CHAPTER ONE

C. S. Lewis: An Unusual Evangelist

1.1 Introduction: Lewis's Evangelistic Legacy

Clive Staples Lewis is one of the most significant lay evangelists of the twentieth century. In *Surprised by Joy* Lewis detailed his spiritual journey from nominal Christianity to atheism, from atheism to idealism, from idealism to theism, and from theism to Christianity. He stated that he embraced belief in a personal God during the Trinity Term of 1929 and became a Christian in 1931. Once he became a Christian, Lewis was not content to rest believing that he had simply arrived at his religious destination, but felt the need to share his religious beliefs with others. George Sayer, who was a student of Lewis at Magdalen College, Oxford, and later a lifelong friend, wrote, "He devoted himself to developing and strengthening his belief, and, almost from the year of his conversion, he wanted to become an evangelist for the Christian faith."[1] Lewis did not enter into the field of evangelism because he was dispatched by his church, nor did he have an official endorsement from his denomination to engage in this Christian work. As will be demonstrated later, many of Lewis's opportunities to engage in evangelism were the result of invitations yet, in some sense, it would not be completely inaccurate to say Lewis was a self-appointed evangelist.

A year after his conversion to Christianity, on a fortnight-long vacation in Belfast, Lewis wrote *The Pilgrim's Regress* and in allegorical form told the story of how the vision of the Island eventually led the protagonist

1. Sayer, *Jack*, 138.

John to embrace belief in the Landlord (God). For Lewis, aesthetic intuition was an avenue for discovering the reality of belief in a personal God. He continued to engage in his literary apostolate and within ten years of his conversion he was addressing the nation on the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), giving talks on basic Christianity.

Lewis's impact as an evangelist was not limited to the United Kingdom. George Anderson wrote in *The Christian Century* in 1946,

> When Christian writers of the future discuss the humanism of the twentieth century, they will be compelled to recognize as one of its strongest opponents this plain layman. Others have roused the religious thinking of England's people—Newman, Pusey and Wesley; but they were clergymen, and the audiences of the three together did not equal that which hangs on the words of this quiet young Oxford don.[2]

Few who knew Lewis personally would have described him as "quiet." Many would have described him as argumentative, and some even referred to him as a bully.[3] In 1947 Lewis graced the cover of *Time,* and was dubbed by the magazine as "one of the most influential spokesmen for Christianity in the English-speaking world."[4] Chad Walsh stated, "No Christian apologist in the English-speaking world is today as much talked about and argued about as C. S. Lewis."[5] Little could these writers know just how prophetic their words not only were, but would become.

Lewis himself had no inkling about how long-lasting and how widely felt would be the evangelistic legacy that he was leaving. Walter Hooper, who served as Lewis's secretary in the summer of 1963, recounts a conversation he had with Lewis in which Lewis shared what he thought would be the future of his works. In a paper presented at the University of Granada in 1998, on the occasion of the centenary of Lewis's birth, Hooper said,

> I think I have not acted with unnecessary haste in waiting thirty-five years to tell the world that I won an argument with Lewis. Not many could make that claim. He was worried about what

2. Anderson, "C. S. Lewis," 1562.

3. A. N. Wilson wrote that the reason why many of Lewis's colleagues disliked him was because he was an "intellectual bruiser" who was "argumentative and bullying." Wilson, *C. S. Lewis*, xii.

4. "Don v. Devil," 65.

5. Walsh, *C. S. Lewis*, ix.

> his brother would live on when he died, and this because he was sure that upon his own death his books would stop selling. 'No!' I exclaimed. 'What'd you mean, 'no'?' he said. 'This happens', he said, 'to nearly all authors. After they die their books sell for a while, and then trail off to nothing'. 'But not yours!' I said. 'Why not?' he asked. 'Because they are too good—and people are not that stupid'.[6]

Hooper has more than won that argument with Lewis.

Lewis's numbers are staggering. It is estimated that his books have sold more than 200 million copies and have been published in forty-one different languages. His impact is measured in more than just book sales.[7] Countless Christians have had their faith strengthened by his works, and many others have converted to Christianity in part due to him.[8] The Ivy League educated lawyer and special counsel to President Richard Nixon, Charles Colson, converted to Christianity in 1973 after reading *Mere Christianity.* Colson stated, "Lewis's logic was so utterly compelling that I was left with no recourse but to accept the reality of the God who is and who has revealed himself through Jesus Christ."[9] Francis Collins, a physician and geneticist who became the director of the National Human Genome Research Institute, recounted how, while in medical school, his atheistic faith crumbled upon reading *Mere Christianity*. Collins wrote,

6. Hooper, "C. S. Lewis: Oxford's Literary Chameleon of Letters," 41. Owen Barfield had a similar conversation with Lewis. Barfield wanted to know Lewis's intentions on how to allocate his book royalties after his death. Lewis responded, "After I've been dead five years no one will read anything I've written." Dorsett, *Seeking the Spiritual Place*, 20.

7. For a collection of anecdotal accounts of Lewis's influence on various individuals' lives, see Phemister and Lazo, eds., *Mere Christians*.

8. Though it is beyond the bounds of this work, it would be interesting to study the reasons why some people have lost their Christian faith upon reading Lewis's works. A. N. Wilson wrote, "I can remember almost yelling that reading C S Lewis's *Mere Christianity* made me a non-believer—not just in Lewis's version of Christianity, but in Christianity itself." Wilson, "Why I Believe Again," para. 6. Alan Jacobs wrote, "I even know a man who says that he lost his faith largely because of Lewis's *Mere Christianity*: he figured that, since all his devout friends told him that it was the last word on what Christian belief is all about, then if he loathed the book he was honor-bound to loathe Christianity as well." Jacobs, *The Narnian*, x. One can see in such testimonials the dangers inherent in elevating the messenger too high, and the very real possibility of a person discounting or dismissing the message based upon the individual's liking or disliking of the messenger. The gate on personality-driven evangelism swings both ways.

