

## **Gods and Friends: C. S. Lewis on Divinization**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*“When asked to identify who is talking about deification in Western theological circles, my initial response is ‘Who isn’t?’ It seems that almost every Protestant and Catholic theologian writing creatively and constructively in the last two to three decades has found it necessary to address the subject.”<sup>1</sup> The explosion of theological interest Olson draws attention to is undoubted, but the time period he fixes needs lengthening. Well in advance of the work on divinization done by Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Finnish school of Luther research, C. S. Lewis (1898–1963) staged a “mini-restoration” of the theme to the center of Christian theology in the West.*

*The claim of this essay is two-fold. First, when Lewis speaks of salvation and heaven, as he so often does, not only does he figure it as redemption, perfect happiness, “union with God,”<sup>2</sup> and many other oft-used images, but also as divinization,<sup>3</sup> being made a god, the “blessed participation in [God’s] Life by a created spirit,”<sup>4</sup> and other traditional though far less common metaphors. These images represent a crucial part of a real doctrine in Lewis’s works, rather than stray bursts of poetic enthusiasm. Second, Lewis presents friendship as an important means to becoming “those gods that we are described as being in Scripture.”<sup>5</sup>*

### **I. “High like the heavens and bright like the sun”**

Speech is incorrigibly metaphorical. We speak abstractly about what is concrete, and concretely about what is abstract, and so our invocations, conversations, addresses and descriptions are large with metaphor. It is not lovers, poets, and philosophers alone who mid-wife metaphor, but all who mean, and want their meaning understood. “It is of the very nature of thought and language to represent what is immaterial in picturable terms. What is good or happy has always been high like the heavens and bright like the sun. Evil and misery were deep and dark from the first.”<sup>6</sup>

Christian speech is pervasively metaphorical; if not more so than some other kinds of speech, at least more obviously so. Consider one example: the language of salvation. Christian faith has brought forth a rich collection of vivid images to describe the saving work of Christ. St. Paul alone, drawing from the realms of commerce, agriculture, law, family, and religion, produces so many metaphors that both novice and seasoned exegete must experience a touch of vertigo when surveying the apostle’s landscape. The Pauline range includes: justification (Rom. 3:28, Gal.

3:24), redemption (Rom. 3:24, Tit. 2:14, Heb. 9:12), reconciliation (Rom. 5:10–11, 1 Cor. 5:18), liberation/freedom (Rom. 8:21, 2 Cor. 3:17, Gal. 2:4, 5:1), life in Christ (Rom. 8:1, 1 Cor. 15:22), citizenship/community membership (Phil. 3:20), transferral into another kingdom (Col. 1:13), salvation (Rom. 1:16, 2 Cor. 1:6, Phil. 1:9, 1 Thess. 5:8), inheritance (Gal. 3:18, Col. 3:24, Eph. 1:14), new creation (2 Cor. 5:17, Gal. 6:15), engagement with Christ (2 Cor. 11:12), marriage to Christ (1 Cor. 6:17), sanctification (Rom. 6:19–22), death (Rom. 6:3–6, 7:4, 6; Gal. 2:19; Col. 2:20, 3:3), resurrection (Rom. 6:5, 1 Cor. 15:20–23), and eternal life (Rom. 6:22–23, 1 Tim. 6:12, 19).<sup>7</sup>

In these and the many other images of salvation offered by the New Testament, the patristic imagination found nourishment, but also sought coherence. In the homiletics, catechetics, and apologetics of the first Christian centuries, the Scriptural images and narratives were interrogated, their implications developed and their connections explored, giving rise both to fresh images and to more technical expositions. The Savior was figured as giver of the true law, bringer of knowledge, sacrifice, recapitulator, doctor, victor over Satan, bestower of incorruptibility, and intercessor, to name only a few.<sup>8</sup> Along with these, under the influence of classical learning, Hellenistic culture, heretical ideas, and changing pastoral situations, there arose the “learned theology” of Logos and Trinity, of Modalism and Adoptionism, of *ousia*, *hypokeimenon*, *hypostasis*, *physis*, and *perichoresis*.<sup>9</sup> Within this wellspring, the promise of the second letter of Peter, that through Christ believers “may come to share in the divine nature” (1:4) – a promise augured in other passages as well (e.g., John 17:21, Gal. 2:20, 1 John 3:2) – was given intense consideration in the patristic period,<sup>10</sup> in images like marriage, the mingling of water and wine, the consumption of green wood in fire, and the ascent of the soul; and in more abstract vocabulary like *methexis*, *theosis*, and *theopoiesis*.

The images of salvation are not the temporary husks of some inner, literal seeds waiting to be plucked forth and scattered by the less poetic hand of the systematic theologian or philosopher of religion.

We are invited to restate our belief in a form free from metaphor and symbol. The reason why we don’t is that we can’t. We can, if you like, say “God entered history” instead of saying “God came down to earth.” But, of course, “entered” is just as metaphorical as “came down.” You have only substituted horizontal or undefined movement for vertical movement. We can make our language duller; we cannot make it less metaphorical. We can make the pictures more prosaic; we cannot be less pictorial.<sup>11</sup>

Still, the image gives rise to reflection as the symbol gives rise to thought, and their relationship is integral. As Karl Rahner, S. J., observes, even the most abstract metaphysical concept includes an imagistic element, as even the most concrete description involves abstract concept.<sup>12</sup> Metaphor is no more of a concession to the truth of faith than air is to the working of the lung. But the mind that craves images also wants integration.

