



C·S· LEWIS INSTITUTE

Reflections

March 2019 – *A DIVINE WORK OF ART*

In his book *The Problem of Pain*, C.S. Lewis argues that “(w)e are, not metaphorically but in very truth, a Divine work of art,” and considers some of the implications. He writes:

The relation between Creator and creature is, of course, unique, and cannot be paralleled by any relations between one creature and another. God is both further from us, and nearer to us, than any other being. He is further from us because the sheer difference between that which has Its principle of being in Itself and that to which being is communicated is one compared with which the difference between an archangel and a worm is quite insignificant. He makes, we are made: He is original, we derivative. But at the same time, and for the same reason, the intimacy between God and even the meanest creature is closer than any that creatures can attain with one another. Our life is, at every moment, supplied by Him: our tiny, miraculous power of free will only operates on bodies which His continual energy keeps in existence – our very power to think is His power communicated to us. Such a unique relation can be apprehended only by analogies: from the various types of love known among creatures we reach an inadequate, but useful, conception of God’s love for man.



The lowest type, and one which is “love” at all only by an extension of the word, is that which an artist feels for an artefact. God’s relation to man is pictured thus in Jeremiah’s vision of the potter and the clay, or when St. Peter speaks of the whole Church as a building on which God is at work, and of the individual members as stones. The limitation of such an analogy is, of course, that in the symbol the patient is not sentient, and that certain questions of justice and mercy which arise when the “stones” are really “living” therefore remain unrepresented. But it is an important analogy so far as it goes. We are, not metaphorically but in very truth, a Divine work of art, something that God is making, and therefore something with which He will not be satisfied until it has a certain character. Here again we come up against what I have called the “intolerable compliment.” Over a sketch made idly to amuse a child, an artist may not take much trouble: he may be content to let it go even though it is not exactly as he meant it to be. But over the great picture of his life – the work which he loves, though in a different fashion, as intensely as a man loves a woman or a mother a child — he will take endless trouble — and would, doubtless, thereby, *give* endless trouble to the picture if it were sentient. One can imagine a sentient picture, after being rubbed and scraped and recommenced for the tenth time, wishing that it were only a thumb-nail sketch whose making was over in a minute. In the same way, it is natural for us to wish that God had designed for us a lessglorious and less arduous destiny; but then we are wishing not for more love but for less.¹

Have you ever thought of yourself as “a Divine work of art” that God is making? Let us be thankful that because God loves us, He wants what is best for us, and will fashion us into people with character like Jesus.

*“But now, O LORD, you are our Father;
we are the clay, and you are our potter;
we are all the work of your hand.”*

PSALM 90:12 (ESV)

¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), pp. 37-38.