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Women and Supposition:
The Chronicles of Narnia and Biblical Womanhood

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HONORS PROJECT

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Dr. Casey Stark

Dr. Allan Emery

Introduction

A ship, helmed by a man and commanded by a king, sails into an unnatural and impossible darkness from a well-lit sea. The travelers had to enter the darkness to complete a portion of their quest, but once inside they realize that they cannot find their way out. They try to navigate back the way they came, but they are hopelessly lost in the darkness and there is no sign of the illuminated world they left behind. The crew members cry out ““He’s steering us wrong. We’re going round and round in circles. We shall never get out.””¹ The ship appears to be utterly doomed, until the lone female on the ship, a girl of about eleven and a queen in her own right, bends her head and prays to God for help. From far off a brilliant light illuminates the ship. The girl watches as a shape moves toward them. At first, it appears to be a cross but as it moves closer, she recognizes the shape of an albatross. The bird circles the ship's mast three times, swooping low to whisper into the girl's ear, "Courage, dear heart," before leading the ship out of the darkness and back out into the brilliant light they left behind.² This scene occurs in the twelfth chapter of C.S. Lewis's *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. Without the interference of Lucy Pevensie, the girl in the scene, all would have been lost for the men aboard the ship. This is especially concerning because the ship had, in true maritime tradition, excluded women in its initial voyage. Through an act of God that subverts this tradition, Lucy is placed on the ship and is able to help the men. Just as Lucy’s assistance subverts the legitimacy of excluding women from voyages, Lewis’ series *The Chronicles of Narnia* subverts a male-dominated Christian tradition by placing women in roles that were biblically designated for them.

¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (HarperCollins, 2009), <https://www.scribd.com/book/163580885/The-Voyage-of-the-Dawn-Treader-The-Chronicles-of-Narnia>, 158.

² C.S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, 160.

This subversion of Christian tradition is echoed in Lewis' *Mere Christianity*, which argues that there are certain truths inherent to Christianity that are separate from doctrinal beliefs and human tradition. He calls these truths "'mere' Christianity," and argues that they are true regardless of anyone's opinion.³ *Mere Christianity* speaks to the reality of Biblical truth and Lewis separates it from doctrinal opinions, including his own.⁴ While Lewis does not know why Christians have come to division over denominational differences,⁵ he argues that Christians should be predominately concerned with where Christ guides them because in looking to Christ the truth about Christianity is made apparent.⁶

For many Christian women, their understanding of their role within Christianity is not founded only on Christ, but also by thousands of years of culture, Christian tradition, and the dogmas of more experienced Christians and theologians. Together, these things have created a veritable quagmire of opinions regarding the roles of women within Christianity. Historically, Christianity is heavily patriarchal, and it has often excluded women from leadership roles and subjugated them within the church and home. However, this treatment has not always been the case and it is not biblically supported. Instead, it is a product of the culture and traditions of the world influencing Christian doctrine. In *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Lewis draws more from

³ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* in *The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics* (HarperOne, 2002), 6, "For I am not writing to expound 'my religion', but to expound 'mere' Christianity, which is what it is and what it was long before I was born and whether I like it or not."

⁴ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 5-6, "The reader should be warned that I offer no help to anyone who is hesitating between two Christian denominations. You will not learn from me whether you ought to become an Anglican, a Methodist, a Presbyterian, or a Roman Catholic. This omission is intentional [...] in this book I am not trying to convert anyone to my own position. Ever since I became a Christian I have thought that the best, perhaps the only, service I could do for my unbelieving neighbors was to explain and defend the belief that has been common to nearly all Christians at all times."

⁵ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 8.

⁶ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 177.

‘mere Christianity’ than from traditional Christian beliefs, including some he held himself, and in doing so crafted an imaginative fiction that affirms true biblical womanhood.

Author Methodology, Doctrinal Beliefs, and Literature Review

This paper is intended for a predominantly Christian audience, and it is meant to be a resource for Christians that are coming to Lewis with denominational biases that impact their views on womanhood. ‘Womanhood’ is defined by Merriam Webster as “the set of qualities traditionally considered appropriate for or characteristic of women.”⁷ Therefore, the research for this paper focuses predominately on what womanhood means in both Christianity and *The Chronicles of Narnia*. This means that to discuss how Lewis subverts traditional doctrines to showcase true Biblical womanhood that is founded in mere Christianity, the traditional Christian viewpoints concerning womanhood need to first be established and then disproven with support from textual analysis, biblical historians, and theologians. It is important to note that this paper is written from a non-denominational Protestant viewpoint. This means that the paper does not attempt to align with any one set of Protestant doctrinal beliefs. However, it is written from the Protestant perspective that scripture has inherent authority, meaning that the Canon was established when it was written because it is the inspired word of God and that it took some time for its authority to be recognized. This differs from the Catholic viewpoint which is that the Church decided on what was Canon and then invested it with authority.⁸ In addition to this, as a non-denominational protestant, I do utilize religious sources that I believe accurately reflect

⁷ Merriam Webster, “Definition of WOMANHOOD,” [www.merriam-webster.com](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/womanhood#:~:text=Kids%20Definition%20of%20womanhood%201%20%3A%20the%20state), accessed April 27, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/womanhood#:~:text=Kids%20Definition%20of%20womanhood%201%20%3A%20the%20state>.

⁸ Robert Plummer, “How Did We Get the Bible?,” [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aEAPWac19a4&t=441s&ab_channel=SouthernSeminary) (Southern Seminary, October 10, 2018), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aEAPWac19a4&t=441s&ab_channel=SouthernSeminary.

Biblical truth. My viewpoints do not align with all Christians, but I do attempt to adequately support any theology presented within this paper by aligning it with scripture.