In an academic setting besotted with scientific materialism and generally supine before the advance of logical positivism, C. S. Lewis upheld the inviolate place of metaphors in the Christian life; and especially in all talk of heaven, which demands “an enormous wealth of

imagery [...] a dozen changing images correcting and relieving each other.”<sup>13</sup> But he also restlessly sought doctrine, and his letters, essays, theological expositions, fiction, literary criticism, poetry, and autobiographical writings, give eloquent witness to his conviction that there is no hard line between image and thought, metaphor and doctrine. His most famous doctrinal works – *Mere Christianity*, *Miracles*, and *The Problem of Pain* – are mother lodes of image. And his much-loved fiction – especially *The Chronicles of Narnia* – are filled with teachers and teaching.

Lewis’s work is especially fecund on the question of salvation. His writings burst with imaginative renderings of the Scriptural figures of incorporation into Christ, regeneration, transformation into a new creature, dying to self and rising with Christ, etc.<sup>14</sup> To these, Lewis adds the figures of a statue come to life, reunion with a first love, a naked body before the noonday sun, a mold into which bright metal is poured, dance, game, union with beauty, far mountains, “deep heaven,” becoming “little Christs,” and many more. Along with these, there is the constant quest for sense, part of the express purpose of interpreting Christian hope to an audience raised in the belief that one cannot accept the Biblical pictures of eternal life while also making daily use of the electric light and the radio.

So far as I have been able to determine, Lewis never uses the terms “deification” or “divinization.” When he speaks of “demi-gods,” he has in mind only the most recent descant on the ancient, dreary promise: “Eugenics have made certain that only demi-gods will now be born: psycho-analysis that none of them shall lose or smirch his divinity: economics that they shall have to hand all that demi-gods require. Man has ascended his throne. Man has become God. All is a blaze of glory.”<sup>15</sup> And when he writes of “gods,” it is almost always to his beloved classical, Irish, Germanic, and Norse myths that he refers. Almost, but not always. Like the kitchen of Heraclitus, true gods are also found in Lewis’s works.

Before reading Lewis, a few words of caution are in order. Divinization is receiving sustained and ecumenical attention from Christian theology today,<sup>16</sup> and the results to date are far from homogenous the results thus far are from homogenous. Are certain metaphors indispensable? Is there a normative version of the doctrine? Where can it be found, and what are its core elements? Does it possess a proprietary vocabulary? These are some of the questions generating debate among the contemporary theologians of *theosis*,<sup>17</sup> and their canvassing would demand a much lengthier essay than this. For clarity’s sake, by “divinization” I mean the following:

1. divinization is conformation to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit
2. divinization is a process, beginning in this world and stretching to completion in heaven, in which the cooperation of human freedom has a proper role
3. divinization is always God’s gracious work; autonomous divinization is a contradiction in terms
4. divinization is the fulfillment of creation: it is not the overcoming of human nature (e.g., through absorption into God or escape from the body), but the destruction of sin and the perfection of the person
5. divinization means creaturely participation in the divine goodness, power, joy, knowledge, and eternity

This understanding of divinization contains no doctrinal innovation. Lewis finds it in “mere Christianity,” that “great level viaduct which crosses the ages,”<sup>18</sup> running through Augustine, Aquinas, Dante, Spenser, Pascal, Bunyan, and Hooker.<sup>19</sup> Lewis presents this teaching with remarkable directness, clarity, and imagination. One would need to read much more deeply in some expert theologians before sifting out a nugget’s worth of the treasure with which Lewis is so prodigal.<sup>20</sup>

Doubtless, precisely as the amateur theologian he always claimed to be, Lewis could not have competently compared Western and Eastern Fathers regarding *theopoiesis* or *deificare*. In just those places where one might expect him to cite the Biblical *locus classicus* of 2 Peter 1:4, wherein Christians are promised to become “sharers of the divine nature,” he does not. One finds none of the cosmic sweep of Maximus the Confessor,<sup>21</sup> nor the eye for detail of Thomas Aquinas.<sup>22</sup> He does not rehearse the debates on Christ, prayer, and the divine simplicity which characterized the lengthy formative period of the idea. Yet, one finds a real doctrine in Lewis.<sup>23</sup> Amateur he may have been, but Lewis displays an uncanny grasp of the chief arteries of the Christian map (if not every access road and country lane), resulting in an exposition which is theologically basic, but not at all vague.<sup>24</sup>

## II. “The same kind of life as God”

Divinization is not hinted at in Lewis’s works, but presented frequently and vividly. In *A Grief Observed*, written following the death of his wife, Joy, Lewis calls divinization God’s “grand enterprise.” His description of it suggests that his own suffering and sadness made the *prima facie* absurdity of the idea very clear to him: “To make an organism which is also a spirit; to make that terrible oxymoron, a ‘spiritual animal.’ To take a poor primate, a beast with nerve endings all over it, a creature with a stomach that wants to be filled, a breeding animal that wants its mate, and say, ‘Now get on with it. Become a god.’”<sup>25</sup> But Lewis had long since recognized that there is no substitute for “becoming a god,” no possible consolation prize for the restless heart that was made for this end alone. We may say truly, if somewhat anachronistically, that Lewis’s anthropology and eschatology are properly integrated:

God made us: invented us as a man invents an engine. A car is made to run on petrol, and it would not run properly on anything else. Now God designed the human machine to run on Himself. He Himself is the fuel our spirits were designed to burn, or the food our spirits were designed to feed on. There is no other. That is why it is just no good asking God to make us happy in our own way without bothering about religion. God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing.<sup>26</sup>

One of the most famous passages from Lewis’s writings adds further color to this picture, making it clear that the human car must indeed “run” – divinization is a process – and that Christians have been drafted to serve as one another’s mechanics:

It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves[.]<sup>27</sup>

*Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer*, completed about six months before Lewis's death, stresses that such a destiny is not from us, but is the gift of God in Christ:

