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Some signposts for contemporary Christian community and conversion in CS Lewis's *That Hideous Strength*

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Acknowledgements

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Abstract

This dissertation examines some of Lewis's ideas on the influence of modernist culture on community and conversion, and his Christian alternative. These are set out in his fantasy novel *That Hideous Strength*, and the essays in *The Abolition of Man.* Lewis argues that Modern socialisation and education distort and limit human psychospiritual development, resulting in people who have dulled aesthetic, ethical and spiritual sensitivity, and are thus predisposed to an instrumental, arrogant and power-driven treatment of others and the natural world. He advocates a return to the tradition of virtue ethics, lived out in community, and a recovery of the awareness of supernatural agency, within a Christian context, to remedy these deficiencies.

The psychospiritual journeys of his main protagonists are analysed to identify some key elements which are particularly important influences on conversion in contemporary culture, and Lewis's vision of a Christian strategy which would be of benefit. Similarly his portrayals of both a Modernist, diabolic organisation, and a small Christian lay community, are examined for key features, and some suggestions for contemporary church communities are made as a result.

Finally, the dissertation looks at the convergence of some contemporary thinkers with Lewis's proposal - basic Christian communities practicing a supernaturally oriented and holistic lifestyle, which supports the human flourishing and eternal destiny of their members.

Introduction

CS Lewis was a scholar, writer and Christian apologist, in the first half of the 20th century. His academic speciality was late medieval and renaissance English literature. In early adulthood he experienced a Christian conversion, having been through a nominal religious upbringing and a period of unbelief, and subsequently produced many works with a Christian message. This background familiarised him with various worldviews: classical, medieval and modern; secular and religious; and not least, the human psyche and religious nature through conversion, mystical experience and self-observation. His Christian views are thus practically grounded, rooted in a depth of scholarship, and both orthodox and contemporary.

In 1944 he wrote a series of lectures, *The Abolition of Man* (Lewis 1996b), on certain concerns about the effect of modernist education and culture on human society, psychology and spiritual orientation. He later developed these and illustrated their implications in the novel, *That Hideous Strength* (*THS;* Lewis 1996a), subtitled *A Modern Fairy-Tale for Grown-ups*. In the preface he calls it a "tall story about devilry" but also says it was written to make the same 'serious point' as *The Abolition of Man*. In this two communities are portrayed, one a modernist (and ultimately, diabolic) organisation, and the other a small Christian lay community. Using the interactions and contrasts between these he explores the effects and influences of the two cultures on various characters, and on the surrounding society and environment. Through this dramatic antithesis he clarifies the problematic dynamic of modernity, and proposes a Christian response which is both practical and radically traditional.

In the first chapter of this dissertation I will set out Lewis's concerns, and the tradition of virtue ethics which he drew on for his alternative. Next, the implications these have for conversion will be considered using examples from *THS*. Thirdly I will look at the influence of these cultures on the communities in *THS*, and those who belong to them, and hence highlight some particular issues for the church today. Finally, this will be drawn together with a proposal for one possible way forward, a model of small Christian community engaged with a contemporary, holistic and supernaturally/cosmically relational spirituality.

(The reader may want to refer to the table of *THS* chapters and page numbers in appendix II, and the *THS* genre and plot summary in appendix I.)

Chapter 1

The effect of modernism on human psychospiritual development

<u>Characteristics of modern and postmodern cultures</u>

Culture can be defined as "the particular way a people cultivates its relationship with nature, with others and with God" (John Paul II quoted in Gallagher 2003:58). This is a holistic viewpoint which fits well with Lewis's authorial intentions. Both have their roots in the Christian tradition which sees the universe and human endeavour in the light of God's creative and caring activity, which humans are called to participate in. And in turn this tradition is rooted in a Greek Classical philosophy and ethic for which existence and purpose could only be considered meaningfully within a metaphysical perspective. Essentially, true fulfilment comes from orientation to some greater and higher reality, rather than narrowly personal ends, which will tend towards mere brutish existence and satisfaction. Eastern theology perhaps retained more of this perspective, in the notion of divinisation, *theosis*, which sees the human calling (and hence the purpose of the church) to become a participant in God's nature and creative energies, and to live in harmony with a restored nature. In the West, a historical emphasis on the struggle against all-pervasive sin and a Latin juridical mindset has tended to set humanity in opposition to itself and nature, and encouraged divisions and distinctions in theological and philosophical thought.

It is perhaps no accident, therefore, that the sources of modernity are all in the West, and arise from this branch of culture. Gallagher (2003:76-77,80,86-87) describes modernity as a complex phenomenon, developing over several centuries with waves of innovation and cultural change. These include the Renaissance, Reformation, Enlightenment, Industrial Revolution, universal education, and the recent communications revolution. This process gradually produced a sense of human autonomy and separation from nature, society and culture itself, and privileged rational and objective thought. Humans began to see themselves as the masters of their fate, controlling and manipulating at will both the physical and socio-psychological environment. The notion of a creator God became a matter of superstitious belief which science was rendering obsolete. In Gallagher's words "A living synthesis fell apart, and...deep connections between nature, God and human beings underwent drastic

change". However modernity also had many positive aspects, vastly improving living conditions through scientific and technological advances, and giving opportunities for greater human freedom, creativity and maturity.

Our contemporary situation can be considered a mix of modern and postmodern cultural influences. Postmodernism is again a complex phenomenon and notoriously difficult to define, partly because it is characterised by diversity and lack of a common foundation. While it has lost faith in the modern claim that rationality and technology can solve all our ills, it is able to propose no alternative that is generally accepted, and furthermore the modern legacies of both centralisation and autonomous individuality have developed into a distrust of totalising systems and institutions. These are still with us, however, impacting on most peoples' lives as a bureaucratic ethos in politics, social welfare, and work management. The ensuing reactions include an increased emphasis on individualistic leisure pursuits and often consumerism. This tends to further erode any sense of shared responsibility, purpose, or common values left in public discourse or civic practice.

Lewis's analysis of the problem

Contemporary theological commentators such as Dupré, MacIntyre and Gallagher agree that the change from pre-modern to contemporary cultures has had a radical and often disruptive effect on human wellbeing and society, and the life of the Church. Nowadays traditional Christianity, being rooted in a pre-modern worldview, is challenged to remain relevant and credible, but is also a potential reservoir of practical wisdom for cultural renewal. In *THS* Lewis shows us his vision of this practical wisdom in action. He also illustrates the distortions and pressures which a dysfunctional modernity causes, and gives us a characteristically shrewd and down-to-earth psychological portrait of those caught up in them. (These will be considered later.) To understand the theological and spiritual roots of his proposal we first need to look at *The Abolition of Man* (Lewis 1996b).

In the first part of this, 'Men without Chests', he proposes that modern education (both formal, and presumably, by tacit socialisation) privileges a reductionist, 'scientific' anthropology. In his view, this teaches that emotions and 'feelings' are merely

subjective physiological phenomena and that objective facts and intellectual reasoning are the only reliable basis for judgements. (Lewis was writing from his experience of male education at the turn of the last century, but his argument still has force.) By this reasoning, the population becomes divided into those who are 'uneducated', swayed by 'cheap sentiment' and liable to emotional manipulation, and the educated elite who have the knowledge and power to pursue their ends, through their ability to manage and manipulate others by psycho-social engineering and propaganda. Lewis is not denying the usefulness of scientific, rational and objective approaches, but saying that this alone is not enough for an adequate education, and indeed is likely to lead to dangers for society, if not counterbalanced.

The 'Men without Chests' are the product of this education: having a trained intellect and animal appetites, but no 'heart', no formed emotional habits or dispositions to moderate or integrate them. He contrasts this with education in the natural law tradition[1], which formed people's emotional responses in accordance with a notion of what is 'right and fitting' for our human nature, and gave them a stable disposition to think, feel and act in accordance with a basic human sense of moral standards. In the second part he asks what possible basis for choices (values) these modern people could have; having rejected emotional feelings as a means of judging, they are left with instincts, but these are too varied and contradictory. In other words, they have the intellectual and scientific skills to do many things, but no reason to choose one over another; they know the price of everything but the value of nothing. Lewis suggests the way forward can only come through regaining a sense of 'natural law or traditional morality' as a starting point for creative and sensitive moral discourse. The alternative would be to abandon the concept of value altogether, considering it a meaningless natural phenomenon[2].

In the third section, he considers some implications of the modern project of 'mastering nature' – not only control over natural phenomena, but increased power over others

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[1] The Natural Law approach came from Classical Greek philosophy, and considered that humans have an innate sense of ethical behaviour. It was later taken up by Aquinas and other Christian philosophers (via Aristotle), and also became the basis of English common law (partly through the work of Henry de Bracton [d.1268], mentioned in Ch1 of *THS*). Throughout the tradition the dialectic between the natural law/human rights approach, divine revelation of ethics, and positive (political, man-made) law was being developed. This issue underlies much of the action in *THS*. (Internet source 2).

[2] Postmodern culture has moved in this latter direction.

who are less advantaged and finally perhaps, the ability to manipulate the human body and mind at will. But if values and traditions (in a broad sense) have been discarded, how will those in power decide? They are no longer accountable to anything greater than themselves, and have learnt to ignore their own moral sensitivities. He suggests the only motive left will be irrational animal appetite, and the project will end ironically with nature mastering humanity, not vice-versa. Lewis does not here take this argument beyond a natural level (1996:60), but in *THS* he continues it from a metaphysical perspective as a Christian, suggesting the end of the process would be to let the human intellect and will atrophy, in a reductive process that also denies the supernatural, and/or attempt a synthesis of technocracy and the occult (*THS*:200-201, see Schwartz 2009:192), leaving the way open for the hegemony of supernatural agencies hostile to humanity[3].

Lewis's uncompromisingly clear and logical argument may seem chilling, but far-fetched, especially when dramatised in the gothic fantasy of *THS*. But there are contemporary signs that this sort of process may be at work, and beginning to impact on public consciousness. The pervasive manipulation of people's interests, desires and choices by constant advertising and entertainment is ultimately to the benefit of those who profit from consumerism and public tractability. Similarly, recent evidence of corruption, self-serving behaviour and scandals within politics, finance, big business, police and the media suggests there may be a certain lack of character and responsibility among those in power, and some collusion among them at a systematic level. The same could be said of clerical child abuse. For Lewis, culture in society is analogous to 'heart' (or character) for the individual: culture mediates between public beliefs and the social environment, and character between intellect and bodily/instinctive urges. They are the usual motivation of behaviour, and their deterioration has analogous effects in society and the individual. Hence the crucial failure of modern culture is that it renders people unable to give an adequate and

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[3] This is echoed by J-P de Caussade (quoted in *Magnificat* 2012:68), writing of the rebellious intelligence of Lucifer at work in the world: "wherever he penetrates, you will always find the work of God disfigured. The more lights, knowledge and general capacity a person has, the more he is to be feared, if he has not the foundation of piety which consists of contentment with God and his will. It is the regulation of the heart that places us in union with the divine will; without that union, everything is but pure nature and, usually, pure opposition to the divine order; God has not, properly speaking, any instruments but pure souls." The problem, of course, is how to recognise the narrowing and dulling process of separation from God when it presents itself as enlightened, beneficial and completely satisfactory rationalism (as Chesterton points out: 2001:13), while distinguishing this from genuine advances.

coherent account of their world and behaviour, and thus vulnerable to degeneration (Kort 2001:25,73-77).

