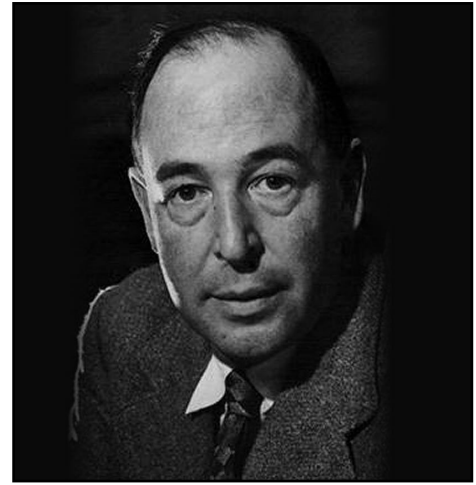


From Belfast to Aslan's Land

C. S. Lewis (1898–1963)

Dr Bob Fyall



Introduction

Better known now than in his lifetime.

Fewer than 20 people at his funeral.

Remarkable life not so much because it was full of exciting episodes but because of what he said and wrote and that is our emphasis.

Early days (1898–1905)

Born in Belfast, father a lawyer, mother daughter of a church of Ireland minister and granddaughter of bishop.

Clive Staples Lewis but insisted at early age his name was 'Jack' and that persisted.

Older brother Warren (Warnie) – mother died when he was 8.

Education and professional life

Very unhappy at both primary and secondary boarding schools.

In 1914 sent to Surrey for private tuition by William Kilpatrick, "The Great Knock".

He became an atheist.

He loved reading and imagination developed powerfully.

In 1916 awarded scholarship for University College, Oxford – studies interrupted by World War 1 – experienced reality of trenches – injured and invalided home.

On graduating awarded a fellowship at Magdalen College, Oxford, his home until 1954 when he became Professor of Mediaeval and Renaissance Literature at Cambridge.

“Most reluctant convert in England” – journey sketched in “Surprised by Joy”.

His conversion was gradual – by 1929 from atheism to theism.

One night in September 1931 entertained J. R. R. Tolkien to dinner at Magdalen and after that in a long walk convinced of the reality of Christ and salvation.

Friendships

Enormously important to CSL.

Group of friends called “the Inklings” met regularly in his rooms on Thursday evenings – not formal group with rules and agendas.

Tolkien, Professor of Anglo-Saxon, a conservative R.C, Hugo Dyson, Owen Barfield, Nevill Coghill, Charles Williams, Warnie Lewis.

They also met on Monday and Tuesday lunchtimes at the Eagle and Child (the Bird and Baby). Usually readings (including Narnia stories and “The Lord of the Rings”).

Opposed ‘wokery’ especially in “Out of the Silent Planet” where Ransom is partly a self- portrait.

Married Joy Gresham in 1956; she died of cancer in 1959.

“A Grief Observed” published posthumously – like a lament psalm.

Apologist

We owe a lot to Walter Hooper, an American, who was close to CSL in his later years for preserving many of his talks and essays.

Books such as “Mere Christianity” originating as talks to the forces in World War 2.

An important talk “Fern Seeds and Elephants” defends orthodoxy against unbelieving criticism by showing the supreme importance of literary genre.

Bible more than literature but never less.

Important essays on prayer.

He never became a professor in Oxford – but Cambridge gave him a chair in 1954.

Screwtape

Spiritual profundity and human interest. Neither excessive interest or unbelief.

Further up and further in

Best known today for Narnia stories.

An unmarried man in his fifties with little experience of children yet books delighted and still do. "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe" earliest in 1948, others at brief intervals.

Why so popular?

Great stories – enjoy them as such – eg. the White Witch and Aslan's friends trying to outpace each other; Lucy's long and nervous walk through the corridors of a large and mysterious house in "The Voyage of the Dawn Treader".

Vivid Settings – the realism of the descriptions as well as the suggestion of hidden wonders – this is no 'shadowlands' – "God likes matter, He made it".

Theological nuggets – examples everywhere.

Some Reading

The Narnia Stories – many editions.

"The Screwtape Letters (Fontana Books, 1964)

"How to Pray: Reflections and Essays" (Collins 2018)

"Jack: A Life of C.S. Lewis" (Hodder & Stoughton, 2nd edition, 1997)