

Teaching C.S. Lewis= Four Loves
With Reference to
Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus
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It is a pleasure to be here at this conference on Christianity and Literature to give a paper on teaching C. S. Lewis, although I do feel a little strange for over the years of attending this conference, I do not remember hearing a paper even mildly critical of C.S. Lewis or his writings.

I could regard this opportunity as similar to one other experience I have had in teaching C.S. Lewis. That came, I believe, in my first year of teaching the writings of C.S. Lewis as subject of directed readings class in English, composed mostly of seniors and graduate students, all with years of devoted reading of Lewis from Narnia to The Abolition of Man.

Because of their maturity and of a good relationship I enjoyed with the Philosophy Department at a nearby college. I began talking rather carelessly about having an atheist come to class to discuss Lewis= writings from an atheistic point of view. I soon realized that if we did do that we would need absolute secrecy, a need that becomes the more difficult the more it is stressed. I soon turned to a compromise - that of taking the interested students (all but one) to the University of Central Arkansas.

Although I soon lost my enthusiasm even for this compromise, the students did not, and we went as a group to hear Dr. James Shelton, Chairman of the Philosophy Department at the University of Central Arkansas, give a spirited critique of C.S. Lewis from an atheistic point of view.

That class profited, I believe, from that experience, but I was never tempted to repeat that experience. Dr. Shelton did too, for he started giving Lewis papers at area meetings of philosophical gatherings. Teaching a course in C.S. Lewis had come as an unexpected pleasure in 1979, especially due to the fact that at that time every time a faculty member suggested the possibility of a new course, the Administrators= response was always that the school needed to drop not add classes. Nevertheless, our Department had found a way to add new courses by offering them under one course number with varying contents. I still do not know if Lewis studies have been added to the official canon of any schools.

However, the problem which gave rise to the paper I want to present arose from a decision I made to add one of his later books to the reading list to a course in Ethics which I taught for several years. The Four Loves sounded perfect as a climax for a class which had studied Plato, Aristotle, some of the stoics and Epicureans. In addition it was on the subject of greatest importance to Christians and the favorite subject of numerous best selling books. Being from the pen of one of the favorite writers in the English speaking world, it stirred both my expectations and those of some browsers who saw it in the college book store. What made it especially appealing was that the original lectures recorded for an Atlanta church were available on audio-cassette. This was a bonus for those in the English class. With high expectation, I discovered that the usual response was that of blank looks and mystified expressions. While Lewis classes regarded the tapes featuring the voice of Lewis as a bonus, neither the tapes nor the book sparked any interest in Ethics courses where students had no particular interest in Lewis.

Late in my teaching, I experimented with another famous book with recordings, Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus by a one-time Catholic priest, John Gray. The response was enormous, especially among the women, depending greatly on their home culture, with the most concerned apparently understanding the book to be teaching against male chauvinism.

There were five young ladies, three of them from foreign cultures showed great interest. These especially good friends showed the greatest interest. One was from Japan, one from China and the third from Central America. The young lady from Central America borrowed every cassette in order to play for some special person, while reactions seemed to suggest that Gray's book was an attack on male chauvinism. This never seemed to me a purpose of the book, but rather to use an old mythology to dramatize problems of male and female relationships.

His playful story about the origin of men and women on separate planets does give a satisfying description of how they are different. He traces the origin of men back to the planet Mars, named for the Roman god of war, suggesting male characteristics while women originated on the planet Venus, named for the goddess of love, suggesting all of the things women like to talk about.

This is not exactly new for what man has not said in frustration, I wonder what planet

she is from?@ Or what woman has not used similar words to express frustration with men?

Gray starts his work with a familiar problem. A wife greets her husband after work with news concerning the day=s problems, hoping for support. He, being the silly descendent of Mars that he is, begins to solve them. On Mars, at least Gray=s version, men are dedicated to solving problems. Women trained on Venus need understanding. While her husband is like a home improvement committee, she the poor, neglected creature needs understanding, something she used to have in the companionship of other creatures of Venus.

I think I know now why the young lady rushed out to play cassettes for her friends, whether from Central America or North America, friends who seemingly had spent too much time on Mars.

Lewis is not negative toward women but he is very positive toward specifically made characteristics. In general, I think it can be said that Lewis believes that women can do anything men can do, they just can=t do it very well.

Ironically, Lewis comes closet to Gray=s discussion in his chapter on Friendship. At the level of friendship, he thinks only a small number of women will be able to break into a male circle. While he cherishes friendship, he begins by conceding that it is the one love which is not necessary. No biological need exists. His definition of friendship is a special kind of companionship which he can trace only on the male line.