<u>The effects on ecclesiology and spirituality</u>

These cultural changes have had their influence on the church as well as secular society. Both leaders and people are embedded in their surrounding culture, and thus it is inevitable that these attitudes and assumptions will gradually have an effect on the ethos of the church, whether consciously or unconsciously. For instance, it is rather ironic that the Roman Catholic church between Trent and Vatican II, especially during the pontificate of Pius X, was reacting against 'modernism' and progressive secular and religious culture, but at the same time was developing some corresponding distortions within the church. Modernism tends to homogenise, producing a uniform, rationally centralised, bureaucratically controlled society (Gill 1992:57). The increased centralisation and prescriptive control by the Vatican from this time could be seen as analogous. Similarly, power in a modern society is typically exercised by an elite of technocrats or experts over more-or-less passive recipients of their technical knowledge and management. Doctrinal expression and administration of the sacraments became much more regulated and precisely defined, and could be seen as development into a sort of 'spiritual technology' which was almost mechanically 'applied' to the faithful. Spiritual direction also took on something of this flavour, with 'expert' priests applying their esoteric knowledge of the soul to humble and passive recipients (Barry & Connolly 1986:9). Clericalism increased, with priests taking on the role of experts in parish management, spiritual guidance and teaching. They presided over a highly ritualised Sunday Mass as the increasing focus of parish life, with a passive and submissive laity. In society, most people now had an urban lifestyle as anonymous labourers in mechanised factories, with ownership of the 'means of production' by an elite. The old organic web of relationships and inherited practices was being lost, and the individual became a human cog, subordinated to the system and administration of the powerful elite. Belief became intellectual assent to dogmatic propositions, and individual piety began to predominate over a practical, communal faith life with strong interpersonal relationships. In short, the same issues of disempowerment, dehumanisation, alienation, top-down control and passivity emerged in the church as well as society, and we are still struggling with them today.

Modern advances in biblical criticism, insights from secular disciplines, and ecclesial reform have all disrupted old ways of thinking and practicing, creating new possibilities, but also leaving some unsure of their identity and values, having been abruptly severed from their old cultural roots. While I believe the *content* of these changes is basically good and inspired by the Spirit of faithfulness and truth, I wonder how good the *process* was. The intellectually and theologically informed may have been able to understand and adapt with integrity, but what was it like for ordinary believers, accustomed to an apparently unchanging, unquestioned status quo? These changes coming from above must have come as a bewildering shock, and left people fundamentally unsure of the rationale of their faith. I think of the situation of indigenous peoples with their own rich culture, who are nonetheless vulnerable to a superficial adoption of a modern Western lifestyle, unless the process of contact and adaptation is under their ownership and control. The glamour and promise soon wears off, and they are left struggling with few resources (Hanbury-Tenison 1984). Again, the modern belief in expertise and technical solutions may have coloured the process, allied with the pre-existing hierarchical power structure. I have a sense of a certain peculiar 'deadness', jadedness, a lack of real animation and assurance, in many parish level ministries today, which I don't find in older priests (now in their late 70's or 80's) or in ministers of other denominations, and I wonder why. The church may have been left with its body 'going through the motions', its head with beliefs shaken, and its heart struggling to stay alive. The present tinkering with the mechanics of the liturgy is not enough, if the people (and clergy) are not actively involved and empowered to live a much richer, deeper Christian life.

In secular society, analogously, the cultural vacuum has been filled with products of the media and lifestyle industries 'concocted for the consumption of the people' rather than 'of the people' (Gallagher 2003:153). Cultural forms are often imposed from above rather than empowered to emerge locally. The people are thus encouraged to become passive consumers of a religious 'product', and taught to desire this, rather than contacting their own real needs and aspirations. There is a need for a neutral, non-agenda-driven space for genuine faith culture to emerge, by allowing the gospel, tradition and context to interact. This would give rise to a genuinely inculturated Christianity, with both thriving internal life and confident engagement with society. The

Roman Catholic church has many riches - doctrinal, sacramental, strong social teaching – and rightly values them. However this can become isolating, complacent and self-regarding if not complemented by the sense of being a 'pilgrim people' led out into the unknown by God[4] [5]. It would do well to learn also from other denominations with perhaps less of these particular riches, but a more adventurous, generous and grounded approach to Christian living.

In a postmodern milieu this erosion of practical wisdom has caused some polarisation of religious attitudes, and left many searching in a complex no-mans-land. Some choose fundamentalist submission to a system, others rejection of religious practice and belief. Some emphasise external observance, others search for personal spiritual experiences. There is a growing diversification of beliefs ('pick and mix Catholicism') and a loss of common ground and endeavour, and confidence to engage as a church with secular society. While the current situation retains many features of modernity addressed by Lewis, it is also increasingly postmodern: knowledge of Christianity has decreased, and it will be difficult to build a shared understanding on the basis of Christian beliefs in an increasingly pluralistic society (Kort 2001:162). However as Taylor (2007:ch19) describes, a deep hunger for the holistic, spiritual and transcendent persists, taking many forms in its search for fulfilment, both in and independently of the churches[6].

Possibilities for the future

After the recent riots, Rowan Williams (2011, internet source 1) spoke to the House of Lords. He is in agreement with Lewis about the root of the issue: "Over the last two decades, many would agree that our educational philosophy at every level has been more and more dominated by an instrumentalist model; less and less concerned with a building of virtue, character and citizenship". This is a serious shortcoming, "because character... involves an awareness not only of the connection between cause and

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[4] Rahner (1985:25) describes this late-modern Catholic attitude to the Church: "..the object of an almost fanatical love, regarded as our natural home, sustaining and sheltering us in our spirituality, where whatever we needed was available as a matter of course...The church supported us, it did not need to be supported."

[5] Dulles (2002:34-37) considers the benefits of pre-Vatican II Church institutionalism to be a) strong support from official teaching b) stability in a time of change and c) a strong sense of identity and loyalty in members. However he also points out the consequences above, which arise if the institution becomes totalising and inward-looking.

[6] Thanks to Paul Rowan for this point.

effect in my own acts, but a ... deepened sense of empathy with others...of our involvement together in a social project". This lack leads to the breakdown of the sense of civic identity and shared responsibility, and opens the way to acts born of deep alienation and hopelessness. However he ends positively by calling for awareness and action: "People have discovered why community matters. They've discovered why solidarity is important. They have begun to discover those civic virtues that we've talked about in the abstract... this is a moment which we must seize, a moment where there is sufficient anger at the breakdown of civic solidarity, sufficient awareness of the resources people have in helping and supporting one another, sufficient hope (in spite of everything) of what can be achieved...to engage creatively with the possibilities...which could be crucial for the long-term future of our country and our society." This captures the promising aspect of the postmodern situation: people are no longer putting their hope and trust in material progress; they have reaped the real benefits of modernity, but are becoming aware that this alone does not satisfy and are still searching.

The spiritual possibilities of this transition are discussed by Gallagher. He proposes that the key tasks of postmodernity are to affirm and develop the positive aspects of modernity, while also working to remedy and heal its defects and distortions. He follows Pope John Paul II's concerns about cultural development: encouraging self-transcending living in the face of dehumanising influences, searching for spiritual fulfilment and truth, and fostering community relationships of loving solidarity. For instance, modern individualism can lead to a search for rootedness, community and authentic spirituality, or to narcissism and narrow self-interest, unless balanced by a wider concern and empathy for others and one's environment. The loss of common socio-cultural language and understanding, and separation of private and public life can be countered by active communication, community building and critical public discussion of cultural trends. He is encouraged by the postmodern movement towards wholeness and integration, fresh valuing of feeling and imagination as well as reason, of community and diversity, of religious truths and practices, and caring awareness for our ecological connectedness. (Gallagher 2003:52,85,92-93,106-108). Dupré (1993:251) also suggests a new balance and synthesis needs to be found between individual subjectivity, the workings of the physical cosmos and the transcendent and

immanent divine, all of which contribute to human meaning and value. Many contemporary people feel these defects and are exploring a variety of initiatives to create a different future society. The church has a great deal of wisdom and resources which could be useful here, particularly if it was less preoccupied with maintenance and internal issues.

However Gallagher acknowledges our present situation of transition and a plurality of attitudes. Much of this can only be 'planting pockets of seeds' and gradually influencing opinion in a prevailing culture that is still largely inimical. Furthermore, the transforming and critical influence of the gospel may be accepted by the surrounding culture at a material and empirical level, but metaphysical or supernatural truth claims are more controversial and unwelcome. Both Lewis and Gallagher suggest a strategy of reaching and transforming people through the imagination, bypassing the overly materialistic limits of modernity, and stimulating and 'baptising' deeper human spiritual aspirations[7]. Another strategy for transition is that of embodying faith truths in a community truly living out the message, in order to be able to give a credible and practical alternative to the prevailing culture (Gallagher 2003:52,94-96,107-108,152).

Virtue ethics and cosmic spirituality in community

The underlying teleological and anthropological question here, and in *THS*, is "What is it to be fully human?". From a Christian viewpoint, what is the (divinely intended) nature and destiny of the human person? What is the meaning of life, within community and relationship with the cosmos and God? These issues have been addressed by virtue ethics[8], and Lewis also writes in this tradition. It emphasises formation of character, which brings into harmony what is objectively good, what the person truly wants, and what they practice, and thus predisposes them to act ethically.The virtues are qualities which enable the person to behave in a way that both benefits their society and fulfils their own potential for excellence. Other systems emphasise for instance the consideration of moral rules, or the consequences of actions. These systems are not incompatible with virtue ethics. However, the latter is fundamentally teleological; that is,

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[7] "Any amount of theology can now be smuggled into the people's minds under cover of romance without their knowing it." Lewis quoted in Urang 1971:142.

[8] Virtue ethics originated with Plato and Aristotle, and became the main ethical system in Christianity for much of its history. It has recently regained popularity. Internet source 3 was used for some of this section.

it is based on formation of a particular sort of person (in Christian terms, someone who will be able to make a definitive choice for eternal life with God and others). Virtue ethics thus does not prescribe or calculate what to do, but leaves this to the free choice and formed sensibility of the individual. Hence virtue ethicists (for example Hauerwas 1981, Verhey 2002, MacIntyre 1981:244-245) think it is best instilled by living in community or family, by naturally 'fitting in' to the give-and-take of loving, respectful relationships, tacitly learning the values, and being deeply and habitually formed by this. Hence, increasingly, small intentional communities are emerging as a place for experiment and inquiry into this way of Christian living. These are attempting to do theology as an integrated way of life, as *phronesis*, practical wisdom. This ethics also emphasises the formation of the whole person, and thus counters the reductive tendency to view people as mere material for shaping, managing, regulating or manipulating, or for using them as means to another's ends. It is allied to the Natural Law approach mentioned above.

