



DAVID O. HARRISON

LARGE  
PRINT  
EDITION

MERE CHRISTIANITY  
IN EVERYDAY ENGLISH

*C. S. Lewis.*

MERE CHRISTIANITY IN EVERYDAY ENGLISH

DAVID O. HARRISON

C.S. LEWIS

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LARGE PRINT EDITION

AN EASY-TO-READ VERSION OF A

LITERARY CLASSIC

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## **ABOUT 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 became a Christ-follower. 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, the 'big banks' and many large law firms.

In 2006 David founded Bus Stop Bible Studies, 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.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

For 10-years David was 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, and David (who failed miserably in English at school) has taken to writing as a hobby.

**DEDICATION**

This book is dedicated to those who  
God has chosen to make my life  
complete, my wife Wendy, our  
children, Krista and Daniel, our son-  
in-law Dan, and our grandchildren  
Jack and Levi.

Praise God from whom all blessing  
flow!



## WHY THIS BOOK?

### WHY THIS BOOK?

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

Clive Staples Lewis authored many famous novels including the Chronicles of Narnia series and The Screwtape Letters. The most recent estimate for sales of his books is in excess of 200 million copies.

Lewis was born in 1898 in Belfast, Ireland, while I came into the world fifty-three years later in Worcester Park, England. Lewis endured the horrors of trench warfare at the Somme during World War I. I was conceived six years after the end of World War II. Lewis found solace in Christ at the age of 33, deeply influenced by his dear friend J.R.R. Tolkien and other spiritual companions. Similarly, it wasn't until I reached the age of 35, also influenced by

friends, that God broke through my hard, prideful shell and radically changed my life. In 1973, I embarked on a new chapter by emigrating to Canada. It was there that I encountered the captivating Canadian accent, which I grew fond of during my time working with friends in London. Upon arriving in Canada, I diligently shed my English accent and embraced this “new language” as my own. Sometimes, when we throw a party, I delight in presenting a list of thirty everyday words from my native tongue and watching people try to guess their meanings.

Now here I am, someone who flunked high school English, daring to revise C.S. Lewis’ most significant work, which has practically become a sacred text. Why, might you wonder? Let me explain.

When I first read *MERE CHRISTIANITY*, I couldn’t help but ponder if the average North American reader could fully grasp

## WHY THIS BOOK?

the essence of this book without an English-to-“English” dictionary at their side. I even found myself Googling the meaning of some of Lewis’s colloquialisms from the 1940s. Even Lewis acknowledged the shifting nature of language and word usage over time, and I’ve taken the liberty to present you with an original paragraph of his work, alongside my own “simple English” interpretation. I have also added several footnotes for further clarity.

### ORIGINAL TEXT:

The word gentleman originally meant something recognisable; one who had a coat of arms and some landed property. When you called someone "a gentleman" you were not paying him a compliment, but merely stating a fact. If you said he was not "a gentleman" you were not insulting him but giving information.

A gentleman, once it has been spiritualized and refined out of its old coarse, objective sense, means hardly more than a man whom the speaker likes. As a result, gentleman is now a useless word. We had lots of terms of approval already, so it was not needed for that use; on the other hand, if anyone (say, in a historical work) wants to use it in its old sense, he cannot do so without explanations. It has been spoiled for that purpose.

REVISED TEXT:

The word “gentleman” originally had a clear meaning. It referred to someone who had a coat of arms and owned land. When you called someone “a gentleman,” you were not complimenting them but stating a fact. If you said someone was not “a gentleman,” you were not insulting them but providing information.

A gentleman, once it has been spiritualized and refined beyond its original, objective

## WHY THIS BOOK?

sense, becomes little more than a person the speaker likes. Consequently, “gentleman” is now a meaningless word. We already had plenty of terms for approval, rendering it unnecessary for that purpose. On the other hand, if someone wishes to use it in its original sense (e.g., in a historical work), they would require explanations because the word has lost its significance.

Please note, I have taken *poetic licence* in a few instances to bring clarity to certain of Lewis’s arguments. I hope that this does not diminish the essence of his work in any way.



The motivation behind my effort to rework the original manuscript of *MERE CHRISTIANITY* aligns with what I believe inspired Lewis to write his book in the first place: to help readers discover their

ultimate purpose and engage in a personal relationship with the living God.

Despite over seventy years passing since its initial publication, *MERE CHRISTIANITY* continues to grace the best-seller lists, standing the test of time. It's worth noting that the original text is now in the public domain in some countries.

I received the ultimate compliment when a friend of mine read my book, *IF GOD, THEN...*, and told me, "I could hear your voice as I was reading it." With that in mind, I'd like to share a link to an original BBC recording<sup>1</sup> featuring C.S. Lewis. Having his voice in the background while reading can be a truly enriching experience. If C.S. Lewis and I were able to meet today, I believe we would become fast friends.

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



## WHY THIS BOOK?

Both he and I delight in logical arguments, of which Lewis is a master.

Using superscript Roman numerals, I have referenced a few endnotes and afterthoughts.

Enjoy!

