



DAVID O. HARRISON

AN ADAPTATION OF C.S. LEWIS'  
**MERE CHRISTIANITY**

FOR STUDENTS  
AND YOUNG ADULTS

- UNDERSTANDING GOD -

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## UNDERSTANDING GOD

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*David Harris*

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## MEET THE AUTHOR

DAVID HARRISON was born and raised in England and emigrated to Canada in 1973 at the age of 21.

When he was 35, David invited Jesus into his life. He is married and the father of two adult children. He attended a Brethren Bible Chapel in Scarborough for 25 years, ten of those years as an elder.

For 23 years David ran a successful audiovisual integration company in Toronto, Canada, catering primarily to universities, banks, and law firms.

In 2006 David founded Bus Stop Bible Studies<sup>1</sup>, a ministry which used public transit advertising panels to display messages of encouragement from the Word of God to many millions of people in Canada.

For 10 years David served as the Board Chair of Daystar Native Christian Outreach, based on Manitoulin Island.

Now 'retired', David and his wife, Wendy, run a bed & Breakfast in Muskoka.

David (who failed miserably in English at school) has taken to writing as a hobby, now has ten titles under his belt and enjoys sales of approximately one thousand copies per month.

Contact: [dohauthor@gmail.com](mailto:dohauthor@gmail.com)

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<sup>1</sup> [bit.ly/BSBSIMAGINE](http://bit.ly/BSBSIMAGINE)

## UNDERSTANDING GOD

### DEDICATION

To Khloe Brown<sup>2</sup>

May your light continue to shine brightly.

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<sup>2</sup> [bit.ly/KhloeStory](https://bit.ly/KhloeStory)



## WHY THIS BOOK?

## WHY THIS BOOK?

C.S. Lewis, the renowned Professor of English at Oxford University, was a literary giant.

Clive Staples Lewis, known as Jack to his family and friends, authored many famous novels, including the *Chronicles of Narnia* series and *The Screwtape Letters*. The latest estimate for sales of his books exceeds 200 million copies. One of his most famous books is *Mere Christianity*.

When I first read *Mere Christianity*, I couldn't help but wonder if the average North American reader could fully understand this book without an English-to-"English" dictionary at their side. Even I, who was born and raised in England, found myself Googling the meaning of some of Lewis's expressions from the 1940s. Additionally, Lewis had no qualms about writing paragraphs that could easily span two pages! After releasing the very successful *MERE CHRISTIANITY IN EVERYDAY ENGLISH*, I realized that to make Lewis's work more relevant to today's youth and young adults, the book needed further modernization and refinement. This led me to create the second version: *AN ADAPTATION OF C.S. LEWIS'S MERE CHRISTIANITY FOR STUDENTS AND YOUNG ADULTS – UNDERSTANDING GOD*.

Even Lewis acknowledged the evolving nature of language and word usage over time. Please note, I have taken poetic license in a few instances to clarify some of Lewis's arguments. I hope this does not diminish the essence of his work in any way.

Enjoy!

David O. Harrison, Author

C. S. LEWIS – THE MAN BEHIND THE WORDS

C.S. Lewis was an atheist for many years before becoming a Christian. He wrote about his change in belief in his book "Surprised by Joy," saying, "In the Trinity semester of 1929, I gave in and admitted that God was God. Perhaps the most dejected and reluctant convert in all of England." This experience helped him understand why some people don't care about or actively resist religion. As a Christian writer, Lewis had a brilliant and logical mind, and his writing was clear and lively. He wrote many famous books, such as "The Problem of Pain," "The Screwtape Letters," "Mere Christianity," "The Four Loves," and "Prayer: Letters to Malcolm," which was published after he died. Besides his popular works for adults, Lewis wrote wonderful books for children, especially "The Chronicles of Narnia" series, starting with "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe." He also wrote science fiction and many books about literary criticism. His books have been translated into many languages and read by millions of people around the world. Lewis passed away on November 22, 1963, at his home in Oxford.

This book is based on a series of talks I gave on BBC radio during the dark days of World War II, which were later turned into three books: "The Case for Christianity" (1943)<sup>3</sup>, "Christian Behaviour" (1943), and "Beyond Personality" (1945).

When I was getting them ready to be printed, I added a few things to what I said on the radio but mostly kept it the same. I think a radio talk should sound like a real conversation, not like reading an essay. So, in my talks, I used casual words and contractions like "don't" and "we've" instead of "do not" and "we have."

I want to warn readers that I won't be giving advice on choosing between different Christian groups, like Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, or Roman Catholic. I did this on purpose, and I even listed them alphabetically. I'm just an ordinary member<sup>4</sup> of the Church of England, not leaning strongly towards any particular side. However, I'm not trying to convince anyone to join my church.

