

## REFERENCE NOTES

# Mere Christianity

— C. S. Lewis —



C.S. Lewis writing

C.S. Lewis was an Oxford professor, scholar, and Christian author of now classic books. Lewis was an Oxford don along with fellow J.R.R. Tolkien, author of *The Hobbit* and *Lord of the Rings* Trilogy.

Originally broadcasted as BBC lectures over the airwaves, Lewis presents *Mere Christianity* combined from four books: *Right and Wrong as a Clue to the Meaning of the Universe*, *What Christians Believe*, *Christian Behaviour*, and *Beyond Personality: Or First Steps in the Doctrine of the Trinity*.

Lewis makes a case for the *common voice*, rejecting boundaries and divisions that fracture society and believes. His work is as relevant

today as it was in 1941.

The following review is from Amazon.com:

*In 1943 Great Britain, when hope and the moral fabric of society were threatened by the relentless inhumanity of global war, an Oxford don was invited to give a series of radio lectures addressing the central issues of Christianity. Over half a century after the original lectures, the topic retains its urgency. Expanded into book form, *Mere Christianity* never flinches as it sets out a rational basis for Christianity and builds an edifice of compassionate morality atop this foundation. As Mr. Lewis clearly demonstrates, Christianity is not a religion of flitting angels and blind faith, but of free will, an innate sense of justice and the grace of God.*

Source: <http://www.drijeffdaniels.com/home/free-ebook-mere-christianity-by-cs-lewis>

Updated: 10/25/2017

# Mere Christianity – Online Resources

## Complete Book

### Scanned Copies:

[http://samizdat.qc.ca/vc/pdfs/MereChristianity\\_CSL.pdf](http://samizdat.qc.ca/vc/pdfs/MereChristianity_CSL.pdf) [PDF]

[http://wikilivres.ca/wiki/File:C.\\_S.\\_Lewis\\_-\\_Mere\\_Christianity.pdf](http://wikilivres.ca/wiki/File:C._S._Lewis_-_Mere_Christianity.pdf) [PDF]

### Text Versions:

<https://www.dacc.edu/assets/pdfs/PCM/merechristianitylewis.pdf> [PDF]

<http://ntslibrary.com/PDF%20Books/Mere%20Christianity%20-%20Lewis.pdf> [PDF]

<http://www.drjeffdaniels.com/home/free-ebook-mere-christianity-by-cs-lewis> (contains link to text PDF)

## Excerpt

### The Great Sin

[http://www.timesandseasons.org/The\\_Great\\_Sin\\_condensed.pdf](http://www.timesandseasons.org/The_Great_Sin_condensed.pdf) (**Book III, Chapter 8**) [PDF]

## Study Guides

<http://www.cslewis.org/resources/studyguides/Study%20Guide%20-%20Mere%20Christianity.pdf> [PDF]

<http://www.lewissociety.org/merechristianityoutline.pdf> [PDF]

[http://www.cslewisinstitute.org/webfm\\_send/756](http://www.cslewisinstitute.org/webfm_send/756) [PDF]

<https://dacc.edu/assets/pdfs/PCM/merechristianity.pdf> [PDF]

<http://www.mucklehoose.com/csl/MereChristianityStudyGuide.pdf> (75 Pages) [PDF]

<http://www.merechristianity.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/MC-Study-Guide-Answers.pdf> -  
**Answer Guide by Steve Urban** (45 pages) [PDF]

<http://www.smallgroupguides.com/guides/mere-christianity-by-c-s-lewis/mere-christianity-by-c-s-lewis/>

PDF of above <http://www.smallgroupguides.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/MereChristianity.pdf> [PDF]

## Discussion Questions

<http://www.joelheck.com/resources/MereChristianityDiscussionQuestions.pdf> [PDF]

**A Sentence Outline** [PDF]

<http://www.pford.stjohnsem.edu/ford/cslewis/documents/notes/O%27Reilly%20Mere%20Christianity.pdf>

**Mere Christianity: Leader's Notes (partially complete)**

<https://joemcfadden.org/2016/09/02/mere-christianity-by-c-s-lewis-notes-and-summary/>

**CS Lewis and Mere Christianity: An Overview**

<http://philosophicaldisquisitions.blogspot.com/2010/01/cs-lewis-and-mere-christianity-overview.html>

**Mere Christianity in 6 minutes**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8mA\\_QCRn0p0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8mA_QCRn0p0) (Video)

**C.S. Lewis Journal – Mere Christianity Summary**

<http://alacslewis.blogspot.com/2004/09/mere-christianity-summary.html>

## Wikipedia – Mere Christianity

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mere\\_Christianity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mere_Christianity)

## C.S. Lewis and Mere Christianity

<http://www.merechristianity.org/cs-lewis-and-mere-christianity/>

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/questionofgod/twolives/lewisbio.html>

## C. S. Lewis – A Biography – Chp 1 – War Service

<http://press.princeton.edu/chapters/s10688.pdf> [PDF]

## Book Review | Mere Christianity by C.S. Lewis

<http://www.ocf.net/mere-christianity/>

Excerpt:

My copy of *Mere Christianity* is covered in red ink and riddled with dog ears. Lewis could turn a phrase so well, I swear, I underlined every fifth line. Let me just throw a couple of my favorite down right here:

*“The Son of God became man to enable men to become sons of God.”*

*(When you pray)...“The real Son of God is at your side. He is beginning to turn you into the same kind of thing as Himself. He is beginning, so to speak, to ‘inject’ His kind of life and thought, His Zoe, into you; beginning to turn the tin soldier into a live man. The part of you that does not like it is the part that is still tin.”*

*“...He uses material things like bread and wine to put new life into us. We may think this rather crude and unspiritual. God does not: He invented eating. He likes matter. He invented it.”*

*“We are all trying to let our mind and heart go their own way—centered on money or pleasure or ambition—and hoping, in spite of this, to behave honestly and chastely and humbly. And that is exactly what Christ warned us you could not do. As He 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.”*

*“...it is just no good asking God to make us happy in our own way without bothering about religion. God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing.”* [Continued, next page...]

