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"'Monstrous Tricks with the Metre': The Creeds, Dante and Dorothy L. Sayers' Orthodoxy without Sentiment"

A Thesis in History

by

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For my Mom, with thanks.

Abstract

In my thesis " 'Monstrous Tricks with the Metre': The Creeds, Dante and Dorothy L. Sayers' Orthodoxy without Sentiment" I shed new light on the works of lay-theologian and dramatist Dorothy L. Sayers by placing her within the broader context of religious fragmentation during the 20th century in England. In the mid-20th century, the Anglican Church attempted to combat secularization and de-Christianization that had been exacerbated by the two World Wars. The Church offered a number of different solutions for this fragmentation. One was presented by Anglo-Catholics who emphasized a return to dogma and ritual in the church. A second option was put forward by Modernists who proposed a synthesis of faith and science in order to make church doctrine receptive to scientific developments. By placing Sayers in the middle of the fractious Anglican Church and an increasingly secularized England, I argue that hers was an innovative method for presenting the co-existent nature of theology and literature. Sayers accepted parts of both Anglo-Catholicism and Modernism in order to reach her audience: like the Anglo-Catholics she emphasized unchanging dogma, but like the modernists she recognized the need for an innovative presentation through modernizing the language of dogma. This provides the frame for my reading of Sayers' most widely discussed work: the translation of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. I argue that her work was not a bad piece of scholarship, as academics have previously stated. Rather it was the expression of her theological principles and her particular understanding of the role of art which was best expressed by the poetry of the *Divine Comedy*. Sayers intentionally created a translation that was dynamic and readable for her modern audience, even at the cost of textual

fidelity. By firmly grounding her translation in a doctrine of the Incarnation, Sayers effectively linked her wartime creedal broadcasts with a literary artistry.

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Introduction

The first half of the twentieth century in England posed a unique set of cultural, political and religious problems. The legacy of the First World War and the outbreak of World War Two presented intellectuals, both Christian and secular, with the peculiar dilemma of how to interpret and deal with the consequences of political and cultural unrest. An unavoidable outgrowth of this instability was the fragmentation of the Church and the mass secularization of English society. The Electoral Roll data published by the University of Manchester indicated a slow and steady decline in Anglican attendance starting in 1933 with membership numbers at 3,634,480. By 1947 that number had dropped by more than half a million members to 2,989,704. The same table indicated that Communicants during this time dropped by roughly half a million also. This meant that fewer people were both attending church and joining church. This general trend of decline is apparent in the Episcopal Church of Scotland and the Church in Wales as well.[1] The responses from the Anglican Church were varied and numerous. Anglo-Catholics spearheaded a revival of orthodoxy and sacramentalism. They stressed returning to the traditional doctrine of the Church and authoritative dogma. Part of the revival of ritual was a reaffirmation of the ceremonial and sentimental aspects of worship. There was an emphasis on converting and ministering to the poor-in-pocket as well as the poor in Spirit.[2] These included dockworkers, those in prisons and the working class in the slums. A number of Anglo-Catholic clergymen desired to reach the members of the working-

[1] R. Currie et. al., "Episcopalian Communicants and Members. Table A1," *Churches and Churchgoers: patterns of Church Growth in the British Isles since 1700* (Manchester: University of Manchester, 1977, 2010), 128-131, found in *British Religion in Numbers*, "Figures," http://www.brin.ac.uk/figures/.
[2] W.S.F. Pickering, *Anglo-Catholicism: A study in religious ambiguity* (London: Routledge, 1989), 65-71.

class and those living in the slums by presenting the Anglo-Catholic church as "a church of the 'ordinary man.'"[3] (This spirit of evangelism should not be confused with Evangelical Christians who opposed Anglo-Catholicism. These Anglo-Catholic clergymen had been very popular and successful during World War One at the front with the soldiers. Part of the rationale for confronting religious fragmentation in England must have been based on the success during that war of bringing comfort to confused and scared people.[4] If fragmented England was confused about how to define itself, then doctrine, ritual and outreach to the poor might help to bring back comfort and Christianity. On the other end of the Anglican spectrum were the religious Modernists (who should not be confused with the literary and intellectual Modernist movement). The religious Modernists believed in the evolutionary ability of Christianity to amalgamate with scientific discovery and advances. Christianity for the religious Modernists was an organic theology, which did not have to hold onto the tenets of Creed or dogma in order to remain Christian. There did not need to be, for example, a division between evolutionary fact embraced by science and religious adherence. An example of this was the belief in Parthenogenesis rather than the traditional virgin birth. Perhaps some wondered if the fragmentation in England was in part caused by the apparent irreconcilability of science and faith: religious Modernists offered an avenue for combining and understanding the two. Both these movements in Christian revival worked beneath the umbrella of the Established Anglican Church and offered options for interpreting and combating secularization and fragmentation. The first focused on

[3] Pickering, 106.
[4] Ibid., 46-8.

sentiment and dogma while the other rejected traditional orthodoxy in an attempt to make Christianity relevant by updating it to be sympathetic to science and innovation.

Dorothy L. Sayers (1893-1957) offered a peculiar interpretation and solution to the fracturing and de-Christianization in England by incorporating and rejecting elements of both Anglo-Catholicism and religious Modernism and forging her own path between the two. She maintained the dogmatism of the Anglo-Catholics but removed herself from the spirit of evangelism and intentional re-Christianization. She vehemently denied the religious Modernists' rejection of strong doctrinal statements and deplored their lack of reverence for the Creeds. Yet even so, she agreed with them on the necessity of updating the language of the Church (though not its meaning) in order to reach the modern person who was either un-churched or lacked correct theological knowledge. This updating was for her the role of artistry which was expressed by Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

Dorothy L. Sayers was born on June 13, 1893 in Oxford where her father was a clergyman at Christ Chapel, Oxford. She was educated at the Godolphin School, a private boarding school in Salisbury, before attending Somerville College, Oxford. She took first-class honors in medieval literature and modern languages in 1915, though she did not receive anything more than an honorary degree at the time, as was the norm for female scholars. This was rectified in 1920.

Sayers is best known for her Lord Peter Wimsey detective series which she wrote in the 1920s and 1930s. She ultimately considered them nothing more than a means to an

end: supporting herself. Nevertheless, she took a great deal of care and put in much research for her novels, learning, for instance, the science or art of campanology, how easily one could buy arsenic, and she even used her job in advertising to add authenticity to her characters in *Murder Must Advertise* (1933). The books were immensely popular and people badgered her for more Wimsey stories until her death. However, her plays were the works she wanted to be known for, as she considered playwriting, rather than mystery novel writing, her true profession. Her theatre works met with a fair amount of critical success, appearing both in London and in religious festivals. *The Zeal of Thy House* (1937) written for the Canterbury Festival told of the building of Canterbury Cathedral by William Sens. This play was so successful that it led Rev. Eric Fenn of the BBC Religious Department to offer Sayers of a job creating a radio drama series on the Nativity story and later the life of Christ. The two radio plays, *He That Should Come* (1938) and *The Man Born to be King* (begun December 1941 and ending in October 1942) illustrated her dedication to the fusion of dogma and drama, to the idea that good drama can tell the proper truth without forcing a "Sunday School lesson." Sayers was not alone in this desire. She found artistic and theological camaraderie with G. K. Chesterton, T. S. Eliot, C. S. Lewis and Charles Williams to name a few. Concurrent with her dramatic work at the BBC, Sayers would participate in more explicitly theological projects, such as her two creedal broadcasts *Creed or Chaos?* (1940) and *The Religion Behind the Nation* (1941). Both broadcasts expressed the importance of a traditional understanding and interpretation of the Creeds in order to show how

Christianity remained relevant for understanding contemporary situations and the role the self played in the greater Christian scheme.

Her creedal broadcasts met with a great deal of success and also controversy, for the clarity in which she had expressed traditional Christian doctrine was so innovative that some credited her with creating a new Christian dogma. This she vehemently denied but the public persisted in either lauding or condemning her. After her broadcasts, Sayers wrote a number of other plays including *The Emperor Constantine* (1951) about the conversion of Constantine and the Council of Nicaea. *The Just Vengeance* (1948), however, was what she considered her greatest achievement. Based on a passage from Dante's *Divine Comedy* Sayers considered this play the strongest affirmation she could give to the doctrine of Atonement, and indicative of Dante's ability to fuse dogma and drama in a way that clearly led the rational reader to an intellectual understanding of faith.

Sayers final work, before her death in 1957, was to be her translation of Dante's *Divine Comedy* and a series of essays written explaining his artistry and his allegory, defending the almost universal love for Virgil, and exploring the humor in Dante that was oft overlooked. She wrote that

> I was prepared to find [Dante] a GREAT POET, and, of course a GREAT RELIGIOUS POET, all in solemn capital letters; but I was not prepared to find myself continually saying with a chuckle, "Dear, funny Dante!"…[5]

[5] Dorothy L. Sayers to Charles Williams, September 14, 1944, *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers Volume 3: 1945-1950 A Noble Daring,* ed. Barbara Reynolds (Cambridge: The Dorothy L. Sayers Society Carole Green Publishing, 1997), 77.

> [Critics] have far, far too much reverence for their author. They are afraid to be funny, afraid to be undignified; they insist on being noble and they end by being prim. But prim is one thing Dante never is:...[he is] dear funny Dante, always a little mocking of himself as he is dragged and scolded and chivvied from circle to circle, staggering between a paralysing personal timidity and a "satiable curiosity" which would do credit to any Elephant's Child.[6]

Sayers died on December 17, 1957 with a number of Cantos from *Paradise* remaining un-translated. Her translation was finished by her friend, collaborator and goddaughter Dr. Barbara Reynolds, who would go on to anthologize Sayers' letters into five volumes.

Scholars discussing Sayers have predominantly focused on the Dante translation, and reviews have been mixed. While the translation received praise from members of the ordinary public for its readability, academics have, for the most part, dismissed the translation as inaccurate. Many see it simply as a poor piece of scholarship. But this judgment is based on an undeveloped sense of Sayers' overall project. Indeed the secondary sources that touch upon Sayers' work with Dante restrict themselves mainly to her technical translation or to criticism of her assertion that Dante was as humorous as she stated. There is very little scholarship on Sayers' artistry and her understanding of an artistic esthetic. Two works, the first a collection of essays edited by Margaret P. Hannay entitled *As Her Whimsey Took Her* dealt the most extensively with Sayers' creative process; the second book, *Creed without Chaos* by Laura K. Simmons is an exploration of Sayers' theological writings. Moreover, there is very little research on Sayers

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[6] Dorothy L. Sayers to E.V. Rieu, March 12, 1945, *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers Volume 3: 1945-1950 A Noble Daring*, ed. Barbara Reynolds (Cambridge: The Dorothy L. Sayers Society Carole Green Publishing, 1997), 132.

elsewhere, and none that aims to understand her work within the context of mid-century Britain.

In this thesis, I examine Sayers' work within the context of her broader project and as part of a conversation about secularization in mid-20th-century Britain. Such research shows that her translation was not a sloppy piece of scholarship, as critics asserted. Rather it was an example of a series of intentional decisions based on her understanding of the role of poetry and theology. If we examine Sayers' involvement within contemporary Anglican debates, and her clashes with Anglo-Catholics and Modernists we can understand why, even at the cost of accuracy, she worked to make Dante readable and accessible to her audience. She used Dante to forge the path for her readers to understand why they felt confused and unsure in post-war England and how poetry could help them understand and definitively name what she called the "dislocated self." According to Sayers' vague definition, it was the artist who could find the path to truth, "a rational and existential road to an ordered vision. [The artist] used observation, experience and imagination to build their creations." [7] This meant that Sayers in her BBC work as a dramatist was "meant" to link the rational presentation of the Creeds with the artistic practice and esthetic of re-presenting the image of the Incarnation. In order to do this, Sayers deemed it necessary to express the truth of the Incarnation in historically appropriate clothing. Her translation had to be popular and readable rather than academic so that the truth of the Creeds was easily grasped

[7] Nancy Tischler, "Artist, Artifact, and Audience: The Aesthetics and Practice of Dorothy L. Sayers," in *As Her Whimsey Took Her*, ed. Margaret P. Hannay (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1979), 155.

The majority of the sources for this paper are primary sources and documents. I have tried to synthesize what Sayers herself said with secondary sources to contextualize why she expressed herself the way she did. What I attempt to do in my thesis is make clear the reasons she chose to translate Dante the way she did. By choosing the Creeds, she picked a central and universal tenet of Christianity. By refusing sentimentality, she appeared non-traditional. By translating Dante "inaccurately" and in the English *terza rima* she was viewed as non-scholarly. But the whole point of her undertaking of Dante was not to be scholarly. She agreed with the criticism of her detractors that she took a number of liberties with the text. But it was done carefully and with the intent to make it readable for anyone with 2 shillings sixpence to spend on Dante.[8] Dante was the pattern through which the truth of the Creeds could be made clear because the reader would be shown how their separation from God had marred the perception and presentation of the self. Dante was overwhelmed by his sin when he entered the Earthly Paradise and met Beatrice, so too the reader was offered the chance to mimic Dante's discovery and his pilgrimage. The reader was able to find the "dislocated will" the name Sayers gave for the recognition of sin and separation from God. Sayers, in Virgilian-fashion offered to lead the reader to discovery. She laid out all the pieces through her presentation of the Creeds, through her translation of Dante and her insistence that, in this case poetry was the vehicle towards finding the re-presentation of the Image that she felt was innate in everyman. This was what the critics overlooked and this is what Sayers accused them of

[8] Dorothy L. Sayers to Charles Williams, May 9, 1945, *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers Volume 3: 1945-1950 A Noble Daring*, ed. Barbara Reynolds (Cambridge: The Dorothy L. Sayers Society Carole Green Publishing, 1997), 143.

overlooking when she criticized academic sticklers for missing the message of Dante because it was "in the poetry."[9]

After framing the context of the fragmentation of the Anglican Church in chapter 1, I turn to the engagement Sayers had with both the Anglo-Catholics and Modernists. In chapter 2, I explore her creedal Christianity. The Creeds were central to the Christian intellectualism that Sayers offered as her solution for the problem of the fracturing and secularization of contemporary England posed by the Church. For her, the Creeds represented the universal and immutable truth of the Incarnation as expressed by the authoritative Church Fathers. These were the tenets of the Church that could not be changed. By taking this stance, Sayers was in direct disagreement with the religious Modernists. Sayers believed the language of the Creeds could be changed in order to facilitate clarification, but the meaning and truth behind them was unchangeable. The forcefulness with which she adhered to this and demanded strict dogmatic interpretation also challenged the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and its Religious Department. The BBC attempted to reach the greatest number of people in its efforts to re-Christianize England by being inclusive and inoffensive, which meant a de-emphasis on dogma. Dogmatism, the BBC believed, alienated its listeners and did not promote conversion because it was too strict. John Reith, the Managing Director of the BBC from 1927-1938, felt that "theological doctrine or dogma [was] not of much practical

[9] Dorothy L. Sayers to Marjorie Barber, August 4, 1945, *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers Volume 3: 1945-1950 A Noble Daring*, ed. Barbara Reynolds (Cambridge: The Dorothy L. Sayers Society Carole Green Publishing, 1997), 156.

significance in the world today."[10] This does not mean to imply that the BBC was always or enduringly anti-creedal, for their broadcast in 1941 the *Religion Behind the Nation* was a six-month exploration of the Creeds by a number of clergymen and lay theologians, Sayers included. But Sayers refuted the wishy-washy nature of "BBC religion" and rather emphasized the importance of strong orthodox Christian belief. She agreed with the sentiment that "the brand of religion emanating from the BBC is much more theist than Christian" and was certainly inarticulate about what Christianity meant historically and contemporarily.[11] She responded to this by explaining and clarifying the Creeds and their significance, specifically that of the Incarnation of Christ, for Christians in her 1940 radio broadcast *Creed or Chaos?* In this, there is a clear refusal to submit to doctrinal vagueness. She was in constant argument with those who lauded her for the creation of a new theology or a new Church doctrine. She maintained that there was nothing original about her broadcasts except the words she used. The meaning and force of the Creeds had not been altered; the language had merely been updated.

Equally forceful, however, was her refusal to be an evangelical missionary or a sentimental Christian, which I deal with in chapter 3. By her own admission, Sayers was a Christian without spiritual conviction. She lacked an "inner light" and admitted that

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[10] Kenneth M. Wolfe, *The Churches and the British Broadcasting Corporation 1922-1956: The Politics of Broadcasting Religion* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1984), 19.
[11] Suzanne Bray, Introduction to *The Christ of the Creeds & Other Broadcast Messages to the British People during World War II* by Dorothy L. Sayers (West Sussex: The Dorothy L. Sayers Society, 1957), 12.

God had never spoken to her.[12] While she appreciated Anglo-Catholic liturgical practices, she could not share their evangelical spirit. She admitted she was "not a priest nor by temperament an evangelist" because she felt it nigh impossible to love her fellow man and rather lived in relative kindness.[13] She would not follow her fellow Anglo-Catholics into the slums to set up small churches. Yet this had not stopped her from accepting Christianity as the only reasonable explanation for understanding the dislocated will and confused sense of the self or the awareness of human sinfulness and the separation from God.[14] Her rejection of traditional Christian sentiment was non-traditional and her refusal to blatantly re-Christianize perplexed her contemporaries, such as C. S. Lewis and John Wren-Lewis (no relation). In her understanding of Christianity, there was a gap between, on the one hand, divine revelation and Christian truth (expressed through authoritative dogma and doctrine), and on the other, natural reason. Because of this gap it was not possible simply to convince people of the truth of Christianity. The Creeds were utterly coherent, but their truth was dependent upon revelation and thus could not be a force for conversion. This was why she addressed her work predominantly to "half-hearted Christians" who did not want evangelism or Sunday school but wanted conversation.

