

C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

Selected Cultural notes and references

(Page numbers refer to the Collins Fontana Books paperback edition of 1955, fifteenth impression, February 1968)

Preface

Page 6 **Baxter**

The words “Mere Christianity” weren’t original to Lewis. In the seventeenth century Richard Baxter, an Anglican divine with Puritan predilections, used the words “Mere Christianity” in his book *The Saints’ Everlasting Rest*. The work was something like the sixteenth-century Spaniard Ignatius Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises* in that it prepared the soul, through a series of measured steps, for its heavenly home. The first ten chapters described Heaven, who’ll be there and who won’t, and why one must pursue Heaven strenuously while on earth. The last six chapters prescribed the Anglican method, with Puritan overlay, of pursuing the heavenly, and indeed heavily contemplative, life.

Nor did the concept of “Mere Christianity” originate with Lewis. In the sixteenth century, Richard Hooker created a distinctive theology for a denomination that needed one—the new Anglican Church—and the prose he did it in was masterful. As Lewis said in *English Literature of the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama*, “The style is, for its purpose, perhaps the most perfect in English.”

Of Hooker’s masterwork, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, a multi-volume work published in the 1590s, Lewis had this to say:

Hooker had never heard of a religion called Anglicanism. He would never have dreamed of trying to “convert” any foreigner to the Church of England. It was to him obvious that a German or Italian would not belong to the Church of England, just as an Ephesian or Galatian would not have belonged to the Church of Corinth.

Hooker is never seeking for “the true Church,” never crying, like Donne, “Show me, deare Christ, thy spouse.” For him no such problem existed. If by “the Church” you mean the mystical Church (which is partly in Heaven), then of course, no man can identify her. But if you mean the visible Church, then we all know her. She is “a sensibly known company” of all those throughout the world who profess one Lord, One Faith, and one Baptism.

Sometime in 1943, Lewis began making the words “Mere Christianity” his own. That was in his Introduction to *St. Athanasius, On the Incarnation*, translated from the Greek by his friend Sister Penelope Lawson, CSMV. “The only safety [against the theological errors in recently published books],” wrote Lewis, “is to have a standard of plain, central Christianity (‘mere Christianity’ as Baxter called it) which puts the controversies of the moment in their proper perspective.”

- William Griffin <http://www.explorefaith.org/lewis/mere.html>

Page 8 **Uncle Toby**

From Cliff's Notes on *Tristram Shandy* (published 1759) by Laurence Sterne (born in Ireland in 1713, died in London in 1768).

Tristram feels that his "honour has lain bleeding this half hour" because of the two blank chapters (18 and 19). No one will understand why he did it, "for how is it possible they should foresee the necessity I was under of writing the 25th chapter of my book, before the 18th, &c.?" Although he will be called many "unsavory appellations," he will not "take it amiss--All I wish is, that it may be a lesson to the world, *'to let people tell their stories their own way.'*"

The Eighteenth Chapter: Bridget opens the door, and Mrs. Wadman just has time to place a Bible on the table and come forward to receive Uncle Toby. He kisses her cheek--the custom--"march'd up abreast with her to the sofa, and in three plain words . . . told her, *'he was in love.'*" She "naturally looked down . . . in expectation every moment, that my uncle *Toby* would go on." He, however, "when he had told Mrs. *Wadman* once that he loved her, he let it alone, and left the matter to work after its own way." **Finally, she takes the initiative, pointing out the cares and responsibilities of the married state; since Toby is "so much at his ease," so well off, she wonders "what reasons can incline you to the state--." His answer is that "they are written . . . in the Common-Prayer Book."** And "as for children," says Mrs. *Wadman*, what *compensation* is there for the "suffering and defenceless mother who brings them into life?" Uncle Toby knows of none, "unless it be the pleasure which it has pleased God--," and Mrs. *Wadman* interrupts with "A fiddlestick!"

Page 8, H.C.F

H.C.F. means "Highest Common Factor". This isn't the same thing as what we in the States call the "Lowest Common Denominator" when used mathematically, but Lewis isn't using it that way. Lewis is using the term as a figurative expression, the same way most folks in the States would use "Lowest Common Denominator", to indicate the most basic component(s) of Christianity. (Note also in context of referring to "divisions" in Christianity. GRW)

Page 8-9

The Latin phrase *Odium theologicum* (literally meaning "theological hatred") is the

name originally given to the often intense anger and hatred generated by disputes over theology. It has also been adopted to describe non-theological disputes of a rancorous nature.

