

C. S. LEWIS

The Story Of A Converted Mind

CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| Thoroughly Converted. . . | 2 |
| The Conversion Of His Imagination (1898–1916) | 4 |
| The Conversion Of His Reason (1917–1939) | 7 |
| The Conversion Of His Conscience (1940–1951) | 12 |
| The Conversion Of His Expectations (1952–1963) | 16 |
| Lord, Liar, Or Lunatic . . | 23 |
| The Ongoing Influence Of C. S. Lewis | 24 |
| The Writings Of C. S. Lewis | 30 |
| Endnotes | 32 |

C. S. Lewis' private secretary once said of him that he was "the most thoroughly converted man" he had ever met. But the conversion to faith in Christ by this noted Oxford and Cambridge professor was a long and winding road.

Although Lewis is recognized today by many as a popular children's writer, he is also well known as "an apostle to skeptics" and one of the most provocative thinkers of our time.

As RBC staff writer Dennis Fisher points out in the following pages, Lewis is remembered not only as someone who moved from atheism to faith in Christ, but as someone who was thoroughly and profoundly changed by what he came to believe and embrace.

Mart De Haan

Managing Editor: David Sper

Cover Design: Terry Bidgood

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Cover photos used by permission of The Marion E. Wade Center, Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL.

© 2010 RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Printed in USA

THOROUGHLY CONVERTED

As a young adult, Clive Staples Lewis appeared to be light-years away from the historic Christian faith. Although he had been raised in a Christian home, Lewis found his religious beliefs challenged by a number of personal heartaches, including the painful loss of his mother to cancer. By the time he was a student at Oxford, Lewis was a committed atheist who found a fellow classmate's belief in a supernatural Christianity a curiosity.

Today, however, C. S. Lewis is known as a defender of the faith he once denied. As an article in *Christianity Today* online observes:

C. S. Lewis is probably the most well known, widely read, and often quoted Christian author

of modern times. Between 1931 and 1962 he published 34 books. Posthumous collections added many more volumes, and the secondary studies of Lewis reach into the hundreds.¹

Through poetry, allegory, popular theology, educational philosophy, science fiction, myth, literary criticism, correspondence, and autobiography, Lewis left his mark on the world. In so many ways, his conversion gave us the

***“I believe in
Christianity as I
believe that the sun
has risen, not only
because I see it, but
because by it I see
everything else.”***

C. S. Lewis

legacy of a former atheist who could say, “I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.”

Walter Hooper, Lewis’ private secretary, reflected on the impression the Oxford professor had on him:

Lewis struck me as the most thoroughly converted man I ever met. Christianity was never for him a separate department of life. . . . His whole vision of life was such that the natural and supernatural seemed inseparably combined.²

Hooper’s description of Lewis as “the most thoroughly converted man I ever met” is a provocative tribute to the extent to which Lewis was changed by his faith.

The meaning of *conversion* depends on its context. In the computer

world, it means reformatting data for a new system. For world travelers, it’s often associated with the exchange of money from one currency to another. In matters of faith, conversion usually means adopting the ideas and practices of a religion for one’s own.

“Lewis struck me as the most thoroughly converted man I ever met.”
Walter Hooper

But the conversion to which Hooper referred is how personal faith in Christ transformed Lewis’ “whole vision of life.” This spiritual conversion was not a single event. It was a process that transformed Lewis’ imagination, mind, conscience, and expectations over a lifetime.

THE CONVERSION OF HIS IMAGINATION (1898–1916)

On November 29, 1898, C. S. Lewis was born in Belfast, Ireland. His father, Albert James Lewis, was a lawyer. His mother, Florence Augusta Lewis née Hamilton, was the daughter of a minister. Lewis had one older brother, Warren Hamilton Lewis, who was often referred to by the family as Warnie. While still in childhood, C. S. Lewis renamed himself Jacksie. The name stuck, and as an adult he was affectionately called Jack by family and close friends.

IMAGINATION AND MYTH

Gifted from childhood with a vivid imagination, Lewis turned a common

environment into an adventurous opportunity for journeys of the mind. In his autobiography *Surprised By Joy*, Lewis recounted:

I am a product of long corridors, empty sunlit rooms, upstairs indoor silences, attics explored in solitude, distant noises of gurgling cisterns and pipes, and the noise of wind under the tiles.³

As a boy, Lewis was fond of Beatrix Potter's children's books. Reflecting her influence, he wrote his own stories of talking animals in adventures filled with chivalry and discovery.

