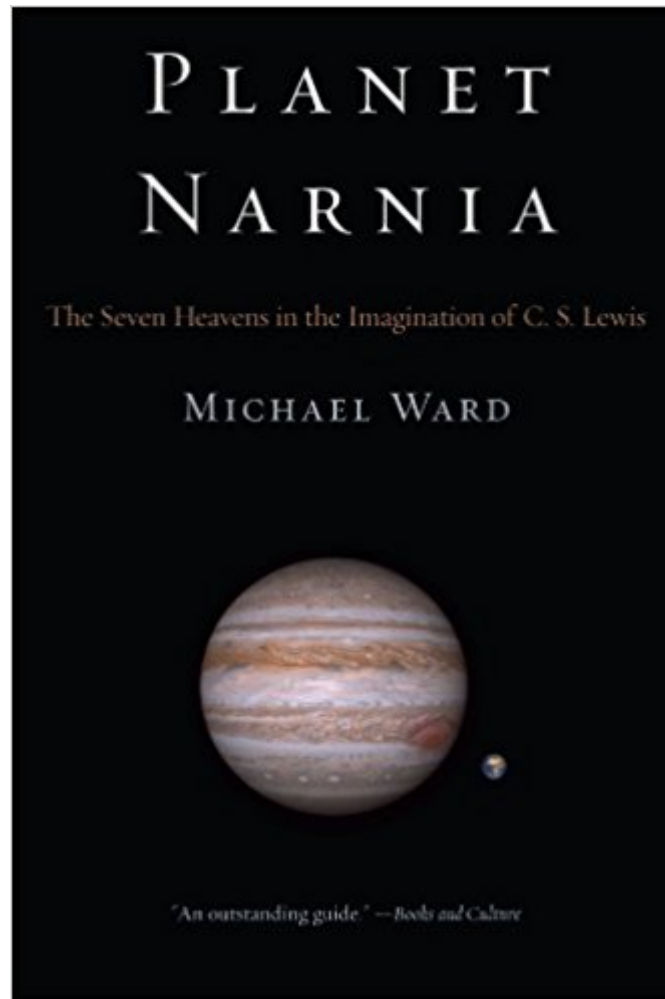


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Planet Narnia: The Seven Heavens In The Imagination Of C. S. Lewis



Synopsis

For over half a century, scholars have laboured to show that C. S. Lewis's famed but apparently disorganised Chronicles of Narnia have an underlying symbolic coherence, pointing to such possible unifying themes as the seven sacraments, the seven deadly sins, and the seven books of Spenser's Faerie Queene. None of these explanations has won general acceptance and the structure of Narnia's symbolism has remained a mystery. Michael Ward has finally solved the enigma. In Planet Narnia he demonstrates that medieval cosmology, a subject which fascinated Lewis throughout his life, provides the imaginative key to the seven novels. Drawing on the whole range of Lewis's writings (including previously unpublished drafts of the Chronicles), Ward reveals how the Narnia stories were designed to express the characteristics of the seven medieval planets - Jupiter, Mars, Sol, Luna, Mercury, Venus, and Saturn - planets which Lewis described as "spiritual symbols of permanent value" and "especially worthwhile in our own generation". Using these seven symbols, Lewis secretly constructed the Chronicles so that in each book the plot-line, the ornamental details, and, most important, the portrayal of the Christ-figure of Aslan, all serve to communicate the governing planetary personality. The cosmological theme of each Chronicle is what Lewis called 'the kappa element in romance', the atmospheric essence of a story, everywhere present but nowhere explicit. The reader inhabits this atmosphere and thus imaginatively gains concrete knowledge of the spiritual character which the tale was created to embody. Planet Narnia is a ground-breaking study that will provoke a major revaluation not only of the Chronicles, but of Lewis's whole literary and theological outlook. Ward uncovers a much subtler writer and thinker than has previously been recognized, whose central interests were hiddenness, immanence, and knowledge by acquaintance.

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Customer Reviews

Narnia lovers behold this book. Michael Ward's revelatory work is too edifying to ignore. For half a century we read (or had read to us) C.S. Lewis's magnificent Chronicles of Narnia. We love them because they captivate us. The series has a mystery, however. Disparateness clouds the atmosphere; a lack of thorough artistry found in Lewis's other fiction. Lewis's mind is consistently meticulous and lucid, a chief trait of the medieval authors he taught professionally, and therein lies the secret. More than allegory, yet nothing obviously more, Planet Narnia contends that Lewis made it so intentionally. Ward argues that each chronicle corresponds to one of the seven planets of medieval astrology. As a whole, they (the chronicles infused with the characteristic traits of the planets) create an atmosphere that is both honest to the human experience and consistent with the loveliness and sovereignty of Christ the Lord. The subtlety, an atmospheric quality, is consistent with Lewis's pneumatology, which maintains that unawareness of the Holy Spirit is a common condition in our human experience. Ward's case focuses on the peculiarities in The Chronicles, of which there are many, like the supposedly discordant appearance of St. Nicholas in The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe. Suddenly they make sense - the jovial saint's laughter resonates like guilt forgiven. Many critics mistook Lewis for slopping together a menagerie of characters and plots without a guiding principle, argues Ward. Rather, it seems that a combination of an allegorical element teetering the brink of believability and dissatisfaction, a well-known pejorative judgment by J.R.R.

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