C.S.Lewis
Milan, 17 November 2005

Ladies and gentlemen, there is a sense in which you have always been in my mind. Let me explain. From the time I was a small boy they hung in my home, in the place of honour, a beautiful tapestry. It was a picture of the most beautiful building I could imagine. But there was nothing on the tapestry to indicate that it was other than imaginary. This dream-building was one of the most pleasant parts of my early life. Then, only a few years ago, on my first visit to Milano I saw it! I saw the dream-building in the tapestry – and it is your Duomo! But since I've been coming to Italy I've become used to finding it a country where dreams come true. And wouldn't you know that if Narnia existed anywhere – it would of course be in Italy! I must also congratulate Professor Rialti on his translation of some of the best of C.S.Lewis. I could not be more happy. Congratulations!

To be invited to share my personal memories of C.S.Lewis in such a place as this, and in such company as this, is a very great honour. I am hugely conscious that men who knew C.S.Lewis very well, and for a long time, would have been tell you much more than I can. I do not rank with them, but I am happy to be numbered with those hundreds who, either meeting him briefly, or who knew him more intimately, found Lewis unforgettable.

I apologise for the amount of autobiography that my talk contains, and I want to make it absolutely clear from the outset that my acquaintance with Lewis was in comparison to that of many of his friends, a mere flea-bite. Owen Barfield, who died at the age of 99 in 1997, met Lewis in 1919. Lewis's beloved brother, Warnie, who knew Jack Lewis more intimately than anyway. And there was J.R.R.Tolkien, who changed Lewis's life almost more than anyone. If this were twenty or thirty years ago, these are the men you *should* have invited. But as they are now in Heaven, I am touched by your graciousness in inviting me.

My introduction to Lewis's writings goes back to May 1953 when I was nearing my final term at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Immediately I had finished my degree I went straight into the army. Days before I was drafted I found a copy of Lewis's *Miracles*, and this went with me. During basic training I kept *Miracles* hidden beneath my shirt, which made for a good deal of discomfort during calisthenics and bayonet practice. However, in those little ten-minute breaks between firing bazookas and throwing grenades, I managed to read a page or so.

By November 1954 I was working for some chaplains at Fort Bragg, and I began corresponding with Lewis shortly after this. Before mentioning that letter, I should say that I was becoming familiar with what I later came to see was of the most characteristic things about him – his lack of interest in himself and his huge interest in almost everything *outside* himself. It will sound foreign to those of us who have been trained to treat personal identity, self-respect and egotism as highly desirable, even the *source* of morality. It was while there I had my first letter from Lewis, dated 30 November 1954. He clearly did not want me to think too highly of *him* because he began by saying, 'I am glad if I have been the instrument of Our Lord's help to you: in His Hands almost any instrument will do, otherwise none. 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 to repent them.'

We continued to correspond, and it was while I was lecturing on English Literature at the University of Kentucky at Lexington in the early 1960s that Lewis invited me to come and see him. I had an appointment with Lewis at the house – The Kilns, Kilns Lane in Headington Quarry – on Monday the 10th June. However, I'd been warned that his house, some five miles from Oxford, was very difficult to find, and on Friday afternoon, the 7th June, almost as soon as I'd arrived in Oxford, I went out to see if I could find his house. I ran into Lewis's housekeeper, and she urged me to go and call on then and there.

I arrived at The Kilns about 4 o'clock. The house faces uphill, and when I walked round to the front door I saw a man with his back to the window reading. I rang the bell and regretted bitterly that I was bothering Lewis. Never had I seen myself in so unfavourable a light. But it was too late. Someone was unlocking the door, and there stood C.S.Lewis.

It turned out that I'd arrived at tea time, a favourite time of the day for Lewis who was a great, a *monumental* tea drinker. 'You can't get a cup of tea large enough or a book long enough to suit me,' he said one time.[1] I too was a lover of tea, but my intake had never been as gargantuan as his. As soon as we'd finished one pot of tea, Lewis would go to the kitchen and make another, and another. I was quite a shy young Southern American at that time, but after what seemed gallons of it, I asked if I might be shown the 'bathroom.' Remember, I'd only just arrived in England, and I did not then know that in most homes the bathroom and the toilet are separate rooms.

