A Problem of Modernism:

A Conversation between C.S. Lewis and Some Modern Episcopal Bishops

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To Dad, for introducing me to Lewis; Professor Kreeft, for deepening my enjoyment and understanding of him; Tanya Bea, for inspiring and supporting me in the imitation of my intellectual master; and Mom, for everything.
A meeting of several bishops of the Episcopal Church, USA. Present are: Bishop
Frank T. Chamberlain, Bishop Shelby Moderno Bishop Winston Oak, Bishop Confucius
Fenster, and several others. Bishop Chamberlain is nearing the end of his address to the
assembly. Bishop Moderno is seated on the dais behind him.

Chamberlain: It is also part of the reality of the Episcopal Church that we live with
divergent points of view regarding the interpretation of scripture and understandings of
the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church. Though we believe “the Holy
Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, and to contain all
things necessary to salvation,” as it is stated in the ordination liturgy, there is no neutral
reading of scripture, and we interpret various passages differently while seeking to be
faithful to the mind of Christ. It is therefore important to recognize that people of
genuine faith can and do differ in their understandings of what we agree is the “Word of
God.”¹ Now to offer one point of view, please welcome The Rt. Rev. Shelby Moderno.

Bishops Moderno and Chamberlain exchange places and polite applause.

Moderno: Thank you, Bishop Chamberlain. The expansion of knowledge over the last
several hundred years has obliterated the way reality was perceived by the church during
writing of the creeds.² To insist that we are bounded by their words is preposterous.
After all, the creeds are merely a reflection of the popular points of view at the time of
their composure. They ought to be rewritten every few centuries to keep up with the

¹ Frank T. Griswold, “A word to the Episcopal Church.”
times.\textsuperscript{3} Who can literally believe in a superman-like Ascension and other such fantastic stories today without their heads in the sand? The God I know is neither concrete nor specific.\textsuperscript{4} The God I know is love—unbounded, freely given, overflowing love. This love that is God is at the core of all that-

\textit{Suddenly, a man appears on the dais from thin air. Some in the assembly gasp; others blink hard. A few yawn. Bishop Chamberlain starts, then quickly regains his composure.}

\textbf{Moderno}: Oh dear. Someone please call an ambulance; I’m hallucinating. I knew it was too hot in here.

\textit{The man turns to address Bishop Moderno, but before he has a chance to speak, Bishop Chamberlain strides forward from his place behind the podium to meet him.}

\textbf{Chamberlain}: You there, what is the meaning of this? The rules set forth at the beginning of this meeting clearly state that all comments from the floor will be taken at the end of each address, and Bishop Moderno is clearly not finished!

\textbf{Moderno}: Bishop Chamberlain, to whom, may I ask, are you speaking?

\textbf{Chamberlain}: To the man in front of you, of course.

\textbf{Moderno}: That man there?

\textbf{Chamberlain}: Yes.

\textbf{Moderno}: The one who appeared from thin air?

\textsuperscript{3} \textit{Ibid.}, 19.
\textsuperscript{4} \textit{Ibid.}, 4.
Chamberlain: Yes, that’s the one.

Moderno: Oh. He’s not a man; he’s an hallucination. Men don’t appear from thin air. No educated person believes such a thing is possible in this day and age.

Chamberlain: I see him too.

Moderno: Fascinating! You and I are having the same hallucination!

Bishop Oak: [from the floor] What are you saying? Everyone here can see quite plainly that there’s a man there, and everyone saw just as plainly that he appeared from thin air.

Chamberlain: [to Bishop Oak] I understand that you might be upset and fearful, Bishop Oak. There is certainly a diversity of viewpoints here. After all, we all have our own experience and understanding to draw upon in interpreting this event.

Man: Your pardon, Sir- I must make clear that I am not a hallucination. It may well look as though I appeared from thin air to you, but I’m quite certain I came from the most beautiful country I’ve ever seen.

Chamberlain: What are you talking about?

Oak: How did you get here?

Chamberlain: Please, we haven’t time for such questions now.

Man: My apologies, bishops. If you give me but a moment I will try to explain how I came to find myself here.

Chamberlain: Your presence is most inconvenient to the smooth operation of this conference; it would really make things more pleasant if you just had a seat. We really ought to respect the conference schedule…

Oak: Clearly something special is happening here Chamberlain. Let him speak so we may know what it is.
Chamberlain: Very well.

*Murmurs of assent*

Man: Well, as far as I can remember, my journey was something like this: The story begins today at home with my brother, who noticed that I was feeling quite drowsy, and helped me to bed for the afternoon. (My health has been failing me for some time, and so my strength is quite limited.) Shortly after tea I got up to fetch a book, but I stood up a little too quickly. I became quite dizzy and fainted on the spot.

The next thing I remember is being startled out of sleep by a man calling out, “Next stop, Niggle’s Parish!” I shook the drowse from my head and took stock of my surroundings. I was in quaint little coach, empty except for myself and the conductor. The small engine let out a whistle, and creaked to a halt in front of a lonely platform. It was a glorious day, full of sunshine and soft green turf. The air was loud with the voices of birds and the buzzing of bees. I stepped onto the platform, and set off immediately down a small, well-worn path, with strength such as I hadn’t known in years. After a length of walking among the pleasantest country I have ever known, the path ran along the edge of a very tall forest and crossed over a trickle of a stream running down from it. I paused for a rest and a drink under the arms of a large, soft, motherly-looking beech growing next to the stream. I don’t know how long I stayed there; I felt I could have remained forever, perfectly content. But after a time I felt I ought to go on. I continued along the path, and it curved gently away from the edge of the wood into a grassy meadow. The ground began to rise a little. The path led me to the crest of a low hill. As I reached its brow, I froze. Before me the path wound down the further side of the hill and back into the woods, which stretched on and on into the distance. On the far side of
the woods I could just make out the path, which seemed to join a larger way. And the larger way went to the Mountains. It was the site of these mountains that made my heart pause; pause, and then leap for joy. It was as if every mountain I had ever seen or imagined was a dim memory of a shadow of these Mountains. Ever since I was a child, I longed for them. My present surroundings were indeed wonderful, but I wished to reach the mountains as soon as my legs would carry me. To that end, I immediately resumed my journey down the footpath.

The path bent back to the left towards the wood again, but instead of running along the edge, it turned square to lead directly under the trees. Where the path met the trees, I found a most curious thing. Standing in the middle of the path was a closed door in a doorframe, but no wall. Having heard of such doors that lead to nowhere in old stories before, and of the magical faërie lands to which they might lead, my imagination was exploding with possibilities of what might be on the other side. “Perhaps it might even be an Elvin kingdom,” I thought. I was naturally curious enough to open it. I stepped forward and turned the handle. If you are a lover of faërie, like myself, you might imagine my surprise at what I found on the other side of the door: A conference of American bishops discussing modernist theology. My imagination sobered immediately.

I had worked much of my Christian life writing against watered-down versions of Christianity. Indeed, Christianity was turning into Christianity-and-water so often that I wondered how long it would be before it became just water. Before the journey, I had prayed continuously and earnestly about the state of the Church as often as I could, and to find out how I could help keep her from lopping off her own Head. As I stood before the
door and pondered, it became clear to me that I ought not walk around the door, but that I was meant to go through it. It occurred to me that perhaps this meeting was my final task and last chance to directly affect the fate of the Church. Even as I formulated that thought I felt sure of it: I was meant to go through this door and meet whatever challenge lay on the other side. I strode through, and found myself here.

Moderno: Now I’m sure of it - I am hallucinating.

Lewis: What makes you so sure?

Moderno: What you just described is clearly impossible. Moreover, I saw you appear with my own eyes.

Lewis: Isn’t that evidence for the truth of my story?

Moderno: But I already know that you couldn’t have just appeared. Therefore, you must be a figment of my imagination.

Lewis: Then how do you explain others in the room seeing and hearing me?

Moderno: You must be a collective hallucination, or maybe I’ve gone mad and everyone here is just humoring me.

Chamberlain: Come now; our different opinions about the presence of this man needn’t be cause for strife between us.

Lewis: I think I’m beginning to see my challenge. From what I’ve heard before stepping through the door, it appears that you, Bishop…

Moderno: Moderno. Shelby Moderno.

Lewis: Pleased to make your acquaintance, Bishop. My name’s C.S. Lewis. My friends call me Jack.

Chamberlain: C.S. Lewis! But you’ve been dead for forty years!
**Lewis**: Surprisingly, that does not come as a surprise to me. I must have not fainted, but died. What year is it?

**Chamberlain**: It’s 2004.

**Lewis**: Judging by what I’ve heard of your speeches and conversation thus far, it doesn’t seem like much has improved since when I was alive.

**Moderno**: Don’t you find us quite new and exciting?

**Lewis**: I’m afraid I don’t. But I think we do have much to discuss. From what I heard before I stepped through the door, it seems that you and I, Bishop Moderno, have very different ideas as to what it means to be Christian; ideas, it seems, on which the fate of the Church lay.

**Chamberlain**: Yes, we have different ideas, but we all live in community through our baptism as one Church.

**Lewis**: Perhaps, but I think our doctrines are contradictory, and these cannot abide the presence of the other. A “house divided against itself shall not stand.”

**Chamberlain**: Wait a moment Lewis. You are very highly regarded in the Church, you know. Our last General Convention was an historic one. Among other more highly-publicized events, your name was added to the Calendar of Remembrances, so it should come as no surprise that I’ve read some of your works. I remember you frequently claiming that you are not concerned with doctrinal issues. For example you were always very reluctant to comment on what separates Anglicans from Rome, and refused to take part in the debate between High and Low Church. Why the sudden change?