John Heron has also initiated intentional communities of spiritual inquiry: drawing on traditional spiritual and religious resources in a thoroughly postmodern practical project, to form a 'self-generating spiritual culture' which aims to be relational, participatory (rather than detached and instrumental), and integrative towards the whole person, community dynamics and the natural and supernatural worlds. The aim is to promote human flourishing as 'cosmic citizens' (Heron 1998,2006). It is not dissimilar to Lewis's fictional proposal, although not affiliated to any particular faith tradition. It is intended for those who are already rooted and proficient in their own spiritual path, and wish to expand their practice. Such projects could be of benefit to some in the Christian tradition who are weary of the flatness of modern approaches, and open to a wider cosmic relationality. This will be returned to in chapter 4.

Chapter 2
Conversion in *THS*

In the following sections I will look more closely at the effects these cultural influences have on moral and spiritual growth and conversion. Lewis has a particular gift of relating the big picture (cultural, and of course metaphysical) to the personal psychospiritual processes and choices that form disposition and lead to conversion, or towards damnation[9]. So I will be using *THS* to illustrate this, by looking at the conversion processes of Mark and Jane Studdock[10].

In particular, I will argue that contemporary conversion to Christianity, or at least a theistic position antecendent to it, has two characteristic requirements, due to the secularising and instrumental biases of modernism. One is the recognition of a supernatural dimension, somehow linked to the transcendent and eternal: the 're-enchanted cosmos' (Kort 2001:Ch2). The other is the recovery of the affective – love, feeling – within a context of intimacy, belonging, and being accepted. Together they enable the person to grow into genuine relationships with others and with the God they cannot see, but can come to sense as loving and personal. This life of love of God and neighbour, within an enchanted cosmos, a web of natural and supernatural relationships, is a setting which makes sense of the virtues. They are the qualities needed to live in this context, and for mutual support and striving toward greater love, which will be fulfilled in the communion of heaven.

This approach probably goes with the grain of our basic human nature: Hay (2006:127,139) researched the characteristics of a possible natural, innate core of spirituality, by analysing interviews with young children. He chose this group assuming they had not been fully socialised (by cultural and educational pressures) into suppressing such awareness and experiences. Two core features emerged when the children spoke of their spirituality (compared to other general topics): a) a higher level of consciousness or perceptiveness, and b) more content about relatedness - to themselves, others, the material world, or God. These themes of heightened

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[9] For example in his classics 'The Screwtape Letters' and 'The Great Divorce' (Lewis 1999a and b).
[10] The reader may want to refer to the genre and plot summary in appendix I.

awareness and strong relationality will be used in this dissertation to analyse the conversions of Lewis's protagonists, identify some societal influences on conversion in our cultural milieu, and finally to make some proposals for a way forward.

How conversion will be considered

These characteristics of spirituality, and Lewis's treatment of conversion in the novel, do not include specifically Christological issues or doctrines[11]. Therefore I will be considering conversion theistically, as: a) the recognition of a supernatural and transcendent dimension to one's life, b) responding by reorienting one's attitudes and behaviour in the light of this, c) doing this within the framework of a relationship with a personal, loving God, and love for others, d) thus developing the specifically theological virtues of faith, hope and love, and the cardinal virtues through *phronesis* (practical wisdom).

Modernism denies or downplays all of these aspects of conversion, by culturally imprisoning people in a closed, mechanistic universe[12], and socialising them in a rule- and power-driven system with individualistic, consumerist forms of fulfilment and reward, rather than self-actualising and transcendent aims. The conversions of Lewis's protagonists, Mark and Jane, show exactly these features: the move from individualism and a closed world, to relationality within an expanded cosmos.

As tools for analysis of these conversion processes, I will be using a) the concept of character development, looking at the virtues and vices predominant at various stages, and how these correlate with the aspects of conversion listed above; b) understandings of moral and religious growth process from Developmental Theorists, in particular Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Reasoning and the synthesis developed by Conn; and c)

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[11] For example, the Trinity, the incarnation and atonement, redemption, or the nature of the afterlife. However, Lewis does of course set the novel in a culture with Christian influences, and partly in a Christian community and indeed cosmos. Also Jane is eventually called to become a Christian, but this is not dealt with in any detail, because Lewis's concerns here are with a different area of human conversion and coming to faith.

[12] The 'closed world systems' of Taylor (2007:551) which foreclose the possibility of thinking about transcendent, metaphysical realities.

the Grid/Group Cultural Theory of Mary Douglas[13], to look at the relationship of the individuals with their communities.

Briefly, Kohlberg describes three developmental levels of moral reasoning (*how* a person makes moral decisions, rather than the actual conclusions). The middle one, 'conventional', he defines as "conforming to and upholding the rules/expectations/conventions of society or authority just because they *are* society's rules/ expectations/conventions" and have been internalised. Pre-conventional reasoning is based on external influences such as reward and punishment, the power of authority figures, and individual self-interest. Post-conventional reasoning is done by individuals who choose according to their own, critically evaluated, principles, which may or may not be those of the surrounding society (Conn 1986:43-44). Conn has developed a parallel scheme of types of conversion, in which a person breaks through to new ways of seeing, relating and being. Corresponding to Kohlberg's conventional level, Conn proposes 'moral conversion', with a shift from deciding on the basis of satisfactions, to that of values. At the post-conventional level, he identifies three more types of conversion: affective (becoming able to choose for the benefit of others); critical-moral (the existential recognition of oneself as aware of, and responsible for, one's thinking and choosing); and religious (realising one's radical inadequacy, and surrendering this to a loving God) (Conn 1986:37,112,117,134,224).

Mary Douglas classifies cultures on two dimensions. The 'group' horizontal axis measures the strength of group boundaries and influence within the culture: ranging from independence to complete control by/identification with the group; from full freedom to enter and leave, to closed exclusivity; and from lack of belonging to complete incorporation. The 'grid' vertical axis measures the extent of societal structuring through shared assumptions and expectations: from absence of

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[13] Confusingly, Gallagher's version of this, summarised in fig. 1, has the cultures described in areas B and C swapped with Douglas' (1992:105-107) version. Douglas argues that living in low group, high grid cultures (B) imposes restrictions and disempowers people, without giving them social support; hence she calls this 'isolate' culture – the people who fall through the social net. Low group and grid (C) she calls the 'individualist', entrepreneurial culture, giving people freedom to innovate and pursue their own ends. However I find Gallagher's (2003:28-34) version more convincing, and will use this. It gives a more positive slant to the grid dimension, recognising the usefulness of social connections and shared assumptions in allowing people to build meaningful lives. Both grid and group have ambivalent, positive and negative influences, which vary according to the status of the individual within the culture, which makes interpretation complex.

expectations about role etc, to detailed and inescapable ones; from complete flexibility and autonomy, to strongly prescriptive; from anarchy to conservatism (Gallagher 2003:28-34; Douglas 1992:105-107). Figure 1 shows the four broad types of culture which are described by this model. Individuals can move around between these types in a heterogeneous society, by choice or through externally imposed circumstances.

TYPES OF CULTURES

GRID
strong = network of assumptions/rules
guiding behaviour of individuals,
shared social expectations

'B'
self at centre,
competitive individualism,
market-exchange relationships,
materialist symbols of status

'A'
order/balance of hierarchical
society,
sense of belonging + stable
relationships with others

GROUP
weak

GROUP
strong = allegiance,
control,
conformity,
pressure on individuals

'C'
isolated individuals,
no structures, supports or
fixed roles,
transitory relations,
secularist horizon

'D'
'sect'-style collectivity,
authoritarian regime,
fundamentalism,
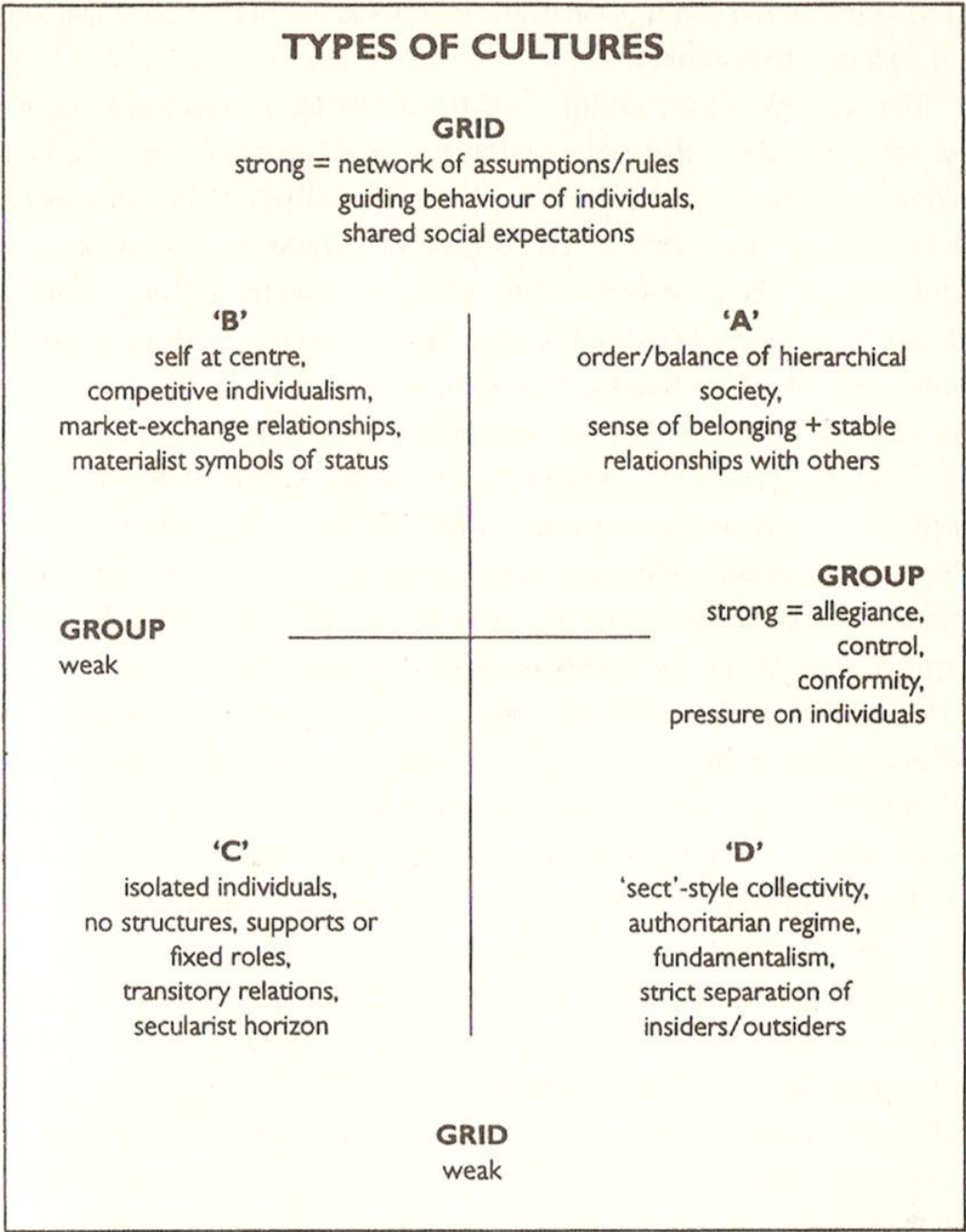strict separation of
insiders/outsiders

GRID
weak

Figure 1. Grid/Group classification of Cultures. (From internet source 4, original source Gallagher 2003:30)

<u>Analysis of Mark's conversion</u>

At the start of the story, Mark has no awareness of the transcendent, and relates to others egotistically. He is mainly motivated by ambition for material success and status, and seeks power and control over others to achieve this. His relationships with his superiors are equally instrumental: he cultivates 'friendships' in order to further his ambition, not out of natural liking, and is over-tractable, lacking integrity and much real sense of identity. As exemplified by his pleasure in being driven in a flashy fast car, he relates to outsiders with arrogant pride. His careerism causes him to neglect his wife, and he looks on her as merely an aid to this end. As he becomes drawn into the manipulations and emptiness of NICE, he becomes increasingly driven by fear and insecurity. He attempts to cope by increasing the relational strategies above, but merely becomes more undermined, as his apparent allies prove false. He is drawn into deception and betrayal of others, and drinks to excess in order to escape his discomfort.