Page 10 (“fool and an **M.A.**”)

The degree of Master of Arts is awarded to B.A.s and B.F.A.s twenty-one terms (seven years) after matriculation, without further examination, upon the payment of a nominal fee. **Despite the fact that no greater academic achievement is involved, the M.A. remains the most important degree in Oxford.** Traditionally the M.A. represented full membership of the University.

Book 1, Chapter 1

Page 16

References to “**football**” may be safely assumed to refer to the game we know as “soccer.”

Page 18

This section is from the book "The Wonder Book Of Knowledge", by Henry Chase. Also available from Amazon: Wonder Book of Knowledge.

How Did The Expression "Before You Can Say Jack Robinson" Originate?

Jack Robinson was a man in olden days who became well known because of the shortness of his visits when he came to call on his friends, according to Grose, who has looked up the subject very carefully. When the servants at a home where Jack Robinson called went to announce his coming to the host and his assembled guests, it was said that they hardly had time to repeat his name out loud before he would take his departure again. Another man, Halliwell, who has also investigated the development of the expression, thinks that it was derived from the description of a character in an old play, "Jack, Robes on."

...

Also, quicker than you can say Jack Robinson. Almost immediately, very soon, as in **I'll finish this book before you can say Jack Robinson.** This expression originated in the 1700s, but the identity of Jack Robinson has been lost. Grose's **Classical Dictionary** (1785) said he was a man who paid such brief visits to acquaintances that there was scarcely time to announce his arrival before he had departed, but it gives no further documentation. A newer version is before you know it, meaning so soon that you don't have time to become aware of it (as in **He'll be gone before you know it**).

...

:: Before you can say "Jack Robinson" is a way of expressing immediacy; something will be done straight away. There is one suggested origin involving the habit of an eccentric gentleman who was renowned for his constant change of mind. He often abandoned a social call and you had to be quick to catch Jack Robinson. This is the origin given in 1811.

:: The French have an even less likely version. In the old days Robinson (from Robinson Crusoe) was a popular name for an umbrella. When these umbrellas were first introduced they were highly fashionable. The story goes that the gentry, at the first sign of rain, would call their servant, inevitably named Jacques, to raise the umbrella. The call was, of course, one of "Jacques, Robinson!"

:: The reader may take or leave these offerings as they please.

:: There is a third possibility, one which I find the most acceptable. Between 1660 and 1679 the Officer Commanding the Tower of London was one Sir John Robinson. It may be that the speed of beheading with an axe, something regularly done in the Tower at that time, may be the basis, Jack being a well known form of John.

Book 1, Chapter 2

Page 23

“we learn to keep **to the left of the road**” – in GB the rules of the road call for driving on the left side of the road, unlike in America where we drive on the right side of the road – strengthening Lewis’ example.

Page 24

Quisling, after Norwegian politician Vidkun Quisling, who assisted Nazi Germany to conquer his own country, is a term used to describe traitors and collaborators. It was most commonly used for fascist political parties and military and paramilitary forces in occupied Allied countries which collaborated with Axis occupiers in World War II, as well as for their members and other collaborators.

The term was coined by the British newspaper *The Times* in its leader of 15 April 1940, entitled "Quislings everywhere." The editorial asserted: "To writers, the word Quisling is a gift from the gods. If they had been ordered to invent a new word for traitor... they could hardly have hit upon a more brilliant combination of letters. Actually it contrives to suggest something at once slippery and tortuous." The noun has survived; for a while during and after the War the back-formed verb "to quisle" (pronounced "quizzle") was used. One who was "quisling" was committing treason.[3]

Book 1, Chapter 3

Page 25

Rockery, a section of a garden made from decorative rocks and alpine plants

Shilling, Pound

The **shilling** is a unit of currency used in current and former Commonwealth countries, and continued to be used in countries that left the commonwealth, such as Ireland and Tanzania. The word is thought to derive from the base *skell-*, "to ring/resound", and the diminutive suffix *-ing*.

The abbreviation for shilling is **s**, from the Latin *solidus*, the name of a Roman coin. Often it was informally represented by a slash, standing for a Long s: *e.g.*, "1/6d" meaning 1 shilling and sixpence (often pronounced "one and six"); a price with no pence was written with a slash and a dash, *e.g.*, "11/-". Quite often a triangle or (serif) apostrophe would be used to give a neater appearance, *e.g.*, "1'6" and "11'". In Africa it is often abbreviated **sh**.

