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

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## Mythcon 50

Looking Back, Moving Forward

San Diego, California

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

**DEEPER MAGIC: THE THEOLOGY BEHIND THE WRITINGS OF C.S. LEWIS.** Donald T. Williams. Baltimore, MD: Square Halo Books, 2016. ISBN 978-1-941106-05-1. \$16.99

AS A SCRUGGLING, CHRISTIAN AND NO THEOLOGIAN, I cannot present a learned treatise on Donald T. Williams's latest work, but I am a perfect target audience. I have read at least two other books by Williams with great pleasure: *Mere Humanity* and *Inklings of Reality*. *Deeper Magic* is another treasure chest to explore. I've read C.S. Lewis with great avidity, repeatedly, and consider him a major influence on my own thinking. To some degree, we share an evangelical outlook, though I look for common unities between denominations as Lewis did. Any book by Williams would be welcome reading.

Theology necessarily involves technical language which can daunt or easily confuse the novice. Williams defines terms well, and the crystalline clarity of his writing makes terms such as soteriology, hamartiology, and eschatology far less scary. Briefly, *soteriology* means "how we are saved," *hamartiology* deals with the problems of sin and the Fall, and *eschatology* charts the murky waters of the Second Coming and the End Times, a subject with numerous areas of disagreement. Williams takes the reader from branch to branch of the theological tree with the ease of an experienced guide. Accessible language, thoughtful, fair arguments, solid research, and respect for opponents are hallmarks, and reflect characteristics that Lewis himself exhibited. For the most part, he treats Lewis fairly, and with the respect he deserves, showing how in each area, Lewis presents a well-thought-out theological bent, and provides trustworthy guidance.

It's only fitting that Williams traces out the tree of theology in the "Prolegomena" (first things) section of *Deeper Magic*, an apt title drawn from what Williams calls "the Narniad" (127, 168) before getting into deeper waters. His introductions are a great strength, giving a clear path to follow.

Given our current culture, Williams in his first prolegomena must deal with questions of truth and the validity of "the correspondence theory" (26) which Lewis argued for in earlier decades, when scholars built the beginnings of theories which questioned truth's existence. Now, both Lewis and Williams must argue for an objective reality, free of the notion that proposing any truth is engaging in power politics. We have devolved to the mind of Pontius Pilate: truth is what Caesar says it is. Lewis argues (with Williams's sharp eye to notice) that to be true, a proposition must correspond to an external reality, an objective world. Most people would consider that simple common sense, but since deconstruction and other abstruse theories, it isn't so simple. Why we need truth is important, and Williams offers several reasons why truth matters to believers, and perhaps more for the non-religious among us. He shows how Lewis shores

up the ground for truth, and that it matters greatly to Lewis and every human mind.

A second prolegomena outlines the task of theology. In the medieval period, theology was considered the highest form of science. Their educational system prepared a student with preparatory grammar, logic, and other subjects in the Trivium and the Quadrivium, before one could even approach the heights of theology. Now, theology is considered mere opinion, rather than science. Williams must convince the reader that theology is relevant. He must define it, and help us learn differing territories. Discovering how Lewis thought about each of these areas organizes Williams's powerful thinking, makes it easy to absorb, because Lewis's own writing is so clear.

A few caveats: the chapter on Lewis's view of Scripture could be improved with more biographical detail on Lewis's own Scripture reading habits. How did he deal with difficult passages? What were his concerns? How often did he read Scripture, and how did his rich imagination and great intelligence approach conundrums? Such works as *Reflections on the Psalms* give clues, but if there is literary evidence of such details, Williams uses little of it. More exploration in this area would strengthen Williams's arguments.

Williams leans to Calvinism, and while fair to those who don't, he seems troubled by a Lewis quote which has greatly shaped the lives of many other Christians.

Every time you make a choice, you are turning the central part of you that chooses, into something a little different from what it was before. [...] All your life long, you are slowly turning this central thing into a heavenly creature or into a hellish creature [...]. Each of us, at each moment, is progressing to the one state or the other. (*Mere Christianity* 86-87)

In the seventh chapter on the Atonement, Williams declares that "Lewis was not an exegetical theologian [...] one does not find him directly expounding it [Scripture] as the basis of his theological positions" (149). On questions of salvation, "this is the area in which his version of things, even as it often inspires and edifies them, most fails to satisfy all of his historic Christian readers, especially conservative Evangelical Protestants" (150). In short, Lewis depends upon historic tradition rather than Scripture, and perhaps is not evangelical enough in this area for Williams. He needs to show more distinctly what historic tradition informs Lewis's thought and how it falls short, to prove the necessity of Biblical exegesis.

Williams considers the above passage troublesome, too dependent upon human freedom rather than God's grace. Lewis is less Calvinistic than he should be, in Williams's view. However, Williams acknowledges that Lewis "is

therefore right to note how significant those choices, even the small ones, are" (238). If Christ is within us, and works within, He makes us wish to follow the heavenly will of His commands. The Great Physician performs spiritual surgery daily, and we must allow Him to do it. Lewis himself knew, even as he became a Christian, that he would be invaded, meddled with, and in the end, he permitted the invasion else he would not have surrendered to become the great Christian writer he became. Lewis's treatment of choice does indeed inspire me to examine my smallest attitudes, ways of thinking, and the ramifications of how my words might inspire or hurt others. Am I crawling back to that dragon skin that God sliced open when I cried out to Him?

Aside from a few quibbles, Williams's *Deeper Magic* presents a valuable addition to the library shelf of anyone who loves Lewis, is interested in theological questions, and enjoys a highly intelligent approach. Williams's study is greatly needed in this current culture, which is shrouded in shadowy confusion, more so than when C.S. Lewis wrote his fiction and his Christian essays. It's well worth the interested reader's time.

—Diane Joy Baker

#### WORKS CITED

Lewis, C. S. *Mere Christianity; a Revised and Enlarged Edition*. Macmillan, 1952.



**THE INVENTION OF ANGELA CARTER: A BIOGRAPHY.** Edmund Gordon. New York: Oxford UP, 2017. 525 p. 9780190626846. \$35.00; also available for Kindle.

CONSIDERING THE SHEER IMPRESSIVE RANGE of Angela Carter's writing—journalism, literary criticism, poetry, film adaptations, radio plays, nine novels, even a libretto—it may be hard for some readers, especially those familiar with only a portion of her work, to pin her down. In a way, the lack of any core or essential identity is the primary theme of Edmund Gordon's captivating and meticulously researched new biography, *The Invention of Angela Carter*. The word "invention" in his title is intentionally ambiguous. First and foremost, Gordon uses the word to indicate Carter's talent for *self*-invention, her tendency to construct a self through a conscious performance in the public and private spheres. An ardent individualist, reveling in asserting her independence even from causes she admired (such as feminism), Carter crafted for herself a "vibrant, defiantly humorous personality," characterized by "strong opinions and outrageous jokes" (408, 72), and becoming someone simultaneously