

METAXAS INTERVIEWS WITH WALTER HOOPER

These are incomplete transcripts - they were modified for my personal research purposes (research for yet published article on C.S. Lewis). Because these interviews are so amazing - such a wonderful treasure trove of delightful insights about C.S. Lewis, I made it available for public use. I have not received permission from Eric Metaxas or Socrates in the City to do. If you represent either of them and would like for me to take it down, please reach out. I'm happy to do so.

I "Transcribed" these from the radio versions of the interviews, which was played in six parts.

The original interviews occurred as [Socrates in the City](#) Events and were in three parts.

Watch on YouTube here: [Part One](#), [Part Two](#), [Part Three](#).

My notes are usually in italics in parentheses.

CSL = C.S. Lewis.

PART ONE

Walter Hooper. (*Summary of brief bio...*) Trustee of Literary estate of C.S. Lewis. Born in Reidsville NC in 1931. Served in Army 2 years. Taught english at U.Kentucky in early 1960s. After corresponding with Lewis for many years, he was able to visit him in England. Where the great CS Lewis asked him to stay with him at the Kilns as secretary.

Following Lewis' death just a few months later, Hooper worked with Owen Barfield to organize and preserve Lewis' vast works. So many essays, writings, and letters.

Became friends with a number of inklings: Tolkien, Charles Williams, Owen Barfield.

Ordained as an Anglican Priest: Converted to Catholicism in 1988

METAXAS: Tell us your story and how you came to meet Lewis and work with him.

HOOPER: I was in the UNC-Chapel Hill in 1953 and the Korean crisis was going on, so all the young men were being drafted. And I was begging the draft board to give me a few more months. And during those last few months, someone introduced me to a book called *Letters to Young Churches* by J.B. Phillips, which had an introduction by Lewis. It was that introduction that absolutely changed my life. I'd never heard such a voice of faith in my life. And I kept saying to other people, 'this man really believes.' and they kept saying, 'but all the believers believe.' and I said no, this is different. And I've been thinking about that since all those years and what I would say was different was because Lewis believed with a confidence, I think, that you would find in St. Peter and St. Paul. He tested everything against this. He knew it in a way we just don't know things today.

So I was going in to the Army, and I thought, "If only I can get a book by Lewis." Unfortunately Chappell Hill didn't have his books in stock at that time. But in Greensborough there were two elderly women, the Straughn sisters, who liked to put the right book in the right hands. So they produced a copy of *Miracles*, the day before I went into the Army.... and said they'd send me anything they find. They were these elderly women who just happened to inherit a book shop. They didn't need the money. They were as good as their word.

I went to Basic Training, Ft. Jackson, SC. This was Basic Training, and you don't have places to store things, so I kept this hardback book inside my shirt. So during calisthenics and all of that it was jumping up and down with me, but so far none of the Sergeants discovered that. Even crawling under barbed wire. The book made

such a huge impression on me. Every once in a while there would be a ten minute cigarette break. And I would use those ten minutes sitting under a pine tree - I think I could recognize that tree today... It really just changed my life. I read it many times since then.

METAXAS: You were looking for any book from Lewis at that point, or were you looking specifically for *Miracles*?

HOOPER: Oh no, I wanted anything....

METAXAS: By the way, Lewis had been a great encouragement to Phillips to write that Bible translation. Were you aware of who Lewis was at this point? What did you know about him?

HOOPER: I knew almost nothing except that the captain of the UNC football team had mentioned the Screwtape letters, which came out in 1942, though this was 1953. I remember one of the Sargeants saw me reading that and said, "Soldier you really ought to be reading a work on Korean."

I had written to him (Lewis), but by this time those two sisters had discovered other of his works. And, unlike you, you can go to a book shop and can see his works.... I didn't know about his different categories... *Chronicles of Narnia*, and his theological works, *Mere Christianity*, and his literary essays (*i.e. the fact that he was such a diverse writer*). And I'm glad I didn't, because he didn't like being known as several different authors, but as one author of different types. The books came to me in a random order. One of the first ones was the *Arthurian Torso* (1947), which was a work by Charles Williams with a commentary on his poems by C.S. Lewis. And then came English Literature in the 16th Century, which I loved, and then came Screwtape Letters, and then The Lion Witch and Wardrobe,... which had long been out. I liked that I could hear the voice of CSL in each of those. The same sounding voice that had reached me from *Miracles*.

In his reply to me, which I didn't expect. He said, "Even at our sins, we should look no longer than to know and repent them, for they are not a proper object of contemplation. When a man comes under the vine meridian, he loses his consciousness of self and in the end becomes a creature who helps fill other people's lives while they in turn help fill up our lives. But how far from this one is at present." He dug so deeply into other people's lives that for a while I wondered, before I met him, 'is there any CSL left if he's so spread out in other people's lives and other people are so influential to him.' Well I was to find that out later.

METAXAS: So you're a nobody and you write to this great author. And he takes the time, not just to reply, but to reply sensibly and with some depth. That's hard to believe.

HOOPER: Well, as I later discovered, he believed that if you write a book, anyone can if they want to, but if you publish a book, and people buy it, you have a responsibility to those people who write to you. You didn't have to do that, and in one way, you asked for that, and you are being paid for it as well. So you must reply to people. He took them seriously. He replied by writing in ink with his hand. And by return post - which means - you reply the same day you get the letter. So he wrote an enormous number of letters. And when you look at the quality of the letters, you realize he really did answer what I had said to him. I liked him even more as a man. From that time on after reading six or seven of his books and waiting on them, it made the Army one of the most wonderful experiences of my life - I hated to leave - after two years, four days, and one breakfast concluded. I ended up shortly after that teaching at UK (Kentucky), and I had the chance to write a book about Lewis for the Twain english author series. So I wrote to him about that. And he said 'it's far better to write about

the unanswering dead because they can't blow the gaff on all the mistakes you make. But if you insist, you can go ahead and write it. And if you'd like to, I'll see you if you come to Oxford.' So I went in 1963. I had an appointment at his house, the Kilns, for Monday, June 10th, and I'd only just arrived. In English homes at that time, the bathroom and the lavatory were separate rooms. So I went out on Friday to find his house to make sure I knew where it was on Monday. Found his housekeeper. She said, "He's there now, and at 4 o'clock he'll be having tea. so go on up." So I did, and rang the doorbell. So then I suddenly saw myself for what I was - ignorant beside him - and a tarheel from NC - what was I doing bothering this man. And I had just wished there had been a hole big enough in his home to drop me into it - even though he invited me.

I assumed this was just the one chance I'd have to see him - so I couldn't really flee when he invited me in. Because this is what I'd wanted for years and years. And he could not have been nicer. The talk was exciting - because everything was a kind of disputation with him because you were always talking towards truth. I remember he made a very important distinction as he does in his books,. I asked him, "Which of your books do you think best?" He said, "I think *Perelandra* is best." And then he asked me, "Which of my books do you like the most" thinking we were talking about the same thing. So I said, "I agree with you. *Perelandra* is the best." he said, "No, you asked me which is best. I asked you which you like the most." and I said, "the book I like more than any book in the world is *That Hideous Strength*." He said, "So do I, but don't you see they are different. Don't you see you might find something better than another, but you might really like one better than the other."

METAXAS: It's interesting that though Lewis is having a wonderful conversation with you, he doesn't relax that way he has of forcing his interlocutor to think hard. He doesn't give you that kind of grace. He's pushing you to think hard. So this is your first meeting.

HOOPER: Yes - he was about to relax though in a very unusual way - and I was not about to relax. Because what was happening all this time - from the moment I got there he brought in a pot of tea. And I love tea very very much - not coffee, but tea - and he was a gargantuan tea drinker. After we finished one pot, he went to the kitchen and brought back a second pot, and then a third pot. But by this time I must have had twelve cups of tea and I was very uncomfortable. And like most Americans I didn't know that they had two different rooms. So I said, "Professor Lewis, do you think I could use the bathroom." He said, "Certainly," so he took me to what was just the bathroom - it had a bathtub in it - and he took out about four towels and put about 4 towels and put them on the side of the bar - took 4 tablets of soap

METAXAS: He's having a little fun with the tarheel.

