



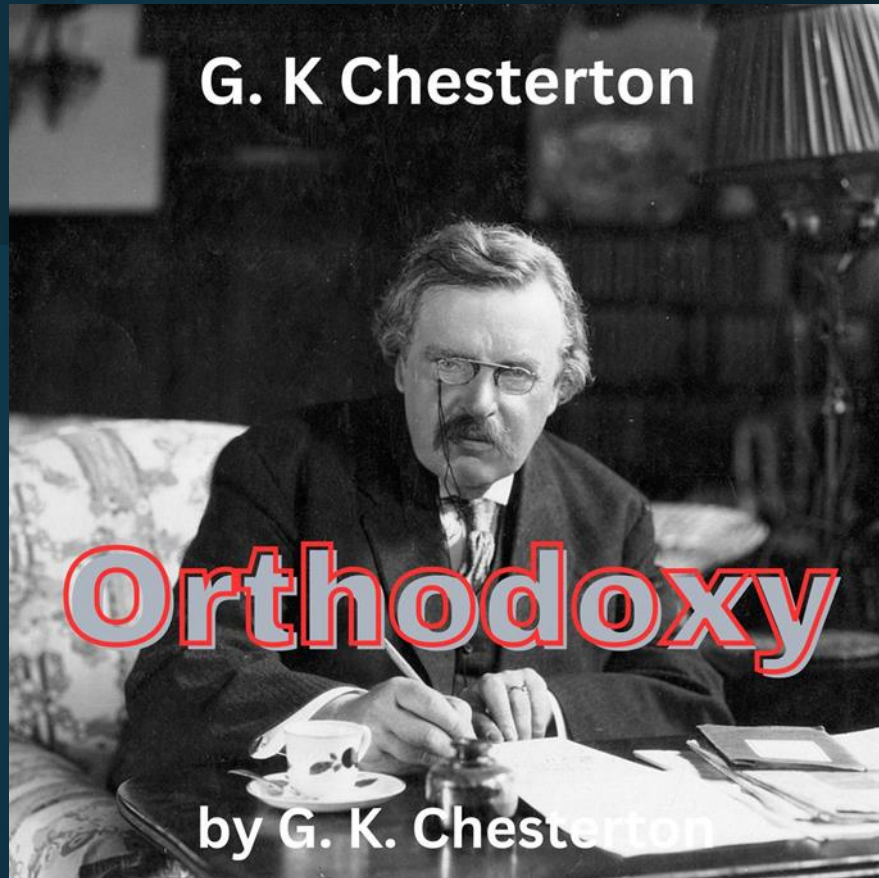
# Influential Christian Literature

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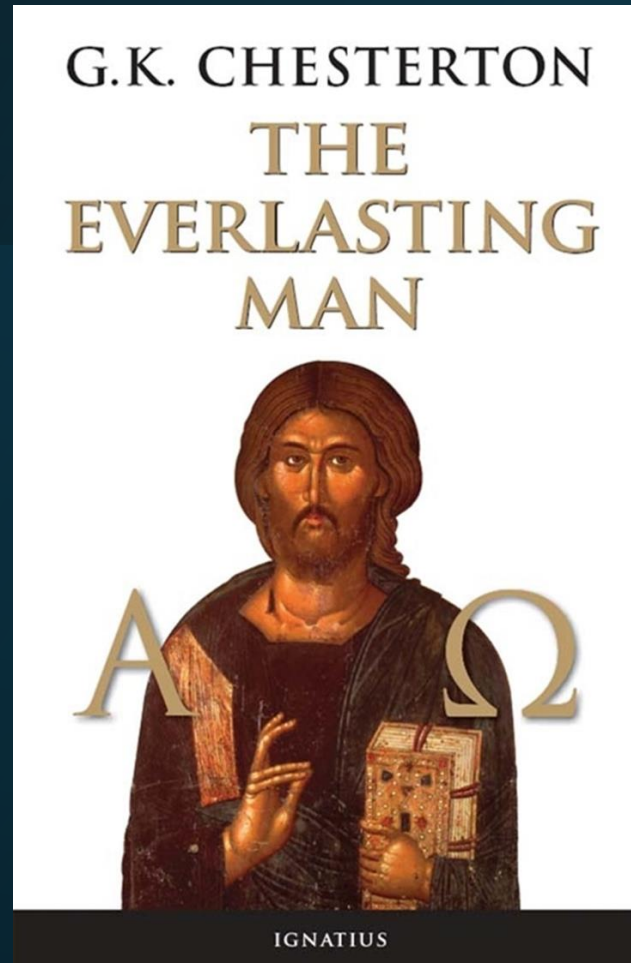
*Exploring Essential Works That Shaped  
Christian Thought*

