

Conflict and Convergence on Fundamental Matters in C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien

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Many enthusiasts of the Oxford Inklings assume that C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien, since they were scholarly friends and fellow Christians and allied writers, shared the same outlook on all fundamental matters, whether literary or religious. It is not so. They were in fact divided in important ways. As the more popular of the two writers, Lewis has come to dominate our understanding of their relationship. Indeed, many readers of Tolkien view him through the lenses of Lewis's work, as if the two fantasists shared the same method and outlook. The aim of this essay is to mark their considerable differences, not in order to denigrate one at the expense of the other, but to increase our appreciation of the oft-clashing quality of both their writing and their Christian witness. It will become evident that I regard Tolkien as the superior figure, both in the literary greatness of his Rings epic, and perhaps also in the theological depth of his vision. Yet I have reached this conclusion ever so slowly and reluctantly, for I owe an unpayable debt to C.S. Lewis—even as others owe a similar debt to Tolkien. I cannot begin to give Lewis due honor except by showing how he stands significantly opposed to Tolkien on eight counts, even if on the ninth and tenth they are united most profoundly.

1) Personality

Their personalities could hardly have been less alike. Tolkien was a quiet and somewhat diffident man. Only among his family and closest friends did Tolkien become animated and raffish. He once entered a contest by swimming on his back, while wearing a bowler hat and holding a pipe in his mouth. On another carnival occasion, he impersonated a polar bear; on still another, he chased a frightened neighbor with an axe while dressed as an Anglo-Saxon warrior. To hear him read *Beowulf*, declared W. H. Auden, was to listen to the voice of Gandalf. Another student declared that Tolkien "could turn a lecture room into a mead hall in which he was the bard and we were the feasting, listening guests." Yet, unlike Lewis, Tolkien was ill at ease when he had to appear in his own persona. He muttered when he lectured, fled from all publicity (especially after he became a world-renowned author), and did not relish the intellectual bravado that other members of the Inklings displayed in their beer-animated arguments at the Eagle and Child.

Lewis, by contrast, was a hale and bluff arguer. He engaged his students at Magdalen College with an intellectual fierceness that many of them found forbidding, and he delighted in confronting his debating opponents with rationalist rigor at the Oxford Socratic Club. Lewis's Oxonian enemies—and they were many; in fact, they twice kept him from receiving a much-deserved professorship at Oxford—labeled him "Heavy" Lewis, as if he were more boxer than scholar. Even if

we acknowledge this allegation to be a canard, Lewis was (as Tolkien was not) a public intellectual, giving popular lectures and making radio talks, as well as carrying on a huge correspondence. Yet even Lewis finally drew the line on publicity, declining ever to visit the United States, despite repeated invitations from his many admirers there. Their radically opposed teaching styles are sharply incised in Anthony Curtis's comparison:

At the end of the hour with Lewis I always felt [myself] a complete ignoramus; no doubt an accurate impression but also a rather painful one; and if you did venture to challenge one of his theories the ground was cut away from beneath your feet with lightning speed. It was a fool's mate in three moves with Lewis smiling at you from the other side of the board in unmalicious glee at his victory. By contrast Tolkien was the soul of affability. He did all the talking, but he made you feel you were his intellectual equal. Yet his views beneath the deep paternal charm were passionately held.¹

2) Craftsmanship

Tolkien never found it easy to honor Lewis's immense facility at writing. Whereas Lewis turned out books almost at first draft, with only light editing of his initial text, Tolkien labored for years over both his academic and imaginative works, releasing them for publication only with the greatest reluctance. Lewis complained, in fact, about Tolkien's being a dilatory scholar, publishing only a handful of essays in his own discipline. Humphrey Carpenter and others have also wondered whether Lewis's venture into the composition of children's books may have been pirated from Tolkien's writing of *The Hobbit*. Lewis was writing animal stories already during his boyhood, in fact, and some of these "Boxen" stories have been published. Even so, Tolkien feared that Lewis had dashed off his Narnia books so rapidly that he had failed adequately to develop the mythology underlying them. Narnia is indeed a comparatively thin imaginative world as compared to the dense richness of Middle-earth. Hence Tolkien's derisive alternate title for the Narnia chronicle: "Nymphs and their Ways, the Love-Life of a Faun."²

Yet despite this drastic difference, Tolkien and Lewis had a shared reverence for non-human creatures—whether elves and dwarves in *The Lord of the Rings*, or the hrossa and seroni and pfifltriggi in *Out of the Silent Planet*. They also had a mutually high regard for creatures from the natural and animal world—for horses such as Gandalf's Shadowfax and Shasta's Bree, for bears like Mr. Bultitude, for the trees in Lorien, and especially for the Ents who, as treeherds, protect and form alliances with the trees. Thus did Lewis and Tolkien promote what Mark Long calls "the fellowship of unlike equals," a mystical sense of communion not only with our own kind, but also with creatures which are radically "other" to us: "Other creatures," declared Tolkien, "are like other realms with which Man has broken off relations, and sees now only from the outside at a distance, being at war with them, or on the terms of an uneasy armistice."³

Such mutuality is not displayed, however, in their respective onomastic skills. Lewis's names often seem clumsy and arbitrary. *Hrossa*, for example, is a crude reworking of the word "horse." "Devine" is an all too obvious reference to the godlike pretensions of the scientist in *Out of the Silent Planet*, just as "Weston" seems a rather heavy-handed signal that he embodies all of the worst aspects of modern Western culture. Ransom's name reveals, rather obviously, his allegorical function as savior. Tolkien, by contrast, devoted enormous care to every name in his vast corpus, usually rooting them in some ancient German word or mythical Scandinavian figure. The ringwraiths, for example, are one of Tolkien's most horrific inventions. They are shadowy, disembodied creatures who are nonetheless garbed and armed horsemen. Tolkien derives their name from the Old English verb *writhan*, which means to twist or writhe. It gradually gave birth to the words *wreath* (a thing twisted or braided) and *wraith* (something wispy and twisting like smoke). But *writhan* also lies at the root of our word *wrath*. Tolkien's ringwraiths are thus the products of an anger that is literally "twisted up inside."⁴ Such onomastic depth, unlike anything in Lewis, undergirds nearly every Tolkienian name. It is the product of a finely-honed craftsmanship.

3) Apologetics

Tolkien disliked Lewis's efforts in apologetics. He feared that Lewis was speaking and writing about theological matters wherein he was not carefully trained and deeply read. Tolkien called Lewis "Everyman's theologian," a description not meant entirely as a compliment.⁵ Lewis never doubted that he was meant to be an evangelist and moralist. "The glory of God, and, as our only means of glorifying him, the salvation of human souls," he declared somewhat ungrammatically, "is the real business of life."⁶ "The Christian knows from the outset," Lewis often affirmed, "that the salvation of a single soul is more important than the production or preservation of all the epics and tragedies in the world."⁷ Again, Lewis could declare that "the Church exists for nothing else but to draw men into Christ, to make them little Christs. If they [i.e., the churches] are not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time."⁸ For Lewis, it is possible for the Gospel to exist without the ethos which it creates. Thus did he discern a potential divide between Christ and culture that Tolkien never observed. Whereas Tolkien sought to build up what might be called a Christian culture, Lewis was an evangelist who sought first and last to make the case for Christianity, whether by straightforward argument (as in *Mere Christianity* and *The Problem of Pain* and *Miracles*) or by fictional embodiment (as in the space trilogy and *Till We Have Faces*).

