

READING  
C. S.  
LEWIS

A COMMENTARY

WESLEY A. KORT

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Wesley A. Kort

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## P R E F A C E

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I should declare at the outset that, as to the person and work of C. S. Lewis, I am neither a devotee nor a detractor. My attention to his work was occasioned some years ago when a group of undergraduates asked me to offer a course on Lewis. More interested in their enthusiasm than in Lewis himself, I obliged. I was aware of the existence of correspondingly strong negative appraisals of his work, some of which I encountered in my own department. From my reading of him I began to draw the conclusion that these pronounced opinions about Lewis were not based on what I began to see as basic and sustaining elements of his work but rather on his specific turn to Christianity as a move separable from that larger project. I have tried in my teaching and in my previous book on Lewis to assess his work more broadly. That intention lies behind this book as well.

A major reason for the sharply focused and divided reception of Lewis is that both ends of the opinion poll take his advocacy of Christianity as defining his work. Those favorably disposed take the rest of his work as valuable primarily because it enhances the visibility and academic standing of his apologetic efforts. His detractors, on the other hand, see Lewis's religious advocacy and apologetics as compromising whatever value his scholarly or

imaginative work might otherwise have. As an alternative to these contrary but similarly based readings of Lewis, I hope to bring into view the stable, basic, and even controlling constants in his work. An overarching intention behind this book is to suggest this sense of the whole and to see why his broader project led him to give attention to religion and to value Christianity so highly.

At its more obvious level, this book is a commentary on and guide to representative and important texts by Lewis, a guide that can be used by individuals, groups, or classes that work through all or some of the texts discussed. Individual texts are treated separately, but they are also placed in three separate parts according to their helpfulness in granting access to what I take to be the structural components of his larger project. I have called the three components or strategies “reasonable assumptions,” “cultural critiques,” and “applied principles.” The first of these includes assumptions, largely concerning philosophical anthropology and moral theory, that Lewis thought were shared or potentially sharable by reasonable people generally. The second, cultural critiques, comprises his analyses and questionings of modernity, especially the impact of modernity on personhood, personal identity, and personal relations, and the threat to human well-being posed by it. The third component, applied principles, relates to his distinction between principles and their embodiments and, second, to his constructive application of moral and doctrinal principles to delineate a worldview that he sees as preferable to its modern, particularly nonreligious, alternatives. He offers these applications not as final or universal but as modeling the kind of views that he would encourage others to form. I conclude each of the three parts of the book with a chapter that gathers some examples or indications of the component or strategy that texts in that part are most helpful in making available.

My overall goal, then, is to give attention both to particular texts and to a structural wholeness or coherence in Lewis’s work.

Not all of his interests and accomplishments are addressed. Some obvious professional and personal investments, including those that identify him as a poet and a literary or cultural historian, are not taken into account. So when I refer to a view of the *whole* I do not mean *all*.

My task would be easier and clearer if Lewis had directed at least some explicit attention in his work to a description or defense of the three constitutive components or strategies that I have identified. As it is, the individual texts on which I comment do not coincide perfectly with the organizing interests that I discuss in relation to those texts. For this reason, in dealing with each text, I have chosen not to focus primarily on its relation to the component of his method that is the organizing principle of that part of the book, but to treat the text as an individual whole. It is my hope that the three aspects of the book—individual texts examined separately, a proposal that the texts in each part contribute to the formulation of a structural component, and the argument that the three structural components constitute the framework of Lewis's project—will do justice to his own strong interest in the relation between the particular and the inclusive.

I begin with an introduction that draws attention to some aspects of Lewis's context, setting the stage for what follows. I conclude the book with some final comments on his project and on why I am appreciative of it.

Before beginning, I want to thank my editor at Oxford University Press, Cynthia Read. It is fitting that her name, however cryptically, appears in the title of the book, since she offered numerous suggestions for making this book more readable than otherwise it would have been.