**Wilbur Reid, summer of 2025**

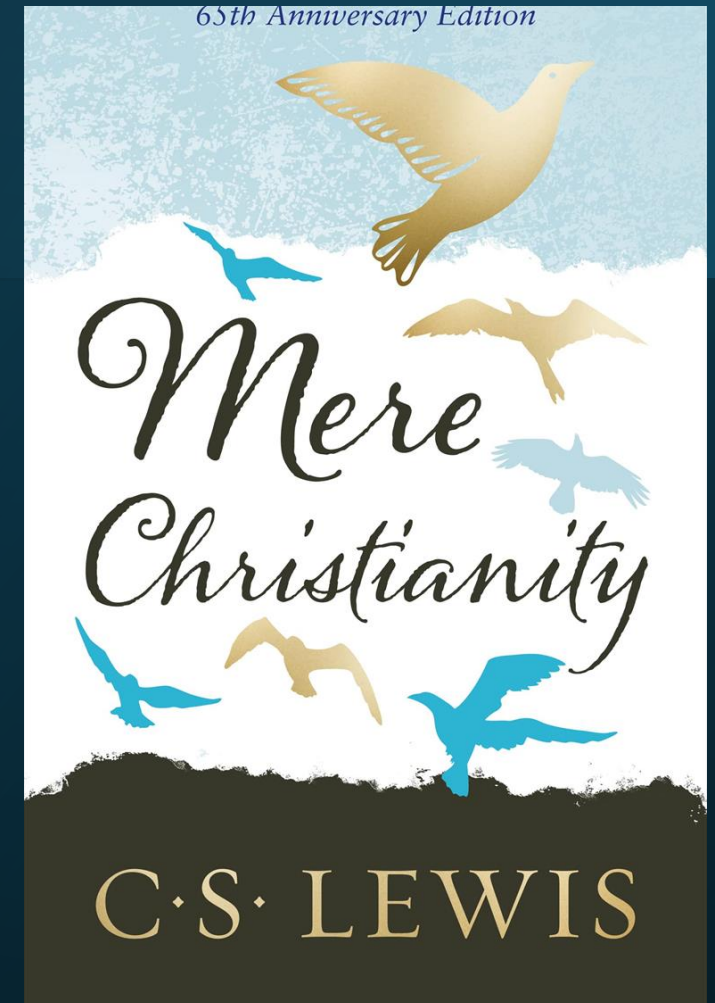
# Defending the Faith



1908



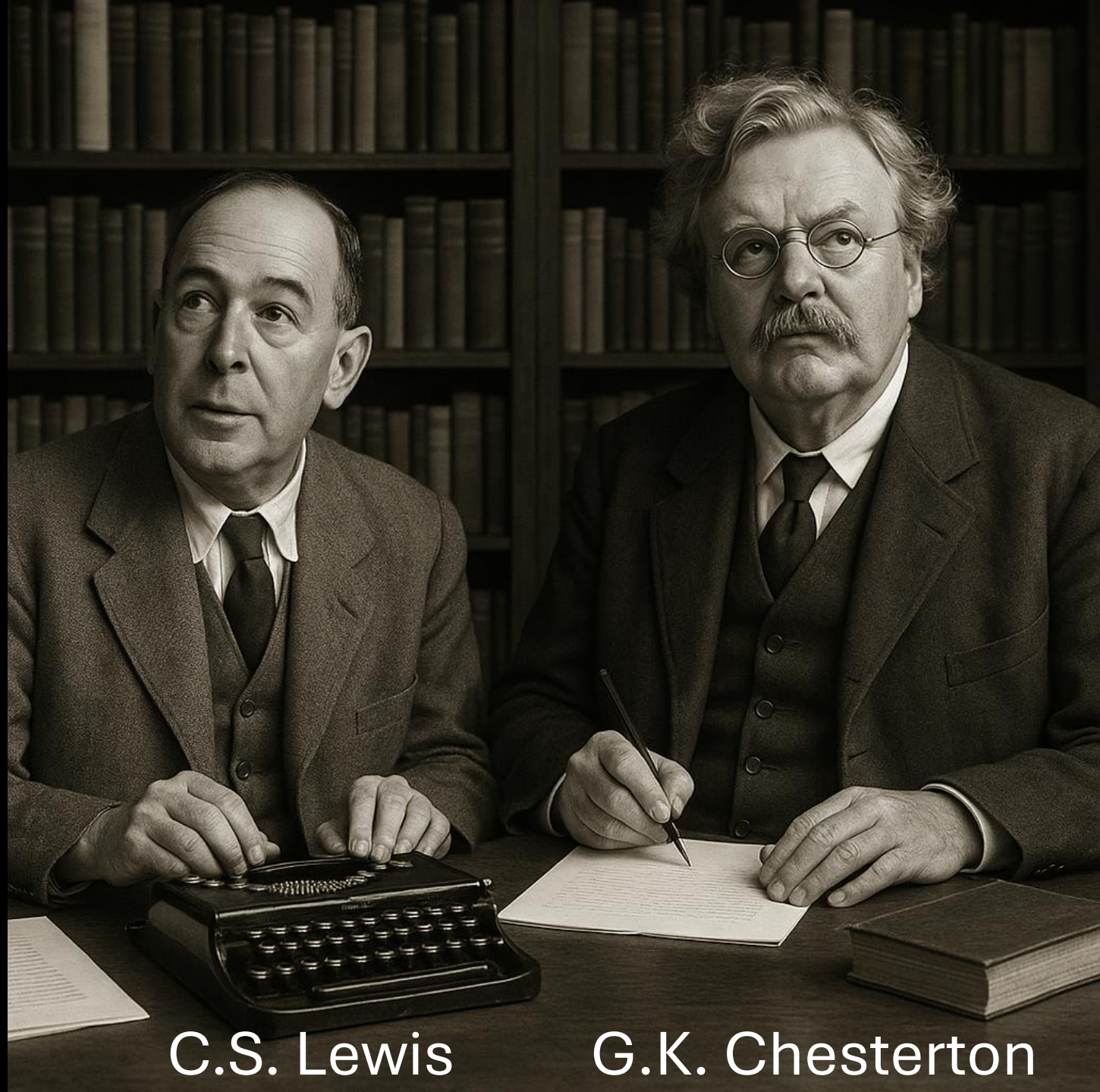
1925



1952

# Is Christianity intellectually credible in the modern age?

Defending the faith with reason



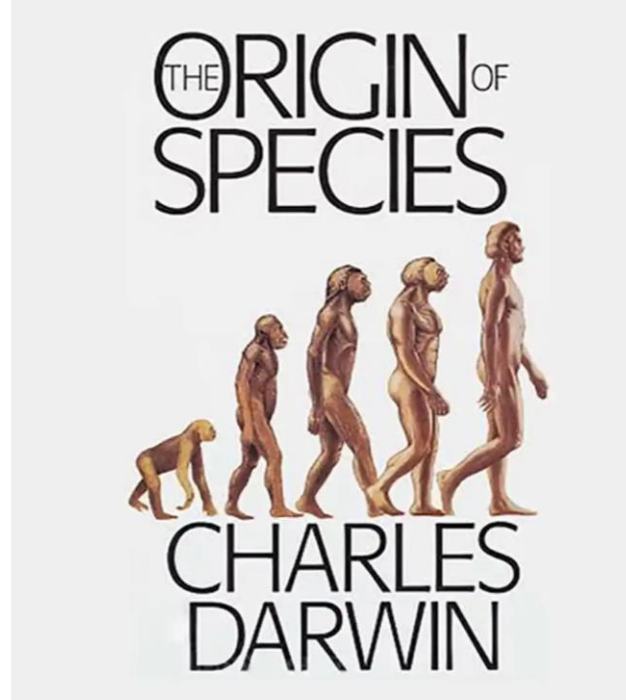
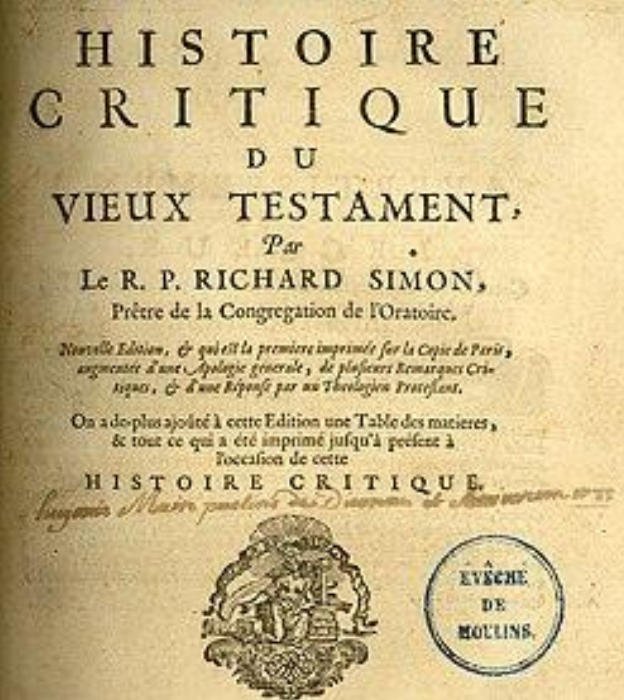
C.S. Lewis

G.K. Chesterton

Always be prepared to make a defense to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence...