9. Colson, "The Conversion of a Skeptic," 83.

"So I read *Mere Christianity,* and my materialist view was quickly laid to ruins."[10] Tom Monaghan, the billionaire founder of Domino's Pizza, credited the chapter on pride in *Mere Christianity* as the tool which created for him a massive change of life and values. He wrote that Lewis's words hit him between the eyes, and as a result he "took a millionaire's vow of poverty."[11] John Beversluis, author of the classic work *C. S. Lewis and the Search for Rational Religion,* noted that millions claim either that Lewis's works were responsible for their conversion to Christianity or else helped them take it more seriously, and added, "Even the most partisan estimates of his influence are likely to be too conservative."[12]

Lewis's influence is indeed considerable. The American Evangelical magazine *Christianity Today* in 1998 dubbed the non-evangelical Lewis "the Aquinas, the Augustine, and the Aesop of contemporary evangelicalism."[13] *Time* magazine on its list of the best children's books of the twentieth century placed *The Chronicles of Narnia* in second place.[14] *Christian History* named Lewis in the list of "The Ten Most Influential Christians of the Twentieth Century."[15] Lewis ranked sixth, and was the first layperson on the list. The first five were Karl Barth, Billy Graham, John XXIII, John Paul II, and Martin Luther King Jr. The April 24, 2000 issue of *Christianity Today* posited that of the millions of books published in the twentieth century, there were only a few hundred which "shaped people in extraordinary ways."[16] The magazine conducted a poll of more than a hundred of its church leaders and contributors asking them to list what they believed were the ten best books of the twentieth century. Number one on the list was *Mere Christianity*. Lewis's book, which was a compilation of his wartime radio broadcasts on the BBC, ranked before Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *The Cost of Discipleship* and Karl Barth's more than six million words of *The Church Dogmatics*. Lewis has not suffered a lack of praise from the most prominent evangelical magazine in the United States. *Christianity Today* in 2005 named the "reserved British intellectual with a checkered pedigree" a superstar, "a rock star for

10. Collins, "From Atheism to Belief," 80. For an expanded treatment of his conversion narrative see Collins, *The Language of God*, 11–31.

11. Sloan and Monaghan, "Tom Monaghan Domino's Pizza," para. 21.

12. Beversluis, *C. S. Lewis and the Search for Rational Religion*, 17.

13. Packer, "Still Surprised by Lewis," 54.

14. "Best of the Century," 73.

15. "The Ten Most Influential Christians of the Twentieth Century."

16. "Books of the Century," 92.

evangelicals."[17] Lewis was also named "the hottest theologian of 2005" by *Time* magazine.[18]

Robert MacSwain in *The Cambridge Companion to C. S. Lewis* argued that C. S. Lewis is "almost certainly the most influential religious author of the twentieth century, in English or any other language."[19] Lewis's fame continued to expand with the cinematic production of Narnia. Three of The Chronicles of Narnia books, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, *Prince Caspian*, and *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* have been made into major Hollywood movies and are available on DVD.

The fascination with him extends not only to his works, but also to his personal narrative. It is ironic that the author of *The Personal Heresy* would have so much attention focused on his private life. Though it is true that Lewis would have grimaced at the attention his private life has received, it must also be acknowledged that he gave the public, whether deliberately or inadvertently, plenty of windows through which to look to see his private life and to consider how this private life impacted the composition of his works. Some of the tools he left us are: *All My Road Before Me: The Diary of C. S. Lewis, 1922–1927*, *The Pilgrim's Regress*, *Surprised by Joy*, *A Grief Observed*, and the three-volume set of his letters, which have been collected and edited by Walter Hooper. Of course, there is also the eleven-volume set of *Memoirs of the Lewis Family* edited by Warren Lewis. There seems to be no end to the public fascination with Lewis. There have been other significant lay evangelists of the twentieth century whose influence was massive, but now are largely footnotes to history. An example is John R. Mott, a long-term leader in the Young Men's Christian Association who presided over the 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh and received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1946. Though Mott is remembered by missiologists and scholars, he is hardly a well-known name.[20]

Lewis, who has been called the Augustine, the Aquinas, the Aesop, the superstar and the rock star of contemporary evangelicalism, resonates with more Christians than just evangelicals. Though it may not have been his intention, nevertheless, Lewis is the founder of a major multimillion-dollar industry and a personality-driven following that

17. Smietana, "C. S. Lewis: Superstar," 29.

18. Van Biema, "Beyond the Wardrobe," 111.

19. MacSwain, "Introduction," 3.

20. For a treatment of Mott's life, and the significance of his contribution to Christian missions and evangelism, see Hopkins, *John R. Mott, 1865–1955*.

some have labeled "cult-like." One can follow in the path of this charismatic religious figure by taking an organized C. S. Lewis tour of Belfast, or by oneself traveling the Holywood Road from the Lewis statue created by Ross Wilson in front of the Holywood Arches Library to St. Mark's Church, Dundela, where his grandfather preached and Lewis was baptized and confirmed. One can then travel on to the Circular Road to arrive at Little Lea, his childhood home. A short distance by car is Campbell College where he attended school for a couple of months, and then up to where Glenmachan, the home of his aristocratic relatives, once stood. The industrious Lewis devotee would certainly not want to miss Crawfordsburn Inn, where Lewis and Joy Davidman Gresham enjoyed their belated honeymoon.