For Sayers, a celebrated author and playwright, all forms of art and artistry were the vehicle that bridged the gap of the awareness of the dislocated self and separation,

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[12] Dorothy L. Sayers to John Wren-Lewis, Good Friday, March 1954, *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers Volume 4: 1951-1957 In The Midst of Life*, ed. Barbara Reynolds (Cambridge: The Dorothy L. Sayers Society Carole Green Publishing, 2000), 137.
[13] Ibid., 136.
[14] Dorothy L. Sayers, "The Man of Men," *The Christ of the Creeds & Other Broadcast Messages to the British People during World War II* (West Sussex: The Dorothy L. Sayers Society, 1957), 57.

linking the revealed truth with human reason. I examine this in the fourth chapter. This was the place that Sayers offered her Christian esthetic as a way of interpreting this inner confusion that would ultimately lead to God. But she would not lead you past the point of her esthetic where spiritual conversion lay. In this formation, artistry and beauty replaced the need for sentiment in faith. Sayers, more than anything, was uncomfortable with the idea of proselytizing because she was aware of her un-orthodox interpretation of Christianity as non-sentimental. She was able to discuss clearly and with conviction the authoritatively revealed truths of dogma and Creeds because they had been vetted by the experts and were ready for mass consumption.

This understanding of the gap between reason and revelation that was overcome by poetry and the Christian interpretation of it was best expressed in Sayers' mind by Dante's *Divine Comedy*. The secular Virgil led Dante the pilgrim to the place of faith; to the understanding of the dislocated will. And there Virgil handed Dante over to Beatrice. Sayers identified with Virgil. Through the use and interpretation of her Christian esthetic as it was exemplified by Dante's *Comedy* Sayers could comfortably remain creedal and non-sentimental and offer Christianity as a way of understanding the turbulent political and cultural chaos. Virgil (read Sayers) led his ward (BBC listeners) to Beatrice (faith and the fulfillment of the esthetic) without being involved in spiritual conversion. Sayers' translation of the *Comedy* attempted to synthesize the meaning and power of the poem while modernizing the language of the work so that it could be better understood by those who read it. The poetic license Sayers took made her translation a non-academic text. She was accused of having ignored the academic debate that surrounded the *Comedy*,

particularly the debate over whether the poem should be read as an "allegory of poets" or an "allegory of theologians." But her translation can be interpreted as a response to the academic debate in the same manner of her response to the problem posed by the Anglican Church to combat the fragmentation of English Christendom and secularization of society. She took pieces of each argument and combined them into her own interpretation. She preserved the form of the poem by writing in English *terza rima*. But the language was changed in order that the meaning and the power of the poem could be disseminated to the reader so that understanding could be achieved. The dislocation of the will and the confused self which Sayers and her contemporaries believed people, particularly the young in England, were experiencing needed to be expressed and a solution needed to be offered. Sayers used Dante's *Comedy* to do so. By making it clear that this poem could lead to the understanding of the self through God, Sayers offered the *Divine Comedy* as an example that could bridge the gap between divine revealed truth and reason that would lead to self-awareness.

A reluctant lay-theologian and an even more reluctant Christian apologist, Dorothy L. Sayers nevertheless introduced a unique blend of a scholarly movement *ad fontes*, or return to origins, and Christian modernization. She based her presentation of faith on traditional creedal and dogmatic authority while applying her own literary artistry to make Christian orthodoxy engaging and relevant. Framed in a World War II and post-war context, Sayers offered an equally traditional yet innovative way to define the "dislocated will" and confused sense of the self.

Chapter I. Anglican Anxiety: Anglo-Catholics, Modernists and the 1928 Prayer Book Crisis

In order to better understand Sayers' work, it would be helpful to have a brief and basic knowledge of the theological context in which she worked. This in and of itself is quite an undertaking since the two "denominations" written about here, Anglo-Catholicism and theological Modernism, are rife with internal controversy and ambiguity.[15] Both Anglo-Catholicism and Modernism were reform movements in the Anglican Church. The Anglican Church, at the time, could be simplistically split into three levels: High Church, Middle Church or "regular C. of E." (a nickname for Church of England) and Low Church, which can then be split into differing degrees of Broad Church. Anglo-Catholicism was decidedly a High Church phenomenon "with its statues, pictures, vestments, confessional boxes, candlesticks and so on."[16] Modernism, like other Low and Broad groups, leaned more towards Protestant worship styles and rejected Catholic influence.[17] Each group, which experienced increased membership numbers between wars, tried to deal with the subsequent fragmentation of Christendom in their own way. The former by returning to dogma and a visual interest in Christian rite, and the latter by discarding the orthodoxy of doctrine and attempting to synthesize science and religion through critical scholarship. The Catholic revival of the 19th-century Oxford Movement was a starting point for the Anglo-Catholic interaction with English Christian fragmentation. The origins of Modernism can be found in the 17th-century English

[15] In this paper when references are made to Modernism, it implies the theological Modernism and not the literary movement.
[16] Pickering, 28.
[17] Ibid., 34.

Nonconformity movements spearheaded by those like Richard Hooker (1554-1600). The Modernist movement of the late 19th and early 20th century aligned itself with the Anglican Broad Church. As the name implies, the Broad Church allowed for a variety of theological interpretations and placed a lesser emphasis on ceremony than the High or Middle Church of England. Though World War I did a great deal to subdue theological tensions for Anglo-Catholics and Modernists, moments of crisis arose in the first half of the 20th century for both groups. For Anglo-Catholics the critical moment in history for our purpose was the 1928 Prayer Book Crisis. This not only exposed intra-Anglican conflict, but illuminated the real question of the relationship between Parliament and Church.[18] For Modernists, these moments came primarily after publication of controversial lectures and books such as Dean Fremantle's 1902 "Natural Christianity" and Bishop E.W. Barnes' *The Rise of Christianity* published in 1947 which, as the historian A. M. G. Stephenson noted, "depicts Early Christians as socialists and pacifists."[19] It is interesting to see the broad and varied methods for combating de-Christianization that were fostered under the Anglican umbrella. Anglo-Catholicism was essentially a return to origins while some felt Modernism tread a fine line between orthodoxy and heterodoxy. This was illustrated in 1921 when the president of the Churchmen's Union (the Modernist organized body), H.D.A. Major was accused of heresy by Southwark priest C.E. Douglas for the profound questioning of miracles, the

[18] Robert Beaken, *Cosmo Lang: Archbishop in War and Crisis* (London: I.B. Tauris and Co. Ltd., 2012), 151.
[19] A. M. G. Stephenson, *Rise and Decline of English Modernism: The Hulsean Lectures 1979-80* (London: SPCK, 1984), 168-9.

empty tomb and the substance of Jesus and Christ.[20] The ability to have such diverse denominational norms was indicative of the broadness that Anglican theology has prided itself on. But this varied nature created controversy about religious practice and belief.

Anglo-Catholicism is an inherently ambiguous term in part due to the fact that there is a great deal of theological flexibility in the Church of England. Indeed, this was a common criticism of Anglicanism by Anglo-Catholics: the inability or reluctance of the Church of England to make clear dogmatic statements.[21] Because of the apparent doctrinal indecision of the Anglican Church, Anglo-Catholics were drawn to Roman Catholicism, which adopted a more rigorous and rigid approach to dogma. Further confusion came from the unclear distinctions between those Anglo-Catholics who wanted to mimic the Catholic Church or return to the Roman fold. There were divisions within the Anglo-Catholic group depending on how much influence Roman practices were meant to have. There were those who wanted to return to Rome explicitly. Some wanted more or less only the ceremony of the Mass and still others felt Anglicanism should have remained essentially Catholic.[22] For the average Anglican the confusion surrounding these distinctions were unnerving.[23] According to the historian W.S.F. Pickering it mattered whether one is an *Anglo*-Catholic or an Anglo-*Catholic.*[24]

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[20] Stephenson, 131.
[21] Barry Spurr, *"Anglo-Catholic in Religion": T.S. Eliot and Christianity* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2010), 176.
[22] Pickering 15-24.
[23] Ibid., 20.
[24] Ibid., 142.

The Oxford Movement of the mid to late 19th century and its outgrowth of Anglo-Catholicism were considered High Church because they were more ritualistic and mimetic stylistically of Catholic and/or Roman Catholic liturgy. The Oxford Movement (or Tractarianism as it was also known) was an attempt and desire to renew interest in Catholic doctrine and rites in the Anglican Church between 1833 and 1845.[25] This was brought about after facing internal fragmentation caused by dissonant Catholic (or High Anglican tradition), Protestantism and Latitudinarianism, the latter of which would lead to Broad Church theology and eventually the outgrowth of English religious Modernism. The Oxford Movement subsided when the majority of its leaders either converted from Anglicanism to Roman Catholicism or decided to remain part of the Church of England. Those who remained Anglican laid the groundwork for Anglo-Catholicism and the renewal of dogma in everyday Christianity.[26] Anglo-Catholicism can then be defined as a movement to reconcile the Anglican Church to its Catholic heritage. It also sought to reinvigorate sacramental elements in liturgy coupled with a reliance in dogma and the authority of the Church Fathers over all else. In his history of Anglo-Catholicism, Pickering argued that the most prominent characteristic of the Oxford Movement (and its later incarnation as Anglo-Catholicism) Catholic revival was basically interested in theological matters such as "apostolic succession, fasting, the work of the clergy" in an attempt to reconcile Anglican and Catholic doctrine.[27] This attempted reconciliation fed into the Anglo-Catholic desire for the synthesis of Creed and ritual. They craved the

[25]Nigel Yates, *The Oxford Movement and Anglican ritualism*, (London: The Historical Association, 1983), 21.
[26] Ibid., 22-3; 36.
[27] Pickering, 18.

revival of the beauty of the sacrament. Though many non Anglo-Catholics were wary because of the similarity with the Roman Catholic service, the Anglo-Catholics were dedicated to expressing the "truth about God, Jesus Christ and the Church. Once these intellectual propositions, enshrined in the creeds, are accepted," then the artistry and liturgy of the church would be a vehicle which expressed the fundamental truth of Christianity.[28]

Another point worth mentioning about the Anglo-Catholic church was its social conscience which was exemplified by its work with the poor in England and its clergy's success and popularity as "padres" to soldiers on the front, during the First World War.[29] The visibility of Anglo-Catholic good works was part of its appeal especially between the wars. Pickering notes that Anglo-Catholic social and cultural practices, such as the moment of silence, public memorials and requiem masses in particular have been linked with the Catholic practices of remembering/praying for the dead.[30] Its integration into English culture was underscored by the growth in church attendance.[31] Anglo-Catholic evangelical spirit and mission works, according to Pickering, were prominent in the slums, in "public schools, and amongst down-and-outs and those convicted by public courts". The Anglo-Catholic model was to "plant a church" and it invited non-Christians

[28] Pickering, 21.
[29] Ibid., 46-8.
[30] Ibid., 46-8.
[31] Ibid., 57. From 1920 to 1933, Anglo-Catholic attendance jumped from 13,000 to 70,000 members.

into conversation. There was the hope that a continued presence of the church would lead to conversion.[32]

If Anglo-Catholicism was something of a movement *ad fontes* dogmatically speaking, then the Modernists as their name implied was a movement that was turned towards the modern. Modernism, originating from the 18th century Latitudinarian movements, has a history equally complex as that of Anglo-Catholicism. A. M. G. Stephenson labeled 1898 as the year of Modernism's founding.[33] The Modern Churchmen's Union was formed in that year after a conference in Kensington. At the conference, there were members of the Anglican Clergy who called for an organization that would unite "the body of churchmen who considered that dogma is susceptible to reinterpretation and re-statement, in accordance with the clearer perception of the truth attained by discovery and reason... [as well as] the advancement of legislation in matters of doctrine, discipline and dogma."[34] 1898 also saw the publication of four Modernist works on theology and the creation of Ripon Hall, a college dedicated to teaching Modernist clergy.[35] The liberal theology of the Modernist's predecessors was called the "anti-dogmatic principle" by John Henry Newman of the Oxford Movement, an apt description given their emphasis on the organic nature of religion and its ability to evolve over the importance of static Creed.[36]

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[32] Pickering, 68-82.
[33] Stephenson, 12.
[34] Ibid., 56.
[35] Ibid., 55.
[36] *Encyclopedia of Religion,* s.v. "Modernism: Christian Modernism," 6102.

In the embryo stages of Modernism (pre-1898) leaders such as Frederick Temple (who would become Archbishop of Canterbury in 1896), Samuel R. Driver, Herbert C. Ryle, Charles Gore and William Sanday as well as others argued that Biblical Criticism had necessitated the belief that Christianity and its doctrine could not be immune from growth and change. By making this assertion Modernists, led by Temple, argued at the 1888 Lambeth Conference that "science, in teaching Evolution, has not yet asserted anything that is inconsistent with Revelation, unless we assume that Revelation was intended not to teach spiritual truth only, but physical truth too."[37] This meant, according to Temple, that revelation dealt with spiritual formation. It made no pretense or claim on biological development and therefore science and faith were not irreconcilable. For the Modernists traditional orthodoxy had historical significance. Because they did not comment on or apply to knowledge of evolution and biology, the Creeds must only concern spiritual understanding and not supersede scientific knowledge. The Modernists, Stephenson pointed out, believed in a God "who worked only through the evolutionary process...His Christology was Adoptionist" (meaning that God "adopted" Jesus to be his son Christ, the *Logos* or Word, used the physical body as a temporary vessel) and there was little room for the miraculous. As such, Modernists were skeptical about the virgin birth and the empty tomb. And though there was no doubt in the power of the Resurrection, modernists debated whether the Resurrection was a physical or merely spiritual event.[38] The Modernist was uninterested in ritual, was highly distrustful of the Romanist Anglo-Catholic, and was content with the 1662 Book of Common Prayer

[37] Stephenson, 36.
[38] Ibid., 7.

because it allowed for broad interpretation and promoted the idea that "ethic was more important than doctrine."[39] And being part of the established church meant Modernists held high pastoral positions such as Dean of St. Paul's, a number were bishops, and even Archbishop of Canterbury. This was indicative of the Anglican's broad theological outlook which was such a sore spot for High churchmen and Anglo-Catholics.

After 1900 we see the solidifying of Modernist theology. This desire for scientific answers was made abundantly clear in the question of the virgin birth. This miracle was problematic for Modernists because it could not be reconciled with biological or evolutionary evidence. Even though this was referred to in the Creed, Modernists argued it need not be believed literally. They felt it was unnecessary to hold onto preconceived notions that were not substantiated by modern science. In October 1902, Dean Fremantle caused a riot within the ranks of the Anglican Church with his lecture "Natural Christianity". This lecture expounded upon his interpretation of the virgin birth, which no longer referred to dogma but rather relied on science to explain away the miracle. He wrote:

> Supposing however, we think ourselves bound to believe that the birth [of Christ] took place without the intervention of the male element, this is a process well known to biologists, under the name of Parthenogenesis, so well known and occurring so high in the scale of biology that Darwin said he could not account for the need of the male except as giving strength and energy to the ovum or germ in the female, which is already complete in itself...a Hebrew woman . . . longing with a pure and divinely inspired hope that she might be the mother of the Messiah, was stirred and quickened by that hope: in other words that this spiritual longing and

[39] Stephenson, 5.

> Divine influence gave the vivifying energy which would otherwise have been given by a husband. I think this would give a satisfactory explanation of the words "Conceived by the Holy Ghost" nor do I know of any other which is possible.[40]

Fremantle worked towards a reconciliation between science and faith so that the one did not preclude the other. He took a historical Christian idea, the virgin birth, and explored a possibility for its explanation in biological terms, terms unavailable at the time of Christ and therefore which could only then be explained as a "miracle." "Parthenogenesis," in layman's terms, is a type of asexual reproduction that does not require fertilization. This is just one example of the synthesis that Modernists used in order to explain Christian faith and phenomenon in rational, scientific terms. These beliefs were disseminated by the *Modern Churchman* the voice of the Modernist movement founded by Major in 1911. This newspaper was for a time the definitive expression of the Modernist viewpoint. In an article in *The Modern Churchman,* taking dogma as authority was dismissed because the historical veracity of the idea it espoused was in question. Therefore, the article stated, "we have to treat our doctrines as the product of picture-thinking...the picture for our own times must be dominated by the evolutionist conception of the world and life. That will give us beyond a question a transformed Christianity. In the course of our reevaluation of old beliefs we shall be content with fewer affirmations and we shall leave many questions open."[41] The method and system of Christian thought had changed fundamentally. Picture-thinking allowed Modernists to ignore the details of traditional Christianity while still affirming some vague but essential truth. It was a mode that

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[40] Stephenson, 68.
[41] J.F. Bethune-Baker, "The reinterpretation of traditional formularies," *The Modern Churchman,* (1927), 370.

allowed doctrine and dogma to be appreciated for their historical importance, and yet still explained how they could be malleable to current needs. The creeds and doctrine were a representation of ancient authority and not the authority itself. This underlined the Modernist's desire to answer questions concretely.

The 1921 Conference at Girton was a very public exhibition of Modernist theology, and the very public outcry that followed helps us understand the major points of contention. The theme of Girton was "Christ and the Creeds" and the lectures covered topics such as Christology, the Divinity of Christ and the idea that Jesus was unique because he perfectly represented the universal incarnate nature of God in man's soul. There are quotations from two of the lectures, the first by Major and the second by Hastings Rashdall, that express the theology that had crystallized for Modernists. Major asserted: "First let it be clearly realized that Jesus Himself did not claim to be the Son of God in a *physical* sense, such as the narratives of the Virgin Birth affirm, nor did He claim to be the Son of God in a *metaphysical* sense such as is required by the Nicene theology. He claimed to be God's Son in a *moral* sense, in the sense in which all human beings are sons of God." [42] Major claimed that Jesus was not unique because of his divinity, but by the token of his perfect nature and representation for which all men should strive. The miraculous nature has been denied Jesus but not his historical importance. Jesus remained vital to humanity without being mystical. He was the best that a human could ever hope to be: an example of the perfectibility that God originally planned for mankind. This is reinforced by Rashdall's argument, entitled "Christ as

[42] Stephenson, 116.

