



The Plumbline

Assessing Current Teachings, Issues and Events with Scripture

Imagine That!

Imagination is the ability of the human mind to create mental images and sensations that do not come from the the five senses. Consequently It is not surprising that self proclaimed prophets claim visions and dreams that have their source in their vivid and well trained human imaginations. Currently The "Elijah List" on the net presents thousands upon thousands of these mental pictures suggesting that these pictures have their origin in God. But these imaginary words and pictures on Elijah List have a very short shelf life. They are posted and soon forgotten as new more appealing prophetic images replace them. In fact many of these prophesies can easily be demonstrated as contradictory.

Prior to the fall of Jerusalem (587 BC) the true biblical prophet Jeremiah complained that the false prophets of his day uttered false prophecies that he identifies as products of the human imagination. "They (false prophets) speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord." (Jeremiah 23:16, ESV). Jeremiah further states: "Behold, I am against these who prophesy lying dreams declares the Lord and who tell them and lead my people astray by their lies and their recklessness, when I did not send them or charge them. So they do not profit this people at all, declares the Lord." (Jeremiah 23: 32, ESV).

Imagination is intoxicating. It is seductive. It can easily become addictive. It can also easily be tied to idolatry. This is one reason why God's word warns that there is such a thing as "the imagination of an evil heart" that can lead one astray. (Jeremiah 18:12). You imagine what you desire. You will what you imagine and at last you create what you will. Well do I remember visiting the Mormon Tabernacle in Salt Lake City 50 years ago. The tour guide presented his pitch for Mormonism. His total point was that God did not stop giving revelation with the first century apostles. This tour guide suggested that in the Latter Days God further revealed himself to Joseph Smith. It was a plea for "continuing revelation." Just a few weeks ago I had a conversation with two Mormon missionaries. Their planned appeal was still the same. Their question to me was "has God ever spoken to you?" If I had said yes their retort would have been simply that God also spoke to Joseph Smith. Joseph Smith's account of his original vision is that of God the father and Jesus the Son simultaneously appearing in human flesh with a further revelation for Latter Day Saints. Surely, this was an imaginary experience, pure and simple. It turns out that it is imagination that is the engine of false revelation. Imagination becomes the stage for continuing revelation.

So It is not surprising that prophetic imagination is alive and well today. In fact without doubt there are many more false imagination prophecies today than existed in Jeremiah's time. Todd Bentley who himself practices false prophecy actually admitted recently that imagination is the key to prophecy when he stated that: "90% or more of all visions and revelations happen in the eye of our hearts, in our imagination." (*Lakeland Revival Blogspot*). Bentley also stated: "The first thing you must do is sanctify your imagination" (Identity Network, 'Open Heavens by Todd Bentley') So I decided to pursue the term "sanctified imagination" in a google search and I found that "sanctified imagination" has become a specific in house term used repeatedly on the net by imaginary prophets today. Craig Kinsley writing on The Elijah List states: "When we set our sanctified imagination on God, his will is made known to us and the imagination is the place where God most often speaks to us. We often call that our "sanctified imagination"... The place we often begin to see in the realm of the spirit is our imagination. The place where we day dream." (Craig Kinsley, 'Sanctifying the Imagination', May 7, 2006, Elijah List).

Bene Johnson, Bill Johnson's wife from Bethel Church, Redding CA. apparently has a vivid imagination with which she claims to see angels frolicking on a hillside. Bentley and seer prophet Bob Jones of Kansas City Prophets fame are well known for their many purported trips to the third heaven. Bentley states: "If we want to see in the spirit, we must use the powerful key of sanctified imagination to unlock visions and dreams... I

have helped bring so many people into the heavenly realm by teaching them to look with their spiritual eye and stop asking, 'Where is it? Where is the angel? Where? I don't see him - where?' We have to begin to see with our "third eye" - the eye on the inside, in our imagination." (Manna, *living under an open heaven*. Todd Bentley from the net).