HOOPER: So then he closed the door. And he said, "Do you think you have enough for the bath?" And I said, "I will."

METAXAS: You didn't object?

HOOPER: I had a very anxious two or three minutes wondering what to do in the bathroom.

METAXAS: Don't you wish you would have taken a bath?

HOOPER: I was too uncomfortable for that - so I went back into the living room and said "It wasn't a bath I wanted." He was laughing, "That will cure you of those American euphemisms. Now let's start over again. Where do you want to go?"

METAXAS: Lavatory - has nothing to do with flushing a toilet. So isn't that an equally wrong british euphemism?

HOOPER: I thought so but I wouldn't dare say that to him.

METAXAS: So he was a jokester.

HOOPER: He was a man who knew language and was interested in language. He told me right before that a beautiful American woman with long blond hair had been entertained by his neighbors. They commented on her beautiful blond hair. She said, "I wash my hair every day in the lavatory." So they said to him, "We never want that disgusting girl back here back again." So he was already primed for my arrival...

It was time for me to go and he took me to the bus stop which was also where the ampleforth arms (?) where his pub local pub was - so we went in and had a pint of beer together and then the bus came and my heart was breaking. I remember on the short journey to the bus stop regretting that I'd ever met him because I'd liked him so much. **I remember thinking, I really love this man. And I thought this was it and it might have been better never to have met him than to taste that wonderful personality and then give it up forever.** So I was getting on the bus and said, "Well thank you very much professor Lewis it's been very nice meeting you." he said, "You're not getting away, oh no - you're coming to the inkling meeting on Monday." The Inklings at that time were meeting just on Monday because once he went to Cambridge - he went there on Monday afternoon. They started drinking beer at about 11am. He loved those meetings. And they were meeting at that time these last several years at the Lamb and Flag which was across from the Bird and the Baby and there were eight.

METAXAS: What happened to make them quit the Bird and Baby?

HOOPER: Well in the old days the Rabbit room which they met in was part of the publicans own territory - that was their sitting room - it wasn't part of the pub it was where the publican lived.

METAXAS: The keeper of the pub was called the publican?

HOOPER: That's right. They still are. The publican, Charles Blaygrove who said they could use the room. No one else was allowed in there - but he had died and the new people had opened it up to everyone - so they wouldn't have had it privately. So they were just meeting in the open part of the lamb and flag.

There were eight people there as I remember and one of those were CSL's occasional friend Roger Lancelyn Green who had a lot to do with the Narnia stories and whose books I had read and liked very much. And in his King Arthur Knights of the Round Table, he had made a great deal of the spiritual kingdom of logress it's called. And I mentioned that "logress the spiritual kingdom." Lewis picked up what I said - and it went like a ball around the room - other people talked about it - he then asked me more questions. He was a very easy man to talk with in these groups. He brought you out - instead of making you feel small or ignorant - he brought you ought. He was like God I think in that way - he wanted you to shine - he really wanted the best of you to shine forth. The curious thing was he didn't do much talking himself but he made good talk possible. I've never seen

anybody who could bring you out more and make you shine. When I left that meeting I thought - Walter Hooper - you are beginning to get intelligent.

METAXAS: Who else was in that room? Was Tolkien?

HOOPER: No - his son Christopher was.

METAXAS: Owen Barfield?

HOOPER: No he wasn't. But John Walsh the historian was there. Colin Hardy was always there. And Dr. Havard, Lewis's Doctor. But it was a lovely group. But Lewis made it work. Then I thought - I'm back to my old worries again - I won't see him again - this is it - I've had him two times and I should be very grateful. So we stepped outside and he bent down to give money to this beggar on the curb. And I'm ashamed I said the usual thing. "Aren't you afraid that this man will spend that money on drink." he said, "well if I kept it I would."

Then after that I started on my regular well I guess I won't see you again - and he said you're coming back on Wednesday. It was a lovely day. And I asked him what he did with his manuscripts. He was always short of paper because of the war.

He said, when I write books, like LWW, I turn it over then I write another book on the back of that. And then I throw it away. What could I say? Stop? I think he knew that I really did appreciate his writings and was sorry that he did that. But I didn't dare say anything. Then he said, "Well you're not leaving because you're coming back on Sunday cause we're going to church together and we're having breakfast here." He loved cooking breakfast.

METAXAS: What do you think was behind this? It's remarkable. Did he have a specific reason?

HOOPER: I think he knew I liked him very much. I had come a long way. And he knew I was working on this book. But very little was said about that. He may have liked me. This is an awful thing to say and I apologize. I think of him as being very good to me. It was not very long after that we got into the habit of the three meetings a week. And in early July I went out one Sunday to find him not dressed at all. He was in his housecoat and he was trying to write a letter to the american lady as she's being called - the letters to her were published as the american lady, mrs. shelburn. She was a complaining person and he could hardly push the pen across the paper. He was going into the hospital. I didn't realize that he had problems - he had an infected kidney and an infected prostate but he was too weak - his heart was - for an operation. Otherwise it would be very simple. But because they feared to operate because of his heart, he was put on a low protein diet and about once a month he went into the hospital for blood transfusions. He looked so well you never would have guessed anything was wrong.

So he said, "Besides this problem - there is the problem of writing. I'm getting rheumatism in my hand. Usually I have my brother to help who drives the typewriter. But he's an alcoholic and he's often away for long periods of time." He was at that point in Ireland where he'd been going since 1947 and he'd been away already for six months. He said, "The thing is I really need a secretary. Would you live here with me and give up your job?" And I said yes.

PART TWO

He went into the hospital the next day and then I had become friends with Austin Farrow and his wife - the Warden of Keavil - and I was with them when we heard Lewis had had a heart attack and probably was dying. After three days we were still waiting by the telephone to hear that he had died. But they rang to say professor Lewis has come out of his coma and is asking for his tea. So we hurried around to the hospital - this was in July 1963 - and Austin Farrow said, "You had us worried Jack." And he said, "You know I don't think it can be said I was a very well man." He said later, "Walter, I want you to arrive tomorrow morning early with pen and paper because we have got to get on with these letters." They were stacking up. So for the next two weeks I went there and we worked all day. But one of the things I learned as his secretary was that I had a lot of correspondence with his lawyer Owen Barfield. Owen was very valuable to him in many ways. But in 1941, as Barfield explained, that was the year of the *Screwtape Letters* - they were published separately in a church magazine. They gave the first series of *Mere Christianity* broadcasts then as well. But, rather than receive any of the money, Lewis sent both groups a list of widows and orphans - think of St. James' epistles (*James 5:16?*) - each of the fees were to be sent to a widow and an orphan. But at the end of the year Lewis had to pay tax on all that money he had given away, so he was really in a quandary. So he turned to Owen Barfield and out of that debacle, what they did together was to set up a charitable organization called the agape fund into which 2/3rds of his total income went to be given anonymously to people in need. I couldn't believe that he put so much into it. When I thought about how poor the house was. When the housekeeper came there in 1952 she still found the blackout curtains still up on the windows because you didn't want the Germans to see the lights on.

METAXAS - a couple of bachelors living there....

HOOPER: He said, "but why waste money on curtains?" He didn't want to waste money on himself. So she said, "Do you mind if I wash these blackout curtains? He said go ahead. She put them in soap and water and they melted and turned into ink. So she poured them out.

METAXAS: They were probably so full of smoke that they were carcinogenic.

HOOPER: Well there was one ashtray in the house - everybody smoked at that time. When I arrived there I came from a tobacco town. And I gave him a carton of Lucky Strikes and then I thought maybe he'd like something with filters on them. So I gave a carton of those. He looked at those and said, "You know my brother and I don't smoke cigarettes with contraceptives on them." I thought, one ashtray. So I asked - can you get more ashtrays. He said he always just flicked the ashes on the rugs. He said, "Ashes are actually really good for rugs though only men believe it." But then I asked, "Jack, why give away so much?" and he took it very seriously - "Well I thought God was so good in having me was the least I could do was to give part back of what I made in his service." And I thought with shame, when was the last time I thought how good God is in having me. But he really had the temperament of a child Christian in a way. So gracious, so grateful that God would have him. But that was part of that faith that he had.

