C. S. Lewis:
A Mere Christian

The Life and Work of
The 20th Century’s Premier Christian Author

Introduction
Significance.
- A renowned lecturer and tutor in literature at Oxford and Cambridge universities.
- One of the 20th century’s most gifted and prolific writers.
- One of the great Christian thinkers of the 20th century.
- In 2000 Christianity Today voted Mere Christianity the most influential Christian book of the 20th century.
  - The Screwtape Letters was #2.
- Dr. Armand Nicholi’s Harvard seminar, “Sigmund Freud and C. S. Lewis: Two Contrasting Worldviews.”
- The movie versions of The Chronicles of Narnia.
- Character and personality.
  - A first-rate lecturer and tutor.
  - A controversial figure among his academic colleagues.
  - A tenacious debater.
- Archival collections:
  - The Wade Collection at Wheaton College (curators: Clyde Kilby and Lyle Dorsett).
  - Oxford University (curator: Walter Hooper).

A Mere Christian.
- The Everyman of the modern age.
- A spiritual journey through many of the ideological themes of the 20th century:
  - Nominal Christianity \( \oplus \) Materialistic Skepticism;
  - Materialistic Skepticism \( \oplus \) Romantic Idealism;
  - Romantic Idealism \( \oplus \) Theosophical Occultism;
  - Theosophical Occultism \( \oplus \) Pantheism;
  - Pantheism \( \oplus \) Manichaeanism;
  - Manichaeanism \( \oplus \) Theism;
  - Theism \( \oplus \) Christian Theism.
- A scathing critic of modern secular humanism.
- A “Great Tradition Christian.”
  - Emphasis on the core defining doctrines of the Christian faith.
- An inspiring example.
A Most Reluctant Convert

Breaking Down Barriers.

- The Christian influence.
  - CSL: “All the books were turning against me. Indeed, I must have been as blind as a bat not to have seen, long before, the ludicrous contradiction between my theory of life and my actual experiences as a reader. George MacDonald had done more to me than any other writer;... Chesterton had more sense than all the other moderns put together....
    “But the most alarming of all was George Herbert. Here was a man who seemed to me to exceed all the authors I had read in conveying the very quality of life as we actually live it from moment to moment; but the wretched fellow, instead of doing it all directly, insisted on mediating it through what I called ‘the Christian mythology.’ On the other hand, most of the authors who might be claimed as precursors of modern enlightenment seemed to me [quite puny by comparison] and bored me... The only non-Christians who seemed to me really to know anything were the Romantics; and a good many of them were tinged with something like religion, even at times with Christianity. [I was drawn to the conclusion that] ‘Christians are wrong but all the rest are bores.'”

- An anti-Christian bias.
- The reality of the supernatural.
  - William Butler Yeats.
  - “A ravenous, erotic lust” for the Occult.
  - Dr. Askins.

Spiritual Checkmate.

- Spiritual deadends.
- Is Christianity true?
- The influence of friends and acquaintances.
  - Arthur Greeves.
  - Owen Barfield.
  - Alan Griffiths.
  - Nevill Coghill.
  - J. R. R. Tolkien.
  - Hugo Dyson.
  - Paul Victor Mendelssohn Benecke.
- G. K. Chesterton’s *The Everlasting Man*.
- Immersion in a medieval worldview
  - CSL: “A young atheist cannot guard his faith too carefully. Dangers lie in wait for him on every side.”
- A random thought:
  - T. D. “Harry” Weldon: “Rum thing, that stuff of Frazer’s about the Dying God. It almost looks as if it really happened once.”
- Investigating the evidence.
- Drawn to the church.
- The turning point.
  - A.N. Wilson: “He began to feel himself approached by God, and in the summer of 1929 went through a mystical experience.”
  - Lewis unbound.
• A life-changing confession:
  - CSL: “Remember, I had always wanted, above all things, not to be ‘interfered with.’ I had wanted ‘to call my soul my own.’ I had been far more anxious to avoid suffering than to achieve delight....
    “You must picture me alone in that room in Magdalen, night after night, feeling, whenever my mind lifted even for a second from my work, the steady, unrelenting approach of Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet....
    “[Finally,] I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England.”

**Jesus Is the Way.**
• Struggling with church.
  - CSL: “My churchgoing was a merely symbolical and provisional practice. If it in fact helped to move me in the Christian direction, I am unaware of this.”
• A perplexing question.
• A nighttime conversion with Tolkien and Dyson.
• The Christian myth.
• Lewis’ “imaginative failure.”
• The Christian story as “true myth.”
  - The fundamental difference: *It really happened!*
  - CSL: “What flows into you from myth is not truth but reality... and therefore every myth becomes the father of innumerable truths on the abstract level.”
• Christianity works.
• Lewis’ magical motorcycle ride:
  - CSL: “When we set out I did not believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and when we reached the zoo I did.”
  - CSL: “I have just passed on from believing in God to definitely believing in Christ.”
• Joy fulfilled.
  - CSL: “The man who has passed through [a profound conversion experience] feels like one who has waked from a nightmare into ecstasy.”

