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Introduction

Rhetoric can be called forth by many different circumstances, though some situations are more urgent than others. It is when a nation is under attack, however, that addressing the people becomes necessary. Situations in which a whole nation is fearful demand that someone take action to comfort the people being victimized and bring hope to the masses. Effective rhetoricians need to know how to bring people together in times of crisis. Unifying a nation that is being assailed is not an easy task, or a desirable one, but there are common sources of hope that people cling to and rely on and where rhetoricians often turn. That source of comfort sometimes comes from a leader taking action against the enemy or from the leader expressing confidence in the security of the country. More often than not, however, leaders focus on a higher power. This broader concept can be seen throughout history in wartime rhetoric. Many presidents, from Abraham Lincoln to President Obama, as well as leaders of other nations, have come to rely on concepts such as prayer and God to bring comfort to their nations.

An example of God being integrated into war rhetoric are the radio broadcasts done by Clive Staples Lewis during WWII in Great Britain. Through these broadcasts, C.S. Lewis, an English professor of literature at Oxford, brought hope in the form of Christianity to a nation in incredible turmoil. These broadcasts, delivered on the air from 1942 to 1944, were later printed in book form as *Mere Christianity*. Not only were these broadcasts popular in a time of world wide warfare but they have also become widely read by people no matter what is going on society. One reason for this popularity is the content of the text, another is the person who wrote it.

[The] all-time best-selling work of apologetics was written not by one of the great Christian philosophers or theologians, or even by a popular evangelist, but instead by a humble English professor of literature. [...] Though first published as a single volume in 1952, to this day *Mere Christianity* regularly outsells all other books in its category, even new releases (Johnson).

The popularity of this book makes it worth studying and makes it worth our time to figure out why it was so effective then and today. “Numbers vary, but in the year 2000 some estimates put worldwide sales of Lewis’ books at over 200 million copies in more than thirty languages” (Lewis Preface). While the book version of the war broadcasts are altered slightly from the original language the book does not stray very far from the original scripts making the book just as powerful of an artifact. C.S. Lewis himself wrote that “The contents of this book were first given on the air, and then published in three separate parts as *Broadcast Talks* (1942), *Christian Behavior* (1943), and *Beyond Personality* (1944). In the printed versions I made a few additions to what I had said at the microphone, but otherwise left the text much as it had been” (Lewis VII).

The comfort derived from leaders speaking about prayer and the God of the Bible is not only useful when there is a crisis situation but in every day life as well. *Mere Christianity’s* lasting popularity shows that this book, which explains the purpose and meaning of the Christian faith, is potent in more situations than just wartime. This is what makes God and the Bible important for communication studies. People need something to cling to in more situations than just times of war or nation-wide strife (such as the economic crisis of the 20th century or the earthquake in Haiti). If leaders can see the power of God in their lives then their rhetoric can be more effective for bringing hope into other people’s lives. Even for people who are not great leaders, the concept that God brings peace is still powerful. If people can see that God is the

common thread that unites them to others in times of war they will discover that no matter what they are going through God will still be there. Seeing how God in rhetoric works in times of crisis will help even the average citizen, who may not be at all interested in communication studies, to find hope in every situation. C.S. Lewis reveals the power behind the God of the Bible through his description of Christian doctrine in WWII. His broadcasts had a unifying, calming effect for the people of Britain which indicates that his rhetoric is something to be emulated in times of war.

Background of Text

To set the scene for the artifact, imagine this: it is 1942 and your country is still healing from a brutal war that ended less than twenty-four years ago. WWI resulted in losing a whole generation of young men and yet Great Britain is being torn apart again, this time on the home front. The world has turned upside down for you and it is hard, if not impossible, to see the hope in your situation. Your country needs a common source of strength in this time, something that will bring light into the desperate situation you all face of being on the front lines of the war:

How strange it must have seemed to turn on the radio, which every day was bringing news of death and unspeakable destruction, and hear one man talking, in an intelligent, good-humored, and probing tone, about decent and humane behavior, fair play, and the importance of knowing right from wrong. Asked by the BBC to explain to his fellow Britons what Christians believe, C.S. Lewis proceeded with the task as if it were the simplest thing in the world, and also the most important (Norris).

