

## **IN PRAISE OF C. S. LEWIS**

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During the past ten years I have read more books by and about C. S. Lewis than any other author. His writings have had a significant impact on my own faith and view of the world. I have enjoyed sharing his life and works with both students and adults during Sunday School classes at Manoa Valley Church, and during evening sessions open to the public at Chaminade University. Tonight I would like to share his life and works with you.

### **Biographical Sketch**

Clives Staples Lewis was born in 1898 in Belfast, Ireland. At age two, according to his mother, he was "talking like anything." At the age of four, he wisely chose the name "Jack" as his nickname, earning the gratitude of all those struggling with "Clives Staples." His mother died when he was ten, and he and his brother Warren were sent off to boarding school in England. After attending a series of schools, he spent two years with a private tutor, a rigorously logical Scotsman named Kirkpatrick, who had a great influence on his intellectual life. He entered Oxford in 1916 and joined the Army when the First World War broke out in 1917. Wounded in battle in France, he returned to England, and won a first in philosophy, a first in classics, and a first in English literature at Oxford.

In 1925 he accepted a permanent teaching position as a fellow in English language and literature at Magdalen College, Oxford, where he taught for nearly thirty years. In 1954 he accepted a position as professor of Medieval and Renaissance Literature at Cambridge University. In 1957 he married Joy Davidman, who was already dying of cancer, and who passed away three years later. Lewis was almost 65 when he died on November 22, 1963, the same day that John F. Kennedy was assassinated.

C. S. Lewis was a prolific writer in two major fields: English literature and Christian thought. He was almost always writing a book or essay in each of these fields simultaneously, switching back and forth between projects. He produced more than 50 books during his lifetime. So far, I have read only half of them.

Lewis wrote a number of books on English literature which are considered classics and are still read today. My focus has been entirely on his other works— the books he

published on Christian subjects. His Christian works include essays, allegories, science fiction, children's stories, and lay sermons.

Lewis lost his belief in Christianity when he was thirteen, after his mother died. For nearly twenty years, he was an atheist, reveling in Nordic myths and things medieval. During that time, he was tantalized and troubled by an occasional brief moment of joy which intimated that there was something more, something beyond, something deeply satisfying—the something for which each of us was made. His journey in search of deep joy led him back to Christianity as the myth which, unlike the other myths, had actually come true. He was 32 when he accepted Christianity again.

As one writer says of Lewis, "Christianity baptized his imagination." To Lewis, Christianity was more than true—it explained all truth." His logic, his soaring imagination, and his mastery of German, Celtic, and classical mythology as well as the literature of Western Europe through the Renaissance, were now at the service of Christian apologetics. What he wrote during the next 30 years made him, in the eyes of many people, the greatest Christian writer of the 20th century.

There are a number of good critical analyses and evaluations of Lewis's works. Rather than a critical analysis, I would like to give you a common man's walking tour of a few of his Christian writings.

### **The Chronicles of Narnia**

I first entered the world of C. S. Lewis through his seven-book series known as *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Lewis wrote *The Chronicles of Narnia* between 1950 and 1956. The seven books were written for children, but were not written down to them, and can be enjoyed on several levels by people of all ages. I find that I like them better as I get older.

*The Chronicles of Narnia* describe the adventures of various school children who are transported into Narnia and then back into their own world again, changed by the experience. The children witness the creation of Narnia, participate in the life of the Kingdom of Narnia, and hold their ground during the last battle as Narnia is brought to an end and the children suddenly find themselves in Heaven with their loved ones.

*The Chronicles of Narnia* are short books, each of which takes only a few hours to read. They are filled with medieval kings and evil witches, sailing ships and battling armies, talking animals and magic trumpets and potions. They are also filled with faith, love, courage, loyalty, joy, and humor.

The major character is the great lion Aslan, who sings Narnia into existence, and

interacts with the children in adventure after adventure. Aslan gives the children advice, comforts them, and forces them to confront difficult choices and take responsibility for the consequences of their actions. Aslan leads the children to victory. More important, he leads them to new knowledge about themselves.

The yearning that all good Narnians have to meet Aslan, to be close to him, to both love and fear him, and to obey him is strong throughout the *Chronicles*. Aslan is good, but Aslan is not a tame lion. When Aslan returns to Narnia to liberate it from the White Witch, the excitement mounts, as the whispered good news spreads among the faithful: "Aslan is on the move! Aslan is on the move!"

