

**Mooreffoc in Narnia ... and the Bible:
The Value of Fresh Perspective in
Gaining a Hearing for the Gospel**

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Here in the West (and especially in the U.S.), we live in what is in some sense a Gospel-saturated society. A large fraction of the population has grown up attending church, even if only occasionally. With freedom of religion (and in the U.S., no state church), many religious groups vie with one another to attract members. Secular radio and TV stations carry some religious broadcasting, and recent years have seen a proliferation of Christian stations. The media (though not exactly favorable to Christianity) usually has some religious issue before the public, whether it be gay rights, the ordination of women, birth control, the creation-evolution controversy, abortion, or the foibles of some TV evangelist. In this sense, our society is certainly Gospel-saturated.

All this is *not* to say that the average person understands the Gospel. On the contrary, it sometimes seems that not even the average member of our evangelical churches understands the Gospel! The problem is, most people *think* they understand when in reality they have no biblical conception of the nature of sin, God=s holiness, real forgiveness, or the radical nature of Christian discipleship. When such people hear the Gospel, some turn it off because they have Aheard it all before,@ though in reality they have never heard it even once. Others continue to listen, but they filter it through their grid of mistaken pre-understandings and so fail to hear it for the hundredth time.

What can we Christians do about this? How can we present the Gospel in such a way that, without presuming to do the work of the Holy Spirit, people will hear us out and begin to see what God is saying to them? Physically, of course, we need to get out where unbelievers are. We need to form friendships with unsaved people so we can reach out to them in their needs and so they can see the Spirit working change in our lives. Verbally, we also need to get out where they are B to climb out of the rut of worn cliches and stereotyped Gospel presentations in order to help others see what Christianity is really all about. Personally, I have been greatly helped in this by the example of C. S. Lewis, and that is what I would like to discuss here.

C. S. Lewis (1898-1963) was gifted with unusual talent. As an Oxford don and later as Cambridge Professor of Medieval and Renaissance Literature, he was highly respected as a scholar in his own field. Unlike many scholars, he was also an interesting communicator, one of the most popular lecturers at the university and a master of the essay.

Outside his field, Lewis is widely known for his fiction. His series of seven children=s stories, *The Narnia Chronicles*, sketches the Asalvation history@ of a world inhabited by talking animals. In a science fiction trilogy, Lewis explores the warfare between good and evil

throughout our solar system. In *Till We Have Faces*, he retells the myth of Psyche and Eros as a sample of God=s activity among gentiles before the coming of Christianity. His *Great Divorce* is an imaginative visit to heaven by a busload of the damned, nearly all of whom decide they prefer living in hell to giving up their sins. Lewis= allegory *Pilgrim=s Rgress* traces the spiritual journey of a certain John (basically Lewis himself), but concentrates on his experiences before conversion in contrast to the post-conversion emphasis of Bunyan=s *Pilgrim=s Progress*.

Not only was Lewis a first-class writer, but he was arguably the most effective Christian apologist of the twentieth century. He wrote a number of brilliant apologetic essays, several of which have been collected in his *God in the Dock*. Yet his fiction, too, has had a significant value for the proclamation and defense of Christianity. Lewis= effectiveness in presenting Christianity to unchurched intellectuals of his day and ours is partly due to his gifts of vivid imagination, literary ability, and sharp logic. Yet not a little of Lewis= impact comes from his effective use of a literary device sometimes known as *Mooreeffoc*, a technique in which the reader is caused to look at an old subject from a fresh and unusual perspective in order to see it in a new light.

The term *Mooreeffoc* is explained by Lewis= friend J. R. R. Tolkien:

And there is (especially for the humble) *Mooreeffoc*, or Chestertonian Fantasy. *Mooreeffoc* is a fantastic word, but it could be seen written up in every town in this land. It is Coffee-room, viewed from the inside through a glass door, as it was seen by Dickens on a dark London day; and it was used by Chesterton to denote the queerness of things that have become trite, when they are seen suddenly from a new angle.¹

Lewis is good at finding Anew angles@ from which to view the things we take for granted, so he uses this technique frequently. Two striking examples are his delightful little piece AXmas and Christmas@² and the first chapter of his unfinished novel *After Ten Years*.³ The former of these gives away too much in its title; it should have had only its subtitle, AA Lost Chapter from Herodotus.@ Lewis assumes the guise of the ancient Greek historian as he describes the distant island of *Niatirb* (Britain), where the inhabitants annually perform a rather masochistic ritual called AXmas.@ Here Lewis uses *Mooreeffoc* effectively by taking us outside our time and culture to show us how absurd our modern, secularized Christmas really is.

¹J. R. R. Tolkien, AOn Fairy Stories,@ in *The Tolkien Reader* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1966), p. 58.

