
Summer 7-15-1995

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Recommended Citation

Adderley, C. M. (1995) "Preliminary Matters: The Neglected Preludes to Charles Williams' Arthuriad," *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature*: Vol. 21: No. 1, Article 4.

Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol21/iss1/4>

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Preliminary Matters: The Neglected Preludes to Charles Williams' *Arthuriad*

Abstract

Detailed explication of the "Prelude" in *Taliessen through Logres* and *Region of the Summer Stars*. Notes that much of the perceived difficulty understanding these poems is the lack of general knowledge of the historical and theological points of the Christian church to which they refer.

Additional Keywords

Williams, Charles. Poetry; Williams, Charles. *Region of the Summer Stars*—Prelude; Williams, Charles. *Taliessin Through Logres*—Prelude

PRELIMINARY MATTERS

The Neglected Preludes to Charles Williams' *Arthurian*

C. M. Adderley

The recent publication of David Llewellyn Dodds' edition of Charles Williams' Arthurian poems has proved extremely useful. In printing the hitherto unpublished poems from Williams' earlier Arthurian series, *The Advent of Galahad*, Dodds has provided the general reader with some beautiful poetry, and the scholar with more material that allows an elucidation of the notoriously difficult published poetry. Of particular interest are two poems that are obviously early draft versions of the "Prelude" to *Taliessin through Logres*. Not only do these allow us to see how the idea evolved in Williams' mind, but in the "Prelude" to *The Advent of Galahad*, Williams also gives his reasons for writing a version of the Arthurian story. He has heard, he writes, "sounding the mighty lays among, / a word, and again a word" (40-41).¹ The repetition of "word" anticipates the "double-fledged Logos" of "Prelude" to *Taliessin through Logres* line 9, and seems to imply that, among many stories (mighty lays), Williams has perceived something of the ultimate truth, the "word," in the Arthurian legend. The image of duality suggests Christ, who was simultaneously God and Man — and notably, one man who shakes Byzantium terribly in Nestorius, who argued that the relationship between these two aspects was not clear (see "Prelude" to *The Region of the Summer Stars* 24-36).

Just as in the later poem, Williams goes on to describe the fall of Byzantium to the Moslems, the departure of Galahad and Percivale from this world. All that remains are "the poets' books" (57); yet this is enough for edification and maybe salvation. "[H]appy they," Williams comments, "who one song can add / of the joyous quest of Dom Galahad" (59-60). The reader understands that the simple telling of the tale and the reading of it is of immense benefit.

Many scholars have commented that Charles Williams' Arthurian poetry is difficult to understand and obscure in allusion. Williams himself hoped that that was not the case, but a succession of commentators have contradicted this hope. C.S. Lewis analyzed four types of obscurity in his analysis of Williams' *Arthurian*. Syntactic obscurity he admitted to occur occasionally in the poems; deliberate obscurity as a kind of vainglorious intellectual exhibitionism and privatism, a system of images shared only by the poet's close friends, were hotly denied on Williams' behalf by Lewis; what he saw as the major problem in this area was what he called "unshared background" ("Williams and the *Arthurian*" 188-90). It is true that this problem has deepened as modern society has become increasingly secular, for most of Williams' "obscure" allusions are to

Church doctrine and history. These allusions are the most central to Williams' theme, and their obscurity is a definite barrier to comprehension of his meaning. This is immediately apparent in the two preludes, which actually summarize the rest of the cycles. They can be quite off-putting, and Lewis, in advancing his theory that the poems should be reordered, excluded them from his analysis. Yet they do have some intrinsic importance — they create the schemata that allow the rest of the poems to fit nicely into place. It is to these poems, therefore, that the present study is directed.

