

# (Re)forming Protestant Reproductive Ethics in Light of Lewis's Abolition of Man

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This article (re)considers Protestant (post)modern treatment of contraception. Using the 1930 Lambeth Conference and C. S. Lewis's *Abolition of Man* as primary touchstones, it proceeds with a theological and literary analysis to treat a topic that the Catholic Church's encyclical tradition resolutely settled in 1930 with *Casti Conubii* and subsequently deepened with the doctrinal developments of the 1968 encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. In evaluating this contraceptive dialectic, I draw on primary and secondary ecclesial and academic literatures to help Protestants take up the mantle and speak boldly where Lewis laid laudable groundwork but ultimately remained less resolute. The article's purpose is to help Protestant Christians in general—and Anglicans in particular—to reconsider present orthopraxical silences and laxities in reproductive ethics in light of wisdom gleaned from prior conciliar and cultural precedent.

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Was C. S. Lewis a Thomist? It's doubtful, but as an Oxbridge medievalist and congenial colleague of Catholics, it is unsurprising that Lewis's intellectual project of public philosophy shared in Thomas Aquinas's scholastic instinct. With detailed dialectics and an aesthetic concern for beauty, Lewis's work brought metaphysical matters into the living rooms of the laity. As a public intellectual, Lewis's competitive advantage was his ability to popularize otherwise opaque ideas to the many with magnanimity and magnificence. Inhabiting the greater degree of theological latitude afforded by his Anglican Communion, though, Lewis's writing sometimes demonstrates more comfort in declaring indecision (or even self-proclaimed amateurism) in contrast to Roman Catholic tradition, whose prelates more readily dogmatize particulars and assert

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epistemic certainty.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, in *Abolition of Man*, Lewis speaks with firm resolution as he forewarns with shrewdness the consequences of the actual anthropological demise of his mid-century Britain, especially as seen in the modernist intellectual ecologies that were seeking to sustain a particular pedagogical *topos*.

What is now known as *Abolition of Man* (henceforth: *Abolition*) began as a three-part lecture series that C. S. Lewis delivered at King's College Newcastle (UK) in late February of 1943. While the heady syllogisms and scholastic formulations of *Abolition* wow readers now, these were originally missed by the modernist intellectual mood of Anglo-erudition. The delayed positive reception of *Abolition* is, ironically, a self-fulfilling prophecy, given that the thrust of its central thesis indicted the intellectual incompetence of Lewis's historical moment. It is unsurprising, then, that *Abolition* is one of Lewis's best philosophical works—and supposedly one of his favorites. If the New Testament's 1 John summarizes the Johannine message, then *Abolition* can likewise be said to be a summary of Lewis's public philosophy, as well as of his general scholarly "project."<sup>3</sup> Comprising about seventy tightly packed paragraphs,<sup>4</sup> Lewis lacks levity and urgently carries a concerned *gravitas* throughout this work. Although *Abolition* is not known for its simplicity, Lewis's unequivocal oracle nevertheless reads with striking force and candor as it carries a germinated idea in chapter 1 to eventually unmask its insidiousness in full bloom by the book's end.

As is revealed by the conclusion of *Abolition*'s third and final lecture (chapter 3), these orations ultimately prove themselves to be authoritative anthropological commentary merely masquerading as pedagogical papers. *Abolition* was written in the relatively near wake of structural reforms that had come to supplant classical curriculums. For instance, the Western pedagogical zeitgeist addressed

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2 This deliberate, self-effacing ethos is seen in Lewis's *Mere Christianity* ("I'm no economist . . .") and his *Psalms Commentary* ("I'm no theologian . . ."). Lewis is likewise self-effacing in his epistolary correspondence with Fr. Giovanni Calabria; in Letter 18, Lewis admits to offering Fr. Giovanni mere *balbutiones*, offering an apology for the substance of his prose. This posture corroborates with Protestants' deliberate reservations on epistemic assertions, as seen in the institutional fallibility posited in Articles XX and XXI of the 39 Articles of Religion. Conceived charitably, Lewis's self-effacing moments across his work can be read as a type of intellectual hospitality intended to create lay accessibility coupled with his Protestant instinct to avoid authoritative unfalsifiability. Despite Lewis's characteristic confidence, close reading of Lewis betrays moments of the epistemic uncertainty that forms a hallmark of Protestant theology (see Chapter 31 of the Westminster Confession of Faith for another Protestant formulation of reason's subordination to revelation).

