

THE CREATION MYTHOLOGIES OF C. S. LEWIS AND J. R. R. TOLKIEN:
FANTASY LITERATURE AS A MEANS OF EDIFICATION FOR THE MIND AND HEART

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Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION.....	4
CHAPTER 2 - CREATION MYTHS AND MUSIC.....	9
LEWIS'S CREATION MYTHOLOGY.....	11
<i>The Presence of Evil in Lewis's Mythology.....</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>The Space Trilogy and the Problem of Evil</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Lewis's Views on Mythology</i>	<i>19</i>
TOLKIEN'S CREATION MYTHOLOGY.....	20
<i>A Breaking of Harmony in Tolkien's World</i>	<i>22</i>
<i>Tolkien's View of Mythology.....</i>	<i>25</i>
CHAPTER 3 - MUSICAL TRADITIONS OF THE CREATION ACCOUNT.....	30
THE GREEK VIEW OF THE UNIVERSE	30
THE EARLY CHRISTIAN VIEW.....	32
THE MEDIEVAL VIEW OF THE COSMOS.....	34
LUTHER'S VIEW OF MUSIC	37
POETS OF THE PURITAN TRADITION	39
CHAPTER 4 - OBJECTIONS TO MYTHOLOGY.....	44
AUGUSTINE'S VIEW OF MYTHOLOGY.....	45
THE PURITAN VIEW OF MYTHOLOGY.....	48
THE DANGERS OF MYTHOLOGY	52
CHAPTER 5 - THE VALUE OF CHRISTIAN MYTHOLOGY.....	57
THE VALUE OF STORY.....	57
CHAPTER 6 - MUSIC IN THE BIBLE	65
THE PSALMS.....	66
<i>Psalms of Praise</i>	<i>67</i>

<i>Psalms of Thanksgiving</i>	69
OTHER OLD TESTAMENT SONGS	71
ALL CREATION SINGS.....	74
ANGELIC WORSHIP.....	78
MUSIC IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.....	80
<i>Music in Christian Community</i>	80
<i>Music in the New Heavens and Earth</i>	82
GOD SINGS	85
CHAPTER 7 - THE VALUE OF A MUSICAL CREATION	91
MUSIC ILLUSTRATES THE CREATIVE PROCESS	91
MUSIC AS AN ILLUSTRATION OF ORDER AND UNITY.....	93
MUSIC AS AN EXPRESSION OF LONGING.....	97
CHAPTER 8 - CONCLUDING THOUGHTS.....	99

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

While introducing the music of Felix Mendelssohn to my class of 4th grade students, a young girl asked, “Who invented the piano?” This was a rather straightforward question with a historical answer that I could have researched and answered had I so desired. But she fired away with a second question, “Who invented music?” Now this question was deep and rich. It seized both my mind and heart and I contemplated it. This is the type of question that should awaken in us a sense of wonder and excitement--and a question that rightly causes us to look deeper into the source of all truth--the Lord himself as revealed in the pages of Scripture.

The Bible is replete with reference to music. God’s world is a singing world, for he has ordained praise unto himself, often through music. He delights in the songs of his people, and furthermore, He is said to be enthroned upon the praises of Israel (Psalm 22:3). An abundance of musical praise is found in Scripture, especially in the book of Psalms, but also throughout the prophets and into the New Testament as well. Song is one of the chief responses of mankind for God’s works of creation, salvation, redemption, victory, and future restoration. Yet, as we will see, this chorus of singers is not exclusive to mankind alone, but inclusive of all parts of creation, from the heavenly host of angels to the plant and animal life upon the earth. In addition, the very matter of creation, such as rocks, hills and oceans all are said to make music unto the Lord.

The book of Revelation is filled with grand spectacles of musical worship from men and angels at the end of time. Their song is said to perpetually ring out as they focus all their praise upon the Lamb of God, who died and rose again victoriously over death and hell, and is restoring all things to sinless perfection. But what about music’s origin? If it is certainly present in the

new creation, was music resounding in the original creation? I have always been intrigued by the book of Job and find it to be of particular interest when considering such a question. In chapter 38 we find God interrogating Job, in a rather rhetorical fashion, asking if he was present when God made the world: “Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation? Tell me, if you understand...On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone—while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy? (Job 38:4-7) My imagination is stirred when thinking of such a magnificent, musical event of praise and celebration, if not *during* the creation, at least present not long after it was complete.

Of course, “One of the distinctive features of the biblical understanding of creation is that God spoke the world into existence. The Christian tradition, beginning in the New Testament, personified this speaking as the Word who became incarnate in Christ. But both C. S. Lewis, in his cosmogony of Narnia, and J. R. R. Tolkien, in his cosmogony of Middle-earth, give this creative role to music rather than to the spoken word.”¹ These Christian authors of fantasy and mythology have both crafted creation stories with music as the primary agent used by a creator. Just as the music of great composers like Mendelssohn raised thoughtful questions in the minds of my students, these works of imaginative literature do likewise for many others and myself.

In *The Magician’s Nephew*, book 1 of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Lewis narrates the creation of the world by having Aslan, the great lion, moving to and fro upon a dark and formless void *singing* things into existence as Narnia comes to life. In addition, Lewis addresses the presence of sin in his creation story in the person of the witch, Jadis, who is present during the singing and hates it and strongly desires to stop it at all costs. Furthermore, we will consider another angle in Lewis’s mythology of music and cosmogony in his works known as *The Space Trilogy*.² In this series, Lewis metaphorically describes the world of men under the bondage of

¹ Norman Styers, “Music in World Making: The Creation of the World, Middle-Earth, and Narnia,” in *C. S. Lewis and the Inklings: Discovering Hidden Truth* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), 116.

² It is sometimes known by the name *Ransom Trilogy* for its main character, Elwin Ransom.

sin and the evil one as being the *silent* planet. It no longer sings, but awaits its deliverance to once again join the cosmic, heavenly music as it once did from the beginning.

Tolkien's story contains a more vivid account of the creation of all things in his opening chapter entitled "Ainulindale" from his major work *The Silmarillion*. This is Tolkien's grand history of the world of Middle-earth and the extensive and vastly detailed background for his famed works of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Here we see the creator-being, Iluvatar, giving a musical theme to his primary created beings, the Ainur, who then sing in harmony as the world is made. As in Lewis, Tolkien introduces discord and broken harmony by a rebellious Ainu³ who disrupts the singing, not with silence, but with a corrupt theme of his own. With both writers, a future restoration of harmony is anticipated.

We have here two different authors, writing mythologies with different intentions, as we will explore, but both theorizing the creation as one filled with, and initiated by music. In both thinkers, creation is equated with beauty, harmony and order, and sin as a breaking of such order and harmony, or as a hatred of such beauty. What can we learn from musical metaphors such as these? Certainly I am not proposing that we can derive from Scripture that God *actually did sing* the world into being. What I am proposing is that fantasy literature such as this can provoke within us questions that drive us to examine the Scriptures more deeply and more delightfully as we reflect and meditate upon the truths we do find there.

Some may still object: what authority can we give fantasy writers to influence or shape our thinking of such serious matters? Objections such as these are valid. How can the make-believe worlds of two English literary professors of the 20th century have any value for our Christian lives today? If myths are defined as untrue, then why give them any credence? Some would immediately dismiss them as trivial, childish, or at worst, to be shunned by serious students of Scripture, for they are a false account of the true creation story in Genesis. There are

³ Singular for 'Ainur.' Tolkien was very thorough in developing a complete language in his mythology, with a proper grammar as well.

those who object strongly to fantasy and myth for their alleged involvement with the demonic themes of witchcraft, magic, divination, and occultism. Others find them frivolous or fanciful, perhaps entertaining at best, but best left behind in childhood as Paul explains: “When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me.” (1 Corinthians 13:11) Yet, there are many in the general population who would argue that while fantasy literature can be enjoyed, it has no place in our Christian edification, reflection, or even in sermon illustrations. So, why give Lewis and Tolkien special attention, and how can their Christian mythologies be considered more than just entertaining, but actually beneficial in the Christian community?

This project will address such issues and concerns. From the words of Lewis and Tolkien themselves, and from an array of literary scholars and Christian thinkers, I will attempt to support the proposal that fantasy literature does have value in the life of the Christian. Story and imagination are wonderful vehicles by which we can experience the sorrows of life and the resulting joys of consolation in what Tolkien calls the happy ending. Hence, these stories of a musical cosmology should awaken within us *fruitful* and *edifying* questions that cause us to reflect upon the role that music does occupy in the Bible and the worship that pleases God. They can drive us to wonder more profoundly at the splendor and majesty of the initial creation and enhance our longing and anticipation for the new creation to come.

We will first examine the creation myths of Lewis and Tolkien in their works of fiction, and in their personal essays that expound their literary philosophies and views on mythology and Christianity. Next, we will explore the long-standing heritage of views on music as it relates to creation through Greek philosophy, early church theology, the Middle Ages, the Reformation, and the Puritan age as we consider the influences and inspirations upon Lewis and Tolkien. Following this, we will examine common objections to fantasy and mythology and how these concerns can be addressed to show that they are not merely permissible, but favorable to the Christian life. At this point we will turn our full attention to what Scripture has to say regarding music and musical worship. With this foundation established, we will finally consider the fruit

that can result from the vantage point of the musical creation stories of our featured authors. I will conclude with some specific questions that have been raised in my mind and heart as I read and reread Lewis and Tolkien, and what great blessing and benefit I receive as I open the Word of God to mine its treasures. It is my hope that this thesis will show why the creation myths of Lewis and Tolkien belong in our Christian libraries, not merely for entertainment, but for our edification as well.

Chapter 2 - Creation Myths and Music

We begin by stepping inside the literary worlds of C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien. These men had a special friendship based on many factors, but of most interest to our study is their common love of myth. Colin Duriez, award-winning writer for his research on the Inklings, proposes, “It is likely that, but for J. R. R. Tolkien, you would have never read C. S. Lewis. It is just as likely that, without C. S. Lewis, you would not have enjoyed Tolkien's work.”⁴ Both of these scholars were professors of English literature: Old and Middle English for Tolkien, and Medieval and Renaissance literature for Lewis. While both lecturing at Oxford University, they met and began a significant relationship, not only as friends, but as writers of mythology.

Each, however, may have defined this broad term, *myth*, differently, especially before Lewis’s conversion to Christianity. In Tolkien’s essay *On Fairy-stories*, he recounts Lewis as a man who describes myth or fairy-story as “breathing a lie through silver.”⁵ To Tolkien, Lewis saw little use for myths. Yet, on the eve of Lewis’s conversion, Tolkien and fellow Inklings Hugo Dyson spent considerable time convincing Lewis that Christianity was the truest myth, being at once both story and truth.⁶ Tolkien knew that only in Christianity could Lewis find all that he was longing for, arguing that “the gospels have a satisfying imaginative as well as intellectual appeal, demanding a response from the whole person.”⁷ Lewis certainly responded accordingly, dedicating his life to writing and speaking, establishing himself as an apologist for the truth claims of Christianity, often through imaginative stories. Tolkien shared a similar passion for the beauty of story, but differed artistically and in intent. “Tolkien was the master of the allusive

⁴ Colin Duriez, “The Fairy Story: J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis,” in *Tree of Tales* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007), 13.

⁵ Jane Chance, ed., *Tolkien the Medievalist* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 41, quoting Tolkien, “On Fairy-stories.”

⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁷ Duriez, *Tree of Tales*, 16.

story, relying on his deep faith in a natural theology of the imagination, in which the insights incarnate in the tale would be a vehicle of God's grace to the reader. Lewis was the apologist and evangelist, building-in allegorical signposts that Tolkien artistically disliked.⁸ In other words, what Tolkien may have expressed implicitly through myth, Lewis did so more explicitly.

Yet, in all their differences, both men loved old stories, whether called fairy-stories or simply myths, being Norse or Celtic or Greek in origin, they were important to them for they "told them important things about reality--about who they were and what the world was like, and about the realm of the divine."⁹ Furthermore, both desired in their promotion of fantasy literature to "open a door that would awaken desires and allow the experience of sensations yet unknown, pointing to a reality beyond 'the walls of the world.'"¹⁰

Admittedly we must be careful in our definition, and embracing of the word *myth*, for Paul warns his flock that some will "turn away from the truth and wander off into myths." (2 Timothy 4:4) But as I will discuss later, there is a proper way to consider myth in the literary world that is not in violation of the Word of God. Zachary Rhone defines *mythopoeia* [a term coined by Tolkien in a poem to Lewis] as "literary and philosophical myth that reaches toward original myth to reveal divine truth."¹¹ And myth is not simply a synonym for something untrue. Thomas Howard posits that the question about myths is not whether they really happened but rather, "How true do they ring?" So in our study, we need to consider a right hermeneutic in reading mythology--not expecting a factual world, but a fantastic one that should cause us to seek the objective truth of God and his world. "Literature is built on a grand-paradox," says

⁸ Duriez, *Tree of Tales*, 16.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹¹ Zachary Rhone, *The Great Tower of Elfland: The Mythopoeic Worldview of J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, G. K. Chesterton and George MacDonald* (Kent: The Kent State University Press, 2017), 120.

Ryken. “It is a make-believe world that nonetheless reminds us of real life and clarifies it for us.”¹² Let us begin with a look at C. S. Lewis.

Lewis’s Creation Mythology

Lewis once wrote, “an author should never conceive himself as bringing into existence beauty or wisdom that did not exist before, but simply and solely some reflection of Eternal Beauty and Wisdom”¹³ This is precisely what he did in his grand work of fantasy literature, *The Chronicles of Narnia*. In these stories, Lewis created a mythical land called Narnia, ruled supremely by the Emperor over the Sea, and ruled immanently by the Son of the Emperor over the Sea, who is Aslan the Lion. As stated above, Lewis was not reluctant to admit the Christian symbolism in his works. However, this was not the primary intention of the author. Leland Ryken explains that, according to Lewis, good stories should unfold, and “tell you their own moral,” rather than imposing one’s own agenda or morals onto them.” Ryken continues, “Christian readers are impatient with that and force the opening chapters into something that Lewis did not intend.”¹⁴ Thus, Lewis did not set out to begin his story of Narnia as a Christian allegory. “In countering the assumption of some of his readers that he ‘began by asking myself how I could say something about Christianity to children,’ Lewis claimed that ‘at first there wasn’t even anything Christian about [the stories].’”¹⁵ Nevertheless, the spiritual truths of Christianity did come forth, and did so powerfully. Lewis admitted later, “...that element [Christianity] pushed itself in of its own accord,” giving these fantasy stories a deeper meaning

¹² Leland Ryken, ed., *The Christian Imagination* (New York: WaterBrook Press, 2002), 25.

¹³ C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (San Diego: Harcourt, Inc., 1958), 7.

¹⁴ Leland Ryken, “The Chronicles of Narnia: The Imagination of C. S. Lewis,” *Tabletalk*, January 2008, 19.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

than at first conceived. In one of his letters he disclosed, “the whole Narnian story is about Christ.”¹⁶

The series began with *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, in which the four Pevensie children are transported to Narnia and meet Aslan, the king. To save Edmund from the power of the Witch, Aslan sacrifices himself. Soon after, we read of his resurrection and subsequent conquering of the Witch in victory. Yet, it’s actually the sixth book in this series that is of primary interest to us. In *The Magician’s Nephew*, we read of the creation of Narnia in ages past. Digory (the old professor in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*) discovered a wood between the worlds, which contains portals to different worlds. In one of these “holes,” he is transported to a place of utter darkness. Among his traveling companions are his friend Polly, a cab driver and his wife, Digory’s wicked uncle Andrew, and the actual Witch herself. Standing in that black and silent void, they all hear a strain of music in the distance coming from the voice of Aslan. Thus begins a musical creation. This melody serves to bring about the making of Narnia, unfolding much like the days of creation in Genesis. Furthermore, the hearing of this music brings about quite different reactions from the various groups of listeners, ranging from bitter disgust to unimaginable delight. Lewis writes,

In the darkness something was happening at last. A voice had begun to sing. It was very far away and Digory found it hard to decide from what direction it was coming. Sometimes it seemed to come from all directions at once. Some he almost thought it was coming out of the earth beneath them. Its lower notes were deep enough to be the voice of the earth herself. There were no words. There was hardly even a tune. But it was, beyond comparison, the most beautiful noise he had ever heard.¹⁷

Next, he describes two developments, one regarding the musical addition of more voices, thus creating harmony, and the concurring development of the physical world around them.

Then two wonders happened at the same moment. One was that the voice was suddenly joined by other voices; more voices than you could possibly count. They were in

¹⁶ Ryken, “The Chronicles of Narnia,” *Tabletalk*, 20.

¹⁷ C. S. Lewis, *The Magician’s Nephew* (New York: HarperTrophy, 1955), 106.

harmony with it, but far higher up the scale: cold, tingling, silvery voices. The second wonder was that the blackness overhead, all at once, was blazing with stars.¹⁸

In the next section Lewis continues,

The new stars and the new voices began at exactly the same time. If you had seen and heard it...you would have felt quite certain that it was the stars themselves which were singing, and that it was the First Voice, the deep one, which had made them appear and made them sing.¹⁹

Tolkien, as we shall see, has a strikingly similar portrayal of a primary singer giving the gift of song to the first of his creation to follow in harmony.

The Voice on earth grew louder and more triumphant as the work of creation continued. Next, the light of day was made. “The Voice rose and rose, till all the air was shaking with it. And just as it swelled to the mightiest and most glorious sound it had yet produced, the sun arose.”²⁰ As it did so, Digory and his company could see the empty world around them, describing it as “a valley of mere earth, rock and water; there was not a tree, not a bush, not a blade of grass to be seen.”²¹ The chapter ends with a hint that this movement of Aslan’s creation song had ended and a new one is about to begin.

In the following chapter Lewis tells of Aslan, pacing to and fro in that empty land, singing his new song. He writes, “It was softer and more lilting than the song by which he had called up the stars and the sun; a gentle rippling music. And as he walked and sang the valley grew green with grass.”²² Now we find vegetation beginning to cover the rocky earth. Aslan has created all types of plants and flowers and trees to fill the land of Narnia. Yet, the music continued as the creation unfolded. Lewis now describes how Digory’s companion, Polly, reacts to the song, making a very important discovery about how the world was being made.

¹⁸ Lewis, *The Magician’s Nephew*, 107.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 109

²¹ *Ibid.*, 109.

²² *Ibid.*, 112.

Polly was finding the song more and more interesting because she thought she was beginning to see the connection between the music and the things that were happening. When a line of dark firs sprang up on a ridge...she felt that they were connected with a series of deep, prolonged notes which the Lion had sung a second before. And when he burst into a rapid series of lighter notes she was not surprised to see primroses suddenly appearing in every direction. Thus, with an unspeakable thrill, she felt quite certain that all the things were coming (as she said) 'out of the Lion's head.' When you listened to his song you heard the things he was making up: when you looked round you, you saw them.²³

The music Aslan is composing is entirely original, finding its source in his mind, yet not like unrehearsed improvisation in jazz music, but purposeful and planned, bringing about exactly what he desires. There are parallels here to God's creation of the universe, *ex nihilo*, although God speaks a word of command while Aslan sings a note of musical phrase.

Following the creation of vegetation upon the land, Aslan intensifies the dynamic of his music as he forms the living beings of Narnia. Lewis writes,

But now the song had once more changed. It was more like what we should call a tune, but it was also far wilder. It made you want to run and jump and climb. It made you want to shout. It made you want to rush at other people and either hug them or fight them.²⁴

This wilder tune, which stirred up such passionate reactions from Digory and his company, was likewise stirring up the very country of Narnia. "Can you imagine a stretch of grassy land bubbling like water in a pot? For that is really the best description of what was happening."²⁵

The land was bubbling with living creatures bursting forth from the ground as Aslan sang. As the land produced moles, dogs, stags and panthers, the river produced frogs and the trees poured forth showers of birds. Bees began to buzz, and a great elephant emerged from the ground. Of course, all these new creatures created quite a sound in themselves, for Lewis states, "And now you could hardly hear the song of the Lion; there was so much cawing, cooing, crowing, braying,

²³ Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew*, 114-115.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 121.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 122.

neighing, baying, barking, lowing, bleating and trumpeting.”²⁶ This point is important in that the work of creation was nearly finished; the song of the creator was diminishing while the sounds from the creation were growing in crescendo. Finally, Digory observes that “for the first time, the Lion was quite silent.”²⁷ His glorious song of creation was finished.

