What did Vanauken think of Christianity prior to becoming a Christian? What causes him to decide to investigate it some day, and what changes his original views?

Christianity is often dismissed from the pagan mind due to its appearance as a “mere local religion,” limited to earth and therefore “inadequate for the immensities of the far flung galaxies” (Vanauken 59). Vanauken embraces this mindset prior to his conversion to Christianity. In his teens, Vanauken thinks he must reject Christianity once and for all for these reasons. However, he later cannot help but wonder why highly respectable intellectuals such as philosophers and physicists believe Christianity to be true (85). Van essentially forces himself to take another look at it to be fair and honest in his rejection. This reassessment completely changes his mindset. Instead of thinking of Christianity as a “mere local religion,” he begins to think of it as something significantly more: a belief system that concerns and accounts for the cosmos.

It is through Lewis’ space trilogy that Vanauken, still under the assumption that Christianity is not universal or cosmic, first sees the potential for Christianity to be interpreted outside the confines of humanity. In addition to the fact that the books are “beautiful and enthralling,” they show him that the “Christian god might, after all, be quite big enough for the whole galaxy” (Vanauken 84). Christianity is concerned with the omnipresent God who created the heavens and the earth (English Standard Version, Gen. 1.1). Apart from humankind, God has also created beings such as angels, the messengers of God, and Seraphim, the worshippers of
God, who dwell outside this earth (Heb. 1.14; Isa. 6.3). Christianity clearly deals with the salvation of man through Jesus Christ, but it is also concerned with God and his universal creations, and in turn, the cosmos. Having acknowledged this, Van finds that his argument that Christianity is only a local religion is overcome (Vanauken 89). Vanauken understands that Christianity is big enough to account for and encompass the far-flung galaxies.

Finally, in his investigation Vanauken’s objection to Christianity’s smallness is flipped on its head. Instead of finding that Christianity cannot account for everything, he finds that it accounts for all things. He describes this discovery as a sudden illumination of all of his collected experience:

Wherever it began, what it was was a coming-together of disparate things—our love for each other and for beauty, our longing for unpressured time and the night of the cold sea-fire on Grey Goose, the quality of our Christian friends and the Oxford built by hands and the Oxford that I saw in the face of the Warden of All Souls. They came together into one, into focus, and the Light fell upon them.

(Vanauken 84)

Vanauken finds that all of his most cherished, most significant, most real experiences are unified and given real meaning in light of Christianity. Christianity unifies them and makes sense of them in its goodness, truth, and beauty. As it turns out, Christianity is not only “big enough” to reach the “far-flung galaxies”; it gathers all things together into a single turning under one great Light.