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Book Review: Mere Christianity

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Mere Christianity

C. S. Lewis (Harper One 2001), 240 pages

Madelyn Doyle, reviewer

C.S. Lewis's *Mere Christianity* is a unique book that has served to answer the questions of many Christians. In *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis writes about the basic beliefs that are common among many Christians. His use of the word "mere" may be misleading to some. Lewis used this word to briefly explain that the goal of his book was a summarization of Christianity. His purpose in writing was not to persuade people to agree with him, but rather it was to analyze these beliefs from a philosophical perspective. The points he uses to illustrate his argument involve the definition and characteristics of morality, the theological beliefs of Christians, the virtues of Christian behavior, and how to apply these things in the Christian faith. He wrote on these basic fundamentals because he believed other authors were more focused on the controversial issues, which he believed only turned unbelievers away. Lewis starts the book with a general definition of morality and how it relates to the basic beliefs of Christianity. The book then progresses with how these moral beliefs shape characteristics and virtues, and then ultimately he describes the beliefs of Christians and how to live as Christian.

Throughout the book Lewis has many incredible insights to offer. One of the strengths that Lewis exhibited was that he provided the view of other religions when making his point. When he was discussing the origins of morality and the question of the "being" that would hold the moral standard, he gave arguments both for the theistic side and also for the life-force side. Ultimately he believed that the Christian perspective was more sound and believed it to be correct, but he still illustrated both possible sides of the argument. This approach helped further

prove his argument because it showed that he had reasoned through the possibilities and still determined Christianity to be correct. Another strength that Lewis exhibited in *Mere Christianity* was sharing his opinions without coming on too strong. He shared his opinions and arguments with a mindset that other beliefs had valid facts, however, he believed that Christianity offered the most logical perspective. Finally, the evidence that he shared backed up his points and made an even stronger argument. For every point that he made he had many facts, arguments, and opinions to back up his statement. When making a claim it is important to be able to back up that claim and C.S. Lewis did this particularly well.

While Lewis made many compelling arguments in *Mere Christianity*, there were a few areas that were not as successful. One of these areas was when he would interrupt a sentence to explain the point that he was not trying to make. This undermined his main argument and drew attention to that point instead of the actual point he was trying to make. It had the opposite effect than it was intended to. For example, by saying “I am not going to argue this point” he both mentioned it and created additional questions that were never answered. Another shortcoming was that at times his wording seemed less than helpful. For example, Lewis used the term “hammering” in the “What Christians Believe” section . In context with the topic of conversation, “hammering” came off forceful and harsh as if God was giving the people no choice but to understand what kind of God he was. And while God does in fact reveal himself, sometimes in harsh ways, a better wording perhaps would have been “to guide” or “teach them” who He was. Finally, a third drawback is that Lewis occasionally had strong opinions about the people who were stubborn in their lack of belief in Christianity. In book one he uses the term “pig-headed” to describe people. Even if these people are “pig-headed”, to call people with differing views by names and use harsh language, draws away from the main point and

essentially undermines the argument trying to be made with the fallacy of “ad hominem”.

Though Lewis may express himself in ways that differ from modern sensibilities, these examples do not undermine the main point of the book and therefore should not deter one from reading it.

Finally, *Mere Christianity* is not a book simply for those studying philosophy. C.S. Lewis himself was a remarkably well-rounded individual who applied himself to many disciplines. Lewis was a writer of both fiction and nonfiction. This is exhibited in works such as *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *The Weight of Glory*. He also studied and applied history to his works. Furthermore, his skills as a philosopher and theologian are exhibited in works such as *The Screwtape Letters*. This interdisciplinary approach is particularly exhibited in *Mere Christianity* and there are many viewpoints from which one may read this book.

Mere Christianity by C.S. Lewis is very illustrative work for those who wonder about the fundamental values of Christianity. The book breaks Christianity down into the basic core of what it is. While the book serves to explain Christianity as simply as possible, it also gives extensive details as to why these fundamentals are as they are. Lewis addresses many concerns that both believers and unbelievers might have about the faith, and he even considers the perspectives of other beliefs. For those who have questions about characteristics of morality, the theological beliefs of Christians, the virtues of Christian behavior, and how to apply these things in Christian faith, while also seeking a deep philosophical perspective, *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis is an excellent resource. There were many other good points and arguments that Lewis made, but these are the ones that stood out to me. The strength of these arguments served to support the basis of his book which was to address the fundamentals of the Christian faith and I highly recommend it to anyone who wishes to begin studying or even further study these things.

REVIEWER BIO

Madelyn is currently a freshman at Liberty University in pursuit of a writing degree. She enjoys reading and learning new things. She hopes to write and publish works of fiction that explore the fantasy genre from a Christian perspective. After earning her degree she plans to move into the editing and publishing industry to help other writers achieve their goals.