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5 Matt. 12:25 (King James Version)
6 General Convention Resolution Number A094
Lewis: You are quite right that I was always reluctant to speak on such topics. To me the real distinction is not between high and low, but between religion with a real Supernaturalism and Salvationism on the one hand, and all watered-down and modernist versions on the other. At issue now in the Anglican Communion is a divide of the latter sort. The church has three options. She may either maintain status quo and continue on with two sets of contradictory doctrine until she disintegrates completely, which is already happening; or heretical doctrine may be abolished and the church healed; or if those who proclaim false doctrine will not repent, then from them we must part company absolutely. I see now that I am here as a voice of reason to you few bishops gathered here. I do not intend to lay down definitive arguments for the historic faith of the Church—there are better men than I for such a task— but to answer your own particular arguments.

Chamberlain: Come now, our differences aren’t as severe as all that. There are disagreements on some points of doctrine, but the situation isn’t so dire a matter as you make out.

Lewis: I’m afraid it is. Heresy and apostasy are rampant in the Church, and respect for Biblical authority has become rare. If one ceases to believe the Christian doctrines, why continue to call oneself a Christian?

Moderno: Just because some of us have progressed past antiquated theistic interpretations of God doesn’t mean we have ceased to believe.

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Lewis: I don’t doubt that you believe something. The question is whether that something is rightly called Christian, and whether those who continue to hold traditional beliefs ought to allow such contradictory teaching to exist in the same church.

Chamberlain: I understand that some people are upset and fearful of some of the changes taking place in the church. This is a very difficult time for us all, but the important thing is that we love one another. We mustn’t forget that we are commanded to love our neighbor as ourselves.

Lewis: Yes, it is of the utmost importance that we love one another as we love ourselves. But how do we love ourselves? When I look into my own mind, I find that I do not love myself by thinking myself a dear old chap or having affectionate feelings. I do not love myself because I think I am particularly good, but just because I am myself and quite apart from my character. I might detest something I have done. Nevertheless, I do not cease to love myself. Love is not an affectionate feeling, but the steady wish for the loved one’s ultimate good as far as it can be obtained. Therefore if our Christian brethren have gone so badly wrong that their doctrine may no longer be meaningfully called Christian and we cannot convince them of their error, then charity demands that they be cut from the body of the Church, lest they be content in their error or lead others astray.

Chamberlain: What do you mean by “lead others astray”?  

Lewis: We all will meet either a heavenly or hellish end: How can a church that teaches false beliefs prepare her members for the land of Eternal Truth?

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9 Lewis, “Answers to Questions on Christianity,” God in the Dock. 49
Modern: Wait a moment. What do you mean when you say we will meet a heavenly or hellish end? Do you really believe in such an antiquated notion as a literal heaven and hell?

Lewis: I do, and we will all end up in one place or the other. I must say though that I don’t quite understand how truth can become antiquated, unless of course you mean that some particular truth has been known for a long time.

Modern: How do you know that they even exist in the manner that you claim? Have you seen heaven and hell with your own eyes?

Lewis: No… well, maybe I have seen the borderlands of heaven. But I believe that it existed before I was it, and I don’t expect you to believe it on my authority. I believed in heaven because I’ve been told.

Modern: You say you’re Anglican, eh? Are you quite sure you’re not from somewhere in the South- part of some Fundamentalist extremist sect?

Lewis: I’m not sure what geography has to do with it, nor what you mean by Fundamentalist. If you mean by Fundamentalist one of the no dancing, drinking, or smoking sort, then I most emphatically am not. I find such beliefs to be unscriptural, tyrannical, and insolent. But please, let us stick to the argument.

Modern: Alright. You believe in a literal heaven and hell because you’ve been told that it exists. Is this Heaven up past the clouds where Jesus went at the Ascension?

Lewis: If you are trying to find out if I believe that Heaven is a physical place within the Universe, then the answer is no.

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10 Lewis to a Lady, Letters, 262.
**Moderno:** But the Gospels say that Jesus “was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God.”¹¹ He’d have to be like Superman,¹² and where is it that Jesus is sitting?

**Lewis:** I don’t believe that Jesus is literally seated anywhere. I believe that some language is literal, and some is figurative.

**Moderno:** How can you be sure which language is which?

**Lewis:** I do not think it is very difficult. All that concerns the un-incarnate activities of God- His operation on that plane of being where sense cannot enter- must be taken along with imagery which we know to be, in the literal sense, untrue. But there can be no defense of applying the same treatment to the miracles of the Incarnate God. They are recorded as events on this earth which affected human senses. They are the sort of thing we can describe literally.¹³

**Moderno:** What about cases when one isn’t sure what is being described?

**Lewis:** It’s really quite simple. Do you think Jesus was a good teacher?

**Moderno:** The best.

**Lewis:** Does a good teacher know his audience and how they will respond to particular teaching methods, and adapt his own methods to whatever best conveys the lesson to them?

**Moderno:** Yes.

**Lewis:** When Jesus says, “I am the vine,” do you think His disciples asked why He had no visible roots or leaves?

**Moderno:** Of course not.

¹¹ Mark 16:19
¹² Spong, *Change or Die*, 13.
Lewis: Do you think that they took Him literally when he spoke of heaven and hell?

Moderno: Yes, of course. A primitive culture such as existed then couldn’t help but believe so.

Lewis: So if Jesus was a good teacher, and He knew that His disciples would have interpreted some things literally and some figuratively, don’t you think we ought to do the same?  

Moderno: I think I understand what you’re trying to say, but in doing so you’re ignoring the last two thousand years of scientific development.

Lewis: What do you mean?

Moderno: With our level of scientific knowledge, the old superstitions just can’t be believed anymore. The laws of Nature cannot be changed. Take for instance the Virgin Birth. The existence of the egg-cell disproves its possibility. This legend was born out of the idea that only the male contributes to the creation of new life, and that the female is merely a receptacle for his “seed”. Otherwise, Mary must have been an equal genetic participant in the procreation of the life of Jesus.

Lewis: The exact details of such a miracle- an exact point at which the supernatural enters this world (whether by the creation of a new spermatozoon or the reutilization of an ovum without a spermatozoon or the development of a fetus without an ovum) are not part of the doctrine. These are matters in which no one is obliged and everyone is free, to speculate. You are attempting to refute a doctrine by attacking a theory which is not a part of it.

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**Moderno:** Even if I allow you that particular argument, belief in supernatural events remains preposterous, and on the same principle. You see, the world operates according to fixed laws, which brook no interference from any external source, divine or otherwise. The Virgin Birth cannot be historical truth because we know that there must be a physical introduction of genetic material into the egg. I’m fairly certain that cloning didn’t exist two thousand years ago, so there must have been a spermatozoon to create the person of Jesus. The laws of Nature demand it.

**Lewis:** It seems to me that St. Joseph knew this particular law.

**Moderno:** Do you mean to claim that a Jewish carpenter living two thousand years ago knew about fertilization and cell division and the stages of embryonic life? That’s fantastic!

**Lewis:** No, I don’t mean that St. Joseph was a biologist. But when he discovered that Mary was pregnant, he called off the marriage, didn’t he?

**Moderno:** Yes, of course. I would too if I thought my fiancée was being unfaithful.

**Lewis:** You’ve seen for yourself then that Joseph knew the law of Nature when it comes to procreation.

**Moderno:** But he came to believe in the Virgin Birth afterwards. That proves that he thought the laws of nature were malleable.

**Lewis:** On the contrary, he must have known the laws of Nature to be unchanging. Otherwise, he couldn’t have regarded the Virgin Birth as miraculous.

**Moderno:** That’s a contradiction. How could one simultaneously believe in the inviolability of the laws of Nature and in the miraculous?

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17 Spong, *Change or Die*, 34.
**Lewis:** Belief in the inviolability of the laws of Nature is a prerequisite to belief in the miraculous.\(^\text{18}\) If one didn’t know that water doesn’t spontaneously turn into wine, or that bread doesn’t turn into stones, or that virgins don’t bear children, then it would be impossible to regard such occurrences as miraculous. St. Joseph knew the laws of Nature, but he also knew that there was something beyond Nature that can interfere with her workings. Thus he came to believe that the Virgin Birth was something supernatural.

**Moderno:** I don’t think you quite understand what I’m saying. Let me ask you something: Do you think God could make two and two five?

**Lewis:** No, I don’t think that’s possible.

**Moderno:** Then how can you argue for the miraculous? The laws of Nature are like math: they describe how things must happen.

**Lewis:** Aha. I think I see the problem. Let’s say you have two twenty-dollar bills in your wallet and you leave it on the table here when you go home. If you come back and retrieve it tomorrow, will the laws of Nature tell you how much money will be in your wallet when you return?

**Moderno:** Of course, provided no one touches my wallet.

**Lewis:** You see, that’s just it. The laws of Nature tell you what will happen *provided* there’s no interference. The same amount of money will remain in your wallet unless a thief takes the money out of it or an anonymous donor puts money into it. A miracle is something that’s not a part of Nature interfering with it.

**Moderno:** But science has shown that there couldn’t be any such thing outside of Nature!

**Lewis:** Really? Which one?\(^\text{19}\)

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\(^{18}\) Lewis, “*Man or Rabbit?*” *God in the Dock*, 100.