*Mere Christianity* is a long walk, through which Lewis holds your hand the entire time. It isn't so much long in size (my copy is 191 pages) as it is in attention to detail. Lewis begins with human nature, the law, the ability to discern between right and wrong, and step-by-step, slowly but surely, comes to understand Christianity and God manifested all the way down to, by the end of the book, our daily lives and our every moments.

As I said, Lewis walks with you through his logical progressions. As a convert himself, self-admittedly one who was outspoken against Christianity, he is intimately familiar with the natural objections that Christians often face at different points in their spiritual lives, whether from internal doubts or external questions. Anticipatory and consistent, Lewis gives comprehensible context and support for many tenants of the faith that, which while they are inherently held to be true, are often difficult to back up. This makes *Mere Christianity* an especially good read for the college student, I would argue—I find verbally explaining my faith, and the certainty thereof, much easier now.

Lewis does more than just “prove” Christianity, if you will. In establishing the Christian God as the only reasonable solution to, you know, everything going on in the universe ever, Lewis provides and expounds upon a context through which things like forgiveness, sexual morality, charity, hope, and faith can all be understood more fully in their role in the church. Those examples up there? They’re all chapters in the book. Faith even has two chapters (and they’re both called “Faith” ’cause Lewis is just that hysterically plain.)

By the time you arrive at that quote I put about (“When you pray...the real Son of God is at your side”), Lewis has irrefutably taken you from, “So, there’s a moral law all humans naturally follow,” to, “Christ literally stands directly next you when you pray and tries to help you out.” The experience shook me. I couldn’t believe that we had started somewhere so simple—“Yeah, okay, duh, there’s a moral law”—and ended up here, with Christ actively trying to infuse life in the “tin soldier” (Lewis’ construction) that my fallen self was trying to so hard to remain. I always had the vision of myself, working hard to get to Christ. I never thought about how hard He must—and does—work to get to me.

### **Why “Mere Christianity” Won’t Go Out Of Style (Review)**

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/book-reviews-mere-christianity>

### **Beyond Mere Christianity**

<http://www.equip.org/article/beyond-mere-christianity/>

# AUDIO / VIDEO

## **TuneIn: Listening to Mere Christianity Online**

<http://tunein.com/audio-books/Mere-Christianity-p708625/>

<http://www.truthaccordingtoscripture.com/videos/playlists/mere-christianity-lewis.php>

## **Focus on the Family – Radio Theater – C.S. Lewis at War**

<http://www.focusonthefamily.com/radio-theatre/cs-lewis-at-war.aspx>

## **BBC Radio Talk: "Beyond Personality -- Mere Men" – Transcript**

<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/cslewisbeyondpersonality.htm>

Broadcast 21 March 1944, BBC Home Service Radio

## **BBC Biography and related links (including to audio, etc.)**

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/people/cslewis\\_1.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/people/cslewis_1.shtml)

**Archives.org** <https://archive.org/details/C.S.Lewis/C.s.Lewis-GodInTheDock1.mp3> [Audio]

## **Audio of Last Remaining Broadcast Talk**

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/people/cslewis\\_1.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/people/cslewis_1.shtml)

(scroll way down page to find broadcast links)

### **Alternate links:**

(from <http://www.apologetics315.com/2012/06/cs-lewis-original-audio-recording.html>):  
<http://apologetics315.s3.amazonaws.com/audio/c.s.lewis-original-recording.mp3>

(from <https://clivestaples.wordpress.com/2009/05/15/beyond-personality-the-surviving-bbc-audio/>):  
<https://clivestaples.files.wordpress.com/2009/05/beyond-personality-03-21-1944.m4a>

## **C.S. Lewis Institute – All Audio**

<http://www.cslewisinstitute.org/audio>

## **The Only Known Recordings of C.S. Lewis (1944-1948)**

<http://www.openculture.com/2014/06/the-only-known-recordings-of-c-s-lewis-1944-1948.html>



## CS Lewis Doodle

'Right & Wrong' – A Clue to the Meaning of the Universe by C.S. Lewis Doodle (BBC Talk 1/Chapter 1)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QmHXYhpEDfM&list=PL9boiLqIabFhrqabtq3ThGdwNanr65xU> [Video]

... [more related videos available](#)

## Mere Christianity Playlist -- Youtube

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL-0zpu2toenZat1pbJkNosOmrnLWGGQ5PC>

## CS Lewis Video Channel

<https://www.youtube.com/user/cslewisweb>

## CS Lewis Video Clips

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XKmJA\\_chWxY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XKmJA_chWxY)

David Payne stars in this one-man play recalling the life and times of C.S. Lewis. Presented as part of the "Let There Be Light Series". Series: "Let There Be Light" [3/2003] [Humanities] [Show ID: 7183]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=96uT-BvRi-k>

Highlights of a conversation between Inklings of God host Kurt Bruner and the late C.S. Lewis (as portrayed by actor David Payne) discussing his life, writings and influence.

## C.S. Lewis Through the Shadowlands (BBC TV Drama)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gY4hymR0IS8>

## BBC – C.S. Lewis

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p01l8hs8>

## C. S. Lewis Biography (video)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t6egyJeg-hQ>

A compilation of the clips on C.S. Lewis from the The Question of God. Simon Jones as the older CS Lewis, with James Como, Colin Duriez, Lewis's Secretary & Biographer Walter Hooper, Francis Collins, Peter Kreeft,



## **Walter Hooper: The Life and Writing of C.S. Lewis (Socrates in the City)**

Part 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sIMLk4dhh0M> [Video]

Part 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2kcD15rNwQA> [Video]

Part 3: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R7Hn0VW8SeU> [Video]

Eric Metaxas interviews Walter Hooper, friend and secretary of C.S. Lewis, about Lewis's life and writings--uncovering fascinating stories about the beloved Oxford don.

