

UNIVERSITY OF TARTU
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH STUDIES

**THE ADAPTATION OF CHRISTIAN MOTIFS IN C. S. LEWIS' *MERE*
CHRISTIANITY IN *THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA* SERIES**

BA thesis

MARTA SÕMER

SUPERVISOR: Prof. Pilvi Rajamäe, PhD

TARTU

2026

Abstract

The present thesis examines how the theological viewpoints of C. S. Lewis expressed in his apologetical book *Mere Christianity* manifest themselves in his fantasy series *The Chronicles of Narnia*. The aim of the thesis is to draw parallels between these works and analyse how Lewis' theological beliefs may have shaped the world of Narnia.

The thesis consists of four parts – an introduction, the literature review, the empirical part and a conclusion.

The introduction briefly discusses theological themes in both children's literature and *The Chronicles of Narnia* and presents the topics analysed in the thesis. The introduction also includes the aim of the thesis.

The literature review provides an overview of prior research done on *The Chronicles of Narnia* and Christian themes, namely morality, biblical narratives, and the character of Aslan as a Christ-figure. Lewis' apologetical book *Mere Christianity* is also discussed.

The empirical part analyses *The Chronicles of Narnia* books from the viewpoint of Lewis' theological standpoints in *Mere Christianity*.

The conclusion provides a summary of the discoveries made.

Table of contents

Abstract.....	2
Introduction.....	3
LITERATURE REVIEW: PRIOR RESEARCH ON THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA AND CHRISTIANITY.....	5
Introduction.....	5
1.1. Mere Christianity.....	5
1.2 Morality, virtue and sin.....	6
1.3 Biblical narratives.....	10
1.4 Aslan and God.....	12
CHRISTIAN MOTIFS FROM MERE CHRISTIANITY IN THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA.....	14
Introduction.....	14
2.1 Moral Law.....	14
2.2. Sin.....	16
2.3 Forgiveness and redemption.....	17
2.4. Faith.....	19
CONCLUSION.....	20
REFERENCES.....	23
Primary sources.....	23
Secondary sources.....	23

RESÜMEE.....	25
---------------------	-----------

Introduction

Theological themes in children's literature date back centuries. In western culture, with the advent of Puritanism arrived a growing need to teach children about Christian morals – most books published with children as the target audience addressed Christian virtues. The very first children's book published in 1656 in the United States (*Spiritual Milk for Boston Babes* by John Cotton) was a catechism (Bingham and Schott 1980). Children's fiction is, in its own unique way, also capable of addressing religious themes, and the 20th and 21st centuries saw a renewed interest in using theological motifs in books meant for children (Blair 2016). Blair (2016) brings an example of the work of C. S. Lewis as children's literature that incorporates both fantastical and religious themes.

C. S. Lewis reconverted to Christianity in adulthood, following which he wrote both Christian apologetics, from which the best known one may be *Mere Christianity*, and fiction with Christian themes incorporated in it (for example, the sci-fi series *Space Trilogy*). Nevertheless, the seven-book children's fantasy series *The Chronicles of Narnia* remains his most notable work to date. Its books will also be the subject of study for the present thesis.

Alongside traits from various mythologies, there is a generally accepted presence of Christian themes in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, some of which have been studied repeatedly. It may be worth pointing out that according to Lewis himself, he had no intentions of weaving Christian themes into the series, and the initial inclusion of religious motifs happened inadvertently (Lewis 1956: 310). The most widely recognised and studied biblical themes may be the character of Aslan as a representation of Jesus Christ or God, and Aslan's death and resurrection in the book *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe* as parallels to the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, other biblical stories like the creation of the world and the Last

Judgement, but also a general incorporation of Christian virtues and morals in the plot or the characters.

This thesis aims to draw parallels between the Christian motifs in *The Chronicles of Narnia* in the context of Lewis' Christian apologetical book *Mere Christianity* and hence examine how Lewis' theological viewpoints may have shaped the world of Narnia. The importance of the paper lies in its contribution to studying theological themes in children's literature, as it focuses particularly on how the ideas from an apologetical book are incorporated into a children's fantasy book series. The first part of the thesis will focus on reviewing previous research done on the topic. The second part looks deeper into each novel in the series and analyses the possible religious themes incorporated. The conclusion gives an overview of the discoveries made.

LITERATURE REVIEW: PRIOR RESEARCH ON *THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA* AND CHRISTIANITY

Introduction

C. S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia* series is widely agreed upon to embody Christian themes. The present literature review will be giving both a brief overview of the themes discussed in Lewis' apologetical book *Mere Christianity* and prior research done on how *The Chronicles of Narnia* incorporates Christian virtue, morality and sin, specific biblical narratives, and Aslan as a character representative of God.

