Foolish Wisdom

Engl 354: Day 3
I Corinthians 1:17-2:16

- why might St. Paul, the author of I Corinthians, suggest it is better to preach the gospel without "eloquent wisdom" (v.17, ESV)?

- for those of you with at least a passing familiarity with The Bible, what Christian principles can you identify that fly in the face of conventional wisdom and intelligence (v.18-25)?

- what criteria must apparently be present, or absent, to be chosen by God (v.26-29)? Why, according to St. Paul?
Dalí’s “Christ of St. John of the Cross” (1951)
crucifixion sketch by St. John of the Cross (c. 1550)

Salvador Dalí's first Christological work, Christ of St. John of the Cross (1951)
Salvador Dalí’s first Christological work,
Christ of St. John of the Cross (1951)
Elements of Design

- **line**: explicit or implicit boundaries
- **color**: chroma (hue), saturation, white balance
- **value**: lightness or darkness; range & contrast; low key vs. high key
- **shape**: two-dimensional contours; geometric or organic
Elements of Design

- **form**: 3-dimensional volume
- Often an illusion created by manipulating lighting, shading, and value
- Presence of shadows, interplay of light & dark
- **space**: area between objects
- Positive vs. negative
- Illusion thru perspective, overlapping elements, size, etc.
- Fore, middle, & back ground
- **texture**: tactile or visual; real or implied
Principles of Design

- **unity**: harmony or chaos created by arrangement of elements
- **balance**: symmetrical, asymmetrical, or radial balance
- **proportion & scale**: relationship among elements (size, quantity)
- **emphasis**: focal point, hierarchy
- **contrast**: opposed elements
- **gradation**: *gradual* shift in color (e.g. warm to cool) or tone (dark to light)
“We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age . . .”

I Corinthians 2:6
“The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness . . .”

I Corinthians 2:14
C. S. Lewis (1898-1963)

a quick overview of a complicated life
Family

mother, Florence
Family

- mother, Florence
- father, Albert
Family

- mother, Florence
- father, Albert
- brother, Warnie
Family

- mother, Flora
- father, Albert
- brother, Warnie
- Janie Moore, friend & . . . ?
Family

- mother, Florence
- father, Albert
- brother, Warnie
- Mrs. Moore, friend & more?
- Joy Davidman, wife (1956-60)
Joy Davidman

- 1946: finds God; reads CSL
- 1952: meets CSL in England
- 1953: divorce from Bill Gresham; relocates w/ boys
- 1956: April, civil marriage to CSL; Oct., cancer found
- 1957: church wedding; recovery & late honeymoon in ‘58
- 1960: death & A Grief Observed
Friends

Arthur Greeves, school friend
Friends

- Arthur Greeves, school friend
- J. R. R. Tolkien, prof
Friends

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- Dorothy Sayers, novelist
Friends

➤ Arthur Greeves, school friend
➤ J. R. R. Tolkien, prof
➤ Dorothy Sayers, novelist
➤ Father Walter Adams, confessor (1941-52)

—Society of St. John the Evangelist
An Academic Life

1908-10: Wynyard School
1911-13: Cherbourg School
1913-14: Malvern College
1914-17: private instruction in town Great Bookham
1917-23: University College, Oxford; earns rare “triple first” (1st in class) in classics, philosophy, & English literature
An Academic Life

1924-25: temp. teacher & lecturer (philosophy), Oxford
1925-54: tutorial fellow in English language & lit., Oxford
1930s: popular lectures
1940s: literary fame outside academia; peers’ disdain
1955-63: English “Chair” at Cambridge

Magdalene College in 1920s
A Winding Journey to Faith

❖ 1908: mother’s death; disappearance of happiness

❖ 1913: the classics, the moderns, & a loss of faith

❖ c.1913: wonder, desire, & “Northerness” — Arthur Rackham’s illustrations to two of Richard Wagner’s operas: *Siegfried* and *The Twilight of the Gods*. Disbelief, but new war between reason & imagination . . .