As a Roman Catholic, Tolkien shared Lewis's conviction that God-implanted natural law underlies everything created. Yet for Tolkien it was the imagination, far more than the reason, that discerns this divine order. He lacked Lewis's urgency to bring people into the Kingdom by argument, despite the venerable tradition of apologetics that animates much of Catholic theology. For Tolkien, it seems, the traditional moral and sacramental witness of the church was a sufficient means of

evangelism. That few if any souls will ever be converted to the Gospel by reading his work was no worry to him. Like the anonymous monks who gave written form to *Beowulf*, Tolkien practiced the method of indirection, quietly imbuing his pre-Christian epic with concerns that are obliquely rather than overtly Christian. Nor was he troubled that many readers failed to perceive the implicitly Christian character of *The Lord of the Rings*. He wanted his work to stand on its own intrinsic merits, to glorify God as a compelling and convincing story, not for it to be propped up with even so noble a purpose as evangelism.⁹

Tolkien may have misunderstood Lewis's apologetic work. Lewis confessed that his intellectual defense of Christianity resulted from the *limitation* of his own gifts, and that he preferred appeals to the heart more than to the mind.¹⁰ Yet argument was Lewis's first love. Christopher Mitchell is ever so correct in calling him "a naturally Socratic soul."¹¹ From his early tutelage under the atheist rationalist W. T. Kirkpatrick, Lewis had learned to relish dialectic, the cut and thrust of intellectual repartee. Lewis's own conversion to theism, moreover, as well as his subsequent return to the church, were hugely enhanced by his "Great War" with Owen Barfield, "an almost incessant disputation [...] which lasted for years."¹² As an anthroposophist, Barfield sought to derive a full-fledged philosophy, even a theology, from the study of *anthropos*—human nature—alone. Despite his debt to Barfield's arguments, Lewis never confused rational demonstration with the mysterious and unaccountable gift of faith—the ability to entrust one's life wholly to God. Rather did he seek to show the *intelligibility* of Christianity, enabling those who already believed (as well as those who did not) to discern that, far from being irrational nonsense, the Gospel offers a cogent account of human existence. Lewis's friend Austin Farrer rightly identifies the real intent of Lewis's apologetics: "For though argument does not create conviction, the lack of it destroys belief. What seems to be proved may not be embraced; but what no one shows the ability to defend is quickly abandoned. Rational argument does not create belief, but it maintains a climate in which belief may flourish. [...] Lewis [...] provided a positive exhibition of the force of Christian ideas, morally, imaginatively, and rationally."¹³ In his "Apologist's Evening Prayer," moreover, Lewis mocked his own efforts at proving the God who first and last proves himself:

From all my lame defeats and oh! much more
From all the victories that I seemed to score;
From cleverness shot forth on Thy behalf
At which, while angels weep, the audience laugh;
From all my proofs of Thy divinity,
Thou, who wouldst give no sign, deliver me.¹⁴

4) The Church

The church and its analogues play a much greater role in Tolkien than in Lewis, whose understanding of Christian faith is often individualist. This is not to suggest that Lewis himself was anything other than a faithful churchman. He gives

Mother Kirk at least nominal recognition in *The Pilgrim's Regress*, and the monastic community of St. Anne's has an important symbolic role in *That Hideous Strength*. Yet most of Lewis's heroes are virtual solitaires. They do battle with evil out of their own private resources of spiritual strength. All four of the children in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, for example, face Aslan alone. So does Ransom travel to Perelandra alone, and he undertakes his battle against Weston and Devine alone. Orual learns to submit her will to the divine will by means of a solitary struggle. She later learns, of course, that she has received the mystical aid of the suffering Psyche, but this cannot be regarded as anything akin to real companionship in faith.

Even so, there are communal emphases to be found in Lewis. In one of his letters, he stresses that Christians are called "not to individualism but to membership in the mystical body."¹⁵ In the Narnia books, frequent prayers are offered in behalf of others. In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, the children are "summoned" by Aslan. They enter Narnia out of curiosity, but it is the Lion who calls them. Each child also receives a gift by which he or she must serve the general good. And the failure of one inevitably touches the whole. We also find the children making common cause with beavers and others. In *The Silver Chair*, Puddleglum and two of the children seek to free the Prince, and in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, the ship's entire company faces their peril together, as their collective fate is imperiled by the solitary Eustace.¹⁶

There is nothing individualist to be found anywhere in Tolkien. He places communal life at the very center of the Rings epic. The Nine Walkers constitute an *ecclesial* company in the precise meaning of the adjective: they are *ekklesia*—called out—for a common mission that could not be accomplished individually. That he makes their number nine is surely an analogue of the triune community and perhaps also of Christ's own company of disciples. They always function as a unity. Even when the Company is split—by the betrayal of the Judas-like Boromir—there is still no solitude in the Quest. Frodo and Sam serve as companions who bear one another's burdens and share each other's joys. Aragorn and the other separated members of the Company also act communally in seeking to draw Sauron's attention to themselves, allowing Sam and Frodo to destroy the Ring while he is attacking them.

5) "Mere" Christianity

Lewis believed that Christian faith contains an essential core of belief and practice that all Christians share. He thus lamented the fragmented state of the church. "While the name of 'Christianity,' covers a hundred mutually contradictory beliefs," he asked, "who can be converted to it?"¹⁷ Hence his concern to locate the animating center of the Faith wherein all Christians stand. He likened it to a hall with doors leading to many rooms. In these lodgings one finds the various liturgical and doctrinal traditions. Though he aims to bring readers into the central passageway, Lewis confesses that Christian life is not to be found there: "it is in the

rooms, not in the hall, that there are fires and chairs and meals. The hall is the place to wait in, a place from which to try the various doors, not a place to live in.”¹⁸ Mark Noll denies that anyone can espouse “mere Christianity,” since we “must always practice one particular form of Christianity.” Yet Noll confirms Andrew Walls’s definition of “mere Christianity” as constituted not by the hall of a great house but by the house itself: “although the mansion of Christianity possesses only rooms, [...] the inhabitants in each and every one of them can realize both that all the rooms were made by the same builder and that at least some of the features in each of the rooms resemble features in all of the others.” “The universal Christ,” Noll agrees with Lewis, “is able to incarnate himself over and again in particular human circumstances.”¹⁹

Lewis’s devotion to “mere” Christianity made him perhaps the most important ecumenist and apologist of the previous century. He became the chief Christian tutor to the twentieth century Anglophone world, helping to make converts of unbelievers and to strengthen faith in all sorts and conditions of souls. When a recent convert to Roman Catholicism wrote in worry that he and Lewis would now be separated in irreconcilable ways, Lewis replied that “in the present divided state of Christendom, those who are at the heart of each division are all closer to one another than to those who are at the fringes.”²⁰ So did Walker Percy discover, in writing an introduction to *The New Catholics*, that C.S. Lewis was more instrumental in recent conversions to the Roman church than anyone else, even Thomas Merton.²¹

Tolkien, by contrast, was no more of an ecumenist than an apologist. As his daughter Priscilla made humorously clear when I visited her in 1988, her father would have had no use for a Baptist such as me. In her father’s estimate, I was no “separated brother,” as Vatican II had declared Protestants to be, but a heretic! Yet she added that, when he turned to his fantasy-work, all of her father’s bitter animosities faded away. Tolkien was an ardent and unapologetic Catholic, in no small part, because his mother had been ostracized by her own Unitarian father as well as her late husband’s Baptist parents when she had converted to Catholicism at the turn of the twentieth century.²² As a widow raising two sons by herself, she also had received little aid from her own Unitarian parents. Thus did Tolkien revere his mother as a virtual martyr for her faith, since she had worked herself to death in order that her two sons might be given a vigorous Catholic upbringing by the Oratorians in Birmingham.