The sources collected for this paper come predominantly from the physical and digital collections of the Bowling Green State University Library, the digital offerings of Scribd.com, and books on women in Christianity and C.S. Lewis that I previously owned. Due to the amount of source material available on the Bible, Lewis, and *The Chronicles of Narnia*, this paper only draws from a small portion of what has been previously written. I have selected, from the sources available to me, what I believe to be representative sources of the topics.

The sources central to my argument in this paper are these works by C.S. Lewis: *The Chronicles of Narnia*,⁹ *Mere Christianity*,¹⁰ and “Priestesses in the Church?”¹¹ Each of these features some facet of Lewis' understanding of Christianity and the *Chronicles* and *Mere Christianity* place Christ and His love for humankind at the forefront of Christianity. To supplement these, I have utilized Ford's *Companion to Narnia* because it offers a masterful compendium of all things Narnia, including commentary on Lewis' use of women within Narnia.¹² I also reference work done by Hardy¹³ and Rigney¹⁴ for their Narnian analyses. These highlight Lewis' dedication to sharing Christianity with his reader and give additional background on theology and the inspiration for Narnia. For Christian theology, I reference the

⁹ C S Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, First (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2004).

¹⁰ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*.

¹¹ C.S. Lewis, “Priestesses in the Church?,” in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970).

¹² Paul F. Ford, *Companion to Narnia* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980).

¹³ Elizabeth Baird Hardy, *Milton, Spenser and the Chronicles of Narnia : Literary Sources for the C.S. Lewis Novels* (McFarland & Company, 2007).

¹⁴ Joe Rigney, “Live like a Narnian: Christian Discipleship in C.S. Lewis's Chronicles,” [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-E_RhiZhC_s&t=224s&ab_channel=DesiringGod) (desiringGod.org, October 5, 2013), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-E_RhiZhC_s&t=224s&ab_channel=DesiringGod.

Bible and for commentary on the Bible I have predominately utilized the works of Dr. Andrew Farley,¹⁵ John Piper,¹⁶ Abiola Mbamalu,¹⁷ Carrie Miles,¹⁸ and Alena Ruggerio.¹⁹ These works delve into controversial passages surrounding the requirements of Christianity and whether men and women are spiritually equal. Frank and Evelyn Stagg,²⁰ Stephanie Cobb,²¹ and James Arlandson's works surrounding the historical roles of women in and around Christianity are also used within this paper.²² These works provide a groundwork for my research regarding Lewis's affirmation of biblical womanhood through his characterizations and writing. This is a topic that has not been heavily researched, and my research provides a foundation for further work.

The New American Standard Bible (NASB) 2020 Edition is the primary Biblical translation utilized within this paper. This translation is a Protestant Bible, which means that it features only the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament and the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. The NASB 2020 Edition was chosen because of its use of the "formal equivalence translation philosophy" which means that it is nearly a direct translation from the original

¹⁵ Andrew Farley, "What Laws Are Written on a Believers' Heart?," BibleQuestions.com (The Grace Message with Dr. Andrew Farley), accessed April 17, 2022, <https://biblequestions.com/answers/what-laws-are-written-on-a-believers-heart/>.

¹⁶ John Piper, "God Created Man Male and Female: What Does It Mean to Be Complementarian?," *Desiring God*, November 24, 2012, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/god-created-man-male-and-female>.

¹⁷ Abiola Mbamalu, "'The Woman Was Deceived and Became a Sinner' – a Literary-Theological Investigation of 1 Timothy 2:11–15," *HTS Theologese Studies/Theological Studies* 70, no. 3 (2014), <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v70i3.2062>.

¹⁸ Carrie A. Miles, "Patriarchy or Gender Equality?," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 39, no. 2 (2006), <https://doi.org/https://doi-org.ezproxy.bgsu.edu/10.2307/45227240>.

¹⁹ Alena Amato Ruggerio, "How Interpretation Becomes Truth: Biblical Feminist and Evangelical Complementarian Hermeneutics," ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2003.

²⁰ Evelyn Stagg and Frank Stagg, *Woman in the World of Jesus* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Westminster Press, 1978).

²¹ Stephanie L. Cobb, "Real Women Or Objects of Discourse? the Search for Early Christian Women," *Religion Compass* 3, no. 3 (2009): 379-394, 380-381.

²² James Malcolm Arlandson, *Women, Class, and Society in Early Christianity: Models from Luke-Acts*, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997.

language into English.²³ Furthermore, the 2020 edition of this translation adjusts its language to include the gendered language of the Bible that would have been evident in the original language in context but has been lost in translation.²⁴ This is not the translation that C.S. Lewis would have used because it was originally released in 1971, nearly a decade after his death. However, C.S. Lewis recognized that language itself poses a problem in translation due to its interpretive nature in his essay “God in the Dock,” and the NASB Bible attempts to tackle this issue itself.²⁵

Additionally, it is important to know the differences between the Old and New Testaments to better understand Hebrew and Christian culture. The Old Testament covers hundreds of years and was written by mostly unknown Jewish authors for the Jewish people. It details the history of the Israelite people from before their creation in the Garden of Eden until around the Restoration.²⁶ It also features the covenant that God made with Abraham and the 613 Levitical Laws, also known as the Law, that the Israelites were required to follow. The Law dictated the civil, ceremonial, and moral behavior of the Israelite people and it was intrinsic to their belief system and culture as it was their only way to be made right with God. The Law was especially harsh to women with commandments that distinguish women as lesser than men even

²³ Lockman Foundation, “More Information about NASB 2020 – Lockman Foundation,” accessed April 17, 2022, <https://www.lockman.org/nasb-bible-info/more-information-about-nasb-2020/>.