Mark Batterson seeker-sensitive pastor has apparently also discovered the imagination. He states: "I think he (God) wants us to live out of our imagination. I am convinced that our potential lies in a "sanctified imagination." (www.markbatterson.com, May 5, 2005).

In the prophetic movement today the professionals have designated certain imaginary prophets as "seer" prophets. These seer prophets attest to seeing things and the things they see in their imagination is played out upon the stage of their trained imaginations. These imaginations become better trained with repeated imaginary episodes. Seer prophet, Bob Jones boasts of many imaginary trips into the heavenlies every night. Apparently, Jones ability to see with his imagination failed him when he counseled a woman in Kansas City some years ago and asked her to disrobe to enable him to receive special revelation for her. He was sidelined to a backstage ministry for a time before being quickly restored. Currently he retains his lofty status as a seer prophet. Recently I viewed him on the net as he attended the Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry graduation at the Bethel church in Redding CA. Graduating students lined up to have a prophetic encounter with Jones the seer prophet of renown and bowed before him to honor him and perchance receive words of prophecy. Jones and the myriads of others claiming these imaginary revelations are totally dependent on their human imaginations, self generated in their human brains.

These mental images become highly sought after as revelations from God. For those who are addicted to these imaginary revelations, these imaginations become for them and their followers supposed revelations directly from God. These imaginary revelations of course fit well into the current postmodern world view so prevalent in modern culture. All of this is further enhanced as Hollywood produces a continual stream of fantasy movies. This only enhances an increasing appetite for fantasy and myth. And our youth are devouring it. Current fantasy movies are the hot the topic of conversation among our youth today. Just take the time to overhear their conversations and you will agree. Our Christian youth get totally animated rehearsing the plots of the latest fantasy movies like the Hobbit. It is something they pursue with reckless abandon. Hollywood knows this only too well. The Hollywood producers appeal to the youth because they know they have a waiting audience. Our youth workers chime in attempting to take these imaginary fantasies and tie them loosely to biblical concepts. But then it is that these fantasies and imaginations become a sort of surrogate world view for thousands of our Christian young people. Our Christian young people then are set up for the latest imaginary prophets and what they are claiming. This becomes familiar normal operating procedure. The scripture then becomes sublimated to fantasy. Without planning it, their faith becomes in part an imaginary world view. The imaginary prophets have a ready made waiting audience already predisposed to the imaginary realm.

Sarah Leslie describes it well:

"The invasion of monsters began decades ago, and it quickly transformed the world of entertainment. With little resistance, an army of cute-ugly creatures swept into the toy stores, television and movies... They now adorn children's clothes, bedding, wallpaper, lunch boxes and books. And many have pushed their way into children's hearts on the backs of seductive myths that mold their thoughts and manipulate their imaginations... Some of these monsters are crude and cool like Stitch, and the serpentine aliens of Men in Black. Others appear wise and honorable like Yoda in Star Wars... They all serve a set of strategic social and spiritual goals: they entertain. They shift a person's attention from the real world to a more titillating realm created by those who write the myths and steer the imagination. They tempt Christian fans to re-imagine both God and themselves in the new context - thus bending the old realities to fit the new myths. They desensitize their fans to mystical images and symbols... And they stir a craving for more intense excitement of the same kind. Eventually, the real world of nature, families, work and biblical truth become too boring to be enjoyed. Who cares about truth and the facts when myths and fantasies seem far more exciting." (*Fantasy or Reality?*, Sarah Leslie." (Herescope on the net).

The Evangelical church has claimed the mythical fantasies of C.S. Lewis "*The Chronicles of Narnia*" and John Ronald Ruel Tolkein "*The Lord of the Rings*" to be their own. But maybe this has been a bit premature. My following article may shed more light on this.

