

Religious issues in  
The Lion, The Witch,  
And the Wardrobe



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# C.S. Lewis

- Clive Staples “Jack” Lewis (1898-1963)
- Irish author and scholar of medieval literature, Christian apologetics, fiction.
- Member of the Inklings (with J. R. R. Tolkien)
- Raised Christian, became atheist at age 13, converted to Christianity at age 31.
- Best known for The Chronicles of Narnia - over 100 million copies sold.
- Disney adaptation of The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe grossed US\$ 745,000,000 worldwide (Prince Caspian grossed US\$ 419,651,000)



# C.S. Lewis



- Conversion to Christianity
- “You must picture me alone in that room in Magdalen, night after night, feeling, whenever my mind lifted even for a second from my work, the steady, unrelenting approach of Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet. That which I greatly feared had at last come upon me. In the Trinity Term of 1929 I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England.”



# Christian Apologetics in The Chronicles of Narnia?



- In Mere Christianity, Lewis writes... “A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic - on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg - or else he would be the Devil of Hell [the Great Liar]. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse.”
- In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Professor Kirke says to Peter and Susan,
  - “There are only three possibilities. Either your sister is telling lies, or she is mad, or she is telling the truth. You know she doesn't tell lies, and it is obvious that she is not mad. For the moment then and unless any further evidence turns up, we must assume that she is telling the truth.”

# The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe (1950)



- Religious Themes:
  - Death & Resurrection
  - Salvation
  - Forgiveness
  - Repentance

- Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy go through the Wardrobe door, and find themselves in Narnia
- The White Witch rules in Narnia, making it always winter, but never Christmas
- Edmund betrays his siblings to the White Witch, but repents and is redeemed.
- A great battle is fought, and the Witch is overthrown. The children become kings and queens of Narnia

# Prince Caspian (1951)



- Religious themes:
  - Apostasy
  - Restoration of true religion
  - Faith

• Prince Caspian flees his home when his wicked uncle, who has usurped the throne, plans to kill him. He meets with the talking animals of “old Narnia” and vows to be their true King.

• Caspian blows Susan’s magic horn, drawing the Pevensie children to Narnia. The children fight to restore old Narnia and put Caspian on the throne.

• Aslan tells Peter and Susan that they are now too old, and can never return to Narnia.

# The Voyage of the Dawn Treader (1952)



- Religious Themes:
  - Being “Born Again”
  - Holy Grail quest
  - Bodily Assumption into Heaven?

- Lucy, Edmund and their annoying cousin Eustace are pulled into Narnia.
- They join King Caspian on a search for 7 Lords, traveling through strange lands. Eustace is turned into a dragon, and is later saved by Aslan.
- Reepicheep the mouse sails west to Aslan’s kingdom.
- Lucy and Edmund are told they are now too old to return to Narnia, and must learn to find Aslan in their own world by another name.

# The Silver Chair (1953)



- Religious Themes:
  - Battle against forces of darkness
  - Failure to follow God's signs leads to hell
- Eustace and Jill are drawn to Narnia while trying to escape school bullies.
- They are given the task of finding Prince Rilian, King Caspian's son. They must follow Aslan's signs, and grant a request asked for "in Aslan's name."
- Although they do not follow all the signs, and find themselves captives in the underworld as a result, they do grant the request of a young man tied to a silver chair, and free him, thus rescuing the prince.
- They return to Narnia, and then to Earth,



# The Horse and His Boy (1954)



- Religious Themes:
  - Parallels to the story of Moses
  - Conversion of the heathen

- Shasta, a foundling, runs away with the talking horse Bree to find a better life. He meets Aravis, a noblewoman fleeing an arranged marriage, and her talking horse Hwin.
- Through various adventures, they learn that the Calormene army is marching on Archenland and Narnia. They warn the leaders of these countries, and the Calormene army is defeated.
- Shasta is revealed as the long lost elder twin heir to the throne of Narnia. He later marries Aravis.

# The Magician's Nephew (1955)



- Religious Themes:
  - Creation
  - Fall from Grace
  - Temptation
  - Forgiveness

- Diggory and Polly touch some magic rings, and are drawn into the world of Charn, where they wake the evil queen Jadis from a frozen slumber.
- She follows them to earth, and in an attempt to send her back, the children accidentally transport themselves and the evil queen to Narnia at the moment of Narnia's creation.
- Aslan sends them on a quest for a silver apple to protect Narnia from the evil queen.
- Diggory fulfils the quest, and in turn is granted an apple to heal his own dying mother.