²⁴ Lockman Foundation, “Gender-Accurate Language in the NASB 2020 – Lockman Foundation,” accessed November 2, 2021, <https://www.lockman.org/gender-accurate-language-in-the-nasb-2020/>.

²⁵ C.S. Lewis, “God in the Dock,” in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970), 242-244.

²⁶ Bible Gateway, “Chronology of the Old Testament - Encyclopedia of the Bible - Bible Gateway,” www.biblegateway.com, accessed April 17, 2022, <https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/encyclopedia-of-the-bible/Chronology-Old-Testament>.

at birth.²⁷ This means that built into the Law, the foundation of the Jewish faith that dictates everything about their relationship with God, was an inherent inequality between women and men. This inequality became a facet of Jewish tradition, and it is evident within the New Testament scriptures, especially the four canonical gospels. However, in the Christian tradition, the righteous requirements of the Jewish Law are fulfilled by Christ in the New Testament.

The New Testament is about both the fulfillment of the Old Covenant and the Jewish Law through Christ's sacrifice and the introduction of the New Covenant that Christians live under today. Jesus was "born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those under the Law."²⁸ This means that Jesus was an advocate of the Law, and that he came to fulfill it, rather than to abolish it.²⁹ Consequently, the Jews that Jesus was ministering to were still under the Law. This means that much of Jesus' ministering to them focused on upholding and maintaining the righteous requirements of the Law while highlighting that no one could follow it. This is important to remember when reading the canonical Gospels because it does impact how Jesus interacted with the world. With the death and resurrection of Christ, the New Covenant and the Age of Grace were introduced and are in effect throughout the rest of the New Testament and Christian history.³⁰

²⁷ Lev. 12:5 NASB, "But if she gives birth to a female child, then she shall be unclean for two weeks, as in her menstruation; and she shall stay at home in her condition of blood purification for sixty-six days."

²⁸ Gal. 4:4-5 NASB, "But when the fullness of the time came, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons and daughters."

²⁹ Matt. 5:17 NASB, "Do not presume that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill."

³⁰ Heb. 9:16 NASB "For where there is a covenant, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it."

The New Covenant operates under a completely different set of rules than the Old Covenant. The New Covenant includes total forgiveness of sins,³¹ the in-dwelling of the Holy Spirit,³² and fulfills the righteous requirements of the Law for all those that believe. Dr. Andrew Farley argues that with the New Covenant come two new commandments, love Christ and one another.³³ These are "completely centered on the finished work of Christ" and not burdensome like the Law.³⁴ Some argue against this because Hebrews 10:16 states God is going to write his laws on the hearts of those who believe. This is about Jeremiah 31:33 from the Old Testament and it is referring to the Hebrew Law. However, Farley argues that the author of Hebrews altered the quotation from Jeremiah to reflect the New Covenant commandments by replacing the singular "Law"³⁵ with "laws."³⁶ This distinction is important because it means that New Testament epistles, which were written to the earliest churches, are written to people under a new religion, under a different set of rules than the Jewish people had been living with for hundreds of years.³⁷ This also means that the inequality built into the Jewish religion because of the Law's requirements for women has been fulfilled and replaced with equalizing commandments of love.

³¹ Heb. 10:14 NASB, "For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified."

³² Ezek. 36:26-27 NASB, "Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you and bring it about that you walk in My statutes, and are careful and follow My ordinances."

³³ 1 John 3:23 NASB, "This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us."

³⁴ Andrew Farley, "What Laws Are Written on a Believers' Heart?," BibleQuestions.com (The Grace Message with Dr. Andrew Farley), accessed April 17, 2022, <https://biblequestions.com/answers/what-laws-are-written-on-a-believers-heart/>.

³⁵ Jer. 31:33, "'For this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,' declares the Lord: 'I will put My law within them and write it on their heart; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.'

³⁶ Heb. 10:16, "'This is the covenant which I will make with them/ After those days, declares the Lord:/ I will put My laws upon their hearts,/ And write them on their mind,'"

³⁷ Gal. 3:16-26 NASB.

C.S. Lewis as a Christian Authority

Clive Staples Lewis, known popularly as C.S. Lewis, is arguably one of the most influential writers and lay theologians of recent memory. His works are a masterclass in Christian apologetics and have been seriously studied by generations of Christians across denominational lines. In *C.S. Lewis: A Companion and Guide*, Walter Hooper argues that Lewis' theological writings appeal "to all manner of Christians" in his theological writings, dealing a blow to denominational and dogmatic divisions within Christianity.³⁸ This is supported by Lewis' preface to *Mere Christianity* where he writes that he is not arguing for any one denomination but rather that there are beliefs intrinsic to Christianity and that any divisions amongst Christians "often involve points of high theology or even of ecclesiastical history."³⁹ This means that Lewis is considered a spiritual authority by many Christians and that the Christianity that Lewis argues for within his writings is representative of the most important Christian beliefs.

The Chronicles of Narnia are a work of imaginative fiction that are described as Christian allegory. This is a description that Lewis has denied on many occasions, asserting that his *Chronicles* are instead a supposition of what it might have looked like if Christ had interacted with and saved a world unlike our own.⁴⁰ According to Ford, the reasoning for Lewis' *Chronicles* can be best found in Lewis' *Space Trilogy* where Lewis writes through his character Ransom that he wants to familiarize people with certain ideas. Ford further argues that Lewis intends to familiarize his *Chronicles* readers with Christ and Christian living, which is best supported by this excerpt from *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*:

³⁸ Walter Hooper, *C.S. Lewis: A Companion & Guide* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), XII.

³⁹ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 5-6.

⁴⁰ Ford, *Companion to Narnia*, XII.

“You are too old, children” said Aslan, “and you must begin to come close to your own world now.”

“It isn’t Narnia, you know,” sobbed Lucy. “It’s *you*. We shan’t meet *you* there. And how can we leave, never meeting you?”

