

UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

“FAR-OFF GLEAMS OF EVANGELIUM”

**A study of how J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*
reflects the biblical “Kingdom of Heaven”**

A Pro Gradu (MA) Thesis in English

by

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HUMANISTINEN TIEDEKUNTA
KIELTEN LAITOS

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Tutkielman tarkoituksena on tarkastella J. R. R. Tolkienin *Taru Sormusten Herrasta* – teosta (tästäed *TSH*) verraten sen sisältämiä elementtejä ja arvoja Taivasten-, eli Jumalan Valtakunta -käsitteeseen sellaisena, kuin Raamattu ja eritoten Kristuksen opetus sen esittää. Yleisesti ottaen ollaan yhtä mieltä siitä, että Tolkienin kristillisyyden näkyminen hänen teoksessaan, mutta vain implisiittisesti, esimerkiksi maailmankuvana ja arvoina. Kuitenkaan kirjallisuudessa ei ole katseltu tarua Jumalan Valtakunnan näkökulmasta, josta avautuu laajasti erilaisia rinnakkaisuuksia, yhteisiä arvoja ja symboliikkaa. Voidaan siis sanoa, että *TSH* on ikään kuin peili, joka heijastelee Jumalan Valtakuntaa, antaen lukijalleen ”kaukaisia kajastuksia evankeliumista”, jonka Tolkien tunnusti olevan yksi hyvän fantasiakertomuksen päätehtävistä. Tutkielmassa käy ilmi, että vaikka *TSH* ei ole allegoria, eikä sillä ole yksiselitteistä sanomaa, Tolkienilla oli kuitenkin tarkoituksena antaa lukijalleen, paitsi vaikuttavan tarinan, myös hengellistä kokemusta heijastelevan kirjallisen elämyksen. Osittain kristillinen symboliikka oli myös tarkoituksellista, kuten hän itse myönsikin.

Tutkielmassa esitellään ensiksi Tolkien itse, mukaan lukien hänelle ja hänen kirjalliselle tuotannolleen erityisen merkittäviä henkilöitä, kuten C. S. Lewis, jota ilman Tolkien tunnusti, ettei *TSH* olisi koskaan valmistunut. Koska *TSH* kuuluu osana Tolkienin laajempaa mytologiaa, *Silmarillionia*, sen kontekstina esitellään myytti ja fantasiakertomus, sekä *Silmarillionin* ja *Hobitin* (*TSH*:n edeltäjä) keskeiset tapahtumat. Sen ”rinnakkaistodellisuuden”, Taivasten Valtakunnan teologia esitellään myös taustatiedoissa, sekä pyritään vastaamaan kysymyksiin: oliko Tolkienilla missio, ja jos oli, minkälainen, ja miten se näkyy?

Analyysissa käydään läpi *TSH*:n tapahtumat sen keskeisimmän ”Valtakunta-piirteen”, kaitsemuksen (engl. Providence), näkökulmasta. Sen jälkeen katsotaan kuinka *TSH* heijastelee Valtakunnan keskeisiä elementtejä, kuten kuninkuutta ja uhrautumista toisten hyväksi. Valtakuntaa tarkastellaan organisaationa yhteisönä, jonka jälkeen sen keskeisiä arvoja verrataan *TSH*:n arvomaailmaan. Viimeisenä tutkitaan hyvän ja pahan problematiikkaa sellaisena, kuin Raamattu ja *TSH* sitä käsittelee.

Tutkimuksessa vahvistuu, että *TSH*:n ja Taivasten Valtakunnan arvomaailmat ovat hyvinkin samankaltaiset, ja että *TSH*:n lukija saa kokemuksen siitä, mitä Valtakunta ideaalisesti on. Mutta tämä kaikki on tarinan ”pinnan alla”, eikä Tolkien tyrkyttänyt kristillisyyttään. Hän antoi lukijalleen vapauden soveltaa teoksen sanomaa hänelle itselleen mielekkäällä tavalla, riippumatta hänen maailmankatsomuksestaan.

Asiasanat: *Lord of the Rings*, Kingdom of Heaven, myth, fantasy, Tolkien, religion, symbolism, Jesus Christ, Bible, values, good, evil, love, self-sacrifice, eucatastrophe

ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this thesis is to examine J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* (hereafter *LOTR*), comparing its elements and values to *The Kingdom of Heaven*, the spiritual reality which Christ introduces in his teachings. Scholars generally agree that Tolkien’s Christianity can be seen implicitly in his work: for example, in its world view and values. However, Tolkien literature has not examined *LOTR* from the point of view of the Kingdom of Heaven, which reveals a rich well of parallels, common values, and symbolism. It can be said that *LOTR* is like a mirror that reflects the Kingdom, giving the reader “far-off gleams of evangelium,” which Tolkien said was one of the main functions of a good fantasy story. This study reveals that although *LOTR* is not an allegory, nor does it have a definitive message, Tolkien meant to give his reader, not only an impressive story, but also a literary experience akin to religious experience. Tolkien admitted that some of the Christian symbolism in *LOTR* was intentional.

In this work I first introduce Tolkien, along with people who were important to his writing, such as C. S. Lewis, without whom Tolkien said that *LOTR* would never have seen daylight. Because *LOTR* is part of Tolkien’s broader mythology, *The Silmarillion*, I present myth and fantasy as its literary context, and the events of *The Silmarillion* and *The Hobbit* as its narrative context. In the background information I also examine the theological foundations of what I propose is *LOTR*’s parallel reality, the *Kingdom of Heaven*, and I further attempt to answer the questions: Did Tolkien have a mission? If so, what was it like, and how can it be seen?

In the core analysis I first give the story-line of *LOTR* from the viewpoint of its most prominent “Kingdom-feature”, Providence. Then I examine how *LOTR* reflects central elements of the Kingdom, such as kingship and self-sacrifice. I look at the Kingdom as an organic community, and then I compare the core values of the Kingdom to *LOTR*. And finally I look at the battle between Good and Evil as *LOTR* and the Bible depict it.

The findings of this thesis confirm that the values of *LOTR* and the Kingdom are notably similar, and that the reader of *LOTR* does indeed derive from it an experience of what the Kingdom ideally is. But all this is “under the surface”, and Tolkien did not impose his Christianity. He gave his readers the freedom to apply the message of *LOTR* in any way relevant and meaningful to them, regardless of their world view.

Key words: *Lord of the Rings*, Kingdom of Heaven, myth, fantasy, Tolkien, religion, symbolism, Jesus Christ, Bible, values, good, evil, love, self-sacrifice, eucatastrophe

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ABBREVIATIONS

In this work I use abbreviations to refer to certain books by J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis, or otherwise works that I cite frequently.

Books by J.R.R. Tolkien:

H: *The Hobbit*

L: *Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*

LOTR: *The Lord of the Rings*

MC: *The Monsters and the Critics and other essays*

S: *The Silmarillion*

TPR: *Tales from the Perilous Realm*

Books by C.S. Lewis:

CL1: *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis. Volume 1. Family letters 1905-1931*

CL2: *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis. Volume 2. Books, Broadcasts, and the War 1931-1949*

CL3: *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis. Volume 3. Narnia, Carmbridge, and Joy 1950-1963*

The above three volumes edited by W. Hooper, 2007.

JOY: *Surprised by Joy*

4L: *The Four Loves*

Others:

BIO: Carpenter, H. 1977. *J.R.R. Tolkien: A Biography*

MOT: MOT Collins English Dictionary [online]

OT: Old Testament of the Bible

NT: New Testament of the Bible

1 INTRODUCTION

“In The Lord of the Rings the conflict is not about ‘freedom’ [. . .] It is about God, and His sole right to divine honour” – J.R.R. Tolkien (*L*: 243).

This statement may come as a surprise to many, just like Tolkien’s claim that *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-1955, hereafter *LOTR*) is a “fundamentally religious and Catholic work” (*L*: 172). How can that be, since God is never mentioned, nor is there any form of religion whatsoever present in the story? Furthermore, Tolkien often said that he disliked allegory (e.g. *BIO*: 189, *L*: 145,174) and emphatically repeated in his letters that *LOTR* is not an allegory of Christianity or anything else. It is a fantasy-story, and in a lecture Tolkien said that a fundamental element of good fantasy is what he called the “eucatastrophe” – a good catastrophe, or a sudden, unexpected happy ending. He wrote: “[. . .] in the ‘eucatastrophe’ we see in a brief vision that the answer may be greater – it may be a far-off gleam or echo of *evangelium* in the real world” (*MC*: 155, emphasis in original). Tolkien thus asserts that fantasy can reflect Christian religious experience.

Kreeft (2005: 65) describes *LOTR* as a Christian novel in the sense meant by Flannery O’Connor: that is, not a novel *about* Christians, Christianity or a Christian world, but one in which the Christian truth is “used as a light to see the world by”, or “light looked along” instead of “looked at”. One of the purposes of this thesis is to look along this light at *LOTR* and study how it illuminates the story, pondering to some extent what it was that Tolkien wanted to communicate to his readers.

LOTR is a fantasy story from an imaginary, ancient period of time in our world. It tells of the quest to destroy an evil Ring, whose owner can dominate the people of the earth. Tolkien has skilfully created an atmosphere of growing peril, with enough havens of beauty and rest along the way to keep the suspense bearable. Amidst the increasing threat and horror of evil, it celebrates the “little” things in life: nature, food, peace, friends, laughter, and singing. *LOTR* is masterly in its descriptive language, and Tolkien has “sub-created” an incredibly detailed world with its own geography, peoples, and languages, and a sense of vast historicity behind the events.

LOTR was voted “Book of the Century” in three separate UK polls in the 1990’s (Rosebury 2003: 2). The reaction in literary circles was shock. “Tolkien – that’s for children, isn’t it? Or the adult slow [. . .] It just shows the folly of these polls, the folly

of teaching people to read. Close all the libraries. Use the money for something else. It's another black day for British culture" (Howard Jacobson in Pearce 1999: 1-2). This is but one example of the reactions of the learned literature professionals, whose main argument against *LOTR* was its alleged escapism. In 1999 Amazon.com arranged a poll in the USA to determine something even greater – the “Book of the Millennium”. To the horror of the critics, *LOTR* won again (Grossman 2002).

With Peter Jackson's motion picture trilogy (2001-2003) *LOTR* rose to the spotlight again and its already vast popularity exploded as a new generation took the story as its own. The book continues to sell millions of copies, 35 years after its author's death. Instead of the elitist snobbery of the “literati”, who condemn the popular, uneducated taste of the masses, I think one should try to find out what it is that makes *LOTR* so popular. It would be out of the scope of this thesis to discuss all the elements that make it so appealing to such a wide readership across generational lines: for example, its rich, descriptive language; its ideal, but true-to-life characters that one can easily identify with; the sense of historicity behind the story; and the incredible detail and coherence of Tolkien's world. Each of these elements would be worthy of its own study, but I will focus on another factor. I propose that one reason for the success of *LOTR* is that it gives its reader an emotional experience of “life as it should be”, or a glimpse of heaven. One of the goals of this thesis is to study what these “gleams of evangelium” (*MC*: 155) are, and how they shine from the story.

Scholars mostly agree that Tolkien's Christianity appears implicitly in *LOTR* (e.g. Duriez 2005; Kreeft 2005; Pearce 1999; Shippey 1982). I agree, but I will go further and attempt to give evidence for Tolkien having a kind of Christian mission or vision behind *LOTR*. Having said this I must emphasize that I do not propose that Tolkien had a conscious mission, but more of an unconscious one – I might even say that the *mission had him* instead of him having a mission. I believe this mission guided him subconsciously to begin with, then consciously in the revision, as he admitted in a letter (*L*: 172). Tolkien said that he had omitted all religious practices, but “the religious element is absorbed into the story and the symbolism” (*L*: 172). But first and foremost Tolkien was trying to write a good story, not an exposition of Christianity. That is why *LOTR* is so universally appealing. Tolkien did not impose any beliefs on his readers: he left them free to apply the message in any way they feel appropriate and relevant to themselves.

1.1 *Gleams of Evangelium: the “Kingdom-viewpoint”*

During my studies of theology I continually met with Christ’s concept of “The Kingdom of Heaven”, which is actually at the centre of all his teachings. Christ’s depictions of the Kingdom are anarchical and radical – an uncontrolled (at least by humankind) realm of Goodness penetrating our existence in the world. It cannot be placed neatly in any single Christian creed, nor can any specific church own it. It seems to pay no heed to the walls of established churches, as it functions through individual people dedicated to its principles and the Person behind them.

One example of the Kingdom affecting the world (in my view) is the significant work of Bono, the lead singer of the Irish rock band U2, to bring debt relief to the poor countries of the world. The Kingdom can also be seen in the music of U2, as Leinonen (2003) points out how Bono often uses biblical motives in his lyrics. Like Tolkien Bono does not impose his faith on his listeners, but The Kingdom is like an inner radiance in the music. Because I saw gleams of the same Kingdom in *LOTR*, it felt natural for me to take this viewpoint for my thesis.

As mentioned above, many books on Tolkien discuss how his Christian world-view is implicitly visible in the narrative. But I have not found any that look at *LOTR* strictly from the viewpoint of the “Kingdom of Heaven” as the spiritual state of being that Christ introduces in his teaching. In many ways *LOTR* can be seen as a mirror that reflects The Kingdom. This is then a descriptive and comparative study, as I will look at the parallels between *LOTR* and The Kingdom of Heaven, using biblical references as points of comparison wherever there is an evident parallel or similarity.

Naturally I fear I might be found guilty of what Tolkien’s character, the wise Gandalf warns about, when he says: “He that breaks a thing to find out what it is has left the path of wisdom” (*LOTR*: 252). In fact, Tolkien applies this directly to literary criticism, and says he has no sympathy for an analytical mind set towards literature (*L*: 414). In the same letter he emphasizes that narrative art is meant to be enjoyed, not analysed. I sympathize with Tolkien in this. My first reading of *LOTR* was a powerful *experience* for me, and I will do my best to avoid breaking the story’s spell by holding to a descriptive and comparative approach. I acknowledge that theoretic analysis always steals something from the effect that fine literature has on its reader, and I must strive not to analytically “dissect” *LOTR* or “betray Tolkien” with my work.

1.2 Structure

First I will introduce J.R.R. Tolkien, describing the main events and relationships in his life that affected his writing. A large portion of this chapter will be dedicated to Tolkien's relationship with C.S. Lewis and his literary club, *The Inklings*, since Lewis and his friends were so crucial to Tolkien's writing. Chapter 3 presents the broader context of *LOTR*: myth and fantasy literature. This includes a detailed description of Tolkien's own views of myth, since they are vital to an understanding of *LOTR*.

In chapter 4 I will examine evidence that points to Tolkien's purposes in writing *LOTR*: whether he had a mission or not; and if so, what that implies. Chapter 5 offers an introduction to the theology of the Kingdom of Heaven, to establish my point of comparison. Chapter 6 comprises the story-lines of *The Silmarillion* and *The Hobbit*, placing *LOTR* in its narrative context of Tolkien's mythology.

Chapter 7 marks the beginning of my core analysis, as I present the story-line of *LOTR* from the perspective of Providence, its foremost "Kingdom-feature". In chapter 8 I will present parallels between *LOTR* and the basic elements of The Kingdom. Chapter 9 looks at The Kingdom as a community and compares it with the Fellowship of the Ring. Chapter 10 is about some of the core values common to both *LOTR* and The Kingdom. The final chapter of my analysis concerns the battle between Good and Evil as depicted by Tolkien and the Bible. This will involve a study of both Personal evil, the devil-figures of the Bible and Tolkien, and inner evil, sin.

To summarize the purposes of this thesis: Tolkien literature has acknowledged that his Christianity is implicitly present in *LOTR*, but it has not paid much attention to Tolkien's intentions and purpose for writing it. Some, like Kreeft (2005), have examined *LOTR* philosophically; others, like Bruner and Ware (2001), have taken a devotional approach (yet maintaining a scholarly stance). But I have not found any literature that examines *LOTR* strictly in light of Christ's Kingdom-teaching.

There is evidence that suggests that *LOTR* was not only a fantasy story for Tolkien, but it also served a religious purpose. I propose that it not only reflects The Kingdom of Heaven inherently, it was also *meant* to do so. Once this is established, I will show *how* Tolkien gives his readers these "gleams of evangelium" without imposing them.

I will draw on Tolkien's own works, Christian theology, Tolkien literature, and the Bible, citing passages that Tolkien may have subconsciously (or consciously) drawn on when he wrote *LOTR*. Other literary sources include works on myth and fantasy. Tolkien's own views of myth and fantasy will be discussed in detail.

2 J. R. R. TOLKIEN – The Author's Life

This chapter introduces the man behind *LOTR*. I will consider the main events of his life, especially the experiences that affected Tolkien as a writer and scholar, drawing heavily on Carpenter (1977, an official biography, hereafter *BIO*), Scull & Hammond (2006a+b), and Tolkien's letters (*L*). Other sources will be mentioned in context, along with specific quotations from the above mentioned main sources.

2.1 Childhood and Education

John Ronald Reuel Tolkien was born on 3 January 1892 in Bloemfontein, South Africa, where his father, Arthur Tolkien, was a banker. Ronald remembered little of his early childhood in South Africa: mainly the blazing sun, the dryness, and running through the grass in panic after being bitten by a tarantula. Their home nurse had sucked out the poison, saving the little boy's health – perhaps even his life. Not the spider bite, but South Africa's extreme climate broke Ronald's health. His mother, Mabel, hated the land and was happily obliged to take him and his younger brother Hilary back to England. Arthur stayed behind, intending to follow the family later. He never did. He contracted rheumatic fever, followed by a severe haemorrhage, which left Ronald and Hilary fatherless on the 15th of February, 1896.

The Tolkiens moved via Mabel's parents' home to the countryside of Birmingham, which Ronald grew to love and which was reflected in his writing. The old Sarehole Mill close to their home showed up in *LOTR*, as well as an old, grouchy farmer, whom they named The Black Ogre (Ogre and Orc are synonyms) after he had chased Ronald off his lands for picking mushrooms (*BIO* 21, cf. *LOTR*: 89-90).

An event that immensely influenced Ronald's life and writing was Mabel joining the Roman Catholic Church. This evoked the outright hostility of both Mabel's and the Tolkien family. Mabel and her sons were deprived of contact – and the financial aid – of nearly all their relatives. But the boys grew attached to the Catholic Church and found a strong Christian faith. Mabel enrolled them in the Grammar School of St Philip for a Catholic education. There she befriended Father Francis Xavier Morgan, who became a father-figure for the boys – literally so, when on 14 November, 1904, Mabel died in diabetic coma and Father Francis became their guardian. He arranged accommodation for the boys in the city. From then on Ronald had an aching longing for the countryside, to which he attached the warm feelings of his mother's memory.

Ronald progressed to King Edward's School, where his aptitude for languages grew. He was not content with knowing languages technically; he enjoyed the aesthetics of spoken language, and he wanted to understand why they had developed as they did. This led him into the field of philology. At King Edward's Ronald formed an unofficial literary club, the TCBS (Tea Club and Barrovian Society [after Barrowe's Stores, where they had their tea]), which became for him a powerful literary and religious influence. At meetings Tolkien recited to the others passages from classic literature like *Beowulf*, *Pearl*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the Norse mythology *Völsungasaga*, and the Finnish mythological epic *Kalevala*.

At the house where he lived Ronald met a beautiful young woman named Edith Bratt. They had a romance that strained Ronald's relationship with Father Francis, who was training Ronald for Oxford and would not tolerate the distraction caused by a girl. Caught between love and his duty to his guardian, Tolkien was rather depressed. He did his duty, and agreed not even to write to Edith until he was "of age", twenty one. Ronald failed his first entrance exam to Oxford. His second attempt was successful, but before he started his studies, in the autumn of 1911, he went on a walking tour from Austria to Switzerland via mountain paths. There he was nearly killed in a rock-slide, as a boulder crashed by, missing him by a mere foot. Tolkien lent this experience to *LOTR*, as his characters also meet a rock-slide as they pass through mountains on their quest (*LOTR*: 281-2).

At Oxford Tolkien was distracted from what he was "supposed to study" by his obsession with languages. His main linguistic side-track was Welsh, which had fascinated him since childhood, having seen Welsh names on freight cars of passing trains. His second "language romance" was with Finnish. He said of Finnish grammar: "it was like discovering a complete wine-cellar filled with bottles of an amazing wine of a kind and flavour never tasted before. It quite intoxicated me" (*L*: 214). This led him to "Finnicize" his own invented Elvish language, Quenya.

2.2 A Woman, a War, and Work

As the clock struck midnight before 3 January 1913, when Ronald was officially of age, he wrote to Edith again. But she had already been engaged, mainly for fear that Ronald had forgotten her. Edith found herself still in love with Tolkien, and she dissolved her engagement, but at a price. Marrying Tolkien entailed her joining the Catholic Church. Like Mabel, she was evicted from her relatives' home and care.

The First World War broke out in 1914 and Tolkien found a way to enlist and yet continue his studies, by joining the Officers Training Corps at Oxford. At this time he worked on a re-telling of the tragic *Kalevala* story of *Kullervo*, who unknowingly commits incest, and upon finding out his mistake commits suicide (*BIO*: 73).

Tolkien's version grew into *The Children of Hurin*, an essential part of his mythology.

In his final examination in English Language and Literature, Tolkien excelled, achieving First Class Honours and good prospects of an academic career – provided he survived the war. On 22 March 1916 Ronald and Edith were married, and on 6 June he arrived in France. Three weeks later he was sent to the Front. He detested the higher-ranking officers, arrogant veterans of India and the Boer war, who ill-treated the ranks. An officer himself, he respected and identified more with the uneducated common soldiers. Sam Gamgee, in Tolkien's eyes the central hero of *LOTR*, was modelled after those humble and simple, but heroic men (*BIO*: 81).

Tolkien called his experiences the 'animal horror' of war: long nightly marches; stumbling over dead bodies and debris in trenches; decaying bodies in no-man's-land; desolation; mutilated trees; and lifeless fields of mud. It was like Mordor, the evil realm in *LOTR*. Tolkien's battalion took heavy losses, and it was trench fever that Tolkien owed his survival. It got worse in field hospital, so he was sent to England on 8 November 1916. It kept recurring and was accompanied by complications and further illnesses, so the army could not send him back to the Front. The evil of Tolkien's illness brought with it something good: he survived the war.

Before re-entering Academia, Tolkien was hired to work on The New English Dictionary. This suited him well for his love of language. In 1920 he received the post of Reader in English Language at the University of Leeds and the Tolkien family moved north. Tolkien continued his mythology, but because he kept on revising and polishing it, he never finished it. Edith gave birth to their third son and they named him Christopher Reuel Tolkien in honour of Christopher Wiseman (of the TCBS). He became the carrier of Tolkien's legacy and finished his father's mythology.

In 1925 Tolkien received the chair of Professor of Anglo-Saxon at Oxford. He held that post for twenty years. He proved an exceptional philologist and teacher, who made substantial curriculum changes in his department. Tolkien started a literary club called the *Kolbitar*, or "Coal-biters", who read aloud Norse mythologies.

2.3 C.S. Lewis

One of the Coal-biters, Clive Staples Lewis, was Fellow in English at Magdalen College in Oxford from 1924 to 1954. When they first met, Lewis said of Tolkien: “a smooth, pale, fluent little chap [. . .] No harm in him: only needs a smack or so.” (*BIO*: 143) They began on opposing sides in the “university trenches”, as Lewis was on the Lit. (literature) and Tolkien on the Lang. side (linguistics). In *Surprised by Joy* (1955, hereafter *JOY*) Lewis wrote: “Friendship with [. . .] [Tolkien] marked the breakdown of two old prejudices. At my first coming into the world I had been (implicitly) warned never to trust a Papist, and at my first coming into the English Faculty (explicitly) never to trust a philologist. Tolkien was both” (*JOY*: 252). Their mutual love for Norse mythology was the bridge between the men. Lewis became Tolkien’s closest friend and the key supporter of the curriculum changes Tolkien made to unite the faculty’s opposing sides. Tolkien’s love for philology had sprung from literature, and he felt that the disciplines should go together, not in opposition.

Lewis was an excellent orator and lecturer, and he drew full auditoriums wherever he taught. In many ways he was an opposite of Tolkien: he was outspoken, loud, ruddy, short, and had none of the athletic appearance Tolkien did. Tolkien wrote of him that he was a “natural clown” (*L*: 350).

2.3.1 An atheist hunted down by God

C.S. Lewis is widely known as the author of the children’s fantasy-series of *Narnia* (1949-54) and as a popular Christian apologist. But when he and Tolkien first met, he was far from that – he was an aggressive atheist. He attacked Christianity bitterly, calling it a “tempting illusion that must be overcome and destroyed in one’s life” (Duriez 2005: 41). Lewis discusses his long intellectual process of returning to Christianity in detail in *JOY*. It disturbed him that his most intellectual friends were all Christians, as were the writers of the most enriching books he had read. His world was shaken further when a friend of his, “the hardest boiled of all the atheists” he knew, remarked to Lewis that “the evidence for the historicity of the Gospels was really surprisingly good. [. . .] ‘Rum thing’, he went on. ‘It almost looks as if it had really happened once’” (*JOY*: 260).

Lewis (quoted in Duriez 2005: 45) said that he had never searched for God, and that it was the opposite: God had hunted him down like a deer. Lewis was thankful it

was that way, because no one could say it was wish fulfilment, since he never wished to find God. Nevertheless, God led him first to a form of theism¹. At this point Lewis had a long, nightly discussion with Tolkien and Hugo Dyson. Lewis complained that he could not understand how the life and death of someone two thousand years ago could help modern people in England, except perhaps as an *example* (*CLI*: 976). He insisted that he should understand the Crucifixion and Resurrection before he could embrace them. Tolkien and Dyson reminded him that in pagan myths he had been touched by the notion of sacrifice and the dying and reviving god. But now from the Gospels he was demanding a clear meaning beyond the myth. They challenged him to apply his appreciation of sacrifice in myth to the “true myth”.

Here Lewis had given his typical modernist counterargument: “But myths are lies, even though lies breathed through silver” (*BIO*: 146-147). Tolkien refuted this, arguing that like language is not the reality of things, but our invented terms for real things, myth is invention about truth. Tolkien continued:

We have come from God [. . .] and inevitably the myths woven by us, though they contain error, will also reflect a splintered fragment of the true light, the eternal truth that is with God. Indeed, only by myth-making, only by becoming a ‘sub-creator’ and inventing stories, can Man ascribe to the state of perfection that he knew before the Fall. Our myths may be misguided, but they steer however shakily towards the true harbour, while materialistic ‘progress’ leads only to a yawning abyss and the Iron Crown of the power of evil. (*BIO*: 147)

Tolkien convinced Lewis that the Gospel was meant to affect its recipient just like all myths do, except that it actually took place in history. The Gospels demanded both an emotional and an intellectual response: neither was sufficient alone (*BIO*: 148).

Soon after this Lewis wrote: “I have just passed on from believing in God to definitely believing in Christ – in Christianity [. . .] My long night talk with Dyson and Tolkien had a good deal to do with it” (*CLI*: 974). He called himself “the most reluctant convert in all England” (*JOY*: 266). Tolkien, from his perspective, wrote in his diary: “Friendship with Lewis compensates for much, and besides giving constant pleasure and comfort has done me much good from the contact with a man at once honest, brave, intellectual – a scholar, a poet, and a philosopher – and a lover, at least after a long pilgrimage, of Our Lord” (*BIO*:148). One can say that Tolkien was the “evangelist” who intellectually convinced a man whom many Western Christians consider one of the greatest Christian communicators of all time (Coren 2001: 56).

¹ The form of belief in one God as the transcendent creator and ruler of the universe that does not necessarily entail further belief in divine revelation. (MOT Collins English Dictionary)

2.3.2 The Inklings

Lewis and Tolkien were invited to an undergraduate literary club called *The Inklings*. The original club dissolved, but its name survived, as Lewis and Tolkien continued meeting in Lewis' rooms at Magdalen College to read to each other and critique their texts. Gradually others joined them. Lewis wrote: "We have a sort of informal club called the Inklings: the qualifications (as they have informally evolved) are a tendency to write, and Christianity" (*CL2*: 183). Tolkien was the most eager reader of the Inklings. Lewis especially enjoyed *LOTR*, and was even moved to tears by chapter X of book 4, "The Choices of Master Samwise" (I will describe the situation in chapter 7). Tolkien (*L*: 362) wrote that he owed Lewis an unpayable debt because he had long been Tolkien's only audience, and without Lewis his writing would have remained a private hobby. Tolkien said: "But for his interest and unceasing eagerness for more I should never have brought *The L. of the R.* [*sic*] to a conclusion" (*L*: 362). Lewis wrote from his perspective near the end of his life:

I don't think Tolkien influenced me, and I am certain I didn't influence him. That is, didn't influence *what* he wrote. My continual encouragement, carried to the point of nagging, influenced him v. much to write at all with that gravity and at that length. In other words I acted as a midwife not as a father. (*CL3*: 1458)

It is undoubtedly to the deep friendship of Lewis and the Inklings (not to forget the TCBS) that Tolkien owed his concept of "fellowship" (see pp. 76-78). Duriez (2003: 92) notes that they were united by their literary interests, Christianity, and a joint "mission against the *Zeitgeist*". "He [Lewis] and Tolkien increasingly saw themselves as against the modern spirit, against modernism both as a literary movement and, more deeply, as an intellectual stance" (*ibid.* 92). Duriez comments further:

At the core of the friendship of Tolkien and Lewis was their shared antipathy to the modern world. [. . .] They were not against science or scientists, but the cult of science, found in modernism, and its tendency to monopolize knowledge, denying alternative approaches to knowledge through the arts, religion, and ordinary human wisdom. Tolkien and Lewis felt that this mentality was a malaise that posed a serious threat to humanity. (Duriez 2003: 103)

2.4.3 Growing apart

However, after 13 years their friendship began to wane. The first reason was in their different social temperaments. Tolkien was introverted and valued few, but deep friendships, which may be seen in his portrayal of pairs of best friends achieving great things in *LOTR*; Lewis, the extrovert, felt "the more the merrier" (Duriez 2005: 78-79). In his book *The Four Loves* (1960, hereafter *4L*) Lewis wrote of how every new

friend in a group brought out new aspects of the existing members, which would otherwise not be known. He gave an example: “Now that Charles [Williams] is dead, I shall never again see Ronald’s [Tolkien] reaction to a specifically Caroline joke. Far from having more of Ronald, having him ‘to myself’ now that Charles is away, I have less of Ronald. Hence true friendship is the least jealous of loves” (4*L*: 74).

To an extent Tolkien shared this view of friendship. But in this particular case Tolkien saw Williams, not as enriching their friendship, but as an intruder. He wrote: “[. . .] many people still regard me as one of his [Lewis’] intimates. Alas! that ceased to be so some ten years ago. We were separated first by the sudden apparition of Charles Williams, and then by his marriage” (*L*: 341). The word *apparition* tells much of Tolkien’s sentiments: a sudden appearance, usually of a ghost or evil spirit. Perhaps this feeling was amplified by Williams’ preoccupation with the occult, a theme often present in his works that Tolkien had extreme reservations with. It may well be that Tolkien directed in part to Williams the words of Elrond in *LOTR* concerning the fall of Saruman the Wise: “It is perilous to study too deeply the arts of the enemy, for good or for evil” (*LOTR*: 258). Or perhaps the words were meant as a warning of Williams’ influence to Lewis, Tolkien’s “primary listener”. Nevertheless, Tolkien’s friendship with Lewis had been the very core of the Inklings, and Tolkien laments that Lewis was so impressed with Williams that he spent more time with him and less with Tolkien, and that Williams’ influence spoiled Lewis’ trilogy (*L*: 349).