\(^{19}\) Previous line of argumentation from Lewis, “*Laws of Nature,*” *God in the Dock*, 72-75.
**Moderno:** Have you been oblivious to the March of Science? Science has been destroying the traditional Biblical worldview for the last five hundred years!

**Lewis:** How?

**Moderno:** Alright, let’s start with Galileo. Building upon the work of Copernicus, he made some startling discoveries, which changed forever the way we would think about the skies and the God who presumably inhabited them. Instead of the Sun revolving around the Earth, he discovered that the Earth revolves around the Sun. This meant that the Earth could no longer be envisioned as the center of the universe and thus God might not be quite as involved in the day-to-day affairs of human beings as previously thought. This was the first mighty blow to the assumptions the Church depended upon for its understanding of God. Next, Newton discovered fixed inviolable laws by which nature operates, discarding the need for or possibility of miracles. Darwin’s theory of evolution showed that instead of being a little lower than the angels, we are a little higher than the animals, thereby putting into question the belief in an immortal soul attached to us in the womb. Later, Einstein introduced relativity as something present in all things, including that which religious human beings had once called “eternal and unchanging truth.” Then the insights of the astrophysicists brought to our awareness a new sense of how large were the skies and how lonely was human life. The sum of this scientific progress and development renders the traditional beliefs in a theistic God inoperative.

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20 Spong, *Change or Die*, 32.
21 *Ibid.*, 33
22 *Ibid.*, 34
23 *Ibid.*, 37-8
24 *Ibid.*, 39
25 *Ibid.*, 40
Lewis: That’s quite a bit of information all at once. Let’s analyze your argument piece by piece. That way we’ll be able to decide if the arguments you presented are good ones or not.

Moderno: You religious people are so judgmental.

Lewis: What a curious statement. Putting aside the fact that it is an attempt to impugn my character instead of responding to my suggestion, I wonder who you mean by “religious people.”

Moderno: Religious people are those whose interest lies in telling everyone that their beliefs about God are right and everyone else’s are wrong and therefore evil.

Lewis: I don’t think I should call such people “religious”. Doesn’t “religious people” simply mean people when they are being religious? And those who are being religious are not “interested in religion.” Men who have gods worship those gods; it is the spectators who describe this as “religion.” The Maenads thought about Dionysus, not about religion. The same goes for Christianity. 26

Moderno: Wouldn’t you call yourself a religious person?

Lewis: Yes, I would when I am engaged in religious activity. But what we are doing now is not religious activity. Rather, we are speaking about a particular religion, Christianity, and trying to treat it in an objective fashion.

Moderno: Then I suppose I could say instead that people interested in religion are very judgmental.

Lewis: Of course they are, and you are one of them. Every other person with a properly functioning mind is also judgmental.

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26 Lewis, “Revival or Decay?” God in the Dock, 250.
**Moderno:** I beg your pardon! I dislike Judgmentalism immensely, and would never engage in such behavior myself.

**Lewis:** Oh, I think I see the problem. I believe we have been using a term ambiguously. I think we mean two different things by “judgmental.” You have used it to refer to “Judgmentalism”. (I am always wary of words that end in –ism. They are frequently easy labels to slap on someone with whom one doesn’t want to agree, and then cease thinking and henceforth react to the label instead of the argument.) If by “Judgmentalism” you mean the condemnation of a person because he disagrees with you, then I too dislike it and believe it an un-Christian thing to do. But “judging” is an essential part of thinking. I meant the term to refer to the second act of the mind, which consists of relating two things by predicating one concept of another. Judgments about things are essential to any meaningful thought. Besides, I don’t know what being religious has to do with judgmentalism.

**Moderno:** Alright, Well on with it then.

**Lewis:** I propose that we examine each argument loosely by order of what I deem to be most recognizably fallacious, since if the arguments are true and independent from one another, then the order of examination should be inconsequential to the determination of their accuracy.

**Moderno:** That’s fine with me. I haven’t studied logic in many long years, so it will be easier to hear less complicated arguments first.

**Lewis:** Excellent. You said, “Einstein introduced relativity as something present in all things, including that which religious human beings had once called ‘eternal and unchanging truth.’” In general terms, what is Einstein’s theory of relativity?
**Moderno:** His theory basically means that space and time are different aspects of the same thing.

**Lewis:** Did this happen sometime in the twentieth century?

**Moderno:** Yes, it was discovered in the last century.

**Lewis:** No, that’s not what I mean. I mean, was there a change in nature sometime this past century?

**Moderno:** No, of course not. The nature of the universe is not contingent on what we know about it. Otherwise, when people thought the world was flat, it really would have been flat, and that’s preposterous.

**Lewis:** And do you also believe that the laws of the natural world don’t change depending on time?

**Moderno:** Yes.

**Lewis:** So then Einstein’s theory of relativity is a fixed and unchanging law, independent of time, which, you say, proves that there is no eternal and unchanging truth. But this law, if true, is an unchanging changing property of Time. Your conclusion is self-contradictory.

**Moderno:** Uh….

**Lewis:** You also claim that Darwin’s theory puts into question the existence of the soul, by re-framing our understanding of ourselves in relation to animals instead of angels. But how does this change anything? It is like saying a glass is half-empty instead of half-full. It has only a psychological effect. The ancients defined man as a rational animal- I don’t see how scientific evidence for this description affects our relation to angels or whether or not we have souls.
**Moderno**: I am pointing out how belief has become harder as time has passed.

**Lewis**: But we are concerned here with what is true, not with how hard it might be to believe truth. You seem to be making the same sort of appeal to the emotions in your next argument. You say that since the world is not in the center of the universe, you conclude that God might not be so involved with its daily affairs.

**Moderno**: That was the fear that began to creep into the minds of believers.

**Lewis**: In order to reach this conclusion, one must believe that God is more involved in things in the center of the universe than things not in the center of the universe.

**Moderno**: Yes, and this was a natural belief for people who thought that God sat on a throne in the sky, just beyond that blue barrier.

**Lewis**: Aha. I see two fallacies here. First, you have an ambiguous term. By “center” you mean the spatial center of the universe. You also use “center” in the sense of “center of attention.” Clearly, these two are not the same.

**Moderno**: I wasn’t trying to give a formal proof. I’m simply describing the effect on the consciousness of believers when they learned this truth. It was much harder to believe in a God in the sky looking down on us and taking care of us.

**Lewis**: Who do you suppose held this conception of God as sitting in the sky looking down on us? Could you kindly tell me which of the Fathers of the Church or what doctrine asserted that God literally sits on the throne in the sky looking down on us as though we were toy soldiers?

**Moderno**: The Nicene Creed says that Jesus “ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.” He went up into the sky and sat down.
Lewis: And what makes you think that this is meant literally, and that heaven is in the sky?

Moderno: Come now. “Sky” and “heaven” are synonyms. Naturally everyone thought God was “up there.”

Lewis: They do share a similar meaning in one sense yes, but they are not completely synonymous. When was the last time you heard someone discussing the joy of spending eternity in the sky? “Heaven” has an additional meaning which “sky” does not.

Moderno: Do you mean to tell me that of the great masses of Christians through the ages, no peasant or anyone else thought of God as up in the sky?

Lewis: No, I suppose some simple folk did have that literal understanding. But it was never the teaching of the Church. Anthropomorphism was condemned by the Church as soon as the question was explicitly before her.27 The “Throne of God” is metaphorical language. As I said earlier, we can’t help but describe the un-incarnate God through metaphor. Exposure to Galileo’s work would not be a challenge to the faith, but an opportunity for those who interpreted the words literally to develop a deeper and fuller understanding of what such language really means. The Bible speaks of the omnipresence of God throughout. God is immanent and transcendent in all places in the universe. To say that the discovery that the Earth is not in the center of the universe affected the doctrine of the church is simply nonsense.

Moderno: Well, these are just a few arguments I happen to remember at the moment anyway. You can’t expect me to recall detailed scientific explanations at the drop of a hat.

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Lewis: No, especially when such explanations do not exist. I have already explained to you how belief in the miraculous requires knowledge of the laws of Nature rather than the laws of Nature proscribing the miraculous. Newton’s description of particular laws could not affect the philosophical possibility of miracles. You see, Science could never disprove the supernatural because that which is outside of Nature is beyond the scope of Science. Science studies nature, not what is beyond it. For questions about the supernatural, one must go to the metaphysician.28

Moderno: What about multiple-universe theories and pre-big bang space? These things are beyond the universe.

Lewis: If such things exist (though they seem to be pure speculation) they would merely be extensions of the natural. If these theories were true, then they would only mean that the Universe is a bit larger and more complex than we thought. The subject has no interaction with the question of the supernatural.

Moderno: But don’t you see? The real point about science is that as our knowledge is expanding, so must our beliefs. Our ancestors had such little knowledge of the universe, their beliefs are understandable. Wouldn’t it be natural for those who had no knowledge of the vastness of the universe to believe in a God who lives beyond the sky, and that Jesus could rise up to Him in a cloud?

Lewis: On the beliefs of the Medievals, Bishop, I might claim authority. As you may or may not know, my chief area of study was medieval and renaissance literature. Are you familiar with Ptolemy?

Moderno: Yes, he was an ancient Greek astronomer.

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Lewis: His text, the *Almagest*, was the standard astronomical handbook used through the Middle Ages. Do you know what this book said?

Moderno: I know he thought the Earth was in the center of the Universe.