Prelude" to *The Region of the Summer Stars*

This is a prelude in a more real sense than the Prelude to *Taliessin through Logres* (which was actually written first), since it covers events occurring before those of the Arthurian cycles. It seems right, therefore, to study that poem first that provides the later poems with a historical, philosophical, and theological context. We first read that

Irony was the Fortune of Athens; Rome came
to pluck the Fortune of Athens, and stand embattled
as in arms, so in mind against evil luck. (1-3)

By irony, Williams clearly means cynicism of the brand espoused by the sophists — skepticism, the guiding principle of Greek civilization in the years immediately following the Incarnation of Christ. The Romans learn it from them as a defense against "evil luck." Just as their legions protect them from physical assaults, so this cynicism protects them from spiritual assaults. It is a form of cowardice, since it provides false comfort, in contrast to the new truth which many no doubt found a challenge.

It was this kind of skepticism which St. Paul the Apostle encountered during his unsuccessful attempt to establish a church in Athens in *Acts*. Williams names Paul in line 9, and quotes him twice, directly from his speech to the Athenian philosophers in line 10 and by means of allusion in line 12, where he describes the apostle as "thorned-in-the-flesh."² The other philosophers encountered by Paul, those promoting the "Irony," were the Stoics and the Epicureans. The Stoics' belief that mankind could achieve moral perfection by accepting the trials of Fate, that ultimately rational force that governed the universe, was certainly in direct conflict with Christian thought, that argued that Man is not perfectible except through Christ. The Epicureans argued that sensation was the only criterion for determining good and evil. All pleasures were good, but some entailed greater suffering than others and should, therefore, be left alone. The soul, furthermore,

consisted of matter, like the body, and therefore died when the body died. This contradicts the Christian philosophy of the soul as Man's spiritual life, not to mention the resurrection of the body; it is even in opposition to the Platonic "dematerialized spirit" alluded to in line 5. Line 6 suggests, however, that most of the inhabitants of Athens adhered to sophism, or "cunning preventive doctrine."

Those Greeks whom St. Paul converted did not remain Christians, and many soon returned to their old ways:

But the ancient intellect

heard, delaying and playing with its archives, and demurred that pain was easy, and completeness of belief costly, and flesh too queasy to bear the main of spirit. (20-23)

They reject the new faith because "pain was easy;" one does not have to exert too much intellectual or emotional effort if one rejects the possibility of God; if there is no faith, there is no concern about the possibility of damnation or salvation. They claim that "completeness of belief [is] costly," that to commit oneself to God to the degree required by Christianity — which is to say, completely — is too much of a commitment to make, and that "flesh [is] too queasy to bear the main of spirit," that men cannot in any case be so good as Christianity requires, since the flesh, easily corrupted by such sins as lust and gluttony, cannot possibly attain the high standards demanded by the "spirit," by which is meant either the human soul or else, possibly, the Holy Spirit.

A Christian would regard these sentiments as radically flawed, though understandable. In the first instance, by assuming that commitment to God is too great, one would be assuming oneself to be of sufficient importance to be above that kind of dependence, a feeling that is quite contrary to God-centered faith, and is clear evidence of pride, the prince of sins. In the second instance, it is easy to see how readily the body fails where the spirit would succeed, but such a philosophy denies the sacred nature of flesh, made so because God Himself assumed fleshly form as Jesus Christ. Christians relive this sanctification at the Eucharist, where the communicant actually receives the Body and Blood of Christ into himself. In so doing, the communicant is becoming part of the mystical Body of Christ, and is united not only with Christ, but with all the other members of the Church as well. The further implication of the Greeks' fear is that man cannot deserve salvation. But to use this — one of the central tenets of Christianity — as an excuse to despair of one's faith is clearly misguided.

The apex of the heretical counter-revolution is Nestorius, who argues for "only a moral union" (33) with Christ. He preaches that the divine and human elements of Christ were not united, but existed only in a loose relationship. That is as much as to say that he denied Jesus' manhood and therefore the "blood-stream" (31), the sacrifice of the Crucifixion. In an article printed in *The Image of the City*, "Anthropotokos," Williams describes the two appellations given to the blessed Virgin at the time of the Nestorian Heresy: *Theotokos*, meaning Mother of God, and *An-*

thropotokos, meaning the Mother of Man. Nestorius had argued that the title should be *Christotokos*, which really does not do much towards defining the blessed Virgin, but he was defeated by St. Cyril of Alexandria, who had argued that both *Anthropotokos* and *Theotokos* co-existed perfectly in Mary. It is at the cry of these two words, in Williams' poem, that the Nestorians shrink away, defeated, the victory of the Church, the "orthodox imagination" (37), follows. This orthodoxy seizes upon "Roman polity" (38) by establishing its center in the old capital of the political Empire. It is important, of course, that religious belief should be orthodox, for upon its correctness depends the salvation or damnation of millions. Any new theory must, for that reason, be subjected to severe scrutiny before becoming a part of the accepted canon. Williams described the state of the Church at the commencement of his Arthurian cycles in terms of victorious orthodoxy:

