C.S. Lewis on Holy Scripture

by Philip Graham Ryken, D.Phil.
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At the beginning of The Silver Chair, young Jill Pole finds herself in a wood at the top of a high mountain. She meets a lion there, who gives her the task of finding a lost prince and bringing him back home to Narnia. The lion also gives Jill four signs to guide her on this quest. When he asks her to repeat these four signs, she does not remember them quite as well as she expected. So the lion corrects her and then patiently asks her to repeat the signs until she can say them word-perfect and in the proper order.

Unfortunately, even though she knows the signs by heart, Jill somehow manages to forget most of them by the time she needs them. The first sign pertains to Jill’s traveling companion—a boy who was named Eustace Clarence Scrubb (and almost deserved it). As soon as Eustace sets foot in Narnia, he will meet a dear old friend, whom he is to greet at once so he can gain help for his journey. But by the time the children figure out that the old king of Narnia actually is Eustace’s friend Caspian, the king has sailed away and they have missed their chance. “We’ve muffed the first Sign,” Jill says impatiently. “And now . . . everything is going wrong from the very beginning.”

And so it continues. Later in the story, when the children discover to their dismay that they have also muffed the second and third signs, Jill admits, “It’s my fault. I—I’d given up repeating [them] every night.”

Whether C.S. Lewis meant it this way or not, to me this story has always illustrated the importance and challenge of Holy Scripture in the Christian life—of memorizing Bible verses, spending time in God’s Word every day, and putting what it says into practice. To be faithful to her calling, Jill needed to go back every day to the will of Aslan (for of course he was the lion who sent her on the quest). Yet, as time went on, she was tempted to neglect the daily quiet time when she recited the four signs. And because of this neglect, she and her friends fell into disobedience and confusion, nearly to the point of death.

If there is an analogy here, then it is entirely in keeping with the importance that C.S. Lewis placed on biblical truth for Christian discipleship. For Lewis, Holy Scripture was the supreme authority for faith and practice, and reading the Bible had life-giving influence for the Christian. These writings are “holy,” Lewis said, “inspired,” “the Oracles of God.” The way for us to know God is on the authority of His Word, which provides the data for doing theology.

These strong affirmations of Scripture may seem surprising. Although C.S. Lewis seems to get quoted on almost everything else, he is not cited often on the inspiration and authority of the Bible. There are some good reasons to be hesitant about certain aspects of Lewis’s doctrine of Scripture—reasons that can be explored elsewhere. Yet Lewis (continued on page 10)
Dear Friends,

As we near the half-way point of what we are calling this “Decade of Discipleship,” we are more and more convinced that God is doing something particularly interesting and powerful in His church. Sure, the culture around us is becoming darker (and perhaps accelerating at an alarming rate), but amid the darkness there are lights within the church that are shining brighter and brighter.

The church tends to prosper during the tougher times. There are few places remaining where going to church is a social advantage, and therefore the church – with exceptions of course - is drawing those who are seeking an authentic relationship with Jesus. Pastors everywhere should be focused on how to help those believers grow and to train them to share their faith in this darker and darker culture. Both Tom Tarrants’ article on true conversion and Joel Woodruff’s article on conversational apologetics and evangelism will help pastors and others address this need.

C. S. Lewis inspires much of the work at the Institute, and Phil Ryken, President of Wheaton College, describes in his article Lewis’s understanding of the enormous importance of scripture and how it is the foundation for understanding God. Those who see God’s beauty demonstrated through art will appreciate Connally Gilliam’s article examining the distinctions Calvin intended in his critical writings about the visual arts. And the power of song and music to communicate God’s truth can be seen in David Calhoun’s article on the famous hymn writer, Frances Havergal.

All believers need to be prepared to “give the reason for the hope that you have.” (1 Peter 3:15). Communicating that belief in this pluralistic culture is a challenge, but one that we should welcome. People are hungry for the truth, and they are looking to live a meaningful, authentic life. We hope this issue of Knowing & Doing helps prepare you just a little better as you seek to help others understand God’s love and his saving grace.

Sincerely,

Kerry A. Knott | K.Knott@cslewisinstitute.org
John Calvin and the Visual Arts: Dueling Cavaliers?

Part One of a Two Part Series on the Arts and Theology

by Connally Gilliam
C.S. Lewis Institute Fellow

Have you ever had a war take place inside your head? Imagine two conflicting forces, each claiming to be truth and each stubbornly refusing to bow to the other. In my mind, there has been such a standoff. Like those who are about to engage in a duel, these two forces have taken their ten paces, turned around, and have aimed their pistols at each other. Who are these cavaliers? They are not living people but caricatured images of John Calvin and Reformed thought on one hand, and the stereotypically flamboyant Artist and the entire world of visual arts on the other.

On the Calvinist side (this in my mind’s eye; please, take no personal offense!) we find restrictive, restricted, repressive, reformed religion. The walls of churches are white washed, bare and blank, matching the surrounding faces. The stiff figures look right at home—as if part of the architecture—sitting on the hard, straight-backed wooden benches. Their lips are tightly pursed while clenched hands sit firmly on cold laps.

On the other side dances the wildly unorthodox, mystical, mysterious, exasperating, and exhilarating Artist. This composite composer is a combination of Caravaggio, who painted the sumptuous Bacchus, and Monet, who rendered his Water Lilies. There is a bit of Picasso flaunting his fractured Demoiselles D’Avignon and Jackson Pollock running around, splashing erratic color.

Is there any hope for reconciliation between these seemingly opposed forces? Can the two dueling sides ever come together? Is there, in fact, maybe at the root of this battle, a gross misunderstanding? Could Calvin and “Visual Arts” actually be friends? Those more familiar with Reformed thought might instantly assert a definitive yes. But for many, resounding affirmation is not the first imagined response of the father of Reformed thought when asked about space in his (and his legacy’s) thinking for the visual Artist and his or her creation. So if we are going to avoid a potentially disastrous explosion inside my head (and I would love to do so), then it is worth taking a closer look.

Back we must go to the original sources to understand this image of Calvin, the seeming foe of visual arts. We must travel back to sixteenth-century Geneva, Switzerland, to the office of one pastor, teacher, preacher, and theologian: John Calvin. His brow furrowed in concentration, he puts his pen to paper and begins to write: “It Is Unlawful to Attribute a Visible Form to God, and Generally Whoever Sets up Idols Revolts against the True God.” Thus begins chapter 11 of the first book (“The Knowledge of God the Creator”) of his Institutes of the Christian Religion. And there begins what seems to some like a short circuit in the connection between Reformed Christianity and the visual arts.

Calvin: The Nemesis of Visual Arts?

Aside from a short paragraph on “The functions and limits of art,” the bulk of Calvin’s words about art have to do with the images of God that are used in worship. Calvin essentially lays out a defense for the iconoclasm practiced by sixteenth-century Protestants everywhere. “Ha!” one-half of my brain says, “Calvin was anti visual arts after all. If he wrote to support the destruction of beautiful images, religious art even, he was obviously an aesthetic nitwit with an axe to grind toward those who were more creative and more sensuous than himself.” But perhaps that brain half needs to relax for a moment, suspending judgment until the whole story is told.

Calvin wrote as he did against images within a context of image misuse and abuse in the late medieval church. If we want to understand his story, we need to go back further, this time to the world of Gothic (continued on page 14)
True Conversion

by Thomas A. Tarrants, III, D.Min.
Vice President of Ministry, C.S. Lewis Institute

There are two roads through life and only two, and every human being is a traveler on one or the other. Each road is entered by one of two gates and leads to one of two destinations: eternal life or destruction. This is why Jesus urges people:

Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few. (Matt. 7:13–14)

In these verses Jesus highlights the decisive choice that faces every human being: will I embrace life in the kingdom of God, or will I remain in the kingdom of this world? Which road are you on?

As Jesus’s words show, true conversion is necessary, difficult, and rare. In light of this very sobering fact, have you ever seriously explored what is required to enter the kingdom of God, that is, to become a true child of God? Of all the important questions in life, this is the most important. It is the one question we must get right, for our eternal destiny hangs on it.

Because there is much confusion today about conversion, it is important that we look carefully at what the New Testament teaches about this vital subject.

Essential Elements

Our starting point is to clarify what we mean by conversion. The key words in the Old and New Testaments that guide our understanding (the Hebrew word shuv and the Greek word epistrepho) commonly mean “to turn, turn back, or turn around.” They signify a change of direction, what we might call a reversing of course or an about face. But when used theologically, both words mean “to change direction in life by turning or returning to the true God.” This necessarily involves turning from other gods (or self) and from sinful attitudes and behaviors.

Repentance (the Greek word metanoeo) is an essential element of true conversion and is not optional. John the Baptist focused his ministry on calling the people of Israel to “repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 3:2). He required those who accepted his message to submit to baptism and to “bear fruit in keeping with repentance” (Matt. 3:6, 8). Repentance for John was not an empty word connected with a ceremonial washing. Rather, it denoted a radical change of mind and heart toward God, a recognition of and sorrow for one’s sins against God and neighbor, resulting in a new direction of life characterized by the fruit of obedience to God.

A succinct definition of repentance is “a godly sorrow for one’s sin along with a resolution to turn from it.”

While repentance is a command that requires human response, it is not something that lies within one’s unaided ability to do but is ultimately a gift of God (Acts 11:18).

When John was jailed for his preaching, Jesus launched His ministry with the same message, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 4:17). The difference between the message of Jesus and John was that the kingdom of God heralded by John was now actively present in the person and works of the King Himself, Jesus. Thus Jesus added to repentance the call for faith in Himself and in the good news He proclaimed: “Repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15).