[1]Preface, C.S.Lewis, *Of This and Other Worlds*, ed. Walter Hooper (London: Collins, 1982), p. 9.

With a touch of mock formality Lewis conducted me to what was really the bathroom. He flung down several towels, produced several tablets of soap, and before closing the door on me he asked if I had everything I needed for my 'bath.' 'Oh, yes!' I said with some alarm. By this time I was very uncomfortable, and I finally got up enough nerve to go back in the sitting-room and say that it was not really a 'bath' I wanted. Lewis was roaring with laughter, and he said, 'Now that will break you of those silly American euphemisms. Let's start over again. *Where* do you want to go?'

Along with an interesting lesson in semantics I was catapulted into a more interesting life than I'd imagined I'd enjoy in his company. He made a great many verbal distinctions, and pointed out several deficiencies in my logic. Although I'd never known conversation like it, it was to me, as Kirkpatrick's talk was to him, 'red beef and strong beer.'[2] I particularly enjoyed his literary horsing-about.

In any event, the effect of all this clear talk was that by the time I had to leave I liked Lewis so much that I foresaw a life ahead of me that would be very dull compared to the few hours I'd just had. I remember to this day how *very* much I liked Lewis. He was beyond anything I hoped for, and certainly generous with his time.

Lewis walked with me to the bus stop, with a visit to his local pub, the Ampleforth Arms, which was just beside it. We'd just finished our pint when the bus arrived. I thanked Lewis for giving me so much of his time. He looked surprised, and said, 'you're not getting away! You're coming to the Inklings meeting on Monday.'

As you probably know, the Thursday evening meetings of the Inklings had ended in 1949, but the Tuesday morning meetings continued, with one alteration. After Lewis became a Professor at Cambridge in 1955, he came home for the weekend and went back to Cambridge on Monday afternoon. For this reason, the meetings were changed to Monday morning. In 1962 they moved the venue from the Bird and Baby across the street to the Lamb and Flag. The meeting was attended by most of the Inklings, and I've never witnessed anything like the conversation on that occasion. Lewis by no means did all the talking, or even much of it. He picked up on something I said, and threw it like a ball around the room. The subject was commented on my others, and pretty soon I was saying things that certainly did not represent my usual, muddled way of talking. We all know people who make us feel insecure and around whom we sound like fools. Lewis was the opposite. He brought you out. He encouraged you. You were your best in his

[2] *Surprised by Joy* (London: Bles, 1955), ch. IX, p. 131.

company. By the time we'd had our pints and pork pies, and the meeting was ended, I was stunned at what had happened. To paraphrase Shakespeare, Lewis was not only 'witty in himself', but the 'cause of wit' in other men.[3]

Lewis invited me back to the Kilns on Thursday. He then suggested I come out on Sunday so we could go to Communion together at Holy Trinity Church. After the service that Sunday we returned to the Kilns for breakfast. Lewis enjoyed cooking breakfast, and there was excellent conversation over fried eggs, bacon, sausage and toast.

After this we settled into a regular routine of thrice-weekly meetings: Monday at the Lamb and Flag, Thursdays at The Kilns, and Sundays when we went to Church together. Most of the Christians I know keep their secular and their Christian lives so separate I'm sometimes surprised to find people I've known a long time *are* Christians. Lewis did not wear his faith on his sleeve, but it was evident in, it coloured, everything he said. I think he was simply the way Christians ought to be if they take the Faith really seriously. He was the most *converted* man I have ever met! If it's true, as they say, that humour is based on perspective - seeing things in their right proportion and context - God must have the greatest sense humour of anyone, with Lewis not far behind.