Lewis tours are also conducted in Oxford, and one can drink a beer at the Eagle and Child pub while looking up at the pictures on the wall of Lewis and the Inklings. One can walk along Addison's Walk and read his poem engraved on a marker about what birds early in the year are saying. In Magdalen College Chapel, a small plaque marks his seat so that the brazen can sit where he once sat. His former home, the Kilns, is now a center dedicated to studying his works and preserving his memory. While in Headington Quarry, the Lewis lover would certainly want to see Holy Trinity Church. There one can stand in front of Lewis's grave and ponder one's own mortality, or sit in the pew behind the pillar where Lewis sat. Turning one's head to the side, one can look out and through the Narnia Window.[21] The focus on the personality creates this question for evangelization studies: how much time is spent looking along the light beam to the source of light versus the time spent looking at the personality and cult-like following of Lewis as a religious leader? Does one side of the Lewis legacy overwhelm the other?

Lewis's private life was made into a play and eventually a movie. The story of his relationship with Joy Gresham was turned into a drama by William Nicholson. It was performed on the BBC on December 22, 1985. It became a stage play which first opened on October 5, 1989 at the Theatre Royal, Plymouth. It was made into a significant Hollywood movie, directed by Richard Attenborough, and the lead roles were played by Anthony Hopkins and Debra Winger. *Shadowlands* had its world premiere on December 5, 1993.

21. I have also been spiritually enriched by Lewis's writings, and have followed in his footsteps in all the previously mentioned places.

There seems to be no end to the Lewis phenomena, with C. S. Lewis conferences, C. S. Lewis centers, and even a new C. S. Lewis College. There are C. S. Lewis stained-glass windows in churches and, of course, one can see the Lewis wardrobe at the Marion E. Wade Center in Wheaton, Illinois. Even the Royal Mail issued a C. S. Lewis stamp of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* in 1998 and in 2011 issued the Magical Realm stamps, which featured Aslan and the White Witch. Lewis was not an ordinary practitioner of evangelism and his legacy is far from receding. Mark Oppenheimer in *The New York Times* asked the question, "Who, since the time of Jesus and his apostles, has brought more people to Christianity than anybody else?"[22] Oppenheimer answers the short list would include the fourth-century Roman Emperor Constantine, the eleventh-century pope Urban II, and most certainly C. S. Lewis, who he wrote has "moved more hearts with a pen than others have with armies."[23] In the article Oppenheimer quotes Michael Maudlin, the editor of *The C. S. Lewis Bible*, who stated that he did not want to make Lewis into a "personality cult" but Oppenheimer noted that the cult in the United States is "here and growing."[24]

Lewis would be uncomfortable with this legacy. He spent great energy and effort attempting to keep aspects of his private life private not only from curious neighbors, but even from his closest of friends and family. Now Lewis's life is open for inspection and one can only imagine how unsettled he would be by this development. He also would not have cared for the adulation which is directed toward him. During the celebrations of the 100th anniversary of Lewis's birth, *Religion & Ethics* correspondent Martha Bayles traveled to England to examine Lewis's legacy. Bayles asked George Sayer what Lewis would have thought of all the attention focused on him; Sayer replied, "He'd have been embarrassed and thought quite incorrect the interest in—in the personality of the man."[25] Though Sayer knew Lewis would be embarrassed by the attention focused on the man, that knowledge did not prohibit Sayer from greatly expanding the public's knowledge of Lewis's private life in his popular biography. Douglas Gresham, C. S. Lewis's stepson, when asked by CNN reporter John Blake what Lewis would think about the Christian icon he

22. Oppenheimer, "C. S. Lewis's Legacy Lives On, and Not Just Through the Wardrobe," para. 1.

23. Ibid., para. 2.

24. Ibid., para. 5.

25. Bayles, "The Legacy of C. S. Lewis."

has become, answered, "I think he'd be embarrassed. The thought that he would be idolized by so many people would embarrass him deeply."[26] That knowledge of Lewis's preferences also did not prevent Gresham from writing his own biographies of Lewis.[27]

MacSwain argued that Lewis is a phenomenon in that half a century after his death he is "one of the world's most popular and best-selling authors" and he is also an anomaly in that even though he has a loyal readership, "scholars are sharply divided over the value and significance of his work."[28] In the evangelical community, Lewis is regarded as a significant theologian, and in mainstream academic theological scholarship he is considered not a "serious figure."[29] MacSwain further contends that Lewis's immense popularity makes "scholarly assessment" of Lewis difficult, and that there are vast amounts of publications on Lewis that lack scholarly value and have no original thought.[30] These works, published largely with the intention of making money based on Lewis's popularity, MacSwain refers to as "Jacksploitation."[31]

In the field of Lewis studies, divisions also abound over what constitutes proper Lewis scholarship. Some of these divisions have, interestingly enough, focused not only on issues of scholarship, but also on the personhood of the scholar. This can clearly be seen in the concerns Kathryn Lindskoog raised in her article, "Some Problems in C. S. Lewis Scholarship." In identifying the problems, she focused a great deal of her attack on Walter Hooper, who not only served as Lewis's private secretary, but has edited the vast majority of Lewis's posthumous works. Lindskoog charged Hooper with being too enamored with Lewis, supposedly

26. Blake, "Surprised by C. S. Lewis."

27. Obviously that knowledge of Lewis's preferences has also not prevented this writer from this work. Lewis's influence is seismic and, in this age of Christianity's retreat in the United States and in Europe, it is well worth pondering how and why Lewis's writings, talks, and practices created, and continues to create such an evangelistic tidal wave.

