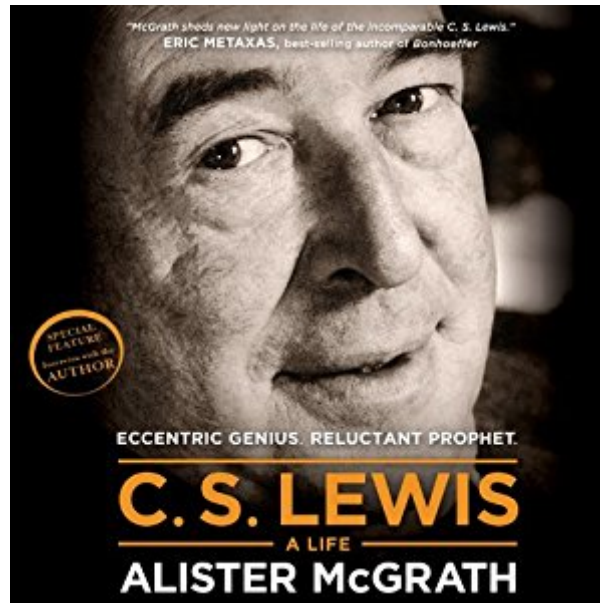


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C. S. Lewis - A Life: Eccentric Genius, Reluctant Prophet



Synopsis

In honor of the 50th anniversary of C. S. Lewis' death, celebrated Oxford don Dr. Alister McGrath presents us with a compelling and definitive portrait of the life of C. S. Lewis, the author of the well-known Narnia series. For more than half a century, C. S. Lewis' Narnia series has captured the imaginations of millions. In *C. S. Lewis - A Life*, Dr. Alister McGrath recounts the unlikely path of this Oxford don, who spent his days teaching English literature to the brightest students in the world and his spare time writing a best-selling fantasy series for children. Dr. McGrath uses his extensive research and thorough examination in chronological order of Lewis' correspondence and archival materials to present a new picture of Lewis' life. This definitive biography paints a portrait of an eccentric thinker who became a compelling, though reluctant, prophet for our times. You won't want to miss this fascinating portrayal of a creative genius who inspired generations.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

C. S. Lewis--Jack to his friends--looms large in the American evangelical mind. On the one hand, this is surprising. A communicant in the Church of England, Lewis was generically orthodox but not specifically evangelical in theological or spiritual emphases. His closest lifelong friends were a homosexual Unitarian (Arthur Greeves) and a traditionalist Roman Catholic (J. R. R. Tolkien). And he drank and smoked prolifically, at one point having a barrel of beer in his rooms at Oxford for the use of his students. On the other hand, Lewis's influence on American evangelicals is not surprising. After World War II, American neo-evangelicals shook off their Fundamentalist separatism and

irritability and began to actively engage culture with an eye toward changing it. Lewis--the Oxford don who wrote well-regarded studies of medieval English literature, well-written works of Christian apologetics, and well-loved children's stories--modeled the kind of influence evangelicals wished to exercise on culture high, middlebrow, and popular. Writing about Lewis is thus something of a cottage industry among American evangelicals, with new titles on this or that aspect of his thought or life appearing regularly.

Let's get the first question out of the way by asking another question: Can there really be a "perfect" biography of anyone? While it's true that a person could compose a imperfect book, to do the total opposite actually asks the wrong question. That's because you have to consider the target audience of a book, what approach is used and what the credentials of the writer are. For those not familiar with Dr. McGrath, he is a historical theologian who is currently Professor of Theology, Ministry and Education at King's College London, UK. This fact may make some people think he has written a rather "dry" biography that would only be of interest to other professionals. This is not the case at all. The book is a well organize volume covering the life of Lewis without being overly concerned with providing every detail possible (which would make for an impossibly long book if it tried). Yet in the 400+ pages you do get an adequately detailed look at his life. In a recent interview by Will Vaus on the HarperOne C.S. Lewis blog, McGrath stated his biography was aimed at individuals who mostly know about Lewis from the recent Narnia movies or have just heard about him without knowing much at all. Thus his aim was to "show why this man was so interesting." Is this just another work to mindlessly applaud Lewis? Not at all, as McGrath states in the book itself, "This biography sets out, not to praise Lewis or condemn him, but to understand him." Consider the subtitle of the book, "Eccentric Genius, Reluctant Prophet." While it provides a nice takeaway line that does reflect a positive view of Lewis, McGrath doesn't hesitate to show Lewis's warts. Prior to a return to the faith, Lewis treated his father very poorly and McGrath admits there likely was a sexual relationship with Mrs. Moore.

Two of the most influential voices in evangelicalism were not evangelicals themselves, though they have been claimed for evangelicalism and many younger thinkers can't imagine their not being evangelicals. Those two are Dietrich Bonhoeffer, an orthodox Lutheran, and C.S. Lewis, an Anglican with the sensibility of a "mere" kind of Christianity. In their day neither was claimed by the kind of evangelicalism that then existed, which was more like the very conservative side of evangelicalism today. One could probably tally up a lengthy list of folks who are "claimed" by some

group but who in their day were not in that group. What cannot be denied though is that C.S. Lewis has become a saint for evangelicalism. The focus of his biography is not on that dimension of Lewis, even if he has one of the better sketches of that story, but on the life, development, theology, and career of C.S. Lewis. I'm speaking of Alister McGrath's exquisite new biography of C.S. Lewis. I can't say McGrath's two categories (eccentric genius and reluctant prophet) are addressed head-on but these two expressions certainly form deep structure themes in this book. Lewis was eccentric and he never did want the attention he garnered. I have read four other biographies of Lewis -- Green, Wilson, Sayer, Jacobs -- and McGrath. McGrath is now the best of the lot because it provides more perspective and critical interaction than the others. Wilson's remains too critical and suspicious while Green's is now the dated volume. Jacobs set out to do more of an examination of imagination but offered more of a biography than a thematic exploration. McGrath spent 18 months reading everything from Lewis in chronological order.

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