

The Holiness of Education: A Review of Gabriel Haley’s “The Re-enchantment of Education: C.S. Lewis’s Idea of the Holy”

Father Geoff Boyle
University of Toronto

The Inklings, as a clearly defined literary group, owes its existence largely to C.S. Lewis.¹ The group formed around a friendship, with Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien at the center. It first consisted of dinner parties and was called “the Cave,” referring to the Cave of Adullam (1 Sam 22:1-2)—which suggests something about how they understood their place within the present educational system. It was not the only club of this sort at Oxford at the time, nor would it be an oddity today. But as it coalesced into a semi-formal literary gathering—initially founded by an undergraduate, Edward Tange Lean, where unpublished writings could be critiqued—it obtained the name “The Inklings.” The group dismantled around 1933 when Tange graduated and left the school. Some years later, however, on 11 November 1939 Lewis wrote to his brother Warnie: “On Thursday we had a meeting of the Inklings.”² It is not clear when an undergraduate club became the high-powered English don’s circle of friendship, nor is it clear why the name “Inklings” was retained. Tolkien noted, “It was a pleasantly ingenious pun in its way, suggesting people with vague or half-formed intimations and ideas plus those who dabble in ink.”³ However—and perhaps more than a clever pun—it may be that the name “Inklings” was preserved by Lewis for the sake of a particular type of intimation, characterizing this motley literary crew as those sensing intimations of “the holy,” or what Rudolf Otto termed “the Numinous.”

Professor Gabriel Haley notes that, among the usual suspects of Chesterton, MacDonald, Virgil, and Wordsworth, Lewis identifies Rudolf Otto’s *Das Heilige* (1917) as one of his greatest influences.⁴ He likewise marks 1936 as the year that Lewis encountered the work—coincidentally during the time between the dissolution of the undergraduate Inklings and the reacquisition by Lewis & co. Interestingly, in the midst of Otto’s critique of Friedrich Schleiermacher, the notion of “inklings” comes to the fore:

What Schleiermacher is feeling after is really the faculty or capacity of deeply absorbed *contemplation*, when confronted by the vast, living totality and reality of things as it is in nature and history....But, though these intuitions are limited and inadequate, they are none the less indisputably *true*, i.e. true as far as they go; and for all Schleiermacher’s aversion to the word in this connexion they must certainly be termed *cognitions*, modes of *knowing*, though, of course, not the product of reflection, but the intuitive outcome of feeling. Their import is the glimpse of an Eternal, in and beyond the temporal and penetrating it, the apprehension of a ground and

¹ Cf. Humphrey Carpenter, *The Inklings: C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, Charles Williams and Their Friends* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1978).

² *Letters of C.S. Lewis*, ed. W.H. Lewis (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1966), 170.

³ J.R.R. Tolkien to William Luther White in White’s *Image of Man in C.S. Lewis*; cited in Carpenter, 67.

⁴ Gabriel Haley, “The Re-Enchantment of Education: C.S. Lewis’s Idea of the Holy,” *Journal of Scriptural Reasoning* 17, no. 1 (August 2018), 1-2.

meaning of things in and beyond the empirical and transcending it. They are *surmises* or *inklings* of a Reality fraught with mystery and momentousness.⁵

It may not be possible to prove that the name of this literary gang derived its name from Otto's positive influence. Even so, Professor Haley has, at the very least, demonstrated the remarkable impact that this Lutheran theologian and phenomenologist had on Lewis' understanding of both education and what he later called "the weight of glory."⁶

Haley's brief summary of Lewis's educational treatise, *The Abolition of Man*, in terms of a "disenchantment of the world" leading to the "abolition of human condition"—the paradoxical idea that an emphasis on the individual actually destroys the individual—centers on a "reverence" for a "doctrine of objective value."⁷ Haley argues that this reverence required in education—with all its religious connotations—derives from Otto's explication of the numinous at first, and ultimately "the holy."

How this pertains to Lewis's educational theory, Haley explains, is drawn from pedagogical implications already espoused by Otto—that is, "that although holiness is ineffable per se, the non-rational component of holiness, the numinous, is in fact transmittable, or 'awakened,' in non-rational ways."⁸ Otto admits, "What is incapable of being so handed down is this numinous basis and background to religion, which can only be induced, incited, and aroused."⁹ Of course, the questions arise of what this numinous sense is in natural man, and *how* it got there. Danger arises when this idea sifts through Pelagian constructs: is there a spark in man that he might fan into flame? Perhaps the best course follows the *imago Dei*—corrupted as it is by sin, but nevertheless capable of being acted upon (*extra nos*) by the Holy One of Israel. This naturally ties overtly religious rubrics to this pedagogy of awakening the non-rational sense of the numinous.

⁵ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 2nd ed., trans. John W. Harvey (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950), 146-47.

⁶ As a Lutheran pastor, seeking to establish a Lutheran liberal arts 6-12 academy, whose PhD studies focus on the *real* (objective, even *numinous*) presence of Christ in the Old Testament, and who serves as vice president of the Eighth Day Institute, where the mission is to renew culture through faith and learning, I found numerous sympathetic lenses through which to reflect on Professor Haley's presentation. First to mention was my intrigue at the possibility of locating a fundamental Lutheran impulse through the thought of C.S. Lewis. Call it a bit of "home team pride" if you like, but more than that, it helps to make sense of my own fascination with Lewis's writings. Admittedly, much of Otto's work is a chastisement to the Lutheranism of his day. Nonetheless, he wonderfully shows this draw towards the mystical (though explicitly not a *mysticism*) in the writings of Luther himself, most notably in his *The Freedom of a Christian* (see Otto, 94-108, 204-207). Otto calls Lutherans to be more *Lutheran* in their perception of the holy through the instruments of the liturgy and the Holy Scriptures. As a Lutheran Pastor, this is often the forefront of my own preaching and teaching, and that which governs my liturgical demeanor and decorum. Furthermore, the passive or receptive character highlighted by Otto (and Lewis) by which we are given access to the perception of the holy is a hallmark of the Lutheran ethos. For Lutherans, it is always and primarily God coming to us that establishes who we are and how we are given to appropriate who he is; hence, *Gottesdienst* as our liturgical description. And within our *Gottesdienst*, Luther gives us to define *reverence* in the Catechism's terms of "fear, love, and trust." These, as Otto aptly described, are comprehended in the creature-conscious response to the numinous, or, more specifically, the spiritual.

⁷ Haley, 2.

⁸ Haley, 4.

⁹ Otto, 60.

Otto's presentation of the holy, ultimately locating its "plenitude" in the eternal Son, Jesus Christ, often takes detours at lesser grades of holiness and perceptions of the numinous among Eastern religions.¹⁰ Professor Haley proposes that Lewis follows Otto's detour along the way of *tao*, precisely as a "felicitous expression for his 'doctrine of objective value.'" ¹¹ The distance provided by the Eastern rubric allows for a universal (natural law) approach to the task at hand, such that the notion of education can be couched in terms of reverence without exclusive reference to Christianity, even if that is where both Lewis and Otto (and Haley, for that matter) find its fullness. What this means for education, then, is that there must be a "cultivation" (sharing the same root as culture), or a means of awakening an *a priori* disposition towards the numinous in order to save both the objective reality of this world, as well as the subjective feeling-responses of the individual. This, Professor Haley argues, is Lewis's main objective for education—"to conform the soul to reality."¹²

Narrative is Lewis's means for attuning (or, as Otto would have it, "awakening") humanity to our proper (and *fitting*) telos. Narrative has a capacity to "reawaken" and "re-enchanted" the reality before us because it elicits the feeling-response of the numinous. To narrative, Haley adds three more possible arrows to education's quiver of re-enchanted and re-awakening the soul's perception of reality: (1) ecology, (2) craftsmanship, and (3) a canon of literature.¹³ Each, though open to misuse and abuse (the politicization of ecological concern, an individualism with regard to craft, and the slippery subjectivism possible with a literary canon) offers an avenue to eliciting what Otto called "creature-consciousness."