28. MacSwain, "Introduction," 1.

29. Ibid., 2.

30. Ibid., 3.

31. Ibid. MacSwain's term "Jacksploitation" is a combination of the name Lewis was called by his friends, "Jack," and of course, exploitation (Ibid., 11). Warren Lewis stated that during a childhood holiday, Clive, disliking his given name, marched up to his mother, pointed to his chest, and proclaimed that his name was Jacksie. The name eventually would become shortened to Jacks and then Jack. W. H. Lewis, "Memoir of C. S. Lewis," 2.

changing his speech patterns from a Kentucky drawl to an Oxford accent, which is an interesting accusation in and of itself since Hooper is from Reidsville, North Carolina. She also claimed that he changed his penmanship to look like Lewis's handwriting, and flicked his ash from his cigarette like Lewis. One cannot help but feel Lindskoog's *ad hominem* attacks on Hooper about accents, handwriting, and cigarettes are more like a row between disciples about who loves their master most. Lindskoog wrote an academic thesis on Lewis, and even had the opportunity to meet him on July 20, 1956 in the Royal Oxford Hotel. Lindskoog was also deeply enamored with Lewis. Commenting upon reading her first Lewis work, she said, "You could say that I was mentally 'married' to Lewis that very day."[32]

Lindskoog made other charges that are more substantial. She accused Hooper of exaggerating the length of time he served as Lewis's secretary, and also the nature of the intimacy that existed between them. Did Lewis actually tell Mrs. Miller, his housekeeper, that Walter Hooper was the son he "should have had"?[33] Walter Hooper claims this was the case, and Lindskoog asserts that Mrs. Miller said to her in person, in 1975, that Lewis never made that statement to her.[34] Lindskoog challenged the propriety of how Hooper came into possession of some of Lewis's papers. She questioned the veracity of the story of the bonfire, which supposedly burned for three days, and was said to have destroyed a significant amount of Lewis's papers. Hooper claimed he arrived on the third day and rescued many manuscripts, among them, *The Dark Tower*. She also accused Hooper of being careless in his scholarship.

Christianity and Literature, in response to the letters they received, printed selected letters which they felt were representative of the ones that were mailed to them. The responses were from Owen Barfield, Eugene McGovern, and a bizarre one from a friend of Hooper's, Anthony Marchington.[35] Lindskoog was afforded the opportunity to respond. Samuel Joeckel, a literary scholar, noted that Lindskoog in her article "attempted to maintain a courteous tone."[36] It is true that at a point in the article she did say that her concerns were not meant to be challenges

32. Lindskoog, "Reactions From Other Women," 82.
33. Green and Hooper, *C. S. Lewis*, 303.
34. Lindskoog, "Some Problems in C. S. Lewis Scholarship," 55.
35. Marchington attempted a literary hoax of his own.
36. Joeckel, *The C. S. Lewis Phenomenon*, 360.

to Hooper or Barfield, but she certainly could have raised her textual concerns without probing Hooper's background prior to his becoming involved with Lewis. The responses from Barfield and McGovern did not significantly deal with the issues of Lewis scholarship she raised, but were primarily preoccupied with her personhood. They, in effect, engaged in practices attacking Lindskoog. Barfield stated that her work consisted largely of "inaccurate statements, ingenious speculations, and waspish innuendo" but he failed to show in detail where she engaged in such behavior.[37] McGovern asserted that sources who confided in Lindskoog confidentially know now that the only safe way to converse with her is, "No comment."[38] Though obviously it was not McGovern's intention to do so, by not mounting a significant counterargument to Lindskoog's challenges, he appears to validate the veracity of whatever she learned from her sources, and, in effect, accuses her not of inaccuracy but of bad manners.

In 1988, Lindskoog continued to raise concerns about the difficulties in Lewis scholarship in her book, *The C. S. Lewis Hoax*. She received endorsements from such well-known Christian writers as Philip Yancey, Frederick Buechner, and Walter Wangerin. Friends of Lewis who lent their names in support of her book are Dom Bede Griffiths, Roger Lancelyn Green, George Sayer, and Sheldon Vanauken. Lindskoog questioned the integrity of the Lewis canon and the authorship of *The Dark Tower*. Chief among her concerns, echoed also by Green and Vanauken, is the inferior quality of the writing. The logic of her position seems to be, since the manuscript is so poorly written, therefore it must be a fraud composed by someone else; either a forgery by Hooper, or a poorly constructed work written by a correspondent or a former student of Lewis whose penmanship resembled Lewis's and which, for reasons beyond comprehension, he chose to keep. She failed to consider that Lewis was capable of writing a mediocre work. When a man has been transformed by his loyal devotees into a literary legend, a literary god, it is difficult to accept and remember his humanness.

Nicholas Barker, in a review of *The C. S. Lewis Hoax,* called the work "a poisoned book," but also noted that the Lewis industry is a club, and clubs are prone to enthusiasm and quarrels.[39] He stated that Lindskoog

37. Barfield et al., "Responses to Lindskoog's essay 'Some Problems in C. S. Lewis Scholarship,'" 10.

38. Ibid., 11.

39. Barker, "C. S. Lewis, Darkly," 367, 359.

"embarrassed the Lewis 'establishment' who have retorted with surprising sharpness."[40] Lindskoog continued her assault, publishing *Light in the Shadowlands* in 1994, and *Sleuthing C. S. Lewis: More Light in the Shadowlands* in 2001. As a result of her incessant probes into both the character of Hooper and the particularities of the editorial decisions he made in editing the posthumous Lewis works, Lindskoog found herself as "Criticized and shunned . . . an outsider, displaced from the Lewis industry."[41] In 2003, Alastair Fowler published the article "C. S. Lewis: Supervisor" in which he stated that Lewis had showed him unfinished or abandoned works which included "After Ten Years," *The Dark Tower*, and *Till We Have Faces*.[42] A. N. Wilson wrote, "What strikes an outsider is how violently the C. S. Lewis devotees seem to dislike one another."[43]

As unseemly as the Lindskoog versus Hooper debate is, it is also part of the Lewis legacy.[44] Lewis inspired incredible devotion among his followers, devotion which brought Lindskoog and Hooper across the Atlantic Ocean for an opportunity to meet their hero, one of whom had married Lewis in her mind and the other seeing himself as the son Lewis never had. They saw themselves as standard bearers and guardians of the Lewis legacy. One is hard-pressed to think of another lay evangelist who has inspired this kind of devotion to the personhood of the evangelist.