The Empire was Christian, and not only Christian but orthodox and Trinitarian. The Arian heresies had been defeated. Christ was adored as God and not as a created being. The variation of this which were called Nestorianism had also been overcome. ("The Figure of Arthur" 79-80)

This is the victory, the conversion of Rome and the gaining of the whole Roman Empire for Christianity, and is the logical outcome of hundreds of years of emperors. In the "ancient line of imperial shapes" (42), that is, the persons and deeds of the old leaders of the Republic and the old emperors, can be seen the inevitable approach of "the only sublime Emperor" (45), clearly God, who is seen "in a cloud" (44). This is reminiscent of the Ascension (see Acts 1:9), but also of the famous vision of Emperor Constantine (reigned 306-338 A.D.) of a Cross in the sky just before a military victory, that prompted his conversion, and thereupon that of the Empire, to Christianity. With the victory established, a period of spiritual prosperity is established:

there, for a day,
beyond history, holding history at bay,
it established through the themes of the Empire the condition
of Christendom
and saw everywhere manumission of grace into glory. (38-41)

Holding history at bay indicates that, for a while, the Empire preserves the myth of Christ as a living principle. When history begins, as we learn from the "Prelude" to *Taliessin through Logres*, miracles cease and men are left to their own devices to seek or reject faith. Myth was, to Williams, a spiritual reality made manifest on earth. Pagan myths were a dim foreshadowing of the great spiritual truth of the Incarnation. This truth is eternal — it exists beyond, or external to, time. While all men believed uniformly in it, history — the process of time — could be kept "at bay." But the fallen nature of mankind made faith difficult to maintain. This theme occurs at line 14 of the "Prelude" to *Taliessin through Logres*, where the rejection of the myth is the act of the supreme heretics, the Moslems, and in the closing lines of "The Last Voyage," where Logres, the mythical kingdom of Arthur, becomes mere

Britain, the historical kingdom. The "manumission of grace into glory" represents the liberation of a slave, that is, those enslaved to the pagan religions. Additionally, it might be noted that manumission could refer to God's sending His grace into the world, where it is manifested as glory. This would also be the work of hands, used both in the act of prayer, and of manumission.

During the period of spiritual prosperity, the citizens of Christendom anxiously await the Parousia, the Second Coming of Christ, the "twnatured single Person" (51), whose blood at the Crucifixion "fulfilled its commission" of redeeming mankind "and was caught" (93) in the vessel that became known as the Grail. He comes from Sarra, the land of the Trinity, "the ThreelOne" (60), and his means of locomotion thence is the Grail. All is expectant work in preparation of this great event. The Emperor establishes order throughout the Empire to facilitate Christ's coming.

But even as all is in readiness, we become aware of "another kind / of tale" (73-74). The introduction of free will also introduces the possibility of two courses of action. We have so far been concerned with the positive option that takes human beings closer to God; Williams now turns his attention to that course of actions that sunders people from God: the story of damnation, represented by P'olu, where "a headless Emperor walked / coped in a foul indurate crimson" (8081). P'olu is a combination of two Chinese words. P'o in Chinese Taoism is the earthly soul whose union with *hum*, the superior and spiritual soul, results in life and health. Separation of the two causes sickness and death. If the body of the deceased is not interred with the proper ceremony, p'o can turn to *kuei*, a malevolent soul. Lu was an ancient Chinese kingdom and the birthplace of Confucius, whose argument that ancient wisdom held the key to modern problems was soundly ignored by the kingdom's rulers (see Thompson 9-12 and Creel *passim*). Of course, Williams was presenting Christianity to an agnostic and apostate world as the solution to modern problems, and so P'olu is the place that rejects this idea. But there is possibly a shade more meaning in the name. C.S. Lewis argues, in *The Abolition of Man* that Confucius was a prefiguration of Christ, in that he defined in the *Analects* what he called Tao:

[T]he Way in which the universe goes on, the Way in which things everlastingly emerge, stillly and tranquilly, into space and time. It is also the Way which every man should tread in imitation of that cosmic and supercosmic progression, conforming all activities to that great exemplar. (Lewis, *Abolition* 28).

