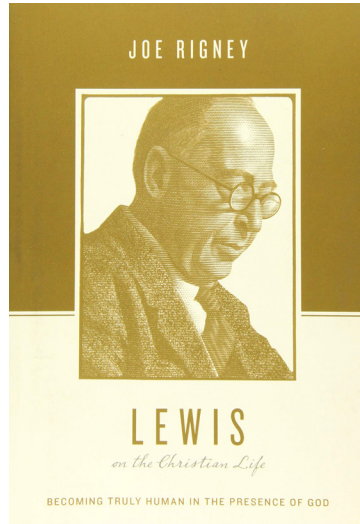


**Joe Rigney.** *C.S. Lewis on the Christian Life: Becoming Truly Human in the Presence of God*, Crossway, 2018, \$21.99 (paperback).

While a book cannot comment, ask questions, or pursue rabbit trails as dynamically as a group of people, *C.S. Lewis on the Christian Life* by Joe Rigney has much more in common with conversational literary criticism—or a book club (17–18)—than a formal theological work. Rigney does not write a definitive summary of Lewis’s theology, nor does he use Lewis’s texts to support a personal apologetic. Rigney purposes to relay Lewis’s perspective—in an approximation of Lewis’s original voice—so that Rigney’s readers can see life through Lewis’s eyes. As his benchmark for success, Rigney wants his readers to be like a “good Berean” to re-consult Lewis, evaluating Rigney’s thoughts against Lewis’s texts (23–24).



Most of Rigney’s reflections on C.S. Lewis and the Christian life reduce to one “either-or” dualism—what Rigney refers to as “The Choice”—to choose God or to reject Him. “In everything [Lewis] writes, his aim is to remind us that we are here and now, that God is here and now, that this God makes total demands of us, and that therefore we must choose to bow the knee or to bow up, to surrender and join our wills to God’s or to resist his will and insist on our own way” (31). His book shows that Lewis sees personal beliefs, practices, and experiences to be expressions of one’s response to “The Choice” and how one becomes distinctly human before God (20).

To this end, Rigney organizes the book topically; in each chapter, he presents Lewis’s perspective through a collection of quotations. Rigney usually begins from two sources—*Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer* (1964) and *The Screwtape Letters* (1942)—to introduce an aspect of Christian life. He then layers the conversation with Lewis’s theological and fictional works. Rigney summarizes the similarities (or contrasts) in the texts with an attention to practical applications. I found this methodology plus Rigney’s own writing style to be successful in representing Lewis’s own perspective and voice. Rigney’s writing style concisely blends descriptive language with well-reasoned arguments, which complements—even unintentionally emulating—Lewis’s own writing style: “art ... embedded in the argument, the argument embedded in the art” (171). Chapters ten and eleven serve as the most prominent examples.

Three chapters stand apart from this pattern and are worth mentioning. In chapters four and eight, Rigney writes from a more overt Reformed perspective and deviates from the more neutral tone of the book. Rigney carefully distinguishes Lewis's works from his own perspective and from Reformed theology (or Arminian in chapter eight). These chapters take on more of an apologetic or systematic theological structure: to defend Lewis from certain criticisms regarding his atonement theory (chapter four) or to consider Lewis's positions on providence and free will (chapter eight). Towards the end of both chapters, he returns to how these headier theological topics relate to how a Lewisian perspective understands ordinary Christian life, independent of one's own theological tradition. This move by Rigney—suggesting that the Christian should lean towards living in the tension of a “both-and” dualism in these debates—makes these topics germane to his practical aim. This is particularly evident in chapter eight with his defense of the importance of Lewis's “The Choice” for someone with a Reformed perspective on divine providence. These two chapters contain the most substantive theological engagement and are worth multiple reads.

Additionally, the final chapter on *Till We Have Faces* (chapter seventeen) also differs from his general pattern, in that it reads like a book summary, as it focuses with singular interest on that work. This chapter is structurally weaker than the rest of the book, but Rigney chose well to emphasize that particular novel. *Till We Have Faces* (1956) is arguably the work that best exemplifies the topics and perspectives in Rigney's project as he presents them. Rigney is concluding the discussion with an interpretive exercise of a single narrative that fittingly summarizes his thesis, even if the inter-textual dialectic is set aside.

Rigney's book has one characteristic that initially seems to be a weakness, but I see it as one of its strengths: Rigney assigns *The Chronicles of Narnia* an infrequent, supporting role. He acknowledges two reasons for his choice. First, he has previously written *Live Like a Narnian: Christian Discipleship in Lewis's Chronicles* (2013), which concerned similar topics. Instead of repeating material, Rigney suggests viewing both books as an expanded project (21). Second, Rigney attempts to reintroduce readers to Lewis's less popular works and show their salience for the Christian life and theology (22). I commend this move, and I appreciated rediscovering old favorites alongside texts that I had not considered.

This book is well-suited for university students or non-academics interested in theology, Christian living, and practical application. As such, I would recommend those new to Lewis—or those who have only read works like *The Chronicles*, *The Screwtape Letters*, and *Mere Christianity*—to read this book as a companion piece to a book study. Rigney pulls from multiple sources—often in a single paragraph—which may create difficulty for inexperienced readers to follow the themes and argumentation without experience with

the source material. Though Rigney faithfully incorporates literary context, there were times that a reader would benefit from familiarity with the plot or characters.

Whether one agrees with Rigney's assessment of Lewis on any given topic, *Lewis on the Christian Life* deserves to be read for Rigney's methodology and voice alone. His presentation is humbly accessible and honest while retaining a dynamic conversational feel. Points of disagreement feel less like an academic debate and more like remembering encounters with an old friend. I can think of few better ways to re-encounter Lewis's influence upon the Christian life.

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**Jennifer Agee. *Systematic Mythology: Imaging the Invisible, Winged Lion*, 2018, \$19.50 (paperback), 378 pp.**

Jennifer Agee's book *Systematic Mythology: Imaging the Invisible* (2018) explores the ways in which myth-making enables us to communicate theological truths as well as to participate in the story that God is telling through all of creation. Agee's book began its life as her master's thesis, the culmination of her degree at Warburton Theological Seminary. In it, Agee re-envisioning theology itself as mythopoeia and systematic theology as systematic mythology—hence the title. This core claim is heavily informed by two sources: mythopoeia as a field of study and Paul Tillich's 'method of correlation.' The extent to which readers resonate with Agee's claims will likely depend on their knowledge and opinion of these two influences as well as their familiarity with the academic discipline of systematic theology.



In the first chapter, "Seen and Unseen," Agee paints a general picture of systematic theology and theology from several vantage points. The overall picture is one in which "the idea behind stories ... in Scripture" are extracted in an attempt to "[articulate] them in a rational, logical system," in dialogue with the creeds and "in conversation with neighbors" (3). Systematic theology, as an attempt to derive "rules, systems, and logic" from stories