The **pound sterling** (IPA: /paʊnd 'stɜː.lɪŋ/, symbol: **£**; ISO code: **GBP**), subdivided into 100 *pence* (singular: *penny*), is the currency of the United Kingdom, its Crown dependencies (the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands) and the British Overseas Territories of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands and British Antarctic Territory.¹

Prior to decimalisation, the pound was divided into 20 shillings and each shilling into 12 pence, making 240 pence to the pound.

Book 1, Chapter 4

Soft soap - a term for "flattery" and "blarney", especially when applied to ingratiating praise intended to persuade, cajole or wheedle a favor. Cheaper oils and potash were used in making softer soaps, and so they were less-effective, but the expression connotes persuasive flattery.

Book 2, Chapter 2

"It follows that this Bad Power, who is supposed to be on an equal footing with the Good Power, and to love badness in the same way as the Good Power loves goodness, is a mere bogey."

Bogy, A specter; a hobgoblin; a bugbear. A purely imaginary evil, raised in this argument as something so evil as to distract us from its impossible nature.

Book 2, Chapter 3

Page 49

“milk and water” (milk-and-water) - Insipid; weak; wishy-washy.

Book 2, Chapter 4

Page 54 – Jeans and Eddington

The English mathematician, physicist, and astronomer Sir James Hopwood Jeans (1877-1946) made important contributions to the development of quantum theory and to theoretical astrophysics, especially to the theory of stellar structure.

In 1897 Jeans entered Trinity College, Cambridge, and in 1903 received his master's degree. In 1904 he was appointed university lecturer in mathematics at Cambridge; and in 1906, at the very early age of 28, he was elected a fellow of the Royal Society - all this in spite of the fact that during 1902-1903 tuberculosis of the joints forced him to go to several sanatoriums. During his illness, from which he completely recovered, he wrote his first book, *The Dynamical Theory of Gases*.

The next decade of Jeans's life (1918-1928) was marked by a rather sharp decrease in his reputation as a theoretical astrophysicist. Already, in 1917, he had a famous debate with Arthur S. Eddington on stellar structure and, though not really apparent at the time, Jeans by and large emerged the loser. In 1929 Jeans turned to popular science writing, especially in astronomy, and soon became very successful. His *Universe around Us* ushered in a series of eight books between 1929 and 1942. All are stimulating expositions, though they suffer in one degree or another from presenting the results of scientific research a bit too dogmatically, thereby giving a distorted picture of such research in progress.

Sir **Arthur Stanley Eddington** (December 28, 1882 – November 22, 1944) was arguably the most important astrophysicist from the early 20th century. The Eddington limit, the natural limit to the luminosity that can be radiated by accretion onto a compact object, is named in his honour.

He is famous for his work regarding the Theory of Relativity. Eddington wrote an article, Report on the relativity theory of gravitation, which announced Einstein's theory of

general relativity to the English-speaking world. Because of World War I, new developments in German science were not well known in England.

Eddington was a superb populariser of science, writing many books aimed at the layman. He is also attributed with introducing the Infinite Monkey Theorem with the 1929 phrase "If an army of monkeys were strumming on typewriters, they might write all the books in the British Museum".

Page 56

“standing the racket” - Idiom: paying. In this sense, the first instance cited by the OED is in G K Chesterton's *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, chap 3 (1904): 'Can we do fifteen hundred pounds?' 'I'll stand the racket.'

“footing the bill” - pay the bill, settle the accounts, as in **The bride's father was resigned to footing the bill for the wedding**. This expression uses **foot** in the sense of "add up and put the total at the foot, or bottom, of an account." [Colloquial; early 1800s]

Book 3, Chapter 1

Page 66

Dead Marches - A slow, solemn funeral march.

Book 3, Chapter 2

Page 70

Cardinal - The four **cardinal directions** or **cardinal points** are north, south, east, and west. The word *cardinal* comes from the Latin *cardo* for "hinge" and usually refers to things of fundamental importance, as in *cardinal rule* or *cardinal sins*. In mathematics, **cardinal numbers**, or **cardinals** for short, are a generalization of the natural numbers used to measure the **cardinality** (size) of sets (Georg Cantor's set theory, 1874-1884). Cardinal numbers informally refer to the "counting numbers," if zero is included.

