

# YOURS, JACK

*Spiritual Direction from*

*C. S. Lewis*

*Edited by*  
PAUL F. FORD



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1916

10 ARTHUR GREEVES, *his oldest friend*: On the book that baptized Lewis's imagination—see *Surprised by Joy*, 180–181. Anodos is the hero of the book *Phantastes*; Cosmo is the hero of a story Anodos tells in the book.<sup>1</sup>

7 MARCH 1916

I have had a great literary experience this week. I have discovered yet another author to add to our circle—our very own set: never since I first read 'The well at the world's end' have I enjoyed a book so much—and indeed I think my new 'find' is quite as good as [Thomas] Malory or [William] Morris himself. The book, to get to the point, is George MacDonald's 'Faerie Romance', *Phantastes*, which I picked up by hazard in a rather tired Everyman copy—by the way isn't it funny, they cost 1/1d. now—on our station bookstall last Saturday. Have you read it? I suppose not, as if you had, you could not have helped telling me about it. At any rate, whatever the book you are reading now, you simply *must* get this at once: and it is quite worth getting in a superior Everyman binding too.

Of course it is hopeless for me to try and describe it, but when you have followed the hero Anodos along that little stream to the faery wood, have heard about the terrible ash tree and how the shadow of his gnarled, knotted hand falls upon the book the hero is reading, when you have read about the faery palace . . . and heard the episode of Cosmo, I know that you will quite agree with me. You must not be disappointed at the first chapter which is rather conventional faery tale style, and after it you won't be able to stop until you have finished. There are one or two poems in the tale—as in the Morris tales you know—which, with one or two exceptions are shockingly bad, so don't try to appreciate them: it is just a sign, isn't it, of how some geniuses can't work in metrical forms—another example being the Brontës.

<sup>1</sup> *Letters I*, 169–170.

TO ARTHUR GREEVES: *On Lewis's religious views as a seventeen-year-old.*<sup>2</sup>

12 OCTOBER 1976

As to the other question about religion, I was sad to read your letter. You ask me my religious views: you know, I think, that I believe in no religion. There is absolutely no proof for any of them, and from a philosophical standpoint Christianity is not even the best. All religions, that is, all mythologies to give them their proper name are merely man's own invention—Christ as much as Loki. Primitive man found himself surrounded by all sorts of terrible things he didn't understand—thunder, pestilence, snakes et cetera: what more natural than to suppose that these were animated by evil spirits trying to torture him. These he kept off by cringing to them, singing songs and making sacrifices et cetera. Gradually from being mere nature-spirits these supposed being[s] were elevated into more elaborate ideas, such as the old gods: and when man became more refined he pretended that these spirits were good as well as powerful.

Thus religion, that is to say mythology grew up. Often, too, great men were regarded as gods after their death—such as Heracles or Odin: thus after the death of a Hebrew philosopher Yeshua (whose name we have corrupted into Jesus) he became regarded as a god, a cult sprang up, which was afterwards connected with the ancient Hebrew Jahweh-worship, and so Christianity came into being—one mythology among many, but the one that we happen to have been brought up in.

Now all this you must have heard before: it is the recognised scientific account of the growth of religions. Superstition of course in every age has held the common people, but in every age the educated and thinking ones have stood outside it, though usually outwardly conceding to it for convenience. I had thought that you were gradually being emancipated from the old beliefs, but if this is not so, I hope we are too sensible to quarrel about abstract ideas. I must only add that one's views on religious subjects don't make any difference in morals, of course. A good member of society must of course try to be honest, chaste, truthful, kindly et

<sup>2</sup> *Letters I*, 230-231.

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<sup>3</sup> *Letters I*, 254.

cetera: these are things we owe to our own manhood and dignity and not to any imagined god or gods.