When he came home I thought this was going to be really difficult because I can't keep up the level of this wonderful conversation he's good at all the time. But he didn't want to talk all the time either. And I discovered that he liked to sit quietly reading his book with another person. So he would say as he picked up his book, "Walter, didn't you bring your book?" So he liked to just sit with somebody. And then if you had something to contribute, he might talk for a while and then go back to the book. I found it extremely relaxing. I loved being there with him. But there were occasional mysteries. When I gave him a cup of coffee after lunch. I left him

alone - felt he needed to be alone then. I closed the door, and I wondered, "Does he take a nap?" I tried to look through the keyhole but I couldn't find out. So finally I asked, "Do you ever take a nap?" "Oh no" he said, "But sometimes a nap takes me." And I think that is the nature of naps. But he was wonderfully cheerful. He had heard me say over and over again, "As CSL has said..." Ao he would start, "As CSL has said, I would like a pot of tea.... As CSL said... You will make it... as CSL has said... I would drink it."

But serious things had happened too. I had found him really worried about his brother. There was a very important conversation that changed my life permanently. This was the occasion - the only time - when I won an argument with him. He was worried about what would happen to his brother when his brother died. He was four years older - and was an alcoholic and let money waste away. So he didn't have enough to live on himself from his pension. So Lewis was worried about what he would live on. I said, "It's simple, he will live on your royalties." And he said, "What you don't understand is that after about three years after an author dies his books trail off to nothing and this will happen." And I said, "But it won't happen to your books." And he said, "Well, sometime an author has a resurrection like Sir Walter Scott is having now, but this is very rare. Mine will stop." I said, "Actually they won't stop." He said, "What is it about this young secretary who knows things that I don't know? Why won't they stop?" And I said, "Because your books are so good and your readers are not that stupid." I'm not sure he believed it. But I believed it. I didn't know him much longer because I was having to go back to the United States in September.

METAXAS: When you said your books won't disappear - and you insisted. I feel like you sort of cheated. Because a large part of the reason his books did not disappear as he thought they would was because of absolutely and only because of your efforts. That's an historical fact, so don't argue with me. But the fact is, as good as his books are, I am aware, and I hope you'll tell us what your role was in helping his work to live on past him. Because it is a huge effort. So you cheated because you made sure that they did.

HOOPER: Well I couldn't believe that they would stop. But then, when he died, and I went to Bagwells and saw huge quantities of his books remaindered, then I began to fear he could have been right. But I still want to stop this.

METAXAS: Can you tell us about his death?

HOOPER: He saw me scribbling things in a little notebook. He said, "You know the divine joke on you is that I will die and you won't be here to take down my divine immortal words." I said, "In that case I'll leave a notebook and you write them down." I left, but we exchanged many letters about what we're going to do when I get back. So I retired from my job and was waiting to come back in January when he died, **the same hour as president Kennedy. Nov 22, 1963.**

One of the people who acted very quickly was Austin Farrow who wrote to me and said, "Please come back. I feel there's a work for you waiting here. You're needed." This was the time when I met Warnie.

METAXAS: I don't understand - why would he go to Ireland?

HOOPER: As he reveals as his own biography, *Brothers and Friends*, in 1947 he went to Drahda - that's near Dblin - and he was to meet a fellow friend there, but the friend didn't show up. He got very drunk and ended up in the hospital. One of the first people he saw when he opened his eyes - was Mother Mary Martin the founder of the medical mysteries of mary - who built that huge hospital - our lady of lourdes. So she nourished him

back to health with the doctors. She then sent for CSL to come over and he went over very worried about his brother. But Warnie wouldn't come home with him. He wanted to stay in this Inn, the White Horse, and he had found a little Anglican church there and so it became this home away from home and the Nuns allowed him to go out all day and drink and yet come home at night to the hospital. And he had a very close friend - Major Henry - another alcoholic and another major - who had a car - and they would go around all day long from pub to pub - village to village. So he got used to that life. He liked it. He came back to look after his brother in November. So they had a few weeks together.

But then Warnie was getting ready when I met him to go back to Ireland. He had decided he was a broke man and didn't have enough money. So he was moving out of the Kilns - which could have been his for the rest of his life - but he thought the taxes would be too much so he had bought a small house nearby - so he was getting rid of everything. He gave me a lot of his notebooks (Lewis') and papers. And he invited me to start editing Lewis' writings. So this was what made it possible for me to do what I've done for the last 50 years.

METAXAS: Now you come back. And are deputized with this job of dealing with the works of Lewis. And there's no one else overseeing this. Sometimes I think with famous people there's someone to take care of that. What a strange irony that he's making so much money and giving it away and his brother is worried he can't stay in the kilns...

HOOPER: But both men tended to panic. I think this was the nature of his family. But it wasn't really up to him (Warnie). He was the beneficiary of Lewis' will. But it was really up to two other people - Lewis' executors to determine who did what. They were Owen Barfield and Cecil Harwood. But the executors were quite old themselves, but they saw my interest, so they were happy to see this young American who could do all this leg work and who was interested.

METAXAS: And what needed to be done? It's hard to for us to imagine - what was necessary?

HOOPER: I had heard from one of the publishers that one of the best ways to sell a new book was to bring back old books of the same author (JCM: *I think he meant this the other way around and he clarifies again later*). Lewis was working on a volume of his own poems when he died. So I felt as a tribute to him I should finish the book that he wanted to put into print. At that time Bless published the books. Jeffrey Bless. But they were soon to go out of business. I then presented them with the poems. And they were willing to publish.

METAXAS: You said he is keeping up this outrageous correspondence with dozens and scores of people around the world and spending great effort in that. Did he have any sense that what he was writing would be collected at some point? Among all the things you've done is publish three collected volumes of Lewis's letters. He's pouring so much of himself into these letters, do you suppose he had any sense that they would be preserved.

HOOPER: I think yes. I saw one time a note he wrote when he was in the hospital to his brother. He was worried again about what his brother would live on. And in that little short note - he said, "What you might do to try to keep the wolf from the door is to collect and publish some of my spiritual letters." So I knew he was aware that they were not junk or text messages. He didn't preserve letters to him and he couldn't have told you where they were sent to.

METAXAS: In collecting his letters, surely there are many many that he wrote which you wouldn't have been able to get back to publish.

HOOPER: He spent two hours every morning writing letters. What I have is published in something like 3,500 pages. They can't represent all that he wrote. But they're the best that I can do so far. Beginning in 1967 I began collecting his letters for the Bodleian library. So at least I had the advantage of knowing many of the people whom he wrote to. The Bodleian library is not able to pay sums like that - so they have a number of people called the friends of the Bodleian - so we just collect for on behalf of the library. So that's where most of them are. But then a good many are at Wheaton college as well. But Wheaton and Bodleian have an exchange program to share copies of what each have.

METAXAS: Anyone who loves Lewis knows he is a never ending fountain. And those letters are like spending time with him. So you were talking about the job that was given to you.

HOOPER: My job was to keep his books in print. But I believed a new book helped sell old books. So I began to go the library and look through everything. I'd take out a journal, like the Guardian, and start with page one - it would take me two weeks - to see if I could find anything by CSL - and I did that with the Church Times - page after page. I remember one time I was seated across from this tall priest from Canada. And he could watch - could look down over the partition... *and see what he was reading*. One of Lewis's friends had told me he was pretty sure he saw something by Lewis in something called "Men Only." Well I got it into my head Men Only was about deep sea fishing and wrestling with bears and things. So I ordered all of them from 1930 to 1963 - so they had piles of these in two or three trolleys. So they put about a stack of 100 in front of me. Well they weren't about deep sea fishing. Lord no. And the priest was looking at me. I was so embarrassed. They were pornography. I followed him out - he was shaking his head all the time - and said, "This is not what you think." he said, "What do you think I think?" I said "I'm not reading porn, I'm looking for an essay by Lewis." "And you really expect to find them in there!" And I said somebody said they thought maybe there was, he said, "I don't believe you." I followed him down to St. Bennet's pleading with him, "Just give me a chance... I'm really not what you think." He said, "We'll see".... The next day... and he saw me as I went through them all till 1963. I didn't find anything by CSL.

METAXAS: The idea that you were able in 1964 to get this woman to say she'd put this book out...