Book 3, Chapter 4

Page 81

V.C. - The **Victoria Cross (VC)** is the highest military decoration which is, or has been, awarded for valour "in the face of the enemy" to members of the armed forces of various Commonwealth countries, and previous British Empire territories. The VC was

introduced on 29 January 1856 by Queen Victoria to reward acts of valour during the Crimean War (a major war against Russia). The Victoria Cross may be awarded to officers and Men of the Royal Navy, or of the Royal Marines, for " most conspicuous bravery or some daring or pre-eminent act of valour or self-sacrifice or extreme devotion to duty in the presence of the enemy on land or at sea."

Book 3, Chapter 5

Page 88

Augustine writes in his spiritual autobiography that he prayed regularly to God long before he gave himself completely to God. He told how he would pray, "O God, **make me chaste.**" And he was honest enough to add the words, "But not right now, not **just yet.**" **Make me chaste.** Later.

Page 91

Wellington and Napoleon were leaders of opposing forces. In particular Wellington defeated Napoleon in the Battle of Waterloo, ending Napoleon's rule as French emperor. The First Duke of Wellington was born in Ireland (as was Lewis).

Holmes and Moriarty – Fictional characters of Arthur Conan Doyle, James Moriarty was the archenemy of the detective Sherlock Holmes, described by Holmes as the "Napoleon of Crime."

The Lewis reference to the kind of mutual knowledge of opposing generals is similar to the expression by Sun Tzu in *The Art of War*: "So it is said that if you know your enemies and know yourself, you will fight without danger in battles. If you only know yourself, but not your opponent, you may win or may lose. If you know neither yourself nor your enemy, you will always endanger yourself."

Book 3, Chapter 6

Page 94

Chesterton re. love – G. K. Chesterton, an essay called "A Defence of Rash Vows" from the book, *The Defendant*. "It is the nature of love to bind itself, and the institution of marriage merely paid the average man the compliment of taking him at his word."

Page 97 & 130

R.A.F. - The **Royal Air Force (RAF)** is the United Kingdom's air force, the oldest independent air force in the world. Formed on 1 April 1918, the RAF has taken a significant role in British military history ever since, playing a large part in World War II and in more recent conflicts.

Book 3, Chapter 7

Page 102

N.C.O. - A **non-commissioned officer** (sometimes **noncommissioned officer**), also known as an **NCO** or **Noncom**, (US) is an enlisted member of an armed force who has been given authority by a commissioned officer. "Noncom" is the lesser-used term in many militaries since it may also refer to non-combatants. In the USA, the NCO corps includes all the grades of sergeant and, in some militaries, corporals and warrant officers. The naval equivalent includes some or all grades of petty officer, although not all navies class their petty officers as NCOs. Some have compared the centurions of the Roman Army with modern NCOs.

In the British Armed Forces, NCOs are divided into two categories. Lance Corporals (Lance Bombardier, depending on unit), Corporals (Lance Sergeant, Bombardier, Lance Corporal of Horse) are Junior NCOs (JNCOs). Sergeants (Corporal of Horse, Serjeant) and Staff Sergeants (Colour Sergeant) (and in the RAF Chief Technicians and Flight Sergeants) are Senior NCOs (SNCOs).

Warrant Officers are often included in the SNCO category, but actually form a separate class of their own, similar in many ways to NCOs but with a royal warrant. SNCOs and WOs have their own messes, which are similar to officers' messes (and are usually known as Sergeants' Messes), whereas JNCOs live and eat with the unranked personnel.

The Royal Navy does not refer to its Petty Officers as NCOs, but calls them Senior Ratings (or Senior Rates). Leading Ratings and below are Junior Ratings.

Book 3, Chapter 8

Page 107 & 127

£10,000 – In *Empire Families* (2005, Oxford Press), Elizabeth Buettner comments that general practitioners earned £756 per annum and dentists £601 in the late 1920s London. £10,000 would be the dentist's income for 16 years. In modern United States the median salary for a typical dentist is \$134,509; sixteen times this is \$2,152,144.

By 1990 an average Irish farm labourer or servant could expect an annual income of £8,000 to £10,000. The buying power of this income has increased even more than the numerical value. Cormac Ó Gráda (ch 2, "The Rise in Living Standards" from

Littleton, M. (ed.). *From Famine to Feast*
(http://irserver.ucd.ie/dspace/bitstream/10197/464/3/oogradac_bookchap_pub_074.pdf)

Book 3, Chapter 10

Page 118

The rainbow's end - "There's a pot of Gold at the end of every Rainbow" is an American **idiom**. Lucy Maud Montgomery (1874-1942), author of *Anne of Green Gables*, included in her book, *The Golden Road*,

"Oh I know a story about that," cried the Story Girl. "Once upon a time an old man found the pot of gold at the rainbow's end. There IS a pot there, it is said, but it is very hard to find because you can never get to the rainbow's end before it vanishes from your sight.

