

Dorothy Leigh
Mrs. Hartenburg
TA Garden Grove
The Inklings
Term Paper 3
5 April 2001
Word Count: 1593

The Great Enigma: Two Distinct Views on Man's Triune Maker

Is the doctrine of the Trinity of importance to the Christian faith? Has it any bearing on the ordinary Christian's everyday life? Is it merely an ineffable mystery to be grappled with only by the most holy of saints and qualified of curates?

These are questions C.S. Lewis and Dorothy L. Sayers endeavor to explicate in their books, *Mere Christianity* and *Mind of the Maker*, respectively. Both authors hold the firm belief that the dogma of Christianity is both relevant and essential to the ordinary Christian's life. In response to the question, "what is religious dogma?" Sayers answers that it "is in fact nothing but a statement of doctrines concerning the nature of life and the universe" and therefore finds it to be of utmost relevance to daily life (48). Likewise Lewis finds theology necessary to the Christian faith. Without it, any personal emotional or mystical experiences of God one might have are useless for they lead him nowhere (136). Lewis compares doctrine to a map in that (1) it is "based on the experience of hundreds of people who really were in touch with God," and (2) to get further into the unfamiliar territory of Christianity, we must use the diagram of doctrine others before us have labored to write (136).

To progress in the way of the Christian faith it is imperative that one be guided by correct theology. Lewis and Sayers are both fervent in their desire to give their readers the right idea about God, for they are well aware that, unless one listens to Theology, his ideas of God will be wrong ones (*Mere* 136-137, *Creed or Chaos?* 39). Lewis' *Mere Christianity* and Sayers' *Mind of the Maker* are the attempts of two keen, logical modern thinkers to expound the doctrine of the Trinity at a popular level, though neither author claims to completely elucidate the mystery of the incomprehensible three-fold Being. While Sayers advocates an understanding of the Trinity by way of analogy to the mind of the human creative artist, Lewis offers an alternative, superior way of appreciating the Trinity by arguing that it is rational to believe in the Triune God without fully comprehending his unsearchable mysteries, and he leads his readers to the direct center of the Christian Faith—Jesus Christ, God Incarnate.

Sayers presumes that God "is not so mysterious as to correspond to nothing within human knowledge" (*Mind* 35). She proposes that the creative artist can shed light on what the creeds say about the Trinitarian mind

because this is the point at which man is “made in God’s image”—that is, he has a desire to create things (22). According to Sayers, the experience of the artist is analogous to what goes on in the Divine Mind. In her book, *Mind of the Maker*, Sayers undertakes to help her readers understand the Creative Trinitarian Mind by making an analogy between it and the human experience of a creative writer. Each creative work, she asserts, is Trinitarian in structure, composed of three parts—Idea, Energy, and Power. Timeless, passionless, the end in the beginning, the Idea (an image of the Father) beholds the whole work at once (37). The Creative Energy (a picture of God the Son) is begotten of the Idea and is incarnate in the bonds of matter (37). Lastly, there is the Creative Power (analogous to God the Holy Ghost) which is “the meaning of the work and its response in the lively soul” (37-38). The Idea does not precede the Energy in time because it is the Energy that creates the time process (38). Everything that is conscious or involves time, form and process belongs to the working of the Energy (38). The Energy is equal with, yet distinct from the Idea, and it is the only way the Idea can be revealed to Itself or others (40). The Power proceeds from the Idea and Energy and comes back to the writer to make him the reader of his own book, and it is the means by which the Energy is communicated to the readers and which produces a response in them (40-41).

Sayers uses this complex, but comprehensible analogy of Idea, Energy, and Power to explain other doctrines such as the Incarnation, sin, free will, and miracle. These she cleverly illuminates by correlating them to different classes of literature such as stage plays and autobiographies. Although her analogies can be difficult to grasp, they provide excellent insight into the Mind of the Maker and, for many, make the Great Mystery less confusing as it relates the complicated doctrine to direct human experience.