Faith is the second essential element of true conversion. Faith in God was implicit in John’s preaching, but faith in Jesus is explicit in Jesus’s message. Sometimes Jesus calls people to “repent and believe,” other times to “repent,” still other times to “believe.” However, whenever He uses only one, the other is implied, for they are like opposite sides of a coin. To use a different
metaphor, turning to Christ in faith is like making a u-turn on the roadway of life; by its very nature it requires you to turn from the direction you were previously traveling and proceed in the opposite direction. This turning is an essential prerequisite of conversion, but repentance itself does not save us. We are saved by grace alone through faith in Christ alone.

Entering the kingdom of God through repentance and faith were consistent themes of Jesus’s ministry: “Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:5); “there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (Luke 15:10); “unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins” (John 8:24); “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live” (John 11:25); “thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations” (Luke 24:46).

After the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, the apostles proclaimed the message Jesus had given them. It consisted of presenting the facts that Jesus was the Son of God, who died for our sins and was raised from the dead, followed by an appeal to repent, believe the good news, and be baptized. This core message appears on the day of Pentecost on the lips of Peter in his sermon about Jesus. The crowd, which had been implicated in Jesus’s death, believed Peter’s message, were “cut to the heart,” and asked, “Brothers, what shall we do?” Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

Later Jesus appeared to Paul, made him an apostle, and commissioned him to preach the gospel (Acts 26:16–18), which includes a call to repentance and faith. As Paul recounts to the Ephesian elders: “I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable . . . testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:20–21). The specific content of Paul’s gospel message is spelled out when he reminds the Corinthians

of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you . . .

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve.” (1 Cor. 15:1–5)

In Romans 1:16 Paul described this message as “the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.”

Thus far we have briefly noted that the twin elements of repentance and faith are essential for true conversion. As John Stott says so well, “Repentance and faith are in fact the constituent elements of conversion, when viewed from the standpoint of man’s experience . . . [R]epentance plus faith equals conversion, and no man dare say he is converted who has not repented as well as believed.” Because of their vital importance and their role in giving (continued on page 18)
Imagine that if you are reading this article you’re pretty smart. God has given you a good mind. You may have done well in school, or you may be blessed with good common sense and the street smarts to excel in the modern world. And yet when you compare yourself to bright followers of Jesus, such as C.S. Lewis, Ravi Zacharias, or Tim Keller, you don’t feel all that competent when it comes to talking knowledgeably about your faith in Jesus around smart nonbelievers. I can relate. I consider myself intelligent, but when it comes to thinking quickly on my feet to respond to people’s questions or statements about religion, I often flounder. (And I even went to seminary!) I’m like those politicians who can sound and look great when they have Teleprompters in front of them to help deliver prepared and rehearsed remarks. But if they have to go off script—look out! You just never know what’s going to come out of their mouths, and usually it doesn’t come off sounding all that erudite. In fact, to use a bad “S” word that my daughters tell me I shouldn’t say, it sounds stupid. And I must admit, I don’t like to feel or look stupid, especially in front of my bright friends.

If you are like me, this may give you some consolation: you and I are in the majority. Not very many followers of Christ have the unusual gift of Evangelism with a capital “E” or the gift of Apologetics with a capital “A.” And yet I want you to know that there is hope for us. Believe it or not, God can still use us in amazing ways to help others get closer to being reconciled with the Creator of the universe. In fact, even though we may not have the gift of Evangelism or Apologetics, God has given us a very important role and calls us to be actively involved in evangelism and apologetics. Relatively few are called to be evangelists, but everyone is called to be a witness (Acts 1:8) and make disciples (Matt. 28:18–20).

The Great Commission in Matthew 28:18–20 is given to all disciples of Jesus. None of us is exempt from the command to go into all the world and to make disciples, teaching them to obey all that Jesus commanded. This isn’t optional for the follower of Christ. And as Peter puts it so well, you and I should “Have no fear of them [non-Christians] . . . always being prepared to make a defense [apologia] to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect” (1 Pet. 3:14–15 ESV). These two scriptural passages make it clear that you and I are to be involved in evangelism and apologetics. This is to be a part of the normative life of a believer.

One of the best definitions of evangelism I ever heard was that it’s one beggar showing another beggar where to find bread. If Jesus, the Bread of Life, has saved you and me from spiritual starvation and death, it seems only natural that we should share this good news with others. And apologetics can be simply defined as giving a reasonable explanation or defense of our faith in Jesus. We shouldn’t feel sorry or ashamed to believe what we do; rather, if we take time to learn about our beliefs, we’ll discover that the wisest Being in the universe, God, has given us logical, thoughtful reasons for putting our trust in Him. While faith is involved in trusting Jesus, it isn’t a blind faith with no rationale or thinking behind it.

I’m not saying that doing evangelism and apologetics is going to be easy. Peter goes on to say that when you are giving a defense for our faith, you are to have “a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil.”
(1 Pet. 3:16–17). In other words, while we hope and expect that God will work in people’s hearts and that some people become part of the Lord’s family through our words and testimony, others will react negatively to our convictions and belief in Jesus.

The good news is that Jesus promised to provide us with the most powerful help available on the planet, the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus says, “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (John 14:26 ESV). So, if we can leave the conversion part in the hands of the Holy Spirit, live rightly, listen to others, and speak truthfully in love, we can live with the responses to our witness for Christ whether positive or negative.

There is some debate in theological circles as to the difference between apologetics and evangelism, some stating that apologetics is pre-evangelism—the tearing down of barriers to faith and belief—that makes possible evangelism, the sharing of the gospel message. Others will say that apologetics is one aspect of evangelism. Personally and practically, I don’t think it matters. The key is that we are taking the daily steps in our life to be faithful to the call that God has given to each of His disciples to give reasons for our faith and to tell others that they too can be saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

Fortunately I’ve discovered that the Lord has raised up some winsome and clever brothers and sisters in Christ who have thought deeply about how we can better serve as evangelists and apologists. Stalwarts such as Randy Newman, Gregory Koukl, Lee Strobel, Alister McGrath, Ravi Zacharias, Michael Ramsden, Amy Orr-Ewing, Art Lindsley, and, yes, even old C.S. Lewis have something to contribute to this arena in today’s changing world. These gifted apologists and evangelists have written books and produced videos and audio recordings that make this endeavor more accessible to people like you and me. They have developed tactics, strategies, and tools that can assist those of us who would like to better defend and share our faith as commanded by Jesus. As I’ve tried to learn from these gifted Apologists and Evangelists, several introductory lessons stand out to me.

First of all, apologetics and evangelism are contact sports—played out on the field of relational life. We have to rub shoulders with non-believers in order to be effective. Just listening to lectures on your i-pod, or reading books and becoming fat and happy on knowledge about how to prove the Christian faith is not going to have any effect on the world around us. We need to find ways to implement and share the truths that we have been given. We can’t be content with staying in our Christian bubble and never dialoguing with others. Once we’re off the bench and applying what we’ve learned about apologetics and evangelism in our relationships at work, home, church, and at the grocery store, there is a good chance that we may get bumped around. At the same time, as we begin to actively engage with people about our faith, we will also become aware of the Holy Spirit working in and around our personal sphere of influence. This will encourage us and inspire us to continue the practice of apologetics and evangelism.

Second, I encourage you to thank God for the great minds of the Christian faith from the past and the present. Prior to the Enlightenment in the 1700s, it was assumed that most of the brightest intellects were followers of Christ. After all, Western Civilization was founded on Judeo-Christian principles that provided the framework for scientific and philosophic discovery. With the understanding that God had created the world and then given mankind the command to “multiply and subdue the earth” came the implication that...
PROFILE IN FAITH

Frances Ridley Havergal (1836-1879): “Always, Only for My King”

by David B. Calhoun, Ph.D.
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Frances Ridley Havergal was born in Astley, Worcestershire, England, on December 14, 1836.1 She was the youngest of six children born to Jane (Head) and William Havergal, a couple described as “a sterling example of Victorian evangelicalism.”2 Her middle name was after Nicholas Ridley, a Reformation martyr burned at Oxford in 1555. Frances’ father was the minister at Astley. In his study, books by John Calvin stood side by side with the works of Thomas Hooker, Jeremy Taylor, and many of the Puritan divines. He was a fine preacher. A member of his congregation said, “Nobody preaches like Mr. Havergal; he teaches me what I want. I tell you what he does: he takes a text, picks it all to pieces, and shows us what is inside it, and then makes us feel it.”3 William Havergal was also an accomplished musician and composer. His book, Old Church Psalmody, was an influential collection of church music.

Frances grew up in “a large, hospitable and stimulating home in which a mix of tutors, curates, students and suitors engaged in lively conversation.”4 She learned to read by the age of three, and picked up languages listening to the tutorials of her five siblings. When she was nine she helped in teaching a Sunday school class for younger children.

In 1845 Mr. Havergal was appointed rector of St. Nicholas, Worcester, a busy city parish. Frances missed her pleasant country life so much that her father called her “a caged lark.”5 Her mother died in 1848, when Frances was twelve. Two years later she was sent to a private school for girls in London. There she perfected her French, learned Italian, and studied music, art, and the Bible, large portions of which she memorized. Frances had resisted attempts by her parents to encourage her to confess faith in Christ as her Savior, but joyfully did so soon after her fifteenth birthday. She wrote: “I committed my soul to the Saviour … and earth and heaven seemed bright from that moment.”6 In 1851 Mr. Havergal married Caroline Cooke, a friend of his daughter Miriam. Caroline was twenty years younger than her husband and her relationship with Frances, who was very close to her father, became difficult at times.

