Junior Devil* (London: Fontana Books, 1955), 117-19. [Italics added]

7. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, 117-18; "Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism" in *Christian Reflections*, ed. Walter Hooper (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1967), 158-66.

8. Lewis, "Historicism," in *Christian Reflections*, 100-01.

9. For Lewis' critique of naturalism, see C. S. Lewis, *Miracles: A Preliminary Study* (London: Fontana Books, 1964). In particular, Chapters 14-16 show how to read the Gospels against naturalistic challenges. See also Lewis, "Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism," 158.

10. Lewis, "Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism," 158.

11. About C. S. Lewis' critique of modern progressivism, see Lewis, "The Funeral of a Great Myth and "Historicism," in *Christian Reflections*. As one of his closest friends, Owen Barfield commented, Lewis' view of history leaves room for corrective development. For Barfield, it is really hard to pin down how to dis-

Finally, many biblical scholars, despite their specialities in their own field, do not have necessary literary experiences due to an insufficient study of literature in general. In Lewis' eyes, "[W]hatever these men may be as Biblical critics, I distrust them as critics. They seem to me to lack judgement, to be imperceptive about the very quality of the texts they are reading."¹² However, as a literary historian, Lewis had "learned in other fields of study how transitory the 'assured results of modern scholarship' may be, how soon scholarship ceases to be modern. The confident treatment to which the New Testament is subjected is no longer applied to profane texts."¹³ Lewis argued that the nature of the text should determine how to read it, not vice versa. The Bible is neither a mere report of what happened in the past, nor an incoherent collection of ancient stories; it is God's gracious self-revelation to and -communication with human beings. What is required to readers, thus, is not to keep the objective distance from the text, but to enter into "the strange new world within the Bible"¹⁴ with awe and love.¹⁵ This may be called Lewis' hermeneutics of participation and love: "No net less wide than a man's whole heart, nor less fine of mesh than love, will hold the sacred Fish [Jesus]."¹⁶

Conclusively speaking, for Lewis, we cannot know who Jesus is by merely re-constructing the image of the historical figure. It is the demon Screwtape who ironically points to where we can encounter the real Jesus: "The earliest converts were converted by a single historical fact (the Resurrection) and a single theological doctrine (the Redemption)."¹⁷ Indeed Lewis did not pay much attention to how Jesus lived; rather he asked why we need someone who can forgive sin and how his resurrection affects us.

tinguish Lewis' view of healthy development from modern progressivism. Owen Barfield, "C. S. Lewis and Historicism," in *On C. S. Lewis*, ed. G. B. Tennyson and Jane Hipolito (Oxford: Barfield Press, 2011), 76-69.

12. Lewis, "Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism," 154.

13. Lewis, "Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism," 162.

14. This expression was used by Karl Barth to overcome a modern objective or critical approach to the Bible. Both Barth and Lewis suggest participating in the narrative of Scripture rather than dissecting or historicizing the text. See Karl Barth, "The Strange New World within the Bible," in *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, trans. Douglas Horton (London: Hodder & Stoughton Limited, 1935).

15. For further study of Lewis' theory of interpretation, see "Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism," *Reflections on the Psalms* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1958), 99-119; *An Experiments in Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961).

16. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, 119.

17. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, 119.

Lewis' negative attitude towards modern biblical criticism, however, was based on his knowledge of New Testament scholarship in the mid-20th century. In my eyes, Lewis' neglect of the history of the 1st-century Palestine remains a poignant weakness in his theology, marginalizing the soteriological significance of Jesus' teaching and life.¹⁸ As a result, despite his disapproval of existentialist theologians – including Bultmann and Tillich, we find in him a similar undermining of the constructive role of historical studies on this Jewish man. Lewis seemed to see the distance between the historical Jesus and the doctrinal statement on Christology too widely, mainly due to his strong reaction to theological liberalism at the time. Nonetheless, in order to know who we worship, to imitate Christ in our particular situation, and to counter against popular images on him, we certainly need nowadays a Christology which leaves positive room for, and gives certain guidance to, historical studies on Jesus' life and teaching. Lewis perhaps did not have to respond these needs; instead, he delved into the meaning of the resurrection for the salvation of humanity. Before moving on to investigating the meaning of the resurrection (IV), the next chapter will explore Lewis' doctrine of redemption (III).

