

Born after Pizza

or the Modest Newsletter as a curious blend of Tozer and Martin

Pondering Anew: Musings on a Lewis Quotation

by Jillian Ross

This summer I read *The Incarnation of the Word of God* by Athanasius. In the preface by C. S. Lewis, Lewis makes the following observation, “For my own part I tend to find the doctrinal books often more helpful in devotion than the devotional books and I rather suspect the same experience may await many others.”¹ I concur with Lewis; often in seminary I have shared in his experience.² In fact some of my most devotional times involve writing seminary papers. Why is this?

Before answering the “why,” we first need to look at “what,” “who,” and “how.” Let us begin with “what” questions. In other words, let us define our terms. First, “What is a doctrinal book?” A doctrinal book teaches readers a core principle of beliefs [about God]. Second, “What is a devotional book?” A devotional book is a book which purposes to evoke religious fervor.³ Third, “What is a devotional experience?” By extension, it is an experience which elicits religious fervor.

Since people write books, one should ask, “who writes these books?” To state it a different way, “What characterizes these authors?” Broadly speaking, theologians/scholars write doctrinal works, while Christian workers/laymen write devotional books.⁴

When considering the two types of authors, one asks “How are the authors similar?” and “How do they differ?” Both groups spend time studying the Word of God, practice piety, and minister to others. They all are theologians to one extent or the other. They differ on how they allocate their time. Theologians tend to spend more time in Scripture than Christian workers and laymen. Often Christian workers and laymen spend more time ministering to others. Authors of doctrinal works and devotional works employ theology. When done properly, theology is evangelical (related to the gospel), exegetical (tied to Scripture), and devotional.⁵ Thus, both doctrinal books and devotional books should facilitate a devotional experience.

1 Athanasius, *The Incarnation of the Word of God*, (New York: McMillian, reprinted 1951), 10.

2 I especially think of *The Pentateuch as Narrative* and *Christianity and Liberalism*. John Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992); J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, reprint 2002)

3 I did not study the difference between devotional books in Lewis’ day compared to our day. If I am anachronistic and imposing my understanding of devotionals, I have made a heurmenutical error. Having said that, I do not think such an error would dismantle my argument.

4 For this conversation, I am assuming both types of authors are faithful Christians. Thus, I am using the term Theologian in a very narrow sense.

5 In Dr. Bauder’s Systematic Theology I class notes, he also correctly includes fundamentalistic and historical.

Now we are in a position to answer the question, “Why are theological books more helpful in devotion than devotional books?” Though this may sound like a simple answer, theologians spend more time studying Scripture and musing. They frequently engage in the theological method. In so doing, they often have a deeper, more coherent understanding of Scripture. By doing evangelical theology properly, authors of doctrinal books understand more about God than laity. As a corollary, they understand who man is and his desperate need for a Savior. Such knowledge should drive them to a deeper fervor for God. They, like David, can say “such knowledge is too wonderful for me; too high, I cannot attain it” (Ps 139:6).

Furthermore, I believe these books can articulate truths of Scripture more accurately and simply. (They have a superior understanding of the whole and the parts; they make more connections and distinctions.) This can be seen a few ways. These theologians can write apologetics. For example, Machen’s genius emerges as he argues Liberalism is not Christianity.⁶ In his chapter on doctrine, Machen dismantles the Liberal’s assertions by carefully stacking biblical evidences on top of each other. In much the same way Jonathan Edwards⁷ proposes “the religion of the most eminent saints we have an account of in the Scripture consisted much in holy affection.”⁸ They also write systematic works. Athanasius explains a difficult concept of the incarnation with a simple analogy.

