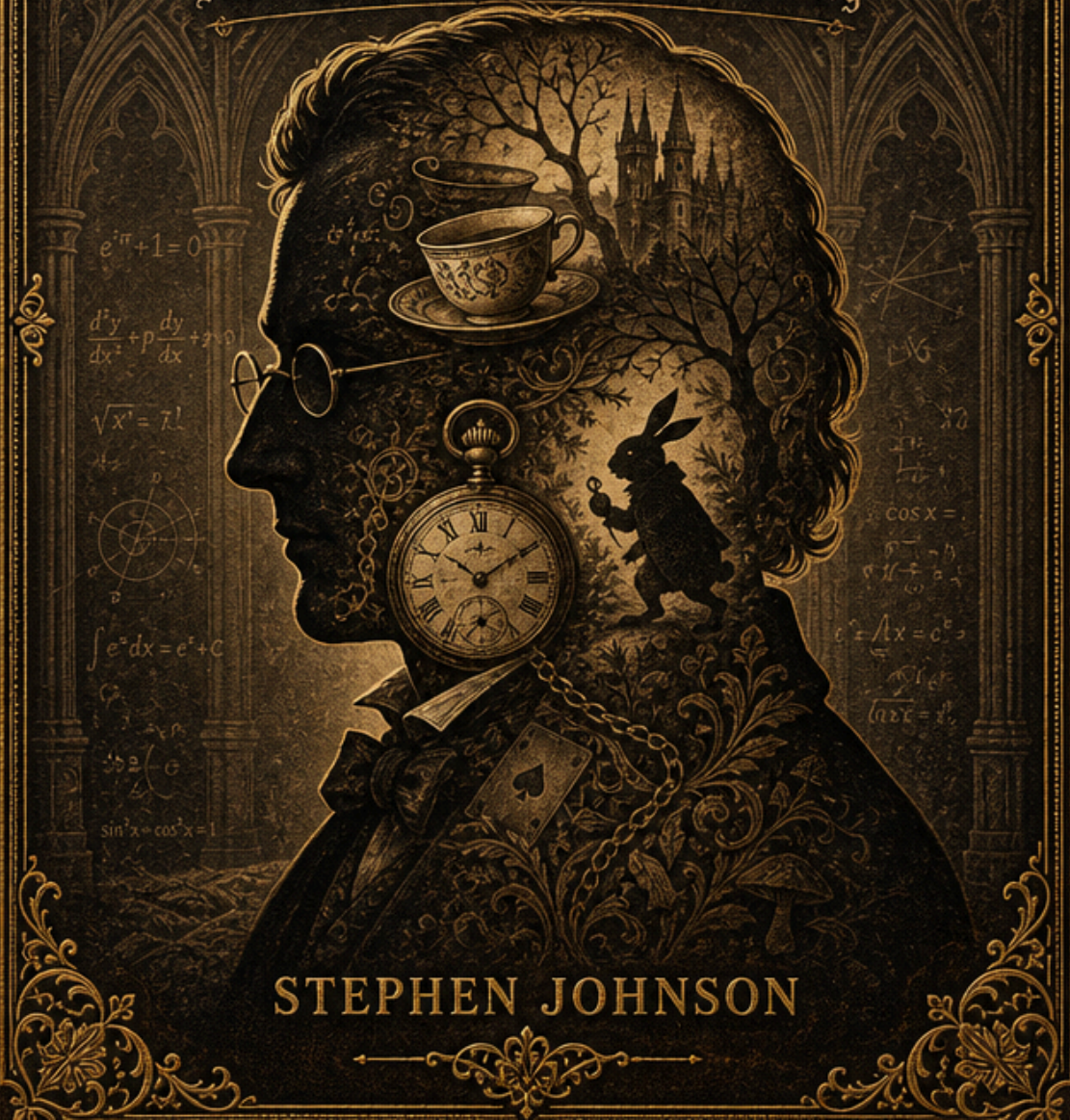


LEWIS CARROLL

A Biography of Faith and Fantasy



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Introduction: The Hidden Dimension of a Literary Giant

When readers think of Lewis Carroll, they conjure images of a grinning Cheshire Cat, a Mad Hatter's tea party, and a young girl tumbling down a rabbit hole into Wonderland. The author's whimsical fantasies have enchanted generations, securing his place among the immortals of children's literature. Yet this popular image obscures a fundamental truth about the man behind the pseudonym: Charles Lutwidge Dodgson was, above all else, a devout Christian whose faith in Christ and belief in a loving God stood at the very core of his being.