The second major dividing issue was Lewis’ marriage to Joy Davidman Gresham, an American divorcé from a catastrophic marriage. Tolkien held strongly the Catholic conviction that marriage is a sacrament and it is sin to divorce, or to re-marry, even in disastrous cases like Joy’s. Tolkien wrote of his convictions concerning marriage to Lewis (*L*: 59-62) in response to a booklet he had written. Lewis was more liberal and felt that the ideals of Christian marriage should not be forced on non-believers, so he had proposed separating Christian marriage and societal marriage. Knowing Tolkien’s strong opinions, Lewis kept his marriage a secret from him. Tolkien heard of it months later elsewhere, and was offended. It enhanced Tolkien’s feeling that Lewis had not “come all the way” when he had returned to Christianity (Duriez 2003: 152). Tolkien believed that the Catholic Church was the true Church, the Vicar of Christ, and all others were distortions or short-comings of Christianity, although he did feel sympathy for ecumenical developments of “Christian re-union” (*L*: 394).

Another cause for the authors growing apart was their emerging differences in literary purposes. They had started with like minds about fantasy and literature in general, encouraging each other as writers. In fact, it might be argued, as Glycer (2007) does, that neither *LOTR* nor Lewis' *Narnia* -series would ever have been written without their enriching relationship. But when Lewis began to gain popular status as a Christian philosopher and apologist, Tolkien disapproved. He felt that defending and explicating Christianity should be left to the professional clergy (Duriez 2003: 120). Nevertheless, when Lewis' Christian writing began to arouse hostility in Oxford and literary circles, Tolkien stood in his defence. For example, when Lewis had been labelled ascetic and life-denying by a newspaper, Tolkien responded: “‘Ascetic Mr Lewis’—I ask you! He put away three pints in a very short session this morning, and said he was ‘going short for lent’” (*L*: 68).

A further separating factor was Lewis' *Narnia* -series. Tolkien disapproved of its “cocktail” of distorted mythologies, where figures from several different mythical sources were altered and brought into the other world of Narnia (Glycer 2007: 85-86). But what Tolkien disliked the most of Narnia was that it was an evident allegory of Christianity. Lewis himself disagreed, saying that it was close to allegory, but not quite allegory *per se*. It was assuming another world and therein assuming a Creator, Redeemer, and Judge (Duriez 2003: 131). Nevertheless, Tolkien felt that Lewis was deserting their battle to “establish fantasy for grown-ups” (Duriez 2003: 129).

Along with the decline of Tolkien and Lewis' friendship followed the withering of the Inklings. One decisive cause for this was, however, not in their estrangement, but in a member's childish veto. Hugo Dyson, Tolkien's comrade in “evangelizing” Lewis, refused to listen to Tolkien's readings of the final volume of *LOTR*. Christopher Tolkien describes the clash in an interview cited by Glycer:

I remember [. . .] my father's pain, his shyness, which couldn't take Hugo's extremely rumbustious approach [. . .] And Lewis, who I deeply admired and loved – had a strong, strong manner. And he would say “Shut up Hugo. [claps hands] Come on, Tollers [= Tolkien],” And *The Lord of the Rings* would begin with Hugo lying on the couch, and lolling and shouting and saying, “Oh God, no more Elves.” (Glycer 2007: 88)

Dyson's behaviour made Tolkien refuse to read at all if he was present. This disappointed the other members, especially Lewis. And since readings of *LOTR* had been at the heart of Inklings meetings, it gnawed at the group's very purpose. Within three years of this, the Inklings had ceased to exist as a group (Glycer 2007: 88).

In spite of their estrangement, Tolkien respected Lewis and repaid his support by promoting his election to Cambridge as Professor of Medieval and Renaissance Literature (*CL3*: 469-470). Lewis held that chair until a stroke hospitalized him in July 1963. He died in November that same year. Tolkien described his feelings after Lewis' death: "So far I have felt the normal feelings of a man of my age – like an old tree that is losing all its leaves one by one: this feels like an axe-blow near the roots. Very sad that we should have been so separated in the last years; but our time of close communion endured in memory for both of us" (*L*: 341).

2.4 Tolkien the story-teller

Tolkien's story-telling career began as a father spontaneously inventing bed-time stories for his children. He later ventured to write some of the stories down. Most of them were never finished in written form, but some survived and were published, for example *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil* (1962), a character Tolkien incorporated in *LOTR*. He also wrote long and detailed letters to his children, in the name of Father Christmas. These were published posthumously as *The Father Christmas Letters* (1976). Also published posthumously was *Roverandom* (1998), a story about the adventures of a dog that has been turned into a toy by a wizard.

The "turning point in his career", like that of Bilbo, when he found the Ring in *The Hobbit* (1937, p.90), happened while marking students' exam papers, and one was empty. He wrote on it: "*In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit*", not knowing what hobbits were. He decided to find out, and began writing of the hobbit Bilbo Baggins, modelled after common English folks. He gave the typescript to a friend while she was recovering from the flu. A student doing a project for a publisher happened to visit the lady and read the manuscript. She suggested it to the publisher, and *The Hobbit (H)* was published in 1937. Thus, almost by accident, Tolkien was plunged onto a literary journey that made him the author of the century.

With *The Hobbit's* success, Tolkien's hopes arose for the publishing of the bulk of his mythology, but to satisfy popular demand the publisher asked instead for a sequel to *The Hobbit*. Tolkien felt he had run out of motifs for hobbits, and reluctantly began writing. He started on the same note as *The Hobbit*, but soon the story "took an unpremeditated turn" (*L*: 34). It grew much darker, and Tolkien let the story have its own life, allowing him to fulfil his ideas about fantasy primarily for adults.

Extra work at Oxford, domestic issues, illnesses, and so forth, kept interrupting Tolkien's imaginative process, and it looked like he would never finish *LOTR*. While it was in progress, he wrote *Leaf by Niggle* (1945) an allegory (ironically, since he disliked allegory) of himself as a writer struggling with his work. *LOTR* was so laborious and took so long (13 years) that he wrote: "But for the encouragement of C.S.L. I do not think I should ever have completed or offered for publication *The Lord of the Rings*" (*L*: 366). It was finally published in three separate volumes (1954-1955). Tolkien wrote several other books (mainly short stories), but his mythology, titled *The Silmarillion* (1977) only saw daylight four years after his death, completed and edited by his son Christopher.

Tolkien never got used to fame. Being a dutiful person, he personally answered his entire myriad of fan-letters until his publishers took some of the load. His house was full of gifts and people would call on his door at untimely hours. He said: "Being a cult figure in one's own lifetime I am afraid is not at all pleasant" (*L*: 418).

Upon Tolkien's retirement from Oxford in 1959 Edith's health continued to deteriorate, and they readily moved to a home easier to keep in Bournemouth, with an unlisted telephone number and address. Edith died in 1971, and Tolkien was offered a flat with room service on campus at Oxford, so he moved back for his final years. Tolkien died in 1973.

2.5 J. R. R. Tolkien's most important works

Prose and fiction

1937 – *The Hobbit or There and Back Again*

1945 – *Leaf by Niggle*

1954 – *The Fellowship of the Ring* – *LOTR* vol.1

1954 – *The Two Towers* – *LOTR* vol.2

1955 – *The Return of the King* – *LOTR* vol.3

1962 – *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil and Other Verses from the Red Book*

1964 – *Tree and Leaf* (On Fairy-Stories and Leaf by Niggle in book form)

1966 – *The Tolkien Reader* (The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm's Son, On Fairy-Stories, Leaf by Niggle, Farmer Giles of Ham, and The Adventures of Tom Bombadil)

1967 – *Smith of Wootton Major*

Academic works

1922 *A Middle English Vocabulary*

1925 *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, co-edited with E.V. Gordon,

- 1937 *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics* (publication of his 1936 lecture on Beowulf criticism)
- 1939 *On Fairy-Stories* (1939 Andrew Lang lecture, shortened version of an essay, published in full in 1947)
- 1966 Contributions to *The Jerusalem Bible* (as translator and lexicographer)
- 1966 *Tolkien on Tolkien* (autobiographical)

Posthumous publications

- 1976 *The Father Christmas Letters*
- 1977 *The Silmarillion*
- 1980 *Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth*
- 1981 *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien* (eds. Christopher Tolkien and Humphrey Carpenter)
- 1983 *The Monsters and the Critics* (an essay collection)
- 1983–1996 *The History of Middle-earth*
- 1998 *Roverandom*
- 2007 *The Children of Húrin*

3 MYTH AND FANTASY

The Lord of the Rings is a story of an era within Tolkien's mythology, *The Silmarillion* (*S*). What then is a myth? What are the functions of a myth? Can Tolkien's work be considered a real myth? These are the type of questions this chapter will deal with. I will start by looking at myth more generally by giving the basic tenets of myth theories and comparing them with Tolkien's work. The second section concerns the truthfulness of myths, followed by a detailed discussion of Tolkien's own views of myth. An overview of Fantasy literature will conclude this chapter.

3.1 What is a myth?

A comprehensive explanation of all theories of myth would be impossible here, but G.S. Kirk (1984: 53-61) gives a basic overview of all major, universalistic myth theories. Kirk says that all universal theories may apply to any number of specific myths, but that none of them apply to all. Kirk (*ibid*: 54-55) says that the only all-embracing idea that can be said about myth is that they are "sacred tales", involving the supernatural element of God or the gods and their effects on humans and the world. But even that definition has its problems, so Kirk steps further back and gives "traditional oral tale" as a broad definition of myth (*ibid*: 57). This implies that

Tolkien's work as Mythopoeia (= deliberate creation of written myth) falls out of the category of a genuine myth, insofar as a myth is understood as an oral tale passed on from generation to generation.

I will now give brief summaries of such major theories of myth that Tolkien's mythology can be compared with. All of the following can be found in Kirk's article (1984: 53-61). The nineteenth century "nature-myth" school held that all myths are allegories of natural processes. If we are to respect Tolkien's claims that his works are not allegorical, this does not apply to his Middle-Earth. Furthermore, Tolkien refuted the nature myth in his lecture "On Fairy-stories". He gives grounds to believe that it is more probable for myths to sprout from both natural and historical data simultaneously, not from one or the other first (*MC*: 123-4).

Andrew Lang (in Kirk 1984: 54) theorized that all myths are about the origins of the Universe. This does apply to Tolkien, because his mythology is basically a story of the creation and history of the cosmos. This includes an explanation of moral issues of existence as well, such as the presence of evil in the world, as Tolkien gives in *The Silmarillion* his own mythological version of the Fall (*S*: 15-24). Tolkien says: "there cannot be any 'story' without a fall – all stories are ultimately about the fall [. . .]" (*L*: 147). He means that all myths that concern the origins of the cosmos must also contain an explanation for evil, since it is so real an element of human existence.

Applied to Tolkien, Freud's theory that myths are reflections of unconscious fears and desires (Kirk 1984: 54) may contain some truth, or at least "the other side of the coin". *LOTR* may demonstrate Tolkien's desire to see the happy ending, the ultimate victory of Good over Evil applied to our real world. As a Christian he believed in the Revelation (19-22) account of the ultimate victory of Good, so his work may be seen as a reflection of both his fears and his faith.

Ernst Cassirer's theory that myths are excited responses to special aspects of the world (Kirk 1984: 54) may apply to Tolkien as well, if his work is seen as a way to deal with Evil, and to inspire hope of Good amidst it. Radcliffe-Brown (*ibid*: 54) says myths are mechanisms of the social order. Insofar as he means that myths serve to make the masses comply with a *status quo* in society, or to submit to the social order, it does not apply to Tolkien who would certainly not have had such a use for his myth.

Another literary theorist who may help to classify *LOTR* is Northrop Frye, as cited by Shippey (1982: 159-166). Frye divides literature into five modes based on the relationships between heroes, environments, and humankind. The highest class is

Myth, if the hero of the story is divine. The second highest mode is *Romance*, if the heroes are superior in degree (not kind) to other men and to their environment. The third highest form is *High Mimesis*, which means epic and tragedy, where heroes are superior in degree to other people, but not to their environment. The fourth class is *Low Mimesis*, where the heroes are at the level of humanity. The lowest class is *Irony*, in which heroes may turn into anti-heroes.

According to Frye's categories, Shippey identifies *LOTR* as Romance, because the heroes are higher in degree than others, and also above their natural environment (Shippey 1982: 159). But that is only partly true, since the examples of being above nature that he gives are Aragorn's 210 year life, his ability to run 135 miles in three days, and the immortality of the Elves. What about the hobbits? They are certainly not above their natural environments, and are in no way romantic heroes. They are ordinary folks, but they do rise above their social environments in that they muster more courage than their kin would normally ever have to use. In this sense the hobbits are Low Mimetic characters that can rise to High Mimetic heroes at need.

Although *LOTR* is fundamentally Romantic according to Shippey, it contains the whole hierarchy of Frye's styles. It is not myth *per se*, but its mythical elements raise it occasionally to the level of myth; and it also occasionally "falls" toward High and Low Mimesis. There are also ironic elements, but not at all in a defining measure. However, Tolkien gives his own classification of *LOTR*. He says he has a passion for myth and fairy-story, "and above all for *heroic legend* on the brink of fairy-tale and history" (*L*: 144, emphasis added). That is indeed what *LOTR* feels like: heroic legend and both history and fairy-tale at once.

3.2 Myths – true or false?

A common modern attitude in both Tolkien's and our days is that myths are lies, as C.S. Lewis said to Tolkien in the aforementioned discussion (p. 15). Therefore the term *modern myth* has been ascribed to urban legends or untrue or exaggerated, circulated stories. But Tolkien refuted this, concerning traditional world myths, in his lecture "Beowulf – the Monsters and the Critics" (*MC*: 5-44). He did not accept the notion that myth had no function in a modern, scientific world. In the Beowulf lecture Tolkien asserted that the mythological imagination could approach serious moral and spiritual issues in a deeply revealing manner, and claimed that "a living mythology can deepen rather than cloud our vision of reality" (Helms 1974: 11).

Helms (1974: 24) cites Matthew Arnold, who claimed that poetry would replace religion as the world's chief source of imaginative enrichment. But Helms (*ibid.* 24) goes on to say: "The poetry of the mythic imagination will not, for Tolkien, *replace* religion so much as *make it possible*, putting imaginatively starved modern man back once again into awed and reverent contact with a living universe" (emphasis added).

Kirsti Simonsuuri (1994: 17) regrets the modern trend to dismiss things considered untrue as "only myths". She gives her own view of what myths are:

[. . .] constant mixing of eras, 'chronological dizziness', and researchers' frustrated attempts to build order and hierarchies of gods, heroes, and human generations and dynasties, where there was originally nothing more than the joy of telling, inventing, adding, and surprising with new turns of plot and fantastic coincidences. (Simonsuuri 1994: 48, translation by present author)

Simonsuuri's (1994: 49) theory of how myths are born follows Freud: people's fears and hopes are mingled with historical data, gradually evolving into mythical stories. Simonsuuri (*ibid.* 53) discusses whether or not myths are true, and if they are, how. Simonsuuri presents the thinking of Giambattista Vico, who proposed that myths were truthful stories, *vera narratio*, and that civilization was "a collective dream consisting of myth; an imaginative interpretation of the central mysteries of life". Vico fought against the science of his day, which attempted to "wake us from that dream" and in a sense destroy myth. His philosophy was to "avoid a nightmare by understanding the function of the dreamlike myth in civilization" (*ibid.* 54).

Simonsuuri (1994: 52) describes the thinking of Isaac Newton, who saw mythical language as the "absolute truth" behind the world in hidden form, just as the laws of nature are behind nature. This follows the trail of such early thinkers as Aristotle, who felt that "Art does not lie [. . .], but reveals truths in a different way than rational deduction" (Klages, 2006: 15). Aristotle was undoubtedly one of Tolkien's sources. He said: "[. . .] myths are largely made of 'truth', and indeed present aspects of it that can only be received in this mode [. . .]" (*L*: 147). In *LOTR* the Elf Celeborn says: "[. . .] do not despise the lore that has come down from distant years; for it may chance that old wives keep in memory word of things that once were needful for the wise to know" (*LOTR*: 365). And further, when a warrior is confronted with a hobbit, which he had only heard of in his people's lore, he asks: "Do we walk in legends or on the green earth in the daylight?" Tolkien's character Aragorn answers: "A man may do both" (*LOTR*: 424). Tolkien did not see myth and scientific truth, or realism, as opposites; he saw the need for both.

Klages (2006: 48) discusses principles of humanist literary criticism, which also sound much like Tolkien:

A literary work is 'sincere', meaning that it is honest, true to experience and to human nature, and thus can speak the truth about the human condition [. . .]
 Literature is valuable because it shows us our true nature, and the true nature of society, through pleasurable means, including drama, event, character, conflict, and symbolism.
 Literature shows us kinds of truth which science or other modes of inquiry cannot.

Consonant with this, Levi-Strauss (in Klages 2006: 43) viewed myth as a language, "because it has to be told in order to exist". Levi-Strauss had noted that cultures far from each other, both geographically and in terms of time, have myths that are almost identical in their structure, while specific characters and actions may (or may not) differ greatly. Simonsuuri (1994: 48-51) points out that there are only a few types of myths, which can be called arch-myths and are fundamentally the same in often very different and distant cultures. She says it is all but impossible to trace the relations between similar myths in different cultures. She also claims that it is impossible to find an original myth and criticizes the attempts to do so in the 18th and 19th centuries. But Tolkien would not agree, as we will see in the following section.

3.3 Tolkien's philosophy of myth

Spence's *Introduction to Mythology* (1921) is a classic book on myth theory. Spence classified all world myths into 21 categories. Central to these are myths of Creation, the origin of man, places of reward and punishment, Flood myths, Sun myths, Moon myths, Hero myths, Fire myths, Soul myths, and myths of death (Spence 1994 [1921]: 138). Where Simonsuuri denies an original myth, Tolkien believed that all myths sprung from an original, common root (*BIO*: 147). The fact that there appear so many Flood myths (or any of Spence's other categories) in so many varying cultures, Tolkien took as evidence for the truth of the biblical myth. Tolkien held that all myths, no matter how removed they are from the Judeo-Christian tradition, contain remnants of biblical truth. He believed the biblical truth that humankind was created in God's image (Gen 1:27), and therefore had the capacity to be a "sub-creator". By this he meant that people can use their imagination and language to create new worlds. He saw all art as sub-creating, but he especially applied it to writing fantasy and myth (*MC*: 132). Tolkien felt that although humankind had fallen, and many peoples had lost most of their theoretical knowledge of God, still their sub-created stories and myths contained traces of knowledge of the One True God. He says quite strongly

about this sub-creation: “Fantasy remains a human right: we make in our measure and in our derivative mode, because we are made: and not only made, but made in the image and likeness of a Maker” (*MC*: 145).

Tolkien called the Bible the greatest myth of all, the only myth that had actually taken place in history (*BIO*: 148). That is why the notion of the dying god in other religious traditions and myths did not mean for Tolkien that the Christian story was only a copy of those earlier myths. On the contrary, he saw that those myths existed because God was working indirectly through their narrators’ imaginations as they sub-created their myths. In other words, they knew “in their hearts” (without explicit knowledge), that they could not rescue themselves from evil, and that a sacrifice must be given for them. In a sense they unknowingly prophesied the coming of God’s true sacrifice. Tolkien believed that in the *evangelion*, or the Good News, the Gospel, the Author Himself had stepped into the pages of his own story, creating the greatest story ever told (*BIO*: 146-148). C.S. Lewis summarizes the thoughts he derived from Tolkien, that the Gospel is supposed to affect its recipient just like other myths...

[. . .] with this tremendous difference that *it really happened*: and one must be content to accept it in the same way, remembering that it is God’s myth where the others are men’s myths: i.e. the Pagan stories are God expressing Himself through the minds of poets, using such images as He found there, while Christianity is God expressing Himself through what we call ‘real things’. Therefore it is *true*, not in the sense of being a ‘description’ of God (that no finite mind could take in) but in the sense of being the way in which God chooses to (or can) appear to our faculties. The ‘doctrines’ we get *out* of the true myth are of course *less* true: they are translations into our *concepts* and *ideas* of that wh. [*sic*] God has already expressed in a language more adequate, namely the actual incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection. (*CLI*: 977, emphasis in original)

This is what Tolkien meant by the truthfulness of world myths: how they had retained aspects of biblical truth in them. This implies that if Tolkien intended *The Silmarillion* to be “proper” myth (and *LOTR* as part of it), it would necessarily contain biblical truth (though not necessarily literal or factual exactness), which he wanted to dress in the form of mythology and fantasy-story.

A reading of Noel (1977) makes it clear that Tolkien was an expert on world myths. Noel looks at the parallels between Tolkien’s works and world myths. It strikes the reader how deeply saturated by mythic elements *LOTR* really is. Almost every single creature has a counterpart in world myths, and the story of every one of Tolkien’s characters contains elements from various world myths. As my comparison will be between *LOTR* and biblical myth there is no need to go through all the myth parallels, but I will give a few central examples.

The relationship of Gandalf and Aragorn has many elements similar to that of Merlin and King Arthur (Noel 1977: 110). Tolkien's Elves are like the Irish Sidhe and the Teutonic Light Elves in their beauty, their antiquity, and their love for the arts (Noel 1977: 113-4). Tolkien's Dwarves are also reminiscent of Teutonic Dwarves, in that they live underground and are skilled as smiths (ibid: 122-3). An element typical of many myths, for example *Beowulf*, is subterranean descent. There are five cases of it in *The Hobbit* and six in *LOTR* (ibid: 21-5).

Noel (1977: 68-76) says that Aragorn is the typical myth-hero, and gives such a long list of comparisons between him and other mythical characters, that it would be beyond the scope of this thesis to explore them all. The parallels with world myths are so numerous throughout the whole of *LOTR*, that it is obvious that Tolkien was trying to create a kind of symbiosis of world myths. It seems almost as if he were trying to create a mythology that would be the plausible original source (feigned, of course) of all other mythologies.

3.4 Fantasy literature

Like all genres of literature, fantasy is hard to define. Sinisalo (2004: 11) says that "all fantasy is fiction, but not all fiction is fantasy". She narrows her definition down with a point of distinction between realism and fantasy, namely that fantasy contains one or more variables that are foreign to our everyday experience. Fantasy can belong to our world, or be wholly outside it, or in another time, but always it consists of something that deviates from a science-explained, rational world-view. But even this definition does not really say much, at least in terms of clearly defined boundaries.

Sinisalo (2004: 13-14) states more definitively that fantasy is fairy-tales for grown-ups. This is in line with Tolkien's thoughts, which I will touch on later in this chapter. However, Sinisalo draws the line between children's fairy-tales and fantasy by claiming that a fairy-tale is always an allegory, whereas fantasy *may* be allegorical, but the symbolism is more hidden in the narrative elements. I fail to see why fairy-tales would always be allegorical: can a fairy-tale not be a mere story that does not symbolize something from the real world? Furthermore, Wienker-Piepho (2004: 33) points out that nowadays the boundary between children's and adults' fantasy is vague. Should the classification then be that if a fantasy story is an allegory, it is for children, and if not, it is for adults? Defining fantasy is clearly not an easy task.

Sinisalo (2004: 14) divides fantasy into the major sub-categories of Mythical hero-stories, High fantasy, Horror, Mystical fiction, and Science fiction. She says that High fantasy typically contains creatures familiar from myth and folklore, such as wizards, trolls, fairies, elves, and giants. *LOTR* is definitely high fantasy, since it is part of the mythology of Middle-earth and contains these very creatures.

There seems to be a consensus among literature scholars that Tolkien is the “father” of the modern fantasy genre (Wienker-Piepho 2004: 32-3). There was, of course, literature of the “fantastic” nature before Tolkien. Most stories throughout history have contained elements of myth, fables, and mystery, but Tolkien popularized (or rather, re-established) the style for adults (Sinisalo 2004: 13). However, Tolkien would never have been the founder of fantasy without C.S. Lewis. It may be that the seed of the fantasy genre was planted when Lewis said to Tolkien: “Tollers, there is too little of what we really like in stories. I am afraid we shall have to try and write some ourselves” (*L*: 378). Lewis was referring to the prominence of realism in their times, and the attitude that the fantastic was for children. Tolkien continues: “We agreed that he should try ‘space-travel’ and I should try ‘time-travel’” (*L*: 378). Their goal in both of the agreed stories was to “discover myth” (*L*: 29). Although Tolkien’s initial attempt at a time-travel story was aborted, that was the starting point when both men decided to engage seriously in writing fantasy. Lewis succeeded in his part and wrote a successful space-travel story *Out of the Silent Planet* (1938). However, in a way Tolkien did do time-travel by taking his readers into the ancient world of Middle-earth in *The Silmarillion*, *The Hobbit*, and *LOTR*. Moreover, in all three works he discovered myth, as clearly shown by Noel (1977).

Tolkien speaks of fantasy and fairy-stories as near synonyms, both related closely to myth. Tolkien says that fairy-stories “are not [. . .] stories *about* fairies or elves, but stories about Fairy, that is *Faërie*, the realm or state in which fairies have their being” (*MC*: 113, emphasis in original). Tolkien introduces Faërie:

The realm of fairy-story is wide and deep and high and filled with many things: all manner of beasts and birds are found there; shoreless seas and stars uncounted; beauty that is an enchantment and an ever-present peril; both joy and sorrow as sharp as swords. In that realm a man may, perhaps, count himself fortunate to have wandered, but its very richness and strangeness tie the tongue of a traveller who would report them. And while he is there it is dangerous for him to ask too many questions, lest the gates should be shut and the keys be lost. (*MC*: 109)

The last line above echoes Tolkien’s dislike of an analytical attitude towards literature. The realm of Faërie is only for those who will let their imaginations fly and allow the fantastic to speak to them the aspects of truth that only the arts can.

3.5 Fantasy as sub-creation

Tolkien (*MC*: 132) says that a story-writer's art should be good enough to produce what is called *literary belief*. This has been called 'willing suspension of disbelief', but Tolkien feels it is not exactly what happens. He says instead, that when literary belief is generated, the author has been the successful 'sub-creator' of a secondary world, which the reader's mind has entered. In that world, what the author tells is 'true', if it is in line with the inner laws of the world. Thus the reader believes it while he or she is inside the secondary world. Tolkien continues: "The moment disbelief arises, the spell is broken; the magic, or rather, art, has failed. You are then out in the Primary World again, looking at the little abortive Secondary World from outside."

Klages (2006: 16) compares Platonic and Aristotelian thought from this sub-creation viewpoint. Plato argued that the artist merely imitates or copies nature, but Aristotle disagreed, claiming that artists put things from nature into a different medium. Klages gives the example of a cherry tree, which exists in the real world as a real object. An artist may paint a picture, or write a poem of it. By doing so he or she is not merely copying it, but actually creating a new version of it in the new medium. The artist thus re-creates the cherry tree. This makes the artist into a creator, not a mere imitator.

This places Tolkien in the Aristotelian "sub-creator" camp. According to Klages (2006: 12-15), Plato thought of the arts as dangerous, because they worked through the emotions rather than the intellect. Furthermore, art was to him "copying from a copy", since art was always a copy of nature, which was, for Plato, also a copy: an illusion, or reproduction of a more perfect world, that of the ideal. Klages gives the example of a chair: for Plato a chair was a mere imitation of "the ideal form of chair", which could only be deduced logically, not perceived through human senses. For Aristotle, on the other hand, the meaning of "chair" can only be understood through real, individual chairs. Klages (2006: 15) says: "For Aristotle, form exists only in the concrete examples of that form, not in some eternal ideal abstraction". Aristotle thought that art is not imitating or reproducing nature, but placing events of nature into a "medium that improves on or completes nature [. . .] Art doesn't lie, but reveals truth in a different way than rational deduction".

Aristotle's thoughts are much in line with Tolkien's idea of myths as a mode of revealing truth (*L*: 147). However, Tolkien acknowledged that while sub-creation can be used to reveal truth, it can also be used for evil purposes:

Great harm can be done, of course, by this potent mode of ‘myth’ – especially wilfully. The right to ‘freedom’ of the sub-creator is no guarantee among fallen men that it will not be used as wickedly as is Free Will. I am comforted by the fact that some, more pious and learned than I, have found nothing harmful in this Tale [*LOTR*] or its feignings as a ‘myth’. (*L*: 194-5)

But when done properly, sub-creation gives readers experiences of goodness. In his lecture “On Fairy-stories” Tolkien (*MC*: 155-7) describes his religious views about the purpose of creating fantasy. He speaks of fantasy as a “consolation for the sorrow of this world” and also as a satisfaction. To answer the question “Is it true?” of the story, he answers: “If you have built your little world well, yes: it is true in that world”. For Tolkien, writing fairy-stories was not only a human right, but also a duty, since we are made in our Creator’s image as sub-creators.

In “On Fairy Stories” Tolkien introduces his term, the *eucatastrophe*. He explains the concept as “a good catastrophe”, “a sudden and miraculous grace”, and “a sudden unhoped-for happy ending”. He says: “[. . .] in the ‘eucatastrophe’ we see in a brief vision that the answer may be greater – it may be a far-off gleam or echo of *evangelium* in the real world” (*MC*: 155, emphasis in original). Tolkien makes a further connection between fantasy and the evangelium, as Shippey (1982: 39) points out. The Old English translation of the Greek *evangelion* was *gód spell*, “the good story”, from which is derived *Gospel*. Although the saying as such disappeared from common English, *spell* remained, meaning “a story, something said in formal style”. It evolved into “a formula of power”, a magic spell. Shippey says: “The word embodies much of what Tolkien meant by ‘fantasy’, i.e. something unnaturally powerful (magic spell), something literary (a story), something in essence true (Gospel)” (Shippey 1982: 39).

Tolkien (*MC*: 155-7) applies the concept of fairy-story to the Gospel, shedding light on what he thought myth and fantasy are supposed to do to the reader. He says that the Gospels “embrace all the essence of fairy-stories”, containing marvels that are “artistic [. . .] beautiful, and moving: ‘mythical’ in their perfect, self-contained significance”. One of these marvels is what Tolkien calls “the greatest and most complete conceivable eucatastrophe”. Tolkien calls Christ’s birth “the eucatastrophe of Man’s history” and the Resurrection “the eucatastrophe of the story of the Incarnation”. But what makes the Gospel Story unique for Tolkien, is that it has “entered History and the primary world”. He says: “There is no tale ever told that men would rather find was true, and none which so many sceptical men have accepted as true on its own merits”. Tolkien continues:

It is not difficult to imagine the peculiar excitement and joy that one would feel, if any specially beautiful fairy-story were found to be 'primarily' true, its narrative to be history, without thereby necessarily losing the mythical or allegorical significance that it had possessed. It is not difficult, for one is not called upon to try and conceive anything of a quality unknown. The joy would have exactly the same quality, if not the same degree, as the joy which the 'turn' in a fairy-story gives: such joy has the very taste of primary truth [. . .] It looks forward (or backward: the direction in this regard is unimportant) to the Great Eucatastrophe. The Christian joy, the *Gloria*, is of the same kind; but it is pre-eminently (infinitely, if our capacity were not finite) high and joyous. Because this story is supreme; and it is true. Art has been verified. God is the Lord, of angels, and of men – and of elves. Legend and History have met and fused. (*MC*: 156)

Tolkien (*MC*: 156-7) goes on: "But in God's kingdom the presence of the greatest does not depress the small". Even though people are redeemed, they are still people, and even in the presence of the Greatest Story, people should continue to write their own stories and fantasy. Far from invalidating stories, the Evangelium has sanctified them, especially the "happy ending". Although the Christian is still under the duties of life and laws of nature, Tolkien feels he or she, as redeemed and so highly valued by God, can take part in the enrichment of creation through writing fantasy, which he sees not only as a human right, but almost the Christian's duty.