Lewis said that he did not set out to write *The Chronicles of Narnia* to convey Christian themes. Rather, he set out to write adventures, and being a Christian, the Christian themes naturally wrote themselves into the stories. Certainly, the books are not didactic texts on theology. They are, indeed, adventures.

Having said that, it is clear to Christians that the lion Aslan is symbolic of Christ, and the choices the children have to make— and the consequences they face— are the kinds of choices and consequences faced by Christians. As adventure follows adventure, lessons are learned, and faith, love, courage, and loyalty are exemplified and rewarded.

One of the most touching parts of the *Chronicles* is the death and resurrection of Aslan, which occurs in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. The four Pevensie children, staying at their uncle's house in the country, accidentally enter Narnia through an old wooden wardrobe. Edmund, one of the children, betrays his brother Peter and his sisters Susan and Lucy to the evil White Witch. The witch confronts Aslan with the Deep Magic, written on the Stone Table, which says that every traitor belongs to the witch, and for every treachery she has a right to a kill.

Aslan acknowledges the Deep Magic but offers himself in the little boy's place. Late at night, Aslan goes to the Stone Table, where he gives himself up to the witch and her evil creatures, who taunt him and tie him up and cut off his mane. After humiliating him, the witch kills him. All this is witnessed at a distance by Susan and Lucy, who accompanied Aslan to the Stone Table. After his death, the two girls cry all night, unable to leave Aslan's body. Let me read you a few pages, now, beginning at that point in the story:

It was quite definitely early morning now, not late night.

"I'm so cold," said Lucy.

"So am I," said Susan. "Let's walk about a bit."

They walked to the Eastern edge of the hill and looked down. The one big star had almost disappeared. The country all looked dark grey, but beyond, at the very end of the world, the sea showed pale. The sky began to turn red. They walked to and fro more times than they could count between the dead Aslan and the Eastern ridge, trying to keep warm; and oh, how tired their legs felt. Then at last... the red turned to gold along the line where the sea and the sky met and very slowly up came the edge of the sun. At that moment they heard from behind them a loud noise— a great cracking, deafening noise as if a giant had broken a giant's plate.

"What's that?" said Lucy, clutching Susan's arm.

"I— I feel afraid to turn around," said Susan; "something awful is happening."

"They're doing something worse to him," said Lucy. "Come on!" And she turned, pulling Susan round with her.

The rising of the sun had made everything look so different— all the colours and shadows were changed— that for a moment they didn't see the important thing. Then they did. The Stone Table was broken into two pieces by a great crack that ran down it from end to end; and there was no Aslan.

"Oh, oh, oh!" cried the two girls rushing back to the Table.

"Oh, its too bad," sobbed Lucy; "they might have left the body alone."

"Who's done it?" cried Susan. "What does it mean? Is it more magic?"

"Yes!" said a great voice behind their backs. "It is more magic." They looked round. There, shining in the sunrise, larger than they had seen him before, shaking his mane... stood Aslan himself.

"Oh, Aslan!" cried both the children, staring up at him, almost as much frightened as they were glad.

"Aren't you dead then, dear Aslan?" said Lucy.

"Not now," said Aslan.

"You're not— not a— ?" asked Susan in a shaky voice. She couldn't bring herself

to say the word ghost.

Aslan stooped his golden head and licked her forehead. The warmth of his breath and a rich sort of smell that seemed to hang about his hair came all over her.

"Do I look it?" he said.

"Oh, you're real, you're real! Oh, Aslan!" cried Lucy and both girls flung themselves upon him and covered him with kisses.

"But what does it all mean?" asked Susan when they were somewhat calmer.

"It means," said Aslan, "that though the Witch knew the Deep Magic, there is a magic deeper still which she did not know. Her knowledge goes back only to the dawn of Time. But if she could have looked a little further back, into the stillness and the darkness before Time dawned, she would have read there a different incantation. She would have known that when a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitor's stead, the Table would crack and Death itself would start working backwards..."

Aslan leads the girls on a great romp around the hilltop, leaping and laughing. The girls find that they are no longer tired or hungry or thirsty. Aslan lets out a great roar, which flattens all the trees in the vicinity. Then, with the girls on his back, he bounds off to join the battle between the witch's army and his own troops. When they arrive, they find that it is Edmund, for whom Aslan died, who valiantly fought his way through the witch's ogres to do battle with the witch herself. Sustaining mortal wounds, he brought his sword down on her wand and disabled her until Aslan arrives to finish the fight. As the battle ends in victory for Aslan's army, Edmund lies dying. He is healed by a few drops of the magic cordial which Aslan has entrusted to Lucy.