For many of us everything in the Scriptures is more or less settled, and we have an habitual way of thinking of them. For Lewis nothing in the Bible had become dulled by convention. I remember him talking about 'poor Lazarus,' who had to die all over again. I wondered who this 'poor Lazarus' was. 'Is Lazarus a *neighbour*?' I asked. 'No,' said Lewis, 'he was the brother of Mary and Martha.' I almost blurted out 'Oh, you mean a Biblical character,' as though Lazarus was not *real* as you and I are. Lewis was writing a poem about Lazarus and he was toying with the notion that, as Lazarus had to die again after Our Lord had brought him back from the grave, he and not St Stephen should be called the Church's pro-martyr. Thereafter I saw not only Lazarus but everything recorded in the Gospels in an entirely new light.

At this point I will depart from strict chronology and talk about Lewis's writings, some of which I knew before I met Lewis, and some of which I learned later. Some of the people who have interviewed me, and who want their work to be accepted by non-Christians almost beg me to say that Lewis would have *been* much the same, *written* much the same, whether he was a Christian or not. No! He is the one man we *can't* say that about!

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[3] William Shakespeare, *Henry VI, Pt. 2* (1597), I, ii, 10-11.

I feel compelled to bring in something that has been growing in my mind for the last dozen or so years. Lewis had always been brilliant, as an atheist as well as a Christian. Before his conversion he could write well, and he was more ambitious than at any time in his life. But apart from two his early volumes of verse, nothing happened. I believe the whole thing can be summed up in five words: *Lewis had nothing to say*. It really does appear that when Lewis cared more about God than being a writer, God *gave* him things to say. I use the word 'gave' advisedly, but I think God *gave* Lewis and Tolkien – sub-creators both - the books we love so much.

I am convinced that Lewis's conversion, in which Tolkien and Hugo Dyson played a vital part, is of vital importance to who he was, what he wrote, and the story of the Inklings. In 1929 Lewis had become a Theist, but no more. He could not understand how Christ fitted into Christianity. Lewis wrote to his old friend Arthur Greeves on 22 September 1931 with the news that Tolkien and Dyson had dined with him on the evening of 19 September. The three of them had a 'long, satisfying talk' which began with a stroll in Addison's Walk, was interrupted at 3 in the morning when Tolkien went home, and continued for another hour. Arthur pressed for information about that 'long, satisfying talk' and on 18 October 1931 Lewis explained what happened. 'What Dyson and Tolkien showed me was this,' said Lewis,

> 'that if I met the idea of sacrifice in a Pagan story I didn't mind it at all: again, that if I met the idea of a god sacrificing himself to himself…I liked it very much and was mysteriously moved by it: again, that the idea of the dying and reviving god…similarly moved me provided I met it anywhere *except* in the Gospels. The reason was that in Pagan stories I was prepared to feel the myth as profound and suggestive of meanings beyond my grasp... Now the story of Christ is simply a true myth: a myth working on us in the same way as the others, but with this tremendous difference that *it really happened*.'[4]

Years before Lewis had complained of the 'two hemispheres' of his mind being 'in the sharpest contrast. On the one side a many-islanded sea of poetry and myth; on the other a glib and shallow "rationalism". Nearly all that I loved I believed to be imaginary; nearly all that I believed to be real I thought grim and meaningless.'[5] On the eve of his conversion he wrote in a poem 'Oh who will reconcile in me both maid and mother'[6] – that is Reason

[4] *Collected Letters of C.S.Lewis: Volume I,* pp. 976-7.
[5] *Surprised by Joy*, ch. XI, p. 161
[6] *Collected Poems of C.S.Lewis*, Edited by Walter Hooper (London: HarperCollins, 1994), 'Reason', p. 95.

and Imagination. With his conversion they *were* reconciled and in 1931 he wrote to T.S.Eliot about his belief in 'imagination as a truth-bearing faculty.'[7] Putting it another way, Reason is a way of Telling, while imagining is a way of Showing. Lewis was good at both: sometimes Reason – telling – worked best; sometimes Imagination – showing – worked best.