For more than a century, scholars and biographers have examined Carroll's life from nearly every conceivable angle; his mathematics, his photography, his relationships with children, even his psychology. But until recently, remarkably little attention has been paid to the religious dimension of his life and work. This neglect is particularly striking given that Dodgson served as a deacon in the Church of England, maintained a personal library containing over four hundred religious titles, and explicitly stated that his novel *Sylvie and Bruno* was the work he believed God meant for him to write.

This biography seeks to correct that oversight by placing Carroll's Christian faith where it belongs: at the centre of his story. From his childhood in a clerical household to his final days, from his beloved Alice books to his lesser-known religious writings, faith shaped every aspect of Charles Dodgson's life. Understanding this dimension is not merely an academic exercise; it is essential to comprehending the full meaning and significance of his legacy.

Formation in Faith: Childhood and Family

Charles Lutwidge Dodgson was born on January 27, 1832, in the parsonage at Daresbury, a small village in Cheshire, England. His birth into a clerical family was no accident of biography but rather the foundation upon which his entire life would be built. His father, the Reverend Charles Dodgson, served as perpetual curate of Daresbury and would later become Archdeacon of Richmond and a canon of Ripon Cathedral. The elder Dodgson was a man of considerable learning, having achieved a double first at Christ Church, Oxford, and his household reflected the serious Anglican piety characteristic of the Victorian clergy.

Young Charles was the eldest son and third child in what would eventually become a family of eleven children. The Dodgson household was one of warmth, intellectual stimulation, and deep religious devotion. Daily prayers, Bible reading, and theological discussion were as natural to the family routine as meals and bedtime. The Reverend Dodgson maintained high standards for his children's education, both secular and spiritual, and young Charles proved an eager and brilliant student.

The religious atmosphere of the Dodgson home was distinctly Anglican; neither the elaborate ritualism of the High Church nor the emotional enthusiasm of Low Church evangelicalism, but rather a middle way emphasising reason, tradition, and moral earnestness. This moderate Anglicanism would remain Charles's spiritual home throughout his life. He absorbed not only the doctrines and liturgy of the Church of England but also its characteristic approach to faith: intellectually rigorous yet deeply devotional, traditional yet open to careful questioning, serious about sin and salvation yet confident in God's love and mercy.

The young Dodgson's religious education extended beyond formal instruction. In the isolated parsonage, far from the diversions of town life, the children created their own entertainments, and Charles emerged as the family's chief entertainer. He wrote plays, stories, and poems for his siblings, edited family magazines, and constructed elaborate games. Even in these childhood creations, moral and spiritual themes appeared naturally. His early writings, preserved in family magazines like "The Rectory Umbrella" and "Mischmasch," reveal a boy already thinking seriously about questions of right and wrong, truth and falsehood, the nature of reality and illusion.

One particularly telling childhood incident reveals the integration of faith and imagination that would characterise his mature work. Young Charles once constructed a miniature railway for earthworms in the garden, complete with stations and rules of conduct. When asked about this peculiar project, he explained that he was teaching the worms to behave properly; a child's game, certainly, but one that reflected a worldview in which even the smallest creatures existed within a moral order established by a loving Creator.

In 1843, when Charles was eleven, his father accepted the living of Croft-on-Tees in Yorkshire, a more prosperous parish that allowed the growing family greater comfort. The move to Croft Rectory brought new opportunities but did not alter the fundamental character of the household. If anything, the Reverend Dodgson's increased responsibilities and status reinforced the family's commitment to the Anglican faith and practice.

Charles's formal education began at home under his father's tutelage, then continued at Richmond Grammar School and Rugby School. At Rugby, then under the headmastership of Archibald Tait (later Archbishop of Canterbury), Dodgson encountered a broader religious world. The school's chapel services, religious instruction, and moral atmosphere all reinforced the faith he had learned at home. Though he later recalled his years at Rugby with little affection, he was bullied and struggled with the rough-and-tumble of boarding school life; the religious foundation remained solid.

By the time Charles Dodgson matriculated at Christ Church, Oxford, in 1850, his Christian faith was not a superficial veneer but a deep conviction woven into the fabric of his identity. The clerical household of his childhood had given him more than religious knowledge; it had shaped his imagination, his moral sensibility, and his understanding of the world. The God he worshipped was not distant or abstract but intimately involved in creation, a God who delighted in beauty, order, and even playfulness. This vision of divine creativity would profoundly influence his literary work.

Oxford Years: Mathematics, Logic, and Ordination

Christ Church, Oxford, would be Charles Dodgson's home for the remainder of his life, a span of nearly half a century. He arrived as an undergraduate in 1850 and quickly distinguished himself as a brilliant student, particularly in mathematics and classics. In 1852, he was nominated to a studentship (equivalent to a fellowship at other Oxford colleges), a position that provided him with rooms, income, and the expectation of a lifetime appointment, on the condition that he remained unmarried and took holy orders.