As Lewis matured, his love of story deepened. The grand characters, epic plots, and colorful settings of ancient tales stirred him emotionally. Myth gave the young Lewis an indefinable bliss that seemed to come

from another world. He called this emotion “joy,” which he felt was the “unsatisfied desire which is itself more desirable than any other satisfaction.”⁴

Such joy filled his heart when he first read the story *Siegfried And The Twilight Of The Gods*. This Nordic tale of love, treachery, and triumph made a powerful impression on young Lewis. Of this, he later wrote:

“Northernness” engulfed me: a vision of huge, clear spaces hanging above the Atlantic in the endless twilight of Northern summer, . . . there arose at once . . . the memory of joy itself.⁵

These epic tales captured the imagination of Lewis in ways that would later enrich his ability to express the wonder and joy of his own spiritual journey.

A BAPTIZED IMAGINATION

Lewis was not the first to see a bridge between mythic story and Christian truth. For years, skilled Christian authors had used storytelling to convey spiritual meanings. One such author was George MacDonald, a Christian clergyman and author of fantasy. In his book *Phantastes: A Faerie Romance*, the main character enters a dreamlike world. There he seeks his ideal of feminine beauty that he finds embodied in the “Marble Lady.” MacDonald’s spiritual insight was so powerful that when Lewis read this fantasy he was deeply moved. Of this, Lewis later wrote:

That evening I began to read my new book. . . . It is as if I were carried sleeping across the

frontier, or as if I had died in the old country and could never remember how I came alive in the new. . . . But in another sense all was changed. I did not yet know . . . the name of the new quality, the bright shadow. . . . I do now. It was Holiness.⁶

Lewis was impressed by the author's ability to use his imagination to capture the spiritual attribute of God's moral purity. The story was pagan, but the meaning was Christian.

Later, reflecting on what he had read, Lewis wrote:

That night my imagination was, in a certain sense, baptized.⁷

Here Lewis uses *baptism* as a word picture to describe the beginning of a spiritual awakening prior to his conversion. He did not elaborate on the term

“baptized imagination.” But looking back, Lewis apparently could see how his own imagination and interest in storytelling were coming under the powerful influence of Christ. Eventually, he saw the connection between great myth and Christian truth.

MYTHS THAT BRIDGE TO CHRIST

Although a childhood appreciation for fantasy would someday help him as a literary scholar, Lewis eventually saw in it something else. He later realized this love of myth had been preparing him for an encounter with the Christian God.

Sometimes I can almost think that I was sent back to the false gods there to acquire some capacity for worship against the day when the true God should recall me to Himself.⁸

Some may view a fascination with mythology as a stumbling block to finding Christ. But for Lewis, it became a steppingstone. In his case, it was the Nordic tales that prepared him for the Christ story. What started in his imagination ended up in a carefully reasoned approach to faith and truth.

THE CONVERSION OF HIS REASON (1917–1939)

C. S. Lewis had reached a significant milestone in his spiritual journey. His appreciation of story had given him a bridge to spiritual truth. Soon this strong intuition would point the way to Someone outside of his own natural experience.

ECHOES OF THE ONE TRUE STORY

As a youth, Lewis received an excellent education. One key influence in his life was a private tutor named W. T. Kirkpatrick, who encouraged him to read Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*. The then-popular book was a comprehensive survey of all the world religions and mythologies. For the most part, Frazer viewed religious belief as a human attempt to make sense of frightening and incomprehensible phenomena such as thunder, pestilence, famine, and death. While describing a variety of myths and legends, Frazer also showed how different cultures told stories of dying and resurrected gods. In agricultural and fertility settings, these common themes of death and rebirth were linked to the cycles of nature. They reflected the

way the harvest kills the plant. But when its seeds are buried in the ground, new life springs from death. The dying and rising god was a symbol of nature's life process.

From his research, Frazer concluded that these various myths explained away the story of Christ in the Gospels. Lewis began to wonder, however, if these same stories actually anticipated Christ's resurrection as a historical event.

Later, after Lewis had become a professor at Oxford, his questions about this continued to grow. A comment made in an offhand manner by fellow Oxford professor T. D. Weldon especially struck Lewis. "Rum [odd] thing, all that stuff of Frazer's about the Dying God," Weldon said. "It almost looks as if it had really happened once."⁹

Astonished at his atheist friend's open speculation about Christ as a real counterpart to pagan myth, Lewis began to read the Gospels closely and found them to be a credible and convincing record. He saw that unlike the other mythical stories of dying and resurrected gods, the account of Jesus Christ was carefully described in a particular place and time.

Later, Lewis discussed his spiritual findings with J. R. R. Tolkien and Hugo Dyson, two fellow scholars who were Christians. Lewis told them that whenever he encountered a dying and rising god story in mythology, he was "mysteriously moved." His colleagues explained that what made the gospel of Christ unique was its historicity. Although carrying a familiar theme of a dying and resurrected God, the recorded events

about the life of Jesus Christ had actually happened in history.