HOOPER: Owen Barfield said, "You don't mind doing anything do you? You'll sacrifice anything for Lewis." We had just received a contract for a book I put together called *God in the Dock*.

METAXAS: Where does that title come from?

HOOPER: It comes from one of Lewis' essays. The people in the past they believed in God, "the gods" and they were being judged. But for the modern man, the roles are reversed, God is in the dock and man is on the bench. Well we got the contract. But they were giving Lewis 10% royalty. That's what you start a young man with. Owen Barfield "They're starting him as if he's nobody." So I struck through it with a big pen and put "15%" he said, "You can't possibly get away with that can you?" I said try it and let's see. And I did - I'm surprised too!

METAXAS: Maybe I think it took an American to be that brassy?

HOOPER: But I needed to be at that time. I thought of that argument with Lewis, which I obviously have won.

PART THREE

METAXAS: Think back to a day 51 years to a day when you could not get the great works of CSL (I think they're all great) but the idea that *The Abolition of Man*, a seminal prophetic work of Lewis' that that would be out of print, is a staggering thought. So I say this to underscore the service that you provided - not just to Lewis lovers, but to humanity, because this is one of the classic works of the 20th century. And if you - a twenty something hot shot American upstart that you were - did dare say to this patrician figure Lady Collins - that you must put out this old book. It's an extraordinary thing. What a monumental service it is to the world of letters. It needs to be clear that this one little young man from NC comes to England and does this and if it had not been for you and this is clear to me, this wouldn't have been done and it is entirely possible that what we know of Lewis, we would not know. I cannot imagine a world without the works of Lewis being well known by millions of people - many hundreds - that I've discussed him with. Did you have any sense in 1964 - as a young man in that office of the importance of what you were doing.

HOOPER: I think I did because as I mentioned earlier, in my argument with Lewis, we didn't know who won at that time. But the argument was essential for me. He was very worried about what would his older brother - a retired army officer - would live on when CSL died... [repeating of previous story]...

METAXAS: Lewis was almost ridiculously humble. Part of it was Christian character. Part of it was sin. You can be overly humble. Sometimes you can do great harm. He had such little respect for his own work... you have to treat yourself the way you ought to treat others. I say this in part because of this episode with the manuscripts. He had very little respect for his own manuscripts. They would throw them away. When Warnie was worried about having to move - afraid he couldn't afford the Kilns. You said he was getting rid of papers. I'd love for you to talk about this.

HOOPER: Lewis was giving away 2/3rds of his income, so it didn't really represent what he really made in royalties. So in one way he panicked.... I think also he had the feeling the old good life is over... get ready for purgatory now.

METAXAS: The idea that this bonfire was burning for three days... What was going on.

HOOPER: They were burning various papers of Lewis's - lectures he had given - he kept the manuscripts if they hadn't been published. And George Sayer - was pretty sure he had written a sequel to SBJ. I don't know that. We thought if he did write it, it's gone into the bonfire.

METAXAS. The idea that Warnie was doing this - was Warnie in his right mind?

HOOPER: Well, when this came up one time "but I didn't burn any of the diaries of the Lewis family." He cared only about family papers as opposed to professional papers. In fact, he wrote a letter to me shortly after that pointing out that he and Jack had brought over all the family papers their father's and mother's letters. Their grandfather's diaries. Eleven volumes of papers. He spent 1932-33 simply going through those papers and copying onto the typewriter so that they make up 11 volumes of typewritten pages about 300 pages each. So he went away and came back to find that Jack had burned about all the original family papers. Jack didn't care.

METAXAS: So do you have this letter or did you burn it? I think you should burn it. We'll get the last laugh on Warnie. When I hear things like this... very little is known about Warnie... was his faith anything like his brother's?

HOOPER: He had a faith. It was not nominal. He had come back to Christianity the same time as CSL in 1931. So when he came back from China, they each discovered they had both come back to the faith. Warnie always insisted that Jack was not converted, he said he was always converted, he just returned. But Lewis knew what his own faith was like and that he had lost it and was later converted. But Warnie was a very firm believer and that there was no doubt at all.

I think he in one way believed this is sort of the army thing - one doesn't behave irrationally if are an army person. And also good Irish people from Northern Ireland. Lewis's diary - his own biography *Surprised by Joy* tells a different story.

METAXAS: So you come upon this scene? Is it Paxford?

HOOPER: Paxford the gardener. He said, "Up there are all these notebooks" and he said to the Major, "I'm pretty sure Mr. Hooper would like those." and Warnie said, "Well if he comes today he can take them away." so I went up to the Kilns. He said yes, paxford said you wanted these notebooks. And I found so many papers that they filled two huge suitcases. And I said, "But I don't think I can carry both of those today, could I come back tomorrow." "No, whatever you leave today goes on the bonfire."

METAXAS: Why was he hankering to burn these papers?

HOOPER: I think he needed to downsize to move into the smaller house. I didn't know - and I wasn't a rich man at all - had almost nothing to live on - so I dragged them a mile down to the bus stop and then I got the bus into town and dragged them into... but I was young then I was only 32. And that made all the difference.

METAXAS: Was there in fact anything in there of considerable value?

HOOPER: There was - there was not only fifty-two notebooks, many of which had essays and things which I have published over the years.

METAXAS: Can you give us an example of an essay that would have burned...

HOOPER: A number of the essays "on prayer" and "on addison" many literary essays.

METAXAS: Where have they been published?

HOOPER: in Selected Literary essays. Lewis didn't save the letters that were sent to him, but he did save a few really important letters like EA Eddison, who wrote the *Worm Orobos*. Lewis had corresponded with him for years.

METAXAS: He always cites that book as a tremendous influence on him. He cites a few other obscure things. But that's one of them. So you're saying he did correspond with Eddison.

HOOPER: Eddison - fortunately preserved Lewis letters. And Edison's daughter and I got together and agreed to put both collections into the Bodleian library.

METAXAS: Are there still letters and notebooks, diaries that have not been published?

HOOPER: No, most things have been published. Those letters to Edison are all in volumes 2 & 3 in the collected letters. And there were a good many letters from Dorothy L. Sayers. She began corresponding with him in 1942, and many of his letters to her have been published in collected letters. And all of her letters have been published by Barbara Riddell's 4 volumes of collected letters.

METAXAS: Did Lewis have diaries and notes that had been published?

HOOPER: Yes, I edited a volume that had been published called *All My Roads Before Me*. It was published in 1992 and just covers 1922-1928. Those were recovered from the bonfire. But I was strong then. A bigger man then.

METAXAS: I think even in this day you wouldn't have left them to burn. It's unfathomable for me that these treasures were poised for the fire and you happened to be there to rescue them. If I were to invent the film version of this - I would invent this story to sum up what you have done with your life.

HOOPER: I don't want to suppose Warnie didn't love his brother - that this had anything to do with it. He loved him very very much and in one way getting rid of these things was part of the love.

METAXAS: It's clear they loved each other and were best friends their whole life. Only someone that was that close would feel the freedom to do that. So this is 1964. You have saved treasures from the fire. You take the collected poems to Lady Collins...

HOOPER - No the collected poems were published by Bless. I took *They Stand Together* - the letters with Arthur Greeves is what I took to Lady Collins. But Bless went out of business. Bless had died, so they gave up the business. So the Lewis estate... by this time I had become one of the three trustees. And we had to decide who we would give all of Lewis's works to? Who will take them over? Well Collins were already publishing the Narnia stories in paperback and they had the best claim to them. And Lady Collins had already brought out a number of paperbacks - because Bless didn't bring out any paperbacks - so she was the natural person to do it. It turned out that she was ideal - but because we also had the benefit of a literary agent - Curtis Brown - and the ladies at Curtis Brown knew how glamorous Lady Collins was and so they said to me after that first meeting with Lady Collins, "Now look, we know you are under the spell of Lady Collins, but we are not - we are immune to her spell, so if she says, 'You know what about a 10% or 5% royalty...' You'd probably say, 'why bother with royalties' - but we are immune to her charms - so that's when we come in and settle. But don't say anything about money cause you'll give it all away."

METAXAS: So this was 1964? So at what point did you realize that this might go on beyond this juncture. Did you have a sense that there were years of kind of service ahead?