The British Broadcast Corporation (BBC) was in the same situation as the people of Great Britain but they were determined to continue bringing news, music, and speeches to Britain. At

one point the station found itself broadcasting from under tables with a single microphone during the air raids of WWII because they realized what they were doing, providing radio to the British people, was important. They knew that in a time of war, people needed to be kept in touch with the world of thought, imagination and ideas more than ever:

[...] A nation at war needed food for its intellect and its soul as well as for its body. The BBC acknowledged freely that religion, art, and science were not luxuries but basic needs. With so many people cut off from libraries and theatres, the BBC stepped out into the void, leading thinkers and people of ideas could be brought into the home by the microphone (Phillips 281).

Broadcasting educated, uplifting material became a goal of the BBC whether they were being bombed or they had to broadcast from makeshift studios. The people were just that important.

So they chose C.S. Lewis to give a series of talks on the basic truths of Christianity to the people of Great Britain. C.S. Lewis helped BBC and radio of the time to break down barriers regarding spiritual broadcasting and in turn people listened. In fact, “There was a definite increase in public approval of broadcast religious services over the first three years of the war. Most notably, the biggest gains were among men and young people, the groups normally least interested in religious worship. [...] The BBC concluded that half of the audience of religious radio were not church-goers” (Phillips 284). Not only did the time call for a new kind of radio but it called for a new era of hope. C.S. Lewis provided that hope for the people through his talks on God and the Bible.

It is important to know where Lewis came from in order to see how he became an effective rhetor and follower of God. “As a young man C.S. Lewis had served in the awful

trenches of World War I, and in 1940, when the bombing of Britain began, he took up duties as an air raid warden and gave talks to men in the Royal Air Force, who knew that after just thirteen bombing missions, most of them would be declared dead or missing” (Norris). Lewis, like the BBC, knew where the country was coming from. Lewis was even more relatable to the people because he had sustained injuries in World War I after arriving “[...] at University College, Oxford, fluent in Greek, Latin, and French, only to find himself in the trenches of World War I [...]” (Como). He returned in “1919, wounded but not disabled (he would carry shrapnel in his chest all his life)” (Como). C.S. Lewis was a man of the people that the common citizen could understand. As mentioned above, C.S. Lewis had not only served and been injured in the First World War but he had been a voice of comfort in that time as well. It is only natural that he should have been asked to take on that role once more when the war was even closer to home and that he would be adept at talking to the people of Great Britain.

Another way the audience could relate to C.S. Lewis was because he was relatively new to the Christian faith himself. “[...] As an intellectual and an erstwhile atheist-turned-Christian at the relatively mature age of thirty-two, Lewis was able to address from personal experience the common stumbling blocks for non-believers and lay out the very case for Christianity that had persuaded him” (Johnson). C.S. Lewis knew what it was like to live without the hope of Christ and what it meant to be persuaded to the faith. He knew what it took to properly explain God to others and what was going to provide the most hope for people. His abilities as a rhetorician were only improved by his recent conversion and insatiable search for truth and knowledge as evidenced by his three degrees at Oxford “in classics, philosophy, and English literature. He won a permanent fellowship at Magdalen College, Oxford, in 1925, by which time he had been, in his words, ‘a blaspheming atheist’ for nearly 15 years” (Como). Lewis was gifted in speaking and

writing yet he remained humble and one of the citizenry. Despite his credentials Lewis spoke “with no authority but that of experience, as a layman and former atheist, C.S. Lewis told his radio audience that he had been selected for the job of describing Christianity to a new generation precisely because he was not a specialist but ‘an amateur... and a beginner, not an old hand’” (Lewis XIX). C.S. Lewis knew how to adapt to his audience and how to be effective in his rhetoric no matter to whom he was speaking. Lewis knew he had an important message and he knew how to get it across. This brings us to looking more in depth at the actual radio broadcasts, starting with choosing a method of critique.