3.6 Tolkien's main functions for fantasy

As we do our duty to create secondary worlds in fairy-stories, Tolkien gives three basic functions that our stories should perform. Firstly, they are to offer *Recovery*. By this he means restoring a clear view and appreciation of ordinary things in human life that we otherwise tend to take for granted. He also called this a renewal of health (*MC*: 146). When I read about the fresh scent of grass in a novel, it reminds me of the real thing and gives me an appreciation of something otherwise taken for granted. Secondly good fantasy offers *Escape*. Tolkien does not mean escapism, which is usually used in a negative sense. For Tolkien it is escape from a constricted and twisted view of reality and meaning. His own words make it clearest:

Why should a man be scorned, if, finding himself in prison, he tries to get out and go home? Or if, when he cannot do so, he thinks and talks about other topics than jailers and prison-walls? The world outside has not become less real because the prisoner cannot see it. In using *Escape* in this way the critics have chosen the wrong word, and, what is more, they are confusing, not always by sincere error, the *Escape* of the Prisoner with the *Flight* of the Deserter. (*MC*: 148)

Tolkien saw the modernist, materialist world-view and culture, not as enriching human existence, but as distorting and enslaving it. Thus he justified the escape that good fantasy provides its readers. This escape, as Lawhead describes (in Pearce 1998: 146-7), leads the reader, not away from reality, but to a heightened reality, in which

emotions are enhanced, beauty and ugliness, good and evil can clearly be seen for what they are, teaching us valuable lessons of the reality we live in.

Tolkien's (*MC*: 153) third function of fantasy is "*Consolation*, leading to joy". By this he meant primarily the "Consolation of the Happy Ending". In this context Tolkien introduced the *eucatastrophe*. He says that a fairy-story is not complete without it. Tolkien says: "It does not deny the existence of *dyscatastrophe*, of sorrow and failure: the possibility of these is necessary to the joy of deliverance; it denies (in the face of much evidence, if you will) universal final defeat and in so far is *evangelium*, giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief" (*MC*: 153, emphasis in original).

These functions make it clear that Tolkien believed that a great piece of literature gives its reader being something akin to a religious experience: it affects its reader much like the Gospel does its recipient. One can now begin to see what Tolkien was trying to communicate to his readers when he wrote *LOTR*.

In this chapter I have established that *The Silmarillion* can be seen as a myth in line with Andrew Lang's theory of myths dealing with the origins of the cosmos. Others hold myths to be untrue or feigned explanations of existence, the natural world, or of social aspects that need an explanation. Others, like Tolkien, believe they are "true", in that they teach aspects of truth that cannot be received otherwise, and also in that they contain elements of biblical truth.

LOTR is considered a landmark work of fantasy: the story of an era within Tolkien's mythology, and it is loaded with elements common to many world myths, including the Bible. Tolkien meant it to offer the reader recovery, escape, and consolation – something akin to religious experience. In the following chapter I will probe this religious element to establish what Tolkien's purposes for writing *LOTR* were from a religious point of view.

4 DID TOLKIEN HAVE A MISSION?

Claiming that Tolkien (or any writer) has a mission behind his writing may seem bold, even preposterous. I do not mean to refute Tolkien, who denied any specific message in *LOTR*. First and foremost it is simply a powerful story. Tolkien said of a fairy-story: "[. . .] first of all it must succeed just as a tale, excite, please, and even on

occasion move, and within its own imagined world be accorded (literary) belief. To succeed in that was my primary object” (*L*: 233). But Tolkien also said in the same context that a fairy story “has its own mode of reflecting ‘truth’, different from allegory or (sustained) satire, or ‘realism’, and in some ways more powerful” (*L*: 233). I will now discuss how the “truth” is reflected in *LOTR*. And I propose that if Tolkien indeed had a mission, it was mainly subconscious: a driving force in his background. Furthermore, it was nobler than the use of allegory, in which the writer deliberately guides the reader to a predetermined interpretation. Tolkien wanted his ‘message’ to be there, but not to overcome the reader with it. Tolkien’s purposes with *LOTR* were in line with the principle of humanist literary criticism as stated by Klages (2006: 47): “The purpose of literature is the enhancement of human life and the propagation of human values. Literature should, however, always be ‘disinterested’, and should never have an overt agenda of trying to educate or persuade someone (which would be called propaganda)”. Tolkien’s values and world-view are implicitly inherent in the story. I suggest that they are, like far-off gleams of heaven, perhaps what makes *LOTR* so appealing to such a wide readership.

4.1 The legacy of the TCBS

Two of the four core TCBS members, G.B. Smith and R.Q. Gilson, died in the First World War. In his last letter to Tolkien, Smith wrote: “My chief consolation is that if I am scuppered tonight... there will still be left a member of the great T.C.B.S. to voice what I dreamed and what we all agreed upon... May God bless you, my dear John Ronald, and may you say the things I have tried to say long after I am not there to say them, if such be my lot” (Carpenter, 1977: 86).

What Smith meant by “what we all agreed upon” is the members’ joint vision of themselves as no less than moral reformers of England and her arts. They loathed the artistic degradation and moral deprivation in their country, which they felt were a result of replacing God (Christianity) with modernism, humanism, science, and technological progress (Scull and Hammond, 2006b: 1002). More specifically Smith’s words refer to a meeting they had prior to the war, which they called the “Council of London”. Smith wrote that the TCBS’ mission after the war would be: “[. . .] to drive from life, letters, the stage and society that dabbling in and hankering after the unpleasant sides and incidents in life and nature which have captured the larger and worsen [*sic*] tastes in Oxford, London and the world [. . .] to reestablish sanity,

cleanliness, and the love of real and true beauty in everybody's breast" (Scull and Hammond, 2006b: 1001). Smith also spoke of "ridding the world" of the influence of realist literature, mentioning authors such as George Bernard Shaw and George Douglas Cole. R.Q. Gilson elaborated on the same TCBS "Council":

We talked of many things in modern life and modern literature and poetry. Especially the horrible enjoyment of the *sheer evil filth of immorality*: an attitude that seems quite new to the world, & [sic] is certainly poles apart from the delight of the eighteenth century in the *humour to be extracted from foulness* [. . .] There is the world [. . .] unconsciously crying out for the TCBSian spirit [. . .] On that night I suddenly saw the TCBS in a blaze of light as *great moral reformers*. [. . .] that remains the great task of the TCBS. *England purified of this loathsome insidious disease by the TCBS spirit*. It is an enormous task and we shall not see it accomplished in our lifetime. But we all have, and all must hold, our faith. (Scull and Hammond 2006: 1002b, emphasis added)

Tolkien wrote to Smith about how he felt the TCBS had been destined to be "a great instrument in God's hands – a mover, a doer, even an achiever of great things... the TCBS had been granted some spark of fire [. . .] that was destined to [. . .] rekindle an old light in the world; that the TCBS was destined to testify for God and Truth in a more direct way than by laying down its several lives in this war..." (L: 9-10).

At the death of Smith and Gilson the TCBS as such ceased to exist, but its spirit was carried on by Tolkien and Christopher Wiseman. Smith's compelling last wish, to "say the things he had tried to say", was doubtless one of the driving forces that encouraged Tolkien to keep writing after the war. This is a clear indication of Tolkien's mind-set and his desire to restore romantic purity and goodness to art.

4.2 Frodo / Fróda / Fróthi

Tom Shippey reveals a further clue to Tolkien's mission in *The Road to Middle-Earth* (1982). It is hidden in the name Frodo, the main character of *LOTR*. It is derived from Fróda, a name known in ancient Northern-European mythologies. Fróda is mentioned in *Beowulf* as a king of the Bards, who was killed by the Danes. The Danish king gave his daughter to Fróda's son, Ingeld, in marriage, trying to end the feud between the two peoples. The plan failed, because Ingeld's lust for revenge is too strong. Ingeld is a personification of what Shippey (1982: 156) calls the "Ragnarok spirit undiluted", or "heroic conventionality at its worst". Ragnarok is the part of Norse mythology, in which a cataclysmic war brings chaos and destruction to the earth.

The *Beowulf* author does not give any more details of the life and death of Fróda, but Tolkien apparently assumed that Fróda was the same person called Fróthi in ancient Norse mythology, since it most likely sprang from the same tradition as the

legends of Beowulf. Fróthi was a contemporary of Christ, and his reign was a legendary era of peace and prosperity. Fróthi means “the wise one”, and Tolkien felt that he was an embodiment of all that was noble in the pre-Christian, pagan world (Shippey 1982: 156). He and C.S. Lewis both seemed preoccupied with “the virtuous pagan” (Duriez 2005: 176), of which Fróthi was a pure example.

Tolkien's Fródo is clearly modelled after Fróthi. They are both unsung heroic peacemakers. In spite of their great and noble deeds for the good of their people, they are not the ones remembered. The ones who drew sword and fought battles are celebrated, regardless of how noble or ignoble their motives had been. Both heroes are in fact failures: Frodo fails his mission, but Providence finishes the job he could not complete; Fróthi is what Shippey calls a:

[. . .] nostalgic failure; in his time everything was good, but it ended in failure both personally (for Fróthi was killed) and ideologically (for Fróda's son returned to the bad old ways of revenge and hatred, scorning peace-initiatives [. . .]) For all these reasons the composite figure of Fróda/Fróthi became to Tolkien an image of the sad truth behind heroic illusions, a kind of ember glowing in the dark sorrow of heathen ages. (Shippey 1982: 156)

Tolkien was a philologist with a love for nomenclature, and it must have been significant to him “that ‘Ingjaldr’ (Ingeld) held on as a common Norse name for centuries. ‘Fróthi’, however was quickly forgotten” (Shippey 1982: 157). Fróda was an intermediary between Ingeld's evil heroism, and Christ. Shippey says: “Fróda stood, in Tolkien's view, for all that was good in the Dark Ages [. . .] for the spark of virtue, which had made Anglo-Saxon England ripe for conversion (a process carried out without a single martyrdom)” (ibid: 158).

Shippey suggests that Tolkien saw the story of Fróda / Fróthi as preparing the pagan ground for the Gospel, and that this is a clue to his possible purpose for *LOTR* as a type of *evangelica praeparatio* (Shippey 1982: 158). This is a plausible stance, especially in light of Tolkien's correspondence with TCBS members and his other letters where he speaks of his infusing *LOTR* with his spirituality. He wanted to touch his readers with something Gospel-like; to give them a positive taste of the goodness, virtues, and values of Christ, and to stimulate an appetite for more without turning them off with explicit preaching, exegesis, or allegory. Shippey says: “He [Tolkien] knew his own country was falling back to heathenism again [. . .], and while mere professorial preaching would make no difference, a story might” (Shippey 1982: 158).

4.3 *Leaf by Niggle*

Tolkien strayed from his dislike of allegory once, when he wrote his short story *Leaf by Niggle* (1945). This allegory of Tolkien himself and his future purgatory¹ offers perhaps the most illuminating clue to Tolkien's visions and hopes for his work. I will first present the story-line and then give its interpretation.

The artist Niggle lives in a country village. The few who know of Niggle's painting hobby do not value it at all: his neighbour Parish calls it Niggle's Nonsense (*TPR*: 141). But Niggle's painting is his passion and calling. It is a vast canvas that he can only work on from a ladder. He is a perfectionist, and he spends so long working on a single leaf, that he begins to despair that he will never finish it. Niggle is continuously frustrated by interruptions. Whenever he finds time for painting, some extra business comes up, or then Parish comes by with a need. The kind-hearted Niggle can never deny his neighbour his help, although he does it with grumbling.

The Driver comes to take Niggle away, and his painting is left unfinished, and the canvas is used to patch Parish's roof. Niggle is taken to a type of labour camp, where he eventually learns to do various tasks without resentment. After an indefinite time he hears voices: the First Voice speaks harshly of him, emphasising his need for more labour; the Second Voice considers his good deeds and what he has learned in his labour, recommending that he be moved to "gentler treatment".

He is taken to a beautiful landscape: his own painting, but in real, live form. He walks about and notices that it is still unfinished. He begins to work on it, but realizes he cannot do it alone: he needs the help of Parish, who is a gardener. At his request Parish is brought to help him, and the beautiful scene is eventually finished. Niggle is then taken to the 'Mountains', and his landscape is left there as a kind of porch, or introductory realm for others to visit before they follow Niggle to the Mountains.

4.3.1 Interpretation of *Leaf by Niggle*

The symbolism of *Leaf by Niggle* is fairly evident, and most scholars have come to more or less the same interpretation. I will follow that of Shippey (2000).

Niggle is Tolkien himself. The painting is his entire mythology, but a major part of it is *LOTR*, which he was working on while he wrote *Niggle*. It was scorned by many

¹ The strictly Catholic doctrine of Purgatory means a temporary place of refinement between life on Earth and Heaven. According to Kreeft (2001: 148) it is necessary because Christians are imperfect, though saved, and must be fully sanctified before they may enter Heaven, the place of perfection.

of Tolkien's colleagues – a scholar should not waste his time writing fairy-stories. Tolkien was frustrated by its slow progress due to his duties as a professor and in his domestic life, along with continual requests from colleagues and neighbours, which he found hard to decline. And his perfectionism: he wrote and re-wrote most sections of *LOTR* several times (mostly by hand!). His preoccupation with details (leaves) further stretched the writing process of *LOTR* to thirteen years.

Tolkien feared he would not finish before he died and was taken to Purgatory. Like Niggle, Tolkien felt guilty of his “selfishness” in wanting to do his own work and only grudgingly doing his duties elsewhere. He felt he would need to be purified of that in Purgatory. But he believed that once through, he would finally be able to complete *LOTR* and his mythology in the spiritual realm. And then, when his life's work had been fully actualized, he could enter “the Mountains” of Heaven.

4.3.2 Clues of Tolkien's purpose for *LOTR* in *Leaf by Niggle*

When the landscape is finished, Parish realises that it is Niggle's painting. He admits that he had not understood it during his lifetime, and that it had not looked so real. The shepherd who has come to lead Niggle onward answers: “No, it was only a glimpse then [. . .] but you might have caught the glimpse, if you had ever thought it worth while to try” (*TPR*: 141). Niggle's painting was a *glimpse of the heavenly realm*.

Even more illuminating is the final passage of the story, in which the Voices again discuss Niggle's landscape.

It is proving very useful indeed,’ said the Second Voice. ‘As a holiday, and a refreshment. It is splendid for convalescence; and not only for that, for many it is the best introduction to the Mountains. It works wonders in some cases. I am sending more and more there. They seldom have to come back. (*TPR*: 143)

Niggle's painting was thus an *introduction to the Mountains (= Heaven)*, and also served to lessen the need of disciplinary measures in Purgatory.

Tolkien thus saw his writings, ideally, as an introduction to Heaven. He hoped it could evoke in people something good, a positive change, so that their need for Purgatorial cleansing would be lessened. He was trying to give people a glimpse of Heaven, and only those who “ever think it worth while to try, can catch the glimpse”.

Randal Helms (1974: 123) analyzes this aspect of *Leaf by Niggle* in light of Tolkien's lecture “On Fairy Stories”. He says: “the realm of the artist's fantasy is in fact the realm of the spirit”; and “participation in an act of sub-creation is in fact

preparation for spiritual experience". Helms (1974: 123) proposes that every well-created secondary world can serve as an introduction to heaven. However, I would question this, because a secondary world can be skilfully created for evil means also, as Tolkien himself acknowledged (*L*: 194-5). But I agree with Helms' thoughts that "the pleasures of Faërie are at their purest indistinguishable from spiritual joy" and that "fantasy can bear the Good News, in its minor way, even in the company of the Evangelists themselves" (Helms 1974: 123).

Leaf by Niggle then suggests that Tolkien wanted his readers to derive from their reading of *LOTR* an experience akin to a foretaste of Heaven. And indeed, he believed that a story can do that without explicit explanation of doctrine (*L*: 283-4).

4.4 Tolkien's views on allegory

The Collins English Dictionary defines allegory as: "a poem, play, picture, etc., in which the apparent meaning of the characters and events is used to symbolize a deeper moral or spiritual meaning", and the "use of such symbolism to illustrate truth or a moral". Tolkien's own views of allegory offer another clue to his purposes. He wrote:

I cordially dislike allegory in all its manifestations, and always have done so since I grew old and wary enough to detect its presence. I much prefer history, true or feigned, with its varied applicability to the thought and experience of readers. I think that many confuse 'applicability' with 'allegory'; but the one resides in the freedom of the reader, and the other in the purposed domination of the author. (*LOTR*: xvii [foreword])

LOTR was sometimes interpreted to be an allegory of World War II. In the foreword of *LOTR* Tolkien refutes this, explaining that he had written down the basic motifs of the story long before the war began to unfold (*LOTR*: xvi). C.S. Lewis defends his friend's position: "These things were not devised to reflect any particular situation in the real world. It was the other way round; real events began, horribly, to conform to the pattern he had freely invented" (*BIO*: 189).

Tolkien emphatically repeated in his letters that *LOTR* was not an allegory. For example, he wrote to a fan: "[*LOTR*] is mythical, not allegorical: my mind does not work allegorically" (*L*: 174). This is ironic, because he also said that his allegory *Leaf by Niggle* was the easiest thing he had ever written, taking only a few hours to write (*L*: 113). Perhaps it would have been natural for him to write allegorically, but he refused, preferring other means of communication. But nevertheless, if *LOTR* is not allegorical, how can its evident symbolic themes be explained? Tolkien answers:

“That there is no allegory does not, of course, say there is no applicability. There always is” (L: 262). What then, is the difference between allegory and applicability?

Tolkien speaks of topical allegory, in which one thing in the imaginary world represents one thing in the real world consistently through the entire allegory (L: 212). In this sense *LOTR* is certainly not an allegory of Christianity, because no single character represents Christ, or any other particular element of the religion. Tolkien wrote: “[. . .] the actors are individuals – they each, of course, contain universals, or they would not live at all, but they never represent them as such” (L: 121). His characters *exemplify* certain things, but are not allegories of them. Shippey (1982: 127) says that for Tolkien, if *LOTR* was an allegory, it would only have one meaning. But Tolkien goes on to talk about “larger allegory”: “In a larger sense, it is I suppose impossible to write any ‘story’ that is not allegorical in proportion as it ‘comes to life’; since each of us is an allegory, embodying in a particular tale and clothed in the garments of time and place, universal truth and everlasting life” (L: 212).

In another letter Tolkien repeated his dislike of conscious allegory, and then conceded that “any attempt to explain the purport of myth or fairytale must use allegorical language” (L: 145). But that is again on the *applicability* side: the side of the reader, not of the writer. C.S. Lewis mentions this in a letter to Tolkien: “[. . .] the essence of a myth being that it should have no taint of allegory to the maker and yet should *suggest* incipient allegories to the reader” (Pearce 1999: 56).

4.5 Applicability

Tolkien himself gives worthy examples of what he means by applicability. He writes of a war-time newspaper article that called for the systematic exterminating of the entire German nation as the only proper solution after the war, because “they are rattlesnakes, and don’t know the difference between good and evil!” Tolkien asks: “What of the writer?” and applies the message of *LOTR*: “You can’t fight the Enemy with his own Ring without turning into an Enemy; but unfortunately Gandalf’s wisdom seems long ago to have passed with him into the True West” (L: 93-94)

Tolkien applied his imagery to other things in the real world. For instance, he disliked technological advancement and machinery. He wrote in a wireless letter to his son Christopher: “I have got over 2 thousand words onto this little flimsy airletter; and I will forgive the *Mordor-gadgets* some of their sins, if they will bring it quickly to you” (L: 88, emphasis added). George Sayer recalls of his friend Tolkien: “When we

saw signs of industrial pollution, he talked of orcs and orcery” (Duriez 2005: 136).

Tolkien sheds further light on applicability as he compares story with allegory:

Allegory and Story converge, meeting somewhere in Truth. So that the only perfectly consistent allegory is real life; and the only fully intelligible story is an allegory. And one finds [. . .] that the better and more consistent an allegory is the more easily can it be read ‘just as a story’; and the better and more closely woven a story is the more easily can those so minded find allegory in it. But the two start out from opposite ends. (*L*: 121)

Tolkien thus accepted people’s interpretations, as long as they were not the above-mentioned consistent kind (*L*: 212), and he maintained that on his side there were no allegorical intentions for *LOTR* (*L*: 220). However, the symbolism in Tolkien’s works is not entirely unintentional. He writes about his own war experiences: “I tried a diary [. . .] but I found it was not my line. So I took to ‘escapism’: or really transforming experience into another form and symbol with Morgoth and Orcs and the Eldalie [Elves] (representing beauty and grace of life and artefact)” (*L*: 85). He also wrote: “[. . .] I shall never write any ordered biography – it is against my nature, which expresses itself about *things deepest felt* in tales and myths [. . .]” (*L*: 420-1 emphasis added). Tolkien’s Christianity was something he felt deeply, which is evident from his letters throughout. Thus Tolkien’s writing does reflect things in his own life and experience, including his Christianity. He explains this in a letter:

[. . .] if one sets out to address ‘adults’ [. . .] they will not be pleased, excited, or moved unless the whole, or the incidents, seem to be about something worth considering, more e.g. than mere danger and escape: there must be some relevance to the ‘human situation’ [. . .] So something of the teller’s own reflections and ‘values’ will inevitably get worked in. This is not the same as allegory. We all, in groups or as individuals, *exemplify* general principles; but we do not *represent* them. (*L*: 233)

This, along with other letters, testifies to the fact that Tolkien did, indeed, have a message. But he wanted to dress it in *exemplifying* mode, not allegorically. He wanted to leave interpretation to the reader, not ‘give it’ as the writer.

Tolkien also acknowledged that his writing may be applied in ways foreign to his own thinking. He lamented the “horror of the American scene” and the fan-cults that arose there. He said of the American enthusiasts: “Art moves them and they don’t know what they’ve been moved by and they get quite drunk on it. Many young Americans are involved in the stories in a way that I’m not” (*BIO*: 231). But nevertheless, he granted them the freedom to apply it their own way.

4.6 Final thoughts on Tolkien's intentions

One reason that Tolkien disliked the English legends of Arthur is that they contain explicit references to Christianity. He says: "Myth and fairy-story must, as all art, reflect and contain in solution elements of moral and religious truth (or error), but not explicit, not in the known form of the primary 'real' world" (*L*: 144). Thus, if Tolkien meant *LOTR* to be proper myth, it must also contain inexplicit elements of religious truth. But he left it to the reader to find it therein. Tolkien admitted as much: "I would claim, if I did not think it presumptuous in one so ill-instructed, to have as one object the elucidation of truth, and the encouragement of good morals in this real world, by the ancient device of exemplifying them in unfamiliar embodiments that may tend to 'bring them home'" (*L*: 194).

John, Tolkien's son, said of his father that "his Catholicism pervaded all his thinking, beliefs, and everything else" (Pearce 1999: 194). It is evident then, that his Christianity would be embodied in his writing also. Tolkien admits: "[*LOTR*] is of course a fundamentally religious and Catholic work; unconsciously so at first, but consciously in the revision" (*L*: 172). So there was a degree of conscious inclusion of religious truth in the story. How is it present? Tolkien expounds in the same letter:

That is why I have not put in, or have cut out, practically all references to anything like 'religion', to cults or practices, in the imaginary world. For the religious element is absorbed into the story and the symbolism [. . .] I have consciously planned very little; and should chiefly be grateful for having been brought up [. . .] in a Faith that has nourished me and taught me all the little that I know. (*L*: 172)

Then again, Tolkien admitted to have "deliberately written a tale, which is built on or out of certain 'religious' ideas, but is *not* an allegory of them [. . .] and does not mention them overtly, still less preach them" (*L*: 283-4, emphasis in original). This implies that *LOTR* contains intentional references to, and literary applications of Christian spirituality.

One thing Tolkien *must* have consciously planned is the date of the fall of Sauron, which thereafter marked the beginning of the New Year in Gondor: the twenty-fifth of March (*LOTR*: 931). Shippey (1982: 151-152) points out that according to Anglo-Saxon and popular European tradition, 25 March is a day of treble significance in Christianity. Firstly it is the date of the Crucifixion; secondly it is the date of the Annunciation (when the angel Gabriel informed Mary that she will become pregnant of God and bear the Saviour, Luke 1:26-38); and also the last day of Creation. It can

be no coincidence that the date of Tolkien's eucatastrophe would be aligned with that of the greater one, which he called the eucatastrophe of the Incarnation (*MC*: 156). It was unquestionably meant to be a tribute to that of the story of Christ.

In this chapter I have set the foundation for my thesis that *LOTR* not only reflects the Kingdom of Heaven, but it was also meant to do so. However, Tolkien insisted that his readers must be free to apply the story to their life in any way they feel relevant, regardless of their world-view. In the "TCBSian spirit" he wanted to give his readers a taste of ideal goodness (the goodness of God) instead of stark realism, inspiring goodness and drawing people that much "closer to God". *LOTR* was meant to offer a glimpse of Heaven, and in the following chapter I will take a look at that realm, the Kingdom of Heaven, from a basic theological point of view.

5 THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

The Evangelium, or the Gospel, is seen traditionally as the story of Christ as told in the New Testament. No doubt Tolkien also had the story of Christ in mind when he spoke of the eucatastrophe as a far-off gleam of evangelium, since he saw every eucatastrophe as a reflection of the Greater one of Christ's Resurrection (*MC*: 155). But what was the Evangelium in Christ's own teaching?

Risto Santala points out in his book *Vanhan Testamentin Messias-odotus* [The Old Testament anticipation of the Messiah] (1995) that the OT (Old Testament) prophecies of the coming Messiah were twofold: they spoke of the Messiah as the 'suffering servant of God' (Santala 1995: 194), but also as the One who would establish the eternal Kingdom of God on earth (*ibid*: 208). Thus Jesus' announcement that the "kingdom of heaven is near" (e.g. Matt 4:17, Mark 1:15, Luke 10:11) was a definite Messianic assertion. It was also the very essence and meaning of the Evangelium, or the Gospel that Jesus preached (Gilbrant 1989: 316).

The purpose of this chapter is to establish what is meant by the Kingdom of Heaven, to shed light on Tolkien's "far-off gleams of Evangelium". In this thesis there is no need to go into all the various historical doctrines and emphases concerning the Kingdom of Heaven, nor their criticisms. I also feel that textual criticism is here irrelevant, so I will look at Kingdom theology from a basic viewpoint, taking the Biblical accounts of Jesus' teaching *per se*, respecting Tolkien's belief that the Christian story is a 'true myth'. I will focus on some of the central aspects of the

Kingdom that are common to most Christian traditions and are likely to be the way in which an active lay member of the Catholic Church like Tolkien would see it.

Santala's work (1995) shows how the OT prophecies were surprisingly accurately fulfilled in Christ. Why he was not recognized by the Jewish leaders as the Messiah is a complex issue, but one essential reason was their missing the two-fold mission of the Messiah. They were primarily expecting a godly political leader who would deliver them from the rule of Rome. Another, and perhaps the crucial reason, is that the religious elite of Jesus' time had fallen into hypocrisy and lust for power, and their actions in all four Gospels reveal a deliberate refusal to see Jesus as the Messiah. Fitting to them is the old saying: "There are none so blind as those who will not see".

5.1 What is the Kingdom of Heaven?

Throughout the Gospels Jesus' message was about the Kingdom of Heaven (see Matt 7:21), or the Kingdom of God (see Mark 10:23). What is this Kingdom? In *Civitas Dei* [The Kingdom of God] (2007), Risto Ahonen points out that although the Kingdom is absolutely central to Jesus' teachings and the Bible speaks much of it, it is still very hard to define. This is because all of Jesus' teachings are basically either parables of what the Kingdom would be likened to, or about the principles or the values of the Kingdom. Jesus' parables present certain aspects of it in allegorical form. They are illustrative, but no single parable gives a definitive or exhaustive explanation. Ahonen says that this was actually Jesus' intention. He explains: "The Kingdom of God, even in all its concreteness, is such a different reality, that the human mind lacks the capacity to understand it fully" (Ahonen 2007: 13, all quotations from Ahonen's work translated by present author). However, some "gleams" of it can be seen and understood.

The word "kingdom" that Jesus uses in this context is in Greek *basilea*. This is not a physical realm or place. A better translation for it would be "the kingship of God", or "the kingly authority or rule of God" (McGrath 1996: 587). The apostle Paul writes that the Kingdom's foundations are in the OT prophecies. Where God's Kingdom had previously been attached to one people, the Jews, in Christ the nature of the Kingdom changed from a physical realm to a spiritual one, and now all people who trust God are part of it (Eph. 2:11-22). Thus the entire OT can be seen as laying the foundation for the Kingdom. The book of Hebrews points out how elements of the OT are physical symbols of the spiritual realities of the Kingdom in the NT. The emphasis of

the Kingdom is not so much on “heaven”, associated with afterlife, but on the kingship of God in human life on this planet. Ahonen (2007: 6) describes the Kingdom as a “different reality that has infiltrated our time”. In the person of Christ the Kingdom of Heaven has already come to the earth:

Asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He replied to them by saying, The kingdom of God does not come with signs to be observed *or* with visible display [. . .] For behold, the kingdom of God is within you [in your hearts] *and* among you [surrounding you] (Luke 17:20-21, AMP)

But Jesus also spoke of the Kingdom as a future realm, which is commonly thought of as a place of bliss in union with God in the afterlife. Nevertheless, it is the same Kingdom that is present here and now, because it is, in essence, a spiritual reality, and its values and spirit do not change. We see that in Jesus’ teaching and Christian theology there is a certain tension between the “now” and the “not yet” aspects of the Kingdom. McGrath (1996: 588) discusses how Jesus’ parables often speak of the Kingdom in this transitory period, already here on earth, but still awaiting fulfilment at the end of time. One example is the parable of the yeast in dough (Matt 13:33): “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough.” The dough is the world, and the Kingdom of Heaven, like yeast, is planted in the dough, until the originally small amount has worked through the whole dough, which represents the fullness of the Kingdom at the end of time.

McGrath (1996: 588-9) analyzes the Kingdom doctrines of St. Paul. In several places Paul speaks of the new era that began with Christ (e.g. 2Cor. 5:17). But in the beginning of his first letter to the Corinthians he refutes the interpretation that the Kingdom had already arrived in its fullness. Paul sees the Resurrection as a sign that the new age has already begun, and also as a reassurance of the hope of a future, eternal Kingdom in its fullness, where the foremost enemy of this age, death, has been defeated (McGrath 1996: 588).

