

CS Lewis's "Mere Christianity," by G. M. Marsden

Princeton University Press. 2016. pp. viii+264
ISBN: 978-0-6911537-3-5

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It is strange that someone who had no theological training at all, should have made such an impact on religious thinking among ordinary people during the second half of the twentieth century; a period marked by substantial disbelief in traditional faith and religion. Perhaps it is not so strange when thinking how difficult theologically trained communicators find it to be lucid and unambiguous in their teaching. Seemingly, despite his training in history, classics and literature, CS Lewis was supremely able to communicate the truth of the Christian faith to a wide audience through his broadcasts and writings (p.36), most notably, *Mere Christianity (MC)*. Its success was due to his ability to help people to find in Christianity the decisive turning point in their lives. Born into the Victorian world, he had to contend with the impact of modernity.

In terms of being a Christian communicator, Lewis was something of an enigma. In some sense he was a traditional Anglican; yet he came to be feted universally by fundamentalists because he decried liberal Christianity despite his failure to support the verbal inerrancy of scripture. Nonetheless, he was drawn in by evangelical Christianity. He certainly possessed the skill to reach wide audiences in a country which was far from being Christian, including children and many among the working classes. He became the expert and apologist, par excellence on Christian morality as “practical everyday questions of how Christians ought to live” (p.46).

However, Lewis came across for the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries as something of a dinosaur—particularly regarding marriage, gender and sexual morality issues. In many ways, he was a controversialist. Further, he was irrelevant to the extent that he eschewed matters of racial justice in the 1960s and beyond and generally avoided socio-political issues also. To this extent, he was out of touch with public culture.



Studia Historiae Ecclesasticae
<https://upjournals.co.za/index.php/SHE/index>
Volume 46 | Number 2 | 2020 | #5664 | 2 pages

<https://doi.org/10.25159/2412-4265/5664>
ISSN 2412-4265(Online)ISSN 1017-0499(Print)
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Duncan

Nonetheless, he was attempting to answer questions people were posing; and clarifying matters for them. He was dealing with timeless truths.

The success of *Mere Christianity* is a little surprising, as it was originally published as three works which were only minimally revised before the composite was published.

The author offers an excellent analysis of the historical and contextual religious reasons why *MC* was so successful, but the summary at the end of the book is disappointing. Lewis's skill lay in his dealing with common human nature, seeing reason in the context of experience, emotions and imagination. It is his poetic nature and his preoccupation with *Mere Christianity* in a straightforward and basic manner which has made it a long-term success.