Frances completed her formal schooling in Düsseldorf, Germany, where her father and stepmother had gone to seek help for his deteriorating eyesight. There she learned German and studied Hebrew, Greek, and Latin.

In 1860 Mr. Havergal, then in failing health, took a very small rural church in Shareshill, a few miles from Wolverhampton. For the next seven years Frances lived with her sister Miriam and her family in Oakhampton House in Astley parish, where she was governess to her two youngest nieces. In December 1867 she went to Shareshill to help care for her father and stepmother. Her father died in 1870, and Caroline eight years later.

On Advent Sunday in 1873, when she was eighteen, Frances was confirmed in Worcester Cathedral. It was a turning point in her life. She knelt before the bishop and followed carefully his words, “Defend, O Lord, this thy child with thy heavenly grace, that she may continue thine for ever, and daily increase in thy Holy Spirit, until she come into thy everlasting kingdom.” “If ever my heart followed a prayer,” she wrote, “it did then, if ever it thrilled with earnest longing not unmixed with joy, it did at the words ‘Thine for ever.’”7 That day she wrote a short poem expressing her feeling:
Oh! “Thine forever,” what a blessed thing
To be for ever His who died for me!
My Saviour, all my life thy praise I’ll sing,
Nor cease my song throughout eternity.

Frances wrote to her sister Maria that she had come to believe that Christ who had “cleansed me had power to keep me clean; so I utterly yielded myself to him, and utterly trusted him to keep me.”

Frances Havergal was a gifted young woman. She excelled in languages and played the piano and sang beautifully. She found her life’s work in writing poems, hymns, and devotional books. She produced five “Royal books,” she called them, beginning with My King or Daily Thoughts for the King’s Children. These little books, in which she gave a meditation or poem for each day of the month, were a blessing to many. In 1879 the three hundred pastors who attended the annual conference at Spurgeon’s Pastors’ College were given two of Miss Haver-
gal’s Royal Books “as a choice and dainty morsel for their spiritual refreshment and quickening.”

Frances also wrote books for children, one of which had the title Little Pillows. Just as we want “a nice soft pillow to lay our heads down upon at night,” she wrote, so our hearts want “a pillow too, something to rest upon, some true, sweet word that we might go to sleep upon happily and peacefully.” In a companion book, Morning Bells, she presented “little chimes of Bible music” for children to wake up by.

Frances Havergal’s greatest and most lasting work was the writing of hymns. She loved the old hymns of the church and was inspired by the new hymns and gospel songs of Charlotte Elliott (1789-1871) and Fanny Crosby (1820-1915). Frances wrote in a letter to a friend, “I hope you will get to know Charlotte Elliott; it is an honour from God to have had it given her, to write what she has written.”

When someone asked, “Who is Fanny Crosby?” Frances replied, “She is a blind lady, whose heart can see splendidly in the sunshine of God’s love.” Frances wrote a poem called “A Seeing Heart” about her “dear blind sister over the sea.”

Frances herself wrote hundreds of hymns, some of which are loved and sung by Christians around the world. She was concerned to write beautiful and memorable words joined with good music, and she was even more committed to writing hymns that clearly expressed biblical truth. In some of the manuscript copies of her hymns, she attached a scripture reference to each line. Her hymn “Without Christ,” based on Ephesians 2:12, contains a verse for each of its one hundred and twelve lines!

“I Gave My Life for Thee”

One of her earliest published hymns was inspired by a painting she saw in Germany. It showed Christ suffering on the cross, with the words “All this I did for thee. What hast thou done for me?” Deeply moved, seventeen-year-old Frances jotted down some thoughts that quickly came to her mind. Back (continued on page 26)
C.S. Lewis on Holy Scripture
(continued from page 1)

generally had a high view of Scripture, not a low one, and his defense of biblical truth can nourish our confidence in the Bible as the Word of God.

Lewis was far more concerned with what Scripture said than with what the scholars said.

Submission to Scripture

To begin, C.S. Lewis believed that Christian doctrine should always be surrendered to Scripture. He had a healthy respect for theological tradition, as codified in the creeds of the church. But his theological norm was the Bible, which typically he referred to as “Holy Scripture.” If we believe that God has spoken, Lewis wrote in a letter to the editor of Theology, naturally we will “listen to what He has to say.”

In his personal letters, Lewis urged his friends and other correspondents to follow this principle and submit to biblical authority. Here are a few examples:

“What we are committed to believing is whatever can be proved from Scripture.”

“Yes, Pascal does directly contradict several passages in Scripture and must be wrong.”

“I take it as a first principle that we must not interpret any one part of Scripture so that it contradicts other parts.”

In giving these exhortations, Lewis took both sides of a doctrinal equation: we believe what the Bible affirms, and we do not believe what the Bible denies. Furthermore, he insisted on accepting the unity and consistency of the Bible.

We see Lewis applying the principle of letting Scripture interpret Scripture to two of the doctrines he found it hardest to understand. One was the sovereignty of God over human suffering. In a letter offering spiritual counsel, he wrote:

The two things one must NOT do are (a) To believe, on the strength of Scripture or on any other evidence, that God is in any way evil. (In Him is no darkness at all.) (b) To wipe off the slate any passage which seems to show that He is. Behind that apparently shocking passage, be sure, there lurks some great truth which you don’t understand. If one ever does come to understand it, one will see that [He] is good and just and gracious in ways we never dreamed of. Till then, it must be just left on one side.

Another example of Lewis’s submission to Holy Scripture is his affirmation of the doctrine of hell, simply on the grounds of biblical authority. In The Problem of Pain he wrote, “There is no doctrine which I would more willingly remove from Christianity than this, if it lay in my power. But it has the full support of Scripture and, specially, of Our Lord’s own words.”

Lewis was far more concerned with what Scripture said than with what the scholars said. When one of his readers—who was tempted to come under the influence of modernist theology—wrote to express her doubts about the Virgin Birth, Lewis sent her back to Holy Scripture: “Your starting point about this doctrine will not, I think, be to collect the opinion of individual clergymen, but to read Matthew Chapter I and Luke I and II.” C.S. Lewis believed strongly that Christian doctrine should be derived from and surrendered to Holy Scripture.

The Bible as Literature

Another strength of Lewis’s approach to Scripture was his sensitive reading of each biblical text according to its literary form. Lewis read the Bible as literature decades before it became fashionable to do so. Not that he read the Bible merely as literature, of course. In fact, he was highly critical of any attempt to claim that the Bible had unique literary majesty apart from its sacred authorship and saving message. “Unless the religious claims of the Bible are again acknowledged,” Lewis wrote, “its literary claims will, I think, be given only ‘mouth honour’ and that decreasingly. For it is, through and through, a sacred book.”

In reading the Bible as literature, Lewis was in his element. His primary calling was as an English professor, and in this he was virtually
without peer. While at Oxford he wrote a famous volume on the sixteenth century for the Oxford History of English Literature, and in 1954 he was awarded the chair of Mediaeval and Renaissance Literature at Cambridge University.

Lewis thus came to Holy Scripture as a reader, not a theologian—someone for whom the Bible was always more than literature, but could never be less. This is one of the things that he appreciated most about the Bible, both as a Christian and as a literary critic: in the Old and New Testaments a variety of literary forms—chronicles, poems, moral and political diatribes, romances, and what have you—have been “taken into the service of God’s word.”

Naturally, Lewis insisted on reading every part of the Bible according to its genre. Because the Bible is literature, it “cannot properly be read except as literature; and the different parts of it as the different sorts of literature they are.” There are even different kinds of narrative—and it would be illogical to read them all in the same way. One has to take the Bible for what it is, Lewis insisted, and it “demands incessantly to be taken on its own terms.”

When it came to biblical history—especially the Gospels—Lewis insisted that it should be read precisely as history. In one essay he criticized Bible scholars who regarded the Gospel of John as a poetic, spiritual “romance” rather than as historical narrative. Lewis frankly doubted that such scholars knew very much about literature at all. “I have been reading poems, romances, vision-literature, legends, myths all my life,” he wrote. “I know what they are like.” So if someone “tells me that something in a Gospel is legend or romance,” he wrote, “I want to know how many legends and romances he has read, how well his palate is trained in detecting them by the flavor; not how many years he has spent on that Gospel.”

For his own part, Lewis had little doubt that the Gospel of John was reliable history. “Either this is reportage,” he wrote, “or else some unknown writer in the second century, without known predecessors or successors, suddenly anticipated the whole technique of modern, novelistic, realistic, narrative.”

C.S. Lewis generally found critical Bible scholars “to lack literary judgment, to be imperceptive about the very quality of the texts they are reading.” He admitted that this was “a strange charge to bring against men who have been steeped in those books all their lives.” “But that might be just the trouble,” he wrote:

A man who has spent his youth and manhood in the minute study of New Testament texts and of other people’s studies of them, whose literary experience of those texts lacks any standard of comparison such as can only grow from a wide and deep and genial experience of literature in general, is . . . very likely to miss the obvious things about them.

To use the analogy that Lewis gave, such scholars “claim to see fern-seed and can’t see an elephant ten yards away in broad daylight.” They “ask me to believe they can read between the lines of the old texts; the evidence is their obvious inability to read (in any sense worth discussing) the lines themselves.”

Christianity versus Liberalism

In defending John and the other Gospels against their critics, C.S. Lewis was steadfastly committed to the historicity and validity of biblical miracles—another strength of his reading of Scripture. He not only believed in miracles but also defended them against their critics. In fact, Lewis saw this as the bright line that divided authentic Christianity from all its pretenders. He wrote: “To me the real distinction is . . . between religion with a real supernaturalism and salvationism on the one hand, and all watered-down and modernist versions on the other.”

