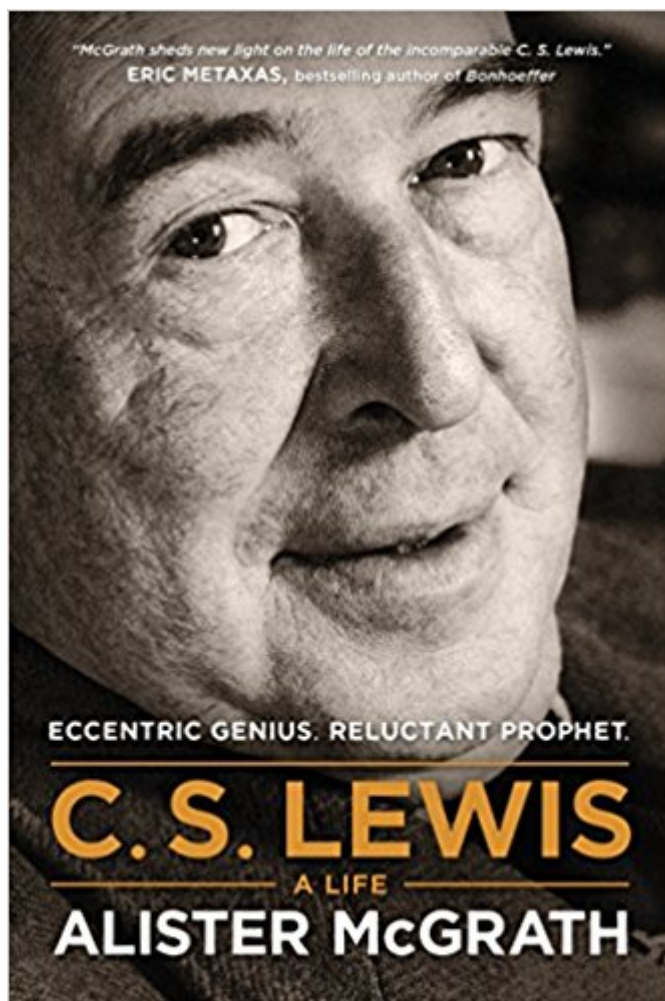


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C. S. Lewis -- A Life: Eccentric Genius, Reluctant Prophet



Synopsis

ECPA 2014 Christian Book Award Winner (Non-Fiction)! Fifty years after his death, C. S. Lewis continues to inspire and fascinate millions. His legacy remains varied and vast. He was a towering intellectual figure, a popular fiction author who inspired a global movie franchise around the world of Narnia, and an atheist-turned-Christian thinker. In *C.S. Lewis: A Life*, Alister McGrath, prolific author and respected professor at King's College of London, paints a definitive portrait of the life of C. S. Lewis. After thoroughly examining recently published Lewis correspondence, Alister challenges some of the previously held beliefs about the exact timing of Lewis's shift from atheism to theism and then to Christianity. He paints a portrait of an eccentric thinker who became an inspiring, though reluctant, prophet for our times. You won't want to miss this fascinating portrait of a creative genius who inspired generations.

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review Medievalist, Christian apologist, and fantasist C. S. Lewis (1898–1963) has had exponentially more readers since his death than he enjoyed in his lifetime. Biographies and studies of his work are legion. Despite that copious documentation, Oxford theologian McGrath discovered a major inaccuracy in all previous accounts of Lewis, including his glowing spiritual autobiography, *Surprised by Joy* (1955). Diligent combing of Lewis's correspondence disclosed that his conversion to Christianity—the catalyst for virtually all his creative work—occurred in 1930, not 1929. Well, Lewis admitted he wasn't good with dates, and a plethora of anxiety-inducing

deadlines involved in the major developments in his life rather justify his confusion. McGrath doesn't speculate about how Lewis's chronic achronology may have affected his work. Instead, he limns Lewis's major experiences—early loss of his mother, horrifying schooling, WWI service (about which he never spoke), long Oxford fellowship, BBC-fostered celebrity in the 1940s, creation of Narnia, late-career move to Cambridge, and brief marriage to Joy Davidman (1915–60)—his great friendships (especially with J. R. R. Tolkien), and his books. McGrath does this so limpidly, so intelligently, and so sympathetically that this biography is the one Lewis's admirers—especially those who, like him, believe that books are to be read and enjoyed—should prefer to all others. --Ray Olson --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