Cur Deus Homo?: From Natural Law to Vicarrism

Lewis' essay "What Are We to Make of Jesus Christ?" begins with an insightful comment: "This is a question which has, in a sense, a frantically comic side. For the real question is not what are we to make of Christ, but what is He to make of us?"¹⁹ Our inquiry about who Christ is, in a deeper sense, a question concerning our salvation. Instead of presenting a doctrine of the person of Christ *in abstract*, Lewis closely linked the person of Christ with his work. For this, he did not appeal directly to the Bible's witness to Christ, but to our repeated experience of moral failure.

18. In a similar vein, N. T. Wright critiques Lewis' dehistoricized approach as follows: "[S]ome in our day, too, see the historical context of Jesus as part of what you teach Christians later on rather than part of how you explain the gospel to outsiders. I think this is simply mistaken. Every step towards a de-Judized Jesus is a step-away from Scripture, away from Christian wisdom." Thus, he calls Lewis' apologetics "a fine but leaky building," without losing his deep respect for this "imperfect apologist." See N. T. Wright, "Simply Lewis: Reflections on a Master Apologist After 60 Years," accessed September 13, 2014, <http://touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=20-02-028-f>.

19. Lewis, "What Are We to Make of Jesus Christ?," 38.

One of the primary roles of a modern apologist, according to Lewis, is to help modern people recover a sense of sin.²⁰ Christianity shows both human beings' corrupted nature and God's salvific act for them. This is not Lewis's own innovative claim, but a widely used dogmatic and apologetical theme.²¹ A dialectic of sinfulness and healing, a key to understand the basic structure of Christian soteriology, is succinctly presented in Lewis' work, but he uniquely interpreted it by analysing our everyday struggle with moral issues.

When observing human behaviour, people not only have a sense of right and wrong, but also appeal to some kind of moral standard for thinking and acting. The Western philosophical and theological tradition has called it natural law (and Lewis sometimes used the Chinese term *Tao* to show its universal scope).²² More surprisingly, different people, societies, and civilizations seem to share certain moral codes— including respect for justice and mercy, responsibility for the weak, prohibition of murder, and others – albeit adopting diverse forms. Lewis contended that these are examples of translating natural law into different cultural settings. The notion of natural law has been an issue of heated debate among modern Protestant thinkers,²³ but Lewis' primary concern is not to prove the existence and contemporary relevance of natural law. What he primarily attempted to illustrate is our inability to keep this moral

20. See Lewis, "Christian Apologetics," in *Essay Collection: Faith, Christianity and the Church*, 152-53; Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 38; George Sayer, *Jack: A Life of C. S. Lewis* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1994), 277.

21. In *Pensées*, for example, Pascal asked: "What religion... will teach us how to cure pride and concupiscence? What religion... will teach us our true good, our duties, the weakness which leads us astray, the cause of these weaknesses, the treatment that can cure them, and the means of obtaining such treatment?" Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. A. J. Krailsheimer (London: Penguin, 1995), 47.

22. One of Lewis' Oxford friends, Dorothy Sayers offered a similar, but clearer explanation of different categories of law. The first is an *a posteriori* code of behaviour based on human agreement. The second refers to the order of the Universe, or the pattern of movement within the physical world. Finally, there is a universal moral law, which cannot be identified with the first, and it contains certain truths about the nature of humanity. Human beings can enjoy their genuine freedom by conforming to it. This universal moral law is called 'natural law.' See Dorothy Sayers, *The Mind of the Maker* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 8-9.

23. See, for example, the following contrasting approaches to natural law by two influential Christian ethicists. Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1983), 50-69; Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Leicester: Apollos, 1994), x-xii, 85-87.

demand. Recognizing this failure is a preliminary step for entering into the Christian faith: “They know the Law of Nature; they break it. These two facts are the foundation of all clear thinking about ourselves and the universe we live in.”²⁴ In his eyes, our daily living embodies this indelible mark of paradox, and thus “[Christianity] does not begin in comfort; it begins in the *dismay* I have been describing.”²⁵ Just as St. Paul described the inner conflict caused by law in Romans 7, so Lewis utilized natural law in order to show this paradox to modern people who lost interest in the traditional doctrine of sin.