This Tao was brought to physical fruition in the Incarnation and so Lu, in rejecting Confucius, was rejecting the nearest approach to Christianity, and therefore salvation, available in pre-Christian times. Mordred, in "The Meditation of Mordred," envisions himself as being like the emperor of a Chinese kingdom, which tends to confirm that it was this Williams had in mind. P'olu combines the sensuous, luxurious excesses of such a kingdom with the sundering of the physical from the spiritual, the rejection

of union, the refusal of salvation and the reversal of all things good. The headless Emperor is the precise opposite of the Byzantine Emperor, having no head (and therefore intellect), and living in the antipodes. His crimson cope is a symbol of how he corrupts and perverts all, for a cope is, of course, the garment worn by a priest, and crimson is the color of the blood of sacrifice, yet his cloak is "foul" and "indecent."

The blood of sacrifice is brought before the reader once more in the closing lines of the poem where Williams notes that

Only the women of earth,
by primal dispensation, little by themselves understood,
shared with that Sacrifice the victimization of blood. (98-99)

The "primal dispensation" works on two levels. In one sense, it is a punishment, in another, a reward. God's "primal dispensation" to Eve is delineated in Gen. 3: 16:

I will intensify the pangs of your childbearing;
in pain shall you bring forth children.
Yet your urge shall be for your husband,
and he shall be your master.

The "pangs of . . . childbearing" are related in Williams' line to "the victimization of blood," stressing the pain associated with childbirth and the sacrifice that goes hand-in-hand with raising children. In addition, it suggests menstrual blood, also related to the "pangs of . . . childbearing."

Williams regards this as a means by which women can actually "share with that Sacrifice" of Christ. As Christ sheds his blood to bring forth life out of death, so women shed blood to bring life forth from their womb. Being involuntary, it is "little by themselves understood," but it does allow women an especially keen perception of Christ's mission. Women are in the privileged position of having an insider's view of the Crucifixion, a subject which Williams returned to in "Taliessin in the Rose-Garden."

"Prelude" to Taliessin through Logres

The "Prelude" seems to offer the theme of the whole series in a single poem. The Emperor is to be understood as a manifestation of God, "God as active, God as known in Church and State, God as ruling men" ("The Making of Taliessin" in *The Image of the City* 181), and the Empire as God's Kingdom, heaven or Christendom. The Emperor is also a human being in a position of authority, whose will is one with God's. As Kollmann points out, the "Emperor is an image of God . . . whose political ideals are at one with the deity's intentions for mankind" (Kollmann 184). He is the source of "orthodox wisdom" emanating from "Caucasia and Thule" (2). The opposite of orthodoxy is heresy, which should be condemned. Heretics deceive and confuse others, causing separation from the Church, the mystical Body of Christ. Although the blame for such a separation lies ultimately with he who separates himself, nevertheless to expose and exploit weakness in such a fashion is a grave sin. One major heresy, according to Williams, is Islam, and we read in Part II of the "Prelude" that when

"the Moslem stormed Byzantium[,] / lost was the glory, lost the power and kingdom" (15). This obvious echo of the Lord's Prayer (for Thine is the Kingdom, the Power and the Glory) associates the Empire, whose center is Byzantium, with God's Kingdom. There are several other obvious biblical allusions, notably to the opening lines of the Gospel of St. John:

In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.
He was in the beginning with God.
All things came to be through him,
and without him nothing came to be.
What came to be through him was life,
and this life was the light of the human race;
the light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness has not overcome it. (John: 1: 1-5)