The Oxford that Dodgson entered was a place of intense religious ferment. The Oxford Movement, led by John Henry Newman, John Keble, and Edward Pusey, had shaken the Church of England to its foundations in the 1830s and 1840s. Though Newman had converted to Roman Catholicism in 1845, the movement's emphasis on the Catholic heritage of Anglicanism, the importance of sacraments and liturgy, and the spiritual authority of the church continued to influence Oxford religious life. At the same time, liberal theologians were beginning to question traditional doctrines in light of new biblical scholarship and scientific discoveries.

Dodgson navigated these theological currents with characteristic caution and moderation. He was deeply committed to the Church of England but suspicious of what he saw as the excesses of both High Church ritualism and liberal rationalism. His faith was traditional without being reactionary, intellectually engaged without abandoning orthodox belief. He attended chapel services regularly, participated in the sacramental life of the church, and read widely in theology and biblical studies.

In 1854, Dodgson received first-class honours in mathematics and was appointed a lecturer in mathematics at Christ Church, a position he would hold until 1881. His mathematical work was competent and occasionally innovative, particularly in logic, but he never attained the first rank of mathematical genius. What distinguished his approach to mathematics was the same quality that marked his religious faith: a delight in order, pattern, and the elegant solution to complex problems. For Dodgson, mathematics was not merely a professional occupation but a way of glimpsing the rational structure of God's creation.

The question of ordination loomed large during these years. His studentship required him to take holy orders, and his family background made this seem a natural path. Yet Dodgson hesitated. He was troubled by a stammer that made public speaking difficult, and he had doubts about his fitness for parish ministry. He also harboured ambitions as a writer and photographer that might conflict with clerical duties.

In 1861, after much prayer and reflection, Dodgson was ordained as a deacon by Bishop Samuel Wilberforce. Significantly, he chose not to proceed to the priest's orders, which would have required him to preach regularly and administer sacraments. The diaconate allowed him to maintain his position at Christ Church and participate in the church's ministry without assuming the full responsibilities of the priesthood. This decision has sometimes been interpreted as evidence of lukewarm faith or worldly ambition, but such readings misunderstand both the man and his motives.

Dodgson took his role as a deacon seriously. He preached occasionally (his stammer was less pronounced when reading prepared texts), assisted at services, and understood his entire life at Oxford as a form of Christian ministry. His teaching, his pastoral care for students, his friendships with children, and even his creative work were, in his view, all ways of serving God and neighbour. In a letter written years later, he explained that he saw no conflict between his literary work and his religious vocation: both were gifts from God to be used for His glory.

The integration of faith and intellect that characterised Dodgson's Oxford years is perhaps best illustrated by his work in logic. He published several books on symbolic logic, including *The Game of Logic* (1886) and *Symbolic Logic* (1896), which attempted to make logical reasoning accessible and even entertaining. For Dodgson, logic was not a dry academic exercise but a tool for clear thinking about truth, including theological truth. His logical works often used religious examples, and he saw no contradiction between rigorous reasoning and Christian faith. Indeed, he believed that God, as the source of all truth, could be approached through both revelation and reason.

During these Oxford years, Dodgson also developed his passion for photography, an art form then in its infancy. His photographs, particularly his portraits of children, are now recognised as masterpieces of Victorian photography. But even this artistic pursuit had a spiritual dimension. Dodgson saw photography as a way to capture and preserve beauty; God's beauty reflected in His creation. His photographs of children, often posed as angels, saints, or biblical figures, reveal his conviction that innocence and purity offered glimpses of the divine.

The Alice Books: Fantasy as Christian Vision

On July 4, 1862, Charles Dodgson took a boat trip up the Thames with the Liddell sisters: Lorina, Alice, and Edith, daughters of the Dean of Christ Church. To entertain the girls during the journey, he improvised a story about a girl named Alice who fell down a rabbit hole into a fantastical underground world. The middle sister, ten-year-old Alice Liddell, was so enchanted that she begged him to write it down. That request would change literary history.

Dodgson spent the next two years expanding and refining the story, eventually publishing it in 1865 as *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* under the pseudonym Lewis Carroll. The book was

an immediate success, praised for its imaginative brilliance, linguistic playfulness, and subversive humour. Six years later, he published a sequel, *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There* (1871), which proved equally popular.

On the surface, the Alice books appear to be pure fantasy, delightful nonsense with no deeper meaning. Carroll himself sometimes encouraged this reading, insisting that he had no allegorical intentions and that the stories were simply meant to entertain children. Yet a closer examination reveals that Christian themes, moral vision, and spiritual meaning are woven throughout these narratives, often in subtle and sophisticated ways.

