



# **An Unexpected Light: Theology and Witness in the Poetry and Thought of Charles Williams, Micheal O'Siadhail, and Geoffrey Hill (Princeton Theological Monograph)**

*David C. Mahan*

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Description: "Can poetry matter to Christian theology?" David Mahan asks in the introduction to this interdisciplinary work. Does the study of poetry represent a serious theological project? What does poetry have to contribute to the public tasks of theology and the Church? How can theologians, clergy and other ministry professionals, and Christian laypeople benefit from an earnest study of poetry? A growing number of professional theologians today seek to push theological inquiry beyond the relative seclusion of academic specialization into a broader marketplace of public ideas, and to recast the theological task as an integrative discipline, wholly engaged with the issues and sensibilities of the age. Accordingly, such scholars seek to draw upon and engage the insights and practices of a variety of cultural resources, including those of the arts, in their theological projects. Arguing that poetry can be a form of theological discourse, Mahan shows how poetry offers rich theological resources and instruction for the Christian church. In drawing attention to the "peculiar advantages" it affords, this book addresses one of the greatest challenges facing the church today: the difficulty of effectively communicating the Christian gospel with increasingly disaffected "late-modern" people. Endorsements: "Can poetry matter to Christian theology? To this question, David Mahan's book comprises a resounding 'yes.' With acute sensitivity and painstaking attention to literary detail, the author shows how Christian wisdom is hugely enriched by three major word-crafters. Far from muddying the waters of theological rigor, 'poetic performance' renders theology more precise, lucid, and faithful. An immensely important book, demonstrating just how badly the theologian needs the artist today." --Jeremy Begbie, Thomas A. Langford Research Professor of Theology, Duke University "The engagement of theologians with the poetry of recent times has usually consisted of giving theological warrant to beauty and aesthetic gratification, of finding analogies between poetry and theology, or of discovering Christian themes in Christian and non-Christian poets alike. David Mahan, in *An Unexpected Light*, has achieved something distinctly new and different. He has taken three examples of Christian conviction inhabiting the contemporary world in the form of poems by Charles Williams, Micheal O'Siadhail, and Geoffrey Hill. With lovingly close attention to both form and content, he has brought to our attention the 'inscape' of these examples of Christian inhabitation in poetic form. And he has judiciously asked what Christian theologians can learn from a close reading of these poems for their own way of inhabiting our world today. It's an admirable achievement!" --Nicholas Wolterstorff, Noah Porter Professor of Philosophical Theology, Yale University. "David Mahan is a superb close reader of poetry and also a rich theological thinker. This book shows how poetry and theology can come together to light up the great questions of human life today. Above all, his profound engagement with three fascinating poets--O'Siadhail, Williams, and Hill--will expand the circle of those who recognize their great significance for the twenty-first century." --David F. Ford, Regius Professor of Divinity, University of Cambridge "David Mahan sheds 'unexpected light' on poetry as a Christian discourse. He does this by deftly elucidating common intellectual ground shared by poets and theologians. Where he shines, however, is in showing how a poem means, how ideas actually become incarnate in texts. Mahan offers beautifully lucid analysis of demanding poets who, in his sure hands, become accessible, though never merely easy. He challenges us to see their work as not only speaking to our particular historical condition but, in quirky and reticent ways, as evangelizing our imaginations." --Peter Hawkins, Professor of Religion and Director of Luce Prog

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