Inklings of Glory

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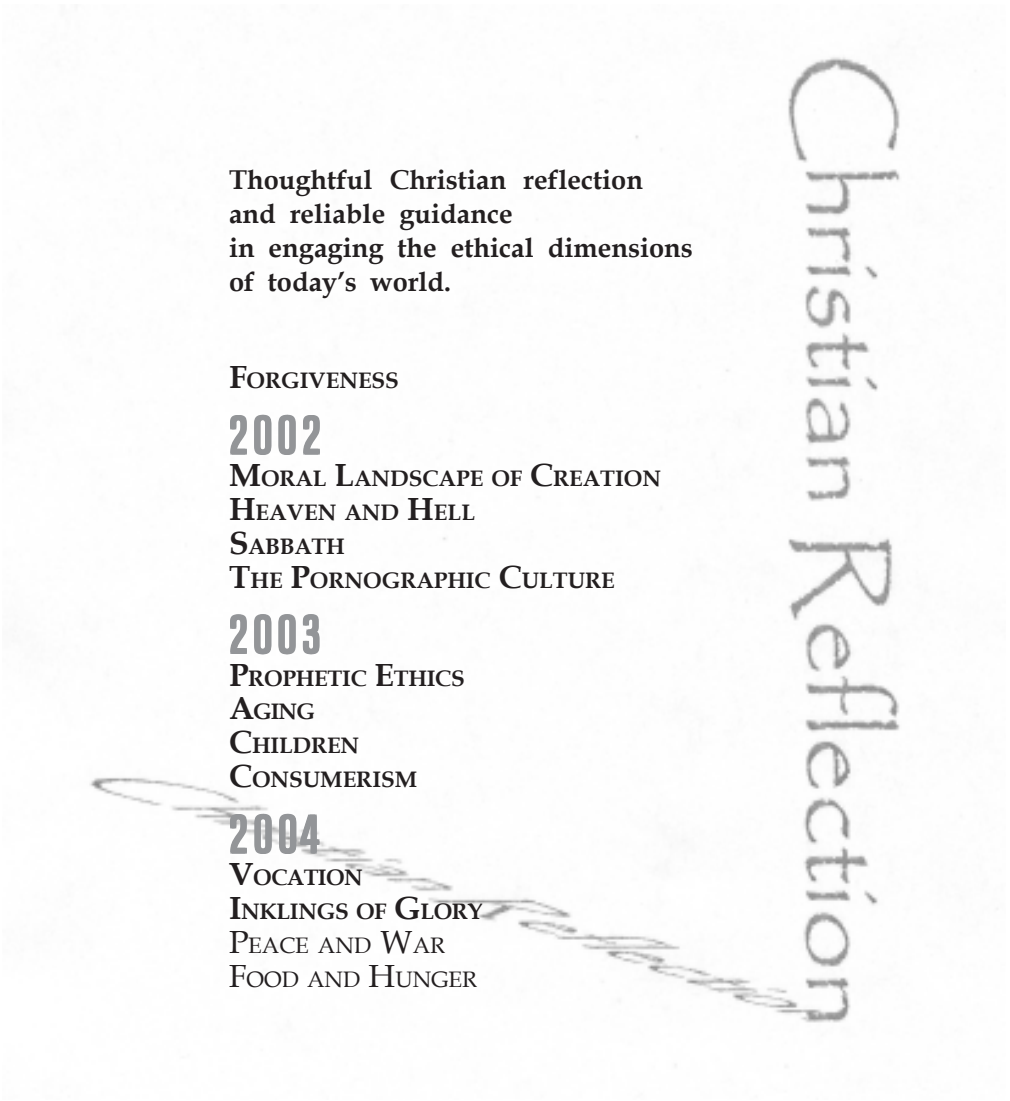

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The Baptized Imagination

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Without imagination, moral education is a wasteland of abstract reflections on principles that we might never put into practice. With imagination, we connect principles to everyday life and relate to the injustices others face when we picture what they experience. Stories develop our moral imagination and nurture the judgments of our heart.

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Frodo's Forgiveness (J. R. R. Tolkien)

Tolkien captures the transcendent quality of love, utterly unknown either to warrior cultures of the ancient world or to our equally merciless culture of consumption. "The pity of Bilbo" is not only for Middle-earth; it's the key to our transformation as well.

Live Large, Dream Small (J. R. R. Tolkien)

God calls us to dream small—to live within limits, instead of destroying creation so we can have more. At the same time, we are called to live large—to live with courage and passion as we give ourselves to the greatest quest of serving God in peace, justice, and harmony.

The Mystery of Vocation (Dorothy L. Sayers)

Our creative work can be a source of fulfillment and blessing, and a celebration of God's creativity through the material world. Indeed, we are most like our Creator when we create.

Introduction

BY ROBERT B. KRUSCHWITZ

In their imaginative works of literary art, J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, and Dorothy Sayers transform our vision and attune our hearts to experience "inklings of glory"—glimpses in the world of God's glory-reflected dignity in human beings and profoundly sacrificial moral demands.

A deep unwelcome to the moral life pervades our culture, flattening human beings to power-driven animals (or worse, mere consumers) and depriving us of all but material hopes and earthly fears. In such a shallow world, what could be the point of justice that requires unending effort, or love that demands sacrifice?

J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, and Dorothy L. Sayers responded by confessing their faith in a deeper reality—in the Christian God, his glory-reflected dignity in human beings, and his profoundly sacrificial moral demands—less with arguments, than with their imaginative works of literary art. They penned (often fantastic) stories that attune our hearts to experience "inklings of glory" within the world, through fissures of experience where the deeper reality still can be glimpsed.

"How do stories transform our moral vision?" Kerry Dearborn wonders in *The Baptized Imagination* (p. 11). After all, human imagination may be twisted to produce fantasies "so purely escapist" that they "blur our vision, blunt our sense of purpose, and inhibit us from wanting to get anywhere near the authentic realities of people and creation." Yet the stories by Tolkien and George MacDonald, the great nineteenth-century innovator of modern fantasy, enable us to see "the enduring goodness at the heart of all things and our fundamental connection with all creation." They nourish our deep hunger for transcendence, significance, and community.

Lewis believed that sound moral behavior does not rely on "the abstract reflections of the head, but on the properly nurtured judgments of

the heart," Peter Schakel observes. That is why moral education is a wasteland when it trains only the mind and fails to nurture moral emotions. In *Irrigating Deserts with Moral Imagination* (p. 21), Schakel illustrates how "through the use of moral imagination in his writings, Lewis was attempting to preserve and pass on the traditional values of earlier ages to the modern world."

In placing universal moral law (or the Tao) at the center of moral education, Lewis acknowledged what T. S. Eliot called "the permanent things"—those features of the moral order to the cosmos that in turn hold all cultures and eras accountable. Since this natural order commends itself to reason and lies beyond current political fashions, Daryl Charles suggests in *Permanent Things* (p. 54), it can serve "as a bridge between Christian and non-Christian morality" and provide a "remarkably nonpartisan" vantage point for political thought.

Tolkien's masterwork, *The Lord of the Rings*, transports us into a battle against evil that threatens a fantastic ancient world. "Tolkien captures the transcendent, even divine quality of real love by having it issue in a pity and pardon utterly unknown either to the warrior cultures of the ancient world or to our own equally merciless culture of consumption and competition," Ralph Wood writes in *Frodo's Forgiveness* (p. 30). "'The pity of Bilbo may rule the fate of many' is not, therefore, a motto meant only for Middle-earth," Wood notes. "It is the key to our own transformation as well."

In *The Triumph of Spectacle* (p. 83), Wood reviews the epic's translation into Peter Jackson's immensely successful films. "Though Peter Jackson and his huge company of film-wrights resort more to spectacle than complexity," he says, "they may inadvertently establish the wry truth of the wag's saying that 'The world is divided into two halves: those who have read *The Lord of the Rings*—and those who will eventually read it."

The central theme of Tolkien's epic, the nature of power and its abuse, goes directly to the heart of the violence that pervades our culture. "We revel in the power of the muscular, the vigorous, the reckless, the daring," John Hamilton observes in *The Power of Sam* (p. 78). "Rarely do we discipline power by wisdom to refrain from things we can do: create armaments for Armageddon, clone human beings, or bulldoze unique ecosystems to build parking lots." Indeed, the misuse of power so reaches into congregations, Kyle Childress declares in *Live Large, Dream Small* (p. 72), that "many Christians cannot see the inconsistency in wanting to talk about Jesus Christ and having the state help them do the talking, or in evangelizing people and having the Pentagon pave the way." Both Hamilton and Childress point to Samwise Gamgee, the hobbit gardener who serves his friend Frodo, as the moral center of *The Lord of the Rings*. "Sam is tempted by power to fantasize about himself as somebody important, but what saves him is his humility," Childress says. "This is why Sam and the hob-

bits can give up the Ring of Great Power: they do not have an enlarged sense of themselves."

Dorothy Sayers, like Tolkien and Lewis, was "more at home in the Middle Ages or the Renaissance," Corbin Scott Carnell has reminded us, "but the very depth of their immersion in the past gave them a useful perspective on the present which presentists ironically lack." Sayers, for instance, recovered a medieval understanding of work as the celebration of God's creativity. From this vantage point Sayers critiqued the dehumanization of work in industrial society, Martha Eads points out in *The Mystery of Vocation* (p. 59). After penning the famous mysteries featuring detective Lord Peter Wimsey, Sayers turned to writing powerful dramas on vocation and other Christian themes. Laura Simmons, in *Showing the Truth* (p. 68), reports that "Sayers saw in the theatrical community a picture of what the church could be: a group of people dedicated to a common cause, each member working out of his or her gifts, coming together to shape a story into something it could only become through their combined efforts—and thoroughly loving the process."

Being so future-oriented ourselves, we are astonished that these writers' imaginations were awakened and hearts attuned by medieval culture. Yet, in *Back to the Future* (p. 38), Heidi Hornik shows how their study of the Middle Ages to gain a new perspective on their present situation was presaged a generation earlier in the visual and plastic arts of the Pre-Raphaelites. She illustrates with the work of William Morris (*Day*: *Angel Holding a Sun*) and Sir Edward Burne-Jones (*St. George and the Dragon*).

Michael Massar's service of worship (p. 44) offers hymns and prayers to complement Lewis's wonderful sermon, "The Weight of Glory." Lewis underscored the link between ethics and worship, reminding us that "the load, or weight, or burden of my neighbor's glory should be laid daily on my back, a load so heavy that only humility can carry it, and the backs of the proud will be broken." *Imagination's Stream* (p. 51), Terry York's new hymn celebrating the baptized imagination, begins with this humble prayer to God, "Do we think our minds can form / a world you do not know?" York concludes that "Deepest thoughts and highest hopes / in story and in rhyme; / inklings glimmer: heav'n on earth, / eternity in time."

Through their fiction, Tolkien, Lewis, and Sayers displayed God's gracious story of redemption. John Sykes, in *The Gospel in Tolkien, Lewis, and Sayers* (p. 88), surveys recent criticism of their individual work in Tom Shippey's *J. R. R. Tolkien: Author of the Century*, David Downing's *Planets in Peril: A Critical Study of C. S. Lewis's Ransom Trilogy*, and Janice Brown's *The Seven Deadly Sins in the Work of Dorothy L. Sayers*. These studies make it clear that our hunger not only for their stories, but also for the truth they disclose, remains unsatisfied.

The Baptized Imagination

BY KERRY L. DEARBORN

Rather than leading us to escape from reality, stories from the baptized imagination address our deep hunger for transcendence, significance, and community. Washing away blinding scales, they give us a new vision of the enduring goodness at the heart of all things and our fundamental connection with all of creation.

As a young atheist, C. S. Lewis purchased a book in a train station bookstall. He was seeking a hint of joy in life, life which he believed to be merely a "meaningless dance of atoms." Like many of us who read novels to escape the mundane realities of life, Lewis was seeking a reprieve from the grim rationalism he had embraced. He yearned to enter through myth into the "mirage" of beauty.[1] Reality is a barren wasteland, he believed, and myths, though they touched the deepest yearnings of the heart, were after all only "lies breathed through silver."[2]

The book he read, *Phantastes* by George MacDonald, had a profound effect on his life. He later wrote that it converted, even baptized his imagination. Rather than leading him into an escape *from* reality, it washed away blinding scales and gave him a new vision *of* reality. Rather than providing mere ornamentation for a life which for him held no lasting significance, it led him to sense the enduring goodness at the heart of all things. Instead of feeding his sense of being alone in the vastness of the universe, *Phantastes* began to draw him out of himself to feel a fundamental connection with all of creation. It is from this experience of Lewis's that the idea of "the baptized imagination" derives. "I know nothing that gives me such a feeling of spiritual healing of being washed as to read MacDonald," Lewis affirmed. Through MacDonald's fantasy he encountered "good Death," which began to cleanse away cynicism and awaken him to "cool morning

innocence." A myth was able to show him "the quality of the real universe, the divine, magical, terrifying and ecstatic reality in which we all live," so that eventually he could come to believe in the 'true myth' behind all myths—the story of Jesus Christ."[3]

In this article I will explore more fully the nature of the baptized imagination. After briefly contrasting the twisted imagination with the baptized imagination, I will articulate three ways in which stories can aid in the process of dying and rising to newness of life. These ways relate to what John Stott has called the three deepest hungers of the human heart: the hungers for transcendence, significance, and community. First, fantasy can transform our vision so that our cynicism and fear are cleansed away and we see the real universe with all its tragedy and glory held fast by the God of grace. Second, the bracing waters of fantasy's baptism can awaken us from the numbness of plodding through what seems a meaningless life. It can ignite a sense of the significance of our own life and of each life we encounter, no matter how seemingly inconsequential. We can see more clearly through story that people's lives and actions have lasting impact. Third, fantasy challenges the lie that ultimately we are each alone, alienated and autonomous. Resembling the sacrament of baptism, stories plunge a person into a reality where the alienated self is left behind. In a sense, as we enter into the story of others we must die to ourselves and rise with awareness of the fundamental connections within all of creation. Stories from the baptized imagination enlarge our sense of community and connection with other people, creatures, and nature.[4]

GOD'S SPIRIT AND THE IMAGINATION

Not all stories have such an effect. Rather than taking us through cleansing waters to baptize the imagination, some stories leave us feeling covered with grime and muck. Others are so purely escapist that we feel we have bathed in sugar syrup which afterwards crystallizes to blur our vision, blunt our sense of purpose, and inhibit us from wanting to get anywhere near the authentic realities of people and creation.

George MacDonald understood well the destructive possibilities of a twisted imagination. "If the dark portion of our own being were the origin of our imaginations, we might well fear the apparition of such monsters as would be generated in the sickness of a decay which could never feel—only declare—a slow return toward primeval chaos."[5] In *The Lord of the Rings* we find this 'sickness of decay' in Saruman who fashions his own Orc-creatures, the Uruk-hai, and brutally destroys the environment around him.

As with every gift from God, the imagination can be warped for destructive purposes. The problem is not with imagination per se, but with the way it is employed. Isaiah describes those who are rebellious, deceitful, and unwilling to listen to the Lord's instructions: "who say to the seers, 'Do not see'; and to the prophets, 'Do not prophesy to us what is right;

speak to us smooth things, prophesy illusions,…'" (Isaiah 30:10). There are always false prophets who will cry "'Peace, peace' when there is no peace" (Jeremiah 8:11b). There is always the temptation to turn the stones of reality into the bread of illusion in order to gratify human craving for self-indulgence and self-deification. Lilly Sammille (or Lilith) in *Descent into Hell* is Charles Williams's profound depiction of such a temptation. Lilly is the teller of soothing and sensuous tales who entices: "Cross my hand with silver, and I'll not only tell you a good fortune, I'll make you one," and "Give me your hand, then come and dream…. You'll never have to do anything for others anymore."[6] Prophesying such illusions has become lucrative business. It is appealing to hear stories that keep us from having to die to ourselves and to rise to a new life in which we are no longer the center.

One can imagine King David hoping for such soothing words from the prophet Nathan after his violation of Bathsheba, Uriah, and his relationship with God. However, the baptized imagination operates in a cruciform manner. It does not soothe with smooth words that would cover over festering wounds. It lays bare the bruising realities of human fallenness, while simultaneously offering a way of cleansing and exaltation to newness of life. God used Nathan's story to confront David's blindness to the evil in his life, to cleanse away the slime of guilt and to open him up to healing forgiveness (2 Samuel 12:1-14).

What makes it possible for a story to challenge so incisively and inspire so profoundly? George MacDonald saw a wise imagination as the "presence of the Spirit of God."[7] Our imaginations were created in the image of God's imagination—the source of all creativity. Because Christ's death and resurrection operate on the entirety of our person, our imaginations too have been "crucified with Christ" (Galatians 2:19). As they are redeemed from the distorting influences of our fallenness, they also may draw their inspiration from the "imperishable flame" of God's own creativity, and offer light to the world.[8] Clark Pinnock exclaims that God's "Spirit is essentially the serendipitous power of creativity, which flings out a world in ecstasy and simulates within it an echo of the inner divine relationships, ever seeking to move God's plans forward."[9] This is not to equate our creativity with God's, but to admit that inspiration comes from the fount of all wisdom, truth, and beauty. Human creativity is a gift of participation in God's creativity. For this reason, MacDonald thought it best to call us "makers" and Tolkien employed the term "sub-creators," rather than claiming that we are creators. Because our "making" can by the Spirit share in God's creativity, stories from the baptized imagination are able to address the deepest hunger of our hearts for transcendence, significance, and community.

TRANSCENDENCE

"The Elves may fear the Dark Lord, and they may fly before him, but never again will they listen to him or serve him," Tolkien writes in *The Lord*

of the Rings. "They do not fear the Ringwraiths, for those who have dwelt in the Blessed Realm live at once in both worlds, and against both the Seen and the Unseen they have great power."[10] The Elves have what I would call "bi-focal" vision. They are acutely aware of the anguish and evil in their midst, but they do not live in fear. They have great power because they are able to see the harsh realities of Middle-earth in light of the more enduring reality of the Blessed Realm. Stories from the baptized imagination are able to offer us that bi-focal perspective as well.

Poignantly aware of human agony around us, we may be consumed by present realities and lose sight of God's kingdom, or abstract ourselves from life's struggles in escapism. Stories from baptized imagination offer a renewing perspective on the wonder of God's grace that penetrates the darkness.

Entering into a fantasy world like MacDonald's *Phantastes*, we are able to perceive the brokenness in our lives and our world, while simultaneously being drawn into the wonder of goodness and grace at the heart of all things. The power that evil wields when operating on one who is proud and self-preoccupied, like the young protagonist Anodos, becomes a sobering alarm, alerting us to our own weakness. Yet, we vicariously experience grace, which not only confronts but also bathes, caresses, and heals. We discover the pervasive realm of holiness that offers an ocean of divine love to bathe and restore Anodos.[11] Grace rescues and redeems from times of failure and capitulation to temptation. Thus we are invited alongside Anodos to relinquish our desperate grasp at control and survival at any cost. Trust becomes more feasible, trust that there is One at the heart of all creation who would extend the blessed realm to all creation. In this way we are invited to see with Lewis the "bright shadow coming out of the book into the real world and resting there, transforming all common things" and drawing "the common things…into the bright shadow."[12]

Similarly in *The Lord of the Rings*, we are offered the gift of bi-focal vision urging both greater realism and deeper hope. We become more acutely aware of how easy it is to be seduced by a thing of beauty and power, like the One Ring. The struggles of Boromir and Frodo to resist that allure, at times woefully unsuccessful, awaken us to the weaknesses in ourselves. Even so the grace, wonder, and glory behind the harsh realities of Middle-earth remind us that joy, celebration, and music are possible in the midst of it all. We gain a vision of the blessed realm through the lives and visions of the Elves in Rivendell and Lothlórien. And we sense the power of such a vision when we read of Sam battling his way forward with Frodo deep in-

to the putrid and barren land of Mordor. In the midst of great dreariness and impending darkness, Sam looks up: "Sam saw a white star twinkle for a while. The beauty of it smote his heart, as he looked up out of the forsaken land, and hope returned to him. For like a shaft, clear and cold, the thought pierced him that in the end the Shadow was only a small and passing thing: there was light and high beauty for ever beyond its reach" (901).

It is difficult for us to walk through each day and sustain a vision of the blessed realm of God's Kingdom, while also remaining poignantly aware of human agony and significantly engaged with the suffering of those around us. Either we tend to become consumed and overwhelmed by present realities and lose sight of God's kingdom that Jesus proclaimed to be in our midst, or we try to abstract ourselves from life's struggles in escapism. Gifts from baptized imagination offer a renewing perspective on the wonder of God's grace that penetrates into the darkness and rests on even the most common things. We are emboldened to come out of our comfort and fears and to participate in God's purpose of drawing all things into God's "bright shadow."

SIGNIFICANCE

Cynicism and escapism are both ways to flee from accountability for our behavior. Lewis's earlier materialist nihilism allowed him to be self-indulgent and self-aggrandizing. What did it matter what he did, since objective reality was utterly meaningless? Similarly, if meaning can only be found in the subjective realm of dreams and emotions why bother leaving the comforts and securities of life to confront problems in the world around? Why go forth to adventure and suffering, if we can remain secure in the cozy Shire of our protected existence? A baptism of the imagination splashes cold water on such cynicism and illusion and awakens us not only to a bi-focal vision, but also to a call. It not only reveals the interpenetration of the material and the spiritual realms, objective and subjective realities, but it also catalyzes responsive self-giving action.

