

## Book Reviews

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**Donald T. Williams, *Deeper Magic: The Theology Behind the Writings of C.S. Lewis*. (Baltimore: Square Halo Books, 2016), \$16.99 (paperback).**

Books on C.S. Lewis often suffer from the immensity of their subject. This is unsurprising, really. An analysis of the ideas of the twentieth-century's most acclaimed apologist, fantasy novelist, literary critic, essayist, poet, and amateur theologian can be hard to manage in a single monograph. Thus, any author whose intent is to "try to go deeper than other books on Lewis's theology have gone" attempts an arduous undertaking (13). Yet with *Deeper Magic: The Theology Behind the Writings of C.S. Lewis*, Donald Williams, Lewis scholar and Professor of English at Toccoa Falls College, has offered as deft a treatment of Lewis's contributions to Christian theology as has been written.

Devoting chapters to theological prolegomena and categories like the study of scripture, Christology, soteriology, and eschatology, Williams sets out to situate Lewis's theological writing among the concerns of theologians. Now, it would be hard to recommend a book that sought to so position Lewis by a theologian's criteria alone. As Williams rightly points out, Lewis was quick to remove himself from the company of professional theologians. One need look no farther than the preface of a book like *The Problem of Pain* to find Lewis remind his readers that he is theological layman and amateur. But Williams wisely takes Lewis on his own terms, expanding the dogmatic categories of systematic theology to consider areas in which Lewis has a thing or two to teach the professionals. Often overlooked in works of systematic theology, the fields of theological aesthetics, poimenics (evangelism and apologetics), and theological articulations particular to Lewis, like his Christological trilemma—Jesus was either liar, lunatic, or Lord—remind readers of just how ingenious Lewis's theology is and how important it has been to Evangelical theology.

Perhaps the greatest strength, and there are many, of Williams' *Deeper Magic* is how equitably it measures Lewis as a theologian with something meaningful to say to evangelical Christianity. Williams sees the need in Lewis studies for such an assessment and goes about taking it: "We do not yet have a book that looks at Lewis's presentation of Christian doctrine as a unified whole and critically asks what are its strengths and weaknesses as a guide to biblical faith from a conservative Evangelical perspective" (13). Here *Deeper Magic* finds itself as a required read for any modern Christian who wants to understand how a thinker from yesterday like Lewis might speak to today's church. In collecting Lewis's theological themes, Williams

brings in over thirty works from Lewis ranging from his children's fiction to his apologetic material. The result is a remarkably thorough, balanced handling of Lewis's broad body of work.

Such finesse is needed when approaching the intersection of Lewis and doctrinal issues like soteriology, a vital ventricle of evangelical theology. For example, his chapter on soteriology brings the brunt of Lewis's atonement theology to bear. Careful and concise, Williams moves through historically important theories of the atonement to sensitively position Lewis who held such theories to be mere images best used to suggest the reality of Christ's work. To Lewis, no one theory could capture the complexity of that reality. "Lewis was often better at portraying the atonement than explaining it," Williams writes (157). Readers find in Lewis a theological artisan, a writer whose theology employs reason, imagination, and myth along with scripture. It is this Lewis, Williams argues, who is not only fit for the task of a theologian but who is uniquely able to elevate the entire field of Evangelical theology.

The contributions *Deeper Magic* makes to Lewis studies extend in two directions. On the one hand, the work hits its mark as a more concentrated exploration of Lewis's theology than has yet been produced. Williams has bridged critical conversations about Lewis to those being had in and about Evangelical theology. Beyond that, *Deeper Magic* achieves something best described as a right sizing of Lewis. Measured against prominent Evangelical theologians, Lewis is, in some areas, lacking. It is safe to say that even Lewis himself wouldn't disagree. In the area of dogmatics, one will not find in Lewis the wealth of material one finds with, say, Wayne Grudem. But in other doctrinal matters of interest to Evangelical theology, Lewis pioneers. Who has influenced Evangelical apologetics more than C.S. Lewis? What argument has directed man's existential longing to God more powerfully than Lewis's apologetic from desire? Who has given the church a clearer picture of what it looks like to communicate the truths of Christianity through memorable, beautiful language more so than Lewis has? Williams reminds readers of just how large Lewis should still loom over Evangelicalism. In effectively arguing for Lewis's place in Evangelical theology, Williams beckons us to enchant the theological with the imaginative, to consider the mythical alongside the scriptural, and to look for the deeper magic beneath the systematic.

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