How, then, did Lewis link the moral law to the salvific work of Jesus Christ? Considering our repeated moral failure and ineradicable sense of guilt, what we truly need is forgiveness. In our daily practice, according to Lewis, we ignore the difference between forgiveness and excuse, which are in fact opposite: the latter requires proper reasons that can explain the offender’s error; the former, however, is a gracious decision or act towards something inexcusable, so it comes entirely from the victim’s favour.²⁶ Lewis drew people’s attention to one Jewish man in the 1st century. This historical person claimed that he had *authority* to forgive others’ sins; he even behaved as if he was the person responsible for the sin of the world. Throughout his short lifetime, he was offended by only certain numbers of people, but he said he would forgive all humankind. How, then, could one historical person have the right to forgive everyone’s sin? For Lewis, “This makes sense only if He really was the God whose laws are broken and whose love is wounded in every sin.”²⁷ In the Bible, indeed, this person is introduced as the Son of God, and we have to determine whether or not to accept him as the divine Son:

A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God.²⁸

24. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 19.

25. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 38.

26. Lewis, “On Forgiveness,” in *Essay Collection: Faith, Christianity and the Church*, 184-85.

27. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 52.

28. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 52-53.

This trilemma was especially efficient for modern intellectuals who denied Jesus' divinity but respected his moral teachings.²⁹ This method, however, may raise more questions: what if there are more than three options?; what if this man was a real lunatic?; how can Lewis be so sure that the historical Jesus really preached the forgiveness of sins? Despite these possible criticisms, Lewis intended to show that one cannot be a Christian by intellectually consenting to Jesus' moral teaching; one should admit that Jesus has the power to forgive sin, because he is the Son of God.

In Lewis' eyes, what is truly unique in Jesus Christ is his message of forgiveness on the one hand, and his own remark that he came to suffer and die on the other. The link between the two is a key to understand his person and work. Lewis claimed that "The central Christian belief is that Christ's death has *somehow* put us right with God and given us a fresh start."³⁰ This reality of atonement is the heart of mere Christianity.³¹ A particular theory as to how Jesus' death works for us is only a secondary matter in Lewis.³²

The trouble out of which men and women cannot rescue themselves is their sinful nature, or in non-religious terms their tendency to "set up on [their] own, to behave as if [they] belonged to [themselves]."³³ In order to overcome this, a person has to realize and turn away from one's

29. This trilemma is not Lewis' own invention. Its earlier form can be found in several sermons in the mid-19th century, but his BBC radio talks made it popular. Many apologists, especially Peter Kreeft, have prized it as "the most important argument in Christian apologetics." Peter Kreeft, *Fundamentals of the Faith: Essays in Christian Apologetics* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 59.

30. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 54.

31. In Lewis' eyes, many theologians have engaged in doctrinal disputes rather than seeking mere Christianity, the term used by a 17th-century English theologian Richard Baxter. Despite schisms within the church, Lewis tried to explain and defend what Christians have believed through the ages, pointing to "her centre, where her truest children dwell, that each communion is really closest to every other in spirit, if not in doctrine." Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 9; See also C. S. Lewis, "On the Reading of Old Books," in *Essay Collection: Literature, Philosophy and Short Stories*, ed. Lesley Walmsley (London: Harper Collins, 2000), 32-33.

32. Recent scholars emphasize that justification is one of main soteriological models in Scripture and in early Christian theology. Gustav Aulén's *Christus Victor* remarkably shows that Christ's victory over the powers of evil, and bestowment of new possibilities of life, was a dominant theory, distinguished from a subjective approach (or moral influence theory) and an objective approach (or satisfaction theory). See Gustav Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement* (London: SPCK, 1931).

33. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 56.

self-centredness.³⁴ Christianity calls it repentance, a kind of humiliation and death of ego. The human self, however, has been tamed, deceived, and distorted by human self-will and pride not only for one's lifetime but also for thousands of years. What is required by God is to die (repent), but human sinful nature prohibits us from doing it. True repentance is something impossible for humankind, but God strictly requests it.