Lewis was not yet convinced, but he was becoming increasingly disillusioned with his atheistic worldview. A meaningless universe empty of any divine power or design seemed an oversimplification. Later, in his book *Mere Christianity*, Lewis would conclude that atheism was too simple because it doesn't adequately explain

Lewis would conclude that atheism was too simple because it doesn't adequately explain the complex design of the universe.

the complex design of the universe. At this stage of his journey, however, Lewis was asking questions like: If there is a God, has there been a time when He revealed Himself to His creation? Lewis kept looking at the myths and wondering if all those stories were really echoes of the one true story.

A QUESTION OF PERSONAL INDEPENDENCE

In time, it would become apparent that Lewis' objections at this point were more a matter of his will than intellectual. Lewis' great concern was a fear of divine interference. He would later acknowledge:

Christianity placed at the center what then seemed to me a transcendental Interferer.¹⁰

Lewis struggled, as so many others have, about what a decision to follow

Christ would mean to his own freedom. He later understood this desire to maintain control of his own life when he wrote:

That is what I wanted; some area, however small, of which I could say to all other beings, "This is my business and mine only."¹¹

To Lewis, it would become increasingly apparent that experiencing a right relationship with God would require a surrender of his will.

With so much at stake, Lewis' desire to know the truth left him with a troubling question: Among all the competing claims of different religions, how could he be sure that his spiritual longings would find rest in Jesus of Nazareth?

At this point, Lewis was influenced by G. K. Chesterton's book, *The Everlasting Man*.

Of it, Lewis wrote:

I read Chesterton's *Everlasting Man* and for the first time saw the whole Christian outline of history.¹²

In it, Chesterton laid out a clear picture of the origin of civilization, with God stepping into history through the incarnation of His Son. Chesterton's case for the Christian God was compelling. Lewis' former arguments for atheism were beginning to fall like a house of cards. Yet it was not the evidence alone that seemed to be crowding in on him, but a Person. He wrote:

The odd thing was that before God closed in on me, I was in fact offered what now appears a moment of wholly free choice.¹³

Looking back, Lewis recognized that the God who created him to have an eternal relationship with Himself would not do so

without the permission of his will.

Finally, Lewis relented. He wrote:

In the Trinity Term of 1929 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.¹⁴

Lewis felt compelled to acknowledge God's existence, not because of some kind of psychological need, but because of the evidence.

Years of nagging facts and spiritual reflection had brought Lewis to a spiritual crossroads. But he was not yet a convert to Christianity. Just as his imagination had come under the influence of Christ, now his reason would drive him to embrace the spiritual tenets he would so masterfully defend for the rest of his life. Of this, Lewis wrote:

It must be understood that the conversion . . . was only to Theism . . . not to Christianity.¹⁵

The evidence that drove him to this decision, however, was not without emotion. Lewis began to connect the phenomenon he called "joy" with the Christian God. He later understood:

I was now approaching the source from which those arrows of joy had been shot at me ever since childhood.¹⁶

The merging of his reason and his heart had been a foretaste of fellowship with God. Later, Lewis would say:

Union with [God's] Nature is bliss and separation from it horror.¹⁷

Lewis' final decision to fully embrace the Christian faith came to him at an unexpected time. It was not while he was meditating

during a Sunday service or chapel at Magdalen College, Oxford. Instead, he was riding with his brother to the Whipsnade Zoo. Of this experience, he wrote:

When we set out I did not believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and when we reached the zoo I did.¹⁸

His honest inquiry and wrestling with God had finally come to rest in genuine faith.

Lewis' decision to entrust himself to a God he had been denying was a defining moment in his life. It was a life-changing encounter that was accompanied by the deepening of his conscience as well.

THE CONVERSION OF HIS CONSCIENCE (1940–1951)

In the period from 1940 to 1951, Lewis published some of his most popular and enduring Christian books. *Screwtape Letters* provided insights from the imagined dialogue of demons discussing the best means of tempting a follower of Christ. *Mere Christianity* pursued an intriguing case for truth by starting with our shared sense of right and wrong. And *The Abolition Of Man* argued for the reality of objective values by comparing different cultures. What all three works have in common is a strong reliance on conscience.

But how did Lewis get to the point of seeing the implications of the inner moral compass that is common to all of us?