Well, now that Lewis is a Christian, what happened? The Inklings as a group was taking shape. Shortly after that remarkable evening that began in Addison's Walk, Lewis wrote to Arthur on 22 November 1931 saying: 'It has become a regular custom that Tolkien should drop in on me of a Monday morning and drink a glass. This is one of the pleasantest spots in the week. 'My happiest hours,' Lewis was later to say, 'are spent with three or four old friends…sitting up till the small hours in someone's college rooms talking nonsense, poetry, theology, metaphysics over been, tea, and pipes. There's no sound I like better than adult male laughter.'[8]

On 4 February 1933 Lewis wrote excitedly to Arthur Greeves: 'Since term began I have had a delightful time reading a children's story which Tolkien has just written.'[9] It was *The Hobbit* (1937), the first work by an Inkling to become a classic. From there Lewis and Tolkien went on to plan a joint project. They were dissatisfied with much of what they found in stories, and according to Tolkien, 'Lewis said to me one day: "Tollers, there is too little of what we really like in stories. I am afraid we shall have to try to write some ourselves." We agreed that he should try "space-travel", and I should try "time-travel".'[10] They had in mind stories that were 'mythopoeic' - having the quality of Myth - but disguised as thrillers. Tolkien's wrote 'The Lost Road,' the story of a journey back through time, and Lewis wrote *Out of the Silent Planet* (1938).

While Lewis was still writing *Out of the Silent Planet*, Tolkien began his masterpiece, *The Lord of the Rings*, which was read and discussed during many meetings of The Inklings. This work, and that of Lewis, cannot be separated from one of Tolkien most important literary theories - that of 'sub-creation' mentioned in his lecture 'On Fairy Stories'. According to Tolkien, while Man was disgraced by the Fall and for a long time estranged from God, he is not wholly lost or changed from his original nature. He retains the likeness of his Maker. Man shows that he is made in the image and likeness

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[7] *Collected Letters of C.S.Lewis, Volume III*, Letter to T.S.Eliot of 2 June 1931.
[8] Roger Lancelyn Green and Walter Hooper, *C.S.Lewis: A Biography* (London: Collins, 1974; HarperCollins, revised and expanded edition, 2002), ch. 6, p. 170.
[9] *Collected Letters of C.S.Lewis: Volume II*, p. 96.
[10] *The Letters of J.R.R.Tolkien*, Letter to Charlotte and Denis Plimmer, 9 February 1967, p. 378.

of the Maker when, acting in a 'derivative mode',[11] he writes stories which reflect the eternal Beauty and Wisdom. Imagination is 'the power of giving to ideal creations the inner consistency of reality.'[12] When Man draws things from the Primary World and creates a Secondary World he is acting as a 'sub-creator'.[13] His sub-creations may have several effects. Man needs to be freed from the drab blur of triteness, familiarity and possessiveness which impair his sight, and such stories help him recover 'a clear view'[14] of the Creation.

Lewis was to make the theory of 'sub-creation' his own. And to this he would add his important distinction between Fantasy and Imagination. Fantasy, when directed onto something which purports to be 'real life' is 'compensatory, and 'we run to it from the disappointments and humiliations of the real world. It seems us back to the real world undivinely discontented. For it is all flattery to the ego.'[15] *Imagination*, on the other hand, takes us right out of ourselves – to Middle Earth, to Malacandra, to Narnia – and affords a view of reality from many angles. A 'clear view' of Creation, and as Lewis put it so well, 'An enlargement of our being.'