A similar dilemma troubled the Reformers, and the doctrine of justification could properly illustrate how the triune God solves this problem by imputing Christ's righteousness to sinners.³⁵ Lewis' mere Christianity avoids using the doctrinal language of justification, but introduces a similar soteriological idea. In my view, it might be termed as the imputation of death: because human beings cannot truly repent by killing their ego, God should put death into them for their salvation.³⁶ For this, God should do something contradictory to God's own nature – humiliation and death. Under the influence of Athanasius' *De Incarnatione*,³⁷ Lewis demonstrated that the One full of life had to “borrow death from others”³⁸ to die for the mortal:

[S]upposing God became a man – suppose our human nature which can suffer and die was amalgamated with God's nature in one person, then the person could help us. He could surrender His will, and suffer and die, because He was man; and He could do it perfectly because He was God. You and I can go through this process only if God does it in us; but God can do it only if He becomes man. Our attempts at this dying will succeed only if we man share in God's dying.... [W]e cannot share God's dying unless God dies; and He cannot die except by being a man. That

34. Lewis claimed that pride or self-conceit is the great sin: “Accordingly to Christian teachers, the essential vice, the utmost evil, is Pride. [Other vices] are mere fleabites in comparison: it was through Pride that the devil became the devil: Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind.” Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 106.

35. About the Reformers' similar but diverse views on justification, see Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 208-307.

36. To be a Christian, for Lewis, involves accepting a particular view of death: “On the one hand Death is the triumph of Satan, the punishment of the Fall, and the last enemy.... On the other hand, only he who loses life will save it.... It is Satan's great weapon and also God's great weapon.” Lewis, *Miracles*, 129.

37. See, especially, Athanasius, *St. Athanasius on the incarnation: The Treatise De incarnatione Verbi Dei*, trans. Penelope Lawson (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary), VIII, 4 – IX, 1.

38. Lewis, “On the Reading of Old Books,” 35.

is the sense in which He pays our debt, and suffers for what He Himself need not suffer at all.³⁹

This is the basic structure of Lewis' vision of atonement. Human beings need to kill their old natural self, so the divine Son died for them and imputed death to them. Men and women can now practice their death in daily living by obediently submitting their will to God. The perfect surrender and humiliation took place in him, and thus a new kind of humanity, or the next step of human evolution, began with the resurrection.⁴⁰ The New Testament, for Lewis, utilizes various concepts and/or images to explain the killing of the old natural self in humanity and the replacing of it with the new self in Christ – including 'being born again,' 'putting on Christ,' 'Christ's being formed in us,' and 'having the mind of Christ.'⁴¹

In short, Lewis demonstrated that our native sense of right and wrong is the first step for reaching Jesus Christ. Some theologians, like Barth or van Til, may raise an objection that our theological reasoning ought to start with faith in God, rather than with human nature.⁴² However, this lay apologist did not first introduce creeds or doctrines, but appealed to our everyday experience. He did not ask people to choose either revelation or human experience; rather, for him, human experience can find its true meaning when seeing it in relation to God's grace. In this regard, an analysis of ambiguous experience can serve as a preliminary step for entering into the Christian faith. This is an apologetical method which made a huge impact upon people dismayed by WWII and subsequent social disorder.

Furthermore, despite criticisms that his vision of salvation is insufficient,⁴³ in my view, he was faithful to the core message of Prot-

39. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 57.

40. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 59. Lewis severely critiqued the Darwinian doctrine of evolution, calling it a great modern myth. However, to explain to modern people the radical transformation of humanity brought by Christ, he utilized the language of evolution: he described the emergence of new humanity in the resurrection as the new evolutionary step. See Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 181-87.

41. Lewis drew our attention to Jn 3:3; Rom 13:14; Gal 4:19; Phil 2:5, etc.

42. Despite Cornelius van Til's critique of Karl Barth, both denied an anthropological basis for theological constructions, arguing that theology should start from God. See Cornelius van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: P&R, 1967), 99-100; Karl Barth, "The Need and Promise of Christian Preaching," in *The Word of God and the Word of Man*.