1.1. *Mere Christianity*

In his apologetical book *Mere Christianity*, Lewis (1952) discusses topics central to the Christian faith, like morality, sin, virtue and forgiveness, what they mean and how they should be interpreted in Christian lifestyle. He uses the proposed presence of an innate moral code inside the human mind to argue for the existence of God. Moreover, Lewis distinguishes between what he calls “cardinal” and “theological” virtues and identifies the “Great Sin” (which is Pride). He also elaborates on the necessity of Jesus Christ as a redeemer for humankind. The way these motifs are later implemented in *The Chronicles of Narnia* series will be studied in the empirical part of the present thesis.

There are various reasons *Mere Christianity* has been chosen for the basis of the analysis of *The Chronicles of Narnia* in the present thesis. Primarily it is because the world of Narnia allows the theoretical arguments of *Mere Christianity* to be displayed in an observable, fictional world. Narnia is similar enough to the real world due to its sentient magical inhabitants, and human protagonists. However, the magical aspect and fantastic medieval atmosphere provide a detachment.

Moreover, as both *Mere Christianity* and *The Chronicles of Narnia* can be argued to, at their very cores, revolve around morality and moral education, *Mere Christianity* would be a good framework to use in studying *The Chronicles of Narnia* books. As the world of Narnia was created with the target audience of children, the moral lessons would be expected to be presented through a child-friendly, perhaps simplified way. *The Chronicles of Narnia* were also written around the same time as *Mere Christianity*.

1.2 Morality, virtue and sin

In *The Chronicles of Narnia*, virtue and sin are explored through a Christian moral lens. Sin generally manifests as some kind of rather trivial wrongdoing and is followed by repentance and forgiveness. The books were written with the goal of educating children on virtues like kindness and forgiveness, according to Wilson (2007) and Misener (2016), the latter of whom further elaborates on the types of errors that characters tend to commit and how they are then redeemed. Conflict between protagonists in *The Chronicles of Narnia* is most of the time verbal and incorporates insults or name-calling. Many of the commonly used insults also have biblical significance behind them, like “pig” (which is considered an unclean animal in biblical literature) and “fool” (Jesus warned his disciples against calling others fools) – it may also be worth mentioning that the entirely evil and irredeemable villain, the White Witch Jadis, often uses the insults “fools” or “foolish”. This is also the case with antagonists who appear in other books. In the case of protagonists insulting one another, an apology from the name-caller and forgiveness always follow, although a considerable amount of time may have to pass before that. (Misener 2016) Overall, angry words or insults tend to make up most of the quarrels between the protagonists, and forgiveness is portrayed as a morally correct way to resolve conflict. As for bigger misdeeds, there are fewer of them, and they usually seem to serve as plot points or triggers for character development.

Nevertheless, when a character does commit some kind of greater transgression, humbleness and repentance become relevant, and often the lion Aslan (overwhelmingly seen as a representation of Jesus, or God) must interfere to right the wrongs committed by a character and ensure they are forgiven. In perhaps the most evident case, Aslan lets himself be killed in the place of Edmund, who betrays Narnia to Jadis (Lewis 1950). However, there are less severe

examples of Aslan's interference, too. Misener (2016) highlights the instances in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, where both Lucy Pevensie's briefly displayed sin of vanity and Eustace Scrubb's general insolence and expression of greed are resolved by Aslan through magic, although Lucy feels bad and is forgiven instantly whereas Eustace is magically turned into a dragon for a while as punishment until he repents for his sin – after some time has passed, Aslan turns him back into a human (Misener 2016). Hence, Aslan's magic sometimes seems to be the only way to redeem a character. The idea that in the end, redemption may only be possible through Aslan, or God, bears a resemblance to the Christian doctrine of being saved by God's grace. This also hints at how everyone is technically redeemable and never too far gone to be saved (save for Jadis).

Wilson (2007) adds that the many characters are representative of Christians at different points of their religious journeys. This interpretation is logical, as similarly to real life, in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, some characters (like Eustace) reject the notion of Aslan (God) for a long time only to come around later. According to Wilson (2007), the fact that the series is set in a fantasy world with a medieval theme allows the author to express the topic of morality more profoundly, as the moral code was held in higher regard in the past.

A particularly notable approach to virtue in *The Chronicles of Narnia* is offered by Trupia (2002), who suggests that each book in the series may have a kind of “central” virtue that the story is modelled after. The seven virtues mentioned by Lewis, four “cardinal” and the remaining three “theological”, may have affected the way that the seven books of *The Chronicles of Narnia* were written. Trupia (2002) argues that *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* has Christian charity as its “main” virtue, and that essentially, the entire plot of the book revolves around charity in some way, whether it be the acceptance or discarding of it.