– 1 Peter 3:15





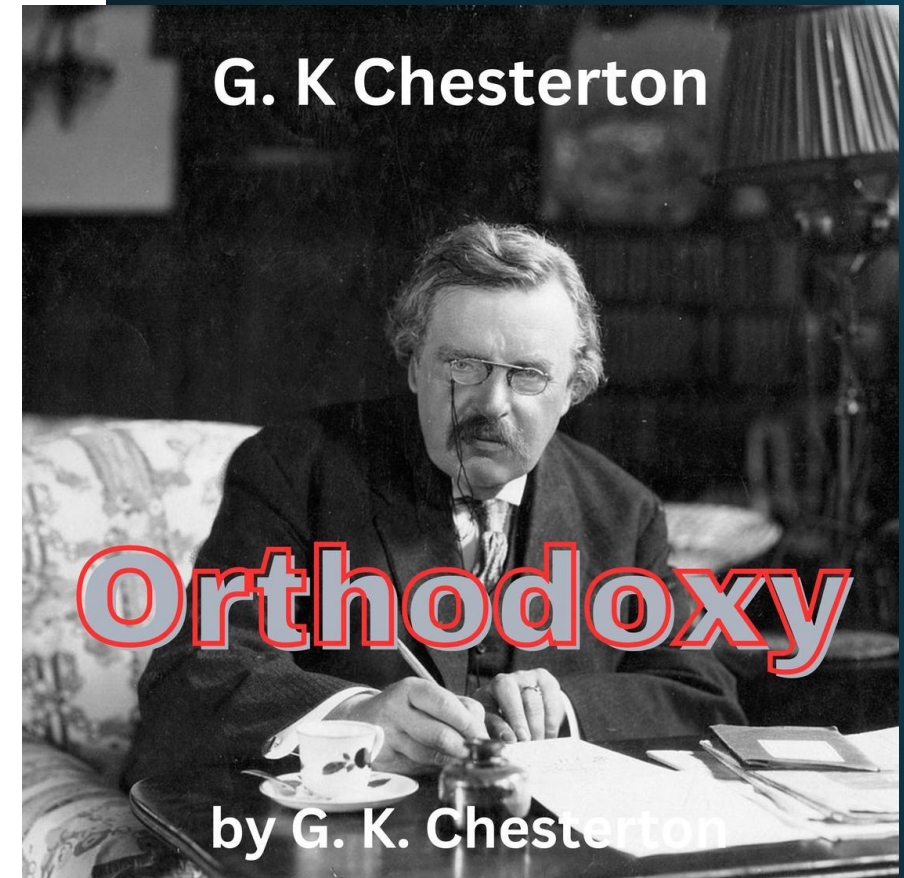
## Historic Context

- Darwin's *Origin of the Species* (1859) reduced man to an animal
  - Rationalism/science vs revealed religion
- Higher criticism of Scripture and rise of secular humanism
  - Christianity seen as myth or outdated superstition
- Two world wars
  - Where was God?



# Orthodoxy (1908)

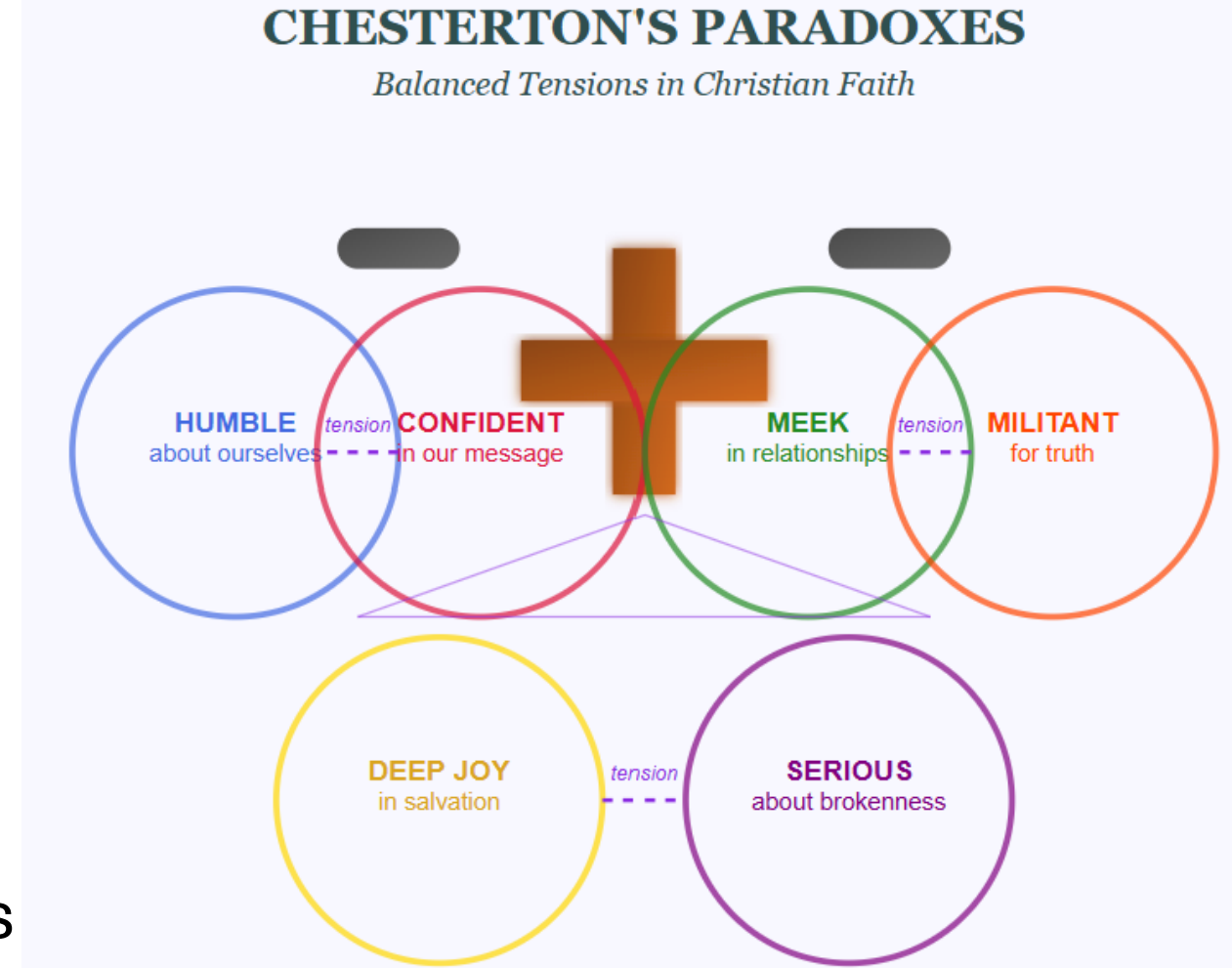
- **Author:** G.K. Chesterton
  - Self-educated British journalist
    - The *Daily News* and *The Illustrated London News*
  - Known for common sense and humor
  - Wrote *Father Brown* detective stories
- **Summary:** Chesterton's intellectual and spiritual autobiography defending Christian orthodoxy with wit and paradox.
- Christianity is
  - the “answer to the riddle of existence.”
  - Not boring, but thrilling