In the Incarnation, God the Son takes the body and human soul of Jesus, and, through that, the whole environment of Nature, all the creaturely predicament, into His own being. So that "He came down from Heaven" can almost be transposed into "Heaven drew earth up into it," and locality, limitation, sleep, sweat, footsore weariness, frustration, pain, doubt, and death, are, from before all worlds, known by God from within. The pure light walks the earth; the darkness, received into the heart of Deity, is there swallowed up. Where, except in uncreated light, can the darkness be drowned?<sup>28</sup>

Even Uncle Screwtape, in a weak moment, concedes that "the Enemy"

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. We want cattle who can finally become food; He wants servants who can finally become sons. We want to suck in, He wants to give out. We are empty and would be filled; He is full and flows over. Our war aim is a world in which Our Father Below has drawn all other beings into himself; the Enemy wants a world full of beings united to Him, but still distinct.<sup>29</sup>

But Screwtape and his colleagues pride themselves on their ability to sabotage the Enemy's plan. Cars get lost, lights dim, replicas melt, mirrors break:

[God] said (in the Bible) that we were 'gods' and He is going to make good His words. If we let him – for we can prevent Him, if we choose – He will make the feeblest and filthiest of us into a god or goddess, a dazzling, radiant, immortal creature, pulsating all through with such energy and joy and wisdom and love as we cannot now imagine, a bright stainless mirror which reflects back to God perfectly (though, of course, on a smaller scale) His own boundless power and delight and goodness.<sup>30</sup>

Lewis is uncompromising on the capacity of human freedom to defeat the grand enterprise: “Century by century God has guided nature up to the point of producing creatures which can (if they will) be taken right out of nature, turned into ‘gods.’”<sup>31</sup>

Lewis does not, however, simply use the images and language of divinization. Any reasonably comprehensive account of Christian faith can be expected to make some mention of it. Rather, Lewis provides a doctrinal framework in which divinization make sense. This framework is Christian, and so his thinking has no truck with the idea of human ascension into divinity, akin to the pagan heroes and Eastern potentates of old. Further, his thoughts on the Trinity, Christology and grace, and creation and sin, demonstrate that Lewis does not seize on the idea of persons being “received into the heart of Deity” simply because the metaphor appeals to his literary sensibilities. He is convinced that the promise is true, the possibility real. Lewis rejects that brand of soteriology that treats divinization as poetic hyperbole,<sup>32</sup> and reduces its images to figurative exhortations for moral imitation of Christ, without any supernatural content. Determined to make as much sense of “becoming God” as can be made, Lewis tackles head-on the question which most obviously arises in response to the promise of sharing in God’s life: *how?* “How is it possible for us to be taken into the three-Personal life?”<sup>33</sup> This question has two levels, both of which must be addressed by a doctrine of divinization. First, how is it possible for a creature to receive such a gift? “But my face you cannot see, for no man sees me and still lives” (Ex. 33:20). Second, how does one receive this gift? “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30).

Lewis’s answer to both is the same: Jesus Christ. First to last, Lewis sees becoming divine as receiving “the kind of self [Christ] has.” Faith in Christ is faith “that Christ will make the man more like Himself. [...] He will share His ‘sonship’ with us, will make us, like himself, ‘Sons of God.’”<sup>34</sup> Thus conformed to Christ, believers are taken into the Triune life: “We shall love the Father as He does and the Holy Ghost will arise in us [...] Every Christian is to become a little Christ. The whole purpose of becoming a Christian is simply nothing else.”<sup>35</sup> The Incarnation is the grand miracle which begins God’s grand enterprise:

In the Christian story God descends to re-ascend. He comes down; down from the heights of absolute being into time and space, down into humanity; down further still, if embryologists are right, to recapitulate in the womb ancient and pre-human phases of life; down to the very roots and sea-bed of the Nature he has created. But He goes down to come up again and bring the whole ruined world up with Him. One has the picture of a strong man stooping lower and lower to get himself underneath some great complicated burden. He must stoop in order to lift, he must almost disappear under the load before he incredibly straightens his back and marches off with the whole mass swaying on his shoulders.<sup>36</sup>

What are human beings, that they can be conformed to Christ?<sup>37</sup> Without the specifically Christian doctrine of creation, the process of becoming “little Christs” will be completely misunderstood, figured as absorption, escape, or the development of an intrinsic potential to become divine, such that “Jesus is simply an elder brother who is further along the path of divine

development.”<sup>38</sup> Lewis champions the real, limited goodness and independence of creation. He rejects Gnosticism: “There is no good trying to be more spiritual than God. God never meant man to be a purely spiritual creature. That is why He uses material things like bread and wine to put the new life into us. We may think this rather crude and unspiritual. God does not: He invented eating. He likes matter. He invented it.”<sup>39</sup> And whereas in pantheism God is all, “the whole point of creation surely is that He was not content to be all. He intends to be ‘all *in all*.’”<sup>40</sup> The existence of a realm of things which are not God, yet are not independent (and certainly not equal), is the precondition for divinization. God is under no necessity to bring anything which He is not into Himself, but if He wishes to divinize, if He desires “union instead of mere sameness,”<sup>41</sup> He must create. Indeed, it is no overstatement to say that Lewis regards divinization as the goal of creation: “To what end was creation except to separate us in order that we may be reunited to Him in that unity of love wh. is utterly different from mere numerical unity and indeed presupposes that lover & beloved be distinct?”<sup>42</sup>

So, too, divinization in the Christian sense cannot be thought of apart from the real freedom which human beings have been given. Following in the tradition begun by St. Irenaeus, Lewis presents an anthropological dynamism focused on the *imago Dei*. He distinguishes between two sorts of nearness to God: by likeness, and by approach. Nearness by likeness is the image of God spoken of in Genesis 1:26–27, the likeness to God that is part of human nature and which expresses itself as freedom, rationality, and power. Nearness by approach is when a person is moving towards union with God. Likeness by nature makes humans “divinizable,” but is not itself the process of divinization. This process is initiated and supported by grace, but it is also something human beings must do.