Lewis also fervently desires for his readers to experience the Trinity, which he explains in a quite different fashion than his contemporary, Dorothy Sayers. In the fourth book of *Mere Christianity*, “Beyond Personality: The First Steps in the doctrine of the Trinity” Lewis undertakes to illustrate the incomprehensibility of the Trinity with an analogy from geometry (142). He uses the example of many dimensions, in which a person from a two-dimensional world could not possibly conceive of six individual squares making up one single object, a cube. So it is with us: we do not understand how a being could be made up of three persons while remaining one single being. In this way Lewis shows how it is possible and rational to believe in something of which we cannot fully conceive.

The heart of Lewis’ exposition of the Trinity, however, is to show his readers how to become Sons of God and to be taken up in the life of the Trinity, which he calls *Zoe*, the spiritual life. Lewis finds this marvelous three-fold life in the simple act of prayer, when “an ordinary simple Christian” tries to “get into touch with God” (*Mere*

143). The three personal God is the thing to which he is praying, the thing that is prompting him to pray, and the thing through which all his real knowledge of God comes, who is also standing alongside him, helping him to pray (143). Having established the rationality of believing in an incomprehensible Trinity of Persons, Lewis attempts to explain how the Persons are connected, and he does so by many vivid analogies or illustrations. When he has finished however, he brings his readers right back to the core of Christianity—unity with God in Christ (Sanders). “Theology is practical,” says Lewis. “The whole purpose for which we exist is to be taken...into the life of God” (*Mere* 142). This divine life of God is caught by infection. To catch it we must expose ourselves to the One who has it—Jesus Christ.

As Lewis directs his readers to the dance of the divine life, Sayers amuses herself with applying her analogy of Idea, Energy and Power to measuring creative works. It can be argued that Sayers book, *Mind of the Maker* is more effective in explaining the creative activities of an artist by way of the Trinity than it is in explaining the creative activities of the Trinity by way of the artist. In a chapter called “Scalene Trinities,” Sayers sets up a criterion for measuring artistic work according to the balance of its Idea, Energy, and Power present in a work of creation. Although it may be profitable to judge work by these standards, it has little to do with the personal relationships the Bible speaks of (Sanders).

It should here be noted that both Sayers and Lewis speak, (indeed, are compelled to speak) by analogies. The two authors agree that in order to speak of anything supersensible one is obliged to employ metaphor (Lewis, *Miracles* 97; Sayers, *Mind* 22-23). While Lewis is the master of apposite analogies and applies them profusely throughout his writings, he is careful to always return to the original words of the Bible, arguing that God knows how to describe Himself much better than we do (*Mere* 151). Sayers, on the other hand, seems to take the analogy route and never return to what is of most pressing concern: knowing, loving, and serving Jesus Christ, the Incarnate God. In answer to the introductory question, “is Christianity relevant to the ordinary man’s daily life?” both Lewis and Sayers answer a resounding “yes.” In their respective books these two notable authors make laudable attempts to orient their audience to a fundamental Christian dogma—the Triune God. Although Sayers’ analogy is a bit complicated and difficult to grasp, it does help to clarify what the creeds say and mean by relating the Creative Mind to actual human experience. Lewis also, in a less complicated fashion, logically directs his readers through the puzzles of the incomprehensible, three-personal Mind, eagerly inviting them to participate in the delightful dance of the Divine Life.

Both these authors are successful in their attempts to elucidate an often distressing doctrine, however, Lewis' approach is the more tidy of the two. After reading Sayers' *Mind of the Maker*, one feels ready to combat a world full of scalene trinities by practicing quality craftsmanship. Lewis, however, leaves his readers with the very core of Christianity—Jesus Christ. More than Sayers, Lewis' writings motivate one to seek Christ and to experience the life of the Trinity, and this is what is of utmost importance. Although both authors disentangle in part the mysteries of the Triune God, when all analogies have been stripped away and there remains only the story of God in Christ, the Trinity remains, as truly it must—the Great Enigma.

Works Cited

Lewis, C.S. *Mere Christianity*. New York: Touchstone, 1996.

---. *Miracles*. New York: Touchstone, 1996.

Sanders, Fred. "Mere Trinitarianism: C.S. Lewis' Practical Doctrine of the Trinity." Audio lecture, Torrey Honors Institute, Biola University. 5 Sept. 2000.

Sayers, Dorothy L. *Creed or Chaos?*. Manchester: Sophia Institute Press, 1999.

---. *Mind of the Maker*. New York: HarperCollins, 1987.