

Reflections

JULY 2021

Illuminating and Integrating the Mass of Our Knowledge



Chapter XIV of C.S. Lewis's book *Miracles* is titled "The Grand Miracle." Lewis begins the chapter with the following two sentences: "The central miracle asserted by Christians is the Incarnation. They say that God became Man."¹

As part of his exploration of the doctrine of the Incarnation, and in light of its centrality, Lewis offers the following analogy:

... Let us suppose we possess parts of a novel or a symphony. Someone now brings us a newly discovered piece of the manuscript and says, "This is the missing part of the work. This is the chapter on which the whole plot of the novel really turned. This is the main theme of the symphony." Our business would be to see whether the new passage, if admitted to the central place which the discoverer claimed for it, did actually illuminate all the parts we had already seen and

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"pull them together." Nor should we be likely to go very far wrong. The new passage, if spurious, however attractive it looked at the first glance, would become harder and harder to reconcile with the rest of the work the longer we considered the matter. But if it were genuine, then at every fresh hearing of the music or every fresh reading of the book, we should find it settling down, making itself more at home, and eliciting significance from all sorts of details in the whole work which we had hitherto neglected. Even though the new central chapter or main theme contained great difficulties in itself, we should still think it genuine provided that it continually removed difficulties elsewhere. Something like this we must do with the doctrines of the Incarnation. Here, instead of a symphony or a novel, we have the whole mass of our knowledge. The credibility will depend on the extent to which the doctrine, if accepted, can illuminate and integrate that whole mass. It is much less important that the doctrine itself should be

fully comprehensible. We believe that the sun is in the sky at midday in summer not because we can clearly see the sun (in fact, we cannot) but because we can see everything else.²

What do you think of Lewis's idea that the credibility of the doctrine of the Incarnation depends on the extent to which it can illuminate and integrate the whole mass of human knowledge? How does the Incarnation help you understand everything else?



"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."

JOHN 1:14 (ESV)

¹ C.S. Lewis, *Miracles*, Touchstone, New York, 1996, p. 143.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 144-145.