43. See J. I. Packer, "Still Surprised by Lewis," *Christianity Today* (Sep 1998), 56; David J. Stewart, "C. S. Lewis Was No Christian," accessed September 13, 2014, http://www.jesus-is-savior.com/Wolves/cs_lewis.htm.

estant soteriology. Melancthon's formula "Only by grace do you justify and only by faith are we justified"⁴⁴ succinctly summarizes the Protestant doctrine of justification. Although Lewis had less interest in presenting his own doctrine of justification, one may find that the *two solas* were central in him.⁴⁵ He certainly held *sola gratia*, which does not exclude but re-creates room for human freedom and morality.⁴⁶ Our work before salvation only results in despair and dismay. However, God rescues us from this agony by forgiving our sins; it is Christ who died for us, because we cannot kill our self-centered ego. In addition, the doctrine of *sola fide* not only emphasizes the priority of God's grace, which does not demand any merit, but also encourages us to rethink the nature of human act. United with Christ in faith, for Lewis, "the Christian thinks any good he does comes from the Christ-life inside him,"⁴⁷ and thus it is impossible to separate between faith and work for those who died with Christ. Conclusively speaking, Lewis sought to interlock justification and sanctification, although he did not use these doctrinal terms, perhaps more closely than other theologians do. What may trouble some readers, in my view, is not an issue of justification but the scope of salvation brought by Christ's resurrection.

Begotten, Not Made: Little Christs in Nicene Christology

As discussed above, Lewis' reflections upon the necessity and the impossibility of moral life lead to key Christological ideas. This section will examine the way in which the resurrection connects the divine Son with human beings as creatures. For Lewis, the resurrection not merely confirms Jesus Christ's divinity, but also announces the beginning of new humanity in history: "Christ, re-ascending from His great dive, is bringing up Human Nature with Him. Where He goes, it goes too. It

44. This quotation is the English translation of Melancthon's formula "*sola gratia justificamus et sola fide justificamur.*" See Philipp Melancthon, *Philippi Melanthonis Opera quae supersunt omnia*, VIII, ed. Carolus Gottlieb Bretschneider (Halis Saxonum: apud C.A. Schwetschke et filium, 1841), 357.

45. It is widely known that the Reformers utilized five solos (*Sola Scriptura*, *Sola fide*, *Sola gratia*, *Solo Christos*, and *Soli Deo gloria*) to counter against the medieval Roman Catholic Church, but they were not presented as a systematized principle for describing the essence of the Protestant faith until the 20th century.

46. Despite Lewis's vision of mere Christianity, he seemed to be in disagreement with several Calvinist doctrines. In particular, one may find his opposition to the doctrines of total depravity, double predestination, irresistible grace in C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (London: Faber & Faber, 1961), 28; *The Problem of Pain*, 28-29; *Mere Christianity*, 61, 152.

47. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 61.

will be made 'like Him' (*Phil.* iii. 21; *1 John* iii.12.).⁴⁸ Lewis further investigated this theme, focusing on a key Christological formula of the Nicene Creed.

The Nicene Creed describes the divinity of the Son as follows: "We believe in... one Lord, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, *begotten of the Father...*, very God from very God, *begotten, not made*, being of one substance with the Father."⁴⁹ In opposition to Arius' position that the Son is a creature derived from the will of God, Athanasius affirmed that the Son is one substance [*homoousion*] with the Father, and thus the Creed utilized the expression 'begotten, not made.' For him, the Son of God became a human person in order that humanity might be made divine. Nonetheless, he did not interpret the Nicene phrase 'begotten, not made' itself from a soteriological perspective,⁵⁰ even though this idea serves as the basis for his doctrine of divinization.

This Christological idea was adopted by Lewis as a key framework for making sense of human salvation. The Son is 'begotten,' not made, but human beings are 'made,' not begotten. Because the only 'begotten' Son assumed something made (the flesh of humanity), those who are originally 'made' might be transformed into being 'begotten' in Christ. This change of status is a new *evolutionary* step for humanity brought by the incarnated Jesus Christ, especially through his resurrection. Lewis seems to be generally in line with the traditional Christian faith, but as Fiddes aptly comments, Lewis' explanation of filial adoption in terms of transferring from a state of being 'made' to one of being 'begotten' is unique.⁵¹

The New Testament shows that Christ is the Son of God and that those who believe in him will be God's adopted children. In the Fourth Gospel, for example, the term 'son' (*huios*) refers to Jesus, and 'children' (*tekna*) to believers. Paul also comments that through the Spirit believers are drawn into the filial relationship with God the Father, which is eternally enjoyed by the Son (*Gal* 4:5; *Rom* 8:16-17). How can this change of status take place in Christ? What kind of language can be adopted to explain this transformation? Lewis related 'being made' to

48. Lewis, *Miracles*, 139.

49. The English version of the creed is from Philip Schaff's translation from *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*. See "The Nicene Creed," accessed September 13, 2014, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf214.vii.iii.html>.