This devotion to the person of Lewis is worth examining. Beversluis noted that Lewis scholars and writers fall into two categories: critics and admirers. In the category of admirers, Beversluis classified them as works of scholarly merit and works that venerate Lewis so much he is transformed into a "cult figure."[45] These works have more in common with hagiography than with scholarship. Commenting on commonly found exaggerations, Beversluis wrote, "To praise him as brilliant in debate

40. Ibid., 360.

41. Joeckel, *The C. S. Lewis Phenomenon* , 363.

42. Fowler, "C. S. Lewis: Supervisor," 71.

43. Wilson, *C. S. Lewis*, xv.

44. Douglas Gresham stated that Lindskoog's "fanciful theories" have largely been discredited. Svendsen, "Behind the Wardrobe." Though some in the field of Lewis studies would hope that this would be the end of it, the conflict elevated, in the minds of some, questions about the reliability of the Lewis canon. It also divided Lewis scholars along lines of loyalty to either Lindskoog or Hooper. Joe Christopher is one of the scholars who defended Lindskoog. One of the scholars who defended Walter Hooper is Michael Ward. See Ward's "They Didn't Have Email." Samuel Joeckel also examined the Hooper-Lindskoog conflict in his 2013 book, *The C. S. Lewis Phenomenon*.

45. Beversluis, *C. S. Lewis and the Search for Rational Religion*, 18

would be altogether inadequate; we must be assured that C. S. Lewis could have matched wits with any man who ever lived."[46]

Beversluis also noted that when he published his book, which is a critical study of Lewis's philosophical arguments, he expected criticism but what he did not expect was the "*kind* of criticism" he received.[47] He stated that Lewis's devotees claimed his book was not a critique, but an assault on Lewis, that he was "unfair," "underhanded," "intellectually dishonest," "despicable," and "a Lewis basher."[48] Bruce Edwards, a prominent C. S. Lewis scholar, placed Beversluis's book at number two on his list of "The Five Worst Works *About* C. S. Lewis" and wrote, "The most charitable thing that can be said here is that it is out of print and will likely remain such."[49] Obviously Edwards's words would not be interpreted by many as a charitable assessment, but would be seen as defensive for Lewis and dismissive of Beversluis. Beversluis wrote a cogent, well-reasoned work the arguments within which one can agree or disagree with, but to label it as an inferior work—which clearly the term "worst" connotes—on a list which, in effect, informs readers to avoid it, hardly seems reasonable. Interestingly enough, the number one book on Edwards's list of the worst books about Lewis is A. N. Wilson's *C. S. Lewis: A Biography*. Edwards wrote, "The chronology may be the only thing right in this pedantic manual of ill-conceived character assassination."[50] Wilson's biography is clearly not character assassination, and usage of such rhetoric by Edwards is dismissive of a significant work. Wilson's literary criticism of Lewis's works is insightful and does not warrant placement on a list of the worst books about Lewis. Certainly it is not difficult to think of some hagiographical works on Lewis that contribute nothing new to the field of Lewis studies and which may in fact be more appropriate for a list on the worst books about Lewis.

For those standing outside the Lewis phenomenon the elevation of Lewis, an Oxford literary scholar, into an apostle of Christianity whose works almost seem to connote canonical status can seem odd. For the evangelism scholar, the devotion to Lewis reveals that there is more occurring than simply a gifted expositor explaining the faith to the masses.

46. Ibid., 18.
47. Ibid., 10.
48. Ibid.
49. Edwards, "A Selective Bibliography of C. S. Lewis's Works."
50. Ibid.

Joeckel argues that for many reading Lewis's works is a profound spiritual experience which is transformative and because Lewis is the communicator of Mere Christianity and "unmediated truths of the faith," he achieves "quasi-divine status."[51] It needs to be noted that some read Lewis because they find his apologetic works convincing, or at least appealing. Some read Lewis's stories because they derive enjoyment from them. Some people read his literary criticism to drink long at the well of a scholar who was well respected in his field. For some, Lewis serves not just as a scholar and a teacher, not just a writer of enjoyable stories, not just as a popular translator of complex theological ideas, but as a spiritual father; one can see this in the devotion of the Lewis followers to their spiritual master. One of the reasons why Beversluis, Wilson, and others who have been critical of Lewis have received such extreme criticism and reaction to their works is because they have, in the eyes of some, profaned a sacred teacher.[52]

1.2 An Odd Choice Explored

A. N. Wilson described Lewis as argumentative, a bully, a man who drank "deep" and frequently, and a smoker who burned though "sixty cigarettes a day, between pipes."[53] He enjoyed lewd stories and liked to roar out "unfashionable views in Oxford bars."[54] Many of Lewis's devotees were outraged when Wilson's biography first appeared in 1990. Many, no doubt, would have agreed with Bruce Edwards that Wilson's portrait of Lewis was character assassination, but those who knew Lewis well over a course of years portray not a stained-glass version of the man, but a very human one.

Alastair Fowler, who knew Lewis both as his DPhil supervisor and later as a friend, said that when he was in the United States he heard people talk about a different Lewis than he knew. Fowler noted that if Lewis were a saint he was not an "austere" or "narrowly pious" kind of

51. Joeckel, *The C. S. Lewis Phenomenon*, 330.

52. Andrew G. Walker, founder of the C. S. Lewis Centre, lamented how "the Lewis aficionados" treated his criticisms of Lewis "as treachery." Walker, *Notes from a Wayward Son*, 303.

53. Wilson, *C. S. Lewis,* xii.

54. Ibid.

one.[55] The Lewis he knew "smoked incessantly," "drank more than was altogether good for him," and enjoyed bawdy ballads.[56] In the last years of Lewis's life, when Fowler visited him at the Kilns or in Ackland Nursing Home, the sort of topic Lewis now proposed that they talk about was "whether the pleasures of masturbation were keener than those of full intercourse."[57] When one considers the entirety of who Lewis was as a person, it is striking to consider the heights to which evangelicals and fundamentalists have elevated him.