Logos and Son of God" which enumerated: "(1) Jesus did not claim Divinity for Himself. (2) Jesus was in the fullest sense man. (3) It is unorthodox to suppose that the human soul of Jesus pre-existed. (4) The Divinity of Christ does not necessarily imply the Virgin Birth or any other miracle. (5) The Divinity of Christ does not imply omniscience."[43] Jesus had been stripped of his Divinity. The miracles surrounding his Incarnation, and the story of the empty tomb had been questioned. The Creeds were denied to be infallible and reliable. In this way, Modernists held that Jesus the historical person was a great prophet, and that the *Logos* was applied through the Incarnation to a human who remained fully human. He was not divine and therefore the human Jesus did not have any of the traits of the Logos. He was the perfect example of a man, but nothing more.

These antithetical theologies came to a head during the 1927-28 Prayer Book Crisis. Diametrically opposed to Modernist thought, the Anglo-Catholic insistence on dogma was strong. In his biography of Anglo-Catholic Archbishop of Canterbury Cosmo Gordon Lang (r.1928-1942) Robert Beaken remarked that during the 1928 crisis it was made clearly evident, in contrast with Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy where the basic tenets of the faith were more or less universally accepted, that the "Church of England had come to contain people holding diametrically opposite views, especially where such subjects as the Real Presence and Eucharistic sacrifice were concerned. The clash over the 1928 Prayer Book, though it focused on liturgy, was actually a tussle for the identity of the Church of England."[44] The question of dogmatic theology and how to

[43] Stephenson, 117.
[44] Beaken, 237.

interpret it, or indeed if it was even necessary, came to the forefront during this time. The attempts to revise the previously used Prayer Book of 1662 caused debates about how it should be written and how sacraments could be interpreted to name a few. Along with the obvious tension and discord within the Anglican Church, the Prayer Book Crisis made evident the strain between Parliament and Church, since the House of Commons had twice failed to the pass the 1927 revised edition. This truly was a mark of the Church's identity crisis as an increasing number of debates questioning previously fundamental church texts arose. An example of this was the debate inquiring into the necessity of the 1562 Thirty-Nine Articles to modern Anglican theology. Though the main issue was the Eucharist and its interpretation and the openness fostered by the 1662 Book of Common Prayer, this was a debate on how to define a Church that had resisted static and strict labels.

The two most common Eucharistic interpretations were "virtualism" and "receptionism." According to the former the bread and wine were symbolic or virtual representations of the body and blood of Christ. Emphasis here was placed on representation. "Receptionists" on the other hand believed that while the physical bread and wine remained bread and wine, the communicants received the blood and body of Christ in their heart. A third belief, held increasingly by Anglo-Catholics was the Real Object Presence of Christ, meaning the bread and wine, once consecrated became the living body and blood of Christ.[45] This was far too Romanist for more Protestant-minded Anglicans; fear over the influence of Rome was highly interwoven with theological and

[45] Beaken, 144-5.

doctrinal issues. The Modernists believed that these revisions and distinctions undermined the openly interpretive nature of the 1662 Prayer Book. An article in *The Modern Churchman* written at the time of the crisis entitled "The Reinterpretation of Traditional Formularies" implored the reader to realize that the

> mark of the great religion is not its success in maintaining the primitive sense of the numinous... [I]t shows its greatness by the measure in which it is able to direct this sense to moral and rational ends, and in its conception of the numinous at least keep pace with the ethical and intellectual evolution of a progressive race and its civilization. In this essential and critical function of a great religion it is bound to find its sacred books and formularies of all kinds an impediment and a drag.[46]

For the Modernists, the Prayer Book Crisis of 1927-8 presented a clear opportunity to make the Anglican Church less reliant on patristic thought by removing the assumed infallible nature of Creed and tradition. Although it maintained the historical significance of figures like Jesus and the Church Fathers the crisis presented the opportunity to make Christianity more amenable to modern critical thought. The Church Fathers had historical, not necessarily theological, significance. Modernists maintained basic Christian doctrine: forgiveness, salvation, etc. It was the interpretation these ideas related to the 20th-century man that required evolution. Traditional articulations of doctrine could not be maintained for sentimental reasons. Modernists viewed this sentimental attachment to archaic ideas and structures as detrimental and limiting to the intellectual view that Christianity could take on the modern world. Although the Prayer Book Crisis tension died down after a time, particularly after Lang, in 1929, urged churches to follow the 1928 prayer book as though it had been accepted until a settlement could be made, the

[46]Bethune-Baker, 363.

problems between movements in the Anglican Church were made evident. The Church of England was in the throes of an identity crisis, symptomatic of its theological and political instability.

The Nonconformists, voiced in this instance by Dr. W.B. Selbie in 1922, bemoaned the fact that "if the Anglo-Catholic view of church traditions and of orders and of episcopacy is to prevail, it is quite incredible that we shall be able to come to anything like an agreement."[47] The Anglo-Catholics made much the same claim about the Nonconformists. This internal Anglican discord was symptomatic of the reaction to English Christian fragmentation and secularization. Because the opinions in the Anglican Church about how to confront the de-Christianization of the nation were so varied there was not one clear option presented or followed. The Anglo-Catholics linked dogma with drama, believing that the ritual enhanced the power of the service. As Barry Spurr wrote of Anglo-Catholic T.S. Eliot "Christianity was the only scheme which satisfied [his intellectual] needs, the only scheme which permitted him to unify his life and his art..."[48] Yet this mode appeared archaic to some, irrelevant or inapplicable to a modern and scientific sensibility. Modernists believed in the organic nature of Christianity and the requirement for it to change with the times and the advancements made in science. There was little reverence for patristic authority other than for its historical significance. By denying the validity of miracles and inserting the necessity for Biblical scholarship and criticism found in other disciplines, Modernists tried to appeal to the progressively-

[47] *The Lambeth Joint Report in Church Unity: A Discussion,* (London: Hodder and Stoughton Limited. 1922), 27.
[48] Spurr, 32-33.

minded in England. Clearly, the Prayer Book Crisis of 1928 brought these fundamental differences to a head and illustrated the need for a unifying voice, or set of voices, that could forge a road between the divisive heritage of the Anglican Church in order to speak to the people who required a specific and innovative type of Christian imagination and intellect.

Chapter II. "Not Just Verbiage or Mumbo-Jumbo": Sayers and the BBC[49]

In June of 1940, the Rev. Eric Fenn, of the BBC Religious Broadcasting Department, convinced Dorothy L. Sayers to broadcast her popular two-part lecture series entitled *Creed or Chaos?*. Sayers would work with the Religious Department again in the early part of 1941 on the program the *Church Looks Ahead*. This program was aimed at general listeners and military forces and was under the joint control of Fenn and James Welch, the Director of Religious Broadcasting. Sayers' emphasis on the essential nature of the Creeds as the expression of the Incarnation would prove foundational for her creative and educative work. Key aspects of this included explaining Christian doctrine and rehabilitating dogma. The BBC therefore afforded Sayers a means of exploring and creating an imaginative and thoughtful Christian outlook. This was not done without difficulty for her or for the BBC in general. Debates at the BBC about the content of religious broadcasts remained a problem for Welch. The BBC adopted a strategy of downplaying controversy in order to focus on unity. But such an approach caused more problems than it solved. For example, the BBC was forced to address questions such as: who should be able to broadcast on Sundays (Catholics? Non-Conformists? Christian Scientists? Jews? Spiritualists)? What type of service should be broadcast? How would Mass/Eucharist be handled? Where and when would it broadcast? (Westminster and St. Paul's had declined and other churches were wary of anything that would undermine the numbers in their congregations.) Prominently, the tone of the broadcasts remained a point of dispute.

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[49] Bray, 7.

Sayers' broadcasts were not an exception to this rule. She and the BBC had a tense, and at times unpleasant, relationship. At the heart of these differing opinions was the question as to how best reach listeners and engage them in thoughtful and intellectual Christian debate. An example of this tension was when Miss May Jenkins, a secretary for the Children's Hour Department was allegedly so offensive in her remarks about the language used to present the life of Christ that Sayers accused Jenkins of "impertinence, tactlessness and literary ignorance."[50] This problem was eventually resolved but it illustrated the struggle that Sayers had in defending her portrayal of Christianity within the context of the inclusive and less offensive mindset of the BBC. In this way, she was in direct contrast to religious Modernists who, like the BBC, believed that Christianity needed to be less dogmatic and more doctrinally flexible. The BBC, while certainly not a part of the Non-Conformist or Modernist camp, like them deemphasized dogma in a way that made Sayers uncomfortable. In contrast, for Sayers the Creeds and doctrine of the Church were themselves the means for a renewed unity. Therefore, the Creeds became the most effective means of explaining the importance and enduring relevance of Christianity. While both the BBC and Sayers aimed to overcome the fragmentation of the Anglican Church their strategies could not have been more opposed.

The war brought Christianity to the front and center of British culture, and Sayers hoped that this could be used to the Church's advantage. In September 1939 she wrote:

> I don't think it's going to be enough merely to keep the Christian flag flying...In a sense Christianity is in a good position...the people who have

[50] Barbara Reynolds, ed. *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers Volume 2: 1937-1943 From novelist to playwright* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 215.

> been busy for the last fifty years secularising everything are now thoroughly frightened by the results...
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> But I do think it is necessary to bring a statement of Christian doctrine into some sort of relation with reality. A lot of the stock phraseology has become meaningless, so that people not merely don't know what it means, but are unaware that it ever had any meaning.[51]

There was a push to make Christianity relevant and helpful in times of crisis. Welch wanted a broad policy at the BBC: we "must not only bring the teaching of the church to bear on critical social and national questions, it must reaffirm the centrality of the Christian faith for the survival of Christian civilization."[52] At the very least the option of Christian critical thought and its historical importance should be made clear. This was done to appeal to the churched, the un-churched, and the tired of church. The anxiety of the Blitz, threats of invasion and news of Hitler afforded the BBC an opportunity to be integrated into the psyche of the public in a way that had not been the case for a long time. The BBC gave Sayers a platform to make the Creeds accessible and offered this as a relevant piece of faith. Therefore, Welch and his advisors agreed it "was all to the good that...Sunday in broadcasting should be significantly different [than before the war] and 'restore depth to life.'" [53] This would be accomplished by promoting a serious reading of Christianity and theology. The problems that remained were how to best accomplish this. It is out of this legacy of discord that Sayers' creedal stance was born and made firm.

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[51]Dorothy L. Sayers to Dr. J. H. Oldham, September 10, 1939, *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers Volume 2: 1937-1943 From novelist to playwright*, ed. Barbara Reynolds (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 133.
[52]Wolfe, 205.
[53]Ibid., 145.

In an attempt to unify and clarify Christianity, Sayers forced herself into the unusual and uncomfortable position of being a mouthpiece for the BBC and its version of Christianity. Time and again she argued against assertions that she was a missionary or evangelist or apologist. Yet Sayers created for herself a strange missionary middle ground by proclaiming the universal authority of the Creeds. She categorically denied that Christians could reject the universally accepted nature of the Creeds. For her, they were authoritative and unassailable. In her mind, to doubt the Creeds as enduring and authoritative opinion of both Church Fathers and the Church itself was, quite simply, heretical.[54] The emphasis on the Incarnation, its fundamental influence on the imagination and significance to the modern psyche permeated her entire body of Christian works.

There was a dynamic tension within the Christian intellectual ideal that attempted to synthesize modern problems with theological answers. Sayers and the BBC were aware of this tension. The BBC wanted to re-educate and re-Christianize but in a way that downplayed controversy. Their motivation was inoffensive unity. Sayers was more invested in explaining the traditional principles of Christianity, whether they offended anyone or not. In this sense, Sayers' traditional dogma was new and confrontational because she presented the Creeds as unassailable and the manner of her presentation was innovative. Because of her aggressive position, Sayers was forced to confront the tension caused by creedal discourse. She attempted to create an anchor for Christian intellectual

[54] One of her favorite pastimes it seems was to complain about all the Arian heretics not only in England but at the BBC and in the clergy.

understanding by providing an intellectually rigorous account of the foundation of Christian faith. And yet at the same time, she remained silent on highly contentious doctrines such as the interpretation of the Eucharist. To reach the radio audience, Sayers used simple and engaging language to achieve this understanding.

Angus Calder raised an interesting point in his book *The People's War* when he indicated that during the Blitz, people showed solidarity with others in their city or town, but not so much with those in the country as a whole. Their identity was localized to Plymouth or London or Bristol, rather than Britain. Each town or city that fell victim to Germany's raids regarded their city as the one hit worst of all and guarded that title vigorously. This emphasis on local, rather than national identity and courage, went so far that during the Merseyside's "May Week" in 1941 German "raiders wreaked havoc in... Liverpool and the neighbouring boroughs of Bootle, Birkenhead and Wallasey." Yet fire departments in Bootle would not join forces with those in Liverpool and as a result 90 percent of all houses were damaged and only one rest center survived the bombing that lasted eight days.[55] This relative lack of unity was precisely the sort of thing that the BBC and by extension Sayers worked against. Though this is an example of municipal rather than religious disunity, it is emblematic of the culture of fragmentation that the BBC felt called to combat. By choosing the Creeds, Sayers specifically and the BBC more generally hoped to choose something that was universally accepted by "the Church" as a theme to unify a scattered nation. Sayers clearly stated that when she spoke of "the

[55] Angus Calder, *The People's War: Britain 1939-1945* (New York: Random House, 1969), 210-17.

Church" she referred to those who accept the Creeds as a universal statement of authority and faith.[56]

Sayers presented the initial wartime broadcast, which was the first half of her two part series *Creed or Chaos?* entitled "The Christ of the Creeds," on Sunday August 11, 1940.[57] A little over two months before this broadcast the Evacuation of Dunkirk had occurred from May 26 to June 2, 1940. It was viewed as both a miracle that the men had been safely brought home and a humiliating failure that a retreat of this magnitude was required.[58] On May 17 Brussels fell and on June 22 France signed an Armistice with Germany.[59] On July 10 the Battle of Britain began, and on July 19 Hitler announced his Directive No. 16 which declared that "As England, in spite of the hopelessness of her military position, has so far shown herself unwilling to come to any compromise, I [Hitler] have decided to begin to prepare for, and if necessary to carry out, an invasion of England."[60] Things in England were indeed dire and appeared hopeless. In her personal letters throughout the war, Sayers did not comment extensively on current affairs, though she does make some scattered and rather satirical and caustic comments about Hitler, "doodle-bugs" (the nickname for the German V-1) and "poor Goebbels and Goering and Co." being so overwhelmed by English fortitude that they had to redo all their 1939 anti-

[56] Dorothy L. Sayers, "The Christ of the Creeds," in *The Christ of the Creeds & Other Broadcast Messages to the British People during World War II* (West Sussex: The Dorothy L. Sayers Society, 1957), 31.
[57] Note the similarities between her title and that of the 1921 Modernist conference at Girton.
[58] Calder, 106-113.
[59] Ibid., 106.
[60] Ibid., 119.

British propaganda.[61] These were her personal thoughts. Her public words were much less acerbic and more factual and impersonal, but it was clear that her attempt to provide a definitive account of the Creeds responded to a siege mentality and to the fraying of national and religious unity that this entailed. In the introductory episode she outlined what the series would encompass. She also took time to acquaint her listeners with some terms that had become so commonplace that their meaning was misunderstood or completely lost. She explained her usage of the terms "dogma" and "creed." These two concepts were fundamental to the understanding of the Church, and by extension the understanding of Christian intellectualism. She intimated that "dogma" had become a negative word, and that "creed" had fallen out of fashion because it represented that which was either irrelevant or incomprehensible to the ordinary person.

While Sayers might have agreed with the BBC's mission of "Christian Simplicity" with regard to its programs, she could not endorse the notion that Christianity lacked depth. Sayers portrayed Christianity as a logical choice which could stand the test of criticism and debate.[62] Sayers' understanding of Christianity negated the idea that it was all sentiment. Thus a return to the Church Fathers, particularly for Sayers, encouraged the idea that Christianity was intellectually alive and dynamic. This is illustrated by an exchange of letters and articles in the journal *The Spectator* between Dr. William Boothby Selbie (a Modernist) and Sayers. Selbie had written an article entitled "The Army and the Churches" in which he had stated that "the rise of the new dogmatism,

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[61] Dorothy L. Sayers to John Fleming July 23, 1939, *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers Volume 2: 1937-1943 From novelist to playwright,* ed. Barbara Reynolds (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 131.
[62] Wolfe, 203.

whether in its Calvinist or Thomist form, constitutes a fresh and serious threat to Christian unity. The tragedy is that all this, however interesting to theologians, is hopelessly irrelevant in the life and thought of the average man."[63] Selbie argued that Christian theology and Creed were static and therefore could not foster the relevance or practical application of Christianity to critical thought that the times required; traditional dogma refused to change with the times.[64] Sayers reacted to the attack on the word "dogma" and rejected the claim that the average man was uninspired by and uninterested in religious or theological matters.

In particular, Selbie's charge that theology was "hopelessly irrelevant" for the average Englishman would be in direct contrast with the ideals upon which Sayers based her Christian understanding. Selbie responded to Sayers' criticism by claiming,

> In theology a dogma is a religious opinion formally and authoritatively stated. Miss Sayers...[restates] some of the Christian fundamentals in a very interesting way and in terms more adapted to human needs than those of the ancient creeds. In other words, she elaborates her own system of Christian teaching or doctrine. This is what she believes and how she believes it. Doubtless she would like others to believe it too, and to accept her statement of it, and she has every right to do so.[65]

Selbie's interpretation stands in direct contradiction to Sayers' explicit purpose in the broadcasts. In her opening lecture entitled "The Christ of the Creeds", broadcast roughly one month after her interaction with Selbie, she explicitly stated that she was not creating a new dogma, doctrine or theology. She began

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[63] Barbara Reynolds, ed. *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers Volume 2: 1937-1943 From novelist to playwright* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 169.
[64] William Boothby Selbie "The Army and the Churches" http://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/2nd-february-1940/12/the-army-and-the-churches.
[65] Barbara Reynolds, ed. *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers Volume 2: 1937-1943 From novelist to playwright* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997),169.