Lewis: Yes, that was an error he made. But another thing he said might surprise you. In Book one, chapter five of the *Almagest*, Ptolemy writes, in rough translation, “The earth, in relation to the distance of the stars, has no appreciable size and must be treated as a fixed point.”

Moderno: Oh, come on! That couldn’t have been a widespread belief in the Middle Ages.

Lewis: Why not?

Moderno: In the Middle Ages the world was full of backwards people who didn’t know anything about science. Just look at all the miracles they claim happened! A talking statue here, a walking headless body there; it’s crazy!

Lewis: Your argument, Bishop, has just come full circle. You say that the ancients could believe in miracles because they didn’t know the laws of Nature and various scientific facts, and anyone who doesn’t know the laws of Nature could believe in miracles. I have just shown you that they did actually know of the laws of Nature and of those facts which you claim refutes the possibility of the miraculous, but you claim that they couldn’t have known these things because they believed in the miraculous. You’re committing a fallacy by assuming the conclusion to prove a premise.

Moderno: Well, living in this day and age, I just can’t believe in the supernatural.

Lewis: There are only four honest ways we can respond to an argument Sir: We can refute it by claiming ambiguous terms, false premises, or invalid logic, or if we are

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29 Preceding line of argumentation from: Lewis, “Religion and Science” *God in the Dock*, 72-75
unable to do any of these things, then we must agree with the conclusion. I have
responded to each of your arguments in one of these four ways; can you respond to mine?

Moderno: Not in the way you want me to, but I know I don’t feel convinced by your
refutations.

Lewis: Logical arguments are usually not designed to produce emotional agreement, but
intellectual assent. How you feel about something doesn’t affect whether it is true or not.

Moderno: I suppose so, but it’s very hard to agree with something one doesn’t like.

Lewis: Yes, it is. It is far harder than most imagine.

Moderno: I can’t hold off your refutations, but I still don’t believe in a theistic
interpretation of God.

Lewis: Then would you at least agree that we hold contradictory understandings of God?

Moderno: I think my up-to-date understanding is more compatible with the times than
your old-fashioned beliefs. But I don’t think this means that our beliefs can’t co-exist.

Lewis: Tell me, Bishop. Do you tell time by an argument?

Moderno: What are you talking about?

Lewis: When you want to find out what time it is, what do you use?

Moderno: A clock, of course. Are you feeling alright?

Lewis: If by asking about how I feel you are wondering about my emotional state, it has
nothing to do with the matter. Courteous words or else hard knocks are a gentleman’s
only language. If you are inquiring as to my mental health, let us stick to judging the
strength of each other’s arguments. I think you shall find this one quite sound. So you
use a clock to tell time, correct?

Moderno: Clearly.

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Lewis: And what is the purpose of an argument?

Moderno: To convince the other person you’re right about something.

Lewis: Oh, dear. The problem is far worse than I imagined.

Moderno: Isn’t that what debate’s about?

Lewis: Winning is not what debate is supposed to be about, though I admit it often is. Anyone who follows politics knows that. But that wasn’t my question. I asked, what is the purpose of an argument? Aren’t they for finding out what’s true?

Moderno: What’s the difference between what you said an argument is for and what I said?

Lewis: The difference is that agreement is no guarantee of accuracy. I may persuade you that the sky isn’t blue but that doesn’t mean that the sky really isn’t blue. You said that argumentation is designed to produce agreement. I said that argumentation is designed to find truth. If we are both honest, then when we find out that something is true, we will believe it and thus produce agreement.

Moderno: What is truth?

Lewis: Well, the answer is quite simple. Truth is simply that which describes reality. Aristotle defined truth thus: “If one says of what is that it is, or of what is not that it is not, he speaks the truth; but if one says of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, he does not speak the truth.” Truth is always about something, but reality is that about which truth is.31

Moderno: There you go again, using such antiquated ideas, but for the sake of conversation, I’ll let it pass this time.

Lewis: Do you agree then that arguments ought to be used to find truth?

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**Moderno:** I suppose.

**Lewis:** So if clocks are for telling time, and arguments are for finding truth, then why do you keep trying to refute my arguments by telling me that they’re old?\(^{32}\)

**Moderno:** Oh, I see what you’re saying. Whether an idea is new or old doesn’t necessarily have anything to do with whether it is true or not.

**Lewis:** Right. Now let’s get back to our discussion. Will you admit that theistic and non-theistic understandings of God are contradictory?

**Moderno:** Well, no. We may not be able to believe the same things, but like I said, don’t see any reason for them not to co-exist in the same church.

**Lewis:** But if a church consists of people who all believe different things, what’s the point of having a church at all?

**Moderno:** We are all united in common prayer.\(^{33}\)

**Lewis:** But what is the use of us all saying the same words if we all mean different, even contradictory things by them? How can you say the Creeds or celebrate the Eucharist at all when you don’t even believe in the divinity of Christ?

**Moderno:** I don’t deny that Jesus was divine. In the sense that Jesus was the model after which we should all mold our lives, he was divine.

**Lewis:** I think that is one thing you cannot say about Jesus. In my view it is impossible to hold that Jesus was the perfect man, or even a good man, without admitting His divinity.\(^{34}\) Jesus is either God or He was a bad man, and I can prove it.

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\(^{32}\) Kreeft, *Heaven and Hell*, 32.


\(^{34}\) Lewis, “Rejoinder to Dr. Pittenger,” *God in the Dock*, 180.
**Moderno:** But Jesus was God—Love is God, and Jesus was the perfect embodiment of love.

**Lewis:** Do you think that this is what a Jewish person who heard Jesus’ claim to be God thought?

**Moderno:** No, I don’t think they were sophisticated enough for such a view.

**Lewis:** If you recall, we’ve already agreed that Jesus was a good teacher.

**Moderno:** Yes, I said He was the best.

**Lewis:** And a good teacher takes into account how his pupils will interpret his words.

**Moderno:** I see what you’re driving at. If Jesus was a great teacher, and great teachers take into account how his pupils will interpret his words, then Jesus took into account how his pupils would interpret his words, and therefore meant that He was God in the literal, personal, and theistic sense. Do you really mean this to be proof that Jesus ought to be understood in such a way?

**Lewis:** No, I don’t. I simply want to make the point that when one reads old books, one ought to take into account the expressed meaning of the author; that we should apply Biblical understandings to the Bible and not twentieth-century meanings when we read the text.

**Chamberlain:** Excuse me. Before going any further, I’d like to ask a question.

**Lewis:** Go ahead.

**Chamberlain:** Practically speaking, what difference does it make whether one’s faith directs him to conceptualize Jesus as man become god or God become man?

**Lewis:** The difference is literally of the utmost importance. If what Bishop Moderno says is true, and Christ is God only in the sense that He is the embodiment of love, then

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35 Spong, *Change or Die*, 71.
Christianity is merely good advice. And if Christianity is merely one more bit of good advice, then it is of no importance. Its salvific quality is gone. Secondly, Christ’s divinity is the gate through which we must pass in order to accept all other Christian doctrine. If Jesus said it, and Jesus is God, then it must be true.

**Moderno:** If we know that he really said it.

**Lewis:** Let’s leave textual questions aside, and deal with the data as is. I am not a Biblical scholar, and I have not come to debate the authenticity of Scripture. I will only say this about them, and then leave the matter to rest: Judging by the style of the text, The Gospels are certainly not myth or legend (they are in that sense not good enough), and if untrue, it is a sort of prose fiction which did not exist until the eighteenth century. It is the little facts, like Jesus writing in the sand when the adulterous woman was brought before him, facts that have no doctrinal significance at all, that are the mark of an eyewitness account. But please, let us leave the question aside, as I have said all I can on the matter.

**Moderno:** Very well.

**Lewis:** The divinity of Christ is paramount for another reason: The fate of every one of us hangs in the balance. If He is God, then our ends will either be heavenly or hellish. What could be more important?

**Moderno:** That’s wish-fulfillment at its height. Trying to get to some far-off heaven is just a way to avoid working to improve the here-and-now.

**Lewis:** I believe you’ve just committed the genetic fallacy. Questioning my motive for claiming the existence of heaven makes no comment on the truth or falsehood of the

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37 Lewis, “What are we to Make of Jesus Christ?,” *God in the Dock,* 158.
proposition. Either there is a heaven or there is not. If there is not, then Christianity is false, for this doctrine is woven into its whole fabric. If there is, then this truth, like any other, must be faced, whether it is useful in social justice programs or no. There are rewards that do not sully motives.\(^{38}\) But all of these doctrines are dependent upon the true divinity of Christ. We cannot argue fruitfully about any other doctrine of the Church until that one is established.

**Moderno:** Alright. You said that you could prove Christ’s divinity in the theistic sense. Please do so now.

**Lewis:** The argument goes something like this: Christ claimed that he is God. Now either He’s right and He really is God, or he’s wrong, in which case he was a bad man. You’ve already asserted that He’s not a bad man, so He must be God.

**Moderno:** I certainly don’t feel convinced. But I remember what you were saying about emotions and the intellect, and I see how it’s important to try to be as honest as we can, especially when we feel like we don’t want to. So let’s examine the argument.

**Lewis:** Wonderful! I may be getting somewhere after all. Then you can judge for yourself whether this argument is a good one or not.

**Moderno:** I think some of your logic is rubbing off on me. Anyway, you say that we must conclude that Jesus was either God or bad because he claimed to be God. Your unstated premise must be that anyone who claims to be God and is not must be a bad man.

