

Reflections

MAY 2023

Solitary Religion?

I

n December 1950, C.S. Lewis wrote a letter to Mary Van Deusen, responding to some questions she had asked, including ones related to church. An excerpt follows.

The only rite which we know to have been instituted by Our Lord Himself is the Holy Communion (‘Do this in remembrance of me’— ‘If you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, ye have no life in you’). This is an order and must be obeyed. The other services [i.e., in the *Book of Common Prayer*] are, I take it, traditional and might lawfully be altered. But the New Testament does not envisage solitary religion: some kind of regular assembly for worship and instruction is everywhere taken for granted in the Epistles. So we must be regular practising members of the Church.

Some (like you—and me) find it more natural to approach God in solitude: but we must go to church as well.



Of course we differ in temperament. Some (like you—and me) find it more natural to approach

God in solitude: but we must go to church as well. Others find it easier to approach Him thro’ the services: but they must practice private prayer & reading as well. For the church is not a human society of people united by their natural affinities, but the Body of Christ in which all members however different (and He rejoices in their differences & by no means wishes to iron them out) must share the common life, complementing and helping and receiving one another precisely by their differences. (Re-read 1st Corinthians [chapter] 12 and meditate on it. The word translated *members* [would] perhaps be better translated *organs*).

If people like you and me find much that we don’t naturally like in the public & corporate side of Christianity all the better for us: it will teach us humility and charity towards simple low-brow people who may be better Christians than ourselves... ‘Regular but cool’ in Church

attendance is no bad symptom. Obedience is the key to all doors: *feelings* come (or don’t come) and go as God pleases. We can’t produce them at will and mustn’t try.¹

In an article titled “C.S. Lewis, Reluctant Churchman”, Wayne Martindale, Professor of English Emeritus at Wheaton College, observed that Lewis had no natural fondness for church-going, but he went. Martindale explained: “He went at first because he felt he ought to: the Scriptures that had won his reasoned assent commanded it. He went later because he learned that it was good for him and necessary for his spiritual growth.”²

We live in a time when it is easy to watch church services on television or on-line. While this can be a blessing as a supplement to regular church attendance and in situations where a person is unable to attend church in person, it is notable that some of the reasons Lewis cites for the importance of going to church, including taking Holy Communion and the benefits of “[sharing] the common life, complementing and helping and receiving one another” among people with differences, are related to being physically present with other people.³



“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

HEBREWS 10:24-25 (ESV)

¹ *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis, Vol. III, Narnia, Cambridge and Joy, 1950-1963*, edited by Walter Hooper, HarperSanFrancisco, 2007, pp. 68-69 (some footnotes omitted).

² <https://touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=02-04-019-f>

³ For a thoughtful article on this topic, see: Ronald L. Giese, Jr., “Is ‘Online Church’ Really Church? The Church as God’s Temple”, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelos/article/is-online-church-really-church-the-church-as-gods-temple/>.