A CONSCIENCE BEING CONVERTED

Long before becoming a Christian, Lewis had a strong sense of conscience. While serving in World War I, he befriended a fellow soldier by the name of Paddy Moore. Many believe that Paddy asked Lewis to take care of his mother if he were killed in combat. When Paddy tragically died in the war, Lewis took Mrs. Moore and her daughter Maureen into his home, where his brother Warren would eventually join them. This living arrangement went on for years and was not without its domestic frustrations. While some have questioned this living arrangement, many believe that Lewis accepted the inconvenience to honor a promise made to his comrade in arms.

After Lewis became a Christian, his conscience

seemed to grow under the influence of his newfound faith. One example of this occurred during World War II. When bombs were falling on London, Lewis volunteered to have evacuated children stay in his modest home. It was while observing their games that Lewis got some of the ideas that were later incorporated into the first Narnia book, *The Lion, The Witch, And The Wardrobe*.

It might be enjoyable today to read about children frolicking in the professor's home, but for Lewis it must have been disruptive. As an Oxford professor, his drive to absorb vast amounts of literature was insatiable. So his time alone to read and study had to have been important to him. Yet his conscience directed him to look after the needs of others.

Another example of

Lewis' generous heart is evident in his donation of royalties from his popular book *The Screwtape Letters* to his favorite charities. He continued to live modestly and give away what he had received to those in greater need. Eventually, he developed a trust fund to donate to charity all the royalties he received from his Christian books.

Even more than his generosity and desire to help others, the real evidence of Lewis' converted conscience is seen in his writings that detail the moral argument for the existence of God.

LOVING AND HATING WHAT IS RIGHT

Mere Christianity contains a partial autobiography of Lewis' journey from atheism to Christianity. In many ways it reflects his own

spiritual journey from a relativistic moral philosophy to one of the objective values of the Lawgiver behind the law.

Lewis began *Mere Christianity* with the intriguing subtitle: "Right and wrong as a clue to the meaning of the universe." He observed that when one man is arguing about the rightness or wrongness of an action . . .

he is appealing to some kind of standard of behavior which he expects the other man to know about.¹⁹

Lewis explained that any quarrel over fairness reflects the capacity for moral judgment and an objective standard that has been violated.

In modern times, moral relativism has sought to dismiss the conscience as "herd instinct" or "social convention." But Lewis found this an inadequate

explanation for this sense of right and wrong.²⁰ He observed:

There is something above and beyond the ordinary facts of men's behavior, and yet quite definitely real—a real law, which none of us made, but which we find pressing on us.²¹

Lewis then turned his attention to human nature to explore the possibility of a moral Creator. Central to Lewis' argument is the internal conflict we all experience between wanting to do what is good but instead doing the opposite. He believed that this love-hate relationship with moral code is best explained by the story of the Bible:

[Christians] offer an explanation of how we got into our present state of both hating goodness and loving it. . . . how God Himself becomes a man to save man from

the disapproval of God.²²

Despite Lewis' arguments for a universal moral code, many of his contemporaries did not agree with him. For them moral choice would often be considered a personal preference. Although cultural relativism was used in an attempt to refute him, Lewis argued the case for objective values by appealing to a wide variety of cultures.

THE LAW OF GOD WRITTEN IN THE HEART

Lewis gave a series of lectures at the University of Durham that would eventually be published as *The Abolition Of Man*. In this work, Lewis used many different cultures to build the case for a similar set of objective values. The many cultures he cited included: Egyptian, Hebrew,

Babylonian, Hindu, Chinese, Roman, Norse, Christian, Native American, Anglo-Saxon, Greek, and even Australian aborigines. Among these varied traditions were moral values such as the golden rule, duties to parents and children, justice in a court of law, keeping one's promises, and showing mercy.

In *The Abolition Of Man*, Lewis eloquently appealed to an eternal moral code of ethics that our consciences naturally respond to. Interestingly, he didn't begin with the Christian faith to which he had converted. Instead, he cited an ancient culture from Asia: The Chinese also speak of . . . the Way in which the universe goes on . . . It is the doctrine of objective value, the belief that certain attitudes are really true, and others really false.²³

From the evidence of this universal moral awareness, Lewis built his case for objective standards that have their origin in the God who revealed Himself in Christ. Lewis' conscience had been converted. Yet he was to face a personal crisis that would challenge the very fabric of his spiritual life and many of his expectations.

THE CONVERSION OF HIS EXPECTATIONS (1952–1963)

As Lewis matured in his faith, his expectations changed along with his life experiences. Like many of us, he saw that life's joys are so transient. He also observed that disappointments make pain unavoidable.

Earlier, Lewis reflected

on why bad things happen to good people in his book *The Problem Of Pain*. The text provided fresh insight on the role of suffering in an imperfect and fallen world. Years would elapse, however, before Lewis himself would have his own Christian view of pain severely tested.