Once it becomes clear that there is more to life than the material realm, we are gripped by the truth that there is also more to each person than meets the eye.[13] Like Frodo, I may feel very small and insignificant in the face of the challenges and wonders of life. I too may feel like I was not "made for perilous quests" (60). But when I read that a halfling is central in the battle of good against evil, it is as if I emerge from the baptismal waters and am anointed with oil to fight the good fight. Stories of the baptized imagination not only awaken us to this sense of significance, they clarify three aspects of the very nature of significance.

First, the way of significance is often hidden and inglorious. This does not naturally appeal to a culture mesmerized by celebrities and superstars, where even fifteen minutes of fame sounds like a worthy goal. Through *The Lord of the Rings* we comprehend that the "least and the lowliest" are

more apt for such a pilgrimage. Self-giving rather than self-aggrandizement sustains a servant commitment to truth. When Frodo learns of the nature of the One Ring, he offers the Ring to Gandalf rather than claiming its power for himself. When he hears that it is a danger to the Shire, he offers to leave, though he knows it means "exile, a flight from danger into danger" (61). "I feel that as long as the Shire lies behind, safe and comfortable, I shall find wandering more bearable…" (61). He is willing to go alone and incognito, knowing his sacrifice might never be appreciated, known, or even effective. It is fitting that Sam Gamgee, Frodo's gardener, is the one who is "chosen" to go with him. The last shall be first and the least shall be the greatest of all.[14]

In contrast, the baptized imagination exposes the destructiveness of one who like Boromir would take the more expedient road of power and glory to defeat evil. Boromir's sense of entitlement as a great warrior and great leader does not serve the Fellowship of the Ring well, nor does it strengthen the battle against evil. One who yearns for the glory of commanding "all men" becomes blinded by his lust for power, and cannot sustain the kind of commitment or bi-focal vision it takes to remain a servant (391).

Phantastes presented Lewis with this emphasis, also. After a long pilgrimage, Anodos finally does something significant when he gives up trying to be noble, heroic, and glorious. He proclaims: "Then first I knew the delight of being lowly, of saying to myself, 'I am what I am, nothing more.'… I learned that it is better…for a proud man to fall and be humbled, than to hold up his head in his pride and fancied innocence. I learned that he that will be a hero will barely be a man; that he that will be nothing but a doer of his work is sure of his manhood" (166).

Second, the way of significance requires endurance and commitment. This challenges the efficient mechanistic ways of our age. Inspired stories reveal that pragmatic solutions are less important than personal character formed through discipline and determination. Frodo and Sam move through many hindrances and obstacles in their journey to Mount Doom. This can wash away unrealistic expectations for easy resolutions and instant gratification and reveal the need for "sheer dogged endurance" (1 Thessalonians 1:3, Phillips). Attempted short cuts to our desires create long detours. Perseverance is revealed as possible through the presence of a greater power who gives strength for the disciplining of the desires, and redemption and healing when we temporarily lose ground.

Third, significance is tied to responsibilities assumed in humility rather than roles asserted in pride. At a time when image is so important and roles are sought for the entitlement they bring, the call of the baptized imagination is to humble responsibility. This may seem utterly foolish.[15] Why should Aragorn, the heir of kings, have to be cloaked in the humility

of a Ranger? Why should he wander throughout Middle-earth to protect people and receive no acclaim? His role entitles him to power, majesty, glory, and honor. Yet Aragorn does not cling to his rights. In humility, he serves, guides, and offers his own life even through the Paths of the Dead.

Similarly, Eowyn does not cling to her role as a protected noble woman, chosen to govern her people. Rather than being imprisoned in that role, she responds to a deeper call and faces the worst dangers that the Enemy can hurl her way. In doing so she shows the way of grace to move within the ancient prophecies to defeat evil. Truly "no living man" would hinder the Lord of the Nazgûl (822). It would be a woman who would defeat him instead.

Stories' clarification of the way of significance cautions us against misjudging a person who takes the way of servanthood, long-suffering endurance, and humble responsibility. We will be reminded to see the dignity in others no matter how seemingly lowly their work. And we will be wary lest we react in self-protective fear to crush a pathetic enemy, having seen that even a creature like Gollum can make a significant contribution.

None of these ways of significance should surprise those who follow Jesus. His way among us was hidden and inglorious. His was a long-suffering way of endurance. And he too relinquished his rights as the Son of God to bring liberation and the defeat of evil. The baptized imagination is able to convey these truths as newly enfleshed so that the old truths shine with greater radiance and relevance for our own lives.

COMMUNITY

The baptized imagination not only offers a cleansed vision of transcendence and a clarified way of significance, it also offers a bridge toward community. In revealing the interconnectedness of all of creation it propels us to die to a sense of isolation, individualism, and autonomy. Through the sacrament of baptism we join with others to become part of the One Body of Christ. In like manner, baptism of the imagination means recognition of our common humanity, that all are created in God's image. It can also free us to see our common creatureliness, whether through trees like Treebeard in *The Lord of the Rings*, or animals like Mrs. Beaver in the Narnia tales.

The baptized imagination offers a bridge toward community. In revealing the interconnectedness of all of creation it propels us to die to a sense of isolation, individualism, and autonomy.

Three aspects of viable community become apparent in such stories. First, community functions best as unity with diversity. Though Christians

may in principal believe that one of the great treasures of the kingdom of God is its diversity of peoples, our social relationships often are quite segregated.[16] Knowing the Spirit of God reaches out through the Church to baptize people from every language and ethnic group, we are often still wary of the stranger and those who are "other." The baptizing imagination is needed as a solvent on our underlying assumptions. New vision of both the inadequacies of homogeneity and the promise of diversity is required for true community to emerge.

When we experience the contrast in *The Lord of the Rings* between the nine Ringwraithes and the nine members of the Fellowship, a cleansing takes place that leaves a deep imprint on the mind and heart. Whereas evil aims at colorless sameness, the Fellowship expresses the richness and power of a diversity of gifts and perspectives. It is clear that such relationships do not come easily or naturally. The Elven prince Legolas and Gimli the Dwarf must work through the enmity from generations past before they learn to trust and value each other. But the reader can see how both characters are crucial to the quest. The Holy Spirit's work to create and call forth the uniqueness of each creation becomes more evident through engagement with this story. Furthermore, the power of grace to unify the Fellowship gives courage to those who would act on these truths in their lives. As hobbits, humans, elf, and dwarf are all clothed with elvish cloaks, Christians can be reminded that in the midst of our many differences we are all clothed in Christ, and need one another on the frontlines to which we are daily called.

Second, vibrant and enduring relationships require sacrifice, for relationships thrive with self-giving not self-aggrandizement. Though it is obvious to our minds that the power of love expressed through sacrifice strengthens community and the love of power destroys it, we need this truth baptized into our hearts and imaginations for it to be enacted in our lives. Sam is willing to give all that he has to serve Frodo, and even Sauron with all his might and terror cannot thwart the power of such love. The baptism of the imagination can serve to remind us that dying to oneself is the foundation of every relationship and every healthy community.

Third, inspired stories reveal that community is sustained by grace. Hope makes self-giving possible when we can see the resources that are available for a cruciform life. We need not attempt to go it alone, as Frodo assumed might be necessary. Just as grace transforms even the most common things, drawing them into its "bright shadow," even so grace is depicted as pervading, sustaining, and strengthening community through battles, apparent death, separation, and loss.

CONCLUSION

Stories from the baptized imagination preserve us from the dreary banality of materialism or the disconnected bubble of escapism. They liberate

us from viewing life mono-focally and call us to lives of true significance and rich community. Central in this process is the restoration of bi-focal vision in which we see all of life in light of the blessed realm. The Spirit of God who inspires such creativity can use these resources in our lives in ways that resemble the impact John's visions have on him as conveyed in the book of Revelation.[17] As he is taken momentarily out of his realm and into heaven, he is able to see beyond the ordinary world of his circumstances. He becomes bi-focal. "He is given a glimpse behind the scenes of history so that he can see what is really going on in the events of his time and place," Richard Baukham writes. "He is also transported in vision into the final future of the world, so that he can see the present from the perspective of what its final outcome must be, in God's ultimate purpose for human history.… It is not that the here-and-now are left behind in an escape into heaven or the eschatological future, but that the here-and-now look quite different when they are opened to transcendence."[18] The power of this vision gives John a sense of enduring significance in the midst of his exile and a sense of lasting community in his isolation. John brings courage to others in the midst of the perilous realm of Nero's persecution, for he reminds them of the blessed realm that is present and will one day prevail. He gives them hope that cannot be curtailed by suffering and death.

Similarly, the baptized imagination creates stories which confront the dominant ideology of our time and empower us to be people who plunge hopefully into the challenges of our day. We are reminded of the presence of the God of the bright shadow and the blessed realm. And we can say with the elves: "The world is indeed full of peril, and in it there are many dark places; but still there is much that is fair, and though in all lands love is now mingled with grief, it grows perhaps the greater" (339).

NOTES

1 C. S. Lewis tells this story in Chapter XI, "Check," *Surprised by Joy* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1955). The materialist universe, he complains, has this severe drawback: "one had to look out on a meaningless dance of atoms…, to realize all the apparent beauty was a subjective phosphorescence, and to relegate everything one valued to the world of mirage" (173).

2 Lewis quoted in Humphrey Carpenter, *J. R. R. Tolkien*, *A Biography*, revised edition (London: HarperCollins, 2002), 197.

3 C. S. Lewis, "Preface", *George MacDonald, an Anthology*, (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1955), p. 21. Lewis felt a debt to George MacDonald in all of his writing: "I have never concealed the fact that I regarded him as my master; indeed I fancy I have never written a book in which I did not quote from him" (20). For a description of Tolkien's conversation with Lewis in which Lewis came to believe in the story of Jesus Christ as the "true myth," see Carpenter, *J. R. R. Tolkien*, 197-198.

4 With the belief that literature fosters community and reduces crime, Mexico City offers free books to its subway commuters. "The idea emerged from discussions with Leoluca Orlando, former mayor of Palermo, Italy, and former New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's consulting firm on ways to cut crime in Mexico's capital…." Tokyo

has also adopted a subway library system and "Japanese commuters say the libraries foster a sense of community." Morgan Lee, The Associated Press, in *The Seattle Times*, January 24th, 2003, A8.

5 George MacDonald, *A Dish of Orts*, (London: Sampson Low Marston & Company, Ltd., 1895), p. 25.

6 Charles Williams, *Descent into Hell*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1993), 60, 110.

7 MacDonald, *A Dish of Orts*, 28.

8 The imperishable flame is Tolkien's image of the source of all creativity in *The Silmarillion*, 2nd edition (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2001).

9 Clark Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, IL.: InterVarsity, 1996), 21.

10 J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, new edition (London: HarperCollins, 1994), 216. I will use mainly two texts to develop an understanding of the baptized imagination: George MacDonald's *Phantastes* (Tring, England: Lion, 1986), because it was the one to which Lewis attributed the baptizing of his own imagination, and *The Lord of the Rings*, as most readers will be familiar with this narrative.

11 C. S. Lewis describes the bright shadow that rests on the travels of Anodos as "Holiness" in *Surprised by Joy*, 179.

12 Ibid., 181.

13 Gandalf says to Bilbo and Frodo, "There's more about you than meets the eye" (319).

14 Mark 10:31 and Luke 9:48. Cf. Elrond's observation: "The road must be trod but it will be very hard. And neither strength nor wisdom will carry us far upon it. This quest may be attempted by the weak with as much hope as the strong. Yet such is oft the course of deeds that move the wheels of the world: small hands do them because they must, while the eyes of the great are elsewhere" (262).

15 In fact, foolishness surrounds the entire venture to defeat evil. "Well, let folly be our cloak, a veil before the eyes of the Enemy!" Gandalf advises the Fellowship of the Ring. "For he is very wise, and weights all things to a nicety in the scales of his malice. But the only measure that he knows is desire, desire for power; and so he judges all hearts. In his heart the thought will not enter that any will refuse it, that having the Ring we may seek to destroy it" (262).

16 See Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

17 Because the Spirit is the fount of all creativity, though such stories are not authoritative in the same way as Scripture, they can work upon us in parallel ways to those in the Bible. Tolkien acknowledged that his work was discovered and inspired rather than invented. See *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, edited by Humphrey Carpenter, revised edition (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 399-400, and Humphrey Carpenter, *J. R. R. Tolkien: A Biography*, revised edition (London: HarperCollins: 2002), 129.

18 Richard Baukham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 7-8.

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Irrigating Deserts with Moral Imagination

BY PETER J. SCHAKEL

Without the imagination, morality remains ethics—abstract reflections on principles that we might never put into practice. With imagination, we connect principles to everyday life and relate to the injustices faced by others as we picture what they experience and feel. Stories feed the moral imagination, C. S. Lewis reminds us, and nurture the judgments of our heart.

Except for salvation, imagination is the most important matter in the thought and life of C. S. Lewis. He believed the imagination was a crucial contributor to the moral life, as well as an important source of pleasure in life and a vital evangelistic tool (much of Lewis's effectiveness as an apologist lies in his ability to illuminate difficult concepts through apt analogies). Without the imagination, morality remains ethics—abstract reflections on principles that we might never put into practice. The imagination enables us to connect abstract principles to everyday life, and to relate to the injustices faced by others as we imagine what they experience and feel. Though Lewis did not use the term "moral imagination" and recent writers on moral imagination rarely cite or draw upon him, he presented a clear, accessible, and powerful delineation of the concept long before it became popularized in the 1980s and 1990s.[1]

The term originated with the Irish philosopher and political thinker Edmund Burke (1729-1797), in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), a book Lewis mentions in a letter to his father as the best introduction to the medieval idea of love.[2] The French Revolution, Burke asserts,

put an end to the system of opinion and sentiment that had given Europe its distinct character. The "new conquering empire of light and reason" has torn off "all the decent drapery of life."

> All the super-added ideas, furnished from the wardrobe of a moral imagination, which the heart owns and the understanding ratifies as necessary to cover the defects of our naked, shivering nature, and to raise it to dignity in our own estimation, are to be exploded as a ridiculous, absurd, and antiquated fashion.[3]

Burke saw the new regime in France as epitomizing unrestricted rationalism, stripping away the values and institutions developed and valued by a society through the years. For Burke, it is sentiment—thought infused with emotion, achieved through the moral imagination—that makes human beings human and sets them apart from animals. Sentiment makes our moral precepts personal and practical through the creative activity of the imagination. This sort of emotion-rich practical reason, not abstract rationalism, civilizes human beings and societies: without it and the human values it creates ("super-added ideas") humans are, in Lear's words, "unaccommodated man," no more than "a poor, bare, forked animal."[4]

TRAINING MORAL SENTIMENT

Lewis's slender but very important book *The Abolition of Man* corresponds to and amplifies Burke's position, though Lewis may not have been influenced directly by Burke and acknowledges no indebtedness to him. The book contains the Riddell Memorial Lectures, delivered at the University of Durham in February 1943. Although the word "imagination" does not appear in the lectures, this is Lewis's fullest articulation of the importance of moral imagination. Addressing educators (but also by implication parents, who are a child's first educators), he raises the problem of imaginative impoverishment. The educational system of the 1940s, he believes, has misread the need of the moment: fearing that young people will be swept away by emotional propaganda, educators have decided the best thing they can do for children is to fortify their minds against imagination and emotion by teaching them to dissect all things by rigorous intellectual analysis. Lewis says in reply, "My own experience as a teacher tells an opposite tale. For every one pupil who needs to be guarded from a weak excess of sensibility there are three who need to be awakened from the slumber of cold vulgarity. The task of the modern educator is not to cut down jungles but to irrigate deserts."[5] Children's and adolescents' imaginations need to be fed, not starved.

The central argument of the book propounds "the doctrine of objective value, the belief that certain attitudes are really true, and others really false, to the kind of thing the universe is and the kind of things we are" (12). *Mere Christianity* refers to these attitudes as "the Law of Human Nature" and *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* depicts them imaginatively as

"Deep Magic from the Dawn of Time" (127).[6] The Law of Human Nature, Lewis believes, is like language, both innate (as emphasized in *Mere Christianity* 1.1) and something that has to be learned, absorbed from parents and society, nurtured by example and precept.

Such nurturing is the central theme of *The Abolition of Man*. The role and approach of education are totally different for parents and educators who accept objective norms and values and for those who do not. For those who accept objectivity, "the task is to train in the pupil those responses which are in themselves appropriate, whether anyone is making them or not, and in making which the very nature of man consists" (13). The child must be guided "to feel pleasure, liking, disgust, and hatred at those things which really are pleasant, likeable, disgusting, and hateful" (10). Those who do not accept objectivity must decide either "to remove all sentiments, as far as possible, from the pupil's mind: or else to encourage some sentiments for reasons that have nothing to do with their intrinsic 'justness' or 'ordinacy'" (13).

Crucial to such nurturing is the child's internalization of the standards and the appropriate response. Intellectual apprehension of abstract principles is not enough. When a child is tempted to steal a sweater that appeals to him or her greatly, the goal is not to have the child intellectually weigh the moral issues at stake; the child must "feel" that stealing is not only wrong but repugnant, feel it through trained emotions: "Without the aid of trained emotions the intellect is powerless against the animal organism" (15). A person possessing trained emotions—the equivalent of practical reason—relies not on the abstract reflections of the head, but on the properly nurtured judgments of the heart: "The Chest—Magnanimity—Sentiment—these are the indispensable liaison officers between cerebral man and visceral man" (16).

Intellectual apprehension of abstract principles is not enough. When tempted to steal a sweater, a child must "feel" that stealing is not only wrong but repugnant, feel it through trained emotions. Moral education that is aimed only at developing knowledge and intellect produces children who are emotionally and imaginatively impoverished.

Lewis goes even further and, like Burke, calls this the defining quality of the human species: "It may even be said that it is by this middle element that man is man: for by his intellect he is mere spirit and by his appetite mere animal" (16). Education, whether at home or school, that is aimed only at developing knowledge and intellect produces children who are

emotionally and imaginatively impoverished and who grow up to be "Men without Chests" (the title of the first lecture). The loss of belief in moral law and its implementation through practical reason will ultimately, inevitably, Lewis believes, lead to the abolition of man, to the loss of the qualities that define the human species.

Practical reason needs to be nurtured first by the direct moral guidance of parents, teachers, and society, through instruction in accepted attitudes and mores. It is such practical nurturing, not abstract ethical study, that builds a life-long foundation for sound moral behavior. The faculty of reason is important in perceiving and articulating principles of morality, but in one sense it remains subservient to imagination because until those principles are internalized by a person and connected to life situations, they do not become meaningful and affect behavior. As Lewis expresses it (using his imagination to create images and invent a memorable analogy), "I had sooner play cards against a man who was quite sceptical about ethics, but bred to believe that 'a gentleman does not cheat,' than against an irreproachable moral philosopher who had been brought up among sharpers" (15).

That initial grounding in practical reason can be further nurtured through reading and responding to literature. The imaginativeness of stories enables children to form and internalize "sentiments," those complex combinations of feelings and opinions which provide a basis for action or judgment. They are helped to learn and live out "magnanimity," the nobleness of mind and generosity that enable one to overlook injury and rise above meanness. In "On Three Ways of Writing for Children," Lewis wrote that a writer should not impose a moral lesson upon a story: "Let the pictures [i.e., verbal images] tell you their own moral."[7] Here, in sum, is Lewis on the moral imagination: the moral of the story must be embodied in the images and the images can be perceived only through the imagination.

MORAL IMAGINATION IN STORIES

Lewis writes in *The Abolition of Man* as a philosopher, attempting to make abstract concepts and arguments clear and convincing, and to persuade readers to adopt and follow them. The book makes a powerful case, but for many readers the abstractness of its concepts and the intricacy of its argumentation make it tough going. Much easier to grasp and remember is Lewis's imaginative depiction of a boy without a chest in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. Eustace Clarence Scrubb grew up in a "modern" household, one that didn't instill traditional values and behavior: "He didn't call his father and mother 'Father' and 'Mother,' but Harold and Alberta. They were very up-to-date and advanced people. They were vegetarians, nonsmokers and teetotallers and wore a special kind of underclothes" (1). Eustace's education had been in modern schools that "didn't have corporal

punishment" (28) and emphasized the sciences. As a result, Eustace liked insect collections (1) and informational books about "exports and imports and governments and drains" (71), but dismissed anything imaginative: he did not like fairy tales or romances and, because he "was quite incapable of making anything up himself," did not approve of other people doing so either (5).

The result of this lack of moral instruction is that Eustace has little respect for others and lacks a sense of fairness: he tries to take more than his rightful share of water rations and lies about it, and later he slips away from his companions to avoid doing his part of the work. His behavior is beastly, and he turns literally into a monster, cut off from other human beings: he becomes a dragon—a creature straight out of the imaginative stories he had resisted. Only then can he begin to get outside himself, imagine how others see him, and "wonder if he himself had been such a nice person as he had always supposed" (75). After being undragoned by Aslan, he is able to escape the limited, materialistic, rationalistic world in which he had grown up, aided perhaps by Reepicheep's stories about "emperors, kings, dukes, knights, poets, [and] lovers" who had fallen into distressing circumstances and recovered (84). Moral imagination comes to play an important role in Eustace's life, and as readers respond to Eustace first with antipathy and then sympathy, they too can experience moral imagination at work in their own lives.