3 Walsh notes: "As Ward states, one could characterize *Abolition* as 'the philosophical theme of Lewis's output and his other work as its variations'" (Walsh 2021, 24).

4 Paragraph total can vary slightly depending on editorial organization.

in *Abolition* included the monumental decision of Harvard's then-president, Charles William Eliot (1869–1909), to inaugurate an “elective system” that effectively overhauled the centralized corpus of classical curriculums historically held to be emblematic of genuine education. This present study, however, is not primarily concerned with pedagogy, but with how Lewis's anthropology (especially in *Abolition*) negotiates with the surrounding Catholic and Anglican commentary on contraception.

Given that *Abolition* appears to align with the post-1930 Anglican Communion's more permissive spirit regarding contraception, this study considers how Lewis's reproductive discourse in *Abolition* can be a touchstone that gives an effective point of departure for Protestants who wish to further handle a contentious ethical matter so resolutely settled in Catholicism. Lewis's other writings reveal a conflicted conscience concerning contraception, and the consequence is a slight—yet not inconsequential—incoherence that obfuscates and substantively undermines his otherwise sound anthropological argument in *Abolition*. Thus, this present article uses various primary and secondary ecclesial and academic literatures to make a call for Protestants to reclaim and repurpose the natural law argumentation and scholastically minded logics of *Abolition* toward the (re?)making of a moral mosaic that effectively combines Lewis's dialectical directness with the substance of additional literatures and ecclesial precedent to speak with perspicuity concerning contraception. Doing this can help (re)align individual, familial, congregational, and corporate Protestant perspectives with the reproductive ethic seen in the substance of today's Catholic Church—and in the essence of classical (magisterial) Protestantism.

## **Textual Overview and Theoretical Significance**

The first chapter of *Abolition* begins with Lewis commenting on a simple observation about a line from a British high school textbook (which Lewis calls “The Green Book”) that relays an old tale about two boys who both observe the same waterfall. One boy calls it “sublime,” and the other, “pretty” (Lewis 1944, 2). Rather than making a distinction between these adjectives, as did Samuel Taylor Coleridge's work in the original story, the authors of this high school textbook (whom Lewis dubs “Gaius” and “Titius”) concede that both

qualitative descriptions for the cataract are valid and sound.<sup>5</sup> For Gaius and Titius, Lewis argues, truth lies not in inherent metaphysical qualities but rather in the caprices of individual perception. Proceeding with prophetic perspicacity, Lewis's tripartite treatise ("Men Without Chests," "The Way," and "The Abolition of Man") elaborates and evaluates the implications of these textbook authors' seemingly innocuous commentary about a waterfall. Throughout the course of this short, dense book, Lewis simultaneously develops and deconstructs this ostensibly benign pair of propositions ("sublime" vs. "pretty"), such that the little green book's atheistic thinking would, along with its materialistic, modernist authors, come crashing down on the rocks of reality. Propelled by the constant flow of natural law argumentation, Lewis ultimately lays bare the philosophical poverty and surprisingly perilous effects of ideas not governed by truth.<sup>6</sup>

Lewis proceeds with a fervor that matches the gravity of his message, wasting no time in lambasting these supposedly harmless comments on the cataract, building his thesis that such subjectivity in qualitative observation inculcates folly and creates malformed human creatures, whom he will later metonymically dub "urban blockheads," "trousered apes," "Conditioners," "Innovators," and most damning of all, "men without chests." These creatures, Lewis argues, are *not* mere caricatures. Following the vector of this relativistic thinking *will* engender humans who are "not human at all." According to Lewis, Coleridge, and nature herself, a waterfall is either sublime *in se*, or it is not. The natural world, which

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5 Modiano (1985) rightfully reminds us that this separation of cognition, sentiment, and objective reality is rooted in Kantian metaphysics.