Since I became a Christian, I've found that the best way I can help others is by explaining and supporting the main beliefs that most Christians have always shared. I have a few reasons for this. First, the arguments between Christians often involve really complicated topics that only experts can talk about. I wouldn't be much help with these deep questions. Second, talking about these arguments usually doesn't make new people want to join the Christian faith. Instead, it might make them not want to be Christians. We should only talk about these

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<sup>3</sup> [\*] Published in England as Broadcast Talks.

<sup>4</sup> Layperson: a person without professional or specialized knowledge in a particular subject.

differences with people who already believe in one God and that Jesus Christ is His Son. Finally, I noticed that a lot of really good writers were already arguing about these controversial topics. But not many were focusing on defending the basic, shared beliefs of Christianity, which Richard Baxter called “mere” Christianity. This seemed like the area where I could help the most, so I naturally focused on it.

To the best of my knowledge, these were my only reasons, and I’d appreciate it if people didn’t make wild guesses about why I didn’t talk about certain controversial topics. For example, just because I’m silent on some issues doesn’t mean I’m undecided. Sometimes I am undecided because there are questions among Christians that I don’t have answers to, and there may be questions I’ll never have answers to. Even in a perfect world, if I asked these questions, I might get an answer like, “What is that to you? Follow Me.”<sup>5</sup> However, there are other times when I do have an opinion but choose not to share it. I didn’t write this book to explain “my religion” but to explain “mere” Christianity, which has been around long before me and will continue to be, whether I like it or not.

It’s interesting that you can’t tell if I think disputed topics are important or not just because I don’t talk about them. Christians themselves disagree about how important these disagreements are. When two Christians from different groups argue, it usually doesn’t take long for one to ask if a certain point “really matters,” and the other to reply, “Matter? Why, it’s absolutely essential.”

Based on reviews and the numerous letters I’ve received, it seems that the book, despite its imperfections, has effectively presented a common and central version of Christianity, often

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<sup>5</sup> John 21:22

referred to as “mere” Christianity. This demonstrates that omitting the disputed points doesn’t create a vague or weak version of Christianity. Instead, the shared beliefs are robust and distinct from non-Christian beliefs, far more so than any differences within Christianity itself.

In Book 3, which deals with morals, I have also chosen not to address certain matters, but for a different reason. Ever since I served as a soldier in the First World War, I’ve disliked people who, safe and comfortable, tell those on the front lines what to do. So, I am reluctant to talk a lot about temptations I don’t face myself. No one is tempted by every sin, and I’m not tempted to gamble. Because of this, I don’t think I can give good advice about gambling. I’ve also avoided discussing birth control. I’m not a woman, a married man, or a priest, so I don’t think it’s my place to take a firm stance on issues that involve pains, dangers, and costs that I don’t experience and that I’m not in a position to guide others on.

Some people have objected to my use of the word “Christian” to mean someone who believes the basic ideas of Christianity. They ask, “Who are you to decide who is and who isn’t a Christian?” or “Isn’t it possible for someone who can’t believe these ideas to be closer to the spirit of Christ than those who do?” In one sense, these objections are kind, thoughtful, and sensitive. They have every good quality except being practical. We can’t use language the way these objectors suggest without causing confusion. I’ll show this with the history of another word, which is less important but serves as a good example.

The word “gentleman” originally had a clear meaning. It referred to someone who had a coat of arms and owned land. Calling someone “a gentleman” was stating a fact, not giving a compliment. Saying someone was not “a gentleman” was also stating a fact, not being rude. It wasn’t contradictory to say that

John was a liar and a gentleman, just like it isn't contradictory today to say James is a fool and has a Master's Degree.

But then some people—rightly and kindly—suggested that the important part of being a gentleman was behavior, not having a coat of arms or land. They argued that the true gentleman is one who acts like a gentleman. In that sense, Edward could be more genuinely a gentleman than John.

Their intentions were good. Being honorable, courteous, and brave is certainly better than just owning a coat of arms. However, they are not the same thing. Not everyone agrees on this point. Using “gentleman” in this new way becomes a way of praising someone rather than providing clear information about them. Saying someone isn't “a gentleman” becomes an insult. When a word stops describing and starts being just a compliment, it no longer gives clear information; it only shows the speaker's opinion (like calling a meal “nice” only shows that the speaker liked it).

