

## C. S. Lewis: A Bridge to Rome



In my research to try to figure out how Protestant theology has become corrupted and influenced by Roman Catholic dogmas, I have realized influential authors are part of the reason. C. S. Lewis is certainly an influential author and is acclaimed by Protestant evangelicals. But some things he wrote make me wonder if he really based his faith in the Word of God and the Jesus of the New Testament.



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“It is largely due to Lewis, an Anglican, that I converted to the Catholic Church...”<sup>1</sup>

—Mark Brumley, President of RC Ignatius Press

“Lewis has been credited (or blamed) in recent years with setting numerous people on the road to Rome. Such Catholic converts have included many of the serious scholars and disciples of Lewis, some of whom knew him before he died...”<sup>2</sup>

—R.A. Benthall, Professor of Literature, Ave Maria College

Clive Staples Lewis was born in Belfast, N. Ireland in 1898 to Protestant parents and, for most of his adult life, was a Tutor at Oxford and a lecturer of Medieval and Renaissance literature at Cambridge. He wrote more than thirty books, and his most popular accomplishments include *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *The Screwtape Letters*, and *Mere Christianity*. At age 32, through the encouragement of his devout Roman Catholic friend and colleague, J.R.R. Tolkien (*The Lord of the Rings*), and after reading *The Everlasting Man* by Roman Catholic convert, G.K. Chesterton, C.S. Lewis converted to Christianity from atheism and returned to his Anglican roots where he remained until his death in 1963. Although Lewis never converted to Roman Catholicism, inwardly he leaned towards certain of its dogmas so that his colleagues considered him to be an Anglo-Catholic.

It is obvious, by the support given C.S. Lewis today by some conservative Christians, great ignorance exists about his life and beliefs. Therefore, we have included several pertinent quotations, individually cited, gleaned from both Lewis’s own writings, and those of his official biographers and personal

friends, in order to enlighten and awaken. For, it is an indisputable fact that to those who seek reconciliation with Rome, C.S. Lewis is a bridge.

“Certainly the path he had taken to ‘mere Christianity’ was very largely the Roman road along which guides such as Chesterton and Tolkien, and Patmore and Dante and Newman had led him.”<sup>3</sup> Patmore and Dante were Roman Catholic writers. Newman was an Anglican priest who converted to Catholicism and subsequently became a Cardinal.

“After more than two decades in the [RC] Church, I have met or learned of scores of far more illustrious Catholic converts who likewise list Lewis on their spiritual resumes.”<sup>4</sup>

“When I converted [to Catholicism] in my teens, it was largely due to reading Lewis’ Screwtape Letters...G.K. Chesterton and Lewis sort of guided me into the Catholic Church, even though Lewis wasn’t a Catholic.”<sup>5</sup>

In 1952, C.S. Lewis published his theological work *Mere Christianity*, which originally began in 1942 as a three-part BBC radio broadcast. As the title suggests, Lewis focused on the mere or common ground he felt existed in Christianity and tried to restate a theology without controversy. The result is a generic Christianity that suits anyone anywhere who can in any way relate to God. Lewis bent over backwards trying to find common ground with all denominations, omitting any doctrine that may be deemed offensive. For this reason, Tolkien disparagingly labelled his friend “Everyman’s Theologian.” Even Mormons find his writings inoffensive.

“He [Lewis] is widely quoted from tried-and-true defenders of Mormon orthodoxy. It just shows the extraordinary acceptability and the usefulness of C.S. Lewis because, of course, most of what he says is perfectly acceptable to Mormons.”<sup>6</sup>

*Mere Christianity* has long been regarded a classic exposition of the Christian faith, yet oddly enough, not one Bible verse is quoted in the first half of the book and only three partial verses in the latter half with no Bible references in the entire book. How can we present Christianity without its foundation – the Word of God?

*Mere Christianity* is a compilation of four essays, transcripts that were sent to four clergymen to gauge their reaction with regard to its common ground.

“I tried to guard against this [putting forth his Anglican beliefs] by sending the original script of what is now Book II to four clergymen (Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic) and asking for their criticism. The Methodist thought I had not said enough about Faith, and the Roman Catholic thought I had gone rather too far about the comparative unimportance of theories in explanation of the Atonement. Otherwise all five of us were agreed.”<sup>7</sup>

“You will not learn from me whether you ought to become an Anglican, a Methodist, a Presbyterian, or a Roman Catholic. This omission is

intentional. There is no mystery about my position ...the best service I could do was to explain and defend the belief that has been common to nearly all Christians at all times.”<sup>8</sup>

Regarding reunification, Lewis said that he “did at least succeed in presenting an agreed, or common, or central, or mere Christianity” and congratulated himself in having helped to bridge the “chasm” between Protestant denominations and Roman Catholicism.

“If I have not directly helped the cause of reunion, I have perhaps made it clear why we ought to be reunited.”<sup>9</sup>

“The time is always ripe for reunion. Divisions between Christians are a sin and a scandal and Christians ought at all times to be making contributions toward reunion...the result is that letters of agreement reach me from what are ordinarily regarded as the most different kinds of Christians; for instance, I get letters from Jesuits, monks, nuns, also from Quakers and Welsh Dissenters, and so on.”<sup>10</sup>

In his quest for unity, Lewis had to muddy the waters of doctrinal distinction. For instance, in chapter 19 of his Letters to Malcolm, Lewis suggests that the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation [i.e., the bread and wine become the actual body and blood of Christ], which takes place in the Mass, might be just as valid as the Protestant view of the Lord’s Supper as a memorial.

“There are three things that spread the Christ life to us: baptism, belief, and that mysterious action which different Christians call by different names – Holy Communion, the Mass, the Lord’s Supper ...anyone who professes to teach you Christian doctrine will, in fact, tell you to use all three, and that is enough for our present purpose.”<sup>11</sup>

“Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbour is the holiest object to your senses.”<sup>12</sup>

Equating Mass [“Blessed Sacrament”] and the Lord’s Supper is not a light matter. In the 39 Articles of the Anglican Church, Article 28 describes transubstantiation accordingly: “Transubstantiation...is repugnant to the plain words of Scripture.” Article 31 describes the sacrifices of the Mass as “blasphemous fables and dangerous deceits.” Godly men and women – among whom were notable Anglicans – were burned at the stake for refusing to accept this Roman Catholic Sacrament. Lewis’s casual equation is an affront to the many who gave their lives defending the Truth of God.

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