What marked the dividing line for Lewis were the biblical miracles: “They are recorded as events on this earth which affected human senses. They are the sort of thing we can describe literally. If Christ turned water into wine, and we had been present, we could have seen,
C.S. Lewis on Holy Scripture

smelled, and tasted . . . It is either fact, or legend, or lie. You must take it or leave it.”

Readers who are familiar with the “Lord, liar, or lunatic” tri-lemma that Lewis posed in Mere Christianity have encountered this type of apologetic reasoning before. When it came to miracles, including the miracle of the Incarnation, it was all or nothing for Lewis.

What was not an option, as far as he was concerned, was to rule out the very possibility of miracles the way that modern, supposedly scientific scholars tended to do. Here is what Lewis wrote in “Fern-Seed and Elephants” about biblical scholarship that denied the miraculous:

Scholars, as scholars, speak on [this question] with no more authority than anyone else. The canon “If miraculous, unhistorical” is one they bring to their study of texts, not one they have learned from it. If one is speaking of authority, the united authority of all the Biblical critics in the world counts here for nothing. On this they speak simply as men; men obviously influenced by, and perhaps insufficiently critical of, the spirit of the age they grew up in.

It was because he believed in miracles—including, supremely, the miraculous resurrection of Jesus Christ—that Lewis was so critical of liberal scholarship on the Bible. He spent far more time defending the Bible than he did criticizing it, which he hardly did at all.

C.S. Lewis was so anti-liberal that many of his contemporaries labeled him as a fundamentalist. Here is how he explained their attitude toward his theology:

I have been suspected of being what is called a Fundamentalist. That is because I never regard any narrative as unhistorical simply on the ground that it includes the miraculous. Some people find the miraculous so hard to believe that they cannot imagine any reason for my acceptance of it other than a prior belief that every sentence of the Old Testament has historical or scientific truth. But this I do not hold.

Needless to say, Lewis’s defense of miracles led many liberal scholars to treat him with suspicion. For his own part, Lewis regarded liberal scholars as wolves among the sheep, especially “the divines engaged in New Testament criticism,” whom he held chiefly responsible for undermining theological orthodoxy.

Lewis exacted his revenge in the fiction he wrote. The Screwtape Letters, That Hideous Strength, and The Great Divorce all feature liberal clergy who are held up to mockery. Lewis treated them this way because he believed that liberal Christianity was not real Christianity at all. Instead, it was:

a theology which denies the historicity of nearly everything in the Gospels to which Christian life and affections and thought have been fastened for nearly two millennia—which either denies the miraculous altogether or, more strangely, after swallowing the camel of the Resurrection strains at such gnats as the feeding of the multitudes.

Lewis proceeded to explain what happens when this kind of Christianity, so-called, is offered to an ordinary person who has recently come to faith in Christ. Either the convert will leave a liberal church and find one where biblical Christianity is actually taught, or else eventually he will leave Christianity altogether. “If he agrees with your version [of the Christian faith],” Lewis said to his liberal opponents, “he will no longer call himself a Christian and no longer come to church.”

Lewis made a similar point in Letters to Malcolm by asking a rhetorical question: “By the
way, did you ever meet, or hear of, anyone who was converted from skepticism to a ‘liberal’ or ‘de-mythologized’ Christianity?” Lewis never had, which led him to claim “that when unbelievers come in at all, they come in a good deal further.” What he meant by “a good deal further” was authentic faith in the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

The place where Lewis learned the difference between authentic and inauthentic faith was in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, which he believed to be the very Word of God. If we are wise, we will follow his example by reading Holy Scripture on its own terms, fully submitting to its authority, and completely surrendering to God’s will for our lives—lest, like Jill Pole and Eustace Scrubb, we miss the signs and lose our way.


Notes:

2. C.S. Lewis, Silver Chair, 109.
5. See my chapter (from which the present article is excerpted) in the forthcoming book The Romantic Rationalist, edited by John Piper and David Mathis (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, in press).
9. Lewis, letter to Emily McIay, August 3, 1953, ibid., 354.
15. Lewis, Reflections on the Psalms, 111.
16. Ibid., 3.
20. Ibid., 155.
21. Ibid., 154.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid., 157.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.

What we are committed to believing, is whatever can be proved from Scripture.

C.S. Lewis
cathedrals, filled with candles and crucifixes, smells and bells, statues of saints, paintings of popes, altars of gold. This is the world that the medieval Christian knew as the center of culture, the heartbeat of Christendom.

In his book *Zwingli and the Arts*, Charles Garstade describes the experience of entering the cathedral in Zurich (prior to the iconoclastic activities of the reformer Zwingli):

... the pilgrim was prepared symbolically on entering the chapel, since over the portal leading down into it was a wall painting of Christ standing in the tomb with instruments of His passion on either side. Once the pilgrim had descended, he would have seen a wooden sepulcher under a canopy supported by pillars, likewise of brilliantly painted wood. Surround the sepulcher were large wooden statues of Mary Magdelene, Mary and St. John, while wrapped in a white coverlet with silken tassels, was laid a wooden replica of the body of Christ, which was removed (through a hole in the vaulting contrived especially for the purpose) from the grave on Easter Sunday.²

Simply entering the church meant encountering an image extravaganza. Everywhere the Christian looked, there were saints and Christ images staring back. (“Ah,” says half my brain, “I’d love to contemplate all that beauty.”)

The medieval Christian, however, did more than simply contemplate these objects as we might do today in a beautiful home or an art museum, letting the “feel” soften or even instruct our hearts. The medieval Christian spent much of his or her time in faithful veneration before these images. Veneration meant giving honor to the saint (or worship to the Christ) whose reality existed behind the painted or sculpted image. So a Christian might come in off the street and light a candle in front of a particular crucifix (there were seventeen altars to choose from in the Zurich cathedral³), knowing that his homage rested not on the gold, stone, wood, or pigment out of which the image was created. Rather his praise and prayer went up to heaven, invoking (via the saints, Mary, or Christ) the good grace of God. Thomas Aquinas put it this way: “Religion doesn’t offer worship to images considered as mere things in themselves, but as images drawing us to God incarnate.”⁴

Trouble, however, started just at this point. As Scripture was unavailable in the vernacular (which actually made little difference, as the majority of people were illiterate), and as services—except for the sermon—were conducted primarily in Latin, most people missed the subtle distinction between worshiping/honoring the prototype and worshiping/honoring the graven image. As a result, images in churches came to be not only beautiful objects that could lift the mind and heart toward a focus on the beautiful Creator; they became power sources that the good Christian should tap for grace. Even the Eucharist need not be understood; one must simply get a look at the host to receive a healthy portion of God’s grace.⁵

Such is the context into which Calvin writes. And write he does. His attack on images (specifically images of God that were used in worship) emerges not as a direct attack against the visual arts, but against the idols that he believes have taken God’s place. His argument is clear and simple: People want to control God, so they “reduce God, who is immeasurable and incomprehensible, to a five-foot measure.”⁶ The
visual image becomes a dumb icon whose grace is invoked at human bidding. No one need wait upon the true Giver of grace, the triune God. Such an understanding of images, said Calvin, teaches “insipid fiction” about God—that God is at humanity’s bidding and not the other way around. This, contends Calvin, infringes upon God’s glory: “Images are unworthy of God’s majesty because they diminish the fear of him and increase error.”

At this point, though, the artist within me aches to ask, “Couldn’t images be put in their proper place, as objects of contemplation, and not be given ‘idol’ status?” Calvin concludes no. Not only are images problematic because people have abused them and thereby dethroned God, but images of God are, he argues, implicitly idols, the product of deceitful hearts: “The mind begets an idol,” says Calvin, “the hand gives it birth.” That is why, Calvin contends, God said, “You shall make no graven images” (Exod. 20:4). Romans 1 says our nature is to be idolatrous, so if images are there, people will inevitably worship them. The best bet, insists Calvin, is to rid one’s heart of the images and, in obedience to God’s commands, do away with all the visual depictions that might be deemed implicitly idolatrous. (As an aside, this is where John Calvin and Martin Luther differed: Luther emphasized that idolatry is solely a heart issue; one can make an idol out of anything that is good [e.g., one’s spouse], but that does not mean we should eliminate that object or person. And though I tend to agree with Luther, I cannot help but recognize that in some way Calvin seemed to understand the undeniable power of sensuous images to affect the heart; the artist in me knows he is right in this.)

Convinced then that visual images of Jesus Christ in particular are inextricably linked with false understandings of God, Calvin nevertheless reminds us that not every visual image need be eliminated. Toward the end of chapter 11, Calvin forwardly declares:

> I am not gripped by the superstition of thinking absolutely no images permissible. But because sculpture and painting are gifts of God, I seek a pure and legitimate use of each, lest those things which the Lord has conferred upon us for his glory and our good be not only polluted by perverse misuse but also turned to our destruction.

Perhaps then Calvin was not so much an oppressive aesthetic nit-wit, as he was a pastor concerned for the freedom of heart and the right grasp of grace for all of his parishioners.

Does this life’s sensuous beauty and its related pleasure have any intrinsic value?

Calvinism: Disparaging the Senses?