Ahonen (2007: 74-75) describes Martin Luther’s views of the line in the Lord’s Prayer, “May Your Kingdom come” – a view common to most Christian churches. Luther says that the Kingdom will come in the end even without our prayers, but our prayers signify that we want the Kingdom to affect us already on earth. We assent that we will live according to the Kingdom’s principles, thus demonstrating the Kingdom to the world around us. The Kingdom among us now is meant to alleviate the effects

of the devil in the world, since it is still to a large extent under his dominion, as we see from all the violence and suffering in the world (Augustine 1972: 471-2). Ahonen talks of Oscar Cullman's analogy of the Kingdom likened to a war against the enemy's kingdom. Often in warfare the decisive, pivotal battle takes place at an early stage in the war. In such a case victory has already been secured, but because of the enemy's delayed action, the ultimate day of triumph is still to come. Cullman says this describes the reality of The Church [I use "The Church" as Ahonen does, to refer to the Universal Church, or Christ's Church – Christians all over the world regardless of their denomination]: through Christ we have already been saved and victory has been won, but we are not yet home from the war. "This 'already' – 'not yet' –tension marks the Christian faith and is vital to the Church. If emphasis is placed only on either side, the Church is lost. They must be in balance" (Ahonen 2007: 138).

This spiritual warfare is unconventional in that its weapons are those of love. Ahonen maintains that humanitarian work is essential to the Kingdom. Feeding the hungry, caring for the sick, alleviating suffering, helping facilitate a better life, etc. *are* in themselves missions, even without the exposition of Christian doctrine (Ahonen 2007: 180-1). This is because goodness and love are essential elements of the Kingdom, and good works are in themselves the Kingdom of Heaven penetrating the enemy's realm of suffering (e.g. Matt 5:16, 1 Peter 2:12).

5.2 What the Kingdom is not

If it is not possible to clearly define what the Kingdom *is*, it can be said what it is *not*. The Church Father Augustine writes of the dual nature of the Kingdom in his landmark work *De Civitate Dei* (City of God, written in the years 413 to 426 – present translation edited by Knowles, 1972). Augustine emphasises the coexistence of God's Kingdom with the world's nations, and the inevitable conflict between these two realms. The Kingdom is then *not* any earthly government or power structure. It is of such a humble nature, that it simply is not appealing to a world governed by military power and riches. Ahonen (2007: 67) says: "The New Testament often describes the kingdom as a mystery, because its immense power is hidden in weakness and an insignificant beginning. Many stumble on the lowly form of the kingdom". Ahonen means that humankind is easily impressed by riches and power, and thus Christ's message of humility and forgiveness is unappealing and usually seen as weakness.

The Kingdom's King was born in poverty, in a stall for animals (Luke 2:1-7). He was welcomed, not by the rich and powerful, but by shepherds (Luke 2:8-20), who were considered the rabble of their society (Heikkilä 2000: 50). He had no special possessions apart from the clothes he wore (Matt 8:20) and he was executed as a criminal (e.g. Luke 22, 23). He answered the governor Pilate, when interrogated: "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews." (John 18:36). However, when Jesus did not defend himself against the accusations presented against him, Pilate asked him if he did not understand that he, as governor, had the power either to free him or crucify him. Jesus' answer asserted that his kingdom was greater even than Rome: "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin" (John 19:11). Only the Resurrection established the power of the Kingdom, and even that was left as a question of belief in the eyewitness accounts of the apostles and his other disciples who saw him after his resurrection (1 Cor 15:4-8). This kingdom is not forced on any one: it is left a matter of voluntary humble faith. But faith opens the door to an awesome reality: the Kingdom that will still be standing once all "earthly" nations and governments have passed (e.g. Dan 7:27).

The Kingdom is also *not* the established Church (meaning any and all of the Christian churches as institutions), although believers do usually belong to a specific congregation. It is something more dynamic and organic than a mere organization. Ahonen says that Augustine never equates any specific Church with the Kingdom, as he was interpreted in the later Middle Ages to have said, especially in the Catholic Church. "Augustine drew a clear distinction between The Church and the kingdom of God, although The Church was, for him, its necessary representative" (Ahonen 2007: 17). All of Augustine's references equating the City (rule) of God with The Church (Augustine 1972: e.g. 335, 524) speak of the Universal Church, the body of believers, and not the established church institution. This is made clear when he states that there are members of the City of God outside of the Church, and in its official membership there are people who do not belong to the City of God (ibid: 45, 831).

According to Ahonen, J.C. Hoekendijk goes even further to say that "God works first and foremost *outside* of the Church, and that the Church is significant only inasmuch as it participates in God's mission in the world" (Ahonen 2007: 51). Hoekendijk means that the Church was never meant to be separated from the rest of the world, and that God's Kingdom is ever moving, bringing goodness into lives

afflicted by evil – if a church ceases to participate in the moving and functioning of the Kingdom in the world, it has become redundant.

5.3 Attributes of the Kingdom

Although the Kingdom cannot be fully defined, the NT (New Testament) offers some attributes of it. First of all, since it is God's rule, it is a Kingdom of goodness, because God is seen as the source of all that is good (Mark 10:18). Furthermore, since Jesus is its King, he is the pure example of good in action (Acts 10:38). "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work" (1John 3:8). He did this by healing the sick, forgiving sinners, and casting out demons (Acts 10:38). Jesus' miracles have been subject to scholarly debate, but the issue is irrelevant for this thesis.

In the letter to the Romans, possibly written by St. Paul, the writer discusses the relation of various 'legalistic' rules and rituals to the Kingdom. In answer to a debate about if believers should follow certain rules concerning acceptable food and drink, he encourages the readers not to let anyone condemn them for what they believe in their heart to be right. He goes on: "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17).

Righteousness, in relation to God, means simply "being in right relationship with God" (McGrath 1996: 471). This relationship with God is possible by the removal of sin by Christ's sacrificial death. It is received by faith in Christ's sacrifice, and not by good works (ibid: 473). Both Catholic and Protestant theology agree on this, as Kreeft (2001: 126) points out. Righteousness involves peace with God. On the opening page of his *Confessions* Augustine says his famous words: "[. . .] you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you" (Augustine 1991: 3). Rest of the soul is a fruit of righteousness.

Price speaks of the purpose of salvation: "Forgiveness is the source of salvation, and eternal life in heaven is the result of salvation, but it is the restored relationship with God that is its main content" (Price, 1985: 40). Price explains that a relationship with God is lived through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, who has been given to all who have trusted in Christ (ibid: 109). Jesus teaches of this relationship with the Holy Spirit in John, chapter 14. The Holy Spirit is the member of the Trinity who represents both the Father and the Son to his children in this era. Thus the entire three-fold Godhead is present in the life of the citizen of the Kingdom (John 14:15-22).

The prophet Jeremiah foretold of the New Covenant God would make with people:

I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts [. . .] No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more. (Jer. 31:33, 34).

Ezekiel declares the word of God concerning this: "And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws" (Ezek. 36:27). Living in the Kingdom is not about obeying a moral code or doing certain rituals to obtain salvation. It is not about people working for God; it is about God working for people within their hearts, gradually affecting their wills and empowering them to do God's will (Kreeft 2001: 95).

Righteousness in human relations means justice, or fairness. This is one of the key principles of the Mosaic Law in the Old Testament (Ex. – Deut.). Sins against social righteousness, i.e. partiality of judgment, oppression, exploitation of the weak or poor, etc. were the sins most harshly condemned by the Old Testament prophets (e.g. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel). According to Deut. 16:20 justice is the requisite for Israel to live in her God-given land. Abandoning justice is the chief reason that the Israelites were removed from their land into exile (e.g. Isa. 10:1-3). Injustice in society is thus antithetical to the Kingdom of Heaven: it is a Kingdom of justice and fairness, where each person is equal with no discrimination (Gal. 3:27-29).

A righteous relationship with God results in peace and joy (Gal. 5:22). The New Testament is full of reasons for joy, and even exhortations to rejoice. Especially Paul's letter to the Philippians is known as the 'epistle of joy': "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" (Phil. 4:4). And indeed, if the Gospel is true, then there is very much to rejoice for. From the NT one gets the feeling that a typical church meeting should be a joyful party – it would be interesting to study why many church services have developed into something more like a funeral. Joy is the word that C.S. Lewis uses to describe his own salvation experience. Hence he called the story *Surprised by Joy* (1960).

5.4 A Kingdom of Forgiveness

The very foundation of the Kingdom is forgiveness. People are forgiven their sins (both original sin and actual sin, Kreeft, 2001: 129) because of Christ's self-sacrifice for them. How forgiveness functions (or should function) in the Kingdom is best described by Jesus' parable of the indebted servants. Instead of explaining it theoretically, I will present the parable. Simon Peter asks Jesus if he should forgive

his 'brother' even seven times, if he sins against him. Jesus answers: "not seven, but seventy-seven times (or 70x7)". He continues:

Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents [millions of dollars] was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii [a few dollars]. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded. His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.' But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened.

Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. (Matt 18:21-34)

Because everyone in the Kingdom has been forgiven a debt they absolutely could never pay, this forgiveness should inspire a spirit of forgiveness to others. "Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us" (Luke 11:4) is an essential part of the Lord's Prayer. Because of the prominence of forgiveness in Christianity, Christian leaders have often played an important part in reconciliation processes after conflicts, e.g. in South Africa with Bishop Tutu, as pointed out by Ahonen (2007: 82), who continues: "Facing and confessing guilt gives meaning to reconciliation. The unique mission of the Christian Church is proclaiming the message of atonement".

The power of forgiveness has been seen in history, not only after conflicts, but also as an active preemptive force that can even bring down regimes or systems of thought. Yancey (2001: chs. 2 and 7) gives two examples: Martin Luther King led his non-violent, non-retaliative campaign against racial discrimination in America. Gandhi defeated the British Empire with the same principles, which he had adopted from Christ's teachings, although he never did come to believe in Christ's divinity.

As I stated earlier, the Kingdom cannot be exhaustively explained. But one aspect of the Kingdom is appropriate to conclude this chapter with. Ahonen (2007: 141) says that the Kingdom is the object of Christian hope, towards which the Church actively orienteers itself. "In the Bible the Kingdom of God is described as dynamic movement and change [. . .] as a Biblical reality it is more a verb than a noun. There is nothing static about it, but it is rather something that breaks through, surprises, grips, and

touches deeply the whole person”. Again this makes me wonder why many churches seem more static than active, as if they have remained culturally several decades (alas! even centuries) behind the rest of the world. If they had grasped the Kingdom instead of their traditions, their message would be much more relevant to today’s people.

I have now established that the Kingdom of Heaven is a spiritual state of being that was inaugurated by Jesus Christ. It is not the same as the Christian Church, although individual churches (hopefully) are places where the Kingdom can be seen. It cannot be owned by any specific church, nor is it bound to church walls. It is an active realm of righteousness, peace, joy, and forgiveness, open to all who will receive, and it combats the evil in the world with goodness.

This will suffice for the theological background of The Kingdom. Before moving on to my core analysis, I will present in the following chapter the narrative context of *LOTR* – Tolkien’s mythology.

6 THE NARRATIVE CONTEXT OF *THE LORD OF THE RINGS*

LOTR is a complete and impressive story on its own, but to fully understand it one must place it in its narrative context: Tolkien’s mythology, which is called *The Silmarillion*, and *The Hobbit*, the events of which precede *LOTR*. *The Silmarillion* is actually a compacted version of all the volume of texts that Tolkien intended for his mythology. His son Christopher gathered the most important pieces of the unfinished work into one book that was published in 1977. I will now present the story-lines of *The Silmarillion* and *The Hobbit* to establish the background of *LOTR*.

6.1 *The Silmarillion* - The First Age

The Silmarillion begins with the Supreme Being, Ilúvatar, creating the world, which is in fact our Earth (*L*: 220), by giving his created, angelic spirits, the Ainur, a Theme to sing. Of that song Ilúvatar fashions the physical world. Here happens the original Fall. Melkor, the highest of the Ainur, is not content with the part assigned to him by Ilúvatar. He makes his own music out of harmony with the Theme to corrupt Creation. He draws a large fraction of the lesser angels with him in his rebellion.

Those of the Ainur who choose to enter the world and live there until the end of its history, are called the Valar, which Tolkien says “take the imaginative but not the

theological place of gods” (*L*: 284). The Valar live in a paradise on Earth called Valinor. It is in the furthest West, across the sea from Middle-earth, which is the central part of the world, where Elves, humans, and Dwarves will eventually live.

The world has been created to be a home for the “children of Ilúvatar”, Elves and Men, who are Ilúvatar’s own design, and the angels have had no part in their creation. However, one of the Valar, Aulë, cannot wait for Ilúvatar’s Children to appear, and forms the dwarves, based on his incomplete preconception of elves and humans. Ilúvatar learns of this and comes to question him. But Aulë's motives were not in rebellion, only eagerness, and he genuinely repents, ready to smite his creations. Ilúvatar sees his integrity and is merciful. The Dwarves are allowed to live, but they must sleep in a deep underground cave until the Children of Ilúvatar have arrived.

The Elves are the Firstborn, and are embodiments of art and beauty. They are immortal in that they cannot die of old age; only if slain in battle. Even then they are doomed to remain in the “circles of the earth” as long as it lasts. Since Melkor’s evil is loose in Middle-earth the Valar summon the Elves to Valinor. Not all come, but those who do, love the lights of Valinor: the Two Trees of Silver and Gold. One of the Elves imprisons some of their light in three jewels called the Silmarilli.

Melkor attacks Valinor with an evil spider-like giant creature that sucks out the life of the trees, but before they utterly shrivel and die the sun and moon are formed from their light. Melkor steals the Silmarilli. Against the counsel of the Valar, lusting for the Silmarilli, some Elves decide to go after Melkor, whom they now call Morgoth. They attack another tribe of Elves to steal their ships, and Elven blood is spilled within the Blessed Realm. The rebellious elves are exiled from Valinor, and readily leave to attack Morgoth, beginning their tragic history of war and death.

Humans, or the Followers, enter the scene long after the Elves. They also have fallen, but Tolkien gives no details of this tragedy. The humans that come to Middle-earth are a people that have rejected the service of evil, and having heard rumours of the “gods” and Elves of the West, flee there from their original home in the East. Unlike the Elves, Men are mortal. The Elves envy them for Ilúvatar’s special gift of mortality, for they see death as escape from the physical world.

The First Age ends in a cataclysmic war. Morgoth is defeated and cast into the “Void”, never to incarnate in the world again. But not all his corrupted, evil creatures, among others the orcs, are destroyed. Morgoth's captain, Sauron (one of the fallen lesser angels), appears to repent, but does not come to the Valar for judgment.

6.2 *The Silmarillion* - The Second Age

The West of Middle-earth is desolate. The Valar exile the Elves from Valinor, but grant them an island within sight of it, and they reward the Men who fought Morgoth with the island of Númenor, granting them freedom to travel anywhere else, except West to Valinor. Sauron, incarnated in human form, persuades Elves and Men to join him in rebuilding Middle-earth: a noble intention as such, but behind it is Sauron's desire to build his own paradise on earth and set himself up to be worshiped as God.

Sauron and his Elf-allies make Rings of Power, which are the central motif of *LOTR*. The rings magically preserve and enhance life and beauty, enhance their bearers' own abilities, and yield specific magical powers, which the Elves want to use to rebuild Middle-earth. Three of the rings are assigned to Elves, seven to Dwarves, and nine to Men, but secretly Sauron forges *One Ring to Rule Them All*, which controls all the other rings. To do this Sauron allows most of his power to pass into the Ring: without it he is virtually powerless, but with it he can dominate the world. He does not fear he will lose it, since the Ring is indestructible, except by the fire in which it was forged at Mount Doom in his own realm called Mordor.

When the Elves become aware of Sauron's purpose they hide their own three rings. Sauron attacks, and most of the Elves flee to Valinor, but the three Elven ring-bearers find hiding places within Middle-earth. Sauron obtains nine of the power rings, which he gives to human kings. They become the Nazgûl, Sauron's terrifying living-dead captains. Thus Sauron obtains supreme power in Middle-earth over those Men that are not in contact with the Elves and have no knowledge of the Valar or of Ilúvatar.

6.2.1 The rise and fall of Númenor

Meanwhile Númenor has grown into a wealthy, powerful nation. The people live long, blessed lives, growing in stature almost to that of the Elves. When the last king of Númenor hears that Sauron is now "king of kings" in Middle-earth, he attacks Sauron. Sauron's servants will not fight the mighty army, even with the Nazgûl as their leaders. Sauron surrenders and is taken prisoner to Númenor. With cunning, Sauron rises from slave-servant to chief counsellor of the king, and gradually seduces the king and the people. He claims that Ilúvatar is merely an invention of the Valar to keep Men under their power and to keep them from obtaining immortality from Valinor. The real God, Sauron says, is the one in the Void, and in the end he will reward his servants with vast realms to rule over. Sauron establishes the worship of the dark lord

Morgoth, and those faithful to Ilúvatar are persecuted and sacrificed. This evil religion spreads throughout Middle-earth, except the North-west with its Elven realms.

Ultimately Sauron entices the Númenoreans to attack Valinor, in lust for immortality. Ilúvatar intervenes, and the old world is broken. Valinor is removed from the physical world, which is “bent” into a Globe (until then it had been flat). This creates a chasm in the sea which swallows Númenor and its armada (Tolkien’s version of the Atlantis myth). Henceforth only Elven ships are allowed to sail “the straight road” to Valinor, but none are allowed to return. Other ships sailing west simply fall below the horizon and sail around the world.

Some of the faithful escape the destruction of Númenor and establish kingdoms in Western Middle-earth, one of which is Gondor. Sauron also escapes and goes to war against them. Men and Elves form an alliance against Mordor. The king of Gondor, Elendil, falls on his sword and it breaks under him. But his son Isildur takes the broken sword and with it cuts off Sauron’s ringed finger and slays his body, reducing him to a virtually powerless spirit. The Nazgûl retreat “to the shadows” (*LOTR*: 1059).

Isildur knows that the Ring could be destroyed in Mount Doom’s fire, but he refuses, claiming it as his own. He is later attacked by orcs and he falls into a river, loses the Ring, and drowns. The One Ring passes out of knowledge for two and a half millennia, and the three Elven Rings are kept by guardians in the mentioned refuges, turning them into beautiful realms of peace, where “Time seems to stand still and decay is restrained, a semblance of the bliss of the True West [=Valinor]” (*L*: 157).

Isildur’s brother’s heirs remain kings in Gondor, but eventually their line fails. The Stewards govern Gondor from then on, and no new king is chosen. A prophesy is made that the Ring will be found again, and in that day Elendil’s broken sword will be forged anew and given to the heir of Isildur, who will use it in battle against Sauron. If he is successful, he will be crowned king in Gondor.

6.3 *The Silmarillion* - The Third Age

A thousand years into the Third Age a shadow rises. The Valar, sensing it is the spirit of Sauron, send five angels of the same rank as Sauron, into Middle-earth to oppose him. They are incarnate, and have the human form of men who age very slowly (Gandalf lives in Middle-earth for two thousand years). They are known in *LOTR* as Wizards. This does not mean sorcerer or magician, but is merely the “Englishing” of the Quenyan “Istari”, “Wise Ones” (*L*: 159). The most important of these are

Saruman, their leader, and Gandalf. Their mission is to inspire Men to resist Sauron, but they may not use force or their powers as immortal spirits; only the powers at their disposal as incarnated beings within the world.

At this point hobbits appear for the first time in “recorded” Middle-earth history, but Tolkien leaves their specific origin obscure. Hobbits are a branch of the human race, and because of their small size (up to around 4 ft. [1,2m] as adults), are known as “halflings”, or the Little Folk. Hobbits exemplify a love for the basic pleasures of ordinary rural life: gardening, farming, nature, good food, etc. They embody anti-industrialism, humility, a diligent work ethic, strong family ties, and deep friendships. Tolkien says they are modelled after common English country-folk, and that he himself is “a hobbit (in all but size)” (*L*: 288). Their home, the Shire, is a beautiful, fertile and well tended land, modelled after rural England (*L*: 250).

The spirit of Sauron grows in power and evil creatures like orcs multiply again. They become Sauron’s chief troops in the series of battles that takes place and the splendour of the Númenorean kingdoms is broken, leaving peoples of diminishing importance in the North-West, the only area of Middle-earth not yet under Sauron’s control. The forces that have guarded the entrances to Mordor can no longer stand their post, and Sauron re-establishes his dark kingdom therein, while seeking the One Ring with increasing fury. And as the Ring is of Sauron’s own nature, it also begins to “seek its master”, and is found suddenly by a hobbit named Déagol from the river-bottom. Déagol’s friend Sméagol lusts for it, and murders Déagol for it. Sméagol is gradually overtaken by the Ring's power and he can no longer live among his kin or under the sun, so he retreats to a cave network under a mountain. There he lives in darkness on an underground lake for almost five hundred years, as the Ring gives him longevity, but reduces him to a wretched, shrivelled, frog-like creature.

6.4 *The Hobbit*

Bilbo Baggins, the main character of *The Hobbit* is a typical hobbit with nothing heroic or adventurous about him. Nevertheless, Gandalf recommends him to some dwarves, to help them on their quest to reclaim their ancestors’ treasures from a dragon. On the long, eventful journey they face perils and evil creatures, like trolls, giant spiders, and orcs. The pivotal event occurs when, passing through a mountain via ancient tunnels forged by dwarves, the group is attacked by goblins, and in the tumult Bilbo falls to the ground and passes out. He is missed by the orcs, and when he

wakes up he begins crawling forward in pitch darkness, seeking a way out. He happens to touch a cold, metal ring on the floor, and takes it.

By an underground lake he meets the creature Gollum (Sméagol), who intends to eat Bilbo, but seeing his sword, challenges Bilbo to a game of riddles and deceitfully promises to lead him out of the mountain if Bilbo wins. Bilbo asks what he has in his pocket; Gollum cannot answer, and loses. He goes to his nest to fetch his “precious”, the Ring, to use it to become invisible and catch Bilbo and eat him. But he cannot find it and guesses that the ring is what Bilbo had in his pocket. Outraged, he attacks Bilbo, who flees, stumbles and falls. The ring slips on his finger and Gollum runs by without seeing him. Bilbo hears Gollum talk to himself about how the Ring makes its wearer invisible and that he will go to guard the exit, so Bilbo decides to follow him.

At the exit tunnel Gollum waits, blocking it. Bilbo thinks he has to kill Gollum to escape, but he pities the wretched, lonely creature. Besides, it would not be fair, since he was wearing the ring and was invisible. So he leaps over Gollum, who tries to grab him in the air, but misses. Bilbo escapes, leaving Gollum wailing after the Ring.

Using the invisibility given by the Ring Bilbo rescues the dwarves every time they are in trouble. Ultimately he succeeds in stealing back many of the dwarves’ artefacts from the dragon’s lair. The enraged dragon destroys the human town closest to his lair, but a heroic Bowman has learned the dragon's weak spot and shoots it down. The dwarves get their treasure and a lot more. After a dispute with the humans over their share of the treasure, which Bilbo tries to solve diplomatically, and a war with goblins, Bilbo finally returns to the Shire with a share of the treasure and the Ring.

Now I have established for *LOTR* both its literary context of heroic fantasy literature, and its narrative context of Tolkien’s mythology. This marks the end of the background information, and it is time to move on to examine how *LOTR* reflects the Kingdom of Heaven, offering its reader “gleams of evangelium”.

7 SHINING RAYS OF PROVIDENCE – The story-line of *The Lord of the Rings*

The Kingdom of Heaven is fundamentally about the Kingship or Lordship of God. He is ultimately in control and governs things according to His plan – even evil will be turned to His Good. This is called Providence, which is the foremost feature of the Kingdom seen in *LOTR*. Although God (Ilúvatar) is not mentioned by name, there is a pervasive feeling of his presence and of the events following a plan higher than that of the characters themselves, although they must participate in the fulfillment of their

“destinies”. Every step of the long quest contributes to the ultimate victory in the end. This chapter will lay out the story-line of *LOTR* from the view-point of Providence.

7.1 Volume 1: *The Fellowship of the Ring*

In *LOTR*, the Ring passes on from Bilbo to his relative and heir, Frodo. Gandalf learns what the Ring is, and urges Frodo to take it to Rivendell, one of the Elven sanctuaries, to seek advice from Elrond, a chief Elf in Middle-earth. Frodo laments having the Ring, but Gandalf encourages him by pointing out the first case of Providence, which has taken place before the beginning of *LOTR*: Bilbo finding the Ring. Gandalf says: “Behind that there was something else at work, beyond any design of the Ring-maker. I can put it no plainer than by saying that Bilbo was *meant* to find the Ring, and *not* by its maker. In which case you also were *meant* to have it. And that may be an encouraging thought” (*LOTR*: 54-5, emphasis in original). A personless force like fate or destiny cannot “mean” anything to happen. It involves intention and a thinking mind, and this was what Tolkien had in *his* mind. From *The Silmarillion* we can deduce that the person who meant the Ring to be found was Ilúvatar, God.

The second major display of Providence is the timing of Frodo’s departure with his three hobbit friends. Frodo procrastinates for several years, and had he done so even a day longer, he would have been captured by the Black Riders, the evil Nazgûl on horseback. The fact that Frodo had chosen to leave on the day after his birthday, demonstrates how even the birth date of Frodo fits into Ilúvatar’s plan. The time was perfect for the quest to begin.

This brings to mind a Biblical passage concerning Christ’s coming: “But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son” (Gal 4:4). This is seen by several scholars, for example Walvoord and Zuck (1983: 601), to refer to the world situation: Rome had conquered the Mediterranean nations, and the Pax Romana had settled in. The Empire of Greece had left in its wake a world language, which was not overcome by Rome: Greek was spoken by nearly all citizens of the empire. The roads were good quality, extensive, and guarded by Roman troops, making travel easy and relatively safe all over the Empire. The time was right for the Messiah to appear, because the spreading of his message was facilitated to the entire area of Europe and Northern Africa.

Providence intervenes for the hobbits again, when a Black Rider has caught their scent as they cower in hiding, trembling with fear. The Rider starts crawling towards them and their capture is imminent, when a group of Elves happen to come by. The

Rider is alone and decides not to confront the Elves at this point and backs off. The hobbits travel the day and sleep the following night in peace among the Elves, and escape the Riders for a time (*LOTR*: 77).

Later they turn off the road into the Old Forest, in spite of its frightening reputation. The forest lives up to its fame when a wicked tree entangles the hobbits in its roots and tries to smother them. Again the timing is perfect, as Tom Bombadil, the mysterious but friendly master of the forest, happens to come along at that very moment. Bombadil orders the tree to let the hobbits go, and takes them to his house for a much needed time of rest and peace amidst their frightening journey (*LOTR*: 114-20). When Frodo asks him whether he came to their aid because he heard his call for help, or “by chance”, Bombadil answers in his carefree manner: “Did I hear you calling? Nay, I did not hear: I was busy singing. Just chance brought me then, *if chance you call it*. It was *no plan of mine* [. . .]” (*LOTR*: 123-4, emphasis added). Bombadil thus suggests three things: first, he does not call it chance; second, their meeting at that specific time was planned; third, he seems to know whose plan it was. He had been on his annual trek down the river to fetch the last of the summer’s flowers for his wife, Goldberry. It was perfect timing; too perfect to be mere chance.

The hobbits make it to Bree, a town that is home to both hobbits and humans. At an inn they meet the suspicious-looking Aragorn, who has a letter of recommendation from Gandalf. They have no choice but to trust him as their guide, as the Riders are watching all the roads out of Bree: only Aragorn knows the way through the wilderness to Rivendell. But even though Aragorn valiantly defends the hobbits, he alone cannot withstand their nightly attack, and Frodo is stabbed with a poisonous dagger with evil spells on it. The Riders leave them, expecting the dagger’s poison to “turn Frodo into one of them”, ghost-like living dead (*LOTR*: 216). But Aragorn’s first aid and Frodo’s own inner strength hinder its effects, and the chase continues.

The next providential turn is when Aragorn and the hobbits meet Glorfindel the Elf. Glorfindel’s skills in healing give Frodo the health he needs to (just) survive the way to Rivendell. Furthermore, Glorfindel gives Frodo his horse, without which he could never escape the Black Riders, as all nine finally catch up with them before the Ford they must cross to enter Rivendell. On the Elf’s horse Frodo slips amidst the Riders to the other side, and as they try to follow, Elrond (who has power over the waters around Rivendell) commands the river to flood over the Riders and sweep them away, and Frodo is safe to heal in the Elven refuge (*LOTR*: 204-9, 217-8).

The hobbits are not the only new arrivals in Rivendell. Representatives of all the free peoples of Middle-earth happen to come there for various reasons. Elves from a far-off forest are there to bring the news that Gollum – whom Gandalf has left in their custody after capturing and interrogating him about the Ring – has escaped (*LOTR*: 248). A delegation of Dwarves are there to ask for Elrond's counsel, because the Black Riders have been to their home realm asking about Bilbo and delivering an ultimatum from Sauron (*LOTR*: 235). Boromir, captain of the army of Gondor, has come to ask Elrond to explain a recurring prophetic dream he and his brother have had and for counsel in their war against Sauron. In the dream they were commanded to "seek the Sword that was broken" in Rivendell, and are told that there they would be shown "Isildur's bane" (bane = something that causes death or destruction [MOT]: in this case the Ring), and that "the Halfling forth shall stand" (*LOTR*: 240). Elrond says that the Ring is the reason they have been called to Rivendell, and continues:

Called, I say, though I have not called you to me, strangers from distant lands. You have come and are here met, in this very nick of time, by chance as it may seem. Yet it is not so. Believe rather that it is so *ordered* that we, who sit here, and none others, must now find counsel for the peril of the world. (*LOTR*: 236, emphasis added)

Frodo, the Halfling, presents the Ring, and it is also revealed that Aragorn is the heir of Isildur, rightful king of Gondor, and owner of the broken sword, which is newly forged. Gandalf reveals that Saruman, head of the Wise, has fallen, and is seeking the Ring so he can dominate Middle-earth in place of Sauron. Saruman had imprisoned Gandalf in his tower, but Gandalf had escaped with the help of a great eagle.

The council, led by Elrond and Gandalf, decide that they must try to get rid of Sauron's evil by destroying the Ring in Mordor where it was forged. Frodo feels the quest is his duty, since the Ring has come to him. Although terrified, he volunteers. The Fellowship of the Ring is formed of the four hobbits, Gandalf, the Elf Legolas, the Dwarf Gimli, and the human representatives Boromir and Aragorn.

They set out, but because of a momentous snow-storm the only way across the Misty Mountains is through mines, dug by Dwarves. After the disheartening realization that Gimli's kin have been slain, the Fellowship is attacked by orcs. They must flee through a way unknown to Gandalf, but this again is Providence. Had they gone the "right" road, they would have been trapped between the orcs and a huge cleft in the floor, but now they make it to the only bridge over another bottomless chasm in the mountain (*LOTR*: 320). The company passes, but an age-old demon of Morgoth's breeding, a Balrog, rises from the depths. Gandalf contests it on the bridge. With the

power of the Valar he destroys the bridge under the Balrog, but it drags Gandalf with it as it falls. The Fellowship escape to daylight, where the orcs will not follow, but they are grief-stricken for the loss of Gandalf. Aragorn assumes leadership.

