Mythcon 50

Looking Back, Moving Forward
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Of Creation and Love
In the spring of 1960 as I was reading The Problem of Pain some longterm psychological struggles came into sharp focus. I took pen in hand and wrote to C. S. Lewis. Can we accurately say, I asked, that God has anger?

Having written, I nearly forgot the fact. I knew something of Lewis' renown, though little of his personal life; I felt there was almost no chance of a response. But to my astonishment and lasting delight, in mid-summer I received the following:

As from Magdalena College
Cambridge
10 July 1960

Dear Miss B——,

I haven't a copy of the P. of P., to hand and I can't remember the exact words I used. What I wd. now say wd. be something like this. We have A. the Scriptural representation of God—a God not only of love but one (whose "bowels are moved" with compassion and who can fall in a "fury," B. a philosophical concept of the Absolute Being to which (one can hardly say "to whom") all these human characteristics are inapplicable.

We have a tendency to regard B. as the literal truth, and A. either as poetical decoration or as a concession to the "primitive" mind of the ancient Jews.

We are right in thinking that A. cannot be literally true, but no more can B. B. is an abstract construction of our own minds. It represents to us as an abstraction, a mere concept, what must in reality be the most concrete of all facts. B. can make no claim to be a revelation. We have made it. A. does make this claim.

If we accept A. literally, we shall remain on the mythological level. But it is no improvement to take B. literally. Both are only shadows or hints of the reality. A. cannot really imagine, and B. cannot really conceptualise, God as he is in Himself. To prefer B. is to think that the symbol we have made is better than the symbol we has made. I think we are right to use B., as a corrective whenever A., taken literally, threatens to become absurd; but we must instantly plunge back into A. Only God Himself knows in what sense He is "like" a Father or a King, capable of love and anger. But since He has given us that picture of Himself, we may be sure that it is more importantly "like" than any concept we might try to substitute for It. You'll find this dealt with more fully in chapter XI of my Miracles.

We can get no further than this in knowledge about (sauoir) God; but we are vouchsafed some knowledge-by-acquaintance (connaître) of Him, in our devotional and sacramental life. This, if it clothes itself in words and images at all, always borrows them from the A view. But these are not the real issue, are they? It is as the moment of personal contact fades that they press upon the mind. We cry "Father" without attending to all those implications wh. wd. become more mythological the further we pursued them. As Buber might say God is most fully real to us as Thou, less so as He, least as It. We must worship the Thou.
SADISM BALANCED

(for Lynn Christopher)

"I cannot marry," cried Lewis in his teens, knowing the cruelty in his nature bred, knowing the dark paths lying between his whip-drawn, moody heart and moral head.

"I cannot marry"...but yet he did at last, four decades later, with a dying wife, bearing her cancered pain to give her rest, carrying joy in that exchanged life.

--Joe R. Christopher

EDITORIAL, cont'd from p. 19

Do you have a letter, an anecdote, a reminiscence of Tolkien, Lewis or Williams? If so will you share it with us, perhaps with comment, in our new department "Perchance to Touch"?

If you have ever written to us and received no response, please write again to the appropriate address given on the inside cover. Your letter could have been lost by the post office, or by us in the process of changeover of personnel, or could have been snatched from the mailbox and eaten by a toddler unarrived at years of discretion. Let us know, and we will do our best to make amends. You exist.

Our thanks to Owen Barfield and Walter Hooper for permission to print the Lewis letter, which is copyright by the Estate of C. S. Lewis.

KERLAN COLLECTION, cont'd from p. 32:

Elizabeth Pope, corrected typescript and galleys of The Perilous Gard; Allison Uttley, material from many stages of many of her books, including A Traveller in Time, Enchantment, John Barleycorn: twelve tales of fairy and magic, and The Little Knife Who Did All the Work: Twelve Tales of Magic (the published book is one of those Pauline Baynes illustrated); and Jane A. Yolen, material from many stages of many of her books, including The Bird of Time, The Boy Who Had Wings, and The Wizard of Washington Square.

MYTHALLIANCES, cont'd from p. 38:

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Prices for membership of these clubs are not listed due to the constant change in currency rates. Write the clubs for further information.

Our thanks to Corresponding Secretary Ellen Cowan for her labor in assembling this information. Inquiries and further information should be sent to her.