A JOY GIVEN AND TAKEN AWAY

In his early life, the tragic loss of his mother and other heartaches may have contributed to the reason Lewis became an atheist. Yet after he had embraced the Christian faith, his attitude seemed to be more accepting of suffering. Ironically, that acceptance would be severely tested after falling in love with a woman named Joy.

Lewis lived with his brother Warren in a modest home called “The Kilns.” Conscientious as he

was, Lewis made it a habit to answer mail from the many readers who had been helped by his growing number of books. This is how he became acquainted with Joy Gresham, a Jewish woman who, through the influence of Lewis’ writings, converted from atheism to Christianity. Separated from an alcoholic and abusive husband, Joy came to England from the US with her two sons, David and Douglas, to meet the writer who had helped her so much. Initially, Lewis considered her only as an intellectual friend. But later, after she and her husband had divorced, Joy was in danger of being deported back to the US. So Lewis agreed to enter into a civil marriage with her. Tragically, not long after this arrangement, Joy was diagnosed with terminal bone cancer. The relationship had grown

into one of love, so they sought a formal Christian marriage. In those days, it was difficult for a divorced woman to be remarried by a priest of the Church of England. But they were able to persuade the Rev. Peter Bide, who performed the ceremony at her hospital bed.

Eventually, Mr. and Mrs. Lewis were given the good news of cancer remission, and they were finally able to take a well-deserved holiday trip. Lewis continued to earn academic achievements and the family enjoyed domestic happiness. But sadly, Joy's bone cancer returned in 1960. In July of that same year, Joy Lewis died.

At this point, the man who had written and spoken with such conviction about the truth of Christianity was to have his faith tested unlike any other time in his life.

When he was a bachelor, Lewis' academic world had been somewhat cloistered with scholarly colleagues and collegial friends at the Inklings Writers' Group. But after Lewis married Joy, she became a central part of his life. Her painful exit troubled Lewis deeply and affected his expectations. He could accept the role of pain in the Christian life, but when it came to someone so dear to him, he struggled deeply.

Lewis could accept the role of pain in the Christian life, but when it came to someone so dear to him, he struggled deeply.

A GRIEF OBSERVED

How did Lewis deal with his pain from the loss of Joy? His brother Warren had recorded his own thoughts and feelings in a journal for much of his life. But Jack hadn't journaled as an adult, until the deep pain he felt couldn't remain bottled up inside. So he took out a notebook and began to jot down his internal struggle. His frank and painful record would eventually be published as the book *A Grief Observed*. Lewis was concerned that he not undermine the faith of those who read it, so he released it under the pseudonym N. W. Clerk. But when he discovered that his friends were recommending the book to people who were also grieving, he made his authorship public.

What these journals show is that Lewis' Gethsemane had been a

roller coaster of fear, hope, and grief. He had prayed for Joy's healing. And when her cancer went into remission, his hopes were buoyed. But when the cancer returned with a vengeance, his emotions swung from optimism to dread about his wife's future health.

After Joy's death, Lewis recorded in his journal his experience of a seemingly impenetrable barrier between him and God:

Where is God? This is one of the most disquieting symptoms. . . . But go to Him when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain, and what do you find? A door slammed in your face, and a sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside. After that, silence.²⁴

In that dark place of despair, the comfort of the Holy Spirit seemed terribly missing. The compassion

and love of Christ was gone from his experience. Feeling exposed and in isolation, he cried out:

Oh God, God, why did you take such trouble to force this creature out of its shell if it is now doomed to crawl back—be sucked back—into it?²⁵

Lewis found that the comfort he should feel from Christianity was lacking:

Talk to me about the truth of religion and I'll listen gladly. Talk to me about the duty of religion and I'll listen submissively. But don't come talking to me about the consolations of religion or I shall suspect that you don't understand.²⁶

As sadness gave way to anger, Lewis asked if God was really a "Cosmic Sadist."²⁷

Fortunately, after some time, Lewis experienced

some lifting of his initial grief. He then resolved to set boundaries on how long he would continue his journal:

This is the fourth—and the last—empty [notebook] I can find in the house I resolve to let this limit my jottings. I will not start buying books for this purpose.²⁸

Yet despite this, he still learned much on his journey. He wrote:

There is something new to be chronicled every day. Grief is like a long valley, a winding valley where any bend may reveal a totally new landscape.²⁹

Toward the end of *A Grief Observed*, we see that the barrier between God and Lewis had come to an end:

Turned to God, my mind no longer meets that locked door.³⁰

In hindsight, he

realized that his idea of God needed to be periodically broken down to make room for reality:

My idea of God is not a divine idea. It has to be shattered time after time. He shatters it Himself. He is the great iconoclast.³¹

Lewis used the term *iconoclast* to describe God shattering a preconceived idea of Himself in the mind of the believer. God then replaces it with a more accurate picture of what He is really like. Terrible tragedies may shatter our

***Terrible tragedies
may shatter
our view of
God's character
and what we can
expect from Him
in this life.***

view of God's character and what we can expect from Him in this life.