In fact, Lewis saw this as an opportunity to put into effect one the things that was to be a hallmark of his writing. It is a 'Supposal' - suppose there are rational creatures on other planets that are unfallen? Suppose we meet them? 'I like the whole interplanetary idea,' he said, 'as a *mythology* and simply wished to conquer for my own (Christian) point of view what has always hitherto been used by the opposite side.'[16] The result was his novel, *Out of the Silent Planet* (1938), in which the adventurers from Earth discover on Malacandra (Mars) three races of beings who have never fallen, and are not in need of redemption because they are obedient to Maleldil (God). When some of his readers failed to see what he was 'getting at', he concluded that 'any amount of theology can now be smuggled into people's minds under cover of romance without their knowing it.'[17]

And here it is appropriate to say something about Originality, a quality prized extremely highly by modern writers and artists. Although nothing could be further from the thought of Tolkien and Lewis. ' "Originality" is

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[11] J.R.R.Tolkien, *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*, Edited by Christopher Tolkien (London: Allen & Unwin, 1983), 'On Fairy-Stories', p. 145
[12] Ibid., p. 138.
[13] Ibid., p. 144.
[14] Ibid., p. 146.
[15] C.S.Lewis, *Of This and Other Worlds*, Edited by Walter Hooper (London: Collins, 1982; Fount, 2000), 'On Three Ways of Writing for Children', p. 50.
[16] *Collected Letters of C.S.Lewis: Volume II*, Letter to Roger Lancelyn Green of 28 December 1938, p. 96.
[17] Ibid., Letter to Sister Penelope of 9 August 1939, p. 262.

the New Testament,' said Lewis, 'is quite plainly the prerogative of God alone; even within the triune being of God it seems to be confined to the Father. The duty and happiness of every other being is placed in being derivative, in reflecting like a mirror.'[18] Or, as he said in another place: 'No man who values originality will ever be original. But try to tell the truth as you see it, try to do any bit of work as well as it can be done for the work's sake, and what men call originality will come unsought.'[19]

Meanwhile, the Second World War had started, and God had plans for Lewis. During the next five years Lewis wrote *The Problem of Pain*, *The Screwtape Letters*, *Mere Christianity*, *The Abolition of Man*, *The Great Divorce*, and *Miracles* – and that at a time when he certainly had other things to think about, including bombs. It is as if he picked up his pen in 1939, and when he put it down again at the end of the War, he had provided Great Britain and the United States with a most popular and profound Christian apologetic.

Let me lay before you two passages I love from two writers I love. The first is this: 'Change is not progress unless the *core* remains unchanged. A small oak grows into a big oak: if it became a beech, that would not be growth, but mere change…Wherever there is real progress in knowledge there is some knowledge that is not superseded. Indeed, the very possibility of progress demands that there should be an *unchanging element*.'[20] Here's the other passage: 'The deposit of faith itself, or the truths which are contained in our venerable doctrine, is one thing, and the way in which they are expressed is another, retaining however the same sense and meaning.' [21]

The first was, of course, Lewis defining those non-negotiable beliefs which make up what he called 'Mere Christianity'. The second passage was from - can you guess? - Pope John XXIII's speech opening the Vatican Council on 11 October 1962. Here we have, side by side, two quite clear definitions of 'Mere Christianity,' about which Lewis commented:

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[18] C.S.Lewis, *Christian Reflections*, ed. Walter Hooper (London; Bles, 1967; Fount, 1998), 'Christianity and Literature', p. 8.

[19] C.S.Lewis, *Fern-seed and Elephants* (London: Fontana, 1975; Fount, 1998), 'Membership', p. 12.

[20] C.S.Lewis, *God in the Dock*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 'Dogma and the Universe', pp. 44-5.

[21] Pope John XXIII on opening Vatican II on 11 October 1962, quoted in Peter Hebblethwaite, *John XXIII: Pope of the Council* (London: HarperCollins, 1994), p. 432.

> 'Measured against the ages 'mere Christianity' turns out to be no insipid interdenominational transparency, but something positive, self-consistent, and inexhaustible.'[22]

Lewis did not intend for anyone to suppose that there is not more truths than what he brought together in his books, that one could do without the Church so long as you have 'Mere Christianity,' but that there are certain beliefs which one *must* accept if you're to call yourself a Christian at all.