> In the title of this talk I will ask you particularly to notice the words: <u>of the creeds.</u> I am not going to offer you any brand-new theology of my own, nor yet any revolutionary theories belonging to what is called "modern thought". I only want to remind you of something we have been familiar with for so long that we are apt to lose sight of it; namely what the universal Church thinks, and has always thought, about Christ, and has set down in those formal statements known as the Creeds of the Church. [66]

Sayers' presentation was revolutionary because it was so traditional. Sayers made it clear that, unlike Modernism, she was not creating a new way of interpreting the Creeds by making them dependent on scientific advancement. She rather updated the language to make the text comprehensible. She aimed to use the rhetoric of reform by returning to conservative origins. Selbie intimated that because dogma was an opinion, it was flexible no matter how historically authoritative the persons or thoughts or ideas behind it. This trend to deny creedal authority (more often than not, in the eyes of Sayers, without the author understanding exactly what they were denouncing) corresponded to the fear that the creeds somehow undermined solid doctrine. Indeed, Selbie went so far as to say this in his second article in *The Spectator*. He argued that "Doctrine is a Latin word, the root meaning of which is simply teaching, or that which is taught. Christian doctrine, therefore, is just Christian truth, that which is taught about the Christian facts. Dogma, on the other hand, is a Greek word, the root meaning of which is opinion."[67] Selbie equated doctrine with truth and dogma with something less than reliable or believable. For Selbie the Modernist, the doctrine/dogma distinction fit into his broader theory. The doctrine of salvation held firm. The dogma of the physical resurrection was questionable.

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[66] Sayers, "The Christ of the Creeds," 31, her emphasis.
[67] Barbara Reynolds, ed. *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers Volume 2: 1937-1943 From novelist to playwright* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997),169.

For Sayers, however, the two could not be separated because both represented ancient Christian authority and scholarship.

Sayers had a very high opinion of the Church's teachings. These teachings deserved respect because of the study that had gone into translating and understanding God's word. She wrote that "we must not imagine that the 'Higher Criticism' was first invented in the nineteenth century; it was quite familiar to the early Christian authorities who lived close to the events..."[68] Her broadcasts presented the Creeds in a logical progression, explicating them line by line. By this method she explained not only how and why one line followed the other but also why the Creeds remained fundamental to contemporary Christianity. The Incarnation was a unifying doctrine because it was not, like baptism or the Eucharist, open to nuanced interpretation according to Sayers. For her it was one thing or nothing; dogma did not change. The method for articulating the Creeds could change with the times, the language could be updated, but to her the meaning of the Creeds was immovable.

> If Christ was only a man, however noble or amiable, then there is no particular reason for believing what He said or trying to do as he did, than for believing or imitating...Adolf Hitler. ...It is important, then, that Jesus should be truly God. But if He is so exclusively God that He was never in any real sense an ordinary human being with human limitations like our own, then it is clearly meaningless for us to try and follow His steps. The conditions that influence us would simply not apply to Him in any way. The whole story of His suffering and death, for instance, would become completely unreal. His body would not be a genuine body, but only a sort of pretence body... incapable of death or pain.[69]

[68] Sayers, "The Christ of the Creeds," 32.
[69] Ibid., 33.

The question Sayers asked was if it mattered, or had ever mattered, if Christ was God or not. She set up her argument and her answer through a progressive logic: if Christ was just a man then he was a very good man, but no more or less worthy than anyone else. If Jesus was just a man then believing in him was no more logical than following Hitler, in her example. This was a very extreme statement but it recalled those people who had indeed followed Hitler with the same religiosity or fanaticism as some who followed Christ. Belief in Christ was, however, different, since it was based on the recognition of his divinity. This kind of radical statement would have, at the very least, made listeners sit up and take notice. The choice for most BBC listeners was not to choose between Christ and Hitler. But for Sayers both figures had enduring relevance to the contemporary situation. Christ was the embodiment of the Christian ideal whereas Hitler illustrated a society that had rejected Christianity and was devoid of the ethics that defined a civilized nation. Therefore, the contrast between the two figures made the reality or significance of Christ's crucifixion all the more relevant.[70] If Christ was only human his sacrifice was noble, but pointless since it carried no salvific authority. Likewise if Christ was fully God and did not share in our humanity, then our lives and suffering were irrelevant to him. If he was only God then his death would not have grasped the full totality of sin or pain or death. At its roots, her argument led to the requirement that Christ be both human and divine or else a fraud. This is the simple

[70] Dorothy L. Sayers to Val Gielgud, September 22, 1942, *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers Volume 2: 1937-1943 From novelist to playwright*, ed. Barbara Reynolds, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 371. The Christ's death would become more tangible in 1942 when as Sayers wrote: "According to the news, Hitler has recently chosen to crucify fifty people in Jugo-Slavia, or at any rate string them up on stakes, which is much the same thing. So we haven't got very far in close on 2000 years. And it's just as well people should know that Christianity deals with that kind of thing, and not with merely deprecating the pleasanter sins and urging people to go to church."

language that she used which made these broadcasts so popular because they could be clearly understood. She broke down the barriers that said the subtleties of Christian dogma could only be understood through theological and technical nuance.[71] She rather attributed the inability to understand the dynamic nature of Christ to a failure of the imagination. The lack or failure of imagination for Sayers clouded the ability to see the self as it related to God. It magnified the initial separation caused by original sin. Thus Christ's death and resurrection works to reinstate the imagination and our ability to understand faith and the self. There was a heavy emphasis on making the common man aware of his ability to understand and to find relevance in previously ponderous theology. Obviously not all Christian intellectual works were presented in the simple language of Sayers, but as a whole the idea behind the broadcasts was simplicity without being simple-minded. Sayers admitted that the Incarnation was a difficult assertion to grasp: Jesus as both fully human and fully divine. She was aware of the complexity, but like her Christian contemporaries (Welch, Fenn, T.S. Eliot, or C.S. Lewis), she did not see that as an excuse for lay ignorance. She emphasized that the Church's Creed "has certain important consequences for human life. For one it implies that religion is concerned... with what happens here and now in this world; it is concerned with society, as well as the individual soul. It is active, positive and creative; a Christian's business is not just to sit about being good, but to go about doing good."[72] The Creed affirmed, according to Sayers, that God's participation in human history, as the Word Incarnate, anchors His

[71] Sayers, "The Christ of the Creeds," 34.
[72] Ibid., 37, her emphasis.

interest in human welfare. Sayers' broadcasts offered a way to interpret current affairs by exploring God's participation in history.

These themes can be seen in another of Sayers' broadcasts, this time for the BBC's series the *Church Looks Ahead* which focused specifically on the Creeds. This broadcast was a response to the Malvern Conference (January 1941), organized by Archbishop of York William Temple.[73] Sayers' contribution to this series was entitled *The Religion Behind the Nation* consisting of six 10-minute broadcasts that focused on the second member of the Trinity: God the Son. Sayers purposefully emphasized the titled "God the Son" instead of the "Son of God" in her broadcasts so that there would be no "confusion often associated with the term Son of God which tended 'to suggest that the second person of the Trinity'" was simply Jesus, the human.[74] Just as her *Creed or Chaos?* broadcasts were aired in times of great political and cultural turmoil, the *Religion Behind the Nations* was broadcast in an equally unsettling time. December 1940 saw the successful assault by joint British and Dominion troops under the leadership of General Wavell against Italian forces in Egypt and an advancement of 500 miles. May 31, 1941 marked the beginning of imported food supplied by America as part of the Lend-Lease Act which contributed to "one-fifteenth of all food arriving in [Britain] in 1941."[75] That year also marked an intensified German U-boat assault (the Battle of the Atlantic) and continued air assaults by the Luftwaffe upon Bristol, the Mersey and the Clyde.[76]

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[73] Bray, 8-10.
[74] Ibid., 12.
[75] Calder, 231.
[76] Ibid., 231.

Sayers was explicit when she invited her listeners to understand the Christian intellectual perspective. Take for example her second broadcast in *The Religion of the Nation* series entitled "Lord of all Worlds," aired June 15, 1941, which detailed the subtle difference between *homoiousios (*of like substance) and *homoousios (*of one substance). Sayers did not come up with an original idea about the Christian faith. She did not reopen the debate nor did she give any new understanding or interpretation of the question of the essence or substance of Christ and God. She is merely reiterating the well-known creedal statement that had become so uninteresting and misunderstood that the power behind it, in her mind, had all but vanished. The context of the war provided a new reason for her careful wording. We have already seen her force the decision, at least abstractly, between choosing Christ or Hitler. In the broadcast below she presented the contrast between the contemporary attempts at deifying and mythologizing Hitler and in her mind, the true divinity of Christ. Christ was not a demi-god, as Hitler at times was portrayed. According to the Creeds, Christ was true God.

> He is "God of God, Light of Light, very (that is true) God of True God". The Creed from which these words are taken was drawn up at Nicaea in the year 325, and its special object was to clear away all possible misunderstanding about this part of the Christian Faith... The Son is not made... He is God of God—springing or arising out of God, true God <u>of</u> true God—not a demi-god or a myth. Finally, so that there shall be no possible mistake about it, we get the famous phrase which rent Christendom asunder before it was generally accepted, "being of one substance with the Father".
>
> "Of one substance"—not merely "of <u>like</u> substance". In the original Greek in which the Nicene Creed was written there is between those two phrases the difference of only one letter—the Greek letter *iota*, the little letter "i"... But the quarrel about that "i" was not, as shallow-minded people like to pretend, a foolish squabble among pedants about a

> technicality. On the absence or presence of the "i" there hung the whole difference between God and man, between Heaven and earth. Men fought and bled for those words;[77]

In this she offered an understanding of the universally acknowledged faith of the Church. This explanation was similar to her earlier comparison between Christ and Hitler in that understanding the subtle theological difference meant understanding the difference between following Hitler and following Christ. The argument was nuanced but the consequences were clear. To be of *one substance* was hugely different than being of *like substance*. In the homoousios and homoiousios debate Sayers argued that this apparently small point of divine essence has the entirety of Christianity resting upon the fulcrum of the *iota*. If God and Christ were the same, the Crucifixion of Jesus was in fact that death of God. If Christ was similar to but *not* really God then Christ coming to Earth in human form would be a mimetic creation instead of the perfect Incarnation. If this were the theology, Sayers argued, then we are back to her *Creed or Chaos?* argument and there would be no reason to follow Christ over Hitler. Christ would be just another creation. But because Christ is homoousios, that is of the same substance, then once again the crucifixion and resurrection becomes meaningful and salvific. Christ had to be, in Sayers' argument, fully human and fully divine, of the same substance as the Father, in order to be worth anything or mean anything for war-torn England.

The third broadcast in the second part of the series "The Man of Men" aired on June 22, 1941 expanded upon the perfection of the Incarnation and its necessity for Christians. Sayers described the awareness of what she called the "dislocated will" as

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[77] Dorothy L. Sayers, "Lord of All Worlds," in *The Christ of the Creeds & Other Broadcast Messages to the British People during World War II* (West Sussex: The Dorothy L. Sayers Society, 2008), 53.

man being consciously and willfully good or bad. "And when he is bad, he knows all the time that he doesn't really want to be like that. There is, as modern psychologists recognise, a kind of inner dislocation in his will."[78] The Incarnation according to Sayers re-forged the link that was broken after the Fall. Original Sin dislocated the human will and separated man from God. Because of the renewed awareness, Sayers' listener could try to understand this discomfort within a Christian context because the Creeds offered a formula for interpretation. The Incarnation was simple, but also enormously complex. When she spoke of Christ coming down as Jesus, she wrote that He did not depart the sphere of Heaven as a mode of existence, but that He merely entered another mode as man.[79] In the example Sayers gave there are two modes: the mind and the paper. Both used different means or modes of expressions but they were intrinsically the same because they expressed the same essence. The idea and what ended up on the paper have different presentations (paper is tangible while thought is not) but the meaning embodied in both was the same. Perhaps more critical to Sayers was the question whether her listeners understood the implications of this debate, exploring the theme of the Incarnation and what that meant for the true nature of Christ's sacrifice.

The fourth broadcast "The Death of God" (June 29, 1941) was important because it gave the historical context of Christ's death, but it was also an indictment against man for his hand in the death of God. This confirmed the inhumanity of man, which was easily recognized against the backdrop of the two World Wars. This broadcast

[78] Dorothy L. Sayers, "The Man of Men," 57.
[79] Ibid., 58.

emphasized the physical and the flesh of God that felt pain, fear, and abandonment. He felt death. These are all essential aspects for the Incarnation. Sayers expounded upon the emotions of Christ to illustrate the idea that man can relate to God and to make clear that He empathizes with human weakness. She wrote that,

> God suffered and God died: that is the godward side of the crucifixion. But there is also the manward side. Because Jesus was truly man, it is possible for all men, through His experience, to know pain and suffering and evil as He knows them…When God passed through the grave and gate of death, He took all human nature with Him. Short of destroying humanity, God could not abolish human sin and evil; but by passing though the universe, He could redeem evil – that is, He could make it good – for Himself and for all mankind.[80]

This was the crux of the Incarnation because it was the end result and its purpose. Because of the Incarnation and the Resurrection, there was salvation. Though there was great evil at play during World War II, Sayers offered the pattern of redemption through suffering to her listeners.

Sayers' BBC broadcasts came at a time which George Orwell called "a civilization in which children grow up with an intimate knowledge of magnetos and complete ignorance of the Bible."[81] It was the aim of the BBC to take the initiative in finding not only an "acceptable and common core of Christian tradition" but also to "enlarge the knowledge of Christianity and Christian insight among the vast mass of the listening public," regardless of their background.[82] Welch specifically wanted Christianity to challenge church and nation intellectually and spiritually and felt that this

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[80] Dorothy L. Sayers, "The Death of God," in *The Christ of the Creeds & Other Broadcast Messages to the British People during World War II* (West Sussex: The Dorothy L. Sayers Society, 2008), 62-3.
[81] Calder, 29.
[82] Wolfe, 17.

could be best accomplished by the recovery of the misconception that the Bible was only "good literature" facilitated by new and dynamic translations.[83] People were asking for clear guidance on religious matters.[84] In response, the BBC provided radio broadcasts that spoke with simple eloquence regarding Christian truths. Christianity, it was believed, had been divorced from contemporary issues and as a result had either been made redundant or irrelevant. This was exemplified in 1941 with radio quiz shows like *The Brains Trust* a secular show "with the purpose of providing easily assimilated knowledge and information" by well-known figures who provided wit while lacking thoughtfulness.[85] Part of the problem with *The Brains Trust* was that for the short time it was allowed to speak about religion it treated it with a sense of off-hand triviality. This was emphasized by the voices of *The Brains Trust* like Aldous Huxley who were more than a little hostile to religion according to Sayers and it was exacerbated by the show's structure, because there was not enough time allotted for a full and thoughtful answer to be given.[86] World War II afforded the BBC and its participants a vehicle for bringing Christianity to the forefront of the cultural world because it offered hope and comfort as well as intellectual stimulation and rigor. It offered a way to interpret contemporary events that was not so bleak. Sayers is known for her impersonal and emotionless personality. In her letters she rarely commented directly on current events but indirectly and sarcastically. Yet she was not immune to the fear that World War II brought and in a rare moment we see in her the evidence of the hope that Christ's Incarnation brought and

[83] Wolfe, 146.
[84] Ibid. 205.
[85] Ibid., 206.
[86] Ibid., 206.

upon which she expounded in her broadcasts. In a letter to her son, written in June 1940 (right before the Battle of Britain began) Sayers wrote:

> Do not be troubled because you are afraid of being afraid. Everybody feels like that... Do what is asked for – that is all that matters.
>
> Look now at the history you used to find so difficult. England is back now in the centre stream of her tradition – she is where she was in 1588 and in 1815. Spain held all Europe, France held all Europe, they broke themselves upon England; we have got to see that the same thing happens to Germany... If we can stick it out then, as the vision of Christ said to St. Julian of Norwich: "All shall be well..."[87]

While this tenderness does not necessarily show through in the broadcasts, the hope that Sayers put in the Christ of the Creeds is evident. Sayers was a good representative for the larger Christian intellectual movement precisely because she clarified traditional dogma. The invitation for others to be aware of the possibility of conversation was evident. For Sayers, the Church and theology were not relics of the past but rather "the custodian[s] and transmitter[s] of the poetry by which men and women popularly construed and expressed the non-material character of their personal and corporate destiny and material character."[88] It was the hope of Christian intellectuals to articulate just how meaningful an understanding of doctrine and dogma could be for laymen. This was not just because religion played an important role in the history of England, but because it expressed what Sayers called the "inner dislocation of the soul." Sayers defined this inner dislocation as the awareness of not only original sin but moreover the awareness of separation from God it caused. The wartime radio broadcasts and the shift in the radio/church/listener

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[87] Dorothy L. Sayers to John Fleming, June 23, 1940, *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers Volume 2: 1937-1943 From novelist to playwright*, ed. Barbara Reynolds, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 168.
[88] Wolfe, 158.

mentality, from a mild exhortation from the “Radio Parson” to a dynamic emphasis on engaging education and lay participation was meant to incite debate and deeper understanding. This understanding provided a means of expressing and interpreting these intellectual and emotional thoughts critically and artistically.