6 If Lewis sounds "dramatic" in his elaboration and evaluation of the waterfall comments, then consider the first chapter of the epistle of St. James, whose causal logic chain between desire, sin, and death explain in Christian terms that evil seeds germinate, grow, and bear bad fruit. In this way, Augustine was not being scrupulous when he named his sinful depravity when reflecting on his robbing the pear tree of its fruit (*Confessions*, bk. 2). Any assertion that Lewis, Augustine, et al. get "bent out of shape" over peccadilloes loses sight of Christian teaching concerning the cumulative effect of sin. This meditative peculiarity is precisely what gives Lewis's method its magnificence and magnanimity; with argumentative force, Lewis pounces on a banal dialogue, adopts its *a priori* presuppositions, and builds the house of folly to the heights with all its rotten beams, until its foundation of sand fails, collapsing the faulty components of the empty enterprise. The "green book" is not alone in its feeble thinking or methods. Take, for instance, Lucy Bell's 2014 book, *The Latin American Short Story at Its Limits: Fragmentation, Hybridity and Intermediality* (Routledge), wherein the seeds of a seemingly benign and banal comment are likewise sown early in the text. Commenting on the literary technique of deliberate decadence in Mexican writer Juan Rulfo's short fiction, Bell notes: "Fragmentation is not only a negative symptom of decay, but also a deliberate artistic technique, which *potentiates new meanings, stories and relations*" (23, emphasis added). In Bell's defense, it is indeed a good task and perhaps even a Christian duty to engage in the deconstruction of systems or de-clawing of *caudillo* despots whose practice of everyday life has been bastardized by evil, and writing literature can be a meek way of saving humanity from itself. Nevertheless, in the case of Lewis's Gaius and Titius, and even Bell, a critical framework that does not comprise a clearly articulated teleology trussed to the transcendentals suffers the risk of metaphysical chaos, as seen in the so-called "new meanings" that Bell posits but ultimately neglects to define. As G. K. Chesterton quips in *Orthodoxy*, "We open our minds to close them on that which is true." Without clearly defined and objective metaphysical referents, meaning becomes subjective, and thus, meaningless. This is why the Lewisian leap to scrutinize the secondary school grammar text is neither scrupulous nor stodgy, but a justifiable, prudent, even live-saving task.

includes humanity, bears indelible, inalienable characteristics, and those who seek to undo or otherwise undermine this nature, or this “natural law,” inevitably scheme their own demise. Stepping outside of natural law leads to, as the title suggests, “the abolition of man.”

To appreciate the Oxbridge don’s mastery, it is worth noting two brilliant moves our author makes in constructing his argument. First, Lewis posits his critique in an “observational” mode. By rooting his critique in an outside textbook, Lewis initially avoids an authoritarian air which might have otherwise stultified the secular, egalitarian sensibilities of his academic audience. Walter Benjamin picks up on these secular sensibilities in his 1936 essay “The Storyteller,” wherein he describes the decline of a didactic, authoritative voice, arguing that such a communicative mode had lost its potency in the intellectual ecology of modernity. Thus, in critiquing an extant text not his own, Lewis plays a role most palpable to the modern mood: that of the curious and highly concerned observer.

Second, Lewis argues with, for, and along the lines of natural law, promoting its use in public and private thinking, yet he uses the nomenclature of the *Tao*, an Asian philosophical corollary, as a surreptitious pseudonym for his moral metric. In appealing to a cosmopolitan conscience beyond the borders of the Anglosphere and outside the walls of Western civilization, Lewis avoids allegations of “hegemonic Eurocentrism” while simultaneously upholding the essence of his allegedly narrow “Western logics.” Yet, Lewis knew what the ancients discovered, that truth indiscriminately manifests itself wherever it may be found, whether in Oriental or Occidental idiom. Lewis risks nothing in outsourcing his cultural catechesis to the vocabulary of the pagan East; the *Tao* ultimately works because, as natural law posits (and proves), truth is not a substance limited to philosophical containment. Rather, truth travels along an unbroken thread of wisdom that, whether within the Acropolis or along the Silk Road, winds through places, ages, and spaces with remarkable malleability.