The importance of story and moral imagination in the nurturing of a child's values comes out also through the character of Mark Studdock in Lewis' science fiction novel, *That Hideous Strength*. He, like Eustace, was not nurtured in practical reason as a child and, like Eustace, he ended up insensitive to the arts and literature and morally obtuse. "In Mark's mind hardly one rag of noble thought, either Christian or Pagan, had a secure lodging. His education had been neither scientific nor classical—merely 'Modern.' The severities both of abstraction and of high human tradition had passed him by" (226). His lack of ethical standards and alert judgment allows him to be seduced into joining an organization (the National Institute of Coordinated Experiments—N.I.C.E.) that seeks absolute social and political control over England. He slides without noticing it into writing fraudulent

A writer should not impose a moral lesson upon a story: "Let the pictures tell you their own moral." Here, in sum, is Lewis on the moral imagination: the moral of the story must be embodied in the verbal images and the images can be perceived only through the imagination.

news stories as part of its propaganda campaign. His moral imagination is badly undernourished and in need of sustenance.

Mark awakens to the peril of his situation and escapes from the N.I.C.E. just before its headquarters are destroyed by supernatural power working through the wizard Merlin. As he trudges down the road with other evacuees fleeing from the holocaust in which Belbury was consumed, he stops in a small, countryside hotel, the kind Lewis always wanted to find in the late afternoon when he was on a walking tour with a friend or two. As Mark has tea, he notices in the cozy sitting room two shelves of books, "bound volumes of *The Strand*. In one of these he found a serial children's story which he had begun to read as a child, but abandoned because his tenth birthday came when he was half-way through it and he was ashamed to read it after that." He begins reading and chases the story "from volume to volume till he had finished it. It was good. The grown-up stories to which, after his tenth birthday, he had turned instead of it, now seemed to him, except for *Sherlock Holmes*, to be rubbish" (446-447).

Fairy stories almost always, by their nature, deal with moral issues; they explore the conflict of good versus evil, and portray traits such as loyalty, fairness, and courage. An important aim of the Chronicles of Narnia for Lewis was the nurturing of his readers' moral imaginations.

The nourishing of his imagination has begun. Even this much food for the imagination is sufficient to lead him to transcend his self-centeredness and do some serious moral reflection, perhaps the first he has undertaken as an adult. He realizes that, when he married, he needed Jane and used her, rather than really loving her. Sensing the vitality in her from her openness to the imagination, he had hoped to be enriched by association with her: "When she had first crossed the dry and dusty world which his mind inhabited she had been like a spring shower; in opening himself to it he had not been mistaken. He had gone wrong only in assuming that marriage, by itself, gave him either power or title to appropriate that freshness" (448). He reaches another moral decision: "He must give her her freedom," "he would release her" (447, 475). As readers follow and respond to the importance that moral imagination comes to have in Mark's life, they may similarly find sustenance to promote their own moral growth.

Examples of the use of story and imagination to nurture the moral attitudes of readers appear frequently throughout Lewis's works, and are particularly evident in the Chronicles of Narnia. Readers often concentrate on

their Christian dimension, and Lewis says explicitly that in them he used imagination to slip past the barriers created by being told how to feel about the sufferings of Christ: "An obligation to feel can freeze feelings.... But supposing that by casting all these things into an imaginary world, stripping them of their stained-glass and Sunday school associations, one could make them for the first time appear in their real potency? Could one not thus steal past those watchful dragons?"[8]

But equally or more important is the moral dimension of the Chronicles. Stealing past watchful dragons was the second stage in the imaginative process, according to the essay. Prior to that came the impulse, even the need, to write a story about some mental images circling through his mind, a story which it turned out needed to be a fairy tale: "I wrote fairy stories because the Fairy Tale seemed the ideal Form for the stuff I had to say" (37). Fairy stories do not always, or often, deal with Christianity, but they almost always, by their nature, deal with moral issues; they explore the conflict of good versus evil, and portray traits such as loyalty, fairness, and courage. Fairy stories are fundamental nurturers of moral imagination. Before Lewis knew the stories would be Christian, he knew they would involve moral issues, and an important aim of the books for Lewis was the nurturing of his readers' moral imaginations.

Edmund, in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, illustrates Lewis's approach well. After mocking Lucy cruelly when she says she has been to Narnia—"Quite batty" (18)—he stumbles into Narnia himself. Lucy is delighted because this will confirm that she has been to Narnia. But when they return, Edmund does "one of the nastiest things in this story," "the meanest and most spiteful thing"—he lies. "Oh, yes, Lucy and I have been playing—pretending that all her story about a country in the wardrobe is true. Just for fun, of course. There's nothing really there" (35-36). Lewis here gives imaginative embodiment to the basic moral principle of good faith: "The foundation of justice is good faith" (Cicero, quoted in the appendix to *The Abolition of Man,* 58). Later, when all four children go to Narnia, Edmund leaves his siblings and goes to the evil White Witch with the intention of betraying them to her, thus violating perhaps the most basic of moral principles: "Anything is better than treachery" (Old Norse *Hávamál,* quoted in *Abolition*, 58). In both cases Lewis chooses a situation that all children reading the book will recognize as wrong. When the White Witch later says to Aslan, "You have a traitor there" (113), readers know that the charge is justified and that Edmund deserves punishment: the narrative conveys the negative lesson powerfully and memorably.

In other cases the Chronicles use moral imagination to convey positive values, such as Lucy's honesty, integrity, and courage; the valor and sense of justice displayed by Peter; and the utter goodness, lovingness, and bravery of Aslan. Doctor Cornelius shows loyalty to Caspian in *Prince Caspian,* at great risk to himself. Jill Pole shows prudence in *The Silver Chair* when

she, Eustace, and Puddleglum the Marshwiggle are imprisoned in the House of Harfang and she uses quick wit and common sense to find a way to escape. In *The Last Battle* Tirian and Jewel live by a high standard of honor which requires that they submit themselves to Aslan's justice for killing two Calormenes who were beating talking horses. In the tragically ironic world of this story, their honorable action contributes to Narnia's doom, but it comes across to us as admirable and inspiring nonetheless, enriching our moral attitudes.

Morality forms a key theme in *The Magician's Nephew*. At the heart of its narrative is the introduction of evil into the "new, clean world" Aslan had just created (121). With that as its center, it is not surprising to find examples of moral imagination throughout the story. We are repelled by the negative examples of Uncle Andrew and Jadis, who break promises (16, 54) and are cruel (19, 55), cowardly (20, 54), greedy (12, 56), selfish (20, 55), and vain or proud (67, 53). And we are attracted to the positive examples of Digory and Polly, who keep promises (146) and are decent (24), prudent (33), courageous (24), truthful (121), and loyal (24, 146-47). Particularly striking is the importance of Digory's early nurturing, which embedded in him proper moral attitudes: "Things like Do Not Steal were, I think, hammered into boys' heads a good deal harder in those days than they are now" (142). That moral grounding enables him to resist when Jadis tempts him to use an apple to save his mother instead of taking it back to Aslan: "'Mother herself,' said Digory, getting the words out with difficulty, 'wouldn't like it—awfully strict about keeping promises—and not stealing—and all that sort of thing'" (146).

But it is not just children whose imaginations become undernourished, as the example of Mark Studdock indicates clearly. Adults too need constant nourishment through the moral imagination, and Lewis's stories for adults also are deeply grounded in moral imagination. *That Hideous Strength* is—Lewis says in the preface—a fictionalized version of *The Abolition of Man*, embedding its "serious 'point'" in an imaginative story. By subtitling the novel "A Modern Fairy-Tale for Grown-Ups," Lewis signals that the book will involve moral issues and that it is intended to nurture moral imagination in adults the way the Chronicles as fairy tales do for children. The role of moral imagination in *The Screwtape Letters*, *The Great Divorce*, *Out of the Silent Planet*, and *Till We Have Faces* would be easy to demonstrate, if space permitted.

CONCLUSION

Lewis derived enormous pleasures, probably daily pleasures, from the imagination. Without it, his life would have been diminished in many ways—dimmer, more constricted, and less rich and rewarding. But he also recognized its importance for faith and moral development. His own moral attitudes were shaped by his early reading and his imaginative writings

later were intended—like those of medieval and early modern writers he admired greatly: Dante, Sidney, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton, for example—not just to entertain but to nurture. He, like Burke, did not want the civilized values of the past to be lost or dismissed as no longer relevant. Through the use of moral imagination in his writings, Lewis was attempting to preserve and pass on the traditional values of earlier ages to the modern world.

NOTES

1 Russell Kirk's *Eliot and His Age: T. S. Eliot's Moral Imagination in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Random House, 1971) stimulated a wave of interest in moral imagination. See also Philip S. Keane, *Christian Ethics and Imagination* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984); Christopher Clausen, *The Moral Imagination: Essays on Literature and Ethics* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1986); Robert Coles, *The Call of Stories: Teaching and the Moral Imagination* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989); Mark Johnson, *Moral Imagination: Implications of Cognitive Science for Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Vigen Guroian, *Tending the Heart: How Classic Stories Awaken a Child's Moral Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); and Patricia Hogue Werhane, *Moral Imagination and Management Decision Making* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

2 Letter from 10 July 1928, in *Letters of C. S. Lewis* (1966), edited by W. H. Lewis, revised and enlarged edition edited by Walter Hooper (London: Fount, 1988), 256.

3 Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), edited by J. G. A. Pocock (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 67.

4 *King Lear*, 3.4.105-107. For more on the term "practical reason," see Lewis, "The Poison of Subjectivism" (1943) in *Christian Reflections*, edited by Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1967), 72-73.

5 C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), 9.

6 Quotations of the Chronicles of Narnia are from the editions published in the United States by Macmillan. The original American editions incorporate Lewis's last revisions and they, not the British versions used in the recent 1994 uniform edition, should be regarded as the authoritative texts. See Peter J. Schakel, *Imagination and the Arts in C. S. Lewis* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 35-38.

7 C. S. Lewis, "On Three Ways of Writing for Children" (1952), in O*f Other Worlds: Essays and Stories*, edited by Walter Hooper (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1966), 33. Lewis's essay is reprinted in O*n Stories and Other Essays on Literature*, edited by Walter Hooper (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982), 31-43.

8 C. S. Lewis, "Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What's to be Said" (1956), in *Of Other Worlds,* 37. This essay is reprinted in *On Stories*, 45-48.

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Frodo's Forgiveness

BY RALPH C. WOOD

The heart of God's love—and thus the real impetus for human love—is forgiveness. Nowhere is The Lord of the Rings more manifestly Christian than in having pity—mercy and forgiveness—as its central virtue.

At the end of J. R. R. Tolkien's epic trilogy *The Lord of the Rings,* as King Aragorn is preparing to die, he utters his final words to Arwen, his elven queen—words that contain a hint of resurrection: "In sorrow we must go, but not in despair. Behold! we are not bound forever to the circles of the world, and beyond them is more than memory. Farewell!"[1] The account of Arwen's own burial contains another hint of resurrection: "She laid herself to rest upon Cerin Amroth: and there is her green grave, until the world is changed" (3.344). Here, as elsewhere in the trilogy, Tolkien obliquely suggests a hope for radically renewed life beyond "the circles of the world."

Christian hope concerns precisely a radical change that breaks the cycle of the world's endless turning. It takes the natural human aspiration to happiness and reorders it to the kingdom of heaven. Such hope is not a general optimism about the nature of things, nor a forward-looking confidence that all will eventually be well. Instead, it is hope in a future that God alone can and will provide.

ONE GREAT STORY

Such a distinctively Christian hope is not an explicit part of *The Lord of the Rings,* yet all members of the Fellowship of the Ring stake their lives on a future realization of the Good beyond the bounds of the world. Their devotion to their quest does not depend on any sort of certainty concerning its success. They are called to be faithful rather than victorious. Often the fellowship finds its profoundest hope when the prospects seem bleakest.

Near the end of their wearying journey, Frodo and Sam are alone, deep within Mordor, crawling like insects across a vast wilderness. All

their efforts seem finally to have failed. Even if somehow they succeed in destroying the Ring, there is no likelihood that they will survive, or that anyone will ever hear of their valiant deed. They seem doomed to oblivion. Yet amidst such apparent hopelessness, Sam—the peasant hobbit who, despite his humble origins, has gradually emerged as a figure of great moral and spiritual insight—beholds a single star shimmering above the dark clouds of Mordor:

> The beauty of it smote his heart, as he looked up out of the forsaken land, and hope returned to him. For like a shaft, clear and cold, the thought pierced him that in the end the Shadow was only a small and passing thing: there was light and high beauty for ever beyond its reach.... Now, for a moment, his own fate, and even his master's, ceased to trouble him. He crawled back into the brambles and laid himself by Frodo's side, and putting away all fear he cast himself into a deep and untroubled sleep (3.199).

This meditation is noteworthy on several counts. Fearing Gollum's treachery, Sam has never before allowed himself to sleep while Frodo also slept. That he should do so now is a sign of transcendent hope—the conviction, namely, that their ultimate well-being lies beyond any foiling of it by Gollum's deceit or Sauron's sorcery. For Sam not to be vexed by Frodo's fate is to have found hope in a future that will last, no matter the outcome of their errand.

More remarkable still is Sam's discernment of the relative power of good and evil, light and darkness, life and death, hope and despair. The vast darkened sky of Mordor, illumined by only a single star, would seem to signal the triumph of evil once and for all. Yet Sam is not bound by the logic of the obvious. He sees that star and shadow are not locked in a dualistic combat of equals, nor are they engaged in a battle whose outcome remains uncertain. He discerns the deep and paradoxical truth that the dark has no meaning apart from the light. Light is both the primal and the final reality, not the night that seeks to quench it. "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:5).

Sam's insight, excellent though it is, cannot be sustained apart from a fellowship such as the nine friends have formed and a quest such as they have been charged to fulfill. It also requires a sustaining story—one that is rooted in their history and that sums up and embodies not only their own struggle against Sauron but also the struggle of all the Free Peoples of Middle-earth against similar evils.

There are many competing stories that vie for our loyalty, and Sam tries to distinguish them, to locate the one hope-giving story:

> "We shouldn't be here at all [Sam says to Frodo], if we'd known more about it before we started. But I suppose it's often that way.

> The brave things in the old tales and songs, Mr. Frodo: adventures, as I used to call them. I used to think that they were things the wonderful folk of the stories went out and looked for, because they wanted them, because they were exciting and life was a bit dull, a kind of sport, as you might say. But that's not the way of it with the tales that really mattered, or the ones that stay in the mind. Folk seem to have been just landed in them, usually—their paths were laid that way, as you put it. But I expect they had lots of chances, like us, of turning back, only they didn't. And if they had, we shouldn't know, because they'd have been forgotten. We hear about those as just went on—and not all to a good end, mind you; at least not to what folk inside a story and not outside it call a good end. You know, coming home, and finding things all right, though not quite the same—like old Mr. Bilbo. But those aren't always the best tales to hear, though they may be the best tales to get landed in! I wonder what sort of tale we've fallen into?" (2.320-321).

The tales that do not matter concern escapades undertaken because we are bored and seek excitement and entertainment. The tales that rivet the mind, on the other hand, involve a quest that we do not choose for ourselves.

Sam has discerned the crucial divide. On the one hand, the tales that do not matter concern there-and-back-again adventures—escapades undertaken because we are bored and seek excitement and entertainment. The tales that rivet the mind, on the other hand, involve a quest that we do not choose for ourselves. Instead, we find ourselves embarked upon a journey or mission quite apart from our choosing of it. What counts, says Sam, is not whether the quest succeeds but whether we turn back or slog ahead. One reason for not giving up, not quitting, is that the great tales are told about those who refused to surrender—those who ventured forward in hope. Real heroism, Sam implies, requires us to struggle hopefully, yet without the assurance of victory.

Frodo interjects that it's best not to know whether we are acting out a happy tale or a sad one. If we were assured of a happy destiny, then we would become presumptuous and complacent; if a sad one, then cynical and despairing. In neither case would we live and struggle by means of real hope.

"Don't the great tales ever end?" Sam asks. Frodo says no. Each individual story—even the story of other fellowships and companies—is sure

to end. But when our own story is done, Frodo adds, someone else will take the one great tale forward to either a better or worse moment in its ongoing drama. What matters, Sam concludes, is that we enact our proper role in an infinitely larger story than our own little narrative: "Things done and over and made into part of the great tales are different. Why, even Gollum might be good in a tale" (2.322).

Sam has plumbed the depths of real hope. The "great tales" stand apart from mere adventures because they belong to the One Great Story. It is a story not only of those who fight heroically against evil, but also of those who are unwilling to exterminate such an enemy as Gollum. As Sam discerns, this tale has a surprising place even for evil. For it's not only the story of the destruction of the ruling ring, but also a narrative of redemption.

PITY AND MERCY

To complete such a quest requires the highest of all virtues: not only hope but also the faith that works through love. Love alone will last unendingly because it unites us both with God and everyone else. Indeed, it defines who God is and who we are meant to be. Love as a theological virtue is not a natural human capacity, not a product of human willing and striving even at their highest. Because charity constitutes the triune God's own essence, it is always a gift and thus also a command. About this matter as about so much else, Christians and Jews are fundamentally agreed.

In both testaments, the heart of God's love—and thus the real impetus for human love—is forgiveness. Nowhere is *The Lord of the Rings* more manifestly Christian than in having pity—mercy and forgiveness—as its central virtue. The summons to pity is voiced most clearly by Gandalf after Frodo expresses his outrage that Bilbo did not kill the wicked Gollum when he had the chance. Frodo has cause for his fury. Gollum was seeking to slay Bilbo, and had Bilbo not put on the Ring to escape him, there is little doubt that Gollum would have succeeded in murdering Frodo's kinsman. Why, asks Frodo, should Bilbo have not given Gollum the justice he so fully deserved?

Gandalf answers with a speech that lies at the moral and religious center of the entire epic:

> "What a pity that Bilbo did not stab that vile creature [Frodo declares] when he had a chance!"
>
> "Pity? [Gandalf replies] It was Pity that stayed his hand. Pity, and Mercy: not to strike without need. And he has been well rewarded, Frodo. Be sure that [Bilbo] took so little hurt from the evil, and escaped in the end, because he began his ownership of the Ring so. With Pity."
>
> "I am sorry," said Frodo. "But I am frightened; and I do not feel any pity for Gollum."

> "You have not seen him," Gandalf broke in.
>
> "No, and I don't want to," said Frodo. "…Now at any rate he is as bad as an Orc, and just an enemy. He deserves death."
>
> "Deserves it! I daresay he does. Many that live deserve death. And some that die deserve life. Can you give it to them? Then do not be too eager to deal out death in judgement. For even the very wise cannot see all ends. I have not much hope that Gollum can be cured before he dies, but there is a chance of it. And he is bound up with the fate of the Ring. My heart tells me that he has some part to play yet, for good or ill, before the end; and when that comes, the pity of Bilbo may rule the fate of many—yours not least" (1.68-69).

"The pity of Bilbo may rule the fate of many" is the only declaration to be repeated in all three volumes of *The Lord of the Rings.* It is the leitmotiv of Tolkien's epic, its animating theme, its Christian epicenter as well as its circumference. Gandalf's prophecy is true in the literal sense, for the same vile Gollum whom Bilbo had spared long ago finally enables the Ring's destruction.

The wizard's saying is also true in the spiritual sense. Gandalf lays out a decidedly nonpagan notion of mercy. As a creature far more sinning than sinned against, Gollum deserves his misery. He has committed Cain's sin in acquiring the Ring, slaying his cousin and friend. Yet while the Ring extended Gollum's life by five centuries and enabled him endlessly to relish raw fish, it has also made him utterly wretched. Evil is its own worst torment—as Gandalf urges Frodo to notice: "You have not seen him."

Be exceedingly chary, Gandalf warns Frodo, about judging others and sentencing them to death. Though Gandalf speaks here of literal death, there are other kinds of death—scorn, contempt, dismissal—that such judgment could render. Frodo is in danger, Gandalf sees, of committing the subtlest and deadliest of all sins—self-righteousness.

Neither hobbits nor humans, Tolkien suggests, can live by the bread of merit alone. Gollum is not to be executed, though he may well deserve death, precisely because he is a fellow sinner, a fallen creature of feeble frame, a comrade in the stuff of dust. Gandalf admits that there is not much hope for Gollum's return to the creaturely circle, but neither is there much hope for many others, perhaps not even for most. To deny them such hope, Gandalf concludes, is to deny it also to oneself.

Gandalf's discourse on pity also marks the huge distance between Tolkien's book and the heroic world that is its inspiration. Among most ancient and pagan cultures—like their modern counterparts—pity is not a virtue. The Greeks, for example, extend pity only to the pathetic, the helpless, those who are able to do little or nothing for themselves. When Aristotle says that the function of tragic drama is to arouse fear and pity,

he refers to the fate of a character such as Oedipus. We are to fear that Oedipus's fate might somehow be ours, and we are to pity him for the ineluctable circumstances of his life, his unjust fate. But pity is never to be given to the unjust or the undeserving, for such mercy would deny them the justice that they surely merit. Mercy of this kind—the kind that is so central to biblical faith—would indeed be a vice.