Neither was Tolkien an enthusiast for Anglicanism. He believed that genuine English tradition had effectively ended with the Norman invasion of 1066. How much more, then, did he regard the Reformation as a terrible error! To him, the cathedrals of England were stolen property, and Lewis remained an Ulsterman who had failed to repent for this Protestant theft of Catholic goods. Tolkien was especially outraged that Lewis expressed no concern for the Communist atrocities committed against Catholics during the Spanish Civil War.²³ This refusal must surely have weakened Tolkien’s already frail ecumenism. For him, there is no such

thing as “mere” Christianity that unites believers of all kinds. There is no common hall where Christians enter the single house of faith, only then to repair to the various denominational rooms. He regarded devotion to the Virgin Mary, together with adherence to the Marian dogmas and papal infallibility, as non-negotiable necessities for salvation. These essentials are located in the central vestibule, not in the ancillary quarters. While Christians may be doctrinally united in many fundamental matters, Tolkien believed that they also remain divided about no less elemental things.

Lewis’s ecumenism extended, ever so happily, to his friendships. He was a practitioner of Christian companionship in ways unknown to Tolkien. Among Lewis’s friends were the anthroposophist philosopher Owen Barfield, the Italian priest Dom Giovanni Calabria, and Lewis’s homosexual childhood mate from the Plymouth Brethren, Arthur Greeves. Nor did Lewis ever relent in his high estimate of Tolkien, even after Tolkien—resentful at Lewis’s bringing Joy Davidman into the Inklings circle—virtually broke off their relation. Tolkien, in turn, acknowledged that he would never have brought *The Lord of the Rings* to publication without the constant encouragement of Lewis. Tolkien was also one of the main advocates for Lewis’s appointment to the Chair of English at Magdalene College Cambridge in 1954, after he had so long and so unjustly been denied a professorship at Oxford. Yet Tolkien neither called on Lewis during Davidman’s illness nor did he attend her funeral when she died. Even so, Tolkien was devastated by Lewis’s death 1963. He declared that an axe-blow had been struck at his roots: “The unpayable debt that I owe to him was not ‘influence’ as it is ordinarily understood, but sheer encouragement. He was for long my only audience. Only from him did I ever get the idea that my ‘stuff’ could be more than a private hobby.”²⁴

6) Philosophical Orientation

Lewis was a Platonist at heart. For him this world is the shadow of another. There is an invisible divine realm hovering over the visible world, making the natural order into a land of shadows and reflections of the really real. Like Isaac Newton, Lewis believed that the invisible God works in and through the visible process of secondary causes. Yet God remains absolutely sovereign over these natural laws. He is able drastically to telescope them whenever He chooses to perform miraculous acts. Lewis cites Jesus’s turning of water into wine and his feeding of the five thousand as examples of this sudden compression of what would otherwise be the slow workings of nature. God thus remains outside the cosmic order, except for his occasional interruptions of it. That miracles are rare rather than frequent is, according to Lewis, their essence. They are dramatic demonstrations of the truest and deepest unity of the whole creation. For God *not* to work miracles would be the sign of real inconsistency in divine purpose.²⁵

Many of Lewis’s readers and critics have been puzzled by his self-confessed “romantic rationalism”—a decided oxymoron. That Lewis could be at once a hard-headed prover of God’s existence and also a soft-hearted devotee of the human

longing for God seems strange indeed. The key to Lewis's equal devotion to Athanasius and Wordsworth lies in his conviction that miracles are not unique disclosures of God's special will for the world revealed in Israel and Christ; rather are they revelations of the grand pattern of Death and Rebirth that operates everywhere already: the "familiar pattern" which is "written all over the world," the pattern of vegetable and animal and human life, and therefore the pattern of pagan religion and myth as well:

Now if there is such a God and if He descends again, then we can understand why Christ is at once so like the Corn-King and so silent about him. He is like the Corn-King because the Corn-King is a portrait of him. The similarity is not in the least unreal or accidental. For the Corn-King is derived (through human imagination) from the facts of Nature, and the facts of Nature from her Creator; the Death and Re-birth pattern is in her because it was first in Him. On the other hand, elements of Nature-religion are strikingly absent from the teaching of Jesus and from the Judaic preparation because in them Nature's Original is manifesting itself.²⁶

Lewis's Platonism gives him an understanding of the universe as a seamless whole in which the inner and outer, the upper and lower, the divine and the natural are deeply intertwined. Yet because this interstitial relation is mystical and invisible, it cannot readily be discerned. It requires a leap of faith. This leap is everywhere evident in Lewis's work, especially in his children and space fantasies. There Lewis creates a parallel universe which we must first credit in order to enter imaginatively into it. Thus do we move from one realm to another, as if they were essentially disjunct, even though they are finally knitted together. Lucy and Edmund, Susan and Peter, pass magically *through* the back of the wardrobe and *into* Narnia. Ransom travels *from* the earth *to* Malacandra and Perelandra. In Lewis's fiction, the realm of Deep Magic always lies on the *other* side of the real or ordinary world. It's an "as if" world, moreover, and its reality depends on the willingness of the beholder to see it. In a frighteningly honest confession to the Witch in *The Silver Chair*, Puddleglum admits that he would not be disheartened or deterred if he learned that this magical other-world did not exist:

We're just babies making up a game, if you're right. But four babies playing a game can make a play-world which licks your real world hollow. That's why I'm going to stand by the play world. I'm on Aslan's side even if there isn't any Aslan to lead it. I'm going to live as like a Narnian as I can even if there isn't a Narnia.²⁷

Even in Lewis's late masterpiece, *Till We Have Faces*, readers are required to enter the Platonic super-world by the leap of faith that Coleridge called a suspension of disbelief. How can Orual *believe* that Psyche's palace is a blessedly real place rather than a cruel deceit, that it is not indeed a mirage of Orual's own making? Frustrated at not knowing *what* to believe, Orual appeals to her readers: "Can a Greek [i.e., an educated Western humanist] understand the horror of that

thought [that “there might be a hundred things ... that I could not see”]?” It was a dreadful moment, Orual explains, “when I believed I was looking at Psyche’s palace and did not see it. For the horror was the same: a sickening discord, a rasping together of two worlds, like the two bits of a broken bone.”²⁸ For Orual as for Lewis, the visible and invisible worlds are often jaggedly and painfully joined, like the jutting fragments of a compound fracture. Both reader and protagonist are thus challenged to credit the existence of this other realm in an epistemological vault that becomes the basis for belief. One must first embrace a certain metaphysical order, understood in largely Platonic terms, before one can participate in its miraculous wonders.²⁹