AFriendship arises out of mere companionship,@ Lewis writes, Awhen two or more of the companions discover that they have in common some insight or interest or even taste which the others do not share and which til that moment each believed to be his own unique treasure (or burden)(Inspirational Writings, 248).@

At this point, Lewis makes use of one of only a few American writers, Emerson, who said friends don=t ask, ADo you love me, but do you see the same truths?@ Thoreau is the other American writer frequently utilized.

Now, for a further analysis of The Four Loves, I will turn to the actual order of the book and the recording. Both have the same order although the book form is more complete. The recording is arranged under the heading of four Greek words: Storge, Phila, Eros and Agape. Whereas the book uses the translated words: Affection, Friendship, Love and Charity.

While in general, the English words are accurate, there are places where they are not complete synonyms. This is especially true of affection and charity. While affection does characterize storge and family love, there are places that affection seems broader and places that family love seems to go beyond affection. Eros appears to have a range of meanings concerning sex and love in both Greek and English. Lewis correlates them well.

Charity is one characteristic of divine love that seems only a small part. It was used about twenty-five times in the King James Version as a synonym for love. Perhaps some background for the writing of the work may be helpful.

George Sayer, writing in what must have seemed at the time an unnecessary biography has given details of the origin of The Four Loves. In 1957 Lewis was asked by an Episcopal broadcasting foundation in Atlanta to make some tape recordings for broadcast in the United States. He could choose the subject as long as the sponsoring foundation knew in advance.

When he decided on The Four Loves, he thought this would bring the whole field of Christian ethics. ABut, Sayer adds, Ahe found the writing rather laborious, so the scripts for the talks were not finished until the summer of 1958 (Jack, George Sayer, 386).@ The tapes were finished August 19 and 20 in a London studio.

After a big publicity campaign, many were disappointed to learn that the tapes were not going to be broadcast widely because American bishops decided the talks were too frank for American Christians- Lewis was told that was because he had brought sex into the talks on Eros. He asked the woman who brought the explanation, Ahow can anyone talk about Eros without bringing it in? (Sayer, 388)@

Lewis commented, ABut isn=t it incredible that the inhabitants of a country so used to every sort of pornography should object to my most circumspect discussions of married love (387-88).@

These tapes were not broadcast widely but twelve years later, the album was put on sale. But the manuscript of the book was published in 1960 with substantial differences from the tapes.

I started this study out of order because of the nearness to John Gray=s analysis of male/female conversation with the way Lewis describes friendship between sexes. For both

studies, the relationship of friendship between the sexes is not biologically necessary. Even Lewis, with his zeal to get to the love which is divine cannot avoid the lowest level of love in nature which he find in affection.

Affection

Lewis begins his discussion of The Four Loves with affection which is the emotion most based in nature but leads from this basis to foretaste of charity or divine love.

Actually, a problem of the entire work is the rich vocabulary. The original lectures stressed four Greek word - Storge, Philia, Eros, and Agape - while the book is arranged as affection, friendship, Eros and charity with each new love supposedly a more spiritual love. I think this causes special problems with Chapter One for storge is translated into English as family love.

It covers the range of affection from child=s need for his mother=s arms to a parent=s willingness to work for children=s welfare far into the future.

Lewis traces this love even deeper into nature for he finds it characteristic of animal life. But this emotion relies on familiarity more than any other factor. A dog will bark at a friendly stranger while the arrival of a family member, no matter how unpleasant will cause him to wag his tail (Lewis, 233).

In retrospect, I think I may have made a teaching mistake in using both the audio cassettes and the finished book for even the terminology is different.

While the four Greek nouns have corresponding verbs, affection and charity are nouns without corresponding verbs. In addition, for the book, Lewis adds two introductory chapters which suggest that Aliked@ would be a suitable synonym for affection. In fact, while Lewis raises the distinction between like and love, he offers no explanation other than using affection in ways that suggests it means Alike@.

I found the discussion of affection to be the most confusing. It is the love that is most natural. It is common to all family relationships, human and animal. It is based most on need but in the case of a parent, it may be a desire to give for children not born and which he may never see.

His plan is to show that the lowest, neediest form of love is related to the highest divine

love, that of growing out of the discussion of affection, Lewis begins with need pleasures which give rise to need love which is the most natural of all loves. Need pleasure leads on to a new kind of pleasure, appreciative pleasure which lead to loves of appreciation. This becomes the sole basis for friendship which has no natural basis.

I think some confusion comes from implying that family love and affection are complete synonyms whereas affection is much broader. Storge cannot be both family love and the emotion which characterizes it.