Defining the Genres

Methods for rhetorical criticism are vast and it is important to choose a method that will best highlight an artifact’s significance. For this paper, generic or genre criticism is an effective method to underscore the importance of *Mere Christianity*. Sonja Foss defines genre well when she summarizes Edwin Black’s method of genre criticism. Black’s reasons for generic criticism are broken into three main ideas: “(1) ‘there is a limited number of situations in which a rhetor can find himself’; (2) ‘there is a limited number of situations in which a rhetor can and will respond rhetorically to any given situational type’; (3) ‘the recurrence of a given situational type through history will provide a critic with information on the rhetorical responses available in that situation’ (Foss 138). These points show the purpose behind using a genre or a grouping system to classify rhetorical works. Rhetorical situations are limited and what can appropriately be said in these situations is even more restricted. This makes what actually is said important merely by the fact that the rhetoric is narrowed by so many factors including place, time, and topic. Amidst this shortage of opportunity, a repeating rhetorical situation makes for an interesting study because a lot can be learned from the successes and failures of rhetors in similar situations. And

with such narrow opportunities to use certain types of rhetoric it is important to be effective the first time around.

The idea of genres being important for learning how to be a successful rhetorician is expanded further by Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson when they say that:

Recurrence of a combination of forms into a generically identifiable form over time suggests that certain constants in human action are manifest rhetorically. One may argue that recurrence arises out of comparable rhetorical situations, out of the influence of conventions on the responses of rhetors, out of universal and cultural archetypes ingrained in human consciousness, out of fundamental human needs, or out of a finite number of rhetorical options or commonplaces. Whatever the explanation, the existence of the recurrent provides insight into the human condition (414).

Not only can our understanding of rhetorical situations be expanded through the use of genre classifications but the knowledge we have about human needs and what speaks to people is also strengthened. Rhetoric is more successful when the audience, the object of the persuasion, is considered. By understanding humans better, rhetoric can be adapted more effectively to the time and place it is being used. Genre criticism provides a unique opportunity for critics and rhetors alike to improve their understanding of human reactions to persuasion, the use of rhetorical situations, and the skills they need to be most effective.

When implementing generic criticism a question must be asked about your critique. “Are the meaning and purpose of the Address—in its uniqueness—in any way illuminated by an analysis of it as belonging to that genre?” (Campbell 406). Whether it is The Gettysburg Address, as specifically referenced in this quote, or another rhetorical artifact, the question

remains the same; is the artifact in question proven to be significant through the genre the critic is placing it in? Campbell and Jamieson explain this point further when they say that, “Generic analysis is justified if and only if the meaning and the purpose of the work are illuminated by struggling with the evidence to determine the work’s best classification” (406). Classifying an artifact into a genre requires an understanding of the artifact, history of the situation the artifact is from, and knowledge about other artifacts in the genre. The genre needs to underscore the artifact’s significance and this will not be the case if the artifact is placed in a genre where it does not belong.

In order to determine the genre an artifact fits into, a critic has the choice of three options of analysis: generic description, participation, or application. The first method, generic description, is when the critic looks at multiple artifacts together to determine if a genre exists and to define the characteristics of that genre. The second, generic participation, is when the critic “determines which artifacts participate in which genres” (Foss 143). The third way to do generic criticism, and the method being implemented in this paper, is generic application. Generic application can be broken down into four steps: describing the principles and components that make up the genre, describing the principles and components of an artifact that is representative of the genre, comparing the artifact’s characteristics to that of the genre and seeing how the artifact fits into the genre, and evaluating how well the artifact fulfills the requirements of the genre (Foss 144). By showing how the artifact fits into a certain genre the critic can demonstrate the artifact’s ability to teach a rhetor how to respond when in a situation that requires rhetoric from that genre. Genre criticism not only analyzes artifacts, it also teaches rhetors how to be effective.

In light of the generic method of criticism, the genre that applies to *Mere Christianity* needs to be determined. It could be argued that because C.S. Lewis' broadcasts are so unique, there is no category that defines *Mere Christianity*. C.S. Lewis' talks are a unique form of religious wartime broadcasting, they cover more than one topic, and they are more detailed and varied than a single sermon would be. It would seem that C.S. Lewis did more with his small allotments of air time than could possibly fit into a clear cut category. To his benefit, there are several genres that *Mere Christianity* can be categorized into. Instead of weakening the effectiveness of the broadcasts, by making them less definable, they are strengthened by the diversity they present. Because *Mere Christianity* is so versatile and applies to more than one genre it can more effectively reach more than one audience and accomplish multiple goals. More than one situation makes these broadcasts relevant and because of that *Mere Christianity* has had a lasting impact over the years. The two main genres that this paper will use to analyze *Mere Christianity* are biblical narrative and religious war rhetoric.