*The Chronicles of Narnia* are an especially appropriate starting point for non-Christians, who can see the themes of Christianity in action, without even being aware that the themes are Christian ones. This, in fact, is one of the great contributions of Lewis. In many of his writings, he does not address Christian theology directly. Instead, he prepares people for Christian ideas. Many of his works do not evangelize, but are preparatory to evangelization.

### **The Inklings**

It is tempting to compare Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia* with Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. Several writers have done so. What is interesting is that C.S. Lewis and J.R.R.

Tolkien were friends for decades. They first met in 1926. They were both in Oxford and they got together each week for many years. They were mainstays of a small group which at its height during World War II came to be known as the Inklings. The Inklings would meet in Lewis's room at Magdalen College, and read out loud from the current drafts of the essays and books they were working on. Tolkien was working on *The Lord of the Rings* during the same period that Lewis was working on *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

Having said all that, it seems to me that the whole mood and tone of the two series are quite different. *The Lord of the Rings* series has a dark, brooding, foreboding tone, in an elaborately created setting. *The Chronicles of Narnia* have a bright, hopeful, thoughtful tone, in a cursively created setting. Tolkien and Lewis were both devout Christians. However, Tolkien did his best to keep Christianity out of his work, while Lewis happily let Christianity into his. For me, Tolkien created more, but says less. Lewis created less, but says more.

### **The Science Fiction Trilogy**

Let us turn now to Lewis's science fiction trilogy. The first book was *Out of the Silent Planet*, published in 1938. A Cambridge philologist named Ransom is captured by two greedy and ambitious men, Weston and Devine. They take him in a spaceship to Malacandra, or Mars. There he escapes and lives for a time with the *hrossa*, one of the three intelligent life forms on Mars—the other two being the *seroni* and the *pfiftriggi*. At the end of the book he has an audience with the viceroy or archangel who rules the planet, and is then sent back to earth with Weston and Devine.

A major theme of the book is that Earth is the silent planet, cut off from the rest of the universe because that is where Satan was sent and imprisoned by God— or Maleldil, as He is known in outer space. Because it is a fallen planet, earth people are known as "the bent ones." The viceroy or archangel of Mars has heard that God has risked great things— even launched an invasion of Earth— to recapture it from Satan.

*Out of the Silent Planet* provides Lewis with the opportunity to contrast the lives of sentient beings living in their natural state on Mars with the unnatural lives of bent Earthlings. Let me read you a passage which appears early in the book. Ransom is with the *hrossa*, intelligent furry creatures who look like seals or walruses. He is still learning their language. In this passage, the *hrossa* are preparing to go out and hunt the *hnakra*, a kind of sea serpent:

They worked hard at Hyoui's boat till noon and then spread themselves on the weed close to the warmth of the creek, and began their midday meal. The war-like nature of their preparations suggested many questions to Ransom. He knew

no word for war, but managed to make Hyoui understand what he wanted to know. Did *seroni* and *hrossa* and *pfiftriggi* ever go out like this, with weapons, against each other?

‘What for?’ asked Hyoui.

It was difficult to explain. ‘If both wanted one thing and neither would give it,’ said Ransom, ‘would the other at last come with force? Would they say, give it or we kill you?’

‘What sort of thing?’

‘Well— food, perhaps.’

‘If the other *hnau* wanted food, why should we not give it to them? We often do.’

‘But how if we had not enough for ourselves?’

‘But Meleldil will not stop the plants growing.’

‘Hyoui, if you had more and more young, would Maleldil broaden the *handramit* and make enough plants for them all?’

‘The *seroni* know that sort of thing. But why should we have more young?’

Ransom found this difficult. At last he said: ‘Is the begetting of young not a pleasure among the *hrossa*?’

‘A very great one, Hman. This is what we call love.’

‘If a thing is a pleasure, a *hman* wants it again. He might want the pleasure more often than the number of young that could be fed.’

It took Hyoui a long time to get the point.

‘You mean,’ he said slowly, ‘that he might do it not only in one or two years of his life but again?’

‘Yes.’