The very structure of Alice's adventures reflects a Christian understanding of the soul's journey. Alice's fall down the rabbit hole can be read as a descent into a fallen world where nothing makes sense, where the rules of logic and morality seem suspended, where identity itself becomes uncertain. "Who in the world am I?" Alice asks herself. "Ah, that's the great puzzle!" This existential confusion mirrors the human condition as understood in Christian theology; we are created in God's image but fallen into a world of confusion and sin, uncertain of our true identity and purpose.

Throughout her adventures, Alice encounters characters who embody various vices and follies: the Duchess's brutality, the Queen of Hearts's arbitrary cruelty, the Mock Turtle's self-pity, and the Caterpillar's arrogant questioning. These are not merely comic characters but moral types, illustrations of how human nature becomes distorted when it is separated from the divine order. The Mad Hatter's tea party, frozen in perpetual teatime as punishment for murdering Time, suggests a world cut off from the natural rhythms of creation, a kind of hell where nothing progresses, nothing changes, nothing grows.

Yet Alice herself, despite her confusion and occasional frustration, maintains a core of moral integrity. She objects to injustice, defends the innocent, and refuses to accept nonsense as sense. When the Queen of Hearts demands "Off with her head!" for trivial offences, Alice recognises the fundamental wrongness of such arbitrary cruelty. Her famous final declaration, "You're nothing but a pack of cards!", represents a moral awakening, a recognition that the apparent powers of Wonderland have no ultimate authority.

Through the Looking-Glass develops these themes further. The chess game that structures the narrative suggests a world governed by rules and purpose, even if those rules are not immediately apparent to the players. Alice's journey from pawn to queen mirrors the Christian concept of spiritual growth and transformation. She must move forward, square by square, facing challenges and temptations, until she reaches the eighth square and is crowned; a coronation that can be read as a figure for the soul's ultimate glorification.

The poem that concludes *Through the Looking-Glass*, an acrostic spelling out Alice Pleasance Liddell's name, contains explicitly religious imagery:

"Ever drifting down the stream,
Lingering in the golden gleam,
Life, what is it but a dream?"

This meditation on the dreamlike quality of earthly existence echoes the Christian understanding that our present life is but a shadow of the eternal reality to come. The “golden gleam” suggests divine light, and the downstream drift evokes the passage of time toward eternity.

Carroll’s Christian vision in the Alice books is never heavy-handed or didactic. He understood that moral and spiritual truths are best conveyed through story and symbol rather than explicit preaching. The books work perfectly well as pure entertainment, yet they also offer deeper meanings for those prepared to find them. This approach reflects Carroll’s Anglican sensibility, a faith that valued beauty, imagination, and intellectual subtlety as much as doctrinal correctness.

It is also significant that Carroll chose a child as his protagonist. In Victorian England, children were often sentimentalised as naturally innocent and pure, but Carroll’s view was more nuanced and more Christian. Alice is not perfectly innocent; she can be vain, impatient, and occasionally unkind. But she possesses what Jesus called the faith of a child: a directness, an honesty, a willingness to question and wonder. When Jesus said, “Unless you become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven,” he was not praising childish ignorance but childlike openness to truth. Alice embodies this quality.

The Alice books made Carroll famous and financially comfortable, but he never forgot their deeper purpose. In his mind, entertaining children was itself a form of Christian ministry, a way of nurturing the young souls entrusted to his care. The books’ enduring popularity suggests that readers, consciously or not, recognise something profound beneath the surface nonsense; a vision of reality that is both playful and serious, both fantastic and true.

The Hunting of the Snark: Quest as Spiritual Allegory

In 1874, while walking on a hillside near Guildford, a single line of verse came unbidden into Carroll’s mind: “For the Snark was a Boojum, you see.” He had no idea what it meant, but the line haunted him. Over the next two years, working backwards from that mysterious conclusion, he composed *The Hunting of the Snark*, subtitled “An Agony in Eight Fits,” which was published in March 1876.

The poem tells the story of a bizarre crew: a Bellman, Boots, a Bonnet-maker, a Barrister, a Broker, a Billiard-marker, a Banker, a Beaver, a Baker, and a Butcher, who set sail to hunt the Snark, a creature whose characteristics are described but whose nature remains fundamentally mysterious. The hunt ends in tragedy when the Baker discovers that the Snark he has found is actually a Boojum, causing him to “softly and suddenly vanish away.”