## **The Life of C S Lewis by John Piper**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DyPhY620e2Y>

## **Michael Ward: Planet Narnia (Socrates in the City)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N52t6AITMIY>

Eric Metaxas interviews Oxford Fellow Michael Ward about his discovery of a secret code in C.S. Lewis's CHRONICLES OF NARNIA, which Ward explores in his book PLANET NARNIA.

## **Fall 2012 - "The Narnia Code" Michael Ward**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C1SikBc6LIc>

Dr. Michael Ward, Chaplain of St. Peter's College, Oxford and a C.S. Lewis expert speaks on "The Narnia Code".

## **C S LEWIS by Michael Ward**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2u4HM8KgNsc>

## **Michael Ward - Narnia , C.S. Lewis & Classical Cosmology**

Part 1: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nikV\\_MTLkN8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nikV_MTLkN8)

Part 2: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=79J\\_JXyjZF0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=79J_JXyjZF0)

A lecture held at the University of Kansas, Lawrence April 12, 2010. Dr Ward is author of the book "Planet Narnia " and "The Narnia Code" is a leading expert on the works of C.S. Lewis, Chaplain of St Peter's College, Oxford, and a writer and speaker.

## **C.S Lewis The Screwtape Letters Dramatization Autobook**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iuhX5k2y9VQ>

## **The Screwtape Letters, Max McLean: NYC production 10/07-01/08**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TdBNimP7eaw> [scene clips]

## **The Planets in C.S. Lewis' Writings** (Includes the poem, "The Planets")

<https://apilgriminnarnia.com/2013/05/27/poem-the-planets/>

## **Planet Narnia: The Seven Heavens in the Imagination of C.S. Lewis**

<http://www.mythsoc.org/reviews/planet-narnia.htm>

Jupiter: *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*  
Mars: *Prince Caspian*  
Sol: *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader"*  
Luna: *The Silver Chair*  
Mercury: *The Horse and his Boy*  
Venus: *The Magician's Nephew*  
Saturn: *The Last Battle*

## **Poems of C.S. Lewis**

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/c-s-lewis>

[http://www.best-poems.net/c\\_s\\_lewis/index.html](http://www.best-poems.net/c_s_lewis/index.html)

[http://famouspoetsandpoems.com/poets/c\\_s\\_lewis](http://famouspoetsandpoems.com/poets/c_s_lewis)

[http://www.consciouslivingfoundation.org/ebooks/new7/c\\_s\\_lewis\\_Poems-2004\\_9.pdf](http://www.consciouslivingfoundation.org/ebooks/new7/c_s_lewis_Poems-2004_9.pdf) [PDF]

## **What the Bird Said Early in the Year**

<https://exlaodicea.wordpress.com/2007/10/02/what-the-bird-said-early-in-the-year-by-cs-lewis/>

<https://pamflute.wordpress.com/2014/07/25/what-the-bird-said-early-in-the-year-c-s-lewis/>

<http://www.discovery.org/a/715>

## Misc.

**Some thoughts inspired by C.S. Lewis's *Mere Christianity* and mimetic theory**

<https://mimeticmargins.com/2012/05/29/mere-christianity/>

**Mere Christianity: Theosis in a British Way**

[http://inklings-studies.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/jis\\_4-1-02\\_meconi\\_theosis1.pdf](http://inklings-studies.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/jis_4-1-02_meconi_theosis1.pdf) [PDF]

**Why Do Bad Things Happen To Good People?**

[https://kensingtonchurch.org/downloads/start\\_badthingsgoodpeople.pdf](https://kensingtonchurch.org/downloads/start_badthingsgoodpeople.pdf) [PDF]

**An Introduction to Christian Theology**

[http://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/centers/boisi/pdf/bc\\_papers/BCP-Christianity.pdf](http://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/centers/boisi/pdf/bc_papers/BCP-Christianity.pdf) [PDF]

**PBS: Questions of God – Freud & Lewis**

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/questionofgod/index.html>

**Origin of the Phrase, “Mere Christianity”**

<http://lewisiana.nl/baxter/>

**FYI: C.S. Lewis' full name: Clive Staples Lewis**

**Beyond Mere Christianity – An Assessment of CS Lewis – Christian-Research-Institute**

<http://www.equip.org/PDF/JAL400.pdf> [PDF]

Here's a video by Randy Alcorn:

## **C.S. Lewis on Heaven and the New Earth: God's Eternal Remedy to the Problem of Evil and Suffering**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gs5VzPK8rw0> [Video]

(It begins with Randy's background and how he came to know the Lord [interesting] and how he was first introduced to C.S. Lewis and Lewis' background [again, interesting]; then proceeds to detail main concepts from his book, *Heaven*)