When reading *Mere Christianity* it is obvious that the entirety of the book is based off of the Bible, what it teaches, and what it says about our lives. C.S. Lewis does not skirt around Christian principles in these broadcasts but rather faces them head on. The genre of biblical narrative, on the surface level, is exactly that, rhetoric based off of the Bible and its teachings. "The rhetorical level [of biblical narration] is that which joins ideas, arguments, logical inferences, values, and beliefs to particular audiences for the accomplishment of specific purposes" (Medhurst 3). Biblical narrations combine the values of the audience with the ideas of the Bible in order to convince people that the truth of the Bible is important. In order to be persuasive, biblical narrative requires the narrator to involve the audience in the narration. In *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*, Meir Sternberg

identifies biblical narrative as “a transaction between the narrator and the audience on whom he wishes to produce a certain effect by way of certain strategies” (1). The audience plays as big of a role in the narration as the narrator does. “Beside the requirement of content, however, there must also be a teller and an interested audience. Thus, both teller and listener respectively must have a certain relationship to the story” (Galli 4). Biblical narrative is rhetoric that ties the audience and their values together with the narrator’s story to convince the audience of the truth and importance of the biblical narration.

How this relationship is formed between the audience and the narrator is through gaps in biblical logic. “The Bible, according to Sternberg, always tells the truth; it does not however, tell the whole truth. And it is in the space between the truth and the whole truth that a certain kind of rhetorical logic comes into play” (Medhurst 6). The narrator has two options when speaking. One option is leaving the gaps of logic alone and letting the audience fill in the gaps on their own. They therefore become engaged in the narration by figuring out the unspoken truths. The second option the rhetorician has is to explain away the gaps and expound on the truth. Both of these approaches leads the audience to think about the principles presented and both make audience participation a part of the rhetoric.

Biblical narratives are also designed to help the audience’s or reader’s understanding of the Bible become applicable to their lives. By explaining the gaps in truth, or by allowing the audience to see that for themselves, the narrator makes the narrative relatable. Sternberg explains that by reading between these gaps in biblical truth you are becoming, “the person that the biblical narrative invites one to become” (Medhurst 7). Biblical narrative is constitutive, meaning the audience lives inside or becomes part of the rhetoric as a part of the discourse. The audience participates further in the rhetoric by having to take a stand on the ideas presented in the

narrative. This stand can either mean accepting the invitation to be the person the rhetoric suggests they be, or they can reject the logic in the rhetoric and not apply the values presented to their lives. “The rhetorical audience is that audience that enters into the drama of reading and completes that drama not only by enthymematically completing the story as told in the text, but also by becoming part of the story by extending the community whose story it is. It is not only *their* story, it is also *our* story if we identify with the religious values and commitments of the storytellers” (Medhurst 7). If done correctly, rhetoric in the genre of biblical narrative convinces the audience that the Bible is applicable to life and important to incorporate in our actions.

The second genre, that this paper uses to analyze *Mere Christianity*, is the genre of biblical war rhetoric. A sense of what defines this genre can be found by looking at a past example of war rhetoric and what role biblical principles played in the speech. H.G. Stelzner makes the argument that, in Nixon’s 1969 speech about the Vietnam War, there was a large lack of biblical imagery. He goes on to explain that, “Three rhetorical considerations explain the absence of such imagery. First, this speech is not so much a war message as it is a message about a war. Second, Vietnam is a small war that Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson sought to localize and restrain. Nixon, too, aims to deflate it. Biblical images have magnitude, scope, and thrust. Thus, on both logical and aesthetic grounds they are simply ‘too large’ for the problem. Third, Biblical images connote ethical and moral values” (Stelzner 168). Stelzner’s first consideration suggests that biblical references are a normal part of war messages addressed to that nation at war. Nixon’s speech was not a war message and therefore did not have biblical images. The second reason, given for Nixon’s lack of biblical imagery, shows that referencing the Bible is a powerful tool in rhetoric and is useful when the problem being addressed is great. The third explanation reveals something more apparent than the other two explanations, that