Lewis' improved understanding of God was not just limited to life on earth. His reality was rooted in the promise of a supernatural existence that transcends death. Christ's resurrection was central to this understanding. In his book *Miracles*, Lewis eloquently expressed his view of the resurrection:

The New Testament writers speak as if Christ's achievement in rising from the dead was the first event of its kind in the whole history of the universe. He is the "first fruits," the "pioneer of life." He has forced open a door that has been locked since the death of the first man. He has met, fought, and beaten the king of death. Everything is different because He has done so.

This is the beginning of the new creation: a new chapter in cosmic history has opened.³²

***It is the promise
of a new creation
that caused Lewis
to view our present
world as only
a shadowland
by comparison.
Seeing the present
as transient,
he looked to a
future in which
God would
introduce joyous
radical change.***

It is this promise of a new creation that caused Lewis to view our present world as only a shadowland by

comparison. Seeing the present as transient, he looked to a future in which God would introduce joyous radical change (1 Cor. 15:51-57; Rev. 21:1)—a future in which humans, heaven, and earth would be changed into something extraordinarily beautiful and eternal.

Although Lewis never found another true love like Joy, his Christian faith offered him stirrings of a world to come—one that would be an eternal and happy place. Lewis persevered in that faith until his death on November 22, 1963.

LORD, LIAR, OR LUNATIC

C. S. Lewis has been called one of the most original Christian thinkers of the 20th century. Ironically, as a Christian writer he never set out to be novel. Instead, he used his imagination and skills to recast ancient truths in fresh and insightful ways. In this booklet, we have briefly looked at how Lewis' conversion to Christianity transformed his imagination, reason, conscience, and expectations. One of the most compelling aspects of his conversion was that it was an extended process, not just a single event. Indeed, the transformation of his mind took place on multiple levels over a long period of time. But central in his transformation was One who had once been to him the unknown God but

ultimately became his intimate Savior and Friend. It was Jesus Christ who ultimately transformed him. And Lewis made it clear that none of us can remain neutral in our response to Him. Here's what he wrote in *Mere Christianity*:

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: "I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God." That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the devil of hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son

of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.³³

THE ONGOING INFLUENCE OF C. S. LEWIS

The popularity of C. S. Lewis has grown over the decades following his death. Some might wonder why. What is the appeal of a scholar in Renaissance Literature? What has given him such a wide influence beyond the campuses of Oxford and Cambridge where he taught?

In the remaining pages of this booklet, we'll see some of the answers to those questions. But all the human factors put together would be of little significance apart from Lewis' deep confidence in the Christian gospel that changed his life.

HIS BELIEF ABOUT WHAT WAS TRUE

Lewis' affirmation of faith was based on what he believed to be fact. Indeed, he claimed not to have become a Christian to meet some kind of personal need, but because he became convinced that Christianity was true. Of this he wrote:

Christianity claims to give an account of facts—to tell you what the real universe is like. Its account of the universe may be true, or it may not, and once the question is really before you, then your natural

inquisitiveness must make you want to know the answer. If Christianity is untrue, then no honest man will want to believe it, however helpful it might be. If it is true, every honest man will want to believe it, even if it gives him no help at all.³⁴

C. S. Lewis also believed what the Christian gospel says about nature, the human condition, and its solution. In *Mere Christianity*, he wrote:

We are told that Christ was killed for us, that His death has washed out our sins, and that by dying He disabled death itself. That is the formula. That is Christianity. That is what has to be believed.³⁵

Clearly central to Lewis' spiritual life was the belief in the death of Jesus Christ on the cross and its power to cleanse the sins of those who have faith in Him.

HIS CONFIDENCE IN SCRIPTURE

But how could Lewis have such confidence in an event that had happened nearly 2,000 years before he lived? The answer lies in his understanding of the evidence of textual criticism. Lewis was convinced that the scholarly evidence for the cross-comparison of ancient manuscripts supported the historic reliability of the New Testament. He also was convinced that the Bible's human writers were supernaturally inspired by God. In one of his essays, Lewis observed:

A belief in . . . verbal inspiration will indeed make all Scripture a book by a single Author.³⁶

For Lewis, the words of Scripture were reliable because they were authored by a Divine Being who worked through human writers. Because of this,

the Bible, which contains the gospel, should be taken seriously.