A turning point comes on a visit to a village. For the first time he is aware of natural respect and liking for others, and the beauty of the countryside, for things which are good in themselves, not solely for himself. He thus begins to develop transcendent values. He is helped by the memory of Jane's liking for such things, and later is able to show some loyalty by refusing to betray her to NICE. Internally he is a turmoil of conflicting impulses and feelings, but a sense of integrity is starting to emerge. This grows as the attempts of NICE to degrade his natural aesthetic sensibilities backfires, and he begins to long for 'the Normal' (*THS*:297). As his alienation within NICE grows, he forms a bond of solidarity with the equally out-of-place tramp, and identifies with the humble, simple and marginalised.

When commanded to insult a crucifix, he feels compassion and solidarity for this image of helplessness and opposition to NICE, 'a picture of what the Crooked did to the Straight' (*THS*:333), and refuses, even though this may mean his death. At this point his values become transcendent rather than self-centred, and he becomes aware that his old categories and judgements have been overturned by strange, unknown metaphysical realities. There is a final intense temptation, which convinces him of the reality of diabolic influence. At such moments of crisis he calls out for help in

spontaneous prayer, although he has no religious upbringing. As his conversion progresses, he grows in self-knowledge and humility, repents of his arrogant attitude to Jane (although not his legitimate desire for her goodness), and feels unworthy of her. He is unsure whether she will take him back, but is invited to enter the marital home on his return by Venus, a symbol of embodied love.

Developmentally, this could be best described as moral and critical-moral conversion (Conn 1986:27-29,58,130). In terms of Kohlberg's stages of moral reasoning, Mark at the beginning of the story is in a preconventional or early conventional stage. He bases his decisions on the consequences for himself alone, and imitates the social behaviour of his colleagues, but only for his own advantage. He then has a crisis in which he develops post-conventional moral reasoning: making the choice to resist the influence of NICE and attempt to escape, although this may cost him his career or even life. He begins to develop a new awareness of universal values (respect, care, loyalty, aesthetic appreciation etc), a felt as well as cognitive response, and acts on this independently, relying solely on his own judgement of the situation. However, in the intervening time he does not clearly go through the expected conventional moral stage. Although he is attracted to and adopts uncritically the behaviour and values of his colleagues, these are characteristic of *preconventional* morality, fundamentally self-centred, although with a veneer of the expected social order and common purpose. This confuses the picture, and one could postulate that he is only able to move on to the post-conventional stage with the help of grace, in the absence of the usual formative social resources (i.e. conventionally held values and practices). Were the story to continue, we would probably see Mark returning to the conventional stage to consolidate this stage of his development, after he joins the Company.

In the grid/group model, Mark's conversion and experience of community is on a trajectory from B to C to D, and finally heads toward A. We first see him aspiring to success, in competition for promotion and influence, as an individualist (B). Once recruited into NICE (although still a relative 'outsider') he realises the organisation provides neither role, shared meaning, or supportive relationship with colleagues and his sense of purpose and security gradually disintegrates (C). At this point he becomes vulnerable to the authoritarian but anarchic, violent and spiritually sinister agenda of the

organisation. He is increasingly pressured, and would gain full membership only by surrendering his moral autonomy, his sense of identity and possibly his life (D). After his escape from Belbury he heads for Saint Anne's and married life with a renewed sense of belonging and relationship, certainly at a human level and possibly also with God (towards A).

Mark's conversion has the elements of recognition of the transcendent, and consequent reorientation of life, including more loving relationships with others, but does not clearly include awareness of a personal God. The interplay of moral development, growth in vice or virtue, and community is very obvious. Mark could be an exemplar of many who are swept along by the cultural currents of our times, and who struggle to develop a humanly and religiously fulfilling spirituality and lifestyle in a distorted and impoverished cultural environment[14].

Analysis of Jane's conversion

Jane's state at the beginning of the story is one of frustration, isolation and bitterness. While this is undoubtedly partly a personal disposition (or likely to become one), it is also caused by social expectations (the stereotypical depressed '50s housewife, denied a career) and thus a basically healthy response to the ills of her society. She has avoided having children out of resentment and fear, while rationalising this as a wish to resume her career. She considers herself an intellectual, and deliberately downplays her femininity. (Lewis seems to view all this as more reprehensible than most would today.) She is destabilised by the irruption into her consciousness of strange, clairvoyant dreams.

She begins to recover some self-esteem and balance through friendship with the Dimbles, who also advise her about her dreams. These are frightening, but also cause her to turn to her husband for comfort, in humility. She reaches out further to others when she seeks advice at the Manor, and there also is confronted with her rejection of embodiment, sexuality and self-giving. She becomes aware of her own complexity and self-deception, and through shame begins to overcome her temper and fear. The fear of the unknown, and desire for companionship, make her ambivalent about joining the

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[14] The resurgence of gang culture in deprived areas is an extreme contemporary example.

Company, but this is decided in a bodily-felt surge of discernment when she recoils from a strange man she has seen in a sinister dream.

Her meeting with the Director is a turning point. She is abruptly and radically decentred ('her world was unmade: anything might happen now' *THS*:141). She is moved out of self-preoccupation by a falling in love with the archetypal, Christ-like figure of Ransom, and begins to learn how to live with and for others in community. She has difficulty overcoming social-class prejudice (and meeting the bear!). The Company gives her a model of Christian virtues – charity, patience, acceptance of faults and diversity, support and courage, for example. She has the space to reconsider her attitude to Mark, becoming sympathetic rather than resentful. For Jane, prayer takes a contemplative form, peaceful and non-discursive, and she begins to make connections between this, the reality of her dreams, the supernatural 'eldilic' world, and her conventional religious knowledge. As part of this, she must confront her image of a demanding, masculine God (who is 'so masculine that we are all feminine in relation to it' *THS*:313) and fear of patriarchism. A vision of raw, disruptive sensuality, the pagan figure of Venus, is a sign she must come to terms with her embodiment and sexuality, and 'baptise' them by giving her whole self to Christ, in whom everything has its being, and is redeemed and transformed. Like Mark, she has to subordinate self-preservation to transcendent values, when sent out to find the dangerous Merlin. This work is finally grounded in a life of love and mutual service when she is reconciled with Mark and they resume married life.

Jane's conversion emphasises what Conn (1986:28) calls affective conversion, in which the person moves towards self-transcendence through increasing love and concern for others. She initially has quite egocentric concerns, but is drawn beyond these by her relationship with Ransom. His principled stance does not allow this to take the route of mere sensuality or marital unfaithfulness. Instead her moral development is supported by the warmth of inclusion in the Company and she learns to relate with Christian love, respect for others regardless of their worldly status, and mutual service. In Conn's scheme, this would include both moral and affective aspects of conversion; and both conventional and post-conventional morality in Kohlberg's. Eventually her initial personal attachment is transcended and fulfilled (Conn 1986:148) as she is led to

see that she can love her husband Mark, and the God she cannot see, as a result of her love for Ransom. Her final vision in which she comes to know the love and transcendence of God, is her full conversion ('religious conversion' in Conn's sense:1986:30-31) in which she surrenders her illusory self-determination and begins to live with God as the centre and motivation of her life. This, and her renewed marriage, are a further move into post-conventional morality, in which she chooses commitments freely for herself, and begins to take on the care and responsibility characteristic of this stage[15].

In the grid/group model, Jane's trajectory starts from area C, where we see her as a frustrated, lonely and isolated housewife, with very little social support, and leads gradually towards inclusion in the community of St Anne's (A). This corresponds closely with Douglas' description of a traditional community (Gallagher 2003:28-34), being fairly high in both benign hierarchical authority (the leadership of the Director, Ransom, who himself serves higher Masters) and belonging and quality of peer relationships (even the bear, Bultitude, is treated as a member of the 'family'!) The members are able to benefit from an optimum amount of structure, order and belonging that supports their individual flourishing, rather than stifling it.

Jane's conversion is much more focused on her inner experience than Mark's, who is more influenced by his social milieu. In this she resembles those contemporary spiritual seekers who have to find their way in a complex, ambiguous and sometimes unexpected inner world. Her tasks are to find an adequate framework for her psychic experiences, to integrate them with her embodied, everyday life, and to move away from self-absorbtion to love of God and neighbour. However both protagonists come to the same place (literally and metaphorically), where they are able to take up life in common, oriented to God and others in love, and work towards their human fulfilment and eternal destiny.

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[15] The later stages of conversion are exemplified by Ransom, whose perspective has been shaped by years of faithful service, prayer and waiting on God. He is able to see his life's effort as a small part of God's plan - for 'Logres', the community of the faithful enduring down the ages, and in the cosmic struggle of heavenly powers. He has thus confronted despair, and learned to let go of narrow personal preoccupations through contemplation – the characteristic tasks of Conn's religious conversion - and we finally see him reaching the end of his earthly life in peaceful fulfilment and hope (Conn 1986:30-31).

<u>Common factors in their conversions</u>

For both, becoming aware of the supernatural dimension is mainly an internal process of self-awareness and discernment, aided by grace, but is significantly moulded and guided (for better or worse) by others more familiar with these realities. Their conversion, and interaction with the transcendent, that 'otherness' which shocks and calls them beyond their current way of being, is often mediated through symbols and bodily feeling, as well as by other people. The imagination, and bodily felt-sense, are vital for the work of psychological integration and developmental conversion, being able to engage the whole self, at deeper levels than the cognitive. (Conn 1986:74-75,92). This is part of Lewis's thesis that Modernism leads to a narrowed, dulled self which denies its own capacity for feeling and creative responsiveness, and that the 'heart' is necessary to recover a vibrant, living internal 'culture' and mediate between the intellect and the body with their respective wisdoms. This recovery of the heart, an intuitive, spontaneous and affective responsiveness, gives them fresh appreciation of life and relationships, and leads them out of isolation and individualism. Again for both, a significant early impetus for conversion is the lack of social structure and support, which drives them to seek some form of community, and reframe their life. The role of the communities and interpersonal relationships in *THS* in providing an environment for such change will be dealt with in the next chapter.