**Lewis:** Yes, that’s right.

**Moderno:** First, are you using your terms correctly? How do you know that Jesus meant that he was literally the God of the Old Testament when he claimed to be God? How do

you know that He didn’t mean that he was the embodiment of perfect love? You’ve already said his followers would not have thought this, but I want more direct evidence.

**Lewis:** We may dismiss this possibility pretty simply by looking at what Jesus actually claimed. Jesus claimed divinity in a number of ways, but let us cut straight to the two clearest. The first is the Tetragrammaton. It is the name God gave to Himself, which translates to, “I AM.” It was blasphemous to speak God’s name because one cannot do so without simultaneously claiming to be God Himself. By uttering that name, Jesus identified Himself as the God of Moses and Abraham; he clearly meant to identify himself with the Jewish understanding of God. Secondly, Jesus claimed to forgive sins.

**Moderno:** Aren’t we all supposed to forgive each other’s sins?

**Lewis:** Sins against ourselves, yes. If a man robs you it is right that you should forgive him. But suppose someone robbed you and then I showed up and said to him, “Oh, that’s all right, I forgive you.”

**Moderno:** That would be silly- he didn’t harm you.

**Lewis:** Exactly. I couldn’t forgive him because there would be quite literally nothing for me to forgive. But that is exactly what Jesus did. He claimed he could forgive sins against others because they were also sins against Himself. These are two ways in which Jesus very clearly made His claim. Are you satisfied?

**Moderno:** I don’t like it.

**Lewis:** But can you find a weakness in the argument?

**Moderno:** No.

**Lewis:** Then you must accept the conclusion.
**Moderno:** Well, at least for humor’s sake. Don’t forget that you are only a figment of my imagination.

**Lewis:** Beware the powers of self-deception. If the end of the world appeared in all the literal trappings of the Apocalypse, if the modern materialist saw with his own eyes the heavens rolled up and the great white throne appearing, if he had the sensation of being himself hurled into the Lake of Fire, he would continue forever, in that lake itself, to regard his experience as an illusion and to find the explanation of it in psychoanalysis, or cerebral pathology.  

**Moderno:** You certainly speak grandly for a specter.

**Lewis:** Perhaps this is a lost cause. But, let us continue the conversation at least for the sake of our listeners.

**Moderno:** Very well.

**Lewis:** We’ve now established that Jesus actually did claim to be God.

**Moderno:** But if He wasn’t correct, why must he be bad? Couldn’t someone be a good person and think he’s God? Might one just be confused?

**Lewis:** To believe oneself to be the Creator of the universe is a pretty big confusion. Most call that insanity.

**Moderno:** I see. So by your reasoning all those with mental disabilities are evil?

**Lewis:** Of course not. I didn’t say that anyone who claims to be God and isn’t is evil; I said such a person is bad. There are several kinds of bad. There is moral badness, which is also called evil. If one knows he is not God and claims it, he is a liar and probably a charlatan and is therefore morally bad. One who really believes himself to be God but is

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wrong is intellectually bad. We’ve already established that Jesus meant that He is the
Creator of the universe when he claimed to be God.

**Moderno:** Alright. I’m not convinced though that Jesus’ claim to divinity makes him
crazy if it’s not true.

**Lewis:** Crazy, or a liar. And here’s why. Suppose I told you that I am the best writer of
my generation. What would you say?

**Moderno:** That you’re very arrogant.

**Lewis:** Suppose I said that I was the greatest Christian writer ever.

**Moderno:** I’d say you’re a monomaniac.

**Lewis:** Now suppose I tell you that I’m the Cause and End of all things, that I created the
Universe and everything in it, including you. Then what would you say?

**Moderno:** That either you’re certifiable, or you are a pathological liar.

**Lewis:** You see my point. The same goes for if I told you I was a teapot. So the
difference between what one claims to be and what one actually is might be used as a
measure of one’s insanity. So if Jesus were not God, but believed that he was, then He
would have to be rather obviously insane.

**Moderno:** How do we know that he wasn’t?

**Lewis:** Does a good teacher teach falsehood?

**Moderno:** No.

**Lewis:** So if Jesus was the best teacher, as you claim he was, and good teachers don’t
teach falsehood, then Jesus taught the truth. He taught that He really is God. By your
own thought, you ought to believe Him. We could go farther and examine how Jesus
built credibility with His disciples, but I am not here to lay out the case for Jesus’ divinity

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40 Kreeft, *Heaven and Hell*, 42.
to all people, but to you few here, and my time is limited. You argued that He is a perfect teacher; therefore you ought to believe Him.

**Moderno:** I certainly don’t want to admit that conclusion! Luckily, I don’t think I need to listen to a hallucination. I think I’ll sit down for a bit, and think about something pleasant.

**Chamberlain:** I admit, Lewis, that Moderno is rather radical. But few in the church hold such an extreme position as he. The disagreements that are upsetting people the most are over sexuality and sexual equality. Some want to leave the church (and some have left already) over disagreements about the ordination of women and the full acceptance of our homosexual brethren.

**Lewis:** I think you are mischaracterizing the issue. On the surface, neither of these issues are severe. Homosexuality is a sin of the flesh, and therefore far less dangerous than many others (though any sin can be a man’s downfall). The debate about whether women ought to be ordained began in my own time. The question as to whether the rite is in accordance with Scripture, and if sufficient reason can be found in tradition to justify the proscription, it ought to be discussed and decided. I do not think there is sufficient Scriptural support for female ordination, but it is a matter of debate, and I respect both those who think there is sufficient Scriptural support and those who think that the practice is contrary to Scripture and ought not to be tolerated. The root of problem that has so many faithful denouncing certain practices is ultimately the willful indifference of our bishops and priests to Biblical authority.

**Fenster:** What does Biblical authority have to do with female ordination?
Lewis: Let us examine arguments about the ordination of priestesses to find the answer to that question.

Fenster: Alright, I’ll give some of my own. Over the last forty years, Western culture has been struggling to shake off its prejudices against the roles and capabilities of women. The priesthood has reflected this cultural change in its admission of women to the sacrament.

Lewis: In my day we were discovering in one profession after another that women can do all sorts of things which were once supposed to be in the power of men alone. But is a merely cultural change sufficient to alter the ancient practices of the Church? What reasons have you found to allow this?

Fenster: Women are just as good, and as often as not, better than men at carrying out the duties of a priest, such as preaching, performing pastoral duties, and administering parishes.

Lewis: I agree.

Fenster: Then what is there to hold women back from this office, other than prejudice reinforced by tradition?

Lewis: That reluctance to accept the ordination of women does not come from any contempt of women is, I think, plain from history. The Middle Ages carried their reverence for one woman to a point at which the charge could plausibly be made that the Blessed Virgin became in their eyes almost a “fourth person of the Trinity.” But there was never anything close to a priestly role ascribed to her.

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41 Lewis, “Priestesses in the Church?” God in the Dock, 235.

42 Ibid.
**Fenster:** Our ancestors did admire women, but it was in the same way that they admired a good painting, or a fine meal, or the hard work of a slave. A woman could never have a priestly role because women, above all else, were kept out of positions of power.

**Lewis:** Just a moment. We are arguing here whether women are fit to be ordained to the priesthood, but we have not defined what exactly a priest is. I suspect that we do not share a common definition. Let us therefore begin again, first defining what a priest is and his role.

**Fenster:** Very well.

**Lewis:** We’ve already laid out some of the activities of a priest: he preaches, attends to the pastoral needs of his congregation, and ensures the operation of its day-to-day affairs.

**Fenster:** Yes, that’s what we’ve said.

**Lewis:** Is this all that a priest does?

**Fenster:** No, of course not. A priest also leads services.

**Lewis:** Can anyone else lead services?

**Fenster:** That depends on what kind of service. A bishop must officiate at confirmations, ordinations, building consecrations, and a variety of other kinds of services. A deacon or a lay person may lead any of the daily offices. The priest (or bishop) must be present at the Eucharist.

**Lewis:** So some services require an ordained person to perform them. What makes these services special?

**Fenster:** Well, in the Eucharist, only a priest or bishop can consecrate the bread and wine. But these are all things we both already know; why are we wasting conversation on them, and how will this help us decide who can become a priest?
Lewis: If we know we disagree somewhere, but are not sure where, I think it is good to find out where we do agree and work from common ground to the points of conflict. We have found out now that we both agree that the power of consecration is at least one distinction a priest has from others. Where did this power come from?

Fenster: It came from Jesus, who commanded the Apostles to do as He did at the Last Supper.

Lewis: And who were the Apostles?

Fenster: You very well know who they were. Get to the point.

Lewis: The Apostles were the first leaders of the Church, were they not? The Apostolic Succession begins with them and continues through to every bishop, priest, and deacon in the Church through the laying-on of hands. Naturally, we ought to look to the Apostles as guides for their own successors, ought we not?

Fenster: Yes, I’ll agree with that.

Lewis: Well you see, they were all men, weren’t they? The same goes for those present at the Pentecost, too. Were any women recorded to have been there or at the Last Supper?

Fenster: Well, no, but this returns us to our original position. Jesus lived in an extremely male-oriented culture. What could one expect but that the positions of power in the newly-forming church would be occupied by men?

Lewis: Here I think you make two mistakes at once. Let us examine the nature of the duties a priest must perform to address the first.

Fenster: Very well.