## WORKS BY C. S. LEWIS CITED

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Editions of works by C. S. Lewis cited by page references in this book are listed below in order of their appearance:

- Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, First Mariner Books ed., 2012 [1955].
- The Problem of Pain*. New York: HarperCollins paperback ed., 2001 [1942].
- The Screwtape Letters with Screwtape Proposes a Toast*. New York: HarperCollins paperback ed., 2001 [1942].
- Mere Christianity*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001 [1952].
- Out of the Silent Planet*. New York: Scribner, 2003 [1938].
- Perelandra: A Novel*. New York: Scribner, 2003 [1943].
- The Abolition of Man or Reflections on Education with Special References to the Teaching of English in the Upper Forms of School*. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2001 [1944].
- That Hideous Strength: A Modern Fairy-Tale for Grown-Ups*. New York: Scribner, 2003 [1945].
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- The Four Loves*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, First Mariner Books ed., 2012 [1960].
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# READING C. S. LEWIS



## Introduction

Although not an obvious choice for sketching in the context of C. S. Lewis's work, one point from which to begin is his "Englishness." He was born on November 29, 1898, in Belfast, Ireland, but soon after his mother's death in August 1908, he was sent to English schools. With only a brief interlude, he was educated there. In the summer of 1917 he began his career at Oxford University, where he studied philosophy, classics, and English, served as a tutor in philosophy for one year, and became a tutor in English literature at Magdalen College in 1925. Except for some return trips to Ireland, his war experience in France, and a trip to Greece late in his life, he spent his days in England. He took a position at Cambridge University in 1955, but maintained his residence in Headington Quarry just outside Oxford until his death there in the late fall of 1963. He spent his free time largely in England, often on walking tours with friends over the countryside. His interest in things English was substantiated, of course, by his profession as a scholar of English, especially medieval and Renaissance, literature and culture, and the attachment to his English location, his vocation,

and his personal identity seem to have much to do with one another.

However, while personally and vocationally engaged by and identified with England, Lewis remained an outsider who retained identification with Ireland. Although they were not close, his father, who continued to live in Belfast until his death in 1929, and his brother, Warnie, who lived with Lewis after retiring from a military career, also identified with Ireland. In addition, Lewis maintained during his life a regular correspondence with his boyhood friend in Ireland, Arthur Greeves. The most influential teacher in his early education, William Kirkpatrick, was Irish, as was also a very important woman in his life, Mrs. Janie Moore, of whom more later. The landscapes of Ireland and Irish love of storytelling, folklore, myth, and poetry had an appeal and resonance that continued, it seems, to exert a hold on him.<sup>1</sup> Given his attachments to Ireland, it is important to note Lewis's awareness of William Butler Yeats, whom he met in the early 1920s. What Yeats may well have represented for Lewis was identity with a particular location and culture and, at the same time, involvement in the cultural breadth of literary modernism.

Mention of Yeats opens a second matter related to Lewis's context, namely, his interest in myth, an interest Lewis cultivated and carried over from his youth into his later work and that he shared with many other modern literary figures. Perhaps one of the things that distinguish Lewis from his readers today, especially Americans, is this deep and developed fascination with myth. It accounts for his early and continuing admiration for such nineteenth-century writers as George MacDonald and William Morris. It also supports his orientation toward and understanding of such traditional cultures as medieval and Renaissance England and ancient Greece and Rome. And it relates him to many of his contemporaries who, like Yeats, were also interested in myth, people otherwise very different both from Lewis

and from one another, such as James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, Robert Graves, and T. S. Eliot.<sup>2</sup>

It is interesting to note that when they met in the early 1920s Yeats was more of a believer in unseen realities and their powers than was Lewis. Like many others at the time, Yeats thought there was something behind myths and fantasies that drew or affected human imaginings and feelings. In the closing decades of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth, there was strong interest in the occult, mystical, spiritual, and magical, and this was felt in Oxford as elsewhere. When Lewis met Yeats, he was, unlike his countryman, a materialist, and, consequently, a nonbeliever in all of that. Consequently, Lewis suffered, if that's the right word, a gap or tension between his deeply rooted attachment to myth and the mystical and his sense of what is real or true. Readers in contemporary America, influenced as they often are by literary realism and naturalism, must adjust to reading the fanciful and mythlike in Lewis's work, which was part of his culture. What he underwent, during his protracted conversion or return to Christianity, was an adjustment not to the wonders of mythic narratives and their unusual or supernatural features but rather to the possibility that there was something to these stories, that they represented responses to or intimations of realities behind them. He came to the conclusion, largely under the tutelage of Christian friends at Oxford, that his long-standing fascination with myth, which he knew to be shared by people in all places and times, was due not only to the recurring themes of myths across cultures, their breadth and starkness, but to the fact that myths gave testimony to something elusive but real beyond them. For Lewis, biblical and Christian narratives share in the world of myth, but he came to believe that they do so with unique completeness and veracity.

The play between Lewis's identification with and distance from his English context and the interplay of myth and reality

went into making Lewis an engaged outsider in his academic vocation. They supported the combination in his work and manner of a sharply critical stance and an equally strong affirmation of his immediate context. Had he identified fully either with his vocational location or with an alternative or contrary to it, he could not have fused affirmation and critique in his scholarly work and personal manner so consistently as he did.