Yet Lewis was a Platonist Christian and not a Christian Platonist. As James Patrick has demonstrated, Lewis was the inheritor of the Oxford Idealist tradition of T.H. Green and F.H. Bradley. They taught him that mind is no late-arriving phenomenon produced by the evolutionary process, but that the universe is mental through and through. The act of thinking, as Patrick explains, is the mind’s own participation in the cosmic Logos:

Reason as [Lewis] uses the word does not refer to the quality of consistency in logical operations, but the ability, indeed the common experience, through which every man gains access to a transcendent ground of truth and discovers unavoidable responsibility for shaping his nature and nature generally in this higher image. Reason in Lewis is the light with which we grasp reality, the *logos* of Philo and St. John, the judge of abstract truths as well as the foundation of practical reason, and hence of morality. It stands closer to what the classical tradition meant by wisdom, understanding, art, and prudence than does the thin talent for deductive consistency that sometimes passes for rationality.³⁰

Lewis selectively retrieved those aspects of Platonism that were useful for Christian faith and life, just as he repudiated those that were inimical to it. He scorned, for example, the Platonic disregard for the body, making clear that our incarnate condition (like God’s own enfleshment in human form) is not our shame but our splendor. In both *The Great Divorce* and “The Weight of Glory,” Lewis celebrates the sheer solidity and heft that the life of redemption accords believers, whether in this life or the next. And in *The Abolition of Man*, Lewis is a thorough-going Aristotelian in his call for the cultivation of virtue as the way to shape human sentiments and to order human loves.

Tolkien was no sort of Platonist at all. He espoused what might be roughly called an Aristotelian metaphysics. For him, transcendent reality is to be found in the depths of this world rather than in some putative existence beyond it. Tolkien argued, for example, that fairy-stories “cannot tolerate any frame or machinery suggesting that the whole story in which they occur is a figment or illusion.” Such devices create a skepticism that undermines the truthfulness of the entire fictional enterprise: “The moment disbelief arises, the spell is broken.”³¹ Tolkien elects,

therefore, to set his readers right down in the midst of Middle-earth. There is no time voyage or space travel in his fiction, no slippage through the back of a wardrobe into a magical realm. Tolkien seeks, instead, to convince readers that his imaginative world is utterly real, having no other foundation than its own laws and conventions.

For Tolkien, it follows, the universe has no upper and lower stories linked by periodic divine incursions. The life-world of *The Lord of the Rings* consists of interlocking realities—human and holy, demonic and natural. Even a quick glance at the battle with the Black Riders at the river-ford in Rivendell would reveal a complex involvement of colliding and colluding powers. These powers are far from equal in either might or significance. There is a profound sense of divine providence coursing through the whole of the epic, subtly undermining the seeming dominance of evil. But for Tolkien as not for Lewis, miracles are unique acts of God; they are not special demonstrations of what God always does through the operations of nature. There is, in fact, an implicit Thomism at work in Tolkien's understanding of miracles. As Brian Davies observes, Aquinas "*thinks that miracles come about by virtue of the creative activity of God and nothing else. The whole point about them is that nothing subject to God's providence, i.e. no cause other than God (no secondary cause), is at work in their occurrence.*" This is not to say that God does violence to the created order, or that he "intervenes" to disrupt its natural processes. On the contrary, St. Thomas insists that God is totally present to every existing thing, so that *all* events are always the effect of God's will. Yet miracles are not worked through secondary causes, not even through their divine compression, as Lewis argues: they are brought about by God alone.³² Aquinas described miracles, therefore, as those events which, because their divine source is hidden from us, excite *admiratio*—the *wonder* which existentially and etymologically lies at the root of the word *miracle*.

This brief by-way into miracles helps us to understand a crucial event in Book I—and there are many others like it—when the evil Ringwraiths are bearing down on Frodo. Having no hope of defeating them, he has put on the Ruling Ring in an act of despairing resignation. Then suddenly he does something surprising:

At that moment Frodo threw himself forward on the ground, and he heard himself crying aloud: *O Elbereth! Gilthoniel!* At the same time he struck at the feet of his enemy. A shrill cry rang out in the night; and he felt a pain like a dart of poisoned ice pierce his left shoulder. Even as he swooned he caught, as through a swirling mist, a glimpse of Strider leaping out of the darkness with a flaming brand of wood in either hand. With a last effort Frodo, dropping his sword, slipped the Ring from his finger and closed his hand tight upon it.³³

Frodo is far more acted upon than acting, as the narrator's passive verb indicates. Too weak of will to save himself, he is divinely enabled to invoke the star-queen Varda by her elven names. Varda is an angel-like being who is also the spouse of

Manwë. She aids him in his providential care for the Earth, especially as he opposes the rebel valar (i.e., fallen angel) named Melkor and his minion named Sauron. Because Ilúvatar (God) is already present to him, Frodo can still prostrate himself in the act of prayer. But the prayer itself is miraculously prayed through him without the aid of secondary causes, much as St. Paul declares in Romans 8:26: “we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us.” This is an act brought about solely by God. That Strider with his fire-brand suddenly appears and drives away the light-fearing Ringwraiths would seem to be a second miracle, for Strider had no knowledge of Frodo’s crisis. Yet these two petitionary miracles do not magically deliver Frodo from further harm, nor do they negate the necessity of his own valorous effort. Indeed, he flails away furiously at his enemy. Nor do they protect Frodo from the injury that he in fact suffers. But because these miraculous events bring him into the direct presence of the divine, he can at last divest himself of the evil Ring he had desperately put on.

7) Magic and Allegory

Lewis was hardly a disbeliever in prayers of petitionary, as *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer* abundantly attests. Several of Lewis’s characters intercede prayerfully for each other, and Joy Davidman underwent a miraculous remission of her own leukemia after Lewis and others had prayed for her. Yet Lewis seems to have understood intercessory miracles as occurring in accord with secondary causes, and thus as having a kinship with what might be called good or benign magic:

If we are in fact spirits, not Nature’s offspring, then there must be some point (probably the brain) at which created spirit even now can produce effects on matter not by manipulation or technics but simply by the wish to do so. If that is what you mean by Magic then Magic is a reality manifested every time you move your hand or think a thought. And Nature, as we have seen, is not destroyed but rather perfected by her servitude.³⁴

Narnia is the land of magic precisely in this sense: its magical events reveal, as we have seen, the deep structure of the natural order but working in a telescoped fashion. And even though Merlin has to lay down his wand in *That Hideous Strength*, his magic is nonetheless allied with true supernaturalism. Thus could Lewis affirm the old Latin tag: *Magis amica veritas*. Benign magic is the friend of truth because it shows the inseparable link between the natural with the supernatural in ways that modern secularity seeks to deny..