I know that, like me, your attention was arrested when the future Benedict XVI cautioned the Cardinals meeting in Conclave about the 'dictatorship of relativism'. He knows better than anyone that this particular dictatorship would seek even to change 'the deposit of Faith' so that, it will NOT retain 'the same sense and meaning'. It gave me great joy to learn that when Cardinal Ratzinger gave the Fisher Lecture in Cambridge in 1988 he devoted it to Lewis's *The Abolition of Man*. That is Lewis's finest statements of Natural Law and if for some reason you were allowed to read only one of Lewis's books that's the one to choose!

If you will forgive me I would also like to mention that great Pope who spans the ages, John Paul II. I was overwhelmed when he sent word that he would like me to come to Rome. In the audience I had with him in 1984 he began by asking if 'I still love my old friend, C.S.Lewis.' He went on to ask what Lewis was like, and he was probably surprised when I said – perfectly truthfully – 'Like you.' I hoped very much he would say what he thought of Lewis, and at the end of the audience he said, 'C.S.Lewis knew what his apostolate was…and he *did* it!'

One of the questions I am asked very often is what Lewis would have done if he were alive today. If he were alive today would he remain with the Anglican Church or would he become a Catholic? Of course the answer is that I don't know. However, I'm convinced that nothing could persuade Lewis to abandon 'Mere Christianity'. If Lewis came back to life right now there would be a surprise awaiting him. The Anglican Church, expect in a few isolated parishes, has abandoned 'Mere Christianity', exchanged what Blessed John XXIII called the 'deposit of Faith' for the Spirit of the Age. I remember Lewis saying, 'He who marries the Spirit of the Age will soon find himself a widow!' So, if Lewis were alive and looking for Mere Christianity, I think he'd find that that he is now a Catholic. In other words, all that he cared about in the Anglican Church still exists – in the Catholic

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[22] 'On the Reading of Old Books,' *Undeceptions: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (London: Bles, 1971), pp. 163-4.

Church. All that Lewis loved in Mere Christianity, and taught others to love, is a permanent part of Catholicism.

This brings us to Lewis's other great 'Supposal'. And, as so often, Lewis had to wait until God was ready. By the end of the war Lewis was exhausted and his home was in crisis. Some of you will know that when he went to war in 1917 he promised his friend, Paddy Moore, that if he died he – Lewis – would look after his mother. Mrs Moore had been his daily care since 1919, and by 1949 she was elderly and an invalid. Lewis spent nearly every available minute at home looking after the woman he now called his 'mother'. Mrs Moore's goddaughter, Vera Henry, was also there helping to look after her. Friction between them broke out into open quarrels, and Lewis had to act as peacemaker.

Meanwhile, his friend Don Giovanni Calabria of Verona – now St Giovanni - pressed Lewis to continue his apostolate of writing. Lewis replied on 14 January 1949, the exhaustion and a sense of futility showing through. 'As for my own work,' he told Don Giovanni,

> 'I feel my zeal for writing, and whatever talent I possessed to be decreasing; nor (I believe) do I please my readers as I used to. I labour under many difficulties... Pray for me, Father.'[23]

It was almost certainly at about this time, when Lewis's spirits were very low, that he began dreaming of lions. 'All seven of my Narnia books and my three science fiction books,' he said, 'began with seeing pictures in my head. At first they were not a story, just pictures. The Lion all began with a picture of a faun carrying an umbrella and parcels in a snowy wood. This picture had been in my head since I was about sixteen. Then one day, when I was about forty, I said to myself: "Let's try to make a story about it." At first I had very little idea how the story would go. But then suddenly Aslan came bounding into it. I think I had been having a good many dreams of lions about that time. Apart from that, I don't know where the Lion came from or why he came. But once He was there He pulled the whole story together, and good He pulled the six other Narnia stories in after him.'[24]

Lewis possibly dreamed about Aslan in February, when things seemed almost as bad as they could get. His young friend, Roger Lancelyn Green, who came to know Lewis when he attended his lectures, was living in Oxford and just beginning to devote himself to writing about children's

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[23] *Collected Letters of C.S.Lewis: Volume II*, pp. 905-6.
[24] *Of This and Other Worlds*, 'It All Began with a Picture…', p. 64.

literature. He dined with Lewis at Magdalen College on the 10th March 1949, and after dinner they went to Lewis's rooms where he read aloud the first two chapters of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Lewis had not finished the story, but Roger remembered thinking that 'he was listening to a book that could rank with the great ones of its kind.'[25] I think he must have remained at his desk for long periods because when he saw Roger Lancelyn Green again at the end of March 1949 he had finished *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. The other six Narnian stories followed soon after *The Lion*, and it really goes look as if they will be Lewis's greatest memorial.