# Paradox

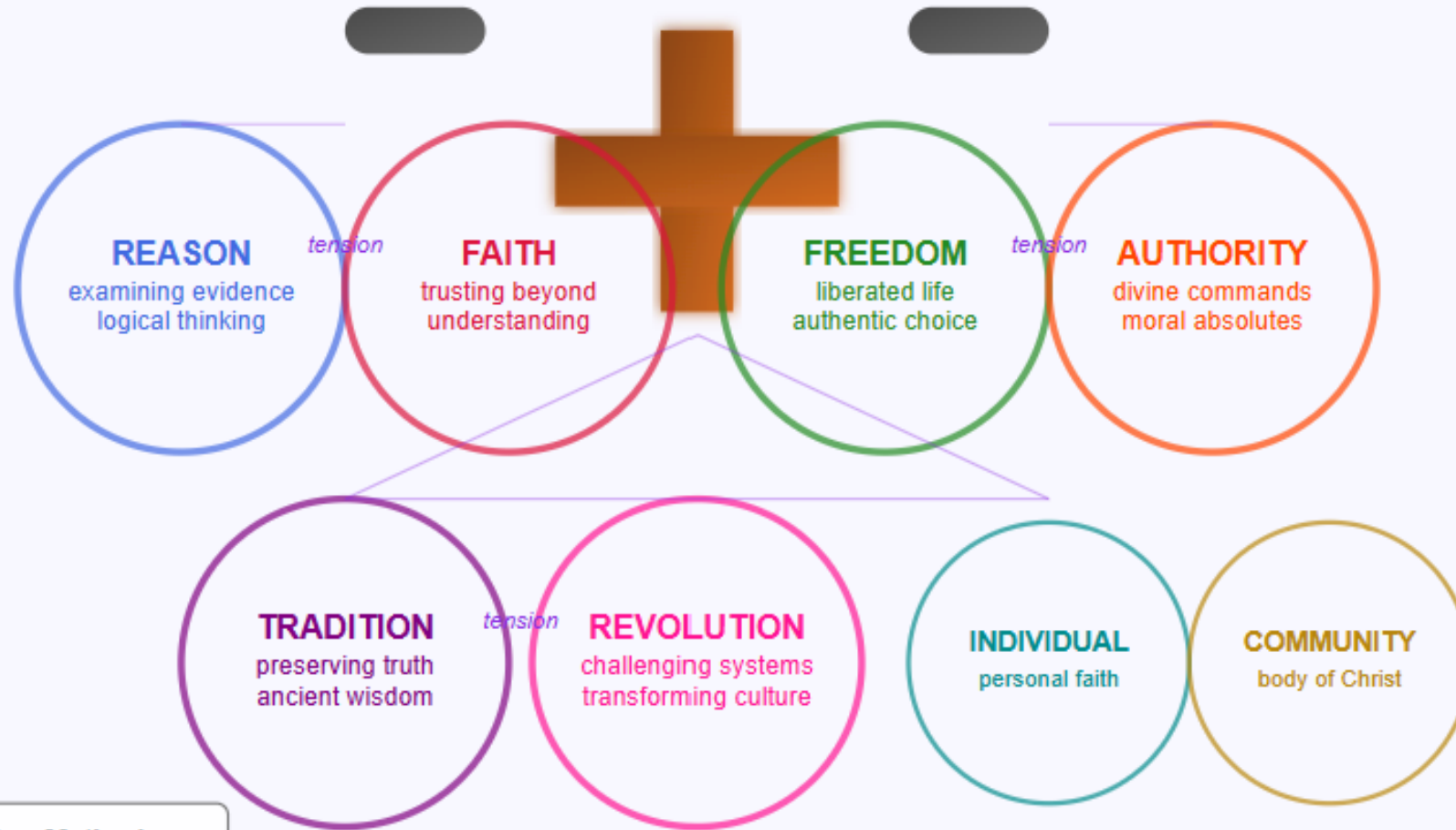
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- A surprising truth that appears contradictory at first glance but actually reveals a deeper harmony.
- Not logical contradictions to be solved, but creative tensions that reveal Christianity's unique ability to hold together truths other worldviews had to choose between.



# MORE CHESTERTON PARADOXES

*The Dynamic Tensions of Christian Truth*



## The Chesterton Method:

- Embrace paradox as strength
- Hold tensions in balance
- Avoid false either/or choices

The ultimate paradox:  
Incarnation, fully God and  
fully man

# Why Paradoxes Convince

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- **They match human experience:** Life really is complex and contradictory
- **They prevent extremism:** They force balanced thinking
- **They create intrigue:** Apparent contradictions make people want to understand more
- **They demonstrate sophistication:** Simple ideologies can't handle life's complexity
- Chesterton's Method
  - Rather than defending Christianity despite its paradoxes, Chesterton celebrated them as evidence of its truth. A faith that could hold all these tensions together, he argued, must be big enough to contain the full mystery of existence.

PARADOX



Truth standing on  
her head to  
get attention.

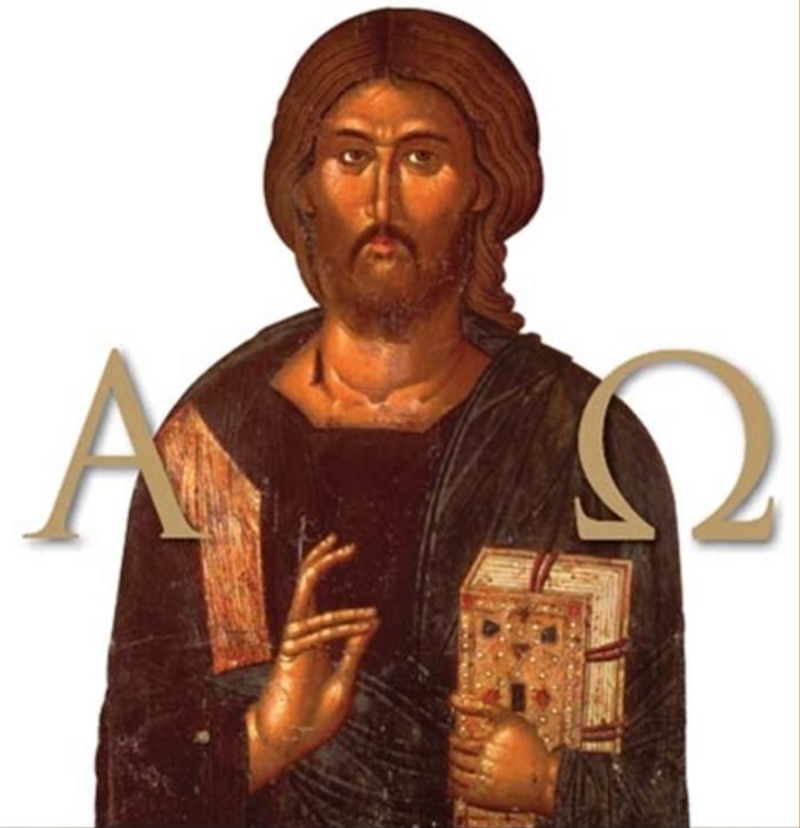
G. K. Chesterton

# The Everlasting Man (1925)

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- **Author:** G.K. Chesterton
- Response to HG Wells' *Outline of History*.
- **Summary:** A philosophical outline of human history arguing for Christianity's unique place in human development. Christ is at the center.
- Influential in conversion of CS Lewis.

## G.K. CHESTERTON THE EVERLASTING MAN



IGNATIUS

# Two-Part Structure

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- Man as unique in creation
- Christ as unique in history

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# Christian Ideal

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**“The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and left untried.”**