The Presence of Evil in Lewis’s Mythology

In speculating as to why both Tolkien and Lewis composed a mythology with a musical creation, Norman Styers suggests, “Perhaps both writers used music instead of the spoken word in order to leave a space in their subcreated worlds for the origin of evil.” Tolkien, as we will discuss shortly, gives greater detail to this topic. Lewis, however, doesn’t fully develop an account of the *origin* of sin, but presents his creation with sin already present as an unwelcome witness and a looming threat. For immediately following his work of creation, Aslan assembles the living beasts in council and states, “We must next take thought for keeping it safe. Come hither to me...we must talk together. For though the world is not five hours old an evil has already entered it.”²⁸ Of course, Digory had helplessly brought the evil to Narnia as Uncle Andrew and the Witch forced their way into the portal with him and his company. Yet, the significant part of this account isn’t where evil had originated, but how it reacts to the music.

Lewis dramatically reveals that the song of the Lion was not glorious to all those present. As much as Digory, Polly and the cab driver were enthralled by the sounds, Uncle Andrew “was not liking the Voice. If he could have got away from it by creeping into a rat’s hole, he would have done so.”²⁹ Uncle Andrew’s reaction may typify any unbeliever who is repulsed by Christ

²⁶ Lewis, *The Magician’s Nephew*, 123.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 124.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 130.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 108.

and his holiness and beauty, as described in John 3:20 “For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.” In Narnia, however, Lewis substitutes light with *music*, with the piercing power of pure melody somehow exposing the darkness within such people. The Witch had an even stronger reaction, less of fear, and more of pure hatred. Lewis writes,

But the Witch looked as if, in a way, she understood the music better than any of them. Her mouth was shut, her lips were pressed together, and her fists were clinched. Ever since the song began she had felt that this whole world was filled with a Magic different from hers and stronger. She hated it. She would have smashed that whole world, or all worlds, to pieces, if it would only stop the singing.³⁰

To her, the music must be silenced at all costs, even with an attempted attack upon the Lion by throwing a heavy iron bar at him. However, she was powerless to stop Aslan from this work. Styers continues his discussion of the evil witch, resigning that Lewis offers no true theodicy, but simply narrates how it opposes the creator, much like Satan in garden challenging the very word of God.

Jadis [the Witch] is not native to Narnia. The children bring her into that world... seemingly by accident when she is already in a fallen state. How evil originated in her home world of Charn is not discussed; as in the Bible, evil appears already on the job of wrecking creation. Still, it is interesting that her first opposition of Aslan and her first physical attack on him are occasioned by the music that he is making and by which he is creating. Although one might wish that Lewis had taken this opportunity to present his view of the ultimate origins of evil, he keeps his story close to the biblical account by simply allowing the evil to be present, unexplained and perhaps ultimately inexplicable.³¹

Thus, evil seeks to silence the voice of the creator, and within Lewis’s story, that voice is music. At this point, another literary work of Lewis will be briefly examined in an attempt to see more clearly how Lewis portrays the battle between music and evil.

³⁰ Lewis, *The Magician’s Nephew*, 109.

³¹ Styers, “Music in World Making,” 126.

The Space Trilogy and the Problem of Evil

The title of the first book in this series is *Out of the Silent Planet*. It is the story of a professor, Elwin Ransom, a philologist (possibly in deference to Tolkien) who is kidnapped and taken from earth (called Thulcandra) to Mars (Malacandra). He is the intended sacrifice to appease the Malancandrian creatures (wrongfully considered “gods”) called Sorn. To his surprise, the sorn are not interested in receiving a sacrifice, but are rather welcoming to the human from Thulcandra. They eventually lead him to Oyarsa, the leader of Malacandra, subservient only to Maleldil, the sovereign maker of all things. Oyarsa reveals that Ransom was summoned to Malacandra for a report of the battle between Maleldil and Thulcandra’s Oyarsa, for that Oyarsa was a “bent,” or evil creature. This is why earth is called the “silent” planet since it is controlled by an evil presence that no longer allows it to participate in the heavenly concert of the other planets.

Ransom is introduced to music upon Malacandra that stirs in him the realization that such music, once heard upon the earth, has been lying dormant, though he does not fully understand why. Dr. Adam Johnson, of Biola University, writes in his essay “Silent No More” about Ransom’s revelation.

Now first he saw that its rhythms were based on a different blood than ours, on a heart that beat more quickly, and a fiercer internal heat... A sense of great masses moving at visionary speeds, of giants dancing, of eternal sorrows eternally consoled, of he knew not what and yet what he had always known, awoke in him with the very first bars of the deep-mouthed dirge, and bowed down his spirit as if the gate of heaven had opened before him.³²

In Lewis’s story, this music was inaudible to Ransom because of the evil nature of its Oyarsa, or ruler. If we read Lewis correctly, this should awaken in us questions about our own world and what consequences we suffer from sin and Satan’s presence. Is Oyarsa Satan? I think the better question is: Does this story cause us to *ponder* or *reflect* about our fallen nature and cursed

³² Dr. Adam Johnson, “Silent No More: Lewis’ Cosmological View of Christ’s Atoning Work” (Biola University, 2016), 17.

world? Ransom was certainly doing this, for Johnson continues, “Ransom, through Malacandrian song, was beginning to hear the music he had always known but never heard, the music of the Spheres, the “central music in every pure experience which had always just evaded memory.”³³

Lewis illustrates the consequences of a “bent” ruler, silencing the music from Thulcandra, causing not only problems upon this planet, but cosmic implications throughout this whole solar system, causing other planets to inquire why the singing has stopped. Sin, or rebellion, is reflected with an analogy of broken harmony and being cut off from the cosmic song. One final example in the *Space Trilogy* is seen in the second book, *Perelandra*. This planet (Venus) did not suffer a fall into sin like Thulcandra. Ransom, present at the end, is witness to a beautiful and harmonious sound of purity and bliss among the natural and supernatural realm. But he realizes the sin and rebellion of his own world has masked this glorious unity of sound, although still present in shards and shadows.

In the very matter of our world, the traces of the celestial commonwealth are not quite lost...The Muse is a real thing. A faint breath, as Virgil says, reaches even the late generations. Our mythology is based on a solider reality than we dream: but it is also at an almost infinite distance from that base...Ransom at last understood why mythology was what it was--gleams of celestial strength and beauty falling on a jungle of filth and imbecility.³⁴

Let’s turn our attention now to these ‘gleams of celestial strength and beauty’ that Lewis refers to in regards to myth.

³³ Johnson, “Silent No More,” 17-18. Note: we will discuss the ‘music of the spheres’ in greater detail in the next chapter.

³⁴ C. S. Lewis, *Perelandria* (New York: Scribner, 1944), 173.

Lewis's Views on Mythology

As stated earlier, Lewis and Tolkien had their differences in their understanding of mythology. In addition, they varied on their approach and intent of crafting myth as an expression of deeper, timeless truths. Lewis, in his own work *On Stories*, shares this: “The value of the myth is that it takes all the things we know and restores to them the rich significance which has been hidden by ‘the veil of familiarity.’”³⁵ Myth can reveal the truer nature of things in our own world. Lewis continues, “If you are tired of the real landscape, look at it in a mirror. By putting bread, gold, horse, apple, or the very roads into a myth, we do not retreat from reality; we rediscover it.”³⁶ This view helps one understand why Lewis was considered more allegorical in his approach than Tolkien, who intently avoided such a method. Aslan, as Lewis admits, is a type of Christ figure, although as previously stated, not by initial conception. To Lewis, mythology is more in line with parable, an imaginative story that is “cast along side” a greater truth about the reality of our own world. Tolkien, however, sees his own work as independent, a secondary world that requires secondary belief to make it plausible. It is not trying to portray the author’s own viewpoint about the primary world, nor is it alluding to it in any intentional way. Lewis, however, sees his sub-creation as interdependent. His art is to communicate an idea. “Lewis wants us to feel some unsettling sense of the connectedness of his fictional world with our ‘factual’ world.”³⁷ David Downing writes, “Amazed by how few reviewers noticed the Christian implications of *Out of the Silent Planet*, Lewis quipped to a friend that ‘any amount of theology can now be smuggled into people’s minds under the cover of romance without their knowing it.’”³⁸

³⁵ C. S. Lewis, *On Stories and Other Essays on Literature [Electronic Resource]* (New York: HarperOne, 1966), 99.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ David Downing, “Sub-Creation or Smuggled Theology: Tolkien contra Lewis on Christian Fantasy,” C. S. Lewis Institute, <http://www.cslewisinstitute.org/node/1207> [accessed March 20, 2018].

³⁸ Ibid.

Thus, Lewis found the concrete world of fantasy to give clarity to the sometimes-abstract world of reality. He states, “And in the same way the whole story, paradoxically enough, strengthens our relish for real life. This excursion into the preposterous sends us back with renewed pleasure to the actual.”³⁹ I am proposing that this return to the ‘actual’ should also result in our seeking deeper insight into themes of beauty, order, sin and restoration that pulls us toward Scripture for greater illumination.

From Lewis we now consider Tolkien, his work and his thoughts on story and myth.

Tolkien’s Creation Mythology

J. R. R. Tolkien is most beloved for his works of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Yet, a much more ambitious work was, to him, the jewel of his repertoire. *The Silmarillion* was the complete history and context of the characters, events and even languages of his famous novels set in Middle-earth. This was an entire mythology, for Tolkien desired to give England an epic myth for itself, like that of the Norse and other ancient cultures. And like these ancient mythologies, it deals with origins and beginnings. For the opening section of *The Silmarillion* is a section entitled “Ainulindale,” which means “The Music of the Ainur,” and gives an account of the creation of Tolkien’s world by a supreme creator.

In this tale, Tolkien first introduces Eru, the One, also called Iluvatar. This being is the maker of all things, and the first of his creation are the “Holy Ones,” or Ainur. He writes, “And he [Iluvatar] spoke to them, propounding to them themes of music; and they sang before him, and he was glad.”⁴⁰ At the very beginning of this universe, we see communication between the maker and his primary creatures through themes of music, first given by Iluvatar, and then reciprocated by the Ainur, resulting in blessing and gladness.

³⁹ Lewis, *On Stories*, 30.

⁴⁰ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1977), 15.

At first the Ainur were singing alone, only aware of each one's own part of the music given by Iluvatar, but "ever as they listened, they came to deeper understanding and increased in unison and harmony."⁴¹ From this point, the Ainur are given creative powers to develop and enhance Iluvatar's theme with music of their own, thus illustrating in narrative form Tolkien's own view of what he calls "sub-creation," which we'll explore in greater detail soon.

Then Iluvatar said to them: Of the theme that I have declared to you, I will now that ye make in harmony together a Great Music. And since I have kindled you with the Flame Imperishable, ye shall show forth your powers in adorning this theme, each with his own thoughts and devices, if he will. But I will sit and hearken, and be glad that through you great beauty has been wakened into song.⁴²

The music of the Ainur, which Tolkien likens to the sound of "harps and lutes, and pipes and trumpets, and viols and organs, and like unto countless choirs singing with words," began to spread out in

interchanging melodies woven in harmony that passed beyond hearing into the depths and into the heights, and the places of the dwelling of Iluvatar were filled to overflowing, and the music and the echo of the music went out into the Void, and it was not void.⁴³

Like in the creation of Narnia, Tolkien's world portrays overflowing, powerful music filling a dark and silent void. Yet there are significant differences already noticeable. Where Lewis has the Lion, the son of the Emperor Beyond the Sea, literally singing rather than speaking the universe into being, roughly following the pattern in Genesis, Tolkien's musical creation is much more complex. This illustrates well the alternate approaches both have in their concept of myth and the transmission of truth. For Lewis, a very direct, rather linear comparison can be made between Aslan's musical song and God's spoken Word. In Tolkien, however, comparison breaks down, as intended. Middle-earth is not meant to be a symbol or representation of our earth, nor are we to look for a direct equivalent of the Ainur, the 'offspring of his [Iluvatar's]

⁴¹ Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, 15.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

thought' as symbolic of the logos in John's gospel. Tolkien found satisfaction in the completeness and integrity of his self-contained, secondary world without Lewis's aim to connect such a world back to our own. Still, as we shall see, Tolkien did intend what we can consider an *indirect* connection that would awaken in us a desire to see divine truth. Before seeing the actual making of his world, we have to consider how Tolkien describes rebellion and discord in the music.

A Breaking of Harmony in Tolkien's World

During the singing and sub-creation of the theme of Iluvatar, Tolkien introduces an antagonist to his story in the character of Melkor, one of the Ainur.

But as the theme progressed, it came into the heart of Melkor to interweave matters of his own imagining that were not in accord with the theme of Iluvatar; for he sought therein to increase the power and glory of the part assigned to himself.⁴⁴

As stated earlier, Tolkien would not want the reader to make a direct analogy between Melkor and Satan, but it certainly raises questions and drives the reader to consider how sin entered our own world according to Scripture. In the forming of Middle-earth, it began in a fallen Ainu, whose "desire grew hot within him to bring into Being things of his own,"⁴⁵ as a *creator*, not a sub-creator. Tolkien illustrates this breaking of the music by explaining,

Some of these thoughts he now wove into his music, and straightway discord arose about him, and many that sang nigh him grew despondent, and their thought was disturbed and their music faltered; but some began to attune their music to his rather than to the thought which they had at first. Then the discord of Melkor spread ever wider, and the melodies which had been heard before foundered in a sea of turbulent sound.⁴⁶

Unlike Lewis, who portrayed rebellion as a desire to stop or avoid the music of Aslan, or as silence in the *Space Trilogy*, Tolkien portrays evil as disharmony, or a counterfeit music. He

⁴⁴ Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, 16.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

describes an alternate, self-serving, pseudo-musical theme to enter and disrupt, causing others to follow it rather than the original melody. Jean Chance makes a comparison here between Tolkien and Milton. She proposes that in both accounts of creation, the question is raised but not answered: *why?* She states that in *Paradise Lost*, “Satan’s Fall is stated simply as a *given*; it avoids the central issue concerning how a free creature created morally flawless can make a choice against the good.”⁴⁷ Likewise, in Tolkien’s myth, the “intrusion of evil into the world... is not first or even foremost the fault of Men... it is the fault of one of the Valar [Ainur].”⁴⁸ Chance raises the issue that in both Milton and Tolkien, and I would propose in Lewis too, that the question of the responsibility for evil is not answered. She goes so far as to propose

Melkor himself might have objected (though he does not) that responsibility for the error that results from his exercise of the free will with which he was endowed must lie at least in part in his creation as a free being, and thus must have its ultimate source in the creator--Eru--himself. The very act of creation must contain within it at least the risk that something might go awry.⁴⁹

But this is precisely what myth should do: raise questions about the deeper things of life such as the origin and responsibility for evil, and how we are to view the sovereignty of our Maker. Tolkien continues his narrative by addressing the response of Iluvatar to Melkor’s rebellion, still within a musical motif.

The discordant theme of Melkor continued to clash with a second theme of Iluvatar, to the dismay of the loyal Ainur and to the ire and wrath of Iluvatar. Finally, after what Tolkien describes as a raging storm and a violent sound, he writes,

Behold! A third theme grew amid the confusion, and it was unlike the others... at first soft and sweet, a mere rippling of gentle sounds in delicate melodies; but it could not be quenched, and it took to itself power and profundity.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Chance, *Tolkien the Medievalist*, 207-208.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 208.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 209.

⁵⁰ Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, 16.

Here we see the sovereign power of Iluvatar with an irresistible will that his music will prevail. But now Iluvatar's music is said to have incorporated the discordant theme into its own, leaving the other stripped of any worth or beauty.

And it seemed at last that there were two musics progressing at one time before the seat of Iluvatar, and they were utterly at variance. The one was deep and wide and beautiful, but slow and blended with an immeasurable sorrow, from which its beauty chiefly came.⁵¹

This is Tolkien's view that the most beautiful of stories contain sorrow that has been overcome with triumph, resulting in greater joy. As we will see, this is the essence of the Gospel story to Tolkien. And Melkor's music diminished to being

loud, and vain, and endlessly repeated; and it had little harmony, but rather a clamorous unison as of many trumpets braying upon a few notes...but it seemed that its most triumphant notes were taken by the other [Iluvatar's theme] and woven into its own solemn pattern."⁵²

This brings to my mind what we will see in the next chapter as Augustine's concept of "plundering the Egyptians," except here the creator plunders the renegade music of the enemy to weave it into his own theme, now containing melodic lines not only of the beauty of creation, but the glory of restoration, still containing elements of sorrow and solemnity. Iluvatar now declares his power over all creatures and music:

And thou, Melkor, shalt see that no theme may be played that hath not its uttermost source in me, nor can any alter the music in my despite. For he that attempteth this shall prove but mine instrument in the devising of things more wonderful, which he himself hath not imagined.⁵³

Finally the theme of Iluvatar and the sub-themes of the Ainur result in the making of the physical world. To the Ainur Iluvatar declares

⁵¹ Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, 16-17.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 17.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

‘Behold your Music!’ And he showed to them a vision, giving to them sight where before was only hearing; and they saw a new World made visible before them, and it was globed amid the Void, and it was sustained therein, but was not of it.⁵⁴

Notice that instead of forming and arranging matter upon an existing place that was “formless and void” as did Aslan, Tolkien places a new globe within an existing Void. This reiterates the position that Tolkien was not attempting to follow the Genesis account in any direct way. Yet, he does give sole creative power to Iluvatar in the making of the inhabitants of this new world, “Children of Iluvatar,” which were men and elves. The Ainur had no role or even thought of this. For they

knew not that it [the world] had any purpose beyond its own beauty. For the Children of Iluvatar were conceived by him alone; and they came with the third theme and were not in the theme which Iluvatar propounded at the beginning, and none of the Ainur had part in their making.⁵⁵

I am reminded of the hymn “Crown Him With Many Crowns,” in which we sing “No angel in the sky can full bear that sight, but downward bends his wondering eye at mysteries so bright.”⁵⁶ God’s messengers do not have insight nor experience in the grace of redemption from God to man. Likewise, the men in Tolkien’s world are not derived from any sub-creator but only from Iluvatar himself.

Tolkien’s View of Mythology

Just as Lewis provided his thoughts and ideas about fiction in a collection of essays titled *On Stories*, Tolkien addressed this in his work *On Fairy-Stories*, originally a university lecture that was later transcribed as an essay. In this work, Tolkien gives great detail to his view of

⁵⁴ Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, 17.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁵⁶ Matthew Bridges, “Crown Him With Many Crowns.”

mythology, specifically in the genre of fairy-story⁵⁷ and its worth and benefit to the reader. A few points from this work are relevant to this thesis and will be briefly examined.

Tolkien knew that ‘magic’ or fantastic elements of such stories were not meant to be where their true significance lies. He explains, “The magic of Faerie is not an end in itself, its virtue is in its operations: among these are the satisfaction of certain primordial human desires. One of these desires is to survey the depths of space and time. Another is to hold communion with other living things.”⁵⁸ Stories like these stimulate grander thoughts and questions and desires within the reader. Anticipating that skeptical adults would object to the incredulity of such stories often considered only for children, Tolkien argues that such a one is missing the point.