Book 3, Chapter 12

Page 123

Sixpence - The **sixpence**, known colloquially as the **tanner** or **half-shilling**, was a British pre-decimal coin worth six pence, $\frac{1}{40}$ th of a pound sterling. Last issued in 1967 (special striking in 1970 for a "farewell" proof set), remained legal tender until 1980 at a value of 2½ new pence. In Elizabethan times, the sixpence was roughly a day's wage for rustic labour in the provinces. With it, one might buy two dinners, six performances of *Hamlet* among the groundlings at the Globe Theatre, or an unbound copy of the play itself.

Book 4, Chapter 7

Page 156

"The other story is about **someone who had to wear a mask**; a mask which made him look much nicer than he really was. He had to wear it for years. And when he took it off he found his own face had grown to fit it. He was now really beautiful. What had begun as disguise had become a reality."

This, from an essay, "**The Allegory of the Beautiful Mask**," **Renée Fuller, Ph.D.**, **Copyright © 2003 by Renée Fuller**, seems to refer to the same story as Lewis:

Decades passed. Then one day she said, "You don't have to wear that mask with me. I love you for who you are, not for your beautiful mask."

Could he do it? Could he admit the truth of the lie he had been living all these years? Would she understand that he would have done anything to be with Her, including wearing a mask day and night for years, for decades?

Reluctantly he did it! He wanted Her to know the truth about him. He pulled off his mask.

Her reaction was unexpected. There was a perplexed look on her face. Then she said, "I don't understand. Why did you wear a mask all these years, a mask that is exactly like your own face?"

He couldn't believe it. Was this another manifestation of her love? He went to the mirror. He was stunned.

For what he saw was a face staring back at him that was identical to the beautiful mask he had been wearing all these years.

Elsewhere there are references to “the mask that reveals:”

It is the mask that reveals the realty, a paradox Shakespeare revels in.

Marxism, as Perry Anderson reminds us, grasps the relationship of capitalism ...

www.tribuneindia.com/2001/20011202/spectrum/book1.htm

As the mask that reveals the actual self, comedy strips pretence. The actual self is the mortal self, and the sane (ie rational) reaction to the self ...

www.tumblong.uts.edu.au/crossroads/forum2.cfm

Book 4, Chapter 9

Page 168-169

George MacDonald, “**God is easy to please, but hard to satisfy.**” Quoted in *My Commonplace Book* (1923) by J.T. Hackett. I could not (yet) find the original source. In Chesterton’s Introduction to <George MacDonald and His Wife>(, by Greville M. MacDonald. 1924.) the statement is presented, but apparently not marked off as a direct quote. Project Gutenberg and the COEL

- "Unspoken Sermons": in the chapter titled "The Way" – the first chapter of "Unspoken Sermons, Series Two (1885)"

"That no keeping but a perfect one will *satisfy* God, I hold with all my heart and strength; but that there is none else He cares for, is one of the lies of the enemy. What father is not pleased with the first tottering attempt of his little one to walk? What father would be satisfied with anything but the manly step of the full-grown *son!*"

In C.S.Lewis "George MacDonald. An Anthology" (1946), a collection of 365 readings; reading no. 55 quotes "The Way" from *Unspoken Sermons, Series Two*:

[55] *Easy to Please and Hard to Satisfy*

That no keeping but a perfect one will *satisfy* God, I hold with all my heart and strength; but that there is none else He cares for, is one of the lies of the enemy. What father is not pleased with the first tottering attempt of his little one to walk? What father would be satisfied with anything but the manly step of the full-grown *son!*

Book 4, Chapter 10

Page 174 Idiom: **down to brass tacks**

The origin of the first phrase, dating from the late 1800s, is disputed. Some believe it alludes to the brass tacks used under fine upholstery, others that it is Cockney rhyming slang for "hard facts," and still others that it alludes to tacks hammered into a sales counter to indicate precise measuring points.

Page 174 **Whitesmile's toothpaste** – now used by a German company, founded in 1994. May be a fictional product name created (or borrowed) by Lewis. No other reference found.

Page 174 **Miss Bates & Dick Firkin** -- Burson and Walls in *C.S. Lewis & Francis Schaeffer* indicate that these are fictitious characters.