For the solidarity of mankind is such that, by virtue of the Word’s indwelling a single human body, the corruption which goes with death has lost its power over all. You know how it is when some great king enters a large city and dwells in one of its houses; because of his dwelling in a single house, the whole city is honoured, and enemies and robbers cease to molest it. Even so is it with the King of all; He has come into our country and dwelt in one body amidst the many, and in consequence the designs of the enemy against mankind have been foiled, and the corruption of death, which formerly held them in its power, has simply ceased to be. For the human race would have perished utterly had not the Lord and Saviour of all, the Son of God, come among us to put an end to death.⁹

Such men know and love God and humbly write in their prefaces “my design is to contribute my mite, and use my best (however feeble) endeavours to this end, in the ensuing treatise.¹⁰ These are men of such the world is not worthy (Heb 11:39).

“Why are their works more devotional?” They lovingly have devoted much time to “ponder anew what the Almighty can do.”

⁶ J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism*, 17-53. [I find it ironic and humorous that Eerdmans is the publisher of my edition.]

⁷For any who are totally culturally illiterate, this Jonathan Edwards has nothing to do with Cary’s [*sic*] running mate Johnathan Edwards [*sic, ay!*].

⁸ Jonathan Edwards, *The Religious Affections*, (Carlisle: Banner of Truth, reprinted 2001):37. See 37-40.

⁹ Athanasius, *The Incarnation of the Word of God*, (New York: McMillian, reprinted 1951), 35.

¹⁰ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 20.

**Conversation between *Love-self* (representing revivalistic preaching)
and *Thoughtful* (old measures of preaching).**

found by Deborah Forteza

William Weeks. *Pilgrim's Progress in the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 358-51; 235-6.

[qt. in Ian Murray, *Revival and Revivalism*, pp. 251-52; 283-84]

L.S....In your method you spend your strength to little purpose. You press upon the sinner, it may be, his obligation to repent without delay; but you do not ask him whether he will comply. If he were disposed to say he would, I should infer, from your manner of talking that you would rather not have him say it. You would dismiss him from the meeting, without his having said or done any thing, by which he should feel committed. Now, I would ask him to do something by which he should feel committed. If he can be led to take this step, whatever it is taking the anxious seat, or rising up, or kneeling down, or whatever it may be, by which he shall pledge himself, he will feel that he is committed, and that he must go on. . . You would never do any thing to place him in this situation.

Th. No. It is not a process directed in the Bible; and that is a reason why I should regard it with suspicion. . .

L.S. I suppose no evangelical Christian now questions, but that preaching ought to produce its results at the time; and yet, according to general experience, it rarely does so. And if you are not satisfied with the measures which have been contrived for the purpose of producing this result, it would seem to be right to call upon you to suggest others which you think better . . .

Th. Let Paul plant, and Apollos water; and let all pray God to give the increase. I have no doubt that every instance of the faithful preaching of the word produces some effect upon its hearers, at the time. But as it belongs to God to give it such effect as he pleases, it may be different in different individuals. The preached word may harden one; it may awaken another; it may produce conviction in another; and it may be the instrument of bringing another to submission. Is that what you mean?

L.S. No. I mean that a sermon addressed to sinners ought to bring them to repentance, at the time. And it ought to be expected to do it.

Th. On whom does the obligation rest? On the preacher, or on the hearer? Or on some other being or agent?

L.S. The sinner is bound to repent now. And if the preacher does his duty, he may expect to see sinners brought to repentance immediately.

Th. There is a great deal of such talk, at this day, which seems to have very little definiteness. I do not believe the preacher can make the word preached by him effectual to the conversion of sinners. The Lord Jesus did not in all cases; nor the prophets, nor the apostles, nor was it required of them. If they faithfully preached the word, that was their duty. What effect it should produce was the divine prerogative to determine. . .

L.S. If you admit that it is the duty of every impenitent hearer to repent now, why not take some means to ascertain, at the close of the sermon, how many have done their duty?

Th. For the plain reason that the eyes of man cannot ascertain. God only looks on the heart. And more time is required for a sober, human judgment to be formed. 'By their fruits ye shall know them;' and there must be time for the fruits to appear.

L.S. You are so often hinting at false conversions, false hopes, and the like, that I begin to think you have not much confidence in the revivals of the present day.