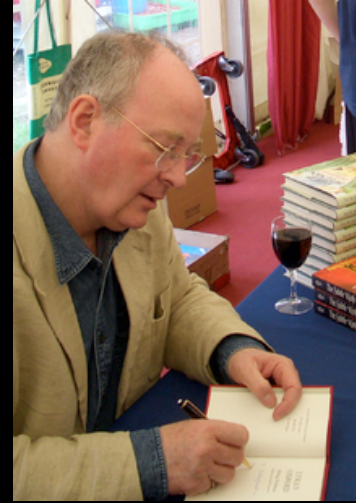
# The Last Battle (1956)



- Religious Themes:
  - Heresy
  - Idolatry
  - Judgment day
  - Heaven

- Eustace and Jill return to Narnia to help fight a battle against Shift the Ape and Puzzle the Donkey, who are posing as Aslan. They have sold Narnia into Calormene slavery, and put forward the teaching that Aslan and Tash (a foreign, somewhat satanic god) are really one and the same.
- Aslan brings Narnia to an end, and judges all the inhabitants of Narnia.
- A link is established between Narnia and Earth, when Peter, Edmund and Lucy, as well as their parents and others, find themselves in Narnia after dying in a train crash.

# Controversial issues: Racism?



- Philip Pullman (author, His Dark Materials trilogy and “The Good man Jesus and the Scoundrel Christ”) has argued that the Chronicles of Narnia are racist. Richard Abanes suggests this charge is false - that it relates to Lewis’ s depiction of the Callormenes (Muslims?) in books such as The Horse and His Boy, or The Last Battle as ‘devil worshippers’. He dismisses these depictions as “a product of their times.” But, does that excuse this kind of racism?
- Also, is that the only kind of racism implicit in the novels? Is Lewis’ s Narnia anti-semitic? If Aslan = Christ, what does that make the “evil” Narnians?

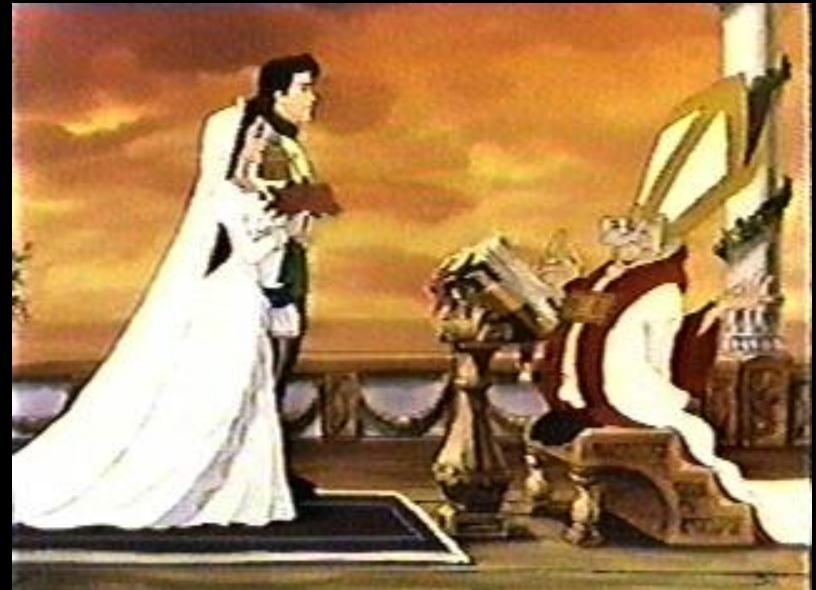


# Controversial issues: Sexism?



- Susan is “no longer a friend of Narnia” and “she’s interested in nothing now-a-days except nylons and lipstick and invitations.”
- Is Susan condemned to hell in The Last Battle?

# Controversial Issues: Disney



- Disney vs Conservative Christianity - the Disney Boycott (1995-2004) - AFA
- Family values
- Subliminal messages

# Controversy: Disney's Narnia



Has *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* been “Disnified?” Surprisingly, the conservative religious community - the ones who boycotted Disney, who expressed huge levels of skepticism when it was announced that Disney would co-produce *The Chronicles of Narnia*, have now largely embraced the Disney/Walden Media film version.