**Growth and Discipleship.**
• Practicing the spiritual disciplines.
  - Thomas a Kempis’ *Imitation of Christ.*
• A demonstrable effect.
  - George Sayer: “Jack’s conversion to Christianity made him a different person. His search for belief was over; he now had a strong platform on which to stand.... He devoted himself to developing and strengthening his belief, and almost from the year of his conversion, he wanted to become an evangelist for the Christian faith.”
  - An exemplary life.
• Post-script: Mrs. Moore’s reaction.
  - A.N. Wilson: “Lewis was not a man to say one thing and do another. He meant his Christian commitment to be total.”
C. S. Lewis
Bibliography

Christopher Derrick, *C. S. Lewis and the Church of Rome.* Xxxx.
  • A critical review of A. N. Wilson’s *C. S. Lewis: A Biography.*
Paul Holmer, Xxxx. Xxxx.
  • A brilliant study of Lewis’ faith.
David Holbrook, *The Skeleton in the Wardrobe.*
  • A skeptical psycho-biography by an atheist.
Thomas Howard, Xxxx. Xxxx.
Peter Kreeft, *C. S. Lewis For the Third Millenium* (Ignatius Press, 1994).
  • Sheldon Vanauken: “This is the best book written about C.S. Lewis.”
  • Lyle Dorsett: Of all the Lewis biographies, “this one by Sayer is superior to all the others for several reasons. First, he knew Lewis better and for more years than other biographers. Second, he knew Lewis in a variety of contexts [first as a student at Magdalen College and later as a friend and colleague]. And finally he knew Joy [Davidman Gresham] and her sons, as well as many of the famous writer’s relatives and friends.”
Brian Sibley, *C. S. Lewis Through the Shadowlands* (Baker/Revell, 1999).
  • A review of George Sayer’s *Jack: C. S. Lewis and His Times.*
Chad Walsh, *Literary Legacy.* Xxxx.
  • A generally sympathetic but critical psycho-biography – more balanced than Holbrook’s.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Life</th>
<th>Publications</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1898</td>
<td>Born in Belfast, Northern Ireland.</td>
<td>Spirits in Bondage</td>
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<tr>
<td>1908</td>
<td>Flora Lewis dies.</td>
<td>Dymer</td>
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<td>1908</td>
<td>Sent to Wynyard boarding school in England.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>Enrolls at Cherbourg Academy in Malvern, England.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>Enrolls in Malvern College.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1914</td>
<td>Begins a 2-year course of study under William Kirkpatrick.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reads George MacDonald’s <em>Phantastes</em>.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1917</td>
<td>Enrolls in University College of Oxford University.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Befriends Paddy Moore and Janis (&quot;Minto&quot;) Moore.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Enlists in the army and is sent to France.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1918</td>
<td>Wounded on the battlefield (April).</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Reads G.K. Chesterton.</td>
<td>The Pilgrim’s Regress</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Begins a relationship with Mrs. Moore.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>Returns to University College.</td>
<td>The Allegory of Love</td>
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<td>1920</td>
<td>Meets William Butler Yeats.</td>
<td>The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature</td>
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<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>Appointed to the faculty of Magdalen College.</td>
<td>Out of the Silent Planet</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Befriends J.R.R. Tolkien.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>Albert Lewis dies.</td>
<td>The Problem of Pain</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Disavowal of atheism.</td>
<td>The Screwtape Letters</td>
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<td>1930</td>
<td>Jack, Warnie, and Mrs. Moore purchase The Kilns.</td>
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<td>1931</td>
<td>Conversion to Christianity (September).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>Tolkien begins writing <em>The Hobbit</em>.</td>
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<td>1936</td>
<td>述べると。</td>
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<td>1937</td>
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<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>Joins the Home Guard.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>Tolkien begins writing <em>The Lord of the Rings</em>.</td>
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<td>1940</td>
<td>BBC lectures: “The Christian Faith As I See It – By a Layman” <em>(Book I of Mere Christianity).</em></td>
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<td>1941</td>
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<td>Year</td>
<td>Life</td>
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<tr>
<td>1943</td>
<td>Riddell Memorial Lectures (later published as The Abolition of Man, February).</td>
<td>Perelandra</td>
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<tr>
<td>1944</td>
<td>BBC lectures: “Beyond Personality” (Book IV of Mere Christianity).</td>
<td>The Abolition of Man</td>
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<td>1945</td>
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<td>That Hideous Strength</td>
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<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>Awarded Honorary Doctor of Divinity by the University of St. Andrews.</td>
<td>The Great Divorce</td>
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<td>1947</td>
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<td>Miracles</td>
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<td>1948</td>
<td>Elected Fellow of Royal Society of Literature. Debate with Elizabeth Anscombe.</td>
<td>The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe</td>
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<td>1950</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mere Christianity</td>
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<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>Mrs. Moore dies.</td>
<td>English Literature in the Sixteenth Century</td>
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<td>1952</td>
<td>Meets Joy Davidman Gresham.</td>
<td>Surprised by Joy</td>
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<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>Accepts chair of Medieval and Renaissance English at Cambridge University.</td>
<td>Till We Have Faces</td>
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<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>Awarded Doctor of Letters by Manchester University.</td>
<td>The Four Loves</td>
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<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>Joy dies (July).</td>
<td>A Grief Observed</td>
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<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>Diagnosed with inoperable cancer (June). Suspends teaching (October).</td>
<td>The Discarded Image</td>
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<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>Awarded Honorary Doctorate by the University of Dijon.</td>
<td>Letters to Malcolm</td>
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<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>Awarded Honorary Doctorate by the University of Lyon. Suffers heart attack (July). Dies (November 22, 1963).</td>
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At Bookham I was met by my new teacher – “Kirk” or “The Great Knock” as my father and I called him. I had heard about him all my life and I therefore [thought I] had a very clear impression of what I was in for....

