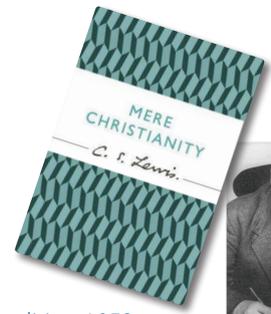




Book Review

Purely, Simply, Christianity

Mere Christianity by C.S. Lewis



First US edition 1952.

We are all told, and rightfully so, never to judge a book by its cover. But if you were to judge this book by its title, you would be rightly vindicated. Because that is its wonderful beauty: as its title perfectly suggests, it is purely, simply (and merely) Christianity. C.S. Lewis writes about a Christianity that is rarely seen and beginning to be lost in a heavily denominated faith and an increasingly agnostic society. He writes of a Christianity stripped of human embellishments and traditions – one that has its roots in logic, rationality, morality, history and (most importantly) the Bible. And that is why, despite the age of his words, C.S. Lewis, through this book, stretches out and speaks to us today just as pertinently as he did to people huddled around wireless sets in Great Britain in the early 1940s.

Mere Christianity is a collection of radio broadcasts given by C.S. Lewis in England for the BBC during the height of the Second World War. The broadcasts were designed to remind people about the fundamental teachings of Christianity. They were made all the more important given the daily traumatic experiences Britons were living through during the war. How poignant must it have been, then, for people suffering through one of humanity's darkest hours to turn on their wireless sets to hear the voice of a man talk about hope; in a time of war to hear about peace; in a time of bloodshed to hear about mercy; in a time of hatred to hear about love.

Mere Christianity is broken up into four sections: Right and Wrong; What Christians Believe; Christian Behaviour; and Beyond Personality. The first section seeks to explain the meaning of the universe and the existence of a 'Higher Being'. Lewis highlights our unique ability to discern what is right from what is wrong, or what he calls the 'Law of Human Nature.' Unlike laws of nature – such as gravity and genetics, which we have no choice but to obey – humans can choose to obey or disobey the Law of Human Nature. Our knowledge of what is right and wrong comes from our knowledge of a greater good, something beyond right and wrong, that deep down each of us has and cannot deny. This greater good is that higher being called God.

The second section expands from the first, explaining our position relative to this higher being and our response to him. If this higher being exists, and if he is God, why should you care? What has he done for you? And what should you do about it?

The third section describes the Christian life. Taking its roots from the first section, it explains the Christian virtues in light of our morality. Lewis writes of each virtue with beautiful simplicity, focusing on what God says regarding the virtues of faith, hope and love.

The final section deals with what Lewis calls 'the science of God', or what we may call theology. This section deals with issues that lie behind the Christian faith that can often be difficult to understand. They include issues such as the Trinity and how we become sons of God. Far from being unimportant, Lewis calls this science of God the road map to greater spiritual understanding and a block in the foundation of Christian faith.

C.S. Lewis, not only through this book but through many of his other writings, has had a profound impact on my faith. He has shown me the way to love God with all of my mind. He has shown me (contrary to what the world tells me) that the Christian is a thinking person, that my faith is not blind but evidence-based, and that instead of being a fairy story that keeps me ignorant, God is the source of clarity, illumination and understanding in every aspect of my life.

For me, the greatest aspect of both this book and its writer is their prescience. What is written speaks equally – if not more powerfully – today than it did at the time of the original broadcasts. And it is for that reason this book and its author are so important. In a world full of skeptics agnostic about all things spiritual, at a time when Christian morals are being questioned and challenged more intensely than ever before, and amongst people whose questions are often insufficiently answered, Lewis' voice speaks with a wonderful gentleness and empathy. His words give clarity, logic and reason at a time of confusion, tension and misunderstanding.

This is a must-read book for any Christian seeking to secure the foundations of their faith amidst an uncertain society. It's ideal for those feeling honestly lost and confused about what they believe and why. It's really is a book written for everyone. Christian and non-Christian. Theist or atheist. Or the just-not-sure. Ultimately, it's a book which – much in the way of the faith after which it is named – does not discriminate. ■

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