²C. S. Lewis, AXmas and Christmas,@ in *God in the Dock*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), pp. 301-303.

³Available in either of two Lewis collections: *Of Other Worlds*, ed. Walter Hooper (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1966), pp. 127-145; or *The Dark Tower and Other Stories*, ed. Walter Hooper (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), pp. 133-154.

In *After Ten Years*, Lewis begins his story of events following the Trojan War with a scene inside the wooden horse. In a most effective use of *Mooreeffoc*, however, Lewis carefully leaves his readers in the dark about where they are, so that we are left wondering for most of the chapter who Yellowhead is and what it is that he and his companions are cooped up in B a spaceship? A submarine? An armored personnel carrier? Not until the hero mutters AOh Zeus!@ does the light begin to dawn!

Mooreeffoc in Narnia

Lewis= use of *Mooreeffoc* in *The Narnia Chronicles* is especially interesting and relevant to our gaining a hearing for the Gospel. His inspiration for these stories began with the incongruous mental picture of a faun from ancient mythology carrying packages and an umbrella on a snowy day. However, Lewis soon discovered that a fairy tale built around this image had some real apologetic possibilities:

I thought I saw how stories of this kind could steal past a certain inhibition which had paralysed much of my own religion in childhood. Why did one find it so hard to feel as one was told one ought to feel about God or about the sufferings of Christ? I thought the chief reason was that one was told one ought to. An obligation to feel can freeze feelings. And reverence itself did harm. The whole subject was associated with lowered voices; almost as if it were something medical. But supposing that by casting all these things into an imaginary world, stripping them of their stained-glass and Sunday School associations, one could make them for the first time appear in their real potency? Could one not thus steal past those watchful dragons? I thought one could.⁴

Thus the whole Narnia series becomes one large *Mooreeffoc*: the basic truths of Christianity transposed to a fairy-tale world!

Yet within *The Narnia Chronicles* we find many additional examples of *Mooreeffoc*. Some are merely single incidents or brief touches. Others are more sustained, occupying several pages of the narrative. Still others are so pervasive as to form a background for the entire series. Let=s consider an example of each of these.

A small, humorous piece of *Mooreeffoc* occurs in the second chapter of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Lucy has just entered Narnia through the magic wardrobe and met Mr. Tumnus, the umbrella-carrying faun. She is now waiting in his sitting room while he prepares their tea. Looking over his library, she spots a book, *Men, Monks and Gamekeepers: A Study in Popular Legend, or Is Man a Myth?* Perhaps no profound apologetic thrust is intended here, yet one can

⁴C. S. Lewis, ASometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What=s to Be Said,@ in *Of Other Worlds*, p. 37.

hardly help wondering: If man, whom we know exists, is considered mythological by some fauns, may not some of the beings we consider mythological also exist? This could easily serve to open the minds of children (and adults) schooled in modern materialism to a more sympathetic reading of those biblical narratives containing angels and demons.

A more extended and clearly apologetic use of *Mooreeffoc* occurs in the twelfth chapter of *The Silver Chair*. Eustace, Jill and Puddleglum have just rescued Prince Rilian from an enchanted chair by which a wicked queen had long held him in forgetful bondage. They are about to make their escape from the underground city. Suddenly the Queen of Underland returns. She instantly recognizes what is happening and begins to put all of them under an enchantment. Influenced by her perfumed fire, monotonous music and charming words, they begin to lose all memory of the land of Narnia back up on the surface.

To promote their forgetfulness, the queen laughingly dismisses their belief in the existence of the sun as merely a childish copy of the lamps in Underland. Likewise she explains away the Christ-figure of Narnia, the lion Aslan, as an inflated idea derived from a housecat. Lewis thus gives his readers a new perspective on the atheistic argument that God is only an extrapolation or magnification of man. It now becomes clear that this Aargument@ has no force in itself. Though it might account for the existence of the idea of God were it known independently that He does not exist, it does nothing to disprove His existence. This *Mooreeffoc* may provide younger readers with an inoculation against such an argument when they encounter it later. And of course Lewis did not intend to limit his readers to children.

Finally, Puddleglum puts a stop to the enchantment, stamping out the fire with his bare foot and clearing everyone=s mind, especially his own. His response to the witch-queen is also a notable apologetic *Mooreeffoc*:

Suppose we *have* only dreamed, or made up, all these things B trees and grass and sun and moon and stars and Aslan himself. Suppose we have. Then all I can say is that, in that case, the made-up things seem a good deal more important than the real ones.

