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# The Logic of Purgatory in C.S. Lewis: Why Spiritual Formation Makes Less Sense Without It

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# **INKLINGS FOREVER, Volume VIII**

A Collection of Essays Presented at the Joint Meeting of

The Eighth

FRANCES WHITE EW BANK COLLOQUIUM ON C.S. LEWIS & FRIENDS

and

THE C.S. LEWIS AND THE INKLINGS SOCIETY CONFERENCE

Taylor University 2012

Upland, Indiana

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## **The Logic of Purgatory in C.S. Lewis: Why Spiritual Formation Makes Less Sense Without It**

Robert Moore-Jumonville  
Spring Arbor University

# The Logic of Purgatory in C.S. Lewis: Why Spiritual Formation Makes Less Sense Without It

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Spiritual Formation, for C. S. Lewis, relates primarily to what we as human beings are becoming; and to *that fundamental goal* God has in mind for us—“the end for which we are formed.”<sup>1</sup> Lewis asserts that God intends to make us into “little Christs.” God, he insists, will “be satisfied with nothing less than absolute perfection.” “The only help I will give you,” God says, “is help to become perfect. You may want something less; but I will give you nothing less.”<sup>2</sup> Moreover, we must cooperate with God in this formation. Such a high human calling can appear daunting. It requires purging of the soul, the sometimes painful work as the potter bends His clay. Yet the ramifications of our choices are eternal. What *are* we becoming?

Every time you make a choice you are turning the central part of you, the part of you that chooses, into something a little different from what it was before. And taking your life as a whole, with all your innumerable choices, all your life long you are slowly turning this central thing either into a heavenly creature or into a hellish creature: either into a creature that is in harmony with God, and with other

creatures, and with itself, or else into one that is in a state of war and hatred with God, and with its fellow-creatures, and with itself. To be the one kind of creature is heaven: that is joy and peace and knowledge and power. To be the other means madness, horror, idiocy, rage, impotence, and eternal loneliness. Each of us at each moment is progressing to the one state or the other”<sup>3</sup>

Let me assure you that eschatological geography does not interest me in this paper; I do not hope to convince you of purgatory as a place.<sup>4</sup> The formation of our souls is what concerns me (what sort of creatures we’re becoming) and so I hope you consider what follows as an invitation—

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 86-87.

<sup>4</sup> Jacque Le Goff’s study, *The Birth of Purgatory*, indicates that the notion of Purgatory developed first in popular piety connected to the early Christian practice of praying for the dead and only developed later, in the Middle Ages, into the notion that Purgatory was a place. See William Crockett, *Four Views on Hell*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996: 98-99, 108-111.

“I believe in Purgatory,” Lewis asserted plainly, though he never argued for Purgatory as a location, but instead, more as a process of purification, some of which occurred in this life (C. S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcom Chiefly on Prayer*. San Diego: Harcourt, 1991: 108; *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis, Vol. III: Narnia, Cambridge, and Joy 1950-1963*, ed. by Walter Hooper New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2007; *Letters To Mary Willis Shelburne* 28/7/60 p.1203; 9/1/61 p.1225-26; and 31/7/62, p.1361.

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<sup>1</sup> C. S. Lewis, “A Slip of the Tongue,” *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*. New York: Touchstone, 1996: 142.

<sup>2</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*. New York: Macmillan, 1960: 171, 169, 172.

an invitation to grow into a more heavenly creature, no matter how purgatorial and painful that process may become for you. One of the Solid People in *The Great Divorce* beckons to a ghost who on earth was a painter: “Come and see. He is endless. Come and feed.”

I say “no matter how painful” it may become because normally we do not want to face our shadow side. It hurts. The light of heaven first dawns on uninitiated eyes as “cruel light,” the grass, “hard as diamonds to [the narrator’s] unsubstantial feet,” cause pain. “I did not entirely like it,” confesses the narrator of *The Great Divorce*.<sup>5</sup> And our shadow embarrasses us. Like the transparent ghosts in *The Great Divorce*, we want “to avoid open places;” we don’t want to “have everyone staring through [us].”<sup>6</sup> That’s why when God asks us, “Where are you?” often we’re found hiding somewhere in the garden, ashamed of our nakedness. Our species seems to have an uncanny knack for self-deception and denial, which makes it easier to hide (even from ourselves); so when we hear Screwtape’s counsel to Wormwood, we cringe: “You must bring him to a condition in which he can practice self-examination for an hour without discovering any of those facts about himself which are perfectly clear to anyone who has ever lived in the same house with him or worked in the same office.”<sup>7</sup> Spiritual Formation, we should admit, does not always taste pleasant. Healing sin often means something in us must die, or something must be cut out like a malignant tumor.

