

Christian architecture of Otherness

based on C. S. Lewis's "Mere Christianity" (1943) - Book Review.

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Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, esteemed guests and fellow students,

*Our presentation concerns otherness in the Christian world. For our presentation, we were based on excerpts from C.S. Lewis's book *Mere Christianity*. Our presentation will have the following structure. We will first share with you a visual metaphor which C.S. Lewis came up with to describe the relationship among different religious backgrounds. So, let's hear it directly from him:*

I hope no reader will suppose that 'mere' Christianity is here put forward as an alternative to the creeds of the existing communions—as if a man could adopt it in preference to Congregationalism or Greek Orthodoxy or anything else. It is more like a hall out of which doors open into several rooms. If I can bring anyone into that hall I shall have done what I attempted. But it is in the rooms, not in the hall, that there are fires and chairs and meals. The hall is a place to wait in, a place from which to try the various doors, not a place to live in. For that purpose, the worst of the rooms (whichever that may be) is, I think, preferable. It is true that some people may find they have to wait in the hall for a considerable time, while others feel certain almost at once which door they must knock at. I do not know why there is this difference, but I am sure God keeps no one waiting unless He sees that it is good for him to wait. When you do get into your room you will find that the long wait has done you some kind of good which you would not have had otherwise. But you must regard it as waiting, not as camping. You must keep on praying for light.”

If we listen closely to his words, we shall understand that all dogmas, all denominations are part of the same household. We as Christians may not share the same rooms, that is the exact same views, but we do share the same core values, the same core beliefs. So, we'd like to invite you to come out of your rooms, today, and chat with us, interact with us in the hallway.

Of course, we can't deny there are problems in such an endeavor. Why is it difficult for us to come out of our rooms? Why is it so difficult for us to accept others? Well, the truth is that we believe ourselves to be absolutely correct at all times while others are wrong. In other words, we think our own room in the mansion is the best and most important one in the house. That's problem number one. The next problem is that sometimes this absolutist thinking makes us believe it's a waste of time to listen to others and try to interact with each other. We enjoy the comfort of our own room and are too afraid to step out into the

unknown. Finally, the third problem is that we do not understand that we belong to the same house, that we share the same overarching structure. We don't know what unites us and this keeps us divided.

So, let's see the way out, the solution. What is it that we share? Once again, let's see what C.S. Lewis has to say about that:

“Every one has heard people quarrelling. Sometimes it sounds funny and sometimes it sounds merely unpleasant; but however it sounds, I believe we can learn something very important from listening to the kind of things they say. They say things like this: ‘How'd you like it if anyone did the same to you?’— ‘That's my seat, I was there first’. what interests me about all these remarks is that the man who makes them is not merely saying that the other man's behaviour does not happen to please him. He is appealing to some kind of standard of behaviour which he expects the other man to know about. It looks, in fact, very much as if both parties had in mind some kind of Law or Rule of fair play or decent behaviour or morality or whatever you like to call it, about which they really agreed. And they have. If they had not, they might, of course, fight like animals, but they could not quarrel in the human sense of the word. Quarrelling means trying to show that the other man is in the wrong. And there would be no sense in trying to do that unless you and he had some sort of agreement as to what Right and Wrong are; just as there would be no sense in saying that a footballer had committed a foul unless there was some agreement about the rules of football.”

What we have in common, therefore, is we're all humans. We came from the same Creative source and we share a common law. The law of Right and Wrong. We may sometimes argue about who's in the right and who's in the wrong, but no one can deny that there is Right and there is Wrong. Since we share this space, let us be aware of it and keep working together to walk closer to the light.

Thank you for your attention!