Pondering these insights together, the two cavaliers inside my mind stare at each other long enough to almost smile, but then . . . the Artist cries out, “Wait just one minute! So perhaps you make a decent case for not painting images of Jesus Christ, and perhaps you have pastoral inklings—but in your Institutes, Calvin, you speak in high, aloof words about an immutable, ineffable God. You seem like a cold Platonist. Do you know what it is to be a human? Do you value what it is to sweat or smile or cry or drink a glass of wine? If you don’t value these things, how could you ever value life as embodied in sculpture or painting? What is this ‘pure and legitimate use’ of which you speak, anyhow? Is it a cold utilitarianism: for those who cannot read words, give them images? Does this life’s sensuous beauty and its related pleasure have any intrinsic value?”

Admittedly, Calvin does emphasize that God is an “incompressible essence” (and obviously that would not lend itself toward a visual depiction), and he does declare that “the best way to contemplate the divine is where minds are lifted above themselves with admiration.” God is for Calvin undoubtedly greater than we can ever understand. But contrary to what the Artist within wonders so vehemently, in both the content and the language of his writing Calvin seems to celebrate the immanence of God. In his preface to The New Testament he writes:

> The little singing birds are singing to God; the beasts cry unto Him; the elements...
are in awe of Him; the mountains echo His name; the waves and the fountains cast their glances at Him; grass and flowers laugh out to Him. Nor indeed need we labor to see Him, afar, since each of us may find Him within himself, inasmuch as we are upheld and preserved by His power dwelling within us.\(^ {13}\)

Clearly Calvin understands both the nearness of God and the joys of His very sensuous creation. And in his word choice and use, we see an understanding of what it means to celebrate beauty: his images are vivid, alive, and full of wonder and delight. Historian John McNeill puts it this way: “While his thoughts flow, the words in which he clothes them are chosen with a trained sense of artistic fitness.”\(^ {14}\) Calvin really does believe in the value of visual beauty, not simply the beauty of well-crafted words, a meek spirit, or a changed heart. Thus, in one of his most famous passages about the gifts of God in His creation, he writes:

\[
\text{Has the Lord clothed the flowers with the great beauty that greets our eyes, the sweetness of smell that is wafted upon our nostrils, and yet will it be unlawful for our eyes to be affected by that beauty, or our sense of smell by the sweetness of that odor? . . . Did he not so distinguish colors as to make some more lovely than others? . . . Did he not endow gold and silver, ivory and marble, with a loveliness that renders them more precious than other metals or stones? Did he not, in short, render many things attractive to us, apart from their necessary use?}^{15}\]

A Reformed Vision of the Visual Arts?

The Artist in me begins to exhale.

Calvin, it seems, neither denigrates the senses nor disparages images (with the exception of those he sees as having become idolatrous). Rather, he values the place of beauty, including its nonutilitarian expressions. True, he does not develop his concept of the “pure and legitimate” use of art. But in fairness, he wrote his Institutes in defense of the faith for which many of his close friends had been killed, to “vindicate from undeserved insult my brethren whose death was precious in the sight of the Lord.”\(^ {16}\) He did not write as a contemporary philosopher of art or as the chief curator of the National Gallery of Art.

And so the Artist and Calvin stare quietly at each other, each exhaling. Perhaps, as the Artist recognizes, Calvin has his own story and even makes some good points. So with much less hostility, and a fair dose of humility, the Artist asks, “Um, any suggestions about how I might think of the visual arts?” And with equal humility Calvin replies: “No, not beyond that which I have already offered. But as our sovereign God would have it, many thinkers in my footsteps have articulated a vision of the visual arts that just might help us put down our pistols for keeps.”

Both of their eyes slowly light up; they begin to talk, and this is where the story starts to get really interesting.

Part Two: A Reformed Vision of the Visual Arts: A conversation with Abraham Kuyper,
Nicholas Wolterstorff, C.S. Lewis, and, most important, the Word of God.

Notes:

7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., I.11.2.
10. Ibid., I.11.12.
11. Ibid., I.11.3.
12. Ibid.
16. Ibid.

I do more thoroughly agree with what you say about Art and Literature. To my mind they can only be healthy when they are either (a) admittedly aiming at nothing but innocent recreation or (b) definitely the handmaids of religious or at least moral truth. Dante is alright and Pickwick is alright. But the great serious irreligious art—art for art’s sake—is all balderdash; and incidentally never exists when art is really flourishing. One can say of Art as an author I recently read said of love (sexual love I mean), “It ceases to be a devil when it ceases to be a god.” Isn’t that well put?

C.S. Lewis

RECOMMENDED READING

Art for God’s Sake: A Call to Recover the Arts, by Philip Graham Ryken, P & R Publishing

The creation sings to us with the visual beauty of God’s handiwork. But what of man-made art? Much of it is devoid of sacred beauty and is often rejected by Christians. Christian artists struggle to find acceptance within the church. If all of life is to be viewed as under the lordship of Christ, can we rediscover what God’s plan is for the arts? Philip Graham Ryken brings into sharp focus a biblical view of the arts and the artists who make art for God’s sake. This is a concise yet comprehensive treatment of the major issue of the arts for all who seek answers.
True Conversion
(continued from page 5)

us assurance of salvation, we will examine the nature of each in more detail.

True saving faith produces love for and obedience to God and Christ, leading to increasing transformation into Christ’s moral likeness.

A Closer Look at Repentance

Repentance is the negative side of conversion. The Bible speaks of two types of repentance: godly and worldly. Godly repentance is not simply feeling guilty or regretful about past sins. Nor is it simply a resolution to change or turn over a new leaf, as some people do on New Year’s Day. Rather, it is rooted in the recognition of our personal sins before a holy God to whom we are accountable and a determination to abandon them. J.I. Packer’s description of genuine repentance is particularly clear and helpful:

The New Testament word for repentance means changing one’s mind so that one’s views, values and ways are changed and one’s whole life is lived differently. This change is radical, both inwardly and outwardly: mind and judgment, will and affections, behavior and lifestyle, motives and purposes, are all involved. Repenting means starting to live a new life.4

We are drawn to this repentance on the human level mainly by the kindness of God toward us, the desire for eternal life, and the fear of hell.

There are three aspects to godly repentance.5 The intellectual aspect is a recognition of and awakening to the seriousness of our sins against God and others; it includes a sense of guilt, remorse, and a desire to turn from our wicked ways. The emotional aspect involves a sorrow for sin and awareness of its offensiveness to God. The volitional aspect involves an inner change of direction in life and is probably the most important. It moves us toward God and His will and away from sinful thoughts, attitudes, and deeds and the desires that give rise to them. Like a cable of three strands, all are intertwined in genuine repentance, though some may be stronger than others.

A Closer Look at Saving Faith

Saving faith requires a longer explanation because so much confusion surrounds it today. We will begin by noting what saving faith is not.

1. More than 90 percent of Americans believe God exists and that they will go to heaven when they die. But the mere acknowledgment of God’s existence is not saving faith. As James 2:19 says, “Even the demons believe—and shudder.” Certainly we must believe that God exists to be saved, “for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him” (Heb. 11:6). But as this verse also indicates, true faith trusts the God of the Bible and seeks Him with expectation of response. A somewhat related idea of faith combines a vague, dreamy concept of God with the popular romantic notion that what’s important is not the destination but the journey, and that it is noble and heroic to be always seeking, and never finding, and yet journeying on with hopefulness. Another common idea is the idea that faith is a leap in the dark. The Bible clearly teaches just the opposite: faith is a confident leap into the light—into the arms of Jesus Christ who is the Light of the world.

2. Interestingly, research shows that many Protestants believe that people are saved by faith and works and go to heaven if their good works outweigh the bad. James tells us that faith that does not produce works is not saving faith: “What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? . . . faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (James 2:14, 17). James is not saying that we are saved by faith plus works, but by a faith that manifests itself in works, just as Paul teaches in Ephesians 2:10.

3. Saving faith is not temporary. Note Jesus’s teaching in the parable of the sower. “As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one...
who hears the word with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away” (Matt. 13:20–21). Contrast this to true faith, which is lifelong and fruit bearing. In the parable Jesus continues: “the one who hears the word and understands it . . . bears fruit” (Matt.13:23–24). Some true converts go from strength to strength in following Christ, but others may have ups and downs—may even backslide for a time—but they will persevere in trusting Christ as Lord and Savior until their life’s end.

4. Faith in the institutional church is not saving faith. The church is certainly important. And some Roman Catholics and Protestants believe that faith in the church is sufficient to get them to heaven. Just attend church and be a member in good standing (receive the sacraments, accept what is taught, contribute what you can, do good works), and God will be satisfied and all will be well. However, the Bible knows nothing of such an idea. Rather, it teaches us that the object of faith is all important; that object is Jesus Christ as He is presented to us in Holy Scripture.

5. Neither is the faith to preach, cast out demons, and do miracles in Jesus’s name necessarily saving faith. Jesus tells us that at the final judgment “many will say to me ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers” (Matt. 7:22–23 NIV). It is sobering to notice that these are not heretics but people who profess orthodox beliefs, evidenced by calling Jesus “Lord, Lord.” This is confusing at first sight; how could anyone hold orthodox beliefs, do such extraordinary works, and not be truly saved? But it makes more sense when we remember that Judas did all of these things, just as the other apostles did, and yet he never had saving faith. These people, who are actively involved in ministry, are secretly living an immoral, ungodly, self-promoting life. Jesus says there will be “many” such people at the judgment. Many, not few. Their profession of faith will be shown to have been in words only and to have made no change in their moral life. This is seen in the fact that Jesus calls them “evil-doers,” and people who do not do “the will of [His] Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 7:21 NIV). True saving faith produces love for and obedience to God and Christ, leading to increasing transformation into Christ’s moral likeness.