Community in *THS*

Even in premodern times with more cultural and religious homogeneity, any deeper conversion and commitment to Christian discipleship usually involved some form of break with surrounding society and forming of new allegiances[16]. The Modern emphasis on rational self-determination, and a greater awareness of the psychological dimension, has tended to skew spirituality towards a quest for personal experience and fulfilment using self-help techniques, and dismissal of traditional religion as outdated and merely conventional, if not completely unbelievable. However the postmodern experience of alienation and cultural and spiritual fragmentation has shown many people that this alone does not satisfy their longings. There is again a growing recognition that belonging to a community has a powerful effect and is often essential to spiritual support, growth and conversion.

However, this is a two-edged sword – the various communities we belong to have many values and aims, which need to be examined with critical awareness, and Lewis's work can be helpful in discerning and counteracting the harmful effects of modernism which infiltrate organisations such as the workplace, political organisations, and also the church. He wrote *THS* as an extended commentary on the effect of culture on social and spiritual development, and to propose a vision of a Christian alternative; a community of authentic humanity, virtue ethics and the re-enchantment of the cosmos, which could attract contemporary converts. In order to move towards this, Christian communities (and individuals living in them) could usefully ask themselves a few questions, based on the characteristics of the communities in the novel. Some aspects of these will be considered briefly below.

Virtue and vice in community

Virtue ethics considers that our attitudes and behaviour should follow our innate potential for goodness and excellence, recognising our natural (although divinely aided)

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[16] For example entering canonical religious life, and/or a stage of rejection or marginalisation then gathering companions: cf Anthony, Benedict, Francis, Ignatius, Teresa of Avila..

ability to live well[17]. Jesus' moral teaching also encouraged an interior disposition which produces authentic goodness, rather than external observance of rules (MacIntyre 1981:139-140,Verhey 2002:407). A discipleship of virtue ethics is based on continuing the story of Jesus, and emphasises mature character formation and contribution to the common good. It is loving, flexible, creative and authentic, able to produce real transformation and witness. Such healthy communities offer their members both relationship and shared purpose, qualities often longed for in an increasingly fragmented culture. If Modern culture suppresses certain aspects of being human, and if these can be recovered through the tradition of virtue discussed above, the style and content of life in Lewis's two communities should reflect this.

Vice in this system is an unbalanced or inappropriate use of some ability, which is however good in itself. The ethos of NICE is a caricature of such vices, in pursuit of Modern 'progress'. Ambitious maneuvering to enter an 'inner circle' drives the organisation, rather than any real liking or loyalty, or regard for others' wellbeing and development. Communication is based on rivalry, malice and fear of detection, emphasising the external appearance of civility and compliance, but disregarding the internal state of its members, and in reality works to break this down, destroying any coherence and meaning. There is no true group formation, committment to each other or a common purpose. Similarly in *The Screwtape Letters* Lewis models Hell on 'the bureaucracy of a police state or the offices of a thoroughly nasty business' masked by surface politeness, and ending with the strong devouring the weak.

Conversely, the Company shows signs of having formed an effective group. The members feel sure enough of their committment to each other and to their cause to be able to voice their honest opinions and feelings. There is little politeness, but genuinely warm banter, scoldings, discussion and celebration, and loving patience with others' failings. People are valued both for themselves, and what they contribute, and their internal state and formation are cared for. Far from enforcing conformity, the community recognises the acerbic, empiricist and non-Christian MacPhee as 'our sceptic,a very important office' (*THS*:181,377). There is a fundamental equality as well as diversity among members, regardless of occupation, class, ability or even species!

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[17] Rule-based ethical systems tend to be more externally prescriptive, set minimal standards and tend to focus on prevention of harm rather than living well.

This spirituality of virtue encourages each person to develop into their own God-given self. The ministry of leadership nurtures the effectiveness and development of the group, and the virtues of its members (Verhey 2002:427-428, Whitehead & Whitehead 1986:74-76). Such communities show forgiveness, reconciliation and care for the weak and marginalised, but also mutual admonition, discipline and communal discernment. They must be both faithful, open to the gifts of the Spirit in members, and able to handle doubt, dissent and difference with love and humility, recognising the difficulties of struggle towards God (Rahner 1974:41-42,56-59,100). For Hauerwas (1981:3) this makes 'not only a community of character but...of characters'. This is certainly true of the Company!

Lewis also shows the price Modernity pays for its ambition to master and improve human nature. Over-reliance on cold reason, scientism and the efficiency of bureaucracy leads to the loss of much that is valuable. Life becomes flat and grey, and people are seen in terms of usefulness, rather than valued for themselves. When advertising and propaganda drive desire, and genuine simpler preferences are forgotten, quality of life and relationships will suffer, as Mark realised on his village visit. By contrast, towards the end of the novel the Company prepare for a victory meal. While the men cook dinner, the women choose from a collection of magnificent robes[18] – but significantly (avoiding vanity), these are for each other, as no-one can see what will suit themselves. They take time after the struggle to recognise each other's gifts and qualities, celebrate them without false modesty, and nourish themselves.

How much does local church life emphasise rules and external observances? Have the 'virtues' become merely demands to be addressed by willpower and technique? We may have largely lost the older understanding and feel for the virtues as developing from and supported by a common life and endeavour[19], which should complement the

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[18] This may reference the Church as the Bride, clothed in the good deeds of the saints, and resplendent at the end of time (Rev 19:8;21:2), and Christ serving his faithful servants at the eschatological banquet (Lk 12:36-37).

[19] I was given a visceral insight into what the virtues mean in a pre-modern lifestyle when on holiday in the Moroccan desert. We were travelling to an overnight camp, in a mild sandstorm, and I was on the camel loaded with our supplies. After an hour or two, the banging of tin boxes against my knees became very uncomfortable and I was considering asking for a halt. Our Bedouin guides were always happy to talk of their way of life with those interested. On this occasion I was told with a wry smile 'Our children were told on desert journeys, if they could not keep up, we would have to leave them'. I then experienced a strong, almost bodily, sense of connection, support and strengthening for the remaining journey. I

modern awareness of choice and responsibility. Genuine open consultation and implementation of decisions could reinvigorate local church life, and enthuse people to 'buy in' to the good life of the gospel. The virtues, stewardship, and a certain amount of asceticism then begin to make sense. They empower, mutually support and free people to work towards their chosen values and common goals[20].

Is the church community one which allows and encourages members to be whole people, with a good balance between head, heart and body? Are people nourished and celebrated by the community? Does it take adult formation, and community spirit, seriously? Does it have a sense of shared story, responsiveness, and loyalty? Is there genuine relationship, emotion and sharing, or merely formality? Co-operation, or rivalry? Is there a favoured, exclusive inner circle? Do people feel respected and encouraged to make their own unique contribution? Is there a place for healthy criticism and 'loyal dissent'? Are initiatives a result of consultation, openness and discernment, or merely fashionable fads?

The teleological basis of community life

The whole thrust of this novel, and indeed all Lewis's spirituality, is teleological[21]. To what ultimate end do our choices, attitudes and actions take us? What story about ourselves and our life's meaning do we believe, and is it a true one? The story told by modernity of humanity's self-sufficiency and mastery of nature has been discussed in the last section, as has the Christian counter-story. These are powerful influences underlying the practices of the communities in *THS*, and I would suggest affect our own similarly. The modernist community of NICE considers humanity to be the most powerful, knowledgeable and therefore supreme agent on Earth, and subjects lower and weaker forms of life (including other humans) to manipulation, control, and even death to achieve its aims. Distorted religious rhetoric (from the 'mad parson' Straik) is

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spent the time pondering on interdependence, solidarity, the common good and sacrifice, on survival and salvation, and what sort of identity would be forged in these circumstances. When personal qualities and choices affect such a closely interdependent group, they are public matters of importance to everyone, not individualistic preferences. The communion of the Body of Christ is (or should be) equally dependent on a felt community ethos, not a collection of individualistic or cerebral pieties.

[20] Thanks to the St Giles, Reading, Lent discussion group for some of these thoughts.

[21] For example: Lewis 1999c:537 "To enter heaven is to become more human than you ever succeeded in being on earth; to enter hell, is to be banished from humanity. What is cast (or casts itself) into hell is not a man: it is 'remains'. To be a complete man means to have the passions obedient to the will and the will offered to God: [to be damned would] consist of a will utterly centred in itself and passions utterly uncontrolled by the will."

used to support this[22], but is of no ultimate significance to the organisation. The 'fruits' of this philosophy are devaluing of human and other life, and a trend towards sterility - in both mental life, and ultimately that of the Earth. Technology can both improve living conditions, and wreak unintended havoc on ecosystems and global climate. It can connect people and give them greater access to knowledge, but also create passive dependency, addiction, and social isolation. Both means and ends need to be considered wisely.

The Company is apparently less effectual, and indeed has no plan of action at first, but this is a sign of their humble and obedient waiting on God, who answers them in due course (*THS*:189,194). Meanwhile their way of life is one of care, service and hospitality to all, particularly the weak and disadvantaged. In this way they live out the Christian truths that we are all valued by God and called to serve each other, and that God alone is able to enlighten, help and direct us to the right ends. Like Hauerwas (1984:99-106, Hauerwas & Willimon 1989:46-48) Lewis sees the first task of the church as *being* the Kingdom, in faithfulness, not the political transformation of society. Christian communities need to *live* the truths of revelation in trusting faith, not preserve them as sterile formulae or stereotyped actions. Hence Lewis downplays any overtly 'religious' themes and ethics, and lets the message come across through action, natural and supernatural. This trusting reliance privileges the charismatic over the institutional as mediator of the divine, and is a movement against the Modern depersonalised and totalising ethos. Rahner (1985:197) also describes the countercultural freedom of the church leading to three tasks: to unmask the hybris of the world, to uphold the value of the individual, and to attend to the unexpected, unplanned consequences of Modernity's agenda. This describes the activity of the Company very well.

Contemporary communities could ask whether in practice they have a lively reliance on God's leading and an attitude of listening, active co-operation; or whether their relationship is often formalised lip-service, and oriented to comfortably familiar self-serving ends. Are they responsible and thoughtful stewards of the environment? Are the poor and weak welcomed and truly integrated in the everyday life and concerns of

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[22] See Rahner (1985:207) on attempts to hijack the church for secular purposes.

the church? Do communities offer a prophetic, practical, countercultural critique by attending to the disadvantaged, people suffering the unintended consequences of the running of our society? Do they, like the Company (*THS*:367) give small nudges of witness to wake society from 'drunken sleep', and steer it in the right direction?

<u>Organisation and leadership</u>

In both NICE and the Company, there is little formal structure. Newcomers find their place and learn the ethos either by looking to colleagues, or through individual guidance (or lack of it) from superiors. According to Dyer (1997) the spirituality of organisational leaders is crucial, because their theological vision sets the story and creates the internal environment for members. If leadership is lacking, the community will follow the norms of the surrounding culture. The declericalised church of the future will consist of those who freely and personally choose to believe and belong, not those there for conventional or historical reasons. They will increasingly give their assent to office holders because of their personal and spiritual qualities, and remain because of the quality of the common life in community, just as Jane does in *THS* (Rahner 1974:56-58).

