



Into the Region of Awe: Mysticism in C. S. Lewis

David C. Downing

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C. S. Lewis is generally thought of as a commonsense Christian, one who offers theology that is understandable and morality that is practical. And yet, when writing about Narnia to a class of fifth graders who asked if it were possible to visit Aslan's country, Lewis replied that the only way he knew of was through death but then added this curious qualifier: "Perhaps some very good people get just a tiny glimpse before then." This simple sentence suggests a side of Lewis that most commentators have overlooked. If one takes another look at Lewis, one can find a sense of the mystical all through his writings, from his memoir *Surprised by Joy* to *Perelandra*, from his nonfiction essays to his Narnia stories. In this book David C. Downing explores the breadth of Lewis's writing, introducing us to Christian mysticism as Lewis knew it and to the contemplative writers who most influenced him. Though he showed a lifelong interest in mysticism, Lewis was not an uncritical admirer. As Downing highlights, Lewis had areas of concern and points of departure with some mystical thought. Lewis's comments about misguided forms mysticism are especially pertinent in our own era of faddish or eclectic religious thought. Exploring Lewis's sense of the mystical can help us safeguard ourselves from false mysticisms even as it opens the way to a deep and full experience of God's very presence with us. In the end we too may find ourselves drawn--as Lewis put it-"into the region of awe."

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