Carroll insisted that he didn’t know what the poem meant, and critics have offered wildly divergent interpretations. Some see it as political satire, others as mathematical allegory, still others as pure nonsense. Yet the poem’s subtitle, “An Agony”, suggests something more serious than mere wordplay. In Christian tradition, “agony” refers specifically to Christ’s suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane, and the poem’s “Eight Fits” echoes the structure of religious meditation.

The spiritual dimension of *The Hunting of the Snark* becomes clearer when we consider what accompanied its first publication: a religious tract titled “An Easter Greeting to Every Child Who Loves ‘Alice.’” This was no casual addition but an integral part of Carroll’s vision for the work. In

the tract, Carroll addresses his young readers directly, in his own voice rather than through fictional characters:

“Do you know that delicious dreamy feeling when one first wakes on a summer morning, with the twitter of birds in the air, and the fresh breeze coming in at the open window, when, lying lazily with eyes half shut, one sees as in a dream green boughs waving, or waters rippling in a golden light? It is a pleasure very near to sadness, bringing tears to the eyes like a beautiful picture or poem. And is not that a Mother’s gentle hand that undraws your curtains, and a Mother’s sweet voice that summons you to rise? To rise and forget, in the bright sunlight, the ugly dreams that frightened you so when all was dark...”

He continues with explicitly Christian teaching:

“Surely your gladness need not be the less for the thought that you will one day see a brighter dawn than this, when lovelier sights will meet your eyes than any waving trees or rippling waters, when angel-hands shall undraw your curtains, and sweeter tones than ever loving Mother breathed shall wake you to a new and glorious day, and when all the sadness, and the sin, that darkened life on this little earth, shall be forgotten like the dreams of a night that is past!”

This Easter greeting transforms our reading of *The Hunting of the Snark*. The mysterious quest for an undefined creature can be understood as the human search for meaning, truth, and ultimately God. The diverse crew represents different human types and approaches to this quest. The Snark itself, described but never fully known, suggests the divine mystery that draws us forward yet remains beyond complete comprehension.

The poem’s tragic ending, with the Baker’s sudden vanishing, has been interpreted as death, but in the context of the Easter greeting, it takes on a different resonance. Easter is about death and resurrection, about vanishing from this world to appear in another. The Baker’s fate is described as “softly and suddenly”, not violent or terrifying, but almost gentle, like falling asleep. Perhaps what seems like tragedy from one perspective is a transformation from another.

The five unmistakable marks of the Snark, as described by the Bellman, include that “its taste is meagre and hollow, but crisp: Like a coat that is rather too tight in the waist, With a flavour of Will-o’-the-wisp.” This peculiar description might be read as a warning about false spiritual pursuits, things that promise satisfaction but deliver only emptiness. The true Snark, like true faith, must be distinguished from counterfeits.

Most tellingly, the Bellman’s map is “a perfect and absolute blank.” This detail has puzzled readers, but it makes spiritual sense. In the quest for God, we cannot rely on human maps and charts. We must venture into unknown territory, guided by faith rather than certainty. As the Bellman says, “What’s the good of Mercator’s North Poles and Equators, Tropics, Zones, and Meridian Lines?” In the spiritual journey, conventional coordinates fail.

Carroll’s decision to publish *The Hunting of the Snark* with an Easter greeting was deliberate and significant. He wanted his readers to understand that even his most nonsensical verse had a serious purpose. The poem entertains and puzzles, but it also invites meditation on ultimate questions: What are we seeking? How do we find it? What happens when we do? These are not

merely philosophical questions but spiritual ones, and Carroll's Christian faith provided his answers.

Sylvie and Bruno: The Culmination of Faith

If the Alice books contain subtle Christian themes and *The Hunting of the Snark* invites spiritual interpretation, Carroll's two-volume novel *Sylvie and Bruno* (1889) and *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded* (1893) present his faith explicitly and unapologetically. These books represent the culmination of Carroll's religious vision, the work he believed God had called him to write.

In an 1887 letter to a friend, Carroll wrote that he considered *Sylvie and Bruno* to be his most important work, the one he felt divinely inspired to create. This conviction shaped every aspect of the novel's composition. He worked on it for over a decade, revising and refining, determined to get it right. The result is a complex, ambitious work that interweaves two narratives: one set in Victorian England, the other in the fairy realm of Outland.

The novel's structure itself reflects a Christian understanding of reality. The "real" Victorian world and the fairy world of Sylvie and Bruno exist simultaneously, and the narrator moves between them in a dreamlike state. This dual reality mirrors the Christian belief that the material and spiritual worlds interpenetrate, that heaven and earth are not separate realms but different dimensions of a single creation. As St. Paul wrote, "We look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal."