His less than full acceptance both of and by his Oxford colleagues may have been one of the reasons for the eagerness with which Lewis developed close friendships and group relations that were continuous with but also alternatives to his relations with academic colleagues. The most famous of these was with the members of the Inklings, a group that began in 1933 and met regularly until 1949. He also moved between his academic residence in college and his personal, more "Irish" life in Headington. His lack of full acceptance at Oxford also contributed to his move, after some thirty years of professional life there, to a position at Cambridge University as professor of medieval and Renaissance literature in 1955.

Lewis became, in the early 1940s, a celebrity. His visibility and even popularity rose both among students and among the population beyond university walls. While he had some public standing prior to the outbreak of the Second World War, it was in the early '40s that he developed a wide following. The radio addresses that he gave on the BBC between 1941 and 1944 were widely received. *The Screwtape Letters*, which began to appear in serial form in 1941, greatly extended his reading audience. The Socratic Club, a debating society founded in 1942 and in which he remained until 1954 a principal participant, sponsored meetings well attended by students. Issues of a religious nature regularly influenced the agenda. This visibility and popularity did not enhance his standing among academic colleagues, since it smacked of catering to popular tastes. Moreover, Lewis at the

same time was publishing in areas outside of his and even any academic field, science fiction and topical essays on religious subjects, for example. I do not think that Lewis sought or was gratified by this popularity, but it must, at least to some degree, have offset the lack of recognition that seems to have been characteristic of his academic life in Oxford.

The complex relation of Lewis to his location and cultural context is not only interesting in itself but is significant for his work because it served to bolster the strong value he placed on holding particularity and inclusiveness, parts and the whole, together. Like living at once both on an island and within an empire, the dual stress on both the specific and the inclusive seems deeply embedded in his work. He saw the general and the particular not only as mutually affecting and illuminating but as also occasionally and significantly coincidental. This capacity or even habit is basic not only to his scholarly work but to his poetic and religious interests and identity as well. The relation was not unidirectional, as though he approached culturally specific things universally and in an intellectually imperialistic way. Indeed, he was very sensitive to the need to understand and appreciate cultures different from his own. He also was not so enthralled by the riches of English culture as to take them as an occasion of pride or superiority. Indeed, while he obviously identified with "Englishness," especially its literary traditions, at important and critical points he was willing to favor other times and places, both real and imagined.

It is noteworthy that someone so complex and ambiguously related to his context, a person of such diverse interests, should evince the continuity and consistency that we find in Lewis's work. This is underscored by the fact that in cases that have elicited sharply contrary positions among his readers, Lewis often chooses to locate himself between clear alternatives. As we shall see, instead of taking a side in a sharply divided field of opinion,

he regularly locates himself in a less clear and more complex position somewhere in between, leaving him often with unresolved tensions. But this complexity does not detract from the sureness or sense of grounding that one finds in his work. Part of its consistency or continuity is a matter of style. There is in his written work a directness and even an informality that, combined with his erudition and insight, is engaging and compelling. His autobiography, sprinkled as it is with multiple references to texts the ordinary person is likely not to have read or even to have heard of, might not be much read were it not for the style of its writing, which could be called a respectful and thoughtful immediacy, even intimacy. Lewis was immensely learned, seeming not only to have read almost everything but to have read major texts numerous times, to remember almost all he read, and to be able to recite large portions from memory. He is not shy about displaying these acquisitions and abilities, but he also does not dominate or alienate the reader with them. He is never aloof, dogmatic, or, especially, arrogant. He has his feet on the ground even when referring to the stars.

This continuity in his work, which offsets his diverse interests and his engagements with various genres and kinds of audiences, has also to do with the continuity between his rational, historical, critical, imaginary, moral, and religious interests. Indeed, that continuity is central to his project. Lewis seems to counter an academic context in which interests or acts of diverse kinds are compartmentalized. It is not so much that he undertook to argue for the relations between various human interests as that he simply embodied those relations in his work and, one would think, in his manner and daily interactions. This does not mean that he ends with a kind of mush or confusion. The reader knows when a move has been made from a rational to an imagined or from a historical to a religious discourse or point. Distinctions are retained, but there is also ease of movement between them.

Relations are more assumed than conflicts, continuities more than separations.