In the New Testament, the verb *pisteuo* and the noun *pistis* are the main words used to talk about faith. As Millard Erickson observes, these words can mean either to accept a statement as factually true or to indicate personal trust “as distinct from mere credence or belief.” He concludes that “the type of faith necessary for salvation involves both believing that and believing in, so assenting to facts and trusting in a person.” This is beautifully expressed in the Heidelberg Catechism’s answer to the question, “What is true faith?” It says:

> It is not only a certain knowledge, whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in His Word; but also a hearty trust, which the Holy Ghost works in me by the Gospel, that not only to others, but to me also, forgiveness of sins, everlasting righteousness and salvation, are freely given by God, merely of grace, for the sake of Christ’s merits.

A more detailed description of saving faith shows that it has three aspects that are intricately intertwined at the deepest level of the human person—what the Bible calls the heart. Each one is essential, though they may vary in strength. The *intellectual* aspect (knowledge) involves understanding and accepting as true the Bible’s testimony about God, sin, and salvation in Jesus Christ. This does not mean that to be initially saved one must have deep or broad knowledge of the Bible. In fact, the amount of knowledge one must have—the gospel message—is quite small. But there are key facts/truths to be believed. The *emotional* aspect (asent) involves what has been called “an absorbing interest” in Christ as the greatest need of one’s life. It is a compelling sense of needing Christ and His salvation and desiring Him. This does not mean that one must have an
“emotional experience” to be saved. Some people do, and some do not. The volitional aspect (trust) involves personal trust in Jesus Christ as He is presented to us in Scripture and embracing and surrendering to Him as one’s Savior and Lord. In this act of self-giving, the will is prominent—and essential.

The concept is of God renovating the heart, the core of a person’s being, by implanting a new principle of desire, purpose and action, a dispositional dynamic that finds expression in positive response to the gospel and its Christ.

Divinely Enabled

True conversion: the kind of repentance and faith described above are human acts on one level. But on a deeper level, they are divinely enabled acts. As anyone who has tried it will know, it is just as impossible for a person who is spiritually dead to repent and believe the gospel as it is for a corpse to will itself to life. Jesus made this clear in His conversation with Nicodemus, who was a good man, a moral man, a highly educated man, a prominent leader, a man acknowledged by Jesus to be the teacher of Israel. Yet Jesus told him very pointedly, “unless one is born again . . . born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:3, 5–6). What did Jesus mean by this enigmatic expression of new birth? “The concept is of God renovating the heart, the core of a person’s being, by implanting a new principle of desire, purpose and action, a dispositional dynamic that finds expression in positive response to the gospel and its Christ.”

Paul speaks of the same reality in different words in his letter to the church of Ephesus:

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ. (Eph. 2:1–5)

Here we see the loving operation of the Trinity in the work of our redemption. It was while the Ephesians were still dead in their sins and in bondage to the passions of the flesh that God the Father made them spiritually alive and adopted them into His family through the atoning work of His Son (Eph. 1:5) and the life-giving ministry of His Spirit (Eph. 1:13).

How does someone who is spiritually dead experience regeneration and come to new life? Jesus told Nicodemus that the way the Spirit produces new birth contains elements of mystery: “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes” (John 3:8). The deep workings of the Holy Spirit in our hearts are not necessarily open to human scrutiny. Later, Jesus shed more light on the process when He said of certain Jews who opposed Him, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him” (John 6:44). These two passages reflect a Trinitarian process in which the Father initiates the mysterious regenerating work of the Holy Spirit to draw people to Christ. Near the end of John’s Gospel we are given an insight into the chief instrument the Spirit uses to draw people when we are told that the words and works of Jesus were written down “so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31).

New Testament Examples

The New Testament gives us a number of examples of true conversion and regeneration. On a larger scale, Paul describes how the members of the church in Thessalonica “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven” (1 Thess. 1:9–10). There are also stories of individuals, and no
two are quite the same: the sudden, dramatic conversion of Saul of Tarsus, who was met by Jesus as he traveled to Damascus to persecute and arrest the followers of Jesus there, is the most stunning in the Bible (Acts 9:1–19). The conversion of the Ethiopian governmental official, who was reading the Bible as he journeyed home, is also an exciting and dramatic story of God’s sovereign, converting grace. In sharp contrast, the quiet, gradual conversion of Timothy came about as he learned the Holy Scriptures at the knees of his mother and grandmother (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:14–15). The conversion of Lydia, a businesswoman whose heart God opened in a very gentle way as she listened to Paul’s preaching, is yet another example of true conversion (Acts 16:11–15). Though differing in outward circumstances, each case is a divine and supernatural work that produced the same inner change of spiritual regeneration. And the fruit of that change was a life of loving surrender to God, commitment to Jesus as Lord, and increasing conformity to His likeness through the Holy Spirit’s fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control.

By Grace

In these and many other stories we could cite, it is God who takes the initiative to draw people by His Spirit and through His Word to believe the good news of Jesus, to trust in Him as God’s Son and Messiah, and to experience true conversion and spiritual rebirth. As Augustine somewhere said, “When we find God, it is because He has already found us.” Augustine could say this from firsthand experience and because he knew well the teaching of Paul, who taught that “by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the work of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Eph. 2:8–9). Yes, it is only through God’s grace—His completely unwarranted kindness to us—that we are saved. It is not because of any good works we have done or will do, nor is it because of God’s foreknowledge that we would respond to the gospel; it is entirely because of the undeserved love and mercy of God, overflowing in His amazing grace. Even the faith to believe is His gift. All of this leads us into a life rich and full of the good works and purposes God has ordained for us (Eph. 2:10) and righteous, godly living (Titus 2:11–14), which will bring praise and glory to Him throughout the ages.

There is no human explanation; only praise and thanksgiving that He has helped us to enter His kingdom through the narrow gate of true conversion and to travel the hard but good road of discipleship that leads to life everlasting. As Paul said so well:

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable are his ways! . . . For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever, Amen. (Rom. 11:33, 36)

Notes:

1. Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version.
5. I am indebted to Professor Lewis Berkhof’s Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941) for the idea of using a threefold structure for describing both repentance and faith.

It costs God nothing, so far as we know, to create nice things, but to convert rebellious wills cost Him crucifixion.

C.S. Lewis
we were to discover through natural revelation more about God’s creation. God-fearing intelligent men and women promoted the mind and ways to use it for the benefit of society, setting up universities, hospitals, libraries, and scientific discoveries that we take for granted today. These positive aspects of culture didn’t develop in other parts of the world where religious worldviews didn’t promote such humanitarianism progress.

Sadly, within the past couple of centuries, many within the academic world have belittled the Judeo-Christian worldview and belief in Jesus as antiquated or anti-intellectual. How far this is from the truth! Throughout history God has given the church great minds such as Augustine, John Calvin, Martin Luther, Blaise Pascal, Sir Isaac Newton, Jonathan Edwards, G.K. Chesterton, Dorothy Sayers, and C.S. Lewis, and today people like Francis Collins, Tim Keller, and Ravi Zacharias who have presented the logic and rationale of the Christian faith through their words and actions in ways that have helped their contemporaries and future generations grasp the beauty, goodness, and truth of Jesus Christ and the gospel message. They have defended the faith well and given solid reasons for putting one’s trust in Jesus.

Just knowing that some of the greatest minds ever have developed good reasons for belief in God should bolster our confidence in the truth and reasonableness of our faith. A 2009 survey conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press shows that 51 percent of scientists believe in God or some kind of higher power.1 Don’t let people fool you into thinking that there are no bright followers of Jesus or that our faith is irrational. Instead, take time to read, listen, and fill your mind with the true, beautiful, and solid arguments, provided by bright Apologists from the past and present, that can help ground your faith in Jesus.

Third, don’t compare yourself to C.S. Lewis, Ravi Zacharias, or Josh McDowell. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12:4–6 (NIV), “There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.” In other words, God has given these great Apologists and Evangelists a gift, but He has also given you a gift or gifts to use in service to the kingdom. He has also given you the empowering presence of His Spirit. You are called to be the very best evangelist or apologist you can be within your natural spheres of influence: family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers. And you are to use the gifts that God has given you, whether hospitality, teaching, service, etc., in the various conversations and opportunities that come your way to share and defend your faith in Him. As you pray for occasions to share your faith in Christ and the gospel message, He will answer that prayer, for it is in the center of His will.

Fourth, and very important, you don’t have to have the answers to every question. Dr. J. Christy Wilson, a mentor and seminary professor of mine, used to tell students, “It’s all right to say, ‘I don’t know the answer to that question. Let me do some research and get back to you.’ Then you can follow up later and carry on the conversation. The next time someone asks you that same question, you will have an answer.” Remember that Jesus asks His followers to be humble. Being able to say, “I don’t have all the answers, but I’ll sure try to find out for you,” helps us develop humility and also creates trust with those with whom we’re speaking. Far from turning people off, this will increase their respect for you. One reason people don’t trust politicians is that they make up answers to appease the crowd rather than being transparent and admitting that they don’t have it all figured out. We must take care that we not fall into the same snare and lose our credibility.

Fifth, when engaged in conversation, listen and ask questions first, before giving the top ten reasons why God exists. Randy Newman, in his book Questioning Evangelism, notes that Jesus often asked people questions and more often than not answered their questions with a question of His own. It was the rabbinic way of teaching and one that helped lower levels of hostility

Your impact may be stronger when you allow people to come to a conclusion on their own without your preaching to or nagging them.
and open people’s minds to think about things in a new way. Michael Ramsden, in his article “Conversational Apologetics,” states that questions get people to think, expose contradictions, define the issue, and reformulate the real underlying issue. In other words, your questions can help others understand their own thinking patterns; this can lead to the self-discovery that they’ve been mistaken in their rationale. Your impact may be stronger when you allow people to come to a conclusion on their own without your preaching to or nagging them.

