

**Mary Anne Phemister and Andrew Lazo (eds.),**  
***Mere Christians: Inspiring Stories of Encounters with C.S. Lewis,***  
**Review by Brendan N. Wolfe**  
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*Mere Christians: Inspiring Stories of Encounters with C.S. Lewis.*  
Edited by Mary Anne Phemister and Andrew Lazo. Grand Rapids:  
Baker Books, 2009. 222pp. ISBN 0801071844.

*National Review* columnist John Derbyshire wrote in his November 2005 diary about C.S. Lewis' Christian apologetics that '[w]hile they are comforting and persuasive if you are already a Christian, I doubt any unbeliever was ever converted by them'.<sup>1</sup> Several readers wrote in, reminding Derbyshire of Joy Davidman/Gresham (later Lewis' wife), Sheldon Vanauken, and Chuck Colson. With the publication of this volume, doubts on this score need never arise again.

*Mere Christians* is a collection of fifty-five accounts of the influence Lewis has had on the religious lives of diverse Christians, some famous, some not. The accounts are generally short and intensely biographical. A few of them have appeared elsewhere (including Joy Davidman's), but most are original contributions. Many contributors were renewed in their flagging Christianity by reading Lewis, many were atheists or unchurched, while some were Jews or Muslims till they encountered his work.

It is interesting to consider which of Lewis' works are most often cited as instrumental in conversions. *Mere Christianity* takes the lead by a great distance, with *The Problem of Pain* also well represented. While the Narnia stories are certainly widely mentioned, they seem to have been most influential in leading young readers to Lewis' other works, rather than through their 'hidden Gospel'. It is worth considering, when critics make so much of Lewis' recasting of the Christian message in fictional form, that the greatest evangelistic value of Narnia may be in encouraging readers to seek out Lewis' other works.

The book is, unsurprisingly, much more about its various contributors than it is about Lewis. There is a certain selection bias in favour of evangelicals and Americans, but the book is none the worse for it. The entries are clear and readable, and sufficiently varied not to become boring or repetitious. Some note that Lewis wrote such appreciations himself in *Surprised by Joy*, where he speaks of the role of George Macdonald and others in his life. *Mere Christians* will be enjoyed by readers with interest in the development of others' lives, or who feel themselves to have been deeply affected by Lewis.

Brendan N. Wolfe