## **Close Reading of *Abolition* and Commentary**

The mention of contraception in *Abolition* first appears as an evaluative aside in chapter 2. Lewis lays out the reality and practical poverty of modernity’s unmoored subjectivism in chapter 1, and in chapter 2 he further elaborates the impoverished epistemology of the secular materialists who support such subjective sophistry. Lewis proposes that these secular sophists, whom he calls

"Innovators,"<sup>7</sup> purport to operate not under the universal *Tao* but under a paradigm of innate urges, which Lewis calls "Instinct." In our author's day, the attitude of the Innovators was manifested in "moderately educated young men of the professional classes during the period between the two wars." Lewis posits that these Innovators, unable to commit to an objective set of values, look instead to the "preservation of the species" (rather than the *Tao*) as their reductionistic *raison d'être*. Awash with an utter immanence governed by no transcendent frame, these Innovators' shrunken souls would surely stagger along the inelastic grass of *The Great Divorce's* imagined purgatory.

Lewis explains, however, that Innovators, having abandoned the *Tao*, articulate "no instinctive urge to keep promises or to respect individual life," and because of this, the pragmatic Innovators follow an alternative governing god, "Instinct" (33). This Instinct ostensibly creates conditions wherein the traditional sexual morality expressed within the *Tao* "can be properly swept away when they conflict with our real end, the preservation of the species" (33). In other words, Instinct ultimately seeks its own survival, and it does so at the cost of the *Tao*. Further evaluating the Innovators' sexual ethic, Lewis continues:

That, again, is why the modern situation permits and demands a new sexual morality: the old taboos served some real purpose in helping to preserve the species, but *contraceptives have modified this* and we can now abandon many of the taboos. For of course sexual desire, being instinctive, is to be gratified whenever it does not conflict with the preservation of the species. It looks, in fact, as if an ethics based on instinct will give the Innovator all he wants and nothing that he does not want. In reality we have not advanced one step. (33–34, emphasis added)

Here, Lewis's satirical aside impersonates the Innovators and derides the burial of the *Tao's* taboos. In a passing comment, Lewis cites contraception's ability to modify (read: separate) the recreative and procreative qualities of coitus. The contraceptive, in this section, serves as an operative actant to push forward the premise that Innovators are guided by a whimsical, ever-wandering Instinct that functions *a priori* outside of the *Tao*. This contraception comment comprises a

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7 Critics lack consensus on whether Lewis, by employing an uppercase letter in "Innovators" and thus covering them with a "blanket of anonymity," is dealing generously or dismissively with the subjects of his criticism (Ward 2021, 92–93).

lesser datum within a greater syllogism that ultimately bows to serve the greater and separate philosophical purpose of chapter 2: Man's arbitrary instinct cannot and must not be trusted. Because the paragraph concludes that "we have not advanced one step," it follows that Lewis's comment on birth control could be read as didactic and directive, not merely descriptive. Regardless, Lewis here lays philosophical groundwork upon which one could continue constructing a sexual ethic aligned with the Catholic viewpoint—or even the historically Anglican viewpoint, given the rejection of contraception in the 1908 and 1920 Lambeth Conferences.

In 1930, however, the seventh Lambeth Conference convened and made slight contraceptive concessions. First held in 1867, the Lambeth Conference is the Anglican Communion's effort toward ecumenical synodality, wherein bishops gather about once a decade to address matters of faith, doctrine, and mission. Lambeth 1930 touched on a variety of topics, including youth involvement, race relations, peace, Christian ecumenism, and women's roles in ministry, among others. Its Resolutions 9 through 20 treated the topic of marriage, a not-insignificant portion of the total seventy-five resolutions. With the advent, access, and application of contraceptives in the decades preceding Lambeth 1930, the topic was unsurprisingly a topic of debate. In continuity with conciliar precedent, the appointed committee overseeing Resolution 14 wrote patently toward what Littlejohn might call a "Protestant pronatalism,"<sup>8</sup> vigorously asserting (emphasis added):

The [1930 Lambeth] Conference affirms:

1. the *duty of parenthood* as the *glory of married life*;
2. the *benefit of a family as a joy in itself*, as a vital contribution to the nation's welfare, and as a means of *character-building for both parents and children*;
3. the *privilege* of discipline and *sacrifice* to this end.