Lewis: Of what do a parish’s day-to-day affairs consist?
**Fenster:** Well, a congregation ought to be involved in community outreach programs helping those in need, evangelizing, and making sure its own members continue to grow spiritually. The parish also needs to attend to its financial concerns, building maintenance, and the like.

**Lewis:** And a priest must ensure that these things are carried out.

**Fenster:** Yes, and a woman can do all these things just as well as a man.

**Lewis:** Granted. These things do sound like real service work to me; lots of drudgery and little reward, if any. Not much glamour in them.

**Fenster:** Of course not.

**Lewis:** I suppose the same could be said for the priest’s other duties.

**Fenster:** Yes.

**Lewis:** So tell me then, where’s the power in being a priest? Are men withholding from women the power to try to get people to volunteer at soup kitchens, turn in pledges, and cut the grass? Does one become a priest because he wants to boss others around?

**Fenster:** Well, no, but- there’s power at the higher levels. You can’t deny that the House of Bishops is a powerful organization.

**Lewis:** Nor would I wish to. But are those who wish to enter the priesthood, man or woman, with a view towards power, entering for the right reasons?

**Fenster:** No, I suppose not.

**Lewis:** It would seem then that to argue for women to enter the priesthood as a matter of power control would be better suited as an argument for the removal of those already ordained who hold this view of ordination as power.
Fenster: Hmm. That is an interesting way of looking at things. I think you might be right.

Lewis: On to what I think is your second mistake. You dismissed the absence of women in priestly roles in the Bible as due to the chauvinism of the age. I have three points to make about this. Firstly, and most simply, women do have important roles in the New Testament, just not priestly roles. To conclude that since Biblical society in general was male-oriented, women had only minor parts in the New Testament is quite simply contrary to fact. Remember, the Middle Ages venerated a woman more than any other person outside the Trinity. This veneration was not an invention of their own, but based on Scripture.

Fenster: Fine, but your arguments have yet to amount to a positive reason to bar women from ordination. Since men and women are equal in value and capabilities, the burden of proof lies on you to find an adequate reason to continue this exclusion.

Lewis: That women do not have priestly roles in the Bible is, I think, a strong argument. But further examination of what a priest is will provide additional reasons. In the Eucharist, the priest is a double representative of Man to God and God to Man. This is clear by the way he stands during prayers: sometimes he faces away from the congregation to speak to God for us, and sometimes he faces the congregation to speak to us for God. Now a woman can do the first part just as well as a man. It is the second that presents a problem.43

Fenster: What problem is that?

43 Ibid.
Lewis: Well, suppose the reformer stops saying that a good woman may be like God and starts saying that God is like a good woman.\footnote{Ibid., p. 236-7}

Fenster: We needn’t suppose, Mr. Lewis, many already say just that.

Lewis: Ah, yes. It seems my return to Earth also means a return to absent-mindedness.

Fenster: They say such is the mark of a good professor. But please continue.

Lewis: Do you object to such language as Mother, Daughter, and Holy Ghost?

Fenster: Well, I find it a bit discomforting, but I see no reason against it. After all, God isn’t a biological being, so “He” is neither male nor female. My discomfort is probably just residual chauvinism engrained by the culture in which I was raised.

Lewis: I think it may be more than that. Do you recall the origin of the Lord’s Prayer?

Fenster: Yes, of course. Jesus taught it to his disciples.\footnote{Matthew 6:9}

Lewis: Then here we have a clear example. You and I, as Christians, believe that God Himself taught us how to speak of Him.\footnote{Lewis, “Priestesses in the Church?” God in the Dock, 237.}

Fenster: What, do you mean, “Our Father?” I think you give one word too much weight. That doesn’t really matter. Besides, it certainly sounds better than “Our Parent.”

Lewis: Indeed it does. But of course the masculine imagery goes far beyond one word. In fact, God is never described as feminine in the entirety of the Bible.

Fenster: Oh, come on. That doesn’t really matter.

Lewis: How can such a consistent and prevalent theme lasting throughout the Bible be unimportant? How can a single word from the lips of Our Lord be considered unimportant?
Fenster: As I said before, it’s all one can expect from a completely male-dominated culture.

Lewis: So you believe that all the masculine imagery in the Bible is human in origin?

Fenster: Why not?

Lewis: What makes just the masculine imagery special? Why not the Resurrection, or the Incarnation, or anything else for that matter?

Fenster: Well, for the masculine imagery, there are clear sociological causes. A male-dominated culture will of course conceptualize God as masculine.

Lewis: I see. But you believe that the Bible is divine revelation.

Fenster: Yes, but it was written and re-written by fallible hands that could make minor changes over the years.

Lewis: Surely that is not an argument for priestesses, but against Christianity. If human intervention could have such a sweeping effect from the first chapter of the Bible through the very words of Our Lord right to the last book, then what reason do we have to trust the Bible at all?

Fenster: Alright then. Let’s say that God’s masculinity was inspired. It won’t make a difference; it’s arbitrary and unessential.

Lewis: We often talk as if God were not very good at theology!\(^{47}\) To say that the Bible is arbitrary and unessential is another argument against Christianity. Christ is the Logos; there’s nothing arbitrary about His words. Also, God had all times and places from which to choose the perfect setting of the Incarnation. Don’t you think He knew the

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\(^{47}\) Lewis to a Lady, *Letters*, 236.
culture He chose was male-dominated? But even from a view outside of Christianity your argument is flawed, for it is surely based on a shallow view of imagery.\textsuperscript{48}

\textbf{Fenster:} Why is that?

\textbf{Lewis:} We know from our poetical experience that image and apprehension cleave closer together than common sense is here prepared to admit.\textsuperscript{49}

\textbf{Fenster:} What do you mean?

\textbf{Lewis:} Poetry can tell us more about some things than prose literature can. The way we visualize things and the way we understand them are very closely related. Don’t you agree?

\textbf{Fenster:} I suppose.

\textbf{Lewis:} Because of this, a child who has been taught to pray to a Mother in Heaven would have a religious life radically different from that of a Christian child.

\textbf{Fenster:} Yes, that does seem to make sense. You’ve now given reasons for why it’s good to stick to Biblical masculine imagery of God, but I don’t think your argument bars women from the priesthood because you’re using an ambiguous term. Sex is a biological distinction, but the masculinity of God is a spiritual reality. If I remember correctly, we’re all spiritually feminine in relation to Him, so spiritual gender must be a malleable thing. So what does sex have to do with the gender of the soul?

\textbf{Lewis:} And as image and apprehension are in an organic unity, so, for a Christian, are human body and human soul. Thus our sex and gender, our physical and spiritual make-ups, are inextricably linked. To say that men and women are equally eligible for a certain profession is to say that for the purposes of that profession their sex is irrelevant. We are,

\textsuperscript{48} Lewis, “Priestesses in the Church?”, \textit{God in the Doc.}, 237.

\textsuperscript{49} \textit{Ibid.}
within that context, treating both as neuters. But in our Christian life we must return to reality. There we are not homogeneous units, but different and complimentary organs of a mystical body.\(^{50}\) Thus only a man can adequately perform the mystical functions of a priest, as a masculine representative of a masculine God.

I think your reasoning is rather typical of those who support Women’s ordination. It seems reasonable, but fails to fully consider Scripture in coming to its conclusion. If this is the sort of reasoning employed by the learned leaders of our church, then we are on the road to wholesale marginalization of the Bible. It will soon become a book from which to choose only those passages that support whatever claim we happen to want to make today. The only way I can see that one can support the ordination of priestesses and respect Biblical authority is to have a much lower regard for imagery. The blessing of homosexual unions on the other hand is on a different plane, for it ignores or denies the plain meaning of Scripture.

**Fenster:** Oh come on. I don’t think it’s quite so bad as that.

**Lewis:** Let us ask Bishop Chamberlain here. He supports the blessing of same-sex unions and the ordination of persons who engage in homosexual behavior and affirm such behavior as good. Let’s find out how he justifies his position. Chamberlain, would you agree to talk about the church’s recent actions regarding its endorsement of homosexual activity?

**Chamberlain:** Yes, let’s; it seems I can’t avoid talking about it anywhere I go. It is interesting to note that there has been such an outcry over the affirmation of homosexuality, but there has not been the same upset over permission for divorced people to be remarried. And in that case, Jesus is quite clear about his opposition to

\(^{50}\) *Ibid.*, 238.
divorce. I think it’s because the majority of people who are sexually active are heterosexual and a great many of them are married, and so they understand how a marriage might collapse. Homosexuality is foreign to them and it seems much more threatening to the stability, purity and authenticity of the church.  

Lewis: Is this a psychological evaluation of attitudes about divorce, or is it an argument for homosexuality?

Chamberlain: I think it is a reason why some people are more upset.

Lewis: I agree, though I don’t think that complacency in one sinful practice justifies complacency in another. But let’s continue. How do you reconcile the recent actions of the Episcopal Church’s General Convention regarding the endorsement of homosexuality (through the confirmation of an practicing homosexual to the episcopacy and giving local dioceses the option to bless same-sex unions) with what the Bible has to say about homosexuality?

Chamberlain: I don’t think that the Scripture writers had any notion of homosexuality; they thought one “behaved” in a homosexual way. We’re dealing with a reality that isn’t reflected in scripture.  

Lewis: How could they have no notion of homosexuality and yet know what homosexual behavior is?