Of course, mind you, I am not laying down as a certainty that there is nothing outside the material world: considering the discoveries that are always being made, this would be foolish. Anything *may* exist: but until we know that it does, we can't make any assumptions. The universe is an absolute mystery: man has made many guesses at it, but the answer is yet to seek. Whenever any new light can be got as to such matters, I will be glad to welcome it. In the meantime I am not going to go back to the bondage of believing in any old (and already decaying) superstition.

TO ARTHUR GREEVES: *On Lewis's favorite short story by George MacDonald.*<sup>1</sup>

15 NOVEMBER 1976

And talking about books I am surprised that you don't say more of the 'Golden Key': to me it was absolute heaven from the moment when Tangle ran into the wood to the glorious end in those mysterious caves. What a lovely idea 'The country from which the shadows fall'!

<sup>1</sup> *Letters I*, 254.

1931

TO ARTHUR GREEVES: *On the conversation that led to Lewis's conversion to Christianity; and on the meaning of death. Hugo Dyson, just two years older than Lewis, became his friend in 1930; Maureen was Mrs. Moore's [Minto] daughter, and Tykes, a dog.*

22 SEPTEMBER 1931

Thanks for your letter of the 11th. I couldn't write to you last Sunday because I had a week end guest—a man called Dyson who teaches English at Reading University. I meet him I suppose about four or five times a year and am beginning to regard him as one of my friends of the 2nd class—i.e., not in the same rank as yourself or Barfield, but on a level with Tolkien. . . .

He stayed the night with me in College—I sleeping in in order to be able to talk far into the night as one could hardly do out here [at home]. Tolkien came too, and did not leave till 3 in the morning; and after seeing him out by the little postern on Magdalen bridge Dyson and I found still more to say to one another, strolling up and down the cloister of New Building, so that we did not get to bed till 4. It was really a memorable talk. We began (in Addison's walk just after dinner) on metaphor and myth—interrupted by a rush of wind which came so suddenly on the still, warm evening and sent so many leaves pattering down that we thought it was raining. We all held our breath, the other two appreciating the ecstasy of such a thing almost as you would. We continued (in my room) on Christianity: a good long satisfying talk in which I learned a lot: then discussed the difference between love and friendship—then finally drifted back to poetry and books.

On Sunday he came out here for lunch and Maureen and Minto and I (and Tykes) all motored him to Reading—a very delightful drive with some lovely villages, and the autumn colours are here now.

I am so glad you have really enjoyed a Morris again. I had the same feeling about it as you, in a way, with this proviso—that I don't think Morris was conscious of the meaning either here or in any of his works, except *Love Is Enough* where the flame actually breaks through the smoke so to speak. I feel more and more that Morris has taught me things he did not understand himself. These hauntingly beautiful lands which somehow never satisfy,—this passion to escape from death plus the certainty that life owes all its charm to mortality—these push you on to the real thing because they fill you with desire and yet prove absolutely clearly that in Morris's world that desire cannot be satisfied.

The MacDonald conception of death<sup>2</sup>—or, to speak more correctly, St. Paul's<sup>3</sup>—is really the answer to Morris: but I don't think I should have understood it without going through Morris. He is an unwilling witness to the truth. He shows you just *how far* you can go without knowing God, and that is far enough to force you (though not poor Morris himself) to go further. If ever you feel inclined to relapse into the mundane point of view—to feel that your book and pipe and chair are enough for happiness—it only needs a page or two of Morris to sting you wide awake into uncontrollable longing and to make you feel that everything is worthless except the hope of finding one of his countries. But if you read any of his romances through you will find the country dull before the end. All he has done is to rouse the desire: but so strongly that you must find the real satisfaction. And then you realise that *death* is at the root of the whole matter, and why he chose the subject of the Earthly Paradise, and how the true solution is one he never saw.

*On Monday, 28 September, Warrie took Jack to Whipsnade Zoo in the sidecar of his motorbike, and it was during this outing that Jack took the final step in his conversion:*

I know very well when, but hardly how, the final step was taken. I was driven to Whipsnade one sunny morning. When

<sup>2</sup> In Lewis's *George MacDonald: An Anthology* (London: Bles, 1946), see Extracts 69–70, 146, 280, 293, and 363.