The Fellowship eventually reaches Lothlórien, the second of the Elven refuges. There they meet Galadriel, an Elven embodiment of beauty. Frodo asks her to take the Ring, but she declines and shows Frodo what a devilish tyrant queen she would be with it. Galadriel gives each one a special gift that they will need on the way, and sees them off on boats down a river that flows south between Mordor and Gondor. Gollum is spotted following them at a distance.

At a certain point in the river they must decide whether to head straight for Mordor as planned, or divert to Minas Tirith, capital of Gondor, where the Gondorian army is preparing for war with Sauron. Here the pivotal occurrence of Providence takes place as Frodo goes aside to think, and Boromir follows him. Boromir thinks it is folly to take the Ring to Mordor, and that it should be used against Sauron. Lusting for the Ring he tries to take it by force. Frodo is compelled to decide: he slips it on, vanishes, and intends to go to Mordor alone. Boromir returns to the Fellowship, and they separate to search for Frodo. Sam, Frodo's gardener and servant, realizes Frodo's plan and sees a boat slipping away "on its own". Determined to go with Frodo, Sam throws himself into the water after him, though he cannot swim. Frodo is forced to rescue Sam and they go together. Relieved and thankful, now Frodo acknowledges Providence. He says: "It is plain that we were *meant* to go together" (*LOTR*: 397, emphasis added). No one notices their departure.

This event is tragic in itself, but without Boromir's "sin" that forced Frodo to leave the Fellowship he would never have been able to take the Ring into Mordor. As a group of so many, from the description of Mordor in book 6 we see that they could not have journeyed to Mount Doom unnoticed. But the two, Frodo and Sam, can.

7.2 Volume 2: *The Two Towers*

Searching for Frodo, Aragorn hears Boromir's horn. He races over to discover Boromir pierced with arrows, surrounded by scores of dead orcs. The repentant Boromir tells Aragorn that the orcs have taken the hobbits Merry and Pippin alive westward, and dies in his arms. Had this tragic event not happened, and even if they had conceded to let Frodo and Sam go alone to Mordor, the rest of the Fellowship would likely have headed south for Minas Tirith. That would have proved the wrong

decision. The orcs are of Saruman's army (not Sauron's), and are taking the hobbits west to Isengard, because Saruman has learned that the Ring-bearer is a hobbit.

Those remaining of the Fellowship – Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli – follow the orcs to save Merry and Pippin, trusting the Ring-bearer to his own fate. However, they cannot catch the speedy orcs – but Providence does. Riders of Rohan (a kingdom north of Gondor) attack the orcs at the edge of a forest. Under siege, an orc tries to carry the hobbits through the circle of Riders, but is noticed and killed. The hobbits lie under his foul body and are missed (luckily, for in the dark the Riders would have mistaken them for small orcs and killed them). The besieging troops tighten the circle and Merry and Pippin are left outside: They escape into the forest (*LOTR*: 444-9).

There they meet Treebeard the ent. Ents are kinds of “living trees”, shepherds of real trees. Had the hobbits not had child-like voices, and had Pippin not mentioned how he “almost felt like he liked” the forest, Treebeard says he would have trampled them, mistaking them for orcs (*LOTR*: 452). But the wise old creature likes the hobbits' innocence and love of nature, and they become friends. The hobbits tell him what is going on in the world, and Treebeard calls the Ents together. They decide to attack Saruman, whose orcs have been felling trees from their forest.

Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli meet Gandalf, who has returned from death, sent back by the Valar now as leader of the Wise, as Saruman has forfeited his office. They go to Rohan's king Théoden who is hopeless due to the lies of his adviser Wormtongue, a spy for Saruman. Gandalf heals Théoden from his “spell”. Théoden fires Wormtongue who flees to his master, Saruman. Théoden's troops, along with Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli, set out to defend the Fortress of Helm's Deep against Saruman. Virtually all of Saruman's army is sent to war, providentially leaving Isengard itself without defence worth mentioning against the ents. But Saruman's vast army is far too much for even the heroic defence of Helm's Deep. The walls are breached during the night and all seems lost. However, at daybreak Gandalf arrives with reinforcements, reviving hope for the army. But more importantly, daylight reveals that during the night a mysterious forest has appeared around the battlefield. In panic the orcs try to escape through the forest, but it is an Ent-herded forest of *huorns* (half trees, half ents), and not a single orc comes out alive. Gandalf's company go to Isengard to challenge Saruman, only to find the city in ruins and mostly under water, as the Ents have altered the course of a river, capturing Saruman in his tower. Saruman has brought about his own destruction by bringing the hobbits to Treebeard with perfect timing (*LOTR*: 486).

Gandalf removes Saruman from his office and assumes leadership of the council of the Wise. Gandalf offers Saruman the chance to repent, but he defiantly chooses to stay in his tower, hoping to call for Sauron's aid with his Palantir (a 'seeing stone', with which he has communicated with Sauron). Just as Saruman turns back inside, the Palantir crashes on the steps where he had been standing, aimed by Wormtongue at his resented master. Gandalf takes it, robbing Saruman of his last weapon.

In all these events, providential timing is crucial. Had the attack of the Ent-herded forest come any later, the people in the fortress would have been killed. The victory gained at Helm's Deep and Isengard would never have come to pass, had the hobbits not been captured by the orcs. Nor would the human army of Gondor have later been able to withstand the attacks from both east and west, had Saruman's army not been destroyed first. Thus the mournful breaking of the Fellowship turns out the very thing necessary for the victory in the end. The evil intentions of Boromir (who repented) and Saruman (who did not) are turned into Good.

Théoden decides to ride with his army and the Fellowship to the aid of their allies in Minas Tirith, where Sauron's forces are to strike. In camp at night Pippin cannot resist the temptation of the Palantir, so he steals it from Gandalf while he is asleep. In it he sees Sauron's eye and cannot break away from the terrifying gaze. Torturously interrogated by Sauron, Pippin reveals that he is a hobbit. Immediately Sauron sends a Nazgûl (now riding huge flying reptiles that can travel the long distance in a few hours) to Isengard, thinking the Ring-bearer is in Saruman's custody. All the Nazgûl finds is Isengard in ruins, but now Sauron's full attention is to the west. He thinks that the humans of Rohan and Gondor are trying to use the Ring against him.

7.2.1 Frodo and Sam pass into Mordor

All the while the real Ring-bearer, Frodo, is at the borders of Mordor itself, and even as the Nazgûl flies west to seek the Ring-bearer in Isengard, the wind caused by its flight keeps Frodo from falling from a cliff he had been climbing down at that very moment (*LOTR*: 593). Again evil is providentially turned to Good.

Frodo and Sam are attacked by Gollum, but they manage to subdue him. Frodo pities the wretched creature and spares him. Although Gollum does not know why they are heading for Mordor, he offers to lead them there, since he knows the way. Frodo makes Gollum swear to guide and serve them faithfully, and they continue the quest together, although Sam is suspicious of Gollum. They make it to Mordor's gate,

but it is impenetrable and teeming with orcs. They despair that the quest has failed, when Gollum (with evil intentions) tells them of another secret pass into Mordor. Frodo decides to trust him, and they turn aside from the gate in the north and head south alongside the mountain range that serves as Mordor's border.

Providential timing steps in again as they are captured by Boromir's brother Faramir, who is waging guerrilla warfare against Sauron's forces in the easternmost forests of Gondor. Were the hobbits not in Faramir's custody, they would likely be caught by the army of Southrons, passing through the forest from the south to fight in Sauron's army. Furthermore, the time they are forced to spend in Faramir's hideout gives them much needed rest and nourishment, and makes the timing of their entrance into Mordor providentially match with the rest of the events. Faramir is wise, and does not succumb to the temptation to take the Ring from Frodo, as his brother had done. He also thinks it is folly for them to go where they intend, but still he lets them go.

Moved by the kind and respectful way Frodo has treated him, Gollum comes close to repentance as he watches Frodo sleep, but Sam wakes up, sees him by Frodo, and drives him away, suspicious that Gollum was after the Ring. Gollum falls back to his evil intentions and goes on with his plan. For Frodo and Sam Gollum's treachery is the vilest case of evil in the whole story, which nevertheless turns out an instrument of Providence. Gollum has agreed with Shelob, a huge, spider-like monster, to guide the hobbits to her lair, which is the only covert way into Mordor. The hobbits realize Gollum's treachery too late, and Shelob attacks them, but with a phial received from Galadriel that contains the light of a star, Frodo manages to drive her away and they make it through. However, they rejoice too soon, and outside her lair Shelob catches Frodo, stings him, and begins wrapping his apparently lifeless body in her web. Sam manages, almost miraculously, to fight off and wound Shelob fatally (I will elaborate on this in chapter p. 73-4), but for Frodo it is too late (or so it seems to Sam). Tolkien's description of Sam's despair is heart-breaking, and the reader can feel it deeply.

Faced with a difficult choice, Sam takes the Ring and Frodo's sword, determined to finish the quest for him, but a patrol of orcs comes and he is forced to put the Ring on. They miss Sam, but find and take Frodo's body. Still invisible, Sam follows them and learns that Frodo is not dead after all: only stunned for Shelob to eat fresh later. Sam feels a complete failure – Frodo is alive and in the hands of the enemy. But providentially the Ring is not, due to Sam's "failure".

7.3 Volume 3: *The Return of the King*

The army of Rohan begins its long ride towards Minas Tirith. Théoden commands his niece Éowyn to govern Rohan during the war. Éowyn disobeys and joins the army disguised, carrying Merry, who also has been ordered to stay behind (*LOTR*: 786-7). On the way they are joined by a group of Aragorn's kin, descendants of Númenor, and Elrond's sons. But instead of riding with Rohan's army, they go with Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli to the Paths of the Dead, a horrific pass through the mountains to the southern plains of Middle-earth. Wild men of the forests lead Théoden's forces a secret way through the mountains around the legion of orcs sent to block the road.

Gandalf rides with Pippin ahead of the others to Minas Tirith. They meet the Steward, Denethor, and Pippin pledges himself to his service. Denethor is a noble man, but he is broken by grief and despair since he has learned about the death of his son, Boromir. Gandalf's hopes rise when he learns from Faramir of Frodo and Sam, but his hope is scorned by Denethor who despises Faramir for letting the Ring go when he had the chance to take it. Denethor sends Faramir on a hopeless mission to a border city held by orcs. Faramir is severely wounded, but is brought back to Minas Tirith, as Sauron's armies lay siege to the city.

Denethor falls into deeper despair, because Faramir seems beyond cure. He has also been looking into a Palantir and Sauron has shown him the sheer force of his evil armies, along with a black fleet approaching from the south. While the battle rages down at the outer walls of the city, Denethor decides to commit suicide, and to kill Faramir with him. He makes a pile of wood and soaks it, himself, and Faramir with oil and prepares to light himself on fire. Pippin runs off to fetch Gandalf, who rescues Faramir at the last moment, but Denethor himself perishes in flames.

At the crucial moment Rohan's army arrives and strikes horror in the orcs, who had not expected their arrival. Now the roles of Merry and lady Éowyn prove vital. They ride and fight close to king Théoden, who is eventually struck down, and the leader of the Nazgûl, the Witch-King, approaches to kill him on one of the terrifying dinosaur-like winged beasts. In the confusion only Éowyn and Merry are aware of the situation. Éowyn demonstrates more courage than any man does in the war, when she stands up against the terrifying Witch-King, who has almost paralyzed Merry with fear. Éowyn beheads the flying beast, and as the enraged Witch-King attacks her on foot Merry musters his courage and strikes at his knee from behind. No normal sword can harm the living-dead Nazgûl, but Merry's sword is Elven-made, with Elvish spells

against Sauron in it, and it pierces the half-spirit body of the Witch-King. He falls over, and Éowyn deals him a final plunge of her sword in the head. Both Merry and Éowyn receive deathly wounds and their swords are broken, but the Nazgûl perishes and fades away. The passing of their leader weakens the orc army, but the arrival of the black fleet from the south raises their hopes again. But it is in fact Aragorn with an army of Men from the southern plains, who have taken over the Southron fleet. I will give an account of Aragorn's side-road in the chapter on self-sacrifice (p.70-71), but now suffice it to say that the orc legions cannot withstand the attacks from three fronts: Rohan in the north, Aragorn in the south, and the warriors of Minas Tirith from the city, who rise to fight with new hope at the arrival of the reinforcements.

Victory is won at Minas Tirith, but the war is not over. The bulk of Sauron's armies are still in Mordor, awaiting mobilization. To further keep Sauron's attention away from the Ring-bearer in his own realm, Gandalf and Aragorn lead an army of Men to Mordor's gate to challenge Sauron. Pippin goes with them, but Merry is left behind because of his wound from the slaying of the Witch-King. To the horror of Gandalf's company, at the gate they are presented with Frodo's gear: they think Sauron has Frodo and the Ring. All hope is lost and they prepare to die, as Sauron's overwhelming forces surround the human army and launch their attack.

7.3.1 The final leg of the Ring-bearer's quest

Just inside Mordor, Sam gathers his courage and enters the orcs' guard tower, only to find the whole outpost full of dead orcs – they have been fighting each other over Frodo. He finds Frodo, but must also fight a couple of survived orcs. Sam and Frodo manage to escape, wearing some smaller orcs' gear as disguise. They intend to go to Mount Doom the shortest way, but are caught by a passing squadron of orcs, heading for the northern gate for war. The hobbits are mistaken for small orcs fleeing from battle, and are cruelly prodded on by orc whips, but eventually they manage to slip away amidst an argument between different squadrons of orcs. Even this awful plight is providential, as the shortest way would have been impassable, and Frodo and Sam would not have gotten there on time, had they not been forced along with the orcs.

Frodo and Sam complete their crushing trek up Mount Doom. Just as Pippin and the human armies at the gate resign to their death, Frodo fails: he refuses to give up the Ring and puts it on. Sauron's attention turns immediately away from the Gate to Frodo, and the Nazgûl fly towards Mount Doom away from the battle, leaving the orc

army baffled without their leaders. However, Gollum beats the Nazgûl to Frodo: he attacks him, bites off his finger, and seizes the Ring. Wildly rejoicing, Gollum trips and falls into the lava. As the Ring is unmade, Sauron disintegrates with a furious rage, the Nazgûl perish, and Sauron's armies all over Middle-earth are in confusion at the loss of their dominating spirit. Mount Doom begins to erupt and there is no way Frodo and Sam can escape. They stagger onto a rock on the infernal mountainside and surrender to their fate: they have done their part, Middle-earth and their beloved Shire are saved, and now their fate is to die. But by the guidance of Ilúvatar, great eagles arrive, carrying Gandalf from the battlefield. They spot the hobbits, pick them up from where they have passed out, and carry them to safety (*LOTR*: 930).

The closing chapters of *LOTR* describe the establishment of Aragorn's kingdom in Gondor, and the hobbits' journey home. They have now grown spiritually and mentally, and are able to face and rid their beloved Shire of the "lesser" evil that has taken it over since they have been gone. Frodo never fully heals from his wounds and the "stain" that the Ring left on him, so he is allowed to sail to the Undying Lands of Valinor for healing. He goes with Gandalf, Bilbo, Elrond, Galadriel, and other Elves that are leaving Middle-earth as their age is ending and the time of Men is beginning.

In all these events the hand of Ilúvatar is seen guiding the events towards the final glory. Many tragedies follow each other, but they are woven by Ilúvatar into ultimate Good. As a Christian, Tolkien believed that the hand of God is guiding things in our world towards final glory. Like in *LOTR*, things may seem quite out of God's control, and in face of the increasing evil in the world we may feel faint, and even hopeless. But to apply the message of *LOTR* to our world and time, it raises hope that evil will one day be destroyed, and the works and actions of even the smallest of us are not insignificant, and one must continue to do what is right until the very end.

8. Gleams of Evangelium – THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

I have now given an overview of how even evil cannot escape the control and providence of God (Ilúvatar) in *LOTR*. Now it is time to look at other aspects of the Kingdom of Heaven paralleled in *LOTR*. The Kingdom in its ultimate mode is not accessible at present, and little of it can be known, so this study must focus on its "here and now" aspects, in which the Kingdom affects our world through people. In

LOTR the Kingdom in action is exemplified by characters and events. This chapter will provide a broader viewpoint on the foundations of the Kingdom. The further chapters will then dive deeper into specific examples.

8.1 The King

The second to last chapter of *LOTR*, *The Scourging of the Shire*, tells how Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin return home from their quest, only to see their beloved Shire overcome by ruffians led by the evil Saruman who has fled there from the siege of his tower. He has seen the simple little hobbits and their fertile land of the Shire as a worthwhile and easy target of exploitation – and also a means for revenge against the hobbits, who were instrumental in his downfall. With his hoodlums Saruman has turned the Shire into an industrial dictatorship. The hobbits of the Fellowship of the Ring boldly lead their kin in a revolution. Wealth and land is redistributed, Saruman is killed, and the bullies are driven away. In response to some critics' conclusions concerning the meaning of this, Tolkien wrote: "I am not a 'socialist' in any sense – being averse to planning [. . .] most of all because the 'planners', when they acquire power, become so bad" (*L*: 235). He also wrote:

I am not a 'democrat' only because 'humility' and equality are spiritual principles corrupted by the attempt to mechanize and formalize them, with the result that we get not universal smallness and humility, but universal greatness and pride, till some Orc gets hold of a ring of power – and then we get and are getting slavery. (*L*: 246)

What, then, was Tolkien's political stance? He said in a letter to his son Christopher in 1943: "My political opinions lean more and more to Anarchy (philosophically understood, meaning abolition of control not whiskered men with bombs) – or to 'unconstitutional' Monarchy" (*L*: 63). Both of these ideals are found in *LOTR*: the Shire is a place of Anarchy with little or no control – merely common hobbits making their own living off their own land – and Gondor, the kingdom of Aragorn. After the war of the Ring the Shire is, in fact, a land of both monarchy and anarchy, as Aragorn takes it into his protection, but gives the hobbits complete autonomy (*LOTR*: 1071).

Although Tolkien believed in monarchy, he also recognized the tendency of power to corrupt. Tolkien said of people suitable for power: "Not one in a million is fit for it, and least of all those who seek the opportunity" (*L*: 64). Scull and Hammond (2006: 771) point out Tolkien's agreement with, and application to government, of the medieval ideal of "*nolo episcopari*: that only the man who does not want to be a

bishop is fit to be a bishop”. Genuine humility is the prerequisite Tolkien felt most necessary for a ruler, and in *LOTR* he has created a character just like that – Aragorn.

Although Aragorn knows his destiny as the prophesied returning King, and is sure of his calling as the heir of Isildur (e.g. *LOTR*: 580), he has no illusions of his own abilities. At many points he recognizes his mistakes. For example, at Boromir’s tragic death and the breaking of the fellowship, Aragorn cries: “Alas! [. . .] This is a bitter end. Now the Company is all in ruin. It is I that have failed. Vain was Gandalf’s trust in me. What shall I do now?” (*LOTR*: 404). This is only one of the situations in which Aragorn struggles for wisdom. “Would that Gandalf were here!” (*LOTR*: 384) he cries faced with a difficult decision. Aragorn complains to his companions: “You give the choice to an ill chooser [. . .]. Since we passed through the Argonath my choices have gone amiss” (*LOTR*: 415). He constantly strives for wisdom to make the right choice for the good of Middle-earth. Aragorn humbly leans on the counsel of Gandalf, Elrond, and Galadriel, whom he recognizes as his superiors in both wisdom and experience (e.g. *LOTR*: 758, 862). He comments on Gandalf’s loss and his own reluctant leadership: “When the great fall, the less must lead” (*LOTR*: 425).

Aragorn is willing to submit himself to the leadership of others while he awaits his own time, even to that of the Steward Denethor, who is destined to be Aragorn’s own subject (*LOTR*: 844). Here Aragorn’s story is parallel to that of King David, told in 1 Samuel. Through the mouth of the prophet Samuel, God had rejected Saul as king because of his deliberate disobedience. Samuel had then been led by God to anoint David as king in Saul’s place. However, David never asserted his kingship, but rather served under Saul, both as a servant and warrior, fighting his famous duel with Goliath during this time. Even though Saul later tried to kill David, David never retaliated, but waited patiently for his time. Denethor does not try to kill Aragorn, but he does not welcome him either, nor will he “bow to Aragorn”, whom he scorns as an “upstart, bereft of lordship and dignity” (*LOTR*: 836).

Saul loses his son Jonathan in battle; Denethor loses Boromir and thinks Faramir will also die. Both commit suicide, grieving for their perished sons and thinking that they will perish anyway, seeing their enemy as overwhelming. Both Aragorn and David are then hailed king, and both assume the position already theirs by right. Because of his humility, his love for God, and his refusal to retaliate, even in the NT David is called a “man after God’s heart” (Acts 13:22), in spite of his sins (of which he genuinely repented, 2 Sam. 11-12), and is thus set as an example in the Kingdom.

Aragorn repeatedly places his own life on the line for Frodo and for all the people of Middle-earth. “If by life or death I can save you, I will,” he says to Frodo at the onset of the quest (*LOTR*: 168). Aragorn is depicted as such a person, that only the most hardened cynics or rebellious individualists would not be willing to have him as their king. Bruner and Ware (2001: 93-7) call him a “king of hearts”: one who wins the love of his followers and their freely given allegiance. Fit to be king in his humility, Aragorn exemplifies the Ruler of the Kingdom of Heaven, who is genuinely humble, and is thus fully qualified (by Tolkien’s standards) for His position of power. St. Paul writes to the Philippians:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil. 2:5-11)

Aragorn is like Christ in more than just his humility. Firstly, his coming has been foretold by prophecies. But nevertheless he is not known as a king. Although he is of Númenorean descent and Isildur’s heir, he has lived as a ranger, a wanderer in the wilderness. He looks rough, not at all like royalty, and is not respected. People do not know that Aragorn and the other rangers are all Númenorean warriors, dedicated to defending the free people’s of Middle-earth. Without the rangers the people would have perished long ago, but still they scowl at them and give them scornful names (*LOTR*: 242). Boromir is sceptical of Aragorn and doubts his ability to help, even though he knows the prophecies concerning him (*LOTR*: 240-1). Likewise, Christ “was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him” (John 1:10-11). The Pharisees and other leaders of Jesus’ time knew all the prophecies of the Messiah, yet they could not, or refused to recognize him.

Aragorn does not assert his kingship or demand allegiance from anyone. He refuses to assume the throne unless the people want him to be their King (*LOTR*: 843). When the War of the Ring is won and the prophecies of him are verified, the people call him Elfstone, because of the green stone brooch he wore, not knowing that it was prophesied that he would be called Elfstone. The people then crown him king of their own free will, arranging a triumphant celebration in his honour, thankful for his role

in liberating them from Sauron's evil (*LOTR*: 942-7). Similarly Christ did not impose his kingdom on anyone. He did not curry favour with his followers. He taught things like unselfishness and giving up one's prerogatives for the good of others (Luke 6:29-31). Many of his followers ended up leaving him because his teaching was "hard". At this point he asked even the Twelve if they wanted to leave him, but Simon Peter voiced their feelings: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God" (John 6:60-9). Even after the Resurrection established that Jesus was the Messiah, he did not use force to establish a Kingdom: he becomes king of those who will have him of their own free will and of thankfulness for delivering people from the evil of Satan (1John 3:8).

8.2 Self-sacrifice

There are further minor parallels between Aragorn and Christ, like Aragorn's healing abilities as a sign of his Kingship (*LOTR*: 845-850). But their most important similarity is one that is exemplified by other characters as well: self-sacrifice. The proof that Christ is a good King, worthy of allegiance, is his self-sacrifice on our behalf. Augustine speaks of the Crucifixion as a demonstration of God's immense love towards mankind, which inspires a reciprocal love towards God (McGrath 1996: 439). Christ's death was necessary to remove what was standing in between people and God, their sin (e.g. Is 59:2). The Catholic theologian Peter Kreeft answers a typical question: "Why could God not forgive our sins without Christ's death? Because that would mean *ignoring* them. And God is Truth" (Kreeft, 2001: 122). God did not ignore our sins, but bore their punishment. This opened the way for people into the Kingdom, not only as subjects of the King, but as children of God (1 John 3:1). Christ's self-sacrifice is set as an example for his own to follow (Phil 2:5-11).

Self-sacrifice for the good of others is present in *LOTR* in many ways. First it is seen when Frodo accepts his doom as the Ring bearer at the council of Elrond (*LOTR*: 263-4). The second major occurrence is Gandalf standing his ground in the Mines of Moria and falling into the abyss with the Balrog, to let the others pass to safety (*LOTR*: 322). Tolkien writes about this incident:

[. . .] Gandalf faced and suffered death; and came back or was sent back, as he says, with enhanced power. But though one may be in this reminded of the Gospels, it is not really the same thing at all. The Incarnation of God is an infinitely greater thing than anything I would dare to write. (*L*: 237)

Tolkien's examples of self-sacrifice are not meant to represent Christ's death *per se*, but nevertheless they remind one of it, and thus *exemplify* it, just like any real instance of self-sacrifice for the benefit of others. Such a spirit is seen in many other places, but a couple more examples will suffice.

8.2.1 Aragorn faces death

Aragorn demonstrates such a sacrificial spirit throughout *LOTR*, but he needs to go through an even deeper symbolic experience of death. He is sent a reminder from Elrond of the prophecies about the Paths of the Dead (*LOTR*: 758). The Paths of the Dead is a horrific, haunted pass through gorges and caves in the mountains between Rohan and Gondor. It is thus named because there live the ghosts of men who had broken their oath to fight alongside Isildur against Sauron in his first rising three millennia earlier. Isildur had then cursed them "to rest never" until they fulfil their oath and fight against Sauron at the coming of Isildur's heir (*LOTR*: 764-5).

Knowing his fate, but also aware that the Dead may not heed his call, and could easily kill him, Aragorn decides to face the horrors of the Paths of the Dead. He does so, knowing that no one has ever entered the paths and returned. Legolas, Gimli, the sons of Elrond, and the rangers join him, and they leave the Riders of Rohan behind. This death experience of Aragorn echoes that of Christ in a further way. Christ's followers felt utter disappointment at his crucifixion: Jesus was not the promised Messiah after all, and all the hopes that he had kindled in their hearts were lost (Luke 24:19-22). Likewise, the Riders of Rohan place their faith in Aragorn, believing him to be the prophesied king to lead them to victory. But now he abandons them at their time of grimmest need, as they are riding to confront Mordor's armies. Since no one has ever survived the paths, they have no hope of Aragorn's return. Éomer voices their sentiments: "Then our paths are sundered [. . .] He is lost. We must ride without him, and our hope dwindles" (*LOTR*: 778). But against all odds, when all seems lost, Aragorn does return with a significant army liberated from captivity to the Southrons, Sauron's allies. The dead have followed him and utterly destroyed the Southron army. Aragorn releases the dead from their oath, allowing them to finally leave the world, and gathers the army to sail north to Gondor.

Aragorn's passing the paths of the dead is reminiscent of the biblical account of Christ in the realm of the dead described in I Peter 3:18-19. Kreeft (2001: 78) quotes the Catechism of the Catholic Church: "Jesus [. . .] experienced death and in his soul

joined the others in the realm of the dead. But he descended there as Savior, proclaiming the Good News to the spirits imprisoned there”. Like Christ, Aragorn enters the realm of the dead, delivers captives, and returns victorious.

A further example of self-sacrifice is that of the hosts of Minas Tirith, led by Aragorn and Gandalf to challenge Sauron at Mordor’s gate (chs. IX – X of book 5). In terms of military strategy it is sheer madness, because the armies still in Mordor are absolutely overwhelming to their few thousand men. They go there to draw Sauron’s attention away from the heart of his realm, to give Frodo and Sam a chance to succeed in their mission – *if* they are still alive. Gandalf’s company knows very well that if Frodo fails, they too will die. But they choose to lay their lives down nonetheless.

8.2.2 The Passion of Frodo

Frodo’s plight with Sam in Mordor is perhaps the purest example of self-sacrifice in *LOTR*. There is powerful symbolism in the whole story, but one point must be mentioned first. In the mines before Gandalf falls, he explains that the material value of the mail-shirt of mithril (the most precious metal in Middle-earth) that Gimli’s ancestors had given to Bilbo is more than the value of the entire Shire. Unknown to the others, Frodo is wearing it. “He felt staggered to think that he had been walking about with the *price of the Shire* under his jacket” (*LOTR*: 310, emphasis added). This is almost certainly conscious symbolism by Tolkien. Frodo sets out to save his own beloved home-land, the Shire, sacrificing himself on their behalf. His own life, his body “under his jacket”, is the price of the Shire.

Only as the quest draws closer to its end, does the reader begin to feel just how high the price is for Frodo. One passage in particular describes how crushing it is:

Frodo seemed to be weary, weary to the point of exhaustion. He said nothing, indeed he hardly spoke at all; and he did not complain, but he walked like one who carries a load, the weight of which is ever increasing; and he dragged along, slower and slower [. . .] In fact with every step [. . .] Frodo felt the Ring on its chain about his neck grow more burdensome. He was now beginning to feel it as an actual weight dragging him earthwards. But [. . .] it was more than the drag of the Ring that made him cower and stoop as he walked. The Eye: that horrible growing sense of a hostile will that strove with great power to [. . .] see you: to pin you under its deadly gaze, naked, immovable. (*LOTR*: 616)

Pearce points out the parallels between Frodo carrying the Ring and Christ’s Passion:

[. . .] such is the potency of the prose [. . .] that the parable of Frodo’s burden may even lead the reader to a greater understanding of Christ’s burden. All of a sudden one sees that it was not so much the weight of the Cross that caused Christ to stumble but the weight of evil, symbolized by Tolkien as the Eye of Sauron. (Pearce 1999: 112)

The Ring grows so heavy on Frodo that he is finally utterly spent, and at one point on the slope of Mount Doom Frodo's strength fails, and Sam must carry him a stretch of the journey (*LOTR*: 919-20). The weight of evil and the sins of humankind grew so heavy on Christ, that in the garden of Gethsemane – prior to his arrest, trial, whipping, and crucifixion – Luke (22:44) describes: “And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground”. This was likely a case of hematidrosis, in which extreme anxiety can cause the blood vessels close to the skin to leak blood into the sweat glands (Anderson 2007). In his agony, Christ prayed: “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me” (Matt 26: 39). The temptation for Christ to abort his mission must have reached its peak at this point, but in the end he submits to his Father's will, though it means unimaginable suffering under the weight of human sin. St. Paul says: “You are not your own; you were bought at a price” (1 Cor 6:19-20). St. John describes the praise of Christ in heaven: “You are worthy [. . .] because you were slain, and *with your blood you purchased* men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a *kingdom* and priests to serve our God (Rev. 5:9-10). The price of the Kingdom was no less than the Passion of the Christ, His blood shed on our behalf.