Several images here cross over into Williams' poetry. First of all is the "word" by which the Emperor "established a kingdom in Britain" (15), paralleling the God's Creation of the world through Christ, the Word Made Flesh. The word-imagery is reinforced by Williams' calling Carbonek, Camelot and Caucasia "the double-fledged Logos" (9) later in the poem. Logos is "double-fledged" because Christ, the Word made flesh, was both man and God. John also speaks of human life as "the light [that] shines in the darkness," and Williams describes these places as "inter-mediations of light" (8). They are "geography breathing geometry" (9) in that they are places concerned with spiritual perfection, always represented in Williams' Arthurian poetry by mathematical precision or geometrical terminology. The implication is that goodness is not vague, but precise and accurate. It is the Devil's work to smudge the edges between good and evil, right and wrong, to emphasize gray areas without pointing out that gray derives its existence only from the combination of black and white, or to convince people that good and evil are relative when, in fact, all things that are relative are relative to something fixed. Geometry in Williams' poetry also implies the creative force. The six-day creation in Genesis, according to Williams, "develops with geometrical precision" (*He Came Down From Heaven* 13), once again linking God with accuracy. The geographical places in Williams' poem are places of one perfection or another: Caucasia physical perfection, Carbonek spiritual, Camelot the fusion of both. Here we see again how the idea is "double-fledged," for Camelot, potentially the place wherein Caucasia and Carbonek will be united, embodies both concepts, body and soul. Only when this is achieved can Logres be a fit vessel for the return of Logos, Christ the Man-God, Deivirilil, the Word made flesh.

So, what we have in Part I of the "Prelude" is the creation, by the Emperor, of a special kingdom. This kingdom, we learn in the first line of Part II, is called Logres, which Williams described as "Britain in an enlarging world" ("The Figure of Arthur" 80). It is of this kingdom

that "they sang in Sophia the immaculate conception of wisdom" (6). The words "immaculate conception" are usually used theologically to refer to the Blessed Virgin having been conceived without original sin, and the implication here is one of the purity of wisdom. Wisdom can only be good, can only proceed directly from good. Where evil appears wise, it is merely an appearance, and in reality a perversion, like the headless Emperor's crimson cope. But the "blind rulers" (10) of Logres follow a philosophy of "rational virtue" (11) which is clearly destined to fail, since virtue, coming from God, must rest on faith, not Reason alone. Thus, "the seals of the saints were broken" (12) and the kingdom diminished, its people becoming faithless. This parallels two biblical themes. In the first place, and perhaps most obviously, is the Fall of Man. God forbade Adam and Eve to eat of the Tree of Knowledge because He wished them to place their faith in Him alone. Desire for knowledge denies faith in divine inspiration. In assuming the burden of knowledge upon themselves, they rejected God, and plunged the human race into the pitiable cycle of life and death from which the Son of God redeemed it by sacrificing His own human life. This pursuit of knowledge based entirely on man's ability, or to put it shortly, philosophy, is the "rational virtue." G.K. Chesterton argues in *The Everlasting Man* that pagan society embraced two responses to the world. The first was the response of the imagination, and this created mythology, a collection of stories to account for the appearance and operations of the world. Nobody seriously believed in mythology, because it was obviously merely a flight of fancy; and this caused the second group of people, the philosophers, to try to work out the nature of the world based strictly on human observation. Chesterton points out that philosophy and mythology are only combined successfully in Christianity. The rulers of Logres, in Williams' poem, reject mythology whilst retaining philosophy and, therefore, reject the union provided by Christianity. Williams ascribed this sin also to those inhabiting the Tower of Babel, "that symbolic legend of the effort man makes to approach heaven objectively only" (*He Came Down From Heaven* 25).