HOOPER: Things were changing at that time. One of the important works - a publication was important at that time - was *Honest to God* by the Bishop of Willage (?) - and this had unsettled many Christians at this time. Lewis had seen a chapter of that and had been asked to comment on that - which he did in an essay. But in

Honest to God what the Bishop said at that time was roughly that you can't... metaphors or images because they are not literally true. So he said when we say Christ came down from heaven - that's not literally true - because that sounds like a man and a parachute coming down. In fact we just don't know - we can only say something like, "He entered the universe." So when Lewis was asked to comment on that, he said, "The Bishop has told us something that we already believed for many centuries - all language is metaphorical - the language is as much as those as literary scholars. So when you exchange 'he came down from heaven' for 'he entered the universe,' it sounds like the man didn't come down in a parachute, but that he went from the garden shed and opened the door into the drawing room. But you can't be absolutely literal. And at least what we have in the Bible is inspired metaphors - so therefore we should give more credence to those than anything we make up.

METAXAS: you're just exchanging metaphor for metaphor....

HOOPER: And in America, a man came and said "God is dead" - this school of thought was prevalent about the same time 65-66 - so a lot of falling away of people at that time. And many of even the clergy who had admired CSL - they were getting on the bandwagon of the new Garden. But one of the things that had happened was the meeting of the Vatican council between 1962-65 in Rome. And I thought, "How does this benefit the CSL estate?" Well I saw one particular benefit - John the 23rd who opened the council had made a statement which I thought sums up exactly what Lewis himself believed. He said, "The deposit of faith and the venerable truths of our tradition are one thing, what you call the revelation. But presentation of that truth is another thing. But the presentation must always bear the same sense and meaning. There's the everlasting gospel. There are ways of making that gospel known. If you make them known like the Screwtape letters and Chronicles of Narnia, it must also bear the same sense and meaning - you must have the gospel. If you keep the gospel out - then it doesn't make any difference what the presentation is if it's no longer Christian." and so I thought, what Lewis writes - he is writing the Screwtape Letters to enforce this truth so you can see things from a different angle. But he's not saying things are changed - just saying - "Let's look at it from this angle than from another." The Chronicles - he said to a number of people who thought they were allegories, he said, "No they are not allegories - it's a supposal... let us suppose that Christ - the 2nd person of the Trinity - the son of God in heaven - came down, not to earth, but to a land of talking beasts and became a Lion there - what would happen?"

So we see Christ living out this life as a talking beast as a lion in there. And many people in one way cannot now separate my love of Jesus from my love of Aslan.

METAXAS: The power of his imagination to dare, to begin to think about the supposal - I don't know that there's anyone who ever lived capable of doing it. It's such a powerful work of imagination - especially for someone who values theological orthodoxy. Bonhoeffer said every sermon should have a shot of heresy in it - which means to really speak the deepest truth we have to flirt with heresy - we have to go almost out on a limb. Lewis could get away with it...

HOOPER: One of the reasons I know he succeeded with Children is that they still write to him and I reply to those letters. I'm still his secretary 50 years later. And I put most of those letters go in the Bodleian library. And one of the sweetest I've had was from a little boy named Josh and the teacher said she had six year old boys - she told them that Lewis had died - they wrote to them anyways. And little Josh said, "Dear Mr. Lewis, I'm sorry you died. I just want you to know how much I love Aslan." His love of Aslan was much more on his mind than the death of the author. But so - the vatican council - so one of the things that interested me very much was the

decree on Ecumenism - when it points out that there's truth in other Christian beliefs = other than catholicism - and this made it possible for Catholic readers and admirers of him to like his works because it was not possible for them to realize there was truth in other Christian works. Yet I think it's a good thing that he was an anglican at that time because no Catholic writer would have been able to take such liberties at the time.

METAXAS: Well he wasn't a staunch Anglican, he came up with the term Mere Christianity. And I would describe myself as such. Lewis helped people avoid the straight jacket of a denomination. That's something he may have intended, you think?

HOOPER: Well he told me one time - suppose main street is the corner market. And suppose a group of martians appeared at the corner market street right in the heart of Oxford. And they said to the people who stopped out to talk, "We've only just got a minute, can you tell us what Christianity is." he said, "I'm afraid they would say - they put too many candles down there and not near enough here... and I'd fear the Martians would have to go back without discovering what Christianity is."

PART FOUR

HOOPER: *Mere Christianity* is partly an answer to what the core beliefs of Christianity. And so far it seems to have served that purpose. Even the Catholic writers like that too. I've discovered fairly recently that Pope John Paul II liked Lewis very early on and in 1950 he was already reading with his students the *Screwtape Letters*. In 1978 when he became Pope he mentioned in one of his sermons that *The Four Loves* - which he loved - was on the level of writings with St. Augustine. In 1984 I was invited by a priest to visit the pope. I said I'll think about it - because I just don't believe it. He got back and said, "I realize how very busy you are, but could you spare five minutes with the Pope?" I said of course! I was terrified, **but he said 'do you still love your old friend CS Lewis?'** I thought that was a very pastoral thing to say. I said, "Oh yes holy father both friendship and affection." He said, 'oh you knew I liked the *Four Loves*.' I said, 'almost everybody in the world does.' **So he talked about that. But then he had read Mere Christianity and many other works as well.** Then he wanted to know from me what he was like. Well I did my best to say what he was like. And at the end I hoped he would say something about Lewis. And I think he knew I was waiting for him to say something. He said, "CSL knew what his apostolate was - and he did it." And I thought that was the nicest thing ever said about him. Because you can know what your apostolate is and not do it, but he did it.

METAXAS: And he's also effectively calling Lewis an apostle.

HOOPER: So I realized that catholics were now free to read Lewis and they began when many other denominations were caught up in liberalism, there were some new readers of CSL. And I was keen to catch those new leaders, so I went to every conference I was invited to to give talks on Lewis. And when I went and joined Alice von Hildebrand in 1989 at Steubenville, I found that most of the Catholics were there because they wanted to hear me talk about the *Abolition of Man*. And when Cardinal Ratzinger came to Cambridge in 1988, he gave his talk on the *Abolition of Man*. He said the biggest danger we now face is the dictatorship of relativism, so that explains so much about why he loves the *Abolition of Man*.

METAXAS: Lewis was saying things that were so deeply true - anyone might have seen these things - but no one else was speaking of it as true.

HOOPER: The first series of talks on *Mere Christianity* are about natural law as well - they are on the moral laws. He didn't want it to be thought to be a RC term. He never actually mentions the resurrection, but he talks about when Christ rose from the dead, so he avoids well known words which sound like traditional christianity. He tries to give it a fresh approach.

METAXAS: He said you cannot really see it if you've been looking at it for so long you become inured to it and take it for granted - and we have to recast it. Suddenly people can see it. I've found that if I can read a verse of Scripture in a foreign language - I can hear it in a new way....

HOOPER: In one of his essays on the fairy tale "what's to be said," - the quotation, "We wanted to get past those sunday school associations and past those stained glass associations - some way to get past those watchful dragons that keep us from attending to the truth." And that is what he did so well. He was willing to talk about the Narnia stories with me. I told him one time that my favorite character was Puddlegum in the silver chair. And he says, "Well you know Puddlegum pretty well. You met him a number of times, he's Paxford the gardener." Paxford was the most pessimistic man who ever lived, but one of the nicest. Lewis gave me a very good example of his pesimism, his puddlelumness. He said when he and Joy were going to Greece in 1960 Joy's cancer had returned. They were going with their friends Roger and June Lancelyn Green. But he said, "Here am I an old man walking with a stick and Joy's cancer returned... what were we doing going off to Greece of all places?" He said the last straw seems to have been when Paxford came out to say goodbye to us. He was always listening to the radio and he said, "Well Mr. Jack, there was this airplane that has just gone down. Everybody killed and burnt beyond recognition. Did you hear that Mr. Jack, burnt beyond recognition." And on that note we flew to Greece."

METAXAS: Lewis' imaginative power is evidenced in part by his ability to make names. Puddlegum. He's described as a particular creature called a marsh-wiggle.... He does this other places. In the *Silver Chair* he creates a world underneath another world. And the names are delightful. Golg. Bism. He does it over and over again.