According to the warrior ethic of the ancient North, the offering of pardon to enemies is unthinkable: they must be utterly defeated. For Tolkien the Christian, by contrast, love understood as mercy and pity is essential: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you. Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you…. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you?" (Matthew 5:43-44, 46).

Here we see the crucial distinction between *philia* as the love of friends who share our deepest concerns and *agape* as the love of those who are not only radically "other" to us, but who deserve our scorn and cannot reciprocate our pardon. We can make friends only with those whose convictions we share, but we are called to have pity for those whom we do not trust, even our enemies.

It is precisely such pity that Gandalf offers to Saruman after the battle of Helms Deep. Saruman rejects it in the most vehement and scornful terms. Having learned Gandalf's central teaching, Frodo offers pardon to Saruman one last time—after the Ring has been destroyed and the hobbits are scouring the Shire of the evils that have been visited on it by Saruman and his thugs. Once Saruman is captured, there is a clamor that he be killed. Saruman courts his own execution by mocking his captors. Frodo will have none of it: "I will not have him slain. It is useless to meet revenge with revenge: it will heal nothing" (3.298).

Here we see the crucial distinction between "philia" and "agape." We can make friends only with those whose convictions we share, but we are called to have pity for those whom we do not trust, even our enemies.

Instead of receiving such mercy, Saruman seeks to stab Frodo. Sam is ready to give Saruman the final sword thrust, but Frodo again denies the malefactor the justice that he is due. He will not deal out judgment in death, knowing that, if Saruman dies in such rage, his life as a wizard will have indeed come to nothing—and perhaps worse than nothing:

> "No, Sam!" said Frodo. "Do not kill him even now. For he has not hurt me. And in any case I do not wish him to be slain in this evil

> mood. He was great once, of a noble kind that we should not dare to raise our hands against. He is fallen, and his cure is beyond us; but I would still spare him, in the hope that he may find it" (3.299).

Then follows one of the most revealing scenes in the entire epic. Instead of receiving this second grant of pity, Saruman is rendered furious by it. He knows that, in showing him pity, Frodo has removed the wizard's very reason for being. Frodo's pardon robs Saruman of his delicious self-pity, his self-justifying resentment, his self-sustaining fury. Having come to batten on his wrath, Saruman flings Frodo's pity back at him in a sputter of acrimony: "You have grown, Halfling," he said. "Yes, you have grown very much. You are wise, and cruel. You have robbed my revenge of sweetness, and now I must go hence in bitterness, in debt to your mercy. I hate it and you!" (3.299)

While revenge curdles the soul and paralyzes the will, pity frees those who will receive it. Repentance does not produce forgiveness, Tolkien shows, but rather the other way around: mercy enables contrition. This is made especially evident when Aragorn orders the assault on the Black Gate of Mordor. He knows that many of his troops are incapable of facing the Sauronic evil: "So desolate were those places and so deep the horror that lay on them that some of the host [the army of the Free Peoples] were unmanned, and they could neither walk nor ride further north" (3.162). Rather than scorning their fear at having to fight "like men in a hideous dream made true," Aragorn has pity on them. He urges them to turn back with honor and dignity, not running but walking, seeking to find some other task that might aid the war against Sauron. Aragorn's mercy has a stunning effect. In some of the warriors, it overcomes their fear and enables them to rejoin the fray. Others take hope from Aragorn's pardon, encouraged to hear that there is "a manful deed within their measure." And so they depart in peace rather than shame. This is the pity that Saruman bitterly rejected, for it would have called him out of his cowardly hatred and sweet revenge into a life of service and virtue.

Perhaps the most poignant scene of pardon in *The Lord of the Rings* occurs with the death of Boromir. He would seem to be the Judas of the story, for it is he who breaks the fellowship by trying to seize the Ring from Frodo. Frodo in turn is forced to wear it in order to escape—not the orcs or the Ringwraiths or even Saruman, but Boromir his friend and fellow member of the company. But no sooner has Boromir seen the horror that he has committed than he recognizes and repents of it: "What have I done? Frodo, Frodo!" he called. "Come back! A madness took me, but it has passed" (1.416). It is too late in the literal sense, because Frodo has already fled. But it is not too late for his redemption. Boromir makes good on his solitary confession of sin by fighting orcs until they finally overcome him.

When Aragorn hears the horn of the desperate Boromir, they run to him, only to find him dying. Boromir does not boast of his valor in death, nor does Aragorn accuse him of evil. Perhaps because he can discern Aragorn's forgiving spirit, Boromir admits his sin, as if the future king were also a priest hearing his last confession: "I tried to take the Ring from Frodo," he said. "I am sorry. I have paid" (2.16).

Boromir does not mean that he has recompensed for his dreadful attempt to seize the Ring. He means that he has paid the terrible price of breaking trust with Frodo. In almost his last breath, therefore, Boromir confesses that he has failed.

Aragorn will not let Boromir die in the conviction that his whole life has been ruined by a momentary act of madness—even though it was prompted by Boromir's arrogant confidence in his own courage. Rather than pointing to his terrible guilt in betraying Frodo and the fellowship, Aragorn absolves the hero by emphasizing the real penance Boromir has performed in fighting evil to the end, even when no one was present to witness his deed: "'No!' said Aragorn, taking his hand and kissing his brow. 'You have conquered. Few have gained such a victory. Be at peace!'" (2.16)

Tolkien captures the transcendent, even divine quality of real love by having it issue in a pity and pardon utterly unknown either to the warrior cultures of the ancient world or to our own equally merciless culture of consumption and competition. "The pity of Bilbo may rule the fate of many" is not, therefore, a motto meant only for Middle-earth. It is the key to our own transformation as well.[2]

NOTES

1 J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings,* revised edition (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1965, 1967), Volume 3, page 344 (further page citations will be in the text).

2 This article is adapted from *The Gospel According to Tolkien: Visions of the Kingdom in Middle-earth* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 117-155. Used with permission from the publisher. Do not copy without written permission from Westminster John Knox Press.

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The Inklings' exploration of pre-modern cultures to gain a new perspective on the present situation was presaged a generation earlier in the art of the "Pre-Raphaelites."

William Morris (1834-96), DAY: ANGEL HOLDING A SUN, c. 1862-64. Watercolor and pencil on paper, 14 x 18 inches. The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; gift of the Houston Alumnae Chapter of Delta Delta Delta Sorority. Photo © Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas.

Back to the Future

BY HEIDI J. HORNIK

The Inklings who gathered in Oxford during troubled times—in the European wreckage of the "Great War" and with a second destructive war looming on the horizon—returned to the past in order to make sense of their present moment. C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, and their friends "were more at home in the Middle Ages or the Renaissance [than in the present]," Corbin Scott Carnell reminds us, "but the very depth of their immersion in the past gave them a useful perspective on the present which presentists ironically lack."[1]

Given that our culture in the United States is so future-oriented and neglectful of the past, it seems astonishing to us that these Christians would turn for their inspiration to legends and art that are hundreds of years old. Yet this is how the Inklings' imaginations were awakened and hearts attuned to create the powerful works of literary art that hold us today with their mystery and instruct us with their insight.

The Inklings' sort of "back to the future" travel through pre-modern cultures to gain a new perspective on their present situation was presaged a generation earlier in the visual and plastic arts of a group of English artists who called themselves the "Pre-Raphaelites." William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones, whose work is represented here, led the second phase of the Pre-Raphaelite movement. They learned about the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (PRB) when they met as undergraduate students at Exeter College, Oxford University, in 1853. They studied the works and artistic philosophies of three young painters, William Holman Hunt (1827-1910), John Everett Millais (1829-1896), and Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882), who had founded the PRB in September 1848 with the hopes of restoring British art to the Italian style of painting practiced before the age of Raphael (1483-1520).

Frustrated with their instruction at the Royal Academy in London, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood longed for the simplicity of form, pure local color, and scientific perspective that had characterized Florentine painting in the fifteenth century. They inscribed their first paintings, exhibited in 1849, with the secret initials "PRB."

In 1856 Morris and Burne-Jones met Rossetti. Although inspired by the first generation of PRB members, Morris and Burne-Jones took the Broth-

erhood in a different direction. Instead of the simple, shadowless forms of the 1840s when the Pre-Raphaelite artists were inspired by their study of renaissance engravings, the 1850s became a time of more natural forms, sharp focus, and brilliant colors which were highlighted by being painted on a white ground.[2]

This use of white background may be seen in *Day*: *Angel Holding a Sun* by William Morris (p. 38). This watercolor and pencil work was a design for a stained glass window. The image looks very medieval, not only in its religious subject matter, but in its artistic form. The flattened perspective, noticeable in the angel's feet and hands, and the reduced color palette—regal blue and luminous gold paints that are used throughout the image—remind us of Byzantine mosaics.

Morris's "passionate devotion to the Middle Ages" did not end with his paintings. In his later political writings "Morris often contrasted the social organization of the Middle Ages with the present condition of England, which led him to advocate a complete reform of industrial society, and found in them a distant perspective from which to criticize the industrial society of England."[3]

Though the Pre-Raphaelite artists were fascinated with medieval subject matter—including tales of heroic knights, beautiful princesses, and wicked dragons—they did not slavishly mimic medieval artistic styles. This is evident in Burne-Jones's treatment of the legend of St. George and the Dragon, where the colors are more vibrant and varied (in part because of the brilliant new pigments available to artists in the nineteenth century) and the foreground figures are more natural and three-dimensional than in medieval paintings (cover and p. 42).

The legend of St. George, the fourth-century Christian martyr who was chosen a thousand years later to be the patron saint of England, has long inspired the moral imagination of artists. St. George and the Dragon was a popular subject in fifteenth-century Florentine painting and sculpture. Donatello is but one artist who uses the story to demonstrate a new method of relief sculpture on the base of one of the niches of Orsanmichele in Florence.[4] All the art guild members walked by this niche to attend meetings within the building, so it strongly influenced the sculptor's contemporaries as well as the Pre-Raphaelite artists four hundred years later.

Like Donatello, Burne-Jones pushes the action to the foreground. George shoves the sword into the dragon's mouth in our space rather than in the midground as in early fifteenth-century painting. The heightened drama and the placement of the event in the viewer's space are not elements of a medieval style; these techniques belong to the Mannerist style of the mid-sixteenth century. To complement the dramatic action, the artist employs a vivid color palette of deep greens for the middle plane and rich blue in the distance. These intense colors are also in the Mannerist style.

Though both Morris and Burne-Jones entered Oxford University with the intention of becoming Anglican priests, they came to believe that their contribution to social reform in England should be through art rather than the priesthood.[5] With some friends they founded Morris, Marshall, Faulker & Co. (later called Morris & Co.) to develop textiles, carvings, metal-work, paper hangings, and windows for churches. Burne-Jones designed amazing stained glass windows for churches all over England, but among his best-loved works are windows in the chapel of Christ Church College, Oxford University. It is these luminous windows, along with beautiful arts and crafts throughout the churches and homes of Oxfordshire, that would inspire a later generation of medievalists, the Inklings.

NOTES

1 Corbin Scott Carnell, "The Inklings and the Twentieth Century: Did They Back Away?" *Bulletin of the New York C. S. Lewis Society*, 5:12 (1974), 4.

2 Julian Treuherz, "Pre-Raphaelitism," *The Grove Dictionary of Art Online* (Oxford University Press, accessed January 28, 2004), *http://www.groveart.com*.

3 Richard W. Oram, "William Morris and His Circle," (Online Exhibition of the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin, accessed March 11, 2004), *http://www.hrc.utexas.edu/exhibitions/online/morris/*.

4 Charles Avery, "Donatello," *The Grove Dictionary of Art Online*, (Oxford University Press, Accessed March 15, 2004), *http://www.groveart.com*.

5 "William Morris," (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1911, accessed March 11, 2004), *http://22.1911encyclopedia.org/M/MO/MORRIS_WILLIAM.htm*.

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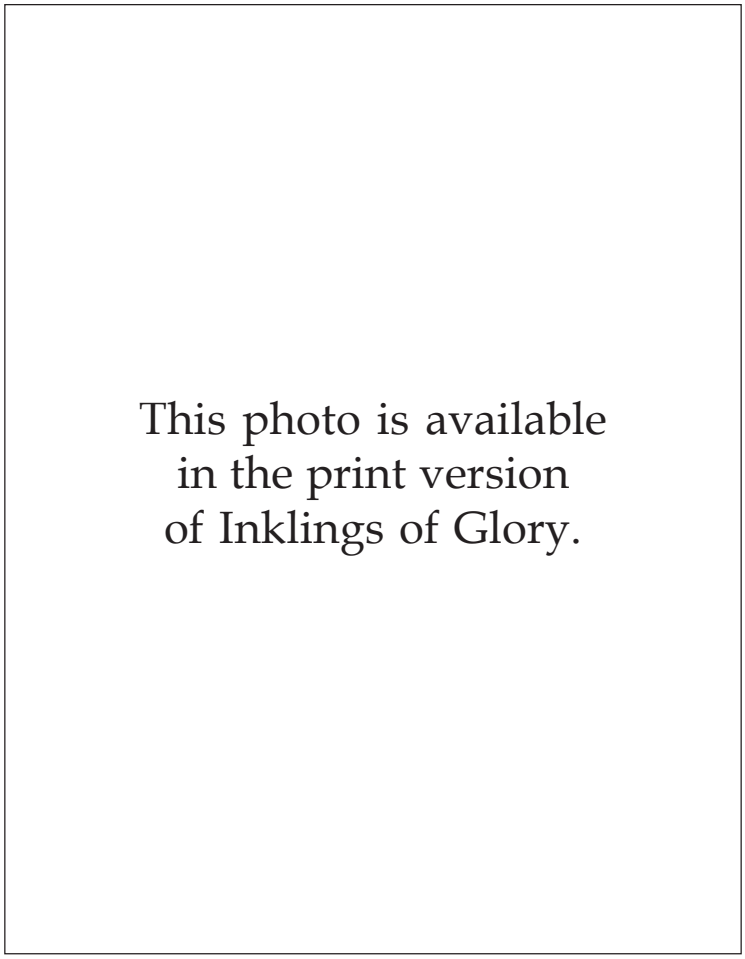

Memorialized in fourth-century churches from Macedonia to Egypt, George probably was a Roman soldier martyred in about 303 for speaking out against Emperor Diocletian's persecution of Christians. He became a heroic knight in medieval Christian legends.

Sir Edward Coley Burne-Jones, Bart. (1883-98), St. George and the Dragon, 1868. Gouache on paper, 61.9 x 48.4 cm. William Morris Gallery, London. Photo © William Morris Gallery, London.

St. George and the Dragon

The city of Silene, Libya is being ravaged by a dragon, according to the famous legend in Jacopo da Voragine's *Legenda Aurea* (1275). When the beast is no longer satisfied with eating sheep, the people draw lots and sacrifice their children to it. The lot falls to the King's daughter to be the next victim, so he places her in wedding finery near the dragon's lair. Saint George, a knight from Cappadocia, rides by and sees the princess. The dragon rushes toward them. With his sword George stabs the fiend, and then he and the princess lead it into the city. The terrified townspeople flee to the mountains, crying "Alas! We shall be all dead," but George reassures them, "believe in God, Jesus Christ, be baptized, and I shall slay the dragon." They are baptized and George severs the dragon's head. When the grateful people offer him all of their wealth, George refuses their gold and orders them to distribute it among the poor.

"Saint George was a man who abandoned one army for another: he gave up the rank of tribune to enlist as a soldier for Christ. Eager to encounter the enemy, he first stripped away his worldly wealth by giving all he had to he poor. Then, free and unencumbered, bearing the shield of faith, he plunged into the thick of the battle, an ardent soldier for Christ," observes Peter Damian (1007-1072). "Clearly what he did serves to teach us a valuable lesson: if we are afraid to strip ourselves of our worldly possessions, then we are unfit to make a strong defense of the faith."

In Elizabethan times, Edmund Spenser models the Redcrosse Knight in *The Fairie Queene* (1596) on George, whose shield is a martyr's cross on a white field: "But on his brest a bloudie Crosse he bore, / The deare remembrance of his dying Lord, / For whose sweete sake that glorious badge he wore, /And dead as liuing euer him ador'd." To protect his queen, the knight must prove himself "upon a foe, a Dragon horrible and stearne."

The legend echoes in John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), where Christian resists the dragon Apollyon in the Valley of Humiliation. Christian celebrates the victory: "Great Beelzebub, the captain of this fiend, / Designed my ruin; therefore to this end / He sent him harness'd out; and he, with rage / That hellish was, did fiercely me engage: / But blessed Michael helped me, and I, / By dint of sword, did quickly make him fly: / Therefore to Him let me give lasting praise, / And thank and bless his holy name always."

Worship Service

BY MICHAEL M. MASSAR

The Inklings shared a sense of awe before our Creator, though they fleshed out their reverence in different ways. For instance, C. S. Lewis was a member of the Church of England and worshiped with the little congregation in Headington Quarry. With his brother Warnie, he shared a pew at the early service, for he disliked a lot of organ music. J. R. R. Tolkien, a thoroughly committed Catholic, attended Mass with his wife in the Catholic churches in Oxford. Charles Williams seems to have had a lover's quarrel with the Church of England, dedicated to God but at odds with some of the forced discipline of church practices. Whatever their communion, the Inklings were devoted disciples who worshiped regularly.

JOYFUL, JOYFUL, WE ADORE THEE, GOD OF GLORY, LORD OF LOVE

Prelude:

"Trumpet Voluntary in D," Jeremiah Clarke

Meditation of Preparation:

O God,
we come this day
grateful for the gift of friendship
and the grace it confers
and the grace it inspires.

We thank You especially
for the friendship of the Inklings,
whose brotherhood seemed to enlarge
their most amazing individual gifts.

Thank You for the agility
of their minds and hearts
that challenges us even today
to look within and without
for new means of seeing and believing.

We are indeed grateful
for their ways with words, thoughts, and deeds;
for their ways of expressing encouragement to each other
as well as initiating insights for improvement;
for their ways with You in commitment and care.

Dear Lord,
thank You for those Inklings' lives
whose coming together grants a model
by which brothers and sisters
can come together in reverent awe and unabashed praise.

In our gathering this day
grant to us the anticipation
of having our hearts and minds stretched
in the experience of Your Grace.

This we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Expression of Fellowship

Choral Introit:

"I Will Lift Up Mine Eyes," John Rutter

HEARTS UNFOLD LIKE FLOWERS BEFORE THEE, OPENING TO THE SUN ABOVE

Hymn of Calling:

"The Triune God Our Safeguard Is"

The triune God our safeguard is
when evil foes assail;
no power can be compared with his,
nor demon powers prevail.

When scheming Satan's spiteful ire
burns hot against the saints,
He flings them in a furnace fire
till human courage faints.

But lo, in that distressful hour
One walks beside us there,
a righteous One whose Heavenly power
makes flame an Eden fair.

Thus God transforms the fire indeed
our natures to refine,
His loved ones from defeat are freed,
and crowned with joys divine.

J. Sidlow Baxter (1998)
Suggested Tunes: IRISH or ST. COLUMBA

Written in commemoration of the Centenary of C. S. Lewis's birth.

Invocation:

O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come,
we gather in this holy place seeking the inspiration
of your Holy Spirit.
We thank you for the Inklings,
those reminders of grace who lived among us,
who relied on your creative impulses to fashion images of grace
that still turn our hearts and heads toward you
and your Kingdom.
In that gratitude there stirs up within us the great desire
that we, too, might offer ourselves as vessels for your grace.
Grant to us your divine prompting we pray,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

MELT THE CLOUDS OF SIN AND SADNESS, DRIVE THE DARK OF DOUBT AWAY

Hymn of Confession:

"Before Thy Throne, O God, We Kneel"

Before Thy throne, O God, we kneel;
give us a conscience quick to feel,
a ready mind to understand
the meaning of Thy chastening hand;
whate'er the pain and shame may be,
bring us, O Father, nearer Thee.

Search out our hearts and make us true,
wishful to give to all their due;
from love of pleasure, lust of gold,
from sins which make the heart grow cold,
wean us and train us with Thy rod;
teach us to know our faults, O God.

For sins of heedless word and deed,
for pride ambitious to succeed;
for crafty trade and subtle snare
to catch the simple unaware;
for lives bereft of purpose high,
forgive, forgive, O Lord, we cry.

Let the fierce fires, which burn and try,
our inmost spirits purify:
consume the ill; purge out the shame;
O God! be with us in the flame;
a newborn people may we rise,
more pure, more true, more nobly wise.

William B. Carpenter (1841-1918)
Suggested Tune: SUSSEX CAROL

Meditation of Confession:

Every contrition for sin is apt to encourage a not quite charitable wish that other people should exhibit a similar contrition.

Charles Williams

Assurance of Pardon

Offering of Gifts

In Prayer

O God, take the offerings we bring and work a miracle with them.
Like bread and loaves, multiply their potential for grace.
In like fashion, dear Lord, work a miracle on those who share
their offerings.
Like Zacchaeus of old, who in his giving received
the redemption of grace,
may our giving infuse us with the joy of your salvation.
This we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

In Meditation

The Christian way is different: harder and easier. Christ says, "Give Me all. I don't want so much of your money and so much of your work. I want you. I have not come to torment your natural self, but to fill it. No half-measures are any good. I don't want to drill the tooth, or crown it, or stop it, but to have it out. Hand over the whole natural self, all the desires which you think innocent as well as the ones you think wicked—the whole outfit. I will give you a new self instead. In fact, I will give you Myself: my own will becomes yours."