Despite this joyful championing of the duties and sacrifices of parenthood and the conclusions of the 1908 and 1920 Lambeth Conferences, the 1930 Conference's subsequent Resolution 15 followed with a small yet significant concession:

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<sup>8</sup> I borrow the term "Protestant pronatalism" from Brad Littlejohn, "Toward a Protestant Pronatalism," *Commonwealth*, June 5, 2024, <https://adfontesjournal.com/commonwealth/toward-a-protestant-pronatalism/>.

*Where there is clearly felt moral obligation to limit or avoid parenthood, the method must be decided on Christian principles. The primary and obvious method is complete abstinence from intercourse (as far as may be necessary) in a life of discipline and self-control lived in the power of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless in those cases where there is such a clearly felt moral obligation to limit or avoid parenthood, and where there is a morally sound reason for avoiding complete abstinence, the Conference agrees that other methods may be used, provided that this is done in the light of the same Christian principles. The Conference records its strong condemnation of the use of any methods of conception control from motives of selfishness, luxury, or mere convenience.* (emphasis added)

With 193 favorable votes surpassing its oppositional 67, Resolution 15 passed, affording Lewis an epistemic aperture to part from the Catholic viewpoint. This was due in large part to the influence of Anglican Bishop Theodore Woods's conviction that, as Moeller describes it, "a shift in the Church's position on birth control was necessary to protect and advance higher-ordered moral teachings on marriage, procreation and sex" (2024, 109). Seeking to craft a compelling and seeker-sensitive reproductive ethic, Bishop Woods "believed that the qualified approval of birth control would furnish the Church with the needed moral authority to combat unChristian teachings and convince the middle and upper classes to live out their God-ordained purpose of serving the state through rearing large families" (Moeller 2024, 98).<sup>9</sup>

The Catholic position on contraceptives was already being articulated in 1930, concomitant to Lambeth. Even before Pope John Paul II's well-known "theology of the body" came along and built on Pope Paul VI's prophetic *Humanae Vitae* (1968), Pope Pius XI condemned reproductive barriers in his encyclical *Casti Connubii* (1930), wherein chapter 54 states: "But no reason, however grave, may be put forward by which anything intrinsically against nature may become conformable to nature and morally good. Since, therefore, the conjugal act is

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<sup>9</sup> Moeller further elaborates Bishop Woods's reasoning, identifying the cunning and compromising nature of the logics Woods employed in his effort to uphold the ethical *ethos* of the Anglican Communion. Moeller critiques Woods's pragmatic approach for how it elevates perception over analytic and theological truth: "In this way, the cautious approval of birth control at the 1930 Lambeth Conference can be understood as an attempt by Woods to enact a nationwide fertility-manipulation scheme" (2024, 98).

destined primarily by nature for the begetting of children, those who in exercising it deliberately frustrate its natural power and purpose sin against nature and commit a deed which is shameful and intrinsically vicious.”

Given that the original hearers of Lewis's *Abolition* manuscript in 1943 would have presumably been a predominantly academic audience comprising atheists or Anglican-minded Christians, Lewis's listeners would have likely lacked the stigma surrounding contraceptives that would have guided the consciences of a Vatican audience. Thus, it is not improper to read *Abolition*'s two treatments of contraceptives in light of Lewis's socioreligious zeitgeist. As was indicated in chapter 2 and will be seen in chapter 3 of *Abolition*, the mentions of contraception ultimately play a role that is not only minor, but also more descriptive and less evaluative, in the work's greater argumentation. Despite the work's landmark logic carried along by a cascade of coherence, Lewis's discourses on contraception ultimately lack what Tandy has called the “rhetoric of certitude” (2009) so commonly seen in Lewis's nonfiction.