After we appreciate the seriousness of human sin, though, Purgatory (the purgatorial, or the purifying of our loves) becomes logically

necessary for Lewis if we genuinely consider both the holiness of God and human freedom. Put simply, if our sin cannot abide eternally with God, it must be purged from us; but, if God truly takes our human freedom seriously, we must let go of sin on our own. First, sin cannot coexist eternally with God. As Zachary Hayes argues, Purgatory “is a symbolism that reflects a sense of distance between human creatures and God.” Indeed, the pain of purgatory “is intrinsic to the encounter between the holy love of God and the still imperfect human being.”<sup>8</sup> So, second, God calls us to surrender our sin. With Lewis, Hayes stresses the importance of human freedom cooperating with God’s grace, insisting, “that without a human response, God’s initiative remains inefficacious and that God never overrides or suppresses human freedom.” A magic wand of cleansing grace waved over us at the moment of our death bypasses our choosing altogether.

This invitation to freely let go of the sin that clings to us is, of course, a primary point in *The Great Divorce*. Lewis states in the Preface:

I do not think that all who choose wrong roads perish; but their rescue consists in being put back on the right road. A wrong sum can be put right: but only by going back till you find the error and working it afresh from that point, never by simply *going on*. Evil can be undone, but it cannot “develop” into good ...The spell must be unwound, bit by bit, “with backward mutters of dissevering power”—or else not. It is still “either-or.” If we insist on keeping Hell (or even earth) we shall not see Heaven: if we accept Heaven we shall not be able to

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<sup>5</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*. New York: Touchstone, 1996: 26, 32, 31.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* 59, 61.

<sup>7</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*. New York: HarperCollins, 1996: 12.

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<sup>8</sup> Zachary J. Hayes, “*The Purgatorial View*,” in William Crockett, *Four Views on Hell*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996: 95,101,115.

retain even the smallest and most intimate souvenirs of Hell.”<sup>9</sup>

Story after story in *The Great Divorce* pictures just this—human beings arriving at heaven, refusing to let go of hell’s trinkets, characters desiring to “extend Hell, to bring it bodily, if they could, into Heaven.”<sup>10</sup> Hell smuggled into heaven would contradict heaven; heaven would not be heaven with residues of hell. “Mystics have classically defined purgatory,” according to Ronald Rolheiser, “as the pain of letting go of a lesser love and life in order to accept a deeper love and life.”<sup>11</sup>

Lewis’s favorite metaphor for Purgatory was a visit to the dentist. Some authors might depict Purgatory as a dismal place of torture; but Lewis conceived it more as a process of deliverance from the gnawing ache of evil residing within us—a kind of cosmic kindness that liberates us from the suffering of ourselves. “I hope that when the tooth of life is drawn,” Lewis projected, “and I am ‘coming round,’ [that is, after he has died and he’s waking on the other side of life] a voice will say, ‘Rinse your mouth out with this.’ This will be Purgatory.”<sup>12</sup> Lewis anticipates the process as blessing, as healing. But that does not mean it will be fun or painless.

In the chapter of Mere Christianity entitled “*Counting the Cost*,” Lewis recounts what going to the dentist entailed. It began with a toothache at

night. He knew that if he went to his mother, she would give him something to deaden the pain; but that soon she would follow up this temporary solution with a visit to the dentist, where, thankfully, the rotten tooth would be pulled, but where, unfortunately, Lewis would be in for more painful prodding: “I knew those dentists. I knew they started fiddling about with all sorts of other teeth which had not yet begun to ache.”

Now if I may put it that way, Our Lord is like the dentists. If you give Him an inch, He will take an ell.<sup>13</sup> Dozens of people go to Him to be cured of some one particular sin which they are ashamed of ... or which is obviously spoiling daily life. He will cure [the tooth] all right: but he will not stop there. That may be all you asked; but if once you call him in, he will give you the full treatment.

That is why he warned people to ‘count the cost’ before becoming Christians. ‘Make no mistake,’ he says, ‘If you let me, I will make you perfect. The moment you put yourself in my hands, that is what you are in for. Nothing less, or other, than that. You have free will, and if you choose, you can push me away. But if you do not push me away, understand that I am going to see this job through. Whatever suffering it may cost you in your earthly life, whatever inconceivable purification it may cost you after death, whatever it costs me, I will never rest, nor let you rest, until you are literally perfect<sup>14</sup>—until my

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<sup>9</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*. New York: Touchstone, 1996: 10.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 76.