*See also by Randy Alcorn:*

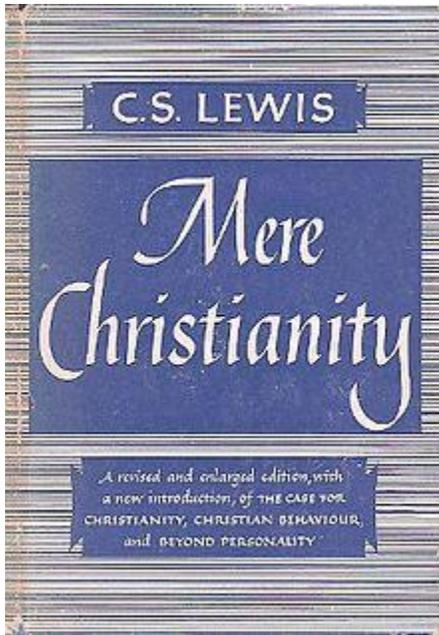
### **Banished from Humanity**

C.S. Lewis and the Doctrine of Hell



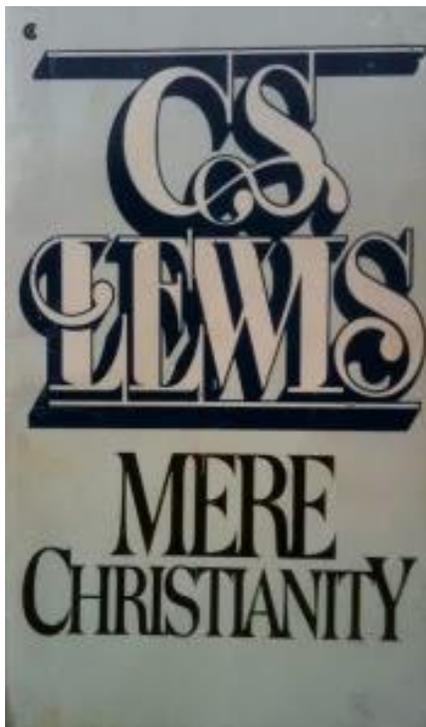
<http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/banished-from-humanity>

**NOTE:** For issues related to Heaven and life after death, as well as covering related topics and including different perspectives - see my separate [“Reference Notes on Heaven”](#)



First US edition

1952 original publication date, English text, based on a series of BBC radio-talks given by Lewis 1942–1944



Cover of Paperback Version

## Litcharts – Mere Christianity – Highlights

<http://www.litcharts.com/lit/mere-christianity>

### Brief Biography of C. S. Lewis

C. S. Lewis was born and raised in Ireland. He attended Oxford University, where he distinguished himself as a scholar of English, Classics, and Philosophy. Lewis fought in World War I, and, partly as a result of the carnage he witnessed, he was an atheist for most of his twenties. For more than thirty years, Lewis taught at Oxford University. During this time, he converted to the Anglican Church, and became an articulate proponent of Christian values. Lewis's love for Christianity, as well as his vast knowledge of mythology and linguistics, inspired him to write his most famous book, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*—the first volume of the *Chronicles of Narnia*—in 1949. Over the course of his life he wrote poetry, essays, literature, autobiography, fantasy, science fiction, and non-fiction works of academic criticism, philosophy, and Christian apologetics.

### Historical Context of *Mere Christianity*

*Mere Christianity* was first written during World War II, when Europe was engaged in a bloody war between the Allied Powers, including Britain and France, and the Axis Powers, including Germany and Italy. Lewis alludes to many of the worst atrocities of World War II, including the Holocaust—Germany's notorious attempt to wipe out the Jewish people and other minorities, which resulted in the murder of more than six million people. Lewis also alludes to some important milestones in Western intellectual history, most notably Darwin's theory of evolution, which revolutionized science and philosophy by portraying the history of the world as a constant, volatile process in which all creatures, including the human species, are gradually changing.

### Other Books Related to *Mere Christianity*

The book takes inspiration from many famous Christian works of literature and philosophy. Two of the most notable are John Milton's long poem *Paradise Lost* (1667), and Boethius's *The Consolation of Philosophy*, which was written in the sixth century A.D. Milton's poem tells the story of the fall of man, partly from the perspective of Satan. Milton's portrayal of Satan as a "fallen angel"—that is, a being who has corrupted good into evil—had a major influence on the composition of Lewis's book, particularly the first part. The late classical philosopher Boethius composed *The Consolation of Philosophy* in the weeks leading up to his execution for treason. While the book makes no specific references to Christ, Christian thinkers have celebrated Boethius for pioneering Christian theology. Boethius's theory that an omnipotent God exists outside of time, and therefore sees humanity's past, present, and future simultaneously, shows up in the fourth part of *Mere Christianity*, and appears in many of Lewis's other books.

### Key Facts about *Mere Christianity*

- Full Title: *Mere Christianity*
- When Written: Based on a series of radio broadcasts made between 1942 and 1944, published as a book in 1952.
- Where Written: London and Oxford
- When Published: 1952
- Genre: Christian apologetics, Non-fiction
- Point of View: First person; the speaker is C. S. Lewis

### **Extra Credit for *Mere Christianity***

Famous fans. C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia* books are some of the most famous children's novels of all time, and they've inspired some other classics of children's literature. Lewis's fans include J. K. Rowling, author of the *Harry Potter* books, Philip Pullman, authors of the *His Dark Materials* trilogy, and Lemony Snicket, author of *A Series of Unfortunate Events*. Pullman, an atheist, claims to despise Lewis's Christian ideas, but has "boundless respect" for the *Chronicles of Narnia*.

Best buddies. Lewis was a popular professor at Oxford University, and had lots of good friends on the faculty. His closest friend, another expert in Classics and English literature, also penned a series of Christian-inspired fantasy novels for intelligent young readers. His name? J. R. R. Tolkien, author of the *Lord of the Rings* books!

### **Plot Summary**

In *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis argues for the logical validity of Christianity, defends the religion from its critics, and looks in detail at what the life of a Christian is like.

In the first part of the book, Lewis discusses the "law of human nature." When studying human history, he claims, one is struck by how similar different societies' moral codes are, at least at a fundamental level. Lewis argues that moral law isn't just an arbitrary human invention—it's actually a real, timeless thing—invented by an all-powerful being who stands outside the confines of material space and time, and reveals itself to humans through moral law.

In the second part of the book, Lewis discusses a few competing theories about the all-powerful being's identity. Some religious groups, the Pantheists, believe that the all-powerful being, God, is neither good nor evil. Pantheists believe that God is the universe, meaning that everything in the material universe is divine. Other religious groups, such as Muslims, Jews, and Christians, believe that God created the universe, yet is distinct from it; thus, God is good, and wants humans to work hard to make the universe a better place. Christians also believe in the existence of an ultimate evil, the Devil. However, in Christianity, evil isn't equal to good—evil is "spoiled good"; i.e., the

perversion or corruption of goodness. Looking around the world, it is obvious that good has been corrupted into evil almost everywhere.