In another sense, the "blind rulers of Logres" reflect the Israelites who, given a Promised Land and the status of Chosen People by God, a special position of salvation, nevertheless continually rejected God. This allusion establishes Logres as the Promised Land of Williams' milieu. Lewis points out that

Israel is always failing, but there is always a "remnant" left; out of that failure at its nadir, and that remnant at its smallest, salvation flows . . . The thing which we thought principally intended . . . comes to nought; what seems to us a mere by-product . . . bursts into flower. (Lewis 135)

With Israel, it seemed that the way to salvation was to be born among the Chosen People. The "remnant" included Moses, David and the prophets, and the seeming "by-product" was Jesus, the Messiah, whose sacrifice redeemed all of mankind — not only the Jews. As with Israel,

so with Logres. For the Emperor's plan is to unite the Empire with Broceliande, Caucasia with Carbonek, the physical with the spiritual, in Logres; but Logres fails, and another means has to be sought. Thus "Galahad quickened in the Mercy" (13). A reader even moderately well-versed in Arthurian literature knows that Galahad's role in the story is to achieve the Holy Grail that, whatever else it might have been in the remote origins of the story, is an object of Christian reverence in most Arthurian tales. Here it is the vessel by which Christ enters the world for His Second Coming, and is intimately connected with the Sacrament of the Eucharist, by which He comes to the communicant personally at communion. So Galahad redeems Logres; but this has its price, for the Promised Land is no more — there is no longer an easy way to salvation. Just as salvation after Christ requires a little more than the simple good fortune of being born a Jew, which is to say, the acceptance of Christ as one's means to salvation, so after Galahad's achievement of the Grail, salvation becomes a slightly more difficult matter. With no automatic salvation, individuals must now *choose* to accept the correct path. Free Will has, in effect, become far more powerful, both for good and for evil. In Williams' words, although "Galahad quickened in the Mercy . . . history began" (13-14). History involves making choices, wrong as well as right. This may be a secondary meaning behind the line, "Evil and good were twins" (19), for when men are absolutely free to choose, as they were not when they were specially favored by God, they will choose both courses. The "dualism of Persia" (21), destroyed by the Moslems, is the belief that good and evil were equal forces in the universe. Such a belief is, of course, contrary to the God of the Christian faith, who is not merely good, but the source of all goodness. To the Christian, evil is a destruction, perversion or reversal of what has been created by God. When in "Rose Garden" Taliessin contemplates the good and evil twins Cain and Abel and Romulus and Remus, he is emphatically not contemplating the dualist idea of the proximity of good and evil; rather, he is reflecting upon the oppositeness of the two. A twin is, for the sake of Williams' argument, an exact replica; but in these cases, one has been warped and, consequently, the other has become a victim. Significantly, Cain committed his evil act shortly after God had withdrawn His favor from the human race because of the sin of Adam and Eve. Similarly, the Jews no longer are favored by God — they have to have faith in Christ like the Gentiles. Without this favored status, they begin to fear God:

Call on the hills to hide us
lest, men said in the City, the lord of charity
ride in the starlight, sole flash of the Emperor's glory. (1618)

The importance of these lines is emphasized by the fact that they were used in the "Prelude" to *The Advent of Galahad*, and retained almost verbatim through the intermediate "Prelude" to the published poem. There is one major difference between the present poem and the earliest, however. In *The Advent of Galahad*, Williams was him-

self uttering those words. The first two stanzas describe his feeling of being trapped, and the fear of God that the Christian feels more keenly because he is surrounded in the modern world by apostates. The lines that describe this were retained through the intermediate "Prelude" and were eventually used almost verbatim in lines 1618 of "Prelude" to *Taliessin through Logres*:

I have called to the dark to hide,
to the hills to cover me,
lest I should see in the starlight ride
the lord of charity.
("Prelude" to *The Advent of Galahad* 7-10)

Williams, a Christian in a world of apostates, feels that he is in an alien world, "a place abhorred, / being bound to the Perilous Sell" ("Prelude" to *The Advent of Galahad* 51-52). Here, the Perilous Sell is the high vocation of Christianity, lay or clerical, which forms the life of every Christian. But in each case, poetry provides a defense. Although Williams feels "an unseen net inmesh / and cover me, head to heel" ("Prelude" to *The Advent of Galahad* 3-4), he has also heard "Taliessin crying that Love is good" ("Prelude" to *The Advent of Galahad* 6). Taliessin here is the embodiment of the poetic spirit, just as he is in "The Calling of Taliessin." Then, when Williams fears God and the consequences of life's decisions, he also knows that "the singers cry, through fear and hate, / love abideth immaculate" ("Prelude" to *The Advent of Galahad* 11-12).