HOOPER: Well not only wonderful names but distinctions for children to read - I wonder how many adult books have anything as brilliant as this. In the *Voyage of the Dawn Treader* they stop at this island where the people are invisible and Lucy goes in to the magicians house and she wants to read the spell that would make them visible. But she also is attracted to the magical book because one of the spells if you say it will help you hear what your friends are saying about you. And she can't resist it so she says it. So what she sees is like a train journey. These two friends of hers. One her close friend and somebody she doesn't know very well. And her close friend is intimidated by the bigger girl. Who said, "Are you still seeing that little Lucy Pevensie?" "Oh well I don't really like her very much she just throws herself at me. I'm friends because she wants to be friends with me." And poor Lucy breaks into tears and then Aslan appears and says, "Reading these spells is the same as eavesdropping in real life." "But will I ever forget it?" "No" says Aslan. "But there's a big distinction. There's a big difference between what your friends say about you and what they think about you. And your friend thinks very well of you and loves you very much but she was afraid of that girl." To make a distinction like this... what modern has anything as profound as that in it.

METAXAS: The reason Lewis is so amazing - I can hardly think of anyone who has such an array of gifts. Tremendous wisdom, humor, creative power. He doesn't seem to get a 10th of the credit he should in the academy. Have you seen that affect in the academy? For example *Perelandra* ought to be taught alongside *paradise lost* in literature survey courses. It rises to that level - much greater than many other things.

HOOPER: Someone told me yesterday that Lewis was not very popular here. When I first came to England and met Tolkien and he knew I was puzzled as to why some Bodleian college dons had not liked Lewis. And he said "You see in Oxford you are only forgiven for writing two different things. You can write in your field of study AND detective stories because all Dons at some point get the flu and they have to have something to read in bed. But you're not forgiven for writing popular works outside your field - especially popular works which become internationally famous." He said, "Lewis new that - but the reason he wrote them was because he was driven by his conscious."

METAXAS: I'm still amazed some of his works are not part of the canon of western literature..... have you ever talked about his works - they're so great - the idea that he's not accepted.

HOOPER: I noticed Lewis's newest books and those of Tolkien's were almost never reviewed in any of the papers. Even though some of them would sell in the millions. In 2000... there was one of the largest polls ever taken about books in this country - amongst readers - not about critics. And Tolkien's LOTR was #1 and LW&W were #14. So they were very high on the list. I was appalled to see that every newspaper critic condemned Lewis and Tolkien. Because they didn't really like Christianity and felt a strong desire to strike at it and the poll. So I said to the Tolkien Family - "Don't worry about this. After all, it's the people... something like 400k people said your father's work is one of the best that there is... so I wouldn't worry about that."

METAXAS: You discovered a manuscript of an unfinished novel called *The Dark Tower*.

HOOPER: This was one of those in the notebooks. It was among those things that would have been burned.

METAXAS: The Dark Tower - it is a little unlike anything else he ever did.

HOOPER - It was to be a sequel to out of the silent planet before he wrote Perelandra. It was partial but didn't know how to go on so he just put it aside and never came back to it.

METAXAS: So he writes this - maybe 80 pages... And I remember in 2002 finally reading it seeing that it's clear that it was Lewis. The horror of it - you get glimpses of it in other parts of the space trilogy. But *The Dark Tower* - published in 1977 - some people eventually accused you of having written part of *The Dark Tower* just to get it out there. What was that like to have people take your genuine love of Lewis and accuse you of having to try and profit from it financially - and a literary parasite. What was that like?

HOOPER: It went on for 25 years. There were 3 volumes involved by the same person. I was very sad at first. The question was what to do. My mother had said a number of things that came to my mind at that time. She said, "If you can't say anything nice about someone, then don't say anything at all." I'm sure your mothers have said the same. That came to mind. I think God wanted me to have something simple to rely on. So I never replied. So the controversy was completely one sided. I still did the right thing, though it was very painful. The pity is that a person chooses to spend her whole life heaping abuse on someone else when it would be better to do almost anything else than that. The person who does that is going to make themselves more and more unhappy. It was very painful to live through. When that person died, Michael Warhart came to tell me and said, "Aren't you going to rejoice?" That's not what I wanted to do. What helped me was to help say a rosary for that person seven days in a row. Then it was right after that there appeared one of Lewis' pupils - Alastair Fowler -

had written a piece in the Yale Review. He said that in 1952 when Lewis was his supervisor, he showed him the Dark Tower. And he said, "I just don't know how to finish it - I don't know how to go on with it."

METAXAS: You can never refute these things 100%... it's been put to rest. But it's still interesting. I think it's a great idea for a novel. You told me earlier that you'd had a conversation with a skylab astronaut about *The Dark Tower*.

HOOPER: Joseph Kerwin - a medical doctor who is also an astronaut. He was educated in a Jesuit institution. And he read *Out of the Silent Planet* and this led him to become an astronaut. He was the doctor in skylab when it circled the earth for a whole month in the late 70s. And he had become very fond of *The Dark Tower*. And he spent his time in the skylab trying to complete *The Dark Tower*. He visited me twice here and talked about writing. He said after they came down to earth from Skylab, he and the other astronauts agreed that Lewis gives a better example of what the earth looks like from space in *Out of the Silent Planet* than they ever could have been there.

PART FIVE

METAXAS: Were there poems that would have been burned?

HOOPER: I think so. He was scooping up a great many things. But some things survived because Lewis had sent me to Cambridge to clean up his affairs because he wasn't fit to go back. In 1963, July-August. And he said, "Whatever papers you find, appropriate to your own use, [take] or destroy [them]." Whatever was in his own handwriting, if I didn't use, he wanted destroyed. That same morning at the Kilns he picked up a piece of paper he had been scribbling on he said, "Would you like to have that." I said, "Yes indeed." He realized that what he said (i.e. throwing away old manuscripts) caused me pain - because there were those of us who liked what he said. So when he finished writing *Letters to Malcolm*, he lent me the copy of that and said would you like to read it so I read it in front of him and said, "Would you like to keep it." I thought it was a trick question. Because he said once, "The reason I don't like to leave manuscripts around is there might come a day where someone says, 'I have a first edition of Perelandra and someone else says, 'Ah but I have the unique manuscript.' I said, 'do you remember that conversation, aren't you afraid I'll do that?' He said "No, but can't you just answer a straight question?" I said I remember how Boromir coveted the ring at the end of the first volume of Tolkien and I remember how it destroyed him. He said, "I suspect I remember that better than you do. But that's not the question. Why can't you just answer a straight question? Would you like to have it or not." and I said, "Yes I would" He said, "It sure took you awhile to make up your mind."

METAXAS: Is it possible that he had a sense of his own impending death and was putting his affairs in order?

HOOPER: Yes he knew that. This is why he had written a short note to Warnie - he suggested to Warnie - one of the things you might do is to collect my letters.

METAXAS: Why do you think he used that french term "Letters Spirituel"

HOOPER: Because Warnie was an authority on France. And I think he occasionally used phrases Warnie often used.

METAXAS: Where are most of these handwritten documents? Bodleian? Wheaton?

HOOPER: The wade center has mainly letters and a number of things from Warnie such as his diary. But all that was given to me are in the Bodleian library.

METAXAS: I know there are many letters scattered all over the world. Tim Keller's wife has a few from when she was twelve. You know there are many of them hidden away in drawers or boxes or attics - who knows what is out there. Lewis's sense of language. When you first came to Oxford. I remember a story that you went to the Bodleian and asked for anything "Lewisiana" can you remember that.

HOOPER: I may have asked for Lewisiana. Together we worked it out. I worked so long over fifty years - and I was always working on Lewis. People who work there call the Readers not by their name but by the name of the person they are researching. So I'm called Mr. C.S. Lewis when I am there. And I know a man who is Civil War and Robert E. Lee and Hitler. One of the things about Hitler's curve - the people I have worked with for years - Curtis Brown agents. They were Hitler's literary agents. Somehow they inherited Mein Kampf. I understand the royalties have been around 50 years. But they can't find anyone to give the royalties to. Even the state of Israel turned them down. And all of the people related to Hitler pretend that they're not.

The Bodleian has a very large collection of his papers - some of the bonfire and his office at Cambridge.

