

C. S. Lewis on *Solus Christus*

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C. S. Lewis's most famous character, Aslan, has been endeared to the hearts of millions. In fact, there was once the mother of a young boy who wrote to Lewis saying that her son was afraid that he loved Aslan more than he loved God (Dorsett 52). What happened? How could a man create a fictional character that was so like God himself, yet had something that would appeal to children so much? C. S. Lewis had a deep, emotional understanding of God that enabled him to write about Aslan in such a way that would inevitably draw a child's love. Specifically, Lewis wrote about Jesus Christ and his work of redemption in his non-fiction and fiction alike. In his writings Lewis's readers find a most original and fascinating way of looking at Christ and his work. While Lewis is much loved for his Christian writings, many have critiqued him for not holding to doctrines that would not agree with a Reformed (or even biblical) theology. A closer look at Lewis's writings on theology and his fiction will reveal whether or not he agreed with the Reformed view of *Solus Christus*.

The doctrine of *Solus Christus* is very important to Reformed faith. Regarding soteriology this doctrine states that salvation is only accomplished through the perfectly sufficient work of Christ, and outside of Christ can no salvation be found. In the eighth chapter of the Westminster Confession of Faith, the fifth paragraph states, "The Lord Jesus, by His perfect obedience, and sacrifice of Himself, which He through the eternal Spirit, once offered up unto God, has fully satisfied the justice of His Father; and purchased, not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for those whom the Father has given unto Him." Here we see what the work of

Christ was. Louis Berkhof says, “It is Christ, as the Mediator of God and man and as the meritorious cause of our salvation, that the Holy Spirit derives everything which He communicates to sinners” (456). Every good thing that we receive from God (especially in terms of our salvation) comes from Christ’s work. Furthermore, it is very important to note that man has nothing to contribute to his salvation (specifically his justification). Isaiah says all our righteousness is as filthy rags (Is 64:6). And no one is righteous (Rom 3:10). Man needs the righteousness of Christ, the only righteousness sufficient to avoid God’s wrath.

Particularly, the atonement found in Christ is sacrificial, the nature of which is vicarious, or in other words substitutionary. On the cross our sin was imputed to Christ, and then by faith Christ’s righteousness is imputed to us. Lewis talks about vicariousness in his book *Miracles*: “Because Vicariousness is the very idiom of the reality [Christ] has created, His death can become ours” (*Complete C. S. Lewis Signature Classics* 418). In *Mere Christianity*, Lewis says, “Now the Christian belief is that if we somehow share the humility and suffering of Christ we shall also share in His conquest of death and find a new life after we have died and in it become perfect, and perfectly happy, creatures” (57). Elsewhere, he says, “[God] raised one man (the man who was Himself) from the dead because He will one day raise all men from the dead” (*God in the Dock* 32-33).

The above paragraph represents Lewis’s views on justification. Later in *Mere Christianity* he talks about the power of Christ in sanctification, or what he calls the “Christ-life.” He compares a Christian to a living body. Unlike a dead body, which cannot heal, a living body can repair itself.

In the same way a Christian is not a man who never goes wrong, but a man who is enabled to repent and pick himself up and begin over again after each stumble—because the Christ-life is inside him, repairing him all the time, enabling him to repeat (in some degree) the king of voluntary death which Christ Himself carried out (59).

This may sound like a strange way of speaking of God's sanctifying grace, but it is very C. S. Lewis-like. Do not confuse this language with any kind of magical power or mystical symbiosis. This is merely his way of illustrating sanctification. And lest his readers think that he is saying that Christians can do good of themselves, he says, "The Christian thinks any good he does comes from the Christ-life inside him. He does not think God will love us because we are good, but that God will make us good because He loves us..." (59). He goes on to say that this "Christ-life" terminology is what he means for being "in Christ," referring to how every Christian is part of the biological body of Christ. Christ's being in us is more than a mental or moral sense; he is actually operating in us.

Because his illustrations are at times strange, it is often the case that Lewis's theology is clearer when it is set in story-form. First, as mentioned in the introduction, Lewis used Aslan, the great Lion of Narnia, to exemplify God in his chronicles. Specifically, Aslan is a type of Christ. Aslan is God who has taken on flesh. He is the mighty ruler. In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Lewis tells the story of four children who are magically transported to the land of Narnia. Lucy, the youngest, is the first to find her way into Narnia. Upon her return she tells her siblings about her fantastic discovery. The second youngest, Edmund, later stumbles into Narnia, but when he comes

back he lies about his entrance. And when all four children arrive in Narnia, Edmund slips away and falls in league with the White Witch, betraying his siblings and Aslan Himself. Much later when the Witch demands Edmund's death for his betrayal, Aslan makes a deal with her that saves Edmund's life. It turns out that Aslan willingly dies in his place. Because of this vicarious death, Edmund was free to go. But Aslan did not remain dead. He resurrected and returned to defeat the Witch. Just like all Christians, Edmund did nothing to merit this rescue. It was all the work of Aslan.

Actually, Lewis was questioned about his strong parallel between Aslan and Christ. In a letter he says,

If Aslan represented the immaterial Deity in the same way in which the Giant Despair represents despair, he would be an allegorical figure. In reality however he is an invention giving and imaginary answer to the question "What might Christ become like if there really were a world like Narnia and He chose to be incarnate and die and rise again in that world as He actually has done in ours?" This is not an allegory at all (*Letters* 283).

He wrote of Aslan as he might have written of Christ if he were to put Jesus Christ into one of his works of fiction.

Another work of fiction that illustrates a Christ-figure and atonement is found in *Till We Have Faces*. Psyche is taken to be sacrificed for all the people of Glome (80). She was the most beautiful (the "spotless lamb") person in the whole nation. (It is also interesting that she and the rest of her family had the blood of the gods in them.) Once she is given up, Ungit's wrath will be satisfied. Also, Psyche goes to her death willingly. Another parallel is seen in the King. Like Caiaphas (John 18:14), the King of Glome

thought it was expedient that one should die for the whole people. The King says, “What’s one girl—why, what would one man be—against the safety of us all? It’s only sense that one should die for many. It happens in every battle” (61).

And the final illustration of Christ and atonement in Lewis is found in *Perelandra*. Lewis records the reflections of the novel’s protagonist, Ransom, prior to his going up against the Un-man. Ransom has just realized (and heard from Maleldil, the interplanetary name for God) that his name is significant. He is to be the ransom for this sinless planet. Lewis says, “If he now failed, this world also would hereafter be redeemed. If he were not the ransom, Another would be” (126). Then he goes into some speculation: “Yet nothing was ever repeated. Not a second crucifixion: perhaps—who knows—not even a second Incarnation. . . . some other act of even more appalling love, some glory of yet deeper humility” (126). But he still settles on the simple fact that “if he left it undone, Maleldil Himself would do some greater thing instead” (127).

In C. S. Lewis is found a layman of extraordinary talent. Though not always completely theologically sound, Lewis has a special way of putting into words doctrines that are very important to Christians. In works such as *Mere Christianity*, *Miracles*, and others, as well as the stories *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, *Till We Have Faces*, and *Perelandra*, C. S. Lewis illustrates the Reformed doctrine of Solus Christus beautifully and with joy.