Lewis himself stated that “forgiveness is part of charity”, which reinforces the previously discussed idea that forgiveness is a valued virtue. The rest of the books also have their leading virtues, which Trupia (2002) names “Guardian Virtues”. *Prince Caspian* handles the virtue of faith and, by extension, trust, primarily in God. The events in the book constantly test the protagonists who eventually emerge victorious, having remained faithful to Aslan the entire time. Caspian, one of the protagonists, begins to believe in and trust Aslan after faith is described to him as “reasonable”. Trust in Aslan is also a vital trait to have for Lucy Pevensie in face of hardship. The virtue of hope is introduced in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, where both the presence and absence of hope act as triggers that cause the characters to act. Trupia (2002) opines that the first “cardinal” virtue, which is prudence, is displayed in *The Silver Chair*. The challenges faced by the two protagonists (Eustace Scrubb, now reformed, and his friend Jill) tend to be largely intellectual, and prudence, or wisdom, is what helps the two overcome them. In *The Horse and his Boy*, the leading virtue is justice or fairness, as the characters are eventually treated the way they treated others. An example would be the pain endured by a slave being avenged by Aslan attacking the master. However, “justice” is used with a broader meaning here and also encompasses fairness, honesty, or truthfulness to oneself – a point also expanded on by Lewis (1952) in *Mere Christianity*. *The Magician’s Nephew* has temperance as its token virtue, as characters struggle with “going the right length, and no further” – someone always goes too far, from uncle Andrew’s strange experiments to Digory’s temptation that leads him to ring the bell that wakes the White Witch Jadis. *The Last Battle*’s leading virtue is said by Trupia (2002) to be fortitude, or courage. As the world of Narnia approaches its end, fortitude is displayed by the protagonists who eventually enter the “true”

Narnia – essentially an afterlife or heaven, where, Trupia (2002) says that “virtue is a fixed state of the soul”.

Throughout *The Chronicles of Narnia* series, morality and sin are largely expressed through the actions of the characters, and any kind of wrongdoing by the protagonists may be atoned for. Smaller conflict is often presented in the form of insults and is usually resolved by forgiveness by the offended party, however, in the event of bigger transgressions, the aid of Aslan is necessary. This sentiment echoes the Christian belief of “saved by Grace”. An unique idea of each book in the series having a “central” virtue as a leading theme has also been proposed.

1.3 Biblical narratives

There are three books in *The Chronicles of Narnia* that can most clearly be read as parallels for specific biblical stories – *The Magician’s Nephew*, *The Lion*, *The Witch and the Wardrobe* and *The Last Battle*. According to Ward (2010: 4), these three books incorporate clear retellings of biblical narratives, whereas the remaining four at first sight scarcely seem to have anything to do with the Bible. Instead, the latter might mainly be an exploration of Christian virtues and lifestyle. Wilson (2007) agrees with this statement and adds that the series vies to retell biblical events in a chronological order, as *The Magician’s Nephew* and *The Last Battle* represent the creation and the end of the world respectively, and *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* includes Christ’s passion narrative.

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe recounts the narrative of the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. When one of the protagonists, Edmund Pevensie, betrays his siblings and brings them to the White Witch Jadis in exchange for Turkish delight sweets, Aslan

is to be put to death for Edmund's misdeed, instead of Edmund himself. On his way to the stone table where Aslan is to be executed he is mocked and ridiculed, much like Jesus was. Aslan rises from the dead after the night has passed. The presence of the Pevensie sisters Lucy and Susan who, in the middle of the night, attempt to untie Aslan's corpse from the stone table where he died, echoes the women at Jesus' tomb in the gospels (Hinten 2002). *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* is certainly the one book in the series where the biblical allusions and references to the scripture are the most obvious and able to be understood even by people less familiar with christianity.

The Magician's Nephew, the first book in the series chronologically, recounts the creation of the world of Narnia and also has some references to the Old Testament. Aslan creates Narnia from nothingness and through the act of singing. He sings the world of Narnia into existence, following which the stars respond to him with singing on their own. According to Hinten (2003), the act of singing may be an allusion to the Book of Job where it is said that "the morning stars sang together" (Job 38:7) when the world was created. Moreover, the concept of Aslan choosing the animals who become his followers and gain the ability of speech is reminiscent of God's "chosen nation", and Aslan warning them to not disobey, lest they become normal animals again may be an allusion to Genesis 3:19 (Hinten 2003).

The Last Battle, the final book in the series, is apocalyptic in nature and echoes the Book of Revelation, the last book of the Bible (Wilson 2007). The events of *The Last Battle* include the arrival of the Antichrist or the false messiah in the form of an ape who wreaks havoc on Narnia and its inhabitants. Eventually, Aslan carries out a final judgment, following which characters either enter the "true" Narnia, or "disappear into Aslan's shadow". Finally, the protagonists originally from the human world learn that they have already died there, in a train

accident, and are now free to enter the “true” Narnia. This “true” Narnia is most likely an equivalent of Heaven.