<sup>11</sup> Ronald Rolheiser, *Forgotten Among the Lilies*. New York: Doubleday, 2005: 277

<sup>12</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcom Chiefly on Prayer*. San Diego: Harcourt, 1991: 109. The actual incident of the tooth being pulled is first cited in a letter to A. K. Hamilton Jenkin, *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis, Vol. III: Narnia, Cambridge, and Joy 1950-1963*, ed. by Walter Hooper New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2007, *To A. K. Hamilton Jenkin* 11/8/26 pp.668-69, then described as an analogy for Purgatory in a letter *To Mary Willis Shelburne* 7/7/59, p.1064.

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<sup>13</sup> An “ell” is a cubit, a unit of measurement, interestingly enough here, the length of a person’s arm, so we’re offered a picture of the dentist’s arm down one’s throat.

<sup>14</sup> “Christ-like” is the appropriate spiritual formation term. See Robert Mullholland, *Invitation to a Journey*. Downers Grove: Inter Varsity, 1993: 15-16.

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Father can say without reservation that he is well pleased with you, as he said he was well pleased with me. This I can do and will do. But I will not do anything less.<sup>15</sup>

How terrifying, then, to face extraction from our soul; the death of something we've been clinging to. Recall the ghost in *The Great Divorce* who is enslaved by the red lizard of lust attached to his shoulder. Recall how he longs to be rid of his addiction, but like Augustine, moans, "not yet." The man battles with letting go. He makes excuses. He wants a compromise. "May I kill it?" asks his Heavenly Dentist. Overhear highlights from the dialog:

"Honestly, I don't think there's the slightest necessity for that. I'm sure I shall be able to keep it in order now."

"The gradual process is of no use at all."

"Get back! You're burning me. How can I tell you to kill it? You'd kill *me* if you did."

"It is not so.... I cannot kill it against your will. It is impossible. Have I your permission?"

Damn and blast you! Go on can't you? Get it over. Do what you like," bellowed the Ghost: but it ended, whimpering, "God help me. God help me."<sup>16</sup>

As Ronald Rolheiser remarks so incisively, "*Purgatory is the pain of entering heaven.*"<sup>17</sup>

Another place where we find the purgatorial described, albeit in this life, is in the un-dragoning of Eustace in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. Eustace

narrates his experience to Edmund. He recalls his initial fear of Aslan, the cleansing pool of healing he stumbled upon, and Aslan's instructions to undress, first, before descending into the waters. Eustace peels off layer upon layer of his inhuman-skin, but he can only go so far with the process before Aslan must offer to finish the job for him:

"I was afraid of his claws, I can tell you, but I was pretty nearly desperate now. So I just lay flat down on my back to let him do it.

The very first tear he made was so deep that I thought it had gone right into my heart. And when he began pulling the skin off, it hurt worse than anything I've ever felt. The only thing that made me able to bear it was just the pleasure of feeling the stuff peel off," [like pulling off a scab, he says].<sup>18</sup>

To become more "solid," more fully human, spiritually freer—requires letting go in the end of all that is less than God. "God does not force or take away human freedom and responsibility," contends Hayes. He cites Augustine's dictum: "He who created you without your help does not justify you without your help."<sup>19</sup> But because letting go of our attachments is a painful prospect, we stall, we negotiate, demanding "our rights," or trying to bargain a compromise with heaven. Or, like many of the Grey Town Ghosts, we try to hold heaven hostage—"Things should not be run this way! I'll not stand for being treated like this! I have my rights! If this is how it's going to be up here, I'm leaving."

Theologian Johannes Metz mentions how too often "We ... try to run

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<sup>15</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*. New York: Macmillan, 1960: 171-72.

<sup>16</sup> *The Great Divorce* 96-99.

<sup>17</sup> Ronald Rolheiser, *Forgotten Among the Lilies*. New York: Doubleday, 2005: 277.

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<sup>18</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. New York: Harper Collins, 1980: 106-109.