The continuity or consistency in his work also rests on or arises from the primacy he grants to personal encounters with natural objects, texts, and other people. He does not explain or defend this attribution of primacy to encounters; he seems more to assume it. This means that he does not subject his encounters to or absorb them within some explanatory theory. This also means that his test for theories and explanations is their ability to take seriously and fully into account the encounters that we have in and with our world and their consequences for our being who we are or are becoming. This means that, while some theories and accounts are certainly more adequate than others, encounters are for him more particular, complex, forceful, and even mysterious than any account of them can be.

Given his strongly “English” identity, his erudition, and the complex position he holds in English modernity, it may be surprising that Lewis is better known and admired by Americans than by readers in Great Britain. Interest in Lewis burgeoned during and after the Second World War in American college departments of English, especially among faculty at conservative Protestant institutions. Lewis would not have been accepted in this context if his work had been of less scholarly merit or was less appealing to a general audience. However, he gained the recognition and even devotion that persist in the United States to the present day primarily because of his willingness to identify himself as a Christian, to take seriously the Christian aspects of the literary tradition with which he worked, and to include religious interests in his interpretation and evaluation of literary texts. This was inspiring and enabling for faculty working in academic environments that had seen, until midcentury, a growing gap, if not antagonism, between scholarship and religious identity and thought. Lewis became a kind of hero for a generation of

teachers and scholars, especially in English literature, who were trying to apply the more appreciative cultural attitudes toward religion that emerged after the Second World War to academic work generally and to the study of literature in particular. His high standing among a large number of American readers depends on his self-identity in public and academic arenas as a Christian.

It could be said that Lewis played for American Protestant faculty a role similar to that played for their Catholic counterparts in philosophy by Jacques Maritain (1882–1973). Like Lewis in Oxford, Maritain initially identified with the secular and materialist assumptions of the culture of the Sorbonne. Dissatisfied with that culture, he converted to Catholicism and studied Thomist philosophy. At the beginning of the war he emigrated to America and taught first at Columbia and then at Princeton, where he was professor of philosophy from 1948 to 1960. His work was influential not only because it revitalized interest in medieval philosophy but also because he applied Thomistic insights to current debates in moral philosophy, politics, and aesthetics. What Maritain was for Catholic philosophers in this country, Lewis was for their Protestant counterparts in literary studies. Given the Anglophile attitudes commonly found among Americans teaching English literature, Lewis's standing was enhanced by his "Englishness." The influence, even the authority, of both scholars for their colleagues in America was due in large measure to their religious identities.

Particular aspects of Lewis's religious identity may also be important for an account of the high esteem in which he is held in America. Wheaton College in Illinois hosts the Wade Center, a depository and study center for Lewis and associated writers. Close ties between Wheaton College and C. S. Lewis would seem unlikely, given the fact, for example, that Lewis was a heavy drinker and Wheaton College, at least until recently, prohibited the use of alcohol not only by students but also by faculty. But Wheaton

is an institution of strong academic standing that is firmly Evangelical, and the heart and soul of American devotion to C. S. Lewis is Evangelical. I shall have more to say later about this somewhat curious relationship between Lewis and American Evangelicalism. For now, let me point out a couple of things that may account for Lewis's attraction for American Christians of this kind. First, he was not church specific. He became a regular participant in the liturgies of the Church of England, but Lewis does not give the church in general, and certainly not a particular denomination, centrality in his work.<sup>3</sup> This lack of ecclesiastical specificity appeals to Evangelicals, who like to identify with fellow Christians without regard to denominational affiliation or tradition. There is a kind of essentialism, idealism, and elevation above institutional location and historical specificity in both Lewis and his American admirers. Second, Lewis, as we shall see, is sharply critical of modernity, and Evangelicals generally articulate a clear contrast between their own identities and those shaped by the surrounding culture. While I think Lewis is commonly misread or overread in his cultural critique, Evangelicals like this side of him. Third, in his moral theology or ethics Lewis's focus is more personal than social or political. This is not to say that Lewis lacks a social or political perspective, but he was far more oriented to personal than to wider problems. This orientation is consistent with Evangelical interests. Finally, Lewis was insistent that doctrinal and moral principles should be maintained even when they became difficult to apply or understand in current conditions. While I shall raise questions in my conclusion about this aspect of his work, it makes him attractive to Christians who bring to their reading of him a desire to have their certainty confirmed. I should add, however, that, for reasons I will mention later, I do not think Lewis was an Evangelical, although there are points of similarity and connection between his work and this prominent, even controlling, part of his audience.