But at no time can I remember that the enjoyment of a story was dependent on belief that such things could happen, or had happened, in 'real life.' Fairy-stories were plainly not primarily concerned with possibility, but with desirability. If they awakened *desire*, satisfying it while often whetting it unbearably, they succeeded.⁵⁹

He continues by validating the enjoyment I receive from reading such literature well past my childhood. “If fairy-story as a kind is worth reading at all it is worthy to be written for and read by adults.”⁶⁰

Tolkien admits that even children sometimes ask the question “Is this true?” regarding fantasy and fairy-story, but he writes, “Far more often they have asked me: ‘Was he good? Was he wicked?’ That is, they were more concerned to get the Right side and the Wrong side clear. For that is a question equally important in History and in Faerie.”⁶¹ This supports the claim that

⁵⁷ Although Tolkien describes this genre in great detail, we can consider *fairy-story* to serve synonymously with fantasy and mythology as exemplified in this thesis.

⁵⁸ J. R. R. Tolkien, “On Fairy-Stories,” in *Tree and Leaf* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1966), 13.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 38. “Faerie” is a word Tolkien uses for the mythical setting of a “perilous land” in which all true fairy-stories take place.

such literature can even drive a young child to ask weightier questions than simply if dragons or elves are real.

Finally, I think it is worth considering Tolkien's statement that "fairy-stories offer also, in a peculiar degree or mode, these things: Fantasy, Recovery, Escape, and Consolation."⁶² Fantasy as literature, "does not seek delusion [like magic in our primary world does] nor bewitchment and domination; it seeks shared enrichment, partners in making and delight, not slaves."⁶³ The making of fantasy is what Tolkien refers to when uses the term sub-creation. This creative ability and impulse derives from God, the original Creator, who grants us the 'right' to create, endorsing and endowing humans with such literary skill. "Fantasy remains a human right: we make in our measure and in our derivative mode, because we are made: and not only made, but made in the image and likeness of a Maker,"⁶⁴ Tolkien explains.

Recovery is a way of seeing anew what has become dull or trite. Recovery is re-gaining—re-gaining of a clear view...I might venture to say 'seeing things as we are (or were) meant to see them' --as things apart from ourselves. We need, in any case, to clean our windows; so that the things seen clearly may be freed from the drab blur of triteness or familiarity---from possessiveness.⁶⁵

Fairy-story helps us consider the truer reality of things in our world by seeing them set in more vivid or 'luminous' settings in the realm of Faerie.

Escape, in contrast to a negative term by critics, is a valid reason for reading fairy-story. Tolkien explains that it is not to be equated with abdicating a responsibility in life. Escape, outside of the literary world is practical, or even heroic, such as one escaping from the evil regime of the Third Reich. Critics "are confusing, not always by sincere error, the Escape of the

⁶² Tolkien, "On Fairy-stories," 46.

⁶³ Ibid., 53.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 55.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 57.

Prisoner with the Flight of the Deserter... And lastly, there is the oldest and deepest desire, the Great Escape: the Escape from Death.”⁶⁶

His final aspect of fairy-story is Consolation, which is the true blessing and experience of joy when death no longer holds one in chains. Tolkien says that this is not a mere “imaginative satisfaction of ancient desires. Far more important is the Consolation of the Happy Ending. Almost I would venture to assert that all complete fairy-stories must have it.”⁶⁷ Just as tragedy is the highest goal of the drama and its true function, he explains that for fairy-story, it is consolation. “Since we do not appear to possess a word that expresses this opposite---I will call it *Eucatastrophe*. The *eucatastrophic* tale is the true form of fairy-tale, and its highest function.”⁶⁸ True to his vocation as a philologist, Tolkien creates a word with the Greek prefix *eu* meaning good or well with the word *catastrophe*. He describes this as a sudden, joyous *turn* in the story, when hope and restoration and wholeness enter in to what was previously dark and broken and despairing. Its true significance lies in this statement: “It is not essentially ‘escapist’ nor ‘fugitive.’ It is a sudden and miraculous grace...It denies universal final defeat and in so far is *evangelium*, giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief.”⁶⁹ Here Tolkien gives very clear insight into the connection between the fantasy and mythology he treasures, and the Christian Gospel that’s even greater. He is not ambiguous or veiled in his worldview on this matter. I quote him at length here:

I would venture to say that approaching the Christian Story from this direction, it has long been my feeling (a joyous feeling) that God redeemed the corrupt-making creatures, men, in a way fitting to this aspect, as to others, of their strange nature. The Gospels contain a fairy-story, or a story of a larger kind which embraces all the essence of fairy-stories. They contain many marvels--peculiarly artistic, beautiful, and moving; mythical in their perfect, self-contained significance...and among the marvels is the greatest and

⁶⁶ Tolkien, “On Fairy-stories,” 60, 67.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

most complete conceivable eucatastrophe. The Birth of Christ is the eucatastrophe of Man's history. The Resurrection is the eucatastrophe of the story of the Incarnation. The story begins and ends in joy. It has pre-eminently the 'inner consistency of reality.' There is no tale ever told that men would rather find was true...

This apologetic for the greatest of all stories is what finally convinced C. S. Lewis that Christianity was true--the true Myth that brought full and complete satisfaction and joy to everything these men found in the stories they loved and cherished.

To end this chapter, I want to reiterate that although Tolkien and Lewis had their differences as to how myth can transmit truth, they both shared a conviction that they *do* transmit truth, or at least direct one in the way in which truth can ultimately be found in the person of Jesus Christ. Montgomery summarizes that "To Tolkien and Lewis, tales such as the Narnian Chronicles can, by their very nature, serve as pointers to the great theme of Christian Redemption. Moreover, they will establish in the hearts of the sensitive reader an appreciation of, and a longing for, the Christian Story."⁷⁰ And Clyde Kilby aptly writes of Tolkien's work: "For many readers the story deeply suggests the sadness of a paradise lost and the glory of one that can be regained."⁷¹

⁷⁰ John Warwick Montgomery, ed., *Myth Allegory and Gospel: An Interpretation of J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, G. K. Chesterton and Charles Williams* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, Inc., 1974), 118.

⁷¹ Clyde S. Kilby, "Mythic and Christian Elements in Tolkien," in *Myth Allegory and Gospel: An Interpretation of J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, G. K. Chesterton and Charles Williams* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, Inc., 1974), 143.

Chapter 3 - Musical Traditions of the Creation Account

John Knox Chamblin, in a lecture on C. S. Lewis and poetry stated, “The task of the poet, playwright or novelist is not to reveal something from the depths of his own being but to point outward and upward to something that far transcends itself.”⁷² The idea of a musical creation was not original to Tolkien and Lewis. In fact, they would be quite comfortable, I propose, to be considered *unoriginal*, for their desire was in ancient beauty and classic lore. Thus, they both drew upon a shared, rich legacy of literary, historical and even musical heritage from the ancient world to the middle ages, and through the Reformation to their own day. The concept of a musical creation can be seen in various eras of history beginning with Greek philosophy, the cosmology of Augustine and the middle ages, Luther’s own views upon the arts, and to the English poets of the Puritan tradition. All of these sources, along with the Scriptural foundations of Lewis and Tolkien, contribute to the creation narratives we find in *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *The Silmarillion*.

The Greek View of the Universe

The Greek thinker Pythagoras is commonly credited with the discovery that musical pitches and harmonies can be quantified with number. Perhaps somewhat legendary, Pythagoras was said to be walking past a blacksmith hammering away at his work. He noticed that, at times, the various sounds of clanking metal produced pitches that were more pleasing or harmonious with each other. What followed was his mathematical proposal that musical pitches can be described as ratios of their vibrations in relation to each other. Jeremy Begbie explains, “This led to a vision that was at root numerical, *rational*—the harmony of the universe can be

⁷² John Knox Chamblin, *The Modern Man*, Lecture on C. S. Lewis (Reformed Theological Seminary), 2014.

expressed in mathematical ratios or proportions apprehended by the mind, and musical sounds can mediate these ratios.”⁷³ Thus, the interval of an octave is the ratio 2:1 and a musical fifth is 3:2, for example.

Just as smaller earthly examples aided in one’s grasp of much larger realities in the heavens, this numerical understanding of music served as a way to understand the nature of the universe. What developed was the concept of the “Music of the Spheres.” If the earth can produce mathematically musical sounds with common, everyday objects, what ratios and relationships exist in the celestial realm? Simply put, this theory can be summarized as “The belief that planets and stars of different sizes emit different pitches, generating huge, but inaudible cosmic music.”⁷⁴ To the ancient world, this gave a framework to the observable order and stability of the world around them. Dr. Adam Johnson, of Biola University, further explains,

Such a cosmos saturated the ancient world and imagination with structure, order, symmetry and shape, which modern cosmology replaced with space, distance, infinity, and chaos. But shape and order are just the beginning, for according to Pythagoras (who was followed by Plato and many others), this structured movement of the spheres was naturally accompanied by music and harmony.⁷⁵

The “Music of Spheres” saturated the Western mindset for centuries, influencing science and philosophy as well as literature and poetry. Dr. Johnson gives an example from Cicero’s *Dream of Scipio* to illustrate this cosmological worldview. He writes,

After describing the heavens, much as [C. S.] Lewis does, Scipio asks: “What is this sound, so strong and so sweet, which fills my ears?” “That,” Africanus replied, “is the music of the spheres. They create it by their own motion as they rush upon their way. The intervals between them, although differing in length, are all measured according to a fixed scheme of proportions; and this arrangement produces a melodious blend of high and low notes, from which emerges a varied harmony. For it cannot be that these vast

⁷³ Jeremy S. Begbie, *Resounding Truth: Christian Wisdom in the World of Music* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 79.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁷⁵ Johnson, “Silent No More,” 14.

movements should take place in silence, and nature has ordained that the spheres utter music.”⁷⁶

The Early Christian View

The belief in a musically harmonious universe was not exclusive to secular Greek and Roman philosophy and literature, but had its foothold in the early church as well. Peter Casarella, in his essay “Music and Creation in Three Theologians,” uses the term *Carmen Dei*, or *God’s Song* to describe “the harmony, order, and beauty with which an all-powerful God created the world.”⁷⁷ Among his ‘three theologians,’ he begins with the foundation laid by Augustine and his cosmological views within his early work, *De Musica*. Augustine continued the idea of the “ancient notion that numerical proportions bind the universe together. In Augustine’s mind, sounded music must be understood in this context. Audible music can—at least at its best—render these proportions accessible to the ear.”⁷⁸ To Augustine, music wasn’t merely a human creation of sounds composed with melody, harmony and rhythm. This would be the lesser, audible form of music that is subservient to the greater discipline of music as a “mathematical discipline... concerned with number.”⁷⁹ Casarella writes, “Number is the key to Augustine’s cosmic *carmen*: It is not just an instrument for counting; number has intrinsic meaning (*sensus*). The judgments we make about numbers derive from a natural endowment (*ius naturale*) implanted in human beings by God.”⁸⁰ So, to Augustine, music *as number* was an expression of God’s governing and orchestrating the created universe in a harmonious relationship of order and pattern. Earthly, audible music was a lower copy or shadow of the higher, divine concept of music. In the words of Augustine, “Earthly things are subject to celestial ones, [and] their temporal rotations are

⁷⁶ Johnson, “Silent No More,” 14-15.

⁷⁷ Peter J. Casarella, “Carmen Dei: Music and Creation in Three Theologians,” *Theology Today* 62, no. 4 (January 2006), 484.

⁷⁸ Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, 84.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Casarella, “Carmen Dei,” 485.

bound together by a numerical succession as if like the *carmen* of the whole universe.”⁸¹ Begbie summarizes Augustine’s view of number as a means of growing in knowledge of God himself. “Guided by the hand of divine providence, it is the mind’s privilege to rise step by step from the lowest to the highest numbers and thus to the knowledge and love of God, the fount and ground of numerical beauty.”⁸² Here we see how Augustine has provided a Christian worldview that gives purpose and personality to creation rather than just impersonal rationality. Begbie concludes his summary of *De Musica* with this profound conclusion:

Indeed, at the heart of *De Musica* lies the conviction that God actually *is* music in this sense; he is supreme measure, number, relation, harmony, unity, and equality, and all manifestations and embodiments of music in the world are from him. The music of the universe--the harmony, unity, measure, equality, and relation of the music of creation--is but a temporal expression of the eternal music belonging to God.⁸³

In the next century, Boethius would carry this tradition to an even greater degree, as Begbie states, “More than anyone else, Boethius formed the musical mind of medieval culture.”⁸⁴

Chadwick explains that, like Augustine, Boethius understood music to have its fullest expression in the cosmos, not with man. He writes that for Boethius,

the theory of music is a penetration of the very heart of providence’s ordering of things. It is not a matter of cheerful entertainment or superficial consolation for sad moods, but a central clue to the interpretation of the hidden harmony of God and nature in which the only discordant element is evil in the heart of man.⁸⁵

This idea of the sinfulness of man affecting the harmony of the universe is a theme of great significance in the medieval era.

⁸¹ Casarella, “Carmen Dei,” 486-7, quoting Augustine’s *De Musica* VI.7.18.

⁸² Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, 84.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 84-85.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, quoting Henry Chadwick, *Boethius: The Consolations of Music, Logic, Theology and Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981), 101.

The Medieval View of the Cosmos

The medieval view continued with the preoccupation of order and stability in the cosmos. Yet, the focus began shifting away from a scientific classification of inaudible, higher music in the universe and lower, audible music upon the earth. There are now evidences of a spiritual explanation for why cosmological music and harmony may be inaccessible to man. In the medieval view, there was a belief that “disorder is contrary to the will of God and a destruction of his plan for creation.”⁸⁶ Lewis himself, in his work *The Discarded Image*, explains the shift of viewing the universe as something “out there” to a view of trying to “look inside.” The earth has long been the center of reality, with mankind looking upwards and outwards to the heavens that surround it. Likewise, in our modern, unbelieving world one views the vast, infinite universe from the perspective of the observer on the ground. Lewis writes,

Again, because the medieval universe is finite, it has a shape, the perfect spherical shape, containing within itself an ordered variety. Hence to look out on the night sky with modern eyes is like looking out over a sea that fades away into the mist, or looking about one in a trackless forest--trees forever and no horizon. To look up at the towering medieval universe is much more like looking at a great building. The ‘space’ of modern astronomy may arouse terror, or bewilderment or vague reverie; the spheres of the old present us with an object in which the mind can rest, overwhelming in its greatness but satisfying in its harmony. That is the sense in which our universe is romantic, and theirs was classical.⁸⁷

An infinite, shapeless, endless universe, according to the medievals, denied the order and harmony in which it was intentionally and purposefully created. The music of the spheres was not merely random, atonal pitches, much like we might describe whale sounds as *song*. Rather, it was composed by a composer to give satisfaction and stability to its inhabitants. Yet it

⁸⁶ Brian L. Horne, “A Civitas of Sound: On Luther and Music,” *Theology* 88, no. 721 (January 1985), 28.

⁸⁷ C. S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 99.

appeared dark and silent, not intrinsically, but because of what Lewis calls a “shadow” around the earth. He writes, “Nothing is more deeply impressed on the cosmic imaginings of a modern man than the idea that the heavenly bodies move in a pitch-black and dead-cold vacuity. It was not so in the Medieval Model.”⁸⁸ Lewis explains their extreme heliocentric view that the sun illuminates everything in the universe, and we only see blackness in the night sky because of the shadow cast by the earth. “When we look up at the night sky we are looking through darkness but not at darkness.”⁸⁹

Furthermore, the medieval view attributes the silence of the universe to the condition of man looking through this shadow of earth, and not because the cosmos actually *is* impersonal, uncreated silence. Lewis continues,

And secondly, as that vast (though finite) space is not dark, so neither is it silent.

If our ears were opened we should perceive, as Henryson puts it,

Every planet in his proper sphere

in moving makand harmony and sound. (Fables, 1659)

If the reader cares to repeat the experiment, already suggested, of a nocturnal walk with the medieval astronomy in mind, he will easily feel the effect of these two last details.

The ‘silence’... was, according to the Model, wholly illusory; and the sky looks black only because we are seeing it through the dark glass of our own shadow. You must conceive yourself looking up at a world lighted, warmed, and resonant with music.⁹⁰

This medieval model, per Lewis, has God at its center, as the *Primum Mobile*, or Prime Mover who moves the planets and stars, and “Intelligences”⁹¹ by love--a compelling love that causes movement towards Him. Thus, earth is not at the center, but on the outside. “But if you accepted the Medieval Model you would feel like one looking *in*. The Earth is ‘outside the city

⁸⁸ Lewis, *Discarded Image*, 111.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Lewis explains the concept of ‘Intelligences’ as celestial spheres with something like a soul. “Each sphere, or something resident in each sphere, is a conscious and intellectual being, moved by the ‘intellectual love’ of God... These lofty creatures are called Intelligences.” (*Discarded Image*, 115.) They can also be considered ‘Angelic’ beings.

wall.”⁹² And why can we not see nor hear from our vantage point? It is because of sin and imperfection. Lewis explains, “Darkness, our own darkness, draws the veil and we catch a glimpse of the high pomps within; the vast, lighted concavity filled with music and life...the revelry of insatiable love.”⁹³

Yet, a model like this--one with *intellectual* love drawing things to itself, may seem to contradict the Christian understanding of a *gracious* love that came down to mankind in the Incarnation. Lewis denies this as an absolute, logical contradiction. He concludes, “a real universe could accommodate the ‘love of God’ in both senses.”⁹⁴ Nevertheless, Lewis does state that most writers have chosen sides when it comes to these two types of the love of God.

While there is no contradiction, the antithesis fully explains why the [Medieval] Model is so little in evidence among spiritual writers and why the whole atmosphere of their work is so different from [French poet] Jean de Meung or even Dante himself. Spiritual books are practical in purpose, addressed to those who ask direction. Only the order of grace is relevant.⁹⁵

Without denying or replacing the need for spiritual books about the practical applications of the doctrines of grace, I’m proposing that there is also a place for literature describing the lighted, musical place that should invoke in us a sense of longing and expectation to enter in. But such stories were fading into the minority. Larsen notes, “Despite the universality and poetic qualities of the music of the spheres, the concept became little more than a historical footnote in the minds of scientists for nearly four centuries. It was only in literature and the arts that the idea remained.”⁹⁶ Lewis, of course, kept this tradition alive in his own stories, as Larsen concludes, “The music of the spheres and its creative powers found prominence in the subcreations of

⁹² Lewis, *Discarded Image*, 119.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁹⁶ Kristine Larsen, “Behold Your Music!?: Themes of Iluvatar, the Song of Aslan, and the Real Music of the Spheres,” in *Music in Middle-Earth* (Zurich: Walking Tree Publishers, 2010), 12.

writers like J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis, Middle-earth and Narnia, respectively.”⁹⁷ I would add that we still find remnants of this Medieval cosmological view with our own heritage of Christian hymnody, especially evident in Maltbie D. Babcock’s text of “This is My Father’s World.” In the opening stanza we sing,

*“This is my Father’s world, and to my listening ears
All nature sings, and round me rings the music of the spheres.”*⁹⁸

Luther’s View of Music

Martin Luther, a transitional figure in the movement from medieval to modern thought, may not have had the aforementioned medieval cosmological model in mind when he spoke of music. However, it is clear that music played a significant role in his life.

I am so completely overwhelmed by the quantity and greatness of its excellence and virtues that I can find neither beginning nor end, nor adequate words or expressions to say what I ought. Experience proves that next to the Word of God only music deserves to be exalted as the mistress and governess of the human heart.”⁹⁹

But what would an Anglican (Lewis) and a Roman Catholic (Tolkien) have to do with the Protestant Reformer, Luther? Aside from his position on soteriology, Luther had much to say regarding the intersection of art and theology, which may have contributed to the western literary traditions of writers such as these. As seen above, Luther held music in very high esteem. Furthermore, he did give credence to the Pythagorean model of cosmological music, not in its scientific merits or verity, but at least in its analogy to the beauty and delight of God’s created order. In his commentary on the opening chapters of Genesis, Luther proposes the question of

⁹⁷ Larsen, “Behold Your Music!”, 12-13.