Otto (and Lewis) highlight the passive, or receptive posture by which we are given access to the perception of the holy. Holiness cannot be missed as the overarching theme for the book of Leviticus. John Kleinig serves as an authority here:

The Lord alone is inherently and permanently holy. His holiness is his godliness, his nature, and his power as God. It is inseparable from him and his presence. Holiness is derived only from him; it is available only by way of contact with him. People and things borrowed their holiness from their association with him at Mount Sinai and at the sanctuary. He sanctified the tabernacle and its precincts so that they became God's "sanctuary." He had called the Israelites to be holy (Ex 19:6) and had sanctified them with the blood of the covenant at Mount Sinai (Ex 24:8). He had, in fact, redeemed them from Egypt so that he could be their God and sanctify them (Lev 11:45; 22:32-33). His presence with them, his glory, made and kept them holy (Ex 29:43, 44). Yet their holiness was something that they never possessed for themselves, but kept on receiving from God. It was an acquired state of being, a contingent condition, an extrinsic power, something that was lost as soon as contact with him was lost.¹⁴

¹⁰ Cf. Otto, 177-78, where Otto identifies three grades of holiness. There is, first, the mere "'predisposition,' in the sense of a receptiveness and susceptibility to religion and a capacity for freely recognizing and judging religious truth at first hand." Then the higher stage is the "prophet," who bears some "creative force" of divination. But the highest stage, "in whom is found the Spirit in all its plenitude, and who at the same time in His person and in His performance is become most completely the object of divination, in whom Holiness is recognized apparent," Otto concludes, "is the Son."

¹¹ Haley, 5.

¹² Haley, 7; Lewis, *Abolition of Man* (New York: Harper One, 1944; 2000), 77.

¹³ Haley, 9-10.

¹⁴ John W. Kleinig, *Leviticus*, Concordia Commentary Series (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2004), 5.

Kleinig recognizes the influence of Otto's work, but finds Philip Jenson's definition of holiness more helpful: "that which belongs to the sphere of God's being or activity."¹⁵ Kleinig prefers to steer clear of the phenomenological approach, as well as anything analogical, saying that it is precisely God's holiness that "distinguishes him from all other beings."¹⁶ Oddly enough, it is in this way that Kleinig tracks most closely with Lewis—and, I might argue, evinces an overly hasty reading of Otto—for holiness cannot be handled as an abstraction but always a concrete encounter with God himself. In the Old Testament this was by means of the Levitical sacrificial system in the Tabernacle/Temple. In the New Testament it was in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, in whom "all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell" (Col. 1:19; cf. 2:9). Applying all this to Haley's presentation, we might say that a Levitical construct demands that any encounter with the holy be through the means established by the Holy One, explicitly through the person and work of Jesus Christ. This reorients the educational endeavor in an explicitly Christian framework; and even under the universal "natural law," the substantial reality of this world cannot be disassociated from its Creator and Redeemer, who is also Sanctifier, in whose holiness the creation is given to share and through which access might be granted. That is, not all things—no matter how concrete and objective—are equally "holy." The Holy One communicates his holiness through the holy things he chooses, and he reveals the means of access to himself and his holiness so that we might be certain of our participation in him: "I am the LORD, who sanctifies you" (Lev 20:8; 21:8; 22:32; cf. 21:23; 22:9, 16; 21:15). Kleinig definitively states: "They did not sanctify themselves; he sanctified them. He made and kept them holy. They drew their holiness from him, and him only."¹⁷

Although Otto is clear that the realm of aesthetics is only analogical to that of the numinous, the objective character of beauty intimately invites the re-evaluation of education in terms of the holy toward a renewed pursuit of wonder. What is now called "classical" in education circles is simply what education *was*, and what C.S. Lewis saw slipping away in his day. Haley identifies the move from objective to subjective, from fitting/appropriate to arbitrary/utilitarian, from wonder and virtue to deconstruction and "critical thinking." This melody recently struck a chord and finds its harmony in the works of Anthony Esolen, Charles Chaput, and Rod Dreher.¹⁸ Today's culture faces unprecedented challenges. Each of these authors offers his own take on how one might proceed. Charles Taylor, a Canadian philosopher, calls today's culture "a secular age," which he defines as an age of innumerable options with Christianity as the most difficult.¹⁹ Lewis says our culture—with education as its machinery—is

¹⁵ Philip Peter Jenson, *Graded Holiness: A Key to the Priestly Conception of the World*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series 106 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 48.