Chapter III. Intellect and Imagination: Sayers and C.S. Lewis

The question naturally arises when speaking of Sayers of how can one so invested in the importance and relevance of the Christian Creeds be so fundamentally *un*interested in the evangelical aspect of the Christian faith. The answers to this problem can be found in two areas. First, Sayers by her own admission was unable to see the Christian faith as anything more than an intellectual and creative experience. In one of the many letters written between Sayers and C.S. Lewis she wrote that, "the chief point is that I do not possess anything which I should care to dignify by the name of 'my faith'. All spiritual experience is a closed book to me in that respect I have been tone-deaf from birth. All the apparatus I have by which to apprehend anything at all is intellect and imagination."[89] For Sayers faith was based in knowledge and as such she had completely rejected the use of sentiment and emotion for gleaning spiritual truths. Dogma and the authority of the Church had so effectively laid out the Christian sensibility that for Sayers there was no ground more solid than Creed, dogma and doctrine. A passive Jesus who was "sadly put upon by the management" played no part in her faith and neither did it play a role in the way she explained Christianity.[90] Second, the people for whom Sayers wrote were the "educated near-Christians or wooly Christians." These members of her audience had experienced their moment of conversion (which she could not facilitate) and were trying

[89] Dorothy L. Sayers to C.S. Lewis, August 5, 1946, *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers Volume 3: 1945-1950 A Noble Daring*, ed. Barbara Reynolds, (Cambridge: Carole Green Publishing, 1997), 255.
[90] Bray, 12.

to situate themselves within the greater Christian framework.[91] Sayers did not have to emotively evangelize to the people she imagined as her audience because they did not require sentiment or emotion. They required solid answers and a strict format to follow. At least initially, she was invested in helping people straighten out their confused faith, but not necessarily helping them find that faith. In this way, she found herself profoundly at odds with Christians like C.S. Lewis, who aimed not at the churched who were trying to "reconnect with their faith, but [at] the un-churched, who need[ed] to have their eyes opened to the rational and imaginative potential of faith."[92] Though Sayers and Lewis' paths to faith could not have been more different they essentially had the same goals regarding re-Christianization. Both aimed to bring about an intellectual and rational understanding of Christianity. Both saw the Incarnation as essential to their faith and their methods of presentation. And both were greatly influenced by G.K. Chesterton, all three finding the only satisfactory answer to arguments constructed around Christianity and theology in the Creeds.[93] However, Sayers' and Lewis' arguments and their faiths differed greatly and in this Lewis, as well as being a fellow BBC Religious Department Broadcaster, was a convenient foil to Sayers. Where Sayers saw solid ground in dogma,

[91] Dorothy L. Sayers to John Wren-Lewis, Good Friday, March 1954, *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers Volume 4: 1951-1957 In The Midst of Life,* ed. Barbara Reynolds (Cambridge: Carole Green Publishing, 2000), 144.
[92] Alister E. McGrath, *The Intellectual World of C.S. Lewis,* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 133.
[93] P.H. Brazier, "'God . . . Or A Bad, Or Mad, Man': C.S. Lewis's Argument for Christ – A Systematic Theological, Historical and Philosophical Analysis of *Aut Deus Aut Malus Homo*," (Wimbledon: The Heythrop Journal, 2014), 16.

Lewis saw truth in the "Christian myth." Where Sayers saw "self-evident" fact Lewis saw "nothing but doubts."[94]

Where Sayers relied solely on the Creeds and doctrine, Lewis used them as a foundation for his arguments, but not the sole justification for a rational faith. The medieval argument of *aut Deus aut malus homo* (either God or bad man) was central to Lewis' exploration of rational faith.[95] This argument played on human emotion by postulating the possibility of Christ being evil or insane. And while Lewis certainly expounded upon creedal authority, he used the arguments that found their justification in the Creeds, rather than the Creeds themselves. The drawback however, in Sayers' mind was that Lewis' arguments elicited a sentimental and emotionally charged response. Because reason could not bring one to religious truth, sentiment was a necessary supplement. But because Sayers rejected sentiment it was impossible for her to lead non-Christians to embrace her explanation of faith. Lewis had not run into this problem of the gap because his evangelism placed doctrine as secondary to the emotionally-charged nature of the "true myth." Lewis' "religious appeal [stemmed from] his emphasis on Christian basics, and his eschewing of denominational politics [coupled with] his remarkable ability to communicate orthodox theological ideas in culturally accessible terms."[96] By this definition, Sayers and Lewis abstractly had the same method of re-Christianization. In reality, Sayers and Lewis presented a two-step approach to evangelism, Lewis being the first and Sayers the second (though it was never so neatly

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[94] Dorothy L. Sayers to C.S. Lewis, August 8, 1946, *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers Volume 3: 1945-1950 A Noble Daring*, ed. Barbara Reynolds, (Cambridge: Carole Green Publishing, 1997), 258.
[95] Brazier, 2.
[96] McGrath, 2.

put into action). Lewis evangelized to those who had little to no real conception of Christianity. Sayers spoke to those who wanted the structure of dogma. Lewis spoke to those who didn't know they were missing Christ and because of this he was able to avoid the "gap problem" that Sayers created. As such, there were three prominent differences in how Lewis and Sayers presented Christianity. First was the opposition between Lewis' "Myth as Fact" and Sayers' "solidity of dogma" structure. Second was the type of audience to whom Lewis and Sayers spoke. Finally Lewis' "Proving Christ" argument (referred to by its more technical name *aut Deus aut malus homo*) contrasted with Sayers' defining Christ through the Creeds. Lewis' original use of sentiment made the gap practically nonexistent. There was still the void between human reason and divine truth but Lewis' arguments incorporated the natural emotional response that Sayers denied.

The use of the term "myth" is somewhat confusing when it is applied to Lewis' understanding of Christianity and requires a certain amount of clarification. A myth for Lewis was "a story which evoked awe, enchantment and inspiration, and which conveys or embodies an imaginative expression of the deepest meaning of life – meanings that prove totally elusive in the face of any attempt to express them abstractly or conceptually."[97] Myths therefore embodied an intangible truth that could only be effectively expressed through the medium of a story. For Lewis (and J.R.R. Tolkien and Hugo Dyson who presented Lewis with the "myth/fact" construction of Christianity) an emotionally-responsive framework was key to reconciling reason and faith. This decisive insight sparked Lewis' belief in Christ in 1931 and solidified in his mind the claim that

[97] McGrath, 63.

"Christianity was not a set of doctrine or moral principles, but a controlling grand narrative..."[98] This exposes a critical point in the Sayers/Lewis dichotomy. While doctrine played an important role in Christianity for Lewis it was not the end all be all. Myth piqued the interest by being engaging. Dogma made the faith demonstrable. Doctrine made the intangible abstractions of faith accessible through an authoritatively determined format. But for Lewis, the church-outsider "should not be asked to accept the truth of Christian belief in order to discover the vibrancy of the Christian faith."[99] Rather, one must be confronted and overwhelmed with the myth before understanding and accepting the belief. This was efficacious for Lewis' pre- "come to Jesus moment" crowd; but for Sayers it was incomprehensible. The overwhelming aspect of spiritual conversion not only underwhelmed her but did not touch her. The "myth" construction was not meant for her "wooly Christians." But this diverging view point is best explained by looking at how Lewis came to his faith; a history clearly different from Sayers' "tone-deaf approach."[100]

Clive Staples Lewis was born November 28, 1898 in Belfast. Though he was born to traditional Irish Protestant stock on his father's side and "Protestant aristocracy" on his mother's side Lewis rejected Christianity from an early age. It was not, he insisted in a letter to a friend, the atheism of adolescent rebellion against his parents but rather the "considered rejection of belief in God based on arguments that he believed to be

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[98] McGrath, 62.
[99] Ibid., 68.
[100] When she was asked to detail her entrance into the Christian faith, Sayers tersely replied "baptism" which ended the interview and conversation.

unanswerable."[101] That there was no proof in God's existence was one thing, but it was the appearance of a God uninterested in human suffering that solidified Lewis' disbelief in the 1910s and 1920s. Obviously and undeniably World War I anchored this anger towards an off-hand and uncaring God. Lewis' poetry during this time exposed this anger, specifically "Ode for New Year's Day" which, written in January 1918 "railed against silent uncaring heaven" and the "unpersuasive human invention" of God.[102]

After his return to Oxford at the close of the Great War there was a tangible shift in the academic atmosphere. The stability of western civilization's upward progress was no longer apparent and the "trauma of the war" caused a number of cultural assumptions, such as the optimistic view of human nature, that were undeniably prevalent in the Edwardian period, to be questioned.[103] As a student and later as a don, Lewis responded in kind to this new intellectual cultural shift in the 1920s by synthesizing his own personal philosophy which he called "The New Look." This was an amalgamation of a number of contemporary ideas and movements, including Oxford's "New Realism" which was itself adapted from Cambridge thinkers G.E. Moore and Bertrand Russell and their group.[104] Lewis' admitted at the time the "New Look" was characterized as being an "aggressively intellectual yet somewhat sterile atheism"; the latter being for Lewis structurally sound and logical as well as culturally à la mode, but "imaginatively unproductive and existentially uninteresting."[105] However the stability of his "New

[101] McGrath, "Introduction," x.
[102] Ibid., x.
[103] Ibid., 32.
[104] Ibid., 31-37.
[105] Ibid., 32-35.

Look" and the rational nature of atheism outweighed the creativity it potentially stifled. And yet he could not shake the feeling that his "New Look" and its sterile atheism did cramp his creativity, particularly when it came to his fascination with the construction of myths. He was aware of an intellectual stinginess that was in fierce competition with "an awareness of [the] compelling imaginative power and beauty" of myths.[106] The idea of "myths" and their ability to be applied to truths, and indeed to be the vehicles and translators of truth, removed the final obstacle in Lewis' path towards not only fully accepting God, but also accepting Christ.

On the evening of September 19, 1931 Lewis was deep in conversation with J.R.R. Tolkien and Hugo Dyson (fellow-members of the Oxford literary group the Inklings) about his faith and hesitations. Lewis had transitioned from militant atheist to admitted theist but had not yet taken the final step towards Christianity because that belief did not neatly fit into his subordination and compartmentalization of reality. By this I mean that Lewis selectively accepted or rejected memories, facts and emotions to create an impregnable mental outpost in order to better deal with reality. Used previously to understand (or escape from) his wartime service Lewis had created what he called a "treaty with reality" in which he was able to pigeonhole and use or ignore certain aspects of it. Christ did not fit into that construct. Yet this mental exercise in border control worked only for so long for Lewis and he recalled his period of pre-conversion to Christianity as being overwhelmed by God. His attempts to control God and Christ failed and God overran the mental outpost. Indeed, Lewis "increasingly refer[red] to an active

[106] McGrath, 55.

and *questing* God, pounding on the door of Lewis' mind and his life, refusing to respect any 'treaty with reality.'"[107] In this frame of mind, Lewis was receptive to Dyson and Tolkien, the latter of whom believed that "pagan myths elicit wonder and longing, creat[ing] both an appetite and an opening for the discovery of the deeper truth that underlies all truth, however fragmentary and veiled."[108] Framed within the language of myth, Lewis was able to make that "leap of faith" because Christianity "was thus a 'true myth' – that is to say, a myth which functions in the same manner as other myths, yet which *literally happened.* Christianity possessed the literary form of a myth, with the critical difference that it was true. The story of Christ is thus to be understood as 'God's myth.'"[109] Lewis recounted his conversion and his lifelong walk with faith in three autobiographical works: *The Pilgrim's Regress* (1933), *Surprised by Joy* (1955) and *A Grief Observed* (1961) written under the pseudonym N.W. Clerk. He remains famous to this day for his *Chronicles of Narnia* series, *The Great Divorce*, *The Problem with Pain, The Screwtape Letters* and *Till We Have Faces* as well as his radio broadcasts *Mere Christianity* from 1942 to 1944.

This was decidedly a very different path and approach to Christianity than Sayers'. Much of what brought Lewis to his faith, and what consequently he used to evangelize was in her mind sentiment at its worst. The concepts that were necessary had to be expressed concretely, like the Incarnation and the important distinction between

[107] McGrath, 41-2. Sayers on the other hand, had no problem with this spiritual trespasser.
[108] Ibid., 59.
[109] Ibid., 62.

homoousios and homoiousios. All else was ephemeral or part of the "religious racket."[110] This is not to say that Sayers in anyway doubted the validity of Lewis' faith or his method of teaching. On the contrary, she referred to Lewis as "the most genuine evangelist of us all. He started out, at any rate, with an overwhelming eagerness to proclaim the salvation he had found...Lewis went through a real religious experience of his own, and, as he has plainly said in *The Pilgrim's Regress*, it was mainly an intellectual conversion that he underwent. That is where I can make my contact with him."[111] The intellectual conversion that Lewis professed in his *Pilgrim's Regress* was the point of intersection for him and Sayers in their reasons for disseminating Christianity, but they differed in the way in which this intellectual Christianity was presented. While Lewis used the medium of autobiographical narrative and allegory to reach readers, Sayers was always "very careful to make [her] statements as factual and impersonal as possible."[112] There was a palpable urgency in Lewis' works that is missing in Sayers'. In one letter, dated July 31, 1946, written on the subject of evangelism (or rather Sayers' reluctance to evangelize) the motives behind their methods are exposed as differing. This directly speaks to how Sayers and Lewis viewed their audiences, the church-confused and the church-ignorant, respectively. Sayers originally wrote,

> You must not do even the right deed for the wrong reason...

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[110] Dorothy L. Sayers to C.S. Lewis, August 8, 1946, *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers Volume 3: 1945-1950 A Noble Daring*, ed. Barbara Reynolds, (Cambridge: The Dorothy L. Sayers Society Carole Green Publishing, 1997), 255.
[111] Dorothy L. Sayers to John Wren-Lewis, Good Friday, March 1954, *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers Volume 4: 1951-1957 In The Midst of Life*, ed. Barbara Reynolds (Cambridge: Dorothy L. Sayers Society Carole Green Publishing, 2000), 139.
[112] Dorothy L. Sayers to C.S. Lewis, August 8, 1946, *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers Volume 3: 1945-1950 A Noble Daring*, ed. Barbara Reynolds (Cambridge: Dorothy L. Sayers Society Carole Green Publishing, 1997), 255.

> I don't mean, of course, that you are to retire into the ivory tower and write only for yourself. You must *speak to and for your audience* – otherwise you are sinning against the City. But you must not tell people what they want to hear, or even what they need to hear, unless it is the thing you passionately want to tell them...[113]

Sayers illustrated an acute awareness of her specific audience and their needs. Though she said you cannot write what your audience needed to hear, she meant that her audience required sincerity. That even the right thing cannot be done for the wrong reason. This meant that she could not write in Christian generalizations. She did not admonish Lewis for his methods. She merely refused to emulate them. From Lewis' response below, he appeared more interested in reaching the broadest group of people. This would fit with his audience of the un-churched and his more explicit desire for evangelism. Sayers however made it clear that her "wooly Christians" needed a more sincerely nuanced exploration and explanation. In the same letter she wrote, "...you've either got to make *ersatz* miracles...or to say firmly: 'I'm sorry; it isn't there'."[114] Sayers was adamant that in her work, there could be no substitute miracles but only clear exposition on what she firmly believed and how she firmly believed. This was how and why her "gap problem" came about. Her religious understanding was so devoid of emotion that it did not take into account those proto-Christians who could not make the leap from reason to divine truth without some intermediary vehicle. But for those that she could speak to, the confused Christians, she was to cement their belief because they already had the tools and prerequisites necessary to accept the logic and reason in the Creeds that she presented as

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[113] Dorothy L. Sayers to C.S. Lewis, July 31, 1946, *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers Volume 3: 1945-1950 A Noble Daring,* ed. Barbara Reynolds (Cambridge: Dorothy L. Sayers Society Carole Green Publishing, 1997), 253, my italics.
[114] Ibid., 253.

almost self-evident. She was unapologetic about her prejudices. "Take shoddy, weak, *sentimental* religious art: there are pious souls who get comfort out of bad stained glass and sloppy hymns and music (though they might well have got better nourishment out of honest stuff). But thousands of others have spewed at the sight and sound of it, and said 'If Christianity fosters that kind of thing it must have a lie in its soul.'"[115] Sayers was concerned with not alienating her audience, an audience that appreciated intellectual rigor, with what she considered sentimental emotionalism and by extension bad Christianity and poor theology.

Lewis on the other hand was interested in helping to nurture or foster in others the spiritual and emotively rich moment of conversion that he experienced in 1931. In response to her letter Lewis replied,

> I don't think the difference between us comes where you think. Of course one mustn't do *dishonest* work. But you seem to take as the criterion of honest work the sensible *desire* to write, the "itch"... In my experience the *desire* has no constant ratio to the value of the work done. My own frequent uneasiness comes from another source – the fact that apologetic work is so dangerous to one's own faith. A doctrine never seems dimmer to me than when I have just successfully defended it. Anyway, thanks for an intensely interesting letter.[116]

Here we can feel the tension in Lewis' motives for Christianizing, and his amusement at Sayers' refusal. But these letters expose the difference between Sayers and Lewis.

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[115]Dorothy L. Sayers to C.S. Lewis, July 31, 1946, *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers Volume 3: 1945-1950 A Noble Daring*, ed. Barbara Reynolds (Cambridge: Dorothy L. Sayers Society Carole Green Publishing, 1997), 253-4, my italics.

[116]C.S. Lewis to Dorothy L. Sayers, no date, *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers Volume 3: 1945-1950 A Noble Daring*, ed. Barbara Reynolds (Cambridge: Dorothy L. Sayers Society Carole Green Publishing, 1997), 254.

