

2010

Review of Mere Christians: Inspiring Stories of Encounters with C.S. Lewis

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Recommended Citation

Vaus, Will (2010) "Review of Mere Christians: Inspiring Stories of Encounters with C.S. Lewis," *Sehnsucht: The C. S. Lewis Journal*: Vol. 4 : Iss. 1 , Article 20.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55221/1940-5537.1064>

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/cslewisjournal/vol4/iss1/20>

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For those hoping for longer quotations from the Inklings with all sources cited, an alternative would be Joel Heck's *A Grand Miracle: Devotions for the Days of Advent based on the thoughts of C. S. Lewis* (2009). At thirty-one pages in length, it is available for a fraction of the price. The appendix in the fourth edition of Kathryn Lindskoog's *C. S. Lewis: Mere Christian* (2007) would do nicely for those seeking an overview of what Lewis thought about the Christmas season. But for anyone caught in the holiday rush and in need of some quiet moments to spend pondering great truths, Murdock's meditations are a fitting guide.

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Andrew Lazo and Mary Anne Phemister, eds., *Mere Christians: Inspiring Stories of Encounters with C. S. Lewis* (Grand Rapids, 2009). 222 pages. \$14.99. ISBN 9780801071843.

Have you ever had an idea for a great book, only to have someone else beat you to the punch? This happened to me. I had a wonderful idea for a book all about the people whose lives have been positively affected by the life and writings of C. S. Lewis. The plan was to invite a number of people to contribute essays about how Lewis led them to faith in Jesus Christ, or nurtured them in "mere Christianity." I inquired of various Lewis scholars to see if they knew of such a book. No one had. Then one day in Wheaton, Illinois, I met a woman named Mary Anne Phemister. She had no idea that I had in mind a book of this nature to edit. However, she told me about a book she was working on with another person whom I had met recently: Andrew Lazo. The book was to be called *Mere Christians: Inspiring Stories of Encounters with C. S. Lewis*. Phemister and Lazo put together exactly the kind of book I wanted to make. And you know what? Now that I have read *Mere Christians*, I must admit that Phemister and Lazo did a better job with "my idea" than I could have!

Mere Christians is a gem of a book. It contains brief essays by some fifty-five people who have either been led to faith or significantly helped in their Christian journey by Lewis' books. This is one of those volumes one can easily dip into at odd moments and read any particular essay that strikes the fancy. Knowing some of the contributors, I naturally turned to their chapters first. For example, if you have never heard how Merrie Gresham (wife of Douglas Gresham, Lewis' stepson) encountered the love of Christ through listening to *Mere Christianity* on tape,

then this book will be worth the purchase price just for Merrie's story. As I hopped and skipped through this volume, I also enjoyed the stories of many other friends and acquaintances, such as Walter Hooper (always delightful in everything he writes about Lewis), Don King (*the* expert on Lewis' poetry), Wayne Martindale and Jerry Root (beloved professors at Wheaton College and editors of *The Quotable Lewis*, 1989), and Michael Ward (most deservedly well known for his intriguing book *Planet Narnia*, 2008).

Mere Christians not only offers essays by Lewis scholars such as those mentioned above and others (including Ronald Bresland, James Como, Lyle Dorsett, David Downing, Colin Duriez, Paul Ford, and Thomas Howard); it also provides the notable Lewisian encounters of people like Jill Briscoe, Francis Collins, Charles Colson, George Gallup, Thomas Monaghan (Domino's Pizza Founder), novelist Anne Rice, and Philip Yancey. However, as good as the essays of these well-known people are, perhaps most enjoyable are the stories of people like Atessa Afshar, one of only a few Iranian-born women working in full-time Christian ministry, and Eddy Benmuvhar, a man of Jewish parentage born and educated in Istanbul.

Toward the end of his life, Lewis wrote: "My own eyes are not enough for me, I will see through those of others" (*Experiment in Criticism*, 1961, 140). Through *Mere Christians* readers get to see through the eyes of fifty-five other sons and daughters of God, not only their view of Lewis, but their view of life, Christ, and so much else. In this book, Phemister and Lazo serve up a rich feast for all those who have tasted before of the Lewisian banquet. And those who have not will learn from this book why they should hurry to the table.

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Robert Velarde, *Conversations with C. S. Lewis: Imaginative Discussions about Life, Christianity and God* (Downers Grove, Illinois, 2008). 192 pages. \$15.00. ISBN 9780830834839.

Ever since the late Chad Walsh wrote *C. S. Lewis, Apostle to the Skeptics* (1949), the list of books on Lewis' life and writing has continued to grow. Occasionally, serious and (usually) charitable students of Lewis and his works question the need for more books on the celebrated author. Quite honestly, when asked to review this book it seemed questionable whether it was even worth reading, let alone reviewing for *Sehnsucht*. But my skepticism vanished after reading the first few pages. Indeed, this unique little book by author and Christian apolo-