In chapter 3, Lewis begins to build the case that man's domination over nature ironically ends with some men using the natural world to dominate (or, abolish) other men *if and only if* those who dominate insist on operating outside of the *Tao*. Thus, without the *Tao*, technological advance not merely potentiates but necessitates that “Each new power won *by* man is a power *over* man as well. Each advance leaves him weaker as well as stronger.” To advance this, Lewis selects three technological developments whereby man has dominated nature: the aeroplane, the wireless (or, the radio), and contraceptives. Elia explains these seemingly eclectic choices: “Ultimately, all of these are examples of attempts of ‘man’ becoming subjective creatures, creatures trying to take control of their environments, their universes” (2018, 57). Lewis's choices are not random; Myers explains how each entity in the triple chain relates back to Nazi Germany's domination of humanity: *Aeroplanes* dropped bombs, the *wireless* broadcasted propaganda, and *contraceptives* aided Aryan eugenics (cited in Ward 2021, 152).

Ward asserts in his authoritative textual gloss that Lewis, despite his outstanding legacy and acumen, fumbled his way through this third lecture in general, and this section in particular. Ward opines: “This final chapter as a whole is, in my view, the least successful part of the book. The logical progressions and the manner of expression are less carefully and skillfully managed than in the previous chapters. There are moments of unclarity and infelicity, as we shall see,” which leads Ward to further query Lewis's “surprisingly high quotient of glitches in this

chapter” (2021, 151). Yet, Lewis’s argument is predicated on a descriptive (not evaluative) quality of these three technologies, leaving Ward with the opinion that “he [Lewis] spends insufficient time making it clear that these three things are not necessarily bad” (154).

For the sake of argument, though, Lewis is trying to explain what happens when chapter 2’s Innovators become what he calls “a race of conditioners who really can cut out all posterity in what shape they please.” These Conditioners are the ones who take Lewis’s three ostensibly morally neutral technological developments (*Casti Connubii* notwithstanding) and use them in air raids, for populist rhetoric, and to prevent the future fertilization of generations of entire ethnic groups. It is possible that Lewis employs contraceptives here as a salient synecdoche for the Nazis’ biopolitical dominance over Jews, blacks, Gypsies, homosexuals, Slavs, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and the physically and mentally handicapped. Descriptively, though, contraception functions in the chapter 3 argument to show that when Conditioners employ contraceptives (i.e., eugenics, condoms, forced sterilization) outside the logics of natural law, or the *Tao*, “there is a paradoxical, negative sense in which all possible future generations are the patients or subjects of a power wielded by those already alive” (Ward 2021, 55).

The primary problem concerns the substance of the argument. Lewis’s positioning of contraceptives alongside neutral technologies is problematic, Ward argues, because “Even if we overlook the historical weakness of the example, it is a poorly chosen example on moral grounds to put alongside the aeroplane and the wireless” (155). Indeed, the third example of the set presents an ethical red herring for both Catholic and historical Anglican readers, necessitating a temporary suspension of belief to adequately follow Lewis’s logics. Whereas the airplane and radio broadcast are ethically neutral entities, the synodal soundscapes of English and Roman Christianity in 1930 lead Ward to accurately state: “Contraception is, in and of itself, a morally debatable practice in a way that air travel and broadcasting are not” (155).

The “aeroplane et al.” argument, though, eventually lands within the lines of sound logic as Lewis warns of the folly of “the Conditioners,” who are but a progressively devolved race of Innovators: “we shall get at last a race of conditioners [*sic*] who really can cut out all posterity into what shape they please” (60). In the end, Conditioners who operate outside the *Tao* are tyrants regardless of the tools they touch; pencils do not misspell words and guns do not kill people. Nevertheless, for this introductory argument of chapter 3 to work—namely, that

some men create technological developments that are used to exert some form of positive or negative control over other men—Lewis's readers must read within the contraceptive permissibility of the 1930 Lambeth Conference's Resolution 15. Thus, it is not possible for a Catholic or a pre-1930 Anglican to follow the argument in full; doing so would require at least a temporary suspension of belief. Ward is not being uncharitable when he writes, "I think it is not being unduly harsh to state that this whole passage concerning 'the aeroplane, the wireless, and the contraceptive' gets Lewis's third lecture off to a notably poor start" (156).