The Word Became Fiction

Myth/fantasy and the Gospel

The Harry Potter books and movies, the Lord of the Rings and the Narnia movie have come and gone and passed from the public eye. Over-zealous evangelical publicists are now preoccupied with much less mythical subjects like voter registrations, getting their purpose-driven lives on track etc. etc. Perhaps now that Narnia and Lord of the Rings have been relegated to re-run and DVD status, we can calmly assess and evaluate the whole concept of myth and fantasy as a medium to present the Gospel and the faith once delivered to the saints. Evangelicals were all over the map on Harry Potter. James Dobson promoted the Harry Potter movies as a “good defeating evil” opportunity to counter secular humanism. On the other side were those who saw the Lord of the Rings and Potter movies as the last straw before the appearance of the Anti-Christ and the End. Paradoxically, C.S. Lewis and the Narnia movie marketed as an evangelistic tool bloated ticket sales because evangelicals saw this as one of their own movies. But now we should assess if Narnia was really an intentional allegory by Lewis of the Christian faith. Does Narnia and all the writings of Lewis and Tolkien really faithfully include the Gospel of the apostles as found in the Scriptures? Can obvious pagan mythology be employed to present the Gospel or rather does mythology distort and dilute the Gospel message? And if Lewis’s writings, laced and riddled with pagan mythology, do not meet biblical standards do any evangelicals even care?

C.S. Lewis has attained the level of unofficial canonized evangelical sainthood. This is surprising in that even his most ardent promoters admit that Lewis wasn’t even close to being an evangelical himself. In America rather more than in the UK Lewis has become an Icon both figuratively and literally. There is actually a stained-glass window with a Lewis likeness in a church in Monrovia, California. A Christianity Today readers poll in 1998 found that readers saw Lewis as the most influential evangelical writer. Later we will establish that Lewis was not even close to being an evangelical. In the December edition of Christianity Today Lewis is featured on the cover and every article is given to him. Commemorating the 100th anniversary of his birth, J.I. Packer calls Lewis “our patron saint”, who has become our Aquinas, our Augustine and our Aesop of contemporary evangelicalism. Lewis is even more popular after his death in 1963 than during his lifetime. Book sales topped two million by 1977 and have increased by 125% since 2001. In an article in Christianity Today (April 23, 2001) entitled “Myth Matters” by Louis A. Markos, associate Professor of English at Houston Baptist University, the sub-title states that “C. S. Lewis has bequeathed to us a method and language for sharing the Gospel with the modern and postmodern world.” Markos leads off his article by stating “Yet for all our passion, knowledge and love, something in our approach is lacking; something about our vocabulary is deficient. We seem powerless to convict, engage, and transform the secular world.” (CT, April 23, 2001, page 32).

This is an alarming statement to me. The author with no equivocation states that myth/fantasy is the missing jewel of evangelism. If we could employ it as did Lewis we could convict and transform the secular world. Somehow, it seems to me that only the Holy Spirit can savingly convict the world of sin and judgment. Surely a Baptist professor ought to know this and CT ought to know this as well. Is Lewis/Tolkien mythology the Evangelical ace in the hole that once played in the secular field would sweep the table and bring huge winnings to the Evangelical cause?

Our family sporadically read the “Chronicles of Narnia” to our children because the word was out that this was much better than the old fairy tale classics. It was some kind of spiritual exercise. And of course we heard that Chuck Colson, Nixon’s hatchet-man, attributed no little part of his conversion to Lewis and his writings. That seemed good enough for me even though I couldn’t really relate to all the mythological fauns and witches etc etc found in Narnia. Surely this was just Christian allegory and it all made sense to someone, hopefully to my children. A friend of mine was so taken by Narnia that he even named his first son Aslan after the lion. Obviously, all was well in Christian myth land and I had other more important things to do, than assess the beliefs of Lewis and his views of pagan mythology and his views of myth and reality.