‘But why? Would he want his dinner all day or want to sleep after he had slept? I

do not understand.'

'But a dinner comes every day. This love, you say, comes only once while the *hross* lives?'

'But it takes his whole life. When he is young he has to look for his mate; and then he has to court her; then he begets young; then he rears them; then he remembers all this, and boils it down inside him and makes it into poems and wisdom.'

'But the pleasure he must be content only to remember?'

'That is like saying "My food I must be content to eat."'

'I do not understand.'

'A pleasure is full grown only when it is remembered. You are speaking, *Hman*, as if the pleasure were one thing and the memory another. It is all one thing... What you call remembering is the last part of the pleasure, as the *crah* is the last part of a poem. When you and I met, the meeting was over very shortly, it was nothing. Now it is growing into something as we remember it. But still we know very little about it. What it will be when I remember it as I lie down to die, what it makes in me all my days till then—that is the real meeting. The other is only the beginning of it. You say you have poets in your world. Do they not teach you this?'

Here, then, is the natural life of an unfallen planet, contrasted with the bent life of fallen Earth.

The second book of the science fiction trilogy, published in 1943, was *Perelandra*. "Perelandra" is the planet Venus. Ransom is sent there by Maleldil to do battle with Weston, whose body has been taken over by Satan, and becomes the Unman, the devil's agent.

The planet Perelandra knows no sin; there has been no fall. The first man and woman have been created there, and are living in a new paradise, in a perfect and beautiful relationship with God and each other. Ransom succeeds in defeating Weston, and the book ends with a Great Dance of music and light—a joyous celebration of angels, archangels, and the spirits of all that have lived in the past. This is a book of great mythic beauty. It is reportedly one of Lewis's own favorites among all the books he wrote.

One of the interesting things about the book is the way in which Ransom defeats the devil, which has taken over Weston's body. Ransom first sees the contest as a spiritual one. He and Weston debate in front of the Green Lady—the Eve of Perelandra. But Ransom



cannot win the debate, because he is limited to the truth, and the devil is not. The Green Lady believes what the devil says, because she is so good and so innocent that she doesn't understand that anybody might lie to her. Furthermore, Ransom is human, and must sleep; the devil never sleeps, and continues day and night in its efforts to make the Green Lady disobey God. Ransom finally realizes he can only defeat the devil by killing the body of Weston, the Unman, which is the devil's only instrument on the planet. It is in physical combat—a long, exhausting battle which ends in an underground cave—that Ransom finally defeats the devil.

The third book, *That Hideous Strength*, was published in 1945. It is a cosmic battle between good and evil which takes place on Earth, in a college town not unlike Oxford or Cambridge. Ransom is there, now revealed as the Pendragon of Logres, the mythical eternal England. King Arthur's sorcerer Merlin is also there, awake after 1500 years of sleep. Devine, the dapper, greedy character we first met in *Out of the Silent Planet*, is there with scientists and opportunists doing the devil's work. The spirits of Mars and Venus, angels, and archangels aid Ransom and his household in the battle. One theme is the need to protect the natural world from those who would replace it with a totally artificial one. Another theme is the need to protect the spiritual life from nihilistic philosophy.

Whereas *The Chronicles of Narnia* are preparatory to evangelism, and embody a world in which Christian virtues are exemplified and Christian choices are made, the science fiction trilogy gives the reader the opportunity to see in action some specific themes of Lewis's expository works. In the book *The Problem of Pain*, Lewis discusses the fall of man. What would a world be like if it had not experienced the fall? He creates such a world in *Out of the Silent Planet*. What would it have been like to be with Eve at the beginning of our world, when she faced her temptation? Lewis puts us into that situation in *Perelandra*.

In his book *The Abolition of Man*, Lewis attacks the trend toward the acceptance of relative and subjective values, rather than the objective values of most societies and cultures which constitute our human heritage. What would happen to the world if it went totally nihilistic? Lewis gives us an idea of the tyranny and meaninglessness of such a world in *That Hideous Strength*. In short, one of the most delightful things about Lewis is that what he presents logically in his prose, he also presents imaginatively in his fiction.

### **Mere Christianity**

Another good door into the thought of C.S. Lewis is his book *Mere Christianity*, the most lucid, intelligent explanation of Christianity that I have ever read. This short book is actually a compilation of talks which Lewis gave over the BBC in England during World War II. *Mere Christianity* is bright and clear, and filled with hope. Its style is simple, direct,

and imaginative. It has had more impact on my thinking than any other book I have ever read, with the exception of the Gospels themselves.