Lewis found apologetic works "dangerous to one's faith" but he was willing to face that challenge head on. He felt he had something to prove for his readers, as if their faith was at stake. Sayers on the other hand could not do so because she was not convincing her listeners but rather leading them around the confusing or nuanced bits of Christianity. Sayers replied to Lewis' accusation of pandering to her "itch" by responding,

> But it does seem to me that all you religious people *trust* God so little. You can't wait to see what He wants to do with a soul or a talent...No sooner does some poor mutt announce, "I've found a bit of truth", than you're all around [saying] "...Exploit the vein! It's your *duty* to go on talking!" By the bones of Balaam's ass, it is no such thing.[117]

To accuse Lewis of trusting God so little was an interesting statement, but it made sense when we look at it within the context of how Sayers and Lewis spoke to their audience. Lewis attempted to give the strongest logical "proof" for his listeners so that they could experience the spiritual conversion. This showed his incorporation of sentiment and reason and how the gap was overcome in his portrayal of faith. Lewis portrayed evangelism as an exhortation to Christ in a way that was not only alien to Sayers' method but uncomfortable for her. Provoking conversion constituted interfering in other peoples' lives.[118] Sayers, while acknowledging the benefit of Lewis' arguments, did not like his desire to actively convert. His logical arguments that used emotion were not part of Sayers' belief system. It was in a sense, his motives and not his methods to which she took exception. It was not her initial calling to speak for and to all the people ("I am not

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[117]Dorothy L. Sayers to C.S. Lewis, August 8, 1946, *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers Volume 3: 1945-1950 A Noble Daring*, ed. Barbara Reynolds (Cambridge: Carole Green Publishing, 1997), 256.
[118]Ibid., 258. "Whether you like the plays or not, or whether or not I wrote them for that purpose, the fact remains that after hearing *Man Born* [*To Be King*]... Jews in New Zealand rush[ed] away to get baptised (a thing that, if true, petrifies me with an alarmed sense of interference in other people's lives).

a missioner") but to speak primarily to her specific group of people that could mind "the gap" between reason and faith on their own.[119] Her primary target was those with a background in doctrine and dogma, just as Lewis' "flock" was those who needed the Jesus-shape hole in their heart exposed and proven for them.

Finally, we must explore the way in which Sayers and Lewis expressed their faith differently. This difference was Lewis' "proving Christ" and Sayers' "defining Christ." We focused on Sayers' definition of Christ in chapter 2 through her exploration of creedal statements and their enduring relevance. Creeds created the foundation of her faith because they were based on the authority of the Church Fathers and had been vetted for public consumption. Creeds reflected and expressed divine Christian truths, most centrally the Incarnation. Sayers based her Christianity on this. She did not try to prove or exhort anyone to belief; she laid forth the foundation and principles as an offering. Lewis also relied on creedal authority but used it as the foundation for later arguments like his contribution to the Johannine trilemma (the three-part version of a dilemma) *aut Deus aut malus homo* which Lewis called "Bad, Mad,...or God."[120] What was meant by this was that Jesus was either 1) malicious in his attempts to gain followers, 2) deluded or insane in thinking that he was the Messiah, or 3) was in actuality and reality God incarnate i.e. exactly who he said he was. Through this argument, Lewis tried to keep people from de-Christianizing Jesus by preventing "anyone from saying the really silly thing that people often say about [Jesus]: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral

[119]Dorothy L. Sayers to C.S. Lewis, August 8, 1946, *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers Volume 3: 1945-1950 A Noble Daring*, ed. Barbara Reynolds (Cambridge: Carole Green Publishing, 1997), 259.
[120]Brazier, 18;1.

teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God.'"[121] For Lewis and others, this type of thinking was impossible. One could reject Jesus and all his claims or one could accept him, but there was no escaping the "either-or dialectic."[122]

This "either-or dialectic" may sound quite like Sayers' argument. You either take Christianity or your leave it. But Lewis used it for very different purposes. In his argument, Lewis put forward the options for "explaining away" Christ, but he also argued that they did not make sense historically, and that through this the most improbable solution or "myth" (Christ's divinity) must be true. If Christ was bad, Lewis and others have argued then he could not help but show tendencies associated with a diabolically fraudulent nature, like pride. Yet as Chesterton pointed out "the character of Jesus is the very last for us to associate with the intoxication of megalomania, and yet *'such steep and staggering megalomania as might be associated in that claim'* should have caused his contemporaries and those later to pause.[123] But it was pointed out Jesus was not condemned for pride or the megalomania associated with intentional messianic deceit. The second option is the madness of Christ. Lewis argued that if Jesus did not know his claims were untrue and deceived his followers unintentionally then he was mad.[124] But it was argued that Jesus could not be credited with being a wise and good teacher if he was insane. Therefore Lewis argued that he was not mad. The only option left was the most myth-like one: factual divinity. Lewis then linked this argument to the Incarnation, saying that "if he [Jesus] is not God incarnate, if the Crucifixion is a terrible tragic accident

[121] Bray, 3.
[122] Ibid., 3.
[123] Brazier., 15, author's italics.
[124] Ibid., 21, diagram.

without meaning, we are lost" but if the Incarnation was true we are therefore bidden to "become sons of God."[125] It is this kinship and the emphasis on the emotional relationship with God that was so important to Lewis and his method and nonessential to Sayers and hers. Sayers, while refuting the idea that God the Father was an abstraction (an old, divine dictator with gray hair), she felt little sentiment towards the title "Father" as she felt it suggested only "the mildest of mild affections, whereas 'our Maker' really is a 'lord of terrible aspect.'"[126] Sayers and Lewis in effect started their arguments from the same place. For both the "Incarnation [was] the key to the nature and reality of the Son of God and Son of Man."[127] Lewis felt this type of understanding, this "proof", was only possible with divine and spiritually-led revelation. God the Father was a necessary title for the emotional response. For Sayers, revelation came not through spiritual movement but from the Creed. Lewis enjoyed and excelled at pushing people to confront his trilemma in order to recognize Jesus as the Son of God. Sayers would have nothing to do with that method and rather left the conversation un-aggressively open.[128]

While Lewis' and Sayers' styles of promoting Christianity were different, it is important to note the evangelical context within which they worked. Sayers, by pointing out Lewis' sentimental evangelism, probably hit a raw nerve for him since those were insults in her vocabulary. Likewise, Lewis drove Sayers to distraction by mocking her hesitancy to evangelize. But by doing this, he overlooked the focus of her work. As such

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[125]Brazier, 20.
[126]Bray, 12; Dorothy L. Sayers to C.S. Lewis, August 5, 1946, *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers Volume 3: 1945-1950 A Noble Daring,* ed. Barbara Reynolds (Cambridge: Carole Green Publishing, 1997), 257.
[127]Brazier 20.
[128]Ibid., 25.

we should take a moment to look at Christian evangelism and fundamentalism in England at this time. Sayers did not like evangelicals or Christian fundamentalists. She had a very low opinion of Frank Buchman and the Buchmanites. She wrote

> the Buchmanites (for I *will* not adorn then with the name of Oxford, which they have appropriated without the smallest justification) are the most infuriating people...the way that the Buchmanites get and maintain their influence is by offering people a sort of compensation for "inferiority complexes". The group (who is perhaps by nature rather timid, stupid, plain, undersized, hen-pecked, odd-man-out in his family, or in some other way feeling himself unappreciated) is suddenly made to consider himself important...[129]

And her opinion of Billy Graham was little better, noting in one letter that the "sight and sound of so much naked emotion" was more likely to nauseate than stimulate.[130] Graham's self-endorsed moniker of evangelist rather than educator would not have jibbed with her intellectual rather than sentimental Christian pronouncements.[131] These sentimental pronouncements she called "a sour pill of antimacassar morality watered down with saccharine thoughts of mystification and clap-trap."[132]

Her opinions may have been unduly negative, but the dislike of Anglo-Catholics by fundamentalists and the more militant evangelicals did not foster happy relations. For bellicose evangelicals, "Anglo-Catholic" was a term interchangeable with "aesthetic

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[129]Dorothy L. Sayers to Ruth Hind (identity unknown) November 17, 1950, *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers Volume 3: 1945-1950 A Noble Daring*, ed. Barbara Reynolds (Cambridge: Dorothy L. Sayers Society Carole Green Publishing, 1997), 523-4.
[130]Dorothy L. Sayers to Barbara Reynolds, November 5, 1956, *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers Volume 4: 1951-1957 In the Midst of Life*, ed. Barbara Reynolds (Cambridge: Dorothy L. Sayers Society Carole Green Publishing, 2000), 343.
[131]Ian M. Randall, "Billy Graham, Evangelism, and Fundamentalism," in *Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism in the United Kingdom during the Twentieth Century*, (Oxford: Oxford Scholarship Online, 2014), 181.
[132]Bray, 28.

religion" and "popish mockery." Fundamentalists were more specific in their anti-Catholic articulations. In particular they called Anglo-Catholics "sensuous, weakly, sentimental, sloppy and effeminate."[133] Strangely enough in the fundamentalist and militant evangelical opinion, Anglo-Catholics and Modernists were easily lumped together because both encouraged biblical criticism and scholarship.[134] With this view in mind, Anglo-Catholics and Modernists posed the greatest threat to English Christianity according to these militant groups. In a strange way, as John Maiden in his article "Fundamentalism and Anti-Catholicism in Inter-War English Evangelicalism" pointed out, Modernists and Anglo-Catholics in the minds of evangelicals simultaneously caused denominational discord while bringing the "true Christians" together in the Anglican Church.[135] Anglo-Catholics were partially to blame for causing the Anglican Church to fracture by bringing in Catholic ritual and sentiment. But this discord was also credited with being a binding agent for "real" Christians who put their differences aside to combat the common Catholic enemy. Thus Anglo-Catholics were in the same breath condemned for being both intellectually ineffectual and biblically corrosive for their promotions of Bible criticism. It should be pointed out that not all English evangelical groups were anti-Catholic or anti-Anglo-Catholic. During the Prayer Book Crisis of 1927-28, some conservative evangelicals were "self-conscious of the anti-Catholicism" and tried to strike a balance publically during the controversy. Fundamentalists, on the other hand,

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[133]John Maiden, "Fundamentalism and Anti-Catholicism in Inter-War English Evangelicalism," in *Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism in the United Kingdom during the Twentieth Century*, (Oxford: Oxford Scholarship Online, 2014), 161.
[134]Ibid., 161.
[135]Ibid., 155.

were frustrated by the comparative Catholic tolerance.[136] Fundamentalist groups like the Protestant Truth Society and the Bible Baptist Union were vehemently anti-Romanists and anti-Anglo-Catholic.[137] This ultimately meant that Sayers was fighting a two-front evangelical battle. She distanced herself from the evangelizing spirit of Anglo-Catholics. And she was directly opposed to the militancy of groups of Evangelicals and fundamentalists. Thus, while Sayers and Lewis had very different methods of promoting their understanding of Christianity there was an obvious camaraderie between them in the face of fundamental Christian militancy that eschewed their brand of intellectual Christianity.

The "gap" that Sayers created in her method of Christian teaching was avoided (almost) entirely by those she directed her teachings towards. Because her "wooly" confused Christians had a basic, if sometimes backwards, understanding of Christianity her listeners had the tools required to navigate her strictly dogmatic structure. But for those that Lewis targeted Sayers' construction of Christianity posed a real challenge because they were ill-equipped to bridge the gap between their reason and the divine truth. Lewis avoided the problem of the gap by couching his understanding and experience of Christianity in the emotionally evocative terms of "God's myth." Lewis saw human myth as a way of pointing towards "God's myth"; human myth was inherently mimetic of the "true myth." In this sense, Sayers and Lewis shared a similar understanding of the relationship between theology and artistry. Lewis postulated that

[136]Maiden, 167.
[137]Ibid., 156-7;160.

"human beings constructed myths because they are *meant* to. They [humans] have been created by God with an innate capacity to create myths as echoes of a greater story...human beings bear God's image, human beings are endowed with the Creator's capacity to create, in a suitably accommodated and a reduced manner."[138] Lewis utilized the fantastic. On the other hand, the majority of Sayers' creative works were historical fiction. This partiality for historical dramatic narratives was indicative of her fusion of dogma and drama. Her creative works tended to be grounded in the traditional moments surrounding sacred texts. Even her play *The Just Vengeance* has its origins in Dante's *Divine Comedy* which has been argued by some scholars as a sacred text.[139] This emphasized her belief that historic Church narratives made for the best drama. Where Lewis said "myth" Sayers said "art." Where Lewis said "created in a modified manner" Sayers said "re-present the image of God." While Lewis' Christianity was available to anyone, Sayers' original construction created a "gap" because it was so solid and so dogmatic and so rigidly based on the assumption that her audience held some previous knowledge of Christianity and had already experienced their moment of conversion. This meant that it could not account for the un-churched people who could not overcome the gap that separated human reason and divine truth on their own. For the un-churched, there was no clear articulation of how to reach that moment of conversion and Sayers, unlike Lewis, was tone-deaf and perhaps even indifferent on how to attain it. Yet though she could not guide her non-wooly Christians to conversion, as we shall see in the next chapter, she provided poetry and a Christian esthetic, or principles of artistic

[138] McGrath, 64.
[139] Indeed Dante himself gave it that name.

interpretation, as the vehicle to bridge the gap and link reason with truth. And the foremost model of that Christian esthetic was, for Sayers, Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

Chapter IV. "She Sat Down Under His Shadow": Sayers and Dante[140]

In 1949 Dorothy L. Sayers published her translation of Dante's *Inferno.* Her translation of *Purgatory* followed in 1955 and *Paradise* was published in 1962. The latter was a collaborative work between Sayers and Dr. Barbara Reynolds, who finished the translation after Sayers' death. The popular success of her work was evident almost immediately. Over 50,000 copies of *Inferno* sold in the first few weeks. *The Divine Comedy* "reached over a million and a quarter readers" in the latter part of the 20th century. As Reynolds wrote "Dante had become a best-seller...a literary and cultural phenomenon unprecedented in Dante studies. How did this comes about?"[141] It was due in part to Sayers translating Dante's work in an intentionally non-academic way. She was not faithful to the text though she maintained the *terza rima* meter.[142] Rather she focused on what she saw as the Christian truth that the poem presented. She updated the text so that her modern reader could glean the spiritual power behind the poem rather than get lost in the outdated language. Sayers knew her translation was non-traditional. When comparing her translation to that of Lawrence Binyon from 1933-43, she wrote that "He [Binyon] woos Dante reverently...[he] does not leave out bits, or embroider, or mangle the metaphors, or play monstrous tricks with the metre. He is careful; I am slap-dash. (I think however, that my leopard is more prettily spotted, my loathsome worms

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[140]Song of Solomon 2:3.

[141]Barbara Reynolds, Introduction in *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers Volume 3: 1944-1950 A Noble Daring,* ed. Barbara Reynolds (Cambridge: The Dorothy L. Sayers Society Carole Green Publishing, 1998), xiii-xiv.

[142] "The rhyme-scheme (aba, bcb, cdc, ded,...xyx, yzy, z) runs continuously from the beginning to the end of every canto, each three line stanza (terzain) being rhyme-linked to the one before and the one after, until the sequence is neatly tied off by a single line rhyming with the middle line of the preceding stanza." Dorothy L. Sayers, Introduction to *The Divine Comedy I: Hell,* by Dante Alighieri (London: Penguin Group, 1949), 56.

wormier, and my whirlwinds much more whizzy.)"[143] Sayers' justification for being "slap-dash" was that her translation was more engaging for her modern reader, and thus better transmitted the poem's essential truth.

Critics of Sayers' translation have not overlooked her slap-dash methods. Indeed, this is the focus of their criticism. Gilbert F. Cunningham in his *The Divine Comedy in English: A Critical Bibliography 1901-1966* noted that

> inequality is a marked characteristic of Dr Sayers' writing; perhaps, considering her multifarious activities, it could hardly be otherwise. Thus her introductions, notes and essays abound in penetrating remarks and competent exegesis, but these are mingled with clichés, risky generalisations, non sequiturs, and some pronouncements which are little better than nonsense. Her didactic manner has been adversely commented on by some critics, and she is inclined to condescend a little too obviously to the general reader; sometimes this produces a piece of frankly bad writing...[144]

Joan Ross Acocella was more specific, and more damning, in her criticisms:

> Do fireflies sprinkle like sprinklers? How can the luminous "risplendea' be reduced to a twinkling'? (Little stars and Santa Claus's eyes twinkle; a *bolgia* of Hell does not.) And whatever is a 'rock-wrinkling'? To add a fourth rhyme, Sayers makes the lines *tinkle*, an effect quite opposite to the slow, almost lazy, summer-evening sound of Dante's *vallea/ rispendea/ parea*. All in all, Sayers's translation is as weak in technique as it is shaky in its critical basis. Her controlling idea of Dante's wide range of tone and

[143]Dorothy L. Sayers to Charles Williams, No date, but before December 21, 1944, *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers Volume 3: 1944-1950 A Noble Daring*, ed. Barbara Reynolds (Cambridge: The Dorothy L. Sayers Society Carole Green Publishing, 1998), 116.
[144]Gilbert F. Cunningham, *The Divine Comedy in English: A Critical Bibliography 1901-1966* (London: Oliver & Boyd Ltd., 1967), 212.

> diction has its justice, as I have said. In practice, however, this idea leads her to do great disservice to both Dante and Ulysses.[145]

Clearly reviews of Sayers' translations were not favorable. Critics accused her of generalizations and inserting ideas that had little academic foundation. They found her work to be unbalanced and not grounded in the academic and nuanced Dante scholarship. They noted her preference for didactic emphasis over the linguistic accuracy and found this lacking in insight and credibility. Cunningham even charged her with condescending to the reader, which he found distasteful. Acocella took great exception to the "monstrous tricks with the metre" specifically focusing on the literal inaccuracy of the translation. The English version of the *terza rima* took away from the poem so much so that she called it a "disservice." The practical application of Sayers' method, in Acocella's mind made it practically unreadable for the scholar and academic. Sayers' refusal to utilize the scholarship available to her discounted the translation as an academic offering.