To the question of whether the world really needs another biography of C.S. Lewis, McGrath's lucid and unsentimental portrait of the Christian champion responds with a resounding "yes." The year 2013 marks the 50th anniversary of Lewis's death, and times have changed and evangelical sentiments have matured. McGrath offers a new and at times shocking look into the complicated life of this complex figure, in a deeply researched biography. The author takes us headlong into the heart of a Lewis we've known little about: his unconventional affair with Mrs. Jane Moore; his hostile and deceptive relationship with his father; his curiosity about the sensuality of cruelty. McGrath navigates the reader through these messy themes, ultimately landing us onto the solid ground of Lewis's postconversion legacy. He shows with skill, sympathy, dispassion, and engaging prose that Lewis, like the rest of us, did the best he could with the hand he was dealt. But he got over it, as must all those who would prefer a Lewis without shadows.--Publishers Weekly McGrath does this so limpidly, so intelligently, and so sympathetically that this biography is the one Lewis' admirers--especially those who, like him, believe that books are to be read and enjoyed--should prefer to all others.--Booklist A thoroughly researched yet very readable, chronological account of C.S. Lewis' life, his literature, and his journey from atheism to Christianity. Fifty years after his death, the words of Lewis continue to inspire many, and McGrath's biography may help to unravel some of the mystery behind his eccentric mind. Staff Pick--ForeWord Reviews An excellent scholarly read encompassing new ideas for Lewis devotees or those interested in religious argument.--Kirkus Reviews Rather than canonizing Lewis, McGrath's meticulously detailed book succeeds in humanizing him.--Patheos.com There have been plenty of biographies of Lewis--I once wrote one myself--but I do not think there has been a better one than Alister McGrath's. He is a punctilious and enthusiastic reader of all Lewis's work--the children's stories, the science fiction, the Christian apologetics and the excellent literary criticism and literary history. He is from Northern Ireland, as

Lewis was himself, and he is especially astute about drawing out the essentially Northern Irish qualities of this very odd man. And he is sympathetic to the real oddness of his story.--A. N. Wilson, TheDailyBeast.com

On the 50th anniversary of his death, this new C. S. Lewis biography succeeds in deepening the appeal of his works...The most abiding gift of "C. S. Lewis: A Life" is its fierce curiosity about the novels, letters, and books of popular philosophy that are Lewis' most substantial legacy. McGrath's biography promises to introduce new readers to those works--and inspire veteran C. S. Lewis fans to visit them again.--Christian Science Monitor

If you're looking for a lively, general introduction to this multitalented thinker and writer, Alister McGrath's new biography is a good place to start.--Washington Post Book World

Alister McGrath's "C. S. Lewis: A Life" now supplies a welcome balance, along with some significant discoveries. Mr. McGrath is well placed, culturally speaking, to understand and sympathize with Lewis. . . . One comes away with a renewed sympathy for a provocative, perceptive, contrarian and somewhat tormented soul--Wall Street Journal

McGrath is not intimidated by Lewis nor overly reverential of him; but he shows him a professional respect that ought to silence those who dismiss Lewis as a theological amateur. He points out that under its clothing of reasoned argument, Lewis' theology is always founded on a profoundly aesthetic effort: to draw us a picture of the Christian universe and our place in it that moves, attracts and persuades us, so that we say: yes, this is what life is really like, and how much more real it is than we ever imagined. A powerful achievement.--The Tablet

While readers of C. S. Lewis might assume a biography would cover his literature, this account comes from an eminent theologian and focuses on Lewis' spiritual life and conversion--and therefore is a definitive survey of Lewis' conversion and faith, recommended for spirituality holdings above all else. Dr. McGrath is the only scholar to analyze the entire collection of Lewis' letters and archives: his survey is a powerful biography combining elements of spiritual and literary analysis, and is a special pick for any Christian collection.--Midwest Book Review

My suggestion is that you read A.N. Wilson's biography instead of this one, unless you want to read every bio of Lewis. Wilson's biography is more perceptive, sympathetic to Lewis without pulling any punches about his limitations, and written by a "man of letters", which is what Lewis was in the main, in spite of his latter-day elevation to patron saint and Guru by Evangelical Christians. Wilson's prose style is also much superior to McGrath's, whose prose is truly prosaic and whose selection of details to include is more like the workings of a steam shovel than a strainer.