❖ 1916: George MacDonald’s fantasy novel *Phantastes*, a “bright shadow,” & the baptism of CSL’s imagination

❖ 1917-18: the battlefields of France & a loud silence
“Not many years ago when I was an atheist, if anyone had asked me, ‘Why do you not believe in God?’ my reply would have run something like this . . .”

C. S. Lewis’ *The Problem of Pain* (1940)
Dark & Unimaginably Cold

- universal expanse, novelty of life, conflict & death (1-2)
- consciousness only leads to pain (2)
- reason leads to longing, loss, & cruelty (2-3)
- reality will end w/ the universe’s collapse; all human accomplishments and stories “will turn out in the end to have been a transitory and senseless contortion upon the idiotic face of infinite matter” (3)
“A Young man who wishes to remain a sound Atheist cannot be too careful of his reading. There are traps everywhere.”

from C. S. Lewis’ autobiography *Surprised by Joy* (1955)
A Winding Journey to Faith

- 1917-23: study in philosophy, literature, humanities
- 1924-25: tutors & lectures in undergrad philosophy, corrects examination papers for extra income
- 1925-27: teaches philosophy & English literature
- 1927-54: lecturing & tutoring in English at Oxford
“If the universe is so bad, or even half so bad, how on earth did human beings ever come to attribute it to the activity of a wise and good Creator? . . . The direct inference from black to white, from evil flower to virtuous root, from senseless work to a workman infinitely wise, staggers belief” (3).

from C. S. Lewis’ *The Problem of Pain* (1940)
Claiming Faith

- Tolkien’s counsel: reason, yes, but imagination too . . .

- Step 1: noting the uncanny Numinous, & the difference between spiritual awe & biological fear (5-10)

- Step 2: consciousness of a moral law “at once approved and disobeyed” (10-11)

- Step 3: recognizing the non-intuitive connection between the Numinous & morality (11-13)

- Step 4: Jesus Christ, “solving” the problem of pain, and identifying entropy’s true endgame (13-15)
“In a sense; [Christianity] creates, rather than solves, the problem of pain, for pain would be no problem unless, side by side with our daily experience of this painful world, we had received what we think a good assurance that ultimate reality is righteous and loving” (14).

from C. S. Lewis’ *The Problem of Pain* (1940)
Rejecting Faith

- the justification for belief “does not amount to logical compulsion. At every stage of religious development man may rebel, if not without violence to his own nature, yet without absurdity” (14).
- ignore the Numinous (14)
- regard moral law as an illusion (14-15)
- “refuse to identify the Numinous with the righteous, and remain a barbarian, worshipping sexuality, or the dead, or the lifeforce, or the future” (15).
A Few Key Texts

- The Space Trilogy of novels (1938, 1943, 1945)
- *The Problem of Pain* (1940)
- radio talks, later *Mere Christianity* (1941-44; 1952)
- *The Screwtape Letters* (1942)
- The Chronicles of Narnia (1950-56)
- *Surprised by Joy* (1955) & *Till We Have Faces* (1956)
- *A Grief Observed* (1961)
A Few Core Concepts

- free will & likelihood of suffering (Problem 19, 24)
- *ecumenical*, or “mere” Christianity (Problem xii)
- translating theology into the vernacular
- allegory a matter of philosophical necessity
- faith requires reason & imagination alike
Divine Omnipotence (chp. 2 of *The Problem of Pain*)

- omnipotence: power to do the *intrinsically possible* (18)
- free will requires *independent* natural laws that are relatively fixed, miracles notwithstanding (19-23, 25)
- free will enables competition as well as courtesy (24)
- if God corrected all human abuses, free will would disappear (24-25)
“Try to exclude the possibility of suffering which the order of nature and the existence of free wills involve, and you find that you have excluded life itself” (25).

from C. S. Lewis’ *The Problem of Pain* (1940)