Sayers' willingness to play fast and loose with the translation seems even more surprising when considered in the context of her method of critical and artistic presentation of her entire body of work. Sayers' definition of art was vague. She was indiscriminate in her phrases, interchanging artist for dramatist, author, craftsman, painter etc. In this way, she mirrors Dante who used the Italian "arte" to encompass all forms of art, including poetry. Signaling my intention to explicate her views, in this paper I will

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[145]Joan Ross Acocella, "The Cult of Language A Study of Two Modern Translations of Dante," *Modern Language Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (1974), 155.

allow for her broad understanding by referencing art as she did.[146] Previously, we saw how tightly Sayers held to authoritative and traditional truths. In her work with the Creed she allowed no modification to the text. Certainly she modernized the language, but not at the expense of authenticity. She was rigorous and disciplined concerning dogma. How then did she justify so much poetic license regarding Dante? To understand her reason, we must look to her method. To do this, we must understand her Christian esthetic. Sayers had a specific understanding of the role of art and it was this understanding that critics overlooked when speaking of Sayers' translation.

As we saw in her dealings with C. S. Lewis, Sayers' method of presenting Christian truths created a gap between natural reason and faith. For the wooly-Christian who had some understanding of Christianity, Sayers' presentation of Christianity posed little problem. These Christians already had some foothold in the faith, and thus only needed the re-presentation of doctrine and Creed to revive their dormant faith. But for those who had no real contact with Christian dogma or history, Sayers' gap between human reason and divine truth was unbridgeable without help. Sayers refused and rejected the role of sentiment, which for others like C.S. Lewis had allowed a spiritually-charged conversion moment. These non-Christians had no way of getting from the place of reason to the place of faith. However, Sayers did not ignore these people. Rather she substituted art for sentiment. Sayers called this understanding or philosophy regarding the role of art a "Christian esthetic." There were two elements to Sayers' esthetic which

[146] Likewise, I spell esthetic as she did for clarity and continuity.

can be understood in her essay "Toward a Christian Esthetic."[147] First she outlined the role of art in fostering conversion. Art bridged the gap between Reason and Divine Truth. Art succeeded for her non-Christians where straight creedal authority failed. Art brought the non-believer to faith in two steps: defined by secular/pagan art and Christian art. For Sayers, secular art brought one to the awareness of what she called the "dislocated will." This was not obviously a Christian phenomenon but rather the dislocated will or sense of self could have been defined as the existential crisis moment. Generally speaking, the awareness of dislocated will was that moment you ask yourself, "What is the purpose of life?" Secular art started the bridge across the gap. But it stopped there. It exposed discomfort but, for Sayers, did not offer a solution or means of defining the dislocated self. This led her to the second step. Christian art offered a solution to the discomfort by redefining the sense of dislocated will as an awareness of sinfulness and separation from God. By giving the dislocation a name (sin) and offering Christianity as a solution, Christian art picked up where secular art left off. It completed the bridge over the remaining part of the gap and led the reader through his moment of conversion.

Here we come to the second element of Sayers' esthetic. Sayers defined Christian art as being mimetic of the Incarnation. When Christ came down to Earth it was the Word made flesh. Christian art is the Word re-presented in image, though this image was not necessarily a painting. Christian art was able to define the dislocated sense of self in

[147]Dorothy L. Sayers, "Toward a Christian Esthetic," in *The Whimsical Christian 18 Essays by Dorothy L. Sayers* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1978), 73-91.

a way that secular art could not because Christian art was the presentation of timeless religious truths or Creeds in acceptable and contemporary historical clothing. For these truths to be understandable and engaging, they had to be accessible and beautiful. To accomplish this, Sayers took poetic liberties with Dante's text. She had to make her "whirlwinds much more whizzy" so that Divine Truth presented by Dante was available to the modern audience.[148]

The first element of Sayers' esthetic, detailing the role of art in the process of conversion, is represented in the *Divine Comedy* by the two figures Virgil and Beatrice. The character Virgil in the *Divine Comedy* wore many hats. He was at times the embodiment of Reason, or empire, or the triumph of human intellect, to name but a few. For Sayers he was the embodiment of secular art that led one from natural reason to the dislocated sense of self, but no further. Sayers admitted Virgil's inadequacy as being man without Christ. But she allowed for this role of secular art as an important step towards God. In the *Divine Comedy* Virgil literally led Dante the pilgrim to the point of the dislocated will. Sayers' Christian esthetic was founded on the role of secular art aiding in the overall conversion process. By this understanding, it is evident why Sayers saw herself as more "Virgil than Beatrice."[149] While Sayers was invested in helping her audience come to faith, she was unable or unwilling to participate actively in their conversion moment. We know this from the construction of the gap and her rejection of

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[148]Dorothy L. Sayers to Charles Williams, No date, but before December 21, 1944, *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers Volume 3: 1944-1950 A Noble Daring,* ed. Barbara Reynolds (Cambridge: The Dorothy L. Sayers Society Carole Green Publishing, 1998), 116.

[149] Dorothy L. Sayers to John Wren-Lewis, Good Friday, march 1954, *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers Volume 4: 1951-1957 In The Midst of Life,* ed. Barbara Reynolds (Cambridge: The Dorothy L. Sayers Society Carole Green Publishing, 2000), 137.

sentiment. She separated herself from the emotional moment of conversion by divorcing traditional sentiment from faith. Virgil played an invaluable role as secular art. He spoke to those who did not have the framework for defining the dislocated will in Christian terms.[150] This is what Sayers meant when she wrote that one can be deaf to Beatrice but receptive to Virgil.[151] When in the beginning of the *Inferno*, Dante "...woke to find myself in a dark wood,/Where the right road was wholly lost and gone/...How I got into it I cannot say,/ Because I was so heavy and full of sleep/ When first I stumbled from the narrow way;" it was the poet from Mantua and not Beatrice who saved him.[152] A non-Christian confronted with the Creeds or a religious work would have no context to understand its significance. This was the problem we saw created by Sayers' gap. Secular art was required to prime the viewer for Christian art by presenting the sense of dislocation. In the poem, Dante had lost his faith and found himself no longer on the "right road" but in darkness and confusion. He cannot say how he got there, but he has somehow lost the path to God. He communicated with Virgil (secular art and human reason) rather than Beatrice (Christian art and Divine Truth) initially. Through Virgil Dante was forced to confront his dislocated self, but could not yet understand it through Christian terms.

In "Toward a Christian Esthetic" (published the same year as her translation of *Purgatory*) Sayers gave the example of being in dialogue with the play *Agamemnon* by

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[150] Dorothy L. Sayers to C.S. Lewis, August 5, 1946, *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers Volume 3: 1944-1950 A Noble Daring*, ed. Barbara Reynolds (Cambridge: The Dorothy L. Sayers Society Carole Green Publishing, 1998), 255-57.
[151] Dorothy L. Sayers, "Dante's Virgil," *Further Papers on Dante* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), 66-7.
[152] Dante Alighieri, "Canto I," lines 2-12, *The Divine Comedy I: Hell*, trans. Dorothy L. Sayers (London: Penguin Group, 1949), 71.

Aeschylus (c. 525 BC- c. 456 BC). The play "is saying something—something important—something enormous…Being a true poet, he was true in his work—that is, his art was that point of truth in him that was true to the external truth, and only to be interpreted in terms of eternal truth." [153] This is obviously not a Christian play. Yet secular art has the potential to point to Christianity. Though Aeschylus' work did not represent the Divine Truth, it led to the initial sense of the dislocated will and so can be applied to Sayers' Christian esthetic. *Agamemnon*, like Virgil's *Aeneid*, could be interpreted as prophetic when placed within Sayers' esthetic because it bridged the first part of the gap.

It was here that the understanding of Dante was fruitful. In her essay "Dante's Virgil" Sayers claimed that

> the Virgil that Dante has drawn is of a piece with the Virgil of real life: he carries with him into eternity that sense…of frustration and insufficiency…Virgil is the best of all that Man by his own nature has and is; and it is not enough.
>
> It is not enough; but on the other hand it is fundamental. Nature itself is the work of Grace, and without Nature, Grace cannot operate…A man may be alienated from God and have sent his spiritual self to sleep, so that he is deaf to the voice of Beatrice, who is Grace…[there is hope if man can be reached] at the natural level: poetry, reason, traditional morality…But if he is deaf to the voice of Virgil, he is far lost indeed.[154]

Virgil was master to those like Dante and Statius who (in the *Comedy* at least) had not yet embraced Christian truth. This is the historical Virgil who was later vested with a quasi-

[153] Sayers, "Toward a Christian Esthetic," 82-83.
[154] Sayers, "Dante's Virgil," 66-7.

prophetic nature in the foretelling of the coming of Christ by some accounts.[155] But the historical Virgil was also a pagan. He did not share in the benefit of the Resurrection and therefore cannot be in Paradise. His moral humanism was, from Dante's perspective, insufficient. He was heralded as the greatest of men but that could not make up for his lack of faith in Christ. Nevertheless, both Sayers and Dante indicate that this secular reason played a part in the journey to faith. It was the first part of her Christian intellectual structure. But the secular nature was insufficient to explain the dislocation. It fostered intellectual understanding, but it could not replace the emotionally charged moment of conversion. Rather it brought the audience to a point where they could be receptive to Christian art and the truth that it expressed. Sayers even said that though man may be unable to hear the Christian truth, he can still "hear" art at the natural level. The natural level is clearly the secular level. Those with no knowledge of Christian theology or direct religious experience had effectively sent their "spiritual selves to sleep" and therefore could not be woken by the unknown entity of Grace or conversion. They required secular art to point them to the uncomfortable awareness of the dislocated will.

Though credited with a prophetic nature Virgil alone was unable to take Dante the pilgrim all the way to the moment of conversion. Virgil's purpose therefore, had to be in concert with the transforming power of Christian art in order to facilitate conversion. Sayers' interpretation of Virgil illustrated the first stage of her two-part esthetic coming

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[155] Dorothy L. Sayers, notes on "Canto XXII," lines 70-72, Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy II: Purgatory,* trans. Dorothy L. Sayers (London: Penguin Group, 1955), 245.

to fruition in the stage of Christian art. Dante expressed this poetically, through the voice of Statius. In *Purgatory* Canto XXII Statius declared that Virgil

> wast as one who, travelling, bears by night
> A lantern at his back, which cannot leaven
> His darkness, yet he gives his followers light.
>
> "To us," thou saidst, "a new-born world is given,
> Justice returns, and the first age of man,
> And a new progeny descends from Heaven."
>
> Poet through thee, through thee a Christian[156]

Sayers noted that part of the above quotation, taken from "Virgil's Fourth Eclogue" was most likely originally written for the birth of Octavian's son but had been taken by early Christians as Virgil's prophecy of Christ.[157] Though Virgil could not see "the light," Statius and Dante credited him with leading them to faith. The light of Christ came chronologically after Virgil, thus he was unable to see it (the lantern was at his back). But through Virgil's intervention, the pilgrim could be rendered ready for the fundamental truth of creation expressed by art and poetry, which would lead one to God.

If Sayers and Virgil, as unorthodox and secular Christians, lead to the point of the dislocated will, then Beatrice as Christian art and faith fostered conversion and an understanding of Divine Truth. She represented the second stage and the fulfillment of Sayers' esthetic. In Sayers' construction with the gap, her audience needed to be primed with secular art in order to be receptive to Christian art such as her play *The Just*

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[156] Dante Alighieri, "Canto XXII," lines 67-73, *The Divine Comedy II: Purgatory*, trans. Dorothy L. Sayers (London: Penguin Group, 1955), 242.
[157] Dorothy L. Sayers, notes on "Canto XXII," lines 70-72, *Purgatory*, 245.

Vengeance. Without the awareness of the dislocated self, her Christian play would have little power for her pre-conversion Christians because they lacked the tools to understand. Aeschylus, like Virgil, did not see the light of the eternal truth because he wrote before Christ, yet his work pointed towards the re-presented Image because it led to knowledge of the dislocated will. This dialogue with secular art made the participant aware of a truth and aware of the dislocated will.[158] They were aware of *a* truth (the dislocation) not *the* truth (that is sin). The definite knowledge of the dislocation as sin and separation required Christian art. This is ostensibly the point in the *Comedy* where Virgil gave Dante over to Beatrice; Reason has done its part in leading man to Redeeming Love.[159] Beatrice, as Christian art and the second stage of the esthetic had the ability to engender conversion. Virgil was unable to do so and Sayers was unwilling. Both required the second step of Christian art and the strict definition and transformative power of the dislocated will it brought. In her "Commentaries" on Canto XXVIII, the entrance into the Earthly Paradise and the Sacred Forest in *Purgatory*, Sayers called this sense of dislocation nostalgia or homesickness, a "dim racial memory of Paradise before the Fall" which "belongs to Man's *nature;*" and as such is available to Christians and non-Christians. She wrote that by naming it homesickness "we are unwittingly calling [the sense of unease] by [its] right name, for [it] quite literally arise[s] from Man's longing for

[158] Sayers, "The Man of Men," 57.
[159] Dante, "Canto XXVII" lines 128-130, *Purgatory*, "Thou hast beheld, my son, and reached a place/ Where, of myself, no further I discern./ I've brought thee here by wit and by address;" to which her "Commentary" explains "When the stain of sin is purged, and love set in order, the wisdom and skill of human reason are no longer needed for right conduct, because love is then fulfilling of the law," 287-88.

his true and original home."[160] When Dante, after Virgil leaves him with Beatrice, is confronted with this "homesickness," he is overcome with the enormity of his sin.

The transformation of the dislocated will into the clearly defined recognition of sin was the second stage of Sayers' esthetic. This second stage illustrated the purpose of Christian art which is to reveal the Divine Truth of the Incarnation. In *Purgatory* Canto XXXI, Beatrice confronted Dante with his sin. She refigured the dislocated will, calling it sinfulness and separation from God. In her introduction to the Canto, Sayers wrote "Under the weight of Beatrice's reproaches, Dante breaks down and confesses his guilt, and is so overcome that he faints away. He recovers consciousness to find that he is being drawn across Lethe by the Lady (Matilda), who plunges his head into the stream so that he drinks the water."[161] In the poem, Sayers translated this as "And, scarcely steady yet, mine eyes saw too/ Beatrice.../Such nettles of remorse stung me thereon/ That of all other objects of my love/ I hated most what I'd most doted on;/ And gnawing self-reproach my heart so clove,/ I swooned and sank;..."[162] Dante the pilgrim was confronted by the newly defined sin. Christian art (Beatrice) facilitated his conversion through baptism in the river Lethe. He had previously accepted his sinfulness and separation and was then able to accept the Divine Truth following his conversion. It can be argued that at this moment, and not before with Virgil, was Dante ready for the creedal truth of the Incarnation. In the *Comedy*, Christian insight was brought by Beatrice. Christian art,

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[160] Sayers, note on "Canto XXVIII," line 136, *Purgatory*, 296.
[161] Sayers, "The Story: Canto XXXI," *Purgatory*, 315.
[162] Dante, "Canto XXXI" lines 79-89, *Purgatory*, 317.

unlike secular art, was explicit in its mimetic nature of the Incarnation, of the Word made image.

The knowledge of Christian art's presentation of the Incarnation explained why Sayers could be loose with the language of Dante without losing the mimetic power. Sayers wrote that "what artists chatter about to the world and to one another is not as a rule their art but the technique of their art…a great artist will produce great art, even though the esthetic of the time may be hopelessly inadequate to explain it."[163] Sayers did not speak about the technique of creating her art. She spoke of the reason for art. Because of de-Christianization and secularization, once commonly held truths became irrelevant. Art was a victim of this. It was no longer explicit that secular art was prophetic and Christian art's mimetic powers were crippled. Contemporary society lacked the tools to read and understand Dante's *Divine Comedy* as was originally intended. Without a set esthetic or philosophy, all art was liable to become lost in conversations about the methods used to create it without ever touching upon its inherent truth.

This second stage of Sayers' Christian esthetic claimed that art and theology naturally co-existed. Dante's *Divine Comedy* as a whole was an example of the fusion of theology and art, or dogma and drama as Sayers called it. But the character of Beatrice exemplified this role for Dante the pilgrim. Sayers called Beatrice, "the vehicle of the Glory – the earthly vessel in which the divine experience was carried... [she] has become

[163] Sayers, "Toward a Christian Esthetic," 75-6.

for [Dante] the God-bearing image, the revelation of the presence of God."[164] Beatrice was the fulfillment of Sayers' Christian esthetic. She re-presented the image of God and bore the revelation of the Incarnation. But like contemporary Christian art, she could not be viewed and understood without aid because the power she carried was lost in translation. Her audience spoke a different language and needed an interpreter or an updated version. In her essay "The Image of God" Sayers wrote that

> it is to the creative artist that we should naturally turn for an opinion of what is meant by those creedal formulas that deal with the nature of the creative mind…Poets have, indeed, often communicated in their own mode of expression truths identical with the theologians' truth; but just because of the difference in the mode of expression, we often fail to see the identity of the statements. The artist does not recognize that the phrases of the creeds purport to be observations of fact about the creative mind as such…while theologians, limiting the application of the phrases to the divine Maker, neglects to inquire of the artists what light be can be thrown upon them from his own immediate apprehension of truth.[165]

Sayers' understanding of the role of art as it connected with theology was the ground for her esthetic. Secular art (read Virgil) worked with Christian art (read Beatrice) because the two were not incompatible.[166] Both worked towards the same idea (presenting the Image of God) but used different methods. Secular art was the implicit expression of this Christian truth of which theology was the explicit explanation. What Sayers advocated was an intentionality of artistic form which promoted the meaning or the Word. Dante had rejected the sonnet in favor of the *terza rima*.[167] Likewise Sayers choose Dante's

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[164] Sayers, "The Greater Images," *Hell*, 68.
[165] Dorothy L. Sayers, "The Image of God," *The Whimsical Christian 18 essays by Dorothy L. Sayers* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1978), 120-1.
[166]Dante , "Canto XXX," lines 49-51, *Purgatory*, "But Virgil – O he had left us, and we stood/ Orphaned of him; Virgil, dear father, most/ Kind Virgil I have me to for my soul's good;" 308.
[167] Teodolina, Barolini, "Dante and the lyric past," *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, ed. Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). 14-34.

original rhyme scheme over traditional verse translations. In Sayers' mind Dante synthesized art and theology, which was one reason she immersed herself in the translation of his work; because he expressed the truth in the best way possible.