One characteristic of friendship is that we form friendships because we want something else, not just for the sake of having friends.

The sexes will have met in affection and Eros before they think about being friends.

Lewis tries to trace the rise of friendship back to primitive human history when men had the need to get together and talk about hunting and fishing and defending the community from different standpoints.

Eros

Lewis= third love, Eros, is the subject of the oldest philosophical discussion of any kind of love, Plato=s symposium. It might seem to be the most natural, biological love of all. However, Lewis specifically differentiates Eros from sexual passion. His definition, which could be questioned, is the state of being in love. Sexual desire he calls Venus after the Roman goddess of love. Sexual desire is desire for pleasure which has no necessity for Eros-Romantic love.

Eros desires a particular woman or man which has no thought of the amount of pleasure the loved one would bring.

Out of his wide reading, Lewis finds only one writer who wondered if being in love would bring more sexual pleasure than the act itself without love. That was the Epicurean poet, Lucretius, who concluded that love impairs sexual activity.

While it is during this period (of writing The Four Loves) that Lewis concedes that he has fallen in love, he finds society is threatened more by hyper-seriousness than levity. He sees the excuse Awe were so much in love@ as making love into a god, then a demon.

Love can be made an excuse for almost every other failing. The more seriously it is taken, the more usable the excuse. Lewis laments that throughout his lifetime a solemnization of

sex has been taking place. Along with this, the overemphasis on sex is reenforced by the claim of lovers that love is forever, when, in reality, it is the most fickle of all emotions.

AEros@, Lewis writes, Ais driven to promise what Eros of itself can=t fulfil (274)@. Can this last a lifetime? Barely a week, Lewis answers.

It is good that Eros promises eternal fidelity. It is then the work begins of Eros. It is here that I think that Lewis and Gray may be in fundamental agreement even if reached in different ways.

Charity

Now we come to what Lewis calls last steep ascent.

AWe must try to relate the human activities called Alove@ to that love which is God a little more precisely than we have yet done (281).@

While many Christians came to know this love first, it does not help in making this last ascent. First, we remember that God as the creator of nature implanted in us need loves and gift loves. God can bestow a far greater gift - a share of His own gift love. This differs from the gift love He has built into our nature for these never give for the benefit of the loved objects= own sake. These gifts are biased in favor of the gifts we can bestow. It is only God=s special gift of gift love that enables man to desire the best for the receiver regardless of who gives it.

It probably seems to non-Christians, that Lewis who has been following a rational approach has come to something he cannot explain on that basis and calls for help from the supernatural.

Critical response to The Four Loves seems to have been rather slight, being limited to religious publications, some of them rather surprising. Among the reviewers, the reviewer in the Christian Century calls it a masterpiece, being firmly rooted in the Bible and Catholic traditions. Normally, the latter statement would not be regarded as complimentary when made in the Christian Century.

Less surprising is the critique of leading Catholic theologian, Martin Cyril Darcy, who writes that despite a wealth of detail the book suffers because the loves are not fixed. Still Darcy concludes that Lewis has written a minor religious classic.

I think that Darcy was correct in calling The Four Loves a minor classic. The problem may be that we were expecting a major classic. Almost every other Lewis work leaves the reader feeling that Lewis has spoken the last word.

But we cannot be critical of Lewis if he does not always produce a major classic. He was not the only Christian scholar of whom we could have help with major studies. I think the main problem is that if anyone could do it, Lewis would have been the most likely.

If anyone felt qualified to take up Lewis= work and complete it, I believe it could most likely be accomplished by writing one book on love instead of four.

Divine love is gift love. Family affection begins with need-love where need is the full explanation. It may begin with the need of the frightened child for his mother=s arms but already has the emotion of gift love as seen in a parent=s desire to work for the future well-being of children he may never see.

Lewis originally had planned to limit love to gift-love, but admitted by the time of writing that he could not deny the name love to need love. While our whole nature is one vast need, we cannot say that we never bring to him anything but need-love.

Lewis admits another prior mistake, the failure to recognize that man approaches God when he is least like Him. This seems to be the significance of words in the limitation of Christ to the effect that the Highest does not stand without the lowest.

Here Lewis introduces a significant distinction in saying there are two things which might be called nearness to God: 1) Nearness by likeness and 2) Nearness by approach. He illustrates this by the example of a traveler going home over a mountain peak. At one point on the peak, home may be just below but he dare not drop straight down. He must go down the other side even though much farther.

Development of the Loves

If we try to follow the progression of love in Lewis= account, it does seem proper to begin with affection which is characteristic of family feeling but certainly applies more widely - even of material objects.

