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## Book Review: of *Deeper Magic: The Theology Behind the Writings of C.S. Lewis.* by Donald T. Williams.

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### Abstract

*Deeper Magic: The Theology Behind the Writings of C.S. Lewis* is both exciting and engaging in its exploration of Christian thought in general and Christian themes in particular, found in the fictional and nonfictional works of C.S. Lewis. This book would sit comfortably on the shelf with other first-rate Evangelical Christian interpretations of the works of individual Inklings, such as Ralph Wood's *The Gospel According to Tolkien: Visions of...* [Read More](#)

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Book Review: *Deeper Magic: The Theology Behind The Writings of C.S. Lewis*

DEEPER MAGIC: THE THEOLOGY BEHIND THE WRITINGS OF C.S. LEWIS.  
Donald T. Williams. Baltimore, MD: Square Halo Books, 2016. 287 p. 978-1941106051.  
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*Deeper Magic: The Theology Behind the Writings of C.S. Lewis* is both exciting and engaging in its exploration of Christian thought in general and Christian themes in particular, found in the fictional and nonfictional works of C.S. Lewis. This book would sit comfortably on the shelf with other first-rate Evangelical Christian interpretations of the works of individual Inklings, such as Ralph Wood's *The Gospel According to Tolkien: Visions of the Kingdom in Middle-Earth* or the works of Matthew Dickerson including his *Narnia and the Fields of Arbol: The Environmental Vision of C.S. Lewis*. Like the authors of these books, Donald Williams nicely balances between presenting Christian thought and discussing its presentation within the works of C.S. Lewis. The text speaks to the reader with a clear, conversational style worthy of C.S. Lewis himself. With that said, *Deeper Magic* would also fit on the same shelf with any of the works of C.S. Lewis.

I begin by defending the book against a possible criticism that its language is too difficult for readers who do not have theological training. I urge the average reader not be discouraged by the theological language seen immediately in the chapter titles, beginning with *Prolegomena A What is Truth?* and *Prolegomena B The Task of Theology*. The chapter titles continue in this vein, but I hold to my characterization of the book as clear, conversational and add *plain spoken* to my descriptors. The author is a theologian using the vocabulary of his discipline to stretch and introduce the reader to the

conceptual tools necessary to participate in the theological conversation instead of being patronized. Williams explains the meaning and context of the words he uses, provides diagrams of their conceptual place within theology, and continues to educate the reader throughout the book. The average person can read this demanding book fruitfully and with pleasure because all of the tools needed to follow his arguments are presented. Like Lewis, the author's clear yet challenging communication style has been developed, no doubt, from years of guiding adult students through similarly complex subjects.

Williams draws from over thirty of the works of C.S. Lewis in his presentation of theology in the writings. The genres of the writings discussed include both adult and children's fiction, popular Christian apologetics, and academic works. Williams fairly assesses Lewis's theology, which is intended for the ordinary reader. Williams's recognition of Lewis's target audience leads him to be critical of Lewis only when the latter gets things wrong. He does not require Lewis's writing to stand up to the rigors of the criticism of professional theology for theologians.

In the conclusion of chapter three Williams states that "Lewis is at his weakest as a theologian when expounding the doctrine of inspiration and its corollaries such as inerrancy." (72) Williams writes that this weakness demonstrates a defect in Lewis's understanding that prevented him from confirming the inerrancy of Scripture and that "he left a gap between text and Word that unintentionally compromises the Bible's authority." (72) He explains that Lewis's teaching could mislead the reader but admits that his living practice of obedience was stronger than his teaching, in this instance.

Williams's chapter four on *The Existence and Nature of God* is a particularly well-done presentation of the attributes of God using Lewis's writings to illustrate or to move the discussion forward. This chapter is one of the many places where the rigor and tone of the text remind me of *Miracles* by C.S. Lewis. Williams concludes by confirming that Lewis read, understood, and made good use of the "best thinking of the Christian tradition." (100) He goes on to write that "His formulations of the doctrine of God are orthodox in content but often daring in expression, in ways that make what often appears only as very abstruse doctrine suddenly appear both understandable and meaningful." (100) Williams here points to one of the attributes of Lewis's writing that makes him the beloved author that he is.

In the *Interlude* of Chapter 6 on *The Person of Christ* Williams engages criticisms of Lewis's famous "Trilemma" argument for the deity of Christ. Williams does an excellent job of explaining the argument, providing its context, and giving a critique of the strengths and weaknesses of the argument. He also defends the argument against its many critics. The *Interlude* convincingly argues for the value of Lewis's "Trilemma" argument and describes how it should be used.

This wonderful book can be read in a number of different ways. One is to follow Williams's explicitly intended purpose of exploring and evaluating the theology that is an important element in the thought and writing of C.S. Lewis. A second is to use the backdrop of Lewis's writing to learn about Evangelical Christianity. Belief is not required for the reader to benefit from this rigorously drawn picture of Christianity in Lewis's writing, though it is likely to increase the reader's enjoyment of the book. Third, on a related note, the book can be used to instruct or reinforce ideas of Christian faith. I

highly recommend *Deeper Magic: The Theology Behind the Writings of C.S. Lewis* regardless of how the book is read.

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