*– G. K. Chesterton*

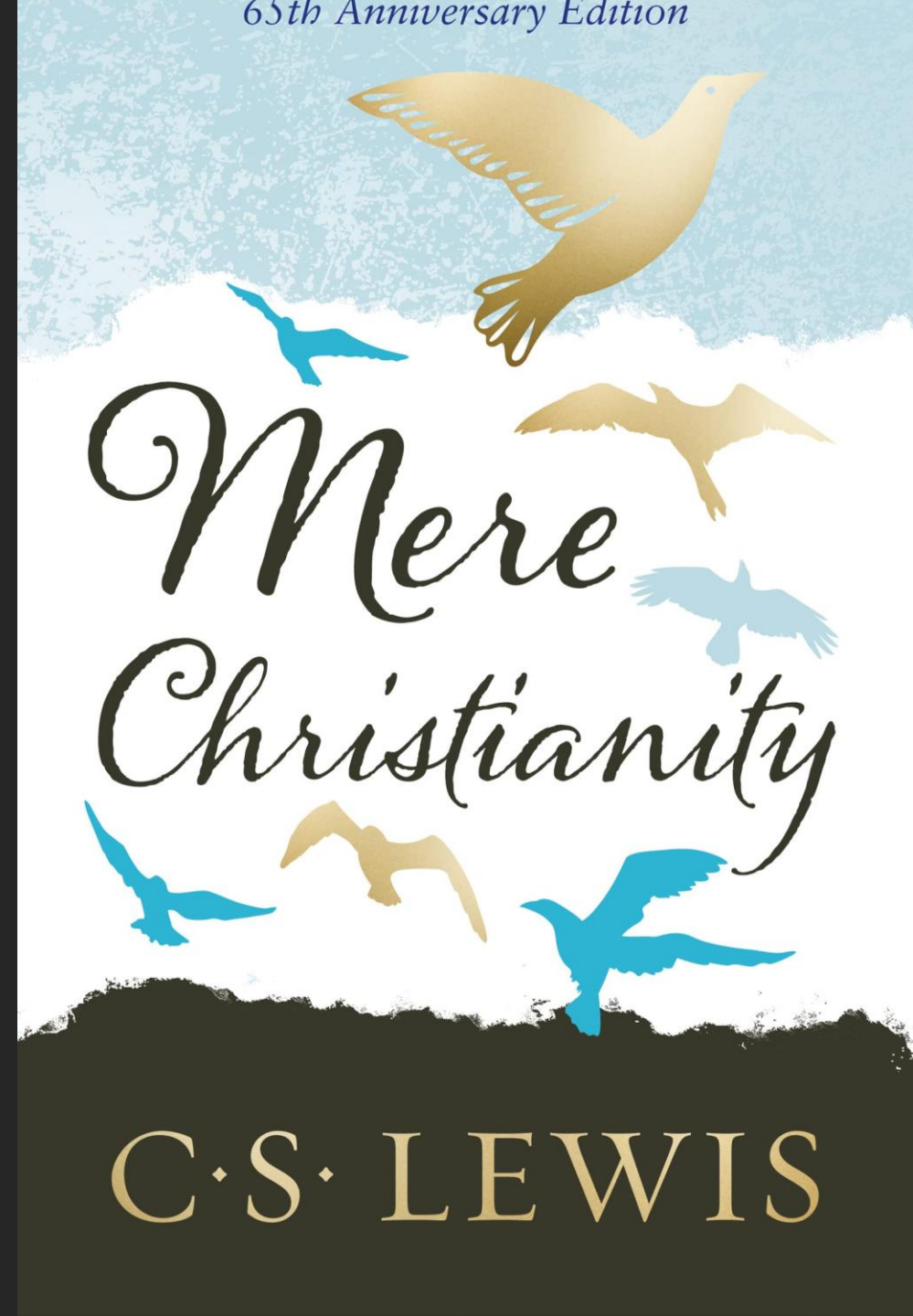
# Chesterton's Key Themes

- Truth is often paradoxical
- Christianity explains humanity's deepest questions
- Christ is the unique answer to history



# Mere Christianity (1952)

- **Author:** C.S. (Jack) Lewis
  - Oxford professor, author, World War II voice
  - Christian to Atheist to Theist to Christian
- **Summary:** Lewis's logical case for Christianity, exploring common ground among Christian denominations and basic Christian beliefs – from BBC talks.
- **Quote:** "I gave in, and admitted that God was God... perhaps the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England."



# THE MOST RELUCTANT CONVERT

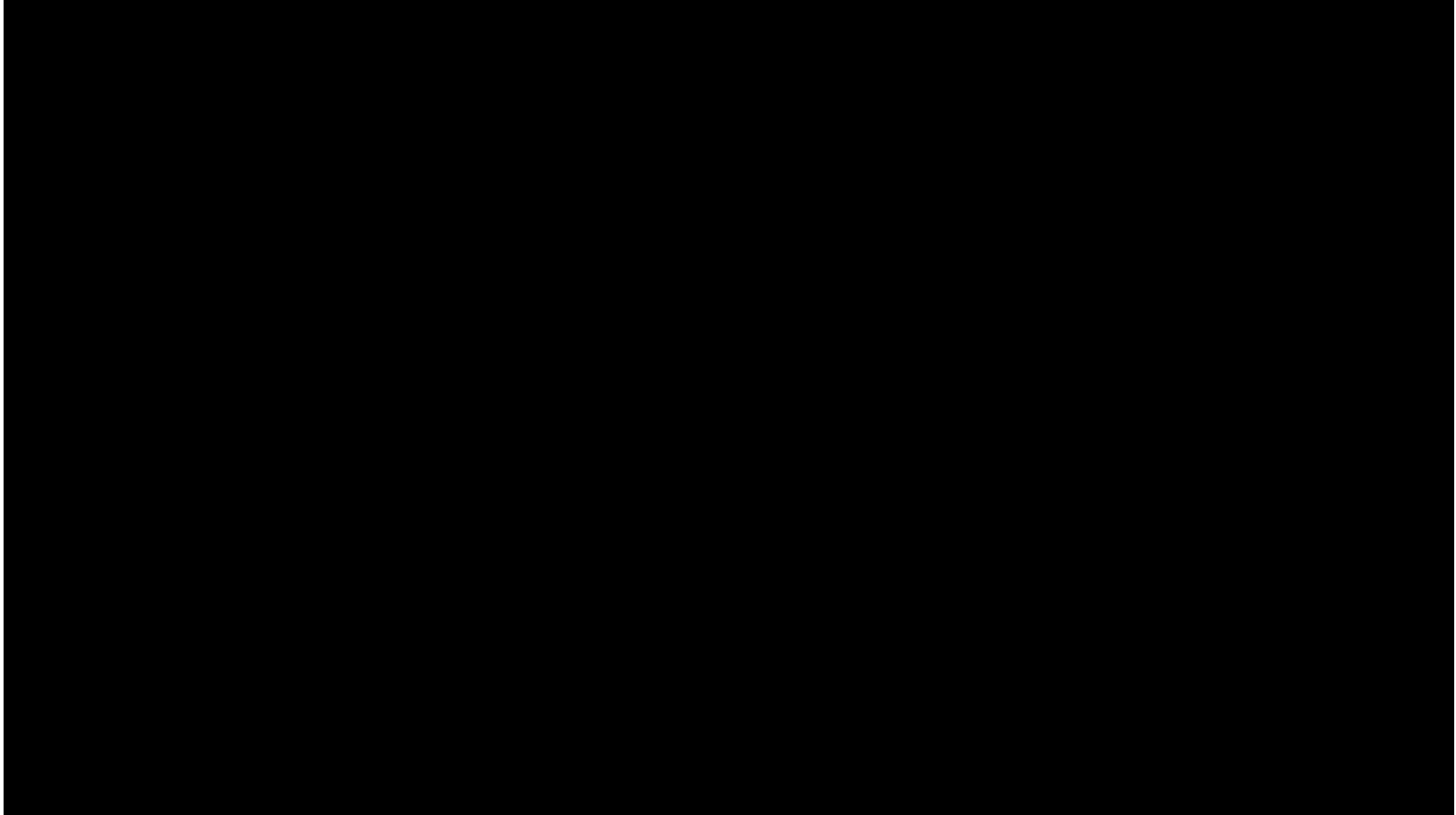
The Untold Story of

*C.S. Lewis*

"ONE OF THE  
BEST CHRISTIAN MOVIES  
OF THE YEAR."

- plugged'n.