The leaders of NICE, Wither and Frost, personify some Modern psycho-spiritual tendencies. Frost represents scientific, clinical objectivity, and reductive psychological manipulation; Wither, a false, abstracted mysticism which ignores the body-mind[23]. Both distance themselves from human nature (their own and others') as something to be used, overcome, and ultimately discarded (see Schwartz 2009:122-123). In this they ally themselves with demonic pride and will to power, challenging God's intention in Creation, Incarnation and Resurrection. The Company is in contrast theocratic, with Ransom the leader himself subordinated to the guiding planetary angels, and ultimately to Maleldil (God). The calling of the Company is God's initiative (*THS*:195-196). Ransom is a Christ-like figure (a wounded servant king, numinous and archetypal). His leadership is authoritative because of his personal spiritual transformation (Lewis

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[23] These resemble Chesterton's (2001:20-22) two outcomes of extreme rationalism: the materialist/determinist/fatalist who reduces everything to physical causation; and the 'pan-egoist' who recognises nothing in the world but himself (and thus empties his life of content). Chesterton's remedies – a call for a regained sense of the mystical, symbolic and unknown, and a good dose of humility and common sense, are also followed by Lewis, and are also characteristic of a move from Fowler's Individuative stage to the Conjunctive , which correspond to Modern and Postmodern cultures respectively.

1955:172,167), but is at the service of the community, creating and ordering a space of acceptance, welcome and non-violence, and of seeking God's will. This aligns the community with God's radical self giving, movement towards others, and open vulnerability (see Williams 2008). He co-ordinates and guides the ministry of others, prays, and exercises discernment,and is secure enough to delegate and allow others to make their own contribution. This mirrors our obedient relationship to Christ, which guides our personality towards fulfilment and enrichment, in contrast to the choice for 'self' which is ultimately empty (Lewis 1999d:464).

Lewis had little interest in institutional church structure, or clericalism. His spirituality came from a transformed world-view, which re-engaged dialectically with everyday life and culture, rather than distancing from it. He saw Christian ministry as the work of all believers, regardless of status (Lewis 2000:582; 1999d:373-374). Hence he portrays Christian community in *THS* not as a parish, but a diverse lay community (Kort 2001:23). Dulles (2002:189,198) also proposes the model of the Church as a 'community of disciples', which emphasises relationality (with the divine, and others), while incorporating many strengths and elements of his other models[24]. He sees the institutional element as useful and stabilising, but only if subordinated to the life and mission of its members, in order to follow Christ; however these are precisely the points of assault from instrumental, secularising modernism described by Lewis, rendering the institutional model particularly vulnerable. Similarly Lewis (1999d:448) makes a comparison between the roles of state and church in promoting the good of their members. In both cases, the structures and institutions are there to aid people's flourishing: for the state, the ordinary life and happiness of citizens; for the church, the shared life in Christ. If these ends are not being achieved, he considers the structures and activities an unjustified waste of time and resources. Of course, how to evaluate their effectiveness is a difficult question, but nevertheless one which should be asked.

Contemporary church organisations could ask themselves, what style and model of leadership is practiced? Is it distanced, bureaucratic, based on power and propaganda? What are the aims and priorities of leadership? Do leaders have a spirit

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[24] Such as the radical call to transformation and commitment, hierarchical leadership as a pastoral function, proclamation of the gospel and service of others, and the community as a sacrament of Christ's presence (Dulles 2002:213-217).

of respectful service to other members, and what ethos do they encourage? Do they lead people to Christ? Are the values practiced those of the gospels and Beatitudes, or secular culture?

Attitude to the Other

The NICE considers the outside world as an object for their agenda, to be used as they will. They use the means of false propaganda, commandeering of houses and land, pressure on Mark to betray his wife, inciting riots, torture and murder. Apparent initial generosity and hospitality is used to trap Mark in debt and forced servitude. Discharged criminals are committed for further unlimited 'remedial treatment', and animals caged for experimentation. These all imply a growing loss of respect and violation of boundaries. There is further destruction of aesthetic and moral sensitivities and aversions in the 'Objective Room', to dispose members towards such acts. Frost[25] represents the tendency of Modern psychology to delve into the innermost being of humanity with a reductive clinical gaze, and find nothing but raw material for deconstruction and reorganisation. These are becoming the dynamics of Hell – leading to a boundless possessive craving for power over others (Lewis 1999a:737).

The Company by contrast respect boundaries and the inner core of each person which is answerable only to God. For instance, Jane's marriage takes precedence over the Company's wish to recruit her (*THS*:114,142). No-one proselytises, and her spiritual development is allowed to develop in its own way and time. Even Mr Bultitude the bear, while given 'certain inhibitions' by the Director, is still free to leave the Manor, to his misfortune (*THS*:303-307). Neither Ransom or the Company as a whole make totalising claims on members, and allegiance is freely given. The Company gives hospitality and support to the disadvantaged, and indeed is formed from their number (*THS*:195-196).

For Williams (2007:60-73) the challenge of 'otherness' (and the boundary it creates) is dealt with in characteristic way by various cultures. The Modern attitude is to control, ignore or repress it. The postmodern response recognises it, but can fail to relate to it in a coherent whole, leading to fragmentation, isolation and relativism. The challenge for

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[25] Also the Giant in *Pilgrim's Regress*; Lewis 1999e:151-153.

religious communities today is to embody the attitude of a God who is without favouritism, and related to all. Hauerwas (1981:92-93) similarly sees Christian revelation forming a people able to see the world as divided and rebellious but cared for by God, and consequently able to offer hospitality to the stranger. Rahner (1974:129) points out that such basic communities are able to give social help on an effective personal, neighbourly scale, somewhere between the powerful institution and the under-resourced individual.

Do church communities respect the integrity and freedom of both members and outsiders? Or can they be valued in practice merely for their usefulness, or as 'material' for conversion or sacramental programmes? Is the community hospitable, and at ease with plurality and diversity? Where are the boundaries between those who 'belong' and those who don't, and is what happens there given the attention and resources appropriate to a missionary church? Is there a prudent openness to the risk and messiness which goes along with genuine hospitality and welcome?

There are also internal psychospiritual boundaries and distinctions – between religious and secular areas of life, the holy and profane, the redeemed and unredeemed parts of our selves. Are these being challenged and integrated, places of growth and negotiation? Are they the subject of attention, prayer, and support in our personal spirituality, and that of the community?

Spirituality in *THS*

The household of the Company practices the Christian life in a very ordinary, down-to-earth way, at least most of the time, although there are extraordinary spiritual events towards the end of the book. Lewis may well be drawing on his own experience of life in a shared household and the companionship of the 'Inklings', and possibly his own mystical experiences, about which he was usually reticent (Dorsett 2009:133-134). The lifestyle is a holistic one. The animal and human, the intellectual and the earthy, the natural and supernatural, happily coexist here in a microcosm of the Kingdom, oriented to God's rule and guided by Ransom's leadership. A holistic Christian lifestyle such as this both needs, and is, an education in the virtues (McCabe 2005:39), a call on all our abilities to work harmoniously together, in discernment and obedience to God's will.

The virtues are a blend of nature and reason because they result from right direction of the passions (Hauerwas 1981:124). Their practice is guided by norms, tradition, and a common end, but because each person's path is unique, it results in a praxis of 'diversity in unity' rather than external or conventional uniformity. Lewis shows us a group which is aware, accepting and skilled at dealing with many facets of the natural, spiritual and human, in this process of harmonisation and flourishing.

Another theme of the novel is the description of advanced spiritual states, both diabolic and Christian. As he has done all through the book, Lewis contrasts the two, reflecting one in the other, playing with their superficial resemblances while discerning their deeper differences and consequences for the soul. For instance, the scene where Wither's and Frost's personalities merge, as *Who's Who* falls off the table and the two men wrestle and cackle like an animal (*THS*:240) represents Lewis' belief that for those who choose the diabolic path, individuality and reason is lost, and eventually what is left of the Person is consumed in Hell (Lewis1999a:737;1999c:538). In contrast, the Company's obedience and loyalty to Ransom and his celestial Masters enhances and harmonises the personalities of individuals, although this is not without struggle and effort. This dynamic also applies to the leadership of the two organisations. We find identification of the leadership and policies of NICE receding ever further as the story progresses. No-one and nothing can be relied on, and no-one takes responsibility for concrete actions. This is the consequence of evil as the *privatio boni,* the reason people do not flourish there. However, Ransom is no go-getting leader either. Physically wounded, he spends most of his time lying on a couch, and admits to having no plan of action, despite having the status of Director (*THS*:192-194). The difference is that he, having been purified of fear and enabled to converse with angels through his previous experiences (*THS*:287-288; Lewis 1955:172,167) is able to keep the Company together in faithful preparation for God's communication and initiative.

A rather more subtle contrast is brought out in the portrayal of the mental states of Wither and Merlin. Wither has lost all real personality, retaining a veneer of normal functioning, with an underlying emptiness. He is in a state of 'spaced-out' false mysticism, having willed to refuse knowledge and reality. At one point he is found in a sinister state of mental vacancy, and is spoken through by another entity

(*THS*:185,236,350). Merlin is also described as having 'the quiet of a gutted building' and accepts to be entered into and used by angelic powers, with the connivance of the Company. This is not what we would expect in a Christian situation, and indeed Lewis goes to some length to explain what is going on (*THS*:281-288). Merlin is a figure from the time when Paganism and Christianity coexisted and shared some spiritual practices, and he could command 'the spiritual qualities of Nature, loving and reverencing them and knowing them from within'. For him, matter and spirit are very close. For Modern people, they are widely separated, hence Wither rejects bodiliness for pure spirit (and Frost rejects spirit for materialistic manipulation). But even in Merlin's time laying his mind open too far to these paranormal influences was damaging, causing him to lose something of his personality. His singular task now is to be filled with *angelic* powers, not those of Nature, because his mind is already opened, and because he consents to be this instrument of good. Later magicians, when such powers were no longer neutral, were necessarily on the side of evil.

Partly Merlin is used as a device by Lewis to allow divine retribution without direct miraculous intervention, or violating the spiritual status of contemporary people. Also, however, 'Merlin represents what we've got to get back to in some different way' (*THS*:283). By this Lewis means the resynthesis of relationship between mind, matter and spirit, between the natural world, the human and the divine, which has been lost in Modernity; the re-enchantment of the cosmos . He hints elsewhere also (1999c:544-547; 1999d:449) that humanity may have an eschatological role in drawing the rest of the universe back into right relationship with God. This project of reclaiming a practical Christian relationship with the supernatural and non-material agencies of the cosmos is a new task for our time.