50. Athanasius commented that we are not begotten first, but made. See Athanasius, *Orations of S. Athanasius against the Arians* (London: Griffith Farran Okeden & Welsh, 1889), II, 59.

51. Paul S. Fiddes, "On Theology," in *Cambridge Companion to C. S. Lewis*, ed. Michael Ward and Robert MacSwain (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 93.

the Greek term *bios*, and ‘being begotten’ to *zoe*.⁵² The *bios* principally refers in Scripture to physical life, or life span (Lk 8:14); in contrast, the *zoe* frequently indicates a new life that one may enter, not as one’s natural possession, but as God’s gift (Mt 18:8; Jn 5:26; Acts 17:25; Rv 2:7).⁵³ Lewis questioned how humankind can have this *zoe*, which is not their native possession but eschatologically promised to them.

Although the Greek term *zoe* does not appear in the Nicene Creed, whose main concern is a doctrinal statement on correct belief in the triune God, Lewis reinterpreted it within the context of the New Testament theology of life. Jesus Christ is the only Son of God, who shares his *zoe* with humankind, and thus human beings may also be transformed from God’s creatures into children. For Lewis, transferring from the *bios* to the *zoe* would be a strange, disturbing, and even painful experience from the human perspective, because:

The two kinds of life [the *zoe* and the *bios*] are not only different (they would always have been that) but actually opposed. The natural life in each of us is something self-centred.... It knows that if the spiritual life gets hold of it, all its self-centredness and self-will are going to be killed and it is ready to fight tooth and nail to avoid that.... Imagine turning a tin soldier into a little man. It would involve turning the tin into flesh.... He is not interested in flesh; all he sees is that the tin is being spoilt. He thinks you are killing him. He will do everything he can to prevent you. He will not be made into a man if he can help it.⁵⁴

Human beings neither have the ability to achieve the *zoe*, nor recognize their fear of losing the *bios* and resistance to the *zoe*. God’s answer to this dual problem is giving to the world “one man who really was what all men were intended to be: one man in whom the created life, derived from His Mother, allowed itself to be completely and perfectly turned

52. The New Testament terms for life are mostly the *bios* and the *zoe*. The *psyche* is also frequently used, but Lewis’ main concern lies in showing the difference between the *bios* and the *zoe*. The Greek terms, such as *agoge*, *anastrophe*, *biotikos*, *biosis*, and *zoopoieo*, are also used, but less frequently, in the New Testament.

53. See E. F. Harrison, “Life,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia Vol. 3*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1986). The LXX term for ‘the tree of life’ (Gn 2:9; 3:22) in the Garden of Eden is *xylon tes zoes*, the same word appears in the Book of Revelation (Rv 2:7; 22:2, 14, 19). In his first apologetical work, *The Problem of Pain*, Lewis speculated that the deeper and subtler meaning of the Genesis story of the trees of life and knowledge might have been lost due to theology’s emphasis upon the issue of (dis)obedience. He did not show how to reinterpret the Genesis story of the trees in the book. C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 66.

54. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 150-51.

into the begotten life.”⁵⁵ The natural life (*bios*) was killed in this divine Son’s death and suffering; the new life (*zoe*) was given to those who are united with the resurrected Christ. Because Jesus Christ and believers share the *zoe*, Christians are called by Lewis “new Little Christs,”⁵⁶ who share his power, joy, knowledge and eternity.