⁹⁸ Maltbie, D. Babcock, “This is My Father’s World.”

⁹⁹ Horne, “A Civitas of Sound”, 26, quoting Martin Luther.

why one may retain the wonder and amazement of the original days of creation, yet lose such admiration of God's day-to-day governance of the universe. He writes,

But how is it that the original miracles of the creation of Adam and Eve seem to us so wonderful and so incredible; while the still standing miracle of the continuous propagation of man, which we all know and daily see, excites no wonder or admiration at all? It is because, as Augustine says, "Miracles become no miracles at all, by familiarity." Hence we wonder not at the admirable light of the sun, because we see it every day. For the same reason we admire not other gifts and blessings of God's creation, but are blind and deaf to them all.¹⁰⁰

He then continues by exploring the idea that being blind and deaf to such wonder is not merely attributed to familiarity, but rather because of dull and sinful hearts.

On the same ground Pythagoras well said, that a most sweet and marvelous concert of sounds was effected by the harmony and velocity of the motions and revolutions of the heavenly bodies, but that men became deaf to this celestial concert by hearing it continually; just as those who are accustomed to the roarings of the Nile are not at all affected by the thunders of the water... There is no doubt that Pythagoras received this idea from the fathers by tradition. Not however that they really believed in any actual harmony of sounds, made by the motions of the heavenly bodies. Their meaning was that the creation of these celestial bodies was truly delightful and marvelous; but that their beauty and their glory were not duly observed by us ungrateful and insensate beings; and that we did not render unto God the praises due to him, as the Creator of such wonderful and admirable creatures.¹⁰¹

So to Luther, the music of the spheres was metaphorical in the sense that it represented what was "delightful and marvelous" about the creation. He did not condemn it as fanciful or harmful to one's concept of reality. Rather, he upheld it for its appropriateness in describing a Creator worthy of being praised for his beautiful creation.

Still, B. L. Horne, in his essay "A Civitas of Sound: On Luther and Music," carries the connection of Luther and music a little further. Referring to Luther's commentary on Genesis, he writes, "In discussing the nature of God's creative activity, Luther's mind revolves around the

¹⁰⁰ Martin Luther in *Luther on the Creation: A Critical and Devotional Commentary on Genesis [Electronic Resource]*, trans. and ed. John Nicholas Lenker (Minneapolis: Lutherans in All Lands Co., 1904), <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/48193/48193-h/48193-h.htm#sect21> [accessed April 3, 2018].

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

question of order. These opening chapters of the Bible tell the story of the establishment of order in the original creation of the world, and the destruction of that order by the rebellion of Adam.”¹⁰² Recall what we discussed earlier regarding the mythology of Tolkien and Lewis and their concept of sin as disharmony in the original music. Horne continues,

In the aftermath of the terrible disruption of that order by the sin of Adam two things remain: theology and music. Why music? For Luther the entirely nonfigurative, non-representational, non-verbal world of sound in which every note and rhythm finds its proper place in the whole, and is indispensable to the whole, was not only a sign of the possibility of order, but was an actual achievement of that order, a sure indication of the stability of God in a shifting and unstable world.¹⁰³

Not only would Luther have approved of music as a metaphor of created order, but also as a metaphor of God’s continuing providence as he holds all things together. I would add that this metaphor could extend to a restoration of the created order in the new creation to come. Thus, it is reasonable to see that Tolkien and Lewis, even if not directly influenced by Luther’s view of music and the cosmos, are not at odds with him in this matter.

Poets of the Puritan Tradition

Moving on from the scientists, philosophers and theologians who have perpetuated this tradition, we now turn to the poets. Begbie, echoing the sentiment from Larsen, writes, “Even when Pythagoreanism waned, the use of musical harmony as a metaphor of cosmic order...is carried forward in modern literature and poetry (it can be found in Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden, and many others.)¹⁰⁴ The literary world is where Tolkien and Lewis felt most at home, and it is not difficult to see rather obvious seeds of music and cosmology and sin’s discord in the works of the authors listed above that would have taken root and blossomed in their 20th century stories.

¹⁰² Horne, “A Civitas of Sound,” 27.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, 78.

In Act 5, Scene 1 of “The Merchant of Venice,” Shakespeare writes,

Here will we sit and let the sounds of music
 Creep in our ears. Soft stillness and the night
 Become the touches of sweet harmony.
 There’s not the smallest orb which thou behold’st
 But in his motion like an angel sings,
 Still choring to the young-eyed cherubins.

“The ‘touches of sweet harmony’ [of which Shakespeare writes about] have their source in the rotation of the heavenly orbs. The celestial concord, informing our lives with beauty, finds its counterpart in the human soul, the microcosm of the macrocosm,”¹⁰⁵ explains Begbie. He considers Shakespeare’s human soul as an image bearer of the universe at large, not necessarily of God himself. Still, we find more imagery of sin’s corrupting effects upon the ears.

Such harmony is in immortal souls,
 But whilst this muddy vesture of decay
 Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.¹⁰⁶

John Milton, considered by many to be England’s greatest poet, added fantasy and imagination not to a sub-created secondary world, but to the retelling of the creation and fall of our own world, per the Biblical narrative in Genesis. In *Paradise Lost*, Milton expounds the story of creation with imaginative and fantastic imagery depicting heaven, hell, angels and demons, as well as the Trinitarian God and the first man and woman upon the earth. In Book VII we read of Adam asking the angel Raphael for an account of the creation story. The angel responds with the events in heaven after God declares his intention to create the universe, following the rebellion of Satan.

Great triumph and rejoicing was in Heaven,
 When such was heard declared the Almighty's will;
 Glory they sung to the Most High, good will
 To future men, and in their dwellings peace;¹⁰⁷ (VII: 180-184)

¹⁰⁵ Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, 80.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 80, quoting Shakespeare’s “Merchant of Venice,” Act 5, Scene 1.

¹⁰⁷ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, VII:180-184. All other references included in endnotes only.

The concept of angelic singing is seen here, perhaps in reference to Job 38:7. When Christ is sent to do his work of creation, Milton imagines a peek into heaven:

Heaven opened wide
Her ever-during gates, harmonious sound
On golden hinges moving, to let forth
The King of Glory, in his powerful Word
And Spirit, coming to create new worlds. (VII: 215-219)

Like Lewis's description of the medieval view, Milton proposes a resonant, music-filled atmosphere in the heavenly realm, here emerging from the very gates themselves. And, from a slightly different angle, Milton describes discord, or unorganized sound, not merely as the result of the man's sinful state, but as the condition of the formless void of yet uncreated earth. He writes of Christ the Creator speaking:

Silence, ye troubled Waves, and thou Deep, peace,
Said then the Omnic Word; your discord end! (VII: 216-217)

Following that first day of creation, Milton describes the musical response from the angelic host.

Thus was the first day even and morn:
Nor past uncelebrated, nor unsung
By the celestial choirs, when orient light
Exhaling first from darkness they beheld; (VII: 252-255)

One more example from the poetry of Milton is found in his work "At a Solemn Music." In this poem, Milton describes heavenly music as the fullest and purest expression of our music upon the earth. He writes of two sisters, Voice and Verse, symbolizing the music of the natural world (the spheres) and the music of the angelic choir above. He employs them to aid in helping us to hear

That undisturbed Song of pure content,
Ay sung before the sapphire-colour'd throne
To him that sits thereon.

We also see again the broken harmony resulting from man's fall from grace. He is pleading for restoration of what was once in "diapason," or a perfect octave in harmony between heaven and earth, once enjoyed in man's original goodness.

That we on Earth with undiscording voice
 May rightly answer that melodious noise;
 As once we did, till disproportion'd sin
 Jarr'd against natures chime, and with harsh din
 Broke the fair musick that all creatures made
 To their great Lord, whose love their motion sway'd
 In perfect Diapason, whilst they stood
 In first obedience, and their state of good.

He finishes with a longing of restoration.

O may we soon again renew that Song
 And keep in tune with Heav'n, till God ere long
 To his celestial consort us unite,
 To live with him, and sing in endles morn of light.¹⁰⁸

One final poet to be considered is John Dryden and his poem "A Song for St. Cecilia's Day, 1687." In this work, Dryden describes a "heap of jarring atoms" that are ordered in place by the voice of heavenly music above.

From Harmony, from heav'nly Harmony
 This universal Frame began.
 When Nature underneath a heap
 Of jarring Atomes lay,
 And cou'd not heave her Head,
 The tuneful Voice was heard from high,
 Arise ye more than dead.
 Then cold, and hot, and moist, and dry,
 In order to their stations leap,
 And MUSICK'S pow'r obey.¹⁰⁹

Peter Schakel explains that this example is not merely a metaphor for music and creation. "In Dryden's ode and Lewis's creation account, the beauty, orderliness, and harmony of music are integrally related to the deepest structures of the universe—not that those structures are like music, but that they are formed of music and by music."¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ John Milton, "At a Solemn Music" in *The Complete Poetical Works of John Milton*, ed. Harris Francis Fletcher (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1941), 66.

¹⁰⁹ Peter J. Schakel, *Imagination and the Arts in C.S. Lewis: Journeying to Narnia and Other Worlds [Electronic Resource]*, 2002, 104-105, <http://ezproxy.biola.edu/login?url=http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/biola-ebooks/detail.action?docID=3570712> [accessed April 14, 2018].

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 105.

In light of this historical survey of the traditions of music and the universe, I believe it's quite clear that Tolkien and Lewis were not trailblazers but rather fellow travelers upon a well-worn path. "The medieval concept of the music of the spheres would have been a natural part of Tolkien's education... This is reflected in Tolkien's grand creation myth, the *Ainulindale* (Music of the Ainur),"¹¹¹ writes Larsen. Likewise,

By having the lion *sing* the song of creation, Lewis has quietly, unobtrusively put young readers in touch with an ancient tradition regarding the universe. In western culture music has long served as an image of the orderliness and harmony of the universe, particularly through the music of the spheres, which keeps the concentric hollow globes circling the earth in an orderly way.¹¹²

Amidst such a legacy of thinkers, many of whom Christian in faith and worldview, who would object to finding value and worth in Tolkien and Lewis? Yet, there are those who remain unconvinced. At this point we will consider objections to Christian mythology and fantasy literature.

¹¹¹ Larsen, "Behold Your Music!", 14.

¹¹² Schakel, "Imagination and the Arts," 105.

Chapter 4 - Objections to Mythology

Not everyone will readily embrace mythology within Christianity, nor find it a viable source from which to reflect and formulate meaningful questions. Moreover, fantasy literature, especially such as is written for children in mind, is ignored as either fanciful and childish, or even to be shunned as dangerous and deceptive. The struggle between literary art and theological truth is a long-standing one, which is expressed quite famously in Tertullian's question: "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" Literature, particularly stories, fantasies, myths, legends and fairy-tales, reflect the culture rather than the doctrine of the church. And culture, as history shows us, most often reflects a pagan, or secular worldview. Hence, to embrace a myth is to wander from the course of truth. Leland Ryken writes, "Christians have traditionally found it difficult to grant integrity to this world of the imagination and have found ways to suppress or discredit the imaginary element in literature."¹¹³

In his chapter "Christian Poetics, Past and Present," Donald T. Williams explains, "Christians have struggled to apply to literature the general New Testament principle about being in the world but not of it (John 17:11-16). They were rightly wary of a culture based on idolatry-hence of literature in general."¹¹⁴ Yet, he lays out the conundrum that for Christians to outright reject literature is to contradict their own literary foundations, and the fact that "they, and all humankind, were created in the image of one who expressed his inmost nature from the beginning as the Word."¹¹⁵ If Christ is the Word, then words, whether spoken or written, or even sung, must have value. The objectors would not disagree with words per se, but with the arrangement of words into anything other than propositional, rational, or doctrinal truth. Thus,

¹¹³ Ryken, *The Christian Imagination*, 24-25.

¹¹⁴ Donald T. Williams, "Christian Poetics, Past and Present," in *The Christian Imagination* (New York: WaterBrook Press, 2002), 3.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

three main objections to fantasy literature are its lack of truth, its frivolity and its potential harm to the believer. Or as Williams clearly states, “The fictions of the poets are lies; they are a waste of time, distracting us from more profitable pursuits; and they are an enticement to evil.”¹¹⁶ These objections will be addressed in three eras of church history, from Augustine, to the Puritans, and finally with the Fundamentalists of our own day.

Augustine’s View of Mythology

In his *Confessions*, Augustine laments about his own early education. He admits disliking the elementary lessons of Greek and Latin, finding them distasteful, but appreciated the practical use of being able to read and write whatever he desired. To young Augustine, words were mere tools. He writes, “But in the later lessons I was obliged to memorize the wanderings of a hero named Aeneas, while in the meantime I failed to remember by own erratic ways.”¹¹⁷ Why learn of the plights of others when he “shed no tears for his own plight”?¹¹⁸ This caused an internal struggle within himself to justify his wanton desire to weep for the characters in Virgil’s Latin dramas, when he had little remorse for his own broken faith with God. He called such literary studies *folly*, and exclaimed the irony that “Such folly is held to be a higher and more fruitful form of study than learning to read and write.”¹¹⁹ Augustine believed that the folly of such lessons was its departure from truth--not only of Scriptural doctrine, but in the truth of *applying* such doctrine to one’s own life and exercise of faith in the God of all truth. In his criticism of schools he writes, “It is true that curtains are hung over the entrances to the schools where literature is taught, but they are not so much symbols in honor of mystery as veils

¹¹⁶ Williams, “Christian Poetics,” 4.

¹¹⁷ Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (London: Penguin Books, 1961), 33.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

concealing error.”¹²⁰ In his early days, he was afraid that literature would cause him to desert the God who saved him.

Another reason for his aversion to classical literature was the fact that he had been trained in rhetoric for use in eloquence and argumentation, but this was for no noble purpose. He lamented, “It was my ambition to be a good speaker, for the unhallowed and inane purpose of gratifying human vanity.”¹²¹ Williams explains, “It is little wonder then that in his post-conversion reaction he felt compelled to toss out the baby of literature along with the bath-water of sophistry.”¹²² But was he just in condemning the classics for his own sinful manipulation of them?

Yet, through the course of Augustine’s growth and maturity as a disciple and theologian, his view of pagan literature changed. Even within the *Confessions*, he admits the unexpected benefit he received from studying Cicero’s *Hortensius* which recommends that the reader study philosophy. Here, Augustine comments,

It altered my outlook on life. It changed my prayers to you, O Lord, and provided me with new hopes and aspirations. All my empty dreams suddenly lost their charm and my heart began to throb with a bewildering passion for the wisdom of eternal truth.¹²³

In this epiphany, Augustine confesses that such literature served not to deliver truth, but to point in the direction of pursuit of such truth where it is ultimately to be found. Furthermore, he admits that even the literature of the Platonists had *some* value in his learning. In his quest to pursue the origin of evil, he comes to the conclusion that everything in God’s creation has some measure of good in it, though corrupted by evil in various degrees. He finds that these *books* aided him in his understanding of his own fallen nature and the infinite perfection of God. He even proposes that it was providential that he came across such literature:

¹²⁰ Augustine, *Confessions*, 34.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹²² Williams, “Christian Poetics,” 5.

¹²³ Augustine, *Confessions*, 20.

I believe that it was by your will that I came across those books before I studied the Scriptures, because you wished me always to remember the impression they had on me, so that later on, when I had been touched by your healing hand, I should be able to see and understand the difference between presumption and confession, between those who see the goal they must reach, but cannot see the road by which they are to reach it, and those who see the road to that blessed country which is meant to be no mere vision but our home.¹²⁴

Of course, Augustine is merely defending the use of pagan, heretical literature for his use in conversion and Christian development. Lewis and Tolkien are certainly not to be directly equated with the Platonists of Augustine's day. The point being that if some truth, or even a suggestion of truth, can be found in such literature, how much more can we benefit from authors who already identify with the basic tenets of the Christian faith?

Augustine's view, however, does continue to develop with even greater balance as seen in his work *On Christian Doctrine*. In this work, he expounds his understanding of God, truth, and Scripture. He exalts God's sovereignty over all things, even pagan works by insisting,

We should not avoid music because of the superstition of the profane if we can find anything in it useful for understanding the Holy Scriptures...we should not think that we ought not to learn literature because Mercury is said to be its inventor, not that because the pagans dedicated temples to Justice and Virtue and adored in stones what should be performed in the heart, we should therefore avoid justice and virtue. Rather, every good and true Christian should understand that wherever he may find truth, it is his Lord's.¹²⁵

Even Calvin would agree with this position, for he elaborates in his *Institutes*:

Therefore, in reading profane authors, the admirable light of truth displayed in them should remind us, that the human mind, however much fallen and perverted from its original integrity, is still adorned and invested with admirable gifts from its Creator. If we reflect that the Spirit of God is the only fountain of truth, we will be careful, as we would avoid offering insult to him, not to reject or condemn truth wherever it appears.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, 154.

¹²⁵ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D. W. Robertson, Jr. (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1958), 54.

¹²⁶ John Calvin, "Institutes of the Christian Religion," II.2.15, *Christian Classics Ethereal Library*, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes.i.html> [Accessed March 22, 2018].

Williams defines this method of appropriating truth and deriving benefit from such literature as “spoiling the Egyptians,”¹²⁷ as mentioned in the previous chapter. Just as God had commanded the Israelites to plunder the gold and silver vessels of Egypt to make better use of them for themselves, likewise we are at liberty to utilize literature in ways to help us understand the truth of Scripture. “These treasures,” Augustine writes, “which were used wickedly and harmfully in the service of demons must be removed by Christians...and applied to their true function, that of preaching the gospel.”¹²⁸

Again, I must reiterate that we have been discussing pagan mythology, with terms such as *folly* and *error* as well as the labels *profane authors* and even *demons*. Since this body of literature can be mined for jewels hidden within, wouldn't Christian mythology and fantasy hold even more riches?

The Puritan View of Mythology

Ad fontes, to the sources, was the rallying cry of the Renaissance. The glorification of humanity sought to return to the bedrock of such beauty and eloquence in the classical works of Greece and Rome. In similar fashion, Christian thinkers embraced an ‘Ad fontes’ of their own, with Erasmus of Rotterdam seeking a return to the source of the Scriptures with his Greek translation of the Bible. Rightly so, the Reformers followed suit and embraced the Bible in its original languages. A return to the sources paved the way for the formulation of the phrase *Sola Scriptura* - The Scriptures alone are sufficient and have the supreme authority in all spiritual matters. So where does mythology fit into the life of the Christian? Does not Paul warn Timothy, “Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness”? (1 Tim. 4:7)

¹²⁷ Williams, “Christian Poetics,” 7.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 6, quoting Augustine in *On Christian Doctrine*.

In the wake of the Reformation, many believe that it was the Puritans who most identify with sobriety, seriousness and a strict adherence to Paul's warning. Truth is found in Scripture alone, and it is most clearly expressed by propositions, not by creativity or imagination. Richard Baxter, in admonishing pastors, writes, "Throughout the whole course of our ministry, we must insist chiefly upon the greatest, most certain, and most necessary truths, and be more seldom and sparing upon the rest."¹²⁹ Note, however, that Baxter is setting priorities, and not necessarily condemning other sources of potential truth. He continues, "We must, therefore, ever have our people's necessities before our eyes... Doubtless this is the best way to redeem time, to see that we lost not an hour, when we spend it only on necessary things."¹³⁰ Such practical use of time allowed for little else, to Baxter. Furthermore, he admits that other enjoyments, such as stories, plays and music, do hold an attraction, but do so on account of men's weakness, and thus should be highly limited, or avoided outright. "This is the way to be most profitable to others, though not always to be most pleasing and applauded; because, through men's frailty, it is true what Seneca says, that, 'We are attracted to novelties rather than to great things.'"¹³¹ Is it not interesting that he chose to quote Seneca in his proposition?