Whether deliberate or not, Lewis followed the spirit of Resolution 14 in *Abolition* chapter 2 and played with the apertures of Resolution 15 in *Abolition* chapter 3. Regardless, although *Abolition* clouds Lewis's true view on contraception, his prose is otherwise salient and speaks for itself; if the Reformed are right that "Scripture interprets Scripture," then so also can it be said that "Lewis illuminates Lewis." *That Hideous Strength*, the third work of his space trilogy, offers a fictional landscape to explore the frightening possibilities of the Conditioners in action in the novel's dystopian Belbury. Moreover, reproductive reticence between the protagonist married couple, Mark and Jane Studdock, drives the plot in a way that represents the tension between the unharmonized conclusions of Lambeth 1930's Resolutions 14 and 15.<sup>10</sup> As Catholic literary theorist Nichols Boyle says, "What supreme works of secular literature reveal is . . . the permanent interaction of law, judgment, and reconciliation which is the source of our existence insofar as it is open to us to know it. The revelation at the heart of secular literature is in the deepest sense a moral revelation, and therefore it is a revelation of God" (2005, 139). Protestants in general (and Anglicans in particular) who long for a "pronatalism" reminiscent of Catholicism's must first take a critical gaze toward the Anglican. Distrusting a church council from 1930 may seem unorthodox, but so are discussions within the same Anglican Communion less than a century later pushing toward innovative marital

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10 For more on the contrasting, or otherwise unharmonized conciliar conclusions in the Lambeth Conferences, see Resolution 1.10 from the 1998 Lambeth Conference, a reaffirmation of the traditional, orthodox understanding of marriage and human sexuality. Then, observe the Lambeth 2022 conclusion that granting bishops permission to petition for a blessing of same-sex affirming relationships supposedly does not transgress Resolution 1.10 from Lambeth 1998, but also allows members of the Anglican Communion to walk together in what has been called "good disagreement." For an orthodox response to Lambeth 2022, see "GAFCON IV—The Kigali Commitment," GAFCON, April 21, 2023, <https://www.gafcon.org/communique-updates/gafcon-iv-the-kigali-commitment/>.

arrangements. Perhaps a response article to expand this study could explore how, whether, or to what extent the 193 delegates who voted yes to Resolution 15 at the 1930 Lambeth Conference are substantially different from Lewis's Conditioners.

## “Thoughts After Lambeth”

Following Lambeth 1930, T. S. Eliot published his reflections on the conference in a treatise titled “Thoughts After Lambeth.” The St. Louis transplant noted the self-imposed authorial limitations of Anglican social teachings that deliberately undercut Anglicanism's temporal authority to pontificate on social ethics.<sup>11</sup> Eliot's evaluative contrast follows: “Between a Lambeth Conference Report and a Papal Encyclical there is little similarity; there is a fundamental difference of intent. Perhaps the term ‘encyclical letter’ for the archiepiscopal communication heading the Report is itself misleading, because it suggests to many minds the voice of final authority *de fide et moribus*; and to those who hope for the voice of absoluteness and the words of hard precision, the recommendations and pious hopes will be *disappointing*” (5–6, emphasis added). In short, Eliot understands and addresses the deliberate epistemic undercut that Protestantism has historically placed upon its councils and synods. Despite his concession to Resolution 15, Eliot understood that Canterbury, despite its reliance on a three-pronged episteme of reason, tradition, and Scripture, does not declare itself to be the living oracle of truth that Rome purports to be. Whereas *Casti Connubii* (1930) believes itself to be without error, Lambeth 1930 would shy away from such epistemic certainty, from which it necessarily follows that its Resolutions 14 or 15 could technically be askew on matters “of faith and morals” (*de fide et moribus*).

## Conclusion

*Abolition* traces modernity's anthropological demise with argumentative force and successfully accomplishes its intended purpose. However, its two sub-discourses on contraception do not sufficiently advocate for or necessarily align with the Anglican Communion's historic teaching on contraceptives as seen in Lambeth 1908 and 1920. In *Abolition*, Lewis was not setting out to comment on contraceptives, which is why a deeper evaluation of his reproductive ethics

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<sup>11</sup> Again, see Articles XX and XXI of the 39 Articles of Religion, wherein the Anglican Communion allocates epistemic primacy to Scripture rather than to churches and councils.