<sup>19</sup> Zachary J. Hayes, "The Purgatorial View," in William Crockett, *Four Views on Hell*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996: 117, 115.

away from ourselves, from the burdens and difficulties of our lot.... thus aborting the work of becoming a human being." In running away, in refusing to face ourselves (as the Hebrew patriarch Jacob spent most of his life doing) "We can," in the words of Metz, "secretly betray the humanity entrusted to us." Instead, "We must learn to accept ourselves in the painful experiment of living."<sup>20</sup>

Lewis was all too aware of the temptation to take half-measures. But God knows compromise cannot cure. He says:

'No half-measures are any good. I don't want to cut off a branch here and a branch there, I want to have the whole tree down. I don't want to drill the tooth, or crown it, or stop it, but to have it out. Hand over the whole natural self, all the desires which you think innocent as well as the ones you think wicked—the whole outfit. I will give you a new self instead. In fact, I will give you Myself: my own will shall become yours.'<sup>21</sup>

A chief image Lewis uses for our desire to finagle a deal between sin and holiness is that of the honest taxpayer. We accept the duty to pay our taxes; but we don't want to overpay, and we want enough left over for us to live on in the end. Early Christian writers pictured Israelites trying to smuggle idols and goods from Egypt into the Promised Land, when the waters of baptism (symbolized in the Red Sea crossing) demand that all idols be purged and destroyed.

"[God] meant that we must go in for the full treatment," cautions Lewis. "It is hard; but the sort of compromise we are all hankering after is harder—in fact,

it is impossible."<sup>22</sup> "God is not to be bargained with," admonishes the priest in *The Diary of a Country Priest*. He assures Mme. La Comtesse: "We must give ourselves up to Him unconditionally. Give Him everything. He will give you back even more."<sup>23</sup> Lewis, in *The Problem of Pain*, cites a straightforward William Law dictum suggesting that if we are not as holy as early (apostolic) Christians, it is simply because we never actually intended to be. "I am only trying to show that the old Christian doctrine of being made 'perfect through suffering' is not incredible."<sup>24</sup>

In this last sermon (seven years before his death), Lewis returned to this "taxpayer metaphor," admitting that he continued to struggle with the reality of complete daily surrender to God (of paying his spiritual taxes). For all his practiced Christian devotion,<sup>25</sup> Lewis wrestled throughout his life to give up "things temporal," to practice what spiritual formation calls "detachment." In *A Slip of the Tongue*, Lewis confesses that letting go of our "ordinary life" (what he terms "the natural self" in *Mere Christianity*), can loom for us as "too intolerably inconvenient." For instance, he suggests, "It would be very tiresome to commit myself to a programme of temperance which would cut off my after-breakfast cigarette (or at least make it cruelly alternative to a cigarette later in the morning)."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid. 169

<sup>23</sup> Georges Bernanos, *The Diary of a Country Priest*. Cambridge: da Capo, 2002: 169.

<sup>24</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*. New York: Macmillan 1978: 66, 105.

<sup>25</sup> See Lyle Dorsett, *Seeking the Secret Place: The Spiritual Formation of C. S. Lewis*. Grand Rapids: Brazos 2004; Wallace A. C. Williams, *C. S. Lewis: Spiritual Disciplines for Mere Christians* in *For All the Saints*, eds. Timothy George and Alister McGrath London: John Knox 2003; William Griffin, *C. S. Lewis: Spirituality for Mere Christians*. New York: Crossroad 1998.

<sup>26</sup> *A Slip of the Tongue* 138. Cf. *Mere Christianity* 167.

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<sup>20</sup> Johannes Baptist Metz, *Poverty of Spirit*. New York: Paulist, 1968: 4, 5.

<sup>21</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*: 167.

But can we truly be satisfied with compromise? “Our souls *demand* Purgatory,” suggested Lewis.

Would it not break the heart if God said to us, ‘It’s true, my son, that your breath smells and your rags drip with mud and slime, but we are charitable here and no one will upbraid you with these things, nor draw away from you. Enter into the joy?’ Should we not reply, ‘With submission, sir, and if there is no objection, I’d *rather* be cleaned first.’ ‘It may hurt, you know’— ‘Even so, sir.’<sup>27</sup>

Isn’t it true that God desires our happiness, and that He knows that we shall not be truly happy until we are restored to His image and likeness (1 John 3:2)? Can a magic wand of grace significantly renovating us at death really transform deeply enough without our participation, or does it merely excuse us? What we long for is real transformation. Lewis explains, “It is the difference between paint which is merely laid on the surface, and a dye or stain which soaks right through.”<sup>28</sup>

Luther stressed justifying grace as *imputed*; Wesley, Anglican, Catholic, and Orthodox theologies add to *imputed* grace a notion of *imparted* grace, where grace is not only conferred upon, or credited to a person, but actually transfused into the individual, becoming a part of him or her. A vigorous doctrine of sanctification (for Catholics and some Protestants) or divinization (the Orthodox meaning of *theosis*) lies at the heart of Lewis’s theological sensibility.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcom: Chiefly on Prayer*. San Diego: Harcourt, 1992: 108-109

<sup>28</sup> *Mere Christianity* 169.