The centrality of the Incarnation for Sayers leads us to an understanding of her reasoning behind her "inaccurate" translation. Because the power of the Incarnation had been lost, it became Sayers' prerogative to alter the language of Dante's text, in order to retrieve and reestablish the Incarnation as found in the original Italian, and reproduce it in 20th-century English. Sayers was aware of the need to update the language at the expense of academic integrity. She utilized one technical aspect of the Dante translation, the *terza rima* and focused on making that into English rather than explaining to her reader the subtlety of allegory. Likewise, she "consulted from time to time most of the great critical texts from Lana to Vandelli" for her *Comedy* translation without hampering the reader with the nuances of her contemporaries.[168] The emphasis was on her audience, especially the younger generation of readers to "have an interpretation that is relevant to their confused souls now."[169] Sayers felt it was ineffective to swamp them in "'the mediaeval outlook', or the development of literary form, or the history of the *trecento* – all of which is much more remote from them, really, than the 'allegorical, moral and anagogical'. It's all right to tell the world about 'the poetry of Dante'...But all the same, people must be

[168] Bray, 66.
[169]Dorothy L. Sayers to Charles Williams, May 9, 1945, *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers Volume 3: 1944-1950 A Noble Daring*, ed. Barbara Reynolds (Cambridge: The Dorothy L. Sayers Society Carole Green Publishing, 1998), 142.

given some clue to what it's all *about.*"[170] Sayers intentionally decided to focus on the essence of Dante's meaning by concentrating on the poetry. Sayers was committed to producing a clear articulation of the meaning of the *Comedy* which she emphasized through the artistry of Dante's work. Dante was for Sayers the most important Christian poet because his literary artistry exposed a profound truth and thereby expressed the Image of God. God the Son manifested himself in human form (became Incarnate) the Word then became Image (or flesh). In this a fundamental and sacred truth was expressed, that of Man's salvation. Art therefore reflected not only creation in general but, if studied along the lines of a Christian sense of beauty, should offer a glimpse of the Word made Image. Because humans are of finite understanding and "speak about something of which we have direct experience, we must think by analogy or refrain from thought. It may be perilous, as it must be inadequate, to interpret God by analogy with ourselves, but we are compelled to do so; we have no other means of interpreting anything." [171] God is infinite and the creator and originator of all things. Sayers was aware (and whether others share her particular awareness is left to be decided) that there was no set or enduring "Christian esthetic – no Christian philosophy of the arts."[172] She argued that there was a lack of continuity regarding the purpose of art in religion; as if the Church was lacking a definite artistic creed. Her translation was aimed at echoing Dante's poetic artistry. This intentionality was the central goal of which her critics were unaware or ignored. The outside debate did not matter; indeed she said as much in the

[170] Dorothy L. Sayers to Charles Williams, May 9, 1945, *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers Volume 3: 1944-1950 A Noble Daring*, ed. Barbara Reynolds (Cambridge: The Dorothy L. Sayers Society Carole Green Publishing, 1998), 142, her italics.
[171] Sayers, "The Image of God," 115; 118.
[172]Sayers, "Toward a Christian Esthetic," 74.

introduction to her translation by writing "The ideal way of reading *The Divine Comedy* would be to start at the first line and go straight through to the end, surrendering to the vigour of the story-telling and the swift movement of the verse, and not bothering about any historical allusions or theological explanations which do not occur in the text itself."[173] The scholarship surrounding the *Divine Comedy* was irrelevant to Sayers because it did not appreciate the beauty of the craft. This was reflective of Sayers' disregard for theological debates that questioned the universality and validity of the Creeds. To her they were superfluous and detracted from the truths that each work revealed.

By her own admission, Sayers' translation of Dante could not be accomplished with deference to the literal accuracy of the translation over the meaning of the work. In a letter to Charles Williams, a noted Dante scholar and the force behind Sayers' translation, she argued: "No doubt [the editor of Penguin Classics] takes the subject of the *Comedy* to be [merely the state of the soul after death]. But what is the use of presenting Penguin readers – or any reader nowadays – with the interpretation *literaliter?* [Latin: in the literal sense.] It means nothing in their young lives. They must see it [the *Comedy*] as the journey within the soul."[174] Only this way would Dante become intelligible to the majority of her readers. Her translation made concessions in order that the meaning behind the words could be more easily appreciated. Its textual imperfections were the result of what she saw as a greater purpose. The decision to place clarity of

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[173] Bray, 9.

[174]Dorothy L. Sayers to Charles Williams, May 9, 1945, *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers Volume 3: 1944-1950 A Noble Daring,* ed. Barbara Reynolds (Cambridge: The Dorothy L. Sayers Society Carole Green Publishing, 1998), 141.

meaning over academic authenticity obviously had it drawbacks as well as its advantages. Sayers admitted to being

> ...somewhat eclectic in my choice of [academic] reading, not infrequently preferring the version which appeared to me to make the better sense or the better poetry to that supported by a greater numerical weight of manuscript authority.
>
> My notes and comments make no pretense to original scholarship or research. Where scholars disagree I sometimes offer alternative versions and sometimes silently made my own choices...[175]

It might be tempting to see this merely as poetic license on Sayers' part. It was viewed as such by those who focused on the technical aspects of the poem rather than the truth of the Incarnation that was expressed with literary artistry. The central importance of the Incarnation was the go ahead for Sayers to play fast and loose with the language. In her mind, if the central truth was lost, the linguistic accuracy was worthless because it did not express the Divine Truth.

Though Sayers mostly ignored the scholarly debate, her willingness to sacrifice precise translation for her esthetic purposes can be seen as an intervention in one of the central Dante debates of the period: the so-called "allegory debate." While the "allegory debate" is very complicated and a detailed account lies outside the scope of this paper, in brief we can say that it focused on the question of how to read Dante's *Divine Comedy*. This question had been contentious since Dante's introduction of the dueling terms "Allegory of Theologian" and "Allegory of Poet" in his *Convivio* and his *Letter to Cangrande.* In a very basic sense the "allegory of the poets" meant reading *the Comedy*

[175] Sayers, Introduction to *The Divine Comedy I: Hell*, by Dante Alighieri, 66.

as a straight allegory. In contrast, the "allegory of the theologians" assigned the *Comedy* a prophetic Christian meaning and the poem took on the status of a quasi-sacred text.[176] The *Convivio* (begun in the early 1300s) was written after Dante's *Vita Nuova*, a series of love poems and commentary in the form of sonnets and canzoni or song. The *Convivio* was an attempt to replace the love and devotion of a woman, namely Beatrice, with love of Knowledge and Lady Philosophy. It was in the *Convivio* that Dante began to define, albeit ambiguously, the two types of allegory: literal and allegorical.[177] In his *Letter to Cangrande* (dating roughly in the 1310s) Dante continued to define the different ways his work could be read. He wrote that

> For the elucidation therefore, of what we have to say, it must be understood that the meaning of the work is not of one kind only; rather the work may be described as "polysemous", that is, having several meanings; for the first meaning is that which is conveyed by the letter, and the next is that which is conveyed by what the letter signified; the former of which is called literal, while the latter is called allegorical, or mystical...
>
> ...The subject, then of the whole work, taken in the literal sense only, is the state of souls after death, pure and simple. For on and about that the argument of the whole work turns. If, however, the work be regarded from the allegorical point of view, the subject is man according as by his merits or demerits in the exercise of his free will he is deserving of reward or punishment by justice.[178]

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[176] John Freccero, "Introduction to Inferno," in *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, ed. Rachel Jacoff, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). 179-89. To get a more depth understanding of the debate contemporary to Sayers articles by Charles Singleton, John Hamilton Green and David Thompson listed in the bibliography.

[177] Dante used "allegorical" to encompass the mystical sense and to differentiate between the literal and historical senses.

[178] *Dante, the critical heritage, 1314(?) – 1870*, "Dante Alighieri, letter to Cangrande della Scala, 1314-17 or 1319-20," ed. Michael Caesar (London: Routledge, 1991), 93-4.

Dante stated that the poem could be read at two levels, the literal, that "which comes from the letter", and the figurative or allegorical, what was "signified by the letter."[179] The former is what one reads and the latter is the symbolic interpretation. He admitted that his work offered many senses of interpretation or was "polysemous." And while he offered simple examples of both readings he gave little advice on what he felt was the correct interpretation. For her part, Sayers felt that most people "shouldn't bother about them [the *Convivio* and letters], unless there is anything which helps to illuminate the D.C. [*Divine Comedy*]." [180] Sayers' refutation of the scholarly debate can be viewed as a contribution of sorts. By explicitly rejecting the scholarship of allegory she pointed to the imperative of language leading to the Word. For Sayers understanding the message was more essential than how the poem was read or understood by academics.

Though Sayers was not writing in a vacuum of Dante scholarship she felt the works unrelated to the *Comedy* and the discord they created among scholars were irrelevant to her readers. Sayers dealt with the academic debates surrounding Dante scholarship obliquely. In her letters, she gave no real indication of her opinion of the allegory debate, other than to ignore it. For Sayers the truth (the theology) that Dante expressed was done artistically and along the lines of the Christian esthetic which academics had overlooked and what she in her own small way was trying to decipher for

[179] *Dante, the critical heritage, 1314(?) – 1870*, section 7, 93.
[180] Dorothy L. Sayers letter to Marjorie Barber, August 4, 1945, *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers Volume 3: 1944-1950 A Noble Daring*, ed. Barbara Reynolds (Cambridge: The Dorothy L. Sayers Society Carole Green Publishing 1998), 156.

her audience.[181] For Sayers, who believed that her artist's tool of creativity were words, the meaning and power of the poem had to be expressed through the language of the poem.[182] Otherwise it no longer reflected the essential tenet of the Incarnation; it could no longer lead to an understanding of the dislocated will.[183] Her contemporary readers, particularly her younger audience, needed to have a Dante they could read. A popularized version that spoke of the enduring Christian truth clearly better expressed what the poem was *about* than academic language.

The importance of showing the Incarnation through the esthetic negated the need for this academic cluttered nuance and textual accuracy. The power of the poem was more important to disseminate than the accurate text. She wrote that "when Dante chooses to be sheerly beautiful...the translator has to give up the chase after perfection [and] erect, as best one can, a kind of sign-post to indicate 'Here is beauty; make haste to learn Italian, so that you may read it for yourself.'"[184] The manner in which she translated the *Comedy* and participated in academic debates surrounding Dante illustrated the application of her Christian intellectual esthetic. The *Comedy* was a vehicle to articulate her Christian esthetic. Sayers was not writing her translation for the academics. In her introduction to *The Divine Comedy 1: Hell* she admitted that

> as regards diction and syntax, I have interpreted liberally the phrase "in modern English" which applies to the present series of translations. The

[181] Dorothy L. Sayers to Marjorie Barber August 4, 1945, *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers Volume 3: 1945-1950 A Noble Daring*, ed. Barbara Reynolds, (Cambridge: The Dorothy L. Sayers Society Carole Green Publishing), 156.
[182] This is not to say that she dismissed tactile art as a lesser being. Rather her tools were words because she was a "verbal" artist.
[183]Tischler, 158.
[184] Sayers, Introduction to *The Divine Comedy I: Hell*, by Dante Alighieri, 64.

> vocabulary and the sentence-rhythms of verse are not, and never can be, exactly the same as those of contemporary prose. I have considered the whole range of intelligible English speech to be open to me, excluding [the archaic and incomprehensible] and up-to-the-minute slang. I have tried, that is, to steer a discreet middle course between Wardour Street and Hollywood, and to eschew: "Marry, quotha!" without declining upon "Sez you!"[185]

As with all things Sayers attempted to bring ancient texts into the language of England's 20th-century common man. She admitted that the translation would inevitably be different from the original because the poetry of the Italian can only be translated so well into English. But the point was that this is not an academic translation. Sayers felt that, like the Creeds, the *Comedy* was not meant solely for academia. The work was ready for popular consumption because it articulated a fundamental Christian truth in a voice that spoke to the contemporary ear. The *Divine Comedy* linked with human reason to bridge the gap and define the dislocated will. In her "slap-dash" translation Sayers' Christian esthetic was the vehicle by which one could define the dislocated self and rectify the separation from God by furthering human knowledge with the knowledge of Divine Truth. It was quintessential Christian art.

[185] Sayers, Introduction to *The Divine Comedy I: Hell*, by Dante Alighieri, 60.

Conclusion

Dorothy L. Sayers was not your typical Anglo-Catholic. Her response to the widespread fragmentation and de-Christianization in England during and after World War II was peculiar and idiosyncratic. She held a very traditional orthodoxy that expressed itself in a non-traditional manner. Yet as we have seen, this allowed for her to express ideas about theology, Christianity and art in a way that was original and thought-provoking. She took pieces of pre-existing ideologies and fused them into a personal synthesis while rejecting tenets that were irrelevant to her purpose or blatantly incorrect in her mind. From the Anglo-Catholics, she used the emphasis on Creed and dogma to act as the rock-solid foundation. At the same time, she vehemently rejected the spirit of evangelism that Anglo-Catholics and other Anglican groups fostered. And while Sayers would spend a great deal of energy countering the postulates of religious Modernism, she took from them the necessity to rework the language of the Church to make it relevant and accessible to the contemporary generation. Unlike the Modernists, the meaning and the authority of the Creeds remained intact and universal, but she agreed with them that the mode of communication could be brought up to date.

Sayers would never have the following or the enduring fame of her contemporaries such as C.S. Lewis or T.S. Eliot. Though, along with Lewis, Eliot, W.H. Auden and Graham Greene, she was a member of the "growing band of heretics among modern intellectuals: an intellectual who believe[d] in God," she never gained the same

type of notoriety as her peers.[186] This is clear for two reasons. Without the beautiful/artistic, Sayers on her own was in a sense un-relatable to her audience because she was emotionally detached. She admitted that "the lack of religious emotion in me makes me impatient of it in other people, and makes me appear cold and unsympathetic and impersonal. This is true. I am."[187] But even this acceptance of an emotionless faith could not satisfy Sayers completely. She wrestled with the application of a purely intellectual faith and found that a religion solely of the mind was inadequate and impossible. Therefore, she looked to art to fill the gap that her construction of Christian teaching created by the rejection of sentiment. Yet her esthetic still required intellectual involvement. At a basic level, her theology required more active contemplation than the emotionally charged "myth" of Lewis and the overtly militarized evangelism of the Buchmanites. Hers was a more quiet faith and as a result received fewer acknowledgements. Secondly, the poor reception of her translation of Dante has done much to discredit her work. By ignoring the reason for her loose translation, scholars have only focused on the inaccuracies and relegated her non-Wimsey writings to a dark corner in the library.

The Incarnation was central to Sayers' understanding of art and its religious implications and applications. For Sayers, all secular art, that is art that was not explicitly Christian, had the potential to be prophetic and point towards Christian truth. Christian art was reflective of the Incarnation because it took thought and ideas and placed them in

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[186]Christopher Mitchell, "Making Doctrine Dance," *Christian History and Biography*, 88, (2005), 23.
[187] Dorothy L. Sayers to John Wren-Lewis, Good Friday, March 1954, *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers Volume 4: 1951-1957 In the Midst of Life*, ed. Barbara Reynolds (Cambridge: The Dorothy L. Sayers Society Carole Green Publishing, 2000), 137.

tangible visual form just as the Incarnation made the Word flesh. By creating art and experiencing art, the artist and audience re-presented the Image of God that is indwelling but distorted by sin and separation from God. The dislocated will defined by Christian art could be firmly called sin and the awareness of homesickness as she called it. By using the Creeds as the foundation of her Christian understanding and her esthetic we see the linking of the overarching theme of Sayers' work, from BBC broadcasts to *Divine Comedy*.

Sayers' work remains important though it was never as far reaching as she might have hoped. This failure can be partially explained by her very complicated understanding of faith. A purely intellectual faith is not easily communicable. The clarity of the Creeds and the readability of Dante are tangible portrayals of this intellectualism. The internalization of this construction of faith however is less easily apprehended. Even Sayers who vehemently rejected the need for sentiment in faith was aware of the necessity of something to overcome the gap. Art filled this role effectively for her audience. Her focus on the co-existent nature of art and theology was popular without question. But it stands to reason that the negative reception of her Dante translations, the majority of which were posthumously published, tarnished her effectiveness as a promoter of Christian intellectual faith and art. Sentiment and emotionally-charged moments are ubiquitous. C.S. Lewis, Frank Buchman and Billy Graham, to name a few, capitalized on this.[188] Sayers could not and did not. Her Christian work was accessible and readable. It touched the intellect. But even with art

[188]Randall, 180.

the lack of sentiment was less translatable than the visceral conversion moment. In this she was unable to reach her audience for more than a generation.

In this thesis, I have attempted to wipe the dust off of Sayers and bring her work out of the library's back corner. I have placed Sayers in a greater religious conversation and by doing so have challenged previous opinions and scholarship. Her dismissal of sentiment was peculiar. I freely admit this. And I also admit that this made her difficult for later generations to appreciate her out of context. But it was certainly not out of character in Sayers' larger body of works and indeed this is the very facet of her work that has been neglected. Sayers has for too long been placed in the scholastic sphere and her contribution viewed as imperfect. This is an inappropriate assessment of her work. The opinion of irrelevance was mutual between Sayers and academics. Scholars found her work impossible because it was to them unreadable. She found their assessment and dissemination of information highfalutin and impotent. Both had different audiences. I have attempted to point out that she was a proponent of intellectual Christianity that had a very specific audience. It is my assertion that we must regard Sayers in her appropriate light and study her work within the framework she used and not consign her to where she had no interest to reside.

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