is better left to his prose fiction or prolific epistolary correspondence.<sup>12</sup> If the literary theorist Boyle is right that “The revelation at the heart of secular literature is in the deepest sense a moral revelation, and therefore it is a revelation of God” (2005, 139), then Mark and Jane Studdock’s crippling fear of fruitful procreation in *That Hideous Strength* might provide a better case study to evaluate the fruit of Resolution 14 and the folly of Resolution 15. Chesterton, in the often quoted “Ethics of Elfland” chapter of his beloved book, *Orthodoxy*, enlarges the ethical efficacy of imaginative fiction and the veracity of fables. While literary verisimilitude, Thomism, and even the scholastic impulse of Reformational Anglicanism certainly have a valuable role to play in compelling readers toward the loveliness of certain social ethics, prose fiction and parabolic truth offer childlike readers a uniquely efficacious alternative that delights and instructs without disclosing its latent didacticism. In this sense, *Abolition* alone is insufficient to develop a Protestant, Anglican, or even Lewisian reproductive ethic concerning contraception. His logical methods therein, though, are instructive for the task.

About fifteen years after the first publication of *Abolition*, Jaroslav Pelikan, a then-Protestant student of Catholicism who died as an Orthodox believer, pondered whether Protestants could maintain a cohesive set of doctrine and ethics, asking: “Can Protestantism provide its adherents with a world view which is as comprehensive and yet as Christian as the Thomistic? Or must Protestant theology choose between comprehensiveness and evangelical loyalty?” (1959, 227). Pelikan’s advice was to let Friedrich Schleiermacher’s legacy take the lead.<sup>13</sup> But, in light of *Abolition*, would Lewis agree that the subjective spiritual subliminality of Germany’s proto-Romantic theologian would lead to flourishing within the *Tao*?

As philosophical touchstones, neither Schleiermacher nor *Abolition* alone seems capable of leading Anglicans back to the beauty of the contraceptive conclusions from Lambeth 1908 and 1920. However, it would seem that the less definitive and more democratic nature of Anglicism necessitates that its adherents and leaders engage with the epistemic triad of Scripture, reason, and tradition afresh with each successive generation. Eliot was right to note that Lambeth 1930

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<sup>12</sup> For more on Lewis’s views of contraceptives as seen in his epistolary correspondences, see Ward (2022).

<sup>13</sup> Pelikan asserts, “Protestant theology has proved that it can supply alternatives to Thomism that are just as comprehensive and yes just as Christian. An outstanding instance of such an alternative is the thought of Friedrich Schleiermacher” (1959, 229).

(and Anglican synodality) is not authoritative in the way Roman polity purports to be, which is precisely why the recent movement of Anglican realignment has witnessed the organic genesis of the objectively more orthodox GAFCON (Global Anglican Fellowship Conference).<sup>14</sup> The primary challenge with creating any coherent and universal (“catholic”) Protestant social ethic, though, is sustaining singularity in doctrine and in practice when its confessionalism undercuts its own epistemic authority and wherever its conciliar conclusions break harmony with orthodoxical or orthopraxical precedent. This is why authoritative bodies of Protestant social ethics, or lack thereof, can suffer both perceived and real discord.<sup>15</sup>

However, by following the fervor of Lewis’s philosophy, retrieving the 1908 and 1920 conclusions of pro-natal Anglican prelates, borrowing from Rome’s corpus of Catholic social teaching, and simply citing and expositing Bible passages (as did the patristics and Puritans), Protestants can continue to develop doctrine and intellectual infrastructure, and promote a proud, public soundscape of reproductive ethics that will engender (literally) what Brad Littlejohn has called a “Protestant pronatalism.” To echo Pelikan’s question: Can Protestants piece (and hold) together a worldview wherein the “Protestant” ethic on contraception will once again be substantially indistinguishable from what is now called the “Catholic” ethic?

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<sup>14</sup> GAFCON comprises bishops largely from the global South who have desired renewal and sought realignment within the Anglican Communion. GAFCON leaders would describe themselves as biblically based, evangelical, and orthodox. See GAFCON’s Jerusalem Declaration (2008) for a fuller picture of its theological commitments and institutional identity.

<sup>15</sup> Anderson (2022) provides a hopeful and practical pitch for such Protestant pro-natalism.

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