In *LOTR*, in a paradoxical twist of fate typical of the Kingdom of Heaven, Frodo, who was willing to give up his life, was “returned to life” by the doom of Gollum, who was seeking immortality, as pointed out by Bruner and Ware (2001: 88). Frodo's story exemplifies Jesus' teaching that “[. . .] whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it” (Mark 8:35). I believe Jesus meant that a life of self-sacrificial service of others is the way to find our true selves and meaning to our lives, while selfishness leads only to emptiness.

8.2.3 The Choices of Master Samwise

According to Tolkien, Samwise (Sam) Gamgee is the real hero of *LOTR*, and the most “closely drawn character, the successor to Bilbo of the first book, the genuine hobbit” (*L*: 105). Tolkien wrote of him: “My ‘Sam Gamgee’ is indeed a reflexion of the English soldier, of the privates and batmen I knew in the 1914 war, and recognised as so far superior to myself” (*BIO*: 81). Sam's self-sacrificial heroism is worth mentioning at this point. At the onset of the quest Frodo reminds him that it would be very dangerous, and they might perish. Sam answers: “If you don't come back, sir, then I shan't, that's certain” (*LOTR*: 85). Sam speaks for himself and Merry and

Pippin, when he says: “You can trust us to stick to you through thick and thin – to the bitter end. [. . .] We are horribly afraid – but we are coming with you” (*LOTR*: 103). He also enters Mordor at his own peril, out of duty to serve his master, Frodo. He also must make choices concerning his part in the quest, and the most difficult of these he faces as they are entering Mordor (*LOTR*: book 4, ch. X).

First, when Shelob the monster-spider has stung Frodo and is looming above him and wrapping him in her web, Sam finds in himself surprising courage and attacks her, knowing that he does not stand a chance against the hideous creature. Before the monster has time to react, he strikes one of her feet off with Frodo’s sword and pierces one of her eyes. Sam leaps under her and stands between her massive, repulsive body and the body of his dear master. He lashes at her stomach, but cannot pierce her age-old, parched skin. Shelob plunges down on him with all her weight to smother him, but Sam is standing upright, with the sword pointed upwards. He stands firm, and the sword pierces Shelob, wounding her fatally. He then chases her back to her lair with the phial of star-light, given to Frodo by Galadriel.

All his hope gone, weeping over his beloved friend’s “body”, he decides to take the Ring and carry it to Mount Doom himself. He continues alone, but suddenly a company of orcs comes towards him and Frodo. He then makes the choice: he must not leave his master. He had promised to serve him to the end, and that was his duty. Again, at his own peril, he returns, and faces an entire stronghold of Orcs. He does have to fight, but a providential battle between the Orcs themselves spares him of the need to fight the whole legion. Tolkien’s in-depth depiction of Sam’s inner reasoning and his decision to sacrifice himself for Frodo is touching. Tolkien wrote that it had moved C.S. Lewis to tears (*L*: 83). It is indeed one of the special moments of *LOTR*, a bright gleam of Evangelium.

8.3 Obedience to the King

Like the kingdoms in the world of *LOTR*, the Kingdom of Heaven is hierarchical. As its name suggests, it is governed by a King, and it is not, for example, a democracy. A king is not a king without subjects. Tolkien revered the hierarchical feudal system. But recognizing the tendency for power to corrupt, he said, “Touching your cap to the Squire may be damn bad for the Squire but it’s damn good for you” (*BIO*: 128). Considering Tolkien’s political ideals of anarchy and unconstitutional monarchy (see p. 67), two significant characters exemplify them both. The hobbits Merry and Pippin

are swept into the War of the Ring. Their hearts' desire is to do what they can in the war to save their beloved Shire, the anarchical, agrarian land. To do so, they each separately pledge allegiance to a King: Merry to King Théoden of Rohan (*LOTR*: 760); and Pippin to the Steward of Minas Tirith, Denethor (*LOTR*: 739-40).

Humbling oneself under the authority of another was for Tolkien a virtue that serves as an exercise in paying homage to God. The modern individualistic tendency to disdain authority is a very new trend in human history, and Tolkien loathed the rise of modernism and the abandoning of old values (Scull and Hammond, 2006: 1001-2). Obedience to an earthly king reflects obedience to God. If there is a God, He has the divine right to our obedience, just like an earthly king or impersonal government does of its subjects. The stumbling block question is: "Is the King a good one, like Aragorn?" If he is, then allegiance and obedience is not a burden, but a joyful duty. One could easily bow before him, like Ceorl does before Théoden, and says: "Command me, Lord!" Throughout *LOTR* people obey their superiors, even if their orders are not always founded on wisdom, as in the case of Denethor (*LOTR*: 808-9).

Although obedience to a specific God is not mentioned in *LOTR*, it is not only exemplified by paying homage to a king, but also by obedience to one's appointed mission or fate. A hint of this, along with an allusion to the God of Middle-earth, Ilúvatar, is given in Gandalf's words (cited on p. 56) to Frodo, that he was *meant* to have the Ring (*LOTR*: 54-5). Later Frodo complains to Gandalf, concerning the rising of Sauron: "I wish it need not have happened in my time." Gandalf answers: "So do I [. . .] and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us" (*LOTR*: 50). Frodo deplores the Ring, and asks: "Why did it come to me? Why was I chosen?" Gandalf answers: "Such questions cannot be answered [. . .] But *you have been chosen*, and you must therefore use such strength and heart and wits as you have" (*LOTR*: 60, emphasis added). And Frodo does just that, throughout the entire Quest.

Along with Frodo, the others also must weigh the consequences and choose whether to follow their designated paths or not, struggling with the temptation to retreat. In fact, Galadriel offers each of them the choice of quitting and going back home (*LOTR*: 348-9). But they all keep going. Sam speaks descriptively of this as he and Frodo face the horror of Mordor. First he says he had thought that people in great stories went out seeking adventure and danger themselves, but instead, in the most important stories, the heroes just "land" in the stories unwillingly. He continues:

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 [. . .] 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 a tale we've fallen into? (*LOTR*: 696)

Sam and Frodo continue to discuss how they are in only a brief chapter of the greater story of the world. They have their part to play – to a good or bad end – and then others will play theirs. In fact, they are sure that theirs will actually be a bad end, but still they “obey”, and go all the way to the “bitter end”.

I have now looked at the most important character of the Kingdom: the King Himself, and His various attributes, as exemplified by the characters in *LOTR*. He is humble and he loves his subjects so much to give himself in sacrifice for them. This makes him a “king of hearts”, who inspires the freely given obedience of those who will have him as their King. It is time to move on the citizens of the Kingdom.

9 Gleams of Evangelium – THE KINGDOM AS A COMMUNITY

The subjects of a kingdom are not only in relation to their ruler or their superiors in the hierarchy; they are also in relation to each other, their fellow citizens. In *LOTR* we see examples of both positive and negative communities, the key examples being the Fellowship of the Ring and Sauron's realm of Mordor. The Fellowship of the Ring “gives flesh” to Tolkien's concept of Fellowship: something he shared with his friend C.S. Lewis. Lewis talks of it in his book *The Four Loves* (2002, hereafter *4L*), as people standing, not facing each other as lovers do, but standing side by side, facing a common objective. Lovers are passionate for each other; friends are passionate for their mutual interests (*4L*: 73). Lewis gives a practical example: “You will not find the warrior, the poet, the philosopher or the Christian by staring in his eyes as if he were your mistress: better fight beside him, read with him, argue with him, pray with him” (*4L*: 86). Lewis praises this kind of friendship:

[. . .] when the whole group is together, each bringing out all that is best, wisest, or funniest in all the others. Those are the golden sessions; when four or five of us after a hard day's walking have come to our inn; when our slippers are on, our feet spread out towards the blaze and our drinks at our elbows; when the whole world, and something beyond the world, opens itself to our minds as we talk; and no one has any claim on or any responsibility for another, but all are freemen and equals as if we had first met an hour ago, while at the same time an Affection mellowed by the years enfolds us. Life [. . .] has no better gift to give. Who could have deserved it? (*4L*: 86-7)

The picture Lewis evokes is somehow hobbit-like: enjoying the moment, the rest, the fire, the drink, and the company. But the depth of the hobbits' friendship is measured, not by the fireplace, but by hardships, and when they are faced with the horror of Mordor. As I pointed out in the previous chapter, Sam's faithfulness to Frodo is tested even to death, as in book six it becomes almost certain that they will never return from Mordor. Sam's love for Frodo is a pure example of the friendship-love that Lewis talks of in *4L* (69-109). Naturally this can also be seen as the class-loyalty of a servant to his master, especially in light of Tolkien's approval of hierarchy. But even then it is a case of the free-willed devotion of the "lower-class" Sam to the "higher-class" Frodo. Frodo does not impose any authority over Sam, and the feeling throughout the book is more of the friendship of equals, as Sam himself asserts that it is their friendship that makes him stick with Frodo to the bitter end (*LOTR*: 103).

Friendship and faithfulness are demonstrated by the entire Fellowship. Each one of them is faithful to the others, demonstrating a love for them and for the free peoples of Middle-earth. The Kingdom of God is also depicted as a community founded on the love of God, and ideally living out of love for each other. Fellowship is the very hallmark of Jesus' teaching of the community of the Church: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:34-5).

This love is meant for all people, regardless of their racial or social background, or their gender or age. St. Paul says: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). When the Jews of New Testament times spoke of "Greeks" they meant all Gentiles, non-Jews, since the Greek culture was the dominant culture of the Roman Empire. Although there are leadership roles in the hierarchical Kingdom, it is still a Kingdom of equality – no one is more important or more loved by God than anyone else. An articulated example of equality in human value is also seen in *LOTR*, when Gandalf remembers times past: "Those were happier days, when there was still close friendship at times between folk of different race, even between Dwarves and Elves" (*LOTR*: 295). Tolkien was not a racist, although sometimes he has been accused of it because some of his peoples from the east and south are seen as wholly evil. But this is only a narrative necessity in the writing, and does not imply racism, as Pearce (1999:133-137) makes clear. Tolkien himself refutes charges of racism many times in his letters, for example, he bluntly stated: "I have not that spirit, and it does not appear in the story" (*L*: 244).

The New Testament uses the Greek word *koinonia* to describe fellowship (Thayer and Smith 2008). The same word is used to describe people's fellowship with God (1 Cor 10:16) and with each other (1 John 1:7). Ahonen (2007: 177-9) says, in accord with other theologians, that Christian fellowship between people is based on the perfect loving unity of the Trinity: three Persons in One. The theology of the Trinity is beyond the range of this thesis, but suffice it to say that it is a mystery, in which the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all distinct persons in One Godhead, so deeply joined in unity, that together they are One. This is the kind of unity Christ called his disciples into. In his "priestly prayer" for his disciples, he said:

I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that *all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you*. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.
(John 17:20-23, emphasis added).

This is seen as the very basis for the Church and her mission: God wants people to share in the love that abounds between the Persons of the Trinity (Ahonen, 2007: 141). If other motives like power mix with this, it spoils the mission of a church, as people can no longer see the reality of the Kingdom therein.

When the narrator of *LOTR* describes orcs in Mordor, he says: "*As usual* they were quarreling" (*LOTR*: 903, emphasis added). This is seen throughout the book. The orcs that take Merry and Pippin captive argue constantly, and once they have an outright brawl in which several orcs are killed (*LOTR*: 411-412). Frodo's capturers end up killing each other, so that Sam only needs to fight a couple of them, whom he overhears viciously cursing each other (*LOTR*: 881-890). Dissonance is an attribute that Tolkien has given to the enemy's realm. Furthermore, the orcs' obedience to Sauron and his Nazgûl is not based on love and loyalty, but on fear (*LOTR*: 720).

St. Paul includes discord, dissensions, and factions in his list of "acts of the sinful nature", which are contrary to the Kingdom of God (Gal. 5:19-21). This implies that they belong to the opposing realm of Satan, and they seem to be his main weapons against The Church. In many of his letters to churches St. Paul is grieved by their arguments, which are contrary to the nature of Christ, in whom all believers are one body and belong to one another (e.g. Rom. 13:13-14). In *LOTR* the Elf Haldir says: "Indeed in nothing is the power of the Dark Lord more clearly shown than in the estrangement that divides all those who still oppose him" (*LOTR*: 339). When an

argument is about to break out between men of Rohan and Gandalf's companions, Gandalf checks them: "Come, come! [. . .] We are all friends here. Or should be; for the laughter of Mordor will be our only reward, if we quarrel" (*LOTR*: 500).

9.1 A community like a living organism

St. Paul talks of the Church as the body of Christ in both his letter to the Romans (8:3-8) and his first letter to the Corinthians (12:7-31). He speaks of believers as separate and unique parts of the body, but still one, belonging to each other, and serving each other with the particular gifts that each one has. If someone is the "eye" of the body, they cannot say to the "hand" that they are not necessary, or are less important than the "eye" (1 Cor 12:21). Each member is equally important, and if any member is missing, the whole is weaker. Ahonen (2007: 200) discusses this body-imagery and says that we need each other to learn to know Christ. This brings to mind C.S. Lewis' thoughts on friendship, which deserve to be repeated here, since they demonstrate this in practice: "In each of my friends there is something that only some other friend can fully bring out. By myself I am not large enough to call the whole man into activity; I want other lights than my own to show all his facets" (*4L*: 74).

Applied to the Kingdom, in Christ there is much that only some other friend can fully bring out for others to see and understand. Nor can one person alone accomplish the mission of the Kingdom. This is like the Fellowship of the Ring: each one of the group serves his own special purpose. If any of them would refuse or fail to play their own part in the quest, it would either fail or be seriously hindered. This leaves no room for pride. No single character is a lone hero, independent of the others; not even Frodo, with his crucial mission as the Ringbearer. He could not succeed if the others did not succeed in their own respective tasks. Gandalf says: "Only a small part is played in great deeds by any hero" (*LOTR*: 263).

Merry and Pippin's roles are also vital: without their part in the battles at Isengard and Minas Tirith, Frodo's mission would have been futile, even if he succeeded in destroying the Ring. But more likely he would not have succeeded, because Sauron would have been free to watch his realm more closely. Without Aragorn's passing through the Paths of the Dead, the southern plains of Middle-earth would have been lost first, then Minas Tirith and all of Gondor also. Without the companionship and specific skills of Legolas and Gimli, Aragorn would never have been so successful. This is an image of the Kingdom as an ideal, or as Jesus intended it to be.

Certainly the separation of the clergy from “common” people is a development alien to this ideal. In *LOTR* Gandalf and Aragorn are not unapproachable, “holy”, distant, or imperious leaders of the Fellowship. They identify with their followers and live in close contact, equality, and solidarity with them. They are servants, who take care of and protect the Fellowship. Here one is reminded of how, after a dispute between Jesus’ disciples about who of them was the greatest,

Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. (Matt 20:25-28)

According to the New Testament teaching of the Church, leadership roles are not for status or for power to rule others’ lives; nor, on the other hand, are they to do all the work of the church. Instead they are there

[. . .] to prepare *God's people for works of service*, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ [. . .] From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as *each part does its work*. (Eph. 4:12-13,16, emphasis added)

This brings to mind Gandalf’s mission. He was an immortal angelic being, sent to assist and encourage Men in their war against Sauron, not to do it himself. He cannot force people: he can only teach wisdom and encourage them to do their own duty (*L*: 202). As such, he exemplifies leadership roles in the Kingdom of Heaven.

9.2 A community of forgiveness

Because human beings are imperfect, loving Fellowship is only possible through forgiveness. In the background chapter on the Kingdom of God I gave the theological and scriptural basis for the Kingdom of Forgiveness. Not only has God forgiven his followers their debt to him, he expects them to extend that forgiveness to each other. Out of grace those who do not deserve to be blessed are blessed because of Christ (Titus 3:5). Tolkien gives an affective example of the power of mercy and grace in Frodo’s dealing with Gollum.

When Frodo first hears of Gollum’s wickedness, his natural response is that of justice: he says it is a pity that Bilbo had not killed him while he had the chance after finding the Ring (referring to *H*: 112). But Gandalf checks Frodo: “Pity? 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 he took so little hurt from the evil, and escaped in the end, because he began his ownership of the Ring so. With Pity” (*LOTR*: 58). Frodo does not understand why Gandalf let Gollum live after all his wickedness, and says that Gollum deserved to die. Gandalf answers:

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. 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. In any case we did not kill him: he is very old and very wretched. (*LOTR*: 58)

Frodo needs time and experience to finally embrace this wisdom. When Gollum catches up with them and tries to steal the Ring back, Frodo shows him mercy and does not kill him (with the same sword that Bilbo had when he had met Gollum) (*LOTR*: 600). Here Frodo recalls Gandalf’s words, and answers Sam, who does not trust Gollum and would be rid of him: “[. . .] I will not touch the creature. For now that I see him, I do pity him” (*LOTR*: 601). Sam is increasingly suspicious of Gollum and treats him accordingly, but Frodo continues to treat him with respect and dignity, and trusts him as their guide into Mordor in spite of his wickedness.

Although Gollum’s initial motive to link up with the hobbits and serve Frodo is to stay close to the Ring and eventually attempt to steal it back, the mercy that Frodo gives him draws Gollum to the point of repentance (*LOTR*: 699). This is reminiscent of the Bible verse that says “God’s kindness leads you toward repentance” (Romans 2:4). The same thought is echoed in Titus 2:11-12: “For the *grace* of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. *It* teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age” (emphasis added). According to the logic of The Kingdom, experiencing grace and forgiveness (*not*, for example, fear of God’s judgment) is meant to be the prime mover for doing what is right and good according to the love principles of the Kingdom.

9.3 Not always a successful community

Tolkien and the Inklings are described by one of the later members, Dr. Robert Havard, as “critical Christians”. He says: “All of them, in one way or another, were dissatisfied with the Church as it existed there and then, but not with the Christian faith itself” (Duriez 2005: 80). Tolkien recognized that The Church could sometimes be more of a hindrance to the faith than its catalyst. He applies his feelings about Gollum’s near repentance in *LOTR* to this:

[. . .] certain features of it [*LOTR*], and especially certain places, still move me very powerfully [. . .] I am most stirred by the sound of the horses of the Rohirrim at cockcrow; and most grieved by Gollum's failure (just) to repent when interrupted by Sam: this seems to me really like the *real* world in which the instruments of just retribution are seldom themselves just or holy; and the good are often stumbling blocks [. . .] (*L*: 221)

In this situation Sam was a “stumbling block”, who unwittingly, because of his suspicion and mercilessness (he could not see into Gollum's heart, he only saw Gollum threateningly close to Frodo), caused Gollum to abort his repentance process. Sam did later come to pity Gollum, when Gollum had attacked him on Mount Doom. Sam let him go, but for Gollum it was too late: Sam's mercy could not change his course, as he was already fully resolute in his decision to attack Frodo for the Ring (*LOTR*: 923). Sam was in a way innocent, and his mercilessness was not deliberate evil will, because it was dictated by his desire to defend Frodo. Nevertheless, this reminds one of Jesus' stern words to the Pharisees who, for their part, had freely chosen their judgemental and hypocritical attitude: “Woe to you experts in the law, because you have taken away the key to knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering” (Luke 11:52). As Sam hindered Gollum from repenting, the Pharisees hindered people from entering God's Kingdom, although they professed to be His representatives.

Ahonen (2007: 58) applies this to the Christian Church. He says that the practical life of the Church has “often hidden, rather than revealed the Glory of God that has been made known to us by Jesus Christ”. Although Ahonen's stance towards the Church is critical, like the Inklings, he is strongly committed to the Christian faith itself. Ahonen (2007: 55) talks about how in Christian missions the vision of the Kingdom has often been clouded or even completely blocked because the good message was delivered by “allies of a bad message”. For example, slavery and other forms of oppression came to various places along with Western colonial power, which coincided with the work of missionaries in those countries. When people sense such imperial (or other) power behind the Christian message, it repels them instead of attracting them. Ahonen (2007: 55) paraphrases Emilio Castro, who says that people have had difficulties recognizing Jesus for who He is ever since the days of John the Baptist. Castro says that the only way to convey the Christian message believably is through self-sacrificial love. Acts of sacrificial love are in themselves communications of the Gospel, the good news that God loves people enough to suffer and die in their place. Without them the message is a mere doctrine or philosophy.

9.4 A community of humility

The hero of *LOTR*, the Ringbearer Frodo, cannot boast of his role in the story for two main reasons. Firstly, he would not have made it even to Mount Doom without the Fellowship, or Sam who even carried him part of the way (*LOTR*: 919-20). Nor could he have gotten there without Gollum and his treachery. Secondly, he fails to destroy the Ring: having resisted the weight of Sauron's evil until all his strength is wasted, he cannot take the mission to the end. The pity he showed to Gollum is now rewarded, as Gollum's evil intention and lust for the Ring ends up destroying it (*LOTR*: 925). Frodo cannot boast, simply because he knew that in himself he had failed.

This is reminiscent of a Bible passage: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). Since the very basis of salvation is in grace and not human merit, there should be no room for pride in the Kingdom. This is one of the fundamental truths of Christianity, the one that sparked the Reformation, as Luther found righteousness by faith from the NT books of Romans and Galatians (Peura 2001: 212-3).

Frodo's plight follows more closely Tolkien's Catholic viewpoint. According to Peura (2001: 215), one of the Catholic teachings that Luther would not accept was that though fallen, people can at least *attempt* to love God. When the person's human resources are then spent, God steps in and pours his own love into their heart and completes the task for them. Frodo went as far as he could, but that was not quite enough, and God providentially did the rest. But then again, it can also be argued that God (Ilúvatar) was the one who started the whole quest to begin with: Frodo did not choose himself; he was chosen by Ilúvatar. Thus even Luther's notion that we are incapable of even beginning the quest of loving God and doing his will without His empowering (Peura 2001: 216), can be seen in the story of Frodo. There need not be a conflict in this case. Either way, he fell short of the task.

Pride is seen in Catholicism to be the topmost of the "deadly sins", the opposites of the "life-giving virtues" of the Beatitudes (Jesus' declarations of blessedness) (Kreeft, 2001: 199). Pride is also regarded in basic Christian theology as the fundamental sin, since it was the original sin of Lucifer, the devil, and that every act of sin is actually founded in pride (e.g. Augustine 1972: 571-4, McGrath 1996: 282). Every time a Christian exhibits pride, it is counterproductive to the Kingdom. Pride is exemplified

in *LOTR* by Boromir (*LOTR*: 390). He thinks his “mighty warriors of Gondor” should have the Ring instead of the little, insignificant, weak, and fearful hobbits. Pride gives way for lust of power, and Boromir would steal the Ring from Frodo for it.

Tolkien said that *LOTR* was “planned to be ‘hobbito-centric’, that is, primarily a study of the ennoblement (or sanctification) of the humble” (*L*: 237). He also said that the story was seen through the eyes of the hobbits, because it was meant to “exemplify most clearly a recurrent theme: the place in ‘world politics’ of the unforeseen and unforeseeable acts of will, and deeds of virtue of the apparently small, ungreat, forgotten in the places of the Wise and Great (good as well as evil)” (*L*: 160). Hobbits were overlooked and left out of the lists of living creatures, which Treebeard the ent recites to Merry and Pippin (*LOTR*: 454).

Not only are hobbits small in size, but at heart they are child-like and innocent, and they have the capacity to thoroughly enjoy the small things in life. The mythic happenings, including the terrifying evil of Sauron, are seen through their eyes. As such, the hobbits bring to mind another Kingdom-teaching of Christ:

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said: “I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me”. (Matt 18:1-5)

Hobbits embody such child-likeness, called for by Christ. The reason Frodo the hobbit was so strong to carry the Ring was precisely his weakness and humility. In *LOTR* we see that the mighty were more tempted to use the Ring for power, be it against Sauron. The small and humble were better fit to carry and destroy it. The fact that the little hobbits were chosen by Ilúvatar for such an immensely important mission is reminiscent of God’s call of Israel to be his people: “The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers” (Deuteronomy 7:7-10). This is echoed in Gandalf’s answer to Frodo when he has asked why he was chosen: “You can be sure that it was not for any merit that others do not possess [. . .]” (*LOTR*: 60).

Bruner and Ware (2001: 52-3) point out how “the greatest task is given to the smallest people”, not only in *LOTR*, but over and over again in the Bible. Abraham and Sarah, over-aged and barren, were chosen to give birth to “God’s people”; the conceited Joseph was humbled and used to save many nations from starvation; the

inarticulate and stuttering Moses was used to bring God's Word to the world; the overlooked shepherd-boy David was chosen to defeat a giant and to be a mighty king; the apostles were not much more than outcasts of society, but Jesus chose them and they changed history. And these are but a sample of the volume of stories in the Bible of the ennoblement of the humble.

A recurrent thought in the Old Testament books of the prophets is that God did not choose to bless Israel for their own sake, but for His own name's sake, so that he would receive all the glory (e.g. Isaiah 48:9, Hezekiel 20:9). The same idea is amplified in the New Testament:

Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. (1 Cor 1:26-29)

The human tendency is not to accept this. Man would like to be important and great. This is another point where even Frodo failed in the end, according to Tolkien (*L*: 328). He was not content to be a mere instrument in the hands of Good. Frodo would have liked to return to the Shire a hero, like Merry and Pippin, who were sung about in heroic songs, because through their experience in warfare they were instrumental in driving the ruffians out of the Shire, while Frodo had refused to use arms (*LOTR*: 975-997). "Sam was pained to notice how little honour he [Frodo] had in his own country" (*LOTR*: 1002). This brings to mind how the Bible tells that Jesus was despised and rejected in his home town of Nazareth (Luke 4:14-30).

Not only was Frodo discontent with his little fame, the Ring had left its mark on him in yet another way. Occasionally he would have fits of illness, one of which is described as follows: "Farmer Cotton found Frodo lying on his bed; he was clutching a white gem that hung on a chain about his neck and he seemed half in a dream. 'It is gone for ever', he said, 'and now all is dark and empty'" (*LOTR*: 1001). Tolkien said of Frodo: "[. . .] he had not in fact cast away the Ring by a voluntary act: he was tempted to regret its destruction, and still to desire it" (*L*: 328). Queen Arwen, who had given up her own immortality (as an Elf), to marry Aragorn, offered Frodo the chance to sail in her place to the Undying Lands: "If your hurts grieve you still and the memory of your burden is heavy, then you may pass into the West, until all your wounds and weariness are healed" (*LOTR*: 952-3).

Tolkien said that for Frodo the Undying Lands were not heaven, but *purgatory*, to heal him of the stain of the Ring, and then he would have to die, since “no mortal could, or can, abide for ever on earth, or within Time” (*L*: 328). So he set sail to the Undying Lands (which were a part of Creation, not heaven) with the Elves, Gandalf, and Bilbo from the Grey Havens at the end of *LOTR*. He would stay there until he was healed of his wounds and “sins”, and had gained “a truer understanding of his position in littleness and greatness” (*L*: 328).

Likewise, the Kingdom of Heaven is all about the ennoblement of the humble. Christ by-passed the self-righteous, noble, and learned of his day, spending time with “common sinners”. This is what the religious elite condemned him for: “For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, ‘He has a demon.’ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and “sinners”” (Luke 7:33-34). Jesus answered the accusations: “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:31-32).

Jesus’ most harsh words were aimed at the self-righteous Pharisees. For example, when they were outraged at his inferring that they were blind, Jesus answered: “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains” (John 9:41). There is no forgiveness of sins without their confession: “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins” (1 John 1:8-9).

The Kingdom of Heaven is for those who will humble themselves to be like children, or hobbits – who acknowledge that they cannot “do it” on their own, and trust in the One who *can* do it, and *has* done it, for them. This is evidently the basis for Tolkien’s thoughts of the “ennoblement of the humble”, and one of the gleams of evangelium that shines through *LOTR*. It is easy to identify with the hobbits, since most of us are not the rich, famous, and powerful; but the small, weak, and fearful – if we are honest. We see in the hobbits our own fears and weakness, but still they do little things that amount to great deeds. Their courage in the face of impossible odds inspires us to face the things we fear, regardless of whether or not we believe in the Kingdom that they exemplify.

This is closely related to an easily overlooked theme in *LOTR*. Bruner and Ware (2001: 22-4) point out that Frodo represents an attitude entirely opposite to that of the modern individualist. In modern thought people are encouraged to look “within” and

seek wisdom from their own souls and minds – everyone may create his or her own “truth”. But Frodo did not try to impress others with his knowledge; he listened when those with more experience and wisdom spoke; he “was humble enough to learn from those wiser still, recognizing that truth is something we *discover*, not something we *define*” (ibid: 23, emphasis added). The same attitude is seen in other characters as well, especially Aragorn. He is the rightful king, a man with much experience and wisdom, but he too draws on the counsel of Gandalf and Elrond for his own decisions (e.g. *LOTR*: 758, 862).

Bruner and Ware (2001: 22) compare this to the attitude of Socrates, who criticised those who thought they were wise enough not to need to learn from others. They cite Socrates: “I am better off than he is, –for he knows nothing, and thinks he knows, I neither know nor think I know”. In the Kingdom of Heaven each one is called to learn from others. “Let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance”, says Proverbs 1:5. But not only are we to learn from our elders (1 Tim. 5:17), but from children as well, as I pointed out above (p. 84). Romans 12:10 says: “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.” Honouring one another needs to be a continuum throughout the Kingdom. No one can lead, unless they also submit to be led; no one can teach, unless they are themselves teachable; if someone is served, he or she must also be a servant (Matt 20: 24-7).

Taking counsel does not, of course, exclude the idea of “following one’s heart”. Both Frodo and Aragorn, along with Gandalf, Sam, and other characters, do search their hearts when decisions must be made (e.g. *LOTR*: 58, 392, 409). But still they respect counsel from the wise. There seems to be a balance between the two sources of counsel in *LOTR*: each one must individually follow their own path, but as they seek to decide, they value the counsel of others. In the Kingdom of Heaven both extremes on their own lead to failure: “Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed” (Prov. 15:22). Jeremiah 31:33 prophesies of the coming New Covenant (establishment of the Kingdom through Christ) that God will write his laws on people’s hearts, meaning that He will guide them to do his will from within. So believers are called to search their hearts, but also to humbly seek the counsel of others for guidance. However, perhaps the most important source of wisdom in the Kingdom is the Bible. This is also paralleled in *LOTR*, as the characters often recall ancient lore and songs for guidance (e.g. *LOTR*: 246, 764).

I have now looked at how *LOTR* reflects the Kingdom of Heaven as a community of love, fellowship, and humility. It is like a body that consists of many different, but equally important, interdependent parts. Thus there is no room for pride in the Kingdom, as no single person can be a hero without the rest of the body.

The Christian Church has often failed to allow the love of God to affect her enough to be able to extend that love to others and to live by these Kingdom-principles. But when a church or group of believers does succeed in practically living accordingly, it is a gleam of evangelium in our world, of life as it should be, just like the Fellowship of the Ring is in Middle-earth.

10. Gleams of Evangelium – CORE VALUES OF THE KINGDOM

As a spiritual realm the Kingdom of Heaven embodies certain values. Tolkien shared those values and he admitted that they were worked into *LOTR* (*L*: 233). Many scholars have discussed how Tolkien's values are visible in his works, and to comment on all the volume of Tolkien literature that does this would be impossible within the scope of this thesis. Some writers dive deep into the philosophical aspects of Tolkien's values, such as Kreeft (2005). He comments that *LOTR* is "infused with the same light that illumined the man who wrote it" (Kreeft, 2005: 20). I have already looked at some of the values inherent in *LOTR* in the previous chapters, like friendship, obedience, and humility, and they need not be discussed here. I will begin by looking at three basic Kingdom values: faith, hope, and love (1 Cor. 13:13).