¹⁶ Kleinig, 5.

¹⁷ Kleinig, 10.

¹⁸ Anthony Esolen, *Out of the Ashes: Rebuilding American Culture* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 2017); Charles J. Chaput, *Strangers in a Strange Land: Living the Catholic Faith in a Post-Christian World* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2017); Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Sentinel, 2017).

¹⁹ Cf. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2007).

“dehumanizing,”²⁰ hence the call to restore education to its grave and *weighty* prominence in the formation of humanity.²¹

“Weighty” is a fitting term, particularly in view of Lewis. In Latin, we might say that education has a certain *gravitas*; in Hebrew, we would say *chavod*; in Greek, *doxa*—which lands us back in the English with *glory*. Otto runs the same linguistic trick to distinguish the holy from morality. He finds in “holy” an “overplus of meaning,” what he calls “the numinous.”²² C.S. Lewis famously brought these words together in a sermon called “The Weight of Glory,” in which he described the reverence and the awe that we are to have towards each other’s *humanity*.²³ In his *The Abolition of Man* Lewis advises one to understand his educational effort in terms of this *glory*, and the reverence such glory deserves.²⁴ Such reverence is the fitting creature-response before the glory one encounters in education.²⁵

Haley’s suggestions appear neither farfetched nor impractical. They already find exercise in numerous communities (albeit fewer than one might like), communities in which one might just as readily find the works of C.S. Lewis, and possibly even Rudolf Otto.²⁶ His reverential call to a fullness of education ought duly to be heeded. May there be more opportunities for our children, and even ourselves, through which we might encounter the numinous and participate in the holiness of God.

²⁰ C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, 59.

²¹ A side project I have is the establishment of Concordia Academy: A 6-12 Lutheran Liberal Arts Education. One of the chief influences behind this project was Lewis’s *The Abolition of Man*. Admittedly, I am a product of an educational system that would never have considered a difference between calling a waterfall “sublime” or “pretty” (see Lewis, *Abolition of Man*, 2). The problem would not have been a failure to distinguish definitions, but to even consider an objective response in the first place. Although Otto is clear that the realm of aesthetics is only analogical to that of the numinous, it was, for me, a wrestling with the objective quality of beauty that forced me to rethink the basis of education and gave me a renewed pursuit of wonder (Otto, 41).

²² Otto, 5-7.

²³ Cf. C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (New York: Harper One, 1949; 2000), 45-46.

²⁴ “Each generation exercises power over its successors: and each, in so far as it modifies the environment bequeathed to it and rebels against tradition, resists and limits the power of its predecessors” (Lewis, *Th Abolition of Man*, 56).

²⁵ Another Kansas output of this was the KU Integrated Humanities Program by John Senior, whose motto was “*Nascentur in admiratione* (“*Let them be born in wonder*”).

²⁶ Many of these personal efforts coalesce in the work of the Eighth Day Institute (EDI) in Wichita, KS. To renew culture through faith and learning is both explicitly education-driven as well as religious. Between the annual symposium, the Inklings Festival, and the liturgical rhythmic gatherings of the Hall of Men and Sisters of Sophia, the goal is to foster these encounters with the numinous through art, music, craftsmanship, and the western canon of literature (accessible through Eighth Day Books). Professor Haley’s three suggestions (ecology, craftsmanship, and canonical literature) each find their place (in varying degrees) at EDI. Admittedly, our ecological work largely rests in the theoretical and literary world of Wendell Berry, but the local classical elementary school, Christ the Savior Academy, exemplifies this through their beautiful, student-created and cared-for garden. We annually offer seminars on cheese-making, pipe-carving, beer-brewing, and other crafts that might simply be called “human” endeavors.