When Lewis was a much younger man, he found it impossible to believe in a just God who would allow Earth to become a sad, unjust place. However, the only way for an atheist to criticize the Christian model of God would be to appeal to some standard for “just” and “unjust”—i.e., the same standard that led us to accept the existence of God in Part One. Lewis then attempts to resolve the apparent contradiction in the existence of a good God who allows evil things to happen by arguing that God gives people the gift of free will: they face the challenge of behaving virtuously in spite of the temptations of evil—a challenge for which they will be richly rewarded in Heaven.

At the end of part two, Lewis introduces Jesus Christ, the cornerstone of the Christian religion. The only way to be truly virtuous, Lewis argues, is to worship Christ. While there are many different Christian sects that worship Christ in different ways, Lewis argues that they can agree on the basic facts about Christ’s existence, and therefore can all attain salvation.

In Part Three of the book, Lewis studies the life of a good Christian. To begin with, Lewis proposes that morality consists of three different parts: harmony between people, harmony within a person, and constant vigilance in achieving a state of salvation. All virtues uphold the three parts of morality, and all sins contradict at least one of these parts. Lewis briefly discusses the four “Cardinal virtues”—prudence, temperance, justice, and fortitude, and explains why they’re necessary for living morally.

Lewis spends time defending the most unpopular aspect of Christian morality—the notion of chastity. Modern society, he insists, is overrun with sex and sexuality, to the point where people think that having lots of sex is “normal” and “healthy.” Lewis, however, argues that the sexual instinct—like any instinct—must be controlled and subdued. Lewis also defends the institution of marriage. While it’s popular to say that “being in love” is the only reason to get married, Lewis argues that being married is actually much more beautiful and majestic than being in love—a married couple must remain together for a lifetime, demonstrating their loyalty and respect for one another as human beings, rather than just following their emotions.

Lewis argues that pride is the most dangerous of all sins, since it encourages humans to place themselves “above God.” He suggests that many people who consider themselves to be good Christians actually worship a “false God,” and secretly think themselves to be superior to everyone else—a state of mind that will lead them to damnation unless they’re careful.

At the end of Part Three, Lewis discusses the three Theological virtues: charity, hope and faith. Charity is a challenging virtue, because it requires humans to be gracious and generous to people they might not necessarily like. But one of the miracles of virtue, Lewis claims, is that when we pretend to respect other people, we eventually do respect them. One of the most challenging aspects of Christianity, Lewis writes, is faith,

especially in the challenging sense of having faith in God's salvation. After a Christian becomes familiar with obeying the moral law of God, they sometimes reach a point of despair, during which they realize their own sinful nature. But even in their despair, the good Christian will find the strength to carry on, cautiously optimistic—not certain—that God will help them find the way to Heaven. A good Christian must trust their fate to God, while also working hard to be good.

In the fourth and final part of the book, Lewis turns to theology, the “science” of God. He analyzes the Holy Trinity, and the strange-sounding idea that God is both one thing and three. Lewis compares the Holy Trinity to a die: just as a die “contains” six square sides, and yet is one three-dimensional object at the same time, so too does God “contain” three parts and yet remain one being. Lewis also tackles the apparent contradiction of an all-knowing God who gives humans the gift of free will—one would think that, if God knows everything, then humans don't truly choose their fates at all. Lewis resolves this apparent contradiction by arguing that God exists outside of time, meaning that he experiences humans' past, present, and future in the same instant, whereas humans have free will within time as they experience it.

Lewis goes on to write that, by worshipping Christ, humans can transcend their mortal nature and experience the divine life of Christ himself; put another way, by worshipping Christ, they, too, can become “sons of God.” Good Christians unite together in their love for God—and yet they don't sacrifice their individuality in doing so. On the contrary, Lewis argues, the only way to truly be an individual and fulfill one's potential is to worship Jesus Christ. In the act of prayer, a human being assumes the guise of Jesus Christ; with practice and faith, prayer can help human beings become divine by leading them toward salvation in Heaven. In Heaven, people lose their desires for earthly things, and thus, the basic components of their so-called “personalities” on Earth. But in place of their old personalities, the saved discover their true selves: unique, individual, and yet united in love for God, in much the same way that the different organs of the human body are different from one another, and yet united in the facilitation of life. In short, Lewis argues, one must sacrifice one's earthly needs and desires in order to be a Christian—but as a reward, one will find Christ, and rejoice in Heaven for eternity.

### **Summary and Analysis (by Chapter)**

<http://www.litcharts.com/lit/mere-christianity/book-1-chapter-1-the-law-of-human-nature>

## Symbols

### The Die

In order to explain the concept of the Holy Trinity, Lewis uses the symbol of a die (the six-sided object used for gambling or games of chance). Just as the die “contains” six squares, and yet is also one three-dimensional object, so, too, does God “contain” the Son and the Holy Spirit while remaining one almighty being. Thus, the die symbolizes the complexities of the Holy Trinity and of God in general.

### The Piano

At many points in the first part of the book, Lewis uses the symbol of a piano to describe the relationship between humanity and moral law. He argues that the relationship between human instinct and moral law is like the relationship between notes on a piano and sheet music—no instinct is “right” or “wrong” one hundred percent of the time, just as no note on a piano is always right or wrong, either. Notes, like instincts, are guided and controlled by the overarching authority of moral law (sheet music). In all, the piano symbolizes the different levels of human morality: our specific behaviors, our instincts to obey or disobey moral law, and the moral law itself.