C. S. LEWIS

C.S. Lewis was an atheist for many years and described his conversion in *SURPRISED BY JOY*: “In the Trinity term 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 not only apathy but also active unwillingness to accept religion. As a Christian writer, Lewis possessed an exceptionally brilliant and logical mind, and his writing style was lucid and lively. He was unrivaled in his works, which include *THE PROBLEM OF PAIN*, *THE SCREWTAPE LETTERS*, *MERE CHRISTIANITY*, *THE FOUR LOVES*, and the posthumous *PRAYER: LETTERS TO MALCOLM*. In addition to his bestselling works, Lewis also wrote delightful books for children, most notably *THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA* series, starting with *THE LION THE WITCH AND THE*

## WHY THIS BOOK?

*WARDROBE.* He also explored science fiction, along with numerous works of literary criticism. His writings have been translated and read by millions of people worldwide. Lewis passed away on November 22, 1963, at his home in Oxford.

INTRODUCTION BY C.S. LEWIS.

The contents of this book were originally presented on the airwaves and later published in three separate parts: *THE CASE FOR CHRISTIANITY* (1943)<sup>2</sup>, *CHRISTIAN BEHAVIOUR* (1943), and *BEYOND PERSONALITY* (1945). While preparing the printed versions, I made a few additions to what I had spoken into the microphone but largely preserved the original text. When delivering a radio talk, I believe it should resemble genuine conversation rather than a recitation of an essay. Therefore, in my talks, I used contractions and colloquialisms that I typically employ in everyday discussions. In the printed edition, I maintained this approach by using “don’t” and “we’ve” instead of “do

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<sup>2</sup> [\*] Published in England as Broadcast Talks.

## INTRODUCTION BY C.S. LEWIS.

not” and “we have.” Additionally, I italicized words to convey the emphasis I had given them through my voice during the talks.

I now believe that it was a mistake, an undesirable blend of spoken and written art. When speaking, one should use vocal variations for emphasis since the medium naturally lends itself to that method. However, a writer should not rely on italics for the same purpose. A writer has different means of highlighting key words and should utilize them. In this edition, I have expanded contractions and replaced most of the italics by rephrasing the sentences in which they appeared, while preserving the intended “popular” or “familiar” tone. I have also made additions and deletions where I believe I now have a better understanding of certain aspects of my subject compared to ten years ago or where

I know that the original version was misunderstood by others.

I must warn the reader that I provide no guidance for those who are undecided between different Christian denominations. I will not advise whether one should become Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, or Roman Catholic. This omission is deliberate (even the listing I provided is in alphabetical order). My own position is not mysterious. I am an ordinary layperson<sup>3</sup> of the Church of England, not particularly “high” or “low,”<sup>4</sup> or anything else in particular. However, in this book, I am not attempting to convert anyone to my own position.

Since I became a Christian, I have believed that the best, perhaps the only, service I can

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<sup>3</sup> Layperson: a person without professional or specialized knowledge in a particular subject.

<sup>4</sup> [anglican.ca/ask/faq/high-low-church/](http://anglican.ca/ask/faq/high-low-church/)



## INTRODUCTION BY C.S. LEWIS.

offer to my non-believing neighbors is to explain and defend the beliefs that have been common to almost all Christians throughout history. I had more than one reason for this belief. Firstly, the questions that divide Christians often involve matters of deep theology or ecclesiastical history that should only be addressed by true experts. I would be out of my depth in such discussions and would need help myself rather than being able to assist others. Secondly, it seems that discussing these disputed points does not tend to attract outsiders to the Christian faith. As long as we write and talk about these disagreements, we are more likely to discourage them from joining any Christian community rather than drawing them in. Our divisions should only be discussed in the presence of those who have already come to believe in one God and that Jesus Christ is His only Son. Lastly, I had the

impression that many more talented authors were already engaged in such controversial matters rather than defending what Baxter refers to as “mere” Christianity. The area where I believed I could be of greatest service also seemed to be the thinnest. And so, I naturally gravitated towards it.

To the best of my knowledge, these were my only motives, and I would appreciate it if people would not make fanciful assumptions based on my silence regarding certain disputed matters. For instance, such silence does not necessarily mean that I am sitting on the fence. Sometimes I am, as there are questions among Christians to which I do not have the answers. There are even some questions to which I may never know the answer. Even in a better world, if I were to ask them, I might receive a response similar to that given to a greater questioner: “What is that to you? Follow

Me.”<sup>5</sup> However, there are other questions where I clearly take a position but choose not to express it. I did not write this book to explain “my religion” but to elucidate “mere” Christianity, which is what it is and has been long before my time, whether I like it or not.

Some people may draw unwarranted conclusions from the fact that I do not say more about the Blessed Virgin Mary beyond asserting the Virgin Birth of Christ. However, isn’t the reason for this omission obvious? Saying more would immediately plunge me into highly controversial territory. And no controversy among Christians needs to be handled with as much delicacy as this one. Roman Catholic beliefs on this subject are not only fervently held, as with any sincere religious belief,

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

but also defended with a sense of honor and chivalry that one feels when the honor of their mother or beloved is at stake.