Before we go any further we should give a brief review of the life of our “patron saint”. James A. Dager has given an overview of Lewis’s early life:

“Clive Staples Lewis was born in Belfast, Ireland, in 1898, the younger of two sons, three years the junior to his brother Warren. As a child Lewis’s fertile imagination was greatly influenced by fantasy and fairy tales told to him by his mother. His brilliant mind was quick to seize upon these experiences, and his favorite pastime became drawing what he later called the anthropomorphized beasts of nursery literature. He and his brother referred to them as “dressed animals.” ... So much was Lewis’s life steeped in fantasy that he wrote, “the central story of my life is about nothing else.” (Surprised by Joy, p. 6)... By the age of twelve there had grown in Lewis’s mind an intense relationship with the world of fantasy and elves... His concept of reality was distorted by his circumstances. And although one would expect childhood fantasies to subside after time, in Lewis’s case they became more a delight as he grew older. After advancing to preparatory school at Wyvern, Lewis gradually “ceased to be a Christian.”... His taste for the occult was nurtured and grew as he became enthralled with Wagnerian operas and their Norse sagas derived from Celtic mythology. At the age of 27 after having been elected Fellow and Tutor in English Language and Literature at Magdalen College, C.S. Lewis met one John Ronald Ruel Tolkien at a meeting of the English faculty of Merton College. This was May 11, 1926. J.R.R. Tolkien, though wary of Lewis at first, enrolled him in the “Coalbiters,” a club founded by Tolkien for the study and propagation of Norse mythology.” (Al Dager, Media Spotlight, 1985).

Before proceeding further we need the insight of one of the world’s most preeminent Lewis scholars. Thomas Howard was the famous son of a famous and prestigious evangelical family. For nearly a century (later part of the 19th century to about 1950 or 1960) the Howard men were editors of a journal that once could be called the Bible of Protestant fundamentalism. It was called the Sunday School Times. Howard’s great-grandfather was the founding editor and after Thomas gained an MA at the University of Illinois and a doctorate at NYU he slated to become the next editor. But by this time Howard was well on his way to converting to Rome. The irony is that all of Howard’s siblings were all missionaries to Roman Catholic countries. Howard’s most famous sibling is his sister Elizabeth Elliot the widowed wife of Jim Elliot one of the five missionaries martyred by the Auca Indians and depicted in the recent film, “The End of the Spear.” As well as his conversion to Rome, Howard was and is the most famous of all Lewis scholars. Another famous evangelical son is Franky Schaeffer the son of the legendary Francis Schaeffer. He also abandoned evangelicalism for the sacramentalism of the Greek Orthodox church. In an interview with Howard, Franky Schaeffer inquires of Howard about C. S. Lewis and Howard’s responses are very interesting.

“FS: I know you are an expert on C.S. Lewis... Isn’t it strange C.S. Lewis is an “evangelical hero when he certainly cannot be described as Protestant, let alone “evangelical” in the classical sense.

TH: You put your finger on a very, interesting point. I had an article in a RC magazine called Crisis several months back on this very point: on C.S. Lewis and his evangelical “clientele.” Not only is it an irony, it is a contradiction. Lewis would have been appalled by the evangelical adulation of his work. He would have been horrified, even enraged by a lot of what he would see today in American evangelical circles. He was not a free church evangelical. C.S. Lewis was a sacramentalist... Lewis’s evangelical “clientele” simply don’t get it. When Lewis speaks of the blessed sacrament they don’t hear it. When Lewis speaks of the prayers of the Church they don’t hear it. When Lewis speaks of auricular confession which he practiced, they don’t hear it... [In] the Screwtape Letters Lewis has a section where Screwtape (the lead demon writing the little demon Wormwood) says something like, “in misleading your Protestant convert, the best thing to do is get him to pray extemporaneously, make sure he doesn’t pray the liturgical prayers his mother taught him, let him think everything he says is original.” (The Christian Activist, “Conversation with Thomas Howard and Frank Schaeffer”, Vol. 9/9interview.htm.)