“But you shall meet me, dear one,” said Aslan.

“Are-are you there too, Sir?” said Edmund.

“I am,” said Aslan. “But there I have another name. You must learn to know me by that name. This was the very reason why you were brought to Narnia, that by knowing me here for a little, you may know me better there.”⁴¹

In addition to this, Ford asserts that Lewis also intended to familiarize his *Chronicles* readers with the Christianity he presents in *Mere Christianity*.⁴²

C.S. Lewis believed that imaginative fiction teaches the reader about the world around them by providing an imaginative, outside perspective of reality. Dr. Joe Rigney, President of Bethlehem College & Seminary, argues in his lecture “Live Like a Narnian: Christian Discipleship in C.S. Lewis's Chronicles” that Lewis’s *The Chronicles of Narnia* “display, through imaginative fiction the way the world really is.”⁴³ This means that the *Chronicles*, much like *Mere Christianity* and Lewis’ other theological works, present a Christianity that does not adhere to any one dogmatic line and further establishes core Christian beliefs by removing Christianity from the Christian tradition. Through the study of Lewis' *Chronicles*, Christians can enhance their own understandings of the character of God and Christian living. Most importantly to the female reader, adrift on the dark sea of Christian Tradition, Lewis has provided an accurate

⁴¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, 211.

⁴² Ford, *Companion to Narnia*, XIII.

⁴³ Joe Rigney, “Live like a Narnian: Christian Discipleship in C.S. Lewis’s Chronicles,” [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-E_RhiZhC_s&t=224s&ab_channel=DesiringGod) (desiringGod.org, October 5, 2013), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-E_RhiZhC_s&t=224s&ab_channel=DesiringGod, 3:39-3:44.

representation of what biblical womanhood can be when they are divorced from the traditions of the world and treated with the love Christ commanded.

Biblical Womanhood and Christian Belief

C.S. Lewis was a self-proclaimed “ordinary layman of the Church of England.”⁴⁴ This means that he did ascribe to the traditional Anglican belief system, which includes a particular view on gender roles in the bible. This view is best described by Lewis in his 1948 essay “Priestesses in the Church?” in which Lewis argues against the ordination of women within the Anglican Church. In the essay, Lewis acknowledges the contributions that women have had to the Gospel story but argues that it is the tradition of the Church to not include women in the priesthood. He highlights that Christ and His apostles were all men and argues that women were excluded from important religious moments. Lewis concedes that there were female preachers but argues that there is an intrinsic difference between preachers and priests because priests represent a masculine God. He also argues that equality must mean that men and women are interchangeable, which is not true because they were created to fill complementary roles within the Christian Church.⁴⁵

The beliefs held by Lewis in his “Priestesses in the Church?” essay align with the traditionalist Christian doctrine of complementarianism. John Piper, chancellor of Bethlehem College & Seminary, states that complementarianism is “the greatest display of God’s glory, the greatest joy of human relationships, and the greatest fruitfulness in ministry come about when the deep differences between men and women are embraced and celebrated as

⁴⁴ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 6.

⁴⁵ C.S. Lewis, “Priestesses in the Church?” In *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, edited by Walter Hooper, 234–39. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970, 239.

complements to each other.”⁴⁶ Piper, citing Ephesian 5:22-33, 1 Timothy, and Genesis 2, argues that biblical womanhood is submission to men, both within the home⁴⁷ and Church.⁴⁸ In her dissertation, Ruggerio argues that this means complementarians believe biblical manhood includes a "God-given inclination for leadership and authority," while biblical womanhood is defined by "the God-given inclination for subordination and support."⁴⁹ In practice, this means that men and women are not equal members of Christianity because women are considered inherently subservient and barred from holding authority over men. Ruggerio also argues that supporters of complementarianism present their interpretation of scripture as biblical truth, leaving no room for opposition.⁵⁰

Traditionalist complementarian beliefs are not the only Christian viewpoint on biblical womanhood. Egalitarians, in opposition to the complementarian belief that separate is equal, argue the Bible does not support a gender-based hierarchy within the home or Church. Through the study of scripture, egalitarians have concluded that the traditionalist complementarian viewpoint is not biblically supported. The egalitarian viewpoint affirms that biblical womanhood is separate from biblical manhood but argues that there is not a biblical basis for the exclusion of women from authority both within the Church and at home. Several verses are commonly used

⁴⁶ John Piper, "God Created Man Male and Female: What Does It Mean to Be Complementarian?," *Desiring God*, November 24, 2012, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/god-created-man-male-and-female>.

⁴⁷ Piper, "God Created Man Male and Female," "And biblical submission for the wife is the divine calling to honor and affirm her husband's leadership and help carry it through according to her gifts. 'A helper suitable for him,' as Genesis 2:18 says."

⁴⁸ Piper, "God Created Man Male and Female," "In 1 Timothy 2:12 Paul says, 'I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man.' In the context, we take that to mean: the primary responsibility for governance and teaching in the church should be carried by spiritual men."

⁴⁹ Ruggerio, "How Interpretation Becomes Truth," 63.

