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Root and Neal's "The surprising imagination of C. S. Lewis" (Book Review)

James L. Sauer
Eastern University

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Root, J. & Neal, M. (2015). *The surprising imagination of C. S. Lewis*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press. 270 pp. \$34.99. ISBN 9781426795107

Wheaton College professor Jerry Root has teamed up with fellow writer and speaker Mark Neal to produce an introduction to the Sage of Narnia's use of imagination. Imagination is no small thing within the Lewisian worldview. The authors trace the imaginative impulse through the whole width of the work of C. S. Lewis: children's literature, science fiction, autobiography, religious writing, literary criticism, satiric humor, and poetry. Pervading this study are the unifying threads portrayed in the subtitle of *Pilgrim's Regress*: Christianity, Reason, and Romanticism (or high imagination); and the authors deftly weave all of Lewis's imaginative work and influences around each genre showing that no literary form stands alone. Lewis himself downplayed adolescent wish-fulfillment daydreams, gave respect to the artistic craftsmanship of imaginative invention, but bestowed highest praise to the mythopoetic imagination that shapes this world and the imaginative creation of other worlds. Yet even in his autobiography, the theme of higher joy and longing, *sehnsucht*, speaks of the power of imagination's place in the most common elements of life. The influences on Lewis' imaginative life were numerous. His imagination was baptized by the fairyland goodness of George MacDonald, the playful orthodoxy of G. K. Chesterton, the numinous theology of Rudolf Otto, the Byzantine mysticism of friend Charles Williams, and the mythmaking genius of friend J.R.R. Tolkien. Root and Neal point out the importance of the concept of a "shared imagination" in Lewis, the attempt to bridge the gaps of knowledge and experience that diverse audiences must necessarily have by appealing to the common experiences that form human universals. The authors point out that "collective experiences are an entry into the shared imagination." This is just the beginning of a set of critical ideas depicting imagination in Lewis as "satisfied", "awakened", "realized", "generous", "transforming", and so on. Even the chapter titles of this critical study picture the imaginative Bunyan-like blend in Lewis: *The Smell of Deity*, *Out of the Dungeon*, *the Grey Town*, *the Hidden Country*. The work is indexed and has an appendix on further uses of imagination in Lewis. This is another solid addition to the Lewis critical studies and will be welcome by Lewis followers and academic libraries.

Reviewer

James L. Sauer, Eastern University

Lambert, H. (2016). *A theology of biblical counseling: The doctrinal foundations of counseling ministry*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan. 344 pp. \$24.99. ISBN 9780310518167

Heath Lambert is the Executive Director of the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors, a pastor, and professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. As