



## Penticton Free Presbyterian Church—Online article archive

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### Some things you should know about C.S. Lewis

The writings of C.S. Lewis have again come into prominence with the release of the Hollywood version of *The Lion, the witch and the wardrobe*. Many evangelicals see this as a tremendous opportunity to present gospel truth. The claim is made that C.S. Lewis' fictional writings are saturated with Biblical truth and even are a sort of parable-like repetition of Scriptural doctrine.

C. S. Lewis attempted to present Scriptural truth under a cloak of pagan mythology in order to give it popular appeal. Such an approach to Scripture is really just tampering with the word of God in an unacceptable fashion. The article below sets out some reasons why the Bible-believing Christian should have little to do with C.S. Lewis' literature.

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Clive Staples Lewis was born in Belfast, N. Ireland in 1898 and for most of his adult life lectured in English literature at Oxford University. 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*), he apparently converted to Christianity from atheism on route to the zoo in a motorcycle sidecar. Later that year, Lewis decided to become a practising Christian. He died in 1963.

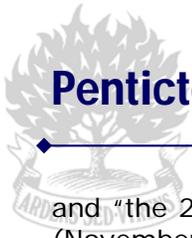
C.S. Lewis has received much acclaim for his fictional works. Recently, his fantasy novel *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* has been made into a movie. According to Lewis, this is a "Christian" allegory. What does he mean by that? His definition of what he meant by "Christian" is clear – not in his fictional works – but in his *theological* works which provide ample evidence of his religious persuasion.

#### QUOTING C.S. LEWIS

C.S. Lewis's personal religious beliefs are readily available to anyone who cares to know them. Therefore, it is assumed that anyone quoting him in a positive light is aware of these beliefs and by extension concurs with them. Similarly, fundamental Christians freely quote from the writings of C.H. Spurgeon or Matthew Henry because they agree with their faithful Biblical positions and are not ashamed to identify with them. The simple old adage is still true: you are known by the company you keep. The same applies in the realm of citation. Quoting C.S. Lewis has become a sort of phenomenon in the evangelical world. One wonders if the purpose is to enjoy some sort of academic credibility? On the contrary, it only reveals ignorance: either of the man and what he believed or of the Scriptures of Truth.

#### THE NEW EVANGELICAL PERSPECTIVE

It is not surprising that new evangelicals revere Lewis as a foremost Christian thinker and philosopher. In an article commemorating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Lewis's birth, J.I. Packer called him "our patron saint." *Christianity Today* said Lewis "has come to be the Aquinas, the Augustine, and the Aesop of contemporary Evangelicalism" (Sept. 7, 1998)



## Penticton Free Presbyterian Church—Online article archive

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and “the 20<sup>th</sup> century’s greatest Christian apologist” (April 23, 2001). *Focus on the Family* (November 2001) made a similar claim; however, the late Dr. D. Martin Lloyd-Jones warned that Lewis had a defective view of salvation and was an opponent of the substitutionary and penal view of the atonement (*Christianity Today*, Dec. 20, 1963).

### C.S. LEWIS’S BELIEFS

In simple terms, C.S. Lewis was an *Anglo*-Catholic and though dead, remains a living spokesman for ecumenism – a link to ecclesiastical reunion. The following documented facts regarding his religious beliefs speak for themselves and raise some disturbing questions about his meaning of “Christian.”

- 1. Lewis believed in a “Christian” purgatory after death.** “Death should not deprive people of a second chance...Lewis frankly admitted believing in purgatory. To him it was a place for souls already saved but in need of purifying – purging. Lewis felt that our souls *demand* purgatory. Who would want to enter heaven foul and dirty? Lewis thought of the dentist’s chair. ‘I hope that when the tooth of life is drawn and I am coming round, a voice will say, ‘Rinse your mouth out with this’ This will be purgatory.’” (Kathryn Lindscoog. *C.S. Lewis: Mere Christian*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Chicago: Cornerstone Press, 1997, p. 105).
- 2. Lewis prayed for the dead.** “Lewis could never accept the Roman Catholic practice of praying to saints...however, he emphatically believed in praying for the dead. He believed that his prayers could somehow bless them. One must remember that Lewis believed in a temporary purgatory for the blessed dead as a kind of entryway to heaven” (Lindscoog 135 based on Lewis’ *Letters to Malcolm*, London: Collins p. 15, 107-110).
- 3. Lewis believed in mystical experiences.** “Rational though he was, Lewis thoroughly believed in the mystical experience, a way to go out of this world before death ... mystics from all kinds of religions have much the same mystical experience” (Lindscoog, p. 197).
- 4. Lewis did not believe in the total inerrancy of the Bible.** “Although Lewis never doubted the historicity of an account because the account was miraculous, he believed that Jonah’s whale, Noah’s ark, and Job’s boils were probably inspired stories rather than factual history” (Lindscoog, p. 199).
- 5. Lewis believed that Roman Catholicism is a “Christian” religion.** Regarding *Mere Christianity*, Lewis said: “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” (C.S. Lewis. *Mere Christianity*. New Jersey: Fleming Revell, 1982, p. 11).