### The Piano Symbol Timeline in *Mere Christianity*

The timeline below shows where the symbol The Piano appears in *Mere Christianity*. The colored dots and icons indicate which themes are associated with that appearance.

#### **Book 1, Chapter 2: Some Objections**

...would be like saying that a sheet of music is the same thing as a piano key.

...that was always moral. By the same token, there is no such thing as a piano key that is right or wrong 100 percent of the time— sometimes a key can be right, and sometimes the same key can be wrong, according to the directions of the sheet of music.

#### **Book 4, Chapter 2: The Three-Personal God**

Christian theology teaches that when humans die and go to Heaven, they become part of God, and yet also remain separate from

# Project Gutenberg: Mere Christianity

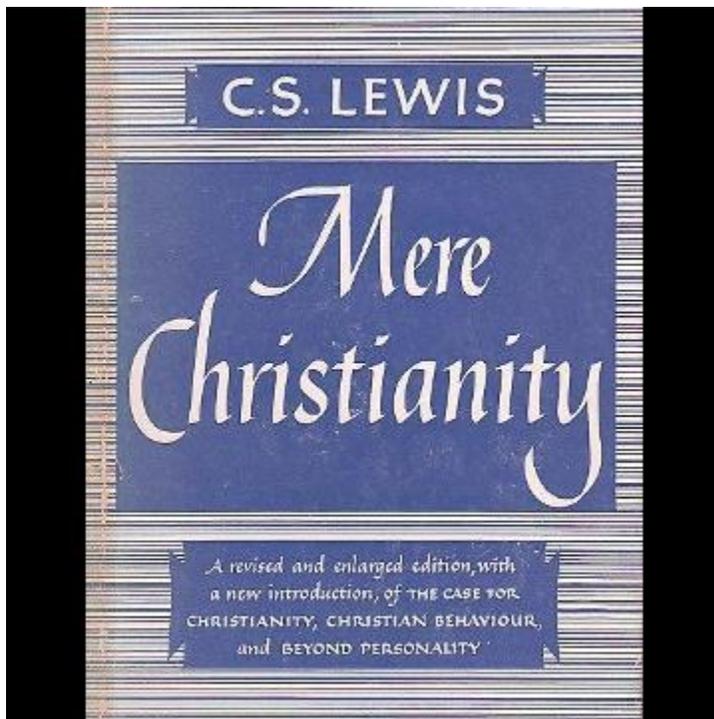
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## Thesis

*Mere Christianity*<sup>[2]</sup> is a [theological](#) book by [C. S. Lewis](#), adapted from a series of [BBC](#) radio talks made between 1942 and 1944, while Lewis was at [Oxford](#) during [World War II](#). Considered a classic of [Christian apologetics](#), the transcripts of the broadcasts originally appeared in print as three separate pamphlets: *The Case for Christianity* (1942), *Christian Behaviour* (1943), and *Beyond Personality* (1944).<sup>[3]</sup> Lewis was invited to give the talks by [Rev. James Welch](#), the BBC Director of Religious Broadcasting, who had read his 1940 book, [The Problem of Pain](#).<sup>[4]</sup>

Lewis, an [Anglican](#), intended to describe the [Christian](#) common ground. In *Mere Christianity*, he aims at avoiding controversies to explain fundamental teachings of Christianity, for the sake of those basically educated as well as the intellectuals of his generation, for whom the jargon of formal [Christian theology](#) did not retain its original meaning.

## *The Case for Christianity*



Lewis spends most of his defense of the Christian faith on an [argument from morality](#), a point which persuaded him from [atheism](#) to Christianity. He bases his case on a moral

law, a "rule about right and wrong" commonly known to all human beings, citing the example of [Nazism](#); both Christians and atheists believed that [Hitler's](#) actions were morally wrong. On a more mundane level, it is generally accepted that stealing is violating this moral law. Lewis argues that the moral law is like the [law of nature](#) in that it was not contrived by humans. However, it is unlike natural laws in that it can be broken or ignored, and it is known intuitively, rather than through observation. After introducing the moral law, Lewis argues that thirst reflects the fact that people naturally need water, and there is no other substance which satisfies that need. Lewis points out that earthly experience does not satisfy the human craving for "joy" and that only God could fit the bill; humans cannot know to yearn for something if it does not exist.<sup>[5]</sup>

After providing reasons for his conversion to theism, Lewis goes over rival conceptions of God to Christianity. [Pantheism](#), he argues, is incoherent, and atheism too simple. Eventually he arrives at [Jesus Christ](#), and invokes a well-known argument now known as the "[Lewis trilemma](#)". Lewis, arguing that Jesus was claiming to be God, uses [logic](#) to advance three possibilities: either he really was God, was deliberately lying, or was not God but thought himself to be (which would make him [delusional](#) and likely insane). The book goes on to say that the latter two possibilities are not consistent with Jesus' character and it was most likely that he was being truthful.<sup>[5]</sup>

Lewis claims that to understand Christianity, one must understand the moral law, which is the underlying structure of the universe and is "hard as nails." Unless one grasps the dismay which comes from humanity's failure to keep the moral law, one cannot understand the coming of Christ and his work. The eternal God who is the law's source takes primacy over the created [Satan](#) whose rebellion undergirds all evil. The death and resurrection of Christ is introduced as the only way in which our inadequate human attempts to redeem humanity's sins could be made adequate in God's eyes.

God "became a man" in Christ, Lewis says, so that mankind could be "amalgamated with God's nature" and make full [atonement](#) possible. Lewis offers several analogies to explain this abstract concept: that of Jesus "paying the penalty" for a crime, "paying a debt," or helping humanity out of a hole. His main point, however, is that redemption is so incomprehensible that it cannot be fully appreciated, and he attempts to explain that the method by which God atones for the sins of humanity is not nearly as important as the fact that he does so.

