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A Collection of Essays Presented at the Second
FRANCES WHITE COLLOQUIUM on C.S. LEWIS & FRIENDS

Taylor University 1999

Upland, Indiana

Christian Reflections on *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*

Bradley S. Belcher

Christian Reflections on *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*

by Bradley S. Belcher

Over the years I have read the C.S. Lewis classic *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* many times. My earliest recollection of hearing the tale is from that of my fathers' reading the book to me as a little boy. I have warm memories of sitting on his great lap and snuggling up against him as he shared the adventures of Narnia with me. When I entered the sixth grade I recall reading the book on my own for the first time. I even prepared a book report for which I received a grade. Show off my accomplishments the teacher even placed my name upon the bulletin board in the classroom along with the names of other children who had read other books. But at the time, I was certain that the book I had read was by far the best.

In my sophomore year in college I had the opportunity to read the book again, this time for a class entitled "Christian Mythic Writers." Again I found myself writing a report. Although, now misplaced, the report I gave merely reflected the obvious analogies presented by C.S. Lewis, that of Aslan's Christ-like comparisons and the Witch's satanic qualities revolving around Aslan's atonement and victory at the roundtable as compared to the Cross of Christ. Again last year I read the book to my then 3½ year old daughter and was surprised when she blurted out one evening "Is Aslan Jesus?" I was delighted to see such fantastic spiritual insight from such a little person and was encouraged

that her little heart and mind were already sensitive to Jesus and His love for us.

Presently I find myself writing yet another paper on this great book in the midst of studying much detailed insight on the nature of Christ, the Holy Spirit and salvation through a seminary systematic theology class. But this time in my reading, the book has hit me altogether differently. To a certain extent I have been taken aback and surprised at this "revelation" that had never crossed my mind until now. For the first time as I have reflected on the theological implications of this book I realized that Edmund represents all of us in our total depravity before a Holy and righteous God.

What has been my experience with stories that have characters that are wicked is that we who are reading the story (or hearing it) quite naturally think of someone else who is just as evil or nasty. For example, upon hearing the Biblical account of the Prodigal Son, our first judgmental inclination is to think to ourselves "Boy, I know someone just like that. So and so was given so much and they went their own way and have fallen away from truth. I wonder if they will ever get right with God." But what we are not recognizing is that the story of the Prodigal Son is really about us. We are the ones who have gone our own way. We are the ones who have squandered our inheritance. We are the ones who are without truth. We are the ones who need to get right with God. And so it is with Edmund. As we shall see,

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Edmund, left to himself, is in a hopeless state and so are we.

Now, it is not my goal to recount all the theological allegories found in C.S. Lewis's book *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. Nor is it my intention to ascribe a theological construction pertaining to the author's original intentions in writing this book. My goal is to simply share my twofold comparative reflections. First, Edmund as presented was totally depraved in sin and treachery and so are we. Second, the only solution for Edmund's status as sinner and traitor as presented in the book is through an atonement based on the penal-substitution of Aslan. Similarly, we, in our depravity, are in need of Jesus Christ's complete work of atonement on our behalf to effect salvation.

Millard J. Erickson, in his work *Christian Theology*, maintains that "The penal-substitution theory confirms the Biblical teaching of the total depravity of all humans." (p. 822) In Edmund's case we see this confirmation. You will recall that from the very beginning of C.S. Lewis's account that Edmund is described through his actions as being an evil and insidious young boy. We later find near the end of the book that it was through boarding school that he became especially wicked. But, in the beginning we have a boy none the less predisposed to evil. He hides his true feelings in front of the professor. He pretends not to be tired which apparently makes him all the more grumpy. He also has a propensity to call his siblings degrading names. It is here that we start—with depravity, hiding, pretending, belittling. How often it is that we find ourselves hiding the truth, or pretending to be something we are not, all the while putting people around us down so that we will appear all the more superior. We do all this so that in our

depravity we can stay and feel all the more comfortable.

Next, as the story unfolds we see Edmund grumbling about the weather and unhappy with his circumstances. We find him focusing on present situations with little hope of future things. In my own life I know that I'm at my lowest point in my walk with the Lord when I start focusing on the circumstances around my life and not focusing on God and the future He has for me. I'm reminded of the story of how the apostle Peter lost his focus on the Lord and began looking at the waves around him. It was when he looked at his circumstances that he began to sink. It's clear with Edmund that self is the only thing upon which he focuses.

Upon hearing Lucy's account of the "imaginary country" in the wardrobe even more of Edmund's character is revealed. He becomes spiteful toward Lucy calling her "Batty, quite batty." He continues his teasing efforts picking on someone weaker than he is. We too must admit our own spitefulness. This usually takes place when someone or something is getting more attention than we are so we react out of spite and jealousy. Our usual reaction is to lash out at something that can't or won't strike back, either verbally or physically. In Edmund's case he lashed back at Lucy who had now become the center of attention thus taking Edmund's place. We, however, do the same. We kick the dog or belittle our children to bring ourselves comfort.