The fairy children Sylvie and Bruno embody Christian virtues in their purest form. Sylvie represents love, compassion, and self-sacrifice, while Bruno, despite his childish mischief, demonstrates innocence and trust. Their adventures in both worlds illustrate moral and spiritual lessons without ever being heavy-handed. Carroll understood that preaching is less effective than showing, and he allows his characters' actions to demonstrate Christian principles.

One of the novel's central themes is the nature of love and its relationship to divine love. The Victorian plot involves several romantic relationships, but Carroll is less interested in conventional romance than in exploring how human love reflects and participates in God's love. The character of Arthur Forester, a doctor who serves the poor, embodies Christian charity in action. His love for Lady Muriel is tested and refined through sacrifice and suffering, ultimately becoming a vehicle for spiritual growth.

The novel also addresses theological questions directly. In one remarkable passage, characters debate the problem of suffering and evil, why a good God permits pain and injustice in His creation. Carroll doesn't offer easy answers, but he presents the Christian response: that suffering can be redemptive, that God works through even the worst circumstances to bring about good, and that our limited perspective prevents us from seeing the full picture. As one character observes, "We are but children, and we cannot understand the ways of our Father."

Carroll's critique of religious hypocrisy and empty ritualism appears throughout *Sylvie and Bruno*. He satirises clergy who are more concerned with ecclesiastical politics than pastoral care, churchgoers who treat worship as social performance rather than genuine devotion, and theologians who lose sight of simple Christian love in their doctrinal disputes. This criticism

reflects Carroll's own Anglican moderation, his belief that true religion consists not in outward forms but in inward transformation and outward charity.

The novel's most explicitly Christian moment occurs when Sylvie tells Bruno about Jesus. She explains the Incarnation, the Crucifixion, and the Resurrection in simple language that a child can understand, yet with profound theological insight. Carroll presents the core Christian message without apology or embarrassment: God became human, suffered and died for our sins, and rose again to offer us eternal life. This is the truth that undergirds all of Carroll's work, here stated plainly.

Sylvie and Bruno also explores the relationship between faith and reason, a question that preoccupied Victorian intellectuals. Carroll, as both a mathematician and a Christian, refused to see these as opposed. Through his characters, he argues that reason is a gift from God, meant to be used in understanding both the natural world and spiritual truths. But reason has limits; some truths must be accepted on faith. The key is knowing when to employ each faculty and how to hold them in proper balance.

The novel's reception was mixed. Critics praised Carroll's imagination and linguistic inventiveness but found the book overly didactic and structurally confusing. The Victorian reading public, expecting another *Alice*, was puzzled by the work's serious religious content. Sales were disappointing, and *Sylvie and Bruno* never achieved the popularity of Carroll's earlier works.

Yet Carroll never regretted writing it. He believed he had fulfilled a divine commission, and the book's commercial failure did not diminish his conviction that it was his most important work. In his view, success was measured not by sales figures but by faithfulness to God's calling. If *Sylvie and Bruno* helped even a few readers understand Christian truth more clearly or inspired them to live more charitably, then it had achieved its purpose.

Modern readers, freed from Victorian expectations, can appreciate *Sylvie and Bruno* on its own terms. It is not a perfect novel; the plot meanders, the dual narrative sometimes confuses, and the didactic passages occasionally overwhelm the story. But it is a sincere and ambitious attempt to create a work of Christian literature that is both entertaining and edifying, both imaginative and instructive. It represents Carroll at his most vulnerable and most authentic, willing to risk failure in order to witness to his faith.

A Life Saturated in Faith

Charles Dodgson's Christian faith was not confined to his published writings but permeated every aspect of his daily life. His personal library, carefully catalogued and preserved, contained over four hundred religious titles, approximately twenty per cent of his total collection. These ranged from biblical commentaries and theological treatises to devotional works and sermons. He read widely across the Christian tradition, from the Church Fathers to contemporary Victorian theologians, always seeking to deepen his understanding of Scripture and doctrine.

His reading was not merely academic but devotional. Dodgson maintained a disciplined spiritual life that included daily prayer, Bible reading, and meditation. He kept a diary throughout his adult life, and its pages reveal a man who constantly examined his conscience, confessed his

failures, and sought to grow in holiness. He was particularly hard on himself, recording even minor moral lapses and resolving to do better. This scrupulosity sometimes bordered on the excessive, but it reflected his serious commitment to Christian discipleship.

Dodgson's faith shaped his professional life as well. As a mathematics lecturer, he saw his teaching as a form of ministry. He took a genuine interest in his students' welfare, both academic and personal, and many former students recalled his kindness and pastoral concern. He believed that education was not merely about imparting knowledge but about forming character, and he tried to model Christian virtues in his interactions with students.