<sup>29</sup> Albert Outler, *Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit*. Nashville: Discipleship, 1975: 73-77. Cf. the view of the Catholic scholar, Zachary J. Hayes, “*The Purgatorial View*,” in William Crockett, *Four Views on Hell*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996: 116.

The notion of showing up at our Beloved’s house in rags, reeking of nasty things sounds as unpleasant for us as it might for God. And if in this life we live as imperfect lovers of God, then only through a deeper maturing in us of love—a remedial perfecting and refining—can we remain content in the presence of the Beloved in the life to come.

Uncle Screwtape protests God’s extraordinary design for granting us freedom and his ultimate design of what we were created to become:

He really does want to fill the universe with a lot of loathsome little replicas of Himself—creatures whose life, on its miniature scale, will be qualitatively like His own, not because He has absorbed them but because their wills freely conform to His.<sup>30</sup>

Would it not, in fact, be reasonable to suppose that we will be happier when we have grown spiritually strong on our own through a process of education and refinement of soul that, as with children, requires our own consent and participation?

God, it seems, greatly prizes human freedom. “Desiring their freedom,” warns Screwtape, “He therefore refuses to carry them ... to any of the goals which He sets before them: He leaves them to ‘do it on their own.’ ... Merely to override a human will ... would be for Him useless. He cannot ravish. He can only woo.... He leaves the creature to stand upon its own legs.”<sup>31</sup>

Josef Pieper speaks of the human person as “an unfolding being, a dynamic reality—just as the cosmos is in its totality.”<sup>32</sup> We are all on a journey: beings in process. We have not yet become what

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<sup>30</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*. New York: HarperCollins, 1996: 7; 38-39.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* 39-40.

<sup>32</sup> Josef Pieper, *Josef Pieper: An Anthology*. San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989: 3.

we already are, proclaims Pieper. Rather than some fixed entity or nature, human existence stands “situated between these different states of realization, disposed toward [our] ultimate potential but not necessarily reaching it.” The apostle Paul cries, I do not consider that I have already arrived, but I press on toward the high call of Christ. Johannes Metz puts it this way:

“Becoming human ... is a mandate and a mission, a command and a decision. We each have an open-ended relationship to ourselves. We do not possess our being unchallenged .... We are something that can Be, a being who must win selfhood and decide what it is to be. We must fully *become* what we *are*—a human being. To become human through the exercise of our freedom—that is the law of our Being.”<sup>33</sup>

Within us, therefore, lie the seeds of our own fruition—for Lewis, seeds growing in a direction either more hellish or more heavenly. Pieper goes on to explain that the *ultimate* goal God created human beings for is virtue—that is, “the realization of the divine design incorporated in the creature,” another way of saying we were created for Christ-likeness.<sup>34</sup> So we are asked in *The Great Divorce* at the climatic entrance of George MacDonald as our mentor-guide (as our Virgil): “Where are you going?” That is, what are we *becoming*? And what do we hope to become? It is not about working for our salvation; it is not about *doing* anything unless that doing first relates to *being*, to becoming—the two cannot be separated.

John Wesley asked all his Methodist class members two questions: “Are you going on to perfection?” and “Do

you expect to be made perfect in love in this life?” Notice that Wesley addresses all serious Christians. Methodist scholar Albert Outler used to follow up this point of Wesley’s with a question of his own: “If you’re *not* going on to perfection, where are you going on to?” Here we see a question, in other words, addressing our spiritual direction, asking what sort of creatures we are becoming. What is our goal spiritually? What is the human “ultimate” for which we are living and striving? In our best moments, we want to strive for something noble, pure, good, and true.

But we are also terrified. Terrified, on the one hand, by the refining suffering we might face on earth, or after this life—suffering as illustrated by Eustace, the Grey Town Ghosts of *The Great Divorce*, or the analogy of the Dentist’s chair. What will have to be torn from us and are we up to it? “Imagine yourself as a living house,” recommends Lewis.

God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on; you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently He starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make any sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of—throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were being made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Johannes Baptist Metz, *Poverty of Spirit*. New York: Paulist, 1968: 3.

<sup>34</sup> Pieper, 4.

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<sup>35</sup> *Mere Christianity* 174.

