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Of Creation and Love

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Of Creation and Love

OF CREATION AND LOVE

BY GRACIA FAY ELLWOOD

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

19 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 of $\sigma\tau\omicron\rho\eta$ 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 *He* 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 (*savoir*) God; but we are vouchsafed some knowledge-by-acquaintance (*connaitre*) 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 so as *It*. We must worship the *Thou*,

not the *He* in our own minds, which is just as much an image (therefore a possible *idol*) as a figure of wood or stone

Yrs sincerely
C. S. Lewis

It took me several weeks to decipher it fully (graphologists say indecipherable handwriting indicates a secretive personality). My secondary reaction, inappropriate as it may seem, was minor disappointment. My supposedly objective theological question had really been an appeal for help. What I had meant to say was How can it be a sin for me to harbor anger if God, who defines sin, harbors anger even from one human generation to another? What must I do with my intolerable anger?

I wished fervently that I had been a little more open and clear in my original letter, but I did not seriously consider writing again to clarify. Without knowing the facts, I could divine that letter-writing must be a heavy burden for him, and I couldn't add to it by writing again. C. S. Lewis had better things to do than deal with the soul-struggles of Gracia Fay B.

Much later, after encountering Charles Williams, I decided this was an error. Remember in *Descent Into Hell* Pauline with one hand on the telephone at midnight, wanting to ask Peter Stanhope for help before going out on the street to encounter the dead? "I ought not to disturb him." She pauses, then: "I ought to disturb him." Lewis, with his great compassion and his thirty-year struggle with his anger against "Oldie," would have had much to offer me; I ought to have disturbed him one more time.



Answering letters is, for most people most of the time, an unpleasant chore, especially for the person who gets quantities of letters from strangers. Of course it is bad form to let the thing go, but does form matter that much, some might ask? (I refer, of course, to letters that ask for a reply; a few obviously do not.)

Lewis was strongly convinced that it was more than a matter of form; it was a matter of love. It is usually the case that when a celebrity speaks, people listen and take notice, for a celebrity is Somebody; but when an obscure person has something to say to a celebrity, s/he is likely to find that s/he is nobody. S/He may get in response a form letter, which is better than nothing (due to sheer volume of mail we have to resort to them ourselves at times), which acknowledges that there is someone there, but can't help adding to its message "You're another of the thousands; you're ordinary." No reply at all says "You don't exist."

But for Lewis "there are no ordinary people." His letter to me said "I hear you. You exist. Your question deserves the best answer I can give." For someone who had been nonexistent to her peers for most of her life, Lewis' message was like an act of new creation.

Craig Smith

#4 Sheridan Place
Brigantine, N. J. 08203

I would like at this time to congratulate you for a job well done; please keep up the good work. I receive many fantasy related magazines but yours is far superior. I am especially impressed with your art and poetry....

I would like to ...congratulate Peter Damien Goselin on his spectacular article "Two Faces of Eve: Galadriel and Shelob as Anima Figures".... I would also like to congratulate the reviewers, George Colvin, Nancy-Lou Patterson (Happy Birthday) and J. R. Christopher; their reviews are usually the first thing that I turn to when I receive a new issue.

I am also in favour of seeing Branch reports in upcoming issues....

Cynthia Kihn

There are many things in *Mythlore* 21 for which I would like to compliment members of the staff.... a very good job of choosing the art pieces. I especially liked the drawing on the back cover and would like to congratulate the artist....

Another fine feature of this issue is the poem "Kyria Sophia"...a marvelously written and well embellished mythical piece.

But my favorite part was the review section, for many of these books...I would never have known about without having read the reviews, and I found the writers' opinions...very interesting.

...is there a place where friends of the Mythopoeic society can meet...? I would like to know if there are...friends of the society who have enjoyed Ursula K. LeGuin's *Earthsea* trilogy as much as I have. If indeed there are, I would like to meet them....

Our apologies to Mistress Kihn for losing her address. If she and anyone who wishes to correspond with her will write to the Corresponding Secretary, Lisa Cowan, they will be put in touch.

Elizabeth Blake

1724 Dupont Avenue S.
Minneapolis, Minn. 55403

I certainly did enjoy my first copy of *Mythlore*.... "Kyria Sophia" is powerful in provoking an emotional response through its clear and consistent imagery, its strongly flowing, elaborate yet conversational rhythms, and its moving theme of rebirth and growth by surrender of one's self to the conquering love and communion of another. I also liked the simplicity and order of "The Lady of La Salette" which somehow gave me a feeling of separateness, even aloneness, in being loved, becoming love, or seeking love....

Dorothy L. Sayers' translation of Dante was important to me in the late '60's, but in 1974 I first read her *Clouds of Witness*, which impelled me to read all of her mysteries that same year. Therefore, the article "Head vs. Heart in Dorothy L. Sayers' *Gaudy Night*...was of great interest to me....

Anybody who writes to say that "Kyria Sophia" is flawed, or wrong from beginning to end, will get published, honest!



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 galley proof 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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Mallorn (journal)

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 Lisa Ellen Cowan for her labor in assembling this information. Inquiries and further information should be sent to her.