The "mere" in *Mere Christianity* means simple or fundamental Christianity. Lewis was very careful throughout his writing to avoid doctrinal disputes between Christian sects. He constantly sought to describe and exemplify what all Christians have in common. Since he accepts the core of traditional Christianity, most people today would call him orthodox.

Lewis does not agree with those who accept Jesus as a great moral teacher but don't accept His claim to be God. Lewis argues that a man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. A great moral teachers would not claim to be God, and forgive sinners on his own authority. Jesus was either a lunatic, or what he said he was— the Son of God. Those are the only two alternatives.

Lewis doesn't water down the demands of Christ: he makes sense of them instead. For example, here is a passage from chapter 8 of the book, a chapter entitled "Is Christianity Hard or Easy?":

The ordinary idea which we all have before we become Christians is this. We take as starting point our ordinary self with its various desires and interests. We then admit that something else— call it "morality" or "decent behaviour," or "the good of society"— has claims on this self: claims which interfere with its own desires. What we mean by "being good" is giving in to those claims. Some of the things the ordinary self wanted to do turn out to be what we call "wrong:" well, we must give them up. Other things, which the self did not want to do, turn out to be what we call "right:" well, we shall have to do them. But we are hoping all the time that when all the demands have been met, the poor natural self will still have some chance, and some time, to get on with its own life and do what it likes. In fact, we are very like an honest man paying his taxes. He pays them all right, but he does hope that there will be enough left over for him to live on. Because we are still taking our natural self as the starting point.

As long as we are thinking that way, one or other of two results is likely to follow. Either we give up trying to be good, or else we become very unhappy indeed. For, make no mistake: if you are really going to try to meet all the demands made on the natural self, it will not have enough left over to live on. The more you obey your conscience, the more your conscience will demand of you. And your natural self, which is thus being starved and hampered and worried at every turn, will get angrier and angrier. In the end, you will either give up trying to be good, or else become one of those people who, as they say, "live for others" but always in a

discontented, grumbling way— always wondering why the others do not notice it more and always making a martyr of yourself. And once you have become that you will be a far greater pest to anyone who has to live with you than you would have been if you had remained frankly selfish.

...The terrible thing, the almost impossible thing, is to hand over your whole self— all your wishes and precautions— to Christ. But it is far easier than what we are all trying to do instead... As [Christ] said, a thistle cannot produce figs. If I am a field that contains nothing but grass-seed, I cannot produce wheat. Cutting the grass may keep it short: but I shall still produce grass and no wheat. If I want to produce wheat, the change must go deeper than the surface. I must be ploughed up and re-sown.

That is why the real problem of the Christian life comes where people do not usually look for it. It comes the very moment you wake up each morning. All your wishes and hopes for the day rush at you like wild animals. And the first job each morning consists simply in shoving them all back; in listening to that other voice, taking that other point of view, letting that other larger, stronger, quieter life come flowing in. And so on, all day. Standing back from all your natural fussings and frettings; coming in out of the wind.

We can only do it for moments at first. But from those moments the new sort of life will be spreading through our system: because now we are letting Him work at the right part of us. It is the difference between paint, which is merely laid on the surface, and a dye or stain which soaks right through. He never talked vague, idealistic gas. When He said, "Be perfect," He meant it. He meant that we must go in for the full treatment. It is hard: but the sort of compromise we are all hankering after is harder— in fact, it is impossible. It may be hard for an egg to turn into a bird: it would be a jolly sight harder for it to learn to fly while remaining an egg. We are like eggs at present. And you cannot go on indefinitely being just an ordinary, decent egg. We must be hatched or go bad.

...This is the whole of Christianity. There is nothing else... [T]he Church exists for nothing else but to draw men into Christ, to make them little Christs... God became Man for no other purpose. It is even doubtful, you know, whether the whole universe was created for any other purpose...

### **The Sin of Pride**

While the goal is to be drawn into the life of Christ and grow toward spiritual perfection, the Christian can still love the physical things of God's creation. As Lewis wrote

in *Mere Christianity*:

There is no good trying to be more spiritual than God. God never meant man to be a purely spiritual creature. That is why He uses material things like bread and wine to put the new life into us. We may think this rather crude and unspiritual. God does not: He invented eating. He likes matter. He invented it.