It is the most natural of all loves, it is also the most Catholic. Its key feature is familiarity; it does not care whether its objects are beautiful or ugly. Here, it comes closest to charity which loves the unlovable.

Its corruption (when it becomes demonic) is to demand love as when a parent claims it is

unnatural for a child not to love his mother or father. Of this, Lewis writes that there is no right to be loved by intimates but a reasonable expectation. @

Lewis, repeatedly mentions the Victorian novelists as those who carried affection too far by making a religion of the family. As an example of family corruption, Lewis mentions King Lear with his ravenous appetite for affection.

It is in this discussion that Lewis makes an important distinction in classifying pleasures as need pleasures, such as fulfilment of a desire and pleasure of appreciation which come by surprise, such as unexpected orders.

Pleasures of appreciation give rise to a new class of loves - appreciative loves. While this becomes crucial to all higher loves, it is especially true of friendship where most pleasures come from mutual appreciation. Further, they foreshadow appreciation of beauty.

In one helpful paragraph, Lewis compares the first three loves introduced: A Need love cries to God from out of poverty. Gift love loves to serve or even to suffer for God. Appreciative love says, >We give thanks to thee for thy great glory (221). @

Friendship, the second, but slightly higher love has no basis in natural need. It arises almost entirely out of appreciation. Surprisingly, friendship increases with number, a glorious resemblance to Heaven.

It is only at the level of charity that truly divine love is seen. Man is fundamentally need, but God helps man out of this predicament, first by building need loves and gift loves into man's nature. This natural gift love, however, is still far from divine gift love. He communicates to man a far greater gift - a share of His divine gift love.

The gift love He has built into man's nature. The gifts bestowed as natural gift love are never pure; they are not for the loved object's own sake. They are biased in favor of the gifts that the giver can bestow. Divine gift love is disinterested.

Further, Lewis argues natural gift loves are always to the desirable. Divine gift love can love those who are not lovable. Significantly, charity is the only other love that loves the unattractive.

Thus, man reaches this highest pinnacle of love only because God gives the ability. This seems to me to be a failure to trace human love on an unbroken path to the Divine. It does not

grow out of the human, but relies again on God=s intervention.

Friendship almost seems like a truly spiritual love because it has no need of the body. This does not keep those who think true friendships are homosexual from connecting friendship with Eros. Actually, while Lewis believes that friends may fall in love, often within the first hour of friendship, he believes that the loves are as different as any two loves can be.

Some differences are that while lovers are always talking about their love, friends are always talking about some things held in common. Furthermore, Eros while it lasts is always between two. For friendship, far from two being the necessary number is not even the best. For illustration, he calls on Lamb=s statement that if of three friends (A,B,and C) if only A should die, then B loses not only A but A=s part in C. Friendship is the least jealous of loves whereas Eros can be the most.

AIN this,@ Lewis adds, Afriendship exhibits a >nearness by resemblance= to heaven.@

In conclusion, I want very humbly to offer the following modest criticisms of C.S. Lewis= The Four Loves. Most if not all, are based on minor questions which arose, almost always in the context of some major insight.

1. The first and most serious question arises from the definition of The Four Loves. Two of them designate the object of specific loves: A) Friendship and B) Eros. The other two are two kinds of loves: A) Affection and B) Charity. Perhaps, the fact that two of the nouns do not have corresponding verbs may be part of the problem.

2. Second and most unsatisfying, is the failure to compare two English words A) Love and B) Like, despite his frequently introducing the terms. He seems, at time, to equate like with affection, but is not consistent.

3. The effort to trace love from affection to charity on natural grounds fails for he needs a generous infusion of Divine help at several points. Especially is this true of the step from need love to gift love. First, God builds natural gift love into man=s nature. Then, in the final step, Lewis hypothesizes that God gives a measure of His own Gift-Love. Perhaps, I misunderstood Lewis= purpose, but I think it a logical explanation of his favorite quotation, AThe highest does not stand without the lowest.@

4. While, in general, the discussion of friendship seems the most immune to criticism,

Lewis= inability to comprehend female friendship suggests an incomplete understanding of friendship, especially as a category of love. While Lewis demonstrates the way that friendship and Eros are different, I think friendship is much closer to family love than Lewis allows.

Conceivably, friendship could be viewed as love of a larger family unit. While friendship is not the word Lewis uses to describe God=s relationship to man, history is filled with examples of famous friendships which suggest the divine love of giving.

If all of the above criticisms are correct, the list would not constitute a single reason for discouraging any potential reader. However, if any of them are correct, this may offer an explanation for why some readers (my students) may have trouble understanding the work.