It is extremely difficult to dissent from these beliefs without appearing not only a heretic<sup>6</sup> but also a cad<sup>7</sup>. Likewise, the opposing Protestant beliefs on this subject stir emotions that touch the very core of Monotheism. Radical Protestants believe that the distinction between the Creator and the creature, no matter how holy, is jeopardized and that Polytheism has resurfaced. Thus, it is challenging to express dissent in a way that does not make one seem worse than a heretic—an idolater, a pagan. If any topic could undermine a book

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<sup>6</sup> Heretic: one whose beliefs or opinions are contrary to orthodox religious (especially Christian) doctrine.

<sup>7</sup> Cad: a man who behaves dishonorably, especially toward a woman.

## INTRODUCTION BY C.S. LEWIS.

about “mere” Christianity and render it unhelpful to those who do not yet believe that the Virgin’s son is God, it is surely this one.

Interestingly, one cannot conclude from my silence on disputed points whether I consider them important or unimportant. That in itself, is a disputed point among Christians. Disagreements arise about the significance of these disagreements. When two Christians of different denominations engage in arguments, it usually doesn’t take long for one to question whether such-and-such a point “really matters,” and the other responds, “Matter? Why, it’s absolutely essential.”

I mention all of this to clarify the type of book I have attempted to write, not to conceal or evade responsibility for my own beliefs. As I mentioned earlier, there is no secret about my beliefs. To quote Uncle

Toby<sup>8</sup>, “They are written in the Common-Prayer Book.”

The danger was that I might present as common Christianity something that was specific to the Church of England or, worse yet, specific to myself. To guard against this, I sent the original script of what is now *BOOK II* to four clergymen (Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic) and requested their criticism. The Methodist felt that I hadn’t discussed Faith enough, and the Roman Catholic felt that I had gone too far in downplaying the importance of theories in explaining the Atonement. However, all five of us were in

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<sup>8</sup> Uncle Toby is a fictional character created by the Irish author Jonathan Swift in his novel “*Tristram Shandy*.” The character of Uncle Toby appears in the book as a kind-hearted and benevolent military officer who is known for his gentle and sentimental nature.



agreement. I did not subject the remaining books to similar scrutiny since any differences would arise among individual Christians or schools of thought rather than between denominations.

Based on reviews and the numerous letters I have received, it seems that the book, despite its flaws, has successfully presented an agreed-upon, common, central, or “mere” Christianity. In this way, it may help dispel the notion that omitting the disputed points leaves only a vague and lifeless H.C.F.<sup>9</sup> The H.C.F. proves to be not only positive but also potent, distinguishing itself from all non-Christian beliefs by a chasm that the worst divisions within Christendom cannot compare to.

While I may not have directly aided the cause of reunion, I have perhaps made it

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<sup>9</sup> HCF: Highest Common Factor.

clear why we should seek unity. I have encountered little of the fabled *odium theologicum*<sup>10</sup> from convinced members of different communions. Hostility has mainly come from individuals on the fringes, both within and outside the Church of England, who do not precisely align themselves with any particular communion<sup>11</sup>. I find this somewhat comforting. It is at the core of each communion, where its most devoted followers reside, that every communion is closest in spirit to every other, if not in

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<sup>10</sup> *Odium theologicum*: bitterness developed during or typical of controversy about religion and giving rise to an unyielding refusal to continue a discussion.

<sup>11</sup> (In this instance) Communion can describe a sense of sharing, fellowship, or intimate connection with others, often based on common beliefs, experiences, or interests. It signifies a close bond or unity among individuals or a group.

doctrine. This suggests that at the center of each communion, there is something—or Someone—who, despite diverging beliefs and temperaments, speaks with the same voice. This covers my omissions on doctrine.

In *BOOK III*, which deals with morals, I have also chosen not to address certain matters, but for a different reason. Ever since I served as an infantryman in the First World War, I have harbored a strong aversion to those who, safe and comfortable, issue exhortations to those on the front line. As a result, I am reluctant to speak extensively about temptations to which I myself am not exposed. No man is tempted by every sin, and the inclination that drives men to gamble is absent from my nature. Undoubtedly, this deficiency comes at the cost of lacking some virtue associated with it. Therefore, I do not consider myself qualified to offer advice on permissible and

impermissible gambling, if there is such a thing, as I do not claim to possess that knowledge. I have also refrained from discussing birth control. I am neither a woman, nor a married man, nor a priest. I did not believe it was my place to take a definitive stance on matters concerning pains, dangers, and expenses that I am shielded from, as I do not hold a pastoral position that would compel me to do so.

Deeper objections may arise—and have been expressed—against my use of the word Christian to denote someone who accepts the common doctrines of Christianity. People ask, “Who are you to decide who is and who is not a Christian?” or “Isn’t it possible for someone who cannot believe these doctrines to be more truly a Christian, closer to the spirit of Christ, than those who do?” In one sense, this objection is justified, charitable, spiritual, and sensitive. It possesses every admirable