biblical references suggest moral arguments. Unlike biblical narrative, that explains the Bible in order to convince people of its relevance to life; biblical war rhetoric uses the already known power of the Bible as a source of invention to back up positions on the war and make an argument stronger. The Bible becomes part of the argument and increases the probability of the argument. Biblical narrative expounds on biblical principles while biblical war rhetoric uses biblical principles to make an outside argument more persuasive.

The idea that biblical references make arguments into moral arguments is important for understanding religious war rhetoric. “When moral or religious teachings have public and political effects, analysis usually focuses on the message, but attention to the manner in which the teachings are communicated is equally important in understanding their power to influence the course of events” (Swanson 1). Using the Bible in public arguments expands this genre to include not only the message given but how the message is communicated. The Bible is influential but this genre of rhetoric is most successful when the Bible is used in the right context. In light of that, other considerations, that are important to this genre, are the audience and the time period in which the rhetoric is being implemented. “[...] ethical judgments must be historical judgments. Cultural configurations of symbols and circumstances are in constant change. Moral persuasion has meaning in relation to this changing field of action. Parroted in new circumstances, a sound moral judgment from a previous era may actually discourage people from seizing the new opportunities for moral action that have just opened” (Swanson 18). Rhetoric within the biblical war genre must take into account the context and history of the audience in order to be successful. Reusing moral old arguments and images is not always effective as times change and the audience adapts to those changes. The history of the audience, as well as the current conflict they are experiencing, needs to be acknowledged for the audience

to respond favorably to the biblical messages being used. Only when the wartime situation calls for biblical images and the images are used correctly is this genre of rhetoric effective.

Criticism: Biblical Narrative

Dealing with the genre of biblical narrative first, it is obvious that *Mere Christianity* is based off of the Bible and its teachings. Whether it is effective as a biblical narrative is up for debate. The goal of biblical narrative, once again, is to convince the audience that the Bible and its teaching are applicable and important for their lives. This genre also aims to explain away the holes in people's understanding of the Bible and fill in the gaps in logic people have about its teachings.

C.S. Lewis needs to do a few things in order to be successful and accomplish this genre's goals. The first is addressing the confusion and lack of knowledge people have about the Bible. In *Mere Christianity* he takes the theology behind the Bible's principles, normally a subject only for religious scholars, and makes it accessible to everyone. Lewis does this by dealing with many of the popular concerns people have about the Bible's claims and by clearing up a lot of confusion about Christian principles. Take for example the Christian claim that 'God is good' along with the commonly asked question, "If God is good, why is there so much corruption in the world?" This is an often misunderstood part of the Christian faith and is just one gap in many people's understanding of the Bible. Lewis begins to address this issue by stating that although God is good and he made the world, "a great many things have gone wrong with the world that God made and [...] God insists, and insists very loudly, on our putting them right again" (38). Bad things are not in this world because God intended for them to be there. He knew they would happen but instead of him causing them, they are deviations from his original, created world. Lewis explains that God is not the cause of evil things in the world but rather he "is separate

from the world and that some of the things we see in it are contrary to his will” (37). The bad things we see in the world are against God’s nature and instead of Him just letting them happen, He wants us to put these wrongs right, just not through imposing his power on our lives. Lewis explains that instead of forcing the world to be a completely good place He gives us the freedom to make it what we will. This ability to make our own choices, Lewis explains, is what makes God loving but is also what caused humankind to fall away from God’s will in the first place. Lewis explains why this freedom to make good and bad choices is necessary when he says:

[...] free will, though it makes evil possible, is also the only thing that makes possible any love or goodness or joy worth having. A world of automata – of creatures that work like machines – would hardly be worth creating (48).

The issue of a good God in an unjust world is a common gap in people’s biblical logic and C.S. Lewis explains why these polar ideas are compatible when he expands on this idea of human free will. God intended for us to voluntarily unite ourselves with him, not to force us to follow his plan. There is evil in this world because we make it that way.