Sixth, pray and trust God to use you as a witness as you rely on the Holy Spirit’s power to guide you. Too often we trip over our own feet in conversations because we’re trying to prove our point or win the person over without seeking the Holy Spirit’s help. After all, it is not we but the Holy Spirit who has the power to convict and persuade the heart and mind. If we can remember to pray without ceasing—as we’re walking down the hall to the water cooler, as we begin an interesting conversation with someone—we’ll be much better off. As we pray silently for the other person, that the Lord would be stirring her heart, we become other focused, sensitive to the prompting of the Spirit, and better able to listen and pay attention to presenting needs. This enables us to be ready to give a reason for our faith when the opportunity arises naturally in conversation rather than forcing something when the person isn’t ready to hear it. When the Spirit does give us opportunities, we can trust Him to bring to our mind anything we need from the Bible or another reputable resource we have studied.

Seventh, take risks for God. As I mentioned earlier, being a witness of Christ and using apologetics is a contact sport. In other words, there is always potential that we might get hit or hurt in some way. On the other hand, if you sit on the bench and never engage in conversations with others about your faith, you’ll do even greater harm to yourself and especially do greater harm to those around you. Your apathy and lack of concern for their spiritual well-being will prevent them from considering God’s truth about eternal life. After all, every other worldview is bombarding them incessantly. Why shouldn’t they at least be exposed from time to time to the truth of God through your words and actions? If you really love the people in your sphere of influence, you’ll need to take some risks. The good news is that the same God who helped David slay the giant Goliath is walking with you. The risks of personal insult and slander are well worth the greater reward of possibly seeing someone move closer to a relationship with Jesus.

Eighth, don’t feel that you have to hit a home run every time you come up to bat. In other words, you’re not a failure if you don’t lead someone in a prayer of salvation when you talk about Jesus. Gregory Koukl, in his book Tactics, makes the point that if you just “put a stone in someone’s shoe” and make that person a little bit uncomfortable with his faulty worldview, you will be helping him become more open down the road to the truth of Jesus. We must realize that not everyone is at the same point in his spiritual journey. Stephen Smallman, in his book Spiritual Birthline, makes the point that all of us who have been found by Christ have a unique spiritual birthline, a story or journey that has included many small steps that eventually led to our conversion.

If you sense that someone is ready to take a step of faith and put her trust in Jesus, then by
I’m Smart, but I’m No C.S. Lewis

all means take the risk and ask her if she’d like to accept Jesus as her Lord and Savior right now. On the other hand, if the person is a hardened atheist and just needs to realize that there are bright scientists, philosophers and thinkers who are followers of Christ, that she has been prejudiced in her thinking, then it’s probably not the time to lead that person in the sinner’s prayer.

Ninth, take some time to study apologetics and learn some strategies, tactics, and ways of presenting the gospel that will enable you to be an effective witness and apologist when opportunities arise. There are many good books and resources available including a new resource developed by the C.S. Lewis Institute. We have sought to take some of these best practices in apologetics and evangelism and present them in what we are calling our Conversational Apologetics Course. This course can be used by churches, small groups, campus ministries, and other Christian organizations to train people like you and me to be effective witnesses for Christ. This small-group resource provides tools that help participants communicate the gospel in contemporary life, while relying on the Holy Spirit to take care of the results. This course is meant to be experiential and interactive rather than focusing on the reception of information. It provides opportunities for practicing conversational apologetics so participants can become more confident and comfortable discussing their faith in Jesus. If you’re interested in checking out this new C.S. Lewis Institute resource, go to our website at: www.cslewisinstitute.org.

One simple strategy used in the course is keeping a Conversational Apologetics Notebook. This is also a part of our year-long discipleship Fellows Program. Here’s how it works: take a notebook and divide it into four sections:

Section 1: Everyday Questions and Statements about God and Faith: Start listening to and observing everyday conversations and keep a list of questions you hear people asking, or that you yourself may be asking, about God. Write down the different statements that people make about faith and God. If you can, note the exact wording of the questions and statements. You may need to keep a piece of scratch paper with you throughout the day, or make a note on your smart phone of what you hear. Then record it in your Apologetics Notebook.

Section 2: Categorize Questions and Statements: In time, you’ll probably note ten to twelve basic questions and related ideas that people normally ask. Organize the questions and statements you’ve collected in Section 1 into categories of similar themes.

Section 3: Seek out Good Answers to the Questions and Statements: At the top of a page write out an apologetics question. Read a good article, chapter from a book, listen to an audio recording, or watch a video that addresses the question. Using an outline format, write a one-page summary that offers an answer to that particular question. Do this for each of the ten to twelve primary apologetics questions you’ve identified.

Section 4: Strategies and Tactics: Read books such as Randy Newman’s Questioning Evangelism or Gregory Koukl’s Tactics and write down questions, strategies, and tactics that can help you become more effective as you engage in discussions about your faith.

You and I may not be C.S. Lewis, but God has uniquely gifted us and
given us the ability to learn from the good resources available in the area of apologetics and evangelism. You might be surprised to know that even C.S. Lewis felt some fear and trepidation when considering the task of evangelism and apologetics. In a letter to his friend Sheldon Vanauken, Lewis wrote,

*My feeling about people in whose conversion I have been allowed to play a part is always mixed with awe and even fear: such as a boy might feel on first being allowed to fire a rifle. The disproportion between his puny finger on the trigger and the thunder and lightning which follow is alarming. And the seriousness with which the other party takes my words always raises the doubt whether I have taken them seriously enough myself.*

You and I and C.S. Lewis are not all that different after all. As Lewis expressed it to the young convert, Vanauken, “Think of me as a fellow-patient in the same hospital who, having been admitted a little earlier, could give some advice.”

**Notes:**
7. Ibid.

I’ve given talks to the RAF [Royal Air Force] at Abingdon already, and so far as I can judge they were a complete failure. . . . Yes, jobs one dare neither refuse or perform. One must take comfort in remembering that God used an ass to convert the prophet; perhaps if we do our poor best we shall be allowed a stall near it in the celestial stable.

*C.S. Lewis*

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**Recommended Reading**

*Questioning Evangelism: Engaging People’s Hearts the Way Jesus Did*, Randy Newman, Kregel Publications

A revolutionary look at sharing Christ with unbelievers by using the probing, provocative, and penetrating method Jesus used to engage others in personal dialogue and caring interaction.
home in England, she tried to make them into a hymn, but became discouraged and threw the paper in the fire. It somehow fell out of the grate unburned. Some months later Frances showed it to her father who encouraged her to finish it. She did, and he wrote the music to accompany the words. In the first verse Jesus speaks some words and asks a question:

I gave my life for thee,
My precious blood I shed,
That thou might’st ransomed be,
And quickened from the dead;
I gave my life for thee,
What hast thou given for me?

Many of Frances Havergal’s hymns express her response to the Lord, such as “Jesus, Master, whose I am … let my heart be all thine own, let me live to thee alone.” In “O Savior, Precious Savior” she joins her voice with all God’s people in singing, “We worship you, we bless you, to you alone we sing; we praise you, and confess you our holy Lord and King.” “Golden Harps are Sounding” describes Christ’s ascension: “He who came to save us, he who bled and died, now is crowned with glory at his Father’s side. Never more to suffer, never more to die, Jesus, King of glory, is gone up on high.” “Thou Art Coming, O My Savior” anticipates and celebrates Christ’s Second Coming “in thy beauty all resplendent, in thy glory all transcendent.”

“Tell it out!”

One snowy Sunday morning in April 1872, Frances was unable to go to church. Reading the Psalms, she came to the words “Tell it out among the heathen that the Lord is King” (Psalm 96:10, Prayer Book Version). She thought, “what a splendid first line!” And the words and the music came “rushing in” to her:14

Tell it out among the heathen that the Lord is King!
Tell it out! Tell it out!
Tell it out among the nations, bid them shout and sing!
Tell it out! Tell it out!

Tell it out with adoration, that He shall increase;
That the mighty King of glory is the King of Peace;
Tell it out with jubilation though the waves may roar,
That He sitteth on the water-floods, our King forever more!

“Lord, speak to me that I may speak”

The same month that she wrote “Tell It Out,” Frances also wrote “A Worker’s Prayer,” especially for lay helpers in the church:

Lord, speak to me that I may speak in living echoes of your tone;
As you have sought, so let me seek your erring children lost and lone.
O teach me, Lord, that I may teach the precious things you do impart;
And wing my words, that they may reach the hidden depths of many a heart.