His work in logic, which occupied much of his later career, was also connected to his faith. Dodgson believed that clear thinking was essential to both intellectual and spiritual life. His books on symbolic logic, such as *The Game of Logic* and *Symbolic Logic*, sought to make logical reasoning accessible to ordinary readers, including children. He saw logic not as opposed to faith but as complementary to it, a tool for understanding God's rational creation and for thinking clearly about theological questions.

Even Dodgson's hobbies reflected his Christian worldview. His photography, which he pursued passionately from 1856 to 1880, was not merely artistic expression but a way of capturing and preserving beauty, God's beauty reflected in creation. He photographed landscapes, architecture, and famous contemporaries, but his most memorable images are of children. These photographs, often posed in allegorical or biblical scenes, reveal his conviction that childhood innocence offered glimpses of prelapsarian purity, a reminder of humanity before the Fall.

His relationships with children, which have been the subject of much modern speculation and controversy, must be understood in the context of his faith. Dodgson genuinely loved children and enjoyed their company. He saw in them qualities that Jesus had praised: honesty, wonder, trust, and openness to truth. His friendships with young girls like Alice Liddell were, in his view, spiritually beneficial to both parties. The children received attention, entertainment, and moral guidance; he received reminders of innocence and opportunities to serve others selflessly.

Modern readers, aware of the dangers of adult-child relationships, sometimes view Dodgson's behaviour with suspicion. Yet there is no credible evidence of impropriety, and those who knew him best, including the children themselves and their parents, never suggested anything inappropriate. His relationships, while unconventional by modern standards, reflected Victorian norms and his own Christian understanding of pastoral care. He saw himself as a spiritual uncle or godfather, responsible for nurturing young souls.

Dodgson's charitable work also flowed from his faith. Though not wealthy, he gave generously to various causes, particularly those benefiting children and the poor. He supported orphanages, hospitals, and educational initiatives. He also gave his time, visiting the sick, corresponding with those in distress, and offering counsel to those who sought it. These acts of charity were not publicised: he believed that Christian giving should be done quietly, without seeking recognition.

His faith even influenced his approach to entertainment and recreation. Dodgson loved the theatre and attended performances regularly, but he was selective about what he saw. He avoided plays he considered immoral or irreverent and walked out of performances that

offended his Christian sensibilities. He believed that art should uplift and edify, not corrupt or degrade. This conviction informed his own creative work; he wanted his books to entertain but also to convey moral and spiritual truth.

In his later years, as his health declined and he faced the prospect of death, Dodgson's faith provided comfort and hope. He had no fear of dying, believing firmly in the resurrection and eternal life promised by Christ. His final diary entries and letters express gratitude for God's blessings and confidence in divine mercy. When he died on January 14, 1898, at the age of sixty-five, those who knew him best testified that he had lived and died as a faithful Christian.

Legacy: Reclaiming Carroll as a Christian Writer

For more than a century after his death, Lewis Carroll's reputation rested almost entirely on the Alice books. Scholars analysed their linguistic innovations, psychological depths, and cultural significance, but few paid serious attention to their religious dimensions. *Sylvie and Bruno*, his most explicitly Christian work, fell into obscurity, dismissed as a failed experiment. Carroll's role as a deacon and his extensive religious writings were treated as biographical footnotes, interesting but ultimately peripheral to his literary achievement.

This neglect is particularly striking when we compare Carroll to later Christian writers like C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien. Both Lewis and Tolkien acknowledged their debt to Carroll, recognising him as a pioneer in using fantasy to convey Christian truth. Lewis's Narnia chronicles and Tolkien's Middle-earth legendarium employ the same basic strategy as Carroll's work: creating imaginative worlds that reflect Christian reality without being explicitly allegorical. Yet while Lewis and Tolkien are celebrated as Christian authors, Carroll's faith has been largely ignored or minimised.

Several factors contributed to this neglect. The early twentieth century saw a reaction against Victorian religiosity, and scholars were often embarrassed by Carroll's piety, preferring to focus on his more "modern" qualities, his linguistic playfulness, his logical puzzles, and his psychological complexity. Freudian interpreters found sexual symbolism in the Alice books, while Marxist critics read them as social satire. These approaches, whatever their merits, obscured the religious dimension that Carroll himself considered central.

The sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s brought new scrutiny to Carroll's relationships with children, often casting them in a sinister light. This focus on his personal life, combined with modern suspicion of Victorian morality, made it difficult to take his Christian faith seriously. He was portrayed as repressed, neurotic, or hypocritical; anything but a sincere believer whose faith genuinely shaped his life and work.