For [God] seems to do nothing of himself which he can possibly delegate to his creatures. He commands us to do slowly and blunderingly what he could do perfectly and in the twinkling of an eye. He allows us to neglect what he would have us do, or to fail. Perhaps we do not fully realize the problem, so to call it, of enabling finite free wills to coexist with Omnipotence. It seems to involve at every moment almost a sort of divine abdication. We are not mere recipients or spectators. We are either privileged to share in the game or compelled to collaborate in the work [...] This is how (no light matter) God makes something – indeed, makes gods – out of nothing.<sup>43</sup>

Echoing St. Augustine, Lewis writes, “Creatures are made in their varying images of God without their own collaboration or even consent. It is not so that they become sons of God.”<sup>44</sup> Progress from likeness to approach is a matter of free, intelligent response to divine grace, and Lewis calls the result “transposition.” Transposition is neither the transformation of human beings into angels, nor their absorption into God. Rather, “by Transposition our humanity, senses and all, can be made the vehicle of beatitude [...] [H]umanity, still remaining itself, is not merely counted as, but veritably drawn into, Deity.”<sup>45</sup> Human persons can be so assumed because they are already diminished versions of those higher levels: “Divine Sonship is, so to speak, the solid of which biological sonship is merely a diagrammatic representation on the flat.”<sup>46</sup> Human intellect and will are unimaginably simple reproductions of the knowledge and love which are

the Trinity; human flesh and bone are nearly insubstantial yet still real sketches of the glorified body Christ possesses. In body and soul, freedom and intellect, humans have the equipment to respond to the divine summons; through the incarnate grace of Jesus Christ, human beings receive the power to do so.<sup>47</sup>

Further, any Christian account of how “human souls can be taken into the life of God and yet remain themselves – in fact, be much more themselves than they were before”<sup>48</sup> must take into consideration the possibility of defection from God’s plan. The process of becoming “little Christs” will be misinterpreted unless it is seen as the divinization of fallen creatures, beings who in their bones feel the force of human sinfulness, the temptation to parody grotesquely the divine gift by hearkening to the offer, “You shall be like gods.”<sup>49</sup> No one familiar with Lewis’s works could fault him for glossing over the desperate state of the *exsules filii Evae*. The transposition which God desires to enact has its counterfeit in the divinization humanity seeks to grasp. The “Christianity-and-water” view, which upholds a good Creator but dismisses “all the difficult and terrible doctrines about sin and hell and the devil, and the redemption,” is dismissed by Lewis as “boys’ philosophies.”<sup>50</sup> Reflecting his oft-repeated concern that Christianity not sound like “pie-in-the-sky,” his talk of transposition is always carried out with eyes firmly set upon the situation of humanity as fallen and sinful. There is nothing affected about this, nothing of the self-apology of an embarrassed academic who does not want his audience to think that the college cloister has left him out of touch with the gritty “real world.” Instead, Lewis owes this pattern to Scripture and tradition; in addition, it is an undeniably autobiographical theme, well-represented in one of his first published works, *The Pilgrim’s Regress*. The pilgrim, John, laments having “to walk warily and on sufferance all his days, never to be alone; never the master of his own soul, to have no privacy, no corner whereof you could say to the whole universe: This is my own, here I can do as I please.”<sup>51</sup> Later, John hears his own words set to a croaking tune by Pride: “So I, borrowing nothing and repaying / Nothing, neither growing nor decaying, / Myself am to myself, a mortal God, a self-contained / Unwindowed monad, unindebted and unstained.”<sup>52</sup> In light of this deep-seated resistance, Lewis always underscores the progressive and demanding character of transposition: “The process will be long and in parts very painful, but that is what we are in for.”<sup>53</sup> Pilgrim John’s final song touches upon the arduous course: “That we, though small, may quiver with fire’s same / Substantial form as Thou – nor reflect merely, / As lunar angel, back to thee, cold flame. / Gods we are, Thou has said: and we pay dearly.”<sup>54</sup>

All of these dimensions – creation, Incarnation, grace, free will, sin, and process – are evident in one of Lewis’s favorite examples of transposition: prayer. A Christian praying alone in his bedroom prays to the Father, through the Spirit, with Christ alongside him: “So that the whole threefold life of the three-personal Being is actually going on in that ordinary little bedroom where an ordinary man is saying his prayers. The man is being caught up into the higher kinds of life [...] he is being pulled into God, by God, while still remaining himself.”<sup>55</sup> This entrance into the divine life is not a matter of mystical moods, but a thoroughly concrete encounter with Jesus Christ. When a Christian prays,

[t]he real Son of God is at your side. He is beginning to turn you into the same kind of thing as Himself. [...] [A] real Person, Christ, here and now, in that very room where



you are saying your prayers, is doing things to you. It is not a question of a good man who died two thousand years ago. It is a living Man, still as much a man as you, and still as much God as he was when he created the world, really coming and interfering with your very self; killing the old natural self in you and replacing it with the kind of self He has. At first, only for moments. Then for longer periods. Finally, if all goes well, turning you permanently into a different sort of thing; into a new little Christ, a being which, in its own small way, has the same kind of life as God; which shares His power, joy, knowledge and eternity.<sup>56</sup>

To be fully divinized is not to be God: Lewis's treatment of creation and grace make it clear that the perfected believer does not create, does not save, is not eternal in the same way as God is, does not know in the same way God knows. Rather, when we put on Christ, we become like God, and we "share his goodness in creaturely response."<sup>57</sup> The divinized believer shares in "the same kind of life as God," becomes a miniature, a mirror, a self-portrait<sup>58</sup> of the Triune God.