He was over six feet tall, very shabbily dressed (like a gardener, I thought)....

We shook hands, and though his grip was like iron pincers it was not lingering. A few minutes later we were walking away from the station.

“You are now,” said Kirk, “proceeding along the main artery between Great and Little Bookham.”

I stole a glance at him.... I began to “make conversation” in the deplorable manner which I had acquired at evening parties.... I said I was surprised at the “scenery” of Surrey; it was much “wilder” than I had expected.

“Stop!” shouted Kirk with a suddenness that made my jump. “What do you mean by wildness and what grounds had you for not expecting it?”

I replied that I didn’t know what, still “making conversation.” As answer after answer was torn to shreds it at last dawned upon me that he really wanted to know. He was not making conversation, not joking, nor snubbing me; he wanted to know. I was stung into attempting a real answer.

A few passes sufficed to show that I had no clear and distinct idea corresponding to the word “wildness,” and that, in so far as I had any idea at all, “wildness” was a totally inept word. “Do you not see, then,” concluded the Great Knock, “that your remark was meaningless?” I prepared to sulk a little, assuming that the subject would be dropped. Never was I more mistaken in my life. Having analyzed my terms, Kirk was proceeding to deal with my proposition as a whole. On what had I based (but he pronounced it baized) my expectations about the flora and geology of Surrey? Was it maps, or photographs, or books? I could produce none. It had, heaven help me, never occurred to me that what I called my thoughts needed to be “baized” on anything. Kirk once more drew a conclusion – without the slightest sign of emotion, but equally without the slightest concession to what I thought good manners: “Do you not see, then, that you had no right to have any opinion whatever on the subject?”

By this time our acquaintance had lasted about three and a half minutes; but the tone set by this first conversation was preserved without a single break during all the years I spent at Bookham.... The most casual remark was taken as a summons to disputation....
Encountering “The Great Knock”
Questions for Consideration

1. If you had been Lewis, what would you have thought about Kirk’s response to your innocent comment that the scenery around Surrey was much “wilder” than you had expected?

2. Was Kirk right or wrong to confront young Lewis as he did? Why or why not?

3. There is a common saying, “Everyone is entitled to his/her own opinion.” Do you agree that everyone’s opinions are equally valid? If not, what should opinions and beliefs be based on?

4. What is the main point that Lewis is trying to make in relating this story?

5. Do you think Lewis considered his relationship with “the Great Knock” to be a generally positive or negative influence on his personal growth and development? Why?
As the Ruin Falls

(C. S. Lewis / Phil Keaggy, 1976, Sandtree Music / Birdwing Music.
Recorded by Phil Keaggy)

All this is flashy rhetoric about loving you
I never had a selfless thought since I was born
I am mercenary and self-seeking through and through
I want God, you, all friends, merely to serve my terms.
Peace, reassurance, pleasure are the goals I seek
I cannot crawl one inch outside my proper skin
I talk of love –
A scholar’s parrot may talk Greek, but self-imprisoned
Always end where I begin.
Only that now you have taught me, but how late my lack
I see the chasm
And everything you are was making my heart into a bridge
By which I might get back from exile a grown man
And now the bridge is breaking.
For this I bless you as the ruin falls
The pains you give me are more precious than all other gains.