Lewis’s unusual conversion

By the time Lewis arrived at Oxford his nominal Christianity was totally replaced by his belief in pagan mythology. He said something to the effect that when he got to Oxford he was a convert to paganism and most of the other students were apostate puritans. But his friend a fellow devotee to Norse mythology and fantasy J.R.R. Tolkien was paradoxically a devout Catholic. With the aid of a mutual friend, Hugo Dyson Tolkien attempted to Christianize Lewis. In a famous all night session they worked on Lewis. Tolkien and Dyson argued that there is an inherent truth in mythology: that all pagan religions point to the direction of

God. They argued that these pagan religions contain truths and arose out of the structure of reality created by God. Through this faulty reasoning Lewis came to believe that the story of Christ is also a myth and a true one. Lewis declared that he was now a Christian. Lewis and Tolkien then together developed their prestigious "sword and sorcery" material. Adam Gopnick has written an insightful article in *The New Yorker* and is taken by the method Tolkien and Dyson used to bring Lewis into the fold. Gopnick comments:

"It was through the intervention of the secretive and personally troubled Tolkien, however, that Lewis made his turn to orthodox Christianity. In company with another friend (Dyson) they took a long, and now famous walk on an autumn night in 1931, pacing and arguing from early evening to early morning ... Tolkien...said that the distinction that Lewis made between myth and fact – between intimations of timeless joy and belief in a historically based religion [For Lewis myth was total reality] was a false dichotomy. Language and the consciousness it reflected, was intrinsically magical. One had to become religious to save the magic, not be saved from it... Tolkien insisted on that night ramble [that all existence] was mythical; the stars were the fires of gods if you choose to see them that way, just as the world was the stories you made up from it. If you were drawn to myth at all, as Lewis was, then you ought to accept the Christian myth just as you accepted the Lovely Northern [Norse] ones. By the end of the walk, Lewis was, or was about to become a churchgoer. This was a new turn in the history of religious conversion. Where for millennia the cutting edge of faith had been the difference between pagan myth and Christian revelation, Lewis was drawn to the *likeness* of the Christian revelation to pagan myth. Even Victorian conversions came in the ... classic manner out of an overwhelming sense of sin. Cardinal Manning agonized over eating too much cake, and was eventually drawn to the church of Rome to keep himself from doing it again. Lewis didn't embrace Christianity because he had eaten too much cake; he embraced it because he thought that it would keep the cake (myth) coming; that the Anglican Church was God's own bakery. The story of Christ is simply a true myth... Perhaps his leap from myth to Christian faith wasn't a leap at all, more of a standing hop in place.

(*The New Yorker*, 11-21-2005)

Perhaps the best-known fantasy from Lewis's pen is the seven-volume *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Most people I know see "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe" as a Christian allegory akin to *Pilgrims Progress* in which Lewis intentionally attempts to convey the Gospel in allegory. But Lewis disavows that he wrote *Narnia* to present the Christian faith. Lewis states: "Some people seem to think that I began by asking myself how I could say something about Christianity to children; then fixed on the fairy tale as an instrument; then collected information about child-psychology and decided what age group I'd write for; then drew up a list of basic Christian truths and hammered out 'allegories' to embody them. This is all pure moonshine... Everything began with images; a faun carrying an umbrella, a queen on a sledge, a magnificent lion. At first there wasn't anything Christian about them; that element pushed itself in of its own accord" (*Of Other Worlds*, 1975, p. 36)

In response to critics claims of Christian allegory in his fantasies, Lewis stated, "...no story can be devised by the wit of man which cannot be interpreted allegorically by wit of some other man..." (*Of Other Worlds*, p. 57)

Gopeck presents a neat summary of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. "[It] opens with four children who have been sent to the countryside to discover an enchanted land on the other side of an old wardrobe: this is Narnia and it has been enslaved by a White Witch, who has turned the country to eternal winter. The talking animals who live in Narnia wait desperately for the return of Aslan, the Lion King, who might restore their freedom. At last Aslan returns. Beautiful and brave and instantly attractive. He has a deep voice and commanding presence, obviously kingly. The White Witch conspires to have him killed, and succeeds in part because of the children's errors. Miraculously, he return to life, liberates Narnia, and returns the land to spring... Yet a central point of the Gospel story is that Jesus is not the lion of the faith but the lamb of God... The ...force of the Christian story is that the lions are all on the other side. If we had, say, a donkey, a seemingly uninspiring animal from an obscure corner of Narnia, raised a... low cast beast of burden rallying the mice and rats and weasel's and vultures and all other unclean animals, and then being killed by the lions in as humiliating a manner as possible – a donkey who reemerges, to the shock of even his disciples and devotees as king of all creation – now that would be a Christian allegory. A powerful lion,

starting life at the top of the food chain, adored by all his subjects and filled with temporal power, killed by a despised evil witch for his power and then reborn to rule, is Mithraic. (Mithras was a first century mystery religion and competitor of the Gospel) not a Christian myth.” (New Yorker, p.10).