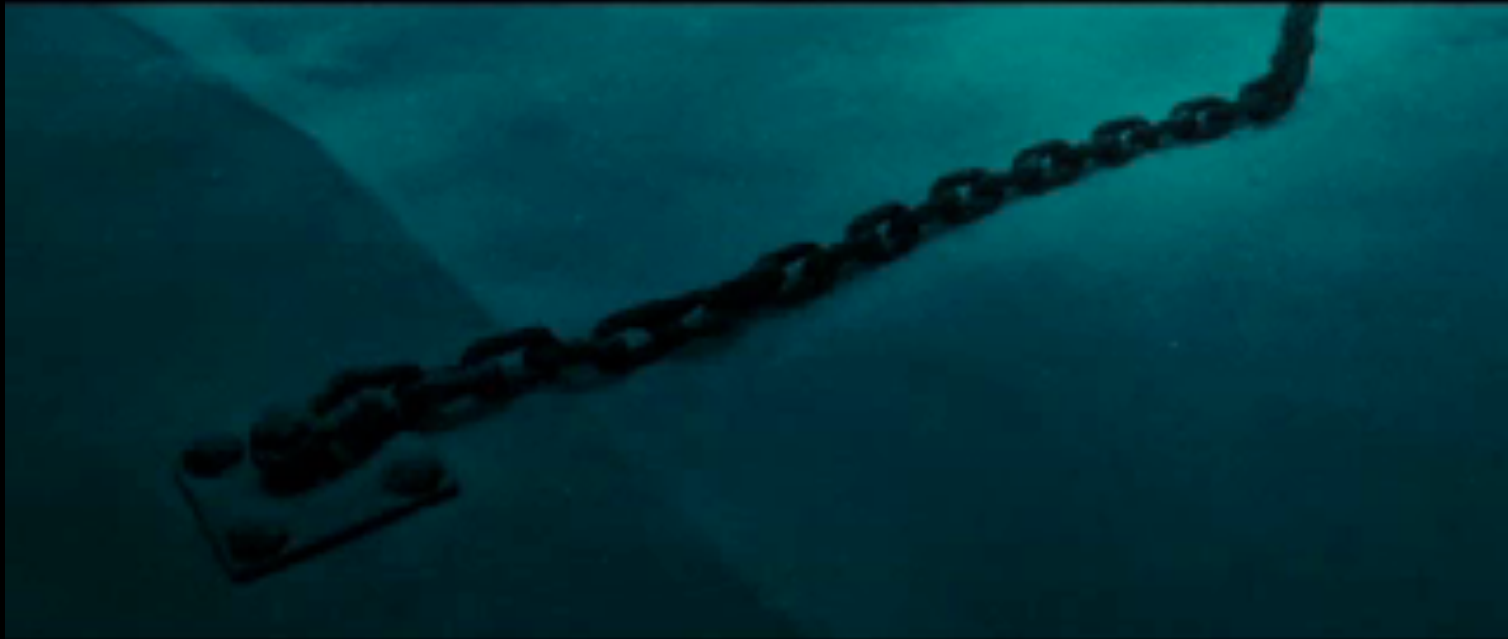
# Theological changes in the Disney film - the Secularization of Aslan?



People who have not been in Narnia sometimes think that a thing cannot be good and terrible at the same time. If the children had ever thought so, they were cured of it now. For when they tried to look at Aslan's face they just caught a glimpse of the golden mane and the great, royal, solemn, overwhelming eyes; and then they found they couldn't look at him and went all trembly." -- C. S. Lewis. *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*



# Theological changes in the Disney film - the Redemption of Edmund?



“Please, your majesty, said Edmund, “I’ ve done the best I can. I’ ve brought them quite close. They’ re in the little house on top of the dam just up the river - with Mr. And Mrs. Beaver.” A slow cruel smile came over the Witch’ s face. “Is this all your news?” she asked. “No, your Majesty,” said Edmund, and proceeded to tell her all he had heard before leaving the Beavers’ house.

# Theological changes in the Disney film - the Redemption of Edmund?



“Please, your Majesty, said the Fox. We were given them [by] Father Christmas. ...” “What?” roared the witch... Then she raised her wand. “Oh, don’ t, don’ t, please don’ t,” shouted Edmund, but even while he was shouting she had waved her wand... And Edmund for the first time in this story felt sorry for someone besides himself.”

# Theological changes in the Disney film - Law, not Grace?



- “It means,” said Aslan, “that though the Witch knew the Deep magic, there is a magic deeper still which she did not know. Her knowledge goes back only to the dawn of time. But if she could have looked a little further back, into the stillness and the darkness before Time dawned, she would have read there a different incantation. She would have known that when a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitor’s stead, the Table would crack and Death itself would start working backward.”

# Theological changes in the Disney film - Law, not Grace?



- “Interpreted the Deep magic differently...” Religion as a matter of interpretation?
- Sacrifice written into the Deep magic of Narnia - no implication that the Law can be superceded by a “different incantation”?
- Sacrifice written into the Deep magic of Narnia - grace implicit in Law?
- So - if film is a “disneyfied” version of Narnia - why didn’ t Christian critics notice?



# American Protestantism

- Old-Testament oriented - “the law” (incl. such things as condemnation of witchcraft and homosexuality) carries more weight than might be expected.
- Evangelical - emphasis on outreach and conversion - so any pop culture artifact with overt Christian themes is embraced as a tool of evangelism - might ‘bring people to God.’