# The Inklings at Oxford



1933-1949

# The Structure of *Mere Christianity*

## BOOK 1. RIGHT AND WRONG AS A CLUE TO THE MEANING OF THE UNIVERSE

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## BOOK 3. CHRISTIAN BEHAVIOUR

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# Key Themes

- Moral law points to God
  - Universal sense of right and wrong
- Trilemma: Liar, Lunatic, or Lord
- The problem of pain
  - Suffering in God's good world
- “Mere Christianity” = essentials of faith
- Practical faith

## C. S. LEWIS' TRILEMMA

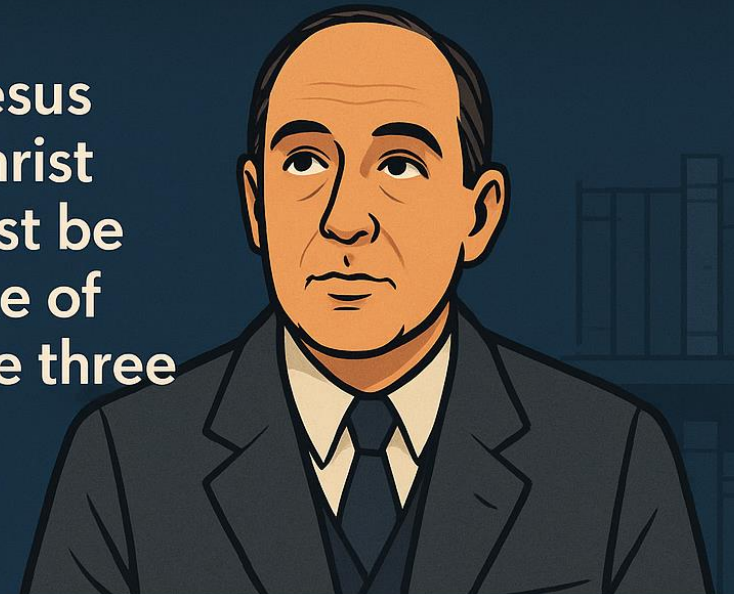


**LIAR**

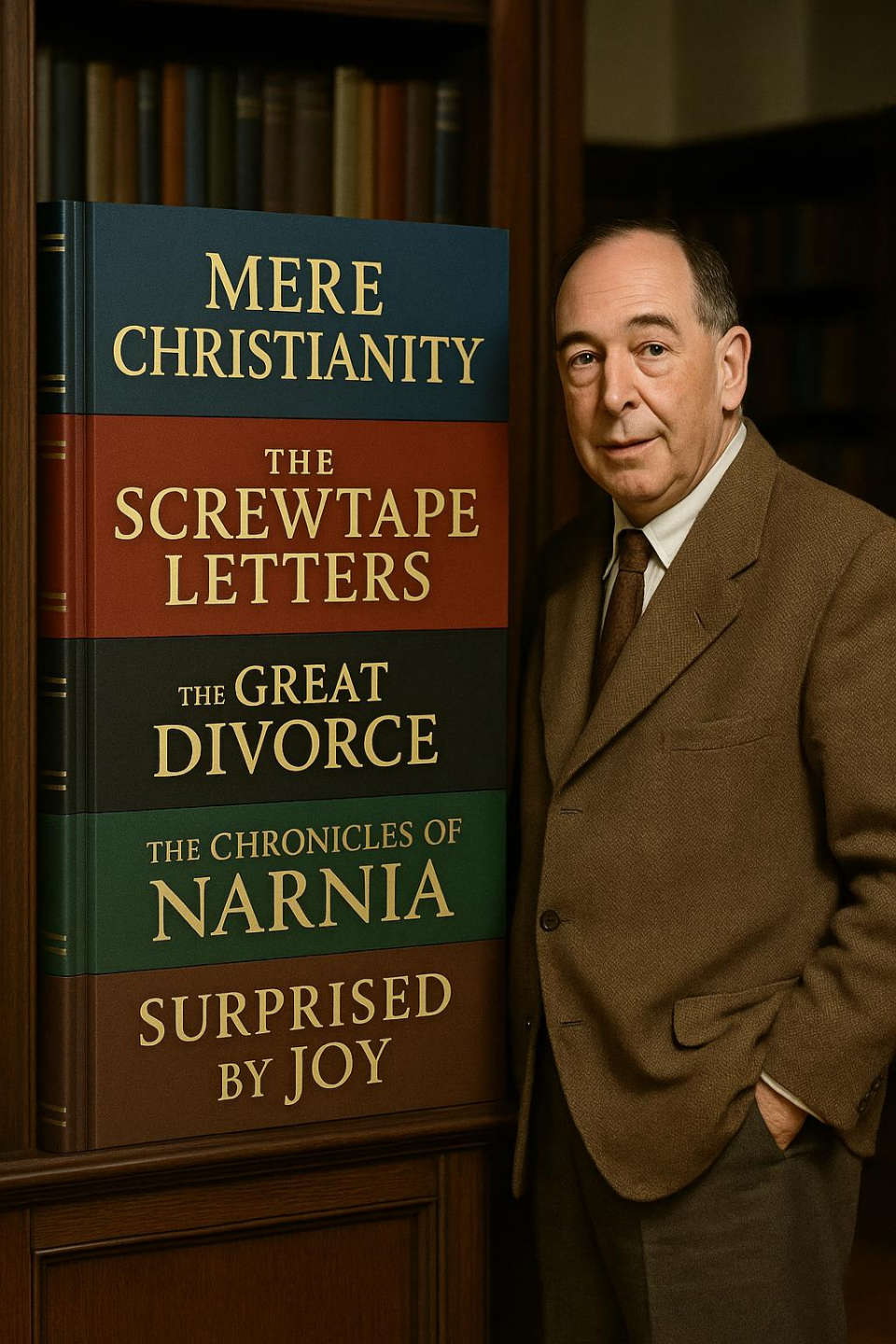
**LUNATIC**

**LORD**

Jesus  
Christ  
must be  
one of  
these three



# Sample of books by CS Lewis

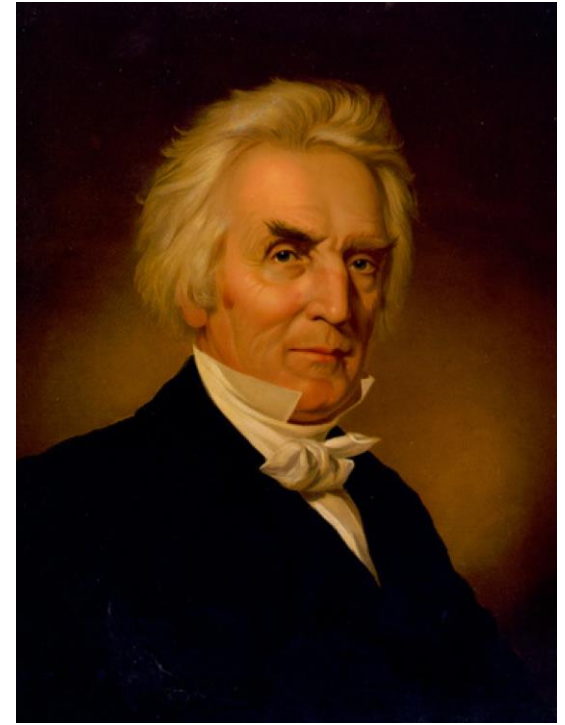


- Christian apologetics and theology
  - Mere Christianity
  - The Problem of Pain
  - Miracles
  - The Abolition of Man
  - A Grief Observed
- Fiction
  - The Chronicles of Narnia
  - The Space Trilogy
  - The Screwtape Letters
  - The Great Divorce
- Autobiography
  - Surprised by Joy
- Academic/Literary Criticism