Williams elaborates: "Baxter advises Christian readers to read first the Bible, then books that apply to it. If there is any time left, they may turn to history and science. But they must beware of the poison in "vain romances, play-books, and fake stories, which may bewitch your fancies and corrupt your hearts."¹³² Baxter then asks, "whether the greatest lovers of romances and plays, be the greatest lovers of the book of God, and of a holy life"¹³³ Early Augustine may

¹²⁹ Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, ed. William Brown (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 113.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 114.

¹³² Williams, "Christian Poetics," 8-9.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

have had the same concern. Yet, as did Augustine, was he right to judge imaginative literature in this manner? He admitted in his own early life he was addicted to such entertainments that corrupted his affects and wasted his time. Was his distaste for literature just an overreaction to his own personal struggle with time and discipleship?

From the Reformation and the Puritan mindset came many creeds and confessions held firmly by the Reformed church. In adherence to such documents as the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, with proper motives to maintain the purity and soundness of the church, many preachers emphasized a greater emphasis on propositional truth than story. Sermons were filled with multi-pointed outlines with rational and logical sequences of unfolding systematic doctrines, but may have contributed to an imbalance in the use of imagery and narration. Many of today's Reformed denominations still retain such reliance upon proposition at the expense of poetry. Yet, there are voices within the Reformation and Puritan tradition that would strive to uphold such a balance. Even Luther would agree with this, for he wrote in 1523 in a letter,

I am persuaded that without knowledge of literature pure theology cannot at all endure, just as heretofore, when letters [literature] have declined and lain prostrate, theology too, has wretchedly fallen and lain prostrate . . . Certainly it is my desire that there shall be as many poets and rhetoricians as possible, because I see that by these studies, as by no other means, people are wonderfully fitted for the grasping of sacred truth and for handling it skillfully and happily.¹³⁴

Truth is of course of utmost importance, but the vehicle of truth is not merely rational argument, but also narrative story. In a lecture on C. S. Lewis and the use of imagination, John Knox Chamblin echoes this point, “The Bible brings together two impulses, ancient paganism and modern technological cultures have never been able to join: imagination and reason, or mystery and fact... The Bible nourishes our imaginative taste for story and our rational need for truth.”¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Martin Luther, Letter to Eoban Hess, 29 March 1523. *Werke*, Weimar edition, *Luthers Briefwechsel*, III, 50. Quoted by Donald Williams in “Christian Poetics,” 8.

¹³⁵ Chamblin, lecture on C. S. Lewis, Reformed Theological Seminary, 2014.

Sir Philip Sydney, a Puritan thinker who actually predated Baxter wrote an influential work called *The Defense of Poesy* [Poetic Literature]. In this work he not only refutes those who would oppose imaginative literature, but presents his case positively for “its place in the larger structure of learning and the Christian life.”¹³⁶ Sydney argues that the goal of the Christian life is not only knowledge but virtue as well. He explains that the sciences can provide knowledge, but such knowing may only be self-serving and not necessarily of noble worth. He concludes, “So that the ending end of all earthly learning being virtuous action, those skills that most serve to bring forth that have a most just title to be princes over all the rest; wherein, if we can show, the poet is worthy to have it before any other competitors.”¹³⁷ Only the poet, he claims, can accomplish this. “By combining the virtues of history and philosophy, the poet then becomes the ‘monarch’ [or prince] of the humane sciences, the most effective at achieving their end: virtuous action.”¹³⁸

How is this accomplished? To Sydney, this is due to man being made in God’s image, and likewise a ‘maker’ of his own. Williams writes, “People are most like God the Maker when they create a world and people it with significant characters out of their imagination. The very existence of literature, then, even when it is abused, is a powerful apology for the Christian doctrine of humanity and its creation in the image of God.”¹³⁹ Tolkien certainly had much to say on this topic of “sub-creation,” as discussed earlier. Christians love to write and hear stories, because they themselves are characters within their Maker’s redemptive story of mankind. And

¹³⁶ Williams, “Christian Poetics,” 9.

¹³⁷ Sir Philip Sydney, “The Defense of Poesy,” *The Poetry Foundation*, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/69375/the-defence-of-poesy> [Accessed March 21, 2018].

¹³⁸ Williams, “Christian Poetics,” 10.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

when Christians create and experience story, they are not merely ‘spoiling the Egyptians,’ as Augustine defended, but “recovering their patrimony.”¹⁴⁰

Thus, imaginative literature is not only to be tolerated, nor simply mined for its nuggets of truth hidden within pagan worldviews, but treasured and enjoyed. It can teach with images and stories when arguments and outlines fall short of getting past the mind and into the heart. Poetry can make concrete what is merely abstract in the mind of the philosopher, or give flesh to a rigid skeleton of ideas from the historian.

From the Puritan tradition also came poets such as Milton, Bunyan, Dryden and Donne (interestingly all named John!) We have already explored the works of some of these writers. Suffice it to say that from with the church of this era, there were champions of imaginative literature who also embraced the great truths of the faith. And although there are few who would see great danger in the reading of *Paradise Lost* or *Pilgrim’s Progress*, there is a voice that objects to Tolkien, Lewis, and other modern fantasy writers.

The Dangers of Mythology

We’ve considered objections to mythology and imaginative literature, primarily from pagan sources, for its error and false worldview. Also, there are those who oppose it for its distractions and enticements that pull one away from spiritual growth and the necessary pursuits of godliness. Now we must address the rallying cry of those who fight against what is considered *demonic* content, especially in fantasy literature. They interpret Deuteronomy 18:10-12 to condemn all such literature. “Let no one be found among you who sacrifices their son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord.” (NIV) Since my thesis is concerned primarily with

¹⁴⁰ Williams, “Christian Poetics,” 11.

the stories of Lewis and Tolkien, then all references to wizards and magic, especially from Tolkien, would be under such condemnation. This *fundamentalist* view, as I shall call it, opposes in principle any content that can be identified with the occult. Throughout history we've seen lists of banned books, some even burned in large bonfires from reactionary groups. Likewise we've seen, in some extreme Puritan societies, the actual burning of those who were thought to be witches practicing occultist beliefs. But should mythology and imaginative literature be shunned simply on the grounds that it may contain references to magic, witches, wizards and spells? In our culture today, would a Christian who rejects *Harry Potter* necessarily reject Lewis and Tolkien on the same grounds?

In an interview with Russell Moore on Albert Mohler's 'The Briefing' podcast, John Granger discusses the use of magic in the English literary tradition, calling upon the works of J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis as supporting examples. He explains that this use of magic is *incantational* as opposed to *invocational*.¹⁴¹ The former is what we find in many of our beloved fairy tales and even Walt Disney stories. Concerning specifically the *Harry Potter* book series, Chuck Colson writes, "It may relieve you to know that the magic in these books is purely mechanical, as opposed to occultic. That is, Harry and his friends cast spells, read crystal balls, and turn themselves into animals--but they don't make contact with a supernatural world."¹⁴² Invocational magic would be characterized by a direct contact with the supernatural world in practices such as séances, Ouija boards, and overtly occultic rituals. Yet, arguments still arise that try to denounce fantasy literature for such content. As stated earlier, the stories of Lewis are a "more explicit vehicle for theological reflection" than Tolkien, as James Sennett explains. He describes Tolkien's stories as having only a "whispered subtext of biblical themes," thus making

¹⁴¹ Albert Mohler, "Finding God in Harry Potter," *The Briefing*, July 18, 2005, <http://www.albertmohler.com/2005/07/18/finding-god-in-harry-potter/> [accessed Aug 2, 2017].

¹⁴² Connie Neal, *What's A Christian To Do With Harry Potter?* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2001), 15.

it more difficult for the casual reader to see beyond the mere entertainment of his storytelling.

As an unintended consequence, some may decry that in Tolkien we may find elements

that should be disturbing to the conservative sentiment bent on heresy detection... Furthermore, Tolkien's mythology is unapologetically pagan in a way that aligns it closely with Wiccan practices of the present day. It is ironic, in fact, that the Harry Potter books are so often accused of endorsing a Wiccan worldview when the mythology that permeates Tolkien is the exact historical soil from which this modern day witchcraft sprang.¹⁴³

Yet, all of this is evidence of a misunderstanding of fantasy, and “a naïve belief that literature is somehow a direct rendition of reality.”¹⁴⁴ It is not. The wizardry in Tolkien and Rowling are not meant to encourage the actual practice of witchcraft in our world. Ryken explains,

Literature is an imagined world having its own characteristics and its own integrity as a world created by human subcreators. The world of literature is a construct of the imagination that adheres to conventions that are always to some degree unlikelike and often openly fantastic. Literature takes reality and human experience as its starting point, transforms it by means of the imagination, and sends readers back to life with renewed understanding of it and zest for it because of their excursions into a purely imaginary realm.¹⁴⁵

And Sennett argues that the magical elements of wizards and witches in fantasy are not the primary focus, for they are merely “staging, window-dressing and backdrop” to the larger themes within the narrative. To him, the substance lies within the story itself.

So we are rightly unconcerned with Lewis's soothsayers, L'Engle's witches, and Tolkien's wizards. They are of no more concern for us than Glenda the Good Witch from *The Wizard of Oz* or the necromancy and divination utilized in Charles Dickens' beloved classic, *A Christmas Carol*. One who would condemn these works for their employment of occultic apparati reveals a pitiable lack of aesthetic discernment that can lead nowhere but to personal and spiritual impoverishment.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ James F. Sennett, “From Narnia to Hogwarts: A Christian Perspective on Fantasy Literature,” *Stone-Campbell Journal* 7 (Spring 2004), 44.

¹⁴⁴ Ryken, *Christian Imagination*, 24.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Sennett, “From Narnia to Hogwarts,” 46.

I do believe Sennett goes too far in his condemnation of their condemnation. Certainly concerned Christians may freely choose to avoid such literature as their conscience dictates. My position is that to uphold L. Frank Baum and Charles Dickens while *condemning* Tolkien and Lewis would be rather inconsistent and inequitable.

I will conclude this section with a final quote from Sennett's essay. He makes an interesting point in how one can derive a greater benefit from supernatural stories than those of pure naturalism.

Christians fear, and rightly so, that exposure to fantasy may influence people to trust the wrong kind of spiritual reality. But as one who has spent most of his adult life immersed in the suffocating confines of academic and cultural naturalism, I for one rejoice when fantasy convinces us that there is a spiritual reality at all. I find it much easier to convince one who already believes in the supernatural that Jesus is the true God than to convince one steeped in naturalism that there is any supernatural truth at all. C.S. Lewis said that the most dramatic conversion he underwent was that from naturalism to theism—after that, the move to Christianity was almost anticlimactic.¹⁴⁷

Lewis and Tolkien have written stories, not factual histories. Therefore, to reject their work as false is to misread them and contradict their own purposes in writing them. Their stories have been cherished by both children and adults, but have been shown to be much more than simply fruitless entertainment or diversion. Furthermore, while they do contain magic, dragons and wizards, they are not how-to guides for witchcraft. Accordingly, fantasy literature such as in Tolkien and Lewis drive us to contemplate, wonder, and ask. “The intellectual usefulness of literature is not that it necessarily tells us the truth about an issue but rather that it serves as a catalyst to thinking about the great issues of life.”¹⁴⁸

I think it prudent to consider a few more benefits we can gain from imaginative literature in general in the next chapter. Following this, our attention will turn exclusively to the topic of

¹⁴⁷ Sennett, “From Narnia to Hogwarts,” 32.

¹⁴⁸ Ryken, *Christian Imagination*, 30.

music, first looking at the Scriptural foundation, and then to the proposed merits of musical creation mythologies.

Chapter 5 - The Value of Christian Mythology

To this point we've looked closely at the creation mythologies of both C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien. From their own words we've attempted to better understand their use of myth and how it not only serves their literary purposes, but a higher, more inspiring purpose of being a pointer to God's ultimate, joyful reality. Following this, objections have been considered as to the appropriateness of myth in general and why there are some who would dismiss fantasy writers such as Lewis and Tolkien as either not worthy of consideration or even harmful to the Christian worldview. It is my hope that if these objections were sufficiently resolved, then we can look more closely at the benefit we can derive from imaginative literature.

The Value of Story

Story can accomplish what logical statements and propositions may not fully and independently be able to do alone. It can affect the whole person: mind, body and soul. Creeds and confessions do have their significance, but as Christopher Bryan explains, "The creeds are not stories and the Rule of Faith is not a story, but the creeds and the Rule of Faith imply a story and are meaningless without one."¹⁴⁹ A well-crafted story can grab the attention of even a young child, and we are called to come to Jesus as little children--not remaining in the immaturity of milky doctrines, but with child-like wonder and unconditional loyalty and faith unto the great storyteller. One author boldly claims, "Even the most so-called advance study material prepared for Sunday School children that I have ever seen, is dreary, flat, unprofitable stuff. I'd like to see it all thrown out and Christian doctrine introduced to the very young through the seven

¹⁴⁹ Christopher Bryan, "Introduction: [Christian Imagination]," *Sewanee Theological Review* 57, no. 3 (2014), 236.

wonderful volumes of the *Chronicles of Narnia*, until somebody comes along with anything else as good or better.”¹⁵⁰

Jesus very often used narrative tales to teach deep and significant doctrines of the kingdom of God. His parables were captivating, producing strong emotional responses from his listeners, whether in repentance and godliness, or in anger and greater rebellion. We must not neglect to mention the use of narration when Nathan confronted David about his adulterous affair with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah. Following direction from the Lord, Nathan told a story about a poor man who had but one ewe lamb that he cherished and cared for like a daughter. A rich man, unwilling to take from his own flock took the poor man’s lamb, killed it and prepared a meal for a traveler passing through. David’s reaction was one of great anger, until it was revealed to him that metaphorically he was that rich man, performing the same evil actions of murder and greed. The story was more effective in reaching the deeper places of David’s heart than any statement of prose could have been.

One may still object: these parables of Jesus and his prophets may have been fictitious, but not *fantastic*. In other words, they were set in the reality of their day, not with magic or mythical creatures and other worlds. How can the value of mythology be compared to the efficacy of biblical parables? But to hold such a view is to truncate what biblical parables point to - not merely the physical world of humans and animals, but to the supernatural realm of God and all of his creation. In this sense they are fantastic. There is a world greater than our own, filled with mysteries of God and his providence. Timmerman writes,

In the Christian life there is no ‘magic,’ yet the word may serve as a marvelous term (properly understood) for the illimitable power of God, who works in ways which we

¹⁵⁰ Edmund Fuller, “After the Moon Landings: A Further Report on the Christian Spaceman C. S. Lewis,” in *Myth Allegory and Gospel: An Interpretation of J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, G. K. Chesterton and Charles Williams* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, Inc., 1974), 91.

cannot comprehend and whose response to our need is often beyond expectation. Whatever we see shadowed in part always seems to us something magical.¹⁵¹

Remember that it was Lewis who was finally convinced by his colleagues that Christianity was the true myth--the greatest story of all time, filled with all the dramatic elements of the best of human stories, but being ultimately true and outside of ourselves. Imaginative literature, then, perhaps is not directly or overtly attempting to teach a lesson, as do the parables, but does serve to connect its readers with something greater than themselves. Lewis comments,

We must not be ashamed of the mythical radiance resting on our theology...If God chooses to be mythopoeic – and is not the sky itself a myth – shall we refuse to be mythopathic? For this is the marriage of heaven and earth: Perfect Myth and Perfect Fact: claiming not only our love and our obedience, but also our wonder and delight, addressed to the savage, the child, and the poet in each one of us no less than to the moralist, the scholar, and the philosopher.¹⁵²

Another aspect of fantasy literature is that it relates a complete story, moving from a beginning, middle and ending. It contains everyday characters, like Lucy Pevensie or Frodo Baggins, a self-contained world with a consistent, rational reality, the use of magic or the supernatural, a clear sense of good and evil, and a quest or task that must be undertaken. And while the characters are often have “powerful mental and spiritual struggles--struggles that lead them through vales of sorrow and dark tunnels of the mind--they never forget that they are acting in a drama which involves others and which is resolutely moving to an ending.”¹⁵³ What Lewis and Tolkien have written, along with so many other writers of this tradition, are not simply reflective snapshots of memoirs or streams of consciousness, Timmerman argues, but complete narratives in which the characters realize they are part of a larger story within their own worlds. Likewise, then, we too find ourselves identifying with these characters, breaking free from our small, isolated thoughts and immediate experiences to the greater story of our creation, fall,

¹⁵¹ John H. Timmerman, “Fantasy Literature’s Evocative Power,” *The Christian Century* 95, no. 18 (May 17, 1978), 537.

¹⁵² Montgomery, *Myth, Allegory and Gospel*, 30-31, quoting Lewis in “Myth Became Fact” in *God in the Dock*.

¹⁵³ Timmerman, “Fantasy Literature,” 534.

redemption and final glorification. Too often we can get lost in our own space and time, evaluating everything in our lives by scientific analysis and pragmatic value, seeing in black and white what God has created in dazzling color. Fantasy worlds can awaken what may be lying dormant, or bring renewed vigor and clarity to what may be obscured by its commonness or regularity. “Perhaps it is the case that when these realities of the human heart are devalued in daily life, one must look to another world where such realities can be restructured and given credence and value.”¹⁵⁴ Timmerman concludes,

Christianity cherishes story, not in the sense of a fictitious tale, but rather in a view of life which is whole, with a beginning (creation), a middle (the incarnation and crucifixion), and an ending (the resurrection). History is often said to be God’s story, the revelation of God to humankind. In a sense we are actively partaking of that story. We are characters in the universal drama which God is writing in time.¹⁵⁵

Fantasy literature can serve as a tool to help remind us that in our own struggles, we are part of a greater plan that is unfolding day by day until it is brought about to its conclusion.

Furthermore, fantasy literature can give us a clearer and more vivid picture of our own nature, both in its fallenness, and in its redemption. Timmerman argues that fantasy literature lures us to enter in and see more clearly who we are. In reference to Tolkien’s view of *Recovery* as one of the four elements of a true-fairy story, he states that Tolkien’s writings serve to provide

a recovery of being, a refreshment, a keener realization of the importance of our spiritual nature... The lure of great literature has long been precisely this which fantasy holds forth in a new way: the lure of losing self in order to rediscover or recover one’s self in a fresher, revitalizing perspective.¹⁵⁶

Lest one argue that this reasoning seems too self-focused or man-centered in its approach, I must agree with Calvin that knowledge of self is inextricably tied to knowledge of God. In the opening of the *Institutes* Calvin explains,

¹⁵⁴ Timmerman, “Fantasy Literature,” 535.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 537.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 534.

Our wisdom, in so far as it ought to be deemed true and solid Wisdom, consists almost entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves. But as these are connected together by many ties, it is not easy to determine which of the two precedes and gives birth to the other. For, in the first place, no man can survey himself without forthwith turning his thoughts towards the God in whom he lives and moves; because it is perfectly obvious, that the endowments which we possess cannot possibly be from ourselves; nay, that our very being is nothing else than subsistence in God alone.

However, it is not fantasy literature itself that aids in our growing in the knowledge of God, but the way in which it can lead us to Scripture to see more clearly who we are as fallen creatures and who God is as our Maker and Redeemer. Thus, in these stories we are compelled to explore the great story in which we do grow in our knowledge of God and self through his revealed word.

Characters in fantasy literature are not moving through some dream-world, detached from any reality, but suffering and struggling with real trials, terrors and sins in which we can readily identify. But, some object, then “why create a fantasy world at all?”¹⁵⁷ Why not just utilize realistic fiction set in our own Primary World? Because we often are too dull to recognize the truth of ourselves, or at times too callous to the nobler virtues of sacrifice, honor, or courage in seemingly hopeless situations. One reason to create Secondary Worlds is to

make it possible to confront more openly and daringly a spiritual reality too often ignored in our world of system and fact...The artist of vision and fantasy expects us to learn something about ourselves by having made a sojourn through fantasy, to probe our spiritual nature, to grow in experience, to resolve our lives toward new directions. If fantasy begins in another world, it is in order to reach that mysterious other world of the human soul.¹⁵⁸

Even to a soul that does not yet know Christ, this genre of story can serve to bring illumination, certainly not on par with the sovereign Holy Spirit’s work, but as an instrument to probe the deeper places within the unbeliever, perhaps more so than a treatise of theology would accomplish. Fuller argues,

¹⁵⁷ Timmerman, “Fantasy Literature,” 535.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 535, 537.