Recent scholarship has begun to correct this distortion. Books like Charlie Lovett's *Lewis Carroll: Formed by Faith* (2015) provide the first in-depth study of Carroll's religious life, demonstrating that faith was not peripheral but central to his identity. Lovett shows how Carroll's Christian beliefs informed his relationships, creative work, mathematical logic, and daily practices. This scholarship allows us to see Carroll whole, as he understood himself: a Christian first, whose various activities, teaching, writing, photography, and logic; all flowed from that fundamental commitment.

Reclaiming Carroll as a Christian writer does not mean reducing his work to religious propaganda or denying its other dimensions. The Alice books remain brilliant fantasies that work on multiple levels. *The Hunting of the Snark* is still delightfully nonsensical. Even *Sylvie and Bruno*, for all its explicit Christian content, offers much more than theology. But understanding Carroll's faith allows us to appreciate depths and meanings that purely secular readings miss.

It also allows us to see Carroll as a bridge between Victorian religious literature and twentieth-century Christian fantasy. Before Lewis and Tolkien, before Dorothy Sayers and G.K. Chesterton, Carroll demonstrated that Christian truth could be conveyed through imaginative fiction, that fantasy and faith were not opposed but complementary. His work showed that one could be intellectually rigorous and imaginatively playful, deeply serious about spiritual matters and delightfully whimsical in expression.

Carroll's moderate Anglicanism, neither rigidly dogmatic nor vaguely liberal, also offers a model for Christian engagement with culture. He did not retreat from the world into religious isolation, nor did he compromise his beliefs to gain worldly success. He participated fully in Victorian intellectual and cultural life while maintaining his Christian convictions. He engaged with science, mathematics, logic, and art, seeing them all as aspects of God's creation to be explored and enjoyed.

His approach to children's literature was particularly influential. Before Carroll, most children's books were explicitly didactic, using stories to teach moral lessons in heavy-handed ways. Carroll showed that one could convey moral and spiritual truth more effectively through imaginative narrative, allowing readers to discover meaning for themselves rather than having it imposed. This approach influenced not only later Christian writers but also children's literature generally.

Perhaps most importantly, Carroll's life and work remind us that Christian faith is not incompatible with intellectual rigour, artistic creativity, or playful imagination. The same man who wrote serious mathematical treatises also created Wonderland. The deacon who preached in Christ Church chapel also invented the Cheshire Cat. The logician who analysed syllogisms also composed nonsense verse. These were not contradictory aspects of his personality but different expressions of a unified Christian vision.

In our own time, when faith and reason are often portrayed as opposed, when religious believers are stereotyped as anti-intellectual or humourless, Carroll's example is particularly valuable. He demonstrates that one can be both a serious Christian and a creative artist, both a rigorous thinker and a playful storyteller, both committed to truth and delighted by beauty. His life refutes the false dichotomy between faith and culture, showing instead how Christian conviction can enrich and deepen every aspect of human experience.

Conclusion

Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, known to the world as Lewis Carroll, was many things: a mathematician, a logician, a photographer, an author, and a friend to children. But above all, he was a Christian whose faith in Christ shaped every aspect of his life and work. From his

childhood in a clerical household to his final days, from his beloved Alice books to his lesser-known religious writings, faith provided the foundation and framework for his existence.

Understanding this dimension of Carroll's life is not merely an academic exercise but essential to comprehending his full significance. The Alice books are not just clever fantasies but imaginative explorations of Christian themes. *The Hunting of the Snark* is not merely nonsense but a meditation on the spiritual quest. *Sylvie and Bruno*, far from being a failed experiment, represent Carroll's most ambitious attempt to create explicitly Christian literature.

Carroll's life also offers a model for Christian engagement with culture. He did not separate his faith from his intellectual and creative work but allowed it to inform and enrich everything he did. He demonstrated that one could be both a serious Christian and a playful artist, both committed to truth and delighted by beauty, both intellectually rigorous and imaginatively free.

As we reclaim Carroll's place in the tradition of Christian literature, we recognise him as a pioneer who paved the way for later writers like C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien. His work shows that fantasy and faith are not opposed but complementary, that imaginative fiction can convey spiritual truth as effectively as a theological treatise, and that the Christian vision encompasses not only the serious and solemn but also the playful and whimsical.

More than a century after his death, Lewis Carroll's work continues to enchant readers of all ages. But to fully appreciate his achievement, we must see him as he saw himself: not merely as an entertainer or literary innovator, but as a Christian writer whose faith formed the very core of his being. In the end, the man who created Wonderland believed in something far more wonderful, a loving God who became human, died for our sins, and rose again to offer us eternal life. That faith, more than any literary technique or imaginative invention, is the key to understanding Lewis Carroll's enduring legacy.