### ***Christian Behaviour***

The next third of the book explores the [ethics](#) resulting from Christian belief. He cites the four [cardinal virtues](#): [prudence](#), [justice](#), [temperance](#), and [fortitude](#). After touching on these, he goes into the three [theological virtues](#): hope, faith, and [charity](#). Lewis also explains morality as being composed of three *layers*: relationships between man and man, the motivations and attitudes of the man himself, and contrasting worldviews.

Lewis also covers such topics as [sexual ethics](#) and the tenets of Christian marriage, and the relationship between morality and [psychoanalysis](#). He also writes about *the great sin*: pride, which he argues to be the root cause of all evil and rebellion.

His most important point is that Christianity mandates that one "love your neighbor as yourself." He points out that all persons unconditionally love themselves. Even if one does not *like* oneself, one would still love oneself. Christians, he writes, must also apply this attitude to others, even if they do not like them. Lewis calls this one of the *great secrets*: when one acts as if he loves others, he will presently come to love them.

## Cultural impact

In 2006, *Mere Christianity* was placed third in [Christianity Today](#)'s list of the most influential books amongst evangelicals since 1945.<sup>[6]</sup> The title has influenced [Touchstone Magazine](#): *A Journal of Mere Christianity* and [William Dembski](#)'s book *Mere Creation*. [Charles Colson](#)'s conversion to Christianity resulted from his reading this book, as did the conversions of [Francis Collins](#), [Jonathan Aitken](#), [Josh Caterer](#) and the philosopher [C. E. M. Joad](#).

A passage in the book also influenced the name of contemporary Christian Texan Grammy-nominated pop/rock group [Sixpence None the Richer](#). The phrase, "the hammering process" was used by Christian metal band [Living Sacrifice](#) for the name of their album [The Hammering Process](#). [Metalcore](#) band, [Norma Jean](#), derived the title of their song "No Passenger: No Parasite" from the section in the book in which Lewis describes a fully Christian society as having "No passengers or parasites".

## References

- <sup>1</sup> [^](#) Lewis CS. "Mere Christianity".
- <sup>2</sup> [^](#) Lewis, C. S. (2001). *Mere Christianity: a revised and amplified edition, with a new introduction, of the three books, Broadcast talks, Christian behaviour, and Beyond personality*. [San Francisco]: HarperSanFrancisco.
- <sup>3</sup> [^](#) Douglas R. Gilbert, Clyde S. Kilby, C. S. Lewis, (Eerdmans, 2005), page 143.
- <sup>4</sup> [^](#) Justin Philips, C. S. Lewis in A Time of War, HarperCollins 2002, page 61.
- <sup>5</sup> [^](#) [a](#) [b](#) *The Life and Writing of C.S. Lewis, Lecture 3; The Great Courses, Course Guidebook; Professor [Louis Markos](#), Houston Baptist University; The Teaching Company; 2000*

6. [^ The Top 50 Books That Have Shaped Evangelicals, Christianity Today, October 6, 2006](#)

**External links**

- *Audio of the last remaining broadcast talk from [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk)*
- *Book description at the [Wayback Machine](#) (archived December 24, 2007), originally from [[CSLewisClassics.com](http://CSLewisClassics.com)]*
- *Origin of the phrase "Mere Christianity"*
- *Mere Christianity. Canadian public domain edition (PDF)*

**Works by [C. S. Lewis](#)**

**[Poetry](#)**

- [Spirits in Bondage](#) (1919)
- [Dymer](#) (1926)

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**Fiction**

- [The Pilgrim's Regress](#) (1933)
- [The Screwtape Letters](#) (1942)
- [The Great Divorce](#) (1945)
- [Till We Have Faces](#) (1956)
- [Screwtape Proposes a Toast](#) (1959)
- [Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer](#) (1964)
- [Boxen](#) (1985)

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**[Space  
Trilogy](#)**

- [Out of the Silent Planet](#) (1938)
- [Perelandra](#) (1943)
- [That Hideous Strength](#) (1945)
- [The Dark Tower](#) (manuscript) (1977)

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)

1930s

- [\*The Allegory of Love\*](#) (1936)
- [\*The Personal Heresy\*](#) (1939)

1940s

- [\*The Problem of Pain\*](#) (1940)
- [\*A Preface to Paradise Lost\*](#) (1942)
- [\*The Abolition of Man\*](#) (1943)
- [\*Miracles\*](#) (1947)