### III. "Hunters of some immaterial quarry"

Adolf Harnack's snarky jab about divinization, that it meant a "pharmacological" transformation of human nature, one to which the moral transformation of the believer was only an appendage,<sup>59</sup> is a prodigious misreading of the Greek fathers.<sup>60</sup> When divinization is conceived as requiring the gracious and free cooperation of the person in a lifelong process, moral transformation is necessarily central to becoming a little Christ.<sup>61</sup> The means of this cooperation are well known and often raised by Lewis: sacrament, belief, prayer, ascetical practice, almsgiving, and many others. However, it is the divinizing capacity of friendship that I wish to examine here. Lewis does not range friendship with the necessary means of conversion and sanctification. It is not on a par with Baptism or Eucharist, not a replacement for penance and charity, and certainly never to be regarded as an end in itself.<sup>62</sup> Still, in a manner familiar to the Christian tradition,<sup>63</sup> Lewis depicts friendship as a most gracious, and especially delightful, assistance to transposition. In Lewis's take on divinization, the friends of earth make us fit for the society of God.

Lewis offers an unqualified estimate of the value of friends: "[F]riendship is the greatest of worldly goods. Certainly to me it is the chief happiness of life. If I had to give a piece of advice to a young man about a place to live, I think I shd. say, 'sacrifice almost everything to live where you can be near your friends.'"<sup>64</sup> Much has been written about Lewis's own circle of intimates.<sup>65</sup> He is as famous as St. Augustine for the role played by friendship in his coming to Christ, and gives frequent thanks for his own Alypius, Nebridius, and Navigius; for example, "Dyson and Tolkien were the immediate human causes of my own conversion. Is any pleasure on earth as great as a circle of Christian friends by a good fire?"<sup>66</sup>

The importance of *philia* to Lewis is reflected in *The Four Loves*, wherein he gives friendship a "rehabilitation," one made necessary by modernity's emphasis on the romantic and emotional aspects of love and its distaste for the blatantly undemocratic nature of groups of friends, as well as by the depredations visited upon non-erotic loves by the illimitable sway of psychoanalysis.<sup>67</sup> What is friendship? Lewis holds it to be the least natural love, one which, unlike affection

(*storge*) or erotic love (*eros*), is not necessary to our biological existence: “Without Eros none of us would have been begotten and without Affection none of us would have been reared; but we can live and breed without Friendship.”<sup>68</sup> Friendship centers on the shared quest for truth. Lewis insists that friendship must be about something, something beyond the individuals and their relationship. At the heart of friendship is a question: “*Do you see the same truth?* – Or at least, *Do you care about the same truth?*” The man who agrees with us that some question, little regarded by others, is of great importance can be our Friend. He need not agree with us about the answer [...] Hence we picture lovers face to face but Friends side to side; their eyes look ahead.”<sup>69</sup>

Lewis is not restrictive about the object of this shared truth. It may be religion, recreation, study, or profession. It may be stamp collecting, golf, mathematics, or dominoes. The prosaic quality of these examples of “shared truth” is instructive. Lewis is very familiar with the tradition of great friendships: Pylades and Orestes, Jonathan and David, Amis *et* Amiles, Roland and Oliver. Yet he does not rank friendships on the basis of dangers overcome, sacrifices endured, or fame earned. Roland and Oliver may make for better poetry, but their friendship is not truer because of the grand background on which it is played out. What is important is not the activity in itself – the sharing of common tasks and duties is not friendship as such, but “companionship” – but the common vision which supervenes upon the activity. Two hunters sharing their conviction that a deer is not only delicious, but beautiful; two votaries bound by the desire that their gods be powerful, but also holy; two companions in golf who discover a shared sense that the broad, green fairways of full spring insistently suggest some other, better place: what these have in common is a shared activity which is also the pursuit of shared meaning. Friends are “still hunters, but of some immaterial quarry [...] still traveling companions, but on a different kind of journey.”<sup>70</sup> A chivalric vision of justice and loyalty may generate grander deeds of greater social value and historical note, but in itself it is no better a bond among friends than the conviction that the inadequate taxonomy and confusing nomenclature of medically useful fungi demands study and redress, or that an evening spent in the discussion of baseball statistics or royal genealogies contains its own happy justification.

Of special interest is Lewis’s contention that friendship promotes “secession,” a partial deafness to the larger community:

In each knot of Friends there is a sectional “public opinion” which fortifies its members against the public opinion of the community in general. Each therefore is a pocket of potential resistance. Men who have real Friends are less easy to manage or “get at”; harder for good Authorities to correct or for bad Authorities to corrupt. Hence if our masters, by force or by propaganda [...] ever succeed in producing a world where all are Companions and none are Friends, they will have removed certain dangers, and will also have taken from us what is almost our strongest safeguard against complete servitude.<sup>71</sup>

All the natural loves – friendship, affection, and eros – are incomplete: “The natural loves are summoned to become modes of Charity while also remaining the natural loves they were.”<sup>72</sup>

*Storge*, *eros*, and *philia* are all raised by *agape*, yet not razed by it. However, Lewis's own experience suggests that the external focus and secession which characterize friendship have a particular power to aid in conversion. Friends united in following Christ, and deaf to the fashions of sin which surround them, are a means of, and consolation for, the painful process of transposition, as well as a foretaste of its heavenly fulfillment.