Out of all the biblical narratives in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, the one of the passion of Christ in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* has been researched the most. It is the most obvious to people even vaguely familiar with the general narrative of the four New Testament gospels. *The Magician’s Nephew* describes the creation of the world of Narnia with some parallels with the Book of Genesis, but also has other additional allusions to the Bible and the scripture. *The Last Battle* tells the story of the end of the Narnia and the Last Judgement. Biblical elements in the latter two may not be as easily recognisable to readers unfamiliar with the Bible or eschatology (in the case of *The Last Battle*), but it is possible to find correlations between them.

1.4 Aslan and God

The character of the lion Aslan, the King of Narnia, is a much-researched topic. Nearly all scholars who have studied *The Chronicles of Narnia* agree that Aslan symbolises the Christian God, sometimes more specifically Jesus Christ or God the Son. Although Aslan’s death and resurrection in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* are clearly reminiscent of the passion, death and resurrection of Christ, the narrative in the book is altered in some ways, likely in order to render Aslan more sympathetic or understandable to children than the portrayal of Jesus they would usually encounter in church (Diana 2024). Wilson (2007) agrees and adds that due to the “chivalric” atmosphere of Narnia, Aslan’s sacrifice still feels dreadful but may strike children as less horrific than the biblical story of Jesus. Overall, Aslan both represents the qualities and commits actions that are typically attributed to God in Christianity –

like his role of creating Narnia in *The Magician's Nephew* and his death and resurrection in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, but also a general omnipotence and a capability to aid characters in trouble, or deliver them from their sins, as discussed before.

Holt (2006) observes that Aslan is easily identifiable as a Christ-figure when reading the books. He highlights the presence of God the Father in Narnia, who is the Emperor-Beyond-the-Sea and ruler of all worlds (not just Narnia) and also Aslan's father, but the presence of this character feels remote and he is mainly made known by Aslan, or God the Son. The Holy Spirit feels absent in the books, but Holt notes that neither does it occupy the centre of attention in the Scripture. In *The Chronicles of Narnia*, the Holy Spirit appears much like it does in the real world according to Christian belief and mainly resides in one's inner character to prompt them to repent, stay faithful or seek out God (Holt 2006).

Shober (2019) acknowledges that Aslan is a Christ-figure and has explored the importance of depicting him as a lion – she highlights the title of the lion as “King of the Beasts” and the historical significance of leonine symbolism in literature and culture, as lions have long been perceived as possessing a regal or even god-like character. By portraying Aslan as a lion in Narnia, the divinity of God becomes understandable to its inhabitants, who are largely also animals or mythical creatures. Aslan's depiction also alludes to the parallel drawn in the Book of Revelation between Christ and the Lion of Judah. The Lion of Judah is a Jewish cultural symbol, and the concept of Aslan as the Lion of Judah was actually previously confirmed by Lewis himself, in a letter of his (Ford 2005). Overall, the choice to portray Aslan as a lion is sensible and perhaps even expected, especially with the historical association of lions with royalty.

Virtually all scholars who have studied *The Chronicles of Narnia* unanimously agree that the character Aslan, the Great Lion, is a Christ-figure and a representation of God in the Narnian world. In addition to Aslan's death and resurrection as parallels to the passion of Christ, other traits and abilities of the Christian God are often attributed to Aslan. Aslan is portrayed as a lion for multiple reasons, the main one of which is the animal and fantastical inhabitants of Narnia relating to him and understanding his divinity better. As the Christian belief sees Jesus as King of both Earth and Heaven, the lion Aslan is the King of Narnia, a world of mythical creatures and talking animals.

CHRISTIAN MOTIFS FROM *MERE CHRISTIANITY* IN *THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA*

Introduction

The second part of the present thesis focuses on the ideas C. S. Lewis has presented in his apologetical book *Mere Christianity* and questions how they may be tied to religious motifs in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. The themes explored will be moral law, sin, forgiveness and faith. In order to answer the question, close reading combined with analysis using *Mere Christianity* as the main framework will be conducted.