On a psychological level, Merlin can be seen as 'the return of the repressed' (cf Schwartz 2009:96,190): the integration of archaic/archetypal/shadow aspects of the self into contemporary *Christian* life. This needs to be done with care, on the psychological level, to retain ego boundaries and not be overwhelmed by the material. (The latter would lead to what Lewis is referring to above – a 'spaced-out' over-expanded mind and withered personality.) This is also an appropriate task for the postmodern age. The egoic sense of individual self is strong, and ripe for

'breakthrough' by unconscious material. Fowler describes this stage of mid-life crisis, breakdown of ego defences, and assimilation of repressed material, as transition from the Individuative to the Conjunctive faith stage, which he also compares to the transition from Modern to Postmodern culture[26] (Fowler 1996:172-176). This integration leads to greater spiritual vitality, and a wider, more inclusive worldview – much the sort of thing Lewis pictures in the life of the Company. Tyler (2006) offers some characteristics of a holistic spirituality for contemporary times which also closely resembles Lewis's proposal: contemplation, social engagement and community, psychological wisdom, embodiment, seeing God in the everyday, cosmic/ecological awareness and an ecumenical outlook.

Is the church reading and responding to the 'signs of the times' in terms of the spirituality it offers? How well does it reflect the above aspects of contemporary spirituality? Could we risk being more open to exploration and change in these areas? Could it eventually offer a practical, authentic and reliable guidance to postmodern seekers exploring expanded consciousness and cosmic relationality?

Is Lewis's vision of community outdated?

Urang (1971:169) criticises Lewis's vision of Christian community in *THS* as a) having an almost dualistic emphasis on the transcendent as saving, and b) reverting to a romantically idealised former age. Hence he does not see Lewis's proposal as engaging with the realities of contemporary life. But four decades later, I think Lewis has dated very well. His theology of the relationship between faith and works is an orthodox one, and he is characteristically concerned to ground belief in practical action and charity. Also many of the practices he proposes are again being taken up with renewed appreciation. The lifestyle of the Company may have seemed outdated among the Modern developments of the 1960s and '70s but such inclusive, simple-

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[26] See Fowler 1996:57-67 for an overview of the stages. Synthetic –Conventional faith usually emerges in adolescence. Faith identity can be held strongly as an individual, but this is tacit and not yet thought through and evaluated, and contradictory elements are unresolved. Instead there is a reliance on others for confirmation and clarification. In the Individuative-Reflective stage beliefs are critically examined, harmonised and internalised from a 'third person' perspective, and the individual takes on personal responsibility for their beliefs. They do this only at a cognitive level, however, and are not aware of deeper unconscious processes and motivations. In the Conjunctive stage maintenance of this confident, egoic, conscious faith begins to break down and the person has to integrate and come to terms with deeper material and drives. 'Truth' is no longer so clearcut and comfortable, and there is a new appreciation of symbolism, ambiguity and paradox, as well as others with different truths and perspectives. These stages can also be applied to communities and cultures.

living and ecologically sensitive communities have regained appeal for many today. For Lewis the importance of practicing a life of virtue in community is that this is the only way chosen by God to reveal himself to humanity, and thus the only way towards our eternal destiny. The whole self, and the gathering of those who love, help and show God to each other are the instruments through which this happens. We 'catch' the life of Christ by living with others who have it, as a kind of benign disease (Lewis 1999d:425-426,442-3).

The revitalising potential of basic communities

Markham (1999) identifies ways to aid this work of the Spirit in organisations, by identifying healthy functioning and characteristic forms of resistance. She contends that in this era of rapid change and uncertainty, organisations face particular challenges, and cannot continue in old strategies. They must be radically open to new possibilities of action, while also being clear and faithful to their basic mission and reason for existence. They must draw on the passion, resources and energies of all members and not divert or block these with disfunctional dynamics. Leaders must be skilled in promoting good working relationships, psychologically mature, able to delegate, and accept conflict between members as an inevitable and positive sign of health and creativity. A further mark of excellence in organisations is the ability to take account of the wider impact of their policies on, for instance, the poor and the natural environment, as well as the wellbeing of the members and leaders. This strategy of promoting good relationality and supporting members to work through anxiety and resistance, towards trust, re-energising and openness to the future will, she proposes, allow the unfolding of events and ideas in an unplanned, fortuitous way, and ready the organisation to recognise and take advantage of these.

Similarly Rahner would see this as the practical virtue of hope in God who is ultimately beyond our ability to know or approach by our own efforts. Although we cannot control or foresee all aspects of our situation, we must place our lives and freedom in God's hands by making decisions and living fully. Hope and faith thus become matters of practical action in courageous trust. The Modern reliance on prescriptive planning and control, while having its place, fixes the horizon on temporal things and human capabilities. The third alternative would be despair, retreat into passivity and

conservatism, which increasingly characterises corporate church life today. He sees the future of the church in freely formed basic communities such as Lewis's, practicing a genuinely active, relational, grounded and contemplative Christianity (Rahner 1985:226-230;1974:108,111).

Present day parish communities, however, may show many of Markham's signs of resistance[27]. Things continue year after year in a superficially comfortable but paralysing way, while members, especially the young, leave. There may be an unexamined belief that only the priest (bishop, Pope..) can make things happen, or know what is right. Promotion of lay leadership and collaborative ministry have not really taken off. Most parish priests are still largely bearing the burden alone, and themselves often seem demoralised and lacking in initiative. I would like to see priests formed in a way that gives them ease, confidence and delight with authentic community, not just through intellectual studies in an isolating, formal, and institutional environment. They should expect to be the leaders of people of character and liveliness, and genuinely celebrate the sacraments with people who have a living, expectant faith and hope, and are expressing this in their everyday lives and decisions.

In terms of Fowler's faith stages, parishes often function in a Conventional style. However many contemporary people may be in the Individuative stage, and are exploring what faith means to them personally. Some are in the Conjunctive stage, and ready for a richer, paradoxical and wider way of relating to others. Neither of these are likely to find much understanding, like-minded people or a satisfying faith life in the parish. They, and the whole parish, would benefit from refocusing on *God* as the leader of the community, and on the Spirit empowering all the members in diverse ways, whatever their faith stage. They need to regain permission, within a community that can 'hold' them, to think and to try something different, to live with their whole being engaged in the life of the virtues. Fowler (1996:Ch10) makes a powerful appeal for leadership in both religion and politics that can develop structures and ways of relating that are suited to the contemporary (Conjunctive/Postmodern) culture.

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[27] For example: isolation, lack of consultation and collaboration, 'waffling' and indecision, cliques, denial of problems/needs, legalistic/dogmatic rigidity, depression, lack of enthusiasm and initiative (Markham 1999:42).

<u>Possibilies for contemporary church communities</u>

Communities should actively promote flourishing at a human level, promoting values that can be broadly agreed by all, such as freedom, universal well-being and cooperation. This is not just lip-service or a 'bolt-on' activity such as supporting a charity, but something which deeply involves everyone as an essential ethos, listening, discussing and contributing to a common endeavour and outreach. By this active caring the community will already be tacitly witnessing to theological truths – God's love for creation, human dignity and giftedness, and the call to loving service. As Warren (1993:28,31) points out, the pressure of prevailing cultural norms and values can only be resisted by giving attention to, and practicing, an alternative within a counter-cultural community. It is what is *lived*, not what is only spoken about, which is transmitted to others, and potentially transformative. The Christian vocation is primarily to be fully human, and this foundation needs to be laid first in both the individual and in common life. If the foundation is strong, the more obviously religious dimension of prayer, worship and sacramental celebration will be that much more genuine, heartfelt and vital, as part of a holistic life. To attempt to form a community by emphasising sacramental practice or doctrine while assuming the more basic human dimensions will follow automatically (or simply ignoring them) is likely to be a failure, and does not meet the needs of many contemporary people. (The increasing popularity of neo-conservative formal religion is likely to be a reaction to insecurity, lacking deep roots.) Conversely, newcomers who experience a genuinely thriving, involved, and welcoming community are likely to be attracted and more open to inquiry about the spiritual dimension of the life. The challenge is to keep a healthy balance and mutually beneficial dialectic between the two. The issues raised in the above section, suggested by the communities in the novel, give some possible ways for communities to promote this flourishing and hospitality, and so become better exemplars and witnesses to the gospel for potential converts.

Chapter 4
Small communities and spiritual renewal

Encouraging conversion and human flourishing

So far, we have looked at certain characteristic contemporary cultural pressures on psychospiritual development, and the effect these can have on interpersonal relationships and the social and religious environment. Some particular challenges to local church life have been raised, but without proposing a positive alternative. Again, Lewis's vision of Christian community suggests one way forward, and aspects of this will be considered in this section.

Within the Catholic tradition, the concept of conversion has been largely hijacked by Modern biases towards the cognitive, instrumental, and institutional – learn the doctrines, and receive the sacraments in the prescribed way, and *voila!* you are a Christian, with nothing else to do except remain faithful to the way you have been taught[28]. This approach to catechesis and initiation has been partly counteracted by the adult inquiry and community-based RCIA process, but this has not yet greatly influenced the institutional church, and mystical, holistic, experiential or heart-centred spiritualities have to find a home where they can. However, drawing on such older richer spiritualities, recent insights into the importance of faith development process, and virtue ethics, there is growing appreciation of conversion as simply choosing to become what we are intended to be, in the freedom and fullness of our human potential, sharing God's nature (*theosis*), and being called to live in loving community. Such intentional conversions will be crucial for the church of the future, as Rahner has pointed out (see below), in renewing its vitality and discipleship.

However, Kohlberg points out (Conn 1986:107) that few people reach the stage of principled, post-conventional reasoning. Our society and churches might be unrecognisable if they did. Meanwhile, as Lewis shows in his depiction of politics in Mark's college, and media propaganda, many people drift, lacking much moral awareness or responsibility, and are vulnerable to the few (with whatever values) who

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[28] While researching, I noticed that a search for 'conversion' in St Mary's well stocked theology library only turned up two relevant items. Does this say something about our current preoccupations and priorities in the church, and in (Catholic?) academic theology?

have the position and knowledge to influence or manipulate them. In a pluralist, fragmented culture people who would previously have had consistent support and guidance from their social and religious environment in the conventional stages are increasingly vulnerable and rootless. This makes it both more difficult, and more necessary, for them to develop moral thinking and responsibility, and a sense of divine presence and help. It is only when people start to wake up to what they have lost (in religious, cultural and societal resources) or long for (as personal growth, fulfilment and transcendence) that they will initiate the transforming, costly processes of conversion, and begin to shape a new reality for themselves and others.

The influence of modernism can produce competitive, acquisitive individualism in society, which tends to pull it towards area B of the grid/group model (see fig. 1). However this process eventually leads (as it does for Mark) towards a breakdown of shared values and social cohesion (C) - the 'darker side' of postmodernism, and a turn by some to intolerance and forms of fundamentalism (D) as an attempt to regain security and meaning. Lewis rightly points to a return to forms of religiously-based community, likely to be fairly high in both grid and group (A) as a way forward. These will probably be largely[29] intentional, because Christianity as a way of life is now counter-cultural. Such small communities may be accessible, humble reservoirs of Christian values and practice, acting as a witness and catalyst at the grass roots of society, and as resources for moral and faith development.