METAXAS: as I heard the story you asked for Lewisiana and the librarian said, "It's across the atlantic take a left" ... ok - when did you have a sense that this would be a long term thing?

HOOPER: After about a year I knew it was for keeps. I was not just hear as a tourist any longer - I was here on a mission. I noted that my own father was already older than CSL. And I remembered my family and became very homesick at times. I made a fool of myself to the first doctor I went to. I went because I was so sad and this had made me ill. I didn't know he was such a "hot prot" a hot protestant. He said "Would you like to tell me what you think is wrong with you." I said I have either Mononucleosis or NE - and you'll need to take a blood test for that and send it to the Radcliffe infirmary to have it analyzed." He said, "Thank you very much for that information. Now would you like for me to tell me what I think is wrong with you?" I said, "Why not, yes." And he said "You are what every English medical student dreams of meeting - an American hypochondriac. There's nothing wrong with you now get out of here." And I felt better right away. Went and had steak and chips. But he became used to me after that. And I would say, "I know I'm a hypochondriac" and he would say, "No, you were... I cured you."

METAXAS: I know in the later part of the 70s you were part of making a documentary that many don't know about involving Peter Ustinov.

HOOPER: Well as gradually time went on and Lewis became better known and being read by a new audience the American Evangelical stayed true to Lewis and liked the new books coming out by him. And it did work that if I bring out a new book I force the publishers to bring out two of his old ones that they had let go out of print. But his works found great success with American Evangelicals. And it was some of those who wanted to make a documentary - Bob O'Donnell in west Chicago. And it was supported and paid for by someone else. I was hired to be the presenter and to write the script as well. And they really did work extremely hard. When we went to Lewis' home in Belfast, the people who owned it let us film inside. So we filmed inside all the places we talked about like the Bodleian library and Mordin college - they have the choir singing. So they had spent a lot

of money and time. It was hard for me and write something to say and memorize it for the next day. But I remember when we came to the end, it really was the beginning - they were filming me on the stage just outside Belfast. And I say, "Behind me you can see all these ships...." But it was cloudy so we did this a few times. So finally they said "We've worked you to death - and send you home - we'll wait for a clear day and film. And they sent me home."

METAXAS: That documentary is not well known. Did Ustinov know of Lewis?

HOOPER: I didn't meet him. I don't think he did. But it was not just that. They did a second film with me interviewing the Inklings. Tolkien had died, but I talked with his children. Also Pauline Baines.

METAXAS: Her illustrations have become... there are so good and apt. They serve the text beautifully. It's funny thing to...

HOOPER: Well Lewis said himself that often times she was responsible for giving form to these people. She was very young when she did this. He hired her to do the first book and she told me - she didn't know anything more - hadn't talked with Lewis. When she was drawing all those pictures of Aslan being tormented, she had to rip up her paper because she kept weeping over the drawings. She finally finished and sent her pictures to Bless. But about a week after doing that it suddenly broke on her, "Oh I know who he is! It's Jesus Christ!" This is the way you get past the watchful dragons you mentioned yesterday. You don't want people told that beforehand. Let it happen to them as it did to her. When she takes in what Jesus did on behalf of humanity she will take in what really happened. She was a wonderful friend who died a few years ago. Lewis said of the last one when he won a prize, "it's really our prize."

METAXAS: you mentioned in 1984 having a private audience with Pope John Paul II - and that affected you greatly and four years later became a Roman Catholic.

HOOPER: Well it wasn't just meeting the Pope thought that played a part. I had felt for a long time that the Anglican Church... Mere Christianity - I think the core beliefs of it were passing away from the Anglican church - and it seemed to me they were settled once and for all in the Catholic church. And I wanted a more doctrinal church. I wanted to hear sin and redemption expressed more often than the ordination of women. So I became a Catholic. And I have no backward glance. I was so happy - I wish I had been young enough to jump up and click my heels together.

METAXAS: You've said that you believe Lewis, had he lived, would have "crossed the Tiber" for similar reasons.

HOOPER: I think what he believed about Mere Christianity is found in the Catholic Church.

METAXAS: It's interesting to speculate. He's found a huge audience among Catholics. Peter Kreeft. Tom Howard. Michael Ward. There's something there about Lewis and Catholicism. His ability to speak to people who are serious about these doctrines. Although it seems especially to appeal to converts to Catholicism. Except for Alice Von Hildebrand. Except she said to rebuke you about your relationship with your cat.

HOOPER: Blessed Lucy of Narnia - they gave a fragment of her habit to put in the library (Narnia is a real place and she is the patron saint of there).... *Long story about his cat...*

METAXAS: Words have importance beyond the content. Lewis came up with the Word Aslan - it's the Turkish word for lion. But also he said it sounded right.

HOOPER: It didn't have a familiar sound of earthly names like George and Burt. And it was short and memorable. And most of us have never heard it. And they are easy to remember.

METAXAS: This touches on something Tom Howard has written about in "Chance or the Dance" and he talks about is God's order and how when you make a statement about "it wouldn't be right" the assumptions come from being baked in - about what might seem holy, base or vulgar. He talks about the Boorzoi - the dog - it looks like nobility - the lion. Though a hyena or vulture evoke death. God has put meaning into all things.

PART SIX

HOOPER: I think it was natural that he called the king of the beasts - the one who rules Narnia after the king of beasts. You may remember that scene in *That Hideous Strength*. Ransom had finished his tea. He blew a little whistle and the mice came out and consumed them. He said, "We want to get rid of the crumbs. The mice need food. Why not do that." Remember it's the mice that eat the ropes off of Aslan at the end. So he gives them a great purpose. Of course one of his great characters is ReepaCheep.

METAXAS: We remember Reepacheep getting in a little boat and rowing away into Aslan's own country. Another name. Where did he get it?

HOOPER: I think it just sound exactly right.

METAXAS: Both he and Tolkien had a very deep sense of language and even made up languages.

HOOPER: The difference was Narnia is really supposed to be a special place where you like going. It's not as serious of a place as middle earth. You would not find anything as powerful as Nausgoul in Tolkien. That sends shivers down your mind. Especially in the context of the story. But Lewis was a world for Children. And they were more happy endings. Though one thing they do share is that they unwind the story upwards. There are many places in the LOTR where he could have ended by subbing "The ring is destroyed" and made it a happy ending. But he knows that's not how the world works. And Frodo goes home with Sam and they find things much changed. So they have to deal with it changed. But then it's still a good ending, but not the quick ending. And Lewis is even better than any at that. He destroys in front of these children - who love it so much - because he knows you cannot rely on anything in this world to last. So they go through the stable door into the real Narnia that lasts forever. But it's heartbreaking - even after reading it fifty times. It's broken my heart every time.

METAXAS: You must have known Tolkien. Can you tell us about him? Did his estimation of Lewis change at all in his last years?

HOOPER: No I don't think so. I think Humphrey Carpenter is wrong and was wrong to talk of them becoming cold towards one another. I saw nothing of this at all. When I first met him, he invited me to see him - and was living at that time in Oxford and was using his garage as a study. When you went in he said, "You've got thirty

minutes," and he put one of these big alarm clocks in front of me. So he did most of the talking himself. And at one point he was talking still and left a book - he said, stay where you are - went about the room. I was worried about the clock - and he was in the middle of telling me something when I said, "it's half an hour" he said, "Sit still, I am the Lord of the Clock, I will tell you when you can go." **And then when he led me to the door, he could not have been more tender. He held my arm and said, "I'm so sorry you've lost your great friend."** I said, "But you've lost one who you knew much longer." he said, "No. What makes your case much sadder than mine is that you were just beginning to love him." **So he said "I've had many years, but you ought to be pitied."** I found that after that he could not have been nicer in talking about Lewis. One time as I was editing some of the letters from Lewis to Arthur Greeves. 1929 they were staying up very late talking about some of the Middle earth documents. I assumed this was LOTR and I asked him about them, he said, "Oh no no no. No story had been written I wasn't really interested in writing stories. I was interested in creating a world, so it was the language and the geography and genealogies that I was interested. But you know what a boy Jack Lewis was. He had to have a story - and that story the LOTR was written to keep him quiet." And I think he meant it to. Because there are letters of this that bear this out.