This freedom we have, that enables us to make choices apart from God, makes the rest of Christianity necessary. If we have the tendency to make bad decisions, we need a way to remedy those poor choices. This leads to another fundamental misunderstanding people have of the Bible; the concept of Jesus, God’s son, dying on a cross for humanity and their sins. Lewis starts with a simple description of how Jesus’ death ties in with Christianity when he says, “We are told that Christ was killed for us, that His death has washed out our sins, and that by dying He disabled death itself. That is the formula. That is Christianity” (57). He defines these “sins,” of which God has forgiven us, as offenses (51) or debts (56) that we accumulate over our lifetimes.

These debts to God are paid in full by Jesus' death and we need that payment to gain admission to Heaven and to be with God. Lewis explains our position further by explaining that:

“[...] fallen man is not simply an imperfect creature who needs improvement: he is a rebel who must lay down his arms. Laying down your arms, surrendering, saying you are sorry, realizing that you have been on the wrong track and getting ready to start your life over again from the ground floor [...] is what Christians call repentance” (56).

Not only are we separated from God by using our freedom to rebel against God's will, but we also cannot make enough good choices to erase our poor choices. Doing anything to reach God, apart from accepting Jesus' death and resurrection, will not save us. Instead, Lewis explains, we need to lay down our own efforts and admit that we need God and his son's sacrifice to change us. This points to the whole purpose of the Bible and our need for it in our lives, to show God's redemption for us and how we can become more like Christ by accepting his sacrifice for us. This explanation of needing Jesus' blood instead of good works covers the difficulty of trying to reconcile our own efforts with God's sacrifice. You only need one, Jesus.

C.S. Lewis speaks to many common questions and issues people have with the Bible in *Mere Christianity*. By answering these questions he continues filling in the spaces of confusion surrounding biblical theology and lessening the holes in the Bible's logic. But C.S. Lewis realized that without applying these ideas to our lives, explaining the Bible is pointless:

Up till now I have been trying to describe facts – what God is and what He has done. Now I want to talk about practice – what do we do next? What difference does all this theology make? It can start making a difference tonight (187).

Mere Christianity and all of its explanations of the Bible is meant to be applied to readers' lives. This second aspect of biblical narrative, the applicability of the narrative, is mainly covered in book four of *Mere Christianity*.

C.S. Lewis explains how the Bible can be applied to our lives with the idea of pretending. An example of this is when you are feeling unfriendly towards people but you want to be more amicable. If you pretend to be friendly and "behave as if you were a nicer person than you actually are" (188) then you actually start to feel friendlier. "Very often the only way to get a good quality in reality is to start behaving as if you had it already" (188). Lewis applies this to our lives with Christ:

Now, the moment you realize, 'Here I am, dressing up as Christ,' it is extremely likely that you will see at once some other way in which at that very moment the pretence could be made less of a pretence and more of a reality. [...] For you are no longer thinking simply about right and wrong; you are trying to catch the good infection from a Person (188+189).

By pretending to be like Christ we are enabling Him to work in us and make us more like himself. In a sense we dress up like we are little Jesus' in order to become more like him. As we do this our thinking changes and we start to evaluate our lives through God's eyes. A practical way to do this is to daily refocus on God:

All your wishes and hopes for the day rush at you like wild animals. And the first job each morning consists simply in shoving them all back; in listening to that other voice, taking that other point of view, letting that other larger, stronger, quieter life come

flowing in. And so on, all day. Standing back from all your natural fussings and frettings; coming in out of the wind. We can only do this for moments at first. But from those moments the new sort of life will be spreading through our system: because now we are letting Him work at the right part of us (Lewis 198).

Our selfish desires and the freedom to make our own decisions confronts us every morning when we wake up. Our positions as free creatures calls us to continually make the decision to ignore our own desires and let Christ's strength flow through us instead. In other words we need to step back from our self centered perspectives and put on our Christ costume. We need to make the daily decision to act like Jesus. This seems impossible but Lewis expands on the idea of dressing up like Christ by saying that "everything that needs to be done in our souls can be done by God" (193). Just like we treat our dogs as almost human and they become quasi-human to us, "the higher thing always raises the lower" (194). We act like God, and he helps us to do that. It is a simple process of trying to think like God and letting him change us and:

[...] the great thing to remember is that, though our feelings come and go, His love for us does not. It is not wearied by our sins, or our indifference; and, therefore, it is quite relentless in its determination that we shall be cured of those sins, at whatever cost to us, at whatever cost to him (132+133).