Chamberlain: I mean they never conceived of a committed, deeply loving relationship between two people of the same sex. They assumed that everyone was heterosexual. Because of this, they misconceived homosexuality as a free decision instead of an internal state.
Lewis: Let us grant your first proposition for a moment, that the Scripture writers did not conceive of homosexual relationships as lifelong, caring commitments, even though I am not sure of its truth. Because of this, you say, their conception of homosexuality as a behavior was erroneous, and therefore Scripture does not reflect the reality of homosexuality. Is this a fair restatement of your line of reasoning?

Chamberlain: Yes.

Lewis: Yet surely homosexual behavior still occurs today.

Chamberlain: Mounting scientific evidence is to the contrary. Homosexuality has been shown to be biological in origin, not psychological.

Lewis: Oh, that’s not what I mean. I mean, surely people still engage in sexual activity with people of the same sex. Accepting your first premise that Scripture writers didn’t conceive of committed erotic relationships between persons of the same sex, it would appear that they also meant sexual activity, not an emotional state. Wouldn’t you agree?

Chamberlain: Yes that makes sense.

Lewis: So back to my previous question: Doesn’t homosexual activity still occur today?

Chamberlain: Yes, I suppose many homosexual couples physically express their love for each other. But the important part is the love, not the act. This is what the Scripture writers didn’t know about, and it is the reality their writings don’t reflect.

Lewis: So really we have two different but closely related terms here. We are speaking of “homosexuality” as, “erotic feelings for people of the same sex,” and “homosexual behavior” as, “sexual acts between people of the same sex.”

Chamberlain: Yes.
Lewis: Good. Now that we’ve identified our terms we may continue. We’ve agreed that the Scripture writers knew about homosexual behavior as we have defined it, but not about “homosexuality,” correct?

Chamberlain: Correct. But I don’t necessarily believe these two concepts are independent.

Lewis: Doesn’t your argument for the permissibility of homosexuality rely on their independence?

Chamberlain: Yes, but the relationship is such that one leads to the other, but the opposite is not true. The relationship of their dependence is not reversible. One could understand condemnation of homosexual behavior if there were no such thing as homosexuality. But in the context of homosexuality, how could the behavior be wrong?

Lewis: It seems that we are presented with two choices. On the one hand is the traditional position of the church on homosexuality: Since the Scripture writers knew about homosexual behavior, and homosexual behavior still occurs today as it did then, the Biblical teachings against homosexual behavior ought to be followed. On the other hand is the argument you’ve presented: Homosexuality as we have defined it fundamentally alters the nature of homosexual behavior to a point where the Scripture writers could not have imagined its new meaning, thereby avoiding its teaching on homosexual behavior. The second choice is rather precarious, for unless we say that the Bible is wrong, which I am not prepared to admit, the change in meaning of homosexual behavior must be so drastic that what the Scripture talks about and what happens today cannot be considered the same thing. Thus we ought to test your argument by trying to find if there is a way that homosexuality fundamentally alters homosexual behavior.
**Chamberlain:** There’s no need to say that one point of view is absolutely right, and the other is not.

**Lewis:** Is there no need even if one *is* right and the other is not?

**Chamberlain:** You think in such black-and-white terms! The Anglican Church deals in shades of grey.\(^53\)

**Lewis:** That’s an interesting belief you have about the Church, but it neither answers my question nor refutes the argument. Clarity in doctrine seems to be exactly what the Church ought to have.

**Chamberlain:** I didn’t say it was clarity that the church avoids. It’s black-and-white thinking.

**Lewis:** Don’t they mean the same thing?

**Chamberlain:** Saying that one interpretation or another is right for all times and places is the kind of black-and-white thinking that’s not a part of the tradition of the Church. Those kinds of absolutes just don’t apply anymore.

**Lewis:** That sounds like a pretty absolute statement. It seems you do mean clarity by “black-and-white.” And I’ll demonstrate to you that there are some things that are black or white.

**Chamberlain:** Oh?

**Lewis:** Yes, black and white.

**Chamberlain:** That’s just a trick.

**Lewis:** No it isn’t. The statement “There are no blacks or whites” is as self-contradictory as “there are no absolutes.” They can’t be true.

**Chamberlain:** Nevertheless, the Anglican Church deals in shades of grey.

\(^53\) *Ibid.*
Lewis: What is grey but black and white combined?

Chamberlain: We’re talking about interpretation here, not colors. The illustration isn’t relevant.

Lewis: I agree.

Chamberlain: What?

Lewis: You introduced the comparison. I agree that it isn’t relevant.54

Chamberlain: What I mean is, why must we be forced to such a yes-or-no response?

Lewis: If one is trying to find out if something is true or not, what other response is satisfactory?

Chamberlain: Not everything is the same for everyone.

Lewis: True, but we aren’t talking about everything for everyone; we’re talking about Christian morality.

Chamberlain: But each Christian finds himself in his own unique position which has its own needs.

Lewis: Morally speaking, I disagree. Morality, especially Christian morality, is the same in all times and places. But we needn’t address that question now. Let us deal with this culture at this time.

Chamberlain: Very well then.

Lewis: This brings us back to our previous question. Either we can find that you are right, and that the modern situation is sufficiently different from the Biblical understanding that the Biblical standards do not apply, or we shall find that it is not sufficiently different and we ought to listen to what the Bible has to say about morality.

Chamberlain: It seems that you are right. Let us begin then.

54Previous line of argumentation from Kreeft, *Heaven and Hell*, 40-41.
Lewis: Celibacy is the choice to refrain from engaging in sexual acts, is it not?

Chamberlain: Yes, but what does celibacy have to do with anything?

Lewis: If you follow the argument, you will see. When one chooses to be celibate, he may still feel erotic attraction to another person, correct?

Chamberlain: I suppose so.

Lewis: Would you say that homosexual people (meaning those of the same sex who have erotic feelings for persons of the same sex) are in terms of capability any way inferior to heterosexual people?

Chamberlain: Of course not, and it is bigotry to suggest such a thing.

Lewis: So you agree that homosexual people are in all ways able to make the same decisions as heterosexual people?

Chamberlain: Certainly.

Lewis: Do you agree that some heterosexual people are celibate?

Chamberlain: Yes, some are called to be celibate. I’m sure some homosexual people are as well. But of course celibacy is not for all.

Lewis: Very well. We agree then that there is no intrinsic difference in capability between a heterosexual and a homosexual person in choosing celibacy, right?

Chamberlain: Yes.

Lewis: Then homosexual behavior does not necessarily follow from homosexual feelings. If homosexual people do not suffer from mental illness which might constitute a compulsion, and if homosexual people can make all of the same decisions as heterosexual people, and heterosexual people can choose to be celibate, then homosexual
people too can choose to be celibate. Thus, logically speaking, homosexual behavior is not implied by homosexual feelings.

**Chamberlain:** True, and the same goes for heterosexual relationships, and we both agree that heterosexual relationships are a good thing.

**Lewis:** You are right. I am merely trying to make perfectly clear that we agree that feelings and actions really are separable things.

**Chamberlain:** Yes, I agree that they can be separated, but the question remains whether they ought to be separated.

**Lewis:** Quite right. If I were a soldier on the battlefield and realized I had a great fear of death, and so decided to hide rather than fight, what would one say about me?

**Chamberlain:** That you have an acute interest in self-preservation.

**Lewis:** Isn’t that called Cowardice?

**Chamberlain:** I suppose so.

**Lewis:** In my life as an Oxford don, suppose I disliked students and decided I would rather have a good walk in the morning than tutor them. Then what would you say?

**Chamberlain:** I’d say that you’re shirking responsibility.

**Lewis:** So in both cases, an emotional response leads me to an action which is morally bad.

**Chamberlain:** True, but badness is not necessarily the outcome of a reliance on emotions. If you are walking down the street, see a car accident, and compassion prompts you to help the victim, I would say that the action of helping a person in need is morally good and a behavior guided by an emotion.
Lewis: Yet if emotions were my only guide for action, surely I would be only animal. Emotions may direct us to both good and bad actions: a murderer might really want to kill, but his desire doesn’t make the action right. Choosing to obey my emotions in all things would be a fundamental (and morally bad) choice, since refusing to discriminate between emotional promptings that would have us do good things or bad things would be willful negligence of moral duty. Good actions from such a situation, like the good of helping the injured man, would be incidental.

Chamberlain: Yes, that makes sense.

Lewis: It would seem then that feelings are not a fail-safe guide to good works, nor an indicator of bad works. You see, moral choice involves two parts: There is the actual choice that a man makes, and there are the emotions that go along with the choice.\textsuperscript{55} Emotions are not you, but something that happens to you,\textsuperscript{56} like indigestion, or the weather. (Your argument for the endorsement of homosexual behavior explicitly rests on this proposition; you claim the Scripture writers mistakenly thought homosexuality was a decision one would make. If it is not a decision, then it is out of our control- that is, something that happens to us.) But morally speaking, feelings are unimportant. It is the will that makes a man good or bad.\textsuperscript{57} Unless someone has a mental illness such that his feelings prevent him from making a decision, feelings do not affect the morality of actions.

Chamberlain: Do you mean to imply that homosexuality is a mental illness?

Lewis: I make no such claim. In my view, it is immaterial whether homosexuality is a psychological or biological phenomenon provided it is not an illness which removes the


\textsuperscript{56} Lewis, to a Lady, \textit{Letters}, 233.

\textsuperscript{57} Lewis to Mrs. Frank L. Jones, \textit{Letters}, 210.
possibility of choice about certain actions, and I am sure you would deny this explanation of the origin of homosexuality. I am merely showing, based on your own evidence, that homosexual behavior is neither necessitated nor justified by homosexual feelings.