Lewis also did not think that sexual morality is the centerpiece of Christian ethics. Certainly, something has gone wrong with the sexual appetite in modern times. Lewis wrote:

...You can get a large audience together for a strip-tease act— that is, to watch a girl undress on the stage. Now suppose you came to a country where you could fill a theatre by simply bringing a covered plate on to the stage and then slowly lifting the cover so as to let every one see, just before the lights went out, that it contained a mutton chop or a bit of bacon, would you not think that in that country something had gone wrong with the appetite for food? And would not anyone who had grown up in a different world think there was something equally queer about the state of the sex instinct among us?

But the perversion of the sexual instinct is not the greatest sin troubling humankind. The greatest sin is the sin of pride. This is false pride— not pride in a job well done, but the kind of pride that places oneself first and sees no need for God. It is the greatest sin because it cuts us off from God. "It was through pride that the devil became the devil," Lewis wrote. "Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind."

Lewis wrote a marvelous little book which demonstrates how pride cuts us off from Heaven. The book is entitled *The Great Divorce*, and it was published in 1945. It is about the divorce between Heaven and Hell. It is cast as a dream fantasy. The narrator finds himself in a gray town in Hell, getting on a bus which takes interested residents of Hell up to Heaven. The bus arrives on the edge of Heaven, and the ghosts all get out. They find that the things of Heaven— the grass and trees and flowers— are hard and heavy, and the outskirts of heaven are bright, unlike the gray of Hell. Heaven is real; Hell is only a ghostlike shadow of reality.

Residents of Heaven who knew the ghosts during their lives on earth come down from the mountains of Heaven to greet the visitors from Hell and encourage them to change, so they can enter Heaven. But of the dozen or so ghosts who make the trip, only one allows himself to be changed, and only that one enters Heaven.

Lewis's portrayal of the different ghosts is both brilliant and disturbing. All of them

want to enter Heaven on their own terms, or not enter it at all. They are too proud to seek or even accept forgiveness or assistance. Lewis believes that the only reason there is a Hell is that people choose their will, instead of God's will. God cannot save them if they refuse to be saved. Lewis wrote: "I willingly believe that the damned are, in one sense, successful, rebels to the end; that the doors of Hell are locked on the inside."

## **Screwtape**

There is a saying that the road to Hell is paved with good intentions. Lewis does an astonishingly subtle job of explaining that the road to Hell is also paved with petty vanities. He does this in the book that first made him famous— *The Screwtape Letters*, published in 1942. This is the book that put him on the cover of *Time* magazine.

Screwtape is a devil, an Undersecretary of the Infernal Lowerarchy, and his letters are written to a junior temptor, his nephew Wormwood. Wormwood is assigned the task of leading a young man to damnation. During the course of the letters, the young man becomes a Christian, falls in love with a Christian girl, and meets his death during a London air raid. Wormwood fails; the young man enters Heaven.

The advice given by Screwtape, of course, sets forth the devil's view of the world. Lewis did not enjoy describing the Christian life from the devil's point of view, and he was reportedly irritated that the book became so popular. However, the subtlety of the advice, and Lewis's insight into the daily foibles of human nature, are impressive and often humorous.

Here is a passage about how the junior tempter can turn "unselfishness" to the devil's benefit. When he refers to "the Enemy," he is referring to God:

My dear Wormwood,

Yes; courtship is the time for sowing those seeds which will grow up ten years later into domestic hatred... The grand problem is that of 'Unselfishness.' Note, once again, the admirable work of our Philological Arm in substituting the negative unselfishness for the Enemy's positive Charity. Thanks to this you can, from the very outset, teach a man to surrender benefits not that others may be happy in having them but that he may be unselfish in forgoing them... When once a sort of official, legal, or nominal Unselfishness has been established as a rule— a rule for the keeping of which their emotional resources have died away and their spiritual resources have not yet grown— the most delightful results follow. In discussing any joint action, it becomes obligatory that A should argue in favour of B's supposed wishes and against his own, while B does the opposite. It is often impossible to find

out either party's real wishes: with luck, they end by doing something that neither wants, while each feels a glow of self-righteousness and harbours a secret claim to preferential treatment for the unselfishness shown and a secret grudge against the other for the ease with which the sacrifice has been accepted.

Wormwood is advised to use pride and self-righteousness to lead people away from God, all in the name of virtue.