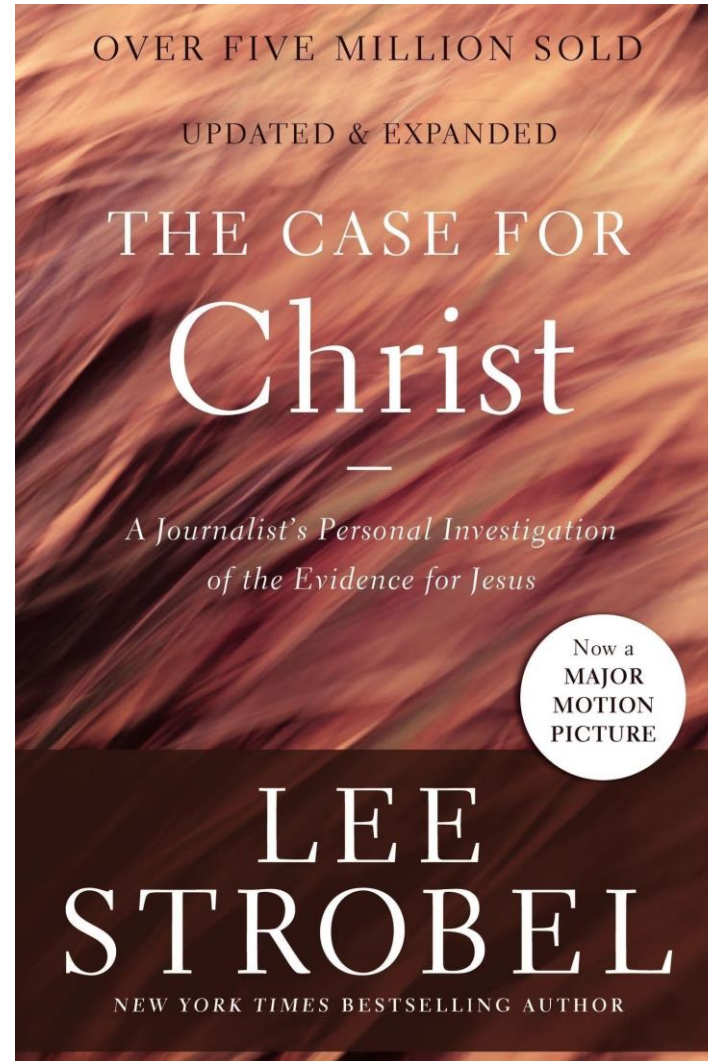
# The Restoration Movement, Chesterton, and Lewis

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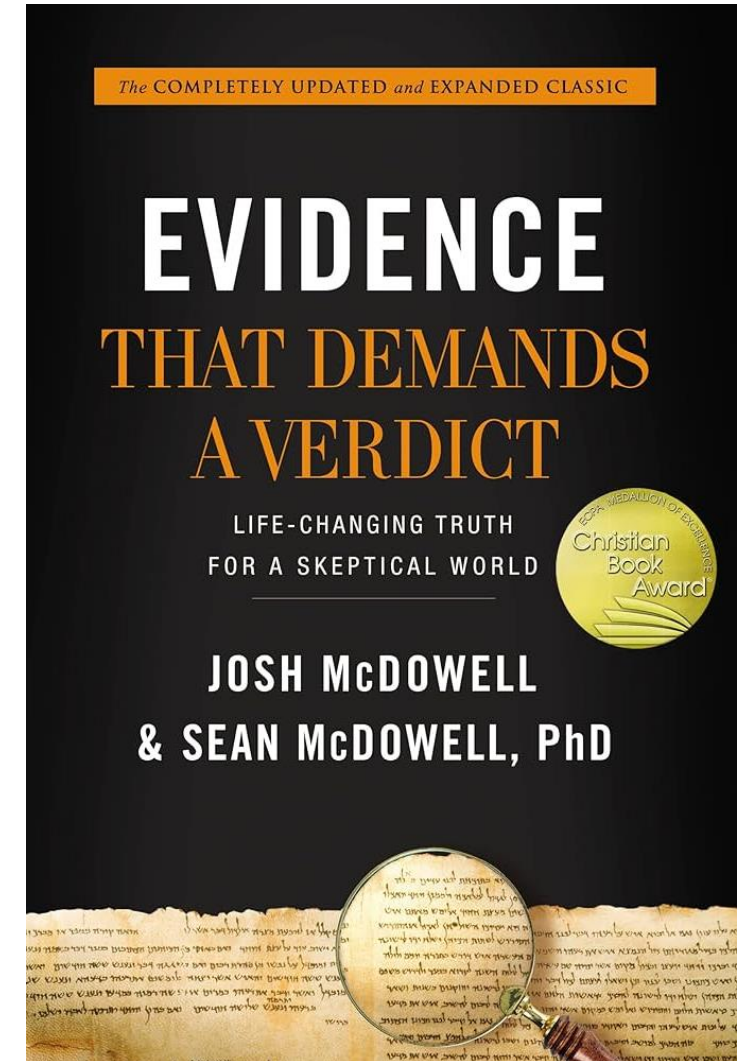
- Rational approach: reason and evidence
- Respect for Biblical authority
- *Mere Christianity* was about core beliefs all Christians share
- Evangelical hearts: reaching out to seekers and sceptics