10.1 Faith

By definition, Christianity is a "faith". Faith is the most fundamental element of religion, and it deserves thus to be looked at as first of the values. What is faith? Certainly it involves "believing something to be true". But that is not enough of a definition. Instead of giving a philosophical or doctrinal statement of what faith is, I will let the example of Frodo show the reader what it is, as compared to the faith of Abraham. He is considered in both Judaism and Christianity the "father" of faith, meaning in Judaism the religion (as well as Abraham being the forefather of the Jewish people), and in Christianity the theological concept of faith. St. Paul teaches in Galatians 3 that Abraham is the father of all who believe and trust in God. Walvoord

and Zuck (1983: 600) call believing Gentiles the “spiritual seed of Abraham”, in contrast to the “natural seed” of Abraham, the Jews.

At the onset of their respective stories, both Frodo and Abram (his name has not yet been changed to Abraham) receive a calling. Abram’s is a mysterious, but direct, spoken calling by God (Genesis 12:1). Frodo’s is an indirect one, but nevertheless, Gandalf’s words that he was meant to have the Ring imply that it is a calling or fate from Ilúvatar (*LOTR*: 54-55). Neither of them knows where their road will lead them, but still both accept their path and set out on it (Hebrews 11:8, *LOTR*: 64, 264). As they go their faith is tested and they both must face fear: Frodo of the horrifying enemy and his forces; Abram for his life in a foreign and hostile land.

It is odd that Abraham is presented as the epitome of faith in the Bible, because he often shows more cowardice than trust. Twice on his journey, when confronted by the rulers of the lands he sojourns in, he lies that his wife, Sarai (later Sarah), is his sister. He does it out of fear that they might kill him for her, and he even gives her up to be taken into their harems (Gen 12:13, 20:2). Doing so, he compromises the very promise given him by God, that He would give him a descendant from Sarai. That is not very exemplary conduct for a hero of faith. God must supernaturally intervene and rescue Sarai back to Abram (Gen 12, 20).

Abram does not sound very trusting in his second meeting with God either (Gen. 15:2-3). God renews his promise to him, but he only complains that God hasn’t given him a descendant and his servant will be his heir. In response, God once again renews his promise, and this time it is recorded that “Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness” (Gen 15:6). But even after this, Abram demonstrates weakness of faith by taking matters into his own hands. Eleven years have passed since the initial promise, and it is already quite impossible for Sarai to become pregnant. So according to the custom of their day, Sarai gives her handmaiden, Hagar, to Abram so he can have a child with her to be his heir. Walvoord and Zuck (1985: 57) call this Abram’s worst failure and sin, since Hagar gives birth to Ishmael, father of the Arab peoples who are still today hostile to the Jews.

Genesis 17 describes how God appears to Abram again thirteen years later, while Abram still has no son. The promise is yet again renewed and Abram’s name is changed to Abraham (Father of the nations) and Sarai is now Sarah. This time Abraham sounds almost desperate: “Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, “Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at

the age of ninety?” And Abraham said to God, “If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!” (Gen 17:17-18). God answers, saying that Sarah will indeed give him a son and he is to be called Isaac. God also promises to bless Ishmael as Abraham asked, but his covenant will be made with Isaac’s descendants. A miracle happens and the following year Sarah gives birth to Isaac at over ninety years of age.

How then, is Abraham’s life worthy to be an example of faith even in the New Testament? Based on my own observations of the story and comparing it to others in the Bible I believe the answer is somewhat like the following: it is notable, that even though Abraham has fears, doubts, and failures, every time God speaks to him, he firstly *confesses* his doubts to Him, and secondly he *obeys* God, doing what God asks of him each step of the way. It is almost as if he is saying to God: “I find your promise very hard to believe, and I am afraid I will fail, but because *You* say so, I will obey, even if your promise never comes true.” It is like he is throwing his whole life in God’s hands, no matter what happens. And this faith is rewarded.

Abraham’s faith, seen from this viewpoint, seems much like Frodo’s. He also has doubts and fears: “But this would mean exile, a flight from danger into danger, drawing it after me. And I suppose I must do alone, if I am to do that and save the Shire. But I feel very small, and very uprooted, and well – desperate. The Enemy is so strong and terrible” (*LOTR*: 61). Although Frodo feels growing despair as the quest proceeds, he still obeys his call, just like Abraham does. As Abraham clings to God’s words, Frodo takes Gandalf’s words concerning his destiny and follows through, even though it costs him his whole way of life. And further, like Abraham, he is not entirely successful – neither would deserve to be rewarded *per se*, but both are rewarded for believing and acting according to their faith.

Another example of faith in action is seen when Aragorn confronts the orcs at the siege of Helm’s Deep (*LOTR*: 527-8). He stands up on the wall and calls for parley. They mock him, asking him what he wants. He says he is looking out to see the dawn. The leaders of the orcs mock him, as they are Uruk-Hai, cross-breeds who do not fear daylight. Aragorn says: “None knows what the new day shall bring him [. . .] Get you gone, ere it turn to your evil.” The orcs dismiss his words as folly and tell him to run back behind the wall. With absolutely no assurance of victory, Aragorn stands even taller and speaks boldly: “‘I still have this to say,’ [. . .] ‘No enemy has yet taken the Hornburg. Depart, or not one of you will be spared. Not one will be left alive to take back tidings to the North. You do not know your peril.’” The orcs shoot a hail of

arrows at Aragorn, who jumps down behind the wall to continue the fight. Only a few moments later dawn breaks and Gandalf arrives with reinforcements. But worst of all for the orcs, the forest of Huorns is revealed, and Aragorn's prophetic words come true, although he could not have foreseen *how* what he said could happen. Aragorn both spoke and acted in faith as he fought the battle with no surety and little or no hope of victory, and his faith was rewarded.

10.2 Hope

“There never was much hope [. . .] Just a fool's hope, as I have been told,” Gandalf recalls Denethor's words to Pippin, when during the siege of Minas Tirith he asks if Frodo has any hope to succeed in destroying the Ring (*LOTR*: 797). In a sense Denethor's hopelessness was more realistic: indeed the Gondorian army had no hope against the massive forces of Mordor by its own power and arms. If any of the human kings would have wielded the One Ring with its power to dominate, perhaps there would have been hope of victory, but the “fool” Gandalf had sent a “witless” Halfling into Mordor to destroy the very thing (and only thing, as far as Denethor could see) that could have given them victory. Denethor further complains that his “fool of a son”, Faramir, had let Frodo go when he had been in his custody. To Denethor it was equal to handing the Ring over to Sauron on a golden plate – madness (*LOTR*: 795).

But Gandalf sees that keeping the Ring would only have turned Gondor into another Mordor. He places everything, even the fate of Middle-earth itself, on that fool's hope. And that hope gives him and his allies the strength and courage to face the mightiest Enemy, win or lose, live or die. Denethor did not live to see the salvation of Minas Tirith, but the ones with a “fool's hope” saw the realization of what it hoped for, in spite of overwhelming odds.

Hope is connected to faith, as Hebrews 11:1 (DR) says: “Now faith is the substance of things to be hoped for, the evidence of things that appear not.” In terms of the “now – not yet” aspect of the Kingdom, I see this to mean that hope in the “not yet” is the motor of faith, which is a trust in God that guides human actions in the “now”. The letter to the Hebrews testifies to this view when it talks of hope being grounded on God's unfailing promises and serving as an “anchor for the soul” that is in Heaven with Christ already now (Heb 6:18-20). But the object of hope is not only the Kingdom in its ultimate form; hope sees that godly actions, works of love, mercy, and justice, will be rewarded somehow in this life on earth (Kreeft, 2005: 68).

Faith, however, will do what is right, even if its hope is not realized in this life. This is demonstrated by the Fellowship of the Ring, along with the human armies that still resist Sauron – they fight with the hope that it will not be in vain, but choose to fight even if it means their death. Aragorn says: “The counsel of Gandalf was not founded on foreknowledge of safety, for himself or for others [. . .] There are some things that it is better to begin than to refuse, even though the end may be dark” (*LOTR*: 430). One is to do what is right and what is called of him or her, regardless of the possible outcome. A parallel from the OT is the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego during the rule of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (Daniel 3). The people of Israel have been exiled to Babylonia, and the three friends have been appointed by Nebuchadnezzar himself as administrators over the province of Babylon. He builds a huge, golden idol and issues a decree that when bells are rung everyone must fall on their knees and worship the image. Loyal to the God of Israel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refuse to bow down before the image, and this is reported to the king. He offers them a further chance to bow down, but they answer Nebuchadnezzar:

[. . .] we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, *the God we serve is able to save us from it*, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. *But even if he does not*, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up. (Daniel 3:16-18, emphasis added)

Enraged, the king has the three thrown into a vast furnace, and then, to his shock, he sees four men instead of three, walking in the fire unharmed. He calls them out, and the three emerge from the furnace without a single scratch – only the ropes that they were bound with have burned. Their hope was realized by an outright miracle.

This is similar to *LOTR* in a further way. As Tolkien said: “In The Lord of the Rings the conflict is not about ‘freedom’ [. . .] It is about God, and His sole right to divine honour” (*L*: 243). Sauron is trying to be worshipped in the place of Ilúvatar as god of Middle-earth. Much like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, the Fellowship, along with the free peoples, refuse to bow down before him. They are presented with Sauron’s terms of peace by his human representative at the gate of Mordor, along with Frodo’s cloak and armour, which robs them of all hope. Even facing the doom of the entire mission, Gandalf “rejects Sauron’s terms utterly” (*LOTR*: 872), and the army must face its own fiery furnace. But the hope that had just been struck down comes true after all, when Frodo literally faces his own fiery furnace: the Ring is destroyed in the fire, but Frodo comes out alive (though not unharmed).

Frodo and Sam's quest exemplifies the intermingling functioning of faith and hope. Facing Mordor's gate the narrator speaks of Sam: "And after all he *never had any real hope* in the affair from the beginning; but being a cheerful hobbit he had not needed hope, as long as despair could be postponed" (*LOTR*: 624, emphasis added). So even without hope, Sam keeps on going, out of love for his master.

Twice on their way, Frodo and Sam are providentially given little signs that rekindle the tiny flicker of hope they had in their hearts. First, coming close to Gollum's secret way into Mordor, they see the stone statue of an ancient king of Gondor, which has been beheaded and mutilated by orcs. It looks disheartening, but at that very moment the clouds in the far west break, and a golden beam of the evening sun reveals the king's head laying a few metres away from the statue. And around the head a trailing plant with silver and white flowers forms a beautiful, living crown. "They cannot conquer for ever!" Frodo exclaims, and they continue towards the darkness (*LOTR*: 687). The second sign is seen by Sam as they are already within Mordor, and he is keeping watch while Frodo sleeps. The dark clouds of Mordor, which have blotted out the sun and stars during their whole journey within Mordor, suddenly break enough to reveal a twinkling star in the sky. Tolkien writes: "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" (*LOTR*: 901, emphasis added). Sam can suddenly see beyond their part in the story, and with new hope he continues.

But soon it is clear that they cannot make it across to Mount Doom. Frodo says: "I never hoped to get across. I can't see any hope of it now. But I've still got to do the best I can" (*LOTR*: 903). As they try to get around the broken land Sam urges Frodo on, and Frodo answers: "All right, Sam, [. . .] Lead me! As long as you you've got any hope left. Mine is gone" (*LOTR*: 907). This point is reminiscent of a passage in the book of Ecclesiastes:

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: *If one falls down, his friend can help him up*. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. (Eccl. 4:9-12, emphasis added)

Frodo and Sam's journey echoes this passage throughout: they literally pick each other up when they fall and keep each other warm, and now, when Frodo's hope fails, Sam's hope carries them onward. But soon, to their horror and ultimate loss of hope,

they are caught, but end up providentially taken by the orcs to a place where they *can* cross to the mountain. They start their climb, but on the way Sam realises that their provisions will be finished before they reach the top – there was no coming home for them. He accepts that it is his fate to help Frodo to the end and die with him.

But even as hope died in Sam, or seemed to die, it was turned to a new strength. Sam's plain hobbit-face grew stern, almost grim, as the will hardened in him, and he felt through all his limbs a thrill, as if he was turning into some creature of stone and steel that neither despair nor weariness nor endless barren miles could subdue. (*LOTR*: 913)

With no hope for their own survival they continue, and although doubts and fears still try to weigh Sam down, Tolkien writes: “He knew all the arguments of despair and would not listen to them” (*LOTR*: 919). The resolute Sam carries Frodo on the last climb to the Crack of Doom. When there is no more hope, by faith they continue, and in the end they come out alive.

10.3 Love

Walvoord and Zuck (1983: 536) call faith and hope “manifestations of love”. If hope is the motor of faith, love is the fuel of them both. In New Testament Greek there are a number of words used for different types of love. In the chapter on the Kingdom as a community I already touched on *koinonia*, love described as fellowship or friendship. Closely related to this is *philia*, which means friendship (Thayer & Smith 2008). Although these two words could be used interchangeably, the difference between them appears to be that *koinonia* more often refers to a larger group, with an emphasis on a joint mission or purpose to be together, whereas *philia* is about smaller units of affectionate friends without necessarily a joint mission. *Philia*-love is seen between Frodo and his friends, Sam, Merry, and Pippin (*LOTR*: 85, 103), before they leave on their mission, which adds to it the dimension of *koinonia*.

A different, or perhaps deeper sense of love is *philadelphia*, which means love between brothers or sisters (Thayer & Smith 2008). The Kingdom of Heaven is described as a family, where each member has been adopted by God and is his child: “For you are all the children of God by faith, in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized in Christ, have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek: there is neither bond nor free: there is neither male nor female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:26-28, DR). The Kingdom is a realm where *philadelphia* can be experienced between people who are not biologically related.

One can see the development of such brotherly love especially clearly between Frodo and Sam, as their joint mission and suffering knits them closer and closer together. So deep is their *philadelphia* that one feels at the culmination of the story, when they are free from the Ring and await their death in the flames of Mount Doom, that even if they now perish, they would be content and feel safe, since they died side by side, mission accomplished, and all that they cared for was saved (*LOTR*: 926).

“Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). As we now have seen, all the characters in *LOTR* demonstrate such a love by “laying down their lives” for what is dear to them: their families, their friends, their homes, their freedom, their peace. Some of them literally perish in the fight, but many live to tell the tale. Nevertheless, to even set out on such a venture was dying for what they loved, because they had absolutely no assurance of success – quite the contrary, only a “fool’s hope”. In the above mentioned passage, the Apostle John uses the word *agape* for love. It contains similar meanings as the other types of love I have mentioned, but it seems to go further, in that it has more to do with the will than emotions. It involves benevolence and charity, which is the word it has often been translated as in older Bible translations, like DR (Thayer & Smith 2008). *Agape* is most often used for God’s love towards people, as it is in the well known verse, John 3:16: “For God so loved the world, as to give his only begotten Son; that whosoever believeth in him, may not perish, but may have life everlasting” (DR).

10.4 Equality between genders

As Tolkien has been accused by critics to have an anti-sexual or chauvinistic stance (Pearce, 1999: 142-3), it is only appropriate to discuss briefly the aspect of romantic and erotic love. Pearce (1999: 130) cites Edwin Muir’s criticism of Tolkien: “[. . .] all the characters are boys masquerading as adult heroes. The hobbits [. . .] are ordinary boys; the fully human heroes have reached the fifth form; but hardly one of them knows anything about women, except by hearsay. Even the elves and the dwarfs and the ents are boys, irretrievably, and will never come to puberty.”

Tolkien’s responds: “Blast Edwin Muir and his delayed adolescence. He is old enough to know better. It might do him good to hear what women think of his ‘knowing about women’, especially as a test of being mentally adult” (*L*: 230). Muir’s thoughts are a mild demonstration of an obsession with sexuality, of which Pearce gives more severe examples. He quotes Brenda Partridge’s analysis, which goes to

extremes in interpreting Shelob's lair as the female sexual organ in graphic detail. Sam's battle with Shelob she sees as a symbol of the "violent sexual struggle between man and woman". She concludes her assessment: "However, as we have seen before, in *The Lord of the Rings* sexual implications are shrouded in religious symbolism [. . .] Once again Tolkien interprets myth in such a way as to reveal his inner fear or abhorrence of female sexuality, but his attitude is reinforced by the prejudices inherent in religious symbolism itself" (Pearce, 1999: 143). Pearce answers:

Ultimately what both the sexist and the anti-sexist interpretations have in common, apart from the overemphasis on sex itself, is a spiritual blindness. They have left out the most important part of the picture because they cannot see it. The 'soul' that breathes life and meaning into Tolkien's myth is the religious dimension and it is a failure to recognize this which is at the root of much of the misunderstanding about *The Lord of the Rings*. (Pearce 1999: 144)

Pearce (1999: 150-152) points out that most of the negative reviews of *LOTR* have been written by non-Christian critics. He cites G.K. Chesterton, one of Tolkien's (and Lewis') contemporaries, also a Christian author, who complained about the inability of critics on the "outside" to understand his works: "But even [. . .] if I make the point of a story stick out like a spike, they carefully go and impale themselves on something else" (Chesterton, in Pearce 1999: 150). Partridge's "Freudian analysis" of Tolkien falls completely into this category.

In the Kingdom of Heaven there is equality between the sexes. Jesus taught that in the Kingdom in its ultimate mode, people do not marry, but they are "like the angels" (Matt. 22:30). Sexuality as we know it will cease in the Kingdom, and what will remain is our true personality clothed in a resurrected body, the nature of which is still a mystery (Kreeft 2001: 139). Not only did Jesus speak of equality between the sexes in the afterlife, he exemplified it by allowing women to participate in his discipleship. Santala (1985: 129-130) says this was a scandal in his day, when only men could be students of rabbis and women had very little societal significance, other than as carer of the family. Even *talking* to women in public was scandalous, but Jesus never shunned women, increasing the animosity of the religious elite.

It is a bit difficult to reconcile some of St. Paul's teachings concerning the role of women in churches with Jesus' teaching and example along with several NT references to women in certain leadership roles in churches (for example Priscilla, Acts 18). Where Jesus demonstrated equality, Paul said to the Corinthians that women should be silent in church (1 Cor. 14:34). Walvoord and Zuck (1983: 540) say this implies that in Corinth there was a problem of disorder caused by married women

talking to their husbands during worship. This may not be as far-fetched as it sounds, because disorders of many causes were typical of the Corinthian church (1Cor. 1-6). But still this feels like an inadequate explanation, and it is more plausible to accept it as an issue of cultural relativism, as presented by Fee and Stuart (1996: 102-3).

The position of women in churches has during the past century become a controversial issue in the West, mainly due to the rise of feminism. The Catholic position has always been that women cannot be ordained as priests (Kreeft 2001: 368), but this does not mean women have no role at all in church. There are many women among the Catholic Church's canonized saints (ibid: 113), and they have no less respect because they are not ordained priests. Tolkien also must have shared this view, as his letters, along with *LOTR*, demonstrate a true respect for women.

The reason women are not often present in *LOTR* is merely that in the ancient time it is set in, women are not likely to have participated in warfare. The fact that Éowyn does, and courageously at that, should be enough to dismiss any thought that Tolkien was patronizing towards women. The Catholic Church teaches that men and women are equal, but have different roles (Kreeft 2001: 215). Kreeft explains that authority does not entail superiority, nor does obedience mean inferiority. He gives the example of Christ, who was equal with the Father, but was completely obedient to Him. That Tolkien's wife was a stay-at-home mother does not thus mean that he considered her inferior. He simply saw her role as that of mother and carer of the family.

As a devout Roman Catholic, Tolkien believed in the sanctity of marriage, which included life-long commitment and fidelity. He loathed the rising sexual promiscuity of his age, which he saw as a cause of "great social harm" (*L*: 60-62). Catholicism respects marriage so highly because it is seen as a symbol of the greater marriage between God and humankind. Kreeft (2001: 353) writes that marriage is a covenant:

"[. . .] a binding relationship based neither on mere feeling nor on external human law but on a freely chosen commitment [. . .] The ultimate aim of God's whole plan of creation and redemption, of the whole Christian religion, and of our whole lives, is a spiritual marriage with God. Human marriage is an image, sign, and sacrament of that".

Aragorn demonstrates this kind of faithful and self-sacrificial romantic love, as he commits himself to Arwen (*LOTR*: 1032-8, appendix A), as does Arwen, who renounces her immortality to wed Aragorn. But Aragorn cannot have her until he has faced his destiny and been crowned king of Gondor. This means he must wait a lifetime of normal men (he had longer life since he was of Númenorean descent) and fight many wars before they can marry. He also declines Éowyn's romantic love for

his faithfulness to Arwen (*LOTR*: 768). Their love-story is like Tolkien's own with Edith, with the difference that Tolkien only had to wait a few years.

If chauvinism has been associated with Christian marriage, it is a distortion of biblical teaching, because it takes Ephesians 5:22 out of context. It says: "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord". The chauvinistic interpretation abuses Scripture by ignoring the surrounding verses. The previous verse says: "Submit to *one another* out of reverence for Christ" (emphasis added). Husbands must also submit to their wives. The following verses lay a much heavier responsibility on the man's shoulders: "Husbands, love your wives, *just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her* to make her holy [. . .] *In this same way*, husbands ought to love their wives *as their own bodies*. He who loves his wife loves himself" (Eph. 5:25, 28, emphasis added). The word used here is *agape*, the determined "choice" -love, akin to that of Christ's self-sacrificial love. Women are called to submit to their husbands '*as to the Lord*', which means in response to his love first given. As I stated earlier, obedience does not mean inferiority. Kreeft (2001: 216) says: "without authority there is chaos; without equality there is tyranny. [. . .] authority does not contradict equality, nor does equality eliminate authority." The same he applies to family roles.

Tolkien was not a sexist, nor was he anti-sexist or chauvinistic; he was a romantic, who believed in sexuality governed by Kingdom principles: fidelity, faithfulness, service, mutual respect, and humility. He demonstrated these values and *agape* love in his own marriage, in particular when he spared no effort in caring for Edith in her sickness, which was one of the things that delayed his work on *LOTR* (*BIO*: 235-252).

10.4 Other values

The above are the core values of the Kingdom of Heaven. There are much more that are exemplified in *LOTR*, but any deeper analysis of them would venture beyond the scope of this thesis. To finish this chapter I will briefly examine some of these values. A good starting point would be what the Bible calls the "fruit of the Spirit" (Gal 5:22-3). The first mentioned is the above-studied love. Next is joy, which is also the essence of Tolkien's *eucatastrophe* (*MC*: 153). Joy is also one of the three core elements of the Kingdom which I presented in chapter 5.

There are two instances of joy in *LOTR* worth mentioning in this context. The first occurred at Minas Tirith, as Gandalf and Pippin were gazing out of a window in grim anticipation of the imminent battle (*LOTR*: 742). Pippin asked Gandalf if he was

angry with him for his hasty enlisting to Denethor's service. Gandalf laughed and put his arm around Pippin's shoulders, and Pippin turned to look at the old man. "In the wizard's face he saw at first only lines of care and sorrow; though as he looked more intently he perceived that under all there was a great joy: a fountain of mirth enough to set a kingdom laughing, were it to gush forth".

The second case was when Frodo and Sam were at the borders of Mordor (*LOTR*: 697). Sam points out how their quest might some day be told as a story. He pictured people eagerly asking to hear of the brave Frodo, the "famous of the hobbits". Frodo laughed, "a long clear laugh from his heart. Such a sound had not been heard in those places since Sauron came to Middle-earth." Sam felt like even the rocks around them were listening and ominously leaning towards them. "But Frodo did not heed them; he laughed again." Then Frodo reminded Sam of his important part in the story. Children might be even more eager to hear of "Samwise the stouthearted", without whom Frodo would not have gone far. Both of these are cases of joy in the face of threatening evil, reminiscent of Tolkien's description of the eucatastrophe:

It does not deny the existence of *dyscatastrophe*, of sorrow and failure: the possibility of these is necessary to the joy of deliverance; it denies (in the face of much evidence, if you will) universal final defeat and in so far is *evangelium*, giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief. (*MC*: 153)

There are parallels to this in the Kingdom of Heaven, the most outstanding of which is that of Paul and Silas in Philippi (Acts 16:40). There Paul and Silas ended up casting out an evil spirit of divination from a slave woman. Having lost their source of income, the slave-woman's owners seized the apostles and accused them in front of the magistrates. Paul and Silas were flogged and imprisoned, but they "denied, in the face of much evidence, universal final defeat," and tapped into "Joy beyond the walls of the world", even the walls of their prison. They sang praise to God, even with their backs still smarting from their wounds, and a miracle happened: an earthquake shook the prison, so that their shackles broke free. However, they did not flee, but waited and demanded to be given a fair trial as Roman citizens. It is one of the paradoxes of the Kingdom, that in the city of their worst treatment they experienced their deepest joy, and Paul's letter to the Philippians is the foremost letter of joy in the NT.

The third fruit of the Spirit is peace (Gal. 5:22). Romans 12:18 says: "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." Such a spirit is demonstrated by the Fellowship throughout the story. The hobbits would never have

even thought of going to war, and even warriors like Aragorn and Faramir would prefer peace, but Sauron has forced their hand: they must fight for peace. Frodo's growth from wishing that Bilbo had killed Gollum to being a peacemaker unwilling to use arms in the scouring of the Shire is a noteworthy strand of *LOTR*, just like Martin Luther King and Gandhi were noteworthy examples of applying the Kingdom-principle of peace-making to conflicts (see, p. 49).

The rest of the fruit of the Spirit are patience (exemplified, for instance, by Gandalf's relations to the hobbits), kindness (e.g. Frodo's treatment of Gollum), goodness (e.g. refusal to use the evil Ring for good purposes), faithfulness (e.g. the Fellowship's loyalty to Frodo), gentleness (e.g. Faramir as the gentle warrior), and self-control (e.g. various characters' resistance of temptation to take the Ring). All of these can be seen demonstrated by various characters in *LOTR*, but any deeper analysis would require an entire study to focus solely on the values of *LOTR*.

To close, I will now briefly look at four specifically Catholic values: the four cardinal virtues, as given by Kreeft (2001: 191-3). *Prudence* means practical moral wisdom. Prudence is embodied by Gandalf, and practiced by all the main characters. Frodo's growth in moral wisdom is a notable strand of the story, reaching its peak in his merciful treatment of Saruman, who had purely evil intentions towards Frodo.

The second cardinal virtue is *justice*, which entails equality and fair treatment of everyone, along with harmonious and "right" relationships. This is the social aspect of righteousness, discussed in chapter 5. The third virtue, *fortitude*, is the courage and the resolve to do what is right, no matter how difficult it is, and regardless of the outcome. Kreeft (2001: 192) says: "Fortitude is a necessary ingredient in all virtues, for no virtue 'happens', but must be fought for". Of all the cardinal virtues this is perhaps the most deeply probed in *LOTR*. On the first leg of the quest, when the hobbits are rescued from the attack of the first Rider by Elves, Frodo asks Gildor, the Elf-leader: "But where shall I find courage? [. . .] That is what I chiefly need." Gildor answers: "Courage is found in unlikely places [. . .] Be of good hope!" (*LOTR*: 83). That is exactly where Frodo finds courage during the quest: in unlikely places – the very places he fears, as he is facing dreadful enemies. Evil serves as the negative force that demands the growth of the positive virtue of fortitude, as described by Koukl (2002).

Temperance, or self-control, is "the moral virtue that moderates the attraction of pleasures' [. . .] as fortitude moderates the fear of pains. [. . .] Temperance 'provides balance' [that is, moderation: not too little and not too much] 'in the use of created

goods. It ensures the will's mastery over instincts' ” (Kreeft 2001: 193, quoting the Catechism of the Catholic Church). Hobbits in particular find this difficult. Their love for good food, drink, and “pipe-weed” normally tends to go just a bit “overboard”, but on the quest they are forced to practice temperance and ration their provisions.

Still other values are characteristic of both *LOTR* and the Kingdom, such as honesty, truthfulness, compassion, charity, willingness to help, generosity, belief in human dignity, etc. But this will suffice for my present purposes. I have looked at the core values of the Kingdom of Heaven: righteousness, peace, and joy; along with faith, hope, and love; and the relationships between these as exemplified in *LOTR* and the Bible. *LOTR* is a value-laden work, and it would be interesting to probe deeper into these values, but since the Kingdom is much more than a value-system, this overview will have to suffice. Now it is time to move on from these positive aspects of God's Kingdom, to the opposing realm of evil, to see how these realms are at odds.

11 Gleams of Evangelium – THE KINGDOM AT WAR: GOOD vs. EVIL

One of the prominent features of *LOTR* that will strike every reader is its depiction of evil that threatens horrifically the peace and life of Middle-earth. Duriez (2005: 193-4) talks about how *LOTR* is “marked by a realistic portrayal of evil”. He identifies it with other twentieth century novels, like Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945) and *1984* (1949), Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954), and Lewis' *That Hideous Strength* (1946), which deal with “the horror of palpable evil revealed in modern, global warfare”. Duriez sees that this kind of fantastic fiction can deal with the terrors and fears of real human life in a more relevant way than so-called realistic fiction. He points out that this is ironic, since critics call Tolkien's writing escapist and irrelevant to this world.

Tolkien was also accused of presenting too clear distinctions between the good and the evil. His hideous orcs were said to be unrealistic. Tolkien answered the criticism:

Yes, I think the orcs are as real a creation as anything in ‘realistic’ fiction [. . .] only in real life they are on both sides, of course. For ‘romance’ has grown out of ‘allegory’, and its wars are still derived from the ‘inner war’ of allegory in which good is on one side and various modes of badness on the other. In real (exterior) life men are on both sides: which means a motley alliance of orcs, beasts, demons, plain naturally honest men, and angels. But it does make some difference who are your captains and whether they are orc-like per se. (*L*:82)

Such clear distinctions between good and evil were Tolkien's purpose. No matter how removed this is *per se* from real life, in a mythical story that is supposed to teach

aspects of truth only receivable in this mode (*L*: 147), the clear distinction is justifiable. Such clear-cut examples shed light on the ways evil works and tries to work even within us, the readers. The orcs were originally Elves that were captured by Melkor (Morgoth) and enslaved, tortured, and corrupted (*S*: 58). Tolkien explains:

I have presented at least the Orcs as pre-existing real beings on whom the Dark Lord has exerted the fullness of his power in remodelling and corrupting them, not making them. That God would 'tolerate' that, seems no worse theology than the toleration of the calculated dehumanizing of Men by tyrants that goes on today. (*L*: 195)

The orcs have been deformed into the opposite of Elves, and are totally governed by the spirit of Sauron and of Morgoth. Like Morgoth, their sole purpose is to strike discord in God's creation by destroying living things, plants, and creatures alike (*LOTR*: 409). Saruman also "sings to Morgoth's melody", and abuses nature to increase his power. In the end he comes in pure malice to avenge himself on the hobbits by ruining their beloved Shire (*LOTR*: 975-997).

