

C.S. Lewis

Conversion

The odd thing was that before God closed in on me, I was in fact offered what now appears a moment of wholly free choice. In a sense. I was going up Headington Hill on the top of a bus. Without words and (I think) almost without images, a fact about myself was somehow presented to me. I became aware that I was holding something at bay, or shutting something out. Or, if you like, that I was wearing some stiff clothing like corsets, or even a suit of armour, as if I were a lobster. I felt myself being, there and then, given a free choice. I could open the door or keep it shut; I could unbuckle the armour or keep it on.

C.S. Lewis on rejecting atheism, Surprised By Joy

All my acts, desires, and thoughts were to be brought into harmony with universal Spirit. For the first time I examined myself with a seriously practical purpose. And there I found what appalled me: a zoo of lusts, a bedlam of ambitions, a nursery of fears, a harem of fondled hatreds. My name was legion.

C.S. Lewis on examining oneself,
Surprised By Joy

You must picture me alone in that room at Magdalen, night after night, feeling, whenever my mind lifted even for a second from my work, the steady, unrelenting approach of Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet. That which I greatly feared had at last come upone me. In the Trinity Term of 1929 I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all of England.

C.S. Lewis on becoming a theist,
Surprised By Joy

I know very well when, but hardly how, the final step was taken. I was driven to Whipsnade one sunny morning. When we set out I did not believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and when we reached the zoo I did. Yet I had not exactly spent the journey in thought. Nor in great emotion.... It was more like when a man, after long sleep, still lying motionless in bed, becomes aware that he is now awake.

C.S. Lewis on becoming a Christian,
Surprised By Joy

You have had a shock like that before,... when the line pulls at your hand, when something breathes beside you in the darkness. So here; the shock comes at the precise moment when the thrill of life is communicated to us along the clue we have been following. It is always shocking to meet life where we thought we were alone. “Look out” we cry, “it’s alive”. And therefore this is the very point at which so many draw back – I would have done so myself if I could and proceeded no further with Christianity. An “impersonal God” – well and good. A subjective God of beauty, truth and goodness, inside our own heads – better still. A formless life-force surging through us, a vast power which we can tap – best of all. But God Himself, alive, pulling at the other end of the cord, perhaps approaching at an infinite speed, the hunter, king, husband – that is quite another matter. There comes a moment when the children who have been playing at burglars hush suddenly: was that a real footstep in the hall? There comes a moment when people who have been dabbling at religion (‘Man’s search for God’!) suddenly draw back. Supposing we really found Him? We never meant it to come to that! Worse still supposing He had found us?

C.S. Lewis, Miracles

Our cause [the devil's] is never more in danger than when a human, no longer desiring, but still intending, to do our Enemy's [God's] will, looks round upon a universe from which every trace of Him seems to have vanished, and asks why he has been forsaken, and still obeys.

C.S. Lewis, The Screwtape Letters

The Importance of Sound Thinking

- If you look for truth, you may find comfort in the end. If you look for comfort you will not get either comfort or truth – only soft soap and wishful thinking to begin with and, in the end, despair.

C. S. Lewis, Mere Christianity

Taking Atheism to its Logical Conclusion

From propositions of fact alone no practical conclusion can ever be drawn. *This will preserve society* cannot lead to *do this* except by the mediation of *society ought to be preserved*.

Abolition of Man

Those who know the *Tao* can hold that to call children delightful or old men venerable is not simply to record a psychological fact about our own parental or filial emotions but to recognize a quality that demands a certain response from us whether we make it or not. I myself do not enjoy the society of small children; because I speak from within the *Tao* I recognize this as a defect in myself – just as a man may have to recognize that he is tone deaf or colour blind. And because our approvals and disapprovals are thus recognitions of objective value... therefore emotional states can be in harmony with reason (when we feel liking for what ought to be approved) or out of harmony with reason (when we perceive that liking is due but cannot feel it.)

Abolition of Man

My point is that those who stand outside all judgments of value cannot have any ground for preferring one of their own impulses to another except the emotional strength of that impulse.... We have been trying, like Lear, to have it both ways: to lay down our human prerogative and yet at the same time to retain it. It is impossible. Either we are rational spirit obliged for ever to obey the absolute values of the Tao, or else we are mere nature to be kneaded and cut into new shapes for the pleasures of masters who must, by hypothesis, have no motive but their own 'natural' impulses.

Abolition of Man

And all the time ... we continue to clamour for those very qualities we are rendering impossible. You can hardly open a periodical without coming across the statement that what our civilization needs is more 'drive', or dynamism, or self-sacrifice, or 'creativity'. In a sort of ghastly simplicity we remove the organ and demand the function. We make men without chests and expect of them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honour and are shocked to find traitors in our midst. We castrate and bid the geldings be fruitful.

Abolition of Man

The Reasonableness of Theism

When I accept Theology I may find difficulties, at this point or that in harmonizing it with some particular truths... derived from science. But I can allow for science as a whole. Granted that reason is prior to matter and that the light of that Primal Reason illuminates finite minds, I can understand how men should come, by observation and inference, to know a lot about the Universe they live in. If, on the other hand, I swallow the scientific cosmology as a whole, then not only can I not fit in Christianity, but I cannot even fit in science. If minds are wholly dependent on brains, and brains on biochemistry, and biochemistry (in the long run) on the meaningless flux of atoms, I cannot understand how the thoughts of those minds should have any more significance than the sound of the wind in the trees. And this to me is the final test. This is how I distinguish dreaming and waking. When I am awake I can, in some degree, account for my dream. The dragon that pursued me last night can be fitted into my waking world. I know there are such things as dreams; I know that I had eaten an indigestible dinner; I know that a man of my reading might be expected to dream of dragons. But while in the nightmare I could not have fitted in my waking experience. The waking world is judged more real because it can thus contain the dreaming world; the dreaming world is judged less real because it cannot contain the waking world. For the same reason I am certain that in passing from the scientific point of view to the theological I have passed from dream to waking. Christian theology can fit in science, art, morality and the sub-Christian religions. The scientific point of view cannot fit in any of these things, not even science itself. I believe in Christianity as I believe the sun has risen not only because I see it but because by it I see everything else.

