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**Jacob Schriftman,**  
*The C.S. Lewis Book on the Bible:  
What the Greatest Christian Writer  
Thought About the Greatest Book.*

**Review by Paul Tankard**

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Jacob Schriftman, *The C.S. Lewis Book on the Bible: What the Greatest Christian Writer Thought About the Greatest Book*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2009. 320 pp. ISBN 978-1438202075.

If you are looking for a book about C.S. Lewis's attitude to the Bible, one which is thorough and scholarly and engages with other works on the subject,[1] you will probably be disappointed with *The C.S. Lewis Book on the Bible*. Jacob Schriftman is a freelance blogger, translator and writer on Christian subjects. His self-published book is, of course, not a 'C. S. Lewis book', much less the C. S. Lewis book; but despite the odd title and other distracting amateurishness endemic to self-publishing, it is thoughtful and serious, engaging and readable. However, it is not an exegesis or critique of Lewis's thought, but rather a work of Christian apologetics – about the philosophical possibilities of theistic faith, and the place of the Bible in the faith of a Christian, with special reference to the work of C.S. Lewis. Schriftman frankly admits that Lewis taught him most of what he knows about Christianity, but also about philosophy, history and

literature. This is not unusual: many Christians of scholarly inclinations have been inspired in their vocations by Lewis's example. But this is not a work of scholarship or for scholars.

The first part of the book puts us in the position of the young C.S. Lewis who, rather than believing in the Bible and subsequently becoming a Christian, became a Christian and independently made up his mind about the Bible, treating it as a book on its own merits. Under the heading 'Why C. S. Lewis believed in the Bible', Schriftman examines various arguments for the Bible's authority, although half of the 22 chapters of this first two-thirds of the book actually focus on reasons that Lewis did *not* give for believing in the Bible. He considers claims such as that faith should not require evidence, that the Bible contains all that we need to know, that it inevitably changes people's lives, that it is confirmed by fulfilled prophecies. Schriftman then

outlines Lewis's (and other) objections to these 'unwelcome supporters'.

In the second group of short chapters, Schriftman examines how Lewis came to believe the message of the Bible: by not pretheoretically rejecting the miraculous, by appreciating – from his specialist position as a literary critic – the kinds of literature the Bible contains, by working his way via reason to a theistic position consistent with the Bible, and by considering historical testimony to the reliability of the Gospels. Schriftman gives weight to Lewis's particular insight that Christianity makes explicit and fulfils what is hinted at in other religious traditions. At the end of this section, Schriftman notes that 'C. S. Lewis' argument so far is sufficient to make someone a Christian' (220).

The last third of the book starts by looking at various problems that Lewis recognised within the Bible: the cosmology of Genesis, the historicity of parts of the Old Testament, the banality of parts of Proverbs, the dubious morality of some of the Psalms, and apparent discrepancies between the Gospels. This leaves only three chapters in which the author argues that for Lewis, the Bible was (and that for all Christians it ought to be) less important than God's revelation of himself in the Incarnation of Christ. This is an important and appropriate conclusion, and in retrospect we can see that Schriftman

has carefully argued his way to it. It has not been his intention to provide a systematic account of what Lewis thought about the Bible, but to replicate a thought process by which readers could understand the force of Lewis's position on the Bible – one which is critical, flexible, honest and thoroughly faithful.

As I have said, *The C.S. Lewis Book* is a work of Christian apologetics, not a work of scholarship or criticism of C.S. Lewis. But it clearly aspires to a certain level of scholarly responsibility, and experienced readers will be distracted by its many idiosyncrasies. Schriftman knows and quotes Lewis, but none of the large body of critical writing about Lewis; his other sources – when he uses any at all – are websites and encyclopaedias. When he quotes, his selection and identification of sources are very haphazard: they are odd books he happens to have read (such as A.W. Pink, or Erich Auerbach – described on p. 150 as a 'German literal historian'), or talks he has heard at conferences. This lack of rigour is bolstered by pointless detail: no one is helped by long lists such as that of Old Testament Apocrypha (111n.), pseudepigrapha (165) or the New Testament apocrypha (175n.). He is very attracted to his own parables and invented scenarios which are frequently over-elaborated. Schriftman frequently misuses words and idioms: he talks about 'rubble'

(five times) when he means ‘rabble’ (52-53), and ‘raided against’ (66) when he means ‘railed’; and there are infelicities such as ‘celebrities furnish power’ (76), ‘the *Iliad* is to a great deal fictitious’ (86), ‘as we already elucidated’ (99), ‘Got [God] is behind it’ (110), ‘does not at all subtract’ (155), ‘they are insofar important’ (159), ‘pouring over’ (164), and ‘Lewis has no philosophical premonitions about miracles’ (247). An editor would have caught these and many other such

oddities. An index would be helpful, and a bibliography would have compelled Schriftman to use better authorities and reliable and verifiable sources.

Nevertheless, this would be a fine book to put into the hands of an intelligent young adult who likes reading, enjoys thinking, and wants to think critically – and with C.S. Lewis as a guide – about the Bible and the Christian revelation.

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## Notes

[1] For example, Michael Christensen’s *C.S. Lewis on Scripture* (1979), or essays by Duncan Sprague (*Mars Hill Review*, May 1995), David Lyle Jeffrey (*Christianity and Literature*, 50, 2000), or Kevin J. Vanhoozer (*The Cambridge Companion to C.S. Lewis*, 2011).