It should also be said that Lewis's standing in America has been gradually enhanced by changes in academic literary culture. Earlier and more rapidly than in England, American literary studies became broader in scope and inclusive of genres. It is not surprising now to find an interest in cultural criticism, philosophical and theoretical issues, personal narrative, popular literature, and even religion among both American and English literary scholars. Consequently Lewis's versatility finds a larger real or potential arena of appreciation among American academics and among their English counterparts than was likely half a century ago.

Another important matter to take note of concerning his context is that Lewis emerged as a scholar in English literature at exactly the time of the discipline's rise and establishment. While English literature had important cultural and educational roles from the eighteenth century on, it was not part of the curriculum of Oxford and Cambridge until the early 1920s, just when Lewis was completing his education and beginning his professional academic life. As Terry Eagleton puts it, "In the early 1920s it was desperately unclear why English was worth studying at all. In the early 1930s it had become a question of why it was worth wasting your time on anything else."<sup>4</sup> He emphasizes his point: "English was not just one discipline among many but the most central subject of all, immeasurably superior to law, science, politics, philosophy or history."<sup>5</sup>

The question arises as to why this radical reorientation of cultural and scholarly interest and emphasis occurred. One reason was nationalism. There was long-standing cultural competition between England and the Continent, especially France and Germany, and England is known not as much for its music, as was Germany, and not as much for its visual art, as was France, as for its literature. The growing prestige of literary studies owed much to postwar national and cultural pride.

It was also a social and political movement. Many of the early movers, such as I. A. Richards and F. R. Leavis, were the sons of middle-class families. Classics, perhaps largely because of its distance from and possible irrelevance to ordinary and immediate conditions, was frequently the major subject of Oxbridge's upper-class students. English literature arose as the poor man's classics, more closely in touch with the ordinary experiences and lives of people but also elevated culturally above them. In addition, it granted a content to English culture that held unifying possibilities offsetting the potentials for disunity in a society divided by regions and class and that was threatened by political and social changes occurring after the First World War in other parts of Europe.

It was also a moral movement, a reinstatement of the nineteenth-century emphasis, epitomized by Matthew Arnold (1822–88), on poetry and literary criticism as giving to culture the shared moral content that religion earlier had provided. The period after the First World War was a time of accelerated cultural and social changes and one with a sense of discontinuity with the prewar period, and literature provided continuity with the past. More, it gave a sense of cultural and moral stability and shared values, and Richards and Leavis were, as was also C. S. Lewis, involved in applying the force, prestige, and values of English literature to contemporary problems and uncertainties.<sup>6</sup>

It was, finally, an idealist and spiritual movement. It drew heavily on the nineteenth century, on the idealism of figures like Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Arnold. Literary culture developed as a stable and elevated alternative to the growing mobility, urbanization, and industrialization of English society, and that spirit of uplifting the culture, of setting alternative, even contrary, values for the material, mechanical side of English life, was very much a part of the movement. Redeeming the culture from its increasingly brutalizing consequences was embedded in the

study of English literature, in its mission. The constant emphasis in Lewis on raising things up, of countering the tendency to reduce everything, has, in addition to its religious and Christian sources and supports, this cultural warrant as well.

Lewis participated in this cultural context. He was influenced by it, and he contributed to it. His literary work, while it had a specifically Christian side or emphasis, was part of larger cultural and social movements in England, and it needs to be seen in that context. While he stands apart from his cultural and academic setting, he was also very much a part of it.

A final point worth clarifying at the outset is that Lewis expects a few things from his reader, and reading him will be enhanced by keeping these things in mind. For example, Lewis has a high regard for what he took to be ordinary experience. He prizes attention to present time and the everyday. Equally important and consistent is his high regard for feelings and personal responses. He counts on and attends to them both in himself and in others, and his interest in personal internality is profound. He believed that people, although also different from one another, experience things in similar ways, and he thought of literature and of religion, among other things, as revealing such continuities and similarities. Things are right for him when they are so morally and rationally, of course, but things that are right also feel right. Sensibility, the coordination of what we perceive with how we respond to it, and awareness of right relations and responses, why they occur and should be honored, are important for him. If something doesn't feel right it may well not be right. And how you feel about something, how you experience it, and its actual value have much to do with one another.

Another thing he counts on, something as important as feeling, is the ability to reason. Literature, religion, and philosophy consort with one another. They are differing aspects of one project, although each also has a life, so to speak, of its own. But they are

not in conflict. If something does not make sense, is not rationally and intellectually appealing, it will also not have much religious or aesthetic potential. This is true for all three. Religion that is resistant to the rational or aesthetic also lacks resonance and potential. Reason, then, is not a contrary either to art or to faith. As we shall see, Lewis had as high a regard for rigorous thinkers as for artists and people of faith.