A spirituality for the future

In this Lewis is thinking along similar lines to Rahner (1985:18-26), who proposes five characteristics of a Christian spirituality of the future:

1) It will remain ecclesial and sacramental, but be humble, patient, wise and loving in the face of the Church's inevitable inadequacies. Although Lewis's community, unlike Rahner's proposal, is not shown to have a sacramental aspect to their life, this may be a result of the genre, the particular focus of the book, and because it is a lay community. We do not know if they attended church on Sundays, but perhaps could assume so! However, Lewis may also have been making the point that a

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[29] The main core membership would be those who share a common vision and belief system, but as with the Company, and many real life communities (Internet source 5) they may well be both inclusive and diverse, accepting many who wish to belong for other reasons.

Christian life and community able to resist secularising cultural pressure must ground and realise their faith in everyday living, letting divine life enter every aspect of being, and not rely on external formal observance. As mentioned earlier, Lewis's spirituality, while recognising the essentially ecclesial nature of Christianity, focuses on personal spiritual growth as a fundamental necessity, as does Rahner. Such small communities offer a half-way house for communal spiritual practice which can avoid some of the pitfalls of both individualism and institutionalism. Rahner (1985:145-146) recommends these groups as a way of encouraging a stronger practice of faith in lacklustre churches, but also stresses they should maintain good links with the institutional church.

2) It will emphasise the fundamental core truths of Christianity, the relationship between God and humanity opened up by Jesus. Lewis is well known for his apologetical work putting forward these truths, but here again the fantasy genre disguises them, and focuses more on the angelic realm, while still putting this in an orthodox teleological setting[30]. However it does not veer towards gnostic speculation, and keeps a good counterbalance of core Christian values and practice. In a pluralistic, relativistic culture these core beliefs must be held to firmly, giving a stable, distinctive identity and witness to offer to seekers.

3) Christian faith will be clearly based on personal choice (not socio-religious expectation/convention), and come from an 'experience of God emerging from the very heart of our existence' (Rahner 1985:22). In this sense all Christians will be converts, and mystics, having confronted the emptiness of existence without God, and chosen this option in faith, hope and love. The conversions in *THS* have this character, indeed starting from ignorance or even suspicion of conventional religion, and the support they have (if any) is one of sensitive facilitation of this personal existential process. Such support can best (sometimes only) come from others who have been through a similar process[31]. Such converts will form the church of the future, coming together in basic communities of Christian living (Rahner 1974:108;1985:148-149).

4) It will learn from the past history of the church, drawing on its classical resources, but be open to fresh expressions inspired by the Spirit. The Company have a strong

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[30] The two earlier books of the Space trilogy introduce some core theology of the Fall, Incarnation and Redemption and Christian angelology, and set the scene for this book.
[31] cf Teresa of Avila, *The Book of her Life* Ch 13, on the relative benefits of consulting those with learning, good judgement, and/or experience.

sense of Christian continuity and historical purpose, of the providential nature of their calling as a community, and of leading by supernatural assistance. We also see them in debate with Merlin, representing an earlier understanding of Christian relationship with the political state and the natural world, attempting to shape a contemporary response to their difficulties. This sort of engagement with a variety of resources is a lively feature of contemporary spirituality and theology, and lends itself to the praxis of post-conventional, self-determining groups.

5) There will be a new openness to the working of the Spirit moving in the *whole* community, inspiring and enlivening prayer, communication, discernment etc; a new sort of collective mysticism. This seems to be what Lewis pictures as the Company are inspired by the descent of the eldils and begin to speak, feel and be aware on a new level: the Pentecost-like opposite of the divisive curse of Babel brought down on Belbury. Such transformation is more known and accepted in individuals nowadays, as Rahner notes, but sometimes emerges in communal forms as well, such as revival and charismatic movements[32]. The personal psycho-spiritual transformation of 3) above will prepare, mature and open people to respond to the Spirit in this communal movement. This may be where the regained sense of an enchanted cosmos bears most fruit, and opens up new avenues for living in co-operation with the divinely ordered, natural and supernatural 'ecosystem', for the benefit and healing of the world.

Taylor (2007:608-609) also raises the issue of whether our current range of ethical systems, our visions of what a good life consists of, and our understanding of the potential we have (as humans within a particular type of ontological universe), are adequate. For instance, are they able to explain the sense of longing for something transcendent, for solidarity with a widening group of others, or the sense of breakthrough and fulfilment that can accompany such broadening of our world and concerns? He suggests that systems which assume a purely natural, materialistic universe cannot do this, and (I would add) even ones which include a supernatural element may benefit from a fresh look at the phenomenology of human desire. In other words, rather than limiting and forming aspiration to fit the current epistomological

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[32] How far these phenomena correspond to Rahner's proposal is a question which cannot be gone into here, but I would suggest that such working of the Spirit would take different routes and bear different fruits depending on the faith stage of the individuals and communities involved. Rahner may be envisaging something more post-conventional than is common at present.

system (whatever it is), could the system be developed and justified by its ability to elicit, explain and support continuing conversion and transcendence? The most promising communal project of this nature I have come across is John Heron's 'Sacred Science' (Heron 1998). This is an ongoing, person-centred, critical inquiry into awareness of spiritual and subtle realms, and the possibilities these open up for integrated, holistic living and co-operation, with other beings, and God, in 'cosmic citizenship'. It would be interesting to pursue this in an explicitly Christian, rather than theistic, setting.

Conclusion

In this dissertation I have argued that there are certain characteristic cultural pressures on contemporary people, stemming from Modernism. These tend to produce what Lewis calls 'men without chests' – a picturesque way of saying that the intellectual/rational and the biological/instinctive faculties are encouraged in our society, but the mediating function of the heart/affective is lost. Ethical sensitivity and natural, innate moral orientation are dulled, and social cohesion and solidarity suffers, producing environments where it becomes ever more difficult to experience, learn and practice such skills. Furthermore, the reductive influences of scientism and materialism, privileged in our culture, encourage belief in a purely natural universe as the norm, and make humanity aspire to mastery over the world. This combination can have particularly unfortunate practical consequences, as well as eroding the sense of supernatural realities and the plausibility of communion with the divine and each other.

The church, however, has both resources and a divine mandate to counter these pressures, and call people to conversion to a way of life based on the gospel, one more worthy of their true nature. But first, it must put its own house in order, discerning where it has been distorted in thought and practice by these pressures, and developing a gospel-based praxis for our times. This in turn should attract converts, and contribute to the growth, vitality and influence of the church. One possibility suggested by Lewis to aid this renewal, is the formation of basic, intentional small communities to practice this way of life and thus contribute to the life of the church and world.

I have only been able to sketch a few features and pointers for this sort of project here. It raises more questions than it answers, in many ways. However, I hope that it may be able to contribute in a small way to the ongoing discussion and initiatives in this area of renewal.

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17/8/12.

The genre of *THS*

Lewis is well known for many fictional works which carry a theological message. He blends his love of a good story with a deliberate strategy of pre-evangelisation - 'smuggling theology into people's minds under cover of romance' (Lewis in Urang 1971:142). He thus excites and stretches their imagination and desire, and familiarises them with a world of metaphysics well before they are ready to accept this as dogma. Lewis's Christianity is very practical and down-to-earth in its application, and this strategy also enables him to keep the message firmly linked to everyday life. Consequently, as Urang (1971:21-22) says: "The unsophisticated reader making his way unwarily through the book will probably be more than one third of the way through before he begins to realise in what an outrageous dance he is being led." Lewis's development of the themes of the last section require him to deal with the cultural recovery of ultimate, spiritual realities. For this he adopts a Romantic[33] style used by his friend Charles Williams, in which numinous supernatural agencies irrupt into the mundane world, and gives it a Gothic twist appropriate for a protest against the excesses of Modernism (Urang 1971:74-75). It is also similar to apocalyptic in blending the political and spiritual with visionary symbolism (see Verhey 2002:383).

Summary of the plot

The story is set in the post-war years in Edgestow, a small University town. Mark Studdock is a sociology lecturer at Bracton College. The 'progressive element' of the college, to which Mark aspires to belong, is collaborating with the National Institute of Co-ordinated Experiments (NICE), a government-backed scientific enterprise based nearby at Belbury. The College is persuaded to sell Bragdon Wood, a place with a legendary association with Merlin, to the NICE.

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[33] The Romantic Movement tried to recover a unity lost in Modernism – between the reason and the desires within the person, between people in community, and between people and the natural world, distanced by instrumentalism (Taylor 2007:315-316). The Gothic horror genre arose from this as the 'darker side' of modernism became apparent.

Mark's new wife, Jane, is bored, frustrated and lonely. She is increasingly disturbed by strange visionary dreams. When she confides in the Dimbles, a Christian couple who befriend her, she is advised to consult a doctor at the Manor in St Anne's. The Dimbles seem to find her dreams significant, and she senses more than her own mental wellbeing is at stake. While at the Manor her attitudes to marriage and self-determination are challenged.

While Jane is being gradually and reluctantly drawn towards the Manor community and its Director, Ransom, Mark is becoming increasingly embroiled in the NICE. Driven by ambition and then fear, he becomes trapped and manipulated into greater commitment, and begins to discover the dark secrets of Belbury. He realises his position and livelihood, and eventually his life, now depend on unconditional identification with the organisation, but its purpose and his particular role are not made clear. The two deputy Directors, Wither and Frost, initiate him in a process of moral and aesthetic desensitisation and dehumanisation, which will prepare him to meet the true 'Head' and possibly take its place. He discovers that the 'Head' is that of a decapitated criminal, apparently artificially kept alive, but actually animated by demonic entities which control the organisation for their own ends, including the elimination of organic life from the Earth.

After being captured and tortured by the NICE Police, Jane escapes and takes refuge at the Manor. She meets the Company, including the Dimbles, a quirky community of humans and animals assembled apparently by chance, but in obedience to a higher purpose, to be a kind of 'faithful remnant' known as Logres in a secular Britain. The Arthurian theme continues as Jane and others are sent out in response to more of her visions, to meet Merlin who has emerged from his crypt beneath Bragdon Wood. It is uncertain which side he will choose, but as a Christian he joins the Company and acknowledges Ransom as Pendragon, the current leader of Logres. Meanwhile a taciturn tramp has been mistaken for Merlin by the NICE, and is being courted by them. They advertise for an interpreter of ancient languages.

Ransom (in the two preceding books) has travelled to Mars and Venus, and made contact with the inhabitants, and also the angelic patrons of the planets, the eldils. He learns that Earth alone is infested by a 'criminal class' of eldil, who currently control Belbury. Ransom is advised that Merlin should open himself to eldilic power, and the rest of the Company have a Pentecost-like experience as the angels descend. Merlin is sent disguised as an interpreter into Belbury, and brings down the 'curse of Babel', disrupting their ability to communicate, and frees the criminals and animals kept for experimentation. Belbury and occupied Edgestow are destroyed.

The Company celebrate and bid farewell to Ransom, who is returning to the heavens. Mark has finally broken from NICE and escaped, and he and Jane are reconciled.

Appendix II

THS Unabridged Edition (1996: New York: Scribner Classics)

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