<sup>3</sup> E.g., Romans 5:12–21; 6:5–23; I Corinthians 15:12–58.

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<sup>4</sup> Letters I, 916.

we set out I did not believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and when we reached the zoo I did. Yet I had not exactly spent the journey in thought. Nor in great emotion. 'Emotional' is perhaps the last word we can apply to some of the most important events. It was more like when a man, after long sleep, still lying motionless in bed, becomes aware that he is now awake. (*Surprised by Joy*, Chapter 15)

TO ARTHUR GREEVES: *Thanking him for sending all the letters Lewis wrote to him, so that Warren could type them into what became the Lewis papers, a family history; explaining that he, Lewis, would keep from Warren any letters about their adolescent sexual trespasses, including Lewis's invented fornication with a Belgian evacuee early in World War I; making his first reflections on the meaning of his life up to this time; and announcing his conversion to Christianity.*<sup>4</sup>

1 OCTOBER 1931

Very many thanks for the letter and enclosure that arrived this morning. Now, as to their return. I confess that I had not supposed you often read them, and had in view merely an *ultimate* return when W. had finished his editing, that is, in about 4 years' time. If however you want them at once, they are of course your property and will be returned by registered post whenever you wish. I shall follow absolutely your directions. In the meantime you can feel quite confident about their safe keeping. I have spent this morning on them and established a pretty good order for all except about eight. (How maddening my habit of not dating them now becomes! And how ridiculous the arguments by which I defended it!)

All the ones that deal with what we used to call 'It' I am suppressing and will return to you in a day or two. I am surprised to find what a very large percentage of the whole they are. I am now inclined to agree with you in *not* regretting that we confided in each other even on this subject, because it has done no harm in the long run—and how could young adolescents really be friends without it? At the same time, the letters give away some of your secrets as well as mine: and I do not wish to recall things of that

<sup>4</sup> *Letters I*, 916.



have reached this. On the other hand, all the 'strangeness' (which was my lesson to you) has turned out to be only the first step in far deeper mysteries.

How deep I am just now beginning to see: for I have just passed on from believing in God to definitely believing in Christ—in Christianity. I will try to explain this another time. My long night talk with Dyson and Tolkien had a good deal to do with it. . . .

Did it strike you in reading those letters how completely *both* of us were wrong in most of our controversies, or rather in the great standing controversy about 'sentiment' which was the root of most of our quarrels? If anyone had said 'There is good feeling and bad: you can't have too much of the first, and you can't have too little of the second' it would have blown the gaff on the whole argument. But we blundered along—my indiscriminate hardness only provoking you into a more profound self pity (which is the root of all bad sentiment) and that bad sentiment in return making me harder and more willing to hurt.

P.S. I have just finished *The Epistle to the Romans*, the first Pauline epistle I have ever seriously read through. It contains many difficult and some horrible things, but the essential idea of Death (the MacDonald idea) is there alright. What I meant about the Earthly Paradise was simply that the whole story turns on a number of people setting out to look for a country where you don't die.

TO ARTHUR GREEVES: *On the intellectual turning point of his conversion—myth become fact (see God in the Dock for the essay "Myth Become Fact").*<sup>3</sup>

18 OCTOBER 1931

What has been holding me back (at any rate for the last year or so) has not been so much a difficulty in believing as a difficulty in knowing what the doctrine *meant*: you can't believe a thing while you are ignorant *what* the thing is. My puzzle was the whole doctrine of Redemption: in what sense the life and death of Christ 'saved' or 'opened salvation to' the world. I could see

<sup>3</sup> *Letters I*, 976-977.

how miraculous salvation might be necessary: one could see from ordinary experience how sin (e.g. the case of a drunkard) could get a man to such a point that he was bound to reach Hell (i.e., complete degradation and misery) in this life unless something quite beyond mere natural help or effort stepped in. And I could well imagine a whole world being in the same state and similarly in need of miracle. What I couldn't see was how the life and death of Someone Else (whoever he was) 2000 years ago could help us here and now—except in so far as his *example* helped us. And the example business, though true and important, is not Christianity: right in the centre of Christianity, in the Gospels and St. Paul, you keep on getting something quite different and very mysterious expressed in those phrases I have so often ridiculed ('propitiation'—'sacrifice'—'the blood of the Lamb')—expressions which I could only interpret in senses that seemed to me either silly or shocking.

