



Lewis's Convoluted Christianity

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C. S. Lewis's Case for Christ - Insights from Reason, Imagination and Faith
• Art Lindsley • InterVarsity Press Illinois • 2005



C.S. Lewis

ART LINDSLEY IS SENIOR FELLOW at the C. S. Lewis Institute in Springfield, Virginia, and this book sets out to introduce his reader to Lewis's ideas. He tells us something about Lewis, with whose thinking he is clearly in tune. He quotes a great deal from him, and from those philosophers who support his views. Thus we see Lewis's own ideas coming through quite effectively.

Lindsley also uses a fictional scenario of his own creation. This concerns an imaginary study group on the great man. This literary device allows Lindsley to present different perspectives on Lewis's ideas, in particular those of the smooth 'John', the Christian facilitator who guides the group. John's students are:

Brenda, who is interested in children's literature;

Simon, an atheist;

The questing Julia, with her eclectic, 'New Age' approach influenced by Buddhism and Hinduism;

Lenae - her faith is about feelings;

Mike, who perhaps represents the 'plain man';

and Damon, who is an agnostic, but he likes Lewis's fictional works, and has some aspects of his life in common with Lewis.

Each chapter begins and ends with their discussions.

We learn that after a Christian upbringing, in his younger years Lewis was an atheist. He was converted to theism in his early thirties, and to Christianity about two years later. However, it is clear he was not a humanist in those early years.

Lewis's mother died when he was only nine. His father then sent 'Jack' and his elder brother Warren to boarding school, where they had a terrible time. These unfortunate experiences perhaps stunted his emotional growth, leaving him short on humane values.

We get to see some examples of Lewis's extraordinary mental abilities. We also see his clear writing style, his lucid analogies, and get examples of his sincerity and other likeable qualities. However, we can also see in the quotations Lewis's tortuously convoluted logic based on hair-splitting definitions, trying to make Christianity seem rational. He was constantly turning arguments against Christianity back on themselves, using many contortions of the mind that appear to be clear thinking.

In addition we see his total inability to accept grey areas, seeing everything in black and white terms. Perhaps born-again Christianity appeals to those who can only cope with absolutes.

Chapter 12 deals with 'other religions' in a rather garbled way. Here we see a glimmer of broad-mindedness in Lewis. His 'inclusivity' suggests that worship of any god counts as worship of the true God. However, Lindsley does not share this view.

In his chapter on Miracles, Lindsley is at his most unsatisfactory when trying to answer David Hume's arguments. In the same chapter he really struggles to play down the effect that a debate with the philosopher Elizabeth Anscombe had on Lewis. There is probably much more here than meets the eye: Lindsley is stating only selected aspects of this significant event.

All in all, I definitely feel I have come to know C. S. Lewis better through Art Lindsley's book. There are few actual flaws: only one stands out. On p.169 a supposed quotation from Lewis is simply ungrammatical – very unlikely, coming from an eminent professor of English literature!

Lindsley includes good notes at the back, giving his sources, and a two-page index. He gives his own comments on the books he lists for further reading.

This is a fair introduction to C. S. Lewis's work – three stars out of five, I think. Read it by all means; but remember, at the end of the day, Aril Lindsley is out to convert you! □