⁵⁰ Ruggerio, "How Interpretation Becomes Truth," 65-68.

as Biblical proof that women are not the equals of their male counterparts. These verses are pulled from both The Old and New Testaments and are taken out of their original contexts or purposefully interpreted to be used to subordinate women within the Church.⁵¹ 1 Timothy 2:11-15 is commonly cited by complementarians in support of their doctrinal beliefs, but the scripture does not affirm the complementarian viewpoint when placed in its original context.⁵² Mbamalu's commentary of 1 Timothy examines the original Greek in context and concludes that complementarians have misinterpreted the scripture. Mbamalu argues that the complementarian interpretation of 1 Timothy "of consigning half of God's created humanity to a marginal role on account of gender – a situation that is not of their making, makes mockery of the grace of God and of the gospel."⁵³ After examining the first four lines of the pericope, Mbamalu concluded that Timothy was in Ephesus to stop a certain group of people from leading the others astray with false doctrine. She further argues that the fifth verse specifically targets people in Ephesus who were attempting to incorrectly teach the Law, which was why they received such a scathing reprimand from the author of the letter.⁵⁴ Furthermore, the original Greek does not apply to all women because it purposefully uses exclusionary language surrounding childbirth that cannot apply to all Christian women.⁵⁵

⁵¹Stephanie L. Cobb, "Real Women Or Objects of Discourse? the Search for Early Christian Women," *Religion Compass* 3, no. 3 (2009): 379-394, 380-381.

⁵² 1 Tim. 2:11-15 NASB, "A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a wrongdoer. But women will be preserved through childbirth—if they continue in faith, love, and sanctity, with moderation.

⁵³ Mbamalu, "The Woman Was Deceived and Became a Sinner," 6.

⁵⁴ Mbamalu, "The Woman Was Deceived and Became a Sinner," 3.

⁵⁵ Mbamalu, "The Woman Was Deceived and Became a Sinner," 2-3.

In “Patriarchy or Gender Equality? The Letter to the Ephesians on Submission, Headship, and Slavery,” Carrie Miles argues for an egalitarian reading of Ephesians 5:22-24.⁵⁶ Miles does this by first explaining the evolution of how women came to be homemakers, arguing that “in a pre-industrial economy, child-bearing and child-rearing are women’s most important tasks” because of the monetary value that a child’s labor added to the family.⁵⁷ In addition to this, Miles argues that it made more monetary sense for women to stay at home and work at this point in history because it was not practical for child-bearing women to work outside the home because they were often pregnant and caring for small children. After establishing that women may have been homemakers out of practicality rather than by divine authority, Miles goes on to argue that Ephesians is arguing against Roman culture and placing wives in an equal partnership with their husbands.⁵⁸

At this point in Roman culture, it was common for men in their thirties to marry girls in adolescence. Miles argues that Paul was telling Christian men “to treat their wives with agape.”⁵⁹ C.S. Lewis argued that “agape is all giving, not getting” and that it is the best sort of love because it “is the kind God has for us and is good in all circumstances.”⁶⁰ Miles argues that in arguing for the most selfless form of love, Paul was challenging the traditional “patriarchal motives for marriage.”⁶¹ Miles also argues that Paul’s idea of marriage further subverts tradition

⁵⁶ Eph. 5:22-24 NASB, “Wives, subject yourselves to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything.”

⁵⁷ Miles, “Patriarchy or Gender Equality?,” 72.

⁵⁸ Miles, “Patriarchy or Gender Equality?,” 75-76.

⁵⁹ Miles, “Patriarchy or Gender Equality?,” 85.

⁶⁰ C.S. Lewis, “Letter to Mrs. Johnson,” (February 19, 1954), quoted in Zach Kincaid, “Lewis on Love,” The Official Website of C.S. Lewis, February 13, 2019, <https://www.cslewis.com/lewis-on-love/>.

⁶¹ Miles, “Patriarchy Or Gender Equality?,” 82-83.

by asking husbands and wives to be loyal to one another before their families. Furthermore, the original Greek word for submission, *hypotasso* is a mutual submission rather than being one-sided. This means that Paul is asking the Ephesians to “‘put themselves under’ each other,” which aligns with the selfless form of love he has already argued for.⁶² Furthermore, Miles argues that the word "head," while translated correctly does not mean authority over but rather a term of unification because husbands are meant to be putting their wives’ interests over themselves. This also means that wives can do the same, knowing that their needs will not be contrary to their husbands’.⁶³ When viewed in its original context, Ephesians 5 argues for a radically equal marriage that does not align with the complementarian viewpoint.

In addition to placing 1 Timothy 2:11-15 and Ephesians 5:22-33 in their original contexts, egalitarians also look towards the heart of the New Covenant to support their views that men and women are equally invited to share authority within Christianity. At its heart, the New Covenant is based in Christ and is about love. Its commandments do not discriminate based on any criteria, which is further supported by Paul’s assertion in Gal. 3:28.⁶⁴ To suggest that Christian women are anything other than inherently equal to their male counterparts is exclusionary and is not supported by the New Covenant. It is not loving to exclude women from leadership roles and subordinate them within their households. Women are invited to participate in Christianity and biblical womanhood plays a significant role in the Gospel story.

The egalitarian viewpoint of biblical womanhood is further supported by the intrinsic roles that women play in the Gospel story. While many point to Eve as the reason that women

⁶² Miles, "Patriarchy Or Gender Equality?," 77.

⁶³ Miles, "Patriarchy Or Gender Equality?," 84.

⁶⁴ Gal. 3:28, “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

must be subordinate, biblical womanhood was not in any way subordinate at its creation. Genesis 2, which Piper used to support the complementarian view, reads “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suited to him.”⁶⁵ Though Piper argues that ‘helper’ subordinates Eve at creation, Bilezikian argues that this interpretation is not supported by the Bible. He further argues that Eve’s intended biblical role was to rescue Adam from his noncommunity and then perfectly complete him as his equal.⁶⁶ This means that intended at creation was a biblical womanhood that was not subordinate but equal in authority and empowering. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God and sinned, they were cast from the garden together. As a result of Eve’s disobedience women were punished under the Old Covenant, but so too were men.⁶⁷ Eve’s initial disobedience to the Lord is later rectified by Christ’s death and resurrection, which reestablishes the gender roles that God intended at creation.

There are many other women whose positive contributions to the Bible highlight their importance to the Gospel story. The most important is arguably the Virgin Mary, whose contribution to Christianity was Christ. This is not to say that Mary’s contribution is the same as Christ’s, but rather that she was faithful and chose to participate in the plan that God had for her.⁶⁸ God also invited many other faithful women to participate in the Gospel story. Among these are Mary Magdalene, whose faith in Christ was so great that she was the one to look for Christ’s body in the Gospel of John,⁶⁹ Jael, who helped her people overthrow the Canaanites by

⁶⁵Gen. 2:18 NASB.

⁶⁶ Gilbert Bilezikian, “Biblical Community versus Gender-Based Hierarchy,” *Priscilla Papers* 16, no. 3 (2002), 5.

⁶⁷ Gen 3:13-19 NASB

⁶⁸ Luke 1:38 “And Mary said, ‘Behold, the Lord’s bond-servant; may it be done to me according to your word.’ And the angel departed from her.”

⁶⁹ John 20:1-18 NASB.

killing the commander of their army,⁷⁰ and Rahab, who was both a gentile and prostitute. Rahab's inclusion in the genealogy of Christ places value on the strength of her faith and value as an individual, which entirely subverts traditional Hebrew and complementarian beliefs concerning women.⁷¹ These women do not align with the complementarian viewpoint, but they do align with the egalitarian viewpoint. Furthermore, they were of incredible faith, which is, arguably, the most important trait for a Christian to have. Ruth was faithful and loyal which resulted in her betrothal to Boaz which made her the great grandmother of King David. Esther, relying on faith, prevented the genocide of the Jewish nation. The argument can and should be made that the entirety of the Gospel story could not have unfolded without the women that God used to reveal His plan. In many cases throughout the Bible, women give birth to the Gospel, which is an act that men are incapable of.

Christian women continue to be treated as lesser and are excluded from leadership roles and subjugated within their households. This is because Christianity has been heavily influenced by culture. Arlandson argues that “the Jewish world was, for the most part, conservative and even oppressive towards women,”⁷² and Frank and Evelyn Stagg found that negative stereotypes about women were prevalent in Hebrew society.⁷³ These viewpoints did not fade into antiquity but rather became entrenched in Christian doctrines where they remain to this day. These viewpoints are based on tradition rather than on scripture, which is something Jesus warns against in Mark 7:8.⁷⁴ While patriarchal interpretations of the Bible have been used to deny

⁷⁰ Judg. 4:17-24 NASB.

⁷¹ James 2:25 NASB, “In the same way, was Rahab the prostitute not justified by works also when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?”

⁷² Arlandson, *Women, Class, and Society in Early Christianity*, 11.

⁷³ Stagg, *Woman in the World of Jesus*, 15-27.

⁷⁴ Mark 7:8 NASB, “Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.”

Christian women their agency and authority within both the Church and their own homes, actual analysis of scripture does not support this. Through the study of the Bible, it has been revealed that Biblical women are strong-willed, brave, and willing to risk their lives for God. The same can be said for Biblical men. It is faith that qualifies a person before God, and lack of faith and refusal to believe God that often causes harm within both the Bible and the Christian world. The Bible unequivocally states that men and women are not only spiritually equal,⁷⁵ but also called to prophesy⁷⁶ and minister to the wider world.⁷⁷ This means that men and women equally share in the intrinsic value that is given to all humans, regardless of their gender.

The Chronicles of Narnia and Biblical Womanhood

Though Lewis argues for and aligns with the complementarian viewpoint in his 1948 “Priestesses in the Church?” essay, Lewis’ *Chronicles*, written between 1950-1956, subvert his own traditionalist viewpoints by accurately representing the biblically supported egalitarian viewpoint on womanhood in his *Chronicles*. Lewis may not have intended to subvert his own beliefs, but his writings and characterizations of the women within his Narnian supposition do align with egalitarian readings of biblical womanhood. Some argue that this change can be attributed to Lewis’ relationship with Joy Davidman, whom he 1952 married in 1956. She was the great love of Lewis’ life and many of Lewis’ readers noticed a change in his writing after meeting her. In her introduction to Ford’s *Companion to Narnia*, Madeleine L’Engle argues that Lewis’ writing “became infused with love” and “became more human as he grew through his

⁷⁵ Gen. 1:27 NASB, “So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”

⁷⁶ Acts 21:9 NASB, “Now this man had four virgin daughters who were prophetesses.”

⁷⁷ Rom. 16:1 NASB, “I recommend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenckrea,”

surprises with joy and his battles with pain.”⁷⁸ Lewis's love of Davidman may be reflected in his movement towards more feminist-leaning plotlines concerning the roles of women in Narnia in his later *Chronicles* books. However, L’Engle also notes that Lewis wrote more than he knew and “beyond himself” in imagining his Narnian supposition. This means that, regardless of his intention, Lewis presented a Christian supposition that aligns with the tenets of love and equality that can be found at the heart of *Mere Christianity* rather than the complementarian tradition he previously argued for.

Though some of Lewis’ change in writing can be attributed to Davidman, she is not wholly responsible for the egalitarian viewpoints that Lewis expressed within his *Chronicles*. This is because Lewis had written males and females into equal positions of authority within Narnia before meeting her. The existence of the Pevensie siblings as the four equal, and rightful rulers of Narnia highlights the inherent Narnian gender equality. At the end of *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* Lewis has Aslan, who is the suppositional Christ, crown each of the siblings a Narnian ruler. Lewis further writes “these two Kings and two Queens governed Narnia well, and long and happy was their reign.”⁷⁹ This description is a display of the intended biblical gender roles that are established with the creation of Adam and Eve in the garden. The existence of King Peter the Magnificent, Queen Susan the Gentle, King Edmund the Just, and Queen Lucy the Valiant in Lewis’ first *Chronicles* story show that Lewis had the love and equality of mere Christianity on his mind when outlining his Narnian story.

⁷⁸ Madeleine L’Engle, “Foreword,” in *Companion to Narnia* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980), XV.

⁷⁹ C.S. Lewis, *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* (HarperCollins, 2009), <https://www.scribd.com/book/163572164/The-Lion-the-Witch-and-the-Wardrobe>, 162.

In addition to the four Pevensie siblings, the other main characters of the *Chronicles* are also equally distributed between male and female and hold equal authority within Narnia. These other characters come in equal pairs: Digory and Polly, Eustace and Jill, and Cor and Aravis. Each of these characters contributes to the Narnian story in separate, but equally important ways. Furthermore, they all learn important lessons about themselves and how they are meant to treat one another with love while adventuring in Narnia. In *The Magician's Nephew*, Digory subverts the tradition of Eve causing the fall by bringing sin into Narnia. This highlights that sin preys equally on both genders in the Narnian world, as it does in Christianity. Digory rights his wrong by then further subverting biblical tradition by having faith in Aslan and not eating the Forbidden Fruit. In this quest, Polly is his companion that saves him on more than one occasion. Together, the children begin a series of events that culminate in the rise and fall of Narnian history. Eustace and Jill, together, stage the valiant rescue of Prince Rilian in *The Silver Chair* and then are called to defend Narnia from evil with Rilian's descendant in *The Last Battle*. Hardy argues that Jill is the most "blatantly warlike female character in the *Chronicles*" and that her accomplishments make her a successful hero.⁸⁰ Most interestingly, Cor and Aravis are intrinsic to protecting Narnia from foreign evil during the reign of the Pevensie siblings in *The Horse and His Boy* and are the only pair that truly emulate the husband-wife relationship shown in Genesis because they later become husband and wife and the rulers of Archenland. Davidman's influence is especially seen in Aravis, one of Lewis' later characters, because she is an educated girl that rejects a culture that would see her married against her will.⁸¹ These pairs of male and female characters

⁸⁰ Hardy, *Milton, Spenser and The Chronicles*, 98.

⁸¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Horse and His Boy*, www.scribd.com (HarperCollins, 2009), <https://www.scribd.com/book/163579464/The-Horse-and-His-Boy-The-Chronicles-of-Narnia>, 33, "Nevertheless my father, because of the wealth and power of this Ahoshta, and being persuaded by his wife, sent messengers offering me in marriage, and the offer was favorably

need one another to accomplish the tasks that create the Narnian story. Much like in Eden, one without the other is not good and would have culminated in disaster for Narnia.

Lewis also highlights that Narnian women have the inherent right to decide their futures for themselves. This is seen especially in *The Horse and His Boy*, which has two storylines that center around the importance of female agency. In *The Horse and His Boy*, Aravis rejects her family's desires for her future. She decides that her future and her right to agency are more important to her than her nobility, wealth, and family and she flees to Narnia where "no maiden is forced to marry against her will."⁸² In doing this, Aravis meets Cor and marries him of her volition, becoming the rightful queen of Archenland. In this book, a vain and sexist man, Prince Rabadash, tries to force Susan into marrying him. Hardy argues that he "wants to acquire and subdue her rather than love and cherish her."⁸³ These storylines place Narnian gender and marriage roles in contrast with the homeland of Prince Rabadash and Aravis, highlighting that female agency and equality are values intrinsic to the Narnian way of life.

While there is an equal split of male and female representation in Lewis' main characters within *The Chronicles of Narnia*, it can be argued that Lewis places more emphasis on the contributions of women to the Narnian story. This can be seen especially in Lucy Pevensie, who physically appears in five of the *Chronicles* and is mentioned by name in all seven books. Lucy,

accepted and Ahošta sent word that he would marry me this very year at the time of high summer. "When this news was brought to me the sun appeared dark in my eyes and I laid myself on my bed and wept for a day. But on the second day I rose up and washed my face and caused my mare Hwin to be saddled and took with me a sharp dagger which my brother had carried in the western wars and rode out alone."

⁸² Lewis, *The Horse and His Boy*, 35.

⁸³ Hardy, *Milton, Spenser and The Chronicles*, 89.

out of all of Lewis' characters, has the best relationship with Aslan.⁸⁴ Like her siblings, she receives her status as a queen from Aslan and is later described as "always gay and golden haired, and all Princes in those parts desired her to be their Queen, and her own people called her Queen Lucy the Valiant."⁸⁵ Her moniker is well-deserved because she is brave. She stands up to her siblings and is a defender of truth throughout the series. Her gift from Father Christmas is a magic cordial that is capable of healing people, even at the brink of death.⁸⁶ Hardy argues that she is the central character of the story and that she is a "catalyst for good."⁸⁷ Hardy also states that Lewis drew inspiration for her character from the apostles, the Virgin Mary, and powerful female characters within the works of both Milton and Spenser. This makes her the amalgamation of impressive people while maintaining her childlike love of the world.⁸⁸

Where Lucy is the most faithful and lauded Narnian, Susan, Lucy's older sister, is the most critiqued character in the Chronicles of Narnia. This is because she alone does not die in the crash that brings her entire family, Digory, Polly, and Jill into Narnia in *The Last Battle*. However, Susan is a Queen of Narnia and holds equal power with her siblings during their reign. The Narnians dub her "Queen Susan the Gentle," and she is considered to be an immense beauty. Her gift from Father Christmas is a horn so that she can always call for help, which may foreshadow her need to call for help when she finds herself alone after *The Last Battle*. Susan is barred from the Narnia she knew, but she can still call upon Christ in her own world. Susan is the

⁸⁴ Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, 97, "Well—he knows me," said Edmund. "He is the great Lion, the son of the Em-peror-be-yond-the-Sea, who saved me and saved Narnia. We've all seen him. Lucy sees him most often. And it may be Aslan's country we are sailing to."