2.1 Moral Law

In *Mere Christianity*, the very first idea Lewis presents is the presence of something he labels the "Law of Nature" or "Moral Law", which manifests as an innate understanding of "right" and "wrong" in the human mind, regardless of one's cultural background. He states that

although this Moral Law may be transgressed, it is not very subject to change with time, but historically it has been interpreted in different ways. The concept he then uses to argue for God's existence, as there has to be something that planted this subconscious moral code into the human mind (Lewis 1952). The way Moral Law is described in *Mere Christianity* bears a resemblance to the concepts of Deep Magic and Deeper Magic in *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

The Narnian Deep Magic is essentially a collection of unchangeable laws that were established in Narnia after its creation and also engraved into various items of significance. One of the statements in the law discloses that Jadis, the White Witch, may kill all traitors in Narnia. The Deeper Magic functions as a sort of addition to the law of Deep Magic – the rule being that if an innocent willingly offers to die in place of the traitor, death itself will be reversed. However, Jadis is shown to be entirely ignorant of Deeper Magic – Aslan has to introduce the idea of it to her, and Aslan's willing death in the place of Edmund Pevensie who betrayed Narnia is shown to trigger Deeper Magic's law, as Aslan is resurrected (Lewis 1950). Portraying Aslan as knowledgeable about the addendum of Deeper Magic, and Jadis as oblivious to it, links to the idea of Moral Law being sourced from God.

This is further proven by how the initial creation of both Deep and Deeper Magic is credited to a character titled the Emperor-Beyond-The-Sea. He is mentioned in the books multiple times but never makes a direct appearance. The Emperor is said to rule over all worlds (not just Narnia) and to be Aslan's Father (Lewis 1952: Chapter VII). The similarities between the Emperor and God, or more specifically God the Father, are quite evident, especially with Aslan frequently compared to Jesus Christ or God the Son incarnate. Hence, the argument of Moral Law originating from God lines up with how both Deep and Deeper Magic are God's, or the Emperor's, creation.

In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, as a response to Susan's suggestion to "do something" about the Deep Magic, Aslan implies that the "Emperor's Magic" is impossible to work against (Lewis 1950). This is not unlike the real world's Moral Law, which cannot be changed or manipulated with and is innate in all humans. A difference between them would be that Moral Law, according to Lewis (1952), may be and is constantly disobeyed, whereas Deep and Deeper Magic cover a narrower set of laws and cannot be overstepped. Perhaps this is an implication that neither should the Moral Law be transgressed in the real world. The Christian motifs in the story are further reinforced by Aslan's usage of Deeper Magic in order to redeem Edmund, which implies that God has made an inherent law of the world being redeemed by an innocent who is killed for mankind's sins. Deeper Magic is also said to be "from before the dawn of time", just as Jesus Christ is described in the Gospel of John to have been existing with God before the creation of the world, as Logos.

Although the concepts of Moral Law and Deep Magic serve different functions, the basic ideas are quite similar. Both are sourced from God, irrefutable, and inherent in the world that they reside in. Neither can be worked against or interfered with, though the Moral Law of the real world allows for transgression. In *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Deeper Magic is used to resurrect Aslan, which recounts the Christian belief that it was the plan of God for Christ to die for the sins of, and hence redeem, all of humankind.

2.2. Sin

Out of all sins, Lewis (1952) argues pride to be by far the worst, since it requires one to think they are above God. He goes as far as to say that the sin of pride has brought despair upon

nearly all societies at some point. This sentiment is echoed quite profoundly multiple times in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, most notably in *The Magician's Nephew*.

Jadis, the irredeemable and evil villain (sometimes equated with Satan), originates from a destroyed world named Charn. Jadis herself is directly responsible for Charn's demise. To not have to surrender to her sister whom she was warring with, she spoke the "Deplorable Word" – a weapon that ends all life save for the speaker's (Lewis 1955: Chapter V). Jadis' pride quite literally triggered the destruction of a whole world. It also makes plenty sense for a character equated with pure evil to display the sin Lewis thinks to be the most harmful. In the same book, despite protests from his friend Polly, the protagonist Digory rings a bell in the desolate Charn that wakes Jadis from her indefinite slumber (Lewis 1955: Chapter IV). Digory's motive for striking the bell might have been fear in addition to pride – Polly told him not to, insulted and argued with him and threatened to leave him alone in Charn. Jadis' awakening later leads to her, and therefore evil, entering Narnia, which Digory would indirectly be responsible for. Digory successfully redeems himself after completing a quest given by Aslan. These events from *The Magician's Nephew* are examples of how the sin of pride can doom and depress worlds in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, much like *Mere Christianity* mentioned. Charn is utterly destroyed by the evil witch Jadis with no chance of repair.

When evil is introduced to Narnia by Digory, a human, he is able to redeem himself through Aslan, or God, and right the wrongs that he committed. This holds true for all human characters. For Jadis, a representative of pure evil, redemption is not an option.

2.3 Forgiveness and redemption

Mere Christianity states that the “most unpopular” among Christian virtues is forgiveness (Lewis 1952). Lewis opines that forgiveness is often seen as a noble and admirable concept, but one that very few are actually happy to practise themselves. He observes that the issue with forgiveness lies in how people actually think “forgiving one’s enemy” to be a disagreeable sentiment – e.g. a survivor who has had their human rights violated would hardly want to forgive the perpetrators. He proposes that humans should instead begin with smaller acts of forgiveness, like forgiving a loved one for a mistake instead of holding a grudge. In *Mere Christianity*, Lewis (1952) also elaborates on the role of Jesus Christ in the salvation of mankind. Humans are unable to “save” themselves on their own, and God’s intervention is necessary.