Lewis regarded magic of the malign and occult sort, on the other hand, as truly demonic. The mental agonies of Janie Moore’s dying brother, who had dabbled in esoteric magic, had horrified Lewis, giving him a lifelong scorn for the evil magic of the kind that the White Witch of Narnia performs. Like Tolkien, moreover, Lewis linked the rise of magic to the rise of modern science. In *The Abolition of Man*, he argues that there was very little magic practiced in the Middle Ages. Serious

magical endeavor arose, Lewis rightly observes, only with the rise of serious scientific endeavor in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The both came to replace the chief concern of ancient wisdom, whether natural or human: the conformity of the soul to reality through “knowledge, self-discipline, and virtue. For magic and applied science alike the problem is how to subdue reality to the wishes of men: the solution is a technique [...]” In Paracelsus, he adds, the roles of magician and scientist are combined, even as the aims of Marlowe’s Faustus and Francis Bacon are also the same: they do not seek knowledge so much as power:

Bacon condemns those who value knowledge as an end in itself: this, for him, is to use a mistress for pleasure what ought to be a spouse for fruit. The true object is to extend Man’s power to the performance of all things possible. He rejects magic because it does not work, but his goal is that of a magician.³⁵

Despite their general agreement about the modern origins of magic, Tolkien had a more negative estimate of it than Lewis. He was careful to describe his own art as sub-creation, for instance, in order to differentiate it from anything supernatural. He sought not to fabricate a new world *ex nihilo*, as only God does, but rather to create a Secondary World of *fantasy*. The fantastic realm of Faërie, as he called it, consists of *phantasms* or images of things not generally believed to exist in our primary world: elves, hobbits, wizards, dwarves, ringwraiths, and the like. Fairy-stories are not meant to deny reality, therefore, but to deepen it. When they succeed, they “open a door on Other Time, and if we pass through, though only for a moment, we stand outside our own time, outside Time itself, maybe.”³⁶ Such magical sub-creations must therefore possess what Tolkien called “the inner consistency of reality.”³⁷ They must bear a distinct likeness to our own historical existence. “The Primary World, Reality, of elves and men is the same, if differently valued and perceived.”³⁸

Magic of the non-literary kind attempts to alter the Primary World—to coerce nature. It is not art, Tolkien agrees with Lewis, but a technique: “its desire is *power* in this world, domination of things and wills.”³⁹ Unlike Lewis, Tolkien sets magic in contrast with craftsmanship. A craft requires lifelong discipline and laborious effort, unlike the instantaneous results of magic. Gandalf’s fireworks, for instance, are matters of skill and labor rather than sorcery—even if his wand is indeed a supernatural gift. Sauron’s Ring of absolute power is the product of such magical constraint of the natural order. No wonder, then, that Tolkien regarded much of modern technology—precisely because it seeks to put nature under its command, speeding up its slow and deliberate processes—as a disguised form of magic.

Magic and allegory are linked, in Tolkien’s judgment. Hence his confession that he “cordially dislike[d]” allegory. Lewis’s *The Allegory of Love*, by contrast, mounts a strong defense of the entire Western allegorical tradition. For Tolkien, one-to-one allegorical correspondences coerce the reader’s imagination and shrink the significance of both characters and events, reducing them to “the purposed domination of the author.” There are links, of course, between Middle-earth and our

own world. They are to be discerned not by direct identification but by means of what Tolkien called historical “applicability.”⁴⁰ The Ruling Ring can indeed be likened to the nuclear bomb, as Tolkien himself admitted. In his battle with the satanic Balrog, moreover, Gandalf actually dies. He also descends into an abyss that might well be hell, just as he is resuscitated from death to newness of life. Yet Gandalf is not resurrected to die no more. And while he possesses Christ-like *qualities*, so does Aragorn and, by the end, so does Sam Gamgee! Never is there any *equivalence* between Gandalf and Christ, whereas Aslan is clearly an allegory of Christ, as are Ransom and Psyche to a lesser extent. For Tolkien, at least in his fiction, Christ is not the full and final manifestation of a Corn-King who chose to remain silent about their connection. The unique and unrepeatable figure of Jesus Christ as the God-Man has no true predecessors or successors. All anticipations and imitations of him are partial and limited, even at best. Believing, by contrast, that all everything natural can be tied to something supernatural, Lewis could create multiple Christ figures.

8) Modernism

Lewis saw himself as a pre-modern man—indeed, as a dinosaur. He marked the pre-industrial age of Jane Austen’s England as his own native era, and he regarded himself as a hoary holdover from a world that was not dependent on machines, especially the automobile. Lewis was, in fact, a reactionary figure. He ridiculed the poetry of T. S. Eliot and the fiction of James Joyce, describing *Ulysses* as having been produced by the “steam” of consciousness. Experiments with literary forms that echoed modernist sensibilities about time and place and selfhood were completely alien to Lewis. In these matters at least, Tolkien was very much akin to Lewis. He was an avowed Luddite who regarded our machine-ridden world as having succumbed to an especially pernicious species of magic. Once he saw what automobiles did to England’s country roads, he stopped driving. Tolkien’s literary predilections were even more reactionary than Lewis’s. He lamented Chaucer’s importation of Italian meter into English poetry, and he thought Shakespeare a hopelessly modern writer. In his chief work, therefore, Tolkien reverted to one of the most ancient of literary forms, the epic.

Yet in three important matters Lewis had modernist sympathies as Tolkien did not. Lewis embraced the Enlightenment conviction that it is possible to reason without any prior assumptions—as if it were possible to reason without presuppositions and apart from historical conditions. As Christopher Mitchell has observed, Lewis’s eagerness for disputation was prompted by his desire to restore the Enlightenment exaltation of “free inquiry.” He was imbued with the Socratic assurance that he could fearlessly “follow the argument wherever it led.”⁴¹ So did Lewis also believe it possible to stand above the flux of history and to view things *sub specie aeternitatis*. Hence his attempt to discern the commonalities shared by the various world religions and to exalt their most enduring values. Lewis is indeed a foundationalist in assuming that all people of good will and right mind can agree upon the basic moral rules that are essential for human existence. The American

Founders are perhaps the most obvious examples of this notion that we can elevate certain virtues as normative, without deep regard either for their dependence upon particular historical communities, or their rootage in particular narrative traditions and religious practices. Though Lewis stands at a very far remove from Thomas Jefferson, his doctrine of Objective Value and his formulation of the Tao in *The Abolition of Man*, like his attempt to distill the Christian essence in *Mere Christianity*, can be traced to the Enlightenment brand of idealism that he inherited from his Oxford teachers.

There is little doubt that certain virtues do inhere in all cultures and that we share a common human nature, a fundamental orientation to God, because we are created *imago dei*. Lewis is right to say that no people has ever exalted cowardice in combat or contempt for one's own kin. Yet, beyond these most rudimentary goods, the manifold cultures and religions remain divided about other fundamental matters: they have shaped our common nature in drastically different ways. The Roman Stoics and the Japanese Samurai, for example, held suicide to be one of the highest moral virtues, while Christians have regarded self-murder as a deadly sin—perhaps even the unforgivable sin. The Aztecs, though having a highly advanced civilization, also made human sacrifice central to their religion. Infanticide was so widely practiced throughout the Greco-Roman world that Christians became known as the scandalous people who did not kill their so-called “unwanted” babies.