The beauty of this idea is that God wants to change us to be like him, to the point that he died for us to save us from our sins. This dressing up as and thinking like Christ is Lewis' straightforward way to apply the Bible to every aspect of our lives. *Mere Christianity* thereby fulfills the application aspect of biblical narrative.

A third and final requirement of biblical narrative is leading the audience to take a stand on the material or claims of the narrative. C.S. Lewis does this very obviously when he tells his audience that they have to make a decision regarding Jesus:

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 the level with the man who says he is a poached egg - or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you could fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to (52).

Jesus and his death on the cross is the basis of Christianity and must be either accepted or rejected. Lewis makes it clear that a decision has to be made and a stand has to be taken. This is exactly what the genre of biblical narrative calls for. Overall, *Mere Christianity* is successful as a biblical narrative. It not only addresses biblically based issues but presents them in such a way that the audience is more knowledgeable about the Bible after hearing or reading Lewis' explanations. *Mere Christianity* makes the Bible practical for life and leaves the reader with a choice to either disagree or agree with the material. The audience has to and is able to take a stand after Lewis' examples and descriptions and this is exactly the point of biblical narrative.

Criticism: Biblical War Rhetoric

This brings this paper to the second genre that applies to *Mere Christianity*, biblical war rhetoric. In order for rhetoric to be considered successful in this genre it must meet two main

requirements. First, it must use the Bible to make the rhetor's argument about war stronger and second, it must take into account the background of the audience to make the biblical references relevant. *Mere Christianity* was originally broadcasted during WWII and was delivered to a nation shocked by the brutalities of a home front war. It is easy to wonder if this was the right time for C.S. Lewis to speak about the Bible so heavily when most other leaders would speak about broader ideas such as the war effort or boosting morale. C.S. Lewis saw the Bible as an applicable text for war time however.

C.S. Lewis knew that the war was hard on everyone but he also knew that the Bible would relate to people in all aspects of the war. He held the radical position that everyone needs the Bible and the teachings of the Bible apply to all humankind. That is why the Bible was his main focus in *Mere Christianity*. Lewis knew that people from every side of the war needed the message he was presenting:

[...] the division of war did not diminish the relevance of the word of God or its direction. If anything, it made the gospel more important than ever. Christ's offer of forgiveness to all who turn to him in repentance and faith is universal. The claim of Christ to be the route to God himself – the Way, the Truth, and the Life – applied in all times and all places. It applied equally to men and women of all nationalities. Germany might be the enemy, but the Christian gospel had equally to speak to Germans as to the English (Phillips 35).

C.S. Lewis wanted to show that God's love applied, and applies, to all people, no matter what side of the war you are on. Lewis even uses the Bible to support his position on the war. His support of Britain's side of the war is apparent when Lewis uses the biblical sense of right and

wrong to show that the Nazi party was immoral. Lewis does not discount the atrocities of the war just because God would forgive the enemy if they really turned to Him. Lewis instead uses the Bible to prove that there is a right and wrong in the world and that the enemy of Great Britain, Nazi Germany, is in the wrong:

What was the sense in saying the enemy was in the wrong unless Right is a real thing which the Nazis at bottom knew as well as we did and ought to have practiced? If they had had no notion of what we mean by right, then, though we might still have had to fight them, we could no more have blamed them for that than the colour of their hair (5).

Within the context of the Bible C.S. Lewis shows that there is an inherent moral code that people need to follow. In the war there are things done that are immoral and C.S. Lewis uses the Bible to support the idea that the Nazi party is doing those immoral things. This in turn shows that the Nazis are on the wrong side of the war. This is supported further by Lewis' belief that the Bible is the ultimate moral code that all humanity should follow. He claims that, "[...] if all moral ideas were equal, what sense would there be in preferring Christian morality to Nazi morality?" (125). Moral codes in fact are not equal but rather better or worse depending on how closely they follow God's moral code for us. Lewis uses the Bible to back up his support for Britain in the war making *Mere Christianity* a prime example of Biblical War Rhetoric.