Suppose this black pit of a kingdom of yours *is* the only world. Well, it strikes me as a pretty poor one. And that=s a funny thing, when you come to think of it. We=re just babies making up a game, if you=re right. But four babies playing a game can make a play-world which licks your real world hollow.⁵

Puddleglum=s argument provides a forceful answer not only to the witch=s arguments, but to several modern ones as well. As one who teaches both New Testament and apologetics, I see here a simple and effective answer which a Bible-believer can give to scoffers of greater intellect and education. Knowing the unity of Scripture and the profundity of its worldview, the believer need not be a scholar to see through modern attacks on the Bible. Not only wild theories like those of John Marco Allegro, in which the Bible is merely a misunderstood code-book for a drug

⁵C. S. Lewis, *The Silver Chair* (New York: Collier, 1970), p. 159.

and sex cult,⁶ or of Morton Smith, that Jesus was a philandering gnostic magician,⁷ but also the less spectacular attacks of liberalism and secular humanism, which see the Bible as a collection of superstitions from the Achildhood@ of our race. Haven=t such scoffers made a Ablack pit@ of society whenever they have controlled it? Don=t most people really want to live in a country where Christian moral principles are widely observed? How did all these Aprimitive children@ who supposedly wrote the Bible get all this right?

A third example of *Mooreeffoc* in the Narnia stories, almost as extensive as the series itself, is Lewis= backdoor approach to the subject of angels. This is probably too subtle to be noticed by younger readers B I didn=t notice it myself until the sixth reading! But as we identify with the children who travel back and forth from our world to Narnia, we begin to function as angels in Narnian salvation-history. If this isn=t an example of Lewis Astealing past the watchful dragons,@ I don=t know what is!

Lewis= use of *Mooreeffoc* to catch his readers off-guard demonstrates the value of this technique. It can be used not only by apologists writing essays and authors producing Christian fiction, but also by pastors preaching, evangelists evangelizing, and by lay people witnessing to their unsaved friends.

But perhaps you feel uneasy about using this technique. It=s new, isn=t it? Is it consistent with biblical standards? Is it even honest?

Mooreeffoc in the Bible

Actually, the technique is at least three thousand years old! And Jesus Himself used it, so it must be OK. The parables of Scripture often use a form of *Mooreeffoc* to help the audience see the truth by presenting it in a fresh light or from a different angle.

One important use of *Mooreeffoc* in the parables is to get the audience to make a moral judgment before they realize they have judged themselves. This is how the prophet Nathan brought David to see the enormity of his sin with Bathsheba (2 Sam 12:1-7). If David had realized that Nathan was going to rebuke him for his sin, he would probably have sent him packing or worse. But once David had committed himself by angrily condemning the rich man for slaughtering his poor neighbor=s pet lamb, there is no way out when Nathan says, AYou are the man!@

In a similar way Jesus exposed the hypocrisy of Simon the Pharisee for judging a woman Christ

⁶J. M. Allegro, *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross* (New York: Bantam, 1971).

⁷Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (New York: Harper and Row, 1982).

had forgiven (Luke 7:36-50). When Simon answers Jesus' question about which debtor would be more thankful, he naturally supposes it would be the one let off the larger debt. Once the Pharisee has thus committed himself, he has no excuse when Jesus makes it clear that the woman's apparently exaggerated affection is only an indication of her gratitude for having been forgiven far more than Simon has.

Other parables may sneak by the Awatchful dragons@ of our moral stubbornness more quietly. In the three parables of the Lost Sheep, Lost Coin, and Lost Son, Jesus gradually brings the lesson closer and closer to home for the Pharisees in his audience who objected to his seeking and accepting tax collectors and prostitutes. In the first two of these parables, the natural concern of a shepherd for his sheep and a woman for her money are used to defend God's concern for his creatures who have strayed from Him. In the third parable, the younger son shares many characteristics with the harlots and sinners turning to Jesus. The uncharitable attitude of the Pharisees finds full expression in that of the elder son, though Jesus never says, AYou are the older brother!@ And perhaps the picture of this older brother is ugly enough to awaken the Pharisees to their need to change.

In many other parables, Jesus uses this technique of *Mooreeffoc*, so we need not fear that it is an unbiblical innovation.⁸ In our Gospel-saturated but sin-hardened society, there is a real need for Christians to bring home the Gospel to sinners with clarity and force. Used properly, *Mooreeffoc* can be a powerful and biblical way to gain a hearing and help people (including ourselves) see things as they really are!

⁸For further discussion of *Mooreeffoc* and other rhetorical techniques in the parables, see Robert C. Newman, APerspective Transformation by Means of Parables,@ in *Interpretation and History: Essays in Honour of Allan A. MacRae*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Swee-Hwa Quek and J. Robert Vannoy (Singapore: Christian Life Publishers, 1986), pp. 139-154.