⁸⁵ C.S. Lewis, *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* (HarperCollins, 2009), <https://www.scribd.com/book/163572164/The-Lion-the-Witch-and-the-Wardrobe>, 162.

⁸⁶ Lewis, *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*, 98.

⁸⁷ Elizabeth Baird Hardy, *Milton, Spenser and the Chronicles of Narnia*, 80.

⁸⁸ Hardy, *Milton, Spenser and the Chronicles of Narnia*, 83-85.

most adult of the children, though not the oldest, and feels the pull of Narnia the least when they return in *Prince Caspian*.⁸⁹ This foreshadows her decision to not return to Narnia later in the series.

Critics argue that Susan's exclusion from heaven at the end of the story is because she is a woman that chooses feminine things and sexuality. The most prominent and outspoken of these critics are Neil Gaiman,⁹⁰ Phillip Pullman,⁹¹ and J.K. Rowling.⁹² They hold the belief that Susan was punished for becoming a sexual creature and that Lewis was sexist. However, their viewpoints ignore the Christian element of the story. Susan is not excluded because she becomes a woman that is interested in sex, makeup, and clothing, but because she chooses these things over Christ. That is why she is considered "no longer a friend of Narnia," and not because Lewis believed women should not like womanly things.⁹³ To further support this, Lewis compared Susan's spiritual journey to his own when questioned about his decision to leave Susan out. This would mean that it was very likely that Lewis believed Susan would return to Christ later in her

⁸⁹ Ford, *Companion to Narnia*, 279.

⁹⁰ Neil Gaiman, *The Problem of Susan and Other Stories* (London: Dark Horse Books, 2019).

⁹¹ Phillip Pullman, statement on Susan, quoted in Alona Wartofsky, "The Last Word," *Washington Post*, February 19, 2001, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/2001/02/19/the-last-word/4bad376f-4ab7-441c-9c50-afc7e63dd192/>, "In the final Narnia book, "The Last Battle," the older girl is excluded from salvation because she has become too interested in lipstick, nylons and invitations. "In other words, she's growing up. She's entering adulthood," says Pullman. "Now this for Lewis, was something . . . so dreadful and so redolent of sin that he had to send her to Hell. I find that appalling."

⁹² J.K. Rowling, statement on Susan, quoted in Eileen Lee, "Lipstick, Nylons, and a Queenly Identity: On Susan Pevensie of Narnia, Feminism, and Humanity," January 1, 2016, <https://theoccidentalnews.com/blogs/2016/01/01/lipstick-nylons-and-a-queenly-identity-on-susan-pevensie-of-narnia-feminism-and-humanity-2/2884193>, "There comes a point where Susan, who was the older girl, is lost to Narnia because she becomes interested in lipstick. She's become irreligious basically because she found sex. I have a big problem with that."

⁹³ C.S. Lewis, *The Last Battle* (HarperCollins, 2009), <https://www.scribd.com/book/163565474/The-Last-Battle-The-Chronicles-of-Narnia>, 137.

own life, after having experienced massive trauma as he did himself. Though Susan's faith in Narnia and Aslan is gone by the end of the series, she remains a Queen of Narnia⁹⁴ and is likely to return to Christ.⁹⁵

Lewis's decision to make women the most and least faithful of his characters highlights that faith is more important than gender in Narnia. Like in the Bible, faith is what justifies a character before God. This is further highlighted when investigating the differences between Lucy and Susan when they accompany Aslan to his death in *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*. Ford argues that Susan's faith in Aslan is weak even in the first book, highlighting that she worries Aslan is going to abandon them to the Jadis. Lucy does not share these fears and is the one pointing out the truth of the resurrection to Susan after it occurs.⁹⁶ Both girls play with Aslan after his resurrection, though Susan asks what it means, further delineating her from her sister's childlike faith. By studying the two sisters, Lewis' opinion on childlike faith as the most important characteristic to be had by any character is highlighted.

Conclusion and Further Research

In removing Christianity from the traditions of men, C.S. Lewis is able to showcase mere Christianity that is not beholden to the traditions of mankind. In his *Chronicles*, C.S. Lewis highlights the biblical truth of love as an equalizing force that ascribes intrinsic value that belongs to all peoples. Throughout both the Bible and the *Chronicles*, faith is what justifies people, regardless of gender, and those who act in faith contribute positively to their respective stories. Though it is unsure how intentional it was, in pulling from his experience of loving Joy

⁹⁴ Lewis, *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*, 161, "Once a king or queen in Narnia, always a king or queen. Bear it well, Sons of Adam! Bear it well, Daughters of Eve!" said Aslan."

⁹⁵ Ford, *Companion to Narnia*, 279.

⁹⁶ Ford, *Companion to Narnia*, 279.

Davidman and from the love and egalitarian values native to mere Christianity, Lewis designed a Christian supposition that places women in their biblically ordained roles as inherent equals to their male counterparts.

This paper builds from previous scholarship to establish that Lewis accurately depicts biblical womanhood, but it is only a cursory glance at the totality of the available source materials. Further research should focus more on how Lewis crafted his female characters to reflect life, as well as a more in-depth analysis of the roles that the girls play in their respective stories. Even one *Chronicles* book has enough material to merit serious study, especially when paired with biblical analysis and sources on Lewis' life. Another avenue of study would be to investigate the characters that lack faith within both the *Chronicles* and the Bible and the implications that lack of faith has for them and their stories. Further study of Lewis is sure to further highlight the egalitarian thread on biblical womanhood that runs throughout *The Chronicles*.

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