Now what Dyson and Tolkien showed me was this: 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 (Balder, Adonis, Bacchus) 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 even though I could not say in cold prose 'what it meant'.

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*: and one must be content to accept it in the same way, remembering that it is God's myth where the others are men's myths: i.e., the Pagan stories are God expressing Himself through the minds of poets, using such images as He found there, while Christianity is God expressing Himself through what we call 'real things'. Therefore it is *true*, not in the sense of being a 'description' of God (that no finite mind could take in) but in the sense of being the way in which God chooses to (or can) appear to our faculties. The 'doctrines' we get out of the true myth are of course *less* true: they are translations into our *concepts* and *ideas* of that which God has already expressed in a lan-

guage more adequate and resurrection. Do any rate I am now c approached, in a sens is the most important that it really happened:

TO ARTHUR GREEVES:  
*Paganism does; and on*  
Letters to Malcolm: C

I, like you, am wor of the Christian story um. Both the things y early upbringing and th causes: but I have a so where, and I have not Pagan stories and of ro are mere beginnings— beyond the world—whu thing, when you have n and there just the same experience of being ma have the old bittersweet ( I think, wicked) to go o must go forward and not turn be ushered in by a ne in its turn to disappear a retrogression. Delight is the first step of a new flig when you have reached t stair that you may expect t may be all rot; but it seem law (thrills also must die to waking, death and resurre

events, 'WE', the people, are never responsible: it is always our rulers, or ancestors, or parents, or education, or anybody but precious 'US'. WE are apparently perfect and blameless. Don't you believe it. Nor do I think the Church of England holds out many attractions to the worldly. There is more real poverty, even actual want, in English vicarages than there is in the homes of casual labourers.

TO ILLA NEWMAN, an eleven-year-old girl who had sent Lewis her drawings and a letter of appreciation for the first three *Chronicles of Narnia*: On Lewis's care not to decode the *Chronicles of Narnia*.<sup>24</sup>

3 JUNE 1953

Thank you so much for your lovely letter and pictures. I realised at once that the coloured one was not a particular scene but a sort of line-up like what you would have at the very end if it was a play instead of stories. *The [Voyage of the] DAWN TREADER* is not to be the last: There are to be 4 more, 7 in all. Didn't you notice that Aslan said nothing about Eustace not going back? I thought the best of your pictures was the one of Mr. Tumnus at the bottom of the letter.

As to Aslan's other name, well I want you to guess. Has there never been anyone in *this* world who (1.) Arrived at the same time as Father Christmas. (2.) Said he was the son of the Great Emperor. (3.) Gave himself up for someone else's fault to be jeered at and killed by wicked people. (4.) Came to life again. (5.) Is sometimes spoken of as a Lamb (see the end of the *Dawn Treader*). Don't you really know His name in this world? Think it over and let me know your answer!

Reepicheep in your coloured picture has just the right perky, cheeky expression. I love real mice. There are lots in my rooms in College but I have never set a trap. When I sit up late working they poke their heads out from behind the curtains just as if they were saying, 'Hi! Time for *you* to go to bed. We want to come out and play.'

<sup>24</sup> *Letters III*, 334-335.

TO MARY VAN DEUSE  
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to the Romans, Ch*

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TO MARY VAN DEUSE  
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the staircase of grace.*<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *Letters III*, 335-336.

<sup>26</sup> *Letters III*, 342.