Lewis personal life can be found in his works. He lived with a Mrs. Moore 30 years his senior for many years. Some suggest that Mrs. Moore was much more than a housekeeper. In later years he married Joy Gresham who was estranged from her husband. When she died Lewis was shattered and he wrote a book called *A Grief Observed*. It is a man in despair and actually in rebellion to God for his loss. When my wife Gini passed away I secured the book. But finally I couldn't read it anymore because it was so dark and Christian hope seemed almost totally lacking.

Lewis never gave up his commitment to and fascination with pagan myths. On a visit to Greece with his wife Joy in 1960, Lewis made the following statement:

“ I had some ado to prevent Joy and myself from lapsing into paganism in Attica! At Daphni it was hard not to pray to Apollo the healer. But somehow one didn't feel it would have been very wrong – Would have only been addressing Christ “Sub Specie Apollonii” (Lewis to Chad Walsh, May 23, 1960, cited from George Sayer, Jack: A life of C.S. Lewis, 1994, p. 387).

In *Letters to Malcom*, (p. 107) Lewis indicates that shortly before his death he was turning toward the Catholic church. Lewis termed himself “very Catholic” - his prayers for the dead, belief in purgatory, and rejection of literal resurrection of the body are serious deviations from biblical Christianity. (C.S. Lewis: A Biography, p. 234). He stated that “Christ fulfills both paganism and Judaism...” Reflections on the Psalms, p. 129)

Lewis believed that we're to become gods, an apparent affirmation of theistic evolution. He believed that evolution was true to an extent in the past, but that it will be superseded in the future (Mere Christianity, p. 169). “ ...for we have good reason to believe that animals existed long before men... For long centuries God perfected the animal form which was to become the vehicle of humanity and the image of Himself... [Eventually,] God caused a new kind of consciousness to descend upon this organism” (Problem of Pain, 133, 133.77)...” “ He made an earth at first ‘without form and void’ and brought it by degrees to its perfection” (Miracles, p. 125). Finally he rejected the substitutionary death of Christ.

Conclusion:

Its hard to know what to say. Our icon is tarnished, a naked saint right in front of our eyes. Is it ok to venerate this man? Should his writings  top the charts for the church? He has made his entry into eternity. God will judge all things including us with truth and compassion. But do we please God when blend together Pagan myth with God's revelation of Himself. For my masters thesis some years ago I wrote on religious syncretism in Israel in the Omirite period. There was this life and death struggle between Jehovah and Baal. Israel was well on its way to being swallowed up and digested by the Canaanite religions. It was Baal or Jehovah the true and living God. However, because God was jealous of his name and nature he sent prophets and challenged the people, “This day choose whom you will serve Jehovah or Baal.” We know the outcome, but it was a close call by earthly standards. Rather than the nature gods of Canaan and mythopoeic fantasies being somehow as Lewis suggests evolutionary steps leading to and including Jehovah, the Cannanites must be vanquished and God allowed His people to ruthlessly accomplish this. Rather than reveling in Baalistic/ myth fantasies, Elijah confronted and exposed the bankruptcy of the nature mythology represented in Baal and all his pantheon of gods and their consorts. For me Baal and Anat and the Norse gods of Lewis are not welcome in my world view. At Sinai the people wanted to merge Jehovah with calf worship and depict Him as a Bull. But God was not pleased at this attempt to adapt to the surrounding culture. So it comes to this: Is it the Bull or Jehovah. Is it the priests of Baal at Carmel or the fiery prophet of God Elijah. I leave to you to decide. You have Lewis's own words, and there are many more quotes that space would not allow.

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