Surviving this sort of renovation project requires absolute trust in the builder (as we hope we can trust our dentist when she begins drilling and pulling, since we cannot see anything being done to us). But let us not minimize the terror involved. Though He's good, Aslan is not safe. Good spiritual direction at this point can begin to uncover our deepest human anxieties—revolving normally around the interconnected fears of failure, rejection, and abandonment.

On the other hand, let us recognize that these fears arise not only as apprehensions in the midst of earthly life, but also carry a cosmic-eternal dimension: how will we ever match up as we stand accountable before God? Will He, in the end, also criticize, reject, and abandon us? Thank God, for grace! We never need to earn the favor of divine love. "He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect?" (Romans 8:32-33) Still, trepidation runs rampant in the human family. As Orual surrenders in the afterlife before the divine tribunal, she groans: "It was as if my whole soul had been one tooth and now that tooth was drawn. I was a gap. And now I thought I had come to the very bottom and that the gods could tell me no worse."<sup>36</sup> She has peered into the Cosmic Abyss.

Of course, most of us, when we die, "leave behind, on this side of heaven, much unfinished business." We die with our "life projects apparently unfinished."<sup>37</sup> Lewis admitted that the process of purging that perfects us—what theologians call sanctification—begins in this life. Purgatory, he depicted as "a

process by which the work of redemption continues, and first perhaps begins to be noticed after death."<sup>38</sup> Personally, Lewis understood the doctrine as "intrinsically probable," but he admitted that it belonged more within the realm of private opinion for Christians rather than as a fundamental of Christian dogma.

What if we come to the afterlife, then, and discover our work of spiritual transformation on earth is incomplete, that our selfish darkness "can be undone, but ... cannot 'develop' into good.... [That] the spell must be unwound, bit by bit, 'with backward mutters of dis severing power'—or else not?" What then? What if we have unfinished business when we die? And who among us—even the greatest of our saints—ever feels like he or she has arrived at that destination of holiness we press on toward? In *Mere Christianity*, Lewis poses an interesting thought-experiment.

Christianity asserts that every individual human being is going to live for ever, and this must be either true or false. Now there are a good many things which would not be worth bothering about if I were going to live only 70 years, but which I had better bother about very seriously if I am going to live for ever. Perhaps my bad temper or my jealousy are gradually getting worse—so gradually that the increase in 70 years will not be very noticeable. But it might be absolute hell in a million years."<sup>39</sup>

If our growing up "into the full measure of Christ" is a process that

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<sup>36</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*. San Diego: Harcourt, 1984: 267.

<sup>37</sup> Ronald Rolheiser, *Forgotten Among the Lilies*. New York: Doubleday, 2005: 273. Zachary J. Hayes, "The Purgatorial View," in William Crockett, *Four Views on Hell*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996: 96.

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<sup>38</sup> Letter *To Mrs Johnson (W)* 11/8/52, in *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis, Vol. III: Narnia, Cambridge, and Joy 1950-1963*, ed. by Walter Hooper New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2007, p.245; see also the letters *To Mary Willis Shelburne* 28/7/60 p.1203; 9/1/61 p.1225-26; and 31/7/62, p.1361.

<sup>39</sup> *Mere Christianity* 73.

continues after death, as Lewis insists, we might as might well roll up our sleeves and get started on the journey.

I began by suggesting that spiritual formation, for C. S. Lewis, relates primarily to what we as human beings are becoming; and to that fundamental goal God has in mind for us. God's goal for us is love: to ever deepen our relationship of love with Him, bringing us into a union where "we shall be like him";<sup>40</sup> and thus exist eternally in communion with God and with all other beings.

Understandably, we often protest against soul-purifying trials. Lewis depicts human beings raising the same sorts of complaints against heaven even in the afterlife. Ignatian spirituality presupposes, in contrast, a providential goodness at the heart of God, affirming that God does not play nasty tricks on his children—torturing them senselessly. He does not give His beloved ones stones when they ask for bread or scorpions for fish (see Luke 11:11-13). Suffering that refines us spiritually, instead, can be considered as precisely what God knows we need at the moment in order to draw us closer into union with Him; for what He cares about most is cultivating a relationship of love with us.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> 1 John 3:2.

<sup>41</sup> See David L. Fleming, *What is Ignatian Spirituality?* Chicago: Loyola, 2008: 8; and William A. Barry, *Finding God in All Things: A Companion to the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*. Notre Dame: Ave Maria, 1999, chapter one: "Can I Trust God? Healing Life's Hurts" 21-32.