I really enjoyed this biography of CS Lewis. It was engaging from beginning to end and did an

excellent job of conveying the overall arc of his life in a readable way. It took me a while to read through it all with several breaks, but each time I returned, it easily recaptured my interest and engaged me with the different aspects of his life. I personally find Lewis a fascinating character himself. I appreciate his overall thrust and purpose in writing, even if I don't fully appreciate all of his writings. The Narnia series as well as *Screwtape* and *Mere Christianity* have been influential in my life. Yet I appreciate and value the influence he has had in challenging me to engage all of life through a lens of faith. I have learned to appreciate and value all the different forms of literature and media to see the underlying theme and currents that speak of and reflect and even criticise God. Through Lewis I have been challenged to engage the world and our culture where they are and to take my faith out of the doors of my home and into the wider context of the life I live.

This was a marvelous biography about C. S. Lewis. In my opinion, Lewis was one of the greatest writers, philosophers and academics of the twentieth century. This was no easy research project and Alister McGrath nailed it in terms of historical accuracy, accessibility, as well as the sheer magnitude of documents required for this book. Although this is the only C. S. Lewis biography I have read, I think it is safe to say that this is by far the best one yet. You really get to see Lewis as a human being. You will find that there are many surprising facts about his life that most people are unaware of, such as the fact that he had initially married his wife, Joy Davidman, for purely legal reasons rather than personal love. I also think that Lewis' conversion to Christianity is very unique and perplexing. I will say, however, that after about 1945, it seemed to get somewhat boring for me. At that point, it seemed to be repeating much of what had already been explored, but was nevertheless still interesting. All in all, this is a great biography and I highly recommend it!

Alister McGrath is a wonderful writer. I just received my book a few days ago and it is difficult to put down. I have jumped ahead in my reading to the "Narnia" chapter and his information on Lewis's writing is great. Any one interested in C.S. Lewis should read this book. Thank you Mr. McGrath.

Exceptionally well-written book. McGrath is highly insightful and thorough in researching his conclusions and humble in offering opinion. I read this in conjunction with *The Lion The Witch And The Wardrobe*, *Mere Christianity* and *The Abolition of Man*, all of which were made more interesting by following the life of Lewis - the inspiration for his books, personal struggles, etc. - with McGrath. The book was an absolutely wonderful experience. I laughed, I cried (father/son relationships get me that way), and shut the book in astonishment (accompanied by "What's?!" and "No way's!") at

the actions of some characters. I cannot imagine anyone interested in C.S. Lewis being disappointed with this read as it appeals to the academic reader or one simply looking for pure enjoyment.

I really enjoy C.S. Lewis - A Life. I learned a lot about Lewis' life that surprised me, especially his relationship to his family, friends, and women. He was different than I thought he would be. McGrath does a great job of offering new insights on his life. It seems to me that Lewis had what we would call today "co-dependent tendencies." The biography as a whole was very readable, I liked how McGrath integrates his thought life with his life. There were a few chapters that I thought interrupted the "storyline" of the biography. Overall, a great biography. C.S. Lewis greatest contributions were as an apologist (pre-WW2 and during WW2), then as a teacher and storyteller (post WW2).

I read this immediately after reading Alister McGrath's book "If I had Lunch with C.S. Lewis" and perhaps that wasn't such a good idea. The smaller Lunch with Lewis book was packed full of inspiring themes and ideas from one of the greats of the Christian faith. I found this biography ponderous at times. The author took great pains to get dates and facts right, while at times glossing over subjects that I would love to have learned more about (it's possible there wasn't more to be said on some subjects, such as his relationship with Tolkien, but I felt like I was missing some of the richer parts of Lewis's life.) Perhaps it's just the nature of the two types of books. If you are interested in what Lewis had to say on important topics, read the Lunch book. If you are interested in the minutia of exactly when Lewis came to faith, etc... then this is the book for you.

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