In nearly every culture, courage manifests itself chiefly in battle, and Tolkien's heroes are indeed distinguished by such courage. Yet their warfare against the invading and coercive forces of Sauron is entirely defensive, and it meets all the requirements of the Christian just-war tradition: far from being the best, it is the worst alternative. For the early church, moreover, martyrdom became the Christian substitute for pagan courage—the willingness not to kill but to be killed. Thus does the willingness of the Company of Nine to be led like sheep to Sauron's slaughter make them far more Christian than pagan in their courage. Their ability also to forgive enemies—manifest most notably in Bilbo's refusal to slay the evil Gollum, and in Gandalf's repeated offers of repentance to the wicked Saruman—would be regarded as an actual vice in ancient Hellenistic cultures. For them, pity is to be given only to the weak and the helpless, never to the strong and undeserving. To grant mercy to such malefactors would be to commit heinous injustice. The Christian virtue of reconciliation, largely unknown in pagan cultures, is also exhibited in Gimli the dwarf and Legolas the elf. They are two historic enemies who, though initially suspicious of each other, become gradually reconciled through loyalty to their self-surrendering common mission.

Lewis is also closer to the modern Enlightenment project than Tolkien because his heroes do not rely as fully upon divine grace as do the hobbits and their friends. Certainly Lewis rejects the modern premise that life presents us with a cafeteria-line of choices, so that we construct our own existence according to whatever values we autonomously choose. Neither would he accept the assumption

that the more unfettered the decision, the more authentic the life. Lewis was no sort of Pelagian holding to the notion that we make our life-determining decisions without the provision of prevenient grace. Yet Lewis, far more than Tolkien, believes that we are the sum total of our decisions. He likens free will to “the trembling needle of a compass.” Though our wills are magnetically drawn to God, we must *choose* whether to conform or disconform them to their native direction. In fact, the word “choice” becomes the virtual leitmotiv of Lewis’s work. Freedom for him does not mean freedom to choose only the good, as it does for Paul and Augustine and the long predestinarian tradition taken up by Luther and Calvin and their modern followers. On the contrary, Lewis believes that we also act freely when we redirect our loves to demonic ends. Entirely by our good or evil responses to divine grace do we create our own heaven or our own hell:

[T]aking your life as a whole, with all your innumerable choices, all your life long you are already turning this central thing [the will] either into a heavenly creature or into a hellish creature: either into a creature that is in harmony with God, and with other creatures, and with itself, or else into one that is in a state of war and hatred with God, and with its fellow-creatures, and with itself.⁴²

This is Lewis’s central premise in *The Great Divorce*, as it is also his reiterated emphasis in “The Weight of Glory”: “We walk every day on the razor edge between these two incredible possibilities.” “All day long we are helping each other to one or other of these destinations.”⁴³

Repeatedly, therefore, Lewis puts his characters at the point of drastic either-or decisions. The most obvious example, perhaps, is Ransom’s dilemma in *Perelandra*. There he must decide whether he will kill the Unman or let him continue to prey upon the Green Lady. The fate of an entire world, the narrator reminds us, hinges upon Ransom’s solitary decision:

He had long known that great issues hung on his choice; but as he now realised the true width of the frightful freedom that was being put into his hands—a width to which all mere spatial infinity seemed narrow—he felt like a man brought out under naked heaven, on the edge of a precipice, into the teeth of a wind that came howling from the Pole. He had pictured himself, till now, standing before the Lord, like Peter. But it was worse. He sat before him like Pilate. It lay with him to save or spill.⁴⁴

Lewis seeks to protect himself against the Pelagian charge that God himself is at the mercy of human decision. And so he grants Ransom the knowledge that, even if he himself fails, *Perelandra* will yet be redeemed by someone else in the future. Ransom’s free decision is accompanied, therefore, by an unavoidably redemptive outcome, however well or ill he acts: “Predestination and freedom were apparently identical”.⁴⁵ Lewis also affirms something akin to the doctrine of election in *Surprised by Joy*, where he declares that his return to Christian faith was totally

his own act and yet totally the gift of God. Even so, Lewis could never say—with Paul and Augustine, with Luther and Calvin, with Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar—that to act sinfully is to reveal that we are enslaved rather than free, that God's grace *enables* our right response to it, and thus that we are the sum total of the gifts we have graciously received rather than the decisions we have bravely made.

It would be foolish to insist that there is any kind of Calvinism at work in a pre-Vatican II Catholic such as J.R.R. Tolkien! In fact, an entire chapter in *The Lord of the Rings* is entitled "The Choices of Master Samwise." Yet Tolkien repeatedly emphasizes the electing providence at work in *The Lord of the Rings*. Gollum did not intend to find the Ruling Ring, nor did Bilbo: it found them. Even less did Frodo seek to bear the Ring, and least of all did he desire the burden of destroying it: he was *chosen*. Though Frodo could have turned away from his vocation to become the Ringbearer, Tolkien would have hardly regarded this as a free decision. Such a rejection would have shown that Frodo's will was imprisoned to its own interest, as the doctrine of original sin teaches. At the end of the epic, moreover, Frodo's freedom is quite overwhelmed by the demonic power of the Ring, so helpless is he finally to resist its coercions. In a scene that one can hardly imagine happening in Lewis, Frodo's free will is completely consumed: he can do no other than answer the summons of Sauron. Only the strange providence at work in greedy Gollum can deliver Frodo from such enormous evil.

Tolkien differs from Lewis in their respective estimates of modernity in yet a third way: Tolkien regards modern warfare as without precedent and thus as uniquely evil. He was haunted by the fact that, in his dread century incarnadine, more lives were violently destroyed than in all the previous centuries combined. For Lewis, by contrast, there will always be wars and rumors of war, and modern combat is more vicious than ancient enmity only because we have more destructive weapons at hand. Thus does Screwtape declare the Second War to be of no real use to demons, since the threat of death may concentrate the minds of the endangered on spiritual things.⁴⁶ For Tolkien, by contrast, totalistic war is the very scourge of modern life, and it becomes the main manifestation of evil in his fiction. Rather than seeking, like Lewis, to rise above the Culture of Death by recourse to allegedly timeless values, he created a mythical world that is deeply grounded in history. The Rings epic constitutes a massive—as well as a wondrously imaginative—recasting of the Gospel story as the only possible hope for creating a Culture of Life.

9) Paganism and Christianity

For Lewis as also for Tolkien, there is an essential continuity between things pagan and Christian. Indeed, Christianity is the fulfillment and completion of what Lewis called the "good dreams" of the pagan world. Lewis learned this lesson from Tolkien himself, for in his famous 1929 conversation, as they paced through the deer park of Magdalen College through the small hours of the night, Tolkien taught Lewis that the great pagan myths are not "lies breathed through silver," as Lewis

had long believed. On the contrary, argued Tolkien, Christ is “the old myth [...] become a fact.”⁴⁷ The ancient vision of poets and myth-makers who held that the gods can become human has at last been fulfilled. The dying and rising gods of pagan religion are deep human expressions of the divinely-ingrained longing for God. In Jesus Christ, God himself has fulfilled the deep desire of which St. Augustine spoke when he declared, in the opening lines of *The Confessions*, that “Thou hast made us for thyself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee.” It is clear that they were also agreed with St. Thomas Aquinas when he famously said that “Grace does not destroy but completes and perfects nature.”