I think that long after such an excellent book as *Mere Christianity* is forgotten...that the *Silent Planet* trilogy, *The Screwtape Letters*, *The Great Divorce*, and his many other fantastic fictions (to which there are far fewer comparably good works by other writers) will be read and will continue to expound classical, orthodox Christian doctrine to minds that would never approach it, or open themselves to it, or understand it, in more formally didactic terms.¹⁵⁹

Even a professor of physics and astronomy who seemingly does not profess faith in Christ admits there is something satisfying in Tolkien's and Lewis's work. Kristine Larsen admits the bleak outcome of her own world: "Turning our attention specifically to the end of our 'primary' universe, we are faced with less certainty than the citizens of Middle-earth or Narnia."¹⁶⁰ She continues to lament a future without hope, beauty or coming glory, all the while acknowledging that Christians would disagree. "Therefore, with all apologies to Tolkien and Lewis, unless the universe rips itself to shreds, it will indeed run down in a rather unpoetic heat death as it expands forever unbounded."¹⁶¹ She concludes this thought with a longing for the satisfaction and peace one gets from really believing the deeper truths behind such stories: "Aslan sagely warned that all worlds end. But before then, we should take the advice of C. S. Lewis, his (sub) creator, and walk beneath the stars, and picture ourselves amidst a universe 'lighted, warmed, and resonant with music.'¹⁶²

I propose that fantasy literature can at times prick the conscience and stir the heart of those who would not otherwise even consider a world beyond our own. Admittedly, Larsen may remain in her unbelief, but she has encountered images of a glorious world to come that clearly have affected her. Thus, in a way, myth can serve as an apologetic, or at the least, a *para*-apologetic for the Christian worldview. John Warwick Montgomery summarizes,

The universal or near-universal appeal of great literature to Christian and non-Christian alike holds out the possibility of a more solid subjective bridge by which unbelievers

¹⁵⁹ Fuller, "After the Moon Landings," 91.

¹⁶⁰ Larsen, "Behold Your Music!," 24.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid., 24-25.

might pass into the Kingdom. If the Faith can be found mirrored in the great literary productions of the time, would this not lead the secular reader to a new appreciation of that ‘Faith once delivered to the saints’?¹⁶³

John Zuck, in an article entitled “Tales of Wonder,” reiterates, “This kind of literature, often rooted in myths and fairy tales of the archaic past, deserves to be taken seriously in our present situation.”¹⁶⁴ He claims that Tolkien would agree that myth, at its best, can offer “escape, recovery, and consolation to a weary and disheartened age.”¹⁶⁵ Furthermore, Lewis has said, “mythopoesis can sometimes reawaken religious awareness by ‘stealing past a certain inhibition’ which characterizes many people’s attitudes to familiar religious ideas and institutions.”¹⁶⁶

Finally, there is one more point to discuss on myth in general. Imaginative literature is not merely useful, but it’s delightful, expressing images of wonder and awe to the reader, and in return, producing sublime pleasures within him or her. “Specifically, what occurs within myth and true fairy-story is what these authors [such as Tolkien or Lewis] believe leads most to salvation: joy.”¹⁶⁷ This is what Tolkien has described as *eucatastrophe*. Rhone, in his work *The Great Tower of Elfland*, elaborates:

[Tolkien] admits that his discovery of *eucatastrophe* came with the revelation that it produces ‘a sudden glimpse of Truth, your whole nature chained in material cause and effect, the chain of death, feels a sudden relief as if a major limb out of joint had suddenly snapped back.’ Fallen humanity, thus, has a chance of being pushed back into place—of salvation for humanity.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶³ Montgomery, *Myth, Allegory and Gospel*, 21, quoting Amos N. Wilder, *Theology in Modern Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 1958.

¹⁶⁴ John E Zuck, “Tales of Wonder: Biblical Narrative, Myth, and Fairy Stories,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 44, no. 2 (June 1976), 308.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ Zachary Rhone, *The Great Tower of Elfland: The Mythopoeic Worldview of J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, G. K. Chesterton and George MacDonald* (Kent: The Kent State University Press, 2017), 155.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

To be sure, Tolkien, and I, are not claiming any salvific work resulting from fantasy literature, but only how it can aid in the joy that comes with salvation, presenting beautiful imagery and stirring story elements of setting, character, plot, conflict and resolution that can deepen the joy we feel of the reality of our salvation.

Subjectivism is not synonymous with relativism. We are created not only to think as rational beings, but to *feel*, as creatures capable of love, joy, and peace, as well as the fallen emotions of hate, fear, and despair. If myth has been shown to be permissible to the Christian for its didactic, or better still, enlightening value, then equally valid is its aesthetic value. We are made to appreciate beauty for its own sake. Christopher Bryan, in his introduction to a series of essays delivered in Oxford for a conference on the Inklings writes of his own experience in discovering fantasy literature. “From them [Christian storytellers] I learned that orthodoxy was not only true but beautiful; that goodness was not only right but also joyful; and that evil not merely bad but boring. From them I came to understand why Jesus is called not just *ho poimen*, the shepherd, but *ho poimen kalos*—the beautiful shepherd.”¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁹ Christopher Bryan, “Introduction: [Christian Imagination],” *Sewanee Theological Review*, 236.

Chapter 6 - Music in the Bible

Our attention now turns to Scripture. What does the Bible say regarding music? To begin, it must be clearly stated that God has commanded that he be praised, and music plays a weighty role in how praise is accomplished.

“Praise the Lord! Sing to the Lord a new song,

his praise in the assembly of the godly!” (Psalm 149:1)

In this imperative, we find God, through the words of the psalmist, directing his people to give him praise, and this praise is to be through the medium of music, specifically by singing. Note also that it is not simply an individual song from a solitary worshiper, but corporately, in the presence of many, in the “assembly of the godly.” Lest we think that only the human voice is in view with our praise, the psalmist continues:

“Let them praise his name with dancing,

making melody to him with tambourine and lyre!” (Psalm 149:3)

We find here other aspects of music that reflect what are known as the elements of music that comprise its definition: melody, rhythm and harmony. We sing melodies with our voice, but also with crafted instruments such as the lyre, or small harp, as in this psalm. Furthermore, we find the use of rhythm with the tambourine, resulting in dancing and movement to the pulse or meter of the music. Finally we find harmony in the plucking of strings along with the voice to produce multiple tones simultaneously, resulting in chords and chordal movements. Vocal and instrumental music, employing the core elements of music of melody, rhythm and harmony, are all present within these few verses of the psalm, and with the purpose of praising God.

What follows is a closer examination of musical references and contexts within the Bible, beginning with the Old Testament and moving to the New Testament. The first and most musically prolific area within Scripture is the book of Psalms.

The Psalms

The book of Psalms, the largest individual book in the canon, is primarily a book of poetry. C. Hassell Bullock notes that the book of Psalms is an “anthology of prayers, worship songs, and poems sung and spoken in public and private worship.”¹⁷⁰ He continues by saying, however, that it is not simply comparable to hymnbooks in our modern churches. Nevertheless he agrees that it does contain many of Israel’s temple hymns, and he acknowledges that “in the history of Israel and the Christian church the Psalms have had extensive use in both public and private worship.”¹⁷¹ He adds, “We can only wish we knew more about the music of ancient Israel than we do. The information we do have is rather laconic, but it is sufficient to inform us that music played a large role in ancient Israel and in the temple.”¹⁷²

In describing the views of Sigmund Mowinckel, Ernest Lucas writes, “He believed that most of the psalms had their original setting in the worship of Israel, and that therefore if we are to understand them properly we have to discern and understand their cultic settings of the various poems.”¹⁷³ Unlike Bullock, Lucas is a bit more overt in his labeling by calling the Psalms the “hymnbook of the second temple,”¹⁷⁴ referring to the rebuilt temple following the return from exile. Yet, he also admits that some of the psalms in the compilation can be dated to the time of worship in the first temple. In any case, it can be concluded that these scholars would admit that the worship of Israel involved many poetic psalms used in a musical setting for worship.

Having established that the Psalms contain musical verse, we will now consider the content, purpose and participants of such musical praise. There are many suggested ways to

¹⁷⁰ C. Hassell Bullock, *Encountering the Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 22.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁷³ Ernest C. Lucas, *Exploring the Old Testament: A Guide to the Psalms and Wisdom Literature*, vol. 3 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 12.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

categorize the psalms, but for the purposes of this paper, we will examine two broad categories: psalms of praise (sometimes called hymns) and psalms of thanksgiving. A further subdivision can be made with psalms of praise into two groups: *declarative* praise and *descriptive* praise. “The first involves generic language like ‘Praise the LORD...’ without the details of why for what the psalmist is praising God. Descriptive praise, as the term implies, involves the details.”¹⁷⁵ Another way to view this is praise for who God is, his attributes and character, and praise for what he has done in history, particularly in works of creation, history and redemption. In many psalms, however, we find examples of both declaration and description within the content of the poetry.

Psalms of Praise

Praise the Lord, all nations!

Extol him, all peoples!

For great is his steadfast love toward us,

and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever.

Praise the Lord! (Psalm 117)

The word *praise* in this psalm is from the Hebrew root *halal*, where we get the word *halleluia*. It is a broad term for giving glory to God. Its literal meaning is *to shine*. In its various uses it can mean to sing praise to God, to celebrate, commend or give glory. Here we find a general call to worship to praise God for his steadfast love and faithfulness. In Psalm 104 is another declarative hymn of praise using a more clearly defined musical verb *shiyr*: to sing.

I will sing to the Lord as long as I live;

I will sing praise to my God while I have being. (Psalm 104:33)

¹⁷⁵ Bullock, *Encountering the Book of Psalms*, 124. Taken from Claus Westermann’s study of the Psalms.

In Psalm 21 David writes of the king rejoicing in God's strength and salvation. He describes the glory, splendor and majesty of the earthly king as a direct blessing from the Lord. In the second half of the psalm, David extols the Lord for his power over David's enemies. Thus, this psalm contains both declarative and descriptive praise. His final verse is one of musical praise using the same Hebrew verb *shiyr*.

Be exalted, O Lord, in your strength!

We will sing and praise your power. (Psalm 21:13)

In Psalm 33 we find a clear expression of the power and strength of musical praise as the celebration begins with loud and ringing shouts of praise, followed by an exhortation to sing a new song to the Lord.

Shout for joy in the Lord, O you righteous!

Praise befits the upright.

Give thanks to the Lord with the lyre;

make melody to him with the harp of ten strings!

Sing to him a new song;

play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts. (Psalm 33:1-3)

The psalm begins with the word shout, or rejoice, from the Hebrew root *ranan*. This word can mean to give a ringing cry in joy, exaltation, or even distress, as when the Israelites cried out and fell on their faces when seeing the fire of the Lord consume Aaron's offering upon the altar (Leviticus 9:24) or during the lamentation of the people of Israel after its destruction. "Arise, cry out in the night, at the beginning of the night watches! Pour out your heart like water before the presence of the Lord! Lift your hands to him for the lives of your children, who faint or hunger at the head of every street." (Lamentations 2:19)

Such passion and emotion like this are found within the musical worship of God's people. Longman and Garland, in their commentary of the psalms, describe Psalm 33 in this way: "The singing of praise to the Lord finds expression in loud and jubilant exultation, accompanied by musical instruments. The worship of God's ancient covenantal people was a

joyous occasion...Apparently, musical instruments had their place in worship.”¹⁷⁶ The authors continue to expound the idea of a “new song,” as the psalmist commands, as being a response given in gratitude of fresh experiences of God’s providence. They write, “The new experiences find expression in a shout for joy at the accompaniment of musical instruments, and the musicians were further inspired by those shouts. The apparent frenzy was an exuberant expression of ever-increasing activity.”¹⁷⁷ Thus, Psalm 33 illustrates that musical praise is not simply soft and meditative voices, as in a gentle lullaby, but also loud, boisterous and powerful symphonic and orchestral praise.

Psalms of Thanksgiving

As psalms of praise are more general in their exhortation to sing aloud to God, psalms of thanksgiving are more specific in a response to God’s mighty works of creation, deliverance and redemption. “Their aim is not only to praise God [like the psalms of praise] but are also a form of witness to the saving work of God, declared before the whole congregation,”¹⁷⁸ writes Lucas. Psalm 95 exhorts us to sing in response to his mighty works of creation.

Oh come, let us sing to the Lord;

let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!

Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;

let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!

For the Lord is a great God,

and a great King above all gods.

In his hand are the depths of the earth;

¹⁷⁶ Willem A. VanGemeren, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Psalms*, ed. Tremper Longman and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 318.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Lucas, *Exploring the Old Testament*, 5.

the heights of the mountains are his also.

The sea is his, for he made it,

and his hands formed the dry land. (Psalm 95:1-5)

The psalmist includes many musical directions in the opening lines of the poem with such phrases as *sing to the Lord, make a joyful noise, and songs of praise*. In the opening section he describes the span of God's power, from the deepest to the highest places in all creation. He continues with a recounting of the creation of the earth's sea and land as described in Genesis. In the second half of the psalm, God is to be praised for his creation of mankind, as the "sheep of his pasture." The psalm ends with an exhortation and warning not to neglect or ignore such a powerful creator God. He is worthy of our praise.

He is also to be praised in song for the covenant he made with his people--not only for his faithfulness in keeping this promise, but also for his judgments upon those who do not.

Oh give thanks to the Lord; call upon his name;

make known his deeds among the peoples!

Sing to him, sing praises to him;

tell of all his wondrous works!

Remember the wondrous works that he has done,

his miracles, and the judgments he uttered... (Psalm 105:1-2, 5)

This illustrates the totality of our praise for the whole character and counsel of God--his benevolence and his justice. This lengthy psalm recounts God's preservation of his people throughout Israel's early history from his covenant with Abraham, his providence through Joseph, and his deliverance through Moses, as well as the judgments upon Egypt for their enslavement of Israel.

In addition to thanksgiving songs for God's works of creation, providence, and national deliverance, the psalms contain a call to praise him for salvation and personal deliverance from the bondage of sin. In Psalm 32, David declares a blessing on all those whose transgressions are forgiven and whose sins are covered. In the final verses he writes,

Many are the sorrows of the wicked,
 but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the Lord.
 Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, O righteous,
 and shout for joy, all you upright in heart! (Psalm 32:10-11)

Furthermore, some thanksgiving songs often precede or follow deep and heartfelt prayers offered in times of need. Lucas explains, “The Songs of Thanksgiving can therefore be seen as the psalmist’s response to God answering the prayer uttered in a Lament and as accompanying a sacrificial thank offering.”¹⁷⁹ Consider Psalm 9:

Sing praises to the Lord, who sits enthroned in Zion!
 Tell among the peoples his deeds! (Psalm 9:11)

What follows is the psalmist’s lament regarding the oppression from his enemies. He cries out to God saying,

Be gracious to me, O Lord!
 See my affliction from those who hate me,
 O you who lift me up from the gates of death,
 that I may recount all your praises,
 that in the gates of the daughter of Zion
 I may rejoice in your salvation. (Psalm 9:13-14)

Other Old Testament Songs

In addition to the songs found in the book of psalms, there are other examples of God’s people responding in thanksgiving by singing a specially written song for a specific occasion of deliverance. The most well known of these odes are the songs of Moses and Deborah.

¹⁷⁹ Lucas, *Exploring the Old Testament*, 5.

Following the destruction of Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea, Moses sang a song of praise and deliverance. In Exodus 15 we read

“I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously;
the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.
The Lord is my strength and my song,
and he has become my salvation;” (Exodus 15:1-2)

Moses exalts the Lord in song for his great work of rescuing the people of Israel from the hand of their enemy. He even makes the audacious statement that the Lord is his strength *and his song*. This is not to reduce God to simply being synonymous with music, but rather to acknowledge the true source of musical worship. Nehemiah makes this clear in his confessional prayer, “Blessed be your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise.” (Neh. 9:5b) Calvin writes of Moses’s statement: “But we must observe that the help of God is conjoined with His praise, because this is the end of all His benefits.”¹⁸⁰ In other words, *God is the rightful source, or the exclusive theme or subject of all our poetry and song*. Praise inevitably follows what God does and who he is.

What follows in verse 20-21 is a repetition of this song by Miriam and the women present. “Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women went out after her with tambourines and dancing. And Miriam sang to them:

“Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously;
the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.” (Exodus 15:20-21)

This reinforces a pattern often found in Scripture with songs of praise and deliverance. They are repeatedly sung to commemorate such an occasion. The Reformation Study Bible states “the form of the Hebrew verb [to sing, in verse 1] indicates that this song was sung regularly by the

¹⁸⁰ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Last Four Books of Moses in the Form of a Harmony*, trans. Charles William Bingham (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 256.

Israelites thereafter.”¹⁸¹ And this makes sense in light of the truth that God often exhorts his people to remember, or chastises them for forgetting that it was he who saved them and brought them safely into the land promised to them. Moses later warns “take care lest you forget the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” (Deuteronomy 6:12) One significant way to remember such a fact is through song.

One final example of such a song is found in the book of Judges, after Deborah and Barak led the army to victory over Jabin king of Canaan and Sisera, his commander. “Then sang Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam on that day:

“That the leaders took the lead in Israel,
that the people offered themselves willingly, bless the Lord!

“Hear, O kings; give ear, O princes;
to the Lord I will sing; I will make melody to the Lord, the God of Israel. (5:1-3)

The song begins with thanksgiving for leadership and a call to bless the Lord. Then what follows is an imperative to the high and mighty of the earth to listen to the words of this testimony. It is a powerful witness to the King of kings through melody. God is then portrayed as the Divine Warrior rescuing his people through his appointed leaders. Following such historic events being retold, we find a command to perpetuate this song in verses 10-11:

“Tell of it, you who ride on white donkeys,
you who sit on rich carpets and you who walk by the way.

To the sound of musicians at the watering places,
there they repeat the righteous triumphs of the Lord,
the righteous triumphs of his villagers in Israel.

¹⁸¹ ESV Reformation Study Bible notes, 117.

Deborah and Barak call for all types of people, both great and small, to continue the musical heritage of Israel in remembering the works of the Lord, lest they forget and return to doing evil in the sight of the Lord.

All Creation Sings

Thus far we have examined psalms and hymns of praise and thanksgiving through the songs of God's people. But the Bible reveals a much wider ensemble of participants. First, we will consider the response to God's great works from the *creation* itself. Then we will consider the *heavenly beings* themselves shouting for joy at the glory and majesty of their creator.

Psalm 65 begins this way: "Praise is due to you, O God, in Zion," establishing the truth that God is worthy of all praise, not just from those created in his image, but from *everything* that was created. To illustrate this the psalmist first describes God's atonement for the sins of mankind. He then recounts the sovereign and providential hand of God over nature:

"the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas;
the one who by his strength established the mountains, being girded with might;
who stills the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves," (Psalm 65:5b-7)

Finally, he allows us to listen to their joyous reply to all that God has done:

The pastures of the wilderness overflow,
the hills gird themselves with joy,
the meadows clothe themselves with flocks,
the valleys deck themselves with grain,
they shout and sing together for joy. (Psalm 65:12-13)

Pastures, meadows and valleys are personified to poetically illustrate the joyous, praise-filled expression of awe and wonder through the medium of song, *even from lifeless matter*.