C. S. Lewis[1]

In Music:

"Air" from *Two Pieces*, Samuel Wesley

Witness of Scripture: Romans 8:20-25

Choral Worship:

"The Lord Is My Shepherd," John Rutter

Sermon:

"The Weight of Glory," C. S. Lewis[2]

GIVER OF IMMORTAL GLADNESS, FILL US WITH THE LIGHT OF DAY![3]

Meditation of Commitment:

Frodo: I can't do this, Sam.

Sam: I know. It's all wrong. By rights we shouldn't even be here. But we are. It's like in the great stories, Mr. Frodo. The ones that really mattered. Full of darkness and danger they were. And sometimes you didn't want to know the end. Because how could the end be happy? How could the world go back to the way it was when so much bad had happened. But in the end, it's only a passing thing, this shadow. Even darkness must pass. A new day will come. And when the sun shines it will shine out the clearer. Those were the stories that stayed with you. That meant some-

thing. Even if you were too small to understand why. But I think, Mr. Frodo, I do understand. I know now. Folk in those stories had lots of chances of turning back only they didn't. Because they were holding on to something.

Frodo: What are we holding on to, Sam?

Sam: That there's some good in this world, Mr. Frodo. And it's worth fighting for.

J. R. R. Tolkien[4]

Hymn of Commitment:

"Imagination's Stream"

Do we think our minds can form
a world you do not know?
Is imagination's stream
an unknown river's flow?
God, you are the fountainhead,
you bid us stoop and drink.
We've just cupped our hands and dipped
when we begin to think.

In our minds we walk with you
through gardens yet unseen.
Caves on unknown planets wait
the light our thoughts will bring.
In the pages of your Word
we humbly place our feet,
wond'ring what our words would be
when face to face we meet.

Let our faith and thinking soar,
alive with hope and prayer.
Insights that the Spirit brings
illumine life's despair.
Deepest thoughts and highest hopes
in story and in rhyme;
inklings glimmer: heav'n on earth,
eternity in time.

Terry W. York
Tune: RANTON (pp. 52-53 of this volume)

Benediction[5]

God's blessing be yours,
and well may it befall you;
Christ's blessing be yours,
and well be you entreated;
Spirit's blessing be yours,
and well spend your lives,
each day that you rise up,
each night that you lie down.

Postlude:

"Allegro Maestoso" from *The Water Music*, George Frederic Handel

NOTES

1 C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1943), 167.

2 C. S. Lewis, "The Weight of Glory," in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (New York: Harper SanFrancisco, 2001), 25-46.

3 "Joyful, joyful, we adore Thee," by Henry J. van Dyke (1907).

4 J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Two Towers* (*The Lord of the Rings*, part 2), 2nd edition (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1988), 321.

5 From *Carmina Gadelica*, an anthology of prayers from the Scottish Highlands gathered in the nineteenth century by Alexander Carmichael.

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Imagination's Stream

BY TERRY W. YORK

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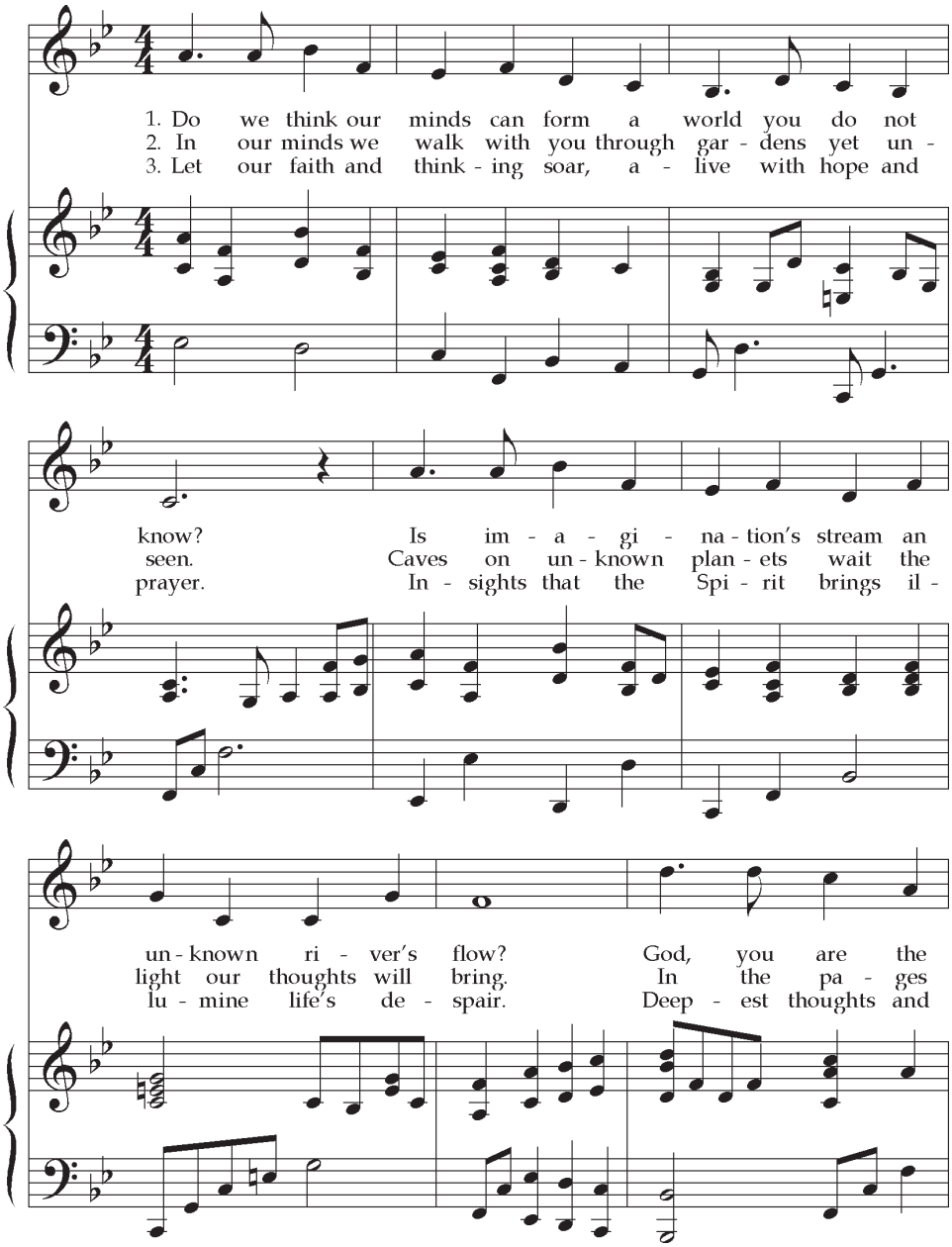
Imagination's Stream

TERRY W. YORK C. DAVID BOLIN



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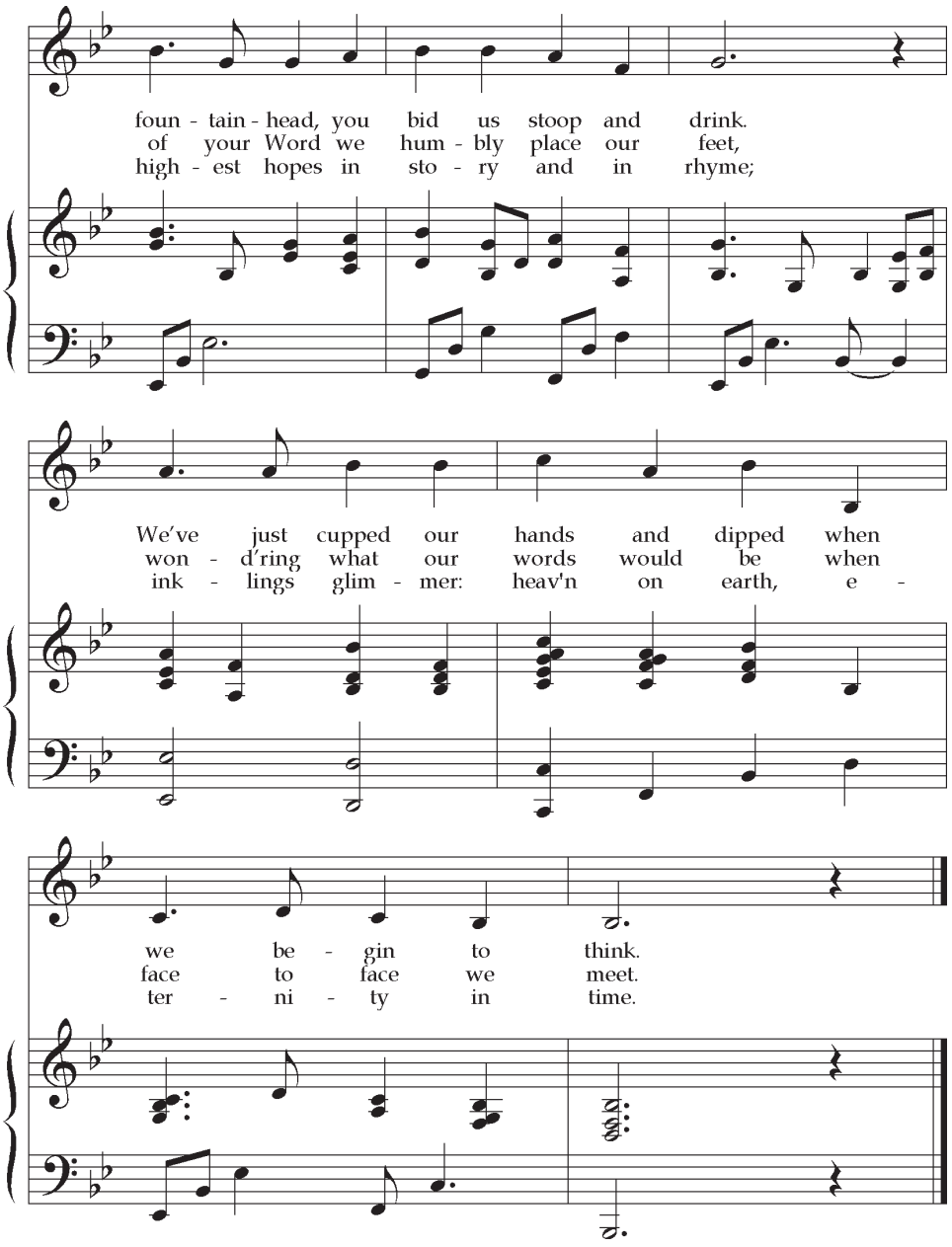
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Permanent Things

BY J. DARYL CHARLES

The Inklings, because they were profoundly out of step with their times, could offer a penetrating critique of contemporary culture and a lucid defense of Christian basics. The wisdom of their vantage point is what T. S. Eliot calls "the permanent things"—those features of the moral order to the cosmos that in turn hold all cultures and eras accountable.

Some of the most fertile Christian thinkers in the twentieth century were profoundly out of step with their times. Indeed, their tendency to buck "conventional wisdom" causes writers such as the Inklings, but also Dorothy Sayers, G. K. Chesterton, T. S. Eliot, and Evelyn Waugh, to retain immense popularity among North American Christians. These literary prophets offered a penetrating critique of contemporary culture and a lucid defense of Christian basics couched in imaginative and morally rich language.

They had a knack for stressing "the permanent things." While many of their contemporaries, in ways familiar to us, measured intellectual sophistication by *how much moral reality they could deny*, these poetic apologists were devoted to seeing *how much they might recover*. While their contemporaries were obsessed with the politics of power, they upheld principle and were supremely sensitive to the need to align themselves with the eternal and the unchanging. C. S. Lewis distinguished between the older approach and the contemporary fashion: "For the wise men of old the cardinal problem had been how to conform the soul to reality, and the solution had been knowledge, self-discipline, and virtue. For magic and applied science alike the problem is how to subdue reality to the wishes of men."[1] Wisdom,

then, stands on a platform of transcendent thinking that is not held captive to the spirit of the age.

By these literary prophets, modernity's vagabond and shallow spirit is found wanting. Its desecration of all things sacred and its material predisposition calls for their robust response that counters the truncated ideology of the here and now. And doubtless, were they to appear in our day, these prophetic voices would expose the paucity of postmodern nihilism.

What are the roots of their critique?

ANCHORED IN THE UNCHANGING

The wisdom of their vantage point is what T. S. Eliot refers to as "the permanent things"—those features of the moral order to the cosmos that in turn hold all cultures and eras accountable. This perspective is capable of addressing both the ills of modernity and the metaphysical murk spawned by modernity's child, postmodernity.

As individuals held captive by "the permanent," the Inklings rejected out of hand the quest for novelty that plagued so many of their, and our, contemporaries. They realized that a culture that refuses to acknowledge what is permanent is consigned to moral lobotomy and spiritual destitution. When moral assumptions about human nature are abandoned, decadence sets in, and with it, nihilism—i.e., the demise of all standards, authority, ideals, and metaphysical commitments. In short, culture collapses. What is left, quite simply, is pornography, idiocy, and broad-based spiritual famine. The Inklings certainly would have much to say in our day.

Among these voices, C. S. Lewis retains especially abiding appeal. Why is this? Clearly, we are moved by his moral imagination—an imagination that understands that pens are sharper than swords. But this is not the sole reason. Perhaps more than any of his guild, Lewis is indebted to and informed by "the permanent things," and these elements imbue virtually all of his literary works, from fantasy to philosophical reflection.

In his writings, this indebtedness takes on numerous forms. Lewis, the storyteller, often depicts moments of pure and spontaneous pleasure, which are "shafts" of divine glory that are a part of everyday life. Though he recognized such moments of Joy in his pre-conversion days (and later understood them as signposts pointing to a heavenly city), as a Christian writer Lewis is particularly cognizant of these innumerable "patches of Godlight" that penetrate our daily life and experience.[2]

"Permanence" also pervades Lewis' work in the fundamental conviction of human beings' depravity as well as their immortality. He is extremely adept at exposing what Gilbert Meilaender calls "the sweet poison of the false infinite."[3] That is, whether we are encountering the misplaced longing for the "ocean-going yachts" in *Out of the Silent Planet* or "Turkish Delight" in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Lewis uncovers the inordinate love of possessions that, because of human fallenness, masquerade as

satisfaction in the present life. To be guided by what is permanent, for Lewis, is to be freed from the tyranny of human passions in the present; it is to set our sights on that which alone can satisfy the deepest human longings.

Devotion to "the permanent things" bred in Lewis a conspicuous detachment from innovation and social conformity, which allowed him to remain remarkably non-partisan in his political writings. Lewis wrote on topics as diverse as capital punishment, humanitarian approaches to criminal justice, socialism, welfare and economics, fascism, the totalitarian tendency, and more. We should take our political cues, he says, not from culture but from the eternal truths of creedal Christianity. Principle, which is rooted in the permanent, is far more important than matters of policy, since the former ultimately guides the latter.[4]

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Yet another defining feature of Lewis' recognition of the unchanging is the emphasis in his writings on a transcendent moral order that is intuited *at the most basic level* by *all* human beings. He calls this the *Tao*, the "law of nature," or the "law of oughtness" in his philosophical treatises, while in his fantasies this order is mirrored in the less-than-bestial behavior among animals. In Lewis, the deepest intuitions of both children and beasts point in the direction of normative morality. As one writer aptly notes, the conviction of a transcendent moral order is "no late addition to Lewis's thought."[5] Rather, it is central.

TOWARD THE ABOLITION OF MAN

If there is nothing universal in the moral nature of humankind, then what constraints are there, beyond our political decisions, on how we will treat one another and organize our communities? Politics truly becomes "war by other means," culture wars are no mere metaphor, and we are confronted with the problem posed so strikingly by Lewis in the final section of *The Abolition of Man*: controllers ("conditioners") lord it over the controlled (the "conditioned") and employ new technologies, which were developed for "conquest over nature," for inhumanity in the guise of "innovation."[6] Only when we acknowledge the permanent—"the law written on the heart," the *Tao*—can we escape enslavement to lower animal in-

stincts for power and personal aggrandizement.

About the time that Peter Singer, the noted animal-rights activist who is an open advocate of infanticide and euthanasia, was being installed in an endowed chair in ethics at Princeton University, President Harold Shapiro delivered a lecture on the university's role in moral education. Shapiro underscored three goals of liberal education, to "provide an understanding of the great traditions of thoughts," "free our minds from unexamined commitments and unquestioned allegiances," and "prepare us for an independent and responsible life of choice." He qualified the last point with the remarkable statement that education is "especially important in a world where we increasingly depend on individual responsibility and internal control to replace—or at least to supplement—the *rigid kinship rules*, *strict religious precepts*, and *other aspects of totalitarian rule* that have traditionally imposed order on societies" (emphasis mine).[7]

Did Shapiro's comments cause any stir in his audience? The characterizations of "kinship rules" as "rigid" and of "religious precepts" as belonging to the category of "totalitarian rule" should strike us as rather frightening and certainly give us pause. But this is the very thing Lewis predicted: when humankind is free-floating in a universe of "choice," divorced from the transcendent and unfettered by moral standards, we descend into self-annihilation. Shapiro's commentary well illustrates the present moral state of affairs within our culture and helps explain why a prestigious university can endow a chair, with relatively little protest, for an animal rights activist who denies those same rights to the handicapped neonate and the elderly persons in our midst. In truth, there is no consensus in the present cultural climate as to fundamentals of right and wrong behavior.[8] *We do not hold these* (or any) *truths*, and to contend for such is deemed rigid, totalitarian, and unsophisticated.

But contend we must, which is why the insight of Lewis strikes us as all the more prescient: without the *Tao*, without an acknowledgement of a universal moral law, we are inevitably and irrevocably consigned to the abolition of man. "Ethical, intellectual, or aesthetic democracy is death," Lewis once wisely quipped.[9] Indeed, apart from natural law, what argument and protection do we have against evil when it manifests itself? If there is no universal moral law, the Nuremberg Trials were arbitrary and wrong-headed, and the Nazis, to their great misfortune, merely ended up on the wrong side of a post-war power-grab.

CONCLUSION

Natural law, as Lewis rightly understood, serves as a bridge between Christian and non-Christian morality. In civil society, religious and non-religious people conform to the same ethical standard in order to be governable. A revival in natural-law thinking, therefore, must be a highest priority for the Christian community as we contend in, rather than abdi-

cate, the public square. Indeed, if there is no natural law, if there are no "permanent things" to which we are subordinate, the alternative is moral, social, and political anarchy, leading to nihilism or political totalitarianism.

In the end, we invite what Lewis, with prophetic insight, sought to forestall.

NOTES

1 By "applied science" Lewis means the use of technology to accomplish the "disgusting and impious," and hence, humankind's self-annihilation. *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), 88.

2 C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (New York: Harvest Books, 1996), 238. In *Letters to Malcolm, Chiefly on Prayer* (New York: Harvest Books, 2002), Lewis writes: "We—or at least I—shall not be able to adore God on the highest occasions if we have learned no habit of doing so on the lowest. At best, our faith and reason will tell us that He is adorable, but we shall not have found Him so, not have 'tasted and seen.' Any patch of sunlight in a wood will show you something about the sun which you could never get from reading books on astronomy. These pure and spontaneous pleasures are 'patches of Godlight' in the woods of experience" (91).

3 See Gilbert Meilaender's *The Taste for the Other: The Social and Ethical Thought of C. S. Lewis*, revised edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998), chapter one.

4 For more on this theme, see John G. West, Jr., "Politics from the Shadowlands: C. S. Lewis on Earthly Government," *Policy Review* 68 (Spring 1994): 68-70.

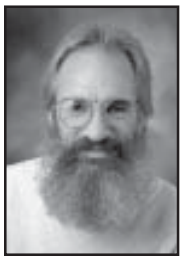
5 Meilaender, *The Taste for the Other*, 183. He refers to this strand in Lewis' thinking as "primeval moral platitudes."

6 C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), 53-82.

7 Harold T. Shapiro, "Liberal Education, Moral Education," *Princeton Alumni Weekly* (January 27, 1999); accessed online at *www.princeton.edu/~paw/archive_old/PAW98-99/08-0127/0127feat.html*.

8 For similar reasons, T. S. Elliot could write in *After Strange Gods* (London: Faber and Faber, 1933), "The number of people in possession of any criteria for discriminating between good and evil is very small; the number of the half-alive hungry for any form of spiritual experience, or what offers itself as spiritual experience, high or low, good or bad, is considerable. My own generation has not served them very well. Never has the printing press been so busy, and never have such varieties of buncombe and false doctrine come from it" (61).

9 *Present Concerns: Essays by C. S. Lewis*, edited by Walter Hooper (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1986), 34.



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The Mystery of Vocation

BY MARTHA GREENE EADS

In popular mysteries featuring detective Lord Peter Wimsey and trenchant essays during the Second World War, Dorothy L. Sayers explored the deep theological mystery of Christian vocation. Our creative work can be a source of fulfillment and blessing, and a celebration of God's creativity through the material world. Indeed, we are most like our Creator when we create.