On the surface, Lewis seems to be an odd choice to become one of the most significant lay evangelists of the twentieth century for a number of reasons, both professional and personal. He also seems to be an unusual choice ecclesiastically. One would certainly expect to find a greater preponderance of lay evangelists among the Methodists, Baptists, evangelicals, and fundamentalists than among the Anglicans.

When Lewis began to engage in the work of evangelism, his professional future looked promising. He did not possess a second-rate mind, nor was he a second-rate scholar. He graduated from Oxford University with a triple first: First in Classical Honour Moderations (1920), First in Literae Humaniores (1921), and a First in English Language and Literature (1923). In 1921, he won the Chancellor's Prize for an English essay in a university-wide essay competition. Lewis was a philosophy tutor for University College (Oxford) for the academic year of 1924–1925. He secured a position in 1925 at Magdalen College (Oxford) as a tutor in English language and literature. In 1935, Lewis agreed to write for the Oxford History of English Literature (OHEL) series, the volume on 16th century English literature. He published in 1936 *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Traditions,* which received high praise and won The Gollancz Memorial Prize for Literature in 1937. Lewis was becoming known both inside and outside of Oxford as a brilliant literary scholar.

With a promising career in the university ahead of him, he chose to engage in an activity that was largely uncharacteristic of Oxford dons of his day, and certainly not highly valued by the vast majority of his colleagues. Furthermore, with his professional responsibilities as a tutor at Magdalen College, as a lecturer in the Oxford English Department, and with his scholarly commitments, he would not have the time it would take to become a successful practitioner of evangelism, nor would it seem

55. Fowler, "C. S. Lewis: Supervisor," 80.

56. Ibid.

57. Ibid.

that a scholar of his capabilities would want to jeopardize his academic reputation and chances at advancement.

There is no doubt Lewis gambled with his academic reputation when he chose to engage in Christian evangelism. His biographers and friends tell a remarkably similar story of Lewis's alienation and marginalization. Chad Walsh in recounting some of the conversations he had in Oxford stated,

> Among the book-store clerks, and still more among professional scholars, I encountered some sad shaking of the head because Lewis has not devoted himself exclusively to literary research. One of the editors of the Oxford University Press praised *The Allegory of Love* in the most unrestrained language and added that Lewis's subsequent career had been one long decline and fall.[58]

Humphrey Carpenter wrote, "Lewis, in fact, had offended against Oxford etiquette not by becoming a Christian, but by making a public matter of his conversion."[59] George Sayer, Lewis's student at Oxford, wrote of Lewis's colleagues, "They most especially could not forgive the fact that the man was serious in wanting to convert others."[60] The writer of the 1947 article in *Time* magazine described Lewis's Oxford predicament this way:

> Outside his own Christian circle, Lewis is not particularly popular with his Oxford colleagues. Some resent his large student following. Others criticize his "cheap" performances on the BBC and sneer at him as a "popularizer." There are complaints about his rudeness (he is inclined to bellow "Nonsense!" in the heat of an argument when a conventionally polite 25-word circumlocution would be better form). But their most serious charge is that Lewis' theological pamphleteering is a kind of academic heresy.[61]

58. Walsh, *C. S. Lewis: Apostle to the Skeptics*, 19.

59. Carpenter, *The Inklings*, 207.

60. Sayer, *Jack,* 174. Another student of Lewis at Magdalen College, Oxford, was Derek Brewer, who suggested to his alma mater, long after Lewis's death, that some of Lewis's letters were for auction and that the college should purchase them. He was told that Lewis "had not been very well liked by the Fellows and there was no wish to gather an archive or mementoes of his long Fellowship." Brewer, "C. S. Lewis: Sixty Years On," 69.

61. "Don v. Devil," 72.

In Oxford, Lewis was admired by some and detested by many.[62] It needs to be remembered that some people did not like Lewis not due to his religious beliefs, but because he was argumentative and, in the eyes of some, a bully.[63] One mistake some Lewis devotees make is to wrongly assume that the only reason why Lewis was disliked in Oxford was because he was a champion of Christianity. Such a view naively underestimates the impact of Lewis's personality upon his circumstances. Tom McAlindon, a PhD student of Lewis's at Cambridge, wrote that Lewis was "renowned in academic circles as an overpowering and combative intellectual personality, impatient with fools."[64] Lewis's friend and personal physician, Robert E. Havard, wrote, "He could be intolerant, he could be abusive, and he made enemies."[65]

Lewis's engagement in evangelism and his combative personality cost him not only the respect of some of his colleagues but advancement within the university as well.[66] A. N. Wilson wrote, "In spite of its lacunae and eccentricities, the OHEL volume established Lewis beyond question as a giant among the pygmies of the Oxford English faculty, which made their failure to promote him to a professorship all the more surprising."[67]

62. Walsh also wrote, "General rumor has it that Lewis is considered a formidable enemy by the 'progressive element' of the Oxford faculty—particularly those who are infected with what Robert Hutchins calls 'scientism.'" Walsh, *C. S. Lewis: Apostle to the Skeptics*, 20.

63. A. L. Rowse, fellow of All Souls College (Oxford), who knew Lewis from 1926 onwards referred to this trait in Lewis as his "perpetual disputatiousness." Rowse wrote, "John Betjeman, a gentle soul on his way to being a good poet, could not bear it, wilted before the intellectual bullying, did no work and was sent down." Rowse, *Glimpses of the Great*, 156.