Forgiveness is one of the central themes in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. As mentioned previously, forgiveness for minor misdeeds (like insults) may either be easy or take some time for the protagonists. Still, eventually, forgiveness for small mistakes does come to pass. But it is only Aslan who is able to redeem serious transgressions, undo their consequences, and hence allow the offender to be forgiven by their peers as well (here, it should also be noted that a desire to better oneself or repentance is generally still needed from the culprit). This system in *The Chronicles of Narnia* is reminiscent of Lewis’ opinion and portrayal of forgiveness in *Mere Christianity*. Both of them distinguish between small, personal conflicts and moral transgressions. In *The Chronicles of Narnia*, the former are plentiful, trivial and easily solvable with human effort, but the latter often serve as plot points and require Aslan’s aid.

Lewis (1952), in *Mere Christianity*, puts emphasis on how no human is truly beyond redemption. In *The Last Battle*, Susan is the only one of the four Pevensie siblings who does not

enter Narnia. The reasonings given by Peter Pevensie and Jill Pole are that Susan is “no longer a friend of Narnia” and has been too busy with make-up and fashion. Eustace also mentions how she has stopped believing that Narnia ever even existed (Lewis 1956: Chapter XII). The case of Susan is interesting, as she seems to be unable to enter Narnia solely due to her preoccupation with material possessions and faithlessness. This can also be analysed in the context of the aforementioned sin of pride, as Susan might feel too proud to acknowledge the “childish” concept of Narnia to her younger relatives, or the older Peter. If Susan expressed the desire to re-enter Narnia and had faith in it, she would more than likely be welcome. In the end of *The Last Battle* it turns out that the Pevensie siblings had died in a train crash before entering True Narnia, or heaven. Susan lived, but lost her family and a chance to enter True Narnia together with them. This also echoes the general Christian belief of earthly life mattering little compared to heaven.

In 1957, Lewis responded with a letter to a young fan, Martin Kilmer, who presumably asked about the fate of Susan Pevensie. Lewis stated that Susan has been turned into a “silly, conceited young woman” by the end of *The Last Battle*, but reassures him that she would still have a lot of time to change herself and grow from her ignorance, and that she may well still be welcome in True Narnia (Hooper 2007). Hence, Lewis himself has also stated that Susan still has the option to repent for her sin. This reinforces the *Mere Christianity* idea of forgiveness being accessible to everyone.

2.4. Faith

Faith might best be described as the concept of staying true to the results one has eventually reached using their reasoning, despite both doubt and the fluctuations one may

experience in their life and mood. *Mere Christianity* is clear on the fact that human moods are fickle, and to have the virtue of faith is to not let one's belief be affected by these changes in mood, which normally frequently happens. (Lewis 1952)

The virtue of faith is well displayed in the character of Lucy Pevensie. In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Lucy is persistent about her experience with Narnia when her siblings disbelieve her in the beginning. Along with Susan, Lucy follows Aslan to the Stone Table where the latter is executed (Lewis 1950: Chapter XIV). In *Prince Caspian*, Aslan only shows himself to Lucy and instructs her to tell her siblings to follow her, as she herself plans on following Aslan. The other Pevensie siblings are dismayed and do not believe that Lucy saw Aslan. All of them disregard her advice and even result to calling her annoying. They eventually concede, though, and are proved wrong, as Aslan appears to the rest of the siblings shortly afterwards (Lewis 1951: Chapter IX).

While the strength of Lucy's siblings' faith ebbs and flows based on their moods, Lucy is a good example of someone who, according to *Mere Christianity*, excels at faith. *Mere Christianity* even describes faith as a kind of skill and notes that it must be practised and kept in good shape constantly through activities like church-going, praying and reading the bible (Lewis 1952). A good explanation for why Lucy excels at exercising the virtue of faith is her age; she is the youngest Pevensie sibling, and therefore the least "tainted" by the distress of growing up and disillusionment with the world, whereas her older siblings, familiar with disappointment, are less receptive to the idea of retaining their faith in Aslan when their mood has already been brought down.

CONCLUSION

The thesis examines how C. S. Lewis' theological ideas, expressed in his book *Mere Christianity*, manifest themselves in his fantasy series *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Though prior research has explored Christian themes in the latter, scarcer research exists on Lewis' theological standpoints in the context of *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Thus, the aim of this thesis was to fill this research gap and examine how Lewis' personal theological beliefs appear in and shaped the Narnian world and story. The method used was comparative analysis of *Mere Christianity* and *The Chronicles of Narnia* books in order to find out how Lewis' stances are written into the series. *Mere Christianity* discusses various topics that are also present in the *The Chronicles of Narnia*, but the specific subjects chosen for this thesis were Moral Law, sin, redemption, forgiveness and faith. The reason for this selection is the recognisable presence of these themes in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and they are among the main discussed topics in *Mere Christianity*.