Continuing this thought, Lewis added 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 Catholicism: “If I have not directly helped the cause of reunion, I have perhaps made it clear why we ought to be reunited” (*Mere Christianity*, p. 12).

“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



## Penticton Free Presbyterian Church—Online article archive

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" (*Mere Christianity*, p. 6-7).

"And, whatever you do, do not start quarrelling with other people because they use a different formula from yours" (*Mere Christianity*, p. 284-5.)

- 6. Lewis accepted the Mass as being the same as Christian Communion.** "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" (*Mere Christianity*, p. 108-09).

In chapter 19 of his *Letters to Malcolm*, Lewis suggested that the Roman Catholic conception of the bread and wine becoming the actual body and blood of Christ might be just as valid as the Protestant view of the Lord's Supper as a memorial.

### THE CONCLUSION?

By including a so-called "Christian" purgatory in his beliefs, Lewis immediately destroys the Bible doctrine of the sufficiency of the righteousness of Christ imputed to the sinner's account in salvation. By including Roman Catholicism under the umbrella of Christianity, and admittedly omitting its doctrines for the sake of unity, Lewis condones the heresies of the Mass, idolatry, Mariolatry, and salvation by works still taught and practised by that institution. These are not "merely" cosmetic differences between denominations as Lewis would have us believe; these make up the great divide between truth and error. According to the Scriptures, salvation by works sends souls to Hell! How can such a life and death truth be casually omitted?

### LEWIS, ALCOHOL, AND OTHER QUESTIONABLE ISSUES

"It is a mistake to think that Christians ought all to be teetotalers; Mohammedanism, not Christianity, is the teetotal religion" (*Mere Christianity*, p. 132).

While awareness of Lewis's confused Biblical perspective is of primary importance, one cannot ignore his tobacco addiction (Lindskoog, p. 187), pub frequenting, relationship with life-long mentor Roman Catholic nun, Sister Penelope, and even his questionable marriage of convenience late in life to American author Joy Davidman. Then, there is the use of profanity [including the Lord's Name] in his allegory *The Great Divorce*, written fourteen years after his conversion. In addition, his chapter on "Hell" in *The Problem of Pain* raises some serious doubts as to his belief in a literal Hell. And there is the constant referral to sexual matters in *Mere Christianity*, but 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 reference in the entire book! With such a lack of supporting evidence, one wonders upon what foundation this "mere Christianity" is built?

### SO WHY IS LEWIS SO REVERED BY SOME EVANGELICALS TODAY?

In 1993, *Christianity Today* suggested this interesting reason why C.S. Lewis is so popular among some evangelicals. "Lewis's concentration on the main doctrines of the church [which included Roman Catholic Church] coincided with evangelicals' concern to avoid ecclesiastical separatism."

One wonders how serious-minded, discerning evangelical Christians can support a man



## Penticton Free Presbyterian Church—Online article archive

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with such fundamental flaws in his basic theology. Even Lewis himself admitted his own lack of knowledge in doctrine: "I should have been out of my depth in such waters: more in need of help myself than able to help others" (*Mere Christianity* 7). So why is Lewis – a man who devoted his life not to the study of theology but to ancient pagan mythology – revered as the greatest Christian apologist in our century? Simple. Many professing Christians have rejected their God-given heritage and are trading in the solid rock of the Word for the shifting sands of man's intellectual conjecture. One look at the seminaries and Christian bookstores of our lands reveals the very evident shift. Sadly, even some fundamentalists are beginning to tread the same precarious ground of compromise.

Today, the market is full of writers like Lewis. If ever we needed discernment, it is now. Every book needs to be tested on these grounds: "What saith the Scriptures?" If books are not in **total** agreement with the Scriptures of truth, we should avoid them. "If they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isaiah 8:20).

Rev. Ivan Foster (*The Burning Bush*, May 2001) observed of C.S. Lewis: "A greater understanding of the man and his theology showed that he was not an advocate of the teachings of Holy Scripture but his own scholarly notions. It is a foolish glorying in worldly scholarship that makes some admire the man."

**"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth..."** II Timothy 4:3-4.

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