When the word “gentleman” changed from its original meaning (someone with a coat of arms and land) to just meaning “a nice<sup>6</sup> person,” it became a meaningless word. We already have plenty of words for approving someone, so changing “gentleman” wasn't necessary. Now, if someone wants to use it in its original sense, they have to explain what they mean because the word has lost its clear meaning.

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<sup>6</sup> In the late 13c., *nice* meant “foolish, ignorant, frivolous, senseless,” from Old French *nice* (12c.) “careless, clumsy; weak; poor, needy; simple, stupid, silly, foolish. By 1926, *nice* was said to be “too great a favorite with the ladies, who have charmed out of it all its individuality and converted it into a mere diffuser of vague and mild agreeableness.” [Fowler]

If we let people change the meaning of the word “Christian” in the same way, it will also become meaningless. Christians won’t be able to use it to describe anyone anymore because we can’t truly know who is or isn’t close to the spirit of Christ. We can’t see into people’s hearts and we’re not supposed to judge them. Using a word we can’t apply correctly makes it useless. Non-believers might start using “Christian” just to mean “a good person.” But we already have the word “good,” so this doesn’t add anything new. The word “Christian” would lose any real purpose.

We need to stick to the original, clear meaning of the word. The term “Christians” was first used in Antioch (Acts 11:26) to refer to “the disciples,” the people who accepted the teachings of the apostles. It doesn’t only apply to those who perfectly follow those teachings. It also doesn’t extend to those who, in a very deep and spiritual sense, might be “closer to the spirit of Christ” than some less exemplary disciples. This isn’t about theology or morals; it’s just about using words that everyone can understand. When someone who accepts Christian teachings acts poorly, it’s much clearer to say they are a bad Christian rather than to deny they are a Christian at all.

Imagine Christianity as a big house with many rooms, and each room represents a different church group with its own beliefs. Now, “mere” Christianity isn’t a new club or a different group. It’s more like a hallway in this big house. In this hallway, there are doors leading to all these different rooms.

My goal isn’t to make you join a specific room, but to guide you into this hallway where you can explore and decide which room feels right for you. But remember, the real warmth, comfort, and nourishment are found inside the rooms, not in the hallway. The hallway is just a temporary place to wait and think.

Some people might find their room quickly, while others might spend more time in the hallway. I don't know why this happens, but I believe there's a good reason for it. Maybe it's to teach us something important. But wherever you are, keep praying and following the basic rules of the house.

When you finally find your room, you'll realize that the wait was worth it because it taught you something valuable. But remember, you're not meant to stay in the hallway forever. Keep searching for the truth and don't just pick a door because it looks nice.

Instead of asking yourself, "Do I like this church?" ask, "Are their teachings true? Do I feel closer to God here? Is my hesitation to join this group because of my own pride or preferences?"

Once you've found your room, be kind to others who have chosen different rooms or are still in the hallway. If they're wrong, they need your prayers even more. And if they're your enemies, you're supposed to pray for them too. This is an important rule for everyone in the house.



INTRODUCTION BY C.S. LEWIS.

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**BOOK 1 - RIGHT AND WRONG AS A CLUE  
TO THE MEANING OF THE UNIVERSE**

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CHAPTER 1 - THE LAW OF HUMAN NATURE

Everyone has heard people arguing. Sometimes it sounds funny, and other times it's just annoying. But no matter how it sounds, I think we can learn something important from listening to what they say. They'll say things like: "How would you like it if someone did the same to you?" – "That's my seat, I was here first" – "Leave him alone, he's not bothering you" – "Why should you go first?" – "Give me a piece of your orange, I gave you a piece of mine" – "Come on, you promised." Every day, people say things like this, whether they are educated or not, kids or adults.

What interests me about these remarks is that the person saying them isn't just complaining. They're appealing to a certain standard of behavior they expect the other person to understand. The other person usually doesn't respond with, "I don't care about your standard." Instead, they often try to argue that their behavior doesn't really go against the standard, or that there's a special reason why they should be an exception. They might say that the situation is different when they take a seat first, or that there was something special about when they got the orange, or that an unusual event means they don't have to keep their promise.

It seems like both people are aware of some sort of Law or Rule about fair play, good behavior, morality, or whatever you want to call it, that they both agree on. If they didn't agree, they might fight like animals, but they wouldn't argue in a human way. Arguing means trying to show that the other person is wrong. This only makes sense if both people agree on what is Right and Wrong, just like it only makes sense to say a soccer player committed a foul if there are agreed-upon soccer rules.