### **Lewis's Popularity**

We have now completed our brief walking tour of the life and Christian works of C.S. Lewis. I hope it has stimulated your interest in reading some of his books. More and more people are doing so. His books sell in the millions. Annual sales of his books have quadrupled since his death 26 years ago. Publishers, anxious to respond to this growing demand, continue to reshuffle his works into new anthologies in order to keep new titles coming onto the market. In 1980, a Time magazine article referred to him as this century's most-read apologist for God.

I can think of seven reasons why Lewis's popularity remains strong. First, he was a good writer. He wrote simply and directly. He always made wonderful use of imagery, allegory, and analogy. One critic has rated Lewis as "one of the most distinctive writers of his time."

Second, he was a keen observer of human nature. He also understood our daily problems, and took them seriously as the material which makes up our ordinary lives. We can recognize ourselves in his works. It is obvious that what he says applies to us.

Third— and this is something for which I am particularly grateful— Lewis makes it clear that you don't have to leave your brain at the Church door. He makes Christian beliefs understandable to the head as well as the heart. And when he does so, he is intellectual without being pompous.

Fourth, he didn't sidestep difficult issues. He spent many of his younger years as an atheist, so he knew the arguments from the other side. He knew what it was like to disbelieve. Much of what he wrote is designed to help Christians with their disbelief.

Fifth, he did not represent a school of thought which was in vogue and is now passe. He provided a rational exposition of essential, historic, orthodox Christianity. Having never been "in," he has never been "out." Catholics and Protestants of many different denominations are comfortable with his work. He was ecumenical by being fundamental.

Sixth, he offered no watered-down mishmash, hoping to please. Instead, he challenges. He throws down the gauntlet. He calls upon us to reach for our highest ideals, and grow toward that perfection which God wants for each of us. He knows that we often fail by aspiring to achieve too little. He encourages us to aspire to achieve much.

Seventh, he brought faith, reason, and imagination together, an integration which is delightful and deeply satisfying. His view of religion and the world was holistic. His comprehensive faith rings and reverberates through all that he wrote. He is convincing, because he was convinced.

## **Conclusion**

Let me end with a marshwiggler named Puddleglum. Tall, thin, with webbed feet, Puddleglum is a solid, practical, moderately gloomy character in *The Silver Chair*, the fourth book of *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

In *The Silver Chair*, Puddleglum and two children, Esutace Scrubb and Jill Pole, enter the deep, dark underworld of the Emerald Witch, to rescue Prince Rilian, who has been captured by the witch and kept under a spell. In the course of the rescue attempt, Puddleglum, Scrubb, and Jill are also captured by the witch. Putting a magic powder into the fireplace to make them drowsy and bring them under her spell, the witch tries to convince them that the Narnia they remember from the Overworld, up on the surface of the earth, was not real. They might as well join her, because there is no Aslan and no sun—her underworld is all there is. The Overworld is just a dream they have made up like a bunch of babies.

Puddleglum shakes himself out of his drowsiness, goes to the fireplace and stomps out the fire with his bare feet, thereby ending the spell. He then makes a little speech, which summarizes many of my feelings about the world of C.S. Lewis:

"One word, Ma'am," he said, coming back from the fire; limping, because of the pain. "One word. All you've been saying is quite right, I shouldn't wonder. I'm a chap who always liked to know the worst and then put the best face I can on it. So I won't deny any of what you said. But there's one thing more to be said, even so. Suppose we have only dreamed, or made up, all those things— trees and grass and sun and moon and stars and Aslan himself. Suppose we have. Then all I can say is that, in that case, the made-up things seem a good deal more important than the real ones. Suppose this black pit of a kingdom of yours is the only world. Well, it strikes me as a pretty poor one. And that's a funny thing, when you come to think of it. We're just babies making up a game, if you're right. But four babies

playing a game can make a play-world which licks your real world hollow. That's why I'm going to stand by the play world. I'm on Aslan's side even if there isn't any Aslan to lead it. I'm going to live as like a Narnian as I can even if there isn't any Narnia. So, thanking you kindly for our supper, if these two gentlemen and the young lady are ready, we're leaving your court at once and setting out in the dark to spend our lives looking for Overland. Not that our lives will be very long, I should think; but that's small loss if the world's as dull a place as you say."

Hear, hear, Puddleglum! Wait— let me get my coat— I'm coming with you!