The analysis shows that Lewis' idea of Moral Law, or the Law of Nature, is comparable with Deep Magic and Deeper Magic in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. In both, the origins of Moral Law and Deep and Deeper Magic are traced back to God, and therefore also act as evidence of God's existence. The difference between them is that the real-world Moral Law is transgressable, whereas the Narnian Deep Magic and Deeper Magic are not. That Deeper Magic allowed Aslan, a Christ-figure in *The Chronicles of Narnia* books, to die for the sin of another and be resurrected later further echoes the belief that God's plan to redeem mankind through Christ was in place since before the creation of the world.

Lewis held the opinion that pride was the worst sin, and this belief is expressed strongly in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, most notably in the book *The Magician's Nephew* and the

character Jadis. Lewis noted that the sin of pride had brought disaster upon societies, and *The Magician's Nephew* depicts an entire civilisation falling due to Jadis' display of pride. Generally, characters who sin regret it, repent and are redeemed. This echoes the *Mere Christianity* idea that forgiveness is available to all through repentance and the Grace of God. Lewis also incorporates this in his handling of characters distanced from or unfamiliar with Narnia or Aslan, and either shows them as reconciled with Narnia or in states that may still allow them to do so.

Both *Mere Christianity* and *The Chronicles of Narnia* differentiate small wrongdoings from moral transgressions. Regarding redemption, the two works agree that small conflicts are solvable without direct divine interference, whereas serious transgressions often require the intervention of God, or Aslan. The topic of faith, which *Mere Christianity* discusses extensively, is very present in *The Chronicles of Narnia* and most profoundly expressed through the character of Lucy Pevensie.

The analysis showed that instead of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, besides including only well-known biblical narratives or a Christ-figure represented by Aslan, also expresses the specific theological beliefs that Lewis held and expressed in *Mere Christianity*. The findings show that topics like morality, forgiveness, sin, redemption and the importance of perseverance of faith during times of hardship link the two works, and form the core of beliefs in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. The latter definitely deserve further research, for instance from the perspective of the portrayal of foreign areas (for example, Calormen) or the role of women and girls in the series.

REFERENCES

Primary sources

- Lewis, C.S. 1952. *Mere Christianity*. United Kingdom: Geoffrey Bles.
- Lewis, C.S. 1950. *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. United Kingdom: Geoffrey Bles.
- Lewis, C.S. 1951. *Prince Caspian*. United Kingdom: Geoffrey Bles.
- Lewis, C.S. 1952. *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. United Kingdom: Geoffrey Bles.
- Lewis, C.S. 1955. *The Magician's Nephew*. United Kingdom: The Bodley Head.
- Lewis, C.S. 1956. *The Last Battle*. United Kingdom: The Bodley Head.

Secondary sources

- Bingham, Jane and Grayce Scholt. 1980. *Fifteen Centuries of Children's Literature: An Annotated Chronology of British and American Works in Historical Context*. Michigan: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Blair, Kirstie. 2016. Children's Literature and Theology in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries. *Literature and Theology*. 30:2, 125-130.
- Diana, R. Celin. 2024. The Biblical Elements and Symbolism in C.S. Lewis' *The Chronicles Of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*. *ILN Journal: Indian Literary Narratives*. 1:2, 48-53.
- Ford, Paul. 2005. *Pocket companion to Narnia: A guide to the magical world of C.S. Lewis*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco.
- Hinten, Marvin. 2002. "Deeper Magic": Allusions in "The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe". *The Lamp-Post of the Southern California C.S. Lewis Society*. 26: Fall-Winter, 50/57.
- Hinten, Marvin. 2003. "The Founding of Narnia": Allusions in "The Magician's Nephew". *The Lamp-Post of the Southern California C.S. Lewis Society*. 27: Spring, 9-20.
- Holt, Rev'd Torbjørn. 2006. Sketches of a Narnian Theology. Part II. *The Chronicle of the Oxford University C.S. Lewis Society*. 27: 3:1, 5-8.
- Hooper, Walter (ed). 2007. *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis, Volume 3: Narnia, Cambridge, and Joy, 1950 - 1963*. HarperOne.
- Lewis, C.S. Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What's to be Said. *The New York Times*. November, 310.
- Misener, Jeffrey. 2016. Conflict, Forgiveness, and the Healing of Harms in C. S. Lewis' The Chronicles of Narnia. *Sehnsucht: The C.S. Lewis Journal*. 10, 103-120.
- Shober, Dianne. 2019. Leonine imagery in C.S. Lewis's series *The Chronicles of Narnia*. *Literatur Journal*. 40: 1.
- Trupia, Robert. 2002. Learning Christian Behavior: The Way of Virtue in "The Chronicles of Narnia". *The Lamp-Post of the Southern California C.S. Lewis Society*. 26: Spring-Summer, 10-15.
- Ward, Michael. 2010. *The Narnia Code: C. S. Lewis and the Secret of the Seven Heavens*. United States: Tyndal House Publishers, Inc..
- Wilson, Dominique Beth. 2007. Christianity in Narnia. *On a Panegyric Note: Studies in Honor of Garry W Trompf*. 173-187.

RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL

ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

Marta Sõmer

The Adaptation of Christian Motifs in C. S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity* in *The Chronicles of Narnia* series

C. S. Lewise teose "Mere Christianity" kristlike motiivide kohandamine sarjas "The Chronicles of Narnia"

Bakalaureusetöö

2026

Lehekülgede arv: 25

Annotatsioon:

Käesolev bakalaureusetöö uurib, kuidas C. S. Lewise apologetilises raamatus "Lihtsalt kristlus" väljendatud teoloogilised seisukohad avalduvad tema fantaasiasarjas "Narnia kroonikad". Töö eesmärk on leida teoste vahel paralleele ja analüüsida, kuidas Lewise teoloogilised veendumused võisid Narnia maailma kujundada. Bakalaureusetöö koosneb neljast osast: sissejuhatusest, ülevaade kirjandusest, empiirilise osast ja kokkuvõttest.

Sissejuhatus käsitleb lühidalt teoloogilisi ideid lastekirjanduses ja sarjas "Narnia kroonikad", ning tutvustab bakalaureusetöös analüüsitavaid teemasid. Ülevaade kirjandusest tutvustab varasemaid uurimistöid "Narnia kroonikate" ja kristlike motiivide kohta, käsitletud on moraali, piiblilisi narratiive ning Aslani rolli Kristust esindava tegelaskujuna. Samuti tutvustatakse Lewise apologetilist raamatut "Lihtsalt kristlus". Empiiriline osa analüüsib "Narnia kroonikate" raamatuid Lewise teoloogiliste seisukohtade vaatenurgast, väljendatud "Lihtsalt kristluses". Selgus, et Lewise teoloogilised ideed on põimitud "Narnia kroonikate" loo ja maailmaga, seda eriti tähtsamate kristlike teemade puhul, nagu moraalsus, andestus, lunastus ja usu säilitamine raskustes.

Märksõnad: C. S. Lewis, kristlus, religioon, inglise kirjandus, fantaasiakirjandus

Lihtlitsents lõputöö reprodutseerimiseks ja üldsusele kättesaadavaks tegemiseks

Mina, Marta Sõmer
(autori nimi)

1. annan Tartu Ülikoolile tasuta loa (lihtlitsentsi) minu loodud teose

The Adaptation of Christian Motifs in C. S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity* in *The Chronicles of Narnia Series*
(lõputöö pealkiri)

mille juhendaja on Pilvi Rajamäe,
(juhendaja nimi)

reprodutseerimiseks eesmärgiga seda säilitada, sealhulgas lisada Tartu Ülikooli digitaalarhiivi kuni autoriõiguse kehtivuse lõppemiseni;

2. annan Tartu Ülikoolile loa teha punktis 1 nimetatud teos üldsusele kättesaadavaks Tartu Ülikooli veebikeskkonna, sealhulgas digitaalarhiivi kaudu Creative Commons'i litsentsiga CC BY NC ND 4.0, mis lubab autorile viidates teost reprodutseerida, levitada ja üldsusele suunata ning keelab luua tuletatud teost ja kasutada teost ärieesmärgil, kuni autoriõiguse kehtivuse lõppemiseni;
3. olen teadlik, et punktides 1 ja 2 nimetatud õigused jäävad alles ka autorile;
4. kinnitan, et lihtlitsentsi andmisega ei riku ma teiste isikute intellektuaalomandi ega isikuandmete kaitse õigusaktidest tulenevaid õigusi.

Marta Sõmer
19.05.2026

Autorsuse kinnitus

Kinnitan, et olen koostanud käesoleva bakalaureusetöö ise ning toonud korrektselt välja teiste autorite panuse. Töö on koostatud lähtudes Tartu Ülikooli maailma keelte ja kultuuride instituudi anglistika osakonna bakalaureusetöö nõuetest ning on kooskõlas heade akadeemiliste tavadega.

/allkirjastatud digitaalselt/
Marta Sõmer

Tartus, 19.05.2026

Lõputöö on lubatud kaitsmisele.

Pilvi Rajamäe

Tartus, 19.05.2026