64. McAlindon, "C. S. Lewis Remembered," 36.

65. Havard, "Philia," 225.

66. In the obituary of Lewis for the British Academy, Helen Gardner wrote that when she returned to Oxford in the 1940s, he was "by far the most impressive and exciting person in the Faculty of English." Gardner, "Clive Staples Lewis 1898–1963," 424. Despite having a major work of literary history, and despite his lectures filling the largest lecture rooms available, he was passed over for the Merton Professorship of English Literature. When another chair became available in the English department, he was not seriously considered as a candidate. He also failed to be elected to the professorship of Poetry. Gardner wrote that the reason for these rebuffs was "a suspicion had arisen that Lewis was so committed to what he himself called 'hot-gospelling' that he would have had little time for the needs of what had become a very large undergraduate school and for the problems of organization and supervision presented by the rapidly growing numbers of research students in English Literature." Ibid., 425.

67. Wilson, *C. S. Lewis*, 244, 245.

Lewis insisted on evangelizing even though it was sabotaging his academic career. Wilson stated, "It was not his failure to be a good graduate supervisor which cost him an Oxford chair, it was *Mere Christianity,* and *The Screwtape Letters*: the fact that he wrote them, and the far more damaging fact that millions of people, as they do to this day, wanted to read them." [68]

Even some of his closest friends, such as Owen Barfield and J. R. R. Tolkien, were not always comfortable with their friend's evangelistic enterprises. Barfield, in an interview with Lyle Dorsett, confessed that he was "bothered" and "embarrassed" by his friend's zeal for the conversion of non-believers.[69] Tolkien was not overly enthusiastic about Lewis's theological writings and believed Lewis should leave theology to the professionals; he once referred to Lewis as an "Everyman's Theologian," a characterization which was not meant as a compliment.[70] Alan Jacobs wrote, "What Lewis took upon himself was, in Tolkien's judgment, none of Lewis's business: the defense of the Christian faith was the province of the ordained priesthood."[71]

Tolkien was not the only one who felt Lewis trespassed into fields for which he had no professional training or authority. Chad Walsh, in conversations with British theologians in the summer of 1948, heard similar views; "Who, they seemed to be asking, is this upstart who has not had the benefit of formal theological training or the laying on of hands and who yet presumes to preach the gospel to a vaster audience than we can reach?"[72] Lewis would have responded that he began this work because the professional theologians failed to write for the laity. He wrote to Katherine Farrer, the wife of the renowned Oxford theologian Austin Farrer, on Whitsunday (May 20, 1956),

> I've just been wildly excited by the preface to Austin's *Short Bible*. I don't know that I ever got so much from so few pages before: deepest problems disarmed with a turn of the wrist. If only real theologians like him had started doing *oeuvres de vulgarisation* a little earlier, the world wd. have been spared C. S. L.[73]

68. Ibid., 246.
69. Mitchell, "Bearing the Weight of Glory," 6, 7.
70. Carpenter, *J. R. R. Tolkien*, 151.
71. Jacobs, *The Narnian,* 199.
72. Walsh, "Impact on America," 109.
73. *The Collected Letters of C S. Lewis, Vol. III.*

One wonders, even if more theologians had been engaging in this kind of work, if the world would have truly been spared Lewis as his sense of being a literary evangelist and apologist was so profound. Despite even having some of his closest friends object to his evangelistic endeavors, and even with one of his best friends employing derisive terms, Lewis remained committed to the evangelistic task.

Lewis seems an unusual choice to become a significant lay evangelist not just due to his promising academic career, not just being willing to risk his reputation, not just taking time away from scholarly pursuits, but also because he was limited in his exposure to the average man on the street. With the exception of his military service and with the exception of his home life that Mrs. Janie Moore created for him, he spent the vast majority of his life in academic settings, around students and faculty.[74] The previous paragraphs noted what Lewis was risking and what the academy was losing with this brilliant literary scholar becoming preoccupied with Christian evangelism, but what failed to be noted were the limitations Lewis brought to the task of evangelism. He had long lived a privileged life from being the son of a successful solicitor in Belfast, raised in a household with servants, educated at public schools and at the most elite university in the entirety of the United Kingdom.[75] What did he know about those laboring in the coal fields, or eking out a living in the inner-city slums of Birmingham or Manchester? As a person who worked and lived in the pinnacle of the English intellectual establishment, he was unaccustomed to speaking and writing on a level which would be accessible for the average man on the street.

Though Lewis was raised in the church, for many years he was a professed atheist and had been away from the church. He had severed himself from church life, rituals, language, and culture. Yet, after his conversion experience he felt the need to engage in evangelism. The question this presents is, was it arrogant on his part to believe he was suited for the work? Furthermore, he went into this work, encumbered with a peculiar and unconventional domestic situation. He was living with another man's wife (Mrs. Moore) and helping to raise her daughter (Maureen Moore). This unusual relationship could have raised credibility concerns of whether his character was trustworthy or not and blackened not only his reputation, but the message he was communicating. Did he even

74. Lewis's complex relationship with Mrs. Moore will be covered in Chapter Four.

75. In Great Britain public schools are what Americans refer to as private schools.

consider the potential scandal this could create or was he simply convinced of his powers to maintain the secrecy of this relationship? For all of these reasons and more, Lewis appears as an odd choice to become one of the twentieth century's most significant and successful lay evangelists.