Now when Edmund himself finally makes his way into the wardrobe C.S. Lewis makes some interesting imagery. First, Edmund is the only one who closes the wardrobe door behind him which promotes him to the classification of "fool." You will recall it is "a very foolish thing to do" closing oneself up in a wardrobe. Secondly, upon finding himself in the dark *lost*

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within the wardrobe he “groped wildly in every direction.” Here we see that Edmund in his depravity is not thinking clearly. He is thinking as a fool. And when a fool is in spiritual darkness he reaches for anything that can be found to bring seeming comfort or temporal stability. Of course this search can lead a spiritually *lost* person most anywhere except toward God. Often times we see non-Christians trying to fill the void in their lives with all sorts of temporal satisfactions and short-sighted commitments. From scripture we learn that when we encounter uncertainty we need to “be still and know that He is God.”

As Edmund makes his way into Narnia he calls out for Lucy giving an insincere apology only seeking to relieve his own loneliness by her presence and nothing more. When no response is made to his call, his insincerity is confirmed when he concludes “just like a girl . . .” Here we see the outward appearances of righteousness in seeking forgiveness only to be destroyed by the true heart convictions of the individual. Many people can give the impression of sincerity of faith in how they act but we need to be careful because only “God looks upon the heart” (I Samuel 16:7). More importantly we need to examine our hearts to see that we are of faith ourselves as the apostle Paul encourages us to do.

It is uncanny how quickly Edmund falls into the hands of the White Witch. He is lured in by his own lustful appetite for Turkish Delight. In his passion for more Turkish Delight he disregards the possibility of getting sick by eating too much of it. Interestingly enough, the White Witch gives him just enough Turkish Delight to keep him coming back for more so that he will continue to be of use to her in her kingdom. She would never give enough to kill him even though we are

told by the author she could. She knows he would be of little use to her if he were dead. And so it is with Satan. Through our depravity Satan uses our natural desires and evil lusts against us to further his purposes. He always gives us just enough to keep us coming back for more and not too much lest we lose our effectiveness for his kingdom.

It is at this time that Edmund is brought to his lowest. He denies his love for his siblings out of his lust for his own selfish gain. Giving in to his passion for Turkish Delight he entertains and harbors the lie of all lies; that the White Witch will make him a prince and a king. This is the very lie that is found in the garden of Eden. Genesis 3:5 states, “*For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.*” After becoming slightly sick from much Turkish Delight he longs for more all the while knowing deep in his heart that the White Witch might be dangerous. We are told that Edmund is “more than half on the side of the Witch.” This illustrates that he is not neutral but is bent toward the Witch and as we have seen, he is bent in on himself. Such blindness, such confusion, such depravity.

Edmund continues his swath of destruction by scheming and denying any knowledge of Narnia to the other children thus breaking Lucy’s heart. When the others find out about Edmund’s lie, Edmund vows revenge. Here we see the destructive force of depravity. Once Edmund has reached bottom he wields pain toward his sister and vows revenge with an irrational sense of justice as he surmises that somehow he is the victim of the other children. He also tries to place doubt in the mind of Peter concerning whose side is right, the Witch’s or Aslan’s. When we have turned to our own way we often find ourselves trying to

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confuse issues over right and wrong. The goal of that, of course, is to somehow justify our unrighteous position. All the while we hurt those around us and we go about with an unforgiving spirit.

The culmination of Edmund's depravity is portrayed by his being bound up by the Witch and made to march through the slush and mud. Enslaved to sin he was forced to obey the White Witch. He was then bound to the tree and doomed for destruction. In his being a traitor there was nothing he could do in and of himself to make himself free. His will was literally bound in the matter. Similarly our wills are bound in sin. We are enemies of God. God haters, all of us. We have missed God's mark of holy perfection and there is absolutely nothing within ourselves that we can do to remedy the situation.

As the Biblical account of the Prodigal Son describes the son "coming to himself" I believe that C. S. Lewis illustrates this with Edmund. We see Edmund finally feeling sorry for someone else other than himself at the tragic Christmas party as the animals were turned to stone. This is more than likely the first instance of grace being applied to his heart as he begins to long for his brothers and sisters. Ultimately, it is only by the grace of Aslan who sends animals who release Edmund from the Witch. Aslan and Edmund have a long talk and I would suggest that it is during this time that the subjective aspects of Aslan's atonement were effected, that of Edmund's turning from sin and his believing on Aslan. I believe Job 42:2-6 applies:

"I know that Thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of Thine can be thwarted. 'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore I have declared that which

I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know." 'Hear, now, and I will speak; I will ask Thee, and do Thou instruct me.' "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees Thee: Therefore I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes." (NAS)

Objectively, Aslan paid the penalty for Edmund's iniquity, by making himself subject to the Witch unto death, even death on a stone table. Through this action Aslan justified Edmund and defeated the White Witch and evil once and for all. After all this we find Edmund a totally different young man. He gives of himself following Aslan's example in fighting the White Witch on the battlefield. He is proclaimed to be "Edmund the Just" and is now a servant of Aslan. Now on our behalf Jesus has paid the price for us, He is our sacrifice, He has provided propitiation, He is our substitution, and He has provided reconciliation. In our sin, there is nothing within ourselves that could save us. Only through the blood of Jesus Christ the Holy One do we have victory over evil.