Friendship was a crucial element of the medicinal grace by which the "celestial surgeon"<sup>73</sup> removed the necrotic tissue of Lewis's intellectual and moral vices – an indispensable and unavoidably painful aspect of every sinner's progress from likeness to approach. Lewis makes reference to this in *The Problem of Pain*, when he uses the image of entrance into a group of friends, as

when the man of inferior moral standards enters the society of those who are better and wiser than he and gradually learns to accept *their* standards - a process which, as it happens, I can describe fairly accurately, since I have undergone it [...] By the mercy of God I fell among a set of young men (none of them, by the way, Christians) who were sufficiently close to me in intellect and imagination to secure immediate intimacy, but who knew, and tried to obey, the moral law.<sup>74</sup>

Lewis's existing distaste for cruelty and stinginess was transformed by his friends' hatred of cruelty and generosity of spirit; and his moral repertoire was expanded by their honesty, chastity, and self-sacrifice. This enlargement was not painless: "But the great test is that the recognition of the new standards is accompanied with the sense of shame and guilt: one is conscious of having blundered into society that one is unfit for."<sup>75</sup> In this circle Lewis found support for his growing philosophical misgivings about scientific materialism, and for the cultivation of virtue.

This "high" view of friendship provides Lewis with an explanation for why Scripture speaks of God affectionately, as Father, and erotically, as when Christ is figured as the bridegroom of the Church, but not in terms of friendship:

It is already, in actual fact, too spiritual to be a good symbol of Spiritual things. The highest does not stand without the lowest. God can safely represent Himself to us as Father and Husband because only a lunatic would think that He is physically our sire or that His marriage with the Church is other than mystical. But if Friendship were used for this purpose we might mistake the symbol for the thing symbolised. The danger inherent in it would be aggravated.<sup>76</sup>

Lewis points out that the spiritual quality of friendship is neither good nor bad in itself: just as there are good and bad spirits, so friends may "see the same truth" in falsehood and wickedness. But when *philia* is true, then the Christian friends gathered around a set of dominoes or an ancient text or a golf tee are part of God's plan for one another's divinization.

Thus it is no accident that *The Screwtape Letters* consistently returns to the subject of friendship as a part of the life of the "patient" which must be given sedulous care, for it has powerful potential to save or to damn. Screwtape applauds the absence in modern Christian

writings of any concern for “the Choice of Friends,” and advises Wormwood on ways to make good use of a pair of new, very worldly friends, as well as how to deal with the patient’s inevitable realization “that his own faith is in direct opposition to the assumptions on which all the conversation of his new friends is based.”<sup>77</sup> Screwtape is especially glad to hear that the two new friends have acquainted him with their whole set. “All these, as I find from the record office, are thoroughly reliable people; steady, consistent scoffers and worldlings who without any spectacular crimes are progressing quietly and comfortably towards Our Father’s house.”<sup>78</sup> Indeed, so powerful is the influence wielded by such groups, that when the patient escapes these worldly friends, falls in love with a good Christian woman, and is accepted into the circle of her family and friends, Screwtape frets that the Enemy, by means of “some very agreeable people far advanced in His service, is drawing the young barbarian up to levels he could never otherwise have reached.” He insists that some way must be found to blunt their influence; not surprisingly, this is through pride:

The new circle in which he finds himself is one of which he is tempted to be proud for many reasons other than its Christianity. It is a better educated, more intelligent, more agreeable society than any he has yet encountered. He is also under some degree of illusion as to his own place in it. Under the influence of “love” he may still think himself unworthy of the girl, but he is rapidly ceasing to think himself unworthy of the others. He has no notion how much in him is forgiven because they are charitable and made the best of because he is now one of the family. He does not dream how much of his conversation, how many of his opinions, are recognized by them all as mere echoes of their own. Still less does he suspect how much of the delight he takes in these people is due to the erotic enchantment which the girl, for him, spreads over all her surroundings. He thinks that he likes their talk and way of life because of some congruity between their spiritual state and his, when in fact they are so far beyond him that if he were not in love he would be merely puzzled and repelled by much which he now accepts. He is like a dog which should imagine it understood fire-arms because its hunting instinct and love for its master enable it to enjoy a day’s shooting!<sup>79</sup>

The seriousness with which Screwtape takes this threat reflects the capacity of the patient’s friends to insulate him from the clamor of vice, and train him in virtue.

In friends we find more than the often harsh means of transposition. We find that our deepest longing, our “desire which no natural happiness will satisfy,”<sup>80</sup> becomes a shared longing: “Are not all lifelong friendships born at the moment when at last you meet another human being who has some inkling (but faint and uncertain at best) of that something which you were born desiring, and which, beneath the flux of other desires and in all the momentary silences between the louder passions, night and day, year by year, from childhood to old age, you are looking for, watching for, listening for?” And more than this: these friends are the means whereby we become little Christs, our aids in becoming gods and goddesses:

[F]or a Christian, there are, strictly speaking, no chances. A secret Master of the

Ceremonies has been at work. Christ, who said to the disciples, “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you,” can truly say to every group of Christian friends, “You have not chosen one another but I have chosen you for one another.” The Friendship is not a reward for our discrimination and good taste in finding one another out. It is the instrument by which God reveals to each the beauties of all the others. They are no greater than the beauties of a thousand other men; by Friendship God opens our eyes to them. They are, like all beauties, derived from Him, and then, in a good Friendship, increased by Him through the Friendship itself, so that it is His instrument for creating as well as revealing. At this feast it is He who has spread the board and it is He who has chosen the guests. It is He, we may dare to hope who sometimes does, and always should, preside. Let us not reckon without our Host.<sup>81</sup>

#### IV. “Society that one is unfit for”

“Our problem today is not the deification but the *humanization of man*.”<sup>82</sup> The implied rivalry between the two would likely have tickled Lewis. His love of Scripture, his grasp of the Christian tradition, and his voluptuous imagination combined – almost inevitably, one is tempted to say – to pick out, endorse, and develop the image and idea of divinization. He knew too much about the demi-gods of Troy and Latium to think his monotheistic forebears contemplated any such transformation. He knew too much about the Scriptural promises of eternal glory, joy, and wisdom to water down the metaphor until it was no more than the thin gruel of hyperbole or ornamentation. He knew too much about human sinfulness, his own and others, to pretend that our promised fulfillment was inevitable or logical.