Lewis has been received warmly and sometimes enthusiastically across a wide section of Christendom. He has been embraced by Roman Catholics, even though he was raised a Protestant in sectarian Belfast. One of his closest friends on Oxford's English faculty, J. R. R. Tolkien, long suspected Lewis of holding deep-seated prejudices against Roman Catholics.[76] Lewis has been embraced by American evangelicals even though his personal life and habits were not in alignment with their code of conduct. In the bastion of American collegiate Evangelicalism, Wheaton College, the alma mater of Billy Graham, is the Marion E. Wade Center. In part, the center is dedicated to preserving the papers, books, and personal effects of Lewis, a scholar who in the 1940s would not have been allowed to teach at Wheaton College due to his vision of Scripture, his relationship with another man's wife, and also his habits of smoking and drinking. Wheaton certainly makes no effort to hide Lewis's habits of smoking and drinking, but not all evangelicals are comfortable with the real Lewis. A. N. Wilson, commenting on the American evangelical reimaging of Lewis, wrote,

> In the United States, among Lewis's Protestant devotees, there is an analogous awkwardness about his passion for alcohol and tobacco. Some of Lewis's American publishers actually ask for references to drinking and smoking to be removed from his work, and one has the strong feeling that this is not so much because they themselves disapprove of the activities as because they need a Lewis who was, against all evidence, a non-smoker and a lemonade-drinker.[77]

This desire to repackage Lewis in order to make him more acceptable to some palates is not new. Frank Cole, who ran The Bible Library Publishing Company in Japan which was related to the Conservative Baptist Foreign Mission Society, wrote to Jocelyn Gibb requesting to publish a Japanese version of *Miracles*. Cole asked if they could also make certain omissions in the text to take out those things which might upset his Baptist constituency. Lewis answered in a letter (May 9, 1960) that he

76. Carpenter, *J. R. R. Tolkien*, 151.

77. Wilson, *C. S. Lewis*, xvi.

was afraid that he could not agree to a Japanese translation under these conditions. He wrote, "Small though they are, their aim clearly is that I should be disguised as a fundamentalist and a non-smoker. I shd. be trying to attract a particular public under false pretences."[78]

The evangelicals and the fundamentalists are not the only ones who attempt to remake Lewis in their image. Even Lewis's own stepson, Douglas Gresham, implies in an interview that if Lewis were alive today he would most likely be nondenominational.[79] Though it is true that Lewis was an advocate of mere Christianity, and though it is also true that Gresham is a nondenominational Christian, what is clear is that Lewis remained committed to the Anglican Church all the years from his conversion until his death.

As with so many other things about Lewis, this too was not one-dimensional. He worshipped for over thirty years at Holy Trinity Anglican Church, Headington Quarry, and is buried in the church cemetery. His former student Dom Bede Griffiths, to whom Lewis dedicated *Surprised by Joy,* on numerous occasions attempted to proselytize Lewis to Roman Catholicism.[80] Lewis wrote,

> You, in your charity, are anxious to convert me: but I am not in the least anxious to convert you. You think my specifically Protestant beliefs a tissue of damnable errors: I think your specifically Catholic beliefs a mass of comparatively harmless human tradition which may be fatal to certain souls under special conditions, but which I think suitable for you.[81]

Lewis described himself as an ordinary lay person of the Anglican Church.[82] He was not overly concerned with the internal squabbles in his church and was more concerned with articulating the central parts of the faith common to all Christians. Walter Hooper wrote, "I remember the first (and only) time I mentioned 'low' and 'high' churchmanship in his presence. He looked at me as though I had offered him poison."[83]

78. *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis, Vol. III*, 1150.

79. Duncan, "The Magic Never Ends—The Life and Work of C. S. Lewis."

80. Alan Richard Griffiths graduated from Magdalen College, Oxford in 1929, converted to Roman Catholicism in 1931, and was ordained to the priesthood in 1940.

81. *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis, Vol. II*, 178.

82. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, viii.

83. Hooper, "Preface," *Christian Reflections*, xi.

Lewis, though not interested in the internal conflicts, remained a committed Anglican. Of course, there were also the strong family connections and heritage as both his grandfather and great-grandfather had served as parish priests, and his great-great-grandfather had served as a bishop. Though Lewis was committed to the Anglican Church, it is intriguing and somewhat odd that he who became an internationally known evangelist for Christianity seemed lukewarm about the institutional church. He attended church out of duty and by no means was he an ideal parishioner. He hated how it wasted time and the hustle of it, the awful hymns, and he liked the organ least of all the musical instruments.[84] George Sayer wrote, "Ordinarily, he attended the eight o'clock communion service, because he disliked almost all church music and few hymns were sung at this service."[85] He attended church, but did not seem to enjoy its aesthetics, the music, or the ambiance.[86] He was often critical of the sermons and did not seem to find much intellectual nourishment.[87] As an evangelist for Christianity, he seems to lack an appreciation for the earthly and very human manifestation of the bride of Christ. As Richard W. Ladborough wrote, "But I think it true to say, as others have also noticed, that neither in conversation nor in his works did he show much interest in organized religion. He was orthodox in belief but seemed to have little sense of the Church."[88]

84. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy,* 234. Lewis also recorded in his diary his disdain for organ music (July 8, 1923). *All My Road Before Me*, 255.

85. Sayer, *Jack,* 163.

86. Lewis mellowed on these issues as the years passed. He knew he had to attend church out of obedience to the Scripture's command that one has to partake of the Lord's Supper, and he believed that one could not do that without attending church. Lewis wrote that even though he judged the hymns to be substandard both lyrically and musically, as the years past, he came to understand that they were being sung with real devotion by an old saint whose boots he was not fit to clean. Lewis, "Answers to Questions on Christianity," in *God in the Dock*, 61, 62. For an article which describes Lewis's minimalist approach to congregational life see his former vicar's essay: Head, "C. S. Lewis as a Parishioner."

87. An example of this occurred when he wrote to his brother July 20, 1940 that he had gone to church for the first time in weeks as he had been hampered by an illness. The Reverend Arthur W. Blanchett preached, and Lewis noted that he did not gain much from it. It was in that service that Lewis was struck with the idea for a new work *As One Devil to Another,* which would eventually become *The Screwtape Letters*. *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Vol. II*, 426, 427.

88. Ladborough, "In Cambridge," 103. Alan Bede Griffiths, Lewis's former student and longtime friend, echoed this noting that Lewis had an "almost total lack of concern about the Church as an institution." Griffiths, "The Adventure of Faith," 19.