

# **That Hideous Strength: How the West was Lost**

**The Cancer of Cultural Marxism in the Church  
and the World, and the Gospel of Change**

*Melvin Tinker*

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# Chapter I

## *A 2018 Space Trilogy*

### Introduction

C.S. LEWIS WAS AHEAD OF HIS TIME WHEN HE WROTE THE third of his Space Trilogy, *That Hideous Strength*, back in 1945. John Mark Reynolds claims that it is ‘the truest account of the state of the West written in the last one hundred years.’ Hyperbole perhaps, but one can’t deny Lewis’s remarkable prescience in being able to see what was coming down the cultural line. The title itself is taken from a sixteenth-century poem by Sir David Lyndsay called ‘Ane Dialog’, describing the biblical Tower of Babel as: ‘The shadow of that hideous strength / Six miles and more it is of length.’ In his preface Lewis wrote, ‘This is a “tall story” about devilry, though it has behind it a serious point which I have tried to make in my *Abolition of Man*.’

In *The Abolition of Man* Lewis offered his thoughts on education, the tradition of natural law and the necessity of moral oversight in the sciences. The ‘serious point’ referred to in the prologue of *That Hideous Strength* entertains

the possibility that an intellectual elite of ideologues is capable of changing the way great swathes of a population considers what is 'common sense,' as well as being able to determine which views are permissible, which ideas are passé and, more than that, dangerous. Furthermore, there is the Promethean desire to use science and technology not so much to tame nature but to dominate it to the point of destruction or, as Lewis puts it in *The Abolition of Man*, 'The power of Man to make himself what he pleases means, as we have seen, the power of some men to make other men what they please.'

What Lewis describes by way of fictional narrative is an outlook which derides all that is supernatural and reduces meaning to matter, or, to give it its proper title—naturalistic materialism. This is what Peter Berger describes as 'a world without windows.' No longer do people see the world as a gift (a created order), but they see it as a given (a wholly natural order). In this sense, the secularisation process has produced a revolution that involves what Charles Taylor, calls, the 'social imaginary.' This is not just a set of ideas, but it is 'what enables, through making sense of, the practices of society.'

Lewis was resolutely opposed to what Max Weber termed disenchantment (*entzauberung*), where the magic or mystery of life is not just removed but unwanted and we simply apply reason and technology with the consequence that matters of faith are deemed irrelevant. This modernist outlook is summed up by the social scientist, Philip Rieff, 'What characterises modernity, I

think, is just this idea that men need not submit to any power—higher or lower—other than their own.’

### **When N.I.C.E. is nasty**

The bulk of the plot of *That Hideous Strength* concerns the threat of the National Institute of Coordinated Experiments (forming the delicious acronym N.I.C.E.) with its aim to free humanity from nature. The symbol adopted by N.I.C.E., which is devoted to ‘Technocratic and Objective Man,’ was a muscular male nude grasping a thunderbolt. The overall goal of the organisation is ‘the scientific reconstruction of the human race in the direction of increased efficiency.’ The irony is that while the group eschews all that is supernatural—embracing a purely materialistic view of reality—Lewis portrays it as being under the direction of unseen, sinister spiritual forces, what he called ‘[dark] eldilic energy and [dark] eldilic knowledge.’ Lewis uses the term ‘macrobes’ for the demonic powers hovering from above, ‘The structure of the macrobe, so far as we know it, is of extreme simplicity. When I say that it is above the animal level, I mean that it is more permanent, disposes more energy, and has greater intelligence.’ These are the ‘rulers,’ ‘authorities,’ and ‘spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places’ of which the apostle Paul speaks in Ephesians 6:12.

The main image of evil in the story is Alcasan’s Head, the forerunner of ‘a new species—the Chosen Heads who never die,’ separated from its body and kept alive artificially. In his helpful critique of the story, Pete

Lowman suggests the various meanings associated with this figure:

This image is given multiple, related meanings. Firstly, it stands for the rational processes operating in supposedly 'objective' separation from the moral law. As Lewis says in the 1955 Preface, he is making the same point here as he did in his essay *The Abolition of Man*; and in the latter book he describes thinkers who move in that direction as 'men without chests ... The head rules the belly through the chest—the seat ... of emotions organized by trained habit into stable sentiments.' Secondly, Lewis is using the amputated Head to stand for a rationalism that cuts itself adrift from or is hostile to 'Nature'. And a third variant appears when N.I.C.E initiate, Frost, compares humanity to an animal no longer needing a large body for nutrition and locomotive organs: 'The masses are therefore to disappear. The body is to become all head. The human race is to become all Technocracy'—and so sixteen major wars are scheduled for the twentieth century.

Lewis is not at all unabashed in bringing the supernatural to the fore at various points throughout the story, but in doing this he drew his strongest criticism. In one early review, George Orwell wrote, 'One could recommend this book unreservedly if Mr. Lewis had succeeded in keeping it all on a single level. Unfortunately, the supernatural keeps breaking in, and it does so in rather confusing, undisciplined ways.' More recently, Rowan Williams has written of the destruction of the evil characters at the end of the story in the following way:

‘Over the top,’ I think, is the only expression one can use for this. I think it’s when the elephant breaks loose and comes into the dining room and begins trampling people to death that I feel something has snapped in the authorial psyche.

However, this approach was quite intentional by Lewis, as he made clear in a letter to Dorothy L. Sayers written after receiving several negative reviews. ‘Apparently

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reviewers will not tolerate a mixture of the realistic and the supernatural. Which is a pity, because (a) it’s just the mixture I like, and (b) we have to put up with it in real life.’

If it is the case that we are involved in a spiritual battle, as the Bible makes clear, Christians can’t yield the field to the secularists, in fact they have all the more vigorously to assert the supernatural for, as we shall see in due course, whatever the particular ideologies the church has to contend with, they are manifestations of forces which mere human means are unable to overcome. As Paul makes clear in 2 Corinthians 10:3–5:

For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy



strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God.

Lewis was simply following the apostle Paul at this point.

### **Science vs. scientism**

The way in which the members of N.I.C.E. seek to realise the organisation's aims is primarily through education but they also employ technology. Lewis knows that ideas never remain hermetically sealed within the academy, they eventually flow out to shape society and more importantly influence *individual* human beings for good or ill. Such individuals are represented in the story by the newly married Studdocks. In an edition of *Punch* published in August 1945, H. P. Edens wrote, 'it is Mr Lewis's triumph to have shown, with shattering credibility, how the pitiful little souls of Jane and Mark Studdock become the apocalyptic battlefield of Heaven.'

Lewis's critique was not universally well received at the time. Some, like the humanistic scientist, J.B.S. Haldane, were particularly offended. Replying to Haldane's concerns, Lewis said that scientists *per se* were not his target, but rather certain *trends* which were beginning to creep into society such as 'officials' using the power of a small group to subvert (the 'inner ring'), the exaltation of the collective with little concern for the individual, the 'Party' that obeys an impersonal force and believes in human progress using whatever means necessary to bring about the 'liberation' of people, especially those who do not yet realise they need liberating; and the way education