“Society that one is unfit for”: although he never does so, Lewis would cordially approve this as a worthy gloss upon the Trinity. “[T]he Divine Life, which gives itself to us and which calls us to be gods, intends for us something in which morality will be swallowed up. We are to be remade [...] [into] a thing we have never imagined: a real man, an ageless god, a son of God, strong, radiant, wise, beautiful, and drenched in joy.”<sup>83</sup> Yet, we are fallen, and if we would enter into the Triune life, God must take the matter in hand: “We are, not metaphorically but in very truth, a Divine work of art, something that God is making, and therefore something with which He will not be satisfied until it has a certain character,” that is, “a reflection of the Divine life, a creaturely participation in the Divine attributes which is far beyond our present desires.”<sup>84</sup> God has purposed us for entrance into His society, and gives his grace that He might see and love in us what He sees and loves in Christ. In this grand enterprise, Christians are meant to receive more than a little help from their friends.

#### Endnotes

1. Roger E. Olson, “Deification in Contemporary Theology,” *Theology Today* 64 (2007), 188.
2. C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1958), 41.
3. “Divinization” is the term I will use in this essay, which for all but the most detailed historical

investigations is synonymous with “deification.”

4. Lewis, *Miracles: A Preliminary Study* (San Francisco: Harper, 2001), 256.
5. Lewis, *The Great Divorce: A Dream* (San Francisco: Harper, 2001), 9.
6. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938), 44.
7. James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 328–333.
8. J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (Rev. ed.; San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978), 163–188, 375–400; H. E. Turner, *The Patristic Doctrine of Redemption: A Study of the Development of Doctrine during the First Five Centuries* (London: A. R. Mowbray, 1952).
9. Manlio Simonetti, “A Theology without Learning,” in *The History of Theology*, vol. I: *The Patristic Period*, ed. Angelo Di Berardino, O. S. A., and Basil Studer, O. S. B., trans. Matthew O’Connell (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1997), 186–187.
10. Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
11. Lewis, “Is Theology Poetry?” in *Essay Collection and Other Short Pieces*, ed. Lesley Walmsy (London: HarperCollins, 2000), 18.
12. Karl Rahner, S. J., “Auferstehung des Fleisches,” in *Schriften zur Theologie* (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1955), bd. 2, 211–225.
13. Lewis, “The Weight of Glory,” in *Essay Collection*, 100, 101.
14. This is especially true of the Ransom trilogy and the Narnia saga; for example, the “un-dragoning” of Eustace by Aslan in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), 114–117. The richness of soteriological metaphor in Lewis’s fiction is prohibitive, and so I have chosen to draw on his “theological fantasies” but not his novels. For the latter, see Clyde S. Kilby, *Images of Salvation in the Fiction of C. S. Lewis* (Wheaton, Illinois: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1978).
15. Lewis, “The Funeral of a Great Myth,” in *Essay Collection*, 27.
16. Paul Gavrilyuk, “The Retrieval of Deification: How a Once-Despised Archaism Became an Ecumenical Desideratum,” *Modern Theology* 25.4 (2009): 647–659.
17. See Olson (n. 1 above).
18. Lewis, introduction to St. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, trans. and ed. A. Religious of C. S. M. V. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1993), 7.
19. Lewis also may have been influenced by his spiritual director, Fr. Walter Adams, a member of the “Cowley Fathers” (Society of St. John the Evangelist), and a keen student of the writings of the founder, Fr. Richard Benson, who stressed the theme of divine participation. See Martin Smith, S. S. J. E., *Benson of Cowley* (Oxford: Cowley Publications, 1980), 30–35, 53. On the influence of Hooker on Lewis, see A. M. Allchin, *Participation in God: a Forgotten Strand in Anglican Theology* (Wilton, CT: Morehouse-Barlow, 1998), 8–12.
20. See Tuomo Mannermaa, “Justification and *Theosis* in Lutheran-Orthodox Perspective,” in *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther*, ed. Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 25–41; J. Todd Billings, “John Calvin: United to God through Christ,” in

