

## Notes on *Mere Christianity*

Because Lewis' *The Problem of Pain* (1940) had been so popular, Dr. James Welch, Director of Religious Broadcasting for the BBC, wrote Lewis and asked him to consider speaking over the radio on some aspect of Christianity. Though Lewis had no interest in radio or traveling to London, he saw in this **an opportunity to speak to a large audience about the reality of Christian faith**. Consequently, he agreed. Eventually it was decided that he would give four, fifteen-minute talks; apparently, Lewis had little trouble writing his scripts other than working to time them so that they were exactly fifteen minutes long. Originally announced as "Right and Wrong: A Clue to the Meaning of the Universe?" they were broadcast every Wednesday in August 1941 from 7:45 to 8:00 p.m.

His talks were a sensation, and he was soon overwhelmed by letters from listeners. On September 6, 1941, he spoke again on the BBC for an additional fifteen minutes, this time responding to questions in "A Talk in Answer to Listeners' Questions." This only stimulated more interest and letters. Although he was pressed by the BBC to give more talks, he initially refused for two reasons. First, he had said all he could usefully say to a broadcast audience. Second, he could not bear to face an increase in the number of letters sent to him, particularly since he felt obligated to answer each one personally. Yet eventually he agreed, primarily because he realized how potent the talks were in clearing away the intellectual difficulties his listeners had with Christianity; that is, he seized on the chance to work as a "pre-evangelist." Eventually three more sets of broadcasts occurred between 1942 and 1944. Each set of broadcasts was later published as separate books: *Broadcast Talks* (1942), *Christian Behavior: Further Series of Broadcast Talks* (1943), and *Beyond Personality: The Christian Idea of God* (1944). *Mere Christianity* published in 1952 is a revised and amplified version of these three books.<sup>1</sup>

When *Mere Christianity* appeared, reviews were mixed. One reviewer wrote that "Mr. Lewis has a quite unique power of making theology attractive, exciting, and (one might almost say) uproariously funny." Another said Lewis' "clarity of thought and simplicity of expression have a magic about them which makes plain the most abstruse problems of theological speculation." Others were less kind; he was accused of being vague, pantheistic, not wholly orthodox, and a "pious paradox-monger and audacious word-juggler." Since its publication, however, *Mere Christianity* has been a perennial best seller. After the Bible itself, this book may be the second greatest publication the twentieth century in terms of challenging people to take seriously the claims of Christianity and the person of Jesus Christ. It is the best example of Lewis as a pre-evangelist.

The source of the phrase "mere Christianity" comes from the work of the Puritan divine, Richard Baxter, *Church-history of the Government of Bishops* (1680):

You know not of what Party I am of, nor what to call me; I am sorrier for you in this than for myself; if you know not, I will tell you, I am a CHRISTIAN, a MEER CHRISTIAN, of no other Religion; and the Church that I am of is the

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<sup>1</sup> A concise history of the broadcast talks appears in *The C. S. Lewis Reader's Encyclopedia*, pp. 271-72.

Christian Church, and hath been visible where ever the Christian Religion and Church hath been visible: But must you know of what Sect or Party I am of? I am against all Sects and dividing Parties: But if any will call *Meer Christian* by the name of a *Party*, because they take up *with meer Christianity, Creed, and Scripture*, and will not be of any dividing or contentious Sect, I am of that Party which is so against Parties: If the name CHRISTIAN be not enough, call me a CATHOLIC CHRISTIAN; not as that word signifieth an hereticating majority of Bishops, but as it signifieth one that hath no Religion, but that which by Christ and the Apostles was left to the Catholic Church, or the body of Jesus Christ on Earth.

### **Questions for discussion on *Mere Christianity***

#### **Book 1: Right and Wrong as a Clue to the Meaning of the Universe**

1. What is the law of human nature?
2. Can human beings keep this law? Why or why not?
3. What is the difference between the law of gravity and the law of human nature?
4. What does the law of human nature suggest about the universe?

#### **Book 2: What Christians Believe**

5. What *don't* Christians have to believe?
6. Which view of God holds that He is beyond good and evil?
7. Which view holds that He is good, righteous, loving, just and so on?
8. Explain what Lewis means when he argues Christianity is "real" because it is not simple.
9. Besides the Christian explanation for why there is evil, what is the other?
10. What is the "catch" in dualism?
11. What does Lewis say about evil in the world?
12. What is the relationship between God's sovereignty and man's free will?
13. How did the "dark" power go wrong?
14. Why won't man find happiness outside of God?
15. What did God give man to combat the dark power?
16. What essential action did Jesus take for human beings?
17. What must one never say about Jesus?
18. What is the central truth about Christianity?
19. What is Christianity in a nutshell?
20. How does Lewis attempt to make the idea of atonement understandable?
21. What does it mean to be "in Christ"?

#### **Book 3: Christian Behaviour**

22. What is purpose of moral rules?
23. What three things is morality concerned with?
24. Why is every individual life important?

25. What are the four cardinal virtues?
26. What is the difference between a just action and a just man or woman?
27. What are the principles of Christian social morality?
28. How do we use morality to bargain with God?
29. What is the Christian virtue of chastity?
30. What are Lewis' ideas about Christian marriage?
31. What does he say about "being in love" as the basis for marriage?
32. What is the great sin?
33. What does Lewis say about hope and charity?
34. What are the differences between enduring faith and saving faith?

#### **Book 4: Beyond Personality: or First Steps in the Doctrine of the Trinity**

35. What is the difference between making and begetting? Why is this important?
36. Discuss Lewis' analogy for theology.
37. Why do we need to be involved in the "personhood" of God?
38. What is the significance of begetting versus making for our spiritual lives?
39. Why did Christ come?
40. Discuss Lewis' analogy of tin soldiers.
41. What does Lewis say about the body of Christ?
42. What is the nature of being born again?
43. What two things do we discover as Christ begins to live in us?
44. Is Christianity hard or easy? What is it "all about"?
45. What does God require of us?
46. What distracts us from this?
47. Why must we count the cost of coming to Christ?
48. What is the relationship between our efforts, His grace, and our pride?
49. How must we then live?
50. How does natural goodness blind us?
51. Why don't nice people necessarily go to heaven?
52. What does it mean to become sons of God?
53. What must we do?

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