METAXAS: What a strange thing that Tolkien was wired that way.

HOOPER: I gave him in 1971 - I had finished *God in the Dock* - and I gave him a copy of that - Tolkien said, "Do you know Jack Lewis is the only friend I've ever had whose written more since he died than before." I said I know exactly what you mean and exactly the same will happen to you. He said, "No it won't because I don't have that much material and Christopher won't know what to do." Wow was he wrong. He was stupendously wrong about that.

METAXAS: Had the *Silmarillion* been published before his death?

HOOPER: Know he really worried about that. I heard him say, "I've got to get that finished." He really worried about it. But I simply think he was just too old. But he loved Lewis very much. And I think he would have been appalled by what others said about this getting cold. In fact his son father John Tolkien - he took his father up to see Lewis right before Lewis died. And I said, "Do you know what they talked about." He said "I remember Mallory's Mort'de Arthur and whether trees ever die."

METAXAS: Remind us who Arthur Greeves was.

HOOPER: This was Lewis's boyhood friend. They met when they were just teenagers and lived across the road from one another. They built up not only a friendship but a correspondence which is one of the longest of all of Lewis's correspondence. It was a great pleasure at that time to have someone who was absolutely on your wavelength. That you can correspond with.

METAXAS: Did he become a Christian?

HOOPER: He was one already.

METAXAS: Lewis had become somehow a reluctant believer in God, but not a believer in Jesus. And it was Tolkien, specifically who really lead Lewis.

HOOPER: Yes, you see Lewis had become a theist, but a year or more later.... One of the things that was holding him back for many years was something that happened when he was about ten years old and he was reading the classics for the first time and noticed that the editors of the classics like Homer and the Aeneid assumed that the beliefs of these ancient Greeks were wrong but that Christianity was right. Well Lewis himself liked the old myths more than he liked Christianity and so he concluded Christianity just happens to be the mythology we've been brought up in. But other Mythologies are in one way more interesting. The Norse mythology he thought more interesting than Christianity so it was still in the belief that it was a mythology - that he believed that night when Tolkien and Hugo Dyson came to dine. Well what they mainly showed him was yes, it is a mythology like the others, but the others are incomplete. They never lead anywhere. But the thing that makes this less beautiful than the other Norse mythology, Greek mythology and all that is it's true. This is a case of myth becoming fact. And he suddenly saw that it was a myth come true. And because it is fact, it cannot shine the way Norse Mythology does or Greek mythology with Gods and giants and all these wonderful things. But yet it's true, so it offers hope for the world.

And remember, people ask why Tolkien didn't push for him to become a Catholic - he had known him a long time and was happy for him to become a Christian at all.

METAXAS: What an idea.. **That these two literary giants of the 20th century. It goes to the friendship. It would take someone like that to tip him over.** Then suddenly in the sidecar in of Warnie's motorcycle on the way to the zoo he says I believe.

HOOPER: I think those two men of all men I've ever known and of all the Inklings - I think they still had a children's heart. They still rejoice in beautiful real wonderful things and Christianity still excited them the way it ceases to excite most adult converts. They still cared. They still saw things with the eyes of a child.

METAXAS: It's in *Surprised by Joy* where Lewis talks about the line from Longfellow, "Balder the beautiful because dead is dead." and how it just touched his heart and felt this yearning for northerness. That's someone who is in touch with his feelings and inner child and why he was able to re-enchant people with his stories. If the Christian faith is just syllogisms and reduced rationalistic theological points, then it is a reduced faith. This is part of why Lewis is so multi-dimensional. He can write on apologetics, but also give us the stained glass. Let's go back to Lewis' use of language. In the Narnia books - mainly for children - so didn't create anything too foreboding. But in the space trilogy he does. There are things in those that are really chilling. And it's not often talked about how he could create a semblance of evil. And his choice of names - like the Sorns - I've never been so frightened. Where did he get that?

HOOPER: Just his imagination. Fiffel tridgee as well. Fiffel-treegee. They make useless things. I said, "What kind of useless things do you think they would make?" he said, 'Back scratchers."

METAXAS: Then the mal-eldil. His ability to imagine these levels of being. And there is something medieval catholic - there are these intermediaries. I can't think of anyone else who has done anything like that. Can you?

HOOPER: What Lewis said was, "What I tried to do with these three stories was to pull the rug out from under all the former writers who when they get to a foreign planet, you always find that we are the good people and everyone else on that planet are monsters." But in his case he reversed it. We really turn out to be the monsters because they are planets filled with unfallen beings. He liked the idea of trying to create an unfallen

being. And nowhere did he try harder than the tenetill, the Lady of Perelandra. To try to make her interesting but unfallen.

METAXAS: An unparalleled accomplishment in literature. There are images he creates that are peerless. The imagery of the floating islands. The sorns. Masterful. And yet it goes so far beyond that. He's doing things to create an unfallen world. Even Dante couldn't make the *paradiso* interesting or a tenth as interesting as the *inferno*. It's very difficult to make paradise interesting. The idea that Lewis was able to even begin to pull it off puts him in the first rank. I've never heard of anything like it.

HOOPER: Well he was aware that it is very hard to create good character. And he discusses this in his *Preface to Paradise Lost*. Why is it difficult to create good character? Simply because the bad characters survive in us. All we have to do to create a bad character is let loose from our own souls and bodies all the itching and horrible thoughts that are in us waiting to get out. But to create better characters, people who are really good, we have to be good ourselves. Because you can't express much goodness unless you have a very good idea of it or you yourself are good. Lewis said himself delighted in good and he was able to create characters who really were good and interesting as well.

METAXAS: In *Paradise Lost*, everyone said that Satan is the romantic hero. You hear it over and over again. It shows that Milton did not have the imaginative power that Lewis had. Did you say Lewis didn't conceive of this as a book (*Screwtape Letters*) - they appeared as a series of articles to be published in the *Guardian*. Where did this idea come from?

HOOPER: This is a church magazine. He was actually in church. He writes to Warnie, in 1941 about being in church when the idea occurred to him of a devil writing letters about temptation. He said what a pity I thought of it in church. But once he thought of it it just poured out. Over the years many people have written new *Screwtape Letters*. And you know they've all been found to be pretty dull. They've tried to be very up to date, but Lewis in the end, you go back and find what makes them up to date is that they're always universal truths like jealousy and worries and humility. He introduces certain things which are very humorous too, like the lady who came to tea. Who was not a glutton in the usual sense but a glutton of delicacy. And I remember Lewis's Lady Dunbar saying, when we saw that on stage, "Oh I remember the woman who came to tea and said, 'oh, that's far too much. All I want is just a tiny wee little taste oh that's too much butter..." and Mory said 'she gave us more trouble than if she'd eaten six large cakes."

METAXAS: When I was thinking of writing a contemporary version to *Screwtape Letters*. I was deconstructing the word *Screwtape* - why

HOOPER: The two syllables - both of which are both ugly to think about.

METAXAS: Here's what I came up with. I realized we think of Wood Screw and Tape worm - they could be broken apart and are terrifying.

HOOPER: He enjoyed I think when he was writing it but he said afterwards. Almost by the time I got to the end I was suffocated by the story itself. It's not something you really enjoy thinking about - putting everything in reverse. What actually lifted his spirits is you would see occasionally they talk about 'the enemy' that is God. And *Screwtape* points out to *Wormwood* and says, "Don't be foolish. We are not the ones who create

pleasures. The enemy is the only one who can create a pleasure. What we do is to turn it around twist it so it ceases to be a pleasure. But we can't create anything good. He does that."

METAXAS: You've done so much over the course of 50 years. How do you want to be remembered?

HOOPER: A few years ago I went to went to Bratislava in Slovakia to the CS Lewis high School I stayed there for several days and gave some talks but then they like to ask some questions. And the last question put to me was by a young girl who was seventeen or something like that. She said, "How does it feel to have lived your whole life under the shadow of someone else?" I said, "Wonderful. I wish I could do it again and again and again. I think I've been the most fortunate man on earth. Without writing anything interesting myself. My apostolate is to push CSL's who wrote all the things that I love. And I've been allowed to keep on celebrating his works and bring out more and more of them as I find them. So yes, I've lived under his shadow. What a shadow though. I love that shadow."