With the early Christian apologist Justin Martyr, Tolkien and Lewis also believed that pagan myth served as a preparation for the Gospel. Yet Lewis turned this general intuition into a carefully-elaborated argument as Tolkien did not. He held that *all* religions and civilizations are built on what he called *Sehnsucht*, the mystical desire for fulfillment beyond the walls of the world. Yet the longing for transcendent satisfaction is not merely emotional; it is also deeply moral. Thus did Lewis come to believe, as we have seen, that all cultures and peoples have affirmed a single set of moral laws. These all-pervasive ethical norms are real proofs, Lewis insisted, that the one God has divinely implanted timeless virtues and values within the very fabric of the world. We human creatures did not invent these eternal verities; rather have we discovered the moral order that God divinely inserted into the world from its foundation. To make sure that we do not confuse the transcendent moral law with something merely Western and historically conditioned, Lewis gave this metaphysical order of Objective Value an Eastern name: the Tao. In his appendix to *The Abolition of Man*, Lewis gathered these perduring ethical standards under eight heads: the Law of General Beneficence; the Law of Special Beneficence; Duties to Parents, Elders, Ancestors; Duties to Children and Posterity; the Law of Justice; the Law of Good Faith and Veracity; the Law of Mercy; the Law of Magnanimity. Tolkien and Lewis were also agreed that friendship, whether found in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* or in an Anglo-Saxon epic such as *The Battle of Maldon*, is a virtue that Christians are called to cultivate. It’s the virtue that the children acquire in the Narnia Chronicle and that the Company of Nine Walkers exhibits in the highest degree.

In both *Mere Christianity* and *The Problem of Pain*, Lewis argues that objective moral standards issue in objective moral guilt: all people know, at the depths of their being, that they have failed to fulfill the standards which have been set for them. Conscience is not, therefore, the fabrication of particular cultures to insure the on-going life of their civic order. Much less is conscience a social construction of elite power groups seeking to preserve their own oppressive rule. Rather is conscience the divinely embedded compass which, when rightly-formed, orients human life in a moral direction. In view of Talibanic terrorism, this exchange between Éomer and Gandalf is especially apt: “The world is all grown strange,” declares Éomer. “[B]ack to war comes the Sword that was broken in the long ages ere the fathers of our fathers rode into the Mark! How shall a man judge what to do in such times?”

“As he ever has judged,” said Aragorn. “Good and evil have not changed since yesteryear; nor are they one thing among Elves and Dwarves and another among Men. It is man’s part to discern them, as much in the Golden Wood as in his own house.”⁴⁸

Universal moral laws point to a universal Lawgiver. This, in Lewis’s view, is the great achievement of ancient Israel: to have discovered that, behind the law of justice, stands the God of justice. Lewis also insists with Tolkien that the completion and perfection of human longing and natural law require their radical reconstruction. In *The Four Loves* he shows how affection and friendship and even marriage must be surrendered to the higher devotion demanded by the self-surrender of *agape*. In *Till We Have Faces* both Orual and Psyche must give up their lower loves, worthy though they surely are, in learning to love the gods above all else. This emphasis on painful sacrifice as the only way to newness of life is perhaps most acutely witnessed in *A Grief Observed*, where Lewis first relinquishes his apologetic effort to justify suffering, and then finally lets go of his own bitter grief for the dead Joy Davidman.

Tolkien, as we have seen, believed more fully than Lewis that the life of radical self-surrender can be accomplished only by the grace manifest in Jesus Christ. Though the triune God demands the world’s moral obedience, our fallen human nature prevents us from ordering our lives aright. Thus does God himself become incarnate in his Son Jesus Christ in order to enable what He demands. God takes on flesh in the crucified and risen Nazarene, having mercy on his wayward people in order that they might overcome their native disobedience and thus fully conform their wills to God’s will. In their long midnight walk, Tolkien thus stressed that, in Jesus Christ, God the Playwright has become the chief Actor in the entire cosmic drama.

In his essay “On Faerie Stories,” moreover, Tolkien stresses the strangeness rather than the obviousness of the Christian gospel by linking it to traditional fairy tales. They are both characterized by happy endings that make them seem escapist. Yet the final victory envisioned both in the Christian story and in fairy stories is not cheaply and easily won; on the contrary, it is cut from the cloth of suffering and disaster. Like many fairy tales, the gospel narrative ends in what Tolkien called *eucaastrophe*—in a calamity which seems to destroy everything but which, in fact, surprisingly restores everything at a new and deeper level. Thus does Tolkien call the Incarnation the *eucaastrophe* of the Creation, since Christ’s birth is accompanied by the Massacre of the Innocents, even as it brings the world’s radical renewal. So is the Cross to be understood as the *eucaastrophe* of the Incarnation, since this worst of all Fridays is made supernally good in the Resurrection. The Second Coming will constitute the *eucaastrophe* of Christian history, since the fearful losses wrought at Armageddon will mark the beginning of Life Eternal.⁴⁹

10) Their Deep Common Ground

Lewis was acutely aware of this last and most important disjunction—namely, that, for all its continuity with things pagan, the Gospel remains a scandal and an offense. Toward the end of *The Screwtape Letters*, for example, the satanic subverter resorts to his most radical subterfuge. Having failed to seduce his Christian “patient” with the temptations of the world and the flesh, Screwtape resorts directly to the demonic. He urges his minion Wormwood to coax the young Christian into an obsession with the “historical Jesus”—that vacuous figure whom one can invest with one’s own interests and prejudices. Screwtape admits that Jesus was an eminent teacher and moral exemplar, but he also concedes that these historical roles were not his essence: “The earliest converts were converted by a single historical fact (the Resurrection) and a single theological doctrine (the Redemption) operating on a sense of sin which they already had.” Screwtape knows, with terrible satanic clarity, that Christ’s uniqueness as Savior and Lord is destroyed as soon as one neglects this bedrock foundation for lesser concerns. Hence his encouragement of the Christian convert to abandon this scandalous distinctiveness in favor of various amalgams—“Christianity and the Crisis, Christianity and the New Psychology, Christianity and the New Order, Christianity and Faith Healing, Christianity and Vegetarianism [...]”⁵⁰

In a 1958 essay on the Psalms, Lewis implicitly acknowledged that he himself may sometimes have defended such an amalgamated faith—in his case, it might be called Christianity and Ethics. Surprisingly and severely, Lewis now qualified his earlier praise for the Tao as the ageless and universally agreed-upon moral norms that unite all cultures and religions. Lewis noticed that the most scandalous of the biblical summonses—the one found in the book of Proverbs no less than the Gospels: to feed and forgive the enemy—is an alien notion to the Confucian philosopher no less than to the Hellenistic worshipper. Lewis also confessed that his beloved classical thinkers, “so civilized, tolerant, humane, and enlightened, every now and then reveal that they are divided from us [Christians] by a gulf. Hence the eternal roguish tittering about pederasty in Plato or the hard pride that makes Aristotle’s *Ethics* in places almost comic.” Lewis added, even more thornily, that the Psalmists, “these same fanatical and homicidal Hebrews, and not the more enlightened peoples [...] are our predecessors, and the only predecessors we can find in antiquity.”⁵¹

Here, I submit, is the common ground on which the two most prominent Inklings both stood, though Tolkien somewhat more firmly than Lewis: the sure footage of God’s self-identification in the Jews, in Jesus Christ, and finally in the Church. For all its commonalty with things ancient and pagan, Christian revelation remains the scandalously particular, the radically offensive, the unassimilable Good News. Lewis and Tolkien profoundly converged in their commitment to this “gospel of God,” as Paul calls it in Romans 1:1. Their common Faith gives their work its perduring interest, even if they were committed to it in often-conflicting ways.

