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## ***Book Review: An Encouraging Thought: The Christian Worldview in the Writings of J.R.R. Tolkien* by Donald T. Williams**

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it. Furthermore, Tolkien’s work instructed and continues to inspire him on how to live a Christianity that nourishes Williams spiritually as opposed to practicing only a sterile spirituality reserved for Sundays.

To establish that Tolkien’s work expresses a Christian worldview Williams begins by discussing five themes in Tolkien’s work:

- “Darkness and Light interact symbolically in the story;”
- “(T)he Strength of Weakness advances the plot;”
- “(T)he role of Sacrifices in the victories that are achieved;
- “(T)he hints of Providence...behind supposedly chance events;
- “(T)he presence of Christ Figures.” (p. 12 Kindle)

He writes that “Together they add up to a story that resonates powerfully with Christian doctrine and with a biblical view of life and the world.” (p. 12 Kindle) The chapter then provides a convincing discussion of how the five themes contribute to the expression of a Christian worldview in Tolkien’s work. His discussion of the theme of “(T)he hints of Providence” provide the title of William’s book. He describes Gandalf’s observation that “Bilbo was meant to find the Ring, and not by its maker—and that may indeed be an encouraging thought. It is encouraging not just because it makes him feel better, but because it speaks truth about the real situation in the real world in which Frodo actually finds himself.” (p. 34 Kindle)

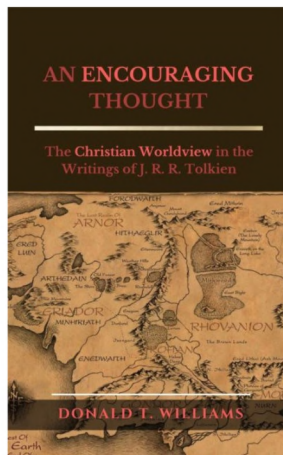
Williams does an excellent job of showing first that Tolkien’s work expresses a Christian worldview. This is followed by a discussion of Tolkien’s concept of sub-creation as described in “On Fairy-Stories” and describes the power of words. Williams writes that “The Poet has that potential to surpass nature in embodying the truth because he is created in the image of the Creator.” (p. 54 Kindle) He adds a discussion of Sir Philip Sidney’s “The Defense of Poesy” as representing the tradition that Tolkien followed of expressing a Christian worldview in poetry and creative writing. My impression from his essays and original poetry in the book that

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## REVIEWS

Donald T. Williams. *An Encouraging Thought: The Christian Worldview in the Writings of J.R.R. Tolkien*. Christian Publishing House, 2018. 154 pp. \$11.95. Reviewed by Phillip Fitzsimmons.

Donald T. Williams begins his book *An Encouraging Thought: The Christian Worldview in the Writings of J.R.R. Tolkien* with the sentence, “I first read *The Lord of the Rings* in the summer of 1968, the summer between my junior and senior years of high school.” (p. 8 Kindle) This autobiographical fact launches the slim volume that shares Williams’s early discoveries that J.R.R. Tolkien was a Christian whose Christian worldview is expressed throughout *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and “On Fairy-Stories.” This autobiographical approach to the narrative works very well because it gives the reader the feel of having a personal and pleasant conversation with the author. Williams describes the process by which these discoveries moved him from adolescent doubts in his own Christian faith to being confirmed in



Williams likewise follows the same tradition in his writing.

Williams's description of a Christian worldview is contrasted within his critique of the Peter Jackson movies. The critique is well-reasoned, in which he provides legitimate criticisms and extends his presentation of the difference between a Christian worldview and the worldly perspective in Jackson's telling of the stories in film. The chapter fits nicely as an illustration of the difference between the two worldviews.

Overall, *An Encouraging Thought: The Christian Worldview in the Writings of J. R. R. Tolkien* is a solid little volume that achieves quite a bit. The book would be good for the library of any Christian institution. It would also be good for discussion groups interested in the work of J.R.R. Tolkien and his practice of Christianity. The book could also make a difference to readers who are either questioning their Christian faith or searching how to re-vitalize the faith they have. The author shares his experiences of first discovering *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* as literature and then as an articulation of a Christian worldview. The author ably shows the differences in Tolkien's Christian vision and Peter Jackson's movie adaptations of Tolkien's work. Finally, the personal essay returns to an expression of gratitude that Tolkien's work has nurtured the author's spiritual life as well as voicing the hope that his book will assist the reader in similar discoveries.

Despite its compact length, the book covers a lot of territory. The principle text of the Kindle version of the book is 85 pages long. The personal essay runs to page 75. It includes several pages interspersed throughout the book of his own original poetry, whose themes highlight similar points throughout the book's narrative. Also, pages 76-85 is an Appendix: "Tolkien, Middle earth, and Narnia: Tolkien's Objections and the Mythical Structure of Narnia." The Appendix is not directly related to the personal essay but will be of interest to readers of J.R.R. Tolkien or C.S. Lewis. The remainder of the book is the Annotated Biography and the Notes.