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British Literature

20 April 2020

A Personal Response

C.S. Lewis, one of the most well-known Christian authors in modern history, hosted a radio show during WW2. His show aimed to restore hope and peace to the people of Britain through a detailed breakdown of the Christian faith. Lewis later compiled his radio talks into a book that would reach the hearts of millions across the globe. This book, titled *Mere Christianity*, published in 1952, lives on as one of the most-read Christian books. While reading the bestseller, I formed many of my own opinions and ideas, however I also found a significant amount of common ground with Lewis. Some of the topics in *Mere Christianity* that I took to heart include the coexistence of theology and personal experience, the condition of the heart dictating true sin, and the importance of individuals within the body of Christ.

In part of the book, Lewis covers the subject of theology in relation to personal relationship with Christ. The stance he takes on the issue directly aligns with my own experiences and beliefs as a Christian. He begins this segment of the book by informing the readers of a man he spoke to who states, “‘ I’ve no use for [theology]. But, mind you, I am a religious man too. I know there’s a God. I’ve felt Him: out alone in the desert at night: the tremendous mystery’”(Lewis 135). Lewis immediately acknowledges the man’s stance and points out the importance of personal experiences with God such as an encounter in the desert. However, he proceeds to explain the need for theology in addition to this personal encounter

saying, "...you will not get eternal life by simply feeling the presence of God in flowers or music ...Nor will you be very safe if you go to sea without a map" (Lewis 136). He explains that, although encounters with God ignite a flame or passion, theology carries Christians through their life of faith. Theology brings practicality and practicability to Christianity, and occupies the most substantial parts of Christian faith. In my own life, I observe this concept in motion. My own independent walk with the Lord started in a field while gazing up at the stars. The emotion and power of that moment ignited a fire within my soul and created a longing for a relationship with the One who created that scene. However, I quickly realized that the passion from that moment would not sustain me in a successful walk with the Lord. I needed to turn to a sound theology to educate me in the reasons behind my beliefs. Without it, I would wander aimlessly through religion, swayed by every passionate and emotional encounter. Lewis artfully illustrates the concept of the coexistence between experiences with God and the importance of theology.

In addition to his points about theology, Lewis touches on the condition of man's heart as it relates to sin. He begins the segment by talking about the Christian writers who seem to place an unhealthy level of importance on sins of thought while not placing enough importance on nefarious physical sins such as murder. However, he explains, "What they are thinking of is the mark which the action leaves on that tiny central self ...One man may be so placed that his anger sheds the blood of thousands, and another so placed that however angry he gets he will only be laughed at. But the little mark on the soul may be much the same in both" (Lewis 87).

This section stirred up thoughts in me about the importance of not judging anyone too harshly on the outward expression of their sin, because I could very well deal with the same root sin.

Transgressions of the heart manifest in different ways, and I believe God looks at the heart to

discern the condition of the man. In the Old Testament, the Lord tells Samuel, "...the Lord doesn't see things the way you see them. People judge on outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (*New Living Translation*, 1 Samuel 16:7b). God looks at the root of the sins and judges according to that. As humans, we only see the outward actions that result from inward sin. In the words of Lewis, "The bigness or the smallness of the thing, seen from the outside, is not what really matters" (Lewis 87). For me, Lewis's description of misdeeds as it relates to the condition of the heart sheds light on the concept of sin as a whole.

Along with theology and sin, Lewis dives into the topic of individual importance in the body of Christ. Lewis claims, "Christianity thinks of human individuals not as mere members of a group or items on a list, but as organs in a body...different from one another and each contributing what no other could" (Lewis 159). This directly correlates with a letter that Paul wrote to the Corinthians that states, "The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ" (1 Cor. 12:12). I personally love this lesson that Lewis teaches because I know the joy of partaking in the body of Christ as an individual organ with a unique skill set. While working toward the advancement of God's kingdom, it becomes necessary to utilize an eclectic range of giftings. The unification of these unique strong suits results in beautiful success and triumph in the Christian commission. However, just as I experience joy through the bonding of disparate giftings, I also see people clash and find division in their differences. Even amongst my peers, we may experience strife when one member reaches the haughty conclusion that their particular giftings embody Christ the most accurately. The member may even attempt to mold that other person to look more like them. Lewis addresses this issue by explaining, "When you find yourself wanting to turn your children, or

pupils, or even your neighbors, into people exactly like yourself, remember that God probably never meant them to be that. You and they are different organs, intended to do different things” (Lewis 159). This imagery of the body again illustrates the importance of each member fulfilling their individual role. After all, a body does not need two noses or three legs, but desperately needs one heart and two lungs. If each member carries out their duties, the body lives on successfully. Lewis’s description of the body provides me with greater insight into the inner workings of Christianity and the church.

Lewis’s radio show assisted many people on their journey to hope and peace. His wisdom and eloquence, now in paper form, continues to influence Christians from all different parts of the world. His coverage of the concept of coexistence between theology and personal experience reminds me of the importance of a map to guide me through faith. The segment about the condition of man’s heart in relation to sin instills in me the importance of a pure and blameless heart. Lewis’s description of the body of Christ, and of the beauty in diverse giftings reminds me to find joy in the giftings of others while harnessing my own strengths for the work of the kingdom. *Mere Christianity* truly forces me into introspection, and clarifies the parts of Christianity that often cause confusion or doubt.

Works Cited

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