The words are yet another biblical echo. In Luke 23, the women of Jerusalem mourn for Jesus on His way to Calvary. He tells them to weep not for Him, but for themselves and their children:

[F]or indeed, the days are coming when people will say, "Blessed are the barren, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed." At that time people will say to the mountains, "Fall upon us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!" for if these things are done when the wood is green what will happen when it is dry? (Lk. 23: 29-31)

In Williams' poem, we see the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy. The wood is dry — that is, God has returned to heaven — and those without faith are left to exercise their free will without recourse to God. While the faithful have the Church to guide them, the faithless have nothing. Their actions determine their fate.

The City in these lines refers to the mass of believers, to Christendom, who are now aware of the awesome responsibility they face. Clearly, having this incredible choice makes men afraid of God not for His vengeance, which is of course righteous, but because it is relentless and inevitable . . . based on *their very choices*. In effect, it is themselves that men are afraid of when they call upon the hills to hide them, though blinded by their choice, they pretend to fear God, the Emperor.

Given absolutely free will, most people choose the wrong course, and these are symbolized by the Moslems, who take Sophia, evidently St. Sophia's, a cathedral in Byzan-

tium, which was a mosque, and is now a museum in modern Istanbul. This Williams regards as a sacrilegious act, for St. Sophia is an especially sacred place in *The Advent of Galahad*. In "Taliessin's 'Holy Wisdom'" ("Byzantion" 9, 33, 61, 69, 73) and once simply "Wisdom" ("Byzantion" 81). Now that the myths are over and history has begun, the heretics overrun this place. Lewis outlines Williams' attitude towards Moslems, these particular heretics, in the following terms:

Islam was for Williams the symbol (as it is certainly the greatest historical expression) of something which is eternally the opposite of Sarra and Carbonek. Islam denies the Incarnation. It will not allow that God descended into flesh or that Manhood has been exalted into Deity. . . . It stands for all religions that are afraid of matter and afraid of mystery, for all misplaced reverences and misplaced purities that repudiate the body and shrink back from the glowing materialism of the Grail. It stands for what Williams called "heavy morality" — the ethics of sheer duty and obedience as against the shy yet (in the long run) shameless acceptance of heaven's courtesies flowing from the "homely and courteous lord". It is strong, noble, venerable; yet radically mistaken. (Lewis 124)

This, to Williams, clearly signifies Man's loss of faith in the "substantial being" (27), for god is more substantial than mankind, as matter is more substantial than a vacuum. This is a common theme with Lewis also, who in *The Great Divorce* describes the blessed spirits in heaven as being "solid." It is ultimately a Platonic idea, that everything in this world is a shadow of a more substantial reality. Aristotle, in Book I of *Metaphysics*, argues that all kinds of matter are indistinguishable from one another. What differentiates one kind from another is its "substance," or form. God is the ultimate "substantial being" because He is independent of matter—He is entirely form. In Williams, the precise word used is "image:" that is, everything in this world is an image, ultimately an image of God. At the same time, it retains its identity as itself, becoming in fact more itself by being a willing part of God. Thus, although Galahad has a Christlike mission, and is a representative of "that in the human soul which finds Christ" ("Malory and the Grail Legend" in *The Image of the City* 190, fn. 1), he is also simply Galahad, the son of Sir Lancelot. At the end of the "Prelude" we see mankind rejecting the substance to retain the image, divorced of its more solid spiritual counterpart — in short, the rejection of heaven to embrace the world.

Notes

¹ All quotations are from Dodds' edition. All citations in the text are line-numbers. Dodds does not supply these, but they are easily added by the reader.

² St. Paul says that "lest I should be exalted above measure for the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me" (1 Cor. 12: 7). This thorn is a reminder of proper humility. It seems, moreover, to have been some kind of physical infirmity, probably an eye disorder of some description (see Gal. 4: 13-15).

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