Before leaving them, I would like to make two observations about the Narnian stories. In one of the first critical works I read about Lewis, the author lamented that he did not write 'a purely *human* story.' There is hardly a day I do not think about this, and that because I think the author was one of many who ask that question. Why didn't Lewis write a 'purely *human* story'? I'm sure the answer is that when you know God and know, as Lewis said, that He is 'the ultimate source of all concrete, individual things and events,'[26] and you know, the whole history of Salvation – you can't pretend the Lord of all life is just not there. A 'purely human story' has to have God in it or it's not human.

Although nothing can persuade me that *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* is not the best of the seven, I am one of the many readers charmed by Puddleglum in *The Silver Chair*. I came to know Lewis's gardener, Fred Paxford, the first time I visited The Kilns, and when I moved in for a while as Lewis's secretary, I saw a good deal of him.

Lewis did not like talking about his own books, but when he did it was because the subjects of his books were of interest to both of us, and not because Lewis had written them. It would be odd if a man could not retain an interest in something he had spend years writing about. I found that Lewis liked the Narnian books almost as much as I did, and for the same reason. When he discovered that my favourite character was Puddleglum the Marshwiggle in *The Silver Chair*, he revealed that Puddleglum was modeled on his gardener, Fred Paxford. Once Lewis mentioned the resemblance I saw it at once. Although I never knew him to go to church, he was forever signing hymns, sometimes so loud he had to be quieted down. When I asked if he were married, and he gave me what I learned was his standard answer to that question. Some of you ladies may not like it, but Paxford always quoted this little poem when he was asked why he didn't marry:

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[25] Roger Lancelyn Green and Walter Hooper, *C.S.Lewis: A Biography*, ch. 11, p. 307.
[26] C.S.Lewis, *Miracles: A Preliminary Study* (London: Bles, 1947; Fount, 1998), ch. 11, p. 90.

A little puff of powder,
A little touch of paint,
Makes a woman look
Just like what she *ain't!*

But Paxford's attention – odd for a man who didn't go to church – was fastened on the Second Coming. This was unfortunate because Paxford did most of the shopping, and we could never be sure he would provide us with enough of the basic things. When I said I was worried about running out of sugar – Lewis took four teaspoons in each cup - he said, 'Well, you never know when the end of the world will come and we don't want to be left with sugar on our hands. What'll we do with it *then*, eh?'

But Lewis's example of Paxford's Puddleglumish character says even more about the man. He told me that Joy's great ambition was to go to Greece, and before they realised that her cancer had returned, Roger Lancelyn Green and his wife June had urged them to join them in a trip to Greece. However, by the time of the trip, April 1960, Joy's cancer had returned, and Lewis was very apprehensive about the trip. He told me that he and Joy were in the taxi, about to leave for the airport to fly to Greece, when Paxford came to see them off. Leaning through the window of the car, he said, 'Well, Mr Jack, there was this bloke just going on over the wireless. Says an airplane just went down. Everyone killed – burnt before recognition. Did you hear what I said Mr Jack? – *burnt beyond recognition*!' 'And on that note,' said Lewis, 'we flew to Greece.'

I now return to the story of my brief months with C.S.Lewis. While Lewis looked perfectly all right to me, he had been ill for several years with an infected kidney and prostate gland. The surgeon wouldn't operate on him because his heart was too weak. Now, suddenly, his health began giving him trouble. When I went out to The Kilns on Sunday morning, 14 July, I found him in his dressing gown, looking very ill. He could hardly sit up, and after asking for tea, he could not hold the cup. He told me he was going into the Acland Nursing Home the next day for a blood transfusion, and he asked if I would stop in England and act as his private secretary, beginning immediately. I accepted with the understanding that I'd go back to the States in the autumn to teach another term in my college, after which I'd return in January 1964 to resume my job with him.