The Law or Rule about Right and Wrong used to be referred to as the Law of Nature. Nowadays, when we discuss the “laws of nature”, we typically refer to things like gravitation, heredity<sup>7</sup>, or chemical laws. But when older thinkers labelled the Law of Right and Wrong “the Law of Nature,” they were genuinely referring to the Law of Human Nature. The idea was that, just as all objects are governed by the law of gravitation and living organisms by biological laws, so too is the creature known as man subject to his own law—albeit with one significant difference: a physical body doesn’t have a choice whether to obey the law of gravitation or not, but a man or woman can choose either to obey the Law of Human Nature or to flout it.

We can explain this in a simpler way. Everyone has to follow many sets of rules, but there’s only one set of rules they can choose to ignore. As a physical body, a person has to follow the law of gravity; they can’t float in the air any more than a rock can. As a living thing, a person has to follow biological rules, just like animals do. This means they can’t ignore the rules they share with other things. But there is one special set of rules that only humans have, which they can choose to ignore if they want to.

This special set of rules was called the Law of Nature because people believed everyone knew it naturally, without being taught. Of course, they didn’t mean there couldn’t be a few people who didn’t know it, just like some people are color-blind or can’t understand music. But in general, they thought everyone knew what decent behavior was. I think they were right. If they weren’t, then everything we’ve said about the war would make no sense. What’s the point in saying the enemy was wrong unless Right is a real thing that the Nazis understood, just like we did, and should have followed? If they didn’t know

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<sup>7</sup> genetics

what Right meant, we might still have had to fight them, but we couldn't say they were bad, just like we wouldn't say someone was bad because of their hair color.

I know some people say the idea of a Law of Nature or common decent behavior is wrong because different civilizations and times have had very different ideas about what is right and wrong.

But this simply isn't true. While there have been differences in moral codes across cultures, they have never been completely different. If you compare the moral teachings of ancient civilizations like the Egyptians, Babylonians, Hindus, Chinese, Greeks, and Romans, you'll see that they're actually very similar to each other and to our own. I've put together some evidence for this in another book called *THE ABOLITION OF MAN*. For now, just think about what a totally different morality would look like. Imagine a country where people are praised for abandoning their friends in battle or where someone is admired for betraying those who have been kind to them. That's as hard to imagine as a country where two plus two equals five.

People have disagreed about who you should be unselfish towards—whether it's just your family, your fellow countrymen, or everyone. But they've always agreed that you shouldn't be selfish. Selfishness has never been considered good. People have disagreed about whether you should have one wife or many, but they've always agreed that you can't just take any woman you want.

Here's something even more interesting: Whenever you meet someone who says they don't believe in real Right and Wrong, you'll find that they don't really mean it. He might break a promise to you, but if you break a promise to him, he'll immediately complain, "That's not fair!" A nation might say that treaties don't matter, but then they'll argue that a particular

treaty they want to break was unfair. But if treaties don't matter and if there's no such thing as Right and Wrong, how can a treaty be unfair? By making such arguments, they show that they do believe in the Law of Nature after all.

So, it seems we must believe in a real Right and Wrong. People might sometimes make mistakes about it, just like they can make mistakes in math. But Right and Wrong are not just a matter of personal taste or opinion, any more than multiplication tables are. If we can agree on that, I can move on to my next point: None of us actually follow the Law of Nature perfectly. If there are any exceptions among you, I apologize. You'd be better off reading something else, because nothing I'm going to say will apply to you!

And now, to everyone who's still reading: I hope you don't misunderstand what I'm about to say. I'm not trying to preach, and I don't think I'm better than anyone else. I just want to point out a simple fact: at some point this year, this month, or maybe even today, we haven't behaved the way we expect others to behave. We might have all sorts of reasons for this. Maybe you were unfair to the kids because you were really tired. Maybe you did something a bit sneaky with money because you were broke. Maybe you made a promise to someone but never kept it because you got really busy. And when it comes to how you act towards your spouse, partner, or sibling, maybe they're just really annoying sometimes. Who am I to judge? I do the same things. I don't always follow the Law of Nature very well, and the moment someone points it out, I have a million excuses.

The question isn't whether these excuses are valid. The point is that these excuses show how much we believe in the Law of Nature. If we didn't believe in decent behavior, why would we make excuses for not acting decently? The truth is, we believe in being good so strongly that we can't stand to admit when we're not, so we try to shift the blame. You'll notice that we only

make excuses for our bad behavior. If we're in a bad mood, we blame being tired or stressed. If we're in a good mood, we give ourselves the credit.

So, here are the two points I wanted to make. First, people all over the world have this idea that they should behave a certain way, and they can't really shake it off. Second, they don't actually behave that way. They know the Law of Nature, but they break it. These two facts are the foundation for understanding ourselves and the world we live in.