Such confidence in Scripture, however, did not mean that Lewis never saw apparent problems and mysteries in the Bible. Instead, he actually pointed to them as evidence for the truthfulness of Scripture. In one of his letters, Lewis wrote:

Would not a revelation which contained nothing that you and I did not understand, be for that very reason rather suspect? To a child it would seem a contradiction to say both that his parents made him and God made him, yet we see how both can be true.³⁷

So despite seeing some issues in Scripture that are difficult to explain, he nonetheless was confident in the Bible as the source of divine truth.

It was the reliability of this record that provided Lewis with the foundation for proclaiming Christ as Lord.

HIS ABILITY TO COMMUNICATE WITH EVERYDAY PEOPLE

Because Lewis wrote from within an academic community of skeptics, it is a wonder that he had an impact at all. Yet he struck a chord in the hearts and minds of millions. How was that possible? Of this, Lewis wrote:

When I began, Christianity came before the great mass of my unbelieving fellow-countrymen, either in the highly emotional form offered by revivalists or in the unintelligible language of highly cultured clergymen. Most men were reached by neither. My task was

therefore simply that of a translator—one turning Christian doctrine, or what he believed to be such, into the vernacular, into the language that unscholarly people would attend to and could understand.³⁸

Lewis viewed himself as a translator. He was aware that scholarly language and thoughts to which he had become so accustomed in academia were not the suitable means for communicating the spiritual truths to the average man and woman. It was Lewis' creative writing that used science fiction, children's fantasies, and popular books on theology to build a bridge to the average person.

Lewis' perpetual popularity, however, can't be accounted for just on the basis of his creativity and simplicity.

HIS BREADTH OF KNOWLEDGE

Another aspect of Lewis' appeal is the depth of his ideas, illustrations, and insights. He drew his thoughts from a vast well of literature, philosophy, and theology. Yet in all this, Lewis used his breadth of knowledge to help others see the priority of personal conversion. In *Christian Reflections*, Lewis wrote:

The Christian knows from the outset that the salvation of a single soul is more important than the production or preservation of all the epics and tragedies in the world.³⁹

At first glance, this statement could be taken as a negative comment about history, literature, and culture. But this is not what he meant. Lewis read widely, reflected deeply, and wrote insightfully with one eye on the human experience in

this world and the other eye on the new world promised by Christ.

HIS CONFIDENCE IN RESURRECTION & TRANSFORMATION

Lewis believed that this current world with all its joys and sorrows was only a preview of a better world to come. It was this confidence in a new cosmos under Christ's sovereignty that caused him to place such a high value on a single human life. Christianity taught that only those who put their faith in Christ would occupy this new world. It was for this reason that Christ came into our world.

For Lewis, the greatest miracle in the history of our universe was the incarnation of Christ—God becoming man. Yet he saw Christ's brief visit to our world having a much bigger purpose. For it would be through His

resurrection from the dead that a way would be made to restore a universe that had gone wrong. Lewis believed that Christ's resurrection carried the promise not only of making believers into new creatures, but it will also transform the entire universe to serve as their eternal home. In his book *Miracles*, Lewis wrote:

The records [of Scripture] represent Christ . . . as withdrawing . . . “to prepare a place for us.” This presumably means that He is about to create that whole new nature which will provide the environment or conditions for His glorified humanity and, in Him, for ours. . . . The old field of space, time, matter, and the senses is to be weeded, dug, and sown for a new crop. We may be tired of that old field: God is not.⁴⁰

In *Mere Christianity*, he explained how the familiar would take on the wonder of a new creation:

Christ's work of making new men [is like] . . . turning a horse into a winged creature. . . . It is not mere improvement but transformation. It is a change that goes off in a totally different direction—a change from being creatures of God to being sons of God. The first instance appeared in Palestine two thousand years ago. . . . [Christ] is the origin and center and life of all new men.⁴¹

Those who are changed by Christ don't just become improved versions of who they once were when living on the earth, but glorious transformations into radiant children of God. Despite the hope of a completed transformation, however, the beginnings of it must be

worked out in life's current imperfections. In *Miracles*, Lewis wrote:

A new nature is being not merely made but made out of an old one. We live amid all the anomalies, inconveniences, hopes, and excitements of a house that is being rebuilt.⁴²

This is another appeal of Lewis' writing. He often seems to connect with the painful and uncomfortable realities of everyday life.