The next day, 15 July, Lewis went to the hospital for an examination, where he had a heart-attack and went into a coma. The doctors did not

expect him to regain consciousness, but to everyone's surprise Lewis came out of his coma – and asked for his tea!

Lewis had me move into The Kilns while he was in the hospital, and after he got home we settled down to some of the most interesting weeks of my life. Lewis the champion of reason was still very much in evidence, but I sensed more gentleness in his manner. Lewis usually had a cup of tea or coffee after lunch, and following this I usually left him alone in his study sitting in his easy chair. I suspected that he had a nap when I was out of the room, and one day, before I closed the door behind me I said, 'Jack, do you ever take a nap?' 'Oh, *no*!' he exclaimed. 'On the other hand,' he went on, 'sometimes a nap takes *me*!' When you think about it you see how right he was. Get into your pajamas in the middle of the afternoon, close the curtain, get into bed - and nothing happens. But relax in your easy chair with a good book, and when you *wake* you realise the nap took you.

Sometimes I was the occasion of his humour. It was evident to everyone I knew, and now even C.S.Lewis, that I could hardly speak without making use of Lewis's thought, and giving full credit to Lewis with my constant refrain of 'As C.S. Lewis has said.' After we'd come to know one another he invited me to call him 'Jack,' and for a while he was almost like two people to me: the author of my favourite books, and Jack Lewis the friend who would never speak of his own work unless pressed. Quoting one of his books one day, I suddenly realised how it must sound to him. 'As C.S. Lewis has said,' I said, 'Oh, but you *are* C.S. Lewis!' Thereafter he made it a joke between us, and whenever he wanted anything done, he might say, 'As C.S. Lewis has said "I would like a pot of tea." As C.S. Lewis has said, 'You will go and make it." As C.S.Lewis has said, "I will drink it!"'

At the doctor's advice, Lewis retired from his Chair of English at Cambridge, and we settled down to a life which seemed to make him happy. Now that Lewis had a little unaccustomed leisure, he spent his time writing, meeting his Inkling friends, enjoying a pint in his local, discussing the books he hoped to write, and enjoying his time at The Kilns.

Lewis told me many times that I valued his writings too much, and he was always amused when he saw me scribbling something he said in my little notebook. 'I know what the divine joke on you would be,' he said near the end of the summer. 'I might utter my last words and *you* won't be here to write them down!'

As it turned out, I wasn't. I was in between classes at the University of Kentucky on 22 November 1963 when a colleague told me President Kennedy had been shot. Later that day we learned that the President was

dead. That evening Douglas Gresham rang me with the news that C.S.Lewis had just died.

I was very depressed for a while. But various of Lewis's friends persuaded me to return to Oxford anyway, and almost as soon as I came to know Lewis's brother Warnie, he invited me to begin editing his brother's literary remains. So in a sense I really have been working as Lewis's secretary these last forty years.

In any event, when I see what has happened to his writing I think we all have reason to be joyful. Over the years since Lewis's death so many of his works have been discovered, collected, and made available to us that if you dropped me down onto a desert island with copies of Lewis's works my life would be almost as rich as it is now.

In conclusion, I hope you will allow me to make this boast. I have waited over forty years to tell the world that I won an argument with Lewis. Not many can make *that* claim. Lewis was worried about what his brother would live on when he - C.S.Lewis - 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.'

Well, you see who won that argument. And yet, if Lewis was wrong about anything, wasn't this precisely the one thing he *ought* to have been wrong about. But such was his humility, his attention always turned away from himself. And if Lewis got one thing not only right, but terrifically right, it was his prediction that I was stuck forever with the phrase even he could not cure me of - 'As C.S.Lewis has said.'