In her mystery novels and stories featuring detective Lord Peter Wimsey, Dorothy L. Sayers dramatically depicts sin's effects on individuals and society. Sayers's aristocratic sleuth regularly encounters shady characters who, as the Gospel of John describes, "loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil" (3:19). Her detective fiction is not, however, overtly religious; Lord Peter states publicly that he doesn't "claim to be a Christian or anything of that kind."[1] Sayers's Anglican Christianity, however, informs all her writing, from her detective fiction of the 1920s and '30s to her secular and sacred plays in the '30s and '40s; her essays, letters, and speeches during the Second World War; and her translation work on Dante's *Divine Comedy* from the War until her death in 1957. In all these works, including the Lord Peter Wimsey novels, Sayers investigates a deep theological mystery: the nature of Christian vocation.

Sayers came to believe that a right understanding of vocation was vital to individual as well as cultural well-being. Lamenting the modern West's insistence on equating work with mere employment, she urges Christians to look beyond economics in thinking about vocation. "'Economic man,'" she writes in a 1942 essay entitled "Vocation in Work," "is Adam under the

curse…. To assume, as so many well-intentioned architects of an improved society assume today—that economics is the basis of man's dealings with nature and with his fellow-men, is the very negation of Christian principle."[2] Borrowing language from the third chapter of John, she sets forth her challenge to think differently:

> I am convinced that *no* satisfactory adjustment of these things can ever be made without a radical alteration in the attitude of everybody—not merely "the worker," but *everybody*—to this matter of the worth of the work. Unless we are regenerate and born again, we cannot enter the kingdom of a divine understanding of work (99).

Christians, she declares, must revive a centuries-old view of humankind as made in the image of God, the eternal Craftsman, and of work as a source of fulfillment and blessing.

Our work, Sayers concludes, should be more than simply a means of producing and acquiring goods and services. She endorses what she regards as a medieval, sacramental understanding of vocation, in which work becomes a celebration of the material world as the expression of God's creativity. We are most like our Creator when we create, she argues. Certainly, every human deserves to work *in* humane conditions, but we ought also to work *on* creative projects worthy of our efforts. After struggling in ill-fitting teaching assignments and designing effective but empty campaigns for Guinness stout and Colman's mustard at a London advertising agency, Sayers knew the frustration of unfulfilling employment. Her subsequent success as a mystery writer enabled her to move on to the work she found most satisfying: writing religious plays and essays and translating medieval poetry.

Sayers's Christian faith and admiration for medieval thought not only shaped her conception of vocation but also served as a foundation for her friendships with Inklings Charles Williams and C. S. Lewis. Although Sayers had studied French literature as an Oxford undergraduate, Williams introduced her years later to the Italian poet Dante and his three-part Christian epic, *The Divine Comedy*. At Williams's urging, she picked up a copy of the first part, *Inferno*, and carried it with her into a London shelter during a wartime air raid. She found *Inferno* so compelling that she mastered medieval Italian in order to translate the entire epic. Two years later, her commitment to Dante scholarship having grown even stronger, Sayers marveled that *The Divine Comedy*'s treatment of land, labor, and wealth made her want to ask the poet "to come and address a meeting about world economics."[3] Her fascination with *The Divine Comedy* never flagged; when she died at age 64, she was still working on her translation of part three, *Paradise*.

Sayers's fascination with the Middle Ages gave her more in common with the Inklings than most detective novelists would have. Although she was never an "official" Inkling (no woman was), Sayers corresponded regularly with Williams and Lewis and, as they did, looked to the medieval period for clues about timeless theological mysteries. Corbin Scott Carnell groups Sayers with Lewis, Williams, and J. R. R. Tolkien because they all "were more at home in the Middle Ages or the Renaissance [than in the present], but the very depth of their immersion in the past gave them a useful perspective on the present which presentists ironically lack."[4] As the Second World War loomed and then broke loose, Sayers believed that the West's need for a renewed understanding of work was increasingly urgent.

GLIMPSES IN MYSTERIES AND DRAMA

Sayers first acknowledged the theological implications of work in Lord Peter Wimsey's debut novel, *Whose Body?* In the 1923 mystery, Lord Peter agonizes over a difficult case but also frets over his sense of professional calling. He turns for counsel to his friend Detective Inspector Charles Parker, whose pedigree is less impressive than Peter's but whose character and insight are not. Calling on Parker in his flat, Peter asks, "D'you like your job?" Parker puts aside the Galatians commentary he has been reading, mulls over Peter's question, and replies, "Yes—yes, I do. I know it to be useful, and I am fitted to it. I do it quite well—not with inspiration, perhaps, but sufficiently well to take pride in it. It is full of variety and it forces one to keep up to the mark and not get slack. And there's a future to it."[5] Sayers sets forth here her earliest criteria for meaningful work: it must be useful, appropriate to the worker's abilities, varied, and endlessly challenging.

Dorothy Sayers, C. S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and J. R. R. Tolkien, "were more at home in the Middle Ages or the Renaissance [than in the present], but the very depth of their immersion in the past gave them a useful perspective on the present which presentists ironically lack."

In this passage, Sayers also suggests that Christian faith enables vocational discernment. Inspector Parker's Galatians commentary, minor detail though it may appear to be, gives him a context of faithful freedom and responsibility for reflecting on work; he understands that the worker must labor without worrying about others' perceptions. He rebukes Peter for focusing on his own reputation in carrying out his calling, to which Peter responds sulkily, "I don't think you ought to read so much theology. It has a brutal-

izing influence" (121). Coming to the conversation from his Galatians commentary, Parker is likely to have in mind the following passage: "Am I now seeking human approval, or God's approval? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still pleasing people, I would not be a servant of Christ" (Galatians 1:10). While Lord Peter would never describe himself as Christ's servant, Sayers nevertheless uses his exchange with Parker to begin developing her own theology of work.

Of the lack of varied work in an industrial society, Sayers lamented: "the Divine joy in creation, which Man should inherit in virtue of his participation in the image of Godhead, has largely been destroyed, persisting today almost alone among artists, skilled craftsmen, and members of the learned professions; and it is this loss…which lies at the root of our social and economic corruptions."

In the Lord Peter Wimsey mysteries that followed *Whose Body?*, especially those featuring Peter's detective-novelist wife Harriet Vane, Sayers further shows characters struggling to understand their relation to work. Attending her Oxford college reunion in *Gaudy Night* (1936), Harriet sizes up her own and her former-classmates' professional choices. To a brilliant scholar who abandoned academics for farming, Harriet observes, "A ploughshare is a nobler object than a razor. But if your natural talent is for barbering, wouldn't it be better to *be* a barber, and a good barber—and use the profits (if you like) to speed the plough? However grand the job may be, is it *your* job?" (48). Harriet wonders at times whether her job of mystery-writing is sufficiently serious, but Peter encourages her to persist and challenges her to make Wilfred, her protagonist, more complex. Peter feels that Harriet has paid him the ultimate compliment when she tells him that his urging has inspired her really to *work* on characterization, telling her that he "shall be honored to go down to posterity in the turn-up of Wilfred's trouser" (498). In the 1936 play *Busman's Honeymoon* (and the novel by the same title that soon followed), Harriet insists that Peter pursue his investigations, no matter how inconvenient or even painful they may be for her. "What kind of life could we have if I knew that you had become less than yourself by marrying me?" she asks.[6] Together, Lord and Lady Peter Wimsey demonstrate work's centrality, even to family life.[7]

In *The Zeal of Thy House*, written for the 1937 Canterbury Cathedral Festival, Sayers's treatment of vocation is more overtly Christian. The play's main character, William of Sens, is a twelfth-century architect whose dedi-

cation to his work on the Cathedral's construction project is as remarkable as his egotism. Although he initially sees himself as indispensable to the Cathedral, William recognizes his dependence on the Church when he suffers grave injuries in a fall. In making his sacramental confession, first to the Cathedral prior and then to the angel Michael, William realizes that confessing his individual sins does him little good if he lacks a proper understanding of his relationship to God. Directed by Michael to consider Christ's self-denial on the Cross, William comes to see that the work itself is more important than the worker's role in it and subsequently repents of his pride. Sayers's account thus illustrates how work can reveal the Christian's role in the Church and, through it, in the Kingdom.

Many of Sayers's contemporaries found her shift from detective fiction to religious drama confusing, failing to understand that she was narrowing her focus rather than changing it. In response to a reviewer's skepticism about her having written both *Busman's Honeymoon* and *Zeal*, Sayers replied, "This is like saying that a person who says his prayers is betraying a split personality when he uses the same organs of speech to say, 'Pass the potatoes'…. Both of these [works]…deal with precisely the same theme: namely, that a man may not exalt his private passions above his proper vocation." Sayers argued further that writers need not limit themselves to one type of writing:

> [The reviewer assumes that] mankind's normal way of working approximates to that of the conveyor-belt, to which each operative contributes his small, standardized operation with as little variation as may be. Now this may be usual, but it is not the normal, in the sense of the natural function of an artist, or of a craftsman—or indeed of a human being at all; it is the function of a machine; and we cannot subdue either art or man to the rhythm of the machine without destroying their proper nature as man and art.[8]

Her indignation in this letter rises from the conviction Detective Inspector Charles Parker expressed twenty years earlier in *Whose Body?*: meaningful work must be "full of variety."

SOCIAL REFORM AND BEYOND

Sayers came to recognize the difficulty of insisting on varied work in an industrial society, lamenting in a 1941 letter that "the Divine joy in creation, which Man should inherit in virtue of his participation in the image of Godhead, has largely been destroyed, persisting today almost alone among artists, skilled craftsmen, and members of the learned professions; and it is this loss…which lies at the root of our social and economic corruptions."[9] She saw that assembly-line work provided vast numbers of jobs offering limited opportunities for tasting "Divine joy in creation." Not a Luddite, however, she asserts in the 1946 essay "Living to Work" that the

Christian's "task is not to run away from the machines but to learn to use them so that they work in harmony with human nature instead of injuring or oppressing it."[10] A Christian re-envisioning of vocation would, she hoped, lead to reform not only of work practices but also of theories about work itself.

She blamed the modern Church, however, for having contented itself with merely striving to improve working conditions instead of calling for an entirely new way of looking at work. Sayers describes one Roman Catholic plan for social reform, praising its emphasis on just employment practices but asking why it failed to go further. The plan, she explains in a May 1940 speech entitled "Creed or Chaos?", "in its lack of a sacramental attitude toward work, was as empty as a set of trade-union regulations. We may remember that a medieval guild did insist, not only on the employer's duty to his workmen, but also on the laborer's duty to his work."[11] In the modern economics-based culture, she believed, both the worker and the work suffer. The worker becomes bored with work he finds meaningless, and the work is trivial and often shoddy.

Our theologically-impoverished view of work has wider cultural consequences. She warns in the essay "Why Work?" that equating work with mere employment leads first to thoughtless consumption and ultimately to war:

> No nation has yet found a way to keep the machines running and whole nations employed under modern industrial conditions without wasteful consumption. For a time, a few nations could contrive to keep going by securing a monopoly of production and forcing their waste products on to new and untapped markets. When there are no new markets and all nations are industrial producers, the only choice we have been able to envisage so far has been that between armaments and unemployment.[12]

A deep love for her country did not prevent her from holding Great Britain partly responsible for the outbreak of the Second World War. In this essay, first delivered as a speech in Eastbourne, England, in 1942, she admonishes:

> Never think that wars are irrational catastrophes: they happen when wrong ways of thinking and living bring about intolerable situations; and whichever side may be the more outrageous in its aims and the more brutal in its methods, the root causes of conflict are usually to be found in some wrong way of life in which all parties have acquiesced, and for which everybody must, to some extent, bear the blame. (91)

She also faults the Church in "Creed or Chaos?" for having adopted "'the industrious apprentice' view of [vocation]: 'Work hard and be thrifty,

and God will bless you with a contented mind and a competence.' This is nothing but enlightened self interest in its vulgarest form, and plays directly into the hands of the monopolist and the financier." She continues in the sharpest of terms:

> Nothing has so deeply discredited the Christian Church as Her squalid submission to the economic theory of society. The burning question of the Christian attitude toward money is being so eagerly debated nowadays that it is scarcely necessary to do more than remind ourselves that the present unrest, both in Russia and Central Europe, is an immediate judgment upon a financial system that has subordinated man to economics, and that no *mere* readjustment of economic machinery will have any lasting effect if it keeps man a prisoner inside the machine (68-69).

The Church must teach society to view work theologically in order to avert cultural and political disaster, she believes.

While many Westerners, today as in her own day, would scoff at her analysis, Sayers insists rightly in "Why Work?" that a "society founded on trash and waste" is a "house built upon sand" (90). To maintain a high standard of living, a society at peace finds itself encouraging wasteful consumption. Sayers invites us to "ask ourselves whether we do not all contribute to it by demanding the newest thing, by our snobbery of the modern and up-to-date, by our ignorance and carelessness about how things work, and our inability to distinguish good craftsmanship from bad" ("VW" 100). She dares us instead "to take the same attitude to the arts of peace as the arts of war,…sacrific[ing] our convenience and our individual standard of living" ("WW" 95). Christians must, she asserts, eschew economic values rooted in envy and avarice, reclaiming instead the "absolute values" of the kingdom of God.

To maintain a high standard of living, a society at peace finds itself encouraging wasteful consumption. Sayers invites us to "ask ourselves whether we do not all contribute to it by demanding the newest thing, by our snobbery of the modern and up-to-date, by our ignorance and carelessness about how things work, and our inability to distinguish good craftsmanship from bad."

The kingdom values, Sayers teaches in "Why Work?", yield a Christian understanding of labor that first celebrates work "not, primarily, as the

thing one does to live, but the thing one lives to do." Work, she asserts, should be the embodiment of the worker's talents and efforts and thus the means by which he "offers himself to God" (101). Such an understanding also acknowledges that God calls many to do secular work and that any work, done well by Christians, is Christian work, "whether it is church embroidery, or sewage farming" (108). Furthermore, an understanding of vocation rooted in kingdom values will direct the worker's attention to the work itself rather than to the community. Although the temptation to serve others seems noble, Sayers warns that it will degenerate into catering to the public. "We are coming to the end of an era of civilization which began by pandering to public demand," she asserts, "and ended by frantically trying to create public demand for an output so false and meaningless that even a doped public revolted from the trash offered to it and plunged into war rather than swallow any more of it" (114). Here Sayers poses the Galatians 1 question Charles Parker has in mind in *Whose Body?*: Do we want "to win the approval of men, or of God"?

CONCLUSION

Although her rebuke still carries a sting over a half-century later, Sayers's is not a counsel of despair. Her writings remind us that the Church can and should think differently from the wider culture about every aspect of life—even work. In celebrating human creativity as evidence of our being made in the Creator's likeness, Christians must encourage one another to do work worthy of our best efforts, whether it be "church embroidery, or sewage farming." We must examine our purchases and practices, asking whether they show respect for other workers created in God's image. Sayers challenges us to seek what she calls "the kingdom of a divine understanding of work"—a mysterious and glorious view of vocation, focused not on economic means but on eternal ends.

NOTES

1 Dorothy L. Sayers, *Gaudy Night* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1935; reprint, New York: Harper Paperbacks, 1995), 490 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

2 Dorothy L. Sayers, "Vocation in Work," in *A Christian Basis for the Post-War World*, edited by A. E. Baker (London: Christian Student Movement Press, 1942), 90. Further citations are marked "VW."

3 Dorothy L. Sayers, "To Wilfred Scott-Giles," 25 February 1946, in *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers*, volume 3, edited by Barbara Reynolds (Cambridge: Carole Green, 1998), 202.

4 Corbin Scott Carnell, "The Inklings and the Twentieth Century: Did They Back Away?" *Bulletin of the New York C. S. Lewis Society*, 5:12 (1974), 4.

5 Dorothy L. Sayers, *Whose Body?* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1923; reprint, New York: Avon, 1961), 119 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

6 Dorothy L. Sayers and Muriel St. Clare Byrne, *Busman's Honeymoon: A Detective Comedy*, in *Love All: A Comedy of Manners. Together with Busman's Honeymoon: A Detective*

Comedy, edited by Alzina Stone Dale (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1984), 101.

7 In *Love All* (1940), her more obviously autobiographical play, Sayers suggests that satisfying work may be far more meaningful than marriage. After her self-absorbed husband leaves her for a young actress, *Love All*'s protagonist finds fulfillment, financial security, and friendship as a playwright. Sayers's own marriage to the shell-shocked WWI veteran Oswald Atherton ("Mac") Fleming foundered while her literary star rose.

8 Dorothy L. Sayers, "Letter to the Editor of the *Stoke Newington Observer*," 12 June 1944, in *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers*, volume 3, 20-21.

9 Dorothy L. Sayers, "Letter to the Editor of the *Sower*," 21 April 1941, in *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers*, volume 2, edited by Barbara Reynolds (Cambridge: Carole Green, 1997; reprint, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 251.

10 Dorothy L. Sayers, "Living to Work," in *Unpopular Opinions* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1946), 126.

11 Dorothy L. Sayers, "Creed or Chaos?" in *Creed or Chaos?* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1949; reprint, Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 1999), 71 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

12 Dorothy L. Sayers, "Why Work" in *Creed or Chaos?*, 94-95.

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Showing the Truth

BY LAURA K. SIMMONS

Sayers saw in the theatrical community a picture of what the church could be: a group of people dedicated to a common cause, each member working out of his or her gifts, coming together to shape a story into something it could only become through their combined efforts—and thoroughly loving the process.

Anyone who's been a care-giver for another person—a small child, an ailing spouse, or an elderly parent—understands the difficulty of free will. Steadfastly refusing to coerce his creation, God made women and men with the power to make decisions for themselves—decisions for ill or good. For God as a parent, it must be painful to watch the poor choices we make, but that pain is part of the creative process.

Dorothy L. Sayers—novelist, poet, playwright, essayist, and translator —understood very well that humans made in God's image are inherently creative beings. Indeed, our primary vocation is to create. In a 1955 series on sacred plays, she wrote that playwrights, of all artists, are best acquainted with God's creative process, because after a playwright creates a story and characters, she must entrust them into the hands of other people to enact. When writing about her mysteries, Sayers once mentioned that Lord Peter Wimsey arrived, already in character, to apply for the position of detective in her novels. When she moved from writing novels to plays, not only did she have to contend with characters intruding on their own stories, but also with the actors who would incarnate those characters!

Yet Sayers loved her work in the theater. She was very involved in the production of her plays for radio and stage: haggling over getting just the right director, helping create costumes and scenic design elements, and attending rehearsals. She even wrote a short spoof of one of her plays, *The*

Zeal of Thy House, to invite the cast to dinner, calling it "A Meal in My House."

Sayers saw in the theatrical community a picture of what the church could be: a group of people dedicated to a common cause, each member working out of his or her gifts, coming together to shape a story into something it could only become through their combined efforts—and thoroughly loving the process. Sayers enjoyed watching actors interpret her characters in ways she never imagined. It delighted her when readers found elements she had not consciously put in a story but which, on closer perusal, made perfect sense to what she was communicating.

N. T. Wright echoes this vision of our life of discipleship together, as analogous to actors faithfully yet creatively responding to characters in a script. "When Jesus announced the kingdom, the stories he told functioned like dramatic plays in search of actors," Wright suggests. "His hearers were invited to audition for parts in the kingdom. They had been eager for God's drama to be staged and were waiting to find out what they would have to do when he did so. Now they were to discover. They were to become kingdom-people themselves."†

ORTHODOXY AND CLARITY

Sayers recognized the power of drama, and other arts, to incarnate truth and the gospel. Theater critics, expecting to be bored by the theological bent of Sayers's *The Emperor Constantine*, for example, marveled at how exciting she made the scene of the Council of Nicaea. Sayers noted that many theatergoers returned to see the play again, just for that scene. The complex theology over which the Church had battled for centuries came alive for people who would never attend a scholarly lecture on the subject.

Similarly, BBC listeners commended Sayers for the way her radio playcycle *The Man Born to Be King* embodied for them Christ in his full humanity and divinity. Sayers wrote to C. S. Lewis about her concern that people in New Zealand were getting baptized after hearing the plays on the radio; she found it a bit unnerving to have such a powerful influence on people's lives. Still, she fought hard for the privilege of bringing these plays to the public and of drawing Christ's life in a way that made him real for people. She considered her play *The Just Vengeance*, a wartime story about atonement, the best work she had done.

Sayers wrote many of her theological essays, plays, and letters at midcentury when people were becoming less and less familiar with the facts of Christianity. She noted that probably only one percent of the British people really understood the Christian faith. Others remembered bits and pieces of it, but mingled these with misunderstandings and strange interpretations and sheer mythology to create a powerful misrepresentation of what Christians actually believe. Sayers, therefore, insisted on orthodoxy and clarity of communication when doing theology. One or both of these often

was missing in congregations in her day. Too many preachers lacked precision and fluency in their use of the English language, so that what they said was confusing to parishioners. Sayers was grateful that her plays, essays, and translations could bring people to a better understanding of the gospel, though she did not create them primarily for that purpose.

Many reviewers called Sayers a preacher, evangelist, or theologian. Despite the obvious evidence of her gifts in these areas, Sayers often (but not always) protested these labels. She believed that, as a writer, her first task was to *show*, not *tell*, the stories God had given her. Creative writing gave her an opportunity, as she wrote in one essay, to put the truth of Christianity on the stage and let it speak for itself. Sayers was firmly convinced that if people could see and understand Christianity correctly, with no possibility for misinterpretation, many more would choose to follow Christ. Nonbelievers in her day, as well as ours, too often chose from a place of ignorance, misunderstanding, or misdirected hostility.

