



Tolkien's Sacramental Vision: Discerning the Holy in Middle Earth

Craig Bernthal

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One of Tolkien's great appeals to readers is that he offers a world replete with meaning at every level. To read and reread Tolkien is to share his sense of wonder and holiness, to be invited into the presence of a "beauty beyond the circles of the world." It is to fall in love with a universe that has a beginning and an end, where good and bad are not subjective choices, but objective realities; a created order full of grace, though damaged by sin, in which friendship is the seedbed of the virtues, and where the greatest warriors finally become the greatest healers.

A correspondent once told J. R. R. Tolkien that his work seemed illumined "by an invisible lamp." That lamp is the Church, and its light is the imaginative sensibility that we live in a sacramental world. This new book by the author of *The Trial of Man* examines in depth the influence of Catholic sacramentality on the thought and work of Tolkien, with major emphasis on *The Lord of the Rings*, but including his literary essays, epistolary poem "Mythopoesis," short story "Leaf by Niggle," and *The Silmarillion*. Here is a signal contribution to a deeper understanding of Tolkien, whose mythological world is meant to "recover" the meaning of our own as a grace-filled place, pointing toward its Creator.

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