Miss Havergal’s theology has been described as “the theology of the Pilgrim’s Progress.”15 She was simple, clear, and compelling in her books and hymns. One Sunday, after a disappointing sermon, she asked the minister, “Oh, why don’t you preach the gospel of Christ?” He answered, “My congregation are well educated and well acquainted with the truths of salvation; if they were Zulus, I should preach differently.” Frances said, “Then I will be a Zulu next Sunday, and just preach at me!” To her delight, a real gospel sermon was the result.16

Frances’ circumstances and frail health prevented her from being a foreign missionary, but she found ways to teach the gospel at home. She began a Bible class for working people. She
wrote, “I don’t know who will come, few or many; but I want God’s real converting grace poured out, and I want to be enabled so to speak of Jesus that souls may be won to Him.”17 She supported and assisted various missions, including the Irish Society that provided Bibles and biblical teaching for the people of Ireland. Frances wrote a “Prayer for Ireland,” which began “Gracious Saviour, look in mercy on this island of the west.”18

In the last months of her life, Frances worked on a book called The Royal Invitation. She explained to a friend, “You see, I have only written for Christians as yet (with the exception of a few leaflets), and so I have not fulfilled the great commission, ‘Let him that heareth, say, Come,’ in writing, though of course I am often at it in speaking. So now I want to peal out a COME!”19

“I Am Trusting Thee, Lord Jesus”

Miss Havergal regularly wrote hymns for the beginning of the new year. For 1874 she wrote “Another year is dawning! Dear Master, let it be, in working or in waiting, another year with Thee.” Later that year she wrote the hymn that became her favorite:

\[
\begin{align*}
I & \text{ am trusting thee, Lord Jesus, trusting only thee;} \\
& \text{Trusting thee for full salvation, great and free.} \\
I & \text{ am trusting thee for pardon; at thy feet I bow,} \\
& \text{For thy grace and tender mercy, trusting now.} \\
I & \text{ am trusting thee for cleansing in the crimson flood;} \\
& \text{Trusting thee to make me holy by thy blood.} \\
I & \text{ am trusting thee to guide me; thou alone shall lead,} \\
\end{align*}
\]

“Every day and hour supplying all my need.

\[
\begin{align*}
I & \text{ am trusting thee for power; thine can never fail!} \\
& \text{Words which thou thyself shalt give me, must prevail.} \\
I & \text{ am trusting thee, Lord Jesus; never let me fall;} \\
& \text{I am trusting thee forever, and for all.}
\end{align*}
\]

“A Song in the Night”

Frances suffered during her short life. She survived almost-fatal typhoid fever in 1874. On the first day of this illness, which kept her bedridden for eight months, she dictated to her niece the beginning of a new poem:

\[
\begin{align*}
J & \text{ust when Thou wilt, O Master, call!} \\
& \text{Or at the noon, or evening fall,} \\
& \text{Or in the dark, or in the light,} \\
& \text{Just when Thou wilt, it must be right.}^{20}
\end{align*}
\]

During a time of sickness two years later, she wrote “A Song in the Night”:

\[
\begin{align*}
J & \text{ust when Thou wilt, O Master, call!} \\
& \text{Or at the noon, or evening fall,} \\
& \text{Or in the dark, or in the light,} \\
& \text{Just when Thou wilt, it must be right.}^{20}
\end{align*}
\]

When her mother died, eleven-year-old Frances was devastated. Years later, she wrote, “I did not at all expect her departure and shut my ears in a very hardened way to those who tried to prepare me for it. I did not, would not, see God’s hand in it.”22 Now she saw God’s hand
Frances Ridley Havergal (1836-1879)

in her pain. To a friend she wrote, “Pain, as to God’s own children, is, truly and really, only blessing in disguise. It is but His chiseling, one of His graving tools, producing the likeness to Jesus for which we long.”

Frances not only found comfort in God for her suffering but also discovered how it was fitting her to do “the Master’s work.” She wrote in her private journal: “Even in very painful spiritual darkness it has sometimes comforted me to think that God might be leading me through strange dark ways so that I might be His messenger to some of His children in similar distress.” One day in a churchyard she found a mother crying while putting flowers on her daughter’s grave. Frances put her hand on the woman’s shoulder and quietly said, “Think of the meeting, not of the parting.”

“Take My Life and Let It Be”

On Advent Sunday, December 2, 1873, Frances “saw clearly the blessedness of true consecration.” She wrote a “Consecration Hymn” based on the last words of the concluding prayer in the Service of Holy Communion in the Book of Common Prayer: “And we humbly beseech thee, O heavenly Father, so to assist us with thy grace, that we may continue in that holy fellowship, and do all such good works as thou hast prepared for us to walk in.” Her hymn begins “Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord to Thee,” and then goes on to offer everything to God—our time, hands, feet, voice, lips, possessions, intellect, will, heart, and love. It ends, “Take myself, and I will be ever, only, all for Thee”—words that sum up Frances Ridley Havergal’s life and service:

Take my life, and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee.
Take my moments and my days;
Let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my hands, and let them move
At the impulse of Thy love.
Take my feet, and let them be Swift and beautiful for Thee.

Take my voice, and let me sing Always, only for my King.

Frances was sometimes overwhelmed by her work—answering fifteen to twenty letters every morning, correcting proofs for her books, and writ-
ing hymns and poems. She was not well, and her doctor said that she “ought not to touch a pen.” After reading Exodus 32:26—“Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp and said, ‘Who is on the Lord’s side? Come to me’”—Frances wrote another “consecration hymn.” The first verse begins with a string of questions:

Who is on the Lord’s side? Who will serve the King?  
Who will be his helpers, other lives to bring?  
Who will leave the world’s side? Who will face the foe?  
Who is on the Lord’s side? Who for him will go?

Then comes the resounding answer:

By thy call of mercy, by thy grace divine,  
We are on the Lord’s side, Savior, we are thine.

“Like a River Glorious”

The River Severn, the longest river in Britain, rises in Wales and, during its first fifteen miles, tumbles from a height of two thousand feet to five hundred feet, before making its way for two hundred more miles to Bristol. Frances Havergal lived near the Severn for much of her life. At Astley, her childhood home, a beautiful brook flowed into the river. While in Worcester she walked along the banks of the Severn. When living with her sister Ellen she could see it flowing below the woods “with an extra sparkle and glitter and shine.”28

In the River Severn Frances found an illustration of Isaiah 66:12—“For thus saith the Lord: ‘Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river.’”29 She wrote:

Like a river glorious, is God’s perfect peace,  
Over all victorious, in its bright increase;  
Perfect, yet it floweth, fuller every day,  
Perfect, yet it groweth, deeper all the way.  
Stayed upon Jehovah, hearts are fully blest.  
Finding, as he promised, perfect peace and rest.

Frances said that “the quiet, everyday beauty of trees and sunshine was the chief external influence” on her early childhood.29 At Berne, Switzerland, soon after sunrise on a June morning, Frances had her first glimpse of the Alps. She said that she had never seen on earth anything which “so suggested the ethereal and heavenly, which seemed to lead up to the unseen, to be the very steps of the Throne.”30 In her summer visits to Switzerland Frances found in the beauty of God’s creation assurance of his care for his children:

Father who hast made the mountains,  
Who hast formed each tiny flower,  
Who hast filled the crystal fountains,  
Who hast sent us sun and shower,  
Hear Thy children’s morning prayer,  
Asking for Thy guardian care;  
Keep and guide us all the day,  
Lead us safely all the way.31

Miss Havergal, last and loveliest of our modern poets, when her tones were most mellow and her language most sublime, has been caught up to swell the music of heaven.

During her fifth and last journey to Switzerland, Miss Havergal lived in Champerry, the small village where Edith and Francis Schaeffer were to begin the work of L’Abri Fellowship in 1955. In her home in England she treasured a picture of the snow peaks of Les Dents du Midi, the majestic mountains near L’Abri.32

Starlight Through the Shadows

During the last months of her life, Frances was preparing a book for the sick and suffering, called Starlight Through the Shadows. As her condition worsened, she asked her doctor if he thought she was really going “today,” and he answered “probably.” She said, “Splendid to be so near the gates of heaven.”33 One of her sisters said, “When thou passest through the waters, I
Frances Ridley Havergal (1836-1879)

will be with thee.” Frances quickly added, “He must keep his word.”

She whispered to a friend, “There is no bottom to God’s mercy and love.” She asked that the words of 1 John 1:7—“The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin”—be put on her tombstone. Her brother, a minister of the Church of England, sang some hymns, gave her the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, and said, “You have talked and written a great deal about the King, and you will soon see him in his beauty.”

Her sister Maria wrote, “For ten minutes we watched that almost visible meeting with her King.”

Frances died on June 3, 1879. She was forty-two years old. Charles Haddon Spurgeon wrote that “to the great loss of the church,” Frances Havergal “has left these lower choirs to sing above. Miss Havergal, last and loveliest of our modern poets, when her tones were most mellow and her language most sublime, has been caught up to swell the music of heaven.”

By the 1920s two million copies of her works were in circulation in English and her hymns were sung, and are still known and loved, by Christian people all over the world.

Notes:


3. Bugden, 120.


5. Bugden, 27.


11. Valuable Selections from the Writings of Frances Ridley Havergal (Hannibal, Missouri: Granted Ministries Press, 2009), 95.


13. According to some accounts, Frances saw the picture in the home of a German pastor; others say that she saw the painting by Domenico Feti entitled Ecce Homo (“Behold the Man”) in the art museum at Düsseldorf. This same picture so moved Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf that then and there the young Count asked the crucified Christ to draw him into “the fellowship of his sufferings” and to show him what he should do. Zinzendorf became the leader of the Moravian movement that gave rise to Protestant world missions. J. E. Hutton, A History of the Moravian Church, 186.


15. Darlow, 14.


17. Atherstone, 118.


It is natural to speak of hymns as “poems,” indiscriminately, for they have the same structure. Imagination makes poems; devotion makes hymns. ... There can be poetry without emotion, but a hymn never. ...In short to be a hymn, what is written must express spiritual feelings and desires. The music of faith, hope and charity will be somewhere in its strain.

Hezekiah Butterworth, The Story of the Hymns and Tunes
RECOMMENDED READING
The Story of the Hymns and Tunes, by Theron Brown and Hezekiah Butterworth
A history of hymns and tunes, divided into easily accessed chapters.

Then Sings My Soul: 150 of the World’s Greatest Hymn Stories, by Robert J. Morgan
Rob Morgan’s inimitable style will help people reacquaint themselves with the hymns of the faithful. His goal is to keep these traditional hymns vital and meaningful to all generations.

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