And so we see the one who had been called "the most thoroughly converted man" become a writer who was both captivated by and who captivated others with the gospel of Jesus Christ. It was Christ to whom Lewis so effectively pointed:

In a civilization like ours, I feel that everyone has to come to terms with the claims of Jesus Christ upon his life.⁴³

The Christ with whom Lewis came to terms is the Jesus who said:

I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live (Jn. 11:25).

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God (Jn. 3:16-18).

Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has

everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life (Jn. 5:24).

“In a civilization like ours, I feel that everyone has to come to terms with the claims of Jesus Christ upon his life.”

C. S. Lewis

THE WRITINGS OF C. S. LEWIS

NONFICTION

- *The Allegory Of Love: A Study In Medieval Tradition* (1936)
- *The Problem Of Pain* (1940)
- *The Abolition Of Man* (1943)

- *Miracles: A Preliminary Study* (1947, revised 1960)
- *Arthurian Torso* (1948)
- *Mere Christianity* (1952)
- *English Literature In The Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama* (1954)
- *Surprised By Joy: The Shape Of My Early Life* (1955)
- *Reflections On The Psalms* (1958)
- *The Four Loves* (1960)
- *A Grief Observed* (1961)
- *An Introduction To Medieval And Renaissance Literature* (1964)
- *Studies In Medieval And Renaissance Literature* (1966)
- *Spenser's Images Of Life* (1967)
- *Letters To An American Lady* (1967)
- *Christian Reflections* (1967)
- *God In The Dock: Essays On Theology And Ethics* (1970)
- *Of Other Worlds* (1982)

FICTION

- *The Pilgrim's Regress* (1933)
- *Space Trilogy: Out Of The Silent Planet* (1938)
- *Perelandra* (1943)
- *That Hideous Strength* (1946)
- *The Screwtape Letters* (1942)
- *The Great Divorce* (1945)
- *The Chronicles Of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch, And The Wardrobe* (1950)
- *Prince Caspian* (1951)
- *The Voyage Of The Dawn Treader* (1952)
- *The Silver Chair* (1953)
- *The Horse and His Boy* (1954)
- *The Magician's Nephew* (1955)
- *The Last Battle* (1956)
- *Till We Have Faces* (1956)
- *Screwtape Proposes A Toast* (1961)

- *Letters To Malcolm: Chiefly On Prayer* (1964)

POETRY

- *Spirits In Bondage* (1919; published under pseudonym Clive Hamilton)
- *Dymer* (1926; published under pseudonym Clive Hamilton)
- *Narrative Poems* (1969; includes *Dymer*)
- *The Collected Poems Of C. S. Lewis* (1994; includes *Spirits In Bondage*)



ENDNOTES

1. www.christianitytoday.com/ch/2005/issue88/2.02.html;
2. *God In The Dock*, p.12;
3. *Surprised By Joy*, p.10;
4. *ibid.*, pp.17-18;
5. *ibid.*, p.73;
6. *ibid.*, p.179;
7. *ibid.*, p.181;
8. *ibid.*, p.77;
9. *ibid.*, pp.223-224;
10. *ibid.*, p.172;
11. *ibid.*, p.172;
12. *ibid.*, p.223;
13. *ibid.*, p.224;
14. *ibid.*,

- pp.228-229;
15. *ibid.*, p.230;
16. *ibid.*, p.230;
17. *ibid.*, p.232;
18. *ibid.*, p.237;
19. *Mere Christianity*, p.3;
20. *ibid.*, pp.9-13;
21. *ibid.*, p.20;
22. *ibid.*, p.32;
23. *The Abolition Of Man*, p.18;
24. *A Grief Observed*, p.9;
25. *ibid.*, p.18;
26. *ibid.*, p.23;
27. *ibid.*, p.27;
28. *ibid.*, p.47;
29. *ibid.*, p.47;
30. *ibid.*, p.49;
31. *ibid.*, p.52;
32. *Miracles*, pp.236-237;
33. *Mere Christianity*, p.52.
34. *God In The Dock*, pp.108-109;
35. *Mere Christianity*, p.58;
36. *Selected Literary Essays*, "The Literary Impact Of The Authorized Version," p.127;
37. *Letters Of C. S. Lewis*, p.253;
38. *God In The Dock*, p.183;
39. *Christian Reflections*, "Christianity And Literature," p.10;
40. *Miracles*, p.149;
41. *Mere Christianity*, p.183;
42. *Miracles*, p.155;
43. *God In The Dock*, p.265.

More than 200 different booklets available



Visit us on the
Web or write for
your copy of the
**Discovery Series
Resource
catalog today.**

www.discoveryseries.org/catalog

USA: PO Box 2222, Grand Rapids, MI 49501-2222

Canada: Box 1622, Windsor, ON N9A 6Z7