Another way that C.S. Lewis strengthens his ideas about the war is that he does not blatantly state his opinions, making it harder for people to disagree with his ideas. Lewis talks about his position on war in such a way the audience wouldn't be able to argue against his opinions as easily. It is easier to argue against an opinion that is blatantly obvious than a position that is intertwined with other ideas and not as readily available. Like his explanation of a single

moral code proving that the Nazi party is immoral, Lewis intertwines his opinions about war into his other explanations of the Bible. Lewis slowly reveals his ideas of war as he explains other Christian doctrine. For example, Lewis explains that our attempts to create happiness for ourselves, apart from God, have resulted in a human history of greed and violence. Lewis states that “[...] money, poverty, ambition, war, prostitution, classes, empires, slavery [...]” (49) all are part of “the long terrible story of man trying to find something other than God which will make them happy” (49). Although Lewis showed his support for Britain’s side of the war he did not support war itself. Rather, he listed war as one of the negative results of our separation from God. Lewis also lists war as a result of bad morality along with other negative results such as poverty, “lies and shoddy work” (72). To C.S. Lewis war is a negative consequence of human deviations from God’s will and is something that should be avoided. These ideas of war not being the ideal option are scattered throughout *Mere Christianity*. While Lewis chooses to side with Britain in the war he also uses biblical principles to support his broader ideas that war is a negative happening as well. Once again C.S. Lewis uses his explanations of the Bible and the Bible’s principles to strengthen his position on the war and war itself.

The second requirement of Biblical War Rhetoric is that the background of the audience is taken into account when forming the rhetoric. All of C.S. Lewis’ claims about the war and about morality do take into account the audience’s situation. Lewis knows that the people he is speaking to do not want to forgive Germany, they do not want to act like Christ towards the enemy, and they do not want to be told that those people can be forgiven. Lewis does not discount those feelings. He instead explains that forgiving someone does not get rid of justice:

Loving your enemy does not mean remitting his punishment. Lewis states candidly that it is, in his opinion, perfectly right for a Christian judge to sentence a man to death, or for a Christian soldier to kill an enemy (Phillips 167).

Just because God's forgiveness applies to everyone does not mean that justice is forgotten. The God Lewis speaks of is a just God and will judge us for the things we do on Earth. That is why Christ's blood is so powerful. It pays the price of death that we deserve for the things we do. Without accepting Christ and His sacrifice we are still dead in our sin and unable to spend eternity in Heaven.

Like the biblical war genre dictates, C.S. Lewis understands his audience and both the physical and internal conflicts they were facing at the time. Lewis supports his idea of the war, that the Nazi party is immoral, with his claims that there is one true moral code and he uses the truth of the Bible to show that God's forgiveness (therefore our forgiveness towards people) applies to everyone. However, Lewis does not forget how hard it is to swallow the idea of forgiveness in a time of war and addresses the audience's concerns about that idea by explaining the justice that God has for sins. Once again, *Mere Christianity* fulfills the genre's requirements and can be seen as an example of biblical war rhetoric.

Conclusion

Mere Christianity, with all of its war references and biblical narrations, has one overall message that makes all the claims that this paper looked at, possible:

Christ offers something for nothing: He even offers everything for nothing. In a sense, the whole Christian life consists in accepting that very remarkable offer. But the difficulty to reach is the point of recognizing that all we have done and can do is nothing (Lewis 147).

C.S. Lewis took what is often hard to understand and made it accessible for everyone. The Bible and all it contains was made relatable to our lives through these broadcasts. Justin Phillips puts it well when he says:

After sixty years, Mere Christianity has lost none of its power. It continues to transform the lives of those who read it. There is no reason why it won't continue to be potent for decades to come. Its success is not just because of Lewis's unique skill as a communicator but because of the person he writes about. Christianity without Christ is just another dogma. Mere Christianity, with Christ at its heart, remains C.S. Lewis's most important contribution to contemporary thought (Phillips 297).

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