Chamberlain: Wait a minute! I think you’re pulling a fast one here- you’re making these claims about homosexual relationships, but heterosexual relationships could be criticized on the same grounds. Are you now going to deny that love is the important thing in marriage?

Lewis: In one sense, love is the important thing in marriage; perhaps it is the only important thing in the universe. But it depends on what you mean by Love.\footnote{Lewis, \textit{Christian Behaviour}, 32.} What do you mean when you say it is what’s important in marriage?

Chamberlain: I mean that people falling in love is generally the main reason people get married. Love is the important part.

Lewis: That is what I suspected. Falling in love may be a good reason for getting married, but I don’t think it’s a perfect one.\footnote{Ibid.} People cease to “be in love.” What then?

Chamberlain: Just take a look at our bishop from New England. He was married, but he fell in love with another and couldn’t love his wife any longer, so he was true to himself and divorced her. After all, we shouldn’t hush up sex; we should treat it as we treat all our other impulses. He had a right to be happy.\footnote{Lewis, “\textit{We Have no ‘Right to Happiness,” God in the Dock}, 317.} No one blames a hungry man for eating.

Lewis: But he is blamed if he steals his food. Don’t you see? You are doing exactly the opposite of what you claim. Instead of treating sex like all other impulses, you are treating it as no other impulse in our nature has ever been treated in our history. All

\footnote{Lewis, \textit{Christian Behaviour}, 32.}
\footnote{Ibid.}
\footnote{Lewis, “\textit{We Have no ‘Right to Happiness,” God in the Dock}, 317.}
others, we admit, have to be bridled. Absolute obedience to your self-preservation instinct is cowardice, to your appetite for food is gluttony. But every unkindness and breach of faith seems to be condoned if its motive is erotic love for another. It’s like having a morality in which stealing fruit is considered wrong—unless you steal nectarines.\(^{61}\)

**Chamberlain:** Are you sure you aren’t from the Victorian age instead of the twentieth century? You seem to want to stifle sexuality.

**Lewis:** If I think one ought not steal nectarines does that mean I don’t like nectarines?

**Chamberlain:** Of course not.

**Lewis:** In the same way, I say no word against sex, but like any other passion, we must not give it sovereignty over ourselves.

**Chamberlain:** You’re missing the point. This is not a question of stealing; it is one of sexual morality. Must he go unsatisfied for the rest of his life, denying his true feelings?

**Lewis:** If satisfying himself means being dishonest (by breaking his marital vows) and ungrateful (to the woman who shared her life with him), then yes. It is not a question of “sexual morality” any more than nectarine stealing is a matter of “fruit morality;” it is simply a question of morality.\(^{62}\) As you can see, the same principle goes for homosexuality. Erotic love simply doesn’t matter when determining whether or not homosexual behavior is moral.

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\(^{61}\) *Ibid.*, 320

\(^{62}\) Previous line of argumentation from Lewis, “*We Have no ‘Right to Happiness,’*” *God in the Dock*, 317-320.
Chamberlain: Well, there are still various interpretations of scripture about sexuality, and we may have differing opinions. But the heart of this matter is that we can’t deny that gay and lesbian Christians are our brothers and sisters in Christ.\(^{63}\)

Lewis: I believe you are mistaken, Bishop; this is not the heart of the matter. What Anglican have you heard deny that a homosexual man is our brother in Christ? Weren’t you at the Lambeth Conference in 1998, which all the Anglican bishops in the world attended? A resolution passed at the conference states, “We commit ourselves to listen to the experience of homosexual persons and we wish to assure them that they are loved by God and that all baptised, believing and faithful persons, regardless of sexual orientation, are full members of the Body of Christ… while rejecting homosexual practice as incompatible with Scripture, [this conference] calls on all our people to minister pastorally and sensitively to all irrespective of sexual orientation and to condemn irrational fear of homosexuals….”\(^{64}\)

Chamberlain: That is one understanding. It is an honest and true understanding for some places. We are a community of divergent points of view.\(^{65}\)

Lewis: But our beliefs are contradictory; they cannot both be correct.

Chamberlain: We are each speaking from our own context, our own experiences, and our opinions reflect this difference.

Lewis: This does not refute my assertion. And where does experience appear in the pillars of faith? Is it not rather by Scripture, Reason, and Tradition that we learn eternal truth?

Chamberlain: True enough, we do. But we must interpret them all in our own context.

\(^{63}\) Griswold, interview by Caldwell, *Presiding Over Crisis.*


\(^{65}\) Griswold, interview by Caldwell, *Presiding Over Crisis.*
Lewis: Now we have come to the heart of it. Do you believe, Sir, in objective reality, and that the Bible is the clearest information on ultimate reality we have or no? “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.”

To say that truth is relative to time or place is a logical contradiction. How can God’s Word be eternal and unchanging, yet entertain various contradictory ‘truths’? If you believe that reality is independent of time and space, then why don’t you drop all this rot about contexts and points of view?

Chamberlain: We aren’t talking about hard science here, but about morality. To some extent, appropriate human behavior is conditioned by time and place.

Lewis: On the contrary, I believe the moral law is universal.

Moderno: [Jumping up from his seat] Moral Law! Your antiquated ideas need some updating. Morality is a social institution passed on by parents and teachers from generation to generation, and since what is conditioned in us by society is arbitrary and human in origin, morality is a human creation; there’s nothing innate about it.

Lewis: I’m not so sure. Let’s examine your argument. Morality, you say, is passed on by parents and teachers to children.

Moderno: Yes, and everyone knows that. One learns that stealing is wrong and to share and the like as a child in kindergarten.

Lewis: I quite agree. Our morality is learned from our parents and teachers, but I think your second premise, that what is conditioned in us by society is arbitrary and human in origin, is false. Some things taught to us by our teachers are arbitrary, like language and

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66 Matthew 24:35
driving on the left side of the road. Other things taught to us are not arbitrary but natural and universal, like mathematics and geography.⁶⁷

Moderno: Yes, but mathematics and geography are the same in every culture. Morality, on the other hand, varies depending on time and culture. Therefore morality has to be a human construction.

Lewis: I think your argument has just gone from bad to worse- now both your premises are false. Firstly, just because different cultures might disagree about values doesn’t mean there is no objective standard by which they might be judged. One culture might be right and the other wrong, just like they might disagree about anything else. In fact, by arguing with each other about which is right, they provide evidence that they both think that their values are objectively Right. If neither thought their morality conformed to an objective reality, what would there be to argue about?

Moderno: But the same argument could be carried out about driving on the left or right side of the road, and we’ve already established that to be an example of arbitrary tradition, so you can’t use it to support universal morality.

Lewis: The difference is that one could theoretically argue about which side of the road is better to drive on, but no one actually does so. People from different cultures do in fact argue about whose morality is better. Wars are fought over this very question. Secondly, there is good empirical evidence that morality from culture to culture does not vary widely. I don’t like referencing my own works, but for the sake of time and to avoid an argument about the veracity of various facts, I wish to refer you to the Appendix of one

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of my books, *The Abolition of Man*. But as we said earlier, we needn’t bother about other cultures, or times or places. I was sent here to speak with you few only.

Bishop Chamberlain, I think the most troubling aspect of our discussion on homosexuality is that you never once claim that the Bible supports homosexual behavior. The nearest you get is to say that the Bible doesn’t address the issue, but I think we have demonstrated that your argument (which, you admit, is contrary to the plain meaning of Scripture) falls flat.

**Chamberlain:** I’ve had enough of this. As the chair of this meeting, I declare that you must submit to our previously-agreed schedule of events and refrain from making any more remarks until the appointed time for questions from the floor, if we have any time left for them.

**Lewis:** Look! My door has reappeared on stage! It seems my time is up. I don’t think I shall be bothering you again.

**Oak:** You can’t go now! We know now that your faith and mine, and many other bishops here is vastly different from that of Bishop Moderno’s and Chamberlain’s, but we haven’t solved anything! You’ve seen how they respond to rational argument. Moderno thinks that every fact contrary to his worldview is a product of his imagination, and Chamberlain is trying to hush up the truth he’s so busy denying. Only Bishop Fenster here has been receptive to honest discussion. What would we do?

**Lewis:** First and foremost, pray. Secondly, as I said shortly after I arrived, you have three options: If you remain complacent with those who do not take the Word of God (Who most clearly expresses Himself in the Bible) seriously, the salvific elements of Christianity will disappear, and the Anglican Church will turn into a club for those who

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will tolerate anything but suffering. Try to reconvert those who have lost their way with all your might, and ask God to correct your own errors. For those who will not listen, even within the Church, “And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet,” and move on. Charity demands that you separate yourselves from those who no longer believe in the full measure of Christianity, lest their unbelief keep others from the Church. Beyond this, I think I can offer no more help.

Fenster: On the contrary, your words will continue to profoundly influence more people than you know for generations. Your influence on me in just this short time has been great. I had hitherto thought that Bishop Chamberlain was the most sensible, but now, Bishop Oak, I’m with you. I don’t know what the future holds, but I do know now that I must believe fully in Christianity- half measures will not do. Thank you Jack for all your help.

Lewis: I am but Balaam’s ass. Now it is time for me to leave you. The Mountains await.

Lewis steps through the doorway that has appeared on the dais. As his body vanishes, his voice lingers, and his final words are heard echoing through the hall:

Lewis: Further up and Further in!

THE END

69 Matthew 10:14
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