Endnotes

¹ Quoted in Bradley J. Birzer, *J.R.R. Tolkien's Sanctifying Myth: Understanding Middle-earth* (Wilmington DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2002), p. 4.

² Quoted in Humphrey Carpenter, *Tolkien: A Biography* (Boston MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), p. 201.

³ J.R.R. Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," in *The Tolkien Reader* (New York NY: Ballantine, 1966), p. 84.

⁴ Tom Shippey, *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century* (Boston MA: Houghton Mifflin, 2001), p. 122.

⁵ Carpenter, 151.

⁶ C.S. Lewis, "Christianity and Culture," in *Christian Reflections* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1967), p. 14.

⁷ C.S. Lewis, "Christianity and Literature," *ibid.*, 10.

⁸ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York NY: Simon and Schuster, 1996), p. 171.

⁹ Tolkien also refused to provide any Christian eschatology for his pre-Christian epic. At the end, Frodo and Gandalf sail for the Grey Havens, the elven realm where they will have a peaceful but not an eternally blessed existence. Tolkien the Christian knows that the Second Coming will bring a new heaven no less than a new earth. In *The Last Battle*, by contrast, Lewis provides the actual eucatastrophe that Tolkien believed fairy-stories could only adumbrate.

¹⁰ Christopher Mitchell, "Bearing the Weight of Glory: The Cost of C.S. Lewis's Witness," in *The Pilgrim's Guide: C.S. Lewis and the Art of Witness*, ed. David Mills (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1998), p.6n11. I seek to show the superiority of Lewis imaginative over his rationalist work in "The Baptized Imagination: C.S. Lewis's Fictional Apologetics," *Christian Century* 112, 25 (August 30-September 6, 1995): 812-15.

¹¹ Christopher W. Mitchell, "University Battles: C.S. Lewis and the Oxford University Socratic Club," in *C.S. Lewis: Lightbearer in the Shadowland*, ed. Angus Menuge (Wheaton IL: Crossway, 1997), p. 335.

¹² C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* (New York NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1955), p. 207.

¹³ Austin Farrer, "The Christian Apologist," in *Light on C.S. Lewis*, ed. Jocelyn Gibb (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1965), p. 26.

¹⁴ C.S. Lewis, *Poems* (New York NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), p. 129. Lewis also made this rending confession: "I have found that nothing is more dangerous to one's faith than the work of an apologist. No doctrine of faith seems to me so spectral, so

unreal as the one that I have just successfully defended in a public debate.... We apologists take our lives in our hands and can be saved only by falling back continually ... from Christian apologetics to Christ himself” (qtd. in William Griffin, *Clive Staples Lewis: A Dramatic Life* [San Francisco CA: Harper & Row, 1986], p. 244).

¹⁵ Quoted in Griffin, 242.

¹⁶ I owe my acknowledgement of these communitarian moments in Lewis to Mark Long and Gil Meilaender who, as vigorous Lewis enthusiasts and apologists, have corrected other one-sided emphases of mine. Yet it is not unfair to wonder whether many non-ecclesial evangelicals, ignoring this stress on community in Lewis, are drawn to the individualist quality of his work because they interpret Christian faith as largely a private and individual relationship to Jesus rather than a public and communal incorporation into the Body of Christ.

¹⁷ Quoted in Griffin, 433.

¹⁸ *Mere Christianity*, p. 11

¹⁹ Mark A. Noll, “C.S. Lewis’ ‘Mere Christianity’ (the Book and the Ideal) at the End of the Twentieth Century,” unpublished essay. Even so expansive a definition of “mere Christianity” elides the enormous differences between Catholics and Protestants concerning the Marian dogmas.

²⁰ Quoted in Griffin, 336.

²¹ Walker Percy, *Signposts in a Strange Land*, ed. Patrick Samway (New York NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1991), p. 345.

²² Carpenter, *Tolkien*, 24.

²³ Tolkien wrote an attack on Lewis called “The Ulterior Motive” that has never been published and that remains unavailable to students of Tolkien’s work, whether professional or amateur (Birzer, 50-51).

²⁴ Carpenter, 148.

²⁵ C.S. Lewis, *Miracles* (London UK: Collins Fontana, 1967), p. 101.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 116, 119-20.

²⁷ C.S. Lewis, *The Silver Chair* (New York NY: Macmillan Collier, 1970), p. 159.

²⁸ C.S. Lewis, *Till We Have Faces: A Myth Retold* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1966), p. 120.

²⁹ Tolkien blamed Charles Williams for the hyper-Platonic turn which Lewis took in *That Hideous Strength*, believing it to have had disastrous effects on the last volume of the space trilogy.

³⁰ James Patrick, *The Magdalen Metaphysicals: Idealism and Orthodoxy at Oxford 1901-1945* (Macon GA: Mercer UP, 1985), pp. 122-23.

³¹ Tolkien, 42, 60, 68.

³² Brian Davies, O.P., *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford UK: Oxford UP, 1992), pp. 171-74. I gratefully confess my debt to Matthews Grant for these references.

³³ J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, rev. ed. (Boston MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1982), p. 208.

³⁴ *Miracles*, 154.

³⁵ C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York NY: Simon and Schuster Touchstone, 1996), pp. 83-84. Lewis might also have cited Descartes's celebrated claim that the aim of modern science is to render us "masters and possessors of nature."

³⁶ "On Fairy-Stories," 56.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 68.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 73.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ "Foreword to the Second Edition" of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, p. 7.

⁴¹ Christopher Mitchell, "Following the Argument Wherever It Leads," *Inklings-Jahrbuch* 17 (1999): 183, 193. Yet, at least in *The Discarded Image*, Lewis rejected such a flight from history. There he describes the medieval world-view as having its own internal consistency and integrity, rather than subjecting it to universalizing categories. The English poet John Heath-Stubbs confessed to me, in a 1988 interview, that he became a Christian largely from hearing Lewis deliver these lectures at Oxford. They convinced him that the ancient Christian outlook was more cogent and persuasive than the naturalist and materialist world-view of modernity.

⁴² *Mere Christianity*, 87. Only occasionally does Lewis sound the grace-note: "I have been talking as if it were we who did everything. In reality, of course, it is God who does everything. We, at most, allow it to be done to us" (166)

⁴³ C.S. Lewis, *"The Weight of Glory" and Other Addresses* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1965), pp. 12, 15.

⁴⁴ C.S. Lewis, *Perelandra* (New York NY: Macmillan, 1965), p. 148.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 149.

⁴⁶ C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York NY: Simon and Schuster Touchstone, 1996), p. 32.

⁴⁷ Humphrey Carpenter, *The Inklings: C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, Charles Williams, and their friends* (Boston MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1979), p. 44.

⁴⁸ J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Two Towers* (Boston MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1982), pp. 40-41.

⁴⁹ "On-Fairy Stories," 85-86.

⁵⁰ *The Screwtape Letters*. 86-87, 91.

⁵¹ C.S. Lewis, "The Psalms," in *Christian Reflections*, p. 116.

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