Not only does *LOTR* portray evil, it draws a most graceful picture of goodness. Duriez cites David C. Downing, who talks about how often evil characters are written in modern literature. As a striking contrast to this, Downing says "Lewis and Tolkien could show you what goodness looks like in the flesh" (Duriez, 2006: 176-7). On the opposite side of the argument against the evil of the orcs, the question has been raised by critics whether or not Tolkien's characters are too good, idealistic, and romantic.

Tolkien responds: "I have not made any of the peoples on the 'right' side, Hobbits, Rohirrim, Men of Dale or of Gondor, any better than men have been or are, or can be. Mine is not an 'imaginary' world, but an imaginary historical moment on 'Middle-earth' – which is our habitation" (*L*: 244). Pearce (1999: 146) discusses the idealism in *LOTR*. He cites an essay on Tolkien by Lawhead, who answers criticism of Tolkien's escapism by stating that it is not an escape *from* reality, but an escape *to* a heightened reality, where joys and sorrows, beauty and ugliness, etc. are in double measure, evident to the reader. He continues: "In the very best fantasy literature, like *Lord of the Rings*, we escape into an ideal world where ideal heroes and heroines (who are really only parts of our true selves) behave ideally. The work describes human life as it might be lived, perhaps ought to be lived [. . .]" (Pearce 1999: 146-7). Lawhead further states that this kind of "heightened reality led the reader closer to ultimate truth which Tolkien believed was God Himself" (ibid: 147). As God is the King of Heaven, I further equate this heightened reality with the Kingdom, the ideal realm of pure goodness, no matter how imperfect its manifestations are in this fallen world.

Such fantasy, be it in the imaginary realm of Faërie, leads the reader to ponder the state of his own soul, and to a deeper understanding of human existence (Pearce 1999: 147). Tolkien's depiction of goodness and beauty stirs in the reader a desire for the same goodness and beauty in their own life, and can call them to make changes in their life where it is not consonant with such goodness. In that sense, the literature kindles a desire for perfection, for the Kingdom of Heaven. Pearce says: "Concomitant with this desire to escape *into* spiritual truth is the realisation that complete 'escape' is impossible in this life. Hence the sense of longing and the feeling of exile which is integral to the spiritual quest" (Pearce 1999: 148).

It is hard to imagine that any review or analysis could be written of *LOTR* without a discussion of Good and Evil: they are such evident themes in the story. And since Tolkien's fiction sheds light on Good and Evil in our world, I will now look at this conflict from the perspective of the Kingdom of Heaven. I will look at Evil first, because Good can be seen most clearly in contrast with what it is not.

11.1 Personal evil: Morgoth, Sauron, and Satan

Morgoth, or the fallen Melkor, was the original source of evil in the *Silmarillion*. Sauron was a lesser angel, one of the Maiar, the servants of the higher angels. Tolkien says: "Sauron had been attached to the greatest, Melkor, who ultimately became the inevitable Rebel and self-worshipper of mythologies that begin with a transcendent unique Creator" (*L*: 259). But since Morgoth himself is captive in the "void" and is not present in Middle-earth, Sauron is his representative. He comes to think of himself as "Morgoth returned" (*L*: 243) and is thus a personification of evil. Honkapää's (1996: 25) assertion that there is no absolute evil (devil) in *LOTR* is in this sense slightly misleading, because Sauron *is* everything that Morgoth and Satan are.

Melkor (and Sauron as his "reincarnation") and the biblical Satan are very similar. They were both created good: "Nothing is evil in the beginning. Even Sauron was not so" (*LOTR*: 261). Like Satan, Melkor's original sin was pride and the desire to take the place of the Creator (*S*: 16-20, Isaiah 14:13-14). Since both were therefore cast out of their places of power by God (*S*: 34, Isaiah 14:15) they turned to wickedness, to pervert and destroy God's creation (*S*: 19, Genesis 3:1-6). Tolkien says: "In The Lord of the Rings the conflict is not about 'freedom' [. . .] It is about God, and His sole right to divine honour." (*L*: 243). This is because Sauron tried to control the wills of the "Children of God", Elves and humans, and make them his worshippers (*L*: 205).

Thus it can be said that Sauron is indeed Absolute or Personal Evil in *LOTR*. To enslave people he uses all possible means, the foremost of which is the One Ring: “[. . .] there is nothing that Sauron cannot turn to evil uses” (*LOTR*: 583).

Sauron’s weapons are lies and fear. Gandalf says: “[. . .] the power of Sauron is still less than fear makes it” (*LOTR*: 254). An exemplary victim of Sauron’s lies and fear is King Théoden of Rohan (*LOTR*: 495-513). Because of his counsellor Wormtongue, a spy for Saruman (who, in turn, is listening to Sauron himself), Théoden has lost his faith in himself and his people. He believes that resisting Sauron is futile, and that destruction is imminent. Wormtongue has twisted Théoden’s mind to the opposite of the truth: he believes that Gandalf, carrier of truth and hope, is a herald of misfortune. Théoden has turned into an old man, stooped and frail, much older than his real years would make him: It takes a powerful confrontation of the truth by Gandalf to break the spell of Sauron’s lies from Théoden’s ears and to raise him from his throne to ride once more to war (*LOTR*: 502-5).

Another character that has fallen prey to the enemy’s lies is Denethor, Steward of Minas Tirith. He has been looking into a Palantir, a “seeing stone”, and has seen things from Mordor that have left him in despair (*LOTR*: 838) and paranoia: he thinks Gandalf’s intentions are evil, to take over his throne (*LOTR*: 835). Sauron cannot make the Palantir lie, but he can show Denethor only things that demoralize him. This is like using half-truths, which serve the purpose of outright lies. The vision of the great might of Mordor fed Denethor’s despair “until it overthrew his mind” (*LOTR*: 838). Unlike Théoden, who is awakened from the spell of lies by the truth wielded by Gandalf, Denethor will not listen to his counsel and ends up committing suicide, trying to kill his own son Faramir as well. Denethor and Théoden exemplify two different responses to the truth after believing the Enemy’s lies – faith and despair.

Saruman represents a third response to the lies of Sauron. He has “long studied the arts of the Enemy” (*LOTR*: 251), originally for good purposes, against Sauron. But somewhere along the line he fell for the lure of power, and decided to use the Palantir to communicate with Sauron. Saruman thought he could use Sauron to obtain the Ring for himself and then take his place, but Sauron was playing him all along, lying like he did to Denethor (*LOTR*: 872), but this time not to evoke fear, but to seduce. Saruman himself has adopted this feature of the Enemy, and has become a master in enchanting others with his voice to do his will and believe his “truth”. His voice is described as beautiful, even loving, and his cunning words seem like true wisdom.

Saruman's speech makes even Gandalf, the representative of goodness and truth, sound harsh and evil in comparison (*LOTR*: 565).

Tolkien ponders the seductive nature of Evil further in his depiction of Frodo's first encounter with Aragorn in the inn at Bree (*LOTR*: 153-168). Everything about Aragorn makes him seem suspicious and dangerous to the hobbits, but when his identity is finally confirmed by a letter from Gandalf, Frodo says: "I believed that you were a friend before the letter came [. . .] You have frightened me several times tonight, but never in the way that servants of the Enemy would, or so I imagine. I think one of his spies would – well, seem fairer and feel fouler, if you understand" (*LOTR*: 168). Aragorn laughs and says: "I see [. . .] I look foul and feel fair". He then quotes a proverb written of him: "All that is gold does not glitter" (*LOTR*: 168) which is the old saying *all that glitters is not gold*, turned around. Saruman looks noble, wise, and royal, but is a servant of Evil; Aragorn looks ragged, lowly, and dangerous, but is a king in the service of Good. This is a further sense in which Aragorn exemplifies Christ. Isaiah prophesied of the coming Messiah: "He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not" (Is. 53:2-3). Christ, despised and rejected by the leaders of his day, became the source of the greatest Good possible.

St. Paul (in 2 Thes.) predicts that the anti-christ, the ultimate servant of Evil in the Bible, will come with all kinds of deceptive power, beauty, and the lure of goodness to deceive those who "refuse to love the truth" (2 Thess. 2: 10). As Saruman makes Gandalf look dull and grey and sound harsh and evil, the anti-christ will masquerade as an angel of light to make Christ seem nasty and unattractive (2 Cor. 11:14).

However, Colossians 2:15 speaks of how Christ has disarmed the powers of the devil. Satan no longer has any weapons of real substance and no true right to people's souls. Jesus himself depicted the devil as the father of lies (John 8:44). Satan can only keep people under his dominion by lies, and by keeping them from believing the truth that they have actually been set free by Christ. He uses fear to keep people in his grip, or seduction to lure them into his bondage. The author of Romans speaks of how Christ has liberated people from the spirit of fear: "For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.'" (Romans 8:15). God is not a tyrant to be feared like the devil:

although God is holy and omnipotent, he is what Jesus and the apostles called Abba, an affectionate term for father (Easton 1897).

11.2 Human evil: sin

With lies and cunning Sauron causes the Númenoreans to resent the only restriction given to them: they were allowed to sail anywhere else but to the Undying lands in the “True West” (*S*: 315). The Númenoreans fall and attack the angels in Valinor. Ilúvatar must allow them to be destroyed, but “in a kind of Noachian situation the small party of the faithful in Númenor, who had refused to take part in the rebellion (though many of them had been sacrificed in the Temple by the Sauronians) escaped” (*L*: 205).

Satan raised suspicions of God’s good will towards Adam and Eve in Paradise, causing them to resent the only prohibition given them: they could eat from all the trees in the garden, except from the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Gen. 3:1,4). Satan lied that God only wanted to restrict them, and that if they did eat from it, they would “become like God”, Satan’s own original evil desire (Gen. 3:5). Adam and Eve fall, and evil is introduced to human history. Evil is now not only an evil persona, but also an inner, subjective matter to us humans. The temptation to attempt to “be like God” is one that most humans face in some form or other, especially those in positions of power. This is exemplified by the temptation to use the Ring in *LOTR*.

Kreeft (2001: 62) says: “The [Roman Catholic] Church does not require us to interpret the creation and Fall stories in Genesis *literally*, but she does insist that they must be interpreted *historically*, as something that really happened” (emphasis added). Since God created the world as a purely good Paradise (Gen 1-3), and the world as it appears today is far from that with all its Evil, the Fall of humankind must be a historical reality (at least when looked at from a Judeo-Christian viewpoint), whether the mythical Genesis account is literally accurate or not.

There has been much philosophical debate on the nature of Evil. I will not go deeply into this, but a few basic notions will suffice for this thesis. Shippey (1982: 107) points out the two main opposing views of evil: Boethian and Manichaeian. Augustine represents the Boethian side when he teaches that evil is in essence *nothing*; it is merely the *absence of good* (Augustine 1972: 440, emphasis added). But this is not an entirely satisfactory explanation. As Shippey (1982: 107) points out, human experience shows that evil is a reality, not a mere absence. Acts of terrorism,

mass destruction, or genocide, are not *nothing*. To do something so horrible involves an active choice and action; it is not passive, as a mere absence would suggest.

Manichaeism is the belief that Good and Evil are equal, opposite, and active forces, and the universe is their battlefield (Shippey 1982: 108). But going beyond Boethius does not necessarily mean that one embraces Manichaeism, as seems to be commonly thought. An example from *LOTR* illustrates the debate. It is the scene where Frodo has escaped from Boromir and is still wearing the Ring as he ponders what he should do. He feels Sauron's evil eye closing in on him:

Very soon it would nail him down, know just exactly where he was [. . .] he threw himself from the seat, crouching, covering his head with his grey hood.

He heard himself crying out: *Never, Never!* Or was it: *Verily I come, I come to you?* He could not tell. Then as a flash from some other point of power there came to his mind another thought: *Take it off! Take it off! Fool, take it off! Take off the Ring!*

The two powers strove in him. For a moment, perfectly balanced between their piercing points, he writhed, tormented. Suddenly he was aware of himself again. Frodo, neither the Voice nor the Eye: free to choose and with one remaining instant to do so. He took the Ring off his finger. (*LOTR*: 392)

Here the evil voice can be seen as either an inner struggle between Frodo's will and his subconscious wickedness, or the voice of Sauron from outside calling him to obey: it is either an inner temptation or an external power (Shippey 1982: 109). Tolkien said of Frodo's failure to destroy the Ring on Mount Doom that he was at "the heart of the realm of Sauron [. . .] all other powers were here subdued" (*LOTR*: 924). Shippey (1982: 110) asks if Frodo's will and virtue are among those powers. "To say so would be Manichaeism. It would deny that men are responsible for their actions, make evil into a positive force". But this raises the question: How does evil being a positive force *per se* deny that people are responsible for their actions? Only if the positive force of evil absolutely possesses a person so that their mind and will are beyond their own control, as in, for example, a mental illness, can one say that the person is not responsible. Otherwise people are free to choose between Good and Evil, no matter how strong the temptation, and whether there is personal Evil or not.

According to Augustine (in McGrath 1996), we are tempted to sin, both from outside by the devil (p. 282), and from inside by our inner lusts, which are inherited from Adam's original fall (p. 462). Not only that, sin is something that people cannot get rid of themselves (p. 462), as Frodo cannot destroy the Ring. And further, Frodo's "godly", or good actions – his pity and mercy – are rewarded, but his failure forgiven. This exemplifies the Biblical description of how those who trust in Christ's atonement are forgiven their sins, but rewarded for their good deeds that are done "in Christ",

that is, not by their own merit, but done by the prompting of God's love and empowered by the Holy Spirit (Kreeft, 2001: 144). Kreeft also discusses this in his book *The Philosophy of Tolkien* (2005):

Nonreligious people usually believe in compassion and mercy, but not that mercy will be rewarded, if there is no God. But Christianity knows it will, even in this world, because the plot of human history is written by a God Who loves mercy. Thus the apparently foolish mercy that spares Gollum time after time is rewarded at the Crack of Doom. The reader sees that, at least unconsciously, and if his heart is open to loving that, he is on the way to believing and loving the God Who is behind that "mercy system" whose literal Crack of Doom in our world was Calvary. (Kreeft, 2005: 68)

Sin is more than just disobedience of God's law. To fail to do Good is also sin. One of the meanings of sin is "falling short of God's perfection", or "missing the mark" (Orr 1915). "[. . .] for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). Tolkien (*L*: 80) laments the "endless repetitive unchanging incurable wickedness" of mankind. He says that there is always good, but it is hidden and hard to see, because it is so rarely demonstrated by actual good words or deeds, even when genuine sanctity is present. "But I fear that in the individual lives of all but a few, the balance is debit – we do so little that is positive good, even if we negatively avoid what is actively evil. It must be terrible to be a priest! [. . .]" (*L*: 80). Tolkien spoke of Frodo's failure:

I do not think Frodo's was a *moral* failure. At the last moment the pressure of the Ring would reach its maximum – impossible, I should have said, for any one to resist, certainly after long possession, months of increasing torment, and when starved and exhausted [. . .] We are finite creatures with absolute limitations upon the powers of our soul-body structure in either action of endurance. *Moral* failure can only be asserted, I think, when a man's effort or endurance falls *short* of his limits, and the blame decreases as that limit is closer approached. (*L*: 326, emphasis in original)

In this sense Frodo's failure resembles the concept of "original sin", which means the human disposition inherited from the first fallen humans. It entails the human inability to save one self (Kreeft, 2001: 119). Tolkien explains this dilemma in his letters and applies to Frodo's case the Lord's Prayer. He says that the petition "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil," would be meaningless if it was against something that cannot happen. Tolkien says it is possible for people to be overwhelmed by a power of evil too strong to overcome, "in which case [. . .] salvation from ruin will depend on something apparently unconnected: the general sanctity (and humility and mercy) of the sacrificial person" (*L*: 252-3). Tolkien admits that Frodo failed, and that "one must face the fact: the power of Evil in the world is not finally resistible by incarnate creatures, however 'good'" (*L*: 252). This raises the problematic question of free will, which would require its own study. An analogy of

Augustine, as presented by McGrath (1996: 460), will suffice for the present.

Augustine saw free will as a scale in which one pan represents good and the other evil. As descendants of Adam and inheritors of original sin, we are born with more weight on the evil side, so that we do have free will, but its tendency is to sin. Only by Grace through Christ can people be saved, but the scale is still leaning towards sin: therefore we need grace constantly.

11.3 How does Good combat Evil?

In the battle against evil, Tolkien reminds us that “You can’t fight the Enemy with his own Ring without turning into an Enemy” (*L*: 93-94). Evil cannot be destroyed by evil measures. Honkapää (1996: 49-50) discusses the battle between Good and Evil as explained by Harvey. She says that although Evil may try to destroy Good, Good cannot destroy Evil, because this would contradict the very nature of Good. Good can only defend itself. Honkapää paraphrases Harvey:

[. . .] since destroying anything, for the sake of destruction, is contrary to the very nature of creativity, which is the clearest attribute of Good, Frodo was caught in an inextricable web [. . .] Had Frodo been able to cast the Ring into the fires of Mount Doom [. . .] Frodo would have been a destroyer instead of a creative agent of Good. (Honkapää 1996: 60)

To destroy is against the nature of Good. In his article “Augustine on Evil”, Gregory Koukl discusses the problem of evil, which I touched on earlier in this chapter.

Augustine says that the best possible good can only be achieved if people have moral freedom to choose between Good and Evil. Koukl says:

When viewed as a whole, that which appears to be evil ultimately contributes to the greater good [. . .] For example, certain virtues couldn't exist without evil: courage, mercy, forgiveness, patience, the giving of comfort, heroism, perseverance, faithfulness, self-control, long-suffering, submission and obedience, to name a few. These are not virtues in the abstract, but elements of character that can only be had by moral souls. Just as evil is a result of acts of will, so is virtue. Acts of moral choice accomplish both. (Koukl 2002)

Koukl’s views are resonant of *The Silmarillion*, where Ilúvatar tells Melkor that anything he did to twist or pervert Ilúvatar’s Theme would ultimately end up contributing to the overall beauty of the Theme (*S*: 18). The Elf Haldir says to Merry that because in the world love is now mingled with grief, love “grows perhaps the greater” (*LOTR*: 339). Augustine is highly respected by Protestants and Catholics alike, as perhaps the foremost Church Father. Some even consider him the “Father of Roman Catholicism” (Portalié 1907). It is evident that Tolkien derived much of his thinking from Augustine, whose thoughts Koukl discusses further:

What good comes out of a drive-by killing, someone might ask, or the death of a teenager through overdose, or a daughter's rape, or child abuse? The answer is that a commensurate good doesn't always come out of those individual situations, though God is certainly capable of redeeming any tragedy. Rather, the greater good results from having a world in which there is moral freedom, and moral freedom makes moral tragedies like these possible. (Koukl 2002)

The problem of evil is a complex one, and Koukl's and Augustine's thoughts may raise more questions than they answer. A question that comes to mind concerning the battle between Good and Evil is, if something evil is trying to destroy or harm someone, is it evil to take sword and fight? When does, say, a nation, when defending itself against hostile enemies, become evil itself? Should one merely stop the attack and allow the evil offender to choose whether to repent or not? What if they will not repent? Is it then not evil to destroy it? Where does one draw the line? Why is evil allowed to exist in the first place? Tolkien addresses this problem in a letter:

That Sauron was not himself destroyed in the anger of the One is not my fault: the problem of evil, and its apparent toleration, is a permanent one for all who concern themselves with our world. The indestructibility of *spirits* with free wills, even by the Creator of them, is also an inevitable feature, if one either believes in their existence, or feigns it in a story. (*L*: 280, emphasis in original)

It is easy to agree that Evil cannot create – but can Good not destroy Evil (at all) without becoming evil itself? However, it is not the purpose of this thesis to probe these questions any further. The point I am trying to make is that the battle between Good and Evil, which Tolkien exemplifies in *LOTR*, is very real. Everyone who watches the news or even looks honestly into their *own* soul can see that Evil is a reality, and is challenged to battle it in their life or society. Encouragement to take on the challenge is one of the gleams of Evangelium that shines from *LOTR*.

11.3.1 *Oft evil will shall evil mar* – Théoden (*LOTR*: 581)

In *LOTR*, Evil is needed for its own downfall. Pearce (1999: 118) says: “The parasitic nature of evil is the key to its inherent weakness. Since, of its nature, it is counter-creative and can only destroy, it often destroys itself in the blindness of its malice.” “Often does hatred hurt itself,” says Gandalf (*LOTR*: 571). Speaking of Gollum's presence with Frodo and Sam (which they have learned of from Faramir), Gandalf declares his hope: “[. . .] a traitor may betray himself and do good that he does not intend” (*LOTR*: 797). This is exactly what happens in several places in *LOTR*, as I pointed out in the chapter on Providence (pp. 55-65). For example, Saruman brings about his own downfall by bringing Merry and Pippin in time to Fangorn, where they meet Treebeard. Here I will present a few more examples.

When Gandalf offers Saruman the chance to repent (*LOTR*: 568) he refuses, but still Gandalf will not punish him. Wormtongue throws the Palantir out of the window, robbing Saruman of his only remaining weapon. Later Frodo also offers Saruman the chance to repent. He refuses and tries to kill Frodo. *Still* Frodo spares him, but again it is Wormtongue (a servant of Evil) who serves as the agent of retribution, as he stabs Saruman to death. Evil destroys Evil.

The darkness caused by Sauron's black clouds facilitates Théoden's covert ride past the orcs to assist in the battle at Minas Tirith (*LOTR*: 816). Gimli speaks of the victory over the Southrons by the army of the Dead, who are under Sauron's curse of eternal captivity in the world: "Strange and wonderful I thought it that the designs of Mordor should be overthrown by such wraiths of fear and darkness. With its *own weapons* was it worsted" (*LOTR*: 858, emphasis added).

The most outstanding case of evil destroying itself is, of course, the unintentional destruction of the Ring by the evil will of Gollum. Sauron himself never sees it coming: it does not even cross his mind that people would choose to renounce the Power offered them by the Ring (*LOTR*: 262). To Sauron, as it is to Boromir and Denethor, it would be folly to destroy such a weapon. But Gandalf says: "It is wisdom to recognize necessity, when all other courses have been weighed, though as folly it may appear to those who cling to *false hope*. Well, let folly be our cloak, a veil before the eyes of the Enemy!" (*LOTR*: 262, emphasis added). The hope of combating the Enemy with power, even with the Ring, was the false hope of Boromir and Denethor.

A parallel to this is found in 1 Corinthians. Paul says: "Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and *foolishness* to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1Cor. 1:22-24, emphasis added). The "folly" of Christ was similar to that of the Fellowship of the Ring. Christ also renounced the power – in fact, world dominion – that Satan offered him if he would worship Satan. Instead of grasping for power and "god-likeness", Christ humbled himself "even to death on a cross" (Phil. 2:8). This is the folly that Satan could not understand, and the apostle John is likely to have meant this when he said of Jesus: "The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood [or overcome] it" (John 1:5). So provoking the killing of Jesus (Luke 22:3), Satan brings about the loss of his only means of holding people bondage, sin (Col. 2:14).

I will close my analysis by returning to the concept of treachery turned into Good. Gollum's betrayal of Frodo and Sam to Shelob facilitates the providential timing and events that lead to the ultimate Good of the Ring's destruction. A parallel of this can be found in the story of Joseph (Gen. 37-50). Joseph's brothers hated him, because their father, Jacob, favoured and pampered him, and because he was a "tattle-tale" and arrogant. He proudly told his brothers of dreams in which he saw them bowing to him. Finally the brothers could not stand Joseph anymore, so they sold him to slave-traders. Joseph was bought by Potiphar, captain of the Egyptian Pharaoh's guard. If such a wicked betrayal was not bad enough, Joseph was falsely accused of attempted rape by Potiphar's wife, and he was thrown in prison.

After many years Pharaoh's chief cup bearer and baker were imprisoned. Each had a dream that bothered them, and with the help of God's Spirit Joseph interpreted them. Both dreams were fulfilled exactly as Joseph said. Years later Pharaoh himself had a troubling dream, and the cup bearer remembered Joseph. Pharaoh demanded an interpretation, and Joseph told him that God had given the dream to Pharaoh to give him foreknowledge of seven years of abundance followed by seven years of drought. Egypt would survive only if all excess grain was stored during the abundant years.

Pharaoh believed Joseph, and because he sensed that God's Spirit was with him, he appointed Joseph as Egypt's highest official, second to himself. The dream came true and seven abundant years were followed by seven years of drought. Having heard that there was food in Egypt, Joseph's brothers came and bowed before him, fulfilling the dream Joseph had boasted of as a youth. Joseph recognized his brothers, and tested them by planting a golden cup in the youngest, Benjamin's bag, and arrested him. But Judah stepped up and offered himself as prisoner instead, since their father would die of sorrow if he lost Benjamin, since he had already lost Joseph. Seeing his sincerity, Joseph broke down crying, and revealed himself to his brothers. Now humbled by his experiences, Joseph forgave his brothers and sent for their father. His brothers brought him to Egypt, where Joseph gave them land to survive the drought. When Jacob eventually died, the brothers appealed to Joseph, fearing that he would avenge them.

His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said. But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? *You intended to harm me*, but *God intended it for good* to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them. (Genesis 50:18-21, emphasis added)

Joseph's story is a touching example of God providentially allowing Evil to take its course, but in the end turning it to Good. Had his brothers not sinned and sold Joseph; had Potiphar's wife not sinned and falsely accused him; and had Joseph not been those years in prison, the family might have perished. Likewise, Gollum sinned against Frodo wickedly, but it was turned to Good and the "saving of many lives".

I have now looked at how *LOTR* reflects the battle between Good and Evil, the Kingdom of Heaven and the devil's realm of Hell. I have established that Tolkien's portrayal of both Evil and Good are realistic, and speak symbolically to the reader. I have pointed out the obvious similarities between Tolkien's devil-personas and the biblical Satan. I have also shown that *LOTR* reflects in many ways the reality of sin.

But most important of all, I have discussed perhaps the main reason Evil is allowed to coexist with Good, as *LOTR* suggests: somehow Evil will one day bring about its own destruction, and all evils suffered – even those caused by evil intentions – will be turned into Good. Like millions of Christians around the world, Tolkien believed that the Kingdom of Heaven will one day come in its fullness, banishing Evil from Creation, and Justice and Goodness will prevail (Rev 22:3). This hope is beautifully exemplified by the story of Frodo and the Ring.

12. CONCLUSION

Studying Tolkien's writings in light of Christian theology has reinforced my original thoughts of *LOTR* as a mirror reflecting the Kingdom of Heaven. I have established that Tolkien wrote *LOTR* with the mainly subconscious intention of writing a fantastic and mythical story that would exemplify aspects of the Kingdom of God without "preaching" or imposing Christianity on the reader. Tolkien has made the message of *LOTR* universally appealing, allowing the non-Christian to derive from the story values and virtues, such as love, faithfulness, friendship, loyalty, hope, joy, romance (in the literary sense), and escape in its positive sense, which was for Tolkien "escape from our narrow and distorted view of reality and meaning" (*MC*: 148).

The believing Christian can derive this and more. *LOTR* is not allegory, but because of striking similarities, some of the contents of the story may justly be called illustrations or narrative examples of biblical truths – albeit in a completely different,

imaginary pre-Christian world setting. As the quest progresses one is often reminded of biblical truths, illustrated in a most stirring way. The story hits the truths home by attaching emotions to them, and thus serves as an inspiration and encouragement to the Christian to continue following Christ by doing works of goodness. Goodness will be rewarded, perhaps already in this life, but at the latest when the Kingdom comes in its fullness. This fallen world, no matter how blatantly Evil still parades itself here, is still governed by divine Providence – Good will cause evil itself to work for its own ultimate downfall, as it does in *The Lord of the Rings*.

Kreeft gives a description that could well serve as a summary of my findings:

The main way The Lord of the Rings is religious is in its form, its structure: (a) of its worldview and thus of its world [. . .] (b) of the plot, full of providential design and cosmic justice; and (c) of the characters as manifesting themes like providence, grace, heroism, hierarchy, glory, resurrection, piety, duty, authority, obedience, tradition, humility, and ‘eucatastrophe’ [. . .] All these themes [. . .] have a religious dimension. (Kreeft, 2005: 68)

I would add to this the Kingdom of Heaven perspective, which does contain these values, but is still something more. I would also add the concept of self-sacrifice for the good of others, which is so prominent in *LOTR*. And something else that is actually the most impressive thing about Tolkien’s work: he managed to sub-create a story that is incredibly powerful merely as a story – *in spite of* the religious element so deeply present. In my view embedding religious elements into a story is risky, and it tends to undermine the story rather than enrich it. But Tolkien has succeeded, and those very elements make it so appealing.

Kreeft suggests that the Christian elements and values are so profoundly present in *LOTR* that “if the anti-religious person loves this story, he must unconsciously love the Christian story, not because The Lord of the Rings is an allegory of Christianity but because its author's mind and philosophy are one with that of the Author of the Christian story” (Kreeft 2005:68). This is quite strongly put, but nevertheless, the Christian “light” that the story is looked along is really present. Tolkien let this light shine in an unobtrusive and respectful way. It is more like an undercurrent of values and symbolism, only here and there gracing the surface of the story. Tolkien wanted to give people, regardless of their religious views, a great story without any intention of proselytizing. I believe Christ himself respects each human being in the same way.

This thesis has approached *LOTR* from the perspective of the Kingdom of Heaven, which has not been done *per se* to date. I have shown that many of the elements, values, and principles of the Kingdom can be seen reflected or exemplified throughout

LOTR. And based on my findings it is fair to say that Tolkien also intended them to be there, albeit under the surface. Or, to put it another way, he could *not prevent* the “far-off gleams of evangelium” from pervading his story.

Because of the limits of an MA thesis, this has been more or less an introduction, and many of the aspects I have examined would deserve further study. In *LOTR* the values alone could be researched in much more detail, because so many characters and events somehow demonstrate the values of the Kingdom. This could be done by creating character profiles and isolating the story-lines of Tolkien’s characters to see how their values appear in various situations. Not to mention the volume of stories that makes up *The Silmarillion*. Further research could also compare Tolkien’s and Lewis’ works – especially *LOTR* and the *Narnia* series – to see how the authors’ respective viewpoints of Christianity appear in their writing. And since Lewis was more liberal in his attitude towards allegory, the allegory-applicability issue would also be a fruitful object of study. A comparison between *LOTR* and a modern “contestant”, Harry Potter, might also be revelatory from almost any viewpoint.

Another fruitful object of further study is the problem of Evil and the battle between Good and Evil in *LOTR*. I feel like I merely scratched the surface, and I think I have more questions now than when I started. But of course Good and Evil is such a bottomless well of philosophical speculation, that it could not be exhausted even with volumes of books.

This work has raised a personal interest to read G.K. Chesterton’s and George MacDonald’s works. I believe there might be much material for academic research in their writings. Tolkien has also aroused my curiosity to read Charles Williams, to see just how he “spoiled” C.S. Lewis’ trilogy (which, of Lewis’ works, I have not yet read either). I will definitely not have any trouble choosing who I will be reading in the near future: their names have all appeared on these pages.

This study has helped me analyse and give names to things I experienced as I read *LOTR* for the first time. Hopefully my fear that I would end up “breaking” *LOTR* has not come true for anyone reading this thesis. For me it has not. On the contrary, my appreciation of the story has actually deepened, and for me the “gleams of evangelium” that shine from *The Lord of the Rings* are not so far-off any more.

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