Furthermore, Psalm 19 describes praise from an even wider perspective of God's creation:

The heavens declare the glory of God,

and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.
 Day to day pours out speech,
 and night to night reveals knowledge.
 There is no speech, nor are there words,
 whose voice is not heard. (Psalm 19:1-3)

It is true that no specific musical verb is used here, but the declaring of God's glory and proclaiming of his handiwork follow the general pattern of the musical psalms we've already discussed. Here, we see another example of personified praise. The firmament that surrounds the earth below, the very heavenly bodies above, through both day and night sky, *speak*. And what are they saying? God is worthy of praise.

In addition to praising God for their own creation, the Old Testament contains imagery that the created world praises God for his work in the lives of mankind, specifically for their redemption. We see powerful examples of this in the prophetic book of Isaiah. In the 44th chapter, he writes:

Sing, O heavens, for the Lord has done it;
 shout, O depths of the earth;
 break forth into singing, O mountains,
 O forest, and every tree in it!
 For the Lord has redeemed Jacob,
 and will be glorified in Israel. (Isaiah 44:23)

Again, we see the vastness of the created universe, from the heavens above, and then sweeping down to the mountains and forests of the earth below, all singular in their purpose of glorifying God in their shouts and songs. Creation also breaks forth in praise for God's compassion upon his broken people.

Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth;
 break forth, O mountains, into singing!
 For the Lord has comforted his people

and will have compassion on his afflicted. (Isaiah 49:13)

Finally, we see the creation making a lament of its own, longing for its redemption as well, since the Fall affected more than just mankind. Praising God for his righteous judgments involves an expectation that he will right all wrongs and restore what has been broken and corrupted. After a call to sing to God for his work of salvation in the house of Israel, Psalm 96 ends with a call for nature to sing as well:

Let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
 the world and those who dwell in it!
 Let the rivers clap their hands;
 let the hills sing for joy together
 before the Lord, for he comes
 to judge the earth.
 He will judge the world with righteousness,
 and the peoples with equity. (Psalm 96:7-9)

Isaiah continues his prophecy of future hope and glory with a vivid example of the reversal of the curse.

“For you shall go out in joy
 and be led forth in peace;
 the mountains and the hills before you
 shall break forth into singing,
 and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.
 Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress;
 instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; (Isaiah 55:12-13a)

This may bring to mind the words of Isaac Watts in the hymn “Joy to the World.” In stanza three we sing: *No more let sins and sorrows grow, Nor thorns infest the ground; He comes to make his blessings flow Far as the curse is found.* The Apostle Paul, in his epistle to the Romans, amplifies this longing of the created world to be set free.

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. (Romans 8:19-22)

So, the poets and prophets of the Old Testament ascribe musical imagery to the world itself as it anticipates the day when all that is in disorder will be made orderly again, or as we shall discuss later, all that is in discord will find harmony once more.

However, it is important to note that just as Moses declared, “The Lord is my song,” the creation itself cannot produce praise of its own initiative. God remains sovereign over the glory he desires and receives. Just as God is the theme of song, he is also the source. We see this clearly in Scripture’s condemnation of idols as being worthless, empty, and especially *silent*.

The idols of the nations are silver and gold,
the work of human hands.

They have mouths, but do not speak;
they have eyes, but do not see;
they have ears, but do not hear,
nor is there any breath in their mouths.

Those who make them become like them,
so do all who trust in them. (Psalm 135:15-18)

Isaiah calls them “empty wind,” and Jeremiah speaks thusly of the craftsmen,

“Every man is stupid and without knowledge;
every goldsmith is put to shame by his idols,
for his images are false, and there is no breath in them. (Jer. 51:17)

Man cannot give life and breath to any created thing, only God can. Our work produces no sound. Praise, even musical praise, must originate in the Creator. This is why David pronounced, “He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God.” (Psalm 40:3) For mankind is unable to sing or cry out with any other impetus. Furthermore, man cannot quench the praise that God calls forth, whether from man or stone. Did not Jesus demonstrate this when

he dismissed the vain attempts of the Pharisees in their calling for an end to the uproarious praise of the people? For they said, “‘Teacher, rebuke your disciples.’ He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.” (Luke 19:39b-40)

Yet, before looking into the New Testament, there is one final Old Testament choir to consider: the angels. In the introduction, I revealed my sense of wonder and delight at Job 38:7 and its imagery of creation. Let’s consider a few other places in Scripture where angels join in worship.

Angelic Worship

In Psalm 148, God calls forth his praises from the entirety of his creation. As if a summary of the opening pages of Genesis, we find the command to praise him from the sun, moon and stars, and even the waters above the heavens. Then praise comes from rocks and plants and animals, and of course, mankind. With greater depth, the psalmist fleshes this out with a view of *all* people: from kings and princes, young men and maidens, the very old, and even children. Each of the days of creation is accountable to respond in praise to their maker. Yet, the psalmist begins with a glimpse into the highest heavens, to perhaps the first of all God’s creation--his ministering spirits. In the opening verses, we read:

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord from the heavens;

praise him in the heights!

Praise him, all his angels;

praise him, all his hosts! (Psalm 148:1-2)

This shows the primacy of praise and worship from the very origin of creation, and it naturally follows in God’s dominion that every aspect of creation thereafter would likewise do what the angels do. As we will soon see in the New Testament, this worship from the beginning

continues and will never cease. Matthew Henry comments: “Praising God always was, and will be to eternity, the work of heaven, and the constant employment of blessed spirits above.”¹⁸²

In Isaiah’s vision of the throne of God, he caught a glimpse of this supernatural worship. He saw angels, whom he described as cherubim, flying above and calling out in antiphonal praise to one another:

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory!” (Isaiah 6:3)

This is a general hymn of praise for the holiness and glory that belong to God alone. Some may consider this simply *speech* rather than song, as we will discuss shortly. Yet, Matthew Henry considers the musical point of view:

"Hear the anthem, or song of praise, which the angels sing to the honour of him that sits on the throne." This song was sung with "zeal and fervency—they cried aloud; and with unanimity—they cried to another, or one with another; they sang alternately, but in concert, and without the least jarring voice to interrupt the harmony."¹⁸³

The concept of harmony is very important to our discussion of both music and creation, as we have seen in the works of Lewis and Tolkien, and as we will explore in the next chapter.

In summary, songs of praise and thanksgiving, victory and deliverance permeate much of Old Testament worship, not only from God’s people, but from everything God has made and from which he ordains praise. Psalm 150 encapsulates all we have examined thus far: “let everything that has breath praise the Lord!” (Psalm 150:6) Our attention now turns to the New Testament.

¹⁸² Matthew Henry, “Commentary on Isaiah 6,” *Bible Study Tools*, <https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/matthew-henry-complete/isaiah/6.html> [Accessed March 5, 2018].

¹⁸³ Ibid.

Music in the New Testament

Although we do not find sweeping, panoramic views of God's work through history like in the Old Testament songs, there are many examples of a musical church in the New Testament. We continue to see the theme of all creation worshipping God, now made manifest in the person of Christ. These examples follow the traditions seen in the previous section regarding music for praise, thanksgiving and witness, but now adopted within the New Testament community.

Music in Christian Community

James instructs his readers that songs of praise are the appropriate response to a joyful heart. "Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise." (James 5:13) We find Paul and Silas singing while suffering in prison in Acts 16:25. "About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them." This follows the Old Testament psalm pattern of a prayer of lament followed by a song of thanksgiving. In addition, we see the evangelistic aspect of music as others were there listening, clearly affected by it, since they remained with Paul and Silas and did not escape after the earthquake opened the doors of the prison (Acts 16:28).

Hymn singing continues in the worship of the New Testament church, but now with greater clarity and direction under the apostolic authority and teaching. Paul instructs that *when*, not *if* hymns are sung, they must be done so with order and understanding, just as tongues or prophecies must be interpreted.

So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my understanding; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my understanding. Otherwise when you are praising God in the Spirit, how can someone else, who is now put in the position of an inquirer, say "Amen" to your thanksgiving, since they do not know what you are saying? You are giving thanks well enough, but no one else is edified. (1 Corinthians 14:15-17)

This reinforces the purpose of music as an integral part of discipleship and edification, within community. Perhaps the most well known passages regarding singing in the apostolic church are found in Paul's epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians.

In Ephesians 5:18-20 Paul exhorts the church to express its joy through music, not through wine. “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” He describes a contrast between being filled with strong drink and being filled with the Spirit. Both can result in passionate expressions of celebration, but with vastly different effects on the Christian’s life. Calvin points out, “To what does drunkenness lead? To unbounded licentiousness, to unbridled, indecent merriment. And to what does spiritual joy lead, when it is most strongly excited? To psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. These are truly pleasant and delightful fruits.”¹⁸⁴ Exhilaration and “merriment” are not forbidden in Scripture, but entirely appropriate when expressed in a way that glorifies God and invites communal participation and edification. Paul urges the church to “speak to one another” in musical language, through song. Hendriksen comments, “The Ephesians are urged to seek a higher, far better, source of exhilaration.”¹⁸⁵ Being filled with the Spirit allows for a proper outpouring of praise and thanksgiving through song.

Paul gives a very similar instruction to the church of Colossae, but with an emphasis here on teaching and admonition. “Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.” (Colossians 3:16) Of primary importance is the knowledge of the *message* or *word* of Christ, namely the gospel story, as well as the broader inclusion of all Scripture. As that word of Christ indwells each believer, they in turn can teach and admonish one another having this rich resource at their disposal. Furthermore, Paul suggests that this can be accomplished not merely by the spoken or written word, but through music.

¹⁸⁴ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to The Galatians and Ephesians*, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 315.

¹⁸⁵ William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 239.

Why is this so? Because, as Hendriksen states, “[songs] are a tonic for the soul and promote the glory of God. They do this because they fix the interest upon the indwelling word of Christ, and carry the attention away from that worldly cacophony...”¹⁸⁶ In summary, the apostolic position is that the singing of psalms, hymns and spiritual songs gives the believer the right outlet for jubilant expression and edifies the church body that “they may grow in grace and may manifest rightly the power of the indwelling word.”¹⁸⁷

Music in the New Heavens and Earth

In the book of Revelation, we find the complete praise of God for all his works from creation, to redemption, to consummation. What was previously separate has now been joined together: the praises of men and angels in concert, unencumbered by sin or conflict or distraction. We are given a glimpse of music in its purest expression, taking place not in temples or churches made with hands, but in the presence of God in heaven.

In the fourth chapter of Revelation, John describes the musical worship surrounding the very throne of God, with various ensembles arranged in concentric circles from the center. Closest to the throne are four living creatures, described with various animal and human-like features, having six wings and covered with eyes all around. Their praise never ceases, for day and night they say,

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty,
who was, and is, and is to come.” (Rev. 4:8)

John’s vision of this angelic chorus closely resembles Isaiah’s vision in the Old Testament. Although there are some differences, the emphasis again is on the holiness, power and eternity of God’s character - themes of many songs of praise that we’ve seen throughout Scripture.

¹⁸⁶ Hendriksen, *Commentary*, 163

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

Absent, of course, is reference to redemption, for these angelic beings have no experience in such matters in and of themselves, as Peter mentions when he describes the saving works of God as “things into which angels long to look.” (1 Peter 1:12) Nevertheless, their song of praise initiates a response from others.

John continues: “And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever.” (Rev. 4:9-10) The word ‘whenever’ does not mean that the angels only intermittingly praise God. Rather, Leon Morris explains, “John was making the point that in heaven, God is worshiped unceasingly...the worship offered by the created beings is invariably accompanied by that of the representatives of the people of God.”¹⁸⁸ Their song also praises God for his immeasurable worthiness to receive such praise for being the Creator.

“Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.” (Rev. 4:11)

In chapter 5 John witnesses The Lamb himself coming forth as the only one worthy to open the scroll from the throne of God, thus evoking worship from both angels and men simultaneously. “And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song...” (Rev. 5:8-9a) Harps, as musical instruments, are associated with the praise of God.¹⁸⁹ The song they sang is now one of redemption, for it includes the choir of men along with angels.

“Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals,

¹⁸⁸ Leon Morris, *Revelation [Electronic Resource]* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 92-93, https://books.google.com/books?id=iHCwAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false [Accessed February 23, 2018].

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 99.

for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God
 from every tribe and language and people and nation,
 and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,
 and they shall reign on the earth.” (Rev. 5:9b-10)

John is hearing, in musical form, the consummation of the gospel upon fallen humanity, restored to wholeness and given kingly and priestly duties to rule and reign with God. And just as the psalms spoke more generally of all people praising God, John widens this view to every tribe and language and people and nation upon the earth. Jew and Gentile, along with the angels, singing together.

Following these twenty-eight voices (four living creatures and twenty-four elders) John hears an even greater chorus. “Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice,

“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom
 and might and honor and glory and blessing!” (Rev. 5:11-12)

Praise is building as each successive group continues the music with more and more voices. This ‘myriad’ of angels is now practically “uncountable.” However, Basil Atkinson in his book *The War with Satan*, challenges the idea of angelic song by stating, “Angels cannot sing the new song, because they have never fallen or needed to be born again. As a matter of fact there is nothing in the Bible to tell us that angels can sing at all.”¹⁹⁰ Morris disagrees and succinctly answers the challenge, as we discussed earlier, regarding the use of verbs that literally refer to speech rather than singing. He writes,

The words of the angels are introduced in the Greek with ‘saying,’ as in 4:8, 10; 5:13, though all look like songs. Indeed, up till now the only specific reference to singing is in verse 9. But as the actual words of their songs are there introduced with ‘saying,’ it is plain that this verb is consistent with song as well as speech. The structure and content of

¹⁹⁰ Morris, *Revelation*, 101, quoting Atkinson in a footnote of his commentary on Revelation.

the other passages show that they should likewise be understood as songs, as is the case with the present passage.¹⁹¹

Finally, John concludes this section by sharing what must be considered the fullest and most glorious expression of musical praise found in all of Scripture: “And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying,

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!” (Rev. 5:20)

God Sings

One final topic in our survey of music within Scripture is one of special importance. It has been clearly shown that God ordains musical praise from his creation, but what about his own participation in music? David makes reference to God utilizing music as a means of strengthening and encouraging him during his lament in Psalm 32. He writes,

“You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble;
you surround me with shouts [or songs] of deliverance. (Psalm 32:7)

God places David, and all his people, in the company of music, specifically amidst loud shouts or cries of deliverance to bring comfort and strength in times of great need. David would have known such healing and soothing power from music as he himself “took the lyre and played it with his hand...so Saul was refreshed and was well, and the harmful spirit departed from him.” (1 Samuel 16:23b) Here, he is saying that God soothed him in the presence of singing. We have seen in Paul’s epistles that the church is called, through the *Spirit*, to use music to bless and edify one another. It is even possible that John’s weeping and distress that no one was worthy to open the scroll was assuaged by the songs of the Lamb from the heavenly hosts that surrounded him.

¹⁹¹ Morris, *Revelation*, 101.

Still, there is one more passage in the Old Testament that is more explicit in revealing the musical qualities of God himself. In Zephaniah, we find this promise of restoration following the judgment and exile for rebellious Judah and Jerusalem.

The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save;

he will rejoice over you with gladness;

he will quiet you by his love;

he will exult over you with loud singing. (Zeph. 3:17)

The noun is *rinnah*, from the word *ranan* - a ringing cry. Loud singing is just what we found in Psalm 33 in the exuberant praise of God's people. Yet here, we see God responding to us in the same manner, rejoicing *in us*, not for any intrinsic worth, but for his sheer pleasure in loving us and being our mighty one, our divine warrior who saves.

In the New Testament, the question evolves: does Jesus sing? The obvious answer is yes, for there is one, yet only one, clear reference in the gospels. In Mark 14:26 (cf. Matthew 26:30) Jesus and the disciples had just shared the Last Supper. Mark then narrates, "And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives." Most scholars agree that the traditional selection of hymns for the Passover were the Hallel psalms (113-118) thus named for the Hebrew word for *praise*. Jesus would certainly have participated in the customary worship of the day. Yet, there are other less-explicit concepts of a musical Christ, most clearly proposed by author Michael O'Connor in his essay in the book *Resonant Witness: Conversations Between Music and Theology*. His premise begins with this question: "Why do Christians, who devote a great deal of time to singing, overlook their Lord's practice in this regard?"¹⁹² He proceeds to reiterate what was stated above, that like any faithful Jew, Jesus would have experienced singing in public worship--not only at the temple, with a "dedicated use of musicians, instrumentalists and choral singers," but also in the home, which was "entirely vocal and less 'professional;' this

¹⁹² Michael O'Connor, "The Singing of Jesus," in *Resonant Witness: Conversations Between Music and Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 434.

would have been Jesus' more frequent experience of organized prayer."¹⁹³ Prayer, surmises O'Connor, is equated with song, for he considers it "patterned intonation," much like the lyrical calling of street vendors, horse-racing commentators, and rap artists."¹⁹⁴ *Sung* worship would have been on the spectrum somewhere between speech and song, but lyrical and musical nonetheless, certainly more stylized than just plain speech.

O'Connor likewise anticipates the same argument discussed earlier regarding angelic song that the verbs used in these prayer passages all mean 'to say' rather than 'to sing.' How can these be musical prayers? Yet, if we accept the idea that it is possible to 'say' a song, as discussed in the book of Revelation, then these New Testament prayers such as those of Mary, Zechariah, Simeon and even the angelic announcement of Christ's birth to the shepherds can be interpreted broadly to imply singing. O'Connor explains, "Nowadays we either 'sing' or 'say'; in the Greek of the New Testament, it is possible to do both at the same time. There is probably more singing in early Christianity than at first meets the eye (or ear), particularly in the context of worship and prayer."¹⁹⁵ All this to say that Jesus would have likely read and prayed *musically*, throughout his earthly ministry, for this was, to O'Connor, the tradition of rabbinic synagogue worship. He writes that when Jesus stood up to read the scroll of Isaiah in Luke 4:16-20, "it is reasonable to assume that he proclaimed the text using some form of heightened speech or cantillation."¹⁹⁶ C. S. Lewis would agree when he wrote, "Our Lord, soaked in the poetic tradition of his country, delighted to use [poetry]."¹⁹⁷ He gives an example from the Sermon on the Mount: "For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to

¹⁹³ O'Connor, "The Singing of Jesus," 436.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 437

¹⁹⁷ Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, 5.

you,” (Matthew 7:2) explaining this as the literary form of parallelism, having “a didactic purpose as well in helping us remember with its rhythmic and incantory expression.”¹⁹⁸

Appealing to the early church Fathers, O’Connor presents Justin Martyr who believed the hymn sung by Jesus and the disciples in Mark 14 was a fulfillment of Psalm 22: “I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you.” (Psalm 22:22) O’Connor writes, “What David foretold in song, the Son of David fulfills by singing.”¹⁹⁹ Furthermore, the last words of Jesus on the cross were verses from Psalm 22 and 31, prayers of lament and suffering. If prayer is equivalent to song, if not fully, but even in some lyrical way, then Jesus sang much more than just a single hymn on the way to Gethsemane.

He admits that he is not making an argument, but rather proposing a theme. His goal is that “we may derive a sense of the intrinsic goodness of singing and of the fittingness of our practice of singing prayers to God -- in our worship here on earth and in the praise offered in heaven.”²⁰⁰

O’Connor expands his view to include the singing of the risen Jesus and finally the Jesus of the new heavens and new earth. The singing of a “new song” in the Old Testament was in response to salvation--from death to life. “Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy!” (Isaiah 26:19) Likewise, as we have already explored in Revelation, the song of the Lamb, the heavenly “new song,” celebrates the victory over death and the redemption of God’s people. Here, O’Connor makes the critical connection:

If this is true of those born to new life in Christ, it is also true of Christ himself, the first-born, the first fruits of the new creation. He too gives thanks for life restored, for heaven opened. But it is not a song he sings in isolation: he witnesses to his brothers and sisters

¹⁹⁸ Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, 5.