Along with experience and reason, Lewis has—and counts on in his readers to have—a high regard for imagination, and he has it for a number of reasons. One of them is that imagination enables us to live in a world that is larger than what we can see or touch. It opens up to us not only the realm of possibilities but also of realities that we cannot directly encounter. The stronger our imagination the larger is our sense of the world in which we find ourselves. Carl Sagan urged his hearers to live in a world that contains billions and billions of stars. Just so, Lewis wants his readers to imagine themselves as living in a world far bigger than the one that confronts them immediately.<sup>7</sup> Also, the imagination augments our identities by extending us into the future. We are persons not only by virtue of our memories and present interests but also in terms of our aspirations. What is it we long for and are striving to be? What is it that we most desire? Who I am and what I desire to be or become have much to do with one another. My imagination and who I am, then, are inseparable. Finally, the imagination has an important moral function. By using it, I can imagine situations in which the present ills and wrongs of our world are altered. We can think of a better way of arranging or of doing things. By means of our imaginations we see why present attitudes and actions can and perhaps will lead to unfortunate results, and by means of our imaginations we can project alternatives to present conditions and behaviors that are morally more robust and promising. Lewis calls on his readers' imaginations to enlarge and complicate the world, to allow them to have

better desires and to desire better things, and to project a kind of world in which evil and destruction have less a say than presently they do.

Finally, it should be said that Lewis was not only very much a part of the context in which he lived and worked but also that he took the particularities of cultural context seriously. He lived in a different world from our own, and we should not expect that what seemed obvious or good to him, as he tried to understand himself and his context, will appear with the same force or adequacy for us today. As he himself would have been quick to acknowledge, he and his culture had their limits as well as their resources, and we are in the same position, with similar but also differing limits and resources. So reading Lewis must be a critical as well as an appreciative act. There are also religious and theological things that some readers will not like. For example, Catholic readers and Protestants who emphasize the centrality of the church and its disciplines and sacraments as crucial to the Christian life will be puzzled by a person who reveals a Christian identity without giving such matters centrality. Evangelicals will not like the lack in his work of a clear and strong doctrine of Scripture. While the Bible is important for Lewis, he usually does not defend what he says about Christianity and the Christian life by appeals to biblical warrants or authority.<sup>8</sup> More liberal Christians will be concerned about the lack in his ethics of a strong social, political, and economic emphasis. Finally, morally sensitive people of various persuasions will be put off by the assumptions and categorizations that he brings to his discussion or depictions of people who are female, of color, and gay or lesbian. Much of this can be chalked up to the cultural context of which he was a part, and it can be argued that he was less insensitive on these matters than many of his contemporaries. However, these are not minor lacks or lapses. The politics of gender, sexuality, and race are more basic to many people than are their beliefs,

including religious beliefs, and their beliefs may well operate primarily to warrant their commitments to views relevant to their social, political, and economic locations. I am, frankly, sympathetic to this response, and I view much that gives rise to religious fervor in America today as closely tied to a self-serving advocacy of political and social views regarding gender, sexuality, and race. However, I also think that it would be excessive to attribute all of Lewis's work to his unacknowledged desire to warrant his political and social position and views. One should read Lewis, along with appreciation, with a degree of suspicion and should not dismiss slights and caricatures when they occur as minor slips or as extrinsic to who he is. Among other things, readers of Lewis should be thankful that they live in a time when there is more cultural and social awareness of and sensitivity regarding issues such as these than was the case in his own time and place.

Having said this, I need to add that Lewis was a surprisingly inclusive and generous person. He not only tolerated, he sought out and embraced people with whom he differed and disagreed. While he is critical of his culture and sharp in his points of disagreement with others, he did not easily separate people into groups, especially into camps of allies and enemies. We shall see, for example, that while he spent a good portion of his time and energy in arguing that a religious and, even more, a Christian way of being in the world was superior to its nonreligious alternatives, he was not simply tolerant but was understanding of people who religiously differed from him or were even not willing or able to be religious at all. Living as we do in a culture largely attentive to identity formation, including religious identity, by means of difference, opposition, and hostility toward others, it is remarkable, sobering, and perhaps healing to encounter someone as affirmative, appreciative, and understanding of others as he was while also being forthright about what he believes and thinks is or should be the case.



# PART ONE

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