

Title: The *Mythos* of Sin: C.S. Lewis, the Genesis Fall, and the Modern Mood

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Digital full text: http://www.calvin.edu/library/database/dissertations/Grinnell_Jeremy_G.pdf

Call Number: BV4070.C2842 2011 .G75

ABSTRACT

This dissertation wrestles with the question how to profitably and theologically handle the Fall narrative of Genesis 3 once it has been classified as “myth,” as was the conclusion of the *Formgeschichte* school.

The dissertation begins by establishing the theological conversation of the mid-twentieth century, which marks a zenith in the discussion. Beginning with a survey of the traditional interpretation of the narrative as historical account, which dominated pre-Enlightenment churchly thought, the survey then summarizes the change of tenor that Enlightenment and higher critical voices brought to the question. The survey concludes with consideration of Reinhold Niebuhr, Karl Barth, and Rudolph Bultmann on the definition and role of myth in the Bible.

At this point C.S. Lewis is brought into the conversation in the belief that his expert status as a literary critic and Medievalist would have given him a unique position from which to help theologians wrestle with the question. Lewis is thus introduced as a literary authority with deep commitments to traditional Christianity, yet with a healthy respect for the conclusions of the modern sciences. In addition Lewis’ thoughts on modern theology and higher criticism are parsed along with his agreement on the mythic quality of the Genesis Fall narrative.

Following this comes an extended survey of Lewis’ theory of myth. Good myth attempts to communicate truth by by-passing the abstracting intellect and addressing itself immediately to the imagination. Close consideration is given to the epistemological role of the imagination and the reader’s response to mythic literature.

These efforts afford two levels of consideration. First, Lewis’ own views on the Genesis narrative are presented under the following heads: (1) the possible history standing behind the narrative, (2) the meaning and appropriate use of the doctrine resulting from the narrative, and (3) the implications of its status as myth—how such a narrative ought to be read and what it produces within the willing reader. Second, Lewis is compared with the aforementioned theological trajectories and persons to consider how his robust literary theory of myth might help clarify or critique the theological conversation of his period. The dissertation concludes with some suggestions for further application of Lewis’ ideas.