Few of her readers understood the Christian faith. Others remembered bits of it, but mingled these with misunderstandings and strange interpretations and sheer mythology to create a powerful misrepresentation of what Christians believe. Sayers, therefore, insisted on orthodoxy and clarity of communication when doing theology.

Like C. S. Lewis, Sayers was gifted in using analogies to make theology easier to understand. Her work in the theater provided opportunities for this clarifying work, as actors and crew members discussed her themes and characters with her. During the production of *The Zeal of Thy House*, a play about a craftsman commissioned to rebuild part of a cathedral, Sayers talked with actors about human creativity and the role of Jesus Christ in the creation of the world. Some who had never read "He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being" (John 1:2-3) or did not understand it when they read it, delved with her into creation theology and its implications for human "subcreators."

CONCLUSION

Peter Jackson's film version of Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy is a contemporary example of the power of dramatic artists to *show*, rather than *tell*, truth. People who would not be caught dead in a church see these films, return to the books, recommend them to their friends and families,

and embrace many of Tolkien's themes.

Sayers's plays had a similar effect on audiences in their day. *The Man Born to Be King* continues to be produced by performers and read by church study groups, especially during Lent. With her other religious plays, it introduces us to the gospel by showing rather than telling its truth.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

Dorothy Sayers's masterpiece play-cycle about the life of Christ is *The Man Born to Be King* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1943; reprinted Fort Collins, CO: Ignatius Press, 1990). I recommend her other religious plays, which are available from used book sellers, including *The Devil to Pay* and *He That Should Come* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1939; reprinted as *Two Plays About God and Man*, Sandwich, MA: Chapman Billies, 1998); *The Emperor Constantine* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1951; reprinted Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1976); *The Just Vengeance* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1946); and *The Zeal of Thy House.* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1937).

I explore Sayers's theological writings in a forthcoming book, *Creed Without Chaos: The Theological Contributions of Dorothy L. Sayers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005).

NOTE

[†]N. T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus: Rediscovering Who Jesus Was and Is* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 43.

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Live Large, Dream Small

BY KYLE CHILDRESS

God is calling us to be a hobbit church in a dark world. We are called to dream small—to live within limits, instead of destroying creation so we can have more. At the same time, we are called to live large—to live with courage and passion as we give ourselves to the greatest quest of serving God in peace, justice, and harmony.

What would we do if we had power? I mean real power, the kind of power to destroy evil and bring about the sort of world that we think we should have? Would we use it? What would this power do to us? James Forbes says that an important question to ask about any religion or institution or even an individual, is what do they do when they get power? In J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, this is not a theoretical question.

The power in question is the Ring, which gives its wearer the ability to accomplish great things, even destruction of one's enemies. Nine walkers, a fellowship of unlikely friends, are chosen—not to use the Ring of Great Power, but to destroy it. They are not even to use it in defense of the good, however tempting that may be; they are to give up this great power, rather than use it. This small fellowship of friends, bound together in their hatred of evil and their increasing self-surrendering regard for one another, set out upon a great Quest to give up and to destroy the Ring of Great Power. They are a distant foretaste of the fellowship we Christians call the church.

The central members of the fellowship, the ones entrusted with the care of the all-powerful Ring and the task of carrying it to destruction, are hobbits. They are small of stature, modest in nature, and temperate in wants. Hobbits are farmers and gardeners who love good land, good food

(they enjoy six meals a day), and good conversation, story-telling, and singing of songs. They smoke pipes and drink ale or beer in the company of their friends. They love children and on special occasions, like a birthday, they give gifts instead of receiving them. Hobbits dwell in low, tunnelly homes dug into the good earth, and have big hairy feet because they travel by foot everywhere, enjoying the world around them as they go. These hobbits have no grandiose uses for the Ring. And this is important. Because their life-aims are modest, the hobbits are not easily swayed to try to do great things with the Ring of Power. Therefore they are the only ones who can be trusted to give up the Ring.

Other characters who are good and wise confess that if they had the Ring, they would be tempted to employ its power for good. But in using the Ring of Power, it begins to use you; eventually you become the servant of coercive Power and as a result, evil triumphs. Thus, the unlikely heroism of the small and weak becomes the glimmer of hope within the story.

ECHOS OF THE OLD, OLD STORY

In *The Lord of the Rings* we hear echoes of the old, old story—the gospel story. The Apostle Paul, when he urges us to have "the same mind as Christ Jesus," gives us in Philippians 2:5-11 what is very likely one of the earliest hymns of the church memorized by those preparing for their baptism. We discover who we are called to become by looking at Jesus:

> who, though he was in the form of God,
> did not count equality with God
> as something to exploited,
> but he emptied himself,
> taking the form of a slave,
> being born in human likeness.
> And being found in human form,
> he humbled himself
> and became obedient to the point of death—
> even death on a cross.

This is not simply a passage about Christ's heavenly pre-existence which he laid aside to become human, observes James McClendon. It is about "Jesus who might have been made a king…but who instead identified himself and his cause with servants and serfs, outcasts and victims, to a degree that led the authorities to arrange his death."[1] Jesus Christ gave up power and instead became a servant.

Remember when James and John approach Jesus about becoming leaders in their fellowship (Mark 10:35-45; Matthew 20:17-28; cf. Luke 22:24-27)? "Teacher, listen," they begin, "we're getting close to Jerusalem. When we get there and you seize power and become king, we want you to give us important positions." The other disciples overhear this and are angry

because they want cabinet-level positions too. Jesus has to stop on the road and get their attention, "We all know how political power works. We all know how the gentiles do it; how everyone else does it. But it is not that way with us. We don't use coercive power. Instead we are servants."

Leadership in the kingdom, Jesus proclaims, is not coercive. In the Hebrew word "shalom" we have a glimpse of God's kingdom, God's way. Shalom means peace and justice, harmony and well-being; it means reconciled relationships between God and humanity, among ourselves and other people, and with creation. Shalom is what God desires and is bringing into the world. As the prophet Micah announces (4:1-4):

> In days to come
> the mountain of the LORD's house
> shall be established as the highest of the mountains,
> and shall be raised up above the hills.
> Peoples shall stream to it,
> and many nations shall come and say:
> "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
> to the house of the God of Jacob;
> that he may teach us his ways
> and that we may walk in his paths."
> For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,
> and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.
> He shall judge between many peoples,
> and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away;
> they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
> and their spears into pruning hooks;
> nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
> neither shall they learn war any more;
> but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own
> fig trees,
> and no one shall make them afraid;
> for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken.

God does not use violence to bring peace, or force to create harmony and right relationship. God's methods must fit the goal of shalom; they cannot be inconsistent with it. We can no more participate in God's way with tanks and guns, laws passed by congress, and prayers imposed by the state, than we can bring about chastity by means of fornication or peace by means of war.

Even though God's shalom is about nothing less than the peace and reconciliation of all humanity and all creation, God's methods are small and weak and humble. God's shalom is brought about by a baby who is born in a feed trough under a cow shed in a one-red-light town in an over-

looked country in the backwoods of the Roman empire. Instead of using the power of kingship, which was offered him, Jesus becomes the suffering servant. In other words, the way of shalom is the way of the cross.

The cross is not only Jesus' calling, it is our calling as well. Too many Christians today cannot see the inconsistency in wanting to talk about Jesus Christ and having the state help them do the talking. Many see no inconsistency in evangelizing people for Christ and having the Pentagon pave the way. But the way of Jesus Christ is not imposed by the state, forced by a church, coerced by an army, or manipulated by money.

"God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise," Paul writes. "God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God" (1 Corinthians 1:27-29). John Milton echoes the Apostle's point that the kingdom arrives: "by small accomplishing great things, by things deemed weak/subverting worldly strong, and worldly wise/by simply meek."[2]

DREAMING SMALL

A wonderful scene in *The Lord of the Rings* features the hobbit Samwise Gamgee, the steadfast friend of Frodo, the hobbit who must bear the Ring of Great Power on the quest to destroy it. Sam, a gardener back home in the Shire, is lowly even by hobbit standards. He so loves gardening that all he really wants is to return home and work in his garden; he is not interested in being somebody important. Yet, when Sam realizes that Frodo is slowly being killed by the overwhelming burden of carrying the coercive power of the Ring, Sam takes the Ring and hangs it by a chain around his own neck.

Many see no inconsistency in wanting to talk about Jesus and having the state help them do the talking, or in evangelizing people and having the Pentagon pave the way. But the way of Jesus Christ is not imposed by the state, forced by a church, coerced by an army, or manipulated by money.

> [Sam] felt himself enlarged, as if he were robed in a huge distorted shadow of himself,…. Already the Ring tempted him, gnawing at his will and reason. Wild fantasies arose in his mind; and he saw Samwise the Strong, Hero of the Age, striding with a flaming sword across the darkened land, and armies flocking to his call as he marched…. And then all clouds rolled away, and the white sun

> shone, and at his command the vale...became a garden of flowers and trees and brought forth fruit. He had only to put on the Ring and claim it for his own, and all this could be…. In that hour of trial it was the love of his master that helped most to hold him firm; but also deep down in him lived still unconquered his plain hobbit-sense: he knew in the core of his heart that he was not large enough to bear such a burden…. The one small garden of a free gardener was all his need and due, not a garden swollen to a realm; his own hands to use, not the hands of others to command.[3]

Sam is tempted by power to fantasize about himself as somebody important, but what saves him is his humility. This is why Sam and the hobbits can give up the Ring of Great Power: they do not have an enlarged sense of themselves.

Sam is tempted by power to fantasize about himself as somebody important. And he dreams large; he dreams that he will conquer for good and impose a garden on his conquered territories. But what saves him is his humility. He knows who he is: he recognizes that he is not large enough to bear such a burden, that he needs to keep to his own small garden. This knowledge is what saves him. This is why Sam and the hobbits can give up the Ring of Great Power: they do not have an enlarged sense of themselves. They dream small.

LIVING LARGE

One of my favorite poets is the Welsh Anglican priest R. S. Thomas (1913-2000), who served over forty years in small rural parishes. Thomas was something of a hobbit: he loved God's creation, was humble, and took joy in the simple, small things of life. In his poem, "Lore," he depicts Job Davies, an eighty-five-year-old tough, independent Welsh farmer who cares for his small farm with courage and passion. The poem ends with these haunting words: "Live large, man, and dream small."[4]

That is our calling, also—to live large and dream small. We are to be content in who we are as human beings and with what God has given us; we are to live within limits, instead of destroying creation so we can have more. God calls us to live within humble boundaries of who we are, instead of invading and imposing, even if we think it is in service to a good cause. We are to live within our vows to have and to hold in sickness and in health until death parts us. This is part of what it means to dream small.

At the same time, we are called to live large—to live with courage and passion as we give ourselves to the greatest quest of serving God in peace, justice, and harmony in this old dark world.

"I was vicar of large things in a small parish," R. S. Thomas said one time. That's how I see myself. I and my congregation live large things in a small parish; we live out the largest kingdom in this small place.

This world prizes power, success, wealth, and bigness, and it uses violence in the service of power. But God chooses small people to help redeem the world—people who love to eat together and raise children, to serve one another with passion, joy, and courage; people whose church is snuggled down in the woods, close to the earth. God calls them to be about the large things of shalom—the peace, harmony, justice known in Jesus Christ.

What if God is calling us to be a hobbit church in a dark world? Thanks be to God! Amen and amen.

NOTES

1 James William McClendon, *Systematic Theology: Doctrine*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 266-267.

2 John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book XII, lines 566-569, in *John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose*, edited by Merritt Y. Hughes (Indianapolis, IN: The Odyssey Press, 1957), 467.

3 J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, revised edition, (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 177.

4 R. S. Thomas, "Lore," *R. S. Thomas: Collected Poems 1945-1990*, (London, Phoenix Press, 1995), 114.

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The Power of Sam

BY JOHN HAMILTON

We revel in the power of the muscular, the vigorous, the reckless, the daring. Rarely do we discipline power by wisdom to refrain from things we can do: create armaments for Armageddon, clone human beings, or bulldoze unique ecosystems to build parking lots. In The Lord of the Rings, Tolkien imagines what little people, hobbits, might do if the ultimate power of evil came into their possession.

In our culture we like power, any and all kinds of power: political power, military power, intellectual power, financial power, spiritual power. We revel in the muscular, the vigorous, the reckless, the daring. Jesus, meek and mild, does not compute; we so much prefer Christ "the power of God" to Christ "the anything else" that we get him confused with Arnold Schwarzenegger.

We rarely demonstrate power disciplined by wisdom to refrain from things we can do: create armaments for Armageddon, clone human beings, or bulldoze unique ecosystems to build parking lots.

J. R. R. Tolkien's magnificent tale of power, *The Lord of the Rings* (1936-1949), imagines what little people, hobbits, might do if the ultimate power of evil came into their possession in the form of a plain gold Ring.[1] Guided by Gandalf the wizard, two hobbits—Frodo the Ring-Bearer and his gardener Sam—lead a courageous band to return the Ring to Mt. Doom, where the Dark Lord made it, and now the only place in Middle-earth where it can be unmade.

Gandalf advised that "having the Ring we may seek to destroy it" would not enter the Dark Lord's mind (262). Nor often ours.

CONTRASTING VISIONS OF POWER

The wizard Gandalf embodies the power of wisdom. Researching ancient records in the dusty libraries in the great city of Gondor, he resembles a professor (perhaps of Oxford) (246). His opposite is Saruman, chief of the wizards, who has kept his desire for the Ring secret and succumbed to its evil: "we must have power, power to order all things as we will," he says (252).

Boromir and Faramir, sons of the Steward of Gondor who rules the city until the return of the King, provide another study in contrasts. Boromir the elder, his father's favorite, is a warrior who fights the encroaching darkness with unflinching zeal. He chafes at being, not the son of the King, but only the son of the Steward (655). The lure of the Ring overcomes him briefly: "It is mad not to use it," Boromir urges, "to use the power of the Enemy against him" (389). His lapse forces Frodo to strike out on his own, accompanied only by Sam, to find the Crack of Doom.

Director Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (2001) poignantly portrays Boromir's transformation in the uses of power. At the Council of Elrond, he dismisses King Aragorn as "a mere Ranger." "Gondor has no king!" Boromir cries, "Gondor needs no king!" At his death, however, he confides to Aragorn, "I would have followed you—my brother, my captain, my King!"

Like Boromir, all of us can be transformed from claiming that we have no king, from believing that we *need* no king, to professing that Jesus Christ is our brother, captain, and King. But doing so requires us to face that we are powerless to resist the will to power. Any of us, as individuals or in organizations, on finding a scrap of power within our grasp, face the danger that the Ring of Power represents.

Any of us, as individuals or in organizations, on finding a scrap of power within our grasp, face the danger that the Ring represents. Yet followers of Christ, as Tolkien makes clear, cannot be conformed to the world in a quest for might and control, regardless of the justice of their cause.

Followers of Christ, as Tolkien makes clear, cannot be conformed to the world in a quest for might and control, regardless of the justice of their cause. Rather, we seek the mind of Christ, which Philippians 2:5-11 describes in words and the Gospel of John depicts in symbol: "Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began

to wash the disciples' feet" (13:3-5).

Jesus, God from God, Light from Light, laid aside his robe of majesty and performed a kindness so lowly that none of the disciples had been willing to do it for themselves, much less for others. It was slaves' work—wiping stinking calloused feet, caked with the dirt of the fields and the stench of the streets; work that demeaned anyone who did it. You wouldn't catch a priest or a prince or a procurator doing it. Or a disciple.

Jesus!
kneeling in front of them one by one
taking their feet in hard carpenter's hands
cupping water in his palm
bathing each sore filthy foot
gently soothing cooling
drying with a soft warm towel.

Jesus' healthy self-fullness[2] freed him to empty himself, take the form of a slave, humble himself, and become obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. With abandon he threw away earthly life, position, riches, and power—the very things we grab for.

Christ-like power shines through humility and duty. Gandalf humbly identifies himself as "a servant of the Secret Fire" when confronting the ancient demon (322); when contending with the Steward of Gondor, he claims, "I also am a steward" (742). How unlike our tendency to downsize stewardship to dollars and cents, and conceive power only in terms of position and fame!

Faramir, the younger brother of Boromir, also illustrates Christ-likeness in relation to power. Meeting him in the wild, Frodo concludes he "was a man less self-regarding, both sterner and wiser" (650). Guessing that Boromir desires the Ring of Power, Faramir describes how his own view differs: "I do not love the bright sword for its sharpness, nor the arrow for its swiftness, nor the warrior for his glory. I love only that which they defend" (656). When Sam in an unguarded moment reveals that Frodo is carrying the Ring, Faramir has a chance "to show his quality" by refusing the power that fortune has put in his grasp; he is "wise enough to know that there are some perils from which a man must flee" (665-666).

Faramir's powerful humility reminds us of the biblical Jonathan, son of King Saul. A mighty warrior, beloved of the people, next in line for the throne, Jonathan elevated David in public, saved his life from Saul's jealous rage, and acknowledged that David, not he, would be the next king (1 Samuel 18:1-4; 20:1-42; and 23:15-18).

THE POWER OF SIMPLE GOODNESS

Of all the characters in Tolkien's epic work, Sam owns the power—both plain for all to see and unknown to himself—that is most powerful. Sam re-

veals the invincibility of simple goodness. A trustworthy conspirator (103), he is a servant and friend who loves without limit. Sam shows his practical nature, for example, in the chapter "Of Herbs and Stewed Rabbit" when he stews a couple of coneys and wishes for a few taters (634-647). Gazing at the sleeping Frodo, he perceives a light shining in him, suggesting to the reader (not Sam) that bearing the Ring is causing the spiritual purification of his master, which Sam's unfailing support has made possible. Despite their peril, Sam delights in seeing an "oliphaunt" (642, 646-647), his innocent joy marking an indomitable spirit.

Believing that Frodo is already dead and that he will die soon, Sam retrieves the Ring and carries on the quest. When someone says Frodo is still alive, Sam hears a warning deep inside: "Don't trust your head, Samwise, it is not the best part of you" (723). Trusting his heart instead, Sam searches for Frodo. When he cannot find him, like Paul and Silas in the Philippian jail (Acts 16:25f.), Sam begins to sing. Hearing the song, Frodo answers, and they put the quest back on track (887-888).

As their journey to Mt. Doom wears on, Frodo drops to the ground exhausted while Sam keeps watch. Here Tolkien pens one of the most exalted passages of the trilogy:

> ...the night sky was still dim and pale. There, peeping among the cloud-wrack above a dark tor high up in the mountains, Sam saw a white star twinkle for awhile. The beauty of it smote his heart, as he looked up out of the forsaken land, and hope returned to him. For like a shaft, clear and cold, the thought pierced him that in the end the Shadow was only a small and passing thing: there was light and high beauty forever beyond its reach (901).

Of all the characters in Tolkien's epic work, Sam owns the power—both plain for all to see and unknown to himself—that is most powerful. Sam reveals the invincibility of simple goodness. He is a servant and friend who loves without limit.

Here we glimpse the power of hope in darkness, of overcoming evil with good, of beauty both within and beyond this world: "The light shines on in the dark, and the darkness has never mastered it" (John 1:5, NEB).[3]

Sam's power is not that of a great elf lord, as the servants of the Dark Lord of Mordor fear. Earlier, when he takes the Ring from Frodo's still body, the nature of his power becomes clear. In stark contrast to the arrogant earth-shattering powers storming about him, he is able to resist the

Ring's corrosive power, which has spun wild fantasies of "Samwise the Strong, Hero of the Age" (880). "In that hour of trial it was the love of his master that helped most to hold him firm; but also deep down in him lived still unconquered his plain hobbit-sense" (881). If only we would hold firm to the love of our Master and our plain hobbit-sense!

NOTES

1 J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1994), xv. Page numbers in this edition are indicated in the text.

2 The word is Andrew Lester's, meaning a positive sense of self, neither selfish nor selfless.

3 Scripture marked NEB is from The New English Bible, © The Delegates of the Oxford University Press and the Syndics of the Cambridge University Press 1961, 1970. Reprinted by permission.

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The Triumph of Spectacle

BY RALPH C. WOOD

Though Peter Jackson and his huge company of filmwrights resort more to spectacle than complexity, they may inadvertently establish the wry truth of the wag's saying that "The world is divided into two halves: those who have read The Lord of the Rings—and those who will eventually read it."

Perhaps the most obvious accomplishment of Peter Jackson's cinematic rendering of J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* is to have turned thousands of moviegoers into new Tolkienian readers. They will now have the chance to discover, in perusing the monumental 1200-page work, that a single word can be worth a thousand pictures. Movies form images for us; novels require us to imagine them for ourselves. Tolkien's narrative is so lengthy, his plot so complex, his characters so fully developed, his scenes so convincingly realized, that an act of considerable imaginative discipline is required for the mastering of this epic novel.

Students sometimes confess that their reading of *The Lord of the Rings* is the largest mental accomplishment of their lives. It contains so many layers of moral and religious richness that readers who first encounter Tolkien at age eight will still be reading him at age eighty. Jackson's three massively successful movies, though they occasionally probe Tolkien's ethical and spiritual depths, elicit no such repeated returns, at least for this viewer. Yet the one-time-only quality of Jackson's films may not reveal his failure as filmmaker so much as it discloses, I suspect, the limits that are inherent in his medium.