¹⁹⁹ O’Connor, “The Singing of Jesus,” 438.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 435.

and invites them to join in his song. He is the high priest who leads the priestly prayer of his body the church.²⁰¹

Hence, Christ not only sings in his earthly ministry, but in his heavenly ministry as high priest as he makes intercession for his people while they await the consummation. Through the Spirit, Christ has gifted his church with words for preaching and witnessing, and promises to pray in them, for Paul explains that “the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.” (Romans 8:26) He also has given them the gift of singing (1 Corinthians 14:15). Thus, as the church prays and sings to the risen Christ, he communes with his people by praying and singing with them and in them, through his Spirit. O’Connor cites Hebrews 2:12, a quotation of Psalm 22:22, as support that the Lord continues to sing: “he is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying, “I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise.” (Heb. 2:11b-12)

Calvin says that Christ’s example of musical praise, and the response of the people is a powerful and effective witness to the world.

Christ encourages us by his own example publicly to celebrate them [God’s praises], so that they may be heard by as many as possible...And it is a truth, which may serve as a most powerful stimulant, and may lead us most fervently to praise God, when he hear that Christ leads our songs, and is the chief composer of our hymns.²⁰²

What follows is the proposal that since Jesus sang in his earthly ministry and in his intercessory role as our great High Priest, then he must be our song leader in the coming new creation as well. The Song of the Lamb is not only written by Him and centered upon Him, by led by Him to the entire heavenly assembly.

Not everyone may agree to such speculation, but even if one cannot validate each of O’Connor’s claims with specific Scriptural proof texts, the idea of a singing Christ is not far-fetched nor illogical. Considering the clarity of the prominence of music in the Old Testament

²⁰¹ O’Connor, “The Singing of Jesus,” 441.

²⁰² John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to The Hebrews*, trans. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 66-67.

from the entire creation, and considering the grand spectacle of musical choirs of men and angels in the new creation, the proposals by O'Connor are reasonable.

Music is not temporary, like animal sacrifice or temple worship, serving only as a shadow of what was to come in the new covenant. Rather, it has shown to be far wider in scope and duration - for what was present in the earliest references in Scripture so long ago is still expressed today and will be forevermore in the new heavens and new earth.

Chapter 7 - The Value of a Musical Creation

We've come to the point where we finally revisit the original question posed at the beginning: what are we to make of the myths of Lewis and Tolkien that portray a musical creation and Creator? Thus far we've considered this topic from many angles. First, we've heard from Lewis and Tolkien in their own words: their stories, literary philosophies, and intentions as myth writers. We've taken a trip through the history of music and cosmology that may have contributed to their creative imaginations. In addition, we've considered why some people, specifically Christians, would object to mythology and fantasy literature, even if baptized as *Christian* mythology. Following this, the virtues and beauty of myth have been explored from within the literary perspective. Finally, we've gone to the fountainhead of truth to see what the Bible says about music. Now we are to wear the spectacles of a musician to see what virtue and beauty are present in Lewis and Tolkien from this point of view. What fruitful and edifying questions arise from such contemplation? What does reflection upon music as a metaphor for God's universe do for the believer as a thinker, worshiper and witness to the world?

Music Illustrates the Creative Process

To begin, music can be seen as a picture of God's created world and can help us to better grasp the concept of creation *ex nihilo*, out of nothing. Of course, we cannot assume to understand the creative workings of God, but we can better apprehend the idea of the transition from nothing to existence through musical composition. Arthur Peacocke explains that there is "a lacuna in our imaginative resources for explicating what meaning could, or might, be attributed to speaking of God, the Ultimate Reality, as giving existence to something other than

God, that is, to everything that is.”²⁰³ He proposes that this difficulty in our conceptual understanding of how something that is non-real can become real, or how something non-temporal can become temporal can be ‘grasped more intuitively’ in the idea of music. He continues, “I suggest that the experience of music can afford the very imaginative and metaphorical resources we need for this and other purposes to enrich our apprehension of creation.”²⁰⁴

Peacocke gives musical examples from the composers Haydn and Wagner as illustrative works that model this coming into existence from nothing. Concerning Haydn’s *Creation* oratorio, he describes a low note beginning where there was only silence or nothingness, a void, if you will. This note develops into broken, random phrases of successive notes in arpeggios, rising and falling until they gain order and structure. As the music continues in development, harmonies are created and pulses of rhythms emerge in time. His point here is that music can be ‘an imaginative resource’ to illustrate that creation is not merely an event *in* time, but the actual creation *of* time. Just as music is a sustained creation of melody, harmony and rhythm over a duration of time, God likewise sustains and governs all things. He writes, “If God ceased to will the existence of each successive moment with all its events and their interrelations, they simply would not *be* at all.”²⁰⁵ Perhaps it is appropriate to quote Paul in speaking of the supremacy and power of Christ: “And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” (Colossians 1:17) Christ, the Creator, not only makes, but sustains and perpetuates his universe throughout the concept of time. Peacocke concludes this comparison by relating the ebb and flow of musical patterns of sound to breathing. “So, in both this music and in Creation itself, there is at first the undifferentiated, the inchoate, then a gradual transformation into identifiable and

²⁰³ Arthur Peacocke, “How Music Models Divine Creation and Creativity,” in *The Evolution of Rationality: Interdisciplinary Essays in Honor of J Wentzel van Huyssteen* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 278.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 281.

perceivable forms possessing duration, followed by patterns of periodic exchange in the succession of these forms, which begin to be articulated as distinct entities.”²⁰⁶ Lewis’s creation by the singing Aslan displayed this very clearly as formless, colorless, amorphic shapes gradually became the distinct mountains, trees, rivers and creatures of Narnia.

Music as an Illustration of Order and Unity

In addition to being a model or analogy of how the physical world came into being, music also can serve to illustrate the orderliness and unity of such a creation. We read in John 1 that in the beginning was the Word, the *logos*, who is Christ. John writes, “All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.” (John 1:3) Although there are many positions as to the meaning of John’s use of *logos*, many agree that it contains both a relation to the Old Testament concept of *dabar*, the Word of the Lord, and the Greek philosophical term that involved the rational, governing principle of the universe. As we have seen, the Greeks principally defined music as the study of mathematical relationships of intervals and ratios. The universe fits together with all its various parts in a harmonious union by ways music may best describe. The sciences can only observe what God has made, but they cannot “account for the actual existence of the world,” as Peacocke states. Yet music, as a science, can help us better perceive its connectedness. He continues,

Their success, which is based on the application of human rationality and experiment, does confirm the underlying unity and oneness of all that is. They point to the world being one and intricately interconnected in space and time by regular relationships often expressible in terms of mathematics. Moreover, the world is richly diverse in its manifestations, both in living and non-living systems. So the source of its existence, “God,” must be of unfathomable richness--a diversity in a profound unity.²⁰⁷

Music, as mathematics, can be successful in clarifying what had plagued the ancient philosophers for centuries: how can there be unity within diversity? But it does much more.

²⁰⁶ Peacocke, “How Music Models Divine Creation,” 283.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 280.

Note that Peacocke concluded that the God of music and mathematics must receive the focus, for such order is not a result of random processes and natural occurrences. Order has its source. This can be a powerful testimony to the power and splendor of the Creator. Music, especially in Tolkien and Lewis, can be an effective apologetic to the truth and character of God.

In today's world, even in the church, people struggle with the seemingly chaotic events that plague us. Where is God in all this? How can these things happen? The terms *random acts* of kindness, or evil, are used to account for people's actions in a world of *un-unified* diversity. But stories of creation can bring clarity. Regarding *The Magician's Nephew*, Peter Schakel writes, "Written in an era when order, harmony and especially purposefulness are widely denied in the nature of things, Lewis's story affirms them, not through philosophical argument or scientific demonstration, but through the imaginativeness of story and myth."²⁰⁸ Lewis is proposing that there is order, harmony and purposefulness in our world, and these are artistically portrayed, in his secondary world, in the order, harmony and purposefulness of a musical composition by its maker.

Like story and myth in general, musical myth can bring the comforts and assurances of a sovereign God to not only the church, but to the un-churched as well. Jeremy Begbie, in his work *Resounding Truth: Christian Wisdom in the World of Music* agrees:

Music and the metaphysical, in the root sense of that term, music and religious feeling, have been virtually inseparable. It is in and through music that we are most immediately in the presence of the logically, of the verbally inexpressible but wholly palpable energy in being that communicates to our senses and to our reflection what little we can grasp of the naked wonder of life...it has long been, it continues to be, the unwritten theology of those who lack or reject any formal creed.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁸ Schakel, *Imagination and the Arts in C.S. Lewis*, 105.

²⁰⁹ Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, 17, quoting George Steiner.

Begbie cautions, however, that ‘religious feeling’ and music must be grounded in truth. He emphasizes that care is needed to avoid the conclusion that music “is in some special way religiously or theologically ‘loaded’ (or at least particularly well suited to religious purposes).”²¹⁰ It is a gross assumption that in music we have “a point of contact of immense potential between church and culture, a bridge across which the church must learn to walk in the interest of engaging effectively with the contemporary world.”²¹¹ Rather, the proposal that music can point people to the unity of God’s creation must be grounded in the purpose and intent of the storyteller and musician. For even music, like oratory or literature can deceive and mislead. I have been careful to present Lewis and Tolkien in a way that portrays the integrity and consistency within their own stories, and their underlying Christian worldviews that do allow for us to rightly reflect upon the God of Scripture as the only God of order and harmony.

Further, a musical creation story can help put into perspective the unity not only found within the church today, but in the glorious new creation to come. Consider Paul’s encouragement to the Ephesians regarding the unity of all believers, Jews and Gentiles alike.

Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. (Ephesians 2:12-16)

This picture of the New Testament church can also be considered from the perspective of a worshiping church, fulfilling God’s call to sing praise to Him. What was once hostile and full of discord is now brought into unity and harmony in Christ Jesus. This harmonious, yet still

²¹⁰ Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, 17.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

imperfect choir will be perfected in heaven. It is then that music will reach its pinnacle--its grandest harmony within unity.

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen. (Revelation 7:9-12)

Lewis creatively illustrates the unity of all creatures within his world singing to Maleldil, the supreme one, in *Perelandra*, the second book of his space trilogy. Ransom, the man from Thulcandra (earth) has been successful in his mission to protect the first woman and man on Perelandra (Venus) from succumbing to the temptation of the evil one. In this fantasy, Perelandra never experiences a "fall" like Thulcandra did. As the first man and woman, sinless and still perfect, approach the supernatural 'eldil,' which are admittedly like angelic beings, Lewis describes this union of flesh and bone with heavenly beings:

It was a wonder that the contrast between the Adam and the eldils was not a discord. On the one side, the crystal, bloodless voice, and the immutable expression of the snow-white face; on the other the blood coursing in the veins, the feeling trembling on the lips and sparkling in the eyes...For now he saw this living Paradise, the Lord and Lady, as the resolution of discords, the bridge that spans what would else be a chasm in creation, the keystone of the whole arch.²¹²

To Lewis, Ransom is witnessing the otherwise unexplainable unity that could be found between man and angelic being. Next, the creatures of Perelandra are considered as they stand behind to witness as well.

By entering that mountain valley they had suddenly united the warm multitude of brutes behind him with the transcorporeal intelligences at his side. They closed the circle, and with their coming all the separate notes of strength and beauty which that assembly had hitherto struck became one music.²¹³

²¹² C. S. Lewis, *Perelandria* (New York: Scribner, 1944), 178.

²¹³ Ibid.

Tolkien likewise includes within his “Ainulindale” not only the splendor of music at creation, but an anticipation of what is to come that will far surpass it. He writes, “Never since have the Ainur made any music like to this music, though it has been said that a greater still shall be made before Iluvatar by the choirs of the Ainur and the Children of Iluvatar after the end of days.”²¹⁴ The “Children of Iluvatar” are men and elves, to Tolkien. They are granted entrance into the joy of composing and singing like at the world’s beginning, but only better. “Then the themes of Iluvatar shall be played aright, and take Being in the moment of their utterance, for all shall then understand fully his intent in their part, and each shall know the comprehension of each...”²¹⁵

Music as an Expression of Longing

Having caught glimpses of heavenly music, as recorded in the Psalms and Prophets, as witnessed at the Incarnation, and even as experienced in our own musical worship within the church, we are at times left with the desire to want more. Yet, as glorious as the original creation was, and how majestic and awesome the response of praise was from the creation itself, we are not to seek to return the *Garden*. Rather, we are to look forward to the *City*--the New Jerusalem to come, when Christ ushers in his kingdom of glory. O’Connor fittingly writes, “The nostalgia for heavenly music must be eschatologically redefined.”²¹⁶ In other words, we should rightly anticipate the greater music at the end of days that Tolkien proposes as we long for the real consummation. In a novel about the Inklings, the character of Lewis makes this comment: “We enjoy our malt in the here and now. But we always thirst again--for the living water. And the great pleasure I take in reading Milton--is it only an echo of all the songs and hymns to be sung

²¹⁴ Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, 15.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 15-16.

²¹⁶ O’ Connor, “The Singing of Jesus,” 446.

in heaven?”²¹⁷ The music within Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and other poems, along with the creation myths of Lewis and Tolkien should cause in us a desire for the truly beautiful, complete, and perfect sound of musical praise in heaven. We live in the *not yet*. All the beauty we experience in nature, and in the sub-creations of poetry, music and visual art are still marred and incomplete, under the shadow. Lewis, in an essay in *The Weight of Glory*, admits

The books or music in which we thought the beauty was located will betray us if we trust to them; it was not in them, it only came through them, and what came through them was longing...For they are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never yet visited.²¹⁸

But music as a metaphor of God’s creative order and harmony can cause us to long for something greater than music itself. Tolkien has called this *eucatastrophe*. Their musical stories can stir within us the desire to see all that was broken being made new. The consolation of redemption finds its parallel in dissonance and cacophony being resolved into harmony, just like the final major triad in a major orchestral or choral work. The satisfaction of rest and resolution will be exhilarating. Music can express the both the sound of the Fall and of redemption.

Finally, music can generate a longing for the source of all creative power Himself. Styers explains that the readers of *The Chronicles of Narnia* may find delight in this secondary world, but only as it points to something greater. These readers can be “carried by their imaginations beyond Narnia to the actual object of their desires, to the real Narnia, Lewis’s depiction of heaven and being in the presence of God.”²¹⁹

²¹⁷ David C. Downing, *Looking for the King: An Inklings Novel* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010), 149.

²¹⁸ C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (New York: Harper One, 1949), 24 as quoted in Schakel, *Imagination and the Arts*, 105.

²¹⁹ Schakel, *Imagination and the Arts*, 108.

Chapter 8 - Concluding Thoughts

It is my desire that the creation mythologies of Lewis and Tolkien have been shown to be worthy of our attention both for their beauty and benefit. Imaginative literature gives us examples of truths rather than precepts, Ryken says. “It embodies experience in event and character, in image and metaphor.”²²⁰ The Bible, likewise employs imagery and metaphor, and can even be considered “in large part a work of imagination. Its most customary way of expressing truth is not the sermon or theological outline but the story, the poem and the vision.”²²¹ I am in no way elevating fantasy literature to Divine truth, but merely stating that imagery is powerful. Lewis agrees in his reflections upon the Psalms when he states,

It seems to me appropriate, almost inevitable, that when that great Imagination which in the beginning for Its own delight and for the delight of men and angels and (in their proper mode) of beasts, had invented and formed the whole world of Nature, submitted to express Itself in human speech, that speech should sometimes be poetry. For poetry too is a little incarnation, giving body to what had been before invisible and inaudible.²²²

I’ve attempted to show that poetic imagery can make clear what is sometimes hard to see.

The concern is valid that mythology, if believed, can lead to falsehood and error. The Apostle Paul warns us to avoid wandering into mythology. However, his warning involves not merely wandering, but taking up residence there, resulting in a denial of the true creation account, or a false understanding of the nature of Christ and his atoning work. In other words, mythology as a *one-way trip* is to be rightly and soberly shunned. But Lewis and Tolkien are not proposing a trip *to* mythology, but a journey *through* mythology, as a round trip. To put it in Tolkien’s words in the sub-title of *The Hobbit* - “There and Back Again.” An excursion through the worlds of Narnia and Middle-earth, as stated earlier can enrich and delight our senses and our

²²⁰ Ryken, *Christian Imagination*, 27.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 25.

²²² Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, 5.

intellect. Furthermore, Lewis and Tolkien in their own convictions, do embrace the truth of Christianity, and in no way are attempting to lead anyone *from* this truth.

As I stated in my opening thesis, these works can and should raise good and meaningful questions that take root in our imaginations, and hopefully blossom into a passionate desire to know what God has revealed to us on such matters in his Word. I will conclude with a few examples of such questions that have resulted from my encounters with these stories.

After reading “The Ainulindale,” I was struck with the sheer beauty of its description of musical harmony and order, and the ugliness and damage caused by a rebellion of such harmony. What does this say about our God who has made everything by the Word of Christ in perfect order and balance? I am brought to the beauty of Christ as described in the first chapter of Colossians: “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.” (Colossians 1:15-16) The Song of Aslan in *The Magician’s Nephew*, likewise brings to my mind the goodness of the creation, as Moses so clearly recounts in Genesis: “And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.” (Genesis 1:31)

What effect does sin have upon God’s creation? The discord and selfishness of Melkor poignantly illustrate how sin blinds us (and deafens us) to the orderly will of God for his people to know him and walk in his ways. Yet, I am humbled and delighted to read of how Iluvatar takes the dissonance of Melkor’s melody and weaves it back in to his grand and purposeful theme. I am thus comforted in the sovereignty of my God as I reflect on the true stories of Joseph in Egypt or Daniel in Babylon. Speaking to his brothers, Joseph exclaims, “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good.” (Genesis 50:20a) Paul echoes this by writing “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28) No amount of cacophony or evil in this world can thwart God’s purposes, and no attempt to silence God’s work will succeed.

The musical harmony in Tolkien's story reminds me not only of the harmonious relationship of our physical world, but of God's redeemed people worshiping together as described in Ephesians 2. "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility." (Ephesians 2:13-14) The imagery of musical creation stories causes me to ask more deeply what Paul means when he describes Christ as making "one new man in place of the two, so making peace." (Ephesians 2:15) I see more clearly in Scripture that God has reconciled not only me to himself, but reconciled us to one another, and has given us a new ministry of reconciliation to bring to the world.

What do these stories illustrate about our music in corporate worship in the church today? As we have seen, the Bible makes it clear that God does delight in the singing of his people. Furthermore, we have explored the concept that God himself sings. Lewis and Tolkien have reinforced the truth that music in the church is not superfluous or unnecessary, but fitting and right. Even if we claim that we cannot sing (well), God has established that it is good for his redeemed people to sing praise to Him, preparing for the time when the "greater Music to come" will surround us and thrill us. Then we join the angels, and Christ himself in perfect worship.

I'm sure each of us has experienced a time in our corporate singing when we have truly tasted and seen that the Lord is good. In these instances the music has stirred us up into what R. C. Sproul has called "a posture of adoration." I believe in these few but precious occasions, we are involved in a harmony, initially created by God, and sub-created by us, that more closely resembles the harmony of music that may have been present at creation, but most certainly will be present at the new creation at the end of days.

Who invented music my student asked? Tolkien and Lewis are not giving us answers, for we are not to formulate truth claims apart from the rule of our faith, the Word of God. But the Bible does reveal the God who delights in music. Music, like everything else, is a result of the creation, for before the world was made there was nothing but God himself. And we know that it is God alone who can make the world from nothing, form man from the dust, and recreate

broken man into the glorious sheep of his pasture. He calls us to sing, and only he can enable and ennoble us to do so. In the great hymn by Robert Robertson we close with these beautiful and poetic lines:

*Come, thou Fount of every blessing, tune my heart to sing thy grace;
Streams of mercy, never ceasing, call for songs of loudest praise.
Teach me some melodious sonnet, sung by flaming tongues above.
Praise the mount I'm fixed upon it mount of God's redeeming love.*²²³

²²³ Robert Robertson, "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing."

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