Non-  
fiction

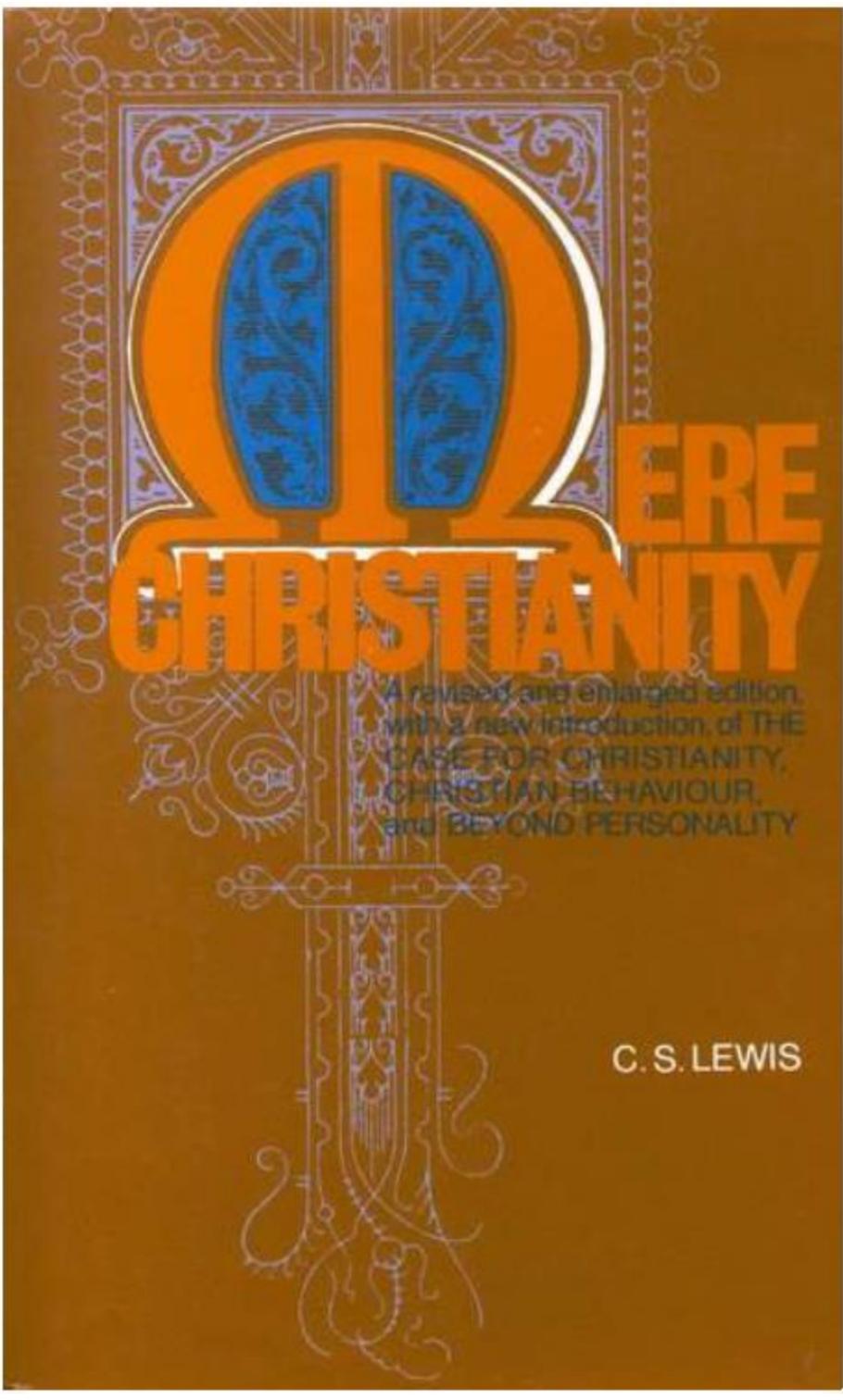
1950s

- *Mere Christianity* (1952)
- [\*Surprised by Joy\*](#) (1955)

1960s

- [\*The Four Loves\*](#) (1960)
- [\*Studies in Words\*](#) (1960)
- [\*An Experiment in Criticism\*](#) (1961)
- [\*A Grief Observed\*](#) (1961)
- [\*They Asked for a Paper: Papers and Addresses\*](#) (1962)
- *Selections from [\*Layamon's Brut\*](#)* (1963)

- [\*The Discarded Image\*](#) (1964)
- [\*Of Other Worlds\*](#) (1966)
- [\*God in the Dock\*](#) (2 volumes) (1970-1971)



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—*Time*

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This is the most often asked "tough question" among seekers and believers alike. The truth is everyone should struggle with this question every time they turn on the 5 o'clock news and hear stories of pedophiles, tsunamis, and murders. Why doesn't God do anything about these tragedies? Theologians have discussed this issue since Christianity began and have come to differing conclusions. Therefore, a one-page "answer" cannot do justice to this question but only provide food for thought . . .

During a war bullets fly, bombs go off, and innocent people are sometimes caught in the middle. In the context of a war the question, *Why do bad things happen to good people?* is no longer a "tough question." Answers like, *Because an enemy is shooting at us* or *Because that's a natural consequence of living in a war zone* make sense and no further explanation is needed.

While Christians in the United States may feel they are living during peacetime, the Bible teaches that, in reality, no matter where you live on planet earth you are in a war. In his classic book "Mere Christianity" C.S. Lewis wrote:

One of the things that surprised me when I first read the New Testament seriously was that it talked about a Dark Power in the universe – a mighty evil spirit who was held to be the Power behind death and disease and sin . . . Christianity agrees . . . the universe is at war . . . and we are living in a part of the universe that is occupied by the rebel.<sup>1</sup>

God created everything that exists. He created the spiritual realm including supernatural beings known as "angels" (Job 38:4-7) and the physical realm filled with human beings. God created both angels and people with free will with the hope that they would use their freedom to love God and others. Yet, early on in the creation a civil war occurred in the spiritual realm. An angel who became known as Satan used his freedom to lead a rebellion among the angelic realm and upon losing this battle he was cast to earth. (Revelation 12:7-9) Since that time, Satan changed his tactics. Instead of mounting a direct assault against God, Satan attacks him indirectly by attacking God's most prized possession – you and me.

Jesus Christ died on the cross to ensure ultimate victory over Satan, but between now and the end of the world we are engaged in a spiritual war against Satan and evil. And just like in any war, sometimes bad things happen to good people. In fact, Jesus guaranteed bad things will happen as he taught, "In this world you will have trouble." (John 16:33a) Yet, right after saying those words he left his followers with this promise, "But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33b)

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### Recommended Reading

***Is God to Blame?*** – Greg Boyd

(ISBN: 0830823948)

Is God to blame when bad things happen? And why doesn't he just stop all of this bad stuff from happening in the first place? Going beyond the typical "pat answers" about the problem of evil and suffering, Greg Boyd offers a fresh perspective on what the Bible has to say.

***Where Is God When It Hurts?*** – Philip Yancey  
(ISBN: 0310214378)

When life doesn't make sense we cry out to God and ask *where are you?* An award-winning book that has ministered to people for over 20 years, Philip Yancey offers thought provoking insight into how to cope with pain and where God is during the tough times of life.

<sup>1</sup>C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, (New York, NY: Macmillan, Inc., 1980), 51.