- Partakers of the Divine Nature*, ed. Michael Christensen and Jeffrey Wittung (Madison: Farleigh Dickinson, 2007), 200–218.
21. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe according to Maximus the Confessor*, trans. Brian Daley, S. J. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003).
  22. Daniel A. Keating, “Justification, Sanctification and Divinization in Thomas Aquinas,” in *Aquinas on Doctrine: A Critical Introduction*, ed. Thomas Weinandy et al. (London: T & T Clark, 2004), 139–158.
  23. Pace Nick Mamatas, “Greek Delight: What if C. S. Lewis Had Been Greek Orthodox?” in *Revisiting Narnia: Fantasy, Myth, and Religion in C. S. Lewis’ Chronicles*, ed. Shanna Caughey (Dallas: BenBella Books, 2005), 178–179, who argues (unconvincingly) that *theosis* is precisely what one does *not* find in the Narnia books.
  24. Lewis, “God in the Dock,” in *Essay Collection*, 34.
  25. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (San Francisco: Harper, 2001), 72.
  26. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (San Francisco: Harper, 2001), 50.
  27. Lewis, *Essay Collection*, 105.
  28. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1964), 70–71.
  29. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (San Francisco: Harper, 2001), 38–39, 94.
  30. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 205–206.
  31. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 222.
  32. Lewis, *Collected Letters*. Volume 2: *Books, Broadcasts, and the War, 1931–1949*, ed. Walter Hooper (San Francisco: Harper, 2004), 1013.
  33. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 177)
  34. Lewis, *Miracles*, 147.
  35. Lewis, *Miracles*, 177.
  36. Lewis, *Miracles*, 179.
  37. Although space does not admit its consideration here, the divinization of non-human nature is an occasional topic in Lewis’s works, and always considered as dependent upon human fulfillment. See *Miracles*, 102–105; *The Problem of Pain* (San Francisco: Harper, 2001), 140–147; *Great Divorce*, passim, especially 113, 119–120.
  38. Douglas J. Davies, *An Introduction to Mormonism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 80.
  39. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 64.
  40. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm*, 70.
  41. Lewis, *Problem of Pain*, 156.
  42. Lewis, *Collected Letters*, vol. 2, 880.
  43. Lewis, “The Efficacy of Prayer,” in *Essay Collection*, 230–241.

44. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1960), 6. Cf. St. Augustine, Sermon 169.13. See Lewis, *Collected Letters*, Volume 3: *Narnia, Cambridge, and Joy: 1950–1963*, ed. Walter Hooper (San Francisco: Harper, 2007), 1013–1014.
45. Lewis, “Transposition,” in *Essay Collection*, 276–277.
46. Lewis, *Miracles*, 146.
47. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm*, 129; *Collected Letters*, vol. 3, 354–355, 1432; “Answers to Questions on Christianity,” in *Essay Collection*, 322; *Letters to Malcolm*, 49–50.
48. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 161.
49. On this score, William Luther White takes exception to Lewis’s language: “It is not customary for theologians in the West to refer to human beings as *gods*. It is particularly surprising that Lewis used this term so often since he clearly names as the Original Sin the persistent human temptation to ‘be like gods’ [...] Lewis’s reflections on life after death are in several ways more dependent upon Greek categories of thought than they are upon biblical thought. But to refer to people as *gods*, I think, is bound to prove more confusing than helpful.” White, *The Image of Man in C.S. Lewis* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1969), 200.
50. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 40.
51. Lewis, *The Pilgrim’s Regress* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 8.6.
52. Lewis, *Pilgrim’s Regress*, 10.5.
53. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 176.
54. Lewis, *Pilgrim’s Regress*, 10.10.
55. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 163.
56. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 163. Though simply stated, without benefit of Scriptural citation or technical analysis, this assessment concurs with the detailed study of James M. Starr on the meaning of 2 Peter 1:4: “Briefly, our internal analysis revealed the following sequence: Christ calls an individual, who responds by faith and receives knowledge of Christ as Savior and Lord. This knowledge of Christ and the promise of Christ’s return equip the Christ believer to live a life that is appropriate to a Christian, the goal of which is to share in Christ’s nature, viz. his moral excellence in the present, and his eternity and glory in the future.” Starr, *Sharers in Divine Nature: 2 Peter 1:4 in Its Hellenistic Context* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 2000), 227.
57. Lewis, *Problem of Pain*, 46–47.
58. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 192.
59. Adolf Harnack, *Das Wesen des Christentums* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1900), 146.
60. Jules Gross, *The Divinization of the Christian according to the Greek Fathers*, trans. Paul A. Onica (Anaheim, California: A & C Press, 2002), 171–172.
61. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 148–149.
62. Lewis, *Collected Letters*, vol. 2, 748.
63. “[F]riendship is a stage bordering upon that perfection which consists in that love and knowledge of God, so that man from a friend of his fellow man becomes a friend of God, according to the words



- of the Savior in the Gospel: 'I will not now call you servants, but my friends.'" Aelred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual Friendship*, trans. Mary Eugenia Laker, S. S. N. D. (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1974), 2.14.
64. Lewis, *Collected Letters*, vol. 2, 174.
  65. E.g., Colin Duriez, *Tolkien and C. S. Lewis: The Gift of Friendship*. New York: Paulist Press, 2003.
  66. Lewis, *Collected Letters*, vol. 2, 501.
  67. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1960), 61; Armand Nicholi, *The Question of God: C. S. Lewis and Sigmund Freud Debate God, Love, Sex, and the Meaning of Life* (New York: Free Press, 2002), 169–172.
  68. Lewis, *Four Loves*, 58.
  69. Lewis, *Four Loves*, 66.
  70. Lewis, *Four Loves*, 66.
  71. Lewis, *Four Loves*, 80.
  72. Lewis, *Four Loves*, 133.
  73. Lewis, *Collected Letters*, vol. 3, 1432.
  74. Lewis, *Problem of Pain*, 29.
  75. Lewis, *Problem of Pain*, 30.
  76. Lewis, *Four Loves*, 87–88.
  77. Lewis, *Screwtape Letters*, 50–51.
  78. Lewis, *Screwtape Letters*, 53.
  79. Lewis, *Screwtape Letters*, 130–131.
  80. Lewis, "Weight of Glory," 99.
  81. Lewis, *Four Loves*, 89–90.
  82. Hans Küng, *On Being a Christian*, trans. Edward Quinn (New York: Doubleday, 1976), 442.
  83. Lewis, "Man or Rabbit?" in *Essay Collection*, 355.
  84. Lewis, *Problem of Pain*, 34; see also 46.