The Weight of Glory

There is no half-way house and there is no parallel in other religions. If you had gone to Buddha and asked him, “Are you the son of Bramah?” he would have said, “My son, you are still in the vale of illusion.” If you had gone to Socrates and asked, “Are you Zeus?” he would have laughed at you. If you had gone to Mohammed and asked, “Are you Allah?” he would first have rent his clothes and then cut your head off. If you had asked Confucius, “Are you Heaven?” I think he would have probably replied, “Remarks which are not in accordance with nature are in bad taste”. The idea of a great moral teacher saying what Christ said is out of the questions. In my opinion, the only person who can say that sort of thing is either God or a complete lunatic suffering from that form of delusion which undermines the whole mind of man..... We may not in passing that he was never regarded as a mere moral teacher. He did not produce that effect on any of the people who actually met him. He produced mainly three effects – Hatred – Terror – Adoration. There was no trace of people expressing mild approval.

God in the Dock

These things – the beauty, the memory of our own past – are good images of what we really desire: but if they are mistaken for the thing itself they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshippers. For they are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never visited.

Weight of Glory

Place of Science

- We find that matter always obeys the same laws as our logic obeys. No one can suppose that this can be some kind of coincidence. A great many people think that nature produces the mind but on the assumption that nature is herself mindless, this provides no explanation. To be the result of a series of mindless events is one thing, to be a plan or true account of the laws according to which these events happen is quite another. It is as if cabbages in addition to resulting from the laws of botany also gave lectures in that subject. We must seek for the real explanation elsewhere. Unless all we take to be knowledge is an illusion, we must hold that in thinking we are not reading rationality into an irrational universe but responding to a rationality with which the universe has always been saturated.

C.S.

Lewis

Suffering

- The complaint was the answer. To have heard myself making it was to be answered. Lightly men talk of saying what they mean.... “To say the very thing you really mean, the whole of it, nothing more or less or other than what you really mean; that’s the whole art and joy of words”. A glib saying. When the time comes to you at which you will be forced at last to utter the speech which has lain at the center of your soul for years, which you have, all that time, idiot-like, been saying over and over, you’ll not talk about the joy of words. I saw well why the gods do not speak to us openly, nor let us answer. Till that word can be dug out of us, why should they hear the babble that we think we mean? How can they meet us face to face till we have faces?

- C.S. Lewis – Till We Have Faces



- - “Are the gods not just?”
- - “Oh no, child. What would become of us if they were?”

- C.S. Lewis – Till We Have Faces



- I know now, Lord, why you utter no answer. You are yourself the answer. Before your face questions die away. What other answer would suffice? Only words, words; to be led out to battle against other words.

- C.S. Lewis – Till We Have Faces

Why We Cannot Judge

The Value of the Self

- The Enemy wants to bring the man to a state of mind in which he could design the best cathedral in the world, and know it to be the best, and rejoice in the fact, without being any more (or less) or otherwise glad at having done it than he would be if it had been done by another. The Enemy wants him, in the end, to be so free from any bias in his own favour that he can rejoice in his own talents as frankly and gratefully as in his neighbour's talents – or in a sunrise, an elephant, or a waterfall.... His whole effort therefore will be to get the man's mind off the subject of his own value altogether. He would rather the man thought himself a great architect or a great poet and then forget about it, than that he should spend much time and pains in trying to think himself a bade one.

C.S. Lewis, Screwtape Letters

- We should, I believe, distrust states of mind which turn our attention upon ourselves. Even at our sins we should look no longer than is necessary to know and repent of them; and our virtues or progress (if any) are certainly a dangerous object of contemplations. When the sun is vertically above a man he casts no shadow; similarly when we have come to the Divine Meridian our Spiritual shadow (that is our consciousness of self) will vanish. One will thus in a sense be almost nothing; a room to be filled by God and our blessed fellow creatures who in their turn are rooms we help to fill.

- Lewis

C.S.

- We must not think Pride is something God forbids because He is offended at it, or that Humility is something He demands as due to His own dignity – as if God Himself was proud. He is not in the least worried about His dignity. The point is He wants you to know Him; wants to give you Himself. And He and you are two things of such a kind that if you really get into any kind of touch with Him you will, in fact, be humble – delightedly humble, feeling the infinite relief of having for once got rid of all the silly nonsense about your own dignity which has made you restless and unhappy all your life. He is trying to make you humble in order to make this moment possible: trying to take off a lot of silly, ugly, fancy-dress in which we have all got ourselves up and are strutting about like the little idiots we are.... Do not imagine that if you meet a really humble man he will be what most people call “humble” nowadays; he will not be a sort of greasy, smarmy person, who is always telling you that, of course, he is nobody. Probably all you will think about him is that he seemed a cheerful, intelligent chap who took a real interest in what you said to him. If you do dislike him it will be because you feel a little envious of anyone who seems to enjoy life so easily. He will not be thinking about humility; he will not be thinking about himself at all.

● C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity