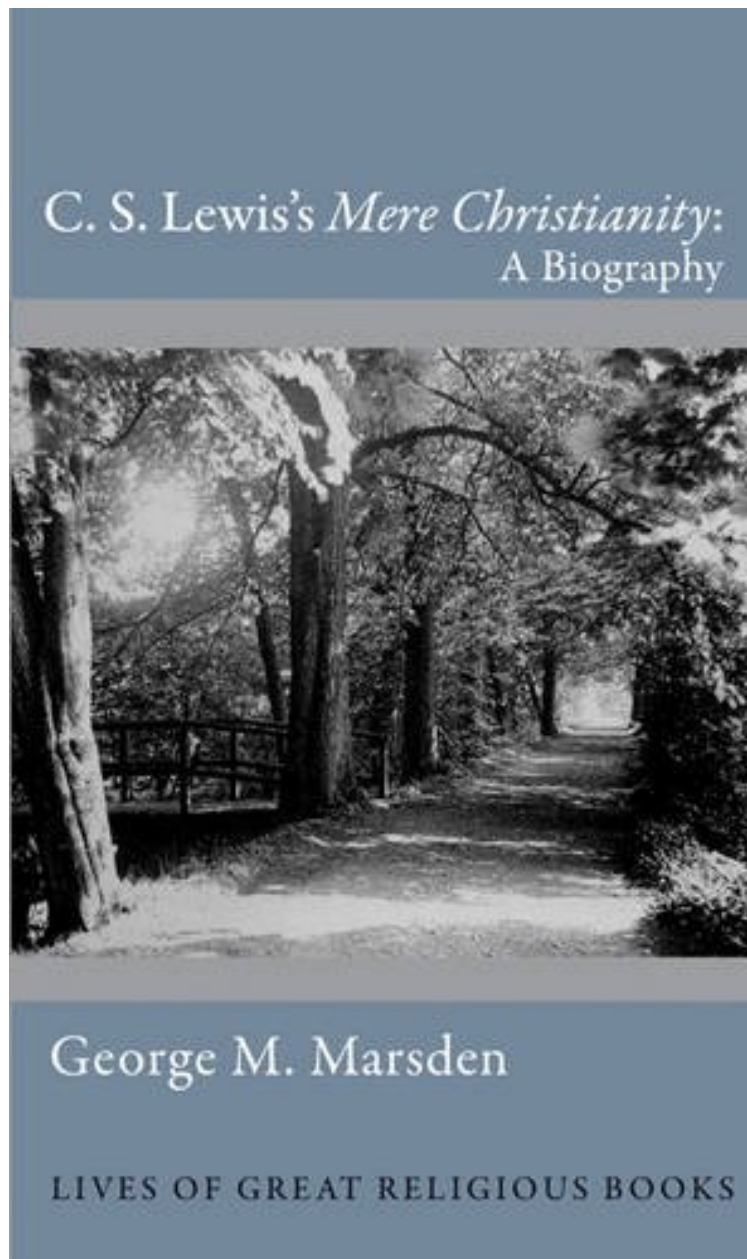


(Download pdf) C. S. Lewis "Mere Christianity": A Biography (Lives of Great Religious Books)

## C. S. Lewis "Mere Christianity": A Biography (Lives of Great Religious Books)

*George M. Marsden*

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George M. Marsden : C. S. Lewis "Mere Christianity": A Biography (Lives of Great Religious Books) before

purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised C. S. Lewis' "Mere Christianity": A Biography (Lives of Great Religious Books):

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Books have biographies too. By Rudy Nelson Books have biographies too. That was the realization behind a new series from Princeton University Press "Lives of Great Religious Books." The list so far includes some obvious entries: Augustine's Confessions, The Book of Common Prayer, Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Letters and Papers from Prison and an occasional surprise, like The Dead Sea Scrolls. The new book under review here is a natural for the list in both its history and in the choice of author. Clive Staples Lewis authored a whole shelf of books in several genres. Mere Christianity, probably his most famous book (though some would argue for Screwtape Letters or the Chronicles of Narnia) didn't start out as a book. In the darkest days of World War Two, all of Europe in Hitler's control and the German airforce raining down bombs on London every night, embattled England was the free world's last hope. Lewis's fifteen minute talks every evening on BBC helped keep that hope alive. In the final chapter, Marsden captures in one masterful sentence the unique qualities that Lewis brought to the task. "Almost like a Mozart of words, Lewis was so thoroughly steeped in a rich tradition, was so much a master of a rational discipline, and so much a lifelong connoisseur of the imagination that he could toss off a series of occasional pieces for broadcast that were not even at first planned to make up a book, and they would turn out to be a compelling set of rhetorical gems." That sentence demonstrates something else as well: the publisher's wisdom in choosing Marsden to write the book. Steeped in the same tradition as Lewis, with perfect balance of reason and imagination in his own work, Marsden's breadth of intellect and sensibility pervade the whole book from beginning to end.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Interesting. By Sewing Grandma I expected there to be more history in general of the period during which Mere Christianity was written. This is history of the book itself, and its acceptance by and impact on the public. I've learned some things I never knew about C. S. Lewis. My son graduated from Wheaton College, and I always wanted to know more about why the wardrobe that inspired the Chronicles of Narnia was housed there. Now I know! C. S. Lewis is such a fascinating character. God has definitely used him over a wide span of demographics.

5 of 6 people found the following review helpful. One of the best books of 2016 (so far), a biography about the life of a book. By Tony Reinke Of the most intriguing 40 Christian non-fiction titles published in the first half of 2016, historian George Marsden's new book C.S. Lewis' Mere Christianity: A Biography stands out immediately. Published in Princeton's pioneering series, Lives of Great Religious Books, Marsden has written a biography about a book, and if that sounds boring, it's not. Lewis' classic has a backstory worth telling and Marsden has told it in one of the best books of the year. When it comes to bestselling books in Christian apologetics, Mere Christianity has claimed first place ever since I can remember. The book was originally the product of a series of short eight-to-fifteen-minute talks delivered on BBC radio by Lewis during World War II, and delivered to an increasingly post-Christian British audience who now lived under perpetual fear of night bombing raids. He gathered a listening audience of between 11.6m, which was big but not huge (the evening news update programs would draw ten-times that number). He pulled the short addresses off with great skill and imagination, but it was all met with mixed reviews in the British press, and generated an almost unbearable amount of fan mail for Lewis. Marsden retells the amazing story of how God used one wartime intellectual, but also a novice apologist and lay theologian (CSL), to invest himself in the immediate medium at his disposal (BBC), in a dire time in world history (WWII), to produce talks that would become three separate books, then one book, that would be published and would spread globally in the 1950s, and then largely drop off and get forgotten during the sexual revolution in the 1960s (except at Wheaton College under the key influence of Clyde Kilby), and then would surge in the late 1960s and take wings in the 1970s largely by the long-tail of word-of-mouth spread leading to a swell of posthumous sales and popularity and eventually to 's top spot. In the end, what makes Mere Christianity so powerful? All Christian non-fiction apologists will pay close attention as Marsden summarizes the key features of Lewis' work (pages 153-188):

1. Lewis looks for timeless truth as opposed to the culturally bound.
2. He uses common human nature as the point of contact with his audience.
3. Lewis sees reason in the context of experience, affections, and imagination.
4. He is a poet at heart, using metaphor and the art of meaning in a universe that is alive.
5. Lewis' book is about mere Christianity.
6. Mere Christianity does not offer cheap grace.
7. The lasting appeal of Mere Christianity is based on the luminosity of the gospel message itself.

A respected historian has retold a worthy story any Christian reader or writer will benefit from hearing. Like his biography of Jonathan Edwards, though shorter by 460 pages, Marsden has once again pulled off a masterpiece of history, in retelling the fascinating life of one of the most influential Christian books in the past century. [Originally published at [tonyreinke.com](http://tonyreinke.com)]

Mere Christianity, C. S. Lewis's eloquent and winsome defense of the Christian faith, originated as a series of BBC radio talks broadcast during the dark days of World War Two. Here is the story of the extraordinary life and afterlife of this influential and much-beloved book. George Marsden describes how Lewis gradually went from being an atheist to a committed Anglican, famously converting to Christianity in 1931 after conversing into the night with his friends J. R. R. Tolkien and Hugh Dyson, and how Lewis delivered his wartime talks to a traumatized British nation in the midst of an all-out war for survival. Marsden recounts how versions of those talks were collected together in 1952 under the

title *Mere Christianity*, and how the book went on to become one of the most widely read presentations of essential Christianity ever published, particularly among American evangelicals. He examines its role in the conversion experiences of such figures as Charles Colson, who read the book while facing arrest for his role in the Watergate scandal. Marsden explores its relationship with Lewis's Narnia books and other writings, and explains why Lewis's plainspoken case for Christianity continues to have its critics and ardent admirers to this day. With uncommon clarity and grace, Marsden provides invaluable new insights into this modern spiritual classic.

"A clear and deeply informed account of a religious work that seems to have no expiration date."--Kirkus  
"Admirers of Lewis as well as those interested in the origins of recent Christian thought will be happy to dive into this densely packed volume."--Publishers Weekly  
"Books on Lewis abound. Marsden's belongs on the top shelf."--Booklist  
"[A]n insightful historical sketch"--The Gospel Coalition  
"If Marsden's biography of *Mere Christianity* encourages his readers to read or reread it for themselves, it may in its own way be an antidote for the attention to self that so dominates our culture."--Gilbert Meilaender, *Commonweal*  
"Marsden's book is fascinating and well-written and researched. It makes one want to go back to read *Mere Christianity* itself."--Frank Freeman, *University Bookman*  
"George Marsden provides a splendid account of the book's evolution . . . and its reception."--Jonathan Wright, *Catholic Herald*  
"Marsden's work is a terrific exemplification of the contribution to knowledge which can be made by study of the reception history of texts. . . . Fascinating insights emerge."--Peter Anthony, *Church Times*  
"[A] fascinating exploration of one of the most influential religious books of modern times."--Ryder Miller, *San Francisco Book*  
"Marsden's biography' of Lewis's *Mere Christianity* is an excellent commentary on a classic of modern Christian literature on spirituality."--Choice  
From the Back Cover  
"A superb study of C. S. Lewis's greatest work. Marsden succeeds both in illuminating the success of *Mere Christianity* and enriching our own reading of this seminal work."--Alister McGrath, author of *C. S. Lewis--A Life*  
"This is a match made in heaven: C. S. Lewis, modernity's most influential Christian voice, interpreted by George Marsden, leading historian of Christian intellectual culture. *Mere Christianity* has taken on a life of its own, winning converts by its peculiar blend of rhetoric and reason. In unveiling the life of this book and taking the measure of its influence, Marsden has given us an indispensable key to the mind and stature of its author."--Carol Zaleski, coauthor of *The Fellowship: The Literary Lives of the Inklings*  
"A significant contribution to Lewis scholarship. No one has surveyed the reception history of *Mere Christianity* as well as Marsden has done here, and given the enduring popularity and influence of the book, this is a task well worth doing."--Alan Jacobs, author of *The Narnian: The Life and Imagination of C. S. Lewis*  
"Though there have been analyses of *Mere Christianity* before, none has been so comprehensive or serious as this one. Marsden has subjected Lewis's book to an assessment more searching and satisfying than anything so far in print."--Michael Ward, *University of Oxford*, author of *Planet Narnia: The Seven Heavens in the Imagination of C. S. Lewis*  
About the Author  
George M. Marsden is the Francis A. McAnaney Professor of History Emeritus at the University of Notre Dame. His books include *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*, and *The Soul of the American University*. He lives in Grand Rapids, Michigan.