Th. I confess I cannot have much confidence in those which are produced by new-measure influence. I think the new measures are usually found connected with radical errors in relation to what Christian experience is, and that the kind of experimental religion which these measures is adapted to produce, is not true Christian experience, but a dangerous delusion.

[After the preaching of **Mr. Bold**, one who uses Finney's preaching methods]

Man. I call that *preaching*, gentlemen, don't you? Such preaching as that will promote a revival. This man is not one of your cold, theorizing, hair-splitting preachers. He has some *feeling*; and he makes his hearers feel too.

Thoughtful. I admit that he preaches much truth, and with a great deal of earnestness: but there are some things in his manner which I regard as very objectionable.

Wife. That is because you are in a cold, dead, and stupefied state yourself. You would feel differently, if you should only get waked up . . . The Holy Spirit gives his sanction to Mr. Bold, such as never was given to mortal man before. Revival upon revival follows him wherever he goes. How dare you find fault with a man whom the Holy Spirit approves?

Th. Where is the evidence that the Holy Spirit approves of this man?

Wife. His success in converting souls is the evidence. Wherever he goes the Spirit seems to follow him. And whenever he speaks it seems as if the Holy Spirit dictated every word he says.

Th. That is extravagant. Surely you cannot believe that the Holy Spirit gives utterance to such strange expressions as we hear from Mr. Bold.

Wife. Your being so cold is the reason why you are not pleased. If you once get your heart warmed, you will feel differently. But if you find fault with Mr. Bold's preaching and measures, what is that but to find fault with the Holy Spirit?

Th. It seems to me to be a very different thing. I cannot yet see that Mr. Bold is actuated by the Holy Spirit. I should not dare to ascribe to that blessed agent all his strange speeches. I do not see how you prove his success to be an evidence of divine approbation.

Wife. Why, does not every-body say that the Holy Spirit blesses these means, and therefore they must be right? .

Th. Not quite every-body. There are some yet who think they must judge of things by the appointed rule, the law and the testimony.

Wife. Well, if you find fault with Mr. Bold's measures, when they are so successful, I must think you are more nice than the Holy Spirit.

Th. Do you think success is always a mark of the divine approbation?

Wife. Certainly.

Advertisement

found by Eric White

Redeeming Halloween: Celebrating Without Selling Out, by Kim Wier & Pam McCune, \$12.99

From *Focus On the Family* comes this helpful guide for Christian parents on "what to do with Halloween"! Practical helps like costume, decorating and party ideas, to an examination of the historic origins of the holiday. This is a great resource for Christian families.

Singing Our Hymns for All the Wrong Reasons

by Ryan J. Martin

Of course, one could give many reasons why we ought to sing hymns. In the same vein, one could sling many criticisms against singing the sludge produced by the contemporary Christian music industry. But how about some reasons *not* to sing hymns? Of course, by asking this question, another, more immediate question is raised—what kind of hymns are you talking about? I am speaking of all the great hymns: “When I Survey,” “All My Hope on God is Founded,” “Holy, Holy, Holy,” etc.¹¹ Why should we not sing these hymns?

Do not misunderstand me. I am not saying that we should not sing these hymns altogether, or that they are unworthy of praise to the Holy Triune God. They are indeed a worthy vehicle of praise toward such a high and lofty Being. But there are reasons not to sing them.

First, we must not sing hymns because we hate pleasure.¹² Some hymn-singers embrace hymns because they find too much pleasure in the other genres. Since they find such a high degree of pleasure in the other genres, they reason that they must not be godly. They do not believe that anything pleasurable could ever be associated with religion. These are the sorts that find no pleasure in religion whatsoever. Religion is something they do because that is what they have always done. But this is not real religion. Real religion is characterized by pleasure.¹³ In fact, we sing hymns *because* it is pleasurable—because we find pleasure in worshiping God as he is. Because he is worthy of praise and love and adoration, we take pleasure in glorifying him. Because he has so graciously saved our wretched souls, we take pleasure in worshiping him. We not only take pleasure in the object of our worship, and thereby our worship, but we rejoice in practicing this worship in such a way that reflects his glory and holiness and majesty. Therefore, we sing hymns because we find it pleasurable to praise God with them. And, if we sing hymns because we despise the “pleasure” found in other genres, it is not a legitimate reason to sing hymns.

Furthermore, we must not sing hymns because we love our traditions for their own sakes. It is one thing to love our traditions or to love being a conservative. But if we love our traditions because they are our traditions, we have gone astray. In other words, we ought to love our traditions and our hymnody because it serves a purpose that we love a great deal more.¹⁴ For

¹¹It is a bit frustrating that I cannot simply say “hymns,” and be completely understood in my meaning. We are far too generous to ascribe the lofty noun “hymn” to such porridge as “Make Me a Blessing,” “I Shall Know Him,” or “The Old Rugged Cross.”

¹²The honorable Dr. Zartman gave me the seed for this undeveloped thought.

¹³I would even go so far to say that “CCM” (for lack of a better title) is, on a certain level, pleasurable. But it is the level (or kind) of pleasure that I find so abominable to the Christian faith. It is a different *kind* of pleasure than the pleasure I find worshiping God. It is an *eros* pleasure, rather than a head and heart kind of pleasure.

¹⁴This is one of the reasons it is so hard for some to give up what are really *bad* hymns. They sing them because they love “the good old days,” or “the old revival hour,” or whatever. They love the hymn because it brings back good old memories of singing them around a campfire. I

example, if I began to love Central Baptist Theological Seminary and the men who teach there above the Lord, I would be a sentimental man. I should love the seminary because it equipped me for service of my Lord and Savior, whom I love much more than the seminary. That is not to say that I should not love the seminary, but I should love it for a reason. It must be a platform to a greater love. Similarly, what kind of man would I be if I began to love the roses I brought my wife more than I loved my wife herself? This is what it is like when we love hymns and traditions and conservatism for their own sake, and not for God's. We must learn to love hymns because they are a tool to express our love for God.

Hymns are glorious and majestic, and certainly something we may love. But the question is *why* we love them. If we love them for any reason short of God himself, we err. Worse than that, we miss terribly the whole point of hymns. Hymns were created to praise our God. When we love the hymns for their own sake, we are guilty of high treason against that God those hymns were intended to praise.

A Quotation

When ministers preach of hell, and warn sinners to avoid it, in a cold manner -- though they may say in words that it is infinitely terrible -- they contradict themselves. For actions, as I observed before, have a language as well as words. If a preacher's words represent the sinner's state as infinitely dreadful, while his behavior and manner of speaking contradict it -- showing that the preacher does not think so -- he defeats his own purpose; for the language of his actions, in such a case, is much more effectual than the bare signification of his words. Not that I think that the law only should be preached: ministers may preach other things too little. The gospel is to be preached as well as the law, and the law is to be preached only to make way for the gospel, and in order that it may be preached more effectually. The main work of ministers is to preach the gospel: "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness." So that a minister would miss it very much if he should insist so much on the terrors of the law, as to forget his Lord, and neglect to preach the gospel; but yet the law is very much to be insisted on, and the preaching of the gospel is like to be in vain without it.

From *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God*
– Jonathan Edwards

Some Remarks

by Joel Zartman

Is the quotation above not the whole case against CCM? As to the remark about actions, we might need to make a Thomist argument: that music is action. And how about the Fundamentalist Musical Discharge (FMD)? Surely there is something there to discover them.

I have been reading Edwards writings on revival and I am increasingly convinced that the answer to the frivolity and triviality that in large part characterize fundamentalist religion can be found in a revival of religion. I say this because over and over again the descriptions of Edwards emphasize reverence and seriousness.

may be wrong about this, but I can think of no other possible reason for someone to love (or even sing) songs such as "In the Garden," or "Just a Closer Walk with Thee."