There are many things to commend in Jackson's epic effort. The first of the films, *The Fellowship of the Ring* (New Line Cinema, 2001), opens with a splendid fifteen-minute recapitulation of the lengthy story concerning the

One Ring of power—how it was crafted by the demonic Sauron in order to rule over all the Free Peoples of the earth, and yet how it has come surprisingly into the possession of an obscure hobbit named Bilbo Baggins. So are many of the novel's scenes magnificently realized. The New Zealand scenery evokes the fantastically real world of Tolkien's Middle-earth, and the tunnelly hobbit-homes are finely rendered.

Jackson's special effects—whether in the brilliance of Gandalf's magical fireworks or the hideousness of the fiend called the Balrog—are also well done. Audiences are appropriately chilled by the Ringwraiths, the corrupted men whose bodies have been consumed by their submission to Sauron, leaving them as ghostly creatures who can still strike terror and wreak horror. The awful workings of Saruman's underground factory for the fashioning of the Uruk-Hai—a wicked Hitlerian hybrid of orcs and men—are so well portrayed that they might have been borrowed from the fantastic, diabolical imagery of Hieronymus Bosch (1450-1516). Yet the loveliness of the elven realm called Lorien is akin to the beauty of a Burne-Jones painting or stained glass window.

Gollum is Jackson's real cinematic triumph. Evil can only twist and pervert, wither and waste the good. The movie-Gollum is an emaciated old man, while at the same time being almost an infant in his childish greed, so that his loincloth might well be his diaper.

Many of Tolkien's characters are excellently portrayed. Sir Ian McKellan is a splendid Gandalf, the wry wizard who serves as guide and guardian for the Company of Nine Walkers who have been charged with the task of destroying the one ruling Ring. He is not only hoary and wise, but also shrewd and witty. Sean Bean also enacts a convincing Boromir, the brave warrior whose courage undoes him because he tries to seize the Ring from Frodo in order to wield it against Sauron. He makes appropriate penance for his sin by slaying as many orcs as he can, and he dies amidst a scene of deeply religious forgiveness pronounced by Aragorn, the rightly returning king who is well dramatized by Viggo Mortensen.

Jackson's depiction of Gollum is his real cinematic triumph. Gollum's long possession of the Ring has virtually devoured him, as Tolkien reveals that iniquity is always negating and destructive. Evil cannot bring anything true and real into being; it can only twist and pervert, wither and waste the good. The movie-Gollum is at once an emaciated old man with only a few strands of hair stringing down over his face, while at the same time being almost an infant in his childish greed, so that his loincloth might well be his diaper.

Though Gollum's movements and voice were both enacted by Andy Serkis, the shrunken hobbit's physical features were digitally realized, and it is his artificial eyes that haunt us long after the movies have finished. They reveal the remnant of hobbitic humanity that remains despite Gollum's long life of total self-absorption. And in his periodic quarrels with himself, as he ponders the doing of either good or evil, we are made to see that Gollum is not a monster but a brother, one of our own kind.

The most compelling scenes in the three movies have less to with characters than with armies. For it is in the epic battle scenes at Helm's Deep and again in Pelennor Fields that Jackson displays the drastic new power of computer-created images to seem more real than even the most faithful documentaries. The assaults of the frightful orcs and wargs and Uruk-Hai, the deafening shrieks of the winged Nazgûl, the giant oliphaunts with their deadly swaggering tusks and their huge wooden towers manned by dozens of archers—all remain terrifying in their lifelikeness. Jackson also succeeds in convincing us that Aragorn really has resuscitated the Sleeping Dead, those unfaithful men who once broke their promises to defend the good but who, brought back from their graves, are able to atone for their earlier betrayals by fighting valiantly against the forces of Sauron.

These digital triumphs are examples of what Aristotle called *spectacle*—an excitation of the visual senses that should enhance moral and religious insight, not obliterate it. Aristotle regarded spectacle as the last and least of drama's essential elements—a crowd-pleasing device that mustn't dominate the play's central moral and spiritual conflict. Jackson not only allows spectacle to overwhelm the agonizing inward conflict that lies at the center of Tolkien's book, but seems deliberately to have done so. With each succeeding movie, Jackson turns Tolkien's slow-paced narrative into eye-assaulting action-driven films. The book almost always favors near encounters and narrow escapes over pitched battles, whereas the movies revel in brutal and bloody warfare.

Tolkien describes the actual combat at Helm's Deep, for example, with a sparing minimalism that downplays the head-severing violence and gore—while Jackson turns the book's ten-page account into a thirty-minute climax of the second movie. Yet, even if at too great a length, Jackson catches the unbowed heroism of Tolkien's courageous Company. With dauntless valor they fight against enemies who are far more numerous and unthinkably more vicious. Jackson's cinematic mastery captures both the virile strength and the exceptional virtue of Tolkien's small band of warriors. They display the death-defying gallantry that Tolkien admired in ancient heroic cultures and that he used as a model in writing *The Lord of the Rings*.

For all of their virtues, Jackson's films largely fail to fathom the moral and spiritual depths of Tolkien's work. Though they finely capture the outward battle between the forces of good and evil, they do not disclose the

dread subtlety of evil. Consider Saruman, Gandalf's fellow wizard. In the movie Peter Lee portrays him as an utterly sinister, wholly despicable creature from the very start, whereas the book reveals him to be a once-noble wizard whom Gandalf had held in great respect.

Tolkien's Saruman is an almost tragic instance of good gone wrong, a figure who wants to bring order to the world's chaos and thus to make alliance with the demonic Sauron for the sake of an allegedly benevolent despotism. Tolkien thus discloses what Jackson obscures—the desire of evil to corrupt virtues far more than to prey on vices. Boromir's stout-hearted bravery is the source of his undoing, even as the wizard Gandalf is threatened by his compassion, and the elven-queen Galadriel by her beauty. Such moral and religious profundities are largely absent from the films.

Their chief flaw, however, lies in Jackson's version of the two hobbits, Frodo and Sam. Perhaps to win over the millions of movie-going teenagers, he depicts them as raw youths rather than Tolkien's middle-aged fellows. Technical ingenuity has enabled Jackson to shrink the size of these hairy-footed halflings, but he mistakenly equates smallness of size with adolescence of character. When the film's boy-hobbits order a pint of beer, for instance, one expects the bartender to demand their IDs. It's no surprise that they are seldom shown smoking their beloved pipeweed, an activity revered by reflective men, not mere boys.

Frodo is fifty when he embarks on the Quest. Even among the long-lived hobbits, he is a full-grown creature, not a teenager. Jackson's authentically adult characters—Boromir and Aragorn, Gimli the dwarf and Legolas the elf—often command more cinematic interest than Frodo and Sam, even though these two dearest of hobbit-friends are meant to occupy the moral core of Tolkien's story.

The wonder of Tolkien's epic lies in the remarkable gap between the hobbits' small bodily bulk and their nascent maturity of character. It is undeniably true that children are drawn to the hobbits because of their diminutive size, but it is truer still that we keep reading Tolkien's trilogy as adults because the hobbits' struggles are our own. Like the other nobodies of this world, we remain at one with the hobbits in being summoned to resist—if not defeat—the enormous forces of evil. Tolkien demonstrates that, against the craft and power of the demonic, our one hope lies in refusing the policies of the wicked—in repudiating their terroristic tactics by surrendering all coercive force, so that our weakness might become our strength.

Suffice it to observe a single example of Jackson's failure in this all-important regard: the depiction of the hero himself. Whereas Tolkien's Frodo is transcendently summoned against his will to destroy the Ring—only later affirming his mysterious election—Jackson's Frodo volunteers in good Boy Scout fashion to lead the Company. Thus does the film miss the deeply providential character, not only of Frodo's original calling, but also of the entire Quest. Jackson's opacity to the Holy becomes especially evident at

the novel's climactic scene when, at the end of his arduous journey, Frodo arrives at Mount Doom, there to cast the Ring back into the melting volcanic fires where it was originally forged.

Tolkien surprises his readers by having this most heroic of all hobbits ultimately overwhelmed by the coercive power evil. Even in his utmost act of resistance against the Dark Lord, Frodo becomes his virtual puppet. Sauron overtakes Frodo's very voice, making him defiantly refuse to destroy the Ring, as he thrusts it onto his own finger instead. Against all secular optimism about freedom of choice in the face of utter evil, Tolkien shows (like Paul in Romans 7) that the human will can be bent over against its own best desires. Our only hope lies, it follows, in a transcendent goodness that can break the death-grip of evil.

Tolkien ever so subtly discloses the operations of this beneficent Power. After he has bitten the deadly band from Frodo's hand, Gollum topples into the molten lava while dancing his jig of false joy. Though it destroys much good in the process, Tolkien teaches, evil finally destroys itself. Tolkien's world is Christian in the precise Pauline sense: in all things, even in the most sinister wickedness, a providential power is at work to bring about the good.

Jackson fails to give us this tragically defeated and providentially redeemed Frodo. Instead, he has Frodo wrestle the Ring-seizing Gollum to the ground, until they both tumble over the volcanic brink. But of course Frodo clings valiantly to a ledge, as Sam tugs him back to safety, while Gollum plummets with the Ring into the river of fire. It's as if Frodo had succeeded—when the fundamental fact is that he failed, and yet that the Quest succeeds in spite of his failure. In Tolkien, even if not in Jackson, the real Lord of the Rings is not Sauron but Ilûvatar, the God who rules over Middle-earth.

Despite these flaws that are perhaps endemic to a medium whose stress is on the outward rather the inward, we must be grateful to Peter Jackson and his huge company of film-wrights for their cinematic version of Tolkien's great book. Though they have resorted more to spectacle than complexity, they may have inadvertently established the wry truth of the wag's saying that "The world is divided into two halves: those who have read *The Lord of the Rings*—and those who will eventually read it."

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The Gospel in Tolkien, Lewis, and Sayers

BY JOHN D. SYKES, JR.

Through their fiction, the Inklings found the means to display how God's gracious story of human redemption is the truth of history. Three recent studies of Tolkien, Lewis, and Sayers's work make it clear that our hunger not only for their stories, but also for the truth they disclose, remains unsatisfied.

Whatever became of sin? The question asked in the title of psychologist Karl Menninger's best-selling book of thirty years ago continues to be answered for many of us by a group of British writers active at mid-century. Whether the setting was the pre-Christian world of Tolkien's Middle-earth or the more contemporary context of space travel or detective fiction, the Inklings found the most compelling explanation of evil to lie within the frame of the theological category of sin. And it is in the narrative display of sin's dynamic through fiction that these writers offered their most profound treatment of evil. Three recent studies of their work take up this theme.

LEARNING FROM BABEL'S TOWER

The Tolkien explosion triggered by the success of Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* films has produced a bewildering assortment of commentaries. Tolkien was himself a complex and somewhat eccentric man, and so perhaps it should not surprise us to find books about him falling into at least three diverse categories, which for convenience we might call the mythic, Christian, and philological.

By "mythic" I mean those works that are content to explore the nooks and crannies of Tolkien's imagined world within its own terms. For the

most part, these books are aimed at fans seeking to extend the spell of Middle-earth that Tolkien has initiated.

Christian approaches to Tolkien usually take an apologetic stance, seeking to alert readers to themes and lessons that the deeply devout Roman Catholic author included *sub rosa*, so to speak, determined as he was to avoid didacticism and to concentrate on the pre-Christian history of European cultures.

Tom Shippey's *J. R. R. Tolkien: Author of the Century* (London: HarperCollins, 2000; New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2002, 384 pp., $13.00) looks at Tolkien from the standpoint of his professional interest, which was the study of the historical forms of language, specifically of Old English and its relatives. This approach may sound forbiddingly academic, but surely Shippey is correct in amplifying what Tolkien himself frequently said, which was that his stories grew out of language rather than language being the mere medium for narrative. For Tolkien, language had a life of its own that mirrored human thought and echoed national histories. Doubtless he was more than half serious when he claimed that the Tower of Babel represented man's true *felix peccatum*, the fortunate sin through which a great blessing came. Tolkien's views on language are so foreign to most readers and critics that having a guide who shares them is extremely enlightening. And Tom Shippey, himself a philologist, knows the philological side of Tolkien better than anyone.

Not content with small scale investigation of Middle-earth's construction, however, Shippey makes large claims for Tolkien's status, and they are claims which show, largely by contrast, Tolkien's Christian significance. The subtitle of the book indicates Shippey's estimate of Tolkien's importance, which is that Tolkien was the greatest author of the twentieth century by virtue of his having most fully developed the "metaphoric" mode of fantasy to deal with issues of contemporary concern. In opposition to critics he identifies as elitist, Shippey maintains that Tolkien, far from turning his back on his own time, addresses more seriously and satisfactorily questions of power, evil, and cultural relativity than do the modernist authors so often extolled by the literary establishment. According to Shippey, Tolkien belongs in a category of fantasy writers that includes George Orwell, William Golding, Kurt Vonnegut, and Thomas Pynchon—all of them writers who used fantastic settings to confront current problems. This suggestion is interesting, especially so in light of Shippey's observation that nearly all such writers have been combat veterans or otherwise seen the horrors of modern warfare firsthand. But his thesis also has serious limitations, especially when it comes to Tolkien's Christianity. This limitation is well demonstrated in his treatment of evil.

Tolkien's handling of evil in the guise of the Ring, Shippey claims, is both profound and anachronistic. This great source of power cannot be used for good. Any use of it at all will eventually corrupt its wielder, mak-

ing a tyrant of him or her. For Shippey, this feature of the Ring makes it a very modern metaphor; Tolkien's readers are instantly put in mind of the saying derived from Lord Acton: absolute power corrupts absolutely. The twentieth century bore out this truth repeatedly as extreme ideologies of right and left found their champions who spawned concentration camps and gulags. But according to Shippey, this timeliness also makes *The Lord of the Rings* anachronistic, for no pre-modern society finds power itself to be corrupting. This claim seems to be a stretch, however, in view of a tradition that goes back at least to Plato's *Republic*, where Gyges' ring (which also can render its wearer invisible) is the emblem of power used to gain private advantage without the wielder suffering any sort of recrimination.

Shippey also applauds Tolkien for recognizing that evil resides in human nature itself. He notes that like Orwell, Vonnegut, and Golding, Tolkien had seen war waged on a massive scale, and observes, "The life experiences of many men and women in the twentieth century have left them with an unshakable conviction of something wrong, something irreducibly evil in the nature of humanity, but without any very satisfactory explanation for it" (121). But the obvious reply is that the Christian doctrine of original sin has offered such an explanation for centuries, and that Tolkien is simply re-supplying it. Shippey is respectful of Tolkien's Christianity and far from ignorant of Christian treatments of evil, but his own commitments (which are elsewhere) seem to blind him to such manifest connections. Rather than find in Tolkien a deeply Catholic writer who is reviving a Christian vision through his mythic sub-creation, Shippey wants to discover a genius who has plumbed the spirit of our age to the chagrin of the would-be literary connoisseurs who continue to snub his work. Even so, his book is well worth the attention of serious Christian readers of Tolkien, who will learn from arguing with this knowledgeable and personable guide.

EXPLORING THE COSMIC REACH OF EVIL

A very different sort of help is available from David Downing's *Planets in Peril: A Critical Study of C. S. Lewis's Ransom Trilogy* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992, 200 pp., $17.95). Downing's book grows out of years of work on C. S. Lewis at Westmont College. Whereas Shippey shares Tolkien's philological zest but does not endorse his Christianity, Downing clearly approves of Lewis's apologetic project as well as appreciating the more literary aspects of his endeavors. *Planets of Peril* is remarkably balanced and thorough in its treatment of a man known to be opinionated and blustery. The direct concern of the volume is the trilogy of science fiction novels by Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, *Perelandra*, and *That Hideous Strength*. Downing seems to have read every important piece of criticism on these novels; he also has at his fingertips a wealth of biographical and historical detail. Most laudable of all is his knowledge of

Lewis's academic writing. Although most Lewis enthusiasts know that he was an Oxford don, few seem to have read what he wrote in his strictly scholarly capacity. Downing shows that this omission is a mistake; although he avoids tedious summaries, by judiciously lifting passages and themes from Lewis's "other" books and lectures, Downing broadens and deepens our understanding of him. For example, in explaining the figure of the Great Dance that Lewis uses as the image of heaven in *Perelandra*, Downing quotes from a lecture on medieval cosmologists where Lewis mentions that their symbol for the *primum mobile*, the ninth and highest heavenly sphere of the universe, was a "young girl dancing and playing a tambourine." This brief reference ties together what Lewis so admired about pre-modern Western thinking with the striking but somewhat puzzling image at the conclusion of his myth re-told.

In fact, as other reviewers have noted, *Planets in Peril* serves as an excellent general introduction to Lewis. Taking the autobiographical memoir *Surprised by Joy* as his point of departure, Downing mentions major figures and events in Lewis's life through the publication of *That Hideous Strength* in 1945. Except that it does not cover the important final period of his life that was dominated by his relationship with Joy Davidman, what emerges from this book is a firm and rounded sense of the Lewis who produced the works so many have read. I almost wish that instead of filling the empty niche of a good book-length treatment of the space trilogy, Downing had set out to provide an introduction to all the fiction. Those readers who do not count these novels among their favorites may unwittingly pass over one of the better treatments of Lewis.

As Lewis modified his goals for each succeeding volume of the space trilogy, he issued books quite different from each other and of inconsistent worth. While Lewis succeeds at moral allegory in Perelandra, he fails at social satire in That Hideous Strength.

Another reason to be less than happy with the book's focus (and its title) is that these novels simply do not represent Lewis at his best. For one thing, the books themselves are of uneven quality. As Lewis modified his goals for each succeeding volume (changes Downing duly records), he issued books quite different from each other and of inconsistent worth. Although Downing is far from hagiographical in his approach to Lewis and includes shrewd observations on his subject's missteps, he avoids the kind of full-fledged evaluation that would allow him to say, for example, that while Lewis succeeds at moral allegory in *Perelandra*, he fails at social satire in *That Hideous Strength*. These are the

kind of broad strokes that Lewis himself was capable of in his role as critic. Despite this limitation, Downing's is a rich book, elegantly written and accessible without being condescending.

DETECTING DEADLY SIN

Dorothy Sayers may be the least appreciated of the Christian writers connected to the Inklings, although she is hardly unknown. Her Lord Peter Wimsey murder mysteries continue to attract readers and have been the subject of excellent film adaptations. No less a figure than P. D. James, Baroness James of Holland Park and current queen of British mystery writers, serves as the patroness of the Dorothy Sayers Society. While Sayers did not attend the Inklings gatherings, she shared with them a strong connection to Oxford and had friendships with Lewis, Charles Williams, and to a lesser degree, Tolkien. And without doubt she made a major contribution to the mid-century exposition of "mere" Christianity in England with religious plays like *The Man Born to Be King* and collections of crisp essays such as *The Mind of the Maker*.

Janice Brown offers a comprehensive and sympathetic reading of Sayers's published work in *The Seven Deadly Sins in the Work of Dorothy L. Sayers* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1998, 286 pp., $35.00). Her point of departure is Sayers's understanding of sin, which Brown believes was formed in her childhood and was enriched but not significantly altered as she matured. While the fruition of Sayers's long reflection is most visible in the introduction to her translation of the Purgatory section of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Brown demonstrates that from the time Sayers received instruction for confirmation at the Godolphin School in Salisbury she had a firm grasp on the Seven Deadly Sins and, more importantly, that her imagination was stirred by them. Although Sayers apparently abandoned it before completion, an allegorical poem she began between her first and second years at Somerville College, Oxford, had the seven sins as its unifying concept. Thus, from adolescence to the end of her life (Dante was her final passion), Sayers found this scheme to be central to making sense of human nature.

Like Downing's book, Brown's emanates from a deep acquaintance with its subject. And at twice the length, it not only gives a strong impression of Sayers, it provides insightful commentary on the whole range of her work. But the scheme of the Seven Deadly Sins—Pride, Anger, Envy, Sloth, Avarice, Gluttony, and Lust—does have its limitations: although it provides a ready means of organization, it sometimes threatens to become tedious and ill-fitting. Naturally, certain vices are more prominent in a particular work than are others, and a character seldom demonstrates only one. Thus, so far as elucidating Sayers's fiction goes, the scheme is rather hit or miss. When in discussing *Gaudy Nights*, which is set in an Oxford college, Brown observes that Sloth is the sin that leads a scholar to produce

dishonest work and ruin his career, her remarks are revealing. But when she describes the frustrations of Lord Peter and Harriet on their wedding night (which include getting smoked out of their own house) and praises them for not giving way to Anger, the analysis seems strained if not laughable. Still, Brown is on target more often than not, and she does take the freedom to leave her list at times, as in her Dantean discussions of love.

Of particular value in the book are Brown's helpful summary of the history of the Seven Deadly Sins (originally, there were eight, and the contents of the list did vary slightly into the Middle Ages) and a list of virtues that stand as correctives to these particular vices. Readers will also be grateful for trenchant quotations from Sayers's letters and papers, not all of which are published or readily available.

CONCLUSION

In various ways, these three volumes show how Tolkien, Lewis, and Sayers found the means to display how God's gracious story of human redemption is the truth of history, despite human sin. Together these studies are proof that the Inklings make a witness as powerful in this century as it was in the middle of the previous one. Indeed, the hunger not only for their stories, but also for the truth they disclose, remains unsatisfied.

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