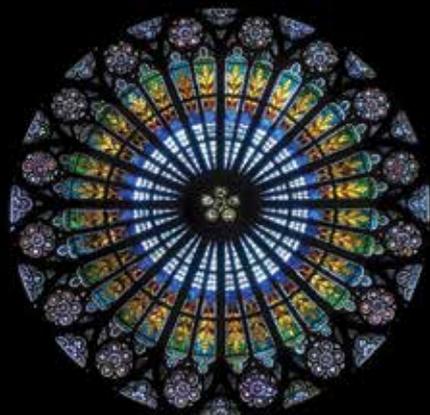


Excerpt from The Atomic Age

C.S. Lewis



Rose Window
Strasbourg Cathedral



Cross of Christ
Save me.
Zeal of your Home
Consume me.
The Cross Wins,
The Cross Reigns,
The Cross Governs,

Through the sign
Of the Cross
Save me, Lord,
From this Plague.

God, my God,
Drive the Plague
Away from me,
From this Place,
And save me.

In your hands, Lord,
I place my Spirit,
My Heart, and my Body.

God was before
Heaven and Earth
And He can therefore Save me
From this Plague.

In one way we think a great deal too much of the atomic bomb. “How are we to live in an atomic age?” I am tempted to reply: “Why, as you would have lived in the sixteenth century when the plague visited London almost every year, or as you would have lived in a Viking age when raiders from Scandinavia might land and cut your throat any night; or indeed, as you are already living in an age of cancer, an age of syphilis, an age of paralysis, an age of air raids, an age of railway accidents, an age of motor accidents.”



In other words, do not let us begin by exaggerating the novelty of our situation. Believe me, dear sir or madam, you and all whom you love were already sentenced to death before the atomic bomb was invented: and quite a high percentage of us were going to die in unpleasant ways. We had, indeed, one very great advantage over our ancestors—anaesthetics; but we have that still. It is perfectly ridiculous to go about whimpering and drawing long faces because the scientists have added one more chance of painful and premature death to a world which already bristled with such chances and in which death itself was not a chance at all, but a certainty.

This is the first point to be made: and the first action to be taken is to pull ourselves together. If we are all going to be destroyed by an atomic bomb, let that bomb when it comes find us doing sensible and human things—praying, working, teaching, reading, listening to music, bathing the children, playing tennis, chatting to our friends over a pint and a game of darts—not huddled together like frightened sheep and thinking about bombs. They may break our bodies (a microbe can do that) but they need not dominate our minds.

— “On Living in an Atomic Age” (1948) in *Present Concerns: Journalistic Essays*