# Modern heirs of Chesterton and Lewis



Lee Strobel: 40 books

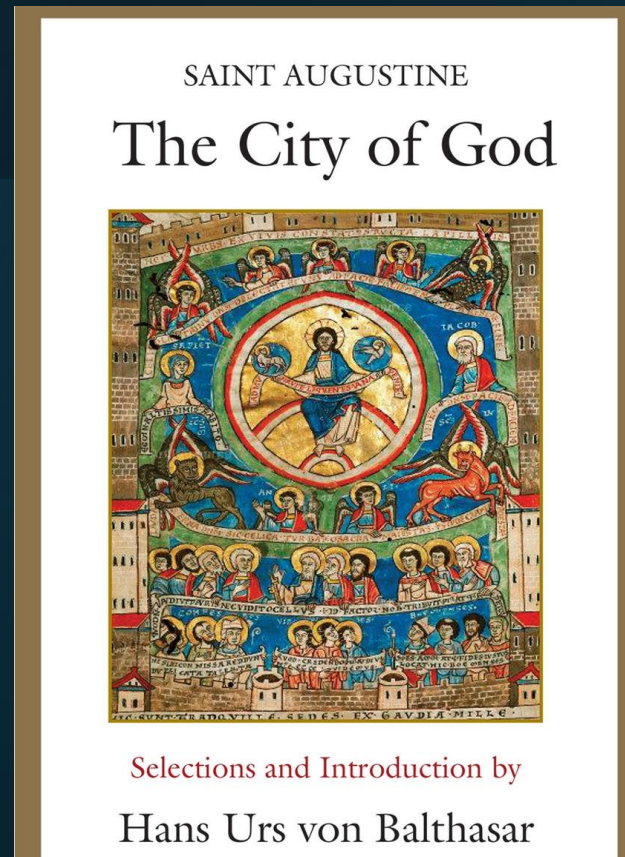


Josh McDowell: 150 books

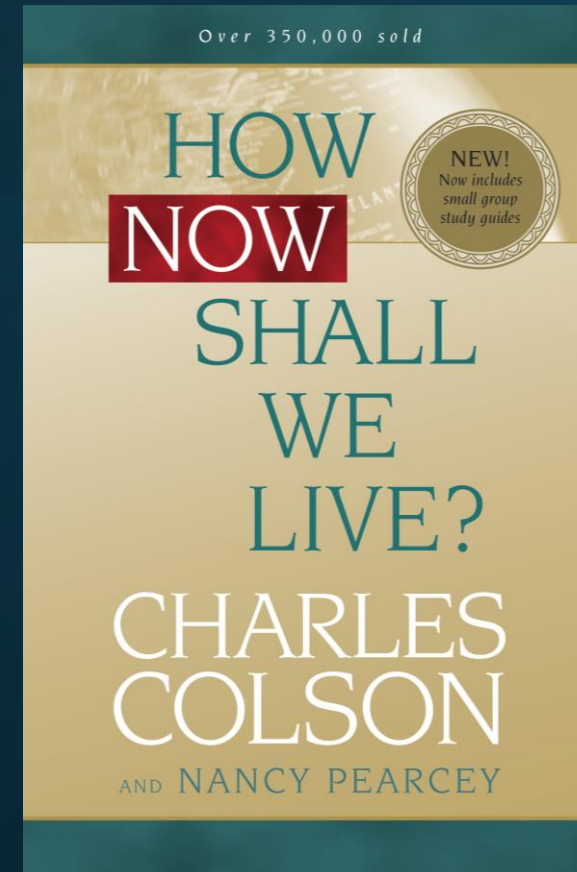


# Next Week:

## The Christian Worldview and Society



426



1999

# Twelve Unifying Themes

**1. The Foundation of Faith**

What we believe and why

*Luther, Calvin, Campbell*

**2. Knowing God's Character**

His attributes and nature

*Aquinas, Tozer, Packer*

**3. Authentic Conversion**

What real faith looks like

*Augustine, Edwards*

**4. The Cost of Discipleship**

Following Christ isn't easy

*Bonhoeffer, Chan, Platt*

**5. Pursuing God's Presence**

Intimacy with the Divine

*Kempis, Lawrence, Tozer*

**6. Spiritual Warfare**

The battle for our souls

*Lewis, Edwards, Peretti, LaHaye/Jenkins*

**7. Defending the Faith**

Christianity makes sense

*Chesterton, Lewis*

**8. Christian Worldview and Society**

Faith and public life

*Augustine, Chesterton, Colson*

**9. The Pilgrim's Journey**

Life as movement toward God

*Bunyan, Dante, Sheldon*

**10. Faith, Reason, and Wonder**

Christianity appeals to the whole person

*Tolkien, Lewis, Aquinas*

**11. Life's Purpose**

Why are we here?

*Warren, Misc others*

Books,  
ranked  
by  
reading  
level

Rank	Title	Author	Reading Grade Level	Difficulty	
1	Summa Theologica	Thomas Aquinas	Graduate/16+	Most Difficult	★★★★★
	The City of God	Augustine	Graduate/16+	Most Difficult	★★★★★
	Institutes of the Christian Religion	John Calvin	Graduate/16+	Most Difficult	★★★★★
4	Divine Comedy	Dante Alighieri	College/14-16	Very Difficult	★★★★☆
	The Christian System	Alexander Campbell	College/14-16	Very Difficult	★★★★☆
	The Everlasting Man	G.K. Chesterton	College/14-16	Very Difficult	★★★★☆
7	Orthodoxy	G.K. Chesterton	College/13-15	Difficult	★★★☆☆
	Religious Affections	Jonathan Edwards	College/13-15	Difficult	★★★☆☆
9	Confessions	Augustine	College/12-14	Difficult	★★★☆☆
10	The Imitation of Christ	Thomas à Kempis	High School/11-13	Moderately Difficult	★★★☆☆
	Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God	Jonathan Edwards	High School/11-13	Moderately Difficult	★★★☆☆
12	The Pilgrim's Progress	John Bunyan	High School/10-12	Moderately Difficult	★★★☆☆
	Luther's 95 Theses	Martin Luther	High School/10-12	Moderately Difficult	★★★☆☆
14	How Now Shall We Live	Chuck Colson	High School/9-11	Moderate	★★☆☆☆
	Knowing God	J.I. Packer	High School/9-11	Moderate	★★☆☆☆
	The Knowledge of the Holy	A.W. Tozer	High School/9-11	Moderate	★★☆☆☆
	The Cost of Discipleship	Dietrich Bonhoeffer	High School/9-11	Moderate	★★☆☆☆
18	Mere Christianity	C.S. Lewis	High School/8-10	Moderate	★★☆☆☆
	The Screwtape Letters	C.S. Lewis	High School/8-10	Moderate	★★☆☆☆
	The Lord of the Rings	J.R.R. Tolkien	High School/8-10	Moderate	★★☆☆☆
21	The Pursuit of God	A.W. Tozer	Middle School/7-9	Moderately Easy	★★☆☆☆
	The Practice of the Presence of God	Brother Lawrence	Middle School/7-9	Moderately Easy	★★☆☆☆
23	Chronicles of Narnia	C.S. Lewis	Middle School/6-8	Easy	★☆☆☆☆
	Radical	David Platt	Middle School/6-8	Easy	★☆☆☆☆
	Crazy Love	Francis Chan	Middle School/6-8	Easy	★☆☆☆☆
	In His Steps	Charles Sheldon	Middle School/6-8	Easy	★☆☆☆☆
27	The Purpose Driven Life	Rick Warren	Elementary/5-7	Easiest	★☆☆☆☆

# Great Christian Literature Course Schedule

Woodlawn Christian Church - Fellowship in Christ Class

Week	Date	Theme	Description	Texts		
1	July 13	<b>The Foundation of Faith</b>	Explore how the Reformation's call back to Scripture laid the groundwork for returning to biblical simplicity.	<i>Luther's 95 Theses</i>	<i>Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion</i>	<i>Campbell's The Christian System</i>
2	July 20	<b>Knowing the Character of God</b>	Discover God's attributes through three different eras showing He is both knowable and beyond full comprehension.	<i>Tozer's The Knowledge of the Holy</i>	<i>Packer's Knowing God</i>	<i>Aquinas' Summa Theologica (selections)</i>
3	July 27	<b>The Journey of Conversion and Confession</b>	Examine authentic spiritual experience from autobiography's father to America's greatest theologian.	<i>Augustine's Confessions</i>	<i>Edwards' Religious Affections</i>	
4	Aug. 3	<b>The Cost of True Discipleship</b>	Challenge comfortable Christianity through voices that demand everything in following Christ.	<i>Bonhoeffer's The Cost of Discipleship</i>	<i>Platt's Radical</i>	<i>Chan's Crazy Love</i>
5	Aug. 10	<b>The Pursuit of God's Presence</b>	Discover that God desires intimate fellowship with ordinary believers across three centuries of seeking.	<i>Tozer's The Pursuit of God</i>	<i>Brother Lawrence's The Practice of the Presence of God</i>	<i>Thomas à Kempis' The Imitation of Christ</i>
6	Aug. 24	<b>The Reality of Spiritual Warfare</b>	Explore the spiritual battle for human souls through wit and fire-and-brimstone warnings.	<i>Lewis' The Screwtape Letters</i>	<i>Edwards' Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God</i>	<i>Peretti's This Present Darkness</i>
7	Aug. 31	<b>Defending the Faith</b>	Witness the golden age of Christian apologetics demonstrating Christianity's intellectual credibility.	<i>Chesterton's Orthodoxy</i>	<i>Chesterton's The Everlasting Man</i>	<i>Lewis' Mere Christianity</i>
8	Sept. 7	<b>The Christian Worldview and Society</b>	Understand how Christians should engage the world through voices from Rome's fall to modernity's rise.	<i>Augustine's The City of God</i>	<i>Chesterton's Orthodoxy (selections)</i>	<i>Colson's How Now Shall We Live</i>
9	Sept. 14	<b>The Pilgrim's Journey</b>	Experience the Christian life as a journey toward God through cosmic vision, everyman allegory, and practical action.	<i>Bunyan's The Pilgrim's Progress</i>	<i>Dante's Divine Comedy (selections)</i>	<i>Sheldon's In His Steps</i>
10	Sept. 21	<b>Faith, Reason, and Wonder</b>	See how Christianity engages both mind and imagination through rational foundation and imaginative power.	<i>Lewis' Chronicles of Narnia (selections)</i>	<i>Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings (selections)</i>	<i>Aquinas' Summa Theologica (selections)</i>
11	Sept. 28	<b>Purpose and Meaning in Life</b>	Compare contemporary approaches to purpose with insights from earlier authors on life's fundamental question.	<i>Warren's The Purpose Driven Life</i>	<i>Selections from various authors</i>	
12	Oct. 5	<b>The Unity of Christian Truth</b>	Demonstrate the remarkable unity of Christian truth across 1,600 years of faithful witnesses.	<i>Synthesis of major themes</i>	<i>Brief readings from multiple authors</i>	