This participatory soteriology is the outcome of Lewis’ version of *Solus Christus*. Because Jesus Christ is the resurrected Son of God, human beings can enjoy the divine sonship in Christ. There is no salvation, or no participation in the divine life, except through Christ. This is a dominant theme in Lewis, but it also creates a possibility of reading his soteriology as a kind of Christo-centric inclusivism.⁵⁷ This is hinted in the following paragraph:

From [Christ’s incarnation]... the effect spreads through all mankind. It makes a difference to people who lived before Christ as well as to people who lived after Him.... What, then, is the difference which He has made to the whole human mass?... Humanity is already “saved” in principle. We individuals have to appropriate that salvation. But the really tough work – the bit we could not have done for ourselves – has been done for us.... One of our own race has this new life: if we get close to Him we shall catch it from Him.⁵⁸

The above quotation does not endorse any kind of universalism. Lewis contended that “Some will not be redeemed. There is no doctrine which I would more willingly remove from Christianity than this, if it lay in my power.”⁵⁹ People may deny God’s salvific grace by misusing God’s gift of freedom, and thus Lewis argued that “the doors of hell are locked on the inside.”⁶⁰ However, he claimed in other places that the effect of Christ’s salvation (especially incarnation) even reaches to

55. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 151.

56. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 166.

57. See the following works which examine Lewis’ inclusivist tendency. John Sanders, *No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Un-evangelized* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 251-57; Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 419-20; Elissa McCormack, “Inclusivism in the Fiction of C. S. Lewis: The Case of Emeth,” *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 11, no. 4 (2008): 57-73.

58. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 152.

59. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 119-20.

60. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 130. He also claimed that “[N]o power in the whole universe, except you yourself, can prevent [God] from taking you to [perfection].” Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 169.

those who have not heard of him.⁶¹ This ambiguity, in my view, arises from his unclarified attitudes toward the objective side of human salvation – especially Christ’s incarnation and resurrection – and toward the subjective side – especially the role of human free will.

Lewis’ emphasis upon the objective side (or God’s saving will) made him speculate a possibility of salvation for those who have no knowledge of Jesus; his defence of human free will, however, resulted in his rejection of universalism and of the Calvinist doctrine of predestination alike: free will allows people to decide whether to accept God’s grace in Christ, and even God’s sovereignty cannot nullify it. This might be a logical conclusion of his nearly equal emphases upon the objective side of salvation and the subjective. Although human freedom is crucial in Christianity, however, does the Bible, or even our daily experience, show that human freedom cannot make a right decision without God’s interruption? Is it not the Holy Spirit who enables sinners to properly acknowledge revelation and to prayerfully respond God? In my view, his insufficient attention to the effect of sin upon our free will, and to the illumination of the Spirit, remains a poignant weakness in his soteriology.

Conclusion

This study has examined C. S. Lewis’ Christology with special attention to its soteriological implications. He critiqued the modern quest for the historical Jesus on the one hand, and impressively argued for the divinity of Jesus Christ on the other. Especially, his use of the Nicene formula, “begotten, not made,” enabled him to interpret our transference from God’s creature to children from a refreshing perspective: his Christological reasoning began with our everyday experience of moral failure, and eventually ended up with traditional participatory soteriology. Despite his less direct engagement with Scripture and with the doctrine of justification, along with a controversial possibility of inclusivism, we may use his apologetical writings with some cautions as a crucial resource for defending and explaining the incomparability of Christ. In some sense, his appeal to everyday experience and search for mere Christianity can contribute, in cooperation with other more doctrinally oriented theologians, to our ongoing endeavor to know and explain the centrality of Christ in the Christian faith in this postmodern and secular era.⁶²

61. C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1962), 114. See also C. S. Lewis, “Letter to Mary van Deusen on January 31, 1952,” in *Letters of C. S. Lewis*, ed. W. H. Lewis (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), 238.

62. About the recent rediscovery of Lewis’ apologetics, see Alister McGrath, *C. S. Lewis - A Life: Eccentric Genius, Reluctant Prophet* (Carol Stream:

Tyndale House Publishers, 2013), 363-77; Brian Stanley, *The Global Diffusion of Evangelicalism: The Age of Billy Graham and John Stott* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2013), 145-49; Michael Ward, "How Lewis Lit the Way to Better Apologetics: Why the Path to Reasonable Faith Begins with Story and Imagination," *Christianity Today*, Nov 2013, 36-41.